



Temporal Parallels Between *Normal & Nature* by Kamin Lertchaiprasert and *Going Forth by Day* Bill Viola

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Abstract

An essay entitled *Temporal Parallels between Normal & Nature by Kamin Lertchaiprasert and Going Forth by Day by Bill Viola* focuses on Lertchaiprasert's and Viola's creative investigation of time from different perspectives. The two installations clearly refer to the two artists' different cultural, geographical, and philosophical backgrounds. However, the two installations reveal two noteworthy parallels which shall be investigated in this essay.

There are two significant parallels that I shall explore. The first parallel is that between the two artists' autobiographical characteristics evident in their publications and works. The second parallel is that between their artistic engagements of time.

In order to discuss the two artists' autobiographical characteristics, I have explored M.M. Bakhtin's notions of two types of autobiography in classical Greece: first, Platonic and second, the rhetorical autobiography and biography. Bakhtin's notions on the Greek autobiography have contributed to my observation and discussion of Lertchaiprasert's and Viola's autobiographical characteristics evident in their publications and works.

In order to observe the forms of time in *Normal & Nature* and *Going Forth by Day*, I have focused on Lertchaiprasert's and Viola's

artistic means and personal interest. The calendar pattern in *Normal & Nature* and the AM/PM time seen as a temporal structure in *Going Forth by Day* lead to the forms of physical time. Lastly, Lertchaiprasert's interest of meditation and Viola's interest of Eastern philosophy are identified to make explicit the forms of subjective time in their practice.

This essay shall explore two art installations *Normal & Nature* (1997) by Kamin Lertchaiprasert, a Thai artist, and *Going Forth by Day* (2002) by Bill Viola, an American artist. The two art installations were created in different cultural milieux and geographical environments. However, the two installations reveal two noteworthy parallels that shall be investigated. The first parallel is that between the two artists' autobiographical characteristics evident in their publications and works. The second parallel is that between their artistic engagements of time. These two parallels allow the audience to explore different angles of thought, time, and space based on the different cultures and environments they are in.

Eleanor Heatney's review *Parallel Lives: Montein at Asia Society and Chen Zhen at P.S.1* (2003) examines parallels between Montien Boonma's and Chen Zhen's life and work. Her review encouraged me to apply this approach to investigate parallels between the life and work of Lertchaiprasert and Viola. Heartney focuses on how their illness produced profound influences on their life and their works. She concludes that:

By happy coincidence the simultaneous appearance of these two exhibitions pointed up the similarities of their concerns. For both artists a nearness to death led to a deeper awareness of links between the body and the mind, and to a sense of interconnection with all things on both sides of the great divide. (2003, p. 52)

The two random contingencies of Boonma's and Zhen's life and works charged with dissimilar social and cultural backgrounds lead



to intriguing connections between their physical body and their inner mind. These different approaches in their art offered various perspectives for us to explore the dilemma between the two worlds they encountered.

Normal & Nature and *Going Forth by Day* is a new pair of random contingencies. I shall investigate the outcomes of their personal, artistic, and philosophical approach to the forms of time developing out of the installations. The development of this chapter shall begin with the brief outlines of *Normal & Nature* and *Going Forth by Day*. Next, I shall present M.M. Bakhtin's investigation on the autobiographical characteristics of ancient autobiography and biography. The characteristics of these types of narrative apply to Lertchaiprasert and Viola's publications and installations. Finally, the palpable forms of time that grow out of the two installations shall be discussed.

Normal & Nature was exhibited at Tadu Contemporary Art Gallery, Bangkok in 1997. It demonstrates Lertchaiprasert's exploration of self-awareness indicating the intrinsic connectedness between time and experience. The artist's personal experience is a central subject that enables him to experience time. The show comprises a series of 365 charcoal drawings on paper that feature the graphic and literary records of his everyday narratives. The work commenced on the 14th of August 1995 and took one year to complete. Each day throughout the year, Lertchaiprasert drew an image of his own personal narrative that happened in that day. The drawings involve his private activities, social life, family, colleagues, and the community in which he lives. Then, he expressed in writings his own way of comprehending and evaluating that narrative with reference to a book entitled *Upalamanee*, a biography of the Venerable Ajahn Chah Supattho¹. The artist states:

I was searching for the meaning of life and the value of art,
until I read this book. It made me understand that

¹ In short, Ajahn Chah.



Buddhism is a way that leads to ‘Ultimate Truth’, with very clear directions on the various steps towards that ‘truth’ and how to practice. When I understood the contexts of this book, I decided to put the Buddhist method into the practice. (Lertchaiprasert, 1997, p. 24)

There are two issues to be considered: first, *Upalamananee* plays an important role in fulfilling his personal aim of searching for the meaning of life and the value of art. Second, as the book provides clear instructions for the artist to relate to the ultimate truth articulated by Ajahn Chah, this impression inspires Lertchaiprasert to combine the practices from two different cultures in the same process. The process of art is thought of as a parallel of the Buddhist practice of achieving the truth. Therefore, what we may experience from his charcoal drawings and writings might not necessarily be the ultimate truth for every audience. It is the artist’s experimental philosophy that is formulated through a close parallel between art and religious exercises. Such direct, and open philosophy invites us to consider what the writings mean to the artist and perhaps to us as well.

Viola’s *Going Forth by Day* was exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2002. It is a video installation comprising five digital screens that are named as *Fire Birth*, *The Path*, *The Deluge*, *The Voyage*, and *First Light* respectively. *Fire Birth* is projected on the wall over the main entrance. It features a male body performing under water. The orange rays of light permeate the moving image, and visually add the warmth to the water. The warmth of orange light and the slowed down movement of performance transform our perception. They lead us to a notice that this life form could live in the fluid. The hands and feet in the foreground showing fingers and toes in detail with a blurred background of the rest of the body remind us of an ultrasound image of a baby in a womb. *Fire Birth* indicates another state of living.

