



Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland

Dissent and Disorientation

Fintan Walsh

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Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland

Dissent and Disorientation

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Birkbeck, University of London, UK

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2016 978-1-137-53449-1

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First published 2016 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-57031-7 ISBN 978-1-137-53450-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137534507

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Walsh, Fintan,

Queer performance and contemporary Ireland : dissent and disorientation / Fintan Walsh, Birkbeck, University of London, UK.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Gay theater—Ireland. 2. Homosexuality in the theater—Ireland.
3. Theater—Ireland—History—20th century. I. Title.

PN2601.W36 2015

792.086'6409415—dc23

2015025926

Typeset by MPS Limited, Chennai, India.

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Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to all the theatre and performance makers whose work I discuss in the book, in particular those who helped me access materials, or allowed me to interview them, including Amy Conroy, Veronica Dyas, Jennifer Jennings, Una McKeivitt, Phillip McMahon, Seán Millar, Mark O'Halloran, Rory O'Neill and Neil Watkins. I'm grateful to all the photographers who permitted me to reproduce images, including Niamh Burke-Kennedy, Richard Gilligan, Conor Horgan, Ros Kavanagh, Fiona Morgan, Jill O'Malley and Niall Sweeney. Cormac O'Brien offered some really useful assistance at the last minute, Caroline Campbell kindly shared some of her photography and film work, and Tonie Walsh was typically generous with his knowledge and resources. Fiona Ní Chinnéide provided excellent copy-editing support, for which I'm very thankful.

Research funding and a period of leave provided by Birkbeck School of Arts were invaluable in enabling me to visit the Irish Queer Archive at the National Library of Ireland, and attend relevant talks and performances. Birkbeck is an incredibly supportive research institution, and I'm fortunate to work alongside Seda Ilter, Andrew McKinnon, Louise Owen, Rob Swain and numerous other colleagues in the Department of English and Humanities. Beyond Birkbeck, many others have influenced my thinking on this material in different ways, including David Cregan, Jen Harvie, Aoife Monks and Catherine Silverstone. Chapter 3 emerged out of a kind invitation by Patrick Lonergan to speak at Synge Summer School, where I was fortunate to share conversations with attendees, including Jill Dolan, Stacy Wolf and their students. Parts of other chapters were either written for, or influenced by, invitations to give talks at Dublin Theatre Festival, Trinity College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast. A visiting fellowship at UCD Humanities Institute in 2014 proved very useful in completing aspects of the project.

Thanks to Paula Kennedy who initially commissioned the book, and for encouraging me to finish it. Since her departure from Palgrave Macmillan, Peter Cary has also been an equally helpful and patient editor. I'm very grateful to Elaine Aston and Brian Singleton for including the monograph in their series, and especially indebted to Brian for steering it so carefully through to publication. Thanks also to Áine, Brian, Fiona, Graham, Los, Mikey and Sam.

Parts of chapter 2 have already appeared in the following publications: 'Cyberactivism and the Emergence of #TeamPanti,' *Theatre Research International*, 40.1 (2015): 104–07; 'Pride, Politics, and the Right to Perform,' in *Theory on the Edge: Irish Studies and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, eds.

Noreen Giffney and Margrit Shildrick (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 105–22; ‘Touching, Feeling, Cross-dressing: On the Affectivity of Queer Performance,’ in *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance*, ed. David Cregan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), pp. 55–72. Much of chapter 3 has been published as ‘Saving Ulster From Sodomy and Hysteria: Sexual and Political Performance in Northern Ireland,’ *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23. 3 (2013): 291–301. With thanks, these feature here in expanded form. Parts of chapters 2, 5 and 7 are interwoven into ‘Queer Performance and the Drama of Disorientation,’ which is forthcoming in *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer*, eds. Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

Finally, this book is dedicated to David, whose work and friendship have helped make the project possible.

1

Introduction: Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland

Weaving my way through Bloomsbury on 2 February 2014, I'm glued to a performance at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, streaming from the iPhone in my hand. Drag performer Panti Bliss (Rory O'Neill) is delivering a speech about homophobia on the main stage of Ireland's national theatre, following a production of James Plunkett's play *The Risen People* (1958).¹ Surrounded by the cast, Panti has us imagine that we are standing at a pedestrian crossing being judged or threatened, as I curl my way towards Euston Station. While the theatre performance took place on 1 February, I'm watching it a day later as a YouTube clip shared on Twitter. Taking the bus home towards Hackney, I chat online with friends about the performance we have just seen, as if we are leaving the theatre together. Soon I'm communicating with people around the world. As a gay Irish man recently living in London, I feel strangely at home in this eddy of global exchange – proud, moved, encouraged – bobbing somewhere between the Abbey Theatre, the smartphone in my hand, and a bus journey eastwards. Panti's performance, and its reception, make me feel a powerful sense of being a part of something important and vitalising – though of what, and just how this has happened, are not immediately clear.

This book attempts to understand how queer performance, including this opening scene (see pp. 41–4), articulates experiences of oppression, exclusion and displacement, while imagining and cultivating more accommodating, inclusive and sustaining modes of interpersonal intimacy, social support, public participation and cultural belonging. Although the book begins in London in 2014, the story it tells focuses on select work made and staged in Ireland during and just after the so-called Celtic Tiger era (which roughly spanned between 1995 and 2007, with the global economic crisis of 2008 precipitating a tumultuous national recession), tracing deeper roots along the way, and winding up in 2015 with the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum in the Republic.² While many of my core case studies focus on work produced after the decline of the economy, even these are shown to be very much products of the previous decade, insofar as they

engage with this period's impact and legacy, while also rehearsing strategies for what lies ahead. Following the decriminalisation of male homosexual activity in the Republic of Ireland in 1993, already decriminalised in Northern Ireland since 1982, unprecedented economic expansion in the Republic propelled the growth of the queer culture which supplies the backdrop to this study.³ This was manifest most obviously in the increased visibility of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) people across society and culture, with the free market embracing all emergent cultural identities, as long as they were fundamentally consumerist. Despite this pattern, and somewhat paradoxically, a great deal of the queer performance produced during this time illuminated the darker social consequences of frenzied capitalism, systemic state failings and pernicious cultural crises. Confounding neat parameters of time and geography, by shedding light on forgotten corners of twentieth-century Irish history and society, this work also offered an oblique critical optic through which the wider landscape of Irish culture might be viewed differently.

While I use the term 'queer' as a capacious index for a range of non-normative sexualities, bodies, desires and subject positions typically housed within the LGBTQ umbrella, I also deploy the term to track thoughts, feelings and actions that unsettle subjects from identity categories, and the social order that would otherwise fix them. In this sense, I locate queerness where subjectivity exceeds a single, knowable and commodifiable identity position (including male, female, Irish or even LGBT, for example), and identity is revealed as both performative (an effect of discourse and culture, as in Judith Butler's work) and intersectional (interactive with multiple positions and categories including gender, sexuality, migration, religion, place, age, class, ethnicity, nationality etc.).⁴ We can also discern queerness, I propose, in aesthetic enactments that gesture towards innovative ways of imagining subjectivity and relationality, and sense it among those emotions, moods and sensations that tingle with the hope or need for brighter days to come.⁵ Understood in this braided way, queerness undermines presumptions of stability and certainty, and at its boldest aspires to alternative ways of being, doing, feeling and knowing. In paying particular attention to registers of affect and phenomenology in this book, my thinking is inspired by the theoretical writings of Sara Ahmed (especially *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* [2006]), though my methodology ultimately draws on an eclectic range of perspectives from queer studies (Elizabeth Freeman, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), performance studies (Jill Dolan, José Esteban Muñoz) and continental philosophy (Jacques Rancière).

Most of my insights are gleaned from engaging with live performance, sometimes drawing on text and archival records too. Although I refer to 'performance' throughout, my examples are not confined to conventional theatre settings, but also take place in pubs and clubs; a guesthouse and a

disused shed; across radio, television and social media; on streets and in the open air. I draw on this range to reflect the variety of sites and contexts in which queer culture is enacted, often outside the main stages and borders of official culture. While this book's explicit focus is queer performance, however, it is no less about transformations in contemporary Irish theatre. In fact, one of my driving contentions is not just that queer performance has flourished in the past two decades, but that it has radically altered the landscape of Irish theatre more broadly. Certainly, queer performance has been an important vehicle for staging those experiences and concerns which might seem particular to LGBTQ people – e.g. relating to social recognition and legal protection, including civil partnership (available in the Republic of Ireland since 2011, and Northern Ireland since 2005), civil marriage (enabled by a referendum in the Republic on 22 May 2015, favoured by 62.1% of the electorate, making Ireland the first country in the world to legalise it by popular vote; though still unavailable in Northern Ireland), and adoption legislation – but it has also been an important force in Irish theatre's reckoning with this period on a much broader level.⁶ As we will see in the chapters that follow, queer performance has been instrumental in exploring the interconnection between gender and sexuality and issues of migration, religion, place, age, economics and class, ethnicity and national identity – all of which were affected by the boom years and their aftermath. In responding to these subjects, queer performance has not only drawn upon existing theatrical paradigms, but also recast established forms, advancing some of the most prominent contemporary practices including solo and biographical performance, documentary theatre, site-specific interventions and musical idioms. It has also contributed to reorienting Irish theatre's fixation on national identity and postcolonial critical paradigms, by exploring more affective and phenomenological ways of responding to and being in the world.

Across the chapters, the book addresses the following questions: 1) How has queer performance been shaped by or engaged with the Celtic Tiger era and its expiration?; 2) What have been the core social, cultural and political concerns of these performances, and how do they relate to broader questions affecting contemporary Ireland in a global context?; 3) How has queer performance culture enhanced or redirected the thematic, aesthetic and formal conventions of Irish theatre?; and 4) How has queer performance culture intervened in the way we think about questions of interpersonal intimacy, social support, public participation and cultural belonging?

Plotting performance

While this book does not attempt to offer a complete history of queer performance in Ireland, the examples drawn together constitute a pivotal and exemplary body of practice, concentrating on LGBTQ cultural politics

during the Celtic Tiger era and its aftermath. In the earlier publication *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland* (2010), I outline some of the most significant dramatic, theatrical and legal antecedents to the work profiled here, to the extent that I will try to avoid repeating myself too much. Nonetheless, it is worth reviewing some of the most important interventions in LGBTQ representation and practice, insofar as they supply an important foundation for the performances considered in this study.

For their ground-breaking representations of queer identities in the twentieth century, we cannot underestimate the importance of drama by Brendan Behan (*The Hostage/An Giall*, Damer Hall, Dublin, 1958); Thomas Kilroy (*The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche*, Olympia Theatre, Dublin, 1968; *The Shape of Metal*, Abbey Theatre, 2003); and Brian Friel (*The Gentle Island*, Olympia Theatre, 1971). Frank McGuinness's work stands out for frequently deploying queer characters and aesthetics in order to revise dominant historical narratives and imagine them differently (e.g. *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, Peacock Theatre, Dublin, 1985; *Carthaginians*, Peacock Theatre, 1988; *Dolly West's Kitchen*, Abbey Theatre, 1999; and *Gates of Gold*, Gate Theatre, Dublin, 2002).⁷ Originally produced by Glasshouse Productions, Emma Donoghue's nineteenth-century historical dramas (*I Know My Own Heart*, Andrews Lane Theatre, 1993; *Ladies and Gentlemen*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 1996) worked to similar effect, while focusing on lesbian experience. Deirdre Kinahan's *Passage* (2001) also centralises lesbian characters, to explore tensions around sexuality, class and diasporic identity.

Some productions have taken a targeted look at topical social issues affecting LGBTQ people. Produced by Operating Theatre at Project Arts Centre, Aidan Mathews' *The Diamond Body* (1984) portrayed the murder of the hermaphroditic Stephanos (played by Olwen Fouéré), the owner of a gay club on a Greek island. Addressing similar issues, though with a more obvious local resonance, Aodhán Madden's *Sea Urchins* (1988) explored the murder of a gay man by a group of teenagers. First produced by Acorn at the Hawk's Well Theatre, Sligo, the play clearly referenced the homophobia-motivated murder of Declan Flynn in 1982, for which the killers received suspended sentences. Premiered by Red Kettle Theatre Company in Waterford, Jim Nolan's *Moonshine* (1991) dramatises the efforts of an amateur theatre company to mount a production, while also trying to manage one of the male cast member's hidden homosexuality. AIDS appears as an explicit concern in Geraldine Aron's *The Stanley Parkers* (1990), first staged by Druid, which focuses on the lives of long-term gay couple, Dimitri and Stanley. Also featuring discussions of AIDS, and a gay male character, is Declan Hughes's *Digging for Fire* (1991). First produced by Rough Magic Theatre Company at Project Arts Centre, the play focuses on the reunion party of a group of almost thirty-somethings that turns from nostalgia to violence. Set in 1993, though premiering at Project Arts Centre

in 1996, Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective* is a thriller and a love story that pivots on a Garda superintendent discovering that his sergeant, Pat, is gay; and the murder of a gay politician, intimated to refer to Emmet Stagg, who was found in a well-known cruising area of Dublin's Phoenix Park in 1994. Rosaleen McDonagh's writing frequently explores issues around traveller identity and disability, subjects rarely broached in Irish theatre, despite in need of address. Her play *Mainstream* focuses on the intersection of disability with homosexuality, though to date it has only received a rehearsed reading at Project Arts Centre in 2012.

Dance has also exerted a significant influence over the staging of queer experience, and the evolution of queer aesthetics beyond verbal forms. This is especially true of MaNDaNCE, founded by Paul Johnson in 1991, which explored gay male sexuality in works such as *Sweat* (1994) and *Beautiful Tomorrow* (1996), both produced at Project Arts Centre. A queer impulse ripples through much of CoisCéim Dance Theatre's work, founded by David Bolger in 1995 – in particular the sexually fluid *Knots* (2005), first performed at Samuel Beckett Theatre, Dublin. Fearghus Ó Conchúir's dance performance is often homoerotically charged, perhaps no more so than *Match* (short film, 2006; performance, 2007), a duet for two men presented as GAA players in competition with each other. Based in Ireland and Northern Ireland, Ponydance Theatre Company has created a highly distinctive model of comedy dance theatre that frequently plays with gender and sexuality, such as in *Straight to DVD* (2012) and *ponybois* (2013).

Oscar Wilde's visibility seemed to increase over the turn of the twenty-first century too, with his image serving as the face of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival (2004–), as well as being the name of an Irish Ferries cruise ship since 2007. Conall Morrison's all-male version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) at the Abbey Theatre in 2005 attempted to assert the sexual politics of Wilde's work, even if it strained under the cross-dressed aesthetic.⁸ In the latter half of the twentieth century, Micheál Mac Liammóir (who set up the Gate Theatre with his partner Hilton Edwards) gained widespread attention and acclaim for his one-man show *The Importance of Being Oscar* (1960), which was based on the life of Wilde, premiering at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. Despite the sexuality of both Mac Liammóir and Wilde, Eibhear Walshe suggests the production 'heterosexualized Wilde' by ignoring the sexual aspect of his final downfall, and by wallowing in the tragedy of his fate.⁹ The intimate life of Mac Liammóir and Edwards was the inspiration for McGuinness's *Gates of Gold*.

The landscape of contemporary queer performance has also been shaped by seminal stagings of international work. In this regard, UK-based Gay Sweatshop's production of *Mister X* and *Any Woman Can* at Project Arts Centre in 1976 is especially important. At the time the company was referred to as 'a crowd of nancy-boys from across the water' by a Fianna Fáil Councillor.¹⁰ Such was the level of controversy that Dublin Corporation

(Dublin City Council) even withdrew its grant allowance from Project Arts Centre for a time. In 1981, Project Arts Centre went on to mount a production of Martin Sherman's *Bent* (1979), which concerns the persecution of gay people in Nazi Germany. At the same venue, directed by Michael Scott, Machine Theatre Company produced Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985) in 1987. UK-based Gloria brought the musical theatre piece *Sarrasine* to Project Arts Centre in 1991. Based on a novel by Balzac, with libretto, direction and design by Neil Bartlett, the show drew links between castrati, drag performers and the gay culture of the time. Patrick Mason directed premiere productions of Frank McGuinness's historical dramas in the 1980s and 1990s (see p.4), including during his tenure as Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre between 1993 and 1999. However, as David Cregan has argued, the queer component of the plays was often critically ignored or underexplored, if not downplayed in performance – very different to the works considered in this book.¹¹ Mason's production of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America – Part One: Millennium Approaches* (1993) at the Abbey Theatre in 1995 was in principle an incredibly important moment in staging queer lives, illness, love and sex on stage, though it suffered from poor ticket sales. There are numerous reasons why this production did not have the impact one might expect, perhaps suffering from audiences' lack of familiarity with the writer and play, the quality of the production (which felt oddly naturalistic and flat), to the fact it was staged in the trough just after decriminalisation and just before the ascent of the economy, debilitated by being both anticlimactic and anticipatory. But according to Mason at least, people thought it was 'about queers' and therefore not 'about us.'¹²

There have also been examples of theatre companies which predominately staged queer work. Established in the early 1980s, Dublin-based Muted Cupid Theatre Company was known for staging queer plays with a quirky or optimistic nuance. Founded in Philadelphia in 1998, and based in Belfast since the mid 2000s, TheatreofplucK has also made and toured mainly queer theatre. THISISPOPBABY, established in Dublin in 2007, has consistently focused on creating and curating queer performance and events, as I elaborate further in chapters 6 and 7. As well as nurturing local artists, the company has also invited well-established international performers to play in Ireland, including Bourgeois & Maurice, Dickie Beau, David Hoyle, Jonny Woo (all from the UK), and Peggy Shaw (USA). This primarily happened in the context of the Queer Notions festival, which was programmed in Project Arts Centre in 2009 and 2010, and as part of the company's Electric Picnic tent, which hosted events at the festival between 2008 and 2010.¹³

With the explosion of the festival circuit in the 1990s, as well as the increased viability of international travel, the possibility of encountering queer performance from all around the world also grew. The interdisciplinary and international programmes offered by Dublin Theatre Festival (1957–), Dublin Fringe Festival (1995–), Cork Midsummer Festival (1997–),

Bealtaine Festival (1996–) and Live Collision International Festival (2009–) have most notably facilitated this, broadening local understandings of queer art.¹⁴ GAZE International LGBT Film Festival has been crucially important in screening queer cinema in Ireland since its establishment in 1992. With its emergence in the late 1990s, aLAF (a Lesbian Arts Festival) provided an important social and artistic context for foregrounding lesbian lives and culture.¹⁵ The birth of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival in 2004 (splitting to create the Absolut Gay Theatre Festival in 2010) marked another significant turn in the life of LGBTQ cultural provision in Ireland, though in a rather limiting way the festival originally aimed to foremost ‘celebrate gay men’s contribution to the arts,’ programming ‘works by a gay author of a relevant theme, or have a gay theme, character or plot.’¹⁶ Belfast’s Outburst Queer Arts Festival was established in 2007, and has been pivotal in hosting international queer performance for the city and its environs, while also stimulating and fortifying local practices. Queer performance is also programmed at the many interdisciplinary arts festivals that sprouted throughout the decade. Among theatre and performance makers considered in this book, work by Amy Conroy, Una McKeivitt and Neil Watkins has been performed in Electric Picnic’s Theatre Tent, with Watkins also performing as part of THISISPOPBABY’s provision at the same festival.¹⁷ In addition to the numerous possibilities for production and cultural exchange at national level, performance represented in this book has been staged in Australia, Finland, France, Iceland, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, for example, often also as part of festivals.

While the work considered in this book certainly reveals the imprint of long-established and widely-recognised Irish theatrical languages (including naturalism, comedy, satire and political theatre more broadly conceived), I also detect the impact of more diverse influences still. For example, as I argue in chapter 2 with a discussion of Panti, and in chapter 3 with an examination of protest in Northern Ireland, we can see the political energies and aesthetics of LGBTQ activism being channelled directly into more conventional theatrical practice, rapidly circulated globally by television and social media technologies. We have to wonder if Panti’s Abbey Theatre speech would have had the same impact online if so many of us around the world were not also regularly tuning in to RuPaul. Panti’s work not only draws on drag, but also club performance traditions, and these can also be seen to inflect the site-specific production of *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* (2006), examined in chapter 6. The solo performance work of Neil Watkins and Veronica Dyas considered in chapter 4 owes as much to Euro-American performance art traditions as it does to the more nationally entrenched monologue form. Analysed in chapter 7, *Alice in Funderland* (2012) is as equally informed by the West End or Broadway as it is by any recognisably local grammar. This diverse range of influences is in part a result of the increased mobility of performance, exposing Irish audiences

to international work in Ireland, and offering Irish performance a platform around the world. But it also reflects the extent to which a rapidly shared global popular culture, rather than just a national literary or theatrical tradition, increasingly informs and shapes the way we perceive and respond to the world.

Que(e)rying neoliberalism

The economic boom which defined the Celtic Tiger era was chiefly enabled by a combination of foreign direct investment, low interest rates and a property bubble, which stimulated the growth of the economy at an average rate of approximately 9.3% between 1995 and 2000, and 5.6% until the crash in 2008.¹⁸ The impact of these sharp changes was not just economic, however, but also social and cultural. Therefore, any effort to understand the queer performance practices which emerged during this time requires accounting for the various ways in which they were shaped by and interacted with the economic climate.

While Ireland during this time presents a specific set of circumstances, they broadly correspond to the neoliberal mode of capitalism that accelerated (and latterly crashed) in the West during the same time period. Under this system, functions of public collective life are handed over to private corporate control, spurred by the rhetoric that the privatisation of goods and services is better for public life. Neoliberalism promises unrivalled freedom, wealth and plenitude to those able to participate in its logic and structures. However, neoliberal ideology is also responsible for unfair distributions of resources, typically making corporate classes very rich and other members of the public comparatively poor. As Robert W. McChesney puts it, these negative outcomes include 'a massive increase in social and economic inequality, a marked increase in severe deprivation for the poorest nations and peoples of the world, a disastrous global environment, an unstable global economy and an unprecedented bonanza for the wealthy.'¹⁹

Neoliberal capitalism can benefit LGBTQ people specifically in a number of ways. First, proliferating identity categories stimulate the production of markets (and vice versa), that in turn provide the means by which imagined selves can be purchased into being. Second, neoliberalism tends to idealise any family formation as the naturalised locus of love, support and welfare in a way that can absolve the state from providing care. As the guilt-inducing implication goes, what committed family would not want the best private education, health care and housing for its state legitimated members? It is perhaps no surprise, therefore, that calls for same-sex partnership, marriage and adoption legislation defined the public face of the LGBTQ political agenda in recent times. Among the work examined in this book, Panti's varied interventions stand out for championing the legal provision of same-sex partnerships and marriage, though, on occasion, they have also rallied

against the normalisation of queer culture, suggesting that both futures for LGBTQ people may be possible. In focusing its social and political energies almost exclusively on the pursuit of partnership and marriage legislation, queer culture arguably became politically conservative, invested in reproducing state-sanctioned structures of legitimation and privilege, or what Lisa Duggan (among others) has described as ‘homonormativity.’²⁰

Embedded in these apparent benefits we can observe neoliberalism’s most insidious violations. Most obviously, those who do not have access to wealth through socio-economic background, education or employment are not privileged by this mode of legitimation. Anne Mulhall has argued that in contemporary Ireland, gay men are often seen as good subjects, and palatable signs of a liberal, multicultural society, while women and non-white Irish are culturally marginalised or injured by the law. In particular, Mulhall suggests that good heterosexual and homonational subjects are produced by marriage, given ‘its regulatory function in enforcing love for the imaginary family, community and nation.’²¹ Mulhall sees this as a ‘qualified and partial inclusion of queer citizens’ which has worked to ‘lubricat[e] the passage of the nation from postcolonial peripherality – “monochrome nationalist Ireland” – to EU racial normativity.’²²

Speaking outside of an Irish context, Alexandra Chasin argues that mainstream gay identity politics aspire to normativity by actively participating in and benefiting from neoliberalism. By emphasising sexuality, Chasin maintains that gay politics often ignore other aspects of identity affecting social inclusion and participation: ‘the insistence on the primacy of sexuality ignores other identity features, such as race and/or gender and/or religion, and thus generates an assimilationist politics that reduces diversity to a superficial value, a matter of choice in the food court.’²³ Operating in this way, gay politics can also enact injuries against minorities who might otherwise be allies. In pursuing individual or group rights rather than systemic problems, Chasin maintains that ‘gay identity politics, in collaboration with gay identity-based consumption, tends to underrepresent women, people of color, poor people, sick people, and very young and very old people.’²⁴ As I see it, a queer (rather than gay) politics is attentive to these complex intersections, and their differential privileges and disadvantages. Such a politics undergirds the performances examined in this book, and the readings I offer.

The Celtic Tiger and queer performance

In the following pages I want to consider some of the most salient features of the time period in question, focusing on how performance illuminates the intersections between gender and sexuality, and issues relating to migration, religion, place, age, economics and class, ethnicity and national identity. Across the discrete chapters, these connections are plotted with varying degrees of focus and nuance.

Employment rates in the Republic of Ireland rose from 53% in 1994 to 65.8% in 2001, hitting a high of 67.1% in 2005, mainly distributed across urban zones. Unemployment decreased steadily from 15.6% in 1993 to 4.4% in 2007.²⁵ This led to the laudable effect of improved living standards, at least for some. However, certain sectors of Irish society also became extraordinarily consumerist, perhaps most clearly evidenced by the widespread obsession with property ownership and material accumulation. This drive was no simple indicator of wealth but also borrowed capital, which as became clear in the wake of the crash, was grossly mismanaged by a corrupt banking system and poor regulatory oversight. Following over a decade of unprecedented prosperity, the country fell into financial difficulty in 2007, declaring a recession in 2008 – the first country in the Eurozone to do so in what would become a global phenomenon. Unemployment rates began to rise sharply again, reaching 11.4% in April 2009, and 15% in February 2012.²⁶ In September 2008, the Fianna Fáil-led government hastily committed to saving the country's inept banking system with a guarantee of up to €440 billion, which placed an enormous burden on citizens and future generations.²⁷ In 2010, the country received an EU/IMF bailout of €85 billion, which not only compromised the country's sovereignty, but shackled the Irish people to a programme of austerity.

The period of economic growth had brought enormous change, some of it positive. But the speed with which this happened, and the uneven distribution of wealth in which it resulted, also made for a highly fractured and stratified society. As Seán Ó Riain suggests, the combination of financial, fiscal and economic crises drove a profound social crisis, including public spending cutbacks and unemployment, which in turn led to a reputation problem around the world with the EU/IMF bailout.²⁸ An unequal share of wealth is a concern of Veronica Dyas's work considered in chapter 4, which in part explores Ireland's relationship to materialism, property and homelessness. It is a central preoccupation of Phillip McMahon's *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* and Mark O'Halloran's *Trade* (2011), both examined in chapter 6, in which we see a rapidly changing Dublin benefit certain classes and identities over others. The Abbey Theatre's production of *Alice in Funderland*, discussed in chapter 7, imagines Ireland being played by greasy politicians as if it were a game of Monopoly, privileging the few and punishing the many. The turmoil Alice encounters is presented as the consequence of political ineptitude and deep-seated inequality.

A key contributor to economic expansion throughout the previous decade, the property bubble burst spectacularly in 2007, leading the government to establish the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA) in 2009, aimed at acquiring property development loans from Irish banks in exchange for government bonds. A grave concern with property runs through this book, from Dyas's engagement with homelessness examined in chapter 4, to the

domestic disenchantments enacted in *Alice in Funderland* and *Twelfth Night* (2014) both discussed in chapter 7.

During the mid to late 1990s, Ireland was affected by an unprecedented surge of inward migration. This flow was initially dominated by the return of many Irish people who had left during the last recession of the 1980s. When the European Union expanded in 2004 to include ten new member states, a wave of people from Eastern European countries including Poland, Latvia and Lithuania (among others) came to Ireland, attracted by its growing economy. Other immigrants and asylum seekers came from places including China, India, Nigeria and the Philippines. Leaping forward, the 2011 census indicated that 544,357 non-Irish nationals were resident in Ireland, from 199 different countries, representing 12% of the population.²⁹ In Northern Ireland too, during the period of July 2000 – June 2010, an estimated 122,000 international long-term migrants arrived, while 97,000 left.³⁰ Following the crash, however, mass emigration ensued, and by 2013 a National Youth Council of Ireland survey reported that 308,000 people had emigrated from Ireland during the previous four years.³¹

This very recent history has radically redefined how we think of Irishness. The movement of people and its effects are explored in this book too, most explicitly in Panti's global adventures considered in chapter 2, and in the more fraught exile of the gay men accounted for in *Silver Stars* (2008), examined in chapter 5. But almost every chapter is concerned at some level with processes of movement, migration and their effects. Less substantial is the amount of work exploring the experiences of LGBTQ immigrants in Ireland, or indeed their involvement in theatre and performance making. In fact, despite the number of migrants coming to Ireland, the country is far from a readily welcoming place. The 2004 referendum on Irish citizenship, for example, resulted in the change of Irish laws to eliminate an Irish-born child's automatic right to citizenship when the parents are not Irish nationals.³² But rather than outright blame a relatively vulnerable queer performance culture for this situation (even though some is undoubtedly deserved), it is important to recognise that a deep-seated structural racism has informed Ireland's response to immigrants more broadly, which inevitably affects social and cultural participation too. There is perhaps no better evidence of this currently than the Direct Provision system, which came under widespread scrutiny in 2014, and which sees asylum seekers staying in temporary accommodation on average of three (but up to seven) years while their application is being processed. It is a stark reminder, too, that migration is not liberating for all. (There is something perversely ironic about this situation within the context of Irish LGBTQ cultural politics, given that the high number of recently emigrated Irish citizens who returned to vote for the Marriage Equality referendum, proved to be a significant factor in its passing.³³) However, as I discuss in chapter 2, we can see some examples of active participation in events such as the queer

pageant the Alternative Miss Philippines, which was established in the early 2000s by Filipino healthcare workers who had arrived in the late 1990s. While the low rates of non-Irish born LGBTQ participation in theatre reflects those across the theatrical landscape, in depictions of free and invigorating travel which occur throughout this book, I think we can at least detect the affirmation of more flexible models of citizenship and belonging. The challenge is for these aspirations to fuel more grounded social change.³⁴

Ireland also underwent a forceful phase of secularisation during the mid to late 1990s, which was spurred on not only by materialistic motivations and an increasingly culturally diverse society, but by revelations of the abuse which had taken place in religious-run industrial schools, reformatories and so-called Magdalene laundries throughout the twentieth century. Published in 2009, the Murphy and Ryan reports document the complicit brutality of the state and religious-run institutions in the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children throughout much of the twentieth century, while in 2013 the McAleese Report detailed the state's involvement in the incarceration of women and girls in Magdalene laundries between 1922 and 1996.³⁵ While these reports do not feature directly in this book, the negative impact of organised religion is felt throughout. In Panti's charge to 'be your own Pope' which we encounter in chapter 2, as well as *Silver Stars'* challenge to religious dogma discussed in chapter 5, we see queer performance stage a critique of Ireland's long-standing relationship with Catholicism, in particular its privileged position as the arbitrator of sexual and moral matters. Chapter 3 reveals how Christian fundamentalism still profoundly informs governance in Northern Ireland, buttressing a culture of homophobia. But in Neil Watkins' and Veronica Dyas's work examined in chapter 4, and indeed also in *Silver Stars*, performance calls out for more inclusive models of spirituality.

With Ireland having a low proportion of people aged over 65 in the EU during the Celtic Tiger era, its transformation was initially motored by a young, highly-educated demographic. But this also had the effect of creating a sharp generational divide, between younger people who actively participated in and benefited from the changes, and an older generation who did not – at least not to the same extent. With the crash of 2008, Ireland experienced a wave of outward migration once more – mainly of young people, but also including an older cohort compared to previous cycles, including some of those who arrived during the boom years. Generational divides and tensions are the subject of many of the performances considered in this book. As recounted in chapter 2, one of the expressed aims of Panti's solo performance work is to narrate LGBTQ history and culture to contemporary audiences, who might otherwise forget or ignore it. Dyas threads her own personal difficulties through her grandmother's history, finding inspiration in her life, as we see in chapter 4. In *Silver Stars* and *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* (2010), both addressed in chapter 5, intergenerational tensions provide the main

creative stimuli. Both productions strive to introduce queer histories into contemporary consciousness, challenging the youth focus of gay culture. An age divide also supplies one of the main conflicts at the heart of Mark O'Halloran's *Trade*, examined in chapter 6. Here so-called Older Man solicits Young Man for sex, and finds it difficult to align his sexuality with any of the contemporary categories available.

In the documentary *Fintan O'Toole: Power Plays* aired by RTÉ in 2011, the eponymous critic decried contemporary Irish theatre for not producing a play that would effectively respond to the Celtic Tiger and its negative social effects.³⁶ Writing in *The Irish Times* on the same day, O'Toole claimed that Irish theatre 'failed in the most basic way. It was unable to create for Irish people even a vaguely accurate narrative or image of who and where they were.'³⁷ Contrary to this view, this book reveals that Irish theatre was far from apolitical or apathetic during the time period in question. But in order to observe this work, I suggest we should not only look for the big 'state of the nation' play, but also attend to the wide range of performance forms represented in this book, which may appear marginal and even minor to some. Not recognising this work and its contribution is as much a symptom of a national crisis as is the dearth of what O'Toole describes as 'power plays.' For capitalism and heteronormativity can conspire to notice and value certain cultural expressions over others. This book strives, in part, to correct this structural blindness.

Performing belonging: dissent and disorientation

While the performances gathered here individually highlight and critique some of the queer intersections which cut across contemporary Irish culture and society, taken together I see them as striving to imagine and cultivate more accommodating, inclusive and sustaining modes of interpersonal intimacy, social support, public participation and cultural belonging. This effort is typically manifest in processes of dissent and disorientation, which reflect some of the actions and experiences of LGBTQ people, while also accounting for the ways in which performance harnesses, amplifies and affirms these phenomena for social, cultural and political comment and effect. At its simplest, I think of dissent as the expression of feeling at odds with, and acting against, the cultural norm; and disorientation as the experience of desiring out of or against time and place – rooted here in non-normative sexual orientation, but also connected to the dizzying effects of migration and mobility, cultural diversity and exchange, and global capitalism more broadly. Despite their distinct qualities, dissent and disorientation often appear intertwined as structures of affect and phenomenologies of experience. Certainly they surface as such in this book, with varying degrees of emphasis and nuance – orientations generate feelings, and feelings generate orientations. I offer these terms as useful guides

rather than rigid hermeneutics to help account for queer performance's capacity for affective and phenomenological intervention.

The word dissent has roots in the Latin *dissentire*, meaning to differ in sentiments or feelings. So resistant feelings form the basis of dissent's political work, even if these might swell to critical thinking, verbal debate and physical action. The direct play between feeling and politics is something we encounter in this book, perhaps most explicitly in Panti's performative public interventions discussed in chapter 2, as well as in events surrounding Iris Robinson's comments about homosexuality, considered in chapter 3. Although representing arguably polar political positions, both figures have provoked extraordinary public response as a result of their very different expressions about LGBTQ people and culture in recent years. In *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991), Jonathan Dollimore imagines dissent primarily as a form of gender and sexual resistance, which 'repeatedly unsettles the very opposition between the dominant and the subordinate.'³⁸ More recently still, dissent has been the source of renewed interest insofar as it is embedded in the idea of dissensus, a term which has gained currency via the writings of Jacques Rancière. For Rancière, dissensus refers to the disruption of a political order by a subordinated social group, through acts that reconfigure the aesthetic regimes that maintain order and hierarchy. Acts of dissensus reorder power relations by allowing new subjects and objects to enter into the field of perception. Thinking about dissent via dissensus allows us to recognise not only the ways in which differences of feeling are articulated publicly, but to consider how, via partitions of the sensible or perceptible, groups can catalyse this feeling as a political tool in order to redistribute power.³⁹ I'm reminded here also of José Esteban Muñoz's claim that 'Queerness, too, can be understood as a structure of feeling,' insofar as it 'has not been let to stand, unassailed, in the mass public sphere.'⁴⁰ Unable to stand, it must necessarily rise up and move differently, 'circulated as a shared structure of feeling that encompasses same-sex desire and other minoritarian sexualities but also holds other dissident affective relationships to different aspects of the sex/gender system.'⁴¹ As Muñoz's formulation suggests, there is something inherently dissident about queerness, insofar as it both navigates and mobilises unsettling structures of feeling.

We can detect dissent in the swell of feeling which surrounds the performances discussed in this book, as it oscillates between registers of pleasure, shame, nostalgia, suffering and hope. In offering feeling as one of queer performance's most important tools, this work not only expresses a set of subjective experiences often at odds with the cultural norm, but also scrambles the reproductive value systems of capitalism and heteronormativity, which are so heavily invested in and structured around the circulation of 'objects' – including legal affiliations and material possessions. This is something we see in chapter 4, in which we learn how socio-economic precarity in part propels the impassioned testimonies of Neil Watkins and Veronica Dyas, but especially in

chapter 6 with its focus on working-class life in Dublin, in which an inability to benefit from the dominant capitalist economy is articulated via a torrent of emotion which exposes some of the inequalities, insufficiencies and limits of that system.

Dissent is often accompanied by the experience of disorientation: the sense of losing a sure sense of self or a footing in the world. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* states, disorientation describes '[t]he condition of having lost one's bearings,' and phenomena 'in which appreciation of one's spatial position, personal identity, and relations, or the passage of time, is disturbed.'⁴² I think of disorientation here as a way to calibrate the trajectories of non-normative sexual orientations – or *dis*-orientations – and how these intersect with processes of migration and mobility, cultural diversity and exchange, and global capitalism over time. In this, disorientations can index sexual, spatial, cultural and temporal relationships of being off course or out of sync with the world as it is, and with what its surroundings have to immediately offer. Certainly, disorientation is something most of us are likely to experience at some point in our lives, from the banal act of losing our way on a journey, to the more traumatic experience of losing a loved one, to the pleasurable (if we're lucky) disruptive event of love itself. But it has a particular relevance for LGBTQ people, who often have to willfully find each other, and actively construct their own social worlds, having no ready-made map to follow or reproduce.

Disorientation can be a symptom of a rapidly changing globalised world that leaves us to spin in a seemingly endless present, or the effect of an unyielding situation, which we desperately strive to move past. In this sense, it can be confusing and painful, leading to social precarity, personal suffering, physical injury and even death.⁴³ As I write this in May 2015, the recent tragic deaths of trafficked migrants on Mediterranean seas expose that some journeys and experiences are much more hazardous and exploitative than others, challenging the affirmative valence of the language of disorientation across all contexts.⁴⁴ However, even though I concede that disorientation can be a symptom of larger cultural problems, not all symptoms are entirely negative – or at least, not all need to persist as such. When, on occasion, this symptom manages to be rehabilitated as the source of social pleasure, cultural opportunity and political possibility, or as the stir of curiosity and worldly wonder, it can supply the preconditions for new forms of intimacy, support, participation and belonging to emerge. In this book I aim to highlight scenes of disorientation which are indeed unsettling, but which are also affirmative; and, as we shall see, disorienting experiences are sometimes both. Paying attention to disorientation allows us to chart the unpredictable trajectories of those whose desire does not follow straight lines, instead swerving off course for other people, objects, places and worlds, including those not yet made.⁴⁵

Throughout this study we see disorientation's effect where non-normative sexual inclinations lead subjects off the beaten track, in marching for legal

rights (chapters 2, 3 and 5), in emigrating in order to lead an openly gay life (chapters 2 and 5), or in experiencing surprise desire, love and even hate (across the entire book). Disorientation prompts the search for more sustaining modes of connection than are immediately available, leading us on wayward journeys through history, and all around the globe. We can also discern it in the confusion that emerges when one's gender identity does not align with one's sexed biology, propelling travel for gender reassignment surgery (chapter 5). Disorientation's work inflects those performances where queerness is aligned with the sense of being out of place and time – as I tried to convey with my opening recollection of encountering Panti's Abbey Theatre performance on my iPhone, for instance. When embraced in performance not just as narrative but as phenomenological verve, as we see perhaps most strikingly in the Abbey Theatre productions examined in chapter 7, disorientation unleashes a vitalising charge. The world is remapped by newly discovered ideas, desires and relationships, produced by searching subjectivities on uncertain routes. According to Alain Badiou, recounting a comment by Antoine Vitez, theatre's function is intimately connected to practices and experiences of orientation: 'the real function of theatre consists in *orienting us in time*, in telling us *where* we are in history. Theatre as a machine for answering the question "where?," a localizing machine, a machine for a topological relation to time.'⁴⁶

To think about the politics of performance in terms of dissent and disorientation is also an invitation to resist the thrusting linearity of political formulations, which are – at least rhetorically – set on a forward-facing future, and instead take seriously the reeling-feeling of no single direction or certain destination in sight. (I return to the power of this reeling-feeling in the Afterword.) It additionally asks us to consider the affective and phenomenological work that the interconnected experiences of dissent and disorientation do – both as symptoms of exclusion and upheaval, but also as strategies of resistance and sustenance, which can effect real social, cultural and political change. To this end, performances examined in this book imagine forms of belonging which do not rely upon conventional, inherited markers of identity. Elspeth Probyn argues that the focus on identity as an organising convention of social relations is preoccupied by questions of depth and interiority. As an alternative, she suggests that a shift from the question of identity to belonging might allow us to think about 'the social world as surface',⁴⁷ or subjects desiring varied forms of participation and connection. Shifting from identity to belonging, Probyn proposes, allows us to account for 'the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught with a wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.'⁴⁸ As Jasbir K. Puar suggests, queer emotion, feeling and affect can be seen to evade the kind of territorialisations associated with identitarianism,

performing instead 'different and alternative modalities of belonging, connectivity, and intimacy.'⁴⁹ As we shall see in the chapters that follow, when identity threatens, disappoints or fails those whom it otherwise claims to nourish and protect, it is the charge of intimate contact and collective action that intervenes to buoy subjects and audiences alike.

Mapping the book

Each chapter represents a distinct performance form or context, and an examination of the case study's queer themes, concerns or aesthetics. Gender and sexuality are explored as they intersect with migration, religion, place, age, economics and class, ethnicity and national identity. As is typical of both theatre and queer culture, most of the performances considered here have taken place in urban centres, and mainly Dublin, though as I outline within discrete chapters and notes, a good deal has also toured nationally and internationally.

Ireland's best-known queer performer, drag artist Panti Bliss, is the focus of chapter 2. Here I explore the activist roots and tenor to Panti's performance work, focusing on her involvement in *Alternative Miss Ireland* (1987; 1996–2012); the trilogy of theatre works *In These Shoes?* (2007), *All Dolled Up* (2007) and *A Woman in Progress* (2009); and her recent Abbey Theatre oration. Panti's performances have stimulated national and international debate about queer activism and apathy, HIV/AIDS, same-sex partnership and marriage, culture and capitalism. Narrating and remembering the recent history of queer culture in Ireland, Panti's work operates as a kind of animate archive that keeps otherwise marginal and ephemeral experiences alive, while also educating and entertaining audiences in the present. In this, Panti's work creates a performative home for Irish queer history, and for the community that gathers to witness it.⁵⁰ Insofar as Panti has directly intervened in public discourse, and agitated law, she has also been instrumental in increasing the recognition and protection of LGBTQ people.

My concern for one performer's capacity to stir public debate is extended into chapter 3. Here I switch my focus from the Republic to Northern Ireland, where even though it did not experience the effects of the Celtic Tiger in the same way, reveals a comparable rift between tradition and modernity during the time period in question. This is especially true following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which sought to promote peace, enable self-governance and stimulate the local economy. The main performer in question in this chapter is not a drag queen or even a professional actor, but one-time Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Member of Parliament (MP), and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Strangford, Iris Robinson, whose personal iterations in public invite us to consider biographical performance from a different perspective still. In 2008, the day after her husband Peter Robinson was elected First Minister of the

Northern Ireland Assembly, Iris responded on radio to the attack of a local gay man. She said she thought homosexuality was an ‘abomination,’ and offered to refer gay people to a psychiatrist who was practising reparative therapy at the time. Heated debates, public protest, political and artistic responses ensued, threatening to derail Peter Robinson’s new leadership of the Assembly. When details of Iris’s extra-marital affair with a 19-year-old man emerged, accompanied by accusations of bribes, it seemed like the Peace Process itself might be under threat, until the politician was ultimately declared by her husband to be receiving psychiatric treatment. As I suggest in this chapter, Iris’s original provocative comments revealed a deep-seated homophobia at the heart of unionism, and in her subsequent scapegoating an eerily comparable misogyny. This chapter examines how these power dynamics and prejudices played out, paying attention to how homosexuality became a battleground on which the terms of cultural belonging were negotiated in Northern Ireland.

Individual experience is very much at the heart of chapter 4 too, which focuses on testimonial performance. Here I examine work by Neil Watkins and Veronica Dyas, whose interventions have highlighted the effect that Ireland’s abusive and shaming approach towards sexuality have had on the artists’ personal lives. In Watkins’ *The Year of Magical Wanking* (2011) and Dyas’s *In My Bed* (2011), this negative impact is communicated via disclosures of the sexual abuse, self-harm and social precarity which has affected both performers. But shame’s immobilising tendency is also challenged in these works, by a charge to create more expansive models of social solidarity. Here reparation does not appear as punitive conversion therapy, as it does in the previous chapter, but as the kind of social support which the performers describe and call for, and which their performances can be seen to enact and enable.

Reality-based performance, and the interrogation of its terms and values, is also the subject of chapter 5. Considered here is work created by a young generation of theatre and performance makers about an older generation of queer lives, who for various reasons have been unable to directly represent themselves. This chapter traces the discrete experiences of invisibility, exile and exposure that these productions engage, and the theatrical methods deployed to do so. Seán Millar and Brokentalkers’ *Silver Stars* is created from the real-life experiences of gay men who were forced to leave Ireland since the 1950s due to their sexuality, and this song-cycle documents the uneasy relationship between the queer diaspora and the ostensible home country, searching for harmony through collaboration and remembrance. Unusual among queer representational practices, Amy Conroy’s *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* is a study in enduring domestic ease, in which a lesbian couple in their sixties relay the story of their lives together. A mock-documentary, Conroy’s play suggests that the dramatic form, which had become relatively unpopular in Irish theatre, still has a valuable role to play in exploring pressing

social issues. A cultural anxiety with transgender identity undergirds Una McKeivitt's *The Big Deal* (2011), though this piece of documentary theatre is primarily concerned with two transgender women's experiences of sex reassignment surgery, and their efforts to feel at home in their own bodies. Collectively these works attempt to recuperate otherwise lost queer histories, and stage important intergenerational queer conversations.

Class and place are the primary contexts underpinning chapter 6, which examines site-specific performances that engage with a rapidly transforming Dublin city: Phillip McMahon's *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)*, which explores the friendship and sexual discoveries of twenty-year-olds Danny and Chantelle on a night out in a city-centre nightclub during the height of economic prosperity, as much of their Ballymun community is demolished; and Mark O'Halloran's *Trade*, in which an older man solicits a much younger man for sex in a north inner-city guesthouse, a few years after the economy has crashed. In these works we are offered contrasting views of life in contemporary Ireland, especially as urban working-class people experience it. In *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)*, the city is buzzing with energy and potential, responsive to the desire of the play's central characters; and in *Trade*, queer sexuality remains hidden, confined to and by an economy of capital exchange. Even though these performances convey different experiences of Dublin, both also communicate deep attachment to the city and its people, such that exile is not even an option.

