Queer Temporalities and the Significance of 'Music Scene' Participation in the Social Identities of Middle-aged Queers.

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Abstract

During the last decade in particular, the scope of queer scholarship has expanded. Queer readings, theories and problematics now pervade multiple sites of cultural and sociological thinking, reaching beyond the specificities of gender and sexuality and their attendant politics. While there is still important work to be done in these areas, thinking beyond the sexual act allows for an understanding of 'queer' through culture and as lifestyle. Here, I relate this specifically to music scene participation and middle age by exploring the significance of music and dance-based activities in the lives of queer people who do not perform their age in accordance with heteronormative conventions of social propriety and thus do not conform to desirable heteronormative temporalities. The concept of 'queer temporality' is not new, however this article demonstrates the relationship of musical time to this temporal scheme thus offering an additional perspective on queer time.

Keywords

Middle age; music; queer; scene; temporalities.

Introduction

Straight sex is a timeless, historical act and we know this with certainty due to its unmistakeable reproductive outcomes. By contrast, queer sex does not have the same outcome, it is not known with the same certainty and this lack of timelessness means that it is often perceived as a lesser somatic fact and in the extreme, it has been pathologised and subjugated for its alternative logics of desire and temporal schemes, and lack of 'reproductive futurity' (Edelman, 2004) among other things. Dominant heteronormative temporalities operate under the assumption that a life course[1] is (or should respectably be) conducted in a linear, sequential progression (Boellstorff, 2007; Halberstam, 2005)—that is, birth, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, marriage, reproduction, child rearing, retirement, old age, death and kinship inheritance—a progression that is often ceremoniously marked and celebrated with weddings, christenings, anniversaries and the like. A queer life course on the other hand, is not always linear and more often than not, it goes uncelebrated or at least it is informally marked in non-prescriptive or obscure ways. Queer lives often skip over some of the steps of the heteronormative timeline and thus they skew the responsible progression towards maturity by favouring— often through extended involvement in queer scene activities—a prolonged youthfulness and a lingering within early adulthood. Of course this is not true for all lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer people, as some do not wish to, or cannot access scene activities. As Duggan (2002), Casey (2007) and Browne (2007) discuss, an increasingly common reason for the latter relates to the emerging homonormativities of the gay public sphere which can be exclusionary, rendering certain identities invisible on the basis they do not conform to varying racial, ethnic, gender, class and age-based specificities. There are also those who—law and

finances permitting—are choosing to enter into legalised same-sex unions and with the aid of reproductive technologies and/or adoption are choosing to have replica hetero families and subscribe as best as possible to the dominant social organisation of life time. This is, however, the exception (see Black et al., 2000).

As a self-identified queer who both researches and regularly participates in queer scene culture and the styles and forms of musical performance and participation within queer scenes (Taylor, 2008), I have come to know firsthand that queer life courses and queer uses of time are different. Taking into consideration, for example, 'coming out' and then the time it takes after coming out to create new forms of relationality and new identities; 'cruising' time and the exploration of, and then the settling into previously untried sexual practices; the uncanny temporal distortion that occurs in 'ecstasy' time or 'speed' time—given the prevalence of both recreational drugs among the majority of queer scenes in large Western cities; and the extended periods of time spent in bars, dance clubs and similar entertainment venues—time invested in the 'scene'. As Halberstam points out in a discussion of queer time: for her this is many a night spent in a 'dark nightclub', watching drag at 2:00 a.m; a reoccurring activity that 'probably seems pointless to people stranded in hetero temporalities' (cited in Dinshaw et al., 2007, pp. 181–182). These alternative temporal states suggest that queers construct, experience, use and privilege time differently, problematising normative progressions into adulthood and maturity and placing queers outside many categories of age-appropriate behaviour.

Method, Aims and Background

Here, under the rubric of queer time, and taking Brisbane, Australia, as my primary locus of investigation, this article looks closely at six ageing queer-identified scene participants, three women and three men, aged between 40–45 from Brisbane and their frequent age-inappropriate public musical gestures. Here, I define 'musical gestures' as any manner of music-related activity not limited to, but including playing in a band or attending gigs, deejaying, dancing in queer spaces, or running queer clubs. All respondents self-identify as queer, distinguishing this from lesbian or gay as discussed in the case study. None of the people interviewed were primary carers of children, this being typical of the scene at large. All but one of my participants had tertiary degrees and all of them had careers per se, across a variety of fields including health work, academia, business and information technology. The relationship between the interviewees was varied, some were partners, others were friends and some were unfamiliar to each other.

