

## MEMORY FIELD

LADAPHA SOPHONKUNKIT



memory field, 2023, photographed by Nat Setthana

**ABSTRACT**

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<p>This written component of the MA thesis addresses self-censorship that derives collective trauma that has been silenced. It enters through the memory of the 6 October Massacre at Thammasart University in 1976. Referring to Thongchai Winichakul, a historian and researcher who was also a victim of the traumatic incident, and who coined the term 'unforgetting'. He highlighted that memories of political atrocities can lead to a memory impasse in society. It examines the condition of unforgetting within the symptom of silencing that has persisted among the Thai people for generations.</p> <p>The thesis also explores self-censorship during the artistic process and how collaborative and participatory methods help to overcome this issue in making of the artistic work, the <i>memory field</i> performance. Additionally, I have also incorporated the concept of memory field by anthropologist Daniel T. Linger to help me examine the interweaving of my personal and social memories within the framework of this thesis together with the notions of recollecting and recalling that resonate with my artistic approach.</p> <p>A close examination of and inspiration from Doris Salcedo's work "Noviembre 6 y 7" (2002) in dialogue with Mieke Bal's analysis in the book, <i>Of what one cannot speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art</i>, has shaped my thinking and artistic approach. In the section on collective action, I discuss how to engage participants using memories and reflect on the tools and approaches I have developed throughout my research. Ultimately, I explore and explain how I design collaborative processes to address and overcome the issue of self-censorship that I have encountered.</p>	
<b>KEYWORDS</b> memory, memory art, massacre, forgetting, remembering, collective, collaboration, trauma, self-censorship, artistic research, performance, participatory art	

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memory field, 2023, photographed by Antti Ahonen

## PREFACE

My curiosity about the 6 October Massacre or the Thammasat Massacre began the moment I saw the red book with the title "6 ตุลา" (6 Oct or in Thai "hok-tu-la"), a shortened name of the massacre. There was no other description, in my memory it was a red cover with big bold letters on it. It happened on a random day when I was around ten years old. I was with my father at a shopping mall walking past a book stall that evening. I did not even pick up the book and get a close look to it. All I remembered was a red cover with letters on it. I remembered the name of the book well because my birthday was on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October. That was the first encounter I had in my memory, and without any further explanation from my father or from any history class from school (rather than two to three sentences about the incident), I have been in search of the answer to what has happened and why it has been silenced.

My MA project consists of the artistic part, which is the performance *memory field*, and this written part, in which I reflect on how I use memory and incorporate collective action into the performance-making process and the artistic work. The starting point of my MA thesis project is the memory of the Thammasat Massacre or the 6 October Massacre in 1976 and in this written part I touch on how I use the memory in the process of creating the performance *memory field* together with how I integrate collective action as part of responding to the issue of self-censorship that has emerged during the process.

In the first section of this written part I will talk about the text that I produced. I have generated a text that I call 'a midnight recall' over a period of time during MA thesis project. The text has shown the after-effect of what I have read and seen about the 6 October Massacre and what kind traces are left within me. The next section will be an introduction to the historical context and the artwork, *memory field*. Looking through my artistic process on how the concept of 'Memory Fields' by an anthropologist Daniel T. Linger and memory analysis of the 6 October Massacre in 1976 by Thongchai Winichakul have informed and shaped my thinking process and my artistic approach. "Memory is not truly individualised, but instead, or also, shaped by others and the collective experiences as well" (Winichakul 2020, 35). With that in mind, in the third section, my focus is on the collective part of artistic research in the making of the

performance *memory field*. In my work and artistic practice I have been interested in working with collaborators and participants. I am using the collective approach to bring in the strength together with the playful quality to deal with what I have encountered and how I can overcome it. To deal with the issue of self-censorship, what tools have I used? I do not want to say that I have completely overcome it, but in order to continue to have the courage to talk about some sensitive issues, I need to have some strategies at hand. Reflecting on how I have woven all these elements into a performance-making process is the main focus of this chapter.

## -a midnight recall-

What would you do with the unfinished ideas mixed with your blurry memories of  
mundane life?

It was started because of the performance  
The one under the tree in front of the university

It was a midnight recall  
He heard gunshots  
He was there in the middle of nowhere

Filling the gaps  
Healing the invisible scars

Marked where they were and found the traces

They were disappeared, vanished  
Red on green

We came to seek an answer

No question  
No solution

Don't dig because you will never know how deep you are going to fall

His body  
breaking like a piñata  
celebration over a soulless body

Why are you not smiling?

I curl up like a ball, holding my knees to my chest, burying my head deep down



So that I don't have to see what's happening around me, above me, even inside me

It was a midnight recall, again

It was a sound of popcorn in a microwave, popping

I didn't see what happen inside

I only heard the sound

It reminded me of popcorn

Filling the space

Retold the untold stories, is that possible?

Move my body, your body to fill up the container

Something came out of our bodies

They shouted

Are they bullets or candies?

It was bitter, too bitter that no-one ever wants to talk about it ever again

The truth disappeared so long ago

The truth never stays, no matter how hard we tried

It changes form, texture, smell, and taste

Sometimes it depends on a container

round, sharp, shallow, deep, wide, big, tiny

On the ground

Laying face down

Our future has been buried deep underground

No one could hear

No one could see

Pile of bodies

Empty shirts

Ripped skirts

What did we do wrong?

What did we do right?

What did we have left?

He was someone's son

Someone's brother

Somebody's uncle

Someone told me he existed somewhere, out there

He used to go to school with his brother

Invisible scars

We are sharing the same scar

Take a deep breath under the water

Take it in and let it sink you

Keep smiling even if you are suffocating

I often hold my breath when I read that book

Words and words stuck in my nose and throat

Over the time you get used to it

The pain will be part of your body, your soul

Embedded in your system

Inseparable

That you won't feel it often

It will visit you unexpectedly sometimes, but not often

Surrounded by crowd, not knowing where to go

Floating in the river

Passing the golden reflection on the river bank

Where are we heading?

No one knows

Just passing through

Hurt people

Hate people

Silent tears

Frozen truth

Zipper on a mouth, done!

