Playing it Queer

Understanding Queer Gender, Sexual and Musical Praxis in a ‘New’ Musicological Context

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Key Words

Bio queens; camp; drag; drag kings; gay; gender; genderfuck; heteronormativity; homosexuality; identity; lesbian; music; musicology; performance; performativity; play; queer; queercore; queer theory; sex; sexuality.
Across ages and cultures, music has been associated with sexual allure, gender inversion and suspect sexuality. Music has been theorised as both a putative agent of moral corruption and an expressive mechanism of gender and sexual signification, capable of arousing and channelling sexual urges and desires. This research examines musically facilitated expressions of queerness and queer identity, asking how and why music is used by queer musicians and musical performers to express non-normative gender and sexual identities. A queer theoretical approach to gender and sexuality, coupled with interdisciplinary theories concerning music as an identificatory practice, provides the theoretical landscape for this study.

An investigation into queer musical episodes such as this necessitates an exploration of the broader cultural milieu in which queer musical work occurs. It also raises questions surrounding the corpus of queer musical practice—that is, do these practices constitute the creation of a new musical genre or a collection of genres that can be understood as queer music? The preceding questions inform an account of the histories, styles, sensibilities, and gender and sexual politics of camp, drag and genderfuck, queer punk and queercore, as well as queer feminist cultures, positioning these within musical praxis. Queer theory, music and identity theories as well as contemporary discussions relating to queer cultural histories are then applied to case studies of queer-identified music performers from Brisbane, Australia. A grounded theoretical analysis of the data gathered in these case studies provides the necessary material to argue that musical performance provides a creative context for the expression of queer identities and the empowerment of queer agency, as well as oppositional responses to and criticism of heterosexual hegemony, and the homogenisation and assimilation of mainstream gay culture. Resulting from this exploration of queer musical cultures, localised data gathering and analysis, this research also supposes a set of ideologies and sensibilities that can be considered indicative and potentially determinant of queer musical practice generally.

Recognising that queer theory offers a useful theoretical discourse for understanding the complexities and flexibility of gender and sexual identities—particularly those that resist the binary logics of heteronormativity—this project foregrounds a question that is relatively unanswered in musicological work. It asks:
how can musicology make use of queer theory in order to produce queer readings and new, anti-oppressive knowledge regarding musical performance, composition and participation? To answer this, it investigates the history of resistance towards embodied studies of music; the disjuncture between competing discourses of traditional and ‘new’ musicology; and recent developments in the pursuit of queer visibility within music studies. Building upon these recent developments, this work concludes that the integration of queer theoretical perspectives and queer aesthetic sensibilities within musicological discourse allows for a serious reconsideration of musical meaning and signification. In the development of a queer musicology, a committed awareness of queer theory, histories, styles and sensibilities, together with an embodied scholarly approach to music, is paramount. It is through this discursive nexus that musicology will be able to engage more fully with the troubling, performative and contingent qualities of gender, sexuality and desire.
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Statement of Authenticity

The original work contained herein is that of Jodie Taylor and has not previously been submitted for an award at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by another person has been included except where due reference is made in the dissertation. Selected material that is the original work of the author has been published in a selection of journals and anthologies throughout the course of this research project. These publications are listed at page xii of this dissertation.

_________________________
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List of Publications


Part I
PRELUDE, MOTIVATIONS AND METHODS

Through an autoethnographic prelude, Part I introduces the study. It outlines the study’s scholarly context, the research questions, the methods employed in the research process and the internal structure of the dissertation.
Prelude to the Study
Rationale, Enquiry and Aims
(Chapter One)

Any list of events that help pave the way for queer musicology will of course be personal and partial. (Brett, 1994a, p. 372)

Musical taste and sexual desire are intensely personal. For this reason, personal narratives are a valuable addition to a scholarly discourse of music and sexuality. Therefore, I would like to begin by taking you, the reader, behind the scenes and inviting you into my world: to explain my motivation; expose my bias; and to briefly explore the person who lives in this text. Undertaking a Doctorate of Philosophy has been driven in equal parts by my desire for academic accreditation and my desire to better understand who I am. Writing this dissertation has been a reflexive project, forcing me to question my identity and disclose my private self to my institution and the wider academy of musical scholars who will view this research. The following autoethnographic narrative evidences my complete membership within queer culture (which later forms an essential component of my methodology), and reveals the impetus behind this investigation. After establishing the interconnectivity of music, gender and sexuality through a personal account, I introduce this topic as it is situated in scholarly discourse.

She Who Lives In-between

I am the she who lives in-between: in-between the masculine and the feminine; in-between heterosexual and homosexual; in-between the classical and the popular; and in-between the covers of this dissertation. At an early age, one learns that it is not socially desirable to switch and change between the feminine and the masculine. We are taught to be either/or, and to desire either/or. During adolescence, music was my only salvation from these restraints, which governed how I should dress, how I should behave and whom I should desire. As a weekday student of classical voice and weekend singer in a hard rock band, I found the freedom in music to intermingle the feminine with the masculine. I was the diva one moment, a rock ’n’ roller the
next, but inwardly I was always an amalgamation of the two. As an enthusiast of opera and musical theatre, I discovered that the diva was often the object of desire, just as I longed to be. Her femininity was robust and disciplined. It was captured in her costumes, in the roles that were written for her, in the curves of her body and in her voice, which gave a powerful blast and refused containment. In my eyes, her own voice was the key to her sexual prowess, and thus she became a personal icon: she was a woman in control, a woman who regulated her own pleasure. In contrast, the masculinity encapsulated in playing the rock star afforded me the public expression of aggressive sexuality: imaginarily, no desire was too outrageous and every spectator became mine for the taking. The rock star was a fugitive of definition and self-control. In this role, it became perfectly acceptable to flaunt my sexuality, to adorn my body in fishnet and leather, and to say and act in whatever manner pleased me. Music allowed me to perform gender and express sexuality in multiple ways that were unavailable to me in daily life. Furthermore, it allowed me to do this without fear of persecution.

For many years, I had been persuaded into thinking that I was biologically programmed to ‘become a woman’ and to desire the sexual affection of one particular gender (be it masculine or feminine). What troubled me greatly was that these desires were always changing: I was unable to securely locate myself within either a gay or straight identity, and I soon realised that sharing this feeling with others (be they gay or straight) resulted in suspicion or dismissal of my flexible sexuality. Basically, there was no group or scene or subculture to which I could fully belong. As a result, I chose not to speak of these feelings, preferring instead to express these desires and play with my own gender and sexual identity through musical performance. While many people still found it unusual that I possessed an equally intense passion for the genres of musical theatre and industrial rock, it seemed that expressing conflicting taste in music did not attract nearly as much scrutiny as expressing conflicting sexual desires or gendered behaviour.

It was not until many years later (when I discovered queer theory) that I realised gender and sexuality are not always fixed categories. Moreover, one does not necessarily inform the other. Upon discovering this, my adolescence began to retrospectively make sense. Unlike the supposedly natural and thus ‘normal’ expression of gender and sexuality, musical taste is not understood to be in any way natural, normal or innocent but rather a self-determined and defining mechanism of
identity. I realised that because I was drawn towards, and physically desired, both the masculine and the feminine (and was therefore unable to comfortably perform a cohesive or normative gender and sexual identity in my daily life), I negotiated my explorations of gender and sexuality within the self-determining pursuit of music.

In my experience, music has always been an expressive mechanism accommodating a variety of performances and roles: I could singularly or simultaneously compose, perform and listen; I could play multiple instruments; I could perform and appreciate various styles. As a musician and music lover, I was allowed to be fluid: to interpret and reinterpret, to create and recreate. Conducting this work upon myself led me to question more broadly music’s ability to mediate the non-normative gender and sexual identities of others. After preliminary investigations I discovered that my experience was not unique. In fact, it was shared by many others who had lived inside the ‘musical closet’—a space which allows us to come out, to play, to perform, to queer and to be queer, under a guise of frivolity and entertainment. In the context of contemporary discourse on queer aesthetics and identity, this dissertation investigates the musical practices as they relate to the gender and sexual identities of other musicians and musical performers who ‘play it queer’, taking Brisbane, Australia as my primary locus of investigation.

**Scholarly Context**

When I began investigating this topic in 2004, I discovered a relatively small body of musicology dedicated to the discussion of music and queer performances of gender and/or sexual identities. Despite there being numerous accounts of gender non-conformity and sexual ‘perversion’ within music, the conditions of queer gender, sexual and musical praxis remains under-examined, as do the histories, styles and sensibilities of queer musical subcultures. Commenting on popular music in particular, Mitchell Morris emphasises:

> An enormous number of figures in popular music are known to have had elaborate gender identities, intense physical relationships with members of their own sex, or sexual tastes outside the mainstream. That these ways of being in the world mattered to the music they created and performed have not often been demonstrated. (2006, p. 22)

Of those scholars who have examined music in relation to queer genders and sexualities, much of the scholarship has been historical and biographical, concerned with investigating the sexual perversities and closeted relationships of specific
composers exemplified in the texts *The Vinyl Closet: Gays in the Music World* (Hadleigh, 1991), *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in 20th Century Music* (Gill, 1995) and *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity* (Fuller & Whitesell, 2002). While these works represent vital steps towards a more open, nuanced and human discourse of music, and indeed enrich our understanding of music and the complications of sexual desire, “musicology by outing”, as John Phillips (2005, p. 272) calls it, is not the only—nor is it necessarily the most effective—way of ‘doing’ queer musicology. The most cited and ground-breaking example of queer musicology to date has been *Queering the Pitch* (Brett, Wood & Thomas, 1994). This text laid the foundation for musicological enquiries of a similar nature. Other publications that have also been instrumental in the formation of a queer musicology are *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (Koestenbaum, 2001), *Beethoven’s Kiss: Pianism, Perversion and the Mastery of Desire* (Kopelson, 1996), *Queering the Popular Pitch* (Whiteley & Rycenga, 2006) and *Listening to the Sirens: Music Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Peraino, 2006). This dissertation, like the preceding work, also attempts to provide an example of queer musicology, specifically a queer musicology that pays close attention to queer theory. It draws on the aforementioned body of musicological scholarship addressing queer music, gender and sexual performances alongside other contemporary studies of music and culture. It will also employ theoretical paradigms from other disciplines within the humanities, arts and social sciences.

**Musical Matters of the Flesh**

Sexuality has been an awkward feature of Western society over the past centuries, hidden from view by Victorian prudery and repressed by bourgeois respectability (Spargo, 1999). In nineteenth and twentieth century Western societies in particular, religious and secular institutions have persisted in governing our bodies and legislating against gender, sexuality and sexual acts considered to deviate from prescribed norms. Music has been scrutinised in comparable ways by religious and secular institutions because of its physical and emotional appeal: “From Plato to Artusi to Hanslick, anxieties about music’s power have been elaborated through metaphors of gender, sexual difference, and sexual allure” (Cusick, 1999a, p. 478). Even the ways in which we talk about music—its discourse—are inherently
gendered and sexual. It is evident in writings from the fifth century that the meaning of the word ‘music’ has been affected by this logic (Tagg, 1999). The meaning of the term was originally derived from the Latin *musica* and the Greek *mousiké*, meaning the skill and art of the muses and referring not only to sound, but to dance and song as well. Because of the bodily pleasure associated with song and dance, this definition came to upset learned men (Tagg, 1999). For example, the fourth century writings of Saint Augustine of Hippo suggest that he was very much aware of the effect that music has on the flesh, and thus he begged God to release him from the dangers that lay in the gratification of musical pleasure (Augustine, 1961). Saint Augustine advocated the disassociation of music with the physicality of its practice, suggesting that all musical practices (even the sacred) must be undertaken with acute moral scrutiny.

In Western culture, music’s corporeal alliances, its emotionality and physical appeal, “predispose[s] it to be assigned to the feminine”, as Nicola Dibben suggests (2002, p. 121). Richard Leppert notes that “music and women were conflated in eighteenth-century English culture” and that to fear music constituted “a fear of feminine eruption” (1993, p. 69). At this time, a degree of anxiety existed regarding the effect of music upon one’s sexuality—particularly the sexuality of a woman, as music was thought to encourage women especially (given the perceived weakness of their sex) to “overstep the bounds of modesty and deference” (1993, p. 69). Music continues to be inextricably tied to our gendered and sexualised bodies, and is often considered to signify the gender and sexualised body of the ‘feminine’ and the ‘deviant’. As self-identified gay musicologist Philip Brett argues, “music has often been considered a dangerous substance, an agent of moral ambiguity always in danger of bestowing deviant status upon its practitioner” (1994b, p. 11). Within a contemporary popular context, one only has to consider the phrase ‘sex, drugs and rock ’n’ roll’ indicating that rock ’n’ roll correlates with physical and emotional pleasures and by extension suggesting its participants are hedonistically inclined towards illegal and immoral acts. Since its beginnings in the 1950s, rock ’n’ roll has been a target of moral reformists vigorously opposed to the blatant sexuality and phallocentrism performed on stage by musicians such as Elvis Presley and Mick Jagger (Frith & McRobbie, 1990; Hadleigh, 1991).

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1 ‘Deviant’ is used as a neutral term, which does not in any manner indicate depravity: rather, it suggests a deviation from prescribed social norms and by extension locates the ‘deviant’ outside the bounds of centrality.
The association that music shares with the gendered, the sexual and the pleasurable is by no means limited to fourth century confessions, eighteenth century anxieties or the rock ‘n’ roll rebellions of men. Gender, sexuality and desire are constructed through, and have a meaningful impact upon musical systems of signification, equally as much for women as for men. However, it has only been in the last thirty years—instigated largely by feminist modes of musicological enquiry and sociological foci on music as a site of identity construction—that music has been recognised as such by musicologists. A selection of arguments across both musicology and sociology that deal critically with constructions and articulations of gender within popular music can be found in *Signed, Sealed and Delivered: True Life Stories of Women in Pop* (Steward & Garratt, 1984), *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Reynolds & Press, 1995), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (Whiteley, 1997), *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Bayton, 1998), *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity* (Whiteley, 2000), *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music Age, and Gender* (Whiteley, 2003), *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (Leonard, 2007) and *Oh boy! Masculinities and Popular Music* (Jarman-Ivens, 2007). Other valuable contributions to discourses of gender and sexuality in music are *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (McClary, 1991) and *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music* (Barkin & Hamessley, 1999). Offering similar critiques on topics of gender and sexuality, *Feminine Endings* and *Audible Traces* locate these issues not only in popular forms but in classical music forms as well, while *Music and Gender* (Moisala & Diamond, 2000) provides a valuable cross-cultural perspective on these debates.

In the introduction to *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary suggests that “music is … very often concerned with the arousing and channelling of desire, with mapping patterns though the medium of sound that resemble those of sexuality” (1991, p. 8). According to McClary, the articulation of desire and the social organisation of both gender and sexuality have been affected considerably by music, and therefore it is a worthy perspective on which to base a critical investigation of music. Lesbian musicologist Suzanne Cusick is of the opinion that:

Music (like sex, which it might be) is first of all, something we do, we human beings, as a way of explaining, replicating, and reinforcing our relationship to the world, or our imagined notions of what possible relationships might exist. I suspect for all of us the originating joy of it comes from assuming more varied positions than we think we’re allowed in regular life, positions that enable us to say yes or no, to immerse, to initiate,
to have simultaneous but independent climaxes, to escape a system ... of bewildering
fixed categories, to wallow in the circulation of pleasures that are beyond danger and
culturally defined desires. (1994, p. 80, emphases in original)

Cusick’s summation, which resonates with my earlier personal perspective,
highlights the variety of roles that musical practices offer to their participants, and
suggests that music lends itself to the exploration of pleasures that exist outside the
cultural limitations that govern gender and sexual norms.

The exploration of pleasures and potentialities afforded by music has made it a
pursuit of the socially disenfranchised and abandoned. Sophie Fuller and Lloyd
Whitesell propose that, historically, “music [has] provided the accompaniment for
confrontations between disparate conventions of social propriety in general, and in
particular, for encounters between diverse idiolects of sexual identity” (2002, p. 12).
Thus, music can be a powerful social agent: it can potentially soothe uncomfortable
subject-matter that disrupts social norms. Moreover, music may provide a refuge for
queers (those who are particularly disruptive to normativity) and a space in which
queer bodies can tolerably skew the margins of acceptable gender and sexual
identity. Wayne Koestenbaum further emphasises this, suggesting that:

Forbidden sexualities stay vague because they fear detection and punishment.
Historically, music has been defined as mystery and miasma, and implicitness rather
than an explicitness, and so we have hid inside music; in music we can come out
without coming out, we can reveal without saying a word. (2001, pp. 189–190)

While all of the musicians and musical performers discussed in this dissertation are
‘out’ (that is, they are socially explicit about their queerness), I would argue that
music still provides them with a degree of safety by accommodating gender
unorthodoxy and queer sexual expressions that would be scorned if articulated in
other public arenas. Reaffirming this in his comparison between music and film’s
accommodation of queerness Boze Hadleigh argues that popular music forms
indulge “all manner of gestures, get-ups, accessories, poses and public
announcements. Sex and reputations are a lot more fluid on the musical scale than on
thin, potentially jagged celluloid” (1991, p. 8).

Music does not simply reflect the current reality of identifying as queer, nor does
it merely perpetuate existing social realities: rather, it creates new realities as well. In
the context of Foucaudian theory (discussed at length in Chapter Three), discursive
practices such as music actively participate in the construction of social reality. At
once music can reinforce a range of appropriate behaviours while also allowing for
the exploration, construction and negotiation of alternative social behaviours and ways of being in the world (McClary, 1991). Music is thus positioned as a productive mechanism, facilitating the production of new experiences, new meanings and new ways of being, irremovable from the social, political and personal contexts in which they are located. Such an assertion would have been impossible to make and maintain thirty years ago, which further strengthens my desire to reinforce it in the contemporary context of queer cultures, politics and subjectivities.

Musicologists have only begun revealing music’s association with gender, sexuality and sex since the postmodernist turn in scholarship. Prior to this, the patriarchal institution of musicology fostered a discourse that can be seen as characterised by absolutism, autonomy and transcendence. By establishing a musical canon that was hypothetically untainted by corporeality and its trivial desires, the modernist (overwhelmingly male) academy attempted to expunge the flesh, and thus the feminine, from music (Brett, 2002b; McClary, 1991; Solie, 1993). Since the fall of Eve (in Christian dogma), women have worn the mark of sin to a greater extent then men, their bodies becoming a symbol of undisciplined sexuality and corruption. According to Judith Peraino “woman’ was understood as sexually incarnate; and furthermore, all sources of sensory pleasures, such as music, poetry, visual arts, and even food, came to be gendered as feminine” (2006, p. 45). Similarly, Ruth Solie points to this in her introduction to Musicology and Difference, noting the “long-standing trope of European culture … in which music is understood to occupy the female position vis-à-vis the male composer” (1993, pp. 13–14). The gendering of music in this way has been a constant threat to the masculinity, rationality and intellect of male music scholars because, as Leppert notes, “music constitutes the putative agent in the feminization of men” (1993, p. 180). In part, this contributed to the privileging of scientific and objective studies over embodied or subjective enquiry by (predominantly male) scholars of musicology. In fear of intellectual castration, men sought to keep women from scholarly pursuits of music, such as musicology and composition because it was in these authoritative roles that men were able to control and maintain their masculinity. For example, Charles Seeger, a pioneering figure of musicology in America, confessed to excluding female

2 The academic treatment of music in this way also coincided with the rise of scientific invention, and as such to study music in a scientific manner was to give it credibility among the most privileged of intellectual pursuits. This positivist approach to musicological scholarship was eventually criticised by Kerman (1985), who advocated for greater value to be placed on critical and contextual approaches.
musicologist and composer Ruth Crawford from attending the founding meeting of the New York Musicological Society in 1930. Many years later, he qualified his action by suggesting that it was “to avoid the incipient criticism that musicology was ‘woman’s work’” (Seeger cited in Cusick, 1999a, p. 472). For such a perception would place musicology in danger of being characterised by the feminine virtues of emotionality, sensuality and frivolity and thus threaten its intellectual legitimacy and authority (Cusick, 1999a). Since public musical activities were already perceived by many as “troublingly feminine” (Fuller & Whitesell, 2002, p. 3), it was believed that the presence of women would agitate further crisis on the position of men.

Musicology has at times idealised, and almost always disembodied, the histories of the people who created, performed and used music in order to preserve the notion that musical meaning is formally self-contained and socially detached. Solie calls for musicology to remedy its historical treatment of the personal narrative, favouring a musicology that values the individual differences locatable in music:

I want to locate these issues of difference in the musicological sites where they come into play: that is in the formulation of the most basic questions about what pieces of music can express or reflect of the people who make them, and thus of the differences between and among those people. These have not traditionally been central questions in musicology—a fact which bewilders many historians and critics in other fields—but only the most extreme formalist position (rare nowadays) can resist them altogether. (1993, p. 3)

Noticeably, over the last two decades, reflexive and sociological studies of music have gained academic legitimacy, championed by new and critical enquiries in all fields of musicology. Concerned with subjectivities, social meanings and bodies in music, critical musicology encourages the integration of critical and other interdisciplinary theories into the study of music. It gives musicological validity to studies of popular music styles and culture, and acknowledges—as ethnomusicologists had since Alan Merriam’s The Anthropology of Music (1964)—that the signification of music is socially grounded. Critical musicology, stimulated by Joseph Kerman’s text Musicology (1985), is sympathetic towards perspectives that dispute the grand narratives of modernist methodologies thus favouring politically accountable scholarly enquiries that offer new insights into the ways in which a variety of different people use music both in their social and private lives.
The Study, Location and Response

This research therefore responds to the call of Solie (1993) and others who want to understand what music may communicate about those who create and perform it, and the individualities of these people. The individualities that are of greatest concern to this study are those that are subjectively experienced and socially constructed as gender and sexuality. If music has the ability to express gender and sexuality, as McClary (1991) and Cusick (1994) previously suggested, then surely these expressions are not reserved for, or limited to the socially sanctioned and morally certified body. Indeed, if music has—as Brett (1994b), Fuller and Whitesell (2002) and Koestenbaum (2001) suggested—been a pursuit of the morally ambiguous, proving sanctuary to the deviant and illicit, then I would argue that it continues to do so, not just for me but for many others.

In order to locate the expression of individual genders and sexualities within music, the nature of gender and sexual identity must first be explained. Queer theory offers a framework that is particularly advantageous to understanding non-normative genders and sexualities, and the aesthetic devices employed in the performance of gender and sexuality such as camp and drag among others. Queer does not signify a specific gender or sexual identity; instead, it poses a challenge to dominant labelling philosophies (such as heterosexual and homosexual) and essentialist notions of fixed and universal subjectivity. Furthermore, queer critique rejects a social identity based solely upon material sexual practices, acknowledging that identities (be they gendered, sexual or otherwise) are accompanied by non-sexual enactments and public signification in a variety of forms (Meyer, 1994). In this context, I am concerned with the public signification of individual identities mediated through musical performance, an investigation which queer theory accommodates.

Borrowing heavily from the work of poststructuralist philosopher Judith Butler, queer theory supposes that identity is located in a performative nexus, arguing that the self is by no means stable but rather constituted in time via stylised acts (Butler, 1988). Therefore, I do not propose that musically articulated genders and/or sexualities constitute or reveal the essence or truth of one’s gender or sexual identity. Instead, I suggest that by employing queer theory we discover that the categories of masculine, feminine, heterosexual and homosexual are indeed constituted and performed in a multiplicity of ways that defy their binary organisation. Furthermore, I suggest that music provides a means of queerly expressing and critiquing gender
and sexuality because, as Peraino suggests in her discussion of queer musical icons, “music can be understood as resembling queer subjectivity: music’s position outside language resembles the impossibility of signifying subjectivities that lie outside normative heterosexuality” (2006, p. 113), and by extension normative homosexuality.

I believe the necessity for a study such as this is further highlighted by the striking lack of queer criticism within the Australian academies of music, and by the expressed need for more extensive enquiry into queer identity in the field of popular musicology. While other institutions such as the American Musicological Society have observed and responded to the need for queer investigation as a means of combating heterosexist agendas that privilege heterosexist knowledges, Australian musicology has not. The Musicological Society of Australia’s gender and sexuality study group is the closest Australian forum attentive to queer enquiry. At a meeting of this study group in 2005, it was noted that:

[While it is] over twenty years after the emergence of queer theory and the establishment of the postmodern paradigm in the other humanities, we still have no undergraduate music courses and very few postgraduate ones that deal even tangentially with issues of gender and sexuality within music research in Australia. (Phillips, 2006, pp. 26–27)

Since this statement was made, a handful of Australian music courses have begun investigating such matters; however, the crusade for queer representation within scholarly institutions of musical knowledge is far from under-way. As a self-identified queer musicologist who has lived all her life in Australia, I feel that it is necessary to give a voice to other queer Australian artists like myself, and to contribute to the beginnings of queer musicological discourse in the academies that have fostered my musical learning. Hopefully this investigation will prompt others to follow—others who for various reasons may have resisted personalising and sexualising their own musicological enquiries. Noting a similar absence of queerness, Aaron Lecklider stated the following in a 2006 edition of The Journal of Popular Music Studies:

As a site of inquiry that has often placed identity formation at its center, popular music studies seems like a perfect venue for inquiries into queer identity, yet there are a

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3 In 1989, the first official congress of the gay and lesbian study group was supervised by the American Musicological Society, which prompted the publication of Queering the Pitch (1994).

4 Dr Linda Kouvaras’s course at the University of Melbourne titled “Sex, Death and the Ecstatic in Music” as well as my own lectures on gender and sexuality in popular music, are the only examples of which I am aware that incorporate queer perspectives on gender and sexuality in music studies.
surprisingly limited numbers of articles—and even fewer monographs—devoted to the subject…. The relative inattention given [to] queer topics within popular music studies appears a crucial gap that demands immediate correction. (pp. 117–118)

Lecklider’s comment reflects a broader neglect on the part of music scholarship to investigate queer identity, and provides yet another reason why this study—a study that focuses primarily on the musical moments in queer identity work, that is in the being and doing of queer—is necessary.

On a macro level, this dissertation is concerned with queer subjectivities, queer aesthetics and musicality. It focuses specifically on queer musical performance, how these performances facilitate the expression of queer gender and sexual identities and how queer musicians use music to pose specific challenges to gender and sexual rigidity. On a micro level it engages with queer musicians and musical performers from Brisbane, Australia. It interrogates their musical activities, exploring and unpacking the methods they employ for self-expression. Furthermore, it examines the ways in which these musicians and performers queer mainstream normativities, in the process exposing queer nuances and meanings within a range of musical activities undertaken by queer-identified people.

**Research Questions and Aims of the Study**

Focusing primarily on contemporary Western popular and subcultural musical styles, queer aesthetic devices and queer gender and sexual identities, this dissertation asks the following key question:

- Can music facilitate the expression of queer identity within the Brisbane scene and beyond? And if it does, how and why has music been used by queer musicians and performers to express non-normative gender and sexual identities?

In the process of addressing this primary area of investigation the following questions will also require consideration:

- If music is used by queer-identified people as a means of signification, does this result in the creation of a new musical genre or a collection of genres that can be understood as queer music? If so, what is queer music? Can it be explained or limited to a sound or style, or is it better understood as a sensibility or an aesthetic disruption of gender and sexual normativities?
• What is there to gain from making use of queer theory within musicology? Will this provide better representation of queer-identified people and will it aid in the production of queer readings and new knowledge regarding queer musical performance, composition and participation?

Furthermore, this research project provides an historically grounded and theoretically enriched survey of the vital role music has played in the formation of queer cultures and the consolidation of Brisbane’s queer scene—the primary locus of this investigation. The next chapter of Part I outlines the methods of enquiry. This is then followed by Chapter Three of Part II, with an introduction to queer theory as well as theories regarding music and identity in a postmodern and poststructuralist context. Chapter Four of Part II returns to the discourse of musicology and speculates about the potential for the integration of queer theories within musicological work. The detailed theoretical accounts of queerness, music and identities presented in Chapter Three provides the necessary grounding for further discussions regarding queer musicology in Chapter Four as well as the contextualised discussions of queer sensibilities and queer musical cultures presented in Part III and IV of this research.
The power of music—both for dominant cultures and for those who would promote alternatives—resides in its ability to shape the ways we experience our bodies, emotions, subjectivities, desires, and social relations. And to study such effects demands that we recognize the ideological basis of music’s operations—its cultural constructedness. (McClary, 2000, pp. 6–7)

This research presents a qualitative enquiry into matters of gender, sexuality and musicality, focusing in detail on queer subjectivities and discourses of queer socio-musical behaviour and investigating local episodes of queer musical expression that have not previously been documented. Specifically, it is concerned with the gendered and sexual self that is negotiated and performed through music. It seeks an in-depth understanding of the ways in which queer musicians engage in musical activity as a means to express their gender and sexual identities. Situated within the broader context of queer musical and performance discourses, which provide the necessary foundation for a thorough understanding of queer musical artefacts, this project is inescapably partial and local. It deals partially with queer lives, experiences and cultural modes of queer expression, focusing on gender and sexual identities and musical participation; it deals locally with queer musicians and musical performers from Brisbane, Australia and their articulation of queer gender and sexual identities through music. It does this through two primary means: literature survey (theoretical and historical review) and ethnographic fieldwork.

History shows that objective, ‘scientific’ studies of sexuality can be dangerous as they are often used against the sexually marginalised, suppressing their voices and experiences in the quest for broad-spectrum understanding and rationalisation of the sexual deviant (Gamson, 2000). Human sexuality does not need to be measured, for the measurement of it can often result in majority and minority groupings of people and the concomitant oppression of those who occupy the latter category. While this charge cannot be imposed upon all objective and/or quantitative methods, objective
quantitative enquiry is not suitable for the purpose of this investigation because this research is not concerned with calculating, measuring or evaluating empirical materials or making sense of these materials via etic commentary. Rather, it is concerned with uncovering, interpreting and illuminating the nuances of queer genders, sexualities and musicality attained through empirical observations and an embodied and detailed understanding of the intricacies and sophistication of queer cultures.

Every person experiences their bodies, emotions, subjectivities, desires and social relations in different ways. The extent of music’s ability to shape these experiences is always going to be variable and contestable. Music’s culturally constructed ideological basis, and its various effects upon our identities and social roles, suggests that the meanings bound in musical expression are not universal, but rather diverse and fragmented. The diversity of musical meaning illustrates our radically decentred postmodern subjectivity—a subjectivity that is void of universal properties and certainties. What is clear, however (and will be argued further in Chapter Three), is that music does shape our experiences and our identities, and it does relate in varying degrees to the way we experience and express our gender and sexuality. Gender, sexuality and musicality are culturally constructed; they are subjective experiences that help us make sense of ourselves and the social worlds in which we reside.

Postmodern studies in sexuality—like this study—have favoured qualitative approaches that accommodate the personal and the peculiar. In particular, suggests Joshua Gamson, such approaches include “ethnography and participant observation, in-depth interviewing, textual analysis, historical research and the like” (2000, p. 248). Similarly, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (1994) propose that the qualitative researcher interprets phenomena “in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 2). As such, it “involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (p. 2). Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) remind us that qualitative methods accommodate the tensions and contradictions that are inherent in subjective perceptions, and it is these sites of gender and sexual tension, of contradiction and of queer perception, that this research is eager to decipher. Therefore, it is necessary
that qualitative methodologies be employed in the surveying and interpretation of meaning within queer musical practices if this research is to successfully make sense of the ways that new and local queer communities construct and identify themselves via music.

Philosopher and art theorist Richard Kuhns suggests that “each interpretation draws a boundary around the variables that can be considered in making an interpretation” (1983, p. 80); thus interpretation usually deals with a limited system of variables, and consequently should never suppose absolute and rightful comprehension. The system of variables employed in this instance are limited to matters of queer gender and sexual difference, thus gender and sexuality form the key interpretative mechanisms of this research. These interpretive mechanisms are used to examine a variety of cultural phenomena, queer sensibilities and musical styles, and explain the modes of gender and sexual identification within these sensibilities and styles. Primarily, this work deals with popular forms of music and the ways that these forms have been employed in the signification of queer subjectivities. This study acknowledges the usefulness of semiotic analysis in understanding music as a symbolic system of communication (Dunbar-Hall, 1991: Tagg, 1987, 1999); however, it does not employ this method as a primary analytical device. While semiotics has been useful for interpreting lyrical content and gestural codes, it is outside the scope of this study to analyse the parameters of music such as rhythm, melody and timbre. As this study is less concerned with decoding the meaning of the sounds made and used by queer people than with the way broader musical activity functions as a site of queer identity work and a performance of self.

The sensibilities and styles to be examined in this way are camp, drag and genderfuck, queer punk and queercore, and queer feminist musical practices. These sensibilities and musical cultures have been chosen for two reasons. First, they represent a range of different queer cultural traditions, musical activities, styles and subcultures, yet the historical research tells us that they are all cultural expressions of queer lives. By surveying a variety of queer sensibilities and musical traditions, I aim to acquire a more complete picture of queer musical activities that will result in a greater understanding of the ways in which queer-identified people use music to facilitate expressions of non-normative gender and sexual identity. Second, my own experiences with queer culture and a convenient survey of queer artists from

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5 See discussion of *musicking* (Small, 1998) on p. 42.
Brisbane revealed that I was able to gain access to musicians and musical performers located within these cultures. My close proximity to queer cultural producers promised valuable access to interviewees, and made continuing observations of their work possible.

**Methods of Enquiry**

In line with previous recommendations posited by Gamson (2000) and by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative methods are used throughout this research. For the purpose of gathering empirical materials and investigating queer sensibilities and musical practices, I have assumed the role of a critical ethnographer employing literature surveys, theoretical and historical review, autoethnography, participant observations, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews in the collection of data. This multiple method approach permits triangulations and enhances interpretability of the literature and data collected (Robson, 1993), increasing the validity of the research findings. Furthermore, a multiple method approach permits complementary and developmental methods, allowing the results or findings of one method to shape the subsequent steps in the research process. In this case, information sourced from current literature informed the interview questions and provides a framework for discussing the case studies in Chapter Nine. Similarly, the data and conclusions that emerged from the interview process are clarified and illustrated using a constructivist grounded theory approach. The following summary of key methods used highlights their relevance to the aims of this research.

**Critical Ethnography**

According to Jim Thomas, critical ethnographers have a political motivation in that they seek to “describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centres, and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain” (1993, pp. 2–3). Critical ethnography does not sit in opposition to conventional ethnography, but rather critical ethnography and conventional ethnography share fundamental similarities. The significant difference is that in studying, observing and describing their subjects, critical ethnographers do not aim to speak for their subjects, but instead “accept an added research task of raising their voice to speak to an audience on behalf of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority
to the subjects’ voice” (Thomas, 1993, p. 4, emphases in original). And thus I, the critical ethnographer, present this knowledge with the intention of provoking social change—that is, change in regard to the way gender, sexuality and queer subjectivities are discussed, positioned and theorised in musicological discourse; and change in our perceptions regarding human gender, sexuality and queer subjectivities more generally.

**Literature Survey, Theoretical and Historical Review**

Identity and its attendant politics are important to this study, and as such they are duly examined, but what is most significant here are queer engagements with culture—specifically the musical performances, representations and roles that have assisted in the production and maintenance of queer identities. “Through our engagement with cultural representations we find the grounds for alternative self-representation and identity”, suggests cultural theorist, Elspeth Probyn (1998, p. 60). As such, I suspect that it is through particular musical engagements that some queer-identified people enact alternative modes of self-presentation and identity.

In order to explain and understand queer forms of musical performance, we must first develop an understanding of the social and cultural structures that have produced these various musical responses. To achieve this understanding, a thorough literature survey of queer theory and the queer musical cultures under investigation is required. A critical appraisal of the existing literature is accompanied by historical research for the purpose of providing insight into the contemporary lived experiences discussed in Chapter Nine. Moreover, an understanding of the existing musical literature and epistemologies of gender and sexuality contributes to one of the aims of this research project, which is to provide an historically grounded and theoretically enriched survey of queer musical participation and the role music has played in the formation and consolidation of queer scenes. This research aims to encapsulate and extend upon the queer musico-sexual work that has come before it, and as such the theoretical and historical reviews presented throughout this research allow the reader to more thoroughly understand the sensibilities and social conditions that have produced various forms of queer musical practice.

The detailed attention to both historical and contemporary accounts of queer sexuality and queer musical practices establishes the researcher’s—that is my—voice
as authoritative and informed by multiple cultural and historical perspectives. In the
tradition of queer studies, which Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga acknowledge
“straddle disciplines while breaking down barriers” (2006, p. xiv), this project
similarly spans disciplines and pushes the frontier of traditional musicological work.
Bringing together and filtering significant data from related fields of study and
interweaving these with real-world experience positions this research as
interdisciplinary—that is, it draws upon and seeks to present knowledge that moves
beyond the traditional foci of any single aforementioned discipline. Moreover, it
seeks to achieve an integrative perspective on queer musico-sexual and socio-sexual
phenomena. An interdisciplinary project such as this, which has arisen from the field
of musicology yet draws upon cultural studies, critical theory, gender and sexuality
studies, postmodern and poststructuralist philosophies, aims to resist the limited
scope and historical fixidity of traditional musicology,⁶ and embrace the barrier-
breaking project of queer.

While much of the literature is drawn from scholarly sources across a variety of
disciplines, this project also aims to siphon knowledge from popular texts and
present this knowledge with a degree of academic sophistication. Since much of the
work of queer cultures has taken place outside of the academy and mainstream
cultural industries, some of the literature under examination here (particularly in
Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine) has been drawn from internet sources, street
zines⁷ and other non-mediated forms of subcultural communication. However, in
these instances every attempt has been made to present a clear and sophisticated
account of queer musical participation, and to avoid where possible merely
replicating the rhetoric of subcultural participants. As a participant in local queer
culture myself, I have drawn upon my intimate knowledge of queer subcultural
tropes and balanced this with my academic skill to assist me in the task of identifying
and deciphering such texts.

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⁶ This will be discussed further in Chapter Four, “From the Straight and Narrow”, p. 91.
⁷ Zines are a type of independent grass-roots publishing. They are usually low-budget magazines often
reproduced using black and white photocopiers and distributed by hand to underground networks of
like-minded people. With the advent of the internet many zines are now distributed globally in
electronic format. The most significant collection of zines (both paper and electronic types) that
relate to this research can be found online at the Queer Zine Archive Project, http://www.qzap.org
Autoethnography

In the preface to *Queering the Popular Pitch*, the editors suggest “critical or scholarly writing is always to some extent involved with self identity and its attendant politics, no less when it is undeclared” (Brett, Wood & Thomas, 1994, p. viii). As such, autoethnography is used to declare and articulate my own identity and position within this research. Autoethnography unapologetically exposes the researcher’s bias. It challenges the dichotomies between subjectivity and objectivity, and visibly locates the author within the field of enquiry (Coffey, 2003). Autoethnography can be seen as a response to the problems of invisible and objective authorship because it brings the author back into focus and celebrates the vulnerable, personal and emotional qualities that are deeply embedded in my research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnography is the project of telling a story—which in this case is a portion of the author’s life story. Eric Mykhalovsky argues that “to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience” (1996, p. 141). Although I am not the central character in this story, I play a significant role as the mediator of other people’s stories, and thus my story gives authority to my interpretive voice. It demonstrates the formation of my own subjectivity and the social and cultural processes that contributed to this. Moreover, it highlights my first-hand understanding of the pleasures and pains associated with queer praxis—that is, being and doing queer.

In the context of this research, autoethnography has assisted me to position myself as a critical ethnographic researcher, one who is critical of heteronormative discourses and their oppression of queer identities. Jole L. Kincheloe and Peter L. McLaren suggest that the critical ethnographer must “enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site” (1994, p. 140). In Chapter One it is made clear that personal experience has lead me to believe that music can help to overcome heteronormativity’s oppressive gender and sexual norms, and that this research seeks to understand how other queer-identified people have employed music in this way. The autoethnographic elements of this research project are contained primarily in the prelude and postlude to this study. However, the placing of autoethnographic writing within the design of this study does not lessen its significance. As a self-identified queer and musician, it is my own personal
experience that has been the primary motivation for undertaking this research project. Personal narrative and self-reflexivity are used to frame this study, while personal knowledge gained through my insider status within local queer cultures is woven into the case studies presented in Chapter Nine.

**Participant Observation**

This research contributes to the construction of queer archives and to the recording of queer memory and experience. As Judith Halberstam notes, in a case such as this where an alliance exists between minority academic fields and minority cultural production, “queer academics … can participate in the ongoing project of recording and interpreting queer culture and circulating a sense of its multiplicity and sophistication” (2003, p. 318). Given the relative obscurity of Brisbane’s queer culture outside of those who actively participate in it, recording and illuminating this knowledge for both the queer and non-queer reader is a key feature of this research.

In order to record queer experiences and select the specific cases to be studied in Chapter Nine, I assumed the role of the participant observer within Brisbane’s queer scene. The role of the participant observer relates to a researcher who makes themselves known to the group they are observing. Observing through participation and activity, a researcher of this kind documents group activities, seeks out group members, familiarises themselves with the members and asks them to explain various aspects of group activity (Robson, 1993). Within the context of this research, observations of queer musical activities were conducted over a four and a half year period beginning in January 2004 through to July 2008. During this time, I regularly attended club events, live concerts and festivals staged by members of Brisbane’s gay and queer scenes, and engaged in hundreds of hours of social conversation with musicians, performers and event organisers from both scenes. The observations made during this time are woven into the interview data in Chapter Nine and form the basis of three case studies of local queer musical practitioners.

These case studies are what Robert E. Stake refers to as instrumental case studies in that their primary purpose is “to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory” (1994, p. 237). In this instance the issues include the ways in which queer-identified people use music as a means of gender and sexual expression. However, this is not the sole purpose of the case studies herein, because they also facilitate the
telling of queer stories and are a testimony to queer lives and experiences countering the historical silence of the queer voice. The participant observations made are detailed in the case studies in Chapter Nine using thick description (Geertz, 1973). Thick description is a term that anthropologist Clifford Geertz first used to describe his form of ethnography. Referring to the work of Geertz, Denzin (1994) proposes that thick description does not merely detail behaviour or happenings, but rather provides a meaningful context that offers greater insight into the reasons for such behaviour. Thick description of musical performances and scene interactions makes possible more detailed interpretations—interpretations that are fully informed by the ethnographic data, queer theory and the relevant cultural history of the performances being studied. Thus the analytical dimensions of my case studies were also influenced by grounded theory methods, which call for such close examination (Lofland & Lofland, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory underscores the importance of situating qualitative research within relevant historical and cultural contexts and promotes reflexive rhetorical analysis of the field in question (Charmaz, 2000). I return to a more detailed discussion on grounded theory as a strategy of this enquiry in the section titled “Process”, below. Based on the simultaneous collection and analysis of data as well as on critical reflection of observations, detailed field notes and interviews, this method allowed me to further my interpretative understanding of the field and construct organic methods of data analysis that were relevant to each individual case.

My role as a participant observer of queer musical cultures is directly related to my ‘insider’ status or complete membership within Brisbane’s queer scene. This kind of work has a well-established history in sociological and cultural studies (Adler & Adler, 1987; Brewer, 2000; Merton, 1972; Sprague, 2005; Wolcott, 1999), and has become a relatively common tactic among some areas of social research strategy—particularly, studies of youth cultures—in recent times (Bennett, 2003; Hodkinson, 2005). There are many advantages to being an insider researcher or complete member of the field under investigation: deeper levels of understanding are available to the complete member because of their insider position and their closer and more regular contact with the field; trust is often able to be generated more quickly between researcher and researched; the insider’s heightened awareness and shared experiences of the field make access to, and selection of, research participants easier and better informed; and lines of communication between this type of researcher and
the subjects of their study are often able to be kept open throughout the entire research process due to their continuing contact with the field (Adler & Adler, 1987; Baca Zinn, 1979).

While the advantages and outcomes of insider research within contemporary subcultures are well documented (see examples of this approach in Hodkinson, 2002; Malbon, 1999; Weinstein, 2000) it is not faultless, nor does it presume that the insider necessarily offers an absolute or correct way of seeing and/or reading the culture under investigation. “There is no monolithic insider view”, argues Wolcott, “every view is a way of seeing, not the way of seeing (1999, p. 137, emphases in original). As such, some have cautioned against privileging this position noting that, as an insider or complete member one does not automatically escape the problem of knowledge distortion, as insider views will be always be multiple and contestable (Hodkinson, 2005; Sprague, 2005; Wolcott, 1999). Given this, I do not assert my view—that is my view as an insider—as absolute certainty. Rather, it should be thought of as a perspective on queer uses of music and musical participation; a perspective that has been informed by personal experience and balanced with scholarly rigour.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

The combination of participant observations and in-depth, semi-structured interviews forms the basis for the case studies presented in Chapter Nine. The semi-structured interview technique was chosen because it allows for a degree of “flexibility balanced by structure” (Gillham, 2005, p. 70), which was useful in this instance because each interviewee had a different story and differing experiences to share; via this technique, I was able to probe these when necessary. A convenient sample of participants was selected on the basis of my observations and knowledge as a complete member of Brisbane’s gay and queer scene. At the time of the interviews, all interviewees were active participants on the scene fulfilling the role of musician (which extends to the role of the deejay) and/or musical performer (accounting for drag performers who are not instrumentalists or singers). In some cases, the interviewees also took part in the organisation of queer club events, and in these instances participants were also encouraged to comment on this role. Furthermore, at the time of the interviews none of the musicians and/or performers interviewed were
contracted to a record company or performance agency, thus all artists maintained complete creative control over their musical products and visual styles.

Upon receiving university ethics clearance for this study in March 2005, I began the interview process. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted, involving a total of thirteen musicians and performers, with each interview lasting somewhere between two and three hours. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed at a later date, thus the direct quotes provided in the case studies in Chapter Nine are quoted verbatim. The majority of the interviews were one-on-one, however due to time constraints some of the interviewees chose to be interviewed with their fellow performers. In the case of group interviews, every attempt was made to ensure that each group member had the chance to explain themselves as fully and as honestly as possible. To ensure this, I contacted each participant prior to the scheduled interview and clarified that they were comfortable discussing details of their gender and sexual identity in front of their fellow group members. No one objected—in fact, all participants indicated that they regularly had these sorts of conversations with fellow performers, and they were very comfortable with this level of disclosure. Interviewees were also encouraged to maintain a dialogue with me after the interview, and many did. Discussions of this nature were not tape-recorded or directly transcribed. Instead, I maintained a field journal in which I recorded detailed notes as soon as possible after the discussions occurred. Within the body of this document, all participants are identified either by their actual name or their stage name, depending on their individual specifications at the time of the interview.

Prior to the commencement of this research, I did not have a relationship with any of the people interviewed in either a personal, social or scholarly capacity. While I was aware of these people and their musical roles within the queer scene prior to conducting the interviews, I was an unfamiliar scene participant to them. Throughout the research process, however, social relationships and friendships were formed which I reflect upon in the postlude to this study.

In undertaking these interviews, I assumed the role of the critical ethnographer. I was not only concerned with the musical activities of the interviewees but also the social, cultural and political situations they negotiated and subverted in their performances. The critical ethnographer attempts to “broaden the political dimensions of cultural work while undermining existing oppressive systems” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 369). Assuming this role, I questioned all my interview
participants on matters concerning gender and sexual politics, as well as on their own identity politics, and I prompted them to discuss their personal experiences of gender and/or sexual oppression.

**Process**

It should be noted that the linearity of this discussion does not reflect the research process. In many ways, the lived process of this research was akin to my own experiences of becoming, and living as, a queer-identified person in that it was far more reflexive, reactionary and erratic than the final design of this research project would suggest. The process was also quite organic and intuitive, driven in parts by my insider knowledge, my emotions and experiences as a queer-identified person and my researcher intellect. In her discussions of anthropology and ethnography, Ruth Behar reflects upon the efforts at engaging with emotion in research and writing. She states: “I think what we are seeing are efforts to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (1996, p. 174). These words are significant. They illuminate many of the challenges and complexities of this project: the delicacy necessitated when attending to subjectivity and meaning in analysis and the unmapped terrain that is the intersection of passion and intellect, art and life. Behar points also to the difficulties of balancing perceptions gleaned through the heart with those from the head. Cautioning against detached and disinterested critique, she welcomes “forms of criticism which are not immune to catharsis; forms of criticism which can respond vulnerably, in ways we must begin to try to imagine” (1996, p. 175).

Aware of the pitfalls of misrepresenting my subjects and reducing them to words on a page or tabulated data, I was determined to become intimately familiar with them, their work and their worlds. In doing so I brought a degree of emotionality and vulnerability upon myself and my work by removing the distance between observer and observed; by listening to my subjects with an openness to feeling and compassion; by engaging with them through the sharing of experience. Herbert Blumer suggests that “the person who … has a intimate familiarity with the area of experience that he is studying, should make a more able analysis than one who is less well equipped in these respects” (1986, p. 123). As such, the strength of this study—of its analysis and critique—lies in the strategies of enquiring and interpretative
processes that were used to draw the theory, literature, observations and interview data together.

As identified earlier, the analytical dimensions of this work presented in Chapters Nine and Ten, are influenced by constructivist grounded theory methods. Grounded theory encourages a multiple method approach: it does not seek to verify, to prove or disprove a grand theory; rather, its purpose is to generate theory and give cause to the realities of the research participants and their worlds (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Kathy Charmaz claims:

A constructivist grounded theory recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed. Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the “discovered” reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. Researcher and subjects frame that interaction and confer meaning upon it. The viewer then is part of what is viewed rather than separate from it. (2000, pp. 523–524)

Charmaz (2000) suggests that seeking meaning and gaining understanding of a research subject in this way brings us closer to being able to fulfil Blumer’s (1969) call for intimate familiarity. Moreover, this process not only recognises but privileges researcher/researched interactivity, arguing that the lack of separation ultimately produces more insightful analysis.

Constructivist grounded theory is a useful analytical tool for understanding lived realities and for furthering interpretative understanding because it allows the empirical researcher to generate and to reconfigure theory based on their observations. The generation of theory in this case, suggests Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, “evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (1994, p. 273). Throughout this research process I have developed analytical interpretations based on the literature and participant observations, which focused my selection of interview participants and my approach to collecting data from them. In turn, this allowed me to develop and refine my theoretical analyses from which the research conclusions are drawn.

This was not a rigid or prescriptive process, but rather it was interpretative and developed organically by responding to and integrating new observations and information into the theoretical analyses as they appeared. For example, the initial participant observations were conducted with considerable prior knowledge of the musical styles and scenes being observed. This prior knowledge was acquired primarily from the literature and from my personal association with local queer
music scenes. Yet, after gathering and synthesising the initial observations, it became clear that flexibility and variation were evident in each case. The unexpected variations and nuances between and among queer music scenes prompted me in many instances to give greater thought to the literature; generating new theories and new suppositions; calling, in all instances, for further observation. I was then able to address and seek explanation for these theories and observations in the semi-structured interviews. The continuing and deepening observation process provided the starting points for building my analysis. This was then strengthened by the interview data and my sustained involvement and semi-regular dialogues with my research participants. Interview data was initially gathered with the intention of explaining and illustrating the research questions, the style, approach and observed flexibility and variation of queer musical expressions—which for the most part it did—while also reshaping the existing theory and generating new theoretical conclusions.

“The back and forth interplay with data” and the subsequent theoretical developments which Strauss and Corbin (1994, p. 282) position as central to a grounded theory approach, are attend to explicitly in Chapter Nine of this study. Here, I move back and forth between lived experiences and empirical observations, interweaving queer theory along with a variety of musical and subcultural theories and styles to render the subjects’ world visible and to clarify their tactical meanings and social realities. The processes of grounded theory necessitate the development of a relationship between myself and my research participants, and call for the inclusion of their voices, stories and perspectives (as well as mine) in my analysis. This accommodates a balance of theoretical representation and catharsis in my written account of the research subjects, the studied phenomena and in my own self-presentation through an evocative, scholarly and aesthetically gratifying presentation of the data (Charmaz, 2000). The diagram presented in Figure 1 (below) represents the processes of this research. It also depicts the queer musical scenes under examination and their relationship to the case studies presented in Chapter Nine.
Figure 1: Approach to fieldwork and data collection
The Research Structure

This research project is divided into five parts, each containing a number of chapters. Part I outlines the motivations and methods of this study. Part II details the relevant theory and landscape of the study. Part III surveys and critically discusses queer sensibilities and queer musical practices, including camp, drag and genderfuck, queer punk and queercore, and queer feminist musical work. This proves to be a necessary precursor to understanding the broader cultural context in which the localised musical practices and case studies are located. Part IV presents localised case studies and observations relating to queer musical practices in Brisbane. And finally, Part V presents the conclusions of this study, propositions for further research and a brief personal reflection. A detailed account of the project’s structure is summarised below:

Part I: Prelude, Motivations and Methods

• In Chapter One an autoethnographic prelude outlines the personal motivations for this study and is used as an entry point into this discussion. Through declaring myself to my audience, the readership of this study gains insight into my self-positioning both within this study and within the queer musical cultures under examination. This chapter also provides a scholarly rationale for this research that gives further validity to this study and outlines the preliminary research questions that have arisen from both scholarly and self-critique.

• Chapter Two details the research design. It identifies the research as being subjective and qualitative and it argues the methodological construction that is subsequently implemented in the investigation of the research questions outlined in Chapter One.

Part II: Theoretical and Disciplinary Landscapes

• Chapter Three provides a thorough literature survey of queer theory as well as theories relating to music and identity. It discusses the emergence of queer theory and many of the contentions surrounding it and offers a broad overview of lesbian, gay and queer culture and their attendant politics. The theory presented in this chapter provides the basis for a focused and contextualised discussion of queer sensibilities and queer musical cultures in the chapters that follow. Based on the data presented in Chapter Three, the research aims are more acutely
defined and extended, accounting for the nuances and complexities that have been excavated from this theoretical discussion.

- Chapter Four deals with the musicological landscape and the integration of queer theory within musicology. Since this research project is located across both disciplines, it is necessary to provide an overview of queer working within musicology and illustrate the contentions that arise when queer musicological research is conducted. Emerging from this discussion are a number of imperatives that musicology needs to address if it is to accommodate queer theory and be representative of queer musical artefacts. As this project is firmly located within queer and musicological discourses, this chapter provides a basis for the generation of new theories and approaches to musicology that are discussed in the research conclusions and recommendations in Chapter Ten: theories and approaches that informed and have been integrated into this project throughout.

*Part III: The Cultural Context*

- Chapter Five identifies the origins of camp and broadly explores its relationship to homosexual practice and gay male culture. Camp is then discussed in terms of its relationship to contemporary queer discourses, identifying camp as a politicised form of queer parody. Camp sensibilities are overtly present in both drag and queer punk cultures. Moreover, the majority of musical performers who are closely examined in this research project employ camp extensively in their work. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a general understanding of camp’s functions before attempting to analyse and critique the application of camp within specific musical contexts.

- Chapter Six investigates drag as a performance of queer corporeality, arguing that drag is a transgressive performance, which subverts (rather than authenticates) the rigid gender binaries of heteronormativity. A brief history of drag will provide the necessary background to enable a solid understanding of drag performance and politics. This is then followed by a contemporary overview of drag performances, leading into a focused discussion surrounding the roles and identities of female drag kings and bio queens. Theories of genderfuck, the musicality of drag and the significance of lip-synching are also featured in this discussion, as it is necessary to understand their significance because they inform
the case study of Brisbane-based drag king and bio queen troupe the Twang Gang, to be presented in Chapter Nine.

- Chapter Seven investigates queer punk, focusing particularly on the emergence of queercore. Contextualised within a history of punk rock style and ideology, this chapter discusses the emergence of queercore, outlining its motivations, musicality, politics, narrative qualities and sensibilities. Focusing specifically on queercore’s musical and extra-musical features, this chapter highlights the parallels between queercore and queer theory, noting queercore’s propensity towards disidentification. Drawing on the earlier work of Robert DeChaine (1997) who identifies queercore’s sensibility of play, this chapter builds upon DeChaine’s argument, demonstrating how it is not only ‘play’ but a highly sophisticated form of camp that is characteristic of queercore style. It suggests that both play and camp inform queercore sensibility, a sensibility that queercore artists use to problematise the binary logics of heteronormativity and enact their queer identity through punk rock musical forms. An understanding of queer punk and specifically queercore methods and motivations will provide a necessary grounding for the case study of Brisbane-based queer punk outfit Anal Traffic, as the information presented here is drawn into the case study of Anal Traffic presented in Chapter Nine.

- Chapter Eight provides a brief history of feminist popular music-making. It begins by identifying the lesbian feminist traditions of womyn’s music, and then proceeds to argue that in recent times we have seen the emergence of a new queer agenda across feminist popular music production, particularly within the context of the riot grrrls movement. This chapter demonstrates how both queer and feminist concerns have been central to younger generations of pro-female musicians. Moreover, it reiterates some of the contentions that exist between queer and feminist politics, and provides a necessary grounding for the case study of Brisbane-based queer feminist outfit Bertha Control in Chapter Nine.

**Part IV: The Local Scene and Case Studies**

- Chapter Nine presents the case studies of queer-identified musicians and musical performers from Brisbane. This chapter illuminates the musical behaviours and the gender and sexual politics of Brisbane’s queer scene. It then focuses specifically on three musical groups from this scene, detailing their gender and sexual politics as negotiated via music and musical performance. The case
studies presented here are checked against the theories and historical literature presented in Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six and Seven. These case studies illustrate the actual lived experience of queer scene members and musicians, reflecting upon the confluent and sometimes discordant relationship between queer lives and queer theory. Because studies are often charged with failing to account for lived experience (Edwards, 1998; Plummer, 1998; Walters, 1996), this chapter ensures that lived experience is prominently represented.

**Part V: Conclusions and Postlude**

- Chapter Ten re-examines the initial research questions, and proposes the research conclusions that have emerged from the data sources presented in the main body of the research. It highlights the significance of music in queer identity work and the features of queer music. Drawing on the discourses of queer and musicology (presented in Chapter Four), this chapter outlines recommendations and speculative possibilities for future approaches to queer musicological enquiries. Moreover, it proposes some general analogies and strategies that benefit the way queerness and musical activity are conceptualised, and proposes further areas of investigation that have been prompted by this study.

