

The Fugitive Reflex: Autonomy and Sublimation after Zomia

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Affinities

Studies in art history feature precious few agrarianists, but one need only read the opening pages of James Scott's 1998 book *Seeing Like a State*, to find clues explaining his felicitous affinity with contemporary art—or at least, *its* affinity for him.¹ It's not clear to me whether Scott cares much for modern art, though I suspect he knows more about it than I know about agronomy. But if few curators were reading him in the late 1990s, these early pages are a guide to why many might be now. In a nutshell, they describe the intellectual innovations of eighteenth-century German forestry, as prototype of an order of planetary exploitation we have come to associate, fairly enough, with the state and with capitalism; the reduction of complex old-growth forests into dressed, gridded, rationalized monocultures, to maximize the yield and predictability of a single resource (timber); the stunning but short-lived economic success of this “radical simplification”; and the unsustainability of such a program, legible in the rapid expiry of its productivity.²

Like much theoretically informed art since the 1960s, Scott is keenly attuned to what *doesn't* appear—to what lies “outside the brackets,” as he puts it, of that system of rationalization, beyond the state's “tunnel vision.”³ (Its “unconscious” or surplus, its repressed others, perhaps as Rosalind Krauss saw a perspectival “window” beneath all of modernism's grids.) This marginalia is far from marginal for contemporary art and its acolytes. Indeed, Scott's account of eighteenth-century forestry reads like a shopping list of recent art-world preoccupations and *causes célèbres*: starting with the vulnerability of ecosystems and deleterious effects of large-scale farming and resource extraction; with ecological complexity, the delicate balance and interdependence between a system's parts; with a principled respect for life, for the animate, but also for the less obvious players in that complex ecology, including displaced humans (especially indigenous ones, and minorities) and displaced flora and fauna; and with strong sympathies for the *local* (an important value of much art in recent decades) and for arcane and endangered local knowledge (“practical” knowledge, artisanal techniques, folk remedies, the languages and customs that encoded them), which artists these days valorize as either communally held intellectual property, abused by multinational corporations, or as capital “unseen” by the capitalists, sometimes held up as a kind of talisman against destructive practices. I am

reminded, here, of Pierre Clastres' 1974 essay "On Ethnocide," the negation of difference that he says is "essential" to the state, its "normal mode of existence," which won't end until "there is nothing at all left to change."⁴

Scott privileges complexity over the simplification we experience as a vague but inexorable homogenization under so-called global capitalism. In sympathy with everything uprooted, silenced, snuffed out in the name of fiscal predictability and profit, his analysis anticipates a certain contemporary *aesthetics*, characterized by: the politics of use and counter-practice (as famously elaborated by Michel de Certeau, for example, another avid reader of Clastres); by tactical alternative and micro-economies; by materiality, another salient preoccupation of contemporary art, for instance in his attentiveness to the by-products of "resources," the wood between the trees, or beneath them, or born of their waste, to which the modern nation-state is blind in its productivist zeal; by the trope of the model or the program, the reduction and rendering of the forest as a "legible" system, ripe for analysis and improvement through informatic operations; and by his emphasis on the *visual* and visibility. The way nation-states came to envision their forests—as "resources"—is just one of the myriad ways that sight and observation were enjoined in the renewal of the rational, developmental program of modernity, in the state's secularization and centralization of power.

Let us note one further affinity: though he shows that such programs were constitutive of the modern nation-state, Scott's "systems thinking" demands immediately a supranational frame. Not only do ecosystems cut across political boundaries, but forestry's scientification and codification themselves (rapidly, he notes), became transnational models.

In our ongoing defense of diversity against creeping monocultures, maybe it is little wonder that we turn to an expert on agriculture and its histories—a cultivation that was the paradigmatic vector of a rationalization we tend now to see less as the antithesis of pre-modern enchantment but perhaps even as a kind of re-enchantment that represented the flip side of modernity.