Chapter 7 considers two productions directed by Wayne Jordan at the Abbey Theatre, which at face value seem to have found a home for an otherwise vagrant queer performance culture, ushering it from the unsettled fringes into the safe arms of the national theatre: *Alice in Funderland*, co-produced by THISISPOPBABY, with book and lyrics by Phillip McMahon and music by Raymond Scannell; and an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601/2). While I analyse the productions' explicitly queer themes, concerns and aesthetics, I also argue that both are fundamentally preoccupied with being lost, restless, searching for home, or for a revised sense of what that might mean. Both productions enact queerness as an enduring and invigorating drama of disorientation, which takes place at the intersection of sexuality and geography, desire and place. This disorientation exerts an additional spin on an Irish theatre culture that has been historically preoccupied with colonialism and national identity; a property-obsessed contemporary Ireland, and an LGBTQ culture which seems increasingly seduced by the domesticating tendencies of assimilationist politics. In *Alice in Funderland* and *Twelfth Night*, the respective protagonists Alice and Viola are motivated by the search for home. What they ultimately discover and offer us, I argue, is an idea of home that does not resemble a fixed place with an equally fixed configuration of identities and relationships, but something altogether more affectively structured and enabled.

Homing devices

Despite the range of unrest evidenced in this book, I do not mean to suggest that queer performance is just an agent of agitation and upheaval. Instead, we might even think of it as a kind of homing device, via which forms of belonging are tested and forged. This might take the important form of legal protection – as in the case of partnership, marriage and adoption legislation, as well as preserving the right to free speech, and offering protection against hate speech, and other forms of violence frequently directed at queers – but its most important contributions are social and cultural. As we see in this book, work of this kind happens in theatres, pubs, clubs and repurposed buildings, on streets and in the open air, in Ireland or abroad, across ‘real’ and virtual contexts. Collectively, these performances function as performative archives of alienation, displacement and searching which provide, in a way, their own kind of home for queer people, history and culture.

In addition to landmark decriminalisation, same-sex partnership and marriage legislation, there have been a number of important scholarly and symbolic steps in the accommodation of LGBTQ people in contemporary Ireland. On 16 June 2008, the Irish Queer Archive was officially handed over to the National Library of Ireland collection. This was a highly significant step in acknowledging the importance of LGBTQ people in shaping contemporary Ireland, which continues to offer a home to this culture’s artifact and resources. Recent academic work also points to the recognition of queer research within the academy too, including David Cregan’s *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance* (2009), Brian Singleton’s *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (2011), and a recent special issue *Irish University Review*, ‘Queering the Issue’ (2013).⁵¹ And with the centenary of the Irish Rising taking place in 2016, whose Republican proclamation guaranteed ‘religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens [...] the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally,’⁵² amid the inevitable pomp, ceremony and national(ist) sentiment the time feels especially ripe to reflect upon how cultural belonging has been experienced, enacted and imagined by some of Irish society’s historically most maligned and marginalised.

But I’m also wary of using the term ‘home’ to index the kind of belonging I’m tracing and advancing here. For I find it hard to separate the word from the scene of normative kinship and family life that can be so unwelcoming for queers and limiting for us all. If, as Sara Ahmed suggests, ‘homes are effects of the histories of arrival,’⁵³ then I would be cautious of any person, relationship or nation laying claims to having ever arrived – as if a time ever really exists when we can settle and reproduce what already is. As the performances gathered in this book demonstrate, the terms and strategies of belonging must always be re-rehearsed, reimagined and reformed.

2

Activism, Drag and Solo Performance

‘Domesticity is the New Gay. That’s not the gay I signed up for.’

Panti Bliss, *A Woman in Progress*

Looming large, in stilettos, high above the eclectic range of practices that constitute queer performance in contemporary Ireland is drag performer Panti Bliss. The creation of Rory O’Neill, Panti has been instrumental in mobilising performance as activism, social engagement and cultural critique, and in ushering queer performance from bars, clubs, social gatherings and street interventions to more conventional theatre and performance contexts and spaces. Panti has also been at the forefront of advancing some of the solo and biographical performance strategies which have become so central to Irish theatre in the last decade in particular. As noted in the previous chapter, it was also Panti who pitched Irish queer performance onto the international stage in 2014, when her oration in the Abbey Theatre went viral.

In this chapter I examine some of Panti’s most important performance works, including hosting the Alternative Miss Ireland queer beauty pageant (1987; 1996–2012); the trilogy of theatre productions *In These Shoes?* (2007), *All Dolled Up* (2007) and *A Woman in Progress* (2009); and her Abbey Theatre speech.¹ My aim is to reveal how these diverse performances function as personal and artistic commentaries that have also intercepted and reoriented important social, cultural and political issues and conversations affecting contemporary Ireland. In particular, I consider how Panti’s performances have engaged and provoked national and international debates about queer activism and apathy, HIV/AIDS, same-sex partnership and marriage, culture and capitalism. I focus on Panti as a unique figure deserving singular attention, but also as an exemplary case study for illuminating how queer activist initiatives have deployed a plethora of performance tactics, and how these approaches have evolved into more recognisably theatrical modes, which have shaped and expanded the landscape of contemporary Irish theatre and performance.

‘Transgressing Beauty and Inventing New Desires’: Panti and Alternative Miss Ireland

Alternative Miss Ireland first took place in Sides nightclub, Dublin, 1 April 1987, initially as a fundraiser for the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre.² On that occasion it was hosted by singer Linda Martin and the drag performer Mr Pussy (Alan Amsby). The event grew out of Dublin’s activist and burgeoning club scenes, much of which took place around the Hirschfield Centre. This was opened on Fownes Street in 1979 by the National Gay Federation (now National LGBT Federation [NXF]), spearheading the LGBTQ rights movement in Ireland.³ The facility included a café, a cinema club, a youth club, counselling facilities and the headquarters of the Gay Health Action group, which launched the country’s first information leaflet on HIV and AIDS in 1985. It also hosted a dance club called Flickers (the Dutch word for ‘faggots’), which provided an important social space for LGBTQ people to come together.⁴ Clubbing was political, not just because it allowed people to unite for pleasure and friendship, but also because in order to use the venue, or indeed to attend the club, punters had to buy NGF membership. Often, too, Flickers featured the kind of dressing-up that would become a defining feature of the Alternative Miss Ireland.⁵

After the first event, Alternative Miss Ireland did not take place again until 1996, when Dublin AIDS Alliance approached collaborators O’Neill, Trish Brennan and Niall Sweeney to revive it to raise awareness and funds for people living with HIV and AIDS. In that year it moved to the Temple Bar Music Centre, before shifting to the Red Box a year later, and finally settling in the Olympia Theatre in 2000, where it stayed until its last instalment in 2012. By the time it ended, the event had raised just under half a million euros for HIV- and AIDS-related charities. Hosted by Panti throughout (except for the first event), Alternative Miss Ireland was commonly referred to as ‘Gay Christmas’ on account of it being the highpoint of the Irish queer calendar. Collaboratively created and produced by a committed team of volunteers, many of whom worked on the show throughout its lifetime, Alternative Miss Ireland was very much the product of a DIY ethic which extends through the independently produced work profiled in this book. In marrying activism, sociality and performance, Alternative Miss Ireland became almost indistinguishable from Panti, whose work beyond this context, as we will see, exemplified similar aesthetics and values.

Modelled on Andrew Logan’s Alternative Miss World (UK), Alternative Miss Ireland contestants were selected from a combination of direct entry and regional heats. Entrants were eventually also drawn from Alternative Miss Philippines, which began in the early 2000s, developing from within Ireland’s Filipino nursing community which had grown rapidly by this time as a result of targeted recruitment by the Irish health service.⁶ Those who made it through to the main event performed in daywear, eveningwear

and swimwear segments, ultimately judged by a ‘celebrity’ panel, encouraged by audience reaction. Although theoretically open to any person, thing, or animal (one year, cabaret performer Agnes Bernelle’s dog took part), and with no strict dress code, most entries involved some element of drag or cross-dressing. Targets of this gender-play frequently included the comely maiden or virginal tropes entrenched by the Church and state in twentieth-century Ireland, which Panti herself subtly undermined as a warm but risqué figure; but also normative models of gender and sexuality more generally, including the sanitised, commercialised forms elevated by traditional beauty pageants. Winners were awarded for ‘Transgressing Beauty and Inventing New Desires,’ and conferred with the title ‘Queen of Ireland.’ This was bestowed with the placing of the Medusa Crown of Shamrocks on the winner’s head, in a move that perverted deep-rooted traditions that served different types of ‘queens,’ including the Virgin Mary and Cathleen Ní Houlihan. Routinely taking place on the Sunday closest to St. Patrick’s Day, the pageant firmly positioned itself in a subversive relationship to all things considered normatively Irish. While the event was fundamentally invested in raising HIV and AIDS awareness and funding, it was also an equally important performance event dedicated to queer cultural imagining and community building, and reckoning with Irish culture more broadly. For instance, in 2009, after the economy crashed, Niall Sweeney designed ‘puntis’ featuring Panti in the place once occupied by Lady Lavery



Figure 2.1 Niall Sweeney’s ‘puntis’ designed for Alternative Miss Ireland, 2009

in the old Irish punt (Ireland's currency between 1928 and 2002), which were dropped from the ceiling of the theatre all over the audience, as if to suggest that Panti would now be our currency.

The timing of Alternative Miss Ireland's revival in 1996 is significant for a number of reasons. First, this came about three years after the decriminalisation of male homosexual activity in 1993, which seemed to indicate a thawing of cultural conservatism, and paved the way for greater visibility of the queer community in Ireland. Second, and not unrelated, in the mid to late 1990s Ireland was defined by sudden, unprecedented economic growth that precipitated the sharper commercialisation and globalisation of culture. Following the recession of the 1980s, and associated mass emigration, now relative social liberalisation and economic prosperity conspired to make Ireland an incredibly popular destination for business and property investment. The country also became desirable to those who had emigrated throughout the previous decade, many of whom now returned home.

This was the case with O'Neill, who spent the years after graduating from Dún Laoghaire College of Art and Design, where he had first created a drag act as part of his degree show, living in Tokyo, Japan. While there he performed in bars and clubs as part of the drag duo CandiPanti, a period substantially reflected upon in *A Woman in Progress*, which I discuss later on in this chapter. Inspired by O'Neill's real aunt Qy, O'Neill originally conceived



Figure 2.2 Competitors and crew on the Olympia Theatre stage for the last production of Alternative Miss Ireland, 2012. Photograph by Fiona Morgan

of Panti as a glamorous, mid-Atlantic aunt returned home, who tapped into the cultural fantasy of the 'emigrant come good.' Understood in the braided context of queer sexual politics, economics, national and diasporic identity, Alternative Miss Ireland was also informed and inflected by real and imagined processes of exile and return, exclusion and inclusion, which Panti embodied. In the wake of then recent social, political and economic changes, Alternative Miss Ireland staged a spirited questioning of what identity, home and belonging might mean.

Alternative Miss Ireland was also instrumental in cultivating a vibrant queer performance scene that bridged both social and theatrical contexts. Many of the organisers and contestants either already performed in or ran queer bars and clubs, or went on to do so, including the important queer clubs GAG (1996), Powderbubble (1996), and H.A.M. (1997) – all of which featured a strong element of participatory dress-up and performance. O'Neill and Panti were involved in all of these ventures, and it was at Gristle (a pre-H.A.M. cabaret show) that Panti started doing the kind of performance lectures and monologues which would eventually form the basis of her theatre work. Indeed, in developing her act for stage, Panti claims not only to have drawn on drag and club performance histories, but on the ancient Irish seanchaí or storytelling tradition.⁷ Panti also ran the popular Casting Couch Karaoke night at The Front Lounge pub for many years, before setting up her own bar – Pantibar - in 2007, which continues to feature weekly performances.⁸ Over the years, many Irish theatre practitioners performed in Alternative Miss Ireland or worked behind the scenes. Artistic Director of The Corn Exchange, Annie Ryan, was involved in various capacities, performing in 1996 and 1997, and later using her commedia dell'arte makeup techniques for Neil Watkins' winning entry, Miss Heidi Konnt, in 2005. Ryan also claims Alternative Miss Ireland was an important platform for testing her physical theatre techniques in the mid-1990s.⁹ And many of the competition's winners, such as Shirley Temple Bar (1997), Veda Beaux Rêves (1999) and Heidi Konnt became regular performers in bars and clubs; and in the case of Shirley Temple Bar, even daytime television.¹⁰ But it is Panti who best exemplifies the movement between, and intermingling of, queer and more mainstream theatrical performance cultures. Not only did Panti frequently perform within queer venues, but she took performance out of these contexts, by touring a number of theatre productions around the county, and to other parts of the world.

Inspirational blondes and studious spectators: *In These Shoes?*

It is impossible to address Panti's theatre work without also referring to THISISPOPBABY, a company that has been at the forefront of creating and staging queer performance and events since its founding in 2007, including

important collaborations with Panti. (We will come to THISISPOPBABY again in chapters 4, 6 and 7.) This has resulted in a number of productions, some of which have toured internationally to Australia, France, the UK and USA. For the purposes of my discussion here, however, I want to focus on what might be seen to constitute a trilogy of work: *In These Shoes?*, *All Dolled Up* and *A Woman in Progress*. In particular, I strive to convey how these productions incorporate and evolve queer activism and drag into more familiar and coherent theatrical forms, arguing that this shift has been an important intervention in the development of solo and biographical performance in contemporary Irish theatre.

In These Shoes? was first staged at The New Theatre, Dublin, in May 2007, as part of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival. Produced by THISISPOPBABY, and directed by Phillip McMahon, the one-hour show took the form of a solo performance, in which Panti assumed the role of lecturer in drag school. Drawing on one of her frequently cited inspirations, the fictional character Miss Jean Brodie, Panti engaged the audience as if a group of naïve students unschooled in the subject of cross-dressing, and in urgent need of her impassioned teaching.

In the small, tiered space, the show begins as Panti rushes from the back of the theatre and down the stairs towards the stage, apologising for being late. Wearing a beige mac, and clutching a briefcase, Panti impresses the conceit that we are enrolled in a term-long module on drag, though the class at hand will focus on the blondes who have inspired her. The performance is structured around mini-lectures on these different women, whose images are projected across the back wall of the stage for the relevant segment. Irish women discussed include Catherine Nevin, the landlady convicted in 2000 of murdering her husband in their Wicklow pub; television newsreader Anne Doyle; and comic performer and singer Twink (Adele King). Among the international figures championed are Anna Nicole Smith and Dolly Parton.

Panti's lesson on Nevin avoids discussing the woman's crime and imprisonment, focusing instead on how the media paid so much attention to her appearance during her trial. Nevin's image was subjected to more forensic examination than the crime itself, Panti claims. Indeed, such was the intensity of the media's focus on Nevin's self-presentation during the trial that the presiding judge, Justice Mella Carroll, banned the press from commenting on this aspect of the accused. Panti is interested in this insofar as she believes that Nevin's changing style both made and unmade her. It enabled the social and economic mobility she strove for in life, but its scrutiny in court and in the media was also used to fuel charges of inauthenticity.

The power of role-playing is also discussed in relation to Twink. While Panti suggests the entertainer sometimes appears excessively fake, comparing her to 'something Macnas made for St. Patrick's Day,' the performer's facility to juggle personas is nonetheless celebrated. Indeed, an infamous

phone message left by Twink on her ex-husband's phone receives regular re-enactment by Panti in her weekly bar shows, having been first performed at the opening of Alternative Miss Ireland in 2007.¹¹ Doyle appears in the lecture for Panti to argue that turning from brunette to blonde, as the former did, was crucial to ensuring career longevity. Panti credits Darwin with claiming that all drag queens eventually turn blonde.

While Panti indicates that future lectures will focus on Irish politician Liz O'Donnell, singer Doris Day, and the dog Lassie, the final subject of this 'class' is her idol, Dolly Parton. Panti has never made secret of her love of the entertainer and, at the Alternative Miss Ireland in 2007, a personalised message from Parton was screened during the show. What rendered Panti's discussion especially interesting in *In These Shoes?*, however, was the way in which this interest was divulged at the intersection of O'Neill's and Panti's identities.

Sidestepping fiction for the most part, and referring to O'Neill's childhood, Panti describes how she first heard Dolly on the radio at home in Mayo in 1978, shortly after Dusty Springfield, her pet sheep, died. Thus began a life-long love affair, revealed here through fragmented tales of ardent fan worship. Other personal anecdotes are added in, too, that offer both a nostalgic and critical glimpse of life in Ireland in intervening years. These stories culminate with the recollection of Panti's invited appearance on the New York based *Maury* chat show in the late 1990s, complete with recorded footage. Masquerading as an Irish transvestite in order to get a free trip to New York, and claiming to be under pressure from Catholic parents and a sister (comedian Katherine Lynch) to dress more like a man, Panti is treated to a female to male make-over by the chat show's team. While clips of the show are projected onto the back wall of the set, Panti slips into a changing booth stage right. After an hour of innumerable crossings, *In These Shoes?*, like the *Maury* episode in question, ends with Rory O'Neill standing on stage to applause.

Speaking in interview with journalist Luke Clancy at the time of the production's staging, O'Neill claimed that *In These Shoes?* was concerned with 'Women who appear to be fake, but are actually real women. They all have a very strong visual image, but we know behind the image there is someone real.'¹² And in this sense, these women share similar ground with drag queens: 'It's like a good drag queen, someone who has created their own surface, but you can see that they exist in the real world.'¹³ In other words, the show's basic premise is that all gender is a form a drag; a performative mode of expression that bears no direct relationship to biological sex. This is something Panti openly celebrates in the show, referring to herself as 'a triumph of greasepaint and gaffer tape.' The production's focus on certain blondes who both play into and defy expectations of being overtly sexual or ditsy, allows Panti to reflect on how reflexively performing selfhood can be socially and politically powerful.

In These Shoes? draws connections between Panti, O'Neill, forms of femininity which are often as fetishised as they are maligned, and the audience's experiences and insights. Panti constructs and deconstructs stereotypes, but also insinuates important alliances between feminist and queer politics. All too often gay male demographics in particular construct antagonistic relationships towards certain women – again, fetishised or maligned – and, in a playful way, Panti realigns these histories and sympathies. Although her tone can sometimes be mocking, as she says herself, 'it's not a parody, it's an homage.' The performance is woven from so many varied perspectives and identifications that it both expands and undercuts the presumed authenticity of the biographical form. On a broader level too, *In These Shoes?* demonstrates Panti's use of performance to inform a contemporary generation about queer history and culture. This is queer performance as activism, as living archive, as education, as entertainment and as cultural critique.

Offending the easily offended: *All Dolled Up*

In September 2007, four months after *In These Shoes?* was first staged, Panti returned to Temple Bar with *All Dolled Up* at the Project Arts Centre (Space Upstairs), as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival. Once again, it was produced by THISISPOPBABY and directed by McMahon. (A revised version, *All Dolled up: Restitched*, which contained elements of Panti's previous theatre shows, would later be remounted at the Peacock Theatre in 2013.) Although a distinct piece in its own right, *All Dolled Up* developed and elaborated upon many aspects of *In These Shoes?* While the latter show certainly included remembered events as part of its broader lecture structure, *All Dolled Up* more obviously resembled a memory play.

Standing on a spare stage, framed at the back wall with red foil trimmings, Panti sets the retrospective tone to the production with an initial lip-synched rendition of Édith Piaf's 'Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien.' In her opening address to the audience, she contests the idea that lip-synching is merely empty imitation, arguing instead that it is 'a full-bodied act of channelling, a collaboration between the queen and the original artiste.' In this cross-identificatory spirit, Panti proceeds to frame her show not as theatre in the traditional sense, but as a 'conversation' between her, the audience, and the people she mentions along the way, who may or may not be present. The event is structured as an interactive performance, in which Panti leads the audience on a queer history of contemporary Ireland. While this is innocuous enough in many ways, Panti is keen to assert that 'Drag still retains its power to offend the easily offended, and that's part of the fun.' And what follows frequently includes stories of how the early queer performance culture of which Panti was a part did just that.

The production foremost involves Panti charting the growth of queer culture in Ireland throughout the 1990s, including recalling her



Figure 2.3 Panti performing in *All Dolled Up* at Project Arts Centre, 2007. Photograph by Fiona Morgan

own central involvement. Referring to Sir John Rogerson's Quay in Dublin 2, which rapidly expanded and became gentrified during the Celtic Tiger period, Panti claims that while many audience members will know the area as a nice middle-class neighbourhood with lots of new, expensive apartments, she knows it as the place where GAG, a fetish club she ran with friends, took place. Discussing images of the club beamed across the back wall of the set, Panti describes some of the risqué sexual acts she staged in the venue, including one called 'Pearl Harbour' in which friend and collaborator Niall Sweeney pulled beads from her behind and swung them around the room. This act, like many of the others Panti was involved in conceiving and staging at the time, was influenced by 1980s/90s performer, designer and promoter Leigh Bowery, who gave himself enemas during some of his performances, and the New York performer Lady Hennessy Brown, whom O'Neill had seen squirt the audience with her lactating breasts in London. Panti also recalls being invited to perform in fetish clubs around the world as a result of this platform. Particularly interesting, as a sort of moral barometer, is the account provided of the media's coverage of this emerging queer club performance culture at the time. We are told how Breda, a suspicious editorial assistant working at *The Irish Times*, refused to advertise the club G.A.G. (as it was then spelled), until she knew what the acronym meant. Panti recalls telling her it meant

Gays Against Germaine Greer, with which Breda was satisfied, even though it was a lie. Recalling another occasion, Panti describes how the *Sunday People* tabloid ran a feature profiling the club, with the headline 'Dublin Sex Orgy Sensation.' This histrionic reporting precipitated the eventual closing down of the venue.

'You don't have to pull something from your ass,' we are advised, 'to offend the easily offended.' Panti continues to tell of a recent invitation to take part in RTÉ's reality television show *Celebrity You're A Star*; an offer that was revoked when she said she wanted to make her donation to HIV charities. 'It was all a bit too gay,' is her assessment of the incident. Another story comes from the experience of taking part in the National College of Art and Design's graduate fashion show. When one tutor did not come on stage to receive flowers from Panti on behalf of her students, the performer approached the lady in the audience following the official ceremony. 'Fuck off. I am a full-blown woman and I have never been so insulted in all my life,' was the lecturer's response. In recalling the incident, what fascinates Panti most is the invocation of 'the language of disease' to describe her womanhood; as if womanhood, like 'full-blown' AIDS, was potentially fatal.

The production takes an even more personal twist when Panti describes how people feel they can tell her anything when they meet her socially, assuming that as a cross-dressed man, she will not judge them. She guffaws at the idea, but understandably the confessional style on display in this performance has a knock-on effect. Taking this sharing further, Panti tells the audience that she/O'Neill is HIV- positive, something she has never divulged before in performance. Instead of offering a traumatic retelling of her experience of the condition, as we might expect, Panti warmly and wittily talks through the original diagnosis, and describes her fears of dying, complete with an imagined rendition of 'Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead' at Glasnevin crematorium. She talks about attending HIV clinics over the years, and the shifting demographic of clients: first gay men, then drug addicts and haemophiliacs, followed most recently by migrant African parents with their children. Delivered with plenty of comic relief, including offering her glass of water to an audience member to drink from, Panti uses her personal story to give voice to a wider history of untold experience and cultural exclusion in contemporary Irish culture. And in a very subtle way, she dispels a lot of the stigma that surrounds HIV, the transmission of which among men in particular was on the increase during this time, asserting that it was something the queer community should know about.¹⁴ Channelling 'that great philosopher Whitney Houston,' Panti ends with an affirmation of gratitude and collectivity. Addressing the audience with outstretched arms, she gushes, 'without you, I'd have nothing.'

As with *In These Shoes?*, *All Dolled Up* takes the form of a solo performance, crackling with quick-fire personal anecdotes and social observation. But even more so, it draws on O'Neill's personal experiences to

broach taboo topics such as gay sex and HIV and AIDS, pressing them for further reflection within public consciousness. In this sense it is entertaining and informative, but it also proves to be an important intervention in the forging of queer political alliances, and more broadly, in the narration and transmission of queer culture.

Memory, travel and internal critique: *A Woman in Progress*

A Woman in Progress was first staged at Project Arts Centre (Space Upstairs) as a work in progress during the Dublin Pride Festival, June 2009, as part of the Queer Notions festival run by THISISPOPBABY. The production was later staged in full at the same venue as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in September of that same year. The programming of the full production at this high profile international festival can be taken as testament of the increased interest in the work of Panti and THISISPOPBABY at this time, including the wider queer performance culture. The scheduling also chimed with a proliferation of national and international debates around same-sex partnership, marriage and adoption which intensified at the time. Under Loughlin Deegan's direction, the 2009 festival was striking for featuring a number of queer productions exploring trauma, repression and memory.¹⁵ These conspired to create the sense that queer performance had a pivotal role to play in revisiting hidden or troubled corners of modern Irish history, as well as investigating the legacy of the recently expired Celtic Tiger.

While also a solo performance resembling *In These Shoes?* and *All Dolled Up*, *A Woman in Progress* was a more theatrically nuanced and polished production, no doubt helped by the fact that it was commissioned by Project Arts Centre. It included a much richer mix of personal reflection and social observation, the tone veering more towards serious than wildly comic. The play essentially maps key events in Panti's and O'Neill's overlapping lives, from boyhood to adulthood, taking us from Mayo in the 1970s, to Dublin in the 1980s, to London and Tokyo in the early 1990s, and back to Dublin as the economy grows in the middle of the decade. Blurring lines between personal and performer biography, subjective experience and social history, *A Woman in Progress* ultimately works to re-narrate the story of contemporary Ireland from a queer perspective.

Panti recalls events from her life contextualised against the key national and international events that unfolded around her (and O'Neill), or sometimes impacted directly: the Pope's visit to Ireland in 1979, mass emigration in the 1980s, economic prosperity in the 1990s, and civil rights developments throughout these decades. Although largely approached in a chronological order, these events are intercut with the reading aloud of a number of letters Panti has written to her younger self,



Figure 2.4 Panti sending up same-sex marriage debates in *A Woman in Progress* at Project Arts Centre, 2009. Photograph by Fiona Morgan

Rory, in which she gives him nuggets of advice to help him as he grows up. This interplay structures the entire production, so that while most of Panti's delivery takes place all around the stage, she moves stage right to a lectern to read letters to Rory, dropping the animated tone to effect a much more reflective atmosphere.

The story of Panti's life begins at home in Ballinrobe, recounted as a 'typical, Irish, country, market town' with 'a couple of streets, a church, a town hall, a cattle mart, and there was great excitement when Tesco came to town.'¹⁶ While describing a happy childhood, Panti advises her searching younger self, Rory, that it will eventually not be enough, and that he will have to leave. Dismayed by the hype around the Pope's visit to Knock in 1979, Panti isolates the event as a turning point in O'Neill thinking for himself: 'There is more to life than this,' Panti tells her younger self, Rory, 'You are your own Pope.'¹⁷ She also advises the young O'Neill to be open to change and to the possibilities of self-reinvention: 'Life is plastic, malleable, and you have to shape your own.'¹⁸ And she locates this capacity for transformation in his gay identity, maintaining that his queerness will impel his better life decisions: 'Your gay necessity will push you further, but the journey is where all the fun is.'¹⁹ For Panti, you cannot 'be whatever you want to be,' which she associates with spurious American pop-psychology, but 'you can be *whoever* you want to be.'²⁰ This principle of role-playing is a central motif in Panti's evolution, including the kind of side-stepping we witness in performance, as she dips in and out of roles.

This sweeping tale of exile illuminates a wide range of international influences on Irish queer culture, and contemporary Ireland more generally. Attending art college in Dublin is the most significant first port of call. It is here that O'Neill meets a community of queer identifying people for the first time, and also begins to develop his drag persona. The first summer was spent in London, where he met performer Leigh Bowery, who died of AIDS in 1994 at the age of 33, and who had profound impact on Panti's artistic development:

In Leigh I saw all sorts of new possibilities: that life was for creating, not consuming, that convention was for wimps, and that being gay, far from being a burden or a limitation, was a gift! For the first time in my life I realized that I didn't have to be defined by Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo. I could define *myself*. And for the second time in my life, a man in an elaborate costume had made me *think*.²¹

Recalling Dublin as being 'grey and depressed' in the 1980s, O'Neill travelled to Tokyo in 1993, where he got involved in club drag performance. If Ireland is remembered as gloomy, Tokyo is a 'sensory overload.'²² Ireland makes news headlines in Japan for being 'ultra-conservative'²³ in terms of its abortion laws, but O'Neill relishes in the fact that whatever expectations

people may have of Ireland and the Irish, 'There are no expectations of a gay, foreign, drag queen in Tokyo. I was free to be whoever and whatever I wanted to be.'²⁴ In this observation, there is a sense too of queerness relieving the Irish abroad of the burden of Irishness. As Panti tells it, any weighty preconceptions or stereotypes shatter at the heels of her drag persona.²⁵

While Panti describes leaving Ireland at the end of a recession, she arrives back in the mid-1990s, just as the Celtic Tiger is beginning to radically alter the economic and cultural landscape of the country. Dublin is recalled as a city 'bursting with energy and possibilities,' and the gay community 'full of a new confidence'²⁶ in the years after decriminalisation. Panti paints a picture of how neoliberal Ireland, especially the gay community, both benefitted from and suffered under this period of economic prosperity. In particular, she claims that in the early to mid-1990s the queer scene was not especially interested in consumerism but participation, and clubbing as a form of performance art, as also recounted in *All Dolled Up*. Panti charges that during the economic boom, however, activism and creativity had been eroded, resulting in the birth of what she terms the 'New Gay,' a figure defined as 'the opposite of creativity, the opposite of passion. An inoffensive, sickly sweet candyfloss of blandness created by corporations.'²⁷ Panti admonishes a young generation of LGBTQ identifying individuals for being more interested in teen pop star Miley Ray Cyrus than equal rights and social and political change, in particular engaging debates around same-sex partnership and marriage. In a show that traces her movements around the globe, Panti ultimately claims that domesticity has immobilised and depoliticised queer lives and culture: 'Domesticity is the New Gay. That's not the gay I signed up for.'²⁸

As already stated, Panti has been a key figure in the growth of queer culture in Ireland, bridging activism, sociality and entertainment. Here, however, the performer critiques the same culture which she was instrumental in developing, including her own audience base. Hardly exempt from being sustained by capitalism herself, the rebuke served as an important attempt to repoliticise the queer community who, in Panti's mind, had lost a connection to the LGBTQ movement's political origins and goals – whether or not everyone agreed on the seemingly singular drive towards civil partnership and marriage.

Panti's outspoken criticism here drew upon and extended remarks posted on her blog earlier the same year, in which she berated people for not turning out to a LGBT Noise (a civil marriage lobby group, commonly known as Noise) rally on 14 February 2009.²⁹ In the entry entitled 'No More Mr Nice Gay' Panti complained that only about 150 people turned out to the Noise event, and that it was time for people to become more politically engaged. In a lengthy post, Panti derided the queer community for trading in political awareness for consumerism and pop culture:

But 150 people? That's pathetic [...] When Alexandra and a bunch of other people you'd never heard of a few weeks earlier, make it to the *X Factor* final, you won't leave the house and no one can get through to you because you're furiously text voting, but when you're told you're a second class citizen and your relationships aren't *real* relationships, you can't be arsed walking over to Dame St from H&M because the cute assistant has just gone to check if they have that cute jacket in your size. Where the *FUCK* is your righteous anger?³⁰

Almost certainly as a direct result of Panti's post, which was widely spread across the Internet and social media sites, when Noise staged another rally on Sunday 19 April 2009 outside the Central Bank in Dublin, over 600 people were believed to be in attendance.³¹

One week after the work in progress version of *A Woman in Progress* was staged as part of Pride's Queer Notions festival, Panti reiterated many of these sentiments again while acting as emcee for the post-parade celebrations at the Civic Offices of Dublin City Council. During this gathering, the much anticipated civil partnership legislation was once again highly topical, and this focus was performed through a mixture of banners, chants and costumes by the estimated 12,000-strong group in attendance. The numerous half-constructed tuxedos and bridal gowns on show communicated the feeling that partnership was less than marriage, while many invited speakers addressed the issue explicitly. Grand Marshal Ailbhe Smyth compared the Bill to an 'apartheid system' in her speech, adding: 'We are not to be insulted and humiliated, we want marriage for lesbians and gays, our goal is equality.'³² Representing Noise, Anna McCarthy ripped up a copy of the Civil Partnership Bill 2009 to widespread applause, while saying 'Civil partnership will officially make us second class citizens in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of society.'³³ But it was Panti's speech that proved to be the most powerful on the day, and the most provocative in the weeks that lay ahead.

Addressing those gathered, the performer acknowledged divisions in the LGBTQ community surrounding the proposed legislation, while adding that these differences needed to be respected in the interest of attaining other shared goals: 'Some think it is a stepping stone to full equality, some disagree and think full equality is the only thing that we can accept, all agree that the proposed Bill does not go far enough,' she said. Reiterating ideas from her blog, and those articulated in *A Work in Progress*, Panti urged those present to get political and stir change. Speaking to a cheering crowd, she emotively charged: 'Anyone can get married in this country except you, any soccer hooligan, any gay basher, any fascist, any murderer, any sex offender can get married, but you cannot.'³⁴

Dublin's first recognisable Pride march took place on 25 June 1983. While Pride demonstrations around the world initially emerged to commemorate the Stonewall riots, and serve as a form of activism in the present, Dublin's

first event was foremost spurred on by more immediate concerns.³⁵ On 19 March of the same year, a group passed from the city center to Fairview Park on the north side of the city, to protest against increasing levels of violence against gay men and women in the city. More specifically, the occasion was sparked off when suspended sentences of manslaughter were issued to a gang of men for the homophobia-motivated murder of gay man Declan Flynn the previous year.³⁶ Carried by this local spirit of commemoration and protest, the first parade was organised by the National Gay Federation, and it moved from St. Stephen's Green to the General Post Office on O'Connell Street.

Gay Pride events in Dublin for the rest of 1980s were much more low-key, affected by high unemployment, mass emigration and the global AIDS epidemic. The 1985 parade is remembered for featuring just 25 people walking behind a van, singing. Economic prosperity, employment, inward migration, health care and a stronger sense of social acceptance and security changed this dynamic after 1992, with Pride events growing and appearing across the country. While these passed without much controversy in the 1990s and 2000s, this was not the case with Dublin Pride in June 2009. Even though Panti's speech at the Civic Offices was received with resounding applause on the day in question by those present, and featured across national news that evening and the following day, not all reactions were supportive. Most notably, in her opinion column in *The Sunday Times*, Brenda Power responded to the event and its coverage to undermine same-sex partnership and make a case against the provision of marriage and adoptive rights to gay people. She wrote:

Marriage is a legal and religious union between a man and a woman. That's a definition, in the same way as Irish stew is a dish made with lamb, spuds and turnips. You can, of course, substitute wild boar, aubergines and pilau rice, and you will have a perfectly delightful meal that will satisfy more sophisticated palates. But it won't be Irish stew. Change the ingredients, and you change the institution. A legal, civil and religious union between a same-sex couple may well be new and wonderful, or sacrilegious and distasteful, depending on your point of view, but it's not a marriage.³⁷

What is perhaps most interesting about Power's article, I think, is that she seemed to be more affronted by the idea of Pride as a performance, than equality or the possibility of legal recognition itself. In fact, she was so outraged by the performance that she used its carnivalesque tenor as evidence of a depraved homosexual lifestyle:

Homosexuals insist that their nature is an inherent, essential reality, and not a lifestyle choice. But if we were to judge by the get-up and carry-on

of some of those in the Pride march last week, that's hard to believe. Some are definitely choosing to pursue a way of life that is quite alien to the majority of married heterosexual parents in this country, indeed deliberately and defiantly so [...] While the gay community in this country chooses to express itself in the manner of last week's Pride march, deliberately provoking reaction and comment, keen to shock and primed to take umbrage if the wrong pronoun is applied to a bloke in a dress, there's not much chance of that.³⁸

Moreover, Power seemed appalled by the appearance of Panti, undermining her speech by virtue of the fact that she was a cross-dressed performer:

It is not easy for a man to make a serious political point on the shortcomings of the new Civil Partnership Bill while he is wearing half a wedding dress and calling himself Miss Panti. Last weekend Panti was the parade host for the annual Pride rally, now officially the LGBTQ Pride Festival, with the abbreviation used to include the entire lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community.³⁹

As soon as the article was published online, it was posted on Panti's blog under the heading 'Apparently I'd Better Shut My Big Gay Trannie Mouth.'⁴⁰ Immediately, comments of support and protest were posted on these pages, and *The Sunday Times* was inundated with criticism over the article. Many people who would not necessarily attend Pride complained, while a small minority, some of whom were gay, supported Power. The overwhelming feeling, however, was that a large majority were very offended by Power's article, not only because of her politics but because she seemed to be objecting to a popular performer, and the queer community's right to perform itself. In the course of this discussion, the suggestion that Pride was the gay community's version of St. Patrick's Day appeared more than once.

Ironically enough, when Panti had spoken a week previously about the inertia of the gay community, an event like this was exactly what was needed to reinvigorate people. Writing on her blog, and speaking on *The Last Word* radio programme on Today FM as Rory O'Neill with Matt Cooper, the performer celebrated the fact that this kind of bigotry would motivate more people to take action.⁴¹ With a number of weeks to go before the next Noise rally, Panti encouraged people to take to the streets.

One week after Brenda Power's article was published, and following heated debates in the print media, radio, and across the Internet, the columnist published a follow up article entitled 'I Must Not Offend Gay People' in which she defended her position. She challenged the militancy of the reaction to her article, calling it misogynistic and undemocratic:

Within a community that expects and demands so much tolerance, there appears to be a vocal, militant and markedly misogynistic element that is reluctant to show tolerance for any opinions that don't accord precisely with its own. No democratic society can afford to indulge groups who seek to punish and silence those who dare disagree with them.⁴²

Moreover, Power seemed affronted by the whole concept of queer performance as having anything to do with political action. Elaborating her defence, she wrote:

I have no time for the Ali G school of debate [...] if you are arguing that you should have the right to be considered as a mature, responsible adult competent to provide a balanced, regular, appropriate upbringing to a stranger's vulnerable child, it's probably best, for the moment, not to do so while wearing fancy dress and a fright wig. That's neither a fact nor an opinion – it's just my advice.⁴³

What we see in Power's follow-up article, then, is an elaboration of the bias that queer identity and culture is fine as long as does not interfere with normative culture or indeed public space. There is a sense here, too, that queer performance feels far more threatening than same-sex partnership or marriage, insofar as the latter at least builds upon a pre-established and legible model of sociality. Power's article reveals not only an anxiety around queer performance, but a lack of awareness that for LGBTQ social and political movements, performance, pleasure and politics have always been intimately connected. As Benjamin Shepard notes: 'cultural resistance functions as creative support, not merely a reactive force. Chock-full of hopeful celebration, camp, and humor, many such performances inject a resilient dose of creative play into struggles against social and cultural oblivion.'⁴⁴

In the weeks that followed the initial controversy sparked off by Panti's Pride speech, a record number of people turned out to the subsequent Noise marriage rally on 9 August 2009. This time, gay and lesbian people were not the only groups encouraged to attend, but their families who were also implicated: 'Do your straight friends and family think you are equal? Now is their chance to show it!'⁴⁵ the group's campaign urged online and in publicity material.

On the afternoon of the 9 August, people from all around the country gathered on Dame Street to march to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform on St. Stephen's Green. This was the site where the first public demonstration of gay rights in Ireland took place, when on 27 June 1974, a small group organised by the newly formed Sexual Liberation Movement waved banners reading 'The Homosexuals Are Revolting' and 'Lesbian Love,' including David Norris and Jeffrey Dudgeon, who would go on to sue the Irish and UK governments respectively.⁴⁶ While Panti

stayed out of the limelight on this occasion, apart from encouraging people through her blog and weekly performances, the event featured a range of other performers and speakers including Niall Crowley (former CEO of the Equality Authority), Patricia Prendeville (former executive director of the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, or ILGA Europe), and Brendan Courtney (broadcaster and entertainer). With a conservative estimate of 5,000 people in attendance, the march attracted greater numbers and media attention than previous events of its kind.

Addressing an animated crowd outside the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Crowley claimed that the legislation was part of a 'backlash' against the equality agenda which had seen some notable gains in recent years, particularly over legislation on incitement to racial hatred. He maintained that the civil partnership legislation would do nothing for equality, because it did not value diversity but merely tolerated it. In addition to overt political commentary, personal stories were delivered to the crowd. Single people, gay couples, straight couples and parents of gay children spoke about their experiences, while live music balanced the tone between protest and cheerful celebration. Encouraged by the turn out, the organisers of the event asserted their commitment to continue the campaign for same-sex marriage.

Unlike the work in progress, the final version of *A Woman in Progress* contained a new segment devoted to the Brenda Power debacle. In the scene in question, Panti claimed that even though she had not been particularly interested in fighting for same-sex partnership or marriage on a national level, she was compelled to do so by people who wanted her to be their spokesperson. While uncomfortable with this role initially, she saw in it the opportunity to pluck people from consumerist self-interest, and to encourage them to engage in political activity. Using the opportunity to destabilise some of Power's most heinous comments on *The Last Word*, Panti satirically re-enacted a section in which Power said that a woman was more likely to choose abortion over having her child adopted by a gay couple:

You know Matt, we've a great difficulty in this country persuading young women not to have abortions but to give their children up for adoption. I have to say, I suspect, that if you were pregnant, and uncertain, and you knew that there was a possibility that your baby could go to Miss Panti and his boyfriend, you would think again about an adoption.⁴⁷

In the August 2009 edition of the gay men's lifestyle magazine *Attitude*, Brian Finnegan, editor of Dublin-based magazine *GCN* (*Gay Community News*), published an article in which he celebrated Panti's role in mobilising the queer community towards political awareness and action in the lead

up to the civil marriage marches, and the government's discussion of the partnership Bill:

The recent political outpourings of Miss Panti have galvanized the gay rights movement in Ireland like never before. Since she, and her alter-ego Rory O'Neill, began to speak about the differences between the Irish government's proposed legislation for same-sex couples and the actual right to civil marriage, a whole wave of newly politicized gay men and lesbians ranging in ages from teens to thirties have emerged on to the streets, shouting out loud for equality.⁴⁸

In Finnegan's assessment, Panti vitalised an inert political consciousness by connecting with people, especially a younger generation who had never experienced being gay while it was effectively illegal. She reinvigorated the campaign by exploiting her popular persona as a vehicle for political debate and action. Of course, no single performer is the beginning or end point of queer interests and politics in Ireland or elsewhere. However, I think that because the LGBTQ community was so divided in its thinking on civil partnership and marriage, and many people did not want to jeopardise whatever legislation the government was prepared to pass, no singular voice or coherent drive emerged during this period.

Panti's interventions at this time carved out an important space in which LGBTQ people were compelled to recognise that the debates were at least relevant to their lives, even if they had no personal interest in this mode of legal recognition. She effectively demonstrated how theatre and politics enjoy a synergetic role in queer culture, while illustrating how performance can be harnessed to ignite imagination and potentially provoke change. And these varied examples of performative activism were powerfully crystallised in *A Woman in Progress*. Indeed, since the first controversial Noise demonstration, there have been hugely significant advancements in partnership legislation in Ireland. Same-sex partnership was eventually made available under the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010; and following further campaigning, same-sex marriage was made possible by the passing of Marriage Equality referendum in 2015. And on the day of its passing, Panti was widely lauded by crowds and by the media, and elevated as a key figure in securing the vote.

While performance's role in helping achieve legal amendment is undoubtedly important, so too is its capacity to animate what philosopher Jacques Rancière refers to as scenes of 'dissensus,' or enactments that disrupt spaces that fix identity, value and hierarchy; and more fundamentally, the perceptual underpinnings of order. So when Rancière claims that '[t]he essence of politics is dissensus,'⁴⁹ he is not just locating political power within the clash of conflicting ideas, but within the 'dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we sense something is given.'⁵⁰

In the context of my discussion of Panti here, what is political is not only expressed disagreement around LGBTQ rights, but also how meaning is differently created, distributed and communicated via the varied aesthetic practices of performance.

Pantigate and the global (virtual) stage

These dissenting impulses have reverberated well beyond the provision of legislation. Another instrumental enactment by Panti took place on 1 February 2014, when the performer delivered a ten-minute speech on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre, following a production of James Plunkett's 1958 play *The Risen People*.⁵¹ The oration was the last instalment in a series of so-called 'Noble Calls' programmed by the theatre, in which invited artists, activists and public intellectuals spoke after the production about an issue of pressing concern. Plunkett's drama explores the impact on a family of the 1913 Dublin Lockout, during which approximately 20,000 people took to the streets in an industrial dispute over working conditions. Marking the centenary of the event, the production and its Noble Calls commemorated the original incident, while also encouraging reflection on the state of contemporary Ireland, and the public's aspirations for a country deeply affected by recent social, cultural and economic upheavals.⁵²

Panti's addition to the line-up came about following the appearance of O'Neill on RTÉ television, the national broadcaster, on 11 January 2014. In a live interview with host Brendan O'Connor on *The Saturday Night Show*, O'Neill was asked what life was like for gay people in contemporary Ireland. While acknowledging positive developments, O'Neill suggested that there was still substantial homophobia, and upon further questioning by O'Connor, claimed that he considered the attitudes and actions of high profile journalist John Waters (who was then a columnist for *The Irish Times*⁵³), and members of the Catholic lobby group the Iona Institute, to be homophobic. After the show aired, named and implied individuals threatened RTÉ and O'Neill with defamation action, leading the broadcaster to remove that segment of the interview from RTÉ Player the next day, and issue an apology on *The Saturday Night Show* on 25 January. In the lead up to a then hoped-for same-sex marriage referendum,⁵⁴ the initiation of legal action, and settlement by the broadcaster who paid out approximately €85,000 to the offended parties, effectively implied that homophobia could not now be called out in public.⁵⁵ National media reflected this initially by barely documenting the interview, the censored edit or legal threat, leading to the palpable sense that accusations of homophobia were now prohibited. Across social media and blogs, however, the phenomenon which became known as 'Pantigate' grew into a global story. That Panti would stimulate this kind of focus and discussion is remarkable in and of itself. But especially interesting is theatre's challenge to and circumvention of the strictures of national broadcasting, and the roles



Figure 2.5 Panti's oration on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre in 2014, with the cast of *The Risen People* behind her. Screenshot from a YouTube video made by Conor Horgan et al.

played by social media and video-sharing technologies in the circulation of performance. These digital platforms continued to play an incredibly important role in winning the Marriage Equality campaign.⁵⁶

Standing on the Abbey stage, surrounded by the cast of the current production, Panti delivered a witty and impassioned oration outlining what she and many others understood homophobia to be, and what it feels like. She opened by identifying as 'painfully middle-class,' in a bid to win her audience's sympathies, and defy their expectations of a drag queen. The speech was structured around incidents of being judged, threatened, and then judging oneself at pedestrian crossings, an experience that many people, regardless of their sexuality, could likely identify with:

Have you ever been standing at a pedestrian crossing when a car drives by and in it are a bunch of lads, and they lean out the window and they shout 'Fag!' and throw a milk carton at you? [...] Now it doesn't really hurt. It's just a wet carton and anyway they're right – I am a fag [...] But it feels oppressive.

