SPEWING OUT OF THE CLOSET: MUSICOLOGY ON QUEER PUNK

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Introduction

The articulation of sexual desire in contemporary popular music idioms has largely been the domain of heterosexuals. In the majority of popular music traditions queer musicians have been isolated, castaway or forced to remain within the binds of the closet; to the music industry their sexuality is an unfamiliar island. To achieve commercial status or public profile, queer artists are often required to maintain the he/she pronoun in their lyrics, thus keeping any referral of affection or physical attraction to the appropriate gender—in other words—that which is not theirs. Outside the commercial radar however, queer musicians have found greater freedom to express desire and to publicly perform and articulate queer bodies, sex and gender. One such example of this is the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture of queer punk.

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 was a feature of 1970s punk (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 problamatise not only punk rock music practices but also the set of available cultural practices and identities associated with mainstream lesbian and gay culture. As 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 (emphasis original, 1993, 73).

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 that Fenster alludes to above. For example, there is a general understanding (be it a commodified and homogenous one) that "lesbian music" is female singer-songwriter music, while "gay music" generally equates to some category of dance music such as house, disco or pop. Such musico-sexual affiliations are (more often than not) gross generalisations purported by marketing strategists who are targeting the pink dollar in an attempt 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 will testify to this.

A compilation titled Lesbian Favorites (Rhino Records) features a selection of female singer-songwriter tracks by popular lesbian icons such as K.D. Lang, Jane Siberry and Ani DiFranco. Furthermore, all of these artists have within the last two years 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. Series titles such as Gay Dance Music Series (DJ Select), Gay Happenings (Dance Street), Let's Hear it for the Boys (Atlantis Records), Gay Classics (Hot Productions), and Gay Anthems (Almighty Records) are just a small selection of the available titles, all of which exclusively feature dance and pop music styles. Cited in the most notable text on the topic of queer punk, Homocore: The Loud and Raucous Rise of Queer Punk (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 and Knox 2005, 116-117)

Lesbian and gay music cultures are further identified by gender segregation. Iconic music festivals that attract high levels of interest from international lesbian communities such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Wiminfest, Ladyfest and Lilith Fair, are patronised predominantly, and in some cases exclusively, by women. While gay male dance music scenes, which are typically located in gay identified nightclub spaces, such as Stonewall in Sydney or London's G.A.Y, 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 Spencer suggests that one of the aims of the queer punk movement was to create an alternative space outside of gay culture:

Opposed to the prevailing attitudes of mainstream gay culture, which was often seen as sexist ... 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, 281).

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

This paper will investigate the culture of queer punk and the aesthetic sensibilities queer punks use to articulate queer lives and desires via musical composition and performance. Focusing specifically on the two seemingly disparate cultural identities of queer and punk, this paper will begin by identifying the cohesion that exists between these cultures; it will briefly survey the history of queer punk cultural production; and the politics and performance of camp sensibility within a queer punk context. Localised practices will be explored on the bases of an ethnographic case study of a queer punk band from Brisbane, Australia called Anal Traffic. This case study will demonstrate how musical performance can facilitate necessary discussions around the social subjugation of queer identity while posing a serious challenge to punk rock musico-normativities.

Since the publication of *Queering the Pitch* (1994), it has been generally accepted that music operates as a means of queer sexual expression, yet the limited scholarly interest in this phenomena would suggest that musicology retains a particular aversion to musical dealings in queer sex. The overwhelming lack of critical attention to queer episodes in Australian popular music studies is evidence of this. Therefore, this paper serves a secondary purpose in that it will provide a musicological example of queer theory in application. It will achieve this by foregrounding the

investigation of gender and sexual identity in queer paradigms and by employing queer theories in the interpretation of meaning. Furthermore, it will highlight concerns regarding an absence of scholarly investigation into queer episodes within popular music discourse (particularly within Australia), arguing that, if we are to combat prevailing heterosexist knowledges, queer cultural production requires some attention within the scholarly forums of Australian musicological inquiry.