It was with broadly the same sympathies that Scott later focused on the avoidance and countermeasures of Southeast Asian populations falling outside the brackets of the state—societies of the upland zone called Zomia—in his 2009 *The Art of Not Being Governed*, one of the inspirations for this project.⁵ Zomians were casualties of that epochal rationalization, a process richly thematized in the study of Southeast Asia (almost always from the point of view of the state) as an *emboîtement* or encompassment. At face value, this process ended with decolonization, by which time Zomia had been carved up into territorially discrete chunks of a Cartesian (or Mercatorian) geography. But what Scott's book suggests to me—certainly when read in the spirit of Clastres—is that the Zomians' avoidance of the state and resistance to encompassment must be just as innate, just as primary or primal, as the urges to form states and encompass neighboring peoples. If Clastres was right that the annihilation of cultural alterity is "essential" to the state, would it not follow that a will to oppose annihilation is similarly inherent to non-state peoples? And as critics of the state today (and who among us can afford to be anything but?), even tangled up in its webs, are our modes of avoidance really so different from theirs?

Far from being luckless roadkill on the highways of national modernity, we might rather see the Zomians as partisans of a much older and ongoing struggle against all kinds of oppressive regulation, authors, by virtue of their



Chia-Wei Hsu, *Ruins of the Intelligence Bureau*, 2015, produced by Le Fresnoy. Courtesy the artist

cultures at least, of sophisticated programs of resistance to forces of economic and cultural simplification. And yet it is important to insist on the non-opposition between the Zomians and the state broadly construed: to stress rather a situational dynamics of selective, negotiable, temporary belonging and contingent identification, manifest in flexible systems of social status, polycentric political landscapes, and above all, in cultural plurality. This “fugitive” geography was not fixed, but time-based and variable, an oscillation shaped by pulses of attraction and repulsion at the edges of the state sphere of influence. Nor were techniques of evasion and flight necessarily discrete to the uplanders, but no doubt borrowed, adapted, hacked by other subject populations from the lowlands, or brought into the state sphere from elsewhere.

We may even detect a certain tolerance built into the logic of Southeast Asian statecraft—allowances by which relative autonomy was entertained in order to keep buffer populations in place at the fringes, as a kind of “standing reserve.” The state may have a totalizing logic, yet not all states—perhaps not even most—achieve total realization. (Take for instance the Kuomintang units from Yunnan who, stranded in northern Thailand after Mao’s ascendancy in China, collaborated with a range of state-led anti-communist campaigns but remained armed, and governed themselves, into the 1980s.) This regional history of accommodation and nomadological collaboration keeps to the forests, mountains, and inaccessible borderlands, a geography that is alive with contradictions to this day.⁶

Donne plus que tu prends / Give more than you take

My proposition is that with the constitution of modern, territorially bounded nations, Zomia doesn’t end, but rather, modes of evading the control of state and state-like forces are developed, adapted, and sublimated once physical flight is no longer possible. The fugitive reflex, in other words, may have survived in other behaviors—in a psychology shaping relations to power, even perhaps at the heart of the state “sphere of influence”—informing struggles not just for formal political autonomy, but for a more subjective, personal kind too.

And certain professions might have preserved this more than others, by dint of their position *vis-à-vis* lines of institutional coercion and patronage.

All this puts me somewhat out of step with the discourse on contemporary art in the time of its “global” extension. For as in other fields, for a good twenty years or so, the preponderance of the nation-state—in the production, circulation, and interpretation of modern art—has seemed to be waning. Contemporary art is characterized as a privileged vector of globalization, increasingly post-national in its outlook and in its habits; the many state agencies still bound up in its production and promotion seem complicit in a larger assimilation. People like me, researching contemporary art in the non-West but often participating in that post-national conversation, share a certain melancholia: we are the ones always insisting that in much of the world, the nation is not over and done with. Clastres concludes his brilliant book *Society Against the State* (1974) with an aphorism: if the history of peoples with history is the history of class struggle, he says, then the history of those *without* history is a history of “struggle against the State.”⁷ But we melancholics are victims of an ironic inversion: while societies with (art) history have somehow left the gravitational field of the nation-state, those of us without much of a written record find ourselves still firmly anchored within it.

