

Surviving Festival Disruptions:

*The Transformation of the New Life
| Performance Cultural Ecosystem in
Contemporary Bangkok Due to the
2020 COVID-19 Pandemic*

Pornrat Damrhung* (Thailand)

Abstract

This article examines how COVID-19 disrupted the *Life | Performance* festival in Bangkok in 2020; focusing on changes in three festival components. Viewing the festival as a cultural ecosystem interrupted by the 2020 novel coronavirus, the article will focus on the disruptions forced on three pieces: Eko Supriyanto's *Urban Movement Laboratory*, Gecko Parade's *Lindbergh's Flight* and Pichet Klunchun's *No. 60: Exhibition, Lecture | Demonstration*. The pandemic-induced disruptions in these performances highlight several important ways that the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the *Life | Performance* urban festival. Changes occurred in the timing/scheduling, spacing/location, relationship with audiences/viewers and their mode of performance for all three pieces. The pandemic also compelled rearranging performances into new spaces, a greater mediatization of the festival and the development of new site-specific, community-centered platforms. These disruptions led to a reorientation of the festival toward efforts to enhance creative placemaking within a smaller urban zone.

Keywords: *Festival, Performance, COVID-19, New Normal, Cultural Ecosystem, Contemporary Bangkok, Placemaking*

* Pornrat Damrhung, Professor, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. email: dpornrat@gmail.com.

Introduction

Life | Performance was a new festival format planned for alternative performance spaces in central Bangkok from late 2019 to early 2020. It was originally designed to include more than a dozen different events spread out over new performance venues in central Bangkok over six months.¹ The festival's structure was meant to be part of an existing urban cultural ecosystem, which it sought to enrich through a set of performing arts workshops, lectures, demonstrations, and performances as different ways of allowing artists and the public to interact in the city. While some parts of the festival were held in late 2019 and early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying closure of universities and lockdown of the city and Thailand led to the cancellation, rescheduling, and reworking of many festival events. Despite these disruptions, the festival continued in new spaces and venues and the cultural ecosystem survived.

To elucidate the resilience of the disrupted *Life | Performance* festival due to COVID-19, this article will first discuss the concepts of festival and cultural ecosystem, and then use the cultural ecosystem framework to analyze three performance projects that were central to *Life | Performance*, but all of which the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in early 2020. These three projects were, first, Japan's Gecko Parade Co. theatre group, who developed a work in an urban architectural space around Berthold Brecht's *Lindbergh's Flight* from mid-September 2019, and then returned to develop it for performances that took place on 12-14 March 2020 at At Slure art hostel, just before the pandemic shut down Bangkok. Secondly, there was a project by dancer and choreographer Eko Supriyanto called *Urban Movement Laboratory* in late November 2019, which the pandemic forced to cancel in February 2020. Thirdly, the article will examine Pichet Klunchun's *No. 60: Exhibition, Lecture | Demonstration* held at a art museum and theatre at Chulalongkorn University during July and August 2020, opening on July 4, the first day after the end of the university's post-COVID phase one lockdown.

By analyzing these projects as disruptions in – but not the dissolution of – an urban cultural ecosystem, we see not only how artists respond to global disruptions in the performing arts like pandemics, but also how festivals improvised their way through the pandemic to develop forms of artistic resilience and how the ecosystem managed to survive. One result of the COVID-19 disruptions has been a refocusing or re-orientation of the festival format toward an effort at creative placemaking in an urban cultural ecosystem.

1. Reimagining a Festival for 21st Century Bangkok: A Cultural Ecologies Approach

Life | Performance was a type of open festival consisting of alternative venues for other types of performance, one meant to enhance the urban cultural ecosystem in central Bangkok. To better understand its place, this section examines the changing role of performance festival culture in Bangkok and links these cultures to an understanding of urban cultural ecosystems.

A. Bangkok's Festival Culture

Festivals are types of public celebration that defy simple definition. Their special cultural forms encompass diverse designs and roles in history and society, often with various events and activities. Unlike other cultural programs, however, a

“festival” normally consists of a more intensive concentration of events of limited duration, often held across a range of venues. They often include periodic celebrations in a place that feature and recreate an identity and a community (Getz, 2010). As specially organized public events, they are situated in a limited “time and space where performers and participants constitute meaning, identity, and belonging in a process together,” thus permitting a “celebration of culture, identity, and belonging [able to] serve as a platform for common experiences,” while also encouraging “ongoing dialogue and negotiation, as individuals and groups attempt to define meaningful concepts of identity and belonging, along with notions of inclusion and exclusion” (Koefoed, et al., 2020:5). More comprehensively, Judith Mair in a recent handbook on festivals defines them as “short term, recurring, publicly accessible events that usually celebrate and / or perform particular elements of culture that are important to the place in which they are held or the communities which hold them; that provide opportunities for recreation and entertainment; and that give rise to feelings of belonging and sharing.” (Mair, 2019:5). Festivals are embedded in and dependent on elements of other social and cultural systems, too. To recognize this interdependence, recently Nicola Frost identified “festival ecologies,” pointing out that “festivals... however defined, are inevitably subjective, embodied, and *lived*, which... means that their myriad elements are complexly interconnected and inter-dependent. They are more than a sum of their parts (and are not reducible to any of them)” (Frost, 2016:570, original emphasis).

As organized events for public participation in specific times and places, festivals are not new to Thailand. Often centered on local cultural performances in particular communities that are open to outside groups, festivals have long been part of Thai life. These complex social phenomena, rich in symbolic and cultural significance for their diverse participants, often consist of structured sets of embodied performances. Festivals in Thailand have often been connected to ritual calendars and periodic markets forming around Buddhist shrines and Chinese shrines, which contain opportunities for informal social interactions and normally include food, entertainments, and performances. These loose event structures concentrate – and connect – diverse communities through collective practices that socially recreate cultural memories and identities in specific times and places. Festivals can form around local celebrations of gods or special times in the Buddhist calendar, such as the local *Phi Ta Khon* festival in Dan Sai, Loei province of Northeastern Thailand or in the Chinese Vegetarian Festival in Phuket. The latter two examples also show how the Thai government has helped to promote local festivals to celebrate certain times, places, and community events, as part of efforts to promote cultural tourism in some parts of Thailand. On a national level, Thai government efforts to promote the *Songkran* festival in mid-April as Thai new year’s day or its boosting of November’s *Loy Kratong* festival at the end of the rainy season signal the importance of festivals for creating national identity, too. With or without government support, community festivals continue to occur, connected to reproducing local and national identity, but also as expressions of what can be seen as a cultural ecosystem.

Links between festivals and cultural ecosystems can be seen in the newer performing arts and theatre festivals in Bangkok. Performances in these festivals are vital parts of city life. They do “more than demonstrate urban processes ... [they

are] part of urban processes, producing urban experience and thereby producing the city itself” (Harvie, 2009:7, original emphasis). Precursors to Bangkok’s performance festivals date back to the post-Asian Financial Crisis era (from 1999 on) and they seek to involve small artist and performing arts networks with urban communities (Skar, 2020). They grew from performers and theatre people who worked with community artists to promote the urban communities which provide local venues for performing arts groups wanting to do live performances for diverse audiences. These efforts helped to create artistic networks for young and old artists who loved live theatre and enriched the cultural life of Bangkok’s communities. The oldest ongoing performance festival is the Bangkok Theatre Festival (BTF), which is an annual festival now in central Bangkok. It began in 2003, and the 18th version of the festival is scheduled for November 2021. Around the same time, the Sam Phraeng FaceStreet Festival in the Phra Nakorn neighborhood of old Bangkok (from 2004) started. It includes venues for theatre artists networks to perform. Both festivals give space and time for new thinking, blends of traditional and experimental forms, and diverse perspectives for artists and audiences from many different backgrounds and ages.

These urban theatre festivals are wonderful opportunities to view new and familiar forms of cultural life, for meeting old friends and making new ones, while discovering performances and people who might be different from us. They are special spaces and times to learn and share live performance and artistic activities in safe public settings by artist communities presenting new ideas and experiences. They allow for concentrated forms of interaction in urban spaces able to create a new ecosystem connecting generations and social classes, while creating sharable experiences in a venue where equality, safety and creative experimentalism could all be enjoyed. Festivals can become new spaces of vitality for grooming young artists and exchanging reflections, while reaching out to public audiences. People attending these performance festivals can interact with pleasure and expand their imaginations while enjoying food and a variety of activities over free performances both small and big. In the variety of mixed performances, they could help provide some vitality to the city twice a year.