Done, done, done!

You contain sadness

Your body is sadness

*A midnight recall* is a text that accumulated over a period of time. It was a process that I decided to articulate textually after reading about the 6 October Massacre, and interviews with survivors and victims' families. I also collected some more personal memories from my father and my friends and their family members who experienced the traumatic event. The only thing my father remembered was the sound of gunshots. He was near the university (Thammasat University campus) but never left his hiding place.

The writing process usually took place at night before I went to bed, which I have gone back to from time to time for editing, but mostly I picked up where I left off. Without rushing or pushing anything out, I let the information and emotions sink in and marinate. What remains inside? Any lingering feelings/visions/effects? What has emerged overtime? Throughout this time I had no clear objective of how I was going to use this text. While writing, I also extended it to drawing with different mediums as suggested by one of my mentors, Vincent Roumagnac, during our mentoring period. This helped me to change perspectives and visualise the text.

The text was a mixture of my blur of recollections and the effects of what I have read and revisited throughout the research process. At times there have been descriptions of my vision in words, sentences or stages. I started writing the text in January 2023 and continued writing and editing until September that year.

Later in the process I selected some text so that it fits into the format of a memory card game that I used in the performance *memory field*. Adding another layer to the game, I then decided to play with the presence and absence in the work by omitting selected words from the chosen text. These omitted words were usually chosen for two main reasons: if the words had more than one meaning, and if they were words that were commonly used. These omitted words became embroidery word patches that would appear on my costume for participant to put on in the first part of the performance and used them when we played the memory card game together. It's not just about matching pairs of text cards. It's also about filling in the missing words together, activating feelings and/or a collective memory as we engaged and took part in the game. I played with the use of these common words to bring in different contexts and perspectives, working with new points of view from the audience's participation, in the hope of seeing different connections of memories and contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

My thesis is about filling the gaps, using memories to navigate actions and activate other memories-the gaps in physical space and an inner space where something is missing or absent.

*memory field* performance took place in the Mylly building (the building of the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of the Arts Helsinki) in the lobby area on the second floor, in a triangular space surrounded by a metal corridor, from the 24th to the 27th of October 2023. The performance consisted of three parts. In the first part I prepared a bucket of water and a cloth and played the audio that was designed by Fluffypak (Napak Nitipatsakorn) as a soundscape that covered the space. Then I kneeled down to clean the floor in the lobby area. I slowly wiped the floor with a rag by hand, examining each area until I had cleaned it completely.

After that I presented the 17 word patches to the audience and offer them to put on my costume. Then I invited a few members of the audience per round, one by one, to sit down or lie down in a comfortable position on a freshly cleaned floor in the lobby area, and then I spread the cards out around them. They could sit down, they could lie down on their back or on their stomach and they could stay in that position for a while. I talk to them individually as I laid the cards out, and brought them back to their original seat. At the end of the first part, I had all the cards on the floor.

The second part took place on the third floor. Here I invited the participants to join me on a *memory march*. In this part, the participant could choose to stay on the second floor or to follow me to the upper floor. I handed out to each of them a set of flash cards that I had prepared for them. Since flash cards are originally used as a memorisation tool, I adopted and used a flash card format in this part. There were 63 cards in each set, with text and instructions for the actions we did together as we walk around a corridor. In the last part, we returned to the cards laid on the second floor and play a *memory game* together. There were 18 pairs of cards and 17 blank spaces on the card. The task was to find all the matching cards collectively, then we filled in the blanks using the 17 word patches on my costume and put the chosen word patches on the blank spaces in the

memory cards. I hoped that this was where the memory, the traces of memory, the bodies, and the collective actions intertwined and opened up conversations and spaces to remember and to break through a blocking wall within ourselves.

**My two questions to approach the research:**

**How to use memory as a process and as a structure of work to address repressed memories and the unspeakable past?**

**How to break a silence using marginalised memories within an internalised oppression?**

I focused on the memory of the 6 October Massacre in 1976, ranging from historical narratives to personal memories, mostly of the victims, from the book *Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the 6 October 1976 Bangkok Massacre (2020)* by Thongchai Winichakul. I also collected some memories from the oral histories of friends and family who had experienced the massacre or learned about it through their family histories. I was searching for a way to make sense of the fragmented and phantasmagorical memory of the massacre and the significance of the massacre, to empower silenced and suppressed voices.

On that day, a group of left-leaning students held a peaceful demonstration on the campus of Thammasat University against political injustice and the return of the former military dictatorship. Before the authorities intervened, several right-wing groups, ultra-royalists, and fascist organisations spread rumours. They claimed that the students had ties with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and that they aimed to overthrow the monarchy. The press and conservative groups tried to discredit the student movement by labelling them as violent extremists. This raised fears of communism in Thai society.

As the result, a brutal attack occurred in the early morning of the 6th October 1976. Students were arrested, hit, assaulted, murdered. Their dead bodies were dehumanised, dragged, beaten up and even nailed with wooden stick into their chests. More and more evidence of the atrocities on that day has been discovered for Thai society to investigate and reconcile with. However, until today, there is no proper investigation of this massacre. It remains unsolved.

Along my research path, I found an inescapable truth: however much I yearn to talk about this traumatic event, the moment of silence is still very present within me. I have been in search of a way to acknowledge the silence within myself and to break it. Silence is more comfortable since justice is rarely achieved in the society I grew up in. It is like a default program installed in your head that if you speak out, you will pay a greater price, you will suffer more if you try to fight injustice. I believe that this effect gradually creeps in through various channels and systems such as the education system, the family unit, religion and the media. These channels help to perpetuate fear in society and in the individual, consciously or unconsciously. I often see it as an act of self-censorship that I assume is present in everyone, especially those who had a similar upbringing to mine.

