



PRATTHANA— A PORTRAIT OF POSSESSION

by Toshiki Okada

Based on the novel by Uthis Haemamool

English translation by Aya Ogawa and Sasapin Siriwanij with James Laver

Main Characters: Khao Sing
Wayla Waree
Teacher
Poet
Important Person
College Friends
Rakchao
Fa
Nam
NA: Narration

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Swimming Pool / 2016

NARRATION (NA)

Night at a swimming pool. Water splashes, blooms into droplets, then falls and spatters the ground. The late night air is muggy. A young man sits by the pool.

(WAREE is in the pose of Caravaggio's Narcissus)

NA

The young man is trying to capture his reflection on the surface of the water with his camera.

He wants to capture his effortlessness in that moment in the reflected image. Anything deliberate is simply unnatural; it's merely forced.

A slight scent of chlorine emanates from his skin. Faintly musty, like the scent of the liquid of love and desire, when you ejaculate on your own or someone else's belly. That slithery and viscous substance coating your own forefinger.

The gazer, and the gazed upon.

Outdoor Sketching by the River / 1992

NA

You, too, have once been the gazed upon. You were 17 years old. You would dive and swim in the water. And you'd return to the bank and spread out your body, so the shapes of light filtering through the leaves of the trees would heat your skin until it was warm and almost dry.

You had an erection. You were at that age where the warm caress of the sun on your thigh was enough to make you tremble with arousal.

At that moment, you were gazed upon by a man on the other side of the river. He was drawing.

He was still young. A fresh graduate from the country's pre-eminent art institution. He wouldn't have taken much time after his graduation to decide to become a teacher at a vocational high school in a province.

Outdoor sketching. The afternoon that the man had taken a group of students out to sketch.

The gazer, and the gazed upon.

After that Day. At the Art School / 1992

TEACHER

That day, everyone else painted with a brush as I'd instructed. You were the only one sketching with a dry twig you'd picked up nearby. You didn't follow the simple instruction to draw with ink and brush on white paper. Was it your attempt at a small rebellion? Or did you think the teacher would praise you for what you were doing? Did you think you were already an artist, unconfined by any frame or anyone's orders? Is that what you thought? But if you can't follow the rules, I can't give you a grade. Do you understand?

KHAO SING

I've seen you drawing with a twig so I wanted to try it, too.

TEACHER

I know.

KHAO SING

Your pictures, at first glance, look like ink stains on paper, but if you squint, the scattered ink marks become clear sunlight, dark shade, lines of swaying grass. I know that such divine skill is not innate talent, but something you trained very hard for.

KHAO SING

Teacher, what are you doing here?

TEACHER

I'm here to draw. I've been drawing since I was younger than you and I've never stopped.

KHAO SING

Why didn't you become an artist? Why did you just become an art teacher?

TEACHER

Not everyone wants to be an artist. Perhaps one just becomes a teacher to be with young people who are still growing, to see how they change. Perhaps he doesn't like socializing, having to show up at exhibitions. Perhaps he doesn't have the same kind of ambition that artists possess in this country. (Smiles) You should go to study at the university. That place suits someone like you.

KHAO SING

Does it?

TEACHER

I'll tutor you.

SCENE 2

Remembering the Poet / 1992

NA

After tutoring, in the evening, the teacher took your group out to dinner. The woman who ran the vegetarian restaurant, you learned from your teacher, was a poet. "She's a poet. Her poems have been in magazines. She's even had her own book published." She was an activist as well. An advocate for protecting the environment and wildlife from the encroachment of golf courses and dams. Her office was a room of a three-story double townhouse.

Your desire was ignited right away. Your desire was easy to read - shy and more secretive than others. She saw through you instantly.

POET

Why don't you come to our office on Sunday? I want your help with something. I want you to use the art skills you've learned to write my poems on fabric. You write beautifully, don't you? I want it to be eye-catching. It's the perfect job for you, right?

Making Placards

(KHAO SING is engrossed in making placards)

NA

For her, you wrote placards for the protest. You followed her and got to know the followers of the Santi Asoke sect¹. You wore Mo Hom² clothing just like her.

The Poet's Pose

(The POET is sitting in a chair. She leans back fully in the chair and sits with both knees up. A notebook is on her lap. In her mouth is the cap of the pen she holds in her right hand.)

POET

We are not like businessmen, the wealthy, or politicians. Brand names. I don't wear synthetic clothes made from complex processes in industrial systems. I don't exploit innocent people who work with their hands and labor, who sweat and find joy through sharing and solidarity. Those whose hands touch books that tell of the value of life and spirit. True labor. Real education.

NA

Skin-tight jeans. The thighs drawn together by the stitches of the seam running down the middle.
If you could blindfold her, you would lean in close and stare at that seam. And breathe on it.
The gazer, and the gazed upon.

Several times you decided to ask her out. Won't you go to a movie with me? But she refused every time. Of course, she wasn't the kind of person who would go to the cineplex to watch romances or action films or adventures.

But one day, you went to see Kevin Costner's Robin Hood. As you were leaving the theater alone, among the wave of people going to see Dying Young in another theater you saw her. Her body pressed into some young man you'd never seen. Just like Julia Roberts in that film.

Returning the Room Key / 1992

NA

After that day, you went to the room on the third floor and found a note on the table. "I will be away for a while. Please leave the room key that I gave you here."

As you left, for the first time you noticed a sign hanging in the entrance. "Palang Dharma Party³ Office". It meant absolutely nothing to you.

SCENE 3

Drinking Circle / 1992

(KHAO SING is at the center of a group of friends who are drinking. He holds a bottle of Mekhong whiskey above his head, declaring that he's about to make a toast to love. Others in the group listen to him while laughing and cheering loudly.)

KHAO SING

Love is giving without seeking return!
Love is not possessing!
It is giving freedom to each other!
It is the joy of loving. True love is love for all things!
Love is the opposite of lust!
Love mustn't be tainted by lust!

SOMEONE

You're just spouting poetic shit because you couldn't get laid!

KHAO SING

You're damned right! I wanted her to return my love. I can't help that love turns into desire and lust. I can't help getting erections. And that's when love gets in the way: I must be a better person. I must hide my savage desires. I must come to terms with my desire while hiding it, showing only love and care. Perhaps there are people who can act that way without effort. But for me, it's as if there is a balloon tied to my desire, always pulling it higher. Who cares what love is! Love will only cage desire inside the heart - it only suffocates me. Therefore, I say desire is love!

(Cheers all round.)

1 A non-mainstream sect of Buddhism in Thailand.

2 A traditional Thai fabric colored with a deep blue dye, to which the name refers, and a type of short-sleeved round-necked shirt often worn by members of the Santi Asoke sect.

3 The Palang Dharma Party was a Buddhist-inspired political party in Thai-

land founded by Chamlong Srimuang in 1988, associated with the Santi Asoke sect. Palang Dharma became a major force in Thai politics during the early-1990s. Its leader Chamlong was a key figure in the 1992 middle class protests against the military rule of Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon, commonly known as the Black May, that led to the resignation of Suchinda.

The Night Pee Am⁴ Came / 1992

(KHAO SING is plastered. His friend carries him back to the dormitory.)

NA

You met a group of kathoey⁵, chatting in the hallway in front of your room.

KATHOEY 1

What a cutie! What faculty are you in?

KATHOEY 1

What an adorable smile!

KATHOEY 1

What a catch! Let me suck you off.

KATHOEY 1

What's wrong, hon? You look frustrated. Are you all pent up?

FRIEND

Just ignore them.

KATHOEY 1

I'd like to give you a hand.

KATHOEY 1

You can't shower by yourself when you're this drunk.

KHAO SING

So what?

KATHOEY 1

I'll give you a bed bath.

KATHOEY 1

Don't lock the door. I'll come to dry you off. I'll wipe you down clean.

(The kathoey⁵ laugh.)

(KHAO SING collapses on the couch and falls asleep. His friend spreads a blanket over him and exits. After a while Pee Am comes to stand next to him. It lift the blanket from KHAO SING's feet and enter head-first beneath it.)

NA

You felt your fly being unzipped.

You were awake but you chose to pretend not to be. Let that shadow below be a ghost - *Pii. Pee Am*.

The ghost breathed on your core. Something soft came down to envelope it.

Moist and slow. Down deep. Then, it withdrew back up.

The ghost devoured you clean. It lay your slumbering member down on your pubic bone, pulled up your underwear, zipped and hooked your trousers closed. Leaving no noticeable trace. That slight dampness would soon dry and disappear.

When you awoke the next morning, the world went round as usual.

Do You Feel It? / 1992

NA

At this moment, do you feel that things in this country have gone awry? That some things have changed. For better or worse? Does it even matter to you? Not at all. You can still walk around at night. You can still shout and make a fuss. Eat when you're hungry. Sleep when you're tired. You gaze at the sunlight in the morning and look back at the last year in the eye. You don't perceive any effects of the coup d'état by the National Peace Keeping Council. It was clean and white.

SCENE 4

An Important Person / 1992

NA

Your teacher saw right through you. "Your mind has been somewhere else lately. Your grades are down. You hardly ever show up at the evening tutoring group either. You have the skills, but unless you use them you can lose them. If you want to get to that point in the future you have to keep practicing." Your teacher once invited you to his home, along with a couple of your classmates that he thought were as promising as you, to introduce you to an important person. He was an eminent artist. A thinker. Someone who understood life and practiced ascetic living.

(The IMPORTANT PERSON sits in a lotus position.)

IMPORTANT PERSON

An artist must dig deep within himself and gaze upon the feelings that flow inside, capture them and express them through color and shadow. Focus hard within yourself. Control your bodily movement and your breathing. Artistic endeavors are much like Buddhist austerities. Be aware of your left hand, of your right hand. Be fully aware of what the whole self is doing right now, in the moment. The present. In this way, the artist is like a philosopher as well. Whether they call me an artist, a thinker, or a monk, those are merely words that others call me. Words that define my form in others' perception. But they are not me. I am not attached to words because what I do is work. When your existence is constantly defined by the work of happiness and contentment, you are more than words.

4 A ghost believed to be the cause sleep paralysis in Thai culture. It is described as an event in which the person is sleeping and dreams that one or more ghostly figures are nearby or even holding him or her down. The sufferer is unable to

move or make any noises.

5 A term used in Thailand to describe transgender women in some cases or effeminate gay men in others.

NA

A friend asked him a question.

FRIEND

I want to dedicate myself to art but my parents don't understand. They won't acknowledge my devotion to art.

IMPORTANT PERSON

Your problem is that you think too much. You're too concerned with thoughts, exhausted, anguished and sad. But you're still here, aren't you? You're still studying and making art. Still waking up to be with it every day. Isn't that so? Then, what need is there to burden yourself with thoughts until you are exhausted, distressed and sad? You're still here, with freedom.

SCENE 5

Reunion with the Poet / 1992

NA

And so, May of 1992 arrived. Once again, she appeared before you.

You were sketching, sitting on the sidewalk in the middle of the night. A sketch of that familiar three-story double townhouse. The background was pitch-black. Blacker than the deep blue of the night sky. There was only a flickering green light from the first floor of the building. In contrast with the yellow light shining from the road on the left side of the sketch, the closed sliding door gave a weight feeling to the building. Beyond the louvered window it was dark.

