

## Entangled Areas: Reactivating Southeast Asia in the Anthropocene

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### Abstract

Since the turn of the millennium, the Anthropocene has heralded a series of wide-ranging transformations in the social sciences. Today, environmental humanities, new materialism, actor-network theory (ANT), multi-species and more-than-human anthropologies, and critical zones all share interest in earthly entanglements. In Southeast Asia, many of the prominent entanglements are disastrous—ecological degradation, mega pollution, accelerating precarity, sinking cities. While a growing body of literature examines entanglements of humans, plants, and animals *in* Asian areas, the present set of engagements explore the proposition that Anthropocene entanglements call for a deeper rethinking of the notion of *area itself*. We are at a moment where the STS analytics of entanglement can be used to *reactivate* Southeast Asian – and other – areas. Shaped in heterogeneous perceptual, conceptual, sensorial, and political registers, areas emerge in the following set of engagements as layered multiplicities, each with its own distinctive grip on reality. Our gambit is that the ways in which entanglements *make areas* becomes a critical issue for STS as we go deeper into the Anthropocene.

### Keywords

Anthropocene; area; entanglements; Southeast Asia; STS

### Introduction

The concept of *area* is usually understood in spatial and geographical terms, as part of a place, town, country, or region. Thus, Southeast Asia is a “part” of Asia, and specifically: “the southern apron . . . of East Asia . . . home to hundreds of ethnic groups that are today the citizens of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Island (or maritime) Southeast Asia includes the Malay Peninsula and two huge archipelagos

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**To cite this article** Jensen, Casper Bruun, and Thufail, Fadjar Ibnu. 2025. “Entangled Areas: Reactivating Southeast Asia in the Anthropocene.” *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 11(2): 5–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2025.2887>.

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whose even more diverse populations are now citizens of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, East Timor, and the Philippines” ([Rush 2018](#)).<sup>1</sup>

For a long time, the overlap between STS and area studies was quite limited. While STS focused on science and technology predominantly in the West, area studies focused on politics, culture, and history in the ex-colonies. From the late 1990s onwards, however, STS gradually became more attentive to knowledges travelling beyond Euro–American circuits. Years later, all those “nonhuman subjects” which—so often end up “far beyond control” ([Winichakul 1997, 174](#)) also began to appear with more frequency in area studies.

At the turn of the Millennium, the Anthropocene heralded a series of wide-ranging and still ongoing discussions and transformations in the social sciences. Today, discourses, ideologies, and hegemonies vie for attention with vibrant matter, elemental media, multi-species and more-than-human anthropologies ([de la Cadena and Blaser 2018](#); [Omura et al. 2019](#); [Tsing 2015](#)), critical zones ([Latour and Weibel 2020](#)), and much else, all with varied interests in earthly entanglements. In Southeast Asia, many of the prominent entanglements are disastrous—ecological degradation, mega pollution, accelerating precarity, sinking cities ([Elinoff and Vaughan 2021](#); [Jobin, Ho, and Hsiao 2021](#)).

At this moment, a growing body of literature (e.g. [Padmanabhan 2021](#); [Pachau and van Schendel 2022](#)) examines entanglements of humans, plants, and animals *in* Asian areas. In dialogue with this literature, the present set of engagements explore the proposition that Anthropocene entanglements call for a deeper rethinking of the notion of *area itself*. We are at a moment where areas, like chemical elements, should be *reactivated* (Papadopoulus, de la Bellacasa, and Myers ([2021, 6](#))), as a way of reimagining and responding to Anthropocene logics. With a focus on material itineraries ([Jensen 2021](#)) with variable perceptual, conceptual, sensorial, and political attunements, areas emerge in these engagements as entangled multiplicities, divergent regimes ([Winichakul 2025](#), post-script), each with its own distinctive grip on reality. Our gambit is that the ways in which entanglements *make areas* becomes a critical issue for STS as we go deeper into the Anthropocene.

### Southeast Asia and Some Problems with ‘Area’

According to the “standard story” ([Bowen 2004](#); also [Hau 2020, 62](#)) Southeast Asia as an area was invented by the South–East Asia Command (SEAC) under Admiral Lord Mountbatten during World War II.<sup>2</sup> When area

<sup>1</sup>The explanation continues: “The entire region stretches some 3,000 miles from end to end and 2,500 miles north to south, an area larger than Europe. It contains 625 million people, around 9 percent of the world’s population.”