The Path shows an ongoing movement of people who walk along a path through the forest in good weather. This scene appears

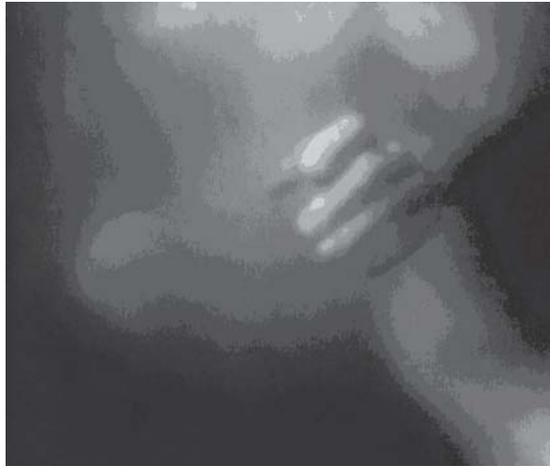


Fig. 1 Bill Viola, *Going Forth by Day (Fire Birth)*, 2002. Video/sound installation in five parts, dimensions variable. Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin. (Viola 2002, 17)

neutral, effortless, and comfortable. However, what becomes questionable is an absence of the two poles of the people's journey. The costumes help to identify various places they might be from, but where are they going? Their unhurried movement gradually draws our eye to observe and to interpret. Their destination of the journey is abstract. The lack of certain polarity makes their walking and the path in the forest space turn strange. They are not in a space that is on any geographical map. The space metaphorically indicates the middle of nowhere.

The Deluge shows people walking along a street in front of a stone building during the day. Their walking is different from the unhurried flow of walking in *The Path*. This rush walking in *The Deluge* relates to day-to-day events. People move settees, lamps, and other possessions from the building. All make us initially believe that the overall situation expresses 'everyday life' that constitutes part of human' existence. Suddenly, yielding, screaming voices followed by people' rushing, running across the scene shift our expectation. The scene reveals an unanticipated moment featuring water flooding violently out of the building. In my view, the torrential



Fig. 2 Bill Viola, *Going Forth by Day (The Path)*, 2002. Video/sound installation in five parts, dimensions variable. Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin. (Viola 2002, 26-27)

water encourages me to link this scene with the quality of ‘sudden’ and ‘at that moment’ effects in the adventure-time in the Greek romances.² *The Deluge* has the imaginative and artistic quality of narrative.

The Voyage shows a vast landscape. There is a small house on the hill overlooking the sea. An old man lies ill on a bed, and is comforted by his son and his son’s wife. There is no clue for me to guess who a man sitting cross-legged in front of the house is. He wears a hat that protects his eyes from getting tired from the sun in the afternoon time. He looks down to a boat off the shore where workers are busy loading possessions. An old lady sits on a chair nearby, waiting and watching. There are two simultaneous situations: the first situation is taking place on the hill, and the second one off the shore. Suddenly, the two events are conjoined. The son knocks on the door; there is no answer. At the same time, the old man reappears on the shore and is welcomed by the old lady. The conjoined situation implies that the old man dies, and joins his wife

² M.M. Bakhtin (2000) investigates a fusion of temporal and spatial indicators in the Greek romance or adventure novel of ordeal, which are characterised as adventure-time. In this type of novel, there is nothing that can be considered in relation to the normal tracks of regular and natural time, Bakhtin presents that ‘suddenly’ and ‘at just that moment’ best characterise the adventure-time. ‘Suddenly’ and ‘at just that moment’ have their own logic that can be seen through incidents that necessarily occur by chance. The incidents refer to chance simultaneity [meeting] and several chance ruptures [nonmeetings] as in a storm at sea or war.

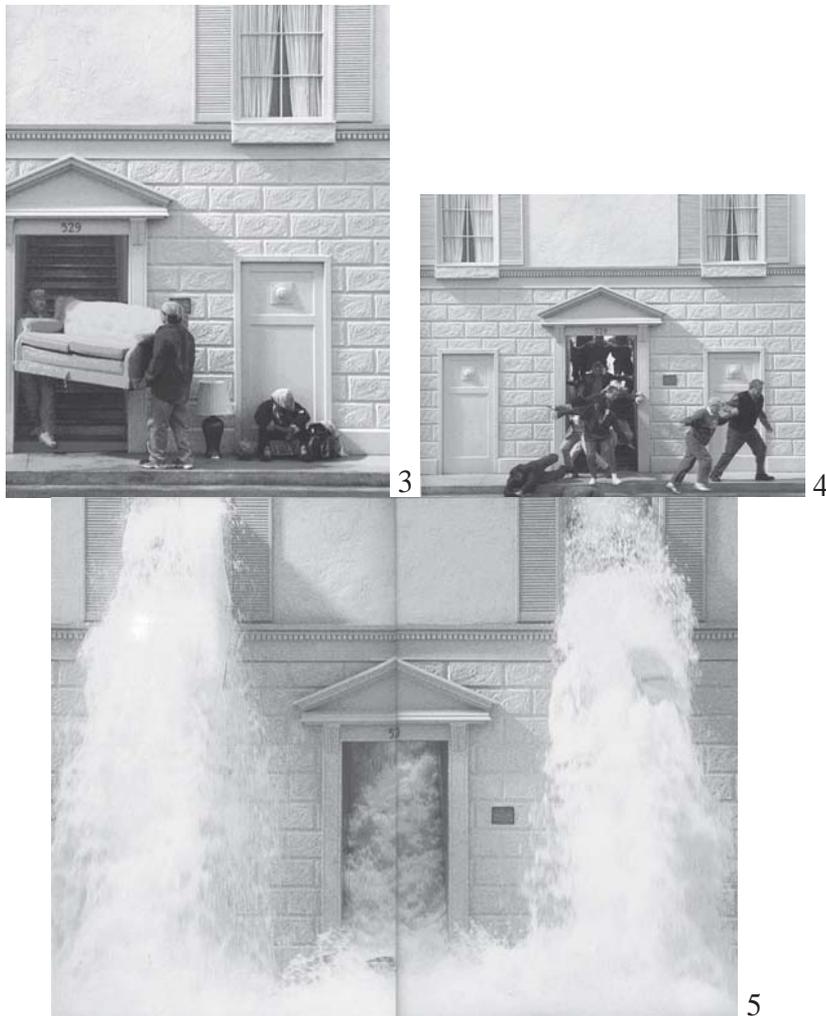


Fig. 3-5 Bill Viola, *Going Forth by Day (The Deluge)*, 2002.
 Video/ sound installation in five parts, dimensions variable.
 Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin. (Viola 2002, 39, 41,
 44-45)

who had been waiting for his arrival. The old couple start their journey to the distant sea. Their journey encourages the atmosphere of *The Voyage* to turn strange and imaginative. The journey does not take place in the physical world as the scene suggests. It is the world in which the couple travel after death.