But suddenly the louvered window became bright. Her silhouette shifting inside the room became visible. Then, the silhouette came to the window, turned the handle of the louver to let the air inside. What was a silhouette became an indistinct figure standing quietly by the window.

(The POET beckons KHAO SING. KHAO SING approaches the POET. The POET embraces KHAO SING.)

POET

Do you want to come with me? By bus.

KHAO SING

Where to?

POET

Bangkok. Have you been there?

KHAO SING

No.

POET

We'll go to support the party leader. To show the power of the people. To shout out our call for banishment. First we're going to the Parliament House and then Sanam Luang. It's very close to the university you want to go to. We should have time. I'll take you to walk around the university, to see what it's like before you go there. And I'll also take you to Nong Tha Prachan⁶.

KHAO SING

What is that?

POET

They sell lots of great, rare cassette tapes. Underground stuff too. We can go to Fame VDO, too. They have loads of weird art films.

KHAO SING

I want to come with you.

First Time in Bangkok / 1992

NA

You joined the protest demanding the resignation of General Suchinda Kraprayoon as the non-elected Prime Minister. You spent days and nights in the capital with the people's marches, from the Parliament to Sanam Luang and Ratchadamnoen Klang Road. The party leader vowed a hunger strike until death. Before that, Pilot Officer Chalard Worachat, already in the 20th day of his public fast, had gone into shock and had been hospitalized. You felt you were part of a historic moment.

SCENE 6

The Kiss with the Poet / 1992

NA

On your 4th day in the capital, she beckoned you out from the protest. You headed to Maharaj Road, passed the Mahathat Temple, and stopped at the gate of the university you wanted to attend. You walked past the basketball court, down a small road leading to a vast field, and entered the building that was known to house Professor Silpa Bhirasri's study.

(POET and KHAO SING stop together, side-by-side. The POET takes the lead and goes inside.)

NA

There was a statue of a young girl, naked and pure. 'Blossoming Flower' by Sawaeng Songmangmee. Her breasts were just budding. Her face was broad with high cheekbones. A lotus flower held in her right hand. She stood straight, but her legs

⁶ A long-standing music shop in Bangkok, well-known for its wide selection of alternative music.

were angled like a deer's.
Behind her hung a Cubist painting in soft colors.

(The POET stops in front of a painting. Her gaze rests on it.)

NA

A picture of a woman with long hair. Her right arm was laid on the back of a chair. Her head tilted, resting her face on her upper arm.

(As this text is spoken, the described posture in the painting is embodied.)

The yellow shirt she wore contrasted with the red wall in the background.

In the bus on the way to Bangkok, she sat next to you. Her head tilted just like that, sleeping on your shoulder.

The gazer, and she gazed upon.

(The narrator hums the tune to Pongsit Kampee's 'Talod Wae La'⁷)

(KHAO SING taps the POET gently. She turns to face him, and he quickly leans in and places his lips on hers. The POET immediately pulls away. She leaves the scene.)

That Night / 1992

NA

That night dragged on. You fell asleep and woke up repeatedly. In your mind that scene was replayed over and over again.

When you finally woke up, you had a slight fever, but you had to go out that day.

In the afternoon, after being in the hot sun all day, you grew faint and collapsed. You didn't see her at all as you rested in a tent at the side of the road.

It wasn't until that evening that she appeared. She took you back to your lodging. She took a wet towel to wipe your face and neck. But that was all she did for you. The next morning, you felt better. You boarded a bus at the Mo Chit Bus Terminal to return to the province you came from.

Advice from the Teacher / 1992

(Pink Floyd's 'The Dark Side of the Moon' plays.)

TEACHER

I thought you'd gone home. Oh, or did you just get back?

KHAO SING

No.

KHAO SING

Last week I went to Bangkok and walked around the university. I went to Professor Silpa's museum too.

TEACHER

Which piece did you like the most?

KHAO SING

The young naked girl holding a lotus in her hand. It's a sculpture.

TEACHER

'Blossoming Flower' by Master Sawaeng Songmangmee. That piece is exquisite. There's another work by Master Sawaeng called 'Tharn Thong'⁸. It's a sculpture of a nude woman lying on her back. The work mimics the gesture in Goya's 'The Nude Maja.' The mature body expresses wealth and abundance. That body is a physical representation of the country of Thailand. The English title of the sculpture is 'Wealth of Thailand'. There's a story behind that piece – when it was exhibited at the National Art Museum, a man did something obscene to it, because it was too realistic, too sensual.

TEACHER

But you picked the worst time to go to Bangkok.

KHAO SING

I took part in the protests.

TEACHER

You placed yourself in great danger. Do you understand that? Do you know what peril this country is facing right now? Who took you there? Do you even understand what you were doing in such a place?

KHAO SING

Of course I do. A General staged a coup d'état and seized power. Then he accumulated power and broke his promise to the people. He wanted to stay in power for his own greedy ends. I became a part of the masses that demanded a righteous change. Isn't that what a true student should do?

TEACHER

I don't know what you're saying. Were you ever bothered before, whether it was the army or the politicians who ruled the country? Can someone your age truly feel change? Has the army ever told you not to study, or not to draw pictures? What is your duty, really? Your duty at this very moment of your life. Can you answer that? Your duty is to study and be educated. That is your true duty. Preparing yourself for the days to come. The future. If you disappeared or died, who do you think would seek you out? Who would remember you? Is it not your parents, me, and your friends? That place will forget you and erase you. But I will say this: you exist, and that existence will always be necessary for your own life and future.

KHAO SING

Are you angry with me?

7 In English, "For All Time".
https://youtu.be/VVUF_JIXyis

8 In English, "The Golden Stream".

TEACHER

I'm not angry. But I'm glad you walked out of it in time. You live in the world of art. If you're dissatisfied or if you want to make an ideological statement, use this world to express it, this world which has more meaning for you.

KHAO SING

To tell you the truth I went to Bangkok to chase after that poet.

TEACHER

Those feelings are important. Perhaps some day, if you can appreciate those feelings with the eye of an artist, they will be truly important.

The Second Night with Pee Am, and the Morning After / 1992

(Pink Floyd's 'Wish You Were Here' plays)

NA

You lay down and drifted away. The dark blue surface of a lake spread out before you. Sounds of seashells and coral. And the sound of sonar. A dolphin lurking deep in the ocean lifted its head and gushed to the surface. You took off like a bird and landed far away in a deep forest. Mysterious vegetation, strange wildlife, legendary werecats and the mythical Kinnara⁹. Silence that twinkled like dust. Black particles of night drizzled down, drop by drop, and accumulated on your skin.

Your ears detected a sound, clearly. Something coming closer, walking step-by-step on its toes, and stopping in front of the door. The sound of a breath in, and out. Then, a deep breath, and the door crept open.

A door left unlocked once may be an accident, but when there was a second time it meant there was a desire to be consumed, and the ghost knew.

That body crawled up from your feet, as before. You were wearing only a pair of gym shorts. Two hands slipped in easily along your thighs towards your core. You were touched, caressed, and stroked open. The gym shorts were peeled off. Its face was then buried in your groin, inhaled your scent, and traced its hot, wet tongue over the shape of the head of your penis.

Your blanket was pushed up and left on your chest. The ghost took off its pants. Then, it moved over and straddled over you. It grasped your member, rubbed and aimed it at the hole at its center and, with a moan, lowered its body onto you. Halfway down you felt pain and tightness. It must have felt it, too. It paused, gulped some air and panted. You moved your hips, pretending to shift in your sleep. The ghost cried out sharply in pain, and you soared towards that overwhelming excitement from the irresistible tightness. The ghost moved its ass and released your member. In that moment, you came. Your juice squirted violently on its behind and thighs. It spurted across your lower abdomen, too. The ghost put your shorts back in place and

hurried out of the room, leaving all traces on your body. Traces of lust, traces of blood, and traces of shit.

You woke up in the afternoon. After washing your body, you headed out of the dorm to eat. Everyone you met was talking about the same thing. The same thing was on the front page of every newspaper. Rumors and gossips were that the army had fired on the protesters. The government offices on Ratchadamnoen Road had been set on fire. That afternoon Major General Chamlong Srimuang was captured. It was the afternoon of May 18th, 1992.

And on May 20th, the leader of the protests, Chamlong Srimuang and the Army's Supreme Commander, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, were forced to reconcile.

SCENE 7

Facebook / 2016

NA

The young man you met at the pool sends you a friend request. His Facebook name is Wayla Waree¹⁰.

As soon as you click "confirm" for a friend request you always get excited. Surprised even. You step further into another room, and you feel closer to them. Now, stepping into Waree's room, what images do you see?

Happy photos of him and his friends at the protest. All of them wearing the same T-shirts. The national flag wrapped around their wrists. Whistles hanging from their necks.

You were summoned once. Something you posted upset peace and order, was divisive, and might have been considered misrepresentation and a threat to stability.

Somewhere else, speaking about what kinds of light and darkness exist wouldn't be an issue. But here, you can't discuss whether such things exist or not, because that's just the way this place is. That is its particular nature.

Living day-to-day merely to acknowledge change. This is who you now are, at present. When you want to post something, it'll be the pictures you drew or about the taste of different beers that you've tried from around the world.

(Screen shot of Messenger. Photos from WAREE of beer bottles and glasses: Schneider Weisse Tap 5 Meine Hopfenweisse. And the message: "You posted that drinking that beer always made you feel good, so I wanted to try it.")

KHAO SING

"And did you like it?"

WAREE

"Hmmm, it smells funny."

⁹ A half-human, half-bird creature in Southeast Asian mythology.

¹⁰ Wayla Waree, from the Thai words for "time" and "water" respectively.

WAREE
 “The bartender said if I liked Hoegaarden, I’d like this.”

KHAO SING
 “It’s similar to Hoegaarden because they’re both wheat beers.”

KHAO SING
 “But there are lots of different kinds of wheat beer.”

KHAO SING
 “Hoegaarden is a Belgian wheat.”

KHAO SING
 “Schneider Tap 5 is a German wheat.”

KHAO SING
 “Specifically, it’s a Weizenbock, which is stronger than normal wheat beers in taste and alcohol level.”

WAREE
 (sends a dizzy emoji)

KHAO SING
 “Info-xicated?”

WAREE
 (sends a grin emoji)

KHAO SING
 “The bar you’re at is probably the bar I go to a lot in the afternoons.”

KHAO SING
 “From around 2pm to 7pm is my favorite time to be there.”

KHAO SING
 “For the anesthesia of sunlight and hot wind.”

KHAO SING
 “When time is drowsy and lonely. The hot and humid time of the day. Drinking new beers that I’ve never tried.”

KHAO SING
 “And going to sleep before 11pm almost every day.”

WAREE
 “I like the pictures you draw, the ones you post on Facebook.”

KHAO SING
 “It’s a hobby for the unemployed.”

WAREE
 “Where do you find your models?”

KHAO SING
 “On whatever porn sites.”

KHAO SING
 “It’s hard to draw live models.”

KHAO SING
 “The postures and movements and placing a body in a particular pose.”

