interviews with
james c. scott

daily resistance
anarchist calisthenics
on not being governed

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Biography

James C. Scott. Political Scientist, Anthropologist [Sterling Professor of Political Science and Professor of Anthropology, Yale University]. Born December 2, 1936.

James C. Scott has shown profound insight in pursuing his studies of peasantry and society in Southeast Asia, and has successfully demonstrated the dynamic relationship between the dominant state and the people who resist this domination. He has been a major driving force behind the creation of an interdisciplinary research area which extends across political science, anthropology, agrarian studies, and history.

Through two years of field work in Malaysian villages and thoroughgoing research into the relevant literature, James C. Scott illuminated the mentality of small farmers and peasants and explained the logic behind their subsistence security, a logic which led to rebellions against excessive interventions and exploitation by the state and landowners, and subsequently to the formation of social movements. His insights crossed both regional boundaries in Asia and disciplinary boundaries in social science, and gave rise to the interdisciplinary debate about the 'moral economy'.

He later concluded that a double-faced attitude toward authority was widely visible among subordinate groups subject to domination and oppression through slavery, serfdom or caste, as a basis for rebellion; he showed that behind the scenes, beyond the reach of authority, there was a capacity to criticize behaviour and a potential for reformation. Working both from logical deduction and from case studies, he persuasively argued that local practical knowledge and traditional practices must be well understood and respected in order to avoid further repetition of the failures experienced by so many state-run social engineering projects intended to improve the life of the poor.

His analysis of the dynamics of modern confrontations between the ruling authorities and a rebellious populace emerges from an intellectual odyssey which began in Southeast Asia; he has returned the same region in his most recent book, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009). He presented the bold argument that people who have taken refuge in mountainous areas in protest against state-imposed taxation and compulsory labor have established and maintained a flexible and adaptable society and culture designed to protect their

freedom and autonomy. This has already provoked much vigorous debate.

Scott obtained his Ph.D from Yale University in 1967. He was a professor at the University of Wisconsin until 1976, when he became a Professor of Political Science at Yale University; since 1991 he has also been Director of the Agrarian Studies Program at Yale. He has guided many of the younger generation in his field. His analysis of the relationship between rulers and ruled within a modern state has remained focused upon concepts such as subsistence, domination and resistance, the politics of daily life, and anarchism. His investigations of the values and worldview of people made vulnerable by their state of subordination has yielded profound insights, which have important interdisciplinary implications for the fields of anthropology, agrarian studies and history.

Scott's work has thus extended beyond its starting point in Southeast Asian regional studies and political science into other adjacent academic fields, and has excited these disciplines and stimulated many productive arguments. This contribution makes him a worthy recipient of the Academic Prize of the Fukuoka Prize.

His major books are *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (2017); *Decoding Subaltern Politics. Ideology, Disguise, and Resistance in Agrarian Politics* (2012); *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* (2012); *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009); *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998); *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990); *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985); *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (1979).

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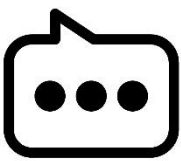

Preface to Turkish Collection of My Interviews

James C. Scott

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I am delighted that, thanks to Soner Torlak and Hayalci Hücre Publishing, my work will be available to Turkish readers.

The reasons for my delight are several. First, the work presented here represents, I believe, my writings since two earlier works, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Yale Press, 1990) and *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. (Yale Press, 1997) were translated.

Although I am a specialist in Southeast Asia, I am both surprised and gratified when my work seems to resonate with social scientists and historians elsewhere. Given the sophistication and size of the Turkish academic and intellectual establishment, the attention paid my work is especially gratifying. Time and again I have been very impressed with the Turkish graduate students coming to pursue a degree at Yale or for a postdoctoral fellowship; their level of conceptual sophistication, their breadth of reading, and their initiative and originality. Their performance speaks well of the training they have received.

My knowledge of Turkish history, let alone its current tempestuous political life, is deplorably slender. I delved into the 'modernist revolution'

under Ataturk insofar as it concerned he creation of permanent –usually Turkic—family patronyms. This was a process repeated as a form of statecraft nearly everywhere in the world but, in Turkey, it took place at lightning speed. (See "The Production of Legal Identities Proper to States: The Case of the Permanent Family Surname," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44:1, (2002). More recently, I have been developing an account of the origins of sedentary agriculture and he very earliest states in the Middle East in which the early, pre-historic settlements in Anatolia play an outsized role.

For these and other reasons I look forward to a closer engagement with the Turkish intellectual community in the near future and, in the meantime, with exchanging ideas via email. My one and only visit, on a family vacation to Turkey, was exceptionally memorable. We came, deliberately during the qualifying rounds of the 2002 FIFA World Cup when the Turkish population was hysterical with "football fever". It was infectious and we have still not entirely recovered from the euphoria that prevailed. Since that heady experience we have made a practice of vacationing every four years in during the qualifying rounds in a country that has a team in the competition.

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James Scott Interviewed by Alan Macfarlane
His Life, Education and First Books

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In this interview conducted by Alan Macfarlane, James C. Scott tells the story of his life, his education, the early thinkers who influenced him, how he became involved in political science and anthropology, how he came to write, and how he began to study peasant revolutions.[*]

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Born in New Jersey in 1936; father was a physician and he died when I was nine years old; there were three doctors in the town and the other two had been drafted into the armed services, but he was declared unfit as he had high blood pressure; he had a stroke in 1946; the effect on me was that we went from being relatively well-to-do to about the poorest people in the town; my mother came from a rather privileged background but had no resources, or sense of economy; I did not feel a sense of deprivation at all. I went to a small Quaker school but after my father died my mother couldn't afford to keep me there; I became the first scholarship pupil there - in return for working at weekends they waived my tuition fees; this school was my salvation, a surrogate mother and father to me, and I think that my academic achievements come in part from my desire to please my teachers; this school did things that a public

[*] For the two-part transcription of the interview on March 26, 2009, see http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/DO/filmshow/scott1_fast.htm and http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/DO/ filmshow/scott2_fast.htm; for the two-part video of the interview, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cWgtrg w7fs and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MP5bvOx4 pyM.

school couldn't have done; we had things like week-long work camps in Philadelphia where we would go to work with a black slum family, painting and plastering their house; we would go to dock worker meetings, Communist Party meetings, eat at settlement houses for people off the street, we would visit prisons, state mental institutions, so got a chance as twelve to fifteen year olds to see the underbelly of Philadelphia in a way that no Government school could have allowed; the Quakers had a lot of conscientious objectors at that time; they put in front of me every day people who had the capacity to stand up in a crowd of a hundred and be a minority of one; that kind of Quaker courage was infectious; I can stand up against a crowd but if you show me the instruments of torture I would betray anyone

Interest in subaltern studies comes from this experience; became a Quaker for a while but now lapsed; the Quaker doctrine of the light of God in every man and the history of Quaker social action, I admire; wrote a book 'Domination and the Arts of Resistance' which I dedicated to the school, Friends' School Moorestown, and dedicated my royalties to them as well as a mark of my gratitude; Alice Paul was one of eight key women in the struggle for women's suffrage in America, most of them Quakers, was a graduate of the school; the school created an award in her name and I was its first recipient; I have never been as proud of anything since

I did not know my mother's parents; the family had been socially prominent in Philadelphia two generations before my mother; their descendants appeared to have drunk themselves to death, so have completely died out; my mother's mother died in childbirth so she was adopted by an uncle and aunt; I heard fond stories about her uncle, but I never met him; a force in my life were my paternal grandparents; they were from West

Virginia, of Scottish-Welsh background; my grandmother was a classical Methodist striver for the success of all her children, with almost no money; my grandfather was a salesman to mining stores and could live anywhere in his territory; she decided they should live in Morgantown, they built a big brick house, and became a boarding house for junior professors at the University of West Virginia; all their five children went to that university; all her children disliked her but realized how responsible she was for their success in life; she had aspirations, at a later time she could have had a career of her own, but she wrote poetry and drove her children to distraction; I was the apple of her eye; she lived long enough to see me graduate for Williams College; I realized that it meant something to her for me to achieve some sort of academic excellence

I have an older brother who has had a working-class life; he went to another small Quaker school; though naturally left-handed they insisted that he write with his right hand, and this gave him a terrible speech defect which sapped his confidence; he didn't do well and ended up doing factory work; he was nine years older than I am, and fought in the Korean War; to show you the difference in our lives, he had not been in a plane in thirty years when I took him to Korea to visit the old battlefields; my mother had a problem with drink, and her background meant that she didn't have any skills; she had been completely dependent on my father and tried to commit suicide a month or so after his death; I did not know this at the time but I was sent to live with another uncle and aunt in West Virginia; I stayed with them for six weeks until my mother recovered; she managed to hold herself together and control her drinking until I went to college; at that point she more or less collapsed and was in and out of treatment; she died

when I was beginning graduate school; it certainly gave me the realization that women who didn't have an independent source of self-esteem and a skill were in trouble in terms of what they had to fall back on; it affected the idea of the kind of relationship I wanted to have; I know there are support groups for people who live in alcoholic families now, but there was nothing available to me; eventually I did what most people are advised to do in such situations; we would have crying and screaming confrontations, me trying to get her to give up drinking, all of which failed; after four or five years of this I realized that I could not change her behaviour and it was destroying me; I can remember withdrawing and seeing my mother as a sad victim, and with an objective eye, emotionally detached, myself; it saved me though it is not something I liked about myself

I was very close to my father; those were the days when doctors went around doing house calls; he had a red Roadster and took every opportunity to have me with him in the afternoons when I was out of school; I came to admire him; he was a bon vivant; he and my mother actually believed that the world is divided into large and small spirited people; one thing they bequeathed to me is an over-the-top large spiritedness; for all her alcoholism, my mother would have given away the house to the next beggar who came to the door; my father was an authoritarian personality as well; when my brother came back from his school knitting blankets for the poor Europeans after the Second World War, my father took him out of the Quaker school fearing he was going to become gay, and sent him to a military school; it was the worst possible thing he could have done for my brother; I can remember him treating a man for lip cancer; he saw the man on his tractor, smoking a pipe; father stopped the car and walked over

to him, climbed onto the tractor, took the pipe and broke it, and without saying a word walked back to the car

On hobbies: I was an avid stamp collector; my father was a supporter of Franklin Roosevelt, and out of loyalty to him I identified with the Democrat Party at an early age, and was actually involved in democratic politics; I had pork-barrel jobs working at the unemployment compensation; I actually had to work all the time; by the time I was eleven, my mother and I were loading lawnmowers into the back of the car and I was mowing people's lawns, doing their gardening, working for the Quaker school in the summer, working in the machine shop at nights on school days doing metal fittings; whenever it snowed, a friend and I would shovel snow; this pattern of working continued all the way through college; I came to agriculture and animal husbandry later, but I had earlier had experience picking corn and peaches etc., along with the Puerto Ricans who came to work in my part of New Jersey, where the land was very rich agricultural land; my mother had grown up on a farm outside the town; I did a lot of agricultural labour but it wasn't that that brought me to agriculture; I can't say that I enjoyed it but it was a necessary way of making money

Went to the Quaker school from second grade, at age seven, and stayed there until the end of high school; it was a tiny school; people that you have know from six until eighteen you know right down to the marrow of their bones; I know them a lot more than people I have been very close to as an adult; they know me too, and I find that very comforting; I avoid reunions, but the two times I have done so have been extremely satisfying in finding the essential persons behind all the wrinkles; have kept in touch with two or three, espe-

cially those who have had comparable lives; on the subject of higher education, I did not have a clue and nor did my mother; I happened to have a Latin teacher whom I liked and he had gone to Williams College; I decided to go there on account of him; the other alternative was to go to Haverford or Swarthmore which were closer, but I wanted to put as much distance between myself and my mother as possible and Williams gave me a scholarship; I don't regret having gone to Williams; I was an economics and political economy major and had the best small colleges economics faculty in the country; I got a fabulous education; I arrived thinking I was badly trained; my brother brought me to my first day of my freshman year and I realized I was completely inappropriately dressed; I remember sitting down in a room where people were talking about artists, writers and poets whom I didn't even know about; thought I was truly out of my league; remember calling my mother and saying that I would probably be home before Christmas; it was a rich kids' school and I was uncomfortable socially, also it was all men at the time; it took me about three years to decide I belonged intellectually and was doing rather well; here I might connect it to the reason why I am a South-East Asianist; I had an economics professor Emile Dupré, who set me the problem of why Germany, in the early years of the war, didn't run double or triple shifts in its factories; it happened to be after working night and day at Williams where I now felt I belonged, and I relaxed for the first time; I fell in love and ignored my senior thesis; I went to see the professor and he asked me what I had done; I tried to bamboozle him and he saw right through me; he told me to get out as I was not going to do an honours thesis with him; I realized I would have to find somebody else to adopt me; William Hollinger, who had

worked on Indonesia, said he wanted to know something about the economic development of Burma and that if I was prepared to work on it that he would adopt me; at that time I didn't know where Burma was, but I ended up doing an honours thesis on Burmese economic development; in the meantime I applied to Harvard Law School as I didn't know what I wanted to do, and was accepted there; then I won a Rotary fellowship to Burma so went to Burma for a year

At school I had piano lessons, but was not happy practising; I later took up the guitar, and am fond of listening to music but don't think I have a great deal of talent; I later took up pastel drawing, but envy people who at an early age either developed a musical or artistic skill; I do listen to music; my partner is a cellist, and I can listen to her playing Bach suites until the cows come home; my wife, who died twelve years ago, had a classical education and I was, I think, a civilization project of hers, and she was relatively successful; she brought me to opera, was an art historian and brought me to art; just living with her for thirty years or so was a kind of intellectual and artistic formation that was remarkable for me; I embraced all her enthusiasms and ended up becoming fond of the things that she was fond of; as a high school kid I was far too anxious about whether our family was going to sink financially or whether I would do all right at school; I was fond of sport, and was a goal keeper in soccer; as it was a Quaker school we did not play violent sports like American football; we had an undefeated basketball season and an, all but one game, undefeated soccer season; I continued to play basketball with my children; I am not particularly good at anything but tend to make up for it by persistence; I am now learning Burmese which I started at sixty-six; I am not a great language

student, but I find that sheer persistent application will get you any language

On religion, my father was a militant atheist; remember him seeing an elderly man dying of cancer; he would sit and talk with him for thirty minutes, trying to talk him out of his faith; it was a pleasant, even affectionate conversation, but my father didn't like the idea that this man was going to his grave with these illusions; my mother was an agnostic; however they did not have the courage of their convictions so insisted that I go to Sunday school somewhere, although not the Catholic church; I decided to go to the Presbyterian Sunday school; I actually liked singing; I then became an Episcopalian at a nearby church, and I got to know the Priest there and was fond of him; I was confirmed there, and became an altar boy; this continued for about two years; I was, thanks to the Quakers, completely taken up with Gandhi, and I asked at Sunday school whether Gandhi could go to the Episcopalian heaven; the doctrine then was that if you hadn't known about Jesus Christ you might have a chance to go to heaven; Gandhi knew about Jesus Christ and did not accept him as saviour, so therefore there was no place in the Episcopalian heaven for him; I walked out of the Sunday school with my friend; I was about fifteen at the time; I remained quite fond of the priest who didn't hold it against me, but that was the end of my being an Episcopalian; later, at the University of Wisconsin, I decided to join the Quaker meeting there; this lapsed, although I admire the Quaker social gospel; I don't have faith in any higher being; if I thought it important, I suppose I would be an atheist, but I don't much care about my lack of faith; I, don't admire Buddhism; I have seen it in action, and although I admire individual Buddhist figures, I see Burma on its back as a country;

Buddhists may do valuable things in orphanages, but the sense that Quaker social action creates civil society and the passion behind it, I don't see in Buddhism; I find it an extremely individualistic form of religion and somehow wonder whether a different kind of Buddhism could bring about more successful results; I spent a lot of time in wats and abbeys, as it is a great way of seeing the country and these people have connections, but I not taken as so many Westerners are by meditation and so on

At Williams I was always on the lookout for father figures; I was taken under the wing of two people in the political science department; one was Frederick Schumann who wrote a book on international relations, and whose nickname was Red Fred; I found his left wing politics very satisfying; I took attendance at his large lecture classes as part of my student duties for which I was paid; he got to know me as a poor scholarship student who did well, so took me under his wing; another professor, Robert Gaudino, who died young, took the Socratic method seriously; in tiny classes that were filled with intellectual tension, in which you were expected to be deeply engaged, I can remember them being rather frightening; he was a kind of small genius; I don't think much of Straussianism generally, but he as a teacher was quite remarkable; there was a Williams in India programme that was started after I left, which took Williams undergraduates to live in a village for six months; after about five years of this enormously successful programme it was realized that the Williams' students knew more about India than they did about their own country; out of this developed a Williams in America programme in which undergraduates would prepare to spend a semester living with ordinary workers, or in a public institution; a brilliant programme as

none of these students would be able to say something facile about such people as they would have experienced that life; when I came back from the year in Burma, I was a student political activist and worked for the National Student Association in Paris for a year; I was elected an officer for another year, and then I went to graduate school; at that point, in 1961, I knew some Burmese but knew I couldn't go to Burma as it had closed up; I had been in Rangoon and had got involved there in student politics with a number of minority groups; after three months I got a death threat put under my door; I lived in the old staff chummery at the University of Rangoon; the Rangoon University Students' Union was a hot-bed of politics, and as I am not brave in that way, within a week or so I moved to the University of Mandalay; I spent the rest of the year there working, initially on economic statistics; within a few months gave this up, and travelled the country, trying to learn Burmese; I feel that I bungled that year and the book that I have done now and the time I have spent in Burma, is an effort to do Burma justice; this is a theme of my life; my dissertation, 'Political Ideology in Malaysia', was not a good book though it pleased my professors; it did not please the specialists who knew about Malaysia, so 'Weapons of the Weak' was an effort to do Malaysia right after having bungled it the first time; Burma was my first time abroad and it was really hard; I lost about 30lb in the course of the year; it was an enchanting country and I would have been perfectly happy to devote the rest of my life to Burmese studies; if I had been able to study with the assurance that I could go to Burma that it probably what I would have done; my next choice was Chinese but I couldn't go to China; I then decided that if I studied Malay-Indonesian it gives you four countries as it is spoken, not only in

Malaysia and Indonesia, but in parts of the Philippines and Thailand as well; it was practical considerations like that which led me; I came to Yale to do graduate studies; I had been going to Harvard Law School but had postponed that for my year in Burma; after that year I realized I did not want to be a lawyer but wanted to be an economist; I applied to Yale economics department and they accepted me; then I had the chance to go to Paris; in the course of that year I realized that although I wanted to be an economist, Yale would want me to do a couple of years of advanced calculus; I had a chance to go to North Africa as part of a trade union delegation; I asked if I could do the calculus in connection with my first semester; James Tobin, who was Chairman then, said no; I appealed and he still said no; I asked if he would send all my things to the political science department to see if they would have me; they accepted me and I went to North Africa and became a political scientist rather than an economist; in Paris I was not a serious student but working for the students' union; it was a fabulous year, a kind of cosmopolitanization of Jim Scott; it gave me a familiarity with the huge international student community in Paris at the time; it also gave me an appropriately jaundiced view of political science which was then in the middle of its positivist, empiricist, moment of American political science though I was not aware of that at the time; I knew nothing about the behaviourist revolution and when I arrived at Yale this was complete news to me; I felt all these people were like Jesuits in the grip of a view of how intellectual progress could be made which I didn't share, but I needed to prove to them that I could master what they wanted me to master before feeling free to rebel; it took me about a year and a half before I was able to reject it.