From July 2019 the Department of Dramatic Arts sought to reimagine a performance festival for 21st century central Bangkok. Working in an experimental mode, the new *Life | Performance* festival was designed to make performance part of public life in Bangkok. Organizing a set of performances, talks, workshops, training sessions, research projects, public rehearsals, works-in-progress and a conference spread across many different venues and over several months would be a new experimental festival design.² It would include both local and international artists and groups festival which would offer many opportunities for urbanites to access and become involved in performance cultures. By seeking to embed performance cultures in urban life and to diversify forms of public performance, urban communities and those interested in performance culture could join in these events, experiencing some of the variety and exchanging thoughts and performance practices with artists, students, performers, academics, and public audiences. By making the diverse forms of live performance culture more visible, this festival would help Bangkok’s performance ecology become more culturally vibrant.

B. The Cultural Ecologies Approach

City performance festivals are vital parts of urban cultural ecosystems. The idea of a cultural ecology of performance has emerged in the study of various performing arts, as well as in the analysis of urban cultures (Stern & Seifert, 2007a; Markusen, 2011; Rogers, 2012; Gibson, 2013; Holden, 2015; Harvie, 2009; Skar, 2020). For the performing arts, an ecology highlights efforts to understand the interconnected and interdependent system of relationships that constitute performances as bubbles of performance life (Lavery, 2016; Woynarski, 2020; Hopfinger, 2020). Rather than focusing on the study of biological webs of organisms in an environment, cultural ecosystems of performance are “entangled, always-in-process system of diverse interrelating (human and nonhuman) parts” (Hopfinger, 2020:2). These systems involve actors, audiences, funders, planners, crew, backstage staff and others who are entangled with props, lighting, costumes and other non-human elements as ensembles of meaningful activity tied to performances in urban environments where they occur (Damrhung, 2022). In this vein, Giannachi and Stewart (2005:20) stress how an ecological approach to performing arts practices based on “the study of... our habitat and environment, as well as the analysis of the interrelationships between us all” as both “one of the most interesting and crucial tools for the interpretation of nature but also an important model for cultural observation.” This ecological approach to performance centers on the creation and experience of ecological relationships in cultural lives rather than those taken by the ecological sciences. (Damrhung & Skar, 2020; Damrhung, 2020; Skar, 2020) They form localizable living assemblages.

They are also part of larger artistic ecosystems, which Markusen defines “as the complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings” and which consist of “the many networks of arts and cultural creators, producers, presenters, sponsors, participants, and supporting casts embedded in diverse communities” and but focuses on the “understudied nonprofit arts and cultural sector and its intersections with people and place.”³ As part of larger cultural ecosystems, performances are often connected to cities. An innovative approach to analyzing urban cultural ecosystems comes from the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) at the University of Pennsylvania. This project has examined the importance of urban cultural infrastructures to establishing and maintaining sustainable urban vitality. Developed by Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert, they “propose an ecological model of community culture that focuses... on the interdependencies among different players.... [A perspective] that balances the economic and social impacts of culture and balances the role of nonprofit, commercial, and informal forms of cultural expression is more likely to lay a solid foundation for thinking and acting on the sector’s future.” (Stern & Seifert, 2007a:2) Their approach thus shifts “attention toward grassroots cultural practices and informal cultural engagement; articulated an ecological view of culture’s relationship to communities; and focused on the contribution of culture to community building.” (Stern & Seifert, 2007a:33) While following some creative economy approaches that recognize the value of cultural activities beyond official nonprofit cultural organizations, “the ecological approach seeks to draw attention to relatively invisible aspects of the cultural infrastructure” needed to build a

sustainable cultural economy for a community. (Stern & Seifert, 2007a:67). This is a useful perspective for understanding the Life | Performance festival as a cultural ecosystem of performance in an urban cultural context.

As will be emphasized at the end of this article, a cultural ecosystem approach for performances in a festival can also be related to placemaking practices, especially to what has come to be known as creative placemaking (Courage & McKeown, 2019; Courage, 2021). Using ecology as a metaphor, tool, and model points to the value of developing a systemic ecological approach to realizing the generative potential of creative placemaking. The ecology of culture approach recognizes the dynamism of cultural life in a larger ecosystem, including feedback loops, emergent behaviors, aside from ideas of interdependence and self-organization. It refers to the need to recognize dynamic practices that transcend the bi-polarities of top-down or bottom-up approaches to organizing cultural life in urban spaces. These are needed to help devolve power, encourage self-organization and agency and include local people's current placemaking practices. Resilient and coproduced instances of creative placemaking are moving to a more processual open-source approach (Silberberg, 2013). They are more common since creative placemaking coalesced in the mid-2010s. Arts-led forms of placemaking stress how the arts can engage the city as a complex ecosystem of vibrant material and symbolic creativity that is ever in flux. These projects bring culture and community together and help to promote local economies and deeper forms of social connection and urban engagement. The projects can likewise connect to other efforts to promote transportation, housing, employment, health care, environmental sustainability, and education. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and strengthened the connections of the Life | Performance festival to creative placemaking practices that can vitalize Bangkok's cultural ecosystem.

2. The Life | Performance Festival as an Experimental Design for an Urban Cultural Ecosystem

Plans for the Life | Performance festival began in August 2019 with two goals in mind.⁴ First, it aimed to create a set of performance-related events and activities in alternative offstage spaces for the performing arts to highlight the variety and the vitality of Bangkok's performance culture. Secondly, it sought to encourage imaginative interactions and exchanges between the university communities, researchers, and artists within the creative parts of Bangkok. To reach these goals, we sought to design a cultural infrastructure for live performance that would add value, vigor, and enjoyment to the cultural ecosystem of central Bangkok. As an experimental performing arts festival, Life | Performance sought to enhance an urban area with diverse performance events that would involve new artists, events, and groups in new spaces over a longer period of time and in more venues than other performance festivals in Bangkok. But setting up a new living infrastructure for performance, the festival aimed to embed itself in Bangkok's cultural ecosystem.

As a distributed festival, Life | Performance was organized to last longer and extend further than many festivals while also embedding it into urban life. Its diverse

performance events were planned to span from September 2019 to May 2020, and end in a conference in late 2020. Over these months, there were plans to develop and insert different aspects of performance culture into central Bangkok's offstage urban spaces for its varied audiences. The extended festival format was intended to consist of an array of pop-up performances, workshops, original devised plays, lectures, community-based performances, artist talks, creative exhibitions, workshops, podcasts, and a concluding conference and two performances originally scheduled for May 2020. Meant to include local and international artists, national performers, student performers and researchers from different backgrounds, the distributed performance format would provide diverse spaces to different groups while they created and performed their creative research work in many forms under the new Research Cluster in the Arts and Culture of Chulalongkorn University that meant to sustainably enhance Bangkok's cultural ecosystem.

Designed to include central Bangkok's diverse audiences, spaces, resources, artists and communities, the *Life | Performance* festival also sought to engage small performing arts departments in different university faculties in enlivening varied urban spaces with performance events, mixing performance practice with artistic research. By involving a web of urban students, artists, researchers, and community participants in a wide variety of performing arts activities, the new open festival design sought to create a performance framework for devising and sharing new work within an artistic research framework tied to ecological thinking. The performance research projects and events in the festival involved interdisciplinary work with faculties outside of the performing arts, too, including those from Education, Pharmacy, Psychology, Psychiatry, while drawing on the participation of local artists to perform or present their work to new publics and in non-traditional venues.

The performance research projects part of the *Life | Performance* festival were led by seven faculty members involved with performance practice from three faculties at Chulalongkorn University.⁵ They all worked with artists and other experts on off-campus projects and aimed to create and present the main parts of their work as productions, exhibitions and talks in the Spring of 2020. Their work aimed to design an interdisciplinary performance infrastructure that could become a sustainable ecosystem for artists, students, experts, and public audiences in Bangkok. The different forms of performance practice were done outside of theatre venues in many urban spaces across central Bangkok. Including a mix of local, Thai and international artists, the networked festival allowed for the distribution of diverse inclusive events, new spaces, and different activities and thinking about performance from a locally-grounded, but international, perspective.

