

Organized by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (NUS);  
with support from the NUS Humanities and Social Sciences Seed Fund – Dancing Ecologies in the Asia-Pacific

# DANCING ECOLOGIES in the Asia-Pacific

Negotiating Identities in a Context of Change and Dispossession

**19-20 FEBRUARY 2024**

Hybrid Format

Tahitian Dancer, Tahiti, August 2022

For more information, please visit: [ari.nus.edu.sg/events/dancing-ecologies/](https://ari.nus.edu.sg/events/dancing-ecologies/)

**This workshop is organized by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (NUS); with support from the NUS Humanities and Social Sciences Seed Fund – Dancing Ecologies in the Asia-Pacific.**

In the Asia-Pacific, the relation humans have with their land- and seascape has traditionally been core to their existence, social identity and sense of belonging, and dance—as a form of embodied storytelling—has traditionally been one of the main mediums of expression and maintenance of this relation. Across history, a long series of events—colonization, evangelization, urbanization, rise of the tourist industry, programs for the protection and valorization of tangible and intangible heritages, acceleration of climate change, natural disasters, migrations and displacements—has come to complicate and often challenge this modality of relating to the land- and seascape. In this workshop, we discuss how dance practices evolved across time reflecting, absorbing, and resisting these changes, but we also examine the role dance often has in dealing with suffering and traumas related to events that undermined the physical or cultural survival of a community or the sense of belonging.

Welcoming approaches that draw from anthropology, performance studies, critical dance studies, literatures, media studies, migration and gender studies, and a diversity of research methods, including decolonized ethnography and practice as method, the workshop wants to be an opportunity to reflect on the connection between bodies and places and about the places, sounds, gestures, and memories that make us and that we carry with us when we move across time and space. In particular, we want to understand how dance embodies the space it signifies; which identities are expressed, negotiated, revendedicated through dance; and how the communicative, transformative power of dance informs dance educators and choreographers in their attempt to engage dancers and audience “ecologically”.

By combining within the same conversation Asian and Oceanic sites, including mildly to highly urbanized Asian sites, animated by very complex and diversified ecologies and cosmologies, and sites in Oceania where green and water spaces are still predominant and the cosmologies more homogeneous, we hope to learn as much about local and regional ecologies, shared and unshared heritages, national and regional identities and how these are connected through dance.

## **WORKSHOP CONVENOR**

**Dr Céline CODEREY**

Asia Research Institute, and Tembusu College, National University of Singapore

# 19 FEBRUARY 2024 • MONDAY

09:45 – 10:00	<b>WELCOME</b>
09:45	<b>CÉLINE CODEREY</b> , National University of Singapore <b>MAITRII AUNG-THWIN</b> , National University of Singapore
10:00 – 11:00	<b>ACTIVATION BY GUEST ARTIST</b>
10:00	Movement for Joy <b>JACK GRAY</b> , Aotearoa, New Zealand
11:00 – 11:30	<b>MORNING TEA</b>
11:30 – 13:00	<b>PANEL 1 • BEYOND COMMON METHODS AND CONCEPTS</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>NORAMIN FARID</b> , Choreographer, Arts Educator & Researcher
11:30 <i>Online</i>	Kinesthetic Meaningfulness: Dance and/as Aesthetic Labor <b>BIRGIT ABELS</b> , Georg August University of Göttingen
11:50	Doing Dance Geographies: Methodological Experiments and Reflections in Singapore's Urban Nature <b>WEN TING OOI</b> , National University of Singapore
12:10	Narrative Research: Empowering Agency through Dance <b>STEPHANIE BURRIDGE</b> , Singapore University of the Arts
12:30	Questions & Answers
13:00 – 14:00	<b>LUNCH</b>
14:00 – 15:30	<b>PANEL 2 • MAPPING AND CARING FOR THE LAND AND THE SEA: ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>NING POH</b> , National University of Singapore
14:00 <i>Online</i>	Embodying the 'Āina (Land): An Example of the Relationship between <i>Hula</i> and the Land in Hawai'i <b>CHARLINE BIDAULT</b> , University of Paris Nanterre
14:20 <i>Online</i>	'Dancing Up Country': Performing Knowledge and Renewing Life <b>FRANCA TAMISARI</b> , Ca' Foscari University of Venice
14:40 <i>Online</i>	SALT: Unveiling Maritime Environment through Dance Ecology <b>EKO SUPRIYANTO</b> , Indonesia Institute of the Arts – Surakarta
15:00	Questions & Answers
15:30 – 16:00	<b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>

<b>16:00 – 17:30</b>	<b>PANEL 3 • NAVIGATING BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>APARNA R. NAMBIAR</b> , National University of Singapore
<i>16:00</i>	‘Dancing the Tradition’: Music and Cultural Knowledge at Friction in the Marquesas Islands (French Polynesia) <b>GIACOMO NERICI</b> , Sapienza University of Rome
<i>16:20</i>	Ancestral Energy: Studying the Marquesas’ Festival of Arts through Archipelagic and Oceanic Thinking <b>CÉLINE CODEREY</b> , National University of Singapore
<i>16:40</i> <i>Online</i>	Performing Tupaia’s Memory <b>FRANCESCO LATTANZI</b> , Sapienza University of Rome
<i>17:00</i>	Questions & Answers
<b>17:30</b>	<b>END OF DAY 1</b>
<b>17:30 – 19:30</b>	<b>WORKSHOP DINNER (For Presenters, Chairpersons and Organisers Only)</b>

