
Introduction

In the opening moments of *Our Carnal Hearts* (2016) – a show about envy, competition and ‘the ugly bits of ourselves we would never usually admit’ – theatre-maker Rachel Mars offers up a ritual invocation to ‘millionaires and billionaires and executives and Wall Street’ before leading the audience in collective rendition of Spandau Ballet’s pop hit *Gold* (1983). Performed by Mars, accompanied by singers Rhiannon Armstrong, Louise Mothersole, Orla O’Flanagan and Rachel Weston, the show straddles church service, group therapy session and ritual intervention in staging a darkly comic satire of capitalism’s celebration of avarice as well as our own personal practices of self-congratulatory individualism. With the audience positioned to confront itself across the four sides of the stage, *Our Carnal Hearts* invites recognition of envy as a communal affect which turns us against our neighbour. In one narrative thread, Mars tells the parable of a fairy who knocks on your door and offers to grant any wish with the catch that

Your best friend, your colleague, your associate, your team mate, your rival, that person you know who is like you, but better, they get double of what you wish for. And you say [pause] cut out one of my eyes. (Mars 2016)

Jabbing at a culture that requires us to always want more while labouring to conceal the signs of our greed, the show provokes us to acknowledge our complicit and even pleasurable attachment to that which may be

socially or personally destructive. Standing in the middle of the room, Mars is our surrogate and scapegoat: the representative of a community of which she is not quite a part.

This book is a study of solo performance that explores the contentious relationship between identity, individuality and the singular subject in neoliberal times. Drawing together works from the overlapping fields of theatre, performance, cabaret, live art and stand-up comedy, it sets out to trace the cultural significance of exceptional, threshold subjects who are neither wholly excluded nor fully assimilated, and instead occupy a suspended relation to the social and political sphere. Focusing on critical readings of performance in the UK and from across Europe, each chapter is structured by a different figure – the entrepreneur, the martyr, the pariah, the misfit, the stranger, the killjoy and the optimist. Presented as critical analogies for describing how cultural and political values are concentrated or dispersed, each figure offers a different heuristic for understanding contemporary debates concerning individuality and subjectivity while allowing diverse examples of performance to be brought into conversation with each other and the socio-cultural moment of their production. This approach does not assume that performance and its effects are inherently radical or progressive, but chooses instead to argue that it is solo performance's potential compatibility with neoliberal structures and values which might most usefully provide for a powerful critique of neoliberalism's gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions. As its title suggests, this book also has queer ambitions: while drawing on a broad range of critical and conceptual sources from across the fields of performance studies, sociology, political science and philosophy, it owes its existence to a field of queer and feminist enquiry characterised by an attempt to open up 'what counts as a life worth living' (Ahmed 2006: 178). Arguing against neoliberalism's forms of compulsory individuation, it presents a case for how solo performance manifests our precarious, constitutive and sometimes unsettling exposure and accountability to one another. It is through that exposure that other worlds – 'worlds of transformative politics and possibilities' (Muñoz 1999: 195) – are made possible.

Scoping solo performance

This project adopts a deliberately catholic approach to the study of solo performance in its inclusion of works from a broad range of forms,

traditions and contexts, albeit focusing on a period of production and reception that spans the last decade. Though including a significant number of queer artists, it is not primarily a study of LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and allies) performance and its critical enquiry takes it beyond the territories of sexuality and gender most intimate to queer studies in order to think more broadly about the contemporary conditions of exception. Many of the works explored here are performed by their creator – what Michael Kirby (1979) once defined as the genre of ‘autoperformance’ – but a significant number involve performers presenting work developed with or by others. All of these works reflect Peggy Shaw’s observation that ‘I am a solo artist and, by virtue of that, a collaborator’ (2011: 39) as each involves the creative labour of more than one person. Several notionally ‘solo’ works examined here have more than one performer, not least in the case of one-to-one performances which require an audience-participant to play an active role. I have also deliberately included a small number of group works which have emerged from – or led to – the creation of single performer works where they might inform an understanding of how an artist’s practice has developed, and where a work’s staging of a singular, exceptional subject might inform this book’s overarching study of neoliberalism. While a number of the works encountered in this book have been published as scripts, I have accessed many through documentation in the form of photographs, scores and films shot in HD for archive or broadcast alongside piecemeal clips captured on mobile phones and uploaded without permission to YouTube, as well as published reviews and less formal responses posted to blogs and social media. I also draw on artists’ own accounts of their practice, whether articulated through press releases and marketing, or through interviews with journalists and academics as in the form of Dominic Johnson’s invaluable oral history of performance art, *The Art of Living* (2015). In moving between these sources alongside my own first-hand experiences as an audience member, I attempt to capture some sense of the contingent materiality of performance, its circulation and its reception.