Bob Lane was my thesis supervisor; he had had sixteen hour interviews with working class New Haven people about how they thought about politics; he had a kind of literary flair; I think his book was called 'Political Ideology' but it was a good book; I liked the technique of deep and searching interviews of that kind; I worked with high political civil servants in Malaysia; I interviewed some sixteen of them, each for several hours, and put together 'Political Ideology in Malaysia'; I think it was a good example of someone who wants to imitate his professor; the dissertation was highly thought of and immediately published but reviewed badly by and large; I realized I was easily flattered by people who were closest to my work and had no distance from it; I had the basis for a class action suit against political science for having bungled my education and mesmerized me in this way; I realized then that I did not want to do any work that was essentially based in a narrow, hyper-specialized, discipline; I then did some work on corruption and wrote a book called 'Comparative Political Corruption'; that was before the 'Moral Economy of the Peasant' which kind of launched me

I was following a minor American form of political science and filling in the grid created by somebody else, without a great deal of imagination; in the mean time, the effect of all of this, the year in Paris - I was married when I began graduate school, so the civilization project had begun to kick in - so by the time I finished my dissertation I partly knew that this was not what I might aspire to; that particular empiricist, positivist, political science, A.J. Ayer inspired, among others, produced work of survey research that doesn't hold up as being very distinguished any longer; I read Riesman and C. Wright Mills, and was particularly influ-

enced by the latter; my education begins, as someone who doesn't depend on the discipline so desperately, when I start to teach at Madison, Wisconsin, in 1967; I am a South-East Asianist, the Vietnam War is at its height, there are demonstrations every day at the university with tear gas etc., and I find myself teaching courses on the Vietnam War with 800 students; I taught with a friend who was a China specialist, Ed Friedman - we taught a course on peasant revolution; we would give a lecture and sixty or seventy students who thought we were insufficiently progressive, would go away after the lecture and write a rebuttal of our lecture which they would hand out to all the students at the next class; this continued for the whole semester and was quite extraordinary; I got into deep trouble as an anti-war person at Wisconsin, and there was a dean who wanted to get rid of me; I had gone to Wisconsin as I knew it had protected its people against McCarthy, and in the end it sort of saved me; at that point it seemed to be the most important thing I could do with my time, to understand peasant politics, peasant revolution and wars of national liberation; this was completely stimulated by the current political situation, but I was determined to make something seriously intellectual of it; Barrington Moore was at that point extremely important because he at least tried to understand these different routes to modernity and the way in which commercial agriculture was created and agrarian elite classes; Friedman and I wrote the introduction to a rather more recent edition of Barrington Moore's work; that was a point where my intellectual agenda was increasingly less dependent on political science; most of my colleague don't consider me to be a real political scientist, and if you ask people who didn't know what I was, most would say I was an anthropologist; I like the

idea of not being a member of any discipline

I was very much involved with anthropologists against the War; when I worked for the National Students Association it turned out, after I was elected to be International Vice-President, I was delivering some resolutions we had passed at our annual student meeting on Haiti and other places, in Washington; I was asked to go to a meeting with someone who turned out to be a CIA agent, who wanted me to write reports for them; at the time I don't think I was ideologically opposed to that but I refused; it turned out that during my period working for the National Student Association, all my reports were sent by the president, who had been recruited by the CIA, to them; I wasn't paid, but I was in effect a CIA agent; I had some sense of being a little cog in a machine I didn't much care for, so the idea that anthropologists should be involved in counter-insurgency - an issue that has come up again - it was clear to me that this must never happen; I knew some of the people - David Wilson and the Tribal Research Center in Thailand - so I was very heavily involved in this, and in the protests against Sam Huntington's ideas on relocation of people in Vietnam too; there were huge demonstrations at the Association of Asian Studies over Huntington's work, and I was very much a part of this; there were at least five or six years at Wisconsin devoted to intellectual work, both against the war in Vietnam and also practical speaking; I met Eric Wolf a couple of times but before meeting him, I met his wife Sydel Silverman; I think 'Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century' and his little book on 'Peasants' are excellent; if you look at my book that is coming out in September it starts out with Pierre Clastres' argument about people with history and people without, and it can be seen as homage to Eric Wolf; I think 'Europe and the People

without History' is a great book; I think he did an admirable job, taking the same political situation that I faced and doing a kind of scholarship that transcended just the particular moment

I have never met Sidney Mintz though I have read everything that he has written, I think; I recently taught his 'Sweetness and Power' - I run a programme on agrarian studies at Yale - Piers Vitebsky was just there, we have everybody and anybody who works on agrarian issues with the exception of Mintz; stayed at Wisconsin for eight years; a dean who had been head of the political science department, Leon Epstein, and within a month of my arrival we had almost all night full faculty meetings on the Vietnam War and the demonstrations on campus; he decided I was a dangerous radical and wanted to get rid of me; thanks to my friend Ed Friedman, who said I should act like a Jew and become the perfect colleague so that the only thing against me was my politics; suggested I read everybody's papers and go to every meeting; I did this and I got tenure there; when I was leaving (I had an offer from Yale), my chairman at Wisconsin asked me to let them respond; Leon Epstein was still dean, and my counteroffer from Wisconsin was my proposed Yale salary minus $100, so his hand was obvious to the very end; I was very happy at Wisconsin - it had an agricultural school, I was working on peasants, Madison was a magnificent community, so I would have been happy to stay there; I left it to my wife to decide, and all her relatives in the East wanted her to move; it was then that my farming career began as we moved into rural Connecticut and kept sheep and goats

When I went to Yale I was hired by political science; they had read the draft of 'Moral Economy of the Peasant' which was then in press and happened to have

money that was to be used for South-East Asia; I do not think I would have been hired had there not been this money; when I went to Wisconsin, anybody who worked on the Third World was considered to be appointable, but by 1976 when I went to Yale that was no longer true; the reason that 'Moral Economy of the Peasant' became known is because someone decided to devote another book to attacking it (Popkin's - 'The Rational Peasant'); I think my book read well because, like most of my books, there is one point that I hammer away at; 'Moral Economy' was an argument about rational choice, that the problem of peasants was the danger of going under and its consequences were catastrophic; as agriculturalists they choose different crops, planning schedules, soil conditions etc., and spread their bets in a series of prudent economic strategies; they don't maximize their yield in the way that modern capitalists would, but minimize the danger of going under; my argument was that they also had a whole series of social arrangements that do the same thing - about the sharing of harvests, the forced charity within the village so that big men have to distribute surpluses - so had a set of arrangements that were organized again, not to maximize production but minimize social danger to individuals in the community; these gradually broke down with capitalist markets and the colonial tax systems; historically, traditional governments were weak enough so they actually couldn't collect taxes very successfully in a bad year as peasants could resist them; in the colonial period you had cash taxes and fixed revenue demands that didn't fluctuate with the harvest; the result was even a small crop failure resulted in existential crisis for the peasantry; eventually I wanted to study peasant rebellion; everyone was concerned with those issues and the fact that Popkin wrote a book criti-

cizing my book meant that it was an ideal teaching vehicle for people who wanted to teach this conflict; my book begins with Tawney's metaphor of the peasantry situation being like a man up to his chin in water so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him; the title of my book was 'The Subsistence Ethic and Peasant Politics' or something like that; then I was convinced by having read 'Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' by Edward Thompson to use "moral economy" in the title; I think it was a mistake in the long run because it suggested to people who didn't read the book carefully that I had a series of altruistic peasants who were not operating rationally; underlined by Popkin calling his book 'The Rational Peasant'

Apart from Thompson, I admire Marc Bloch - very taken by the Annales school of a larger scale history what was not just a history of events; also A.V. Chayanov who was following the Austrian and German traditions of household budgets, work routines, and labour surveys, did these Zemstvo studies in Russia in the early twentieth-century that established the social organization of the household; he was the first person to absolutely establish a set of family cycle strategies, the consequences of having many children who can't get work, and the way the structure of the farm changes over time; thought he had developed an empirical basis of a solid kind under a series of speculations for the first time; I found it extremely useful in the 'Moral Economy'; I was often asked after publishing that book where I had done my fieldwork; in fact it was a library work, mainly on Burma and Vietnam; these were two places where there were rebellions and the object was to work up to these and explain them; by that time I had read a lot of anthropology about peasants, including Eric Wolf's work; I was convinced that, as most of the

world were peasants, then I would spend the rest of my life studying them; for this the only way to prevent writing some really stupid things is to know one place like the back of your hand so you can test generalizations against a real place; I have never been able to understand generalizations without seeing them working with real people; the most important book for me was 'Weapons of the Weak' which was written on the basis of two years in a village, and I had never worked so hard before or since; this was in Malaysia; I had what I thought then was a very clever idea, that I would do my fieldwork in the village, then go off and write a synopsis of my argument, and then I would come back to the village and speak this to villagers, then I would write down what they had to say; the last chapter of my book would be an early review by the villagers themselves; I did this, except that in the last four months where I was explaining what I thought I knew to people, they corrected me in so many ways that I was faced with the possibility of writing a rather stupid book and giving them all the intelligent things to say in the last chapter; I ended up abandoning this model and rewrote the book; I know people who write ethnographies of people who would both like to read them, and recognise themselves; it is the kind of anthropology to which I aspire; on Levi-Strauss's suggestion that the subjects could not see themselves in the way the researcher might, should ask why they don't recognise themselves; John Dunn has written a fine article on doing history and social science under realist assumptions which addresses the problem of the relationship of the subjects of social science to the description of their action that social scientists reach; I practice what John Dunn preaches

I had written about rebellions and since I am not a particularly brave person I decided that I would like to

do fieldwork in what was the biggest rice growing area of Malaysia, in the State of Kadah; Malaysian politics was not remotely revolutionary in that period, but rather like the 'Captain Swing' rebellions in the 1830's in England, they were introducing combine harvesters, people were losing their jobs, and there was conflict in the countryside; since it was possible to ensure there were no riots, there was a whole series of strategies of class contestation that took place below-the-radar; there was arson and sabotage, burning of crops and killing of animals, but also strategies of slanders, boycott of feasts; it occurred to me that for most people who were not living in open political systems in which they were free to organize and protest, that most of the class resistance in the world is this below the radar form, what I call everyday forms of resistance; my objective was, with slavery and serfdom and this situation, to try to understand a kind of politics which most people in modern, organized, democratic systems don't understand; that is the most common form of politics for subordinate groups, that is what got me into subaltern studies; it was rather pleasing to see it being taken up by people who had not particularly read the book; one of the dangers of a good title is that people can wave it as a wand without actually having read it very carefully; it travelled as a slogan pretty far and wide and I thought often traduced it; the thing that I am proudest about in that book is the really careful effort to work out Gramsci's idea of hegemony as it would work in a peasant setting like that; in Gramscian terms I was talking about a situation of domination so technically, in a sense, hegemony doesn't apply; what I wanted to show is that for an anthropologist or an historian, in situations of domination you get a surface of political conformity, consent and performance, in which the subalterns were

tugging their forelocks and producing the formulas expected of them; under such situations, what I call the public transcript, is organized by the effects of power to produce the appearance of hegemony, and that we must never necessarily take this as the establishment of hegemony unless we are able to recover, what I call, the hidden transcript - what subordinate groups say among themselves when they are outside the immediate effects of this power; I would be in situations where rich and poor villagers were together and everything would look like it was hegemonic, then I would be among rich people and there would be a different transcript as there were no poor to impress, and then I would spend time among the poor and after a long period of doing field labour with them I would get their view of things; I thought that social science meant triangulating in terms of ideological effects these three different transcripts; can be applied in many situations

On writing, when I am doing original composition I use a pencil and eraser and a block notebook; I probably write every sentence about three times; it is one of those things in which you have found a formula which you think works you are terrified to vary it from fear; I have continued to do this; I think that I write more slowly than anyone I know - eight or nine years generally between books - and I am working pretty hard in between; however, the advantage is that I work so hard the first time to get that sentence out; to plan - it will take me months until I am happy with the outline even before I start writing; it means that the revisions that I have to do are probably less catastrophic than they are for many people; my revisions tend to be fiddling here and there or actually dropping out or in whole chapters; I don't like to read my stuff again, I find my attention wanders, so I would rather work hard the first time to

try to get it right so I don't have to go back over my own prose; I think that cutting and pasting late on it is hard to keep the continuity and narrative drive you had the first time you were writing it; I think there are lots of ways to write successfully and I don't even recommend my way

In 1991 I had decided to work on peasants and started a programme on agrarian studies; when we moved from Madison to Connecticut we decided we either wanted to move right to the middle of the city or all the way out in the countryside as we did not want to live in the suburbs; I had always wanted to keep animals so got a few chickens, sheep and a goat; when I was about to go to Malaysia to do 'Weapons of the Weak', the farm across the street, of forty-six acres, and which we admired, came up for sale but we did not have the money; we went off to Malaysia and when we came back we found that the farm hadn't been sold and was being offered again at a much reduced price; we made a bid and bought it; it had a good barn and I decided I wanted to raise sheep; I learned how to shear - had about twenty-five sheep for about twenty years and did all my own shearing, sold the lambs to the Greeks and Italians; I put in good fences, and raising sheep does not take more than a half hour night and morning, with a month during lambing when you have to be around, a few days shearing, but I would have wasted that time doing something else; I find it really wonderful to have an activity every day which requires your body and arms, but leaves your head alone; you can just day-dream, think up ideas, I find it actually creative; I have changed my breed of sheep over time to one where I could minimize the number of lambs that I lost; for the last three years I only lost one lamb; I organized my flock for the health and survival of the lambs, not for

quantity; I wake up from bad dreams in which I have failed lambs rather than failed people

'Seeing Like a State', is a different sort of book from others that I have written; I ran the programme in agrarian studies for eighteen years from 1991 and this book was published in 1997; you could say that the book grew out of the seminar I gave myself in this programme; agrarian studies has an outside speaker every week so is pretty intensive; I also teach a course on the comparative study of agrarian societies with other faculty members - it is the biggest graduate course at Yale; we had an endless succession of people who were talking about development in the Third World, the history of Western agriculture, failed development projects etc.; over time, this idea of legibility - Ian Hacking gets into this a little bit - in which the state, in order to manipulate the society has to know it, and does so through statistics, cadastral surveys, the creation of a kind of legible society that can then be manipulated and be the object of policy changes; I tried to understand how forms of creating legibility also create rigidities and failed development projects; there are a couple of chapters in general about understanding legibility; there is the case of Lenin versus Luxemburg on the role of the vanguard party and how much can be directed from the centre; there is a study of Brasilia as a one-off city in the wilderness, and Jane Jacobs as the great critic of the high modernist city; then there is Julius Nyerere and Tanzanian villages, and a little bit on South-East Asia; then a couple of chapters on industrial agriculture, and another on knowledge that can't be learned from a book where I tried to work out where this kind of knowledge is more valuable than knowledge that can be codified; this is where Hayek and Michael Oakeshott get to be interesting.

Current book is about Burma but also Zomia; the argument of the book is that all people who live in the highlands are seen by lowland people as a primitive remnant, Thai's would say "our living ancestors"; my argument is that almost all these people in the hills, which were virtually empty until about 1500, have run away from state-making projects in the valleys; these are not people who were left behind but are people who are state-evading people, running away from taxes, forced labour, wars, epidemics etc.; they become ethnicised in the hills over time and their agriculture - swiddening etc. - is an effort to evade appropriation; everything about them which makes them look primitive, including their literacy - I argue that they had a literate minority at one time and rejected it as it suited them better to make up their genealogy and itinerary; I argue that all the things that make these people look primitive are, by and large, state evading strategies; that is why Piers Vitebsky's work on reindeer people, on non-state people who have tried to keep out of the way of the state, has become very interesting to me, including gipsies etc.; I think I have remained relatively faithful to the desire to work on the peasantry; what has surprised me is the anarchist turn that I have taken; the reason I taught a course on anarchism a couple of times in the last ten years is that I found myself saying things in class, and then reflecting that it was what an anarchist would say; it happened enough that I thought I should take it seriously; it was a great experience for me as once you announce such a course you get the undergraduate left; at Yale, I get all of them in my class, and I find them in many ways the most interesting, and I think they have educated me as much as I have them.

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Seeing Like a Society: Interview with James C. Scott

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Scott is one of the most profound critics of high-modernist human development planning. He believes that the process of state-building, leading to what he calls the legibility and standardization of society, fosters control and domination rather than enlightenment and freedom. Scott started his academic career studying small village communities in the forests of Malaysia. When he left the rain forest he took with him a number of vital observations on how nation states organize their society. His monumental book, Seeing Like A State (1998)[1], became the basis for a fundamental and elaborate critique of how governmental planning for the advancement of society can go utterly wrong: compulsory villages in Tanzania, scientific forestry in Prussia, high-modernist Brasilia, industrial agricultural planning in the USSR and its modern day variant the Millennium Development Goals. According to Scott, these are all examples of rational-utopian blueprint thinking that proved fatal. [*]

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Erik Gerritsen: *How did you reach the conclusion that society cannot be engineered?*

James C. Scott: During my research in South East Asia I was confronted with the dramatic failures of development projects. I found that successful rural communities were all but destroyed in the wake of well- intended development aid and I tried to understand the deeper causes of these failures. It occurred to me that in order to have ambitious plans for a society, to change it and intervene in any way at all, the state had to create a

[*] Archis 2008 #2, Seeing Like a Society Interview with James C. Scott, February 1, 2008 — by James C. Scott.

certain kind of society that could then be manipulated. It had to create citizens with identities. It had to create citizens with names that could be recorded, with matching addresses, put down in cadastral surveys. I found myself mesmerized by the fact that part of the struggle of state-making in early modern Europe was to create a legible society that could be understood before it was possible to intervene. And it also occurred to me that in the process of making society legible it changed it radically. They way early-modern states changed the society they governed is very much comparable to the way the World Bank is changing the Third World nowadays.

The example I give in the book is that of scientific forestry. This was a form of transforming the forest so it would produce a single product, neglecting everything else about the forest. It ended up creating a forest that violated the natural processes of forest regeneration. It was an abject failure, but not before becoming the world standard of scientific forestry. I was intrigued by that insight and tried to apply it to the well-intended planning fiasco of Brasilia and compulsory villagization in Tanzania in which seven million people were moved into villages that didn't work. Finally, I looked into the industrialization and collectivization policies of Soviet agriculture.

I worked out a critique of what I call high- modernist planning. That is, the nineteenth century ideology grounded in the believe that a scientific- technical trained elite could take responsibility for the social planning. The high-modernists claimed to know how parents should bathe their children, how they prepare their food and the design of their houses. The hubris of the high-modernist led them to believe in unitary and singular answers to all social problems and that solu-

tions to them could be either imposed on the public or a public could be persuaded that these schemes were in their own interest.

Since you published Seeing Like a State *in 1998, the world seems to have profoundly changed. Making society 'legible' through standardization has now been implemented on a global scale. Are we witnessing the building of another, higher level of state? A world state?*

In a way. The World Bank tries to control devel – opment processes in the Third World and by doing so is fundamentally changing those societies. This is comparable to what we saw in early modern Europe. The World Trade Organization, the IMF and the World Bank try to implant the institutions of North Atlantic liberal capitalism and liberal democracy throughout the rest of the world. Just look at the massive emphasis on the development of central banks, the creation of private property, the protection of intellectual property, the repatriation of profits, and also what I call 'cadasterization' and the collection of statistics according to UN-standards. The wonderfully accurate word they use for this development is harmonization.

It is all a magnificent piece of propaganda. Of course it means making sure that the institutions match one another and comply. What's interesting to me is that these institutions are the peculiar, odd, vernacular institutions of North Atlantic capitalism around the turn of the century. They are now traveling back to the Third World as a universal standard, being imposed by these large multinational institutions. The logic of their projects is that a businessman from, let's say, the Netherlands, can get off of a plane in Assuncion or Kinshasa and find a perfectly familiar world of institutions and structures. They are familiar because they are the insti-

tutions from the world which this businessman came from in the first place. We must never forget that these are vernacular institutions which represent themselves as universal, but they carry all the cultural baggage of their particular history.

These tendencies may point to an irreversible path towards the global village, very much along the lines I described in my book. Luckily, reality is more complex. For example, a World Bank program of rural development ends up being colonized by the counter-planning of thousands local farmers who find that the scheme doesn't quite serve their needs. They start deforming it and twist the grand scheme to suit them. Although there's no way they can resist this conditionality, the actual projects in the Third World often have very little resemblance to their original design. The sad part is that most of the deviation is a con sequence of a particular government's effort to increase its own power and project it into the countryside.

Another relevant development in this respect is the enormous increase in financial capital and the volume and pace of communication. These techniques make a kind of detailed control possible that was not possible earlier. But it also makes collective failures both instantaneous and widespread; we have just witnessed how the American sub-prime mortgage crisis was instantaneously ramified throughout the world. It seems that the speed and volume of things which can spin out of control is just as fast as the speed with which they are the subject of new forms of control.

From the state to the world to the city. What is your take on big city engineering and the extent to which planners and people can actually bring change to the city?

It happens that I teach in a city, New Haven, Connecticut, which has the highest per capita government grants for urban renewal in the entire United States. It implemented those plans to the point that they actually destroyed the city. In twenty years of urban planning they've moved people two and three times. New Haven is almost a test case of urban government planning gone bad. There was a saying in Victorian times 'three moves equal a death'. Once you pick people up from a neighborhood where they have roots and friends and routines, even if it's not the best neighborhood in the world, such a move comes at great social costs. If you move people several times, some react by not putting down roots at all because it's too painful to pull them up again.

Jane Jacobs wrote a brilliant book on this subject in 1961, The Death and Life of Great American Cities. She tried to work out the principles of a successful community: not a community created by urban planners, but a community that over time had created a successful neighborhood that was safe, prosperous and in which people wanted to stay. Jacobs introduced the concept 'un-slumming'. Rather than 'slum clearance' the way high-modernist would just bull – doze an area and rebuild it from the ground up, she saw the 'un-slumming' capacity of neighborhoods. She argued that if people were permitted to stay in an area where they wanted to stay and made sure there was a stable job environment and credits to improve their homes, this neighborhood would 'un-slum' itself. Unfortunately, most communities don't have the time for slow regeneration.

No city planner has ever created a successful neighborhood. Ever. The best a city planner can hope for is to identify the workings of successful neighborhoods

and to preserve them, rather than destroy them by getting in their way.

Your critique on the engineering of society has been judged as a plea for the free market. Yet you are a self-acclaimed anarchist. Could you explain?

Some consider Seeing Like a State a right-wing book because I had an occasional good word to say about people like Friedrich Hayek and Michael Oakeshott. My answer to that charge is that I'd like to write a book about the ways in which large capitalist firms rely on standardization in exactly the same way as do nation states. Take a look at McDonalds and their tools of management and control. The only difference with a nation state is that they have to make the standardization pay in terms of profit.

On the other hand, there are people who would like to pin me down on anarchism. I'm the kind of anarchist who is very impressed with the anarchist point about mutuality without hierarchy, about the accomplishments of very complex collective coordination over time without any state involvement. Take for example the creation of agricultural terraces all around South-East Asia. Personally, I live by what I once described to students as 'Scott's law of anarchist callisthenics'. The idea is that at some point in your life you're going to be called upon to break a big law and everything will depend on it. In order to be ready for that moment, you have to stay in shape. So I dedicate myself to breaking a law every day or two.

You are currently researching why the state has always been hostile towards non-sedentary people. To what extent can this be seen as a new chapter in research into the limits of social engineering?

States seem to be completely unequipped to deal with people who've chosen alternative lives. Whether the people in question were Berbers, Bedouins, gypsies or homeless, they interfered with the oldest state project sedentarization.