In designing and planning to manage the festival in different spaces that could engage young people and community members with different relations to the arts, festival planners wanted to embed these constituent performance events in Bangkok's larger urban cultural ecosystem. By linking performance activities to larger activities in central Bangkok, the university could encourage the involvement through activities in the more friendly neutral space that students might not yet again used to visit. Six major spaces are selected beyond standard performance spaces at Chulalongkorn University ties. These included the Chulalongkorn University Museum, the Chulalongkorn Sports Center, Chulalongkorn University

Centenary Park, the small Park @ Siam, the 1956 Maha Vajiravudhi Building, and Lido Connect at Siam Square, which is a free space that open for short performances in Siam Square.

Outside funding also permitted arrangements for four pre-production workshops for three performances in new experimental spaces for the festival. Three of these pre-production workshops included traditional performance styles that performed in new venues. We were then able to see the festival as a period of celebrating *Life | Performance* to open up for public participation among audiences and for life in central Bangkok to refresh the existing urban cultural ecosystem.

The free workshops were advertised through social media platforms, but open for participants from the general public. All the festival news and the workshop events schedule were promoted through a new Facebook page called *Thai Performance Practice as Research (PPaR)*. It created a platform and reception of people from different colleges and public audiences to connect and promoted and prepared both audiences and participants leading up to the March 2020 research events. The new festival structure was expanded in time, in space, in society and in media, to allow for more interaction and collection of more participants in and beyond the university and wider performance arts network. It also opened up alternative dance and theatre opportunities to public audiences in around the university. By December 2019, some parts of the festival planned for had been held, and plans were firmly in place for developing the other parts, whether the performances or research elements in early 2020. The new cultural infrastructure for performance was embedding itself in Bangkok's cultural ecosystem.

The novel coronavirus reached Thailand in early 2020, disrupting all aspects of the *Life | Performance* festival as the new virus turned Bangkok and its cultural ecosystem into a danger zone that banned public gatherings and valued social distancing.

3. Three *Life | Performance* Festival Projects Disrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Among the most important parts of the *Life | Performance* festival were those involving international performers who were invited to develop their work in Bangkok's cultural bubbles of life. This article will examine the performance work of three artists for the festival that were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The three pieces were: 1) Gecko Parade and Co.'s workshop in mid-September 2019, which developed into the trans-architectural journey performance, *Lindbergh's Flight*, eventually performed on March 12-14, 2020 at At Slure in Yawarat, Bangkok, 2) Eko Supriyanto's workshop and work-in-progress *Urban Movement Laboratory*, begun in late November 2019 and performed in Park @ Siam, and 3) Pichet Klunchun's *No. 60: Exhibition, Lecture | Demonstration*, first planned for May 2020 but finally opened at the Art Museum and Theatre at Chulalongkorn University on July 4, 2020 and running through August. All three artists sought to design and present contemporary performance projects within the *Life | Performance* format for urban spaces, environments and atmospheres. Their perspectives on contemporary urban performance differed, however. Gecko Parade focused on performance that engaged urban architectural spaces, Eko explored urban studio and public park spaces, and Pichet focused on museum spaces. Together, they

help to highlight the ecological aspects of urban space and time we live in here in Bangkok. By underscoring the importance of urban sites for contemporary performance, they developed new work with performers who were dynamically involved with both performance spaces and mobile audiences. These artists cared about the atmosphere and environment of performance, and in the interdependence of performers bodily movements, sounds, and audiences in specific urban performance sites.

A. Gecko Parade from Japan: Dialogue with the Artists in an International Series
Life | Performance held its first activity with a “Dialogue with the Artists - International Series.” Gecko Parade (Japan) on September 13-14 at the Chulalongkorn University Museum. In this exclusive workshop, thirty participants met artists from the Japanese performance group, Gecko Parade, which specializes in developing site-specific performances in unique architectural sites. By creating site-specific performances in non-theatrical spaces, such as ordinary homes, streets, and old building, they aim to highlight both unique performances and distinct aspects of city design and architecture. The group held its first activities on the afternoon of Friday, September 13 with an artist talk called “Play / Place / Concept: Creating theatre performances in non-traditional venues with an architectural view.” This talk and discussion with the artist dealt attracted 30 participants, and provided Gecko Parade’s working method to connect architecture and performing art, focusing on their previous work. On the afternoon of Saturday, September 14 the group held a workshop called “Inhabiting architecture with stories: Creating short performances in a non-theatre architecture.” This workshop developed around parts of the 1929 Berthold Brecht radio play *Lindbergh’s Flight* that were linked to space and architecture as the first stage in planning a performance together for 2020.



Figures 1. Gecko Parade Co. workshop at Chulalongkorn University Museum, September 14, 2019.

We invited Gecko Parade to the *Life | Performance* festival because they were young performing artists who were enmeshed in the cultural ecosystems of Tokyo, working in an office in an ordinary Tokyo house on a small alley. Their site-specific alternative performance practice suited the goals of our new Bangkok festival since they did not depend on a stage, and did not aim to attract large audiences. Their audiences often lived in their neighborhood, and would come to sit, stand, and move through the space to experience the performance with their eyes, ears and their bodies in motion with the performers. They came to listen to stories of the

actors as they performed, listening and to experience the performance, up close to the performers in different spaces as they moved through the different parts of the house, sensing the size, design and atmosphere of the building where the performance occurred. The storyteller and actors led the audience to follow, move up, down, sit and listen and use their imagination to follow the story in new interior spaces. This was a key aspect this troupe that interested us. Their acting ability is good and suits well with the urban ecology we aimed to create.

Their presentation and workshop were held in the Chulalongkorn University Art Museum space. They were looking both for possible performers and also suitable venues for doing a full production of a version of Berthold Brecht's 1929 radio play called "Lindberg's Flight," about the challenges of Charles Lindbergh's first transatlantic flight, completed in May 1927. They planned to return in February 2020 to prepare and rehearse for a March 2020 performance at some new building site. They looked and would plan to let festival organizers know which one they preferred along with possible actors. They would spend time finding performers to be involved in the project at the site would choose.

Gecko Parade works with unconventional pieces in old urban architectural spaces. They have become famous for making buildings part of the performance experience and imparts to visitors a different imagination. Their project simply sought to connect audiences to unfamiliar plays and to hidden urban spaces so they could use their senses to see, hear and feel the spaces they moved through during the performance. Their September 14 workshop was advertised on our research project's Thai PPaR page on Facebook, and attracting the limit of 23 participants, mostly young theatre artists or graduate students from various Bangkok universities in dramatic arts, but also visual arts students, architecture students.

The first phase of the Gecko Parade project involved spaces and people who would become part of the performance ecosystem for their production once they would return in early 2020. Other parts of festival were also held from September to December 2019, helping to enrich Bangkok's cultural ecosystem with new forms of performance.⁶

B. Eko Suprinyanto from Indonesia: An Urban Movement Laboratory Workshop

Eko Suprinyanto is an important contemporary dancer and choreographer from Indonesia who has worldwide recognition.⁷ His EkosDance Company and Solo Dance Studio in Surakarta, Indonesia have developed new dance projects by working with young performers and local traditions in the Indonesian archipelago. Some of these pieces, like *Cry Jailolo*, *Balabala*, *Daunt in Soya Soya*, and *Ibuibu Belu* have been well-received in both Indonesia and in international venues. His recent solo work *Salt* emerged from his reflections on tensions and commonalities from a lifetime of training in both classical Javanese and martial arts dance forms. Mr. Suprinyanto also works in local communities, traditions and artists and students, and encourages young people in local Indonesian communities to connect to their identity and re-create identities through their cultures of movement. By working to revitalize traditional dance forms for the contemporary world, he attracts local and global audiences.