These interviews have been selected from a larger project currently in development, which examines queer scene activities in local and translocal contexts drawing on empirical data gathered in Brisbane and Berlin, Germany (Taylor, 2009).[2] Although the material presented here focuses specifically on the Brisbane scene, many of the cultural trends observed in the data can also be extended to Berlin and, by definition, the broader global queer scene, the latter being underpinned by a series of translocal scene affiliations that, in addition to global mobility is also facilitated through virtual information and media exchange (Bennett and Peterson, 2004). Thus, while participant-perspectives included here refer mostly to local specificities, the translocal scene affiliations of the interviewees suggest these six perspectives can be considered indicative of the alternative temporalities that queers construct through music scene participation more broadly.

The decision for incorporating only six interviewees here was based on the need for a greater depth of reflexivity and personal narrative on the part of the participants. An obvious disadvantage of empirical sociological research drawing on a small sample is the need for adequate representation with the data (Angrosino, 2007). However, in this particular case, the scene under investigation exhibits complex issues of identity and belonging. Thus, the strength of this small sample size is in the depth it affords as the socio-cultural background of scene members routinely problematises straightforward distinctions in terms of established socio-economic and cultural

indicators such as sexual identity, geographical location, race, education levels and class composition. It is also worth noting that there appears to be a significant degree of social mobility within this scene, as half of my research sample and a significant percentage of past respondents interviewed as part of the larger project referred to above have working class origins, but are now identifiably middle-class. Moreover, the interview data was complemented by six months of participant observation, during which time I attended numerous parties and club nights and estimate casually speaking with 30+ people about ageing in this scene context. Notes on these engagements were recorded in my field journal. Respondents were approached during the participant observation phase on the basis of their age and status as committed scene participants and follow-up face-to-face tape-recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted during March and April 2009.

All personal information included here is with the respondents' consent and pseudonyms are used. Like Hodkinson (2002) in his sociological study of goth subculture, I too was a 'critical insider researcher', thus my empirical literacy meant that gaining access to scene spaces and identifying respondents was less complicated, although, as Bennett (2003) suggests, should not be thought of as any more or less authoritative. Being an insider researcher made the research experience both accessible, affording closer and more regular contact with my field, and complex in that it demanded a higher degree of reflexive negotiation when moving between the data gathering and writing processes (Taylor, 2011 forthcoming).

This article seeks to illuminate the significance of music-related scene participation in the lives of queer-identified people who do not perform their age appropriately and thus do not conform to desirable hetero temporal narratives while also exploring the notion of queer temporality and the relationship of musical time to this temporal state. I have chosen to look at people who are 40+ years old not least in terms of scene participation (Bennett, 2006; Vroomen, 2004), but also because middle age is a time in one's life when one is expected to perform their age, gender and sexuality in a coherent way that renders them culturally intelligible subjects, that is, subjects who conform to the norms of bourgeois respectability. In middle age, career, child rearing and kinship family is expected to take precedence over what may be perceived as irresponsible and thus less respectable social activities such as organising or attending dance parties and other music related events, playing and dancing to music, sexual promiscuity, recreational drug use and so on: activities which, as this research shows, remain prominent in the lives of the middle-aged queer people discussed herein.

In the context of this article 'queer' does not assert a coherent lesbian/gay perspective or portend a monolithic gender or sexual politic but instead refers to those people, identities, activities, times and spaces that do not subscribe to heteronormative logics of desire, temporal schemes and social organisations. Moreover, it also refers to those people, identities, activities, times and spaces that resist emerging homonormativities (Duggan, 2002). Here, I evoke an understanding of queer as an oppositional and abject positionality (Halperin, 1995; Warner, 1993), one that seeks to upset and to problematise heterosexual hegemony and its ongoing reiteration and privileged position within normative systems of identity, temporality and social order. To queer or the act of queering is similarly upsetting, effecting a deviation from the expected norm and a troubling or spoiling of social conventions.

