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**‘A piggy boob and a cocky bomb-hole’:
the anus and its metaphors in contemporary Australian political cartoons**

ABSTRACT

This paper examines imagery of the anus in the artwork, Nothing If Not Abnormal, by Australian artist Juan Davila, and in two Australian political cartoons, one by Eric Lobbecke and one by Sturt Krygsman. Applying Judith Butler’s theory of the plastic, transferable, and ‘expropriable’ properties of all bodily organs, I argue that Davila, Lobbecke and Krygsman have variously employed metaphors of four body parts—the penis, the vulva, the breast and the eye—to construct grotesque imagery of the posterior orifice. I further argue that these images represent depictions of the polymorphous tropes of the castrated, vaginal anus and the phallic penis-breast fundamental not only to Freudian theory but also to the maintenance of the regime of straight-male dominated culture, which Butler calls the heterosexual matrix.

KEYWORDS

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The first explicit, realistic picture of an anus disseminated in the mainstream Australian media may or may not have been that featuring in a portrayal of Paul Keating farting, as depicted by Juan Davila in his 1991 artwork, *Nothing If Not Abnormal*. In any case, a reproduction of this artwork was published in the April 1992 edition of the *Independent Monthly* newspaper, and in the two decades since this remarkable event, major daily newspapers, such as the *Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, have included dozens of cartoons drawn by prominent male political cartoonists, like Bill Leak and Peter Nicholson, which contain symbolic or realistic pictures of a man’s anal region or that of a hybrid man-animal body.

In this paper I examine the depiction of the anus in Davila’s image and in two cartoons by less well-known cartoonists, one by Eric Lobbecke and one by Sturt Krygsman. Applying Judith Butler’s theory of the plastic, transferable, and ‘expropriable’ properties of bodily organs, I argue that these artists have employed metaphors of four body parts—the penis, the vulva, the breast, and the eye—to construct grotesque imagery of the posterior orifice. I further argue that

these images represent depictions of the polymorphous tropes of the castrated, vaginal anus and the phallic penis-breast fundamental not only to Freudian theory but also to the maintenance of the regime of straight-male dominated culture, which Butler calls the heterosexual matrix.

This paper reveals preliminary findings from research conducted for my PhD thesis, a work in progress, which examines the sexual politics of the anus and its representation in Western popular culture in the age of AIDS. By this I mean the period since 1981 when reports of the disease then termed GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency) surfaced in the mainstream media before being titled AIDS in 1982. Cindy Patton has referred to the 1980s as ‘an era obsessed with anility’ (1991: 45), citing the medical charts of Ronald Reagan’s cancerous colon that were reproduced worldwide in leading stories in print and television media in 1985, plus the unprecedented public discussion of anal sex practices associated with HIV and AIDS. Prior to this era, visual imagery of the anus was mostly relegated to anatomy books, gay male pornographic materials, underground erotic art, and doodles on public toilet walls.

In the age of AIDS, the libidinal functions of the anus became a topic of everyday discussion, not least because of the involvement of anal sex in both the spread of HIV and its prevention. Much of this discourse was blatantly homophobic and anal-phobic, for example, popular schoolyard and boardroom jokes about the acronym AIDS standing for ‘anally-injected death sentence.’ In response to such jibes, gay men in particular counter-produced a significant register of written and visual work celebrating the anus and its eroticism. My Honours thesis surveys key artworks from within this oeuvre produced during the first fifteen years of the epidemic (Scholfield 1997). These gay books, films, porn, artworks and safer sex materials were in many cases restricted or banned from public view, while imagery of the rectal aperture in medical, literary, artistic, filmic and cartoon productions produced by straight men were freely distributed in public spheres, across the board of popular cultural productions including heterosexual pornography.

One of the key points I stress in my work on this topic is that this proliferation is no coincidence. Heterosexual male culture, rather than avoiding discussion and depiction of the anus (of the male body at least) which it supposedly finds repulsive, has become drawn to it—even obsessed with it—to the point of dominating how this part of the body, male or female, is represented in the media, film, literature, pornography, and so on. In other words, while gay men have spent three decades overcoming the cultural body blows inflicted as a result of the intense homophobia and anal-phobia that has characterized the era of AIDS, heterosexual male culture has not only restricted or banned gay male imagery of anal eroticism, it has also been insidiously

staking its claim over the anus, and almost every facet of how it is represented in mainstream society.

