

Electoral Guerrilla Theatre in Australia

Pauline Hanson vs. Pauline Pantsdown

Lawrence M. Bogad

Election Night

Sydney, 3 October 1998. Election night for the Australian Parliament. Pauline Pantsdown, candidate for the Federal Senate, hobbles down a dark street in Marrickville—a working-class, multicultural, immigrant, inner suburb of Sydney—headed for the headquarters of Anthony Albanese, local Member of Parliament (MP) for the Australian Labor Party (ALP). Although ostensibly an Independent rival to the Labor Party, Pantsdown is the ALP's entertainment on this crucial evening. Scores of the local electorate and several local leaders of the left faction of the ALP are present. Pantsdown is in his full campaign costume, a cartoon-drag version of far-right MP and founder of the One Nation Party, Pauline Hanson: a bright-red frizzy wig, outrageous lopsided makeup, high heels, and an inexpensive, bright-red dress—the same brand that Hanson wears. Pantsdown is no traditional drag queen, but a radical, critical,¹ candidate drag queen, who apes grotesque politics through grotesque mask work and mimetic excess.

When Pantsdown arrives, Albanese, a shoo-in for reelection, tells him that Hanson has lost her seat in Parliament. The mood in the hall is festive as Albanese introduces Pantsdown to the audience as “the person who has done the best job of exposing the fascism that Pauline Hanson represents.” Pantsdown immediately launches into a lip-synch performance of his anti-Hanson, chart-topping hit, “I Don't Like It.” The crowd cheers as Pantsdown bobs about like a puppet on a string—lip-synching to Hanson's own voice, digitally remastered and rearranged to form the anti-Hanson lyrics of Pantsdown's creation. These lyrics mock both Hanson's cultural racism and her taste in music.

A bit of Pantsdown political stand-up follows: The candidate mocks Hanson's cultivated image as a working-class “battler” by detailing the huge profits she made and tiny wages she paid as the owner of a fish-and-chips shop. Pantsdown then recounts buying the same brand of dresses at the same warehouse where Hanson does her shopping. Those dresses cost only \$39 apiece, says Pantsdown, “so where is the money going?”

The performer then details his current legal troubles—his first song, “I’m a Backdoor Man” has been banned as a result of a lawsuit by Hanson’s One Nation Party against JJJ (also known as Triple J), the youth radio station of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Hanson’s lawyers claimed that the song, an earlier cut-and-paste satirical reworking of the parliamentarian’s words, is defamatory.

As the setup for his closing song, Pantsdown pulls the deputy premier of New South Wales, the local state-level representative, and Albanese up in front of the blue-collar Vietnamese/Turkish/Greek/Anglo audience of about 300. The politicians are each assigned a part, which they awkwardly but good-naturedly struggle through. They play lawyers and judges, reciting actual transcripts of Pantsdown’s day in court, which ended with the banning of “I’m a Backdoor Man” from airplay. A good, beery, left-wing time is had by all and Pantsdown shakes many hands on his way out the door.

After the show, Pantsdown is whisked by his campaign staff (a couple of friends) to Sleaze Ball ’98—the huge, annual gay performance event (which in ’98 happened to fall on the same night as the election).² Pantsdown, the main event for the 16,000 people in the hall, performs his second song, “I Don’t Like It.” The grand scale of the Sleaze Ball contrasts sharply with the labor hall. There is a huge, frightening, papier-mâché Hanson head on stage; laser lights beam and a powerful sound system booms. A dozen “Dancing Hansons” back up Pantsdown in an earthy, bawdy, and tightly choreographed routine. At the end of the song, the massive Hanson head explodes and the Dancing Hansons collapse to the floor. Pantsdown steps to the mike and announces Hanson’s electoral defeat. The place goes wild and the party escalates (Hunt 1999c).

Electoral Guerrilla Theatre

Electoral guerrilla theatre is a contemporary way for resource-poor political actors to do with satire and irony what they cannot do with an earnest engagement with political systems whose costs and social barriers are too high for many marginalized subaltern counterpublics (Fraser 1997). Electoral guerrilla theatre is a phenomenon of liberal, postindustrial representative democracies. This brand of political action cannot find space to operate in authoritarian regimes.

Hanson’s racist politics were thoroughly critiqued, as were the vast inconsistencies and illogic within her party’s ideology and platforms. Additionally, there was often a classist and regionalist bias against Hanson in the media.

I define electoral guerrillas as candidates who use satire in their campaigns; have a specific social critique and a cultural axe to grind and/or specific political opponents but little or no hope (and, usually, no intention) of actually winning; and who nevertheless go through the legal motions to actually run for office so that “equal time” laws can be exploited, and the electorate can potentially be engaged as an *active* audience with the option to deliver a punch line by voting for the guerrilla candidate. Such formal participation can infect the electoral public sphere with outrageous “low” performance and rhetoric. This transgression can have a jarring and alienating effect, a Brechtian showing of the instruments, revealing invisible and reified exclusionary structures, rhetorical norms, and rituals of politics through off-kilter “repetition with a critical difference” and mimetic excess (Hutcheon 1985).



1. Pauline Hanson spoke at the Mortdale Bowling Club, 24 September 1998. From footage for *Send in the Clown: The Pauline Pantsdown Story*, an unfinished documentary video. (Directed by Sally Regan and Simon Hunt; produced by Sally Regan)

The Target: Pauline Hanson

Sometimes the electoral guerrilla mocks liberal democracy and its unmarked exclusionary devices and structures. Simon Hunt, a gay, left-wing teacher and film critic from Sydney, had a more specific target in his sights—far-right parliamentarian Pauline Hanson. One of Hunt’s slogans proclaimed, “There will be either two Paulines or no Paulines.” *Pantsdown’s* function was to respond to Hanson’s public presence—once the latter retired, so by necessity would the former. To understand *Pantsdown* we need to know Hanson.

In 1996, to the surprise of pundits and politicians, Pauline Hanson won the traditionally Labor, blue-collar, and rural Queensland seat of Oxley. Hanson, from a small town in Queensland, was a fish-and-chips shop owner, a twice-divorced single mother with three children. She fit the popular Aussie image of a working- to lower-middle-class battler struggling to make ends meet. Hanson accepted the seemingly hopeless job as the right-wing Liberal Party’s candidate for Oxley, but was expelled from the party for anti-Aboriginal comments printed in a local paper. Her expulsion happened too late for Hanson to be removed from the ballot as the Liberal party candidate. She thus won the ballots of both habitual Liberal voters and economically disaffected Labor voters because of her sudden reputation as an independent given the boot by the establishment.