Of course it is premature to be declaring the demise of the nation—recent events around the North Atlantic axis certainly suggest a lingering desire to “make it great again,” whether or not artists care to resist that. But if my years working with Southeast Asian artists have taught me anything, it is that the arts of evasion and state avoidance are very much alive; and that the internationalization of contemporary art breathes new life into them. In a moment I will summarize a few “planes of withdrawal” across which we might trace the fugitive reflex in contemporary art, its lines of flight. I shall refer mainly to Thai examples, but I think a more general, global resonance might be detected. So first I will consider one very transnational project that sits comfortably within the topical, ethical complex I have drawn from Scott’s work, in order to pose the questions: Just how far might these lines of flight take us? How might the fugitive reflex have been sublimated, practically, aesthetically, or psychologically?

Pratchaya Phinthong’s *Donne plus que tu prends / Give more than you take* (2010–11) took up trending themes of the commons, and global migrant labor. The artist undertook a six-week tour of duty with Thai contract workers picking wild berries in Swedish Lapland, an industry reliant on the legal principle of *allemansrätten*—an ancient right of common access to uncultivated



Pratchaya Phinthong, *Donne plus que tu prends / Give more than you take*, 2010–11.
Courtesy the artist and gb agency, Paris



Pratchaya Phinthong, *Donne plus que tu prends / Give more than you take*, 2010–11. Courtesy the artist and gb agency, Paris

lands—the survival of which in the Nordic context is put down to the absence of feudalism and the preponderance of unenclosed forest. This is not agriculture, exactly, but organized foraging, for a natural resource that is there for the taking but which has become unviable with first-world labor. Yet the “freedom to roam” (as *Allemansrätten* is sometimes known), exposes these visitors to the perils of competing claims to the land: during Pratchaya’s stay, one Thai worker from another nearby camp was killed by a bear, an animal known to be fond of berries. Others have been shot accidentally by hunters. The workers conspired (in a bout of what Scott would call “anarchist calisthenics”) to dismantle a hunting tower—symbol of their precarious circumstances—which the artist expropriated and exhibited as a kind of trophy-installation.

When not picking berries, Pratchaya documented what he could; his photos and videos were archived online. What on the surface looks like matter-of-fact manual labor, at the same time describes a more epic alienation, precipitated by the workers’ radical displacement and attempted reterritorialization. As they were fed only one or two eggs per day, much of the documentation captured incidental searches for protein, hunting and gathering punctuates the working day with something akin to *play*—angling for unfamiliar fish, stalking pheasants with a slingshot—as these modern-day explorers improvised in a foreign environment.

In one sequence, they gather around the gleaming innards of a freshly butchered moose that has been left behind by a hunter, amused by the challenge of identifying edible bits based on their experience with buffalo. When they are ripped off by their Swedish employer, the artist with his confident English is thrust into the role of spokesperson in a labor dispute, an advocacy he reluctantly performs for a while but from which he recuses himself as soon as



Pratchaya Phinthong, *Donne plus que tu prends / Give more than you take*, 2010–11. Installation View CAC Brétigny, co-production CAC Brétigny / GAMeC, Bergamo. Courtesy gb agency, Paris

possible. For he is no activist: his artwork depends on his partaking of the job on the same terms as the others. He doesn't trace the inflating value of their wild harvest, nor belabor the precarious working conditions.⁸ He highlights instead the *conditions of possibility* of this venture, from its austere calorific economy to the profit motive that migrant worker shares with transnational capitalist—both seek new, “global” opportunities thanks to the falling costs of air travel, loosened labor regulations, and rewards lucrative enough to warrant this dangerous bivouac in a distant land's pre-modernity. Pratchaya's *exhibitions*, in France and Italy, were built around deliberate, arbitrary abstractions of the material economy to which he had subjected himself. Curators were tasked with making installations of unspecified waste materials, equivalent in weight to the amount of berries picked by the artist, reported each day by SMS—a blind conversion of quotidian labor, from the wilderness to the cosmopolitan *kunsthalle*.

