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From Magdalenism to Slut-shaming: A Performance Historiography of Female Containment in Modern Ireland

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies

by

Jaime Leigh Gray

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September 2022

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August 2022

From Magdalenism to Slut-shaming: A Performance Historiography of Female Containment in Modern Ireland

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by

Jaime Leigh Gray

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ABSTRACT

From Magdalenism to Slut-shaming: A Performance Historiography of Female Containment in Modern Ireland

by

Jaime Leigh Gray

From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming: A Performance Historiography of Female Containment in Modern Ireland studies how reproductive rights and women's sexuality are entangled with the limits of national identity and belonging. Focusing on the campaign to Repeal the Eighth, the constitutional amendment that criminalized abortion until 2018 in the Republic of Ireland, this dissertation investigates feminist protest tactics that use multiple media forms and embodied practices to intervene in contemporary body politics. I situate reproductive politics and feminist activism within a performance historiography of national struggle enacted across and through women's bodies. As a contemporary protest movement, the fight for bodily autonomy is waged in the streets and town squares, and on social media and the Internet. Thus, in considering the digital as another site in the containment and control of women's bodies, this project expands the field of feminist performance historiographies. It exposes a transhistorical framework of misogyny that endures on- and offline, continuing to regulate women's sexuality, visibility, and access to state power.

From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming suggests that the labor of representation for Irish women and other menstruators continues to be burdened by Marian iconography. It considers how Repeal artists and activists engage intermedial performances that expose the material consequences of legal, political, and moral boundaries imposed on abortion-seekers. An intermedial approach accounts for the interactions among the body, media types, and technologies in meaning-making; these performances blend spaces, media, and realities, thereby animating the political potential in disturbing the bounds of the sacred and secular, past and present, visible and invisible.

In accounting for the material and visual culture of the Repeal campaign, *From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming* simultaneously engages performance, art history, and popular media. It explores the interplay of everyday rituals and performances, of live arts and still arts, that shape public spaces and mobilize bodies. Repeal artists and activists stage challenges to the stigma of shame associated with abortion, the cultural phenomenon of abortion travel, and inequities to abortion access such as class, race, ethnicity, and citizenship status. My primary sites of study include Two Women Travel, a live-tweeted abortion journey that follows two anonymous women as they traverse geographic and media borders; the on- and offline circulation and reproduction of Savita Halappanavar's mythic image as a symbol of Repeal; the home|work Collective's pop-up performance action *The Renunciation* which repurposes the Angelus prayer into a performance of abortion truth-telling at sites of transit; and Tara Flynn's one-woman show *Not a Funny Word*, in which she uses comedy, song, and dance to stage her autobiographical experience as an abortion-seeker and target of digital gender harassment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

ABSTRACT viii

LIST OF FIGURES xi

INTRODUCTION:
Repeal the Eighth: Mobilizing Identities, Images, and Reproductive Bodies Across Geographic and Media Borders 1

CHAPTER ONE:
Live-Tweeting from the Abortion Trail: Performing (Digital) Presence, Exile, and Endurance 22

CHAPTER TWO:
#RIPSavita: Constellations of Mourning and the Performative Labor of the Migrant Pregnant Body 81

CHAPTER THREE:
Breaking the Silence: Confessional Bodies and Re-making the Virgin in home|work Collective's The Renunciation 148

CHAPTER FOUR:
From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming and Witch Hunts to Online Misogyny: Reimagining Femininity in Tara Flynn's Not a Funny Word 209

CONCLUSION:
"Thank God for Abortion:" Staging the Sacred in Feminist Politics 277

BIBLIOGRAPHY 290

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Hannah Hogan's Repeal jacket, the Marian statue at Broadstone Bus Garage in Dublin, a group of Catholic students carry a Marian statue during nationwide prayer service to prevent abortion in the Republic 49

Figure 1.2 Two Women Travel prepare to depart 55

Figure 1.3 Hey @EndaKennyTD where u watching the Olympics from? 57

Figure 1.4 Flight delay 62

Figure 1.5 Pretty ordinary sights 65

Figure 1.6 Weighted by bated breaths 66

Figure 1.7 *Untitled* (1978) from Mendieta's *Silueta Series* and a sculpture from St. Leger's *Out of the Shadows* (2017) 71

Figure 1.8 Waiting room no. 2 74

Figure 1.9 A note of thanks for support 75

Figure 1.10 Not the first or the last bleeding women 76

Figure 2.1 The Savita Photo 89

Figure 2.2 Vigil for Savita in Dublin 99

Figure 2.3 Ceramic pin designed by Emily Ross and Martina Skelly in 2018; Illustration by Laura McCauliffe from *Mine Anthology* (2018); cut away of Repeal mural by Shirani Bolle in 2018; still from Laura Fitzpatrick's short film *Silent Killer: A Timeline of the Death of Savita Halappanavar* (2017) 101

Figure 2.4 March for Savita in Dublin 102

Figure 2.5 "Altar" at Belfast Vigil on Fifth Anniversary of Halappanavar's Death 111

Figure 2.6 Savita Mural by Aches 138

Figure 2.7 Offerings at the Savita Mural 145

Figure 3.1 home|work performs *The Renunciation* at Busáras 184

Figure 4.1 Duchess of Devonshire: *A Certain Duchess Kissing Old Swelter-in-Grease the Butcher for his Vote*, published by H. Macphail in 1784, and William Dent print, *The Duchess Canvasing for Her Favorite Member* (1784) 224

Figure 4.2 Porno-chic: Bill Blass fashion promotion from 1966, and Duncan Quinn advertisement from 2008 225

Figure 4.3 Jean Butler 233

Figure 4.4 Tara Flynn performs *Not a Funny Word* 238

Figure 4.5 The stage set for *Not a Funny Word* 241

Figure 4.6 Jesse Jones' immersive video installation *Tremble Tremble* (2017) with Olwen Fouéré 254

Figure 4.7 Photograph of Peig Sayers, and a still from the film *Playboy of the Western World* (1962), starring Siobhán McKenna as the tragic colleen, Pegeen Mike 260

Figure 4.8 A female tradition of divinity through the goddess figure: Tara Flynn in *Not a Funny Word* and a lino-cut print, *Dancing at the Crossroads* (1996), by Constance Short 267

Figure 4.9 Repeal campaigner dressed as St. Brigid; Artists Campaign to Repeal the Eighth banner featuring Celtic goddess imagery in a re-imagining of the tarot card "Six of Swords;" and an Abortion Rights Campaign flyer 270

Figure 5.1 *Thank God for Abortion*: still from the "Thank God for Abortion Anthem" music video 280

Figure 5.2 Viva Ruíz at a *Thank God for Abortion* action 281

Figure 5.3 Reimagining Marianism in the tradition of the Virgin of Guadalupe: Viva Ruíz; Yolanda López's "Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe" (1978); and Cecilia Podestá's *Virgen de Legrado* (2009) 286

INTRODUCTION:
Repeal the Eighth: Mobilizing Identities, Images, and Reproductive Bodies Across Geographic and Media Borders

> *The progressive secularization of modern man [sic] has altered the content of his spiritual life, but not broken the mold of his imagination; a huge residue of mythology lingers in the zones that have escaped regimentation.*
> –Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols* (1952)

On May 26, 2018 the Irish people voted by an overwhelming majority to legalize abortion. This was a momentous occasion for the thousands of activists who had worked for decades to repeal the Eighth Amendment, the constitutional ban that proclaimed a fetus or embryo to have equal rights to the mother. When officials announced that 66% of the voters favored repeal, celebrations erupted in the streets of the capital and in smaller towns throughout the nation. Thousands of organizers and activists had labored tirelessly, canvassing door-to-door, striking up conversations on the street, and sharing their own stories of crisis pregnancies. They had changed their Facebook pages to feature a heart-shaped frame around their profile pictures with the word "Repeal" in neat red and white cursive font. They had rallied outside government buildings, a sea of bodies all wearing uniform black shirts with the single word "REPEAL" across the front. In a nation in which their right to bodily integrity was hotly contested and debated, the Repeal the Eighth movement was led by women and featured the voices and experiences of women.

The Repeal the Eighth campaign conveys what social activism looks like in our contemporary, globally connected world in which the Internet and social media mobilize bodies to action on- and offline. Twitter streams and Facebook feeds manifest a remote body politic, physically dispersed but connected through civic responsibility. The same slogans and logos represented on signs and banners at street marches spread across digital networks; passion and enthusiasm translated into hashtags and memes. As such, the contest over

reproductive rights was waged across physical spaces and digital environs. Throughout history, public art and architecture has communicated a vision of whom people imagine themselves to be, telling stories through images and symbols that matter to individuals in their everyday lives. We wander through streets confronted by or gaining pleasure from these images depicted on murals, walls, and in statuary. Now, the images come to us; they are delivered to our screens, becoming mobile rather than fixed.

The Repeal the Eighth campaign reimaged and reimagined the visual and material culture of public space. Across the country, where shrines inscribe the landscape with statues of the Virgin Mary, the epitome of maternity, the stories of abortion-seekers were discussed out in the open. Along city streets, where formidable stone walls seal off the crumbling remains of former Magdalene laundry buildings, people who had abortions rallied and marched, demanding recognition by a nation that would rather ignore them. Where abortion-seekers and people with crisis pregnancies had been invisible, the campaign made them seen. Bodies refused to be contained any longer, pushing the boundaries of political space to include their personal experiences. Thus, the fight for reproductive freedom illuminated and troubled the spatial limits of the national imaginary, traversing spatialities of the ancient and sacred, modern and digital, divine and virtual, as well as spaces of brutality and harm, and joy and hope.

From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming situates Repeal politics and feminist activism within a performance historiography of national struggle enacted across and through women's bodies. I am not merely concerned with the symbolic authority of Repeal activists, but rather with how artist-activists assert their embodied knowledge and experiences as vital elements of their political lives. Consequently, they animate the ways in which the labor of

representation has material consequences on the legal, political, and moral boundaries imposed on individuals. Hence, I explore the material and visual culture of the Repeal movement to uncover its continuities and disruptions within a transhistorical model of misogyny that regulates women's sexuality, symbolism, and access to political power.

Thus, *From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming* is concerned with the ways that women and other menstruators use art, media, and activism to challenge, subvert, and traverse the limits placed on their bodies in the national body politic. Abortion in Ireland has been entangled with fears and anxieties about national borders and the limits of cultural identity. Keeping abortion out of Ireland maintains the Catholic righteousness of the Republic.[1] Of course, this assertion ignores and discredits the opinions of those Irish who have had abortions or have desired or needed one. They become shadowy figures whose experiences are driven underground, made obsolete and replaced by those women who reproduce correctly. In a country that reveres the Virgin Mary as the model of womanhood, those bodies who transgress disappear from discourse and representation. So, what happens when those bodies suddenly refuse to be silenced and shamed any longer and begin confessing their abortions? How will a nation respond when those bodies decry stillness and, instead, they mobilize and border cross? What happens when those bodies generate global attention by traversing geographic and media borders? What will citizens do if those bodies reclaim the Virgin as one of them?

---

[1] While my study focuses on abortion rights in the Republic of Ireland as distinct from Northern Ireland, I acknowledge that the movement for reproductive freedom extends beyond the border dividing the two regions. Even though abortion has been legal across the United Kingdom since 1967, it was criminalized in Northern Ireland until 2019. In 2019, the UK Parliament voted to legalize termination (and same-sex marriage) to bring NI in accordance with the policies of other UK countries. Despite legalization, abortion access remains difficult and scarce. See Rory Carroll, "Abortion Services in Northern Ireland Almost Nonexistent Despite Legalization," *The Guardian* (UK), 4 May 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/04/abortion-services-in-northern-ireland-almost-nonexistent-despite-legalisation, accessed 3 August 2022.

Using the Repeal the Eighth campaign as a frame, this dissertation grapples with the margins of feminist representation at the messy intersection of (neoliberal) national body politics and the persistence of the sacred in public spaces. While liberal democracies like the Republic champion gains in individual rights and the freedoms of speech, religion, and opportunity, this rhetoric is often out-of-step with the material realities for women and other marginalized genders. Following the national ballot that successfully legalized abortion, Taoiseach (prime minister) Leo Varadkar celebrated the historical moment, proclaiming:

> I believe today will be remembered as the day we embraced our responsibilities as citizens and as a country. The day Ireland stepped out from under the last of our shadows and into the light. The day we came of age as a country. The day we took our place among the nations of the world. Today, we have a modern constitution for a modern people. […] The wrenching pain of decades of mistreatment of Irish women cannot be unlived. However, today we have ensured that it does not have to be lived again.[2]

That Varadkar is the figure to patriotically announce Ireland's new dawn among the modern world is particularly emblematic; he was the youngest Taoiseach in the country's history (at thirty-eight), the first to be openly gay, and the only one of an ethnic-minority heritage (his father is an Indian immigrant). Thus, he symbolizes the increasingly progressive, diverse, and secular nature of Ireland. Yet, despite Varadkar's assertion that decades of mistreating women have come to an end, pregnant people continue to struggle to access abortion: the three-day waiting period imposes undue burden on people who may not have the resources or ability to make multiple visits to the doctor; the law only permits abortion up to twelve weeks without exception, meaning some individuals do not have legal access once they learn they

[2] Leo Varadkar, "Speech Following the Declaration on the Referendum on the Eighth Amendment," *Merrion Street: Irish Government News Service*, 27 May 2018, https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/speech_by_an_taoiseach_leo_varadkar_following_the_declaration_on_the_referendum_on_the_eighth_amendment.html, accessed 9 July 2022.

are pregnant; and, medical professionals can refuse to perform abortions on the grounds of conscience which has meant many pregnant people struggle to find healthcare or still have to travel internationally for it.[3] Thus, while Varadkar's speech celebrates a monumental achievement, feminist activists and academics continue to interrogate the parameters of the advances that have actually been won.

This interdisciplinary study sheds light on this conversation, not to assess the efficacy of the Repeal movement, but rather to scrutinize the elliptical history of women's rights and visibility. Varadkar's remarks look to the promise of the future and commemorate a modern body politic, and yet his words are haunted by the cultural past. While his speech foregrounds abortion legislation, lingering at the edges of the collective, cultural memory are the bodies of transgressive women who were shamed and blamed for bearing children out of wedlock, for being perceived as seductresses, or for any other assertion of feminine sexuality or desire. Modern Ireland deployed the figure of the Virgin Mary as the feminine ideal, a figure whose presence, I argue, persists in the Irish social imaginary and cultural landscape. She hovers at the edges of Varadkar's imagery, somewhere between the shadows and light, in the place occupied by the "wrenching pain" suffered by "mistreated" Irish women. What is the political potential of recognizing her presence? What are the limits of her endurance as a cultural icon? How do shifting mediascapes affect the way her image is reproduced and circulated? How does this influence the mobilization of bodies across virtual spaces? And how does she mark and re-mark the cultural terrain traversed by abortion-seekers?

[3] Sydney Calkin and Ella Berny, "Legal and Non-Legal Barriers to Abortion in Ireland and the United Kingdom," *Medicine Access @ Point of Care* (January 2021), https://doi.org/10.1177/23992026211040023.

The place of religion in civic life is largely understood to have diminished in contemporary (neo)liberal society. General sentiment perceives divinity to be incongruent with modern politics; in order to achieve liberal aims like gender equity, the state and church need to be kept in radically distinct realms.[4] This logic has justified bans on wearing the hijab in some European cities; it drives the contestation of the legality and moral legitimacy of same-sex marriage; and it fuels the debate around abortion rights. These positions continue to be contentious, demonstrating how religion endures. It perseveres, informing public space and sociality, shaping the limits of inclusion, and marking the territory of dominant cultural ideology. Hence, feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood contends that "the secular liberal principles of freedom of religion and speech are not neutral mechanisms for the negotiation of religious difference and remain quite partial to certain normative conceptions of religion, subject, language, and injury."[5] Religiosity cannot be taken for granted as a persistent force in liberal society and culture, nor can it be understood as fixed and natural. Religion "is not (just) a set of ethical, ontological or theological assertions, but a dynamic, lived, and fluidly embodied set of actions, practices, gestures and speech acts at specific points in time and

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[4] This is discussed by interpreters of Jürgen Habermas' model of the public sphere which is important to how political theorists understand liberal democracy. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1989 [1962]); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins, 1-32 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, 377-401 (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992). Habermas has recently expressed an urgent need to reassess the role of religion in the public sphere in "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1-25.

[5] Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (2009), 861.

space."[6] As such, these performative qualities of religion elucidate how it becomes folded into ideologies, socialities, and identities, often in subtle ways.

In accounting for the material and visual culture of the Repeal campaign, my project simultaneously engages performance, art history, and popular media. This intermedial inquiry accounts for the shifting visual terrain of sacred and public art, as well as how communities and individuals use, repurpose, and subvert this landscape. The works I investigate range from conventional street marches and protest actions to social media hashtag campaigns, public art, agitprop theater performances, and political ephemera—analog and digital. I explore these events and objects as intermedial performances due to the ways that their production and materialization extend the conventional borders of art forms, media types, and ritual practices. As its prefix suggests, *inter*mediality is a bridge that connects different media, drawing attention to what they have in common as much as how they diverge.[7] Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider marshals intermediality as a kind of between-ness, an unstable fluctuation back and forth between and among different media forms.[8] Thus, an intermedial approach accounts for the various layers of meaning-making, "the mixedness of media," to uncover the *interactions* between the body, media types, and technologies.[9]

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[6] Claire Maria Chambers, Simon W. du Toit, and Joshua Edelman, "Introduction: The Public Problem of Religious Doings," in *Performing Religion in Public*, ed. Joshua Edelman, Claire Maria Chambers, and Simon W. du Toit (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1-2.

[7] Lars Elleström, "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations," in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12.

[8] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 159-160.

[9] Jørgen Bruhn and Beate Schirrmacher, "Intermedial Studies," in *Intermedial Studies: An Introduction to Meaning Across Media*, ed. Jørgen Bruhn and Beate Schirrmacher (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 7.

Schneider productively asks, "how can we account not only for the way differing media cite and incite each other but for the ways that the meaning of one form *takes place* in the response of another?"[10] As media theorist Chiel Kattenbelt attests, "intermediality is very much about the *staging* (in the sense of conscious self-presentation to another) of media."[11] The artist- activist projects I investigate engage this interactive staging; they are multi-sited performances that utilize a range of old and new media forms as a strategy of challenging hegemonic ideas and visualities. They self-reflexively blur the boundaries among various media while simultaneously exploiting how popular media are entwined with cultural and bodily memory. Accordingly, these intermedial performances blend spaces, media, and realities. Intermediality becomes "a process of transformation of thoughts and processes where something different is formed through performance."[12] Thus, I consider how intermediality expresses possibilities for re-forming mythic images and seeing things differently, thereby challenging the patriarchal order.

In this configuration, literary and media scholar Lars Elleström advocates for a hermeneutics of intermedia positioned around "the perception, conception and interpretation of media as material interfaces situated in social, historical, communicative and aesthetic

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[10] Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 168. In Schneider's monograph, she's particularly invested in troubling the distinction between live arts and still arts, specifically photography (145). I extend this troubling to digital imagery.

[11] Chiel Kattenbelt, "Intermediality in Performance and as Mode of Performativity," in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, ed. Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 29; emphasis added.

[12] Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt, "Key Issues in Intermediality in Theatre and Performance," in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, ed. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 12.

circumstances."[13] Reading Repeal actions as intermedial performances facilitates theorizations that: move across the past and present through old and new media forms; juxtapose live and recorded performances, the live and still arts, and the entanglements of presence and representation, bodies and media objects; and negotiate bodies as performing objects as well as bodies as recipients of sensorial data (audiences). The softening of these media borders enables "a re-perception of the whole, which is re-constructed through performance."[14] This uncovers the political potential of intermedial performances that disturb the peripheries of the sacred and secular, past and present, visible and invisible. Through these re-constructed performances, spectators might (re)perceive the complexities of how womanhood and femininity are constructed in ways that confine and constrain actual bodies.[15]

In her book *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces*, dance and performance studies scholar SanSan Kwan asks, "how do places choreograph identities and how do identities choreograph places?"[16] This question intimates a kind of rhizomatic flow among spaces and the bodies that occupy them. Particularly relevant to my study, Kwan theorizes "the production of cultural identity as a choreographed negotiation," a concept I

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[13] Elleström, 13.

[14] Chapple and Kattenbelt, 12.

[15] Various feminist theorizations explain gender as a social construct, performative, or a masquerade. The social construction of womanhood is explored by Simone de Beauvoir's seminal 1949 book *The Second Sex* (trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier [London: Vintage Classics, 2011]). Judith Butler influentially theorizes gender as performative behaviors (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [London and New York: Routledge, 1990]). Mary Ann Doane posits femininity as masquerade in her essay "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" (in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 60-71 [London and New York: Routledge, 2003]).

[16] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

apply to the meeting point of cultural identity and gender.[17] Space is not neutral, and the corporeal experience of space is simultaneously somatic and tactile, perceptive and receptive; bodies sense and feel space tangibly and abstractly. Kwan thus advances a kinesthetic and choreographic awareness of space because "moving bodies, space, time and community identity are interrelated processes."[18] The intermedial protest performances I analyze engage this interdependent development. For my purposes, however, I ask: how does the presence of the sacred complicate this chorography? How does the authority of the divine inform kinesthesia and the spatiotemporal? And, what is more, how do *digital* places choreograph identities, and how do identities choreograph *digital* places?

The enduring image of the Virgin Mary embodies the persistent performative presence of religion in Irish social and political life. Historically, Mariology was a distinctive feature of Irish Catholicism.[19] Feminist critic and cultural theorist Gerardine Meaney asserts that, because women in Ireland were historically excluded from direct action as citizens, then they have been "subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit."[20] Historically, women were charged exclusively with the work of representing the nation as a site of traditional and moral purity, configurations embodied by "Mother Ireland," the postcolonial trope of "the land as woman," and the Virgin Mary,

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[17] Kwan, 18.

[18] Kwan, xxxv. Kwan is drawing from Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a set of bodily practices that are socially and historically conditioned (5-9).

[19] Mariology refers to the theology associated with the Virgin. I use the term Marianism because it privileges the worship and devotion of the Virgin, and my concern is primary with everyday practices and engagement with her iconography.

[20] Gerardine Meaney, *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, and Nation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 4.

"Queen of Ireland."[21] Thus I explore how Marianism—the rituals, images, media, art, and material culture associated with the Virgin—reiterates a sacred and cultural authority that affects how bodies, space, and identity choreograph and shape one another. In uncovering the emanations of Marian iconography in Repeal activism, this dissertation foregrounds how the secular and sacred are not discrete spheres, but rather mutually collapsing domains.

The Eighth Amendment represents a single node in a dense web of control that prominent Irish studies scholar James M. Smith calls modern Ireland's "architecture of containment." From abortion rights and legal policy to reform schools, mother and baby homes, and Magdalene laundries, this containment regime is both discursive and spatialized, advanced by formal systems of government and Catholic doctrine, as well as by social practices and cultural activities—such as the makeup of the family and gender roles.[22] Thus, this architecture of containment affects bodies—their mobilities, as well as how they embody spaces of belonging and spaces in which they feel out-of-place.

Historical Background

Repeal the Eighth was a reproductive rights campaign committed to overturning the Eighth Amendment in the Irish constitution.[23] The Eighth Amendment was originally passed

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[21] Belinda Loftus interrogates the multifaceted figure Mother Ireland in *Mirrors: William III & Mother Ireland* (Dundrum, NI: Picture Press, 1990); David Lloyd's postcolonial study investigates the land as woman motif in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); and Meaney considers all three of these formations in *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change*. See also Angela K. Martin, "Death of a Nation: Transnationalism, Bodies and Abortion in Late Twentieth-Century Ireland," *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 1999).

[22] James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[23] Repeal the Eighth was comprised of a number of formal and informal groups dedicated to legalizing abortion. Most prominently, the Coalition to the Repeal the Eighth formed an umbrella organization uniting committees across Ireland, including factions of political parties. Similarly, Together for Yes formed after the referendum was announced in early 2018, bringing together the Coalition to Repeal with the Abortion Rights Campaign, the Irish Family Planning Association, the National Women's Council of Ireland, and dozens of

by a national ballot in 1983. Its text, formerly Article 40.3.3, reads: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."[24] Prior to decriminalization, the only case in which abortion was lawful was in the event the pregnant person's life is at risk, a precarious judgement to make as I will discuss in Chapter 2.

The abortion debate substantiates national anxieties concerning Ireland's political, economic, and moral boundaries. In the Irish context, an anti-abortion stance has allowed the nation's character to maintain its morally conservative, Catholic identity while exerting influence as a modern state on the global stage. When Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, some Irish perceived the coalition as a threat to national authority.[25] In particular, the EEC decreed that member countries must provide contraception and abortion services for women. Dolores Dooley argues that the debate over the legality of abortion became a fulcrum for the assertion of Ireland's continued independence. Their pro-life stance proclaimed an appropriate system of governance based upon their distinctive cultural and national identity while preserving alliances with continental Europe.

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other groups. For historical background on the movement for abortion rights and Repeal in particular, see Sinéad Kennedy, "#Repealthe8th: Ireland, Abortion Access and the Movement to Remove the Eighth Amendment," *Antropologia* 5, no. 2 (2018): 13-31; Gráinne Griffin, Orla O'Connor, and Ailbhe Smyth, with Alison O'Connor, *It's a Yes! How Together for Yes Repealed the Eighth and Transformed Irish Society* (Dublin: Orpen Press, 2019); and David Ralph, *Abortion and Ireland: How the 8th Was Overthrown* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2020).

[24] *Bunreacht na hÉireann* [*Constitution of Ireland*] (1937), Article 40.3.3. The full text is available online: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html.

[25] The European Economic Community was renamed the European Community after the formation of the European Union (EU) in 1993. Ireland remains a member of both organizations. Moreover, the Irish economy has flourished in the last few years following a period of recession, which can be attributed at least in part to the advantages of these continental pacts.

Subsequently for Dooley, the Eighth Amendment, passed into law a decade after Ireland joined the EEC, had less to do with abortion and more to do with "perceived erosions in Ireland's moral foundations."[26] The legal policy thus re-affirmed the nation's Catholic principles while the country's (geopolitical and media) borders were becoming more porous.

Following independence in 1937, the burgeoning Irish state looked inward, skeptical of influences from abroad that would besmirch an emerging, distinct national character. At mid-century, however, isolationist paradigms waned as the country opened to foreign investment and international affairs.[27] Likewise, the advent of television and rapid development of other media, in conjunction with the mitigation of censorship laws, launched the previously insular country into "the global flow of culture."[28] Subsequently, with economic expansion and modernization, the Republic became increasingly secular, moving

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[26] Dolores Dooley, "Medical Ethics in Ireland: A Decade of Change" *Hastings Center Report* 21, no. 1 (1991): 18-21. The termination of pregnancy was not always the controversial topic it has become in the modern era. On the one hand, the illegality of abortion is a product of the "right to life" ideologies of the 19th century (a lineage described by Laury Oaks in "Irish Trans/National Politics and Locating Fetuses" in *Fetal Subjects, Feminist Positions* ed. Lynn M. Morgan and Meredith W. Michaels [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999]). England's Offences Against Persons Act of 1861 made it unlawful for anyone to act with intent to "procure a miscarriage" (qtd. in Dooley). This law extended to Ireland as a colony of the British crown. Eight years following this law, Pope Pius IX issued the *Apostolicae sedis* in which he said that the termination of pregnancy *at any stage* was homicide and would lead to excommunication. This pronouncement marks the emergence of the concept of life beginning at conception, also called ensoulment or "hominization." While the Pope did not use any of these terms explicitly, the "life begins at conception" debate cites his decree as the concept's inception. To eliminate any ambiguity, the Catholic Church reiterated this position in the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*. For Oaks, the dates of the *Apostolicae sedis* and *Code of Canon Law* are important in that the Church's official position came after the enactment of English law. Moreover, this is evidence that the Catholic Church's position has shifted over time and that they have not always been at the forefront of the anti-abortion campaign. For more information about the Catholic Church's historical position on abortion see Oaks and John M. Riddle, *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[27] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin Press, 1988), 579.

[28] Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland: Same Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 2. See also, Tom Inglis, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland," *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 40, no. 3/4 (2005), 30; and Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 335.

away from the traditionalist Catholic customs "of chastity, humility, piety, and self-denial to a liberal-individualist culture of self-indulgence."[29] In this context, the Eighth Amendment embodies a reinvestment in a definitive national identity that merges Irish ethnicity, culture, and Catholicism. Via the Eighth, Ireland professed that they could belong to the global sphere while still regulating day-to-day Irish life predicated upon a vision of Catholic social morality.[30] Hence, women's reproductive bodies became a site and marker of national identity and virtue.

The Eighth Amendment is a guarantor of women's roles as child bearers, a function that has been legislated into modern Irish life through the Constitution. Following civil war in 1922, the Free State that emerged contrasted British colonialist rule in every way possible. The Irish endeavored to prove that they could build a stable independent government, refuting the stereotypes that had defined imperialist rule.[31] Consequently, the framers of the Constitution (1937) presented a modern identity grounded in Catholic social values, while simultaneously incorporating an authentic, pre-colonial mythos evocative of the Gaelic cultural imaginary.[32] In particular, Barry Collins and Patrick Hanafin argue, Irish law "makes

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[29] Inglis, *Global Ireland*, 3.

[30] Others viewed this as widening the divide between the North and the Republic; in asserting Irish identity as entangled in Catholic, pro-life ideology, this "second partitioning of Ireland" foreclosed opportunities for re-unification. "The Second Partitioning of Ireland," editorial, *Irish Times*, 30 August 1983, qtd. in Tom Hasketh, *The Second Partitioning of Ireland? The Abortion Referendum of 1983* (Dublin: Brandsma Books, 1990), 334-35.

[31] Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Virtuous Mothers and Dutiful Wives: The Politics of Sexuality in the Irish Free State," in *Gender and Power in Irish History*, ed. Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 100.

[32] Barry Collins and Patrick Hanafin, "Mothers, Maidens, and the Myth of the Origins in the Irish Constitution," *Law and Critique* 12 (2001), 57. The fusing of Irish Catholic identity and nationalist politics emerged in the seventeenth century with the Counter-Reformation. At that time, British colonial power was associated with Protestantism, particularly following the resettlement of Scottish Protestant landowners in northern Ireland during the seventeenth century. Therefore, Irish Catholics advanced their alternative worldview through a national political identity as an important source of resistance against their colonial oppressors.

formal distinctions between men and women, recognizing the 'special' role of woman."[33] This novel position is predicated on the image of woman as the embodiment of the nascent country. Article 41.2 reads,

> In particular, the State recognises that *by her life within the home*, woman gives to the State a support without which the *common good* cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour *to the neglect of their duties in the home*.[34]

As such, the government severely restricts women's roles in public life, arguing against *permitting* them from engaging in both "reproductive" and "nonreproductive" life.[35] A woman's place, therefore, is enshrined as a married child bearer (and thus heterosexual). The Constitution professes her national duty to be acts of self-sacrifice that ensure her maternity and imprison her in the home. If she fails to achieve this, she jeopardizes the "common good." These configurations set clear boundaries around women's behavior, sexuality, value, mobility, and subjectivity.

Subsequently, as the Eighth Amendment illustrates, the 1980s and 1990s were defined by contentious moments between modernism and liberal ideals and the conservative traditions of the Republic's founding patriarchs. To further ensure a woman's place in the home as wife and mother, additional laws were passed outlawing divorce and banning birth control—policies that remained in effect through 1995 and 1985, respectively. Since the founding of the Republic, women were prevented from serving on juries or entering civil service professions, and marriage bars made retirement compulsory for women in several

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[33] Collins and Hanafin, 58-9.

[34] *Bunreacht na hÉireann* [*Constitution of Ireland*] (1937), Article 41.2.1-2; emphasis added.

[35] Oaks, 179.

employment industries.[36] These legal actions ensured the adoption of a Catholic discourse classifying a woman's "natural" role: she was to be an obedient wife, a productive child bearer, and a devoted caregiver.[37] Thus, the interlocking systems of economics and politics formalized women's contributions to the new nation in which, as dictated by the constitution, "she is condemned to sacrifice her public role for the common good."[38] These statutes reinforced the heterosexual family as the fundamental social unit of Irish life in the advent of the Republic. As Jenny Beale describes, politicians advanced the family as the basic unit of the economy while the Catholic Church preached the family as the basic unit of moral and social welfare.[39] In relegating women to private domestic life, the Irish state and church colluded to make women solely responsible for the moral health of the nation predicated on controlling their sexuality and reproductive lives. Thus, a threat to the family was a threat to the whole nation.

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[36] Social anxieties about women in the workforce were prevalent throughout inter-war Europe in which women's claim to a public role was believed to yield social and moral ills that plagued society. Caitriona Clear attests that Eamon de Valera, frequently described as the architect of the 1937 Constitution, feared that "the appalling maternal ill health and infant mortality of early industrialisation" would come to Irish shores as a result of the "industrialising drive of the 1930s" (180). Therefore, these legislative restrictions on women's employment and social life were strategies to keep women in the home and out of the workforce where they would not take jobs away from men. The new Irish state's primary concern was providing men with the skills and trades to enter the workforce. See Clear, "'The Women Can Not Be Blamed': The Commission on Vocational Organisation, Feminism and 'Home-makers' in Independent Ireland in the 1930s and '40s," in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1995), 180-81; also, Kylie Jarrett, "Laundering Women's History: A Feminist Critique of the Social Factory," *First Monday* 23, no. 3 (2018), np.

[37] Maryann Valiulis, "Neither Feminist Nor Flapper: The Ecclesiastical Construction of the Ideal Irish Woman," in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1995), 169.

[38] Collins and Hanafin, 64.

[39] Jenny Beale, *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change* (London: Macmillan Education, 1986), 7.

Sociologist Tom Inglis contends that, when Catholic doctrine was adopted into political life, "secular civility became synonymous with Catholic morality."[40] Ironically, these formulations depended upon postcolonial images that associate women's bodies with the land through the Republican icon of Mother Ireland, perpetuating the notion that independence was fought for and won by men with selfless mothers who put the good of the nation ahead of their own desires.[41] Legal scholar Ruth Fletcher, furthermore, links the Eighth Amendment to these cultural discourses; in prohibiting a woman's right to choose, the state "draws on nationalism's representation of the self-sacrificing mother as an emblem of Ireland."[42] Therefore, the mother is rendered public property. Despite the configuration of sexuality within the private, in Ireland, sexuality is "publicly determined and policed."[43] In her analysis of maternal bodies, Rebecca Kukla affirms that, as a site of civic responsibility for the production of human life, the reproductive body must be made manageable and brought under control, an untenable effort if a woman's insides are privatized and her

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[40] Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 165.

[41] Collins and Hanafin, 63; Valiulis, "Neither Feminist Nor Flapper," 170; Meaney. Valiulis argues that this version of Irish Republican motherhood emerged following the American and French Revolutions. A woman's duty became to produce sons and instill them with pride for Gaelic traditions so they would become good and virtuous citizens of a new and independent state (169-170). The patriarchal tone and delineated gender roles enshrined in the Constitution ignore the contributions of women as active participants in the nationalist movement, as well as other social campaigns including suffrage and labor organizing. See Clear, "'The Women Can Not Be Blamed.'"

[42] Ruth Fletcher, "Post-colonial Fragments: Representations of Abortion in Irish Law and Politics," *Journal of Law and Society* 28, no. 4 (2001), 574.

[43] Clair Wills, "Women, Domesticity, and the Family: Recent Feminist Work in Irish Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001), 37.

reproduction is left to individual desires.[44] Consequently, in Ireland, "privacy has been displaced by secrecy" and "reality has been displaced by denial."[45]

Women were thus subjected to what geographers Una Crowley and Rob Kitchin label "a dense *spatialised* grid of discipline, reform and self-regulation."[46] Legal codes and social policies regulated the conditions in which women could occupy public space, and cultural and social standards dictated behaviors and actions. As Irish studies scholar James Smith explicates, these matrices of control—an architecture of containment—depended upon regulating the physical spaces individuals occupied: the home, school, and workplace, as well as the church and its confessional.[47] If anyone transgressed their politically inscribed and morally sanctioned duties, then the offending party was physically removed from public life and incarcerated, thereby safeguarding the body politic from corruption and danger by immoral forces.[48] Reformatory schools, mother and baby homes, and Magdalene laundries are all regulatory sites serving this function. As long as those wrongdoers were remorseful and sought forgiveness, then they could be "quietly dealt with behind closed doors."[49]

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[44] Rebecca Kukla, "Pregnant Bodies as Public Spaces," in *Motherhood and Space: Configurations of the Maternal Through Politics, Home, and the Body*, ed. by Sarah Hardy and Caroline Wiedmer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 296.

[45] Ursula Barry, "Discourses on Foetal Rights and Women's Embodiment," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2*, ed. by Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 120.

[46] Una Crowley and Rob Kitchin, "Producing 'Decent Girls': Governmentality and the Moral Geographies of Sexual Conduct in Ireland (1922–1937)," *Gender, Place and Culture* 15, no. 4 (2008), 367; emphasis added.

[47] Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 2-3.

[48] Crowley and Kitchin, 364.

[49] Tom Inglis, "Sexual Transgression and Scapegoats: A Case Study from Modern Ireland," *Sexualities* 5, no. 1 (2002), 6.

Conversely, those who "made a virtue out of their transgression" had to be "pilloried, vilified and demonized."[50] Thus, sexuality is imbricated in what Inglis calls a "thematic of sin" that casts sexual behavior and desire as a problem to be controlled through self-discipline and denial.[51] Physical spaces contained and segregated the pollutants—those bodies deemed out of place and not-belonging in the national imaginary.

As Smith explains, the physical sites that cordoned off bad elements were contingent on abstract forms of power, governance, and discourse to support them. As a result, the architecture of containment comprised an interlocking structure of material, symbolic, and ideological operations. If concrete containment forms physically removed people troubled by social issues like poverty, illegitimacy, sexual abuse, and infanticide, then the abstract forms included "both the legislation that inscribed these issues and the numerous official and public discourses that resisted admitting to the existence and function of their affiliated institutions."[52] By virtue of having delegitimized any behaviors that fell outside social norms, government actions were perceived as *not* impeding women's rights.[53]

Chapter Breakdowns

Each chapter in *From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming* focuses on a distinct political action affiliated with the Repeal movement. These actions involve artists and ordinary citizen activists alike; they include aesthetic performances and artworks staged for mass

[50] Inglis, "Sexual Transgression and Scapegoats," 6.

[51] Tom Inglis, "Foucault, Bourdieu, and the Field of Irish Sexuality," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 7 (1997), 11-12.

[52] Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 2-3.

[53] Crowley and Kitchin, 368.

consumption, as well as spontaneous responses to unfolding events. I do not claim that my account of the Repeal movement is exhaustive nor complete; rather, I have carefully curated a range of artist-activist interventions that are intermedial and respond to a transhistorical model of patriarchy that regulates women's sexuality, visibility, and access to the body politic.

Chapter 1, "Live-Tweeting from the Abortion Trail: Performing (Digital) Presence, Exile, and Endurance" follows the forty-eight-hour journey of two women, calling themselves Two Women Travel, who live-tweet their trip from Ireland to England where one of them could receive a safe and legal abortion. This social media travelogue—broadcast and documented through a series of tweets comprised of textual commentary, photographs, hashtags, and mentions—makes highly visible abortion travel, which has become a cultural phenomenon given the severe ban on the procedure within Irish borders. Their use of mobile, digital media enables a critique of the disembodying discourses of Marianism. Thus, this intermedial performance makes apparent the material and immaterial boundaries imposed on the bodies of pregnant people and abortion-seekers.

The second chapter, "#RIPSavita: Constellations of Mourning and the Performative Labor of the Migrant Pregnant Body," considers how the borders imposed on pregnant bodies are troubled by issues of race, ethnicity, and citizenship status. While Two Women Travel are anonymous, I shift focus to the highly visible and widely circulated image of Savita Halappanavar, an Indian woman who died in Galway when she was denied a life-saving abortion. Savita's mythic role as a symbol of the Repeal movement sheds light on how Marianism influences which bodies are imagined as reproducing the nation.

The last two chapters focus on intermedial aesthetic performances in which people confess their abortions. In *The Renunciation*, the activist group the home|work Collective stages a popup, guerrilla performance in public sites of transit in order to re-make how Marian devotions inscribe national and cultural spaces. Rather than subverting or defying Catholic belief, *The Renunciation* juxtaposes Mary's potential motherhood with that of Irish abortion-seekers, thereby blurring and collapsing the borders between the bodies of the Virgin and those seeking termination. In contrast, actor, author, and comedian Tara Flynn displaces Marian iconography altogether in her one-woman show *Not a Funny Word*, the focus of Chapter 4. Flynn's performance recounts her abortion journey as well as the online gender harassment she was subjected to following her public abortion confession. The online misogyny and gendered violence aimed at her expose the complexities concerning which feminine bodies are imagined to reproduce Irish-ness. Flynn therefore replaces Marianism with images of the pre-Christian Celtic goddess Brigid. Her performance complicates postcolonial discourses that aim to re-form the boundaries imposed on women's bodies but overlook and obscure racial and ethnic differences.

These diverse case studies therefore represent a range of responses to and engagements with Marian iconography as it materializes, overtly and covertly, in a variety of media. They expose the limits of Marianism toward challenging patriarchy and misogyny, as well as its potential for subversion and radical reimagining in the service of feminist politics. This reveals the complexity of Repeal discourses, imagery, and material culture. As boundaries of identity—in citizenship, gender, etc.—are constantly being made and re-made, pregnant people and abortion-seekers are important producers of culture and embodied knowledge.

CHAPTER ONE
Live-Tweeting from the Abortion Trail: Performing (Digital) Presence, Exile, and Endurance

> *"Emigration and exile, the journies to and from home, are the very heartbeat of Irish culture. To imagine Ireland is to imagine a journey."*
> –Fintan O'Toole, "The Ex-Isle of Erin: Emigration and Irish Culture"
>
> *"'Irish Woman' enables definition of 'Irish man.' I am the edge, defining the center. Border country. Margin. Perimeter. Outside."*
> –Ailbhe Smyth, "The Floozie in the Jacuzzi"

August 20, 2016. The Twitter account Two Women Travel announces, "Good morning all. Thanks for all of th[e] messages of solidarity and support. Thanks to @EndaKennyTD we're about to hit the road. #twowomentravel." A couple of hours later, Two Women Travel tweet again, sharing a photograph of the tail of a green and white airplane cutting across an overcast, gray sky. They narrate, "#twowomentravel boarding, it's chilly. @EndaKennyTD." Another couple of hours pass and they tweet, "Pretty ordinary sights, over here away from home. Can't say it's comforting though, @EndaKennyTD #twowomentravel." In the accompanying photo, the view from a taxi window reveals a massive concrete wall rushing past.