I had a student not so long ago who had broken his leg and decided he would use the time to live as a homeless person in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For two weeks he followed an elderly homeless person who collected things from dumpsters. My student was greatly impressed with life as an urban hunter-gatherer. The homeless man was not just a sad alcoholic living on the streets, but a man with unbelievable survival skills from whom you can learn a tremendous amount about the city.

If you're interested in successful social engineering, I guess you want to take this approach seriously. If you're in charge of urban services for the poor and homeless of a city, you ought to do something like this. Live on the street for a few weeks. And have everyone who works at your department do it as well.

You research, you write… and you farm sheep. What do they teach you?

Sheep are used as a metaphor for mindlessness and obedience. We talk about people being sheep if they do what they're told, behave in crowds and don't have any individuality. But anyone who has ever seen a wild sheep in action knows they are unbelievably individualistic by nature. We've been breeding sheep for 8000 years and selecting for docility. Now, having accomplished that, we have the nerve to insult sheep for becoming what we turned them into! We get the sheep we deserve!

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James Scott on Agriculture as Politics, the Dangers of Standardization and Not Being Governed

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How are agriculture or foot-dragging the core of the political? What if messy villages and myriads of local measures are rational? Can the well-intentioned state we take for granted as our point of departure be just as shortsighted as we are? Sometimes International Relations (IR) and political science more generally get challenged in unexpected ways. The work of James C. Scott, a Marxist inclined towards anarchism by conviction and something between agrarian specialist and political scientist in training, inspires many not only to reconsider what the realm of politics was about—but also makes resistance to state-driven schemes understandable—even for political scientists. As such, he helps political scientists seeing the state differently. In this comprehensive Talk, Scott—amongst others—gives an overview of his ideas on 'the political'; engages the politics of political science; and explains why despite globalization the state is still very much alive.[*]

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Theory Talk: *What is, according to you, the biggest current challenge or principal debate in politically oriented social sciences? What is your position or answer to this challenge / in this debate?*

James C. Scott: This is not a question I pose to myself often. About the only time I did was, however, some years ago. I don't know if you know about the Perestroika Movement in Political Science? Some time ago, an anonymous manifesto signed by Mr. Perestroika appeared. It started out with the observation that

[*] Theory Talk #38: James Scott, Saturday, May 15, 2010, James Scott on Agriculture as Politics, the Dangers of Standardization and Not Being Governed.

Benedict Anderson and I had never read the American Political Science Review, and it proceeded to ask why—arguing that perhaps this journal and the hegemonic organization that backed it were irrelevant and indeed inhibitive of progress. Now the Perestroika Movement connected with the European Post-Autistic Economics Movement, which propagates heterodox economics as a challenge to all-consuming mainstream neoclassical economics. I was on the Executive Council of the Political Science Association because they invited me as a result of the Perestroika insurgency, and that was the only time I got actively involved in trying to think about what political science ought to do. By and large, I do what I do and let the chips fall where they may; I prefer not to spend my time in the methodological trenches of the fights are swirling around me.

As you can see, I haven't thought deeply about how political science ought to be reformed; but I do believe that in political science, the people who do have pretentions to 'scientificity' are actually very busy learning more and more about less and less. There is an experimental turn in political science, consisting of people conducting what they call 'natural experiments' and that are carefully organized the way a psychology experiment would be organized, with control groups and so on. But the questions they ask are so extraordinarily narrow! They imagine that you answer as many of these questions as possible and you are slowly constructing a kind of indestructible edifice of social science, while I think all you have then is a pile of bricks that doesn't add up to anything.

I am actually more impressed by people who make modest progress on questions of obvious importance than people who make decisive progress on questions

that aren't usually worth even asking. I have always tried to focus my own work on the questions I saw as having an obvious importance, such as the origins of the state or the dynamics of power-relations, whether between the state and its population or in general. Two of my books (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance* and *Weapons of the Weak*), for instance, were efforts to understand power-relations in a micro-setting (rather than in a macro-setting). Today, we are interested in what the political conditions are of non-catastrophic macro-economic policy, and that indeed seems an important question to me. Not only social scientists, but laymen too, would recognize the difference between an important question and a trivial question.

How did you arrive at where you currently are in your thinking?

Before I began graduate school—a long time back—a friend of mine said: 'before you go to graduate school, you must read Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*.' I read it the summer before I went to graduate school, and I think it is, in some ways, the most important book I've ever read. The other book that greatly influenced me a great deal was E.P. Thomson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963)—I can actually remember the chair I sat in when I read the whole hefty 1000 pages. This book digs into the naissance of the working class consciousness in the same period that Polanyi zooms into to describe the disembedding of the economy from society. Another book that influenced me was Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels*, because he pointed to forms of social banditry as political phenomena and

should be understood as such in terms of methodology, where they are normally analyzed as something else.

Why do I like these scholars? They have taught me that it is an important contribution to the social sciences to bring in a novel concept that changes people's way of looking at things. You know these hand-held kaleidoscopes, that when you shake them, they change colors and show you a different world? All works that made an impact on me, had that effect on how I saw the world: if I look at the world through the kaleidoscope this author proposes, I see a fascinatingly different world, and understand things I didn't understand before.

Now in terms of real-world events that impacted me, the Vietnam War—going on while I took my first job working on South East Asia at the University of Wisconsin in 1967—was certainly one of them. I found myself in the midst of demonstrations and so forth, giving talks and lectures on that phenomenon. I also realized in that period, that I had done a boring dissertation, that sank without a trace. I decided about that time, that since peasants were the most numerous class in world history, it seemed to me that you could have a worthy life studying the peasantry. If development is about anything, it ought to be about peasant livelihoods and the improvement of peasant lives more generally. They also stand at the origins of wars of national liberation, as the Vietnam War was for the Vietnamese. My book *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* came directly out of the Vietnam War struggles—it was my effort to understand peasant rebellion.

What would a student need to become a skillful scholar or understand the world in a global way?

Here I have a definite opinion. We can assume, in the kind of trade-union sense of the word, that everyone who becomes a scholar is going to be trained in their specialties and disciplines, so I take that for granted. But what I'm fond of telling students these days, is that if 90% of your time is spent reading mainstream political science, sociology, anthropology, and if most of your time is spent talking to people who read the same stuff, then you are going to reproduce mainstream political science, sociology and anthropology. My idea is that if you were doing it right, at least half of the things that you should be reading would be things from outside of your discipline, as most interesting impulses come from the margins of a discipline or even externally. Interesting scholarship in social sciences arises when you see a foreign concept as applicable and adding something to your field. Now I give that advice as a theoretization of my practice. When I was working on *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, I read all the peasant novels I could get my hands on; all the oral histories; in short, as much as I could stuff from outside of political science. If you look at the works that have been influential historically, you can tell by the index or bibliography that the author has been reading a lot of things that are outside the normal range of standard, mainstream work.

But if you decide to do something broad and challenging, you'll face some difficulties and resistance from the established academic machine. Take Barrington Moore's *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, again one of those great works. This book was turned down six times by publishers, because specialists on each of the fields he covered had problems with the chapters about those subjects.

On the other hand: how important is it to publish articles? A colleague of mine reported how many people actually read academic articles—and the number on average was less then three. So the majority of article publishing is essentially a vast anti-politics machinery put together to help people get tenure, and that holds even for peer-reviewed articles. Professional advancement depends increasingly on a kind of audit system for number of peer-reviewed articles et cetera, a kind of mechanical system that is an anti-politics machine, an effort to avoid making qualitative judgments about how good something is. It is something particularly common to democracies, where you have to convince people you are objective, you're not playing favors, there are no qualitative judgments, and it's just comparing the numbers. So**,** if you are producing an article, and it's going to be read by three people, then why are you doing this in the first place? You should find another line of work, where you have a little impact on the world. If you're doing it to please the discipline looking over your shoulder, it's going to be alienated labor, and I fully grant it is more difficult to make your way if you want to do it otherwise. It's easy for me to say, because I came along at a time when there was this romance about the third world—anything on the third world was likely to get published. So I am conscious of the fact that life was easier for me than it is for students today. But on the other hand: unless you prefer a clerical nine-to-five job in which you put in your hours, you might as well be doing something exciting even if it's harder to sell.

You are an agrarian by training; yet all of your texts are decisively political. What's so political about agri-

culture? And what are the policy implications for state-making and development in the 3rd world?

This came to me in the middle of the Vietnam Wars, as people were fighting wars of national liberation. At that point, people began to see for the first time the Vietnamese peasant, the Algerian peasant, the Mexican peasant, as the carrier of the national soul. While it may have been incorrect, the idea was that the peasant as the ordinary Vietnamese stood for the Vietnamese nation in some way. That brought me to agriculture: if you wanted to understand insurrections in Vietnam, you had to understand peasants; and if you wanted to understand peasants, you had to understand things like land tenure, crops, and so forth. It has gone so far that I started out with political violence thirty-some years ago, and now I am studying the domestication of plants and animals!

I think that as the major way of sustenance, as the major resource over which people struggle—questions of land and irrigation water and food supply and famine—are at the very center of the history of political struggles. They are the elementary version of politics and that's why it seems to me that a concern with such issues as farming is directly and immediately a concern with politics.

Back to the 'modern, developed world': in Western Europe and the US, the agricultural section makes up typically 5% of the population. Yet they tend to be heavily overrepresented politically in respect to their demographic weight in many respects because of questions of rural policy, political districting, subsidies… Smallholders and petty bourgeoisie are very important for right-wing parties. They are protected and subsidized to a point where surpluses accumulate and we

actually make it difficult for the Third World to export. In a truly neoclassical world, we wouldn't be subsidizing agriculture and we'd be getting most of our agricultural supplies from poor countries on the periphery of Europe and Latin America. Even in a place like India, which is industrializing and urbanizing rapidly, the fact is that the rural population and the people that live off of agriculture and related activities has never been higher than it is today—even though the proportion is declining, the population is growing at such a rate that this tendency can be marked.

Your book Seeing Like a State *focuses on legibility and standardization efforts for purposes of taxation and political order. Do you see the same principle hold for the establishment of commodities and markets and are the same 'interests' involved, or does the market philosophy require different inscriptions? In other words, what is the difference between legibility for commercial and state purposes, and, in the end, between market power and state power?*

It seems to me that large-scale exchange and trade in any commodities at all require a certain level of standardization. Cronon's book *Nature's Metropolis*, which is a kind of ecological history of Chicago, has a chapter on the futures market for grain. There exists a tremendous natural variety in the kind of corn, soya and wheat that were grown, but they all have to be sorted into two or three grades in the great granaries, and to be shipped abroad in huge cargo ships–the impetus to standardize in the granaries found its way back to the landscape and diversity of the surroundings of Chicago, reducing the entire region to monocropping.

It's the same principle at work as I describe in *Seeing Like a State* with regards to the *Normalbaum* in German scientific forestry. Agricultural commodities become standardized as they move and bulk in international trade. If you build a McDonalds or Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise, they tell you architecturally exactly how to construct it, you have to buy the equipment that is standardized, it all has to be placed in the same relationship to the other things in the floor plan, so it's all worked out in detail, and it is worked out in such detail to produce a standardized burger or standardized fried chicken. And because it is standardized, the person who comes from the corporate headquarters can come with a kind of checklist in which every place is more or less the same, and they can check on cleanliness, quality, productivity and conformity to the corporate standard. This is the kind of control over distance that is required for industrial purposes. In the end, what is the assembly line? It is an effort to standardize the unit of labor power. The processes are not so different for grain production, burgers, or cars—as are the effects on diversity. Contract farming is then an instance to adapt agriculture to post-Fordist conditions with a higher emphasis on demand.

You can be labeled as a critic of the modernizing project inherent in states. Can you give an example of a contemporary form of governing you do endorse or would promote?

The degree to which a planning process is inflected at every level by democratic processes—for all the messiness that it introduces—seems to me to lead in the long run to more satisfactory outcomes for everybody concerned, and it also results in the kind of commitment to the results in which people felt that they

had an adequate part in shaping. Examples are rife of successfully designed plans thought up from above, that fail because the people for whom this planning was designed, have had no stake in it. I don't want to get rid of the modernization project, I just want to tame the rule of experts.

I remember that I was in Berlin at the Wissenschaftskolleg, and there was a woman**,**Barbara Lane, there who was an architectural historian. We went to a housing area, where two types of *Seidlungen* or housing were to be found together: Bauhaus housings and a competing housing project by National Socialist architects. It was interesting to me, that the Bauhaus architects had figured out exactly how many square meters people needed, how much water they needed, how much sunlight, playground space… They had planned for an abstract human being; and the architecture could have been executed anywhere in the world. Whereas the Nazi architects had build genuine homes, with little chimneys, small front steps in brick—all these references to vernacular architecture that was part of the German cultural tradition. I realized that in a sense, the international aspiration of the Bauhaus school was to be placeless and universal, as IKEA does now. I found myself a little embarrassed that I would rather have lived in a dwelling designed by the Nazis than a Bauhaus home, but it does illustrate my point of governing: how is it executed? With what level of ambition in mind?

In that vein, your work is cited as a big inspiration to something called resistance studies, which aim to promote the interests of the subaltern/repressed, exactly those who you give a voice, face, and comprehensi-

ble outlook. What is your take on such emancipatory resistance studies?

All I have done in books such as *Weapons of the Weak* is to consider behavior we commonly label 'apolitical' or 'irrational' as forms of politics that were previously not given the dignity of considering them consciously political. For most of the world most of the time, the possibility of publicly assembling, creating organizations, having demonstrations, creating open democratic processes simply does not exist. The late (great) Charles Tilly and I disagreed about this. For him to consider something a political movement it had to have a durable public presence and have large public goals. I, on the other hand, tried to identify a zone of political action where it was considered inexistent before. About all these situations in which a formal and restricted definition of politics does not apply, I simply asked the question: 'What happens if we consider this politics?' And in fact foot-dragging, not complying, and other such tactics that people deploy when faced with brutal or authoritarian power, are often the only political tools available for the most of the world's population for most of the world's history.

It is powerful institutions that have most to conceal about the operations of power and about how the world actually works. I thought that the emancipatory potential of social science was actually simply doing your work honestly, showing how things really operate, that this would always have a subversive effect because it was the powerful institutions that had the most to hide and conceal. Good social science, I thought, would by its nature be emancipatory and have a kind of resistance function. I have less confidence nowadays about the motives of people who want to unearth how things

work; they bring their own powerful prejudices to bear, and their motives are not always motives I find worthy.

How important is Marxism for you in explaining how the world works?

When I used to be asked about my relation to Marxism I used to say that I'm a crude Marxist, with the emphasis on 'crude', in the sense that I look at the material basis of any political struggle, and I think class and material basis are the best points of departure for analysis. And what I add to that—and that's why I was so taken with Karl Polanyi's *Great Transformation*—is that it seems to me a powerful argument about the way the economy was embedded historically in other social relations and could not be extracted from it until the early 19th century when the *laissez-faire* ideology was elaborated. The struggle that Polanyi points to is a struggle that we're still engaged in, and certainly after the Washington Consensus we're going to have to invent forms of social protection of the kind Polanyi talked about. Whether we call them socialism or not, it is the kind of self-defense of people's life chances and subsistence. How to protect ordinary human beings against market excesses is a classical socialist question still very much to the fore.

In a strange way, I find myself nostalgic for the Cold War, in two senses. First, I think you could argue, as my colleague Roger Smith argued, if you want to understand the success of the civil rights movement in the US, one major reason during the Kennedy era was the fact that the US was losing the Cold War in part—they thought—because of the fact that we were a racist society. So winning the Cold War became premised upon reforms I fully endorsed, to make society more equita-

ble. Secondly, when it was a bipolar world, the US and the West were interested in land reform in places where the land distribution was wildly unequal. After 1989, the IMF and the World Bank have never talked about land reform again.

So while the mechanical teleological Marxist class struggle discourse has simply been proven wrong historically, the Polanyi kind of socialist questions are all alive and well.

In your latest book, you argue that we're witnessing a definitive expansion and entrenchment of the nation-state over the globe, a sort of final enclosure and you mention liberal political economy as a constraint on high modernist aspirations that can lead to catastrophe. But according to many contemporary observers, this would be contested, with rather the market expanding excessively, which ought to be curbed by states.

I note somewhere in *Seeing like a state* that the French trade unions were defending social security and the safety net in France against a set of liberal policies of the IMF and the World Bank, and in that respect, the nation-state was one of the few obstacles against markets. Henry Bernstein reminds me every time I argue against the state that it is the only institution that stands between the global liberal economy and the individual or the family.

But in most of the world, the third world anyway, the effective leaver of the world economy has been the state; and often, it is the state that is then checked by a liberal appeal to private space which the expansive state cannot appropriate and regulate.

We might agree that the more truly democratic a state is, which means minimizing the distortion of

structural advantages in the accumulation of wealth and property, the degree to which those distortions of wealth, power and property are curbed by the state, indicate the extent to which a state can become something that restrains the completely unimpeded operation of the market. The only state that is likely in the long run to serve as a vehicle for the self-protection of citizens against market failures is a democratic system that is open enough and that negates, mediates or minimizes the structural advantages of concentrations of power, property and wealth.

What is neoliberalism in your definition?

In a sense, the pervasiveness of neoliberal ways of talking has the effect of turning people into calculators of advantages. There is this book, *Everything I learned aboutlove I learned in business school*, and it's about 'cutting your losses', about having a 'mission statement', about 'measuring performance'… In a curious way, in terms of classical political economy, Hobbes thought we needed a state to restrain our appetites, and it may be that the neoliberal state has so colonized our way of decision-making (stimulating our appetites), that the neoliberal state has in fact created the human actor that now *does* have to be restrained by the state.

In your last book, The Art of Not Being Governed, *your focus is on places and peoples in South-East Asia that were reluctant to be incorporated into the nation-state system. It is a historical book; does it, despite of that, have any lessons for the present?*

Next to what I mentioned earlier about recognizing the choice not to be incorporated into the state as a consciously evasive political choice, I would argue that since the Second World War, these place have been

incorporated into the nation-state, albeit not everywhere and unevenly. We need to invent ways of association and cooperation across state boundaries and forms of limited sovereignty like Catalonia. The only alternative today is somehow taming this nation-state, because it can't be held at bay—it is increasingly usurping these frontier regions—the movie Avatar, which pretends you *can* burn bridges and keep 'modernity' away is simply utopian. So I think the task for indigenous peoples is to somehow slow down and domesticate the advance of the nation-state in ways that will make their absorption more humane.

You stated earlier you are a 'crude Marxist', yet in your recent book you adopt a constructionist take on collective identity, by showing how easily social formations can change. If the material basis is so important, what do you mean with constructionism?

The number of things that can function as markers of distinctive identities. If you think about the potential commonalities that groups of people share, any one or any combination of these commonalities can be made the basis for an identity. In South-East Asia, some people bur**y** their dead in jars; they can choose to take that as aboundary sign confirming some sort of group identity; then, all of a sudden, social mobilization occurs on the basis of the way in which the dead are buried—those who bury them in jars *versus* those who don't. The question is always: which of these almost endless series of cultural or economic features are the bases for social mobilization? There are material conditions; if in fact a whole series of small landholders all find themselves subject to the same conditions of debt and if there's an economic crisis and they're all losing their land at the same time, then it is likely that this kind of pain will crystallize itself as a peasant movement for the reduction of debt. The same goes, of course, for

mobilizing French farmers who suffer from the same European regulations; whereas they support different local soccer teams and as such have little in common, when a new regulation targets their industry, they'll mobilize around that material fact. On the other hand, you can get poor farmers in Michigan, as in the Michigan militias, who decide to mobilize around the fact that the government is the enemy of poor white people.

It seems to me that some features are more likely to serve as the point of crystallization around which group identities will rally, but there is no way of predicting which one it will be in a given situation.

Your last book in a way makes an argument similar to that of Rousseau, namely, that outside the state, there is not anarchy but also—and consciously different—political order. What do you think of the philosophical idea of the 'state of nature', which by realists in international relations is extrapolated into the unsafe anarchy that 'surrounds' states?

My answer would be a historical one. The state, or centralized political organization, has been with us for the last 4000 years. Even when this state was not all-pervasive or all-powerful everywhere, it was always there. So even if certain spaces or people were 'outside' the state—in the so-called state of nature—they always coexisted with the state and interacted with it dialectically. So saying that there are people living inside and with the state, and others outside and without it, and that supposedly they will behave completely different, is a difficult hypothetical. I have, for instance, the idea that life was *not* 'brutish, nasty and short' outside of the state as Hobbes argued, partly because the population levels were so low that the way of dealing with conflict was simply moving out of the way. A lot of the things people struggled and died over, were essentially com-

modities. So if by the state of nature we mean people living outside the state in a world in which states already exist so they are at the periphery of states, then this is a completely different thing. We know, for instance, that pastoralism is in fact always organized in order to trade with agrarian states; it is not some previous form of subsistence that is superseded by agriculture. Another example: in the 9th century the people in Borneo were considered to be very backward and they were a typical example of a hunting and gathering society. What were they gathering? Certain kinds of feathers and resins and the gall bladders of monkeys, all stuff hugely valuable in *China* at the time! So they were gathering these things for international trade with an already existing state; their hunting and gathering is a hunting and gathering performed in the shadow of states. So which 'state of nature' are we referring to? When Rousseau speaks of the savages he has met, he sees people that strategically respond to representatives of an organized state, pursuing their interests and behaving politically. So the concept, perhaps, hides more than it reveals.

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James Scott is Professor of Political Science and Professor of Anthropology at Yale and is Director of the Agrarian Studies Program. His research concerns political economy, comparative agrarian societies, theories of hegemony and resistance, peasant politics, revolution, Southeast Asia, theories of class relations and anarchism.