WAREE
 “Do you want to draw me?”

SCENE 8

A Statue of Silpa Bhirasri / 1994

NA
 Professor Silpa Bhirasri. Founder of Silpakorn University. The father of Thai modern art. His former name was Corrado Feroci, born in Florence, Italy. You were chosen to enter your dream art school, and so you became one of his children.

Scenes from Training / 1994

(KHAO SING and classmates are training.)

“Freshy” / 1994

NA
 New students were called “freshies” by the upperclassmen. You and all the other freshies were forced to live in solidarity and value harmony, to respect teachers and upperclassmen, all under the wholesome-sounding name of “Freshmen Welcoming.”

UPPERCLASSMAN LEADER
 Do you know anything about the person next to you? What their name is, what their personality is like? Do you know about your upperclassmen? We live here together like brothers. Friendship and brotherhood never existed in your lives until now. Your friends and brothers are here. You are new. You know nothing of this place. You can’t just walk around this department without approval or permission. First, throw away your past. Your new personal history begins here. By erasing your past, we all become equal. Your father is the founder of this university. You must not let him down.

NA

One day you and the other freshies were lined up into a dark room. Pitch black. And you were forced to close your eyes.

Naming Ritual / 1994

A new female student is pulled up by the upperclassmen. What's your name?! What's your last name?! Where are you from?! Which high school did you go to?! The female student tells them the nickname that her parents gave her at birth, the one her friends and acquaintances call her by. The upperclassmen shout savagely. That's not the name they want. She is in shock. She can't help adding "chao"¹¹ at the end of all her answers. And for that she is christened with the new name "Rakchao"¹². Then it is Khao Sing's turn. He is dragged forward and told to open his eyes. Blinding white light blasts in his face, he recoils and falls down. The upperclassmen push him back upright.

UPPERCLASSMEN

Hey, get your shit together! Have you been possessed by a ghost or something?

NA

Raucous laughter. Someone suggests "KHAO SING"¹³ as a new name, and the upperclassmen come to a unanimous agreement. The end of the christening ritual is announced.

UPPERCLASSMAN LEADER

That's it! ... Guys, listen up. Come on! ... It's over!

NA

Khao Sing. That's the name you've been called from the age of 18. What a dark joke. You recalled those secret moments you'd kept to yourself. The night you let Pee Am hold you down.

SCENE 9

Outsiders, Keep Out / 1995

NA

At the beginning of 1995, when you became a second year student, Manager Weekly printed on its front page "The Golden Age of Thai Art: The Path to Commerce." The article talked about the age of the bubble economy, where the Thai art scene had become much more involved in the business world. The value of art pieces was skyrocketing. Thai artists were perhaps selling their souls to capitalists, businessmen, bankers and the nouveau riche. The problem was the edited image that accompanied the news piece. It was the statue of professor Silpa Bhirasri with a

"Sale 50%" banner placed over his name.

You and your peers lined up and marched to protest against Manager Weekly at its offices. Over the next several weeks, no one, teachers and students alike, could concentrate in class. You were indignant towards the "outsiders" who besmirched your school. If there was anything that needed reform or correction, it was for "us" to realize, not for outsiders to dictate.

Punishment for the Art Critic / 1995

NA

An art critic presented a statement saying that your university, its schools, and alumni held a monopoly on the country's art. That served to add fuel to the fire already ablaze from the case of Manager Weekly.

Some upperclassmen dug up the critic's credentials and found that he had been rejected by your university. That rejection had probably become a deep wound for the critic and eventually a revengeful feeling for the university. This must be the case, definitely.

The critic attended an exhibit at the university, and your group guys politely invited him to have a conversation. You surrounded him, leaving no exit. When he tried to speak, he was asked to shut up. He had already said too much in his article. Now it was his turn to listen to your voices. The critic was bullied by your brothers who surrounded him, rammed into his body, elbowed him. This critic had created his own art. Unsophisticated surrealist work. Cracked earth, ox horns, a sharp scythe, the laborers' twisted bodies. How dare he critique education while being so outdated in his own practice? Failure in his own work led him to criticize other people's. The upperclassman brought the critic a glass of wine and deliberately spilled it all over him. He tried to escape but his shoulders were pinned and he couldn't move.

After a while the critic walked out of the place alone. Red wine stained his jacket and crotch. Your friends had fun teasing him. "On your period?", "Why the hell did you cut your dick?"

In truth, at that moment, you thought it was an act of humiliation. To debase someone's humanity with no means of escape or protecting themselves. But all you could say was, "Man... his clothes are all stained now."

Many Years Passed and you Realized

NA

Many years passed and you realized that it was just a mechanism of collective self-defense. Shutting others out. Hoping you'd never have to change yourselves. But that would be a matter for the future.

Right now, we're using the future to talk about the past, maturity to talk about innocence.

Our voices did mature. We've lived long enough to understand all

11 A sentence ending particle denoting politeness in the Northern Thai dialect.

12 A pun, since the Thai word "rak" means "to love", and "chao" can either mean "the monarchy" or serve as a polite ending particle.

13 In English, "to possess another body" or "to be possessed".

too well what things have decayed and died along the path of life.

SCENE 10

Conversation with a Friend / 1996

FRIEND

The last three years, actually six including three years of art school, we've just been repeatedly training in our technique. But we haven't learned anything about how to think critically. Suppose, in the West one day, a sheet of music blown on the wind sticks onto a canvas with a still-wet painting of a violin. Then, paintings start to become low relief with mixed media. They begin to move into the empty air permeating an exhibition room, and eventually become installation art. Art work has shaken itself off the frame, off the walls, and even out of museums. The relationship between art and museums, art and community, critique of government – all these are presented through works of art. But in a place that doesn't recognize the relationship between art and society, even the advent of outlandishly creative techniques merely serve as a desperate attempt to remain relevant within the contemporary art scene – it's just useless affectation. The content of the work hasn't changed at all. Juts your run-of-the-mill moral ideologies or ideas of truth derived from Buddhist thoughts like reincarnation, and the cycle of birth, aging, sickness and death and whatever.

KHAO SING

True. In art thesis exhibitions by graduating students, and works by the teachers exhibited in group shows, solo shows and annual exhibits. They've been constantly and faithfully "reincarnating".

FRIEND

In Thai art, the goal of education and the goal for future artists is always to move towards the Buddhist philosophy of goodness and beauty. The cause and effects of your actions, the idea of reincarnation – they are all conveniently available in the universe of the Tripitaka¹⁴.

KHAO SING

It's all rubbish. And it's time for the "Freshmen Welcoming" again? Did you know they've chosen three people from our class to be this year's Intimidators. Next year, when we're fourth-years, they'll be the ones with full power in determining how students are inducted. I want nothing to do with it.

FRIEND

Me neither. I don't have time to sit and soak myself in the value system here. I want to discover all the other possibilities. I want to absorb as many stimuli as I can. Like alternative rock these days. Or films. There are more and more indie films and foreign films to see. International film festivals at cultural centers,

art-house theaters, and pirate videos. Visual art is the same. If you get too attached to the "great power" of our university in the art world, you'll be swallowed up by a new wave before you know it. Dynamic art movements are already being born outside universities. Curators choose artists and pieces for projects. It isn't some faraway notion anymore for a Thai artist to participate in the Venice Biennale, Art Basel, or documenta. But it's a dream that will realize those new movements, ones this university doesn't nurture.

NA

Your group was invited to exhibit work for the first time as part of the "New Generation of Artists to Watch," chosen by an emerging curator. It was an experience that had a huge impact on you all. It was completely different from the traditions of your academy, where as freshmen you had to walk behind the teachers and upperclassmen, viewing the works in the gallery at the opening of their art exhibitions.

KHAO SING

The other day in class the teacher mocked me. "Ah, here is the work of a great artist. Perhaps this classroom is too small for you. You should have someone from outside evaluate your art, because we're not sure you want to get your grades from us."

FRIEND

I had something similar, too. "We have arrogant students like you every year. Let me tell you, you aren't the first. Don't let it go to your head."

KHAO SING

The other day, they asked me join the meeting to plan for the next "Freshmen Welcoming". I turned them down.

FRIEND

I bet they weren't happy.

KHAO SING

Yeah. They said "You can't just shake your head and turn us down. You've got to offer some solutions."

FRIEND

We should just get rid of that tradition altogether, it's unnecessary.

KHAO SING

That's what I said.

FRIEND

And?

KHAO SING

"Easy for you to say, asshole. Even if we don't do it, the next class will. You think we can get rid of the hazing tradition by skipping

¹⁴ Literally "three baskets", the Tripitaka are the collected sacred texts forming the basis of Buddhism.

it one year?" I said freshies should have a choice in whether they participate or not. The upperclassmen should only haze the ones who want to participate.

FRIEND

Let me guess what they said. "Everyone has to be treated equally."

KHAO SING

Exactly. "How are freshies who are hazed and those who aren't supposed to live together? Just think about it! Think!" Mother-fuckers. My head's splitting.

NA

You advanced to your fourth year. You applied for the Student Loan Fund which started the same year that Banharn Silpa-archa became Prime Minister. The fund was approved. As soon as the first installment appeared in your bank account you moved out of your pigeon hole on the university campus and into a flat with a modest monthly rent.

SCENE 11

Waree Comes to Khao Sing's Room / 2016

NA

Waree came to your room. To model for your art work.

Posture and the Body in Art History 1996

NA

Posture and the body in the history of art. Portraying life in movement has been a challenge since ancient Greece. In sculpture and painting, where the form of presentation is stillness, life is realized when movement in transition between one action and the next is captured and portrayed as a posture with twists and contortions.

Like this 100 x 140 centimeter oil painting. It was the figure of you that your teacher drew. A naked body reclining, its back pressed against a boulder. One leg was bent with knee up, covering your groin. The upper body twisted toward the gazer nearby. One arm was raised to block the sunlight filtering through various flora overhead. A posture of Greek-style beauty set against the background landscape of Southeast Asia.

In Front of the Teacher's Painting / 1996

(RAKCHAO is holding a notebook.)

RAKCHAO

So homosexual.

KHAO SING

I don't think the artist is, though. He was my teacher before I came here. He was pure and simple. He didn't chase fads.

RAKCHAO

But he was already in the club. As are you. You're a homo too, aren't you?

KHAO SING

What about you, Rakchao? You're the experienced one.

RAKCHAO

To me, gender doesn't matter. I just enjoy holding and being held.

KHAO SING

With the people you choose. Not just anyone, right?

RAKCHAO

This part of you. You're always contrary. The way you argue and question everything in the world, dissecting your own feelings.

KHAO SING

What about it?

RAKCHAO

You're like someone who loves taking a watch apart. You love it and you're good at it, but you can't build one yourself. If the school had an art theory major, I'm certain you'd be the top student.

KHAO SING

But doesn't any artistic process, at its foundation, necessitate thinking? Ideas take the lead in walking and guiding the methodology and the process in the same direction. Close your eyes and walk in whichever direction you feel. When you open your eyes, you find yourself in a new, unfamiliar place, even though the instincts that led there you were only habit and skill. Even though the direction was conceived with your eyes closed. You may believe your path was a straight one, but in reality you may have been walking round and round in circles.