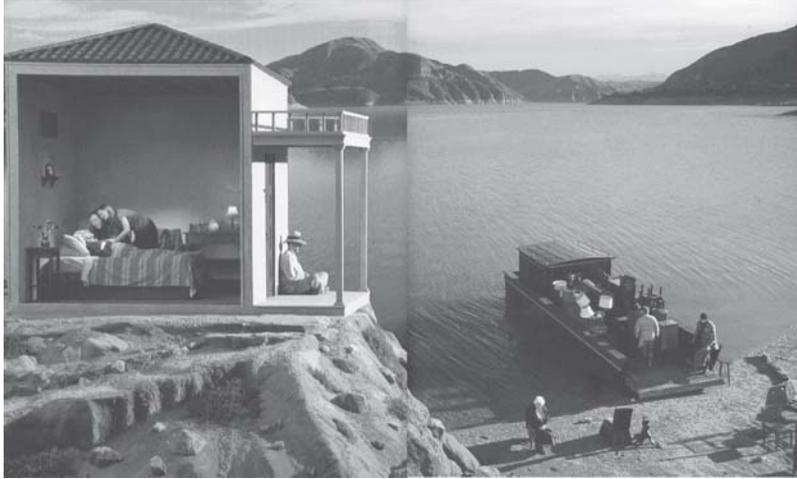


Fig. 6 Bill Viola, *Going Forth by Day (The Voyage)*, 2002. Video/sound installation in five parts, dimensions variable. Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin. (Viola 2002, 47, 53)

The final screen, *First Light*, shows a group of people wearing rescue uniforms and working near the flooded area. It is night-time. In the foreground stands a middle-age lady. She is quiet and looks towards the flooded area. Time passes. Everybody gets tired and falls asleep. Suddenly, a face of a young man slowly emerges from below the surface of the water. He rises up unconsciously into the sky. The rain starts. Everybody gets up, gathers his/her equipments, and leaves the scene. The situation implies that the young man has died, drowned in the water. The middle-aged lady who could be his mother along with the rescue team searches for him. Until the moment in which the young man is invisible to everybody's eye, his body moves from under water up to the sky. This particular situation raises an important awareness: it is we, the audiences, who witness the unusual and disturbing occurrence. *First Light* enhances our perceptive involvement in the scene.

Going Forth by Day visually depicts a limbo state of human beings. There is no beginning or end to each situation. Human existence in the five screens is described variously through

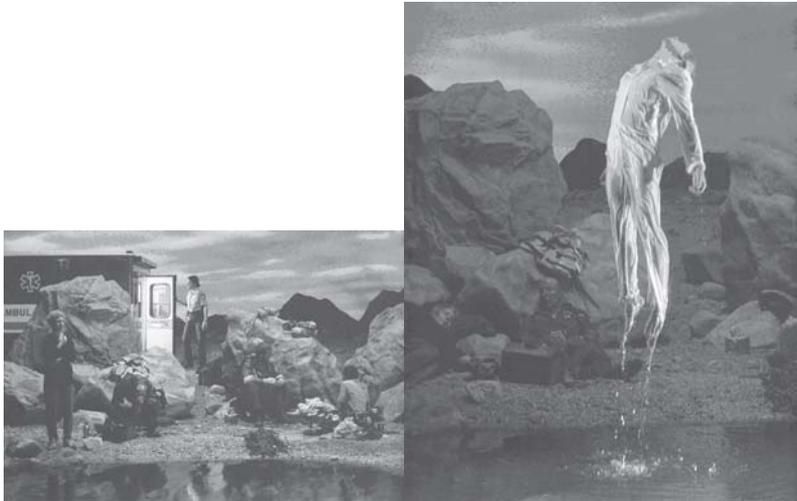


Fig. 7-8 Bill Viola, *Going Forth by Day* (First Light), 2002. Video/sound installation in five parts, dimensions variable. Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin. (Viola 2002, 60, 62)

relationships among individuals influenced by social surroundings, random contingencies, nature, and Viola's family's narratives.

The Autobiographical Characteristics

Normal & Nature and Going Forth by Day reflect autobiographical characteristics as articulated by M.M. Bakhtin. He identifies two types of autobiography in classical Greece. The first type is named Platonic; it focuses on an individual's autobiographical self-consciousness that reveals 'the life course of one seeking true knowledge' which Bakhtin suggests we view as a type of chronotope. The characteristics of the first type is described as follows:

The life of a seeker is broken into precise and well-marked epochs or steps. His course passes from self-confident ignorance, through self-critical scepticism, to self-knowledge and ultimately to authentic knowing...(Bakhtin, 2000, p. 130)



The Platonic type concentrates on the seeker's path that unfolds clear steps of life or significant events that enable one to educate oneself through one's self-explorative methods.

The second type is the rhetorical autobiography and biography. It concentrates on "encomium" – the civic funeral and memorial speech. Bakhtin explains that the second type of autobiography and biography is very much about how the public esteems someone publicly, or how someone admires him/herself in the presence of others. A purpose of these actions is to glorify and honour one's good deeds that relate to public issues. This type is no longer about one's own personal consciousness, individual aspirations for life, and intimate or private secrets. The image of this man is explored from all sides and can be referred to from public points of view.

An aspect of the second type of autobiography and biography intrigues me: the importance of this type focuses on an external relationship between a man and his environments and/or public. This suggests a real life chronotope that is based on civic and political events. Let us explore what Bakhtin means by a man's external relationship with the environment and/or the public.