- An autoethnographic postlude forms the closing section of this research project. It sketches my personal journey throughout this process, explaining how the research process—particularly the ethnographic practices and social interactions that produced much of this knowledge—has impacted upon how I have come to understand myself; my gender, sexuality and musicality; my queerness; and my relationship to Brisbane’s queer scene.

Much like the research process I described earlier, the relationship between each of these parts and between the various chapters is not linear, but rather reflects the complexities and intricacies of ‘real-life’ practices and experiences. The information presented in Parts II and III of this study share complex relationships with the case studies presented in Part IV and the conclusions in Part V. Figure 2 (below) offers a visual representation of this relationship. It illustrates the internal structuring of the chapters and parts, and graphically emphasises the connections that each chapter and case study share before the research project proceeds.
Figure 2: Structural relationship between chapters and parts
Part II
THEORETICAL AND DISCIPLINARY LANDSCAPES

Part II details the theoretical paradigms employed in this study and surveys the current thinking regarding queer theory and cultural politics, as well as theories pertaining to music and identity. It provides a history of musicology and identifies the shortcomings of the discipline regarding the integration of queer theory within musicological work.
All musicians, we must remember, are faggots in the parlance of the male locker room. (Brett, 1994a, p. 371)

Brett’s above assertion poignantly reminds us that, in certain social settings, musicality, queer sexuality and gender share a recognised and often disparaging interconnectivity. While the reasons for this were partially outlined in Chapter One, they are reasons that extend beyond the socially constructed nature of music and its institutions of study — reasons that are rooted more deeply in matters of human identity and subjectivity. This chapter attends to these matters by offering definition and explanation of: music and musicality; gender, sexuality and queerness; and identity and its attendant politics. It deals directly with the emergence of queer theory and its impact upon our understanding of gender and sexual identity, outlining the theoretical suppositions upon which proceeding arguments draw. It offers a theoretical account of musicality and musically constructed identities. And finally, it refines the research questions, accounting for the theoretical suppositions expounded herein.

Theoretical Paradigms

This dissertation draws heavily on queer theories, theories of music and identity, as well as musicological analysis in its criticisms and conclusions — all of which are deeply embedded in the conditions of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Therefore, it is necessary to start by establishing a foundational understanding of both theoretical paradigms before further unpacking the specificities of queer theory, musical identity theories and musicological discourse.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a condition of late twentieth century industrialised societies articulated in the work of Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson.
Postmodernism is largely a critique of modernist ideas. While modernism is encapsulated by Enlightenment thinking, valuing objectivity, rationality and scientific methods of understanding both the natural and social worlds, by contrast postmodernism values subjective critique, critical enquiry and contextual analysis. In 1979, Lyotard first published *The Postmodern Condition*, claiming that we had been living in a generic postmodern social condition since the 1960s. Postmodernism, as Lyotard and Jameson understood it, was more that just a new academic or creative methodology, it was a large-scale epistemic shift. In this shift, universal meta-narratives of Western thought (such as the existence of singular truth) which had previously informed scientific and social scientific knowledge over the past two centuries, were beginning to unravel. In 1984, Jameson published *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, characterising the social and cultural implications of postmoderism. In this text he identified that: postmodern aesthetics display a penchant for irony; postmodern subjectivity is schizophrenic and less concerned by its historicity; and postmodern idealism is decidedly utopian on the grounds that one’s dreams are potentially achievable (Jameson, 1992). These characteristics of postmodernism are explicit in queer theory, and will become evident once we interrogate queer theory later in this chapter.

Postmodernism has encouraged interdisciplinary enquiries, increased plurality in cultural representations and criticised the totalising effect of institutionalised knowledge, favouring instead richer understandings of human difference. Loosely defined, postmodernism suggests “things are not certain, orderly or fixed, but are instead uncertain, disorderly and fluid” (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 109).

Postmodernism is constituted by a broad set of ideas, and this makes a concise summary of its ideologies and effects difficult and heavily dependant upon a disciplinary perspective.

Queer theory is a derivative of postmodernity, and from a queer perspective postmodernism’s critique of identity, rationality, essentialism and objectivity has been enormously beneficial to the dissolution of fixed and impermeable conditions and categories and to the study of fluid identities, states of multiplicity, queer gender and queer sexuality (Tierney, 1997). In comparison, musicology is not a postmodern derivative: however, it has been greatly influenced and reconfigured in its advent. As I discuss in detail in Chapter Four, it is the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of postmodern...
scholarship that has allowed a queer critique of musical composition, performance and reception, permitting also, a musical critique of queer gender and sexuality.

**Poststructuralism**

Poststructuralism is a theory of knowledge and language that is typified by the work of Michael Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. Emerging in France during the 1960s, poststructuralists rediscovered the work of linguistic structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure, who asserted at the beginning of the twentieth century that language was a productive device rather than a representational device: language constructs reality as opposed to merely describing it. “For Saussure, language is not some second-order system whose function is simply to articulate what is already there. Rather, language constitutes and makes significant that which it seems only to describe” (Jagose, 1996, p. 79). Saussure suggested that we reconsider the notion of a self that is expressed through language in favour of a self that is constructed as a result of language. As I discuss in the sections to come, Foucault took up these ideas in his theories of sexual identity, arguing that sexuality is not a natural fact of humanity which we articulate via language, but instead is an identity category constructed through discursive practices. The origins of sexuality are therefore not biologically specific, but rather historically, culturally and socially constructed (Foucault, 1979).

Focusing on the construction of identity and self-identification, Lacan—who was heavily influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis—established a model of subjectivity as something that is learned rather than something inherent within the self. In reference to Lacanian theory, Jagose argues that, “subjectivity is not an essential property of the self, but something which originates outside it. Identity then, is an effect of identification with and against others: being ongoing, and always incomplete, it is a process rather than a property” (1996, p. 79). Both queer theory and theories of musical identity that are discussed at length later in this chapter take up the poststructuralist notion of the subject as:

> An ideological fiction that work[s] to conceal, and thereby perpetuate, modern relations of power… [T]he subject does not exist prior to social structures but is constituted in and through them, and thus it is neither autonomous nor unified but contingent and split. (Corber & Valocchi, 2003, p. 3)

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8 Subjectivity is understood as “a self-conscious perspective of the person or subject” (“Subjectivity”, 1994, p. 519).
The final principle of poststructuralism that needs elucidating is Derrida’s notion of deconstruction. Deconstruction suggests that one may never find a true or fixed meaning within literary or philosophical texts because meaning is expressed via language, and language is inherently elusive. Derrida opposed the binary logic of Western thought, and used deconstruction to dismantle mutually exclusive terminology such as true/false, good/bad, natural/unnatural, rational/irrational, thus illustrating that “meanings are not inherent in the thing or action itself but are created by words and their relationship to other words” (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 113). As we will see, feminist and queer theories have taken up this notion, thus suggesting that categories of woman and homosexual exist in negative binary opposition to the categories of man and heterosexual; therefore, their meaning is dependant upon that which the other category is not.

**Demystifying and Delimiting the Terms**

This dissertation focuses on the convergence and interplay between music and queer identities. Each has multivariable functions and is multiply informed by the complexities of human experiences, circumstances and states of being in the world. Music and queerness are open to numerous interpretations, and offer many different truths to those who locate themselves within their practices and identity constructs. The intangibility of music and the multiplicity of the queer subject make this difficult terrain to navigate, so it is essential that I begin by defining the function and treatment of the terms ‘music’, ‘queer’ and ‘identity’ within the scope of this research.

*Music*

The task of defining music and delimiting its constituent characteristics has been problematic for musicologists and musicians for centuries. “‘Music’ is a very small word to encompass something that takes as many forms as there are cultural or subcultural identities. And like all small words, it brings a danger with it” (Cook, 1998, p. 6). Definitions of what constitutes music are both culturally and historically variable, and in many cases are subject to logics of taste and value. For example,

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9 See explanation of Cartesian dualism later in this chapter under the section heading “A Brief Epistemology of Gender”, p. 48.
what one particular generation or culture regards as music, another may consider to be nothing more than noise. Music, understood in its most basic form as organised sound, is located in cultures worldwide and manifests itself in multiple styles and genres, each with characteristics that extend far beyond what is simply heard. For many people music constitutes something far greater than sound objects. As Tia DeNora suggests, “music may serve as a resource for utopian imaginations, for alternative worlds and institutions, and it may be used strategically to presage new worlds” (2000, p. 159).

In the West, what we name and understand to be music is, as Nicholas Cook suggests, “a multiplicity of activities and experiences; it is only the fact that we call them all music that makes it seem obvious that they belong together” (1998, p. 6). To further confound the concept of music, the activities and experiences to which Cook refers are the products of very particular times, places and people who compose, perform, dance, play, sing and listen to a range of different sounds in multiple and conflicting ways. Music in this context, and as it is employed throughout this discussion, extends beyond the sound object itself, focusing instead on the equally valued and interrelated practices of composition, performance and reception. Under no circumstances am I imposing a hierarchical value upon these musical roles, as all musical practices contribute significantly to music’s identity work, which is explored later in this chapter.

Composition is broadly defined as “the activity or process of creating music and the product of such activity” (Blum, 2006, para. 1). However, I would like to extend this definition beyond the creation of instrumental music (where this definition is embedded) and incorporate the role of the songwriter. All of the musical groups discussed here are located in popular musical idioms, and those groups that engage in original composition primarily produce songs. Lyrics are a core component of these songs; therefore, in this context, the role of composer may often be or become interchangeable with the role of lyricist.

In popular music traditions especially, further conflation of musical roles occurs when we introduce and explain the performer (who in some instances is also the composer) and musical performance. In both historical and contemporary Western music practices the performer is frequently undervalued. The performer’s role is sometimes considered a subservient practice to composition, and is often viewed as a reproductive mechanism lacking musical authenticity (Cook, 1998). The performer is
nonetheless a producer of interpretation, contributing significantly to the construction of meaning within popular music practice:

Whether we choose to see the performer as a creative vessel of transmission from composer to audience, or as cog in a three-cog mechanism that can never work with only two cogs … there is no known ramified art of music that is performer-less. (Dunsby, 2006, para. 2)

Herein musical performance is examined in detail. This is not to suggest that musical performance is a more valued role than musical composition or reception, but rather, I suggest that composition and reception are themselves a performance, because “any and all of the activities of human life can be studies ‘as’ performance” (Schechner, 2006, p. 29). Furthermore, I argue that music constitutes a set of reflexive acts that contribute significantly to the identity of the person who is engaging with music.\footnote{This is discussed in detail towards the end of this chapter, in the section titled “Constructing and Performing the Self via Music”, p. 81.}

As I have suggested, reception and social engagement with music constitute yet another performance. Simon Frith acknowledges that “‘listening’ itself is a performance: to understand how musical pleasure, meaning and evaluation work, we have to understand how, as listeners we perform the music for ourselves” (1996, pp. 203–204). In other words, we have to actively decide for ourselves what a piece of music means to us, and negotiate our emotional interaction with the music. While two or more people may listen to the same piece of music, they will inevitably hear (and experience) something different. Sonic difference will always be perceived acoustically, depending on one’s location in relation to the sound source; yet meaningful, ideological differences may not rely upon acoustics at all. Rather, meaning relies on personal experiences and cultural or subcultural contexts. The meaning in music—the narrative, the emotion or significance of it—is thus dependant upon an extraordinary number of personal and social variables. Peraino highlights the necessity for understanding the larger cultural matrix from which music has emerged if we are to accurately perceive its meaning. She proposes that:

The field of ethnomusicology holds as a central tenet that music has meaning only as part of a large cultural matrix; “the music itself” is always a partial or problematic concept. In other words, “the music itself” cannot be divorced from the history of ideas that supports its practice; the ideas set up the conditions under which those practices become and remain meaningful. (2006, p. 8)

Within the scope of this research, the music and musical performances under scrutiny have emerged from a queer cultural milieu, and thus the music itself plays a
significant role in allowing us insight into, and understanding of, the conditions of queer subjectivities and queer culture. Music’s role in this discussion is primarily one of mediation: through music, we may come to understand things about ourselves, others and society that were otherwise unclear or unable to be articulated. As Jacques Attali so accurately acclaims, “music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world. A tool for understanding”…. It is “a radically new theoretical form” that “speak[s] to new realities” (1985, p. 4). For Attali, music gives structure to noise, and the ways in which communities musically structure noise provide insight into the ways in which those communities also structure themselves, their politics and theoretical paradigms. Thus queer music potentially provides insight into queer organisations of subjectivity, community, politics and culture.

Music, then, is an active mechanism that has various functions and takes multiple forms, each highly contextual and vitally performative, insofar as we are either performing music ourselves, or performing music for ourselves. Music is not simply a static object or product, but rather a collection of activities that we may think of as musicking. The definition of musicking proposed by Christopher Small is: “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practising, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (1998, p. 9). No music discussed herein is valued on the basis of technical or structural merit. Instead, the value of music is located in the function that serves within queer identificatory practices: “it is the act of art, the act of creating, of exhibiting, of performing, of viewing, of dancing, of wearing … that is important, not the created object” (Small, 1998, p. 108, emphasis in original).

In Chapter Four, I investigate the discipline of musicology and its methods for constructing and interrogating meaning in greater detail; however, this broad definition of music remains constant throughout, referring to specific musical practices where necessary.

**Queer**

In the history of all that is and has ever been queer, it would seem that queer is and has always been at odds with the normal, and supposedly ‘natural’ behaviour. The etymology of queer poetically evokes the unfixed and ambiguous nature of contemporary queer identity. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, queer is of “doubtful origin” (“Queer”, 1989). The literal English definition of the word itself
implies odd behaviour or abnormal conditions. This is most commonly thought to have originated from the eighteenth century German *quer*, meaning across, oblique, perverse. Yet there is a record of the Scottish *queir*, from 1508, which describes strange, peculiar or eccentric characteristics. The early English word *crew*, meaning crooked or not straight, bears further similarity to queer as we understand it today and provides another etymological link to the contemporary meaning of queer (Leap, 1996). While all semantic origins are plausible and the etymological origins remain poetically ambiguous and unfixed, in essence queer has always maintained a steadfast relationship with the abnormal and continues to do so.

Queer was not used colloquially to describe (homo)sexual behaviour until the end of the nineteenth century. In the popular context, it was first employed by the English-speaking homosexual male subculture as an identificatory label, and later became a pejorative term used against them. The reappropriation of queer as a positive term of reference to lesbian and gay identity began again in the late 1980s and since then has evolved into a term of resistance, positioning itself against the binary organisation of one’s gender and sexuality. Queer poses a significant challenge to the dominant means of organising and naming sexed, gendered and sexual bodies, and as such the rubric of queer offers a political space for all manner of gender and sexual deviants. Queer opposes normalising regimes and debases heteronormative logics by refusing to construct and impose a fixed identity upon a subject that is based on biological sex and binary gender categories. According to Moe Meyer, “‘queer’ … indicates an ontological challenge to dominant labelling philosophies, especially the medicalization of the subject implied by the word ‘homosexual,’ as well as a challenge to the discrete gender categories embedded in the divided phrase ‘gay and lesbian’ (1994, pp. 1–2). In this context, queer is not merely an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual identity, nor is queer simply another word in the homosexual lexicon—like fag, or dyke—relating specifically to homosexual behaviour. Since the early 1990s, queer has become politically and aesthetically mobilised; it now signifies a range of non-normative gender and sexual practices, and is able to move freely between the fixed identity categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual. Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi suggest that, in today’s context:

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11 As discussed extensively in this chapter, queer in the context of queer theory represents “an unfixited site of engagement and contention” (Jagose, 1996, p. 129), and “an identity without an essence” (Halperin, 1995, p. 62).
“[Q]ueer” names or describes identities and practices that foreground the instability inherent in the supposedly stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender and sexual desire…. [Furthermore] queer studies is especially interested in nonnormative forms of identity, or forms in which sex, gender and sexuality do not line up in the socially prescribed way. (2003, p. 1)

It is in this context that queer is employed throughout this research unless otherwise stated.

The noun and adjectival definitions of queer offered thus far name and describe queer subjects, objects and behaviour. However, it is important to note that queer also behaves as a verb. To queer something is literally to ruin or spoil it, or to raise doubt over its authenticity. Within the interdisciplinary fields of queer studies the doubting of authenticity has become, more specifically, the doubting of ‘authentic’ gender and sexual identity and a reaction against the ‘legitimate’ categories of female and male, heterosexual and homosexual and the social power afforded to them. To queer is resist the institutions of heteronormativity by offering an alternative or skewed perspective in the construction of meaning—an interpretation that defies the normative codes and alignment of sex, gender, sexuality and sexual object choice. Therefore, one is able to queer a text, performance or space, and to do so is commonly understood as an act of queering.

Queering is a relatively new function of queer, and since the early 1990s the act of queering has become widely accepted in many fields of social and cultural studies. The act of queering generally implies a reading or criticism that is executed with a queer gaze or from a queer subject position. Queering values explorations of non-normative gender and sexual behaviour, and serves as a criticism of heteronormativity, unsettling preconceptions about sex, gender and sexuality, and the manner in which they relate to one another. Musicological, historical, pedagogical and theological texts such as *Queering the Pitch* (Brett, Wood & Thomas, 1994), *Queering the Renaissance* (Golberg, 1994), *Queering Elementary Education* (Letts & Sears, 1999) and *Queering Christ* (Goss, 2002), highlight the broad scholarly acceptance of queer criticism and the breadth of disciplines that queering has permeated.
Identities and Their Discontents

Age, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, sex, gender, sexuality, disabilities, tastes and talents are all facets of identity that contribute to the way we know ourselves and how we present ourselves to others. We identify ourselves by these various conditions and states of being, yet for each of us these conditions intersect and are valued in a multiplicity of ways. A popular definition of identity derived from psychological discourse suggests that identity is “the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else” (“Identity”, 1989). The fixed sameness that this definition suggests is problematic because identity is a fact of being human in all its multiplicities and therefore impossible to describe as something whole and stable at all times. Regarding the psychological dimensions of identity in a postmodern context, psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen offers these insights from his book The Saturated Self:

The postmodern condition … is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality—to be accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and the good. As the voices expand in power and presence, all that seemed proper, right-minded, and well understood is subverted. In the postmodern world we become increasingly aware that the objects about which we speak are not so much “in the world” as they are products of perspective….Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. (1991, p.7)

Identity in the postmodern era has witnessed the rise of what Jameson (1992) calls the ‘schizophrenic subject’. Benjamin Carson discusses this with reference to Jameson, suggesting:

In postmodern identity, the monadic subject has been replaced by a schizophrenic subject, a multiplicity, whose experience, now that there is no longer a unifying past, present and future, is a “series of pure and unrelated presents in time”. (2003, para. 17)

Jameson’s postmodern conception of identity rejects the oneness, fixidity and determinability of modernist identity, and redefines identity as plural and fluid. For the postmodern subject, identity is a self-comprehensive system of being, informed by fragmentations of social engagement and positioning, experience and knowledge that are expressed in numerous ways. While I recognise that all social engagement, experience and knowledge is potentially transformative, I am immediately concerned with the experiences of the queer subject and the musical expression of their queer subjectivity.
In the context of this discussion, identity is the point of conflux when musical and queer practices become intrinsically linked, inseparable from the body and a necessary part of self-knowledge and self-growth. Identity may also be imagined as a lens I have applied to the examination of musical practices and how musical practices are able to facilitate the expression of queer subjectivity. Dan Fisher notes that, “music provides a template for postmodern identity construction that encompasses incongruity and disparity but can also emerge coherent and comprehensible” (2002, p. 101). As such, it is the aim of this research to produce a comprehensible examination of queer identities within a musical template, an examination that accommodates a range of incongruent and disparate expressions of queerness through music.

Within a queer theoretical framework (which is discussed at length further in this chapter), the notion of identity categories can be troublesome. I suggest this because queer identities and theory largely hinge on the notion of disidentification: a theory that rejects the mobility of minority groups on the bases of identity politics, advocating that identity politics do not offer any resistance to oppression but instead propagate unequal power relations resulting in continuing entrapment. Disidentification is similar to Jameson’s schizophrenic subject in that it proposes an unfixed identity—an identity hybrid—acknowledging biology, sex, gender, sexuality, race, class and desire without forcing one category to determine the other. Disidentification strategically attempts to transform cultural logic by overtly confusing and compounding identity categories. As José Esteban Muñoz explains:

Disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology…. It is a reformating of self within the social, a third term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification. (1997, p. 83)

Queer rejects the heterocentric logics of aligning identity categories as well as prescriptive methods of articulating identity. Furthermore, queer is one means of resisting the dominant discourses of identity as well as counter modes of identification such as lesbian or gay, which are often charged with reinstating the same binary logics as dominant, heteronormative discourse (Butler, 2001; Duggan, 2002; Halberstam, 2005; Meyer, 1994; Sedgwick, 1993).

Queer theory suggests that identity politics are exclusionary and discriminatory, and although I refer to specific genders (male/female/trans/genderqueer), sexualities (gay/lesbian/queer) and other gender and sexual identities extensively throughout
This dissertation, I am in no way suggesting that these identities are fixed or even stable. Instead, I refer to the plurality of postmodern and poststructuralist concepts of identity which, according to Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, “offer some relief from the endless cycle of identity politics since the idea of essential identity is regarded as belonging to a past wedded to ‘grand narratives’ of truth and progress” (2004, p. 74). I suggest that identity is merely a word that allows us to talk about ourselves (and others) in terms of how we perceive ourselves or how we would like to be perceived by others. There is no singular or correct mode of articulation or perception of identity.

There are two fundamental schools of Western sociological thought that dominate theories of identity formation: essentialist and constructionist theories. Essentialism implies that science is capable of deciphering truth by investigating the essence of reality while social constructionism acknowledges that the nature of reality is created by and within societies. With specific reference to sexuality, Steven Epstein summarises each perspective as follows:

“Essentialists” treat sexuality as a biological force and consider sexual identities to be cognitive realizations of genuine, underlying differences; “constructionists” stress that sexuality and sexual identities are social constructions, and belong to the world of culture and meaning, not biology. In the first case, there is considered to be some “essence” within homosexuals that make them homosexual—some gay core of being, or their psyche, or their genetic makeup. In the second case “homosexual,” “gay” and “lesbian,” are just labels, created by cultures and applied to the self. (1987, p. 11)

Both perspectives offer conceptual frameworks pertaining to the nature of gender and sexual identities as they exist in contemporary society; however, only social constructionist perspectives are employed in this research as the essentialist model lacks the flexibility, fluidity and engagement with culture that this study necessitates. The following epistemologies of gender and sexuality trace the shift in thought from an essentialist model to a social constructionist model, thus demonstrating the developments in knowledge that have led to the emergence of queer theory.

**A Prehistory of Queer Theory: Understanding the Origins**

To understand how queer practices impact upon one’s understanding and construction of the self, we must first understand the nature and function of sex, gender and sexuality in its broader sense. Queer theory and queer concepts of sex, gender and sexuality are inextricably postmodern and poststructuralist in nature, and
borrow heavily from feminist scholarship, lesbian and gay studies and critical theory. The following two sections offer a brief epistemology of gender and sexuality as relevant precursors to queer theory demonstrating the intellectual landscape upon which queer theory was formed.

**A Brief Epistemology of Gender**

Historically, Western philosophy has placed crude limitations on the way we think about ourselves, suggesting that who we are can be reduced to simple dichotomies based on differentiating bodies. During the seventeenth century, the French philosopher René Descartes (1998) proposed that the human mind and body were distinct from each other, and could be thought of as two separate conditions of our humanity. This mode of thought became known as Cartesian dualism, and has fostered a history of contention between the value of mind and body, as they exist in a binary division.

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*Table 1: Binary dualisms of Western philosophy*

Binary dualisms are concepts that position themselves in opposition to each other, where each binary pair implies either a positive or negative polarity. Table 1 (above) illustrates some of the dualisms that have existed in Western epistemologies, which have contributed greatly to the epistemology of gender and sexuality, and the relationship between and among categories of sex, gender and sexuality. These
dualisms have been responsible for informing our understanding of a stable and confluent identity. Alliances and subsequent hierarchies have formed between all those concepts listed in the left-hand column of Table 1, such as mind, man and masculinity, and those listed in the right-hand column, such as body, woman and femininity; the latter have always been subservient to the former.

Gender identity has suffered from bodily inscription, allowing us to think only of ourselves in terms of biological sex categories (man or woman) and behave accordingly, thus suggesting that gender is inherited through our biology and is passively static. During the time of first wave feminism (c. mid-1800s until the 1920s), gender was synonymous with biological categories of sex, thus gender was conceived as an essential and biologically inscribed trait. From this perspective, women were unable to escape the binds of femininity because femininity (the act of being female) was inherent in their nature. The physical condition of being a woman was marked by oppression, as binary logic positioned woman as a negative but necessary precondition for man. Furthermore, the small physical and mental differences between men and women were greatly exaggerated to perpetuate a patriarchal system of power (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004).

Cultural and sociological studies of gender were uncommon prior to the late 1960s and 1970s onset of second wave feminism. At this time essentialist concepts of gender begin to unravel when studies in the 1970s into historical and transcultural gender differences proved contradictory to the essentialist universality of womanhood (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). The second wave feminists firmly rejected the essentialist model of gender in favour of a social constructionist perspective. In 1972, Ann Oakley introduced the concept of gender into the field of sociological enquiry. During this time, a line of demarcation was drawn between the biological category of sex (that is, possessing either male or female anatomy) and what became known as the socially and culturally constructed category of gender (that is, behavioural indication of masculinity and femininity). Pioneering feminist texts such as Ann Oakley’s *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972) and Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1972) rejected essentialist notions of gender, suggesting that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (De Beauvoir, 1972, p. 295). A constructionist perspective of gender argues that masculine and feminine behaviour is learned through various social institutions such as the family, community, media and the academy. According to second wave theories, instructions in gender are not actively
sought out or chosen, but rather externally imposed upon the individual by social institutions of power. In a landmark article, “The Traffic in Women: The ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, first published in 1975, feminist theorist Gayle Rubin coined the phrase *sex/gender system* arguing the constructionist perspective of gender and delineating the separation of gender from sex. In effect, Rubin and other second wave feminists suggested that women and men are taught how to behave in masculine or feminine ways; moreover, they are taught that they are only allowed to act according to their biology. While this was a highly valuable argument that reconfigured feminism in the 1970s it was largely based upon oppositional notions of mind/body, nature/culture. Furthermore, feminism was yet to give serious consideration to the impact of sexual identity within the *sex/gender system*, failing to challenge such distinctions as heterosexual/homosexual.

Radical attempts at reconceptualising the emerging paradigms of *sex/gender/sexuality* were made by lesbian feminists who sought a separatist area for gender studies that focused specifically on the solidarity of women. Lesbian feminism was a distinct and more radical faction of second wave feminism that attempted to remove the sexual content from the category of lesbian and reconstruct lesbianism as an identity that all women could assume. This could be achieved by developing a kind of lesbian consciousness through the rejection of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’. Introducing the latter term in her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, Rich (1980) advocated for woman-identification and controversially claimed that all women could assume a lesbian identity by rejecting heterosexuality. Compulsory heterosexuality is the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural and universal form of sexual desire. It suggests that men and women are innately attracted to each other, and leads to an institutionalised inequality of power between women and men and between heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. Rich (1980) suggests that heterosexuality is not natural but a condition that we are coerced into by the patriarchy in order for men to maintain power over women. Woman-identification, she suggests, is a more natural state of being. While queer theory similarly rejects the idea that heterosexuality is natural or innate, it does not use it as leverage in the way lesbian feminists did for the promotion of gender separatism. Lesbian feminism tried to minimise the differences among women, thus uniting them, by removing the conditions of sexual practice and desire from the category of lesbian, effectively conflating categories of gender and sexuality. And
therefore, suggesting that all women—regardless of sexual orientation—could potentially identify as lesbian (Corber & Valocchi, 2003).

In “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”, Rubin (1984) argues that conditions of sexuality and gender need to be theorised separately and that lesbians and other sexual minorities are oppressed within a hierarchy of sexuality. Rubin’s argument proved fundamental to the establishment of queer theory specifically by arguing that the social stratification of sexuality shifts over time according to changing notions of social propriety. Therefore, the stratification of sexuality will subsequently discriminate on the basis of sexual practices, regardless of gender, race or class (Corber & Valocchi, 2003). Rubin and her contemporaries were at the crest of the second wave, predominantly focused on the private and political struggles of women. This agenda was soon to be challenged with the arrival of postmodernity.

Third wave feminists emerged querying the second wave notions of sisterhood and gender-centric identity. While many third wave feminists were largely university educated in the second wave model, their exposure to postmodern and poststructuralist theories and their keen awareness of cultural representations of gender, distinguish them from their predecessors (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). A key example of third wave gender activism is the riot grrrls movement, which began to take shape in the early 1990s. Riot grrrls had a vested interest in popular culture and used pop cultural vehicles such as music to mobilise their cause. As Pilcher and Whelehan suggest:

> Being part of feminism’s third wave means realising one’s own politics through the mass media and popular culture—this is dramatically opposed to the ambitions of second wave feminism to keep its “authenticity” by generally shunning the blandishment of the media for fear of being absorbed by patriarchal power structures. (2004, p. 171)

Among other agendas, the third wave movement sought to remove the ‘victim’ status from women: this concept is exemplified in Naomi Wolf’s 1993 publication *Fire with Fire*. The third wave also proposed a do-it-yourself philosophy, one that continues to resonate with queer activism (Bail, 1996).

During the late 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholarship and gender studies underwent rapid expansion and resulted in ideological fragmentation. While the social constructionist perspectives remained evident throughout, the event of postmodernism and theories of embodiment and corporeality brought about further
change in our understanding of the construction and reality of gender. Critical of oppositions such as mind/body, sex/gender, essentialism/anti-essentialism and nature/culture, the sex/gender line of demarcation was interrogated by feminist theorists Moira Gatens (1983, 1988, 1996) and Elizabeth Grosz (1989, 1994b). These theorists questioned the neutrality and passivity of the body as it is situated within the sex/gender distinction. Gatens challenged the “unreasoned, unargued assumption that the body and the psyche are postnatally passive tabulae rasaes…. [T]he notion that the mind, of either sex is, in initially a neutral, passive entity, a blank slate on which are inscribed various social ‘lessons’…. [The] role of the body—understood as the passive mediator of these inscriptions” (1996, p. 4). Drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray, Grosz argued that bodies are discursively inscribed and culturally produced:

Not only is subjectivity structured with reference to the (symbolic) meaning of the body, but the body itself is the product and effect of symbolic inscription which produce it as a particular, socially appropriate type of body…. The body is thus the site of the intersection of psychical projections; and of social inscriptions. (1989, p. xv)

Corporeal feminisms became concerned with the socio-cultural role of the body and our experiences as embodied subjects, paying particular attention to differences between and among sexed bodies. The body is “unrepresentable”, suggests Gatens: “human bodies are diverse and, even anatomically speaking, the selection of a particular image of the human body will be a selection from a continuum of differences” (1996, p. vii).

The return to the body, especially as a site of unrepresentable and unclassifiable differences, leads us closer to understanding a queer perspective of gender, specifically a perspective that subverts collective and stable gender identity and denaturalises the concept of identity itself. The final theory of gender that I shall address is that which has contributed most significantly to queer theory: Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. In 1990, Butler published Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Although at the time she was not consciously working in the theoretical paradigm of queer, this text was soon appropriated as a seminal work of queer theory, considered by some as queer theory’s founding text (Gauntlett, 2002). In Gender Trouble, Butler argues that gender is in no way natural or stable, suggesting instead that gender is constructed by a series of repeated gestures understood as performative acts. Butler proposes:
Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality … words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (1990, p. 136, emphases in original)

Drawing on the work of her poststructuralist predecessors, Butler argues that gender is discursively produced by social institutions of knowledge that shape our understanding of gender and its essence. Gender discourse—the way in which we describe masculinity and femininity and the repetitive bodily enactments that we associate with lexicons of gender—are, in fact, all that gender is. Gender essence is an illusion, and it is only through discursive re-enforcement and repetitive performance that gender appears real. “Gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again” (Butler, 1988, p. 526).

The gendered body has no ontology. Ontologies of gender are fictions created by disciplinary regimes for the purpose of normalising and limiting gender performance to benefit the appearance of heterosexuality and gender polarity as natural:

Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis: the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress. (Butler, 1990, p. 140)

Therefore, Butler is suggesting the two distinct gender categories of masculinity and femininity that we have come to accept as reality are nothing more than fictions—fictions that are unwittingly performed on ourselves under duress. Those who do not perform as they should risk punishment for appearing to have an unnatural gender identity—that is, a gender identity that does not reflect the current social constitutions of gender. Furthermore, it is a culturally and historically specific performance of gender that informs natural gender identities and ways of being and knowing our gendered selves (Sullivan, 2003). The cultural and historic specificity of gender suggests that gender is not a fixed personal attribute, but rather is a fluid variable of one’s identity that is capable of shifting in different contexts at different times (Gauntlett, 2002). “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of
“Identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990, p. 25). Butler contends that we have no essential gender identity that informs how we behave: instead, how we behave (our performance of gender) is all that our gender identity is. And this gender identity does not express a bodily difference, but rather is a cultural construction and a performance that is an effect of power.

For Butler, the sexed body—like gender—is also a cultural product in that cultural interpretations of gender difference create anatomical sex categories. As Chris Beasley makes clear with reference to Butler’s (1990) work:

Gender … is typically interpreted as derived from the body. Bodily (anatomical) sex is seen as pre-dating culture, as eternal sex, the eternal male female binary. However, in Butler’s analysis, the body is also a gendered performance which is socially constituted as the essence of gender, and it’s an intact, untouched foundation, and is all the more culturally powerful for this interpretation as being outside culture. Indeed, in her view, socially constituted gender creates anatomical sex, rather than the other way around, in the sense that the former makes the latter relevant in social practice. And if gender does not follow automatically from anatomical sex, then it is not axiomatic that gender refers only to the two categories designated in the binary men/women distinction. (2005, p. 101)

Since gender is not fixed to the sexed body, we are able to perform our gender in multiple and conflicting ways that challenge the distinction of man/woman and the false dualities of the sex/gender paradigm. To do so, suggests Butler (1990), is to cause gender trouble. Thus, gender trouble is “created by not ‘doing’ gender as it is suppose to be done” (Hekman, 2000, p. 292)—that is, doing gender in a way that problematises the sex/gender system.

Feminist scholar Martha Nussbaum (1999) criticises Butler and her work in *Gender Trouble*, arguing that its language is unnecessarily complex; it fails to attend to the public realities of gender for many people; and it neglects to offer specific details outlining exactly how one might go about causing gender trouble. However, Butler (1990) does suggest that gender trouble can be done by revealing the performative nature of gender through parody or pastiche, and by exemplifying the discontinuity between sex, gender and sexuality. Butler’s work is revisited and elaborated upon in the proceeding sections that deal specifically with queer theory.12

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12 Refer to discussions later in this chapter, in the section titled “Sex, Gender, Sexuality and Performativity”, p. 68 and “Distinguishing Performance and Performativity”, p. 71.
A Brief Epistemology of (Deviant) Sexuality

The act of “sex has no history”, says David Halperin. “It is a natural fact, grounded in the functioning of the body, and, as such, it lies outside of history and culture” (1993, p. 416). While sex as an activity much like eating or sleeping may have no history, the culturally produced notion of sexuality is historical. Much of the work concerning the advent of the modern homosexual and the genealogy of sexuality is credited to Michael Foucault, who in 1976 wrote a three-volume work titled The History of Sexuality. According to Halperin:

Foucault did for “sexuality” what feminist critics had done for “gender.” That is, Foucault detached “sexuality” from the physical and biological sciences (just as feminism had detached “gender” from the facts of anatomical sex, of somatic dimorphism) … He divorced “sexuality” from “nature” and interpreted it, instead, as a cultural production. (1990, p. 7)

The History of Sexuality revolutionised our knowledge of sexual discourse, suggesting that sexuality in modern Western societies is a relatively new concept, emerging in the latter part of the nineteenth century. While many people were having sex (in various forms) prior to the advent of sexuality, the sex act had not until then corresponded to a category of sexual identification (Foucault, 1979). Instead, only ‘abnormal’ sex acts such as sodomy, oral sex and other non-procreative methods of sex were legislated against. Such acts were deemed unnatural and sinful because they denied the reproductive destiny of fluids omitted during sex (Sullivan, 2003). Any sex act that was not in the interest of procreation was considered a social and moral abomination—an abomination that potentially anyone was capable of committing.13

History offers many accounts of men and women engaging in same-sex sexual activity; it is commonly understood to have occurred across the cultures of ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, China and Japan. Similarly, Western histories exhibit traces of same-sex activity; however, until the mid-nineteenth century these acts were not considered to be the behaviour of a homosexual person, because at this time the homosexual person did not exist. In 1869 the Austrian born journalist Karl-Maria Kertbeny (also known as K.M. Benkert) coined the term ‘homosexual’ in reference to people who engaged in same-sex activity intending the term to identify an innate physical attraction between two people of the same sex. He wrote a letter to German legislators calling for the emancipation of homosexuals, suggesting that people who

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13 Christianity was paramount in purporting the sinfulness of such sexual acts because the Christian church believed that the male sperm was the seed of human life, and to ejaculate without the intention of procreation was wasting the seed and therefore wasting a potential human life.
partook in these activities should not be punishable by law because homosexuality is
innate and therefore cannot constitute immoral behaviour. Kerbeny’s actions marked
the beginning of, and partially set the agenda for, the homosexual rights movement
to follow (Hunt, 1992; Jagose, 1996).

During the mid- to late part of the nineteenth century the medical profession
exhibited growing concern (and intrigue) regarding the nature and treatment of
homosexual activity, and this resulted in the publication of many new theories. The
first significant publication was by Karl Westphal, a German neurologist and
psychiatrist who published an article in 1870 titled “Contrary Sexual Sensations”.
According to Foucault, this article marked the conception of the homosexual as a
subject of psychological and physiological enquiry: the homosexual had become a
new ‘species’ and homosexuality was born:

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a
childhood in addition to being a try of life, a life for, and a morphology, with an
indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his
total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at
the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle;
written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself
away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature.
(Foucault, 1979, p. 43)

The reconfiguration of the habitual sinner into the homosexual as a type of person
raised questions surrounding the legalities of homosexual activity. German lawyer
Karl Heinrich Ulrich began arguing in the mid-1860s that homosexual acts should
not be punished because they were a fact of nature (albeit an uncommon one). Ulrich
suggested that “some males are born with a strong feminine element or psyche …
[and] some females are born with a strong masculine drive” (cited in Sullivan, 2003,
p. 4). Ulrich’s conclusions were highly influential, especially upon the emerging
field of sexology. However, his dichotomous logic clearly perpetuated the binary
dualisms that have configured the lesbian as a masculine female and the gay man as
a feminine male (Sullivan, 2003).

Notable sexologists such as Westphal and his German contemporary Richard
von Krafft-Ebing skewed Ulrich’s assertions of naturally occurring homosexuality.
Instead, they maintained it was a disease of the mind, or psychological illness,
advocating that homosexuals were degenerate human beings. Furthermore,
homosexuals were considered to be ‘inverts’—a theory which argued that male
homosexuals were women ‘trapped’ in men’s bodies and female homosexuals were
men ‘trapped’ in women’s bodies. In 1897, doctor Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin with an agenda to educate the public about homosexuality in order to reduce unnecessary suffering and persecution. Hirschfeld understood same-sex attraction somewhat differently to Krafft-Ebing and Westphal. Initially, Hirschfeld built upon Urlich’s argument suggesting that homosexuality was a congenital condition and the homosexual was a kind of ‘third sex’—an amalgamation of both masculinity and femininity. As his studies progressed however, he radicalised his thinking and came to acknowledge a form of sexual pluralism that preposed multiple forms of human sexuality in contrast to the rigid polarity of other nineteenth-century paradigms (Sullivan, 2003). Sullivan states that Hirschfeld “positioned a notion of infinite sexual variability that he compared to the distinctiveness of fingerprints … [and he] totally undermined the distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ forms of sexuality and challenged the popular theory of constitutional degeneracy” (2003, p. 12). Attempts to ‘cure’ homosexuality were erroneous under Hirschfeld’s model: instead, he advocated for legal and moral acceptance of sexual difference. and thus became a figure of early gay rights activism.

Theories of sexuality stated thus far are commonly united by their assertion that inverts exhibit a form of gender-crossing—thus male inverts are considered effeminate and female inverts are mannish in character. British doctor and sexual psychologist Havelock Ellis marks an adjustment in thinking about sexual identity in these exclusive terms. While Ellis remained convinced that inversion was congenital, he controversially refuted the claim that it was a disease. Following these claims in 1896, Ellis went on to publish an article on “Sexo-aesthetic Inversion” in 1913, which makes a distinction between two different types of invert. It suggests that a subject may exhibit sexual inversion and/or aesthetic inversion. Ellis proposes:

By “sexual inversion” we mean exclusively such a change in a person’s sexual impulses, the result of inborn constitution, that impulse is turned towards individuals of the same sex while all other impulses and tastes remain those of the sex to which the person by anatomical configuration belongs. There is, however, a wider kind of inversion, which not only covers much more than the direction of the sexual impulses, but may not, and indeed frequently does not, included the sexual impulses at all. This [aesthetic] inversion is that by which a person’s tastes and impulses are so altered that, if a man, he emphasizes and even exaggerates the feminine aptitudes and very especially, finds peculiar satisfaction in dressing himself as a woman and adopting a

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14 I suggest this was controversial because in 1896 Ellis first published Sexual Inversion in German as British publishers found the text to be highly offensive, lewd and immoral. It was not until 1903, when an American publisher agreed to print his text, that Ellis was able to publish his theories in English.
woman’s ways. Yet the subject of this perversion experiences the normal sexual attraction, though in some cases the general inversion of tastes may extend, it may be gradually, to the sexual impulses. (cited in Davidson, 1987, p. 21)

Ellis’s summations illustrate an important shift in thinking about sexual identity because he distinguishes the anatomical condition of sexuality from non-physical sexual impulses. Thus, sexuality is no longer exclusively linked to a person’s anatomy, but may also constitute a matter of taste, impulse and desire (Davidson, 1987).

The work of German writer and anarchist Adolf Brand appears relatively unfamiliar to many, failing to be mentioned in a selection of significant texts that provide an historical grounding for the emergence of queer theory. Brand’s ideas, which he published in his journal Der Eigene (One’s Own) between 1896 and 1932, offer a momentary reprieve from scientifically grounded theories of sexuality and represent a radical development in thinking. Although he was urging a return to patriarchy, Brand argued against Hirschfeld’s medicalisation of homosexuality and the popular notion of homosexuality being associated with the feminine. Instead, he based his argument on Marx Stirner’s theory of self-ownership and the sovereignty of the individual, suggesting that sexual desire is a personal choice and each person has the exclusive right to control his own body and sexual conduct (Kennedy, 2005; Stirner, 1974). Der Eigene was not a journal of sexual behaviour, but the first ever literary and cultural journal dedicated to male homosexual culture. According to historian Harry Oosterhuis "most authors of Der Eigene were of the opinion that their feelings and experiences could not be understood in scientific categories and that art and literature provided the better means of expression" (Oosterhuis cited in Kennedy, 2005, para. 6). In the contemporary context of queer theory, it is not surprising that a cultural journal was among the first to articulate notions of sexuality that were based on personal choice and self-ownership of identity rather than pseudo-scientific logic, as queer theory has always professed a notion of sexuality grounded in culture. Brand’s journal gave rise to the foundation of the Gemeinschaft der Eigenen (Community of One’s Own) in 1903, which is understood to be the second movement (Hirschfeld’s being the first movement) of homosexual rights in Germany.

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15 He is absent from discussion in Queer Theory (Jagose, 1996), A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (Sullivan, 2003) and Queer Theories (Hall, 2003).

16 Stirner (1974) originally published The Ego and His Own in 1844 from which Brand drew upon the theory of self-ownership.
Returning now to scientifically grounded theory, in 1905 psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (a contemporary and critic of Ellis) rejected all claims of congenial sexuality, suggesting instead that sexuality (including heterosexuality) was not predetermined but rather continuously constructed through human social development. In other words, Freud radically proposed that heterosexuality, while a necessity for the continuance of humanity, is not natural. According to Freudian scholar Juliet Mitchell, “Freud’s achievement was to transform the biological theory of instincts into the notion of the human drive, then to trace its possible expressions and to regulate them to their place within the person’s history and subjectivity” (2000, p. 27). Freud theorised that humans are born polymorphously perverse, and it is only through social instruction that they learn heterosexuality; in the event of incorrect instruction or social development, a person may exhibit sexual deviance.

Although Freudian psychoanalytic theories remained popular throughout the twentieth century, they were often contaminated by the sexologist’s legacy of gender impropriety and thus the understanding and ‘treatment’ of deviant sexuality by medical institutions was largely inconsistent (Sullivan, 2003). While some did not believe that homosexuality could or should be cured, a variety of therapies and treatments continued to plague the lives of people who exhibited signs of homosexuality. These included subjecting people to emotional abuse and physical tortures ranging from drug therapies to electric shock treatment, lobotomies and the surgical removal of reproductive organs. It was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association agreed to removed the classification of ‘disease’ from the condition of homosexuality.

The final theoretical contribution from the scientific disciplines that requires mentioning is the work of American biologist Alfred Kinsey, whose research caused enormous controversy, outraging academic, medical and social institutions alike. During the 1940s and 1950s, Kinsey (with the support of the National Institute of Mental Health) conducted extensive surveys collecting data on the sexual identity and practice of individuals. From this he contributed to the publication of two landmark texts, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948) and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (Institute for Sex Research, 1953).

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17 Polymorphous perversity suggests that sexual desire can be directed towards any object, and sexuality can be satisfied in many ways that lie outside of socially normative sexual behaviours. According to Freud, it is a condition of childhood and is considered to be abnormal in adults.
In this work, Kinsey derived a seven-point scale with exclusive heterosexuality marked at one end, exclusive homosexuality at the other and bisexuality (or equally heterosexual and homosexual as Kinsey termed it) as its midpoint. Kinsey’s extensive statistical data showed that most people regarded as heterosexual have at some time in their life experienced varying degrees of sexual interaction with members of the same sex. Thus, the majority of people are not exclusively heterosexual, and instead can be located somewhere within a sexuality continuum (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948; Institute for Sex Research, 1953). While Kinsey cautioned against discrete sexual categories, suggesting that the natural world is a continuum, his study did not reflect the true depth of this continuum because human sexuality was still categorised somewhere within one of seven increments. Moreover, the scale purported the mutual exclusivity of homosexuality and heterosexuality, naming homosexuality as a category in opposition to heterosexuality.

The notion of the homosexual discussed thus far (with the exception of Brand’s and Kinsey’s summations) depicts a sick and loathsome character stigmatised by his or her ‘illness’ and condemned to an ignominious existence. The social propagation of the homosexual as deviant served to segregate and control homosexual identity by drawing clear boundaries between the normal and abnormal, while at the same time perpetuating a homosexual character stereotype. In 1968 (pre-dating the work of Foucault) radical British sociologist Mary McIntosh published “The Homosexual Role”, arguing that homosexuality was not a medical condition, psychiatric condition or human deviance; instead it was a social role, an identity that is socially constructed. Using cross-cultural examples, McIntosh argues that behaviours labelled homosexual vary across time and culture defying categorisation, therefore suggesting that there are homosexual behaviours but not innate homosexuals. The role to which she refers had been created by institutions and placed upon the homosexual, thus becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. McIntosh explains that this role “refers not only to a cultural conception or a set of ideas but also to a complex of institutional arrangements which depend on and reinforce these ideas” (1968, p. 189). By labelling and persecuting the homosexual, society created for them an identity and a
way to identify each other, forcing homosexuals into the ‘closet’ and ultimately giving rise to homosexual cultures.

The nineteenth century ‘creation’ of a homosexual class subsequently produced vibrant and sophisticated counter-cultures with unique aesthetic sensibilities, sensibilities that have pervaded various creative practices of Western popular culture. Film and cultural theorist and author of *Culture of Queers*, Richard Dyer, notes that, “like all other cultural production, only occasionally is queer cultural production done in order to say something about queers and the world in which they find themselves, though inadvertently it may suggest ways of making sense of these” (2002a, p. 9). While queer cultural artefacts may not always speak directly about the feelings or state of one’s queerness, they potentially offer an insight into the ways that queer people perceive or make sense of their gender, sexuality and social world. As such, to study these artefacts is to better understand the complexities and sophistication of queer lives and sensibilities beyond scientific discourse, social roles and material sexual practice.

**Lesbian and Gay Identity: Coming Out of the Closet**

In 1969, exactly one hundred years after Benkert first called for the emancipation of homosexuals, the gay liberation movement was ignited when police raided a New York bar called the Stonewall Inn. This event provoked a collective resistance of sexual suppression—a refusal to stay in the closet any longer. Homosexual identity was being dramatically reconfigured and gay identity constructed in its place. Jagose explains that “‘gay’ was mobilised as a specifically political counter to that binarised and hierarchised sexual categorisation which classifies homosexuality as a deviation from a privileged and naturalised heterosexuality” (1996, p. 72).

In the new post-Stonewall era, being lesbian or gay became a matter of pride, and this collective pride became a platform upon which liberationist efforts were mobilised and a new identity was constructed. An international collection of groups (originating in New York in 1969 and London in 1970) know as the Gay Liberation Front began publicly protesting against the persecution of lesbians and gays, and

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18 In very simple terms, the closet is a metaphorical space that indicates secrecy regarding one’s non-normative sexual desires. Being ‘in the closet’ suggests that feelings or activities relating to non-normative sexual desire are undisclosed while ‘coming out’ or being ‘out of the closet’ suggests that one publicly acknowledges these feelings, actions and desires. For further discussion of the closet metaphor, see the landmark text *Epistemology of the Closet* (Sedgwick, 1991).
lobbied governments for equal rights. This new gay identity purported by the Gay Liberation Front rejected the biological model of homosexuality opting instead to assert a notion of choice. As Sullivan suggests, “in response to the image of homosexuality as a biological anomaly … liberationists claimed that one’s identity ‘needs no excuses’, that, in fact, it is something to celebrate” (2003, p. 30). Lesbians and gays began openly celebrating their identity and various cultural products are testament to this. Pride songs began circulating through gay communities and musicals such as Let My People Come (1974) and La Cage Aux Folles (1984) explored deviant gender and sexual identities on Broadway stages. Scholarly discourse surrounding the history, culture and politics of non-heterosexual gender and sexual identity also started to appear.

Australian Dennis Altman contributed significantly to this in 1971 when he first published Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation. This and other liberationist texts such as Karla Jay and Allen Young’s Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation (1972) radically suggested, among other things, the dispensation of sexuality from the repressive conditions of heterosexuality and homosexuality; the transformation of gender relationships and roles; the rejection of marriage and monogamy; and a reconfiguration of the family unit. Basing its politics loosely upon what Robert Reynolds calls “a utopian vision of liberated bodies and unrepressed psychic drives” (2002, p.70), gay liberation sought a new and radical approach to the way gender and sexual identity was conceptualised for all human beings. The Liberation Front were also advocates for Third World liberation and strong critics of capitalism, making a common cause with some feminist movements, anti-war movements and black power counter-cultures. United by individual experiences of oppression, liberationists politicised the personal and optimistically sought the end of oppression for all. However, such attempts were stifled by conflicting identity politics and fractions within the movement began to destroy the hope of achieving a unified state of resistance.

As lesbians and gays gained greater mainstream acceptance during the 1970s, the liberationist model (to which queer theory and contemporary queer radicals are considerably indebted) was outmoded in favour of an ethnic model of identity politics. The ‘legitimation’ of lesbian and gay sexuality and the mobilisation of lesbian and gay lobby groups throughout the Western world consequently resulted in

19 Originally a French film of the same name produced in 1979.
the assimilation and commodification of gay identity (Bronski, 1998; Highleyman, 2002; Moore, 2001; Reynolds, 2002; Wotherspoon, 1991). Jagose efficiently summarises the contrasts between the two models:

According to the liberationist model, the established social order is fundamentally corrupt, and therefore the success of any political action is to be measured by the extent to which it smashes that system. The ethnic model, by contrast, was committed to establishing gay identity as a legitimate minority group, whose official recognition would secure citizenship rights for lesbian and gay subjects. (1996, p. 61)

The ethnic model necessitated a stable gender and sexual identity (albeit a narrow and exclusive one), as this was crucial to the struggle for civil rights such as the right to marry, the right to raise a family and inclusion within the military. Rather than attempting to destroy normalising and oppressive systems, lesbians and gays began demanding inclusion within existing heterosexist structures, and professing that lesbians and gays were ‘just like everyone else’.

The limitations of identity politics soon became evident, further damaging any chance of a monolithic liberation effort. During the late 1970s and 1980s, debates concerning sexual identity and practice within the ethnic model were largely gender separatist. Lesbian feminists felt that gay sexuality was overtly phallocentric and oppressive to their womanhood. As a result, lesbian and gay concepts of sexuality were debated and constructed in fundamentally different ways, each with varying opinions concerning non-normative sexual practices such as sado-masochism, transvestism and pornography. The ethnic model also failed to account of other axes of identity such as race, ethnicity and class. By organising lesbian and gay identities and communities primarily on the basis of sexual orientation, lesbians and gays of colour were forced to subordinate their racial or ethnic identity to the political advancement of their sexual identity. The emerging differences among sexually centred communities called into question the reality and the usefulness of a unitary lesbian or gay subject.

The theoretical and political paradigms of lesbian and gay identity, much like the feminist ideologies discussed earlier, become increasingly destabilised by the poststructuralist assertion of an illusionary subject where practices (not identities) become the focus of investigation. This brings us to queer theory: a new paradigm shift that I believe offers a more inclusive and effective means for understanding the construction and articulation of gender and sexuality.
Queer Theory

The term ‘queer theory’ was introduced to the academy in 1991 by Teresa de Lauretis in her introduction to a special issue of Differences. Borrowing most notably from the work of Foucault, the discourse of queer theory emerged in the early 1990s with a strong postmodern and poststructuralist critique of identity. Queer theory is in many ways, radical, subversive and disruptive. It resists prevailing limitations of sexual identity and gender identity, including those of assimilated lesbian and gay minorities. “Ultimately [queers] oppose not only the hegemony of dominant culture but also the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay culture” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 61).

In 1993, Alexander Doty’s ground-breaking book, Making Things Perfectly Queer, demonstrated how queer can be conceptualised as something different, something more than lesbian and gay: the “intersecting or combining of more than one specific form of nonstraight sexuality” (1993, p. xvi). Thus queer is not a monolithic category in itself: queer is many different things to those who choose to engage with it. Queer is a continual process of becoming, an aesthetic and political resistance to stable and cohesive subjectivity and a big ‘fuck you’ to all discourses and institutions that suppress difference, reproduce binary knowledges and reinforce normativities. While I acknowledge that queer theory has made a significant contribution to contemporary discourse on race and class, it is not within the scope of this dissertation to investigate these concerns. Therefore, the following text unravels the particulars of queer theory in relation to gender and sexual identity, exposing the logic behind its arguments and assertions.

Power and Discourse

Queer theory articulates the fluidity of gender and sexual identities; it acknowledges the various multiplicities of human desire and modes of identity. Because of these multiplicities, queer is difficult to define precisely in terms of its scope of signification. Perhaps, then, it is easier to start by explaining what queer is not. Butler, who is often credited as a pioneer of queer theory says that:

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20 For further information on queer theory, race and class see Sullivan’s chapter, “Queer Race” in her Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (2003); Ian Barnard’s Queer Race: Cultural Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory (2004); Max Kirsch’s Queer Theory and Social Change (2000).
Queer is not being lesbian. Queer is not being gay. It is an argument against lesbian specificity: that if I am a lesbian I have to desire in a certain way. Queer is an argument against certain normativity, what a proper lesbian or gay identity is. (2001, para. 2)

Elaborating on queer as a theoretical construct, Tasmin Spargo notes that “queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire” (1999, p. 9).

During the early part of the 1990s, the sociological, historical and cultural critique of non-normative gender and sexuality began to exhibit significant theoretical shifts. In 1996, Altman implied such a shift by stating that “perhaps inevitably a new sort of academic enterprise begun to emerge with the rapid impact of postmodernism and its criticism of both identity—and ideological based politics” (para. 23). The new academic enterprise that Altman refers to is queer theory. Queer theory is decidedly different from the ethnic model purported by lesbian and gay studies of sexual identity, fundamentally resisting mutually exclusive methods of categorisation and the suggestion that heterosexuality it tantamount to humanity (Warner, 1993). As Kate Bronstein explains:

The lesbian and gay community is solidifying and becoming more of a codified group—existing within and accepted by the dominant ideology. Self-defined “Queers” become more and more the adversarial outsiders, the ungrateful children, the bad influence—queers like the drag queens, the stone butches, the dyke leather daddies, the she-males—the ones who are going to “wreck everything” for (assimilated) lesbian and gays. (1994, p. 134)

Queer theory illustrates the fundamental reconsideration of a definitive identity core, and understands gender and sexuality as constructed categories of self-knowledge, capable of shifting over time. As Joshua Gamson suggests, “queer studies is largely a deconstructive enterprise, taking apart the view of a self defined by something at is core, be it sexual desire, race, gender, nation or class” (2000, p. 348). While queer theory continues to acknowledge the categories of male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian and gay among many others, it encourages “an analysis that embeds the self in institutional and cultural practices” (Seidman, 1993, p. 137) rather than a preoccupation with identity politics and the assertion of a coherent lesbian or gay perspective on matters of gender and sexuality. By shifting the focus from the study of identities to the study of practices, queer theory has made room for a variety of desires, practices and alternative sexual identities that were not previously given due consideration with the praxis of lesbian and gay enquiry. Such practices and
identities that interest queer theory include, but are by no means limited to, homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, intersexuality, transsexuality, asexuality, pansexuality, transgenderism, androgyny, polyamory, sadomasochism and fetishism.