Queer to the core

Punk was originally a cultural phenomenon that emerged in Britain and New York during the mid to late 1970s,² 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, anti-professional and anti-virtuosic, intent on undermining what punk saw as the arrogant and unnecessary complexities of progressive rock. Punk "stressed the need for directness of self-expression unhindered by the sophisticated considerations of [previous] music traditions" (Laing 1985, 26). Drawing inspiration form 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 the preceding generations, revolting against the aesthetic and political establishments of the time.

Halberstam argues that "punk has always been the stylised and ritualised language of the rejected, [and] the perverse" (2006, 4). Punk's longstanding association with social marginality and sexual perversity is evident even in the etymology punk, which was originally prison slang referring to a homosexual catamite. Although this well positions punk 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 overemphasise 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 authors such as Steward argue that "punk sexuality was angry and aggressive, implicitly feminist" (1984, 158), rejecting the conventions of traditional gender and sexual appropriateness. Others, such as O'Hara more boldly posit that "homosexuality has been a visible part of the Punk movement since it first began" (1999, 115). Hebdige suggests that punk represents a phase of "polymorphous, often wilfully perverse sexuality, obsessive individualism, [and a] fragmented sense of self' (1991, 28), citing Mick Jagger and David Bowie as precursors to this. 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 individuals. What they do tell us that the original punk movement was a cultural space that was open to gender and sexual nonconformity. The connection between punk and queer culture therefore lies in its celebration of the social misfit and its willingness to articulate dissatisfaction with social normativities and cultural hegemonies. The most prolific example of this is the subculture of "queercore."

Representing a convergence of punk rock music and queer politics, queercore is a cultural and social movement that emerged in North America during the mid 1980s and has since evolved into a scattered, yet intense and dedicated community that expresses itself through a variety of media such as music, writing and zine publications, visual art and film. In 1991 the first queer punk convention, suitably titled SPEW, was held in Chicago which brought together queer identified zine-makers, musicians and other artists to discuss creative ideas as well as matters of sexuality, gender and identity more generally. This "loose coalition of radical anarchist and/or punk queers" as Sullivan names them (2003, 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. Drawing on his direct participation within queercore scenes, Cooper describes it as a "punky, anti-assimilationist, transgressive movement on the fringe of lesbian and gay culture" (1996, 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" (293). Furthermore, queercore's loosely anarchic and somewhat ambiguous rhetoric rejects the notion 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, 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, 25). And while queercore scenes remain predominantly populated by same-sex attracted people, this is by no means an exclusive characteristic. Instead, queercore demonstrates a conscious move away from lesbian and gay specificity, which is reflected in the first

issue of *J.D.s* queercore zine (1985) featuring a manifesto titled "Don't Be Gay."

In 1985 gay filmmaker and pornographer Bruce LaBruce and lesbian filmmaker and musician G. B. Jones published *J.D.s* which is widely acknowledged to be the zine that launched the queercore movement. 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. Evoking a somewhat romanticised notion of 1970s punk sexuality, 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 (emphasis original, cited in Ciminelli and Knox 2005, 8).

As LaBruce points out, during the 1980s punk culture sprouted a variety of hardcore and alternative sub-genders each with distinctive musical and ideological qualities that deviate from punk's original sound and ethic. As the global popularity of hardcore and alternative punk styles have grown, subsequently becoming consumed by the major record labels and gaining 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, becoming hostile towards outward expressions of queer gender and sexuality.

Intent on remaining outside the commercial radar, the methods of queercore cultural production maintain punk's original DIY ethic favouring experimentation and bricolage over proficiency and cohesion. This do-it-yourself approach is declared to be the only way queers can maintain complete creative control over their product and avoid compromise. Jody Bleyle, musician and founder of the independent queercore label 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" (Bleyle cited in Ciminelli and Knox 2005, 56).

