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ARTICLE

## Forms of Life for Meaghan Morris

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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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

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 Worst Things in the World'. The expression is 'modes of goo'.<sup>3</sup> 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:<sup>4</sup>

**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  
     go straight to mute  
     ~  
 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,  
     never 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':<sup>5</sup>

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  
 \*

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## 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.

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## Notes

1. Meaghan Morris, Foreword, in her *Ecstasy and Economics: American Essays for John Forbes*, EMPress, Sydney, 1992, pp. 7.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
3. Meaghan Morris, 'Room 101 Or a Few Worst Things in the World', in her *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*, Verso, London and New York, 1988, p. 194.
4. Pam Brown, 'Hi Fax' in *Missing up*, Vagabond Press, Tokyo and Sydney, 2015, pp. 74–6.
5. Pam Brown, extract from 'Left Wondering', in *Click here for what we do*, Vagabond Press, Tokyo and Sydney, 2018, pp. 66–70.