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Meaghan's Voice

Laleen Jayamanne

Corresponding author: Laleen Jayamanne, Marrickville NSW 2204 Australia.
lajay2014@gmail.com

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1. I will focus on the praxis of Meaghan's voice as teacher and film critic. I first met Meaghan in 1979 in the Media Studies degree at the NSW Institute of Technology, now University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). She had just returned from her studies in Paris. She taught courses in Semiotics and Avant-Garde cinema. Her seminars had a remarkable atmosphere and intensity not only because people smoked in the classroom. She introduced us to some heady ideas like the Linguistic Sign as well as the importance of non-linguistic semiotic systems, Benveniste and a concept of discourse. It was the dynamics of her teaching praxis that was incomparable. There were moments of enchantment, certainly, and of heightened perception and affect too. What I also remember is Meaghan rushing between the blackboard (remember the blackboard?), and the chair, all covered in chalk and getting up on a chair to write stuff on it—ideas—diagrams of intellectual rigour. The ethos of the classroom was marked by an ethic of speech—a tremendous capacity to listen carefully and then return one's embryonic thought amplified and made clearer. Learning became exhilarating, irresistible.
2. Meaghan was the film critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Financial Review* in the 1980s; she wrote on independent cinema and also on Hollywood, including blockbusters. She taught us formal stuff of reviewing, saying that the real constraint was not from the editors but rather from the nature of the column itself, where sentence structure had to be simple—no room for parenthesis or a chance to disagree with oneself! She had a surprising way of seeing what no one else saw and was able to make it seem worth seeing and thinking about. Above all, she taught us a way to write in a vernacular voice without separating criticism from theory. Her vernacular voice influenced a generation of students and helped us to get away from academic prose, especially of the British variety.

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3. Meaghan has the voice of a young girl that seems to remain young even as the years fly by.
 - i. ABC radio anecdote: she was asked to pitch her voice a register or two lower than is natural to her so that she would sound authoritative. But she couldn't or wouldn't do that. It's a light voice, airy and sweet.
 - ii. Hong Kong has given Meaghan a gift, a chance to go slow, very slow in her enunciation, despite the speed of her thinking. This, I think, is because for most of her students English would have been their second language. So that now the cadence of her speech has a different rhythm from her pre Hong Kong voice. The speed of Meaghan's thought processes, the complexity of the connections she makes, are made more accessible by this new rhythm. She now works with speeds and slowness, movements and rests, as Deleuze might have said. I love that. So I feel that Meaghan's thinking is a flash of lightening but in slow motion.

About the author

Laleen Jayamanne taught Cinema Studies in the Department of Art History and Film Studies at the University of Sydney and is the author of *The Epic Cinema of Kumar Shahani* (2015).