Power as Foucault understands it “is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation within a particular society” (1979, p. 93), and it is the strategies of social organisation that have become institutionalised and lawful. Although Foucault argues that power comes from everywhere and should not be thought of as an institution, throughout this text I make reference to institutions of power, by which I mean hegemonic institutions and their discourses that dictate the behaviours, values, identities and desires deemed normal, acceptable and advantageous—in other words, the discourses that have contributed to the construction of normativity. By suppressing homosexual behaviour, hegemonic institutions inevitably gave rise to the deviant status of sexual identities (other than heterosexual), introducing the sexual act itself into public consciousness. The mutual exclusivity of homo/heterosexual identities places the deviant or abnormal category of homosexuality in binary opposition to the normalised category heterosexuality, and it is the discourse of normativity, the normal/abnormal binary logic, that produced oppressive knowledges and power relations. As Sullivan reiterates:

The punishment or stigmatisation of so-called ‘unnatural’ actions and identities is everywhere apparent in our society, and functions to reaffirm or naturalise that which is held to be ‘normal’. And we are all both agents and effects of disciplinary regimes. (2003, p. 84)

The disciplinary regime that affords power to the normal by naturalising and therefore privileging heterosexuality is referred to by Butler as the ‘heterosexual matrix’ (1990), and/or ‘heterosexual hegemony’ (1993). The heterosexual matrix is “a grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised” (1990, p. 151). For example, bodies are only thought to make sense (and be an asset to society) if a stable sex is expressed through a stable gender such as a man’s expression of masculinity and a woman’s expression of femininity. Thus, dominant social discourses assert that sex is a biological given and gender is culturally inscribed on the basis of sex. Sexed bodies are hierarchically arranged on the basis gender (female subordinates male) and are prescribed a culturally

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21 The term ‘heterosexual matrix’ was used through Butler’s Gender Trouble (1990). Later in her text Bodies That Matter (1993) she changed the term to ‘heterosexual hegemony’. Her reason for this was that she felt the latter term suggested that the matrix was open to rearticulation and conveyed a sense of malleability (Butler cited in Osborne & Segal, 1994).
appropriate sexual role, which is the compulsory assertion of heterosexuality. Thus the dominant or normative sex/gender/sexuality paradigm is one in which heterosexuality is culturally desirable and privileged. Anything that deviates from this is abnormal, and has been historically punished and legislated against.

Access to power and privilege is granted not only on the basis of one’s sex and gender, but also on the basis one’s sexuality. Institutions and social structures favour heterosexuality, asserting its naturalness and privileging its participants. This institutionalisation of heterosexuality is called ‘heteronormativity’, and it is a valuable conceptual addition to sexual discourse on the part of queer theory. According to Corber and Valocchi, “heteronormativity … is the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organize homosexuality as its binary opposite” (2003, p. 4). Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner expand on this definition, positioning heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent—that is organised as a sexuality—but also privileged” (1998, p. 565). It is important to note that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are not interchangeable terms. Heterosexuality does not oppress other forms of sexual identity or sexual practices. Rather, queer theory argues that it is institutions of moral, political and social power that are oppressive through the maintenance of heterosexuality as the dominant and normalised sexual identity. Furthermore, heterosexual sex is not necessarily heteronormative, as heteronormativity is constituted in the regulation of normative desires and practices favouring monogamy and other ‘natural’ sexual relationships and heterosexual institutions such as marriage and reproductive outcomes.

The impetus of queer theory is to confuse these gender and sexual binaries and deconstruct fixed categories on the grounds that “fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power” (Gamson cited in Gamson & Moon, 2004, p. 50). Fixed categories assign power to the majority by organising society into central and marginal groups. Those who construct the ideal centre of mainstream Western society—what Audre Lorde calls a ‘mythical norm’—can aptly be described as “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure” (1990, p. 282). And those who reside in the margins are scrutinised for their deviation from the social, moral and political codes purported by the centre. Queer theory seeks to expose the false truths that have constructed boundaries of centrality.
and marginality and have normalised the centre by revealing the performative nature of gender and sexuality and the fluidity of identity. As Shane Phelan proposes, “by challenging the boundary lines as well as the content of the territories they mark, queer work calls each of us to attend to the uncertainties and incompleteness in our identity” (1997. p. 3). In conclusion, queer theory does not call for a secure space within the margins for the articulation of deviant gender or sexuality; instead, it seeks to disrupt or trouble all boundaries and identities as part of a large-scale egalitarian project.

**Sex, Gender, Sexuality and Performativity**

Earlier in this dissertation, in “A Brief Epistemology of Gender”, I outlined Butler’s theory of gender performativity, which I positioned as a fundamental tenet of queer theory. However, before we move any further, I would like to clarify the impact that gender performativity has had upon the origins and performance of sexuality by association. Performativity suggested that there is no truth or origin to any identity because the actions that are thought to be the result of identity are in fact the actions that create identity. Thus, by extension, naturalised heterosexuality is also performatively constructed:

> If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is “before,” “outside,” or “beyond” power is a cultural impossibility … The representation of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of “the original,” … reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original. (Butler, 1990, pp. 30–31, emphasis in original)

Any true notion of normalised gender and sexuality is a fiction. One gender or sexuality can be no more or less normal than any other. However, the logic purported by the heterosexual matrix (see Table 2 below) suggests that our biologically categorised body determines the socialisation of our gender and our gender determines the bodies that we are normatively permitted to desire.

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22 Trouble refers to Butler’s call for gender trouble, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Troubling loosely refers to the upsetting or disruption of naturalised identity categories through a disorderly performance of gender. The effects of troubling will become more apparent when they are discussed in a cultural context in following chapters.
Table 2: Logic of the heterosexual matrix/heterosexual hegemony

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexed body</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>Sexual desire</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Attraction of females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Feminie</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>Attraction to males</td>
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</tbody>
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Gender norms contribute exceedingly to the stabilisation and maintenance of heterosexuality, as homosexuality is often attributed to failed or misconstrued gender roles. Heteronormativity positions the gay male as feminine because his gender abnormality gives credit to his sexual abnormality and thus normalises the heterosexual male acting masculine. Similarly, the lesbian female is often perceived as masculine because she too normalises society’s construction of the heterosexual, feminine female (Butler, 1997).

As I previously argued, sex is most commonly understood as a biological given; however, Butler questions the history of sex and the organisation of people into sexed categories suggesting that—like gender—the sexed body is also a cultural construct, the consequence being that “the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (1990, p. 7). The existence of ambiguously sexed bodies such as hermaphrodites (although rare) demonstrates the existence of another category of body that contests the supposedly stable binary of sex itself. As such, queer theory proposes that we understand the relationship between bodies, gender and sexual desires as follows:

- We have a body that is culturally inscribed as male or female.
- We may choose to perform a gender (or other identity) on that body.
- We may use that body to enact desires.

The power of Butler’s theory of gender performativity is its ability to reveal that, as individuals, we are not locked into codified sex and gender roles; there is no natural way to desire, and there is no natural way to perform identity upon our bodies.

The social reality of sexuality and gender, according to Butler, is established through discourse, making them appear as robust social phenomena. This argument has incurred considerable criticism as some scholars feel it is contrary to the goals of feminism and it ignores the real-world significance of gender (Gauntlett, 2002).
Grosz (1994a) and Sheila Jeffreys (1993) argue that queer theory, and Butler’s work in particular, serves a gay white male agenda, and that it has quashed feminist concerns and suppressed lesbian identity. Moreover, they see performativity as apolitical, somewhat abstract and parodic. Sheila Jeffreys’ remark below is offered as an example of criticisms which contest performativity:

When a woman is being beaten by a brutal man she lives with is this because she has adopted the feminine gender in her appearance? Would it be a better solution for her to adopt a masculine gender for the day and strut about in a work shirt or leather chaps? (1993, p. 81)

Jeffreys’ remark is countered in Butler’s publication “Critically Queer” (1993a, also appears as a chapter in 1999b), in which she suggests that gender performativity is not a simple matter of making a choice as to which gender one will be today. In a later edition of “Critically Queer” Butler succinctly explains:

The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning; that there is “one” who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. This is a voluntarist account of gender which presumes a subject, intact, prior to its gendering. (1997, p. 16)

Butler goes on to explain the specificities of performativity while highlighting an important and promising point that gives hope to workers, creators and theorists of queer. Butler suggests that the performatively constituted norms of gender are at once the essence of gender falsehoods and the very resources that will provide queers with tactics for subversion and resistance:

Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, one which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources for which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged. (1997, p. 17)

In following chapters, I discuss in detail some of the performance-based methods employed by queers that attempt to expose the performative nature of gender and the unauthenticity of gender norms. Drag performance, being the primary example of this, is offered by Butler as testimony that all gender identities are a melange of concealed norms and performed acts. Drag is dealt with extensively in Chapter Six.
Identity, Queerness and Musicality: Examining the Theory (Chapter Three)

Distinguishing Performance and Performativity

This research deals with musical performance in great depth, and many instances where musical performers cause gender trouble and disturb heterosexual hegemony are examined. In the interest of clarity and intelligibility the terms ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ must briefly be explained in relation to one another. This is necessary to avoid confusing or compounding these terms in the following analysis and critiques.

In Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (published in 1993, three years after Gender Trouble), Butler was aware of the confusion that surrounded her previous discussion of performativity and attempted in this text to offer a more lucid explanation of performance and performativity. “Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance” (Butler, 1993, p. 95). Rather, Butler argues that performativity is a precondition of the subject, a forced and repetitious performance of norms sustained by the constraints society applies to those norms that effectively endorse some sexual and gender practices and make others illicit. In contrast, performance is a condition of the subject, a chosen enactment that we ‘put on’ at will:

In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the “truth” of gender; performance as bounded “act” is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s “will” or “choice”; further, what is “performed” works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (Butler, 1993, p. 234)

Thus performativity is not a voluntary act, while performance (for the most part) is voluntary. According to Sullivan, “the distinction between voluntarism and anti-voluntarism is often understood by commentators as the difference between performance and performativity respectively” (2003, p. 89).

While the constitutions of performance are clearly defined by the will to act, interpreting a performance or the intent of the performer remains highly contestable. As Sullivan suggests, “all performances and all attempts at subversion will be ambiguous and open to multiple meanings” (2003, p. 92). The potential for a performance to subvert or expose the rigidity and unnaturalness of gender and sexuality will be a fundamental measurement of its success at queering normativity. However, the multiple potential of meanings suggests that the measurement of its
success will always remain ambiguous, thus the political and subversive potential of performance is always contextual and never absolute.

**Queer Identity: Tensions and Transgressions**

Queer theory’s contribution to academia has largely been the reiteration of Foucauldian sexual discourses and the discursive production of knowledges and power, the articulation of the performative nature of gender and sexuality and the assertion that identities are fluid and multivalent. By the latter, I mean queer theory has drawn to our attention the continuous process that is identity, calling into question the fixidity of categories such as feminine, masculine, lesbian and gay by exposing their performative and unfixed qualities. “Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river—a process” (Anzaldúa cited in Goldman, 1996, p. 173). Furthermore, queer identity fluidity undermines the binary logic that constructs identities as oppositional and exclusionary. As Phelan notes:

> Queer theory [has] pointed to the fundamental indeterminacy of identities—of inside/outside communities, of masculine/feminine, of homo/hetero/bi, of male female, and of racial and ethnic categories. Ultimately queer theory’s target is identity itself—the assumption of unity or harmony or transparency within persons or groups. (1997, p. 2)

While queer theory targets identity, as Jagose suggests, it is by no means outside identity’s magnetic field and may be more accurately described “as ceaselessly interrogating both the preconditions of identity and its effect … Like postmodern architecture, it turns identity inside out, and displays its supports exoskeletally” (1996, pp. 131–132). Queer suggests an unbounded recognition of sexual or gender identity; it allows us to have, to acknowledge and to nurture a sexual and gender identity that is driven by fluid and changing desires. A queer understanding of the self acknowledges that a person may at different times in their life desire different bodies or objects. Queer says we do not have to confine our identificatory practices to the limited patterns of behaviour like those insisted upon when the fixed labelling of a sexual identity is either heterosexual, lesbian or gay, and when a gender identity is labelled either feminine or masculine. In fact, the queer label emerges in opposition to such bourgeois models of identity, refuting definition based upon material sexual practices. According to Meyer:
Queer sexualities become … a series of improvised performances whose threat lies in the denial of any social identity derived from participation in those performances. And it is precisely in the space of this refusal, in the deconstruction of the homo/hetero binary, that the threat and challenge to bourgeois ideology is queerly executed. (1994, p. 3)

Moreover, queer displaces the notion of self as exclusive, abiding and continuous in favour of a concept of self as performative, improvisational and discontinuous, constructed through the repetition of stylised acts (Meyer, 1994).

Queer people identify as queer for many different reasons; consequently, they may also choose to talk about their queerness in a variety ways. Many of the people who are discussed here employ the term ‘queer’ exclusively as an identity signifier while others choose to mix up terminology, switching between queer, lesbian and/or gay (among others). Therefore, when I talk about queers in a collective sense I am not naming and describing a cohesive group of people. While collective description is useful for the purpose of general explanation, it is not entirely accurate and should be noted as such. The people who produce queer culture do not (as we will see) constitute a single unified subcultural group: some may not necessarily understand themselves to be queer in the same way as others do. Literary critic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who has been influential in the construction and discourse of queer since it began, points out:

Anyone’s use of the word “queer” about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else … “gay” and “lesbian” still present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence…. “Queer” seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. (1993, p. 9)

Sedgwick is suggesting that queer is more about the “performative acts of experimental self-perception” than it is about a unified or coherent construction of identity. By calling oneself queer or by engaging in queer cultural production or consumption, one is not signifying a specifically inclusive or exclusive identity, but rather demonstrating a conscious move away from the totalising effects of gender and sexuality. Halperin (1995) suggests, that instead of thinking of queer strictly as an identity, it might be better to think of it as a positionality that is available to anyone who aims to subvert hegemony. I support Halperin’s suggestion, and consider it another valuable conception of queer—one that is available to be taken up by those who have been marginalised owing to the acting out of their desires and/or
because of their inability to locate themselves within a specific fixed mode of identification.

Queer can be understood as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” suggests Sedgwick (1993, p. 8). While her definition is quite dense, Sedgwick manages to illustrate many of the fundamental characteristics of queer, which I shall reiterate for clarity as follows: queer is hopeful; it is conflicting, yet it is comfortable within this discord; queer encourages us to openly challenge and to explore multiple modes of being. Jagose further supports this notion of queer suggestion that “queer retains … a conceptually unique potential as a necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contention” (1996, p. 129). Queer episodes, intentions and values are thus located in someone or something that is dynamic, that is in the process of constructing itself rather than something that presents itself as whole and static. For this reason, queer theory and identities are sometimes criticised as ambiguous and indeterminate.

In 1998, Tim Edwards published a critical attack on queer theory in the journal Sexualities. In his article, Edwards accuses queer theory of being vague, suggesting that it undermines sexual discourse:

Despite the proliferation of publications and populist outpourings on the significance of queer theory and politics, its definition remains distinctly murky … queer theory is primarily defined as an attempt to undermine an overall discourse of sexual categorization and, more particularly, the limitations of the heterosexual-homosexual divide as an identity. Indeed, queer theory often seeks to refute the entire concept of an identity politics as falsely constructing a unitary entity or person … the reality for many people much of the time is that their sexualities remain remarkably constant and stable over time even when lived experience may contradict this. (p. 472)

While such criticisms are not entirely unfounded, it does seem unreasonable to penalise queer theory for its heterotopian aspirations, because queer is not proclaiming itself as the perfect ‘one-size-fits-all’ discourse or mode of identity, but instead offers a real identificatory alternative, another space in which to locate oneself. Moreover, the indeterminacy of queer identity is, in this instance, criticised negatively rather than as a value-added characteristic. In the contestation of such criticism, I cite Jagose, who suggests that:

Queer is very much a category in the process of formation. It is not simply that queer is yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics. (1996, p. 1)
Furthermore, Edwards’ suggestion concerning the constant and stable reality of sexual identities is not supported by any kind of ethnographic study, a concern which my autoethnography instantly refutes.

Another notable critic of queer studies and its theoretical underpinnings is Jeffrey Weeks. Weeks’ contribution to *Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Sandfort et al., 2000)—a text that is clearly adverse to queer theory’s emphasis on fluidity and diversity—argues that queer studies has rejected the 1970s pioneers of liberation and that it focus too much on diversity as opposed to the commonalities of lesbian and gay experience (Weeks, 2000). Instead, Weeks (1995) supports a model of sexual and social identities as largely continuous and coherent, refusing to reject identity politics yet also acknowledging that identities may shift over time. He sees this as a more effective means of activating and mobilising large-scale social change.

According to Beasley, Weeks’ approach is very much macro and modernist—it is an approach that is “against the local and often symbolic iconography of Queer performative models of political transgression” (2005, p. 149).

For Weeks and others such as Jeffrey Escoffier (1990) and Harriet Malinowitz (1993), queer theory is an academic ivory tower: it is elitist and exclusionary; it favours abstract theoretical models; and it offers little value to the lives of average lesbians and gays. A similar criticism of queer theory noted by Edwards and supported by Ken Plummer suggests that queer theory fails to offer a critique of lived experience in favour of fanciful cultural and textual analysis. Plummer argues that “there are important studies to be done in the empirical world, and an obsession with texts is dangerous indeed. It is time to move beyond the text—and rapidly” (1998, p. 611).

Queer theory is undeniably concerned with cultural texts because it uses them to problematise normative concepts of gender and sexuality and to expose and challenge oppressive gender and sexual norms. As Altman notes, “queer theory shares with much of contemporary postmodernism an emphasis on representation as an aesthetic rather than a political problem, a desire to deconstruct all fixed points in the interests of destabilising and decentring our preconceptions” (1996, para. 26). However, this does not suggest that queer is apolitical; rather, queer work actions its politics via aesthetic means. Similarly, Bronstein disputes the ineffectiveness of cultural critique and textual analysis arguing, “as outlaws … we lampoon the images of the dominant (i.e., heterosexual) culture. We blend, fold, and manipulate popular
forms and genres and claim them for ourselves. The end result is oddly cohesive and coherent” (1994, p. 159). In line with Altman and Bronstein’s assertion, this research is indeed concerned with aesthetic and textual analysis, specifically that relating to music and musical performance. However, it also remains mindful of Plummer’s assertion, agreeing that empirical studies are necessary and important. The cultural artefacts to be studied here say a great deal about the lives of the people who make and produce them, and as such this research pays equally close attention to the lived realities of the makers, producers and consumers of queer culture and their negotiation of gender and sexual difference in and through cultural participation.

**The Culture and Politics of Queer**

Queer culture is nascent; it is multi-faceted and broadly locatable; it is reactionary; and it is productive, producing new considerations of gender, sexuality and desire. Queer can be radical and oppositional, and as such “queer identities can open a social space … for the development of new cultural forms (Halperin, 1995, p. 67). Queer work crosses disciplinary borders and is evident throughout the visual, performing and literary arts. Queer artists can exist at once inside and outside popular culture, borrowing existing cultural material and adapting it with queer signifiers to produce alternative cultural artefacts representative of a queer consciousness. Halberstam suggests that queer subcultures not only produce queer work and culture, but also produce “alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2005, p. 2). Thus queer subcultures also produce alternative life narratives, narratives that more often than not, contradict dominant cultural norms such as age-appropriate adulthood and reproduction. Drawing on the work of Butler, Halberstam suggests that cultural style signifies queer marginalisation and the disruption of social norms through which queers empower their own survival: “style is both the sign of their exclusion and the mode by which they survive nonetheless” (2005, p. 153).

The application of queer theories to the construction and/or reading of cultural artefacts, known as queering, is at once a political and aesthetic device used by queers to deconstruct normativity and expose the extent to which gender and sexuality are textually and intertextually constituted (Sullivan, 2003). Queering is political insofar as it is dedicated to large-scale social change through deconstructing
heterosexual hegemony as purported by the logic of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm. It instigates this change largely from within the realm of popular culture. Rather than favouring political action and legal reformation on a macro level, queer work tends to focus on the micro level, favouring aesthetic commentaries and representations of social improprieties, exposing the fallacies embedded in dominant culture. It is via aesthetic critique that queer politics are actioned. Within the scope of this research, queer theory is used (in conjunction with musicological critique) to explain queer musical episodes—that is, musical performance and composition that relates directly to queer praxis and identity work, episodes that cannot be neatly located within either the rubric of hegemonic culture or that of mainstream gay culture.

An extended discussion of the distinctions between mainstream gay culture and queer cultures is presented in Chapter Seven and again from a local perspective at the beginning of Chapter Nine. However, it is important to be aware that this distinction does exist as it points to an important aspect of queer politics—that is, queer’s opposition to the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay identity. The mainstream agendas of mass culture perpetuate an image of gayness that can aptly be described as a youthful, white, healthy, middle-class, male consumer. Sarah Schulman theorises this image as:

A fake public homosexuality [that] has been constructed to facilitate a double marketing strategy: selling products to gay consumers that address their emotional need to be accepted while selling a palatable image of homosexuality to heterosexual consumers that meets their need to have their dominance obscured. (1998, p. 146)

She goes on to argue that this image of gayness is very much a ‘straight’ construction. It is a construction that pervades all forms of popular culture in the Western world. It is evident for example in the portrayal of characters Will and Jack from the television series Will and Grace (1998–2006); Stanford from Sex in the City (1998–2004); and George from the film My Best Friend’s Wedding (1998). Each of these examples depicts this archetype: an attractive, well groomed, white, sexually non-threatening, middle-class man who is a loyal friend, gay ‘galpal’ and confidant, well versed in interior decoration, haute couture and women’s emotional needs. As I alluded to earlier in this chapter with regard to Bronstein’s work, the fake public homosexual deflects attention from the less wholesome images of queerness such as stone butches, trans people, rent boys and queer punks—people who threaten to “‘wreck’ everything for ‘assimilated’ lesbian and gays” (Bronstein, 1994, p. 134).
AIDS activist Eric Rofes similarly argues that less wholesome images of queerness are at odds with the mainstream gay agenda; thus he is not only blaming ‘straight’ marketing strategists but also mainstream gay culture in general. The gay mainstream, argues Rofes, “present[s] a sanitized vision of our people and replace[s] butch/femme dykes with Heather and her two mommies, and kinky gay men with domestic partner wedding cakes” (1998, p. 204). He asks: “can we not advocate for a pluralistic queer culture in which we affirm everyone’s right to self-determination in the way they organize their sexual relations” (1998, p. 204). It is now ten years since Rofes posed this question, and little has changed. Throughout the Western world, marketing and advertising companies are increasing targeting the pink dollar, and the follow-on effect is that consumerism has come at the expense of political dissent. “For most gays in contemporary, consumer driven Australia,” suggests Reynolds in What Happened to Gay Life?, “freedom is more commonly a furniture store than a call to arms” (2007, p. 37).

Similar ploys aimed at targeting the pink dollar and relegating gayness to a marketable commodity are also evident in the music industry. In 2006, Sony Music launched a gay music label branded ‘With a Twist’. In a CBS News article, a spokesperson for the venture, Matt Farber, made the following comment suggesting in a condescending tone that ‘we’ (and it is unclear if the ‘we’ refers to the record label or the music-buying public) are accepting of gay artists. “It's a home that says to gay artists, 'we not only are OK with who you are, but we embrace that as part of your identity’” (“Sony Music Launches Gay Music Label,” 2006). Faber’s comment is yet another example of the current trend towards the commodification of sexual identity and collective categorisation of the cultural output of same-sex sexually attracted people under a ‘gay’ label. It is entrepreneurial acts such as this—acts that

23 Yet another example of commodified fake public homosexuality is the television series Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (2003–2007), in which five gay men are employed to ‘make-over’ a straight man. This show perpetuates a very narrow stereotype of the gay male as effeminate, fashion-conscious and superficial, turning gay sexual identity into a marketable commodity. More detailed examples and examinations of the commodification of gay identity can be found in articles by Katherine Sender (2006) and Elizabeth Whitney (2006). Extensive discussion surrounding the trends towards gay consumption and the co-option of gay identities can be found in The End of Gay (Archer, 2002), The Twilight of Equality (Duggan, 2003) and Stagstruck (Schulman, 1998).

24 Referring to the collective spending power of lesbians and gays, the pink dollar organises lesbians and gays as a consumer group (Gage, Richards & Wilmot, 2002; Jones & LeBlanc, 2005). In 2007, gay media mogul Peter Walton stated that a conservative estimate of lesbian and gay spending power in Australia was $25 billion (Cincotta, 2007). Examples of the proliferation of lesbian and gay advertising can be found at online sources such as: http://www.gayadvertising.net, http://www.outnowconsulting.com and http://www.commercialcloset.org
institutionalise and commercialise sexual identity—that many queer artists are striving to dismantle.

“Homo propaganda is everywhere, in the form of banners, badges, and posters … and it’s all for sale” argues D. Travers Scott disdainfully. “You have an endless supply of ready-made identity signifiers: all the mass-produced knick-knacks to show off and celebrate your oh-so-uniquely-you Queer Identity” (1997, p. 63, emphasis in original). Similarly, Matt Bernstein Sycamore, a radical queer activist, argues against the homogenisation of homosexual identity and affirms the necessity for queers to remain resistant to such normalising effects. Speaking out against the mainstreaming of gay identity, Sycamore proposes that:

Against the nightmare backdrop of assimilation, queers striving to live outside conventional norms become increasingly marginalized. A ravenous gay mainstream seeks control … of the very ways we represent our own identities. The radical potential of queer identity lies in remaining outside—in challenging and seeking to dismantle the sickening culture that surrounds us. (2004, p. 5, emphasis in original)

The dominant, normalising or ‘sickening culture’ to which Sycamore refers produces—by ways of resistance—a counterculture of queers whose cultural products constitute a variety of possible enactments of gender and sexuality and contestations of oppressive gender and sexual normativities imposed upon them by the heterosexual as well as gay mainstream. While the limitations of this study restrict a more detailed account of the politics of consumption, one must be mindful that the radicalised forms of queer culture discussed in the chapters to come generally position themselves outside of these consumer driven paradigms and reject homogenisation of lesbian and gay identity for the reasons mentioned above.

Queers twist, skew and lampoon hegemonic culture in order to subvert, challenge and deconstruct heteronormativity; they deconstruct oppositional binaries and expose the performative nature of identity. They do this by employing a variety of sensibilities and aesthetic devices in the creation of original cultural material, and by applying these sensibilities and aesthetics to their interpretation and performance of existing cultural material. These sensibilities can, for the moment, be broadly identified as camp, drag and genderfuck, queer punk and queercore, and queer feminism. In the chapters to follow, each of these sensibilities and their associated aesthetic devices is thoroughly examined in terms of its cultural evolution and application within a given context. Queer sensibilities and aesthetics are not specifically located in any particular style or genre, but rather pervade multiple sites.
of cultural production. Within a musical context, queer episodes are evident in a variety of genres and performance traditions, ranging from musical theatre to disco, house, pop, funk, rock, punk, and folk to name a few.

Historically, there has been a synchronicity across all human endeavours including philosophy and music; therefore, when we see a high creative output from one discipline, this usually corresponds with a high creative output from another (Simonton, 1997). Thus it is reasonable to assume that, as queer theory, aesthetics and new identificatory possibilities emerge and evolve, so too will queer music and queer musical practices. Or, if we consider the words of Attali who suggests that “music is prophecy. Its styles … are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code” (1985, p. 11), then quite possibly musical activities may not only mirror new realities but may in fact pre-empt them. And “for this reason musicians [suggests Attali] … are dangerous, disturbing and subversive” (1985, p.11). If music is a harbinger of change then queer musics anticipate new queer futures. Queer musicians may be considered especially dangerous, disturbing and subversive due to their ability to pre-empt, perform and circulate a range of new possibilities that lie outside of the given codes of gender and sexual practice—codes that modern society has relied upon for the maintenance of order and power.

The relationship between musicality, queer identity and desire is evident on numerous levels, as demonstrated in Chapter One. Fuller and Whitesell suggest “the link between musicality and queerness as related forms of suspect subjectivity was forged in modern times” (2002, p. 8). Modern euphemisms that interconnect musicality and queerness, such as ‘a friend of Dorothy’ or ‘he’s a little bit musical’ were once commonly used to describe a person’s (usually male) suspect homosexuality. ‘A friend of Dorothy’ makes reference to Judy Garland’s character in the 1939 film musical *The Wizard of Oz*, and plays on the established knowledge of Garland’s iconic position within homosexual culture during the mid- to late twentieth century. More abstractly, the term ‘musical’ in the phrase ‘he’s a little bit musical’ is intended to replace the term ‘queer’; thus musicality colloquially insinuates a recognisable performance of queer male identity. In the English novel *Despised and Rejected* (1988), by lesbian writer Rose Allatini (who first published the book in 1918 under the name A. T. Fitzroy), the term ‘musical’ is used as a coded implication of her character’s homosexuality. Similarly, in the work of Brett (2002b)
on the history of musicology and sexuality, he notes how during the first half of the twentieth century Tchaikovsky’s sexual ‘nervousness’ (his homosexuality) was theorised in relation to his musical disposition. While these may seem slightly trivial examples of the interconnectivity between musicality and queerness, they do demonstrate a crude degree of social awareness surrounding the links between music and queer sexual practices throughout the last century.

In the following section, I shift the focus of discussion from queer gender and sexual identities to music and its relationship to the construction and performance of identity. As I demonstrate, music—like gender and sexuality—plays a significant role in the formation of self-identity because music—again, like gender and sexuality—is also performative in that it constitutes a set of acts that are attributed to one’s identity. Furthermore, music is a creative and aesthetic pursuit and, as I have previously suggested, queer has a creative and aesthetic focus in that it creates new ways of understanding and articulating gender and sexuality, which are grounded in aesthetic performances rather than scientific or social-scientific knowledge. Music is a unique product of our humanity. It is a valuable communicative device capable of human expression and a means of self-representation and definition. Musical composition, performance and participation can offer an oppositional response to hegemonic culture, and by extension contest the social and political subjugation of queers.

**Constructing and Performing the Self via Music**

Social constructionist perspectives on identity argue that the existence of an inner-self or core being is an essentialist fallacy. Instead, identity is a complex system of understanding and presenting ourselves that is in constant negotiation and reconfiguration. According to Fisher, “identity is nothing less than one’s personal paradigm for existence, a comprehensive, though not necessarily coherent, way of being in the world” (2002, p. 90). The previously discussed poststructuralist and queer perspectives on identity remind us that gender and sexual identities are unfixed and can be signified and performed in multiple and conflicting ways. Retaining this understanding of identity, I now shift focus from discussing identity in terms of gender and sexuality to a discussion of identity and its relationship with music.

Identity is not created in isolation from the social world: it cannot be located ‘inside’ us or understood solely through introspection. Rather, as postmodern human
beings, our selves are interactive and mobile because we come to know ourselves through continuous fragmented social interactions and cultural practices such as music. Naomi Cumming suggests “‘subjects’ are formed by participation in the social media of gesture, language, or music-media that provide a repertoire of possible choices—within which they achieve their personal ‘style’” (2000, p. 10). Music, like postmodern identity, is elusive and transient, unable to be contained in space or paused in time. Both are productive and dynamic systems of constructing meaning, yet neither can be comprehensively articulated discursively or pictorially. Music and identity share a contested history; the nature and essence of each has been exhaustively debated for centuries by philosophers, theologians, and social scientists. Yet we continue the search for greater meaning and explanation.

Creative practice and engagement can potentially brings us closer to knowing ourselves. While science gives us a means of understanding our physicality and natural world, it cannot account for our subjectivity or selfhood, or for our intimate perceptions of them. Throughout time, humans have explored a variety of sciences, philosophies and mysticisms in an attempt to understand the self. The recent epistemic shift in Western thought from essentialist notions of selfhood and identity to constructionist understanding—resulting in the loss of a fixed and timeless self—has produced a selfhood of vast possibility and uncertainty. As postmodern human beings, we understand that the self is created and our identities are constructed from a variety of cultural materials gathered from repositories of social knowledge. Therefore, as postmodern human beings, the self (especially a queer perception of self) can be understood as a creative project, with our existence strongly resembling a work of art (Foucault, 1984).

The Aesthetic Self or the Art of Life

Inspired by ancient Greek philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche and Foucault both spoke of life in terms of creativity, describing life as a self-determining aesthetic experience. Nietzsche proposed that the self is a self-creating work of art, and we use creative practice to imitate and transform our existence. For Nietzsche, art is “the highest task and proper metaphysical activity of life,” (1995, p. iv), and a “complement and consummation of existence, seducing one to a continuation of life” (1995, p. 9). Similarly, Foucault was fascinated by the idea of life and the self as a
work of art, especially because this idea lends itself to theorising sexual practice outside of scientific discourses. Foucault observes:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? … From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art…. we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity. (1984, pp. 350–351)

Like all philosophical concepts, these ideas are unable to be strictly proven right or wrong, yet they are attractive and relevant propositions that highlight the synergy of art and life. Most importantly, they allow us to gaze insightfully upon human existence without the need for a scientific or codified system of understanding human behaviour and identity. As James Bernauer suggests:

To speak of human existence as a work of art is to take it out of the domain of the scientifically knowable and to free us from the obligation of deciphering ourselves as a system of timeless functions which are subjected to corresponding norms. (1998, p. 129)

If one subscribes to Nietzsche and Foucault’s understanding of life as an aesthetic phenomenon, then the ways of being and conducting one’s life are no longer biologically determined. Instead, we are able to adapt our lives in accordance with aesthetic principles and modify our behaviour through what Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace refer to as “conscious artistry” (1993, p. 124). If life is indeed aesthetic, explaining and articulating human experience via artistic means should certainly be considered just as effective as scientific explanations. Music is a highly expressive form of artistry that is capable of altering our behaviour and affecting our lives. In modern society, music is ever present: it is used for entertainment, for ritual, to effect consumer behaviour, to pacify angry crowds, and to incite armies to war. While music serves these and many other purposes, “one of the primary functions of music lies in establishing and developing an individual’s sense of identity” (Hargreaves, Miell & MacDonald, 2002, p. 5); thus music and selfhood share an innate connection.

Hailed by novelist Joseph Conrad in 1897 as “the art of arts” due to its “magic suggestiveness” (1999, p. vii), music has long been considered the most powerful art form and that which most accurately represents our being. In 1873 literary critic Walter Pater announced that “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of
music” (cited in Kivy, 1997, p. 98). In his *Philosophies of Art* Peter Kivy (1997) points out, the conditions of music to which Pater’s referred were, music’s untranslatable, non-representational and abstract qualities. While this study positions music as a highly representation medium it also acknowledges music’s abstract qualities: “music’s position outside language” (Peraino, 2006, p. 113) as cited earlier. If, then, music is suggestive and not concrete, music may well be positioned as a useful device for the articulation of identity—particularly queer identities. Therefore—with a sense of playfulness—I invite you to consider the following: if life is a work of art, does it also aspire towards the conditions of music? And if it does, what is it about music that makes it such a perfect resource for identity?

Music is an exclusively temporal form of artistry. Music exists in time; it is dynamic, energetic and in a constant state of motion. Music is created over time and explores a combination of conflicting and complementary sounds and rhythms, which come together to form a unique work that is coherent and comprehensible within the context of itself. However, this work is always able to be reinterpreted, remixed or performed again; thus it is never a whole or static representation of a particular moment in time, but the result of multiple and changing moments in time. These qualities of music share a striking resemblance to the qualities of queer identity which like music, are also dynamic and in a constant state of motion. Fisher suggests that “music as a temporal art form corresponds in interesting ways to identity as temporal structure of the self” (2002, p. 101). The self is a result of numerous conflicting and harmonious feelings and desires that are produced in time and changed by time. And much like music, the self is created by a uniquely specific combination of actions that also occur in time.

The creation of music (like the construction of identity) is fundamentally a human activity and, like identity, music is not a simple or static collection of products or objects, but a complex activity that is undertaken by a person or a group of people (Elliot, 1995). All known civilisations throughout history have exhibited musicality; thus music appears to be a vital part of our humanity. David Elliot suggests that while “there is no obvious biological reason for the existence of music practices.… Life without musicing and music listening would not be human as we know it. Homo sapiens is the species that ‘musics’” (1995, p. 109). Music is thus an essential part of the human experience. Moreover, it is a crucial component in the
construction and maintenance of identity, providing a fluid context for negotiating and actualising performances of the self.

*Music as Expression and Agency*

Over the past thirty years, musicologists, sociologists and social psychologists have conducted extensive research into music as a marker and constructor of identity. This has led to the broad acceptance of the idea that music informs personal development and constructs a central part of our identity (Frith, 1996). Music is personal because it allows us to manage our feelings, to regulate our moods and negotiate the parameters of aesthetic agency, and it is a strategic resource in the production and transmission of self-narrative (DeNora, 2000). Music is also social insofar as it is something we do and share with others, as co-creators, performers or listeners. Music allows us to form social identities because musical tastes and practices facilitate group membership forming social alliances and scene groupings (Hargreaves et al., 2002; Peterson & Bennett, 2004). Therefore, music is a multi-purpose tool for conducting various identity work.

In her book *Music in Everyday Life*, sociologist Tia DeNora reaches the conclusion based on extensive ethnographic research that “the sense of ‘self’ is locatable in music. Musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity—for identity’s identification” (2000, p. 68). DeNora’s claim confirms that music is a means of facilitating and expressing self-identity, a claim which is further supported by leading social psychologists of music, David Hargreaves, Dorothy Miell and Raymond MacDonald. They declare that music is a particularly important communication device for self-expression, allowing us to construct new identities and transform existing ones:

> Music can be used increasingly as a means by which we formulate and express our individual identities. We use it not only to regulate our own everyday moods and behaviours, but also to present ourselves to others in the way we prefer. Our musical tastes and preferences can form an important statement of our values and attitudes, and composers and performers use their music to express their own distinctive views of the world. (2002, p. 1)

Thus the act of creating and performing music does not only result in the creation and performance of sounds but also in the creation and performance of subjectivities; as such, music provides an opportunity to compose and perform a multiplicity of identities—particularly in the context of this research, identities that lie outside
heterosexual hegemony. As Victoria Moon Joyce suggests, “when we compose, we are not only composing a thing, we are composed in the process: we compose ourselves. This is an example of the postmodern understanding of the creation of *subjects* and the creations of subjects” (1997, p. 54, emphases in original).

It is clear from the arguments presented that musical activity undeniably contributes to a person’s sense of self and facilitates acts of self-creation and self-expression. By acknowledging these particular functions of music, we employ a Foucaudian understanding music as technology of the self. According to Foucault:

> [Technologies of the self] permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts conduct, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection and immortality. (2003, p. 146)

Technologies of the self assist us with the task of self-transformation, particularly in relation to the constitutions of power and truth enforced by disciplinary and discursive systems. In summarising Foucault, Peraino states that technologies of the self are:

> … fundamentally ascetic in that they entail “an exercise of the self on the self,” and they are fundamentally ethical in that they take into account positive or negative feedback accorded by the moral codes or acceptable ranges of conduct produced in the given matrix of truth and power. (2003, p. 435)

Music is one way we can facilitate exercises of self-creation upon ourselves while negotiating the self we are creating in relation to normative codes of conduct. This idea is further articulated in the work of John Connell and Chris Gibson, who suggest “music can provide opportunities for individuals or groups to assert human agency, to avert cultural homogeneity, to resist symbolically the wider social order and capitalist modes of production, and negotiate hegemonic ideology” (2003, p. 272). The essence of this idea is not entirely new, as Peraino identifies a similar summation in the modernist work of Theodor Adorno, claiming that “for Adorno, music provokes individuals to question their subjectivity, [and] their social identity in relation to ideological superstructures” (2006, p. 3). Thus, music provides a framework for establishing social relations and asserting individual or collective ideology, and by extension accommodates oppositional responses to hegemonic culture when individual or collective ideology is in conflict with the norm.

Frith argues that the “interplay between personal absorption into music and the sense that it is … something public, is what makes music so important in the cultural
placing of the individual in the social” (1987, p. 139). Music thus potentially provides disenfranchised people (such as queers) with a means of overcoming the public/private dichotomy that has long operated as a means of sexual repression. As I demonstrate in the chapters to follow, this particular function of music is especially important to queers because it accommodates emotional, physical and sexual expressions that may be unavailable in other expressive forms. Music is used extensively in queer work to facilitate the contestation of boundaries, allowing queers to individually and collectively negotiate the margins of acceptable behaviour and transgress them.

The aesthetic and performative qualities of music, coupled with its fluidity, temporality and looseness of meaning, make it perfectly suited to expressions of queerness, moreover providing a ‘safe space’ for these expressions because of music’s theatrical and fanciful nature. Music, and the world of entertainment more generally, have long been hospitable to gender and sexual misfits because in music you can get away with exaggerated and ‘artificial’ effect; you can ‘try on’ different modes of self-presentation; you can ‘come out’ and reveal yourself in music, lessening the risk of persecution because music itself is a mysterious and implicit form (Brett, 1994b; Koestenbaum, 2001; Morris, 2006; Peraino, 2006). Music, like gender and sexuality, is also performative in that it constitutes a set of acts that are attributed to one’s identity, and it is at the site of performance where we find Butler’s thinking about sex, gender and sexuality intersects most poignantly with theories of musical identity. As Cusick explains:

> These performances of a gendered and sexed self are partly, but certainly not entirely, performances of and through the body. It is at this point in Butler’s notion of gender and sex as performative that I think to be most promising for thinking about musical performance. For musical performance, too, is partly (but not entirely) the culturally intelligible performance of bodies.… Musical performances, then, are often the accompaniment of ideas performed *through* bodies by the performance of bodies (1999b, p. 27, emphases in original).

Thus music is an important resource in the construction and articulation of identity, and provides queers with an aesthetic tool that is capable of challenging the ideological superstructures imposed upon the performance of gender and sexuality—a tool for the enactment of gender and sexual subversion and social protest.
Extending the Research Aims

Taking into consideration the predominantly theoretical arguments presented in this chapter, additional research objectives have emerged. I propose that, thus far, this research has identified the following key points, subsequently extending the aims and objectives as follows:

- The meaning and significance of music and musical performances cannot be separated from the larger cultural matrixes and the history of ideas that have produced and sustained these practices. Detailed historical examination of the ideas and subsequent musical practices perpetuated by queer culture provides necessary foregrounding to the examination of contemporary queer music and musical performances. And as such, each chapter in Part III aims to give an inclusive history of the ideas and conditions that have fostered the respective practices.

- Queer is a complex identificatory term that does not and cannot be made to signify a cohesive group of people. Thus this research project aims to illuminate the complexities and multiplicities of queerness and queer cultural activities.

- Queer culture often positions itself in contrast to the gay mainstream, and as such it is necessary to explore these theoretical underpinnings within the context of Brisbane’s queer scene: the location in which the research participants reside (discussed in the case studies presented in Chapter Nine).

- Queer cultural artefacts potentially offer an insight into the ways that queer people perceive or make sense of gender, sexuality and the broader social world. Therefore, this research seeks not only to understand gender and sexual subjectivities as they are performed and negotiated via music and musical performance, but also the broader political concerns of the artists in question.

- Queering is often concerned with aesthetic and textual analysis. However, this research also remains mindful of the importance—and indeed the necessity—of empirical studies. Therefore, this research pays equally close attention to the lived realities of the makers, producers and consumers of queer culture, and the gender and sexual differences that the research participants express in and through cultural participation.
The primary research question posed in Chapter One—asking whether music facilitates the expression of queer identity—has partially been answered in this chapter. The research presented suggests that music does facilitate important identity work: it provides a framework for establishing social relations and asserting individual or collective ideology, and it accommodates oppositional responses to hegemonic culture and social normativities. Taking this into account, it can be said with some degree of certainty that music and musical participation facilitate expressions of queer identity. Therefore, I now seek to explore how this occurs through examining the identities being expressed and the aesthetic sensibilities engaged in the expressions.

Having completed an examination of queer theory and theories of music and identity, I now turn to an examination of musicology. Drawing on the information presented in this chapter, I offer an account of queer musicological work to date. I also propose the need for musicology to be more attentive to queer theory.
Music and its attendant realms emerge not only as mirrors of the sexual currents and ideologies of an age, but also as producers of these very modes of discourse. (Kallberg, 2007, para. 6)

Musicology is very much an attendant realm of music, a realm that for over a century has managed the task of contemplating and evaluating music. With dubious methods and motivation, musicology has attempted to interpret music, to analyse it, to critique it and to canonise it. In Chapter One, I asked: what is there to gain by making use of queer theory within musicology? Will this provide better representation of queer-identified people and will it aid in the production of queer readings and new knowledge regarding queer musical performance, composition and participation? A vital step in the development of a musicology attentive to queer musical episodes is to understand the history of the discipline in relation to its treatment of gender and sexuality. Specifically, we need to understand how this may be a lesson in the production of a new and more effective musicology—a musicology that is sensitive to experiences of queer gender and sexuality and resistant to institutionalised heteronormativity in its methods and critique; moreover, a musicology that favours the disturbance and subversion of meaning, over classifying or fixing it. As I outlined in the preliminary research questions, a goal of this projects is to achieve such a musicology: a musicology that sensitively renders the lives as experiences of queer-identified people visible through musical criticism; a musicology that produces, with a degree of catharsis, contextually rich and historically informed readings of queer musical performance, composition and participation.

The discipline of musicology and the history of its discourse had, for many years, obfuscated gender and sexuality within the study of music. With specific reference to the postmodern interdisciplinarity of ‘new’ or ‘critical’ musicology, this chapter reviews the most notable contributions by musicologists in theorising the interconnectivity of non-normative performances of gender, sexuality and music: exemplifying current efforts at integrating queer theory into musicological enquiry. It draws synergies between queer theory, music and identity theories and musicology
for the purpose of establishing an effective means of dealing with the musical
activities to be discussed later in the case studies.

**From the Straight and Narrow**

Historical musicology gained significant momentum during the rise of modernity,
becoming a recognised academic pursuit in 1885 when Austrian scholar Guido
Adler, published his article “Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft”
(The Scope, Method and Aim of Musicology). Inspired by the contemporary Austro-
German obsession for encyclopaedic knowledge, the discipline engaged primarily in
the analysis and classification of music, strongly advocating the construction and
sensibilities of European high-art forms, which it valued above all other musical
forms (Mugglestone & Adler, 1981; Williams, 2001). From its inception, musicology
(originally conceived by its founding thinkers as the science of music) was
considered to be autonomous from social signification, and thus it professed that
music worthy of its study similarly transcended the body, the social and the
emotional (Brett & Wood, 2004). Traditionally, musicology maintained a very
narrow focus, concerning itself largely with textual (score-based) analysis of
instrumental music, employing positivist and formalist methodologies in its studies.
Such quasi-scientific approaches to the study of music sought to uncover the ‘truth’
and value of music as a purely aesthetic experience, rejecting contextual meaning or
criticism in its enquiry. As a result of these early methods and ideals, musical
autonomy and absolutism became valuable perspectives that maintained a stronghold
in musicological enquiry until the 1980s, contributing significantly to musicology’s
long-standing ignorance of popular and non-Western musics.

Untainted by affect, absolute music was considered the highest of all music
exhibiting “the free play of pure form in which the mind takes pleasure” (Cusick,
1999a, p. 481), and therefore rendering the body obsolete. Spurred by the desire to
de-feminise and thus legitimise music and musicological enquiry,25 musicology
avoided any examination of embodied conditions such as gender or sexuality, and
refuted cultural criticism altogether until the 1930s. Adorno, a member of the
Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, was a pioneer in the cultural criticism of
canonised Western art music. Although his research is overtly Euro-centric and

vehemently critical of twentieth century Western popular music, he was groundbreaking in his application of critical theory to musicology and was among the first to assert that music is intrinsically tied to subjectivities and social practices. Critical musicology, emerging almost half a century after Adorno’s work began, brought about great change in the way musicologists approached the study of their subject, advocating greater concern for interpretation and less interest in the deduction of facts. In an attempt to subvert the grand narratives of traditional musicology, critical musicology encouraged a continual rethinking of music that incorporated new philosophical understandings of musical works and an awareness of the cultural contexts in which the music was produced and consumed (Beard & Gloag, 2005; McClary, 1991; Solie, 1993; Williams, 2001). The role of the gendered and sexual body in the composition, performance, experience and study of music became a valid concern for many under this new disciplinary approach. As Leppert suggests, “whatever else music is ‘about,’ it’s *inevitably* about the body; music’s aural and visual presence constitutes both a relation to and a representation of the body” (1993, p. xx, emphasis in original). Considering that humans have always used their bodies to produce and respond to music through playing, singing and dancing, Leppert’s claim seems an obvious one to make. However, musicology’s prior attempts at divorcing music from the body had been relatively successful; thus the body only began receiving attention in musicology’s critical age. As McClary observes, “the mind/body split that has plagued Western culture for centuries shows up most paradoxically in attitudes toward music: the most cerebral, nonmaterial of media is at the same time the medium most capable of engaging the body” (1991, p. 151). Thus a musicology that separates the body from music is incomplete, and only serves to reinforce the mind/body split, and by extension the subsequent binary dualisms and hierarchies attached to this notion, such as masculinity as original, powerful and rational, and femininity as its feeble and irrational subordinative.

**Embodied Music**

The advent of feminist criticism in musicology (emerging during the 1970s and gaining vigour in the 1980s) brought with it a reunification of the mind, body and

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26 As an example of Adorno’s critical appraisal of music, dealing with the social and subjectivity, see *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973). An example of Adorno’s criticism of popular music forms can be found in his article “On Popular Music” (2002).
music, advocating an understanding of music as “sensually powerful, socially constructed, and socially constructing” (Cusick, 1999a, p. 484). That is, feminist scholars began crossing the boundaries between the musical, the social and the erotic, examining music’s role in the affirmation of pleasure and in the construction and maintenance of gender and sexual identity. Refuting anachronistic assertions of musical absolutism, landmark feminist works such as those by McClary (1991), Solie (1993) and Marcia Citron (1993) began (re)excavating musical sites with the goal of unlocking gendered meanings in both music scholarship and the music itself—thus providing, as Cusick suggests, “a theoretical legitimacy for multivocal, interdisciplinary thinking … [and] a theoretical legitimacy for reconnecting ‘the music itself’ with the fabric of human life” (1999a, p. 498).

Emerging within close proximity to feminist criticism, popular musicology is similarly concerned with the social significance of music; that is, what music is able to tell us about people, politics, history and locality (see discussions of popular musicology in Brackett, 2000; Covach, 1999; Frith, 1996; Frith & Goodwin, 1990; Moore, 2003; Shuker, 2001). Since academic studies of popular music began in sociological institutions during the 1950s (Frith & Goodwin, 1990), popular music debates have been relatively attentive to issues of deviance, alterity, subjectivity, performativity, identity, space and place. Moreover, encouraging enquiry into the codified gendered and sexual roles evident in music as well as extra-musical devices. However, such criticism has not been without contention. Debates among musicologists and sociologists concerned with popular forms have lead to arguments regarding the disciplinary treatment of music. Sociologists have accused musicologists of ignoring the social contexts within which music is made and used, while musicologists have countered this charge; claiming that sociology is overly concerned with the latter, failing to consider the importance of music as a sound object and placing excessive emphasis on the analysis of lyrics (Frith, 1978, 1983; Schuker, 2001). This study does not wish to contribute to such debates; rather, it seeks to bridge the musicological and the sociological; to encourage greater interplay between the personal, social and the musical; while making sure that the music itself is not relegated to the background.

In his discussion of these disciplinary contentions, Roy Schuker reminds us that “popular music … emphasises interpretation through performance, and is received primarily in terms of the body and emotions rather than as pure text” (2001, p. 140).
The key point Schuker makes here is that popular music meaning is located in and mediated through performance, physicality and emotionality, a point that is particularly significant in the context of this study. As Barbara Bradby and Dave Laing note, “where else have gender and sexual identities been so explicitly and exhaustingly performed as on the pop stage and dance floors of the twentieth, now twenty-first century?” (2001, p. 296, emphasis in original). Bradby and Laing’s question makes two important points: it proposes that gender and sexuality impact upon the performance and consumption of popular music; and, most importantly, it alludes to the performative nature of gender and sexual identity, implying that popular music provides a context for these performances.

In 1978, Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie published their landmark article “Rock and Sexuality”, in which they proposed that music was a means of sexual expression and a mode of sexual control (Frith & McRobbie, 1990). Although the article is now thirty years old, this assertion remains central to contemporary debates within popular music criticism, and has been revisited from a variety of subject positions and cultural contexts.27 What is slightly outdated, however, is their second wave feminist approach to gender difference. Frith and McRobbie rely upon polarised musical comparisons in the signification of gender identity by positioning the aggressive sexuality of ‘cock rock’ in the masculine sphere and the passive sexuality of ‘teenybop’ music in the feminine sphere. By employing polar opposite examples in their investigation, Frith and McRobbie (and many others who have followed in their wake) ultimately reaffirmed binary codes of gender identity and the heteronormative performance of gender and sexuality within popular music. This style of analysis remains common among popular music scholars and these assertions are routine in popular music culture; they are assertions that, as we will see, many queers skew and play with.

Feminist and popular scholarship within ‘new’ critical forms of musicology has contributed significantly to an understanding of music as both a facilitator of gender and sexual expression and as a producer of social realities, yet both disciplines appear to favour a rather ‘straight’ approach to their discussions of sexual expression. Much of the work these disciplines propose to be of a sexually investigative nature often fails to deal critically with sexuality. Instead, what is most

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27 Refer to list of texts on issues relating to music, gender, sexuality and identity in Chapter One, p. 5 and p. 7.
common is a fixed and binary approach to sexuality, a persistent focus on the musical division of masculine and feminine gender roles, and the lingering assumption that gender is the determining object of sexual orientation. Ultimately, to treat gender and sexuality in this way is to reinforce heteronormative logic and in many cases perpetuate homonormativity—what Lisa Duggan refers to as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them” (2002, p. 179). The following discussion deals specifically with this concern. It demonstrates how lesbian and gay studies do not always constitute queer scholarship, because queer scholarship promises new possibilities for exploring multiple and overlapping experiences and expressions of gender and sexuality outside of fixed, body-based notions of sex and same-sex desire.

**Sexy Scholarship**

As performance theorist Sue-Ellen Case notes, in contrast to gender-centric investigations that are typified by feminist scholarship “queer works not at the site of gender but at the site of ontology to shift the ground of being itself … [to] attack the dominant notion of the natural” (cited in Hall, 2003, p. 55). Scholarship surrounding ‘unnatural’ sexuality in music was brought to the fore with the publication of *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (Brett, Wood & Thomas, 1994). This was the first edited collection dedicated exclusively to lesbian and gay issues within musicology, providing a context for musicologists to ‘come out’ within their scholarship and ultimately queering the academy itself. Contributing author Koestenbaum, boldly proclaims in the first chapter of the collection that, “I wish to enforce no separation between my musical and my sexual passions” (1994, p. 1). Koestenbaum’s controversial statement subverts orthodox musicological discourse and encapsulates a central theme of this research. His inclination to maintain continuity between his sexual and musical desires points broadly to the interconnectivity between musical and sexual passion. It is a connection that is felt not only by Koestenbaum, but also by those who I examine later in Chapter Nine. Furthermore, it is a sentiment upon which this research project will build, suggesting music is a facilitator of sexual expression. As contributing author Martha Mockus notes (ten years after its publication) “*QtP* expanded queer studies by identifying music as a central ‘technology of desire.’” Thus the disciplinary interventions of *QtP*
were twofold: a queer intervention in music studies, and a musical intervention in queer studies” (2004, p. 14).

*Queering the Pitch* theorises an historical link between musicality and homosexuality and interrogates the intangible space of the ‘musical closet’, a space that historically provided a safe haven for sexually marginalised musicians and composers (Brett, 1994b). Jennifer Rycenga’s article examines sexuality, creativity and the nature of being, and offers a unique perspective on a lesbian compositional process in which she intuitively declares that “love-making is simultaneously experience and expression, and music can be too” (1994, p. 284). Cusick directly confronts musicology with the radical question: “what if music IS sex?” (1994, p. 78, emphasis in original). In her essay, she proposes that:

> For some of us, it might be that the most intense and important way we express or enact identity through the circulation of physical pleasure is in musical activity, and that our “sexual identity” might be “musician” more than it is “lesbian,” “gay,” or “straight.” (1994, p. 70)

In this statement, Cusick queers normative sexual identity in her association of music with sexual pleasure and her positioning of music as a sexual activity. Cusick’s hypothesis offers a revolutionary way of thinking about the interconnectivity of musical performance and sexual identity by subverting the normative mode of genital-associated sexual pleasure and ultimately fetishising music.

*Queering the Pitch* represents a genuine attempt at queering within a musicological context, revealing the personal and pleasurable relations between music and non-normative sexuality and declaring music (a once autonomous and disembodied practice) a technology of desire. *Queering the Pitch* established queering as a legitimate musicological device, demonstrating its usefulness in the production of a new critical musicology. In the preface to this collection the editors explain what they believe queering has to offer all music lovers, including musicologists:

> The risk, the treat that “queering” represents may be to uncover for music’s lovers what it is we generally repress in thinking about our experience of music: our emotional attachments to music, our needs met by music, our accommodations to society through music, our voices, our bodies. (Brett, Wood & Thomas, 1994, p. ix)

For musicologists, then, queering is a technique that provides a way of reading the pleasurable, corporeal and identificatory functions of music as they relate to people who exist outside the boundaries of heteronormative gender and sexuality. It is a way
of disturbing the sexual norms of scholarship. For musicians and musical performers, queering offers a loose method for using musical styles and extra-musical devices to articulate their non-normative desires, perspectives and bodies, accommodating the subversion of popular cultural meanings and the transgression of normative gender, sexual and musical practices. *Queering the Pitch* successfully attacked the dominant notion of ‘acceptable’ music scholarship, yet— with the exception of Cusik’s article—it did not go so far as to attack the heteronormative rigidity of sexual identity categories, instead predicing fixed sexual desires and maintaining gender and the sexed body as the basis upon which sexual desires are informed.