In the artistic process, I reached out to my Thai artist friends and discussed the issue. We approached self-censorship with a collective approach. We found that our self-censorship occurred in different ways. Some experienced an unconscious unwillingness to extend their creative endeavours to touch on certain topics. Others said it was hidden quietly in their minds and bodies, but it manifested as a guilt that ate them up from the inside. For some, it came in the form of being overly self-critical. We articulated and visualised the issue in the form of embroidered patches. These patches united with an inspired version of the Finnish university uniform or a student boiler-suit. I like to think of the suit as a student uniform, because each programme or department has its own colour scheme with a printed logo of its organisation. The uniform is a brightly-coloured overall that is often seen and used in most student organisations at Finnish universities. This outfit is typically worn not for work but mostly for parties, and it is usually made of durable, water-repellent fabric.

The idea was to re-interpret the meaning and use of the uniform. I hoped to create a new layer of the uniform and the patch-collecting activity. I have borrowed the form of the existing Finnish school uniform. It has a completely opposite meaning to my understanding of school uniforms in the context of my country. The use of uniforms in Thailand is a means of exercising control over the student body. However, the unserious and playful element that I see in the use of the Finnish school uniform, together with the

custom of collecting patches, inspires me to use it as my form of encounter with the past and to empower the students' gathering movement in a different context.

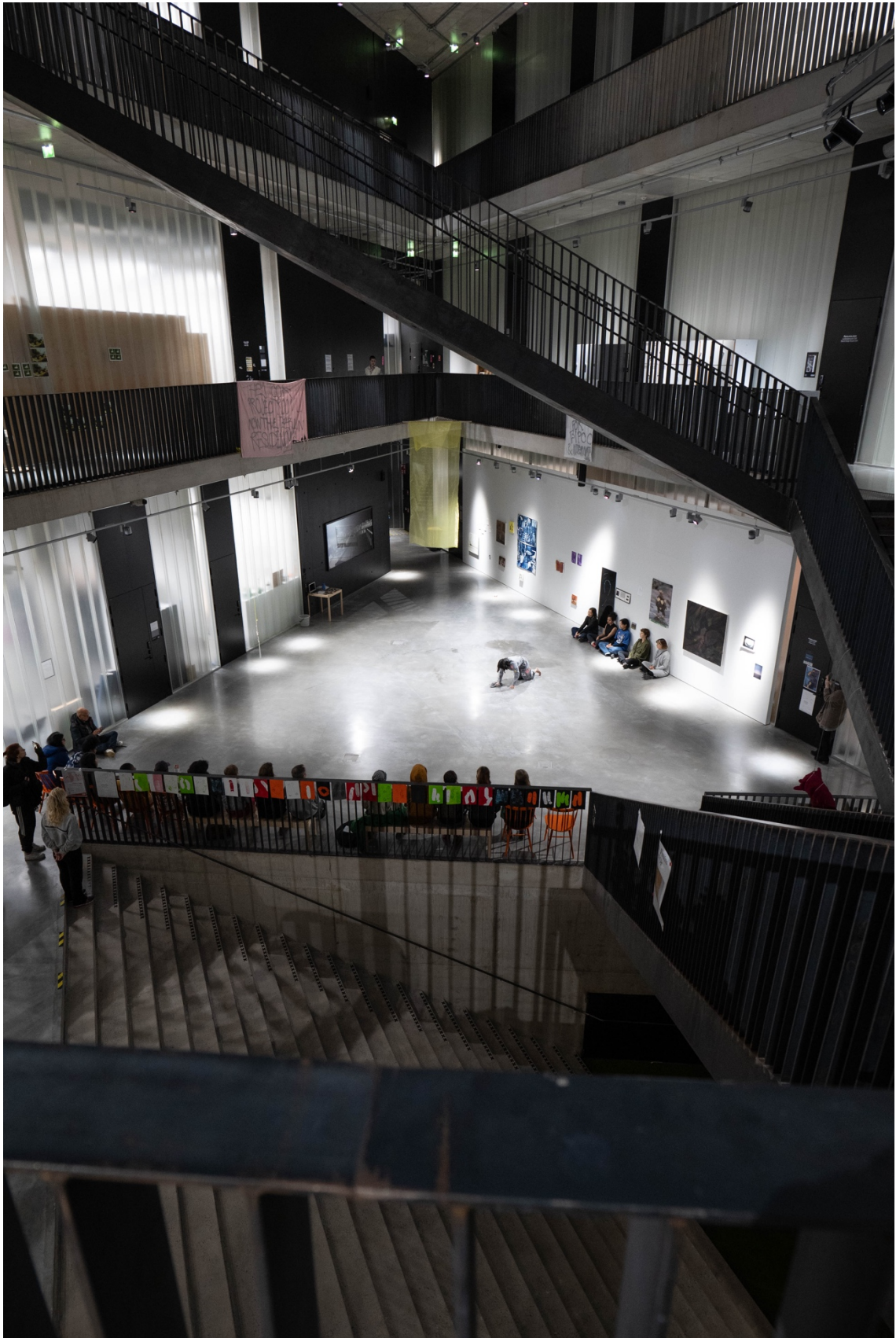
Filling in gaps is a process I use in my artistic work as an approach to accumulating a missing piece. Referring to Diana Taylor's notes in the article "Trauma as Durational Performance", where she writes about a walking tour through Villa Grimaldi, a former torture and extermination camp on the outskirts of Chile. She followed a guide and a survivor, Pedro Matta, in Villa Grimaldi (Taylor 2011). She pointed to the power of a narrative. The story that Matta told during the tour filled in the empty space. The absence of evidence and the emptiness spoke loudly in the ruins of the former camp. There was not much left to see, but enough to imagine and fill in the gaps of what had happened there. In this written part, I try to reflect on how I apply this idea into a structure of my artistic part of my thesis.

Besides the historical part of the research, I would like to mention the inspiring artwork of the Colombian visual artist Doris Salcedo. Her work, "Noviembre 6 y 7" (2002), is an ephemeral installation in a public space in Bogota, using empty chairs that slowly descend from the roof of the outer wall of the rebuilt Palace of Justice building. A reflection on her work in the book *Memory Art in the Contemporary World: Confronting Violence in the Global South* (2022) by Andreas Huyssen (Huyssen 2022), together with the analysis of Doris Salcedo's artworks on the book of Mieke Bal, *Of what One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political art* (Bal 2010) helped me to envision my artistic process. Her work influenced me on how to look at memories, traces of memory and evidence, and how to approach violence without perpetuating it in the work. Her use of everyday objects translated into traces of bodies and memories within the structure of the work. This inspired me to develop my own performance structure. I intentionally avoided any depiction of violence from the actual event and instead aimed to evoke memories and feelings in the participants by using everyday words and leaving gaps for them to fill in themselves and allowing them to negotiate the space within themselves and the physical space they were in.