Theorising Queer Temporalities in Relation to Music

In the last decade, there has been an increasing interest within queer studies in the notion of queer temporalities. Halberstam defines queer time as 'a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance' (2005, p. 6). Freccero suggests that queer time and temporal models 'can be understood to dislodge queer from its gossamer attachment to sexuality by thinking "queer" as a critique of (temporal) normativity tout court rather than sexual normativity

specifically' (2007, p. 489). Drawing on these, I too understand queer time in a similar way but I would like to add to these definitions by stressing that queer time is not only a departure from and a critique of temporal heteronormativity, but it is also a form of temporality that invests heavily in and places great value upon cultural production and innovation. As it has been my experience, both as a participant and researcher of queer culture, that queer scenes not only produce new considerations of gender, sexuality, desire and life course, but also new cultural forms and queer connotations of existing cultural styles (Halberstam, 2005; Halperin, 1995).

Much of the existing work on queer temporalities has focused on queer history and historiography (see Dinshaw, 1999; Freccero, 2005; Jagose, 2002), queer politics and cultural studies primarily interpreted through the mediums of literature and film (see Edelman, 2004; the special issue of *GLQ* on 'queer temporalities', Freeman, 2007; Halberstam, 2005). With the exception of the final chapter in Halberstam's book, *In a Queer Time and Place* which explores—through subcultural participation—the 'stretched-out adolescence of queer culture makers' (2005, p. 153), there has been little attention given to notions of music and/or music scene participation under the rubric of queer time or queer temporalities. This is something of an oversight given the inherent temporal qualities of music and how well musical practices lend themselves to being structured within and across the dimension of time. Music exists only in time; it is dynamic, energetic and in a constant state of motion. It is never a whole or static representation of a particular moment in time, but the result of multiple, changing and reinterpretable moments across time.

Music is a primary means of self-representation, of self-regulation and a way of forming social alliances (DeNora, 2000). Moreover, it is a way of performing queer gender and sexuality in and across time, as music is particularly apposite to creative articulations of queer identity. Peraino suggests, 'music can be understood as resembling queer subjectivity' (2006, p. 113)—a resemblance grounded in music's ineffability—its position outside language which is akin to the signification of subjectivities outside normative heterosexuality. Koestenbaum argues that the 'mystery and miasma' of music provides a safe space for the articulation of 'forbidden sexualities' (2001, p. 189). While Fuller and 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). In other words, music is well suited to socially and morally ambiguous displays of gender, sexuality and, I would argue, age. Noticing the potential for music and scene engagement (which is accompanied by music) to disrupt normative social conventions, here, I examine the practices of ordinary scene members with the purpose of uncovering if and how engagement in queer scene culture can disrupt the heteronormative conventions of ageing. Thus, I will return to music and its affect on queer temporal frames in the case study and conclusion.

Studying Queer/Music Scenes and their Ageing Participants

While a queer scene is not, strictly speaking, a music scene in that queer is not a bona fide musical genre, it is however, a scene that highly values music—albeit different styles of music—and musical production. Queer, as a scene descriptor, does not point to a cohesive musical aesthetic. Instead, it is a variety of contrasting and alternative forms of rock, electro, punk and dance music and musical activities such as playing or attending live gigs, deejaying and/or attending dance clubs that constitute queer musical output, which I suggest is one of the most significant features of queer scenes (Taylor, 2008).

In the majority of spaces in which queer scenes congregate—bars, clubs, dance parties, live music venues, private homes—music is ever present and highly valued and considered in terms of appropriate mood, style and 'dance-ability' within each location. Thus, like music's relationship to goth lifestyle (Hodkinson, 2002), music is integral to public queer 'lifestyle' (Chaney, 1996). As a regular participant in queer scene culture in both local and translocal contexts, I have never been to

a scene gathering that has been music-less. Even in the most peculiar of localities, scene members go to extreme efforts to make sure suitable music is available. For example, between November 2008 and April 2009, I attended four public outdoor gatherings organised by members of Brisbane's queer scene, three at a municipal swimming pool, the other at a suburban lawn bowls club. At all four events, organisers brought along their own club-style amplification systems and decks, deejays performed throughout the gatherings and music and dancing accompanied swimming and lawn bowls. Given the detailed attention to music typical of queer scene activities, I argue that a queer scene can be studied in much the same way as other music scenes (see Bennett, 2000; Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Cohen, 1999) based on shared value of music, loose commonalities of both musical taste and sexual non-normativity, the exchange of cultural knowledge that occurs among its participants and, most significantly, the potential for 'queer'—as an identity and temporality—to distinguish and reconceptualise the types of musical activity that take place in the scene context.