RAKCHAO

Just go and major in art theory already.

(KHAO SING and RAKCHAO gradually draw closer together.)

KHAO SING

Tell me – you want touch, love, warmth, so why give freshies the opposite?

Why are you participating in the exact opposite process?

RAKCHAO

There are different processes of arriving at love, warmth and touch, aren't there?

KHAO SING

Even when there's already a direct path which is simple and requires absolutely no digging for other convoluted processes?

RAKCHAO

Won't you leave any room for complexity at all? The mysterious world where dichotomy lives, where words and actions contradict?

(The two of them are now extremely close.)

RAKCHAO

Whatever experience you get yourself involved in. One that transforms you to be part of it. Without any understanding, you walk into it. You pass through it and leave still without any understanding. Do you always have to make everything so clearly readable and completely comprehensible?

(KHAO SING embraces RAKCHAO passionately. Their lips crush one another's. RAKCHAO lightly pushes him away.)

RAKCHAO

Fine. Explain this phenomenon in a comprehensible way, then. Shed light on it. Like you always do.

(KHAO SING takes the notebook RAKCHAO is holding.)

KHAO SING

What's this?

RAKCHAO

My notebook, obviously.

KHAO SING

Can I look inside?

RAKCHAO

Do you want to?

(RAKCHAO tries to take her notebook back. KHAO SING raises the hand that holds the notebook high behind him, beyond her reach.)

KHAO SING

Can I look inside?

RAKCHAO

Go ahead.

Rakchao's Notebook / 1996

NA

Cigarette butts, bus tickets, restaurant receipts, beer bottle caps, coasters, coins, torn posters, tissue stained with something brown like blood. All these were taped into RAKCHAO's notebook. Most of the book had sketches. Self-portraits and animals of some sort. A crow, a black cat, caterpillars and worms. Or eyes of weird shapes from the darkest and deepest parts underground or the deep sea.

Khao Sing Critiques Rakchao / 1996

KHAO SING

You're using those strange deep sea creatures again?

RAKCHAO

How can you tell?

KHAO SING

You always do. Why is it always bizarre creatures with twisted shapes, some hundred eyes and a thousand legs, segmented bodies that extend and shrink, soft and disgusting, referencing male and female genitalia?

RAKCHAO

They're symbols. Representations.

KHAO SING

Of what?

RAKCHAO

Of dichotomy. Beauty and ugliness, love and desire, happiness and a sad, depressed state.

KHAO SING

And they look like these sea creatures?

RAKCHAO

Everyone's imaginary creatures are different.

KHAO SING

Why imagine, then? An imagined creature is only a mediocre symbol so it's easy for people to understand. For example, during one particular period in time, the crow was used by artists as a symbol for the angel of death, death itself, or taking or being deprived of life. That was because at that time there were plagues, and crows were seen circling in the sky waiting to eat carcasses. Now, how is the crow a symbol of death in your contemporary art work? Does it relate directly to your own memory or experiences? If not, you're only borrowing second-hand experiences from other artists like Louise Bourgeois and Francesco Clemente.

RAKCHAO

Are you done lecturing me? Go and do your own work.

KHAO SING

I'd say you should spend more time on the body in your work. Just you and your body on the canvas are enough.

(KHAO SING leaves.)

SCENE 12

Pager / 1996

(Suede's 'Wild Ones' plays.)

NA

At night, your pager would go off.

"Sleep as much as you want but don't forget to dream about me. / Rakchao"

" 'Wild Ones' by Suede before bed and when you wake up. / Rakchao"

"Haven't seen you all day. Call me. / Rakchao"

"There's something in front of your room. Open the door and take a look. / Rakchao"

(KHAO SING finds a gift and picks it up. He opens it, There's a Polaroid camera inside.)

"A camera. Polaroid. But... what for?"

"For taking photos of me or whatever, silly! It's a birthday present."

"There's one more. Open the door, silly."

(RAKCHAO is standing in front of the door. KHAO SING and RAKCHAO embrace tightly and kiss.)

Fire Reignites / 1996

NA

The salty taste of her sweat. Her hair had an artificial scent. The smell of the orange air freshener from the taxi she'd ridden in to come to see you.

(The two move their bodies more passionately. They are soon on the ground. RAKCHAO and KHAO SING take pictures of each other in various poses with the Polaroid camera.)

NA

We fucked like crazy, and did it everywhere.

Of course there were also times of rest – when she had her period, when she didn't feel well. Things got swollen from too much sex. She even gave me herpes. I'm sorry I gave it to you. Her voice was sad. Why are you apologizing? I said. We may as well

have it together.

We were together for quite a long time. We went from being 4th to 5th year students. Throughout our university years, the prime minister changed repeatedly over a short period of time. From Chuan Leekpai to Banharn Silpa-acha, then General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Chuan Leekpai's 2nd term. Then the Tom Yum Kung economic crisis happened. In the Buddhist year 2540¹⁵ the Constitution of Thailand was enacted. And our relationship came to an end.

The End of Love / 1997

(KHAO SING embraces RAKCHAO from behind.)

KHAO SING

Your work has come so far over this last year. "I like touch. I just enjoy holding and being held." Where have those feelings gone?

RAKCHAO

People have to mature. Time is limited. We have to move forward to the next step in life.

KHAO SING

What I don't understand is that you've begun to vilify that clear sense of self-appreciation. The self-admiring kind of beauty in your work. You've been influenced so heavily by Buddhist ideologies. From a religious standpoint, happiness becomes sinful. To live is ever being out of balance. The colors have drained. Now there's only white, black, grey and red. Do you really think that the body is sin and the joy of intimacy and touch is fleeting, that it's merely the vicious cycle of sexual desire? Is it not that you've been told so by a louder, more powerful voice, and you've surrendered to being ruled and suppressed by that power?

RAKCHAO

Sing, you can't be stuck thinking like that forever. I can't spin my wheels like you, wanting to get somewhere but not going anywhere.

KHAO SING

How so?

RAKCHAO

I have to graduate. My advisor says this kind of idea guarantees that I will graduate. Why do you have to debate every single word and just prolong time? What do you get from doing all this?

(RAKCHAO breaks away from Khoasing's embrace from behind, turns around and embraces him.)

RAKCHAO

If we split up, Sing, will you still be my friend? You know that the picture of my life will always include you. But we never thought

that one day we would be married, have kids and make a family. Right? We have each other for a certain period of time. It's true for this period of time, but not outside that.

NA

It was never asked in the first place whether, after getting into a relationship, you'd be together forever. Whether you'd be willing to be a father and start a family together. If it had been asked, though, would you even have been with her at all? The fact that she didn't ask meant that, from the beginning, you weren't ever that person in her future. And if asked after the relationship had begun, it would have been an insult. It would have meant that you simply didn't have the capacity. You felt insulted because of what you simply didn't have in you and never thought of becoming in the first place.

And that's how you still feel now.

She found a new lover. She graduated on schedule.

In the future, she would become a mother. She would put on weight appropriate to her age, become picky and moody, distant from the world of art. She would import things from overseas to sell. Or she would be a well-off housewife of a husband with a stable income from business. She would show off her darling children on Facebook, and upload photos from wedding anniversary trips to Rome, Prague, Paris. She wouldn't talk about politics but would wish for the country to return to the peaceful state of yesteryear. That kind of life.

SCENE 13

Don't Talk About Your Life / 2016

KHAO SING

Not long after graduation I received a document envelope from her. In it there were receipts for coffin donations. Redemption for a life lost. There had been "our" child.

WAREE

What year was that?

KHAO SING

1998. The year of suffering.

WAREE

That's the year I was born. My mother raised me on her own. My father divorced her before I was born. That's how I was raised. My mother bought this condo and we lived here, the two of us...

KHAO SING

I don't need to know your life story. If you can't accept that attitude, you are free to leave. You're just a model, here to offer your body to me. I'm just an artist. I don't need bonding or compassion or caring for one another. I

won't enter into the arena of your family, lovers or friends. Like a set-up for a porn film. Two people meet coincidentally. Their mutual desire erupts. They fuck. They're done. No strings attached.

(KHAO SING takes gets a beer and pours it into a glass.)

KHAO SING

During the Asian economic crisis, Japanese porn VCDs spread like wildfire. Japanese porn is different from that from the West, which only serves the male perspective, savage and coarse. It totally transformed my perception of sex. What I hated most were scenes where the man would abruptly pull out and spurt his cum on the woman's face. After ejaculating the man would shake the cum off his cock. When even a drop landed on his hand you could tell right then that he hated it, his own semen. He would spread his fingers apart as if to avoid dirtying his middle finger with the drop of cum on his forefinger.

WAREE

A person who dislikes his own cum is utterly unattractive.

KHAO SING

That's why Japanese porn was so satisfying for me. After swallowing the cum, the woman would kiss the man, command him to open his mouth, and she would spit whatever remained into it. You have to take responsibility for the taste of your own lust, of the apex of your happiness. I think that's what she was trying to say.

(KHAO SING hands the beer he has been drinking to WAREE and pushes him to take a sip.)

Porn

NA

You loved to watch S&M porn videos where the man was tied up and bound, his entire body wrapped tight with clear film. The woman in a black leather outfit, whipping the man, at times stroking him, administering pain and ecstasy. Except all these things should be happening in more ordinary circumstances. Men who are made to beg, men who are punished, decency torn up. Japanese pornos responded to these wishes better. Stories and tales that you are more familiar with. A shy and fragile girl exploding her long-subdued emotions on a bed. "Asian beauty." At first, you watched uncensored Japanese films. But gradually you realized that the uncensored films had a fixed pattern – they served the male-centric world of sex that wanted only to satisfy itself and control the female body. Sky High, Dream Room, Tokyo Hot, and Caribbeancom. Whatever the label, women were merely string puppets of desire. The porn in the censored world was completely different, because there were so many different styles and stories. The hot female teacher, the father-in-law getting

naughty with his son's wife. A porn star and average Joe in the forest, etc. These were by labels like Ideapocket, SOD, E-Body, and Maxing.

Within the social domain which men control and regulate, the sexual arena is the most fragile spot. Loyalty and betrayal in the same member. Once it had discovered the fun and become addicted to the pleasure, the rules, traditions and customs that had weighed heavily, could be lightened. In reptilian fashion it could even slither under the majestic walls of discipline that it had built itself. Our sexual organ. Penis. Or to put it bluntly, cock. It rises with the taboo, craving pleasure rather than the duty to propagate. It ignores what the brain and heart say. It is rooted in instinct. It rages in the moment of gushing desire, is oblivious to the future, and never learns from history.

The cock of morality is thrust into women. Women are anointed by the morality of this place, by the concepts of nation and masculinity of this culture. The cock of morality which penetrates and anoints everything, and affixes its mark on everything it attempts desperately to anoint. Woman shall bear child. Those children shall be taught that they are born of the same father and shall feel indebted. All of Man's various cocks, therefore, are bodies possessed by the same cock of morality.

Beyond the Galaxy / Around 1992

NA

In art school you had to hide your desire from others. You lived in a dorm and didn't have a VCR. You satisfied your desire yourself. A quiet, humid, intense afternoon. Your small dorm room became a cube that the universe tossed into the void.