My interest in the topic of the 6 October Massacre is not only how it happened or why it happened, but also on the after effects both on individual and collective levels that have



perpetuated until these days. Instead of focusing on the violence itself, the research seeks to depict its effects and what remains both on a surface level and hidden within us unnoticed and unrevealed.



memory field, 2023, photographed by Nat Setthana

## MEMORY / FIELD

I found the concept of memory field when I searched to see if anyone had used the name for a performance or art-related project. Here, I came across an academic article called “Memory Fields” (2018) by Daniel T. Linger, an emeritus anthropologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Interestingly, Linger introduces the concept of memory field, defining it as “the set of public and personal memories associated with a putatively past event, object, or situation” (Linger 2018, 374). The perspective of a memory field led me to examine the interweaving of my personal and social memories of the 6 October massacre and how I have treated them during my MA thesis project.

Furthermore, in the article, the author used the Kent State University Massacre of May 4, 1970, as an example case and also compared additional cases to analyse the impact of the state's memory control strategy on personal memories. In the Kent State University Massacre or also known as the May 4 Massacre, four unarmed college students were killed and nine injured by the Ohio National Guard, on the campus of the Kent State University in Ohio during a demonstration against the Vietnam War’s expansion into Cambodia (Lewis and Hensley n.d.).

Linger argued that memory is intimately linked to identity, and controlling a memory field means destroying connections between identities and the past. My understanding is that these state authorities are not explicitly dictating memory. Instead, they control the perception of the identities of the people they wish to erase. Like the effect of Cold War ideology in Thailand in the 70s, students that were considered communists were often executed, and the perception of a communist in Thai society at that time was made equivalent to the devil/animals/satanic creatures. The fear of communism was stirred up and intensified in Thai society in early 1976. The anti-communist atmosphere spurred the right-wing extremist crowd into a rampage during the massacre. Later, those right-wing extremists who once saw themselves as heroes refused to talk about the past when anti-communist ideology no longer fit into the current social narrative. When the political climate changed then the memory landscape also changed. And in this case, the silence occurred.

In one of the key characteristics of memory fields, “any historical memory field is vast, differentiated, and internally dynamic” (Linger 2018, 381), the field of both personal and public memories are constantly changing. They depend on various different factors such as public representations, personal perspectives, or political narratives. Linger brought out a distinction between recollecting by Maurice Bloch, “consciously recognizing information from the past,” and recalling, “expressing the content of this knowledge to others” (Linger 2018, 381). That is to say, to recollect is to acknowledge past memories or recollections, and then to recollect is to generate and transmit the memories to others, which I find interesting and helpful to help me look through my artistic process as a recollection method and then recalling comes after. In Bloch's view, memory is constructed by a social or cultural context (Bloch 2012, 206). This notion echoed the characteristic of the memory fields that I mentioned earlier, and explained how personal memories are always shifting and changing according to a current narrative or the circumstances surrounding it.

The method I use to articulate and accumulate *a midnight recall* text is a set of recollections of memories, feelings, and traces. The result of it then became a memory card game, which presented layers of memories, and operated as the core of the performance. The layers of memory in the game was not only produced by me (performer/facilitator), but memories also evolved, shifted and were interpreted according to how people take them.

### ***The unforgetting***

Silence about the massacre in Thai society, Thongchai argued, “is a symptom of the inability to remember or forget, the inability to articulate memories in a comprehensible and meaningful fashion, or to depart from the past completely.” He called it, the “unforgetting”, the condition between remembering and forgetting (Winichakul 2020, 33). It's a very important notion for me. Not only did it allow me to better understand the phenomenon that's persisted among Thai people for many generations, but it also touched on a self-censored symptom that I think has been passed on as well. It has been difficult in terms of recognising and questioning. Especially when the society has been trying to maintain the peace and normalcy as a whole and has continued to blame anyone who tries

to break the silence. This may be the result of generational oppression, where trauma has been passed down or extended collectively through subsequent generations.

The primary example of a tangible legacy of the massacre is the *lèse majesté* law, Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code. Even though the *lèse majesté* law has existed long before that, after the 6 October Massacre the head of the 1976 coup group (the NARC—the National Administrative Reform Council) added extreme harsh penalties which are still used until today. The Act states, “Whoever, defames, insults, or threatens the King, Queen, the Heir-apparent, or the Regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years” (Royal Family Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, 1908). The Act can be used by anyone against anyone, and the authorities can interpret the Act broadly to allow it to be used in any way they see fit that threatens the monarchy. In my opinion, we could not talk about self-censorship without touching the institution that claims to be a pillar of stability of the country, the Thai monarchy. For a long time, the institution of the Thai monarchy has gained respect and moral authority. It’s been in our daily lives, education, family beliefs and more. As I recall, we sang, prayed and praised the Royal Family on every occasion. It was integrated into school activities and the curriculum. In a way, I think it's a forced part of our self-value and our identity. This led us back to how the 6 October Massacre started. The narrative used by right-wing and ultra-royalist groups as a pretext for persecution and attacks on student protesters was closely linked to their claim to be protectors of the Thai monarchy.

With several military coups and hundreds of prosecutions of political activists and critics, there is no denying that there has been a lot of fear in the social climate. Perhaps the thought of 'it could happen to anybody' or 'what if it were to happen to me or my family' has been left in the air. By 'it' I mean being arrested, threatened or, worse, forcibly disappeared. At the same time, the Thai state has tried by all means to avoid talking about the massacre by using the victims’ trauma as an excuse. Some people said that digging up the past could hurt everyone. As a result, I believe, Thai people, both consciously and unconsciously, were left with the unforgetting effect. It was not that we had no memory of it, but that we had no way of talking about it.