Panti also used the opportunity to speak to O'Neill's appearance on television, explaining his comments further:

Three weeks ago I was on the television and I said that I believed that people who actively campaign for gay people to be treated less or

differently are, in my gay opinion, homophobic. Some people, people who actively campaign for gay people to be treated less under the law, took great exception at this characterisation and threatened legal action against me and RTÉ.

The performer recounted some of the effects of his comments as O'Neill, arguing that the threat of legal action, and RTÉ's response, had created a situation where the term homophobia was no longer available to gay people:

And for the last three weeks I have been denounced from the floor of parliament to newspaper columns to the seething morass of Internet commentary for 'hate speech' because I dared to use the word 'homophobia'. And a jumped-up queer like me should know that the word 'homophobia' is no longer available to gay people. Which is a spectacular and neat Orwellian trick because now it turns out that gay people are not the victims of homophobia – homophobes are.

Met with a standing ovation on the night of its delivery, the filmed speech was also posted to YouTube. Immediately it went viral, appearing on NBC News, Fox News, Channel Four and BBC News stations, to name a few. It was discussed in the pages of *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post* and *The Washington Post*. It was also the stimulus for debate in the Irish and European parliaments, and O'Neill has said he was even approached by political parties to stand for election.⁵⁷ Journalist and theatre critic Fintan O'Toole described it on Twitter as 'The most eloquent Irish speech since Daniel O'Connell was in his prime.'⁵⁸ The video has since been viewed online by almost a million people to date – far more than most other Abbey Theatre performances – and translated into over ten languages. It has been endorsed and shared by figures such as Stephen Fry, Armistead Maupin, Madonna and RuPaul. In March 2014, the Pet Shop Boys released a dance mix of the speech called 'Oppressive (The Best Gay Possible),' accompanied by visuals documenting homophobia around the globe.⁵⁹ The hashtag #TEAMPANTI proliferated across social media feeds for months, leading BeLoNG To (Ireland's national LGBT youth organisation) to design and sell TEAM PANTI t-shirts, which have since earned over €10,000 for the charity.

No doubt due to the high level of support and publicity Panti accrued during this time, the legal action threatened against O'Neill has not been pursued. Instead, in a fittingly perverse twist of fortune, Panti has since been invited to lecture or perform all around the country, and abroad to places including Australia, Canada, France and Germany, the UK and USA. In October 2014, the week before her memoir *A Woman in the Making* was published (commissioned on the back of Pantigate), Panti won the Editor's Special Award at the UK *Attitude* Awards, to honour her speech and its impact. Her national elevation continued when Taoiseach Enda Kenny

joined members of Fine Gael's LGBT group in Pantibar on 2 December 2014, even if accusations of electioneering on the party's part were hard to doubt. And a few days later, Panti was awarded a Rehab People of the Year Award, conferred by Stephen Fry at a ceremony televised by RTÉ, for 'courage and defiance in fighting for freedom of expression and breaking down barriers to equality.'⁶⁰ What began as an effort to silence one man, led to the global fame of one drag queen, and the championing of the LGBTQ politics she used the platform to advance.

The interventions by O'Neill and Panti reasserted homophobia as an experience that people continue to encounter, and one which performance might still tackle directly. The revival of the word 'homophobia' struck an uncomfortable chord in a cosmopolitan Ireland that would rather assume its erasure, and instead debate the provision of rights to gay people in terms of what is best for children, or families, or more generally the 'natural order.' (The latter response, of course, is not specific to Ireland alone.) The events also revealed how theatre and performance still have a unique part to play when television and radio recoil under the threat of legal action: Panti in the Abbey Theatre could do more than what O'Neill on RTÉ could or was allowed to do.⁶¹

While queer performance typically takes place in very localised community contexts, this occasion was striking too in that social media and video-sharing technologies were instrumental in effectively extending the stage by circulating the performance worldwide, expanding new lines of influence and impact. As Panti's speech spread globally, it intersected news of homophobic violence at the Sochi Winter Olympics that was emerging at the same time. For Irish theatre, historically so preoccupied with battles over space and place, this occasion revealed the value of a geographically-rooted performance culture, but also the possibilities engendered by the virtual reroutings and disseminations that social media technologies enable. Remarkable, too, given Ireland's relatively small queer performance scene, that Panti's oration in the Abbey Theatre would be the catalyst for conversations around the world.

Panti effects

This chapter has aimed to show how Panti has played a pivotal role in deploying performance as activism, evolving these strategies by drawing on drag, club and even seanchaí traditions to create work for more conventional theatre spaces and contexts. Such is her focus on the latter, however, that Panti frequently describes herself as an 'accidental activist.'⁶² In an interview with Caomhan Keane for the *Irish Examiner* following Pantigate, O'Neill claims: 'I feel it's my duty rather than a particular passion [...] I'm an entertainer. All this other stuff, it's my civic duty. To say I don't want to do it isn't right. I do it because it's the right thing to do.'⁶³ Panti's performance work has

significantly influenced the landscape of queer culture in Ireland, which as I continue to argue in this book, has impacted Irish theatrical culture more broadly. In Panti's practice we see queer performance at once being sociable and political, entertaining and educational, instrumental in generating resources and raising political consciousness. Such is Panti's current profile, of course, that there is always the risk of assuming that she is the embodiment of a unified queer culture and its values, or by investing her with that responsibility, thus elevating her to the untouchable status of idol or icon. The performer acknowledges this tendency and resists it. As she boldly declaims in her latest stand-up show *High Heels in Low Places* (2014), which in the main reflects on Pantigate, 'the downside of being a national treasure is that no one wants to fuck a national treasure.'⁶⁴

It seems to me that Panti's broad effect chimes with what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has described as 'reparative': queer work that does not only take the form of suspicion, negativity or critique, but works by weaving these threads into creating new sustaining relations and possibilities. Using camp as an example, Sedgwick suggests that even though camp is most often understood in the context of acts of parody, denaturalisation and demystification, its constructive doing or reparative impulse is equally important:

To view camp as, among other things, the communal, historically tense exploration of a variety of reparative practices is to do better justice to many of the defining elements of classic camp performance: the startling, juicy displays of excess erudition, for example; the passionate, often hilarious antiquarianism, the prodigal production of alternative historiographies; the 'over' – attachment to fragmentary, marginal, waste or leftover products; the rich, highly interruptive affective variety; the irrepressible fascination with ventriloquistic experimentation; the disorienting juxtapositions of present with past, and popular with high culture.⁶⁵

As I have endeavoured to track in this chapter, Panti's varied performance practices grate against widely-accepted truths, but also give us alternative ways for thinking about gender and sexuality, queer culture, Ireland and Irishness – even the Irish theatrical tradition; and she fashions and repurposes new contexts and spaces in which we might come together to do this. Around Panti, too, we see the flourishing of solo and biographical performance forms which became increasingly important within Irish theatre and performance throughout the past decade, and which will be the main concern of the next three chapters.

3

Reparative Therapies and Political Performers

‘Just as a murderer can be redeemed by the blood of Christ,
so can a homosexual.’

Iris Robinson, *The Stephen Nolan Show*

Homophobia is rampant in Northern Ireland, and it is ably encouraged by a culture of sectarianism and religious fundamentalism. According to sociologist Richard O’Leary, it is ‘both one of the most religious and the most homophobic countries in Western Europe.’¹ These embedded prejudices were dramatically thrown into relief in 2008 when Iris Robinson – then Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Member of Parliament (MP), and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Strangford – responded to the homophobia-motivated assault of local man, Stephen Scott.² On 6 June, the day after her husband Peter Robinson was elected First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Iris spoke on BBC Radio Ulster’s *The Stephen Nolan Show*. She claimed she believed homosexuality was an ‘abomination,’ and that it made her feel ‘sick’ and ‘nauseous.’³ She offered to refer homosexuals to a ‘lovely psychiatrist’ colleague (Dr Paul Miller) who was practising a form of reparative therapy that was gaining popularity at the time. While condemning the assault, Iris drew no connection between her rhetoric and that which propels or enacts violence. Shortly after making the assertion, the politician addressed a House of Commons debate on the management of sex offenders, conflating homosexuality with child abuse: ‘There can be no viler act, apart from homosexuality and sodomy, than sexually abusing innocent children,’⁴ she said. While the DUP’s condemnatory stance on homosexuality has always been public since the party was founded in 1971 by Ian Paisley, and indeed only the previous year his son Ian Paisley Junior declared in interview that he was ‘pretty repulsed by gay [sic] and lesbianism,’⁵ on this occasion heated debates, public protest, political and artistic responses followed.

This chapter seeks to explore some of these events, tracing a connection between reactions to Iris’s comments about homosexuality and the

subsequent exposure of her extra-marital affair, including accusations of accepting bribes, which combined to pressure the Assembly to crisis.⁶ Focusing on the operation of gender and sexual dynamics within a variety of public, cultural performances (on streets and across the media), I argue that an intimate link between the performative life of the male 'sodomite' and the female 'hysteric' can be observed during this time, in a manner that reveals the centrality of gender and sexual power dynamics to the maintenance of social and political stability in Northern Ireland. While the focus of the previous chapter was on a deliberately constructed queer persona in the form of drag artist Panti, here I centralise the Robinsons' media enactments of heterosexual heteronormativity, which in their hyperbolic moralising, inadvertently queer themselves. In addition, the chapter strives to examine the connection between these very public cultural performatives and their strategic treatment within more conventional theatre and performance practices and settings, especially among work ostensibly supporting LGBTQ culture. The critical approach pursued here allows us not just to read a manifest LGBTQ culture, but to observe some of the inconsistencies, hypocrisies and fictions that structure and secure normative culture more generally. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 may have brought relative peace to Northern Ireland, and at least promised (if not delivered) prosperity like that enjoyed in the Republic, but during a key change of leadership in 2008 comments about homosexuality set in motion a period of heightened unrest. The terms of cultural belonging in Northern Ireland were once again exposed to scrutiny, challenge and critique, as they played out across a variety of theatre and performance practices.

Much of the drama which immediately followed Iris's remarks took place across radio stations, news programmes, the Internet and print media. Some commentators called upon the politician to resign from her position as Chair of the Assembly's health committee, while others demanded an outright departure from political life. The Republican party Sinn Féin – the second largest group in the Assembly, supportive of gay rights across the island in recent times – accused Iris of being 'obsessed' with homosexuality, claiming her remarks were 'deeply offensive to members of the gay community and their families.'⁷ The gay community, where sectarian divisions are believed to not be so sharp as elsewhere, initially reacted most forcefully in the Belfast Pride parade that took place the week after the radio interview.⁸ Seizing the opportunity to respond to their negative representation, many participants wore masks of the outspoken politician to satirise her position and authority, while others carried banners to convey their anger. A so-called 'Iris Mobile' drove through the city, featuring a giant *papier-mâché* model of the politician's head, flanked by the title 'Wicked Witch of the North.' The tone of these demonstrations tipped between impassioned activism and melodrama, as the swell of dissenters used the opportunity to challenge the politician's comments and foster solidarity. As



Figure 3.1 The 'Iris Mobile' at Belfast Pride, 2008. Photographer unknown

Kathryn Conrad notes, since the first official event in 1991,⁹ Belfast Pride has offered an 'alternative to the performance of "identity" and "tradition" presented by the loyalist and nationalist parades.'¹⁰ Some members of the Free Presbyterian Church held at least two small protests, though the day passed quite peacefully overall. Gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, who delivered the Amnesty International Pride Lecture during the week, used the platform to make claims about the hypocrisy of unionists, given that some historians speculate that William of Orange had male lovers.¹¹ By July 2008, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that nearly 11,000 people had signed a petition calling for the then UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown to reprimand Iris over her remarks.¹² This never happened, however, and she became LGBT rights charity Stonewall's official 'Bigot of the Year' in 2008.

An outside view: DV8's *To Be Straight With You*

The year following Iris's denouncement, the once widely visible and exuberant politician gradually receded from public life. It was not until the Belfast Festival in 2009 that there was a significant, direct theatrical response to her remarks.¹³ In October of that year, London-based DV8 Physical Theatre's production of *To Be Straight With You* played for three nights at the Grand Opera House, having just been staged at Dublin Theatre Festival.¹⁴

Combining elements of documentary and dance to investigate homophobia and its consequences around the globe, the production sharpened into focus a number of open wounds and unresolved anxieties that had agitated Northern Ireland's social and political landscape throughout the previous year.

Running since 2007, by the time DV8's production opened in Belfast it had already garnered considerable critical acclaim from its international tour. Directed by Lloyd Newson, the piece had been widely received as a slick, uncompromising and deeply affecting response to homophobic violence.¹⁵ The show's call for awareness and tolerance was mainly built from 85 interviews with people living in the UK, whose lives were directly touched by issues of homosexuality and religion. Primarily structured around powerfully choreographed statements from Jamaican, Iraqi, Nigerian and South Asian immigrants who had been subjected to homophobia-motivated hate crimes, the testimonies of victims were interwoven with the justifications of their persecutors. Commentary from Peter Tatchell was also incorporated into the performance, and a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu flashed across the back wall to striking effect: 'The persecution of people because of their sexual orientation is every bit as unjust as that crime against humanity, apartheid. We must all be allowed to love with honour.'

Following Iris's comments to Stephen Nolan, Newson added to the original version of *To Be Straight With You* by including a recorded excerpt in the production. About halfway through the show, an audio clip of the following exchange was aired:

- SN: Do you think for example that homosexuality is disgusting?
IR: Absolutely.
SN: Do you think that homosexuality should be loathed?
IR: Absolutely.
SN: Do you think it is right for people to have a physical disgust towards
homosexuality?
IR: Absolutely.
SN: Does it make you nauseous?
IR: Yes.
SN: Do you think that it is something that is shamefully wicked and vile?
IR: Yes, of course it is, it's an abomination.¹⁶

The excerpt was embellished by a group of dancers wearing horses' heads trotting across the stage to the tune 'Clap Your Hands Say Yeah,' finally raising cards to spell out 'LOVE SINNERS HATE SIN.'

At its simplest, the equine interlude served to mock Iris's logic, and indeed that espoused by much Christian teaching, but especially the kind of evangelical Church of which the Robinsons are members. Simultaneously, the

dance offered a raucous physical counterpoint to the stories of brutality and oppression being shared, as was the case with many other scenes in the performance. As words and bodies entered into battle on stage, the production seemed to suggest that it is no more sensible or even possible to advocate hating the sin and loving the sinner, as Iris and her Church advises, than it is to speak hate and not claim responsibility for its enactment. It was reported that Iris, who was invited by the producers to attend the show, turned down the offer.¹⁷

While the production included a lively post-show discussion on 22 October, the short run passed without significant controversy. Nonetheless, many critics were quick to relate the piece to current conflicts, foregrounding that Northern Ireland was now ranked alongside other places notorious for their human rights abuses. Writing for the *Belfast Telegraph*, Phillip Hammond reflected:

[...] when I hear the words of Iris Robinson, MP, MLA, wife of the First Minister, thrown at me in the midst of a theatre piece which highlights vividly the discrimination, the violence, and the hatred for gays and lesbians around the world, I begin to wonder just how far we have moved in terms of liberal, civilised and intelligent thought right here at home [...] as a gay person reared and living in this society, I came away from the GOH [Grand Opera House] slightly depressed and very angry.¹⁸

In his review of the production, David Lewis lamented the image of Northern Ireland being transported across the globe at a time when many people wanted to leave a history of conflict, and a negative reputation, behind: 'I squirmed in my seat while watching, utterly ashamed to be associated with our wee country and the fact that this version of homophobia Norn Iron style is to be exported to Germany, America and Canada in the coming months.'¹⁹ For Lewis, Iris's comments only strengthened the perception that Northern Ireland was prejudiced and hostile, when what was urgently required at that time was the cultivation of a more tolerant, welcoming culture, and the projection of that image globally. This pointed to immediate concerns for the quality of local life, but also the long-term flourishing of tourism, investment and international business relations and opportunities.

Although DV8's *To Be Straight With You* did not vigorously stoke political fires upon its staging, it provided an important platform for reflecting upon unresolved tensions, instigated by a company based outside of Northern Ireland. Further, given the breadth of the show's geographical focus, not to mention the company's touring remit, it seemed particularly well-informed and placed to situate Northern Ireland alongside other cultures where human rights are systematically violated, often in the

name of religious conviction. For some time, many members of the public were bemoaning the failure of the Northern Ireland Assembly to speak out about Iris's statement, and artists' apparent slowness to intervene. In theatricalising the situation as it did, *To Be Straight With You* succeeded in reflecting back the highly performative relationship between sexuality, religion and politics in Northern Ireland, while mirroring this pattern in other pockets across the world. The production boldly suggested that perspectives on gender and sexuality supported, and were perpetuated by, other deep-seated sectarian divisions, and that these were holding back Northern Irish society from leaving its troubled past behind, and moving towards mature and ethical self-governance.

Performing Iris Robinson: between camp and hysteria

In considering this series of events, I argue that we cannot extricate the figure of Iris Robinson from the domain of performance. Indeed, any attempt to understand the cultural significance of Iris's performance of homophobia requires that attention be paid to her own public performance of gender and sexuality, as well as to its management. Moreover, I suggest that it was a certain performative approach to politics and public life that garnered Iris so much attention during her office, both to her benefit and ultimately her detriment.

Just over two months after DV8's appearance at Belfast Festival, in January 2010, Iris's party issued a statement claiming that she was retiring from public life, citing depression as the main reason. It soon transpired that Iris and/or her party were pre-empting a BBC Northern Ireland documentary set to reveal that the politician had an affair with 19-year-old family friend Kirk McCambley in 2008, during the period she publicly denounced homosexuality, acquiring him £50,000 from developers to open a café, while also receiving a £5,000 kickback for herself. Additionally, it emerged that Iris also had an affair with the young man's, by now deceased, father, Billy McCambley. On 6 January 2010, the day before the documentary was aired, Peter Robinson appeared on ITV news to confirm his wife's affair and take questions. On 11 January 2010, he held a press conference to announce that his wife and party colleague was receiving 'acute psychiatric treatment' from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Robinson added that he was standing down from his position for up to six weeks.²⁰ Within a week of the documentary's airing, Iris was effectively expelled from the DUP and she resigned from her roles in the Assembly and Westminster. Wryly observed by Anne Enright writing in the *London Review of Books (LRB)* after the story unfolded, this collision of personal and political plotlines – Iris's condemnation of homosexuality and

the unveiling of her own indiscretions – was of tragic proportions: ‘better than *Phaedra*. Or worse.’²¹

This turn of events was fascinating for many different reasons: the money, the adultery, the age difference between Iris and her lover are all the ingredients of soap opera. What interests me from a theatre and performance perspective, however, is both the rhetorical and embodied management of Iris, and how in many ways this mirrored the cultural regulation of homosexuality in which she was complicit, and which she so forcefully brought to light. The DUP’s and the Assembly’s public performance of stability during this crucial period of political succession necessitated the quick, rather convenient fashioning of Iris into a hysterical female who, uncannily like the homosexuals she spoke against, required psychiatric intervention. From a unionist perspective in particular, political supremacy depended upon both the construction and regulation of homosexuals and hysterics, and the performance of what we might see as a distinctly masculinist ethos. As one social networking sticker crudely put it, Iris was now ‘Queer in the Head’ herself, and needed to be similarly disciplined.

Prior to her downfall, Iris was widely known to be glamorous, loud and vivacious; almost the complete opposite of her controlled, steely husband. Writing in *The Guardian*, Fionola Meredith likens her to ‘a kind of Ulster Sarah Palin, and the very antithesis of the buttoned-up unionist matron.’²² Iris’s constituents knew her as the woman who zipped around in a convertible Mini Cooper, often extravagantly turned-out. She was reported to openly boast about the family’s numerous holidays and homes, including the one in which she lived where each room was designed according to a different theme; the master bedroom being Tuscan and featuring a four-poster Gothic bed.²³ In her *LRB* reflection, Enright suggests that in addition to the Troubles dominating Northern Ireland for 30 years, people were also very interested in sex and shopping, and that Iris illustrated well this concentration of seemingly contradictory passions and practices. Speaking in interview to Suzanne Breen, Iris recalled how when her husband appeared in court in Drogheda in 1986 after leading a loyalist invasion,²⁴ she decided clothes would be her ‘camouflage’: ‘I wore a big purple ski-suit one day and an emerald green tartan skirt and sweater another day to show the Republic didn’t have a monopoly on that colour. On the last day, I wore a black dress with a white blouse and bows tied in front like a judge’s gown.’²⁵ Clothes, then, were akin to political weapons for Iris, who was moving in a male-dominated world. Following on, and perhaps not so surprisingly, her femininity was often a point of attention in media coverage. Frustrated at one point with rumours that her husband beat her, Iris claimed that ‘this malicious lie was started by the [British] government in an attempt to blacken Peter’s name when he was protesting at the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It took root because I was in hospital 17 times during that period with gynecological problems.’²⁶ Whatever the truth to murmurs that Iris suffered domestic abuse, there was a sense, too, that she often foregrounded and played with her femininity

in strategic ways. The culminating effect was that her feminine frankness and flamboyance seemed to embarrass the more dour, rigid masculinity that her party performed, drawing attention to its fabrication and fallibility.

What I'm suggesting is that Iris Robinson frequently performed an excessive and often jarring blend of flirtatious femininity and stern, stiff-lipped unionism and Protestantism. This helped her build a compelling public profile, but it also threatened to expose the over-determined nature of other identity formations in Northern Ireland, including those she was expected to embody. Writing about masculinity in contemporary Irish theatre, Brian Singleton deftly explores the connection between theatrical and cultural performances of Protestantism in Northern Ireland. In a way that proves useful here, he highlights the assumed dangers of multiple role-playing within the tradition:

The power of the evangelical churches in Northern Irish society further reinforced the antipathy in the Protestant community towards the theatre. Playing someone other than yourself was frowned upon also in the collective Protestant work ethic that had profited in the industrialized North, and leisure entertainment was not considered favourably.²⁷

In his analysis of Martin McGuinness's and Ian Paisley's warm public interactions before the media following the Good Friday Agreement, Singleton discerns a 'collapse of binarism'²⁸ effected through the leaders' performance of 'reflexive' masculinity.²⁹ This was made possible, he proffers, because the British were no longer configuring the Irish Republic as an enemy.

While Singleton illuminates a necessary elasticity in the performance of masculinity by McGuinness and Paisley, I think that Iris Robinson's heightened performance of femininity took on a camp quality that often undermined, rather than creatively modulated, her complex religious and political affiliations. Not only did Iris look and behave a bit over-the-top, but her impassioned convictions sometimes peaked to resemble Susan Sontag's alignment of camp as 'failed seriousness.'³⁰ When it comes to camp, Iris is not unique among Northern Irish political figures or expressions. According to Richard Kirkland, writing in *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (2002), sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland have produced over-determined identity categories. Having no internal, ontological truth, Kirkland suggests that these identities are often displayed with a camp performance affect. Camp ostentatiously celebrates identity, but it also risks demolishing that same identity through parody, he writes:

The danger inherent in this parade of identity is the ever-present possibility that its parodic nature will ultimately take on a life of its own; that the performance of socio-sectarian affiliation will eventually become so

self-delighting that the symbols of its fetishisation will become dissociated from its ostensible cause. It is at such moments that the vulnerability of the identitarian project is revealed, as the elaborate edifice of the construction becomes top heavy with accumulated detritus.³¹

Deliberately performed, camp can humorously alert us to the shallowness of certain identity constructs. This was one of the main achievements of the satirical performances of Iris Robinson at Belfast Pride described earlier in this chapter. However, as an inadvertent or symptomatic effect of the failure to seamlessly embody an identity, camp can also dangerously sabotage an underpinning ideology or culture.

Kirkland refers to Sontag's assertion that a key aspect of camp is the pleasure it finds in the concept of 'instant character'; the sense of an individual as 'being one, very intense thing.'³² Certainly, this can be seen to apply to bombastic Iris, who frequently courted attention. But when her public persona extended to real life stories of adultery and accusations of questionable financial dealings, not to mention the publication of the intimate text messages she sent to McCambley, Iris's femininity was to seem to be at fault. As the camp ridiculousness of the events and their reporting become increasingly apparent – the song 'Mrs. Robinson' was a popular hit on radio stations, for instance, and McCambley was even approached by the gay lifestyle magazine *Attitude* to pose for a forthcoming issue – Peter Robinson intercepted mounting criticism of his leadership with the announcement that his wife was admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

A decisive performance by the First Minister at this time was a statement he delivered to media representatives on 6 January 2010, which was aired the same day on ITV and RTÉ news programmes.³³ With a crackling voice and misty eyes, flanked by a greeting card from his children, Robinson claimed he stayed with his wife following the revelations of her affair and accusations of laundering because she had attempted suicide, stating that she would 'certainly have been less unlikely to recover' had he left. In this crucial intervention, Robinson portrayed himself as a dedicated father and family man, who was both the victim of his wife's infidelity, and the hero who would rescue her. In making a promise to not let his personal life affect his public role, he also presented himself as a saviour of the Assembly during this precarious phase. The announcement of Iris's hospitalisation framed her as a hysterical female whose deviance was bound to her gender, ironically not unlike the way she had previously figured male homosexuals as essentially abhorrent. Although reports suggest that Iris did indeed receive psychiatric treatment, what primarily interests me here is the manner in which the story played out culturally and politically rather than medically. Accurately, I think, Fionola Meredith understands the perception and treatment of Iris within the context of a deep-seated misogyny in Ulster evangelicalism:

Many Ulster evangelicals have an ingrained mistrust of what they see as women's vicious, conniving, sexual ways. In this view, evangelical women must still enact the story of poor, crazy Eve: weak, in need of male supervision and control, easy prey to temptation and deficient in moral capacity.³⁴

Not discounting real mental illness then, what Iris performed culturally was a (perhaps unwitting) shift from camp dissent to a hysterical disruption of norms, which was altogether more confounding and unsettling. According to Slavoj Žižek, hysteria is essentially a questioning effect in the face of an otherwise perverse economy. The hysteric does not easily participate in or reproduce a given situation, but inadvertently interrogates and destabilises it. The hysterical scenario is about creating 'symbolic distance and reflection.'³⁵ In this sense, there is something distinctly queer about the cultural work of hysteria, as it resists and disassembles dominant symbolic fictions. As with the sodomy she spoke against, Iris's feminine excesses troubled the values of her religious and political affiliations. Both positions seriously threatened the masculinism of Ulster unionism and needed to be policed to enable smooth political succession within the Northern Ireland Assembly, and continued social and political cohesion.

Sodomy and whoredom

Any attempt to understand the mechanics and significance of this series of events requires an appreciation of the gendered dimension to performances of cultural identity in Northern Ireland. Although divides are frequently drawn between unionists and nationalists, as John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary point out, unionism and nationalism have a good deal in common: 'Unionism is a type of nationalism, a variation of British nationalism, and it has both civic and ethnic dimensions, just like its Irish nationalist counterpoint.'³⁶ However, given the historical roots of Ulster Protestantism in British colonial settlement, unionism and loyalism are deeply invested in the performance of a heavily encoded hegemonic masculinity to ensure dominance and privilege. Women, as a result, are typically sidelined. As Rachel Ward points out in *Women, Unionism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland: From 'Tea-Makers' to Political Actors* (2006):

Politically active unionist and loyalist women in Northern Ireland are rendered relatively invisible because of the predominately male public faces of unionism and loyalism. This is evident in the media images of the male-dominated Orange Order, statements of mostly male political party spokespersons, and the murals of loyalist paramilitaries that designate territorial possession and seldom depict female involvement.³⁷

While Irish nationalism and republicanism can also be seen to rely upon a particular kind of masculinist code of behaviour, the gendered values are often broader or more tempered, certainly in more recent times. One of the reasons for this may be that both nationalism and Catholicism are supported by a wide variety of gendered icons that include female figures such as Cathleen Ní Houlihan and the Virgin Mary. As Mary K. Meyer argues, 'The Catholic/nationalist/republican identity draws on masculine symbols but also makes room for more powerful feminine symbols, thus reflecting (creating?) more space for women to participate in the nationalist struggle.'³⁸ Further, the legitimation and advancement of the nationalist/republican cause in the latter part of the twentieth century was significantly influenced by its articulation as a civil rights issue, and as such, could not afford to easily discriminate against other minorities. Even so, women's bodies and ideas about femininity became battlegrounds in the distribution of political power, 'territories to be controlled, violated by, or defended against attacks by males of the other group.'³⁹

Indeed, the LGBTQ rights movement in Northern Ireland began as a civil rights movement in the late 1960s, which coincided with the Irish Women's Liberation Movement, and marked the start of the Troubles. In some ways, the public focus on religious and political conflict – in particular intolerance between a unionist/Protestant majority and a nationalist/Catholic minority – resulted in a slowness to tackle LGBTQ discrimination. However, as McKenzie A. Livingston notes, 'it brought forth a dialogue on human rights and equality protection, which attracted sexual minorities, though most were not open about their sexual orientation at the time.'⁴⁰ The ripples of Stonewall and gay liberation movements could be felt in the early 1970s, when the first gay and lesbian organisations began to appear in Northern Ireland. In 1975, the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA) formed, and its members made the first steps towards repealing laws criminalising male homosexual acts.⁴¹ It was NIGRA who brought the *Jeffrey Dudgeon v. UK* case to the European Court of Human Rights in the mid-1970s, which would eventually lead to the decriminalisation of male homosexual acts in 1982.

Despite this long history of LGBTQ activism, homosexuality occupies an especially contentious position within unionism. While nationalist groups like Sinn Féin have more recently openly supported gay rights, many unionist groups remain resistant. (Sinn Féin's President Gerry Adams, giddily sharing a stage with Panti Bliss while waiting for the Republic of Ireland's Marriage Equality results to be announced, was surely a standout image of the campaign.⁴²) Protestant, evangelical orders are most out-spoken in this regard, and the DUP the most vocal political group. Perhaps the most historically significant demonstration of this is the 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign, which was launched in 1977 by Ian Paisley – who was then the leader of the party and the Free Presbyterian Church – to prevent

the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland that was being called for by NIGRA at the time, and which had been in place in the rest of the UK since 1967.

Paisley's crusade, in which Peter Robinson was instrumental, combined both rhetorical and embodied intervention to prevent the legalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland. While he claimed that the Ulster people should have their Christian values legally protected, what was presented as a moral and legal battle was essentially a war over gender and sexual diversity, and liberalisation more generally. Ulster unionism was rooted in a masculinist code which male homosexuals, and women, were believed to contravene. As Richard O'Leary suggests, 'This is a society which has had its masculinity shaped by the macho culture of street violence and paramilitarism and threatened by de-industrialisation and the recent social progress made by women.'⁴³ For Paisley especially, these sexual associations inflected his attack on Roman Catholicism, which, with a misogynistic flourish, he referred to as 'mother of harlots and abominations of the Earth.'⁴⁴ As Enright observes, the DUP has been particularly obsessed with both sodomy and whoredom throughout its history, though members have felt more assured of the sanctity of their own women: 'The purity, in this uncracked patriarchy, of their own women, was a given; what they had to guard against were the sins of men.'⁴⁵

Even after homosexuality was legalised in Northern Ireland in 1982, many unionists, especially within the DUP, vehemently spoke out against the provision of rights to gay people. In 1983, Belfast was the scene for the National Union of Students' Lesbian and Gay Conference, held between 22–23 October at Queen's University. A contributor writing in the *NGF News* (National Gay Federation publication) recalls the event and its opposition in the following terms: '[a]bout 15 religionists turned up with placards accusing delegates of child rape but were met with vocal opposition from local students and delegates,' which included one student wearing a 'Save Sodomy from Ulster' t-shirt.⁴⁶ Although the Assembly funds some gay rights activities, and civil partnership has been available since 2005, there is still strong opposition to civil marriage legislation, mainly coming from the DUP. Suffice to say, sexuality, religion, place and politics have been highly interrelated and frequently contested sites of identitarian struggle in Northern Ireland, and these dynamics have played out across a wide range of cultural performances and contexts. So when it comes to analysing Iris Robinson within the wider context of contemporary Northern Irish culture, it would be insufficient to say she just suffered a mental breakdown. Instead, not unlike the homosexuality she spoke against, I suggest she performatively hystericised her party's laws, rules and norms, exposing biases in Northern Irish culture, and fractures in the Assembly's governance. As a result, Iris required corrective intervention – her own form of reparative therapy.

Theatrical interventions

The manner in which Iris Robinson troubled social and political stability in her performance of – and references to – gender and sexuality finds itself mirrored, if not foreshadowed, by a wave of theatre and performance that emerged in Northern Ireland in the years surrounding the Peace Process (roughly spanning the 1990s, culminating with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998). During this transformative period, a number of productions worked to subvert the toxic fixity of loyalist/unionist as well as nationalist/republican identities. A recurring strategy involved demonstrating how pivotal the regulation of gender and sexuality was to the consistent reproduction of those communities, while puncturing the fantasy of absolute political and ideological difference through the introduction of queer desire.⁴⁷ Although I'm not saying that Iris wilfully upset the status quo as such productions aimed to do artistically, in both these cultural and theatrical performance contexts, articulations of gender and sexuality are the means by which worlds are made and unmade, thus signalling something of the centrality of those dynamics to the continuation of certain identitarian and political formations. For this reason, I think it is useful to map and examine some of the theatre work that both anticipated and responded to the Robinson debacle, in order to illustrate the heightened interaction between political and cultural, as well as public and theatrical life during this time, and the role of particular expressions of gender and sexuality in interrogating sectarian divides.

Against the backdrop of Paisley's 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign, Martin Lynch's *Crack Up* offers one of earliest representations of a queer character in Northern Irish theatre. First staged by Stage 80 in Belfast's Ulster Group Theatre in 1983, it featured Nipper whose coming out at a wedding is met with violence. Although first produced at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester in 1986, Robert Glendinning's *Mumbo Jumbo* concerns the sexual discovery and political awakening of two classmates in a Protestant boys' school, prompting walkouts when it played at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, in 1987. Throughout the Troubles, numerous community theatre projects sought to intervene sectarianism and violence at a local level.⁴⁸ One such example is the nationalist Belfast Community Theatre's production of *Ecce Homo*, devised by the company in 1988. Although the production was never staged, in part because director Joe Reid felt certain scenes never worked, but also because lead performer Tony Flynn got a professional job in Dublin, its conception marked a pioneering moment in exploring sectarian divisions through the prism of homosexuality.⁴⁹

Following the Peace Process, one of the ways Tim Loane's farcical play *Caught Red Handed* (Tinderbox Theatre Company, Northern Bank Building, Belfast, 2002) implodes factional divisions is by giving the fictive Alternative Unionist Party's leader, who closely resembles Ian Paisley, a gay son. Billy

Cowan's drama also explores queer issues and Northern Ireland, typically premiering in England. Set on the eve of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, his comedy *Smilin' Through* (Birmingham Repertory Theatre and Contact, Manchester, 2005) sends up sectarian and sexual politics by featuring a young man who goes on hunger strike when his Presbyterian mother refuses to accept his homosexuality. Writing critically from within the loyalist tradition, Gary Mitchell's plays forensically dissect the macho nature of unionist politics. His male characters are repressed and violent; his female characters denigrated or absent as in *In a Little World of Our Own* (Peacock Theatre, 1997).

Speaking from a nationalist, Catholic tradition, one of the great achievements of Frank McGuinness's dramaturgy has been to collapse oppositional politics by representing queer characters within different historical moments. By doing so in plays such as *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985, mainly set during WWI), *Carthaginians* (1988, which deals with Bloody Sunday) and *Dolly West's Kitchen* (1999, set during WWII), for example, his artistry allows for alternative experiences and histories to be represented. Collectively, these plays and their productions work to expose the relationship between gender, sexuality, religion, place and politics in Northern Ireland, revealing how the architecture of sectarianism is frequently supported by a hotbed of repressed desires, misogynistic and homophobic ideologies, images and performances. Similar organisational patterns were exhibited in the public protests and enactments sparked off by the Iris Robinson saga. Interestingly, however, local theatre and performance initiatives emerged as important artistic vehicles in processing these events and their impact. Unlike the theatre that preceded the Robinson incident, I see this work as notably pointed and direct, and characterised by a strong, reparative affect and ethic.⁵⁰

In November 2009, as part of Belfast's Outburst Queer Arts Festival, Australian playwright Lachlan Philpott's *Bison* (2000) played at the Brian Friel Theatre at Queen's University. This was produced by Theatreofpluck, Northern Ireland's first publicly-funded gay theatre company, and directed by lecturer in Drama at Queen's, Alyson Campbell. The production focused on the subject of internalised homophobia among gay men, and was expressly staged by Campbell to create public dialogue around homosexuality, and to correct the university's silence on the Robinson matter. The staging was complemented by a conference held by Drama Studies at Queen's between 14–15 November, titled 'Here's to You Mrs Robinson: Performing Queer Subjectivities,' that included a number of performers, activists and scholars from Northern Ireland, the Republic and abroad - including myself. Directed by Des Kennedy, a rehearsed reading of Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* (2000) also played at Black Box as part of the same festival.

The following August, Belfast-based Prime Cut Productions toured Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* (2000), a play about the homophobic killing of a young

man. Directed by Sophie Motley, the company explicitly cited the Robinson incident in the production's programme note, and Northern Ireland's reputation for being intensely homophobic. In November of the same year, The Company Youth Theatre staged Jonathan Harvey's coming out play *Beautiful Thing* (1993) at Rainbow Factory Studio, also as part of Outburst. Suffice to say, at this time there was a surge in theatre and performance events that directly addressed issues surrounding homosexuality and homophobia.

However, one of the most direct and penetrating dramatic responses came in the form of Colin Bell's *God's Country*, produced by Tinderbox Theatre Company at the Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast, September-October 2010, for which it won a Queen's Audience Award at Belfast Festival.⁵¹ The play focuses on the fictional politician Patricia Williamson (Laura Hughes), who is preparing to address a Cystic Fibrosis charity ball about the murder of Declan Campbell, a young gay man in her constituency. Gillian Davenport (Claire Lamont), her advisor, exhorts conveying empathy in order to reassure moderate voters that the party has learned from the Robinson upheaval. However, Williamson struggles to temper her thoughts, and publicly condemns homosexuality, linking Campbell's death to the 'moral subsidence' of the nation, and the betrayal of 'the laws of God.'

Meanwhile, Williamson's domestic life is in disarray. As her husband James (Ivan Little) convalesces from a stroke, her son Jamie (Paul Mallon) arrives home from London to introduce his partner, Jonathan (Patrick Buchanan). Jamie reveals to his parents the truth behind the death of his brother Glenn years before. Although the details have been electively vague up until now, Jamie explains how he died when trying to escape his mother after she attacked them both for dressing up like girls, while repeatedly singing a line from pop star Sinitta's song 'So Macho': 'I don't want no seven stone weakling nor a boy who thinks he's a girl.' The play opens inside Jamie's nightmare, in which he finds himself in a rowing boat on Strangford Lough, which is in the Robinsons' constituency. The voice of his brother, who perishes on the Lough, whispers to him: 'You're not a boy who thinks he's a girl and I'm not a weakling. We'll go and we'll not come back.' Jamie struggles to save his brother, and is ultimately unable to do so.⁵²

In Bell's play, the Robinson controversy, and indeed unionist anxieties around gender and sexuality, are broached within the context of weak masculinity. At the charity ball, Williamson asserts the importance of moral strength, and claims that she will 'fight to ensure that the word of God remains shining.' Challenges to this macho value system come in the form of the politician's incapacitated husband and revelations about her sons. When Williamson caught her boys dressing up as children, Jamie recalls her face 'fizzing with fury,' spitting 'Nobody loves boys who think they're girls.' Feeling 'shame like acid,' the boys planned an escape that ended in tragedy. Still, Williamson is unable to empathise fully with the Campbell family, because she sees Declan as a 'pervert,' unlike her son. Although Williamson

has internalised a rigid cultural ethic, the men in her family are no longer conventionally strong or masculine.

The power of this play emanates from its consideration of religious and political violence through the prism of gender and sexuality, most importantly by centralising a fear of weakness at the heart of unionism and its public expression. Rather than locating homophobia on the doorstep of individuals like Williamson – and by extension, we might say Iris Robinson – the play situates it within a larger power structure. The politician admits knowing the ‘truth’ about her son as a child, but felt crippled by the accusations that his sexuality was her fault. Ultimately, she emerges as someone who is also unaccommodated by her religious and political community. Indeed, in different ways, every member of the Williamson family is a victim of culturally restrictive codes of gender and sexuality, which are determined by an over-arching sense of disciplined, potent, hegemonic masculinity. This, too, seems to be a lesson of the Iris Robinson debacle.

Absolution and beyond

The Iris Robinson saga threw into focus not only the delicate relationship between public and private life in Northern Ireland, but the role of gender and sexual performativity in the regulation of sectarianism, social and political power, and the terms of cultural belonging. In the events that followed Iris’s comments about homosexuality in 2008, the male sodomite and female hysteric emerged as unwelcome within the Northern Ireland being imagined by Ulster unionism at the time, provoking widespread discord and unrest. As we have seen in this chapter, homosexuality and forms of femininity demonstrated a shared capacity to derail Peter Robinson’s new leadership of the Assembly, and even peace itself. In particular, the LGBTQ community and its allies exerted their demand for recognition, even when the ruling political order revealed contrary values and intentions. In the end it was Iris Robinson, embodying extreme conflicting ideas of femininity and unionism, who was scapegoated as psychiatrically unwell in order to restore peace. These political performatives played out in public, cultural performance and were addressed more purposefully by a surge of more conventional theatre initiatives too.

It was not until 18 May 2011 that the formal disciplining of Iris seemed to have been completed. For the first time since withdrawing from public life, a diminutive Robinson, wearing a green dress, attended a dinner being held by President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, at Dublin Castle to mark Queen Elizabeth II’s first state visit to the Republic. In a moment that seemed more like a public apology for unruliness than anything else, Robinson bowed to her Queen, next to Ireland’s President – two paragons of female poise, respectability and authority – in front of the world’s media. While this very public performance seemed to indicate absolution for Iris at the highest

level, that the dubious position of the sodomite in Northern Ireland had to be resolved by publicly shaming a woman, compelling her to personally bear the burden of the homophobia she exposed within her own party and culture, is hardly a benevolent triumph for queer cultural politics. Here, hate and blame seem to be merely redistributed rather than resolved.

Indeed, in December 2014, many of these feelings and debates surfaced again when a DUP Assembly member initiated a campaign to introduce a so-called 'conscience clause' into equality law, which would allow people to discriminate against LGBTQ people if they did so on religious grounds. This proposed Bill was advanced following the threat of legal action by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland against the Antrim Christian business Ashers Baking Company, after it refused to make a cake that carried a pro-gay marriage slogan. However, on 19 May 2015, District Judge Isobel Brownlie ruled that Ashers unlawfully discriminated on the grounds of sexual orientation. And with the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum in the Republic less than a week later, Northern Ireland looks set to come under increased pressure to make same-sex marriage available there too.⁵³

But as this chapter has endeavoured to show in its discussion of the Robinsons, sometimes the most aggressive assertions of heteronormativity are among the most vulnerable. Hyperbolic identities buckle under pressure, and can even take on camp qualities that unwittingly undo themselves. If queerness has the potential to define a culture's outer limit of acceptability, then it remains symbolically central, and so retains the capacity to unsettle and disrupt. An optimistic reading of the events discussed here might see in the exposition of the centrality of certain gender and sexual dynamics to culture and governance in Northern Ireland, the seeds of their reconfiguration. Particularly encouraged by the spirit of the targeted productions discussed here, we might also hope that theatre and performance will continue to play both proactive and responsive roles in staging and disarticulating prejudice and injustice; rehearsing less violent and more accommodating futures for post-Peace Process Northern Ireland.

4

Transforming Shame and Testimonial Performance

'I wank, therefore I slam.'

Neil Watkins, *The Year of Magical Wanking*

'I'm facing the shame, separating mine from theirs.'

Veronica Dyas, *In My Bed*

Histories of sexuality and shame go hand in hand in Irish culture. Throughout the twentieth century, bolstered by Catholic teaching, sexuality was largely seen as something to be culturally disciplined and repressed, with no real purpose outside of the reproductive ambitions of a heterosexual marriage. In the 1990s and 2000s, the devastating impact of this policing was steadily exposed, by seemingly endless revelations of the sexual, physical and emotional abuse of children in industrial schools and reformatories, and girls and women in Magdalene laundries. The Ryan (2009), Murphy (2009) and McAleese (2013) reports formally recognised just how corrupt so many state-sanctioned institutions of moral management actually were, drawing on harrowing personal testimony. But in a classic Foucauldian way, attempts to patrol sexuality throughout the twentieth century actually resulted in the proliferation of sexual discourses, sites and subjects, such that sex and sexuality became the defining issues or problems for Irish culture to grapple with. Early to mid-twentieth-century literature may have led the artistic investigation of this phenomenon (notably in the literature of James Joyce, John McGahern, Edna O'Brien and Kate O'Brien, for example), but in the past decade a number of theatre and performance makers have reckoned with the legacy of sexual shaming and abuse from personal perspectives, including Mannix Flynn's theatre and installation work (e.g. *James X*, 2002/3) and Amanda Coogan's performance art (e.g. *Yellow*, 2008). More recently still, some artists have directly engaged with specific institutions and published reports in their work, including the Abbey Theatre's production of Mary Raftery's *No Escape* (2010), Brokentaklers' *The Blue Boy* (2011), and ANU Productions' *Laundry* (2011).

In chapter 2 we saw how Panti's solo performance work has been instrumental in creating space for queer voices to speak and be heard in contemporary Ireland. In confessing ostensibly real experiences in public, at the intersection of Panti's and O'Neill's identities, the work has been particularly important in shaping and advancing the evolution of biographical performance practice. A nuanced version of this form, which I focus on in this chapter, includes what is often termed testimonial performance, in which artists bear witness to typically difficult or traumatic personal situations, and ask the audience to do the same. The word 'testimony' is rooted in the latin *testis*, meaning witness. *Testis* derives from an old Indo-European word for the number three, which likely lent itself to describe a witness as a third party. The more familiar association, perhaps, is that *testis* also describes male genitalia, an appropriation understood by some to come from the belief that ancient Romans were required to hold their testicles when giving evidence in court. Infused with different meanings over time, in the word testimony we find witnessing and sexuality to be intimately connected.

This chapter considers testimonial performance which bridges recent documentary theatre's concern with institutional abuse, and Panti's focus on queer biography. Examining performances by queer artists Neil Watkins and Veronica Dyas, we encounter the impact that Ireland's shaming approach to sexuality had on the artists' individual lives. While organised religion hovers in the background as a contributing factor to the negative experiences both performers share, in different ways each artist also affirms the need for more inclusive forms of spirituality and social solidarity than prevailing models have to offer. In this, they comply with what Deirdre Heddon describes as a common feature of performance art since the 1970s, in which '[t]he translation of personal – or autobiographical – material into performance' was connected to 'consciousness raising activities,' and led by the motto 'the personal is political.'¹ In the last chapter's discussion of fundamentalist religion and reparative therapy in Northern Ireland, we saw how sexual shame was politically mobilised to promote (self-)policing and punishment. In this chapter, shame's damaging effects come under scrutiny, and their expression become the occasion for rethinking personal history, national culture and theatrical form.