## 20 FEBRUARY 2024 • TUESDAY

<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>PANEL 4 • DANCING THROUGH THE “OTHER” AND INTERNATIONAL SPACES I</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>PEILIN LIANG</b> , National University of Singapore
09:00 <i>Online</i>	Children and Foxes: Dancing with/in the Settler State of Japan <b>ROSLYNN ANG</b> , National University of Singapore
09:20 <i>Online</i>	Rethinking the Circuits of Cold War Culture: Mexican Modern Dance in Mao-Era China <b>EMILY WILCOX</b> , William & Mary
09:40 <i>Online</i>	Heterodox Masculinities: Physical Nationalism and Male Tai Cultural Performers <b>TANI SEBRO</b> , California State Polytechnic University – Humboldt
10:00	Questions & Answers
<b>10:30 – 11:00</b>	<b>MORNING TEA</b>
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>PANEL 5 • DANCING THROUGH THE “OTHER” AND INTERNATIONAL SPACES II</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>MIGUEL ESCOBAR VARELA</b> , National University of Singapore
11:00	Dancing Avatars: <i>Yishun is Burning</i> and <i>Postcolonial Spirits</i> <b>ALVIN ENG HUI LIM</b> , National University of Singapore
11:20	Singapore-Santali Transactions of Tribal Dance-Technique in Bhirbhum, West Bengal <b>APARNA R. NAMBIAR</b> , National University of Singapore
11:40	Creating <i>Mutiara</i> : Pearling Histories, Re-Establishing Malay-Australia Connections <b>NORAMIN FARID</b> , Choreographer, Arts Educator & Researcher
12:00	Questions & Answers
<b>12:30 – 13:30</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>
<b>13:30 – 14:30</b>	<b>KEYNOTE ADDRESS</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>CÉLINE CODEREY</b> , National University of Singapore
13:30	Cambodian Dancers on Contested or Ravaged Ground <b>TONI SHAPIRO-PHIM</b> , Brandeis University
14:10	Questions & Answers
<b>14:30 – 15:00</b>	<b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>
<b>15:00 – 16:00</b>	<b>SCREENING &amp; REFLECTION BY GUEST ARTIST</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>GIACOMO NERICI</b> , Sapienza University of Rome
15:00	<i>Wharenuī Harikoa</i> <b>JACK GRAY</b> , Aotearoa, New Zealand
15:20	Reflection
<b>16:00 – 16:15</b>	<b>BREAK</b>
<b>16:15 – 17:15</b>	<b>FINAL SESSION</b>
16:15	<b>CÉLINE CODEREY</b> , National University of Singapore
<b>17:15</b>	<b>END OF WORKSHOP</b>

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## ACTIVATION & SCREENING BY GUEST ARTIST

### **Movement for Joy & *Wharenui Harikoa***

**Jack GRAY**

Aotearoa, New Zealand

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#### **19 February | Activation: Movement for Joy**

Gray will physically lead the group through a spontaneous and embodied practice he devised within different multicultural community contexts around the world. The movements are accessible for a range of mobilities from experienced to beginners, in person and online. This form engages with simple collective coordination movements and pop music to direct neural pathways towards the experience of joy. Come prepared to physically move, sweat, so comfortable clothing and hydration is advised.

#### **20 February | Screening: *Wharenui Harikoa***

This film choreographed by Gray, explores the context of a collaboration with Māori crochet / carving artists, Lissy & Rudi Robinson-Cole. The film is performed by four Māori contemporary dance artists. Gray, Taane Mete, Bianca Hyslop, Terri Crawford, who created a response to the concepts of *Wharenui Harikoa*, a full scale traditional house created out of neon yarn and polystyrene. Themes of the work include creation stories, the social interactions of Māori and elements of individual stories that make up our whakapapa (lineage).

**Jack Gray** is a world-renowned Māori contemporary dance artist, choreographer, teacher, facilitator, and writer. His independent arts practice spans two decades. In 2000, Jack founded Atamira Dance Collective and was Artistic Director from 2018-2023. He curated Cultural Informance Lab (California), Transformance Lab (New York), I Moving Lab (USA, Australia, New Zealand), Indigenous Dance Forum (New York), I LAND (Hawaii, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, New York), Intentional Indigenous Artform Exchange (New York) and more. Jack has taught in a range of universities in a variety of roles. More prominently, he was Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of California Riverside, Artist in Residence, Artist in Residence at New York University's Asian/Pacific/American Institute, and Regent's Scholar at University of California, Los Angeles/World Arts and Cultures. Jack's published writings appear in *Dance Europe Magazine*, *Danz Magazine*, *Theatreview*, *Te Kaharoa* and *Biography* amongst others. As a collaborative facilitator, Jack has produced interdisciplinary works for the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum (Hawaii), Berkeley Dance Project (UC Berkeley), FestPAC (Guåhan/Guam), Yirramboi Festival (Narm/ Melbourne), Festival 2018 (Gold Coast), Te Whaingā (Auckland Museum/Smithsonian Museum) and more. His work as a cultural ambassador has occurred with Dancing Earth (New Mexico), International Interdisciplinary Artist Consortium (Massachusetts), First Nations Colloquium (South Africa), Kaha:wi Dance Theatre (Canada), University of the Arts (Philadelphia), Blakdance (Australia) and more.

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## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### Cambodian Dancers on Contested or Ravaged Ground

**Toni SHAPIRO-PHIM**

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Cambodian dancers of the classical tradition are said to embody a sacred serpent who dwells in both the water and the earth. Carrying these elements of Cambodia within them, through performance the dancers foster a tactile experience of home, indeed a re-creation of home, even in exile or diaspora. In this presentation, I'll be exploring the relationship between dance, displacement, political and ecological violence, and what peacebuilding scholar and practitioner John Paul Lederach calls the moral imagination – the ability to acknowledge underlying real-world (perhaps systemic) injustice and danger while nurturing an openness to envisaging a future free from such burdens. Dance ignites the imagination that leads to discoveries of ways out of the morass. The practice and witnessing of Cambodian dance have long afforded people the opportunity to affirm their dignity and (re-) build community, often in circumstances – or the aftermath – of loss, chaos and dehumanization. We will look at how dancers, choreographers, and even a visual artist have implicitly and explicitly evoked the character of the sacred serpent (*Neang Neak*) to engage with and confront issues of concern through Cambodia's myriad political ruptures, and the extensive migrations of its people in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

