

## EUROSEAS 2021

Panel proposal (single session)

Title: Materialities of occupation in Southeast Asia in the twenty-first century

Convenor: Stephanie Benzaquen-Gautier (ERC Research Fellow, 'Cultures of Occupation in Twentieth century Asia' (COTCA), University of Nottingham, UK).

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Brief description of the panel

Writing in the wake of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, cultural theorist WJT Mitchell tries to bring about a new definition of 'occupation' ('Image, space, revolution: the arts of occupation,' *Critical Inquiry*, 2012). He underlines the changing valence of the term, whose 'principal meaning in the preceding historical epoch as a label for military conquest and neo-colonialism' has been transformed into a political praxis associated with new forms of agency. It is this nexus – or rather this potentiality for reversal – that the panel proposes to explore with a focus on Southeast Asia. How does imperial/colonial 'occupation' transform into a mobilizing force in struggles for political rights, social justice, civil liberties, and environment? The rights campaigner organization FORSEA (Force of Renewal for Southeast Asia), for example, connects the dissemination of progressive ideals and the transnational collaboration of activist networks with the reappraisal of the 'colonial residues' that still haunt Southeast Asian countries through persistent forms of political domination and ethnic and religious conflicts. The panel will discuss such rearticulations of historical, political, structural and 'slow' violence in protest movements and operations in Southeast Asia today. It will focus on the doings of civil society NGOs and critical contemporary artists.

On the theoretical level, the panel builds on Mitchell's disciplinary displacement of the notion of 'occupation' from the fields of history, international relations, and law to the fields of visual culture and media. It aims to expand this move and proposes as a framework for the discussion the interdisciplinary field of New Materialisms (feminist theory, natural sciences, queer studies, ecocriticism, critical theories of race, animal studies, chaos and system theories). The panel will try to assess the ways in which 'theories of matter' and the range of concepts they produced/reworked (e.g., assemblage, trans-corporeality, posthumanism) contribute to critical knowledge about activism in Southeast Asia, more specifically on the questions of intersectionality of struggles, formation of collectives, networks, performativity, and repertoires. Conversely, the panel will seek to understand how Southeast Asian perspectives 'decenter' or 'decolonize' conceptions of materialism that have so far been little challenged by non-Western and indigenous ontologies. The conversation between Southeast Asian studies and New Materialisms will help to rethink the definition of 'occupation' and its relationship with colonialism and imperialism in Southeast Asia, with a focus on issues of temporalities, scales, and ecologies. It will also stimulate a new look at the sources – beyond texts and images – that academia uses for the study of protest in Southeast Asia. The panel will be open to academics, activists, artists, and curators.