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Points of Resistance and Departure: An Interview with James C. Scott

James C. Scott is among the foremost experts on the struggles of subaltern people in Southeast Asia and throughout the world. He is the Sterling Professor of Political Science and Professor of Anthropology as well as the Director of the Agrarian Studies Program at Yale University. Scott's books have included The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*(1977);* Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*(1987);* Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*(1992);* Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Better the Human Condition Have Failed*(1999); and* The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia *(2009). In this interview, Scott discusses his own political development, elaborates on some of the major contributions of his work, and offers significant insights into understanding the intricacies of recent worldwide struggles. This interview was conducted in New Haven, Connecticut by Benjamin Holtzman and Craig Hughes in July 2010.*[*]

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Benjamin Holtzman and Craig Hughes: *Can you discuss your upbringing, particularly with respect to how your earlier years may have contributed to your political beliefs and research interests?*

James C. Scott: I was sent to a Quaker school and it had a huge impact on me. I don't think I noticed it at the time. But people in this Quaker school had been conscientious objectors during the Second World War.

[*] Points of Resistance and Departure: An interview with James C. Scott, by Benjamin Holtzman and Craig Hughes.

These people were still alive and kicking. And they had paid a heavy price for their opposition. I'm sure at the time I didn't agree with them at all. But I was faced with people who would stand up in a crowd of a hundred and be a minority of one. It made a deep impression on me. They made me the kind of person I am, actually. It wasn't in me to begin with.

The Quakers also had these weeklong work camps in Philadelphia. Those were the days were we would work with a black family for a day or two, repainting their apartment. We went to Moyamensing prison for part of the day. We went to Byberry, the state mental institution. We ate in settlement houses. We went to communist dockworker meetings. We went to mission churches. We went to see Father Devine, a charismatic black leader who fed the homeless.

I grew up in New Jersey, maybe 15 miles from Philadelphia, and the Quakers showed me a part of Philadelphia and its underclass that I never would have seen – that most people didn't see. They did this without any particular preaching. They also held a weeklong work camp in Washington, DC. And this was in 1955, the height of the Cold War. All the people who had come from little Quaker schools (there probably were about twenty of us) marched into the Soviet Embassy to talk about peace. We were being filmed, by the FBI I presume, from the house across the street. We met with people like the Marxist author William Hinton, who wrote *Fanshen*,[1] and became acquainted with a kind of political fringe internationally. I never would have done

[1] William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (Republished many times, most recently by Monthly Review Press, 2008).

this without the Quakers. There was a kind of intrepid bravery: go anywhere, talk to anyone.

The Quaker belief in "the light of god in every man" led them to a social gospel vision that made a big impact on me. My book, *Domination and Arts of Resistance* is actually dedicated to Moorestown Friends' School, which was the tiny Quaker school that I attended. I was part of its biggest class in history, which was comprised of 39 people.

Later, my colleague Ed Friedman played a big role in my political education when I was at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. We were teaching this course on peasant revolution and Ed said, "once the revolution becomes a state, it becomes my enemy." What's striking is that every successful progressive revolution has tended to produce a state that's even more tenacious and oppressive than the one it replaced. The results of revolution make pretty melancholy reading when you consider how they've created stronger and more oppressive states.

Long ago, when people would ask, I would always tell them that I was "a crude Marxist" with the emphasis on "crude." By that, I meant that the first questions I would ask would be about the material base. These questions don't get you all the way, but you want to start there. When I was working on *Weapons of the Weak* and beginning to work on *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, I would find myself saying something and then, in my mind, I would say to myself, "that sounds like what an anarchist would say." And it happened with enough frequency I decided that I needed to teach a course on anarchism.

Through the process, I learned a tremendous amount. I also realized the degree to which I took a certain distance from anarchism. A lot of the anarchists believed that the technological advances of science were such that we wouldn't need politics anymore – that everything could become a matter of administration. Giving a course on anarchism without writing specifically about anarchism helped me figure out where I belonged. *Anarchist Fragments,* a book I'm working on now, is an effort to refine that a little bit.

How did you become interested in studying what you refer to as the "infrapolitics" of powerless groups?

I had this book, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant,* and people used to ask me where I did my fieldwork. I had to tell them that I hadn't done any. I didn't do fieldwork. I had done archival work. This was way back in Madison, when I was studying wars of peasant liberation. I had read so many things that I admired but realized that I knew very little about any particular peasantry. So I decided that I wanted to study one peasantry so well that I knew it like the back of my hand. Afterward, whenever I was tempted to make a generalization, I would know enough about a particular peasantry to ask "does it make sense here?"

One of the contributions of *Weapons of the Weak* was to take things like Gramsci's idea of hegemony and to try to figure out how it would actually work on the ground in a small community. I've never been able to understand abstractions very well unless I could see them operate. So I spent two years in this village. It was completely formative. People were not murdering one another and the militia was not coming in and beating up peasants. Nevertheless, there was this low-level

conflict that I didn't quite know how to make sense of. Although there was a lot of politics going on, it was nothing that someone like the late social movement theorist Charles Tilly would have recognized. There was no banner, there was no formal organization, and there was no social movement in the conventional sense.

It became clear to me that this kind of politics was the politics that most people historically lived. "Infrapolitics" tries to capture what goes on in systems in which people aren't free to organize openly. This is politics for those that have no other alternatives. It's no big news to historians, I don't think. Eric Hobsbawm noted a similar thing in his book *Primitive Rebels*. But for political scientists who study the formal political system, I thought it ought to be news. In any organization and in any department, this kind of politics is going on all the time. We learn a lot by realizing that politics doesn't stop once we leave the realm of formal organizations and manifestos.

Prior to Weapons of the Weak, *most writing on peasant resistance had focused almost entirely on large-scale, organized protest movements. As you note, however, "subordinate classes ... have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity." You therefore called attention to the "ordinary weapons" used by poor and powerless groups to resist the rich and powerful. What are these "weapons of the weak" and what effects can they have?*

Between 1650 and 1850, poaching was the most common crime in England in terms of frequency and in terms of how much it was loathed. However, there was never a banner that said "the woods are ours." And

there were no efforts to reform the crown or curtail aristocratic rights to woodland. Nevertheless, ordinary villagers and peasantry took rabbits, firewood, and fish from this property even though there are all these laws to prevent them. If you stepped back from this and widened the lens even a little bit, you could see that this was a formative struggle over property rights. It was conducted not at the level of Parliament or formal politics but at the level of the everyday.

One of Marx's earlier essays concerns the theft of wood in the Rhineland. He pointed out how, when employment rates decreased, prosecutions for taking firewood from the crown lands increased. One of the reasons that people have difficulty seeing these acts as a kind of politics is because they're based on theft. The thief gets to have rabbit stew and it doesn't look like a collective act of resistance. It looks like "I'd like rabbit stew tonight, thank you very much. I'll just take my rabbit and run." But when you put it all together, you realize that – for decades – no one can get villagers to give evidence against one another. No prosecutions are brought because those in power can't get anyone to testify. Meanwhile, the game wardens are systematically killed or intimidated and frightened.

Even though it's hard to get all the details, it's clear that there's a collective conspiracy of silence, that the whole pattern relies on tacit cooperation and shared norms and values. And so, if it's just stealing a rabbit, it doesn't count. But if you can show that there's a normative belief that prevents aristocrats from calling woods and fish and rabbits their property, and you can establish that these norms enable a corresponding pattern of violating aristocratic claims in the popular cul-

ture, then you put your hands on something extremely political that never speaks its name.

The job of peasants is to stay out of the archives. When you find the peasants in the archives, it means that something has gone terribly wrong. Their resistance is more like a desertion than a mutiny, which is a public confrontation with political power. It's the difference between squatting and a public land invasion with banners. What's important analytically is that all of this activity is politics and, if we don't pay attention to the realm of infrapolitics, then we miss how most people struggle over property, work, labour, and their day.

The peasants of the Malaysian village you studied for *Weapons of the Weak* faced proletarianization and a loss of access to work and income. Nevertheless, as you describe it, there were "no riots, no demonstrations, no arson, no organized social banditry, no open violence," and no organized political movements. The absence of these conditions seems to confirm many of Gramsci's conclusions about hegemony. However, by examining what was taking place beneath the surface of village life, your analysis complicates how Gramscians have depicted the capacity of those in power to shape the actions and beliefs of subordinates.

I've been accused – with some justice – of misusing the word hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony requires a kind of liberal political order of citizenship and elections. In contrast, domination applies to the non-democratic political systems. Strictly speaking then, the situation I described in Malaysia is domination, because there wasn't a parliamentary system in any real sense of the word. What I tried to figure out was how hegemony

and domination worked in a situation like that. How did the poor and disadvantaged of the village create a kind of discourse that was not known among the rich, and how did this create a way of talking about things, a set of reputations, and a set of norms about what decent people do? Although there was nothing grandiose about them, these practices served as a sort of criticism of the existing order.

What I try to establish is that there was a kind of community discourse and practice among the village poor that could enable connection to a larger scale social movement. From there, village concerns could connect with other people who shared similar sources of pain and worry and similar values. Even today, there's a kind of opposition to the ruling party in Malaysia that's based in just that kind of populist dislike of the Malay landed elites.

Many on the radical Left believe that the working class must be "conscious" in order to struggle successfully. Consequently, their strategies emphasize building "class consciousness." How do forms of everyday resistance like the ones you've described complicate this picture?

In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson argued that consciousness is an *effect* of struggle rather than a *cause* of struggle. It's not about a working class that develops its consciousness and then looks around ruling classes to beat up on. In the course of struggle, people develop consciousness. If there's any mistake that the intelligentsia makes, it's to vastly overstate the force of ideas as ideas. In contrast, Thompson highlighted how ideas – when they are

grounded in actual struggle – have a kind of force behind them.

I don't know if you know the village of Chambon in France that saved 6.000 Jews in the Second World War. Because it was a Huguenot village, they knew something about persecution historically. So they were sympathetic. The two pastors in this village went around trying to organize the village so that it would save Jews who were fleeing persecution.

The two pastors were arrested for their efforts and sent to a concentration camp but their wives took up the effort to save Jews. The two women went from house to house, farm to farm, and said: "there are Jews who are going to be coming. They're on the lam, they're persecuted. Would you take in a Jewish family and hide them in your barn? Would you take in a Jewish kid and pretend they're your child?" And people said, "I've got nothing against Jews, I'd like to save them, but I've got a wife and family and once they find out that I'm doing this, they're going to take us all away and kill us. I can't risk my family, so good luck to you. I'm sympathetic but I can't risk this."

But the Jews actually came. And the pastor's wives found that when they came with an elderly, shivering Jewish man without an overcoat and said, "would you feed this man a meal and have him stay in your barn," the response was totally different. When the villagers had to look a real human being in the face, they couldn't say no. Most of them said, "yeah, I'll do that," reluctantly. After they did that once or twice, they became committed to saving Jews for the rest of the war. They weren't moved at the level of ideas but, when they were faced with a concrete situation, most of them

were unwilling to turn their backs. The ideas didn't work. But the practical situation did.

You've noted that – for most of the world – public assembly, forming political organizations, and democratically challenging the state are essentially impossible and that actions like foot-dragging and pilfering should be seen as "political" because they are the only means by which people can engage in political acts. But what about contexts like the present-day United States, Canada, and other representative democracies? Can we read the worker who spits in the food at a fast food place, or the refusal to vote, or the worker who punches in her colleague's time card in the same way?

Frances Fox Piven, Richard Cloward, and John Zerzan make an argument that I'm quasi-sympathetic to. I think Piven and Cloward make it about truancy from school: increasing rates of truancy tell us something about the confidence and normative power of the institution. Pissing in the soup does the same. As a social scientist, I can't presume to know what's going through someone's mind when they spit in the hamburger. Maybe it was a bad day and the dog bit them or their lover smashed up their car. Only the person knows. And so these things aren't of interest to me until they become a kind of shared culture. Even if it's only at one McDonald's franchise where people are looking back and forth at one another and then spitting in the burgers – at that point, there's a certain shared, public, normative, subaltern contempt that is a real thing in the world. Or when people give their boss the finger when he turns his back and chuckle to one another.

It's a real thing in the world. For people who are interested in politics, it's something we can tap into

should the occasion arise. Twenty years ago, there was this famous Italian restaurant in New Haven. It was very popular and the wait staff could make a lot in tips. The two brothers who ran it often demanded sexual favours from the women who waited there. In exchange, the women would be given the best stations and make a lot of money. Most women played ball. There was this culture among all the waitresses who knew these two brothers were vicious. Some played ball and some didn't. Those who didn't and had an attitude were fired.

One evening a waitress who had previously played ball but was no longer desirable to the brothers and no longer got the best stations was delivering a pile of food to her table. It was very early in the dining hours. One of the brothers said, "put that down and do this." And she said, "I'll just deliver it first" or something like that. And he said "no, you cunt. Put it down and do what I told you." And she – you have to read this long history into it – she just dropped the whole tray on the floor and went back to the kitchen and huddled with the other waitresses who all hated these brothers. Within five minutes, they were all outside picketing the restaurant. And then they went looking for a trade union organizer who would represent them.

Because they had waited at the restaurant for a long time, many of the patrons knew them well. When they drove up, the women on the picket line said, "don't eat here, they treat us like dirt." They finished the restaurant; the brothers had to move the restaurant to another place. I tell the story because it's a case in which this pervasive atmosphere must have lasted for a decade or more and, at this particular moment, it allowed for a kind of crystallization. Women who, at 7:01, had never

thought of being on strike found themselves on a picket line at 7:05. They were there because they were like the other woman, they were all friends, they all worked together. So that's the kind of logic I'm pointing to. And often it doesn't happen at all, right? The only reason I can tell the story about the norms is because they were crystallized in a strike action.

What's the connection, then, between everyday forms of resistance and more collective forms of political mobilization?

The circumstances under which subterranean resistance cultures become connected are usually exogenous. They come from somewhere else. Take the Solidarity movement in Poland, which had no central committee. Martial law in Poland brought together cultures of resistance that first formed in one tiny little plant or even around the kitchen table – within a family or amongst very close friends who trusted one another. These cultures of resistance were relatively homogenous in terms of the troubles and tribulations that people faced. People hated the regime, and the party hacks, and the lack of meat and decent medical services.

Although the critiques were highly developed, they existed in fragmented little circles because people were afraid to share them in public. What Solidarity did by a few very brave strike actions was to somehow crystallize this. People then realized not only that their neighbours shared the same beefs as they did, but that it was actually possible under some circumstances to manifest them in a public way. The reason Solidarity didn't need a central committee to tell everyone what to do was because the regime, while it was atomizing people, was also homogenizing them in terms of its effects on their daily life. When it became possible to connect these

people and to act publicly, there was an infrastructure that was already present. By standing up to martial law, Solidarity was able to crystallize a kind of political capital that had been created in tiny units throughout the society.

In reading your work, it's difficult not to draw connections to the present and to regions closer to home, even though you caution against this. With concepts like "everyday resistance," drawing these connections is sometimes fairly easy. But with others, like "illegibility" and "state evasion," which you discuss in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, it can be a bit more difficult. One could make the argument, for example, that some parts of the UShave been abandoned by the state and capital, such as parts of Appalachia or parts of the Gulf Coast. Do you think these concepts have any resonance in the contemporary USor for other "first world" nations?

I think that Appalachia is a fairly significant non-state space, even today. So, if you wanted to do a map of illegal distilling or of marijuana production, it would coincide with those mountainous areas of Appalachia. Historically, one of the really interesting things is that desertion from the Confederacy correlates brilliantly with altitude. That's because the people up at the highest elevations had tiny farms and no slaves.

It wasn't that they loved black people; they just weren't going to die for a social order based on the plantations that the lowlands depended upon. So they deserted in huge numbers. In the Civil War, people were recruited by county and served in units filled with their neighbours. When they deserted, they all left together. They took their weapons, went back into Appalachia, and could not be recruited again. They defended themselves against re-enlistment or re-conscription. If

you do a map of Republican voting in the South – this is back when the Democrats were racist Dixicrats – it correlates perfectly with altitude too. All of the Republicans are at the tops of the hills. It was an area where runaways from other parts – people running from the law, and a certain number of free blacks who wanted an independent life – could find reprieve. This lasted until the region became an enormous site of coal and mountaintop removal. Today, the coal companies own West Virginia from one side to the other.

The reservation system was a formal effort by the state to create areas of indirect rule that didn't have to be administered directly. Consequently, they became a particular form of non-state space. Non-state spaces are social creations and not merely geographical phenomena. A lot of people who appear to be stateless or between states are not people who were never part of the state but rather people who have managed to distance themselves from the state. It's just that Zomia is such a huge area of a non-state space that it represents such a large zone that one doesn't have here.[2]

In closing The Art of Not Being Governed, *you write, "In the contemporary world, the future of our freedom lies in the daunting task of taming Leviathan, not evading it." Current debates on the libertarian left struggle with this issue. If representative democracy is "the only frail instrument we have for taming Leviathan," how do we end our status as "state-subjects"?*

People like Richard Day have argued that the point is not to tame Leviathan. Once you start taming Levia-

[2] Zomia, the subject of *The Art of Not Being Governed*, is a region the size of Europe in Southeast Asia that Scott describes as "one of the largest remaining non-state spaces in the world, if not the largest." For centuries its residents have fled surrounding state societies in order to intentionally evade state control.

than, you're involved in all sorts of regulatory policy fiddling. You become stuck in that politics. You become complicit. Consequently, Day has emphasized creating autonomous zones of political action based on affinity. I'm sympathetic to that.

In Europe, the Greens argued about whether they would enter coalitions or remain outside and create intentional communities and forms of action that were independent of the state. In the end, of course, they split; some of them formed coalition governments and some of them remained independent. I'm a little more sympathetic to these autonomous initiatives than the quote you cited indicates. I'm cognizant of the fact that, once you become a reformist, a whole series of options become closed to you. A whole series of assumptions about the way you have to operate and the way you have to dress up for the dance come into play.

Consequently, I'm pretty sympathetic to the idea that creating structures of independence, contaminated though they may be, is more productive right now. I don't know. I realize it's a key question, and I'm also not immune to the idea that, when faced with an Obama or a John McCain, it seems fairly irresponsible to say "fuck you both" when you know that – for all the disappointments that Obama represents – his election held the promise of millions of tangible benefits for millions of people. And even though not much has been done by the Obama administration, one could still argue that the people running agencies are at least more humane, sympathetic, and attentive.

I've got nothing against people who choose to work at that level. But when you think about what can be done in that field, it seems kind of minimal. I don't know if you've heard of Christiania. It started out as a squatter movement but ended up being a long lasting

autonomous zone in Copenhagen. The liberal Danish state just decided that it wasn't worth the trouble to crush. It became a kind of self-governing little place, and I have a lot of respect for that. In a sense, Copenhagen bicyclists have created the same thing through a whole series of little struggles that are cumulatively very powerful. The result has been that, today, whenever a motorist hits a bicyclist, they are *prima facie*guilty until proven innocent. Similarly, a bicyclist who hits a pedestrian is *prima facie* guilty until proven innocent. The idea is that the more protection you have, the more you're to blame unless you can prove otherwise.

It would be worthwhile to study the history of the various non-state spaces that have opened up within modern democracies. What is their meaning and what have their implications been? Such a study would involve all the utopian communities that American religions formed in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Amish and Mennonites.

Do you consider yourself an anarchist at this point? Is that a label you've taken on?

In a way, no other label works as well. It doesn't work very well but it works better than anything else. If I had a pistol put to my temple and had to answer "what are you?" I'd say "anarchist" probably. It's just a point of departure.

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Interview with James C. Scott
Egalitarianism, the Teachings of Fieldwork and Anarchist Calisthenics

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James C. Scott is Sterling Professor of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale University where he directs the Program in Agrarian Studies. Author of foundational books on the fields of agrarian studies and social movements (but with a wider resonance in other domains of social sciences), namely The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast *Asia (1977),* Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance *(1985), and* Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts *(1990), Scott recently published* The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia *(2009). His work has been a major source of inspiration for the four of us and we therefore invited him to visit Portugal in order to discuss some of the key-elements of his research.*[*]

The following conversation took place in Lisbon, April 2012, and gathered many students and researchers from both Portugal and Spain. The conversation was first directed by our own questions and we then opened the floor for discussion, taking some questions from the audience. The subjects discussed ranged from Scott's participation in the Perestroika Movement in Political Science to his critique of the State and the concept of high-modernism (see Seeing like a State – How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Scott's 1998 book). The conversation*

[*] Interview with James C. Scott: Egalitarianism, the teachings of fieldwork and anarchist calisthenics, by Diego Palacios Cerezales, Diogo Duarte, José Manuel Sobral and José Neves, Análise Social, 206, xlviii (2.º), 2013, issn online 2182-2999.

also included his perspectives on resistance and their relation to contributions made by authors such as E.P. Thompson, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Clastres, among others. Finally, we also discussed the possibility of an "anarchist turn" in social sciences and came to know Scott's law of anarchist calisthenics, and some hints about his new book, Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play *(2012).*[3]

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Interviewers: *Let us start with some questions concerning your early academic formation, which, as far as we know, had a more direct connection to Political Science. So, how did you get to Anthropology and how did Anthropology come to have such an important place in your work?*

James C. Scott: Thanks. I'm both flattered and terrified by the number of people here and also by the change of venue. The other room was small and cozy and this is an intimidating room. Because of its hierarchical structure,I feel that I should be operating on some patient and changing a kidney. So, the room requires something more important of me than I have to say and I want you all to know that you can all live a long and happy life without listening to me. I was trained as a political scientist and the question of how I became an anthropologist, a fake anthropologist, grew

[3] James C. Scott visited Portugal to participate in the research activity of the fct project"The Making of State Power in Portugal 1890-1986" (ptdc/his-his/104166/2008). Besides the financial support of fct, Scott's visit also benefited from the financial support of flad.

out of my work on peasants.I wrote a book called *Moral Economy of the Peasant – Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* a long time ago [1977], my first major book, based entirely on library resources and archival work. After I published it, people asked me where I had done my fieldwork and the fact is I had done no fieldwork. So, I was embarrassed to even answer their questions. Because I had decided to devote my career at that point to studying peasants, I thought that, if I am going to do it, I need to spend two years or so in a peasant village, so that every time I am tempted to make some big generalization, I have a real place I understand and that I can test these generalizations against. So, I spent two years in a Malaya village, the result was *Weapons of the Weak*, as you may know. The fact is that I am a defector, a deserter from the army of political scientists and I formally have never been trained as an anthropologist. About fifteen years ago, when I gave a small talk in Toronto, the poster said "James Scott, social anthropologist from Yale". It was the first time someone had mistaken me for an anthropologist and I was so proud, I saved the little poster. It's like someone who wants to be accepted as a member of a tribe and is refused and then, finally, I had this moment in which I had passed, as we say, as an anthropologist. I have always had Anthropology envy and I'm happier in this tribe thanI have been in my Political Science tribe.