We invited Mr. Suprinyanto to lead a workshop in the *Life | Performance* festival in late November 2019, when he was free, as the first part of his work on a piece which he would develop from late February 2020 to perform it in March 2020 as a more refined movement project for a public urban space. His *Urban Movement Laboratory* dance workshop was opened to the public and included young performers, mostly from Bangkok area universities, who wanted to develop new types of movement for the new city and to create a movement-based network among universities in Bangkok. He gave a talk to people interested in his project and 25 people attended. The workshop itself included 50 dance and theatre students, dance practitioners, five university students involved, three professional dancers and contemporary mime artists join the workshop, and a foreign student. The intense 3-day November workshop had limited spaces and a very tight schedule since they had to perform a work-in-progress at its end.

The intense dance lab workshop was held in the dance studio of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Chulalongkorn University on November 22-24 and then performed in a preliminary form at the Park @ Siam on the boundary between the university campus and Siam Square shopping mall facing small shops – coffee place and people who pass and walk through. Participants, mostly tied to university performance programs in Bangkok had diverse backgrounds in movement and dance: two were mime performers, four were classically trained Thai dancers, three were ballet trained dancers, and eight had theatre experience, while some others had no training in the performing arts at all.



Figure 2. Urban Movement Laboratory led by Eko Supriyanto, center. Left, workshop, Faculty of Fine and Applied Art studio on November 23, 2019. Right, work-in-progress, Park @ Siam on November 24, 2019.

The exercises in Mr. Suprinyanto's workshop centered on fascinating ways to connect one's body to one's breathing and one's movement, not only individually, but also in pairs and in larger groups. Workshop participants showed a rough work in progress on Sunday, November 24 at Park @ Siam, a park on the southern edge of the Siam Square shopping area, just for some exposure to experimental activities that could be developed into a future urban movement project when Mr. Suprinyanto would return in early 2020. The workshop and work in progress

were organized to emphasize flow but it included individual and collective forms of movement, aiming to have performers interact with the park space and people – whether casual visitors, curious onlookers, or the dancers themselves. The hard work for this work in progress were open to the public and provided a path for Mr. Supriyanto to select people for the fuller and more developed production he planned to develop from this *Urban Movement Laboratory* in March 2020.

C. Pichet Klunchun and No. 60

Pichet Klunchun is a well-known contemporary dancer and choreographer based in Thailand who runs the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company, the only contemporary dance company in the country. Although trained in classical masked dance (Khon) in the giant role with a private teacher, he is better known in much of the world for the innovative work developed from his classical training. In recent years, he has developed a new way to analyze and teach classical Thai dance that would allow dancers a path to embodying freedom and creative movement. We wanted him to be part of the festival to show his new vision for dance in Thailand. His project was one of several of those tied to the festival funded by Contemporary Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture.⁸ We wanted Pichet to introduce his research on classical Thai dance as an exhibition in a museum along with a demonstration of this ideas. He had produced a lot of line drawings and made notes before it was becoming computerized version. With the exhibition at Chulalongkorn University Museum, we also asked him to do a lecture demonstration for the opening of his exhibition and planned to make a video session to show in the museum if people wanted to visit the exhibition and hoped this could happen in the spring of 2020. We first reserved the time of his exhibition and performance in May 2020, as the final performance of the festival, to be held in conjunction with our conference for performance researchers.

The three above projects were core parts of the *Life | Performance* festival infrastructure that we aimed to embed in the cultural ecosystem of central Bangkok. They formed part of a cluster of performances planned for the spring of 2020. By December 2019, they all seemed on track and in place. Gecko Parade and Eko Supriyanto had begun work on their respective urban-based projects, finding unique spaces to perform, working with potential performers, and developed preliminary ideas of what their movements and performance would be like. Pichet Klunchun had visited the site for his exhibition and begun planning to do a lecture and demonstration in the same space. A fledgling cultural ecosystem of performance was emerging by the end of 2019.

4. Reworking the Life | Performance Festival under the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 outbreak from early in 2020 produced a new viral ecosystem that forced a radical reorganization of the *Life | Performance* festival. During the initial phase of the outbreak, from January to mid-March, disruptions to the festival varied from cancellation to relocation to rescheduling. From mid-March to June, the lockdown banned live in-person events, but opened up new opportunities for online discussion, interaction and dialogue. Then from July 2020, there were hopes to complete the remaining festival events, even if they would need to be scaled back and revised. But a new COVID-19 resurgence that emerged from November meant another postponement of these items until 2021.

A. *The First Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand*

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was officially identified in China on December 31, 2019. It reached Thailand soon after it was identified in China, and the first reported case outside China was in Bangkok on January 13, 2020. The WHO declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), its highest level of alarm, on January 30. In comparison to many other countries in the world, Thailand was quite successful in containing the pandemic for much of 2020. The first wave of reported infections came from Bangkok bars, nightclubs, and a Thai boxing arena, and peaked on March 22, 2020 at 188 new cases per day. Since the virus was not well known and since there was no vaccine, however, public concerns were high. Schools and universities closed, and government-imposed preventive measures were put into place, contributing to a subsiding of the outbreak. Efforts to limit the spread of the virus from March 2020 included a state of emergency on March 26 and lockdown measures imposed in varying degrees throughout the country, including closing public venues and businesses, then a curfew from April 3, and the suspension of commercial international flights from April 4. When infection rates subsided, some restrictions were eased from mid-May, but the curfew was only lifted in early July 2020.

Chulalongkorn University responded to its concerns about the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic even before the government did, closing most on-campus teaching and learning activities on January 27, and banning its personnel and students from travelling to nine countries with high daily case counts. Although the university cancelled all international academic activities after February 20, 2020, the university found a staff person infected with COVID-19 on campus, which led the University to close the campus. It officially started a policy requiring all teaching and learning to be fully online from March 16, 2020. The government issued its curfew and closure and travel policies shortly thereafter. All of these developments affected the *Life | Performance* Festival.

B. *COVID-19 Disruptions of the Life | Performance Festival in 2020: Cancelling Eko Supriyanto's Urban Movement Laboratory and Relocating Gecko Parade's Lindbergh's Flight*

The emerging viral threat of COVID-19 in Thailand, from January to March 2020 created a new viral-laden cultural ecosystem which forced the *Life | Performance* festival to deal with many uncertainties and concerns with its component performances and projects. Many events and spaces were banned on campus, in civic venues, and public concerns limited interaction and travel in the city during its lockdown. The timing and locations of festival's projects were evaluated on an ongoing basis. They required flexibility from artists, festival organizers and their audiences, which helped it produce forms of resilience. *Life | Performance* had become part of a new viral ecosystem, and part of its performance now became our ongoing effort to develop new sites for performance activities amid an evolving pandemic.

The three artists discussed above focused on urban performance practices that linked audiences with participants in unconventional performance spaces – old buildings, parks, museums – and developed new perspectives on performing arts

spaces in contemporary Bangkok, none of which were available during the pandemic. The most pressing events were those involving international artists – those dealing with Gecko Parade's *Lindbergh's Flight* project and Eko Supriyanto's *Urban Movement Laboratory* – both of which were scheduled for March, but we kept in mind Pichet Klunchun's No. 60 piece, too. In the end, the Gecko Parade project went ahead, albeit at a different site than preferred and with fewer audiences than desired, Eko's project was cancelled, and Pichet's project was postponed and diverted to a new location. The pandemic and uncertain global situation drastically disrupted the festival and forced much reworking of its performances and events into new social-distanced urban and media spaces. Having to adjust to the new viral ecosystem prevented all ability to rehearse or perform in public, so everything tied to public performance had to be reimagined, revised, and rescheduled. Many other parts of the festival were recorded as videos or made into online events. The festival continued, and survived, but in a very different form than had been planned.

It was a great disappointment that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented Eko Supriyanto from returning to Chulalongkorn to develop his *Urban Movement Laboratory* in 2020. The WHO's declaration of an effective pandemic on January 30, three days after the university closed most on-campus teaching and learning activities, was soon followed by a ban on its personnel and students from travelling to nine countries. The university also cancelled all international academic activities after February 20, 2020, which forced a cancellation of Mr. Supriyanto's project since he was not in Thailand at that time. All international events that involved international flying for work on another workshop toward performances like that of his and his participant team that had started in November were cancelled. There were five graduate students from the Chulalongkorn Dance and Drama department, three from the dance group at Burapha University in Chonburi, two drama students from Thammasat University's Rangsit campus, and five young contemporary artists not in school. Since the performance would have needed to work in a studio with the 15 people he had planned for, however, the piece and would spend time to refine it, the project could not go ahead. We made a video of the work on his project to date and how he envisioned it being developed before the pandemic hit.