While this plethora of anal imagery has surfaced in popular media during the AIDS era, cultural histories of various sexualized body parts have been published, but not a book devoted to the anus. These monographs include Marilyn Yalom’s *A History of the Breast* (1998), David Friedman’s *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis* (2001) and Naomi Wolf’s *Vagina: A New Biography* (2012). Meanwhile, at least three books have been devoted to the buttocks, each concentrating on the female *derriere*: Jean Luc Hennig’s *The Rear View: A Brief and Elegant History of Bottoms through the Ages* (1997), Edward Lucie-Smith’s *The Art of the Arse* (2008) and Hans-Jürgen Döpp’s *In Praise of the Backside* (2011).

However, while no comprehensive study of cultural representations of the anus in contemporary times, or any period for that matter, has been published, the anal orifice has not been overlooked in academic studies. Scholarly essays and chapters about this region of the body include George Rousseau’s study of representations of the fundament in 1830s medical discourse and Ivan Crozier’s history of the anus of the nineteenth century sodomite. The anus also pops up significantly in landmark queer texts such as Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire*, and in essays with metaphorically-suggestive titles like Eve Sedgwick’s ‘Is the Rectum Straight?’, Leo Bersani’s ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’, and Lee Edelman’s ‘Rear Window’s Glasshole.’

A comprehensive account of modern, post-nineteenth century, representations of the anus in the academy, the media and popular culture remains to be written. My forthcoming PhD thesis begins to fill this void, with a queer analysis of such imagery produced and disseminated in the last three decades. Foucauldian sexologist, Thomas Laqueur, points out that he tries to write ‘the history of sexuality as a history of cultural transformation in which the pleasures of the body are mobilized for the work of culture’ (2009: 428). I follow suit, with my thesis addressing three questions. What words and pictures have been employed to mobilize (and shape or avoid) the pleasures of the anus during the past three decades? In which discourses and media have these illustrated narratives surfaced? And for whose socio-political and cultural ends?

Taking a poststructuralist approach to my topic, I elaborate upon the work of feminist and queer theorist, Judith Butler, who sees the body and its parts as discursive constructions and as floating signifiers in themselves. Two of Butler’s key concepts are important here: the operation of the heterosexual matrix and the interchangeable properties of body parts. She explores the first concept in *Gender Trouble*, postulating that sex is itself a gendered category

and that the hegemonic meanings of sexual organs are naturalised as supposed facts through the repetitive ‘performativity’ of binaries of gender and sexuality (i. e. male genitalia = masculine and phallic; female genitalia = feminine and castrated). These sexual binaries achieve unity and coherence through their intersection and conjuncture within a heterosexual matrix. The regulatory regime of this matrix is constructed at multiple discursive sites and disseminated through media, which reproduce these gender fictions that, because they are fictitious, can be deconstructed, challenged, and subverted.

Butler develops the second concept relevant to my discussion in her *Bodies That Matter*. Deconstructing Freudian and Lacanian accounts of the phallus, she argues that the properties of this symbolic construct are ambivalent, substitutable and transferable; that the phallus can be attributed to various non-penile organs; and that its power is therefore available for expropriation by women, and lesbians in particular. Reconsidering Freud’s declaration that ‘the erotogenic zones – may act as substitutes for the genitals and behave analogously to them’ (Freud 1960: 84), Butler reasons that:

Reference to the temporal or ontological primacy of any given body part is suspended. To be a property of all organs is to be a property necessary to no organ, a property defined by its very *plasticity, transferability, and expropriability* (1993: 61).

Butler’s purpose is to provide grounds for the conception and identification of the lesbian phallus, and in doing so she does not define or set limits on what the transmutable properties of an organ might or might not be.