**Toni Shapiro-Phim** is Associate Professor of Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation, Assistant Director of Global Community Engagement at the Samuels Center for Community Partnerships and Civic Transformation, and Director of the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, all at Brandeis University (USA). She is a curator, filmmaker, researcher, writer and educator (PhD in cultural anthropology, Cornell University), whose work in both community and academic settings focuses on the arts in relation to war, genocide, displacement, conflict transformation, climate justice, and gender concerns. Her documentary film *Because of the War*, about superstar refugee performing artists, received the 2018 Elli Köngäs-Maranda Prize for “superior work on women’s traditional, vernacular, or local culture and/or feminist theory and folklore”. The latest of her many publications include “Freedom and the Archive”, co-authored with Germaine Ingram, in *Art and Human Rights*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023; “Absence/Presence/Silence/Noise” in *Dancing Transnational Feminisms*, University of Washington Press, 2021; “A Cambodian Dancer in a Displaced Persons’ Camp” in *Music & Minorities* Vol 1, 2021; “Imagining Alternatives: Cambodia, Accountability and Compassion” in *Coexistence in the Aftermath of Mass Violence*, University of Michigan Press, 2020; and “Embodying the Pain and Cruelty of Others” in *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, ijz029, March 2020.

## Kinesthetic Meaningfulness: Dance and/as Aesthetic Labor

**Birgit ABELS**

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“Dance”, in its academic usage, is a distinctly North Atlantic category and sets a specific type of kinesthetic repertoire apart (from daily life activities but also from other types of cultural practices), assigning a bounded category to it. In much of Micronesia, kinesthesia is deeply entangled with daily practices and to think in terms of dance as a distinct category would conflict with lived experience. For this reason, Adrienne Kaeppler has suggested the term “structured movement system” instead.<sup>1</sup> Structured movement systems are “systems of knowledge, the products of action and interaction, and processes through which action and interaction occur”.<sup>2</sup> In Palau, Micronesia, people use the neologism *dangs*, adopted from the English word dance; generally, however, Palauans will discuss specific dance forms by the name of their dance genre rather than a generic category. The actual movements and motion-based gestures are inherited from either the Gods or the ancestors. Importantly, such underlying knowledge systems are invisible themselves, “existing in the minds of people as movement motifs, specific choreographies, and meaningful imagery”;<sup>3</sup> but, as the performers move their bodies through time-space, they take shape as visible form. This is, in a tangible manner, reminiscent of neo-phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz’s archetypical creative process according to which any piece of is “dance having taken shape”. This process transduces motional energy into a visible medium and, importantly co-creates and impacts the performers’ socio-spatial surroundings. For Schmitz, any creative process is by nature a dancing movement: Drawing on the felt body’s sensing its motion-laden environment, a motional motive grows into a *gestalt*. This *gestalt*, in turn, literally takes form as it transitions from abstract inspiration into a visible, audible or palpable medium. With this, Schmitz suggests that dancing is a motional phenomenon located in primary proximity to any aesthetic comprehension of the world we live in; it is felt-bodily communion with the tempo-spaciousness surrounding us. In my contribution, I critically reflect on this conceptualization of dance and explore its implications by thinking it through Palauan kinesthetic practices and their relation to time-space.

**Birgit Abels** is Professor of Cultural Musicology at Georg August University of Göttingen (Germany). Her research interests include neo-phenomenological and Pacific indigenous approaches to the performing arts as well as music-making as an epistemological practice. The geographic foci of her research are the Pacific Ocean (particularly Micronesia), North India, and the Southeast Asian Island world. Her books include *Sounds of Articulating Identity. Tradition and Transition in the Music of Palau, Micronesia* (2008), which was recognized with the ICAS Book Prize (PhD) 2009, *The Harmonium in North Indian Music* (2010), and *Music Worlding in Palau: Chanting, Atmospheres, and Meaningfulness* (2022). She is the principal investigator of the ERC Consolidator project “Sound Knowledge. Alternative Epistemologies of Music in the Western Pacific Island World”.

<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Kaeppler, “Structured Movement Systems in Tonga,” in *Society and the Dance*, ed. Paul Spencer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 92-118; Adrienne Kaeppler, “Understanding Dance,” in *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 9, *Australia and the Pacific Islands*, eds. Adrienne L. Kaeppler and J.W. Love (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 311-8.

<sup>2</sup> Kaeppler, “Understanding Dance,” 311.

<sup>3</sup> Kaeppler, “Understanding Dance,” 312.



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## Doing Dance Geographies: Methodological Experiments and Reflections in Singapore's Urban Nature

**Wen Ting OOI**

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Geography's sustained interest in human-environment interactions makes Singapore's urban fabric – interspersed by highly manicured nature spaces – an interesting site of study for performance. Movement experiences in urban spaces have been largely theorized by Henri Lefebvre, and this paper uses his work on Rhythmanalysis to examine a specific type of urban space – that of urban nature. Urban nature spaces are pockets of nature within urban environments that are becoming increasingly popular in dense cities. This project draws from ongoing research that brings dancers to urban nature spaces around Singapore for dance improvisation. Using Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis as a conceptual frame, I tap on my dance experience and practice to think through methodologies I have employed to study how dancers look at the artistic potential of urban nature spaces. The work has engaged close to 40 dancers at sites around Singapore ranging from roadside parks to more remote nature reserves. Findings on the impact of outdoor dance practice on individuals, broader concerns of urbanism, human-environment interactions and climate change were uncovered. Specifically, the conceptual framing and experimental improvisation approach revealed the interstices in which the urban dance subject finds inspiration in an urban nature landscape, revealing how urban nature is experienced by dancers through the tensions of urban living, time and space, in between modes of performance and practice.

**Wen Ting Ooi** is a graduate student from the Department of Geography at National University of Singapore, a dancer for 17 years and a yoga practitioner for 6 years. Her research is inspired by her embodied movement practice and research exposure at the UN COP 25, Nature of Cities festival and Singapore-ETH Centre as a research intern. Her ongoing research investigates dancers' experience in urban-nature spaces, and how their embodied, situated experiences can inform existing modes of planning and understanding nature in cities where competing objectives often reduce socio-cultural valuations of nature to proxies. Her research attempts to bring theory-grounded experimentation in movement practice, visual methods and non-representational methods together. Her previous experiences as a Research Assistant for feminist pedagogy, interdisciplinary education and dance ecologies projects have also made her keenly aware of how bodies are subjected to power structures and constitute webs of agency at varying scales. She attempts to question these structures through her movement practice. She is also interested in bodily experiences of transient spaces – the movement of bodies in transit and the reproductions of spatial norms through movement in social media.