There are two key words that shall be explored: firstly, the exteriority of the Greek man, and, second, a space in which the Greek man lives. These expressions are counted as keys that lead to the relationship between a man and his environments and/or public. Bakhtin claims that the exteriority of man refers to two aspects of man- internal and external- which the Greek did not know. He describes that:

Our "internal" was, for the Greek's conception of man, laid out on the same axis as our "external," that is, it was just as visible and audible and it existed on the surface, for others as well as for oneself. (2000, p. 135)

The internal for Bakhtin refers to a mute internal life, a mute grief, and mute thought that are alien to the Greek (Bakhtin, 2000, p. 134). As a result, from the quotation above, Greek's sense of the



internal is not different from the external. Every aspect of man is necessarily seen and heard on the surface of the autobiography and biography. The important thing about the exteriority of the Greek man is that his actions must somehow be incorporated into others' actions. The image of man must relate to others who were referred to on the same surface. This suggests his real-life chronotope that is attested by the event and the human environment, and leads to the survey of the space in which his existence dwells.

The second phrase refers to the characteristics of space in which the image of man exists as an organic human collective or as 'folk'. (Bakhtin, 2000, p. 135) There is nothing alien or strange in the territory. He knows his environments, and is there for others. The image of man, his activities, other men, and the space are open and transparent in nature. However, when the man's real-life chronotope is depicted into a form of autobiography and biography through the social and political processes in the public square, this particular public square becomes substantial. Bakhtin explains it as follows:

But the square in earlier (ancient) times itself constituted a state (and more- it constituted the entire state apparatus, with all its official organs), it was the highest court, the whole of science, the whole of art, the entire people participated in it...the laying bare and examination of a citizen's whole life was accomplished and received its public and civic stamp of approval." (2000, p.132)

The public square in the ancient sense can possibly refer to a space in the man's territory that contains familiar elements. It is neither any square occupied by theatre, common audience, or any forms of entertaining activities nor the state and official society of the elite, along with their official arts and sciences. (Bakhtin, 2000, p.132) It is the public space/square in which everybody is equal and can express his/her ideas and opinions towards a citizen's life to get public approval. The public square features rather inclusiveness than exclusiveness.



Next, the autobiographical characteristics of Lertchaiprasert's written publications and his *Normal & Nature*, and Viola's and his *Going Forth by Day* shall be discussed.

Autobiographical characteristics are central in Lertchaiprasert's several written publications. He merges his personal, intimate, and private narratives into his professional exercises by describing these narratives in forms of timeline biography and episodic stories on many occasions. His selected biography (Lertchaiprasert, 1997, p. 137) shows not only his educational qualifications and important exhibitions, but also his personal and private matters. His personally published publication entitled *The Temporary Truth* (1999) describes certain narrative events that play an important role in enabling him to achieve new dimensions of meditation. The narratives include some of his students who taught him to experience alternative perceptions of art, and his two years old daughter who communicated without words that a child had sophisticated thoughts and feelings. Lertchaiprasert's narratives are about people whom he knows and who inspire him. The situations took place in his environment. He selected unique narratives and narrated them by himself in his art-related publications.

Similar characteristics of relating his own narratives appear in *Normal & Nature*. Lertchaiprasert used images to relate events in his life and used words to comprehend and evaluate them. The installation portrays the exposition of the double-stranded theme of the installation: the autobiographical events based on daily sequencing, and the words inspired by *Upalamanee*, expressing his self-subjective evaluation. Basically, the temporal sequence based on day duration is an overall device that the artist uses to construct his one-year records. The first two records, however, suggest a different characteristic of time. On the first day of his record, the 14th of August, his birthday, he drew a newborn baby indicating himself and wrote '*Born from the emptiness, die to the emptiness, what gain for the happiness and suffering in emptiness*'. On the second day, the 15th of August, a rectangular shape indicating *Upalamanee* and the words explaining '*To*

1964	: Born in Lopburi, Thailand.		
1968 - 1971	: Attended School at Charouklom Withaya, Lopburi.		
1972 - 1974	: Attended boarding school at Samook Christian Withaya, Chonburi.		
	: Interested in God.	1992	: Solo Exhibition <i>GAWERY GAW GAI</i> at Visual Dhamma Gallery, Bangkok and Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok.
1975 - 1977	: Moved to Bangkok		: Interested in physics.
	: Attended school at Sritabhut Bumroong, Bangkok.		: Third Time came back to Thailand.
1977	: Interested in Art.		: Solo Exhibition " <i>Niras Thailand</i> " at Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok and Silom Art Space, Bangkok and The Art Gallery of Faculty of Painting and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok and CON-tempus, The Bangkok Fine Arts Center, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok
1978 - 1981	: Attended College of Fine Arts, Bangkok.		: Interested in Children Art
1981	: Changed name from "Muangnging Sae Lao" to "Kamin Lertchaiprasert".		: Desired to move back from New York to Bangkok, Thailand for good.
	: To 1987 : Attended Silpakorn University, B.F.A. in Print Making.		
1982	: Interested in Photography.		
1983	: Lost my mother from an accident.		
1984	: Travelled in Europe.	1993	: Solo Exhibition <i>Muangnging Sae Lao</i> at Dialogue Gallery, Bangkok, The National Gallery, Bangkok, and Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai.
1987	: Solo Exhibition Photographs and Prints. Selected "Out Standing Young Artist of the Year" by the Silpakorn University Art Gallery.		: Learned how to drive.
	: Moved to New York City, U.S.A.		: Learned how to love again.
	: Worked at Photo Shop.		
1988 - 1990	: Worked as a busboy.	1994	: Solo Exhibition <i>What's in My Mind</i> at CON-tempus. The Bangkok Fine Arts Center, Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok.
1989 - 1992	: Worked as a printer for other artists.		: Married with "Pawana Lertkhampeesin"
	: Broken heart.		: Impressed by "U-Palamanee" the Biographical Book about Luang Poh Cha Supattho.
1990	: Interested in eastern philosophy.	1995	: Interested in meditation.
	: Desired to give up being an artist.		: Interested in YOGA.
	: First time came back to Thailand.		
	: Became a monk.		
1991	: Second time came back to Thailand.		

Fig. 9 Selected Biography of Kamin Lertchaiprasert (Lertchaiprasert 1997, 137)

comprehend Dharma, must understand, make mind empty'.

These two records display a contemplation of a condensed period of time starting from the day he was born to the time he was interested in the book. From the third day onwards, his records are based on daily sequence. The first two days of his records show his transformative use of time to emphasise that the rest of his autobiographical records are inspired by *Upalemanee*.