In your analysis, as we have discussed this morning, the people's understandings of their own situation, their worldviews, are very important. Do you think that there is something biographical in this relevance? Does it reflect the democratic ideals you were socialized in?

I haven't thought about that question… I can tell you a story about the connection but I'm not sure the story is true. We all tell stories about ourselves. Let me begin the answer with a story I like very much, by Jean-Paul Sartre. I think in *L'Être et le néant* (*Being and Nothingness*), he creates a situation in which a man faces a choice of whether to stay with his sick mother or to go away with his wife who's leaving for another job. He doesn't know what to do: these are both obligations that he has. But the day arrives, just the way a strike arrives and people have to decide to go on strike or stay at the factory. Anyway, the day arrives and, let's say, the man decides to stay with his sick mother. Sartre's argument is that the next day he can give you a story about why he's the kind of man who would have stayed with his sick mother. It doesn't explain why he did what he did, it just means that he has to create a story on the next day to understand himself. In the same way, people point to connections in my work that I'm not sure really exist but I will tell the story that is appropriate to your question. I went to a Quaker school. I don't know if you know much about Quakers, but historically it was an austere protestant sect that grew up in the English Civil War. They refused to say "Sir", "Ma'am" or "Mr.", they refused to take off their hats, they called everybody by their first name. It was a kind of linguistic egalitarianism, if you like. And they were a radical sect. The first head of the Quakers was broken, essentially, in the Cromwellian reaction. In the school in which I grew up there were many conscientious objectors from the Second World War, elderly men who had gone to prison rather than fight in the army. As you can imagine, this was not a popular thing to do and so I had,

in that sense, the example before me of men who had gone to prison and who were capable of standing in a crowd of a hundred and being the minority of one.I think the Quakers taught me how to stand up in a crowd of a hundred and be a minority of one. The Quakers could do it while loving their enemies; I cannot do this. I can only stand up as a minority, being angry actually. So, I don't have the true Quaker spirit. But the Quakers had one other thing, which is at the center of their doctrine of "the light of God in every man", whether a beggar or a slave. The Quakers were responsible for prison reform, for the so-called underground railway that took slaves to Canada through a succession of farms all the way north, so that they could escape. They were responsible for most of the education for Native Americans. There was a kind of Quaker "work-week" in which we would spend a week among the very poorest of Philadelphia. It was a kind of tour of the dispossessed that the Quakers gave me and that had a big influence. I was not brought up in a Quaker family, as my parents were both atheists. I later became briefly a Quaker although today I don't practice Quakerism. The school had a tremendous influence on me. My father died when I was nine years old and so the school became a kind of surrogate parent for me. But, again, this is a story I tell and it is as true as any other story I would tell you. It makes a connection that I'm not completely certain of.

The Moral Economy of the Peasant *aroused an intense debate within peasant studies and, especially, between you and Samuel Popkin, who wrote a book to refute your thesis. The terms of that debate were not entirely new, and reproduced some old discussions op-*

posing anthropologists' views on the importance of culture for understanding economy to more utilitarian arguments. That debate was crucially relevant to economics and to anthropological perspectives on the individual and the social, but also had a deeper epistemological meaning. Do you think that this is a discussion that still makes sense nowadays and, if so, in what way do you think that the terms of this debate have changed since then?

For those of you who may have read Samuel Popkin's *The Rational Peasant – The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* [1979] and my earlier book *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, this may make some sense. My one regret about that debate is calling my book *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, which suggested to some people that I thought peasants were altruists, willing to lay down their life for their fellow men and that this was "one for all and all for one", a kind of primitive communist society. But I made it quite clear that the peasants, as I was understanding, behaved completely rationally and that they wished to protect themselves against the worst outcomes of a food shortage by social arrangements that provided some insurance against the worst outcomes. In that sense, I had a picture of completely rational peasants who were operating under very difficult conditions in order to make sure that their food supply problems did not result in famine and starvation. I thought my book was a study of rational peasants. Once Samuel Popkin called his book *The Rational Peasant* it implied that I had a theory of crazy or altruistic peasants. I think it was very clever: it misrepresented the debate and, of course, as you imply, the two books were then taught as a kind of

"evil twins" in lots of classrooms and I think it was a classroom success as teaching a debate, although I thought the title led to a lot of misunderstandings. The question is whether this debate is valid today, I think the answer is yes, that is to say, that in Economics and in Political Science the idea of the individual maximizing agent is at the very center of Neoclassical Economics and of much of the Rational Choice Theory in Political Science.

Although I think Rational Choice Theory has some important things to teach us, the point in *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* is that arrangements that may have had a rational basis, over time, if they are valuable and become customary, acquire a kind of moral value, so that when they are broken or violated, the reaction is not just to a loss of calories or income, but it is a reaction that has a moral tone of the violation of a kind of social contract. You can't account, I think, for the rage, anger, and indignation of peasants unless you take into account, if you like, the surplus indignation beyond what is rationally derivable. And it seems to me that we can say this about all of our choices, even though many people speak in a kind of neoclassical vocabulary about personal relations (in English and American English, people will say "I'm very invested in her" and "I have to cut my losses", etc). This vocabulary has become hegemonic when in fact we know nobody makes choices like this that aren't infused with an embedded combination of received ideas about what is fair, just, customary, traditional in the social contract, in addition to rational calculation, which has a place but not the hegemonic place in our decision making about anything.

You have criticized the idea that subordinates comply with the existing order because they accept the dominant ideology. But in your work you have mainly dealt with forms of domination linked to slavery, property, class, and political power. Don't you think that some types of inequalities are more widely accepted, like the ones linked to the possession of cultural or scholar capital? And doesn't this mean that those who have less or no access to them believe in the importance of these capitals?

I think your question is correct and important. In *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*,I chose on purpose, deliberately, situations in which the binary relationship was strong (serfs and masters, slaves and masters, peasants and landlords, untouchables and brahmans) partly because there was a literature that would allow me to understand both sides of these binaries. It seems to me that when you have, let's say, a valuable prestige good like wealth or education that is, in principle at least, attainable by all, then it is much easier to legitimate differences.Of course, in the Modern post-French Revolution Republic the mythology is that the differences that exist are based on meritocratic criteria: achievement, education, degrees, skills, and so on. In that respect, and this is a very crude way of understanding contemporary democracy, but it is a good point of departure, in the neoliberal West political life is organized for the benefit of the top 15% or 20% of the income distribution. They control the legislation, the money, the parties and so on. The trick in an election is to persuade the next 30% to fear the bottom 50% more than they envy the top 20%. This is the shaman-

istic magic of every election. It doesn't always work, but for the most part it works because, as Gramsci understood, the positional advantages of entrenched wealth's influence in the media, and so on, has an enormous power to convince this 30% that their position is tenuous as well. In that respect, the possibility of legitimating differences in life chances, and in esteem for that matter, in modern secular democracies is much greater than it was in the systems thatI analyzed in my work.

Your work cuts across disciplines and you are a stern critic of narrow-minded disciplinary focus in mainstream political science. You have even been a reference for the "Perestroika movement" in Political Science. Also, you always pointed to the value of other contributions to social analysis, like the ones coming from fiction, which you used very creatively in Domination and the arts of resistence, *for example. Nevertheless, nowadays teaching and research seem even less interdisciplinary than thirty years ago. Is this the dominant trend? What do you think about it?*

First, let me say something about my own practice. I don't think I have an interdisciplinary method that I follow; that is to say, I don't have a set of rules about how I should spend my time. The fact is I am bored silly by Political Science and so the reason that I began with friends a program on Agrarian Studies is that if someone told me that there was a talk in the other room about peasants or agriculture, chances are about 70% or 80% that I would go and learn something. If someone told me that there was a talk in Political Science around the corner, chances are maybe 15% or 20% that I would be enlightened and learn something. My interdiscipli-

narity is a product of boredom and a desire to relax with things that are more fun to read. I can actually give you an intellectual justification for this – the *ethos* of play – but the serious intellectual explanation for this is that if you only read mainstream things in your own discipline and if you only talk to people who are doing mainstream work in your own discipline, you are condemned to produce mainstream disciplinary work. It's the health food dictum that "you are what you eat": in the same way, intellectually, you are what you read and who you talk to.

I think I would disagree with the idea that the discipline is headed in the other direction. It is true to say that, particularly, American social science is hyper-specialized and they hire, promote, and fire people depending on these hyper-specialized ideas of the discipline. They produce journals that are so specialized that we actually know from research almost no one reads them. People are promoted on the basis of an article in a peer review journal but no one reads the peer review journal, only the peers who review it to put it in the journal. They have done a study in which they tried to figure out the number of people who actually read a social science article on average – good, bad, and mediocre journals. The number is less than two. So, let's imagine that the methodology is wrong and it's wrong by a factor of four; let's imagine that eight people read an average social science article. Well, why you would be doing this, right? You're not paid well, you work very hard and there are only eight people in the world who read your work. It seems to me if you're producing for that kind of narrow niche market, you may get tenure, you may thrive, but you must have no illusions that

you're making any difference at all in the world.

This is like medieval scholasticism, an internal game. I actually think that the tide has turned against formal modeling and purely quantitative and rational choice work, partly because of the "Perestroika movement", but not only because of that. There's more emphasis on qualitative techniques, and so, I'm not generally an optimist, but I think the wave has crested for purely formal modeling and purely quantitative work.

Your work relates itself to two legacies that are often set apart: the legacy of E. P. Thompson, and the legacy of Foucault, namely his studies on la gouvernamentalité, *power, and resistance. And, to put it simply but openly: what was it that Foucault brought to your perspectives that Thompson hadn't. And what do you think is shared by both of them?*

That question actually calls for a day long symposium on E.P. Thompson and on Foucault, which we do not have time for. Aside from Karl Polanyi's*The Great Transformation*, E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* was perhaps the most important thing I read as a young scholar. I can remember the chair and the room in which I was sitting when I read it, it was so memorable. For me, the argument that class consciousness is a product of class struggle, rather than class struggle being a product of class consciousness, was brilliantly worked out. It's not as if there's a class conscious proletariat that then decides to struggle but that, in fact, a sense of classness comes out of struggles over the wage, over, as he says, ship biscuits and small things. Outof this, a sense of who we are and what we're struggling for, emerges class consciousness. It is,

as he says, the last term of class relations, not the first. I think it directs people who want to study class to the micro-politics of struggles at the ground level. For me, it was the first example of someone who had done this in a convincing way that I wanted to emulate in my own work. Foucault is, as we say in English, another kettle of fish. I think the most important of Foucault's works to me was *Discipline and Punish*. I don't think I could have written *Seeing Like a State – How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* without a sense of Foucault's effort. He didn't use the word *legibility*, which I use in *Seeing Like a State*, but, in a sense, he had a theory of legibility that I borrowed from very heavily. So, I am enormously in Foucault's debt. The one thing – and I suppose one should not reproach a dead man – but the one thing I reproach Foucault for is that he kept promising a theory of resistance which he never delivered. That is to say, he was totally convincing about the capillary effects of power, legibility, control, the way power works at these micro levels. He then kept saying resistance could be understood in exactly the same way, but he never quite got around to filling the other side of that promise. I'm sure if he had, he would have taught me a great deal.

I kept waiting. With each new book he published, I thought, "This is it, this will teach me about resistance!" I thought he was so mesmerized and so brilliant at describing the micro effects of power that he never got around to doing much in the way of analyzing resistance in the same way.

Agrarian Studies are an important part of your work and you were even responsible for the organization of an important seminar on this theme at Yale for more

than a decade. We would like to know your thoughts about the increasing number of patents on seeds and plants and, specifically, how do you see this kind of phenomenon in the light of a work such as Seeing Like a State*?*

I don't think I have anything more intelligent to say about that than the rest of you, probably. I haven't made a special study of it, although I have a number of students who are interested in Monsanto and Genetically Modified Organisms (gmo). The effort which began in American Courts in the 1970s to patent life forms was a kind of enclosure of the commons, an enclosure of the botanical and organic richness of the world, in which you could then take an organic compound and by changing one amino acid you could patent this life form and sue anyone who infringed on that patent. The history of property is the imperial expansion of property to enclose things that you've never imagined were the subject of property relations. For example, the effort to privatize water supplies, to patent new forms of life, the drawing of blood from indigenous groups in order to patent certain enzymes that they have and other people don't. It seems to be the final frontier of property relations. In a way, that is, the destruction of a natural commons that we all ought to have equal rights to and not ought to be the subject of monopolistic private property claims.

In the present day it seems that there's a kind of return to anarchist ideas and principles going on. This is perhaps more visible at the political/activist level but also at a scientific level. The title and subtitle of your last book speaks for this: The Art of Not Being Governed – An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast

Asia. *And one could also mention the work of your American and anthropologist colleague David Graeber, for instance, with his* Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology. *What kind of implications in the social sciences can we expect from such an "anarchist turn". Will there be an implication at the level of methodology, of epistemology, of ethics, of the style of writing?*

Also an interesting question to which I think I may have something to add. At the beginning of my efforts to understand peasant revolutions, I realized that almost every revolution I studied had actually created a stronger State that was able to batten itself on the population more severely and comprehensively than the State it replaced. This makes for sad and melancholy reading of the histories of revolutions that create stronger and often more repressive States. A friend of mine once said, "You know, once the revolution becomes the State it becomes my enemy". I thought this was a good observation. So, I found myself saying things that before they were out of mouth, I realized in my head, "That sounds like what an anarchist would say". And it happened enough: two points make a line in geometry, but when the third, the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth points all fall down on the same line, you have to pay attention. So, I decided to teach a course on Anarchism at Yale and did so for three years, which, as you can imagine, brought the entire undergraduate left into one room. If you had dropped a bomb on my classroom, you would have destroyed the undergraduate left at Yale University in one blow. We read together the anarchist classics that you all know. But I decided that I should try both to write in a different way than the way

I've historically written, which was a very inner compulsive way. So, I decided to try a different form of writing, a looser and easier style of writing.

I have a book coming out in four or five months called *Two Cheers for Anarchism!*, not three, but two cheers for Anarchism. It's not a history of anarchist thought or anarchist movements. You will learn nothing about that from this book. It's an effort to understand how an anarchist spirit or sensibility might help you understand the emancipatory and freedom potentials of any social institution. Anarchism means mutuality without hierarchy, cooperation and coordination without hierarchy, not disorder but a certain kind of order. And so, I try to talk about what an anarchist playground, an anarchist monument, an anarchist work situation, or an anarchist old people's home would look like, and how you would evaluate institutions in terms of the degree of freedom and autonomy that they accord to people, and their respect for people's own various wishes and their changing needs, instead of trying to fix these people's identities and desires. I try to work out, in a sense, how an anarchist sensibility might help us evaluate institutions.

I'll say one other thing. I begin the book with what I call, immodestly, *Scott's law of anarchist calisthenics*. I was in East Germany for a year and in 1991, after the wall came down, I worked in a peasant village for six weeks in order to improve my German because I didn't want to sit in a Goethe Institute with teenagers. Once a week, because the East German peasants I was living with were afraid of me and I was boring to them, I decided that I should both give them a holiday from me and give myself a holiday from them. So, I went to the

city of Neubrandenburg and for six weeks, waiting for my train to go back to the village, I would see in the front of the train station a red light. It was the evening and there was absolutely no traffic. The Mecklenburg Plain was flat: you could see five miles in every direction and no cars were coming. But there would be 60 Germans waiting for the light to change. The light was set for the day time, I think. It took five or six minutes, and all these Germans stood there waiting for the light to change, and if I was feeling confident because my last German sentence had worked, I would walk across and be scolded. And, if my last German sentence was a failure, as it often was, I just waited with them until the light changed. Angry at myself for waiting, I invented *Scott's law of anarchist calisthenics*, which goes like this: one day in your life, you will be called on to break a big law and everything will depend on it. Think of the civil rights movement, the freedom rides, breaking the pass laws in South Africa, civil arrests in demonstrations. If you want to be ready for this big day, everything will depend on it, and you, therefore, have to stay in shape and do your exercises. And so, you must, every two or three days, break a small law, so that you're ready when the big moment comes and you can break a large law. And then I go on to explaining that in the 20th century every major episode of structural change in the United States has come from extra-parliamentary disturbances outside of the normal circuits of legislative politics. It's a kind of tragedy that all these democratic institutions, that are supposed to be vehicles of translation and change for popular wishes, actually have not worked in my country since the turn of the century, unless they were accompanied by large and massive

outpourings of disorder that could not be contained. These large changes only occur as a result of disruptions, which can lead to other, worse consequences, but they appear to be a necessary but insufficient condition for large scale structural change.

You are very critical of State action generally speaking. But, as you well know, after World War Two and in the Cold War context, Western states, and social democracy in particular, played a key role in democratizing societies and in– modestly – curbing inequalities. The Welfare State has been attacked by Conservatives since the Reagan-Thatcher years and you find its supporters on the Left.

I would of course defend the Welfare State against neoliberal attacks myself. However, we should not think of the Welfare State as merely the product of a benign and munificent government. Actually, the Welfare State is the product of struggles that created it piece by piece. If you think of, let's say, the New Deal in the United States, the social legislation was the result of riots, sieges of relief offices, looting, and so on, at the height of the depression, which made Franklin Roosevelt turn to aspects of structural change that we now call the New Deal. It was not some recognition by the elites that the people needed the Welfare State. It was, if you like, a counter-revolutionary reform, in order to preclude what looked like a possibly revolutionary situation. In the same sense, and this is a strange thing to say, but I am nostalgic of the Cold War.

In its height the West in the Third World and in Latin America promoted land reform, because they were afraid of the communist's takeover in Latin America,

parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, or Vietnam. Land reform was an effort to outbid the communists for an egalitarian redistribution of the most important commodity for peasants: land. Since 1989, I defy you to find a World Bank or imf document that talks seriously about land reform. The moment the Socialist Bloc disappeared, land reform was never mentioned again.

You talked about nostalgia. Coming back to this idea, sometimes in E. P. Thompson and in your work it is present, and it may or may not be criticized, a nostalgic and romantic critique of modernization. For example, in Seeing Like a State, *you somehow depreciate – we know that this is not the proper word – the urban project of a city like Brasília and praise a city like Bruges. Isn't there the risk that your romantic enchantment ends up idealizing an urban fabric of cities like Bruges?*

Yes. I try to use Bruges as an example of a city that grew up more or less organically without any central plan, just the way Damascus or Fez did: almost no streets are at right angles, the alleys that exist are usually the product of walking paths and paths of an earlier period, and so you get an urban form in which there's both an integration of functions and a lack of an overall central plan. My use of Bruges was not to praise the social relations in the early city, as being egalitarian and fair, but to give an example of a city that grew up in a fundamentally different way from the enlightenment cities of Chicago, Philadelphia, or Brasília, which were planned from the top down. The reason I use Brasília, actually, is because it was planned by left wing architects (Lúcio Costa and Óscar Niemeyer), who had communist convictions and an idea about what the peo-

ple required in terms of "so many" square feet and space, "so much" air, water, windows, sunlight. Of course it was an administrative city for administrators, but they thought they were planning for, if you like, the popular welfare. What's interesting is that the people they were planning for were abstract people. They might as well be people in Togo, South Africa, Laos or Cambodia. They had no history, tastes and values. It was abstract planning for abstract persons with abstract human requirements. There was, in a sense, no historicity about it; it never touched the ground. As a result, the city was extremely unsuccessful. There was a psychoanalytic ailment diagnosed as *brasilites*, by people who were moved from São Paulo and Rio to Brasília and had a clinical depression, because there was only work and one's apartment. I don't mean to valorize traditional arrangements just because they are traditional arrangements. Those encode huge inequalities, patriarchal family, all kinds of forms of, if you like, vernacular oppression. But I do mean to compare them with State mandated high-modernist plans that, it seems to me, are even more difficult to change and uproot.

Is it possible to think about a political project which would not intrinsically be highly standardized, as it happens with the rationalist utopias of high-modernist development in the way you present them?