The afternoon sunlight and humid heat. The faint smell of your own sweat. The smell of your joints, arms, armpits, and crotch. You smelled them and were aroused. The tip of your finger stroked the space between your testicles and your thighs, and you smelled the warm, damp scent.

You stroked your stiff, erect shaft of flesh and then gripped it. As the universe tossed your room far from the galaxy, a clear syrupy drop brimmed out of the crown of your member. You touched your forefinger to it then spread it around the head of your cock.

You slid the finger with a drop of clear liquid onto the embrace of your tongue, and tasted its flavorlessness.

You leaned your body lower, closer to the fleshy shaft.

Little by little you leaned back, readjusting your body.

Once extended to your fullest, you lifted your legs up in the air, until your head and toes pointed in the same direction.

Your back lifted further and hung in mid-air.

Craning your neck forward, your chin touched your chest.

You took a deep breath. You stretched both arms out, anchoring your body in space like a tripod.

As you breathed deeply you grew aware of your increased flexibility. Your lower body could draw closer to your upper body.

Your tongue touched your penis. From the tip of your cock, a

piercing ecstasy ran to your perineum, across your anus and up your spine.

It ran spasmodically through your body that was now an endless circle. The deep pleasure shifted from your testicles to your cock and erupted before your eyes.

You splashed your own face.

In that moment, you were simultaneously the giver and the receiver.

You were tossed beyond the galaxy and found the taste of pleasure and pain within yourself.

You were flung beyond the world of culture, morality and societal ethics.

Savage, naked, and repulsive. Such behavior without beauty or aesthetics deserved condemnation.

But such a time and moment persists among people and society, and it has never disappeared, nor has it been defeated. It stands audacious and defiant, waiting for the time when, with raucous laughter, it knocks down the hypocrites who spout morality and wield sledgehammers.

(End of Act One)

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

You in 2001

NA

Do you remember what kind of person you were in 2001? You, when Thaksin Shinawatra had just become Prime Minister and the country's new foster father. You, when the government had fully repaid the loans from the IMF ahead of schedule. You, when the national healthcare system known as the "30-baht universal healthcare" scheme was born.

Back then you were possessed by savagery.

You were working as a continuity supervisor for films. On set you checked continuity from scene to scene, as the director's second pair of eyes. The position of assistant director was reserved for a woman who'd just graduated from NYU film school. A well-off "returnee". Everyone called her Fa¹⁶. She had a condo in an alley in Phrom Phong. She gave you "sweets". That was what she called cocaine. She used her ID card to cut two lines, and a straw up one nostril to inhale it.

Fa's Room / 2001

(FA and KHAO SING are dazed, high on cocaine.)

KHAO SING

A couple of years ago I loved going to the flea market at the Carrefour parking lot. People would be selling their CDs or clothes, or airline workers would be selling discount bottles of perfume. I'd look around there and then go to Tsutaya¹⁷. I would look for B-movies and other weird films and watch them at home, so I could write reviews and publish them in the contemporary cultural magazine that I was always writing for. I got to be acquaintances with a young man who was a staff member at Tsutaya. Our first interactions were just general. "Do you want to rent another video? There's a promotion now." That kind of thing. But gradually our conversations grew more curious. "Why are you always watching strange old films?" he'd ask.

(FA laughs strangely, under the influence of cocaine.)

KHAO SING

I wanted to make a film about him. So, I treated him to dinner at a food court and turned my camera on him.

KHAO SING

Why are you working at a video store? You must like movies. I mean, instead of choosing a full-time job, a real profession and income. You must have a film-related interests or ambitions.

NAM

Not at all. I'm only working to support myself. I have to pay back the loan on my bike. My bike is my only interest. I have no other ambitions.

KHAO SING

But with your potential... What's your name?

NAM

Nam¹⁸. It's Nam.

KHAO SING

With your potential, Nam, you could go further. I want to make a movie of you, Nam.

KHAO SING

Nam rented an apartment in the slum along the railroad on Rama IX Road. The noise outside was raucous. But when the door and windows were closed, it turned into a damp and cool world, just enough for one person. Some nights he came to my place. We'd lie around watching long, boring European movies and fall asleep, or watch vivid erotic films and talk about the difference between porn and art films.

KHAO SING

I rode on the back of Nam's bike and we filmed in empty lots, private properties, and abandoned ruins. I wanted to make something Andrei Tarkovsky-esque. Nam drove his bike so fast I was scared, but the speed made me come closer to him.

(FA mimics the two riding a bike, pressing her butt into KHAO SING's crotch.)

FA

Like this?

KHAO SING

Yeah.

(KHAO SING embraces FA and smells her.)

KHAO SING

Back then I sometimes worked as an art director for commercials and it was pretty good work. Whenever I did it a pretty healthy sum would be deposited in my account. So I bought a new computer, installed some editing software and transferred the footage I shot on my handycam to it. I tried editing it in my free time. And that computer led us to the websites of lots of different genres of porn. We were inspired by scandalous videos shot with hidden cameras. So we started going to department stores in the suburbs. I'd heard that gays would secretly hook up in tucked away restrooms. Whenever two men disappeared into a private stall in the restroom, we would sneak into the next stall and get the camera rolling. I would climb on top of the toilet seat and

gently push the camera over. We were doing this repeatedly. And then one day I was almost killed. These bathrooms had a lot of holes in the walls. Once, an erect cock was pushed through one of these holes. I gestured to Nam that he should grab it and start stroking it. Nam looked disgusted. But I thought it was an amazing chance for some great footage. In the end, it was me who reached out and touched the strange member, and filmed it. On our way back, Nam drove even faster than normal. He was enraged, and looking back at me he yelled, "Why the hell are we filming all this? What did you touch that cock for!?" At that moment, the bike lost balance. I was thrown from my embrace, flung away and slammed into the road. The momentum carried me skidding down the asphalt. I could see the headlights of another car approaching. I thought it was going to crush and split me open. But the car suddenly braked. I continued to breathe. And so, living on, the pain gradually began to filter in. Nam dragged me to the side of the road. He had only suffered some scratches. The bike was okay too. But my whole body felt wrenched, and there were huge grazes on my arms, legs, and sides. Blood and pus oozed out, and large swaths of skin flapped open.

FA

Write a screenplay of it.

KHAO SING

Oh, there's more.

Khao Sing Recovers in His Room / 1999

(KHAO SING is lying down on his back in his room.)

KHAO SING

I continued my recovery alone in my apartment. I drew on every last ounce of strength to crawl through my day-to-day life. I managed to write my column and submit it via email during the day. At night I lay down and slept to the sound of blood flowing through the inflamed parts of my body. One night I heard a strange noise. A child crying. Then it turned into the meowing of a cat. As the night went on the sound crept closer. This kept happening again and again until late one night I heard the meowing next to my ear. When I tried to turn to look, I found that my body was frozen, as if I were paralyzed. Then the sound took shape. The head of a cat and the body of a baby. It was lying flat across my chest. I tried to resist but it was no use. It was at this age that I learned for the first time what it was like to experience Pee Am.

(Nam comes close to KHAO SING.)

NAM

You were really struggling in your sleep. What were you dreaming about?

KHAO SING

About you, Nam. It was a nice dream. We were riding a bike together.

NAM

In the dream...were you hard like you usually are?

KHAO SING

Nam, are you high?

KHAO SING

It wasn't like the "sweets" we do now. It was yaba. The drug of laborers, crooks, delinquent kids. You know it?

FA

I've heard of it. The current government is heavily criminalizing it.

KHAO SING

It's gotta be the "sweets". The pores on your face are so clear. And your eyes are at a greater depth than your nose. Your ears are at an even greater depth than your eyes.

(KHAO SING touches FA's face. He is going to grasp her neck and kiss her, but she strikes first with a heated kiss.)

FA

When you want to fuck someone, don't you care at all whether it's a man or a woman, or what kind of personality, ideology, taste or ideals they have?

KHAO SING

Anything goes. The body communicates so much through sex. You can exchange trust through naked bodies.

FA

I think so too. If I want to know whether I could be with someone, I have to sleep with them first. I won't do things the way my parents' generation did. We have to get out of the expectation that everyone gets married and has babies.

(KHAO SING takes FA to the chair and pushes her down into it, then he removes her shorts.)

KHAO SING

When doing it with Nam, the missionary position is the most difficult. Our genitals get in the way. It's as if two intimate souls can't find connection at the physical level. I thought that if I were on the receiving end I could draw Nam closer to me. That's why I asked to go back to his apartment in the slum.

I lay on my back on the mattress, opened my legs, bent my knees and grabbed tightly onto my ankles. I tried to relax as much as I could. Nam's cock pushed into me.

16 Fa, from the Thai word for "sky".

17 A well-known chain of video rental shops.

18 Nam, from the Thai word for "water".

19 Literally "crazy drug", a combination of stimulants, mainly caffeine and methamphetamine.

The noises outside aroused my passion. The sound of a chicken pecking at something on the ground. The noise of a child running and crying out loud. Muffled voices talking outside the room. “This is a search,” said a voice pursuing some gang. I held Nam tight. “Come,” I said. “Come, let’s show the cops how we fuck.” Nam started moving his hips fast and hard. Then we heard some loud noises – bang, bang, bang. It was nothing to be surprised about. It was the sound of a gun. A real gun. Not some child’s toy. Bang bang bang bang. Just outside the cops killed a kid selling drugs. Nam’s cum spurting inside me. Sperm dies as soon as it comes out. My anus relaxed as if I’d just defecated.

FA

You’ve got to make this story into a film.

SCENE 2

Shooting a Threesome / 2005

(In FA’s room. FA, NAM and KHAO SING. FA holds a handcam and shoots NAM. KHAO SING flatters NAM by calling him the “leading actor”. FA teases NAM, who’s been standing frozen, that he’s as stiff as a log in front of the camera. FA is clearly behaving bizarrely. The camera doesn’t like me. NAM excuses himself. FA keeps provoking NAM. Are you going to be shit-scared in front of the camera, or are you going to fight it? What do you want to do right now? FA continues provoking NAM. NAM kisses FA. How do you two kiss? Do it in front of the camera, says FA. KHAO SING and NAM kiss. FA continues to push them to reveal their desire in front of the camera. And then it turns into a threesome.)

NA

Thaksin, the hero on a white horse four years ago, had now transformed into a power-crazed devil. He hid stock ownership, committed policy corruption and cronyism, and canceled TV shows that opposed his government. Four years of his term had passed, and it was election time. The Thai Ruk Thai Party garnered 19 million votes, and Thaksin returned for his second term.

One year in, in February 2006, Thaksin Shinawatra declared the dissolution of Parliament. There were protests on the streets demanding Thaksin’s exile. Every week there was public discussion on the issues of fraud, privatization of public services, illegal pay-offs, and corruption at Suvarnabhumi International Airport. Thaksin’s definition of democracy became Parliamentary dictatorship. Thaksin’s evil sorcery had to be dismantled. We had to halt the election, one of the forms of democracy. On September 19, 2006, Army Commander Sondhi Boonyaratgalin staged a coup d’état as the head of the Council for Democratic Reform, and exiled Thaksin. The people flooded the streets and placed flowers in the muzzles of soldiers’ rifles, showering the

army with love for having chased off a demon.