The autobiographical characteristics are also dominant in Viola's written publications, especially those in forms of chronological biography and acknowledgements. Firstly, the chronological biography shall be looked at. His methods of relating own experiences and perspectives are quite close to those of



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Fig. 10-11 Kamin Lertchaiprasert, *Normal & Nature*, 1997
(Records of the 14th and the 15th of August 1995)
Charcoal on paper, 35.5 x 100 cm, 366 pieces.
(Lertchaiprasert 1997, 43)

Lertchaiprasert. Viola combines personal narratives into the timeline of his career developments. The chronology in an exhibition catalogue entitled *Bill Viola* (1997, pp. 196 -197) expresses the timeline of his life as an artist incorporating by personal and significant events.

Secondly, the acknowledgements reveal his relationship with many people who relate to his creative processes. Let us look at the excerpts, focusing on his personal and working relationship with his wife and partner, from the acknowledgements of two publications as follows: firstly, his acknowledgements in a book entitled *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*:

I want to thank Kira Perov for her insight, too many late nights, and dedication to insuring that this book... would be the best possible object of her efforts and the most



accurate reflection of the work and ideas we both share and care deeply about. (1995, p. 8)

Secondly, an excerpt in an exhibition catalogue entitled *Going Forth by Day*:

As always in our 24 years of working together, her creative and practical insights have proved essential to me in the creation of this work. (2002, p.118)

The above acknowledgements reflect aspects of the second type of Greek autobiography and biography. Viola publicly expresses his thankfulness to Perov. Her associations are not mute. Viola turns her 'touches' behind the scene onto the same surface of his life through literally praising her in his publications. It could be seen that his wife incorporates Viola's real-life working time. Her existence is present and evident.

The autobiographical characteristics are illuminated in *Going Forth by Day*. The circumstances in this installation are directly based on his personal consciousness and experiences. The scenes *The Voyage* and *Fire Birth* shall be examined. *The Voyage* is particularly dedicated to his father's memory. The two simultaneous occurrences in the same scene refer to the artist's family events and narrative imagination extended out of them. His father moved to live with his family in California, became ill, and passed away. Viola went through his father's possessions- the contents of his old house- that were shipped from Florida. He explains that:

I'd like to think that the unfinished act of his relocation is now complete and that he has journeyed well beyond the Isles of the Blessed to join my mother in a world where his material possessions are no longer needed. (Viola, 2002, p. 115)

The Voyage does not only relate to Viola's authentic experiences; it also shows his innovative ways of contemplating a parallel between the two worlds in which he and his parents live in the opposite sides of the great divide.

The performance of a man under the water in *Fire Birth* refers back to in earlier pieces by the artist, e.g. *The Passing* (1991), *Stations* (1994), *The Messenger* (1996), and including *Nantes Triptych* (1992) that shall be considered.

Nantes Triptych features three screens of moving images side by side. The left scene shows a woman comforted by her husband, and giving birth to their newborn baby. The middle scene is a performance of a man with clothes on under water. The right scene shows the artist's mother on her deathbed. The right and the left scenes refer to Viola's two substantial events in 1991. It was the year in which he lost a loved one, his mother, and welcomed a new born, his second son. Celia Montolio presents a response towards *Nantes Triptych* that: "...the reaction is to rub out the borders with which we usually categorize feeling." (Viola, 1994, p. 176) This statement implies that the scene of birth and that of death are of opposite feelings, and the middle screen is in between these two extremely sensitive polarities. It illuminates the artist's unsettled emotions between birth and death, encouraging an inner awareness that words cannot be used to clarify. As well as the middle scene of *Nantes Triptych*, *Fire Birth* illuminates an indeterminate state between death and reincarnation, implying his inner awareness



Fig. 12 Bill Viola, *Nantes Triptych*, 1992. Video installation, dimensions variable. (Morgan 1993, 28)



developed through the two events in 1991.

The autobiographical characteristics in the two installations are not necessarily of the process of an individual who takes an action of writing words explaining events in his/her own life. Instead of using words and sentences, Lertchaiprasert engages in an action of drawing and calligraphically writing about his daily events incorporated by *Upalemanee*; Viola creates five narrative circumstances that explain simultaneous occurrences linking to his personal narratives and experiences. All are bonded to form multi-narrative feature for the installation.

The two exhibitions show Lertchaiprasert's and Viola's individual methods of breaking their biographical time into clear and well marked steps or states. *Normal & Nature* shows one year of Lertchaiprasert's life divided into 356 temporal steps with reference to the constant sequence of time based on day. While *Going Forth by Day* expresses Viola's life, of which its certain periods are marked into five states specifying narrative predilection and importance. These five narrative states imply a continuous circularity and an intrinsic relationship among them. All of the narratives implying various temporal steps or states of life prove themselves as solid evidences for the artists' real-life chronotope.

Even the two central exhibitions are initially presented as containing autobiographical qualities, these qualities are different from autobiographical elements found in the Greek biography and autobiography. The Greek narratives express matters of what happened in one's own life, as direct and authentic evidence, in order to be granted civic stamp of approval. (Bakhtin, 2000, p. 132) As a result, the image of the Greek man has to achieve a laying bare and public quality. On the contrary, when Lertchaiprasert's and Viola's artworks come into the public space (galleries and museums), the artworks can no longer be considered as purely or solely personal matters. The artists contemplate their own experiences, and fuse artistically their thinking, evaluation, and self-awareness into their art practice. The artworks demonstrate their personal knowledge. Therefore, the relationship between the



installations based on the artists' personal matters and the public space/square deviate from the public nature understood by the Greek. This relationship can be observed in the participation of the audience with the artwork in the art space, in which the artists bring in their knowledge or what they discovered from the parallel between life and practice, and the audience is free to respond.

Forms of Time in *Normal & Nature*

Lertchaiprasert makes use of the calendar pattern in order to illustrate the importance of experience taking place in time. He describes his central inspiration that indicates his interest in time in relation to physics and personal experience as follows:

I am impressed by a quotation from Einstein in which he wonders how we acknowledge 'Time'; we perceive time through experience; everybody conceives 'Time' differently, depending on the state of mind. This concept made me realise the value of 'Time' as related to my own state of mind and my experience in everyday life. (Lertchaiprasert, 1997, p. 21)

The artist emphasises a firm connectedness between time and experience in everyday life. He stresses that in order to conceive time, one needs to encounter it through everyday experience that involves the state of mind. It is intriguing to see that *Normal and Nature* demonstrates how the artists use time based on the calendar pattern as a well-marked strategy to specify what and when he experiences things, and including his state of mind.

