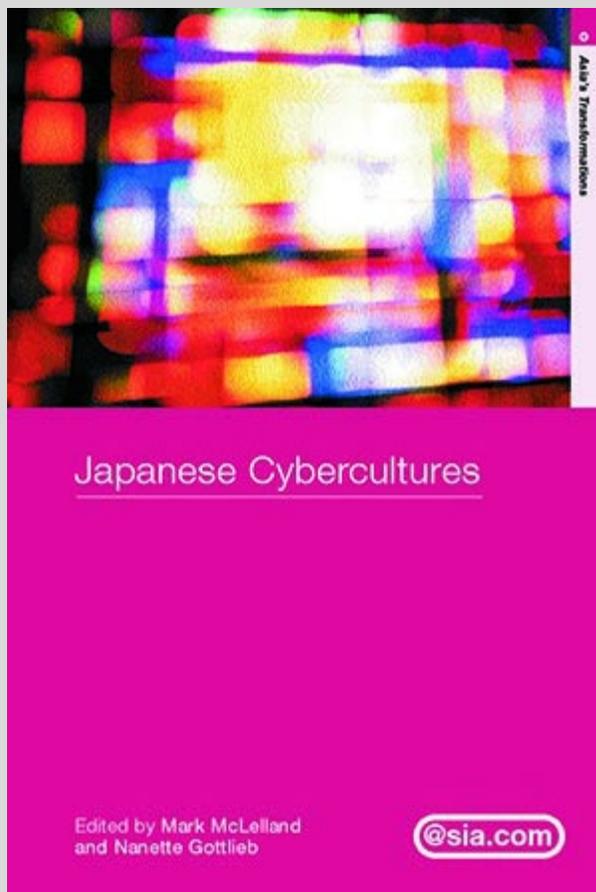


## Remembering Mark McLelland: A Personal Reflection

Graeme Turner

I first met Mark McLelland when he arrived to take up a postdoctoral fellowship at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Queensland in 2000. This was the first academic appointment the CCCS had made since its establishment at the end of 1999, so it was quite an exciting moment for us. In those days, postdoctoral appointments in the humanities were few and far between—apart from those offered through the Australian Research Council's (ARC) Australian Postdoctoral Fellowship program, there were very few local humanities research institutes or centres, and most teaching departments were yet to appreciate the value of such appointments. Consequently, Mark had to compete with a large and highly qualified field of applicants. It was the originality of his research proposal (he was to work on Japanese anime and the phenomenon of 'boy love'), and his location in Asian cultural studies that won the day. Our Faculty Dean at the time, Alan Rix, was an Asian Studies scholar and he was keen to see that element in the CCCS's work, as was I.



**Figure 1.** Cover of Nanette Gottlieb and Mark McLelland (eds), *Japanese Cybercultures*, London: Routledge, 2003.

When Mark arrived from Hong Kong, where he had completed his PhD, he had a couple of concerns. The first was about his two cats, who had to be quarantined in Sydney for a couple of months. After he had come to terms with all that was involved in this, he then wanted to know what we wanted him to do. My answer was that I would help him work out the details of that if he wished, but in principle he could do pretty much whatever he wanted. He really liked that answer (although I suspect he did not believe I was serious at first), and fortunately for all of us he ended up doing exactly that, more or less, for the rest of his career. Initially, that involved the 'boys love' project, but it also took him into the murky ethical territory of investigating fan chat rooms. He was one of the very earliest academic researchers to embrace the task of finding ways to better understand what was happening via these emerging online environments, and he took a few bruises as a result; this kind of pioneering work was not without its risks. The fact that much of the research material he dealt with early on was considered by some to be pornographic (this was Queensland, in the early 2000s, remember), did not bother him all that much until there were a few cases where other researchers at the university—working in less contentious areas, it has to be said—found themselves exposed to public criticism and political intervention.<sup>[1]</sup> So, we ended up approaching the university's chief legal officer for a signed institutional endorsement which said that, in the university's judgment, what he was doing was legitimate and valuable research. We never needed to use this, as things turned out, but the initial conversation between Mark and the chief legal officer as Mark explained what he was doing (showing a few illustrations as examples of his research corpus) was one of the comic highlights of the year for me.