Twelve years after the publication of *Queering the Pitch*, Sheila Whiteley and Rycenga produced the edited collection titled *Queering the Popular Pitch* (2006). With specific reference to popular music and its discourses this text exhibits a more inclusive and theoretical understanding of queer gender and sexual fluidity. Unlike *Queering the Pitch* (published during the infancy of queer theory), this text refers continuously to queer theoretical premises attempting to unpack the monolithic identities of lesbian and gay in the pursuit of a more fluid and comprehensive critique of sexual meanings within music. It focuses not just on lesbian and gay sexualities, but features a variety of other queer sexual and gender performances such as transsexuality, sadomasochism and drag kinging within its discussions of music. *Queering the Popular Pitch* provides an understanding of queer identity that is cautious of the gender specificities signified by the divided phrase ‘lesbian and gay’ therefore it is more attentive to queer theory and more conducive (than *Queering the Pitch*) to the discourses of contemporary queer debates. Positioning queerness as a fluid and dynamic system of meaning and mode of identity available to all people whether they are female, male, lesbian, gay or queer in any of its incarnations, this text refutes identification on the basis of sexual preference. *Queering the Popular Pitch* (re)introduces queer to musicology in multiple contexts. It extends the application of queer beyond the scope of gender and sexual identities, providing music-centred accounts of queer scenes, subcultures and communities, queer uses of time and space, queer sensibilities, queer representations of celebrity, and queer politics. This text provides the most comprehensive collection of queer popular musicology to date.

*Queering the Popular Pitch* teaches us that a queer musicology must maintain a challenge to dichotomous labelling and binary reductions, refuting the determinacy
of identity in favour of contextual and performance-centred critiques. Employing multiple and varied methods, the editors maintain that the text:

> Allows for both personal reflection and academic scrutiny of the ways in which sexual meanings are inscribed in different forms of cultural expression, and the ways in which cultural meanings are inscribed in the discourses and practices of popular music. (Whiteley & Rycenga, 2006, p. xiv)

The musicology in *Queering the Popular Pitch* is not simply conducted from the perspective of a lesbian or gay musicologist; rather, it is constructed from multiple perspectives, echoing the voice of the queer musicologist as well as the queer subject. This coupling of personal reflection and academic scrutiny evident in this text presents a valuable methodological example for a study (such as this) located in the discourse of popular music and queer theory, which is aiming to investigate episodes of queer musical expression that have not previously been documented. The nascent quality of queer subcultures relies on their academic allies to document and interpret contemporary queer episodes in music. In the first chapter of this collection, Halberstam restates a significant assertion from some years prior:

> Where such alliances exist, academics can play a big role in the construction of queer archives and queer memory, and, furthermore, queer academics can (and some should) participate in the ongoing project of recording queer culture, interpreting it, and circulating a sense of its multiplicity and sophistication. (2006, p. 8, emphasis in original)

This statement, and the essay from which it comes appear in slightly revised forms in Halberstam’s work form 2003, 2005 and 2006. This research recognises the urgency in Halberstam’s call, and is attentive to it.

The extensive subject matter examined in the collection of essays that make up *Queering the Pitch* (1994) and *Queering the Popular Pitch* (2006) is testimony to the fractured and divergent nature of queer musical scholarship. What is evident from surveying both texts is that queer musicology is not limited to dealing with the musical work of lesbians and gay men. Moreover, it provides new approaches to reading meaning into musical composition and performance; new insights into the interconnectivity of music and non-normative identity; new ways to theorise musicality and musical performance; and in some instances (exemplified in Cusick’s article especially), new ways to contemplate sexuality.
The Problems and Promises of Queer

If music and musicology are not only mirrors of sexual ideologies, but also producers of its discourse, then it is vital that musicologists maintain acute awareness when employing the term ‘queer’ in their scholarship. Propagated misuse of queer could potentially damage its potency as a signifier of fluid, unfinished, unstable and multifarious identities, moreover abating its capacity to disrupt the norm. Queer acquires its meaning through its oppositional relationship to “the normal, the legitimate, the dominate” argues Halperin (1995, p. 63). Drawing on this premise in his essay “Queer Musicology”, Phillips (2005) argues that queer theory—in terms of its importance to the establishment of a queer musicology—can be thought of as an umbrella concept that deals with the cultural (which includes the musical) construction of all identities by rejecting the normal, legitimate and dominate binary logics of heteronormativity. If this is to be the case, and queer musicology is to respond to the efforts of queer theory and provide more inclusive accounts of musical identity work, then musicologists (particularly those engaged in studies of lesbian and gay composers/song writers) must be careful that they do not resultantly support complacent homonormativities in their attempts to erase the heterosexual norm.

I suggest this because queer is in danger of over-use and dilution by lesbian and gay scholars from various disciplines, who are capitalising on the current trend of the term, meanwhile giving little thought to how, in the advent of queer theory, the term ‘queer’ ultimately disrupts all fixed identity categories, including lesbian and gay. While a considerable number of texts address queer (most commonly lesbian and gay) sexualities in music, some of them fail to accurately employ queer theoretical perspectives in their analysis or description. More commonly, these texts offer biographical accounts of famous musical figures and the retrospective complications of their homosexual desire. In part, many of them appear to be building a ‘queer canon’ while forgetting, as William F. Pinar suggests, that “queer is non-canonical” (1998, p. 43).

An example of this is John Gill’s book Queer Noises (1995) which, prior to the publication of Queering the Popular Pitch (2006), was one of three texts—the others being Hadleigh’s more journalistic work, The Vinyl Closet (1991) and John Clum’s gay male critique of musical theatre, Something for the Boys (1999)—that dealt specifically with popular musical forms. Gill’s book provides an account of the roles
that homosexuals have played in a variety of twentieth century Western music genres and, while it is certainly less hyperbolic and essentialising than Clum’s work and more credible and coherent than Hadleigh’s, it is nonetheless a good example of what queer musicology should try to avoid when dealing with contemporary and popular musics. In her review of this text, Mockus suggests that, “Gill’s queer canon is just as pious and limited as the heterosexual mainstream” (1996, p. 55). Gill does not seem interested in the music itself as he pays very little attention to musical performance or composition. Instead, he seems more concerned with identifying the sexual tendencies of famous musical figures—especially those who are seen as being ‘most out’ of the closet. This text, which is more concerned with (re)claiming queer ground than with the dissolution of binary identity categories, does not effectively queer the heteronormative discourses of music scholarship; rather, it produces a homonormative discourse in its place. While this book does offer many valuable and insightful historical accounts of gay (and to a lesser degree lesbian and bisexual) music-making, contributing to the visibility of minority sexual identities within contemporary Western music history, the failure to challenge heteronormative logics weakens its effect.

Attributing his subjects’ experience of sexual difference to their musical endeavours and vice versa, Gill makes generalised comparisons between the differences in queer (which he uses as a descriptor of homosexuality) and heterosexual musical activities without acknowledging that it is heteronormativity, not heterosexuality, that queer positions itself in opposition to. In a discussion of gay musical icons The Pet Shop Boys, Gill concludes that by comparison “heterosexual songwriters just don’t write songs that way, employ such language, entertain such contingencies … in short conduct the manoeuvres of bricolage, the act of cladding ourselves with social meaning, in that fashion” (1995, p. 4). By making this claim, Gill is in danger of excluding heterosexuals from assuming a queer positionality. Such hetero/homo comparisons only serve to strengthen oppressive binary logics. Moreover, the use of the term ‘queer’ interchangeably with the terms ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ throughout this book is misleading, as is its use in the book’s title, since the book refers predominantly to gay men—thus defying the multiplicity and inclusively that the term ‘queer’ denotes. I am not attacking Gill for this: queer is used and has been used to describe male homosexuality for decades; however, I am suggesting
that it is time to re-evaluate the way that musicologists use the word and to be attentive to the recent evolution of its meaning and signification.

Many of the problems inhibiting an understanding of what a queer musicology is can be located in semantic issues surrounding the use of the term ‘queer’ interchangeably with ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’. Of course, queer musicology includes lesbian and gay perspectives; however, it must also remain attentive to queer theory and the various modalities of queer identity. As outlined in the previous chapter, for queer work to be effective it must resist the all-too-common tendency to equate queer scholarship exclusively with lesbian and gay accounts, particularly accounts that fail to deal critically with the preconditions of gender and sexual identity. To date, musicology has demonstrated ignorance towards the complexities and pluralities of gender and sexual identification. In seeking the representation of lesbians and gays in music history, many scholars seem to have forgotten those proximate gender and sexual identities that have equally shared in and contributed to queer cultural histories. In the interest of social justice, queer musicology needs to construct and emphasise a broad and inclusive discourse as opposed to representations that serve only the interests of lesbian and gay scholars. As Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk have recognised in their work on queer community building, throughout the 1990s “mainstream gay and lesbian groups argued that the only thing wrong with the society was that it discriminates against gays”; by distinction, “queer activists linked their work with larger social justice movements” (2002, p. 104). Therefore, I ask whether we, as queer musicologists, are going to argue that the only thing wrong with the current discourse of musicology is its concealment of lesbians and gays in music, or are we going to link queer musicological work to larger social justice issues also?

Thus far, some of the difficulties surrounding the integration of queer theories into musicology have been outlined without providing lucid explanation of what queer musicology actually is. This is because queer musicology—like queer itself—is not easily defined; it does not have distinctive disciplinary boundaries or deal categorically with specific musical genres, cultures or epochs. Early on in its development, Brett considered the constitution of a queer musicology in an article he published in the Musical Times, which suggested the following:

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28 Refer to discussions in Chapter Three, “Power and Discourse”, p. 64 and “Queer Identity: Tensions and Transgressions”, p. 72.
A queer musicology will always need to nurture its unsettling qualities if it hopes to achieve anything. A reader who expects a new kind of musicology, moreover, must inevitably be disappointed by the lack of a unified approach, a single or even systematic method. To queer the pitch is to get rid of such notions: there is little attachment … to such things as a unitary method, a univalent approach, universal values. (1994a, p. 373)

The amorphous nature of queer, coupled with the abstract qualities of music—its position outside the visual and literal—and the multiplicity of meanings imbued in musical works and performances, suggest that undertaking queer musicology is not a clearly defined task and will almost certainly not produce impervious methodological boundaries. Queer musicology must (in line with queer theory) make itself available to the interpretation and critique of all gender and sexual performances within music if it is to provide a serious challenge to heteronormativity and binary logics of gender and sexual identity. In *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Cook poses the following question:

Mightn’t music be one of the ways in which we can learn to go beyond such black-and-white, essentializing categorizations as ‘gay’ or ‘straight’ and instead come to appreciate the complexities, the provisionalities, the light and shade of genuine human sexuality? (1998, pp. 122–124)

This question resonates with the core of what I propose a queer musicology is capable of achieving—that is, interpretation grounded in awareness of music as an identificatory practice, which acknowledges the complex, fluid and often contradictory nature of gender and sexual identities and the non-exclusive association of queer sexualities with homosexual and homosocial practices. If queer musicology is to resist heteronormativity and produce new pluralities of musical thought, it must maintain astute attention to the nuances, complexities and the sometimes-contradictory nature of the identities of the people who make and use music. It must be cautious of interpretation that is based on known or assumed sexual practices of musicians, musical performers and/or consumers, and it must resist the temptation to collate or generalise its findings for the sole advancement of lesbian and/or gay identity politics. Queer work, both in musical practice and in musicology, serves as an aesthetic and a discursive criticism in the unsettling of heteronormative discourses; cohesive performances of sex, gender and sexuality; and reductive binary logics. If, as Koestenbaum suggests, “the word ‘queer’ opens beauty’s floodgates, [and] enables a serious consideration of aesthetics” (1994, p. 3), queer musicology must exhibit a contextually grounded understanding of queer aesthetic devices if it is to achieve a comprehensive and insightful critique that reflects the multiplicity and sophistication of queer. In the concluding Chapter Ten of this dissertation I revisit
the question of how we can better account for queer lives and theories within musicology, drawing on the attempts made throughout this research.

In the chapters to follow, I commence this work by introducing the aesthetic sensibilities and cultural styles of camp, drag and genderfuck, queer punk and queercore, and queer feminist practices, detailing their history, politics and employment within queer musical cultures. Part III of this dissertation therefore serves multiple purposes: it locates, historically contextualises, surveys and critically discusses a variety of queer sensibilities and queer musical practices and subcultural styles. It reworks existing concepts and in some instances proposes new meaning drawn from the current body of literature. It attends directly to some of the research aims—that is, it gives an inclusive history of the ideas and conditions that have fostered the respective practices; it draws attention to the complexities and multiplicities of queerness and queer expression through cultural activities; and it introduces many of the ways that queer people perceive or make sense of gender, sexuality and the broader social world through participation in musical activity. Moreover, the case studies to be discussed in Chapter Nine draw upon the aforementioned aesthetic sensibilities and cultural styles; thus Part III is a necessary precursor to understanding the broader cultural contexts in which localised queer musical practices are situated.
Part III

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

Part III begins by introducing camp and then proceeds with a discussion of drag, queer punk and queer feminist musics, identifying the use of camp within these cultures where applicable. A critical discussion surrounding the queer sensibilities and musical practices of camp, drag and genderfuck, queer punk and queercore, and queer feminist work is a necessary precursor to understanding the broader cultural context in which the case studies of queer musicians and performers from Brisbane (presented in Part IV, Chapter Nine) are located.
Philip Core’s above statement is testimony to camp’s witty approach to gender and sexuality, while its ambiguity and playfulness suggest that camp is perhaps resistant to definition. Concise explanation of camp is made all the more difficult because camp—like queer—has multiple linguistic functions, acting as a noun, a verb, an adjective and adverb, and also as a subject, an object and modifier. Conventionally understood as an aesthetic sensibility, a subject or object can be read as camp while a subject can also act camp.29 During the mid-twentieth century, novelists, journalists and scholars of various disciplines began writing on the topic and origins of camp, notably positioning camp in relation to Western male homosexual culture. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, gay men have been camp’s vanguard; to recall Altman’s memorable phrase, “camp is to gay what soul is to black” (1972, p. 141).

On some occasions, camp has received criticism for its seemingly misogynist tendencies due to its association with gay male culture (Case, 2002; Robertson, 1996). But I propose, through the reclamation of camp as a performative critique of social normativities and as a political praxis, that camp can be (re)read as a commentary on gender construction, performance and enactment, thus situating camp within a queer rather than exclusively gay discourse (Meyer, 1994; Robertson, 1996); moreover, releasing camp from its historically limited signification of gay male effeminacy and introducing camp into the repertoire of queer performances of sex roles, gender and sexuality.

While camp’s association with a variety of historic and contemporary queer identities remains constant, popular culture has appropriated camp as part of its

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29 The act or gesture of camp is thought to have originated from the French se camper, meaning to posture or to flaunt.
discourse, and as a result camp is sometimes confused with apolitical parody and pastiche, and other aesthetic pejoratives such as kitsch or schlock (Booth, 2002; Meyer, 1994). This has incited contention over the integrity of camp’s meaning and function, and resulted in a fractured array of definitions and applications. In the context of this research project, camp is fully acknowledged as a proliferation of what was originally homosexual wit and aestheticism—what has now become part of a critically queer discourse. As the subcultures of sexual minorities have evolved, so too has the meaning and function of camp. As Chuck Kleinhans notes, “the conditions and contexts for Camp differ in pre-Stonewall, post-Stonewall, post-AIDS, and contemporary Queer moments” (1994, p. 182).

Given the difficulty and dispute surrounding definitions of camp, this discussion starts by identifying the origins of camp and broadly exploring its sensibility and association with homosexual practice and gay male culture. Camp is then positioned within queer discourse, and its function as a politicised form of queer parody, pastiche and performance is also be broadly identified. Camp is used extensively by many of the musical performers who receive close examination in the chapters to follow. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a general understanding of camp’s functions before attempting to identify and analyse the application of camp to specific musical performances.

**Sex and Sensibility**

Camp once belonged to the idiolects of those who populated London’s underbelly during the latter half of the nineteenth century—namely the prostitutes, the sexually perverse, those in show business and other practitioners of the arts. A literal definition of camp first appeared in the 1909 publication *Passing English of the Victorian Era: A Dictionary of Heterodox English, Slang and Phrase*. This text defined camp as “actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis … used chiefly by persons of exceptional want of character” (Ware cited in Cleto, 2002, p. 9). Although there is no official definition recorded prior to 1909, personal letters exchanged in 1869 between famous British transvestites, Lord Arthur Clinton and Frederick Park (also known as Fanny Park), make reference to camp as an embodied style or manner of conduct. In a notable letter to Clinton, Park writes: “my campish undertakings are not at present meeting with the success they deserve. Whatever I do seems to get me into hot water somewhere” (cited in Bartlett, 1988, p. 168). These examples suggest
that camp was used colloquially during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods of British history, and at this time referred predominantly to the mannerisms and gestures of wanton individuals.

Camp was introduced into literary discourse almost a century later in 1954, when Christopher Isherwood published his novel *The World in the Evening*. For the first time in a literary context, this text attempts to provide a loose explanation of camp’s schematic workings in a conversation between two of the novel’s characters, Charles (a homosexual) and Stephen. Charles explains to Stephen:

“You can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously. You’re not making fun of it; you’re making fun out of it. You’re expressing what’s basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance. Baroque art is largely camp about religion. The Ballet is camp about love…. Mozart’s definitely a camp. Beethoven, on the other hand, isn’t. (1973, p. 125)

While this is only a short excerpt from a much longer conversation, it is evident from this passage that, by the mid-twentieth century, camp had evolved into something much more than descriptive colloquial terminology. Camp was not simply a manner of gesture, but a sensibility—a system of meaning and a method of perception. Further testimony to the definitional ambiguity of camp is Isherwood’s distinction between high and low forms of camp. The division of camp into multiple forms is a continuing trend resulting from camp’s various operative modes and representational effects (Cleto, 2002). Isherwood distinguishes the two forms by identifying the underlying seriousness of high camp typified by the ballet and baroque art, in contrast to the unrefined silliness of low camp exemplified by “a swishy little boy with peroxided hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feather boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich” (1973, p. 125).

Isherwood’s novel consequently inspired scholars to further investigate the history and function of camp, and to attempt more lucid explanation. The most influential and recurrently cited discussion of camp is Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” which was originally published in *The Partisan Review* during 1964. This detailed collection of fifty-eight notes which attempted to explain the nature, quality and principles of camp sensibility has since been reprinted in Sontag’s book, *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (first published in 1966), and also in numerous anthologies on the topic of camp and a variety of texts concerned with gay and queer

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Isherwood expressed a somewhat similar idea in 1938 when he published his first novel *Lions and Shadows* (1963). Although he did not specifically define camp in this instance, camp motifs can be traced in the cleverly disguised discussions of homosexuality in this text.
discourses. Recognising the necessity for a critical analysis of camp, Sontag was the first scholar to seriously address the camp phenomenon and her success in doing so launched camp into the mainstream cultural economy.

Immediately following Sontag’s publication, camp found its way into heterosexualised popular discourse, appearing frequently in major publications from Britain and America such as the *New Statesmen*, *Time, Holiday*, the *Observer, Art News* and the *New York Times* (Cleto, 2002). “Notes on Camp” is widely recognised as the seminal attempt at defining the esoteric nature of camp as a sensibility and logic of taste. At her most concise, Sontag suggests camp is, in essence, a “love for the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (1982, p. 275). However, like many critics that followed in her path, Sontag did not achieve strict definition but rather posited suggestive criteria for determining instances and functions of camp taste and sensibility (Booth, 2002).

In this essay, Sontag endeavours to locate the origins of camp, positioning it historically within an eighteenth century appreciation of artifice and nineteenth century dandiacal self-indulgence and debauchery. Towards the end of her essay, she briefly reflects upon the affinity and overlap between modern camp taste and homosexuals who, according to Sontag, have been camp’s vanguard. Although Sontag acknowledges that gay men are generally accepted as the most articulate audience of camp, she downplays the significance of this by arguing that, “if homosexuals hadn’t more or less invented Camp, someone else would” (1982, p. 291). Two authors in particular, Dyer and Jack Babuscio strongly disagree. Dyer takes a more assertive approach than Sontag to the role gay male identity has played in establishing camp, arguing:

> It is just about the only style, language and culture that is distinctively and unambiguously gay male. In a world drenched in straightness all the images and the words of society express and confirm the rightness of heterosexuality. Camp is the one thing that expresses and confirms being a gay man. (Dyer, 2002b, p. 110)

Furthermore, Dyer proposes that, prior to times of gay liberation, camp was a means of coming out or going public in straight society, a way to reduce the risk of detection or persecution (Dyer, 1986). Thus camp is a product of gay oppression, a

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31 The term dandy originated in late eighteenth century Britain, and was used to describe a man who placed particular importance upon aestheticism, fashion, linguistic refinement and the pursuit of leisure. Such a person was seen as attempting to emulate aristocratic refinement while usually being of middle-class background. A notable example of dandyism is expressed in the work and persona of Irish literary figure Oscar Wilde (1854–1900).
façade to hide one’s gayness and protect one-self from mainstream alienation. Consequently, gay men became well versed in role-playing, “developing an eye and an ear for surfaces, appearances, forms—style” (Dyer, 2002b, p. 114). Camp uses irony, parody and to a lesser extent pastiche to negotiate the conditions of dominant morality and its imposed subordination. And, with an acute sense of style, camp blatantly undermines authenticity by performing with a strong sense of exaggerated theatricality.

Similarly, Babuscio proposes that camp is a gay male response to the polarisation of hetero- and homosexuality as natural and unnatural respectively. Camp expresses “a relationship between activities, individuals, situations and gayness” (2002, p. 118), and camp is unable to be fully understood unless attention is given to the heterosexist attitudes that produced camp in the first place. Framing camp within the context of a gay sensibility, Babuscio identifies four basic features of camp performance: irony, aestheticism, theatricality and humour. Since Babuscio first published these ideas in 1977, camp has been recontextualised within queer discourse, outgrowing its origins as a strictly gay male sensibility. However, these basic features of camp performance have maintained their validity, and continue to offer a constructive insight into the qualities of contemporary (queer) camp performance. According to Babuscio (2002), camp irony is “any highly incongruous contrast between an individual/thing and its context/association. The most common of incongruous contrasts is that of masculine/feminine” (p. 120). Camp aestheticism involves the effective shaping and delivery of irony. “As a practical tendency in things or persons, camp emphasises style as a means of self-projection, a conveyer of meaning, and an expression of emotional tone…. In terms of style it signifies performance rather than existence” (p. 122). Theatricality is the perception of life-as-theatre or being-as-playing-a-role and “implies that roles … are superficial—a matter of style” (p. 123). Finally, humour is “a means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity” (p. 126).

Of course, there are those who challenge these functions of camp as well, arguing that camp is now an embarrassment to post-Stonewall gay culture; it is an artefact of the closet that only works to limit the ways in which one can perform gay identity (Britton, 1978; Melly, 1984). In a notable essay titled “For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp”, Andrew Britton strongly argues against the effectiveness of camp’s challenge to heterosexist society. Instead, Britton sees gay camp as “a kind
of anaesthetic, allowing one to remain inside oppressive relations while enjoying the illusory confidence that one is flouting them” (1978, p. 12). From this perspective, camp lacks definition without the primacy of societal norms thus camp reinforces this primacy, and fails to offer any kind of radical critique of the norm itself. Thus, in relative isolation, Britton claims that camp does not challenge, but rather reinforces, the authority of dominant gender and sexual roles.

Camp’s association with gender and sexuality, specifically in perverse forms, is an underlying current of its sensibility—one that Sontag is obviously cautious about in her earlier examination. Briefly flirting with this issue in her ninth note on camp she remarks on the androgyne as being “one of the greatest images of Camp sensibility” (1982, p. 297). She further remarks:

Camp taste draws on a mostly unacknowledged truth of taste: the most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined form of sexual pleasure) consists on going against the grain of one’s sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine. (p. 297)

In this passage (which is not contextualised within her discussion of homosexuals), Sontag has discreetly identified one of camp’s most poignant features—that is, the attractive interplay of gender performances and the detachment of gender from sexed bodies. Occurring here is the Butlerian notion that gender does not automatically express biological sex, nor is sexuality necessarily the result of sex or gender. While Sontag’s notes do not deal with either gender or sexuality in a crucial manner, they do demonstrate camp’s potential to disturb gender and sexual norms, a point that is addressed in greater detail later in this chapter.

(Un)Doing Camp

Like Isherwood did previously in his distinctions between high and low camp, Sontag similarly deduces two forms of camp: these are naïve (or pure) camp and deliberate (or wholly conscious) camp. These categories do not replace or correspond directly with Isherwood’s distinctions, but rather, are considerably intertwined, because the activity of producing camp is evident both in the performance of camp and in the perception of it (Robertson, 1996). According to Sontag, “the essential element [of naïve camp] is seriousness, a seriousness that fails…. which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve” (1982, p. 283). Naïve camp is the perception of failed seriousness, which Sontag suggests
can be found in opera, in particular Bellini’s operas. Moreover, naïve camp necessitates a parodic or perverse perception of something or someone that emphasises an artificiality passing as natural, in which case the perception debunks the intended seriousness of the object or subject (Cleto, 2002).

Deliberate camp is produced by a self-conscious act or performance of self-parody that intentionally reveals a failed seriousness through artifice. In the absence of a concise definition of deliberate camp by Sontag herself, I refer to Cleto’s explanation of Sontag’s notes in which he suggests:

As to ‘deliberate camp’, the focus is not in the perverted decoding, but in the very act of performance, intentionally, as paradoxically so, producing a failure of seriousness, acknowledging its ‘essence’ in the unnatural, in the inessential and the contingent, and privileging form and style over message or content in self-(re)presentation. (2002, p. 24, emphasis in original)

Camp juxtaposes seriousness and paradox to reveal the unnatural state of something that is often perceived as real or essential, such as gender. By making fun out of one’s self,—that is, performing one-self incongruously with one’s supposed essence, a doer of camp is exposing the performative nature of identity. Moreover, by blatantly emphasising performance style over content, camp draws further attention to identity performativity, and exposes the tendency for normative society to value a culturally appropriate performance over sincerity of self-presentation.

Sontag also suggests that “to perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre” (1982, p. 280). This camp criterion further highlights camp’s unorthodox approach to self-representation. To camp or to perceive camp is to draw together antithetical qualities: it is to unite artifice and realism, theatricality and authenticity (Dyer, 1986). Camp reconfigures our notion of an authentic self by arguing that one is constructed and exists in a variety of performing roles—roles which are all essentially artificial. The ability to perceive or act out roles, exemplified by camp’s common (but not exclusive) association with effeminacy, not only inverts social roles but displaces them altogether. The displacement occurs by exposing the aesthetic artifice present in the role itself, dissolving its presumed truth or naturalness and replacing it with a paradoxical essence. In relation to gender roles, Jonathan Dollimore notes:

In a sense … [camp] renders gender a question of aesthetics. Common in aesthetic involvement is the recognition that what seemed like mimetic realism is actually and
In this sense, camp is clearly related to Butlerian gender performativity, and provides a potential method for gender subversion. It is sympathetic towards the politics of the contemporary queer movement while always maintaining a space for individual authority and experience within its execution. Camp is aesthetically mobile, as Sontag points out: “camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different set of standards” (1982, p. 286). Thus camp can be understood as an enactment of queer, a way of bringing the queer subject into being through playful irreverence for the established order while functioning as a cultural critique and a non-violent form of social protest (Bronstein, 1994; Meyer, 1994; Spargo, 1999). Although camp is partially defined in opposition to dominant culture, this does not automatically position camp as radically oppositional (Kleinhans, 1994). Camp’s refusal to reverse things or argue the good as bad or the bad as good further highlights its resistance towards binary logics and its contempt for absolute judgement values. Moreover, camp does not simply reverse dominant binary logics or directly oppose binary value systems. Instead, it transforms binary signifying structures through oblique (and often dramatised or aesthetic) operations (Christian, 2001).

In the light of camp’s performative qualities, camp cannot be fully understood as a mere logic of taste or a sensibility. As Meyer proposes, “when a concept of performance is used to establish the existence of a knowledgeable social agent who signifies through Camp, then the conventional interpretation of Camp … can be overturned” (1994, p. 13, emphasis in original). When we overturn this conventional notion, camp becomes what Kerry Mallan and Rod McGillis describe as “an oppositional critique (of gender and sexuality) embodied in a ‘queer’ performative identity” (2005, p. 1). Thus, in addition to understanding camp as a purely aesthetic sensibility, camp can also be thought of as an oppositional critique and a performance-centred method for the articulation of identity as role-play and life as theatre. This suggests that camp can better be understood as a queer praxis rather than a homosexually codified sensibility.
Camp as Queer Parody, Praxis and Performance

One of Sontag’s greatest errors was to suggest that, due to camp’s association with frivolity and aestheticism, camp “is disengaged, depoliticised—or at least apolitical” (1982, p. 277). Camp, particularly in a queer sense, is in fact a highly political form of aestheticism, especially in its critical and subversive use of postmodern parody (Hutcheon, 1989; Meyer, 1994; Robertson, 1996). According to literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, postmodern parody is defined as “a value-problematizing, denaturalising form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations” (1989, p. 94). Moreover, it is typified by an “ironic playing with multiple conventions … [and] extended repetition with critical difference” (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 7). Postmodern parody marks difference as opposed to similarity because it moves beyond ludicrous or comedic imitation and instead assumes a critical distance from the texts and/or ideologies engaged in the interpretation. Camp uses parody to critique the ideologies of the dominant class and expose multiple manifestations of gender and sexuality that are often considered poor taste. Parody in this instance becomes a queering process as opposed to an apolitical form of farcical interpretation or copying of dominant culture. As Kleinhans suggests:

This kind of parody reveals a greater sense of the range of life and its possibilities, and awareness of the grotesque, of carnival, and of anger, sensuality, and sexuality. Camp, as parody, has an ability to expose what the powers-that-be would like to keep neatly hidden and out of sight. Instead of acquiescing in the ideology of a disposable culture that wants to flush away its social problems, Camp can insist on a determined recycling of political agendas as well as aesthetic diversity. (1994, p. 199)

Therefore, a camp use of parody can be understood as a process of negotiating the power relationships between social agents and cultural texts in which queer social agencies become visible through parodic representation of what is perceived (by heteronormative society) to be legitimate or original (Meyer, 1994).

Since 1978, the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras has been held annually in Sydney, Australia and is one example of camp performance as political protest. In its original form, the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras was a cross between a political pride march and carnivalesque spectacle, exhibiting an array of queer identity performances spanning a range from the glamorous to the grotesque. Over the years the Mardi Gras parade has provided a highly theatrical platform for drag queens, leather dykes and numerous other deliberately camp manifestations of queer identities to march in solidarity. Drag (discussed at length in Chapter Six) is one of the most notable illustrations of camp as queer parody, and serves as an example of camp practice by
parodying the notion of ‘original’ gender and revealing the imitative structure of all gender performances (Butler, 1990, 1993). It is also quite common to see some people in the parade perform parodic representations of morally oppressive political and religious leaders, such as governing ministers, presidents, bishops or the pope. Moreover, much of the music used in the parade is likely to have been borrowed from mainstream pop culture, such as the music of Kylie Minogue\(^{32}\) in more recent years. The camp readings of popular songs produced in these carnivalesque performances can be understood as a contestation of hegemonic cultural readings, and the compulsory association of popular culture with heterosexuality. Mardi Gras provides a critical insight into the non-essential state of queerness and highlights the multiple manifestations of gender and sexual identities, especially those that are often hidden away from public view or considered poor taste.

During the early 1980s, camp began to emerge as a political strategy of queer parody employed by queer activist groups such as ACT UP,\(^{33}\) Queer Nation,\(^{34}\) OutRage\(^{35}\) and the Radical Faeries.\(^{36}\) These and other performance-based protest groups have used camp as a signifying practice in the constitution of publicly visible queer identities and as a theatricalised form of guerrilla activism (Christian, 2001; Meyer, 1994; Tatchell, 1999). Camp as political strategy can be noted in the protest style of ACT UP. Throughout the organisation’s history, group members have staged numerous public ‘die-ins’ at which people congregate and perform a fake death in protest of the lack of appropriate health care for people living with HIV and AIDS.

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\(^{32}\) Although popular Australian musician Kylie Minogue does not identify as either gay or queer, her music and image have been appropriated by the mainstream gay community throughout Australia and Europe and she is widely acknowledged as a popular gay icon (Baker & Minogue, 2002).

\(^{33}\) ACT UP (or the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed in New York during 1987 and later spread to other American, European and Australian cities. ACT UP’s aim is to raise awareness of the AIDS crisis and demand effective and affordable drug treatment. It does this through a variety of methods including political negotiation and non-violent dramatic acts of civil disobedience (Bateman, 2005).

\(^{34}\) Queer Nation was formed in New York during 1990 by four members of ACT UP. Queer Nation’s main goal was to raise awareness through direct public actions and militant protests against the escalating violence towards queers and to combat the heterosexist prejudices that were prevalent in Western arts and media. Although Queer Nation was a relatively short-lived movement, it was instrumental in the reclamation of the pejorative term ‘queer’ and had a lasting impact on sexual identity politics in America (Stryker, 2004).

\(^{35}\) Founded in Britain in 1990, OutRage is a civil disobedience group dedicated to artistic forms of social protest (Tatchell, 1999).

\(^{36}\) The Radical Faeries emerged in America during the late 1970s in opposition to the assimilatory agendas of gay liberationists. Informed by neo-pagan ritual, Marxism and gender fluidity, they are now a widespread counter-culture of queer men who often live in fringe communities (Bonck, 2007).
In 1990, OutRage staged a public ‘kiss-in’ which saw a large group of queer people displaying affection in London’s Piccadilly Circus in protest of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act which stated that homosexuality must remain a private matter under British law. This act blatantly disrupted any lingering notion of camp as an artefact of the closet by challenging the distinction between public and private space, while also providing a valuable commentary on puritan morality. In another instance, during 1992 OutRage protested the ban of homosexuals in the armed forces by draping a pink feather boa over a military statue and posting the slogan ‘For Queens and Country’ underneath the memorial to Admiral Mountbatten. In these instances, camp is employed as a sign of a repressed alterity, which is transformed through parody, theatricality and carnivalesque spectacle into an empowering queer critique of dominant ideology and morality.

**Chapter Five in Summary**

As the preceding discussion argues, queer camp performances acknowledge—with a degree of irony—the culturally constructed ‘truth’ of masculinity, femininity and compulsory heterosexuality while calling into question the social power afforded to these supposedly natural states on the grounds of authenticity. While this definition may seem to have shifted some distance from the original use of camp by the nineteenth century dandy, there is in fact a remarkable continuity. Camp—belonging to the discourse of the morally deviant and sexually perverse—has always critiqued, and will continue to critique dominant morality and draw out attention to the innate theatricality of being and the absurdity of authenticity. Camp is a style of performance and more specifically a method for revealing the performativity inherent in all social roles. As Allan Thomas suggests:

> Camp has strong links with a notion of performance which asserts its ‘truth’ whilst simultaneously contradicting it, undercutting it, calling it into question, a performance which works to articulate the performer’s ambivalent relation to cultural and economic power. (1996, p. 105)

Camp performance is political in that it acknowledges the power of normative social roles, while simultaneously disempowering them by mocking (through parody) their false claim to authenticity. Understanding explicitly the aesthetic modes of camp performance and perception—evident, for example, in drag and genderfuck performances and other forms of queer musical play—relies heavily on context and
an awareness of the performer’s intent. Therefore, specific discussions of camp as a performance-based method for articulating queerness with regard to musical performances are further addressed, in specific contexts, in the following chapters.
This biblical verse suggests that clothes are a powerful signifier of gender and a marker of the sexed body, furthermore demonstrating that inappropriate gender dressing has disturbed social norms and moral codes for millennia. In more recent times, similar codes of gender conduct remain true. In modern Western society, we commonly see infant boys and girls wearing blue and pink clothes respectively. While it is accepted that females may dress in shirts accompanied by skirts, frocks or trousers, males are only permitted to wear shirts and trousers. These conventions of gendered dressing are not fixed; rather, they have changed over time in accordance with social norms. For example, it only became acceptable in the post-World War II era for women to wear trousers and it was not until the 1960s that women’s trousers became a fashion item. Moreover, in Western societies prior to World War One, boys were dressed in pink and girls in blue. According to literature at the time pink was thought to be a “stronger and more decided colour” while blue was considered “delicate” and “dainty” (cited in Garber, 1992, p. 1). It was not until the 1940s that the current convention of colour-appropriate gender dressing firmly existed. Prior to this time small children of both sexes were dressed in ornate frocks. And it was not until boys became of age and entered the masculine rite of passage known as breeching that they were first permitted to wear short trousers, followed a little later by longer ones.

Considering these moderately changing trends in sex-appropriate dressing, it is surprising that in the twenty-first century this kind of inappropriate behaviour can still cause such moral outrage—yet it does. This is because the act of adorning one’s body with clothing and accessories culturally assigned to the opposite sex draws our attention to the inherently performative qualities of gender, revealing that gender is a performance with no basis in biology. Such revelations are not always welcome.
because ambiguous gender (which consequentially points to ambiguous sexuality) can incite violent reactions from those unwilling to acknowledge the inessentiality of gender to the sexed body. Cross-dressing in ‘real-life’ can be dangerous, often provoking negative criticism and in some cases a physically violent response. However, the perceived ‘unreality’ or fantasy of musical performance offers a unique way to frame these gender commentaries while still maintaining their power of subversion. Thus, in the camp traditions of queer parody, drag provides insightful social commentary cleverly masked by the jocular nature of entertainment.

Arising from the popular theatrical traditions of pantomime, minstrelsy, burlesque, variety and vaudeville, the art of drag is an historical example of musically embellished gender subversion and genderfuck.\(^{37}\) In recent times drag performances have once again crept into the realm of popular culture.\(^{38}\) Yet even in the most popularised and commercial displays, drag is by no means a wholly frivolous or futile pursuit. Drag, I argue, is ultimately a form of queer self-expression that transcends entertainment and offers a valuable critique of gender as performance, potentially (though not always) subverting dominant gender norms and creating new gender and sexual categories (Butler, 1990, 1993; Halberstam, 1998). Butler argues the power of drag lies in its ability to show that gender itself is like drag. She suggests:

> To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that “imitation” is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior or original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations…. In this sense, then, drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim to naturalness and originality. (1993, p. 125, emphasis in original)

Of course, there are those who contest Butler’s argument. Some feminist scholars claim that men in drag (drag queens) are making a mockery of womanhood and by performing dominant stereotypes of privileged white femininity they are simply reifying hegemonic gender norms and power relations (Feigen, 2000; hooks, 1992; Phelan, 1993; Schacht, 2002). Sociologist Steven Schacht (2002) for example

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\(^{37}\) Genderfuck plays (or fucks) with normative images of gender, and in the process of play, drag destabilises gender norms and subverts the logic of the sex/gender/sexuality paradigm. This will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

argues that drag queens—who are historically associated with homosexual persecution—are less of an oppressed and powerless class of individuals than scholars such as Ester Newton (1972) and Roger Baker (1994) would have us believe. But drag queens, argues Schacht (2002), are themselves the perpetrators of oppression against women by exploiting femininity and reinforcing gender binaries.

This chapter investigates drag as a performance of corporeality that differs from socially prescribed norms in that it is a transgressive performance, which subverts (rather than authenticates) the rigid gender binaries of heteronormativity. A brief history of drag provides the necessary background to enable a complete understanding of drag performance and politics. This is then followed by a contemporary overview of drag performances, leading into a focused discussion surrounding the roles and identities of female drag kings and bio queens. The choice to focus on drag king and bio queen performances has been made partially to counter feminist assertions that drag makes a mockery of women but primarily because they reflect a greater range of gender identities and performances than the conventional and popularised drag queen (Devitt, 2006). Furthermore, drag king and bio queen performances have received minimal popular and scholarly attention in comparison to their more widely examined counterpart, the drag queen.

This discussion shows how music and musical performance have contributed significantly to drag cultures, and it repositions music as a central contributor to the subversion of gender and the articulation of queer identities. For, even in some of the most notable volumes discussing drag cultures to date (Ackroyd, 1979; Baker, 1994; Halberstam, 1998; Newton, 1972; Richardson, 1995; Senelick, 2000; Troka et al., 2002; Volcano & Halberstam, 1999), the musicality of drag performance is often ignored, and the songs that are performed and the methods of vocalisation appear largely inconsequential to many scholarly observers. Although Elizabeth Kaminski (2003) does offer one scholarly example (in the form of her doctoral dissertation) detailing the musical elements of drag performance, she focuses solely on the music of drag queen performances, identifying these activities as a form of queer agency and oppositional protest. In the case study to be presented in Chapter Nine, I similarly conceptualise drag as a form of queer agency and oppositional protest. Yet unlike the work of Kaminski, my examination is conducted in regards to female-identified drag king and bio queen performances.
The Origins of Modern Drag: Cross-dressing, Gender Impersonation and Queer Theatricality

The ancient cross-cultural practice of transvestism exhibits similar characteristics to contemporary Western drag, as the cross-dressing act is a key component of drag performance, visually blurring gender categories and normative behaviours. Marjorie Garber explains transvestism as “a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself” (1992, p. 17, emphases in original). A diverse array of cultural traditions such as the Khawal dancers of Egypt, Japanese Kabuki and Indian Kathakali dance drama have historically exhibited transvestism as ritualistic and culturally sanctioned behaviour (Hanna, 1988). In the Western traditions of the medieval Christian church during the Feast of Fools, laymen and clergymen would dress up in women’s clothes and mock the rituals of the Christian Mass (Ackroyd, 1979). This particular tradition exhibits anarchic and parodic qualities similar to radical drag, in which gender binaries and authenticities are the target of mockery. A final example from Indigenous Canadian and American culture offers an intriguing disruption to binary ways of thinking about sex and gender. It is understood that native tribes had a special category of men and women known as Berdaches39 or two-spirited people. Male-bodied two-spirits would dress in female attire, have sex with other men and partake in activities traditionally gendered feminine, such as pottery or weaving. Female-bodied two-spirits similarly dressed in male attire, took on male roles such as hunting, and had sex with other women. Most importantly, they were not thought of by their tribes as ‘deviant’ or ‘defective’ men or women, but rather honoured by their tribe as a third gender and given a spiritual, almost sacred, role within the community (Lang, 1998).

These examples clearly demonstrate the cultural significance and social power of cross-dressing, yet none of them can be called drag as such, because drag relates specifically to a modern Western practices. It is uncertain why contemporary cross-gendered performances are called drag, given that the origin of the term itself is questionable. It has been suggested by some that drag was a colloquial term originating in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods of English history when male

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39 Berdache was not the traditional name for these people, but rather it was the French colonial term used by anthropologists: it is now considered derogatory. The native term for these people would, most likely have varied between tribes.
actors dressed in women’s clothes to perform female roles in transvestite theatre (Ashburn, 2004). It has also been suggested that drag was a nineteenth century term of Britain slang which, according to one source, referred to the swishing or dragging of a woman’s gown as she walked (Richardson, 1995). Yet another source posits it as a description of a petticoat worn by men who played female roles in the theatre (Baker, 1994). Whatever its original definition may be, in a contemporary context the meaning of drag shares only a vague relationship with its etymology.

Today, drag is commonly understood as a conscious, flamboyant, hyperbolised and embodied performance of femininity by a male or of masculinity by a female, in which the man or woman who does drag is presumed to practise homosexuality. The assumption made in regard to a drag performer’s sexuality is not necessarily surprising or new, for Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor note that “this association between gender transgression and same-sex desire can be found throughout time and around the globe” (2003, p. 181). In modern Western societies however, the basis for this assumption relies on an antiquated knowledge put forward by sexologist Krafft-Ebing that suggests homosexuality presupposes an “abnormal” gender crossing or inversion.40 Theories of inversion, as discussed earlier, naturalise the heterosexual male body’s performance of masculinity, and the heterosexual female body’s performance of femininity.41

Popularised (and sanitised) images of contemporary drag performances often depict glamorous lesbians in top hats and tailcoats or gay men in elaborate gowns, often singing, acting and dancing; the doers of drag rarely escape the confining social role of an entertainer. The history of drag is firmly located in dramatic role-playing and theatrical styles: thus the contemporary popular perception of the gender-illusive drag performer nothing more than as a mere entertainer is a misnomer, which is later rectified in the context of contemporary discussions regarding radical drag performance.

40 Refer to earlier discussion of Krafft-Ebing’s theory of inversion in Chapter Three, “An Epistemology of (Deviant) Sexuality”, p. 55.
41 Refer to earlier discussion on heteronormativity and gender performativity in Chapter Three, “Sex, Gender, Sexuality and Performativity”, p. 68.
Historically, both men and women in drag have played a central role in mainstream theatrical performances. In mid-nineteenth century British pantomime, for example, men often graced the stage in women’s attire to perform the role of the dame. A satirical and often grotesque display of ageing femininity, the role of the dame crossed various theatrical traditions appearing in dramatic plays, comedic farces and Savoy Operas (Baker, 1994). During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the theatrical styles of minstrelsy, burlesque, variety and vaudeville began developing throughout Britain, America and parts of Europe and Canada, and remained one of the most popular forms of entertainment with audiences until the early 1930s. With a keen sense of parody, each craft incorporated its own stylised form of cross-gender performance, allowing for insightful social commentary cleverly masked by comedic frivolity.

In the American tradition of minstrelsy, male actors would sometimes assume the theatrical role of the prima donna or the wench, and in singing roles of this kind would tailor their voices to mimic feminine qualities. Another of the minstrel characters also performed by a man was the comedic funny old gal role. Similar to the dame, her character required a ridiculous costume on a fat and highly unfeminine male body, employing unsophisticated satire and parody to humorously illustrate social conditions and stigmas (Ackroyd, 1979; Hamilton, 1993; Rodger, 2004). Not all theatrical female impersonation at this time was farcical. The performances of famous American vaudevillian female impersonators Francis Leon (performing c. 1860s–1900s) and Julian Eltinge (performing c. 1900s–1930s) celebrated traditional womanliness and received national acclaim for their highly skilled and respectable embodiment of Victorian femininity (Hamilton, 1993).

In the tradition of burlesque, the principal boy and second boy roles provided a space for women to theatrically perform masculinity. Assuming the character of a rascally adolescent or young adult male, women would playfully curse and spit onstage. However, unlike the costumes worn by male actors impersonating women, the costumes of the principal and second boy were highly unrealistic and often tailored to expose the legs and accentuate the curves of the female body (Rodger, 2002, 2004). As the song and dance tradition of burlesque evolved, scantily clad

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42 It was not until 1660 that English theatre permitted women to act on stage, and until such time, a culture of skilled female impersonators flourished. During the rule of the Puritan Commonwealth however, it was decided that men acting as women was morally offensive; thus the right to publicly perform on stage was granted to women.
female bodies became a staple means of entertaining audiences; thus a believable masculine performance or the sincere embodiment of masculinity by a female actor was extremely rare in this case.

During the early twentieth century, the less sexualised American theatrical traditions of variety and vaudeville as well as the British music halls and some European cabarets, gave women greater freedom to perform masculinity without resorting to sexual exploitation. However, it should be noted that female performances of masculinity were usually of a boyish nature; plausible representations of mature masculinity by a woman were not encouraged, and as such manliness remained an exclusive performance of the male body (Halberstam, 1998; Senelick, 2000). In a routine known as the sister act, two female performers (usually sisters) were required to sing romantic duets to each other, one dressed as a young man and the other as a young woman. Sister act performances relied upon quality vocal stylisation and intelligently dramatised impersonation (Rodger, 2004). The musicality of these performances is an illustration of how music—in the same way as costume and gesticulation—can enhance the gender-bending affect. Similarly, solo male impersonators with masculine vocal qualities who dressed in male costumes and performed male repertoire were also popular in the traditions of variety and vaudeville. According to musicologist Gillian Rodger, this well paid style of performance was highly favoured among male working-class audiences because “their act mercilessly parodied middle-class values, while glorying in the excess of leisure—alcohol, women and fine fashion” (2004, p. 265).

In the *Queer Encyclopaedia of Music Dance and Musical Theatre* (2004), Rodger—who has written extensively on gender impersonation in variety and vaudevillian traditions—points to two other musically enriched gender subversive performances: the female multi-instrumentalist who defies gender norms by playing traditionally male instruments such as trumpet or saxophone; and the role of the double-voiced vocalist. According to Douglas Gilbert’s *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (1963), female multi-instrumentalists were not gender impersonators as such; however, they did often appear dressed as a young male. As an example of such a talent Gilbert refers to the work of Lillie Western (performing c. 1880s), who was known for her expertise on the concertina, banjo and xylophone. The double-voiced vocalist is known to have costumed their body in one half male attire and the other half female attire, turning the appropriate costumed side of the body to the
audience as necessary. Double-voiced vocalists skilfully switched between male and female vocal ranges, portraying—both in song and appearance—two genders at once. In some performances however, the double-voiced entertainer may have been made up to appear as one gender at a time, changing costume between songs. It was acceptable for double-voiced acts to be performed by either men or women, providing they had the necessary vocal skills. Notable performers in this tradition included American variety performer Miss Dora Dawron (performing circa 1870s) and British music hall performer Bert Errol (performing c. 1900–1930s), both acclaimed for their ability to sing proficiently in either soprano or baritone and soprano or tenor ranges respectively (Busby, 1976; Rodgers, 2004).

The rise in popularity of cinematic entertainment during the 1920s and 1930s consequently reduced public interest in variety and vaudevillian theatre. Many of the old theatrical crafts did not translate to film and an increase in travelling film, companies and cinema houses slowly put numerous stage actors and those from drag-like performance traditions out of work. With the exception of highly acclaimed talents such as Julian Eltinge, female impersonators rarely became screen actors, while male impersonators nearly disappeared altogether. Increasing social awareness of the homosexual as a sexual category and as a psychologically deviant gender invert saw cross-gender performances lose favour with morally respectable middle-class audiences. Until such time, the sexuality of a cross-gender performer had remained within the private domain, receiving only vague commentary from theatre critics or audiences if the performer in question was not married (Baker, 1993; Roger, 2002). Furthermore, Halberstam (1998) notes that the passing of the Hays Hollywood Motion Picture Production Code in 1930 (lasting until 1968) banned all screen performances that were deemed sexually perverse, which included realistic gender impersonations.

While female impersonation continued its tradition within mainstream theatre in newly developing forms of all male revues, male impersonation was largely forced underground. During the 1940s, all-male revues became increasingly popular among live theatre-goes, this popularity lasting until the mid-1950s. These shows usually consisted of an all-male performance troupe of singers and dancers who performed a variety of roles ranging from comedic mimicry to glamorously costumed hyper-feminine impersonations. While the revue attracted a largely heterosexual audience, it became commonly accepted that its male performers were of homosexual
persuasion. As Roger Baker notes, “the only people eager to strut their stuff in drag were camp young effeminate lads who felt they had nothing to lose and everything to gain” (1994, p. 196). During the 1950s, homosexuality and its associated performances of male effeminacy were increasingly frowned upon. Legal persecution was on the incline and male revues became the targets of moral reformists, consequentially decreasing the popularity of drag amongst heterosexual audiences and forcing the tradition off mainstream stages and into underground gay bars and clubs (Baker, 1994; Chauncey, 1994).

**Gay Culture and Drag in the Twentieth Century**

Drag, as it is situated within gay culture, diverges somewhat from its origins within the theatrical traditions of gender impersonation, and as some scholars have previously noted, the two should not be conflated into a single history (Halberstam, 1998; Newton, 1996). In large cities such as London and New York, drag is known to have been a vibrant part of gay (and to a lesser extent lesbian) communities since the late nineteenth century, and the theatrical traditions of gender impersonation and mainstream socio-cultural practices such as masquerade balls are thought to have been a necessary precursor to twentieth century gay drag (Chauncey, 1994; Halberstam, 1998; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Rupp & Taylor, 2003). As George Chauncey (1994) points out in his history of gay world-making in New York during the 1920s and 1930s, “the ‘drag queens’ or ‘fairies’ on display at the balls embodied camp culture in their inversion (and often burlesque) of gender conventions” (p. 297). Furthermore, he suggests that “it was at the drag balls, more than any place else, that the gay world saw itself, celebrated itself, and affirmed itself” (p. 299).

In the gay cultural tradition, drag queen performances can generally be organised into two different performance styles commonly understood as high camp and low camp drag. In relation to Isherwood’s distinctions discussed in the previous chapter, high camp drag is best described as maintaining an underlying seriousness of the performance, while low camp drag reproduces its performance as an

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43 It is argued by some scholars that male impersonation did not make the transition into lesbian drag in a similar way to female impersonation transitioning into gay male drag and the all male revue show because the aesthetics of camp, which at that time was perceived as a gay male sensibility, did not serve the needs of lesbian theatre (Halberstam, 1998; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Newton, 1996). Moreover, lesbian sexuality was subordinated by the patriarchy of gay male society. This argument will be addressed later in this chapter.
entertaining (and often self-parodying) hysterical failure (Zervigon, 2004). Drag performances in both high and low camp styles often draw from and transform popular culture. Traditionally, many drag queens chose (and some still do) to impersonate a famous female singer/actor with which gay men identified, such as Ethel Merman, Joan Crawford or Judy Garland. And even those who did not choose to do specific impersonations of female stars would usually source the songs for their musical routines from mainstream culture.

In the style of low camp drag, there is a tendency to emphasise the performer’s fraudulent femininity through grotesque or absurd representations of women. Acts in this style often resort to crass humour and/or musical performances that mock the original sincerity or meaning of a song through over-articulation of seriousness or the exaggeration of flaws. In contrast, high camp drag strives for sophistication and authenticity in its delivery. High camp drag is a skillfully crafted artistry in that it aims to tastefully and respectfully recreate an idealised performance of femininity. In the high camp style, a drag queen may choose to impersonate Judy Garland, for example, but unlike low camp drag, this performance is never intended to mock Garland’s particular style of femininity or exaggerate the flaws in her character. Instead, high camp performances generally pay homage to the original performer, stressing with great detail the exact quality of her voice, appearance and gesture.

The tradition of drag performance within gay culture suggests that drag is not just an entertaining act of gender transgression, but can also be a signifying performance of gay cultural identity. During the 1950s and 1960s in Britain and America, gay bars and establishments where drag queens often performed were targeted by law enforcement; homosexuality was a crime and the frequency of police raids escalated. Being a drag queen was, for many gay performers, an increasingly political role in that drag performances had become an affirmation of one’s sexuality and cultural identity (Baker, 1994). The most famous of all police raids occurred in the early hours of the morning of 28 June, 1969 at a New York bar frequented by drag queens called the Stonewall Inn. Emotions were particularly heightened at this

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These women and others belonged to what is known within queer cultural studies as ‘the cult of the diva’. The diva may be an opera singer, stage performer or film actress who acts as a role model for the socially marginalised. She is generally someone with extraordinary talent who, either in her personal life or stage roles, embodies the heartache and suffering felt by many marginalised homosexuals (Dyer, 1986). In more recent times opera and popular singers such as Barbra Streisand, Cher, Renee Fleming, Kathleen Battle and Madonna have acquired diva status among predominantly gay male audiences.
time, as many of the bar’s patrons were mourning the death of Judy Garland and had attended her funeral the day before. According to some of the varying historical accounts, drag queens and butch lesbians were at the forefront of the retaliation against the police, fighting fiercely amongst a violent confrontation with an estimated four hundred police officers (Duberman, 1993). As previously discussed in Chapter Three, Stonewall was the event that mobilised a collective gay liberation effort in protest of homosexual persecution.

In the 1970s, a new and more extreme style of drag began to develop. It was distinctive from the forms of drag that had preceded it in that it employed a camp sensibility in the queer parodic sense, assuming a more radical and politicised role within emerging queer cultures. Factions of the Gay Liberation Front began using drag performances in their street theatre groups as a public act of empowerment and confrontation (Baker, 1994). In America and Britain, radical performance troupes such as The Ridiculous Theatrical Company,45 The Cockettes,46 Angels of Light,47 Hot Peaches,48 Bloolips49 and Split Britches50 took to the streets and stages, offering audiences a variety of newly stylised, politicised, radical and more anarchic drag performances. These acts parodied hegemonic cultural norms and social values as well as the gay cultural traditions of high and low camp drag; many of them also began exploring concepts of genderfuck in their shows. Acts such as the all-male troupe known as The Cockettes sensationally dressed in gaudy female attire, wore full beards and performed outrageous theatrical routines that Mark Thompson describes as “a pastiche of every used-up myth, fable, and lie they had ever watched, read, or been taught” (1995, p. 449). New radical performers challenged the

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45 The New York-based Ridiculous Theatrical Company was formed by Charles Ludlam in 1967. It performed a ground-breaking style of avant-garde theatre that drew upon drag and queer culture until 1987.


47 Angels of Light was formed in 1971 and continued performing until 1980. After some disagreement between members of The Cockettes, Hibiscus (the founding member) left The Cockettes to form a new radical drag troupe that was similar in style but differed in the way it was managed.

48 Performing during 1972 and 1979, Hot Peaches were a New York-based troupe, which performed a variety of radical street drag and theatrical works.

49 The London-based theatre troupe Bloolips performed between 1981 and 1991. Its shows aimed to parody hegemonic Western society and provide entertaining social commentary on a range of topics, including gender, sexuality, consumerism and Western politics.

50 Split Britches is a lesbian feminist theatre company, which perform gender-bending queer satire. Formed by American’s Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver in 1980, it has have toured major American and European cities and is still performing today.
conventions of drag as entertaining mimicry, lowbrow farce and stylised gender impersonation, focusing instead on drag’s potential as political commentary, sex role exploration and entertaining confrontation. As one radical American drag queen and ACT UP activist, Lurleen, suggests:

Traditionally drag has been a form of escapist entertainment, like the alternative version of TV-sitcoms for fags…. What we do reflects the mentality of our generation. We approach serious causes with humor and react to what’s going on in our culture and society. (cited in Hilbert, 1995, pp. 464–465)

Emerging out of a punk sensibility in the early 1980s, the radical drag of the Wigstock\(^{51}\) generation firmly positioned drag at the front lines of queer activism, rejecting the role of drag queen as mere entertainer (Hilbert, 1995; Senelick, 2000). Queens such as Lurleen and her contemporaries, Lady Bunny RuPaul and the black power advocate Vaginal Creme Davis, acknowledged the important role that drag had played in the fight for gay civil rights during the late 1960s and 1970s, and as such they attempted to politically mobilise drag for a new generation of queers who were currently in the midst of an AIDS crisis. “AIDS has forced gay people to think about who we are and what our relationship with straight society really is”, said Lurleen. “When there is a reactionary government in power, it’s kind of hard to get up onstage and lip-synch Barbra Streisand and then say, ‘drink up, everybody’” (cited in Hilbert, 1995, p. 463). Moreover, the Wigstock generation of queens fashioned their own drag personas, rejecting the culture of high camp mimicry and impersonation that had preceded them and instead choosing to create their own, uniquely queer cultural capital. For example, Lady Bunny launched the Wigstock festival in 1984; she is a deejay and has released disco singles such as “Shame Shame Shame” (1996) and “The Pussycat Song” (1996); RuPaul has release over ten studio albums of original music to date and starred in films such as *RuPaul is: Starbooty* (1987) among numerous others; while Vaginal Creme Davis fronted punk and thrash concept bands such Pedro Muriel and Esther, The Female Menudo, Black Fag, and the Afro Sisters and is the editor of the queercore zine *Fertile La Toyah Jackson*. Through political engagement and the self-fashioning of individual drag

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\(^{51}\) Pioneered by the notorious radical drag queen Lady Bunny in 1984, Wigstock is an outdoor drag festival that was first staged in New York’s East Village on Labor Day. Since then, Wigstock has grown into an annual event, and in 1991, 2 September, was officially declared Wigstock Day by Manhattan borough president Ruth Messinger. In her speech, Messinger declared that “the Wigstock experience, a celebration of music, peace, love, drag and gay pride, helps New Yorkers realize the celebration of difference makes us all richer” (cited in Senelick, 2000, p. 436). For a detailed depiction of this event, see *Wigstock: The Movie* (2003).
identities, the radical drag of the 1970s and the Wigstock generation of the 1980s produced a queerer modality of drag performance.