At first glance, these posts broadcast the kinds of quotidian activity and casual communication that characterizes social media writ large. This Twitter stream could be an exciting travelogue of a couple of jet-setting gals on holiday. Against the backdrop of other social media noise, however, Two Women Travel's digital chronicle oddly stands out. Their photographs are eerily devoid of their physical images or any identifying details of any kind. Their tone lacks the excitement and anticipation of leisure travel; their trip is unfortunate and distressing. Two Women Travel remain anonymous because the Irish government—represented in their account by @EndaKennyTD, the official Twitter handle of the Prime

Minister—deems their behavior criminal. They have been forced from home at an inconvenient hour to undertake the arduous journey to obtain a safe and legal abortion in a foreign country.

At the time, Ireland was among the nations openly criticized by the United Nations for its severe and restrictive abortion laws that violated international human rights standards for women's rights. Passed in 1983 and repealed in 2018—two years after this trip—the country's Eighth Amendment criminalized abortion by recognizing the right to life of an embryo or fetus.[54] Prior to repeal, the only case in which abortion was lawful was in the event the pregnant person's life was at risk, a precarious judgement to make as I will discuss in Chapter 2. Thus, Two Women Travel are among the more than 170,000 pregnant people who travelled abroad to access abortion services since 1980.[55] Theirs is not the kind of journey imagined to constitute Ireland's emigrant culture. These temporary expatriates threaten the stability of the state. For the two Irish nicknamed Two Women Travel, their actions are illicit and secretive. They are doubly silenced by the law that exiles them—first, in denying them a medical procedure that forces them to travel, and secondly in the refusal to recognize the "abortion trail" that finds thousands of abortion-seekers trekking from Ireland to the rest of Europe. Accordingly, Two Women Travel's unapologetic broadcast is a radical act. In divulging an activity that is typically hidden, they bring awareness and visibility to the

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[54] The full text of the amendment reads: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right" (*Constitution of Ireland* [*Bunreacht na hÉireann*], Dublin: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1945, art. 40.3.3).

[55] Sarah Bardon, "Fact Check: Have More Than 170,000 Irish Women Travelled Abroad for an Abortion?" *The Irish Times*, 2 May 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/fact-check-have-more-than-170-000-irish-women-travelled-abroad-for-an-abortion-1.3481581.

reality of their circumstances. They use everyday and commonplace behavior—tweeting on social media—to normalize a deed that *should be* everyday and commonplace in the Irish context.

This chapter explores the potential for social media users to exploit the conventions of digital technology for political ends. In Ireland, pregnant people's bodies and reproductive rights are policed and regulated; therefore, Two Women Travel (TWT) use Twitter to protest state control of their bodily autonomy. This digitally chronicled and lived venture is both hashtag activism and social protest, representing the innovative ways that individuals employ social media to raise awareness and support for a cause.[56] On the one hand, as rogue performers, TWT disrupt and intervene in mundane online sociality through the (digital) visibility of their lived journey. Social media, however, is full of contradictions and ambiguities. Two Women Travel exploit these complications in enacting a performance of endurance that exposes the systems of control while simultaneously depending upon them. They negotiate the messy boundaries between the material-physical and digital-intangible to shed light on the systems of power and representational economies that have made abortion travel a cultural phenomenon in Ireland. In digitally mapping their trek via textual commentary and photographs, TWT exploit the surveillance practices of Twitter to reproduce the regulatory laws of the state. Subsequently, they enact the enduring labor of travel

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[56] There are limits to using social media for activist practices. Critics argue that engaging the Internet in this way encourages "slacktivism," whereby people are gratified by their political intervention through online activities while their influence is minimal or even counterproductive. Moreover, repressive government regimes have used social media themselves to track, follow, and discredit or capture activists. Employing social media for political activism continues to be a complex and multifaceted practice. For more information, refer to William Lafi Youmans and Jillian C. York, "Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interest, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements," *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 315-329. Also, for a thorough critique of slacktivism, see Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World*, Allen Lane, 2011, and Malcolm Gladwell's often referenced article, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not be Tweeted," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010: 42-49.

performed by abortion-seekers. Therefore, I read TWT as a quotidian performance of endurance predicated upon a temporal ontology of the digital as much as a spatial one.

This Twitter project illustrates the possibilities of tactical media not to exclusively raise visibility for a cause, but to communicate the *non*-visible—what feminist performance theorist Peggy Phelan calls the "rhetorically unmarked aspects of identity."[57] I examine how TWT's performance makes visible the material conditions of abortion travel while their bodies concurrently remain anonymous and invisible, challenging spectators to account for the *immaterial* construction of identities, specifically of womanhood in the Irish context. Through figurative and material body politics, the bodies of women and other menstruators disappear from social discourse and representation. In the Irish context, they are superseded by the fetus or the signification of idealized motherhood. The Virgin Mary embodies the most potent icon of Irish womanhood. Thus, Marian iconography is a political weapon entangling reproductive rights discourses, legal policy, moral ideology, and the disciplining of the female body. The Virgin is a malleable cultural production whose image inscribes borders and boundaries on the lives of real women. TWT deny the borders imposed on their bodies—national borders that would constrain their mobility and still their bodies, and the border of representation that affirms their bodies can only appear if they reproduce correctly. In their intermedial performance, they refuse the disembodying discourses of Marianism that dominate the Irish social imaginary, while simultaneously challenging disembodying

[57] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 26.

conceptions of the digital. Hence, their project accentuates the stakes for individuals affected by on- and offline systems of "control and freedom."[58]

@TwoWomenTravel: Digital Embodiments & Choreographies

Two Women Travel's Twitter project integrates feminist hashtag activism, tactical media practices, and intermedial performance. This amalgamation allows them to communicate with a wide audience while foregrounding their embodied experiences in conflict with political circumstances. TWT's tweets are not merely visual and semiotic representations of their physical journey; their embodied performance is enacted on- and offline. In accounting for the spatiotemporal properties of social media, this live-tweeting project enacts a persistent happening that is both emplaced and fluctuating. Their project reveals variances of border-body-machine entanglements that challenge spatial ontologies of the digital. On their Twitter page, Two Women Travel describe themselves: "Two Women, one procedure, 48 hours away from home."[59] Their profile picture is the logo of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, an alliance of more than 70 organizations who worked to "raise awareness of the urgent need for a referendum to repeal" the Eighth Amendment in

[58] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[59] Two Women Travel Twitter page, accessed 3 December 2016, https://twitter.com/TwoWomenTravel. This account has since been closed (although it can still be accessed on the Wayback Machine). Their event did attract media attention. Articles chronicling their trip, including screenshots of some of their tweets, include Elle Hunt, "Irish Woman Live Tweets Journey for Abortion in Great Britain," *The Guardian*, 20 August 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/20/irish-woman-live-tweets-journey-for-abortion-in-britain; Ciarán D'Arcy and Dean Ruxton, "Two Irish Women Live-tweet Journey to UK for Abortion," *Irish Times*, 20 August 2016, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/two-irish-women-live-tweet-journey-to-uk-for-abortion-1.2763194; "#TwoWomenTravel – Live-tweeting the Journey for an Abortion," *BBC News*, 22 August 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-37156673; "Irish Woman Live-tweets Abortion Trip," *BBC Newshour*, 22 August 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p045jmjj?ocid=socialflow_twitter.

Ireland.[60] In a series of twenty-five tweets, TWT chronicle their trip with commentary on the sights they see and the people they meet along the way. They share problems that emerge while undergoing an intimate medical procedure and express frustration at being away from the comforts of home. In making visible their trip and the fact of obtaining a safe and legal abortion, TWT reflexively enact an activity of social protest; they are doing the very activity that is illegal within the Republic's borders. As explained by Sarah Kendzior, "hashtag feminism makes visible what was never truly invisible, but what people refuse to see."[61]

TWT use the conventions of Twitter to gain visibility for their cause using a hashtag, #twowomentravel, as a unifying symbol and site around which supporters can virtually gather. Likewise, as a political performance, TWT practice de Certeau's reading of everyday life; they engage text, photographs, the convention of the hashtag itself, and other Twitter handles (namely, @EndaKennyTD) as tactics for challenging strategies of the nation-state and law.[62] Their tweets juxtapose textual communiqués with photographs of sterile waiting rooms, views from bus and taxi windows, and generic hotel rooms. The un-remarkability of their photographs corresponds to the casual commentary about everyday life that is typical of Twitter streams. Yet, the piece functions as a tactical media project designed to disrupt other users' activities.

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[60] "Who We Are," *The Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment*, accessed 3 December 2016, http://www.repealeight.ie/who-we-are/.

[61] Sarah Kendzior, "Blame It on the Internet," *Al Jazeera*, 4 February 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/02/blame-it-internet-20142453122572101.html.

[62] Michel De Certeau,"'Making Do': Uses and Tactics," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

With their trip underway for a few hours, TWT announce, "We stand in solidarity with all women exiled by @EndaKennyTD, his predecessors, his apologists. #twowomentravel."[63] This Tweet receives over two-thousand re-tweets, of which I, @JaimeLeighGray, am one. Their courage and affirmation of humility in the face of struggle are performative acts microcast via Twitter where this performance disrupts my complacency. As performance studies scholar D. Soyini Madison describes, performatives strive to *do* something, to disturb or generate a consequence.[64] TWT aim to interrupt daily life, and thus their behavior is an act of civil disobedience. Their embodied experience is a disruption from their own lives that is then broadcast on the Internet where the performative act interferes in my life. As a kind of DIY practice that utilizes new media to interrupt banal communication processes, TWT are akin to tactical media activists. Their work is contingent, ephemeral, and variable while also striving *to be seen*.[65] The Critical Art Ensemble, an American-based art collective, defines tactical media as a type of "digital interventionism" that utilizes an array of existing media forms so that participants might discover a "new way of seeing, understanding, and (in the best-case scenario) interacting with a given system."[66] For tactical media producers, "the doing, the *performance*, is all."[67]

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[63] Two Women Travel, 19 August 2016, 11:52 p.m. PST.

[64] D. Soyini Madison, "Dressing Out-of-Place: From Ghana to Obama Commemorative Cloth on the American Red Carpet," in *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance*, eds. Karen Tranberg Hansen and D. Soyini Madison, 217-230 (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), para. 4, DOI: 10.2752/9781474280068/HANSEN0020.

[65] Rita Raley, *Tactical Media* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 13.

[66] Critical Art Ensemble, *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media* (New York: Autonomedia, 2001), 7-8.

[67] Raley, 10; emphasis added.

As a digital performance structured around the locale of the body as it moves through time and space, TWT's project is both performative and theatrical. Over the course of their forty-eight-hour odyssey while they navigate medical clinics, hotel rooms, and airports, @TwoWomenTravel exploit what John Muse describes as Twitter's "inherent theatricality" to craft a narrative that unfolds in real time for an audience in cyberspace.[68] Their tweets are conceived for the spectator at-a-distance who will likely encounter their tale asynchronously. Nonetheless, the dialogic, abbreviated 280-character form combines with the platform's public nature to create a sense of online liveness shared among audience and performer.[69] Accordingly, TWT perform across a "global theater," to use McLuhan's oft-cited phrase.[70]

Moreover, TWT cast themselves as a protagonist who reacts to the conflict incited by an antagonist. Their travelogue begins, "Good morning all. Thanks for all of th[e] messages of solidarity and support. Thanks to @EndaKennyTD we're about to hit the road."[71] They build solidarity in acknowledging their followers who will comment, re-tweet, and like their

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[68] John H. Muse, "140 Characters in Search of a Theater: Twitter Plays," *Theater* 42, no. 2 (2012): 43-63. Others recognize the theatricality of TWT's digital storytelling; actors read their tweets as part of an evening of performances called *Witness, A Day of Testimonies*, organized by the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth on 26 August 2017. This staged reading (performed by Danielle Galligan, Karen McCarthy, and Arthur Riordan) excluded TWT's photographs, thereby emphasizing the semiotic narrative of TWT's original performance and downplaying its visuality. In my analysis, I argue that the visuality and digitally networked qualities are vital to the performance's phenomenology. A video of the *Witness* performance is available in the Artists' Campaign archive at the Digital Repository of Ireland (https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/dn409p498).

[69] Twitter originally capped its character limit at 140 characters per tweet. In November 2017, the platform changed to a 280-character limit.

Media theorist Nick Couldry contends that Internet users experience shared sociality as *liveness*. Any co-present social interaction that takes place online is embraced by the concept of online liveness, including a couple of individuals in a private chat room or mass numbers of people drawn together by a breaking news story on the BBC's website (Couldry, "Liveness, "Reality," and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," *The Communication Review* 7 [2004]).

[70] Marshall McLuhan, "At the Moment of Sputnik the Planet Became a Global Theater in Which There Are No Spectators but Only Actors," *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 1 (1974): 48– 58.

[71] Two Women Travel, 19 August 2016, 8:13 p.m. PST.

posts. More significantly, they cast an antagonist in their story, @EndaKennyTD, the Twitter avatar of Enda Kenny who was the Taoiseach, or Prime Minister, at that time.[72] In addressing Kenny, TWT co-opt his Twitter presence to gain greater visibility for their own. He is "mentioned" in each tweet (a Twitter feature of linking to a username using the @ symbol) even when TWT do not directly address him. Hence, they use Kenny's connectivity—his high-profile Twitter account—to their advantage, meanwhile disparaging him for the ways he represents an impediment to their reproductive rights. He is a man legislating what these women can and cannot do to their bodies. Kenny provides a material entity to embody their obstacle (the Eighth Amendment), thus his non-anonymity emphasizes the necessity of their own secrecy.

TWT remain conspicuously absent from their photos. Aside from the occasional glimpse of a hand holding a book or a knee resting against a chair, they withhold their material bodies from every picture. Therefore, Kenny is cast as the sole figure in their script whose identity is connected to a corporeal body that can be made visible. While the Taoiseach never responds on Twitter to TWT's direct address of him, his silence is a performance that reverberates throughout this project.[73]

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[72] Kenny was Taoiseach or Prime Minister from 2011-2017 and the leader of Fine Gael from 2002-2017. Interestingly, Kenny is a complicated antagonist because he had been widely criticized by his own party for not being conservative *enough* regarding the abortion debate. He had encouraged the rule of popular opinion in expressing support for a vote on the repeal of the Eighth Amendment, although, he never advanced a vote on the matter during his tenure. Rather, following his resignation in June 2017, his successor, Leo Varadkar (who is also a member of Fine Gael) announced a vote on the repeal within seven months of taking office.

[73] The only member of Fine Gael to publicly acknowledge Two Women Travel's journey was the Minister of Health Simon Harris. He tweeted: "Thanks to @TwoWomenTravel for telling story of reality which faces many. Citizens Assembly—a forum to discuss 8th & make recommendations" (quoted in Kate Antosik-Parsons, "A Body is a Body: The Embodied Politics of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Contemporary Irish Art and Culture," in *Reproductive Justice and Sexual Rights: Transnational Perspectives*, ed. by Tanjo Saroj Bakhru (London and New York: Routledge 2019), 48.

TWT, however, use social media beyond its function as a stage. Their use of digital media is an embodied spatio-temporal practice that inscribes their on- and offline interactions with meaning. TWT maintain a sustained online presence over a period of days, while capturing the feeling of motility and stasis that characterizes the journey—waiting for the plane, waiting for the procedure to end, waiting to return to Ireland. The tiresome repetition of taxi rides and waiting rooms adds to the monotony and aggravation of the trip. The rigor of the venture is embodied in the shifting scenes and impersonal, cold environments depicted by these images. On the one hand, their performance reflects a time-based practice that utilizes a clear beginning, middle, and end. The computational operations of Twitter manage this temporality; each tweet is timestamped as though freezing this moment in history. However, Twitter is not fixed, linear, or singular. While tweeting a series of images and texts initially fashions a chronological arrangement, these tweets do not appear in other users' Twitter streams as a tidy sequential composition. A user's feed is fragmented, varying widely across account preferences and settings, and perpetually evolving based on social interactions and algorithmic functions. TWT's tweets emerge amid other traffic and user activity. Their performance thus engages the messy web of embodied enactment, archival processes, and digital practices.

Performance studies frequently privileges the synchronous encounter, the live event enacted with co-present bodies in the here and now. This position, characterized by Peggy Phelan's assertion that "performance's life is in the present," questions technology's ability to preserve, mediate, or otherwise reconcile the totality of what occurs live.[74] Philip

[74] Phelan, 146.

Auslander disputes the polarity of liveness and mediatization. He argues that mass media incorporate "live elements as part of its raw material."[75] He explains, "as the mediatized replaces the live within cultural economy, the live itself incorporates the mediatized both technologically and epistemologically."[76] Thus, just as commonplace daily activity has become imbricated with mobile technology, live and mediatized elements blend and inform one another. Accordingly, performance theorist Steve Dixon re-articulates presence to account for the affective qualities of the encounter of actual bodies through and across digitally mediated forms. He claims, "audiences cognitively and empathetically perceive the performing virtual *human* body (as opposed to a computer simulated body) as always already embodied material flesh."[77] Similarly, centering intersubjectivity, art historian Amelia Jones argues that the performer's body or self is always *already* mediated; the body, whether live or not, "activates" the bodies of spectator-viewers who become involved in meaning-making.[78]

Auslander, Dixon, and Jones release liveness and co-presence from a limiting temporal model, shepherding possibilities for asynchronous encounters. In her analysis of holograms and other digital projections, performance scholar Suk-Young Kim explains that the mediated reality "inhabited" by digital bodies "liberates the actual bodies from their time-

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[75] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 38.

[76] Auslander, 39.

[77] Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 215.

[78] Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Arts Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997), 11-12; also Jones, "Encountering: The Conceptual Body, or a Theory of When, Where, and How Art 'Means.'" *TDR* 62, no. 3 (2018), 21.

and-space confinement."[79] Similarly, dance historian Ann Cooper Albright agrees that technology has the potential to "render, rather than efface, presence—be it theatrical presence or a more existential being-in-the-world."[80] As a live-tweeted endeavor, TWT's project emphasizes the passage of time and the traversal of space—how long their journey lasts matters. Yet, users are likely to encounter their tweets and images asynchronously. Furthermore, taking a photo, composing a tweet, and posting that missive across a digital network enacts a time lag. If, as Alice Rayner claims, performance "marks out the temporal dimension of an act as it emerges from nothingness into actuality," then it "aligns with digital technologies to resist landscapes and geometric space, and to resituate space in the fugitive dimension of time."[81] For Rayner, events unfolding in online networks happen *nowhere* and yet they are *everywhere* in ontologically occurring in the *perpetual now*.[82]

Tweets, therefore, draw audiences into the affective nature of on- and offline sociality, reproducing the feelings of the original statement in an offline here and now.[83] Like performance, digital media is an *enduring ephemeral*, to employ Wendy Chun's phrase.[84]

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[79] Suk-Young Kim, *K-Pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 141.

[80] Ann Cooper Albright, *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 185.

[81] Alice Rayner, "E-scapes: Performance in the Time of Cyberspace" in *Land/Scape/Theater* eds. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 363, 350-351.

[82] Rayner, "E-scapes," 363. Rayner also rehearses this concept in "Everywhere and Nowhere: Theatre in Cyberspace" in *Of Borders and Thresholds: Theatre History, Practice, and Theory*, ed. Michael Kobialka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[83] Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019); Zizi Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[84] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2008).

TWT's digital posts make visible the emergence and re-emergence of somatic expressions across time and space. They craft a personal narrative and political intervention that is *everywhere* and *perpetually now*, thereby rebelling against the constraints of time and place. Their project enacts a persistent happening. In negotiating digital platforms as a fluctuating field of duration, they produce a multiplicity of emplaced visualities. Viewers are confronted by the immediacy and intimacy of their embodied acts, composing a mutually emplaced and evolving encounter that encourages new ways of looking and *being seen*—of *being there* without materializing.

While TWT withhold their physical presence from the photos, their images and tweets chronicle their traversal of material spaces to produce digital, intangible emplaced visualities; however, they emphasize temporal and geographical gaps at every turn. Their visual and textual narrative stages material traces, mobility, and temporal ontologies to embody their digital identity and acts of movement—their choreographic enactments. Their identities as Irish women seeking a safe and legal abortion are mutually constructed by material-physical embodiments and the technological particularities of mobile devices and digital platforms.[85] Scholars like Elizabeth Grosz and performance theorist Jason Farman deduce that bodies and narratives are culturally inscribed by the spaces and places they occupy and traverse, and, in turn, those bodies form and shape space.[86] Farman challenges conceptions of social media users as disembodied spectators; rather, he argues, "we are

[85] Raz Schwartz and Germaine R Halegoua, "The Spatial Self: Location Based Identity Performance on Social Media," *New Media & Society* 17, no. 10 (2015), 1649.

[86] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Jason Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012).

embodied through our perceptive being-in-the-world and simultaneously through our reading of the world and our place as an inscribed body in the world."[87] Thus, Farman insists that users do not merely experience social networks but *enact* them through movement and reciprocal interactions. As such, bodies can be created in non-physical spaces through the sensorially enacted emplacement of being *here* and *there at the same time*.[88] This theorization challenges the limits placed on discrete bodies like those of TWT, as well as the boundaries of other bodies that become imbricated in their project, such as that of Enda Kenny.

TWT exploit the co-constitutive relationship among their bodies, digital images, and material environments, forming their identity as Irish abortion-seekers through emplaced visualities. Social media studies frequently focus on habits of co-present sociality—e.g. the "networked self" who is connected to diverse audiences thus requiring constant negotiation of identity presentation.[89] TWT, however, minimize the conversational function of Twitter in their broadcast. While they repeatedly acknowledge messages of support that are directed at them, they do not openly converse back-and-forth with followers. Consequently, by virtue of their anonymity and precise purpose, TWT decry the self-management typical of network sociality. Instead, they construct what media theorists Raz Schwartz and Germaine Halegoua

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[87] Farman, 33. See also, Tara McPherson, "Digital," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014); and Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019).

[88] Farman, 33.

[89] danah boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications," in *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi (London: Routledge, 2010).

call the "spatial self" in which representations of physical space, embodied activity, and mobility combine to develop a user's identity.[90] While this accounts for location-based performance and mobile digital technologies, focusing on a "spatial self" runs the risk of privileging space and overlooking temporal ontologies. As TWT's performance highlights, space and time are not polarities, but rather behave in a "mutually dependent dialogical relationship."[91]

Media ethnographers Larissa Hjorth and Sarah Pink theorize "digital wayfaring" to designate the conditions of emplacement that emerge from border-body-machine entanglements whereby people, images, and technology are "always situated, in *movement*, and part of and constitute place."[92] Hjorth and Pink extend anthropologist Tim Ingold's concept of wayfaring to digital practices in order to account for how mobile bodies and technologies weave themselves and environments together, altering both along the way.[93] This application of wayfaring to digital practices exemplifies a map of fluctuating and intertwining positions between off- and online copresence in everyday life.[94] Critically, movement—as a temporal and spatial practice—is integral to digital wayfaring.

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[90] Schwartz and Halegoua, 1647.

[91] Jason Farman, "Map Interfaces and the Production of Locative Media Space," in *Locative Media*, eds. Rowan Wilken and Gerard Goggin (New York: Routledge, 2015), 84-5.

[92] Larissa Hjorth and Sarah Pink, "New Visualities and the Digital Wayfarer: Reconceptualizing Camera Phone Photography and Locative Media," *Mobile Media & Communication* 2, no. 1 (2014), 44; emphasis added.

[93] In *Lines: A Brief History* (2007), Ingold explains, "the path of the wayfarer wends hither and thither, and may even pause here and there before moving on. But it has no beginning or end. While on the trail the wayfarer is always somewhere, yet every 'somewhere' is on the way to somewhere else. The inhabited world is a reticulate meshwork of such trails which is continually being woven as life goes on along them" (quoted in Hjorth and Pink, 45).

[94] Hjorth and Pink, 44-5.

TWT's tweets, whether textual or visual, are composed on the move while they are banished from their home country. They use images and captions to craft a narrative that weaves together the affective, material, social, and temporal elements of their excursion. Like their offline experiences, their online activity is embodied and emplaced.[95] As such, their photographic images and tweets do more than freeze a moment or locale into a snapshot. They are emplaced visualities, both part of and creating space, connecting the material-physical with the digital-intangible.[96] Like performance, memory is incomplete and partial. Each tweet and photo omits something, illustrating how "memory stores information not as a linear visual narrative, but in idiosyncratic 'emotional sets.'"[97] Hence, digital wayfaring illuminates how technology informs the ways we experience, enact, and embody the world. As a narrative that unfolds across various settings, charted and marked as time passes, TWT compose "intimate media vignettes [dispersed] across the world that are at once *photographic, social, locative*, and *mobile*."[98] The relationship between embodied identity and social space is altered by mobile technologies and locative media.[99] A user can be nearly

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[95] Hjorth and Pink, 48; Sarah Pink, "Sensory Digital Photography: Re-thinking 'Moving' and the Image," *Visual Studies* 26, no. 1 (2011); Jason Farman, "Mapping the Digital Empire: Google Earth and the Process of Postmodern Cartography," *New Media and Society* 12, no. 6 (2010).

[96] Hjorth and Pink, 46.

[97] Dixon, 545. Performance and media theorist Sarah Bay-Cheng argues that users of social media engage in a kind of "compulsive performance" out of anxieties about the loss of memories (50). We are so motivated by this threat of loss, Bay-Cheng contends, that we willingly sacrifice our privacy and adopt self-surveillance measures ("'When This You See': The (anti)Radical Time of Mobile Self-Surveillance," *Performance Journal* 19, no. 3 [2014], 48-49).

[98] Hjorth and Pink, 43.

[99] Farman, *Mobile Interface Theory*, 27.

anywhere in the world, limited only by the capacity of the network, and maintain connectivity to their social group.

Like today's "connected migrant," TWT depend upon digital and location-based social media to maintain alliances, connect to networks back home, and share and receive information.[100] As a result of mobile capabilities, national borders have become more porous. Yet, the same technology that liquifies borders also increases the efficacy and ability of border enforcement and surveillance, generating "the simultaneous, yet sometimes contradictory, tendencies of border concretion and border disaggregation."[101] Threats to the safety and mobility of migrants and asylum seekers are more extreme and urgent than those faced by TWT; however, the comparison underscores the hazards of border-*crossing* while drawing attention to the extreme differences in the bodies and status of border-*crossers*.

In her analysis of refugee-created selfies, media researcher Eszter Zimanyi declares "wayfarer" too casual a term for the exigency and insecurity of the refugee. As a substitute, Zimanyi proposes "digital transience" to reinforce the refugee's precarious and unstable relationship to place, both symbolically and materially.[102] I embrace the notion of digital wayfaring because it captures the ironic tone of TWT's travelogue. Their use of phrases like "we're about to hit the road" and "unxpected [*sic*] change of venue" are tongue-in-cheek, playing with the sense of leisure associated with vacation travel. Even their username teases

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[100] Dana Diminescu, "The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto," *Social Science Information* 47, no. 4 (2008), 567.

[101] Juan Llamas-Rodriguez, "The Datalogical Drug Mule," *Feminist Media Histories* 3, no. 3 (2017), 15.

[102] Eszter Zimanyi, "Digital Transience: Emplacement and Authorship in Refugee Selfies," *Media Fields Journal* no. 12, (2017), http://www.mediafieldsjournal.org/digital-transience/.

levity; Two Women Travel intimates a couple of adventuring gals jet-setting around the globe. A viewer expects an exciting sojourn that celebrates women's liberation and autonomy.[103] With a combination of irony, irreverence, and solemnity, TWT destabilize national frontiers and cultural identities, challenging the limits of representation projected on their bodies.

TWT's sardonic tone and empty photographs recalls another prominent example of surveillance art, *Tracking Transience* (2002-2014) by Bangladeshi-born American media artist Hasan Elahi. After being racially profiled by the FBI who detained and interrogated him as a terror suspect for several months, Elahi began monitoring and sharing his whereabouts at all times.[104] Prior to the development of smartphones and social media, Elahi captured GPS data via his cellphone for upload to the Internet. His massive archive includes the mundane—photographs of meals he ate, sites he visited, public toilets he used—as well as his private banking transactions, communication records, and transportation logs. In this

[103] Since TWT, others have used Twitter to chart their abortion journeys. In November 2016, a married couple live-tweeted their journey to and from Liverpool to obtain a termination. This example marks a compelling contrast to TWT because of the romanticism that underscores the tragic tale of a heterosexual couple whose unborn baby was diagnosed with a fatal genetic abnormality. The photograph that ran with their story in *The Irish Post* exhibits a dramatic image of the couple embracing in silhouette in front of the airport window overlooking a plane at the gate (Erica Doyle Higgins, "Heartbroken & Punished – Couple Live Tweet…" *The Irish Post*, 10 November 2016). Moreover, their Twitter username, @Heartbroken&Punished, and *lack* of anonymity, accentuates TWT's singledom and the perception of shame and irresponsibility associated with their circumstances. See Heartbroken&Punished Twitter page, accessed 7 December 2016, https://twitter.com/itstimetorepeal/. Using a similar travelogue form (although not live-tweeted) on Twitter in 2018, the married couple Rather Be Home (@HomeRather) released their Twitter story to coincide with a bill in the UK Parliament that would have decriminalized termination in NI (see https://twitter.com/HomeRather). Activist-blogger Janet O'Sullivan tweeted her abortion story during a social media take-over of the @Ireland account in 2014. Her tweets are reproduced in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2,* edited by Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Attic Press, 2015). Social media has been used to share abortion stories more broadly, including the In Her Shoes Facebook campaign (https://www.facebook.com/InHerIrishShoes/), as well as the American-based hashtag campaign #ShoutYourAbortion (https://shoutyourabortion.com/).

[104] An archive of these images is available online at http://trackingtransience.com/.

piece, Elahi proclaims, "You want to watch me? Fine. But I can watch myself better than you can, and I can get a level of detail that you will never have."[105]

Like TWT's images, Elahi's body is never visible. For all his obsessive record-keeping, Elahi withholds arguably the most salient object—his brown body. In a performance that emphasizes how state surveillance impacts the movement of the racialized body, Elahi "literally *dislocates* this central referent from the spectator's experience of the work."[106] Consequently, Elahi's performance is "both *of* the law and *for* the law," as performance scholar Joshua Chambers-Letson contends.[107] If Elahi compels the viewer to "rehearse the way in which racial knowledge is produced in and on his indexed but absent body," then TWT force the viewer to reinscribe gendered ideologies and restrictions on and across their bodies as they traverse on- and offline territories.[108] Hence, they implicate the audience in regulating their bodies. They force the spectator into the role of witness to their "crime" who must choose to be complicit and remain silent, like Kenny, or recognize the need to legislate for abortion in the Republic. In withholding corporeality, TWT emphasize the secrecy of abortion travel and its position as an underground, illicit activity in the Irish context.

Blessed Art Thou Among Women: Digital Wayfaring along Ireland's Abortion Trail

As I explained previously, the abortion debate epitomizes national fears about Ireland's political, economic, and moral boundaries. The phenomenon of abortion travel

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[105] Hasan Elahi, quoted in Elise Morrison, *Discipline and Desire: Surveillance Technologies in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 123.

[106] Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 208; emphasis added.

[107] Chambers-Letson, 207.

[108] Chambers-Letson, 210.

represents a paradoxical condition in which the procedure is kept out of Irish borders, while people with crisis pregnancies, like TWT, continue to have abortions. In what follows, I explain the construction of "the abortion trail" and the ambivalence of the public *to see* its existence. Through a performance that strains the limits of body-machine entanglements, TWT (re)produce the experience of exile—of forced (temporary) border-crossing—through acts of digital wayfaring. As such, they expose those institutions who regulate their mobility and bodily boundaries. While they are exiled from Ireland's sovereign territory, the nation's containment culture is persistently enacted across their bodies. Thus, in their digital wayfaring, TWT interweave the abortion trail with the digital network, revealing the former to be not only a transnational crossing, but a cultural and ideological phenomenon.

The Eighth Amendment is a guarantor of women as child bearers. Thus, the severity of the Irish law forced TWT into exile. The journey, therefore, is not a contemporary phenomenon, but rather the continuance of a seventy-five-year history of women traversing national borders for reproductive healthcare. What Laury Oaks describes as the "abortion trail" began when England's termination laws were changed in 1939 to allow abortion under certain instances (like rape), and then again to fully decriminalize the procedure in the 1967 Abortion Act.[109] Thus, abortion travel "is a masculinist construction" and the result of Irish

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[109] Laury Oaks, "Irish Trans/National Politics and Locating Fetuses" in *Fetal Subjects, Feminist Positions* ed. Lynn M. Morgan and Meredith W. Michaels (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 177. Irish women were border-crossing prior to the emergence of the abortion trail, further complicating the transnational discourses surrounding women's bodies and reproduction. Ireland has a long history of emigration out of the country, particularly associated with the Great Famine (1845-1852); however, following Irish independence, women continued to emigrate in large numbers for economic and personal opportunities. In her book *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland 1885-1920*, Janet Nolan stipulates that, in part, "the legions of young women leaving rural Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were discarding their newly subservient and marginal positions, not their traditional expectations" (quoted in Jennifer Redmond, *Moving Histories: Irish Women's Emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic* [Liverpool University Press, 2018], 14). In the Free State, emigration was framed within moral and gendered discourses, and women who left were viewed as "problematic, wayward, vulnerable and prone to sin" (Redmond 15). Redmond describes a national anxiety that "the best and brightest men were leaving" the country while the

patriarchy.[110] As more people began to travel along the abortion trail, the Irish government attempted to control access to abortion by denying pregnant people of their right to traverse national borders. The right to mobility was officially granted in a 1992 constitutional amendment, but the Irish judicial system continued to challenge this privilege.[111] Migration studies scholars Mary Gilmartin and Allen White argue that "because [Irish] women have 'won' the right to travel, the Irish state has been excused from any responsibility to provide safe, legal, and affordable abortion services."[112] Moreover, legal scholar Ruth Fletcher contends that the dependence on abortion services elsewhere has contributed to public ambivalence and a general lack of urgency on the need to legislate.[113] Under these circumstances, TWT's direct address of the Taoiseach openly contests government deniability from an openly accessible and highly visible public platform.

"worst kinds of women were becoming (or would quickly become) debased" by emigrating to Britain (8). Moreover, Mary Daly recounts how welfare groups in England created a category designated "pfi," pregnant from Ireland, to receive those single mothers for whom emigration was preferred to being sent to a mother and baby home or Magdalene Laundry where forced adoptions were the norm (Mary Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920-73* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006], 265); see also Caitriona Clear, "Women in de Valera's Ireland 1932-48: A Reappraisal," in *De Valera's Irelands*, ed. by Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh, 104-114 (Cork: Mercier Press, 2003).

[110] Mary Gilmartin and Allen White, "Interrogating Medical Tourism: Ireland, Abortion, and Mobility Rights" *Signs* 36, no. 2 (2011), 279.

[111] Prior to repealing the Eighth Amendment, the Irish judicial system continued to dispute the right to travel. One challenge of this sort includes a 2007 court case in which a 17-year-old woman (known publicly as "Miss D") was originally denied a passport that would allow her to travel to Britain to terminate a pregnancy in which the unborn child had anencephaly, a fatal congenital defect in which the fetus is absent major parts of the brain, scalp, and skull. Following an appeal, the Irish High Court eventually upheld the right to travel even though Miss D was a minor and a ward of the state. More information on this case and other challenges to the right to travel in Ireland are discussed in Gilmartin and White.

[112] Gilmartin and White, 277.

[113] Ruth Fletcher, "Reproducing Irishness: Race, Gender, and Abortion Law," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 17, no. (2005), 382.

The issue of a pregnant person's right to mobility emphasizes the gap between the legal right to travel and those who have the means and ability to do so. Reproductive healthcare options are deeply affected by class, race, and citizenship.[114] One writer calculates the costs of abortion travel at more than $1,200 US, including round trip transportation to the UK, lodging, and meals.[115] Thus, prior to the Repeal, the Irish state circumvented legislating for crisis pregnancies by substantiating what activist-scholar Goretti Horgan calls "one law for the rich, another for the poor."[116] The dependency on abortion travel therefore discounts those pregnant people without legal citizenship status, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty (a population that is more likely to be non-white or not settled Irish—namely, people of color and Travellers). Moreover, abortion-seeking migrants have been subjected to increased surveillance and scrutiny by authorities at points of entry.[117] As I explore in Chapter 2, migrants are obliged to negotiate abortion access in an environment in which their reproductive practices are already being minutely dissected. TWT's journey, therefore, highlights the complexities and contestation of reproductive rights in Ireland, as well as the ways in which repealing the Eighth Amendment has not necessarily leveled the playing field for all women and menstruators living within national borders.

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[114] Leah Culhane, "Reproductive Justice and the Irish Context: Towards an Egalitarian Framing of Abortion," *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2,* eds. Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Attic Press, 2015), 76; see also, Jo Murphy-Lawless, "A Brief Glimpse into Hell," *AIMS Journal* 26, no. 1 (2014), https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/a-brief-glimpse-into-hell, accessed 5 February 2021.

[115] Caroline O'Donoghue, "The Price of an Irish Abortion," *The Pool*, November 2, 2016, https://www.the-pool.com/news-views/opinion/2016/44/the-price-of-an-irish-abortion. This figure, however, does not take into account the loss of income from missed work or the psychological and emotional toll of having to travel.

[116] Goretti Horgan, foreword to *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora: The "Abortion Trail" and the Making of a London-Irish Underground, 1980-2000*, by Ann Rossiter (London: Iasc Publishing, 2009), 17.

[117] Fletcher, "Reproducing Irishness," 398-99.

State intervention in women's and pregnant people's mobilities is symptomatic of Ireland's legacy of containment culture. As Gilmartin and White explain, "the pregnant female body moving over an international border is interpreted as problematic and deeply threatening to the Irish state." [118] When abortion-seekers travel abroad, they dispute the illusion of moral purity that claims the procedure is not necessary and does not happen within Ireland's borders. To maintain this façade, legal governance strives to contain and still the pregnant body. Thus, ethnographer Angela Martin stipulates that "the materiality of the nation (as it is manifested in state juridical structure) and the materiality of women's bodies" converge around the Eighth Amendment.[119] In replicating this convergence, TWT's performance exposes how borders are enacted across and upon their bodies, thereby unveiling the regimes of control that aim to obstruct their motility.

As I explained in the Introduction, the abortion debate epitomizes anxieties about Ireland's political, economic, and moral boundaries. In relegating women to private, domestic life, the Irish state and Catholic church colluded to make women solely responsible for the maintenance of the (heterosexual, settled, and white) family—the basic unit of the economy, as far as politicians were concerned, and of moral welfare as preached by the Church.[120] In the twentieth century, Marian devotion advanced this agenda. The Virgin Mary emerged as "Ireland's first true female nationalist emblem" in the seventeenth century.[121]

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[118] Gilmartin and White, 278.

[119] Angela K. Martin, "Death of a Nation: Transnationalism, Bodies and Abortion in Late Twentieth-Century Ireland," *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 1999), 66.

[120] Beale, 7.

[121] Belinda Loftus, *Mirrors: William III & Mother Ireland* (Dundrum, NI: Picture Press, 1990), 50.

The Church and state suffused her image with Catholic beliefs and an ancient Celtic identity, thereby securing the Virgin as a "changeless icon of feminist purity."[122] Religious and nationalist ideology thus constructed Irish womanhood in Mary's image, propagating motherhood, modesty, and passive suffering as a woman's "natural" condition.[123] The Virgin's visual presence became a fundamental aspect of inscribing cultural spaces with this patriarchal representation of Irish womanhood.

Marian iconography shapes female corporeality. While studies of Marian devotion assert that Mary's influence materializes through women's emulation of her suffering ideal,[124] Martin counters that women do not merely attempt to manifest the "essence" of the Virgin; rather, they embody her through mimetic performances of femininity. Martin posits, "in the Irish case femininity is inscribed and embodied in individuals as a product of the everyday discursive practices that comprise devotion to Mary."[125] The cult of the Virgin sanctioned chastity and motherhood, as well as humility, obedience, and passive suffering.[126] Sociologist Tom Inglis argues that piety, humility, and modesty are an "embodied habitus," deeply ingrained in Irish society and its ideological formations.[127] Thus, through metonymic links between the Virgin Mary, family, and motherhood, women came to experience their

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[122] Meaney, 13-14.

[123] Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*; Valiulis, "Neither Feminist Nor Flapper;" C.L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (NY: Harvester, 1993), 40.

[124] See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985); also, Valiulis, 178.

[125] Martin, 69.

[126] Innes, 40.

[127] Inglis, 18.

bodies and their identities through projections of Mary's image on and across their bodies.[128] Marian imagery distributes her symbolic significance and disciplines bodies to perform according to her feminine standard. Thus, the Virgin's function as the epitome of womanhood reflects on other women their own failure to measure up to her impossible ideal.[129]

Visual arts of the twentieth century inscribed public and private spaces with Marian iconography that conjoins femininity with immobility, vulnerability, and the desexualized female form. Homes were decorated with portraits of the Blessed Virgin; people built small altars featuring statues of her.[130] Through the 1950s, material culture in domestic settings—including plaster statues, cheap rosary beads, framed lithographs and photographs, printed prayer cards, and other small religious objects—ensured a Marian texture woven into one's quotidian, tactile experience of everyday life. Marian visual culture adorned public space, as well. The Virgin's image was reproduced on stained glass windows and at altars in churches, but most notably, her statuary occupies a variety of shrines and other public sites. Art historian Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch contends that, as "Queen of Ireland," the Virgin's presence in the landscape of the early Republic "fostered the notion of a visible ruler, ruling

[128] Martin, 67.

[129] Catherine McCormack, *Women in the Picture: Women, Art, and the Power of Looking* (London: Icon Books, 2021), 59.

[130] John Turpin, "Visual Marianism and National Identity in Ireland: 1920-1960," in *Art, Nation, and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths, and Mother-Figures*, eds. Tricia Cusack and Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch (Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 70.

over her sanctified territory, that of the new Gaelic Ireland."[131] Devotion to Mary at home extended her watchful, disciplining eye to all facets of social life.

Rural landscapes contain the most prominent depictions of Marian statuary. Her figure occupies wayside shrines along roadways and at village intersections, erected within stone walls or smaller statues in stone or wooden boxes. Open-air grottoes dedicated to Our Lady are found adjacent to churches and surrounded by boulders, trees, plants, and often a stream or holy well (mimicking the environs of the original grotto at Lourdes).[132] In these environs, the Virgin materializes as "an emanation of nature."[133] She thus becomes part of the ecological landscape, bolstering the conflation between Irish identity and Marian devotion.[134] Moreover, she represents the fusion of religious and nationalist ideology as her image embodied the feminine and maternal ideal.