Abuse, addiction and healing in performances by Neil Watkins

Neil Watkins is a highly distinctive voice in contemporary Irish theatre, best known for his equally dark and comic writing and performance, often dealing with sexual subject matters. Watkins' work is nationally unrivalled in its uncompromising investigation of the darker shades of gay male sexuality in particular, exploring issues including S&M, drug use, HIV/AIDS, religion and

spirituality. Moreover, Watkins has been especially invested in considering both the immuring and transformational effects of shame, so timely and relevant for a culture that has been fashioned by its heat. Watkins' work testifies to experiences that are challenging for many people to reckon with or even to understand, not least of all given the sanitised thrust of mainstream gay culture.

Watkins' idiom is indebted to performance art as well as club drag histories, and it is teeming with gay subcultural imagery and references. As a particularly skilled storyteller, however, there is also something recognisably Irish about Watkins' approach. This interplay between subversion and tradition is apparent in his ribald drag character Heidi Konnt, who in many ways forms the basis of his solo performance work. Konnt won the Alternative Miss Ireland competition in 2005, and made appearances in the solo theatre shows *A Cure for Homosexuality* (2005), *The Heidi Konnt XXXmas Story* (2005) and *The Dark Room* (2008), produced by his Gentle Giant Theatre Company. Although claiming Bavarian heritage, typically dressed in PVC, and singing songs about fisting, Konnt also tells wild stories that grate against the Church, satirise the government and encourage audiences not to feel ashamed about their bodies and desires.

The issues and strategies broached in these early works receive their most thorough treatment in *The Year of Magical Wanking* (2011), the production of which at Project Arts Centre (Space Upstairs) in September I continue to focus on in this chapter.² Produced by THISISPOPBABY, and directed by Phillip McMahon, the title offers a wry nod to Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), directed for theatre by David Hare in 2007, starring Vanessa Redgrave. Unlike Didion, Watkins does not mourn a spouse, but describes coming to terms with his queer sexuality, his abuse as a child, current dependencies on porn and cannabis, and HIV infection. Crucially, the piece focuses on the profound impact of meeting a shamanistic healer, who helped him to better understand his self-destructive behaviours. Watkins also uses the performance to analyse his earlier theatre work too, so that the show involves him reflecting on a good deal of his personal and professional life to date. In this chapter I consider how Watkins abandons his many alter egos in this performance, in the service of sharing ostensibly real personal experiences. But I also follow Watkins' lead to look back on earlier work too, in order to assess how it exposes the more troubling, painful and hard to assimilate strands of queer experience. As I hope to show in the following pages, Watkins' practice jars with an increasingly commercialised, homonormative gay culture; which, as Lisa Duggan defines it, essentially 'upholds and sustains' heteronormative institutions and values.³

Watkins' play text takes the form of a monologue, chiefly composed of rhyming couplets. The published version is structured around twelve months, from November through to the end of October, the year of the play's title, in which Watkins underwent the changes we learn about.



Figure 4.1 Neil Watkins in *The Year of Magical Wanking* at Project Arts Centre, 2011. Photograph by Fiona Morgan

The hour-long performance begins with Watkins walking on stage into a blacked-out theatre. In Ciarán O'Melia's design, strips of lighting that cross the set floor gradually flicker on. Dressed in a grey suit, Watkins looks just like the man himself, with the exception of daubs of make-up on each cheek, which subtly intimate some kind of warrior persona or tribal affiliation. Cormac O'Brien suggests that Watkins' appearance blends corporate executive, fighter and athlete, in a way that communicates how 'he has fought his way through life, in constant battle with conservative family and society.'⁴ The effect also suggests that while this may well be a performance about Neil Watkins, it is also a theatrically enhanced one, showcasing different roles and identities.

Feet anchored on stage, facing forward, Watkins begins with an appeal to a 'Great Spirit' to hear his speech and to bless all those gathered in the theatre.⁵ The opening address has the quality of an incantation, in which the performer asks this spirit to give him courage to share his story:

Tonight, Great Spirit. Shine. Infuse my heart
With courage so sublime that I may say
The details of my story and my way.⁶

This mode of address also frames the performance as a kind of spiritual ritual. The audience, in turn, are positioned as co-conspirators in Watkins' rite. We are not here just to see theatre, but to participate in a ceremony of sorts. The religious connotations deepen with Watkins telling us that he is 33-years-old, the age when Christ was crucified. He compares himself to Christ numerous times throughout the piece, so much so that the performance we witness, and especially the year it charts, construct Watkins as a martyr or sacrificial figure to be purged and born again. This comparison is also foregrounded in some of the publicity material for the show, which features a longhaired Watkins wearing a red crown of thorns on his head.

As Watkins tells it, the main stimulus for his transformation is a meeting he had with the Native American healer Sweet Medicine Horse Nation the previous year. He visited her in Wicklow, where she was staying, in a bid to cure the migraines he had been experiencing for over a decade. These led him to smoke cannabis heavily in order to numb the pain. Sensing Watkins' queer identity, the healer tells him 'You are a woman's spirit, and a man's,' which she claims makes him an evolved soul on his last worldly incarnation. The healer also absolves Watkins of the shame he expresses to her, with:

You are Winkta, God's servant, and you can
Be who you are, be kinky or a queer.⁷

This encounter with the healer prompts Watkins to share the many other difficulties he had been grappling with at the time, including dealing with

HIV, a porn and masturbation addiction, and engaging in all sorts of sexual practices he deems to have been unfulfilling and damaging:

On alcohol, on ketamene, on coke.
 On poppers, on my own, on with the porn.
 On headshop herbal smoke, I am reborn.
 On x-tube I'm abused and used by ghosts.⁸

He is drawn to abusive sexual situations too, and is gripped by rape fantasies, repeatedly longing to be assaulted by a figure he refers to as 'Freddy Krueger,' after the horror movie icon:

You're Freddy. Rape my soul. And fuck my head.
 I've always wanted to get fucked by fear.⁹

The healer tells Watkins that he only has abuse fantasies because he himself has experienced abuse. As Watkins recounts it, this conversation precipitates his coming to terms with being abused as a child, something that he had never faced up to properly before.

Watkins speaks briskly and earnestly in performance, sometimes breaking away from his position at the front of the stage to mark the end of a sequence, or going for a quick walk about the set before commencing a new line of thinking. On occasion he sits on a chair, dropping the tone to create a more powerful sense of intimacy, and draw us in closer. While at the outset of the performance Watkins dwells on explicitly sexual matters, these eventually give way to him discussing other difficulties in his life too. As a person and a performer, Watkins came of age during Ireland's previous decade of prosperity. Now he finds himself not only physically and psychologically unwell, but in a very precarious financial situation too. He lives in his grandparents' social housing flat in inner-city Dublin, which he illicitly took over after his grandfather passed away:

Grandparents dead. Me in their bed... a queer.
 My granny died when I was diagnosed.
 So I could cry and nobody would know
 That my tears were for her and my new fear.¹⁰

The rent is cheap, and the apartment is located right in the centre of Dublin city, close to Open Heart House, the HIV/AIDS support centre where he gets meals. However, Watkins still claims to feel unsettled. The area is rough, and the local children shout homophobic abuse at him when he passes. When Dublin City Council finds out that Watkins has been living illegally in his grandfather's flat for two years, he is forced to leave, and he worries about becoming homeless and alone. The fear of homelessness is something which

many Irish people felt during the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger economy, first for being priced out of rental and purchasing markets, then as result of being unable to meet mortgage repayments. Although there has been no Irish study on the subject, all international research indicates that LGBT people are at a much higher risk of becoming homeless, as well as ending up in state care.¹¹ While Watkins delivers his performance with verve, the story he tells is of profound psychological, physical and economic fragility.

As indicated earlier in the chapter, Watkins uses *The Year of Magical Wanking* to reflect on some of his previous theatre work too, so that the production unfolds as both a personal and a professional history. For instance, he makes reference to touring trips to New York and Tampere with the production *Silver Stars*, which I discuss further in the next chapter. When talking about his mother's negative reaction to his coming out, he claims 'she didn't love me more than God,' a direct reference to another mother's response to her son's homosexuality as relayed in *Silver Stars*. Most interesting among all these reflections, however, is Watkins' scrutiny of the drag act for which he is best known, Heidi Konnt.

About halfway through the performance, Konnt's voice suddenly interrupts the flow of Watkins's broader self-analysis. This results in an antagonistic, split conversation between the two voices:

Heidi: Oh Neil, you're such a wanker.
Watkins: Shut up Konnt.
Heidi: Just call me Heidi. Neil you never call.
Watkins: Because you're not my friend.
Heidi: Ah Neil. Zat all?
Zat all the thanks you give me?
Watkins: I'll be blunt.
Miss Konnt, you're my addiction. You're insane.¹²

While Watkins has explained in interview with Brian Singleton that Konnt was originally conceived as an antidote to a perceived insincerity on the gay scene,¹³ the act which was so instrumental in his development as a queer performer is here revealed to be the embodiment of his self-loathing and insecurity. Further amplifying the Christian allegory, it is Konnt who brings doubt and temptation into Watkins' road to redemption.

A similar internal conflict between Watkins and Konnt characterised the performer's earlier *The Dark Room*, first staged as part of Dublin Fringe Festival. This was a cabaret-style show in which Watkins appeared in various guises and personas singing songs about S&M, religion and politics. Konnt makes an appearance too, and talks about being HIV-positive, though it is not entirely clear if Watkins or Konnt is speaking. Discussing his viewing of the production, Singleton suggests that the visibility of Watkins' beard as Konnt blurred the line between the actor and the

person: 'Queering himself through Heidi, or Heidi through himself [...] Watkins contested the normativity of hetero and homo alike, slipping from one gender to the other, in the same way as one of his characters slipped in and out of sexualities [...].'¹⁴ The same might be said of the earlier *A Cure for Homosexuality*, first performed in Centre Stage Café, Dublin. Here Watkins plays bar owner, Paddy Doyle, who becomes the slave of an older man living in Berlin. He returns from the USA proclaiming that God can turn gays straight, before escaping from a HIV concentration camp in the USA as a drag performer, also hinted to be Konnt.¹⁵ But *The Year of Magical Wanking* seems to resolve some of these ambiguities, with Watkins unequivocally claiming to be HIV-positive himself. Konnt emerges as the hyperbolic embodiment of the shame, self-loathing and fear he felt around this diagnosis.

Konnt intercepts Watkins' story to warn him that, having been abused, he will likely become a 'kiddy fiddler' himself,¹⁶ and that he will never find the intimacy he is looking for.¹⁷ This leads to a fight between the person and the act for which he is best known. It is part of an ongoing battle which has already led Watkins to attempt suicide, an experience he recalls in the following terms:

Because I could not stop Miss Konnt
I had to stop us both.
I tied a rope around our throat
And eased the pain with dope.

My dearest darling Mother,
How I wish I had been good.
I cannot go on troubling you.
Your lot's more than enough.¹⁸

Attending therapy, Watkins comes around to thinking that his self-abuse as an adult – via drugs, sex and chronic masturbation – is a repetition of the abuse he himself has experienced as a child. And he connects his own sexuality, violation and sense of shame to the experiences of other Irish children who were abused over the years:

I don't know many people who were not
Abused. That's just being Irish. Forty shades
Of shame. We all submit when men invade.
Rape is the culture that we know.¹⁹

The reference to men invading here suggests that the Irish have a dysfunctional relationship with sexuality because of our colonial history. Broaching

similar territory, when David Norris addressed the Seanad in June 1993, following the passage of the homosexual law reform Bill in the Dáil, he celebrated 'wiping the lingering shame of British imperial statute from the record of Irish law.'²⁰ With this contribution Norris seemed to try and absolve Irish gay people of shame, and confer it on imperialist Britain, from whose laws it emerged. In this rhetorical formulation, LGBTQ people – but especially gay men – were held up as ideal embodiments of an independent, post-national and cosmopolitan Ireland. But Watkins' performance suggests that the national trauma runs deep, rendering him unable to take on the mantle of the model citizen-subject.

In an interview with *GCN (Gay Community News)* magazine published in 2011, Watkins claims that *The Year of Magical Wanking* was fundamentally about his own internalised homophobia: 'I choose to share a very graphic account of how my own internalized homophobia and how my own self-loathing around being gay had manifested in destructive behaviour.'²¹ He also suggests that gay culture is complicit in perpetuating this phenomenon, maintaining that 'collective gay history has shaped current behavior and mental health.'²² In an *Irish Times* interview conducted the same year, Watkins expanded on his understanding of the relationship between sexuality, shame and troubled mental health in the following terms:

Because we've all been conditioned for years and years to be ashamed of certain aspects, ashamed of emotion, ashamed of feeling, an inability to sit with feelings. And I think that's what leads people to seek a distraction, whether that's alcoholism, workaholism, food disorders, gambling, whatever. All of those things – looking for a high, looking for a hit – it all has to do with an inability to sit with feelings. We do all know it.²³

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has suggested that queer performativity is an effect of shame – that shame is a kind of performance blushing the borders between public and private, inside and outside: 'Performance interlines shame as more than just its result or a way of warding it off, though importantly it is those things. Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and – performativity.'²⁴ Watkins' performance powerfully reveals the role of shame in constructing queer subjectivity, but also performance's capacity to renegotiate and restructure that relationship – including via the one he offers. For even though the experience of shame has been ostensibly crippling for Watkins in the past, *The Year of Magical Wanking* is fundamentally propelled by it. Ultimately, and somewhat paradoxically, the immuring effects of sexual shame activate Watkins' performance, informing and animating the insights to which he testifies.²⁵

As I suggested at the outset of this chapter, Watkins' work can be difficult for audiences to experience, on account of its frank, graphic nature. The

gay shame he highlights speaks both to and against audiences, not least of all assimilationist strands of contemporary gay culture that struggle to incorporate voices like Watkins' into their wholesome, family-friendly futures. As David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub claim, gay shame can create a powerful site of belonging for those who feel disenfranchised by the relentless drive on gay pride:

Gay Shame offers a refuge, a site of solidarity and belonging. It willingly embraces those queers whose identities or social markings make them feel out of place in gay pride's official ceremonies: people with the 'wrong' bodies, sadomasochists, sex workers, drag queens, butch dykes, people of color, boy-lovers, bisexuals, immigrants, the poor, the disabled. These are the queers that mainstream gay pride is not always proud of, who don't lend themselves easily to the propagandistic publicity of gay pride or to its identity-affirming functions.²⁶

While *The Year of Magical Wanking* is very much about Watkins coming to terms with his acute sense of shame and its negative effects, it also validates the experience of shame among audiences. For those who identify with its sting, Watkins' shame offers a powerful, if counterintuitive, site of affirmation and belonging.

The last full scene of the play, October, breaks out of the consistently rhyming structure as Watkins reveals how his year of turmoil reached resolution. A key moment was meeting Amma, the Hindu spiritual guru, better known as the 'hugging saint,' on account of her travels around the world administering hugs. 'When Amma hugged me, I felt this huge sense of... relief. I felt a very deep feeling of... unconditional love,'²⁷ Watkins confesses. Subsequent to this meeting, the performer recalls a vision he had of Amma, in which she appeared at the end of his bed one night, her face turning into Jesus and back again. Watkins recounts how both Jesus and Amma asked him: 'Neil, do you still want to die?... because you can come with us now.' When he declines the offer, we are told they order him: 'Then tell your story.'²⁸

Whatever anyone thinks about the plausibility of such a vision, or indeed of Amma's beneficence, Watkins deploys the scenario as a useful device to find common ground between the disparate religious and spiritual worlds he addresses and feels torn between. We might say that what is queer about Watkins' performance is not just its sexual content or confessional thrust, but also its overarching assertion that queer people have a right to access a sustaining spiritual life, even if many organised religions make this almost impossible – in particular the Catholic Church in Ireland, which he targets most directly. Communicating this in performance, Watkins also suggests that theatre has a powerful role to play in this process, not just for LGBTQ people, but for the many left feeling disenfranchised by the Church and

state. As he claims in interview to a journalist in Perth during the Australian run of the production: ‘The message of the show really is “tell your story” and that’s from a therapeutic point of view. To be able to tell your own story is to somehow come into a peace with yourself.’ The main purpose of this production, he continues, is ‘so I can just have open honest conversations with people, so we can quit the bullshit.’²⁹

Watkins outlines further thoughts on religion and spirituality in his GCN interview. While critical of institutional religion’s role in perpetuating discrimination, as well as its abuse of children, Watkins claims that gay people often feel they have no right to a spiritual life at all, and that this is something he wishes to rectify. He also maintains that performing in *Silver Stars* was instrumental in coming round to this way thinking: ‘*Silver Stars* put into my mind, for the first time since I was a kid, that I was as worthy [of] a spiritual life as anybody else.’³⁰ And in *The Year of Magical Wanking*, the power of theatre, religious ritual and healing are all interwoven forces in Watkins’ queer biographical performance.

The first time I saw *The Year of Magical Wanking* was the opening night of the work in progress at Project Arts Centre, 10 December 2010. About fifteen minutes after commencing, the show was interrupted by a power cut affecting all of Dublin city centre. The packed theatre spilled into a snowy winter night, and as people began to stream their separate ways, Watkins emerged from the theatre and leapt onto one of the bollards outside the building. Now lit only by iPhones, he performed some more of the show, as well as a piece of verse and song normally delivered by another alter ego, Fachtna McGinty, who was initially conceived to host THISISPOPBABY’s Werk at the Abbey Theatre, which I will discuss further in chapter 7.

Fachtna is remarkably like the Watkins who performs in *The Year of Magical Wanking*, but he plays to a more self-consciously Irish idiom, invoking and queerly subverting the figure of the stage Irishman. His speech is punctuated with ‘skiddle di is,’ and when he plays in theatres at least, he is often accompanied by a *Riverdance* soundtrack. Like Watkins, Fachtna addresses porn addiction, devastating debt, isolation and abuse in his performances: ‘the feeling I’m feeling is that you feel alone. Your coddle has lost its granny grey touch, for the children of Éire have been touched too much,’³¹ being one of his more memorably crushing lines.

On the night in question, Fachtna’s spontaneous outdoor performance inadvertently amplified the themes of *The Year of Magical Wanking*, especially retrospectively, once I had the chance to see the performance in its entirety. But the incident was also a striking reminder of just how hard to contain Watkins’ work is: here filling the theatre, then the streets; at other times bars, clubs and festival tents; and across numerous production runs. Given his interest in experimenting with form and generating new audiences, *The Year of Magical Wanking* has been Watkins’ last solo production to date. Most of his performance work since has involved singing in bars,

cafés and festival venues with his band Buffalo Woman, named after the sacred female figure at the centre of the Native American Lakḥóta religion, harking back to the healer featured in *The Year of Magical Wanking*. Watkins remains interested in exploring performance's spiritual and healing potential, while operating outside conventional theatre and performance spaces and aesthetics, which he believes struggle to serve his newly desired form and audience base.

Veronica Dyas's ghostly dis/possessions

Veronica Dyas is an artist who makes both performance and installation. While earlier works included the installation *YOU*, presented at Dublin Fringe Festival in 2009, Dyas came to wider attention for her solo performance *In My Bed* (made in collaboration with Niamh Burke-Kennedy), which was first staged as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2011.³² Since 2012, Dyas has been developing an ongoing, processual project called *Here & Now* that explores materialism and homelessness in contemporary Ireland, and related issues around psychological and spiritual dispossession.

Although Dyas has created a relatively small body of work to date, she is already an important voice in representing female, lesbian and working-class urban experience. In particular, *In My Bed* offers a powerful account of the exclusion and erasure of women in Ireland, and the persistent violence enacted on their bodies. In its original site-specific staging, *In My Bed* also drew attention to hidden and disused spaces in inner-city Dublin, shedding light on the people who used to live and work there, and the changing functions of these sites over time. Moreover, Dyas attempts to fashion from the personal experiences, micro-histories and locations she uncovers, an ethic of social solidarity and civic responsibility. In Dyas's work, queerness overspills the subjective to question the organisation of the wider body politic, and to stimulate thinking and action around what form support might take.

In My Bed was created to take place in an old, abandoned shed in Temple Bar, Dublin, as it did for its first production. Here is the former site of the Norman typewriting factory which made carbon paper, in which Dyas's now deceased grandmother – also called Veronica – started working 50 years previously. It was a job she loved, though she had to give it up in the early 1970s when she got married, returning years later with encouragement from management, despite her husband's wishes to the contrary.³³ While at face value *In My Bed* is essentially a solo performance in which 34-year-old Dyas shares intimate personal experiences about herself and her family over the course of an hour, the production is haunted so palpably by the ghost of her grandmother that the piece feels like a choreographed exchange between the two women, in the company of the small number of spectators gathered.



Figure 4.2 Veronica Dyas lying on her grandmother's bed, under a blanket of projected photographs, as part of the Temple Bar production of *In My Bed*, 2011. Photograph by Niamh Burke-Kennedy

Writing about autobiographical performance, Heddon suggests that we often describe life experiences not just in temporal terms, but also spatially. Given this tendency, Heddon maintains 'we might think of autobiography as cartography of self,'³⁴ in which experience is mapped out spatially. 'Autotopographic' is the term she coins to describe performances which are particularly sensitive to the relationship between autobiography and place.³⁵ In autotopographic performance the shape and surface of personal histories and environments are intertwined. Heddon's concept offers a useful way for thinking about Dyas's performance too, in which self and site are intricately interwoven, always in productive conversation with each other. We come to know about Dyas's life by walking into the spaces she knows, which are most likely unknown or inaccessible to us; we come to know these spaces and the city via Dyas's story and body.

The central physical feature of *In My Bed* is Dyas's maternal grandmother's bed, on which the performer sits. It serves as a reminder of the times they shared a bed together when Dyas was a child, which we hear more about in the course of the performance. Here it is covered with layers of blankets, and the audience is invited to sit around it on three sides. Between the audience and the bed numerous objects are placed: photographs, diaries, teddies and fruit. At various stages throughout the performance, Dyas asks us to pass these to her, to assist her storytelling. The objects, and the ways they are

engaged, enhance the performance's spectral quality, insofar as they mediate the past and present, the dead and the living.

Other revenants haunt the space too: for instance, within an Irish theatrical context, it is hard to see a performance about a woman telling stories from her bed and not think of Mommo in Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire* (1985), in which this is the defining action. But Dyas is not embittered, frantic or tragic like Mommo; nor is she purely symbolic. Indeed, her self-presentation queerly subverts this image, and the limiting ideas about women and femininity which it reflects and perpetuates. Tracey Emin's installation *My Bed* (1998) might be a better comparison still, though Dyas's production is less graphic and more interactive than Emin's artwork. In this storytelling and its staging, lines between private and public, domestic and industrial, self and other intermingle and blur. 'The body remembers,' Dyas repeats like a mantra throughout the performance, inviting us to see hers as a locus for the circulation of entangled personal and social, artistic and cultural histories.

While Watkins begins his performance by framing himself as a Christ-like figure, Dyas starts her address aligning herself not only with her grandmother Veronica, but with the biblical figure said to have wiped the face of Christ while carrying the cross. It is also said that the imprint of Christ's face was left in the cloth she used, and this detail evocatively resonates in the site of a carbon paper factory, where one Veronica transmits the image of another in a different way, via performance: 'I am Veronica. I was called after me Granny, Granny Vera, and Veronica wiped the face of Our Lord, the two of them I was called after.' Veronica – not the sacrificial martyr who saves us through her own suffering, but the one who lends support from the margins, and mediates images of suffering through time. Dyas's narrative differs to Watkins' in other ways too: while Watkins essentially offers a story of redemption, Dyas begins by insisting that her performance will not be conclusive in this way: 'This is not a resolution. It's an action. An action towards something, I don't know what yet, though I'm beginning to understand what that might be.' If Watkins' performance figures him as a Christ-like figure whose redemption we gather to learn about, and effectively complete by witnessing it in theatre, Dyas's performance implicates herself in a long genealogy of women who work in the wings of history, primarily in order to draw attention to the suffering of others.

Dyas's life story is very much interwoven with that of her grandmother's, so that the performer's personal testimonies and reflections are regularly intercut with descriptions of her grandmother. The performer's two defining personal experiences shared here include coming out to a friend as a teenager, and later being raped by a male acquaintance. Recounting the latter experience, Dyas claims that she did not deal with the attack at the time, and that this led to what she describes as 'sexual paralysis.' Her body shut down to physical intimacy and sexual contact, and she suppressed her

lesbian identity for years. Looking back, Dyas thinks that shutting down was how her body remembered the assault, even if she was not consciously aware of this at the time: 'Each time it hurts less. I'm not exactly sure what I'm doing through. The pain eases over time not in any single act. I'm alone. I have to be. The body remembers, remembers and contracts. I do nothing. I take no action. I'm building the armour, I'm covering myself in it.'

It is only when Dyas eventually admits to being raped that she manages to create 'a chink in the armour' she has erected around herself. A key turning point is a relationship she develops with another woman, who she meets just before moving to London to study. Dyas suggests that this woman 'could've been the woman of my life, after me Granny,' in a remark that sees her interest in her grandmother strain towards something more erotic still.

Dyas's traumatic memories are counterpoised by comforting ones involving her grandmother. It was while sleeping with her as a child that the performer became intrigued by the woman's body, and the bed we see forms an important link to those experiences. As Dyas tells us from her perched position, 'She fascinates me, always.' One description captures this attraction particularly well:

She swings her legs over the side of the bed, well, not swings so much as negotiates them over, she's a mountain of a woman, she's huge. She has the biggest arms I've ever seen, or ever will, and they are strong, big strong arms she has. And she introduces me to her breasts, both named, a large part of her identity. To Dolly and Dora, mammoth ladies lingering on the edge of the end of her bed.

Dyas's grandmother's body is here mapped out like a vast, undulating landscape. The woman is huge, solid and safe, and her form completely captures Dyas's imagination. There is a cinematic quality to this rendering, too, that recalls the short film *Undressing My Mother* (2004), in which filmmaker Ken Wardrop presses his mother's body to comparable scrutiny. The sense of attachment to her grandmother is what helps Dyas come to terms with her sexuality, and overcome the trauma of her attack. By reviving her grandmother's body in performance, and her tenderness for it, Dyas manages to revive her own.

While Dyas remembers her grandmother as an old woman, she relies on the memories of her family to know her in her younger years. These versions of the woman all knit together, constructing her into a larger than life figure that transcends time:

It's before I was born, so I can only tell you what they told me, I can only tell you what they told me.

They told me that she bought him a pair of gloves for Christmas before they were married, and that when he told her he stood her up because his Mother died in Limerick and he had to go home, she said 'That's no excuse!'

They told me that she modelled herself on Elizabeth Taylor, that he was a sort of Richard Burton figure.

Dyas's grandmother was a performer of a different sort, someone who flirted with Hollywood glamour in her adoration of Elizabeth Taylor. Taylor was her idol, and she modelled her look on the star. Hollywood offered the chance of entertaining a fantasy life outside of the home, and societal expectations of a wife and mother in Ireland in the 1950s. The performer's discussion of her grandmother's interest in Taylor insinuates additional transcultural lineages of female attraction and attachment, enabled by an emerging celebrity culture. So while Dyas's personal life forms the substance of this performance, it is surrounded and sustained by many female influences, and webs of female fascination and inspiration.

As I suggested at the outset of this section, Dyas's story does not build towards a neat resolution. Nor does it offer us a consoling lesbian romance that might undo the confusion and pain to which the performer attests. However, as with Watkins, Dyas's performance concludes with a reference to a spiritual presence which helps get her life back on track. While Amma is the female figure described by Watkins as instrumental in his recovery, Dyas just refers to the woman who inspired her healing as 'The Beautiful,' recounted in the following terms:

I don't understand, can't find the category, I'm callin' her The Beautiful, 'til I can figure it out. She is beautiful. She's something to do with my soul, something to do with The Universe, a message, a shock, she's like shock treatment, this is hurting my brain. I'm a grown woman.

Part real, part transcendental; this figure helps Dyas dismantle the wall she claims to have built around herself. And even though their relationship does not continue for long, Dyas finds that she has begun to deal with her past and build a future as a result of their meeting.

Central to Dyas's performance, too, is an attempt to resolve her experience of shame. It is shame that literally immobilises her in the form of sexual paralysis, and it is shame that initially prevents her from exploring her lesbian sexuality. Dyas also claims to feel the burden of other people's shame: her attacker's; and via her grandmother, the cultural climate that would treat women with such aggressive disregard. As she phrases it: 'I'm facing the shame, separating mine from theirs, taking responsibility, letting theirs go, that was never mine. I'm staying open even when my whole

body contracts. It isn't easy, but nobody said it would be.' Sally R. Munt describes shame as a 'very sticky emotion,' one that can 'leave a residue to which other emotions are easily attached.'³⁶ Munt also suggests that because shame is infective and travels quickly, it can be both subjective and cultural, currently felt and historically mediated: 'Histories of violent domination and occupation are found frequently lurking behind these dynamics of shame, and the shame, although directly aimed at the minoritised group, also implicates the bestower.'³⁷ Dyas's performance traces and illuminates these bonds of shame, ultimately positing them as the basis for shared understanding, social support and political action. As Munt also argues, at certain points in shame's lifespan, it is not entirely negative, but rather can be constructive and transformative: 'When you no longer care that you are being shamed, particularly when horizontal bonds formed through communities of shame can be transmuted into collective desires to claim a political presence and a legitimate self, that new sense of identity can forge ahead and gain rights and protection.'³⁸

Writing about female-authored performance in contemporary Irish theatre, Oonagh Murphy suggests that *In My Bed* speaks to the biopolitical oppression of female bodies typical of Irish culture. This is manifest in Dyas's words, her body and the general *mise-en-scène* of old objects – 'the spoils of her sexually tarnished youth and her repressed queerness.'³⁹ But Murphy also argues that Dyas's work represents an example of biopolitical resistance that unites and speaks for generations of Irish women: 'In placing her life in direct parallel with that of her grandmother, Dyas creates a place where Irish female bodies converse with one another. Both bodies become important archives for the ways in which Irish society has been hostile to women.'⁴⁰ Murphy's point is well made, but I also think the performance is charged with a queer erotics that achieve additional effects too. Dyas's relationship to her deceased grandmother – her continued fascination with her body, her summoning in performance, the deliberate intersecting of their life stories – speaks to the model of queer temporal erotics elaborated by Elizabeth Freeman. Freeman argues that queer studies and culture tend to be torn between a traumatic, lost past and a performative thrust towards the future. Resisting this polarisation in favour of advocating greater porosity, Freeman advances that we might 'reimagine "queer" as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference' or 'the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities (or even nonrelationality).'⁴¹

In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Freeman analyses the temporal dimension to queerness. She maintains that queerness is temporal as well as sexual, and that history can be embodied and erotic. 'Erotohistoriography' is the term Freeman deploys to describe the process by which we come to understand the past through the body. It is a way of tracing 'how queer relations complexly exceed the present,' she suggests.⁴² Against pain and loss, erotohistoriography 'posit[s] the value of surprise,

of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfillments from elsewhere, other times.¹⁴³ A key feature of Freeman's argument is the idea that time binds in two particular ways: in the connections of the present, and in those intimacies that exceed conventional spatial and temporal parameters: 'not only attachments in the here and now but also those forged across both spatial and temporal barriers.'¹⁴⁴ As she elaborates, 'even as it suggests connectivity, "binds" also names a certain fixity in time, a state of being timebound, belated, incompletely developed, left behind, or not there yet, going nowhere.'¹⁴⁵

Time binds too in Dyas's performance. The loving memories of her grandmother, interwoven with traumatic sexual testimony, suggest that time fixes in troubling as well as vitalising ways, making for a disorienting experience of the world – for Dyas, and for the audience. The site, the bed, the photographs, the objects passed around all underscore the sense of an enduring link between past and present. In encouraging us to touch her possessions, Dyas also wants us to imprint ourselves in the historical chain that stretches back to her grandmother. The performer eroticises the space with her yearning personal desire, queerly stirring its history back to life, and enlists the audience to support her – to see history through her eyes, to feel it via her body. This affirmative force resembles what Freeman celebrates as the value of temporal drag, or 'the pull of the past on the present.'¹⁴⁶ As Freeman conceives of it, temporal drag describes the excess of historical signification, in which ghosts from the past tug on the present, only to better illuminate our personal lives and cultural contexts. Crucially, then, these encounters with times gone by can be reparative rather than just regressive. They can generate enriching connections to the past, rather than just imagine it as something to be escaped from, as is common of so many queer life histories.¹⁴⁷ The broader reparative potential of this kind of art work was something *Irish Times* critic Peter Crawley detected in his review of *In My Bed*, in which he described it as a therapeutic intervention for Irish society: 'If this is therapy, it's not for her, but for a society, for history, for you.'¹⁴⁸

Dyas's project is in many ways about her own life. But she also mobilises her body as an erotohistoriographical artifact that finds sustenance in her past so that we might too. This can be seen as a queer-feminist project that allows for elided female experiences and bodies to be recuperated and heard, seen, smelt, touched, validated and learnt from. Mike Pearson and Cliff McLucas describe site-specific performance as 'the coexistence and overlay of two basic sets of architectures: those of the extant building or [...] the *host*, that which is *at site* – and those of the constructed scenography and performance, or the *ghost*, that which is temporarily brought *to site*.'¹⁴⁹ The site of performance, they argue, can become 'an active component in the creation of performative meaning, rather than a neutral space of exposition or scenic backdrop for dramatic action.'¹⁵⁰ This host/ghost model seems very much at work in Dyas's performance, in which the old shed

becomes a vibrant portal for communing with her dead grandmother. And the ghosts of all the women who worked in the factory cannot help but creep in too – all those who once occupied the space before it was rendered derelict, built over and around. The performance also allows us to reflect on the changes that have taken place in Dublin city over the years, linking Dyas's grandmother's life and her own: the industry, labour patterns, urban planning and building usage that erase history while shaping our access to and within the city.

Where Dyas's work resonates for me as being queer in a particularly nuanced way is the connection she insinuates between forms of personal and material dispossession. Lying on a bed in an old shed, surrounded by memorabilia, reflecting on old hurts and loves, one might even say that this is Dyas's primary preoccupation. The concern is elaborated further in the stories she tells. For instance, Dyas claims that when she felt vulnerable she sought out stability in purchasing property. While Watkins lived illegally in his deceased grandparents' flat, when Dyas's grandmother died, she bought her old house, 'To feel safe, to feel secure, to close the door and shut it all out.' But Dyas also discovers that material ownership does not help either. She cannot make the repayments on the house, and so it is repossessed during the recession. Her focus turns to spiritual fortification: 'I don't need walls, the security is in my soul.'

The Irish preoccupation with property, and Dyas's own experience of repossession, is dealt with more explicitly in *Here & Now*. When Dyas lost her house she gave away her possessions to friends and family. She walked the Camino de Santiago, keeping diaries, collecting photographs and gathering new friends. She returned to create *Here & Now* to reflect on this personal experience, but also to highlight the problem of homelessness in Ireland, which deteriorated during the recession. The first installation of the project produced at Project Arts Centre (Space Upstairs) in 2014 included the personal objects also featured in *In My Bed*, and a mock pilgrim trail for visitors to walk along. Now infamous conversations recorded within Anglo Irish Bank, which reveal how top executives lied to the government about the true extent of losses at the institution, also play on a loop, juxtaposed against televised video footage of Dyas leaving her home.⁵¹

In featuring material from *In My Bed*, *Here & Now* performs another temporal twist, and asks us to look back on Dyas's earlier work too. With this project, the artist's personal losses are explicitly interwoven into opportunities for building wider social support networks. As Dyas states in interview to Sophie Gorman: 'One of the big things I learnt was to ask for help and it was something I had never really done before, though there were many times I should have, pride is a demon. And it was an extraordinary feeling to realise that there was a community of friends and family who would help hold me up, support me through this.'⁵² When I saw *Here & Now* in May 2014, this ethic of care was manifest in Dyas holding meditation time

in the theatre, allowing members of the public to join as they wished, or wander through the installation, or talk to her over a cup of tea. According to Dyas, many shared their own financial difficulties too, and this was very much the demographic she hoped to reach: 'But I have no regrets about all that's happened to me. My main regrets are for the other 146,563 people in this situation of mortgage arrears who are not living their lives in a way they would have chosen, the stress this puts on everyone, the prospect of becoming homeless.'⁵³

Judith Butler has devoted some of her more recent writings to addressing forms of social precarity and material dispossession in neoliberal culture. In conversation with Athena Athanasiou, Butler describes dispossession as 'a term that marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings.'⁵⁴ To be a subject, for Butler, requires at some level to be psychically possessed by the other. But often we do not realise this until we experience yearning, loss, or grief; when we find ourselves 'undone by each other [...] in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel.'⁵⁵ What the experience of dispossession conveys is that we are already dispossessed. As Butler phrases it: 'Our interdependency establishes our vulnerability to social forms of deprivation.'⁵⁶ In other words, the experience of dispossession exposes how relational subjectivity is; that the self is not 'the ground and cause of its own experience.'⁵⁷

In so many ways, *In My Bed* is also a performance about personal loss and coming undone: sexually, psychologically, emotionally and financially. But this unravelling becomes the occasion for seeking out new modes of relational support - some current and historical, some social and cultural. Following Butler's line of thinking, we might suggest that the queerness of Dyas's work radiates beyond the experience of subjective sexual desire, to a refusal to see loss as the occasion of a petrifying end. Instead it prompts her to move through time and space, seeking out alternative ways of living in the world. There is nothing romantic about the abject experience of dispossession, and there is no knowing where Dyas's long-term project will go. She may be able to sustain it, but who will sustain those that sustain her? Nonetheless, her small but compelling body of work communicates an urgency to imagine new ways for thinking about and doing intimacy, support and participation.

The performer as testament, the spectator as witness

In this chapter we have seen how performances by Neil Watkins and Veronica Dyas have served as testimonies of queer sexuality, highlighting struggles with shame and abuse, and related forms of social precarity including housing, health, employment and personal relationships. In different ways, the performers deploy deeply personal experiences to expose wider

histories of oppression and violence. Both artists lay bare their bodies, stories and possessions to public scrutiny, and invoke a numinous syntax and atmosphere to reflect upon present-day material realities. The work can also be seen to have a potent effect on spectators too: indeed, both performers attest to being approached by audience members wishing to share similar stories. Enacted in performance, private shame becomes a stimulus for public reflection. Both performers also wrestle with theatrical form, undoing it and recasting it to accommodate their purposes. This is the case for Watkins, who now focuses on performing with his band Buffalo Woman, and Dyas, whose work has become more conceptual and installation focused, responsive to her life without possessions.

As I indicated at the outset of this chapter, testimonial theatre imagines that witnessing occurs in at least two domains: a performer (or performers) who bears witness to an event or to a series of events, and an audience implicated in bearing witness to those experiences. This might happen via discussion or debate immediately following live performances (such as among artists and audiences), or by actively ushering these stories into the wider cultural sphere. But witnessing might also happen via artistic collaborations between individuals and groups who do not identify as professional artists, in order to make theatre and performance about their experiences, as I examine in the next chapter.

5

Intergenerational Moves and Documentary Theatre

‘And of course anyone who is Irish knows that if you don’t speak about it and you ignore it, it will go away.’

Michael Byrne speaking Brendan Fay’s words,
Silver Stars

‘We are here, we were here all along.’

Alice Kinsella, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*

‘I will never again have to pretend I’m something I’m not.
The horror is over.’

Cathy, *The Big Deal*

In solo performances by Neil Watkins and Veronica Dyas, we saw how shame had an isolating effect, with the power to separate the artists from their families and communities. This chapter extends this discussion of exclusion and reality-based performance, by focusing on work in which a comparatively young generation of theatre and performance makers represent older subjects who cannot represent themselves: Seán Millar and Brokentalkers’ *Silver Stars* (2008), a song-cycle created from the real-life experiences of gay men who left Ireland since the 1950s;¹ Amy Conroy’s *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* (2010), a mock-documentary in which an older lesbian couple tell the story of their lives together, produced by Conroy’s company HotForTheatre; and Una McKeivitt’s *The Big Deal* (2011), based on two transgender women’s experiences of sex reassignment surgery, produced by her company Una McKeivitt Productions. These works collaboratively construct versions of reality, variously drawing on text, photographs, video recordings, interviews and oral history. Here I trace the discrete experiences which these productions respond to and chart, and the theatrical methods deployed to do so, exploring how they function as works of intergenerational dialogue and recovery that strive to recuperate otherwise lost queer histories into cultural consciousness.

I'm concerned here with performances that fall into the broad category described by Carol Martin as 'theatre of the real.' Martin uses this term to include any kind of theatre that claims 'a relationship to reality,' or can be seen to 'recycle reality,' such as 'documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre-of-fact, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, restored village performances, war and battle reenactments, and autobiographical theatre.'² While this definition could also be taken to encompass the performances examined in the last chapter too, the fact that the lives we encounter here can only be represented by other performers – that is, by younger artists representing a past or older generation – makes the work especially important as a form of cultural surrogacy. As Joseph Roach has claimed, theatre as surrogate works to 'produce memory' by filling 'the vacancy created by the absence of an original.'³ Roach's definition of the process of surrogation suggests that theatre is always implicated in other people, events, times and places, and charged with the responsibility that this interconnection brings. However, in the case of documentary theatre, wilful surrogation carries an even more pressing ethical responsibility, not least of all when the culture staging the representation might also be accused of having made self-representation difficult or impossible.

This ethos is something which collaborative ensembles tend to be especially attuned to, and invested in managing. As Duška Radosavljević observes, the main criterion of collaborative ensemble work 'is that the subjects represented here are speaking not only on behalf of themselves as individuals, but on behalf of an artistic entity which depends upon the contribution of other – often long-term – collaborators as constituent parts of that entity.'⁴ Viewed in this context, the collective exchange of ideas, sharing of voices and the making of work often aspires to represent a non-hierarchical artistic, social and political system of values – even if only ideally so. While the production companies I examine here do not consider themselves to be ongoing ensembles as such, the work under focus was ostensibly made collaboratively by a number of contributing partners, including the source subjects, performers, writers, directors and other members of the creative teams. This can be taken as an additional sign of an effort to resist repeating the kind of authority complicit in reproducing the violence that, as we will see, is highlighted and interrogated across the different productions.

Exile and remembrance in *Silver Stars*

Silver Stars was originally conceived by Seán Millar in the mid-2000s as a project which would respond to Ireland's ageing generation of older gay men, in particular its activists and those who had emigrated in the past. In an interview I conducted with Millar, he recalls a pivotal moment of inspiration when, walking past The George gay bar on South Great George's Street,

Dublin, he spotted an advert for an event featuring two young men with bare, muscled physiques. It struck him how, if he were an older gay man, he would feel alienated by this culture.⁵ Around the same time, Millar heard of older gay men entering nursing homes, where they were effectively compelled to go back into the closet again. Both of these fates – young gay men flaunting their bodies in clubs, and older gay men being forced back into the closet in care homes – were particularly perverse outcomes for a civil rights movement originally invested in issues of equality and social justice, Millar felt. This was a result not just of the commercialisation of gay culture, which glorified certain forms of sexual embodiment over others, but of the broader invisibility of Ireland's socialist roots and activist traditions. As Millar observes of the time, so much of Ireland's grassroots political histories were imperceptible: 'Looking at footage of old Ireland, I never saw people like my parents who were working-class socialists and feminists. A whole section of the population had been written out of history, all these amazing brave men who faced down their own community, true heroes,'⁶ he says. For Millar, Ireland had developed a skewed sense of values, and this was something he wanted to rectify with *Silver Stars*. As he puts it: 'The unfairness of it all killed me and, as Johnny Ramone said, all you need is three chords and a grudge.'⁷

In 2006, Millar began interviewing older Irish gay men from Dublin and New York about their lives. These edited interviews were developed into a full production by Brokentalkers, directed by Feidlim Cannon and Gary Keegan, and *Silver Stars* had its first outing at Bealtaine Festival, which promotes creativity in older age, in Project Arts Centre (Cube) in 2008. One year later, September-October 2009, it was staged as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, at Project Arts Centre (Cube), which informs most of my reflections here. Since its formation in 2001, Brokentalkers has made documentary theatre exploring a range of highly topical social and political issues. For example, *The Blue Boy* (2011) focuses on children incarcerated and abused in the care of the Catholic Church in Ireland, while *Have I No Mouth* (2012) investigates one family's grieving process in the wake of personal loss, including the failures of state medical care. Shared concerns with institutional violence and cultural amnesia made the pairing of Brokentalkers with Millar for *Silver Stars* seem especially appropriate.

The production presents Millar's gathered and edited material through a combination of songs, music, spoken word, subtly choreographed movement and screened snippets of documentary footage (*The Love That Dare Not Speak its Name* by Bill Hughes and *From Silence to Speech* by Brendan Fay). It is performed by a cast of ten mainly non-professional gay Irish actors in plain clothes (some with shirts and ties, others more casual still), ranging in age from thirties to sixties. For the most part they stand still, in a tiered formation, directly addressing the audience, until individuals step away from the group to present a new story or idea. The words of much older, exiled gay interviewees or their families are shared among the ensemble, and given

new life with harmony, repetition and gesture. While different performers take the lead on introducing a new account, the name of the person whose experience is being related is projected onto the video screen, and the cast turn in unison to watch and listen. Some of the testimonies are interwoven to form what seems like the same narrative. With a choral surge these experiences are polyphonically shared by the group, and sung into something altogether more sublime. As Charlotte McIvor observes, 'These bursts of unison singing occur in every song, implying that these stories are not just personal but communally shared. In other words, the notion of a "solo" is continuously undercut.'⁸ The non-professional status of the actors gives the production an unpolished, brittle quality that makes the stories seem especially familiar and accessible, while also impressing a sense that these gay men are speaking on behalf of men just like them, who can no longer speak for themselves. In this sense, everyone becomes a kind of everyman. But in moments of heartrending song and music, they feel anything but ordinary. Earnestly performing the rare testimony of older gay men in public, the actors in *Silver Stars* become exceptional themselves.

Stories of familial rejection, religious condemnation, exile, diasporic segregation and AIDS are set against a richly melancholic score, which is played



Figure 5.1 Some of the cast of *Silver Stars* at Project Arts Centre, 2009. Back row, left to right: Michael Byrne and Neil Watkins. Middle row, left to right: Pat Morris, Erich Keller and Pdraig Cullen. Front row, left to right: Michael Foley, Patrick Fagan, Liam Burke and Martin McCann. Photograph by Jill O'Malley

by three cellos and an electric guitar on stage. At one point the performers step out of their choral formation to slow dance, and at another the face of a central narrator (Neil Watkins, the only professional actor in the production, whose work I discussed in chapter 4) is projected onto a large screen via a live video feed. He wears cartoonish glasses that magnify his eyes, and which work to quirkily emphasise the fact that he is speaking on behalf of someone else.