Scene participation has long been considered the domain of youth (conventionally understood as those between 15 and 25), and as such, studies into these forms of social participation have primarily focused on the aforementioned age grouping (see for example Bennett, 2000; Brake, 1985; Hebdige, 1979; Whiteley, 2005). While I do not contest that scene participation is one of the most significant ways in which youth position themselves against the prevailing social norms of their time and effectively create dissonant social identities, I would also argue, as does Bennett (2006) in his study of ageing punk fans, that scene engagement has a continuing significance in the construction of some post-youth identities. And it is the 'failure [on the part of subcultural theory] to consider musical and stylistic practices of individuals beyond the category of youth' (Bennett, 2006, p. 222) that has rendered ageing scene participants invisible: they exist, they contribute and they urgently need to be studied and respected as such.

As Bennett and Kahn-Harris have observed, music and style is increasingly used by middle-aged people to retain a sense of youthfulness: '"youth" has become more noticeable in recent years as subsequent generations of "youth" have reached adulthood yet refused to "grow up"' (2004, p. 10). Thus, they suggest that youth may be perceived as an 'ideological category, a state of mind rather than a particular life stage' (2004, p. 10). West's recent study *The Death of the Grown-up* (2007) further emphasises the notion of youth as an ideological category, albeit with much more negative connotations. West argues that 'civilised adulthood' began to deteriorate in 1950s America in the wake of rock 'n' roll when adulthood was 'square' and square was 'uncool'. Critiquing youthful performances by middle-aged people as distasteful and having a negative social effect, West goes so far as to suggest that 'youth obsession' and the construction of the 'eternal adolescent' is responsible for America's political and societal breakdown.

In Vroomen's (2004) study of Kate Bush's ageing female fan-base, she draws on the concept of 'social ageing' identified in the work of Thornton (1996) and Bourdieu (1984). Noting how music-based scene involvement has been theorised as a way of resisting social ageing—a way of delaying progression into 'proper' adulthood—she concludes that 'there is an assumption that intense popular music investments cannot be carried over into adult life' and that if this anomaly does occur, the ageing participant is either seen to be living an 'extended youth' or 'dismissed as a reluctant exile' (2004, p. 243).

The following exploration of middle age queer scene participants from Brisbane demonstrates that these people and their investment in music is neither dismissible nor some form of extended, false, destructive or inappropriate 'youthfulness'. Rather, I propose they are vital and contributing scene members who are living what can be more aptly described as a queer adulthood; a way of living one's life that cannot be sequentially mapped onto pre-existing hetero temporal schemas; a complex web of temporal states that overlap, blend and distort the normative models of middle age.

'Scene' to be Queer in Middle Age

As suggested earlier, queer is not simply a catchall term for lesbian and gay. To the contrary, queer can be a positionality constructed in opposition not only to gender, sexual and indeed temporal heteronormativities but also to the codification of the lesbian and gay public sphere (Casey, 2007; Duggan, 2002). Self-identifying as queer appears (here at least) to be an articulation of one's culture or one's 'lifestyle' (Chaney, 1996) more than it is a transparent and finite indicator of one's same-sex sexual preferences and it is in this way that all six of my interviewees evoked the term with regards to their self-identification. In conversation with partners Emily and Lucy, I asked them how they identified and both responded that they think of themselves as queer. When I asked them how they interpret queer Emily said, 'queer is a lot more bent … it's more about the bent minds, yeah, that's what queer's all about' (i/v, March 31 2009). Agreeing, Lucy remarked that 'sexuality isn't a dominant factor for us … I've never fitted into the labels and I don't want to because it's more restrictive and 'cause you have to behave a certain way and I've never found that possible' (i/v, 31 March 2009). 'Yeah, neither of us have boxes in our minds' Emily replied:

> Like we don't have rules, we're quite big on anti-rules and anti-establishment or boxing people in so neither of us are anti-men and we don't feel that people have to label themselves as gay or lesbian or the butch and fem or top and bottom. (i/v, 31 March 2009)

While all of the people in this interview sample identified as same-sex attracted (either exclusively or mostly), the idea that homosexuality was not the deciding factor of queer scene identification was something that all of my respondents raised to some degree, and indeed opposite-sex attraction is visible among participants of this scene. At the risk of not wanting to exclude their heterosexual friends and fellow scene participants when describing the queer scene to me as they saw it, some respondents employed words and phrases such as 'bent', 'kooky', 'quirky', 'queer and alternative' and 'alternative straight' in their descriptions. Therefore, while displays of heterosexuality are less common, the practice of heterosexuality does not appear to preclude one from identifying with a queer scene.