Seeing this project through the lens of “flight” leads one to emphasize a few aspects of it. First, in formal terms, like most of Pratchaya's work it is easy to situate in a long Western tradition of dematerialization, of modern art's evasions of the commodity form, and the reification of the culture industry by way of (*inter alia*) land art, conceptualism, performance, community, and collaborative practices. The artist's “flight” might also be a flight from the studio, from art's conventional materials and formats, from humdrum artistic work.

Second, a certain ethno-political evasion ought to be noted: there is no reference either in the documentation or exhibitions to Thailand. Though Pratchaya's collaborators were compatriots and that clearly determined their rapport, the setting was transnational and the project—commissioned by European institutions and never shown in Thailand—sidestepped the national frame of interpretation. In any case, their actual affinities were *sub-national*: like the artist, the workers were from Isaan (northeast Thailand), historically

a non-state buffer zone encompassed loosely over centuries, and only decisively with the establishment of modern nation-states in response to European imperialism and internal colonization around the turn of the last century.⁹ This region accounts for one-third of Thailand's land mass and population, but its GDP per capita is only one-third of the national average. Though most Isaan people (until October 2016, anyway) were proud subjects of the Bangkok monarch, they have benefited less than anyone from the modern state's centralization of power and surplus, consistently getting the rough end of the environmental, political, and economic sticks. They have a long history of resisting political domination (and military conscription) by central Siamese bureaucracy, and economic domination by Sino-Thai agribusiness and all that comes with it (debt and dispossession, privatization of genetic resources, reliance on costly and toxic pesticides—all the iniquities of big-time monoculture). For want of better opportunities, much of Isaan's economy has remained agrarian, despite being drier and less fertile than other regions. As its workforce is the nation's most seasonal and mobile, so its underemployed rice farmers are an obvious labor pool for this overseas work, for which their physiognomy is suited, their bodies already trained, and the price right.

These workers' "flight" is a flight not to greater altitude but to further latitudes. It is still seasonal, but now orbital, and subject to *multiple* interwoven state regimes. Despite extortion by unscrupulous brokers, they remove themselves from a poverty trap with clear ethno-national dimensions; but the "freedom to roam" turns out to be a *chimera*, the European commons, ironically, a site of recapture.

Planes of Withdrawal

What became of the Zomian instinct after decolonization, after encompassment, enclosure, and urbanization? In what remains of this essay, I will offer a quick survey of modern and contemporary art's "sublimated" escape routes. This is far from exhaustive—my aim is merely to imagine how we might



FX Harsono, *Power and Oppressed*, 1992. Courtesy the artist

reorganize this field of art history, seeing it through a fugitive lens. I have divided my examples into three “planes of withdrawal.”

The first, the plane of narrative, is the most obvious. The fugitive paradigm suggests some revision of an idiom that was the hallmark of Southeast Asian contemporary art in its emergent phase, the 1990s, when the latter came to be called both “contemporary” and “Southeast Asian,” not *instead* of “Thai,” “Indonesian,” or “Vietnamese,” but by virtue of that very national identification. This idiom has become the central pillar of a Southeast Asian canon by way of survey shows and regionally framed collections.¹⁰ Through allegory, artists encoded and encrypted national problems, dodging taboos and regulation (not least, state monopolization of the media), to serve up non-frontal political critiques to knowing counter-publics. This was the idiom of some important critical art during the height of Cold War authoritarianism, and later during its twilight, on both sides of the ideological divide. But it proved remarkably susceptible to instrumentalization once bureaucratic investments in contemporary art began in the 2000s.