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## Narrative Research: Empowering Agency through Dance

**Stephanie BURRIDGE**

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The impact of globalization, climate change, prevailing government policies, tourism and economic factors, to name a few, have dramatically affected dance communities. Shifts in ideology, the use of technology and ubiquitous social media platforms underpin not only new directions across cultures but perceptions of them. Documentation in multiple forms is vital and deep research essential to comprehend the complex role of dance in local, regional and international communities. Through a narrative research process the voices of the artists are fundamental and should be center stage in any research and documentation process on dance enabling collaboration, freedom of expression and the articulation of histories, philosophies, extrinsic and intrinsic knowledge that occurs in embodied codes and symbol systems expounded in the form. Dancers in communities with deep cultural connections to the land, royal hierarchies, the gods and the spirits of the ancestors often grapple with the dichotomy between tradition and preservation, hybridity and contemporization. For the researcher, issues of colonization, hegemony, the stresses of religious, social and political contexts and more are often incorporated as a 'context;' yet these factors can be transformative and are catalysts for change-making. Positionality, the researcher's 'gaze' and methodological lens converge, mesh and interconnect with these strands as the spectrum is navigated to find meeting points and resonance. Dance is performative; affecting agency in creative and innovative ways that are responding to the growing destabilized political, geographical and environmental spheres of the C21st. This chapter discusses some of these issues in relation to curating the Routledge book series *Celebrating Dance in Asia and the Pacific* as Series Editor with specific reference to the Artist Voices sections of each volume.

**Stephanie Burridge** (PhD) is a choreographer, performer and dance writer and series editor for two Routledge anthology collections *Celebrating Dance in Asia and the Pacific* including books on Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Taiwan, Australia, Singapore, the South Pacific, North India and Thailand (in press); and *Perspectives on Dance, Young People and Change*, co-editor Charlotte Svendler Nielsen, Series Foreword by Sir Ken Robinson (Dance Education Around the World, Dance Access and Inclusion, and Dancing Across Borders). She edited the *Routledge Companion for Dance in Asia and the Pacific: Platforms for Change* (2021) and co-authored *Choreographic Basics* with Jenny Roche (2022). Her current choreographic and research focus is on senior artists with a Routledge anthology *Dance On! Dancing Through Life* (2023) featuring over 50 artists from 17 countries. Her research and choreographic projects have been supported by the Australia Council, Arts ACT, Singapore International Foundation and the National Arts Council Singapore. She is a research consultant at the Singapore University of the Arts.

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## Embodying the 'Āina (Land): An Example of the Relationship between *Hula* and the Land in Hawai'i

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This paper focuses on *hula*, a dance practice from Hawai'i, and its relationship with the land ('*āina*). Based on the author's fieldwork in Hawai'i and MA research in anthropology, it explores how *hula* embodies the land and is informed by the dancer's experience of and understanding of place. Using one *mele* (poetic text that is chanted or sung) and its choreography as an example, I first look at how *mele* describe specific places in Hawai'i, naming distinct natural elements and phenomena, as well as their topographic characteristics, that enable the audience to visualize a place. The expressed words and their closely-related movements map and reflect a *Kanaka Maoli* (native Hawaiian) intimate knowledge and observation of the land and its features. Journeys to the places described in *mele* help the dancers to experience and better understand places and thus inform their dance. For *Kānaka Maoli* (native Hawaiians) the '*āina* is strongly linked to the notions of identity and belonging. Using another example from a *hālau hula* (*hula* school) based in Mānoa valley in Honolulu, I argue that *mele* serve not only to celebrate specific places, but also to connect the dancer and the audience to native epistemology of lived place as a means of creating and expressing a sense of belonging and to instill values of *kuleana* (responsibility), in relation to stewarding the land and claiming it as a living entity of prime importance to *Kānaka Maoli* in an era of social and political change.

**Charline Bidault** joined the master's degree in dance anthropology at the University of Paris Nanterre and carried out a research project on the teaching of *hula* (Hawaiian danced and chanted practices) within a *hālau hula* (*hula* school) in Honolulu, Hawai'i after several professional experiences in cultural outreach departments in dance institutions in France. She is currently pursuing her research by preparing a thesis project on the relationship between *hula* and the land and continues to learn and practice *hula*. She is also working as an independent cultural educator and develops cultural projects and workshops designed to explore the diversity and richness of dance practices in different communities.

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## **‘Dancing Up Country’: Performing Knowledge and Renewing Life**

**Franca TAMISARI**

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Ritual songs and dances in Indigenous Australia have been mainly studied as expression of a complex cosmogony distributing groups across vast regions, celebrating their unique cultural identity, and a way of asserting and negotiating their political authority over others individuals and groups within the region and in the diplomatic arena with non-indigenous institutions. Yet the significance of music and dance in recording, sustaining, renewing and transmitting environmental knowledge has been neglected. Drawing from ethnographic research conducted in Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia, I explore how Yolngu Indigenous song and dances are a repository of environmental knowledge as they describe in detail the complex physiological, social and emotional interdependence and cooperation among people, places and life forms. Particular attention will be given to the ways in which songs and dance celebrate relationships of nurturance, care and affect in order to enliven the past into the present, transmit knowledge to the young generations and keep on renewing a mutual life-giving bond among human and more-than-human beings.

**Franca Tamisari** is Head of the Anthropology Program at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where she has been teaching and conducting research since 2005. She previously lectured at the University of Sydney and the University of Queensland (1996-2004). She has conducted extensive ethnographic research in Northeast Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, and published internationally on indigenous performance, with particular attention to dance, bicultural education, the politics of representation and the history of colonial and postcolonial relations in Australia. Among her publications are: *Enacted Relations: Performing Knowledge in an Australian Indigenous Community* (Berghahn Books 2024); *La sfida dell'arte indigena Australiana: Tradizione, innovazione e contemporaneità* (co-edited, Jaca Book 2007).

