



## Cultural Studies Review

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## EDITORIAL

# Meaghan

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It had to be 'Meaghan'. The title of this edition of *Cultural Studies Review* is our salute to the work of Meaghan Morris and her lasting influence. That legacy is directly addressed in the collection of written works that emerged from the Meaghan Morris Festival held in 2016 but it is also echoed in the essays and reviews that are gathered within, that in their very mix speak to the particular tradition of cultural studies, Australian and otherwise, that Meaghan Morris helped so much to create.

It had to be a festival. What else would be capaciousness enough to hold, if only for a moment, Meaghan Morris's intellectual, disciplinary, political, interpersonal and professional contributions? What else would communicate the intellectual force with which her work has crossed, and continues to cross, philosophical, national and international boundaries while, at the same time, honouring the particularity of the popular and political in everyday lives? How else to showcase her history of academic labour that has spanned multiple genres of writing, including film reviewing and translation, and academic work that ranges from international visiting professorships, leadership in expanding networks of scholars both regionally and globally, and myriad forms of mentorship as an editor, reviewer and advisor. And, of course, tenured academic positions. So—a festival organised by Prudence Black, Catherine Driscoll, Stephen Muecke and Katrina Schlunke. A celebration with merrymaking that would also recognise and revisit, through Meaghan's work, some principles of the diversity of cultural studies. This necessarily included some deliberations about the changing state of

our institutions, a reckoning with our contemporary politics and a reflection on our lives as scholars, writers and teachers.

The festival featured musical introductions to each of the presentations. The music chosen by each presenter was an opportunity to ‘translate’ Meaghan and her work into a sonic register, creating perhaps an affective score for the festival. It also allowed the day to operate within a sliding temporal cum cultural environment. The music, speakers and presentations made for an order of participation and expectation different from most academic forums. Together, they created an active experiment within the very traditional, sharply tiered, wooden-seated, University of Sydney lecture theatre where the festival was held—and where Meaghan had attended lectures decades before. The setting floated orders of re-enactment into the event. Sitting high in the uncomfortable seats was itself an act of continuity with an institutional materiality, but it was also an interruption to our usual academic work. While the festival echoed the more traditional *Festschrift*, whereby essays in honour of an academic’s work are gathered together, it also hoped to reach beyond that to a new way of figuring the legacy of Meaghan Morris. Hers is a strikingly original legacy to honour.

The day began with a welcome from two University of Sydney colleagues, Elspeth Probyn, Professor in Gender and Cultural Studies, and Barbara Caine, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Presentations followed from a who’s who of cultural studies scholars from across the world, as well as from poets, anthropologists and scholars of film, gender and English literature. The opening trio of Katrina Schlunke, Graeme Turner and Lawrence Grossberg were followed by poetic performances from Pam Brown and Kate Lilley, and more papers by Stephen Muecke, Melissa Hardie, Stephen Chan and Chua Beng-Huat. After lunch, Ghassan Hage, John Frow, Chris Healy, Kara Keeling and Catherine Driscoll all spoke, with Adrian Martin sending a recorded video from Vilassar de Mar, in Spain. Audrey Yue, Laleen Jaymanne and Alifa Bandali rounded off the day, but not before Meaghan gave a thundering closing address.

Post-festival drinks were accompanied by a scrolling series of film clips. If the musical selections were a translation of Meaghan-ness, selecting the clips was an easier task. Film has been an abiding passion of Meaghan’s and Prudence Black took on the task of selecting an arrangement of films that have been featured in Meaghan’s writing: *Mad Max* (1), *Rocky* (1), *Wake in Fright*, *Fist of Fury*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Australia*, *Muriel’s Wedding* and, of course, the climactic fight scene between Bruce Lee and Chuck Norris in *The Way of the Dragon*. These film clips, then, offered another reflection on Meaghan’s legacy, paying tribute to the way her work has helped persuade students and scholars that cinema, especially Australian film and martial arts movies, can be important not only for the vast popular audiences it attracts but as a means of addressing some key questions at stake in contemporary culture.

Meaghan might be thought of as a singularly distinctive ‘pioneer’, an independent scholar and part of the scholarly precariat of another time. She taught film part-time at the New South Wales Institute of Technology in the early 1980s, in seminar rooms filled with clouds of smoke and intense discussions about Laura Mulvey, Roland Barthes and Paul Hogan. Like many of her students, Meaghan also had to work for a living in different capacities, and in her case brought to class the real-world engagement of writing film reviews for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Financial Review*. The cultural studies ‘conjuncture’ was a livewire; the Drum tobacco was carefully eked out.