An early story comes from an anonymous man who, in his youth, left Ireland for Europe to explore his sexuality. He meets two men on a train who turn out to be Benedictine monks, who take him back to their monastery where he finds comfort in the community they have built around themselves. While the subject describes ignoring his sexuality in Ireland – amplified by the interjection of Brendan Fay’s testimony, ‘anyone who is Irish knows that if you don’t speak about it and you ignore it, it will go away’– in the heart of this religious community he discovered himself surrounded by priests who led openly gay lives. As he says, he found them ‘living a life you could recommend to anyone.’ As performer Erich Keller recounts, this was a life with ‘no fear, no shame, no bullshit.’ After the performer delivers these words, they are briskly diced up among the choir, and sung into a collective affirmation of what life should be like: ‘no fear, no shame, no bullshit.’

The theme of spirituality recurs in an audio clip featuring gay priest and theologian John McNeill, who takes issue with the Catholic Church’s official teaching on homosexuality as being ‘objectively disordered.’⁹ But he also suggests that the Catholic Church’s position has forced gay people to forge new forms and expressions of spirituality: ‘So we had to develop a new spirituality, what I call the Church of the Holy Spirit, where we discern in our very experiences what God is saying to us. And I think this spirituality, which is coming from the gay community is the spirituality of the future.’ Despite critiques of institutionalised religion, there is something very prayerful about this performance, so invested in marking and honouring lives which were condemned and reviled, forced into hiding by their families, communities and places of origin.

A central story provided by Fay recalls the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization’s (ILGO) first march in the Manhattan St. Patrick’s Day Parade, run by the Ancient Order of Hibernians, in 1991. This was the first and last time that the group was allowed to march in the parade, and there has since been a ban on the organisation being represented, having been successfully argued through the courts that being homosexual is antithetical to being Irish. At the original event, those who perceived homosexuality to be at odds with Irishness – in particular restrictive Irish-American ideals – attacked gay and lesbian marchers as they participated in the proceedings.

Writing about the 1991 parade, Sally R. Munt and Katherine O’Donnell argue that queerness is often deemed incompatible with national identity, given that the latter ‘depends on an account of oneness that requires

by default compulsory heterosexuality.¹⁰ In the case of the New York parade, the highly romantic and indeed ethnic diasporic desire to belong to a place and a people that effectively do not exist is so strong as to obliterate the existence of the gays and lesbians who quite obviously already do belong. This resembles Svetlana Boym's suggestion that diasporic communities, reliant on nostalgia to structure their intimacies, practice 'a survivalist aesthetics of estrangement and longing.'¹¹ As Munt and O'Donnell put it, '[t]he Ireland being celebrated in the parades is a historical sentiment, a nation made static in the minds of its ethnic descendants by exile and loss.'¹² In chapter 2, we saw how Alternative Miss Ireland took place on the weekend before St. Patrick's Day, as a subtle subversion of staid notions of traditional Ireland. But even Ireland's St. Patrick's Day festivals and parades have become increasingly knowing and diverse, including generous representation by members of the LGBTQ community. In policing the nostalgic performance of an Irishness which does not exist – except as and in nostalgia – the New York parade works to keep alive a phantasmatic ethnicity, while spectacularly erasing the lived experience of many Irish people.

While the 1991 parade day will be remembered by many for epitomising the incompatibility of queerness and Irish national identity, Fay recalls it as being profoundly reassuring and sustaining, describing it as his 'Coming Out Day.' For many of the Irish gays who came together on that occasion, it was their first time marching together as a group. As Fay's voice expresses it in the production: 'For the first time, it was like they were identifying their human selves and saying "we're Irish, we're gay, we're lesbian and we're out and no longer ashamed and living with fear of who we are." It was an extraordinary moment.' Instrumental in Fay having such a positive experience was meeting ACT UP spokesman Robert Rygor on the day. Although Rygor was ill from an AIDS-related illness at time, Fay remembers him buzzing with an energy which he claims has carried him ever since. In a projected video interview, Rygor's parents recall how they initially struggled to deal with their son's sexuality. It was not until he told them he was dying of AIDS that they were able to rebuild their relationship.

Although New York's Mayor at the time, David Dinkins, compared the events of the 1991 parade to civil rights marches in Alabama on account of the gauntlet of bigotry and violence members of the ILGO faced, Fay describes it as ultimately being a day of 'incredible joy,' an instruction on 'how to live, how to be yourself, how not to be frightened. How to be strong, how to have joy in the midst of all of this.' Despite opposition, it was a key moment of belonging for the many queer members of the Irish diaspora in New York. As Munt and O'Donnell argue, for queer people the attendance at a Pride parade or march is a rite of passage, where many people feel, for the first time, that they belong to the temporary 'queer nation' in which they find themselves.¹³

In 2014, it was announced the ban on LGBTQ identified groups would be lifted, however only OUT@NBCUniversal was permitted to march in 2015 – a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender support group based within the company that broadcasts the parade. While this has been greeted as a positive sign by some, many continue to see it as a purely commercial gesture benefitting the parade’s broadcaster, provoking further outrage and activism. In a letter to Mayor Bill de Blasio and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, activists from groups such as Irish Queers insisted that OUT@NBCUniversal are only included because they are sponsors, and that the ‘Irish LGBTQ community is still excluded from the parade. The “lifting of the ban” is a sham.’ Dismayed that a corporate group was selected rather than a grassroots organisation, the letter demanded that OUT@NBCUniversal ‘withdraw from the parade until Irish LGBTQ groups are part of the parade.’¹⁴ In a robust assertion that many people in the Republic of Ireland held different ideas about Irishness and LGBTQ people, in 2014 Panti Bliss attended the ‘St. Pat’s for All’ parade in Queens as Grand Marshal, joined by de Blasio, who boycotted the Manhattan event.

While this particularly fraught situation forms an important backdrop to *Silver Stars*, and for this reason I have felt it was worth reflecting on at some length, relationships among individuals are mostly warmly evoked in the production. The emotional centrepiece is informed by Aidan Cribbin’s account, in which he describes fleeing from Ireland for Paris, where his distressed mother visited him. Trying to come to terms with her son’s sexuality, which was at odds with her religious beliefs, she ends up telling him she loves him even more than God:

My God has told me
Your life is a sin [...]
But I love you more than God

When the declaration is uttered in performance, the ensemble swoops in on the last line, holding up photographs of their own mothers, drawing the story from an isolated past into a collectively shared present.

In chapter 2 we encountered Panti’s experiences of being a queer Irish emigrant abroad. However, one of the earliest representations of the queer emigrant in post-decriminalisation Irish theatre can be found in Loughlin Deegan’s *The Queen & Peacock*, first staged by Red Kettle Theatre Company, Waterford, in 2000. The play is set in an old bar in Brixton, London, where a number of gay Irish emigrants congregate: Paul (late twenties) from Dungloe, who has been in London for ten years; Willie (17) from Dublin who arrived, fresh-faced, the night before; and Mark (32), a drag queen who is forcibly outed *as Irish* at the end of the play. The drama explores some of the reasons why different generations of gay men, from urban and rural

backgrounds, have left Ireland for London, with characters shedding light on some of the intricate negotiations that such a move entails between personal freedom and familial obligation, national identity and cosmopolitan aspiration, and ideas of home and belonging.

While *Silver Stars* portrays the queer Irish emigrants affectionately, in *The Queen & Peacock* Mark gives a much more acerbic portrayal of the numerous gay Irish people he has encountered in London over the years. He describes this demographic as 'hibernoqueers,' a term he elaborates like a wildlife documentarian:

A particular breed of immigrant. Unique in many ways and not to be mistaken with the common or garden Paddy whose natural habitat is down Kilburn way, and who hangs out on building sites all day, eats greasy fry-ups every evening, the remains of which he vomits onto somebody's doorstep after 'a good feed of pints' later that night. Oh no, Hibernoqueer is a different class of asylum seeker altogether [...] They're in hiding [...] From their families and their friends and from the prying eye of our good friend, Holy Catholic Ireland.¹⁵

Mark is self-loathing on account of his sexuality, and bitter about his exile. In this he embodies two diasporic positions on queer sexuality which appear as distinct, competing forces in *Silver Stars*: on the one hand we see how queerness offers relief from the burden of Irishness for those who leave home, and on the other we see how certain forms of diasporic Irish identity violently resist this queerness, enacting especially insidious forms of 'self'-directed homophobia and racism.

Outside of Ireland, *Silver Stars* has toured to Under the Radar Festival in New York (2010), the Tampere Theatre Festival in Finland (2010), the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris (2010) and the Auckland Arts Festival (2011). While this remit can be taken to indicate a wide interest in Brokentalkers' work and the subject of *Silver Stars*, when the production was performed in New York, *The New York Times* reported finding it somewhat dated, reminiscent of 'something you might have heard in New York a generation ago, when the act of coming out was by itself enough to hang a theater piece on.'¹⁶ However, as Peter Crawley notes, what the production had failed to make clear at the time was that male homosexual sexual activity was only decriminalised in Ireland in 1993, and so it made this surprising detail explicit in subsequent shows.¹⁷ *Silver Stars* may have seemed outdated to a certain New York audience base, when in fact it was all too fresh for an Irish one. Whereas New York spectators may have been used to this theatrical mode, and especially to the sexual and ethnic diversity it strives to remember and celebrate, for the Irish and the Irish diaspora, the material was much more urgent still.

Returns of the repressed: queer couples, domestic dramas and *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*

First performed in The New Theatre as part of Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2010, Amy Conroy's *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* is also presented as a piece of reality-based theatre about older people: more specifically, the relationship between sixty-something-year-old lesbians Alice Kinsella (played by writer Conroy, who also directs) and Alice Slattery (Clare Barrett), who sit opposite each other on stage.¹⁸ Following its premiere production at the festival, it won the Fishamble New Writing Award for best new play. While the thirty-something-year-old actors are effectively made up to appear like older women, even those who might detect the artifice are led to believe throughout that the show has been created from a real couple's experience.

With the women nervously adjusting themselves in their places on stage, the production begins. Alice Slattery starts by gently coaxing her nervous partner: 'Just say the words as you said them to me. As we rehearsed them.' Alice Kinsella responds, 'If you get lost or stuck, stop, find your place on the map and carry on.'¹⁹ This dipping in and out of narrative recurs throughout, and it works to suggest that the production has been constructed over time, and that the subjects on stage are non-professional performers. The conceit is enhanced by the set design, which features notes and transcripts ostensibly involved in the making of the show, to which the Alices look if they get stuck or lost. Surrounding them too are numerous household items: books, a record player, postcards and photographs. As with *Silver Stars*, and as we will see with *The Big Deal*, music is very important here too. The couple's favourite songs punctuate scenes to imply history and modulate the emotional register, while also adding a sense of real-world authenticity to which the audience might connect: Dusty Springfield's 'I Only Want to Be With You'; The Kinks' 'Sunny Afternoon'; Marvin Gaye's 'Sexual Healing'; Lionel Richie and Diana Ross's 'Endless Love.'

The women elaborate on the reputed process of making the production we are here to see. We are told how they were spotted by a director in a supermarket, slyly sharing a kiss, and approached to make a show about their lives, and their thirty-year-long relationship. Alice Slattery recalls the director they supposedly worked with: 'She proposed that we should meet every week, sometimes together, sometimes separately, and she would ask us a series of questions. She was interested in memories, opinions, stories. A "getting to know you" kind of a thing.'²⁰ The theatre maker is ostensibly especially interested in the ordinary aspects of their lives – 'The more mundane the better,'²¹ was the directive they were given. Although the couple are assured there would be no judgement or pressure, Alice Slattery initially had no desire to participate, for fear of being made vulnerable and embarrassed. In what seems like the production's own subtle critique of

documentary practices, and their popularity in Irish theatre at that time, she says: 'Well, why in God's name would we want to do that? I'd be mortified [...] I've always cherished what Alice and I have, talking about it would feel cheap. Like we're belittling it or giving it away. Who in their right minds would want to know about this?'²²

Once the reservations about documentary theatre have been aired, and we hear about the Alices' tentative steps in participating, the stories flow. Alice Slattery was born on 27 May 1948, Alice Kinsella on 20 October 1946. Although they knew each other as children, Alice Kinsella left for London when she was twenty, to work as a receptionist and then as a secretary. 'I always remember Dublin seemed black and white, and London was in Technicolor,'²³ she recalls of the late 1960s and early 1970s – not unlike how Panti compares Dublin with Tokyo in the 1990s, as we saw in chapter 2. Alice Slattery stayed in Ireland and married a man, and she reunited with Alice Kinsella when she came back to Ireland in 1974 to nurse her sick mother.

Alice Kinsella tells us how before she started a relationship with Alice Slattery she always felt 'on the outside, looking in at life, trying to figure out how to be a part of it.'²⁴ We hear too about their family reactions and commitments, Alice Slattery's religious beliefs and Alice Kinsella's reservations about the Church. They speak of their mutual love of hotels and travel, but preference for being in their shared home. They also discuss how they dealt with Alice Kinsella's breast cancer diagnosis, and her affair with a sexually confident young American student, whom she met in the mid-1980s when she was living and working in Ireland. But mostly we come to know about what they say their director has lauded as the prosaic details of their lives, with not a lot remarkable happening, besides loving and living with each other.

In every sense of the term, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* is a domestic drama, in which we are offered everyday insights into the commonplace details of two people who share their lives together, surrounded by personal artifacts and household objects. In a way, this couple speaks back to Panti's attack on the domesticity of the 'New Gay' in *A Woman in Progress*, discussed in chapter 2. For, despite being domestic, these two characters are not apolitical. Although Alice Slattery claims to have been uncomfortable with anything 'overtly gay'²⁵ over the years, and her partner accused her of harbouring shame in the past,²⁶ both women have come to recognise the importance of publicly declaring their relationship, and this is the main reason they give for taking part in the documentary process. They have just been to their first Pride too, and they are waiting for full marriage rights to become available, rather than commit to a civil partnership.

The importance of queer visibility is stressed here, but in particular the visibility of older women, including lesbians. Alice Slattery refuses to

be seen as just an ‘unassuming older lady’²⁷ any longer, and is ready for her full, complex history to be recognised: ‘People don’t see the life I’ve lived. They don’t know that I’ve breathed in the misty air overlooking Niagara Falls. They don’t know that I’ve been kissed in a hot air balloon, the type of kiss that made me blush.’²⁸ Writing in the *Sunday Tribune* in 1982, Emily O’Reilly describes a trip to the then popular gay bar Flikkers, in Dublin’s Hirschfield Centre. She goes purposefully to speak with lesbians, to counter a lack of public knowledge and representation. O’Reilly recalls one girl asking her if she had ever met a lesbian before, to which she replied: ‘Not that I know of, but, but I’ve met several gay men.’ The girl remarks that, ‘Lots of people in Dublin know gay men, but they don’t believe the women exist. In a sense, lesbianism is the unacceptable side of homosexuality. The men have a better public image, more agreeable, even more romantic, because of all the gay writers and artists in the past.’²⁹ This is a comment which echoes through the decades, from the earliest days of the LGBTQ movement. For instance, writing in the *Irish Gay News* as early as 1982, a lesbian contributor challenged the male bias of the community and its distribution of resources with, ‘Lesbians have only limited access to these social centres, one night a week in most cases, because we are not commercially profitable [...] To put it succinctly, the gay movement at the moment is defensive, apologetic, patriarchal...’³⁰ The final moments of *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* can be taken as a confrontation with this history, with Alice Kinsella asserting to the audience: ‘We are here, we were here all along.’ ‘So here we are, warts and all,’ she continues. ‘We have lived, lived well; we have loved, loved well.’ Speaking in unison, both Alices finally assert: ‘We will be seen.’³¹ The actors then remove their wigs to reveal themselves, adding of their characters, ‘They will be seen.’³²

We might wonder what it is in particular about these characters that has made them invisible. What is it that has not been seen but should be? I think the couple represent and challenge a number of distinct areas of persistent blindness and marginalisation in contemporary Irish culture – as women, as lesbians, as older people, and as older lesbians enjoying long-term domestic partnerships. The specificity of these intersections might indeed have made it hard to create a ‘real’ documentary theatre production. But as a scripted drama, Conroy manages to illuminate this compounded invisibility in a very targeted, distilled way. When the actors step out of roles at the end of the production, we might feel duped or disappointed by the realisation that the women are professional actors acting, or worry that the project has undermined its authenticity or integrity. However, here we might also sense drama’s capacity to represent those who cannot represent themselves as being freshly recharged and reinvigorated, having seemed to slip in popularity in Irish theatre in the 2000s, not least of all within queer performance culture.

In/visibility, authenticity and transgender identities in *The Big Deal*

It is widely agreed that cultural visibility is an important step in attempts by minority groups to gain rights and recognitions. *Silver Stars* recuperated the experiences of older gay men for whom being open about their sexuality when they were younger in Ireland was simply not an option – the choice was largely to remain closeted or to emigrate. The production and its performers foregrounded the lives of people rendered invisible or expunged, who were unable to represent themselves in the present. In a different way, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* attempted to stage the relatively everyday experiences of a culturally underrepresented cohort – an older lesbian couple – by strategically resorting to fiction staged in a documentary mode. But visibility is not only a question of being seen ‘as one really is.’ For transgender-identifying persons in particular, their sexed bodies differ to their sense of gendered identity. Even those who transition are vulnerable to public judgement, violence and further insidious forms of exclusion. Self-presentation in a public context of any kind can be a fraught, complicated affair. In particular, the high levels of physical and personal scrutiny that come with performing on stage do not create an environment conducive to passing, for those who wish to do so.

Una McKeivitt almost exclusively makes documentary theatre, drawing on experiences of everyday life. Sometimes the subjects she works with to create performance appear in the final productions, as in *Victor and Gord* (2009), *565+* (2010) and *Singlehood* (2012); and other times they do not, as in *The Big Deal*. A consistent concern of McKeivitt’s work, however, is the inclusion of queer voices, bodies and relationships on stage. Most notably, McKeivitt attempts to show queer lives as being commonplace rather than exceptional, weaving these experiences into an eclectic tapestry of contemporary Irish life. For example, *Victor and Gord* essentiality involves four people sharing stories about themselves and each other on stage. While two of these figures changed in the production’s numerous incarnations over the years, the central relationship involved McKeivitt’s straight sister Áine (‘Gord’), and her lesbian best friend Vicky (‘Victor’). In *Singlehood*, which focuses on experiences of being single in contemporary Ireland, LGBTQ people are embedded in the ensemble rather than the sole focus. On one level, we can see how this allows McKeivitt’s work to take place in more commercial contexts with bigger audiences – *Singlehood* has played sold-out shows in larger venues such as Vicar Street and the Olympia Theatre in Dublin – but it also marks an attempt to stage queer lives without necessarily making sexual identity or orientation the most significant issue at stake. In this aspect, I think McKeivitt’s work enacts a deceptively potent political gesture.

Despite McKeivitt’s efforts to interweave queer experiences, *The Big Deal* does not shy away from dealing with its subject matter in a direct

way. The seeds for the project were sown while McKeivitt was leading a theatre project with Ireland's first transgender support group in 2006/7 at Outhouse, Dublin's community and resource centre for LGBT people. ShopFloor Productions emerged from this meeting, and the group devised a show called *Who the hell does she think she is?* which was first staged in Bewley's Café Theatre, Dublin, in February 2007, and later in May that year at The Front Lounge pub, as part of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival.³³ This was essentially a melodramatic musical about a mother who abandoned her son. Although there was no obviously transgender or queer theme in the plot, most of the performers were transgender, and McKeivitt suggests, in an interview with me, that it was an important step for members of the community just to come together to make and stage work in public like this.³⁴ McKeivitt also recalls how some bloggers reacted negatively to the show at the time, 'wanting to know how these players thought they had the audacity to "pass" as male or female characters when that wasn't their assigned gender at birth.'³⁵ However, she also remembers how 'older transgender people in the community who attended the show as audience members were very moved by the fact that there was a show with transgender people in a public venue, the visibility meant a great deal to them.'³⁶ It was via this production that McKeivitt met the two friends whose relationship became the subject of *The Big Deal*. They shared their stories and gender reassignment diaries with her, and in 2010 she approached them about using that material to develop a stage show based on their experiences.

The Big Deal was created from these diaries, as well as interviews, emails, poems and songs provided by the two source subjects, who McKeivitt worked with to produce the script and direct the production. The show documents the subjects' decision to transition, the process itself, and the impact of their transgender identities on their lives; and to an extent, on the lives of their families. Although the stories are drawn from real-life experiences, the two subjects never appear on stage. Instead two cisgendered (i.e. someone whose gender identity corresponds with their sex, or is not transgender) female professional performers play the roles. According to McKeivitt, this decision emerged from the fact that one of the subjects did not want to perform, and the presence of the other woman on stage would have jeopardised her anonymity. And in staging cisgendered identity, the choice also reflected the subjects' wishes to pass.

The words we hear on stage describe the self-hatred the subjects experienced as men and the challenges they faced in making the decision to transition. 'I had the wrong fucking body,'³⁷ Cathy (Úna Kavanagh) asserts when recalling her earliest attempt to transition in 1984. At that time she told her parents she had a womb, as she thought an anatomical problem would be easier for them to accept. Even when she finally decides to undergo a surgical transition, Cathy feels ashamed for her wife and for their children, and for what they might think: 'My feelings of disgust are almost drowning me. I am

in love with a woman who is not gay and must hate me for killing her husband. I don't expect to find anyone else. For God's sake, I'm not even looking. And if I were, who or what would have me.'³⁸ But Deborah (Shani Williams, a well-known burlesque performer and drag king in Dublin) is adamant that her time has come, having lived a lie for thirty-seven years: 'I spent thirty-seven years apologising for my condition. Over those thirty-seven years, I always felt I was answering to someone else. I put other people's needs before my own. Now I'm shaking.'³⁹ While discrete personal revelations are moving and at times harrowing, what ultimately stands out in their exchange in performance is the steadfast friendship between the two women.

When I saw the full production premiere in August 2011 at Barnstorm Theatre as part of Kilkenny Arts Festival, the set was unadorned, and the actors performed in a very relaxed, almost affectless mode.⁴⁰ The stage had one bench upstage, and two mics – one to the left and one to the right. The subject material is potentially so emotive, that this spare, restrained delivery allowed us to actually hear very clearly what was being said. Mostly the actors spoke directly to the audience, sometimes into the mics for emphasis, and rarely to each other. When Cathy transitioned, Deborah gave her an iPod of songs to listen to in hospital, bursts of which are used throughout the performance to punctuate scenes: The Runaways' 'Cherry Bomb'; David Bowie's



Figure 5.2 Úna Kavanagh as Cathy (facing) and Shani Williams as Deborah in *The Big Deal* at Project Arts Centre, 2011. Photograph by Una McKeivitt

'Space Oddity'; Christy Moore's 'Lisdoonvarna'; Transvision Vamp's 'Baby I Don't Care.'

Although McKeivitt does not put her subjects on stage, the production does not shy away from the difficult, confusing realities of what it means to feel you belong to a differently sexed body, and to try to fully realise and embody that identity. Both of the friends go abroad for surgery – Cathy to Bangkok, Deborah to London. Cathy recalls the build-up to the operation, and her shock at seeing her body post-surgery: 'I saw badly bruised, mounds of unrecognisable flesh. I felt pain and lots of it [...] want to look down and see a healthy vagina where my healthy penis had been. That's all I want. Not this torn and battered flesh.'⁴¹ She confesses that as a man she never felt so fragile, but this defined her experience of transitioning: 'As Patrick I never felt vulnerable – not really. Now I just feel vulnerable.'⁴² Despite the psychological and physical pain of transitioning, Deborah assures Cathy that this is the only route to feeling at ease: 'Remember that each day should bring you that much nearer to the day when there will be no pain.'⁴³

Unlike *Silver Stars* or *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, *The Big Deal* does not document the challenges of trying to accept one's sexual orientation, or indeed of having it accepted by others. Instead it charts the attempts of two people to surgically and aesthetically fashion the embodiment with which they identify, and the personal and social challenges that such a transformation involves. Although the production exposes the various stages in this process, the picture of identity we get is much more fixed than many of the others we encounter in this book: Cathy and Deborah claim that their sense of belonging is absolutely dependent upon their gendered embodiment, rather than just on sexual partners, or families, or where they live – though these are also important. After her transition, Cathy celebrates: 'I will never again have to pretend to be something I'm not. The horror is over.'⁴⁴

McKeivitt claims that even though she and her collaborators were trying to stage very subjective experiences, some people still felt they were entitled to weigh in morally on those accounts. 'We were expressly saying this is not a social or moral quandary for the wider community, it is an individual's expression of their true selves,'⁴⁵ McKeivitt claims. However, although this is essentially a story about two extraordinary friends in exceptional circumstances, *The Big Deal* also sheds light on the position of transgender people in Ireland more broadly. According to the annual Rainbow Map published by the International Lesbian and Gay Association in 2014, which ranks European countries according to their level of protection of LGBTI human rights, Ireland was in 22nd place.⁴⁶ It was also the last country in the EU with no provision for gender recognition, despite a 2007 High Court ruling which found the state was in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, by refusing to allow Irish transgender woman Lydia Foy have her birth certificate reflect her gender identity. Striking a more positive note, at the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia Forum

on 13–14 May 2014, then Minister of State for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older Persons, Kathleen Lynch TD, signed a declaration of intent committing the government to a twelve-point plan, including the articles:

6. Guarantee the full legal recognition of a person's gender identity in all areas of life, in particular by enabling the change of names and gender in official documents in a fast, transparent and accessible manner;
7. Remove abusive and disproportionate requirements for legal gender recognition, make available appropriate gender reassignment services and ensure that no-one is subjected to gender reassignment procedures without his or her consent.⁴⁷

Foy settled her High Court case in October 2014, with the government promising to publish a Gender Recognition Bill late in 2014, and enact legislation as soon as possible in 2015. A final version of the Bill was approved in June 2015, that excluded an earlier forced divorce clause (made possible with the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum), and included the right to self-declare gender identity.

The Big Deal does not examine the challenges of legal recognition for transgender persons head on, as such, but it ends by emphasising the importance of recognising an individual's chosen sense of personal identity, rather than the few categories made available by the state or law. Cathy asks Deborah, and us, the audience: 'What word do you put on people like us?,' answering her own question with, 'Call me what you like. I'm a woman.' Deborah concludes with a qualifying retort: 'Don't call me what you like. I'm Deborah.'⁴⁸

Counterintuitively, perhaps, the production allows us to engage with the deeply personal experiences which McKeivitt has gathered and compiled, precisely by not putting the source subjects on stage. The flat documentary style is less a representation of life as it has been for the subjects, in all its emotional turbulence and physical duress, than it is a representation of life as the transgender subjects would like it to be – unremarkable, coherent, seamlessly cisgendered. There are no before and after photographs of family here, no surgery lines on display. In other words, although the production is based in reality, and is therefore rooted in documentary theatre, what we actually experience in performance is a very restrained form of naturalism. In order to be respectful of the subjects' experiences and wishes, the documentary process almost undoes itself, and what we end up with is drama. Despite the project's collaborative construction and ethos, McKeivitt is clear, too, that at some point the needs of the production must be prioritised: 'The challenge of collaboration in the documentary process is that to succeed it requires that everyone be clear on when the collaboration needs to end so that the show can continue and focus on other elements such

as touring and production.⁴⁹ Regardless of the documentary production's original ethic or collaborative construction, McKeivitt suggests here that at some point an aesthetically fixed theatre performance has to take over.

Queer micro-histories and cultural memories

In this chapter we saw queer performance intersect with documentary practices and aesthetics, to create theatre from the lives of those who could not represent themselves: whether for reasons of being old, living abroad or even deceased (*Silver Stars*); because they have been historically so resolutely invisible, that they need conjuring via drama (*I ♥ Alice ♥ I*); or because they are susceptible to unwanted scrutiny and attack (*The Big Deal*). In this sense, too, the productions worked to restore and install exiled, vulnerable and invisible queer bodies and histories to contemporary Irish culture. I see the intergenerational component of all of these performances as being incredibly important and politically reassuring. All of the productions evidence young queer artists engaging older queer people's stories and experiences – real and imagined. This amounts to a recognition of rich and extensive queer history in the face of a contemporary Irish culture that often seems to prefer we forget the past, unless we can profiteer from it as tourism, for instance; and a commercialist gay culture that would rather we settle quickly into picket-fenced domestic lives, and forget the shared political battles and alliances that have paved the way.

Among the tantalising range of newsletters, magazines and literature collected in the Irish Queer Archive is an anonymously-written pamphlet published in Dublin in 1967, in which a young gay man reckons with the predicaments of homosexuals, including himself. Particularly striking is the way he describes older gay men:

I am not in a position to make a bold statement on the problem of 'the old queen' or the old homosexual, since I have not reached this terrible state. This is the time that I fear most of all; the morning I wake up and suddenly realise I am an old man. I don't think about it, because it frightens me. You see, one of the great fears of the homosexual is the fear of growing old, of a lost youth. He lives in constant dread of this. Because once we have lost our youth we are no longer interesting to ourselves or to any of our world.⁵⁰

To contemporary eyes and ears these words may seem excessive, even funny. But they also speak to a real fear which haunts gay culture – that it privileges the young, the beautiful, and the sexually active or desirable. Without a family or offspring, nothing to live for or leave behind, gay people are pitched towards sure misery and death, as this quotation so colourfully evokes. (This sense would only later be compounded by the AIDS crisis in

the 1980s.) The intergenerational dialogues and collaborations profiled in this chapter work, in part, to navigate this tension, reviving older queer lives, and affirming their ongoing contributions to younger generations.

Some of the differences in the intergenerational concerns of Ireland's queer population can be explored by taking a closer look at an issue of *GCN* (*Gay Community News*) published in 2007, bearing the strapline 'Out, Proud, & Loaded.' In this issue, which sought to mark Dublin Pride, and highlight the recent economic power of the Irish LGBTQ community, the magazine published the results of a readership survey. It claimed that its readers were mainly aged between twenty-five and thirty-four years old, and lived in Dublin. This demographic was composed of sexually expressive, confident and financially secure people. They were educated, cultured and cosmopolitan. The editorial expanded: 'You are brand aware and brand loyal and earn considerably more than the national average income. The majority of *GCN* readers have no dependents and spend money on leisure activities, travel and entertainment.'⁵¹

Despite the publication's celebratory claims, introducing these findings in his editorial, Brian Finnegan was keen to add the caution that the findings 'do not represent everyone in the gay community.'⁵² He recalls how twelve years previously, a study of the gay community by the Combat Poverty Agency in association with Nexus Research 'found that 21 percent of respondents were living in poverty and over half (57 percent) of respondents said they found it difficult to make ends meet.'⁵³ The divide Finnegan highlights is economic, but it is also generational, signalling very different relationships to queer history, which the magazine also reflects: on the one hand there are those shaped by and rooted in past struggles, and on the other those who have no idea about this past, or simply do not care, blindly buoyed by historical achievements and relative economic prosperity.

As the *GCN* issue seems to suggest, there were at least two queer worlds in operation during Ireland's economic heyday (not discounting Northern Ireland or the diasporic vision): one which was deeply connected to a repressed, traumatic, even poor past; and one which was animated by a confident, prosperous present, and the promises of a better future. David Cregan proposes that the issue in question raises important challenges for Irish queer culture's understanding of itself in terms of its historicity, and the ways in which the culture is remembered and transmitted. Cregan remarks: 'Finnegan challenges the commonsense notion that the memory of the past keeps us rooted, pointing out instead that historical memory can prohibit necessary change for the gay community in Ireland.'⁵⁴ Living too much in the past or in the present can obscure the future, and create obstacles to its realisation. Performances examined in this chapter enact an important function in trying to keep those intergenerational conversations alive.

In chapters 2, 3 and 4 we saw how solo and biographical performance have been deployed to share personal information about performers' lives.

But here we see younger, professional and non-professional theatre and performance makers work collectively to share the responsibility of illuminating the lives of older generations who cannot represent themselves. Of course, there are also difficulties and dangers involved in the attempt to represent others, even when doing so with an ethical conscience. These include romanticising or demonising subjects and the past, blatant inaccuracy, or the more subtle manipulation of facts and feeling. But these risks are true of all representation. In this regard, it is interesting that in this chapter we saw the knowing assertion of drama over documentary theatre in *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, and the blurring of documentary theatre with dramatic naturalism in *The Big Deal*. These shifts should not be taken to suggest that drama is the *better* form, but rather that it continues to have a place in queer cultural expression, and contemporary Irish theatre more broadly, despite what felt like a dip in its appeal in the 2000s. The persistence of drama is evident in the next chapter too, in which we will encounter it plotting some of the intersections between queerness and class in site-specific productions in Dublin city.

6

Sex, Class and the City: Site-Specific Roots and Routes

‘There’s a funeral for the flats tonight [...] We’re still here.’
Danny, *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)*

‘All falling to fuck [...] Broken. But we keep going.’
Older Man, *Trade*

Emigration, exile and travel have been recurring features of the theatre and performance practices examined in previous chapters. From Panti’s documented trips to London and Tokyo, to the scattered diaspora creatively assembled in *Silver Stars*, we have seen how coming out in Irish culture has also frequently involved moving away. It has also become apparent how even though the production of queer theatre tends to be very localised and take place in urban hubs, queer performance narratives tend to be less geographically anchored, frequently trailing around the world, charting the pains and pleasures of staying and leaving home. As I have accounted for them so far, these varied trajectories have been motivated both by desires to escape oppressive situations, and by more benevolent yearnings for adventure. In this chapter I extend these lines of inquiry further, by examining queer theatre and performance that is particularly focused on urban space and place, as both subject matter and as production context. Moreover, I consider work which shines light on queer working-class experiences of Dublin, and a section of people divided between optimistically surfing a rising tide, and perilously sinking below its surface.¹

The chapter focuses on the site-specific productions of two plays that directly engage with Dublin city during a time of enormous change: Phillip McMahon’s *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* (2006), which deals with the friendship and sexual discoveries of twenty-year-olds Danny and Chantelle on a night out in POD, Harcourt Street – one of Dublin’s most popular night-clubs during the height of the economic boom; and Mark O’Halloran’s *Trade* (2011), in which a middle-aged man solicits an 18-year-old man for sex in a north inner-city guesthouse, a few years after the economy has imploded.²

As Dublin rapidly expands and changes around the central characters in these works, we are given two contrasting perspectives on life in contemporary Ireland, in particular for working-class Dubliners. Here, queerness extends beyond subjective desire to expose the interplay between sexuality and class, and in order to illuminate how material conditions are implicated in shaping sexual expression, identity, social mobility and opportunity.

In these productions we see Dublin as a world of excitement and promise that unfolds in time with subjective desire (*Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)*), and a repressive, exclusionary city where certain forms of sexuality remain sequestered (*Trade*). As two-hander plays, originally created for production in confined site-specific contexts, both examples are also very intimate works, which serve as important bridges between the kinds of biographical theatre and dramatic writing considered in this book so far. The experiences explored in each are heavily imprinted by the socio-economic contexts of the environments depicted, and it emerges that to be a happy queer in Ireland essentially means having easy access to youth culture, employment and lots of disposable income. Despite the fact that coming out in Irish theatre has typically involved emigration, exile or travel, in these productions queer desire reveals a deep attachment to site and location, for better or for worse. Staying is hard, but leaving is not an option.

This attachment is conveyed by the site-specific contexts, which embed us in the worlds evoked. Indeed, Irish theatre witnessed an increase in site-specific and site-responsive performance during the past decade. One of the ways this surge can be understood is as a reaction to the fast-changing face of the urban landscape, with theatre attempting to make sense of how space impacts social relations, past and present. For instance, during the Celtic Tiger, only certain parts of the north city experienced accelerated development and gentrification, while others did not. This was very much the case with the north docklands, which expanded with glass-fronted new offices and financial zones, for example, while much of the north inner-city, dominated by social housing, remains largely untouched. The effect has been the creation of a sharp spatially-divided community of people, with the inordinately wealthy and poor side by side. The site-specific productions examined in this chapter draw attention to some of these disparities and distinctions, by immersing us in the urban environment.

We have already encountered site-specific theatre in chapter 4, in a discussion of Veronica Dyas's *In My Bed*, which took place on the disused grounds of an old factory where the performer's grandmother once worked. With her body and story exposed in this location, I suggested that Dyas's production had the effect of framing queerness in a variety of braided ways that exceeded subjective sexual desire: as embodied and ghostly; personal and intergenerational; symbolic and material; presently felt, yet historically mediated. In the same chapter, we saw how both Dyas and Neil Watkins faced a range of housing, health and employment problems. Their work

subtly suggested that to be an assimilated queer in contemporary Ireland fundamentally requires considerable access to finance, and active participation in the dominant commercial culture. Insofar as most of queer life takes place in cities, especially Dublin, where property remains remarkably expensive, we get a sense too of how coming out is not the last step in living a fulfilled queer life, as is so often presumed. Rather, queer lives are particularly dependent upon access to a number of social, cultural and economic opportunities usually only available in urban centres.

This material reality has sharper implications for certain sectors of the would-be queer community over others; in particular, as I argue in this chapter, urban working-class individuals and communities. The rhetorical fantasy undergirding the Celtic Tiger, and indeed neoliberalism more generally, holds that economic prosperity flows freely and evenly to those brave enough and bold enough to play the game. As Michael Piersie argues in *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey* (2011), within Irish culture this perception has tended to imagine that recent economic prosperity kindly erased class boundaries: 'In the first decade of the twenty-first century, there has also been a general perception of increased opportunities for social mobility in the "Celtic Tiger" economy [...].'¹³ The queer community is often understood to exemplify the cultural and social mobility made possible by access to capital. As a demographic at least presumed to be free from the burden of family spending, for instance, and in search of alternative identities to purchase, LGBTQ people have long been seen as the ideal subjects for capitalist instrumentalisation and appropriation.

But the performances considered in this chapter suggest that national prosperity does not readily accomplish classlessness, not even for LGBTQ people. While class may indeed be an 'organic, mutable concept, shifting according to the vicissitudes of historical change,' as Piersie suggests, it also marks and charts the 'continuity of human affairs under capitalism.'¹⁴ As we will see in the following pages, capitalism and economic growth can promote access for some people to certain experiences within the city, but underneath surface success, deep structural differences persist. As Rob Shields cautions, 'the city is a concept with a very concrete effect,'¹⁵ such that the substance of cultural fantasy and material reality can often be sharply at odds. This is a position widely supported by economic and social science research which reveals that during the boom times, workers in Ireland were actually receiving a lower share of wealth than ever before, leading to an ever-widening chasm between rich and poor. As Kieran Allen argues in *The Celtic Tiger: The myth of social partnership in Ireland* (2000), this has engendered a situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century where 'class divisions and even class struggle has [sic] become more relevant than ever before.'¹⁶ For the poor and members of Ireland's working classes in particular, promises of trickle-down wealth and prosperity never really materialised. As Andy Medhurst proposes, class is a complex organisational system, not

just about ‘an objective entity, but also (and mostly?) a question of identifications, perceptions, feelings.’⁷ As implied in this observation, class is so deeply entrenched in Irish culture, that we cannot make claims about its conditions or mutability based on the present situation alone: ‘It is a matter of history, a relationship with tradition, a discourse of roots.’⁸ Or, as I continue to submit in this chapter, in contemporary theatre and performance class emerges as a discourse of roots and as a mapping of routes.

In *Theatre & the City* (2009), Jen Harvie describes how theatre and the urban environment are mutually imbricated. She suggests that both are constantly changing material, aesthetic and social structures, where many people gather for work and leisure. In this regard, Harvie claims that theatre might be seen as ‘symptomatic of urban process, demonstrating the structures, social power dynamics, politics and economies also at work more broadly throughout the city.’⁹ Harvie also argues that the relationship between theatre and the city extends beyond theatre’s ability to show this relationship representationally, to its capacity ‘to *demonstrate* urban process, therefore: theatre *is a part of* urban process, producing urban experience and thereby producing the city itself.’¹⁰ Performative encounters such as site-specific events, that install audiences in particular urban sites, Harvie continues, can be seen to ‘indicate more broadly how we can interrogate and change how we perform ourselves in everyday urban life and who we are therefore able to be.’¹¹ This impulse ripples through the performances in question in this chapter too, which are ostensibly about life in the ‘new’ capital, mediated through specific urban sites and locations. We also see queer desire emerge as a spatialising force, with the capacity to creatively carve new worlds into being. However, in the absence of certain forms of wealth and cultural capital, we also observe lives being dashed and derailed.

Bright young things for a bright new city: *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)*

Danny and Chantelle (Still Here) was first staged in the POD nightclub, Harcourt Street, Dublin, as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2006, winning a Spirit of the Fringe Award. Although produced by Gentle Giant Theatre Company on this occasion, it prompted the coming together of Phillip McMahon and Jennifer Jennings to form THISISPOPBABY. Like many of McMahon’s plays to date – in particular *All Over Town* (2007), *Pineapple* (2011), and even the book and lyrics for the musical *Alice and Funderland* (2012) which I consider more closely in chapter 7 – *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* explores the intersections of sexuality, class and contemporary urban experience.

Its first staging at POD was especially apposite, given that the play tracks the journey of friends Danny (performed by McMahon) and Chantelle

(Georgina McKeivitt) across the city to the popular nightclub. POD opened its doors in 1993, in the vaults of the former Harcourt Street railway station on Dublin's south side. Its opening coincided with the arrival of club culture in Ireland, and throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, it hosted some of the most successful parties in the country. As we saw in chapter 2, for example, it was home to Dublin's most exciting queer club nights, including H.A.M. and Gristle. Although the former ended in 2006, it was one of Ireland's longest running club nights.¹²

The stone-walled interiors of POD carry the heat of these histories, and memories of wild nights, which undoubtedly some of the audience attended, are revived when we walk into the building to see the production. Time, space and function intermingle – economic growth and cultural transformation, club and theatre, raving and spectating – such that we are always perceiving and negotiating a number of different realities at any given moment. As Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks observe, this layering and interactivity is typical of site-specific work:

Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused [...] site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop [...] The multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another.¹³

The audience sit roughly in the round, perched on small stools at neat tables, and are permitted to drink throughout the show. Under Deirdre Molloy's direction, the performers move agilely around the central space, hopping across cubes of furniture, dipping into and out of characters. A live DJ (Sally Foran) provided the soundtrack to the production, which worked to immerse the audience in the dramatised event, and locate it firmly within the building's club history. Although Danny and Chantelle end up in POD, the story they tell starts on the other side of the city, so that the audience are effectively in the venue before the two main characters have even arrived to join us. As the flyer put it, this is a place 'where you can get off your head and forget for a while. The night, like most nights, gets carried away with itself – the city is on fire and all bets are off.'¹⁴

Danny and Chantelle's story begins at a bus stop in Ballymun, on Dublin's north side, where the friends live. They are giddy with excitement for the night ahead, making phone calls to friends to fix a plan. Danny wears a tracksuit top and jeans, while Chantelle is all dressed up, showing off her hoop earrings and sovereign rings – recognisable markers of her socio-economic milieu. Speaking directly to the audience, Danny describes their bus ride like a thrilling adventure, so pumped are they both for the partying in store:

As the bus dips and drops, messy punters slip and slop on the back seats, hurlin' abuse at, and scabbin' smokes off, each other. They've weighty issues on their mind as they discuss the pros and cons of being joined at the hip, Siamese style. They're locked. It's only half eight, for fuck's sake. But that's OK. That'll be us in a few hours, as we blip blob our way into the morning. These back of the bus bastards are no different to us; just on a different shift... and different substances, of course.¹⁵

The friends' enthusiasm for their night out is given extra momentum by what they are leaving behind. As Danny tells us, the Ballymun social housing flats are in the process of being torn down around them, as happened in reality. (This is also a subject of McMahon's *Pineapple*.) Ballymun is one of the most economically disadvantaged parts of Dublin, and the flats referenced were originally erected in the 1960s to respond to a social housing crisis in the inner-city. There were 36 blocks of Ballymun flats built in total, comprised of 7 fifteen-storey, 19 eight-storey and 10 four-storey units. The high towers were all named after signatories of the Irish proclamation of independence – Éamonn Ceannt, Thomas J. Clarke, James Connolly, Seán Mac Diarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, Pádraig Pearse and Joseph Plunkett – as if they exemplified founding republican values. However, in the 1990s the flats were widely seen to contribute to the very deprivation they sought to rectify, while also being monuments to a bygone impoverished time. In 1997, the Irish government announced plans to regenerate Ballymun, including demolishing all of the fifteen- and eight-storey blocks. On stage, the flats are represented by screened footage, which shows some of the buildings crumbling in slow motion. This effect works to anchor us in the world from which the story stems, even if in reality we are already located in Danny and Chantelle's destination. So despite the party at hand and the friends' desire for reinvention, we also feel the very real tug of their community of origin, and the drastic changes it is simultaneously undergoing. Even as we experience it live, the whole production takes place in the intersection between past and present, poverty and prosperity, melancholy and celebration.

Despite this poignant and powerful backdrop, Danny and Chantelle resist reflecting on life in the flats in much depth, focusing instead on propelling their journey towards the city centre, and into the south side. In one of the play's more serious moments, Chantelle reveals that her dad is refusing to leave their current family flat, and move to the house in suburban Balbriggan that is being offered to him by the council instead. Unable to understand her father's resistance, Chantelle wonders, bewildered, 'like, why would you want to stay in the flats? There's something wrong with him.'¹⁶ She sees her dad as stuck in the past, in a time and place that can no longer sustain them. Unlike her father, Chantelle is intent on carving out her own new world, and the journey she takes in

performance is indicative of her hunger for travel, transformation and self-definition.

Discussing the representation of social housing in British theatre, Charlotte Bell and Katie Beswick describe how '[t]he council estate has become a form of social categorisation and economic classification,'¹⁷ but also how these places and their inhabitants are usually figured as 'lacking.'¹⁸ As scripted characters and in their live portrayals, Danny and Chantelle boldly resist this representational pattern, and are instead full of life and verve. Danny describes passing the flats by bus in a way that firmly consigns them to the past: 'We pass MacDonagh Tower. Wrapped in black. There's a funeral for the flats tonight. (Pause) We're still here.'¹⁹ The characters' night, and the performance we witness, is thus framed as a kind of memorial to a passing community, and a utopian longing for the better life that might lie ahead.

As they move through the city, Danny and Chantelle signpost its roads and landmarks, mapping the world they yearn for rather than the one to which they strictly belong. Resembling a kind of contemporary odyssey, they press through the city's neighbourhoods and streets in search of pleasure, friendship, love and sex; and moreover, a sense of belonging by whatever means. (As Michel de Certeau writes, 'What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.'²⁰) They jump off the bus at Parnell Square, where Danny spots all the smokers outside the Rotunda maternity hospital. From there they continue towards the Ilac Centre, 'where the unconscious go to shop [...] Where the bored go to browse and the poor go to peruse.'²¹ They drunkenly lurch through Moore Street, then Henry Street, now crossing into the south side via the Ha'penny Bridge that arches over the River Liffey.

The Ha'penny Bridge is a landmark full of symbolism and history, much of it romantic. But in practical terms, it provides a platform for looking up and down the Liffey, with the north docks far up on the left, and Heuston train station deep towards the right. This position allows people not only to admire the waterway and its immediate environs, but to observe some of the dramatic changes which have taken place to the skyline in recent years. In *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (2013), Chris Morash and Shaun Richards describe the 'monumental space' which appeared during the boom years, which utterly redefined the skyline: 'From the north bank of the River Liffey in Dublin, in an area that in the mid-1990s was semi-derelict warehouses, it is now possible to see a single vista that takes in a spectacularly tiled glass cylinder of the National Convention Centre, and the swan-neck lines of the Samuel Beckett Bridge, with the curves of the Aviva sports stadium rippling in the distance.'²² At first glance, these new sights communicate the impression of a city with great wealth, but they also signify huge economic disparity among the communities in which they are erected.