While images of rural life epitomized the "real" Ireland,[135] urban regions were nonetheless marked by Marian iconography inside and outside church settings. In the state's suburban development projects through the 1970s, statues of the Virgin were erected in residential neighborhoods and complexes, typically surrounded by gardens and greenery.[136] The state therefore wove the sacred into the culture of domestic city life. Consequently,

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[131] Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch, *Ireland's Art, Ireland's History: Representing Ireland, 1845 to Present* (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 2007), 99.

[132] Turpin, 73.

[133] Turpin, 73.

[134] Bhreathnach-Lynch, 99.

[135] Catherine Nash, "Remapping and Renaming: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender, and Landscape in Ireland," *Feminist Review* 44 (1993), 44-45.

[136] Eoin O'Mahony, "Connecting the Local and the Global in Post-secular Urban Settings," *Geographical Review* 109, no. 1 (2019), 11; 13.

Mary's physical presence blurs the distinction between "sacred space and secular suburbia."[137] Geographer Eoin O'Mahony avers that, despite shifting demographics and gentrification, Marian statues endure as sites and symbols of continuity that residents view as part of the cultural and social fabric of the community.[138] In this context, Marian statuary is non-threatening: "their persistence does not destabilize other political struggles about the institutional Church's role in state politics or the city's efforts at making Dublin more amenable to global capital."[139]

Marian imagery persists as a political weapon around debates concerning women's sexuality and reproductive rights. In the 1980s, the Virgin's image was used by conservatives opposing the legalization of contraception and divorce; and, in the 1990s, protestors carried posters featuring the Virgin of Guadalupe while campaigning against abortion referenda and the Maastricht Treaty founding the European Union.[140] Most recently, images of the Virgin were deployed by both sides of the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment. She appeared on political ephemera for the No side, including the Madonna and Child on "Love Both" campaign stickers and postcards that featured Our Lady in conjunction with calls to "pray for life and family."[141] Each campaign, however, borrowed strategies from the other; anti-

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[137] O'Mahony, 14.

[138] O'Mahony, 18-20.

[139] O'Mahony, 23.

[140] Martin, 64. The use of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a fascinating transnational appropriation of a political symbol from Chicano/a and Latinx activism while simultaneously protesting against a treaty formalizing transnational relations among European countries. The particularities of Virgin of Guadalupe iconography and a study of transnational Marian devotional practices are beyond the scope of my project here.

[141] Postcard in Repeal the Eighth ephemera collection at Dublin City Archives.

abortion materials featured images of women more than ever before, while the Repeal movement re-appropriated Marian iconography—typically the domain of the conservative,

Figure 1.1. From documentary photographer Olivia Harris, a group of Catholic students carry a Marian statue during nationwide prayer service to prevent abortion in the Republic (top); Hannah Hogan's Repeal jacket (bottom left); and the Marian statue at Broadstone Bus Garage in Dublin (bottom right).

anti-choice side—for their own purposes. Artist Hannah Hogan created a denim jacket featuring the Virgin in blue robes with a circle of stars around her head. The artist Maser's popular red "Repeal the 8th" heart is superimposed in front of her open arms (Figure 1.1). Additionally, activists placed a Repeal sign around the neck of the Marian statue at

Broadstone Bus Garage in Dublin.[142] These examples affirm Martin's observation that the Virgin possesses a "curious ability to appear just about anywhere at pivotal and volatile moments in time."[143]

The proliferation of Marian iconography thus reveals the "secondary place of woman" in visual culture, in which allegorical images replace the real thing.[144] While the Virgin Mary enjoys unique status in Irish art and iconography, the patriarchal state and church institutions reproduced and promoted those traits that served their agenda—namely, her passive and obedient nature and her modest acceptance of her role as virgin and mother.[145] The aesthetics of Marian iconography therefore enact these qualities. Catherine Leen concedes that Irish art has not adopted a "unique visual language" in the tradition of political religious painting like that of Latin American iconographies;[146] however, studies of mass-produced statuary and devotional artifacts, as well as fine arts aesthetics of Marian imagery reveal some telling continuities.

Moreover, these continuities express how gender and sexual difference are enacted upon real bodies. Representations of Mary communicate anxieties about female sexuality and freedom of movement. Church-sponsored artworks depicted "an idealised and sentimental

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[142] O'Mahony, 18.

[143] Martin, 64.

[144] Paula Murphy, "Madonna and Maiden, Mistress and Mother: Woman as Symbol of Ireland and Spirit of the Nation," in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage: Figurative Painting from Twentieth-Century Ireland*, ed. James Christen Steward (London: Merrell Holberton, 1998), 90.

[145] Bhreathnach-Lynch, 101.

[146] Catherine Leen, "Virgen Transatlantic: Religious Iconography in Irish and Chicana/o Art," in *International Perspectives on Chicana/o Studies: This World is My Place*, eds. Catherine Leen and Niamh Thornton (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 172.

figurative treatment of Marian images," preferring imitation to artistic innovation.[147] Mass-produced church and domestic statuary are modelled on the Renaissance tradition of European religious art, but "worked in an utterly hackneyed format," as Bhreathnach-Lynch describes it.[148] In these representations, the Virgin Mary is a "prettified, doll-like figure," thus making her "attractive to look at, and easy to relate to in prayer."[149] But this eliminates any idiosyncrasy of her form, features, or gestures, creating an "impersonal virgin" with a lifeless expression.[150] Innes argues that Irish Marian iconography portrays the Virgin "either in the attitude of humble acceptance of her destiny at the Annunciation, or wearing a crown to represent her special status."[151]

According to theologian Sarah Jane Boss, representations of the Virgin Mary prior to the thirteenth century presented a "regal mother" who embodied the unity of spirit and matter and whose physical presence transmitted a "sense of divinity in the physical world."[152] In the modern era, Boss contends, humankind aims to rule nature, and thus Marian devotional art and literature conveys anxiety and fear of sacred authority. In visual media, the Virgin

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[147] Turpin, 75; also, Leen, 171.

[148] Bhreathnach-Lynch, 99.

[149] Bhreathnach-Lynch, 108.

[150] Meaney, 8. Sarah Jane Boss positions these lifeless Marian representations within a broader trend toward the interchangeability of all people, characterized by Susan Griffin in *Pornography and Silence* (1981) as the age of pornography. Griffin contends that modernity ushered in an interest in the body as flesh without a soul; thus, the body has become an impersonal machine—an object of manipulation rather than a living, individualized person (Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* [London and New York: Cassell, 2000], 3).

[151] Innes, 40.

[152] Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 40, 9.

becomes “meek and unassuming” and “less commanding.”[153] She stands in for the ideal pious congregant. Likewise, she is portrayed in voluminous robes from head to foot so only her face and hands reveal her corporeality. As such, her image is desexualized, concealing her sexual identity and any remnant of her body’s biological function.

In her essay, “Stabat Mater,” feminist cultural critic and philosopher Julia Kristeva argues that images of the Virgin Mary during the Renaissance—particularly those represented in Madonna and Child iconographies—propagated humanist principles by emphasizing Christ’s relationship with his mother. This relationship serves as “a matrix within which various other relations—God to mankind, man to woman, son to mother, etc.—took shape.”[154] Innes observes, however, that in the Irish context, depictions of the Virgin differ significantly, emphasizing her role as a suffering mother to an adult son.[155] The nurturing mother of Renaissance art is replaced by an inhuman apparition. As Meaney describes, in contrast to “the expressive faces and rounded bodies” of Marian imagery in Spain and France, these representations display “a peculiar *stillness*” and a “singularly *unmaternal*” figure.[156] This absence of Mary’s sexuality—of “the mother’s body as origin of life”—thereby formalizes the denial of women’s sexuality.[157]

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[153] Boss, 9. Boss draws on the critical theory of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) in analyzing how Western attitudes toward Marianism reveal modernity’s inclination to dominate nature and the female body (Boss, 6-7).

[154] Kristeva, 138.

[155] Innes, 40.

[156] Meaney, 7; emphasis added.

[157] Meaney, 13; see also, Bhreathnach-Lynch, 99; Leen, 171.

Irish studies scholar Cheryl Herr theorizes an "erotics of Irishness" characterizing public expressions of sexuality and gender. She postulates that a legacy of Victorian moralism and the paradigm of moral purity propagated by nationalist, Catholic ideology yields a pervasive distrust of the body that thereby attempts to contain it and keep it at a distance. In visual arts, "bodies are imaged as changeless […] inert […] masses on the verge of reabsorption into the landscape."[158] The body is a threat, scrutinized with "an intensity that *stills* (photographically)."[159] Likewise, cultural geographer Catherine Nash recognizes that colonialist and nationalist discourses conflate the land with the female body, thereby associating Irish womanhood with passivity and stillness.[160] The realities of sexuality thus remain hidden and secret, impeded by the logic of gender and cultural iconography. A desexualized and lifeless Virgin Mary takes shape while actual female bodies vanish.

In conjunction with the recession of Marian devotion and iconography and the emergence of organized feminist groups and movements, representations of Irish women changed significantly in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Artists scorned allegorical tropes for the "more universal status of woman and mother" at the turn of the twenty-first century.[161] Art historian Paula Murphy claims that female artists were driven by the "need to replace woman as patronized, powerless and propagandist symbol" with critical imagery that questioned previous representations and presented woman as "an emotional,

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[158] Cheryl Herr, "The Erotics of Irishness," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 1 (1990), 14.

[159] Herr, 6-7.

[160] Catherine Nash, "Embodied Irishness: Gender, Sexuality, and Irish Identities" in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 120.

[161] Murphy, 90.

living being."[162] Nonetheless, the cultural impact of the disembodied mother persists. Belinda Loftus deduces that "Mother Ireland and her entourage," which includes the various incarnations of the Virgin (Queen of Ireland, protectress, *Mater Dolorosa*), are "two-faced" figures, "both beautiful and horrific, subservient and manipulative."[163] These icons remain ambiguous and malleable as political weapons that variously serve the state, Church, and citizens because they glide so effortlessly between public and private use and representation.[164] Both the appeal and threat are derived from their position as "dangerous, dirty, *boundary* figures."[165]

TWT's performance works within this representational economy to concurrently manifest and negotiate these boundaries. In contrast to Mary's stillness, passivity, and incorporeality, they are mobile, active, and somatic. Hence, their performance locates the margins of constructed femininity as imaged by Marianism. Using Kenny as an emblem of patriarchal regimes of control and containment, TWT disclose the conditions of exile—the way in which their sexuality incites the need to separate them from the bounds of nationhood because they threaten the stability of the changeless and compliant feminine body. As TWT prepare to depart Ireland, they tweet, "#twowomentravel boarding, it's chilly. @EndaKennyTD."[166] Accompanying the caption, a photograph features the tail of a green and white airplane waiting at the gate (see Figure 1.2). Only the "gus" of Aer Lingus is

[162] Murphy, 98.

[163] Loftus, 86.

[164] Loftus, 86.

[165] Loftus, 86; emphasis original.

[166] Two Women Travel, 19 August 2016, 10:06 PM PST.

visible across the plane's side where the photo's edge interrupts the airline's logo. The morning is bleak and damp; the sky is so cloudy that a streetlamp is lit off in the distance and the headlights of a truck peer around the rear of the plane. From the foreground, a path is marked with red and white lines painted on the pavement and a barrier fence safely guides passengers to the stairway to board the plane. To further aid travelers, large white stick-figure men with their legs apart as though they are walking are painted sporadically along the path. This (gendered) universal symbol performs a false sense of security that fails to effectively protect these travelers from the real threat to their welfare. The nondescript figures eerily echo the faceless parliamentary body that regulates women's mobility.

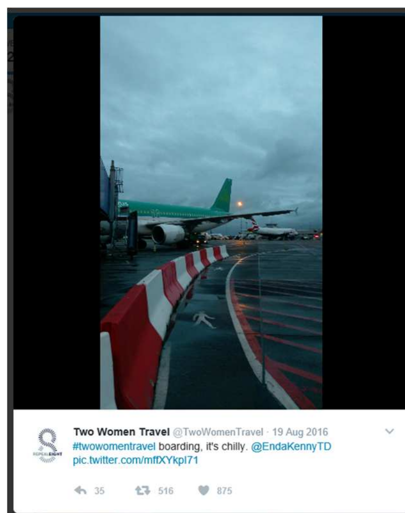

Figure 1.2. Two Women Travel prepare to depart.

In using location-based social media in this way, TWT map their movements and the passage of time for others to follow and watch. Consequently, their digital wayfaring replicates the surveillant and regulatory practices of containment culture on women and other menstruators. Along their pilgrimage, they draw attention to other Irish they meet along the trail. They tweet, "Forced 2 leave Ireland @EndaKennyTD joined by more Irish in waiting

room, waiting for our loved ones."[167] And later, "To the women from Munster with us as we waited. Strong and brave. Like all who have braved this journey b4 us."[168] These tweets situate their bodies, other Irish abortion-seekers, Kenny, and physical locales in emplaced visualities. In exploiting these co-constitutive border-body-machine networks, they enact a sense of collectivity; despite the corporeal absence of the human form in their images, they are not alone. Simultaneously, their digital wayfaring produces emplaced visualities among themselves, other exiles they encounter in transit, and their audience. Theater historian Cathy Leeney explores containment culture as a form of exile for actual women—exile from self-determination and self-expression. She declares, "only the crossing of a boundary makes that boundary visible."[169] Thus, TWT's acts of digital wayfaring make visible the abortion trail as a material experience—an enactment—constructed by limits imposed upon real bodies who deviate from the narrow path of Irish femininity formed by Marianism.

Crucially, this enactment depends upon the digital presence of both TWT and Kenny—banished abortion-seeker and state actor, respectively. In directly addressing Kenny, TWT give material form to the containment culture that has expelled them. They position him as their audience, a performance that emphasizes his symbolic and literal responsibility for their need to make this journey at all. He embodies the patriarchal Irish government, giving form to abstract regimes of power like the Eighth Amendment and the ideology of Marianism. At a restaurant, they ask, "Hey @EndaKennyTD where u [*sic*] watching the

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[167] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 7:59 a.m. PST.

[168] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 9:02 a.m. PST.

[169] Cathy Leeney, "Ireland's 'Exiled' Women Playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr," in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, ed. Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 150.

Olympics from? Out for a tense lonely lunch. No sleep, no food" (see Figure 1.3).[170] While Twitter provides access to confront the person with power, digital wayfaring enacts the conflict between lived experience and cultural structures. In pointing to Kenny's materiality, his physical body watching television somewhere, they emphasize his freedom against their lack. When they are sent to a different healthcare clinic, TWT not-so-flippantly ask Kenny for his aid: "Unxpectd [*sic*] change of venue. #twowomentravel more thn [*sic*] originally anticipated. Hit us back th [*sic*] taxi fare @EndaKennyTD?"[171] In their exile, they enmesh Kenny in their emplaced visualities, making him not only witness but part of the abortion trail's off- and online formations. They tweet, "Friend is out & safe. Procedure was quick & staff very warm. Our love to you all. @EndaKennyTD failed us. You did not."[172] Hence,

Figure 1.3 Hey @EndaKennyTD where u watching the Olympics from?

TWT craft a performance that strives to enfold and unify their followers against Kenny who, they imply, has not only failed *them*, but who has failed all of "*us*." To acknowledge their

[170] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 4:36 a.m. PST.

[171] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 2:27 a.m. PST.

[172] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 8:28 a.m. PST.

reality and the need for abortion services within the country, government leadership would have to admit that the Irish people are not as pure and morally upstanding as the national imaginary would have everyone believe. TWT therefore render broadly visible the regulatory systems that construct and sustain the frontiers of women's bodies and mobility. They unveil the material conditions that control their bodies. In the next section, I turn to the *immaterial* conditions rendered broadly visible through TWT's Twitter journey.

Performing Endurance: The Labor of Abortion Travel

In their digital wayfaring, TWT use Twitter to chart a choreography of exile. In a performance that sustains their digital presence over time, their intermedial project emphasizes endurance. In what follows, I interrogate how framing TWT as endurance art brings to the fore the physical, mental, and emotional exertion of their journey. In situating their bodies in a series of non-places, they traverse and produce spaces of transit designed to be provisional and connective. The material entanglements of their bodies, physical spaces, and mobile devices enacts and constitutes their digital presence, emplaced visualities, and the immaterial conditions of travel. As such, their enduring bodies uncover the (ongoing) hidden labor associated with abortion travel. This labor, I argue, shrouds the bodies of TWT, thus highlighting the secretive and illicit nature of abortion.

To reiterate, mobile, location-based media enables TWT to animate, not just a visual representation of travel, but the embodied experience of banishment from their home country. In juxtaposing movement and stasis—border-crossing and waiting—they re-produce the rhythms and effort of a journey that must be endured, a choreography of survival. How long the trip lasts matters; even the asynchronous encounter with their tweets reveals their endurance. As a practice of digital wayfaring, their emplaced visualities accentuate their

bodily experiences of space and time, and, as I explained previously, their bodily enactment of space and time. As a forty-eight-hour performance, TWT's work is durational, a descriptor applied to artistic pieces that feature a live performer engaged in an activity for a long period of time. Performance theorist André Lepecki contends that "durational" describes artworks that "last longer than the average/expected *amount* of time that chrono-normativity imposes on art."[173] In the manipulation of time and its logics, durational performances reconfigure quantitative time into "intensity"—the performer must endure.[174] Hence the appellation "ordeal art" or "hardship art" to signify the suffering the performer must withstand.[175]

In *Performing Endurance*, performance theorist Lara Shalson postulates that durational performance artists strategize endurance for reasons beyond challenging normative, measured understandings of time.[176] Instead, she proposes, endurance art delineates a performer's embodied commitment to execute an activity amid unpredictable circumstances. Thus, endurance is "always performed *in relation* to forces that are beyond

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[173] André Lepecki, "Duration," *In Terms of Performance*, eds. Shannon Jackson and Paula Marincola (Berkeley and Philadelphia: UC Berkeley Arts Research Center and The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2016), np. Lepecki derives his definition of duration from philosopher Henri Bergson's phenomenological theory of *la dureé*. Bergson distinguishes between time as a quantity, measured and spatialized, and time as *felt* quality, the inner experience of individual consciousness, personal memory, and the external world (Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 7th ed., trans. F.L. Pogson [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959], 108). Thus, he understands time not as a spatialized matrix of discrete units, but rather as an ongoing, varied, and continuous flow of interpenetrating states of experience, the past resonating in ever-expanding present moments. Reality is imbued with a mobility that is never complete: "the very essence of duration and motion, as they appear to our consciousness, [is] to be something that is unceasingly being done" (Bergson, 119). When time is measured, the body falls under control and limitation; it is *acted upon*. In the duration, however, bodies are agents of action.

[174] Lepecki, np.

[175] Phelan, 152.

[176] Lara Shalson, *Performing Endurance: Art and Politics Since 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 10.

the performer's control."[177] These performances may last an unusually long time or they may present the performer suffering, but the distinguishing feature of endurance art, Shalson contends, is the performer's commitment to a task in which the completion or outcome of that task is uncertain. Consequently, "there is always at least one implicit element being endured: time itself."[178] In framing her definition around indeterminacy, Shalson refutes popular designations of durational and endurance art that celebrate the triumph of the heroic artist who overcomes and survives—a narrative that Shalson critiques as a gendered, masculinist construction.[179]

In the 1960s, dancer-choreographer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer began experimenting with ways to challenge the polished and refined aesthetics of concert dance. She elevated the importance of everyday movement and tasks, making them the raw material of dance. Linked to the impulse of minimalism in visual art and Happenings in theatre, Rainer's work exposes the *process* of art—how dance is labor and the dancer is a worker. Like the endurance performances identified by Shalson, Rainer's choreography draws on unpredictable activities that expose the dancer's laboring body to chance. By extension, the audience become workers who must exert effort to make meaning of the spectacle. Dance historian Wendy Perron observes that Rainer values "butting two opposite actions or moods up against each other. She wasn't interested in snap judgments, in audiences being able to

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[177] Shalson, 12.

[178] Shalson, 13.

[179] Shalson, 13-14. Shalson cites the veneration of artist Chris Burden as an example. Burden's work was frequently heralded by critics and scholars for its "singular acts of boldness and daring," while the performances of female endurance artists working in the same period, such as Eleanor Antin, Catherine Elwes, VALIE EXPORT, and Gina Pane, were characterized as too personal and narcissistic (14-15).

grasp an idea instantly. She wanted to engage them *long enough* to provoke serious thought."[180] The laboring body of the spectator thus becomes a vital element. Watching—an activity as mundane and unextraordinary as those enacted by Rainer's dancing bodies—becomes another behavior on display alongside those enacted by dancing bodies. In this context, Rainer's work exemplifies how interdisciplinary female artists have contributed to endurance art since its inception. She productively investigates assumptions of the audience-performer relationship, and, as I will discuss later in this chapter, the ways that the camera's gaze further complicates this visual exchange.

The indeterminacy of endurance art resonates with acts of digital wayfaring in which the relational meshwork of bodies, material environments, and digital images are perpetually in flux and under development. TWT's project is constructed around an event (traveling to obtain an abortion) that tidily has a beginning (leaving Ireland) and an end (returning home). TWT endure various modes of public transport, the crossing of international checkpoints, and an invasive medical procedure, all while adapting to evolving circumstances. They have planned, made reservations and appointments. As the event unfolds, however, unexpected occurrences emerge and change the narrative altering their experiences (and ours) along the way. They are unexpectedly sent to a second medical clinic; their flight keeps getting delayed while they anxiously want to get home; they accidentally double post a few tweets because of roaming connection issues.[181] For all the scheduling and preparation, circumstances are still

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[180] Wendy Perron, *The Grand Union: Accidental Anarchists of Downtown Dance, 1970-1976* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2020), 54; emphasis added.

[181] This tweet reads in full, "Hey @EndaKennyTD if curious RE double posting, roaming connections suck. Sure you know that anyway" (Two Women Travel, August 20, 2016, 4:39 a.m. PST). The accompanying image looks like a snowy television screen with black text in the center reading, "NO SIGNAL FOUND."

beyond their control. As Shalson explicates, endurance is "a willful act, but a willful act that confronts in repeated and sustained encounters the limits of individual agency."[182] TWT, then, utilize what they can control—a Twitter account—to express what is beyond their control—having to travel to access a safe and legal abortion.

To assert bodily autonomy in the face of the regulatory Irish state, TWT must endure the exhaustion and frustrations of travel—and while one of them is in pain for a portion of the trip. They tweet from the waiting area at the airport, a pen sitting on the purple seat of the chair and a black backpack resting on the floor: "Hey @EndaKennyTD dont [*sic*] u [*sic*] just love it when yr [*sic*] flight keeps gettin [*sic*] delayed while u [*sic*] sit there in pain?" (Figure 1.4).[183] As the curators of their Twitter feed and user account, they make apparent the bounds of their control. They assert autonomy over their reproductive bodies while simultaneously making plain the limits of that autonomy and thus the labor associated with exercising it.

Figure 1.4. Flight delay

[182] Shalson, 13.

[183] Two Women Travel, 21 August 2016, 8:46 a.m. PST.

TWT straightforwardly express the realities of their journey in a tone infused with irony. They foreground their frustration with Kenny, the fatigue of travel, and the sense of isolation associated with being exiled. While remaining entirely anonymous, they capture the affective labor required of abortion travel. Each of TWT's photographs presents a different site of transit—such as airplanes and taxis—and temporary stopover points—including the airport terminal, a restaurant, a hotel room, and medical clinics. These locations characterize the conditions of travel as one moves from point to point, interacting with each site based on its purpose—to facilitate how people get from here to there. These "non-places," as defined by anthropologist Marc Augé, are utilitarian, transitory spaces where people pass through without developing a personal connection to or relationship with the site or the people there.[184] Likewise, non-places are solitary and isolating, reducing occupants—or "users"—to anonymity and sameness.[185] Non-places are occupied temporarily in order to serve many; they are briefly but continuously navigated by users. Thus, for Augé, "they are measured in units of *time*"—a five-minute wait in line, a subway car that arrives in eight minutes, an appointment at one o'clock, etc.[186] Yet, while individuals come and go, non-places exist within a state of the "perpetual present."[187] They are incessantly occupied in a state of use, reducing occupants to similitude.

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[184] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to An Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London & NY: Verso, 1995), 77-78.

[185] Augé, 103; 101.

[186] Augé, 104; emphasis added.

[187] Augé, 105.

TWT engage digital wayfaring to reproduce the experience of non-places across social media. Twitter's temporal logics reiterate the elements of non-places in ways that enable TWT's performance. Twitter facilitates anonymity and sameness. As Rayner argues, the digital enacts the perpetual now as an event that unfolds everywhere and nowhere. While TWT generate a sense of online liveness with their audience, their anonymity and lack of direct discourse embraces the distancing effect of social media—the experience of "being alone together," as Sherry Turkle characterizes it.[188] The aesthetic choices made by TWT in the composition of each photo illustrate that these non-places are generic and impersonal, and the absence of human forms yields a feeling of isolation and desertion. Moreover, the sense of endurance across geographical and digital borders produces a gap that keeps the audience at a distance; the work of abortion travel belongs to TWT alone.

As a performance of endurance, TWT's pilgrimage accentuates the physical and emotional work of travel. In making the labor of survival evident, their travelogue enacts shifts between movement and stasis, exposing the oscillating energy required to maneuver from site to site. In one photo, a massive concrete wall rushes past the window from a taxi (see Figure 1.5). The wall is a blur, the tops of trees barely visible as they whiz past. In contrast, the handles around the door window inside the taxi are in sharp focus. TWT tweet, "Pretty ordinary sights, in a place away from home. Can't say it's comforting, though @EndaKennyTD #twowomentravel."[189] They reveal the disjuncture between the familiar and the not-quite-familiar—the strangeness that can be associated with travel to an unknown

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[188] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

[189] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 2:46 a.m. PST.

place that looks like home but is also not quite the same—as well as the disorientation that accompanies the rigor of travel. Their discomfort is not merely symbolized by the image; digital wayfaring enacts the somatic experience of traveling. Their perspective conveys that they are on the move, defying the inertia imposed upon their bodies while simultaneously being burdened by it.

Figure 1.5. Pretty ordinary sights.

The transit portrayed by this picture is juxtaposed with the next few images, a series of impersonal and vapid waiting rooms. In one photograph, an industrial-looking chair with a drab green seat cushion and cold, metal legs rests across the expanse of wooden floorboards where the two women walked and are now "weighted by bated breaths" (Figure 1.6).[190] The act of waiting is infused with uncertainty as they proclaim, "@EndaKennyTD we could be home by noon in another world."[191] In the stillness expressed by this image and its commentary, they reveal the gap between the reality of patriarchal Irish law and the dream of

[190] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 1:54 a.m. PST.

[191] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 1:54 a.m. PST.

just and fair rights for pregnant people that articulates such an impossibility as to exist "another world" away. Moreover, a state of unease pervades this moment of stasis; even waiting is work. In the apposition between mobility and loitering, TWT rehearse the temporal and spatial dynamics of travel. As they negotiate ephemeral moments of transit and the tedium and protracted lull associated with waiting areas, their curated Twitter feed (re)produces the rhythms and rigors experienced by their enduring bodies. In their intermedial performance, online liveness and temporal logics transform into intensities of movement and stillness, highlighting the artificiality of the "erotics of Irishness;" their bodies are monitored with *an intensity that stills*.

Figure 1.6 Weighted by bated breaths.

TWT construct emplaced visualities of exile, chronicling their movement from non-place to non-place, animating sentiments of detachment, precarity, and indifference that are constitutive of non-places. Thus, the conditions of non-places—isolation, solitude, anonymity, similitude—embody the affective labor of abortion travel. Additionally, TWT's enduring bodies exceed the present; the temporal logics of the digital and non-places yield a state of eternal nowness that contributes to their durational performance. They tweet, "Finally time for a power nap. @EndaKennyTD all done and dusted, we won't get home for another

24hrs #twowomentravel."[192] In the accompanying photograph, a wooden nightstand sits between the edges of a couple of beds in a modest hotel room. The nightstand is empty except for a black telephone. Hours later, they post a picture of heavy purple curtains hanging from tall windows. One of the curtains is falling off its track at the top of the window frame, failing at its job of blocking out the sunlight. Already an unfamiliar room, the darkness accentuates the feeling of strangeness—of being cut-off from home. TWT proclaim, "Morning. Finally slept. Shes [*sic*] konked out, check out soon, could sleep for Ireland."[193] Even at rest, they are encumbered by the anticipation of transit.

Their staging of these various non-places heightens the vitality of their performance of endurance. Their digital wayfaring uncovers the exertion of abortion travel and the sense of its persistence. Shalson argues that endurance exceeds the live event framed by the performance; in other words, "the life of endurance is not only the time of the live performance."[194] Accordingly, TWT's trek was already underway when they created their Twitter account. Their performance encompasses their decision to travel and to tweet, as well as the planning of the trip itself, and it continues after they disembark on their return to Ireland. It continues when I load the archive of their Twitter page on the Internet Wayback Machine. It persists in the ongoing namelessness of Two Women Travel. To travel for an abortion requires work—the planning and scheduling of the before, and the physical exertion and exhaustion of travel and its afterlife. Their trip may end, but the reality of the illicit activity remains. The experience of exile from self-determination and self-expression lingers.

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[192] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 10:09 a.m. PST.

[193] Two Women Travel, 21 August 2016, 2:06 a.m. PST.

[194] Shalson, 32.

The work of keeping the secret does not end. Thus, their enduring bodies reveal the hidden, relentless emotional labor of abortion. The *invisibility* of their bodies—the anonymizing of non-places—uncovers the inexorable burden of this illicit, secretive behavior. The enduring bodies of TWT make apparent the ongoing labor of women and other menstruators, and the operations of power that compel them to take up this work in the first place. Digital media affords TWT the ability to assert bodily autonomy while exposing the regulation and surveillance practices enacted against their bodies by concrete and abstract forms of power. Their performance of endurance reveals how individuals—their followers, lurkers, citizens, Kenny and other legislators—are entwined in networks of exploitation, re-producing those same regulatory regimes even as they deconstruct and challenge them.

Focusing on the temporal ontology of digital media elucidates TWT's performance of endurance. Their project is conversant with a growing interest in duration concerning abortion narratives in popular media. In particular, a number of filmmakers represent performances of endurance. For example, director Cristian Mungiu employs a real time narrative within each scene in *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* (2007). Set in 1980s Romania under Ceausescu's dictatorship, Mungiu's film unfurls over an intense twenty-four period when a woman enlists her roommate to help her obtain an illegal abortion. More recently, Eliza Hittman's *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always* (2020) and Rachel Lee Goldenberg's *Unpregnant* (2020) use the road movie genre, featuring abortion-seeking teenagers who are forced to travel across U.S. state lines for the procedure.[195] Significantly, TWT's project

[195] Notably, like the story of Two Women Travel, all three of these films showcase two women who support one another without judgement. These films center the stories of white, cis-gender women, however. While the characters' shrinking budgets generate conflict and obstacles, the challenges of race, citizenship status, sexuality, and gender identity are not interrogated in these instances.

evokes Irish artist Emma Campbell's photographic and video artwork *When They Put Their Hands Out Like Scales* (2012). Campbell captures in photographic stills the various scenes and landscapes along the abortion trail from Northern Ireland to England. Like TWT's images, this work is eerily bereft of the human form; however, Campbell juxtaposes a wide variety of natural settings and cityscapes, rather than exclusively featuring non-places. Altogether, these media and artistic performances of endurance convey a trend in abortion discourses, and contemporary feminism generally, that foregrounds personal anecdotes to foster compassion, inclusivity, and reform.[196] Thus, neither TWT's journey nor its telling are anomalies within this broader context. Yet, situating TWT in the history of reproductive rights in modern Ireland illuminates complexity and nuance in their Twitter performance.

"No Filters, No Monologues, Just the Facts": The Political Potential of the Unmarked Body

In making visible the immaterial labor of abortion travel, the bodies of TWT remain obscured. Therefore, their performance both exposes and conceals. It exceeds the audience's ability to witness it entirely. Their bodies and interior lives remain inaccessible to the viewer. Thus, what is *not* seen becomes as meaningful as what they make seen. To conclude, I interrogate how the enduring bodies of TWT perform an active vanishing that enables new representations of womanhood in the Irish context. Making use of the enduring ephemerality of the digital, their absent presence enacts the ways in which political and cultural conflicts are practiced on the boundaries of women's bodies. In Ireland, idealized womanhood as imaged in the figure of the Virgin Mary demands that pregnant people conform, or they

[196] Ruth Fletcher, "#RepealedThe8th: Translating Travesty, Global Conversation, and the Irish Abortion Referendum," *Feminist Legal Studies* (2018), 245.

disappear. TWT make visible this erasure through their own figural disappearance. We are accustomed to seeing artificially constructed people presented in a variety of social media. Conversely, photos so purposefully devoid of human presence are conspicuous and even disconcerting.

TWT use the absent body as a model for a resistant, feminist performance. In *The Body in Contemporary Art*, Sally O'Reilly attests that the body as a medium of art functions as "the principal arena for the politics of identity, as well as a facilitator and marker of belonging."[197] The boundaries between the body and the world generate meaningful lines of inquiry, particularly for those (othered) bodies whose borders are used to define moral, political, and physical national frontiers. These bodies, therefore, incite anxieties about *how* and *where* they appear. Those that conform to national ideals are valuable to the state; while those who defy custom are dangerous and threatening. Feminist artists have critiqued these dynamics of embodiment and representation. In its strategy of bodily non-appearance, TWT's digital saga recalls feminist artist Ana Mendieta's *Silueta* (1973-80) series. Mendieta photographed imprints and outlines of her figure in various natural landscapes including sandy beaches and muddy earth. These ephemeral images mark the traces of her corporeal presence. Performance scholar Rebecca Schneider interprets the artist's disappeared body as a challenge to erasure; Mendieta asserts the historical misrecognition and misrepresentation of the female form by creating "a literal shroud."[198]

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[197] Sally O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London & New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009), 8.

[198] Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 119.

Figure 1.7. *Untitled* (1978) from Mendieta's *Silueta Series* (top), and a sculpture at a bus stop from St. Leger's *Out of the Shadows* (2017) (bottom).

Similarly, Irish artist-activist Will St. Leger uses spectral female forms in his mobile installation *Out of the Shadows* (2017). St. Leger constructed life-size silhouettes of women with suitcases that were placed at various non-places around the Republic—at roadside bus stops, waiting at crosswalks, traversing a town square.[199] These mysterious figures stand-in for the anonymous women like TWT who have been forced to travel for abortion services.

[199] Photographs of *Out of the Shadows* can be viewed on St. Leger's website, https://willstleger.wordpress.com/2017/01/03/out-of-the-shadows/.

Their uncanniness makes them highly visible in public spaces. The outline of the suitcase at her side or being towed behind her has become a powerful symbol in the public consciousness. In the Irish context, a woman with a suitcase signifies abortion travel while also visualizing the nation's history of emigration—a history that disproportionately affected women.[200]

In comparison to the bodily traces of Mendieta's or St. Leger's works, TWT are even less forthcoming in divulging aspects of the body. Their tweets shroud their remains, hinting at them but largely withholding them. Performance theorist Peggy Phelan refutes the politics of visibility as an activist goal, reconfiguring the representational economy to consider the political potential of performance for its immateriality and ephemerality. Phelan argues that "visibility is a trap […]; it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession."[201] She eschews visibility for what she labels the *un*marked, "an *active* vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility."[202] To remain unmarked is a failure to appear that defies and refutes how the body is read, viewed, inscribed, and demarcated according to hegemonic authorities.

In the film *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), director Yvonne Rainer withholds the visual presence of her protagonist: Trisha is heard but never seen. In her analysis of the film, Phelan speculates that female presence might be most effectively mediated through physical absence.[203] Invisibility avoids the gaze—it is to exist in silence, to be

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[200] Antosik-Parsons, 49-50.

[201] Phelan, 6.

[202] Phelan, 19.

[203] Phelan, 89.

un(re)productive, to avoid being marked by patriarchy. For Albright, the absence of Trisha's body affords the character a "much greater *mobility*."[204] Phelan attests that Trisha's invisibility makes her a spectator in her own film *and* in her own life: "Trisha recognizes that she is in the middle of a very old script. Both her past and her future are always already 'imaged' within that script—the script of the heterosexual narrative."[205] In critiquing Rainer's work more broadly, art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty surmises that Rainer fleetingly divests the body of the signifiers enacted on and across it, while simultaneously making its materiality more available.[206] Rainer thus invests in the tension between "the body *being*, and [the body] *being watched*."[207]

At every turn, TWT expose the surveillant and legal practices that manufacture their identity as Two Women (who have to) Travel. Their performance recognizes the trick of visibility, entrapping Kenny and the viewer into its logic by making them witnesses to their illicit behavior. Moreover, TWT manipulate photographic composition, framing, and perspective, subverting expectations of travel photography. Non-places become the subject of their images, evading grand landscapes and compelling portraiture for the mundane and non-descript. They subvert the expectations of social media's visual culture. In one photograph, two-thirds of the photographic frame is filled by the drab industrial carpet in a waiting room, drawing the eye to the corner of a closed wooden door at the upper left and a table littered

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[204] Ann Cooper Albright, *Engaging Bodies: The Politics and Poetics of Corporeality* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 64; emphasis added.

[205] Phelan, 72.

[206] Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2008), 6.

[207] Lambert-Beatty, 6; emphasis added.

with magazines against the white wall in the upper right. They tweet, "@EndaKennyTD waiting room no. 2. Feel might collapse from exhaustion. No sleep. Friend calm. Brave. #twowomentravel" (see Figure 1.8).[208] TWT construct glimpses of the trip from *their* vantage point; like Trisha in Rainer's film, they become spectators in their own plot. Their bodies take the snapshot but are not the subject of it. Instead, they invite the audience into the waiting room, asking them to see what they see. Art historian Kate Antosik-Parsons identifies their approach as a means to encourage empathy from the audience; the camera's gaze captures that of "the waiting friend."[209] As I propose, however, TWT's performance extends beyond fostering empathy; their disappearance enables a disruption in the continuities of display of the Irish female body. The control of women's reproductive bodies is not exclusive to Ireland; nevertheless, TWT's active vanishing enacts a unique socio-cultural pattern of female construction and representation bounded by Marianism.

Figure 1.8. Waiting room no. 2.

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[208] Two Women Travel, 20 August 2016, 4:33 a.m. PST.

[209] Antosik-Parsons, 48.

As such, TWT's absent presence reveals the most enduring immaterial condition of abortion travel—secrecy. Even as they assert bodily autonomy in their border-crossing, they are haunted by a national narrative emphasizing conformity, obedience, and advancing conservative Catholic morality in glorifying motherhood in the image of the Virgin Mary while shunning and shaming any woman who dares to challenge this image. Their active vanishing confronts viewers with the absence of the material body and thus what society more broadly ignores—the material reality of women and other menstruators living in Ireland.

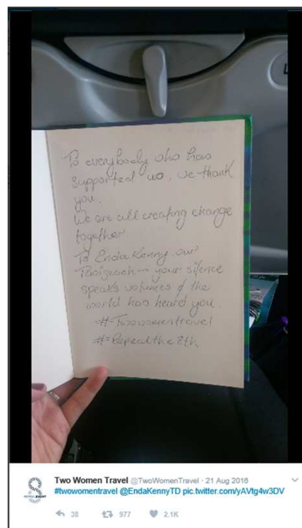

Figure 1.9 A note of thanks for support.

In their Twitter performance, TWT tease their material bodies, offering corporeal traces of femininity and womanhood that complicate models of representation. In a tweet that photographs a handwritten note on the last page of a journal—a spray of blue and green framing the edge of the white paper—TWT scrawl, "To everybody who has supported us, we thank you. We are all creating change together. To Enda Kenny, our Taoiseach—your silence

speaks volumes & the world has heard you."[210] In the lower left-hand corner, the bottom half of the palm of a hand—just the thumb, pinky finger and part of the fourth finger visible—holds the book up against the dark gray back of an airplane seat (Figure 1.9). The tip of the thumb is just visible with a splash of red nail polish; the fourth finger wears a silver ring. These small feminine pieces of the human body are the only indicators of corporeality. The personalization of the handwritten note contrasts sharply with the insipid non-place that surrounds it.

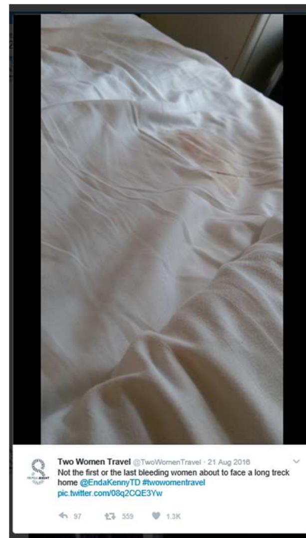

Figure 1.10 Not the first or the last bleeding women.

One provocative picture depicts a slept-in bed with a faint bloodstain on the rumpled white sheets. TWT write, "Not the first or the last bleeding women about to face a long treck [*sic*] home" (Figure 1.10).[211] In depicting the reality of their circumstances so

[210] Two Women Travel, 21 August 2016, 10:09 a.m. PST.

[211] Two Women Travel, 21 August 2016, 2:44 a.m. PST. Depictions of bleeding women are controversial across social media and the Internet. TWT's project recalls an event in 2015 in which Irish comedian Gráinne Maguire started live-tweeting about her period to Enda Kenny. Thousands of other Irish menstruators quickly followed Maguire's lead and did the same using #Repealthe8th. See "Irish Women Tweet Periods to Enda Kenny in Abortion Protest," *BBC News*, 5 November 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34741326?ocid=socialflow_twitter&; see also Gráinne Maguire, "Why I Decided to Live Tweet My

straightforwardly, TWT challenge representations of women's bodies as unhygienic and reprehensible. Evoking the imagery of artists like Mendieta and Carolee Schneemann, and Irish performance artists Amanda Coogan and Helena Walsh, they defy the dismissal of natural bodily functions to the private sphere.[212] Furthermore, they refuse the desexualizing femininity embodied in the figure of the Virgin Mary. Marina Warner argues that the Virgin's image negates all biological functions except lactation and weeping.[213] Her body is sealed shut, from which only milk and tears escape.[214] Innes, however, surmises that, in Ireland, even lactating Mary has disappeared from representation in favor of the sorrowful

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Menstrual Cycle to Enda Kenny," *The Irish Times*, 16 November 2015, https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/grainne-maguire-why-i-decided-to-live-tweet-my-menstrual-cycle-to-enda-kenny-1.2431917.

More broadly, TWT's bloodstain image recalls other feminist digital projects such as the work of Indian Canadian artist and poet Rupi Kaur who was censored by Instagram in 2015. Kaur's visual poetry series *Period.* (2015) included six photographs of a woman menstruating. In one, a woman lies on a bed fully clothed with her back to the camera; her sweatpants and bedsheets are stained with a pool of menstrual blood. Instagram deleted the photo *twice*, insisting that it violated their community standards and acquiescing only when Kaur publicized her story. Kaur's image is available on Instagram here https://www.instagram.com/p/0ovWwJHA6f/.