Since all live face-to-face events and performances for the festival were shut down or diverted to small venues from late February, we faced a problem about what the *Life | Performance* festival could do under a pandemic. At first rehearsals were done with special care, but by February, many students felt uneasy to travel to and from rehearsal spaces and to be with other people en route. As a result, all rehearsals stopped and everything was shut down. As a result, we postponed the main program planned for March, and decided to book venues like Chulalongkorn University Art Museum for July 2020, hoping that we would be able to work again by that time.

The COVID-19 pandemic's disruptions of normal life in Bangkok and Thailand drastically affected all aspects of the *Life | Performance* festival in 2020, too. All of its

components needed rethinking, so the festival looked for new ways to become an active platform during a pandemic lockdown that ran from March through June. We tried to connect to the world through new forms of media, sponsoring three podcasts that sought to connect with our events and research projects, developing new online platforms for the festival to continue even under the pandemic.

In January 2020, we still planned to work with the Gecko Parade group, and they planned to return to develop the *Lindbergh's Flight* piece for March performances. They informed us that they hoped to work in the Maha Vajiravudh Building on the Chulalongkorn University campus and we got approval for this.⁹ Erected in 1954-1956, this building houses the Humanities Information Center of the Faculty of Arts and blends traditional Thai architectural features with modern institutional interiors. The Japanese artists from Gecko Parade arrived in Bangkok and were working in mid-February with artists on their piece. But the February announcement made it seem that we would need to reconsider their program on campus. We discussed with the project coordinator, and considered postponing the project, but since the artists had been working together, and no one could guarantee when the next opportunity since the project's funder, the Japan Foundation, ended its fiscal year at the end of March 2020.

Gecko Parade still had hopes to do the project at their preferred site, with small ticket-buying audiences circulating through the locations for the performance in two rounds a day for many days. Although universities prohibited international travel and exchanges from late February, we decided to move ahead with the Gecko Parade project hoping to complete it before the pandemic worsened. When the university banned on-campus meetings, teaching and performances, however, it was not possible to perform *Lindbergh's Flight* on campus. I suggested that they continue working on this project but at a different venue outside the university. Since no one knew how the pandemic situation or government responses would evolve, or how serious it would become, and since the project has been developed so far, why not perform the piece as a work-in-progress with a limited audience watching it for free so it could be done within Japan's fiscal year and it could still be a part of the festival. We would support the Thai artist expenses.

Lindbergh's Flight was first a radio play about the first 1927 solo transatlantic flight by Charles Lindbergh written in 1929 by Bertolt Brecht. The Gecko Parade and Co. performance group from Japan created a contemporary performance with Thai and Japanese artists that come from different forms, from theatre, projected film, architectural space, and installation art.¹⁰ It was performed in the At Slure Project in Yawarat for small, select audiences due to the COVID-19 pandemic on evenings in March 12-14. Audiences followed performers re-enacting Charles Lindbergh's flight, as performers and audiences moved through the whole building while witnessing the difficulties Lindbergh experienced while trying to fly across the Atlantic Ocean.



Figures 3. Lindbergh's Flight: A trans-architectural journey by Gecko Parade Co., At Slure Project, March 13, 2020.

Gecko Parade agreed to perform their work-in-progress version of *Lindbergh's Flight* with some Thai performers in an arts hotel in the Yawarat neighborhood of Bangkok since their earlier preferred old building on the Chulalongkorn campus had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns there. The small off-campus site for their performance only permitted small audiences for the performances on March 12-14, and a total of 120 people attended. The day after their final performance, the university officially closed, soon followed by a lockdown of Bangkok and the country. Since it happened, audiences and artists alike benefited from their interactions in a shared architectural space that used an expanded sense of space and time to allow everyone to imagine the voyage and to interact with people. By doing things simply, walking, listening, sitting, down on the floor, making audio effects, in an almost claustrophobic space allowed for a richer experience for audiences. It created a small performance ecosystem that included performers, audience, props, soundscapes, films, visual art, movement, and architectural space all interacting in a living process.

Lindbergh's Flight was the only project held in a live setting in the *Life | Performance* festival in early 2020. From March 15, universities and other venues in Bangkok began shutting down. In the new viral environment, everything else in the festival was subject to various pandemic disruptions until July 2020: cancellations, postponements, video recordings, or digital diversions.

5. Reworking *Life | Performance* as a Viral Festival under the 2020 Pandemic Lockdown

As noted above, the COVID-19 virus had become part of Bangkok's cultural ecosystem, and this resulted in many changes to the festival. During the first lockdown period from mid-March to June 2020, Thailand operated on social distancing, digital communications, extended homestays, and work from home. The limited direct interactions were matched by high levels of fear due to concerns of a large COVID-19 outbreak in Bangkok and other areas of Thailand. Since universities and urban spaces were shutdown, urban quiet and social isolation were dominant in Bangkok.

There were no opportunities for live in-person festival activities during this period, so we stopped performances and other activities and postponed all research projects in *Life | Performance*, deciding to reschedule everything until we hoped that schools and the city would have re-opened in the late summer 2020. No rehearsals were possible and the remaining five component parts of the festival could not continue. To entertain people and to keep up people's interest, we wanted to shift the work and the spirit of festival to new spaces that were suitable for a pandemic.

To continue the interactive and social nature of the festival in pandemic conditions, we moved to online channels and venues. We engaged the public through online podcasts and talks to digitally communicate and embody the *viral festival as performance ecology* concept. We articulated our attitudes to the festival and its ways of working with audiences through diverse social media channels. We tried to keep interacting with the public and designed three podcasts and a video with performing artists. They discussed new types of performance-making they have been involved in.¹¹ This challenging pandemic environment was the new cultural ecology that the festival was part of. We worked toward more collective activities and tried to solve problems and work things out together, and we interacted with diverse groups.

An early project in the new viral festival occurred in April 2020, when we showed a performance from a cross-disciplinary research project that aimed to give an idea about what contemporary Thai theatre can be. The program aimed to show more about work in performance research that would allow device-connected audiences to communicate and interact through cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary artistic activity. It later connected and became platform that performance events that were tied to research in performance practice.

The first podcast interviewed Siree Riewpaiboon, who was the coordinator of the *Lindbergh's Flight* with Gecko Parade from Japan from September 2019 to March 2020. She talked about the concept and the collaborative work between Gecko Parade and Thai artist collective B-Floor and Jarunan Phantachard, along with Somchai Pongsa, installation artist and Chulayarnnon Siriphol as a media and film artist, among others. We wanted this to make people learn about the company's unique approach and concept and their collaboration with Thai artists in a unique urban setting. As a site-specific multimedia and multicultural work in unique architectural spaces outside theatre spaces outside theatre, it formed a unique performance ecosystem. This helped listeners understand the relations between performance and architectural spaces and its place in Bangkok's urban cultural environment under pandemic conditions.

I spoke on a second podcast focused on how "devised theatre" worked.¹² It explored alternative ways of performance-making using collaborative concepts and teamwork as the basis of performance-making. The podcast aimed to support performance research-based events that were working with teachers in high schools. This session gave a different approach to teachers that allowed them to

use in making theatre with their students in school, developing performances that reflect the school and home social context for a team to use to interact, react and question how to do performance-making.

A third podcast dealt with “creative Likay” (Likay is a traditional Thai dance performance) and was led by the contemporary artist Pradit Prasarthong, who shared a talent in a creative workshop which sought to explore how to make new a new Likay story that could reflect contemporary issues. This also prepared students who participate in Likay performance could understand about how using Likay as form to address contemporary issues like health and aging society.

As part of the viral performance festival we also showed a final short film of the work-in-progress by the dancer and choreographer Eko Suprinyanto from Indonesia with students he had worked with in Bangkok in November 2020. Although the COVID-19 pandemic prevented him from realized his *Urban Movement Laboratory* project fully, the film showed his work with students in a preliminary form. It helped viewers to understand how he think about working with young people from different backgrounds in an urban park environment.