Danny holds Chantelle's hand as they cross the bridge to Temple Bar. This iconic quarter was part of a major government regeneration plan in the 1990s, which resulted in it becoming the centre of the city's

growing nightlife, typically frequented by tourists, most notoriously stag and hen parties. Discussed briefly in the last chapter, in Loughlin Deegan's 2000 play *The Queen & Peacock* Temple Bar is wryly held up as a monument to economic wealth and sexual liberalism, and a playground for the newly moneyed Irish. As the young gay character Willie depicts it: 'People are having a great fucking time at home, Paul. Just getting on with it, you know? having the craic, getting the odd shag – it's no big deal. (*Beat*) Haven't you heard of Temple fucking Bar, for fuck's sake? The war is over, Paul. And the sooner you in here realise it the better.'²³ Danny and Chantelle's walk through Temple Bar captures this party spirit, even though it feels more messy and unhinged than assured or confident. Ambling towards South Great George's Street, then into Camden Street, the couple trace what was at the time the city's most bustling stretch of nightlife. Chantelle is not very impressed, sneering at the 'high heels hitting the Village, wankers heading to Whelan's, and pricks being refused from the Palace.'²⁴ At the top of Camden Street, they cross the LUAS tracks, and walk to the POD's entrance.

As the city opens up to meet the duo, so the POD club becomes a space for exploring sexual desire and burgeoning queer impulses. It is here Danny and Chantelle bump into older out gay Swiss Tony, who gives them ecstasy, and later educates them about gay culture and sex: 'chicken hawks, poppers and rimming, cock rings and anal beads!'²⁵ Danny's friend Steo is here too, and he rebukes Swiss Tony for being too showy. Swiss Tony calls him out for maybe being gay himself: 'I'm serious, Steo, they've done these surveys and tests an' all that prove that homo-haters are actually homos themselves. So is there something you wanna' tell us, Steo?'²⁶

Danny, Chantelle and their friends all take ecstasy. Their bodies become almost indistinguishable from each other and the environment. They relish being 'tangled together' in this sensory overload:

Chantelle: Joined at the heart/
 Danny: All joined up and tangled/
 Chantelle: Tangled in dance/
 Danny: Strangled by the tunes/
 Chantelle: Faces mashed and mangled/²⁷

Dancing, singing, high on life and drugs, desire overspills individual bodies so that the club and the city also become erotised spaces. It is hard to tell where selves stop and the city begins.

As the night continues, any defences that may have existed are dropped, especially Danny's laddish bravado. Most significantly, he starts to talk freely about his affection for Steo. Speaking directly to the audience, he wistfully recalls how they were born in the same hospital; how they once robbed a horse and rode it to the airport, to watch planes overhead: 'we agreed to never not be friends. I love Steo's company. I put me arm around him on the

street. He flashes me a smile and calls me a faggot. I kiss him on the cheek, and run before he digs me.²⁸ Although Steo claims to be straight, later in the night Chantelle spots him kissing another man. Danny confronts him, and he recalls their time spent hanging out as teenagers somewhat differently:

Chantelle: (As Steo) When we had that horse, Danny. We'd sit all day long. God help me if I'm lying. We'd sit and talk shite, talk about wankin' and riding women.

Danny: Yeah?

Chantelle: (As Steo) ... And we kissed.

Danny: No ... we didn't!

Chantelle: (As Steo) Yeah we did! We fuckin' kissed²⁹

Danny tells Steo to fuck off, and so the latter punches him. The bust up divides their night, and they go their separate ways.

It is never clear from the narrative if Danny is gay, but it is certainly implied by the deal of fondness he conveys for Steo, and in the queer affectations and gestures McMahon gives the character in performance. After this altercation, Danny goes looking for Chantelle, who has left the club. Separately they weave their way back through the city, down South Great George's Street again, then Temple Bar, towards the Liffey. 'They say all things lead to the water,'³⁰ Chantelle remarks, as she sits alone by the Ha'penny Bridge once more. Feeling sorry for herself and at one with her environment, she incants – 'River. Flowing through me.'³¹ Soon joined by Danny, the friends sip tea under a moonlit sky:

Chantelle: We sit and sip and suck in a new day.

Danny: Danny and Chantelle.

Chantelle: Joined at the hip.

Danny: Joined at the hoop!

Chantelle: Still here!³²

The play's celebration of being 'still here,' which is inscribed in the title, and reiterated in various exchanges throughout – including the last line quoted above – invites us to ask: what exactly endures, and what was at risk of being lost in the first instance? At face value, friendship lasts, even surviving the dramas of a night out: the boozing, the drug taking, the sexual encounters and failed romances. Danny and Chantelle repeatedly describe themselves as being conjoined during the piece, like French twins Michelle and Marie who are supposedly being surgically separated while their night progresses.

But Dublin city also endures, despite the enormous change which it is has been experiencing, primarily represented here in the demolition of the Ballymun flats, and the bustling nightlife of a prosperous city centre. In this, *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* offers an essentially positive, affirmative

account of the city's changes for its young people, perhaps especially the working-class communities that its main characters represent. Paul Kearns and Motti Ruimy caution that we should be wary of warm-hearted renderings of working-class mileus: 'the romanticisation of an impoverished community not only serves to alleviate the social consciousness of suburban middle-class detachment, but reinforces an artificial and ultimately self-fulfilling division [...] It perpetuates a divisive "them" and "us".'³³ While I'm also wary of this tendency, and share Kearns and Ruimy's reservations, I see this production's warmth resemble something closer to critical optimism, in which the characters are afforded access to everything they seem to want and hope for, even if for one night only.

Danny and Chantelle's night draws to a close by the banks of the Liffey, one part of the city that has not been knocked down or reconstructed. Like the city's lifeblood, bridging past and present, friendships here and gone astray, it pulses on. Having accompanied them on their night out, we are left with a sense that something has been lost, something has been gained, and some things stay exactly the same.

Intimate transactions in *Trade*

While Danny and Chantelle travel freely and joyfully across Dublin city, the characters in Mark O'Halloran's *Trade*, first produced by THISISPOPBABY as part of Dublin Theatre Festival in September-October 2011, remain hidden in a dank bedroom in Clifden Guesthouse, Gardiner Place, on Dublin's north side. Known only as Young Man (Ciarán McCabe) and Older Man (Philip Judge), the characters' actual names are never given or mentioned in performance. These two men do not fling themselves into the night in the same way as their fellow Dubliners in McMahon's play do. The audience are similarly confined. In Clifden Guesthouse, which supplied the room in which the production took place, the audience sit on narrow rows of benches pressed against one of the bedroom's sidewalls. Ciarán O'Melia designs the space so that we must watch silently and voyeuristically, rather than assume this site-specific context is an invitation to interact. In O'Halloran's writing – which in 2012 won him Best New Play at the *Irish Times* Irish Theatre Awards, and Best Theatre Script at the ZeBBie Awards – the verbal exchanges are so restrained and sparse that it feels like a misplaced breath by the audience could disturb the atmosphere and action. Fraught efforts to communicate between men is a common feature of O'Halloran's writing, who is perhaps best known for the screenplays for the films *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Garage* (2007), while also being an acclaimed theatre and film actor. Under Tom Creed's direction, the interactions in *Trade* are so tense and searching that it feels like we, the audience, are charged with the great responsibility of keeping everything on course.

The men we witness are here because Older Man has solicited Young Man for sex, their namelessness reflecting their desire for anonymity, as well as the fact that there is something very ordinary and familiar about them both. They have met like this before, and very soon into the performance it becomes clear that Older Man has become too attached and that this is creating problems. Both men have families and economic responsibilities, and neither identify as gay or even queer. While Young Man says very little at all, he does reveal that he is under pressure to look after a new baby, implying that this is why he is engaged in sex work in the first instance. Wearing a shoddy tracksuit and a baseball cap, Older Man awkwardly tells him he looks like 'a knacker.'³⁴ Over the course of the hour-long performance, Older Man gradually has him undress down to his underpants.

Older Man has a much more complicated, frustrated sense of why he wants to be with Young Man. He tells him that, since their last meeting, he has not been himself – 'I been lonely or something.'³⁵ Older Man admits to being surprised with how much he wants to share with Young Man, that he does not usually talk so freely – 'I don't usually say nothing ever.'³⁶ Although Young Man says very little in return, and in particular nothing to encourage his client, Older Man recounts an elaborate dream about him:

I *dreamt* I was holding you. Holding on to you. The both of us easy. Only next thing it changes and I don't know how it starts [...] but we're falling in a lurch like down a set of steps. A big steps a stairs and we're falling into the dark and I let you go then cause I can't hold on. I can't hold on and I let you go then and you disappear down this down. And I'm hardly falling now at all I'm stopped and standing but you just keep falling farther. And I want to help you I do but I can't. I can't reach out. I can't reach down. And then I wake then. And I'm crying. I'm crying cause you're gone cause you're *dead* maybe. I'm crying. There. Then. Like that. That's it. That's all.³⁷

As we discover, part of Older Man's vulnerability stems from the fact that his own father recently died, and this has stirred the anxiety apparent in his dream sequence, in which everything is falling apart. He tells Young Man that no one really knew his father in his lifetime, not his children, not his wife, nor the man himself; that in the end he was just 'an accumulation of fucken lies.'³⁸ Not wanting to end up like his own father, Older Man reveals how he told his own adult son about Young Man: 'I told him I loved you. I told him I loved you more than I loved him. I told him that.'³⁹ It is a revelation which seems as misguided and destructive as it is heartrending, completely exposing Older Man to his family, and the situation in which we find him. The otherwise reticent Young Man suddenly hits back: 'This

is just this. It isn't real. It's money.⁴⁰ Resounding as a sort of queer reading of labour relations, for Young Man his work is intimacy, and for Older Man, the pursuit of intimacy is hard work.

Despite claiming to love Young Man, Older Man is adamant he is not gay. He also presses Young Man to admit that he is not either:

Older Man: I'm not one of those you know.

Young Man: I know.

Older Man. You're not one of them either.

Young Man: No.⁴¹

According to Older Man, gay people are showy and materialistic, with no family responsibilities like either of them: 'I see them all the time everywhere I do. On the telly permanently. With their clothes. With their clothes and their fucken... And they have no idea... They don't have families... The don't have children... They don't know what it's like.'⁴² Coming from another mouth it might seem like he is rehashing a negative stereotype, but here it draws attention to a different sort of truth: that queer identity does not necessarily precipitate social or economic mobility, but largely relies upon the pre-existence of these material conditions to enable its expression



Figure 6.1 Philip Judge as Older Man (facing) and Ciarán McCabe as Young Man in *Trade* at Clifden Guesthouse, 2011. Photograph by Fiona Morgan

and be culturally viable. The queers that Older Man spots on television are likened to the flashy developments he sees on the docks, described here as 'all the blah'⁴³ – more surface than substance.

Older Man has worked on the docks since he was sixteen, and recently lost his job when his company was taken over by a Scandinavian group. He finds it easier to understand sex with men as an expression of his primitive animal instinct, rather than tenderness – 'I don't mind anyone fucken anyone you know. It's nature isn't it?... Men do that. We're animals.'⁴⁴ – though his behaviour and tone suggest differently. Older Man's affections are unreciprocated, and in the end he just asks Young Man to hold him. His weeping fills the room, piercing the slow blackout.

We can think about O'Halloran's play in terms of frustrated queer male desire and sexuality, but more broadly in terms of prostitution. In *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (2009), Diarmaid Ferriter describes how prostitution flourished during the Celtic Tiger, not least of all via sex trafficking: 'There was a lot more money to be made from prostitution in Celtic Tiger Ireland, and prostitutes working in Dublin were believed to be earning significantly more than was possible in most other European cities.'⁴⁵ And as Evanna Kearins argues in *Rent: The Untold Story of Male Prostitution in Dublin* (2000), there was also a major male prostitution scene in Dublin, with workers representing 'a marginalised, disenfranchised, criminalised and misunderstood section of Irish society,' typically suffering from a lack of education, unemployment and poor family lives.⁴⁶

When *Trade* premiered at Dublin Theatre Festival, its concern with unearthing sexual histories in north inner-city Dublin reverberated across other performances in the festival too. In particular, less than ten minutes north on Seán McDermott Street, ANU Productions staged the second part of their Monto Cycle, *Laundry*, in an old Magdalene laundry. The Monto refers to this area of north inner-city Dublin, including Talbot Street, Amiens Street, Gardiner Street and Seán MacDermott Street, which was once the city's red light district. It famously features in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), in which it is referred to as Nighttown, where Stephen, his friend Lynch, and Bloom end up after drinking. ANU Productions' lauded quadrilogy has been invested in unearthing histories of sexuality in the area, in particular those which have been hidden or erased due to the expansion of the city.⁴⁷ Although not dealing with female prostitution, for which the Monto was best known, *Trade* participates in this wider attempt to shine light on the darker corners of north inner-city Dublin life, exposing the lives and cultures of those who have resolutely not benefitted from economic prosperity.

I found the struggle for intimacy which *Trade* charts very moving, with characters endeavouring to find words for their feelings, in a way that still allows them to hold on to their identities as working-class family men. A large part of Older Man's problem is not so much that he is sexually repressed, but that Ireland has seemingly liberalised so quickly, and he

still has no education, no social mobility, and no economic prospects that might allow him access to other walks of life. What he does have is loads of crippling family responsibility. Older Man's observation that the recession feels like 'we're all being put back in our box or something,'⁴⁸ could equally describe what has to happen to his queer desire: in the world in which he finds himself, there is no room for him to express it, and he must keep it under wraps. To be an openly gay or queer man in his world is simply not an option.

While Young Man effectively advises Older Man to think of sex as shopping, the latter is inclined instead to think of his desire as animal instinct, such that it feels almost complementary with his history of manual grafting, and working-class identity. Although Older Man senses that the world around them is falling apart, he is equally surprised that everyone seems to still 'keep going.' He is less celebrating enduring life as Danny and Chantelle do with their mantra 'still here,' and more bemoaning the repetition of suffering. (Somewhere behind and between these voices, Samuel Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon can be heard endeavouring to press on, despite going nowhere; or the voice in *The Unnameable* announcing: 'I can't go on, I'll go on.'⁴⁹) In this, *Trade* offers us a very different vision of Dublin to *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)*. This is not a world where you are only as sexually adventurous as the party you are going to, or the drugs you are taking; where the city unfolds to the will of your desire. Instead, it is a world in which the city blocks desire and opportunity, especially for the working-class men we witness, brutally routing them into the shadows and underground.

Mapping queer desire and urban working-class experience

I find these plays and their site-specific productions compelling not just because they are concerned with queer sexuality in contemporary Dublin, but for the way they expose its material interdependency with the city: the life of queer desire is both enabled and foreclosed by economics, labour and youth culture. And central to this dynamic is the working-class milieu from which the characters are drawn.

In modern and contemporary Irish theatre, when urban working-class people are represented on stage, it is fair to say that they are rarely seen acknowledging – let alone enjoying – personal or even sexual desire. As is typical of Irish theatre more broadly, the individual is often turned into a vehicle for negotiating other matters deemed to be of national importance. James Hickson has drawn attention to this dynamic, claiming that Dublin's urban working-classes have been represented in a particularly negative way in Irish theatre in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a problem compounded by the often middle-class constitution of audiences. He writes: 'When Dublin is dramatised, it often ends up

stabilising stereotype, and reiterating certain social and classed discourses. It forms and fastens tropes simultaneously. Theatrical efforts to articulate a working-class perspective can easily become swamped by the mire of predetermination.⁵⁰ However, in more recent Irish theatre, particularly that emerging from the tail end of the boom, and indeed during the recession, we see a considerably more diverse range of working-class experiences being represented on stage. With reference to ANU Productions' Monto Cycle, *Trade*, and McMahon's other play set in the Ballymun flats, *Pineapple*, Hickson highlights a strand of contemporary theatre that insists that working-class urban identity is not innate, narrow or outright negative. Instead, he claims that there are increasing examples of characters who want more than their inherited social and cultural positions offer them: 'the characters' yearnings to do things differently – socially, sexually, expressively – disrupt entrenched expectations of what working-class Dublin is.'⁵¹

In the performances that I have examined in this chapter, we have potent and poignant examples of characters that yearn to do things differently; figures that long to create lives other than those they have inherited. Moreover, the sexual experiences that they encounter or wish for are very much enabled by the economic prosperity which made way for the circulation of disparate identities and sexualities in the first instance, and in particular supported the growth of queer culture. However, while characters in both plays come from roughly the same urban working-class communities, they represent very different relationships to the Ireland in which we find them. In *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)*, the main characters and their friends feel deeply invested in the city and its people, but also enthusiastic about its transformation, and the opportunities that such a change might bring. They largely evolve as the city evolves, and vice versa. And, in *Trade*, we find two men so crippled by their familial and economic responsibilities and expectations that they are unable to fully articulate or embody their sexuality, or access life in a fast changing city. Young Man understands sex with other men as a form of labour or service work, and Older Man tries to conceptualise his desire as a distinctive mark of his primitive, manly urges. Even so, I do not see these productions as mere reflections of static inequality. Rather, in performance these works also contest capitalism's value system of accumulating possessions and wealth, by unleashing a powerful emotional and affective intensity that seems to demand a new mode of social engagement and cultural value.

Paul Murphy has claimed that the disciplines of theatre and performance studies have paid poor attention to issues of class, arguing that our neoliberal capitalist culture requires much greater alertness to these dynamics. With reference to Ireland, he suggests that economic expansion under the Celtic Tiger created huge gaps between middle-class and working-class people: 'Notable, if perhaps somewhat predictable, in the expansion of the Irish middle class during the 1990s and 2000s is the overt display of class

distinction manifest in lifestyles and consumer choices, particularly in the tacit aim to distinguish their new status from past generations of relative poverty and also from different class strata in their own generation.⁵² This middle-class expansion, as Murphy describes it, does not actually eliminate a class divide, but in a sense just makes the split more pronounced. Unemployment, austerity and emigration only serve to maintain these gaps. There is significant difference too between the rhetoric of public discourse on class, and the realities of people's lives and identifications. As Pierson observes, even at the height of Ireland's affluence in 2005, 30% of the Republic's population identified as working-class, suggesting a persistent divide in Irish society: 'Self-designation of this sort can be fanciful (although it generally tends to underestimate the size of the working class and to inflate that of the self-proclaimed well-off), but it conveys at least that a strong sense of class divisions still obtains in Irish society.'⁵³

Side-stepping a specifically Irish context for a moment, it is Bertolt Brecht who offers foundational interpretations of the urban environment, and its socio-political construction and effects. In the lyric cycle *Handbook for City Dwellers* (1930), we see the city imagined as a battlefield for the marginalised and underprivileged, peopled by figures desperately trying to survive against the odds. According to frequent interlocutor Walter Benjamin, in Brecht's work the city is seen as 'the arena of the struggle for existence and of the class struggle,⁵⁴ which makes him 'probably the first important poet who has something to say about urban man.'⁵⁵ In the first poem of the collection, Brecht evokes a figure trying to make his way through the city, that is reminiscent of the characters we have seen in this chapter, to whom the poet's voice repeatedly issues the injunction: 'Cover your tracks.'⁵⁶ This order wills the subject to escape the trappings of bourgeois history and subjectivity, and the controlling mechanisms of industrial capitalism, including the codifications of identity, family, home and settlement. In the essay 'Experience and Poverty' (1933), Benjamin associates glass building materials with this new world without traces, in which the middle-classes can no longer leave their marks on their property, or keep anything hidden. 'Glass is, in general, the enemy of secrets. It is also the enemy of possession,' Benjamin writes.⁵⁷ Or, as Beatrice Hanssen interprets Benjamin's claim, 'Glass architecture assumes the characteristics of a revolutionary surface for a new subjectivity – an austere and slick surface on which it is hard to leave traces, accumulate commodities, or form habits.'⁵⁸

Brecht and Benjamin come to mind here because both have been so influential in shaping our understanding of the relationship between workers, cities and art in the context of twentieth-century modernisation. But despite the optimistic if not utopian politics they detect in the trackless, traceless city – the kind of glass-fronted developments which now define Dublin's docklands, for example – in the site-specific performances examined in this chapter the actual physical, material city resists erasure. Even though the

city changes, shiny buildings do not reflect a new society free of hierarchy or materialist trappings, but one more deeply rooted in and divided by them. As Brecht himself prophetically writes in the third poem from the handbook, 'The cities are allowed to change/But you are not allowed to change.'⁵⁹ With differing degrees of affirmation and critique, *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* and *Trade* lead us through and along the border between the old and new city, the rich and the poor, partiers and mourners, to show how Dublin and its people have been newly stratified and segregated. In text and performance, characters trace routes in the city to mark their existence in the face of threatened erasure, as it swiftly alters around them. Via immersive, site-specific stagings, audiences are encouraged to do the same.

I agree with Hickson's claim, quoted earlier in the chapter, that when working-class Dubliners appear in Irish theatre, they are often either romanticised or vilified. (However, I do not think they are the only group to endure such a pattern of representation. The rural Irish have suffered similarly in the past, not least of all in plays by J.M. Synge.) I also concur that one of the effects of Ireland's economic prosperity was the promise of liberalisation and social mobility for all, which never quite materialised. In *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* and *Trade*, we see characters negotiating this breach in different ways. From the love and yearning in both, I also discern a queer desire for a different social order. This is not just a world that accommodates same-sex relationships, but one in which the material conditions that structure and fix a whole range of differences and hierarchies are transformed. Queer desire, in this context, strives not just for same-sex relationships, but for a reimagining of access to the city and its opportunities. In their site-specific contexts, both productions redraw the city to give their characters, and the groups that they represent, different degrees of ownership of the city. Moreover, the productions work to encourage audiences to follow the routes and roots of their stories, and to track our shared histories.

7

Vertiginous Loss, Love and Belonging on the National Stage

‘Which way is home?’

Alice, *Alice in Funderland*

‘What country, friends, is this?’

Viola, *Twelfth Night*

When THISISPOPBABY opened its electro-pop musical *Alice in Funderland* on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre in April 2012, it seemed like Ireland’s vagrant queer performance culture had finally found a home in the national theatre. Since its founding by Jennifer Jennings and Phillip McMahon in Dublin in 2007, THISISPOPBABY has gained a reputation for creating projects dedicated to both recuperating and evolving queer performance in Ireland, but always brightening the margins rather than the main stage of the national theatre. Loosely structured around Lewis Carroll’s children’s book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) – with book and lyrics by Phillip McMahon, and music by Raymond Scannell – this production followed Cork girl Alice’s journey through Dublin’s technicolour underbelly. But even though THISISPOPBABY appeared to have settled comfortably in the national theatre, here was a musical whose heartbeat pulsed to the pains and pleasures of being lost; of one girl’s search for home, rather than her arrival at a specific location, as such. Alice’s venture is routed around the reiterated questions: ‘Who am I?’, ‘Where am I?’, ‘Which way is home?’; appeals she connects throughout to feeling ‘very queer indeed.’¹

In this chapter I want to take the occasion of THISISPOPBABY finding a home on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre, and Alice’s struggle to do the same, as an opportunity to reflect upon how recent queer performance at the national theatre has been particularly concerned with the problem of being lost, restless, searching for home, or for a revised sense of what that might mean. I do so by focusing on two recent productions, both directed by frequent THISISPOPBABY collaborator Wayne

Jordan: *Alice in Funderland* and a version of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (2014).² Distinctive for their queer aesthetics, themes and characters, I argue that both productions can be taken to reflect the national theatre's welcoming embrace of the queer performance culture I have been tracking in this book so far. But I also highlight how both productions figure queerness as an ongoing drama of orientation, taking place at the intersection of sexuality and geography, desire and place. In this sense, queerness has as much to do with locating oneself in the world, or not, as it has to do with locating oneself in relation to other people, as it were. In performing queerness in this manner, both productions reflect some of the dilemmas facing LGBTQ subjects and queer performance culture in contemporary Ireland, torn between exclusion, assimilation and the impulse to fashion different intimacies altogether. I dwell on these peculiar tensions to extrapolate how queer theatre and performance conceives of home and belonging for subjects and (would-be) citizens, as well as the implications for theatre and performance more broadly.

THISISPOPBABY at the national theatre

THISISPOPBABY has been at the forefront of making and curating queer theatre and performance in contemporary Ireland, and it has worked in some way or other with many of the artists profiled in this book. For the most part, the company has tended to animate the fringes of cultural provision, producing work in small or experimental venues, and programming events in festivals. THISISPOPBABY's expressed ambition is to '[rip] up the space between popular culture, counter culture, queer culture and high art – providing both a vehicle for [their] associate artists' dreams and an electrifying access point to the arts.'³ As this mission statement espouses, the company is invested in queerly distorting boundaries between what we might think of as legitimate and illegitimate cultural practices, while increasing access to the arts for an otherwise excluded demographic – in particular among young and LGBTQ people. The innovation which best exemplifies the company's flirtation between alternative and more mainstream forms and contexts is *Werk*, a neo-cabaret style production format which has to date taken place in a wide range of venues and contexts, featuring comedy, music, performance, political commentary, slam poetry and visual art.

The first *Werk* took place in May 2010, in the foyer of the Peacock Theatre, and it marked THISISPOPBABY's first formal collaboration with the national theatre. Since then, the Abbey Theatre has hosted four *Werk* events in total. Described on promotional material as a combination of 'underground club and performance roulette,' and 'a house of outrageous investigation, abnormal talent and unnatural beauty,'⁴ *Werk* has since taken place as part of Dublin Theatre Festival (2010, also at the Abbey Theatre), Electric

Picnic (2010), the Melbourne Festival (2013), and more recently at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (2014), drawing on Irish and international artists. The theme of the first event was 'We Buy Gold!', a direct reference to the Irish financial crisis, which saw the rise of pawn shops around the country. Subsequent themes included 'Mná na hÉireann' (Women of Ireland), and 'Fat of the Land' – events respectively framed by topical questions of gender and consumption.

Werk was dedicated to finding common ground in what might otherwise seem like an incompatible clash of ideas, conventions and audiences. Indeed, one of its main remits at the Abbey Theatre was to lure a new, younger population to the theatre, while also encouraging artists to use the space in different ways. Among the theatre and performance makers discussed in this book so far, Panti often performed, Mark O'Halloran has read his own writing, Veronica Dyas co-created a sound installation, and Neil Watkins was a frequent emcee. At the first Werk, in the foyer of the Peacock Theatre, I was fortunate enough to hear Watkins, posing as Fachtna McGinty, memorably sing: 'I've a better dream for how this place is gonna be for me. I'm not criticising, I'm just fantasising – one day I'll put on a production that people will actually want to see.' It was a lyric that amplified THISISPOPBABY's ambition to make room for a new generation at the national theatre, led by a queer sensibility. In collaborating with figures heavily involved in the 1990s' club scene, such as Rory O'Neill and Niall Sweeney, Werk can also be seen to reveal nostalgia for the first flush of queer performance culture in Ireland, as well as a desire to mark its legacy in the present. This goal received its most comprehensive and elaborate realisation to date when the Abbey Theatre co-produced *Alice in Funderland*, following a work in progress showing by THISISPOPBABY at Project Arts Centre (Space Upstairs) in 2011. This co-production promised to build on the collaborations with Werk, by staging a full-length musical brimming with pop cultural references in the national theatre; the first new musical that the theatre had staged in thirty years.⁵

***Alice in Funderland* and the wreckage of the boom**

As indicated at the outset of this chapter, *Alice in Funderland* took its cue from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in which a bored young girl falls down a rabbit hole, into a fantasy world populated by anthropomorphic creatures: a smoking caterpillar, a smiling cat, a mad hare and rambunctious playing cards. An example of the literary nonsense genre, the novel twists logic to find value in the ludic and otherwise nonsensical. The story has also been read as a journey of queer sexual awakening, in which Alice's burgeoning desire mobilises the action, leading her away from the straight and narrow path that limits and dulls her. As Rachel Carroll argues, Alice's queerness also emerges from the way she quite generally

highlights ‘the absurdity of normative laws and customs and her radical indeterminacy as a child in an adult world – at once too big and too small.’⁶ But due to claims that the protagonist is based on Alice Liddell – the young daughter of Carroll’s friends, in whom some have argued the writer showed inappropriate sexual interest – the story is also shrouded in a dark cloud of suspicion. Given these varied contexts which inform and frame Carroll’s text, Alice has often been appropriated to highlight wildly contrasting political ends – sometimes a victim, sometimes a hero. As Rachel Carroll also suggests, this pattern has gendered implications too: ‘Where the radical feminist reclamation of the ‘real’ Alice constructs her as an unknowing victim of an exploitative gaze, the contemporary queer appropriation of the fictional Alice celebrates her as a knowing agent.’⁷

In THISISPOPBABY’s version, we do not find Alice (Sarah Greene) as a child, but as a young woman in mourning, following her boyfriend’s death from anaphylactic shock. Her sense of loss feels sharper as she prepares to act as bridesmaid to her older sister Susan (Susannah de Wrixon), who is manically planning her wedding when the action opens. In her pink living room, overlooked by a framed photograph of The Liberator, Daniel O’Connell, Susan’s wedding looks set to be a crass affair, best captured by the crate of Icelandic volcanic spring water – ‘hand poured by Inuits into crystal carafes’ – which is delivered by Warren (Ian Lloyd Anderson) in the opening scene. But Alice’s adventure only really begins when she samples her sister’s wedding menu. Suddenly she finds herself dancing in a Dublin nightclub with Warren. He is her white rabbit, whom she follows into and around this fantasy landscape.

‘Everything is suddenly very queer,’ Alice surmises, as she tries to make sense of what is happening. She does not know how she got to the club, and she has no idea who she is: ‘I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night? I do remember feeling a little different when I woke up this morning. But if I’m not the same, the next question is... who am I?’ Even though Alice wonders who she is, her real quest is for home – not so much a fixed identity, or even a real place, but a revised sense of belonging. As she sings soon into her journey:

Which way is home?
How do you map a broken heart
When feeling’s gone?

The answer the production seems to give to this question is that Alice can find home by developing feeling again, in particular for other people less fortunate than her. She must find a way to make sense of the wild, eclectic world she has uncovered.

This process sees Alice confront a dark, ruthless side to Irish life, populated by a suicidal gay man, drug dealers, the homeless, patronising



Figure 7.1 Tony Flynn as the Queen of Hartstown (left), Sarah Greene as Alice (right) and the Public in the background, in *Alice in Funderland* on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre, 2012. Photograph by Richard Gilligan

daytime television presenters, a corrupt politician, the sadistic Queen of Hartstown and her exploited immigrant workers, and two sisters imprisoned for murder. These roles are loosely mapped onto characters from the original story: so the Duchess (Ruth McGill) becomes a drug-dealing street trader who sells from her pram, which also features her pig baby; the March Hare and the Hatter become television presenters Gobnait (Kathy Rose O'Brien) and Fleachna (Mark O'Regan); the Cheshire Cat becomes The Minister (also played by O'Regan); the Queen of Hearts becomes the Queen of Hartstown (Tony Flynn); and Tweedledum and Tweedledee become the imprisoned sisters Linda and Charlotte (McGill and de Wrixon). In remapping Ireland and her knowledge of it, Alice reorganises her sense of self in the world, and the world's sense of itself. By extension, the production suggests that only by recognising its injustices, and embracing its exclusions, can Ireland rehabilitate itself.

It is fair to say that THISISPOPBABY's production history implicitly places the musical within a queer register. This expectation is satisfied by Naomi Wilkinson's costume and set design, composed of vivid colour blocks, hyperbolic objects (including a flying chair on which Alice eventually escapes), pulsing lights and reflective materials and fabrics. Many of the actors play in a camp mode, particularly Gobnait and Fleachna, the sarcastic daytime

television presenters, and the suicidal Gay (Paul Reid) who cruises around on rollerblades. Most of the actors double-up roles, creating the impression that everyone is also someone else. Performers also dip in and out of the action, in particular Alice, who appeals to the audience directly about what steps to take next.

The Queen of Hartstown, Delores, best embodies the merger of queer design and acting style. (Hartstown may be named after the Queen of Hearts, but it is also a neighbourhood in Dublin 15.) Played as a cruel and sometimes comic dominatrix by well-known gay male actor Flynn, and dressed in a garish red PVC costume, Alice meets her towards the end of her journey. As proprietor of The Castle pub, Delores rules over a group of East European women, exploited as prostitutes and dancers. But this Queen has little heart, and her capitalistic greed is captured in her motto, 'Labour is life. There isn't anything else. Stay focused, work hard and before you know it, it will all be over.' Throughout the course of the production, the tone veers from warm, witty and impassioned, to dark and embittered. And although what we might think of as typically queer social and political issues do not overtly constitute the core focus of the plot (e.g. sex, legal rights and recognitions), all of these interweaving contextual and aesthetic features conspire to create a palpable queer sense, that offers and invites wry reflection on the world represented.

While *Alice in Funderland* is in many ways a musical about loss and being lost, the production ultimately strives to put everything on display. Alice may be in mourning and unsure of who she is or to where she is going, but the richly animated *mise-en-scène* makes her world highly visible to the audience. Writing about Carroll's original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Gilles Deleuze suggests that the story is foremost about the girl's loss of personal identity.⁸ We can see this drama played out in the story's battle between surface and depth, which Deleuze describes in the following terms:

In Lewis Carroll, everything begins with a horrible combat, the combat of depths: things explode or make us explode, boxes are too small for their contents, foods are toxic and poisonous, entrails are stretched, monsters grab at us. A little brother uses his little brother as bait. Bodies intermingle with one another, everything is mixed up in a kind of cannibalism that joins together food and excrement. Even words are eaten. This is the domain of the action and passion of bodies: things and words are scattered into every direction, or on the contrary are welded together into nondecomposable blocks. Everything in depth is horrible, everything is nonsense.⁹

In Deleuze's dazzling reading, what is deep in Alice's world is what is ultimately damaging. So the story hollows out this under-layer and gives

us a play of surfaces. Alice's achievement, Deleuze maintains, is to allow surfaces to shimmer and shine: 'She rises or returns to the surface. She creates surfaces. Movements of penetration and burying give way to light lateral movements of sliding; the animals of the depths become figures on cards without thickness.'¹⁰ Deleuze claims that surfaces sparkle with 'the "Radiance" of pure events, entities that never finish either happening or withdrawing.'¹¹ In *Alice and Funderland*, too, Alice journeys to Ireland's underbelly to bring hidden experiences to light, and the design and playing style clearly prioritise surface over depth. The protagonist's capacity to imagine or effect new worlds through exposing these depths is given to be much more important than her desire to recover an identity or a pre-existing home place. This queer logic reverberates throughout the national theatre, which was founded with the ambition to construct national identity against derogatory colonial representation, rather than to void it.¹²

This queer sense, as I'm charting it here, allows subjects and stories that have been marginalised, oppressed or forgotten in contemporary Ireland to become more visible, audible and palpable. The Dublin that Alice travels through has been directly shaped by the Celtic Tiger, and its negative effects are accounted for with repeated references to the property crisis, the economic downturn, and general political ineptitude and malaise. Alice leads us down through the fallout, drawing our eyes to paths the establishment would rather we did not see. The group which best embody this destruction are known only as 'the Public,' but self-described as 'broke, tattooed, and toothless.' A dancing ensemble of homeless people wrapped in sleeping bags, they sing their predicament in the following manner:

Broke, tattooed and toothless
 It's no joke; these mean streets are ruthless
 When there's no hope, of ever getting through this
 Put your head down, you just have to do this.

There's no chance of ever getting richer
 The fat stock up as the weak get thinner
 Me? I wanna be a winner
 I may have sinned; but I'm no sinner.

The group appear at different stages throughout Alice's journey, punctuating her travels as constant reminders of the abject poverty suffered by thousands of homeless people in contemporary Ireland, the figures for which rose dramatically following the economic crash, due to unemployment rates and impossible mortgage debt.¹³ The Public allude to property, unemployment and poverty in their songs, exploiting musical theatre's tonal elasticity to be both utterly serious and comic:

Fucked, stuck in a rat race
Live for the weekend
To get off your face
And your mother thinks you're a disgrace
Living alone in a bedsit in Naas.

Treat yourself to a Pot Noodle
Dinner for one never felt so cruel
And you pray for the days back in school
And everyone at work, thinks you're a fool.

Political satire receives its most substantial treatment when Alice meets The Minister. He is the production's answer to the Cheshire Cat, who also stands in for everything that is deemed wrong with the other cat – the Celtic Tiger. Arrogant and smarmy, he is only interested in using politics for self-promotion:

I'm the minister for all your needs!
I'm your publicly elected jack the lad
I'm the back to scratch, the hand that feeds
I'm the minister for all your needs!

The Minister tells Alice that she must be mad for still living in Ireland, unlike the thousands who emigrated following the recession. He gambles with the country like it is a game of Monopoly, and encourages Alice to do the same:

Let's run the country [...]
Into the ground.
Let's have a cock fight
You be the euro and I'll be the pound

Let's run the country...
Let's run amok
Let's wedge our citizens
Between a hard place and a rock

The suggestion here, of course, is that the Irish government foolishly gambled with the country – first by mismanaging the economy and property sector, and then by committing to save the banking system with a guarantee of up to €440 billion, and requiring an EU/IMF bailout of €85 billion. This decision placed an enormous pressure on current and future generations of Irish people, while also eroding national sovereignty. The scene ends with the politician's sinister voice resounding 'We all partied' – a quotation from former Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, who controversially made the

claim on RTÉ's current-affairs television programme *Prime Time* in 2010, when questioned about the causes of Ireland's economic failure.

When Alice meets the young man on rollerblades just known as Gay, he is on the brink of committing suicide, having been dumped by his boyfriend. While his sassy, slightly hysterical behaviour suggests he is over-reacting, his duets with Alice are delivered with much more sincerity and gravity. They give import to the day-to-day fears most people face relating to relationships, health and finance:

What if there are no answers?
 What if my connection breaks down?
 What if they diagnose me?
 What if the silence breaks my heart?

 What if I can't make the repayments?
 What if I can't see the light?
 What if this tunnel's too long?
 What if my head and my heart give up?

As Alice and the Gay repeat at various stages, everyone is 'on the edge' in some way – in their world, and in the audience's. But there is nothing incidental or purely local about the climate of fear about which they speak. As Paul Virilio argues in *The Administration of Fear* (2012), after the recent global economic crash, fear defines so much of the world we live in: states make policies to create and manage it, and it circulates to affectively police us.¹⁴

The arc of the action suggests that Alice is travelling deeper underground with each scene. Understood in this way, her Hades is undoubtedly Act 2, Scene 10, when she meets Linda and Charlotte (played by McGill and de Wrixon), representatives of sisters Linda and Charlotte Mulhall who were imprisoned for killing their mother's reputedly abusive Kenyan boyfriend, Farah Swaleh Noor, in 2005.¹⁵ The women became known as the Scissor Sisters by the press, on account of dismembering the man's body, and disposing of it in Dublin's Royal Canal. When Alice stumbles upon them, the production abandons all gloss and wit. On a darkened stage, the women stand expressionless, apart, in chains. Linda advises an upset Alice: 'You make yourself real by standing on your own two feet. By facing up to it.' The sisters then sing to explain their own story.

Despite the violent gruesomeness of Swaleh Noor's murder, for which the women remain imprisoned, this scene strives to highlight how abused and deprived the sisters were themselves, as emerged in court and subsequent investigative publications.¹⁶ Each of the three times I saw the production live, this moment took many audience members aback: some gasped audibly, others walked out. The scene took the production to a grim, desolate place rather abruptly, abandoning all glimmers of humour

and hope. Some spectators might also have felt the production was repeating an injustice, by giving voice to the convicted murderers, rather than, say, the dismembered victim. And yet I found the manner in which the women sang to departricularise their crime to be deeply affecting, in particular the refrain:

We're all torsos in the banal
Who are you to buck the trend?
We're all just torsos in the banal
And where we're going, you're going in the end

While Alice's journey through Dublin's underbelly manages to illuminate the hypocrisy of politicians, the problems of poverty and homelessness, racially-inflected labour exploitation, and a general climate of fear and anxiety, this is unquestionably the darkest point she reaches. The Scissor Sisters are deployed not as representatives of recent economic misfortune, but as symptoms of decades of stratified disadvantage and neglect. In reality they may have killed and dismembered a man and put his body in a canal, but here they appear to tell us that in this Ireland, we are all torsos in the canal – not waving, not drowning, but long disregarded. However problematic the erasure of the dead victim might seem to some, the scene rather audaciously attempts to understand the incident as symptomatic of a wider pattern of state-enabled violence.

'Who am I?', 'Where am I?', 'Which way is home?': in many ways Alice's guiding questions are those which have preoccupied a (post)colonially fixated Irish theatre throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, implicitly voiced by characters asserting their claims to ownership, or driven by a desire to belong. In an uncanny way, Alice's search recalls so many other quests in Irish theatre, from the allegorical Cathleen's pursuit of her four green fields in W.B. Yeats' and Lady Augusta Gregory play *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (1902), to Hester Swane's struggle to stay on the bog in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998). But as I have been arguing so far in this chapter, Alice also allows us to reflect upon a nation spinning from the Celtic Tiger and its effects. In his study of this period, and its impact on Irish society, Kieran Allen identifies a widespread sense of cultural vertigo – 'Ireland has reached its own modernity with a pace that has left many with a sense of dizziness'¹⁷ – which I think can be felt in this production too. The musical's queer sensibility worked to re-focus some of contemporary Ireland's volatile subjects and stories. As Alice is forced to contend with them in looking for her home, the production seems to propose that audiences might also engage them in trying to imagine a new future for a bewildered Ireland. In this, Alice is both a national allegory and a sort of everywoman, who must contend with all that disorients her before she can ever really move on.

Beyond this narrative specificity, however, *Alice in Funderland* also exalted the pains and pleasures of being lost and disoriented, extolling the interesting things that happen when you do not take the paths that open up immediately before you – in Alice’s case marriage, and Cork. It is only through being displaced – as in the *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* on which the musical was based, or indeed *The Wizard of Oz* tale, which also inflects the story – that this protagonist can start to make sense of the world. In this, we can see how this Alice is part Carroll’s protagonist, part symbolic Cathleen and part Dorothy. This sense of unbridled carnival is also embedded in the musical’s title, with ‘Funderland’ referring to Ireland’s iconic funfair.

While Alice eventually arrives back to her physical home, the performance also undercuts domestic convention with a finale that sees the ensemble join hands, and face the audience, encouraging us to step outside our homes too, and into the streets:

Unlock your doors, turn off the news
 Stop counting pennies in your head
 And if you lose, fuck it, you lose
 Count up your blessings instead...

There is no fear
 Just nonsense
 There is no fear
 You’re here, You’re here

It is impossible to hear this exuberant invitation to material abandon soar in the national theatre without thinking about Ireland’s troubled relationship to land ownership in particular, from British colonialism and its resistance throughout history, to the implosion of the property bubble in 2007, which heralded the spectacular demise of the Celtic Tiger. *Alice in Funderland* exerts a queer spin on these preoccupations, as well as the Abbey Theatre tradition so invested in the architecture of space, place and national identity. Celebrate being ‘here today,’ the ensemble movingly exhort, sharing in this theatrical experience, alive in and to the world. The injunction to have ‘no fear’ also recalls the ‘no fear’ lyric from *Silver Stars*, here turned into a much more joyful choral charge. This concluding moment resembles what Jill Dolan describes as a ‘utopian performative,’ in which another brighter, better world is sensed or imagined in the theatre. Dolan writes:

Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.¹⁸

Alice may have travelled into an underworld to sift through the rubble of contemporary Ireland, but at the end of the production the company urge us to enjoy the rapturous present – ecstatically out of place and time – unfettered by history, materialism or even marriage plots.

If the company that found a home for queer performance culture in Ireland found a home in the national theatre, then this production was curiously unsure about what exactly constituted home, and the kinds of identities and relationships it was presumed to support. Alice does not really find out who she is, or where she is from, but rather discovers how she might belong differently: by engaging with the past while forging a future, by being alive to the present, and by supporting society's most marginalised. Queerly scrambling the Irish obsessions with identity, place and property, *Alice in Funderland* ultimately champions forms of sociality, civic solidarity and social responsibility not accounted for within these dominant terms or value systems. The sense of belonging Alice finds, and which I think the production espouses, is not a familial, spatial or even a temporally neat configuration, but something closer to an affective bind or relation that needs to be continually negotiated, rehearsed and performed.

Travel, transformation and cooling effects in *Twelfth Night*

In April 2014, two years after *Alice in Funderland* was produced, the Abbey Theatre staged *Twelfth Night*. Also under Wayne Jordan's direction, this production was unmistakably nuanced and adapted to resonate with an Irish audience, most obviously in its use of local accents and speech rhythms. It was also distinctive for its lustrous colour palette and kitsch design, displays of contemporary fashion and occasional bursts of pop music. Indeed, these have become distinctive trademarks of much of Jordan's work, including earlier productions with his theatre company Randolph SD|The Company, founded in 2004.¹⁹ Played by a young cast and created by a young team, it also seemed like the production was actively trying to speak to and about young people. Although typically played by adults, it is easy to forget just how young Shakespeare's leading twins Viola and Sebastian are, thus making it a play, in many ways, about young people. (That they are teenagers is indicated by Malvolio's comment to Olivia: 'Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy [...] one would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him.') But more fundamentally, the plot of *Twelfth Night* is propelled by the drama of swapped identities and resulting implicit same-sex desire, arising from Olivia (Natalie Radmall-Quirke) falling for Viola (Sophie Robinson) who is dressed as a boy, and Antonio (Conor Madden) falling for Sebastian (Gavin Fullam), whom he confuses for Viola. In the Abbey Theatre's staging, all of these elements conspired to create a sense that the production

was very much attempting to address youth and queer culture in contemporary Ireland.

While *Twelfth Night* is in many ways very different to *Alice in Funderland*, both plots are motivated by grief and being lost, travel and its transformative potential. The interconnection of these experiences is captured by Viola's question upon landing in Illyria, having been shipwrecked, with her twin brother Sebastian presumed dead: 'What country, friends, is this?' Here, Illyria is a zone of anchorless grief, as well as a place of geographical uncertainty. And Viola is not the only character affected by loss. Duke Orsino (Barry O'Connor) is in love with his neighbour, Countess Olivia, who does not reciprocate. Her brother has died, and so she is in mourning, planning to avoid men's company for seven years.

The theme of loss extends into the play's convoluted hide-and-seek love plot, which is worth outlining in some detail here. Working as a page for Orsino, Viola dresses as a boy, Cesario, who tries to woo Olivia on his behalf. However, Olivia falls for Cesario instead, and sends her steward Malvolio (Mark O'Halloran) – who is himself wildly infatuated with Olivia – after him. Cesario has already fallen for Orsino. It emerges that Viola's brother Sebastian has survived the shipwreck, and he arrives in Illyria. A jealous Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Mark Lambert) challenges Cesario to a duel, only to be defended by Antonio who mistakes Cesario for his Sebastian. Meanwhile, Olivia has met and married Sebastian.

