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'I DON'T LIKE IT': PAULINE PANTSDOWN AND THE POLITICS OF THE INAUTHENTIC

At the end of August 1997, four months after the launch of her One Nation party, Pauline Hanson, the right-wing populist politician, who at that time was still the federal member for the Queensland seat of Oxley, had Brisbane solicitors Watkins Stokes Templeton take out an injunction against the ABC to prevent Triple J, the youth-oriented radio station, playing the song '(I'm a) Back Door Man.' This song, by drag artist Pauline Pantsdown was not for sale and, indeed, was only ever played on Triple J to which it had been made available on cassette. Triple J had been playing it for ten days, increasingly often as feedback from its audience suggested the song's growing popularity. In spite of this brief and limited exposure, the song came in at number five in Triple J's audience-voted hottest one hundred songs of 1997.¹

Exactly a year later, at the end of August 1998, Pauline Pantsdown released 'I Don't Like It,' this time commercially available as a single, through TWA Records. Judged on sales for the week of 28th September-4th October, 'I Don't Like It' was number four in the Australian Music Report chart, and number one in the Alternative chart. Like 'Back Door Man,' 'I Don't Like It' was a dance track which used digitally reconstructed cut-ups of Hanson's speech.

'Back Door Man,' and the character of Pauline Pantsdown, evolved in Sydney's gay community.² The song was first performed at Vanessa Wagner's Melting Pot, a gay dance party put on by the drag artist Vanessa Wagner whose persona is well summed-up in her self-description as the gay divorcee.³ Given this context it is not so surprising that 'Back Door Man' should identify the narrator as gay. 'I Don't Like It,' a more technologically sophisticated track, lists what the narrator dislikes with a refrain:

'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'

which makes the focus of the song's concern clear.

It is important to remember that Pauline Pantsdown had an existence outside of the songs. As a drag act she appeared in the 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, she hosted dance parties, was interviewed on Triple J, on Channel 9's *Today* show and on ABC television's *Recovery*. She also stood as a Senate candidate for New South Wales in the 1998 Federal Election, in which, while falling well short of being elected, she gained more votes than any other un-grouped candidate. After winning the seat of Blair for the Liberal Party, the seat which Hanson contested in the 1998 Federal Election after an electoral redistribution had eliminated the seat of Oxley, Cameron Thompson said: "I focused on doing something for the local people while she [Hanson] was doing battle with Pauline Pantsdown and running a three-ring circus with the media."

In modernity social identity has been related to authenticity, and both have been established by virtue of reductive, foundationalist claims to essence. Pauline Pantsdown, and her songs, both activate in different, but complimentary ways, what I shall call the politics of inauthenticity. As a satirical attack on the claims of Pauline Hanson, the Pantsdown persona operates as a camp interrogation of Hanson's own image, an image which gains much of its effectiveness by its claim not to be an image but, rather, to be the public face of somebody who is not a politician and who is, in fact, just an 'ordinary Australian,' to use one of Hanson's catch phrases.⁴ Indeed, the very name 'Pantsdown' suggests the revelation of something that Hanson is keeping hidden behind her image. I will argue that Pantsdown's political use of the camp aesthetic takes place in the social context of a carnivalesque mocking of Hanson's public image.⁵ Today, cultural theory tends to attack and critique essentialist notions, privileging the idea of discourse and of cultural constructivism. In discussions of sex and sexuality, queer theory, with its emphasis on performance, is replacing the more traditional assertions of gay and lesbian identity.⁶ However, in practice, essentialist understandings of identity are still generally assumed. In everyday life, therefore, the Pantsdown persona tends to operate as an undermining of Hanson's claim to authenticity. However, it can also be read as a radical and celebratory critique of the very notion of authenticity, as a harbinger of a new politics of play and performance which might, at least, supplement the dominant, exclusionary politics of identity. In this article I emphasise how the Pauline Pantsdown persona works within the modern

binary of authentic/inauthentic because this is still the dominant paradigm in everyday life.⁷

Exclusion and Social Commentary

In the United States the ambivalently accepted Yiddish-background Jews have been the subordinate group which has provided the site for comedians from the Marx Brothers to Lenny Bruce, Woody Allen and Jerry Seinfeld to offer social commentary on American life. In Australia, the group that has begun to take on this role, as it has begun to experience itself as a community, is the gay community, in particular through its use of drag. This is most obvious in the history of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras which is seen not only as a site for the public celebration of (a) vibrant gay and lesbian culture(s) but also, and intimately connected with this, as an opportunity for varied social and political commentary.

From this point of view, Pauline Pantsdown can be understood as political commentary that is a part of a drag, if not gay, social commentary tradition.⁸ One place to begin thinking about this history is Roy Rene, who performed as Mo – though his given name was Harry van der Sluys. Mo, who had a Yiddish background, performed in the character of a stereotypical Yid during the 1920s and 1930s and was the most popular Australian comic of his generation.⁹ While not using drag, he did play the character as very effeminate.¹⁰ Barry Humphries' creation in the 1950s, the oh-so-average Edna Everage from Moonee Ponds, is, though, the first of the popular drag acts.¹¹ Edna's caricature of suburban Melbourne life was aimed at denaturalising the social conventions on which it was built.¹² Humphries himself is best described as a dandy. At Melbourne Grammar, where he went to school, he was given the nickname 'Queenie.'¹³ Today the tradition is carried on in the person of Vanessa Wagner, the gay divorcee, who, indeed, had a regular spot on Triple J's afternoon show for a while.