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## **SALT:** **Unveiling Maritime Environment through Dance Ecology**

**Eko Supriyanto**

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This artistic exploration delves into the evolutionary process of Eko Supriyanto's choreographic journey, transitioning from a foundation rooted in Javanese agriculture to a maritime culture context. Within this research, Eko Supriyanto's imaginative innovations, as an observer, dancer, and choreographer, manifest in the creation of the dance work "SALT."

The study aims to comprehend the relationship between the dance work "SALT" and dance ecology through an ecocritical approach. It adopts a practice-led research method, referring to evidence-based issues discovered through diving experiences. The analysis covers the importance of aspects such as environmental impact on bodies, cultural site exploration, and soft power practices through silent tourism movements.

The present pressing maritime issues such as coral reef degradation and underwater waste inspire the researcher to create the dance work as a proposed solution for environmental protection. The choreographic process of creating "SALT" becomes a pivotal moment in the transformative formation of an identity, transitioning gradually from an agriculturally-based movements to a dance work in a maritime context.

In this dance work, the body is not merely an imaginative movement but it can also serve as a powerful communication medium to foster and sustain society's awareness for the environment. The research concludes that "SALT" is the culmination of a transcultural journey in the formation of researcher's choreographic identity, responding to environmental issues in the surrounding context, which gradually and unintentionally becomes a part of silent tourism movement. "SALT" emerges as a dance ecology, offering diverse perspectives regarding the strength of dance in fostering change in environmental awareness and supporting local tourism.

**Eko Supriyanto**, born in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, is one of the leading choreographers in his generation. With a Bachelor's Degree from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI Surakarta), and a Master's Degree in Dance of World Arts and Cultures Department University of California Los Angeles, Eko is Founder and Artistic Director of his own company, Solo Dance Studio and EkosDance Company. He has participated in contemporary productions under theater director Peter Sellars, and Garin Nugroho, and is sought after as a choreographer for large scale and international productions including the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta, 2021 Asian Para Games in Solo, G20 Gala Dinner in Bali 2022. Eko completed his Doctoral degree in Performance Studies from Gadjah Mada University, with a second Doctoral degree in Arts Creation Programs at ISI Surakarta. He is now a fulltime Faculty member at ISI Surakarta. Since 2011, Eko's creativity as focused on cultural design activities as community empowerment in the Eastern regions of Indonesia, including Jailolo, Tidore, Sula and Morotai (Nort Maluku), Taliwang West Sumbawa, Kaimana West Papua and other regions, with special focus on protection of marine life and empowering the local culture and arts.

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## ‘Dancing the Tradition’: Music and Cultural Knowledge at Friction in the Marquesas Islands (French Polynesia)

**Giacomo NERICI**

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In the Marquesas Islands (Henua ‘Enana / Fenua ‘Enata) today, music is one of the main domains of artistic and cultural revival. In recent decades, dances and singing have become identity traits and forms of heritage for the natives to be able to keep alive a line of continuity with a traditional past that has been partly lost. This paper seeks to trace the process by which Marquesan music has become a contested terrain of ancestor relations, knowledge transmission and heritage frictions. In particular, I will focus on how historically certain indigenous musical repertoires had 'survived' cultural loss through tactics related to telling or keeping silent, showing or concealing particular aspects of Marquesan history. The aim is to emphasise how, at particular times, dance was a device for narrating through the body a changing relationship with the traditional past and with ancestors, which from the 1980s onwards was declined within a cultural and artistic ferment defined as *réveil culturel*. Addressing this frame of reference specifically, my ethnography will focus here mainly on the relationship of influence and tension between the first and second generation of the Marquesan revival. Although they participate together in enhancing the 'enana culture, the young and the elders manifest different needs, feelings and values with which they relate to traditional history, the island way of life and local ecological knowledge through their way of dancing. Especially by considering the Matava‘a o Te Henua ‘Enana (The Marquesas Arts Festival), I will try to give an account of how dance is a shared practice but also a ground for frictions and different indigenous cultural visions.

**Giacomo Nerici** is Honorary Fellow at Sapienza University of Rome and has recently accomplished his PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. His research interests have initially focused on indigenous claims and heritage among the Sami people (Northern Norway). His doctoral project concerned the inscription of some native heritage at the UNESCO WHL as well as the rediscovery of traditions within the cultural and artistic ‘awakening’ in the Marquesas Islands (French Polynesia). He is the author of several articles in scientific journals and chapters in books as well as of the monograph *Sulle orme dei nostri antenati. Riappropriazioni culturali e usi del passato tra i Sami norvegesi*, Rome, CISU (2021).

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## **Ancestral Energy: Studying the Marquesas' Festival of Arts through Archipelagic and Oceanic Thinking**

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My presentation is an ethnographic study of the 14th Matava'a, Marquesas' festival of arts, that took place 16th-20th December 2023 on the island of Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas (French Polynesia), and of its socio-political significance.

Started in 1987 under the initiative of the cultural association Motu Haka and the Bishop Le Cléac'h, the Matava'a has ever since represented the pillar of the cultural revival. It aims to support the preservation and the intergenerational transmission of different forms of art that were silenced for hundred years following the evangelization and colonization of the archipelago. At the core of the event are dances delegations coming from the 6 islands of the archipelago create around a selected topic. The cultural valorization operates through the re-activation and strengthening of the connection between people and islands, but also connection with the land, the ocean, and with the animals, ancestors and spiritual forces that inhabit them. This connection is enabled by dances through the multisensorial experience they generate with their interweaving of music, chants, stories, body moves and costumes enacted on sacred sites at the threshold between land and ocean. Examining the forms and meanings given to these performances one realizes that they speak about tensions between ancient knowledge and contemporary life, seek for authenticity and desire to innovate, valorization of each island's peculiarity and strengthening of the Marquesas' unity and difference from Tahiti and the rest of Polynesia. If one might wish for these tensions to be solved, they are actually fertile as they engender discussion, reflections, and adjustment, expression of a culture that is alive, constantly remade, through trials and errors, but in unity.