As should be obvious from this brief sketch alone, confused identities and entangled desires enmesh the play, even though the relationships between Viola and Olivia, Cesario and Orsino, and Sebastian and Antonio supply the richest homoerotic potential. Aguecheek is also hoping to win over Olivia, and is encouraged by his friend and Olivia's uncle Sir Toby Belch (Nick Dunning). Sir Andrew, Sir Toby and Olivia's maid Maria (Ruth McGill) plot to humiliate Malvolio, by tricking him into thinking Olivia has sent him a letter asking him to wear yellow stockings and smile constantly the next time he sees her. When he does so, Olivia reads his appearance and behaviour as signs of madness, and has him interred. When Sebastian arrives to apologise for fighting Sir Toby, Cesario is accused of deserting both Antonio and Olivia. The latter solves the mystery when both twins are seen together. The plot against Malvolio is revealed, he is released, and departs promising revenge. Maria and Sir Toby marry, and the play ends as Orsino welcomes Olivia and Sebastian. He promises Cesario that once she is dressed as a woman again they too will be wed.

This was not the first time that *Twelfth Night* lent itself to exploring queer issues in Irish theatre. *Wet Paint Arts*, which worked to increase young people's access to and participation in the arts, drew on the structure for its production of *Tangles* at Project Arts Centre in 1990. Devised and directed by David Grant, the production focused on a web of love interests among young people, including a gay character.²⁰ A number of more recent

international productions of *Twelfth Night* have also mined the play's homoerotic elements, in particular by using all-male casts, as would have taken place in the original early modern staging. For example, under Tim Carroll's direction, the Globe Theatre produced an all-male period style version in 2002, which went on to tour internationally. Declan Donnellan's 2003 version with Cheek by Jowl and the Chekhov International Theatre Festival (which played in the Olympia Theatre as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2004) presented a much more stylish, chic world – a kind of catwalk around which the Russian-speaking cast posture and preen. Propeller's 2007 production, directed by Edward Hall, was neither historically faithful nor stylistically contemporary. Adopting a highly physical, visual and dream-like approach to the play, it foregrounded a potent melancholy in the play's delineation of desire.

While these productions approached the play's queerness as latent, Jordan's production takes it as a given, to the point of it seeming like not a particularly big deal. So even though Shakespeare's drama still moves to a rhythm of concealment and revelation, Jordan's production seems to take delight in putting everything on display from the outset. Ciarán O'Melia's set design is striking for its colour blocks of yellow, pink and blue. Gold lamé curtains shimmer across the back wall, and five large amplifiers are placed about the stage. Setting the pop tone, the Duke passionately gyrates to a musical arrangement at the outset of the production, and musician Alex Petcu plays percussion upstage left throughout. While Tom Lane provides some original music, the show is punctuated by well-known tunes too. For instance, at one point the Duke plays a sample from Air's 'Sexy Boy,' and in the party scene Sir Toby Belch blasts the lyric from Rage Against the Machine's 'Killing in the Name' – 'Fuck You, I Won't Do What You Tell Me.' When Sir Toby and Sir Andrew dance in their first scene together, as they hatch their plot against Malvolio, they do so to Prodigy's 'Firestarter.' During the interval, Petcu is joined by a number of actors on stage for a percussive interlude. The entire set is covered with laminated wood flooring, and a trendy Smeg fridge occupies upstage right. The overall effect is that the action is taking place somewhere between a club and a swish open-plan loft apartment.

In the original early modern staging, the audience would have watched a boy play Viola pretend that she was a boy. Here the production abandons this device completely. Viola does not 'act' as a boy playing a woman, or as a boy playing a woman play a boy; or even as a woman playing a woman. Actor Sophie Robinson plays Cesario exactly as she plays Viola. This has the effect of removing humorous tension from exchanges with other characters, naturalising them instead. So when Viola effects her transformation by stating 'Conceal me what I am,' we do not see her hide her 'true' identity at all. This does not feel like an inconsistency or a distraction, however, as Jordan's approach directs us to appreciate this same-sex desire straight up, as it were.

Women desire women, and men desire men. This is commonplace and even exciting, rather than exceptional or funny, the production seems to suggest. Characters and audiences desire what they can see, not what they are duped into thinking they can see.

After the play's resolution returns everyone to heterosexual partnerships in the final scene, Orsino still cannot see his lover as a woman: 'Cesario, come;/ For so you shall be, while you are a man;/ But, when in other habits you are seen,/ Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.' The role of Valentine, a servant of the Duke, was here played by female actor Elaine Fox. But if the Duke hires women to work, then there is no good reason why Viola has to dress as a man to enter the court, as we are led to believe is necessary. When Valentine is referred to as 'Sir,' this has the effect of gently queering their interactions, while also making Cesario's at least verbally proposed cross-dressing seem unnecessary. And in this production, she does not really cross-dress at all.

Although Jordan does not technically cross-dress his cast, clothes constitute important scenographic signs within the production, insofar as they reflect the often gender-neutral quality of much contemporary fashion, which also points to more fluid notions of gender and sexuality. Under Emma Fraser's design, the actors are by and large androgynously dressed in American Apparel, All Saints and Cos, as you might expect on the streets of most European cities. Cesario and Sebastian both wear nautical striped tops and dark three quarter length trousers. Feste (Ger Kelly) wears a dark navy kilt, and the Duke sports skinny jeans and a sleeveless vest. Where costume is used to conceal and thereby highlight conceit is in the case of Malvolio. The yellow stockings he wears to catch Olivia's attention are what betray him in the end, and destroy his chances of social advancement. In this production his ultimate abjection is manifest by wearing a morphsuit, a garment that speaks to his desire to transform and invent himself, while also putting O'Halloran's body explicitly on show. His humiliation is compounded when he is interred in a large glass case center stage, wailing and slobbering. The fact that the role was played in a slightly unhinged, camp way by well-known gay actor and writer O'Halloran (who wrote *Trade*) might also be taken to subtly infer that Malvolio was not motivated by sincere sexual desire or love, but rather social mobility. These elements worked together to suggest that the production was less interested in concealed appearances, than with boldly exposed bodies and surfaces.

In addition to these stage and costume design choices, Jordan foregrounds the allure of queer bodies on stage. He carves room for us to dwell on Olivia longing for Cesario, but even more so Antonio craving Sebastian. The latter spend a good deal of time showing off their attractive, toned physiques in little more than their underwear. Sprawled on a large bed placed centre stage at one point, with limbs interlinked, Jordan encourages the audience to

enjoy the men's bodies as much as they seem to be enjoying each other. He clearly places Antonio as the production's erotic male centrepiece, with his muscled body exerting a strong sexual presence on stage.²¹ Playing Captain and Priest, Muiris Crowley whirls semi-naked across the set between scene changes, seemingly just for titillation. When the tall, broad, bearded Kelly, as Feste, sings a heartrending song in falsetto, he too seems at odds with his otherwise robust masculine frame and demeanour. In a very queer way, his desire and his body do not obviously align.

The principle of exposure which I have been tracking, and the one which I argue characterises the production, is also reflected in the fact that the left side of the back wall is inscribed with the text 'What You Will?', a reference to the play's full title *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will*. In the vernacular of the early modern period, 'will' was understood to indicate male and female sex organs, as well as desire.²² Given visual emphasis in this production, and as an interrogative, the phrase explicitly frames the action as a dilemma of desire and object choice. But it also returns the title as a question for the audience to ask of ourselves: 'What do *you* want?', the production seems to be posing. A similar question is posed in the Abbey Theatre's publicity material. As one of the theatre's online adverts put it: 'Love is complicated but can we choose who we fall for?'

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'will' also has roots in the Old Norse word *villr*, meaning 'bewildered, erring, astray.' As the entry elaborates, will can also mean 'Going or gone astray; that has lost his way, or has nowhere to go for rest or shelter; straying, wandering, "lost" and "Going astray in thought, belief, or conduct; going wrong, erring; wayward, "wild".'²³ The word, then, refers both to the experience of desire and of being lost. For Sara Ahmed, these resonances make will a particularly queer topic of inquiry. In *Willful Subjects* (2014), Ahmed writes: 'Willing is how we end up deviating from the right path, as well as the means for directing ourselves along that path.'²⁴ As Ahmed also reminds us, this figuration of the queer as stray is something inscribed in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of queer:

How queer is this will! As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has elaborated, the word 'queer' derives from the Indo-European word 'twerk,' to turn or to twist, also related to the word 'thwart' to transverse, perverse, or cross [...] That this word came to describe sexual subjects is no accident: those who do not follow the straight line, who to borrow Lucretius's terms, 'snap the bonds of fate,' are the perverts: swerving rather than straightening, deviating from the right course. To queer the will is to show how the will has already been given a queer potential.²⁵

Given will's potential for deviation, Ahmed suggests it often becomes the subject of straightening techniques, used to hold subjects to account: 'If

we have this understanding of will, we would not be surprised by its queer potential: after all, you only straighten what is already bent.²⁶

It is in this definition of will that *Twelfth Night* also finds common ground between sexual and geographical orientations. As in *Alice in Funderland*, the action is motivated by a young person's loss of a loved one. This loss effects the experience of being geographically lost, and only in being geographically lost do Viola and Sebastian – like Alice – experience their queer encounters. Lisa Jardine suggests that we should not underplay the fact that *Twelfth Night* is as much about finding home as it is about finding a sexual partner, insofar as Viola and Sebastian are young orphans with no means or place to go to:

Indeed, one might argue that *finding a place* in the domestic economy of a household other than that of their family is the initiation of the drama – they are shipwrecked on an unspecified voyage, and voyages are (in narrative) conventionally quests or searches. In addition to the careful specification of their being orphaned before the age of majority ('when Viola from her birth/had numbered thirteen years'), the audience are persistently reminded of the extreme youth of *both* twins (since each resembles the other so completely.²⁷

It is this dual experience of loss which opens up queer worlds to the characters. This connection between sexual and geographical lost-ness and searching brings us back to shifting definitions of 'will' as being both about wanting something we do not have, and being out of place. As Ahmed suggests, 'The landscape of will [...] is littered with waifs and strays.'²⁸

While the entire production is shaped by a strong directorial vision, the final scene is entirely Jordan's own. Once the dramatic action has run its course, and the 'straight' couplings have been formed, most of the cast strip to their underwear, and everyone walks centre stage. Huddling together, they are suddenly showered from above with cold water. (We can tell it is cold from their shivers). They stand there for about 15 seconds, soaking and cold, some of them giggling awkwardly. This dampens the heat of the dramatic action, but it also works as a meta-theatrical gesture that washes characters from actors in real time. The final image is of wet, semi-naked actors – rather than necessarily characters – on stage.

This specially crafted ending can be seen to have a cooling effect in a broader context too. As discussed in chapter 2, in February 2014, a couple of months prior to this production taking place, Panti stood on the same stage and delivered her short speech about homophobia in contemporary Ireland. This was a performance which generated a lot of heat, in stimulating discussion about homophobia, same-sex marriage and adoption rights in Ireland and in pockets around the globe. As I also argued in the same chapter, these

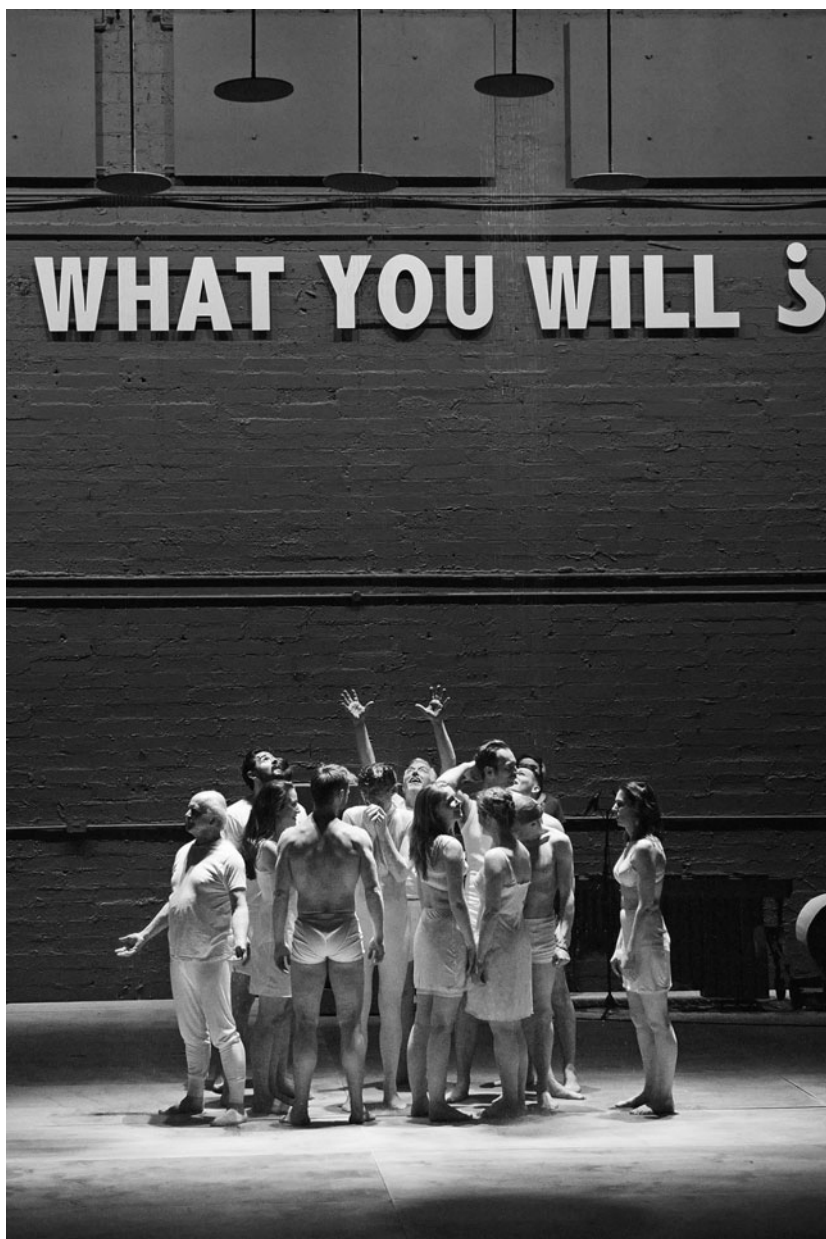


Figure 7.2 The cast of *Twelfth Night* being cooled down by a shower in the final moments of the performance on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre, 2014. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh

debates were heightened owing to Ireland's then imminent Marriage Equality referendum.

We can see in this final scene a comment on the natural chilling of desire that comes with time or, more specifically perhaps, marriage. As Jordan observes in interview, 'Sex isn't as big an issue in our world of the play. I don't think people care whether you kiss girls or boys that much.'²⁹ But the ending can also be taken to will a cooling effect on public discourse, though not the prohibitive kind that followed Panti's appearance on *The Saturday Night Show*. There may be a semi-naked cast in front of us, but as cold water flows over their bodies and onto the stage, the production seems to suggest that desire – queer or otherwise – is nothing to get particularly hot and bothered over; and even that marriage may not be the hottest solution after all. With the final scene, land, property, rank and marriage all seem less important than desire's capacity to draw bodies together, soaked to the skin.

Disorientation: an ethic of navigation

Writing about the Globe Theatre's all-male *Twelfth Night*, Sharon Holland assesses the queer qualities of the production, not just in terms of how it dealt with the play's homoerotic impulses on stage, but in light of how it worked to create what she describes as a 'queer constituency.' The difference between an audience and a constituency, Holland proffers, is that a constituency is deliberately constructed and 'massaged' into an allegiance:

An audience can be a number of instruments: an assembly of listeners, the readership of a book, or the whole group of spectators or viewers of a play. In contrast, a constituency is a politically represented group or a body of customers or supporters. In other words, an audience is an always already captivated *entity*, whereas a constituency has to be worked – massaged into its allegiance.'³⁰

In Holland's reading, a queer constituency is not just about representation on stage, or even about incidental presence in the audience. Instead, a constituency can be best understood as the demographic world a production tries to cultivate or construct around itself. Holland measures this capacity in terms of how productions can 'woo a potentially "gay" audience – or, at least, *reinvigorate* a queer constituency.'³¹

Holland's understanding of constituency formation invites us to think about theatrical politics outside of what happens on stage and the composition of an audience on any given night. Developing constituencies involves the often more complicated task of engaging particular political perspectives and groups in an integrated way, over time. (With the 1995 production of *Angels in America*, for example, this work had not been done, and was hardly even possible at the time). With *Alice in Funderland* and *Twelfth Night*,

I suggest we can see the Abbey Theatre make a concerted effort to engage youth and queer culture in terms of issues and modes of representation, but perhaps more importantly still, in terms of artist access and audience cultivation. (This was also bolstered by the mounting of *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* in the Peacock Theatre in February 2012.) In this respect, as I indicated at the outset of this chapter, you could surmise that the Abbey Theatre was quite openly and enthusiastically offering Irish queer performance culture a legitimising home; a project whose roots stretch back most obviously to Patrick Mason's tenure as Artistic Director in the 1990s, even if the queer elements of some productions were not always made explicit or noticed (as with Frank McGuinness's subtly encoded and historically situated plays), nor widely attended and embraced (as with *Angels in America*). This can be seen to mirror if not encourage the increased acceptance of LGBTQ people in contemporary Ireland. While the word 'legitimation' might sound formal here, and even incompatible with what we expect as queer culture's transgressive instincts and ambitions, I do not think that there is anything inherently wrong with it in this context. Indeed, the act it describes responds to a lack of queer representation on the national stage, which many of us have bemoaned for a long time. But despite this welcoming gesture, I'm also struck by the uneasy relationship these productions themselves enact to ideas of home, in particular as it indexes normative models of relationality in fixed relationships to place. In the following pages I want to consider this tension further, in order to propose how these productions can be seen to speak to alternative ways for thinking about belonging in contemporary Ireland.

In my discussion of both productions earlier in this chapter, I highlighted their dramatic preoccupations with being lost and disoriented in terms of personal identity, sexuality, geography and marriage bind: of being unsure of who you are, what you desire, where you are coming from, or going to. I argue that a phenomenological charge of disorientation ripples and riffs across this work, which giddily resists the easy fixing of gendered, sexual, national or diasporic identity and citizenship, imagining instead more supple, responsive and affective modes of togetherness and belonging.

In *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (1995), Una Chaudhuri examines the unsettling relationship between place and subjectivity in modern drama, a phenomenon she elaborates as 'geopathology.' This manifests itself in terms of 'a *victimage of location* and a *heroism of departure*,³² in which 'who one is and who one can be are [...] a function of *where* one is and how one experiences that place.'³³ Chaudhuri argues that the protagonist of geopathological drama is caught up in a conflict of staying or leaving home, with 'incessant dialogue between belonging and exile, home and homelessness' defining this theatre's 'tragic impasse.' In contrast to this feature of modern drama, Chaudhuri argues that 'postgeopathological' postmodern plays imagine place as heterotopic, 'capable of containing within it many different, even incompatible, places.'³⁴

The concept of geopathology is very useful for thinking about both dramatic and worldly relationships to place, capturing our often competing desire to root and to flee. But in relying on the language of illness, Chaudhuri's term does not sufficiently capture the potential for this interplay to be affirming and sustaining. While postmodern drama may well show evidence of heterotopic spaces as Chaudhuri argues (she highlights Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* as exemplary), the queer performance I examine here reveals an especially nuanced relationship between subjectivity and place, in which sexualities and bodies, bodies and homes, even homes and theatres misalign.³⁵ But as well as producing pain or trauma, these occasions can also be the stimuli for creative movement and redirection, involving characters, performers or even theatre companies. Less a theatre of geopathology, this might be described as a theatre of disorientation.

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz claims that 'Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.'³⁶ While Muñoz imagines queerness's future to inhabit the 'there' of his book's title, I suggest we might also discern it in the disorienting effects of the present. Muñoz hints at this too when he suggests that the desire to be lost has political force, writing: 'We can understand queerness itself as being filled with the intention to be lost. Queerness is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds' mapping of space. Queerness is lost in space or lost in relation to the space of heteronormativity.'³⁷ We can surmise that, for Muñoz, a queer life's disoriented and disorienting aspects are virtues, insofar as they allow queers to dip and dive from the punishing inevitabilities of being found, named and located. As he remarks in a discussion of performer Kevin Aviance, 'It matters to get lost in dance or to use dance to get lost: lost from the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality.'³⁸

It is Sara Ahmed who offers the most extensive queer reading of orientation as it relates to both sexuality and migration. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), Ahmed writes: 'If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space,' which she likens to being at home, 'then disorientation occurs when that extension fails,'³⁹ when we never quite arrive at the objects of our desire. So the experience of feeling oriented is closely connected to the experience of feeling at home, of having arrived, whether in terms of one's embodied subjectivity, or our relationship to place. For queers, there is nothing straightforward about orientation: our desire draws us to people and places off the beaten track. This can make for a disorienting experience of the world, which can be confusing and painful, even unyielding and destructive.

But facing the always strange or new, disorientation is also ripe with the kind of promise and potential which can be life-giving. To be lost is not to be without purpose. Ahmed suggests that living out a politics of disorientation

'might be to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering' possible.⁴⁰ To put it another way: to live out a politics of disorientation, of never settling or being fully settled, might involve never feeling fully quite at home, of having arrived, in terms of one's socially-mandated embodied identity, or location. This is not identical to fetishising the kinds of precarity and mobility we associate with some of the negative effects of global capitalism. Instead, as we have seen across the theatre and performance examined in this book so far, in compelling us to look in or for different directions, in certain situations acts and experiences of disorientation can also rehabilitate those symptoms, upturning and re-laying the ground for the cultivation of new ways of being in the world.

If these productions seem to have found a home for queer performance in the Abbey Theatre, what kind of home is this? As I have been arguing in this chapter, playing against their apparent embrace by the national theatre, these productions resist the easy fixing of identity in bodies, times and places. In fact, these terms slip, slide, and swerve in these productions, creating a phenomenologically-charged stage of reeling subjectivity. What we witness and experience instead is the spark of an affective longing and belonging, in which people commune regardless of the differences which define and distinguish them.

Elizabeth Freeman has examined forms of queer kinship that exist outside of heterosexuality and state policy, which are typically driven by imperatives to marry and reproduce. She imagines this kinship as a relation of belonging which 'names more than the longing to *be*, and *be connected*, as in being "at hand." It also names the longing to "be long," to endure in corporeal form over time, beyond procreation.'⁴¹ For Freeman, the desire to belong undercuts and exceeds state practices of legitimation. As she puts it: 'Longing to belong, being long: these things encompass not only the desire to impossibly extend our individual existence or to preserve relationships that will invariably end, but also to have something queer exceed its own time, even to imagine that excess *as* queer in ways that getting married or having children might not be.'⁴²

I see in *Alice in Funderland* and *Twelfth Night* both the national theatre's acceptance of queer performance culture, and queer performance culture's at least partial resistance or supplement to this gesture. The sense of a refusal to fully be 'at home' in the national theatre might also be indicative of a reluctance to occupy and reproduce the identity positions and values available within such a context. These productions do not simply call for the reiteration of pre-existing forms of identity – which might even include fully assimilated, officially partnered or married gay people – but queerly imagine more expansive relations of intimacy and belonging.⁴³

Ireland's knotty, meandering history of colonialism, migration, sexual oppression, as well as numerous social, cultural and economic crises, make it a fertile case study for thinking about in terms of real and metaphorical

orientations: the comings and goings, across the compass and around the clock, that block and lead our direction. This message may have a particularly Irish bent, but it also speaks to wider trends of domesticating queers and queer culture via the assimilationist trajectory of contemporary homonormative politics, often implicit in the glorification of family formations bound by same-sex partnership or marriage legislation, for example. A disorienting impulse has defined the narratives, dramaturgies and phenomenological experiences of my most powerful encounters with queer performance, if not with life. Queer performance's disoriented and disorienting effects remind us of the value of neither being quite here nor there, this nor that. Uncertain of where we are coming from, going to, even of who or what we are, it can vitalise the present, reminding us that there are not only roads left to be taken, but forged.

Afterword: Reeling-Feeling

This is a book of many intersections, featuring subjects seeking intimacy, support and solidarity, or just struggling to belong. Throughout I have endeavoured to map queerness not only among obviously LGBTQ subjects and cultures, but where these interact with migration, religion, place, age, economics and class, ethnicity and national identity, such that subjectivity and relationality are shown to be infinitely more complex than any identity regime has to offer. Illuminating the gaps between remembered history, lived experience and social expectation is perhaps the most important queer gesture that these works collectively perform, all the while straining towards worlds not yet realised – maybe even unrealisable.

Across the chapters we have encountered some of the diverse forms that constitute queer performance in contemporary Ireland, encompassing solo and biographical practices, documentary theatre, site-specific interventions and musical idioms. As we have also seen, these forms have taken place in a diverse range of settings including pubs and clubs; a guesthouse and a disused shed; across radio, television and social media sites; on streets and in the open air; as well as in more conventional theatre buildings. Within these varied contexts, we have witnessed queerness imagined as a scene of multifaceted encounter. As I have endeavoured to show throughout, these dynamic meeting points challenge the notion that there is anything singular or coherent about Irish theatre or identity, including queer paradigms. Rather, articulated through acts and experiences of dissent and disorientation, these junctions are whirling with disparate subjects and desires, fashioned by local and global influences.

Of course it is not just LGBTQ-identifying people who occupy these positions, or who find themselves trying to navigate social, cultural and political turbulence. After the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland, set against the escalation and buckling of global capitalism in the West, many people find themselves in this position, even if some undoubtedly are more negatively affected than others. But insofar as I take 'queer' to indicate a range of non-normative subject positions and practices, I have prioritised these here

in the hope of demonstrating how multiple, competing forces shape us all. Indeed, one of the reasons why Panti's speech in the Abbey Theatre was so impactful, I think, is that in animating a scene of *oppression* to elaborate a point about homophobia, a great many people were able to imagine similarly fraught situations. Distinct identities are less important in this scene than the feeling we all know, at some level.

But oppression is not the only feeling that we share. If anything, I hope this book has exposed vitalising points of contact between people, communities and their environments. One of my guiding aims has been to highlight the affective and phenomenological work that the interconnected experiences of dissent and disorientation do – both as symptoms of socio-political exclusion and upheaval, but also as strategies of resistance and sustenance that propel us in different directions, hopefully towards better futures. Acts and experiences of dissent and disorientation unmoor us from a sure sense of the world as it is, freeing us to turn towards worlds not yet discerned or made. When this happens against our will or conscious judgement, it can be profoundly unsettling and even violent, privileging certain subjects' pleasure and security over others. But the performances under discussion here also show how these phenomena can be life-giving when routed through activism, travel, friendship, love, sex, and of course art. For dissent and disorientation also supply the affective vitality fuelling the pursuit of new forms of attachment and ways of being together. It is precisely from this experience that these works derive their energy, most clearly articulated in chapter 7, where the emotional experience of loss, and the geographical experience of being lost, conspire to propel new relationships and inaugurate new beginnings.

No one can sustain an entire life of disagreement and uncertainty, not least of all when these experiences are symptoms of systemic inequality and structural precarity. At minimum, performances discussed here assert the inevitability of these experiences for all of us, while emphasising the value of not living a life of consensus and fixity – the importance of disagreement, mobility and not knowing. And we must draw from this reeling-feeling not just uncertainty and confusion, but excitement and a sense of possibility – the chance to forge new ways of living out our sexual, social, cultural and political lives. This might mean turning to enable those who do not enjoy the same privileges as us, or actively sharing the means of cultural production. And when we accord, as the Republic of Ireland seemed to with the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum, our responsibility increases to reach out to those who will inevitably be assigned to the category of the 'bad' would-be citizen-subject, as we become assimilated as 'good.' (It remains true of Irish society, as it does elsewhere, that within the LGBTQ umbrella, young, white, middle-class, able-bodied gay men dominate and are more warmly embraced than lesbians, transgender people, people of colour – the list, unfortunately, goes on. The status of migrants, travellers

and the policing of women's bodies across Ireland continue to reveal and enact deep-seated prejudices.) This latter gesture is perhaps the hardest task of all, when it requires that we give up some of our newly acquired status to catalyse deeper structural change. Channelling the activism, hospitality, generosity and unmistakable collective joy that secured and celebrated in the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum into nourishing new social solidarities seems like the most urgent task ahead.

I think of the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum as especially significant insofar as it was the product of decades of grassroots activism, and it seemed to signal a rejection of the Catholic Church's stranglehold on sexual mores.¹ While the provision of same-sex marriage will hopefully usher in welcome changes for many, like other forms of state legitimation, it at least implicitly risks creating additional social hierarchies, by elevating certain configurations of bodies and relationships over others, normalising desires, and further consolidating the couple as social ideal. Within neoliberal cultures, including Ireland, this consolidation is often used to justify the privatisation of welfare within the domain of 'the family,' thus devolving the state of duties of care. We should not forget that the Fine Gael-Labour government that campaigned for same-sex marriage was the same government that expedited privatising education, health, transport and water. I hope, therefore, that the advent of same-sex marriage does not mark the end of queer cultural intervention and inventiveness, but rather represents yet another important mark on a much more profound adventure, that includes cultivating and validating other kinship structures and alliances too. Although some of the performances discussed in this book explicitly champion the provision of same-sex marriage, more powerfully than this they underscore the importance of continuing to revisit dark histories even as we strive for more luminescent futures, by offering us dissenting and disorienting glimpses into worlds where individual life stories, private feelings, group collaborations and collective actions have much more urgency than the legitimated couple. We should not let this construct derail these virtues, insofar as they pressure us to continue the work of imagining more elastic and expansive modes of interpersonal intimacy, social support, public participation and cultural belonging.

Given that this book has been more interested in intersections than destinations, let's turn one last time to the crossing which Panti so effectively evoked in her Abbey Theatre speech, and which seems to speak to the many real and conceptual routes featured in this book too, to ask: what do *we* do when faced with similar junctions? Well, sometimes we stand, nervously, waiting for others to go past. On occasion, even unbeknownst to ourselves, we are those unnerving others. Other times we just wait for the right moment to make a move. Sometimes we get hurt, or worse. But the time comes when the crossing must be traversed, when we must find ways of occupying shared time and space. I imagine the performances discussed in

this book, and the experiences they convey, assembling to guide us on how to approach these intersections. They do not always illuminate an obvious point ahead, or a clear destination in sight. Instead I see them queerly willing (remember how in chapter 7 we saw how willing incorporates ideas of wanting and wandering off course) us to continually search for new ways of co-existing in the space between; not divided by identity as we know it, but allied in the pursuit of friendship, love and solidarity. But as these performances also suggest, this does not mean traversing the crossing completely, to get to another, safer side. Instead it demands that we step into the heart of that bustling scene together, and work to create spaces to which we might all belong.

Notes

1 Introduction: Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland

1. The Abbey Theatre, Ireland's national theatre, is so named on account of its location on Abbey Street Lower, Dublin 1. It contains a main stage on ground level, known as the Abbey Theatre, and a small downstairs space known as the Peacock Theatre. *The Risen People* was first produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1958, and revived with this production from 4 December 2013 to 1 February 2014, adapted by Jimmy Fay from a version by Jim Sheridan, and directed by Fay.
2. It is understood the term 'Celtic Tiger' was first used by Morgan Stanley investment bank in 1994 to refer to Ireland's economic boom, which exploded at the time. Previously, 'tiger' economies referred to growing Asian markets including those of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. The global financial crisis of 2008 affected countries around the world, supplying the last blow to the already ailing Irish economy.
3. Male homosexual activity was considered illegal under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, and the 1885 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act. These were enacted by the Parliament of the UK before Irish independence, and therefore affected both countries. The law was repealed in England and Wales in 1967 and Scotland in 1980. It was not repealed in Northern Ireland until 1982, after Jeffrey Dudgeon took a case against the UK to the European Court of Human Rights, and in the Republic of Ireland in 1993, after David Norris took action against the state to the European Court of Human Rights, claiming the laws against homosexuality infringed constitutional rights to privacy.
4. Performative understandings of identity are particularly indebted to Judith Butler's work, especially *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990). Contemporary thinking about intersectional identity politics is vast and varied, even though Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's early essay 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics' is deemed foundational. See the article in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140 (1989): 139–67.
5. José Esteban Muñoz describes queerness in affective terms as 'that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.' See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 1.
6. Civil partnerships in Ireland are granted under the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010, and a referendum proposing same-sex civil marriage has just passed on 22 May 2015, which will enshrine into law that 'Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex,' as per the wording of the Thirty-Fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill 2015. Civil partnerships in Northern Ireland are granted under the Civil Partnership

Act 2004, though same-sex civil marriage is not available, largely due to resistance from the DUP (see chapter 3 for a further discussion of this.) Under the Republic's Adoption Act 2010, the non-marital family was not recognised by the Irish Constitution, and it did not enjoy the same legal rights and obligations as the family based on marriage. Overriding this law, the Republic's Children and Family Relationships Act was enacted into law in April 2015. This law clarifies legal issues surrounding parentage, guardianship, custody and access for diverse families, and was strategically pushed through by the government in advance of the same-sex marriage referendum. In Northern Ireland, unmarried couples can apply to adopt. This was ensured after a ban preventing gay and unmarried couples from applying to adopt was lifted in 2013 by a Supreme Court ruling.

7. Despite its importance and influence, I do not think that Frank McGuinness's drama fits neatly into the tradition I'm mapping here, which is explicitly concerned with contemporary queer cultural politics and socio-political issues, including offering critiques of the Celtic Tiger era and its effects. McGuinness's queer drama, on the other hand, is typically set in a historical past, even if in so doing it can be seen to comment upon the present. Also, McGuinness's drama is so rich and vast that it would risk overshadowing the work I focus on here, none of which has enjoyed a similar level of attention to date. Numerous studies have already been written on McGuinness's theatre, with David Cregan providing a queer reading of his drama in *Frank McGuinness's Dramaturgy of Difference and the Irish Theatre* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011). Brian Singleton also offers a queer interpretation of some of McGuinness's plays in *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), especially in chapter 5.
8. For further insight on the influence of Oscar Wilde on Ireland, see Eibhear Walshe's *Oscar's Shadow: Wilde, Homosexuality and Modern Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011).
9. Eibhear Walshe, 'Queer Oscar: Versions of Wilde on the Irish Stage and Screen,' in *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance*, ed. David Cregan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), pp. 7–24; 7.
10. See Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), p. 12.
11. See David Cregan, 'Irish Theatrical Celebrity and the Critical Subjugation of Difference in the Work of Frank McGuinness', *Modern Drama*, 47.04 (2004): 671–85.
12. While this production was undoubtedly at least symbolically important, I do not focus on it in great depth here, insofar as its timing, reception and the play's US origin and cultural specificity remain outside the immediate remit of this study. Additionally, I chart new performance and writing that develops from the performative practices of more locally grounded activism and politics, and more specifically work that explicitly engages the Celtic Tiger era. To read more about this production, and Patrick Mason's role in staging queer work at the Abbey Theatre during his tenure as Artistic Director, see the excellent discussion in Patrick Lonergan's *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 128–62. For Lonergan, a key reason for the production's 'failure' was the fact that it was a relatively new play being staged in the summer months, a time when tourists craved more familiar Irish drama.

13. Electric Picnic is an annual music and arts festival which has taken place in Stradbally, County Laois, since its founding in 2004.
14. The names of Dublin Theatre Festival and Dublin Fringe Festival have altered over the years to reflect new sponsorship arrangements. Owing to support by Ulster Bank, Dublin Theatre Festival became Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival from 2007 to 2011. Due to sponsorship by Absolut Vodka, Dublin Fringe Festival became Absolut Dublin Fringe Festival from 2009–2012, and with support from Tiger beer, it became Tiger Dublin Fringe in 2014. Given that sponsors change, and sometimes disappear altogether, I do not include them in references to festivals throughout the book.
15. According to Katherine O'Donnell, the Dublin-based festival arose from the Lesbian Lives conference at University College Dublin in 1999, formalising and running annually since 2002. See 'Introduction: Lesbian Lives and Studies in Ireland at the Fin de Siècle,' in *Tribades, Tommies and Transgressives; Histories of Sexualities: Volume I*, eds. Mary McAuliffe and Sonja Tiernan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 1–26; 8. The festival is no longer running, having recently petered out.
16. See 2004 overview posted on the organisation's website. Read online at http://www.gaytheatre.ie/archive/html/2004_overview.html. Viewed 27 May 2015.
17. Even what seemed like the most staid heterosexual festival of all, the Lisdoonvarna Matchmaking Festival, which aims to pair up lonely bachelors with single women, evolved a gay wing in 2013, with the establishment of The Outing Lisdoonvarna LGBT Matchmaking and Music Festival. And in 2014, the Rose of Tralee International Festival, which celebrates twee notions of Irishness, the diaspora and women, for the first time in its history was won by an openly gay entrant, Maria Walsh.
18. Figures based on Central Statistics Office and FÁS Irish Labour Market Review 2006 and 2008. Reproduced in Peadar Kirby in *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 33.
19. Robert W. McChesney, 'Introduction,' in Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999), pp. 7–18; 8.
20. See Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).
21. Anne Mulhall, 'Queer in Ireland: Deviant Filiation and the (Un)holy Family,' in *Queer in Europe*, eds. Lisa Downing and Robert Gillett (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 99–112; 110. Mulhall's discussion of homonationalism follows the thinking of Jasbir K. Puar who describes how sexual minorities and gay subcultures are embraced and celebrated by the state, as long as they show allegiance by redefining new enemies. These tend to be religious or ethnic others, deemed to hold the state back, often from economic growth. Puar identifies Israel as an example of a state that cultivates the support of gay people in the service of arguing for the barbarism of parts of the Arab world. See *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
22. Anne Mulhall, 'Queer in Ireland: Deviant filiation and the (un)holy family,' p. 107.
23. Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out: The Lesbian and Gay Movement Goes to Market* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 21.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

25. Figures based on Central Statistics Office and FÁS Irish Labour Market Review 2006 and 2008. Reproduced in Peadar Kirby in *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model*, p. 33.
26. Figures obtained from Central Statistics Office. See 'Live Register: April 2009,' (29 April 2009), http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2009/lreg_apr2009.pdf, and 'Live Register: February 2013,' (27 February 2013), http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/latestheadlinefigures/lreg_feb2013.pdf. Viewed 27 May 2015.
27. For an overview of this bailout programme, especially statistics and figures, see Sean D. Barrett, 'The EU/IMF Rescue Programme for Ireland 2010–13,' *Economic Affairs*, 31.2 (June 2011): 53–57.
28. Seán Ó Riain, *The Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger: Liberalism, Boom and Bust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 4–5.
29. Taken from Central Statistical Office data. See the Census 2011 report 'Profile 6: Migration and Diversity,' (October 2012), at <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile6/Profile,6,Migration,and,-Diversity,entire,doc.pdf>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
30. See 'Migration in Northern Ireland: an update,' (February 2012), <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2012/general/3112.pdf>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
31. See National Youth Council of Ireland Report, *Time To Go?: A Qualitative Research Study Exploring the Experience & Impact of Emigration on Ireland's Youth*, (April 2013), pp. 13–14, http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI_Youth_Emigration_Report.pdf. See also Central Statistics Office publication 'Population and Migration Estimates,' (27 September 2012), http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/latestheadlinefigures/popmig_2012.pdf. All viewed 27 May 2015.
32. This law was effected under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 2004. For more information see: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0038/>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
33. While Irish citizens cannot vote from abroad, those who leave within 18 months prior to polling, and plan to resume residence, are still permitted to vote. The return journeys of these people for the Marriage Equality referendum gained a lot of attention across social media, where the phenomenon was tracked by #hometovote.
34. I do not think we can easily criticise Ireland's LGBTQ community for its poor engagement with immigrants – in terms of representation and participation – not least of all given its own relatively marginal position during the time period in question, and the fact that this dynamic broadly reflects a national pattern. However, this is certainly something we should hope would change in time.
35. 'The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse' (also known as the Ryan Report, after its Chair, Justice Seán Ryan) was published on 20 May 2009 and can be read at <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/>. 'The Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin,' (also known as the Murphy Report, after its Chair, Judge Yvonne Murphy) was published on 26 November 2009 and can be read at <http://www.dacoi.ie>. 'The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of state involvement with the Magdalen Laundries,' (also known as the McAleese Report, after its Chair, Senator Martin McAleese) was published on 5 February

- 2013 and can be read at <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013>. All viewed 27 May 2015.
36. See *Fintan O'Toole: Power Plays*. First aired by RTÉ One on 7 June 2011.
 37. Fintan O'Toole, 'Can Irish dramatists tackle the big questions again?,' *The Irish Times*, 7 June 2011, p. 12.
 38. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 21.
 39. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. Steven Corcoran (Continuum: London, 2010), especially 'Ten Theses on Politics,' pp. 27–45.
 40. José Esteban Muñoz, 'Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,' *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 8.2 (1996): 5–16; p. 11.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. See 'disorientation', in <http://www.oed.com>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 43. This model of suffering resembles Lauren Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism,' a term she deploys to describe a relation in which something that someone desires is an obstacle to their flourishing – e.g. property ownership, material accumulation, or other such heteronormative trappings, which are particularly relevant to this study (for example, the discussions of homelessness in chapters 4 and 7). In a critique of what she sees as Adam Phillips' celebration of uncertainty as the measure of a good life, Berlant claims 'people come to fear and hate these processes because they exert a constant pressure for negotiating social location. Cruel optimism or not, they feel attached to the soft hierarchies of inequality to provide a sense of *their place in the world*.' See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 194.
 44. In April 2015, an estimated 900 migrants perished at sea while being smuggled into Europe from North Africa, after the vessel carrying them capsized. The incident represented one of the worst tragedies in an escalated migration crisis.
 45. While this book began with a drag queen standing tall on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre, my research in this area actually began when another well-known drag performer, Shirley Temple Bar (Declan Buckley), fell off the same stage in 2007. This happened when Temple Bar was invited by the theatre to perform a sort of publicity act to highlight the production of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777), which was running at the time. Writing about the event on that occasion, I suggested that despite the fact that Shirley Temple Bar is a talented performer, and important within the LGBTQ community, the Abbey Theatre's invite seemed tokenistic, and it both conceptually and physically could not accommodate her and the queer culture she represented. This was made vividly evident when the performer fell off the stage. While at the time I described Temple Bar's performance as an act of disidentification, as I recall her reeling now I think of its primary valence as disorientation too. See 'Shirley Temple Bar at the Abbey: Irish Theatre, Queer Performance and the Politics of Disidentification,' *Irish Theatre International*, 1:1 (2008): pp. 53–72.
 46. Alain Badiou, 'Rhapsody for the Theatre: A Short Philosophical Treatise,' *Theatre Survey*, 49.2 (November 2008): 187–238; p. 229.
 47. Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings: Disciplines, Nations and the Place of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 19.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, p. 208.

50. The word 'community' crops up throughout this book. While I'm aware of its limitations, I use it as shorthand to refer to a group united on the basis of some kind of a shared interest or identification, however publicly, privately or provisionally.
51. See David Cregan, ed., *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and Seán Kennedy, Sarah McKibben, Anne Mulhall and Eibhear Walshe, eds., *Irish University Review*, 'Queering the Issue,' 43.1 (Spring/Summer 2013).
52. See 'Poblacht na hÉireann' (The Proclamation of the Irish Republic). The text is widely available, including from the National Library of Ireland at <http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/1.intro.pdf>. Viewed 27 May 2015. This commitment to 'cheris[ing] all of the children of the nation equally' was frequently invoked to support the Marriage Equality campaign, including by the 'yes' advocate and former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.
53. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 9.

2 Activism, Drag and Solo Performance

1. References to *In These Shoes?* and *All Dolled Up* are based on viewing live performances as well unpublished manuscripts. *In These Shoes?* was staged at The New Theatre, Dublin, 14–19 May 2007, as part of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival. *All Dolled Up* played Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 18–22 September 2007, as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival, and again in November the same year. It also played The Udderplace, Brighton Fringe (2008). In 2013 an adapted version of *All Dolled Up – All Dolled-Up: Restitched* – was staged in the Peacock Theatre, followed by an Australian tour the same year, which saw it play at Brisbane Powerhouse; The Vanguard, Sydney; and Melbourne Festival Hub. References to *A Woman in Progress* are based on viewing live performances, including the work in progress at Project Arts Centre, 24 June 2009, and the full production at the same venue which played 24–26 September and 8–11 October 2009. I also draw on the script published in Fintan Walsh, ed., *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2010), pp. 244–61.
2. For an account of the Alternative Miss Ireland's history, see Rory O'Neill's *Woman in the Making: A Memoir* (Dublin: Hachette Books Ireland, 2014), especially pp. 136–50.
3. The Hirschfeld Centre, named after German sexologist and advocate of sexual minorities Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), burned down in 1987 in suspicious circumstances – only a few years after a bombing attempt. The building housed the offices of National Gay Federation (now National LGBT Federation [NXF]), Gay Health Action, Tel-A-Friend (now Gay Switchboard Ireland) and Liberation for Irish Lesbians.
4. For further insight into this scene, Caroline Campbell's short film *Our Love is History* (2013) focuses on oral recollections of Flikkers and Dublin's early queer social scene, narrated by a contemporary generation of LGBTQ youth. The film operates as a work of historical recovery and intergenerational dialogue.
5. Among those taking part in the first Alternative Miss Ireland was well-known and much-loved gay street performer Thom McGinty, or 'The Diceman.' McGinty's usually silent agit-prop performances were an important feature of

Dublin life from the late 1970s until his death in 1995, particularly around the Grafton Street area where he typically performed. The influence of his artistic approach in terms of characters and costumes can be seen running throughout the Alternative Miss Ireland competition from the very first year. Born in Scotland in 1952, McGinty came to Ireland in 1976, and was one of the first public figures to discuss his HIV-positive status and ill-health, offering a rare interview on *The Late Late Show* in 1994, only to die within the following year. McGinty travelled to perform in street festivals in Berlin, Moscow, Paris and Seville, and in the 1980s set up The Dandelion Theatre Company in Galway. He played the executioner in the Gate Theatre's 1989 production of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, directed by Stephen Berkoff. In 2012, *Diceman*, a play written and performed by Christopher Samuel Carroll, and produced by Bare Witness Theatre Company and Bewley's Café Theatre, played in Bewley's Café Theatre from 26 September - 13 October.