In its recent history, drag has championed queer politics through its role in gay liberation, its anarchic display of social disobedience and its tactical performances of genderfuck. As such, drag has evolved into a form of social commentary, specifically, a queer theatrical marker of heterosexuality’s false claim to gender authenticity and a way to perform queer imaginings of the self and the social. While it is clear from this concise history that not all drag intends to be subversive, Butler argues that “drag can be read for the way in which hyperbolic norms are dismantled as the heterosexual mundane…. Norms, taken not as commands to be obeyed, but as imperatives to be ‘cited’ twisted, queered” (1993, p. 237). And it is the incongruencies that arise out of the act of citing, twisting or queering that produces a mode of gender creativity, a queer positionality that is in contrast with the norm. Thus drag as it is examined here is firmly grounded in a recent history of camp as a theatricalised form of political praxis, serving the disruptive agenda of queer political agency.

Most of the writings on drag and camp are one sided in that they often address the performance of femininity by males, but largely ignore the performance of masculinity by females. This has produced an extensive history and knowledge surrounding the culture of queening, but at the same time rendered theatrical forms of female masculinity largely obscure. Very little scholarly or popular criticism of drag kings existed before the late 1990s (see DiFrance, 2004; Halberstam, 1998; Troka, Lebesco & Noble, 2002; Volcano & Halberstam, 1999) and to date less has been published in regard to the drag role of the bio queen. The next section offers a concise explanation of these roles. Once drag has been thoroughly conceptualised in regard to its relationship with all sex, gender and sexual identity performances, noting also drag’s propensity for genderfuck, I then consider the significance of song selection and lip-synching in drag performances as this informs the examination of Brisbane-based drag troupe the Twang Gang later in Chapter Nine.

**Drag Kings and Bio Queens**

As discussed, the contemporary drag queen has originated from a long theatrical tradition of glamorous and parodic female impersonations that in recent history has
become a more radicalised and politicised form of queer performance. Yet male impersonators did not make the transition into performing the role of the drag king within lesbian communities until the latter half of the twentieth century. As Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1993) highlight in their history of lesbian communities, the rise of the drag queen in gay culture does not parallel the rise of the drag king within lesbian culture. And, while performances of gender transgressions were significant in the formation of lesbian communities (reflected in the construction of butch and femme roles), a notable lack of anything similar to drag queen performances within lesbian culture is observed up until the 1990s, hence the relatively new scholarly attention to the topic. According to Halberstam, “lesbians seem not to have cultivated the same kinds of drag cultures that gay men have” (1999, p. 39). Kennedy and Davis point to a “puzzling lack of camp” (1993, p. 62) in the lesbian butch role during the 1940s and 1950s as a possible reason for this. They suggest, as do Kate Davy (1994) and Halberstam (1998), that a gay camp aesthetic was unable to serve the needs of lesbian theatre in the same way as it did gay male theatre, because ‘true’ masculinity is considered original, authentic and non-performative in contrast to the artificiality of feminine gender roles. Therefore, in order for a woman to pass as a true butch—that is, to present herself as authentically masculine—her performance must not be perceived as artificial. She must not appear to be acting a role, but instead her physical portrayal of masculinity should be perceived as the embodiment of her true self. This suggests that the theatrical roles of the drag king and the drag queen as they are understood today do not share a joint or symmetrical history, and as such the role of the drag king deserves to be attended to separately in order to avert confusion.

Drag kings are broadly defined as anyone (regardless of gender and/or sexual preference) who turns masculinity into an act through a conscious performance of the signs of maleness. Such acts may include the wearing of facial hair, male clothing, a

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52 The concept of butch and femme identities has been a part of lesbian culture since the 1930s, and can be explained in the simplest sense as equating to an overtly masculine or overtly feminine performance of gender. During the 1970s lesbian feminist identity politics criticised butch and femme identities for reproducing a false and dichotomous representation of lesbianism within the heteropatriarchy’s system of oppressive gender norms (Maltz, 1999; Theophano, 2007). However, within contemporary queer cultures, butch and femme gender roles remain evident. Butch and femme roles are highly complex and variable; thus it should be noted that this definition is not complete as there are multiple manifestations of butch and femme identities such as queer butch, butch dyke, stone butch and stone femme among others. For a complete discussion of these roles, refer to The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader (Nestle, 1992) and Lesbian Sex Scandals: Sexual Practices, Identities, and Politics (Atkins, 1999).
prosthetic penis, stylised deportment and other physical mannerisms normatively deemed male. Just like drag queening, the nuances of drag king acts are highly varied; however, it should be noted that the literature on this topic identifies two specific sub-types of kinging: butch or male-identified drag kings; and female-identified or androgynous drag kings. Halberstam (1998, 1999) and Ashburn (2004) distinguish the two sub-types by suggesting that the butch kings “elaborate in their acts their off-stage female masculinity” (Ashburn, 2004, p. 88), often maintaining a male gender identification offstage by wearing and performing masculinity “as part of her quotidian gender expression” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 232). In contrast, female-identified drag kings are often involved in a parody of masculinity, assuming masculinity merely as an act in which they expose the theatricality of maleness.

Contributing author to The Drag King Anthology (2002) Annabelle Willox, summarises the contemporary emergence of the drag king as a queer role, suggesting that “the drag king has emerged out of recent moves towards gender blurring as a subversive act that denaturalises categories of gender advocated by queer theory” (2002, p. 274). As I demonstrate in Chapter Nine, local drag king and bio queen performance troupe the Twang Gang falls into the latter category, and as such I argue that a camp sensibility favouring parody and artifice is available to these female performers—a sensibility that they employ extensively both in their drag king and bio queen performances.

The role of the bio queen is a recent development in drag performance and in 2001 a Bio/Femme Queen Manifesto was submitted to the International Drag King Community Extravaganza Board, calling for greater acceptance of this role within international kinging communities (“Bylaws”, 2007). Bio queens are biological females or female-identified individuals who consciously perform hyper-femininity and can be crudely described as female drag queens. The term ‘bio queen’ has developed from the previously contested term ‘bio faux queen’, an abbreviation of ‘biologically faux drag queen’. Members of the international drag king and queen community are cautious of the term ‘bio-faux-queen’, preferring instead terms such as ‘bio queen’, ‘femme drag queen’ or simply ‘drag queen’ because it is felt that by naming this behaviour as faux one is suggesting that it is a lesser imitation of true or original queening. The authors of the Bio/Femme Queen Manifesto thought that, by using the word ‘bio’, they could challenge and expand upon notions of biology (Eve, Kentucky Fried Woman, Tristan Taormino & Venus Envy, 2004). However, some
transsexuals still regard the word ‘bio’ as problematic, instead preferring the term ‘femme drag queen’.

In her examination of bio queening, Rachael Devitt has noted the lack of scholarly consideration given to this emerging role, a role that she argues is unique in its ability to “out gender as performative because it does not depend on an assumed incongruity between ‘actual’ and staged gender” (2006, p. 30). The role of the bio queen, then, is extremely important in articulating the nature of gender as performative because she does not rely upon the displacement of the imagined “authentic” gender and gender as it is being performed on stage. Devitt goes further to suggest that a rigid sex-based notion of kinging or queening—defined as a performative gender grossing—leaves little room for women who choose to perform variations of femininity to be included in the paradigm of drag:

If drag must entail a cross to the “opposite” of one’s “true” identity, then that original, that biological sex-based identity becomes normalized and immobile, thus denying both the validity of the performer’s self-identified gender and the power a drag performance has in questioning gender “realness”. (Devitt, 2006, p. 30)

Furthermore, drag performances of this nature demonstrate a resistance towards the privileging of masculinity within both heterosexual and homosexual cultures. As Eve Shapiro notes in her discussion of American drag king and bio queen troupe the Disposable Boy Toys, “many members chose to perform femininity as a feminist act. They viewed performing girl drag as one way to claim space for and empower femininity” (2007, p. 264).

Because the roles of the drag king and bio queen are presumed to be lesbian roles (although this is not always the case), drag king and bio queen performances make further commentary on lesbian sexual identity—that is, that lesbians perform gender in a multiplicity of ways. Thus the recent emergence of lesbians performing masculine parody and hyper-femininity complicates the lesbian butch stereotype. The butch being an image through which society has judged and comprehended lesbian sexuality for decades (Willox, 2002). Moreover, the execution of gender hyperbole that is essential to both these roles would further suggest that camp as theatrical political praxis is, in the present day, available to lesbians who perform drag in these ways.
Genderfuck

The final theory that requires explanation before our understanding of drag is complete is the theory of genderfuck. The self-fashioning of radical drag identities that are not based solely on the performance of gender-crossing or gender-passing is a prime example of this. Genderfuck is a postmodern term used to describe a person or performance that plays (or fucks) with normative images of gender, and in the process of play destabilises gender norms and subverts the logic of the sex/gender paradigm. For Stephen Whittle, genderfuck is concerned with practical enactments of the theoretical premises of queer theory: it is “a full frontal theoretical and practical attack on the dimorphism of gender- and sex-roles” (2005, p. 117). In June L. Reich’s highly cited article on this topic, “Genderfuck: The Law of the Dildo” (first published in Discourse, 1992), she proposes that “genderfuck structures meaning in a symbol-performance matrix that crosses through sex and gender and destabilizes the boundaries of our recognition of sex, gender, and sexual practice” (2002, p. 255). In this article, Reich goes on to suggest genderfuck could be conceptualised as “the effect of unstable signifying practices in a libidinal economy of multiple sexualities” (2002, p. 264). Thus genderfuck’s multiple symbolic performances of gender, which separate the performer’s anatomy (sex) from gender’s semiotics, produce a visible array of sexual subjectivities that lie outside the heterosexual matrix.

Cultural studies theorists Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman support Reich’s definition, agreeing that genderfuck is all about the destabilisation of subject positions via symbolic play and performance. They argue that “in playing with binary opposition it [genderfuck] moves towards a model of gender as simulacrum (without an original)” (1995, p. 49). Unlike early examples of drag, a performance that employs genderfuck does not attempt to pass as authentic or believable. Instead, it deliberately mixes gender cues in an attempt to subvert the dominant sex/gender/sexuality paradigm by exposing the false dualities that lie at the heart of heteronormativity. For Christopher Lonc, genderfuck is not a theatrical attempt at female or male impersonation; rather, he sees it as a way to “ridicule and destroy the whole cosmology of sex roles and sexual identification” (cited in Bergman, 1993, p. 7). Thus genderfuck directly coincides with Butler’s previously discussed notion of gender trouble. Moreover, genderfuck can be understood as a way of causing gender trouble or as an anarchic theatrical enactment of the concept of gender trouble.
**Aural Signifiers: Lip-syncing and Vocalisation**

To successfully achieve genderfuck in a drag performance one clearly requires the right combination of costume and gesticulation. However, there is another key element which contributes to the genderfuck effect but which is often overlooked in studies of drag: aural signifiers. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler alludes to this arguing that “signs work *by appearing* (visibly, aurally)” (1993, p. 68, emphasis in original). While Butler refers primarily to language in her statement and does not extend upon this argument to incorporate theories of vocal register or timbre, she does make the point that vocalisation signifies the material body. Similarly, Peraino (2007) claims that the voice plays a primary role in gender determination highlighting how gender-coded vocal mannerisms such as register and timbre operate (like genitalia) as an attribute of biological sex. Given this, discussions around music and the voice—specifically song choice and methods of vocalisation—are remarkably absent from studies of drag. While many scholars make passing mention of the prevalence of lip-syncing in contemporary drag, none thus far have theorised its effect in relation to drag’s genderfucking potential or what it may signify about the subversion and/or articulation of the body and gender identity of drag performers. Therefore, I give this specific consideration in the case study of the Twang Gang presented in Chapter Nine.  

What the majority of studies have shown in passing is that, in the long tradition of both gender impersonation and drag, music has always been a necessary feature. In earlier times—before the prevalence of recorded music—performers would always sing in their acts, usually accompanied by live music. However, the introduction of recorded music into clubs (most notably during the 1960s) allowed for a new style of drag performance to emerge, which became known as a recorded vocalist or lip-sync performance. In Esther Newton’s famous text *Mother Camp: Female Impersonations in America* (1972), she notes that the introduction of lip-syncing in drag performances caused contention amongst performers. A prestige was afforded to those who sang, and as such singers were revered as stage performers while lip-syncing was considered to be a more armature style of street performing. In the majority of drag performances today, those who sing ‘live’ are not necessarily held in higher esteem than those who lip-sync, as lip-syncing currently

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53 See discussion of this in Chapter Nine, “Case Study One: The Twang Gang”, p. 186.
appears to be the most common method of song delivery among nightclub performers.

In relation to performances of sex and gender *through* the body, I suggest that lip-synching can potentially be theorised as an act of genderfuck. In Cusick’s essay “On Musical Performances”, she proposes that:

Voices stand for the imperatives of sex because, unlike the behaviours we might agree are performances of gender (clothes, gestures, ways of walking), voices originate inside the body’s borders and not on the body’s surfaces. We assume that physical behaviours originating within the body’s borders (in the body’s cavities) are determined by their site of origin, by the body itself. Thus, they cannot be “performances,” in that they seem not to be choices. We believe that the voice *is* the body, its very breath and interior shapes projected outward into the world as a way others might know us, even know us intimately…. I believe one key element to the usefulness of Song as a medium for the performance of gender and sex is the relation of Song to the borders of the body: all voices, but especially singing voices, perform the borders of the body. (1999b, p. 29, emphasis in original)

If, then, we are to agree with Cusick’s summation that voices necessitate and articulate the sexed body, I would argue that lip-synching is one way that drag performers can subvert the body’s borders. If the voice produced in the act of singing reveals without choice an intimate truth about the performer’s body, then a performance of lip-synching reclaims the right for a performer to choose what they reveal about their bodies, and thus confounds this intimate physical truth. In essence, lip-synching is the ultimate subversion of the vocally codified sexed body. If, for example, a female performer chooses to wear male drag and sing in her natural female sexed voice, her vocal performance is inescapably sexed as female and may consequentially be gendered feminine because, according to Cusick, the natural voice signifies her sexed body. “We believe”, she says, “that the voice *is* the body” (1999b, p. 29, emphasis in original). Therefore, no matter the extent to which a female performer might go to subvert the bodily markers of her femaleness, she is ultimately reduced to them via singing. Lip-synching breaks down the ‘physical given’ of the body. The vocal incongruencies that occur in a lip-synching performance—when a female is perceived to be producing a male voice or vice versa—is one example of the way music can be used to subvert the borders of the body, demonstrating that things are not always as they seem or sound, thus queering the vocal production of sex and gender signification and genderfucking with the vocal cues of sex and gender in the process.
Chapter Six in Summary

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the histories, styles and functions of drag are many and varied. To some, drag may have appeared simply as an entertaining charade; however, here I have shown that the power of drag extends beyond the comedic image of a man in a frock or the sensual image of a woman donning top hat and tails. Since the 1970s, drag performance has increasingly served a disruptive agenda, one that is grounded in a recent history of camp as a theatricalised form of political praxis. We see this particularly in the self-fashioning of radical drag identities that are not based solely on the performance of gender-crossing or gender-passing: drag that employs genderfuck; drag that purposefully troubles gender, upsetting heterosexual hegemony. The style of drag that is most commonly associated with contemporary queer culture is drag that mixes multiple signs of sex, gender and sexuality, engaging in symbolic play and performance, both visually and aurally.

What has been missing thus far from scholarly discussions of drag is the significance of music and other aural signifiers such as lip-synching and vocalisation. It would appear that the songs that are performed and the methods of vocalisation appear largely inconsequential to many scholarly observers; therefore, I address this with priority in the case study of local drag troupe, the Twang Gang in Chapter Nine. I also pay close attention to the use of camp within Twang Gang performances as I believe that a camp sensibility favouring parody and artifice is available to these female performers, which they employ in an attempt to be both entertaining and political, engaging and empowering their audiences and troupe members while denaturalising categories of gender and performing parodic social commentary.
A life of listening to disco is too high a price to pay for your sexual identity. (T-shirt slogan cited in Spencer, 2005, p. 281)

To identify as both queer and punk is to simultaneously resist the cultural norms of gender, sexuality and musicality associated with both queer and punk rock cultures and, as such, marginality forms a crucial aspect of a queer punk identity. While gender-bending fashions and sexual experimentation were features of 1970s punk (Hebdige, 1991; Laing, 1985; O’Hara, 1999), the majority of contemporary punk rock scenes as well as society at large continue to uphold heterosexist values. Thus queer punks are marginalised in relation to the dominant sexual practices associated with contemporary punk rock idioms. Furthermore, they are also marginalised in relation to the dominant musical tastes and styles associated with mainstream lesbian and gay culture. Being a queer punk musician forces one to problematise not only punk rock music practices, but also the set of available cultural practices and identities associated with mainstream lesbian and gay culture. As Mark Fenster suggests:

To be a queer punk or fan of hardcore means, in many local music scenes, being outside the dominant sexual orientation articulated to a music practice; to be a queer punk means having taste and style that lies outside dominant notions of what music mainstream adult gays and lesbians perform, listen and dance to. (1993, p. 73, emphases in original)

Identifying as lesbian or gay does not necessarily presuppose affiliation with a particular musical scene or subculture. However, there are undeniable musical norms that are associated with mainstream lesbian and gay cultural identity to which Fenster alludes above. The simple slogan above—screen printed on t-shirts and worn by a select few queer punks in Chicago in the early 1990s—similarly draws our attention to the musical norms associated with mainstream gay cultural identity. For example, there is an anecdotal understanding (albeit a commodified and homogenous one) that ‘gay music’ equates to some category of dance music such as house, disco or pop, while ‘lesbian music’ usually implies some form of folk music, particularly by female singer-songwriters. Such musico-sexual affiliations are highly generalised,
serving as a way to package and sell lesbian and gay cultural identity to mainstream sensibilities. A brief perusal of track listings on so-called lesbian and gay music compilation discs testify to these generalisations of taste.

A compilation titled * Lesbian Favorites: Women Like Us* (1997) features a selection of female singer-songwriter tracks by popular lesbian icons such as k.d. lang, Jane Siberry and Ani DiFranco. Furthermore, within the last two years all of these artists have been discussed or interviewed in Australia’s leading lesbian lifestyle magazine, *Lesbians on the Loose*, thus substantiating their status as lesbian music icons and further perpetuating the notion of a dominant lesbian music taste culture. Similarly, there is an extensive selection of gay music compilations available for purchase. Albums such as *Gay Dancing* (1997) and compilation series such as *Gay Happening* (vol. 1–18), *Let’s Hear it for the Boy* (vol. 1–7), *Gay Classics* (vol. 1–12), *Glad to Be Gay* (vol. 1–3) and *Gay Anthems* (vol. 1–3) are just a small selection of the available titles, all of which exclusively feature dance and pop music styles and exhibit a preference towards ’70s and ’80s disco remixes. Cited in the most notable text on the topic of queer punk, *Homocore: The Loud and Raucous Rise of Queer Punk* (Ciminelli & Knox, 2005), queer musician Gina Young argues this point, noting that lesbian and gay cultures have stratified their musical tastes in very particular ways:

Lesbians have gravitated towards folk-rock, whereas the gay boys are all about that pumping house music … I know tons of out musicians, but very few who gravitate towards the harder, punk edges of sound. (cited in Ciminelli & Knox 2005, pp. 116–117)

A further point to note regarding mainstream lesbian and gay music cultures is that they are not only genre specific, but are often gender specific as well. Iconic music festivals that attract high levels of interest from the international lesbian press and communities of lesbian festival attendees such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Wiminfest, Ladyfest and Lilith Fair, are patronised predominantly, and in some cases exclusively, by women. Gay male dance music scenes, which are typically located in gay identified nightclub spaces such as the Wickham Hotel in Brisbane, Stonewall in Sydney and The Peel in Melbourne, attract a predominantly male clientele.

Unlike the mainstream trends that typify lesbian and gay music cultures, queer punk music and queer punk scenes promote gender inclusivity in all areas of music production, as well as in other participatory musical activities such as concert
attendance, promotion and technical production. In her writing on the emergence of queer punk, Amy Spencer suggests that one of the aims of the queer punk movement was to create an alternative to the cultural norms of the gay mainstream:

In creating their own alternative to the gay culture they saw around them they could employ their own values concerning gender, money and censorship…. [T]hey were opposed to the prevailing attitudes of mainstream gay culture, which was often seen as sexist … They attacked the idea that due to your sexuality you should be offered only one choice of social scene, challenging one particular aspect of gay culture: the idea of separate gay and lesbian bars. Through Homocore events, they aimed to create a space for men and women to be together, as opposed to the sense of gender segregation which was the norm in mainstream gay culture. (2005, p. 281)

Thus sex, gender and sexual pluralism are defining characteristics of queer punk and a central motivation in the establishment of queer punk scenes.

I will map the emergence of queer punk, focusing particularly on the relatively obscure culture of homocore, later known as queercore. A brief history of punk will provide the necessary insight into punk style and ideology. This will then be followed by a discussion on the emergence of queercore, outlining its motivations, musicality, politics and sensibilities. Focusing specifically on queercore’s musical and extra-musical features, I draw on the earlier work of DeChaine (1997), who critiques queercore in terms of its ‘playful sensibility’. Building on DeChaine’s argument, I demonstrate how queer punks use play as well as a highly developed camp sensibility to problematise the binary logics of heteronormativity and enact their queer punk identity.

**Out of the Ashes of Punk**

Punk was originally a cultural phenomenon that emerged in Britain and New York during the mid- to late 1970s, encompassing musical styles, fashion, art and ideology. In its original context, punk was a culturally mutinous and playful response to political and social conservatism (Laing, 1985; O’Hara, 1999). Punk methods of cultural production were emphatically DIY (do-it-yourself), anti-professional and anti-virtuosic, intent on undermining what punk saw as the arrogant and unnecessary

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The original punk movement was fairly short-lived, lasting in its original form for only two years between 1976 and 1978 before diversifying (Laing, 1985; Steward, 1984). The term, however, is still frequently used and has come to signify a variety of hybrid musical styles and subcultures within contemporary popular music discourses such as hardcore (Blush, 2001), anarcho-punk (Gosling, 2004), post-punk (Reynolds, 2006) and straight edge (Haenfler, 2006) to name a few.
musical complexities of progressive rock as well as the overblown production styles of glam rock and disco. Punk, suggests Dave Laing, “stressed the need for directness of self-expression unhindered by the sophisticated considerations of [previous] music traditions” (1985, p. 26). Initially, punk rejected the mechanisms of the music industry, instead favouring independent music production, distribution, staging and publicity. Punk was a self-fashioning mode of expression, a way of creating a cultural alternative to the mainstream and subverting, in the process, rock music hegemonies and commercial models of music production. Drawing inspiration from the cultural fringes—which is evident, for example, in the sado-masochistic undertones of punk fashion or the situationalist undertones of punk art—the punk ethos activated an aggressive challenge to the bourgeois norms of preceding generations, revolting against the aesthetic and political establishments of the time.

Punks “were passionate about music, and the potential to express themselves through its form” (Spencer, 2005, p. 229). As such, punk stressed musical and narrative self-expression placing little emphasis on musical formalism or conventional lyrical tropes. The punk sound was largely raw, technically unsophisticated, loud and fast, requiring little more than elementary musical skills. Songs were generally constructed around two or three chords, accompanied by a loose 4/4 rhythm with simple—often shouted—homophonic melodic lines over the chords. These uncomplicated musical features allowed almost anyone who so desired to engage in, and express themselves through punk music performance. Lyrically, punk was abrasive and antagonistic, privileging social and political themes over romantic or lustful accounts. In Laing’s authoritative account of punk, One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock (1985), he notes in a comparative study of punk and British top-fifty lyrical themes of 1976 that punk dealt with social, political and sexual themes to a far greater degree than mainstream pop music. He shows that twenty-five percent of punk subject-matter focused on society and politics compared with four percent by top-fifty artists. Moreover, none of the top-fifty songs broached the topic of sexuality compared with fifteen percent of punk lyrics, which addressed sexuality in some way.

Punk’s long-standing association with social marginality and sexual perversity is evident even in the etymology of punk, which was originally prison slang referring to a homosexual catamite. Although this positions punk well as a useful vehicle for the articulation of queerness, specific accounts of queer gender and sexualities within the
original punk rock scene are somewhat vague. As such, caution must be taken not to over-emphasise the ambiguity or queerness of punk genders and sexualities during the 1970s and early ’80s because we must remember that a working-class, male centricity prevailed. However, some historians and sociologists such as Sue Steward argue that “punk sexuality was angry and aggressive, implicitly feminist” (1984, p. 158), rejecting the conventions of traditional gender and sexual appropriateness.

Others, such as Craig O’Hara more boldly posit that “homosexuality has been a visible part of the Punk movement since it first began” (1999, p. 115). Dick Hebdige suggests that punk represents a phase of “polymorphous, often wilfully perverse sexuality, obsessive individualism, [and a] fragmented sense of self” (1991, p. 28), citing Mick Jagger and David Bowie as precursors to this. Indeed, a range of British and American glam rock and proto-punk musicians from the late 1960s and ’70s (and those who later became associated with the form) such as Bowie, Lou Reed and The Velvet Underground, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, the New York Dolls and Alice Cooper, all contributed to the visual spectacle and outrageousness of punk performance and punk’s gender-bending subversiveness (Auslander, 2006; Hebdige, 1991; Laing, 1985; Thomson & Gutman, 1996). Bowie’s performances of ambiguous gender and sexuality—specifically transvestism and bisexuality—along with the shock rock tactics of artists like Cooper, challenged the dominant cultural standards of masculinity; thus paving the way for punk’s purposefully shocking fashions and non-normative expressions of gender to come.

While these comments point to punk’s accommodating capacity for gender and/or sexual experimentation, they do not suggest that punk was predominantly (or even moderately) populated by queer-identified individuals, however, they do tell us that the original punk movement was a cultural space that was open to gender and sexual non-conformity. The connection between punk and queer culture therefore lies in punk’s celebration of the social misfit; its willingness to articulate dissatisfaction with social normativities and cultural hegemonies; and its gender-bending potential.

Since the late 1980s, punk culture has diversified, sprouting a variety of hardcore and alternative sub-genres, each with distinctive musical and ideological qualities that deviate from punk’s original sound and ethic. As the global popularity of hardcore and pop punk styles has grown, subsequently becoming consumed by the major record labels and gaining popular/commercial acceptance, punk—in its
various contemporary incarnations—has been charged with abandoning its cause and failing to extend the boundaries of its social critique. Elaborating on Fenster’s (1993) remark cited at the beginning of this chapter, punk (in particular American hardcore punk) had become hostile towards outward expressions of queer gender or sexual identity. By the mid-1980s skinheads (or skins) had developed an affiliation with American hardcore which lead, in part, to increasing racism, sexism, heterosexism, nationalism, violence and right-wing attitudes among scene participants (Blush, 2001; O’Hara, 1999). As such, queer punks became marginalised within the emerging hardcore scenes. Self-identified queer punk and social activist Stephen Donaldson (better known as Donny the Punk) addresses this in an edition of a street zine called *Homocore*. Donaldson states:

> When punk made the transition from the classic style to Hardcore, there started a new emphasis, not part of the original idea of Punk, on being ‘hard,’ and this was identified with being ‘macho.’ Given the popular image of homosexual activities as ‘unmanly,’ it was not surprising that homophobia soon became a part—fortunately a very controversial part—of the Punk scene. (cited in O’Hara, 1999, p. 120)

Therefore, it was in response to this resurgence of homophobia among punks as well as to the genre and gender specificities of gay culture, that queer-identified punks sought to create a cultural space of their own, leading to the rise of the distinctly queer punk subculture known as queercore.

### Queercore Music and Anti-gay Anarchy

Representing a convergence of punk rock music and queer politics, queercore is a social and cultural movement that emerged in North America during the mid-1980s and has since evolved into an international community that expresses itself through a variety of media such as music, literature, zine publications, visual arts and film. This “loose coalition of radical anarchist and/or punk queers” as Sullivan names them (2003, p. 45), articulate an intense dissatisfaction with gay sexual politics, believing that the mainstream gay agenda has diluted the complexities of queer desire in order to broaden its respectability and placate its conservative elements (Cooper, 1996; Fuchs, 1998). Queercore participant and writer Dennis Cooper (1996) describes it as a “punky, anti-assimilationist, transgressive movement on the...
fringe of lesbian and gay culture” (p. 292) which, like punk, is an ideological response to past-radicals who abandoned their cause for what Cooper refers to as “the pleasures of a compromised but stable Left” (p. 293). Furthermore, queercore’s loosely anarchic and somewhat ambiguous rhetoric rejects the notion of cultural unity or cohesion among sexual minorities and irreverently attacks the established figureheads, symbols and codification of mainstream gay culture. In an interview with the San Francisco Chronicle, Jon Ginoli, the lead singer of the internationally renowned queercore band Pansy Division, states: “I've always felt that mainstream gay culture not only didn't include me, it was antagonistic to me. People were, like, ‘You like rock? You don't like Judy Garland?’” (cited in Arnold, 1995, p. 25).

In 1985, gay filmmaker and pornographer Bruce LaBruce and lesbian filmmaker and musician G. B. Jones published a zine titled J.D.s, which is widely acknowledged to be the zine that launched the queercore movement (Ciminelli & Knox, 2005; Fenaster, 1993; Spencer, 2005). On the pages of J.D.s, LaBruce, Jones and others ranted about the prevailing heterosexism and gender segregation that had become typical of punk rock subcultures as well as the orthodoxy and assimilationist attitudes of the Western gay mainstream. LaBruce explains:

We’re tired of the gay scene, which even in the ‘80s was starting to get assimilationist and conformist, so we turned to punk rock because it seemed more glamorous and political and aesthetically pleasing. But we quickly discovered that punk had become sexually conventional and boring, betraying its early roots. The original punk movement, like the early gay movement, was about embracing all sorts of nonconformist behaviour. Early punks experimented with homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, and trisexuality—they’d try anything. But by the mid ’80s, with the advent of hardcore and the mosh pit, a new era of machismo and heterosexual rigidity was ushered in…. We started J.D.s as a reaction against the increasing sexual conformity of both the gay and punk movements. (cited in Ciminelli & Knox 2005, p. 8, emphasis in original)

J.D.s (and queercore subculture in general) demonstrates a conscious move away from lesbian and gay specificity, which is further reflected in a manifesto that featured in the first issue of J.D.s zine (1985) titled “Don’t Be Gay”.

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56 Formed in San Francisco in 1991, Pansy Division is the most commercially successful example of a queercore band. In 1994, the band was chosen by the hugely successful American punk rock band Green Day to support it on a nationwide tour. For a more detailed discussion of Pansy Division in a queer punk context see the work of DeChaine (1997) and Cynthia Fuchs (1998).

57 Some accounts suggest J.D.s ran for eight issues between 1985 and 1991 (Spencer, 2005), while others propose that there were nine issues starting in 1986 and finishing in 1991 (Ciminelli & Knox, 2005). A selection of J.D.s back issues is available through the Queer Zine Archive Project at http://www.qzap.org
It was through *J.D.s* that this scene and its associated punk rock musical style first became known as homocore; however, the prefix ‘homo’ was soon replaced by ‘queer’ in order to better represent the diversity of scene participants and to distance the movement completely from lesbian and gay conventions. Homo or queercore was an emerging subculture and an ideological space—articulated firstly and formally through *J.D.s*—dedicated to deviant cultural expressions that were seen as necessary enactments of queer social justice and queer cultural identity construction. An editorial by Jones and LaBruce states that:

> J.D.s is dedicated to the furtherance of homo-core…. It is our belief that freedom of communication shall not be denied to any segment of our society even though that group may be anathema to the so-called “normal” majority. If we were wise enough, we might know that communication may have greater therapeutical value than any sermon that those of the “normal” community can offer. And if the communication is of value to the so-called “deviant” community, how can it be said to be without any redeeming social importance? (1989, p. 24)

Following the emergence of *J.D.s* other queercore scenes began to take shape. Communication networks expanded through zine publications such as *Homocore, Bimbox, Holy Titclamps, Chainsaw* and *Fertile La Toyah Jackson*. Punk rock-sounding music by queer bands such as Fifth Column, Tribe 8, Team Dresch, God Is My Co-Pilot, Third Sex, Sister George, Phranc and Pansy Division (all of which were championed in the aforementioned zines) became synonymous with the queercore sound.

Methods of queercore cultural production generally maintain punk’s DIY ethic, favouring experimentation and bricolage over proficiency and cohesion. This is most evident in the proliferation of queercore zines—originally in paper form and more recently as online archives—many of which exhibit a handmade, cut-and-paste aesthetic. Intent on maintaining queercore’s independence from the mass marketing approaches of the music industry, queercore operates within the cultural underground and has established queer-owned and operated music labels such as Outpunk, Candy-Ass Records, Chainsaw and Queer Control Records, dedicated to promoting and distributing queer artists of various music styles. This do-it-yourself approach affords queercore artists the freedom to speak directly to their audience about issues that they feel are relevant to the lives and identities of queers. Furthermore, it is considered by some members of the queercore community to be the only way queers can maintain creative control over their product and avoid compromising their subject-matter in order to broaden their appeal or appease heteronormative
sensibilities. Jody Bleyle, guitarist and singer from Team Dresch58 and founder of Candy-Ass Records, expresses her anger towards major labels that often advise queer artists to use heteronormative pronouns in their lyrics claiming that queer narratives limit the marketing potential of an artist. “Why aren’t straight people limiting themselves [when they sing about being straight]?” Bleyle argues. “I didn’t live Bob Dylan’s songs, and I didn’t live the Guns N’ Roses shit, but I still got their records and listened to them” (cited in Ciminelli & Knox 2005, p. 56).

In its beginnings as a musical genre, queercore was akin to punk: this is signified by the suffix ‘core’, which is indicative of its punk rock extraction. Originally, queercore was distinguished by its loud, fast and raw sound, its physically energetic and interactive performance style and, most significantly, by its lyrics. Queercore lyrics are typically queer-centric, remorselessly vulgar and antagonistic, relying heavily on a balanced mix of both anger and humour (Arnold, 1997; DeChaine, 1997). However, defining a queercore sound has become somewhat problematic because, according to various published accounts from queercore participants, the music is defined largely by its extra-musical qualities such as its politics, thematics and queer narratives rather than by its musical qualities. Gina Arnold (1997) suggests that queercore should not be thought of as a genre but rather as a subculture. “The bands involved may be allied with one another in their goals”, suggests Arnold, “but they sound entirely different from one another” (1997, pp. 161–162).

A definition posted on the official Queercore Blitz59 website characterises queercore as:

A subgenre of punk originally spawned out of the politically explosive environment of the Reagan years. Lyrically, and in performance, queercore rawly and honestly addresses queer desire, societal prejudice and the price of being true to one's own self. (Queercore Blitz, 2004)

This statement points to the primary significance of lyrics and physical performance in defining queercore. Furthermore, this statement suggests that queercore is a musically facilitated means of expressing a queer identity and is celebrated by its practitioners and fans as an ideological response to oppressive social conditions. While it is a punk rock sound that is most commonly associated with the queercore’s musical aesthetics, statements from scene participants show that bands that align

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58 Team Dresch is a queer punk rock band, which also shares strong ties to the riot grrrls movement. The band formed in Portland, Oregon in the early 1990s.

59 Queercore Blitz was a festival showcasing queercore bands that toured America in 2004 and 2005.
themselves with queercore are by no means limited to the punk sound. In some cases, their musical characteristics may be located across a range of popular music idioms, including sub-genres of metal, rock, pop and even electro and more recently hip-hop. Matt Wobensmith (founder of the now defunct queercore label Outpunk and new label A.C.R.O.N.Y.M) states: “I’ve been saying—since 1995—that queercore is more than queer punk. My vision includes other styles of music, other mediums, and other communities” (cited in Spencer, 2005, p. 291). Queercore is “multi-subcultural” argues Wobensmith; it is “not just about an indie rock or punk thing” but rather it is about “creating new aesthetics” (cited in Vale, 1996, p. 118, emphases in original). This characteristic of queercore—that is its loose musical styling—is further highlighted by Beyle who acknowledges that:

The music is important but the music is not the defining characteristic of this scene. You can play any musical style. If you feel like you belong in this scene, you belong. (cited in Ciminelli & Knox, 2005, p. 53)

Queercore is defined more specifically, says Beyle, by “its focus on the individual stories of the people involved than by the specific kind of music they play” (cited in Ciminelli & Knox, 2005, p. 55).

The primacy of self-narratives and political agency within queercore suggests—in line with previously stated theories on music and identity—that the queercore movement uses music as: a technology of the self; a strategic resource in the production and transmission of self-narrative; a means of questioning and negotiating queer subjectivity and its relationship to the dominant as well as mainstream lesbian and gay culture; and a symbolic means of resisting commercial modes of production. Queercore is effectively a dialogical scene that values reflexive musical production over the confines of musical formalism. For that reason, I would argue that queercore’s narrative qualities, its non-prescriptive sound and its DIY methods of cultural production could be understood as a simulacrum of the non-prescriptive performances of gender and sexuality that are characteristic of queer identity theories in general. As I have previously argued, queer is an identity that hinges on disidentification, where disidentification is a performative process that refutes collective behavioural descriptions and classifications and strategically attempts to transform cultural logic by overtly confusing and compounding identity categories.

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60 See the section in Chapter Three on “Music as Expression and Agency”, p. 85.
61 See the section in Chapter Three on “Identities and Their Discontents”, p. 45.
As such, queer is going to mean (and sound) differently for each person who chooses to identify themselves in this way. Queer is a lax descriptor that refutes binary gender and sexual classification as well as identity classifications based upon codified gender and sexual acts. Queer is inherently subversive, experimental and self-administered—characteristics indicative of queercore’s focus on individual narratives that are expressed in a variety of popular musical styles and forms via DIY methods of cultural production. What is particularly intriguing about queer punks and queercore scenes generally is the way that these subversive effects are achieved. In the following section, I detail the aesthetic methods and sensibilities of queercore with regard to this.

**Queercore Sensibilities: Play, the Carnivalesque and Camp**

In addition to queercore’s distinctive narrative qualities and liberal musical stylings, it also exhibits an underlying sensibility of carnivalesque play. According to DeChaine, who is the only author to have addressed queercore from this perspective, “play endows queercore participants with a space in which to resist and subvert the materials of the dominant culture” (1997, pp. 8–9). Prior to the work of DeChaine queercore has largely been addressed empirically (see Arnold, 1997; Ciminelli & Knox, 2005; Cooper 1996; duPlessia, 1997; Fenster 1993; Spencer, 2005). Most of the scholarly and popular criticism of this movement has dealt directly with the actions and products of queercore participants, locating them and their products solely within discourses of punk, queer activism and queer’s disidentificatory (or anti-identity) politics. In this section, I outline DeChaine’s (1997) work on queercore’s sensibility of play, as it proves relevant to the case study of Brisbane queer punk band Anal Traffic presented in Chapter Nine. However, I build upon DeChaine’s theories to argue that queercore also exhibits a highly developed sense of camp. To do this, I draw on earlier discussions of camp that suggest camp is an enactment of queer subjectivity, a way of bringing the queer subject into being through playful irreverence for the established order and cultural norms. Moreover, camp is a theatricalised form of queer political praxis, functioning as a cultural critique and a non-violent form of social protest.

The conditions of play outlined by DeChaine are strongly grounded in Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) notion of the carnivalesque. As the argument by Kleinhans

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62 Refer to discussion in Chapter Four, “Camp as Queer Parody, Praxis and Performance”, p. 114.
previously cited in Chapter Five suggests, camp as queer parody similarly exhibits “awareness of the grotesque, of carnival, and of anger, sensuality, and sexuality” (1994, p. 199). Therefore, before I attend directly to queercore’s sensibility of play, a preliminary discussion of the carnivalesque is required. Within a context of humour and jest, the carnivalesque exhibits qualities of parody, mockery, playful anarchy and grotesque realism. A carnival atmosphere favours vulgarity and profanity; it displays a total lack of reverence towards systems of power and through ritualised social theatries; it encourages criticism and subversion of standard social hierarchies. The carnival offered its participants an escape from the social norms that governed appropriate or acceptable behavioural conduct, affording them an imaginary and temporary reality—or as Bakhtin describes it, “a second world and a second life outside officialdom” (1984, p. 6), in which the oppressed could temporarily escape the conditions of their oppression by inverting, mocking and parodying the norms of the dominant class. The essential principle of ‘grotesque realism’ within the carnival atmosphere is further described by Bakhtin as “degradation … the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract” (1984, p. 19). He specifically points to this in relation to the body which has long been organised in negative binary opposition to the mind and/or spirit. “To degrade means to concern oneself with the lower sanctum of the body, the life of the belly, the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth” (1984, p. 21). Within the carnival context, the body is emphasised and exaggerated, bodily pleasures are stressed and the body becomes a positive and public spectacle.

According to Attali (2002), music plays a significant role in social organisation: “its order stimulates social order, and its dissonances express marginalities” (2002, p. 29). Through the channelling of noise and social disobedience music gives order to bedlam. For Attali, the origins of music—that is, music as it first existed outside of systems of economic exchange and value—can be located in the ritual sacrifice of the scapegoat and carnival. Music channelled disorder: it accommodated temporary chaotic episodes and the transgression of social order masked by the exhibition of carnival, which in turn marked the limitations of social normativities and affirmed boundaries of social respectability. Music operated as both a mirror of mainstream sensibility and power relations as well as a strategic resource in the disruption of order. Attali suggests that music’s primary function under this system “is not to be sought in aesthetics … but in the effectiveness of its participation in social
regulation” (2002, p. 30). Under a system of economic exchange, music behaves quite differently: once valorised, music is no longer able to remain a pure, uncensored social affirmation. Much like the punk which in its original form resisted social conservatism, appropriate gender and sexual conduct and commercial modes of production via a DIY ethos, the origins of music itself and the value of its function, according to Attali, can be located in the potential for music to facilitate disobedience and affect the central ideologies which govern society.

Queercore shares a particular affinity with Bakhtin’s carnival and Attali’s system of music as ritual sacrifice. Like the carnival, queercore does not operate in isolation from the mainstream, but rather playfully and critically interacts with it. For the most part, queercore resists commodification, which—in accordance with Attali’s theories—suggests that it potentially retains its power of subversion and its capacity to effect social organisation and affirm the existence of the marginal. Thus the queercore movement may be thought of as a secondary world that provides for its participants a means of escaping mainstream (gay and straight) prejudices and heterosexist conventions as well as a space in which to critique dominant cultural and social norms which is primarily enacted through subversive forms of cultural production. According to DeChaine, “a discourse grounded in a carnivalesque, playful sensibility provides the subaltern participant opportunities for various tactical deployments” (1997, pp. 14–15). The ‘tactics of play’ to which DeChaine refers are identified as appropriation, parody, pastiche and bricolage.

In this context, appropriation is the process of re-signification. To appropriate is simply to borrow or steal cultural materials that are not your own, and in the process reinscribe them with a new meaning that serves the agency and identity of a secondary group—in this case, the queer re-signification of punk. Appropriation, I would argue, is also an underlying feature of camp because the enactment of camp usually involves an object or idea that originated within dominant culture, which is appropriated then queered to reveal an alternative meaning—one that relates more specifically to queer lives and desires.

Parody, suggests DeChaine, “marks the presence of carnival laughter” (1997, p. 15). It is a playful attempt at imitation that mocks or pokes fun at the original meaning or context of an object, act or work. I would also suggest that parody is, within a queer context, inherently critical and subversive and marks not only carnival laughter, but also the presence of a politicised camp sensibility. Referring back to
Hutcheon’s (1989) and Kleinhans’ (1994) earlier statements regarding camp as a form of queer parody, for queercore participants, parody marks not only a play tactic but also a camp tactic that draws our attention to the politics of representation in new, critical and aesthetically diverse ways.

Like parody, pastiche is also concerned with the imitation of an object, act or work; however, pastiche differs in that it lacks the humorous undertones of parody and is void of any satirical impulses. Pastiche, as DeChaine identifies it, is concerned with disorganising and reorganising artistic forms, and for this reason it appears largely apolitical, functioning instead as an aesthetic mechanism relating to form rather than as an aesthetic means of critique. Pastiche shares a tenuous relationship to camp. While camp has been described in terms of pastiche (Sontag, 1982), it is also argued that pastiche relates to a pop cultural or ‘straight’ notion of camp (Dyer, 2002b; Meyer, 1994), and does not serve as a function of camp within a queer context because camp, within a queer context, is always a property of queer visibility and is thus inherently political. However, I would argue that the incongruity of pastiche, its ability to “disrupt linearity and ‘completeness’” (1997, p. 16), as DeChaine puts it, shares some resonance with queer camp because pastiche, in this way, problematises notions of cultural authority and authenticity, particularly the authority of high culture which privileges authenticity. As such, pastiche acknowledges the false ‘truth’ of authenticity—in terms of a work of art and also in terms of the self, which may also be considered a work of art—pointing to the inherent theatricality and ‘incompleteness’ of identity and of self that is recognised through queer perception.

The final tactic of play identified by DeChaine is bricolage, which closely relates to appropriation and has always been a particularly important feature of punk. “Punk exemplifies most clearly the subcultural uses of these anarchic modes. It … attempted through ‘perturbation and deformation’ to disrupt and reorganize meaning”, argues Hebdige (1991, p. 106). Punk (like queercore) is notorious for its bricolage of form, genre and style in that it often appropriates the musical qualities of reggae, industrial, electronic and pop idioms in the creation of its own musical artefacts. Moreover, punk (also like queercore) employs elements of parody and pastiche in the construction and performance of musical bricolage, and in its fashions and artwork. In his explanation of bricolage, DeChaine draws on Hebdige’s

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*Subculture: The Meaning of Style* and his often-cited argument that certain subcultures can be considered bricoleurs in the way that they “appropriate another range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings” (Hebdige, 1991, p. 104). It is in this subversion of original or ‘straight’ meaning that bricolage exhibits qualities of camp, particularly a campish perception of an object in which the process of perception and recontextualisation of the object comes to signify queer agency. As such, I would argue that while bricolage can be posited as a tactic of play as DeChaine suggests, it—along with the other stylistic elements of parody and pastiche and semiotic and/or ideological appropriation and re-signification—can also be considered as tactical ways of enacting a queer camp sensibility. Therefore, while I do not dispute that a sensibility of play remains central to queercore, I do extend upon the sensibility of play as mapped by DeChaine, and suggest that play forms a part of a broader queercore sensibility—a sensibility that also draws heavily on camp.

**Chapter Seven in Summary**

Punk is an idiom of the social misfit, the freak, the gender and sexual outlaw. It is raw, aggressive and favours candid self-expression over technical prowess. Punk is subversive and highly critical of hegemonic social and cultural institutions. It is cautious of commercial modes of production, giving preference to DIY methods of creation and distribution, and in doing so it is resistant to the dominant social order. Since the late 1970s, punk has provided a musical aesthetic and a sensibility of expression that have been particularly accommodating to the marginalised. During the 1980s, this form of expression was appropriated by queer youth and became a hallmark of queercore culture, distinguishing queer punks from the dominant lesbian and gay culture as well from dominant punk cultures of the time. Queercore revels in its position outside of the lesbian and gay mainstream, evoking gender and sexual anarchy and promoting an alternative to commodified forms of lesbian and gay culture. Queercore seeks social justice for the disenfranchised by acknowledging the value of deviant cultural expressions and giving voice to the fringe-dwellers, the unrepresented and the perverted.

Drawing on the work of DeChaine (1997) and theories of camp, I have detailed queercore’s distinctive sensibility, which relies heavily on the tactical use of anger, humour and sexual vulgarity. In the case study of Anal Traffic presented in Chapter
Nine, I refer to and expand upon this discussion. I demonstrate how this local queer punk rock ensemble draw upon both punk and queercore sounds, aesthetics and sensibilities to form its own blend of queer punk rock. Moreover, I position the work of Anal Traffic within a politico-sexual discourse that is attentive to matters of queer sexuality—advocating for unrestrained representations of desire—as well as broader social justice issues.
If recent women musicians’ anger has centred on the self and on sexuality, music has provided another language through which to articulate these personal narratives and to experience the new selves envisaged. (Bradby & Laing, 2001, p. 299)

As Bradby and Laing suggest, in recent times women musicians have defended their right to express anger towards a patriarchal hegemony that has often quashed assertions of femaleness and sexuality, and they have conveyed these expressions through various forms of popular music-making employing music as forum of self-expression and self-experience. Popular music-making, especially rock music discourses, has long depended on the reiteration of gender normativities. Rock in particular, suggests Norma Coates, “is indeed a technology of gender in that ‘masculinity’ is reinforced and multiplied in its many discursive spaces” (1997, p. 52). Moreover, rock musical spaces are constructed as pre-eminent representations of largely white, heterosexual masculine supremacy (Bayton, 1993; Coates, 1997; Dibben, 2002; Frith & McRobbie, 1990). In the spirit of womyn’s music and lesbian feminist culture, recent iconoclasms within rock music discourses such as the development of the riot grrrls movement have reignited an awareness of both feminist and queer issues within popular music, challenging the impossibility of female articulations within phallocentric popular music discourses.

This chapter distinguishes itself from the previous two because, unlike performances of drag and queercore, the music and surrounding cultures to be discussed here are not strictly artefacts of queer culture, but are locatable instead across two cultural and political forms that are often at odds with one another: queer and feminism. The connections between feminist and queer cultures, as well as feminism and queer theory, are broadly acknowledged, however directly or indirectly, both inside and outside the academy. Yet queer theory has often been

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The term ‘womyn’ (or wimmin) is an alternative spelling of ‘women’, and has been used largely by feminists as a means of removing the reference to ‘men’ from the category of women.
charged as exclusionary, erasing lesbian specificity, rewriting feminism, implicitly referring to the queer subject as gay and male, and advocating a false sense of identity fluidity that does not reflect the lived realities of lesbians and gay men (Edwards, 1998; Escoffier, 1990; Jeffreys, 2003; Malinowitz, 1993; Walters, 1996; Weed, 1997; Weeks, 2000). From a lesbian feminist perspective, Jeffreys claims that queer theory is largely hostile towards lesbians, and disputes its claims of inclusivity. Moreover, Jeffreys believes that queer theory is dangerous to women because it is founded upon and primarily supports articulations of masculinity, which she defines as the “behaviour of male dominance” (2003, p. 7). Suzanne Walters posits a slightly more positive relationship between the two paradigms noting the usefulness of theorising beyond gender rigidity, as queer does, while also acknowledging that queer sometimes “forgets the very real and felt experience of gender that women, particularly, live with quite explicitly” (1996, p. 844). As argued earlier, the project of queer has been to overcome the binary oppositions and hierarchical organisation of male and female, and by extension, the gender and sexual rigidity that is socially inscribed upon these biological sex categories. Therefore, while queer theory aims to deconstruct these binary categories, arguing in favour of multifarious forms of gender and sexual play, this is sometimes felt to be unrealistic or out of sync with lived experience and forged at the expense of feminist goals such as women’s equality and the construction of non-patriarchial systems of political, cultural and sexual conduct.

In this discussion, it is important that we are aware of these arguments. However, I do not wish to add to the debate surrounding the contentions between queer and feminist theories. Rather, I suggest that outside of these academic debates, women musicians have enacted, and continue to enact, a politic that borrows from both feminist and queer discourses. Drawing on the riot grrrl-style feminism, I propose that since the 1990s a younger generation of women has largely rejected the overtly intellectualised debates around gender and sexual identity (be it explicitly feminist or queer). Many riot grrrl spokeswomen have acknowledged their distrust of institutionalised knowledges and their fear of misrepresentation by both media and academic critics, preferring instead to represent and speak of themselves through DIY zine publications and song-writing (Leonard, 1997). These women are opting to enact a form of pro-female music-making and political activism that borrows

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65 Refer to earlier discussion in Chapter Three, “Queer Identity: Tensions and Transgressions”, p. 72.
partially and selectively from womyn’s music traditions and mixes this with forms of queer cultural activism to create their own style of queer feminist politics.

The information presented here is, in Chapter Nine, woven into a case study of a Brisbane-based all-women, queer, funk/reggae/ska band, Bertha Control. In this case study, I demonstrate how a younger generation of women (or sistas, as Bertha Control’s members often call themselves) is incorporating both queer politics and feminism into musical production and performance. In this chapter, however, I contextualise this discussion within a history of feminist popular music-making, arguing that in recent times we have seen the emergence of a new queer agenda across feminist popular music production, particularly within the context of the riot grrrls movement.

**Womyn and Grrrls: Doing it for Themselves**

The position of women within Western popular music cultures has often been a subordinate one. Since the 1950s, the patriarchal power structures of rock music in particular have succeeded in most instances at regulating the role of women to little more than that of the fan, the consumer, the subservient follower, the sexual object or the groupie. Commercial pop and folk traditions have generally been more accommodating to female performers than rock music. However, the roles available to women within these forms of music-making have chiefly been that of vocalist and not instrumentalist (Bayton, 1993). Women who have been successful in overcoming rock’s patriarchy and phallocentricism are usually acknowledged by the mainstream rock music press under the collective label of ‘women in rock’, and as such are identified firstly (and inescapably) by their sex and secondarily by their proficiency as musicians. As Mary Celeste Kearney (1997) points out the ‘women in rock’ label is used to defuse the threat that these women pose to rock’s male supremacy. Through the labelling of female musicians as ‘women in rock’, a secondary space is created that only women can occupy and because this space is constructed outside of rock’s masculine sphere it poses no threat to the ‘authenticity’ of rock masculinity. The binary gender categorisations that circulate within and are sustained by a popular music discourses—such as the masculine rock/feminine pop dichotomy which privileges heterosexual articulations (Dibben, 2002; Frith & McRobbie, 1990)—

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66 A groupie is a colloquial term for a person (usually a female), who idolises a musical performer or band. This term often implies that the person it names is pursuing her/his idol for sex.
point to the fundamental inequalities in the way that male and female music-making is valued and to the dominance of heteronormative institutions within both traditions.

Politically grounded in second wave feminist and lesbian feminist discourses, womyn’s music began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a direct reaction against the domination of men within popular music traditions of the time (Bayton, 1993; Garofalo 1992; Quimby, 1997). As Mavis Bayton illustrates:

Feminists created an alternative musical world of their own. This world offered the chance to rewrite the rules: of lyrics, of band membership and organization, of the gig, of the stage, and even of the music itself. Feminists enthusiastically and optimistically promoted alternative values: collectivism and co-operation instead of competitive individualism; participative democracy and equality instead of hierarchy. (1993, p. 179)

The womyn’s music movement sought to create a style and culture of explicitly female music incorporating women in all parts of music-making including song writing, performance, production, promotion and sound reinforcement.

Music was a necessary process in the institutionalisation of lesbian culture and the creation of lesbian visibility within broader public culture (Quimby, 1997). Favouring a DIY separatist approach, women such as Alix Dobkin and Cris Williamson created original music and their own alternative musical institutions as a means of combating the patriarchy and misogyny of the music industry. In 1973 Dobkin released *Lavender Jane Loves Women*, which was ground-breaking in its attention to lesbian feminist themes. Dobkin wanted “lesbians to have tangible musical proof of their existence” (1979, p. 12). In the same year, Williamson launched Olivia Records, the first label dedicated solely to the recording and marketing of womyn’s music. Olivia Records was a separatist organisation that employed a feminist business model, as it not only produced womyn’s music but also solely employed women. For female musicians of this kind, the personal was intensely political and this was reflected in their musical style and lyrical content. The message and politic of the womyn’s movement was articulated primarily through folk music styles because folk was already imbued with political themes and its sound was considered ‘softer’, less aggressive and therefore less ‘masculine’ (Bayton, 1993; Kearney; 1997). Lyrically, womyn’s music dealt with issues of suffrage, lesbianism, domesticity, motherhood, the female body and other explicitly female themes.

As womyn’s music continued to position itself in opposition to male music styles such as rock, punk and metal, its focus on gender differences within music
proved to be somewhat problematic for future generations of feminist musicians. Some women were frustrated by the tendency of womyn’s music to downplay female sexuality and to redefine lesbianism as a sensual rather than sexual experience (Peraino, 2006). Peraino recalls that, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new generation of lesbians inspired by third wave feminism, queer theory, punk rock culture and AIDS activism “flatly rejected women’s music as part of a reevaluation and critique of cultural feminism’s construction of ‘womaness’ and women identification” (2006, p. 175). As younger women grew sceptical of second wave feminism and the gender rigidity of womyn’s music traditions new musical cultures began to emerge. Most notable was the movement know as riot grrrls.

