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Chapter 2

‘Not Now, Not Ever’: Julia Gillard and the Performative Power of Affect

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Gender-based criticism of Australia’s first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, reached a level of intensity in 2011 and 2012 that culminated spectacularly in a speech now widely known as the Misogyny Speech. Delivered by an enraged Gillard in the Australian parliament in October 2012, and uploaded and circulated on YouTube shortly afterwards, the speech denounced the sexist and misogynist remarks used against her for political gain.

The Australian parliament was a particularly apposite space for the speech. Feminist writer and commentator Anne Summers writes that during Gillard’s Prime Ministership, female politicians identified a gang of men, who would sit in what the women called ‘misogynist corner’ and ‘positively bray’ whenever a female from the government rose to speak (Summers 2012a). This named ‘corner’ effectively marks the wider spatial-gendered dimensions of the parliamentary system, and its patriarchal history, allowing us to understand, as I will argue, how liberalism and now neoliberalism appear to champion but actually circumscribe women’s rights. Heightening the effect is the nation’s adoption of the British Westminster System in which the two major political parties, nominally representing the left and right of politics, sit opposite each other in the parliamentary chamber in such a way as the business of governance easily turns into a theatre of politics. In the case of Gillard, the adversarial system supported a gender-based campaign to destabilize her leadership,

malign her legislation and inflict electoral damage on her political party. Set against this background, the Misogyny Speech was a stunningly affective performance within this theatre and beyond – it crossed national borders via global newsfeeds and gathered over 2.5 million views on YouTube. It generated further performative and popular citations including: a choral rendition that played on Gillard’s phrase, ‘Not Now, Not Ever!’, an award winning play by Debra Thomas entitled *The Man’s Bitch*, and a printed tea towel sold online to raise funds for Emily’s List Australia, an association for the advancement of women.¹

My contribution to this volume is to consider the affective power of the Misogyny Speech in relation to our topic, feminist performance in neoliberal times.

—The chapter takes a multilateral approach to Gillard’s speech. I read it as a cultural performance of the kind defined by Elin Diamond as ‘embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self)’ (1996:1). The speech takes place in the parliament, is witnessed by parliamentary colleagues, and then millions more on YouTube. I draw on Foucault’s writings on the formation of neoliberalism and especially the concept of biopolitics to account for Gillard’s embodied experience of sexism and misogyny. Her countervailing feminist response – the delivery of an improvised speech act – is further viewed in terms of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s concept of ‘the aesthetics of everyday life’ (1993:416). Accordingly, I work from the premise that the speech *artfully* contends with the structures of patriarchal power that operate on the female subject in her place of work. My analysis of the speech utilizes Judith Butler’s 1990s writings and her more recent work with Athena Athanasiou (2012) on affect and performativity to identify the constituent features of the speech, both Gillard’s being moved to speak and the speech’s particular power to move, and to reflect upon Gillard’s enactment of a

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resistant feminist politics.

Neoliberalism in Australia

The Misogyny Speech is framed by the context of Australian neoliberalism, which has dominated the landscape of Australian politics since the 1980s, and to which I now turn. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive analysis of Australian neoliberalism, I offer a brief history that highlights some of its distinct features and contradictions. Chief among these contradictions is that a newly elected centre left Labor Government in 1983, thirty years prior to Gillard's Labor government, succumbed to the logic of neoliberalism and began to focus on the national and global economy. Acting on advice from free-market advocates in the civil service and elsewhere, and adopting the mantra that economic growth was the solution to social inequality, it legislated for the 'reform' of a protectionist and allegedly overly regulated Australia and its 'transformation' into a free market economy. Needless to say, it presented the case for change as a matter of forward-moving pragmatism rather than an ideological turn to the right or a matter of political rationality. The Hawke-Keating Labor Government began by deregulating the financial sector and moved on to privatize state-owned institutions such as the Commonwealth Bank, Qantas Airlines and the national telecommunications company, Telstra (Pusey 2008:np). There was resistance to the pace of change, especially from the left. However, through the Labor government's historic connection to the trade union movement, the pace of deregulation was leveraged by social welfare benefits, tax concessions and a trade union consensus over wages and conditions, known as the Prices and Income Accord (1983) (Connell & Dados 2014: 123; Swarts 2013:109–11). With the return to governance of the conservative pro-

business and farming Liberal-National coalition in 1996, neoliberalization of the economy took a more ideological turn. It broke with the consensus model of the Accord by curtailing collective bargaining in favour of individual worker-employer enterprise agreements thus reducing centralized trade union power. Publically owned utilities such as power, water, transport, airports and roads were sold to the private sector. As in the United Kingdom and many parts of Europe, the public education and health systems survived as iconic markers of the liberal democratic state although privatized education and health services increasingly catered to the middle classes. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Liberal/National coalition government protected and expanded the private sector, especially the booming fossil fuel and mining industry, and insisted on labor market flexibility as both a moral right and the rationale of a free market economy.