Being involved in a queer scene seemed, for all of my interviewees, to hinge more radically on a sense of disidentification with sexual mainstreams and homology—an altered association less reliant upon codified sexual practices and homosocial gender norms. In line with this, 'open' or unconventional relationships and/or engagement in public sexual play was mentioned by all interviewees and frequently observed in queer scene spaces. Moreover, participation in such activities seemed to be equally taken up by both men and women, sometimes in men or women only spaces but other times in unisex spaces. Interviewees also drew upon personal and secondary examples of unconventional and non-monogamous relationships as a way of distinguishing their behaviour from hetero- as well as homonormative lifestyles. Visual cues, political associations and musical styles were also offered by way of distinction:

> If you say 'gay' [says Tex] I think shaved chest, gym body, designer clothes, but if you say 'queer' I think a little bit punky, little bit lefty, ripped jeans and boots, I don't know. But you know, gay is different to queer and um … it does seem to make sense that gay seems to be more the mainstream homosexual culture and queer seems to be the alternative culture. (i/v, 25 March 2009)

> Yeah, it's [queer] definitely less mainstream kind of music, [says Jacob] I mean dance music is still what I like but I like all kinds of music and yeah, there are often interpretations of lots of kinds of music I suppose … as opposed to a more narrow, mainstream pop kind of approach [of gay]. (i/v, 15 March 2009)

The other people in my interview sample similarly drew comparative associations between gayness as the mainstream and queerness as alternative, distinguishing themselves as the latter on the basis of their visual style, politics, tastes, forms of cultural participation and to some degree, their age.

And while there is a level of cross-over between gay, lesbian and queer culture that all interviewees noted, it is important to realise that here, 'I am queer' has a different meaning to 'I am gay'. Based on numerous other conversations with scene participants during the participant observation phase of this research, this appears to be a salient feature of this queer scene.

The Brisbane queer scene is made up of people with various sexual orientations who congregate in a variety of non-specific locations. By this I mean, they do not congregate at the same location all the time, but at a variety of available-for-hire or fly-by-night spaces in which events are organised semi-regularly by smaller groups of people within the scene (Taylor, 2008). So while the people who orchestrate this scene have been participating in queer culture for many years—the keepers of local queer cultural memory one might say—the scene spaces are largely ephemeral. Predominantly the scene is made up of an equal number of male and female,[3] middle-class, Anglo-Australians[4] aged anywhere from 18 to approximately 65. However, the majority of participants and event organisers seem to be aged somewhere between 30 and 45, with people in their early 20s being visible but less common. My observations of this dominant age range was confirmed by all respondents, agreeing that Brisbane's queer scene spaces attract an 'older' crowd than Brisbane's commercial gay nightclubs. This is not to say that younger and older people are not present, however, middle age participants seem to be more prominent. 'I think the mainstream gay and lesbian scene is … aimed at a younger crowd … and I think with the quirky bent people there is a lot more room for, um, a range of ages', said Emily (i/v, 31 March 2009). While Roger commented:

> I think older people in the scene get a lot of kudos for having organised a lot of things and for being out, being active and being in bands and still being engaged and I think younger people are actually keen to learn and they observe us, you know. (i/v, 30 March 2009)

In Thornton's *Club Cultures* (1996) she explains how age partly affirms authenticity in the dance club setting: 'the connoisseur deplores the naïve and belated enthusiasm of the younger … or … the younger participant castigates the tired passions of the older one for holding on to a passé culture' (p. 101). Contrary to the predominantly heterosexual club spaces of Thornton's study, in queer spaces observed here, age seems not to relate in any way to 'authenticity' as cross-generational participation, respect and communication among people in their 20s, 30s, 40s and beyond is common.[5] In many ways, music, dancing and event organisation appears to provide a context for multi-generational social exchange: it is an affirmation of enduring queer identity for older queers who have been deejaying, playing and dancing over the last 20+ years and it is an embodied temporal exchange of knowledge from older to younger queers, a way of leaning, sharing and making queer culture across lifetimes.