In 1991, Stephen Muecke had the opportunity to interview Meaghan for a book on small journals edited by David Carter.<sup>1</sup> It was part of the import/export energies that animated

conference titles like ‘Foreign Bodies’ (the 1981 conference where Jean Baudrillard was a rock-star of European obscurity, and the commentariat was given its first chance to denounce ‘French theory’). Meaghan mounted a spirited defence in conversation with Martin Harrison on the ABC at the time, ironically citing Bjelke-Peterson’s phrase, ‘that just because a few wogs want their spicy tucker, that doesn’t mean that Australian health has to be put at risk’.<sup>2</sup> This was a time when ‘theory’ was self-published on miniscule budgets and in the case of the ‘Working Papers’ collection, minuscule font sizes to save paper. These were incredibly exciting little books featuring translations into English of Foucault and Irigaray, publishing that contributed to making Australian cultural studies part of global circuits.<sup>3</sup> English intellectuals like Tony Bennett and John Fiske would later be attracted to Australia because of this pioneering work, and Larry Grossberg’s version of US cultural studies was strongly influenced by Meaghan as he took over from Fiske in transitioning the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* into the American-based publication, *Cultural Studies*.

Meaghan has always pursued her intellectual work across the boundaries between universities and the world of thinkers—poets, filmmakers, activists and writers—outside it. And she has never been confined in her more strictly academic work to the Australian university system. After her long tenure as Chair Professor of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, Meaghan came back to the Australian academy, but it has never owned her. While teaching at Sydney University, she was also helping run cultural studies camps in Asia; while sustaining international networks like the Association for Cultural Studies and the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society, she was also leading local research groups back in Australia. And, of course, she has continued to be an inspirational thinker, speaker and writer.

What follows is a written record of that day; it includes diverse forms of writing, from traditional academic essays through anecdotal memoirs, poetry and polemics of a particular order to careful explorations of particular aspects of Meaghan’s work. They don’t share a shape but they do share a focus. They are part of a festival of thinking and writing that leveraged the possibilities of language and celebrated the rich legacies in the work of Meaghan Morris.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Cultural Studies Review*, Kate Wright writes of the weeping willow and the way a community garden might be imagined as a decolonising metaphor. In a poetic form, this article makes a very cogent argument for the ways the contemporary university, with its bureaucratic and economic production of research cultures, limits decolonising work and engagement and ‘blinds us to minoritarian multispecies realities’. Wendy Alexander also experiments with styles of research and writing in her ‘object-oriented literary criticism’ of a late 1800s newspaper short story. Alexander follows the material trail of the writing’s production to detail the way in which it not only works as a ‘thing in the world’ but also contributes to the work of world creating.

Emma Sarian shows us that the Australian Citizenship Test depended upon the history of other such tests that seek to register and thus create ‘good’ Australian citizens. This is an elegant portrayal of how tools of exclusion are refigured as ‘common-sense’ paths to inclusion and used to create a (limited) idea of national cohesion. In an article that is as much about pedagogy as it is about theory, as much about practice as it is about research, Astrid Lorange and Tim Gregory work through the idea of post-pornography. Their focus was inspired by ‘the growing disjuncture between students’ lived experience of porn and the institutional and disciplinary structures that present pornography as an object of study’, a widening gap they felt demanded ‘a shift towards the post-pornographic’. That shift has opened the possibilities for an important refiguring of how we (and our students) think and experience gender, sex and

bodies—historicised in relation to the here-and-now of ephemeral screens. In book reviews, Nabeel Zuberi explores how Margie Borschke's *This is Not a Remix: Piracy, Authenticity and Popular Music* 'delineates a genealogy of remix', from its origins to recent issues such as copyright. Astrida Neimanis provides an emplaced and affecting review of Kath Weston's *Animate Planet* that reminds us that 'feeling' the weather and the effects on our planet presents possibilities for a new order of activism and activity. Lynn Comella's *Vibrator Nation* is reviewed by Megan Le Masurier who, along the way, provides a neat history of sexuality. We hope our readers might also pick up some hands-on hints!

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## Notes

1. Meaghan Morris and Stephen Muecke, 'Relations of Theory—A Dialogue', in *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, ed. David Carter, Local Consumption Publications, Sydney, 1991. Also available at: [https://www.academia.edu/29577366/Relations\\_of\\_Theory\\_A\\_Dialogue\\_1991\\_.pdf](https://www.academia.edu/29577366/Relations_of_Theory_A_Dialogue_1991_.pdf).
2. Stephen Muecke (comp. and transc.), 'A Martin Harrison ABC', *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Ecopoetry and Eco-poetics*, <https://plumwoodmountain.com/a-martin-harrison-abc/>.
3. See the now rare publications: Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris (eds), *Language, Sexuality & Subversion*, Feral Publications, Sydney, 1978; and Paul Patton and Meaghan Morris (eds), *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, Feral Publications, Sydney, 1979.