I am wondering if I can pass on that question, in the sense that I'm no good at predicting the future or at utopian thinking. The one thing that I can say is that we can only understand why people are now studying Anarchism, which disappeared from academic work for 30 or 40 years, by two observations. One of them is that socialist forms of state-led modernization and egalitari-

an programs have proved to be failures or worse. The second is that, increasingly, the kinds of unrest you see are not structured or orchestrated by organized social movements, left wing parties and so on. They are explosions of outrage and indignation, as in *indignados*, one saw in the suburbs of Paris, in the 1960's ghetto riots in the United States, and that one sees in the Occupy Wall Street movement. One has to take into account the changing shape of public action, by which I would also include the Arab Spring. What is interesting to me is that these are movements which took place when the left wing of the Islamic Brotherhood decided that it wanted to ally itself with these movements. It was very late in the game: they didn't stimulate it and, instead, stood aside. So, if we want to understand the empirical shape of contemporary protest, it looks more like small groups affiliated by neighborhood. It has an anarchic cast to it. I am having a quarrel with my publisher about the cover of my book *Two cheers for anarchism…* They will win and I will lose. But the cover that I would like, which you will not see, is an actual graffiti in which someone wrote "Spread Anarchy" on a wall and it was crossed off by someone else who underneath wrote "Don't tell me what to do!". I told my publisher this would be a successful cover. And what better way to begin a book than with a good laugh!In any case, they are not buying this, but it captures that, the fragmentation of contemporary protest.

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[The floor was then opened for discussion. From then on, questions came from the audience.]

James Scott's work is very important to understand where the peasants are today, especially after leaving the countryside and coming to the city. Here peasants are having new encounters, probably new relationships, facing new frameworks of domination and resistance. So, I would just like to know James Scott's opinionsabout how his work can be used to understand contemporary movements for old or new peasants. I would also like to invite James Scott to think about the ethics and the responsibility, not only of social scientists, but of science in general about their own work. Thank you.

I haven't studied migration and peasants going to cities, though I understand, of course, how common such migration is. I guess the reason why I was seduced by Anthropology is its fieldwork *ethos*, that is, the idea that your first obligation as an ethnographer is to try, actually, in a naïve and wide-open way to understand the life-world of someone else; a life-world that is not familiar to you. I suppose the migration studies, for which I have the greatest respect, are studies in which people not only study peasants in the city (first and second generation), but also the movement back and forth between, let's say in the United States, Mexican workers who go back to Oaxaca every vacation. In a sense, for lots of peasants the reason to move to the city is like a plundering or pirate operation to get the resources in order to solidify their place back home. One wonderful book on this is Douglas Holmes' *Cultural Disenchantments*, about the peasant workers of Friuli, in Italy. His argument is that these people are not peasants on their way to becoming workers, they are peasant workers. They have been migrating from Friuli for 500 years,

going to Northern Italy, the United States, and coming back all the time. They are a stable in-between category of peasants and workers. I guess, in terms of ethical commitment, that the first place to start is the understanding of the life-world of whoever's behavior you're interested in shedding light on or illuminating. The conceptual tools that you assemble for that are particular to each problem. That is to say, once you've asked yourself a successful question – which is two thirds of the research – the tools will follow from that question, rather than precede it. There are some social sciences that give you a tool box and send you out so you can use those tools on whatever society. I suggest the reverse: that you ask an important question and then ask "what tools will help me understand this problem?", rather than starting with the tools.

I was wondering if you could comment on the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group. I am asking this especially because of the tendency of some of the more prominent scholars of that group's subordinates to focus on the archive, which is where you suggested the successful peasant does not go.

Many of you may be familiar with the Subaltern Studies, a kind of annual collection. I think the original intellectual inspiration for this was Ranajit Guha and his collaborators. And Guha, from whom I learned a tremendous amount (e. g. *The Prose of Counter-insurgency* and also *A rule of property for Bengal: an essay on the idea of permanent settlement*), tried to outline a way of reading official documents against the grain. He tried to say that you can use official documents and if you know how to read them and compare them one with another, understand the euphemisms and

so on, whether court cases or interrogations, you can read those documents in ways that are enormously enlightening in a way that an official, reading them at the time, would never have been able to discern. I actually believe that if you're working with archives and documents generated by historical actors who are no longer able to answer for themselves, and if you don't have memoirs and things you can compare to the archives, the best you can do is to read against the grain. Some of the most successful work in Subaltern Studies was "reading against the grain". The other nice thing about Subaltern Studies is that it never became a hard orthodoxy. The people who were writing articles in each annual of Subaltern Studies came from different perspectives and disagreed with one another. It's a kind of carnival of efforts to understand subaltern action and, I think, all the better for not having become an orthodoxy with a method of its own. In *The Art of Not Being Governed*, I think I've failed to cover North Eastern India, which is part of what I call Zomia, and to read enough about the Naga and of the literature about Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram. So, I feel that I am a quasi-failed *subalternist* in terms of not having paid enough attention to the literature on the Indian section of Zomia.

One comment and two questions if I may. First of all, as an old-fashioned authoritarian Leninist, I would like to commend the organizers for not taking the issue of Anarchism too seriously. I agree with the way you divided the time between the experts and the rest of the crowd. So, congratulations for that. I will pose a question regarding the influence of Pierre Clastres in your work, mainly the issue of the antagonism between society and state.

Let me begin with Pierre Clastres. Actually, in my most recent book, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, the epigram at the beginning is from Pierre Clastres, the last two sentences of *La Société contre l'État*, in which he says, if I'm quoting correctly, "If the history of people with history is the history of class struggle, it may be said at least as truthfully that the history of people without history is the history of their struggle against the state". That's where I begin *The Art of Not Being Governed*. For me, Pierre Clastres is a kind of hero, in the sense that he was the first person to suggest that the Yanomami, the Siriono, the Guarani, were not some sort of Neolithic survival, but they were previously sedentary agriculturalists who ran away from the Spanish Reducciones, because of disease and forced labor, and became foragers. It is a secondary adaptation: they were barbarians by design, if you like. So, it seems to me that at a time when almost no one accepted these conclusions, when all of American Anthropology would have been against him, he proposed this understanding of foraging as an adaptation to State formation. He also understood the social structure of these groups as an effort to prevent states from growing up among them, a sort of state prevention social structure. It seems to me that everything we have learned about Latin America has generally corroborated what Clastres supposed. In the half century since he wrote, I think in the 60s and 70s we have had a tremendous amount of evidence that makes his suppositions look very good. So, I'm hugely in debt. I use another term developed in Latin America called *shatter zones*, originally developed by Stuart Schwartz and also by Richard White, writing about Native Americans in the Great Lakes area, zones of difficult access to which people running away from States went. These areas became extremely

complex, linguistically and culturally, because they are made up of the fragments of people who are running away at different times and are from different societies. This idea of *shatter zone* seems to me enormously fruitful and I appropriated it.

I have two questions, which I will try to keep short. The first one has to do with semantics, meaning this idea of using the word peasants*. Why do you use the word* peasants *when we are talking about farmers in Africa, South East Asia, or South America, but you'll never call it* peasants *in Europe and North America? I will still challenge you, saying that the World Bank has not been publishing anything about land reform or tenure. Yes, they are publishing it again, when there's again a rush for land in Africa and South East Asia. I mean, since the food crisis in 2008, all the emerging economies are publishing it again. The value of land is again in fashion.*

The second question would be more theoretical, let's put it that way. You've mentioned twice hegemony or hegemonic power, I suppose that in a gramscian way. To take us nowadays, we know that hegemony is not just about domination but also about consent, of people consenting to this hegemonic power, and then there is the other side of the coin, that is, resisting. I guess there are many ways of resisting. You mention, and I think this is the most interesting part of your work, the hidden ones, that contest of power in a subtle way. But what is the meaning of it nowadays with the present kind of sanctioned discourse and the political reaching that we have?

I'm happy to stand corrected if the World Bank and the imf are now talking about land reform as a result of the land grabs that have been taking place. With the

respect to the use of the term *peasant*, the Agrarian Studies program actually has existed now for 21 years and when we began it, we probably would have had a program in Peasant Studies, except someone said, "No, it sounds a little too demeaning and stigmatizing". So, we settled on the program in Agrarian Studies. In my use of the *peasant*, I tried to be reasonably careful. As Eric Wolf says, when you say *peasant*, you say part of larger society in which there is a superordinate class that claims rents of one kind or another (taxes and so on) from a subordinate peasantry. So, peasantry is a kind of cultivating class of a larger society in which landlords or aristocrats often have a claim on both land and on part of the surplus production, and maybe to the labor. Only in those cases are we entitled to use the word *peasant* in its strong sense. America actually has had a peasantry, the black and white sharecroppers after the Emancipation, in 1865, through 1930. This was a dependent class held in check by debt, cultivating cotton and tied absolutely to their land by credit systems. We have had slaves in America, of course, but those were the only peasants we've had. The rest of the cultivating classes in America were independent small holding farmers who, aside from minor taxes and commodity crashes when the price of what they sold disappeared, were not on any account peasants. I think the term *peasant* ought to be used only in those situations where a superior class that has a direct claim to rents on land and labor is the layer above them. About the question of hegemony and Gramsci, I actually believe that in *Weapons of the Weak*, and not many people have pointed this out, thank goodness (I can accuse myself!), I misused Gramsci's word *hegemony*. The fact is that, for Gramsci, the situation I am describing is a situation of domination, in *gramscian* terms. Hegemony for

Gramsci, as I understand it, only applies to a situation in which the working class has the vote. Therefore, Gramsci's question is, "Why is it that the proletariat, who are numerous and with the vote, has not made the revolution through democratic means?" And his answer is the kind of ideological hegemony that elites, the State, and embedded wealth have in generating consent to this inequality. The situation I am dealing with in *Weapons of the Weak* is of domination and not of hegemony. Although popular voting existed in Malaysia, when I was writing this book, it had no importance at all. I ought to have used domination and talked about hegemony in a different way. I surrender.

Professor Scott, there's a chapter in Alan Barnard's History and Theory of Anthropology *where Leach's 1954 book on highland Burma is mentioned. Much of Bourdieu's earlier work is also very concerned with strategies by individuals and families. What I would like to ask you is: in a kind of humanistic and also anarchistic form, subaltern peasants and other underdog groups seem to always have some margin of action through resisting. If we are talking about a theory of resistance, can you link your theory of resistance to action-theory as a whole?*

I think I can answer this question by saying what I learned from the early Bourdieu. I'm actually a big fan of *Distinction* as well. Bourdieu was very hard to read but worth the struggle. I remember *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*. Originally, I got the English translation and it was so difficult to read I thought "well, I read French easily. Maybe it's a bad translation and I should get the French". I got the French and it was even more difficult. It turned out that the English translator had actually simplified things a little bit. On

the other hand, I can remember what a struggle it was, but I also understood Bourdieu's point about the room from maneuver that all actors have. So, Bourdieu pointed out that you may have to marry your mother's brother's daughter, but when you marry, how you delay, the kind of wedding you have, the terms that you use, the dowry that you pay or don't, how you pay it, you can outline these kinship rules and there are a million ways they can be fiddled with, negated, changed. Just the way in the army you may have to say "Yes Sir" to your superior officer, but you can say, "Yes, Sir" in a way that is filled with contempt for subordination, although you are pronouncing the right words. It seems to me that Bourdieu understood the kind of play, room for maneuver, manipulation, and expressive action that is available even in the most constrained circumstances. That is not a small achievement for the kind of social sciences in which structuralism seemed to put everyone in a straightjacket. So, I'm in Bourdieu's debt for that. As for Edmund Leach, I don't know if it's much read in Portugal. Certainly, it is not much read anymore in the United States, I think. But the *Political Systems of Highland Burma* is still worth debating with 60 or 70 years after it was written. My book *The Art of Not Being Governed* is, in a sense, a conversation with Edmund Leach, a bit one-sided because he can no longer answer and complain. So, if you want to win a debate it's convenient to have it with a dead person who can't speak back at all. I think Leach asked all of the questions about highland-lowland relations that could be asked and answered them in a kind of elegant way. My disagreements and quarrels with Leach are actually pretty trivial compared with what he taught me.

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Interview with James C. Scott: Anarchy, State Decreed Patronymic Naming, Vernacular Knowledge, Bottom-up Urban Planning

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My guest tonight is James C. Scott. He's a professor of politics and anthropology at Yale University. He's the founder of Yale's Agrarian Studies program and he's been described as an anarchist and a Marxist. Some of his books include The Art of Not Being Governed, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, *and his most recent I believe is* Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play, *published by Princeton University Press.*[*]

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Rob Kall: *So what aspects of anarchism do you believe in?*

James C. Scott: Well, as you know, I start the book … I started with an anecdote which I could go back to if you like, but I try to make the point that almost all of the important changes, structural changes, of the 20th Century that you and I and most of your listeners would agree were emancipatory and progressive in the 20th Century, they all took place only because of disorder and rule breaking and law breaking outside the normal, if you like, halls of congress, normal politics and electoral politics.

[*] An Interview with James C. Scott, from Gastronomica 15:3, Soas Food Studies Centre Distinguished Lecture, James C. Scott Transcript: Anarchy, State Decreed Patronymic Naming, Vernacular Knowledge, Bottom-up Urban Planning, By Rob Kall.

The examples I use are first of all, the New Deal. It seems to me that it's impossible to understand the reforms of the New Deal without the riots, the wildcat strikes, the sieges of welfare offices and so on. At a point when Roosevelt thought that the only way to restore public order, I think he and other people thought we were on the lip of a potential revolution, was to enact a whole series of social legislations that would convince the working class that their interests were taken seriously and that their security, financial security, was an object of government legislation.

The second, I think it's also true in a somewhat milder way, but very important. If you think before that of the women's suffrage movement, although it's not a huge movement in terms of masses, the fact is that the women who were at the center of this all went to prison. They were all put in solitary confinement and they were all force fed. This became a sort of huge issue and persuaded Woodrow Wilson, I think, to finally decide that he ought to back an amendment supporting women's suffrage.

I don't think we would have gotten out of the Vietnam War without the demonstrations that we had. I don't we would have had the civil rights movement without the kind of disorder in the streets that Lyndon Johnson and others thought and Kennedy, for that matter, thought was likely to result in a kind of level of public disorder that they had not seen before. The only way, if you like, to put it back in the bag was to pass civil rights legislation that had been proposed a long time before, but just had languished until the public disorder made them go back to it again.

So the point is, my point is that I think if you look carefully at the 20th Century, we had a political system of elections and democratic contestation of peaceful" that's supposed to actually make possible huge changes in a peaceful, legislative way of electoral change. The fact is that the incumbents historically have such an advantage that influence of concentration of wealth and media and so on, actually make it unlikely in the 20th Century. One cannot point to really large scale changes that have come about simply in the ordinary working of the legislative process.

So my argument is that we have to take into account the fact that disorder and operation outside the normal institutional circuit of legislatures has been responsible for most of the large changes that we are likely to think were important and emancipatory.

I love it. So what does that say about protests, protest marches, planned protests in Washington, D.C.?

Well, it depends on, again, it depends on whether the kind of protest that you envision has a public resonance and for whom and among whom and to what degree it does, right? Some kinds of protest of course can be polarizing as well. Many of them are. So it's" I'm trying to" Let me give you a really simple example because I do have a chapter that has to do with schools and exams and so on.

Which book?

This is *Two Cheers for Anarchism*. There's a kind of … I don't know where this is going to go, but one of the things that I find quite interesting is that in many places there have been public walkouts by high school students who are refusing to take the seventeenth state

mandated exam, right, for which the teachers are supposed to drill them for so that they can get the kind of grades that will trigger federal or state money. Anyway, students who feel that they are being treated like, what shall we say, they're being treated without much respect for their individual creativity and intellectual talents and are just having to do mindless drills, many of these people have walked out of exams including the scholastic aptitude test, I might add, and this has become a kind of small social movement. I don't how common it will become. It's kind of risky. So here are people who are in a sense violating a whole series of school routines that they find demeaning and disrespectful of their individual creativity and I think it's one of the things that if it does take off will lead to a better kind of reform of schools. But, you know I'm"it's hard to tell actually whether this, as they say, has legs or not and how far it will ramify.

Okay. We only have a certain limited amount of time here and I want to make sure I get a couple things covered. I call my show the Bottom Up Radio Show *because I believe we're in a transition from a predominantly top down structure to one that's more bottom-up and that the Internet has helped to catalyze that so people start seeing and thinking more that way. A lot of your writing talks about concepts that are top down or bottom up. Do you have any thoughts based on what I've just said?*

You mean about the social media and the new forms of communication and Internet and so on? Is that what you're talking about?

Well, generally about the nature of our culture from a top down and bottom up perspective. You've written whole books about it. I'm just asking you to kind of throw something at me that is related to that off of the top of your head.

So, there are many ways of coming at this. For the most part I think historically, action from the bottom up has come from people who feel they're being severely pinched or cornered or disadvantaged and so on. So from that point of view it seems to me it is perfectly clear that since the increase in income inequality, especially it's concentration at the highest levels and the kind of grip that gives the one percent over legislation and lobbying and the media, that there comes a point and, of course, no one knows exactly where that point is, in which it" because it jeopardizes the life chances of millions of people there comes a point when these people react.

In a sense, the Occupy Wall Street was a first example of that that brought attention to this huge income inequality. It seems to me that the worse the income inequality gets the more the banks and the super wealthy are able to control legislation, the more likely you're going to have a reaction of one kind from the bottom up. Now, how that reaction takes place is more complicated than it used to be.

You used to have trade unions. Our trade unions are a very small portion of the active working force these days so it's less likely to come from that quarter. Compare us to Canada which has the same industrial structure, more or less, and we're far less unionized than they are. Realize that Occupy Wall Street was coordi-

nated to a certain extent by social media just as the Arab Spring was.

I don't know. I don't know enough to say whether those forms of coordination can substitute successfully for face to face communities of people who have lived together, who know one another, who trust one another, whether they are social organizations or unions. But I worry, actually, about the" what shall we call it, the thinness of relationships that are purely through social media.

Okay and that's a concern that others have certainly expressed. The book called The Shallows, *for example. I think that's part of the change in the way people function. They lose the depth and they have more thin, shallow connections.*

Also, the other thing to observe, I suppose, is that in fact most of us, and here, alas, I have to place myself, I have a kind of farm in Connecticut, but the fact is that most of us live in settings that are highly segregated by class and by race. So that, in fact, my connection to the inner city of New Haven is a connection that I have to make. It's not a connection that's naturally there in terms of where I live and what I see every day. So, to the degree that our lives and experiences are segregated by class and race, to that degree it's" we're"our sympathetic nerve for other people's suffering is not stimulated as much as it would be if we lived in multi-class and multi-race settings

You've written about that in a number of your books. Did this whole idea of top down centralization simplify making the straight lines, seeing the pattern from ten

thousand feet up in the air, whereas what's really necessary is diversity and organized chaos of a sort?

Well, what I've lived experience"one of my heroines is actually Jane Jacobs whose work now is part of the new urban planning. But she was, I think, the first person to think about how the city is lived and experienced on the ground by ordinary people and not just by people who are going to work and then home. So it's the, if you like, how life looks from the bottom. She then set about understanding a city from that perspective and it completely transformed, I think, what was an architectural or sculptural idea of cities that they should somehow look pretty from a helicopter. It's one of the things.

It's curious to me, actually, that whenever the city fathers in Philadelphia, for example, although Philadelphia has saved a lot of its old housing stock, when they're planning new urban projects, you typically have this photo of the architects and the city fathers standing around a miniaturization of a neighborhood, a block a sort of new development and they're looking down on it because everything is miniaturized as if they were god in a helicopter. The fact is nobody experiences the city from that vantage point and what we want to know is how the city will work and how it lives at ground level because that's the level at which most people are going to experience it.

I think this is a problem we have in a larger way. If you think of watching a basketball or football game, you see this game from a camera that's poised above the playing field or above the court and because it's at a distance it makes things look easier and slower. Whereas, if you were to place that camera at court level you

would see the unbelievable intricacy and speed and apparent visual confusion through which an actual player has to pick his way, or her way. So it seems to me our whole way of looking at the world comes from this helicopter perspective and it distorts our sense of how difficult, complicated things are.

And this is so deeply woven into who we are now. In your book Two Cheers for Anarchism*, you say that the use of patronymic naming, in other words giving names based on the father, was invented as a means of supervision and control and that they centralize knowledge and power. Can you explain that a bit and talk about that?*

Oh sure! That's one of my favorite, favorite things. I mean I came across this in writing *Seeing Like a State* and then wrote about it under"and so the fact is that until there were states and, if you like, churches that were collecting taxes and so operating like states, nobody in the world had permanent patronyms that were passed from father to son to grandson to great grandson and so on. This was a state project in order to keep track of people for conscription and taxes and land records and so on because almost all of the forms of naming historically have been for men and often for women as well naming of the relationship between a father and a son. So the "Mac" in Scottish names, or the "O" in Irish names, or the "Bin," or "Ben" in Middle Eastern names means "son of." So names only identify the father and that father's son and then that son would have a son who would have a different name and so the patronym after two generations disappeared. States actually want to keep track of people for, as I said, taxes, conscription- the early states before there was any

kind of welfare state. So it was essentially states that were responsible for the creation, I mean later on, of identity cards and photo IDs and DNA and so on. But the patronym is like an early identity card and an effort to figure out who's who.

There's a great story that I tell. In I think it's the seventeenth century, on the Welsh-English border, in which a Welshman is involved in a court case and they ask him who he is. He says, "My name is Evan ap Huw ap William ap Vaughn ap." So "ap" in Wales meant "son of." So what he was saying was my father was so and so, my grandfather was so and so, my great great grandfather was" it's like the Old Testament" and so and so begat so and so begat so and so. That's the way in which he was able to identify himself by specifying the name of his father, grandfather, great grandfather and, as you go up each generation, you identify more clearly a particular individual. And the judge says, "No, we're not going to have that here in this court." England already has last names for most people and it turns out he has a house named Mostyn House. I guess, people named their houses then and he said, "Well, we're going to call you Evan Mostyn." So he went down in the court records as Evan Mostyn. What's interesting is this is a legal last name and he probably had to remember because the documents were in that form, but none of his neighbors and friends knew him as Evan Mostyn. So the nice thing is that you'll see exactly that moment in which a legal last name is being created for the first time by someone who hasn't needed it until he had this contact with the state.

