

Title: Encountering Spirits: Trance and Spirit Possession in the Performing Arts of Contemporary Southeast Asia

Convener: Lorenzo Chiarofonte (SOAS University of London, UK); Iaria Meloni (La Sapienza University of Rome, ITALY); Eva Rapoport (Mahidol University, THAILAND)

Brief description of the panel: Spirit encounters constitute an essential part of many performing arts throughout Southeast Asia. Various forms of trance, shamanism, spirit possession, mediumship, altered states of consciousness, ecstatic and transcendent states are deeply intertwined with local cultures and everyday life of local communities: while some of these forms are still embedded in traditional, religious and ritual milieu, other appear to belong to a more globalized context and to be closely connected to the political, economic and social trends of the current century. In fact, practices of spirit encounters, despite their archaic roots, do not remain frozen in time but adapt to the changes in action in their diverse environments. The ongoing scholarly interest in this field produced important contributions; however, the amount of studies emerged in recent years is still incomparable to the wide variety of phenomena to be found in the region.

This panel intends to discuss new challenges and responses and to explore different practices through inter- and multidisciplinary approaches (including, but not limited to, performing arts studies, ethnomusicology and ethnocoreology, religious studies, cultural anthropology and cultural studies) in a geographical comparative perspective, investigating diverse aspects of the phenomena throughout Mainland and Insular Southeast Asia. More specifically: Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar.

We are proposing new insights and innovative multiple approaches discussed by scholars from different countries – including Italy, United Kingdom, Russia and Germany, in order to encourage the interdisciplinary and intercultural exchange.

Session: single session (1 x 90 min.): 3-4 presenters

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