<sup>2</sup>Under SEAC, Southeast Asia excluded the Philippines and parts of Indonesia but included Sri Lanka. In Japan, *nanyô*—literally South Seas, a term with dreamy and paradisiac connotations referring to South Pacific islands—was adopted by the military between 1914–1945. They were categorized as the front South Seas of Southeast Asia,

studies emerged as a field of inquiry after the war, it thus had an in-built “intimate linkage” ([Derichs 2020, 45](#)) with American military and strategic interest. Understanding social, economic, religious and, centrally, political contexts in the post-colonies was imagined as crucial to the containment of communism ([Jory 2010, 28](#)).<sup>3</sup> It was, nevertheless, always rather unclear what justified speaking of Southeast Asia as an area. Why should Laos be grouped with Timor Leste rather than China, say, or the Philippines with Myanmar rather than with Polynesia or Mexico? What coherence could be ascribed to the category, when there was neither a “single dominant power, religion, or language,” nor “a single center in the region (or even a half-dozen centers)” ([Bowen 2004, 386](#))?<sup>4</sup> Such problems may appear rather distant from the concerns of STS. Yet, we can tease out a relation, which hinges on the analytics of space. Still partial at most, accelerating Anthropocene transformations suggest that this relation may be growing in significance.

It is fair to say that space have not been the strongest point of STS theorization. To be sure, contrasts between micro- and macro, or local and global, are often evoked (problematically: see [Jensen 2007](#)) and situated knowledges are cherished ([Haraway 1988](#)). Yet, paradoxically, the notion of the “situated” is often somewhat vague and abstract because it is rarely elaborated in relation to any deeper theorization of spatiality. For example, it is quite common to read about how facts and machines transform as they travel. But space is usually taken for granted as a neutral medium in or through which the travelling happens. In contrast, questions of spatiality were, of course, always central to cultural geography and adjacent disciplines. They were also crucial to rapidly emerging critiques of the notion of area in area studies – in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

Area studies were criticized for a lack of rigor almost immediately. In the early '60s, Manfred Halpern ([1962, 117](#)) described the typical approach as “a kind of stamp collecting.”<sup>5</sup> Bits and pieces of information about different countries were avidly collected with little interest in making systematic knowledge. His disdain for low-grade empiricism was shared by others for very different reasons. Soon, critiques focused on unproblematized ideas of spatial areas began hailing down. In empirical reality, Southeast Asia exhibited

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New Guinea, and Solomon Island and the back South Seas of Micronesia, and governed by the *nanyô cho* (South Seas Agency) from Palau Island. As Japanese occupation spread, however, *nanyô* colloquially came to cover an area all the way to Burma. In the post-war period, usage of the term rapidly decreased.

<sup>3</sup> In the US, these agendas were pursued with a triple basis in “island ethnography, contemporary political studies, and classical Indology” ([Bowen 2004, 386](#)). Worrisome political developments were analyzed with a mixture of anthropology and “classical texts on power and religion” ([ibid.](#))

<sup>4</sup> In 1923, the Austrian ethnologist Robert Heine-Geldern argued that the dissemination of Indian cultural forms and ideas made it feasible to speak of Southeast Asia as a region, an argument developed in “Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia” ([Heine-Geldern 1942](#)). But “colonial scholars generally studied the history and societies of subjects as defined by colonial boundaries” ([Collins 2010, 17](#)). Hence, regional research aspirations only came to fruition in the aftermath of World War II.

<sup>5</sup> One year after the social anthropologist Edmund Leach ([1961, 2](#)) launched his famous attack on Alfred Radcliffe-Brown’s comparative project as mere “butterfly collection.”

“unwieldy diversity” ([Rafael 1994, 99](#); paraphrasing [Keyes 1992](#)). Nevertheless, “politically produced” misrepresentations inscribed the area with an “illusory unity” ([Rafael 1994, 99](#)). The outcome was an updated, intellectually rubber-stamped form of colonialism and orientalism ([Chow 1990](#)) with wide-ranging socio-economic and political consequences. During a moment of peak critique, Harry Harootunian ([2000, 25](#)) extravagantly described Asia as nothing more than the “simulacrum of a substanceless something.”<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the political significance of area studies waned after the cold war. But while programs in the West became strapped for funds, the home areas – like Southeast Asia – bore witness to a “slow but progressive growth of interest and activity” ([Heryanto 2002, 4](#)).<sup>7</sup>