All interviewees clearly distinguished themselves as adult scene participants, however the idea that they were 'middle-aged' adults was clearly a contentious label for some. While each agreed that they were by definition middle-aged, they all remarked in varying degrees that the thought of themselves as middle-aged was 'weird', 'strange' and for some, 'uncomfortable'. In each case this was not because the idea of getting older was frightening, but it had more to do with how they viewed middle age as a life stage and their lack of association with this. One respondent noted that until she was approached for this interview, she had never actually considered herself in this way because 'perceptions of middle age are not so acute in the queer world' said Jemima. She then went on to clarify this:

> I think … we're a bit edgier and groovier for some reason and … I admire both men and women who hang onto their individual quirkiness or that individual stance in their appearance or what they're involved in much later in life. (i/v, 21 April 2009)

All respondents inferred that being queer somehow meant that age was irrelevant in that what was considered 'normal' or appropriate social behaviour for a middle-aged person did not apply within the context of queer scene involvement. 'We're already outside that' said Emily, 'by being queer and quirky or whatever … we already don't fit into that box and don't gauge ourselves by that

heterosexual environment' (i/v, 31 March 2009). When I asked Roger if he thought that being queer somehow disrupted the idea of a 'normal' progression into middle age he said:

> Yeah definitely, you know the normal path like you have fun when you're at university or whatever and then you stop listening to new music, stop going to clubs, settle down and get into a sensible relationship, have children, focus on your career whatever … there are some people in my social group who formally would be party people who now have kind of withdrawn into that world of parenting, career whatever and who don't go out and party much anymore and I would say, yeah, those people don't identify with queer culture. But there's also lots of gay and lesbian people who do the same thing, who get into their little house buying, child minding, suburban, career, or whatever existence and they classify themselves and being too old to behave that way anymore whatever that is. It's all just a matter of attitude really. (i/v, 30 March 2009)

Above, Roger observes that a 'normal' progression into middle age is associated with a decline in one's want to 'party' (implicit in the idea of 'partying' is the consumption of alcohol and/or illicit drugs), club attendance and appreciation of new music. Thus, echoing Vroomen's (2004) account that music-based scene involvement is assumed not to be carried over into adult life and that if it is, one is seen as an anomaly or improper adult. In the cases presented here, the aforementioned activities remained highly relevant to their lives. Some have noted that as they have gotten older the regularity of these activities had decreased—Tex, for example, said that in his youth he would be out at gigs or in clubs up to three times a week and now it is more like monthly or six weekly—however, all respondents suggested that they aim to continue to participate in queer culture in this, or degree of this way for years to come.

For Jacob, the queer scene means that he can get away with a range of activities that he thinks are probably considered inappropriate for someone in middle age. 'Largely' he said, 'this is to do with music and dancing … music gives me a chance to dance and be silly and have fun … I don't think in my head that you're ever too old'. Jacob goes on to say that queer music and dance spaces also permit a range of other behaviours:

> If I decide I want to wear high heels and make-up and mismatched fucked up clothes or a dress or something it's totally fine … Then there's drug taking … and sexual activity with pretty much whoever … you can just modulate all that however you like, I don't think you're judged for that stuff. (i/v, 15 March 2009)

For Emily and Lucy who run a semi-regular queer event, dancing and music is also a very important aspect of queer social life. 'I feel really free on the dance floor' said Lucy, 'Or maybe it just grounds us, puts us in our own skin … Yeah, we think that we'll always dance somewhere, somehow' replied Emily (i/v, 31 March 2009). Similarly, Jemima (who is a performing musician) said that she goes to queer specific live gigs and dance parties mostly:

> So mostly musical events … anything that's queer specific … I'm really into dance culture and deejay music … I've always been into dancing … but I had a major car accident … so I have some mobility issues so I'm not as wild as I use to be … But I still go out to dance to music more than anything else … I imagine one day it will probably cease, I mean I'm questioning that now at 40 and I wonder how many other 40 year olds are still taking the occasional drugs. I've researched that as a health issue and I guess I feel quite comfortable with it at this point but I guess I don't want to be in a culture where I'm feeling like I'm too old to be in that space. *I certainly don't feel that now and I don't actually envisage myself being left behind too much, like I am totally into the music scene and listening to new music and expanding in that way, I'm not stuck in the '80s or the '90s or whatever.* (i/v, 21 April 2009, emphasis added)

The idea encapsulated in the emphasised statement above is representative of all my respondents and, based on numerous aural and visual participant observations, is appears typical of the scene generally, that is: the pursuit of newness, expansion and growth—defying the perceived staidness of

ageing—is enacted through engagement with new styles of music. This is positioned in contrast to 'being stuck in the past' which is a trope commonly associated with a youth's impression of middle to old age.