Wagner not only offered a space for the first public performance of 'Back Door Man,' s/he also provides the only spoken line in that track which is not cut up or sampled. In this way, Wagner's drag social commentary provides, by implication, a narratorial anchor for the song, highlighting the inauthenticity of the remainder. This is not to say that, in more general terms, Wagner's drag act is not itself an

undermining of authenticity. Of course it is, like Edna Everage's undermining of the authenticity, the reality we might say, of Australian (petit) bourgeois politeness, revealing it solely as a veneer of etiquette. However, in a track which questions the authenticity of voice, Wagner's line, itself a piece of commentary, 'It's a little bit rock and roll, if you ask me,' serves precisely to highlight the artificial nature of the use of Hanson's voice, and the sampling of the track's chorus from the 1947 film *The Perils of Pauline*.

The extent to which the humour of Pantsdown's nomination for the Senate presented a threat to the taken-for-granted legitimacy of the political public sphere in Australia was well brought out in an editorial in *The Daily Telegraph*. Here, we are told that: 'The nature of the Senate lends itself to obscure parties or individuals standing on even more obscure platforms.'¹⁴ In a tone so serious one would suspect that the writer had his/her tongue firmly in their cheek if it were not so clear that this was not so, the editorial continues:

'Among legitimate candidates standing for the Senate in NSW are Pauline Pantsdown, a transvestite recording artist who is yet to think of any policies; David Mouldfield, a parody of One Nation candidate David Oldfield, whose manifesto includes military service for the disabled and castration of stupid people; and Party Parslow, a representative of the Stupid Party, which has as its slogan, You Voted Stupid Last Time.'¹⁵

We are then told that, while it goes against democratic principles, none of these candidates should be on the ballot paper because:

'None is a serious candidate. None is driven by the desire to further the interests of the nation. They have nominated for self-aggrandisement, cluttering a complex ballot sheet.'¹⁶

In fact, both Pauline Pantsdown and David Mouldfield, at least, were serious candidates driven by a desire to further the interests of the nation, but not in the conventionally serious and hegemonic way considered the only possible way by the editorial's author. Indeed, the text itself suggests the anxiety over legitimacy when it describes Pantsdown and the others as legitimate candidates.¹⁷ It is clear that it should not be possible to be both legitimate and inauthentic, that political practice should be for the serious and the authentic, criteria, of course, conferred by those who

control the hegemonic power structure of the political order, and who have the power to confer legitimacy.

The Voice and Authenticity

The digital reworking of Hanson's own speech attacks her at precisely the site that connects her 'real' image with her statements. It is her voice that gives force to those statements. David Oldfield, Hanson's and One Nation's chief advisor, understood this very well.¹⁸ When '(I'm a) Back Door Man' was being played on Triple J, he said that:

'he believed some people who listened to the song would actually believe it was Ms Hanson speaking.'

"Pauline's voice is her trademark and people know she says what she thinks, so I think this song could do her a lot of damage," he said.¹⁹

As a populist politician, Hanson has been notorious for not putting forward developed policies. For those who followed her and voted for her - her party gained eight per cent of the vote at the 1998 federal election - it was enough that she said what they thought: that there was too much 'Asian' migration; that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were unfairly given special treatment, and too much money; that Australia was giving up its sovereignty to multi-national companies and the United Nations; and so on. In Australian politics, which is a party politics, a politician is, to a great extent, a vehicle of her or his party's policies. This is one reason for a general disillusionment in politicians. They rarely seem to be saying what they mean because they are speaking on behalf of their party rather than as individuals. In this sense, at least in her early days as a politician, Hanson was different. As an independent MP she had no party line to toe. She could, and did, say what she wanted. Oldfield, then, was absolutely right. Hanson's authenticity was confirmed by her voice.

Moreover, the expectation in modernity was that a voice is the authentic expression of a particular person. We might describe this as part of the modern assumption that there was a reality beyond public representation. Certainly it was possible to edit tapes of people's voices, as it was possible to tell the 'fake' from the 'real,' to distinguish that which had been in some way concocted from that which was thought to be an accurate representation of what a person said, or how some part of

the world looked. With computer-based digitalisation it is now possible to compose apparently real photographs, and, as the now normal musical practice of sampling shows, it is also possible to edit not only phrases but also words and even syllables.²⁰

Simon Hunt, who is the private person who plays the public Pauline Pantsdown, is a part-time lecturer in sound at the University of New South Wales. In 1989 he had put together a sampled cut-up of the voice of the national president and New South Wales Senate representative of the Christian Democratic Party, the Reverend Fred Nile, who is also a notorious anti-homosexual campaigner. The cut-up was then amplified through a sound system. The aim was to overlay Fred Nile's own amplified voice during one of Nile's irregular anti-gay drives up Sydney's Oxford Street.²¹ In an interview Hunt noted that 'I Don't Like It' took:

"about three months all together. . . working about six days a week, ten hours a day. It was a very intricate piece of work. With my previous song ['Back Door Man'] it was really just jamming a few phrases together and changing a few words. This time it was very much constructed even down to the individual Hanson syllables to create words and keep the bouncy, funky rhyme going."²²

In another interview Simon Hunt/Pauline Pantsdown elaborates on the procedure:

"It was a very slow job, I had to find the right 'Fr,' the right 'an,' and then had to change the pitch separately, all the timing separately. . . ."²³

Here we have a description of the painstaking production of the inauthentic Pantsdown/Hanson monologue of 'I Don't Like It.' Yet, if the illusion were complete, if it could actually be thought that Hanson had made a humorous song lampooning her attitude towards the world, and in particular towards race, it is possible that she might have had another unconventional success on her hands. For the song to act as a political critique it is important that it be recognised that it is not Hanson who has made it. In the same way, as I will discuss below, that it was important that Pantsdown be a drag act rather than a transvestite, that is that Pantsdown be recognisably a female played by a male, so it was important that 'Back Door Man' and 'I Don't Like It' be simultaneously recognisably voiced by Hanson and also be marked as not-Hanson. It is in this duality that the authenticity of Hanson's voice, her trademark as Oldfield described it, gets problematised.