In its beginnings as a musical genre, queercore was akin to punk: it was originally distinguished by its loud, fast and raw sound; its physically energetic and interactive performance style; its queer-centric and sometimes vulgar lyrical content. However, defining a queercore sound has become somewhat problematic because according to scene participants the music is defined largely by its extra-musical qualities such as its politics, thematics and queer narratives rather than its musical qualities. A definition posted on the official Queercore Blitz 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, suggesting 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 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 that, "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, 291). This characteristic of queercore is further highlighted by Beyle who acknowledges that the queercore scene is not defined solely by musical style: "You can play any musical style. If you feel like you belong in this scene, you belong" (cited in Ciminelli and Knox 2005, 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" (quoted in Ciminelli and Knox 2005, 55). Thus queercore is effectively a dialogical scene that values reflexive musical production over the confines of musical formalism. And for that reason, I would argue that the nonprescriptive sound of queercore and its DIY methods of cultural production could be understood as a simulacrum of the non-prescriptive performances of gender and sexuality that is characteristic of queer identity theories in general.

Queer is an identity that hinges on disidentification, where disidentification is a performative process that refutes collective behavioural descriptions and classifications. Moreover, disidentification strategically attempts to transform cultural logic by overtly confusing and compounding identity categories (Muñoz 1997). According to Meyer, "'queer' ... indicates an ontological challenge to dominant labelling philosophies, ... as well as a challenge to the discrete gender categories embedded in the divided phrase 'gay and lesbian'" (1994, 1-2). Moving beyond lesbian and gay specificity Sedgwick further articulates:

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, 9).

As both Meyer and Sedgwick point out, queer is a lax descriptor that refutes binary gender and sexual classification as well as identity classifications based upon codified gender and sexual acts. Thus, queer is inherently subversive, experimental and self-governing: characteristics that are indicative of queercore's focus on individual narratives that are expressed in a variety of popular musical styles and forms and through doit-yourself methods of production.

In addition to queercore's distinctive narrative qualities and liberal musical stylings, it also exhibits an underlying sensibility of carnivalesque play that, according to DeChaine "endows queercore participants with a space in which to resist and subvert the materials of the dominant culture" (1997, 8-9). DeChaine suggests that queercore artists employ a variety of play tactics being appropriation, parody, pastiche and bricolage in the production of original cultural artefacts that, via musical performance, deliberately trouble heterosexual hegemony and heterosexual logics. While I acknowledge the centrality of play and the carnivalesque to queercore, I would argue play and the carnivalesque form part of the discourse of queer camp and that queer punk cultures are more accurately described in terms of camp. I make this suggestion because within a contemporary queer context, 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 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 (Bronstein 1994; Meyer 1994; Spargo 1999). I shall now extend upon this notion of camp before demonstrating its application in the context of queercore musical performance.

Camp as queer political praxis

When camp was first theorised by Sontag in the 1960s it was often associated simply with overt gesticulation, frivolity and aestheticism, and as such it has been called a "disengaged, depoliticised—or at least an apolitical" sensibility (Sontag 1982, 277). However, camp, particularly in a contemporary queer context, has evolved into a highly political strategy used extensively by queer activist groups such as ACT UP⁴ and Queer Nation: 5 a strategy that critically and subversively employs postmodern parody in its critique of gender, sexual and broader social normativities (Meyer 1994). Postmodern parody theatrically "plays" with social conventions, exposing them as problematic and inauthentic, and is formally defined by Hutcheon as "a value-problematizing and denaturalising form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations". Moreover, it is typified by an "ironic playing with multiple conventions, ... [and] extended repetition with critical difference" (1989, 94). A camp performance of this nature marks the gueer subject as different—as oppositional—because it moves beyond ludicrous or comedic imitation and the "failed seriousness" of Sontag's 1960s pop camp sensibility, assuming instead a critical distance from the cultural norms it is scrutinising.