From March to May 2020, even while under the pandemic lockdown, we kept the festival alive in viral ways through social media and other online channels. Since by late May the COVID-19 case counts were decreasing and lockdown measures were being reduced, we then arranged for Pichet Klunchuen to do his project with us in early July since he did not have much free time due to his other commitments, preparing an exhibition and do his lecture-demonstration. We booked the Chulalongkorn Art Museum, hoping that there would be new normal after a few months of lockdown. In June, we started promoting Pichet Klunchuin’s No. 60 for the festival.

6. Reviving Pichet Klunchun’s Lecture | Demonstration and No. 60 Exhibition

The Life | Performance festival reopened to live in-person events after the lockdowns with Pichet Klunchun’s No. 60 project on July 4-5, 2020, the first day that Chulalongkorn University was reopened. We rescheduled his work from May to when we thought the university could reopen, They let us book a space for him in the university art museum in early July but at the last minute, we had to change the performance space from the museum to the theatre and to limit it for only those who received tickets. Everyone had to be fully masked except the performers, and we had to do two performances since the booking was full and was still in high demand. He twice held his Lecture | Demonstration, on July 4 and 5, in the faculty theatre, each with a masked and socially-distanced maximum of 70 people, and gave a talk after each one.¹³ Streaming his events on Facebook, which attracted a lot of audience at Burapha University, and recording them for later viewing allowed for many audience interactions and requests to see more of the lecture. Parallel to these live events with limited audiences, we also hosted an exhibition of Pichet’s original drawings of classical Thai dance positions for his No. 60 ideas and the resulting book No. 60 which ran from July 10 to August 25, 2020. An introductory video for the exhibition discussed the background to his drawings

and how it related to his larger project of developing a creative way to introduce classical Thai dance to larger audiences and to provide the highly disciplined classical Thai dancers with a path to creativity. Pichet later ran another Lecture | Demonstration at his own Chang Theatre in Thonburi before he left to perform in Taiwan in the August. He was also filmed and shown on the Thai PBS channel and shown through the Thai PPaR Facebook page.¹⁴

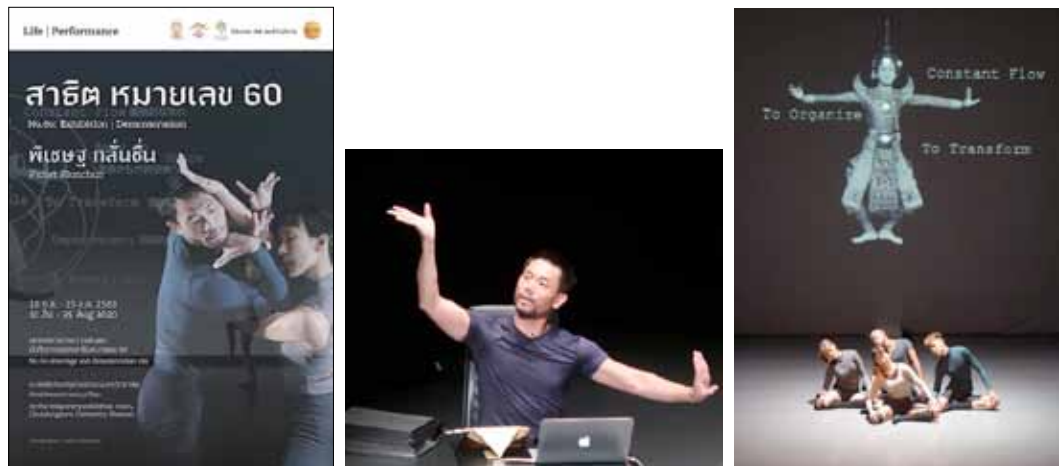


Figure 5. Left, Pichet Klunchun, No. 60 exhibition and Lecture | Demonstration poster. Center and right, from the Sodsai Centre for Dramatic Arts, Chulalongkorn University, July 4, 2020.

This was the first live performance on campus, so it excited people. The response was good for his work and for our festival, not only because people were eager to view live performances, but also because we advertised Pichet's live piece in our festival on many online platforms. We also added some new clips and work-in-progress pieces to show that live in-person performance can be in live performance spaces again and still be live-streamed or appear in a recorded form in online virtual spaces, too.

With hopes of adjusting to this “new normal” environment from July 2020, we tried to move toward completing the remaining four projects in the *Life | Performance* festival. We started research again and other work, preparing for some performances in November 2020. The first to be performed as the work of Patsupang Kongbumrung, who directed two live performances for limited audiences in late November on “acting out” which used devised theatre to produce a better understanding of sexual diversity. We hoped to do more programming in December 2020, but new viral outbreaks in and around Bangkok emerged, so we decided to turn them into video clips and then present them to target audiences in Saraburi and in the northeastern Thai province of Khon Kaen. We also planned to have another performance on psychology and performance that would close the project without any live performance, but that became impossible.¹⁵

The cascading pandemic's waves and their effects in Thailand in late 2020 forced us to reschedule and redesign the research output again, so we all had to begin our research projects from a new starting point. The *Life | Performance* had stalled

and would only be able to develop again in mid-2021 at the earliest, but we could not be sure of that, so we decided to close the project before fully completing three of our planned events. So the festival fully did seven of the planned events, even though sometimes in partial, distanced, preliminary or mediated ways, while two of them were adapted to performances through media and space.

The process of surviving the pandemic's disruptions changed how I look at the performing arts. We tried to listen better and to communicate more clearly to both artists and to audiences so both could better engage with the performance festival. Engagement from diverse stakeholders could move us, and also keep us moving and resilient to things that happen, so we can discover new ways to use the arts to address problems, celebrate identities, and facilitate relaxation.

Another disrupted project was based on a Likay performance using a script developed by Pradit Prasarthong for Saraburi, a small city north of Bangkok. This project planned to create and perform a new Likay piece tied to a story about understanding and treating high blood pressure. Although the piece was made, it was not possible to perform it live in Saraburi, so the Pradit made a video of the piece and sent it to the community, asking them to test their knowledge about high blood pressure medicine instead of performing it live as he had planned.

While the three projects of the *Life | Performance* festival discussed above were all disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, they all went ahead in some form. Gecko Parade's *Lindburgh's Flight* was diverted to new venue with limited performances and audience, while Eko Suprinyanto's *Urban Movement Laboratory* project was cancelled and kept at the work-in-progress stage and supplemented by a video of his reflections on this type of work, and Pichet Klunchun's *No. 60* was rescheduled and redesigned for new spaces and limited audiences. All three of the projects were also shifted to online venues. However disruptive, the festival continued by evolving into new pandemic-ready spaces and to evolve into new directions for a post-COVID environment. This resilient performance infrastructure was also supported by a new set of online podcasts, performance videos and discussions with artists, becoming a veritable performance ecosystem – both through alternative live settings and also through various online settings – able to survive a relentless pandemic.

Conclusion

The experimental *Life | Performance* festival in central Bangkok was devised as an urban performance ecosystem. While designed as a new performance infrastructure able to add value to central Bangkok's cultural ecosystem, when the cultural ecosystem became viral, so did the festival. It was forced to respond to the severe disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Through adaptive evolution to the new viral environment, the festival developed cultural resilience and learned to survive through creating new forms of symbiotic performance culture. Working in pandemic conditions, festival artists, organizers and audiences improvised their work and built up new spaces of life that produced new forms of cultural adaptability. While some parts of the festival were held as first planned,

others were cancelled, diverted, mediated, or rescheduled. A main result of this improvisational behavior has been a transformation of the festival design of *Life | Performance* within a viral cultural ecosystem that reoriented itself toward creative placemaking in central Bangkok.

Thailand's efforts to open up amid the pandemic in the fall of 2020, before vaccines had arrived, now seem premature. Beginning in December 2020, a new surge of infections emerged in migrant worker communities in Samut Sakhon province and quickly spread to nearby Bangkok and other area cities and widely throughout the country, with a crest of reported cases in early 2021 subsiding in February before a new wave rose in April 2021 from the Thong Lor nightlife area of Bangkok. These quickly spread in Bangkok and elsewhere in Thailand, more quickly than vaccination rates, so the 1000 cases per day in April led to shortages of hospital beds and some medical supplies, even as vaccinations became more common. Cases were spiking and peaked at more than 20,000 per day by mid-August 2021, when a curfew and other measures, together with more vaccinations, helped to bend the curve lower.