Riot grrrls is a DIY, pro-female (and not anti-male) movement often associated with punk that emerged in America in the early 1990s. Drawing inspiration from earlier female punk musicians such as The Slits and Poly Styrene from the X-Ray Spex, the riot grrrls evoked a renaissance in angry, loud, aggressive and bratty female music-making. Much like the queercore movement, the riot grrrls were angered by the gender orthodoxy and machismo prevalent in the American hardcore punk scenes with its violent forms of audience interaction in the mosh pit and its sexist attitude to women musicians (Schilt, 2004). The name ‘riot grrrl’ signals the vitality of youth implicit in the term ‘girl’ as opposed to woman, while adding energy, rage and a growl to the idea of ‘girl’ by spelling it in this particular way (Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998). The riot grrrls, suggests Kearney, were:

> Often highly critical that ‘second wave’ feminism operated like a fundamentalist religion with prescriptions on how to dress, behave and think, young feminists such as the riot grrrls [began] infusing feminist politics with forms of confrontational cultural activism which relied less on exposing gender differences than on deconstructing them. (1997, p. 224)

Although critical of second wave fundamentalism, riot grrrls demonstrate ties with both second and third wave feminism. In some instances they exhibit the separatist practices associated with womyn’s music such as female-only bands, all-female gigs or female-only mosh pits. Yet they also demonstrate a particularly third wave interest in popular cultural forms such as rock and punk, which they use as a means of self-expression and as a way to mobilise their cause (Kearney, 1997; Leonard, 1997, 2007; Spencer, 2005). It should be noted, however, that not all riot grrrls are in

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Forming in London in 1976, both The Slits and X-Ray Spex were forerunners in the punk scene. X-Ray Spex most notable single “Oh Bondage, Up Yours!” can been described as a riot grrrl premonition due to its attention to feminist and anti-capitalist themes (Leblanc, 1999; Lee, 2002).
favour of a gender separatist approach, as many of the iconic riot grrrl bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile have had male band members.

Like the womyn’s movement, the riot grrrls movement is both a musical and political phenomenon that sprang from feelings of oppression and a lack of access to musical participation. Unlike womyn’s music, however, riot grrrls’ flexible forms of self-identification meant the movement’s participants were free to embrace a range of femininities, be it playful girlishness and/or militant lesbian feminism. The riot grrrls’ pro-female stance allowed for the celebration of femininity with out the necessary rejection of traditionally masculine attributes thus it does not rely on dualistic systems of identification. Instead, riot grrrls rejected prescriptive performances of gender and critiqued normative constructions of the feminine by celebrating multiple manifestations of femaleness, positing that women too can be angry, aggressive, loud and edgy musicians. Moreover, the riot grrrls sought to include and speak to adolescent women, a group that was generally excluded from forms of popular music-making (Downs, 2007; Friskics-Warren, 2005; Kearney, 1997; Leonard, 1997, 2007; Spencer, 2005): a group that “at a time in their lives when girls are taught to be silent, Riot Grrrl demands that they scream” (Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998, p. 810).

Adopting the catch-cry ‘revolution girl style now’, riot grrrls sought to establish women’s equality within masculine musical spheres while at the same time tackling broader social issues. According to pioneering riot grrrl Kathleen Hanna of the band Bikini Kill, sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, ageism, thinism and capitalism were also key targets on a list of social ills that the riot grrrls movement sought to quash (cited in Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998). In an interview with Celina Hex for Bust magazine, Hanna and feminist writer Gloria Steinem were each asked to comment on their definition of feminism. Hanna articulated her view positing that she saw feminism as “as a broad-based political movement that's bent on challenging hierarchies of all kinds in our society, including racism and classism and able-body-ism, etc. etc.” (cited in Hex, 2000, para.5). Agreeing with Hanna, Steinem remarks that feminism is a transformation “because once you take away the basic first step in a hierarchy, which is the passive/dominant of female/male, it challenges everything” (cited in Hex, 2000, para. 5). According to riot grrrl and author Julia Downes, feminism in the 1990s was seen by many of the riot grrrls as a politic that belonged to, and served the needs of, university educated, heterosexual, middle-class women.
It was the riot grrrls, suggests Downes, who “rewrote feminism and activism into a punk rock rebellion and youth-centred voice” (2007, p. 26).

**Riot Grrrl and Queer Crossovers**

Often overlooked in discussions of riot grrrls are the ties between this movement, queercore and queer female identity generally. For many riot grrrls, lesbian visibility was as much desired in the 1990s as it was by women like Dobkin in the 1970s. Val Phoenix notes that “for some queer women, Riot Grrrl provides a refuge from a homophobic punk scene and a conformist gay culture” (1994, p. 40). As such, queer female musicians have contributed, and in many cases expanded upon, riot grrrls-style feminism incorporating a decidedly queer politic into their music-making. In Melissa Klein’s article “Duality and Redefinition: Young Feminism and the Alternative Music Community”, she illustrates how younger feminist and alternative music communities became a space for “queer and questioning girls” (2002, p. 415) to discuss their feelings of isolation and their experiences of sexuality. Moreover, Kearney suggests with reference to the riot grrrls movement that “the incorporation of queer politics and theory in feminism has been largely responsible for refocusing discussions of gender and sexuality in provocative new ways” (1997, p. 224). These “provocative new ways” encouraged women to celebrate their femaleness and femininity while also allowing them to play with, subvert and deconstruct gender and sexual normativities, creating new modalities of female genders, and alternative performances and articulations of female sexuality. The riot grrrls, argues Bill Friskics-Warren, were “about creating a space for women to be free to love each other (in every respect) … to discover new and unforeseen physical, emotional, and spiritual possibilities for their lives” (2005, p. 202).

Riot grrrl-style music and pro-female advocacy reached their peak in the late 1990s. Today, those artists who have persisted in this vein are given little attention by the mainstream music press. However, the riot grrrls movement remains active, as do the connections between riot grrrls and queer subcultural activity. In a 2008 interview in *Cherrie* magazine, Elena Jeffreys spoke with Gina Mamone, who is the founder of one of the world’s largest GLBTIQ (guy, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer) record labels, Riot Grrrl Ink. Mamone spoke about the support the label offers to GLBTIQ political movements and rallies, and its ‘radical capitalist approach’, which she suggests borrows partially from existing business models but strongly
resists conventional mass marketing approaches. Instead, Riot Grrrl Ink. chooses to trade advertising space, participate directly in community action projects and offer its artists access to graphic designers and publicists free of charge. “We make art at the intersection of social justice and change”, suggests Mamone (cited in Jeffreys, 2008, p. 13). Contemporary queer/riot grrrl culture has, similarly to queercore, produced a stylistically diverse array of artists, and as such riot grrrl is no longer exclusively associated with punk. Riot Grrrl Ink. for example, produces and supports artist across a variety of popular genres. On its website, the label avoids stating that it has an affinity with a particular style of music. Instead, it claims to “provide resources and financial support for political, radical and revolutionary art it all forms … art that defines and inspires contemporary queer culture and its ongoing revolution and evolution” (Riot Grrrl Ink., 2008). Thus Riot Grrrl Ink. further points to the expansion of riot grrrl-style feminism and its attentiveness to queer issues and queer cultural production.

Other musicians, like the self-proclaimed queer/dyke punk rock outfit Tribe 8, employ feminist politics in their lyrics while addressing and critiquing queer dyke gender and sex roles in songs such as “Neanderthal Dyke”, “Estrofemme” and “Femme Bitch Top” among others. In doing so, Halberstam suggests that Tribe 8 is producing “a taxonomy of queer lives and a dissonant record of dyke punk and dyke genders” (2007, p. 57). Team Dresch—the “de facto riot grrrls of the queer rock scene” (Ciminelli & Knox, 2005, p. 182)—interweaves queer and feminist themes in its music, speaking from multiple minority positions which aim to challenge sexism and heterosexism at the same time. Explicit in both its lyrics and music, Le Tigre pays homage and makes multiple references to various queer and feminist artists, musicians and writers who have inspired the band creatively and politically. The song “Hot Topic” from Le Tigre’s self-titled debut album (1999) serves as a notable example of this. Furthermore, on The Butchies album We are Not Femme (1998) the band performs a cover of Chris Williamson’s iconic womyn’s anthem “Shooting Star”. The Butchies rocked-up rendition of this folk song is noted by Halberstam as

68 Tribe 8 formed in the early 1990s in San Francisco, California. The band takes their name from the lesbian term ‘tribade’, which means a woman who partakes in the sexual practice of tribadism.

69 Le Tigre was formed in 1998 by riot grrrl Kathleen Hanna, formally of Bikini Kill. It is a queer feminist electro-pop band from New York, New York.

70 The Butchies is a punk rock lesbian feminist band, which formed in 1998 in Durham, North Carolina. Some of the band’s members have also played in Team Dresch, as well as other notable riot grrrl and queercore bands.
way for ‘riot dykes’ to “build a bridge between the raucous spirit of rebellion and the quieter, acoustic world of women’s music form the 1970s and 1980s” (2006, p. 18). Bands such as Tribe 8, Team Dresch, Le Tigre and The Butchies who borrow from both feminist and queer cultural and political discourses suggest that riot dykes—as Halberstam (2003, 2005, 2006) names them—do not counter-identify with womyn’s music traditions but instead selectively refer to and borrow from them. Thus, during the mid- to late 1990s a cross-pollination of feminist and queer politics within and outside of the riot grrrls movement has produced a new politico-musical discourse that is employed by a variety of pro-female queer artists.

Chapter Eight in Summary

Over the last forty years in particular, the patriarchal power structures responsible for the subordination of women within popular music traditions have incited various, politically motivated responses from female musicians. The production of womyn’s music grounded in second wave feminist and lesbian feminist political discourses offered women the chance to engage in an egalitarian, co-operative and non-hierarchical form of music-making and participation, encouraging an exclusively female membership. The gender rigidity of womyn’s music traditions and their rejection of traditionally masculine music forms such as rock, punk and metal, began to frustrate many feminist and queer subcultures. As third wave feminism, queer theory, AIDS activism and punk rock began to emerge so to did a new focus on women-identified music—one that refocused discussions of gender and sexuality by accommodating and encouraging flexible forms of gender and sexual identification. Championed by the riot grrrls, a louder, faster and angrier (often punk rock) sound became synonymous with a new era of pro-female music-making. In claiming these musical spaces as their own, women imbued them with rich lyrical narratives that often spoke directly to other women. Maintaining a second wave approach to non-hierarchical structures of music-making, riot grrrls sought to quash the machismo, sexism, ageism, heterosexism and racism prevalent among punk rock music forms in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Riot grrrls spoke from multiple minority positions, providing a space for both queer and feminist women to participate in music-making and explore alternative gender and sexual expressions.
Today, women continue to seek expression through genres and forms that have traditionally been reserved for men—forms like reggae and/or funk that often relegate femaleness (particularly queer forms of femaleness and female sexuality) to the margins. Many women demonstrate a retention of female solidarity and continue to perpetuate broad-scale social justice through music-making. In the case study of Bertha Control presented in Chapter Nine, I refer to and expand upon this. I demonstrate the ways in which these women execute their challenge to patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, racism, ageism and capitalism. Moreover, I argue that both queer and feminist agendas remain central to their work.
Part IV

THE LOCAL SCENE AND CASE STUDIES

Part IV introduces Brisbane’s queer scene and offers an account of the lived realities of the people who make up this scene and the queer gender, sexual and musical praxis that occurs within it. Moreover, it presents three case studies of local queer-identified musicians and performers who draw upon the queer musical histories styles and sensibilities outlined in Part III.
Queer subcultures illustrate vividly the limits of subcultural theories that omit consideration of sexuality and sexual styles. Queer subcultures cannot only be placed in relation to a parent culture, and they tend to form in relation to place as much as in relation to a genre of cultural expression, and ultimately, they oppose not only the hegemony of dominant culture but also the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian culture. (Halberstam, 2005, p. 61)

Halberstam points to the necessary consideration of sexuality and its emergent cultural modes when discussing queer subcultures. She indicates the complex formation of queer subcultures, suggesting that historicism, locality and style are all contributing factors in their materialisation. Finally, she suggests that oppositional ideologies—specifically queer’s propensity for disidentification—are a central factor in queer subcultural formation. This follows logically from the preceding discussions addressing theories of queer sexuality and cultural historicism: in Chapter Three and again in Chapter Seven, I argued how queer gender, sexuality and culture often work in direct contrast to the coherent and commodified culture of the gay mainstream; in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight queer cultural practices were historically contextualised and dominant aesthetic sensibilities and political motivations were identified and thoroughly explained. The purpose of this chapter is to address queer music-making and participation in a local context, and provide an account of musical episodes in queer identity work that relates directly to the lived experience of queers who produce and perform music in Brisbane. By illuminating the gender, sexual and musical complexities of a variety of queer musical performers from this scene, I intend to provide insight into the way local queer musicians have drawn upon and adapted queer musical histories and sensibilities for the purpose of self-fashioning and expressing their own queer identities.
Brisbane’s queer scene provides a useful context in which to examine expressions of musicality, gender and sexuality. While this research project is not specifically a locality study, queer cultural practices in a local context are used as a means of exemplifying queer approaches to musical composition, performance and participation. As such, the exploration of Brisbane’s queer music scene is informed by the sociological work on music-related scenes that have preceded it (Bennett, 2000; Bennett & Peterson, 2004; Cohen, 1991; Connell & Gibson, 2003; Shank, 1994; Whiteley, Bennett & Hawkins, 2004). As Whiteley reminds us, “the search for social and cultural meanings in popular music texts inevitably involves an examination of the urban and rural spaces in which music is experienced on a day-to-day basis (2004, p. 2).

The term ‘scene’ as opposed to ‘subculture’ has been employed throughout this discussion for a number of reasons. Sarah Cohen (1999) suggests that unlike ‘subculture’ or ‘community’, the term ‘scene’ reconceptualises musical activity, emphasising shifting and dynamic mobility across local contexts. Since it is clear from the cultural histories presented thus far—that queer musical activity is not limited to specific local contexts—the term ‘scene’ is thus a more adequate descriptor. Moreover, the dynamic and shifting qualities of the scene share a certain resonance with the fluidity of queer identity theories in general. Similarly, Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennett (2004) also note the mobility of the term ‘scene’, suggesting that it provides a useful way of articulating how clusters of people distinguish themselves based on a commonality of musical tastes (and in this case, distastes). Drawing on the work of Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (1997), Peterson and Bennett (2004) argue that the term ‘subculture’ generally presumes that its participants mark a cohesive deviation from a shared dominant culture and are governed by unified subcultural standards. The term ‘scene’ does not carry with it such assumptions, and thus it is more fitting for a discussion that focuses on a queer grouping since, recalling Jagose’s earlier claim, “queer retains … a conceptually unique potential as a necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contention” (1996, p. 129). Although this claim is contestable (see Edwards, 1998; Weeks, 1995), it reminds us that (in theory at least), queer is resistant to unified standards.
Brisbane’s queer scene is relatively obscure; outside of those who actively participate in it, little is known of it and very little has been written about it.⁷¹ Therefore, the discussion presented in this chapter contributes significantly to the project of recording and interpreting queer cultures. Considering the relative obscurity of these cultures, the ethnographic data has primarily been drawn from the following sources: participant observations made while attending both gay and queer clubs and events in Brisbane during a four and a half year period beginning in January 2004 and ending in July 2008; interviews conducted with scene participants, musical performers and club organisers between February 2005 and November 2007; and online texts sourced from the official websites of clubs, events, musicians and performers to be investigated in this discussion.

To begin, this chapter locates and contextualises Brisbane’s queer scene, drawing out the connections between the theoretical premises of queer theory in relation to the lived experiences of Brisbane’s queer scene participants. It provides both and gay and queer scene ethnography that offers some insight into the disparities between gay and queer scene culture and nightclub events from a queer perspective, thus highlighting how—as Halberstam has suggested—queer cultures oppose the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay culture. Furthermore, it draws upon the previous detailed examinations of queer musical histories and sensibilities in order to decipher the meaning to be found in local practices of queer musical performers.

The case studies of musicians and performers to be examined in this chapter are: drag king and bio-queer performance troupe the Twang Gang; queer punk band Anal Traffic; and the queer feminist funk/reggae/ska band Bertha Control. Through data gathered from interviews and close observation of these ensembles, this chapter directly address the primary aim of this research project. That is, it illustrates the ways in which queer musicians and musical performers use music to facilitate expressions of non-normative gender and sexual identities, and in doing so offers valuable insight into the complexities and multiplicities of queerness and queer cultural activities. However, before I deal explicitly with individual performers from

⁷¹ Clive Moore’s book Sunshine and Rainbows: The Development of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Queensland (2001) is currently the only book that discusses Brisbane in this context. However, this book focuses primarily on gay and lesbian cultural history and it makes no attempt to address or theorise queer musical production and performance. In 2007, the Queensland Review journal published a special issue on “Queer Queensland”, vol. 14(2). While some of the contributing authors provide more recent accounts of lesbian/gay/queer cultures in Brisbane, discussions of musical production and performance remain absent.
this scene, I will first examine the relationship between queer theories and lived experiences, as well as gay and queer scene participation in Brisbane more generally.

**Setting the Scene**

In comparison to the larger and more cosmopolitan Australian capitals of Sydney and Melbourne, Brisbane is significantly smaller, with smaller lesbian, gay and queer scenes. Due in part to Brisbane’s smaller size (both in relation to its population and geography), there are fewer venue and event options available to local lesbian, gay and queer scene participants. Therefore, people who identify primarily as queer have noted participation in, and attendance at, lesbian and gay events and vice versa. Population and geographical size are not the only factors to be considered here. Brisbane’s queer scene has been parented by lesbian and gay culture, and there continues to be a level of crossover between these two worlds. Moreover, Brisbane has not always been accommodating to people with non-normative genders and sexualities. The oppressive legislation against homosexuality in Queensland and its capital city of Brisbane surely discouraged people of this persuasion from seeking refuge here; thus other capital cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide have historically provided safer alternatives.

Queensland has a contentious homosexual history. Due to strict legislation against displays of homosexuality, homosexual activity and culture was confined to certain bars, public toilets and private homes for a large part of the twentieth century (Moore, 2001). From 1957 until 1989, Queensland was governed by conservative politics. National party leader Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen exercised an autocratic rule between 1968 and 1987 that was unsympathetic to gay liberationist efforts to make changes elsewhere around the country (particularly in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales). Queensland was one of the last states to enact homosexual law reform, finally decriminalising homosexual activity in 1990 (followed by Tasmania in 1997), and continues to uphold inequitable age of consent laws which currently

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72 In the 2006 report of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the population of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne were recorded as follows: Brisbane 1,820,400; Sydney 4,284,379; Melbourne 3,744,373 (“Regional Population Growth, 2006–07”, 2006).
stand at eighteen years for anal sex while vaginal and oral sex is permissible at age sixteen.\textsuperscript{73}

During the last forty years of lesbian and gay political struggle in Australia, contention has arisen amongst both conservative and radical factions—that is, those who seek inclusion within the ‘normal’ and those who choose to celebrate their marginality. While essentialist and assimilationist agendas have sought to establish homosexuals as a legitimate minority in order to gain the rights and privileges enjoyed by heterosexual citizens, these same agendas have simultaneously perpetuated the impermeable boundaries and binary organisation of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Furthermore, many queer radicals claim that this has resulted in the commodification of sexual identity and the production of a narrow constitution of the gay citizen (Archer, 2002; Duggan, 2003; Schulman, 1998; Sycamore, 2004). In their notable histories of gay liberation in Australia, Gary Wotherspoon (1991), Clive Moore (2001) and Reynolds (2002) have similarly noted that during the late 1980s and 1990s gay culture in Australia became increasingly bourgeois and assimilationist. In response to this strong push towards co-option and assimilation, Moore suggests that the gay mainstream bred “‘deviant’ subcultures which have much the same relationship to the mainstream gay culture as the earlier gay and lesbian subculture once had to the mainstream straight culture” (2001, p. 191). Brisbane’s queer scene is an example of such a deviation; in many ways it could be looked upon as the rebellious spawn of gay assimilation. It is a scene that has developed around a desire to create a space where queer-identified people can come together, listen to and play music, and perform their queer identity in a multitude of ways that are not socially permissible in either heterosexual or mainstream gay contexts.

\textit{Queer Theories and Lived Experiences}

Before examining Brisbane’s queer scene and its musical performers, I would first like to offer an insight into the way that scene participants conceptualise the scene as well as their own queer identities. As I argued earlier in Chapter Three, unlike the

\textsuperscript{73} As the law currently stands in Queensland, anal intercourse is punishable under the Sodomy Law (Section 208 and 209 of the Criminal Code of 1899) with up to fourteen years’ imprisonment. Queensland is the only state that still holds an unequal age of consent law, inhibiting the provision of appropriate health care and support services for some sexually active queer youth in the state.
terms ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’, ‘queer’ poses a significant challenge to dominant labelling philosophies by refusing to indicate the biological sex or gender of the subject it is describing. As Sedgwick has proposed, queer hinges radically on “performative acts of experimental self-perception” (1993, p. 9). Gamson (2000), Halperin (1995), Jagose (1996), Phelan (1997) and Warner (1993, 1996), among others, recognise that queer is particularly concerned with interrogating the notions of fixed, coherent, unified and transparent identity categories. Butler (2001) directly reminds us that queer is not lesbian or gay; rather, queer is an argument against lesbian and gay specificity and the idea that being lesbian or gay presupposes that we perform our gender and sexuality in a particular way.

Within a local context, it would appear that the emergence of queer theory has had a positive effect on the way people self-identify in terms of their gender and sexuality, as approximately sixty percent of the interviewees noted that they were aware of queer theory to some extent, while the remaining forty percent all acknowledged at least a personal understanding of the distinctions between mainstream gay and queer culture. The ways in which they had come to know this were quite varied: some suggested it was through past involvement in or knowledge of ACT UP and Queerruption;74 some had encountered it in tertiary level gender studies; some had read about it in the lesbian/gay/queer press; while others had heard of it in general social discussions. When scene participants were questioned in regard to the way that they conceptualised the local Brisbane scene as well as their own queer identities, a correlation emerged between queer theory and actual lived experience. This is exemplified in the following selection of statements made by local queer-identified people from the Brisbane scene.

Shane Garvey, a local queer musician and scene participant, states that:

Given that the nature of queer is pretty ephemeral I’d say my queer identity is pretty ephemeral too. Queer is a good opportunity to mix and mash, to take little bits from here and take little bits from there to create your own identity. (personal communication, June 30, 2006)

Garvey’s comment illuminates the flexible and experimental qualities afforded to queer, offering a ‘real-life’ affirmation of Sedgwick’s previous account. Drawing a distinction between gay and queer lifestyles, local queer musician and scene

74 Beginning in 1998, Queeruption is a global network of alternative, radical and disenfranchised queers. Queeruption stages a DIY festival that takes place in a different city around the world every year. It was held in Sydney in 2005. Further information can be found at [www.queeruption.org](http://www.queeruption.org)
participant Matilda Alexander offers yet another ‘lived’ confirmation of queer as an ‘outsider’ identity or a positionality that is resistant to heteronormativities. Alexander states:

I reckon it’s the difference between buying into the capitalist heterosexual patriarchy and not. The kind of Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, the Wickham [a local gay nightclub], and all that stuff about how perfect your abs are and how waxed your back is in the gay male culture which translates in the female culture by women just wanting to move into single couple households and have kids and a picket fence just like the heteros do. I think as queers we’ve got the opportunity to expand beyond that because we’re put outside that paradigm to start with and then we have to choose to go back or choose to go somewhere else and I think that’s where the chasm is. (personal communication, November, 30, 2005)

Many scene participants have, at some point in their lives, been active participants in both the gay and queer scenes, and when questioned in regard to their perceived distinctions between the two scenes a similar response was received. Scene participant Matthew Goodwin states:

When I go to a queer event I feel more comfortable. I don’t feel like I’m going to get judged because I’m not wearing the latest fashion or t-shirts with designer labels emblazoned on them, or because I want to talk about politics or some such thing.… For me, the queer scene is about people coming together to celebrate life beyond categories or labels. (personal communication, September 12, 2007)

Similarly, Simon Betteridge notes:

The Brisbane queer scene is generally more accepting of difference and personal scope than the gay scene. While both scenes are not mutually exclusive the queer scene seems less about (but not totally without) hierarchy and judgement. It promises a more open articulation and celebration of difference than the gay scene.… A Queer scene for me consists of people and/or spaces where anything goes. Whether it’s gender, space, politics, sexuality, dance, attitude or dress, it’s a scene where I expect interpretation of self to be freely and comfortably expressed. (personal communication, September 12, 2007)

As an insider, I am a little cautious of the idea that ‘anything goes’, a point that Betteridge briefly touches on when he suggests that the queer scene is not totally without hierarchy. As with any scene grouping there are bound to be internal politics and at times conflict among members. In this scene, for example, conflict has arisen over conduct in public sex spaces and BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism) performances.75 Some lesbian-identified scene members feel that these spaces and performances discriminate against women, while other women have expressed an opposing view, arguing that they find them to be an accommodating space. The majority of interview participants however, expressed the latter view. The

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75 For further explanation of BDSM refer to Appendix One: Glossary, p. 278.
overwhelming response regarding the nature of the Brisbane queer scene was, as Betteridge and Goodwin suggest, that a queer scene provides its participants with an experimental space in which they are able to enjoy, or at least expect the freedom to ‘try on’ different styles of self-presentation, of which BDSM may be just one.

Exemplifying the performative and unfixed quality of queer identity, queer musician Paul Jones notes:

I think a queer scene is what Omo [a queer nightclub] has been where you’ve got gay male-identified, lesbian-identified, straight-identified, bisexual-identified and then you’ve got interested other parties who just found their way in. People don’t really care cause they’re all queer and that’s just it. I identify as a gay male in regards to sexuality but I snog [intimately kiss] all my female friends, and we all just play around, cause a good snog is a good snog so I never let gender get in the way of that. Omo is an environment where things like that aren’t misinterpreted as anything else and that’s what I think a queer environment is one where there’s no confusion over labels. (personal communication, December 12, 2005)

The above comment by Jones—referring to a same-sex sexually attracted man who enjoys intimately kissing and ‘playing around’ with women—reveals that the queer label emerges in opposition to fixed models of identity, refuting definition based upon material sexual practices. And it is acts such as these that underscore much of the rhetoric of queer, pointing out—as Meyer did previously in Chapter Three—that:

Queer sexualities become … a series of improvised performances whose threat lies in the denial of any social identity derived from participation in those performances…. And it is precisely in the space of this refusal, in the deconstruction of the homo/hetero binary, that the threat and challenge to bourgeois ideology is queerly executed. (1994, p. 3)

Remarking upon the gay/queer divide that she identifies within the Brisbane scene, local deejay Neroli Cannon offers yet another perspective on this. As an active member and deejay on both scenes, Cannon remarks:

They gay community is a minority community anyway and yet they’re so judgemental. Sometimes the gay community has an expectation that everyone should behave a certain way, but that [codified behavior] is not a part of being gay and you don’t have to do that…. The community itself holds us back with all these labels…. I just think we limit ourselves too much with the word gay and the politics of being gay. With the whole queer/gay thing I think the people who see themselves as queer might, on the surface, frighten the people who see themselves as gay because the queer culture has more of an edge. (personal communication, March 8, 2006)

Cannon’s comment further alludes to certain expectations and behaviours associated with the local gay scene, thus verifying the distinction between local gay and queer cultures. Elaborating upon these distinctions, I now focus specifically on the locality, musicality and sexual politics of Brisbane’s gay and queer scenes.
As the theoretical arguments and ethnographic material illustrate, Brisbane’s queer scene works in direct contrast to the culture of the gay mainstream, a culture which many local queers feel has begun to reproduce the gender, sexual and musical normativities of straight society. The following comment by Jones is further testimony to this:

The gay community is like a condensed version of ‘normal’ society with so many straight lines running through it…. That’s the problem with the gay inverted commas scene in Brisbane at the moment … now that they’ve homogenised and pasteurised themselves for public consumption. (personal communication, December 12, 2005)

The gay scene to which Jones refers can be geographically located in the inner city Brisbane suburb of Fortitude Valley. “Indeed, the Valley has become an illustration of what is happening to the gay community” says Jones. “It’s been prettied up on the outside but it’s turned rotten on the inside” (personal communication, December 12, 2005). What Jones means by this is that Brisbane’s gay precinct (as well as its gay culture) has, in recent years, undergone something of a transformation in that it is now a popular weekend entertainment precinct for the general public. Fortitude Valley was once considered Brisbane’s underbelly, a place populated predominantly by licentious characters such as sex workers, illicit drug users, gamblers, gangsters and queers. Continuing efforts over the last two decades to ‘pretty up’ the Valley and make it ‘safer’ for the general public have in fact had a negative effect. As the revitalised image of the Valley draws more and more people into the area, levels of alcohol-fuelled street violence and vicious physical and verbal assaults on members of the queer community have increased. The gay scene that resides in this area has also been affected by this. As the Valley becomes increasingly commercialised and ‘morally respectable’, so too has much of the gay culture which takes place here—as local (queer) opinion would have it.

Within the Valley, the gay scene can further be isolated to three main nightclubbing venues: the Wickham Hotel, the Beat Megaclub, and Fluffy. The Wickham and the Beat are open nightly, while Fluffy, which is the most elaborate in terms of scale and production expense, is a weekly gay nightclub hosted by Brisbane’s largest and most famous nightclub, the Family. In contrast, the queer scene—which is partly locatable in Fortitude Valley but extends to other inner city

76 It should be noted that the Beat is called a megaclub because it actually hosts five distinctive nightclub spaces, seven bars and three ‘chill-out’ areas in one building. However, when reference to the Beat is made in the context of this investigation, I am specifically referring to what is known colloquially as ‘up-stairs at the Beat’, which is the club’s ‘gay’ area.
suburbs such as Spring Hill and West End—does not congregate at fixed locations. Instead, queer scene participants congregate at a variety of club events produced by fellow scene members that occur at various ‘available-for-hire’ locations on a semi-regular basis. The queer club events examined here are: Omo (queer and alternative club), Cut and Taste (queer and alternative club) and Taboo (queer, alternative and fetish club).

As argued earlier, music provides a framework for establishing social relations and asserting individual or collective ideology, and by extension accommodates oppositional responses to hegemonic culture when individual or collective ideology is in conflict with the norm. Therefore, the following overview of Brisbane’s gay and queer scenes focuses specifically on the music that is performed and deejayed at these clubs and events, drawing out the relationship between the musicality and sexuality of these spaces in each case.

**The Local Gay Scene: An Ethnographic Overview**

Previously, I established that ‘gay music’ is often associated with styles of dance music. In *Queer Noises*, Gill suggests that “the dancefloor has always been a holy space … but it is particularly so among men and women attracted to their own sex” (1995, p. 134). Dyer asserts in an article titled, “In Defence of Disco” that “disco’s romanticism provides an embodiment and validation of an aspect of gay culture” (1995, p. 413). Brian Currid argues that house music can be read in part as a “narrative of ‘gay community solidarity’ through time and place” (1995, p. 176). Fiona Buckland’s *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-making* (2002) provides a detailed account of New York’s gay scene in which she suggests that dance music and dance spaces are vital sites upon which the construction of gay/queer identities and communities happen. This centrality of dance music to both gay and queer communities is not something I wish to contest, because dancing is a highly favoured activity in both contexts. Dance music and dance spaces continue to be of equal importance to both the gay and queer scenes in Brisbane; this is evident from both the interview data and observations presented here. However, what distinguishes the gay mainstream from queer culture in this instance is the different

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77 See earlier discussion in Chapter Three, “Constructing and Performing the Self via Music”, p. 81.
styles of dance music and other forms of musical entertainment featured in Brisbane’s gay and queer spaces.

The musical entertainment offered at the Wickham, the Beat and Fluffy is broadly identified as commercial house music. According to the respective websites of each club, the Wickham generally describes the music it plays as “vocal and uplifting house” (Wickham Hotel, 2007); the Beat describe its music as commercial, camp classics, pop and vocal house (The Beat Megaclub, 2007); while the deejay’s weekly updated play-lists on Fluffy’s website similarly exhibit a strong preference for house music (Fluffy, 2007). Most deejays who play at these clubs hold long-term residencies, therefore club attendees are generally exposed to the same deejays spinning the same style of music each week with little variation. A typical selection of popular artists who have been recurrently deejayed at these venues would include Kylie Minogue, Madonna, Britney Spears and the Rogue Traders.78

Amongst the queer scene, much of the music that is played at such mainstream gay venues is colloquially referred to as ‘handbag music’. Music journalists and scene commentators loosely define the term as a form of up-tempo commercial house music, heavily influenced by disco, usually featuring soulful diva-style vocals, and long piano breaks which generally has a ‘cheesy’ happy feel (Fritz, 1999; Rietveld, 2003). The term, ‘handbag music’, which Jimi Fritz (1999) and Thornton (1997) suggest originated in Northern England, is a pejorative reference to groups of women who would congregate on nightclub dance floors and/or at private parties and place their handbags on the ground and dance around them in order to prevent theft. In its original context, the term loosely refers to the mainstreaming of rave culture and house music in the early 1990s, suggesting that once this style of music had achieved popularity amongst commercial music fans, the subversiveness and subcultural capital that this music was originally afforded lost its potency (Thornton, 1997). These kind of club goers (those who carry handbags and dance around them) are thought not to take the music or the dance experience seriously, representing a mainstream sensibility, and by extension house music was labelled ‘handbag’ due to its growing appeal to commercial tastes or to people who are perceived by ‘serious’ scene participants as lacking individual taste or style.

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78 This list of artists is provided merely as a musical reference and is by no means complete.
While this definition of handbag music has clearly arisen far from the locality of Brisbane’s gay and queer scenes, it is a term that has been appropriated by members of Brisbane’s queer scene and applied to the style of music (mainly vocal house music) typically played in local gay venues. As Thornton (1997) notes in her exploration of the “Social Logic of Subcultural Capital,” the tendency for one scene to distinguish itself in opposition to the mainstream—positioning the mainstream as ‘other’, homogenous and commodified—can be understood as a tactical discursive strategy in the struggle for power between closely associated scene groupings. Thus, the pejorative use of the term ‘handbag’ in the local context has a dual effect: it marks the queer scene’s resistance of gay mainstream musical tastes while also pointing to the queer scene’s discriminating strive for self-worth and/or scene validation through the approbation of minority (and denigration of commercial) style. The close and historic association of gay and queer culture and lifestyle would suggest that the queer scene would be particularly invested in the propagation of such distinctions if it is to create a scene identity that is understood as separate from (what it views as the homogenisation of) the gay mainstream.

An overwhelming distaste for what the queer scene collectively names ‘handbag music’ is notable in many of the comments made by scene participants and event organisers. According to Garvey:

We’ve all been in clubs before and said ‘god this music is shit’ and that will ruin your night, it really will. If it’s one handbag song after another then you feel like crap but if it’s something you’re relating to then that will allow you to amplify the good time that you’re having. I think that the music facilitates that and allows it to happen. (personal communication, June 30, 2006)

Music that would be classified as handbag by the queer community might, for example, include dance remixes of music by mainstream gay icons such a Kylie Minogue or Madonna. The popularity of these artists amongst both heterosexual and gay communities is reflected in their recurrent polling within music charts, the frequency with which they are heard in clubs such as the Wickham, the Beat and Fluffy, and the alliances these artists have made with gay culture.79 Kylie and Madonna provide simple testimony to the mainstreaming of gay musical sensibilities and reflect the homogenisation of gay cultural identity and mainstream music tastes.

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79 For example, Kylie Minogue was invited to headline the thirtieth annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in Sydney in 2008, while Madonna has in the past performed in London’s infamous G.A.Y nightclub, and is a popular source of inspiration for various drag performers throughout Western gay culture.
As such, Madonna, Kylie and similar diva-vocal house styles of music are strongly rejected by members of the queer scene—a rejection that constitutes a fundamental oppositional act. This is further highlighted in a comment by queer scene member and musician Blintz Darfur, who posits the following in relation to gay and queer music scenes:

In queer clubs the music is more diverse and it just tends to be defined as alternative queer by not being Kylie, Madonna etc. that you usually get at the gay venues…. When I went to uni in my teens and early twenties there was still a cliché around that gay clubs had the best music, and I’m sure it wasn’t quite true but at least gay clubs had good dance music or at least they weren’t playing just top forty pop stuff, and by definition the music they were playing wasn’t really charting, well some of it was, the diva type stuff of course. But really since the ’90s gay clubs internationally have been playing the worst kind of music in my opinion. (personal communication, November 22, 2005)

Another feature characteristic of gay musical entertainment and performance is low camp drag. The Wickham, the Beat and Fluffy all have their own local celebrity drag queens in residence who, on a weekly basis, perform highly choreographed and flamboyantly stylised lip-synching routines to (and in rare instances actually sing) a variety of handbag pop songs. At the time this research was conducted, all bar one of the resident drag performers at these venues were biological males (the exception being a male-to-female transsexual), who were in all cases backed by ‘body-beautiful’ and generically stylised dancing chorus boys. The style of drag performed at these venues is particularly low camp.80 The use of crass humour—particularly humour insulting to women and female sexuality—appeared to be generally accepted conduct. Furthermore, the absence of drag king performers, biological females or masculine-identified female performers in these mainstream gay venues is testimony to the privileged position of the gay male, and customary performances by gay men in this scene. In an interview with local scene participant, drag king and bio queen performer Dita Brooke, she revealed that when her troupe, the Twang Gang, entered a drag competition in 2000, coming second in the competition, she later found out from the judges (who admitted, said Brooke, that the Twang Gang should have won) that because her troupe was female they were unable to take first prize. Since the competition organisers had expected that a drag queen would take the first prize, they had arranged this to be an opportunity for a queen to perform in Sydney’s Arq nightclub. “They had fixed it up for a drag queen to perform there” said Brooke, “so

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80 See earlier discussion of low camp drag in Chapter Six, “Gay Culture and Drag in the Twentieth Century”, p. 126.
we couldn’t win” (personal communication, November 29, 2005). Eight years later, on 8 June 2008, the Twang Gang (now renamed the Gang Stars) would, for the first time in their performance career, take the main stage at the Wickham. The fact that it took eight years for Brisbane’s only drag king and bio queen troupe to gain access to this significant performance space—significant in the context of local gay culture—further points to the underprivileged position of women in Brisbane’s mainstream gay scene.

Gender and sexual identity performances within the mainstream gay scene appear largely prescriptive and a social code of homosexual exclusivity is casually enforced—that is, men who attend these clubs are assumed to sexually desire other men and women are assumed to sexually desire other women. In the majority of cases, the biological sex of a person appears to dictate their performance of gender. There are, of course, some exceptions to this, as female-identified males and male-identified females were occasionally visible. In my observations conducted at the three aforementioned gay venues, a common physical and clothing style was explicitly evident among the club’s attendees. Both males and females are typically Caucasian, youthful (thirty-five years or under), slender, body-toned and well-groomed with short hair, wearing casual, non-descript clothing. A very small proportion of attendants have large or obese bodies, while people wearing alternative or fetish styles of clothing are extremely rare. These observations are further supported by perusing the local lesbian and gay street press: *Queensland Pride* and *Qnews*. In each edition of these publications a selection of candid scene pictures taken at the Wickham, the Beat and Fluffy are printed.81 Based on my observations, it appears that the gay scene is predominantly populated by gay men who assume the most prominent roles of event organiser, deejay, performer and punter and subsequently by lesbians who, in smaller numbers, assume the roles of deejay and punter.

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81 Scene pictures can be viewed online by visiting the websites of *Queensland Pride* (http://qlp.e-p.net.au/) and *Qnews* (http://www.qnews.com.au/) and clicking on the ‘scene pics’ link.
trends differ considerably within each context. This is particularly evident among the local gay and queer scenes, where queer clubs and events have emerged to facilitate the musical desires of those dissatisfied with the musico-normativities of mainstream gay culture. The queer scene as it is addressed here is typified by the aforementioned club events: Omo, Cut and Taste, and Taboo.

Born out of frustration with Brisbane’s established gay scene, Omo was one of the first queer events in Brisbane, and was the longest running. According to its organisers, the idea emerged when two scene members (Blintz Darfur and Shane Garvey) were returning from Sydney after having just attended a dance party. On the road-trip home, Darfur commented to Garvey: “how can we go back to Brisbane and have our entertainment limited to the Beat and the Wickham?” So it was decided at this point that “we should just start our own club” (personal communication, November 22, 2005). Built upon a strong do-it-yourself ethic, Omo operated in Brisbane at semi-regular intervals between 2000 and 2006. While Omo ceased operations during the course of this research, in 2007 the organisers of Omo teamed up with other members of the queer scene and launched a new event called Skank which has maintained Omo’s original queer politic. Within a few months of Omo’s final event in June 2006, two other queer events appeared: Cut and Taste launched its first event in November 2006 and Taboo was launched in December of the same year. It would seem that Omo was the catalyst for queer events to come. The activation of two new queer events so soon after the closure of Omo would suggest that queer scene members did not want to lose touch with the networks they had formed.

According to Garvey, one of Omo’s founding organisers, “Omo was constantly changing and evolving…. It was about generating discussion and discourse around the politics of queer”. Moreover, he also suggests that “Omo was about providing a space for people to play in” (personal communication, June 30, 2006). This idea of play as an oppositional tactic to the gay mainstream is central to queer cultural practice, and underpins both the sexual and musical characteristics of the queer scene. As I will demonstrate, the eclectic deejay sets, the live musical performances as well as the gender and sexual performances of all queer events to be discussed here encapsulate this sensibility of play. Thus I propose that musical play (that is, the variety of genres and performance styles accommodated by the queer scene) is a simulacrum of the gender and sexual play embodied by queer scene participants.
Such gender and sexual play might, for example, include the mixing or subversion of sexual identity cues, cross-gender and fetish dress and/or BDSM sex spaces and public performances. Moreover, it is through playing with, mixing and queering multiple conventions of music performance and gender and sexual identity performances that the queer scene distinguishes itself from mainstream gay culture, and challenges both gay and straight cultural norms.

The following comment by Jones, a queer scene member, demonstrates the centrality of music to the queer scene. He says:

Music has been the binder of the queer community over the years, because the queer scene has been just that, a dance scene, a music scene…. Music binds social outings especially for the queer community because the scene was burgeoning in the clubs where you could escape from the rest of the world. (personal communication, December 12, 2005)

For scene participants, music provides a temporary means of escape. It forms a key aspect of the way the queer scene defines itself. However, unlike the gay scene—musically defined by commercial dance, pop and house music styles—a uniformed musical taste culture is remarkably absent from the queer scene. Rather than exhibiting a strong appreciation for a single or closely associated collection of musical genres, the queer scene collectively expresses a dislike for one particular style of music: handbag music. “One of the main reasons we started Omo” says Darfur “was so you could go out and be with queer people and not have to listen to that top-forty remix bullshit” (personal communication, November 22, 2005).

Similarly, on the official Cut and Taste website, organisers claim that Cut and Taste is “an alternative to handbag dance parties and camp vocal house for the Queer community of Brisbane” (Cut and Taste, 2007).

The music that is deejayed at all three events is a variation of dance and rock styles, including electro, tribal, dirty house, industrial, alternative and punk. Omo and Cut and Taste are particularly keen to encourage new and emerging deejays to the decks, and make a conscious effort to accommodate as many tastes as possible, ensuring that the musical styles vary over the course of the evening. Referring again to Cut and Taste’s website:

[Cut and Taste] is about sampling different flavours, and putting together something new each time for a really vibrant scene of creative people. We aim to please, and every event is different. You can never know what to expect. But one thing is for sure, the music is deep, phat, dirty, electronic and totally twisted. Handbag, this ain’t! (Cut and Taste, 2007)
Resident deejay of the Wickham and Fluffy, Neroli Cannon, further differentiates between the musical characteristics and expectations of the gay and queer scene participants. Talking about her own experiences as a deejay at the Wickham, she comments:

On a Thursday night at the Wickham, there’s not that many people and they want to hear all the hits, some Abba, the Village People, Kylie and a bit of Pink. But I still always introduce new music but in such a way that it keeps the same groove and atmosphere going cause if you change it they’re going to go “what’s this shit” and walk off regardless of whether it’s a good song or not. I haven’t been to a lot of queer spaces in a while but in my opinion you get music with more of an edge. In a queer space you’ve got the room to be a lot more creative, a lot more experimental where as in a gay space you’re limited and it’s frustrating because sometimes I don’t want to be asked to play Kylie, some nights I might feel like playing Kylie, but other nights you think to yourself, “can I have one night where I don’t get asked to play Kylie”. (personal communication, March 8, 2006)

Unlike the mainstream gay scene, in which drag queening is the staple form of live musical performance, queer spaces offer scene participants a variety of live musical performances that help to create a unique shifting musical dynamic at each scene event. “If it’s dance music all night then everyone just hides in their little corners. But live music and performance in the queer scene is almost like an injection of adrenaline into the night” says Jones (personal communication, December 12, 2005). Between 2004 and 2006, Omo regularly showcased performances by local queer punk band Anal Traffic. In the year that Cut and Taste has been running, it has featured live performances by local darkwave/ambient outfit82 Dizzygotheca and electo rock singer/songwriter and bassist Zia. As part of the three Taboo events to date, organisers have offered scene participants an alternative to low camp gay male drag by hosting fetish fashion parades and showcasing performances by local drag king and bio queer performance troupe the Twang Gang.83 Featuring a female cast which performs a variety of fem, butch and drag king roles, the musical sketch comedy style of the Twang Gang is radically different to the mainstream drag in Brisbane. Unlike the aforementioned mainstream gay drag, the Twang Gang explores multiple manifestations of queer lesbian sexual identity, demonstrating that lesbian sexuality can be expressed through a fluid multiplicity of gender performances.

82 Darkwave/ambient is characteristically slow, melancholy and/or haunting sounding music that relies heavily on the use of synthesisers, female vocals and drum machine loops.
83 Throughout the course of this research, the Twang Gang changed its name to the Gang Stars, and it is under this name (and not the Twang Gang) that the troupe has performed at Taboo. However, for the purpose of continuity I shall continue to refer to them as the Twang Gang.
Table 3 (below) succinctly displays the most prevalent styles of live musical performance as well as the most common styles of music deejayed at gay and queer club events in Brisbane over a period from February 2004 to November 2007. The diversity of musical genres and performance styles outlined in Table 3 emphasises the musical eclecticism that is a feature of the queer scene—which, as previously suggested, corresponds with the gender and sexual diversity of scene participants. The balance of power between queer scene organisers, deejays and musical performers is distributed equally amongst both women and men. Omo, which was established by men, has always featured an equal mix of both male and female deejays and showcased mixed-sex bands and musical acts. Cut and Taste, which was started and promoted by a female and male duo has similarly featured both female and male deejays and live performers at its events. And finally, Taboo, which is run by women, has fostered a supportive female network that encourages female deejays and live performers while also welcoming men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Wickham</th>
<th>The Beat</th>
<th>Fluffy</th>
<th>OMO</th>
<th>Cut and Taste</th>
<th>Taboo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drag Queen Troupe</td>
<td>Drag Queen Troupe</td>
<td>Drag Queen Troupe</td>
<td>Anal Traffic (Punk)</td>
<td>Dizzygatha (Darkwave Ambient)</td>
<td>Drag King and Bio Queen Performance Troupe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal House Commercial Dance Uplifting Trance</td>
<td>Vocal House Commercial Dance Disco</td>
<td>Vocal House Commercial Dance Uplifting Trance</td>
<td>Electro Dirty House Punk Rock Alternative</td>
<td>Electro Dirty House Tribal</td>
<td>Electro Dirty House Industrial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

Commercial dance music, vocal house and uplifting trance are the dominant styles heard at all three gay clubs surveyed. Similarly,lip synced drag queen performances accompanied by a chorus of dancing boys accounts for the dominant style of live musical performance. While electro and dirty house are the most common genres heard at all three queer events they are by no means exclusive as a variety of alternative and rock genres are also evident. Live performance is also considerably varied, with each queer event offering a radically different form of live musical entertainment.

Table 3: Featured musical styles at Brisbane's gay and queer club events

The sex, gender and sexual identities of queer scene participants are also wide-ranging and non-discriminatory. While it is clear from observing and participating in this scene that same-sex sexual desire is the most prominent commonality amongst scene members, this is by no means an exclusive feature as polymorphous sexual expressions (including heterosexuality) are evident both in the partnering of scene
participants and via the public sex play that occurs at queer events. Unlike the aforementioned gay venues, Omo, Cut and Taste and Taboo all accommodate diverse expressions of gender and sexuality and facilitate cross-gender and mixed sex play. This is particularly significant, as the gay scene rarely encourages sex play outside of designated sex clubs. Overt expressions of sexuality and public sex play is frowned upon in mainstream gay spaces, and if at all present are generally hidden from public view or confined to toilet cubicles, further reinforcing the public/private dichotomy characteristic of heteronormative institutions. Within the gay scene, public displays of lust or affection are compatible with those one might witness at straight clubs, such as sexy dancing, kissing and clothed physical contact. People who have engaged in sexual activity in gay club spaces (including public toilets) have reported being escorted from the nightclub and not being allowed back in for the duration of the evening. In Brisbane, gay sex clubs are open to men only, further highlighting the gender segregation that is typical of the gay scene.

The style of sex play evident in queer spaces varies across events: Omo has hosted BDSM and sex on premises spaces in which both homosexual and heterosexual activity is evident. Cut and Taste and Taboo have provided play-rooms open to all scene participants, who may choose to either participate or observe, and have featured live sex play shows by experienced members of the BDSM and fetish communities. Among the queer scene, the general feeling towards BDSM sex play is that it is an empowering and confronting act that signifies a multiplicity of pleasures. Theoretically, it offers its participants a form of momentary escape from sexual repression, specifically because it can be understood as a subversive way of creating new possibilities of pleasure that lie outside the naturalistic and medicalised notions of desire perpetuated by dominant culture (Foucault, 1997). Furthermore, as Sullivan suggests, it is “a strategic game, a political practice of queer pleasure that functions to denaturalise sexuality” (2003, p. 156), because it allows for a reconceptualisation of pleasure that removes gender as the determining factor of one’s sexual object choice.

84 A play-room is a space in which a variety of sexual acts such as rope play or whipping may occur; however, such spaces usually do not allow for intercourse due to legislation governing the venues in which these events take place.

85 Jane Stoddart (2007) has conducted research in queer BDSM spaces and identity in Sydney, Australia and has similarly found that participants identify BDSM spaces as a confronting, enjoyable and playful.
Musico-sexual Synergies on Brisbane’s Queer Scene

According to Connell and Gibson “music contributes to the gendering and sexualisation of a space through its role in the creation and maintenance of identity” (2003, p. 210). While this is true in the case of both gay and queer scenes in Brisbane, there are distinguishing factors in the way that music makes its contribution to these scenes. In local gay culture, we have seen how it is a singular musical style (which the queer community dubs ‘handbag music’) that contributes most significantly to the maintenance of gay identity. In queer spaces however, I would argue that while music similarly contributes to the gender and sexualisation of space, here we see how the multiplicities of queer gender and sexual identities in turn contribute to the multiple musical stylings of queer space.

Queer musical spaces function in much the same way as theories on queer gender and sexual identity performance. Queer theory accounts for a multiplicity of gender and sexual perversities, and in turn the local queer scene accommodates an equally diverse array of musical tastes. It is in the space, where these dissonant and resonant gender, sexual and musical performances occur—creating a musio-sexual synergy—that this local queer scene emerges. Furthermore, the locality of the club events in question is also intertwined in the production of the gay and queer scene. Gay club events occur on a regular basis at fixed locations, while queer events occur on a semi-regular basis at random ‘available-for-hire’ locations. While the queer scene is newer, it is community driven and largely self-funded, which would account for its lack of fixed real estate. The argument could also be made that the locative fluidity of queer scene events is in fact a reflection of the very nature of queer—that is, that the fluidity and indeterminacy professed by queer theories have filtered down and can be identified in the basic structure and organisation of these events.

Musical play and live performance, as well as sexual play and live performance, are distinguishing features of the queer scene, and as the relative theories on queer and musical identities suggest, important identity work takes place at both sites of play. The identity work in progress here presents an interrogation of the preconditions of gay identity and its follow-on effects, such as emerging patterns of musical taste. The absence of genre-specific or codified musical tastes and performances within the queer scene correlates with queer’s disidentificatory position. By defying collective sexual and musical classifications, the queer scene activates its resistance towards coherent and commodified aestheticism that is
determined on the grounds of sexual identification. In opposition to the social limitations imposed upon expression of sexuality by the gay mainstream, as well as the gay scene’s preoccupation with handbag music, Brisbane’s queer scene encourages eclectic expressions of sexual and musical play, and it is through playing with multiple conventions and representations of gender and sexual norms, as well as musical norms, that queers activate a serious aesthetic challenge to gay cultural normativity. Furthermore, the varied musicality of the queer scene demonstrates the indeterminacy and elasticity that are characteristic of queerness and queer cultural production in general.

With this broad perspective of the queer scene in mind, I now turn my attention to three local musical groups which participate in local queer culture in a variety of ways: the Twang Gang, Anal Traffic and Bertha Control. The following investigation of these local performers serves to illustrate the use of music as a means of expressing their individual queerness. Collectively, the music and musical performances of these artists represent a series of disorganised contestations of heteronormative sex, gender and sexual rigidity, as well as various objections to local mainstream gay culture.

Case Study One: The Twang Gang

Contextualised within a history of drag as queer gender performance, the following case study draws upon the previously discussed theories of camp, genderfuck, lip-synching and vocalisation\(^\text{86}\) in an examination of the queer performance style and song choice of the Brisbane-based drag troupe, the Twang Gang. The Twang Gang exemplifies the use of musical performance as a means for unsettling gender, sexual and musical normativities, while offering an insight into the relatively unknown world of drag king and bio queen performance in Brisbane. This case study demonstrates how the Twang Gang employs multiple drag king and bio queen identities in its live shows, and uses these roles to execute a queer critique of gender and lesbian sexuality. Moreover, this examination focuses on how the musicality of Twang Gang performances further facilitates the expression of queer subjectivities and increases the gender troubling effect.

\(^{86}\) Refer to Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of camp sensibilities and to Chapter Six, “Genderfuck”, p. 134, and “Aural Signifiers: Lip-synching and Vocalisation”, p. 135, for a detailed discussion of genderfuck, lip-synching and drag methods of vocalisation.
The Twang Gang was formed in August 2000 by Dita Brooke and Mary Alexander and grew to become known as a “travelling fantasy cabaret” (The Twang Gang, 2002). It should be noted that in June 2006, the Twang Gang changed its name to the Gang Stars; however I refer to it as the Twang Gang throughout this discussion for the purpose of continuity. Since its beginnings, the Twang Gang has had numerous members.87 In November 2005, I interviewed six of these members: Dita Brooke, Mary Alexander, Jo Lieven, Kylie McGill, Analea Holmes and Melissa Hall. In their daily lives, all members of the Twang Gang with whom I spoke suggested that they self-identified as queer, lesbian females. On stage, however, they perform a variety of drag king and bio queen roles which they have named and nurtured throughout their performing careers: Brooke performs as drag king Rock Hard and bio queen Mitzee Burger; Alexander performs as drag king Tricky and bio queen Boom Bang; Lieven performs as drag king Bonn Apiteet and bio queen Elektra Fying; McGill performs as bio queen Mystery Bound; Holmes performs as drag kings Mr Frisky Bob and Inspector Muff; Hall performs as bio queen Miss Match. Figure 3 (below) displays a selection of promotional images of Twang Gang members. Pictured from left to right are Electra Fying, Rock Hard, Mystery Bound, Tricky, Bonn Apiteet and Boom Bang.

![Twang Gang performers](image)

**Figure 3: Twang Gang performers**  
© Twang Gang 2005.

**Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Performance**

The Twang Gang’s unique style of drag cabaret welcomes female- and male-identified performers of all ages, races and sexual persuasions to join and experience what Brooke referred to as “empowerment through entertainment” (personal

87 According to Brooke, between August 2000 and November of 2005 the Twang Gang has had approximately one hundred and thirty members of the local gay, lesbian, trans and queer communities performing with it at one time or another.
Twang Gang members use their bodies, via singing and dancing, to perform a part of themselves that is often restrained in their daily lives. This idea of empowerment is central to the Twang Gang’s ethos, as troupe participants explicitly claim that one of their primary motivations is to provide members of the queer community (especially women) with an accommodating space for self-discovery, specifically a space that is drug and alcohol free. The Twang Gang stresses that members always perform free from the effects of drugs and alcohol as they feel the GLBTIQ communities often resort to excessive drug and alcohol consumption in social situations. Therefore, in the interest of promoting an alternative to this, the Twang Gang encourages its members as well as its audiences to “gain confidence from the spirit not the substance” (personal communication, November 29, 2005).

The Twang Gang has a playful, almost celebratory, feel to its performances, maintaining that entertainment and community engagement are an integral part of its show. Members non-threateningly encourage audience participation in their performances, and verbally and theatrically convey messages of acceptance and tolerance within and outside of the queer community. When I interviewed the members of the Twang Gang Brooke commented and the other members agreed that:

From being on stage it [empowerment] now overlaps into our real lives. It [performing] gives you the space and the freedom to express yourself in any way you want … the confidence of doing it on stage starts coming into you real life and the level of empowerment is phenomenal … it helps you stand on your own two feet and be more confident with who you really want to be. You don’t have to fit into a pigeon hole of any sort, you don’t have to conform to society, you can make your own rules and so long as they’re cool and groovy within yourself you can do and achieve whatever you like. (personal communication, November 29, 2005)

This idea of non-conformity is primarily related to modes of gender and sexual expression. By employing a pert camp sensibility, and invoking their capacity for gender trouble, Twang Gang performers create a sense of gender and sexual identity anarchy on stage, and intentionally subvert and critique gender and sexual normativities in their shows.

88 While the Twang Gang has at times had male as well as male identified female troupe members, there were none regularly performing with the troupe at the time of this research. On the odd occasion that male performers did participate in their shows while I was observing the troupe, they were usually guest artists rather than actual troupe members. The Twang Gang members stress that this is not because they do not welcome men, but rather it is an indication of the gender segregation that is prevalent in lesbian and gay culture, which they are still trying to overcome. The ages of troupe members varied from people in their late teens to those in their early forties. The racial identity of troupe members was not exclusively white; Brooke is an Indigenous woman.
From the numerous shows that I attended, it was clear that the Twang Gang consciously troubled gender and questioned the performance of lesbian sexual identity. The troupe achieved this in two highly powerful ways: first, by being female and performing masculinity in the role of the drag king; and second, by being female and also performing femininity in the role of the bio queen, thus demonstrating that gender itself is performative and not limited by or attached to the physical body. Most members of the Twang Gang choose to perform both masculine and feminine roles, and in doing so they increase their capacity to critique these gender roles rather than merely exposing gender as pretence. By using female bodies to campishly parody both masculinity and femininity, the Twang Gang is able to critique the connection between female biology and feminine gender in ways that are not available to performers who only perform cross-gender roles. Furthermore, performing both masculine and feminine roles allows the Twang Gang to explore the multiple manifestations of lesbian sexual identity and desire. As lesbian-identified women, they demonstrate that lesbian sexuality does not necessarily imply a gender crossing to the butch or masculine, but rather allows one to freely assume multiple and conflicting genders. Therefore, it is through various performances of female masculinities as well as female femininities that the Twang Gang executes its critique of normative gender performance and sexual identity as it is defined by and organised with heterosexual hegemony.