Lertchaiprasert tells his own experiences by juxtaposing comic-like images and words inspired by *Upalemanee* in a frame to create the double-stranded theme. The comic-like images express Lertchaiprasert's daily situation including his initial reactions towards them. The words express the artist's driving force of depicting his own experiences with reference to Ajahn Chah's life



and teaching. Together, the characteristics of images, e.g. easy and less serious drawing, and the words help the artist to depict his own life that is distinguished and unique from others'. He makes candid and intellectual references to his experiences and subjective evaluations explaining his self-confidence, self-teaching, self-criticising, self-evaluating, and self-knowing through the course of his everyday life.

The composition of images and words in a frame reveals a temporal and spatial distance between the actuality of events and his evaluation of recollection afterward. This specific distance leads to a discussion regarding the systems of time used in this double-stranded installation. *Normal & Nature* demonstrates two fundamental systems of time. The first system can be seen through the calendar sequences used as time-distancing devices that allow the artist's biographical time to be recognised. Johannes Fabians refers to time based on the calendar as physical time that is itself not subject to cultural variation. The second one is that which can be perceived through subjective evaluation recorded over the year. Thomas Butler (1989) calls this psychological or subjective time that moves at an individual pace. It is apparent that *Normal & Nature* is crowded with physical and subjective temporal expressions.

I shall introduce some notions expressing a controversial relationship between physical time and subjective time. Butler questions: "*How can we reproduce the essence of such events later in our minds, if we are recording them with an eye on our watch?*" and "*... our western obsession with linear time holds disadvantages personal memory, and perhaps for spiritual and mental well-being.*" (1989, p. 22) Fabians suggests:

In fact, expressions that have a clear temporal referent (a date, a time span, an indication of past, present or future) are probably less important, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, than those whose temporalizing function derives from the context in which they are used. (2002, p.75)

If these notions are to be used to analyse the relationship between the two times within *Normal & Nature*, it is unavoidable to think that physical time (date, month, and year) could be less important than, and even defeat the performance of psychological or subjective time. Is it possible that physical time can behave as a supportive base for subjective time?

To answer the above question, it is appropriate to examine the artist's religious and philosophical interests. Lertchaiprasert is interested in yoga and Thai Buddhist meditation that he practises on a regular basis. The records created on the 10th of November 1995, the 9th of December 1995, and the 22nd of February 1996 show his interests.



Fig. 13-15 Kamin Lertchaiprasert, *Normal & Nature*, 1997.
(Records of the 10th of November 1995, the 9th of
December 1995, and the 22nd of February 1996)
Charcoal on paper, 35.5 x 100 cm, 366 pieces.
(Lertchaiprasert 1997, 65, 72, 83)

Pradhamtitarathmahamunee (1994) states that every style or way of practicing Thai meditation should be done on a regular basis in order to develop *Opanisaipatjai*³. While practising walking meditation, if one likes, one pronounces ‘step left *nor*⁴’ and ‘step right *nor*’ or ‘inhale *nor*’ and ‘exhale *nor*’ while doing sitting meditation. The word ‘*nor*’ is pronounced for some objectives such as, first to generate *Sangwet* or sense of urgency easily, second to generate concentration quickly, third to grab hold of the nowness quickly, and fourth to make *Tilakkhana*⁵ clear in mind. (Pradhamtitarathmahamunee, 1994, pp. 20-22) The aim of practising meditation is to develop the quality of mind’s state, and one needs regular practice to do so.

Lertchaiprasert combines the practices from two different cultures in the same process; the process of art is thought of as a parallel to the Buddhist practice of achieving the truth. He treats his everyday art practice based on the physical time of the calendar to be equal to the everyday meditation practice. It is possible to ponder that if the meditation practice carried out on a regular basis enables him to develop *Opanisaipatjai*, so does the art practice. The *Opanisaipatjai* that is specifically developed through the art process based on physical time can one way or another help to generate a moment of subjective time. He used this special moment to evaluate his own narratives and develop a state of his mind. Physical time in this case becomes an important factor that engenders the fruitions of subjective time.

Within the special moment, there is a palpable form of time growing out of the contexts of the artist’s subjective evaluation. It is time that lacks futurity. Lertchaiprasert’s images and words have no

³ *Opanisai* means habit and/or manner. *Patjai* means factor. (Dictionary of Buddhism, 1996)

⁴ *Nor* is a Thai word and has no translation in English.

⁵ *Tilakkhana* means The Three Characteristics or The Three Signs of Being which include impermanence, state of conflict, and not-self. (Dictionary of Buddhism, 1996)



sign of subjective futureness. There is no expectation, no belief in tomorrow, intention, anticipation, premonition, and presentiment. The only time objectified is of the inner nowness of the artist.

The record dated the 31st of October 1995 describes that precisely: '*Do the present good with reference to Sati.*⁶ *The present - result of the past, the future - result of the present.*' Moreover, the record dated the 26th of December 1995 explains a subtle cause that could lead to subjective futureness, and the artist stops it at his heart. The record shows the artist doing the laundry and glancing at a half naked woman. He wrote: '*See Rupa*⁷, *Kilesa*⁸ *generates. To end Kilesa, must end it at heart. Do not decorate Citta.*⁹' This states that the *Kilesa* can lead to the consciousness of subjective futureness that can cause further imagination as well as actions. To end the subjective futureness, one must retain the present state of consciousness which one should not fill or add anything into. This is the way the artist underlines the importance of subjectivity in the process of the inner nowness.

