

The Cringing Continent

2027 InASA Conference

Tuesday 9–Friday 12 February

Flinders University, Adelaide



InASA

International Australian
Studies Association

In February 2027, we invite you to join us on Kaurna Country to reconsider one of the foundational epigrams of Australian Studies: A. A. Phillips's much-cited 'cultural cringe.' Detached from its original context in the pages of *Meanjin*, the phrase has been used to stand in for many of Australia's colonial insecurities, remaining widely cited across disciplines and in the pages of the *Journal of Australian Studies*. At this conference, we aim to interrogate it anew, and re-vision the cultural cringe's impact on Australia and on Australian Studies for a new century. At a time of resurgent nationalism across the globe, it is timely to return to a formulation that encourages us to think seriously but self-deprecatingly about our national anxieties.

In a special section of *Meanjin* titled "Cultural Cringe Reassessed" (2020), which presents a range of valuable correctives to how Phillips's work has been taken up in the shadow of the centenary of Federation, Ivor Indyk insists that

when the culture fails to go forward, fails to open towards the future, it falls prey to the past, which must seem more powerful than anything the present has to offer . . . it is before our past that we cringe, when the present falters—it beckons us with a masochistic allure.

Across the conference, we are particularly interested in curating trans-historical and cross-cultural perspectives that not only illuminate the cringe's hold over us as a construction, but also propose new formulations in order to transcend it.

In his account of Phillip's critical career, Rollo Hesketh reminds us that

he was unashamed of being Australian and he was unashamed of Australian culture. If the culture he promoted tended, according to his critics, to the hackneyed or the unsophisticated, nevertheless it was an *Australian* culture.

We carry these provocations forward into InASA 2027, in order to think both generously and broadly about Australian Studies as a disciplinary formation. In an age of polarisation, examining the cultural cringe invites us to ask how we balance shame and pride in the ongoing search for a national identity. Phillips and the work that he provoked, both those who sympathised with it and those who contested its influence, is also notable for its commitment to placing culture at the centre of

debates about the nation. This conference similarly seeks to use culture to curate our conversations within the interdisciplinary field of Australian Studies.

This conference will aim to use the frame of the cultural cringe to curate a range of conversations critical to our disciplinary formation. While contributions from any area of Australian Studies are welcome, we particularly encourage those on:

- The cringe as a manifestation of coloniality
- Cringe comedy and Australian humour
- Ozploitation and Australian genre content
- Australian Modernism's anxiety of influence
- *Meanjin's* influence on Australian cultural life
- Australia as a small player in Europe / as a big player in the Indo-Pacific
- Cross-cultural perspectives on the cringe
- Nationalism, neo-liberalism and cringe
- Universities, social license and the cultural cringe
- The politics of cringe
- Anti-intellectualism as cringe
- Cringe as national pride
- The joy of cringe
- Festivals as institutionalised cringe.

The conference will be hosted at the Flinders Bedford Park campus, where the eucalypts sway and Gulf St Vincent glistens in the distance, connected to the Adelaide CBD by direct and frequent public transport. The InASA conference is hosted by Assemblage Centre for Creative Practice Research, Flinders University's research centre for artistic enquiry and art creation. The Centre aims to support research that empowers Australians to live better lives; lives enriched by art and culture and marked by creative care of each other and our environment. Its core membership is drawn from the Creative and Performing Arts discipline cluster, the nucleus of creativity and creative thinking at Flinders.

Submissions

Abstracts of between 200 and 300 words, plus a short bio of 100 words, should be submitted via email to assemblage@flinders.edu.au by **Monday 17 August 2026**.

Alongside traditional written abstracts, we welcome proposals in alternative forms to support your access preference, e.g. voice notes or videos of up to 90 seconds.

Please also indicate in your abstract both the proposed form of your presentation, as well as if you are responding directly to any of the specific prompts included in this Call; this will assist our programming and in offering timely responses.

We welcome proposals in the following forms:

- Conference papers, of 20 minutes;
- Creative showings, screenings, or interventions, of 60 minutes;
- Panel presentations of three to four pre-selected panellists, of 90 minutes; or
- Manifestoes, channelling the spirit of Phillips's original, of 15 minutes.

Format & Delegates

The conference will run from Tuesday 9 February to Friday 12 February 2027 at Flinders Bedford Park and will be an in-person only for presenters, with limited hybrid streaming for keynotes and plenaries where possible. The conference will begin on Tuesday with a half-day workshop for postgraduates and early-career researchers followed by an opening function, and close on Friday afternoon to allow for evening return flights from Adelaide. A conference dinner is planned in the Adelaide CBD.

Further Reading

Hesketh, Rollo. "A. A. Phillips and the 'Cultural Cringe': Creating an 'Australian Tradition.'" *Meanjin*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2013, pp. 92–103.

Indyk, Ivor. "The Status of a Colonial: Like that of a Jew." *Meanjin*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2000, pp. 28–32.

Phillips, A. A. "The Cultural Cringe." *Meanjin*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1950, pp. 299–302.