Once I had dinner with a new group of Thai people who are currently in Helsinki for work or study. We are in a similar age group. We all introduced ourselves and shared what we were doing at the time. I told them about my thesis project and its content. One reaction I remember was a joke that we (myself included) could all be arrested if we were part of the performance. The group quietly moved on to other things. But that line stuck with me. It was just a bad joke, but it also represented the embedded fear that quickly came to the surface when we mentioned the 6 October Massacre.

### ***The Field***

When I was thinking about the name of the performance, I first called it 'memory ground' as a working title. I had in mind the contrasting qualities of 'memory' and 'ground'. I wanted to find a physical way to feel grounded whenever I got lost in my own thoughts. Therefore, I chose to mop the performance space by hand. It was a way of feeling the space and being grounded, literally.

The image of the Thammasart soccer field in the middle of the campus where the massacre took place was something I could not forget. The buildings and the field are still in use until today. The field is surrounded by Thammasart University's faculty buildings. Looking at the lobby area of the building of the Academy of Fine Arts at University of the Arts Helsinki, I was struck by the brutal architecture of the space. The resemblance is not in the design or shape, but in the atmosphere created by being in the middle, surrounded by the closed metal balconies on three sides. The semi-enclosed space creates a mutual panopticon effect; those on the balconies can see those on the ground floor and vice versa. People on the second floor can see people on the upper floor in the hallway. Everyone could hear different sounds and noises that were constantly echoing around the space, the beeps of the door, or a conversation from a lounge area on the third floor.

The Thammasart soccer field was always there, in reality, in my conscious mind, in my dreams and in some of my nightmares. I aimed to turn the lobby on the second floor of the Mylly building into that field to host my performance. The space was surrounded by the three side balconies. I saw it as a gathering place, in the same way that groups of students used to gather at the soccer field in Thammasart; to turn the space into a field full of memories. My goal of transforming this location into a thesis performance space

preceded the development of my performance's structure. It's important to have a sense of connection with the space, to absorb and observe the life in and around it. Returning to my research process, I often returned to the site for no particular reason, just to be present in the space. This sometimes led to unexpected encounters; of memories and surrounding occurrences.

On the soccer field in the Thammasart University, there were some traces of life, death and memories that have not been discovered until these days. The place still exists and is currently in use, yet the historical massacre has been erased from public memory. Taking inspiration by the artwork of Doris Salcedo, "Noviembre 6 y 7" (Salcedo 2002), over a period of 53 hours, wooden chairs were unexpectedly lowered onto the outside wall of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá at the specific times that were believed to coincide with the death of each of the victims. The hanging chairs outside the rebuilt Palace of Justice were a testimony in the space where the violent death took place. Mieke Bal pointed out in her book, *Of what One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art*, in the chapter called "acts of memory": "the material, or medium, that Salcedo has used so frequently, always in conjunction with a sense of memory, trace, or real, human use" (Bal 2010, 202). I perceive her work as a response to the traumatic event. She subtly and silently placed a generic chair outside the building as a reminder that something traumatic had happened there and needed to be remembered. As each chair slowly descended from the outside wall, passers-by began to notice. Over time, the shadows of hundreds of hanging chairs became a haunting reminder of the victims of Colombia's civil war in the public sphere. Such horrific incidents of violence often begin in the midst of everyday life. While some might choose to ignore them and carried on, they eventually seeped into daily life and can no longer be ignored. After 17 years, this memory art has helped to initiate legal prosecutions and shed a light on the erased memory. According to Bal, "The concept 'act of memory' serves to remind us that memory is something we do, not a passive occurrence" (Bal 2010, 218). This is to say, the act of memory concept that Salcedo applied in her works serves as a reminder that memory is an active process rather than a passive one. I think this could be the answer to my question about how to use memory as a process and structure to deal with repressed memories and the unspeakable past. I was looking for ways to embody it, to experience it, to actively engage with it—and finally—to translate a memory into a performative action.

In my thesis performance, I was trying to create traces that reveal the absence of the physical body and the memories that live in the realm of the mind. I created a way in which audiences would get introduced to all the elements; the space, the two set of cards, and the game. I was combining memories of the massacre from different sources while recognising the self-censorship within me. Focusing on the second part of my performance, memory march, as previously mentioned, I wrote a text for it and put them in the form of flash cards. The participants were given flashcards to follow along with the text and my lead as we walked around the third-floor corridor of the Mylly Building. The content of the cards related to details of the memories of the 6 October Massacre and was intended to encourage and comfort me (hopefully others, too) to speak out. Ultimately, I approached this part as a rehearsal for an assembly, a deliberate ritual of mourning and remembrance. I released each card after I read it. Each card fluttered down to the second floor. Participants were given the option to release their cards or keep them until the end of the march. The performative action was conceptualised as a march to emphasise the power of collective action and the active process of memory.

After the march, the final part of the performance took place on the second floor. All of the participants were invited to gather around the outline made of cards that were on the floor. I laid out cards to outline the bodies of the participants as they sat or laid down on the floor to leave a mark and trace of what was here, their presence and the stories they shared with me. At first glance, some may argue that the historical context I discussed at the beginning of my written thesis was not present in my work. On closer inspection, however, my focus is more on the impact that the historical event had, which is still with me to this day, instead of going into great detail about what unfolded that day. I do not wish to portray violence on a stage. I believe our society does not require more of it. I want to offer space for healing and mourning together. But if the memories have been silenced, there will be no healing. I believe that this is a work in progress. It is about healing and activating memories that might have been buried or distorted. More importantly, what I have learnt from my participants is how to take a positive approach to dealing with all of this together on which I will elaborate more in the next part.