This problematisation was taken one step further. After the rapidly notorious *Sixty Minutes* television interview when Hanson asked her interlocutor to ‘please explain’ what xenophobic meant, the term quickly became an Australian catch-phrase. However, ‘I don’t like it’ was not a phrase instantly identified with Hanson until the Pantsdown song. There is a cameo that Margo Kingston tells from Hanson’s 1998 election campaign:

‘In Tasmania, Ms Hanson posed with journalists for a scrapbook picture.

After the photo was taken as reporters called out “please explain,” she retorted: “I don’t like it,” showing that she had heard Pauline Pantsdown’s spoof song.²⁴

At this point, albeit as a joke, Hanson problematises her own authenticity by repeating a phrase which Hunt, as Pantsdown, had made publicly identifiable with her and which he had achieved through the digital manipulation of her own voice.

Oldfield’s anxiety over ‘Back Door Man’ being taken as verbatim Hanson by some Australians reflects the conservative nature of many of Hanson’s political positions, and the conservatism, and age, of a significant sector of her constituency. Equally, it is not surprising that Triple J’s audience, many of who are too young to remember when audio-recording and photography were commonly presumed to represent a reality, should readily appreciate the two tracks’ inauthentic political critique of Hanson.

At the same time, the Queensland Supreme Court found against the ABC and continued the injunction against playing ‘Back Door Man.’ In his verdict the president of the Court of Appeal, Justice Paul de Jersey, said that the song was “patently defamatory,” that “These were grossly offensive imputations [and] a mindless effort of cheap denigration.” And that the song exposed Hanson “to ridicule and contempt.”²⁵ As Julie Eisenberg puts it in her commentary on the case, and others came to the same conclusion, ‘In effect, the Court found that listeners would have taken the song literally or colloquially.’²⁶ Eisenberg’s point, like that of Richard Ackland in *The Sydney Morning Herald*,²⁷ is that this decision is a major blow against political satire in Australia.

The court’s conclusion implies that members of an audience could not distinguish between outrageous views being attributed to a politician for comedic

purpose, and views actually held by that person. For this distinction to be possible an auditor of the song would need to be familiar with the effects of cut up voice techniques, analogue or digital, and have knowledge that the author (obviously a complicated attribution in this case) of the song was not Hanson but Pauline Pantsdown. While, clearly, the judges understood Pantsdown to be the author in some sense, they obviously felt that the voice is so identifiable with a particular person that, no matter what was said in Hanson's speech, it would be taken to be the thoughts of Hanson herself. In other words, the inauthenticity of the speech, which is what enables it to be heard as political satire, would not be recognised and, instead, as Oldfield suggested, the song would be heard as Hanson's actual speaking, as authentic Hanson.

Pantsdown, Popular Music and Politics

Another way of thinking about the inauthenticity of the two Pantsdown tracks is to place them within the common-sense organisation of the genres of popular music. If we think of popular music as a system organised by way of a taken-for-granted distinction between 'pop' and 'rock' then central to this distinction is the claim that rock is more authentic music than pop. What this means is that, whereas pop music is thought to be more manufactured and contrived as a commercial venture, rock music is thought to be more the genuine, heartfelt outpouring of particular musicians' genius. Hence, where the primary emphasis in pop is assumed to be on the recording, that in rock is on the concert where artists can offer the unique experience of their music. Interestingly, this distinction maps onto an assumed gender distinction where girls are thought to be more pop-oriented while boys like rock. Rock, then, is considered to be the 'better,' and more serious, musical form.

In Australia a good example of a politically motivated rock band is Midnight Oil.²⁸ While their work is political, Midnight Oil are on the rock fringe of a distinctively Australian genre of social commentary in popular music which includes, for example, Paul Kelly, Archie Roach, Redgum and Weddings Parties Anything.²⁹ Given the existence of this genre, it is not surprising to find that the Pauline Pantsdown tracks were only the most successful of a number of popular music releases in 1998 which attacked Hanson. There was, for example, The Single Mothers' 'Turning Into Pauline' which was a rewritten cover of The Vapours' early 1980s hit, 'Turning Japanese.' In the new version the chorus went: 'I'm turning into

Pauline, think I'm turning into Pauline-bloody-Hanson.' Here, much of the power of the song's critique of Hanson's racism came from the intertextual reference. Then there was PH Balance's 'All for Nothing' and a proposed single by the comedian Austentayshus which, while publicised, does not appear to have been released.

It is useful to compare the different approaches to politics of Midnight Oil and Pauline Pantsdown to get a sense of how they work in conjunction with the artists' different positioning in the spectrum of the discourse of popular music. Simon Steggels argues that:

'The cultural project of Midnight Oil is similar to [that of The Clash] in that they embrace the anger generated in the moment of punk and its iconoclastic (anti) stance, but choose to remain within the world which it rejects in order to challenge the social establishment from within.'³⁰

As a rock band Steggels notes that, 'Midnight Oil generate a wild and exhilarating sense of masculine power in performance.'³¹ It goes pretty much without saying that Midnight Oil's political musical activism is also carried out in a highly serious manner.

Unlike the tactical, subversive, mimetic undermining dealt in by Pauline Pantsdown and her/his tracks, Midnight Oil seek to stake a righteous space for the band within the public sphere from which they can speak in their own voice, or literally in the voice of Peter Garrett, the lead singer, and provide an authentic political critique of establishment politics. Where Pauline Pantsdown ran for the Senate with little hope or expectation of winning but with the intention of further caricaturing the person and policies of Pauline Hanson, Garrett stood as a serious candidate for the Senate in the 1985 Federal election on behalf of the Nuclear Disarmament Party and failed to be elected only because Labor distributed preferences to the Liberal Party rather than the NDP.

In 1998 Midnight Oil released the album, *Redneck Wonderland*, the band's attack on the rise of racism and nostalgic conservatism most obviously identified with Hanson and One Nation. To some extent this must have been a difficult album to make because Midnight Oil have always championed the 'ordinary Australian' working class against the uncaring capitalist values of big business. In this, the band

echoes the populism of Hanson. Where they utterly part company is in Hanson's social conservatism.