Like DeChaine's sensibility of play, camp's irreverence and scrutiny of social norms, also incorporates elements of Bakhtin's (1968) notion of the carnivalesque. Exhibiting qualities of "grotesque realism," mockery, parody and playful anarchy, the carnivalesque subverts standard social hierarchies, stresses bodily pleasure and favours vulgarity and profanity. Queer camp employs both postmodern parody and the carnivalesque to critique the ideals of the dominant class and expose the artificiality and theatricality present in all that is supposedly "natural" in relation to human identity and subjectivity. Moreover, camp's inherent theatricality—its insinuation that being is role play (Sontag 1982)—directly correlates with Butler's notion of performativity, or identity as performance. From a social constructionist perspective, Butler (1990) argues that gender and

sexual identities are a performance that we learn and repeat, rather than something that is essential to our selfhood. Gender performativity suggests that there is no biological basis for female femininity or male masculinity, because femininity and masculinity are constituted through repetitive performances, gestures and cultural semiotics, and as such are able to be transgressed and subverted. Broadly speaking, queer camp draws out attention to the culturally constructed "truth" of masculinity, femininity and compulsory heterosexuality and articulates the performer's ambivalent relation to cultural hegemony. As sign of a repressed alterity, camp turns parody and theatricality into an empowering queer critique of the dominant social order, forming a tactical response to oppressive social categories and essentialist notions of identity.

To investigate these claims and to provide an example of queercore in a local context I shall now examine the Brisbane based band Anal Traffic focusing specifically on their sensibility of play, tactical use of camp and transmission of queer ideologies. In the brief scope of this analysis I shall demonstrate how Anal Traffic wage their assault on social and sexual normativity primarily via the lyrical content of their music and subsequently by their physical performance, which in this instance will be limited to a discussion of the gender and sexual identities they perform and critique on stage.

Anal Traffic: Oueercore in a local context

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 compact disc in August of 2005. During 2005-2006 I attended numerous live performances by Anal Traffic and conducted interviews with the founding members of the band, which has formed the basis of the proceeding discussion.

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" (P. Jones 2005, pers. comm., December 12). In 2007 the band continue to maintain this tactic, 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 form. 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, member 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 skew or "queer" this aesthetic by juxtaposing the raucousness of punk against a clearly articulated vocal line, synthesiser solos (often organ sounding), and a tight rhythm section which 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 punk style. Musically, Anal Traffic draw on punk's stylised mayhem and intensity while also incorporating synthesiser pop and rock influences into their sound to create a musical mélange that is unique to them 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 them to draw on their years of musical training. The mix of skilled and amateur technique, quite noticeable in their live performance and to a lesser extend on their recording, creates a somewhat disorderly aesthetic effect that further contributes to the distinctiveness of their sound.

The band suggest that collectively they share both a sexual and political consciousness which is overtly present in, and transmitted through, their lyrics. Both in their live performances and on their EP, the vocal lines sit high in the mix which suggests that 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 (B. Darfur 2005, pers. comm., November 22).

The lyrics of songs such as "Six Beer Queer", "Daddy's Chocolate Kisses," "Two Pumps and a Squirt" and "In Past Your Wrist" 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 use excessive sexual profanity to intensify their argument and over-articulate sexual perversions. As DeChaine (1997) has similarly noted in the lyrics of Pansy Division, these linguistic tropes used to describe casual and hedonistic queer sexual encounters can be seen as an embodiment of Bakhtin's (1968) carnivalesque "grotesque realism." Moreover, this tactic is also as a means of antagonising mainstream (especially "straight") sensibilities and as such it is camp in the way that it problamatises acceptable or normative sexual representations within the heterosexist conventions of popular (particularly punk rock) music. The following excerpts from "Two Pumps and a Squirt" and "In Past Your Wrist" exemplifies this:

"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.

"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.