Within a year of her upset victory, with the help of far-right political advisor John Pasquarelli, Hanson formulated her anti-Asian-immigrant and anti-Aboriginal politics into her own party—the One Nation Party—a magnet for far-right voters. One Nation’s policies include the withdrawal of Australia from the United Nations; a halt to all immigration (and a zero-net-gain immigration policy from then on); the cessation of all foreign aid; the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission; a halt to all subsidies of any kind for Aborigines; and a subsidy for medical care for elderly rural whites, One Nation’s power base. One Nation opposes Aboriginal reconciliation, which the cultural left-center has been pursuing for the last two decades. While Hanson insists that she is not a racist, Jon Stratton, author of *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, notes that her racism takes the form of cultural racism, in which cultural behavior is immutably equated with racial identity (1998). Thus, according to One Nation, Asians as a homogenous group will always act in ways culturally inimical to “mainstream Australia,” and therefore will never assimilate—and, of course assimilation is the only way in which mainstream (read: white, Anglo-Celtic) Australia can accept any newcomers.

Journalist Tracey Curro’s interview of Hanson on Australian *60 Minutes* (Wilkinson 1996) is a good example of Hanson’s media coverage. Hanson’s racist politics were thoroughly critiqued, as were the vast inconsistencies and illogic within her party’s ideology and platforms. Additionally, there was often a classist and regionalist bias against Hanson in the media. In the *60 Minutes* piece, Hanson is shown misreading her speeches and confusing her syntax—the unpolished, uneducated Deep Northerner with a Queensland accent from the perspective of the cosmopolitan, southern, and multicultural urban centers.

CURRO: [...] Well, let’s look at some actual numbers then. There are 866,224 Asian-born Australians out of a population of over 18 million. Now, is that “in danger of being swamped” [referring to Hanson’s earlier claim that “we are in danger of being swamped by Asians.”]?



2. In the early morning of 4 October 1998, Pantsdown sat onstage at the big Sleaze Ball, next to the huge papier-mâché Hanson head. From footage for *Send in the Clown: The Pauline Pantsdown Story*, an unfinished documentary video. (Directed by Sally Regan and Simon Hunt; produced by Sally Regan)

HANSON: I don't believe those figures.

CURRO: Well, these are from the Department of Immigration.

HANSON: That's, they're as far as I'm concerned they're booked figures [*sic*]. I don't believe those figures.

CURRO: Are you xenophobic?

HANSON: (*Pause*) Please explain?

CURRO: (*Pause*) Xenophobia means a fear of all things foreign.

HANSON: No, I don't think I am. No, I'm not. Is there a problem? Just because I might be... I find this very hard because I have to sort of clarify all my, what I think and how I feel about things, isn't it?

CURRO: Precisely, because you are a federal politician. We're not just sitting around in a pub, talking about things [...]. (Wilkinson 1996)

"Please explain?" resonated as a favorite quote throughout Australia for months. But this sort of coverage angered her supporters, further galvanizing them against what they perceived as an elitist, intellectual media. In crafting his drag performance, Simon Hunt drew on Hanson's public persona as reflected in the mainstream media's coverage—her slogans, phrases, accent, and dress.

The Guerrilla's Art

The electoral guerrilla's art is improvised and processual. Electoral guerrillas have what de Certeau (1984) would call tactical agency as opposed to strategic power. Low on resources and wherewithal, guerrillas do not make the laws or strategic frameworks in which they operate and have little hope of changing them. In fact, the system may make reactionary laws to further circumvent their maneuverability: responding to Jello Biafra's 1979 campaign in San Francisco, the municipal government passed a law proscribing "silly names" for candidates (Biafra 1992). The guerrilla makes do by using the tools and refuse

of the strategic power in a way not originally intended—especially to gain media exposure and audience access at a level otherwise very difficult to attain.

Electoral guerrillas, like their military counterparts, can operate only given the pre-existence of “base communities” of support (Guevara 1961). These communities are both the social groups that electoral guerrillas draw support from, and the targets of the positive, galvanizing aspect of their performances.

This point draws on Nancy Fraser’s theory of “counter-publics,” in which she challenges Habermas’s ideal of a single, all-inclusive public sphere, positing instead polyglot, internally fractious, rival, overlapping, and conflicting sub-publics with their own rhetorics, positionalities, and worldviews (1997). Similarly, in her work on the “parallel public sphere,” Susan Herbst refers to a series of shadow elections on Chicago’s South Side in the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s, in which an alternative “Mayor of Bronzeville” was informally elected by the African American readership of the *Chicago Defender* (1994).

Linda Hutcheon, in her work on irony, asserts that rhetorical subcultures pre-exist the ironist, not the other way around—that the ironist or humorist would not tell the joke if there was no group from whom the humor-sensibility and corresponding worldview was first generated. The audiences then consume the irony that was conceived with them in mind (Hutcheon 1994).

Hunt drew parallels between Hanson/One Nation’s rhetoric and that of the Nazi Party. While acknowledging that there was a vast difference in degree between the two, Hunt stated that both used the rhetoric of internal and external enemies as threatening to the racially constructed nation.

In postindustrial representative democracies whose political public spheres do not address, acknowledge, or meet the needs of all its fractious counter-publics, there are gaps between the self-legitimizing and universalizing rhetoric of the strategically empowered political elite and the actual level of representation and opportunities for legitimate participation for the diverse communities of the nation. These gaps, these fractures and lacunae in the political landscape, are the operating ground, the base camps of the electoral guerrilla.

Hanson and One Nation met a great deal of enraged opposition from the Left. A youth group called Resistance (which One Nation labeled a Red Front of foreigner-manipulated youths) constantly confronted One Nation with counter-demonstrations. Hanson was definitely successful in polarizing the country and bringing race to the forefront of political debate. She claimed that she was exercising her right of free speech and that the Labor governments of the past had stifled honest discussion about race:

As a citizen, the right of free speech under the law is fundamental to our nation and way of life. As a democratically elected parliamentarian, it is vital. Stopping free speech will lead in the end to a totalitarian society, ruled by dictators, where no one will have the right to disagree. [...] I respect the right of people to disagree with me. [...] Instead of attacking me [...] they should consider the end result of this attempt to silence me. (1996)

Waving the free speech banner would cost Hanson later in her censoring of Pantsdown’s work. In fact, once censored, Pantsdown drew on this quote,

saying, “now we know that Hanson’s statement was not a warning but a wishful fantasy” (Hunt 1999c).

Simon Hunt (the guerrilla behind the makeup)

Simon Hunt, aka Pantsdown, teaches digital sound editing at the College of Fine Arts in Sydney. In 1989, he used this skill to satirical effect against the anti-gay, religious right-wing, Christian Democratic Party leader Fred Nile: he recut Nile’s voice into an absurd speech which he played at full blast while Nile and his Christian fundamentalist followers marched through the gay neighborhood of Sydney on a “moral crusade.”

When Hanson appeared on the national political scene, Hunt decided to answer her racist nationalism with digital sampling, lip-synching, and satirical, gender-critical live performance. These satirical elements came from what he’d always seen as the less serious side of his work, having placed a higher premium on his original musical composing and film work.

Instead of dealing directly with Hanson’s white supremacism, he [Hunt] used her argumentative methods and her actual (digitized and rearranged) voice to make Hanson’s unwilling mouth advocate gay supremacy.