The Labor Government returned to power in 2007, and Julia Gillard became Prime Minister in June 2010. Her government restored some of the lost collective bargaining powers of the trade unions but by then climate change was on the political agenda. Her government's passing of the Clean Energy Act of 2011, which taxed the carbon emitted by the fossil fuel industry, was framed by the right as an excessive and unwarranted government intervention into the economic prosperity of the nation. The opposition quickly resignified the Clean Energy Act into the hated carbon tax, and ensured it became the singular cause around which the public, schooled in climate change scepticism by Rupert Murdoch's media and communications empire, perceived a threat to democratic freedom, jobs, growth and the Australian way of life. The threat was swiftly and effectively attached to the leadership and gendered presence of Julia Gillard. The separation of politics from ethical behavior that followed bears out Jemima Repo's recent claim that 'No regulatory context is perhaps

more pertinent – or threatening – for feminist struggles today than that of neoliberalism’ (2016: 160). The case of Gillard, a powerful woman occupying high office, shows that the threat to women crosses class lines.

Making a biopolitical subject

Gillard was an easy target for a campaign against her government’s legislation. She was not only the first female prime minister, and hence cast against type, but also the first head of state to live outside marriage in a defacto relationship, and she had no children. It was said that as a woman she was incomplete, and unfit to lead a nation. Gender became for Gillard a public liability – she never met the public’s expectations of her role as woman or a leader. While being a subject, as Butler has written, ‘is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate’, for Gillard the stakes were escalated by intense public and private scrutiny (Butler 1993: 231). In a telling example, she was asked in a radio interview in June, 2013 to respond to rumours that her partner, a former hairdresser, was a gay man, by way of drawing attention to her own never quite proper or queer self.

The empirical evidence of gender-based discrimination mobilized against Gillard is hardly subtle or concealed. Back in early 2011, Tony Abbott, leader of the Opposition in the Australian parliamentary system from 2009 to 2013, had joined a pro-fossil fuel and anti-carbon tax rally outside Parliament House in Canberra. Peter Meares’ press photograph shows Abbott alongside two senior female members of his party, Bronwyn Bishop and Sophie Mirabella (Figure 2.1), whose presence allowed Abbott to simultaneously mobilize and disavow anti-woman bias. The three stand together – a trio of ham actors on a soapbox stage – under crudely drawn placards

calling on Australia to ‘Ditch the Witch’ and naming the Prime Minister a ‘liar’ and ‘Bob Brown’s Bitch’. With this physicalized, discursive, gendered and politicized performance, the tacit line of prohibition on the use of sexist and misogynist language in public debate, which had held since the 1980s, was crossed.

Figure 2.1. L to R: Bronwyn Bishop, Sophie Mirabella and Tony Abbott at the anti-carbon tax rally, Parliament House, Canberra, 2011. Courtesy of the photographer: Andrew Meares

‘Bob Brown’s Bitch’ refers to the influence of Senator Bob Brown, who was the charismatic leader of the Australian Greens, an environmentally activist and social justice party. Brown, who is also a gay man, was briefly imprisoned for eco-activism in the 1980s. Attaching Gillard to the constellations surrounding Brown further intensified the case against her. The anti-carbon tax rally and other related media events are not only performative acts within the politics of climate change, but campaigns to gather support for a broader neoliberal campaign against regulatory governance. Gillard’s leadership, manifesting as a female bodily presence (and liability), was readily manipulated and managed by neoliberal sexism, rendering her abject and contemptible, ‘a menopausal monster’ and ‘a lying cow’ (Summers 2012b). This rendering meant those who slandered Gillard increasingly felt they could do so with impunity and without shame.