Nowhere was the recuperation more dramatic than in Thailand, where those critics have since been aligned with very conservative state forces. My book on Thai contemporary art is broadly about what followed: the struggles of the next cohort to move beyond the national frame of reference, while retaining some critical purchase on national situations.¹¹ I isolate a number of overlapping strategies. First, a “radicalization” of allegory, in which it becomes more subversive but even less legible, as artists destabilize the formal “frames” and boundaries of the artwork as a way of disrupting and casting off representational norms. Second, an obvious return to narrative, with artists reviving vernacular modes of storytelling (particularly oral, fictional ones) rather than competing in a documentary discourse with the official record. Apichatpong Weerasethakul exemplifies this strategy, as well as a third one: a new “hauntological” kind of figuration and embodiment, especially palpable in the moving image, in which Cold War national-historical trauma began—all of a sudden and all over the region—to be revisited earlier



Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (Still), 2009.
Courtesy the artist and Kick the Machine

this century. This return, too pronounced to be accidental, suggests that even where Southeast Asians have not quite shared historical experiences, they nevertheless share ways of experiencing history. It also raises some intriguing questions: Why have these ghosts been turned loose only *now*, why not in the 1990s when the settings of Cold War repression eased? To what extent might the identitarian fixations of that decade's contemporary art have been sublimations of that Cold War trauma?

The second, the plane of withdrawal, may be called psycho-social. Indeed, a "centrifugal" political geography makes some sense to social anthropologists, who have long wondered why the Siamese (i.e. the state-encompassed "people," always an ethno-cultural *mélange*) have historically enjoyed great social cohesion despite their relatively high degree of personal autonomy. One scholar writing in the 1970s proposed a theory of "negative individualism" to explain this contradiction, a "mode of retreat, avoidance and distrust," which colors many kinds of social behavior in Thailand.¹² Anyone who has worked there can attest to the Thais' generous but ultimately non-committal and temporary ways of collaborating. While I am skeptical of this sort of social science, I think it rightly links interpersonal strategies of association and avoidance to the old political dynamic of periodic flight into the forest and ungoverned hinterlands, since given its historical due by James Scott.

A Zomian withdrawal from the interfaces of worldly power garners autonomy which, commuted to the subject of the modern nation-state (where physical withdrawal is no longer an option), becomes "negative individualism": a retiring, self-administered conformity that favors flexibility over confrontation. This might explain why contemporary artists, from whom a certain positive individualism might from time to time be expected, acquire more stature through their excursions *beyond* the national sphere instead. It might also explain the non-oppositional stances of the Thai vanguard—figures like Rirkrit Tiravanija, Surasi Kusolwong, and Apichatpong are masters of wry subversion, but seldom take legible stances on contentious political issues.

In the study of art, individualism has been a quintessentially "modern" attribute, a characterization broadly imported into Asia, though we know that individualism has distinct resonance and histories there, while few art institutions—especially the dominant state ones—have enshrined it as a guiding value. A more nuanced individualism that accommodates both distinction and withdrawal will better describe the professional postures modern artists have struck. This is precisely the terrain of the exhibition "*Misfits*": *Pages from a Loose-leaf Modernity*, mounted concurrently with *2 or 3 Tigers*, the former featuring three singular Southeast Asian artists who, though influential, have been overlooked by their respective national institutions.¹³ For each of them, individualism meant deliberate evasion of institutional norms, but demanded neither rebellion nor isolation. Their examples invite us to rethink in detail the artists' avoidance of the academy's coercive patronage and bureaucratization, of its non-reflexive pedagogies, and its monolithic, chauvinist narratives. Such a rethink would suggest a revised geography of modern art: while there is perhaps something inherent to the structure of art's globalization that permits the expression of the fugitive instinct, provincial lines of flight have been no less important.