These choices serve several interlocking goals, the first of which is to reflect a diversity of form and convention in current practice within the UK and Western Europe, and contextualise that work in a broader field of cultural production and artistic endeavour. Many elements of the artists’ work discussed here straddle live performance, film, visual and sculptural arts to be shown in theatres, galleries and other public spaces. ‘Mixing’ performance across perceived genres also allows me to trace a genealogy of practice that extends between established and emergent artists, and

to do so in a way that respects how practice has evolved over the last decade or so without the 'new' simply replacing the 'old'. The second is to inform a consciously critical approach to matters of form and genre that resists the compartmentalisation of practice and allows diverse examples of, say, stand-up and live art to mutually inform understanding of each other. While it is possible to identify formal characteristics that might distinguish work in one field (say, Neil Bartlett's monologues) from practice in another (La Ribot's performance installations), I follow Michael Peterson's observation that meaningful difference between forms of solo performance 'more often lies in the material circumstances of production and the cultural uses to which these forms are put' (1997: 22). In this respect, I am less interested in preserving a strict definition of solo performance as the work of a solitary performer than exploring what the varied manifestations of solo practice might have to say about this particular cultural moment – one in which the twentieth-century's liberal projects of recognition and inclusion seem in increasingly profound tension with the logic of neoliberalism at the start of the twenty-first.

To that end, I privilege a critique which contextualises examples of solo performance in respect of cultural debates which surround their production and reception, and the pragmatic circumstances which mean – as Sean Bruno and Luke Dixon's recent guide to creating solo performance observes – solo performances 'are usually less expensive to mount and can offer greater returns than non-solo shows' (2015: 15). Nonetheless, this project takes its roots in acknowledgement of the close relationship of solo performance to questions of identity, individuality and autobiography, and the entanglement of those associations with a cultural tradition that 'recapitulate[s] philosophical and theological explanations of genius' (Frieden 1985: 18). In this frame, an attachment to the idea of the exceptional artist coheres to a belief in the unique qualities of solo performance – an understanding that 'more than any other form of live performance, the solo show expects and demands the active involvement of the people in the audience' (Bonney 2000: xiii) or, more expansively, the notion that

the solo can be seen as the quintessential form of performance. The audience's relation to the soloist is undivided, gratifying the performer's deepest desires not only to be seen but to be the centre of attention. The solo is a means of presenting the self to others, generally in terms of a display of virtuosity designed to elicit the spectator's admiration and awe. (Carroll 1979: 51)

If solo performance is part of an extended tradition of rhetorical forms which 'represent and accomplish individuality' (Frieden 1985: 20), it is

nonetheless one in which the notion of the individual has undergone continuous (and in the twenty-first century, *rapid*) change.

Eddie Paterson's study *The Contemporary American Monologue* (2015), for example, traces the emergence of a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century 'modern' sensibility characterised by 'an increasingly solitary self, preoccupied with an inner world' (2015: 24) alongside the longer standing tradition of the soliloquy as a performance mode by which a character expresses some authentic, interior aspect of himself to himself. For Paterson, it is the work of Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter which from the mid-twentieth century onwards challenges the status of the monologue as expressing psychological truth, either by inducing a critical distance between a performer and the character which they portray, or by questioning the assumed narrative authority of the monologue through speech which is shown to be ambiguous, unreliable and fragmented (see Paterson 2015: 30–7).¹ Retained, though, is the sense in which solo performance is associated with the figure of the auteur: Paterson's engaging study is focused on major artists – Spalding Gray, Laurie Anderson, Anna Deavere Smith and Karen Finley – whose status as singular performers may overshadow the broader networks of collaborative endeavour through which their reputations as soloists have been established. Part of the problem, perhaps, is the degree to which the tradition of the monologue – emerging from a history which imagines its origins in the work of Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning (see Byron 2003) – always, already has in mind an author.

While praising solo performance as a format 'seemingly infused with the infectious raw energy of spontaneous storytelling', Jo Bonney's introduction to the solo performance anthology *Extreme Exposure* (2000) notes that the semblance of spontaneity is the product of skilful performance 'with the support of offstage collaborators such as directors, co-writers, designers, composers and technicians' (Bonney 2000: xiii). Mirroring Paterson's history of the singular self, Bonney locates the rise of solo performance in the shift from a nineteenth-century emphasis on community to the twentieth century's emphasis on the individual, passing through 'the hedonism of the twenties, the radical individualism and activism of the sixties and the so-called "me decade" of the eighties' (2000: xiv) before the 1990s finally made room for previously marginalised voices. Speaking to this point, Deirdre Heddon's *Autobiography and Performance*

1 For a parallel history of the monologue from the ancient Greeks through Shakespeare to modernists such as Ibsen and Strindberg, see Geis (1993).