In theoretical terms, the anti-carbon tax rally is redolent with how a body and politics are brought together to discipline and manage a female subject, bring her under control and punish her for breaching free market values. In his elaboration of the term ‘biopolitics’, Foucault described how the management of large populations

posed a new set of problems for liberal democracies that had not been experienced by earlier more autocratic regimes. Liberal and neoliberal governments, he wrote, needed to rationalize the potential unruliness of 'living beings forming a population', while also respecting individual legal rights and freedoms (2008: 317), a problem that we can see has been exacerbated by the rise of women's rights in the twentieth century. Living beings presented the state with unruly challenges especially around the areas of 'health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race' (317). While Foucault here did not specifically include gender and sexuality amongst the management problems facing neoliberal governance, Judith Butler notably filled this gap in her well-known writings (1990). Taking my cue from Foucault and Butler, I use the term biopolitics to describe the ways in which embodied legal and political subjects are managed, neutralized and made complicit with the state and its interests. This understanding underpins my sense of how Julia Gillard as a biopolitical subject was managed and contained through being rendered bodily and therefore morally inferior, despite her position as a leader responsible for the management of others. The logic behind the defamation was that rather than effecting an illegal coup d'état, her opponents attacked her by means that sat within the legal boundaries of the neoliberal state. Accordingly, the left-leaning, childless body of female leadership became a contemptible female body, a target for linguistic violence that proliferated in the media, the parliament and the public sphere.

The language of the media was especially virulent. In July 2011, for example, Sydney commercial radio broadcaster, Alan Jones, stated on air that 'The woman's off her tree and quite frankly they should put her . . . in a chaff bag and take her as far out to sea as they can and tell her to swim home' (in Crooks & Dara 2012: 39). The figurations of woman, madness, liar, witch and water adhered to Gillard with a

stickiness that conjured the hateful humid, clammy body of female governance. The term ‘outrage media’ (Ward -2015), which refers to the heightened populism and moralism of talkback radio and social media is not sufficiently inflected with the sexism and misogyny that characterized complaints against Julia Gillard; in her case, an avowedly *anti-feminist* media placed itself in the service of the neoliberal backlash against the carbon and other taxes she introduced. In the public sphere, right wing lobbyist Graham Morris claimed that Australians ‘ought to be kicking her to death’ (Dunlop 2012). In February 2013, a fund-raising dinner menu for the conservative party offered ‘Julia Gillard Kentucky Fried Quail – Small Breasts, Huge Thighs & A Big Red Box’ (Murphy -2013). With this menu, Gillard’s body is fetishized and cannibalized by her opponents, and rendered abject. These linguistic acts revealed a disturbingly violent misogynist turn in Australian culture, which I link to hard right neoliberal politics. In a recent documentary, a former Labor politician, Craig Emerson, identified the affective mood of the times recalling with emotion how: ‘There was so much hatred for her being a female Labor Prime Minister’ (ABC 2015). Gillard had effectively become a target for the affects she was said to produce in others: righteous disgust, hatred, and rage. The problem of Julia Gillard, and her supposed threat to neoliberal free market values, was managed through the logic of biopolitics notwithstanding her legal power as a subject and her status as a democratically elected head of state.

Neoliberal sexism and misogyny are here deployed as a strategy to turn the public against Julia Gillard and her Labor government. By the time she was deposed in June, 2013, and the Labor government was defeated at a General Election shortly after, it was no longer a question of whether Gillard was a good or bad prime minister, or a wise or foolish leader. As a biopolitical subject, she was caught in the

bind of a body politics that negated affirmative feminist attitudes to body and self. She was subjected to what Judith Butler calls ‘injurious speech’, language that wounds, that targets a body, causes injury, and through which one is affectively ‘derogated and demeaned’ (1997: 2). Recalling that time Gillard told a journalist that ‘the pain hits you like a fist, pain so strong you feel it in your guts, your nerve endings.’ (Taylor 2013).

Yet Gillard cannot be cast entirely as the victim of neoliberalism’s moral universe. On the contrary, it was her party, as I have already mentioned, that introduced neoliberalism in the 1980s, and she was not a ‘green angel’ to Abbott’s ‘carbon cowboy’ type, to use Adrian Parr’s terms (2014: 22). As Parr argues, ‘decarbonizing the free market economy’ is well meaning but useless under neoliberal capitalism (2014: 2). I disagree with Parr’s fatalistic position and argue instead that in this neoliberal context a patriarchal schema, as in an organized pattern of thought or behavior, is easily mobilized to create the affects of hatred and disgust against a bodily target. The irony is that Gillard accepted the logic and truth of neoliberalism through the mechanism that Margaret Thatcher referred to as ‘TINA: There Is No Alternative’ (Robinson 2013). What emerges, however, is the unforgiving scenario that follows liberal feminism’s attachments to neoliberal capitalist democracies in the West.