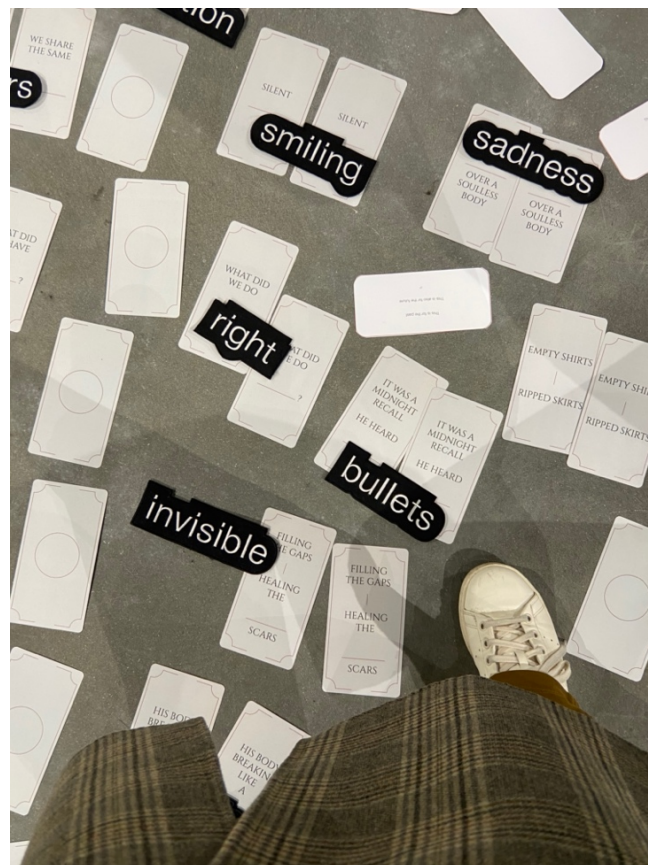


I used a memory card game format together with the text I had produced. Originally, the objective of the memory game is to collect the cards with the same pictures. All the cards are shuffled and placed face down, then the players take turns turning the cards over and trying to find matching pairs by memorising what they see. Players compete against each other and take turns to play.

In my version of the game, I asked all the participants to be collaborators and to play together, not against each other. We flipped over the cards simultaneously. If a blank card (no text, only a red circle in the middle) was found, it was left face up. If a card with text was found, the finder should read the text out loud so the others can hear and remember it. The card was then put back face down until it was matched with its pair (the same text on another card.) On each card there was a blank space from which I had removed some words. We then found matching cards and together filled in the blanks with the designated word patches I introduced at the beginning of the performance: the word patches randomly placed on my costume by the audience. Next, the participants had to agree on which words would fit into the sentences on each card. Initially, I prepared some words to fill in each sentence, but during rehearsal, I found more opportunities by allowing participants to choose and match words to sentences based on their preferences, which resulted in an unexpected outcome. Some members of the audience told me about their strategy for choosing words to complete sentences. They said that they felt it might lead to an emotional sentence, so they chose other words that turned the whole sentence into other moods, with a more playful and positive approach.

Filling in gaps, whether literal or figurative, was a process I aimed to use for memories to activate the memories of others. In this I took some inspiration from Diana Taylor's article, "Trauma as Durational Performance" (2011), which was about an experience of a walking tour through Villa Grimaldi, a former torture and extermination camp on the outskirts of Chile. Pedro Matta, he is a survivor and a guide who would give an information about the place and what happened there. Between 1973 and 1979, 4,500 people were tortured, and 226 were killed or disappeared. Matta was a student activist and was captured as a political prisoner in Villa Grimaldi in 1975. Matta's tour gave an aspect of how to keep a memory alive through the acts of walking, telling, sharing the story and the memory. Taylor argued that all of this is a performance, the tour and the

trauma. They are in the present. The information and the effects are transmitting through his scripted tour of the torture camp (Taylor 2011, 242). Many keywords from the article stayed with me throughout my artistic process. In Taylor's view, "Memory is a tool and a political project—an honouring of those who are gone, and a reminder to those who will listen that the victimizers have gotten away with murders" (Taylor 2011, 244). In essence, Matta's walk served as a means of preserving the memory of the deceased and as a reminder to make the memory visible for the sake of justice. Matta's re-enactment demonstrated the effective use of a memory to stimulate the imagination of visitors, helping to prolong the memory of those who have been lost and those who are still alive. To prolong the memory, I didn't think about how to convey a message or give the information directly. My idea was to play with common words that we use in everyday life. With the given words on the patches and the sentences on the cards, there was a space in between. It needed to be filled in, played with, explored, and responded. The memory will be filled with our current interpretation and perspective. A single word has meanings on its own. But when it is placed in a context, the meanings multiply.



memory field, 2023, photographed by Sirada Darikarnonta

These are the words and sentences from the midnight recall text I used in the memory card game. Words appeared on embroidery patches and sentences printed on 350g paper.

**Right**

**Left**

**Wrong**

**Smiling**

**Scar**

**Bullets**

**Invisible**

**Popcorn**

**Piñata**

**Celebration**

**Sadness**

**Tear**

**Candies**

**Frozen**

**Zipper**

**Smiling**

**Gunshots**

Keep \_\_\_\_\_ even if you are suffocating

We share the same \_\_\_\_\_.

What did we do \_\_\_\_\_?

What did we do \_\_\_\_\_?

What did we have \_\_\_\_\_?

Filling the gaps

Healing the \_\_\_\_\_ scars

His body

breaking like a \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ over a soulless body

Silent \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ truth

\_\_\_\_\_ on a mouth, done!

Why are you not \_\_\_\_\_?

Something came out of our bodies

Are they \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?

Our soul contain \_\_\_\_\_

It was a midnight recall

He heard \_\_\_\_\_

It was a midnight recall.

It was a sound of \_\_\_\_\_, popping



memory field, 2023, photographed by Antti Ahonen

## COLLECTIVE ACTION

How does memory become participatory? How do I engage people in using memories? I designed my artistic thesis project to be participatory to seek for answers to these questions. I designed a collaborative approach in my process as well. In this chapter I will talk about the two aspects of the collective action I employed in my artistic part.

