

LET'S MAKE SENSE

Arin Rungjang together with
Kornkrit Jianpinidnan, Chitti Kasemkitvatana,
Sivaroj Kongsakul, Shooshie Sulaiman
and Rirkrit Tiravanija

Politics do not necessarily align with political rights or action. In several aspects politics could be elicited by creating a space for cohabitation where incommensurabilities may exist side by side. As a result of the political stagnant ebb after a crackdown in May 2010, the three pillars that are supposed to uphold national coherence of Thailand's political landscape are scantily taken into account. Especially the argument on how the public sphere retains its democratic aspect, as far as unilateral consensus does not utterly open up to contestation. Politics as action and politics in spatial terms are not diametrically opposed, both of them co-exist and fill the gap. In spite of actively grabbing the sentiment of the political variance, an art space cannot achieve or adjacently attack political action, but at least with the scarce autonomy of the art space as public sphere, it may have some virtue in forcing interested parties to become aware of their common interest or in encouraging the audience to organize resistance to political agendas, collectively.

However, the art space can allot the arena of cohabitation on some level. This might be the case for political scholars not very familiar with art practices. Arin Rungjang, a young Thai artist whose pursuit inexorably underlines his investigative prowess, especially by creating installations and site specific works with political sensibility, has attempted to investigate the private sphere. Many works by Rungjang were redefined outside the generic artistic practice of his contemporaneous tenet. Examples include *Red and Blue Floor*, 1998, his first major work in contemporary art that was underlined by his major debut with his colleague Vishnu Charoenwong. *Red and Blue Floor*, 1998, brought about a stark contrast between a refurbished old Thai shop house that was used as an alternative space. By contrasting the old shop house of About studio/About Café to an extremely pared down, almost modest structure, Rungjang's *Red and Blue Floor* created the ambience of absence as well as the viewers' contemplation of their physical presence within the situation generated by the artists. Rungjang's installations draw the viewers' attention, many times, to ponder a resurfaced space with sparse exposure of simple material such as the reverberating surface of waves and lights in *Emotion as Water*, 2001. His works always attract the viewer to poetic resolution of a space, in order to imbue them with the ever-changing aspect of material entities that confront them.

In *Never Congregate, Never Disregard*, 2008, Rungjang filled Bangkok University

Gallery's space with a neat pile of soil along with the video interview presenting his mother sitting on a rocking chair. At the Bangkok Art and Culture Center, Rungjang used a pile of carpets from the gallery's storeroom, which were almost thrown out, to make his piece, *Art as space for politics without space*, 2010. Arin presented a spontaneous response and ingeniously biting critique to the megalomaniac but lame structure of bureaucratic institutions that represents cultural supremacy in the Thai capital of Bangkok.

Addressing social interaction or embracing cohabitation has characterized most of Rungjang's works. In December 2008, Arin worked with Sylvain Saily, residing in About Studio/About Café. They were collaborating on an in situ work for two months, interacting with and asking members of *As Yet Unnamed* – a Bangkok based artist collective, who were running the space, collectively gathered, day and night, to share their thoughts. Art spaces have to offer specific competence because the audience cannot suddenly grab or become the creator of surprise and disconcertion. For an art space to become a competitive catalyst to local politics by offering free interpretation and exchange, the artist needs to be capable of offering a new sensation, creating a space of political sensibility which can be easily grasped.

Unlike his conceptual precursors, who mainly apply fashionable social sculpture or user friendly situations, what makes Rungjang stand out from the previous generation of Thai artists is his insertion of politically resonant elements. Such as in his latest installation in the Singapore Biennale, 2011, called *Unequal exchange/No exchange can be unequal*. The piece filled the exhibition space with a neat and minimalistic atmosphere. The exhibition space resurfaced the old airport in Kallang with a collaborative resonance. Rungjang's scrutiny of the idea of cohabitation and translocation of art objects redirects the approach to art spaces that prompt an ephemeral juncture.

Simply by touching the sensibility among cohabitants, audiences are stimulated to scrutinize their political involvement and self imagination. Rungjang prepares the ground for political sensibility insomuch as domestic political deadlocks prevail nowadays. It's the old hackneyed cycle, it still holds true. Rungjang's thinking is organized around both analytic and skeptic interrogation, the prescription for which is formed by the distant cohabitation. When he connects two segregated political landscapes by inviting Thais in Singapore to collaborate and asking villagers to recount their anecdotes back in Thailand, a narrative is formed.