(2008) identifies the significance of solo autobiographical performance within and arising out of the second-wave feminist movement as a means 'to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalisation and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency' (2008: 3). While alert to essentialising claims on 'authentic' experience and the reiteration of normative narratives within autobiographical performance, Heddon traces a tradition in which members of marginalised communities have sought to 'challenge, contest and problematize dominant representations and assumptions about those subjects' (2008: 20). This development is further significant for its broadening of the kinds of artists involved in making and presenting work – that is, for its diversification of both professional and amateur spheres of cultural production.

The centrality of such practices to LGBTQIA art and activism – and their allegiance to the political logic of 'coming out' as a mode of individual and collective transformation – is apparent in queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's affirmation of 'the spectacle of one queer standing onstage alone ... bent on the project of opening up a world of queer language, lyricism, perceptions, dreams, visions, aesthetics, and politics' (1999: 1). For Muñoz, the queer soloist offers a singular perspective of 'being queer at this particular moment' that is capable of taking on 'ever multiplying significance' which exceeds the bounds of any individual signifying event. The introduction to *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance* (1998) – a significant collection of primarily North-American performance texts co-edited by Holly Hughes and David Román – goes one step further, offering that 'I don't think it's too much of a stretch to suggest that all of us who are queer can loosely be described as solo performers insofar as we have had to fashion an identity around our gender and sexuality' (Hughes and Román 1998: 6–7). In these and other accounts, solo performance's relative low cost, accessibility unfettered by industry gatekeepers, and willingness to treat the personal as the political locates it within a 'tradition of "witnessing," a project of revising history, educating others about one's personal experience, and mobilizing them to political or social action' (Sandahl 2003: 29) that is of particular significance to marginalised communities. This dynamic may be readily apparent in Jo Clifford and Chris Goode's recent play *Eve* (2017) in which Clifford appears alone on stage in front of projected photographs of her childhood at an all-boys boarding school and, later, as a young man in love with the woman who would become her wife. Refusing 'a story of unhappiness and betrayal and being a victim of it all' (Clifford and Goode 2017: 7) from its opening lines, the work is structured by moments in which Clifford's compassion for her younger self – 'dear John' – offers a trans biography structured by

something other than the disavowal of a former name. On the night of its final performance at the Citizen's Theatre in Glasgow in September 2017, Clifford took the closing moment of applause to call our attention to the inherently political nature of our gathering as an audience – and to call for solidarity with Brazilian trans performer Renata Carvalho whose production of Clifford's earlier work *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven* (2008) had been threatened with violence.

While several of the works explored in this book elaborate this tradition and its claim on the congruity of social and theatrical performativity, I am also interested in how recent practice may problematise the affirmation of solo performance as inherently or unreservedly empowering for politicised subjects. Observing that the primary focus of autobiographical works made by LGBTQIA artists has remained relatively stable since the 1980s, performance scholar and trans performer Lazlo Pearlman interrogates the now received wisdom that performative acts of confession are 'key to advancing liveable identities, not only for and as artists but also for and as representatives of identity groups as a whole' (Pearlman 2015: 88). Reading such acts via Michel Foucault as potential expressions of an internalised disciplinary power which 'creates, controls and regulates the limits of identities', Pearlman's practice has deployed 'truth traps' in which seemingly genuine autobiographical details lead the audience 'down a false path toward "understanding" my non-heteronormative identity' (Pearlman 2015: 89–90). In making use of 'the material but not the identity' of his body, Pearlman's work articulates an understanding of how the affirmative potential of self-narration may be constrained by the pressure to produce oneself as an intelligible subject in full mastery of one's social identity and existence. Such a privileging of transparency and self-assertion in the performance of 'coming out' is problematic insofar as it lends itself to an understanding of 'the effects of structural inequality as the personal failure of those who suffer from it' (Clare 2017: 19).

Without insisting upon a paranoid reading that finds solo performance always compromised, I am conscious of the ways in which the special value accorded to solo work may operate to reflect and sustain social hierarchies of different kinds, and serve to sustain a broader economy of professional arts practice which offers disproportionate opportunities to white, male-presenting and able-bodied performers. As Peterson argues in *Straight White Male: Performance Art Monologues* (1997), the circumstances of the soloist have been occupied with greatest frequency by white men even though monologue performance has been practised 'as well, as complexly and as (in)famously' (Peterson 1997: 6) by women

and by men of colour. Centred on readings of the work of Spalding Gray and Eric Bogosian, Peterson's critique points to the particular coincidence of 'a performance form that privileges personality, individual creative energy, and singular performance presence', the array of identity privileges 'that accrue to whiteness, maleness and heterosexuality' and the high value placed on monologic genius within 'modern Western conceptions of artistic quality' (1997: 46). While aspects of this study reflect the dominance of white and male-identifying performers with the Anglo-European performance scene, and the relative dearth of opportunities for queer, trans and minority ethnic practitioners as well as those from working-class backgrounds, my choice of case studies is nonetheless intended to broaden recognition of the diversity of contemporary artists – both established and emergent – who are engaged in creating and performing solo works.