I have argued in this section that the gender-based attacks on Gillard were incited and mobilized by a consortium of neoliberal politicians and the media. Her carbon tax was indelibly associated with forces opposed to the free market. As Tony Abbott asserted: ‘Let’s be under no illusions the carbon tax was socialism masquerading as environmentalism ... That’s what the carbon tax was.’ (Abbott, 2013). The final act of the drama involves the resistance in the form of the Misogyny

Speech and its circulation and reception.

Julia and the Misogyny Speech: mobilizing affect

The Misogyny Speech was directed at Tony Abbott, who had moved a censure motion against the Gillard government for its alleged condoning of a sexist text message sent by its Deputy Speaker, Peter Slipper. Claims and counter claims of sexist language had crossed the floor throughout the morning. Gillard's reply, driven by the events outlined above and transformed into affects of offence, distaste and disgust, made the 'breakthrough into performance', to use Dell Hymes' evocative phrase for the moment of 'passage of human agents into a distinctive mode of existence and realization' of intolerable subjugation (Hymes cited in McKenzie 2001: 37). Sections of the transcript are selected and reproduced below:

I rise to oppose the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, and in so doing I say to the Leader of the Opposition: I will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man. I will not. The Government will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man – not now, not ever. (Gillard 2012a)

The performative and rhetorical emphasis of 'I rise', 'I will not' and 'not now, not ever' recall Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's notion that 'everybody has something inherently creative and artistic in them' (1993:416). Here Gillard draws on those possibilities to assert a self who has endured a prolonged and exhausting attack on her political leadership and is ready to create a performative response. Rejecting the dissembling language used against her, her words are solid and resolute. Pointing her finger at Tony Abbott, she declares this is 'what misogyny looks like in modern Australia',

before referring to the many published statements that demonstrate his bias against women in public office. She then shifts to a personal register to identify herself with women in general:

I was very offended personally when the Leader of the Opposition as minister for health said, 'Abortion is the easy way out.' I was very personally offended by those comments. . . . I was also very offended on behalf of the women of Australia when in the course of the carbon pricing campaign the Leader of the Opposition said, 'What the housewives of Australia need to understand as they do the ironing.' Thank you for that painting of women's roles in modern Australia! (Gillard 2012a)

The rebuttals see her not only reject the imposition of an ontology of gender, but point to Abbott's conservative neoliberal Catholicism, which mixes a free market economy with the biopolitical regulation of women's choices. Neoliberalism, as Raewyn Connell and Nour Dados explain, is not as homogeneous or rational as it appears but takes contradictory forms, religious, secular, fascist, parliamentary and so on (Connell & Dados 2014: 118). Gillard's speech calls out the religious character of Australian parliamentary neoliberalism under Abbott's hard right governance including its attempts to quarantine the female body from liberalism's freedoms.

Gillard next turns to offensive parliamentary behaviour:

Then of course, I am offended by the sexism, by the misogyny, of the Leader of the Opposition catcalling across this table at me as I sit here as Prime

Minister, ‘If the Prime Minister wants to, politically speaking, make an honest woman of herself’ –, something that would never have been said to any man sitting in this chair. (Gillard 2012a)

Immersed in patriarchal signifiers of governance, Gillard interrupts the parliamentary codes to speak of personal gendered attacks that penetrate the high office she holds, and the interruption is thrilling. Members of her side sit behind her, silently. As is appropriate to the ritual of governance, they back up the leader’s speaking position, like a chorus. Opposite her sits the leader of the opposition, and behind him, his party. In addressing her comments to Tony Abbott, gendering him as ‘this man’, the leader of the opposition, Gillard accuses him of the misogyny that witnesses in the house are called upon to acknowledge and disavow. As she continues:

I was offended when the Leader of the Opposition went outside the front of Parliament and stood next to a sign that said ‘Ditch the witch.’ I was offended when the Leader of the Opposition stood next to a sign that described me as a man’s bitch. I was offended by those things. It is misogyny, sexism, and every day from this Leader of the Opposition. Every day, in every way, across the time the Leader of the Opposition has sat in that chair and I have sat in this chair, that is all we have heard from him. (Gillard 2012a)

Watching the speech on YouTube, we see an improvised performance that relies on scant scribbled notes. The performative power is enhanced, exquisitely, by the condensed historicity of the mise en scene of the performance. Not tied to the stake like a witch or bound in a chaff bag, Gillard is free to use her arms to indict her

tormentor and strike home each point. A lawyer, she turns the parliament into a courtroom scene addressing her speech to the Madam Speaker/Judge and the Accused. She rotates from one to the other in gestural flourishes that animate the rhetoric and give emphasis to the constrained female body moving into full flight. In the stunned silence of the chamber, nobody dares move. But better still, nobody knows what she will say next in her allocated speaking time of 15 minutes. At this point, her performance is at its most 'authoritative', to draw on Hymes once again, in that she effectively utilizes the 'standards intrinsic to the tradition in which the performance occurs, are accepted or realized' (84) and inverts their authority.