This was also the time when the notion of postcolonial technoscience appeared in STS<sup>8</sup> – a “signpost pointing to contemporary phenomena in need of new modes of analysis and requiring new critiques” ([Anderson 2002, 643](#)).<sup>9</sup> Postcolonial STS meant placing the “metropole and post-colony” in the same “analytic frame” ([ibid.](#), see also [Thufail and Dominguez 2021](#)) By suspending assumptions of “relatively closed communities” ([Anderson 2002, 643](#)) and methodologies premised on the nation-state, it would be possible to grasp the role of technoscience in relation to alternative modernities, borderlands, and hybridities in an emerging global order.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, there were ongoing translations in other directions. With inspiration from actor-network theory, Sarah Whatmore ([2006, 600](#)) introduced the notion of an “earth-life nexus” to

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<sup>6</sup> Between these antagonistic poles (an anti-theoretical acceptance and a hyper-theoretical rejection of area) researchers grappled with the problem in various ways. Caroline Hau ([2020, 63](#)) lists the following examples: Southeast Asia is a heuristic device, a contingent device, a Euro-Japanese construct, an intellectual site, a theoretical problematique, and a reserve of intellectual diversity. From an STS point of view, it is not very surprising that diversely situated knowledges and practices ([Haraway 1988](#)) create partially connected versions of area. We discuss below how divergent Southeast Asias emerge from a multiplicity of practical, conceptual, ontological, and material entanglements.

<sup>7</sup> Thus emerged a fresh contrast. While Southeast Asian Studies in the United States came to be characterized by “profound pessimism regarding the immediate future” ([Rafael 1994, 98](#)) and European ones were engulfed in a “general scenario of gloom” ([Chou 2017, 234](#)), the Asian situation was becoming more “cheerful” ([ibid., 234](#)). Thongchai Winichakul ([2014](#)) is a lucid meditation on the implications.

<sup>8</sup> Excepting Singapore, the source of important research on biomedical, urban, and Anthropocene issues, STS remains quite rare in Southeast Asia. In the concise words of a reviewer, the major hurdle is that few institutions operate in frameworks insufficiently international and well-resourced “to be plugged into the globally-oriented STS project.” In Indonesia, STS research is carried out in the “More-than-Human lab” headed by Fadjat Thufail under the National Institute for Research and Innovation (BRIN). In Thailand, STS is mainly done at the department of sociology and anthropology of Chulalongkorn University. “Science and Technology Studies in the Philippines” is the theme of a recent special issue of *Philippine Studies* ([Gutierrez and Atienza 2023](#)).

<sup>9</sup> Recently, the challenges and possibilities of transnational STS was the subject of a thematic collection of ESTS ([Kaşdoğan and Okune 2023](#)).

<sup>10</sup> For example, Warwick Anderson and Vincanne Adams ([2008, 191](#)) commended Annemarie Mol and John Law ([1994](#)) for “edging, it seems, toward a postcolonial spatiality,” but found their fluid topologies too abstract and inattentive to new “political economies of capitalism and science.”

cultural geography. In this nexus, animals and technologies would play the role of “agents provocateurs” ([ibid.](#), 604). The nonhumans promised to create troubles for conceptions of space and power understood with reference only to human interests and ideologies.<sup>11</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, these encounters seem to leave something missing at both ends. While geography became acquainted with nonhuman agency, their sophisticated discussions about scale (e.g. [Marston et al. 2005](#)) proceeded as if the new agents played no role in changing the dynamics ([Callon and Latour 1981](#); cf. [Jensen 2017](#)).<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the postcolonial analytics imported into STS via cultural studies often took for granted ideas about the homogenizing forces of globalization that cutting-edge human geography (e.g. [Whatmore 2006](#)) and sociocultural anthropology (e.g. [Tsing 2005](#)) had begun to dismantle and transform.

And other momentous things were happening.

### **Anthropocene Intrusions and Entangled Areas**

The new millennium bore witness to the rise of China and new geopolitical tensions ([Jobin and Chen 2023](#)). As the threat of homogenous globalization waned, discourses emphasizing postcolonial hybridity and *mélange* were replaced by critiques of settler-colonialism and calls for decolonization in many disciplines. But while the frames changed, some crucial questions and tensions remained in place. Among them was how to change relations between historically dominant or hegemonic Western forms of knowledge and neglected or repressed local alternatives. These are live problems for both STS and area studies.