I started to think about what I could offer to participants in a space, in order to open up possibilities for collective action, while keeping the historical background out of it. Although the text contained references to the 6 October Massacre, I did not plan to create a theatrical presentation or a documentary theatre illustrating the details of the event. When working with participants, I usually offer multiple options to choose from when using the participatory method. Being given orders forcefully, even in a performance context, is not something I prefer. However, I was aware of my role and my authority. Additionally, I was cautious of being overly concerned with the audiences' potential feelings or perceptions. As Claire Bishop points out in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), that “an over-solicitousness that judges in advance what people are capable of coping with can be just as insidious as intending to offend them” (Bishop 2012, 26). Bishop has warned that being too cautious in predicting audience's abilities to handle something can do more harm than good.

In my opinion, the fear of talking about the traumatic memory could be an actual eraser of memory. This led me to seek a way to talk about it and create a space, not only for myself, but for others as well. I am aware of the potential of social gatherings, political demonstrations, protests and other similar events. I see my participatory performance as a rehearsal version of an assembly. There was room for exchange, experimentation and play with the elements I had offered, with a loose framework of what and how things would happen in a particular context. People could come, stay, join, and leave at all times. I intended to design the performance with different levels of participation. With this idea in mind, some might intimately engage; one-to-one with me, others might witness from upstairs. Not everyone would have the same experience. But will I ever be able to get all the audience to have the same experience anyway?

My approach on the visual aspect of the performance was strongly influenced by a book called *Memoirs of October 6, 1976* or *มนุษย์ 6 ตุลา* (มนุษย์กรุงเทพฯ 2022). It was a book that collected interviews with victims, witnesses, family members of the students, activists who shared their memories, stories, feelings and traces of the unforgettable event of the 6 October Massacre. When I read the descriptions of these people's memories and their recollections of that day from different places on the same soccer field, it was like experiencing a first-person point of view. But, it jumped from one person to another. It was like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that were scattered here and there. Some repetitive elements occurred through multiple interviews. From different directions and distances, they heard the same scream. Some of them saw the burnt bodies, others smelled the burnt bodies but didn't see them. It was this effect that I had experienced and I wanted to convert it into an embodied experience in the structure of the performance by allowing them to witness and engage with it from different angles, both physically and in terms of perspective.

In addition, in my artistic practice I have already developed and experimented with the use of memory with a collaborative approach. For instance, *Whispering History* is a performance workshop that I developed during a one-week workshop called “My Body is a Queer Academy” (2022). The workshop concept was created by River Lin, a Taiwanese artist and curator, as a visiting artist for the Live Art and Performance Studies programme (LAPS) in November 2022. As LAPS students, we have been exploring how to challenge academic norms and develop alternative curriculum, exploring new ways of learning that incorporate cultural politics and process-based knowledge production. River Lin coined the term 'workshopping' to describe the process of developing a workshop into a performative act and an artistic practice. The *Whispering History* performance workshop aimed to tell stories that are often overlooked in traditional history classes. By whispering these stories, the workshop brought the participants closer together. In doing so, I had not clearly distinguished between the terms 'history' and 'memory'. I started with a question; How do you associate with the memories of other people? Then, I designed a ritual to clear participants' minds and allow them to engage on their own terms. Participants walked around a studio with a bell in hand, following one another like a train. Once we found a peaceful spot, we sat in a circle. I had adapted a form of the Word Association game in which a player is given a random word and then has to come up with

a word to associate with it, with the next player repeating the process with the previous word and so on. In the version I created, however, the first person began to share a memory after we had sat close together. The listener would then recall a related memory and pass it on to the next participant. This allowed us to see how memories were associated with each other and how they were transferred and transformed throughout the process.



memory field, 2023, photographed by Antti Ahonen



### *Seeking outer strength*

There were times in the middle of the thesis process when I felt lost and unsure. I already had a midnight recall text in process, but otherwise I felt like I could not go any further. I began to doubt my process, my content and myself. I asked myself, why this? Who am I to talk about this subject? The insecurity leaped in, I needed someone to talk to. I secretly thought: my Thai artists might've had similar experiences or feelings.

All my collaborators are my Thai friends from diverse art backgrounds. We have a similar age range-we were born between the years 1989 and 1993. I listed all the names and reached out to them one by one. I contacted each of them individually to tell them about my MA thesis project and explained what I plan to do. I asked if they were interested in collaborating. I used the same process with all of them. First I explained my project and then I gave details of my plans. After that I mentioned my struggle with self-censorship during the process. So I shared my assumption with them and asked if they had ever had to censor themselves, and if so, how did they deal with it. Each one had a different approach to dealing with the issue. We had a lot of open discussion and sharing of our thoughts on the subject. My aim was for everyone to freely express themselves. At the end I asked them to create and design a patch in their own style on the theme of self-censorship. We had about an hour's worth of conversations or more, but no less. I cannot go into detail, as their stories are very personal, and in my opinion they have already revealed part of their story through their patch design. However, I still want to introduce them and present their background properly. The order of the name appears according to the patch table down below.

**Naraphat Sakarthornsap** is an artist who uses photography and installation art to tell stories of social inequality and gender discrimination, often using flowers to symbolise hope and resilience. I knew Naraphat from a group art exhibition in 2018, I was a project manager and we became good friends since then. His patch design expresses his enthusiasm for gender through a flower feature and an interpretation of gender on a school style patch design. He called it "When I'm ready".

**Dean** or Thanakorn Dean Siriraks is an artist who enjoys expressing himself through painting and music. I can't remember when we first met, but I remember going to his solo

art exhibition at his home. Blue seems to be a dominant colour in his work. I saw his love and passion for art and his unique style in the drawing of human figures. His patch has a blue person with a flame inside his body with a name, “I cannot be angry”.

**Banana blah blah** or Naruemon Yimchavee is an artist and illustrator whose work is featured in various forms, including book covers, commercial brands and online article illustrations.

We were both interns at a design house called Non-citizen in 2015, and have been in touch ever since. She created two patches: one called “Show the way you are” and the other one is “Go with the flow”

**Jeen Ku** or Praejeen Kunawong is visual artist and designer who I have met in Helsinki, Finland. She was studying an MA programme in Fashion, Clothing and Textile Design at Aalto University. She is the only collaborator that I have talked about the collaboration in person. I like the representation of the female form in her creations, including illustrations and textiles. “Am I broken?” is a name of her patch and a question she left in between.