Were you conscious of the political situation at the time? Not at all. You never liked politicians in the first place. In the life of an artist, it is best to avoid people of this species.

But if politicians and businessmen approached you humbly to buy an art work from you, that’s a different story. If they handed you a blank check, or offered to be a patron, if that were the case then it would be okay to meet with them and discuss it.

But that would never happen to you, since you had turned 30 years old and still didn’t have a single piece of worthwhile art.

SCENE 3

Borrowing from Future Happiness / 2005

NA

In the middle of the night FA was standing on the veranda, absent-mindedly, in her underwear. She stuck her head over the edge and looked out, then traced her gaze down to the ground. People who can do that are so brave, she said. She admired and respected people who’d made up their minds to do it. The scent of evaporating drugs emanated from FA’s body, from her skin. Her body started to give away the remnants of taking “sweets.” “Borrowing happiness from the future.”

One day she went into the shower room and stayed in there for too long.

You broke the door open to find her sitting on the floor in a daze. Blood was flowing from one of her arms, diluted in the water. The gash gaped open revealing white tissue underneath. Her other hand still gripped the multi-purpose knife. The knife that had gone rusty from use, helping to put “sweets” up her nose.

Video Leak 2006

NA

The video you shot in the department store bathroom leaked onto underground website communities. It spread through the world in an instant. It was categorized as Asian, amateur, or voyeur, and tagged with Thai, gloryhole, and handjob.

NAM

At first, a man I didn’t know kept coming back to the video store. He signaled to me with a dirty look. And the other day, another man started up a conversation with me in the bathroom and asked if I was the guy in the video? He took a laptop out of his bag and showed me that he’d saved the video. He offered to delete the video if I let him touch my cock.

KHAO SING

My computer had a virus. I took it to an IT mall to get fixed, and this is what happened.

NAM

It's not fair that I'm the only one who's fucking humiliated.

KHAO SING

It was meant to be part of our movie. It was supposed to be framed within an artistic environment and elements. The video was stolen and now it's ended up somewhere it doesn't belong, and been turned into something worthless, shameful, and scandalous. But you yourself, Nam, you are not worthless or shameful.

NAM

You used me. You fucking tricked me with nice words and empty promises.

KHAO SING

No one can really be used by another person.

NAM

You have to get that video off that fucking site! If you can't, I'll hold it against you 'til the day I die.

KHAO SING

There's no air here. It reeks of yaba. You're still doing it?

NAM

I'm not important anymore.

KHAO SING

Don't say that.

NAM

Can you swallow my cum?

(KHAO SING nods.)

NAM

Can I film it?

KHAO SING

Stop using drugs. The more you use them, the more you want to hurt yourself. You should live your own life. Do you understand?

(NAM exits the room.)

Nam Destroys Khao Sing's Room / 2006

(NAM in KHAO SING's room. He takes the desk, bookshelf, video tape storage shelves, CDs, destroys them and trashes the room.)

SCENE 4

PAD²⁰ Protest / 2006

NA

You went to an assembly at FA's invitation. Her friends were going to perform in front of about a thousand people. Let's go to support them. There would be Phua Chiwit²¹, country, modern Thai music, and even DJs. There would be some theatre and some political Chinese opera performances. Sondhi Limthongkul was also slated to give an overnight speech about the Thaksin's evils. Friends from film and music, and celebrities would also be there. It was a People's Alliance for Democracy protest in front of Sanam Luang²².

KHAO SING

The fact that we participated in today's gathering means the two of us are part of the Thaksin opposition, right?

FA

Yeah, we are.

KHAO SING

So, does that make us part of PAD?

FA

No.

KHAO SING

Why not? We shouted their slogans and even bought their T-shirts and scarves.

FA

We came to support our friends. We bought those because we wanted to support our friends' designs.

(FA and KHAO SING kiss.)

NA

Kissing in a dark alley. You'd done this before with someone. At the demonstration, you caught sight of the Poet. You saw her on the other side of the barricade where the security guards were. She wore a yellow scarf around her neck that said "Save the country" and she was wearing yellow wristbands. She had changed. Her body was broader, and she was fuller in the cheeks and under the chin. There's no one who doesn't change. Even your body isn't the same anymore. Later, you read several thought pieces she had written online. "Thaksin has created evil successors and is expanding his power. Warriors who gaze upon the light, let us steal their light and make them blind. Throw every one of them into hell, and let them burn to the ground." Her once beautiful poetry was no more. But she was celebrated and popular.

20 People's Alliance for Democracy, more commonly known as the Yellow Shirts, was a Thai political movement and pressure group. It was originally a coalition of protesters against former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Its membership consisted mainly of ultra-royalist middle-class and working-class Bangkok residents and anti-Thaksin Southerners, supported by some factions of the Thai Army, some leaders of the Democrat Party, and members of the state-enterprise

labor unions.

21 A type of Thai folk music, strongly influenced by Western folk and rock music with a protest theme mainly centered on the hardship of working-class people and in favor of a democratic political system.

22 A large open field and public square near the historic center of Bangkok, famously used for large public gatherings and events.

KHAO SING

Let's go back to my place and do this. Let's go crazy inside, in the soft yellow light.

Are You Hurt? / 2006

(KHAO SING and FA return to KHAO SING's room. It's now completely trashed. NAM is there.)

NAM

I did it. Are you hurt?

FA

What happened? Why are you so drunk?
(She reaches towards NAM's shoulder.)

NAM

(Twisting away from her.)
Don't try to be nice to me.

KHAO SING

Don't say that, Nam.

NAM

I went to see him. The guy who said he'd erase the video.

KHAO SING

Why would you do a thing like that?

NAM

You wouldn't do it so I had to find someone who would.

KHAO SING

That wasn't the right thing to do.

NAM

What's right is what you, and only you, say is right, isn't it? You tell me to love you, to wait, to calm down, to begin a new life, to stop using drugs, but what about you? You're doing what you've always done. I was desperate so I got drunk and went to that guy's place. I told him to do it, to erase the video. That if there was something he wanted, he could have it, all of it. Are you hurt by what I did? The video is gone. He deleted it right in front of me. But a few days later he posted a new video. He shot the two of us fucking. So? Are you hurt now?

KHAO SING

I am hurt, Nam. I'm really sad.

NAM

Do you still love me at all?

Nam's Death / 2006

NA

"Do I love you?" Try jerking the handlebars and flipping the bike. Launch us into the air. Let's go. Doesn't matter where. Then, the young man put you on his bike, gripped the handlebars, and rode off fast and with aggression. Standing in the middle of the cable-stayed bridge, over the dark and thick Chao Phraya River, you held hands, embraced each other, and kissed. Don't slip away. Life has its challenges and troubles to get through. In that moment, the young man rushed across the footpath, jumped over the crash barriers, and standing there flashed you a satisfied smile. And bang! Life rang out loud.

(Video of KHAO SING interviewing NAM.)

NA

Seen in a recording, one appears more significant than in reality.

SCENE 5

After Nam Died / 2006

KHAO SING

I'll tell you what happened to Fa and me after that. One day, we were at a party at someone's condo. Suddenly there was a blackout, and the police came to search the place. It wasn't like we were doing drugs on the sly at a club or in the slums. We should have been able to party all night without anyone reporting us. We were in the type of condo where the rich and famous live, surrounded by the upper echelons of the art and entertainment industries. We were supposed to be the most protected by that invisible armor. Not like those that are easily shot to death in the alleys in the slum.

Fa was taken into police custody. She finally gave in and called her parents. Her father contacted his friends and colleagues, those indebted to him at one point or another. The chain of phone calls finally came back to the local police chief. The story ended up being that the party had disturbed the neighbors. Fa returned to her family home, under her parents' supervision. While Fa was with her family, she sometimes went to rehab at her father's instructions, and other times she went with her mother to sutra recitations to exorcise demons. When I called her, she said "They chant the sutras so vindictively and incessantly. It's impossible to bear the sound without losing your mind. We cannot go on living, when hope is merely a word of consolation." I'll come and take you away. "Sing, do you have a passport?" I'll get one. The week after, my passport arrived. I wanted to tell her, but I couldn't reach her. After some time, she called me. It was around 11pm. She was calling at 11:12am from Central Park. Come over, Sing. Come live

with me. I'll take you to MoMA and the Guggenheim. I probably won't go back. To the place where I can't be myself. Like there's always someone who owns me. I'm not going to feel bad about myself for this... how I've chosen what's good for me. Your body was sent back to your home province, and the funeral at the temple lasted for three days. Then you were burned in a fire, became smoke, and disappeared into the sky. But another form of you is still dancing in the archives of the carnal world, arousing every time someone presses play.

SCENE 6

In Flames / 2011

NA

There was an article that the Poet wrote for a news site.

The coup d'état got rid of Thaksin, drafted a new constitution and even used the judicial system to limit the civil rights of party leaders. Yet that party has returned for another term by means of an election. By means of an evil democracy. By means of the parliamentary dictatorship. By means of abolishment conspiracy. By the people from Isan²³ and the north. Bigoted, ignorant, stupid and easily bought. We chased the specter of Thaksin away many times. Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat. We even blockaded the airport. And yet he still returned. He returned with the woman prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra. We have to make it known that light is being eroded by darkness. We must be each other's eyes and ears. We shall imprison them, lynch them, and destroy their entire kind.

That article received many comments in enthusiastic agreement. You reminisced. That posture that you yearned for as a young man. The seam whose stitches drew the thighs together down the middle. Nestled in the middle of the Poet's body back then. You wrote a comment. "If you insist that this is something that transcends everything, I don't think it's right to cling on to it in order to support your own position."

Soon the meaning behind that comment was questioned. "What do you mean by 'this'? Could you please elaborate."

Your account was investigated and your real name was revealed and reviled.

In the cold, frozen online world, we are dried black and burnt to a crisp. Our shattered remains are scattered all over the world, whether it's the physical world, the spiritual world or the online world. And it disgusts others. Your emotions had forgotten all conscience and reason. Just like when the bike lost its balance and spun violently on the road. They wanted your blood to run. This had happened once before.

Dragged across the grass lawn. Hanged from a tamarind tree. A shoe was shoved into the mouth of your soulless body.

(A throng of people surround KHAO SING. They recreate the photograph taken in October 1976, of a man being hanged from a tree and a crowd of people looking on, laughing.)

NA

Your mouth is shut so you can't speak.

That would happen again.

Dangling down [*something unspoken*]. Claiming and using [*something unspoken*]. All for [*something unspoken*]. The ultimate, hideous stunt, somehow seen as beautiful only through contortions against all constraints, and resulting in a deformed body. The aesthetics of compulsion. The impossible is distorted into the possible just to answer the desires of a specific group of people.

(The performers, each taking strange distorted poses, lie down on the ground. They are performing corpses.)

NA

Just like when the handsome, dandy, middle-aged gentleman from Oxford named Abhisit Vejjajiva became prime minister. He established a new government within the protective shields of the military. A coalition party of the previous government defected. Their long mutual disgust didn't matter when the party in question shamelessly joined the coalition with the new government.