> I'm much more interested in innovation … new fusions and new genres [says Roger] … in most queer party scenes … you won't hear the same style all night and whether or not what you hear is always new … it's not the same style all the time and you can have nice juxtapositions. (i/v, 30 March 2009)

In addition to newness, diversity in the styles of music played at a queer event as well as a variety of performance formats such as live bands, deejays and cabaret ensembles, were also stressed as being very important. Diversity of styles, formats and taste in music is perhaps a further aestheticised rejection of the social and cultural fixity associated with ageing. Multiple aesthetic investments, open-mindedness and individualism are qualities that are more likely to be associated with youthfulness—qualities that are also highly representative of queer gender and sexual politics in general.

In middle age, music and dancing remained extremely important social activities to all in my interview sample: Emily and Lucy said 'it's like a 9 out of 10' (i/v, 31 March 2009); and Roger said 'I might as well pull the plug if I get too old for this' (i/v, 30 March 2009). To a much lesser degree drug taking and excessive drinking remained important as all but one interviewee noted a definite decline in the frequency of such activities as they aged. Therefore, a decline in substance consumption did not equate to a decline in their want to be in music and dance centric spaces—spaces that the interviewees constructed and accessed through queer scene engagement.

Conclusions

The alternative temporal schemes of the middle-aged queer lives discussed here, effectively challenge—however ambiguously—the naturalised codes of socially appropriate ageing and age-appropriate behaviour and music plays a significant part in effecting this challenge. Music transcends the regularity of the everyday, altering one's experience of themself in time and space (Malbon, 1999; Thornton, 1996). If, as Malbon suggests, we think of music as something that 'exists only in the continual present of its unfolding' (1999, p. 76), then perhaps it is easier to understand how, for my respondents at least, music may signify an unfixed and timeless idea of selfhood: a self that exists outside the 'temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance' (Halberstam, 2005, p. 6). The temporal shifts that occur within musical contexts appear transformative both within and beyond the present moment, thus effecting a queering of time—a queer temporality—in which a continual focus on constantly *being* in the present and the new takes precedent over a *re*productive future and the idea of what is *to be* or *has been* before.

While others have argued that queer sexualities force a reconceptualisation of the reproductive logics of hetero temporality, here, I have argued that the organisation of one's queer identity around music scene participation and a continuing investment in public musical gestures in middle age also problematises notions of maturity and appropriate progression into adulthood. Moreover, the queering of hetero temporalities put forward here closely aligns with Freccero's notion of queer time: that which 'think[s] "queer" as a critique of (temporal) normativity tout court rather than sexual normativity specifically' (2007, p. 489). Given that people who identify as queer at the age of 40+ most likely operate in partial or full opposition to heteronormativity to begin with, it cannot be said that it is music related activities alone that effect a queering of the normative temporal schemes of middle age. However, the temporal qualities of music itself and the 'youthful' qualities associated with music scene participation are significant enough to suggest that music is a contributing factor.

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[1] A life course is "conceptualized as a sequence of age-linked transitions that are embedded in social institutions and history" (Bengtson et al., 2005 p. 493). In this paper, I do not wish to critique the latent heteronormativity underlining the life course perspective as this work is already being done (see Cohler and Galatzer-Levy, 2000). Moreover, I am not directly engaging with life course perspective, but rather with the work on heteronormative and queer time that has emerged within the relevant fields of queer cultural studies.

[2] The larger project draws on my doctoral research in Australia and postdoctoral research in Berlin. A book based on this work will be published by Peter Lang in June 2011.

[3] A smaller but note-worthy proportion of scene participants identify as either genderqueer or transgender.

[4] Polynesian, Indigenous Australian and Asian participants are visible on the scene, however, in terms of ethnic proportions they account for the smallest percentage.

[5] Unlike Thornton's (1996) or Casey's (2007) study, age ranges identified in these spaces are not affected by door policy, as none of the events observed during fieldwork had a policed door policy.