The persistence and virulence of the pandemic in Bangkok made continuing the festival as planned difficult. Some parts were held as scheduled, especially the preliminary or workshopped phases, but most of it was deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the festival to continue in a viral environment, the festival needed to become more viral, too. In dealing with the disruptions, the festival sought to link itself more deeply to the surrounding urban cultural ecosystem and to rework its activities into mediated events, as forms of creative placemaking, and as projects that involved other universities, high schools, and plans for re-opening the city.

Life | Performance was first imagined and designed as a new kind of open or networked festival for the cultural ecosystem of central Bangkok. COVID-19 made the ecosystem viral, and radically transformed the festival itself, along with all other public cultural activities. When COVID-19 deprived performers of any ability to do live interactions for rehearsals or performances from February 2020, *Life | Performance* needed to fundamentally reimagine and rework itself to continue under pandemic conditions, in a sense it needed to become viral itself. Because travelling was not allowed many events had to be moved into different spaces or changed made into media events. At first, online spaces and channels were used. Soon we started to see that, on the one hand, we can use our approach to developing performances as part of creative placemaking efforts in Bangkok neighborhoods and also to develop performance teaching materials with partner universities and high schools. Despite the cancellation of some projects of the festival, we have reoriented our work toward embedding ourselves in urban cultural ecosystems which we aim to enhance through creative placemaking activities.

To build on the evolving performance infrastructures, cultural ecosystems and ways of thinking about the place of performance cultures in contemporary Bang-

kok in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Life | Performance* festival reworked itself into a pair of performance research projects tied to new cultural ecosystems. One project is seeking to locate a small performance festival in an urban cultural ecology as part of a creative placemaking venture, while another project is seeking to produce flexible teaching modules in the performing arts. Both of these projects derived from the *Life | Performance* festival, but are now set within a social innovation space rather than a focused research cluster. The university and the country are moving toward arts projects that are assessed by their contribution to society, although just how these contributions are to be evaluated and assessed remains unclear.

Endnotes

- 1 The festival was part of a fledgling Research Cluster in Arts and Culture at Chulalongkorn University, the performing arts section. The goal of the project was to develop a new kind of distributed or networked festival for central Bangkok communities, drawing on cultural resources from universities. It was also used as a structure to showcase six performance research projects run by faculty who developed interdisciplinary projects by working with artists and experts from other fields.
- 2 For another approach to new festival making in Southeast Asia, see Masunah, et al., 2019, and for outside of the region, see Quinn 2005.
- 3 Markusen (2011: 8) bases her definition on the work of John Kreidler and Moy Eng, along with William Beyers. Her definition stresses the interdependencies among commercial, nonprofit, public, and informal organizations in a given space.
- 4 The *Life | Performance* festival was supported by the Arts and Culture Research Cluster of Chulalongkorn University's "Cultural Ecologies of Performance: Creativity, Research and Innovation" project from Chulalongkorn University's Ratchadapisek Sompoch Endowment Fund (761008-02AC) in association with Thai Performance practice as Research Network (PPAR), The Japan Foundation, Bangkok and the Office of Art and Culture, Chulalongkorn University, with additional support from the Department of Culture Promotion and Department of Contemporary Arts in the Thai Ministry of Culture.
- 5 The seven performance research projects tied to the festival were: 1. "The Process of Creating and Managing the Cultural Ecologies of Performance Through an Arts Festival: *Life | Performance*, Pornrat Damrhung and Premmarin Milindasuta (on festival organization and artistic research); 2. "Likay Bu Lan Cha La: A Cultural Ecology for Neighborhood Vitality and Theatre Vivacity," Sukanya Somphaiboon, (performed live on Dec. 1, 2019 in a community celebration event near Hualumpong Train Station); 3. "Script Writing and Performing Arts for High School Teachers," Parida Manomaiphiboon, (project with Bangkok high school teachers was paused due to COVID-19); 4. "Acting Out: Devising theatre for a better understanding of sexual diversity," Patsupang Kongbumrung (performed twice live for limited audiences in late November 2019); 5. "Learning Drama, Teaching Life Skills," Dangkamon Napombejra (could not complete the research due to COVID-19); 6. "Likay Performance for Hypertension Learning," Anukoon Rotjanasuksomboon, (performed and recorded as a video clip in 2020); 7. "Working with the 'Wounded Mind'" Bhanbhassa Thubthien, (could not complete the program due to COVID-19).

- 6 Four more parts of the Life | Performance festival were held after Gecko Parade during 2019. Three of these parts were in a series called “From Experts to Offspring” which included talks, workshops, and performances by different traditional artists in new spaces. First, on September 28-29 there was a talk and workshop capped at 30 participants on “Likay” with several artists. Second, Nora artists led by Ajarn Thamanit Nikomrat from Songkhla, Thailand ran a workshop for more than 70 people on October 28 and then had an interactive performance the next day at Lido Connect in Siam Square area of Bangkok. This was followed by a performance of a well-known Chinese opera troupe ran by Meng P. Pla in the Chulalongkorn Centennial Park in the Sam Yarn area of Bangkok on the evening of November 2. Aside from the November 22-24 workshop and preliminary performance led by Eko Supriyanto, on December 1, a new Likay performance named “Bu Lan Cha La” was staged at the urban Rong Meung Reung Yim Festival near Hualampong Train Station.
- 7 Mr. Supriyanto has done his own dance and choreography, and been consulted on Julie Taymor’s Lion King Broadway production, and choreographed and performed for international productions like Peter Sellars Le Grand Macabre, John Adam’s Opera Flowering Tree, Garin Nugroho’s Opera Jawa, MAU Lemi Ponifasio’s Tempest, Solid.States with Arco Renz, and was a featured dancer in Madonna’s 2001 Drowned World. He completed a PhD in Performance Studies (2014) at Gadjah Mada University and holds a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Dance and Choreography from the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures (2001). Recently he has begun working on another PhD in the Performing Arts.
- 8 The Thailand Cultural Ministry’s Contemporary Arts Department sponsored three Silapathorn Artists for this festival, namely Pradit Prasartthong for contemporary Likay project, Nikorn Sae Tang for an alternative play-making project, and also Pichet Klunchun for new ways to revive Thai classical dance.
- 9 The site was selected not only for how its unique architecture that would suit the performance, but also for its political meaning. The building appeared in a protest scene in the 1963 Ugly American adventure film directed by George Englund and starring Marlon Brando, Eiji Okada, among others. The protest scene of the film also featured the cultural polymath and politician Kukris Pramroj as Prime Minister Kwen Sai of a fictional Southeast Asian country.
- 10 The text of Lindbergh’s Flight was translated into Japanese by Tatsuji Iwabuji, and then into Thai by Piyawan Sapsamroum, and in the performance English, Japanese and Thai were used. It was directed by Mizuhito Kuroda with help from Mizuho Watanabe, and costume design by Yumika Mori. Funding for the project came from the Japan Foundation (Bangkok) and its coordinator was Siree Riewpaiboon. Saowakhon Muangkruan played cello for the piece, while Somchai Pongsa was an installation artist for one part of the show and Chulayarnnon Siriphol added film and media elements. Jarunan Phanthachart and Sornchai Phongsa appeared the peice. Their effort helped insert the experience of Lingbergh’s long, lonely flight into a setting that was closer to Thai audiences. Using the small space, they sought to be creative and involve audience to experience the long flight of Lindberg. Actors included Mai Kawahara, Yukari Sakida, Thongchai Pimapunsri, Chanida Punyaneramtdee.
- 11 The Office of Contemporary Culture in the Ministry of Culture supported three of its “Silapathorn” (Young Artists) winners to be involved in the festival. Since the pandemic meant they could not work in live settings, however, in April 2020, we decided to do podcasts with them to keep the spirit of the festival going under COVID-19. The three artists were Pradit Prasartthong, Nikorn Saetang, and Pichet Klunchun. We were only able to schedule Pichet for a live lecture and demonstration in July.

