Meaghan once remarked (I think to the poet and art critic Ken Bolton) that she didn’t like poetry because of all the empty space on the page. A quarter of a century ago in 1992, in *Ecstasy and Economics: American Essays for John Forbes*, she said she was ‘a desultory reader of poetry’ and that reading poetry might induce a ‘scary cultural estrangement’. In the foreword, she extrapolates the ‘awkward’ place of poetry in cultural studies then as being more an American problem than an Australian one but nearly a quarter of a century later I wonder if poetry has made an individuated local spot for itself, or even if it cares to. I mean, ‘should poetry worry?’

On the other hand Meaghan wrote: ‘As well as lending cultural comfort and rhetorical support, the poems I discuss ... here ... deeply and directly structure the essays in which they appear. This is not for “aesthetic effect”; I do not believe that criticism is, or can ever be, a mirror to art. It happens, to put it bluntly, because the poems gave me ideas.’ In the following paragraph she concludes: ‘I read the texts in order to learn more about the complex networks of living by which they are shaped, and in which, *as* poems (or “forms of life”, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms), they participate.’

Like everyone else here I love Meaghan’s essays and have done so for a long time. Back in the late 1980s I stole an expression of Meaghan’s from her essay ‘Room 101 Or a Few Worse Things in the World’. The expression is ‘modes of goo’. The Generic Ghosts, that is my collaborators and I, used it as a subtitle for one of our performance texts. I’ll read a poem from my recent book *Missing up* that refers back to ‘modes of goo’ in passing:
Hi fax
(in memory of my stealings)
winter goes grey,
as it should,
somebody up there loves me
gets moody, funky
never no turning back
like
1984
the year of our fax machine
& the 'o's of Adorno
at your place,
not mine
& the modes of goo
we wrought so well,
someone tried to
'save me' from you
& they did
I tried to groan
Help! Help!
but the tone
that came out
was that of
'polite conversation'
~
clutching a cardboard cup
of cold coffee
throughout
the 25 minute presentation –
his blazon
of casualness,
au courant,
a provisional philosopher
fingering the bottom of the jar
for crumbs
~
but hi anyway,
fax something by you
to say for you,
we'll suck
the last poetic drops
& reject the 'market'
for good & sure,
your duty to consume
scorned,
ever never no
never no turning back
& what do you reckon,

my wintry shadow,
my fraudulent duplicate,
somebody up there?

And I'd like to present another 'form of life'—an extract from a long poem called 'Left Wondering':

making a list
of mistakes & failures
then
new books arrive
& magazines -
haven't cut
the heat-sealed packets yet
if I read Giorgio Agamben
I can't always digest
the decade-old
being stuff
the coming being
is probably here by now
spherifying some ravioli
in a techno pleasure dome
dream kitchen
am I so docile
so swayed
by my media network
reactions –
following
the sociology ninja’s
shortcut through
the digital humanities graveyard
to the warehouse cafe
to get a chai latte
for Cthulhu

( ? )

like you don’t ‘die’
you ‘pass’
in this particular
schema or schemata
used to be scheme
but that was tiring
tiresome

like
deciding your own
ethics
weighing up
compatibility propositions –
anarchism
as against existentialism
for example

* burglary
looks like a good idea
if I read Kate Lilley
but none of the new books
are poetry
I am missing
a prompt –

* failure results
from making mistakes
from pontificating
with our mouths filled with pie
(peter culley)

* the tapes
(cassettes) were peculiar
when we played parts of them
decades later
weak, really too slow, really
but funny
&
kind of
embarrassing
yet ‘of the times’
‘in today’s saturated mediated performative bowl’
I’m glad to have lived
in the time
of
so many
women of influence
&
in the time
of the young women
to come
– the coming women –

my list begins

*
About the author

Pam Brown has published many chapbooks and nineteen full collections of poetry. She has been writing, collaborating, editing and publishing in diverse modes both locally and internationally for over four decades. She lives on unceded Gadigal land in Alexandria, Sydney.

Bibliography


Brown, Pam, extract from ‘Left Wondering’ in Click here for what we do, Vagabond Press, Tokyo and Sydney, 2018.


Notes

2. Ibid., pp. 9–10.