

## Queer Sounds and Spaces: Introduction

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In the beginning, there was 'queer'. The state of 'excuse me, do you mind explaining yourself?'; or 'I'm not sure that's quite how things should go'; or 'are you allowed to be here?'. A challenge to order, a baffling, puzzling thing. Before long, attendant to the nineteenth century's all-purpose policing of bodies and bodily behaviour, the term became intertwined with the newly-defined notion of homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Reclaimed in the height of the AIDS epidemic – 'We're here, we're queer, get used to it!' shouted Queer Nation – the radical edge of queerness was somewhat softened by the incorporation of homosexuality into a new social order. With equality legislation and the official sanctioning of same-sex marriage (in many Western countries), being gay and being queer may no longer be so obviously the same thing. Today the concept of queerness extends to a broad range of irregularities spanning the body – including, but also extending beyond, sexuality – race, place and class. Some argue that it should be used more sparingly, rather than being applied to anything remotely outré. Perhaps the term should be limited to its origins in LGBT cultures, thereby safeguarding the interests of those oppressed constituencies.<sup>2</sup> Others, however, claim that its reach does not extend far enough; that the emancipation queering offers should be available to all, the reasoning being that the straightjackets of heteronormativity and gender toxicity (most of all, toxic masculinity) are damaging to all, albeit not in equal measure. In this special issue of *Radical Musicology*, we take both of these sides of the debate seriously, recognising that the discursive history of queering matters, while nevertheless pushing the frontiers in some unexpected and previously little-explored directions. The premise of coexisting truths and apposite acts undergirds all of the work that has been undertaken in this special issue, highlighting the dazzling ear-opening potential of queer theory. This issue is our way of branching out while keeping focus, set out in a cluster of seemingly opposing acts, and translating into an overarching queerness. 1

And then there were 'sounds', ostensibly manifest and straightforward, sandwiched between two already heavily theorised concepts; resonating, negotiating and facilitating new conceptual openings between the first and third terms. For several of our contributors, sound is the starting and the end point of their writerly excursions – which explore queerness and spatiality before ricocheting back to the precious resonance of sounds and music. Of course, it is contrary to our aims here to partition sounds off from queerness and the culturally constructed / experiential / ontological spaces they occupy: this mode of listening across bounded categories is what queer musicology is all about.<sup>3</sup> As the scope of 'queerness' expands and the field of queer theory diversifies, so should queer musicology, by embracing sounds that permeate nations while destabilising borders (represented here especially in contributions by Ålvik and Biddle); classes, while complicating the very notion of 2

class (Kallioniemi, Välimäki); times, while endeavouring to stand outside of time (Dubowsky, Pääkkölä, Maus); and intersecting identity categories, while interrogating what is meant by 'identity' (Richardson, Attinello). Music, sounds, queerness and space co-exist in this special issue in an easy communal relationship where each reflects on the others; the state of 'excuse me, do you mind explaining yourself' somehow becomes, 'ah, I see', or rather, 'ah, I hear'. Our ability to hear queerness in sounds makes both sounds and queerness more palatable, more concrete, more – spacious – in scholarly debates.

Sounds occupy 'space', our third concept. Not the final frontier, but in tandem with time – which musical sounds demarcate, inhabit and distort – space can be understood as a physical / experiential bottom line: it is the geometry, the architecture (Dubowsky), the bodily reach of queer musicology (Biddle, Pääkkölä, Richardson). Our consideration of these issues stands out because of the diverse ways in which our authors relate and theorise these concrete and imaginary queer spaces as well as their relevance to experiences of sound. In several chapters the spaces in questions are utopian.<sup>4</sup> During the relatively long process of editing this special issue, hate crimes towards LGBT+ people have increased dramatically around the world; spectacles of terrorism have been enacted against gay clubs, transgender people and pride rallies, and developments in various national legislations are gathering worrying momentum in their own forms of aggressive identity regulation. At the same time, young adults in many locations are demonstrating a promising level of self-acceptance by speaking of their sexualities or gender identities more openly.<sup>5</sup> Tensions between intolerant attitudes and new, more fluid identities are surfacing on a daily basis, and the situation will probably deteriorate before it improves. It is still not completely risk free anywhere in the world today to identify as LGBT+. While a new generation of queer-aware people are currently going about their own lives under conditions of apparent normality, in ways that would not have been possible in the past, and undertaking important work towards realising equality, older generations recall all too well how it was ten, twenty, thirty or more years ago, and they recognise signs of slippage and its bedfellow, complacency.<sup>6</sup> We still witness violence towards LGBT+ people: physical, political or emotional. This is why queer spaces so frequently coalesce with utopian spaces, suggested in this volume in the contributions of Dubowsky, Pääkkölä, Richardson and Välimäki, especially. Utopia – an ideal future, a physically and/or symbolically constructed safe space, a state of mind and the possibility of immersion within resonant, free-flowing time – provides an important refuge for the imagination, which in turn facilitates the development of strategies, political interventions and, at the end of it all, societal change.<sup>7</sup>

The authors of this special issue each in their own way contribute to these ongoing debates, whether it is by recognising streams of queer consciousness in existing styles and genres (Biddle, Ålvik); opening up queerness to boundary issues like transvestism and masochism while theorising how these might sound (Richardson, Pääkkölä); excavating the politics of queerness, even when it might contain disquieting contradictions (Kallioniemi); celebrating the work of groundbreaking scholars (Maus); paying critical attention to positive representations (Välimäki); or complicating existing ideas by viewing them in light of different intellectual traditions (Attinello). Eventually, the values of musicological inquiry might change in a more queer-positive direction, in which queer and feminist 'subgenres' or individual interventions will be valued more highly. When that time comes, perhaps the scoffing, the raised eyebrows, the accusations of over- or under-interpreting, and the dismissing

of our central concerns as goals already achieved will evaporate like morning mist.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps a time will come when academic workplaces will no longer endorse inbuilt hetero-cis-white privileges in their hierarchies (as discussed by Maus), and researchers will hone new styles and strategies that will make it less likely for their work to be dismissed in (mainstream) debates in the manner of ‘fake news’ or produce of the ‘ivory tower’. The secret perhaps lies in envisioning – *and making audible* – new queer spaces and then inhabiting them as if they are real (which, of course, they are). All of us can play a part in making this happen.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13-16.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Against Proper Objects: Introduction’, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6 (2–3, 1994), 1–26: 21; Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 4-5; David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, ‘Beyond Gay Pride’, in Halperin, David M. & Valerie Traub (eds.), *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3 - 40: 17.

<sup>3</sup> See, for a brief selection, Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7-8; Stan Hawkins, *Queerness in Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender Normativity, and Temporality* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 5-6, 18-21; Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*, ix, 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Hawkins, *Queerness in Pop Music*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> GLAAD, ‘Accelerating Acceptance: A Harris Poll Survey of Americans’ Acceptance of LGBTQ People’ (2017). [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/20-percent-millennials-lgbtq-glaad-study\\_n\\_58dd140be4b05eae031d8f9c](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/20-percent-millennials-lgbtq-glaad-study_n_58dd140be4b05eae031d8f9c)

<sup>6</sup> See also Halperin and Traub, ‘Beyond Gay Pride’, 14.

<sup>7</sup> See also Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), and Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

<sup>8</sup> See Jason Edwards, *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 81-82.

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