- 12 Nikorn Saetang also did a workshop on “alternative script-making” with high school teachers looking to use performance-making techniques in their classroom. In this work, he discussed how he uses a script-writing process with high school teachers and also related it to his own creative work. The teachers also went to see how this process worked at a piece Nikorn put on.
- 13 Pichet performed a version of this piece first as a work-in-progress at the Esplanade in Singapore in October 2019. A fuller version was staged at TPAM in Yokohama, Japan on February 15, 2020, but after that time he was not able to do live performances of the work as he had scheduled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. He went to Taiwan in mid-July to perform this piece at the Taipei Arts Festival in early August 8-9, 2020 since he had to undergo a 14-day quarantine there before performing.
- 14 The Thai Performance Practice as Research Thai PPAR Facebook page contains materials on the Life | Performance festival and other projects tied to artistic research in Thailand.
- 15 This was Bhanbhassa Thubthien’s “Working with the ‘Wounded Mind’” which could not complete the program due to the new outbreaks of COVID-19 from December 2020.

References

- Andersson, T., Getz, D. and Mykletun, R. “Sustainable Festival Populations: An Application of Organizational Ecology,” *Tourism Analysis* 18.6 (2013):621–634.
- Arons, W. and May, T., eds. *Readings in Performance and Ecology (What Is Theatre?)*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.
- Borrup, Tom. “Artists and Creativity in Urban Placemaking – Reflections on a Downtown Minneapolis Cultural District.” *Journal of Urban Culture Research* vol 7 (2013):96-111.
- Courage, Cara, McKeown, Anita, et al., eds. *Creative Placemaking: Research, Theory, and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Courage, Cara, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking*. London: Routledge, 2021.
- Courage, Cara and McKeown, Anita, eds. *Creative Placemaking: Research, Theory and Practice*. Milton Park, Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Cudny, Waldemar. “Festivals as a Subject for Geographical Research.” *Geografisk Tidsskrift - Danish Journal of Geography* 114:2 (2014):132-142.
- Damrhung, Pornrat. “Refreshing the Spirit of Creativity: The Cultural Ecosystem Approach at the Lanna Wisdom School, Chiangmai.” In *Spirit of Creativity in Dance Education*, edited by Mohd Anis MD Nor. Kuala Lumpur: Nunsantara Performing Arts Research Center, 2021.
- Damrhung, Pornrat. “Young People’s Theater in Thailand: A Performance Ecology Approach.” In *Global Handbook on Youth Theatre*, eds. Selina Busby, Kelly Freebody, and Charlene Rajendran. Milton Park, Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2022.
- Damrhung, Pornrat and Lowell Skar. “Introduction: From Performance Research to Performance Ecologies in Contemporary Thailand,” *Manusya: Journal of Humanities* 23.3 (2020):311-327.

- Frost, Nicola. "Anthropology and Festivals: Festival Ecologies." *Ethnos* 81:4 (2016):569-58.
- Giannachi, G. and Stewart, N., eds. *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, 1, Peter Lang AG, 2005.
- Getz, Don. "The Nature and Scope of Festival Studies." *International Journal of Event Management Research* 5 (2010):1-47.
- Getz, D., T. Andersson and J. Carlsen. "Festival Management Studies: Developing a Framework for Comparative and Cross-cultural Research." *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 1 (2010):29-59.
- Getz, D. and Andersson, T. "Analyzing Whole Populations of Festivals and Events: An Application of Organizational Ecology." *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure & Events* 8.3 (2016):249-273.
- Gibson, C. "Music Festivals and Regional Development Policy: Towards a Festival Ecology." *PerfectBeat* 14.2 (2013):40-157.
- Giovanardi, Massimo; Andrea Lucarelli; Patrick L'Espoir Decosta. "Co-performing Tourism Places: The 'Pink Night' Festival." *Annals of Tourism* 44 (2014):102-115.
- Harvie, J. *Theatre & the City*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Holden, John. "The Ecology of Culture: A Report Commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultural Value Project" London: Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2015. Available at: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/the-ecology-of-culture/> (accessed August 2021).
- Hopfinger, Sarah. "Doing the Ecological Through Performance." *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (2020) 1-19. DOI: 10.1080/14682761.2020.1757319
- Koefoed, L., de Neergaard, M., & Simonsen, K. "Cross-cultural Encounters in Urban Festivals: Between Liberation and Domination." *Space and Culture* 23.1 (2020).
- Lavery, C. "Introduction: Performance and Ecology – What Can Theatre Do?" *Green Letters* 20.3 (2016): 229-236. doi:10.1080/14688417.2016.1206695.
- Machon, Josephine. *Immersive Theaters: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Mair, Judith, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Markusen, Ann, et al. "California's Arts and Cultural Ecology." James Irvine Foundation, 2011. Available at: <https://california.foundationcenter.org/reports/california-s-arts-and-cultural-ecology/> (accessed August 2021).
- Masunah, Juju; Nugraheni, Trianti; Sukamayadi, Yudi. "Building Performing Arts Community Through Bandung Isola Performing Arts Festival (BIPAF) in Indonesia." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 255 (2019):169-173.

- May, Theresa J. *Earth Matters on Stage: Ecology and Environment in American Theater*. New York: Routledge.
- Pallai, Janet. 2013. *Cultural Mapping: A Guide to Understanding Place, Community and Continuity*. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre: Petaling Jaya, 2020.
- Phoasavadi, Pornprapit. *Halal Culture: Cultural Development of Anashid Musical Performance in Bangkok*. Bangkok: Thailand Science Research and Innovation. 2018. (This collaborated project is part of research project sponsored by Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI) and Center for Muslim World Policies).
- Quinn, R. "Arts Festivals and the City." *Urban Studies* 42.5/6 (2005):927-943.
- Quinn, B; Colombo, A.; Lindström, K.; McGillivray, D. & Smith, A. "Festivals, Public Space and cultural Inclusion: Public Policy Insights." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 29:11-12 (2021), 1875-1893.
- Rogers, Amanda. "Geographies of the Performing Arts: Landscapes, Places and Cities." *Geography Compass* 6.2 (2012):60-75.
- Skar, Lowell. "Playing with Practice Theory: Preliminary Remarks on the Work of Performance Ecologies in 21st-Century Bangkok," *Manusya: Journal of Humanities* 23.3 (2020):407-429.
- Stern, Mark J. and Seifert, Susan C. "Cultivating 'Natural' Cultural Districts." *Culture and Community Revitalization: A SIAP/Reinvestment Fund Collaboration – 2007-2009*. 4. 2007a. https://repository.upenn.edu/siap_revitalization/4 (accessed August 2021).
- Stern, Mark J. and Seifert, Susan C. "Culture and Urban Revitalization: A Harvest Document." *Culture and Community Revitalization: A SIAP/Reinvestment Fund Collaboration—2007-2009*. 7. 2007b. https://repository.upenn.edu/siap_revitalization/7 (accessed August 2021).
- Stern, Mark J. and Seifert, Susan C. "From Creative Economy to Creative Society." *Culture and Community Revitalization: A SIAP/Reinvestment Fund Collaboration—2007-2009*. 6. 2008. https://repository.upenn.edu/siap_revitalization/6/ (accessed August 2021).
- Stern, Mark J. and Seifert, Susan C. *Cultural Clusters: The Implications of Cultural Assets Agglomeration for Neighborhood Revitalization*. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 29.3 (2010):262-279.
- Stern, Mark J. and Seifert, Susan C. "Culture and Community Revitalization: A Framework for the Emerging Field of Culture-Based Neighborhood Revitalization" (2011). *Culture and Community Revitalization: A SIAP/Reinvestment Fund Collaboration—2007-2009*. 10. 2011. https://repository.upenn.edu/siap_revitalization/10 (accessed August 2021).
- Sukmayadi, Y. & Masunah, J. "Organizing Bandung Isola Performing Arts Festival (BIPAF) As A Market of Innovative Performing Arts in Indonesia." *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research And Education* 20.1 (2020):47-57.
- Waterman, Stanley. "Carnivals for Elites? The Cultural Politics of Arts Festivals." *Progress in Human Geography* 22 (1998):54-74.

Wenger, Etienne. "Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction" [online]. 2006. Available at: https://www.ohr.wisc.edu/cop/articles/communities_practice_intro_wenger.pdf (accessed August 2021).

Woynarski, Lisa. *Ecodramaturgies: Theatre, Performance and Climate Change*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.