As a postdoctoral fellow in a new and developing research centre, Mark could not have been more perfect. Not only was he a joy to have around—wandering around the shared space of the Centre in his slippers, carrying his cup of tea, and always ready for a chat—but he made enormously significant contributions to the work of the CCCS outside its walls. He set up an Asian Studies research concentration, pulling in a bunch of largely disaffected Asianists previously confined to their own language-based foci, to discuss sharing their projects and concerns in order to find lines of collaboration and debate. This work eventually resulted in Mark convening a successful interdisciplinary national conference at UQ that foregrounded the work of these colleagues. He also established a work in progress network for people working across disciplines on gender and sexuality, revealing and developing all kinds of intersections and shared interests across the faculty—something that was particularly productive for the growing number of early career researchers in these areas. As the CCCS expanded, he found common ground with new appointees such as Melissa Gregg on issues around gender and sexuality and he developed an especially productive collaborative partnership with Gerard Goggin around histories of the Internet. The two of them published several important books together within Internet studies and were major forces behind the establishment of the international Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR).<sup>[2]</sup>

The fact that the CCCS turned out to be a successful venture is very largely due to the vigorous and well targeted effort that Mark put into ensuring that it would benefit the rest of the faculty, not only those fortunate enough to work in that research only environment.<sup>[3]</sup> I will forever be grateful for the patience, intelligence and plain common sense he put into managing that relationship. Furthermore, the quality and sophistication of his intellectual engagement with the faculty—through his presentations, his participation in academic events and of course through his own published work—played a significant part in legitimating the work being done in the Centre and its claim to research leadership. Mark also contributed in important ways to the Australian Research Council (ARC)-funded Cultural Research Network (CRN) that ran from the Centre between 2006 and 2011, and to the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia (CSAA)—in general just as a lively and engaged personal presence, but in particular by presenting at seminars and workshops

on the role of the postdoctoral fellow and the ways forward from such positions. (At one such event, he outraged some of the more hardcore cultural studies postgrads by suggesting it might be useful for them to adopt an 'affable persona' to help them deal with the networking in which they needed to engage when they attended conferences. It was helpful advice, nonetheless, and admirably reflected his own personal practice.)

It was not at all surprising that Mark would go from strength to strength after he made his move to Wollongong, with his ARC successes and the leadership position he adopted within the fields of Gender and Sexuality Studies, as well as the continuing work in Internet Studies. His work on minority sexual identities in Japan was groundbreaking and challenging, especially for some within the more conservative parts of Asian Studies. It is work that has prevailed, however, and is now seen as fundamental to histories of gender and sexuality in Asia. His standing grew to the point where he was elected to the Fellowship of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, and he had the personal authority to enable the taking of public positions on issues related to his expertise and to his social and political principles. In what remains a regrettably short career, his work was the product of both vision and courage, and it had real impact.

At this point, however, it is important to say that what is especially remarkable about his career is not only how much he was respected as a researcher and as an intellectual—how could he not be? What is also notable is the love and affection he inspired amongst his colleagues: Mentioning Mark to those who have worked with him immediately brings a smile to their face. I share that response myself. I loved working with Mark and maintained contact with him as his research moved on, and as he took on new roles and responsibilities. He was such a memorable character, such an original thinker, and the source of so much humour and good times, that it is terrible to think that he is now gone. There is so much to celebrate, though, in what Mark did and what he gave. It is wonderful to see that this issue takes on the task of ensuring that is remembered.

## Notes

[1] Mark would go on to explore ethical issues in teaching and researching sexual subcultures in Japan in a series of articles and in an edited collection: Mark McLelland (ed.), *The End of Cool Japan: Ethical, Legal and Cultural Challenges to Japanese Popular Culture*, Oxford: Routledge, 2017, doi: [10.4324/9781315637884](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315637884).

[2] See [Gerard Goggin](#)'s essay in this issue. Their collaboration resulted in the following edited collections: Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories*, Oxford: Routledge, 2017, doi: [10.4324/9781315748962](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315748962); and Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (eds), *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, Oxford: Routledge, 2009, doi: [10.4324/9780203891421](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203891421). Mark also co-edited a pioneering collection on cybercultures in Japan: Nanette Gottlieb and Mark McLelland (eds), *Japanese Cybercultures*, London: Routledge, 2003, doi: [10.4324/9780203219614](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203219614).

[3] In addition to numerous articles and book chapters, during his time at CCCS, Mark published the following: Mark J. McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*, London: Curzon, 2000; Gottlieb and McLelland, *Japanese Cybercultures*; Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005; Romit Dasgupta and Mark McLelland (eds), *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*, Oxford: Routledge, 2005, doi: [10.4324/9780203346839](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203346839); and Mark McLelland (ed.), 'Queer Japan,' special issue of *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, 12 (January 2006)—the first of a series of special issues for the journal, *Intersections*. For Mark McLelland's contributions to *Intersections*, see [Carolyn Brewer](#)'s essay in this issue.

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