In a song that speaks directly to Hanson, though without naming her, Garrett sings:

'What are you gonna do now,
now that you started

What are you gonna do now, now that it's done

The words got out there they are floating around

and coming right back down

Are you going to leave us lying here, dealing

with the consequences of a bad sound'

(‘White Skin Black Heart’)

Midnight Oil's approach is to speak in their own voice to Hanson, and by extension to the people who support her. One consequence is that the band could be said to be complicit in the authenticating, and therefore legitimating, of Hanson and hansonism as part of the democratic political fabric of Australia.

Pauline Pantsdown's way, as I have already begun to explain, was to challenge the very claim to authenticity on which Hanson drew for her support. In this, the Pantsdown approach typifies that of a socially subordinate, if not excluded, group, in this case gays, using a tactic which calls into question the very organisation of the political public sphere, as male- and hetero-dominated, which Hanson draws on for her legitimisation as a political actor.

If Midnight Oil are at the rock end of the popular music spectrum, Pauline Pantsdown's two tracks are at the pop end, specifically in the disco/dance genre. From a disco tradition which privileged the work of producers such as Giorgio Morodoro, who worked with Donna Summer on the hugely influential 1975 album *Love to Love You Baby*, to 1990s techno and ambient artists such as Moby, Orbital and Future Sound of London there has been an increasing acceptance of technology and an emphasis on the end product.³² The ‘artist,’ performer, has become less and less important.

Where voice is concerned the watershed seems to have been in the early 1990s. In 1989 the duo, Milli Vanilli, released an album entitled *Girl You Know It's True*. To the disgrace of the Grammy-award winners, the album's producer, Frank Farian, not coincidentally another German producer like Morodor, subsequently admitted that he had recorded the album with two other voices and had used Robert Pilatus and Fabrice Morvan, both aspiring models, to provide the image for Milli Vanilli. This included lip-syncing on the group's videos.³³ In this case it could be argued either than Farian simply wanted to create an enticing finished product that was a combination of sound and image or that he intended to deceive the audience into thinking that the sound and image were both embodied in Pilatus and Morvan. Which opinion one has will most likely depend on whether one tends towards the pop or rock end of the popular music aesthetic. In either case, Milli Vanilli represent probably the most well-known and extreme example of the long-standing tradition of session musicians and singers 'tidying-up' performers' efforts in the studio. Pauline Pantsdown's appropriation and reworking of Hanson's voice, then, is a part of the pop/disco/dance tradition of popular music. Equally, it is a reworking of the celebration of inauthenticity in the drag performance where a drag artist will mime to a song by a well-known singer. These songs are usually pop or disco hits.³⁴ In performance Hunt takes this idea one step further by having Pauline Pantsdown mime to the cut-up of Hanson's voice.

Where Midnight Oil's 'White Skin Black Heart' speaks from an authentic position and objectifies and confronts, it uses the second person pronoun, both Pauline Pantsdown tracks are in the first person. Their project is to construct a particular image of the narrator who is presumed to be conflated with the named performer, that is Pauline Pantsdown. Hence, the tracks build an image for us of Pauline Pantsdown.

Analysing the Song Texts

In '(I'm a) Back Door Man' Pantsdown describes herself as, among other things, a 'back door man,' specifically as a homosexual, as happy because she's a back door man, as calling for a homosexual government, as proud that she is not straight, as not being human, as being intolerant of people who won't 'accept it here inside.' In short, Pantsdown is constructed as a proud and militant homosexual who also, as another verse suggests, works as a prostitute, and who is so intolerant that she even wants to force those (men?) who will not accept being anally penetrated to do so.

Elsewhere in the track, Pantsdown expresses her confusion by, on the one hand announcing her liking for trees and shrubs and plants, and on the other hand stating that she has ‘put up a fence now so that they can’t get in.’

In Hunt’s own account, written at the request of the ABC, he describes his tactic in ‘Back Door Man.’ Hunt explains how, like the German satirists of the 1930s who found themselves unable to lampoon Hitler by making his statements more extreme in order to highlight their lack of logic because they were already so extreme, he found he had a similar problem with Hanson. Thus, he adopted a similar solution to that of the Weimar satirists, which was to apply the thinking behind the statements to a quite different matter, in this way demonstrating the illogicality and extremism of the other views. Hunt’s primary concern, then, was not with Hanson’s attitude to homosexuality, though it is clear that her ambivalence was never too far from his mind, but with her attitude to race and immigration. What Hunt feels he created was satire by analogy. Pantsdown, then, is a queer analogue of Hanson.

What is most peculiar, unsettling, in this construction is Pantsdown’s assertion that she is a male homosexual. After all, if we accept Pantsdown at face value, she is a woman. Indeed, in a number of interviews Pantsdown develops the narrative that she is Hanson’s younger sister whose given name is Raelene. In this story Raelene changed her family name to Pantsdown when One Nation emerged in order not to be associated with it. It was, she claims, at her record company’s urging that she changed her forename to Pauline. Furthermore, ‘Pantsdown says that growing up with Pauline Hanson was incredibly difficult because they had opposing views on everything except their clothes.’³⁵

How, then, to understand a text in which Pantsdown describes herself as a male homosexual? What the text does is create a gender ambivalence for Pantsdown, which makes sense if one accepts Pantsdown as a drag image, that is to say, if one thinks only in terms of performance, but which is hugely problematic if one takes Pantsdown literally as a woman. Here, then, within the structure of Pantsdown and track, and reinforced by the use of Hanson’s own voice, we have a deauthenticating problematisation.