The speech emanates as much from the biopoliticized subject as from Julia Gillard as an individualized identity and bases its authenticity on the felt bodily experience of Abbott and other members of his party's 'vile conduct' towards women in parliament. On YouTube the speech is palpably energized by anger, indignation and outrage at provocations that extend well beyond the immediate situation of utterance (Gillard 2012b). She notes how Abbott is 'looking at his watch because apparently a woman's spoken too long' and how he has often shouted at her to 'shut up' (Gillard 2012a). These elements amplify a singular event into a cultural performance for the contemporary era: it is affective, embodied, resistant, challenging and accusatory. On YouTube and social media it becomes a global event in which the Australian parliament briefly becomes a platform for a resistant feminist performance.

As my earlier references to Butler indicate, the metalanguage I use to historicize the speech can be traced to the 1990s, using the groundwork of feminist history to deal with the residual patriarchy entwined in Australian neoliberal governance. Gillard's own feminist past, and the continuing support of her feminist colleagues, allow her to mobilize the affects of outrage, offense and anger as a counterweight.

Among the many performative and affective excitements of the speech and its circulation are the revitalization of the political as cultural performance and the potential of the cultural to be made political in a live mediated theatre.

Judith Butler continues her work on the linguistic construction of subjectivity through the performative in a recent book with Athena Athanasiou (2012). In this book, they add 'affective dispositions' to the linguistic and performative elements of the construction of provisional subjectivities that give rise to subjects who take political action. Affective 'dispositions' assist with the crossing of the threshold into action, or activism. Strong emotion can derail a subject's habitual 'crafted condition' and lead to a 're-crafting', deterritorialization, or 'dispossession' of self (71). If we consider Gillard in that moment as being beside herself with anger, she might be said to have stepped aside from an 'auto-logical and self-contained individuality' to express outrage on behalf of the social, the 'others as well' (71) such as the women of Australia. Beside herself with political rage and passion, Gillard was not only speaking as herself but as a subject that is 'decentred' and 'out of joint' (72), dispossessed of her identity and so able to exceed the norms that otherwise made her speech appear robotic, even to her supporters. Butler & Athanasiou, speaking in a different context, offer a further way of interpreting the perlocutionary power and affect of Gillard's speech, which exceeds the circumstances of its utterance. These attributes support a view that the speech is a landmark achievement for Australian feminism and has a significant place in the history of Australian performance.

Feminist resistance

The Misogyny Speech is a powerful performance but it is not the solution to the problem of sexism and misogyny in neoliberal times. Drawing on Butler and

Athanasίου once more, it is possible to see that the speech garnered recognition for the injuries Gillard had sustained in the public sphere at the hands of politicians, the media and social networks. Its performative power appeared to be the mark of survival, of a subject using feminism as a mode of resistance to biopoliticization. The speech cannot, however, acknowledge the extent to which the alternative ‘self-determined life’ she performs is not hers to determine (79). The space from which she speaks remains attached to the liberalism that is also espoused and practiced selectively by her party as well as her tormentors. Liberalism sticks because, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, it is ‘that which we cannot not want’ (1999: 79) but which now ties us, in (neo)liberal times, to the compromises of democratic systems of governance. The cost for a female Prime Minister in Australia is the injurious language it attracts, softened by the hope that: ‘It will be easier for the next woman and the woman after that and the woman after that and I’m proud of that’ (Gillard 2013). Despite the apparent setback to its progress, feminism offers a powerful and buoyant base for resistant action to briefly rupture the collusion of neoliberalism with any passing prejudice it can muster to its cause.

¹ [“‘Not Now, Not Ever!’ \(Gillard Misogyny Speech\)”. Composed by Rob Davidson. Performed by The Australian Voices. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpavaM62Fgo>. Accessed 11 August 10, 2015.](#)
[Debra Thomas. *A Man's Bitch*. Unpublished Manuscript.](#)