[212] Some of the earliest examples of using gendered blood for feminist expression in performance art include Carolee Schneemann's *Blood Work Diary* (1972), *Interior Scroll* (1975), *Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology* (1983), and *Venus Vectors* (1988); Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Painting* (1965); and Ana Mendieta's *Body Tracks* (1974). Visual artists who depicted menstrual blood without the presence of the body include Judy Chicago's *Red Flag* (1971) and *Menstruation Bathroom* (1971-2), and Judy Clark's *Menstruation* (1973). See Ruth Green-Cole's chapter "Painting Blood: Visualizing Menstrual Blood in Art" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Chris Bobel, et al., 787-801 (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

More specific to their Irish context, TWT's performance alludes to Helena Walsh's use of her own menstrual blood in her performance piece *In Pursuit of Pleasure* (2012) and her painting *Mapping Feminism* (2014). For a description of Walsh's performance, see her chapter, "Developing Dialogues: Live Art and Femininity in Post-Conflict Ireland" in *Performance Art in Ireland: A History*, ed. Áine Phillips (London: Live Art Development Agency and Reaktion Books, 2015). Furthermore, blood features prominently in the body art performed by Kira O'Reilly, particularly her piece *Wet Cup* (2000), although not directly connected to menstruation. TWT's image also gestures to the works of artists Amanda Coogan and Áine Philips whose various performances enact bodies that leak and spew all sorts of bodily fluids, including urine, breastmilk, and ejaculate.

[213] Warner, 251.

[214] McCormack, 59.

Mother of God.[215] In contrast to the purity of Mary's tears, all other bodily functions are dangerous and polluting.[216]

When asked about the bloody sheets photo during an interview, TWT says, "The realities of women's bodies have been glossed over for too long. We bleed, and we birth, and it's not pretty, but that's life, and that reality needs to be brought to the fore."[217] Thus, in TWT's photograph, the bloodstain highlights her corporeality and bodily experience, but in the body's failure to materialize, the stakes of this journey come into view. Their active vanishing embodies the hiding and secrecy of women's reproductive lives. In refusing enforced motherhood, they are made immaterial. Thus, they expose the gap between cultural ideology haunted by Marianism and the realities of pregnant people's lives. Their mobile and enduring performance challenges geopolitical, cultural, and moral boundaries, revealing these limits to be artificial and pliable, and thus signaling possibilities for legal reform and social change that could reimagine people's access to healthcare. Their unmarked bodies dissolve the border of representation that affirms their bodies can appear only if they reproduce correctly.

Finally, TWT's unmarked bodies convey the political potential of being unremarkable. They strive to normalize abortion by emphasizing its status as commonplace and unexceptional. In one of their final tweets, TWT explain in a formal, typed-font note that

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[215] Innes, 39. Meaney expresses a similar statement in highlighting the censorship in Ireland of an EU-wide advertising campaign that featured a mother's bare breasts. This, coupled with Ireland's low rates of breast-feeding, reveals the repression and exclusion of the maternal body (14).

[216] Warner, 222.

[217] Emer O'Toole, "Abortion in Ireland: 'Silence is Breaking 12 Hearts a Day,'" *The Guardian* (UK), 29 August 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/aug/29/abortion-in-ireland-two-women-travel, accessed 7 August 2021.

contrasts with the personalization of their hand-written notes: "We wanted to share the very ordinariness of the situation-we wanted to show it for what it is; a series of waiting rooms, moments in transit, a sequence of tediums protracted by stigma. No filters, no monologues, just the facts."[218] As such, they position themselves as *unremarkable* people seeking routine healthcare. They enact the rhythms, sensations, and sights of the experience in its entirety while also revealing its profound *ordinariness*. In so doing, they enact a profound irony; pregnant people travelling for abortions has become routine—perhaps even expected—in Irish society.

Moreover, TWT do not explain or justify why they are seeking an abortion. Hence, they mark the limit of their public display, symbolized by their bodily absence. To return to Phelan's analysis of Rainer's film, "the gaze itself is, and can only be, partial."[219] As such, TWT delimit the bounds of privacy. Pro-choice activism frequently frames abortion rights through the lens of the right to privacy; however, this runs the risk of perpetuating secrecy and the stigma of silence that surrounds abortion.[220] The right to privacy protects the status quo and normative (hetero)sexual behavior.[221] In refusing to substantiate their need for an abortion, TWT challenge rhetoric around "good" and "bad" terminations. These discourses often frame abortion as a "necessary evil" or profess that the procedure should be "safe, legal, and rare." Thus, the more extreme "hard cases"—pregnant people who require

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[218] Two Women Travel, 21 August 2016, 2:15 p.m. PST.

[219] Phelan, 90.

[220] Culhane, 69; Eric Olund, "Repealing a 'Legacy of Shame:' Press Coverage of Emotional Geographies of Secrecy and Shame in Ireland's Abortion Debate," in *After Repeal: Rethinking Abortion Politics*, eds. Kath Brown and Sydney Calkin (London: Zed Books, 2019), 186.

[221] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998), 553.

abortions for health reasons, including pregnancies in which the fetus is deemed inviable, those who have a life-jeopardizing illness like cancer, as well as individuals who become pregnant as a result of rape—garner the most publicity and sympathy. This paradigm erases the experiences of those bodies marked undeserving: pregnant people who do not want to parent or who do not want more children; those who are not white or not Irish; and those menstruators who do not identify as women. Significantly, TWT's project represents an important intervention in normalizing termination, while also exposing the ways in which certain bodies are not imagined as needing access to abortion services.

In the next chapter, I interrogate the public's role in these architectures of containment. While I have considered here the ways in which people are enmeshed in TWT's digital wayfaring, the audience's vocality remains largely absent from this discussion. Indeed, TWT are disinterested in debate. The point is to uncover the conditions and labor—material and immaterial—of abortion travel. The next chapter, however, considers how and why people are mobilized to action by on- and offline performances by reproductive bodies. While TWT cast themselves as a sort of everywoman, this signification assumes that all abortion-seekers are a threat to Irish national identity in the same way. Thus, in what follows, I explore how intermedial performances of national identity and Marianism are problematized and threatened by race and citizenship status.

CHAPTER TWO
#RIPSavita: Constellations of Mourning and the Performative Labor of the Migrant Pregnant Body

> *On a night like this I remember the child*
> *who came with fifteen summers to her name,*
> *and she lay down alone at my feet*
> *without midwife or doctor or friend to hold her hand*
> *and she pushed her secret out into the night,*
> *far from the town tucked up in little scandals,*
> *bargains struck, words broken, prayers, promises,*
> *and though she cried out to me in extremis*
> *I did not move,*
> *I didn't lift a finger to help her,*
> *I didn't intercede with heaven,*
> *nor whisper the charmed word in God's ear.*
> –Paula Meehan, "The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks"

> *"The living can be disbelieved, dismissed, but the dead do not lie. We turn in death from witness to evidence, and this evidence is indelible, because it is mute."*
> –Anne Enright, "Antigone in Galway"

In 1984, fifteen-year-old Ann Lovett was discovered bleeding to death after delivering a baby in a grotto to the Virgin Mary in the rural town of Granard, Co. Longford. Lovett had concealed her pregnancy from her family, and in the end both she and the newborn died. As the imagery in Paula Meehan's poem about Lovett makes plain, she was alone and unaided when she delivered her child in the shadow of the immobile statue of the Mother of God. Did she seek mercy? Or perhaps fortitude from a figure who had also borne an illegitimate child while seeking a haven to give birth? Meehan's Virgin towers over the forlorn Lovett but cannot—or will not—intervene.

Nearly thirty years later, Meehan evoked Lovett's death when she read these lines from her poem to a crowd of more than fifteen thousand Pro-Choice protestors gathered in Dublin. Behind the poet, hung banners emblazoned with the face of Savita Halappanavar, a

woman who had died in a Galway hospital two weeks earlier after she was denied a life-saving abortion. Beneath Halappanavar's smiling face read the slogan, "Never Again," a phrase riddled with irony by Meehan's performance. In conjuring Lovett's memory, Meehan conjoined her senseless death to Halappanavar's, suggesting how little circumstances for pregnant people in Ireland had changed in the last thirty years. Fifteen years old and unmarried, Lovett feared the stigma of shame associated with "fallen women" so she hid her secret at great cost to herself. Conversely, Halappanavar, a thirty-one-year-old married Indian immigrant, placed her faith in medical professionals and yet her life was also sacrificed for the sake of national morality. As Meehan so poignantly demonstrated, the specter of the Virgin Mary haunts both women's deaths.

The Virgin Mary is a potent emblem of motherhood in the Republic. As I explained in the previous chapter, the Irish Constitution—infused with conservative Catholic values—enshrined a woman's place in society as child bearer, homemaker, and obedient wife.[222] The Virgin Mary exemplifies these duties. Thus, the Eighth Amendment prohibiting abortion epitomized the symbolic influence of the Virgin over jurisprudence and social life in Ireland. Irish women were bound by these demands to become mothers and wives, reproducing and cultivating the heterosexual, nuclear family—the fundamental social unit of Irish life.[223] Lovett's and Halappanavar's deaths raise questions about which bodies are imagined as reproducing the nation. In particular, Halappanavar's mortality is not solely about controlling

[222] Historically, the Irish Catholic Church emphasized a commitment to living a virtuous life cultivated through a strong sense of right and wrong; a respect for upholding tradition; and an obligation of obedience to (the heterosexual) family and the Church (Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, Chapter 2).

[223] Valiulis, "Virtuous Mothers and Dutiful Wives," 102-103; also Beale, particularly "Introduction: Women and the Family."

women's reproduction; her case exposes how migrant women and their reproduction are cast as threatening to the integrity of the Irish state.[224] Those bodies that do not fit the racial and ethnic norm are not imagined as reproducing Irish-ness. Halappanavar's body and life were sacrificed to re-nationalize Irish identity and perpetuate the Virgin Mary as the representation of purity, whiteness, and motherhood.

The Irish were galvanized by Halappanavar's death in 2012. Her portrait became a ubiquitous image in the Repeal the Eighth campaign, and, six years after her death, the nation voted to overturn the Eighth Amendment thereby legalizing abortion in the Republic. In this chapter, I investigate to what extent using "Savita" as a symbol of reproductive rights obscures the complexities of race and citizenship status. I argue that ignoring racial difference overlooks the persistence of iconographies (like that of the Virgin Mary) that prevail across media and digital culture in the twenty-first century. In contrast, paying attention to race, ethnicity, and citizenship status illuminates the precarious situation of pregnant people in contemporary Ireland—in particular, the way that discourses of patriarchy and white supremacy continue to impede feminist progress. In the ongoing global migration and refugee crisis, the politics of childbirth are an important site of investigation.

This chapter continues my interrogation of the Repeal campaign in scrutinizing how activists and artists foregrounded Savita Halappanavar as a figure to represent the campaign. In the previous chapter, I critiqued feminist activists' use of social media to circulate images

[224] I use "migrant" to describe people born in one country but living in the Republic on a temporary *or* long-term basis. In the US, the term is frequently associated with individuals whose status is more precarious, namely refugees or seasonal workers, whereas in European discourses, migrant has a more common, broader designation. "Non-national" is a descriptor more in line with migrant in the US, and as I discuss later in this chapter, both terms are fraught and contingent.

of themselves that covertly and overtly resist and exploit systems of power. While Two Women Travel crafted and controlled their performances of identity, images of Halappanavar spread and aggregate without her consent. Two Women Travel are participant witnesses to the state's hypocrisy and control over pregnant bodies. Halappanavar, however, changed from witness to evidence in her death. The fact of her tragic loss yields a powerful, affective response in those who view her image. Thus, I explore Halappanavar's lived experience, the intermedial transmission of her image, and performances of Irish national identity. I scrutinize the extent to which Halappanavar's non-Irish and non-white body interrupts Irish legal and moral codes.

While this dissertation is primarily concerned with the *embodied* experiences of women and pregnant people across physical and digital space, I am going to diverge from this slightly in my interrogation of Halappanavar's image as represented in her portrait called the Savita Photo. My interest in this photograph as a medium of protest focuses on two points of contention: first, the tension between political exploitation and Halappanavar's performative labor as it materializes and circulates in the Savita Photo; and secondly, the way that the affective encounter between the Savita Photo and the Irish public incites on- and offline political performances of nationalism. My aim is not to dwell on representational digital images, but rather to scrutinize how they choreograph an embodied, affective performance of identity as a moment of conflict.[225] Therefore, I scrutinize not the

[225] My definition of affect is drawn from Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg who assert that affect "arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Seigworth and Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010], 1). Thus, affects are forces that pass and are exchanged between bodies, objects, and environments. These forces, or forces of encounter (they are not necessarily forceful—in fact, they are often subtle and unobserved), are "beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension" (Seigworth and Gregg, 1). The body, therefore, experiences a constant oscillation between senses

performance of the object but rather what it makes bodies *do*—how it mobilizes bodies *to act*.

My inquiry is framed by two flashpoints in the Irish Pro-Choice campaign: the extensive broadcasting of Halappanavar's image following her death in 2012, and the upsurge in the transmission of her likeness again in 2018 when she appeared as a national symbol in the days leading up to the referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment. During the intervening six years, Halappanavar's portrait, the Savita Photo, circulated widely across a variety of mediascapes: print posters and leaflets, news reports on television and online, and across social media. Activists used her portrait on banners, shirts, pins and jewelry, and her name, "Savita," was evoked to construct what political scientist Zizi Papacharissi calls "affective publics," designed to mobilize people in the abortion debate.[226] I interrogate the intermedial transmission of the Savita Photo in conjunction with hashtags across social media, on posters and banners at vigils and rallies, and in a street mural ahead of the Repeal ballot. Considering Halappanavar's case complicates how the pregnant body is understood in Ireland where non-national immigrant women die almost twice as frequently as Irish or

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and sensibility that includes the ordinary and the extraordinary, the conscious and the unconscious, the material and the incorporeal.

[226] Papacharissi derives her definition of affect from Deleuze and Guattari: "the ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1980] 1987], xvi, quoted in Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 13). For Papacharissi, affects arise from "a liminal nature," prefiguring emotion (15). This liminal status, echoing the "in-between-ness" articulated by Seigworth and Gregg (or what they call an "inventory of shimmers," evoking the ephemerality and thus performativity of affect), imparts affect with a "*not yet* formed shape" from which it has the "potential for subversion" (19). Accordingly, order and hierarchy compromise the futurity of affect, while its habitat affords disorder, marginality, and anarchy (19).

British female citizens.[227] The myth of "Savita" fashioned by the Repeal Movement disguises how mediascapes revise bodily representations in ways that misappropriate or obscure the embodied experiences of those bodies.

From Witness to Evidence

Savita and her husband Praveen embody what Bryan Fanning calls "the New Irish," the population of non-citizen residents from one hundred ninety-six nationalities now living and working in Ireland.[228] Immigration into the country has been driven by economic prosperity that began in the 1990s. The Halappanavars' experience supports this; Praveen, a software engineer, moved to Galway in 2006 for employment. Savita left India in 2008 following her marriage, and by the time she became pregnant in 2012, she had passed the necessary examinations to practice dentistry in the Republic.[229] As I explore below, Savita's professional and middle-class status mattered and complicate her role as a symbol of the Repeal movement. Before investigating the complexities of Halappanavar's identity, however, the circumstances of her death and maternity care must be interrogated within the Irish context.

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[227] Jo Murphy-Lawless, "Embodied Truths: Women's Struggle for Voice and Wellbeing in Irish Maternity Services," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2* eds. Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Attic Press, 2015).

[228] Bryan Fanning, *New Guests of the Irish Nation* (Dublin and Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 145. In the 1990s, in-migration numbers began to exceed out-migration for the first time in the Republic's history. The 2011 census reports that 12% of the national population is of migrant origin. In 2002, this figure was 5.6% and 10% in 2006. This reveals a significant increase in inward migration from the period between 2002 and 2006. The rate of migration into Ireland has slowed since 2006, but continues to increase (Department of Justice and Equality, "The Migrant Integration Strategy," [Dublin, 2017], 6-7).

[229] Unless stated otherwise, accounts of Halappanavar's life come from reporter Kitty Holland's book *Savita*, particularly Chapter 1 (Holland, *Savita: The Tragedy that Shook a Nation* [Croydon, UK: Transworld Ireland, 2013]).

Seventeen weeks into her pregnancy, Halappanavar died of septicemia during miscarriage. She had been in a Galway hospital for one week. Despite her deteriorating health, doctors refused to perform an abortion because a heartbeat was detected for three days after the fetus was deemed non-viable. Medical staff were concerned that she could develop an infection, and yet, until signs were clear that her life was immediately threatened, all they could do was wait.[230] The X Case legislated by the Irish High Court in 1992 avowed the right to life of the mother which had not been accounted for in the Eighth Amendment.[231] The decision states that abortion is permissible in the instance of "a real and substantial risk

[230] Halappanavar's situation typifies the "wait and see" approach to managing miscarriage in the event of a persistent fetal heartbeat. In the absence of a palpable threat to the pregnant person's life, medical professionals are bound by law to wait for either the fetus to expire or a clear deterioration of the mother's health that indicates a serious risk of death. Scholars call this the "chill factor" in that doctors and clinicians are frozen from acting in their patient's best interests because of the threat of a prison sentence for themselves and their patients. The wait and see approach exposes pregnant people to unnecessary risk and coerces them into additional psychological and physical pain. For this reason, international human rights standards require access to abortion when a pregnant person's life *or health* is at risk. In 2011 (one year before Halappanavar's death) the UN Committee Against Torture "urged" the Irish state to reconcile the ambiguity of the law since the X Case ruling and reconcile the country's policies with those of the Convention (UN Convention Against Torture, Concluding Observations: Ireland, UN Doc. CAT/C/IRL/CO/1 [2011], para. 26). These recommendations had not been acted upon by the time of Halappanavar's medical crisis. See Peadar O'Grady, "Prison Sentence for Abortion is Cruel and Unusual Punishment," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2* eds. Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Attic Press, 2015), 165.

Most notably—and controversially—the coroner's report includes the testimony of Dr. Peter Boylan, a nationally respected obstetrician, who asserts that if Halappanavar had been given a termination within the first two days of admittance to the hospital, then "it is highly likely, on the balance of probabilities, that *she would not have died*" (Dr. Ciaran McLoughlin, *The Coroner's Report of the Inquest on the Death of Savita Halappanavar* [Clifden, 2013] quoted in Joan McCarthy, "Reproductive Justice in Ireland: A Feminist Analysis of the Neary and Halappanavar Cases," in *Ethical and Legal Debates in Irish Healthcare: Confronting Complexities*, eds. Mary Donnelly and Claire Murray [Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2016], 15; emphasis added). Holland reports that audible gasps of shock were heard during the inquest when Dr. Boylan attested that "the real problem [in Halappanavar's medical treatment] was the inability to terminate the pregnancy prior to Ms. Halappanavar developing a real and substantial risk of death. By that time it was, effectively, too late to save her life" (quoted in Holland, *Savita*, 212).

[231] As I have stated previously in this dissertation, the Eighth Amendment recognized the right to life of the fetus as equitable to that of the mother. The problems inherent in this lack of provision for the pregnant person's life and wellbeing were anticipated by some lawmakers in 1983 when the referendum passed. Peter Sutherland, the Attorney General of Ireland at that time, presciently warned that the Eighth Amendment was a "legal timebomb." (Stephanie Lord, "The Eighth Amendment: Planting a Legal Timebomb" in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2* eds. Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon [Cork: Attic Press, 2015], 91).

to the *life*, as distinct from the *health*, of the mother, which can only be avoided by the termination of her pregnancy."[232] As healthcare ethics scholar Joan McCarthy avers, this ruling does little to clarify what constitutes a "real and substantial risk" to a pregnant person's life, burdening medical professionals with the responsibility to determine these factors for themselves. Thus, when Halappanavar collapsed two days after being admitted to the hospital, doctors had to deduce if her life was at risk—a judgement that can have serious legal consequences. In this case, they concluded there was no "real and substantial risk" to Halappanavar's life.

During the subsequent medical inquest, Praveen testified that Savita asked for a termination three times. The couple questioned why Halappanavar could not have a termination if the fetus was going to die anyway. Purportedly, the midwife answered them, "This is a Catholic country,"[233] and Savita countered, "But I am neither Irish nor Catholic."[234] The veracity of the midwife's comment became a polarizing statement in the public response to Halappanavar's death. Halappanavar's reply articulates incredulity that *her* bodily integrity could be compromised by the sociopolitical beliefs of someone else. Her statement succinctly expresses the fissure between contemporary notions of the freedom of choice and the lived realities of institutions that are discreetly controlled by ideological

[232] *Attorney General v. X and Others* (1992), quoted in J. McCarthy, 16; emphasis added.

[233] The factuality of this assertion was deeply contested during the Coroner's Inquest. Praveen Halappanavar steadfastly affirmed that a medical clinician made the statement, but the midwife was less certain of her precise terminology. The midwife, however, meant the statement to be a reassuring explanation to the Halappanavars' confusion about why an abortion was not permissible, and according to Holland, Praveen is understanding and grateful for her aid and attention where other medical staff were less forthcoming. Holland provides a useful account of the evidence provided during the inquest concerning this matter (*Savita*, 174-78).

[234] Kitty Holland, "'Are You Okay…I think We're Losing Her," *The Irish Times*, 24 November 2012, np.

authorities. The presence of the "new Irish" alleges the nation's transformation to a modern, secular state—proof that a traditional, conservative national character has given way to progressivism and multiculturalism. The midwife's utterance shattered this illusion and Halappanavar's death substantiates it.

On November 14, 2012, the front page of *The Irish Times* announced "Woman 'Denied a Termination' Dies in Hospital." Below the headline, a photograph of a young Indian woman smiles back at the viewer (see Figure 2.1).[235] This was the first time that Irish citizens had heard of Savita Halappanavar, but within twenty-four hours, the hashtags

Figure 2.1 The Savita Photo

#Savita and #RIPSavita were trending around the globe. Less than a week later, crowds chanted the name "Savita" in the streets with posters and banners adorned with her face. Images of Savita dominated Pro-Choice events and ephemera—her name invoked to express the urgent need to legislate for abortion.

[235] Kitty Holland and Paul Cullen, "Woman 'Denied a Termination' Dies in Hospital," *The Irish Times*, 14 November 2012, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/woman-denied-a-termination-dies-in-hospital-1.551412.

At the time of Halappanavar's death, a pro-choice resurgence had already begun. That summer, the anti-abortion group Youth Defense had launched a national campaign peppering buses and billboards with posters proclaiming, "Abortion tears her life apart – There's always a better solution."[236] Accompanying the text was either a ripped photograph featuring a young white woman looking sad and troubled or a torn image of a fetus in the womb. The campaign was met with public outcry. The images appeared to be openly shaming and blaming individuals going about their daily lives. In particular, the posters were prominently displayed at commuter stations, thereby apparently targeting those travelling with crisis pregnancies.[237] Under the pretense of support, they leveled shame at people (despite the lack of evidence to support claims that abortion is psychologically or physically harmful). Some felt the campaign was "disingenuous and misplaced;"[238] others called it outright "offensive."[239] Capitalizing on this reaction, the Abortion Rights Campaign formed to

[236] Youth Defense and other anti-choice groups were responding to the recent ruling *A, B, C v. Ireland* by the European Court of Human Rights in 2010. The Court decreed that the Republic needed to establish a clear procedure for determining under which circumstances abortion would be legally permitted. Halappanavar's death placed public pressure on the Irish government to expediate this legislation, eventually adopted in 2013 as the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act. This act recognized the right to an abortion in the event of the risk of suicide or physical illness. It was repealed with the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018.

[237] Cathie Doherty and Sinead Redmond, "The Radicalisation of a New Generation of Abortion Rights Activists," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2* eds. Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Attic Press, 2015), 270.

[238] Anne Quesney, "Speaking Up! Speaking Out! Abortion in Ireland, Exploring Women's Voices and Contemporary Abortion Rights Activism," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2* eds. Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Attic Press, 2015), 153.

[239] Holland, *Savita*, 63. In their essay in *The Abortion Papers Ireland, Vol. 2*, Cathie Doherty and Sinéad Redmond describe the movement to vandalize and alter these anti-choice posters. The resultant images were shared widely across social media, including on the Facebook page that the two activists created called "Unlike Youth Defence, I Trust Women to Decide Their Lives for Themselves" (https://www.facebook.com/notalwaysabetteroption/). This represents another example of how street art and social media virality played a crucial part in the Repeal movement. See Doherty and Redmond, 270-272.

concentrate efforts around a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment. When news of Halappanavar's unnecessary and painful death broke in November, the groundwork was already established to harness the political momentum toward overturning the abortion ban.

The "Abortion Tears Her Life Apart" campaign introduced a rhetorical shift in anti-choice discourses. Its imagery showcases a woman, directing attention away from the fetus who had been the star of most anti-abortion ephemera since the 1980s.[240] Activist Anne Quesney speculates that anti-abortion groups recognize a need to appeal directly to women; therefore, they are adopting tactics typically associated with pro-choice perspectives, including an emphasis on reproductive autonomy and decision-making.[241] The circulation of Savita's image represents one of these pro-choice maneuvers. Like the unhappy, anonymous white woman on the Youth Defense campaign poster, Savita's smiling face inscribed public spaces across the country.

The Repeal campaign had a "visual nature" that added to its success according to art historian Emily Mark-Fitzgerald.[242] Many images "became visually iconic and therefore persuasive pieces of work," including Repeal shirts and the Maser mural which featured a red heart overlaid with the phrase "Repeal the 8th" in white cursive font.[243] As semiotic objects,

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[240] For more on the power of fetal images over public imagination, see Rosalind Petchesky, "Fetal Images: the Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 2 (1987): 263-92; Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, trans. Lee Hoinacki (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Rebecca Kukla, "Pregnant Bodies as Public Spaces," in *Motherhood and Space: Configurations of the Maternal Through Politics, Home, and the Body*, ed. By Sarah Hardy and Caroline Wiedmer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 283-305. On fetal imagery in anti-choice campaign propaganda, refer to Phelan, Chap. 6.

[241] Quesney, 153.

[242] Christina McSorley, "Etching Irish Abortion Referendum into History," *BBC News,* 16 July 2018, Accessed November 12, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44821433.

[243] McSorley.

these items perform a particular political affiliation, and Halappanavar's image became woven into this civic posture. The Savita Photo is the only iconic and persuasive campaign image that included a readily recognizable body. In her analysis of the Irish Pro-Choice movement, historian Niamh NicGhabhann professes that the campaign's emphasis on personal stories is reflected in the "ongoing commemoration" of Halappanavar (and the X Case and Ms. Y, [244] although these anonymous cases do not strike the same degree of affective resonance as Halappanavar's story).[245]

Performance Constellations: Trending Hashtags, Vigils, and the March for Savita

Once Holland's *Times* article was published, Halappanavar's image circulated across global media. Savita became hypervisible, choreographing bodies to enact a kind of political theatre that used grief and anger as the source of its drama. While her image is a call to action on one hand, its intermedial circulation depends upon her tragic death. The Savita Photo reiterates the way Irish law and the medical system rendered her body disposable, even as people challenge this disposability through acts of remembrance. In the aftermath of Halappanavar's death, social media provided a forum for public reactions in the absence of immediate action on the part of the government. Holland's article was picked up by the BBC World Service, CNN, and Al Jazeera as well as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *El*

[244] One notably relevant case from 2014 involves an asylum-seeker known as Ms. Y who learned she was pregnant as a result of rape in her home country. She became suicidal when she was denied an abortion. She attempted to travel to the UK but was detained in Liverpool for trying to enter the country illegally. The Irish court ruled that the fetus was viable so she was no longer a candidate for termination. Ms. Y went on hunger strike and the courts subsequently ordered her to be fed intravenously. She eventually gave birth by caesarean section at twenty-five weeks. An overview of the case can be found here: "Ms. Y's Case: Denied a Lawful Abortion in Ireland," *Amnesty International*, 21 March 2016, https://www.amnesty.ie/ms-ys-case/.

[245] Niamh NicGhabhann, "City Walls, Bathroom Stalls, and Tweeting the Taoiseach: The Aesthetics of Protest and the Campaign for Abortion Rights in the Republic of Ireland," *Continuum* (2018), 6.

País (Madrid). The English-language online news site *Indiatimes* published the Savita Photo with the headline "Ireland Murders Pregnant Indian Dentist."[246] As the story traversed formal media channels, social media users linked to it with mentions and hyperlinks. The "always-on" ambient culture of digital networking enables users to share information and rapidly communicate across distances.[247] A localized event escalates into global news. Thus, in the days following the publication of Holland's article, people reacted to Halappanavar's death, voicing their individual opinions and sentiments and collectively responding to the event.

As the story went viral, social media users transformed headlines and their spontaneous reactions into popular and concise hashtags. #Savita emerged as a useful keyword to aggregate information about Halappanavar. #RIPSavita expressed a meaningful sentiment and #NeverAgain paired feeling with a commitment to political reform. As terse performatives, these tags index the immediate, visceral concerns of the Irish public at large. They transform inert news articles about *something that has already happened* into a swiftly unfolding event in the *here and now*.[248] Their reiteration exploits social media algorithms to make them trending topics, increasing their spread and intensity.[249] Hashtags have a call and

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[246] Vandita Agrawal, "Ireland Murders Pregnant Indian Dentist," *India Times*, 16 November 2012. Accessed on 28 November 2019, https://www.indiatimes.com/europe/ireland-murders-pregnant-indian-dentist-47214.html.

[247] danah boyd, "Participating in the Always-On Lifestyle," in *The Social Media Reader*, ed. Michael Mandiberg. 71-76 (New York: NYUP, 2012).

[248] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 93.

[249] Trending topics refers to hashtags or keywords that appear most frequently in tweets over a period of time. These topics might be streams of "surfacing content" that suddenly emerge as a response to a specific event, for example, or topics that "set a trend" because hyperconnected users push the messages to go viral. See José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 77.

response effect that assures people of their connectedness—someone is listening.[250] Yet, social networks possess a "distorting effect" in which an event can appear more significant or popular based on the insular nature of a user's network.[251] One's friends and followers typically share similar viewpoints and tastes, filtering out opposition and increasing enthusiasm for one's outlook. Thus, a message can become entrapped in an echo chamber of like-minded users, or within a feedback loop in which users are crafting their messages exclusively for consumption by a targeted, niche audience.

Performance theorist Marcela Fuentes contends that hashtags are "gestured text" like graffiti, "transmitting affect, argumentation, belonging, and dissensus."[252] Thus, tweets are a productive category of embodied mediatized social action. They generate a sense of shared temporality that gives users the sense of "participating in" rather than "posting about" an event.[253] Papacharissi maintains that hashtags, therefore, operate as "tropes of belonging" or "affect mini-worlds."[254] Spectators and users are drawn into the emotional resonances evoked by tweets and hashtags, asserting their alliances with other users and content, and forming a "virtual body politic" that broadens the category of witness.[255] People broadcast their

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[250] Elizabeth Losh, *Hashtag* (NY and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 63.

[251] Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015), 6.

[252] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 99. Fuentes uses Seigworth and Gregg's theorization of affect. She writes, "the notion of affect invites us to attend to the force fields that move us or that suspend us in inaction" (*Performance Constellations*, 126n50).

[253] Bonilla and Rosa, 7.

[254] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 117.

[255] Laila Shereen Sakr, "A Virtual Body Politic on #Gaza: The Mobilization of Information Patterns," *Networking Knowledge* 8, no. 2 (2015), 3.

feelings, initiating a site of togetherness where they express their sadness, shock, anger, frustration, and so on. Through "the construction of shared meanings, identities and narratives" in an online public network, social media users were moved to respond to Halappanavar's death on- and off-line.[256]

Contemporaneous protest movements informed the intermedial responses to Halappanavar's death. In his seminal study of online social movements like #ArabSpring and #OccupyWallStreet, sociologist Manuel Castells argues that these campaigns were manifestations of "popular outrage," fashioned in response to oppressive government and economic regimes.[257] In the era of networked sociality and protest, Castells claims that rage fuels action: "if many individuals feel humiliated, exploited, ignored or misrepresented, they are ready to transform their anger into action, as soon as they overcome their fear."[258] When Halappanavar's story emerged, tweets indexed the visceral outrage communicated by the virtual body politic. Directing their ire at the state, users announced, "I've never been so angry. The government killed Savita, no ifs or buts about it! #RIPSavita #ashamed," and "Mother and child scheme, Magdalene homes, forced symphysiotomies, Neary, X Case, Savita. Why are pregnant women hated so much?"[259] These emotionally-charged gestures are

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[256] Paulo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 9.

[257] Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 15.

[258] Castells, 15.

[259] Kitty Ní Cnaimhsí (@PirateQueen316), Twitter, 14 November 2012, 11:27 AM GMT, http://twitter.com/ PirateQueen316/status/268676410812542976; Jim (@jimwirl), Twitter, 14 November 2012, 10:32 AM GMT, http://twitter.com/jimwirl/status/268662698517094400. See Chapter 1 for background on the Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes. From the 1940s to 1980s, a number of Irish women were subjected to symphysiotomies during childbirth without their consent. In this painful procedure (very rare in modern medicine), the cartilage and ligaments of the pubic bone are sliced through to allow for the baby to pass through the birth canal unobstructed. A symphysiotomy allows a woman to birth more children, while the

examples of what performance and media theorist Abigail de Kosnik calls "digital political performativity" embodied by those who are working to "dismantle historical structural inequities" (although, as de Kosnik notes, these online tactics are not exclusively the domain of liberal-leaning actions; they can easily be taken up by individuals working to reinforce the status quo rather than challenge it).[260] The user responses to Halappanavar's death—curated by #RIPSavita and other hashtags—formed an affective public as tweets were "textually rendered into being through emotive expressions that spread virally through networked crowds."[261]

While hashtags aggregate spontaneous, gut-reactions, the affective public is sustained, intensified, and expanded deliberately by users. Re-tweets, likes, mentions, and hashtags generate visibility and traffic (and consequently profit). While platforms like Twitter appear neutral, its streams of data are engineered by complex algorithms that advance certain users, keywords, and topics over others.[262] Thus, when users with larger networks and greater connectivity amplify a hashtag, they sustain its digital presence and reach. Social media accounts associated with pro-choice organizations like the Abortion Rights Campaign

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alternative and common caesarean section allows only two or three pregnancies and makes contraception necessary (for more information, refer to Homa Khaleeli, "Symphysiotomies: Ireland's Brutal Alternative to Caesareans," *The Guardian*, 14 December 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/dec/12/symphysiotomy-irelands-brutal-alternative-to-caesareans). Michael Neary was an obstetrician at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda who was removed from his position for performing unnecessary hysterectomies on women in the 1990s (see J. McCarthy).

[260] Abigail De Kosnik, "#CancelColbert: Popular Outrage, Divo Citizenship, and Digital Political Performativity," in *#identity: Hashtagging Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Nation*, ed. Abigail De Kosnik and Keith P. Feldman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 207. In her investigation of the labor movement in North Carolina, Jen Schradie argues that right-wing political organizations utilize digital tools more extensively and effectively than those on the left; see Schradie, *The Revolution That Wasn't: How Digital Activism Favors Conservatives*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[261] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 14.

[262] van Dijck, 68.

(ARC), Pro-Choice Campaign Ireland, and Choice Ireland, wielded these trending hashtags to gain followers and mobilize people to their cause. Castells describes networked social actions as "leaderless movements," open and democratic.[263] The multivocality of social media reinforces this concept to an extent, but a number of media theorists challenge this characterization. The participatory nature of social network platforms obscures and dissipates governance but does not jettison it entirely; in fact, a lack of clearly defined leadership often leads to the quick demise of networked protest.[264] Sociologist and political theorist Paolo Gerbaudo employs the language of choreography to explain how soft (or liquid) leaders guide the flow of online traffic that materializes in bodies who gather to occupy town squares or march in the streets.[265] Thus, hashtags are useful tactics for mobilizing bodies on- and offline. Soft leaders drive and maintain the sense of excitement and togetherness generated through online interactions, preventing it from dissipating.

Whereas Gerbaudo argues that online socialities "set the scene" for choreographed collective action in the streets, Fuentes asserts that digital media do not exclusively inform the before and after of the performance event.[266] According to Fuentes, media informs "the ontology of the protest" as a constitutive element in its construction and embodiment.[267] The participatory act of sharing via social media functions as a kind of "social choreography" that

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[263] Castells, 131.

[264] Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 78; also, Schradie, 18-19.

[265] Gerbaudo, 13.

[266] Gerbaudo, 21.

[267] Marcela A. Fuentes, "Performance Constellations: Memory and Event in Digitally Enabled Protests in the Americas," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2015), 38.

"animates these performances as affective occupations of digital, physical, and hybrid intermedial spaces."[268] Engaging with Diana Taylor's acts of transfer, Fuentes accounts for the *non*-linearity of bodily transmission and preservation across hybrid spaces and networks of body-based performance and digital media. Formulating a concept of *performance constellations*, Fuentes explains how "digital media assembles dis-located bodies and events" to offer reworkings of time, space, embodiment, and mobilization that challenge shifting neoliberal and capitalist logics.[269] When individuals virtually assemble through social media or gather in public space for vigils and rallies, these body-based performances and digital networks enable synergetic worldmaking.[270]

Public accessibility is both a strength and a potential challenge for digital networking. Social media networks flatten varied audiences into a single one, a social and spatial collapse in which users present a single identity to the public writ large. This "context collapse" means users cannot alter their self-presentation to target distinct audiences.[271] Through hashtags and other metadata, users can find common causes and concerns; however, online identities and digital content are openly accessible and thus vulnerable. A performance constellation is not a closed system, but rather an intermedial network that possesses its own susceptibilities and transience. Nonetheless, without privileging on- or offline tactics,

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[268] Fuentes, "Performance Constellations," 38.

[269] Fuentes, "Performance Constellations," 27. Also, Fuentes, *Performance Constellations,* 3.

[270] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 3.

[271] Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience," *New Media & Society* 13, no. 1 (2010), 122-23.

performance constellations theorize a framework for interrogating contemporary political movements.

Pro-choice campaigners emerged as the soft leaders of hashtags like #RIPSavita and #NeverAgain. Capitalizing on the flurry of political engagement, they quickly organized vigils and rallies in response to Halappanavar's death (Figures 2.2 and 2.4). Facebook emerged as a particularly important site to advance solidarity and bear witness to collective

Figure 2.2 Vigil for Savita in Dublin

outrage. The day Holland's article was issued, activist Sinéad Kennedy of the Pro-Choice Campaign Ireland, created a Facebook page calling for a vigil for Halappanavar outside Leinster House, the seat of the Irish Oireachtas (parliament) in Dublin. Vigils were soon planned throughout the country. Despite rain and cold, thousands of people showed up with signs resounding the feelings expressed across social media: "I am here to apologize for my country" and "I have a heartbeat too."[272] Placards echoed the trending hashtags: "Remember Savita" and "We Are All Savita," or simply the word "SHAME" in large capital block

[272] Holland, *Savita,* 96.

letters.[273] As I discussed in this chapter's opening pages, Paula Meehan read from her poem, "The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks," flanked by posters featuring the Savita Photo.

When Holland wrote her exposé, she asked for a photo of Halappanavar to accompany the story. In the portrait (given to her by Savita's friend Mrdula Vaseali) Halappanavar appears in traditional Indian dress for Diwali (see Figure 2.1). She smiles broadly at the camera, showing her straight, bright white teeth. Her head is turned slightly. She wears bold, red lipstick that glistens on her bottom lip. She has a small beauty mark below her lip. Her dark hair hangs loosely around her face and over her shoulders. She is wearing dangling, sparkling gold earrings and a white, diamond-shaped bindi on her forehead. At the center of her hairline, she wears a round diamond tika. Her large brown eyes are accentuated by rosy eye shadow and black eyeliner and mascara around them.

While these elements partially capture attributes of Halappanavar's identity, the repetition of these qualities are commodified through the image's reproduction. The femininity displayed in the photo renders her body desirable; the exoticism of the bindi, tika, and jewelry mark her body distinctly non-Irish. Her smiling face dramatizes the tragedy of her death, while her youth and conventional beauty coalesce into an image that sells crisis and grief. The proliferation of this specific facsimile portrait across print and digital media rendered her face instantly recognizable. People immediately identified "Savita," the woman whose story spread so far and wide that she only needs one name. In *Regarding the Pain of Others,* Susan Sontag observes that "photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as

[273] Michelle Hennessy, "Vigils Held Around the Country for Savita Halappanavar," *The Journal,* 15 November 2012. Accessed 28 November 2018, http://jrnl.ie/675072.

totems of causes."[274] The virality of Halappanavar's story charts these paths of recognition as her photo and story traveled across the Internet, was transmitted via television, and materialized in print.

Figure 2.3 Clockwise from left to right: Ceramic pin designed by Emily Ross and Martina Skelly in 2018; Illustration by Laura McCauliffe from *Mine Anthology* (2018); Cut away of Repeal mural by Shirani Bolle in 2018 (next to her portrait are the words "Don't choose death, Vote Yes"); Still from Laura Fitzpatrick's short film *Silent Killer: A Timeline of the Death of Savita Halappanavar* (2017).

In juxtaposition with Holland's headline, "Woman 'Denied a Termination' Dies in Hospital," or in conjunction with protest signs emblazoned with the slogan "Never Again," Halappanavar's portrait is cast against the backdrop of a powerful scenario of public grief

[274] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 85.

and culpability. Captions like these are given greater meaning in conjoining them with Halappanavar's image. As Sontag explains, "sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan."[275] Illustrations and other artist renderings employ the distinctive qualities of this portrait to ensure Halappanavar's intelligibility (see Figure 2.3).

While the crowd had gathered for the Savita Vigil under the impetus of dissent, the event's tone was indicative of a funeral; people were eerily quiet and reflective. They were crying, carrying lit candles, and sitting on the street silently with their eyes closed. When activist Sinéad Ahern, founding member of Choice Ireland, stood to speak to the crowd, all she could think of to say was "sorry." For these mourners, tweeting and sharing Holland's article were not enough; they were compelled to assemble to physically share in collective bereavement. Yet, the atmosphere of this protest was not overtly charged with outrage like so much of the online networked activity.

Figure 2.4 March for Savita in Dublin

[275] Sontag, 85.

A national protest, the March for Savita, was held three days after the vigils on November 17, 2012. According to Holland, the mood of this event had shifted to outrage since the solemnity of the vigil. People marched in the rain chanting the event's theme, "Never Again." Sinéad Kennedy observed that this protest was different from any other pro-choice rally held before; attendees included parents pushing their children in strollers, men and women in equal measure.[276] The organizers from ARC placed the Halappanavars' images at the center of the event; large banners of Savita's face were encircled with lights that lit up as the sun set. When the marchers reached Merrion Square outside the government buildings, people lit candles "for Savita and for our own failure as a country to enact a change that could have saved her."[277] A March for Savita was also held in Galway, where about a thousand people gathered in Eyre Square just down the street from the memorial statue in honor of the Magdalenes. Additional marches happened in Kilkenny, Carlow, Sligo and London. In Belfast, the crowd held candles and chanted the Indian song "Om Shanti Om," "Peace be with you" in Hindi. Tweets that called out the government for its responsibility in Halappanavar's death were animated by bodies collectively occupying public space.

These two modes of radical performance, the vigil and formal protest march, engage in overlapping but distinct "dramaturgies of protest."[278] Both events were emotionally charged with grief and anger, respectively. Both events relied upon narratives of shame and

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[276] Holland, *Savita*, 99.

[277] Doherty and Redmond, 274.

[278] Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

the need to apologize for Ireland's law. Both events relied upon mobilizing material bodies to occupy public space together. The vigil was stationary, affording the chance for reflection and stillness; yet, performed against the backdrop of a state building, the symbol of the Irish government and its legislators, their presence in the shadow of Leinster House demands they be noticed by the state. The contemplative nature, shared grief, and silence counter the mobility and noise of the march. Moreover, the significant meaning of the vigil lies in how quickly and seemingly spontaneously people responded with little time to plan or prepare. People felt compelled to participate; they were moved by the need to come together, to do something.

The interplay of print and digital narratives and off- and online gatherings in response to Halappanavar's death generate multisited and asynchronous scenes of encounter. The sustained dissemination of hashtags like #RIPSavita and #NeverAgain enact a multiplatformed, (re)mediated performance in response to this affective interaction. As these examples demonstrate, the Internet is not merely a tool for (potentially) mobilizing bodies for conventional activist practices. Social media users utilized online platforms to manifest an affective public to bear witness to Halappanavar's death and insist on state culpability. The *in situ* events that followed are not isolated performances either; rather these "constellative, connective dramaturgies" of on- and offline protest challenge the differentiation of unmediated, bodily events from networked sociality. Through "affective circulation," performance constellations unite bodies locally situated with bodies globally dispersed on the other side of screens.[279] These simultaneously local and global modes of participation are

[279] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 3.

vital to the emergence and persistence of Halappanavar's role in the Repeal movement. Her hypervisibility, initiated by the virality of #Savita and #RIPSavita, was sustained by activists and campaigns through the remediation of her image and name. These performance constellations enacted scenarios of mourning (#RIPSavita and the candlelight vigil) and proclaimed responsibility (#NeverAgain and the March for Savita). Yet, the sudden visibility of Savita's image raises concerns about reproductive rights discourses. The abundance of Halappanavar's image by the Pro-Choice campaign emphasizes the historical invisibility of (white) Irish women as political agents and symbols. The exclusion of Irish women's experiences is normalized to such an extent that a *non*-Irish female body became the national symbol of reproductive rights. Denying bodily autonomy to one's countrywomen is commonplace but limiting the rights of a guest in the country takes matters too far.

People were outraged by the gap between Halappanavar's identity as a non-Irish, non-Catholic woman who fell victim to Irish law. This rift exposes how institutions have become messily entwined with a deep-seated Catholic moral code that sacrifices the pregnant body for the fetal one. Ultimately, generations of Irish citizens contributed to the preservation of this ethical foundation through a cultural indifference to women's reproductive rights. Hence, in the aftermath of Halappanavar's death, a sense of personal responsibility energized the Repeal movement, employing Savita's image to garner support. #NeverAgain symbolizes this self-determination for reform, becoming an expression of one's commitment to act. As a visual symbol of the pro-choice movement, Halappanavar's image is complicated by those attributes that mobilized the public writ large—her non-Irish, non-Catholic body. Her intersectional identity as a woman and a brown body problematizes the reiteration of her image in the Repeal campaign, fostering questions about Irish national identity and racial and

gender differences. As Halappanavar asserted, she is neither Irish nor Catholic; her refrain disturbs the (mis)appropriation of her photograph to overturn legislation that has historically been synonymous with Irish and Catholic identities.

Performative Labor: Gender, Race, and National Identity

While the Savita Photo represents Pro-Choice principles including bodily autonomy and reproductive justice, the image re-enacts scenarios of worship entrenched in patriarchy and whiteness. As a symbol inscribed on public spaces, Savita performs a vision of Ireland as an intercultural society, progressive and secular.[280] Yet, her image occupies public spaces already marked by representations of the Virgin Mary, the epitome of maternalism and whiteness. As described in the previous chapter, Marian statues proliferate throughout Ireland at wayside shrines and churches, in community green spaces throughout suburbia and among bustling city streets; they occupy sequestered spaces like the grotto at Granard, as well as widely accessible urban areas where commuters pass on their way to work. These iconographic representations weave the devotional into everyday life across the island.[281] The hypervisibility of Savita therefore troubles the promise of interculturalism in raising concerns

[280] I use the term "intercultural" following Charlotte McIvor's approach which accounts for how the term encompasses both a social policy formation as well as an aesthetic practice. In focusing on the Republic of Ireland since the 1990s, McIvor asserts that interculturalism symbolizes "an ideal process in which minority-ethnic communities can transform the meaning of the Irish nation without losing their own identities or entirely displacing 'Irish' culture" (Charlotte McIvor, *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland: Towards a New Interculturalism* [London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016], 7.

[281] O'Mahony, 14. Notably, O'Mahony recounts being confronted by a man at the Marian statue at Broadstone Bus Garage in Dublin in 2017 because he was wearing a Repeal pin. The man was upset that someone had placed a Repeal sign around the statue's neck a year prior (18). This story exposes how these public statues realize a sense of belonging that transcends religious and political affiliation. As O'Mahony argues, Marian statues and their continuity of place into the twenty-first century are part of the community identity experienced by individuals regardless of religious or secular attitudes.

about which bodies threaten the integrity of the Irish state and which ones reproduce it. As a symbol, her migrant, brown body re-nationalizes Irish as white, settled, and Catholic.[282]

When Halappanavar's story became known, the midwife's comment that "this is a Catholic country" captured the public's attention as another example of the ways in which the Church has imposed its will on people's lives; like the sex abuse scandals and revelations about the treatment of women in mother and baby homes and Magdalene laundries, here was further evidence that the Church had gone too far. A medical professional had openly articulated healthcare treatment based on religious ideology rather than on "evidence-based medicine."[283] McCarthy emphasizes the accuracy of the midwife's statement; the Eighth Amendment *is* a product of religious conviction.[284] Moreover, McCarthy stresses that none of the conversations about abortion between Savita or Praveen and the midwife or doctors are recorded in medical notes. The reticence on this issue betrays the "uneasiness" about openly discussing abortion and discloses "a lack of respect for, and inability to respond appropriately to, a woman's request for an abortion."[285]

Nonetheless, directing blame squarely at the Catholic Church obscures the complicity of the state and the public at large in perpetuating anti-feminist discourses and institutions. The healthcare that Halappanavar received (or was denied) was informed by the cooperation

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[282] The term settled is applied to non-Traveller people in Ireland whose "settled, non-nomadic status" institutionalizes and perpetuates their privilege (Eithne Luibhéid, "Sexual Regimes and Migration Controls: Reproducing the Irish Nation-State in Transnational Contexts," *Feminist Review* 83 [2006]: 3, n. 6). See also Oaks.

[283] J. McCarthy, 19.

[284] J. McCarthy, 20. McCarthy praises the midwife Ann Burke for her "sensitive response" in trying to assuage Halappanavar's confusion as to why abortion was not a valid course of treatment in the Irish context (20).

[285] J. McCarthy, 20.

between law and Catholicism in the Republic. As cultural theorist Gerardine Meaney attests, in the Irish social imaginary, the horrors and struggles of history—the Great Famine, the Magdalene laundries and mother and baby homes, the sexual abuse scandals of the Catholic Church—have been relegated to the distant past, replaced by progressive and liberatory policies—e.g., the legalization of divorce and same-sex marriage, and the influx of migrants from less industrialized and affluent countries. However, this narrative of reconciliation depends upon burying "the evidence of the *persistence* of structures of conformity, domination and exclusion at the heart of Irish society and culture."[286] In Halappanavar's experience, these regimes function in complex ways given her status as a migrant and pregnant body. As her image was incorporated into Repeal campaign rhetoric that challenged social tradition and reproductive policies, her non-white and non-national identity further problematized definitions of Irishness and the struggles of progress against the weight of history.

Sociologist Nirmal Puwar explains that women are granted recognition in the nation-state within the confines of motherhood and delineations of the feminine.[287] Feminine concepts like motherhood, land, and justice establish the boundaries of who women can be and where they are allowed to be. In Ireland, womanhood and motherhood are synonymous realities.[288] In the nineteenth century, pre-Christian Celtic iconography that had defined womanhood as empowering, sexual, and independent was expunged against the backdrop of

[286] Meaney, xv; emphasis added.

[287] Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender, and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), 26.

[288] Ailbhe Smyth, "The Politics of Abortion in a Police State" in *The Abortion Papers Ireland* ed. by Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press, 1992), 143.

increasing nationalism and the consolidating authority of the Catholic Church, both of which affirmed Irish identity in opposition to the English Protestant colonizers.[289] Insurgent nationalism embraced the trope of Mother Ireland (often embodied in the figure of Cathleen Ni Houlihan) who sought the blood sacrifice of her sons for the sake of liberation. Thus, Mother Ireland represents a figure of mourning who laments her dead, as well as a crusader who inspires young men to take up arms.[290]

The burgeoning Irish state fused nationalist iconography with Catholicism through the congruence of Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary, particularly *Mater Dolorosa*.[291] The cult of the Virgin Mary had flourished in Ireland from the nineteenth century. Initially, clergy represented the Virgin as "the active protectress" of Ireland.[292] Historian Margaret MacCurtain describes how, during the era of the Famine (1845-49), the Virgin Mary evolved into a passive and somber figure.[293] If the Famine reveals God as punisher, then the Irish turned to the Virgin as the sorrowful mother (*Mater Dolorosa*) or Our Lady of the Sorrows as a means to fathom the severity of the Famine. Through her grief, the ordinary person could feel the weight of loss through prayer; hence, she focuses human feeling "in a

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[289] Adele Dalsimer and Vera Kreilkamp, "Re/Dressing Mother Ireland: Feminist Imagery in Art and Literature" in *Re/Dressing Cathleen: Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists*, ed. Jennifer Grinnell and Alison Conley (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, 1997), 37.

[290] *Mother Ireland*, directed by Ann Crilly (Derry Film & Video, 1998).

[291] Meaney, 7.

[292] Laura Lyons, "Feminist Articulations of the Nation: The 'Dirty' Women of Armagh and the Discourse of Mother Ireland" in *On Your Left: Historical Materialism in the 1990s*, ed. Ann Kibbey, Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 114.

[293] *Mother Ireland*.

comprehensible and accessible way."[294] As such, Mary's image as a devoted and sorrowful mother who sacrifices her son became entwined with Mother Ireland who made her own maternal sacrifices for national independence.[295] Moreover, Catholic ideology employed *Mater Dolorosa* iconography to establish a role model for Irish women.[296]

Constructing a national, gendered identity around Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary was predicated upon the maternal body being "idealized out of existence, or at least out of representation," according to Meaney.[297] In contrast to other Marian depictions in Europe, Ireland's representations of Mary portray her as a decidedly *un*maternal figure—as the mother of an adult son rather than as the origin of life.[298] Thus, the female body is desexualized to account for the purity of the Virgin. As wife and mother responsible for the maintenance of the (heterosexual) family, the maternal body is relegated to the private, domestic space, unseen and immaterial to public (and political) life. Those bodies that defy the confines and influence of the Church or State are labeled unruly and polluted.

Memorializing Halappanavar's maternal suffering and loss re-ignites scenarios of worship associated with the *Mater Dolorosa*. In vigils commemorating her death, mourners lit candles and carried Halappanavar's portrait. Tributes in the form of a makeshift altar are frequently constructed around her image with candles and other votive offerings (Figure 2.5).

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[294] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 211. Warner explains how the cult of the *Mater Dolorosa* emerges in Europe during the eleventh century (Chapter 14).

[295] Meaney, 7.

[296] Lyons, 114.

[297] Meaney, 7.

[298] Meaney, 8.

At the limit of verbal expressions of mourning, bodies are induced to respond through *kinesthetic imagination*, “a way of thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable, just as dance is often said to be a way of expressing the unspeakable.”[299] Theater historian Joseph Roach theorizes kinesthetic imagination to explain those bodily performances made manifest through cultural memory and everyday behaviors. The sentiments of loss ignited by Halappanavar’s death manifests potent cultural scenarios of mourning associated with Marianism. As such, kinesthetic imagination accounts for the multifaceted texture of the vigils for Halappanavar; these moments express a potent legacy of idealized maternalism and myopic characterizations of womanhood.

Figure 2.5 “Altar” at Belfast Vigil on Fifth Anniversary of Halappanavar’s Death

These performances of mourning depend upon Halappanavar’s grievability, the recognition that her body is worth lamenting. Critical theorist Judith Butler advocates a reconsideration of the positive potential of grief as a mobilizing emotion, not one of stasis or paralyzing pain. Instead, grief can be employed as a political resource.[300] Grief, she asserts, “may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with

[299] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 27.

[300] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004).

suffering itself."[301] For Butler, mourning presents a new way to consider community formation and social relations. Through a consideration of the vulnerability of bodies, we can recognize the geopolitical systems that unevenly distribute corporeal vulnerability. Lives are supported and maintained differently, and thus bodies experience susceptibility in radically different ways.[302] The online and digital protests are evidence of Butler's contention that grief can benefit political action; in this case, activating affective publics to express private feelings and opinions in public forums. This exposes Halappanavar's corporeal vulnerability as a woman and a person of color living in Ireland. Furthermore, as a performance of citizenship, the protests actively acknowledge Halappanavar's *material* vulnerability. This recognition inscribes her body as a grievable one—as a body with value.[303]

The affective publics mobilized by Savita's image are entangled in a messy imbrication of performances of history and those of futurity. The cultural residue of *Mater Dolorosa* complicates the desire for a more inclusive society in that it stages Halappanavar as a grievable body through the iconography of the sorrowful mother. This association re-nationalizes an Irishness embedded with tropes of Catholic moral legibility that advance maternalism and justify state control over pregnant bodies. Halappanavar's experience is marked by loss—of her bodily autonomy, of her child, and finally, of her life. This national trauma precedes her life in Ireland and proceeds after her death at the hands of its jurisprudence. In responding to her death, people were moved by the need to contest this

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[301] Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, and Politics," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 4, no. 1 (2003), 19.

[302] Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, and Politics."

[303] For more on grievable bodies, see Butler's "Violence, Mourning, and Politics," *Precarious Life*, and *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009).

legacy and break the cycle of violence and suffering enacted across pregnant bodies. Yet, the martyrdom of Halappanavar persists in victimizing her in the shadow of the *Mater Dolorosa*.

The tension between Halappanavar's sacrifice and its impact makes her a compelling figure in the campaign. Her portrait evolved as a signifier of redress symbolizing a lived experience to embody pro-choice discourses. As such, Irish citizens imagine themselves to be increasingly secular, progressive, and liberal, acknowledging a pregnant person's right to bodily integrity. However, advancing "Savita" as a cultural icon relies upon her ongoing injury, constantly reiterating the painful loss of her wanted child and the mental and physical suffering she endured. Thus, her image indexes maternal sacrifice, conjoining tragic loss and her smiling face. Placing the Savita Photo within the context of vigils and altars re-enacts the valorization of the *Mater Dolorosa*, thereby concretizing the phenomenon of maternal martyrdom and worship that props up national identity.

The maternal image of suffering and sacrifice forecloses the reality of most pregnant people who access termination. Inadvertently, the binary that pits acts of shame against acts of purity and moral chastity is reactivated in this performance of maternalism. Savita is the appropriate kind of mother: cis-gendered, heterosexual, and married. As a pregnant body, she is worthy of being commemorated for these normative qualities. Restaging these scenarios of motherhood in an Irish context forecloses those people with crisis pregnancies who choose not to carry or birth a child for a variety of reasons—lack of sufficient income, not the right time, or not wanting to parent. Feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva posits that representations of the virginal alleviate social anxiety.[304] Thus, commemorations of Savita have a way of

[304] Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," 135.

perpetuating a moral status quo, even while asserting Halappanavar's right to bodily autonomy. In Repeal campaign discourses, performances of remembrance for Halappanavar inadvertently advocate for a grievable body while subjugating the unruly female body who challenges the limits of conventional Irish motherhood.

As an archetype, the Virgin Mary is not only the epitome of purity; she also embodies the linkage of whiteness to Irish national identity, a paradigm that has become increasingly problematic in contemporary intercultural Ireland.[305] Immigrant labor has become an integral part of the burgeoning economy.[306] Fiscal strength and diverse population are indicators of neoliberal Ireland's rising status as an influential force in the EU and abroad. Hence, the nation's status as "a showpiece of globalisation" bolsters national pride for the Republic's accomplishments.[307]

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[305] Meaney, 6.

[306] Currently, the Celtic Phoenix, the term frequently used to describe the Republic's financial rebound (or rise from the ashes) after the global recession in 2008, relies upon the "free movement of peoples" and "inflow of a multi-lingual workforce" (Aidan Regan and Samuel Brazys, "Celtic Phoenix or Leprechaun Economics? The Politics of an FDI-led Growth Model in Europe," *New Political Economy* 23, no.2 [2018], 224). In the 1990s, the Irish economic boom, what was called the Celtic Tiger (a term inspired by the East Asian Tigers of the 1980s and 1990s and was first used by Morgan Stanley in 1994), originally opened the nation to migrant labor. See Peadar Kirby, *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model*, 2nd ed. (New York and UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[307] Nicola Jo-Anne Smith, *Showcasing Globalisation? The Political Economy of the Irish Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 2. Neoliberal Ireland is not devoid of the present-day populist movement against migrants and refugees, however, baring a persistent anxiety about "new models of Irish identity" (Matthew Causey, "*Jus Soli*/*Jus Sanguinis*: The Biopolitics of Performing Irishness," in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, eds. Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh [Hampshire, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009] 153). Peter Casey, a wealthy businessman who ran for President in 2018, is indicative of the presence of a populist movement in Ireland. Casey positioned himself as the voice of rural Ireland, and, after making derogatory comments against the Traveller community, he gained significant popularity in the polls. Ultimately, he finished second in the election to incumbent President Michael D. Higgins. The support he garnered, however, reveals troubling agreement for his anti-immigrant, anti-welfare system policies. Prior to the presidential vote, one activist told me that in repealing the Eighth Amendment, she believed the Irish majority was saying no to the Alt-Right and Fascism in Ireland. Certainly, Casey's defeat can be seen as a continuation of this viewpoint. Regardless, nationalist populism persists, fueled by growing social predicaments like gentrification, housing crises, and failures of the Direct Provision system to name a few.

Contemporary Irish (white) identity has been constructed in part by espousing its history as a nation of emigrants. Nationalists typically viewed outward migration as a "blight" on Irish society.[308] Following the Great Famine, emigration was invoked as a symbol of colonial oppression, a product of "a lack of territorial sovereignty" that could be resolved through independence.[309] In the 1990s, cultural attitudes about emigration shifted to commemoration for the Irish diaspora around the world; as cultural critic Fintan O'Toole observes, Ireland "often happens elsewhere."[310] Thus, public discourse touted the "moral responsibility" of the modern Irish citizen toward humanitarian crises in under-developed areas of the world.[311] Sociologist Steve Garner identifies this cultural ethos as a "historical duty" to migrant populations; the Irish have an ethical obligation to support other emigrants because of their own history of outward migration.[312] Ireland has enlarged beyond a geographical territory to include a diaspora around the world, and thus, the nation is duty-bound to incorporate "other people's diasporas" into its system.[313]

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[308] Jim Mac Laughlin, "Emigration and the Construction of Nationalist Hegemony in Ireland: The Historical Background to 'New Wave' Irish Emigration," in *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities*, ed. Jim Mac Laughlin (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 5.

[309] Breda Gray, "Unmasking Irishness: Irish Women, the Irish Nation and the Irish Diaspora," in *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities*, ed. Jim Mac Laughlin (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 210.

[310] Fintan O'Toole, *Black Hole, Green Card: The Disappearance of Ireland* (Dublin: New Island Books 1994), 27.

[311] Emily Mark FitzGerald, "Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Famine Memory," in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, eds. Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh (Hampshire, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 88.

[312] Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2004), 159-60.

[313] Garner, 158.

The "historical duty" argument is used by politicians, artists, activists, and academics to encourage identification with migrants through a shared legacy of colonial oppression. Performance scholar Charlotte McIvor describes it as an "*affective* and *ethical* capacity" to recognize common qualities of a migrant experience.[314] Thus, when Irish describe Halappanavar as "our guest" who had been treated poorly,[315] the sense of ethical obligation generates an affective response of inadequacy.[316] Activist-performer Lynne McCarthy of Speaking of IMELDA explains of the response to Halappanavar's situation, "[I]t's very easy to shame the Irish if they're being inhospitable."[317] This statement deepens the complexity of a tweet that self-referentially engages the tag #ashamed or a protest sign pronouncing "SHAME." These assertions convey the complexity of Halappanavar's double bind in which she is differenced by her race as well as her gender.

During the 1990s Celtic Tiger, "the Irish became used to hearing Polish spoken in the pubs and on the buses, to being served by Chinese waiters and Latin American waitresses in the restaurants, and seeing shops opened for Middle Easterners, Eastern Europeans, Africans and Asians."[318] The dawn of the twenty-first century, however, challenged the limits of historical duty and hospitality. This period marked a mounting apprehension about the

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[314] McIvor, 117. Conversely to my own application of affect, McIvor employs the term to account for the "structures of feeling," the repertoire of sentiments and thoughts that emerge from historical or social phenomena. McIvor's engagement with affect is nonetheless constructive because it foregrounds embodied repertoires of behavior and their relationality.

[315] Grace Dyas, interview by author, October 18, 2018.

[316] Here, I am extending McIvor's use of affect beyond emotion and feeling to a general sensibility toward the world. See Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 15; Seigworth and Gregg, 8.

[317] Lynne McCarthy, interview by author, October 25, 2018.

[318] Kirby, 2.

number of migrant bodies occupying Irish soil. In particular, citizens grew increasingly uncomfortable with the "ubiquitous visibility" of migrant women "walking the streets of Irish cities with their baby strollers."[319] How these migrant women and their families came to be in Ireland were of little consequence in the public imaginary; regardless of their legal status, asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants were lumped into the single category "non-nationals," the popular pejorative used at the time.[320] This term entrenches the language of difference and articulates the threshold of belonging. "Non-national" implies that one occupies a liminal space without country, caught in a borderland somewhere between homeland and national recognition (a strange irony given that the expansion of *multi*-national corporations into Ireland drives one of the main reasons for immigrant presence in the country). Furthermore, a "non-national" may have Irish citizenship and still be perceived and labeled a "non-national." This designation marks the individual as beyond the bounds of national recognition and identity. Accordingly, citizenship is not a guarantor of equal treatment under law.

The fear directed at "non-nationals" was not aimed at the migrants entering Ireland from Eastern European countries enjoying the benefits of recently joining the EU. "Legitimate" immigrants (from places like Poland, Lithuania, and Romania) were racialized as white and permitted to move freely about the country. Conversely, "bad" or "bogus"

[319] Ronit Lentin, "Strangers and Strollers: Feminist Notes on Researching Migrant M/others" *Women's Studies International Forum* 27 (2004), 302.

[320] Garner; Lentin. I use the term in quotations marks here to emphasize its problematic nature. African women were the most direct targets of this rhetoric. While there were a significant number of asylum seekers from Nigeria during that period, there were also many Eastern European asylum seekers. The disparity in treatment based on country of origin further emphasizes the ways in which migration was racialized in advance of the Citizenship Referendum. See Eithne Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival: Making the Illegal Immigrant* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

migrants (from nations such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Ghana) were marked Other based upon the perceived color of their skin. As such, Irish nationalism is implicitly affirmed white. Accordingly, "non-national" women, particularly pregnant people, became the primary targets of racist legislation and social discord. Their Othered bodies were displays of difference as they occupied Irish national spaces not made for them. As Puwar attests, these non-white women are "space invaders" whose public presence provokes a phenomenon of collective anxiety driven by their extreme visibility and thus making them a threat to be met with feelings of terror.[321] Women's bodies and the bodies of people of color belong differently in physical spaces that have been crafted for white men. These bodies are hypervisible, even disorienting, in their not-belonging as bodies out-of-place. Their uncannily absent presence fuels a psychic paranoia that irrationally amplifies the threat and numbers of migrant bodies. This rhetoric argues that vast numbers of immigrants are occupying a space in which *they* do not belong, creating problems and taking jobs from more deserving citizens.

The peak of Irish anxiety about "non-national" bodies occupying Irish territory culminated in the Citizenship Referendum in 2004. Amid a "moral panic" about birth tourism, the Irish law strove to control pregnant women's travel *into* the country.[322] Prior to the legislation, Irish citizenship was granted by birthright; anyone born on Irish soil was granted citizenship. Driven by racial anxieties, however, the public believed pregnant refugees and migrants were entering the country exclusively to gain permanent residency via

[321] Puwar, 33, 49.

[322] Ronit Lentin, "A Woman Died: Abortion and the Politics of Birth in Ireland" *Feminist Review* no. 105, (2013), 131.

childbirth. The tale went as follows: a pregnant woman enters the country from a poor, underdeveloped nation; gives birth to a child at the expense of the national healthcare service; the child is automatically granted citizen status, and, as the parent of an Irish citizen, she will not be deported back to her homeland. Legally remaining in Ireland, she and her child will exhaust social welfare schemes, taking valuable resources away from other (white) Irish citizens. To counter this narrative, a national referendum changed birthright citizenship laws; citizenship is now granted by bloodline—at least one parent must be an Irish citizen. As a result, nationalism becomes a "deterritorialized notion of belonging."[323] Indeed, political sociologist Ronit Lentin explains, as a diaspora nation O'Toole's comment that Ireland happens elsewhere is particularly salient.[324]

The nation's control of movement of racialized bodies is an unfortunate colonial value that Ireland has internalized.[325] The Citizenship Referendum re-articulates Irish as white and obscures the racial identities of non-white Irish living on the island for centuries, including the Traveller community.[326] The selection criteria for citizenship are constructed into immigration law in ways that continue to discriminate against certain people based upon

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[323] Sinéad Moynihan, *"Other People's Diasporas": Negotiating Race in Contemporary Irish and Irish American Culture* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 12.

[324] Ronit Lentin, "Illegal in Ireland, Irish Illegals: Diaspora Nation as Racial State," *Irish Political Studies* 22, no. 4 (2007), 433.

[325] Garner, 249.

[326] As a number of scholars have exposed, discrimination against a number of ethnic and cultural social groups was not a biproduct of the Celtic Tiger, but had existed in Ireland for centuries (see Bill Rolston and Michael Shannon, *Encounters: How Racism Came to Ireland* [Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2002]; also Robbie McVeigh, Steve Garner, Bryan Fanning, Ronit Lentin, Eithne Luibhéid). The country has its own painful history of racial discrimination practices characterized by (ongoing) racism against Traveller communities, as well as anti-Semitism (see Robbie McVeigh, "The Specificity of Irish Racism," *Race & Class* 33, no. 4 [1992], Lentin and McVeigh, *After Optimism? Ireland, Racism, and Globalization* [Dublin: Metro Éireann Publications, 2006], Chapters 7 & 8).

race, gender, sexuality, economic status, education, etc., and thus marking certain bodies as more valuable than others.[327] The discourse of "crisis racism" frames exclusionary legal practices as a necessary rejoinder to social problems for which blame has been displaced from nationals to "non-nationals."[328] This process of "immigrant selection" purports to be based on neoliberal principles like competition, rewarding hard work, and advancing the educated. In fact, the system discriminates among "applicants on the basis of choosing those who best meet the needs and values of the nation-state," and those individuals who are not-white, poor, unskilled, and who are largely women, fall outside of the state's "needs and values."[329] As such, the female immigrant body is marked as surplus and disposable, reproducing difference as a marker of Othered bodies.

Consequently, Halappanavar's death is not solely about the regulation of reproductive bodies in Ireland; the incident highlights how migrant women and their reproduction are cast as endangering the integrity of the Irish state.[330] Feminist scholar Eithne Luibhéid argues that, amongst globalization and interculturalism in contemporary Ireland, the country aims to *re*-nationalize Irish identity via the bodies of migrant mothers. Those Irish people who do not fit the racial and ethnic norm, including Travellers, Jews, Blacks, and Muslims, are "not the ones whose childbearing [is] imagined as reproducing the nation."[331] The Constitutional

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[327] Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival*.

[328] Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Crisis," trans. by Chris Turner, in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, eds. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 217-227; Garner.

[329] Catherine Dauvergne, *Making People Illegal: What Globalization Means for Migration and Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) quoted in Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival*, 7.

[330] Lentin, "A Woman Died," 130-136.

[331] Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival*, 17. Travellers are an indigenous, traditionally nomadic, minority ethnic group in Ireland. While they are often pejoratively labeled "Gypsies," they are ethnically distinct from

imperative authorizes *white* Catholic Irish mothers with the ethical duty to bear children in order to maintain the country. If "the body of woman creates and contains birth-nations," then the state imperative is "to strictly control female sexuality."[332] Working from Foucault's notions of biopolitics presented in his lecture "Society Must Be Defended," Lentin contends Halappanavar was "made die" in order to "make live" her unborn fetus.[333] Her life was forfeited to enable the social imaginary of the "truly Irish," constructed (white) Catholic and thus anti-abortion in all circumstances. Her death re-nationalizes Irish identity as Catholic and moral. For those Irish who were not hardline pro-life Catholics, this realization is particularly detestable and reveals why the midwife's reasoning, "this is a Catholic country," articulates a painful reality. For those Irish mobilized to tweet and assemble at vigils and marches, Halappanavar's sacrifice is irreconcilable with the progressive, secular Ireland of contemporary globalism.

Anthropologist Anwen Tormey connects the historical duty argument to the treatment of non-citizen mothers in contemporary Ireland. The prevalence of neoliberal discourses of individualism and self-determination complicate the situation for migrants. They are expected to "reciprocate Irish hospitality" by demonstrating their value to the economy and

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the Roma peoples; however, Irish Travellers identify politically with the collective of Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers in England and Wales (see Amanda Haynes, Sindy Joyce, and Jennifer Schweppe, "The Significance of the Declaration of Ethnic Minority Status for Irish Travellers," *Nationalities Papers* [2020], 1–19; see also, The Equality Authority, *Traveller Ethnicity: An Equality Authority Report* [Dublin: The Equality Authority, 2006] http://hdl.handle.net/10147/44960).

[332] Lentin, "A Woman Died," 134.

[333] Lentin, "A Woman Died," 135. Foucault writes that, in the nineteenth century, the right of sovereignty was complemented by a new right "which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it. This is the right, or rather precisely the opposite right. It is the power to 'make' live and 'let' die. The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die" (Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended:" Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey [New York: Picador, [1997] 2003], 241).

society.[334] Rather than "sponging off" a welfare regime, migrants must work and positively contribute to the society that has offered them a home. Tormey avers that, embedded in this rhetoric, is a sense of morality that commends a legacy of Irish immigrants as those who worked hard to prove themselves worthy of "social and political ascendance."[335] Luibhéid affirms that recent migration policies are driven by "neoliberal regimes of capital accumulation and forms of social life that valorize entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, privatization, and reduced or nonexistent social spending."[336] The discourses identified by Tormey and Luibhéid perpetuate notions of the deserving or undeserving migrant. Pitting the "good" migrant against the "bad" one is an ineffectual compromise between moral obligation and sensibilities of progressive society, and the perceived moral degradation of certain foreign-nationals—namely pregnant people.

While the Irish state conjoins womanhood with motherhood and the private space of the home as enshrined in the Constitution, migrant mothers are not afforded the same (suspect) right. They must contribute to the economic sphere in order to avoid being deemed "bad" migrants—"parasites, spongers, and an *undesirable* 'type' of being."[337] In her book *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland*, Charlotte McIvor investigates the "twinned categories of compulsion for migrant women," in which their *economic* and

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[334] Anwen Tormey, "'Everyone with Eyes Can See the Problem': Moral Citizens and the Space of Irish Nationhood" *International Migration* 45, no. 3 (2007), 80.

[335] Tormey, 80.

[336] Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival*, 7.

[337] Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival*, 17, emphasis added.

reproductive labor are demanded in service of the nation and its citizens.[338] They are expected to contribute to the market system that demands a need for their labor (outside the home) so they are not perceived as "sponging" off the social welfare scheme. But they are also expected to reproduce correctly according to ethical and juridical limits. Thus, McIvor identifies a third category in which migrant women's bodies "have no option but *to* perform as a matter of course in everyday life through the[ir] hypervisibility […] in Irish public space."[339] This *performative labor* occurs at the intersection of their workforce participation and social reproduction, a symbolic expression that re-nationalizes Irish identity and perpetuates a vision of the Republic as the "showpiece of globalization."

Halappanavar's performative labor complicates her status as a Repeal icon. She was a "good" migrant according to neoliberal principles; she and her husband were in a position to return the hospitality afforded them by Irish society and institutions. Thus, Halappanavar's performative labor—made visible through the image of her commemorated in Savita—has significant value to the Irish state. In contrast to "non-nationals," she is an acceptable immigrant (a middle-class professional) who advances Ireland's neoliberal agenda. Therefore, her image reflects Irishness as cosmopolitan and progressive. Savita and Praveen's successful life in Ireland becomes a construction of contemporary Irishness re-nationalized by a desirably globalized, intercultural country with opportunities for a better life for those from abroad. Thus, the performative labor of Savita's body and image functions in the service of re-inscribing national identity on white, settled, and Catholic bodies.

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[338] McIvor, 156.

[339] McIvor, 156, emphasis original.

The widespread and rapid transmission of Halappanavar's image reverberates with her absent voice. In a nation in which pregnant people are silenced, the propagation of "Savita" substitutes her image for her voice. Under anti-abortion legislation, pregnant people cannot speak; their voices are ignored and subsumed by fetal heartbeats. Despite the hypervisibility of Savita's image, her voice—as a non-Irish and not white—is frequently muted. In this context, Halappanavar is doubly silenced—as a woman and a brown body in public spaces devised to accommodate whiteness. McIvor investigates how historical duty reactivates performances of loss and recuperation. Using Roach's notion of surrogation in her analysis of contemporary Irish theater, McIvor asserts, "contemporary asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants […] find themselves cast in the role of proxies for the dead as supplicants for a better future that still can be shaped by Irish citizens for themselves now."[340] In plays about the status of migrants in present-day Ireland such as Sonya Kelly's *How to Keep an Alien* (2015) and Laura Wyatt O'Keefe's *Vessel* (2018), the refugee/migrant characters do not appear on stage.[341] They are unseen figures whose lives and experiences are central to the plot, but who are not given the opportunity to be *seen* or *heard*. Other characters must/do speak for them.

The mass reproduction of Halappanavar's smiling face on posters, banners, and online posts, echoes McIvor's claim. Savita is seen, but she does not speak. She is central to the plot but denied a voice of her own. She becomes "a spectral projection of the Irish

[340] McIvor, 123.

[341] Sonya Kelly, *How to Keep and Alien* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015); Laura Wyatt O'Keefe, *Vessel*, unpublished playscript, 2018.

emigrant displaced by poverty and underdevelopment exacerbated by a colonial past."[342] A cross-cultural recognition is at work in which as an immigrant, Halappanavar is not viewed for her own story; instead, she is defined in relation to Irishness. Like the migrants McIvor describes, she is seen "as Irish through the lens of Irish history."[343] As legal scholar Ruth Fletcher elucidates, the outcry to Halappanavar's death verbalized public shame about how she was *mis*treated, but this collective indignation failed to open space for non-white voices in the movement writ large: "The cry of anguish that could be heard over the troubling way in which a brown woman's dead body became a site for repeal grief, when brown women's lives were not visibly [or audibly] front and centre in #Together4Yes."[344]

Halappanavar's experience in Ireland and her subsequent death undeniably mobilized bodies in service of the Repeal campaign, even while her death and performative labor re-nationalizes Irish identity. As a symbol, she represents a desire for an intercultural Ireland while her performative labor threatens to unmask interculturalism as contrivance rather than lived reality. To what extent can dramaturgies of protest expose "the overdetermined joining of economic, reproductive and performative labour in migrant women's experience of social interculturalism as everyday life"?[345] Can Halappanavar's performative labor be reclaimed *and* politically activated rather than exploited?

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[342] McIvor, 123.

[343] McIvor, 124. Halappanavar's role as surrogate for Irish emigrant bodies is further complicated by the large numbers of Irish *women* who emigrated out of the Republic because they were "alienated and damaged" by society (Meaney 12). See Meaney, also Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland 1922-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) and Jennifer Redmond *Moving Histories: Irish Women's Emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic* (Liverpool University Press, 2018).

[344] Fletcher, "#RepealedThe8th," 241.

[345] McIvor, 157.

"How many Savitas do they want?":[346] (A)liveness, (In)stability, and Remediated Images

Pro-Choice activists exploit the qualities of digital culture in re-cycling Halappanavar's portrait, the Savita Photo. They utilize both the ephemerality of social media and its sense of intensity and aggregation to chart performance constellations that extend space and time. The photograph, however, complicates how textual-based performatives like hashtags operate. Digital mediation reiterates the multiple ways that Irish law renders Halappanavar's body disposable, even as people challenge that disposability in commemorating her. Her image performs a kind of surrogacy to the Irish body politic that subsumes her identity. The Savita Photo was reproduced and re-purposed by the Repeal campaign until Halappanavar became synonymous with the movement. The photo was not only used on signs and banners at vigils and rallies; the image is used by media outlets reporting on the abortion debate in Ireland and by activists endeavoring to mobilize the public. Halappanavar became a potent symbol for individuals. In *The Abortion Papers Ireland, Volume 2*, editors Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon, describe Halappanavar as "omnipresent" throughout the anthology.[347] Emily Ross and Martina Skelly created pins based on an illustration of Savita's portrait image (see Figure 2.3); Anna

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[346] This question was asked by Halappanavar's father, Andanappa Yalagi, in response to his disappointment in the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (2013) for failing to account for the *health* of the pregnant person as well as her *life*. He says, "A law that does not protect a woman's health will mean my Savita has been sacrificed for nothing. How can this be called a Christian law? God is merciful. He does not want women to die. How many Savitas do they want?" (quoted in Holland, *Savita*, 262).

[347] Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon, "Editors' Introduction," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2* eds. Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Attic Press, 2015), 12.

Cosgrave created the Repeal jumpers because she was “haunted” by Savita’s death.[348] Even now, annual vigils are held on the anniversary of her death.

Following Performance Studies scholar Joshua Chambers-Letson, I read photographs as “scenes of encounter” between the subject/content of the photo and the viewer.[349] Chambers-Letson draws from Rancière and Barthes in understanding the photograph to be “an event that animates the space between the spectator and the image.”[350] A picture aims to do something, to generate a reaction from the one who views it. While this provides the photo with a “politically performative function,” not all spectators respond in the same way.[351] Audience reception is unique to the viewer in animating (to use Barthes’ word) feelings that are personal and individualized. Barthes calls this affective feature the *punctum*, “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”[352] Thus, while the image “*performs for* the spectator” and invites her to “*perform in response* to the photograph,” the encounter is an indeterminate one full of possibilities for multiple meanings

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[348] Fiachra Ó Cionnaith, “Woman Behind ‘Repeal’ Jumper was ‘Haunted’ by Savita’s Death,” *Irish Examiner*, 26 May 2018, https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30845241.html.

[349] Chambers-Letson, 137.

[350] Chambers-Letson, 148.

[351] Chambers-Letson, 146.

[352] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27. Notably, Seigworth and Gregg take up the term “inventory of shimmers” after Barthes. In his lectures titled *The Neutral*, Barthes explores the elusive and shifting nature of affect. He describes an “‘inventory of shimmers, of nuances, of states, of changes (*pathè*)’ as they gather into ‘affectivity, sensibility, sentiment,’ and come to serve as ‘the passion for difference’” (Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier [New York: Columbia University Press, 2005], 77 quoted in Seigworth and Gregg, 11). Barthes describes intense, but so far unexperienced states that are situated in-between other recognizable states in relation to objects, spaces, subjects, and times. Seigworth and Gregg elucidate, “In these in-betweens or blooming intervals, intensities are continually divulged in the supple relations between a world’s or a body’s interleavings and their vectors of gradience—where gradient is ‘progressive accentuation, spatial or temporal, in the intensive dimensions [concentration, speed] of a stimulus [gradient of odor, gradient of luminosity] or of a comportment [gradient of goal]’” (Barthes, 196 quoted in Seigworth and Gregg, 10).

and affective outcomes.[353] Barthes concludes, "it is not (it seems to me) by Painting that Photography touches art, but by Theater."[354]

To feel the power of the *punctum*, we experience the *studium*. For Barthes, the *studium* is the historical and cultural meanings that the viewer gleans from the content of the picture. The *studium* of the Savita Photo presents youth, joy, beauty, luxury, femininity, Indian-ness. I read these qualities from Halappanavar's pose, dress, and body. They are consequences of my knowledge, to paraphrase Barthes. What pricks me (to again use Barthes' words) is the way that she stares directly into the camera back at me. Her large brown eyes are penetrating. She is slightly uneasy but not overtly uncomfortable. Her smile is ever-so-slightly forced, but not out of disinterest. Rather, she seems to want to say, "hurry up and take the picture so I can get on with it." I am struck by the strand of hair that has fallen out of place, curving down her forehead and above her eye.[355] I want to push it back into place for her. This tiny imperfection reflects the casual ordinariness of the portrait that captures a spontaneous moment in time and not a highly staged, professionally posed scene.

Barthes' reading of photography's effect on the viewer accentuates the way in which Halappanavar's portrait enacts a sense of (a)liveness while also marking death. Notably for the spectator, Barthes insists that a photograph is not merely a copy of reality; one is not conjuring a memory when confronted by the image. More accurately, the referent appears

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[353] Chambers-Letson, 137.

[354] Barthes, 31.

[355] Notably, this detail has been photoshopped out of the Savita Photo printed on the cover of Holland's book *Savita: The Tragedy that Shook a Nation*. Moreover, the light glistening on her face in the original picture has been reduced. This effect darkens the brown skin of Halappanavar's face.

once again alive "*in flesh and blood*, or again *in person*."[356] The photo is a resurrection, "the return of the dead."[357] This powerful, affective experience is personal and contingent; thus Barthes, declines to share the photograph that profoundly moved him—his deceased mother as a young child. He preserves the intimacy of the image for himself ("it exists only for me," he explains), while he freely shares photographs of parents mourning their dead child or condemned prisoner Lewis Payne.[358]

In confronting the viewer with her happiness, the Savita Photo animates tragedy. She reappears alive, and yet I am acutely aware that *she is going to die*—an encounter with what has been and what will be: unchangeable reality and the fact of mortality.[359] The power of her image lies in the fact of her death—she becomes a symbol because she died tragically; however, the affective encounter depends upon Halappanavar's resurrection—the immediacy

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[356] Barthes, 79.

[357] Barthes, 9.

[358] Barthes, 73. In his book, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, performance studies scholar Fred Moten critiques Barthes for his emphasis on the visual and semiotic qualities of the photograph without accounting for the more affective and performative, namely sound. Moten juxtaposes Barthes' refusal to share the Winter Garden Photo of his mother with the insistence of Emmett Till's mother to distribute the photo of her mortally beaten, murdered son. He argues that Barthes was moved by the Winter Garden Photo precisely because his mother was a woman who, in Barthes' words, "never made a single 'observation,'" a characteristic Barthes associates with gentleness and kindness (*Camera Lucida*, 69). Moten considers Barthes' commemoration of his mother's silence as part and parcel of the centering of a universal whiteness and masculinity that displaces racial and gender difference. He proposes "that the necessary repression—rather than some naturalized absence—of phonic substance in a general semiotics applies to the semiotics of photography as well; that the semiotic desire for universality, which excludes the difference of accent by excluding sound in the search for a universal language and a universal science of language, is manifest in Barthes as the exclusion of the sound/shout of the photograph; and, in the fundamental methodological move of what-has-been-called enlightenment, we see the invocation of a silenced difference, a silent black *mater*iality, in order to justify a suppression of difference in the name of (a false) universality" (*In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003], 205). Moten's robust critique of Barthes informs the discursive feminist and racial politics of my own analysis; I aim to recover the affective and performative nature of the Savita Photo while also recognizing the ways in which Halappanavar's own phonic eruption (as in her affirmation, "But I am neither Irish nor Catholic") informs audience reception of her image.

[359] Barthes, 96.

of the *punctum*, the prick that captures the spectator's attention and imagination, "a kind of subtle *beyond*."[360]

This notion of "beyond-ness" guides Barthes' interest in how photography addresses the nature of reality. While a photo captures reality—a moment in time that is irrefutable ("that-has-been")—as an invitation to enter a scene, it provides an authenticity of experience beyond what the psyche can summon. He writes, photography's "force is nonetheless superior to everything the human mind can or can have conceived to assure us of reality—but also this reality is never anything but a contingency ('*so much, no more*')."[361] Photographs unlock possible meanings to the viewer, opening a portal to the world (or the past). Hence, this affective and theatrical encounter offers a virtual experience in which the observer enters the scene: "I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented, I entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die."[362]

In performance studies' liveness debates, scholars have generally overlooked Barthes' ruminations on photography. Yet, the photograph's ability to show the reality of the past in the present—to re-animate the dead—has profound implications for understanding the uncanny presence of digital forms. Performance and media theorist Steve Dixon applies Barthes' phenomenon to digital performance. Barthes' existential encounter with the spectacle of the photograph leads the viewer to the crossroads of time, death, reality, and madness: "a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the one

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[360] Barthes, 59.

[361] Barthes, 87.

[362] Barthes, 117.

hand 'it is not there,' on the other 'but it has indeed been')."[363] Thus, photography is superior to the human mind in its ability to substantiate reality. This, Dixon argues, accounts for the way digital images attain "a more telling and profound *presence* than the live performer, at least in a philosophical sense."[364]

Analogously, in *Death 24x a Second*, film theorist Laura Mulvey applies Barthes' conceptual theory of photography to slowed images and freeze-frames. She argues that cinema, *qua* photography, possesses the "unique ability to return to and repeat the past, which becomes both more real and more mysterious as the [film still] is itself subject to repetition and return."[365] Mulvey's argument has implications for analyzing the interactivity of new media in which the viewer can control how an image appears through pausing, slowing down, or otherwise manipulating a moving image. While Mulvey locates this as a site of confusion and disorder in audience reception, however, Dixon reads Barthes' approach as a challenge to conceptions of the digital as fragmented, diffuse, and anti-reality. If the digital affirms the real as proof of existence, then images stabilize reality, thereby making it visible in a medium for the viewer to enter into it.[366] Ultimately, photographic

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[363] Barthes, 115.

[364] Dixon, 122, emphasis added.

[365] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 160. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes expresses a preference for photography over film: "What founds the nature of Photography is the pose […] looking at a photograph I inevitably include in my scrutiny the thought of that instant, however brief, in which a real thing happened to be motionless in front of the eye. I project this present photograph's immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest that constitutes the pose. This explains why the Photograph's *noeme* deteriorates when this photograph is animated and becomes cinema: in the Photograph something *has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever […] but in cinema, something *has passed* in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images" (78). Mulvey counters this argument in her monograph. She attests, "The halted frame, the arrest, discovers the moment of immobility that belongs to the frame and allows the time for contemplation that takes the image back to the brief instant that recorded the 'real thing'" (163).

[366] Dixon, 122.

images (digital or print) are “deeply concerned with mortality itself, with the nature […] of humanity.”[367] In gazing at a photo, one encounters her own mortality.[368]

In confronting one’s fate, the viewer centers her own subjectivity. This individual-centered perspective both accounts for the photograph’s ability to move the spectator—the *punctum*’s prick or touch—and its limit. Art historian Kaja Silverman equates Barthes’ *studium* with the “given-to-be-seen,” the constructed myths of culture that affirm normative representation.[369] Consequently, his *punctum* looks beyond this to what lies “outside,” to the insignificant and culturally devalued details of the photo.[370] Barthes, however, fails to look beyond himself and his singular sensibility; Silverman concludes,

> When Barthes apprehends a photograph in the way he celebrates, his own past is victorious over the photograph’s assertion of a ‘this has been.’ The figures depicted in the photograph serve only to activate his own memories, and so are stripped of all historical specificity. Barthes’s recollections might thus be said to ‘devour’ the images of the other.[371]

Barthes’ reflections account for the way that an image takes on a life of its own; in enveloping the image, the photograph becomes more powerful than its referent. In this act of displacement, to use Silverman’s phrase, the challenge is to *see* beyond one’s self in order to

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[367] Dixon, 122.

[368] Mulvey, 60. “[Barthes’] journey into photography is reminiscent of Freud’s remark (in a very different context) ‘Si vis vitam, para mortem. If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death’” (60).

[369] Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 182.

[370] Silverman, 183.

[371] Silverman, 184. In her commentary on Barthes, Silverman observes, “The remembering look is not truly productive until it effects one final displacement—the displacement of the ego. It does not fully triumph over the forces that constrain it to see in predetermined ways until its appetite for alterity prevails, not only over sameness, but also over self-sameness” (183).

"*listen* to (and touch, taste, and smell) a photograph."[372] Nonetheless, Barthes' theorization, and its subsequent interpretations, illustrates the capacity for digital performance to grapple with the nature of humanity in opposition to popular appraisals of digital technology's *dehumanizing* character.[373]

Extending Barthes' conception of photography to digital performance illuminates public engagement with the Savita Photo and its widespread use in the Repeal campaign. In a private encounter with Savita's image onscreen, the viewer confronts and considers Halappanavar's life and death. The photographic image attests to Halappanavar's corporeality, placing her in digital proximity to the living spectator. Its (a)liveness animates the space between image and spectator, mobilizing an affective response to the image and then re-animating the photo in recycling it into campaign materials, a kind of ongoing mutually constructed political performance. While spectators conjure a multiplicity of viewpoints and feelings about Halappanavar's death (and the role played by the Irish state), at the scene of encounter with the Savita Photo, lies the potential to collectively contend with Halappanavar's humanity. People assemble at or around the image—both on- and offline. Thus, the Savita Photo creates a community, an affective public, based upon the shared affective response to it.

The political actions of the Repeal campaign following Halappanavar's death are examples of the intermediality between digital networks and physical spaces. These media do

[372] Moten, 208; emphasis added.

[373] Work declaring technology's dehumanizing attributes concerning photography and other reproduced images includes Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), Paul Virilio's *Pure War* (1983), and Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), and in the field of Performance Studies, Patrice Pavis' book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992).

not work in isolation, but rather operate as constitutive elements.[374] The *punctum* of the Savita Photo (the collapse of *this will be* and *this has been*) pricks its viewer and the spectator is moved to act—to do something in response; "motion and e-motion work together."[375] Sontag affirms that the image is more powerful than text alone: "in an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something."[376] Indeed, the Savita Photo functions as a "compact form for memorizing" not just Halappanavar's death, but the affective qualities each individual might associate with it—shame, anger, sadness, etc.[377] Or, to return to Barthes' words, the photo is "an emanation of a *past reality*."[378] The "politically performative function" drives the formation of affective publics that assemble around the photo and various hashtags, as well as the collective bodies who gather in town squares and on city streets. The performativity of the Savita Photo and hashtags like #RIPSavita yield an affectivity that moves the spectator. Thus, the convergence of technologies, new media practices, and political sentiments influences how citizens are actualized.[379] The performance constellations animated by the on- and offline circulation of the Savita Photo are affective occupations of digital, physical, and hybrid spaces. The image

[374] Robin Nelson, "Introduction: Prospective Mapping and Network of Terms," in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, ed. Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 17.

[375] Fuentes, "Performance Constellations," 38.

[376] Sontag, 22.

[377] Sontag, 22.

[378] Barthes, 88.

[379] Zizi A. Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (Polity Press, 2010).

is transitory and open to ongoing transmission (and manipulation), but a mutually constitutive, synergetic engagement with Halappanavar's portrait develops.

Despite the potential for multiple meanings, mass responses to the Savita Photo relied upon staging scenarios of mourning in conjunction with political action. The image relied upon the performative labor of Halappanavar's migrant body to define Irish identity—a moment in which the collective desire to be intercultural and progressive comes in conflict with scenarios of mourning activated by kinesthetic imagination. Commemorating Savita *now* attempts to reconcile historical losses and sacrifices—women who emigrated, pregnant women who felt shamed and silenced like Ann Lovett, those marked unruly and transgressive like the Magdalenes. Savita's body is rendered valuable for its maternal sacrifice, and she becomes a surrogate image re-enacted by representations of the *Mater Dolorosa*. The photograph performs Halappanavar's loss *and* the widespread public response of grief and outrage. Thus, its performative function is an act of remembrance on the one hand (#RIPSavita), and a call to action on the other (#NeverAgain); the portrait animates commemoration, and protesters (on- and off-line) subsequently re-animate the image through its (ongoing) intermedial circulation. In enacting what Barthes calls "reality in a past state," the Savita Photo recuperates Halappanavar and her performative labor again and again, reiterating the way Irish law renders her body disposable, while simultaneously challenging this disposability through commemoration.[380]

This prominence could be exploited in the circulation and reproduction of Halappanavar's image. As Peggy Phelan cautions, "representation is almost always on the

[380] Barthes, 82.

side of the one who looks and almost never on the side of the one who is seen."[381] Halappanavar's narrative—so intricately bound to her portrait—could be appropriated. Sontag observes, the photographer cannot affix an intended meaning to a picture; a photo has "its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it."[382] Activists made extensive use of the Savita Photo, though not nefariously. Individuals were already moved by Halappanavar's story. Thus, they constructed *pulsating* performance constellations to keep her image at the forefront of the Repeal campaign.

As the Repeal movement gained momentum in the six years following Halappanavar's death, the Savita Photo appeared as one node in the *pulsating* performance constellations of the campaign. At crucial moments and events such as the anniversaries of her death, Halappanavar took centerstage again and again. Her image shifted from being associated with Pro-Choice discourses broadly to being formally linked to the Repeal movement. In 2018, on the day of the national vote to revoke the Eighth Amendment, the Savita Photo went viral again—this time repurposed into a street art mural by the Dublin-based artist Aches. Like the image it is based on, the mural was photographed and widely shared across social media. As such, it represents another convergence of the performance constellations around Halappanavar's likeness—one that mobilized bodies to political action while also activating scenarios of mourning.

Aches' mural represents a new expression of the Savita Photo, inscribed on the city street. While new modes of experience and encounter are possible, they are fleeting; the

[381] Phelan, 25-26.

[382] Sontag, 39.

image's (a)liveness is the source of its affective power and its immutability. Hashtags can lose their immediacy, declining in significance or "freshness" given the rapidity and changeability of online sociality.[383] As I discussed earlier, hashtags like #RIPSavita, #NeverAgain, and #WeAreAllSavita emerged as real-time, spontaneous and affective responses to unfolding events. The tactical power of these hashtags, however, lies in their ability to sustain collective action over time and across localities. As Fuentes argues, it is their *instability*, "their *(a) liveness* within a sort of digital rhythm of generation, degeneration, and regeneration" that makes them effective in sustaining political action.[384] Thus, hashtags do not possess "fixed and stable boundaries," but rather they are "dispersed, interconnected, and diffuse."[385] Their oscillation is enabled by the "enduring ephemerality" of digital content.[386]

Media theorist Wendy Chun disputes conceptions of new media that equate the digital with permanence and storage.[387] Like embodied performance, digital media requires repetition and circulation for its durability. What is online will not necessarily always be there, and yet, things online have a way of resisting erasure—data lost can be found. The persistence of digital objects is caught in the slippage between preservation and forgetting. Subsequently, users drive the spread of topics *over time* in both exploiting and resisting the enduring ephemerality of social media content. Of course, as media scholar José van Dijck

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[383] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 95.

[384] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 91.

[385] Bonilla and Rosa, 7.

[386] Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral," 166.

[387] Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral," 164.

cautions, social media platforms' "algorithmic grammar often masks a cacophony of push-and-pull forces" beyond a user's control.[388]

Fuentes characterizes the rhythms in which hashtags wane, re-emerge, and morph over time and across localities as *pulsating* performance constellations.[389] While a hashtag's instability sustains its persistence over time and across dispersed networks, the mass circulation of the Savita Photo complicates this fluidity. In fact, it is the (a)liveness of the photograph that *stabilizes*, foreclosing the possibility for change. Hashtags like #RIPSavita and #NeverAgain prolonged political action, mobilizing bodies at crucial moments including annual vigils to observe Halappanavar's death and the Repeal rallies in the lead-up to the referendum. Yet, even as Halappanavar's image became connected to hashtags like #Repeal and #RepealtheEighth, the Savita Photo continued to manifest scenarios of mourning and political action that defined the Irish body politic in relation to Halappanavar's performative labor.

Figure 2.6. Savita Mural by Aches

[388] Van Dijck, 88.

[389] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 91.

On the day before Ireland's national ballot on the Eighth Amendment, Aches painted his mural on a wall along the street outside of the hip George Bernard Shaw Café in central Dublin. Aches used two-tone shades of pink and red to spray-paint Halappanavar's smiling face, filling the height of the approximately eight-to-nine-foot wall. He then painted the affirmation "YES" in tall gray and pink transparent block letters—the "E" centered on Halappanavar's face as though she is peeking out from behind a partition of letters (Figure 2.6). This style was a departure for Aches, whose signature works at that time featured text-based graffiti art. When he does paint portraits, he uses digitally inspired effects that pixelate, replicate, and blur the image. What is more, his work generally avoids being overtly political. At the last minute the night before he painted the Savita Mural, he resolved to use his skills to paint something "a bit more meaningful."[390]

Aches painted the mural on a Thursday morning and then "thought no more of it."[391] On the day of the ballot people started texting him and posting photos online. He then realized how audiences were interacting with his work; people began flocking to the mural, leaving flowers on the sidewalk below Savita's portrait. Then, some added hand-written notes, and others stuck cards to the wall. People took photos of the mural and offerings, sharing those images across social media. The pile of flowers grew. Someone left a "Repeal" sweatshirt. Candles were lit. The Together for Yes campaign posted flyers that read "Vote Yes." People went to cast their vote, then made the pilgrimage to the Savita Mural. The more

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[390] Stuart Holdsworth, "Interview with Aches, the Irish Artist whose Mural of Savita Halappanavar became the Image of Yes in the Irish Referendum," *Inspiring City* (blog), 1 June 2018, accessed 12 November 2018, https://inspiringcity.com/2018/06/01/ interview-with-aches-the-irish-artist-whose-mural-of-savita-halappanavar-became-the-image-of-yes-in-the-irish-referendum/.

[391] Holdsworth, np.

the photographs were shared across social networks, the more notes were written to Savita, filling up the white space next to her and gradually growing to cover part of her face. In an analogue visualization of a Twitter feed, the wall replicated tweets, gathered at a material site rather than around a hashtag. This performance constellation reveals the parallel ontologies of the online dialogues now visually depicted on city streets in atoms rather than bits.[392]

Much like the virality of Holland's news story about Halappanavar's death, Aches' mural ignited a digital spread of its own, one that re-activated performance constellations of citizenship and national identity. The mural's on- and offline virality were typical of the campaign and indicative of street art more broadly.[393] Street art is increasingly "being made and performed to be captured in digital form" for online consumption around the world, and thus embodies "the work of art in the age of instant digital dissemination."[394] It is

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[392] danah boyd argues that networked publics are simultaneously space and a collection of people, in "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics" (42).

[393] Street art was important to the Repeal campaign overall, most notably in what became known as the Maser Mural (or the Maser image), a large red heart (one of Maser's trademarks) with the phrase "Repeal the 8th" written in cursive across it. This mural was painted on the exterior of the bright blue building that houses the Project Arts Centre (PAC), an organization that sponsors theater productions and art exhibitions among other things. Complaints poured in about the political propaganda plastered on a building (in the very busy Dublin neighborhood of Temple Bar) that is financed by the state. This violates city law. The controversy eventually led the Dublin City Council to order its removal. By that time, debates about censorship and free speech had become embroiled with those over reproductive rights, leading many to speculate that the image's popularity was fueled by the outcry against it. Maser re-painted the mural in the same spot ahead of the Repeal referendum in April 2018, and the controversy resurfaced. When the City Council again demanded its removal, the PAC left a small portion of the bottom of the heart to remind people of its presence underneath a layer of blue paint. This controversy and Maser's permission to make the "Repeal the 8th" image widely available for reproduction led to its frequent use and proliferation. Street artist ESTR used the image in conjunction with a reproduction of Banksy's famous painting of a little girl reaching for a floating balloon. In ESTR's version, the balloon is Maser's "Repeal the 8th" heart. People used the Maser image as a frame around their profile pictures on social media. Posters of the image were still visible in windows when I visited Dublin during the fall of 2018. For more on Maser's mural, street art, and censorship around the abortion debate in Ireland, see Lorna O'Hara, "Maser's 'Repeal the 8th' Mural: The Power of Public Art in the Age of Social Media," in *After Repeal: Rethinking Abortion Politics*, ed. Kath Browne and Sydney Calkin (London: Zed Books, 2019), 159-173.

[394] Martin Irvine, "The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture" in *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, edited by Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (London and New York: Berg, 2012), 242. Cedar Lewisohn asserts that graffiti artists have always carefully documented their work (and that of other graffiti

increasingly "at once local and global" even while it expresses "a deep identification and empathy with the city" in which the piece is created.[395] As art and media scholar Martin Irvine describes, the street artist is induced "to state something *in* and *with* the city."[396] Street art gains new meaning in considering how an online audience engages with the work in the "city of bits" where they can spectate, but also share the artwork thus fueling its future consumption.[397] This performance constellation superimposes the wall on the public street onto the wall of a social media page on the computer/smartphone screen.

The digital images of Aches' mural certainly drove web traffic who saw the image online into becoming foot traffic who brought flowers or left a hand-written note to Halappanavar; however, the virality of the Savita Mural did not merely initiate pilgrimages to the street. The responses to the mural, on- and offline, articulate the "synergetic relation" between bodily and digital mobilization.[398] Aches' incorporation of the Savita Photo re-ignited the public's *kinesthetic imagination.* Fuentes extends Roach's kinesthetic imagination to digital embodiments, affirming that "embodiment or bodily perception always already involves interactive processes, feedback and feedforward loops between production, signification, and representation."[399] To encounter the Savita Photo *via* a digital photograph

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writers) through photography, so this practice is not unprecedented (see Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* [New York, NY: Abrams, 2008], 45-46).

[395] Irvine, 235; 236.

[396] Irvine, 236.

[397] William J. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

[398] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 7.

[399] Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 33.

of Aches' mural ignited affective responses, at once past-facing and forward-looking. This new reiteration of Halapannavar's image reawakened sentiments of mourning, moving individuals to again respond with embodied behaviors. Those who trekked to the mural to leave offerings were re-enacting scenarios of worship—the vigils evolving into a new form.

In his mural, Aches re-inscribes the Savita Photo; rather than a site of grief and tragedy, the image is employed as a declaration of political will—a rallying cry. His skill in replicating the attributes of Halappanavar's image, as well as the unique, eye-catching colors, the imposing size, and the simplicity of the word YES all contribute to the mural's attention-grabbing effect. In a commonplace and ordinary setting, a street lined with shops and townhouses, the Savita Mural emerges as something extraordinary. Its beauty and ethical imperative are self-evident and forthright.[400] Aches is another consumer who has taken up the portrait for his own agenda—another co-opting, recycling, and re-performance of the portrait. The affective significance of the photo drives its reuse while the image accrues greater symbolic, cultural, and political value as it is used again and again. Aches' iteration, however, is freely available to the public in contrast to those that were merchandized. Akin to the shareability of digital content, street art is "largely ephemeral art that is usually cheap to

[400] Riggle explains, "The meaning of street art outstrips the power of its manifest aesthetic qualities. There is no necessary tension between a work's beauty and its philosophical, critical, religious, or moral force" (Nicholas Alden Riggle, "Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 3 [2010], 250). The Aches Mural also echoes the tradition of mural painting in Northern Ireland during The Troubles. In particular, the commemoration of Halappanavar's sacrifice performs a kind of surrogacy of the murals of Bobby Sands, an imprisoned member of the Provisional IRA who died on hunger strike at the age of twenty-seven in 1981. Sands was the most recognizable face of all the hunger strikers. Murals depicted him as a martyr often using Christ imagery to draw parallels to the righteous morality of his suffering and subsequent death for the cause of Irish Catholic equal rights in the North. This Catholic and political iconography parallels the martyrdom of Halappanavar that relies upon the gendered iconography of the Virgin Mary and *Mater Dolorosa*. For more information on the murals during this period in Northern Ireland, see Bill Rolston, *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991).

make, free to experience, and owned and overseen by no one (or, rather, *everyone*)."[401] As philosophy scholar Nick Riggle explains, street artists endeavor "to make their works pop out of the street and call on passersby and other artists to pay attention."[402] On social media, the image pops out of a timeline, a recognizable face in a new aesthetic context. The image is purposefully shared and amplified using hashtags across particular networks. This problematizes who has access to it. Online, the image has the potential to circulate freely, but algorithms and networks control whether or not it does.

In the recycling of the Savita Photo, Halappanavar's body becomes a metaphor for not-Irish geographies—for Ireland's arrival as a global economic force that has become a "colonizer" of its own. Savita's circulating image "re-animates" her; as a figure from the past, she is given a future by staging a place for her to intervene in the present.[403] In placing her face on posters that read "I'm sorry" or "Remember," her body is inscribed and not given voice to speak for itself. However, Aches' mural empowers Savita to say "Yes" to her own request for an abortion. She is given a voice where she had been denied one. As a space invader, this enlarged version of Halappanavar's non-Irish body confronts the viewer and challenges one to see and *hear*. To read "yes" is to hear Savita speak. This simple affirmation—yes to life, yes to authority over one's body, yes to a future—bequeaths her a voice in the present to aid in changing the Irish law that victimized her in the past. The visual dominance of YES is crafted in the magnitude of each letter and its arrangement —in the

[401] Riggle, 249; emphasis added.

[402] Riggle, 246.

[403] Charlotte McIvor, "Historical Duty, Palimpsestic Time and Migration in the Decade of Centenaries," *Irish Studies Review* 24, no. 1 (2016), 55.

foreground of, but not larger than, Halappanavar's face. In placing the base of the E at her mouth and overlaying her face with the letter's gray color, she appears to have formulated the letters into being (see Figure 2.6). The pronouncement is *from* her but does not mask her; she remains visually dominant. Her piercing eyes confront the spectator. This cross-temporal and multi-sited engagement works to dismantle the "architecture of containment" that characterizes Irish history.[404] Thus, the Aches Mural indexes previous iterations and representations of the Savita Photo to make women's lived experiences visible and to draw attention to the gap between lived reality and law.

Despite this political performance, Aches' mural struggles to perform its message against the performative labor of Halappanavar's body and the Savita Photo. The power of kinesthetic imagination re-activates public mourning. This time, rather than grief leading to protest (vigils preceding the March for Savita), protest leads to grief as a 'yes' vote yields a pilgrimage to leave offerings at the mural. Halappanavar began to disappear among the objects of lamentation, creating a tension between remembrance and rallying cry (Figure 2.7). Some items memorialize (flowers, candles, personal notes) and others declare political will; the bold YES, Savita's affirmation, becomes lost in the compendium of paper stuck over it. The "Vote Yes" papers are overt political messages, but their political performance becomes diluted. One needs to be close to read the writing on the wall. The Savita Photo is inextricably conjoined to Halappanavar's representation as tragic death; her performative labor as a grievable body in the image of *Mater Dolorosa* dominated how the public interacted with Aches' mural.

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[404] James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

Figure 2.7 Offerings at the Savita Mural

The Savita Mural became a site for people to pay their respects, a “rallying point,” a physical space to gather and occupy once the referendum results were announced.[405] Hence, it marks the territory of progress of Ireland. In the encounter between street art, social memory, and political activism, Dublin was “re-imaged and re-imagined” into an intercultural, progressive world.[406] Here, individuals could rehearse their tribute to Halappanavar and other women who have died at the hands of the unjust practices of the Irish state. To visit this makeshift altar to Savita was “a way of coping with their grief and channeling it into life-affirming action.”[407] One could vote, performing one’s civic duty, and then pay respects to Savita and in doing so, perform remembrance with real and embodied consequences. Voting is abstract; one does not immediately see the effects of casting a ballot. However, the size and scope of this shrine visualized the political will of the Repeal movement.

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[405] Holdsworth, np.

[406] Irvine, 3.

[407] Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's “Dirty War”* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 185.

Against the foreground of the public offerings, Savita's disappearance into the background of Aches' mural visualizes the erasure of her lived experience. Savita's "YES"—what had been a single-authored declaration—occupies shared space with a multiplicity of voices, becoming overpowered and displaced by the spectators' dialogues. The *grievability* of Savita's body was made manifest once again (indeed, part of the ephemerality of street art is how it becomes vulnerable to public intervention).[408] The borders of her space are assaulted by these notes that are addressed to her but displayed for public consumption. This engagement with her image radically changes the interactive qualities of the mural as Aches painted it. Viewers now talk back to it, rather than focusing on listening for Savita's voice. As such, Halappanavar's corporeality is linked to her performative labor; she is obscured by a re-nationalizing of an Irish secular and progressive identity. Activist Emily Waszak of the group Migrants and Ethnic-minorities for Reproductive Justice tweeted her response to the event: "I love the Savita memorial for so many reasons, but it is also a visceral reminder—the physical manifestation of white tears covering over an image of a brown migrant woman and her pain."[409] Waszak highlights the surrogacy at work; Halappanavar's body is replaced by a national one—the body politic mobilized to visit the site.

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[408] The night the referendum results were announced (only two days after Aches painted the mural), someone wrote "FREED" and drew a heart and arrow across Savita's forehead. While the sentiment might mean well, Aches was disappointed: "I thought it was disrespectful to both Savita and the mural. There was plenty of space around the mural to write it. I don't know what they thought they were doing" (Gráinne Ní Aodha, "Savita Mural Artist: 'I've Been Painting a Long Time, I've Never Seen a Reaction Like That Before,'" *TheJournal.ie*, 31 May 2018, accessed 12 April 2019, http://jrnl.ie/4044389). He has since fixed the mural for its preservation at the Shaw Café where it was displayed behind panes of plastic until the pub was forced to change locations in November 2019. This situation provides interesting commentary on the status of street art and graffiti to mainstream commodification.

[409] Emily Waszak, Twitter Post, 30 May 2018, 4:55am PST, http://twitter.com/waszaaaaak.

Despite the pulsating performance constellations of national identity that surround the Savita Photo, Aches' mural represents the potential to see Halappanavar's image differently—to break free from the weight of historical images and symbols. In Savita's YES, Aches discloses the possibilities when we experience an image—digital or otherwise—as a "theatrical irruption."[410] As we stroll or scroll past images in our daily lives, how can we *see* them differently? The second half of this dissertation considers this question in interrogating how autobiographical performances might reimage and reimagine cultural spaces. What happens when bodies refuse to be silent any longer and actively truth-tell? How can scenarios of worship evolve through kinesthetic imagination? The body is a site of struggle that animates scenarios of worship in different ways. Working within the dogma of Catholicism, how might we engage contemporary media in updating Marian imagery? In the next chapter, I explore an activist performance that explicitly aligns the personal experiences of abortion-seekers with the iconography of the Virgin Mary, thereby working against the confining legacy of Marianism. This work animates an altered encounter, a kind of "ambulant freeze," suggesting that through motion and emotion, we could look through a photograph's window of meaning from a different angle.[411] While what has been can never be changed in the Savita Photo, we can alter the possibilities of what will be.

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[410] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 144.

[411] Schneider, 144.

CHAPTER THREE
***Breaking the Silence: Confessional Bodies and Re-making the Virgin in home|work Collective's* The Renunciation**

> *As we witness more and more the erosion of family values and come increasingly under pressure to go the way of the world, we see all around us people falling foul of the evil regimes and toeing the line of modernism. […] We have at our disposal the greatest weapon of all, the Mother of God. […] Now we must let them see that not everyone wants to go the way of the world.*
> –Letter to the Editor, *Irish Democrat*, 16 August 1992[412]

> *I suppose some [people] find [telling personal abortion stories] prurient, likening it to a hunger strike or even a suicide bomber whose body is used as a political weapon.*
> –Ann Rossiter, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora: The "Abortion Trail" and the Making of a London-Irish Underground, 1980-2000*

In 1992, singer Sinéad O'Connor led a group of protestors in "storming" (as newspapers later described it) the Dáil, the seat of Ireland's government. Disrupting the sober atmosphere, the controversial rock star carried a sign reading "SHAME" in large block letters. She demanded to speak to the Taoiseach about the Irish court's decision to prohibit a fourteen-year-old pregnant rape victim from travelling to England for a legal abortion.[413] Using her fame to bring international attention to the young woman's plight, O'Connor met with the prime minister before she addressed the press, revealing her personal stake in the matter; she was sympathetic to the young girl's plight because having two abortions was "the right thing" for

[412] Quoted in Martin, 72.

[413] The anonymous fourteen-year-old's juridical dispute became known as the X Case, mentioned in Chapter 2. This case eventually led to the right to mobility for abortion-seekers to travel abroad and the lawful distribution of information on abortion in other countries. It did *not*, however, lead to legal clarification on the right to abortion in the event that the pregnant person's life is at risk (including suicidal risk as was the situation for X). The lack of action on this point contributed to the death of Savita Halappanavar as I discuss in Chapter 2. For an overview and information about the subsequent ruling, refer to J. McCarthy, 15-16.

her. She resolutely declared, "when I go to where you go to when you die, I will have no problem."[414]

One interpretation of O'Connor's public admission posits her behavior as fitting of an international celebrity with a reputation for being a "hairless hell raiser," a reference to her rocker look that usually featured a shaved head and not-so-feminine clothing.[415] But more significantly, this moniker is an admonishment of her outspoken behavior. She dared to talk unashamedly about topics marked culturally taboo; in addition to revealing her abortions, O'Connor had previously divulged that she was physically abused by her mother and that she had suffered abuse and trauma during her time at a reform school run by the Catholic Church.[416] These uncomfortable public revelations positioned her as a target for public derision. She was dismissed as attention-seeking, unstable, and self-destructive.[417] One journalist later quipped that she was "a few wafers short of a mass,"[418] and *The Irish Times* branded her a "garrulous harpy."[419]

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[414] Maol Muire Tynan, "Sinead Storms in to see Taoiseach," *The Irish Times*, 21 February 1992, 1.

[415] David Wild, "Sinead O'Connor: Artist of the Year," *Rolling Stone*, 7 March 1991, 34. In her article, Tynan describes O'Connor's appearance during the visit to the Dáil, "in flowing black coat and Doc Marten boots." The accompanying photograph also reveals O'Connor's closely-cropped hair and wire-rimmed glasses.

[416] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2001), 248. In the fall of 1992, she would really draw ire when she tore up a picture of Pope John Paul II during a live broadcast of *Saturday Night Live*. Cullingford provides a compelling analysis of this performance in *Ireland's Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (248-50).

[417] Cullingford, 256.

[418] Quoted in John Mulholland, "Irreverent Mother" *The Observer* (UK), 9 May 1999, D1.

[419] "Moors Maladies," *The Irish Times*, 7 March 1992, A2.

Yet, another rendering of these events depicts O'Connor leveraging her fame to bring publicity and awareness to social issues, regardless of how uneasy they make people feel.[420] Cast in this light, her performance of civil disobedience is noteworthy, and outright dismissals of her actions adopt the texture of misogyny and sexism. In a nation built upon the (public and private) circulation of images of the Virgin Mary—the Queen of Ireland—and her iterations (Mother Ireland, *Mater Dolorosa*, the young colleen), O'Connor embodies a radically different image of womanhood, one that threatens the stability of representations of feminine vulnerability, obedience, and modesty. Her behavior offends not necessarily because she had an abortion, but because, in admitting it, she openly professes her female sexuality and insists that others acknowledge it too. Brandishing her eccentric and shrewish delegitimizes what she has to say. Moreover, repeated performances that publicly shame and disparage her for such behavior ensures that others are too afraid to speak out as well.

Sexually transgressive bodies like O'Connor's disrupt the social order. Their willingness to truth-tell threatens to expose an uncomfortable reality—decades of secret abortion travel by people with crisis pregnancies. For a century, abortion in modern Ireland has been shrouded in narratives of shame and secrecy. Public discourse euphemistically referred to "the substantive issue" or "getting a boat to England." In the 1990s, O'Connor was one of the only Irish women willing to speak openly about her abortion experience.[421] In

[420] Cullingford elaborates on this perspective of O'Connor's behavior. She productively compares O'Connor to Princess Diana in how the two women were derided by the press despite their commitment to humanitarian causes (256).

[421] Ann Rossiter, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora: The "Abortion Trail" and the Making of a London-Irish Underground, 1980-2000* (London: Iasc Publishing, 2009), 142. Rossiter mentions author June Levine and journalist Mary Holland as the only others. Suzanna Chan cites O'Connor, singer Mary Coughlan, and activist Ruth Riddick as the few well-known women who disclosed their abortions in the 1990s ("Speaking of Silence, Speaking of Art, Abortion and Ireland," *Irish Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2019): 75.

2012, cultural discourse shifted and people who had abortions began speaking out in great numbers. From well-known journalists and actors to activists and average citizens, abortion testimonies became commonplace, featuring prominently in the campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment.

This chapter continues an investigation of personal abortion stories that I initiated in Chapter 1. The abortion narratives I analyze here comprise an aesthetic performance staged in social protest. In 2015, the artist-activist group the home|work Collective created *The Renunciation* from twelve real-life abortion testimonies. Reminiscent of the narrative of Two Women Travel, these anecdotes provide material lives to an abstract political issue. Compared to Two Women Travel's performance, however, *The Renunciation* has a different relationship to the past. As a visual and semiotic narrative, Two Women Travel's performance embodies the immediacy of the realities of abortion travel; spectators are placed in proximity to the event itself to watch it unfold in seemingly real time. Contrarily, *The Renunciation* enacts confessional performances as memory and thus the performers have a more circumspect organization of time and space. As a pop-up political performance staged in bus stations and town squares amidst the flow of everyday life, the piece casts the performers and audience as witnesses to challenge accepted truths of confessional forms. Notably, the performance's tone, structure, and aurality exploit the significance of the Angelus in the Irish cultural imaginary. The Angelus is a Marian devotion that infuses public and private secular spaces with the presence of the divine. Moreover, the Angelus combines old and new media forms; transmitted daily by church bells or television, it is woven into quotidian life and national identity. In repurposing the structural patterns, rhythms, and visuality of the Angelus, *The Renunciation* negotiates its function as intermedial cultural

performance and religious practice that choreographs bodies and inscribes public spaces. Importantly, home|work does not contest its role in society; instead, they recuperate the Marian devotion for pro-choice politics in drawing a parallel between the Virgin Mary's potential motherhood and that of abortion-seekers.

Feminist scholar Jeannie Ludlow observes that "abortion stigmatization is a deliberately choreographed tactic of anti-abortion rights activists, and they continue to use it because it works."[422] The performances I explore in this chapter and the next aim to re-choreograph acts of stigmatization. Media and political discourses tend to favor the so-called "hard cases," stories of health complications like Savita Halappanavar's. But most abortion stories are mundane and uneventful. Through their public confessions, performances of uncontained, transgressive bodies are exposed to potential injury while simultaneously challenging people to acknowledge their humanity. Truth-telling offers a way to de-stigmatize abortion and reproductive life more broadly. Likewise, the stories of Irish abortion-seekers have been an unwritten history, ignored and silenced for the sake of a false sense of moral virtue. The abortion testimonies of *The Renunciation*, along with Two Women Travel and O'Connor's public confession, recover, transmit, and record a neglected genealogy of feminist narratives, experiences, and activist labor. home|work's performance piece suggests how the Virgin Mary can be positioned as a feminist icon rather than as a political weapon belonging to the Christian right in service of patriarchy. Thus, this chapter considers how the cult of Mary in Ireland might be re-imagined, positioning her as a revolutionary figure in the tradition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Latin America.

[422] Jeannie Ludlow, "Love and Goodness: Towards a New Abortion Politics," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012), 475.

Speaking Out: Cultural Taboos and Breaking the Silence

The disclosure of personal abortion stories as part of the Repeal campaign represents an overt sign of the erosion of Ireland's architectures of containment. As the socio-political and cultural ideologies of Catholic doctrine have gradually been expunged from the Irish legal system, women and other activists began speaking out against gendered narratives that limit their autonomy. As such, they use truth-telling to expose the chasm between their material lives and patriarchal discourses. For abortion rights advocates, the language of the law fails to articulate lived realities. Subsequently, they affirm the value of their bodily knowledge to generating policy reform. While disclosing abortion stories is new, however, Irish feminist interventions have previously challenged and subverted scenarios of mythic womanhood through various media and policy work. In this section, I briefly trace the evolving ethos of public disclosure before turning to the ways in which the performance mode of confession enables feminist tactics that re-choreograph abortion stigmas in the service of liberatory body politics.

In the last three decades, the Catholic Church has been shaken by public revelations of child abuse scandals. These disclosures have contributed to the waning popularity of the Church in Ireland, a secularizing shift that began with the nation's movement away from isolationist policies in the 1960s.[423] As novel economic schemes opened the nation to foreign investment and influence, television and other media aided in exposing the population to "the global flow of culture."[424] While this affected the mass appeal of the Church, the greatest

[423] Foster, 579.

[424] Inglis, *Global Ireland*, 2. See also, Inglis, "Origins and Legacies, 30; and Ferriter, 335.

defeat of public trust in the Church arrived in the form of child sexual abuse scandals. Beginning in 1993, a series of high-profile cases surfaced, alleging clerical sexual abuse and physical and psychological abuse at industrial and reform schools run by the Catholic Church.[425] Additionally, investigations into Magdalene laundries—and later mother and baby homes—began when unmarked mass graves of hundreds of anonymous women were unearthed in High Park, Dublin.[426] Inquiries uncovered accounts of decades-long abuse and incarceration of women and girls, including forced adoptions and dangerous working conditions for no pay. In their totality, these scandals tested the Church's authority and legitimacy as a beacon of morality and education. The general sentiment was that "the Catholic Church was in no position to throw stones."[427] The Church's moral bankruptcy in perpetuating and concealing these crimes rattled public belief in the institution's right to judge the behaviors of the laity for less egregious transgressions.

These widespread atrocities marked a decided shift in public discourse concerning previously taboo subjects. Contentious social problems that had historically been dealt with behind closed doors were suddenly discussed openly and honestly for the first time—and on legal grounds. From television and media journalism, to memoirs and legal personal

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[425] The public came to understand the scope and severity of the situation when RTÉ broadcast a three-part series, *The State of Fear*, in 1999. This led to an official public apology from the government, a commission to investigate, and a redress board (Emilie Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Irish Culture* [Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011], 19).

[426] The 1998 television documentary *Sex in a Cold Climate* (dir. Steve Humphries) fueled public outcry with its personal testimony from former Magdalene Laundry inmates. The film inspired *The Magdalene Sisters*, Peter Mullan's 2002 fictional account of life inside the laundries which brought international attention to the issue when the film won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

[427] Ferriter, 523.

testimonies, documentaries, and plays, individuals told their stories *en masse*.[428] Irish studies scholar James Smith classifies this phenomenon of "speaking out" as part of a "*visible* public discourse," a new relationship between the spoken and written word.[429] If the state's official narrative "denies, silences, and conveniently edits-out" the existence of social problems, then personal testimonies enact "narrative retellings," "alternative versions to the nation's official story."[430] Analogously, performance studies scholar Emilie Pine locates the cultural shift of speaking out within remembrance culture. She reasons that "traumatic memory" emerged as a primary means of understanding and representing the past.[431]

While debates around the Eighth Amendment in the 1980s and the X Case ten years later captured the public's attention, the phenomenon of speaking out did not include abortion stories. The stigma of shame clouding women's sexuality and abortion maintained an imposing wall of silence. Abortion discourses framed the issue as a moral argument, rather than a legal or health concern. Sexuality had remained firmly the purview of the Catholic Church, not the domain of government, medicine, or education.[432] Thus, abortion—

[428] James M. Smith provides a range of examples of these personal accounts ("Retelling Stories: Exposing Mother Ireland in Kathy Prendergast's *Body Map Series* and Mary Leland's *The Killeen*" in *Re/Dressing Cathleen: Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists* ed by Jennifer Grinnell and Alison Conley [Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, 1997], 43). Emilie Pine also provides several examples, including compelling analyses of specific documentaries, films, plays, and memoirs in Chapters 1 and 2 of her book *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Irish Culture*.

[429] Smith, 43; emphasis added.

[430] Smith, 43.

[431] Pine, 5.

[432] Tom Inglis, "Foucault, Bourdieu, and the Field of Irish Sexuality," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 7 (1997), 12.

regardless of the reasons for seeking one—remained a shameful and secret practice.[433] As Ruth Fletcher describes, women who had abortions felt ashamed not because they *believed* their actions to be wrong or immoral, but rather because cultural expectations fostered *feelings* of inadequacy.[434] The sense of moral judgement and standards was highly effective in maintaining silence around abortion. However, when state legislation and social democracy assumed authority of sexuality through judicial policies and referenda, religious teachings that equated the flesh with sin began to lose effect.[435] Therefore, Lisa Smyth argues that political discourse around abortion has gradually undergone a process of *de*-moralizing since the adoption of the Eighth Amendment.[436] This paradigm shift is particularly evident in parliamentary debates during the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act in 2013; law and health were front and center, including statements from medical professionals.[437] The voices of individuals who had abortions, however, remained conspicuously absent.

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[433] Rossiter; Ruth Fletcher, "Silences: Irish Women and Abortion," *Feminist Review* 50 (1995); Clara Fischer, "Feminists Redraw Public and Private Spheres: Abortion, Vulnerability, and the Affective Campaign to Repeal the Eight Amendment," *Signs* 45, no. 4 (2020); and Olund, 174-188.

[434] Fletcher, "Silences," 49.

[435] Ferriter, 335.

[436] Lisa Smyth, "Ireland's Abortion Ban: Honour, Shame, and the Possibility of a Moral Revolution," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2*, ed. by Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 175.

[437] Even while public conversations were evolving around abortion as a health issue rather than a moral one, Smyth notes that the language justifying the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act relies upon pro-life rhetoric and arguments (Lisa Smyth, 175). Nonetheless, Edwige Nault attests that the bill's adoption reveals the eroding moral authority of the Catholic Church (Nault, "Abortion in Ireland: From Religious Marginalization to State Recognition" in *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities*, edited by Pilar Villar-Argáiz [Palgrave Macmillan, 2018], 136).

In the foreword to the second volume of *The Abortion Papers: Ireland* (2016), activist Ailbhe Smyth describes the silence around abortion as "deafening."[438] More than two decades earlier, Smyth had edited the first volume of *The Abortion Papers*; in the wake of the X Case, she sharply rebuked the conspicuous absence of women from abortion debates:

> For much of the time over the past several months, it has seemed as though we are living in a nightmare version of Alice's Wonderland where words can mean whatever lawyers and politicians want them to mean—without any reference to the material realities they supposedly signify. Women's bodies, women's right to bodily integrity, women's freedom to control our reproductive processes are caught in an impenetrable, materially meaningless web of male-generated words.[439]

Clearly, in the more than twenty-five intervening years, not much had changed surrounding who was allowed to freely discuss abortion. The image of woman constructed by the Constitution, a child bearer and obedient wife who was modest and chaste, did not reflect the facts of women's lives. The solution was to ignore the gap, to shame and secret people away—first in Magdalene laundries and later by ignoring the thousands of people with crisis pregnancies who travelled abroad for abortions. The lack of language articulating and describing the realities of women's actual lives persisted throughout this period. Thus, the quantities of abortion stories that emerged around the Repeal campaign are a challenge to the patriarchal discursive practices as women untangle themselves from rhetoric that subsumes their lives for fetal rights and shames them for taking control of their own fertility and reproduction.

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[438] Ailbhe Smyth, "Foreword: Above and Beyond the Silence," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2*, ed. by Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), x.

[439] Ailbhe Smyth, "A Sadistic Farce: Women and Abortion in the Republic of Ireland, 1992," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland*, ed. Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press, 1992), 7-8.

In 2012, the public nature of abortion discourse shifted. Veiled references to abortion via euphemisms ("to travel," the substantive issue," "get a boat to England") were suddenly replaced by firsthand experiences. In April, four women—Ruth Bowie, Amanda Mellett, Arlette Lyons, and Jenny McDonald—were featured in *The Irish Times* in a front-page story detailing their abortion journeys following diagnoses of fatal fetal abnormalities.[440] That summer, the Youth Defense group launched their "Abortion Tears Your Life Apart" campaign (discussed in Chapter 2), and later that fall, Savita Halappanavar's appalling death put the abortion debate back in media headlines again. The succession of these three events galvanized the movement to Repeal the Eighth, bringing vast numbers of new supporters into the campaign. The stories of Bowie, Mellet, Lyons, and McDonald generated widespread sympathy for the suffering these women—and their families—endured in light of their wanted pregnancies; consequently, the blatant shaming expressed in the imagery of the Youth Defense campaign was shocking and detestable.[441] Notably, journalist Kathy Sheridan's headline (quoting a statement made by Bowie), "I Believe in a Loving God and I Won't Be Damned for What I Did," articulates a sentiment resonant with Sinéad O'Connor's pronouncement twenty years earlier.

While the cultural reckoning of "speaking out" supported the disclosure of abortion testimonies, formal pro-choice organizations utilized this approach as central to an effective

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[440] Kathy Sheridan, "I Believe in a Loving God and I Won't Be Damned for What I Did," *The Irish Times*, 17 April 2012, https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/i-believe-in-a-loving-god-and-that-i-won-t-be-damned-for-what-i-did-1.502988, accessed 7 August 2021. These four women all travelled for terminations because the fetuses were diagnosed with abnormalities that were "incompatible with life," evidence of the way in which hard cases were featured prominently by the media.

[441] Gráinne Griffin, Orla O'Connor, and Ailbhe Smyth, with Alison O'Connor, *It's a Yes! How Together for Yes Repealed the Eighth and Transformed Irish Society* (Dublin: Orpen Press, 2019), 19.

Repeal campaign. Borrowing a tactic from the successful marriage equality referendum in 2015, abortion-seekers' voices were deliberately and strategically featured as part of the Repeal movement.[442] In *Abortion and Ireland: How the 8th Was Overthrown*, sociologist David Ralph concludes that women were positioned as the "key experts" on the issue and their stories were prioritized over any legal, medical, moral, ethical or philosophical argument.[443] Historians Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart insinuate a different goal in using personal testimony; the Repeal campaign organizers committed to encouraging frank and honest conversations (another strategy borrowed from the marriage equality referendum).[444] This approach is embodied in the #HearMeOut campaign which urged, "Put the kettle on, start a conversation, send a letter, an email or even a text asking a person in your life to hear you out."[445] Despite the divergent contexts, the results are the same: fostering understanding, compassion, and empathy for the realities of abortion-seekers'

[442] Ailbhe Smyth, "Telling the Truth about Women's Lives," *Estudios Irlandeses* 10 (2015): 115-118. In his book, David Ralph argues that the use of personal testimonies alongside a variety of conventional political campaign tactics was the primary reason so many citizens participated in the referendum's endorsement (*Abortion and Ireland: How the 8th Was Overthrown* [London: Palgrave Pivot, 2020]). For salient overviews of the range of personal stories and their strategic value to the campaign, see Clara Fischer, "Feminists Redraw Public and Private Spheres: Abortion, Vulnerability, and the Affective Campaign to Repeal the Eight Amendment," *Signs* 45, no. 4 (2020): 985-1010; Suzanna Chan, "Speaking of Silence, Speaking of Art, Abortion and Ireland," *Irish Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (2019): 73-93; Niamh NicGhabhann, "City Walls, Bathroom Stalls, and Tweeting the Taoiseach: The Aesthetics of Protest and the Campaign for Abortion Rights in the Republic of Ireland," *Continuum* (2018). For a critique of this strategy deployed at the expense of legal argument, see Ruth Fletcher, "#RepealedThe8th: Translating Travesty, Global Conversation, and the Irish Abortion Referendum," *Feminist Legal Studies* (2018): 233-259.

[443] Ralph, 52; 55.

[444] Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart, *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920-2018* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 127.

[445] Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, 127.

lives.[446] Repeal campaign organizations embraced this strategy, providing forums for people to talk about their abortions while simultaneously mobilizing support for the cause.[447]

Akin to the cultural shift in the 1990s around historical institutional abuse, when people began talking about their abortions, they did so in significant numbers. Historian Diarmaid Ferriter establishes that, "for much of the twentieth century, the contention that public debate on sexual morality was inappropriate stood alongside public sermonizing and a preoccupation with what was *seen*, not what was suffered."[448] The Repeal movement radically altered this perception, firmly establishing women's claims to knowledge and authority over their sexual and reproductive lives. Mythic representations of women had

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[446] Ralph, 52; Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, 128. Various Repeal campaign literature signifies this aim. One Together for Yes motto announces, "A Woman you love might need your yes." The Labour Party distributed flyers proclaiming, "For compassion in a crisis. Yes." Moreover, the slogan "Trust women" was featured throughout the campaign, including the Irish language version, "*Muinín i Mna*" published on a Sinn Fein leaflet. The accompanying image features a woman in silhouette with a rolling suitcase at the airport. The banner reads, "She could be your sister, your daughter, your workmate…you." Notably, the Protect the Eighth side used some of the same rhetoric, particularly in the popular refrain "Love Both," as well as personal testimonies of women with crisis pregnancies who decided to have their babies or those who regretted their abortions.

[447] In 2017, the Abortion Rights Campaign began organizing "speak outs" to encourage people to share their stories "in an intimate, supportive environment" ("Time to Speak Out: 2017 Abortion Rights Campaign Speak Out," *Abortion Rights Campaign*, https://www.abortionrightscampaign.ie/event/time-to-speak-out-2017-abortion-rights-campaign-speak-out/, accessed 15 August 2021). The Together for Yes coalition established a "storylab" to record personal testimonies. Likewise, the intermedial nature of the campaign is reflected in online forums created for telling and sharing abortion stories. The *Share Your Abortion Story Tumblr* opened in 2013 following Savita Halappanavar's death (available at https://shareyourabortionstory.tumblr.com/ (accessed 15 May 2021). The site organizers hosted writing workshops led by a non-fiction writing teacher to instruct participants on how to compose an abortion story (Ralph, 58). Similarly, in 2015, the *Xile Project* began archiving the photographs of fifty-five Irish people who travelled for abortions. In 2018, the Facebook page *In Her Shoes - Women of the Eighth* curated a public forum for individuals to anonymously share their stories always accompanied by a photograph shot from the waist down. Artists Grace Dyas and Emma Fraser crowd-sourced more than 150,000 abortion testimonials via the Internet, incorporating those stories into the performance installation *Not at Home* (2017) which toured Ireland prior to the referendum. Mainstream media outlets also amplified ordinary voices. In the weeks before the Repeal referendum, *The Irish Times* invited readers to send in stories for their "Abortion and Me" series ("Abortion and Me: Share Your Story," *The Irish Times*, 4 May 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/abortion-and-me-share-your-story-1.3484457, accessed 16 August 2021).

[448] Ferriter, 546; emphasis added.

dominated the cultural landscape, obscuring those whose behavior and experiences fell outside acceptable gendered norms and definitions of Irish womanhood. Thus, people refused the social demand to carry shame and guilt in silence. The founder of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Sinéad Kennedy explains that there was a compulsion to talk about abortion: "For a country which had derived much of its identity from telling stories about women, the repeal referendum afforded women a unique opportunity to tell their own stories."[449]

These campaign strategies were effective in mobilizing bodies to political action, as well as fostering compassion for abortion-seekers.[450] Smyth characterizes the energy as extending beyond the formal structure of a political campaign to a fully-fledged social movement fueled by women: "we challenge the society as a whole *not* to listen to our stories of abortion, because the stories have been kept so desperately secret, held so closely."[451] While a lot of people were truth-telling, all voices were not necessarily given equal attention, authority, or visibility. As I investigated in the previous chapter, the denial of bodily integrity is a campaign of violence; however, this violence is not enacted against all bodies in the same way. The stories of disabled abortion-seekers, the voices of migrants and people of color, and the testimonies of non-binary and transgender persons were not featured in Repeal ephemera as evenly as those of cisgender white women. Moreover, the most tragic cases—

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[449] Sinéad Kennedy, "#Repealthe8th: Ireland, Abortion Access and the Movement to Remove the Eighth Amendment," *Antropologia* 5, no. 2 (2018), 28.

[450] Olund, 177; Ralph, 52. Ralph cites exit polls that highlight the impact of personal abortion stories in motivating individuals to vote for the repeal: 10 per cent of voters cited 'campaign posters' as influencing how their vote was decided; 7 per cent cited "direct contact with campaigners" as influencing their choice; however, 37 per cent of those polled cited "the experiences of people I know," and 43 per cent cited "peoples' personal stories as covered in the media" as factors informing their vote (Ralph 52).

[451] Ailbhe Smyth, "The Obvious Explanations of How Power is Held and Exercised Over Women Are Very Basic," in *Repeal the 8th*, ed. Una Mullally (London: Unbound, 2018), 139.

the so-called "hard cases"—dominated public media: couples with wanted pregnancies that were diagnosed with fatal fetal abnormalities, people with serious illnesses or health complications with life-threatening pregnancies, and pregnant rape victims.[452] Meanwhile, spaces that provided open forums for truth-telling were more representative of the ordinary circumstances around which most individuals have abortions. In part, the confessional performances depicted in home|work's *The Renunciation* address these omissions, accentuating the ways in which artist-activists recovered those stories overlooked by official, institutional discourse.

Confessing Bodies and Spatializing Shame

Abortion stigmatization depends upon the reactivation of scenarios of guilt, shame, and fear to be effective. These scenarios are rooted in cultural memory and social behaviors. Through their disclosures, these confessors refuse the silencing and shame associated with abortion in the Irish context. Their transgressive performances deconstruct the cultural ideologies that have marked their bodies unruly, contaminated, threatening, and thus shameful. Consequently, these performing bodies rewrite and re-form mythic images of women through a "disruptive articulation" of embodied experiences. They use public performances of exposure to reorient abortion discourses around shared humanity and a politics of compassion.

As a cultural phenomenon, abortion travel is embedded in scenarios of exile, secrecy, and shame. Under the authority of the Eighth Amendment, the state demanded that a pregnant person carry a fetus to term; if anyone dared to defy this mandate, then they became

[452] Olund, 186.

a criminal in violation of a lawful mandate. The fear of prosecution and being found out necessitates silence and deception.[453] Sociologist Lisa Smyth describes speaking or writing openly about one's abortion experience as "unimaginable" during the 1980s or '90s.[454] At that time, abortion was so secretive in the Republic that women arrived at English abortion clinics "in a state of blind panic, terrified of meeting someone who might know them."[455] They were afraid of being recognized and "found out" because they were unprepared with a plausible excuse for being at the airport.[456] Some women arrived at clinics without having taken a pregnancy test for fear of the judgement and questions from the pharmacist.[457] They describe feeling "like a criminal," "as they stole away."[458] As a result, the shame and subterfuge—a whole theatrical performance of concealment—means abortion-seekers "suffer longer and harder than they should."[459]

[453] This is an anti-abortion tactic currently being employed by conservative activists in the U.S., where many state legislators are moving to follow a Texas legal model that empowers citizens to enforce an abortion ban by allowing them to file lawsuits against anyone who performs or receives a termination after six weeks. While this judicial tactic is new, the shame and stigma around abortion has persisted in the U.S. despite the legality of the procedure at the federal level. See Jill Filipovic, "How Texas Created a Culture of Shame and Silence Around Abortion," *Cosmopolitan*, 8 July2014, https://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/news/a28327/abortion-stigma-texas/; and Christine Vestal, "Citizen Enforcement of Texas Abortion Ban Could Spread to Other Laws," *Pew Charitable Trusts*, 23 September 2021, accessed 20 May 2022, https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/09/23/citizen-enforcement-of-texas-abortion-ban-could-spread-to-other-laws.

[454] Lisa Smyth, 176.

[455] Mary Holland "Eire: Girl on a Nation's Conscience," *Observer*, 23 February 1992.

[456] Rossiter, 34.

[457] M. Holland, "Eire."

[458] Lisa Smyth, 170.

[459] Rossiter, 35.

Shame—public and private—has been the apparatus by which women's bodies have been disciplined, controlled, and deprived of authority, integrity, and personhood. This "shame industrial complex" is not uniquely Catholic nor Irish; however, journalist Caelainn Hogan contends that modern Ireland employed this scheme to "a sort of dark perfection."[460] So long as problems could be contained and hidden from view (like the body of Mary the woman who birthed a son, as opposed to the Mother of God who is free of the stain of sin), then the status quo—patriarchal authority—could be maintained. So long as women's bodies were *de*-sexualized into images of obedient and chaste maidens (young "colleens"), then sex could be hidden. In the second half of the nineteenth century, as sex became more visible in mass media—including images of sexually liberated and assertive women—then anxieties grew to intervene, publicly shaming those who transgressed and enacting legislation to prevent further offenses.[461] Consequently, the *visibility* of sex received more attention than scrutinizing the context or harm that resulted from it.[462] Ferriter asserts that authorities tasked themselves with "keep[ing] souls, not *bodies*, safe."[463] The realities and lived experiences of people's lives were secondary to cultivating the perception of national moral purity.

Confession is one of the sacraments of the Catholic Church and the means through which one's sins can be absolved. As such, individuals rely upon the Church to be pardoned for vice and secure their salvation in heaven. The authority of Catholic orthodoxy depends

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[460] Caelainn Hogan, *Republic of Shame: Stories from Ireland's Institutions for Fallen Women* (Dublin: Penguin, 2019), 35.

[461] Inglis, "Sexual Transgression," 5.

[462] Ferriter, 546.

[463] Ferriter, 546; emphasis added.

upon the laity's fears of being denied redemption and "moral respectability."[464] In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that confession has evolved from its function as a pious ritual in the Middle Ages to become a discursive practice of self-regulatory behavior in the twentieth century—a kind of self-monitoring panopticon. Originally associated with the practice of admission to a holy authority for the sake of penance and absolution, a truthful confession has become central to "procedures of individualization by power."[465] What had been a unitary transaction between the individual and God, although facilitated through a priest, has splintered in modern society, becoming incorporated into all facets of life from family relations to work:

> One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat. […] Western man [*sic*] has become a confessing animal.[466]

Accordingly, confession promises a kind of freedom, liberating oneself from the burden of truth, and thus regulating health and well-being. In order to facilitate the need to confess, behavior—and in particular sexuality—has to be identified as appropriate and acceptable.

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[464] Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 30.

[465] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 59. Interestingly, theater historian and medievalist Robert Potter explains that the practice of confession was developed by the Celtic Church in the sixth century. The Celtic region, the British Isles and northwest France (Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany), was remote enough from the Roman Catholic Church as to be beyond the bounds of its direct influence. According to Potter, the ceremony of penitence had grown unpopular because, granted only once in a lifetime to absolve the most serious offenses, it was regularly enacted at one's death. Thus, the Celtic Church developed a system of private penance that later spread throughout Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries (Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play: Origins, History and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition* [London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975], 17).

[466] Foucault, *The History Sexuality*, 59.

Thus, institutional powers label certain behaviors taboo and illicit.[467] Like the economy of shame, the obligation to conceal is embroiled within the obligation to confess.[468] The secret must be told for one's liberation and well-being, but that secret is predicated on thoughts and gestures deemed immoral and transgressive, outside the bounds of normalcy.

Positioning confession as a regulatory process of self-discipline enables the bodily experience of shame. As a negative sentiment, shame is intimately bound to social relations because it predicates the concealment of a moral failure.[469] Importantly then, it is associated with character rather than actions—feelings of shame stick to personalities as a kind of flaw, rather than attaching to behaviors.[470] Nonetheless, emotions *do* things, as feminist theorist Sara Ahmed argues; they shape our bodily actions and behaviors as we re*act* to the world.[471] Shame, therefore, is an embodied action felt *in relation to others*—the impression of self-recognition activated by anxieties about other people's reactions ("I feel myself to be bad and to have been 'found' or 'found out' as bad by others").[472] The dread of discovery materializes as a "facial flush" and a turning away.[473] More dramatically, a habitus of shame is expressed

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[467] Foucault, *The History Sexuality*, 60.

[468] Foucault, *The History Sexuality*, 61.

[469] Fischer, 998.

[470] Fischer, 998.

[471] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd Ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014 [2004]), 5. Ahmed explains, "Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others," 5.

[472] Ahmed, 105.

[473] Ahmed, 104.

through kneeling, bowing the head, and lowering the gaze, a gesture redolent of a praying posture.[474]

The threat of exposure drives the anxiety of shame. It forces people into hiding because "shame is about being seen."[475] Ahmed describes this paradigm as a "double play" in which shame uncovers (one turns away, lowers her face, averts her gaze), while simultaneously demanding that one re-covers—"such a re-covering would be a recovery from shame."[476] This paradoxical design is represented in the nude Venus as her image emerged in Renaissance art; she both reveals and conceals. The figural pose of the *Venus pudica* presents the Western standard of feminine beauty in which a naked Venus modestly covers her private parts while her sexuality is on full display (often artists would asymmetrically pose her figure to draw attention to the very body parts that her gesture hides). Hence, her "shame is hidden in plain sight."[477] In this posture, Venus symbolizes the suppression of women's sexuality.[478]

In the Irish context, the notoriety associated with transgressive feminine bodies recalls the imagery of *Venus pudica*. In this "double play," the exposure of these women's behaviors renders them noteworthy; their shame draws the spectator's gaze. At the same

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[474] Miryam Clough, *Shame, the Church, and the Regulation of Female Sexuality* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 79.

[475] Clough, 9.

[476] Ahmed, 104; see also Clough, 92.

[477] Catherine McCormack, 52.

[478] Catherine McCormack, 42. During the Victorian era, nude classical forms inspired "aesthetic contemplation," whereas the naked moving body was deemed pornographic and thus required censoring (Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011], 42).

time, the viewer is repulsed by the same transgressions, initiating the re-covering of the source of that shame. Thus, the regulation of women's bodies and behaviors conjoins sexual desire with shame, characterized by modesty and humility—actions of concealment, turning away, lowering the gaze, a facial flush, etc. These virtues are epitomized by the Virgin Mary whose Immaculate Conception liberates her from the stain of sin and thus the need for shame.[479] In sum, these emotions, embodied actions, and social relations construct an economy of shame that compels women to be ashamed of their bodies.[480] As such, shame is a social practice, the product of historical and social conditions.[481]

Gestures of shame are coupled with acts of repentance, behaviors that depend upon confessing one's shame. The fear of being exposed, of being labelled sexually transgressive, built walls of silence around those people who had abortions. Ahmed contends that shame requires a witness, even if that witness is imagined.[482] The burden of exposure exists within oneself ("to expel badness, I have to expel myself").[483] Geographer Eric Olund posits that the discourse of abortion travel spatializes shame's prompt to turn away by constructing an abortion trail that materially distances the abortion-seeker from judgment at home.[484] Thus, travelling is an attempt to escape the shame, albeit temporarily.[485]

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[479] Clough, 89.

[480] Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 188.

[481] Ahmed, 9.

[482] Ahmed, 106.

[483] Ahmed, 104.

[484] Olund, 177-78.

[485] Olund, 178.

The telling of an abortion story is a confession of female sexuality. The testimonial performers studied in this chapter, however, refuse the disciplinary body associated with confession to reimagine what publicly exposed bodies can *be* and *do*. As acts of remembering—*re*citing and *re*living—public abortion testimonies utilize the *re*-iteration of truth-telling and confession in everyday life. Working with Diana Taylor's concept of cultural scenarios, performance studies scholar Christopher Grobe theorizes confession as a scenario that recovers the embodied nature of truth-telling.[486] Hence, Grobe shifts confession from the domain of text and narrative to that of dramatization and performance—from the purview of the archive to recover the significance of the repertoire. This paradigm illuminates the embodied nature of shame and the possibilities of feminist confessional performances to expose historical erasure and challenge cultural ethos. The confessional mode is about "the production and maintenance of 'truths;'" however, inherent in this operation exists "the opportunity for counter-discursive stories."[487] Testimonials can reveal the limits of self-discipline, presenting critiques that move beyond individual experiences to scrutinize architectures of control and shame. Performance theorist Deirdre Heddon stresses that, in feminist politics, "the personal was never *only* personal since it was always structural and relational."[488] For feminist performance, structural judgements are vital and necessary. Telling one's abortion story affirms the importance of embodied memories to a greater genealogy, preserving the hidden past to challenge its forgetting.

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[486] Christopher Grobe, *The Art of Confession: The Performance of Self from Robert Lowell to Reality TV* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 22.

[487] Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 163.

[488] Heddon, 161; emphasis added.

The discursive construction of secret shame produces material consequences for people with crisis pregnancies. In the Irish context, abortion testimonies are conjoined to abortion travel. Activist-scholar Ann Rossiter recounts the clandestine abortion trail between Ireland and England before the advent of the Internet and mobile technology in which planning and executing the journey necessitated furtive communication between activists in the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group (IWASG) and abortion-seekers. This "strategy of silence and subterfuge" included code words, like the common girl's name Imelda as a metonym for abortion, and signals such as wearing a red skirt as an identifying trait when meeting abortion-seeking strangers at airports and train terminals.[489] Historically, abortion travel has been hidden, little documented in any official state record, and, as I discuss here, rarely talked about in social institutions. Thus, the history of Irish abortion journeys belongs to the repertoire—embodied and performed acts of knowledge and transmission.[490] In their secrecy, feelings of shame persist, hidden away out of sense of failure to live up to cultural standards and expectations. Those individuals like O'Connor and the twelve abortion-seekers of *The Renunciation* constitute an ever-expanding record of the repercussions of rigid abortion bans on people with crisis pregnancies—including migrants, non-binary people, and transmen.

Re-Imagining Mary and the Angelus: The home|work Collective's *The Renunciation*

The Renunciation is an agitprop theater performance that materializes in public spaces against the backdrop of quotidian life. In this way, the home|work Collective brings

[489] Rossiter, 34; "Why IMELDA?" Speaking of Imelda, accessed 16 October 2021, https://www.speakingofimelda.org/why-imelda.

[490] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 18-21.

their activism to the people, inviting discussion about reproductive rights in open forums. They enact confessional interventions that situate the performers and spectators as witnesses to abortion truth-telling. The structure and form of their performed reading, however, relies upon ritual practices associated with Catholic custom and belief. Thus, their social protest adopts traditions of religious practice, medieval theater, and popular cultural media to produce a shared devotional space. Home|work exploits religious visuality, aurality, and bodily gesture to reinscribe public space and reconfigure performances of gender, particularly those associated with the Virgin Mary and her role in the Angelus prayer. *The Renunciation* exploits the significance of the Angelus in the Irish national imaginary to re-form Mary as a pro-choice icon rather than an anti-abortion one.

In 2015, visual artist Siobhán Clancy teamed up with members of the Abortion Rights Campaign to form the home|work Collective. Drawing on Clancy's background developing community art in service of social change, the group aspires to innovate new frameworks for conversations about reproductive rights. On their website, they assert: "home|work collectively confronts censorship and self-censorship through art, action, performance, conversation and comradery."[491] While their cause unites them, home|work is composed of artists and non-artists. Writing in *The Irish Times*, journalist Una Mullally characterized them, "a brilliant bunch of women whose performances are searingly political."[492] The group epitomizes the cooperative creativity of the Repeal movement more broadly, in which

[491] home|work Collective, https://homeworkcollective.tumblr.com/, accessed 23 July 2021.

[492] Una Mullally, "Una Mullally's 2015: Beauty in the Eye of the Placard-Holder," *The Irish Times*, 19 December 2015, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/una-mullally-s-2015-beauty-in-the-eye-of-the-placard-holder-1.2468428, accessed 26 November 2021.

individual talents and skills were deployed for reform. Moreover, they represent how a feminist praxis can be used to confront social problems through community building.

The group's name bears multiple meanings, encapsulating the varied personal histories of its members. First, "home|work" references the domestic policies of the Irish government that conjoin women's lives to the home and childbearing by explicitly evoking Article 41.2 of the Constitution: "by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved," and thus, "mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties in the home."[493] In gesturing to this state-sanctioned definition of gender roles, the collective emphasizes how overlooked and obscured "women's work"—from childcare to housecleaning—supplements the professionalized (and masculinized) labor regime. Their name thus represents the ongoing historicity of domestic labor and social reproduction as freely given acts of sacrifice and recreation. The vertical bar that separates these two aspects of their name forms a wall that ensures the partition between home and workplace.[494] Moreover, this designation draws attention to the unpaid artistic and activist labor performed by themselves and others—toil that happens beyond a conventional workday schedule and in nontraditional workspaces.[495] Lastly, Clancy explains, their name acknowledges "the efforts

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[493] *Bunreacht na hÉireann* [*Constitution of Ireland*] (1937), Article 41.2.1-2. The full text is available online: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html.

[494] The vertical bar used in "home|work" is called the Sheffer stroke. The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that in logic operations, this glyph signifies "non-conjunction," as in "'*p*|*q'* to mean 'not both *p* and *q*'" ("Sheffer," *OED Online*, March 2022, Oxford University Press, https://www-oed-com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/view/ Entry/177844?redirectedFrom=sheffer+stroke& (accessed 13 May 2022).

[495] "the home|work collective," *A4 Sounds Studio*, A4sounds.org/the-homework-collective/, accessed 23 July 2021.

of migrant members to create a home in a place where they may have fewer rights than the[ir] place of origin."[496] In referencing the varied, entangled relations between home and work, the collective foregrounds gender and social reproduction. They are united by an agenda to advance reproductive justice while setting aside other political posturing. Describing themselves as a coalition of "non-party affiliated" individuals, they enter the work through a single issue that impacts their lives regardless of political, social, racial, or class differences.[497]

Finally, home|work's appellation gestures to feminist artistic traditions. Their approach situates them in dialogue with other Irish artists who have appropriated "women's work" to raise the status of domestic labor, textiles, and handicrafts, including Pauline Cummins, Louise Walsh, Mary Duffy, Dorothy Cross, Alanna O'Kelly, and Alice Maher. Art historian Joan Fowler recognized in a 1990 exhibition that Irish artists were increasingly interested in issues of gender and sexuality. Notably, she observed, women artists approached these themes through new media, video and performance, rather than through conventional painting.[498] Feminist art theorist Hilary Robinson asserts that women artists in the 1970s and 1980s used the body as the medium through which to articulate their messages; these artists revealed how their bodies were inscribed by cultural and social experiences to become the "site of struggle—struggle for control, struggle for meaning."[499]

[496] Siobhán Clancy, "*The Renunciation*," *Feminist Review* 124 (2020), 154.

[497] "the home|work collective"

[498] Joan Fowler, "Speaking of Gender...Expressionism, Feminism and Sexuality," in *A New Tradition: Irish Art of the Eighties* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1990), 56.

[499] Hilary Robinson, "Irish/Woman/Artwork: Selective Readings," *Feminist Review* no. 50 (1995), 103. This movement is part of the broader trend in Western feminist art to emphasize the corporeality of the body as a to challenge patriarchal social institutions and discourses that consolidate white, heteronormative

Kate Antosik-Parsons theorizes “embodied politics” to account for the culturally-specific form of performance art developed by Irish artists. Embodied politics are “provocative personal acts that exercise and resist power in local sites or through collective acts.”[500] While this impetus began during the Women’s Rights Movements of the 1970s, its legacy persists in exhibitions like *LABOUR* (2012) and the formation of collectives including the Artists’ Campaign to Repeal the Eighth, as well as performance art developed by Áine Phillips, Helena Walsh, and Amanda Coogan who use textiles, craft, and the laboring female body to situate social reproduction within Ireland’s containment culture.[501]

Home|work developed *The Renunciation* as a protest action to be shared freely. They encourage its adaptation to the particularities of the communities in which it is performed. For ease of staging, the piece employs a minimalist, do-it-yourself, and low-budget aesthetic. Originally, the ensemble made their own handbound scripts designed to replicate prayer books with a bright blue cover.[502] In a special issue of *Feminist Review* focusing on abortion in Ireland, Clancy provides a template for building the booklets, including instructions for

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masculine authority. See Lucy R. Lippard’s essay collections *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1976) and *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists* (London: Institute for Contemporary Art, 1980).

[500] Kate Antosik-Parsons, “The Development of Irish Feminist Performance Art in the 1980s and Early 1990s,” in *Performance Art in Ireland: A History*, ed. Áine Phillips (London: Live Art Development Agency and Reaktion Books, 2015), 175.

[501] The exhibition catalogue for *LABOUR* is available online: Amanda Coogan and Sheena Barrett, eds. *LABOUR* (Dublin: The Lab, 2012), accessed 10 March 2022, http://www.dublincityartsoffice.ie/ content/files/ LABOUR%20publication%202012.pdf; see also Helena Walsh, “Developing Dialogues: Live Art and Femininity in Post-Conflict Ireland” in *Performance Art in Ireland: A History*, ed. Áine Phillips (London: Live Art Development Agency and Reaktion Books, 2015). The work of the Artists Campaign to Repeal the Eight has been archived by the National Visual Arts Library. See also, https://www.facebook.com/artistsrepeal8/. For an introduction to the works of Phillips, Walsh, and Coogan, see the anthology *Performance Art in Ireland: A History*.

[502] Clancy, 154.

binding them for use in performance. As such, the shareability and ease of performance are embedded in the form and aesthetics of the work. Likewise, the pop-up nature of the performance reinforces these aims.

After a succession of concert performances in theatre spaces, *The Renunciation*'s first guerrilla staging took place at Dublin's Busáras station, the city's primary bus terminal. Subsequent performances occurred at transportation hubs across the capital as well as in sites of transit and town squares across the island.[503] Likewise, activist groups around the world have staged the piece in London, New York, Berlin, and Bangkok. In the Irish context, the site-specificity of the performance physically locates the piece's confessional testimonies in the places accessed by abortion-seekers. Thus, geographer Lorna O'Hara interprets home|work's performance as a reclamation of the city for women, thereby "transforming the locations along the abortion trail from stigma and shame to spaces of resistance."[504]

The Renunciation is a scripted, pop-up performance that inscribes public spaces with the confessions of real-life abortion-seekers. These confessions are structured as a series of repeated call-and-response dialogues between a single performer and the rest of the

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[503] An audio recording of the 2015 concert performance is available: home|work Collective, *The Renunciation*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 29 October 2015, SoundCloud audio, 5:14, https://soundcloud.com/homeworkcollective/the-renunciation, accessed 23 March 2022. The 2015 guerrilla performance at Busáras is available online, home|work Collective, *The Renunciation*, Busáras, Dublin, December 2015, YouTube video, 5:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8FL1wYVXhs, accessed 16 March 2022. There are several online recordings of performances in 2016 as part of St. Brigid's Day actions: home|work Collective, *The Renunciation*, Connolly Station, Dublin, 1 February 2016, YouTube video, 5:01, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCq_ZXSerAM, accessed 23 March 2022; *The Renunciation*, Colbert Station, Limerick, 1 February 2016, YouTube video, 4:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3p8IO2yHfc, accessed 23 March 2022; Speaking of IMELDA, *The Renunciation*, King's Cross St. Pancras Station, London, 1 February 2016, YouTube video, 6:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XSiKDl1oKU, accessed 23 March 2022. Lastly, a rehearsal of the piece in Galway is featured in Hanan Dirya's documentary *Our Right to Choose* (UK: Stinging Hornet Films, 2017), available on Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/243545241, 2:49-3:44, accessed 23 March 2022.

[504] Lorna O'Hara, "Exploring 'Artivist' Innovations in Ireland's Pro-Choice Campaign," *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture* 76 (2020), 44.

ensemble. Call-and-response exchange is a characteristic of contemporary protest action. Likewise, the format characterizes a number of Catholic rituals, including prayers recited at mass and everyday devotions like the Hail Mary, a prayer frequently assigned as penance during the sacrament of confession. *The Renunciation* recounts twelve vignettes of distinct crisis pregnancies—twelve "scenes" to symbolize the twelve abortion-seekers who travel abroad daily. These firsthand anecdotes were shared by group members and other participants in an Abortion Rights Campaign community event. Through experimental workshops, these stories were developed into a staged reading, an accessible form to inexperienced and seasoned performers alike.[505]

The script's opening lines establish the performance's call-and-response pattern. A performer proclaims, "The government decreed unto the people of Ireland," to which the others reply in unison, "Thus 12 women are exiled everyday."[506] These lines cite the authority of the Eighth Amendment which forces women with crisis pregnancies into temporary exile to seek terminations abroad. Their vocalizations thus perform the collusion of church and state. The form is devotional with performers enacting the roles played by the priest and congregation. In their version, however, home|work indicts the government's culpability while using the ecclesiastical pattern to implicate God's obscured role in the matter.

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[505] O'Hara, 42-43; Clancy, 153-54.

[506] Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from *The Renunciation* are taken from the script reproduced in Clancy's article (Siobhán Clancy, "*The Renunciation*" *Feminist Review* 124 [2020], 159-164). The script is also published in the anthology *Short Plays on Reproductive Freedom*, edited by Cindy Cooper and Stacey Linnartz (New York, NY: Words of Choice, Inc., 2018), 164-171.

Following this initial exchange, each of the twelve vignettes follow the same back-and-forth rhythm, conveyed here in the first "scene:"

> Performer: At 27, she does not want to be a mother. She lives with her boyfriend and they agree.
> All: She has overcome obstacles to abortion before and ten years later she faces the same ones again. A Woman.
> Performer: People of Ireland, raise your voices.
> All: We are all worthy of our right to choose. (162)

Each abortion-seeker's unique story prompts the same dialogue between performer and ensemble, the last two lines in the above excerpt. Consequently, home|work repeatedly invites their spectators—the "People of Ireland"—to recognize *everyone's* right to bodily integrity. The constant reiteration of this dialogue—more than twelve times because it is repeated three times consecutively in the closing lines—stresses the aggregate of confessional stories.[507] The duplication feels relentless and perhaps a bit tiresome, enacting a ceaseless request for intervention. In employing second-person narrative, the actors perform abortion confessions that are a degree removed from the original confessor; yet, the repeated refrain, "we are all worthy of our right to choose" foregrounds first-person perspective in the construction of a collective "we." Hence, the performance enfolds the original confessors, the actors, and spectators within the confessional voice of the performance. The confessions are

[507] O'Hara states that the twelve stories symbolize the twelve Irish women who travel abroad daily seeking an abortion (42). The number twelve has deeper significance to *The Renunciation*'s Catholic iconography, particularly as it pertains to the Virgin Mary. In Marian imagery, the Virgin is sometimes crowned with a halo of twelve stars, particularly in depictions of her coronation as the Queen of Heaven, the Immaculate Conception, and as the Star of the Sea (*Stella Maris*) (Melissa R. Katz, "Regarding Mary: Women's Lives Reflected in the Virgin's Image," in *Divine Mirrors: The Virgin Mary in the Visual Arts*, eds. Melissa R. Katz and Robert A. Orsi [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 95). This imagery is taken from the *Book of Revelation*, Chapter 12; Catholicism associates Mary with the Woman of the Apocalypse who was "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (12:1, qtd. in Katz, 95). A Marian statue, *Réalt Na Mara* (Star of the Sea), stands on a globe and pillar along a sea wall in Dublin Bay. She is crowned with twelve Waterford crystals from her post where she can look out at the Irish Sea and watch abortion-seekers arrive and depart by ferry at the port or by plane from Dublin Airport.

intimate and personal, capitulating to the desire for public consumption of private lives. Nonetheless, each vignette charts the same succinct, monotonous pattern using a straightforward tone without judgement or sentimentality.

Within its pattern, *The Renunciation* animates an array of characters in diverse circumstances. Some experiences are mundane and ordinary, not unlike Two Women Travel's story. In addition to the twenty-seven-year-old who does not want to be a mother, there's a university student who spent her hard-earned tuition money to travel and a woman who was anti-abortion until she needed one herself. Other stories give voice to those who are habitually overlooked in popular media: a transgender man who became pregnant when contraception failed, a recovering addict who is HIV-positive, a migrant forced to travel alone while her partner stays behind to look after their children. Some situations revive notorious cases prevalent in the public imaginary, such as an asylum seeker who had been raped in her country of origin (Ms. Y), a cancer patient who became pregnant (Michelle Harte and Sheila Hodgers), and a pregnant teenager who "had 15 Summers to her name," quoting Paula Meehan's poem about Ann Lovett.[508] The coupling of the past to present situations underwrites the long-standing status quo concerning reproductive rights.

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[508] See Chapter 2 for explanations on the cases of Ms. Y and Ann Lovett. In 2010, while being treated for stage four cancer, forty-year-old Michelle Harte became pregnant. Her doctor advised her to terminate the pregnancy so she could continue undergoing cancer treatment. The hospital ethics committee objected to performing the abortion because they deemed Harte's life was "not under immediate threat." Despite her poor condition, Harte was forced to travel to the UK. She died in 2011 (Ursula Barry, "Discourses on Foetal Rights and Women's Embodiment," in *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2*, ed. by Aideen Quilty, Sinead Kennedy, & Catherine Conlon [Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 128]. Sheila Hodgers became pregnant one year after what was deemed "successful" treatment for breast cancer. Hodgers began experiencing severe back pains and she was subsequently admitted to the hospital. While the pain worsened, medical staff refused to perform an abortion, induction, or caesarean section because it could harm the fetus. In 1983, the same year the Eighth Amendment was passed, Hodgers gave birth in "extreme agony" to a premature baby that immediately died. Two days later, Hodgers died from cancer that had spread to her neck, spine, legs, liver, and ribs. She was twenty-six years old. See Padraig Yeates, "Sheila Hodgers—a Case in Question," *The Irish Times*, 2 September 1983, 10.

Additionally, the range of these testimonials signifies home|work's commitment to challenging the silence and secrecy around abortion and reproductive healthcare.

In *The Renunciation*, home|work uses confessional modalities not as self-disciplinary tools, but rather as a means to deconstruct truth and thus perform a confessional intervention. The spoken text reconceives call-and-response exchange—a distinguishing characteristic of social protest action—to infuse it with Marian devotional practice. As such, home|work incorporates Catholic ritual, generally associated with conservative and patriarchal politics, into progressive and feminist activist labor. Rather than working with a standard call-and-response protest chant, *The Renunciation* performs abortion testimonies in a rhythm and structure designed after the Angelus prayer. The Angelus is a traditional Catholic devotion recited at dawn, noon, and dusk, typically signaled by eighteen peals of a bell. It interrupts daily life, inviting people to pause their work or activity to contemplate spirituality; the goal is reflection and repose.[509] Thus, the Angelus synchronizes remote worship through a call to prayer.[510]

In their use of the Angelus, the home|work Collective situates the performers and spectators as witnesses to personal testimonies, inviting a moment of reflection and repose on the lives of abortion-seekers. The text of the Angelus prayer recounts the Incarnation when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that the Son of God was conceived in her womb: "[V.]

[509] Anna McCarthy, "The Angelus: Devotional Television, Changing Times," *Television & New Media* 22 (2021), 14.

[510] A. McCarthy, 12.