Adopting the postcolonial lens of archipelagic and oceanic thinking, that reflects indigenous interconnected ontologies, my paper examines the dynamics of connections and disconnections that have come to shape the politics and poetics of dance in contemporary Marquesas, contributing to craft an ever evolving identity and heritage.

**Céline Coderey** is Research Fellow with the Inter-Asia Engagements Cluster at Asia Research Institute, and a Lecturer at Tembusu College, in the National University of Singapore. She received her MA and PhD in Anthropology from the University of Provence, Aix-Marseille 1 (France) and her MA in Psychology from the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). Her field of expertise spans from medical anthropology and anthropology of the body to anthropology of religion and anthropology of dance, and also to questions of heritage making, displacement and temporalities. She dedicated 16 years to the study of medical pluralism in Myanmar and neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. Her current project focuses on Polynesia and looks at dance as embodiment of the land and seascape in a context of ecological change. Her teaching includes the undergraduate interdisciplinary seminars such as Biomedicine and Singapore Society, Time and Life, Skin, and courses in medical anthropology.

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## Performing Tupaia's Memory

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My contribution focuses on Tahitian performances, on the *'ōri Tahiti* dance specifically, read as an instrument selected by Mā'ohi dance groups in the Society Islands (French Polynesia) to relate to the past and self-represent themselves.

It is known that performances are a fruitful key to reflect on the ways of "re-making" history adopted by pasifika populations, especially from the 1970s onward. In the contemporary scenario, the performances of self-representation adopted by certain sections of Mā'ohi society evoke the great chiefs of the past, and their often forgotten and concealed memory. A memory also marked by complex internal conflicts and negotiations.

I will talk about the process within which Tupaia's memory has returned in Tahiti and Ra'iātea, as demonstrated in 2019 by the *'ōri Tahiti* show performed in the "Heiva I Tahiti" Festival by the group 'Hitireva'. 2019 coincides with the 250th anniversary of the voyage of the British navy ship "Endeavour" captained by James Cook from Tahiti to Aotearoa/New Zealand, which Tupaia also joined.

Analyzing the lyrics of the 'Hitireva's *'ōri Tahiti* performance through the ethnohistorical method, the desire of Tahitians to celebrate Tupaia, in order to "indigenize" history, emerges. Comparing them with the voices collected during the ethnography in Ra'iātea, it is possible to deepen the contemporary effervescence, political implications, and different interpretations on Tupaia's memory.

**Francesco Lattanzi** is a PhD candidate in Cultural Anthropology at Sapienza University of Rome, where he is currently "Cultore della materia". His PhD thesis, *Quando i mā'ohi prendono la parola... Eroi del passato e della contemporaneità alle Isole della Società* ("When Mā'ohi take the floor... Heroes of the past and the present in the Society Islands"), was the result of ethnographic field researches on the themes of contemporary memory of the past, especially on colonial history. From 2017 he has conducted several researches in insular Oceania, first in New Caledonia, then in French Polynesia, especially in the Society Islands. In New Caledonia he worked on the observation of the identity and territorial claims provoked by the repatriation of the relics of Ataï and his 'companion'; while in French Polynesia he worked on the memory of the Annexation's war of the Leeward Islands archipelago which turn around the figure of Teraupoo. During his PhD, he actively contributed to the experiences of the "Ermenautica-Saperi in rotta" project, an anthropology of the sea(s) research group. In particular, Lattanzi dedicated his self to develop an anthropology of the seas' path conducted "halfway" between the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean.



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## Children and Foxes: Dancing with/in the Settler State of Japan

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Late-stage settler colonialism usually shifts from violent assimilation to a valorization and commodification of Indigenous cultures. While researchers have established that this is a continuity of settler colonialism in another form, there is a need to consider the ways indigenous communities strive to survive and resist this biopolitical form of settler control. This paper explores the relationship between settler colonial institutions and the revitalization of Indigenous Ainu intangible cultural heritage through the performance of *Chiron Nuppu Rimse* (Dance of the Foxes) at the Upopoy National Ainu Museum. I start with a brief historical and political context of the gradual decline of Ainu song and dance within a settler colonial Japan. After more than 150 years of assimilation, most contemporary Ainu are unfamiliar with their heritage. The Sapporo Upopo Hozonkai (SUH) is an urban performance group that created for Ainu community members to learn and perform their traditional dance and songs. *Chiron Nuppu Rimse* is a dance that outlines the relations between foxes (played by mostly children under 12) and a male Ainu hunter. My ethnography of the community's rehearsal shows how cultural transmission works within the constraints of settler state funding and support. While the state funded Ainu National Museum takes the performance out of its usual context within the Ainu community, I argue that the community members participate to create more public awareness of their continued existence, and as a form of private transmission of cultural and ecological knowledge to the next generation.

**Roslynn Ang** is an educator and scholar in the intersections of cultural anthropology, East Asian Studies, settler colonial studies and critical heritage studies. She is in a long-term engagement with the Sapporo Upopo Hozonkai, an intangible cultural heritage performance group that focuses on revitalizing Ainu song and dance (*upopo* and *rimse*) in Japan. Her research interests include performance and media, decolonizing methodology, indigeneity, representations of race and nation, and Japan's global colonial history. She is an adjunct at National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, and has received a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence (S-I-R) fellowship to the Center for East Asian Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington for AY 2023/24.

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## Rethinking the Circuits of Cold War Culture: Mexican Modern Dance in Mao-Era China

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With the recent increase in scholarly attention to the early PRC's historical relations with the Global South, Afro-Asian solidarity has played a major role in theorizing the politics of PRC engagements in the 1950s, with researchers often centering the Bandung Afro-Asia conference, the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau, and other related activities. Missing from this assessment is the role of Latin America in PRC international relations and exchange during this period. In this talk, I take international dance tours as a lens through which to explore PRC cultural exchanges with Mexico during the first decade of the PRC, in order to expand thinking about the politics of PRC-Global South friendship beyond Afro-Asian contexts. I focus on the first major dance tour to China by a Mexican ensemble in 1957 that brought modern dance to the country at a time when this art form was officially unwelcome. Examining extant performance programs from these tours, archives of the World Federation of Democratic Youth's 1950s international dance competitions, and Chinese-language media reports about the tours in China, I demonstrate that modern dance played a prominent role in the repertoires of these troupes, though this was often ambiguous in the ways the ensembles were represented in the Chinese media. I argue that this untold history reshapes our understanding of Cold War-era dance history in the Asia-Pacific region, laying a foundation for greater attention to Asian dance in the framework of the Global South.