Once the text is applied to Hanson, the unsettling becomes even greater. As Ackland writes in his commentary on the Queensland Supreme Court decision:

'To think that [the words of the song give rise to the literal meanings contended by Ms Hanson's lawyers] one would have to believe that Ms Hanson is a male homosexual who indulges in anal sex and is a paedophile. It is all too ridiculous for words.'³⁶

The paedophile reference here is to some lines in the track which were removed after four days airplay on Triple J. While Ackland thinks it ridiculous that anybody might consider Hanson a homosexual, just this possibility is one of the items listed in the Statement of Claim finally submitted by Hanson's lawyers on 23rd September 1998. Perhaps, then, Hanson's anxiety was that some people might consider that she was the drag queen and not Hunt/Pantsdown; or that she and Pauline Pantsdown were both the same drag-dressing person. In short, while Hunt's purpose may have been to produce a logical impossibility that was, nevertheless, humorous for the gay community in particular, and which provided a spring board for his satirical attack on Hanson's racism, he also managed to undermine Hanson's own authenticity as a woman, suggesting the outrageous possibility that she was, in fact, a gay man in drag.³⁷

'I Don't Like It' has an apparently simpler narratorial form than 'Back Door Man.' It primarily consists of a catalogue of things that Pantsdown does not like. The track begins with what is tantamount to a commentary on Hanson's court action over 'Back Door Man' saying, in Hanson's own voice, that:

'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.'

(I Don't Like It)

Here, the complexity comes in the problem of who is, and who is supposed to be, speaking. It is, after all, not Pantsdown who doesn't like having her voice turned around and her language murdered, but Hanson. Thus, the speaker, while identified as the track's creator, Pauline Pantsdown, is actually speaking Hanson's own dislike of what Hunt/Pantsdown has done to her speech in Hanson's own voice and using the very sampling and cut-up technique to which Hanson has objected. In this way the track begins by merging Pantsdown and Hanson, thus subtly reinforcing the unsettling ambiguities produced in 'Back Door Man.'

From this point on the track identifies other things that Pantsdown/Hanson doesn't like: 'when railway lines are white;' 'when day becomes night;' and Pantsdown/'Hanson,' goes on to complain that 'coloured blood, it's just not right' and to ask why 'she' can't have white blood.' The only things that Pantsdown/'Hanson' does like are dancing, disco and Neil Diamond. As this is a dance track it is, perhaps, understandable that 'she' should like dancing. As for disco and Neil Diamond, well, disco follows on logically from liking dancing but also names what is generally thought of as these days a genre very much caught up in the gay sensibility, not least because of its emphasis on spectacular and self-consciously superficial image. Neil Diamond is an artist who has been notoriously rejected by the rock establishment and who, as a singer-songwriter, is thought to lack credibility. In other words, both disco and Neil Diamond are markers of a lack of authenticity in the conventional sense. Liking them reinforces once again the lack of authenticity of Pantsdown/'Hanson,' and, by implication of Hanson herself.

Mimicry and Camp

We can think about the structural relationship between Pantsdown and Hanson by way of the idea of mimicry. Homi Bhabha has written about colonial mimicry in the Indian context. He suggests that mimicry:

'is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, *as a subject of a difference which is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.'³⁸

Bhabha thinks of subordinate mimicry as being, in the first place, something produced by the coloniser who desires a familiar colonised population but who does not want that population to merge with that of the coloniser. However, the population which is produced as 'almost the same, but not quite' is able to appropriate the mimetic structure for its own political purposes.

We can adapt this idea as a way of beginning to think through the nature of the politics of the Pantsdown persona. Here, as I have already remarked, we have Simon Hunt, a gay political activist among other things, constructing what is a mimetic drag persona of Hanson. This is clearly not a straightforward imitation of Hanson but rather a mimetic parody that is excessive and transgressive. While not a function of colonialism as such, gays and lesbians, as members of groups who even now are often

excluded from, and discriminated against in, the social and cultural life of Australia, both officially and unofficially, learn to mimic straight, heterosexual behaviour in order to be able to pass successfully. Mimicry is an important component of gay and lesbian culture. If drag, unlike transvestism, is a self-conscious reworking of the practice of mimetic passing for audience effect, then Hunt's *Pantsdown* creation produces a socially and politically excessive version of Hanson to make a political critique.

Mimicry is also an important component of the aesthetics of camp. In her foundational essay on camp, Susan Sontag described how, 'the way of camp, is not [to see the world] in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization.'³⁹ She adds that to emphasise style is to slight content and argues that the consequence is that the camp sensibility 'is disengaged, depoliticized - or at least apolitical.'⁴⁰ This understanding of camp privileges its preoccupation with the inauthentic.⁴¹

Tracking camp back to Oscar Wilde, Jonathan Dollimore explains that:

'The aesthetic and the political, the anger and the boredom, are all active in Wilde's transgressive aesthetic, and most especially when the survival strategies of subordination - subterfuge, lying, evasion - are aesthetically transvalued into weapons of attack, but ever working obliquely through irony, ambiguity, mimicry and impersonation.'⁴²

Here, we find camp's connections with the groups that I have earlier described as the subordinate, those excluded from the sites of social power and sometimes even from society itself. A transgressive aesthetic in this case, then, is one which subverts, comments on and/or critiques not only the dominant and hegemonic aesthetic itself but also the social order which gives legitimacy and meaning to that aesthetic. The weapons that Dollimore identifies camp as using to achieve this end are those which I have already linked with Pauline *Pantsdown*.

Dollimore discusses a kind of camp which:

'undermines the depth model of identity from inside, being a kind of parody and mimicry which hollows out from within, making depth recede into its surfaces. Rather than a direct repudiation of depth, there is a performance of it to excess: depth is undermined by being taken to and beyond its own limits.'