This selection also reflects the programming practices of the new and experimental performance festivals described in chapter 1, and ongoing attempts by a new generation of creative producers, programmers and practitioners to address long-standing issues of diversity and access in the arts as well as the political efficacy of performance in its relationship to institutional arts structures.² One feature of this trend may resemble what Joanna Krakowska has described in the context of contemporary Polish theatre as a form of 'auto-theatre' in which

authors speak from the stage in their own names, from the self about the self, referring to their own experiences, studying personal limitations, revealing weaknesses, exploring situations in their works, defining and questioning their identities, revealing the back-stage processes, interpersonal relations, economic conditions and ideological unrest in theatre itself. (2016: 24)

As I will explore at several different points across this study, such work engages reflexively with the conditions of its production to deliberate – as in Ivana Müller's *60 Minutes of Opportunism* (see chapter 7) – on how the patterns of labour particular to artistic activity might generate a critique of neoliberal conditions that reaches beyond the theatrical sphere.

Finally, if the critical trajectory of this study means that it does not attempt a general survey of the field of contemporary solo performance, it remains cognizant of the exercise in power marked by including some artists' work while excluding others. Most of the work described here

2 See, for example, Toni Lewis and Demi Nandhra's 'A Seat At The Table' (2017) retreat, in association with the Live Art Development Agency, intended to explore historical and contemporary relationships of race, culture and identity through participants' relationships as peers and colleagues working in the arts industry.

is English-language, and my access to it has turned on its appearance within UK-based festivals (or related documentation) produced over a fairly tight window of research activity following 2014. Though this study repeatedly returns to the conditions of queer lives, it is consciously and critically partial in its terms of reference – and largely avoids the use of more expansive acronyms such as LGBTQIA to avoid giving the impression of a cultural moment which is more inclusive, diverse and egalitarian than exists in actuality. In this regard, the title of chapter 6 – the misfit, a term drawn from the work of disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson – calls deliberate attention to ableist suppositions which persist within liberal cultural spaces. This strategy is double-edged: on the one hand, it allows me to focus more explicitly on the privileged terms by which some but not all queer lives are legitimised; on the other, it may serve to push discussion of bisexual, trans, intersex and asexual experiences, as well as those of minority ethnic lives, further into the margins. In this sense, the authority of the broader argument offered here may be as meaningfully structured by what it omits as by what space and time – alongside my own editorial choices – permit me to include.

Individuality and neoliberalism

Solo performance's relationship to issues of identity and selfhood – explored at greater length in the following chapters – marks its potential compatibility with many of the forms of governmentality which characterise contemporary neoliberalism. David Harvey observes that 'any political movement that holds individual freedoms to be sacrosanct is vulnerable to incorporation into the neoliberal fold' (2005: 41) and the claim on solo performance as a venue for the affirmation of previously unheard lives and experiences may describe a particularly invidious form of susceptibility – not least when, as Matthew Causey and Fintan Walsh argue in the introduction to their study of neoliberal subjectivity, 'capitalism sees in the fracturing of identity a wonderfully lucrative commercial project, to the extent that it does not simply respond to identitarian distinctiveness, but actively cultivates it for its own purposes' (Causey and Walsh 2013: 2). While often conceived as a primarily economic logic that has overseen 'the financialization of everything' (Harvey 2005: 33), this study approaches neoliberalism as a field of cultural production preoccupied with individualism and individuation, rooted in a conceptualisation

of freedom as the right to participate in market exchange but extending far beyond it to involve an array of practices and expectations concerning biographical self-fashioning and 'responsible' life management.³ In this respect, neoliberalism can be understood as the development of the liberal tradition of the 'possessive individual' that is apparent – as political theorist Sharon Krause observes – across the work of philosophers John Locke, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill as a discourse in which the individual is understood 'at least in principle, to be the master of her domain' (Krause 2015: 2).

Echoing the terms of Elin Diamond, Denise Varney and Candice Amich's recent edited collection *Performance, Feminism and Affect in Neoliberal Times* (2017), this book turns to solo performance as part of the 'social stitching' of the forces which comprise neoliberalism as well as their potential unravelling, as a means of historicising neoliberalism, and as evidence that the 'world has not become homogeneous; neither are neoliberal regimes everywhere dominant or stable' (2017: 4). This perspective is informed by the work of sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim who distinguish between the free market 'egoism of Thatcherism' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 202) and the concept of individualisation: a process by which neoliberalism 'requires individuals to become entrepreneurs in their own lives, making choices within a highly volatile world and taking individual responsibility for their failures' (Bockman 2013: 15). Faced with the diminishing relevance or power of institutions that in previous generations offered stable roles or rules for dealing with risk and opportunity, individuality shifts from being something determined by birth into a particular set of social preconditions (such as class and religion) to become

a choice among possibilities, *homo optionis*. Life, death, gender, corporeality, identity, religion, marriage, parenthood, social ties – all are becoming decidable down to the small print; once fragmented into options, everything must be decided. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 5)

Here, the imperative 'must' indicates that an emphasis on decision-making is not the same thing as a celebration of free will or agency. Individualisation is instead characterised by the expectation that people conduct themselves as responsible, productive and self-actualising individuals, and do so through the orderly stage-management of their life stories.