6. The Alternative Miss Philippines competition was organised by the League of Filipino Nurses, which supported the high number of Filipino nurses who were working in Ireland at the time. Ireland began targeting the recruitment of Filipino nurses in the late 1990s, which contributed to the growth of the community.
7. See Rory O'Neill, *Woman in the Making: A Memoir*, p.183.
8. For a more detailed account of this club history, and its use of performance, see O'Neill's *Woman in the Making: A Memoir*, especially pp. 106–35.
9. See Fintan Walsh, 'The Transformative Power of Having Fun: Alternative Miss Ireland and Contemporary Irish Theatre,' *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 21 February 2012, <http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Features/Current/The-Transformative-Power-of-Having-Fun--Alternativ>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
10. Shirley Temple Bar has run a performance-centred night at The George gay bar since 1997, shortly after she won the Alternative Miss Ireland the same year. She also presented the Irish National Lottery's *Telly Bingo* twice a week on RTÉ for three years, between 2001 and 2004, before her alter ego, Declan Buckley, took over.
11. The phone message left by Twink to her ex-husband David Agnew featured a slew of abusive language, leading to it going viral.
12. Luke Clancy, 'Panti's Shoes,' *The Loy* [blog], 10 May 2007, <http://www.theloy.com/2007/05/pantis-shoes.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
13. *Ibid.*
14. A report by Ireland's Health Service Executive found that diagnoses of men who have sex with men rose sharply between 2003 and 2012. See 'Trends in HIV among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Ireland,' (2013), <http://hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/sexhealth/gmhs/ghf/katedonnelltrendsinhiv.pdf>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
15. The 2009 festival programme was especially queer. In addition to *A Woman in Progress*, Dublin-based theatre company Brokentaklers staged *Silver Stars*, a documentary song-cycle developed from interviews with older gay Irish men, which I consider further in chapter 5. London-based physical theatre company DV8 brought *To Be Straight With You*, which explored the relationship between homosexuality and religious fundamentalism across the globe, drawing on interviews with people affected. It continued to the Belfast Festival at Queen's, as I discuss in chapter 3.
16. Panti, 'A Woman in Progress,' in *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland*, p. 245.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
25. The alignment of travel and queer sexual adventure similarly features in Phillip McMahon's *All Over Town* (2007). In this one-man play, young Dubliner Seán's sexual discoveries take place while travelling in Australia and South East Asia. He repeatedly uses the language of 'living' to account for his experience, and is energised by everything he sees: 'Now *this* is life! This feels like living. Nobody speaks. No time for that. Speak to who? For what?' (References based on the unpublished script and two separate productions at Project Arts Centre: September 2007, directed by Darren Thornton; and June 2009, directed by Tom Creed.) A less fluid vision of the world can be found in Sonya Kelly's *How to Keep an Alien* (2014), first produced by Rough Magic Theatre Company at Dublin Fringe Festival. The play wittily focuses on the attempts of Kelly (who also performs the main part, assisted by stage manager Justin Murphy) and her Australian girlfriend to prove their relationship to immigration officials, so that they can stay together. These efforts are intercut with letters sent from Kelly's girlfriend's great-great-grandmother to her parents when she emigrated from Ireland for Australia in 1862, effectively initiating the situation we learn about.
26. Panti, 'A Woman in Progress,' p. 256.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
29. LGBT Noise was established in November 2007 in response to the Irish government's failure to process the Civil Unions Bill. Similar activist groups sprung up at this point too. Marriage Equality was founded in February 2008 to lobby for equal marital rights for lesbian and gay couples, and it developed from an initiative introduced to support the high-profile legal case taken by Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan to have their Canadian marriage recognised in Ireland. Both initiatives were notable for the performative tenor to their approaches, which variously involved initiating Internet viral campaigns, protests and parades, and linking with professional performers, musicians and filmmakers to mobilise action. A notable early example includes the short film *Sinead's Hand* (2009), which was made specifically to promote the legalisation of same-sex marriage, and was widely circulated across the Internet. Directed by Peter Murphy, the film shows a man asking a range of people for permission to marry his girlfriend, in a bid to highlight the absurdity of what gay people were effectively being forced to do.
30. Panti, 'No More Mr Nice Gay,' *Pantiblog* [blog], 15 February 2009, <http://pantibar.com/blog.aspx?contentid=739>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
31. *The Irish Times* reported approximately 600 people to be in attendance, but others estimated up to 1,000. See Genevieve Carbery, 'Rally calls for gay marriage rights not in proposed Bill,' *The Irish Times*, 20 April 2009, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/rally-calls-for-gay-marriage-rights-not-in-proposed-bill-1.748702>. Viewed 27 May 2015.

32. This information is based on my attendance at the event and hearing Smyth speak. It is also corroborated by media reports. See, for example, Genevieve Carberry, 'Dublin Pride celebrations soured by anger over Civil Partnership Bill,' *The Irish Times*, 29 June 2009, <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2009/0629/1224249725588.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.* Also see two-part YouTube recording of Panti's speech at the Dublin Civic Offices that day at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x77g_YufDH8 and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zacGrEEt2rU>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
35. The Stonewall riots involved a series of demonstrations by members of New York City's gay community against a police raid that took place on 28 June 1969. They are believed to constitute a pivotal moment in the advancement of the LGBTQ movement around the world.
36. The ruling in the Flynn case provoked outrage, and the first large-scale public demonstration against anti-gay and anti-women violence. Between 800-1,000 people marched from Liberty Hall to Fairview Park on 19 March 1983. (Walt Kilroy, 'Irish March for Freedom,' *Gay News*, London, March 1983). This event fed into the establishment of Dublin's first recognisable Pride, which took place in June 1983, with a reported 200 people taking part.
37. Brenda Power, 'You can't trample over the wedding cake and eat it,' *The Sunday Times*, 5 July 2009, http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/world_news/article176284.ece. Viewed 27 May 2015.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. Panti, 'Apparently I'd Better Shut My Big Gay Trannie Mouth,' *Pantiblog* [blog], 5 July 2009, <http://www.pantibar.com/blog.aspx?pageno=13&tag=&month=July%202009>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
41. *The Last Word* with Matt Cooper, Today FM, 9 July 2009.
42. Brenda Power, 'I Must Not Offend Gay People...,' *The Sunday Times*, 12 July 2009, http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/world_news/article177669.ece. Viewed 27 May 2015.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Benjamin Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 12.
45. See Noise website for details of campaigns at <http://lgbtnoise.ie>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
46. Formed in 1974, the Sexual Liberation Movement began campaigning for reform on numerous issues including homosexuality, contraception, divorce and abortion. In February 1974, the first Irish conference took place in the Common Room at Trinity College Dublin. It was attended by approximately 300 people, including former Minister for Health Dr Noel Browne.
47. *The Last Word* with Matt Cooper, Today FM, 9 July 2009.
48. Brian Finnegan, 'Civil War,' *Attitude* [gay men's lifestyle magazine], August 2009, p. 38.
49. See Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. Steven Corcoran (Continuum: London, 2010), especially 'Ten Theses on Politics,' pp. 27–45; 38.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
51. A film of the speech, made by Conor Horgan et al., can be watched here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXayhUzWnl0>. Viewed 27 May 2015.

52. In brief, we might think of the demise of the Celtic Tiger economy, the exposure of banking corruption, and revelations of Church/state institutional abuse throughout the twentieth century. See the introduction for further discussion of some of these issues.
53. In March 2014 Waters resigned from writing his *Irish Times* column, citing unhappiness with the way the paper handled what became known as the 'Pantigate' affair. He also resigned from the board of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, presumably as he could not hold this position and take legal action.
54. O'Neill's television interview and Panti's Abbey Theatre speech became catalysts for foregrounding this subject in Ireland, but also around the world where many countries were dealing with similar issues. For more on how Panti's has intervened social and political debates, see Fintan Walsh, 'Pride, Politics and the Right to Perform,' in *Theory on the Edge: Irish Studies and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, eds. Noreen Giffney and Margrit Shildrick (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 105–22.
55. In response to this apology, RTÉ received over 800 complaints, and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland over 100 complaints. After the RTÉ payout, the case against O'Neill was not pursued. This was not the first time RTÉ was involved in a controversy surrounding homosexuality. A seminal interview about the subject between presenter Áine O'Connor and campaigner David Norris took place on the station's *Last House* programme on 24 July 1975. As Tonie Walsh recalls, despite being a fairly straightforward interview, the telephone log records dissent: 'A very angry gentleman from Castlebar objected to this discussion on homosexuality and said he would keep ringing RTÉ until he could speak to someone in authority. His wife also objected,' read one entry; and 'A lady caller who worked with homosexuals said their tragic plight was contrary to Romans 1, Verse 26 to 27,' read another. A grievance issued by Máire Breathnach to the RTÉ Complaints Advisory Committee about the show was upheld, on the basis that 'at present time, homosexual practices, even between consenting adults, are a criminal offence in Ireland, it is improper for RTÉ to present anything which could be reasonably regarded as encouragement or advocacy of such homosexual acts.' See Tonie Walsh, 'Fadó Fadó,' *GCN (Gay Community News)*, (March 1999), p. 32. [Also see Irish Queer Archive/National Library of Ireland, MS 45,951 /1.] In 1975, homosexuality was effectively illegal in Ireland, so discussions on the national broadcaster were particularly contentious. Following Pantigate, and in the lead up to the Marriage Equality referendum, a different kind of policing was at work, with broadcasters ensuring that almost every discussion seemingly in support of same-sex marriage included an argument against it. RTÉ's interpretation of concepts of 'balance' and 'impartiality' are enshrined in Section 18 of the Broadcasting Authority Act 1960.
56. According to a number of analysts, social media played a huge part in securing the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum. Information compiled by Colin Oliver, for instance, suggests that #MarRef was used 893,188 times since 1 March 2015 across Twitter, in blogs and general news. An estimated 1 billion global impressions were generated from 467,323 Twitter mentions by 384,002 users in the week leading up to voting day. Also since 1 March, the 'yes' side consistently held the lead in terms of social presence. Higher levels of social media activity may explain the demographic split of voters, with many young people

- voting 'yes' and even returning from abroad to do so. See Colin Oliver, 'The Irish Marriage Referendum – Social Media Statistics Broken Down,' <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/irish-marriage-referendum-social-media-statistics-broken-oliver?trk=prof-post>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
57. Rory O'Neill reported this invitation in numerous interviews around this time. See, for example, Niall Murphy, 'Rory O'Neill seeking apology over RTÉ statement,' *Irish Examiner*, 10 February 2014, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/rory-oneill-seeking-apology-over-rte-statement-258159.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 58. Fintan O'Toole Twitter account (@fotoole), 4 February 2014, <https://twitter.com/fotoole/status/430851619081576448>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 59. The track can be listened to here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXhzNsozCIw&feature=youtu.be>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 60. Quote taken from the People of Year Awards official press release, <http://www.peopleoftheyear.com/Press/News/2014/Winners-of-the-2014-People-of-the-Year-Awards-Anno.aspx>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 61. One of the outcomes of Pantigate was that O'Neill was commissioned to write a memoir *Woman in the Making: A Memoir*. Coinciding with its publication, Panti (rather than O'Neill) was invited to interview on *The Saturday Night Show* on 25 October 2014. She talked jokingly about the intervening months, in a way that O'Neill might not necessarily have been able to do, with drag offering protection from being taken too seriously. In this way, we can also see how the drag queen and the clown share much in common: no one wants to challenge either too much, in case they end up looking too foolish themselves.
 62. For instance, Panti uses the term in her Abbey Theatre speech.
 63. Rory O'Neill in interview with Caomhan Keane, 'Panti Bliss in a Twist,' *Irish Examiner*, 21 July 2014, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/features/panti-bliss-in-a-twist-276054.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 64. 'Pantigate' receives plenty of discussion in *High Heels in Low Places*, which is essentially a stand-up show directed by Phillip McMahon and produced by THISISPOPBABY. In particular, Panti resists how she became 'a national treasure' as a result of this period of time, asserting her role as a performer whose primary job is to entertain and provoke debate. The show opened on 13 June 2014 in Vicar Street, Dublin, and in the same year went on to play in: Cork Opera House; Radisson Live Lounge, as part of Galway Arts Festival; Wexford Spiegeltent; Seoda Shows, Limerick; NUI Galway; Outburst Queer Arts Festival, Belfast; Hawk's Well Theatre, Sligo; and Project Arts Centre, Dublin. At the time of going to print in 2015 it has toured to: The Vanguard, Sydney; Soho Theatre, London; Norfolk and Norwich Festival; and the Irish Arts Centre, New York.
 65. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 149–50.

3 Reparative Therapies and Political Performers

1. Richard O'Leary, 'Christians and Gays in Northern Ireland: How the Ethno-Religious Context has Shaped Anti-Gay and Pro-Gay Activism,' in *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 123–38; 124. Following a study by The Rainbow Project, figures released in 2009 reveal that 39% of LGB people in Northern Ireland claim to have been

- victim of some sort of crime in the previous three years. 21% of GB males and 18% of LGB females claim to have been victim of one or more homophobic hate crimes or incidents. See 'Through Our Eyes,' (2009), http://www.rainbow-project.org/assets/publications/through_our_eyes.pdf. Viewed 27 May 2015.
2. I tend to refer to Iris Robinson as 'Iris' rather than 'Robinson' throughout, not as a diminutive, but to distinguish her from husband, and Northern Ireland Assembly leader, Peter Robinson.
 3. Iris Robinson in interview with Stephen Nolan, *The Stephen Nolan Show*, 6 June 2008.
 4. Iris Robinson addressing the Northern Ireland Grand Committee debate on 'Risk Assessment and Management of Sex Offenders,' (17 June 2008), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmgeneral/nigc/080617/80617s02.htm>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 5. Ian Paisley Junior speaking to Jason O'Toole in *Hot Press* magazine (May 2007).
 6. Iris Robinson has since been cleared of wrongdoing following an independent inquiry by Deloitte.
 7. Statement reported in Anon, 'Belfast Pride Hits Back at Robinson, *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 August 2008, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/belfast-pride-hits-back-at-iris-robinson-28510398.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 8. I say this based on personal experience and anecdote, though the observation is supported by other academic perspectives too. See, for example, Richard O'Leary, 'Christians and Gays in Northern Ireland: How the Ethno-Religious Context has Shaped Anti-Gay and Pro-Gay Activism,' p. 125.
 9. Belfast city hosted its first Gay Pride Week in June 1991. Writing in *GCN (Gay Community News)*, August 1991, Andrew Wakefield reported a largely positive atmosphere and approximately 120 marchers on the day: 'The few comments (such as "you'll burn in hell" and "I hope you all catch AIDS") were drowned by cheers from the marchers.' See Andrew Wakefield, 'Proud to Party in Belfast,' *GCN*, August 1991. The late PA Mag Lochlainn, who sat on the Belfast Pride committee from its formation in 1991, recalled how Queen Elizabeth II also happened to be in the city on the same day, with the increased security working to the marchers' benefit. See Thomas Fegan's untitled ethnographic resource on Pride in Northern Ireland, hosted by Queen's University Belfast, http://www.qub.ac.uk/sa-old/resources/sites_2009/thomas_fegan/TFEGAN/pages/2pridehistory.html. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 10. Kathryn Conrad, 'The Politics of Camp: Queering Parades, Performance, and the Public in Belfast,' in *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance*, ed. David Cregan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), pp. 25–35; 26.
 11. See, for example, Louis Crompton's *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 402–11.
 12. Deborah McAleese, '11,000 demand PM reprimands Iris for her outburst about gays,' *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 July 2008, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/11000-demand-pm-reprimands-iris-for-her-outburst-about-gays-13918742.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 13. While technically called Ulster Bank Belfast Festival on account of the main sponsor, for ease of reading I refer to it as Belfast Festival.
 14. On this occasion, *To Be Straight With You*, was staged at Grand Opera House, Belfast, 21–23 October 2009. Prior to this, it was staged at O'Reilly Theatre, Belvedere College, as part of Dublin Theatre Festival, 30 September – 3 October 2009. All quotations are based on the Belfast production.

15. For example, reviewing the production at Nottingham Playhouse in *The Guardian* on 15 April 2008, Lyn Gardner describes the show as 'a hard-hitting and passionate 80 minutes that expresses what is often left unsaid [...] brave, life-affirming show.' (See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/apr/15/theatre1>. Viewed 27 May 2015.) Writing about a performance at the National Theatre in *The Telegraph* on 31 October 2008, Charles Spencer celebrated 'an enthralling, eye-opening show.' (See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3562746/To-Be-Straight-With-You-at-the-National-Theatre-review.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.)
16. Transcript from *The Stephen Nolan Show*, 6 June 2008.
17. See Matthew McCreary, 'A straight 'no' from Iris Robinson to gay play invite,' *The Belfast Telegraph*, 2 October 2009, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/a-straight-no-from-iris-robinson-to-gay-play-invite-28497944.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
18. Phillip Hammond, 'To be straight with you, I left the theatre angry,' *Belfast Telegraph*, 22 October 2009, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/entertainment/belfast-festival/reviews/to-be-straight-with-you-i-left-the-theatre-angry-14538205.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
19. David Lewis, 'To Be Straight With You' [Review], *culturenorthernireland.org*, 7 October 2009, <http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/2845/theatre-review-to-be-straight-with-you>. Viewed 27 May 2015. Lewis's fears relate to the fact that the newly added Robinson segment was to be kept in future performances. The production premiered at Haus der Berliner Festspiele, Berlin, Germany on 6 December 2007 and opened in the UK at the Nottingham Playhouse on 11 April 2008. It toured Australia, Europe, the UK and USA from March to June 2008, and September to November of the same year. From September to December 2009 it travelled to Canada, Europe, the UK and USA.
20. Peter Robinson temporarily stepped down from his position as Northern Ireland's First Minister on 11 January 2010 and resumed the role on 4 February 2010.
21. Anne Enright, 'Diary: Mrs Robinson Repents,' in *London Review of Books*, 32.2 (28 January 2010). See <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n02/anne-enright/diary>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
22. Fionola Meredith, 'The Fall of Iris Robinson,' *The Guardian*, 7 January 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/jan/07/iris-robinson-fall-evangelical-christians>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
23. Ibid.
24. On 7 August 1986, Peter Robinson, then deputy leader of the DUP, led 500 loyalists into Clontibret, County Monaghan, in the Republic of Ireland. He was arrested and fined in a Drogheda court.
25. Speaking to Suzanne Breen, 'When Iris Met Peter,' *Sunday Tribune*, 20 April 2008, http://www.nuzhound.com/articles/Sunday_Tribune/arts2008/apr20_Iris_Robinson_SBreen.php. Viewed 27 May 2015.
26. Ibid.
27. Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.165.
28. Ibid., p. 190.
29. Ibid., p. 189.
30. In 'Notes on "Camp",' Susan Sontag writes: 'In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails.' See 'Notes on "Camp",' (1964)

- in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), pp. 275–92; 283.
31. Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), pp. 127–8.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 156. (Sontag reference, 'Notes on "Camp",' p. 284.)
 33. This interview can be viewed in either RTÉ or ITV digital archives. It is also more readily available on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RbfNmoRrwo. Viewed 27 May 2015.
 34. Fionola Meredith, 'The Fall of Iris Robinson.'
 35. See Slavoj Žižek's discussion of hysteria, perversion and sexuality in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), pp. 248–50; 250.
 36. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (London: Blackwell, 1995), p. 92.
 37. Rachel Ward, *Women, Unionism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland: From 'Tea-Makers' to Political Actors* (Dublin and Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2006), p. 1.
 38. Mary K. Meyer, 'Ulster's Red Hand: gender, identity and sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland,' in *Women, States, and Nationalism: At home in the nation?*, eds. Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 123–46; 124.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
 40. McKenzie A. Livingston, 'Out of the "Troubles" and into Rights: Protection for Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals in Northern Ireland Through Equality Legislation in the Belfast Agreement,' *Fordham International Law Journal*, 27.3 (2004): 1207–64, p. 1213.
 41. Formed in 1975, NIGRA was composed of politicised organisations and groups, including the Belfast Gay Liberation Society (a student society at Queen's University Belfast), Sappho readers' groups, and the Northern Ireland Council on Religion and Homosexuality.
 42. Gerry Adams was present for the announcement of the result on 23 May 2015, and spoke alongside Panti Bliss on a range of televised broadcasts. Social media sites carried images of Adams enthusiastically taking 'selfies' of himself and the drag performer.
 43. Richard O'Leary, 'Christians and Gays in Northern Ireland: How the Ethno-Religious Context has Shaped Anti-Gay and Pro-Gay Activism,' p. 132.
 44. While Paisley referred to the Roman Catholic Church as a 'harlot' on many occasions, at the 1986 World Congress of Fundamentalists, which he co-chaired with the American Bob Jones, they explicitly emphasised 'Recognising the Roman Catholic Church as revealed in Scripture as "mother of harlots and abominations of the earth".'
 45. Anne Enright, 'Diary: Mrs Robinson Repents.'
 46. Anon, 'Queen's Protest,' *NGF News* (National Gay Federation publication), Dublin, November 1983.
 47. Throughout the twentieth century, theatre and performance in Ireland have been important in the exploration of questions of history and identity, including among nationalist and Catholic enclaves in the North. However, for most of the twentieth century, unionist and Protestant divisions rarely exploited theatre as a practice in the same way, largely due to the belief that the history of settlement was not something to be revised and interrogated.

48. For a comprehensive overview of some of these activities see Bill McDonnell, 'A Good Night Out on the Falls Road: Liberation Theatre and the Nationalist Struggle in Belfast 1984–1990,' in *Radical Initiatives in Interventionist and Community Drama*, ed. Peter Billingham (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005), pp. 25–54.
49. For a discussion of this production of *Ecce Homo* see Niall Rea, 'Sexuality and the Dysfunctional City: Queering Segregated Space,' in *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance*, ed. David Cregan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), pp. 113–31. See also an interview between Belfast Community Theatre founder Joe Reid and Bill McDonnell in "'To Speak Your Truth": Dialogues on Political Theatre and the Troubles,' in *Kritika Kultura*, 15 (2010): 93–112, <http://kritikakultura.ateneo.net/images/pdf/kk15/tospeak.pdf>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
50. In keeping with the rest of this book, I do not mean to offer a complete history of queer performance in Northern Ireland here. In this chapter specifically, I aim to identify some works that explore the intersection of queerness, religion and political governance. Readers interested in other intersectional works still might find Micheál Kerrigan's *Pits and Perverts* relevant. It was first produced by Sole Purpose Productions and the Rainbow Project at The Playhouse, Derry/Londonderry in 2013. The play focuses on the UK miners' strike of 1984, when Northern Irish gay activist Mark Ashton co-founded Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. While there is a dearth of lesbian representation in Northern Irish theatre, Brenda Murphy's *Baby It's Cold Outside*, which premiered at Roddy's Social Club in 2013, represents a recent comic and popular example. The play focuses on rising tensions when three lesbians are trapped inside a cottage outside Belfast during a snowstorm.
51. Directed by Des Kennedy, the first production ran from 30 September – 16 October 2010. It was programmed as part of Tinderbox's 'True North' season, which included other plays exploring contemporary Northern Ireland, namely *The Cleanroom* by John McCann and *Everything Between Us* by David Ireland. Quotes are taken from the unpublished manuscript.
52. Other Northern Irish plays have similarly explored political tensions through the deconstruction and eroticisation of masculinity. Set against the backdrop of resistance to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, Christina Reid's *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989) focuses on a family of Protestant women in Belfast. As their relative Jack protests against the Agreement, and violence stirs on the streets, the women strive to maintain a sense of community. Central to Reid's analysis of this historical juncture is the emphasis she places on the misogyny of loyalist leaders who, like Jack, see women as 'Temptation! Deception! [...] the instruments of the Devil!' and the structural homoeroticism implied by a preference for exclusively masculine milieus. In Reid's play, the management of women and femininity undergirds loyalist culture, and the unleashing of female desire unsettles order. See 'The Belle of the Belfast City,' in *The Methuen Drama Anthology of Irish Plays*, ed. Patrick Lonergan (London: Methuen Drama, 2008), pp. 183–262; 214.
53. As the first popular vote on the issue, the Republic's Marriage Equality referendum is likely to spark global discussion, and even moves towards same-sex marriage legislation elsewhere. Indeed, within the first week of its passing, calls for similar legislation to be enacted have been aired within Australia and Germany. Additionally, same-sex marriage was rendered legal across the United States in June 2015, following the ruling of the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

4 Transforming Shame and Testimonial Performance

1. Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 21.
2. *The Year of Magical Wanking* was first presented as a work in progress in Project Arts Centre, 10–11 November 2010, as part of THISISPOPBABY's Queer Notions festival. In 2011, it played at the Half Moon Theatre, Cork, as part of Cork Midsummer Festival; Naughton Studio, The Lyric Theatre, Belfast, as part of Outburst Queer Arts Festival; and Project Arts Centre, as part of Dublin Fringe Festival, 9–17 September, which I focus on here. In 2012, it played at Theatre Works as part of Melbourne Midsumma Festival; Metcalfe Playhouse as part of Fringe World, Perth; Richard Wherrett Studio, Sydney Theatre Company, as part of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras; AC Arts X Space as part of Adelaide Fringe Festival. In 2014 it played Project Arts Centre as part of First Fortnight festival.
3. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), p. 52.
4. Cormac O'Brien, 'Performing POZ: Irish Theatre, HIV Stigma, and 'Post-AIDS' Identities,' *Irish University Review*, 'Queering the Issue,' 43.1 (2013): 74–85, p. 80.
5. Neil Watkins, 'The Year of Magical Wanking,' in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays*, ed. Thomas Conway (London: Oberon Books, 2012), pp. 291–326; 293.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
11. Research published by The Palette Fund foundation in the USA in 2012 indicated that LGBT youth comprise approximately 40% of the clientele served by homeless agencies represented in a study sample. See 'Serving Our Youth,' (2014), <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>. In the UK, research published by Barnardo's in 2007 claimed that young homeless LGBT people were at higher risk of sexual exploitation, with many getting involved in sex work, as well as drug and alcohol abuse. See 'Tipping the Iceberg,' (2007), http://www.barnardos.org.uk/tipping_the_iceberg_report_sept07.pdf. Both viewed 27 May 2015.
12. Neil Watkins, 'The Year of Magical Wanking,' p. 304.
13. Neil Watkins in interview with Brian Singleton, cited in *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 124–5.
14. Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, p. 125.
15. It is worth recounting how, when I took steps to publish this play, the process was hampered by the passing of the Defamation Act 2009, which rendered the publication or utterance of blasphemy illegal under Irish law. Given that the play staged an uncompromising critique of the Catholic Church's condemnation of homosexuality, my editor at Cork University Press had concerns that we might be vulnerable to litigation. After seeking advice, however, he thankfully proceeded on this occasion.
16. Neil Watkins, 'The Year of Magical Wanking,' p. 305.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 316.
20. See Norris's speech, alongside other speeches delivered at the time, published by GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network) here: 'Dáil and Seanad Debates on Decriminalisation of Homosexuality June 1993,' (June 2013), http://glen.ie/attachments/Decriminalisation_1993_-_GLEN_Extract_of_Dail_and_Seanad_Debates.PDF, p. 28. Viewed 27 May 2015.
21. Neil Watkins in interview with Ciara McGrattan, 'Risky Business,' *GCN (Gay Community News)*, (September 2011): 26–27; p. 26.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Una Mullally, 'If you see one play about sex addiction this year...' *The Irish Times*, 8 September 2011, <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/festival-hub/2011/09/08/if-you-see-one-play-about-sex-addiction-this-year/>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
24. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 38.
25. Of course, shame performed by a queer artist in public is different to shame felt in private; and more different still when that shame is projected and acted out against other people. So powerful an assault on the self can shame be, that the experience has also been used to explain and justify homophobic violence. Often described as the experience of 'gay panic,' such a claim was made in the Irish courts in 1983 on behalf of Cork resident Michael O'Connor, who murdered John Roche after they had a sexual encounter. O'Connor's counsel, Seamus Egan, argued that his client did not aim to kill Roche, but 'shame': 'His real intention was to rid himself of the shame and degradation he had got involved in. He was striking out at the debauchery he had got ensnared inside him and trying to rid himself of it.' He was eventually found guilty of manslaughter, and only sentenced to five years in prison. See Anon, 'Corkman found guilty of manslaughter,' *Irish Press*, 15 June 1983 [Irish Queer Archive/National Library of Ireland, MS 45,969/1].
26. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 9.
27. Neil Watkins, 'The Year of Magical Wanking,' p. 326.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Neil Watkins in interview with Graeme Watson, 'The Year of Magical Wanking,' *Out in Perth*, 4 February 2012, <http://www.outinperth.com/the-year-of-magical-wanking/>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
30. Neil Watkins, 'Risky Business,' p. 26.
31. This can be seen in a THISISPOPBABY promotional video for crowdfunding: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcg3W-QI0iM>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
32. All quotations are taken from an unpublished script. The first production of *In My Bed* took place in a disused shed through the arch, off Cope Street, Temple Bar, 11–13 and 15–17 September 2011, as part of Dublin Fringe Festival. The second production took place at The Lir, Dublin, 2012, as part of as part of Forest Fringe, a micro-festival sponsored by The Lir, Dublin Fringe Festival and the British Council. It was later staged as part of Home Festival in Cork, 2013.
33. A number of pieces of legislation discriminated against female employment in Ireland in the twentieth century. The Civil Service Regulation (Amendment) Act 1926 limited women's rights to take competitive examinations in the Civil Service. The 1932 marriage bar required female National School teachers to retire as soon as they got married, and this was eventually extended to include the entire Civil Service. The Conditions of Employment Act 1936 allowed the

Minister for Industry and Commerce to limit the number of women employed in industry, and the type of industries that could employ women. Following the report of the first Commission on the Status of Women, the marriage bar in the public service was removed in July 1973. In 1977, the Employment Equality Act prohibited discrimination on the grounds of gender or marital status in almost all areas of employment.

34. Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance*, p. 88.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
36. Sally R. Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 2.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
39. Oonagh Murphy, 'Making Space: Female-Authored Queer Performance in Irish Theatre,' in *'That Was Us': Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, ed. Fintan Walsh (London: Oberon Books, 2013), pp. 63–76; 70.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Elizabeth Freeman, 'Introduction,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.2–3 (2007): 159–76; p. 159.
42. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 51.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
47. This preponderance for trauma is what Heather Love describes as queer culture's preoccupation with 'backward feelings.' In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), Love evokes the tension queers often face in the following terms: 'Queers face a strange choice: is it better to move on toward a brighter future or to hang back and cling to the past? Such divided allegiances result in contradictory feelings: pride and shame, anticipation and regret, hope and despair. Contemporary queers find ourselves in the odd situation of "looking forward" while we are "feeling backward."' (p. 27) Freeman's argument aims to dismantle this either/or proposition, by suggesting that backward feelings are not always traumatic, but sometimes nourishing.
48. Peter Crawley, 'In My Bed' [Review], *The Irish Times*, 12 September 2011, <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/festival-hub/2011/09/12/in-my-bed/>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
49. Mike Pearson, 'Haunted House: Staging *The Persians* with the British Army,' in *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice*, eds. Anna Birch and Joanne Tompkins (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), pp. 69–83; 70.
50. *Ibid.*
51. The recordings from Anglo Irish Bank's internal telephone system, dating to the tipping point of the financial crisis in 2008, reveal senior manager John Bowe, who had been involved in negotiations with the Central Bank of Ireland, joking as he tells another senior manager, Peter Fitzgerald, how Anglo was lurking the state into giving it billions of euros.
52. Sophie Gorman, 'Imagine no possessions: Veronica Dyas's personal journey,' *Irish Independent*, 11 May 2014, <http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books/imagine-no-possessions-veronica-dyas-personal-journey-30259613.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.

53. Ibid.
54. Judith Butler, in conversation with Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 3.
55. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 19.
56. Judith Butler, in conversation with Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, p. 5.
57. Ibid., p. 4.

5 Intergenerational Moves and Documentary Theatre

1. References to *Silver Stars* are based on the unpublished manuscript and the Dublin Theatre Festival production at Project Arts Centre, 28 September – 4 October 2009.
2. Carol Martin, *Theatre of the Real* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 5.
3. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 36.
4. Duška Radosavljević, ed., *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 11.
5. Seán Millar, interview by email exchange, 7 October 2014.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Charlotte McIvor, 'Witnessing the (Broken) Nation: Theatre of the Real and Social Fragmentation in Brokentaklers' *Silver Stars*, *The Blue Boy*, and *Have I No Mouth*,' in *That Was Us: Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, ed. Fintan Walsh (London: Oberon Books, 2013), pp. 37–56; 43.
9. The 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' (Part Three, Section Two, Chapter Two, Article 6, Number 2358 states that homosexuality is 'objectively disordered.' See http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a6.htm. Viewed 27 May 2015.
10. Sally R. Munt and Katherine O'Donnell, 'Pride and Prejudice: Legalizing Compulsory Heterosexuality in New York's Annual St. Patrick's Day Parades,' *Space and Culture*, 10. 94 (2007): 94–114, p. 95.
11. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xix.
12. Sally R. Munt and Katherine O'Donnell, 'Pride and Prejudice: Legalizing Compulsory Heterosexuality in New York's Annual St. Patrick's Day Parades,' p. 95.
13. Ibid., pp. 99–100.
14. Victoria Bekiempis, 'Irish Gay Rights Activists Protest First LGBT Group in St. Patrick's Day Parade,' *Newsweek*, 14 October 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/irish-gay-activists-protest-first-lgbt-group-march-st-patricks-day-parade-277434>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
15. Loughlin Deegan, 'The Queen & Peacock,' in *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland*, ed. Fintan Walsh (Cork: Cork University Press, 2010), pp. 17–70; 29.
16. Neil Genzlinger, 'Voices of Gay Irishmen, Set to Song,' *The New York Times*, 13 January 2010, <http://theater.nytimes.com/2010/01/13/theater/reviews/13silver.html>. Viewed 27 May 2015.

17. Peter Crawley, 'Viewed from Afar: Contemporary Irish Theatre on the World's Stages,' in *That Was Us: Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, ed. Fintan Walsh (London: Oberon Books, 2013), pp. 211–28; 221
18. I draw on the initial run of the production here, 22–25 September 2010. Following this, in 2011 *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* also played at Project Arts Centre (Cube); the Civic Theatre, Tallaght; Draíocht Studio, Blanchardstown; and the Pavilion Theatre, Dún Laoghaire – all as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival (ReViewed programme). In 2012 it played at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin; the Irish Arts Centre, New York; Reykjavík Art Museum as part of Lókal festival; and at the Arches, Glasgow, as part of Glasgay Festival. In 2013, along with a national tour, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* played at Brisbane Powerhouse Theatre as part of the World Theatre Festival; Q Loft as part of Auckland Arts Festival; and toured three venues as part of Ten Days on the Island Festival, Tasmania. It was also recorded as a radio play for RTÉ's 'Drama on One' in 2011, and played at the Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris in 2014. The show was revived at Project Arts Centre in March 2015 to raise funds to support the Marriage Equality lobbying campaign.
19. Amy Conroy, 'I ♥ Alice ♥ I,' in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays*, ed. Thomas Conway (London: Oberon Books, 2012), pp. 186–219; 188.
20. *Ibid.*, 196.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, 199.
24. *Ibid.*, 200.
25. *Ibid.*, 205.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 198.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Emily O'Reilly, 'Lesbians in Ireland,' *Sunday Tribune*, 7 March 1982, pp. 4–6; 4.
30. Anon, *Irish Gay News*, June 1982, p. 2 [Irish Queer Archive/National Library of Ireland, MS 45, 969/3].
31. Amy Conroy, 'I ♥ Alice ♥ I,' p. 219.
32. *Ibid.*
33. The show played 9–10 February 2007 at Bewley's Café Theatre, and once-off on 13 May 2007 at The Front Lounge pub as part of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival.
34. Una McKeivitt, interview by email exchange, 14 October 2014.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Una McKeivitt, ed., 'The Big Deal,' in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays*, ed. Thomas Conway (London: Oberon Books, 2012), pp. 221–49; 240.
38. *Ibid.*, 244.
39. *Ibid.*, 233.
40. *The Big Deal* was first performed in Project Arts Centre (Cube) as a work in progress, as part of THISISPOPBABY's Queer Notions festival, in 2010. It was later staged in full at Barnstorm Theatre, Kilkenny Arts Festival, 10–14 August 2011, which I focus on here. It was subsequently staged at Project Arts Centre (2011) and Le Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris (2012).
41. Una McKeivitt, ed., 'The Big Deal' in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays*, p. 229.
42. *Ibid.*, 231.

43. *Ibid.*, 229.
44. *Ibid.*, 243.
45. Una McKeivitt, interview by email exchange, 14 October 2014.
46. See the findings of the ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) study here: http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/publications/reports_and_other_materials/rainbow_europe. Viewed 27 May 2015.
47. See International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia 2014's 'Declaration of Intent' at <http://www.idaho2014forum.org/images/prs/IDAHO%20Declaration%20of%20Intent%20signing.pdf>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
48. Una McKeivitt, ed., 'The Big Deal' in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays*, p. 249.
49. Una McKeivitt, interview by email exchange, 14 October 2014.
50. Anon., 'Homosexuality in Ireland,' in *Creation* (Dublin, April 1967) [National Library of Ireland; call number Ir64605c3].
51. Brian Finnegan, 'Pink Power,' *GCN (Gay Community News)*, 211 (July 2007): 21–23; p. 23.
52. Brian Finnegan, 'Editorial,' *GCN (Gay Community News)*, 211 (July 2007), p. 1.
53. *Ibid.*
54. David Cregan, 'Remembering to Forget: Queer Memory and the New Ireland,' in *Memory Ireland, Volume 1: History and Modernity*, ed. Oona Frawley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), pp. 184–94; 193.

6 Sex, Class and the City: Site-Specific Roots and Routes

1. The theme of escape recurs throughout queer theatre and performance, including work examined in this book. In its focus on young people, *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* makes for an interesting comparison alongside Ailís Ní Riain's *Desolate Heaven*. This play concerns the burgeoning lesbian sexuality and familial responsibilities of two teenage Irish girls, Orlaith and Sive, who leave their respective homes in rural Ireland where they care for their parents. The play premiered at Theatre503, London, from 5 February – 2 March 2013, and is published by Methuen Drama (London, 2013).
2. *Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)* first played at POD from 18–24 September 2006, produced by Gentle Giant Theatre Company for Dublin Fringe Festival. It was remounted the following year in Project Arts Centre (Cube), by the newly established THISISPOPBABY, and has been performed by a number of other companies since. *Trade* was performed from 27 September – 16 October 2011 at Clifden Guesthouse as part of Dublin Theatre Festival.
3. Michael Pierson, *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 9.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
5. Rob Shields, 'A Guide to Urban Representation and What to Do About It: Alternative Traditions of Urban Theory,' in *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st-Century Metropolis*, ed. Anthony D. King (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), pp. 227–52; 231.
6. Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: The myth of social partnership in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 2.
7. Andy Medhurst, 'If Anywhere: Class Identifications and Cultural Studies Academics,' in *Cultural Studies and the Working Class: Subject to Change*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 19–35; 20.

8. Ibid.
9. Jen Harvie, *Theatre & the City* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 6–7.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 8.
12. As I claimed in chapter 2, club culture was very important to the earliest stirrings of queer life in Ireland, with Flikkers in the Hirschfield Centre coinciding with the high point of disco. The George opened on South Great George's Street in 1985, and continues to be important in the provision of pop music and weekly drag performance. The club landscape shifted again in the 1990s, with the arrival of the techno scene, with which POD was centrally involved.
13. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 23.
14. See the THISISPOPBABY website, <http://www.thisispopbaby.com/past/danny-and-chantelle-still-here>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
15. Phillip McMahon, 'Danny and Chantelle (Still Here)' in *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland*, ed. Fintan Walsh (Cork: Cork University Press, 2010), pp. 184–208; 186–7.
16. Ibid., p. 189.
17. Charlotte Bell and Katie Beswick, 'Authenticity and Representation: Council Estate Plays at the Royal Court,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, 30.02 (May 2014): 120–35; p. 132.
18. Ibid., p. 122.
19. Phillip McMahon, 'Danny and Chantelle,' pp. 186–7.
20. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 129.
21. Phillip McMahon, 'Danny and Chantelle,' p. 188.
22. Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 98.
23. Loughlin Deegan, 'The Queen & Peacock,' in *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland*, pp. 17–70; 67.
24. Phillip McMahon, 'Danny and Chantelle,' p. 193.
25. Ibid., p. 192.
26. Ibid., pp. 195–6.
27. Ibid., p. 198.
28. Ibid., p. 195.
29. Ibid., p. 202.
30. Ibid., p. 207.
31. Ibid., p. 208.
32. Ibid.
33. Paul Kearns and Motti Ruimy, *Redrawing Dublin* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2010), p. 183.
34. Mark O'Halloran, 'Trade,' in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays*, ed. Thomas Conway (London: Oberon Books, 2012), pp. 47–81; 54.
35. Ibid., p. 57.
36. Ibid., p. 66.
37. Ibid., p. 64.
38. Ibid., p. 76.
39. Ibid., p. 79.
40. Ibid., p. 80.
41. Ibid., p. 68.

42. *Ibid.*, 68–69.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
45. Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009), p. 520.
46. Evanna Kearins, *Rent: The Untold Story of Male Prostitution in Dublin* (Dublin: Marino Books, 2000), pp. 13–39.
47. ANU Productions' quadrilogy focuses on the history of Foley Street and surrounding areas of Dublin's north inner-city over the last hundred years. It includes the site-specific productions *World's End Lane* (2010), *Laundry* (2011), *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012) and *Vardo* (2014).
48. Mark O'Halloran, 'Trade,' p. 63.
49. See Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1952) (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) and 'The Unnamable' (1953) in *Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Calder Publications, 1994), p. 418.
50. James Hickson, 'Representations of Working-Class Dublin at the Dublin Theatre Festival,' in *'That Was Us': Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, ed. Fintan Walsh (London: Oberon Books, 2013), pp. 137–55; 153.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
52. Paul Murphy, 'Class and Performance in the Age of Global Capitalism,' *Theatre Research International*, 37.1 (March 2012): 49–62; p. 56.
53. Here Piersie is referring to a survey conducted by Amárach consultants. See Michael Piersie, *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey*, p. 10.
54. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, (1966) intro. Stanley Mitchell, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), p. 60.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
56. Brecht's poem and Benjamin's analysis published in *Understanding Brecht*, pp. 59–61.
57. Walter Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty,' (1933) in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 731–36; 734.
58. Beatrice Hanssen, ed., *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 235.
59. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, p. 61.

7 Vertiginous Loss, Love and Belonging on the National Stage

1. References to *Alice in Funderland* are based on a number of viewings of the live performance and the unpublished script. First performed at the Abbey Theatre, 4 April – 12 May 2012. As a result of the production selling out, extra dates were added in May.
2. *Twelfth Night* played at the Abbey Theatre, 25 April – 24 May 2014. It is believed Shakespeare's original play was written around 1601/2. Quotes are based on the production, checked against the Arden Shakespeare text, ed. Kier Elam (London, 2008). As versions of British works, both productions under discussion here might be seen to subtly invoke Ireland's colonial history, while also queerly propelling us away from the entrenched preoccupation.

3. See the company website at <http://www.thisispopbaby.com/about>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
4. See Werk promotional material on the THISISPOPBABY website at <http://www.thisispopbaby.com/past/werk-fat-of-the-land-2>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
5. *Alice in Funderland* was the first musical to be produced by the Abbey Theatre since *Mary Makebelieve* in 1982.
6. Rachel Carroll, *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory and Contemporary Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 77.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
8. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (1969), ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 3.
9. Gilles Deleuze, 'Lewis Carroll,' in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993) trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 21–2; 21.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
12. Founded in 1899 by W.B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory and Edward Martyn, the Irish Literary Theatre (which reformed in 1902 as the Irish National Theatre Society, becoming better known as the Abbey Theatre with the opening of the building on Abbey Street Lower in 1904) was primarily invested in constructing a noble image of Irish national identity. The manifesto conveys this goal in the following terms: 'to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with high ambition, and so build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism.' See the Irish Literary Theatre's manifesto in Lady Augusta Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1913), pp. 8–9.
13. Focus Ireland, an Irish homelessness charity, claims that homelessness has risen dramatically since the economic recession. A statement released on 3 December 2013 reveals that the number of people sleeping rough in Dublin increased by almost 50% since April that year, and that this represented an all-time high since the count began in 2007. In the same statement the charity warned that 'a growing number of people are at risk due to the recession,' <https://www.focusireland.ie/about-homelessness/resource-centre/press/press-releases/839-pr-03dec>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
14. Paul Virilio, *The Administration of Fear* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012).
15. Dublin sisters Linda and Charlotte Mulhall, who became known as the Scissor Sisters, killed and dismembered Farah Swaleh Noor, a Kenyan immigrant who was in a relationship with their mother, and who they claimed was abusive, in March 2005. The young women had endured a very deprived, abusive upbringing themselves, and this was voiced in a duet in *Alice in Funderland*.
16. See, for example, Mick McCaffrey, *The Irish Scissor Sisters* (Dublin: Y Books, 2007).

17. Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: The myth of social partnership in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 11.
18. Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 5.
19. While I'm suggesting Jordan's work with THISISPOPBABY marks a shift in the Abbey Theatre's approach to staging queer performance, it was not Jordan's first time to broach this territory in the national theatre. In particular, Jordan's production of Thomas Kilroy's *Christ Deliver Us!* (2010), set in Kilkenny in the 1950s, and based on Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* (1891), was directed with lots of queer nuance. For example, here schoolboy hurling is choreographed like dance, and a lesson in waltzing ends up in a tender kiss between two boys.
20. For further discussion of this production, and its attempts to explore the intersections of queerness, class and youth culture, see Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 112–14.
21. For further consideration of Antonio's sexuality, see Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), especially pp. 132–3; and Joseph Pequigney, 'The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*,' *English Literary Renaissance*, 22 (1992): 201–21.
22. On the early modern meanings of the word 'will,' Bruce R. Smith writes: 'The valences of the word are wittily pressed to their limits [...] where will can be taken to mean volition, the auxiliary verb will, lust, penis, vagina, and the nickname Will, sometimes all at the same time.' See Bruce R. Smith, *Twelfth Night: Texts and Contexts* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), p. 13.
23. See 'will' *adj.* (and *adv.*) in <http://www.oed.com>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
24. Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 8–9.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
27. Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 69.
28. Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, pp. 7–8.
29. Wayne Jordan in Peter Crawley, 'Casual sex changes in "Twelfth Night",' *The Irish Times*, 6 May 2014, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/casual-sex-changes-in-twelfth-night-1.1782074?page=1>. Viewed 27 May 2015.
30. Sharon Holland, 'Is There an Audience for My Play?,' in *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 385–93; 385.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 389.
32. Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. xii.
33. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
35. Queer theatre hardly constitutes a neat body of transnational practices about which one can easily make general claims. Yet it is fair to say that 'misalignment' emerges as a recurring trope that speaks to the difficulties of fitting in with social situations and cultural conventions. The experience of misalignment, I suggest, can precipitate the experience of disorientation.
36. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 1.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

38. Ibid., p. 81.
39. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 11.
40. Ibid., p. 24.
41. Elizabeth Freeman, 'Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory,' in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, eds. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (London: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 293–314; 299.
42. Ibid., p. 299.
43. Even though these productions allow us to think about intimacy and belonging in a range of innovative ways, the Abbey Theatre explicitly came out in support of the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum. On 13 May 2015 it staged a production of artist talks and performances, called 'A Noble Call for Marriage Equality' – a nod to Panti's Noble Call the previous year. Hosted by the theatre's Director, Senator Fiach MacConghail, and artist and Councillor Mannix Flynn, the event also featured contributions from Marina Carr, Wayne Jordan, Frank McGuinness, Seán Millar and the cast of *Silver Stars*, and Sarah Greene and Paul Reid who performed in *Alice in Funderland*.

Afterword: Reeling-Feeling

1. Laws also enshrine some of these mores. For example, the enduring Section 37 of the Republic's Employment Equality Act 1998 still allows religious, educational or medical institutions to discriminate based on religious ethos, although this is likely to change following the Marriage Equality referendum.

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