**Juli Baker and Summer** or Chanaradee Chatrakul na Ayudhya is an artist who uses bright colours and a cheerful style to convey strong socio-political messages in her works of art. I met her in Berlin in 2022, but we have heard about each other long before that. We did not get a chance to know each other in person. “A bird born in a cage” is her patch name.

**Bo Nawacharee** is a filmmaker I've known for over 15 years. We attended the same boarding school for six years and have a sisterly bond. We've confided our dreams, fears, and secrets to each other extensively. Her films explore issues of identity, including female representation, fetishisation and violence. She designed two patches, “loose tie” and ” BSHWSHBSHWSH”.

**Beam Wong** is an artist. He works in film, music and zines. I got to know him in 2017, when he worked as a Film Editor for a producing company. This year, we have started a letter exchange project, in which we will write at least one page of emails to each other





every month. It is through this project that we are getting to know each other better. He designed a "Good Enough" patch to bring comfort and strength to us all.





**Maja Jett** or Nitan Chunnacha is an artist and illustrator. She currently lives in Stockholm, Sweden. She makes comics and writes light and loving content about relationships, music and people she has met. We first saw each other at Thonglor Art Space in Bangkok. She was in charge of the space, and I was part of a theatre production that was occupying the space. She designed "I AM ME" patch.




**Jayda Sakulpoonsook** is an artist who is presently studying art management at RMIT University in Australia. We attended the same boarding school for six years and both obtained our BFA degrees from the same university in Bangkok, but in different majors. Her patch design took on an abstract graphic form which she named "Barrier".

These patches became my power source on my costume, empowering me and letting me know I was not alone. Talking to all the artists and the work they put in gave me the strength I needed to keep working and doing what I believe in. During the performance I faced many challenging feelings; embarrassment, fear, insecurity and sometimes feelings I found indescribable. These patches have been a kind of reminder to myself that I am not facing all of this alone and to keep on going.

## About the patches

Patch	Patch's name	Artist	Description
	When I'm ready	Naraphat Sakarthornsap	-
	I cannot be angry	Dean	-
	Show the way you are	Banana blah blah	In a society where people are often held back and criticized, this can influence how individuals communicate, leading them to conceal their true selves. I would like to empower everyone to break free and feel free to express who they are.
	Go with the flow	Banana blah blah	The unexpected outcome or uncontrollable factors are often what we worry about. We should not waste our energy on this. Instead, we should believe in ourselves, trust the process and go with the flow.

	Am I broken?	Jeen Ku	A societal mold has shaped me into what's considered the 'norm.' Unknowingly, I've silenced my true self out of fear, revealing only a partial me to the world. Yet, deep down, I wonder if the real me still exists in there. Has society broken me in some way?
	A bird born in a cage	Juli baker and Summer	-
	loose tie	bo nawacharee	After given the word 'self-censor' and 'self-oppression' I thought about how sometimes the power and decision of being set free from that consciousness is in our own hands.
	BSHWSHBSHWSH	bo nawacharee	The self-censoring frustration that sometimes feels like talking into a well or a wall. the suffocating that often times reminds me of an act of screaming into a pillow.

	Good enough	Beam Wong	Sometimes we censor our pride, self-esteem, and ability. Even we might suck many times but I think we can be good enough.
	I AM ME	Maja Jett	-
	Barrier	Jayda Sakulpoonsook	As an international student, we often construct invisible barriers to shield ourselves. These barriers can involve challenges with language, the fear of saying something embarrassing in front of peers. Also, it is gradually reducing our self-esteem and self-confidence.

## CONCLUSION

This is not a beginning  
Nor the end  
We are in the middle of it  
The middle of the story

I am unsure how to begin the conclusion of my MA thesis project. I have selected part of the text from my thesis performance to begin with. Here, I put the text in a similar form of a flash card that I used in the performance.

When considering the political violence that has occurred around the world, particularly in my home country of Thailand, I have often felt powerless in the face of injustice. I have questioned whether my use of a game approach in my performance was appropriate. Was it too simplistic or inappropriate given the underlying traumatic issues? Did my approach to the serious issues seem too cheerful? However, I have discovered my voice, or more accurately, my strategy for surviving in the midst of a fragmented truth and an unspeakable past. I have encountered the traumatic incident with what I perceived as the energy of youthful and empowered students and activists who have made sacrifices. I adopted a playful approach to resist the pain and defeat of hopelessness.

In both the artistic and written components of this MA thesis, I have intentionally refrained from including historical photos of the massacre. While such images can serve as a reminder of the atrocities committed, an overabundance of graphic violence can desensitize viewers and diminish the impact of the victims' suffering. Instead, I have chosen to create a space for mourning and remembrance integrated in a collective ritual in *memory field*. The elements of a memory card game, colourful patches, and a collective gathering were juxtaposed deliberately; however, it is important to note that there was no intention to create a sense of comedy or to mock the tragedy. Through my process of creating the *memory field* performance, I sought to engage and activate conversations about the unspeakable past and repressed memories with my Thai friends and family, challenging myself to explore other possibilities and overcome my fear. Additionally, I

aimed to expand the contextual boundaries within the framework of shared traumatic memories, making these conversations accessible to a wider audience.

While writing this, I am seated on the second floor of the Mylly building, in the same space where I performed. The lobby area is filled with chairs arranged for the graduation ceremony of the Fine Art Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki students. Above the lobby area, on the metal corridors of the upper floors, several banners are hung in support of Palestine. The banners read 'SILENCE = DEATH', 'FREE PALESTINE', and 'BE SILENT WHEN KIDS ARE SLEEPING, NOT WHEN THEY ARE BOMBED!', with painted pictures of watermelons. Alongside my artistic research for my MA thesis, I cannot deny the effects of the Israel-Gaza War on our social climate and I feel many resonances that I should not ignore. It is important to acknowledge this issue and although it may seem that history is repeating itself, we must remain hopeful and continue to break the silence. As the philosopher George Santayana warned: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana 1980, 122). Not only have we failed to learn from past mistakes, but we have also disregarded the sacrifices made by those who have gone.



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