What is important at this juncture is the ability to host Thai expats in a

makeshift furniture warehouse. By allowing Thai collaborators to swop IKEA furniture, the circulated items will bring about an allusion to creating a desirable living space. However, it seems peculiar to bridge the gap of people from the Third World that was facilitated by a modernist standardization and universalization of geometric criterion by IKEA furniture pieces. Physically, the exhibition space looked like a store room or furniture shop.

A pile of furniture was thus swapped with used furniture brought by Thais in Singapore. The exchange had two levels: a spontaneous one is material, another one is narrative. By interviewing people who used to live near the border between the Thai Khong river, Rungjang and his colleague produced a video interview with film shots en route from Bangkok to Nakorn Phanom. His approach to community is not suddenly noticed as community intervention at first glance. Secondly, *Unequal exchange/No exchange can be unequal* involves industrial-minimalist products from IKEA. In this way, two trajectories – old forms, new forms – converged. In *The girl asked me to bring her a river* based on the narrative of people who take refuge and settle in rural parts of north-eastern Thailand, the interviewed participants in the video were not only recounting their history, but also filling up the imagination about the place and landscape they inhabited. The narrative structure in Rungjang's *Unequal exchange/No exchange can be unequal* and does not intentionally ask the participants to bring forth a comment on the hardships they suffered.

Rungjang is certainly in a position to comment on the fragility of politico-cultural bonds between the periphery to the centre of the nation. Even political dissent is always caught in an aporia of binary oppositions. On some level, *Unequal exchange/No exchange* traverses the idea of an institutionally endorsed project. Paradoxically, this project might be condemned as both inclusive and discriminatory by allowing Thai people to acquire furniture for free taking advantage of Singaporean taxes.

The narrative structure clearly epitomizes historical, ethnical and political tensions that propagate political segregation between the urban and the rural parts of Thailand. Fragments of anecdotes from Thai people can be conceived as a memorial conduit, as uncovered community tales. By free association of their personal narrative, the verbal gesture allows political imagination to reinvent their imagination.

As an artist is trying to create a space that permits the irresistible of political incommensurability between the partitioned communities, Rungjang frequently creates the structure encompassing a circulation of thoughts and

dialogues. In his fresh proposal *Let's make sense*, 2011, Rungjang embraces a collaborative context by producing conviviality in an art space. Rungjang still articulates his deep interrogation and exploration into the idea involving the poetics of space. For his coming collaborative works at West, Rungjang will fill up the gallery space with works conceived by his artist colleagues. Collaboration produced from multiple sources certainly articulates conviviality in certain directions, as the space will open up with an assortment of items ranging from foods to furniture.

As part of the collaborative element, Rungjang will ask Rirkrit Tiravanija to send instructions for cooking a Thai dish, and Chitti Kasemkitwatana will send his furniture blueprint. His colleague Kornkrit Jianpinidnan will export his idea by asking a photographer to create an invitation postcard, Shooshie Sulaiman will explore a Dutch painting found in Melaka Malaysia and, with similar flowers as in the painting, she will decorate the vases found in The Netherlands. Together with a short film conceived and produced by Sivaroj Kongsakul – a young Thai filmmaker who won the Tiger Award at the 40th Rotterdam International Film Festival. On one hand, these kind of practices seem outdated in the sense of a post-‘relational art’ generation, because some want to produce a new narrative or orient them in a different direction by freely associating collaboration from diverse disciplines. Providing facilities by borrowing people’s hands to envisage the transient community rather than validates the relationship between an authorial supremacy of each artist whose works have an individual touch.

In these realms of transient cohabitation, Rungjang’s *Let's make sense* seems to cut across disciplinary allocation. Bringing a kind of collaboration into the situation is not just addressing a collaborative valence, but also clearly wraps up the exhibition space into one single structure. *Let's make sense* will once and for all create a micro community where anyone can traverse geographical limits. This cohabitation may be transient and provisional. Through the work’s open-endedness that fills up the art space with loosely knit interpretive collaborations, the work may also articulate new symptoms of cohabitation by drawing people’s attention to ‘realize that people are living amongst one another, and we are not living on one side’, says Rungjang.