The masquerade of camp becomes less a self-concealment than a kind of attack, and untruth a virtue. . .⁴³

In applying this insight to Pantsdown we must consider the social politics of drag. Commenting on some magazine advice for the cross-dressing male, Marjorie Garber reminds her readers that, ‘this is advice for the *passing* male-to-female transvestite, not the radical drag queen who *wants* the discontinuity of hairy chest or moustache to clash with a revealingly cut dress.⁴⁴ Obviously there are many reasons why men, and women, dress in drag. My interest here is in the distinction between drag and transvestism.

In the case of Pauline Pantsdown the use of drag – the visible recognition that Pantsdown is a man dressed as Hanson – provides the site for an excessive mimicry of Hanson. The emphasis on clothes, and make-up, provides an emphasis on Hanson as an image, more, as a public image. This excessive mimicry offers an opportunity to unpack in practice the strategies that Hanson uses to claim her authenticity as an anti-politician.

Pantsdown and the Politics of Drag

In Australia male-to-female drag is much more culturally visible than female-to-male, and, it would seem, more acceptable.⁴⁵ Indeed, the social commentary tradition would seem to be one inflection of a more general tradition of male drag that has, in various ways, been part of Australian popular culture. Thus, for example, Graham Bond’s drag Auntie Jack, from the eponymous 1972/73 ABC television show, had elements of the British tradition of the pantomime dame. We need only acknowledge the popularity of Barry Humphries’ Edna Everage and the film *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (1994) to appreciate its importance in Australia.⁴⁶ During the 1990s drag has become a popular aspect of mainstream Australian culture.⁴⁷ Garber argues that, ‘The social critique performed by. . .transvestite magazines for readers who are not themselves cross-dressers is to point out the degree to which *all* women cross-dress as women when they produce themselves as artefacts.’⁴⁸ In Australia, at least, it would seem that one of the cultural contexts of male-to-female drag is its assertion of the greater authenticity, we might say reality, of men in Australian society than women.

While drag, as I have already argued, does indeed blur gender and help to produce ambiguity it does so by first reinforcing the everyday common-sensical

assumption that men and women, both physically and culturally, are radically distinct. Given this, it is not so surprising to find that the particular women most singled out for drag mimicry in Australia are those whose image in the public sphere contain important elements, either physical or cultural which mark them as in some way ‘male,’ that is, these women have aspects to their personalities which transgress gender stereotypes. Here, we need to acknowledge the importance of gender as a performance. Judith Butler has argued that:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of signified corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of “woman” (what its critics oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulative fiction of heterosexual coherence.⁴⁹

This may well be possible, but being able to read drag in this way requires already having the ability to engage critically with the drag text. I would argue that, in Australian culture at least, it has been more usual to read drag conservatively, through an hegemonising patriarchal cultural order which insists on a correspondence between anatomy, gender identity and gender performance, and which has tended to think in terms of ‘proper’ and ‘natural’ looks and behaviour for women. Two female politicians come immediately to mind here: Bronwyn Bishop and Amanda Vanstone. Both, in different ways, are often read in public life as ‘unnatural’ as women, as drag women, because they do not subscribe to culturally accepted images of femininity. Both, for example, have characteristics of assertion, aggression and general belligerence which are stereotypically male markers rather than female. Both have been mimicked with drag look-a-likes in the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. These transgressive personality traits are also present in Helen Darville, the notorious author of problematically anti-Semitic novel, *The Hand That Signed The Paper* under the pseudonym Helen Demidenko. To look at, however, Darville is almost excessively stereotypically female, being blonde and willowy. Consequently, the drag Demidenko Marching Troupe was one of the highlights of the 1997 Sydney Gay and

Lesbian Mardi Gras.⁵⁰ One of the Marching Demidenkos remarked that: ‘We consider Helen Demidenko to be Australia’s foremost female impersonator.’⁵¹

In this context it is interesting to discover that Simon Hunt’s previous venture into drag was as Noeline Donaqueer. Donaqueer was a drag version of Noeline Baker/Donaher, the partner of Laurie Donaher in the much-watched supposed-documentary of an ‘average’ Australian family, *Sylvania Waters*, broadcast on the ABC in 1992. Noeline was portrayed as coarse, assertive, aggressive while Laurie was constructed by the program as weak and down-trodden.⁵² Noeline wore the pants, as the expression goes.

What, then, has all this to do with Pauline Pantsdown? First of all, we can identify a conservative social politics here that takes Hanson’s visibility in the male-constituted and dominated political public sphere, and her ‘male’ characteristics of straight-talking and aggressive assertiveness as sources for critique. Culturally speaking, drag questions Hanson’s qualifications as a woman. Pantsdown takes Hanson’s image, which she has always claimed as her real identity - describing herself as an anti-politician, she has always produced herself as nothing but an ‘ordinary Australian’ - and, in Dollimore’s terms, undermined it from within by, first of all, implying, as Garber suggests, that all women are in an important sense artifice, inauthentic. Pantsdown achieves this both by mimicking Hanson’s clothes, in a stroke of luck Hunt even managed to find the warehouse from which Hanson bought many of her outfits and was able to buy similar ones, and by mimicking Hanson’s make up. Most obviously, Pantsdown exaggerates Hanson’s slightly lop-sided lipstick and her eyebrows. Second, by parodying Hanson’s speech practices and thought processes, even this ‘depth’ becomes visible as a surface artifice.

It is no wonder, then, that with apparent hyperbole, Oldfield could describe ‘Back Door Man,’ and by extension Pauline Pantsdown, as ‘the biggest sex scandal of the last decade.’⁵³ Far from being apolitical, Hunt’s use of camp and drag combines a conservative politics of male social hegemony with a radical critique of Hanson’s public statements to undermine her claim to authenticity and legitimacy as a populist politician.