When I spoke with these women, they identified a number of concerns they had about gender and sexual identity rigidity, particularly within the lesbian community. Brooke made reference to a recent performance in which Mr Frisky Bob (a female drag king) was onstage wooing a male drag queen who was performing with them on this occasion. The act was called “A Whole Nude World” and was a genderfuck parody of the Walt Disney film musical Aladdin, which featured a song called “A Whole New World”. Holmes, who was performing as Mr Frisky Bob, was partially naked, wearing only a long hairy beard, thick pubic hair and a small lap-lap, protruding from which was an excessively large prosthetic penis and testiculi. The penis was made out of stocking material and continued to unravel, like a giant erection, throughout the performance. During this act, a number of female audience members got up and walked out of the performance, clearly offended by what they had witnessed on stage. It was unclear, however, whether they were offended by the phallus or by the fact that a known lesbian was wooing a gay male in drag. When I
asked Brooke and Holmes about this incident, and specifically why they thought the women had left, Brooke remarked:

> There are a lot of hardcore dykes who are anti-men and they don’t know how to take us because they think that we want to be men and yet we are women who are very out and in touch with our own sexuality. We’re portraying men affectionately, we don’t take the piss out of guys, we’re just embracing a part of the world and having fun with it. We’ve lost a lot of dykes from our audience because of this. (personal communication, November 29, 2005)

While Holmes agrees with Brooke regarding the Twang Gang’s portrayal of men and masculinity, she goes on to comment that she feels very ‘natural’ when performing as a man, and does not understand why some women may take offence at this:

> It’s strange [said Holmes] because I felt particularly comfortable in that male role. When I’m being a bloke on stage I feel, well, there are facets of your personality that are latent in everyday life but when you get up there it’s a licence to let them go, and for me they’re naturally there…. During the show I was sitting down at one point and I had fake balls under my lap-lap and it just felt so nice. It felt really comfortable on my body and there was nothing that felt awkward about it. You can get up there and be tough and dirty and silly and really have a lot of fun and it comes through naturally because it’s already there inside. (personal communication, November 29, 2005)

When I questioned other members regarding their use of phallic props on stage Alexander commented that in her experience performing as Tricky (her drag king character) is not something she thinks of as being ‘natural’. Alexander said:

> For me it’s not about pretending I have a dick, it’s got nothing to do with that. It’s interesting…it’s really empowering, it feels fantastic and it’s such a release … when you’re on stage it’s another world, it’s my world … I like the androgyny of it too. It’s quite sexy. To me it really doesn’t feel like I’m trying to be a boy.” (personal communication, November 29, 2005).

Lieven and McGill stressed that they prefer performing as bio queens, and they do not care much for wearing a dildo or any other kind of male phallic symbol. “For forty hours a week I drive a forklift” says Lieven, “and to get up on stage with a pony tail wig in fishnets and little hotpants feels fantastic. For me, it gives me a chance to be a woman” (personal communication, November 29, 2005). McGill remarks that, “I’m extremely fem and I don’t enjoy being a boy, I just don’t get off on it. I’d rather be in a corset. You’re suppose to have short hair if you’re a dyke and you can’t wear lipstick,” and McGill sees her role within the Twang Gang as challenging that stereotype through the expression of her femininity (personal communication, November 29, 2005).

The self-made words created by each troupe member on stage are many and varied. Performances of femininities, masculinities and androgyny point to the
diverse and deeply personal expression of gender as it is experienced, lived and enacted by each troupe member, thus accounting for the multiple experiences and expressions—the individuality—of queer female sexuality. Further discussion on this topic revealed that the Twang Gang see themselves as pioneers of queer sexual politics; specifically, they feel that they challenge the norms of lesbian gender and lesbian sexual identity, but they also suggested that this was quite often a difficult task to undertake. “The gay press is killing us,” Brooke said, because they often refer to us as an “all female production.” Moreover, “the gay male venues [referring here to the Wickham and the Beat] won’t hire us because they think we’re not attractive to the men” (personal communication, November 29, 2005). Similarly, Alexander remarks:

We still suffer the stigma of being only for women, even though our audiences are mixed. Because most of our shows are at Options and it has been a girl bar for so long, guys still have that assumption. Even with out advertising it’s hard to get the gay press not to market us for the girls. The local papers will refer to us saying ‘come on girls’ or ‘go on girls’ and we haven’t even put that in our info sheet. (personal communication, November 29, 2005)

Lesbian stereotypes and gender segregation amongst Brisbane’s lesbian and gay audiences are some of the things the Twang Gang strive to overcome. Considering themselves as pioneers of queer politics, the Twang Gang performers suggest that through their form of drag entertainment—a unique form within the Brisbane context—they aim to create a nurturing space that welcomes those who feel dislocated from the heterosexual as well as the lesbian and gay mainstream. “We don’t discriminate against age, race, sex, gender … we want to embrace everyone, especially those who are generally outcast within our community. The more odd you are”, says Brooke, “the more we’ll like you” (personal communication, November 29, 2005). For the Twang Gang, drag performance functions as a site of experimentation, an inclusive space that allows people to play with and ‘try on’ different genders and celebrate incongruous expressions of sex, gender and sexuality. Moreover, it is a transformative space acknowledged by troupe members as empowering and affecting, transforming bodies and perceptions on stage as well as in the troupe member’s everyday lives.

89 Options is a bar located in the Brisbane suburb of Spring Hill. It has a reputation among the local community as a lesbian establishment.
Gender, Sexuality and Musicality

Since its beginnings in the music halls of Great Britain and on the vaudeville circuit throughout America, drag has involved musical performance to some degree. However, the musical styles and song choices of drag artists are something that has received very little critical attention to date. During the time I spent observing the Twang Gang, it became apparent that the music was given just as much consideration in the design of their acts as the costuming and choreography. Furthermore, it is evident that the musical style and song choices of the Twang Gang contribute significantly to the troupe’s capacity to cause genderfuck, further aiding their enactment of a queer camp sensibility.

The binary dualisms that have plagued Western thinking for centuries have (albeit unjustly) situated rock music in the dominant masculine sphere. Rock has become synonymous with the conventional concepts of ‘authentic’, heterosexual masculinity, while pop music, disco, dance music and dancing have been tagged as an effeminate, femininised and in some cases ‘gay’ pursuit (Currid, 1995; Dibben, 2002; Dyer, 1995; Frith & McRobbie, 1990). Recognising this, the Twang Gang plays with, or queers these conventions by drawing on a range of musical styles across genres of rock and pop. In particular, they seem to favour musical styles that are seen as contrary to mainstream gay and feminine musical sensibilities. When asked specifically about the Twang Gang’s musical choices, Brooke remarked:

When we first started, one of our catch phrases was ‘if it ain’t got a twang, it don’t mean a thang’, so every song that we chose has to be different from the disco clubs. Because we were always performing in nightclubs, we decided that every song had to have some ‘twang’ in it. Twang meant a bit of guitar which you didn’t find [in gay clubs] back in 2000. Everything was dance or techno … there just wasn’t any guitar being used in dance clubs, so when our songs came on, and we often used classic type rock songs, it separated us from what was happening in nightclubs. (personal communication, November 29, 2005)

In this instance, the masculine/feminine binary is blurred by the incongruity in the sonic information and visual spectacle. The nightclub space—usually filled with dance music—is gendered feminine. Femininity is further authenticated via the elaborate costumes of the bio queens as well as by the dance routines used in the Twang Gang’s performances. As McClary notes, “the mind/body-masculine/feminine problem places dance decisively on the side of the ‘feminine’ body rather then with the objective ‘masculine’ intellect” (1991, p. 153). Therefore, by setting their choreographed drag routines to classic guitar-driven rock music,
which is gendered masculine, the performance consequently becomes gender
troubled, confusing the feminisation of the nightclub space and the dance spectacle
with the masculinity that is culturally signified by rock music. Brooke goes on to
explain that the Twang Gang does not limit its song choices strictly to rock anymore.
The reason she gives for this is that “we [Alexander and Brooke] are getting older
but our newer members who are in their twenties are drawn to different types of
music so sometimes we have to let it in” (personal communication, November 29,
2005). Although the Twang Gang now choose to use a variety of musical styles in its
shows, this does not make its choice of rock music any less significant.

The troupe’s conscious decision to use guitar-based rock music in a female drag
context can be read as a musical execution of genderfuck. To recall the theory
presented in Chapter Six: for a performance to qualify as genderfuck it must be seen
(or in this case heard) to be intentionally playing, or ‘fucking’ with gender
stereotypes, thus creating multiple symbolic performances of gender and separating
the performer’s sexed body from the visual (and auditory) signs of gender. Through
the orchestration of both drag king and bio queen performances to guitar-based rock
music, the Twang Gang is effectively genderfucking both rock music hegemonies
and its members’ own female sexed bodies and lesbian sexualities on multiple levels.
In playing with binary oppositions and mixing both visual and auditory gender cues,
the performers are effectively destabilising their own gender subjectivities. They are
enacting a subversion of gender role rigidity (both in a musical and socio-cultural
context) by using female bodies that are performing a variety of genders to
theatrically critique the false dualities that govern gender as well as musical
normativities. Moreover, since rock music is considered a marker of heterosexual
masculinity, the use of rock music in a queer/lesbian drag context presents itself as
somewhat contrary to both gay and lesbian musical norms.90 As such, the
introduction of rock into a predominantly lesbian sexual space can be read in two
ways: first, the heterosexuality of rock is subverted or queered through its
performance by genderfucking lesbians; and second, lesbian musico-normativities
are subverted or queered through the conscious decision to employ rock music styles
in a genderqueer, lesbian drag troupe.

90 Refer to discussion of gay and lesbian musico-normativities in beginning of Chapter Seven, p. 138
and to the discussion of womyn’s music in Chapter Eight, “Womyn and Grrrls: Doing it for
Themselves”, p. 156.
A further example of musically facilitated and auditory genderfuck can be identified in the vocalisation style of the Twang Gang’s performances. Previously, in Chapter Six, it was suggested that the human voice is a fundamental signifier of both gender and the sexed body. This is because vocal register and timbre are gendered, and thus operate (much like genitalia) as an attribute of biological sex. In the Twang Gang shows I observed, it was very clear that all members of the troupe were lip-synching to the music. As an observer, this created a rather perplexing audio/visual display of sex and gender. In any given show, the troupe would usually perform somewhere between four and six songs, and these songs were generally a mixture of rock and pop styles sung by both male and female vocalists and then lip-synched by an array of masculine and feminine female bodies. What was particularly perplexing or queer about these performances—serving as yet another example of genderfuck—was the constantly shifting and morphing spectacle of sex and gender cues that I, as an audience member witnessed. One moment the audience is hearing a male-gendered voice that appears to be coming out of the mouths of both masculine and feminine female bodies. Then a few minutes later, the audience hears a female voice being performed by the same assortment of both masculine and feminine female bodies.

Through the juxtaposition of the recorded voice against the performer’s voice in this ever-shifting way, the voice (or absence there of), coupled with the performer’s physicality and gender cues, creates an audio/visual spectacle that appears to subvert the biological imperatives of the sexed body. Subverting the sexed body in this way problematises the last bastion of hegemonic sex/gender logic: the supposedly inescapable signs of our biology, signs upon which gender is constructed. According to the theories of Cusick (1999b), discussed earlier,91 we commonly perceive the voice as the body since it originates inside the body, from within the body’s borders. Moreover, Cusick suggests that all voices—but the singing voice in particular, due to its unmistakable timbre—are performances of the body’s borders, borders that the ‘natural’ singing voice is ultimately limited by. Therefore, in instances of lip-synching, the rejection of the performer’s ‘natural’ singing voice may also be understood as a rejection of the limitations attached to a biologically sexed body and a means of transgressing the supposedly fixed borders of the sexed body. Here, I am not suggesting that these performers are rejecting their female

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bodies, as they quite openly admit to embracing them, but rather the act of lip-
synching queers, in this case, certain physical imperatives of the female body.

In addition to genderfuck, a camp sensibility is employed extensively in Twang
Gang performances. Observing the Twang Gang, it was clear that they appeared very
comfortable with camp, and agreed that a camp sensibility was particularly evident
in their costuming, song choice and in their musical sketch comedy performance
style. Previously, the relationship between lesbian drag king performances and camp
sensibility was identified by Davy (1994), Halberstam (1998) and Kennedy and
Davis (1999) as awkward and unaccommodating, the reason being that camp is
inherently a performative sensibility which favours parody and artifice. As such
camp is incongruous with acts of masculinity because masculinity is generally
perceived as original, authentic and non-performative.92 In contrast to this, the
Twang Gang’s use of camp marks an attempt at revealing the inherent theatricality of
masculinity (through drag king performances) as well as femininity (through bio
queen performances), and suggests that Twang Gang performers have no desire to
appear as authentically masculine spectacles or pass for men. As female-identified
drag performers who perform a variety of masculine and feminine identities in an
exaggerated manner, camp becomes an exceptionally useful device that aids in the
denaturalisation of gender categories as advocated by theories of camp as a form of
queer political praxis. Furthermore, by reclaiming performative spaces and
sensibilities such as drag and camp that were once dominated by gay men, the
Twang Gang is performing a feminist act. That is, they are resisting the privileged
position of masculinity within both homosexual and heterosexual cultures, and
reinventing drag and camp to accommodate expressions of lesbian femaleness.

Alexander’s drag king character, Tricky, is remarkably camp in his attention to
artifice and in his parody of hegemonic rock masculinity. Tricky is a playfully
arrogant rock god,93 so when Alexander performs as Tricky she chooses the music
that best represents Tricky’s personality. Tricky is hyper-masculine in his physicality
and mannerisms, he has excessive facial hair and he often sports an exaggerated

93 The rock god is an iconic figure of rock ‘n’ roll subculture. This status is generally reserved for men
who achieve great success and fame from playing rock ‘n’ roll. It is often the case that fans and
aspiring musicians will playfully assume this title to exaggerate a sense of their own importance.
phallus. In a notable performance during 2005, Alexander chose the Spiderbait\textsuperscript{94} cover version of the song “Black Betty” (2004) as the soundtrack to one of her drag routines. According to Alexander, the heavily distorted guitar-driven rock arrangement of this song musically authenticated Tricky’s masculinity. During this performance, Tricky was onstage in a car, cruising to this song while a chorus of hyper-feminine dancers hung off the sides of the car swinging their long hair around. In this instance, Alexander employed a camp sensibility as a strategy for undermining both heteronormative and rock music gender roles via over-articulation and artifice. Tricky’s costume, gesticulations and musical soundtrack appear to parody the stereotypical image of rock god masculinity. The dancing girls further authenticate this parody, fulfilling the role of the objectified female groupies who lustfully pursue their rock god. And, as with all Twang Gang performances, genderfuck was also incorporated into this routine. The tight-fitting clothes Alexander had chosen to wear left her breasts very noticeable; thus it remained clear to the observer throughout the routine that Tricky was in fact a woman.

Camp is used in other instances as an entertaining political device whereby songs are appropriated from popular culture and inscribed with a new meaning that resonates specifically within a queer context. In response to religious and political oppression of queer lifestyles, the Twang Gang developed a show it called \textit{Our Tribe}, which was performed at Lez Vegas and Brisbane’s annual Pride Fair in 2005. This performance reflects Babuscio’s definition of camp as “a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression” (1993, p. 19). \textit{Our Tribe} queerly recontextualises Christian iconography and values; Alexander describes the show as signifying to the audience that “this is our church” (personal communication, November 29, 2005). The overarching narrative of \textit{Our Tribe} was revealed through a medley of popular music, drag and musical sketch-comedy, incorporating choreography and elaborate costuming. The costumes were bastardised versions of sacred religious garments, redesigned with a stylistic fusion of fetish and punk fashions, and the show serves as an example of queer aesthetic recontextualisation and cultural synthesis. A photograph taken at this performance is presented (see Figure 4 below) as a visual reference.

\textsuperscript{94} Spiderbait is an Australian rock band, which had a number one hit in Australia with a cover of African-American working song, “Black Betty” in 2004.
The songs used as the soundtrack to the show were arranged in such a way that the narrative of *Our Tribe* was articulated both musically and literally. Contrasting musical styles, including industrial rock, pop, dance, and house remixes of gospel music, created a shifting musical energy that reflected the incongruence and bricolage symbolic of queer culture. The Twang Gang told me that each song in the medley was chosen to articulate a specific idea about spirituality and self-discovery. For these women, music facilitates self-discovery: it provides a crucial framework that supports their physical and emotional experiences of gender and sexual difference. Some of the lyrics in the chosen songs made literal reference to the thematic of the show, while other songs were chosen for their sentimentality or their evocative musical attributes.

*Figure 4: The Twang Gang performs Our Tribe at Pride Fair in Brisbane, 2005*
© Twang Gang 2005.

*Our Tribe* opened with “Closer of God” (1994) by industrial rock outfit, Nine Inch Nails. The lyrics in this song blatantly refer to fetishism, debauchery, temptation and desire; themes which are further authenticated by the dark sexual undertones and grinding mechanical rhythms of industrial music. During this song Brooke’s drag king character Rock Hard was being tempted by one of the bio queens who put Rock Hard in bondage. The second song in the medley was “Like a Prayer” (1989) by Madonna. This song was chosen as a representation of the inner turmoil
many queers experience as they are “coming out” to their friends and family. While the lyrics of this song do not make any specific mention of such a situation, the music video that accompanied this song when it was released in 1989 told the story of a woman who witnessed a crime and a false criminal accusation made against a black man. The woman, who was very conflicted about what she should do, decided to pray. Once she has looked deep inside herself, she realised that there was only one right course of action and that was to testify so that the wrongly accused man would be free. By using this song, the Twang Gang was drawing on the themes of inner conflict and the idea that we all need to testify to our true feelings, even if our true feelings may bring some hardship upon us.

The third song in the medley was a remixed version of Aretha Franklin’s “(Pride) A Deeper Love” (1993). Since the first release of this song in 1993, it has received notable attention from various gay and queer communities, and has been appropriated as an unofficial ‘gay anthem’. The lyrics, up-tempo disco rhythm and gospel vocals of this song encapsulate notions of self-respect, personal strength and determination. The fourth song in the medley was another dance track called “Rise Up” (1998) by The Sun Kids. Brooke suggested to me that this song was about choosing the right path in life. She said, “to me, this song indicated what ever you choose in life just make sure it’s right within yourself. It might be bad it might be good but make sure it’s the right thing for you” (personal communication, November 29, 2005). The show ended with the gospel chorus and pounding dance rhythm of “Sing Hallelujah” (1992) by Dr Alban. According to Brooke this song was selected because of its powerful, celebratory feel, and because the Twang Gang wanted to end the show with a song that celebrated the queerness and diversity of both the performers and the attending audience.

Sedgwick (1991) reminds us that one of camp’s great pleasures is the recycling and reinvention of pop cultural artefacts, which is particularly evident here in the Twang Gang’s song selection. Thus the song selection of Our Tribe demonstrates an explicitly camp sensibility. Recalling the words of Sontag: “camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different set of standards” (1982, p. 286). As Brooke previously suggested, this is precisely what the Twang Gang were trying to articulate through the music and performance of Our Tribe. In this instance, a camp sensibility
is functioning as an oppositional response and non-violent form of social protest enacted through dramatised and aesthetic operations.

Popular songs are strategically incorporated into Twang Gang performances to signify character identity, articulate queer subjectivity, and for aesthetic appeal and continuity. Music assumes a crucial role in Twang Gang performances, and facilitates multiple positive outcomes: music provides accompaniment and a valuable support in the exploration, articulation and authentication of queer gender and sexual identities; and music has facilitated criticism of and oppositional responses to dominant social morality. The appropriation of popular songs in Twang Gang performances reinscribes queerness on the margins of popular culture. The queering of popular songs in this way reclaims a space for the disenfranchised and contests the privileged position that heterosexual narratives have assumed within popular cultural forms such as rock and pop music.

Case Study Two: Anal Traffic

Moving away from drag, I turn now to a radically different style of queer musical performance: queer punk. Contextualised within a history of queer punk and queercore, the following case study of Brisbane-based queer punk band Anal Traffic draws upon the previously discussed sensibilities of camp, play and the carnivalesque\(^\text{95}\) in an exploration of Anal Traffic’s musicality, visual imagery, lyrics and performance style. Supporting material gathered from interviews conducted with the founding members of the band and observations of Anal Traffic’s live shows between 2005 and 2006 provides the basis for a localised examination of queer punk, demonstrating the ways in which these local queer musicians use music as a vehicle for gender and sexual identity construction, negotiation and critique.

Anal Traffic is the collective efforts of keyboardist and vocalist Paul Jones, guitarist Shane Garvey, vocalists Blintz Darfur and bassist Cian who, in 2004, began writing together with the input of drummer Samantha Downs and vocalist Paul Rollo. Since their formation they have played numerous gigs at local queer events in Brisbane and have independently released a self-titled, six-track, extended play (EP)

\(^{95}\) Refer to Chapter Five, “Camp as Queer Parody, Praxis and Performance”, p. 114, for a discussion of camp and Chapter Seven, “Queercore music and Anti-gay Anarchy”, p. 143 and “Queercore Sensibilities: Play, the Carnivalesque and Camp”, p. 148, for a history of queer punk and queercore style and sensibilities.
compact disc in August of 2005 that is referred to throughout this investigation. Before I proceed, it should be noted that Darfur and Rollo ceased performing with Anal Traffic in 2007, however they still maintain close ties with the group and feature on the band’s 2005 EP. Therefore material gathered in an interview with Darfur in November of 2005 has been kept in this investigation because the continuing band members felt that Darfur’s comments remain representative of the band’s style and politics. Figure 5 (below) is a promotion image of the band used on their website. Pictured in the four headshots from left to right are Jones, Garvey, Cian and Downs.

![Figure 5: Anal Traffic promotional image](image)

© Anal Traffic 2006. Photos by Matt Ditton, design by Kylie Downs

**Approach, Performance Style and Sound**

Strongly resisting alliance with mainstream gay pop culture and homogenised gay identity, Anal Traffic define themselves as queer in the most radical and fluid sense of the term, employing punk rock as a vehicle for queer sexual and political expression. When I spoke with Jones in 2005, he specifically signalled Anal Traffic’s association with a queer agenda, describing the band’s sound and aesthetic as “raw, fun, filthy and very queer” (personal communication, December 12, 2005). In 2008, the band’s members continued to maintain this ethos, describing themselves on their official website as “queer punk rock in a latex glove to the shoulder … a mix of punk, rock, synth, filth—all mashed together for your listening pleasure” (Anal Traffic, 2007). The playful rhetoric colourfully describing the band’s sound and style points to aspects of bricolage, emphasising a bricolage of musical forms. The “latex glove to the shoulder” can be read as a cryptic parody of queer sexual pleasures, while the qualities of ‘fun’ and ‘filth’ more generally mark Anal Traffic’s playful vulgarity.
Evoking a punk/queercore interactive performance style, members of Anal Traffic use their bodies to create a playful, almost anarchic atmosphere on stage. They throw themselves around, encourage audience interaction and dancing, and employ poses that blatantly parody conventional rock stage behaviours, such as the guitarist simulating sex with his guitar, or the singer using the microphone as a phallic prop. Their clothing is mismatched and draws inspiration from a variety of distinguishable styles ranging from conservative casual to fetish wear. This lack of consistency can be seen as a marker of each band member’s personal style and an example of pastiche and bricolage by way of disrupting aesthetic cohesion and appropriating multiple clothing styles.

The music is loud, fast and rhythmically driven, with an emphasis on heavily distorted guitars. Their lyrics, which are delivered in an aggressive war-cry tone, are uncompromisingly provocative, political and sexually explicit. Such a physically dynamic, fashionably diverse and musically vociferous performance is highly reminiscent of punk’s disorderly aesthetic. However, Anal Traffic skews or queers this aesthetic by juxtaposing the raucousness of punk against a clearly articulated vocal line, synthesiser solos (often organ sounding), and a tight rhythm section that does not conform to the punk rock style. And, while most songs—typical of punk—are in a simple 4/4 metre, occasionally there are metric shifts into compound 6/4 time, which is particularly uncommon in traditional punk style. Musically, Anal Traffic draws on punk’s stylised mayhem and intensity, while also incorporating synthesiser pop and rock influences into its sound to create a musical mélange that is unique to the band and indicative of queercore’s loose musical styling. The musical proficiency of the band members is also quite diverse. For some, Anal Traffic has provided an induction into musical composition, performance and lyric writing; for others, Anal Traffic has provided a necessary means of musical expression, allowing members to draw on their years of musical training. The mix of skilled and amateur technique, quite noticeable in the band’s live performance and to a lesser extend on its recording, creates a somewhat disorderly aesthetic effect that further contributes to the distinctiveness of the group’s sound.
Visual Representations and Textual Themes

In true queercore style, Anal Traffic’s visual content and lyrical themes are purposefully vulgar and provocative. The band’s preoccupation with queer male sexuality can be noted in its album artwork, presented in Figures 6, 7 and 8 (below). The cover of Ana; Traffic’s EP (Figure 6) features a chocolate-covered donut used as a barely concealed pictorial representation of an anus. On the back cover of the EP (Figure 7), the same donut is featured, but in this instance the donut is broken in half and semi-destroyed. Lying beside the donut is a used condom, thus giving the impression of penetrative, yet safe, anal sex. The inlay artwork (Figure 8) similarly demonstrates the band’s sexual playfulness. It features a man at a urinal who appears to be urinating on (or near) a yellow rubber ducky, as well as a slide that resembles a medical or anatomy text that depicts a hand examining the prostate. Additional inlay images and disc-face artwork (not featured) include items from a public toilet such as a condom-vending machine and wash basin; a medical examination chair; medical slides of objects used for anal penetration; and a cartoon penis wearing a leather cock ring harness.
Figure 7: Back cover of Anal Traffic EP

Figure 8: Album inlay from Anal Traffic EP
The album artwork exhibits a particularly DIY punk cut and paste aesthetic. The text fonts are designed to appear hand written; a substance that resembles chocolate sauce is used to write the band’s name on the album cover; inlay images are presented off-centre, with tattered or torn edging, and what looks like sticky tape is used to bind the images together. This points to aspects of pastiche in their work as the torn and mismatched images are arranged in such a way to disrupt the linearity of design and distort (then reorganise) the meaning or significance of the images presented. Moreover, it suggests a campish perception in which the process of perception and recontextualisation of a particular object comes to signify queer agency: a donut, for example, is not merely a donut; rather, it substitutes for an anus. Similarly, a medical slide is presented in a highly sexualised context, thus misrepresenting the original purpose of the image.

When I spoke with Darfur, Garvey and Jones, they all suggested that the band collectively shares both a sexual and political consciousness which is overtly present in and transmitted through their lyrics. Both in the band’s live performances and on the EP, the vocal lines sit high in the mix, which suggests there is an explicit intention for the content to be heard and understood by the audience. Darfur comments:

We’ve got multiple agendas … there are a lot of expressions of queer sex, lots of sex, but we’re a politically conscious bunch with a lot to say about society as a whole so in the best traditions of punk we’re trying to do a bit of commentary at the same time. (personal communication, November 22, 2005)

The lyrics of songs from Anal Traffic’s 2005 EP, such as “Six Beer Queer”, “In Past Your Wrist”, “Daddy’s Chocolate Kisses” and “Two Pumps and a Squirt”, exemplify Anal Traffic’s preoccupation with sexual acts, specifically acts that defy normative sexual practice and are, in many circumstances, deemed unnatural or morally corrupt. The sexual content in each of these songs is unashamedly explicit, and broaches such controversial themes as anal sex, oral sex, fisting, coprophilia and voyeurism. In an attempt to make queer sexual acts publicly visible, Anal Traffic uses excessive sexual profanity to intensify its argument and over-articulate sexual perversions. As DeChaine (1997) has similarly noted in the lyrics of other queercore artists, these linguistic tropes used to describe casual and hedonistic queer sexual encounters can be seen as an embodiment of Bakhtin’s (1984) carnivalesque grotesque realism. That is, these lyrics represent a playful subversion of social and sexual norms and make constant references to the “lower sanctum of the body” (p.
21), in particular, stressing acts of sexual perversion and defecation. The following selection of lyrics from the aforementioned songs exemplify this:96

**“Six Beer Queer”**
Stick it in baby, anywhere you like
Stick it in, my hole is nice and tight
Stick it in, my mouth is hot and wet
Keep going we haven’t started yet.

**“In Past Your Wrist”**
I’m such a dirty bitch when I go out to play
Now you can feel my arse in a different way.
Pull yourself off with the hand that’s free
Or you can let them both play inside of me.

**“Daddy’s Chocolate Kisses”**
I’m ready and waiting on the floor with my mouth wide open
Just squeeze it out, dump you sweet love on me
I’ve got the taste for something brown and warm.

**“Two Pumps and a Squirt”**
I don’t want you to love me
Just take your cock and stick it right up me.
I’ll hold on tight and if you do it just right it’s just
Two pumps and a squirt.

Here we see Anal Traffic engaging with carnival play through stressed bodily pleasure and sexual vulgarity. Moreover, the band uses terms of play, as noted in the song “In Past Your Wrist”, to describe gratifying sexual encounters. Garvey defends Anal Traffic’s sexually explicit content, arguing: “Anal Traffic is all about exploring our inner filth, we’ve all got it”, he says (personal communication, June 30, 2006). Jones supports this argument, suggesting that:

It’s all about dirty disgusting sexual things that people are probably doing this very minute and we make no judgement of it. I want listeners to get into the heads of people who get off on things that others don’t find very savoury. I’ve always wanted to write something about shit and people who are into scat [coprophilia] because I find it really fascinating. It’s like the best and worst things you can think of are happening right now and someone is into it, that’s human nature. People seem so surprised when they hear these things but really if they understood themselves they’d know that nothing is surprising. (personal communication, December 12, 2005)

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96 To hear these songs in full, refer to audio examples in Appendix Two: CD tracks 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively, available only in the hard copy version of this thesis.
Band members acknowledge that these lyrical tactics are also a means of antagonising mainstream (and particularly straight) sensibilities. As such, these lyrics are camp in the way that they problematise acceptable or normative sexual representations within the heterosexist conventions of popular music. While punk’s association with social deviance is commonly cited, Anal Traffic intentionally pushes the boundaries of conventional punk rock themes. In doing so, Anal Traffic employs a camp sensibility by excessively articulating sexual gratification in a parodic and playful tone thus queering punk rock and critiquing the politics of sexual representations within popular (or popular alternative) music discourses.

While personal experience is a catalyst for much of Anal Traffic’s lyrical material, Darfur, Garvey and Jones note that not all the sexual narratives and practices articulated in their songs are autobiographical. In some instances, lyrics are written with humorous intent and are aimed to stimulate thought around a particular sexual taboo and encourage the listener to question the limitations they place upon what society considers ‘normal’ or ‘acceptable’ sexual behaviour. In a review of the band’s EP that featured in a local entertainment newspaper, *Time Off*, the journalist had this to say of the band: “In these torrid times of fake gay antics at local indie clubs, it’s nice to see that Anal Traffic sing it with a sense of sincerity and comedy in equal parts” (Tahiraj, 2005, p. 26). This reviewer’s summation of Anal Traffic poignantly reflects the sentiment of queercore as it is articulated in the work of both Arnold and DeChaine. Arnold argues that queercore artists’ “politically charged music explores aspects of being gay with a defiant mixture of humor and anger” (1997, p. 160). Similarly, DeChaine suggests queercore demonstrates that “queer issues are not limited to categories of sexuality and sexual preference, and that ‘anger’ and ‘humor’ are but discursive tactics ‘played out,’ as it were, yet anchored in real issues which impact the lives of human beings” (1997, p. 22). Together with camp, comedy, sincerity, anger and humour form part of the band’s discursive toolkit, enabling it to critique human sexuality more generally. Garvey and Jones’ previous comments emphasise their desire to draw attention to sexual ‘deviancies’ which, they believe, are apart of the human—and not exclusively queer—condition. By drawing their audience’s attention to these perceived deviances and then celebrating them through song, the band is playfully engaging its camp sensibility of outrageousness and over-articulation as a tactical response to angering and oppressive socio-sexual norms. During my interviews with the band members, Jones
openly acknowledged Anal Traffic’s lack of female-centred content and suggested that this was something members would like to address in the future. Their current failing to do so, suggested Jones, was simply because Darfur, Garvey and Jones—who are the primary lyricists—lacked experience to draw upon. However, Jones told me of a song that he had written “for the ladies” titled “Minge Binge”, which the band is planning to work into its live set shortly (personal communication, December 12, 2005).

Anal Traffic’s socio-political consciousness, referred to previously by Darfur, is particularly evident in the remaining two songs from the band’s six-track EP. These songs, titled “Shit for Dickheads” and “Scapegoat”, form the basis of a critical parodic commentary on a range of issues including John Howard’s government, inflation, the importing of low quality, sweat-shop manufactured goods into Australia, the 2001 ‘Children Overboard’ affair; and social prejudice towards queers. The following selection of lyrics from “Shit for Dickheads” and “Scapegoat” exemplifies this:

**“Shit for Dickheads”**

I went down to shit for dickheads, and I bought ten kinds of crap
It’s all plastic made in sweat-shops and I can’t take it back.
All that shit from shit for dickheads costs four-fifty, beg you pardon!
It will only last a weekend but it gives me a consumer hard-on…
I went out to the Western suburbs and bought a spec McMansion
Double garage, local golf course, four bedrooms and room for expansion.
All those houses in the burbclave cost four fifty, beg you pardon!
How can I make the repayments? I better vote for Howard.

**“Scapegoat”**

Got my foot right to the floor
Jonny’s getting really bored
Throw some children overboard.
Sit back take note queers are the scapegoat
Go straight for the throat.

97 John Howard MP was the leader of the conservative Liberal Party and Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007.

98 The Children Overboard affair was an Australian political controversy. The Howard government, which, at the time was up for re-election, claimed that asylum seekers off the coast of Australia had thrown their children into the water in a plea for them to be rescued. Howard then suggested on radio that genuine refugees would not do this. A senate enquiry into the matter was launched, as it was later proven that there was no evidence to suggest that children were ever thrown overboard.

99 To hear these songs in full, refer to audio examples in Appendix Two: CD tracks 5 and 6 respectively, available only in the hard copy version of this thesis.
As shown by the above lyrics, Anal Traffic employs elements of camp parody and irony in a musically facilitated commentary on a range of political issues and social conditions, demonstrating that queer issues and concerns reach far beyond matters of sexual preference. These songs in particular mark the use of camp as a theatricalised (specifically musical) form of queer political praxis, functioning as a cultural critique and a non-violent form of social protest. In this way, Anal Traffic’s members can be seen as queer cultural activists (in the tradition of groups such as ACT UP and OutRage), using music and a sophisticated camp parody, with its critical and ironic undertone, as a means of critiquing the flaws they identify within the dominant social order. Moreover, in discussions with the band, the performers stressed their distance from what Darfur described as “the appeasement lobby of the gay community” (personal communication, November 22, 2005). This comment further emphasises Anal Traffic’s desire to challenge both hegemonic as well as mainstream gay politics: “for example, [gay] marriage rights”, says Darfur, “are not on my agenda” (personal communication, November 22, 2005). This attitude is a hallmark of both punk and queercore in that it situates the band as being anathema to the straight and gay mainstream. This marginal position is one that the band revels in and uses as political leverage to execute its musically facilitated contestations of sexual and social normativities.

When I questioned Darfur, Garvey and Jones with regard to Anal Traffic’s reception within the queer community, specifically relating to their lyrical themes, they suggested that the band had received mixed responses. Darfur commented:

What we’ve found is that most people find it amusing and the people that don’t like it don’t say much about it so we’ve heard indirectly that there’s a few people, in fact interestingly, most of the feedback is from other queer people who find it a bit too extreme, although there have been various straight people who get a bit squirmy and find it hard to deal with but mostly they think it’s amusing anyway. I guess we’re not really getting out there to a very mainstream or straight audience so I’m sure if we played at a regular punk night we might find that some people are a little more put off, maybe not with punks, I don’t know. So we’ve had a surprisingly positive reaction even though people don’t identify with what they’re hearing all the time. They’re ok with it, they find it amusing, and the material we sing about is so diverse and so extreme that we don’t identify with all of it either and so for us, it’s just putting out another character or story that’s not necessarily about us. (personal communication, November 22, 2005)

Darfur’s comment gives further credence to the humorous, amusing and playful nature of Anal Traffic’s music and its delivery. Moreover, he suggests that the band’s humorous intentions are, for the most part, perceived as such by their audience.
The following remarks by Jones offer a slightly less sympathetic view. He states: “we [Anal Traffic] are still something that they [the community] think is dirty and filthy but after a while I think there’s going to be a bit of desensitisation among the supposedly desensitised community” (personal communication, December 12, 2005). To qualify Jones’ remark, I turn to an example offered by all three interviewees. On different occasions, Darfur, Garvey and Jones all raised the point that the selection committee for Brisbane’s 2005 Pride Fair rejected Anal Traffic’s proposal to play at Fair Day. The reason the committee gave for rejecting the band was that Anal Traffic was too offensive and not family friendly. Later in the interview, Jones went on to suggest that it was potentially a good thing that Anal Traffic was not widely embraced by the entire community because while the band remains on the fringes of queer culture it is free to keep pushing the boundaries of acceptability without agitating the morals of too many people. Jones pointed out that with popularity comes certain expectations:

Because then you get people waving fingers if you put a foot or a flap out of line and that’s something I don’t want. I just want to play a few bits and bobs here and there and keep the subversiveness in the subversive queer community. (personal communication, December 12, 2005)

Jones went on to clarify what he meant by this, offering an example of a gig Anal Traffic did at Brisbane’s Powerhouse in 2005.

At the Powerhouse gig, Anal Traffic played a song called “Age of Consent”, which does not feature on the EP due to the negative feedback the band has received when playing this song live. This song draws attention to the unequal age of consent laws in Queensland that currently prohibit consensual anal sex until the age of eighteen, yet permit consensual vaginal sex at the age of sixteen. The live performance of this song was met with contention as some audience members left while others appeared visibly upset by the song’s theme. Jones suggested that the disturbed audience members clearly misconstrued the song’s narrative and wrongly concluded that the band was singing about engaging in under-age sex. Jones elaborated:

A lot of people, especially in our queer audience, take this song the wrong way. The chorus goes “I’m nineteen I want a cock up my arse, I’m eighteen I want a cock up my arse”, etc. all the way down to “I’m thirteen I want a cock up my arse, twelve”, and that’s where the chorus ends. And that’s all that people hear. People hear twelve and they go, ‘they’re singing about fucking twelve year olds up the arse’. But it isn’t, it’s sung in a fashion that suggests that there were quite a few of us who, when growing up, knew what we wanted at a very young age. (personal communication, December 12, 2005)
Garvey, who wrote this song, reiterated that it is based on personal experiences of sexual maturity and is intended to stress to the listener that queers are fully capable of making the decision to engage in penetrative anal sex at the same age at which straight people are legally permitted to engage in vaginal intercourse.

The negative reception of this song, particularly by members of the queer community, highlights an underlying fear that queer sexuality is, in some instances, associated with paedophilia. Jones concluded that:

This song is easily misconstrued because people just pluck at the thing they find most fearful. I think specifically in the queer community they pick up on that simply because there have been so many incorrect allegations about homosexuality and paedophilia, and they think ‘oh you can’t sing about that because you’ll undo all our good work’.

(personal communication, December 12, 2005)

The reception this song received highlights the negative images of queer sexuality purported by ignorant social constituents, and in turn the damaging effect that these misassumptions have upon the self-image and collective identity of many queers. Anal Traffic’s persistent interest in matters of sex, politics and governance—evident in the song “Age of Consent”, among others—suggests that the band’s music potentially bridges the public/private dichotomy, a dichotomy that has for centuries, reinforced the paradigmatically male position (Warner, 1996). This bold mixture of in-your-face sex and political commentary highlights the potential for queer cultural practices to deconstruct the binary and opposing spheres of personal and political, intimate and public. As such, Anal Traffic’s lyrics could also be read as challenging and subverting the oppressive institutions and social hierarchies that reinforce these dichotomies.

**Performing Queer Bodies and Identities**

As previously outlined, queercore culture maintains a critical distance from institutionalised homosexual culture, preferring instead to ‘play’ with alternative gender conventions and representations of sexual identity. In keeping with this ethic, Anal Traffic attempts to campishly destabilise dominant images of gay male sexual identity. This is achieved primarily via the physicality of the band’s performance and through the juxtaposition of the performers’ bodies and gender identities against the sexual themes explored in their music.
Presented in Figure 9 (below) is a promotional photograph of the band, featuring from left to right, Garvey, Downs, Jones and Cian. This image shows the band in a domestic setting, wearing mismatched attire, and drinking tea. Downs is eating chocolate while Garvey, Jones and Cian are pictured with chocolate smeared all over their faces. In the middle of the table sits a copy of *Inches* magazine (see Figure 10 below).

![Figure 9: Anal Traffic chocolate tea party photograph](image1)


![Figure 10: Cover of *Inches* magazine](image2)

Inches is pornography marketed to a gay male audience. The poses assumed in
the photograph appear audacious and slightly mischievous; the clothing is odd and
out of place in a tea party setting; and the smeared chocolate is particularly symbolic
of the band’s celebration of fun and filth, as previously articulated by Jones. In
discussion with Jones, he jokingly suggested that the chocolate could be read as a
cryptic euphemism for faeces. Although the magazine cover is slightly obscured in
Figure 9, to those in the ‘know’, this is clearly gay male pornography and serves as a
discreet reference to the band’s thematic and its pre-occupation with male
homosexuality. Both the male and female bodies in this image—the same bodies that
appear on stage in their live performances—are rather incongruous with the image on
the cover of Inches—that is, none of them appears to resemble the tanned, buffed,
hairless, scantily clad and sexually suggestive image of homosexually masculinity
pictured here. In fact, this image on the cover of Inches is contradictory to the
physicality of the band members.

Another contradiction between the band’s physical image and a homosexual
stereotype is evident in the band’s lyrics. Anal Traffic’s lyrical narratives, most of
which deal with themes of overtly aggressive homosexual masculinity, suggestively
position Anal Traffic within a gay ‘leather’ and/or gay ‘bear’ cultural context. Gay
leather and bear culture is male-centric; it strongly emphasises sexual aggression,
muscular bodily features such as acute muscle tone, large bodies and facial hair,
while its fashions are often typified by tight leather and fetish wear. However, the
corporeality, fashions and physical gesticulation normally associated with this sexual
identity are playfully undermined by the collective physicality of the band.
Parodying this gay stereotype, Anal Traffic juxtaposes the overt sexual vulgarity and
aggression associated with gay leather men, against slender, boyish, non-muscular
and even female bodies, thus causing incongruence between the lyrical narratives
and physical spectacle that appears on stage and in the image above (refer to Figure 9
above). As Jones remarks:

I find that some of the gay men, like the rough trade who are into leather, will turn up to
see us and because I’m a skinny little thing and Shane’s tall and slim, and Sam’s a
woman, we don’t fit their ideal of what dirty filthy shit pigs and bears should be so they
put their guard up. I’ve felt it a few times when people like that look at us and go ‘oh’
[with a confused expression], then walk off because we’re not the big rough brooding
masculine men they thought we’d be…. I find it hilarious. I think they’re too busy
upholding the image of masculinity they’re trying to attract. (personal communication,
December 12, 2005)
The band’s incongruous physical image subverts the association of overt homosexuality with hyper-masculinity, as the hyper-masculine spectacle one would typically associate with Anal Traffic’s lyrics and, to a lesser degree, with their punk rock sound is remarkably absent in the image presented in Figure 9 and in their physical performance. Instead, the male and female bodies that perform the music of Anal Traffic present a fractured array of gender identities encompassing masculinity, boyishness, androgyny and femininity. These multiple and incoherent representations of sexuality expressed by Anal Traffic through the band’s lyrics, physicality and promotional imagery point to the broader project of queer. That is, by demonstrating the multiple manifestations and representations of male homosexuality, the band is in effect queering homosexuality, dismantling the idea of a homogenous or universal homosexual male gender in the process.

Anal Traffic’s queerness is clearly evident in the recorded medium, artwork and in the band’s live performances. With specific regards to the latter, the band’s on-stage antics further point towards its members’ desire to be confronting and to challenge the conventions and exceed the boundaries of both punk and local queer performance styles. While the simulation of masturbation and male-to-male fellatio are common features of an Anal Traffic show, it is these same stage antics, as well as the band’s lyrics, that both visibly and audibly position the group outside of Brisbane’s alternative and punk scenes and on the edge of local queer culture as well. By locating the band in this marginal space, Anal Traffic has created a new position—one that is unique in the context of local queer and local punk cultures. Drawing on the rhetoric and style of queercore, it is a position that problematises sexuality within a punk rock context, and a position that playfully undermines and confuses gay male stereotypes through punk rock. Akin to the zeitgeist of queercore, Anal Traffic use playful tactics and its members’ keen sense of camp to negotiate the politics of sexual identity, to subvert categories of hetero- and homonormativity, and to resist the musical trappings of a commodified gay identity. Through musical composition and performance, the band members have found a means of expressing themselves, emphasising their sexual, social and (to a lesser extent) musical deviances that they embrace as queer individuals. Anal Traffic marks a site of queer and musical identity production. It constitutes a way for these individuals to enact their contestations of the ‘normal’ and to aesthetically critique the hetero-normal/homo-deviant dichotomy that purports essentialist notions of sexual identity.
In doing so, they are calling into question the truth, stability and normativity of sexual identity in general, and putting in its place campish parodies that celebrate all the ‘fun’ and ‘filth’ that they suggest is at the core of all human sexual desires.

**Case Study Three: Bertha Control**

The final case study exemplifies yet another style of queer musical performance, which I refer to as queer feminist music. Contextualised within a history of womyn’s music and riot grrrl-style politics, this case study of the all-woman Brisbane ensemble Bertha Control draws upon queer sensibilities and feminist politics as well as elements of funk, reggae and ska musical styles in an exploration of Bertha Control’s musicality, visual imagery, lyrics and performance. Supporting material gathered from interviews conducted with members of the band and observations of Bertha Control’s live shows between 2005 and 2006 provide the basis for an examination of the musicality, style, politics and gender identity of the band. Furthermore, it demonstrates the ways in which these local queer women use music to express their gender and sexuality, and to critique the flaws they identify within the dominant social order.

Bertha Control is currently a five-piece ensemble (pictured in Figure 11 below), featuring the musical talents of Patty Bom (percussion and vocals), JC Nimble-Fingers Bassey (bass and vocals), CC the Cat (guitar, flute, keyboard and vocals), Fretmaster Flawless (guitar, trumpet and vocals) and maTHRILLda (saxophone and vocals). The band formed in 2003 with a sixth member, Mona Verdour, who has since left the group. In November 2005, I interviewed three of these women: Clare Cottone (CC the Cat), Matilda Alexander (maTHRILLda) and Patty Preece (Patty Bom). At the time of these interviews, Verdour was still recording and performing with Bertha Control hence the constant reference to six women by the interviewees. Since the band’s formation, Bertha Control has released three independent albums. In 2005, it released a six-track EP titled *You’re a Bertha Control Yourself* and a full-length, thirteen-track album titled *Out of Control*. In 2007, the band released a ten-track album titled *Songs of Sedition*. In this case study, I draw upon the musical and lyrical material from *You’re a Bertha Control Yourself* and *Out of Control*, as the

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100 Refer to this discussion in Chapter Eight, “Womyn and Grrrls: Doing it for Themselves”, p. 156.
release of these albums coincided with the time of my interviews and observations of the band.

Throughout the band’s live performance career, Bertha Control has gigged extensively in Brisbane and in numerous towns and cities along the east coast of Australia. The band’s performances at a remarkably diverse array of events, festivals and political rallies signal Bertha Control’s alliance with multiple musical cultures, social causes and political movements, such as reggae, funk and to a lesser degree punk culture; environmental, refugee, Indigenous and anti-corporate activism; queer and women’s movements. The band’s participation in the following selection of events during 2004-2007 exemplifies this: Stradbroke Island Reggae Festival, Rasta Funk Blasta, Joyfest, Punkfest, Environmental Awareness Week, Wollumbin Dreaming Festival, World Refugee Day, Brisbane Social Forum, Funk U CEOs fundraiser, Brisbane Pride Festival, The Fruit Tingle Queer Cabaret, Ladyfest, International Lesbian Day, International Women’s Day and Reclaim the Night.
Approach, Performance Style and Sound

In an online biography from Bertha Control’s official website, the women describe themselves as an “all-woman funk/reggae/ska outfit”, which is “on a quest to heal the world and its people through music” (Bertha Control, 2006). This description goes on to suggest that Bertha Control is representative of the ‘sistahood’. The recurring use of this term—which the women employed regularly in discussions with me—highlights the centrality of femaleness to the collective identity of the band and points to their extended sense of camaraderie—that is, a spirit of camaraderie among all women. When I asked Alexander, Cottone and Preece to describe the sound and style of Bertha Control, they all agreed that it could be characterised first by the fact that they were all women and subsequently by their ‘revolutionary’ themes and their funk and reggae sound. Cottone pointed out that, like rock music forms, reggae and funk are traditionally male-dominated genres and as such their approach to the formation of Bertha Control is firmly grounded in their experience as women, particularly women who are trying to make their way in a male-dominated musical style. Preece commented that the band “aim to be role models for young women coming through, or just women generally who want to play music.... If they can see six women doing it maybe they’ll think, wow, it’s actually possible” (personal communication, November 30, 2005).

Bertha Control takes great pride in its members’ role as mentors for other women, and the women encourage female participation in all aspects of performing and promoting their music. Alexander stated that:

We try and skill up women in all the different aspects of it cause in a way having a band is like having a small business, there are all these auxiliary things attached like the cover artwork and the graphic design on the website and the live sound. We make sure that all these roles are filled by women when we can. And if we could find appropriate recording studios which we’re working on, we’d have women in that role as well. For example, at the last gig we had two trainee sound mixers watching over the woman who does our sound. These were two women who were wanting to learn how to do sound and I love giving people the opportunity to do that kind of thing. It’s [live sound] another area where there aren’t many women. (personal communication, November 30, 2005)

Cottone added that this idea of nurturing is something that the band foster internally as well:

When we started out we weren’t the best guitarists or drummers or anything in Brisbane. Jewels just picked up her bass when we started Bertha and Matilda started playing sax in Bertha and my keyboard work was all classical in the past so we’ve really supported each other to grow musically by nurturing each other. Even though we
started out as beginners we’ve nurtured each other to grow and become a lot more professional. (personal communication, November 30, 2005)

This approach to the group’s organisation and management is indicative of second wave feminism and the womyn’s music movement generally. To recall Bayton’s previous assertion, feminist musicians of the second wave aimed to create “an alternative musical world of their own” (1993, p. 179)—a world that promoted alternative values centered around collectivism, participative democracy and equality, a world that rejected competitive individualism and hierarchy.

Bertha Control’s members believe they play a significant role in awareness-raising and in healing; hence their suggestion that they are “on a quest to heal the world and its people through music” (Bertha Control, 2006). Although I discuss their role as awareness raisers in more detail in the following section, it is a role that the band members feel is deeply connected to music’s ability to heal. In a song from their album *Out of Control* titled “Music is the Weapon of the Future”, Patty Boom raps the words, “music is the weapon of the future, music is the language of the soul yeah, music is the healer of the people”. When I asked the band members to elaborate on this, Cottone explained:

I think our role is awareness-raising. I feel really conscious when we’re playing that yeah we’re all having a great time and having a great party but firstly we’re on stolen land, having this great time at other people’s expense. I think we need to be aware of that but without dampening the situation because another role I think we play is a healing role. We offer healing to people doing really hard work and we support a lot of activist movements so when everyone gets together to listen they can all relax and celebrate and have healing through music. (personal communication, November 30, 2005)

The notion that music is both a weapon and a healing tool is a central theme in Rastafarian reggae music, and as such marks the cohesion between the band’s politics, style and sound.

In terms of their musicality, Bertha Control exhibits a rather curious, or possibly ‘queer’, approach to style. I posit this because the band’s sound—specifically its rejection of rock’s whiteness and misogyny—incorporates elements of funk, reggae, ska, rap and occasionally punk styles, thus situating them queerly within the discourses of typical feminist music production and also within the dominant styles

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101 To hear this song in full, refer to audio examples in Appendix Two: CD track 7, available only in the hard copy version of this thesis.

102 Cottone’s reference to ‘stolen land’ is an acknowledgement that Aboriginal settlement in Australia pre-dates British settlement and that the British wrongly stole the land from its Indigenous peoples.
of queer cultural production, as funk, reggae, ska and rap are not genres traditionally associated with either feminist or queer cultures. Bertha Control’s sound is typified by funk guitar, bass grooves and interlocking 4/4 rhythms. In the style of funk, many of the melodic instruments often take on rhythmic qualities, contributing equally to the percussive drive of the music, and to its timbric and tonal qualities. Songs frequently incorporate the off-beat sounds of reggae with its recurring accents on the third beat of the bar, intricate vocal harmonies, freestyle rapping, and classic ska-style keyboard, saxophone and trumpet riffs. The band’s occasional use of flute melodies and flamenco-sounding rhythms and harmonies suggests that the band draw on a vast array of ethnic musical influences and further distinguishes it from a standardised rock or pop sound.

Another significant phraseology to which the women regularly referred in discussion was ‘the Bertha vibe’. The women used this phrase in reference to both their sound and their stage performance. When I asked them to elaborate on the meaning of it, Cottone and Preece suggested that it was a feeling or atmosphere that the group created on stage, a type of exchange between the band and the audience. The women also agreed that there is a political aspect to the vibe. Cottone explained:

> It’s all part of the vibe, there’s definitely a political side to it, there’s also a performance aspect to it and I think just simply having six women on stage playing all the instruments is quite new and different for a lot of people, it has its own feel to it. One different thing about Bertha from the other bands is the traditional thing of focusing on the lead vocalist and everyone supporting the lead vocalist, but we equally share the stage, which is pretty different in general. But there’s definitely a political element to it as well. (personal communication, November 30, 2005)

Again, Cottone’s remark points to the strength that the band members draw from their identity as women, and also from their identity as female instrumentalists. Furthermore, it is strength and an energy that the band members exchange with their audience in a live context. As an attendee of many Bertha Control gigs, I can attest that this exchange is evident most notably in their positive and encouraging dialogue with their audience; their playful personas and colorful stage attire; and in their ability to rouse their audience’s enthusiasm through dance.

As Cottone pointed out above, Bertha Control does not have a designated lead singer: vocal performances are shared between the band members. This idea of equally sharing the stage and the role of vocalist is a central performance aesthetic of the band. It is a marker of the members’ equality as individuals and their collective resistance of hierarchical power structures, again reminiscent of a second wave.
approach to musical organisation. Bertha Control’s members acknowledged that when they made this decision it was difficult to find a similar performance model to work from. Generally, in popular music formations, the lead singer is ‘accompanied’ by the rest of the band. This is reflected in all aspects of stage design, press photography and even credit listing, as the lead singer is generally named above all others in album credits and in band biographies. Because Bertha Control has made a conscious decision to subvert this hierarchy, Cottone argues: “I genuinely think we feel that we are trailblazing” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). While Alexander further commented: “we try and reflect this in our band photos as well, you know what I mean, we are all the same size in the image, there is never someone in front view and someone up the back” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). The cover photograph from Bertha Control’s EP You’re a Bertha Control Yourself (see Figure 12 below) is a pertinent example of Alexander’s remark, and further points to Bertha Control’s fun, engaging and colourful aesthetic.

Figure 12: Cover image from You’re a Bertha Control Yourself
© Bertha Control 2005. Photo by Alicia.
Visual Representations and Textual Themes

In contrast to the other queer artists discussed here, Bertha Control’s album artwork (refer to Figure 12 and Figure 13 above) and publicity photography (refer to Figure 11 above) do not exhibit an overtly sexualised tone or a particularly queer sensibility. While the rainbow on the cover of Out of Control (Figure 13) could potentially be read as soft reference to queer pride,103 this is not made explicit. Moreover, given the sizable body of work (currently over thirty songs) that Bertha Control has recorded and performed in the band’s relatively short career, only a small percentage of its song lyrics—most notably “Love Triangles” and “The Rap Against Homophobic Crap”, “Freedom”, “Dropped”, “Time”—directly reference themes pertaining to female oppression, intimate and/or sexual relationships, and queer sexuality. This suggests that Bertha Control’s agenda extends beyond matters of gender and queer sexual identity.

During the first two years of Bertha Control, the band started out by predominantly supporting women’s and queer events and movements, receiving the majority of its airplay on local queer community radio programs. However, Cottone pointed out that: “we’ve always thought our music goes far beyond that and we don’t want to be limited to that audience because we think we’ve got a lot to say to

103 The rainbow flag is a widely recognised symbol of queer pride and has been in global circulation since it was first designed by San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker in 1978 for use in the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade.
everyone” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). Indeed, Bertha Control does have a lot to say on a broad range of issues, and by mid-2005 numerous community radio stations on the east coast of Australia began playing the band’s music and its songs have been included on various reggae and ska compilation discs, signifying the diversification of Bertha Control’s audience. While the women maintain their loyalty to Brisbane’s queer community—by performing at Brisbane’s annual Pride Fair and other queer fundraisers, for example—the band exhibits a resounding social consciousness for a variety of topics that do not exclusively pertain to matters of female or queer identity.