Forms of Time of Going Forth by Day

I paid a visit to view *Going Forth by Day* at Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2002. I began with reading the five imagery panels by ignoring the text in the exhibition guide. Then, I read the text and found that my readings deviated from the literary introduction. In *The Deluge*, the exhibition guide says: "*Small incidents play out, affecting individual lives. Families are leaving their homes...*" Those small incidents were absent in my reading. I saw people moving out from the building like many city

⁶ *Sati* means mindfulness and awareness. (Dictionary of Buddhism, 1996)

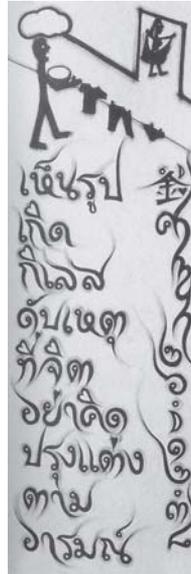
⁷ *Rupa* has two potential meanings: First, matter, form, material, and body. Second, object of eye. (Dictionary of Buddhism, 1996)

⁸ *Kilesa* means defilements, impurities, and impairments. (Dictionary of Buddhism, 1996)

⁹ *Citta* means a state of consciousness. (Dictionary of Buddhism, 1996)



16



17

Fig. 16-17 Kamin Lertchaiprasert, *Normal & Nature*, 1997.
(Records on the 31st of October and the 26th of
December 1995) Charcoal on paper, 35.5 x 100 cm,
366 pieces. (Lertchaiprasert 1997, 63, 77)

nomads in London and New York do. In *The Voyage*, the same guide says: “*Outside, another man sits by the door keeping vigil.*” I thought he was there without a specific or important meaning to the simultaneous situations, but appeared as Viola’s personal signature on his own creation. These deviations have affirmed my impression: by the nature of the Viola’s works, it was impossible to grasp all of these detailed messages from his moving narratives. Therefore, the above was a pre-planned experiment to feel the narrative circumstances before reading the guide.

Here is a point of my experiment: narration should come after the imagery panels. Gilles Deleuze argues against Christian Metz who presented that narration consisting linguistic determinants flows into the visible images of cinema. Deleuze’s argument is as shown by:



On the contrary, it seems to us that narration is only a consequence of the visible [*apparent*] images themselves and their direct combinations-it is never a given... Narration is never an evident [*apparent*] given of images, or the effect of a structure which underlines them; it is a consequence of the visible [*apparent*] images themselves, of the perceptible images in themselves, as they are initially defined for themselves. (2000, pp. 26-27)

This statement explains that the visible images of the cinema encourage narration, not vice versa. The narration never takes place before viewing the visual images in cinema. Likewise, it is appropriate for me to introduce my own narration of *Going Forth by Day* at the beginning of this chapter. Even though, my narration deviates from the text in the exhibition guide, it proves itself as a true consequence of the visible images of this installation. As a result, I shall concentrate on exploring directly the five images regarding the palpable forms of time growing out of the installation. Viola uses

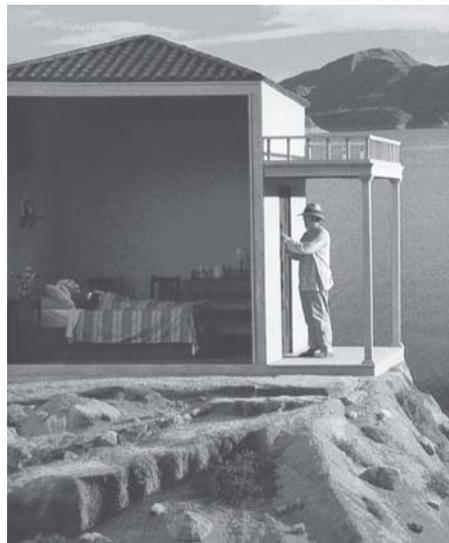


Fig. 18 Bill Viola as an invigilator in *Going Forth by Day* (*The Voyage*), 2002. (Viola, 2002, 52)



images to express his ideas of time in many ways. I shall introduce three aspects of time in this installation: am/pm time, subjective time, and philosophical time.

Am/pm time can be seen as a temporal structure for this installation. The five panels depict different periods of time of a day as follows: *The Path* shows an indication of the morning time, *The Deluge* of working time or noontime, *The Voyage*, afternoon, *First Light*, night time, and lastly *Fire Birth* situated as the interval period of time between night time and morning time. This am/pm-based temporal structure can be considered as a type of physical time. All of the five screens do not connect to one another in terms of the continuous contents of narrative. Individually, they can be considered as diverse events taking place here and there in different times of the day, and are organised to be together within the temporal frame of morning, noontime, afternoon, and night time.

The structure of physical time is not a factor that enables the contents of the five narratives to connect to one another. The physical time appears as the loose structure for setting up all narrative panels in the square room. In my view, subjective or psychological time, developed out of each panel, enables the five narratives to make sense and to relate to one another conceptually. I shall explain this idea. Let us consider that all of the narrative reveals time that is independent of any types of physical time. For example, the space of *The Path* implies metaphorically a path in the forest that exists beyond the periphery of the geographical map. During my research on time and space in science and ancient poetics, I have observed that time and space develop accordingly in the same direction. Likewise, time in *The Path* is free from any types of physical time, e.g. second, minute, and hour, as it does not apply to this specific space in the middle of nowhere. The imaginative, non-logical characteristics of time in *The Deluge* can be seen through the torrential flood. The flood unfolds a random contingency reflecting the elements of ‘suddenly’ and ‘at that moment’ of the adventure-time of the Greek Romances. The flood in this specific scene suggests itself as the unanticipated, interrupting



time that freezes the regular time of the community. Time in *The Voyage* can be recognised through the parallel of the two situations taking place in the same scene. It illuminates the important parallel of the two times that are based on the artist's personal dedication and imagination towards the relocation that his father had never completed.

The qualities of temporal indicators in the three panels are completely independent of the physical time. They relate to tragedies and rules of nature that make lives progress and are separated temporally and permanently. However, these times are not yet connected until the last panel, *Fire Birth*, is identified properly. *Fire Birth* represents itself as a conclusion of all times for the first four panels. It suggests that every human's life journey will meet this time, the temporal period between death and rebirth, in other words, an unknown and mysterious realm to all beings. Time in this scene is slowed down and is independent of the regular pace of time that we are familiar with.

The above qualities of the subjective time independent of the physical time relates to philosophies in which Viola is interested. Viola has referred to Eastern and Western philosophical influences on his works throughout his long career. In this specific case, I shall attempt to explain the characteristics of philosophical time in *Going Forth by Day* with reference to Tao. The reason for introducing Tao is that Viola expresses his interest in it. He claims that he carried a copy of *Tao Te Ching*¹⁰ everywhere. However, I shall not say that *Going Forth by Day* features Tao, but I see a possible parallel between time in his installation and some properties of Tao.