Pauline Pantsdown combines two different tactics to subvert Pauline Hanson's authenticity, and therefore her populist legitimacy. The first is the technique of appropriating and reworking Hanson's voice and her speech. Sampling and cutting up Hanson's voice had the effect of calling into question the voice as the authentic vehicle of Hanson's ideas. Simon Hunt notes, with special reference to 'Back Door Man,' that what he wanted to do was to show up the extremism and illogicality in Hanson's ideas. He achieved this by the use of analogy. By applying Hanson's views on race and immigration to homosexuality. Combined with the reworking of Hanson's voice Hunt achieved a radicalisation of satire for the digital age.

The second technique was the use of drag. Here, I have suggested that Pauline Pantsdown is part of a tradition of male-female drag as a site of social commentary in Australia. At the same time, the use of drag in connection with specific women operates in a conservative way to police the culturally assigned role practices of men and women in Australian society. In Pauline Pansdown, and the tracks identified with 'her,' both these techniques are used together to provide a subordinate critique and deauthentication of Pauline Hanson by subverting the ways she uses to claim authenticity and political legitimacy.

I want to thank Simon Hunt for all his help; for generously agreeing to be interviewed and for checking the interview, for providing a copy of his clippings collection, for sending me the Pauline Pantsdown bibliography, for providing the lyrics to both Pauline Pantsdown songs, and for agreeing to the publication of the essay that he wrote for the ABC. I would also like to thank Tara Brabazon for her helpful comments on an earlier version of my article which she made as a reader for *Perfect Beat*.

Endnotes

¹ 'Back Door Man' can be heard on the web at:
<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/5192/index.html>

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- ² The best source for material on Pauline Pantsdown is the Pauline Pantsdown Fan Club (unauthorised) webpage. This can be found at: <http://reconciliation.queer.org.au/paulinepantsdown.htm>
- ³ Vanessa Wagner's Melting Pot took place on August 23rd, 1997, at the Metro, Sydney.
- ⁴ There are now a number of discussions of Pauline Hanson and her politics. For example, Tony Abbott ed. *Two Nations* Melbourne, 1998, Bligh Grant ed. *Pauline Hanson* Armidale, 1997, and the issue of *Journal of Australian Studies* entitled 'Urban Cannibals,' no 57, 1998. Hanson is also a major focus in my own *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis* Sydney 1998. Hanson's own ideas, and those of some of her followers, are available in the now notorious Pauline Hanson *Pauline Hanson: The Truth* Ipswich 1997.
- ⁵ Although I have no room to elaborate here, Bakhtin's idea of carnival, especially as filtered through Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* London 1986, offers a very fruitful way of thinking about how Pauline Pantsdown, and drag generally, function in Australian society.
- ⁶ See, for example, the work of Judith Butler such as *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York 1990 and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* New York 1993. See also, Steven Seidman ed. *Queer Theory/Sociology* Cambridge Mass. 1996, Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory* Melbourne 1996 and, emphasising performativity, the collection edited by Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality* Bloomington 1995.
- ⁷ A rather different line is taken by McKenzie Wark in *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace* Sydney 1999. Wark writes that, to him, 'Pauline Pantsdown is a singular expression of an attribute I recognise as contemporary: the capacity to deconstruct messages received and become, in the process, the apparent author of a unique take on what the vector throws at us all, revealing the sense-making machinery at work that produced the apparently seamless obvious "mock chicken" world of third nature.'(pp 250-251).
- ⁸ There is a complicated complicity between the stylings of gay and drag which I do not have the space to discuss here. One place to start such a discussion would be their common concern with social performance.
- ⁹ For a discussion of Roy Rene see John Docker *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History* Cambridge, 1994. An alternative view, based on Rene's film, *Strike Me Lucky* (1934), is offered by Frieda Freiberg in 'Lost In Oz? Jews in the Australian Cinema,' *Continuum*, 8, 1984, pp 196-203. I discuss Roy Rene briefly in 'The Impossible Ethnic: Jews and Multiculturalism in Australia,' *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol 5, no 3, 1996, pp 339-373.

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- ¹⁰ Mo also marks the beginning of a minor Jewish comic tradition in Australia which includes Elle McFeast and Austentayshus.
- ¹¹ Interestingly, in her ‘autobiography,’ written by Barry Humphries, the first sentence is: ‘I am probably Jewish.’ (Dame Edna Everage *My Gorgeous Life* Melbourne 1989). In John Lahr’s *Dame Edna Everage and the Rise of Western Civilisation: Backstage with Barry Humphries* London, 1991, Humphries is quoted saying: ‘I have memories of Jews coming to Melbourne, a group with whom I have always sympathised and identified with [sic].’ P 79.
- ¹² For a history of the Edna Everage character see Peter Coleman *The Real Barry Humphries* London 1990.
- ¹³ See Lahr, p 40.
- ¹⁴ ‘Senate a candidate for change,’ *The Daily Telegraph*, 12th September 1998.
- ¹⁵ ‘Senate a candidate for change’.
- ¹⁶ ‘Senate a candidate for change’.
- ¹⁷ To be considered as legitimate candidates they had to officially change their names.
- ¹⁸ In the 1999 New South Wales State election, David Oldfield was elected to the New South Wales Senate as a One Nation representative. One Nation won 6.3% of the vote, the Democrats won 4.0% of the vote.
- ¹⁹ ‘New “sex scandal” song rocks Hanson’ by Robert Hoge. *Queensland Times*, 25 August 1997.
- ²⁰ On photography see Martin Lister ed. *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* London, 1995. One discussion of sampling in music can be found in David Toop *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop* London, 1991.
- ²¹ Fred Nile is also national coordinator of the Festival of Light. He stands for ‘family values.’
- ²² ‘Pauline Pantsdown: One Nation Under a Groove’ by Shane O’Donohue. *Impress*, (Melbourne) p. 57.
- ²³ ‘Pauline Pantsdown,’ Q and A, *Time Off* (Queensland) 16-22 September 1998.
- ²⁴ ‘Hanson’s ego-driven nightmare’ by Margo Kingston in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday, 2nd October, 1998.
- ²⁵ ‘Court shirtfronts back-door man’ by Margo Kingston, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday, 29th September 1998.