You use this as an example, a kind of introduction to your discussion of the difference between vernacular

and artisanal production in manufacturing compared to centralized, automated, Henry Ford type manufacturing. Could you talk a little bit about those ideas of vernacular and artisanal versus"?

So let me give you a kind of also an example that I use. So I live in a town called Durham, Connecticut and there's a road that leads from Durham to a town called Guilford at the coast. We in Durham, this is a vernacular way of identifying it, we call this The Guilford Road because it tells us where we'll get to if we take it and the same road at it's Guilford end is called The Durham Road because it tells the people of Guilford where they'll get to if they take it. So these are vernacular names and notice that already we've got a single road that has two names depending on whether you're looking at it from the Durham side or whether you're looking at it from the Guilford side. There are also other roads to Durham from other towns and they call these roads The Durham Road. So it's kind of information. This vernacular knowledge is exactly what we need in Durham to identify a road because it tells us the most important thing, which is where it leads.

The state, however" and so, for certain kinds of other knowledge, you need an official system, a non-vernacular system. Vernacular's good for local people, not good for a kind of official knowledge. So if you're in a car accident and you're bleeding to death on the road and you call the ambulance and say, "Oh, I'm bleeding to death on The Guilford Road," well, there are many Guilford Roads and so you're going to have to specify which Guilford Road you mean. The state calls the road between Durham and Guilford, Route 77. So it then puts it in this universal, infinite, unique series of

numbers in which every road has its own particular number. Now, Route 77 doesn't mean a thing to you until you see it on an actual map of one kind or another. That's a simple distinction. So, states require official knowledge to do much of their work and it is very different from vernacular knowledge.

And you describe how this really affects people's way of seeing and thinking and perceiving and it kind of seeps down into them, this imposition of the state of a centralized way. In your book, Seeing Like a State, *you describe how this approach can be disastrous and lead to failure. Maybe not in the first year but after a certain amount of time because it is too simple. It's too stupid and it really doesn't work, but it looks attractive because of its simplicity.*

Well, the example that I give at the beginning of *Seeing Like a State* is as you know the invention of scientific forestry in Germany in which after trying to maximize the revenue from wood, the princes of Saxony and Prussia hired these, I guess you'd call them, scientists of the day. But their job was to actually make sure that the prince maximized the revenue every year from exploitation of forests by the sale of timber and firewood. So what they did, to make a long story short, is over time they would actually cut down a forest and they would plant the fastest growing tree which, depending on the kind of soil, would be a Scotch Pine or a Norway Spruce. They would plant it in straight rows all at the same time so you ended up then replacing a kind of mixed forest of many different kinds of species of trees with a forest of one tree and all of the trees planted at the same time so all of the trees were of the same age. While they were doing it, they planted them in

straight rows. They did this because they thought of the forest now as like a one product machine as the production of the maximum amount of firewood and lumber. The result, as we all know, was to create a kind of green desert.

It was so monocultural as a forest that most of the species of insects and birds and animals disappeared. The forest actually" because diseases of a particular tree are able to spread like an epidemic when the forest is all just one kind of tree. These trees were actually prone to diseases and diebacks and so on. The result was, since we understood so little about the dynamics of forest growth and forest health and all of the creatures and flora and fauna that live in a forest and it's dynamics, that they ended up actually destroying a forest and had to invent something called, restoration forestry, which was not very successful either, in order to change this.

So, my … there are all series of things … I want to make the larger case that there are certain things that actually you can never learn from a book. Think of riding a bicycle, another example. You can't give someone an instructional booklet on how to ride a bicycle, have them pass a test on it and then put them on a bike and then expect them to be able to ride. They have to sort of experience the movement and balance and so on, little by little as we've all learned as we learn to ride a bike or taught our children to learn bikes. And so, that's something that's sort of like fishing or even playing basketball. These are things that kind of have to be learned by experience and practice and all of those things cannot be codified and made the object of a kind of book learning. These are, of course, skills that are

artisanal knowledge. I think you were referring to that, is the way you became"

(interruption)

We're still here. Hello, hello, hello.

I'm sorry. I lost the connection.

Are you still here?

I've got it back, yeah. Okay. The way in which you became a master craftsman historically was to work as an apprentice with a master craftsman and gradually little by little by little learn each of the functions that the were involved. The same way, I guess, in the great restaurants, you start as a *sous chef*, just chopping lettuce or something, and gradually work your way up to more complicated chores. So it's that kind of learning that's interesting. That kind of learning is not something that is much prized or copied in the formal schooling.

I think that we all know that there are large" there are many kinds of intelligences in the world: mechanical intelligence, combinatorial, imaginative intelligence and so on. Schools … formal schooling generally measures only one kind of intelligence and that's why I think many of the people who go to school find that they feel defeated or humiliated because they're not getting great grades. In general, I think it's because they have talents that are not prized or are not used, that are not trained, and so the school is too much of a one product machine just like the German scientific forest was.

Okay, I'm just moving along, I've got so many questions. I think we could do another two interviews like this frankly. I hope you'll come back.

Sure.

We're getting near the end of the time though. What I like that you describe though is this idea- the centralized, simplified, stupidified, like the German scientific approach to forestry and city planning. It really doesn't work down to all the details and that really what you see is that there, at the edges, you've got people who are supporting by non-conforming, quote "non-conforming, unacknowledged practices at the periphery." This is the kind of thing that Chomsky talks about too. How our economic system does not consider all the factors and all the costs. So this is what the elite do. The elite may set up the system where they live in a protected world, but the only way they do it is by getting the subordinates to support it by breaking the rules by living outside and around the rules, outside of the structure.

Right, right, right. So, my example in the book as you may recall is Brasilia, that kind of new capital of Brazil which, when it was built, the people hated moving there because it didn't have any of the animation and excitement that they associated with what a city should be. In Brasilia, they separated commerce, factory, legislatures and residences and made them all completely separate parts of the city. The result was, of course, a tremendously boring city, true for many, actually, new capitals historically in the last century, or so. There was actually a psychological illness in Brazil diagnosed as Brasiliaitis, which was a sort of depression that came from living in the new city of Brasilia.

So it seems to me that architects ought to be" they ought to be required somehow to spend a lot of time

observing the actual use of a city and the use of space. They should never be allowed to design, if you like, something that other people are going to have to live in without that kind of on the ground, careful observation of what people enjoy about space. How they use it creatively and so on.

That's why Jane Jacobs was so observant about how a city actually worked and how it's different from the city as a planned city. I mean, Philadelphia of course is a good city. The enlightenment plan was to make it all right angles, more or less. Of course, the Delaware River got in the way of that to some extent. San Francisco is a good example of a very hilly city, but the streets are all at right angles and so it's kind of insane. You have streets that have a steepness that there's no rational explanation for, except that they just took a ruler and paid no attention to the actual topography of the city when they were designing the streets.

And so really what you're talking about in terms of the right way to design cities is to take a bottom up approach and look at it from the bottom up.

Right, and to also understand that if you're even planning residences and so on, first of all, that people have a history of taste. They have things that they like and you ought to respect that. Le Corbusier was fond of saying that cities and residences were machines for living. Well, the fact is that people don't look on them as machines. They have to be" they have to work to some extent of course, but they're also a kind of aesthetic environment that people care a lot about.

The fact is that we've designed a whole series of housing, suburban housing in particular, modeled on

mother, father and two kids. You know, the kind of suburban, post Second World War rush to the suburbs. I think a lot of our urban planning ought to be very modest in terms of" it should be designed in terms of flexibility and plasticity because we actually don't know now that mother, father and two kids is a distinct minority of the way in which families are formed and live. We don't know what families are going to look like, what living arrangements are going to look like ten, fifteen, twenty years from now. So we should design housing that allows for a tremendous amount of flexibility in terms of moving partitions so it can be shaped for the needs and desires and aesthetic tastes of people who are not yet even born.

Now you've described how the elites, the people who do these centralized, top down, idealized, simplified projects. They like miniaturization and they'll even create miniatures in the shape of pilot programs or theme parks and things like that. Can you talk a little about bit about that?

Yeah, well I think we're all"one of the ways we deal with things that are out of our control is to deal with them in toy versions. You could say that a doll's house is a way of practicing. Right? Given traditional gender roles, young girls could play in a safe way at running a household, arranging a house and so on. The same is true, I think, historically for boys with tin soldiers and tanks and airplanes and so on. All of which escape our control and are dangerous and so we miniaturize them. In the same way, I think it's extremely common for dictators, not just dictators, to create little zones of perfect order as we call them model projects, model villages. The czars of Russia did this. So of course did Stalin.

You could say in a sense the Tennessee Valley Authority in the depression under Roosevelt was an effort to do this as well. So in many cases it seems to me to be a mark of an elite that has thrown up its hands at creating a larger order. What it does as a substitute for this is to either create a model city, a kind of new city that is going to be representative of the new order that they want to create for the whole country, or they create model villages and model economic development zones that are" in which they can control all the variables because it's smaller and more contained. It's often not clear" this I would argue is often a substitute for, rather than an experiment of an order that could be imposed nationally, or on a broader scale.

Okay, so that makes sense. How does that jibe with E. F. Schumacher's Small is Beautiful? *This idea of miniaturization versus small is beautiful?*

It jibes very well with Schumacher. I actually try … and I should have probably given Schumacher more credit for that. I have a little thing about things that planners should keep in mind. One of them is, if possible, to do small steps and also favor reversibility. So if you" since we know almost always less about the world than we think we know about the world, if we make a huge intervention that is not reversible we're likely to ruin either the natural world or human lives or both of them. Think of Khrushchev's Virgin Lands projects in Siberia. Thousands of people were sent to Siberia to plant wheat and it failed because they didn't understand the environment. It would have been different if they sent, let's say, a tiny little colony to check it out for ten years and see what would grow and what wouldn't grow and so on.

The point is if you make small steps you can withdraw if it doesn't work out. You can adjust. You can change. If the steps you make are steps that you can reverse then you're unlikely to make large mistakes. So this is all about … and I think Schumacher was very much in that genre. It's all about a kind of modesty about our knowledge of how both the natural world works and our knowledge about what people like in terms of their kind of living arrangements. Schumacher" that's that small is beautiful which he experienced actually. I happened to be working, studying Burmese and going to Burma often and Schumacher developed this actually when he was in Burma as well.

Really? Did you get a chance to meet him?

No, never met him.

So, in a number of your books you take on this top down, centralized planning. How do Libertarians respond?

I'm sorry I missed the, I missed the last part.

This idea that we've been discussing where you take on and criticize this top down, centralized planning and design that oversimplifies. How do Libertarians respond to that?

Oh, I see what you mean. I think for that segment of what I have to say the Libertarians would largely be in accord, in agreement. That is the whole point of a certain Libertarian view is that the order that's created by human cooperation and so on is preferable to an order that's created by states. Where I differ from the Libertarians is that the Libertarians" their model of order without hierarchy is the market. My problem with the Libertarians is that they simply don't understand, or

refuse to understand, the fact that market outcomes can result in disparities of income and power that create inequalities and oppression that are intolerable. Most Libertarians are perfectly comfortable with the one percent taking everything. They are completely blind to inequalities in life chances. A Libertarian" I'm taking an extreme example, but it's illustrative. So a Libertarian would say that if I want to sell my child, I'm at liberty to do so. That's an act of free will and it's a free exchange.

In fact, in interwar China there were lots of women who did sell their children, but they sold their children because they had nothing to eat. Anyone in their right mind would recognize this sale as a kind of outcome of coercion and oppression. The trick is to change the conditions that force people to choose between keeping their children and dying, or having a meal. It seems to be the Libertarians are kind of blind to those differences and the way in which life chances are maldistributed.

Speaking of selling one's children. It makes me think of Jonathan Swift's article, "A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People From Being a Burthen to Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick," which was a suggestion that they be sold as food.

Right, right, right.

I wonder if Libertarians might go for this.

Well you know, it's funny you should mention Swift, because Swift understood somehow implicitly that often the best critique of a particular ideology is to take it to its logical conclusion and show how it would work and *A Modest Proposal* was a perfect example of that. I

wish there was more in that way of critique in American political discourse than there is.

We're going to have to end pretty soon by the way.

Yes, I was going to say, you've given me more time than I asked and I do appreciate it. I have so many more questions and I hope we can do this again and hopefully soon, but we'll wrap for now. Any last things you want to say?

No, it was fun and I'm a South Jersey boy. I grew up in a town called Beverly, halfway between Camden and Trenton along the Delaware. Spent a lot of my time swimming in the polluted Delaware River and fishing for eels and went to a little Quaker school, Moorestown Friends School, to which I just went back to the reunion. There was probably not a weekend, there was probably not a single weekend during the basketball season in my teenage years when I didn't go to Philadelphia to see Villanova, La Salle, Penn, St. Joe's, whatever, to see a basketball game.

Okay, I have one more question. I took it from your interview two years ago in the New York Times when your book first came out. It said you were working on a new book on the deep history of plant and animal domestication. How's that going and what's that about?

So I'm interested in why … as you know, I'm interested in states and so I'm interested now in … when I say deep history, I really mean deep history. That goes to say, we've been around as a species, Homo sapiens, for about two hundred thousand years and only the last five thousand years have we lived in things that we call states. So I'm interested in understanding how we came originally to live in these great heaps of grain and domesticated animals and concentrated human beings originally. And so I'm interested in the origin of the

state and since these states, the first ones in Mesopotamia and so on, were very small. Most people were not in states for quite a long time and I'm interested in the relationship with the people outside of states and the people in states. The book that prepared me for this in some sense is a more recent book called, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, which is about hill peoples in Southeast Asia having, over the last two thousand years, run away from states and concentrated in the hills and practicing a form of agriculture that makes it impossible for them to be taxed or controlled.

Okay, I have feeling we're going to have to take this to the next interview, which I'd like to set up with you soon. I'm going to wrap now.

Okay.

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Panel Interview with James C. Scott: by Harry G. West and Celia Plender

On December 11, 2014, James C. Scott, Sterling Professor of Political Science and Professor of Anthropology and founding director of the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University, gave a Distinguished Lecture in the Food Studies Centre at SOAS, University of London (co-organized by the Agrarian Change and Development Research Cluster at SOAS). Lectures in this series are co-sponsored by Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies. *On the following day, Scott answered questions put to him by Harry G. West, Professor of Anthropology and Chair of the Food Studies Centre; Celia Plender, doctoral student in anthropology; and other SOAS students.*[*]

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For decades, Scott has been a key figure in Southeast Asian Studies and in the comparative study of agrarian societies and peasant politics. His best-known works examine the state, hegemony, revolution, resistance, and anarchism, and include *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (Yale University Press, 1976), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1980), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998), and *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale University Press, 2008).

In this session, Scott reflects on his intellectual precursors and his place in the landscape of academic disciplines; the significance of food and agriculture in his work; the tenuous future of peasant agriculture and

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agrarian societies; globalization and the rise of corporate agriculture and the food industries; poverty and the struggle for justice; and his own experiences with farming and farm land conservation.

PANEL:

JAMES C. SCOTT [JS]

HARRY G. WEST [HW]

CELIA PLENDER [CP]

HW: *Jim, what drew you to "agrarian studies"—specifically with a focus on the peasantry and its relationship with the state—and what drew you to Southeast Asia? Is there a backstory that you can share with us that gives us a sense of this emergent intellectual agenda?*

JS: I stumbled into Southeast Asia. I had bungled my honors thesis as an undergraduate, my professor dismissed me, and if I wanted an honors degree, I had to find someone who would adopt me. I was an economics major and someone said, well, I think I'd like to understand more about the economic development of Burma and if you do this I will adopt you as an honors student. And I said fine, and then when I closed the door behind his office I said to myself, where's Burma? I got a Rotary Fellowship to go to Burma and one thing led to another and I became a Southeast Asianist. As far as agrarian studies is concerned, that's actually a simpler story and maybe typical of my generation. I started to teach as a Southeast Asianist during the middle of the Vietnam War and the expansion of the Vietnam War at the University of Wisconsin. The university had a long progressive tradition, which was one reason why I took a job there. The fall of 1967 when I arrived to begin

teaching there were the so-called "Dow Riots" protesting the war and the manufacture and use of napalm ordnance by Dow as well as the contract research for the Department of Defense conducted on campus. These riots convulsed the campus and coincided with a strike by teaching assistants to secure unionization rights. The police responded badly and a good many students were beaten and arrested. The turmoil led to a series of all-faculty meetings in which I took an active part, speaking against the war and for the rights of the protestors. As a budding Southeast Asianist I spent a good deal of the following two years speaking against the war in Wisconsin and elsewhere. I became interested in peasant rebellion—understanding the Viet Cong and how peasant rebellions happened. I taught a course on peasant rebellion with a China specialist friend, Edward Friedman, and in those days we had 400, 500 students in the class who were fighting for the microphone to denounce us as insufficiently progressive. Finally I decided that since peasants were the largest segment of the world's population, it would be an honorable and worthy career to devote my life to the study of peasants and agriculture. So when I finally went to Yale, we began something called the Program in Agrarian Studies and it brought together all those people who were interested in rural life generally: land tenure, agriculture, now food and environment. For me it was a wonderful interdisciplinary community in which I learned a tremendous amount. I think of the book *Seeing Like a State* as the book that agrarian studies helped me write, just by attending all of the seminars that we had—including ones which Harry presented.

HW: *The next question really builds on that. It's about disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, because you regularly engage in your work with a range of disciplines: political science, anthropology, history, in the Program on Agrarian Studies forestry is very prominent, people in environmental sciences as well; your work is also used by people in these disciplines. And you use ethnographic methods, you use archival methods, you engage with culture in ways that the typical political scientist doesn't. So tell us your thoughts on disciplines; their usefulness, the problems they pose, where your work fits in relation to them. Do you consider yourself to be undisciplined?*

JS: Definitely! I was trained as a political scientist and the profession bores me, to be frank. I am truly bored by mainstream work in my discipline, which strikes me as a kind of medieval scholasticism of a special kind. People ask me about the intellectual organization of my interdisciplinary work, and I have to say, it's the consequence of boredom and the knowledge that so many other things had been written about peasants that are more interesting than anything political scientists have written about them, that I should go to those places and learn these things and read things outside of the discipline like Balzac and Zola, novels about the peasantry and memoirs. If you spend all of your time reading mainstream political science, you are going to reproduce mainstream political science. Nothing else can happen from that particular place. It seems to me, anything interesting that happens in political science is probably an import from some exotic place outside political science and I happen to go to different exotic places than other people and once in a while I stumble

across something that helps me understand. The thing that attracted me to anthropology is that it insisted on a kind of eyes-wide-open fieldwork and total immersion in a peasant community and so I went from political science to a kind of anthropology envy. I can remember the first time I gave a talk when, I think it was in Toronto, and they didn't know what discipline I came from, and they said, "Jim Scott, social anthropologist from Yale" and I thought, oh my God, I've finally passed. I felt so proud that they didn't know I was a political scientist; I had succeeded in transcending my background.

HW: *Next we have a question which deals with a methodological aspect of the kind of ethnographic work that you've done.*

Cormac Cleary: *In* Weapons of the Weak *you say that "power-laden situations are nearly always inauthentic." Being a member of an elite Western institution yourself and so occupying a high position in global power structures, I was wondering whether this has affected your search for the "hidden transcript" among peasants and, if so, how you have gotten around this?*

JS: The only fieldwork of any real extent that I've done was for *Weapons of the Weak* and this was a sort of mainstream, rice farming village in the state of Kedah in Malaysia. I spent nearly two years in a small village—perhaps seventy families. I've never worked harder or learned so much so fast in my life; as an anthropologist you are at work from when you open your eyes in the morning to when you close them at night. I always read a novel for twenty minutes, with a flashlight under the mosquito net no matter how late I had

finished my fieldnotes—long after everyone else in the house was asleep—just to clear my head and travel, briefly, to another world. My whole family was with me and between the four of them, they noticed many things that I had overlooked. I think it is fair to say that this was the one occasion on which I tried to earn my "stripes" as a field ethnographer. Though I stumbled any number of times I felt that I did manage to come to know one village intimately enough so that whenever I was tempted to make some third-order generalization about peasants and villagers I had one place I knew sufficiently so that I could at least avoid the usual clichés. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, which has no original field research of mine at all, deals further with the subject of "hidden transcripts"—I think it is my work that's traveled furthest outside the social sciences in some way. And you can't think about these issues without examining your own performance before people of power and the performance of people over whom you have power when you interact with them. It's made me exquisitely self-conscious. I'm in charge in part of trying to raise money for this Agrarian Studies Program, so once every year I have to go to New York and I have to do a convincing performance for foundation executives that what we're doing is exactly what they want to have happen in the world. It's nothing like people who are the bottom of the heap who are indigent and so on, so I don't want to dignify my insights with any particular kind of power, but it's not as if all of us don't find ourselves having to present ourselves in the most favorable light before someone who has the power to help us or hurt us or to injure us, and so on. In the same fashion you sit around a seminar

table at a university and the circular formation of the table makes it seem as if everybody is equal. In a sense the architecture of the seminar says equality and it says Habermas's ideal speech situation. But in fact some people give grades and other people take them and I'm under no illusions—the performance in a seminar is both a performance for one's fellow students and a performance for the professor who gives out the grades.