**Emily Wilcox** is Associate Professor of Chinese Studies at William & Mary and formerly Associate Professor of Modern Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. Wilcox is the author or co-editor of five books: *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy* (University of California Press, 2018, winner of the 2019 de la Torre Bueno Prize® from the Dance Studies Association); *Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia* (University of Michigan Press, 2020), *革命的身体：重新认识现当代中国舞蹈文化* (Fudan University Press, 2023); *Inter-Asia in Motion: Dance as Method* (Routledge, 2023); and *Teaching Film from the People's Republic of China* (Modern Language Association, forthcoming 2024). She is also the co-creator of the University of Michigan Chinese Dance Collection and co-editor of the book series *China Understandings Today* with the University of Michigan Press. In fall 2023, Wilcox is a member in residence in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, where she is writing a book on international dance exchange in Mao-era China.

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## **Heterodox Masculinities: Physical Nationalism and Male Tai Cultural Performers**

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As scholarship on gender and women's rights in Myanmar has proliferated in the past decades, there is a relative dearth of work focusing on male sexualities, masculine performativity, and homosociality. This paper centers on the heterodox masculinities that lie at the crucible of political life in Myanmar and in its diaspora by bringing to the fore the gendered dimensions of building a nationalist physical culture for Tai (Shan) men who have fled from Shan State in Myanmar to Northern Thailand and have taken on roles as cultural educators. Through long-term ethnographic and ethnochoreological research with exiled Tai dance, theatre, and martial arts practitioners, this paper attends to how male cultural gatekeepers reclaim their sense of masculinity by engaging in the physical practice of the performing arts. The ability of cultural practitioners to transmit the repertoire of Tai performing arts has been severely limited by the ongoing civil war in Myanmar, land dispossession, and the increased precaritization of work. Therefore, male performing arts practitioners find that their work also entails the responsibility to rebirth the Tai nation through an investment in a national physical culture.

**Tani Sebro** is Assistant Professor of Global Politics at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt. Prior to joining the faculty at Humboldt, she was Assistant Professor of Diaspora Studies, Human Rights, and Transnational Migration in the Department of Global and Intercultural Studies at Miami University, Ohio. She received a PhD in Political Science from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa under the direction of Michael Shapiro. Her research and teaching interests span the subdisciplines of political ethnography, critical political theory, Asian cultural studies, mobilities studies, performance studies, and international relations with a particular emphasis on refugee politics in Southeast Asia. As a Norwegian-American growing up in an immigrant community in Oslo, Norway, she became interested at an early age in how exiled groups form senses of belonging in the diaspora. She later went to live and study in Thailand where she became interested in the plight of Burmese refugees. As a practitioner of dance (she studies Ballet/Middle Eastern/Indian/Tai/Thai), one way she engages her research community is through practice and performance.

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**Dancing Avatars:  
*Yishun is Burning and Postcolonial Spirits***

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This paper explores the long-term project, titled CosmicWander, of Berlin-based Singaporean artist Choy Ka Fai. Designed as “a conceptual travel agency exploring the diverse shamanic culture of Asia” (see <https://cosmicwander.info/>), the project intersects the rhetoric of cultural tourism with the embodied practices of spirit possession and shamanism. The paper will examine the touring dance production, *Yishun Is Burning* (2021–2023), one of the productions or “experiences” created as part of the project. One strong element of Choy’s work involves the use of virtual technology to create 3D versions of the dancing body as an articulation of both embodied and disembodied connections between bodies and places and how spirits can be reimagined as digital avatars. Mixing spirit possession and voguing, *Yishun is Burning* features the Norwegian-Thai dancer, Sun Phitthaya Phaefuang (aka Aurora Sun), who enacts a trance performance in international platforms such as Romaeuropa Festival 2023. Sun’s journey from being a vogue dancer in Southeast Asia to dancing in *Yishun* (Singapore) alongside the spirits of Kali and Goddess of Mercy (Kuan Yin) and rendered as a dancing avatar of Kali on a screen performs a queering of places, identities, gender, and dance forms.

**Alvin Eng Hui Lim** is a performance, religion and theatre researcher. He is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Linguistics, and Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore. He holds a PhD in Theatre Studies jointly awarded by the National University of Singapore and King’s College London. He is also Deputy Director and Technology and Online Editor (Mandarin) of the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A). Lim’s first monograph, titled *Digital Spirits in Religion and Media: Possession and Performance* (2018), studies how lived religious practices in contemporary Singapore perform in combination with digital technology. He has also published on theatre, translation, digital archiving, and religious performance in Singapore.

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## Singapore-Santali Transactions of Tribal Dance-Technique in Bhirbhum, West Bengal

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In the Santal community, among the largest indigenous communities in India, practices of communal dancing materializes relationships between tribal land, plants, humans, non-human animals and more-than-human divine entities (Schulte-Doresch, 2018)<sup>1</sup>. In Bhirbhum district in West Bengal, India, where the current study is based, the grounds upon which seasonal, ceremonial dance performances are enacted mark tribal territory, and the act of dancing performatively hails dancers and their kindred as those with ancestral ties to the land upon which they dance. This ecological function of dance in the Santali context shifts when performance is extracted and placed within the world of intercultural and international performance, as the heterotopic space of the stage severs this land-body connection. This paper explores a project where state arts funding from two nations – India and Singapore – facilitated a collaboration between a Singapore based dance company Chowk Productions and a Bhirbhum based theatre company, the *Bhirbhum Blossom Theatre* in West Bengal, India, the latter company being unique in involving members of the forest-adjacent Santal community in its productions. Extrapolating the notion of “technique” in both dance and subject-formation, this paper studies exchange of dance techniques as exchanges in techniques of living that do not necessarily translate across the domains of the stage and that of “real” life. Using “fungibility” (Ong, 2015)<sup>2</sup> as a conceptual framework and building upon literature on intercultural theatre, this paper offers perspectives from Singaporean practitioners on the ethics of transnational intercultural exchange as well Santali perspectives of participating in the global community through staging and transferring knowledge on romanticized notions of tribal life and practice.