Let us consider the following: subjective time (that enables the different contents of narratives to connect to and flow into one another) underpins the limbo state of human beings and the cyclic transformation of life. Firstly, the limbo state of life can be seen through

¹⁰ *Tao Te Ching* contains eighty-one chapters. It is a collection of sayings and commentaries of which written expression is lack of grammatical systems and rules.



the lack of beginning or ending points in each narrative. Every step of human life is in a condition of flux. Secondly, the cyclic transformation of life can be recognised through the key panel, *Fire Birth*, that presents the meeting and departing point for the abstract journey (in *The Path*), the natural incident (the torrential flood) that makes life pause temporally, the natural rule (the death of the old man) that separates lives apart permanently, the tragedy (the flood in *First Light*) that shortens life of the young man. Together, all narratives suggest a similar pattern of the transformative process of life, and birth and death are part of that cyclic process.

These qualities of subjective time that suggest the condition of flux and the transformative process of life connecting to birth and death reflect some aspects of Tao. Tao is spontaneity, evolution, or, 'change' itself (Legge, 1964, p. xi) and emphasises constant cyclic transformation and metamorphosis. (Girardot, 1983, p. 80) These can be seen through visible and not easily observable changes and movements in the environment that do not correspond to seconds, minutes, and hours. Furthermore, the process of change and movement is devoid of permanence, and definable and static shapes. All changes and movements continue constantly and implicitly along the time that is not meant to be called the past, the present, and the unseen future.

A parallel between the qualities of the time in *Going Forth by Day* and some aspects of Tao is illuminated here. As well as Tao that is based on changes and movements in the environment, time in *Going Forth by Day* can be recognised through both visual and conceptual movements of the limbo states. The visible movement can be viewed through the flow of the walking in *The Path*. The conceptual movement can be seen through the transformative process of life in various environments, affected by random contingencies and rules of nature. All of the visual and conceptual movements do not present the order sequence and are free from physical time. They show part of the ongoing process of life, expressing the human's confrontation with the elements causing happiness, suffering, and leave taking.



Normal & Nature and *Going Forth by Day* demonstrate significant performances of Lertchaiprasert and Viola: they have long sought for true meanings of life through art practice. Both of them explore their own personal life, experiences, along with their religious and philosophical interests. All works unfold some similar patterns between Lertchaiprasert's and Viola's explorative journey. They integrate their personal lives into their career through the forms of chronological biographies, personally published publications, and acknowledgements. All forms reveal their autobiographical narratives as well as their biographical time. Additionally, both artists blend their autobiographical accounts into the installations. The artworks illuminate the artists' interpretations and evaluations of their inner awareness, of other humans, circumstances, and what they mean to them.

Both of the installations are crowded with temporal expressions. Those of *Normal & Nature* help us to engage Lertchaiprasert's inner awareness. The temporal expressions include physical time based on the calendar, and psychological or subjective time developed from his subjective exploration. Also, the installation features the time unfolding the lack of futurity. All types of time are connected and objectified by the inner state of mind in the present moment, and give way to the characteristics of his experimental philosophy. It reveals the free will of the artist who wants to portray his self-explorations on the aesthetic and ethical level. His animation-like images and words inspired by the *Upalamanee* allow us to engage such exploration in an enjoyable and contemplative way.

Going Forth by Day features three basic types of time. The physical time can be seen through the frame of morning, noon, afternoon, and night time that Viola uses to arrange all five narratives in the exhibiting room. The physical time is not as important as the subjective time. The subjective time can be perceived through the walking in *The Path*, the torrential flood in *The Deluge*, the death of the old man in *The Voyage*, and that of the young man in *First Light*. As soon as the key panel, *Fire Birth*,



is identified, the subjective time allows all of the narratives to relate to and flow into one another. *Fire Birth* suggests itself as the conclusion to every state of life. Lastly, *Going Forth by Day* reflects some aspects of Tao. The installation underpins the limbo state of life that can be recognised through the lack of beginning and ending point in each narrative. It strengthens the transformative process of life which death and birth are part of. Finally, the philosophical aspect of time allows our physical presence and perceptions to be part of this video installation. *Fire Birth*, the key panel, is projected on the wall over the main entrance. We, the audience, walk through this door to get into and out of this room. The physical relationship between the projected image of the man in the water and the continuous coming and going of the audiences allows us to feel that we are actually part of the cyclic process of life. We go in and come out from the same point- the temporal period between death and rebirth.

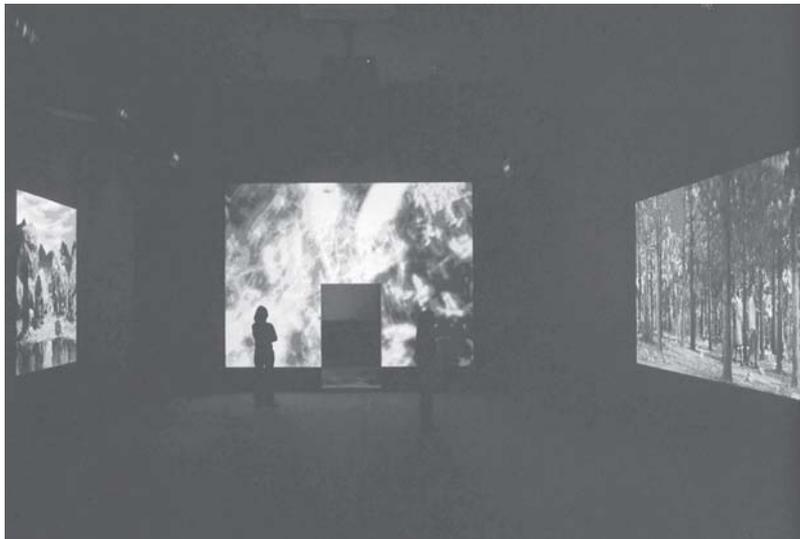


Fig. 19 *Going Forth by Day (Fire Birth)* projected over the main entrance (Viola, 2002, 73)

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