For an example, consider Vincent Houben’s ([2020, 53](#)) proposal to redefine area studies as a new “meta-discipline” focusing on forms of “alterity” specific to spatio-temporal contexts. To some, this is an attractive vision that combines a much-needed respect for a “multiplicity of epistemological perspectives and traditions” with a “universalising tendency” ([Fleschenberg and Baumann 2020, 7](#)) that is necessary for disciplinary or intellectual coherence.<sup>13</sup> But if one takes into consideration that the inspirations are

<sup>11</sup> Juanita Sundberg’s ([2014, 33](#)) decolonial effort to “craft geo-graphs or earth writings” is resonant but critical of the Western bias she detects in Latour’s and other “post-humanist” approaches.

<sup>12</sup> Sally Marston et al.’s ([2005, 419–420](#)) influential article offered three options for thinking about scale: reaffirm scalar hierarchy from micro to macro, create new hybrid models that integrate horizontal and vertical processes, or—their preference—drop scale altogether. However, nonhuman agency allowed ANT to explore a completely different, and scandalously overlooked, fourth option. It became possible to study how actors, networks, and realities themselves grow or shrink. If this option is so often overlooked it is because that ANT’s flat ontology (where preconceptions about the actors are suspended so the relations, realities *and scales* they make can be fully explored) is routinely mistaken for the absurd notion that all the actors are equal and identical.

<sup>13</sup> However, it is not clear that being favorably disposed to universality is helpful for integrating incongruent perspectives.

“stringently Euro–American in origin” ([Guillermo 2020, 59](#)), the project seems to reflect the very same power imbalances that, so far, have kept Southeast Asian–based area studies trapped in “a merely reactive game of catch–up” ([ibid., 60](#)).<sup>14</sup> The proposal then appears as a new form of epistemic colonialism.

Others seek to denaturalize “Eurocentric truths” with regional perspectives ([Lan 2010, 51](#)). And this is surely significant. Yet, one might wonder how much mileage can be gained from a vision centering on the rebuttal of flawed Western knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Awareness that all knowledges are inescapably messy and entangled might provide a better anchoring point. And the more so, for a different reason.

In 2000, two years after postcolonial technoscience entered *Social Studies of Science* journal, the “central role of mankind in geology and ecology” ([Crutzen and Stoermer 2000, 17](#)) was emphasized in the now canonical piece that introduced the term Anthropocene to the *Global Change Newsletter*. This is not the place to get into the quagmire of the Anthropocene debates (for that see [Jensen 2025](#)). But it seems safe to say that planetary change processes set in motion seismic transformations in the ecology of knowledges. Of special relevance, recent decades have seen the rise of new materialisms, elemental studies, multi–species and more–than–human anthropologies, and critical zone research, among others. One keyword appearing in many of these literatures, and resonating with them all, is *entanglement*.

As other widely adopted concepts,<sup>16</sup> entanglement is subject to a range of interpretations and forms of usage. Donna Haraway ([2008](#)) examined the tangles of history, practice, politics, and ethics that mutually shaped dogs and people. Later, the anthropologist Anna Tsing ([2015](#)) showed landscapes to be an emergent effect of historical entanglements of matsutake mushroom with legacies of war, capitalism, and science. Such complex entanglements are also on display in parts of Gabrielle Hecht’s ([2011](#)) edited *Entangled Geographies*, which focused on struggles over technology in contexts of decolonization. In contrast, the editors of *Entangled Itineraries* ([Smith 2019](#)) used entanglements primarily as a way to characterize movements in

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<sup>14</sup> Ramon Guillermo also objects that ‘alterity’ simply prolongs the long–lasting allure of the exotic for Western scholars. But here we must slow down. Recent anthropological approaches with an interest in ontology and alterity have subjected to barrages of critique for reification, primitivism, exoticism, harboring a colonial mentality, and worse. Their actual interests typically include the problematization, expansion, transformation, or explosion of dominant modes of Western social theory—often as part of a fundamental rethinking of the embedded politics of disciplinary knowledge formations with nature–culture dualism as the central dogma. Thus, it is not *alterity* that is the major problem with Houben’s proposal but *meta–theory*.

<sup>15</sup> With inspiration from Marilyn Strathern ([1988, 3](#)): it seems unlikely that Southeast Asian scholars have nothing better to do than correcting the mistakes of Western thought.