Hunt’s research into both Nazi propaganda and the respondent anti-Nazi cabaret satire for the uncompleted film project *Risk* was of great use in this “low” artistic enterprise. Hunt drew parallels between Hanson/One Nation’s rhetoric and that of the Nazi Party. While acknowledging that there was a vast difference in degree between the two, Hunt stated that both used the rhetoric of internal and external enemies as threatening to the racially constructed nation. The Nazis depicted the Jews as a dehumanized, parasitic ethnic minority eroding and corrupting the nation from within. One Nation assigned that role to the Aboriginals. The Nazis used the French as the external threat (as well as, I would add, the Soviets). One Nation positioned Asia—a racial mass undifferentiated by nation, politics, or economics—as the “swamping” threat. Hunt decided that:

[Hanson] was the next candidate for my cut-up technique, that I could get my ideas out in that way. [...T]he Pauline Pantsdown project [...] seemed to be the project that pulled in all the different bits and pieces I’d been doing before that—performance, music, humor, politics [...]. (Hunt 1999d)³

*“I’m a Backdoor Man”:
The Pauline Pantsdown Project Begins*

Hunt composed his first anti-Hanson song, “I’m a Backdoor Man,” as a satirical cutup of Hanson’s words that mocked her politics. The piece was originally written in August 1997 to accompany a dance piece for his drag queen friend Vanessa Wagner’s dance party. In the piece, Pauline Pantsdown threatened the survival of a bizarre 1950s Australian family, but was exposed in the end as a space alien (with antennas hidden under his wig) and banished. The name “Pauline Pantsdown” was chosen because it alliterated slightly with Hanson’s surname and went well with the song’s title.

In his construction of “I’m a Backdoor Man,” Pantsdown was inspired by the cabaret performers who satirized Hitler. These satirists faced the challenge that Hitler’s views were so extreme that they could not be mocked through exaggeration. Instead, Hitler’s Austrian accent, his quirky speaking style, and his erratic logic were mocked by portraying him discussing something innocuous like grocery shopping with the same fervor and hatred with which he ranted against the Jews. Hunt says he drew on this tradition directly. Instead of dealing directly with Hanson’s white supremacism, he used her argumentative methods and her actual (digitized and rearranged) voice to make her unwilling mouth advocate gay supremacy (Hunt 1999b).

A close reading of the lyrics reveals how the song operates on several levels, through both direct and indirect satire. Lines like “I find this very hard,” “clean up our own backdoor,” “we need to get behind / and we’ll do trade with you,” and “This is a circular driveway” were matched to appropriate phallic and anal gestures in the original stage performance. These lines can also be seen as the “way in” for listeners—entertaining, silly, and slightly titillating lyrics.

The violence of the male chorus’s lines is perhaps a bit disturbing, especially as they are sung in a jaunty Broadway musical style. However, they are also a parody of Hanson’s self-portrayal as the victim of invisible and powerful forces—the media, the foreign-sponsored Left, and other persecutors.

Of course, Pantsdown makes hay of Hanson’s famous “Please explain” gaffe—while only implicitly referring to Curro’s “Are you xenophobic?” Pantsdown’s answer is, “Yes, of course, and ridiculous as well.” Pantsdown demonstrates Hanson’s loopy xenophobia with such lines as: “I like trees and shrubs and plants / [...] but I’ve put up the fence now so they can’t get in.” Pantsdown gives “Please explain” an added twist by changing it to “Please explain me”; Hanson is forced to ask the Australian people for an explanation for her own bizarre existence, politics, character—and her incarnation as Pantsdown.

Pantsdown makes ironic use of anti-gay rhetoric in the song. “I’m very glad that I’m not natural,” coming after “I’m very glad that I’m not straight,” mocks the reactionary construction of queerness as “unnatural.” “You know I’m not human / Someone hit me on the head one day” refers to gay bashing in a way that is both flip and chilling.

“What I’ve called for is a homosexual government”: with this line Hunt casts his new persona, Pantsdown, as a gay supremacist. The threat, “[...] other people don’t receive / They’ve got to accept it here inside / Or I’m saying that they up and leave,” parallels One Nation’s Anglo-Celtic-cultural-supremacist ultimatum to all immigrants, whether Asian or Southern European “wogs”: assimilate or evacuate. With the line, “All our fears will be realized / But I’m a happy person,” Pantsdown deftly summarizes, alienates, and debunks the rhetorical strategy of the modern friendly fascist who combines an approachable, down-home, grassroots persona with the worst of scare tactics and dark prophecy.

Forgive the usage in this context, but the ironic anti-gay rhetoric and the gay-supremacist bits rub up against each other in a slippery way. It fascinates to hear these “both sides of the backdoor” rhetorics juxtaposed to a bouncy beat, and orated by the voice of a known homophobe. The joyful contradictions and multivalent, multileveled ironies make “I’m a Backdoor Man” still fun after multiple listenings.

The payoff line, of course, is “I’m a backdoor man for the Ku Klux Klan with very horrendous plans.” Here, Pantsdown ties together the strands of his satire: the direct mockery of Hanson’s voice, accent, and speech patterns; her argumentative tactics; her rhetorical and grammatical confusion; and her cultural racism and xenophobia.

“Backdoor” Censored

Hunt never intended for this song to be a big hit on the radio, or to achieve escape velocity from his own subculture—the gay performance scene of Sydney. However, when a friend managed to get it played on Triple J, it received countless call-in requests for airplay and was heard over and over again for 11 days—until One Nation filed a defamation suit against Triple J and the court imposed an injunction against its further play on that station until the case could be resolved. This despite the fact that the song was prefaced before each playing by a disclamatory note saying it was satire and not to be taken seriously. One Nation leader David Oldfield, the top adviser for Hanson, went so far as to call “I’m a Backdoor Man,” “the biggest sex scandal of the last decade” (in Hunt 1999b). Although the actual case was never brought to court, the injunction remained in place. As a result, no other radio station was willing to risk a suit by playing the song.

Hanson and One Nation played right into the satirist’s hands. One Nation was for free speech only in some cases. Hanson was the straight woman to Pantsdown’s comedic queerness, showing that she couldn’t take a joke. But the courts upheld the injunction. Because the injunction is in effect until the case is resolved, One Nation hasn’t bothered to pursue the case.

This was what Hunt hoped for—that the “drag” novelty aspect of his work would provide him with a way into the news as a cartoonish bit of fun, enabling him to make his greater political critiques.

