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Interview Dorothea Strauss/Rirkrit Tiravanija 1996 (Rough Version)

D.: I would like to start this article with a text about your work and a little bit about the exhibition you are doing and end it with a link to Migros, and then there could come the interview and I'll ask some questions.
R.: Ok.
D.: With the big star-company Migros everybody associates Switzerland. You will now install in the context of the exhibition a Migros-store at the Migros-museum. First question: "Is this ironic?"
R.: Well you know, I like to make positive irony. I think irony can make new metaphors. I also think it's an interesting ... I mean it is kind of contextualized by the place and the irony may be that it's a nice coincidence that it could work. Of course the structure which is the museum ... people know that it's funded by Migros, and more people in Zürich than anywhere else know. And I think it's something to look at because it's an interesting model. This is one thing you try to find out, what is the engender of the company, of the Migros company. Now the company itself has been historically interested in kind of being social in both cultural and economic way. And in a funny way it's like a new way of capitalism.
D.: So to you this installation belongs to a reality ...
R.: Yes. It's ironic because it's looking at itself. It's looking at its roots and how that works. It also looks at its own economy. To me it's not just talk about economics and not just talk about social structure, but it's also talking about the structure of art and how art is looked at, how art is consumed or how art is produced and how it's used.
D.: And what kind of stuff and products will be there? Will people be able to buy things there?
R.: For me right now we are talking in advance of certain realities. I would like to have what I call the "basic needs" which will be in the store. For me the "basic needs" are things you need to live in a common way. So you need house, you need medicine, you need food and you need clothing. And this is kind of basic, everybody needs to have clothes, everyone needs to eat, everyone needs to have good health and everyone needs to have all those things and live inside of something. And that's of course what the supermarket can provide. Of course it's based on a certain kind of consumption. I mean of course there are products you don't need, there are too much, but that's about something else.
D.: This is interesting. What kind is your mental attitude towards consumption and how important is the visible world to you with it's different objects und different desires?
R.: I think it's a balance between desire and survival and I think that you can survive because you can desire, but at the same time if you only desire you might not survive. So it's a balance of that. And I think you can desire for more than you need. I have desires for less, some people have desires for more, but that's the choice and maybe that's the struggle and that's the survival.
D.: You are comming from Thailand. Which position have the fine arts in the society of Thailand? I think, in Thailand contemporary fine arts are more integrated in the normal life, is this true? Not so separated from the society.
R.: One could probably say that art is in the everyday, it's not separated. I go back and I look at things and I do that here too. What's interesting is that of course there are things that are around you and if you are distant to them you will look at them. That can be art or can be culture. For Thai people it's there and it's in there. There's no separation and at the same time there's a lot of creativity and the creativity comes from the need to survive.

D.: A real difference to Europe or America.
R.: Yes. Not to generalise, but things are made because of some necessity and the creativity comes in this need. So it's everyday and it's everywhere and maybe it's good but it's not separated.
D.: Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the artscenes in Europe and America love your work so much because in your work there's a relation, a joint between what you need in your life and for your life and also out (?) context. It's an interesting thing because in your exhibitions the visitors are able to get something, to make something, to do something. You give them a gift or something like a part of your private life. And sometimes it's striking the tune of the last years where many young artists presented in their art more a way of service. And sometimes I don't know what the visitors are looking for and if they realize that it's a link between reality and reality. You know what I mean?
R.: It's hard for me to say that everyone likes what I do but there is a kind of need to find a way where art should continue in the society, in the future, that in some ways you can bring people together. I think that the audience always in a sense learns to separate art from life and even though we had the sixties and the seventies where there had been tries to break down this line, that somehow this kind of situation becomes institutionalized. And when it becomes institutuinalized it becomes separated, it's no longer integrated into reality. You have a distance because you can look at it as an institution. If you can't see it, if you can't recognise it. Maybe that's better and then maybe it's not art anymore.
D.: You're talking about this integration, that's one point. On the other side when we go to an exhibition, when we go to an institution, into the white cube and a part of real live is coming with into this white cube, for me the question is that it's also important to have these two sides of reality: that we look at a piece of art and also an integration with our desires of our normal life. I think it's important not to mix all.
R.: No, I think that what I do is really about modelmaking. It's a model, it can be used outside, you can see the structure. And that's maybe more important, it's like a cooking recipe. I make the recipe, you can take it, you can cook it straight from the book or you can make more recipes. And actually making more recipes is more interesting. So that's what it is. It's a model and it could be ideal but you can change it to make it more ideal with what you're living with, with your taste, with your desires. When people are talking about bringing art and life, or separation of life and art, or not separation, it's about model-making and maybe it's more usefull to look at it that way.
D.: When people talk about your work they often speak about communication and travelling and of course I think these two aspects are very important in your work. But I would like to speak a bit more about the aspects of sculpture in your work because I think that's also very important. Sometimes people forget this. Or I think for example the relation to Dan Graham - between your work and his I see some relations. I don't know if it's true because we never talked about this, but what do you think?
R.: Oh yes. I think a lot about Dan Graham and certainly he is a model for what I do and there are few figures like that from that time. And I think they are important and that they carried their work to a certain point, that they carried a certain idea which is a model and therefore I'm using their model to make another model which I hope is kind of a synthesis of that model and something else which can progress or in a sense can move as a new dish, as a new recipe. But I don't think it's about newness really, I don't think it's about making something new. It's about making another room to a house, another space in which these ideas connect, and it's another door to another space. You have to go through both spaces. When you say sculpture you could look at Dan Grahams work as being more sculpture. I

don't talk about those aspects in my work but certainly it's always sculpture and certainly it could even be painting. I also of course think a lot about film which is something very dominant in cultural thinking now. But it's not a projected image, it's an image that's happening and you're in it.
D.: In 1987 in Münster Dan Graham realized a project in the garden or in the park. It was a summerhouse with mirrors. Do you remember? It was like a cubus where you could see yourself as well as the area and the surrounding. This was interesting because when I first saw one of your works in New York, I think it was in 1994, I thought about that work of Dan Graham. About the mirrorhouse, where you saw your own reflections and your own world and also the surrounding. All this is sculpture and sculpture is connected with communication of course. In this way I mean the relation.
R.: Yes. I think Dan Graham does it really well in a very minimal way and that's something you have to deal with. Dan Grahams projects have been going on for a long time. They have always been a model and now they are being put out as an actual space. So I think that's quite important that people actually see that.
D: Do you think it's important that people realize that your work is a model? In Köln or St.Gallen for example, people forgot where they were, and perhaps this is good. But sometimes I don't know if it's good or not good to forget it.
R.: I think it's ok. It's ok to forget because you forget to remember certain things. You forget and when you realize you forgotten you remember something else. It is a space that is again, for me it's a plain space and perhaps I make a space where people can play quite freely. And how they read the space and how they plan it is a kind of interpretation. A limitation and an extention of the space is with everyone.
D.: What are the rules for your work? Are there any rules?
R.: There are no rules. I would say that the rules are made according to each persons needs. And I think it's important for all persons to realize, that they make up the rules. The construction they do and how it relates to another persons rules. How does that work while they're playing with other people? I don't mean playing as a game, I mean playing as an interaction, as a relationship.