<sup>16</sup> One indicator of such popularity is the emergence of critiques and counter–discourses (e.g. [Chandler 2018](#)). In almost perfect analogy with the backlash against ANT for (purportedly) paying attention *only* to connections *but not disconnections*, or to attachments *but not detachments* (e.g. [Yarrow et al. 2015](#)), Eva H. Giraud ([2019](#)) recently examined situations where effective political action seems to call for *disentanglement and exclusion* rather than the opposite.

history of materials and knowledges across Eurasia.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, too, areas appear as containers within which the entanglements under consideration take place. Thus, Joy Pachuau and Willem van Schendel's (2022) *Entangled Lives* is concerned with the relations between animals and people in the Eastern Himalaya, and a recent special issue focuses on "Entangled Environments in Asia" (Padmanabhan 2021). However interesting these studies of entanglements *within* an area are – and they *are* interesting – they reach their limits when facing Anthropocene intrusions. For those intrusions, by forces far beyond the human, involve the making, remaking, and unmaking of areas.

An admittedly cheeky way of measuring how far we have travelled since the dawn of the millennium is to compare the conversations to which we just alluded with the forceful deconstructions of those days. When Harry Harootunian (2000, 25) declared that Asia had no reference except to "itself in the expectation that something out there will eventually correspond to it," he seemed to think he was really dispelling an illusory power. Like a magical sleight of hand, the notion of Asia would cease to impress when the trick was revealed.<sup>18</sup> But it is one thing to deconstruct an area assumed to be a purely human construct, and quite another to confront the dawning realization that earthly processes far beyond human control is now deconstructing our landscapes and practices, dashing our futures and hopes.<sup>19</sup> We cannot, of course, fault Harootunian for failing as a prophet. But we can note that his solution stopped just where things were about to become exciting – indeed perhaps too exciting for comfort. That is, with close examination of all those Anthropocene entanglements that used to sustain but increasingly also endanger Southeast Asian areas and forms of life.

At this point, there are openings for all kinds of approaches and experiments. Several are displayed in the following engagements, and many others haven't yet been imagined. Among those that intrigue us is the possibility of bringing into communication Annemarie Mol's (2002) body multiple and Thongchai Winichakul's (1997) influential study of the making of Siam, as studies of ontologically heterogeneous geo-bodies (cf. Omura et al. 2019) composed by swarms of Anthropocene agents and characters (Hetherington 2020, 7) from sediments and rock strata, to tsunami warning systems, malaria-bearing mosquitoes, PM 2.5 dust particles, and land-protecting entities.

Each geo-body has its own rhythm and refrain (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 323; see also Thufail 2016).<sup>20</sup> Some, like post-WW2 anti-communism, create areas of brutalization. Today, some threaten to grow into

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<sup>17</sup> We hasten to note that this does not subtract from other fine qualities of the book.

<sup>18</sup> Given the repeated debunking of area, it is tempting to evoke Eduardo Viveiro de Castro's (2012, 47) quip that *there are already far too many things that do not exist*.

<sup>19</sup> This scary thought is due to Atsuro Morita.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari's famous discussion of the refrain concerns a small child, alone in the night, who stays calm by humming the same tune over and over. The refrain creates a small protective envelope or "limited pocket of organization" (Brown and Capdevila 1999, 36). Thus, a *tiny rhythmic area* is carved out of the night.

new “massive programmes of world-ordering” ([Brown and Capdevila 1999, 37](#)). We also listen with growing distress to ever-noisier Anthropocene refrains, which may soon overwhelm and de-realize whole areas. But they are layered with others, evanescent, or barely audible, which express different qualities of participation or unexpected forms of belonging (cf. [Stengers 2011, 436](#)). They deserve our attention and some also deserve admiration.

As the rhythms overlap and entangle, areas emerge as layered multiplicities. We must learn to listen to and compose with all those more-than-human refrains that emerge, even now, from the interstices. Of course, they are far less imposing than the monster Anthropocene areas conjured by geopolitics and big business. But they are crucial for keeping Southeast Asian cosmopolitics open ([Jensen, forthcoming](#)), taking care of the possible, and finding ways to thrive in transitional environments ([Jensen and Sangkhamanee 2024](#)).

### The Engagements

Following this introduction, “Entangled Areas: Reactivating Southeast Asia in the Anthropocene” consists of ten engagements and a post-script by Thongchai Winichakul.