One Nation’s leaders and lawyers played the role of Steven Dubin’s *homo censorus* perfectly (Dubin 1999). They declared only one possible interpretation of a multivalent piece of art. They argued that Hanson, and the public at large, would be deceived and harmed by the song. But they also failed to silence “Backdoor Man” (Dubin notes that censorship rarely truly censors). The song is widely available on the Internet—for example, go to <<http://www.pantsdown.org.au>> or <<http://ardormix.hypermart.net/mp3s/p.html>>. To evade One Nation lawyers, offshore websites were set up. A whole cult formed around the song’s distribution. Little kids were singing it in the schoolyards—including the children of outraged One Nation members. Even though it was only played for 11 days, at the end of the year Triple J’s listeners voted it number five of the top 100 songs played on that station. It even made it onto the listener’s list of “Top 100 Songs of All Time.” The injunction only helped create more attention for the song.

One Nation also played into Hunt’s hands with their legal argument. In order to win the case, One Nation had to show that there was actual defamation in broadcasting “Backdoor Man.” Hunt and Triple J argued that no one would ever think that this song was actually written by Hanson or that it expressed her beliefs or sexual preferences; One Nation claimed that because it used Hanson’s voice, listeners would assume it was her speaking. One Nation’s claim was unbelievably literal-minded, providing Hunt with tremendous Pantsdown material.

The “Backdoor Man” controversy received a great deal of media attention. This was what Hunt hoped for—that the “drag” novelty aspect of his work would provide him with a way into the news as a cartoonish bit of fun, en-

I'm a Backdoor Man

lyrics by Pauline Pantsdown

Unless otherwise specified, all lyrics are spoken in Pauline Hanson's re-edited voice.

JAUNTY MALE CHORUS:

(sampled from the American musical movie The Perils of Pauline)

I'm as worried as can be, Pauline
I wonder what the end will be, Pauline

HANSON:

Yes
Here I am
I find this very hard'
But I look at it this way

I'm a backdoor man, I'm very proud of it
I'm a backdoor man, I'm homosexual
I'm a backdoor man, yes I am, I'm very proud of it
I'm a backdoor man, I'm homosexual *(giggles)*
Backdoor, clean up our own backdoor
We need to get behind, and we'll do trade with you

Backdoor, all our fears will be realized
But I'm a happy person
Because I'm a backdoor man, yes I am *(giggles)*

What I've called for is a homosexual government, yeah
Join us, be one of us
Come out, be one of us, yeah

I'm very proud, that I'm not straight
I'm very proud, that I'm not natural
You know, I'm not human
Someone hit me on the head one day, yeah
You know, I'm not human
Someone hit me on the head one day and,
I don't know I don't know I don't know

MALE CHORUS:

Poor Pauline, Poor Pauline, Poor Pauline [etc].

HANSON:

I like trees, and I like shrubs and plants
And trees and shrubs and plants
But I've put the fence up now so they can't get in, yeah
Please explain, Me, me, me *(3 times)*
Please explain

MALE CHORUS:

Poor Pauline, Poor Pauline, I'm as worried as can be
Pauline and her peril

HANSON:

I'm a backdoor man
I'm very proud of it
I'm a backdoor man
I'm homosexual
And back here, this is a circular driveway

I still work it, I worked the other night
I'm rostered on, I think for next week
Now a gentleman came up and told me, he said that
"Other people don't receive"
They've got to accept it here inside
Or I'm saying that they up and leave

Yes, it's a little bit country, it's a little bit country, country, country

VANESSA WAGNER:

It's a little bit rock and roll if you ask me

HANSON:

Yes, it's a little bit country, of course, of course

MALE CHORUS:

Of course, her horse, will neigh, neigh, neigh, Pauline

HANSON:

I'm very proud that I'm not straight
I'm very proud that I'm not natural

*I'm a backdoor man for the Ku Klux Klan
with very horrendous plans*

I'm a very caring potato.
We will never have the chance (*repeat*)

Please explain, ME
Me me
Please explain
Please explain, Me (*repeat*)

Thank you
Please explain, please explain, thank you
(Hunt 1997, emphasis added)

Note

1. This is the same "I find this very hard" from the *60 Minutes* interview (Wilkinson 1996). Hunt extracted Hanson phrases for his songs from many different interviews and speeches on TV and radio.

abling him to make his greater political critiques (Hunt 1999b). On 29 August 1997, “Pauline Pantsdown” and Vanessa Wagner were interviewed on the *Today* show. (Hunt had not yet legally changed his name but did insist on keeping his real name secret for both satirical and personal-safety issues.)

On the *Today* show, Pantsdown was in an early form of Hanson-drag: a tight wig, heavy-but-not-absurd makeup, and a red dress-suit that included fascistic jodhpurs and boots. He wore a band of tiny, impaled koala bears pinned to his chest as medals. In later appearances Pantsdown would wear his second, and final, costume: a frizzier wig, more outrageous and lopsided makeup (Hanson’s lipstick was often crooked), and two dresses of the same brand as Hanson’s:

Visually, I tried to replicate her as closely as possible. I began to wear the same brand of clothing as her. I think the replication worked two ways. I was sending up her actual construction as a so-called “non-politician,” the idea being that I was no less real than she was. Secondly, replicating her media presence isolated the absurdity of her politics, because they were the only difference between us. (Hunt 1999a)

But on this particular day, *Today*’s host was wearing a red dress very similar to Pantsdown’s, providing an unintended visual joke. In the ensuing interview, Pantsdown and Wagner played off each other as a comedy duo, with host Tracey Grimshaw playing the obliging straight woman. One of Pantsdown’s priorities was to undercut Hanson’s use of “mainstream Australia” as a euphemism for Anglo-Celtic Australia, with her common defense that “a majority of mainstream Australia will back me on this issue”:

(Headshot of Grimshaw)

GRIMSHAW: Now how is it that two shy, retiring boys like yourselves find yourselves in the middle of political controversy?

PANTSDOWN: Well, I think obviously the point is that Pauline Hanson has no sense of humor. I mean she talks about freedom of speech and you know we’re just having a bit of fun, Vanessa and I, and she doesn’t seem to quite understand it. But I think that mainstream Australia, when they listen to this song, they’ll realize that her words make much more sense when arranged this way.

[...]

WAGNER: Really, it’s funny because, she’s upset a lot of people with her comments, and I think it’s very hypocritical that she’s become upset about this rather small and humorous thing. She’s very un-Australian if she doesn’t have a sense of humor.

PANTSDOWN: Yehs, and I think mainstream Australia will back me and Vanessa on that as well, yehs.

GRIMSHAW: What is it about her that rankles you two so much?

PANTSDOWN: Oh, that she’s a racist really, people talk about the reputation of Australia overseas, which of course she’s damaging, but it’s more of what she’s doing to Aboriginal Australians and Asian Australians. It’s absolutely appalling, very un-Australian and un-patriotic.

(Camera zooms in on Vanessa Wagner’s bracelet, then pans back to a close-up on her and her costume.)

WAGNER: *(Big smiles throughout)* Yes, and she does have appalling dress sense, and she really does need some makeup tips! *(Bar appears: “VANESSA*

WAGNER' *Song Producer*"⁴) And we thought we'd bring some color and movement to this whole poisoned debate!

GRIMSHAW: So that's what bothers you the most then, the dress sense and the makeup?