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- ²⁶ ‘The perils of Pauline’ by Julie Eisenberg, *Communication Update*, October 1998.
- ²⁷ ‘Decision for Hanson has disturbing effect’ by Richard Ackland, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday, 2nd October 1998.
- ²⁸ The best discussion of the ways in which popular music can be used for political purposes is still John Street *Rebel Rock: The Politics of Popular Music* Oxford, 1986.
- ²⁹ I think it could be argued that this Australian inflection in popular music derives from the bush ballad tradition.
- ³⁰ Simon Steggels ‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained: Midnight Oil and the politics of rock’ in Philip Hayward ed. *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism: Popular music and Australian culture from the 1960s to the 1990s*, Sydney 1992, p. 140.
- ³¹ Steggels ‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained’ p. 141.
- ³² On Giorgio Morodor and his connections with the German electronic music tradition see David Toop *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* London, 1995, p 41.
- ³³ One discussion of the Mill Vanilli controversy is David Rowe’s ‘The truth is never top of the pops,’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th December, 1990.
- ³⁴ Abba songs are mimed to in the popular Australian film, *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (1994). The gay connection with disco was first popularised in the late 1970s by the American group, The Village People, who dressed in gay iconic outfits including policeman and construction worker. Here, again, we can find a connection with public spectacle which can be understood by way of performativity.
- ³⁵ ‘Pauline Pantsdown: Disco Dancing in the Senate,’ *Scene Magazine* (Queensland), Wednesday, 23rd September, 1998.
- ³⁶ ‘Decision for Hanson has disturbing effects.’
- ³⁷ In ‘The Uncanny’ Freud argues that the double has come to be understood as a portent of death. Here, we have an alternative reading of Hanson’s anxiety over the Pantsdown excessive imitation of her. Certainly both she and Oldfield were worried that Pantsdown’s ‘Back Door Man’ might contribute to Hanson’s political death.
- ³⁸ Homi Bhabha ‘Of Mimicry and Man’ in *The Location of Culture* London 1994, p. 86.
- ³⁹ Susan Sontag ‘Notes on “Camp”’ in *Against Interpretation* New York 1961, p. 277.

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- ⁴⁰ Sontag ‘Notes on “Camp”’ p. 277.
- ⁴¹ Interestingly, in connection with the point I made earlier about how Jews are the most important social and cultural commentators in the US while gays and drag artists are in Australia, Sontag argues that: ‘Jews and homosexuals are the outstanding creative minorities in contemporary urban culture. Creative, that is, in the truest sense: they are creators of sensibilities. The two pioneering forces of modern sensibility are Jewish moral seriousness and homosexual aestheticism and irony.’ (‘Notes on “Camp”,’ p. 290).
- ⁴² Jonathan Dollimore *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* Oxford 1991, p. 310.
- ⁴³ Dollimore *Sexual Dissidence*, pp. 310-311.
- ⁴⁴ Marjorie Garber *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* London 1993, p. 49.
- ⁴⁵ A useful journalistic account of the role of drag and camp in Australian culture is Ben Holgate’s article ‘All That Glitters’ in the *Review* section of *The Weekend Australian*, January 16-17, 1999, pp16-18.
- ⁴⁶ For a discussion of *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* that makes use of queer theory see David Buchbinder *Performance Anxieties: Re-Producing Masculinity* Sydney 1998, pp 154-158. A relevant book is Fiona Nicholl’s *From Diggers to Drag-Queens: Configurations of Twentieth Century Australian Subjectivity* Sydney, 2000. Nicholl includes a discussion of Pauline Pantsdown.
- ⁴⁷ There are many reasons for this. One intriguing suggestion which coincides with my argument that drag is a subordinate tactic comes from Mardi Gras festival director Jonathan Parsons who is quoted by Holgate (in ‘All That Glitters’) saying: ‘I don’t know if it’s too long a bow to draw, whether Australia’s cultural position in the world is equivalent to a gay and lesbian one’. Holgate glosses this: ‘In other words, Australians know, and feel, they’re in a minority.’
- ⁴⁸ Garber *Vested Interests*, p. 49.
- ⁴⁹ Judith Butler *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York 1990 p 137.
- ⁵⁰ A discussion of the Marching Demidenkos can be found in Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese ‘Wogface, Anglo-Drag, Contested Aboriginalities ... Making and Unmaking Identities in Australia, *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, vol 4 n1,1998, pp 39-72. Perera and Pugliese argue that, ‘in the context of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the performance of ethno-drag can be read only in terms of a de-ethnicised, gendered sexuality.’ (p 66).

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- ⁵¹ Quoted in Perera and Pugliese ‘Wogface, Anglo-Drag, Contested Aboriginalities,’ p 66.
- ⁵² For one discussion of *Sylvania Waters*, see Jon Stratton and Ien Ang ‘*Sylvania Waters* and the spectacular exploding family,’ *Screen*, vol 35, no 1, 1994, pp. 1-21.
- ⁵³ ‘New “sex scandal” song rocks Hanson.’

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Discography (This is a complete discography but is only for Pauline Pantsdown. It does not include material recorded under the name Simon Hunt)

“I’M A BACK DOOR MAN” — single.

available on the following sites:

<http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Rue/1472/song.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/5192/index.html>

“I DON’T LIKE IT” — CD single.

Tracks: “I Don’t Like It” (Radio Edit). 3:17

“I Don’t Like It” (Xenophobia Mix). 5:25

“Pauline’s Nightmare” 2:37

All tracks by Pauline Pantsdown.

A Caring Potato product distributed by TWA Records. Catalogue number TWAS478

The radio edit of “I Don’t Like It” is also available on: "Triple J’s Hottest 100 Vol. 6", ABC Music, marketed by EMI, 1999. Catalogue number 5210342.