Paiboon Suwannakudt, for instance, was a conscientious objector from Thailand's national academy but spearheaded a temple-mural revival that underpinned the neo-traditionalism which came to dominate both official and

market patronage by the late 1980s. This individualist's mode of production was broadly collectivist—his “escape trajectory” was both provincial and “traditional.”¹⁴ Another Silpakorn *refusenik*, Uthit Atimana, was a prime mover behind the artist-run festival, Chiang Mai Social Installation (1992–98), which represented a collective rejection of national institutional norms and leveraged Chiang Mai's status as a halfway house for recuperated leftists, following the amnesty declared by the military government in the early 1980s. Uthit also co-founded The Land Foundation in 1998. These two projects alone have been enough to make Chiang Mai the obvious antipodal alternative for those withdrawing from the center of art-institutional power in Thailand.

Scanning regionally, similar withdrawals too numerous to mention are found in all manner of returns to the village, both literal and figurative. In the 1980s alone, one could cite Moelyono's community art workshops in East and Central Java; the artists' guild in the upland retreat of Baguio in the Philippine cordillera, whose festivals married a localist (rather than nationalist) celebration of indigenous cultures with international contemporary art trends; and the brief but fertile occupation of a defunct poultry farm on the disappearing fringe of urban Singapore by The Artists' Village. These retreats were not disavowals of the state's cultural administration—indeed, most went on to attract state patronage and have become quasi-institutional. But all yielded relative autonomy which enabled them to sidestep the regulation and rationalization going on in the officialized sphere of modern art. This regional culture of independence was perhaps the fundamental ingredient of art's contemporaneity in Southeast Asia. And it harks back not to Gustave Courbet or the Salons des indépendants, but to another kind of autonomy that is much, much older than modern art.

The third plane of withdrawal might seem to take us even further away from modern art. Political, social, and physical withdrawals have analogues with religious practice and geography. Thai Buddhism bears obvious, quotidian evidence of a withdrawal reflex that has been institutionalized and generalized: ordination is a formal and actual withdrawal from the world still undertaken by most Thai males. While the clerical life—once the only means of attaining an education—has held less and less appeal for ordinary Thais, withdrawal, and asceticism still confer potent moral and political currency. From a Western standpoint it seems counter-intuitive, but in Siam, religion was a key vector of modernization, pivotal in the rationalization and centralization of political power. The elite Thammayudt order, founded in 1833 by the fourth Bangkok king, Mongkut (before he took the throne), has since enjoyed disproportionate influence thanks to royal patronage. This austere, orthodox sect was a vehicle for streamlining and centralizing religious authority at a time when, beyond a few larger towns, the temple was often the only institutional link to the administrative center. The Thammayudt monks professed to rid Siamese Buddhism of the many other faith traditions that had become embedded within it; they decried superstition, magic, and ancestral worship. They were emissaries of rationalism, of intellectual modernity, when the nation was still just a concept awaiting actualization.

If the Thammayudt were agents of a nascent state, the archetypal “fugitives” were the heterodox monks of the so called “forest tradition,” itinerant ascetics who wore recycled robes, ate one donated meal per day, and generally eschewed worldly affairs, spending much of every year walking and meditating in the wilderness.¹⁵ Forest monks believe in practice, not theory. They



Photograph of Prince Mongkut wearing a monk's robes, before coronation as King Rama IV, 1845–51. Unknown Photographer.

derived their power and special charisma not from political or symbolic association or patronage but from mastery of arcane, magical, and even occult practices, and from their radical disavowal of worldly power and material comforts. They were often distrusted by villagers, and not infrequently taken for weretigers. But while their practices were basically antithetical to the Thammayudt orthodoxy, far from being opposed, in fact, the two enjoyed a special synergy. From the late nineteenth century, the most charismatic forest monks—most of whom were Lao/Isaan, rather than Siamese—were re-ordained in the Thammayudt order, which instrumentalized them as boundary-riders, trailblazers who could establish footholds (in the form of hermitages, small temples, and monasteries) at the very fringes of civilization. These footholds were then funded and staffed from the central clerical administration, rising quickly through the ranks from outpost, to town, to city.