WAGNER: (*mock-earnest*) It does me personally, yes.

PANTSDOWN: That's right, the racism, the dress sense, and the makeup, perhaps in that order, yehs.

WAGNER: A nasty combo, actually.

GRIMSHAW: (*laughs*) But you agree that you've probably—just a little—misrepresented her in the song?

PANTSDOWN: Well, see her lawyers say that people will think it's her. But now, if people believe that it's really Ms. Hanson saying things like "I'm a caring potato" and things like that then, well they must be even sillier than Ms. Hanson herself, and there's not many of those around, let's face it. Yehs. [...]

GRIMSHAW: Did you expect that she would sue? Did you think in the back of your mind, as you were doing this—'cause I know you spent weeks and weeks working on this in the sound studio—

PANTSDOWN: Oh, yehs yehs yehs listening to her voice for quite some weeks, in the studio working with it, some people say it's had a permanent effect, I can't see it myself.

WAGNER: You almost wanted to sue her for the effect that it's had on you, right?

PANTSDOWN: Oh I know, that's right, emotional distress actually, yehs. Well the legal advice was always that she might sue for defamation, but when something is so obviously satire, it'll just be laughed out of court.

WAGNER: Do you think so?

PANTSDOWN: Oh yehs, and I think 102 percent of mainstream Australians will back me on that.

WAGNER: Oh, most definitely, Pauline! (Palmer 1997)

In this appearance, Pantsdown and Wagner accept (and even play up) their role as queer novelty items, while asserting their agenda on race, satire, and their alternative definition of patriotism and Australian identity.

To win the case, One Nation had to show that there was actual defamation in the act of broadcasting "Backdoor Man." This took 13 months to formulate; in fact, Hanson only put forth her Statement of Claim on 23 September 1998, five days before the court date—long after the injunction had first been put in place. While Hunt and Triple J argued that no one would ever think "Backdoor Man" was actually written by Hanson, One Nation claimed that using Hanson's voice would convince listeners it was her speaking, and that they would take her words literally.

Below is an excerpt from Hanson's legal Statement of Claim.

[...]

11. The song, when given its normal and ordinary meaning would, or could, be taken by the ordinary person to mean, [...]

(g) that the Plaintiff is a homosexual;

(h) that the Plaintiff is proud to be a homosexual;

- (i) that the Plaintiff is a homosexual (gay) activist;
 - (j) that the Plaintiff is proud to be a homosexual (gay) activist;
 - (k) that the Plaintiff is a prostitute;
 - (l) that the Plaintiff is proud to be a prostitute;
 - (m) that the Plaintiff engages in unnatural sexual practices including anal sex;
 - (n) that the Plaintiff is proud to engage in unnatural sexual practices including anal sex;
 - (n) [*sic*] that the Plaintiff engages in unnatural sexual practices including anal sex with the Klu Klux Klan [*sic*];
 - (o) that the Plaintiff is proud to engage in unnatural sexual practices including anal sex with members of the Klu Klux Klan;
 - [...]
 - (r) that the Plaintiff is a “potato” (which is understood to be a word associated with a male engaged in sexual acts with another male who has had the genitalia of the other male voluntarily inserted in his anal passage);⁵
 - (s) that the Plaintiff is engaged in illegal and immoral acts;
12. The Plaintiff has not been associated with or involved with any of the assertions or imputations referred to in the last preceding paragraph.
- [...]
22. As a result of the publication of the song the Plaintiff has suffered;
- (a) mental anguish;
 - (b) social embarrassment;
 - (c) damage to her political image as a Federal Parliamentarian;
 - (d) likely damage to her chances of re-election as a Federal Parliamentarian, or an election in any other political capacity in which she may choose to stand in the future [...]. (*Pauline Lee Hanson v. Australian Broadcasting Corporation*)

Hanson’s lawyers chose this starkly literal reading of Hunt’s text in order to win their case, and they succeeded. On 1 September 1997, the court issued an injunction against Triple J’s further playing of “Backdoor Man.” No other radio station has since dared to tempt a similar suit. Ironically, the rulings of Simon Hunt’s father, once a preeminent conservative Australian justice known for his judgments in defamation hearings, were cited in this case (Hunt’s father, now sitting on the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague, expressed unqualified support for his son’s activities [Morris 1998]).

The One Nation suit provided Pantsdown with a cornucopia of comedic material. Several Australian legal scholars published articles opposing the court’s decision and arguing for the merits of satire such as Pantsdown’s—an unexpected expression of support from the mainstream (see, for example Fitzgerald 1998).

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation appealed the decision, and by chance the date of the ruling on this appeal in the Supreme Court of Queensland in Brisbane (28 September 1998) fell during the final week of Hanson’s reelection campaign (the election was on 3 October). While Pantsdown/Hunt never imagined that Hanson would waste one of her last precious days of campaigning, she showed up in court and then made a brief public statement after the appeal was denied.

Pantsdown arrived just a few minutes after Hanson left. Pantsdown’s denunciation of Hanson was broadcast on TV and printed in major newspapers.

When asked if he regretted the grief he’d caused Hanson, Hunt replied:

I regret the grief that she has caused to the many thousands of Australian people who she has divided with her views. I regret that Mrs. Hanson has caused a rising tide of violence against Asian people in this country. I regret that Mrs. Hanson has caused unimaginable pain to the Aboriginal

people who were so close to finding some sense of justice in this country. My action, my song, was trivial. It was a joke. (Hunt 1999c)

It is not surprising that Hanson made such a politically costly appearance at such a crucial time. Her appearance was a testimony to the effectiveness of Pantsdown's electoral guerrilla attack. Hanson's lawyers argued that if the injunction were lifted at this tactically crucial time, then Triple J and many other radio stations would probably play "Backdoor Man" nonstop for the last week of the election campaign—which could have a lethal effect on One Nation and Hanson at the time when so many swing voters make up their minds. In a sense, Pantsdown left Hanson with only bad options: either appear in court and look petty, censorious, litigious, and easily distracted from the home voters; or don't show up and increase the chance of losing the injunction, which could lead to a blaze of airplay of a very electorally damaging song. Hanson chose her day in court, triggering yet another news item connecting her public persona to that of her queer, multi-culti doppelgänger.

Hanson did not have a free range of motion in responding to Pantsdown. Her own visibility restricted her. She had to establish and maintain legitimacy, in the public eye and in the national legislature. She could be penalized for excess and inconsistency, the very staples of a guerrilla's performative repertoire.

At the same time, Hanson had to repeat sound bites—the job of a politician to utter simple, catchy, and reductive phrases over and over: e.g., "mainstream Australia"; "fringe dwellers"; "ordinary Australians"; "we are being swamped by Asians"; "Asians form ghettos and do not assimilate." In this necessary act of redundant "message-drilling," Hanson fed Pantsdown his straight lines. Pantsdown completed the routine by improvising punch lines to close the jokes. During the election campaign, Hunt read newspapers looking for Hanson quotes, then prepared himself for the inevitable calls from journalists for his in-character reactions. Shadow press releases on the Pauline Pantsdown website mocked One Nation's proclamations (Convery 1999).

