

Infra-structural remediations: Agroecological futures as prospective ethnographies of hope

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We are entering an age of speculation, in which ideas become more powerful than material reality. This is nothing new, but technological and architectural design is set to deepen a process that has already begun: deterritorialisation, as a material, emotional, and spatial process; and consequently, total dispossession, of capacities and competencies that enabled a certain paradigm of connection with an autopoietic, self-replenishing Earth.

Suggesting that reorientation might take place through a process of unlearning and learning, mediated through disorientation devices, I seek to work through empirical research with visual analyses of photographs, maps of familiarity, and sketches, to allow disorientation to inscribe itself in visible ways, enabling forms of disorientation to become intelligible. My fieldwork considers three case study areas to understand a bigger phenomenon: the agroecological learning assemblage as an emergent empirical phenomenon, seeded by the assemblage of travellers in search of alternatives. Building on my Master's work, I seek to develop this argument by looking at the dynamic movement of Chinese influence and pushback in northern Thailand (Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces up to the Mae Sai border with Myanmar), the Pattaya area, and Bali, Indonesia, as a constellation of power, aspiration, and animistic belief. These three sites provide me with grounds to range over forms of middle-class accommodation and accumulation (northern Thailand), freewheeling appetite for immediate gratification amongst corporate groups and tourists (Pattaya), and resistance enmeshed or arising from within eco-tourism's socioeconomic and cultural (re)articulation of ecological-cultural entwinement with spring water and daily ritual (Bali).

Agroecological work is still dispersed—and will remain so in Southeast Asia as infrastructure fever—Chinese, Thai, Indonesian—develops. However, as new businesses and travellers turn their attention to sustainable food systems and climate emergency, I find reason to believe that an ethnography of hope might be possible: that “re- articulating it through a variety of texts and mediums might be a means of gathering its separate relations together, for a renewed familiarity and organizing meaning to develop.” Through flexible, open-ended methods, research can develop an infrastructure (of resistance) that operates within ambiguity to reorient communities toward capacities “open to the future” (Ahmed, 2006: 46).

Doing so, I aim to refine an approach of ethnography and assemblage I have been practicing. Via patchwork ethnography (Tsing, 2005), this concerns itself with how transformative agroecological practices create new subjectivities, showing how power operates outside of recognised consolidations of power, refining analytical perspectives of grassroots change in the context of agricultural and land use transformation in Southeast Asia. Second, I will continue thinking and feeling my way towards agroecological futures as non-determined, challenging the complex and variegated nature of urbanization processes without conflating it with the paradigms through which they are studied. Third, building off considerations about ethnography as a largely retrospective act (and methodology), I consider what the practice and representation of agroecological futures might be, assembled through hope and prospective ethnography.