**Aparna R. Nambiar** (PhD University of California, Berkeley, 2022, MA University of Amsterdam, 2012 and University of Warwick, 2012) is Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She applies theories from performance studies, contemporary anthropology and globalization on performance genres that are broadly labelled as ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary Asian’. Her current book project explores the evolution of South and Southeast Asian traditional dance forms that now cater to urban, transnationally mobile and culturally cosmopolitan audiences in cities around the world. Her research on creative flexibility in traditional dancing in Asia has yielded three peer reviewed publications, namely, “Mutations in Crisis” (*Critical Stages*, Issue 23, July 2021), “The Aesthetics of Acclimatization” (*Performance Research*, June 2022) and Bharatanatyam and Buddhist Diplomacy (*Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 2022). Aparna is trained in classical Odissi and Bharatanatyam dance.

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<sup>1</sup> Schulte-Doresch, Lea. *Making Place through Ritual: Land, Environment and Region among the Santal of Central India*. Vol. 75. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ong, Aihwa. *Fungible Life: Experiment in the Asian City of Life*. Duke University Press, 2016.

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## **Creating *Mutiara*: Pearling Histories, Re-Establishing Malay-Australia Connections**

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“The sea as home, land as death and the coast is the edge of life itself” is a line I say in the dance-theatre work called *Mutiara* which is a collaboration between artists from Australia and Singapore. *Mutiara*, which means pearl in the Malay language, is an ode to the connections between the Malay world to the Australian northwestern coast town of Broome which was a thriving pearling industry. However, behind the lustrous fruits of labour, lies the darkness and weight of history of settler blackbirding, racist policies and poor employment practices.

This paper employs an autoethnographic and practice as method approach to share my experiences as a co-creator and performer working on this dance-theatre production with my international collaborators. Most importantly in relation to this workshop’s theme of dancing ecologies, the embodiment of Rubibi (Broome) and her peoples as well as the diasporic experiences of Malays will come to play a huge part in telling the stories of *Mutiara*. Underlying this whole creation process is Australian intercultural dance company, Marrugeku’s dramaturgical model which emphasizes listening to country, a methodology that is attentive to ecological and geographical aspects; an embodied honoring of the co-relations between human and non-human species, their livelihoods, communities, histories, climate and spiritualities.

**Noramin Farid (Sultari)** is a choreographer, arts educator and and maritime Southeast Asian performing arts researcher. He is a recipient of the ASEAN-India Youth Award (2018), Singapore Youth Award (2017), National Arts Council Scholarship (2017) and Goh Chok Tong Mendaki Youth Promise Award (2016). He holds a PhD in Theatre, Drama and Dance Studies from Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. He is an adjunct lecturer at University of Arts, Singapore, and Singapore Raffles Music College. Noramin is the curator of an online portal, ARKITARI, which documents maritime Southeast Asian dances. He is also the current president of a dance organisation, DIAN Dancers, and the founding member of Arki-Gen, a group focused on promoting discourse and research about Southeast Asian performing arts. As an arts practitioner-researcher, his works interrogate the normative notions of class, ethnicity, identity and gender. He believes that young practitioners must become leaders in creating artistic works that are innovative, critical and relevant to their evolving landscape.

## ABOUT THE ORGANISER & CHAIRPERSONS

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**Giacomo Nericì** is Honorary Fellow at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" and has recently accomplished his PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. His research interests have initially focused on indigenous claims and heritage among the Sami people (Northern Norway). His doctoral project concerned the inscription of some native heritage at the UNESCO WHL as well as the rediscovery of traditions within the cultural and artistic 'awakening' in the Marquesas Islands (French Polynesia). He is the author of several articles in scientific journals and chapters in books as well as of the monograph *Sulle orme dei nostri antenati. Riappropriazioni culturali e usi del passato tra i Sami norvegesi*, Rome, CISU (2021).

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**Noramín Farid (Soutari)** is a choreographer, arts educator and maritime Southeast Asian performing arts researcher. He is a recipient of the ASEAN-India Youth Award (2018), Singapore Youth Award (2017), National Arts Council Scholarship (2017) and Goh Chok Tong Mendaki Youth Promise Award (2016). He holds a PhD in Theatre, Drama and Dance Studies from Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. He is an adjunct lecturer at University of Arts, Singapore, and Singapore Raffles Music College. Noramin is the curator of an online portal, ARKITARI, which documents maritime Southeast Asian dances. He is also the current president of a dance organisation, DIAN Dancers, and the founding member of Arki-Gen, a group focused on promoting discourse and research about Southeast Asian performing arts. As an arts practitioner-researcher, his works interrogate the normative notions of class, ethnicity, identity and gender. He believes that young practitioners must become leaders in creating artistic works that are innovative, critical and relevant to their evolving landscape.

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**Ning Poh** is a third-year undergraduate majoring in Southeast Asian Studies at National University of Singapore, pursuing dance and performance making outside of school. She enjoys exploring the intersections between her artistic and academic interests, particularly fascinated by how the worldviews of communities are manifested in dance and performance practices.

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**Peilin Liang** is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Linguistics and Theatre Studies at National University of Singapore. She is a researcher, educator, facilitator and translator of theatre and performance. Her areas of studies are Taiwan and Hawaii. She is interested in (post)colonialism, minor transnationalism, cultural diversity and dynamics of cross-cultural exchange in relation to the performing body. Her expertise spans from health and decolonization, health and wellness in performance, intercultural theatre and performance, theatres of East Asia and the Pacific.

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