The electoral guerrilla usually has neither the capacity nor the desire to take legislative territory—only to drain the resources and the legitimacy of the greater power through harassing tactics and spectacular "zaps" and "hits," mimetic excess, and the use of the enemies' weapons against them—in this case endlessly repeated sound bites that are flipped, inverted, and fired back as frequently as possible.

However, this also limits electoral guerrillas to making do with the castoffs and "lost" or "surrendered" material of the more powerful enemy. Writing his speeches or preparing for press phone calls, Hunt depended on what Hanson and her Party officials had said the day before. Pantsdown's songs were also limited by the syllables actually uttered publicly by Hanson.

The Campaign

During the 1998 federal election, Hanson ran for reelection for the seat of Blair (Oxley had been reshaped). Simon Hunt legally changed his name to

3. & 4. Pantsdown appears at the polls on 3 October 1998 to cast her vote. (Photos by Garry Convery)
5. Pantsdown signing autographs at Fish Records on election day, 3 October 1998. (Photo by Garry Convery)



Pauline Pantsdown and declared his candidacy for the Senate in New South Wales. One of his opponents was David Oldfield, the #2 man in One Nation and Hanson's alleged "Svengali." Pantsdown felt that he could escalate his battle against Hanson by appearing on the same ballot as her party. He hoped that this would merge their images even further in the media, helping to show that Hanson was no less a public construction than Pantsdown. He also felt that as a candidate he would move from "novelty" press coverage to "news" coverage—a tactic that proved successful.

Australia uses a proportional-representational electoral system, with preferences to elect senators. This means that voters rank candidates in the order of preference. The result is a more open system than that of the United States. In Australia, citizens can vote for minor candidates without "wasting their vote"—a vote will simply go to the second choice if the first choice is not elected.

More importantly for the electoral guerrilla, who hopes for visibility over viability, getting on the ballot is much easier than in the U.S. People run "below the line," as minor-party candidates, for A\$700, and "over the line" for A\$7,000. (Conservatives in Australia have expressed alarm at the openness of this system, claiming that it allows for too many "trivial candidates.") In addition, all citizens have to vote or pay a fine, and voting is much more convenient in terms of work hours and registration than in the United States. Expensive voter registration and election-day mobilization campaigns are not necessary or even possible. Voter turnout tends to be at 96 percent, an incredible figure compared to that of the United States (Australian Electoral Commission 2000a; 2000b). All this limits the impact of major-party financial resources on elections.

There were 69 New South Wales candidates running for six open senate seats. Pauline Pantsdown urged his supporters to "do a 69" on David Oldfield by ranking him last on their ballot.

"I Don't Like It"

The launch of Pantsdown's campaign was contingent on the success of his second anti-Hanson song. This new single was a technically complicated, if satirically simple, piece called "I Don't Like It" ("IDLI"). In "I Don't Like It" Pantsdown attempted to *create and assign* an embarrassing sound bite—a "bite back," one indicative of Hanson's overall negative worldview—and attach it to her by using a catchy beat.

Pantsdown was warned by his lawyer/agent/friend not to try satire by analogy as he had with "Backdoor Man" because this was likely to result in another injunction. Pantsdown couldn't call Hanson a gay homosexual sex partner of the Ku Klux Klan and prove in court that it was true. But he could call her a racist, and he did. While its satirical method is simpler, "I Don't Like It" is more technically complicated than "Backdoor Man." It actually creates new words from different Hanson syllables; for example, "San Francisco" was pieced together from four different words.

Unlike "Backdoor Man," which was meant for one subculture and unexpectedly spread to a wider audience, "I Don't Like It" was designed to break on radio. The song was released on a single CD, along with a dance remix and an original Simon Hunt composition, "Pauline's Nightmare," featuring Asian wind and string instrumentation complemented by electronic sound effects. In his "I Don't Like It" lyrics, Pantsdown wanted to walk the line between satire and novelty song. If "I Don't Like It" came across as a "fun, bouncy, silly little song," it wouldn't frighten DJs and might be played every couple of hours. Thus for every "racist rubbish, racist hate" there is a "my shopping trolley murdered, my groceries just gone" (Hunt 1999b).

I Don't Like It

lyrics by Pauline Pantsdown

I don't like it, when you turn my voice about.
I don't like it, when you vote One Nation out.
My language has been murdered, my language has been murdered,
My shopping trolley murdered, my groceries just gone.

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, racist rubbish, racist hate,
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, racist rubbish, racist, feel the heat.

I don't like it, when railway lines are white,
I don't like it, when day becomes night.
My language has been murdered, my language has been murdered,
My shopping trolley murdered, my groceries just gone.

I don't like it, no, no, no I don't, never did,
I don't like it, I don't like anything.
I don't like it, no, no, no I don't, nowhere near,
I don't like it, I don't like anything.

Please explain, why can't my blood be coloured white,
I should talk to some medical doctors,
Coloured blood, it's just not right.

I don't like anything, I can't do anything about it.

But I like dancing, and I like the disco,
'Cos I left my heart in San Francisco.

Feel the heat, on the street,
Dance to the beat, out of your seat.
Feel the heat, on the street,
Dance to the beat, out of your seat.

Get down, get down, down, down.
I don't like anything,
Except I like Neil Diamond, yeah?
Disco dance, disco dance,
Disco nation? Not a chance.
Disco dance, disco dance,
Out of my tree, out of my branch.

[...]

I don't like a puppet without strings,
There's a muppet in the wings,
And it's saying racist things,
I won't cop that, no way.

(continued)

c

I don't like anything! I can't do anything about it.
 Video killed the racist star.
 Howard¹ wonders what you are,
 But he is on the scrap heap too—bit of a Downer.²

I don't like anything, I can't do anything about it,

But I like dancing [etc.]

Feel the heat [etc.]

I don't like it [etc.]

No, the whole thing is wrong, and it stinks, and I DON'T LIKE IT!
 (Hunt 1998a)

Notes

1. Right-wing Prime Minister John Howard, that is. A constant aim of Pantsdown's performances, both recorded and live, was to tie Hanson's blatant racism to Howard's more low-key anti-Asian immigrant/Aboriginal Reconciliation policies—to argue that Howard quietly benefitted from the attention which Hanson received on these issues while he actually implemented policies that had some elements in common with One Nation's (Hunt 1999a).
2. This is a reference to conservative politician Alexander Downer, currently Foreign Minister and, according to Hunt, considered a bit of an also-ran in his career (Hunt 1999b).