Here we see Anal Traffic engaging with carnival play through stressed bodily pleasure and sexual vulgarity, using terms of "play" 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 (S. Garvey 2006, pers. comm., June 30). Jones supports this argument suggesting:

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 ... 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 (P. Jones 2005, pers. comm, December 12).

While personal experience is a catalyst for much of Anal Traffic's lyrical material, Jones also notes that not all the sexual narratives and practices articulated in their songs are autobiographical. In some instances lyrics are written with humorous intent and aim 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. Together with camp: comedy, sincerity, anger and humour form part of the band's discursive toolkit, enabling them to broadly critique human sexuality. Garvey and Jones' comments emphasise their desire to draw attention to sexual "deviancies" which, they believe, are apart of the human—and not exclusively queer—condition. Thus, they are employing a camp sensibility of outrageousness and overarticulation as a tactical response to angering and oppressive socio-sexual norms.

Anal Traffic's socio-political consciousness, referred to previously by Darfur, is particularly evident in the remaining two songs from their sixtrack EP, titled "Shit for Dickheads" and "Scapegoat." These songs parodically comment on a range of issues including John Howard's government; ⁷ inflation; the importing of low quality "sweat-shop" manufactured goods into Australia; the 2001 Children Overboard Affair; ⁸ and social prejudice towards queers. The following excerpt 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 housed 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,
Queer are the scapegoat,
Go straight for the throat.

Here we see Anal Traffic employ elements of parody and mockery in a musically facilitated commentary on 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 are queer cultural activists 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, Anal Traffic's persistent interest in matters of sex and politics suggest that their music potentially bridges the public/private dichotomy, a dichotomy that has, for centuries, reinforced the paradimatically male position (Warner 1996). This bold mixture of sex and politics highlights the potential for queer cultural practices to deconstruct the binary and opposing spheres of personal and political, intimate and public. And as such, Anal Traffic's lyrics could also be read as challenging and subverting the oppressive institutions and social hierarchies that reinforce these dichotomies.

Queercore culture maintains a critical distance from institutionalised homosexualities, preferring instead to "play" with alternative gender conventions and representations of sexual identity. In keeping with this ethic Anal Traffic attempt to campishly destabilise dominant images of gay male sexual identity via the physicality of their performance. Lyrical narratives of overtly aggressive homosexual masculinity suggestively position Anal Traffic's content within a gay "leather" and/or gay "bear" cultural context. Gay leather culture is male centric, it strongly emphasises sexual aggression, masculine bodily features such as acute muscle tone while its fashions are typified by tight leather and fetish wear. However,

the corporeality, fashions and physical gesticulation normally associated with this sexual identity is playfully undermined by the collective physicality of the band. Parodying this gay stereotype, Anal Traffic juxtapose 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 (see figure 1). 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 homo 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 (P. Jones 2005, pers. comm.., December 12).



Fig. 14-1. Anal Traffic promotional image

The band's incongruous physical image challenges the notion that sexual aggression is a marker of hyper-masculinity, as the 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 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 their lyrics, physicality and promotional imagery point to the broader project of queer; reinforcing queer's ontological challenge to coherent identity categories; highlighting its sophisticated capacity to resist the totalising effects of gender and sexual normativities.

Reflections and queer directions

Within the limitations of this preliminary investigation two important points have emerged. Firstly, dissatisfied with orthodox and assimilationist lesbian and gay culture, Anal Traffic and queercore generally have sought visibility for, and given an alternative voice to disenfranchised sexual minorities and "deviant" sexual practitioners. Through DIY methods of cultural production queercore becomes, for its participants, a means of resisting oppressive cultural hegemonies. Thus, Anal Traffic provide further insight into the way queer's uses music as a necessary means of sexual expression and social protest. Reinforcing this argument Pansy Division's Chris Freeman says, "I'm still hoping that queercore will have a place in history as a type of music that was needed while getting our civil rights in line" (cited in Ciminelli and Knox 2005, 191). And secondly, through Anal Traffic's tactical (musical) resistance, a direct challenge is activated which threatens the authority of sexual as well as musical normativities. The queercore movement and bands such as Anal Traffic challenge musico-normativity by countering the silence or ambiguity of the queer voice; a voice that has been suppressed by both popular and alternative music traditions throughout the history of rock music forms (Gill 1995); a voice I suggest is still not receiving the attention it deserves.