So, taking her at her word, and putting the phallus aside, if we extend her line of thought to its logical conclusion, the property of any one bodily organ may be that of any other bodily organ. A metaphorical exchangeability might exist, for example, in terms of anatomical form and function. If the anus and mouth (Freud’s ‘erotogenic zones’) may replicate the penis and vagina, then logically, the opposite is also a possibility. The morphological and functional properties of a penis may be those of a vagina, or *vice versa*, those of an anus may be those of a mouth, those of a penis those of an anus, and so on. We may well wonder what such grotesque organs might look like. As we shall see, the two political cartoons I have mentioned in my introduction provide cogent examples of such monstrosities.

But before we study these, it should prove instructive to examine the image of a ‘front-bottom’ in *Nothing If Not Abnormal*, the deeply satirical artwork by the self-proclaimed queer artist, Juan Davila, which features a depiction of Keating farting through his exposed anus at

upper left and an image of Keating and Bob Hawke having sex with each other and a map of Australia at bottom left (see figure 1). Significantly, the body of Davila’s farting Keating figure contains both male and female parts: milk is squeezed and squirted from a woman’s breast, the underside of the scrotum or penis is lit up from the rectal explosion and, in between these body parts and between the spread buttocks, the anus appears at the front of Keating’s body like a displaced vulva (see figure 2). This frontal anus thus evokes the anatomical remains of the supposedly castrated penis of the mother, as seen in the mind of the boy—the infant Wolf-Man— in Freudian theory. As Calvin Thomas explains, the notion of the mother’s ‘front-bottom’ as understood by this infant is integral to his—and Freud’s— perception of the primal scene:

In the case of Freud’s speculation about the Wolf-Man’s narrative, the disavowal of castration entails imagining the vagina as a ‘front-bottom’, that is, as a forward extension of the posterior region. This particular extension, however, extends into Freudian theory itself (1996: 76).

As evidence for his latter claim, Thomas quotes the following passage from Freud’s ‘Anxiety and Instinctual Life’:

Interest in the vagina, which awakens later, is also essentially of anal-erotic origin. This is not to be wondered at, for the vagina itself, to borrow an apt phrase from Lou-Andreas Salomé, is ‘taken on lease’ from the rectum (Freud 1960: 101).

Apparently, the trope of the violated front-bottom maintains its grip on the contemporary heterosexual male cultural imaginary: since 1992, the vaginal anus has featured as a staple joke in political cartoons depicting heterosexual men and sexual relations between them.

As I have demonstrated in my Master of Philosophy thesis (2010), the publication of a reproduction of *Nothing If Not Abnormal* in Terry Smith’s review of this artwork in the April 1992 edition of the *Independent Monthly* apparently inspired Australian political cartoonists to create their own versions of anal sex between men and afforded licence to the editors of major daily newspapers to publish this material. At least thirty-eight political cartoons published from 1992 to 2009, portray fictional sexual encounters between well-known heterosexual men – typically a pair of politicians or businessmen – in violent contact or with one man under threat of violent contact by the other. These images conform to Butler’s concept of the heterosexual matrix with its asymmetrical gender binaries: one man is cast as a hyper-masculine penetrator.

Wielding a symbolically penile weapon with which he threatens or attacks the other man who is represented as an ultra-feminine victim, portrayed as passive, vulnerable, penetrated, castrated and defenceless. Over this period, the cartoonists caricatured straight men of ever higher political office in the guise of such figures, while portraying the intercourse between them as increasingly violent, explicit and focussed on the anus of the victim as a feminized, pseudo-vaginal zone. Yet, as we shall see in my two cartoon examples, the preposterous ‘front-bottom’