6. "Racist Rubbish, Racist Hate." Pauline trashes Pauline. From the music video for "I Don't Like It" (1998). (Produced and directed by Greg Ferris and Justin Ball; courtesy of Simon Hunt)



In fact, "IDLI" is the audio equivalent of the "Hitler Jig" film put together by Allied propagandists during World War II. These filmmakers wished to ridicule Hitler just at the moment he seemed undefeatable—after France had capitulated to the Wehrmacht. Using a brief film clip of Hitler raising and slapping his own knee on the eve of France's defeat, the filmmakers spliced, reversed, and respliced Hitler's gesture until it appeared that the Nazi dictator was performing an ugly, jerky, and ridiculous little jig. Swing music was laid over the doctored film and the fearsome image of Nazi storm troopers goose-stepping in perfect, robotic formation was tampered with to make it look like they were dancing back and forth in a Rockettes-like number. Thus a frightened or demoralized populace was empowered to laugh in the face of their enemy—thereby diffusing their fear, at least temporarily.

In "IDLI," Hanson's words, down to the very syllable, are spliced and respliced with similar effect—to truly make her appear ridiculous as she utters both surprising non sequiturs and jokes at the expense of her own politics. Pantsdown wanted to make Hanson say, "Hey hey, ho, ho, Pauline Hanson's got to go," but he couldn't configure the syllables quite right (Hunt 1999b).

"I don't like it, when you turn my voice about. / I don't like it, when you vote One Nation out." With these lines, Pantsdown uses Hanson's voice to say, "Stop undermining my authentic voice!" The irony, of

course, is that even this line, the only one that Hanson might actually agree with, is digitally constructed.

“My language has been murdered, my language has been murdered / My shopping trolley murdered, my groceries just gone.” Here Pantsdown makes Hanson push her original complaint about the authenticity of her own voice into the realm of bathos and absurdity. “1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, racist rubbish, racist hate” opens up a new front of anti-Hansonism—direct, blatant, and denunciatory. This is followed by two whole stanzas of silliness, perhaps to ensure a lyrical balance, and to characterize Hanson as a useless, ridiculous “whinger” (Aussie for “whiner”). In a sense, the lyrical tactics of this song are similar to Pantsdown’s entire electoral campaign—they attempt to balance a trenchant anti-Hanson critique with humor, sugar-coating the pill to ensure that the message gets through to the maximum number of people. The song did remarkably well on the national charts and media coverage of Pantsdown’s campaign increased. “I Don’t Like It” received two nominations for the 1999 ARIA national music awards, the Australian equivalent of the American Grammys.

The Video

Because One Nation did not sue, Pantsdown was able to make a low-budget music video of “IDLI.” Pantsdown drew on every favor owed him—and also received a great many voluntary contributions of skill and materials from politically sympathetic Sydneyites. The video was shot and edited in two days. To parody Hanson’s “swamped by Asians” line, everyone in the video, except for Pantsdown and a David Oldfield look-alike, is Asian. The “plot” of the video features Pantsdown hurting his finger by stamping “NO” on a stack of immigration forms, then waking up in an all-Asian hospital. He succumbs to his injury and is welcomed into an all-Asian, queer, disco-dancing heaven.

7. Campaign flyer. (Courtesy of Simon Hunt and Kate Gilroy)

Live Performance on the Campaign Trail

During his campaign, Pantsdown performed live for a wide range of communities—Aborigines, university students, political youth rallies, record stores, immigrant/left-labor groups, queer demonstrations, and drag events, culminating in the huge performance on election night, Sleaze Ball ’98. Pantsdown’s format—the two songs sandwiching a stand-up routine—worked well. People were usually eager to hear the banned “Backdoor Man” followed by the big hit, “I Don’t Like It.” Pantsdown inserted his spoken political humor between the two. He rewrote his between-song patter for each specific audience and event, often arming the audience with humorous rebuttals to Hansonite rhetoric. It was particularly important to him that these speeches undermine Hanson’s image as a battler by documenting and joking about her actual substantial wealth and the paltry (government-subsidized, at that) wages she paid her workers. Sometimes he would present his nine-point “Ten Point Platform” which was a parody of One Nation’s vague, incomplete, and contradictory policies. At one performance, he ripped up his speech in an apparently spontaneous move, and then explained

Vote 1

**Pauline Pantsdown
for NSW Senate**



Clean up the Racist Rubbish

Written by Pauline Pantsdown.
Authorised and printed by Owen Trembath,
1st Flr, 10 Ward Ave, Kings Cross, NSW 2011.



8. Pantsdown gets whacked with a feather in *Queer Asian Heaven*, in the music video for “I Don’t Like It.” (Produced and directed by Greg Ferris and Justin Ball; courtesy of Simon Hunt)

that he was coached to do so by his advisors in order to seem more “natural”—a mockery of such stagy gestures.

I got the impression from the video footage of these performances that Pantsdown intended to motivate his audiences to either vote for him and other anti-racist candidates, or at least to put One Nation last on their ballots—and to continue organizing progressive alternatives to Hansonism. These performances differed from Pantsdown’s appearances on the mass media where he had much less control over how his material was edited and broadcast.

Pantsdown also had an ally on another front—Garry Convery, a gay activist who formed the Pauline Pantsdown Fan Club Website (<<http://pantsdown.org.au/>>). Using tactics similar to Pantsdown’s, Convery took the texts of One Nation publications and changed some of the words and names in order to ridicule them. The website was also filled with show dates, related events, rather silly news about the Pantsdown campaign, and Pantsdown’s “biography”—which reveals that Pantsdown is in fact Pauline Hanson’s long-lost sister.

The Last Week of the Campaign: The Paulines Merge

Timing is crucial both in comedy and elections—and perhaps even more so when the two are intertwined. The timing for the 1998 election worked in Pantsdown’s favor. In the crucial last week of the campaign, the public personas of Hanson and Pantsdown, if they did not actually merge, were fastened tightly together, much to Hanson’s dismay. Pantsdown’s goal was to force people to choose, not between Hanson and other “serious” candidates, but to bring Hanson down to his level and force people to choose “between Paulines.”

By the final week, the mass media spliced pictures of Pantsdown and Hanson together to form the graphic headers for news stories on such items as the “Backdoor Man” appeal and the “Mortdale Bowling Club” confrontation. On 24 September 1998, outside the Mortdale Bowling Club, where Hanson announced her party’s healthcare policy (and where her supporters roughed up some of the journalists covering the event), Pantsdown confronted Hanson



9. *Personas juxtaposed: “Seeing double” news shot with Pantsdown and Hanson’s heads over the shoulder of the look-alike newscaster. Videotaped off television for the unfinished documentary Send in the Clown: The Pauline Pantsdown Story. (Directed by Sally Regan and Simon Hunt; produced by Sally Regan; courtesy of Lawrence M. Bogad)*

and David Oldfield, maneuvering into the same photographic frame. These photographs made the national press.

“I Don’t Like It” came in handy for protestors. As Hanson arrived in one town, a local DJ dedicated the song to her before he played it. On another visit to a shopping mall, the workers in a music store blasted it at full volume as her entourage walked by.