There Is No Politics in Beauty

NA

There is no politics at all in beauty. You may have thought that. But beauty has the power to impress, dazzle, and transform us. You may despise the ideologies of both the red and the yellow²⁴. Staying in opposition. And yet you followed the beauty of the opposition both on Facebook and Instagram.

SCENE 7

A Tied-Up Desire / 2016

NA

Once the young man said to you, "You won't even touch me. How can an artist fully capture something when he hasn't experienced it in any way other than through sight?" But touch would be the beginning of the end. If you touched his body with your hand, next you'd touch his mouth, and then you would be fucking. And that would give way to awkward feelings. You wouldn't see each other the same way anymore.

(WAREE is in a white T-shirt and underwear only. He wears black-framed glasses. KHAO SING grabs both of WAREE's hands, pulls them apart, and straddles him.)

KHAO SING

A ruddy face. I once had a face like that. Now I've simply become

²³ The northeast of Thailand.

²⁴ Refers to the two bitterly divided camps that have for years driven sporadic protests in Thailand. The red-shirts are formally known as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), and consist mainly of rural workers,

left-wing activists, and pro-democracy supporters, while the yellow-shirts is a loose grouping of royalists, ultra-nationalists and the urban middle class, also known as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD).

disinterested in everything. My face is rough, its surface dull. My skin has drooped, giving into gravity. My eyes, once white, are now stained like smoke. It won't be long before I get cataracts. Like when you see a photo of an old person with eyes clouded white.

WAREE

You pin others down and crucify them and keep them from doing what they desire.

KHAO SING

You have the right to do it to others. Anyone.

WAREE

But not to you. The forbidden body.

KHAO SING

The body of diseases and deterioration.

WAREE

Why don't you let me have a taste? To see whether you are what you feel about yourself.

(KHAO SING shakes his head.)

WAREE

You have me in all the ways that you wish. My coming to model for you. My falling into your desire.

KHAO SING

No, not all.

WAREE

In fact, you're not any different from a moralist or a eunuch. Always talking about it but never actually doing it.

KHAO SING

I've done it all before.

WAREE

So what? You're satisfied by yearning but not touching. I can see you desire to be tied down, blindfolded and for your body to be immobile. You want something that you can't see to come and taste your flesh, letting yourself be done to, in whichever way it wants. So you won't feel guilty of the restrictions or limits you've set up for yourself if you fall into the state of being tied down and helpless.

KHAO SING

Interestingly put.

WAREE

But it's me who hasn't pushed that far. I see you translate your

deep desire to be tied down into controlling and giving others orders. But deep down, you're just giving orders to yourself.

KHAO SING

(He releases his grip on the young man.)
You're the one who approached me

WAREE

You approached me, pretending I approached you.

(WAREE touches the scar on the crook of KHAO SING's arm with his forefinger. Then, he traces it with his tongue, lightly sucking on it. KHAO SING lets WAREE do as he pleases.)

The Gradual Disintegration of the Flesh

(KHAO SING gently takes WAREE's arm and leans him back off the sofa, so he hangs upside down. He lifts WAREE's other arm and places it on his forehead, as if to block the sunlight. It is the same pose he took when he pleased himself on the rock on the riverbed that afternoon. KHAO SING positions his body in between WAREE's legs, sitting with his knees up. With his forefinger, he traces from his collarbone to his chest ever so lightly, stopping at the nipple. Then he lays his face into WAREE's chest.)

NA

You listen to the sound of the young man's stomach twist and secrete the acid that eats away his stomach walls. Would Waree develop gastritis if nothing is done about this?

You want something so badly that you're stressed out. So badly you go out of your mind. By the time you finally have it, your life is ruined.

You will remain lying down like this, pressing your face into this chest, burning up this aged breath in a bosom at its full glory. The gradual disintegration of the flesh. Every day you rinse your nose with salt water praying that it might help soften the noise of your breath.

Grab the desire and put it in a body. No love involved. Once you're satisfied, you finish up and leave. You insist to others that it's only to quench your thirst.

That's how you want it to be.

Massage / 2016 = The Feet / 2010

(KHAO SING lifts his face away from WAREE's chest. He sits on his knees in between WAREE's spread legs.)

(KHAO SING grasps one of WAREE's legs with both hands. He bends the knee and pushes it towards the model. He takes WAREE's foot in his hands.)

(KHAO SING turns the sole of WAREE's foot towards him, then massages it with both thumbs.)

KHAO SING

Does it feel good?

WAREE

How come you know how to give a massage?

KHAO SING

I'm just making it up.

Tension and strain is inevitable for the foot.

NA

The foot touches dirty, filthy things. It's used in behavior that expresses an uncaring attitude.

The butt of the cigarette you've smoked is thrown on the ground, crushed underfoot and kicked into the sewer.

You step on the face of someone you hate.

Bacteria and dirt buried in the nails and between the toes.

Repeatedly beaten with pressure, the foot grows stubborn and apathetic.

It's a tough and sturdy body part. Its beauty lies in weathered coarseness. It has perseverance, and is, on the other hand, an explosive outlet when perseverance reaches its limit.

KHAO SING

In anatomy class I learned that the size of someone's foot is about the same as the size of their face. When we draw the human body, we adhere to those proportions for the accuracy of our picture.

(KHAO SING brings the sole of WAREE's foot to his cheek.)

KHAO SING

But the foot will never transform into the face or even take its place.

You can't interchange the foot for the face. Or can you?

The feet make their living with perseverance, in order to provide the arms, hands and face with comfort and happiness.

They remain the foundation for a tall, majestic tower. At times they seek a little kindness from the top of the lighthouse. Won't you pass down some joy and gratitude the way you press down your weight on them? You can't be so cruel as to only press down on them with your status and duty. Or can you?

(KHAO SING grabs both of WAREE's legs, straightens them, and aims the feet towards the ceiling. WAREE feels the entire back of his legs stretched tight.)

(After a while, KHAO SING bends WAREE's body so that his feet frame his face. WAREE's butt is now very close to KHAO SING's face.)

(KHAO SING draws his body close to WAREE's arched back,

supporting WAREE in that position.)

KHAO SING

Are you embarrassed?

WAREE

A little.

KHAO SING

Because you only take this position secretly, when you're alone?

WAREE

It's a little embarrassing for someone else to put me in this position. It's a helpless pose.

KHAO SING

You know what I'm going to make you do?

WAREE

You're going to make me suck myself.

(KHAO SING stretches WAREE's legs even further and places his feet on sofa behind his head. KHAO SING leans his face in close to the young man's. He reaches both arms underneath WAREE's armpits, and lifts the young man up into his embrace.)

NA

A bullet is shot from an unseen spot. M79 grenades fall on the offices of a newspaper, power poles, and elsewhere. All the feet that are targeted and shot at. Oppressed, tortured feet whose intentions are crushed again and again, whose mouths are stopped. They crawl low, desperately and frantically, trying to escape and survive. Can't die. Have to go home to see the wife and children. Promised to come home with dinner. Even prepared what to say if questioned on arriving home: "Just wanted to check out the protest." Haven't bought dinner yet. Have to hurry now. And suddenly, consciousness is lost. No need to buy dinner now. No need to work hard to make a living anymore. Let the body be just a body. The spirit has been set free, there is no sadness.

This society doesn't care who comes or goes.

It only cares about those who are still here.

And its remembrance for those who've gone is always prescribed – remembrance which never taints it with any responsibility.

Big Cleaning Day / 2010

(KHAO SING sniffs WAREE's neck.)

KHAO SING

Did you go out on the Big Cleaning day?

WAREE

Why do you ask? Do my clothes smell of detergent? Weren't you at the PAD stage too?

KHAO SING

Yeah.

WAREE

This country was being burned and destroyed. There was trash everywhere. How could you let it happen and not do something about it? I didn't pressure anyone. I didn't kill anyone. I just joined others to clean up the city.

(WAREE quickly dresses himself and returns to his room.)

SCENE 8

A Pathetic Body / 2016

NA

Your body can no longer burn energy the way it could when it was young. A body with accumulated residue, a bloated stomach, and the constant secretion of gastric acid. A body that wants to burp but cannot.

Your most comfortable sleeping position used to be with both arms raised above your head; these days, your shoulders and arms get stiff and cramped instead. It usually brings on the Pee Am. Your body tightens up and its parts become unmovable. Even the neck.

If your subconscious were a room with four walls with ears and eyes attached, those ears and eyes would gaze down at your body from above. They would see that everything was the exact opposite of what your consciousness thought it was. You're not thrashing your arms and legs with full strength; there are only twitches and insignificant straining.

It's a saddening and pathetic body.

SCENE 9

A Video Call / 2016

(WAREE is sitting in front of a computer screen in his room. He is making a video-call on LINE. KHAO SING answers. WAREE waves to him and then puts his forefinger on his mouth. He brings his face close to the camera, gives a little smile with the corner of his mouth and winks. KHAO SING grasps his clothes and gestures taking them off. WAREE crosses his arms, grasps the bottom of his shirt and slowly lifts it up.)

KHAO SING

See this brownish yellow skin? No abdominal muscles whatsoever. Just a lump of fat enveloping the belly.

(KHAO SING slightly sucks in his tummy. He runs his hand up through the thin body hair that covers the area below his navel.)

KHAO SING

So unkempt. Your belly, though, is flat and clean. Hairless.

(KHAO SING and WAREE gaze at each other through the screen. Then WAREE sets his smartphone in position and take out his penis in front of it. KHAO SING stares.)

NA

Your teacher's words from 24 years ago still cut. "I don't know what you're saying. Were you ever bothered before, whether it was the army or the politicians who ruled the country? Can someone your age truly feel change?"

But those words are now spoken by people who want the country's absolute peace and order, who think the army is the answer, who think that everybody wishes to be ruled over, supported and protected.

What if you could say these words to Waree?

Why did you join the whistle blowers?²⁵ It has nothing to do with your life at the moment...

You wanted to be with him there. You wanted to take the young man's neck with both hands and push his head down and make him suck and swallow his own member to the root. The same way one man had seized the neck of another man who was trying to make his way through a resistant crowd on his way to the polling booth²⁶.

The PDRC Protest / 2013-2014

(WAREE slowly tilts his body forward. He wraps his arms around his leg so that it is drawn closer to his head.)

NA

You recall the days of the PDRC protest that went on continuously from 2013 to 2014. Reporters from all public TV channels, and even a neutral channel like Thai PBS, were glued to the stage with live reports of the demonstration almost every hour. Drones were launched in excitement. The army was watching from afar, waiting for the right timing to seize control of the situation. Hundreds of thousands of people. Comedians, celebrities, pretty faces took turns getting on stage like floral displays beautifying the event.

"You can't curse this stupid, shitty bitch of a prime minister enough. She's an idiot. She has no clue what she's talking about. She just reads off a script. She can't control the flood²⁷ situation. She's all *Four Seasons*²⁸. She can "handle it."²⁹ She is the biggest

25 Refers to the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) or People's Committee for Absolute Democracy with the King as Head of State, who were an umbrella political pressure group, aimed at removing the influence of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra from Thai politics and achieving political reforms through an unelected 'People's Council'. The group played a leading role in the 2013-14 Thai political crisis, organizing large-scale protests within Bangkok.