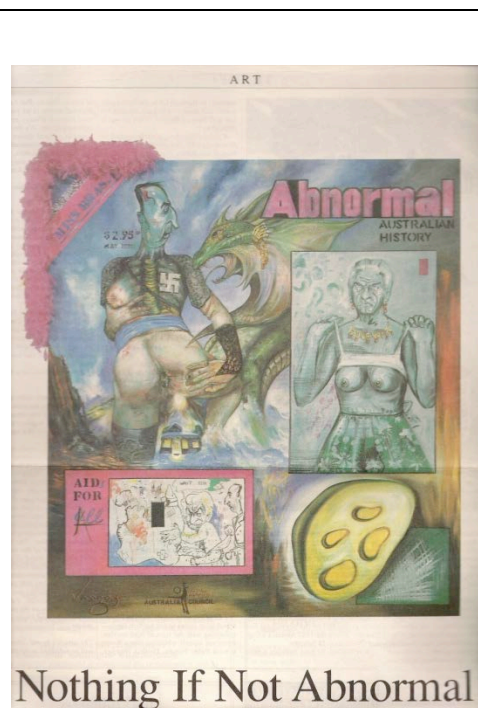


Figure 1: Juan Davila (1991), *Nothing if not abnormal*, reproduced in Terry Smith, ‘Nothing if not abnormal’, *Independent Monthly*, April 1992, p. 28.



Figure 2: Detail from Juan Davila (1991), *Nothing if not abnormal*, reproduced in Terry Smith, ‘Nothing if not abnormal’, *Independent Monthly*, April 1992, p. 28.

is not the only configuration of a Freudian anal trope that holds currency in popular culture today. These cartoons were published in the *Australian*, a quality broadsheet owned by Rupert Murdoch and the biggest-selling newspaper in Australia with national coverage. The *Australian* provides serious coverage of local, national and international news to a middle-class white readership, and claims to set the national news agenda.

A COCKY BOMB-HOLE

The first example is a 1995 Eric Lobbecke cartoon which comments on France’s then plans to test nuclear weapons in the Pacific Ocean. President Chirac and his country are portrayed as a giant anthropomorphized rooster that has deliberately dropped a bomb from its cloaca over an atoll (see figure 3). With its arms/wings crossed, the creature strikes a proudly defiant pose; its glaring eye and awkward stance indicating the determination with which it has strained to eject the bomb from its body, as if defecating upwards, against the force of gravity. Or, as if urinating or ejaculating semen upwards from a penis, or laying an egg downside up.



Figure 3: Eric Lobbecke, ‘Testing time for nuclear bans’, *Australian*, 15 June 1995, p. 11.

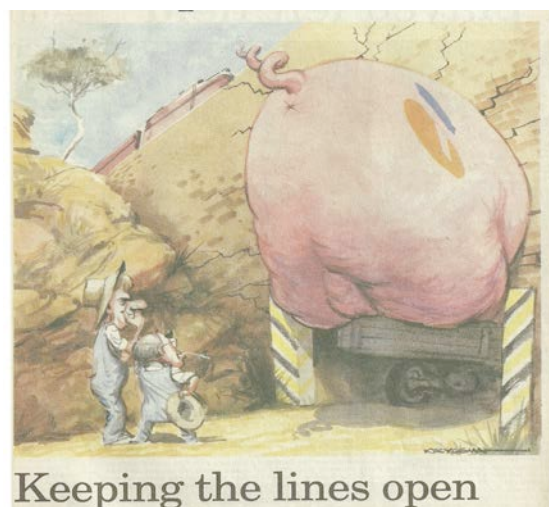


Figure 4: Sturt Krygsman, ‘Keeping the lines open’, *Australian*, 15 March 2000, p. 13.

For below its tail feathers, the rooster-man’s bottom oddly resembles the head of a gigantic penis, partly revealed amidst surrounding downy rolls of foreskin, such that the cloaca resembles an enormous penile meatus, this being the technical term for the orifice in the penis, known more commonly by various colloquial terms like the ‘eye of the cock’. Moreover, considering that the expelled bomb, being a solid rounded vessel, resembles an egg as much as, if not more than, a human faecal stool, this avian creature represents a hen as much as a rooster. So, the fowl Chirac has a rooster’s posterior orifice that visually resembles a penile meatus, but functions also like a hen’s cloaca, with an intertextual inference of optical symbolism. In this schema, the monstrosously multivalent cloaca presumably defecates, urinates, lays eggs and, if not blind, sees. The egg-bomb thus symbolizes a conflation of faeces, urine and tears (and even

semen, considering the whiteness of the demarcated trajectory of the bomb). This is one strange cock indeed.