There was also the matter of the Grand Final Breakfast in Melbourne, a traditional politicians’ roast tied to the Australian football finals. Pantsdown was invited to the breakfast in Hanson’s place, but because this was a mainstream event where the leaders of the major parties were present, Pantsdown was not allowed a mike. Clearly Hanson was not the only politician worried about being in the same frame as Pantsdown. Pantsdown glad-handed the leaders of the various parties—but when he came to shake the hand of Prime Minister John Howard, a pair of secret service agents twisted the video-documentarian’s aim away from the scene for a few seconds to prevent that moment from being filmed.

The drag-guerrilla’s campaign distracted Hanson and drained her political energy. At least once she fled from him to avoid being in the same picture. Yet their images were conflated on several occasions at this most crucial time, the final week of the campaign.

In the end, Hanson lost her seat to the conservative candidate, Cameron Thompson, who stated, “I focused on doing something for the local people while she was doing battle with Pauline Pantsdown and running a three-ring circus with the media” (Convery 1999). Since this defeat, the One Nation Party has imploded due to internal factional strife and legal/funding troubles. This may be only a temporary setback for the far-right movement. In the meantime, with Hanson’s relatively low-key public presence, Pantsdown is largely inactive but still occasionally invited to perform at counter-cultural events.

Below the Belt Hits?

So, who was this character, “an alternative Ronald McDonald” for the multicultural generation, as Pantsdown described himself? A radical drag pop



10. *One Nation* bodyguards try to hold off *Pantsdown* as he confronts Hanson outside the Mortdale Bowling Club on 24 September 1998. This shot was all over the mainstream press. (Photo by Grant Turner)

star to answer and hopefully irrevocably blend with Pauline Hanson's image, to reveal the latter as an equally constructed pop star/glamour queen of the grassroots far Right (Hunt 1999b)? I would suggest that *Pantsdown* was more consistently successful in mocking Hanson than in exposing her constructed nature. To some audiences, in contrast to his obvious drag, she seemed more "natural," more of a "normal" and battling, hardworking, and unsophisticated rural Northerner. As always, the audience does the ironizing.

Jon Stratton (1999) considers *Pantsdown's* work to be radical, anti-racist performance that nevertheless—because it is drag—is socially conservative, aimed against females who show stereotypically male traits of assertiveness, independence, and political power. In the music video, for example, we see *Pantsdown-as-Hanson* in the fish-and-chips shop hurling fries while ranting and, later, riding in a shopping cart through the aisles of a supermarket. *Pantsdown/Hanson* might thus be read as a grotesque female figure, a woman tied to food, images of domesticity, and excessive behavior—in short, a woman out of control, one who does not know her place (Griswold 2000). Perhaps the *Pantsdown* drag act carried the classist/regionalist baggage of the *60 Minutes* coverage into the realm of live-cartoon satire—buying into the mainstream media's method of attack, debunking Hanson's racism while also mocking her lack of polish and education and her "cheapness" in clothing, hair, and makeup. While this depiction galvanized the anti-Hanson forces, it may also have activated *One Nation* supporters, polarizing the stereotypically white, rural, and homophobic north against the urbane, queer-friendly, cosmopolitan south.

Such is the risk with any political cartoon—an art form that is by definition unfair. Linda Hutcheon notes that irony's critical edge is double-sided and multivalent (1994). Audiences do the work of interpreting or ironizing—and,

depending on which counterpublic is consuming the irony, there is always room for backfire, misfire, or return fire. In August of 1999, I asked Simon Hunt about these issues (he had changed his name back by then). While acknowledging that Stratton's interpretation was possible, Hunt argued that he was using Hanson's individual characteristics as a way of critiquing her politics, her dangerous and willful ignorance, and most importantly her lack of justification for her extreme and harmful racist statements. He had to do drag to imitate her, and that helped him to be a novelty item in the mainstream entertainment news. Drag was a "way in" for his satire. Pantsdown focused his punch lines on Hanson's values and ideology much more than her background/class/education (Hunt 1999b). In this sense, Pantsdown's drag follows in the radical traditions of the Church Ladies for Choice (Cohen-Cruz 1998) the Ladies Against Women (Schechter 1985:180-83; Burbank 1998), or the Gulf War-era Overkill Brigade in Philadelphia. I also propose that there was a big difference between how Pantsdown's performances resonated live in front of friendly, counter-cultural audiences and how they were received when mediated, as edited snippets appearing on mainstream, national television.

Conclusion

It is impossible to tell if Hanson would have won the election without Pantsdown's counter-campaign. However, the "Pantsdown Phenomenon" was certainly a factor in Hanson's defeat, creating a parodic performer-symbol around which the Australian cultural Left continues to rally on occasion. How Hunt's techniques would work against a male, center-right, and more powerful politician (such as Prime Minister John Howard) is still an open question. Simon Hunt is attempting to answer that question with his current project (see <<http://littlejohnny.org/>>).

Pantsdown was often asked, "What if you *win*?"⁶ His first response was, "Well, I only have two dresses, so I'd have to wear each one for three years straight." But, on second thought, he ventured, "Well, I guess I'd just hang the wig and the dress up by my seat in Parliament and everyone can take a turn putting them on and being Pauline" (Hunt 1999b). With this, Hunt puts forward his costume as an ironic dig at the far Right, as a more generally absurd symbol of the con-



11. Pantsdown performs at the Gay Rights Rally outside the New South Wales Parliament House in Sydney, 22 September 1998. (Photo by Garry Convery)

structed nature of public political personas, and, perhaps, as an expression of a felt need for a more equal-access, participatory, and creative democracy.

Notes

1. Or, as Jan Cohen-Cruz puts it, “Brechtian drag” (1998).
2. See Jonathan Bollen’s article on the 1994 Sleaze Ball (1996).
3. Hunt also explains his satirical strategy and its paralleling of Nazi and One Nation racial rhetoric in a five-page fax to the ABC’s lawyer, Michael Martin (Hunt 1998b).
4. In fact, this was a faulty crediting. Hunt produced the song, while Vanessa Wagner produced the live performance.
5. It is still not clear how Hanson, who is widely understood to be a female of the species, could be understood to fit under this definition of “potato,” even if such a definition existed.
6. Pantsdown actually received about 2,500 votes—four times as many as any other “below-the-line” candidate. His One Nation opponent, David Oldfield, failed to win a Senate seat.

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Lawrence M. Bogad is a doctoral candidate in Performance Studies at Northwestern University. He is completing his dissertation, an international comparative study called "Speak Mirth To Power: Electoral Guerrilla Theater in Postindustrial Democracies," with the support of a Charlotte W. Newcombe Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. Bogad has taught graduate and undergraduate classes in political and satirical performance, ethnographic field studies, and literature adaptation at Northwestern and the University of Illinois, Chicago. He also taught "Arts and Publics" as the Teaching Fellow at Northwestern's Center for the Humanities. Bogad is active in experimental theatre and film projects as a director, actor, and writer.