In “Coastlines in Motion: A Sedimentary Rethinking of Southeast Asia,” Zahirah S., et al. ([2025](#)) take the reader to four sites—Kendari Bay, Kupang, Johor Straits, and Jakarta—where entanglements motions of sediment, history, and politics are *shifting the grounds* under cities and states. “Buoyant Life: Floating Urbanites Adrift in the Archipelagic Imaginary” by Rapti Siriwardane-de Zoysa and Muhammad Soufi Cahya Gemilang ([2025](#)) shows how threats of inundation and dreams of flotation entangle policy makers and infrastructural visionaries from the Netherlands to Jakarta with flooded communities in Semarang, Java seeking ways of living with rising seas. Bringing to life a wave multiple, Irina Rafliana’s “Tsunami as Method? Recognizing Tsunami Waves, Reconfiguring Areas” ([2025](#)) discusses three radically different versions of tsunamis – as an uninhabitable red zone on the Mentawai islands, as trading zones of knowledge among German and Indonesian researchers, and as a high-tension zone in the Indonesian Tsunami Warning center—which emerge and become entangled. Is it possible to imagine, she invites us to ponder, relations with the deadly waves that, beyond their destruction, are also regenerative?

After all this water, things get dusty as Jakkrit Sangkhamanee ([2025](#)) takes us to “*Atmospheric Zomia: Revisiting Upland Southeast Asia under Anthropocene Conditions.*” Bringing together Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Plantationcene analytics, Sangkhamanee shows how land transformation from swidden to large industrial corn cultivation in Thailand’s northern periphery has created conditions for unbreathability—a fine dust regime—with ramifying effects all the way back in Bangkok. With Fathun Karib and Dana Listiana ([2025](#)) we remain on land but travel back in time. Their “Can the Geo Speak? The Emergence of Southeast Asia Through Geological Assemblages,” traces the historical entanglements of economic geology, the science of mineral deposits, with the emergence of Borneo as a contested colonial area.

“Urban Areas as Entangled Areas in Southeast Asia,” explores what area might look like when assemblage urbanism encounters STS. With reference to developments on Manila’s outskirts, Kristian Karlo Saguin (2025) shows urban areas as layered becomings shaped by a multitude of practices and the fluid movements of heterogeneous actors. “Unsettled Area: Popular Territories of Blackness,” written by the inimitable AbdouMaliq Simone (2025), places the reader “in the middle” of an area with undefined contours, composed by the entangled itineraries of precarious Indonesian migrants far from home. His engagement suggests that while area is never really where it seems to be, it is yet also always in many places at once. Area is also simultaneously in many places in “Regioning with Resistance: Borderlands and Africa–Greater Mekong Subregion,” where Jenna Grant (2025) traces how “regioning” is co-enacted in geographically distant places in Africa and Cambodia. This engagement shows how entanglements of traveling medical science, multi-species companions like parasites and mosquitoes, and conflictual postcolonial histories turn borderlands into emergent regions of antimicrobial resistances.

Multi-species relations are central, too, in Jiraporn Laocharoenwong’s “Rethinking ‘Area’ Through Appetite for Hot–Fresh Meat and the Cross–Border Cattle Trade,” (2025) which explores itineraries of cattle trade, fattening, and consumption. The engagement shows how a distinctive area is carved from the territories of Myanmar, Thailand, and China as emaciated cows embarking on a lengthy journey to Chinese hotpots become entangled with microbes and pharmaceuticals, forms of inter-species care, and eventually with consumer preferences for “fresh-hot” meat of square proportions. Fadjjar Thufail’s “Manifesto of the Durian: Smell and Area Studies” (2025) focuses on another itinerant and controversial food item. The engagement challenges the conventional geopolitical ontology of area (studies) by imagining a fruity geobody emerging from a multitude of sensorial attunements.

Thongchai Winichakul (2025) observes in the post-script that the durian might indeed be the sole agent whose realm happens to coincide with the area of Southeast Asia. Yet even the Southeast Asian “king of fruits” lives a double existence, “its heavenly taste beyond describable, while its smell is devastatingly stinky.” We won’t ruin the post-script by paraphrasing other nuggets of humor and wisdom. Suffice to say that we fully agree with his advice to “let our imaginations and visions of other kinds of space create fresh entanglements . . . to generate many other contingent devices that serve our differentiated and always changing purposes.”



## Acknowledgements

This introduction has benefited from anonymous review comments, editorial suggestions by Grant Jun Otsuki, and advice from Atsuro Morita. Casper's work was made possible with generous support from The Second Century Fund (C2F), Chulalongkorn University.

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