A PIGGY BOOB

The second example is a 2000 Sturt Krygsman cartoon, also published in the *Australian* newspaper, which illustrates an article about the impending full sale of Telstra, showing then Prime Minister, John Howard, and his treasurer, Peter Costello, looking towards a gigantic pig's bottom branded with the Telstra symbol (see figure 4). Apparently a ute carrying the pig has entered a tunnel but the pig's oversized bottom has crashed into, and cracked, the upper entrance to the too small hole in the wall, stopping the vehicle in its tracks. The head, body, legs, and trotters of the pig are hidden in the tunnel, such that only its rump, anus, and tail are in view. The genitals of the pig cannot be seen, or have been ignored by the cartoonist, or are not where they should be, any or all of which draws attention to its anus and its apparent sexlessness. Yet, when viewed from other visual perspectives, this bottom is suggestively oversexed as genitally male or glandularly female, thus displaying a polymorphous sexual diversity.

By which I mean, first, that on second look, the pig's pink rump seems to resemble the semi-tumescent head of an enormous human penis that appears to have rammed through the tunnel toward the viewer, poking out toward Howard and Costello. In this visual context, the porcine anus looks like a rather small urethral orifice in the head of an enormous human penis, while the squiggly tail evokes an abnormal growth on the penile glans, or perhaps suggests an ejaculatory, twirling squirt of semen. At another glance, the pig's bottom resembles a giant female or feminine human breast, the squiggly tail evoking a twisted nipple and the anus appearing like an extra, inverted papilla.

This peculiar visual amalgam of male and female human body parts recalls Freud's description of the penis as the 'heir of the mother's nipple' (1960: 101) and seems to illustrate his claims to what Diana Fuss summarizes as a 'psychical connection between homosexuality and the maternal, the symbolic link that makes every act of fellatio a re-experiencing or re-enactment of the preoedipal nursing phase' (1993: 186). Considering that for the Wolf-Man and for Freud, 'the anus seems to be the primordial site of all transactions' (Thomas 1996: 76), Krygsman's fantastic penile breast or mammary penis makes sense in its overt overlay onto a sexless bottom. So does Davila's image of Keating with an anal front-bottom and milk-squirting breast and Lobbecke's depiction of an anal cock when viewed in this context. In the hegemonic 'boy's own' world of national political cartoons, sexual humour remains steadfastly infantile in its anality. Political cartoons have the power to reinforce and reify dominant discursive

meanings attached to the anus: they can turn what is usually only thought, read or said about this part of the body into something that is recognizable as fully seen.

Of course, the porcine rump does not exactly resemble a female breast nor the head of a penis, nor does the fowl cloaca look precisely like an eye or a penile meatus. But constructed as they are in these cartoons, they offer enough suggestive similarities—of shape, colour and function—for the mind to tap into the cultural imaginary and marry these images metaphorically. This is what I mean by contemporary visual metaphors of the anus: the posterior orifice cannot only be described, but also depicted, as other body parts. While it might be tempting to speculate whether Lobbecke and Krygsman consciously or subconsciously drew their animal anuses to resemble other magnified body parts, such conjecture is beside the point. My proposition is that this visual imagery of vaginal, penile, mammary, and optical anuses not only lends concrete support to Butler’s contention that bodily organs have properties that may be substitutable and transferable, but also demonstrates that their plasticity and transferability of form and function may pertain to the very anatomy and physiology of the organs themselves.

As grotesque visual re-presentations of analogized and conflated body parts central to the Freudian theory of psychosexual development, the cartoon images in this study show that the penis and vagina may serve as metaphors of the anus, and *vice versa*, in our cultural imaginary. Yet the integral involvement of the anus in these images directly challenges claims that male and female genitals operate as the corporeal prototypes respectively of masculinity and femininity. As a generator of penile, vaginal and other sexual symbols, the anus, while dismissed as supposedly sexually neutral, nevertheless plays a fundamentally queer role in the construction and maintenance of gender. However, its resistance to categorization as either male or female, means that the anus must be graphically sexed as one or the other, or both at once, but never neither, in a masculinist straight culture dependent for its political dominance on maintaining the asymmetrical sex and gender binaries of the heterosexual matrix. Hence the public legitimization of images like the piggy-boob and the cocky-bum hole which provide the daily newspaper viewer with a juvenile display of anal humour barely disguised as political cartoon pornography.

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