3 See, variously, Bauman (2001), Guthman and Dupuis (2006), Brown and Baker (2012) and Barker (2014).

Crucially, this expectation is not confined to one's own intimate biography but involves the bonds and networks surrounding it, with the consequence that individuals are required to seek out and devise biographical solutions for systemic crises even as risks and contradictions go on being socially produced. This idea is developed in the work of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman who coins the term 'subsidiarization' to describe how neoliberalism's increased imperative on individuals to develop and maintain political choices has not been accompanied by the social resources or political mechanisms 'which would allow choices to be effectively made and realized' (Dawson 2013: 57). Bauman distinguishes between individuality *de facto* and individuality *de jure* to describe the difference between those who can 'afford' individuality, and those who lack the resources to fulfil this duty but are still expected to conduct themselves as though they can – while maintaining that

we are all individuals now; not by choice, though, but by necessity ... self-identification, self-management and self-association, and above all self-sufficiency in performance of all these three tasks, are our duty whether or not we command the resources which the performance of the new duty demands. (Bauman 2001: 111)

An exploration of this double-bind recurs across this study where I explore how an occupation of involuntary terms for being may nonetheless allow a form of critical resistance. Though neoliberalism is undoubtedly the dominant political and cultural logic of our time, it is not so utterly hegemonic as to preclude alternatives, and this study proceeds from recognition that neoliberalism is an incomplete regime fraught with 'contradiction and partiality and subject to limitation' (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008: 115).

Theorising exceptionality

While adopting a queer scavenger methodology in combining perspectives and insights from potentially disparate fields of enquiry in the attempt to 'collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour' (Halberstam 1998: 10), this book's initial understanding of exceptionality is drawn from the work of philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito. As I will trace

briefly below, what these theorists share in common is an attempt to describe ‘the paradoxical dynamic of the political inscription of life: a paradox by which the “excluded” reinscribes itself systematically in the “included,” and the “outside” ... breaks in and disrupts the “inside”’ (Giorgi and Pinkus 2008: 100). Though the work of these theorists has come to occupy a less central place in my thinking as this project has developed, my starting point remains Agamben’s exploration of exceptionality as a break from the general rule that does not operate absolutely without reference to the rule. It is, rather, the presupposition of the rule ‘in the form of its suspension’ (Agamben 1998: 21). Rejecting narratives in which exception is understood as either an emergency measure anticipated by the law or the expression of unrestrained sovereignty (see Humphreys 2006: 678), Agamben proposes that

The state of exception is neither external or internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other. (2005: 23)

The challenging nature of this logic may be more clearly articulated in Agamben’s earlier discussion of ‘homo sacer’, drawn from Ancient Roman law as the paradigmatic figure of exception who ‘can be killed but yet not sacrificed’ (1998: 8).

In Agamben’s words,

the most proper characteristic of the exception is that what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. On the contrary, what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule’s suspension. *The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.* (1998: 17–18, original emphasis)

This concept of exclusive inclusion has served to describe ‘how certain subjects undergo a suspension of their ontological status as subjects when states of emergency are invoked’ (Butler 2004: 67): most notably, non-citizen ‘enemy combatants’ detained without trial at Guantanamo Bay, displaced persons living in refugee camps or confined to concentration camps, and ‘illegal’ immigrants held in detention zones at airports and other border sites. Agamben’s account, though, does not offer a hierarchy of victimhood and the larger claim of his work is that the state of exception has become the paradigm of contemporary political life to the extent that we are all ‘virtually homines sacri’ (Agamben 1998: 115). While certain aspects of this study address the extremity of bare life which *homo sacer* represents, my intention is to develop from Agamben’s work an

account of marginalisation ‘that goes beyond the binary distinctions to be had in dichotomies such as inside/outside, centre/margins, inclusion/exclusion’ (Downey 2009: 109) in order to better understand the significance of threshold subjectivities characterised not by their exclusion from the legal, political or social sphere but by their suspended relation to its terms.

This ambition is served by insights drawn from Esposito’s trilogy of works concerning political community – *Bios* (2008), *Communitas* (2010) and *Immunitas* (2011) – which dispute the popular conception of community as a place of ‘mutual, intersubjective “recognition” in which individuals are reflected in each other so as to confirm their initial identity’ (Esposito 2010: 7). Noting the etymological origins of community in the term ‘munus’, understood as a form of obligatory gift, Esposito theorises that the ‘subjects of community are united by an “obligation,” in the sense that we say “I owe *you* something,” but not “you owe *me* something”’ (Esposito 2010: 6). This constitutive debt arises from our status as finite subjects continually exposed to what we are not: the exterior ‘nothing’ which constitutes the ‘outside’ of our being. Consequently, Esposito argues that community

isn’t a mode of being, much less a ‘making’ of the individual subject. It isn’t the subject’s expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject. (Esposito 2010: 7)

Against this account of community as the ‘outside’ which threatens our coherence as properly individual subjects, Esposito offers the biopolitical metaphor of immunisation as that which ‘brings us back within ourselves by cutting off all contact with the outside’ (Lemm 2013: 4) to protect us from the demands of undifferentiated community.

While Esposito finds that immunity is necessary to the preservation of both individual and collective life – allowing individual bodies to resist infection, and members of a body politic to develop collective mechanisms of protection from external threats – he cautions that any immune system that is ‘exclusive and exclusionary toward all other human and environmental alterities’ (Esposito 2013: 86) will come to threaten the very life that it seeks to protect once its operation crosses a certain threshold. This dynamic takes the form of an ‘autoimmune crisis’ wherein structures or policies notionally intended to preserve a particular way of life – whether in the form of austerity economics or the ‘war on terror’ – serve to force life ‘into a sort of cage where not only our freedom gets lost but also the very meaning of our existence’ (Esposito

2013: 85). In response, Esposito calls for a reconceptualisation of community and immunity that places them in reciprocal relation. In this conceptual frame, immunity is posed not as a barrier of separation but a filter of relations: a potential mode of continuous exchange 'between an internalised outside and an externalised inside' (Esposito 2011: 174). As I will argue most directly in discussion of Martin O'Brien's work in chapter 6, this metaphor is valuable to a queer critique of exceptionality for its deconstruction of the oppositional logics of common/proper, inside/outside and exposed/immune on which neoliberal thought (in its attachment to notions of autonomous personhood) heavily depends.

The figural

As indicated above, this book deploys a figural logic to organise its case studies and structure its argument. This approach echoes those undertaken by queer and feminist scholars such as Lee Edelman, whose critique of reproductive futurity turns on the figure of the child, and Sara Ahmed whose ground-breaking work on the figures of the killjoy and the stranger directly informs several of the following chapters. In this respect, it joins a longer-standing critical tradition in which Michel Foucault's studies of the figures of the patient, delinquent and homosexual animate a historiographical analysis of knowledge, power and subjectivity.⁴ First explored in his lectures of 1978 and 1979 at the Collège de France, Foucault's concept of governmentality emerges from a figural discourse to describe how practices of governing others relate to the practices of governing the self, whereby the 'docile bodies' required of modern political and economic institutions are produced by 'arranging things so that people, following only their own self-interest, will do as they ought' (Scott 1995: 202–3). Concerned with the 'conduct of conduct' rather than the exercise of direct force, governmentality describes how processes of subjection signify 'the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject' (Butler 1997a: 2). While Foucault's work may be read to conclude that there is no possibility of subversive subjectivity, his account asserts that power is not simply monolithic but

⁴ See Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1973), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) and *The History of Sexuality: Vol 1. The Will to Knowledge* (1978).

always opposed by other forms of power. Moreover, the operation of power is also always reversible, in the sense that mechanisms of power used by one group to control another may be re-appropriated and turned against their original ends (Heller 1996: 101).

In this context, subjectivity – and the relation between subjectification and subjugation – emerges as the terrain in and through which the operation of power may be examined and challenged. This book emphasises the figure over the subject, though, to draw attention to the ways in which ideology ‘bodies forth’ subjectivities of different kinds: to figure is to invoke an embodied human form, and to pay critical attention to the ways in which such a form becomes intelligible *as* human. Given so, while many of the figures named in this study invoke readily identifiable, established cultural tropes – the entrepreneur, the martyr, the pariah and the stranger – these titles are not intended to assert their historical permanence or appeal to any universal truth about subjectivity encoded in their form. They are, instead, intended to serve as a critique of the ways in which contemporary neoliberalism imagines and produces subjectivity, and organises a diverse array of sometimes contradictory imperatives as naturalised, inevitable forms of being. As such, this book reads figurative representation as involving allegorical and metonymic forms of association that are expressive of historically and culturally located values and processes, whereby the logic of analogy (in which one object is given to stand for another) describes how power relations of different kinds are concentrated or dispersed. This thinking acknowledges the normative quality of ‘figuring’ in the sense of a practice which represents something’s readily intelligible or typical form, and thereby serves as an example which ‘transforms singularities into members of a class, whose meaning is defined by a common property (the condition of belonging)’ (Agamben 1993: 9).

At the same time, it asserts that to engage in figural thinking is to deliberately deviate from the orthodox syntactical relations of words and ideas, and challenge that which is ‘most normal’ or ‘obvious’. To figure is to test and play with the domain of the sensible in pursuit of that which exceeds its regular bounds: to work with figural representations is to invoke and challenge what Pierre Bourdieu understands as *doxa*, ‘an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident’ (Bourdieu 1984: 471). Such a practice is not only deconstructive but generative, serving the attempt to better apprehend marginalised lives which are not recognised by recognition itself by calling attention to the limits of existing regimes for social intelligibility. This latter claim is informed

by the work of Jean-François Lyotard, who differentiates between the discursive – that which belongs to the order of signs and linguistics – and the figural ‘which is a libidinal event irreducible to language’ (Pavis 2003: 87). For Lyotard, the figural is not the opposite of language, but rather ‘a semiotic regime where the ontological distinction between linguistic and plastic representation breaks down’ (Rodowick 2001: 2). Serving to deconstruct the opposition of word and image, the ‘scandal of the figure is that it is both inside and outside of discourse’ (Rodowick 2001: 9) in having the status of that which ‘is only approachable within the boundaries of discourse while always remaining outside its grasp’ (Gaillard 2013: 234).

Characterised by the febrile mobilities of desire, the figural marks the body’s resistance to discourse while – recalling Foucault’s analysis – describing how resistance always take place within or in relationship to the domain of ideology rather than through reference to some imagined outside space. On these terms, we might draw parallels between the figural and the logic of Agamben’s state of exception insofar as the figural occupies a suspended relationship to the authority of discourse – named within it, but exceeding (or perhaps failing) its remit. Yet where the Agambian state of exception is always, already punitive, the status of the figural as that which linguistic space ‘cannot incorporate without being shaken, an exteriority it cannot interiorize as signification’ (Lyotard 2011: 7) marks the possibility of generative resistance to hegemonic conditions. Though the figural may be translated into a linguistic signified and thereby enter discourse, this ‘by no means exhausts their meaning and function’ (Pavis 2003: 87). It is this untranslatability – a queer excess that does not directly oppose because it operates without reference to a linguistic norm – which ‘shows that alternatives to established forms of discourse – not only language and critical philosophy but also visual methods – are possible’ (Bamford 2012: 21).

Queer exceptions

This book’s chapters are written as part of a larger critique but intended to be accessible as essays on their own terms. While a conceptual framework drawn from Agamben and Esposito is laced through the study as a whole, each figure invokes and examines a different set of dynamics concerning solo performance, subjectivity and neoliberalism while

pointing towards the ways in which exceptional subjects might manifest different modalities of resistance, or alternative ways of being. In attempting to take up 'the positions and perspectives of sexual minorities in order to reread the social world' (Phelan 2000: 438), this book also challenges a reading of queerness as primarily oppositional to instead explore the complex conditions of *complicity* which characterise the neoliberal experience.⁵ Each chapter begins with a short introduction that locates its titular figure in its corresponding cultural tradition or conceptual context before moving to discuss instances of performance. The grouping of performers under each figural title is not intended as an act of formal classification but an attempt to describe particular emphases within the discursive field through which exception finds its forms. In plainer language, the figures overlap: works by David Hoyle discussed in chapter 3 under the banner of the pariah might also be viewed through the lens of the killjoy in chapter 4; Ron Athey's practice – considered in discussion of the martyr in chapter 2 – might also be understood in relation to the questions of bodily propriety which animate my exploration of the misfit in chapter 6. Structured by analogy, movement between chapters invites – or perhaps requires – a sideways step to re-examine a familiar set of problems from a new perspective. Chapter 1 offers a material context for the book as a whole by exploring the figure of the creative entrepreneur in relation to the economies of contemporary performance production, and argues for the significance of arts festivals as spaces in which neoliberal logics find their most acute expression for the creators of solo performance. After scoping the rapid proliferation of new and experimental performance festivals over the past two decades, I focus on the ecology of the Edinburgh festivals to examine how the uneven distribution of artistic labour and financial risk that characterises the Fringe Festival mainstream has been countered by alternative models of organisation and collaboration.

Mindful of neoliberalism's preference for subjects who are willing and able to exploit their own well-being, chapter 2 turns to performance through the figure of the martyr to explore works in which the staging of endurance implicates its audience as witnesses to the function and necessity of public suffering. Focusing on the aura of 'involuntariness' that surrounds the martyr figure which allows them to be claimed as representatives for contrasting (if not directly opposed) causes, I explore

5 For further discussion of the inflection between 'studying queers' and a study that begins from the knowledge and practices of sexual minorities, see 'The Refusal of Sexual Difference: Queering Sociology' in Seidman (1997).

the highly selective terms on which such subjects are allowed – or called upon – to stand as surrogates for others or speak for themselves. By moving between performances by live artists Ron Athey, Kira O'Reilly and Franko B, and performance makers Eddie Ladd, Adrian Howells and Scottee, I consider the relationship between self-injury, exhaustion and confession as technologies of the self, and the possibilities for ritual presentations of the self to be occupied to ends other than those of normative or disciplinary redemption. Building on that account, chapter 3 examines performance through the lens of Hannah Arendt's notion of the 'conscious pariah' as an outcast who is aware of his own place in history, and sceptical of the promise of equality offered by assimilation. Framed by what Heather Love describes as a tendency to 'rescue' injured queer lives from the past, I explore Neil Bartlett's AIDS-era work *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* alongside more recent works by Marc Rees and Seiriol Davies as performances concerning subjects whose refusal of recuperation frustrates progressive narratives of recovery and inclusion. I then turn to Jon Brittain and Matt Tedford's *Margaret Thatcher Queen of Soho* and the work of performance artist David Hoyle to examine how pariah identifications offer a new perspective by which to understand the politics of 'wounded attachment' – what Wendy Brown (1995) describes as the structuring of politicised identity through an investment in its own subjugation, and in which social progress is unthinkable apart from a history of hurt.

In continuing to trace where the conditions of complicity within neoliberalism might yet provide a basis for critique, chapter 4 draws on Sara Ahmed's discussion of the feminist killjoy to read stand-up and cabaret works by performers Bridget Christie, Ursula Martinez and Adrienne Truscott which anticipate and invoke antifeminist sentiment in order to subvert its force. Mindful that the trope of the killjoy persists whether or not the killjoy is actually present, I explore how La Ribot's live art 'distinguished pieces' series might frustrate a demand for sociable happiness by deploying the body against the conceit of an already constituted, sovereign subject. From this perspective, I reframe the killjoy as a scapegoat through a reading of Cristian Ceresoli's *La Merda / The Shit* and Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* as dramatic monologues in which the killjoy's disturbing public affects force a reconsideration of the terms on which togetherness is constructed and sustained, and in which marginalised or politicised subjects are required to participate in the terms of their own exclusion. This examination of highly conditional citizenship is further explored in chapter 5, which animates the figure of the stranger to read a range of works made in response to contemporary

border regimes. Drawing from the work of Georg Simmel alongside more recent scholarship by Bauman and Ahmed, I read Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman*, Zodwa Nyoni's *Nine Lives* and Oreet Ashery's *Staying: Dream, Bin, Soft Stud and Other Stories* – each made in relation to the UK's asylum system – as works in which compulsory testimony calls into question the believability of the one who is bound to speak, and where recognition turns on one's ability to resemble or perform what is already being looked for: the 'right' kind of refugee. In arguing that the contemporary stranger acts a space of projection for liberal fantasies of difference, I turn to consider Nassim Soleimanpour's *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit* – written when he was unable to leave his home country of Iran – and Yugoslavian-born artist Tanja Ostojić's sequence of border works concerning the 'immediate outside' of the European Union to address how the stranger is not merely 'any' body, but one whose misrecognition is a constitutive condition of their inclusion.

In chapter 6, I develop a critique of neoliberalism's bodily norms through the figure of the misfit – a term drawn from the work of disability scholar Rosemary Garland-Thomson – and through performance works concerning illness, disability and impairment. Adopting 'propriety' as a term for thinking about the intersection of various norms concerning bodily autonomy and responsibility, I discuss how performances by Rita Marcalo, Brian Lobel and Robert Softley invite fresh understanding of the assumed relationship between agency and autonomy, and of how social judgements about both are shaped by norms for sexuality and gender. The claim on the misfit as a figure capable of interrupting those norms is further explored through works by Bobby Baker, Katherine Araniello and the vacuum cleaner (artist James Leadbitter) whose interventions in public spaces draw critical attention to neoliberalism's configuration of the relationship between care and self-care as a demand for personal responsibility. In pursuit of alternative relationalities, I examine the practice of live artist Martin O'Brien as elaborating forms of interpersonal contact characterised by contagion and exposure rather than sovereign immunity, and in which the performative rendition of disgust brings to light social judgements about the assumed integrity of autonomous bodies.

The final chapter of the book offers a reparative turn to the figure of the optimist in examining a range of works which describe the difficult and uncertain relationship between the present, futurity and the possibility of change. Reading against accounts of utopia in performance offered by Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz, I consider Deborah Pearson's *The Future Show*, Ivana Müller's *60 Minutes of Opportunism* and

Duncan Macmillan's *Every Brilliant Thing* to argue for an understanding of optimism as a form of radical present-tenseness which might resist paranoid, neoliberal demands for a well-ordered future. In understanding that such an attentiveness to the here and now might be characterised by vulnerability rather than autonomous sovereignty, I explore three further works by performance artists FK Alexander, Rosana Cade and Nando Messias to propose how forms of subordination that are a constitutive condition of subjecthood might be mobilised to address those which are socially contingent, and open to change. In a brief conclusion, I then explore some of the common characteristics of solo performance encountered in this book and outline what a politics of queer exception might make possible next.