FULL MOON, BANGKOK & DEN HAAG - 18.04.2011

GREEN CURRY WITH CHICKEN

- 350 GRAM CHICKEN BREAST
- 60 ML COCONUT CREAM
- 400 ML COCONUT MILK
- 3 TABLESPOONS GREEN CURRY PASTE
- 100 GRAM THAI PEA EGGPLANT
- 200 GRAM THAI EGGPLANT
off the stems, quartered, keep soaking
in salt water until ready to cook
- 6 LEAF KAFFIR LIME LEAVES
- 1 BUNCH THAI HOLY BASIL
- 6 TABLESPOONS FISH SAUCE
- 1 1/2 TABLESPOONS PALM SUGAR
- 1 TABLESPOON VEGETABLE OIL
- 1/2 TABLESPOON SEA SALT

Dice chicken breasts into bite size strips and mix in a bowl with 1/2 tablespoon sea salt.

In a wok with vegetable oil stir fry to seal the chicken, which should appear lightly cooked and drained of juice. Set aside and let cool.

In a heavy pot or wok, fry the coconut cream over low heat, when bubbles form add in the green curry paste and stir well to combine and cook until fragrant (do not burn).

Add the chicken to the frying curry, tear the kaffir lime leaves and add the coconut milk to simmer.

Season with fish sauce and palm sugar, when starting to boil add the eggplants, let simmer until the eggplants cook. Add the holy basil and remove from heat to serve.

Please note: chicken can be substituted with different meats as well as tofu for vegetarians.





SAI KROK E-SAN (E-SAN SAUSAGE)

- 500 GRAM GROUND PORK
- 1000 GRAM CHITTERLING
- 85 GRAM COOKED STICKY RICE
- 10 GRAM SALT
- 8 GRAM BLACK PEPPER
- 50 GRAM GARLIC CLOVES
finely chopped

Clean the chitterling well under running water. In a blender mix ground pork with garlic, salt and pepper.

Using a knife on a cutting board, mince the sticky rice down, then add to the stuffing in the blender, and blend.

Fill the chitterling with the sausage stuffing and tie into segments.

Hang the sausages in the air and sun for a day, before grilling to serve.

Garnish with cloves of raw garlic and Thai Birds Eye Chili.

Please note: sausage can also be air-dried in convection oven at very low temperature (below 75 Celsius). The sausages can also be frozen and grilled at a later date, after drying.



TOM YAM (SHRIMP)

- 6 TIGER SHRIMPS OR LARGE PRAWNS
(FRESH) peel and devein
- 3 CUPS FISH STOCK
- 5 THAI BIRDS EYE CHILI smashed
- 4 LEAF KAFFIR LIME LEAVES
torn in strips
- 3 LEMON GRASS
clean and split in half and smashed
- 1 STALK CORIANDER
cut into 5 cm segments
- 6 TABLESPOONS FRESHLY
SQUEEZED LIME JUICE
- 3 TABLESPOONS FISH SAUCE

In a pot simmer the stock, when boiling add lemongrass, shrimps, season with fish sauce, chili and lime juice (in this order).

Add the kaffir lime leaves and coriander, turn off heat and serve.





PAD THAI

- 300 GRAM RICE VERMICELLI NOODLES (SEN LEK) pre-soak in warm water
- 50 GRAM PORK LOIN diced into small pieces
- 3 EGGS
- 500 GRAM BEAN SPROUTS
- 50 GRAM PRESERVED TURNIP finely chopped
- 50 GRAM CHINESE CHIVES
- 1 BLOCK FIRM TOFU / IF POSSIBLE SMOKED TOFU diced into small cubes
- 1/2 CUP CHOPPED ROASTED PEANUTS
- 1 TEASPOON THAI CHILI POWDER (PREFERABLY THAI / CAYENNE CAN BE USED AS SUBSTITUTE)
- 1 TABLESPOON CHOPPED GARLIC
- 6 TABLESPOONS VEGETABLE OIL
- 3 TABLESPOONS FISH SAUCE
- 4 TABLESPOONS PALM SUGAR
- 4 TABLESPOONS TAMARIND PUREE
- 1 LIME

In a wok stir-fry garlic in 3 tablespoons of oil, add chili powder, palm sugar, tamarind puree, stir in well to mix and melt sugar. Add to the mixture 2 tablespoons chopped peanuts, tofu, the preserved turnip, Chinese chives, and fish sauce, then the diced pork and stir until the pork is cooked.

Add remaining oil and the softened noodles to the mixture, stir and turn the noodles into the sauce until the noodles are well coated.

In the middle of the wok (and noodles) add the three eggs and stir the eggs to scramble, then stir and fry the mixture of eggs onto the noodles until all the egg liquid is cooked.

Remove from heat.

Add the remaining chopped peanuts on top of the noodles and stir the peanuts into the noodle mixture.

Served with garnish of raw bean sprouts and slices of lime (to be squeezed over the noodles).







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