If the Thammayudt were the foot soldiers of national encompassment, rationalization, and modernity, the wanderers were literally the *vanguard*. The relationship was tested during the Cold War, with some gurus branded as communists, but the domesticated ones thrived, and by the 1980s some commanded nationwide networks of scores of monasteries. (They were also, after that, Thai Buddhism's most successful international export.) The parallels with modern art are clear, and though I will not go into detail here, it should be noted that many of Thailand's most esteemed contemporary artists—especially those known for relational and other heterodox practices—have ties to the forest order. Indeed, modern art's independence and instrumentalization have proceeded along related lines, with a similar dynamic of incorporation and resistance, of *non-mortal opposition*, in keeping with the political geography Scott describes.

Evasion—be it religious, artistic, political, or all of the above—is never absolute or final. It is one side of a continuous negotiation, and though art's geography may be gradually decentralized, and more and more globalized, the invisible force fields that organize it may still be those of the state.

- 1 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- 2 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, pp. 19–20.
- 3 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 11.
- 4 Pierre Clastres, “On Ethnocide,” trans. Julian Pefanis and Bernadette Maher, *Art & Text*, 28 (March–May 1988), pp. 51–58. For a contemporary instance of that negation in Cambodia, see Erin Gleeson, “Field Report: Preah Konlong,” *Mousse*, 58 (April–May), 2017.
- 5 James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.
- 6 The last decade has seen some exemplary artistic investigations of this geography of conflict and collaboration, including Amir Muhammad’s *Village People Radio Show* (2007), Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s *Primitive project* (2009–10) and *Mekong Hotel* (2012), Chia-Wei Hsu’s *Huai Mo Village* (2012) and *Ruins of the Intelligence Bureau* (2015), and Ho Tzu Nyen’s *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014).
- 7 Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books, 1989, p. 218.
- 8 The project was exhibited at CAC Brétigny near Paris (2010) and at GaMEC Bergamo, Italy (2011), coinciding with the rise to the world’s top restaurant rankings of Copenhagen’s *noma*, its menu heavily reliant on seasonal foraging.
- 9 Isaan was one of several peripheral zones absorbed into what became modern Siam in the late nineteenth century, principally by way of administrative reforms enacted under the fifth king of the present Chakkri dynasty, Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910). See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.
- 10 See e.g. the collections built through the Asian Art shows (and later the triennial) in Fukuoka, Japan, the Asia-Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, Australia, and the many regional surveys composed in and around the Singapore Art Museum.
- 11 David Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary*. Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2017.
- 12 Han ten Brummelhuis, “Abundance and Avoidance,” in Brummelhuis and Jeremy H. Kemp (eds), *Strategies and Structures in Thai Society*. Amsterdam: Anthropological-Sociological Centre, University of Amsterdam, 1984, p. 45.
- 13 “*Misfits*”: *Pages from a Loose-leaf Modernity* featured artworks and archival material of Bagyi Aung Soe, Tang Chang, and Rox Lee. It was curated by David Teh, in collaboration with Yin Ker, Mary Pansanga, and Merv Espina, at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, April 20–July 3, 2017.
- 14 Referring to postwar Korean art in the *2 or 3 Tigers* opening program, Park Chan-Kyong remarked that retirement to mountainous retreats and “traditional” Korean idioms was not always indicative of conservatism. Park Chan-Kyong, “Colonial Unheimlich,” lecture at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, April 22, 2017. Cf. Reiko Tomii, who suggests that by suspending comparison with Western benchmarks we might reset the criteria of art’s contemporaneity. See her *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan*. Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2016.
- 15 See Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror & World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976; and J. L. Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-state: An Anthropological and Historical Study in Northeastern Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993.

2 or 3 Tigers
 Exhibition April 21–July 3, 2017
 hkw.de/tigers