PDRC protestors wore and blew whistles as a symbol of the group.

26 A famous image from the general elections held in Thailand in February 2014, after Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra asked to dissolve parliament more than a year early owing to Thailand's political crisis. The photograph depicts a member of the anti-government PDRC grasping a voter by the throat outside a polling station as other members look on.

imbecile and worst disgrace in the history of the Kingdom of Siam.”

Artists, writers, poets, and others who celebrate the spirit of being reigned over by rulers gathered to blow their whistles.

“There’s so much freedom in this country that people have lost their conscience and sense of spirituality. The concepts of virtue and goodness and seniority have been challenged and destroyed by the idea that all men are equal. Equality isn’t realistic. We have to let farmers plant rice, feel the salt of their sweat, bathe in the heat of the sun every morning and evening, and contemplate how they’re indebted to the land of their ancestors. Let them live humbly!”

Then, a bomb went off in front of the Big C mall at Ratchadamri. It had only been four years since one of those killed had opened his eyes for the first time to see the world.

Shots rang out in a restaurant parking lot. The poet Mainueng K. Kuntec³⁰ was assassinated in broad daylight.

The Paralyzed Body of the Nation

NA

Even though Yingluck’s government had announced the dissolution of Parliament in order to organize a general election, the desire for the army to stage another coup d’état gave birth to yet more demands; the immediate halt of all political activity, reform before election, the closure of the country, the shutting down the of the roads with traffic cones. It was like a body with white, itchy fungal infections on the mouth, tongue, and genitals.

The paralyzed body of the nation. A body transformed into a string puppet. A body that doesn’t deserve to have life. A body that doesn’t deserve the dynamics from its diverse parts to drive itself forward. A body that must be owned by one single entity. There’s no need to hide the identity of the mastermind anymore. It’s clear who’s behind all this, pulling the strings connected to the limbs and eyes. There’s only one owner who puppeteers this body away from the desire for humanity and freedom. Let’s all laugh over this paralyzed body of the nation.

Blood Flowing from Protests / Cum Flowing from Porn

(KHAO SING lies on his back and fully stretches, then lifts his lower body up in the air. Two circles, one folded forwards and the other backwards. Each holding on to their own genitals as the anchor.)

NA

You have seen it. Footage of an attack that occurred during a protest.

Running along the outside wall of a building, away from bullets fired from an unknown source, a person stumbles into frame towards a group of four or five other people who are already

there. The camera wavers. The next instance, bright red blood pours out, across the floor and down some concrete steps.

When the camera tilts down, it shows the person face down on the ground.

They are trying to hold themselves up with both arms. The blood flows continuously without pooling, like water. You recall the time you were still working in film. The art director liked to make stage blood thick and viscous. But blood is like that only after several hours. When it flows out of the body, it’s like fresh water. Flowing out like water from a faucet.

Soon they stop moving. Only the blood continues to flow without pause. They can’t breathe, and suddenly grow sleepy.

NA

You’ve seen group sex scenes and cum shots in porn films.

Bukkake³¹. Usually there are just a few groups of two or three in focus, while the others are far off in the background. As the camera moves off a supporting actor he isn’t hard anymore. Then he occupies himself to get it back up, ready for another round. But he just can’t, and yet he has to continue performing. Soon the camera abandons him, it moves on to the leads. The supporting actors leave the scene. The story and emotions all lie with the main characters. The viewers follow the main characters, and not you. So you hide in a corner and help yourself, alone. The supporting actors who have gone to lick their wounds off-camera never experience victory the way the main characters do. The leads wear military-style camouflage clothes at a party at a famous restaurant in Thong Lo and shout their hurrahs³². May 22, 2014.

Eating a sandwich, reading George Orwell’s “1984” in a public place, even young people engaged in these symbolic actions of protest were arrested by soldiers and taken into custody.

The body is moved, manipulated by intentions from the past. The body wakes up, and begins to move in this possessed state.

SCENE 10

You Don’t Feel It Anymore

NA

You still remember the first time you drew, the line you made in your notebook, and how that line later met with realism. The pictures that artists created centuries ago became your final goal. As you switched from pencil to pen to ink and then to paints, you walked through art history and you learned the limits of your own talents.

Was it Paul Cézanne who put movement into the wind and sunlight? The movement of leaves and shadows, branches, trees, and even hills. The hills that shift as if rocked by an earthquake. All this made real through the illusion of vague lines and geometric shapes. Lines mirror the rhythm of the body. Humans simultaneously chaotic and continuous. Time is connected. Past,

27 Refers to the great floods of Thailand in 2011, the country’s worst flood crisis in almost 70 years.

28 PM Yingluck Shinawatra skipped a parliamentary session for a private meeting with a group of business people at the Four Seasons hotel. The case became a scandal among opposition parties who openly questioned her ethics.

29 PM Yingluck Shinawatra was infamously remembered for her repetitive claims that her government could handle any problematic situation in the country.

30 Dubbed by the Red Shirt demonstrators as “the POET of the people”, he was among the first POETs who publicly supported the grass root pro-democracy demonstration in 2013-14.

31 A sex act in which multiple people ejaculate on another person.

32 Refers to a party held by leading members of the PDRC who took the coup d’état in 2014 as a sign of their victory.

present and future descend the stairs in Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2".

How did the rumors go, that came from the far West? "Painting is dead." Christo wrapped royal palaces and entire islands in the sea. Joseph Beuys tamed a coyote in a gallery by living, sleeping and eating with it. Nam June Paik placed a Buddha to stare at a Buddha on TV. Marc Quinn froze his own blood to create a sculpture of his face. Those were ideas from the West. They are not your spirit. We humans of the East, we Thais don't adhere to their norms and ways living. That is what you must find.

When you were young, didn't you want to go far away? At least a step and a half or two steps farther than where you were then. But that determination disappeared. You don't feel it anymore.

The determination and arrogance, the desire to completely change the consciousness of the art world melted away when you graduated from university. You worked hard to make a living, you sought stability, and you worked to maintain the health of your body and mind. You don't feel it anymore.

In the art world, as curators have stepped in to assemble, manage and orchestrate the concepts for solo and group exhibitions, written articles abound and exhibition brochures replace the actual art works. You don't feel it anymore. Select language, intellectual and academic, governs this space and chooses who has access, who can touch art. You aren't smart enough for the art industry, and can't bear schmoozing, talking about other people only to go home and lie, wallowing in self-pity, alone. You don't feel it anymore. That's why you returned to a world of art devoid of such complexity.

Edgar Degas's paintings of ballet lessons. You don't feel it anymore. Young girls with limbs extended, their movement frozen in position. A gentle light illuminating the neck, under the chin, the slope of the chest, the slender legs. You don't feel it anymore. And the work of Pierre Bonnard, peeping from the next room to catch a naked woman taking a bath. Bright, beautiful colors. Happy and calm. The beauty of the simplest activity seen in peaceful sunlight and shadow. You don't feel it anymore. The world of beauty is eternal. Time captured in paintings remains in its place, waiting for you patiently and understandingly. You don't feel it anymore. A work of art is so precious you can trade your whole life for an opportunity to stand before it and see it with your own eyes. You don't feel it anymore. Formless emotions are made to take shape through the body and its posture. This can be found in the works of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Lucian Freud, and Francis Bacon. You don't feel it anymore. Like a sword that penetrates the human body and affects the heart in a single stroke. You felt driven to seek and one day possess that quality as a painter...

You don't feel it anymore.

You traveled alone to Paris. You stood in front of Gustave Courbet's "The Origin of the World" at the Musée d'Orsay. A simple picture of the female genitalia. You don't feel it anymore. At the time, Fa was in Paris too. She was with her boyfriend, a young photographer. You don't feel it anymore.

She wanted to take you to an art museum, even though it wasn't

MoMA in New York. You don't feel it anymore. The next day you met up with her and together you lounged in the city of love and glory. You don't feel it anymore. But not without revolution and death also. You don't feel it anymore. Even protests and executions in the plaza. You don't feel it anymore.

On the fifth floor of the Pompidou Centre, there were pieces from the early 20th Century. Beginning with Fauvism, Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism and Dadaism. You don't feel it anymore. Down to the fourth floor, works were exhibited chronologically starting from the 1960s. Abstract art, Fluxus, minimalism, pop art. You don't feel it anymore.

The more you walk, the further you are pushed away from art. You can't access its messages anymore. You don't understand what André Breton wants to say with his "Le Mur de l'Atelier." You feel the same way standing before Andy Warhol's black and white portrait of Elizabeth Taylor. You can't understand what is communicated through the shattered pieces of a piano in an exhibit.

When you parted ways, you smiled at her and said, "I'm glad I could see the real work in front of me. It's totally different from only seeing them in books." You don't feel it anymore. (The narrator reaches his hands out in front of him.)

What about this? Do you feel this?

SCENE 11

October 13, 2016

NA

Calm and deep, the Chao Phraya River runs through the city, dividing it into two sides. Thonburi and Phra Nakhon.

You and Waree are at a restaurant by the river.

The young man reaches both arms across the table and places his hands on yours. Holding your hands, he looks you in the eye. You look around the restaurant to see if anyone notices your actions.

Actually, nobody cares what you're doing. Everyone is staring at the TV as if under a spell. The prime minister is making an announcement.

Around 10pm, you both leave the restaurant and walk. In the shadow of a building where no light can reach, Waree stops walking and kisses you on the lips.

The young man then draws back and says: How about this? Do you feel this?

You both keep walking, onto Rama VIII Bridge.

You stop right in the middle between Thonburi and Phra Nakhon. Waree turns his back to the road and faces the river and the faraway landscape.

The past distorts itself into odd shapes. It freezes in unnatural shapes like rubber bands that have been fixed in place for a long time. You believe that these are their original forms. So when they loosen and snap back to their natural state, you can only

watch dumbfounded.

Waree is now on the outside of the railing.

WAREE

Right now, in this moment, I'm ready to die for you.

"It shouldn't be you. At this point, I should be the one who dies."

WAREE

But you won't.

"I can die in your place."

WAREE

No. The moment for you to express that has passed. You will never actually die in my place. You will be the one who goes on living, lashed countless times by the scourge of memory and the repeating circumstances which we call the present, until your whole body and heart are completely beaten and numb.

You don't want a model to possess life. You don't want to know your model's background or where they came from. From the beginning, you didn't want your model to be anything more than a model. You might feel that we fit perfectly together, that we can talk, that we're in rhythm. Because the model asks for nothing. In front of the artist who draws him, the model knows how to control his own emotions and thoughts and express them only in a manner appropriate to his status.

But there is a limit to such a time. One day, naturally it runs out. What you worry about dying and slipping away is not me, therefore, but your own feelings. I'm sorry to have to use such disagreeable language.

NA

All of these words should have been spoken by you.

WAREE

Yes. Because I am you.

Can you accept the truth of who I am now?

Please let go of my hands.

NA

You will continue to hold onto him like this. Until your arms grow numb from the stretch and ache because of the pull. Until your body can no longer endure it.

(WAREE, who has had both arms extended until now, lowers them, falls to the ground and lies there face up.)

NA

13 October, 2559³³

THE END

³³ The date of the death of H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej.