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ARTICLE

## Meaghan Morris: A Student's Perspective

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We have been asked to contribute to a special section of *Cultural Studies Review* in honour of Meaghan Morris and her significant influence to cultural studies. Before sharing my contribution to the Meaghan Morris Festival, it is important to note that my role in this intellectual celebration was minor, but Meaghan's influence on me is rather large and meaningful.

On a rather hot and humid day in December preceding the 2016 Crossroads Conference at the University of Sydney, the Meaghan Morris Festival brought together a juggernaut of cultural studies' thinkers from all over the world. As a PhD candidate at the time, only a few months away from submission, I presented a keyword address to Meaghan in front of many of her friends and esteemed colleagues. Needless to say, my nerves kicked in. It had been a day of hearing beautifully articulated words from the likes of Katrina Schlunke, learning of some of Graeme Turner's early encounters with Meaghan and hearing about Kara Keeling's imagining of Meaghan Morris as a blonde 'Aussie' woman. The common sentiment of the day that shone through was a deep appreciation of Meaghan and her intellectual contribution to the field. I was energised by the speakers at the event and their words in recognition of Meaghan.

In my short response to Meaghan and her influence, called 'Keywords for Meaghan Morris', I began by sharing my own experiences with Meaghan, which often involved a weekly after-departmental seminar drink. Meaghan is probably unaware of this, but her presence at department and work-in-progress seminars was a weekly ritual I, and many other postgrads in the Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney, looked forward to. In my attempt to capture the word *anecdote*, a term that is associated with Meaghan and her greater body of work, here I present my original contribution to the Meaghan Morris Festival:

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The word I have chosen is anecdote. Whether it is Meaghan using an anecdote such as referring to the Lego movie in a seminar or a work in progress, her work more broadly speaks to the different ways in which we can use anecdotes. This word is one Meaghan exemplifies as she has a real talent telling amusing and interesting stories both in person and in her writings. In her article ‘Banality in Cultural Studies’, Meaghan writes that anecdotes for her ‘are not expressions of personal experience, but allegorical expositions of a model of the way the world can be said to be working’.<sup>1</sup> She shows us how anecdotes can be used discursively as an approach in our research and writing and, because of this, she is able to convey a realness in her writing, where you are able to really envision her sharing stories and experiences. This is one of Meaghan’s many talents and something I appreciate and strive to work on in my own research and writing.

Reflecting on this, almost a year later, there is much more I wish I had said in that moment to Meaghan in celebrating many of her achievements. Given this opportunity to elaborate on the word anecdote, I want to expand on how Meaghan gives us a way to think about anecdote and the wider part it plays in our research. Just like many who follow Meaghan’s lead in the importance of an anecdote, we are drawn to her notions of ‘the point of an anecdote’ that allows us to encapsulate the speaker’s sense of what is important in present circumstances, as the anecdote narrates an incident and gives us critical proximity to our object of study.<sup>2</sup> I draw on this particular aspect of anecdote to consider how Meaghan establishes a position of nearness to a problem or an object.<sup>3</sup> Seeing the value in an anecdote, Meaghan also notes, is:

to think about how an anecdote is told to have an effect in a conversation. It makes no sense outside of a particular interlocutory situation. That can be a casual conversation on a bus drive, or it can be at a conference ... But an anecdote, if it’s a good anecdote, always has a point.<sup>4</sup>

It is the preciseness of Meaghan’s use of the word that allows us to think about what an anecdote can do in the event or moment it seeks to capture and in broader terms such as what are the social and political stakes of doing something.<sup>5</sup> This is what Meaghan has offered cultural studies, her ideas and dedication to the field makes us want to *do* something with our words, to invest in our research with care, so we are able to illuminate the nuances of the everyday and how it informs our scholarship. This is something I take with me as an early career researcher, as a scholar wanting to continue to learn and grow, with hopes of employing a keyword like anecdote with the ease and eloquence of Meaghan Morris.

## About the author

Alifa Bandali lectures in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. Her research interests include feminist, gender and decolonial theories; women, work and care; and feminist activism.

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## Notes

1. Meaghan Morris, 'Banality in Cultural Studies', *Discourse*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1988, p. 7.
2. Liam Grealy, 'Cliché, Gossip, and Anecdote as Supervision Training', *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2016, p. 352.
3. Meaghan Morris, *Identity Anecdotes: Translation and Media Culture*, Sage Publications, London, 2006.
4. Meaghan Morris, 'Interview with Meaghan Morris', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2013, p. 136.
5. *Ibid.*