CP: *Going back to your intellectual project, could you name three to five scholars whose work has been particularly important to your own development and explain how their work has informed yours?*

JS: There are books that I've read that are absolutely central to my intellectual formation, such as Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*. Someone told me that I had to read it before I went to graduate school, and this is someone I respected, and so I did, and if it's not the most influential book I read in my intellectual development, it's pretty close to it and it still kind of rings true. I found that eight or ten years ago I taught it and I thought students would not be interested in the Speenhamland system of poor relief, but it turns out to be an incredibly charismatic book and everyone loved reading it. So Karl Polanyi is at the center of that. E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is also enormously important to me. I can remember the chair I was sitting in when I read it, because it took me two or three days. That certainly has stuck with me in terms of the analysis of class consciousness. And I have the pictures of two scholars up over my desk. One of them is Marc Bloch, who worked on feudal society in France and the essential characteristics of French rural history. He was the kind of rural

historian that I would like to have become if I were an historian, the person who can stand on a hill and read the history of the landscape over the last three or four centuries just by looking at the hedgerows, at the marks on the land. I think *Feudal Society*, all two volumes of it, but without footnotes, is one of the most readable, wonderful books I've ever read. And the other one is Chayanov. *The Theory of Peasant Society*, which basically comes from meticulous studies of labor and expenditure and cropping in small peasant farms, which were part of an Austrian and German tradition of small farm studies around the turn of the century. It's worth noting that Chayanov was murdered by Stalin in the early 1930s and Marc Bloch was murdered by the Nazis in the course of the Second World War as well. Finally, in *Seeing Like a State* it struck me all of a sudden that the people who make great innovations are often people who are knowledgeable about a discipline, but who have not been trained in the mainstream of that discipline. I learned so much from Jane Jacobs' work on *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. She was not an urban planner, she was not an urban historian, she worked as a journalist for an architectural magazine, and she had a different eye, as a mother among other things, and as a walker in the city. She saw the city with eyes that no urban planner would, and she produced the best critique of modernist urban planning that I think we have that's now kind of settled doctrine, but at the time, in 1960, it wasn't. The other example is Rachel Carson. She starts out her book *Silent Spring* with women in Michigan noticing that there are no songbirds in their backyard any more, and wondering what's happened to them. She was a marine biolo-

gist who happened to be interested in pesticides and wildlife, and both of these people wrote books which are orthogonal to the discipline and the work on biology and environment at the time and they both launched hundreds and hundreds of ships of other scholars who wanted to do work of that kind. So it's kind of sobering that most of this work is produced by, I wouldn't say outsiders, but quasi-outsiders. So, the trick is, how can you make yourself a quasi-outsider and see with fresh eyes all the things that your discipline takes for granted and one of the things you can do of course is to reverse every assumption that your discipline teaches you and see how it looks upside-down, and usually it's just as plausible as it is the way that you're taught and that's a good way to start.

CP: *Following on from the last question, if your primary interest has been in the dynamics of agrarian society, how would you characterize the significance of agriculture and food in your own intellectual project?*

JS: Well, for more than two decades I was a sheep breeder. I do a little gardening but I'm not much interested in scratching the earth and making vegetables grow. I'm an animal husband person and I always have loved raising animals. It was never very profitable; I did learn to do my own shearing—which is definitely the hardest thing I've ever learned to do—and sheared for neighbors. So I have enjoyed a kind of relationship with agriculture as a mediocre farmer, as a mediocre sheep raiser, and as a mediocre beekeeper—and I'm serious about the mediocrity, I'm right there in the middle. As a sheep shearer I get a sort of solid B or B plus, alright? In any case, I found that actually practicing a little agriculture makes me sensitive to issues that

I would not otherwise understand. There were four of us who started the agrarian studies program; we thought this was essentially a peasant studies program. We were interested in land tenure and we were interested in peasants. We didn't know anything about crop biology and botany and how things grew and soil composition and environment or food and supply chains. So what has happened is that the students who've come to our door over the past twenty, twenty-five years have been interested more in environment, in food, in supply chains. The people in environmental studies know a lot about soil cover and nutrients and erosion. So I think that my interest in food and agriculture, qua-agriculture as opposed to peasants, is a result of changes in the zeitgeist and the things that people are interested in. I remember, we were going to do a little conference on land tenure, and I remember Michael Pollan, who's got a good sense for the popular zeitgeist, saying, you know, if you do a conference on land tenure no one's going to come. Figure out a way to start with food and then you can take 'em anywhere you want to take 'em, but you ought to start with a place where you know they're likely to be engaged. Now I think the fact is that food is, given the current concerns about health and food chains and environment and so on, it's a fabulous way to have people trace back where whatever they're eating comes from and how it was created and the supply chain that put it together, and that's part of a serious analysis of capitalism, and I mean you can go to deep theoretical levels, starting out with that piece of meat on your plate, or that vegetable.

HW: *We want to shift into some questions that have a thematic focus now. In Weapons of the Weakthere's*

the story of the combine harvester: after this technology begins to replace peasant labor, one gets stuck in the mud and peasants are then asked to help get it out. Of course they're not very pleased about that and resist it. So it's a story both of them becoming irrelevant and of their resisting this. I think of this story as suggesting two possibilities. It may be emblematic of a moment of transition that's irreversible, or it may be a story that is told over and over and over again in many different places and at many different times. As you look back over the years and what you've seen in the various places and the things that you've studied, the question is, how long can this timeless story be retold before there is no one left, of the sort that you have long studied, to resist?

JS: So, let me tell you why that story seemed important to me at the time and why we might think of stories like that as telling us something important. So this was in a sense the waves of history rolling over these small farmers in the area in which I was doing my research. They understood that their days were numbered and the combine harvester stuck in the mud was a kind of moment of reversal, it was a moment of symbolic victory and it was important for them because it was a moment of success and triumph in a world in which the cards were stacked against them in every other way, and that's why they dwelt on it. It's interesting that the world of rumors and gossip is a world of wish fulfillment. And one of the things that gives volume and amplitude to a rumor is that it satisfies people's dreams and expectations about the world—and it's not just peasantry. I remember, there was a man in my village who was actually disliked, because aside

from me he was the only person who had a little automobile, and he never took anyone to the hospital, never did any service for the village. There was a rumor that the Chinese from whom he'd borrowed the money for the car had come to repossess it, and I've never seen people happier, because they hated him because he wasn't using his wealth to be a good member of the community and they were just overjoyed at the news. It permeated the whole village for days and days and days, but it turned out to be false. And lo and behold, two months later the Chinese middlemen did come and take the car, so that they had their moment. I think Eric Hobsbawm captures this in his idea of social banditry. There's hardly any country that you can find that doesn't have the history of what Hobsbawm calls social banditry, that is, people who rob from the rich and give to the poor, who are seen as benefactors of the poor. Hobsbawm's point, which I think is absolutely correct, is that it doesn't much matter what the social bandit is doing, and, you know, stories about Jesse James helping little old ladies across the street, of coming home to his town to teach Sunday school as a good Christian, none of this is even remotely true. This is the dream that people had that he was one of them and was a good Christian citizen of his town. And so they fill the void in information with their utopian expectations of what a good man who was violating the law on their behalf might have done. So the world of rumor and gossip is like a privileged world with which a social scientist or an anthropologist can take the temperature of popular aspirations.

HW: *How long does this story go on? Does it go on interminably or is there an endgame in all of this?*

JS: In a world of injustice there's going to be dreams of justice; whether there are peasants around, whether it's justice for peasants or not, is another thing. We may be seeing the end of the smallholder in many places, Via Campesina notwithstanding, it may be that the days are numbered for small property of that kind. But it seems to me that rumors and dreams of justice are part of a dialectic of injustice and dreams of justice will be with us for as long as there's injustice, and that doesn't seem to be in short supply.

HW: *Sticking with the theme of resistance, in The Art of Not Being Governed you make the argument that there are particular natural ecologies—in that case it's hills, it's mountains, it's high terrain—that lend themselves to forms of resistance, forms of retreat from authority, and you map that out very nicely with the kind of relationship between people, their cultivars, and these spaces of resistance. We see today all kinds of forces that are expanding into these hinterlands and borderlands, as well as the exhaustion of arable land and now the farming of marginal areas, including rainforest ecosystems, and terrain that has greater slope. We also see attempts in the agricultural sciences to create technologies that can be expanded into these terrains. But to what extent do you see these ecological niches themselves as being able to persist through time and provide a kind of cover or a kind of habitat for forms of social, economic, and political resistance?*

JS: That's a big question. There are parts of most countries, particularly in the global south, in which the state never had much interest. They might be deserts, they might be swampy, they might be "empty quarters" as they're called, but they'd be areas in which the popu-

lation is relatively thin, it doesn't produce much in the way of important resources of trade, and so these are areas that I called "fiscally sterile" areas in *The Art of Not Being Governed*. In British and French colonial rule these areas were ruled indirectly by appointing some native chief over them and making sure they didn't cost the metropolitan country any money. The areas that were valuable economically as export zones, tax fields and so on, were ruled more or less directly. What's interesting to me is that in the late twentieth century it seems that there's scarcely a part of the world that doesn't have some capitalist return that can be realized providing that this area's made accessible and resources can be extracted from it. This includes rare earth metals, for different kinds of ores, used for cell phones and the aerospace industry; hydroelectric sites; and stands of timber, which can actually be gotten out by helicopter in the most difficult situations. I think swamps that have not been drained are one of the last areas that persist. So in the Civil War, when the Civil War began in the United States there were seven thousand escaped slaves in the Great Dismal Swamp, the Virginia–North Carolina border, because it was an area in which you could go and be safe if you couldn't make it to Canada. And so it's not as if these "non-state" spaces are absent, it's that they're fewer and fewer. Increasingly, there are technologies available to make such previously off-the-grid spaces legible and bring them under control. Think, for example, of the Vietnam War and Agent Orange, which was an effort to destroy the canopy of the forests so that you could actually detect movements of Viet Cong underneath the canopy. And the spread of plantations: palm oil, rubber, what

have you, in Southeast Asia, is also making these places legible. As is the movement of valley peoples whose population is growing quickly in Southeast Asia. There's this effort in Vietnam, in Burma, in Thailand, to take Thai, Burmans, and Vietnamese and move them up into the hills in order to engulf the indigenous population and to people the borders with people who they regard as culturally similar and more loyal. And the same of course is true of what's happening in southwest China; it's the movement of large numbers of Han populations into these areas that essentially overwhelms and engulfs an indigenous population that becomes a minority. And if you look at the borders of Tibet, most of the Tibetan Buddhists are outside of the autonomous region of Tibet, and that's by design in order to divide them up and mix them with Han populations who can dominate them.

HW: *So there's one more question here that pertains to the dynamic between disappearance and persistence. It relates to food and foodways in Southeast Asia.*

Andy Spraklen: *In reference again to* Weapons of the Weak, *have you recently revisited Muda? What are your views on the state and the future sustainability of the Southeast Asian food system and the cuisines that it supports, and to what extent are Western methods of production and consumption habits impacting Southeast Asian cuisine, in your view?*

JS: I do go back to this village every four or five years as a kind of matter of habit and of loyalty, but it's changed enormously and a lot of the people that I knew are now dead. I think it's important to say that in terms

of foodways, the area in which I was working was an area of marine clay soils that was sea bottom not so very long ago, geologically, and that it was entirely a rice-growing plain. I mean people grew a handful of vegetables during the dry season along the canals, watering them from time to time, but this place didn't grow very much except rice, period. There were small fish in the paddies and in the canals and there were a whole series of greens that one could gather, which are called *kangkung*, which people sort of ate every day. So I actually think that I probably had the healthiest diet of my entire life, because it was fish, rice, and greens, every day, all day. And it was monotonous, but there was nothing unhealthy about it except there was not much in the way of fruits that came from the highlands, but they were available in most of the markets because Malaysia had a pretty good road system that made the movement of things, of hill products, possible. So my impression is that Malayan peasant cuisine is monotonous but quite healthy, and they do have bananas and coconuts. With a little extra cash they can add the fruits and vegetables that are not grown in their region. So I think, given the constraints of income, they eat probably as well as almost anybody in the world. In the city Malaysia is a kind of wonderful hybrid of Chinese food, Indian food, Malay food, and also fusions of these foods. Many of you are familiar with so-called Nyonya food, which is the sort of Straits Chinese version of Malay food, which is famous in Penang and other places. So I think as a cosmopolitan place with a lot of different tastes and a pretty intelligent food-consuming public, that Malaysia has a food culture that's very rich and varied. Now, if you change the lens on your ques-

tion a little bit and ask what's happening to Malaysia as a food producer, then by and large it's producing palm oil, rubber, and rice, three basic commodities, and not contributing much to the biodiversity of agricultural goods. From that perspective of where they fit into the international food chain, you could draw a much more pessimistic and lamentable picture, Malaysia has probably gone about as far as any country in the world to replace small farms with industrial, monocropped plantations, mostly for industrial crops like oil palm and rubber and monocropped timber with all the loss of biodiversity, crop diseases, and heavy use of pesticides and herbicides that implies.

CP: *Now we'd like to move on to thinking more about corporations, globalization, and the role of the state, in the food system and agriculture.*

Tracey Campbell: *Given that few societies, if any, are now fully independent of the kind of market forces that you have been discussing today, how should ethnographers consider corporations as actors when they're doing their research? To elaborate a little further, a lot of people studying peasant agriculturists bemoan the presence of a market or corporations who extract value from the peasants, but there doesn't seem to be any robust methodology for dealing with the corporations on the other side of those transactions so that there's a corporate perspective on the transaction. It seems to be a sort of "here there be dragons" area of ethnographic research.*

JS: I suppose that would be remedied by the kind of ethnography in which people who either undercover, or with permission, go and do ethnographies of corpora-

tions as they're dealing with them, right? So I would recommend a hero student of mine who's named Tim Pachirat. He had an idea which was not politically correct for a political scientist; he was interested in what it did to people to kill sentient beings every day all day for a living. And so what he did, although he's originally of Thai-American background and was going to work in Thailand, he learned Spanish and got himself a job in a slaughterhouse working for a year and a half, including working on the kill floor of the slaughterhouse, and ended up writing an ethnography of vision in the slaughterhouse in a book that I promise you, you cannot put down, it is so gripping. Everybody said that this was a career-ending move as a dissertation, but he wanted to do it and the book is an astounding account of the way in which the clean and dirty sections of a slaughterhouse are kept separate from one another and workers treated differently, and the way the line works. You could only write this ethnography, I think, by actually doing this work. And if he asked permission they never would have given it to him, so he just did it. So, he avoided all of the protocols for the people you're interviewing, etc., he just ignored it all and did it. To begin with nothing much happened; he spent three months hanging livers in a cold room with another Hispanic worker. I mean, three months just taking a liver that came on a chain and putting it in a box and passing it on. And so he didn't think that there was a lot of ethnography coming out of the room where he was packing livers, but he gradually worked his way into other parts of the plant. But I wish more people would go into the belly of the beast, either of corporations or supermarkets or institutions. At the end of his book he sug-

gests making slaughterhouses out of glass and allowing schoolchildren to see how their meat's prepared. I always believed that social science was a progressive profession because it was the powerful who had the most to hide about how the world actually worked and if you could show how the world actually worked it would always have a de-masking and a subversive effect on the powerful. I don't think that's quite true, but it seems to me it's not bad as a point of departure anyway.

HW: *Moving on to the state now, you associate developing technologies of rule historically with ever more exploitative forms of hierarchy, and of course revolutionary states come in for focused critique in your work, as you distinguish between struggles over and through the apparatus of the state and you point out that these struggles have generally been disastrous for peasants and the working poor. But in a globalized world where decisive forms—and here I'm thinking about things like vertically integrated food supply chains—operate at ever greater distances and seem ever less controllable to ordinary people, is there not some role for the state; is resistance possible without engaging the state, without using the state in one way or another?*

JS: It's hard to see any institutional structure that stands in the way of the homogenization and simplification of these supply chains in international capitalism, unless it is the nation state, right? Unless it is a kind of authoritative state structure. So, "yes." [laughs] Now, qualifications that will leave little of the "yes" standing. First of all, most states aren't even remotely democracies and most of the people who run these states by and

large do the bidding of their corporate masters and take bribes and are servants of international capitalism, right? So we can't rely on those states, can we? And then you take contemporary Western democracies, let me use my own country which I know best as an example, yes, you have an electoral system, yes you reelected the first black man president, yes there are some changes. On the other hand, the concentration of wealth has grown steeper and steeper and steeper, it allows lobbyists and people who provide campaign finance to basically control a campaign and its message, these people tend at the sort of high echelons of the corporate world to control most of the media and its messaging—right? These people are also able to sit on the congressional committees and write the loopholes in the legislation. Even when there is reform, they're able to so influence the wording of the legislation that the loopholes are built in, they don't have to be found, they're actually legislated. And so then you get a state that in a neoliberal world is less and less able to be an honest mediator, a representative of popular aspirations, to discipline corporations. I want to leave a little bit of the yes standing, because as the result of the financial crisis there were slightly more stringent rules on bank capitalization, on regulation, on some consumer protection, but I think by and large there is not much in that way. Now, Scandinavian social democracy is a better picture, but North Atlantic, Anglo-American neoliberalism is not providing the kind of state that I think can provide this kind of discipline and regulation. I'm pessimistic.

Orlena Yee: *Your work, and your answers today, have documented many of the ways that states under-*

mine peasant farming, land tenure rights, and even agricultural ecologies, but in some historical instances the state has played a key role in securing endangered ecosystems, shoring up land rights, and subsidizing farming. Can you comment on the scope for the state to play a beneficial role in such instances?

JS: Tell me more about these places that are protecting farmers and ecosystems.

Orlena Yee: *In* Weapons of the Weak *you use the example of the double-cropping of rice, how the state took control of the water supply and how Muda became a double-cropping area. And initially that did raise the level of everyone's well-being, but as you argued, over time the inequalities increased, particularly for the peasants, who suffered. But in the initial instance it did help. And I was just wondering if there were any other instances like that?*

JS: So that's true, everyone looked on the double-cropping as the first time when even poor families could eat rice all year long, which was an important sort of civilizational marker for them. So that was a moment in which land tenure remained constant and the supply of water all year round increased and it was a boom for everyone. But very quickly those effects began to filter back and change the land tenure system, in which large owners who had previously had to rent to tenants because they couldn't farm large areas, could use the big machines and then could farm, and kick off a lot of their tenants. So my impression is that it's only in quasi-revolutionary situations where the state steps in and guarantees smallholder property that this occurs. The most striking example of that is probably the Mexican Revolution in which Mexican peasants got back

their *milpa* lands, which had been taken away by plantations. And up until the new basic law ten years ago, enforced in part by the World Bank, a lot of Mexican peasants had at least a foot in the land—they were able to grow some of the major subsistence crops that they needed. But I think that's actually fairly rare and when it does happen, it happens because there's a popular movement of land rights that is powerful enough to create a government that is dedicated to that and to enforcing it. As you know, the world is filled with failed land reforms, so usually there's what's called a land retention limit. I remember someone explaining this to me in the Philippines, they were traveling with a land reform team and the news came over the radio, they were setting the limit of how much land you could keep before it would be seized and distributed to tenants, and it turned out that—I think I have this right, this was under Marcos a long time back in the mid-1970s—that the retention limit was declared to be twenty hectares, which is a lot of rice land. And the land reform team broke into spontaneous applause, because they all owned between ten and twenty hectares of land themselves and they were happy that none of this land was going to be taken away from them. So when you have a retention limit of course, it's possible for people to avoid it in hundreds of ways by distributing land to their cousins, their children, their nephews, their nieces, and to make sure that no one rises above this retention limit. So most government land reforms are effectively a dead letter and those that are not are because of a mass of popular pressure or an actual revolution. The other thing I wanted to mention is, especially in the neoliberal moment that we're living in, the economists of the IMF and the World Bank believe that the only way of economic progress is for land to seek its highest

return, and that is to create a market, a national market in land in which anybody can buy land anywhere, and that means making sure that people who have unclear titles are given clear titles—this is Hernando de Soto's particular hobbyhorse. What they're trying to do in Mexico is to title all these tiny little pieces of land and Hernando de Soto believes they can use it as a collateral to get a loan to start a small business of one kind or another. In fact, it allows for the concentration of land in the hands of wealthy entrepreneurs who may actually be able to get more profit out of this land than a smallholder, but probably at the price of the insecurity of smallholders who previously had some subsistence goods that they were in direct control of. So it seems to me that the largest development project in the world is the World Bank land titling project. It's a formula. Any officials, I suppose, can send, oh…, $49.99 and a cereal box top to the World Bank, and they will send them back a land titling kit, because they are titling land all over the world with the objective of making it possible to market land in a secure, contractual way that's guaranteed by law…they're trying to make land a commodity. While I'm mentioning that, I think it's interesting that it's now possible for countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, China, and so on to actually lease for ninety-nine years huge tracts of land in the Third World. And so it turns out that land is not only a fungible commodity within a national market for property, but it's also an international market for land in which the one thing you thought would stay in the same place can effectively be sold to foreigners.

Claire Gilbert: *Thinking about land on a smaller scale, I was reading about your farm in New Haven and this really struck a chord with me, given your comments on "escape agriculture" in* The Art of Not

Being Governed *and also on the sense of autonomy provided by land ownership in* Two Cheers for Anarchism. *So my question is, to what extent do you see your farm and other smaller hobby farms, if you will, as effective forms of resistance in the West?*

JS: I don't think they're resistant at all. [laughter] You know, as you say, it's a hobby farm, and now, instead of sheep I have two Scottish Highland cows who've been there for seven or eight years and are like decorative lawn ornaments, more or less, and I have chickens and bees and I do this for my peace of mind. What I have done, I wouldn't dignify it with the name of resistance, is that I've come to love this land so well—it's about forty-six acres—that I arranged to have it put in a "conservation easement," which means that it can never be built on and always has to be open land or agricultural land, and that sort of reduced its value to my children. Oh well, too bad for them. But it means that there will never be a Walmart or a Sainsbury's, and so I've done what little I can to make sure that I've done right by the land.

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