Much of Bertha Control’s musical output directly addresses matters of social justice and governance, positioning the majority of the band’s work within the context of protest music. Arguing from a strong leftist perspective, a range of contemporary political debates is voiced through song. Lyrics that deal with Australian politics, censorship, racism, environmentalism, refugee rights, social pluralism, the abuse of policing powers, anti-corporatisation and anti-capitalism dominate their agenda, fulfilling the band’s role as ‘awareness raisers’. The following lyrical excerpts from three songs from their 2005 album Out of Control, titled “Happiness”, “Fight” and “Time”, exemplify the band’s aforementioned politics.104

“Happiness”
Well the world is getting sicker in the day-by-day
And the shopping centre’s growing on the forest grave
The population’s choking on their fast-freeways
They’re working so hard they forget their own names…

Do wop she dop, do wop she dop hey
Forget about your troubles let them skidillidat away
Do wop she dop, do wop she dop hey
I don’t give a shit what the Government say

“Fight”
Hey Mr. Howard can you hear us when we scream
We don't want a war, we wanna free the refugees
Don't need another highway, need a few more trees
We don't need your bullshit or your weak hypocrisy.

104 To hear these songs in full, refer to audio examples in Appendix Two: CD tracks 8, 9 and 10 respectively, available only in the hard copy version of this thesis.
“Time”
Oh yes you have to join the boys club if you wanna get anywhere
And the boys club don't take it well when you decide to cut your hair
And the boys club constitutes about one percent of the world
Yet they think that they can tell us how we can be better girls.

Why must the air I breathe fill me with dirt
Can't walk down the street without a shirt
Constantly told that I should wear a skirt
And told I'm a slut if I so much as flirt.

White upper-class men are making our laws
Manipulating the media to believe in their wars
You must work till you break down, get fired if you pause
While the screams of our children are being ignored.

Breed hatred breed fear breed submission breed control
Breed ignorance breed apathy so no one believes in the freedom you stole
Buy money buy cars buy people’s souls
Buy nature buy oil and fill our air with poisoned coals.

Don't breed it don't buy it don't feed it deny it
Don't be a slave to the system smash it!

Alexander made mention that, in the past, Bertha Control had been rejected for a gig in the Queen Street Mall\textsuperscript{105} for being an anti-capitalist band, which Alexander suggested was “one of our proudest political moments” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). Elaborating on the band’s politics, Alexander said: “we all have our individual politics and I guess the recognition and support of each other’s politics is anarchist in a lot of senses. I personally identify as an anarchist and I think we all would identify as anti-capitalist” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). Reaffirming the band’s gender and sexual politics Cottone followed Alexander’s comment by adding that most of the band members identify as feminist and queer as well, while Preece agreed with both their assertions.

Indigenous reconciliation and the black history of Australia are other pressing issues that the band are concerned with. Previously, Cottone acknowledged that when they were performing the women remain conscious of the land’s history and the injustices perpetrated against Australia’s Indigenous peoples from the time of European arrival. This issue is raised in a number of their songs, especially on the

\begin{footnote}{The Queen Street Mall is the central shopping area of Brisbane CBD.}
\end{footnote}
album *Songs of Sedition*, the most significant example being “Reconciliation”. The rhythmic style and instrumentation of “Reconciliation” are distinctively reggae. Sung in a melodic rap fashion, the song invokes both the protesting and healing nature of the genre and marks a further attempt by the band to raise the political consciousness of its audience.

Rather than recycling the musical styles of womyn’s or riot grrrl culture, Bertha Control is reinvigorating these female music traditions by crossing the borders of musical style and exploring a complex web of musical influences, identities and modes of disidentification. Both the folk sound of womyn’s music and the punk sounds of the riot grrrls movement encapsulated a sense of musical and political ‘whiteness’. Halberstam refers to this as “the emphasis on white womanhood, or the exclusive focus within lesbian feminism on issues of gender and sexuality, and the disinterest in a politics of race and class (2005, p. 180). Thus the multiple non-white musical influences in the band’s music would suggest that Bertha Control are also attempting to confront the legacy of racial exclusivity among women’s music traditions. “Reconciliation” originally appeared on *You’re a Bertha Control Yourself* and was later re-recorded and realised in 2007 on *Songs of Sedition*. The song’s lyrics are presented here: 106

“Reconciliation”
Let me tell y’a little story bout d’Australian nation
Not just two-hundred years old but more like sixty thousand
When the sun first came up and the dreamtime begun
An aborigine lived in peace widda rest of creation
He sings I don’t own the land, the land owns me
Take only what I need and I care for country.
Respect the lore of my elders and the spirit inside me
Never hoarding possessions coz I always roam free.

Reconciliation, healing of a nation
Reconciliation, healing of a nation.

Then the white man came down under with no invitation
Say what a nice place to put some population
If we say there’s no one here it can’t be called invasion
Then they wiped out some of the blacks with their diseases and their guns
In 1788, 26 of January
They stuck a flag in the land and called it British colony
Pretend black people had not been here for six-hundred centuries
Slit the throats of their children and deny-a them a treaty.

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106 To hear this song in full, refer to audio examples in Appendix Two: CD track 11, available only in the hard copy version of this thesis.
Reconciliation, healing of a nation
Reconciliation, healing of a nation

Then Australia had a party in 1901
They brought the states together, call it federation
They wrote a little book called the constitution
Which said the black man was an animal and not a citizen
They said the Aborigine was a dying race
In fifty more years, you wouldn’t see a trace
Of the black black skin or the menacing face
Because the genocide was happening all over the place.

Reconciliation, healing of a nation
Reconciliation, healing of a nation

And then there was a time they stole a generation
Took the baby from the breast and put ’em in a mission
Feed ’em scraps feed ’em lies tell ’em blackfella is scum
and keep ’em from the learning of his tribe’s traditions
They take away the woman put her in a white house
Where she slaves away for nothing and gets raped and roused
They take away the man and they stick him on a farm
Where they pay him in alcohol to do his spirit harm.

Reconciliation, healing of a nation
Reconciliation, healing of a nation

From his land and his people blacks faced separation
White man severed family and spiritual connection
They tore apart an ancient civilisation
Then they throw him in a jail to make his own extinction
White men drinking black blood in a government chair
They committed genocide singing advance Australia fair
Well the time has come for some recognition
To heal the nation it’s time for reconciliation.

The lyrics of this song offer a counter-dominant history of white settlement in Australia and highlight some of the dominant cultural narratives perpetrated by white society in regards to Aborigines. This explicit criticism of white history marks Bertha Control’s attempt at troubling dominant historical narratives and hegemonic perceptions of Indigenous Australians. According to Sullivan, “the troubling of (hegemonic) race(ist) perception and of the public fantasies that (in)form it and are (in)formed by it could be said to constitute queer practice” (2003, p. 78). In this instance, Bertha Control is offering a queer perspective of white settlement in
Australia, redefining what has historically been termed ‘settlement’ as ‘invasion’. In the process, the band is restructuring its members’ own identity as white Australians through a musical critique of white Australian history. Similar musical commentary has occurred across a variety of Australian music styles, and I am not suggesting that this type of text is exclusive to queer culture. However, it does demonstrate the broader social and political concerns of queer cultural producers and their commitment to social justice.

A camp sensibility in the music of Bertha Control is, for the most part, absent. While Alexander, Cottone and Preece made no mention of camp when we discussed the band’s queer sensibility, I resist suggesting that they are totally lacking a sense of camp because their juxtaposition of multiple musical styles would imply an element of musical pastiche and to a lesser extent parody. The song “Love Triangle”, with its lyrical references to polyamory and playful celebrations of queer sexuality, provides an example of what could be termed a campish pop parody. This song plays on familiar musical themes such as Anita Ward’s number one disco hit from 1979, “Ring My Bell”, and the predatory semi-tonal motif that has become synonymous with the film score from *Jaws*. Moreover, the general absence of a camp sensibility should not imply that Bertha Control is without a sense of playfulness and humour. In a live context Bertha Control are exceptionally playful: colourful costumes, jumping around, dancing and assuming silly poses are a regular feature of the band’s live sets. On occasion, humour is also used as a discursive tactic that draws the listener’s attention to an underlying seriousness. The song “Go Go Nana” from *Out of Control* is a fine example of this. In this song, Alexander pays homage to her nanna and sings: “look inside and find that rockin’ shakin’ nanna, in your rockin’ chair with your rockin’ purple hair, yeah”. The lyrics of this song, while playful and funny, also point to society’s negative stereotyping of the aged and the misconception that elderly people are without vitality and individualism.

The range of themes addressed in Bertha Control’s songs is highly reminiscent of riot grrrl-style politics, as advocated previously by artists such as Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill. In the early 1990s, punk provided riot grrrls with a vehicle to address a broad range of social ills such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, ageism and

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107 The most notable non-Indigenous Australian rock band to address this and other issues pertaining to the oppression of Indigenous people was Midnight Oil. This band was active on the Australian music scene between 1971 and 2002.
capitalism. Hanna suggested that feminism should be broad-based and “bent on challenging hierarchies of all kinds in our society” (cited in Hex, 2000, para. 5). And although Bertha Control has chosen to execute its protest through reggae and funk music rather than punk, the band clearly favours the same politico-musical approach advocated by the riot grrrls movement: revolution girl style—that is, music which seeks to establish female equality in popular music-making while enacting a radical challenge to broader social and political issues.

**Performing Queer Bodies and Identities**

As I have previously argued, women’s music traditions placed an emphasis on lesbian feminist politics and feminine musical forms. While they promoted participative democracy, they also downplayed female sexuality and gender diversity. Advocating a ‘softer’ folk sound over more ‘masculine’ musical forms, women’s traditions inadvertently limited the musical expression of women and forced them to enact a kind of musical gender rigidity. In contrast to this, the riot grrrls movement promoted flexible forms of self-identification and rejected prescriptive gender and sexual identity performances, encouraging a ‘harder’ punk rock sound. While the participative democratic staging, management and organisation of Bertha Control closely resembles that of the women’s music tradition, the band’s approach to gender and sexual identity and its ‘harder’, ‘masculine’, funk and reggae sound are more accurately described as an amalgamation of riot grrrl-style feminism and queer politics.

When speaking with Alexander, Cottone and Preece they pointed to their attempts at negotiating the stereotypes of femininity and lesbianism and the difficulties that such negotiations encompass. Speaking about her gender and sexual identity and her expression of this in Bertha Control, Alexander pointed out that:

[On stage] I feel that I clearly come across as a lesbian, I love it when I sing “I hope your daughter’s gay and have a good fucking day”, but even Mona does that and she’s queer…. I see us all as being sistas, so it [sexuality] is kind of linked to a family identity of the band. But I’ve always felt a bit of conflict in how to express gender identity because as a lesbian if you do something like have hairy armpits or wear a tank top you’re conforming to society’s idea of what a lesbian is but if you wear a dress you’re conforming to society’s idea of what a woman is so you just have to get past that. Either way you’re conforming to someone’s stereotype of something. So I really enjoy playing around with different kinds of costuming. I personally identify as a woman, but I enjoy

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108 Refer to Chapter Eight, “Womyn and Grrrls: Doing it for Themselves”, p. 156.
wearing things that would shock people and conflict with being a woman but at the
same time conflict with being a lesbian too…. We all have hairy armpits and hairy legs
but at the same time we don’t look like standard dykes, but to a lot of people who look
at us they just look straight at those armpits and go ‘you’re all a bunch of lesbians’. It
all depends on your subjective view of someone. Like you [indicating me, the
interviewer] would be used to seeing images of lesbians who don’t look like ‘lesbians’
but to a straight man that comes along to our gigs we are really confronting. Even that
there are six women on stage and the stereotypes attached to that, like the fact we have
women drummers. (personal communication, November 30, 2005)

After hearing what Alexander had to say, Preece, with a slightly surprised tone,
admitted that she had not really thought about it to such a degree. She commented
that in her experience gender and sexuality are about “what I’m feeling and what’s
right for me”, and the music she creates is an expression of that (personal
communication, November 30, 2005). Preece gains a lot of personal strength from
being a female drummer, and remarked that she feels both her femaleness and
drumming abilities are central to her self-image. Cottone added that she finds the
performance and musical space of Bertha Control to be generally accepting of, and
accommodating to her multiple gender and sexual identity performances:

I think I’m definitely a woman [says Cottone] … but I also think I’ve got a really strong
boy spirit that I have a lot of fun with…. I actually got recruited half way through
Bertha Control’s life into being a lesbian so I’m a cross-over case, so I identify mostly
as queer but also as bisexual and lesbian and heterosexual, so I identify as lots of
different things and I’m not afraid to express all of those different identities on stage or
musically. Patty and I do a song called “The Rap Against Homophobic Crap” which we
wrote together, and we’re out there saying, ‘we’re gay and if you don’t fucking like it
fuck off’. But a lot of my songs are about men that I’ve been in love with too. (personal
communication, November 30, 2005)

While only a small percentage of Bertha Control’s subject-matter deals directly
with issues of sex and sexuality, the women I spoke with all agreed that being in
Bertha Control reaffirmed their gender and sexual identity; it allows them to express
a “sexy persona”, increases their self-confidence and enhances their
“outrageousness” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). Bertha Control
provides an accommodating musical space for sexual and seductive expressions that
are often unavailable to these women in their everyday lives. Alexander suggested
that when she expresses herself through music she finds that people are more
accepting of her difference and what she has to say. Cottone then responded to
Alexander, saying: “that’s part of our trick, to seduce people with these wicked
tunes…. So they’re busy being seduced by the music but at the same time getting
into the message” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). For Alexander
and Preece (who work as a solicitor and therapist respectively), their jobs often
require them to be more subdued. Preece commented: “in my daily life where I’m a therapist, the attention is never on me, it’s all about giving that to someone else. So when I’m on stage it’s like, woohoo! Now you can look at me” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). Cottone added that she finds playing in Bertha Control a cathartic experience that helps her overcome day-to-day challenges and allows her to reconnect with her sistas: “sometimes we might be a bit disconnected before we go on [stage] … “but then we’ll go on and start playing and make beautiful friendship love on stage and it’s really therapeutic, and that happens in rehearsals as well” (personal communication, November 30, 2005). Thus playing music affords these women a space not only to perform their gender, sexuality and individuality, but also to connect more deeply with each other.

All three women admitted that they do not spend too much time interacting with mainstream lesbian and gay culture. Moreover, they do not feel that their music is particularly suitable to mainstream lesbian sensibilities, which they defined as top-forty style taste. Preece delineates between what she feels is the mainstream lesbian community and the more ‘alternative’ queer community in which she and the others locate themselves:

Haircuts, the suburb i.e.: New Farm versus West End, the Adidas shorts, the sporting dykes. I’ve been a part of that community being an ex-sporting person and what I perceive to be the difference in the cultures is that a lot of those women are chasing what I see to be a heterosexual dream. Like wanting to own their own house, have a dog, go to Options every Friday night, listen to top-forty radio. They aren’t really politically aware, they would question me being vegetarian, question my hairy armpits. They’re just not as aware as the West End crew or what you might call the alternative queer culture. (personal communication, November 30, 2005)

Preece’s comment reiterates Halberstam’s earlier sentiment that queer cultures tend to reject the mainstreaming of lesbian culture—what Preece refers to as chasing the heterosexual dream. By situating themselves outside of lesbian and gay hegemony, the women of Bertha Control are enacting a particularly queer positionality, one that is made clear through their multiple and distinct expressions of femaleness, lesbianism and queerness; their keen interest in alternative cultural expressions; and their commitment to broader issues of social justice and social plurality.

In performance, Bertha Control clearly demonstrates that lesbian and queer sexualities produce a multiplicity of gender performances. Through their music and lyrics, they articulate a broad range of political and social concerns; they reject cultural elitism, exclusivity and hierarchy in favour of cultural hybridity and
Case Studies: Accounting for Lived Experience (Chapter Nine)

collective participation. While Bertha Control displays a clear line of influence from earlier forms of feminist music-making, the band has been careful not to directly replicate them. Rather, they have borrowed selectively from them, producing a distinct politico-musical discourse by interweaving feminist, queer and broader political articulations into the non-white and traditionally ‘masculine’ sounds of funk and reggae.

Chapter Nine in Summary

Before moving onto the concluding remarks, I wish to briefly comment on the findings in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter was to provide an account of the musical moments in queer identities that relate directly to the lived experience of queers who produce and perform music in Brisbane. The studies of the Twang Gang, Anal Traffic and Bertha Control illustrate three individual and diverse cases in which local queer-identified artists employ both music and queer sensibilities as a means of expressing their gender and sexuality, and broader socio-political concerns. Moreover, they offer insight into the way that queer people make sense of gender, sexuality and the world in which they reside. This chapter contributes significantly to the new knowledge component of this research. It provides a lived account of queer theory and queer scene participation; it attends to the empirical world; and it contributes to the project of recording and interpreting queer culture.

As I have shown, Brisbane’s queer scene has evolved in relation to locality and in opposition to heterosexual hegemony, as well as lesbian and gay cultural norms; however, it is not a cohesive and coherent scene; it cannot be thought of as a collective of people who share a common gender and/or sexuality identity; it does not demonstrate a single logic of taste or even an over-arching musical persuasion; and it cannot be separated from the larger cultural matrix that has produced and continues to inspire local queer cultures. Rather, Brisbane’s queer scene is accommodating to a range of musical performers of varying genders and sexualities, who draw upon and adapt a variety of queer histories, sensibilities and musical styles in the creation of original music and original musical performances. And it is through the process of mixing and queering multiple styles of music and performance, as well as gender and sexual identity performances, that the queer scene distinguishes itself for local lesbian and gay culture, activating a challenge to both gay and straight cultural norms.
Musical play and live performance, as well as gender and sexual play and critical performances, are distinguishing features of the local queer scene. As the relative theories on queer and musical identities suggest, important identity work takes place at both sites of play—that is, at the site of music production and through the performance of gender and sexuality. Broadly speaking, the identity work in progress here is an interrogation of the preconditions of heteronormative gender and sexual behaviour, the stereotypes of physical appearance as well as mainstream gay identity and its follow-on effects such as emerging patterns of musical taste. The lack of musical stylistic cohesion within Brisbane’s queer scene correlates with queer’s disidentificatory position. By defying collective sexual and musical classifications, the queer scene activates its resistance towards commodified aestheticism that is determined on the grounds of gender and sexual identification, moreover demonstrating the indeterminacy and elasticity that is characteristic of queer identity and queer cultural production in general.

Thus Brisbane’s queer scene facilitates multiple expressions of musicality, gender and sexuality, particularly expressions that are not socially permissible in either heterosexual or mainstream lesbian and gay contexts. This chapter has demonstrated that, in many ways, the theoretical premises of queer theory underpin the lived experiences of Brisbane’s queer scene participants. Queer theory accounts for a multiplicity of gender performances and sexual perversities, as does Brisbane’s queer scene. Moreover, the scene accommodates an equally diverse array of musical tastes. And, as I suggested previously, it is in the space where these dissonant and resonant gender, sexual and musical performances occur—creating a musico-sexual synergy—that this local queer scene emerges.
Part V

CONCLUSIONS AND POSTLUDE

Returning to the initial research questions and design, Part V draws the case studies together and positions them, together with the broader findings of this research, within a conclusive discussion. This is followed by a personal reflection on the research experience.
Conclusions

The Jester and the Jongleur

(Chapter Ten)

As jesters and priestesses, our queer ancestors traded in the healing arts. (Bronstein, 1994, p. 157)

In her book *Gender Outlaw* (1994), Bronstein uses, among others, the analogy of the jester as a link to queer people, acts and times past. The jester, she argues, is our queer ancestor: an entertainer; a social commentator; someone who played with gender and sexual roles; someone who mocked authority and made visible their lies; someone who was laughed at, often unkindly; someone who was humiliated and ridiculed; a professional fool. The rituals of the jester were ones of healing: “our ancestors performed their rituals, their theatre, to heal themselves, and to heal their tribes”, suggests Bronstein (1994, p. 158). In the medieval British courts, the jester was often considered a mentally and/or physically unsound lunatic. As such, jesters were allowed to speak freely with impunity because, by way of social ranking, the jester’s absurdity preserved the superiority and dignity of the ruling class (Otto, 2001). Drawing on the work of Attali (1985), Joyce (1997) proposes a similar queer ancestry regarding the jongleur. Joyce recalls how the jongleurs “fulfilled a role as social critics and used their compositions to reveal the ironies and injustices they saw in the various communities through which they travelled and performed” (1997, p. 53). Through song, the jongleur would critique the laws of the land because “information flowed freely in musical forms where it was otherwise restricted and segregated” (Joyce, 1997, p. 52). The role of the jongleur was to entertain through music and through physical performance. The jongleur was both “music and the spectacle of the body” (Attali, 1985, p. 14).

Jesters and jongleurs found a social niche accommodating their peculiarities and a space for the creative articulation of marginalised bodies. Because jesters and jongleurs were perceived by the ruling classes as lowly and inferior, they were afforded a freedom of expression that was not permitted to a ‘normal’ class of person. They were a metic voice fulfilling the role of the entertainer, the subversive commentator and the political trickster—a role resembling that of the queer musical
performer today. Much like the jesters and jongleurs of old, the queer performers discussed in these pages are entertainers who have created a social niche that allows them to challenge social norms and reveal the injustices and fallacies embedded in dominant culture and politics through music and musical performance. Moreover, these present-day jesters and jongleurs remain familiar with humiliation and ridicule: they know too well the disapproval and disgust for what they are and what they do ‘behind closed doors’. It is through music that they both affirm and heal themselves and their people, and form oppositions to heterosexist prejudice. In the medieval times of the jongleur, music provided an escape from normative social restraints, just as it continues to do today. For many queers who choose to work in contemporary music idioms, music can facilitate an oppositional space and a space to imagine the possibilities of living, being and loving outside heterosexual hegemony.

Throughout this research project, I have argued that queer people can compose, perform and reveal themselves in and through music. Music is especially attractive to queers because its theatrical and fanciful quality affords them greater freedom to ‘try on’ different modes of self-presentation and lessens the risk of persecution when these modes of self-presentation, are in conflict with existing norm. Since music has historically been tainted with moral ambiguity, it affords those who partake in musical activities a degree of moral flexibility. In a musical context—especially in popular forms—all manner of queer perversities can be explained away as theatrical folly or dramatic effect, creating a space in which queer bodies can tolerably skew the margins of socially acceptable gender and sexual identity. Thus musical composition and performance can be at once: critical, oppositional and defiant; revealing, self-affirming and healing; entertaining, humorous and playful. It is through combining and exploiting these properties of music and musical performance that queer artists like the Twang Gang, Anal Traffic and Bertha Control express their queerness, entertain and empower their audiences, and formulate their challenge to heterosexual hegemony. As the case studies have shown, the ways in which each group of musical performers achieves this are quite different in method, form, style and sensibility. However, upon critical inspection, concurrent patterns that imply an interconnectivity between musical expressions of queerness emerge, thus pointing to the conditions of queer music and musical activity. This chapter addresses these concurrent patterns in relation to the research aims and objectives.
Reviewing the Study

This study has illuminated some of the methods, styles and sensibilities of musical performance as they pertain to queer identificatory practices, and it has revealed some of the ways in which queer-identified people engage with and employ music as a means of expressing non-normative gender and sexual identities. Through a detailed ethnographic study and critical examination of local queer music and musical performance that is embedded in a thorough understanding of recent queer cultural histories and sensibilities, I have drawn out many of the complexities and multiplicities of queerness and queer musical activities, and provided an insight into the ways that local queer people make sense of gender, sexuality and the broader social world through musical participation. Emerging from this primary motive of investigation were a series of resultant enquiries that aimed to explore the characteristics of queer music and account for queer theories within musicological research. The conclusions that relate directly to the primary and secondary research questions are discussed and elaborated upon in the following sections.

The Significance of Musical Moments in Queer Identities

As we have seen in each case study, as well as throughout the histories of queer musical performance, music facilitates queer expression, empowerment and oppositional critique, providing a context for subversive spectacles of gender and sexual performance. Musical performance permits the expression of queer identities and the empowerment of queer agency, as well as oppositional responses to, and criticism of heterosexual hegemony and the homogenisation and assimilation of gay culture. These are defining qualities of queer musical performance; they are concurrent threads woven through each case examined here—threads that connect the musical performances of the Twang Gang, Anal Traffic and Bertha Control, threads that have woven these artists into the history of queer musical performance.

Expression: Musical composition, performance and participation allow for the construction of new identities and facilitate the transformation of existing identities. The unfixed and fluid modalities of queer identification thus seems well suited to musical expressions, given music’s qualities of vitality and dynamism. Music provides a context for the (re)signification of non-normative gender and sexual identities because musical expression is noted both in historical and contemporary
contexts as being particularly accommodating to those who contradict the rules of social propriety. In the drag performances of the Twang Gang, music was used to reinforce the performance of a specific gender identity and to cause genderfuck—that is, music contributed to the practical enactment of queer theory, and through musical performance new identities were envisaged and actualised. Musical performance provided the troupe members with an accommodating space for the expression of queer gender and sexualities, particularly genders that were in conflict with the performer’s sexed body and expressions of sexual desire that contradict lesbian sexual norms. Anal Traffic used music a vehicle for queer sexual expression. Music provided the band with a performative context for the expression of its members’ own queer bodies and desires as well as bodies and desires imagined. For Bertha Control, music was a platform for a celebration of ‘sistahood’ solidarity. Through song and performance these women negotiated the stereotypes of femininity and lesbian sexuality and created individually appropriate gender and sexual identities, which they expressed through music-making.

**Empowerment:** Music empowers troupe and band members, providing both performers and fellow scene members in some instances, with a model of self-efficacy. Music can also facilitate a transformative space in which people may feel more at ease to experiment with queer modes of gender and sexual performance, particularly those restrained by normative social constitutions in daily life. The Twang Gang’s members acknowledged that empowerment is central to their ethos. The troupe’s style of musically embellished drag is both empowering and affecting as it transforms performers’ bodies and perceptions on stage as well as in their everyday lives. Through music, Anal Traffic seeks to empower its members’ own queer sexualities by exploring their ‘inner-filth’. Lyrical material and physical gesticulations that stress bodily pleasures are presented in a playful and non-judgemental manner. The inclusion of subject material that is outside of the band members’ personal experience marks Anal Traffic’s aspiration for a broad-base sexual empowerment that is available to, and celebrates, all manner of polymorphous perversities. Bertha Control’s members stress a sense of healing, ‘sistahood’ and female empowerment through collective song-writing and musical performance. Band members acknowledge that they gain confidence and personal strength from writing and performing music together. Through music, they suggest that they heal themselves and their audiences. Through music and performance, Bertha Control
seeks to empower younger women and encourage female participation in all forms of music-making.

**Oppositionality and critique:** Musical performance mobilises oppositional responses to heterosexual hegemony and the concomitant oppression of queer identities. It allows for the critique of institutionalised power and facilitates the resistance and subversion of gender and sexual norms, providing an accommodating space for the construction of alternative models of being and desiring and for the generation of new subjectivities. The Twang Gang’s *Our Tribe* show demonstrated how musical sketch comedy employing camp as a means of queer political praxis can be used to expose and critique social prejudices towards queers, particularly those inflicted upon queers by organised religion. Through musically embellished drag performance, the Twang Gang enacted an oppositional response to queer oppression, while at the same time offering a different set of ethical standards that were more akin to a queer consciousness. Anal Traffic’s members position themselves in opposition to normative codes of sexual conduct. They critique dominant sexual morality, questioning the limitations placed around ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ sexual behaviours by engaging in a campish display of over-articulation and grotesque realism through music and musical performance. Playful, yet powerful acts of punk rock rebellion are used to upset mainstream sensibilities and interrogate the preconditions of heteronormative gender and sexual behaviour. At the same time, Anal Traffic also engages in a degree of non-sexually specific social commentary, voicing criticism of and opposition to a range of contemporary political affairs. The structural organisation of Bertha Control points to the band’s critical stance against patriarchal (heteronormative) musical hierarchies and the women’s desire to foster participative (queer/feminist) musical democracies. Through its performance of funk/reggae/ska music, which members describe as ‘revolutionary’ and ‘awareness raising’, Bertha Control critically attends to issues of racism, governance and environmentalism among others, and advocates anti-corporate, anti-capitalist and anti-oppressive agendas.

It was evident in each case discussed in Chapter Nine as well as in the account of Brisbane’s queer scene, that—as Halberstam (2005) had previously suggested—queer culture does not only oppose heterosexual hegemonies but also the assimilation, increasing conservativeness and ‘normalisation’ of lesbian and gay culture. All interviewees acknowledged that they see a difference between queer
culture and the lesbian and gay mainstream, while most interviewees nominated their position as being outside of the latter. Common to all performers were experiences of judgement and criticism in relation to their expressions of gender and sexuality—specifically, their non-quotidian expressions that did not conform to lesbian and gay cultural norms. Music provided the context for the majority of performers to both critique and subvert some of the gender and sexual specificities associated with the stereotypes of lesbian and gay identity, and to ‘try on’ identities that they did not regularly assume in day-to-day living as ‘out’ individuals. Moreover, music provides a way to move beyond the dominant styles and genres associated with lesbian and gay cultural expression, a way to construct and progress new and renewed queer cultural forms.

The various forms of musical participation and stylistic practices that have received the attention of the queer musicians and performers discussed herein suggests that it is not just one particular style of music, but rather it is music and musical expression itself, that are apposite to creative articulations of queer identity. As Peraino suggested previously, “music can be understood as resembling queer subjectivity” (2006, p. 113)—a resemblance that she grounded in music’s ineffability—its position outside language which is akin to the signification of subjectivities outside normative heterosexuality and by extension, I suggested, is also akin to the signification of subjectivities outside of normative homosexuality. In other words, music allows us to engage in multiple and fluid forms of self-representation because music does not represent anything exact; rather, it represents the essence of subjectivity: that which we love, desire and lust after without reason or logic; that which is not expressible through words; that which is more aptly expressed through sound, movement and listening.

Evoking Small’s (1998) previously stated definition of musicking,109 music in all its capacities is a means of self-representation. However, like any act of representation, music brings with it a culturally constructed history of signs and signification. When queers engage with music in the ways discussed here, they are playing with these signs, using them to point to, manipulate, destabilise, twist, bend and skew hetero- as well as homonormativities. The musics of all three groups—be they rock, pop, dance, punk, funk, reggae or ska—each carry a history of meaning and signification that embody various gender and sexual normativities. For example,

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109 Refer to the discussion of music in Chapter Three, “Music”, p. 39.
rock typifies white heterosexual masculinity; reggae typifies black heterosexual masculinity; pop and dance music are implicitly feminine and disco, especially, is associated with urban gay identity. Therefore, it is through queer engagement with these musics that the signs of gender and sexuality they embody are able to be altered so that they may mean something to those who do not perform their gender and sexuality in socially and culturally prescribed ways—those who do not typify a mainstream rock, pop, dance, punk, funk, reggae or ska participant. The impossibility of exact musical representation—its position outside of the visual and the literal and its cultural constructedness—indicates that music is always open to subjective interpretation, particularly interpretation by those, such as queers, who are seeking new cultural expressions and new ways of self-representation. For this reason, music is a highly suitable means of queerly articulating and critiquing gender and sexuality. And so, if queers are in fact seeking and creating new expressions and representations, does this result in a new, specifically queer, music?

What, Then, is Queer Music?

As I argued at the end of Chapter Nine, Brisbane’s queer scene does not demonstrate a single logic of musical taste or even an over-arching musical persuasion. The most prominent logic of taste among Brisbane’s queer scene was, in fact, distaste for what was termed ‘handbag music’. While this logic of distaste is imbued with meaning and significance (as discussed in Chapter Nine), it does not tell us much about the characteristics of queer music. This is because queer music cannot be defined by, or limited to, a single or even closely related set of structural characteristics or sonic qualities. Instead, the queer punk rock sounds of Anal Traffic, the funk/reggae/ska vibe of Bertha Control as well as the rock and pop song choices of the Twang Gang point to the diverse array of sounds and styles that contribute to the corpus of queer music.

As I have shown in broader cultural contexts, queer music is not distinguishable by sound or genre, but rather queer music and musical performance exhibits a multiplicity of musical sounds, styles and aesthetics, drawing on a variety of queer and sometimes non-queer musical histories. The over-arching commonality is that the queer music and performance discussed here marks experiences of difference and marginality. Queer music celebrates the lives, bodies and desires of those who do not perform gender and sexuality in the socially prescribed way, and in doing so offers
critical insight into gender and sexual normativities while also seeking to subvert them.

Queer music and musical performance are typified not by sound or style, but rather by ideological imperatives. Looking holistically at the creative output of these local queer performers—particularly at their methods of production, their themes and lyrical content, their motivation and envisaged goals—similarities between each case emerge. Based on a comparison of the preceding case studies, some general summations regarding the nature of queer music and musical performance can be made. The similarities between the case studies point to the following:

- Queer music and performance are about self-expression and self-discovery, and suggest open and fluid forms of gender, sexual identity and eroticism.

- Queer music and performance do not exclusively address issues pertaining to gender and sexuality but are instead concerned with issues that affect the lives of human beings of varying genders and sexualities, particularly those who have experiences social marginalisation and oppression.

- Queer music and performance are motivated by a desire for self-expression. They value awareness-raising and enjoyment over profit and commercial fame. They are largely resistant to commodification, and exist for the most part outside the realm of commercial modes of production favouring a DIY ethos.

- Queer music and performance mock hegemonic power structures as well as those people who ‘hold’ power. They attempt to reveal the fallacies of heternormativity and the false truths embedded in the dominant culture.

- Queer music and performance are seditious, embodying an outlawry mentality. They are provocative, transforming, rebellious, riotous and anarchic; never passive, obedient or contrite. Through performing and circulating a sense of this, queer music exhibits a subversiveness akin to the carnival, heralding a liberation from the norms of the ruling class.

- Queer music and performance tactically employs both anger and humour; expressing both rage and wit. They are angered by social injustice and attempt to allay the pains of injustice through amusement, pleasure and playfulness, while also remaining critical of the conditions that cause oppression.
• Queer music and performance create an interaction between performer and audience that is at once challenging, engaging and empowering. Privileging honesty and directness of expression, they aim to speak to and of their audience; they are unafraid to be critical of their audience and community.

• Queer music and performance are historically aware and socially responsible, assuming an informative role within queer culture. Queer artists are in many ways social commentators and cultural activists, who use music as a non-violent form of social protest.

Here, I am not suggesting that these ideological imperatives are exclusive features of queer musical work, as many of these may apply to other forms of subcultural production such as punk, grunge or folk music, to name a few. As I have indicated previously, queer artistic endeavours favour cultural borrowing and appropriation; thus it is logical that similar ideologies will appear across a range of styles and subcultures. This does not, however, reduce their significance and relationship to queer work. Queer music and performance stand out as the primary site upon which gender and sexual non-normativity is musically negotiated, and this, above all else, marks queer musical production as exceptional and vital.

In summary, queer music and performance cannot be limited to a particular sound or style, but rather, are a colourful and intricate mosaic of sounds, styles, sensibilities, ideologies, genders and sexualities. Queer music and performance often point to the conditions of queer marginalisation, yet they also offer a means by which queer people can fight this marginalisation, maintaining and asserting their individual and collective strengths. Queer music and performance provide a window into queer subjectivity. Through music, non-queers may glean insight into queer realities. And finally, queer music and performance do not only mirror queer realities, but offer queer people a way to modify these realities and pre-empt more flexible and desirable ways of being.

Towards a Queer Musicology

In preparation for summarising my thoughts on queer musicology, I consulted a number of sources, including David Beard and Kenneth Gloag’s text *Musicology: The Key Concepts* (2005). I was dismayed to see that the entry heading under which...
queer theory was ever so briefly mentioned was ‘Gay Musicology’. The opening to this section reads:

Gay musicology is a response to, and part of, what is more broadly labelled ‘queer theory’, that is, studies in humanities subjects that interpret topics from a gay, lesbian or bisexual perspective. Although the term is used here in a general sense, it should be noted that lesbian musicology is gaining currency in its own right. (Beard & Gloag, 2005, p. 66)

Once I recovered from my initial and rather hostile objection to the supposedly ‘all-inclusive’ term ‘gay musicology’, and to their lax definition of queer theory, I became increasingly concerned that my attempts at fostering a non-discriminatory and anti-oppressive musicology—one that is attentive to a range of gender and sexual subjectivities—would be perceived by my peers as ‘gay’ under this definition. Yes, this work is responsive to queer theory and yes, it deals with lesbian and gay subjects; however, it is certainly not ‘gay’, nor is it ‘lesbian musicology’. And why is the masculine term ‘gay’—which popularly denotes male homosexuality—used to define this type of scholarship? Does this not only serve as yet another example of gender segregation and the oppression of female identification? And what about the music of trans people, or people who identify as genderqueer and engage in heterosexual acts? Who is willing to speak of them? This definition suggests that these people have no place within the realm of ‘gay musicology’.

By referring broadly to non-normative gender and sexual scholarship as gay and/or lesbian (rather than queer), one is potentially differentiating same-sex desire on the basis of gender, thus organising who is desiring/being desired within a binary construct. However, by using the term ‘queer’ to broadly refer to non-normative sexual identities, acts and/or desires, one is refusing to distinguish sexual identity categories on the basis of which sexed body is desiring or being desired. Thus queer—both as a collective descriptor and a mode of self-identification—offers a means for subverting the heteronormative definition of sexual orientation that is based on the gender of object choice. By semantically refusing to equate this kind of musicology with a particular sexual subjectivity that designates a fixed gender of object choice—that is, gay male/lesbian female—we are thus strengthening our subversion of heteronormativity within musicological discourses as well. This is not to suggest that queer musicology should not deal with matters of lesbian and gay sexuality; for the most part, that is what queer musicology has predominantly dealt with to date. However, in terms of the broader naming of our discourse, ‘queer’ as
opposed to a ‘lesbian’ and/or ‘gay’ musicology promotes a more inclusive disciplinary focus because a queer musicology signifies the inclusion of all non-normative gender and sexual identities and performances that cannot neatly be located within the categories of either lesbian or gay. In summary, it can be argued that queer musicology is lesbian and gay inclusive, while lesbian and/or gay musicology designates gendered relationships of desire; it lacks flexibility and precludes certain gender and sexual subjectivities other than male/female heterosexual/homosexual.

This project therefore constitutes a significant contribution to queer musicology. It has incorporated queer sensibilities and perspectives on gender and sexuality into the construction and reading of queer musical histories of popular culture. It has also provided first-hand accounts of contemporary queer musics and the significance of music and musical performance in queer lives and queer identity work. What my readership and I have gained from this is a more comprehensive understanding of queerness—of its complexities; of its multiplicity of desires, genders and sexualities; of queer history and its cultures; and of queer people and their music. I anticipate that a greater understanding of queer theory and the lived realities of queer music-makers will inspire more insightful musicological discussions of gender and sexuality.

Gender and sexual binaries, and heteronormative logic, influence the way we talk about music—the way we shape musicology. This research has shown how these discourses can be subverted and challenged by queer engagements with music and with musicology. When queer people participate in and bring their sensibilities to the production of forms such as rock, pop, dance, punk, funk and reggae, for example—when they use these forms in the signification of their queerness—they are not only queering the gender and sexual normativities implicit in these forms, but they are also queering the gender and sexual normativities implicit in the way musicologists speak about these forms. Musicologists (especially scholars of contemporary music whose subjects have not been obscured by time) must speak about queer musical episodes and queer people’s engagement with music in a manner that most closely resembles the vitality, emotionality and significance of the music conveyed by the people who make and use it. To do this, musicologists must become aware of the discourses and sensibilities of the musicians themselves and pay close attention to the variety of ways in which queers engage with their own cultural history to produce new uses for, and connotations of, style. Moreover, any musicologist who deals with
queer musical episodes needs to take into account the shifting and contingent meanings in their subjects’ use of and personal investment in queer as both a cultural identity and a gender and sexual identity. As I have demonstrated here, queer scenes and subcultures form in relation to a variety of stylistic persuasions and a variety of gender and sexual persuasions that extend far beyond ‘gay’. To ignore the latter is to risk (re)entrapping ourselves in the dualisms and hierarchies that have erased certain marginalised ways of being from musicology to date. Queer theory ultimately resists hierarchies, yet I believe we may be at risk of privileging gay and to a lesser degree lesbian subjectivities within the current forms of queer musicology. In order to establish a truly anti-oppressive musicology, queer musicologists must be cautious of perpetuating lesbian and gay normativities. Moreover, we must resist the conflation of queer exclusively with gay so that the music of all people who partake in queer gender and sexual practices can aptly be understood.

In his work on post-AIDS identities, Rofes argues that “among the most effective ways of oppressing a people is the colonization of their bodies, the stigmatisation of their desires, and the repression of their erotic energies. Continuing work on sexual liberation is crucial to social justice efforts.” (1998, pp. 203–204). The literature and the case studies discussed here have demonstrated that many queers are currently struggling against the repression of sexual desires, the commodification of gayness and its fake public stereotypes. Queer identities, bodies and desires have been simplified and sanitised by the media, while public representations of queer erotic energies remain eclipsed by the moral majority in the name of civility and rectitude. Musicological discussions of queerness must not inadvertently contribute to this through the oversimplification of queer bodies and desires, and the expurgation of eroticism. I suggest that those who choose to speak of queerness and queer musical cultures must remain aware of Rofes’ argument. An anti-oppressive queer musicology is therefore one that decolonises bodies, honours a multiplicity of musical and sexual desires, and celebrates all manner of sexual pleasure as it is energised through music.

In Chapters One and Four, I explored both the achievements and limitations of musico-sexual historiography, which has typified queer musicological investigations to date. The queering of musicology cannot solely be executed by laying claim to the work of dead composers, outing them as gay or lesbian and canonising them into an imaginary queer museum. Queer musicology should not replace the straight
historical narratives of music with new queer ones; rather, it should problematise these master narratives by chipping away at the binary and hierarchical logics upon which they are built. As I have said before, I do not dispute the relevance of outing or queering history in asserting queer visibility or the potential for work of this kind to construct new queer dialogues between the past and the present. However, I suggest that as queer musicologists we must not limit ourselves to this—in fact, we must move rapidly beyond it if we are to keep up with queer endeavours in other disciplines. Queer musicology necessitates interdisciplinarity: of course it requires intimate knowledge of queer theory, but it also requires deeper engagement with cultural studies. Queer musicology must pay attention to the music (be it new music or old music) that matters to queer people now. It must speak about the body and gesticulation and how, in their various musical states, queer bodies produce queer meanings and styles. Ultimately, it must demonstrate a commitment to understanding the complexities of gender, sexuality and desire, and the signification of these in and through all forms of musicking—not only composition.

I suggest that queer musicology should be dynamic; it should be troublesome and contentious; it should promote a coherent yet playful disobedience of the rules of propriety as well as the rules of musicology; it should be critical of the heteronormative assumptions embedded in orthodox musicology; and it should be an anti-oppressive discourse that encourages a plurality and flexibility of meaning and signification. This is how I perceive the potential effect of my musicology.

**Reflecting on the Study**

Queers have a nervous history—a history stained with oppression, silence and sorrow; a history marked by modern anxieties, moral panic and unkindness. But queers can—and should—have a glorious future: this is a time for celebrating and circulating their culture. In the process of documenting the lives and interpreting the music of queer people—people who live in the here and now as well as people I have come to know only through their lasting sounds and texts—I see that queer is determined to expunge these past sorrows and unkindness from its memory and focus on healing and empowerment through creative expression. The work of modern-day queers—much like that of our ancestral jesters and jongleurs—is to engage creatively in social critique; to question legitimacy and dominance; to speak out candidly and fearlessly against oppression; and to heal and empower themselves.
and their people through music. This is the work of both the queer artist and the queer musicologist. In doing this, queer culture creates more open and fluid systems of meaning and signification. Through radical and experimental cultural acts, queers produce unsuspected and unimagined ways of being that offer relief from and an alternative to homogeneity.

A Note on Jamming

Over the years of reading, writing, thinking about and partaking in queer musical activities, a recurring analogy between queer musical work and the resistance movement of culture jamming has often sprung to mind. Culture jamming is a form of political activism that seeks to undermine the hegemony of the mass media and popular culture through playful and disruptive rhetorical practices and semiotic manipulation that produce satirical, ironic and parodic commentary about the media and cultural forms they are attempting to undermine (Dery, 1993; Harold, 2004; Kelin, 2001). The term ‘jamming’ is borrowed from the practice of radio piracy or ‘radio jamming’, which involves the interruption or hijacking of public frequencies for the purpose of disrupting communication and subverting the broadcast message. Culture jamming is motivated by the subversion of social hierarchy through creative, spectacular and often witty transgressive acts, and as such it has been theorised in terms of Bakhtin’s (1984) playfully anarchic ‘upside down’ world of the carnival and its symbolic inversion of the binary logics and social hierarchies that constitute dominant culture (Duncombe, 2002; Harold, 2004; Worth & Kuhling, 2004). This, along with its motifs of parody, irony, satire, playfulness and semiotic pastiche suggests that culture jamming can be likened to the practice of camp as used by queer radicals and activist groups—a practice that the majority of the musical performers discussed previously also exhibit.

Jamming is also a musical term that denotes an informal gathering of musicians who perform music in a semi-structured manner. The loose structure of the jam denotes a general disregard for and disruption of formal and ritualised musical activity such as playing from a score or playing under the direction of a conductor or bandleader. Jamming rejects such musical hierarchies in favour of spontaneity, self-fashioning and self-gratification. To jam is to improvise and/or reinterpret a musical text—be it an existing piece, a stylistic form or a set of chord progressions—in a way that is pleasing to the jammers. This kind of composition bears a striking
resemblance to Attali’s ideas of composition—that is, music produced for pleasure and self-communication outside of commercial exchange and use value: “beyond the rupture of the economic conditions of music, composition is revealed as the demand for a truly different system of organization, a network within which a different kind of music and different social relations can arise” (Attali, 1985, p. 137). Music of this kind presages new social relations akin to those in the liberating world of the carnival—a disobedient world in which pleasure, sensuality and the body take precedent. For Attali, composition (and, by extension, I suggest jamming) “is thus laden with risk, disquieting, an unstable challenging, an anarchic and ominous festival, like a Carnival with an unpredictable outcome” (1985, p. 142).

Playing on the idea of jamming as a both an apparatus to negotiate dominant cultural representation and subvert cultural hegemony, and a form of pleasurable collective musical interpretation and improvisation on a given text, I offer the notion of sexual jamming as an analogous strategy of queer musical activism. In the context of this research, sexual jamming represents musical attempts at undermining the dominant logics of gender, sexuality and cultural hegemony as well as the gender, sexuality and musical normativities embedded in popular music forms. Queers manipulate popular music forms to accommodate queer expression, empowerment and oppositional responses, providing some relief from the social constraints placed upon gender and sexual performance. By engaging both their queerness and musicality, queers improvise and interpret gender, sexuality and music on their own terms, thus creating more flexible systems of meaning and modes of identification.

I see the work of queer musicians and performers such as those discussed here as a composite subversion of gender and sexual hegemony, political and social conservatism, and commercial modes of production, as well as hetero- and homonormativities such as gender and sexually codified music tastes—all of which are achieved via the appropriation or hijacking and the subsequent reinterpretation or queering of popular musical forms. I believe that the analogy of sexual jamming could potentially offer a way to theorise queer musical practices of this kind. It provides a way of distinguishing the kind of queer work that has been discussed here with the popularised and depoliticised forms of gay music consumption driven largely by media stereotypes of the youthful white male aesthete that I outlined in Chapters Three and Seven. Thus, sexual jamming would reject passive consumption
and commodification of gayness and gay music, advocating instead for dynamic musical creation and interpretation among queer scenes, cultures and communities.

**Where to from Here?**

In terms of advancing the aforementioned agenda, further investigation is required specifically, investigation focusing on queer scenes and cultures in other locative contexts, which pays close attention to gender, sexual and musical behaviours as I have done here in relation to Brisbane’s queer scene. The emergence of a queer scene and queer musical production in Brisbane is clearly not a distinct local phenomenon, as Buckland (2002), Ciminelli and Knox (2005), Currid (1995), du Plessia and Chapman (1997), Halberstam (2005) and many others have written about queer scenes located across the globe, which form on the basis of their marginal gender and sexual identities and their appreciation for particular styles of popular music. Like these scenes, the Brisbane queer scene is also an example of a scene formed by people with marginal gender and sexual identities—people who feel a need to express themselves in a manner that no other local scene accommodates; people who crave an alternative to the music and the social conduct of both the gay and straight mainstream. While the extent of my investigations into the formation, politics and performances of this scene is sufficient in terms of the scope of this research, it is by no means complete. To fully understand the structure and dynamism of such a scene, a broader range of questions needs to be asked of these people; more lengthy and detailed observations need to be made; and further work needs to be done in relation to other Australian queer scenes to determine whether this is in fact a localised occurrence, or a local manifestation of translocal queer scenes across Australia and possibly around the world.

This research investigation provides a mere glimpse into the histories, styles, methods and trends of queer music production and consumption. However, this glimpse was enough to prompt further questions regarding the music and politics of queer scenes more generally. The politics of queer as a scene identity points to the emergence of separatist queer scenes, distinct from lesbian and gay scenes and resistant to hetero- as well as homonormativities; this creates queer economies of music. The function and significance of these new and distinctly queer economies of music necessitates greater attention.
From this study, another significant area of concern that I feel requires further attention has also arisen. This is a concern that has been prompted by this study but which the scope of this study was unable to accommodate. The second area of further study relates to those queer identities that I (and others) have, for various reasons, been unable to focus on thus far. By this I mean queers of colour and various ethnicities; elderly queers, differently-abled queers; trans people, genderqueers and other gender outlaws who do not perform their gender and sexuality in the socially prescribed way. The same questions I have asked here need to be asked of these people. How does music matter to them? How do they subjectively experience music? What styles and forms do they engage with? What critical sensibilities do they employ? Do their musical modes of signification differ from the mainstream? How do they musically construct and negotiate their marginality? These are questions that queer musicology must ask, not only in its attempts to foster an anti-oppressive discourse but also in the interest of understanding how music functions as a process of these identities.

In this age of postmodern identity fragmentation, people will undoubtedly continue to employ music as a means of constructing and articulating a sense of self, and I suggest musicology’s foci and discourses need to be ready and willing to engage. Musicology need not wait for such people to join the ranks of scholarship before it begins to pay attention to these people and their musics. If we have learnt anything from the emergence of queer musicology to date it is that queer episodes in music occurred long before there were self-identified queer musicologists to study them.
Postlude to the Study
A personal reflection

I am what I am, I am my own special creation...

(La Cage aux Folles)

I began this research by inviting you, the reader, into my world. I wanted to show you who I was, how I had come to this place in life and why I had chosen to identify as queer, particularly as a queer musician and musicologist. When I began this research I felt that I inhabited an in-between place: in-between genders, sexualities, relationships, life-stages, musical cultures and academic disciplines. In retrospect I see that I had a very slippery hold on belonging. In part, this research was about finding others who also ‘did not belong’ and in doing so I created a new space for myself—a space that allowed me to attend equally to my queerness and my passions for music and musicology; a space in which I, and others like me could find this sense of belonging. Some years have passed since I wrote my first introduction to you, yet I still inhabit these in-between spaces; however, I now realise that it is in these in-between spaces that I do indeed belong.

Today, I am the she who not only lives, but who has grown and has become someone new within the pages of this dissertation. In and through this research, I have become (and I am still becoming) a different kind of queer musician and musicologist, one who has been deeply and irreversibly affected by the task of completing a doctoral dissertation and engaging with theories and histories of queerness; one who has been sincerely and gratefully affected by the people she met along the way and by those who supported her on this journey. Through a reflective understanding of theory and the personal connections that I have made during this research, I have reconfigured my self-image. I now see more clearly the multiple subjective positions that I assume—positions that cannot be described as one thing or another; positions that flow between multiple times, spaces, histories, affiliations and styles of self-perception. I have always felt the connectivity between my queerness and musicality, but I now have greater understanding of this connectivity and the power that it yields.
Through interviewing and engaging with Brisbane’s queer scene I have made new friendships. I have seen from multiple perspectives the joys and pains of being and doing queer, and of living as an out and proud queer person. People have shared with me their experiences of family rejection, of contracting and living with HIV, of drug overdose, of queer bashing and discrimination. I saw how important music was to all of them and through music—through dancing with them, listening and watching them perform and talking about music—I connected with other queer people and their histories, and many of them connected with me.

One night, about a year ago, my partner said to me on a living room dance floor: “babe, if this is the queer scene then we’re right in the middle of it”. The next day I wrote this down and reflected on what it meant. It felt monumental. I felt as if my presence in this very private space signified that I was ‘accepted’ by some of the people who I had been observing and probing for some years prior. When I came to the end of this research and began looking over all the personal notes I had made in my research journals, I came to realise that what really excited me about this comment—why it has stuck in my head for so long—was not a feeling of acceptance but a feeling of multiple and ineffable differences. I felt privileged to be invited into the private space of this particular queer group, but I had in fact been a part of something ‘queer’ all along. This was not a profound moment of queer acceptance; this group of people was no more or less queer than others I knew—they were just a different kind of queer, one I had limited experience of, and that is what I felt in this moment: the vast and awe-inspiring differences in the ways that people express and perform their queerness and the willingness of these people to share themselves, in their private moments, with me.

The ‘journey’ cliché lacks the profundity I was hoping to evoke in these final lines of text; however, when I looked up this word and all its synonyms in the dictionary, it was clear that “a gradual passing from innocence to mature awareness” was the most honest description I could attach to this process. I have indeed become more maturely aware: aware of my disciplines; aware of methods and processes; aware of theories, history, styles and sensibilities. But most of all I have become more aware of people, their histories, styles and sensibilities. I feel more connected to my own history and culture; I am more aware of myself, my potential and the complications of desire, of feeling and of being queer. This is the most significant truth and value of my work.


Bertha Control. (2005). *You’re a Bertha Control yourself* [CD]. Brisbane, Qld: Independent release.


Appendix One: Glossary

This table provides a quick reference guide to terminology used throughout this research. Its purpose is to clarify the use of terms and establish a consistency of meaning, as some terminology is new or contestable within scholarly discourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BDSM</td>
<td>An abbreviation of bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism. The term generally refers to various forms of sex play, such as bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism, masochism, punishment and role-play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio queen</td>
<td>A biological female, or female-identified individual who consciously performs hyper-femininity and can cruelly be described as a female drag queen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butch</td>
<td>An overtly masculine performance of gender that is associated with lesbian culture. Lesbian butches are same-sex attracted women who exhibit typically masculine gender qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp</td>
<td>The queer practice of parodying normative social roles, and in doing so revealing the artifice present in all roles, even the supposedly natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag</td>
<td>A performance of gender that embraces aspects of gender subversion and genderfuck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag king</td>
<td>Anyone (regardless of gender and/or sexual preference) who turns masculinity into an act through a conscious performance of the signs of maleness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag queen</td>
<td>Usually a biological male or, or male-identified individual who turns femininity into an act through a conscious performance of the signs of feminality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effeminate</td>
<td>A term that usually pertains to a man who is considered to exhibit gender characteristics or perform his gender in a way that is typically understood as feminine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>A biological category denoting the sex of one’s body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Qualities or performances of gender that are normatively related to the condition of being female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femme</td>
<td>An overtly feminine performance of gender that is associated with lesbian culture. Lesbian femmes are same-sex attracted women who exhibit typically feminine gender qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>This term relates predominantly to male same-sex attraction. However, it can also be used as an inclusive term that relates to the culture and politics of both male and female homosexuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Relating to the performance of the sexed body, gender is a fluid variable of one’s identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genderfuck</strong></td>
<td>A person or performance that plays (or f*cks) with normative images of gender and the logic of sex/gender signification. In the process of play, genderfuck destabilises gender norms and subverts heterosexual hegemony. It is sometimes said to be an enactment of queer theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genderqueer</strong></td>
<td>As a catch-all term, genderqueer signifies the transgression of the gender binary as well as multiple gender identities that cannot be identified as male or female. Genderqueer may signify someone who identifies equally as male and female, someone who identifies as neither male nor female, or someone who identifies partially as both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GLBTIQ</strong></td>
<td>This is an inclusive abbreviation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual/gender, intersex and queer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heteronormativity</strong></td>
<td>The privileging and legitimisation of heterosexuality as natural or right. Heteronormativity organises homosexuality or any other non-heterosexual desire, act or institution as its binary opposite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesbian</strong></td>
<td>A term that relates exclusively to female same-sex attraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>A biological category denoting the sex of one’s body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculine</strong></td>
<td>Qualities or performances of gender that are normatively related to the condition of being male.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
<td>Extending far beyond the sound object itself, music refers to the interrelated practices of composition, performance, listening and other forms of musical engagement more generally such as dancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musicality</strong></td>
<td>The qualities of being musical or relating to music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance</strong></td>
<td>A condition of the subject, a chosen enactment that we ‘put on’ at will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performativity</strong></td>
<td>A precondition of the subject, a forced and repetitious performance of norms sustained by the constraints society applies to those norms that effectively endorse some sexual and gender practices and make others appear unacceptable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queer</strong></td>
<td>In opposition to the binary organisation of one’s gender and sexuality, queer poses a significant challenge to dominant labelling philosophies by refusing to indicate the biological sex or gender of a subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queercore</strong></td>
<td>A movement and related musical style which, in the traditions of punk, is a cultural response to subjugation of the queer voice within popular music traditions and the gender, sexual and musical rigidity of mainstream lesbian and gay culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queering</strong></td>
<td>An act that generally implies a reading, criticism or performance that is executed with a queer gaze or from a queer subject position. Queering serves as an aesthetic criticism of non-normative behaviour, especially that which unsettles our preconception about sex, gender and sexuality and the manner in which they relate to one another.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Two: Audio Examples

The attached compact disc (available only in the hard copy of this thesis) contains music by Anal Traffic and Bertha Control. It has been compiled with permission of the artists and is provided as an auditory reference for the sole purpose of illuminating the research. Further copies are not to be made without seeking permission from the author of this project. To contact the author please email Jodie Taylor at: jodie.taylor@griffith.edu.au

If you are viewing a digital copy of this thesis, please consult the websites of Anal Traffic (http://www.myspace.com/analtraffic) and Bertha Control (http://www.myspace.com/berthacontrol or http://www.berthacontrol.com) if you wish to listen to exemplars of their work and/or purchase their recordings.

Anal Traffic

Track 1: Six Beer Queer
Track 2: In Past Your Wrist
Track 3: Daddy's Chocolate Kisses
Track 4: Two Pumps and A Squirt
Track 5: Shit 4 Dickheads
Track 6: Scapegoat

Bertha Control

Track 7: Music is the Weapon of the Future
Track 8: Happiness
Track 9: Fight
Track 10: Time
Track 11: Reconciliation