Although queercore styles and subcultures has been gaining momentum since the mid 1980s they remain largely under-theorised in popular musicology. To date queercore has been the focus of a single popular text, which is a collection of interviews compiled by music journalists and scene participants (see Ciminelli and Knox 2005). It is been discussed in passing in the work of music scholars such as Gill (1995) and Kearney (1997), and by others such as Arnold (1997) and Spencer (2005) in their respective discussions of punk and DIY subcultures. Queercore also feature in a small selection scholarly articles and chapters—De Chaine's being the most significant in terms of its focus on music production—(see Fenster 1993; DeChaine 1997; duPlessia 1997;

Fuchs, 1998). None of these however, make any mention of queer punk scenes in Australia.

Studies into queer musical production are further necessitated by the overwhelming lack of queer criticism within the Australian academies of music and by the expressed need for more extensive inquiry into queer identity in the field of 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 we have to a 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, 26-27).

Since this statement was made a handful of Australian music courses have begun investigating such matters, ¹⁰ however the crusade for queer representation within scholarly institutions of musical knowledge is far from underway. As a self-identified queer, musician and musicologist who has lived all her life in Australia I feel that it is necessary to give a voice to queer Australian music and to contribute to the beginnings of queer musicological discourse in Australian music academies.

To reinforce the urgency for studies into queer cultural production I would like to end with a quote from a 2006 edition of *The Journal of Popular Music Studies*. Noting a similar absence of queerness from popular music studies, the editor states:

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 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 (Lecklider 2006, 117-118).

Shortly after this statement was made, Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga released an edited collection titled *Queering the Popular Pitch* (2006), which (although no mention is made of queercore), has been a valuable edition to queer studies within the field of popular musicology.

However, it is clear that there is still along way to go before the closet metaphor is a redundant one.

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Notes

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¹ Referring to the collective spending power of lesbians and gays, the pink dollar regulates lesbians and gays as a consumer group (Gage, Richards and Wilmot 2002; Jones and LeBlanc 2005).

² The original punk movement was fairly short-lived, lasting in its original form for only two years between 1976 and 1978 before diversifying (Steward 1984; Laing 1985). 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 pop-punk, hardcore-punk and anarcho-punk to name a few.

³ Queercore Blitz was a festival showcasing queercore bands that toured America in 2004 and 2005.

⁴ ACT UP (or the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed in New York during 1987 and later spread to other American and European 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, non-violent dramatic acts of civil disobedience and other theatrical forms of protest (Bateman, 2005).

⁵ Queer Nation was formed in New York during 1990, its 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 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).

⁶ It should be noted that Blintz Darfur and Paul Rollo are no longer performing with Anal Traffic, however they still maintain close ties with the group and feature on Anal Traffic's 2005 EP. Therefore material gathered in an interview with Blintz Darfur in November of 2005 has been kept in this article because other members felt that material gathered in this interview continues to represent the ethic of the band.

⁷ John Howard was the leader of the conservative party and prime minister of Australia between 1996-2007.

⁸ The Children Overboard affair was an Australian political controversy. The Howard government, who at the time were up for re-election, claimed that asylum seekers off the coast of Australia threw 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.

⁹ This is not a complete list of texts regarding queercore as there are numerous other texts that make limited mention of queercore in terms of its style and politics. However, those listed here are provided as a reference to discussions of queercore in terms of its musical style.

¹⁰ Dr Linda Kouvaras' 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 I am aware of which incorporate queer perspectives on gender and sexuality in music studies.