The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, / [R.] And she conceived of the Holy Spirit."[511] In its imitation of the prayer's structure, *The Renunciation* replaces the versicle typically spoken by the priest with a personal narrative recited by a performer. The ensemble answers with a refrain in unison, thereby mimicking the hymnal call and response of Catholic mass and devotions.[512] Clancy explains that this structure is consciously minimalist and incorporates repetition to reinforce the subject matter.[513]

When the performer is positioned as witness, the confessor is not divulging the self, but forms "a watchful eye/I of the world, […] seeing or proposing it differently."[514] As witnesses, the performers (and subsequently the audience they circumscribe via their imperative "People of Ireland") question the impetus that sparks confession in the first place; they challenge abortion stigma and the forced exile of people with crisis pregnancies. As such, *The Renunciation* embodies what literary historian Irene Gammel calls "confessional intervention," a performance in which women and other marginalized genders "resist, manipulate, and negotiate the confessional frames and practices designed to entrap them."[515]

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[511] Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the Angelus prayer are taken from *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, Rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007), 15.

[512] Clancy, 154. The activist group Speaking of IMELDA used a similar tactic in their performance action *Silenced Screams*, created in response to the Ms. Y case and staged at the Irish Embassy in London in 2014. They used what they describe as a "secular rosary" in repurposing the call and response form of the Hail Mary prayer into their protest chants. Member Helena Walsh explains that the performance "replac[es] the repetitions of the rosary with an expression of care" (Helena Walsh, "Performances of Autonomy: Feminist Performance Practice and Reproductive Rights Activism in Ireland," *Scene* 8, no. 1-2 [2021] 41). A video of the protest action is available here: Speaking of IMELDA, "IMELDA Tackles Church and State," Speaking of IMELDA, accessed 24 March 2022, https://www.speakingofimelda.org/imelda-tackles-church-and-state.

[513] Clancy, 154.

[514] Heddon, 163.

[515] Irene Gammel, "Introduction," *Confessional Politics: Women's Sexual Self-Representations in Life Writing and Popular Media*, ed. Irene Gammel (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 7-8.

Home|work reconfigures the framework of Catholic prayer and custom to embrace the experiences of abortion-seekers.

As discussed previously, self-censorship is a survival strategy used by people with crisis pregnancies for decades. To a certain extent, *The Renunciation* reproduces the self-disciplinary gestures of confession. Like Two Women's Travel's disclosure, these abortion testimonies are anonymous. If shame is about being seen, then identifying characteristics are withheld to protect the truth-teller from shame. Thus, home|work acknowledges the ongoing need for secrecy and the perpetuation of the stigma of abortion. *The Renunciation*, however, uses confessional modalities to not merely reinforce its self-disciplinary qualities. The piece reframes these modalities to mark the limits of knowing; secrets remain hidden by an impermeable wall that divides the confessors from the audience, emphasizing the institutional architecture that marks these bodies threatening and dangerous while proposing an alternative truth to the status quo. The performance complicates the authority of truth in the confessional mode, refusing the entrapment of patriarchal discourses including confession's punitive censorship and Catholic doctrine that deems certain bodies immoral and shameful. Hence, *The Renunciation* belongs among those confessional performances that advocate for confession's ability to deconstruct truth as much as maintain it.[516]

In their revision of the Angelus, the home|work Collective dismantles the authority of the clergy; they use the formal structure of the prayer to challenge the notion that only an individual ordained by the Catholic Church has the right to reflect on the morality of behavior. This displaces the priest, the traditional audience for a confession. In confessional

[516] Heddon, 163-64.

interventions, storytellers “disrupt confessional frames and unsettle the confessional reader’s secure expectations.”[517] The home|work Collective modifies confessional narrative by situating it within forms of Catholic ritual, namely the interactional versicle and response of Catholic prayers such as the Angelus and Hail Mary, important cultural touchstones for Irish religious practice.[518] In *The Renunication*, the versicle normally delivered by a priest has been reassigned to performers, thereby supplanting the voice of authority from the priest to the performers. If confession gains its power through being heard, then the presence of the listener “legitimize[s] it and assign[s] it a truth value.”[519] Therefore, home|work manipulates the tactics of confession away from the patriarchal governance of the religious order. Their performance corroborates the sovereignty of the community, embodied by the ensemble who perform the dual roles of witness and confessor, acting as both the “watchful eye/I” of society *and* its voice of authority.

Transforming Spaces of Shame into Spaces of Compassion

As a staged reading, *The Renunciation* is an auditory performance. But, like the recitation of a prayer, the performance is also embodied and gestural. Home|work engages embodied politics in animating collective action in meaningful localities. Their performance illuminates the body as a site of struggle, while negotiating the metaphysical and material—how sacred and patriarchal discourses interact with secular cultural spaces. Positioning *The*

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[517] Gammel, 8.

[518] The home|work Collective was mentored by artist Áine Phillips whose feminist performance art frequently re-imagines and re-situates Catholic rites and rituals. Notably, her performance *Sex, Birth, and Death* (2003) comments on her own abortion experience. She invites the audience to share a fetus cake in an act reminiscent of the Eucharist (EL Putnam, “Not Just ‘A Life Within the Home’: Maternal Labour, Art Work, and Performance Action in the Irish Intimate Public Sphere,” *Performance Research* 22, no. 4 [2017]: 61-70).

[519] Gammel, 6.

Renunciation as a site-specific performance emphasizes how civic identity and religious belief contribute to the body's experience of public space, and how bodies can challenge the spatialization of shame by generating a space for compassion. In the agitprop performance of *The Renunciation* at Busáras, the performers congregate in the middle of the open lobby of the terminal, exposed to all passers-by (see Figure 3.1).[520] They form a circle with their backs to one another, Romanesque stone columns looming over them in the background. An attendant carries a megaphone speaker to each performer in turn, amplifying their voices above the echoey din of the cavernous station. As the attendant moves around the circle, the backdrop shifts to reveal the schedule of arrivals and departures on the wall above shop kiosks and a constantly changing display of ads on a digital billboard. In contrast to the flow of bodies in and out of the bus station, the performers remain still. They impede the traffic pattern across the expanse of the lobby. They are bundled up in jackets, some wearing bags and backpacks over their shoulders or resting them against their legs on the floor. Each performer wears an identical light blue scarf casually draped around their neck and holds a matching blue prayer booklet. These items signify the group as a chorus. Deliberately

[520] home|work Collective, *The Renunciation*, Busáras, Dublin, December 2015, YouTube video, 5:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8FL1wYVXhs, accessed 16 March 2022. In their occupation of sites of transit, home|work's performance recalls the performance action *Metronome* staged by the Perform for Choice Collective throughout 2012-2013 at various locations including Dublin Airport, train stations, and ferry terminals. In *Metronome*, women in red coats carry suitcases or backpacks and move through these spaces in choreographed patterns. The performance "unsettles and troubles the associations between international transport hubs travel for holiday and leisure by performing a choreography that highlights the way abortion-travellers are interspersed in the crowds that move through the airport" (Sydney Calkin, "Healthcare Not Airfare! Art, Abortion and Political Agency in Ireland," *Gender, Place & Culture*, 26, no. 3 [2019], 352). Video footage of Metronome's various performances is available: Siobhan Clancy, Jacinta Fay, Grainne Griffin, Jo May, and Lenka Vrbnakova, "Actions for Choice," Dublin: *Metronome*, 2012, https://vimeo.com/50730626, accessed 24 March 2022.

avoiding a praying posture, they hold their heads up and keep their prayer books from obscuring their faces and voices.[521]

Figure 3.1. home|work performs *The Renunciation* at Busáras.

In mounting *The Renunciation* in public spaces amidst everyday traffic and activity, home|work materially and symbolically situates abortion truth-telling within national

[521] In the documentary short *Our Right to Choose* (2017), someone instructs the other performers in a rehearsal for *The Renunciation* in Galway: “The idea is when you walk up, those of you who have booklets, you can hold them like this, if that works. And then when you get there, you stand and you open them up. And the idea is to hold them about here, okay, so you can read. It’s like a prayer book, right? We’re kind of taking a piss-take on the Hail Mary” (Hanan Dirya, dir., *Our Right to Choose* [UK: Stinging Hornet Films, 2017], https://vimeo.com/243545241, accessed 24 November 2021, 02:49-3:11). While this resistant politics is unmistakably part of the performance, the staged reading evokes less a sense of anger and sarcasm and more a sense of solemn prayer. The tone of playful irony displayed by Two Women Travel is absent here, and likewise the kind of moral outrage conveyed through the interventions of Speaking of IMELDA.

discourse. Art historian Miwon Kwon expands the definition of site-specificity to include the shared sense of space produced by cultural conditions, for instance, a "repressed ethnic history, a political cause, [or] a disenfranchised social group."[522] Accordingly, site-specific artwork occupies nonmaterial, rhetorical spaces generated by social relations and formations. *The Renunciation* thus renders visible those bodies traversing sites of transit along the abortion trail, while simultaneously producing discursive sites that animate Catholic rituals and cultural customs. This staging symbolically re-places abortion-seekers *and* the topic of abortion in plain view.[523] As such, they negotiate the double play associated with the *Venus pudica*, revealing the ways shame drives acts of uncovering and recovering. The performance both reveals and conceals. Abortion confessions are heard but the aberrant bodies remain obscured, alluded to but never seen, displaced by an interlocutor.

At the same time, however, *The Renunciation* insists upon the corporeality of its abortion confessors, negotiating the body as a site of struggle. As a site-specific event, the performance animates abortion as a process of involuntary travel in the Irish context.[524] These transitory environs spatialize shame in exiling people with crisis pregnancies, forcing them to turn away. In occupying these spaces and making abortion-seekers' experiences seen and heard, home|work rejects the spatialization of shame. Because the actual confessors are obscured and voiced by another individual, their shame is not rendered visible. The performers refuse the self-disciplinary gestures of turning away and blushing. Additionally,

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[522] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002), 30.

[523] Sydney Calkin, "Healthcare Not Airfare! Art, Abortion and Political Agency in Ireland," *Gender, Place & Culture*, 26, no. 3 (2019), 338, 339.

[524] Calkin, 348.

they challenge a posture of prayer. In devotional practice, the body animates the words of prayer. In the Angelus, the glory of the Annunciation is marked in gesture as well as words; when uttering the phrase "And the Word was made flesh," individuals normally kneel or touch the chest to signify "Jesus Christ's moment of incarnation in Mary's womb."[525] In their performance, however, home|work negates those gestures that signify and embody shame.

In occupying geographical locales along the abortion trail, like Busáras station, home|work re-forms spaces of shame and abortion stigma into sites of recognition and compassion. Their use of the Angelus is central to this transformation; their site-specific performance uses religious ritual and theatre in repurposing intermedial cultural forms to alter how bodies create sacred and secular space. Drawing on the work of Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre, performance scholar SanSan Kwan asserts that space is a social process that is historically produced. In *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces*, Kwan elaborates, "A city is determined not only by the unique crisscrossing of peoples, things, and practices through its territory at a single moment but by activities and material relations over time."[526] For Kwan, bodies traversing particular places at distinct moments informs the construction of place *and* bodies at that moment. This accounts for how places like Busáras spatialize the abortion trail; significantly, if "space is experienced and constituted through the body," then the activities, gestures, and movements enacted by bodies can reconfigure those spaces.[527] In their reorganization, home|work depends upon the role of

[525] A. McCarthy, 15.

[526] Kwan, 17.

[527] Kwan, 17.

the Angelus as a social practice and a component of the auditory and visual landscape of the national imaginary.

In the Irish context, the Angelus is not only a Catholic ritual that mobilizes prayer; it is a form of cultural media that represents and constructs national identity. Since 1950, the Angelus has been broadcast daily on national radio and television, weaving the sacred and contemplative act of prayer into public mass communication. The Republic's public service broadcaster, RTÉ (*Raidió Teilifís Éireann*), airs the Angelus bells every day at noon and six in the evening on the radio, and once daily at six before the nightly news on television.[528] As such, its transmission through media forms—whether from the local church bells or those recorded and played back on radio and television—provides a soundtrack to the cultural landscape of quotidian life that translates into social ritual and personal behavior. Thus, the Angelus has a connotation that supersedes its role in Catholic custom. Cultural sociologist Patricia Cormack proposes that, despite the prayer's waning popular practice, the daily RTÉ broadcast endures as an idea and image of collective Irish identity.[529] In its initial televisual form, the bells were accompanied by still images of Old Masters paintings of the Madonna and Child or the Annunciation, extending visuality to the sacred and reflective auditory space of the Angelus. In the 1990s, RTÉ incorporated moving images to utilize more effectively the televisual while preserving the prayer's relevance to everyday life.[530] The slow and

[528] RTÉ began broadcasting the Angelus on television in 1962.

[529] Patricia Cormack, "Angels, Bells, Television and Ireland: The Place of the Angelus Broadcast in the Republic," *Media, Culture, & Society* 27, no.2 (2005), 272.

[530] Cormack, 272. A still image version of the Angelus broadcast from 1983 is available here: RTÉ, "The Angelus [25 September 1983]," YouTube video, published 26 May 2020, 3:25-4:38, https://youtu.be/txFdalvk6D0?t=205, accessed 17 March 2022. In contrast, a version with moving pictures from

methodical bell track was paired with "varying one-minute sequences, structured by slow fades and dissolves, [that] offered the viewer a hypnotic drift between inspirational images of nature, church architecture, and tableaux-like scenes of ordinary people in modern life, pausing as they sip tea or light a candle."[531]

While RTÉ's broadcast originally brought the visuality of the church into the private space of the home, the last several decades have marked a decided change characterized by a "progressive decentering of Catholic iconography in the Angelus image track."[532] On their website, RTÉ designates their Angelus, "a reflective minute, where people of all faiths and none may, if they choose, take time out."[533] Consequently, the broadcast forms an "electronically 'imagined community' of reflection and pause" that offers a break from both the pace of television and the realities of modern Ireland.[534] While some Irish view it as a relic of a bygone era of enthusiastic Catholicism, public opinion overwhelmingly expresses a desire to keep the Angelus on television.[535] It is RTÉ's longest-running, most-watched religious program, but perhaps it is also the most contentious.[536]

2002 is available here: RTÉ, "The Angelus [2002]," YouTube video, published 3 June 2010, https://youtu.be/X1rCO694RiU, accessed 17 March 2022.

[531] A. McCarthy, 14. The content of RTÉ's Angelus broadcast sequences has generally remained the same, only evolving to address shifting population demographics as the Republic becomes more ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse and more secular in general.

[532] A. McCarthy, 16.

[533] "The Angelus," *RTÉ Player*, Raidió Teilifís Éireann, accessed 3 August 2021, https://www.rte.ie/player/series/ the-angelus/SI0000003471?epguid=IP000061264.

[534] Cormack, 283.

[535] In 2018, Irish citizens voted to decriminalize blasphemy, and at that time, they were given an exit poll asking if the RTÉ's Angelus broadcast should continue (A. McCarthy, 16).

[536] "RTÉ Says Retention of Angelus is 'Defensible,'" *RTÉ*, 25 June 2015, https://www.rte.ie/news/2015/0625/ 710601-angelus/.

Social and cultural theories generally adopt the view that religion is at odds with modernizing technologies. The Catholic Church has historically eschewed the use of new media, privileging the live, co-present relationship between the clergy and laity.[537] RTÉ's Angelus, however, provides evidence that this relationship is more complicated. Media scholar Erica Robles-Anderson attests that ecclesiastical practices are frequently mediated and positioning technologies as "agents of religious decline" obscures and diminishes a mythic understanding of the world.[538] In her seminal work *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, feminist media scholar Lynn Spigel hypothesizes television in the home as a vital facet of the formation of social space, particularly concerning gender roles and family life. She relates how television facilitates the emergence of leisure pastimes within domestic spaces through private access to collective activity; as a "window on the world," television can take viewers anywhere without leaving the comforts of their living rooms.[539] In this context, communications technology blurs the boundaries of the public and private, geographic and temporal. This transcendence of time and space presents exciting possibilities for devotional television.

Practically speaking, RTÉ's Angelus program is a product of modern convenience: it overcomes the challenges of distributed social conditions in which everyone might not be in proximity to hear live church bells. While the content of the Angelus is not broadcast live,

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[537] Erica Robles-Anderson, "Blind Spots: Religion in Media Studies," *Flow*, 18 December 2012, http://flowtv.org/2012/12/blind-spots/, accessed 16 May 2022.

[538] Erica Robles-Anderson, "The Crystal Cathedral: Architecture for Mediated Congregation," *Public Culture* 24, no. 3 (2012), 599.

[539] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9.

the ritual of the prayer itself, which pre-dates television and radio, constructs remote communities—what Robles-Anderson calls "a mediated congregation"—by its definition as an event; it is initiated by clock time.[540] Media scholar Jane Feuer theorizes that television produces a perceived liveness among its remote audiences that fosters feelings of unity among them.[541] Hence, the syncopation of television production and its consumption by an audience attempts to resolve its contradictions between segmentation and flow.[542] Similar to the sense of online liveness crafted in Two Women Travel's narrative in which they negotiate the mediation of synchronous and asynchronous encounters to generate suspense, television programs craft feelings of immediacy to overcome spatial fragmentation. Consequently, RTÉ's Angelus demonstrates how worship can coexist with daily activity without entirely suspending the rhythms of ordinary life. Furthermore, the private nature of prayer correlates to the consumption of television as a practice that happens in private spaces. The Angelus broadcast does not seek to resolve the contradictions inherent in contemporary, mediated society; rather it engages with the ways that current relations are fragmented and fluctuating, and yet, in this moment, individual and nation can come together, all facilitated by technology. No matter what people are doing or where they happen to be, the Angelus

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[540] Robles-Anderson, "The Crystal Cathedral," 579.

[541] Jane Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches—An Anthology*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1983), 14. Feuer explains, "Television's self-referential discourse plays upon the connotative richness of the term 'live,' confounding its simple or technical denotations with a wealth of allusiveness. Even the simplest meaning of 'live'—that the time of the event corresponds to the transmission and viewing times—reverberates with suggestions of 'being there' … 'bringing it to you as it really is.'"

[542] Feuer, 16. Influentially, Raymond Williams hypothesizes that television watching as a social activity is inherently paradoxical; it strives to keep the audience watching "in the flow," while simultaneously being structured by segments—commercials, act breaks, and multiple programs (Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology, and Cultural Form* [New York: Routledge, 1974], 93).

reaches them, as a dispersed national body, inviting them to form a mediated congregation engaged in prayer.

In her study of the use of technology in the American megachurch movement, Robles-Anderson contends that a mediated congregation legitimizes Christianity in the constantly evolving technological landscape.[543] In taking advantage of the tools of modernization and secularization, churches "reassert the legibility of a Christian cosmology within contemporary technological conditions."[544] In this context, the Angelus broadcast buttresses Catholicism's ongoing relevance in Irish social life. As a state-sponsored broadcast, the televisual landscape of RTÉ's Angelus impacts shifting definitions of national identity, suffusing them with a sacred texture by virtue of its soundtrack, the methodically ringing bells. The program's visuality juxtaposes scenes of community, nature, and craft with quotidian social activity. Like its previous immobile iterations, the current mediascape of the Angelus conjures a "wistful nostalgia for the social world it calls forth," beckoning a return to a simple and quiet way of life free from the noise and bustle of the contemporary world.[545] Cormack argues that "viewers are not so much called to recognize themselves literally in [the

[543] Robles-Anderson, "The Crystal Cathedral," 579.

[544] Robles-Anderson, "The Crystal Cathedral," 579.

[545] Cormack, 286. Cormack argues that the content and medium of the RTÉ's broadcast are at odds with one another; the Angelus prayer and bells call forth a timelessness and nostalgia for a pre-Industrial, pre-modern Ireland that is at odds with the fragmented and invasive nature of television (285-286). The current images seem aware of this disjunction (affirming Spigel's theorization that television seeks to resolve these oppositions), featuring artists and craftspeople intently at work (for instance, gardening, bookbinding, or painting) while intercutting footage of daily activity on busy streets. These depictions shift the Angelus away from its previous position as an interruption of work, instead highlighting the meditative virtues of working with one's hands. Notably, McCarthy reasons that the transition to moving images "strengthened the association between the Angelus and work, because it called attention to the Angelus itself as product of craft" (19).

figures portrayed in the broadcast], but to 'recall' their Irishness through them."[546] Similarly, media studies scholar Anna McCarthy describes the Angelus as a malleable projection, "an image in which we see what we want to see."[547]

In their use of the Angelus, the home|work Collective exploits its role in popular media. As a social habitus, the Angelus bells animate embodied physical gestures; they hail people to pause for a moment and reflect. In their guerrilla stagings of *The Renunciation*, home|work exploits this call to attention that inscribes shared, public spaces with a sacred function. They rely upon what Cormack identifies as the localized, timelessness of the Angelus.[548] Staged in bustling points of transit such as Dublin's Busáras station, their performance reproduces the halt in daily activity, inviting spectators to stop, listen, and deliberate. O'Hara equates their performance with the bells that signify the Angelus: the performers' "voices, like the peal of the Angelus bell, intruded on the daily commute of citizens and passersby."[549] On the one hand, *The Renunciation* reinforces the ways that the ideology of the church spreads to seemingly "neutral" public spaces like bus stations. Like the Angelus piped into private homes and living spaces across the country, the reach of Catholic belief has infiltrated people's lives. In this configuration, *The Renunciation* operates as a radical performance of disruption and resistance.

While using the contemplative and private form of the Angelus, the *publicness* of the performance and its site-specificity use the Angelus as a cultural, intermedial form. This

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[546] Cormack, 282.

[547] A. McCarthy, 27.

[548] Cormack, 285.

[549] O'Hara, 43.

configuration depends upon employing the Angelus to envisage "what we want to see"—its ability to form a mediated congregation emphasizing communion and mercy. The cultural space of the Angelus stages a national collective identity shared by abortion-seekers, performers, and audience. In *The Renunciation*, individuals are called to act, but in this case the action is directed in support of others. Home|work positions their unvaried and incessant collective refrain, "we are all worthy of our right to choose," as a call to compassion that asks people to recognize everyone's humanity. Consequently, home|work's negotiation of the cultural power of the Angelus yields an incitement rather than an intrusion. They strive to mobilize civic participation through prayer or contemplation. Their performance, however, depends upon the audience's cultural literacy; one must be able to interpret the signifiers. In an increasingly secular society, kinesthetic awareness of the Angelus has become ambiguous. Spectators with varying knowledge of the Angelus and Catholicism will receive and respond to *The Renunciation* differently. Some might recognize a more overtly political message, viewing the call-and-response style as social protest; others will identify the rhythms of devotions and understand the religious critique.

In its aims and execution, *The Renunciation* adopts strategies and aesthetics indicative of medieval theater. While the Collective does not identify this inspiration, I argue that their staging of religious content in an urban setting using participatory forms parallels dramatic productions of medieval Europe. Performed by townspeople in conjunction with important Christian holidays, religious drama of the Middle Ages staged Bible stories and symbolic allegories in a didactic tone and structure. As theater scholar Robert Potter describes in his study of morality plays, these performances blended Catholic doctrine and realism derived from a preaching tradition that sought to make theological concepts accessible to common

people.[550] Significantly, these performances were staged by the community in public sites, infusing the divine into everyday secular life and day-to-day experiences. Theater director and historian Mike Tyler asserts that religious performances during the Middle Ages were participatory, community-based theater in which the city and its citizens had vital roles to play.[551] In embodying their beliefs "within the cramped streets and public spaces of the city, spectators and audience became one single community of faith."[552] These performances stage identity and belonging, using theater in service of the sacred. As Sarah Beckwith asserts, medieval theater "stage[s] for the city a spectacle of itself."[553] Thus, medieval performance sheds light on how civic identity and religious belief contribute to the body's kinesthetic understanding of public space.

In repurposing the structure of the Angelus and the dialogic and dramatic qualities of Catholic mass, *The Renunciation* produces shared, sacred space in the tradition of medieval religious theater forms. Hence, they reveal how religion has historically been—and continues to be—a media project. Like medieval plays, *The Renunciation* fosters communal sentiment in using ordinary citizens as performers, locating the audience and actors within the same mise-en-scène, and thereby placing the dramatized religious content in the here and now. The performance uses the dialogical narrative of the Annunciation against the backdrop of the present-day city, making the story relevant to contemporary living. As such, it invokes an

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[550] Potter, 20.

[551] Mike Tyler, "Revived, Remixed, Retold, Upgraded? The Heritage of the York Cycle of Mystery Plays," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 4–5 (2010), 323.

[552] Tyler, 326.

[553] Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 13.

immediacy, a sense of nowness that resonates with the medieval theatrical form. Medieval literary scholar Jody Enders attests that "from the earliest liturgical dramas, [medieval theater] had long come close to quotidian existence, *alive* and in *motion* as it paraded itself through time and space before the eyes of spectators."[554]

The home|work Collective animates a unified community of faith in using the intermedial form of the Angelus, while they simultaneously invest the prayer with new meaning. Like the national identity presented by RTÉ's Angelus broadcast, medieval theater made visible "civic unity and pride."[555] Thus, the slow and monotonous peals of the bell and its reproduction in the rhythmic pattern of *The Renunciation*'s versicle and response conjure images of a congregation united by national identity. Home|work exploits the media conventions of religious theater, bellringing, and prayer, to construct a unified community in shared physical, national, and sacred space. Their use of the Angelus conjures the timelessness associated with devotional worship and the church, what Cormack describes as "the imaginative construction of all Ireland as existing within the spatial dimensions of a small community."[556] The characters, performers, and spectators share a temporal proximity that bonds them as a national community; however, home|work uses this proximity to invest the old significance of the Angelus with a new purpose: to extend compassion to the abortion-seekers in their community. Finally, this meaning-making depends upon enacting the traditional visuality of the Virgin and her central role in the Angelus prayer.

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[554] Jody Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2002), 70; emphasis added.

[555] Tyler, 323.

[556] Cormack, 283.

The Virgin Mary is Pro-Choice: Reclaiming Mary in the Service of Bodily Autonomy

The Renunciation foregrounds the significance of the Virgin to the Angelus prayer and its cultural, intermedial performance via RTÉ broadcast. This sheds light on the Virgin Mary's role in defining national identity and gender roles, particularly in the diverse range of media that contributes to the embodiment of identity and national belonging. Home|work exploits the auditory and visual associations of the Angelus with Mary's role as mother in order to extend this relation to other potential maternal bodies. As such, they re-imagine how Catholic ritual and belief can produce a space of support for pro-choice politics. As a media event, the Angelus broadcast has evolved over the years to reflect Ireland's shifting culture and population, but the broadcast continues to bear traces of a national identity shaped around traditional gender roles and Catholic values. As a cultural visual object, the mass broadcast of the Angelus has moved away from its association with the Virgin Mary. Against the backdrop of revelations of abuse in the Catholic Church and an increasingly non-homogeneous population, religious iconography has been downplayed in favor of scenes featuring the diversity of daily life. Currently, Marian imagery is limited to the Angelus Christmas broadcasts—typically a Nativity scene—or Mary is referenced obliquely through emblems. For example, one broadcast features a blacksmith forging a rose, an image associated with the Virgin.[557] In another version, an artist sculpts from sand a dove—another Marian symbol—flying out of a pair of hands.[558] Thus, Mary's presence lingers at the edges

[557] A. McCarthy, 16.

[558] This version of the Angelus broadcast and others are available online: RTÉ, "The Angelus: 01. Dove Sand Sculpture," 2015, https://www.rte.ie/player/series/the-angelus/SI0000003471?epguid=IP000061259, accessed 19 March 2022.

of the Angelus broadcast, in the same way that her image continues to mark the boundaries of morality and femininity in culture altogether.

The Renunciation juxtaposes the historical and Marian traditions of the Angelus broadcast with its evolving characteristics as a symbol of Ireland's secularization, liberalism, and multiculturalism. As a devotion that includes a series of Hail Mary prayers, the Angelus commemorates the Incarnation. Therefore, it is bound to the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation. To reiterate, the prayer's text invokes Mary's role as mother: "[V.] The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, / [R.] And she conceived of the Holy Spirit." In RTÉ's linkage of the tolling bells of the Angelus and still images of the Madonna and Child or the Annunciation, they extended visuality to the sacred and reflective space of the Angelus. In this context, the televisual serves a similar purpose to the advent of Marian imagery in the Middle Ages. As art historian Melissa R. Katz illustrates, in modern devotion, this iconography represented an external stimulus to prayer for the laity, encouraging individuals to forge intimate connections to Mary and Jesus by meditating upon their own lives and experiences.[559] Likewise, home|work invites spectators to extract the same kind of personal investment from their performance; however, in *The Renunciation*, they expand this relation to Mary to include other maternal bodies.

As discussed above, in reconfiguring the confessional mode in terms of the Angelus, the home|work Collective applies the Angelus' role in Irish society as simultaneously a Marian devotion and a cultural media project. Home|work reinscribes the Angelus with images of Mary that evoke the Old Masters' paintings originally featured in the RTÉ

[559] Katz, 33.

broadcast. In their guerrilla performance at Busáras, the performers uniform blue scarves reaffirm Marian visuality. Blue is the color of the Blessed Virgin; she is typically depicted wearing either a blue robe or veil.[560] Consequently, home|work members associate themselves and the abortion-seekers whose confessions they tell with the Virgin Mary through the symbolic garment. Regardless of the performer's gender or identity, the scarves costume them all in the same spectacle and, regardless of the abortion-seeker's gender or identity, the blue scarf links their potential parenthood to the Virgin as the epitome of motherhood.

Consequently, home|work's performance stages a mythic pose that embodies the coexistence of spiritual and material discourses. In animating Marian imagery, they reveal how the Virgin's cultural meaning evolves despite her ongoing timelessness. In *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance*, Carrie J. Preston defines mythic posing as a performance strategy that confronts the "crisis" of modernity—the anxieties and fears sparked by rapidly developing technology and the radical restructuring of social and political life.[561] Preston recuperates the role of embodied classical forms and ancient myths in configurations of the modern—from poetry and theater to dance and film. She situates the performance of mythic posing as a still or pause that simultaneously operates as "skeptical critique and nostalgic diversion," thereby delivering a means for individuals to grapple with

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[560] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 266. This practice began with Byzantine Christian art to reinforce Mary's associations with the sky and heaven, as well as with the sea and water. This symbolic convention continued during the Renaissance when the sacred color adopted an economic value; blue was an expensive pigment and thus a painter's "most fitting and fervent tribute" (Warner, 266).

[561] Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

the everchanging conditions of life.[562] Cultural theorist Walter Benjamin conceived of the crisis of modernity as a perpetual "state of emergency"—societies cultivate a relentless cycle of despair through technological progress.[563] Thus, humanity proves its existence through destruction, a concept which he saw embodied by the "angel of history," the figure in Paul Klee's print *Angelus Novus* (1920). Benjamin describes how, in Klee's drawing, the bird-like angel with wide eyes turns his face toward the "piling wreckage" of the past, while a storm has caught its wings and violently propels him into "the future to which his back is turned."[564] Benjamin's image encapsulates anxieties about the advancement of progress and feelings of impotence against it. The mythic pose of his angel of history—caught somewhere between the past and the future, the realms of divinity and earthly life—freezes a moment for consideration. Thus, it resonates with Preston's postulation, conceiving "a method for ordering human experiences that does not fully separate nature from technology, wholeness from fragmentation, or body from soul."[565]

In *The Renunciation*, home|work performs a mythic pose that conjoins the traditional gendered role of the Virgin with a radical re-imagining of her place in social life. Their mythic pose conjures Marian iconography, enacting a reflective pause in the commotion and movement of quotidian life as people come and go and advertisements flash and change across the billboard screen. Like the older forms of RTÉ's Angelus program, their pose

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[562] Preston, 5.

[563] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

[564] Benjamin, 257, 258.

[565] Preston, 98.

recalls pre-modern life; yet, at the same time, it suspends the present to insert gaps and omissions in the laws of contemporary material realities. In *The Renunciation*, the linkage of potential maternity and motherhood's idealized status exploits the Angelus as a commemoration of Mary's agency in bearing the Son of God. Home|work uses embodied language to reinforce the Marian imagery of the piece. The Angelus is associated with words; the prayer venerates the power of an utterance when the Word of God was made flesh. Its text echoes Mary's reply to the angel Gabriel as reported in Luke's Gospel: "[V.] Behold the handmaid of the Lord, / [R.] Be it done unto me according to your Word."[566] In *The Renunciation*, Mary's utterance accepting God's will is invoked through the spectacle's visuality, as well as the rhythm and structure of the performance. Mary's words, however, are supplanted by twelve different stories of potential motherhood that capture the complexities of contemporary life:

> Performer: He is transgender and spent 3 hours at Dublin Airport to make them understand why his passport states he is female.
> All: The contraception failed once and he had to explain his life to a stranger. A Man.
> Performer: People of Ireland, raise your voices.
> All: We are all worthy of our right to choose. (162)
>
> […]
>
> Performer: She is 23 and had a baby. They are both living with HIV. She is a recovering addict. Every day is a struggle.
> All: She knows she can't afford another baby. She can't even afford this. She borrows money to travel. A Woman.
> Performer: People of Ireland, raise your voices.
> All: We are all worthy of our right to choose. (164)

[566] From Luke 1:38: "Behold the handmaid of the lord, be it unto me according to thy word" (qtd. in Warner, 9).

These abortion-seekers do not replace the Virgin Mary, instead, posing in her image, they create a parallel between them. Preston explains that the mythic pose does not merely mimic the bodily form of a character from myth; it also functions as "an interpretive paradigm posing myth in analogical relation to current life."[567] As such, the performer's difference is vital in highlighting Mary's acceptance of her role to become a mother, a choice that is denied the figures of the piece. Thus, the distance between these characters and the performers and audience—expressed in their physical absence and the use of second-person narrative—re-enacts the marginalization of these individuals as autonomous bodies.

Additionally, *The Renunciation* draws on the significance of Mary's acceptance of God's will and her role as the mother of Christ. Mary's agency during the Annunciation is a source of rigorous debate. Conservative Catholic doctrine asserts Mary's free will, while feminist critiques decry Mary's obligation and submission. Interpretations of her response inform the myriad constructions of the Virgin as a figure of motherhood and femininity. The home|work Collective employs Marian images that herald her role as a desexualized and dutiful mother. While this is a patriarchal and traditionalist construction, home|work's performance uncovers a duplicity embedded in the commemoration of Mary's ability to choose motherhood while others are denied that same option. As such, the group's use of Marianism represents the potential to activate this imagery for liberatory feminist politics.

The Angelus prayer identifies Mary as "the handmaid of the Lord," emphasizing her obedience and acceptance of God's will. Current Catholic teaching asserts that "handmaid" is an honorific; Mary is revered for her free will and voluntary acquiescence to Gabriel's

[567] Preston, 239.

pronouncement.[568] Feminist critiques typically cast Mary as "the vessel that received."[569] As feminist critic Julia Kristeva postulates, she is "a woman whose entire body is an emptiness through which the paternal word is conveyed."[570] Many Madonna and Child images, like those originally featured in the RTÉ Angelus program, emphasize Mary's "perpetual virginity" and single child, rather than representing her as a model of fertility.[571] Her maternity is desexualized, a configuration that has a precedent in the narratives of the Annunciation and Incarnation. Art historian Catherine McCormack questions the notion of Mary's consent during the Annunciation: "[Mary's] sexuality is denied to her before she ever has a chance to experience it: Mary falls pregnant as a girl with a forced conception (the work of the Holy Spirit) that censors even the possibility of physical pleasure. Her womb, having performed its service, becomes obsolete: she bears no more children."[572] An utterance infiltrates Mary's body, foreclosing the biological act of conception, and in emphasizing her virginal status, her sexual body is deferred. In this way, the Incarnation becomes a passive act of obedience on her part. Mary's biology and fecundity are superseded by acts of hearing and speaking.

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[568] Katz, 24. Theologian Sarah Jane Boss argues that a submissive and selfless Mary is a product of modernity. During the Medieval period, Mary was a commanding and regal figure, a "wielder of Christ's imperial authority" as represented in the image of the Virgin in Majesty (Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* [London and New York: Cassell, 2000], 13).

[569] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 83.

[570] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 374. See also Sarah Jane Boss' *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (9-12); Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 85; Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 73-75.

[571] Katz, 25.

[572] McCormack, 59.

Conversely, historian Jaroslav Pelikan argues that Mary's role as handmaid is more complex because Catholic doctrine teaches that "full selfhood comes through the liberty to obey," and Mary's freely given acceptance during the Annunciation serves as proof that the grace of God always respects human freedom.[573] Gabriel brought the word of God to her for the express purpose of obtaining a reply. Thus, when Mary spoke freely, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord," God's will was carried out through her consent to "finite freedom" that acknowledges the "infinite freedom of God."[574] Furthermore, Mary's accord was an act of faith; "she didn't debate the existence of God or consider the feasibility of becoming pregnant with His child."[575] She made her choice based on her faith in God and His plan. In this reading of the Annunciation narrative, Pelikan observes that "an obedience that is open to the future should be defined as supreme activity, not passivity."[576]

In her analysis of *The Renunciation*, O'Hara emphasizes the magnitude of spotlighting women's voices "publicly telling strangers about the hidden stories of abortion."[577] Home|work deepens the complexity of these public confessions in drawing a parallel between abortion-seekers' potential maternity and that of Mary. In explaining the logic behind their use of Marian devotions, Clancy stipulates that the Hail Mary, which is repeated three times in the Angelus prayer, observes the moment in which "we are told Mary

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[573] Pelikan, 84.

[574] Pelikan, 86.

[575] Deidre Sklar, *Dancing with the Virgin: Body and Faith in the Fiesta of Tortugas, New Mexico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 73.

[576] Pelikan, 84.

[577] O'Hara, 43.

exercised her agency in consenting to becoming pregnant."[578] The Catholic Church celebrates Mary's choice and devotees are likewise moved by this choice. Thus, in home|work's refashioning of these observances, *The Renunciation* exposes how, under the Eighth Amendment, the Irish are denied the choice that Mary was allegedly afforded. Irish law disregards their consent, "in essence attempting to enforce pregnancy on [them]."[579] They appeal to the logic of religious belief, using the significance and authority of the cultural image of the Virgin Mary to address their audience. Home|work entangles their performing bodies, the confessional bodies of abortion-seekers, the meanings of the Marian myths they invoke, and audience interpretations. As an act of mythic posing, their staging functions as a critique of gender and politics "only if audiences realize the ambivalence of the pose as an imagined alternative that also fails to escape entrenched gender constructs."[580] They rely upon a common language of faith to challenge spectators to contemplate the incompatibility between religious ideology and personal experience without deconstructing dogma; law fails to satisfy theological doctrine.

Correspondingly, *The Renunciation* exposes the hypocrisy of those who would revere the Virgin Mary while denying others the same independence. Like the Hail Mary, the Angelus concludes with a direct appeal to Our Lady: "[V.] Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, / [R.] That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ." In their version, home|work performers collectively intone, "We are all worthy of our right to choose." They overtly compare Mary's experience of pregnancy, as represented by the Annunciation and

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[578] Clancy, 154.

[579] Clancy, 154.

[580] Preston, 13.

the Angelus, to that of the ordinary pregnant people whose stories are retold in *The Renunciation*. As I've discussed previously, associations with the Angelus as a cultural intermedial performance inscribe secular space with complex notions of national belonging and Catholic belief. In their study of Marian apparition sites, Angela K. Martin and Sandra Kryst postulate the Virgin as a boundary figure; her ability to appear to worshippers locates her in the gap between the supernatural world and the earthly one. She blurs the sacred and profane.[581] Home|work's performance conjures her image through rituals that manifest a new Marian belief predicated on her role as potential mother and not as submissive servant to the Lord.

Over a period of five months in 1985, two years after the ratification of the Eighth Amendment, observers at thirty different sites across the Republic reported seeing moving statues of the Virgin Mary. During a time of intense hostility, judgement, and shame directed at women with crisis pregnancies, a rash of people suddenly witnessed stone statues of the Mother of God weeping, moving, beckoning, and, in a few cases, bleeding and speaking.[582] While the Catholic Church never officially sanctioned these phenomena, crowds of spectators flocked to grottoes, purportedly ten thousand on one occasion in Ballinspittle, Co. Cork. As historian Margaret MacCurtain recounts of these *communal* episodes, "some kind

[581] Angela K. Martin and Sandra Kryst, "Encountering Mary: Ritualization and Place Contagion in Postmodernity," in *Places Through the Body*, ed. Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 223.

[582] Lionel Pilkington, "Moving Statues in Ireland: Theater, Nation, and Problems of Agency," in *Théâtre et Nation*, ed. Jeffrey Hopes and Héléne Lecossois (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), para. 11, http://books.openedition.org/pur/81126. For more on the social and historical context of the moving statue phenomenon in 1985, see Colm Tóibín's edited anthology, *Seeing is Believing: Moving Statues in Ireland* (Dublin: Pilgrim Press, 1985), Tim Ryan and Jurek Kirakowski's *Ballinspittle: Moving Statues and Faith* (Cork: Mercier, 1985), and Nell McCafferty's *A Woman to Blame: The Kerry Babies Case* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1985).

of fuse ignited the imagination around an object of popular devotion during those weeks, and there occurred a disjunction of spiritual vision, or a suspension of conventional faith."[583] Theatre historian Lionel Pilkington hypothesizes that the moving statue sensation articulated a popular moral conscience at a time when social institutions, including the Church, government, and police, were under extreme scrutiny. National institutions—those responsible "for ordering morality and justice"—were revealed to be "heartless and dysfunctional."[584] At the apparition sites, no Catholic ritual or masses were held, and "no official presence of Church authorities occurred."[585] The Church's verification was irrelevant; people affirmed their values and integrity through a kind of unofficial *visible* public discourse, to repurpose Smith's phrase.

The moving statues of Our Lady haunt the posed bodies of home|work's performance. They expose the timelessness of Marian iconography and its ability to inform contemporary events. These mythic poses animate the contemporary body in relation to the past while staging classical figures among present-day experiences of gender, technology, and politics. Like the moving statue phenomena, home|work's performance functions as a kind of unofficial public discourse that aims to express the moral conscience of society. *The Renunciation* does not seek Mary's prayers or her intercession on behalf of abortion-seekers. Alternatively, performers call attention to the audience's ability to act, asking citizens to "raise [their] voices"—and subsequently cast their vote—in support of abortion access.

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[583] Margaret MacCurtain, "Moving Statues and Irish Women," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 76, no. 302 (1987), 141.

[584] Pilkington, para. 19.

[585] MacCurtain, 142.

Whereas the Angelus expresses the community's faith in God and their belief in the Virgin's intercession, the "prayer" of *The Renunciation* asks the audience to intercede on behalf of their fellow community members. Home|work marshals the worship of an idealized image of maternity to honor the material realities of *all* reproductive bodies in Ireland. The anti-abortion campaign engages discourse that configures the moment of conception as sacred. Thus, home|work aims to reframe this assertion; they characterize pregnancy as choice. *The Renunciation* is not a performance of subversion or rebellion against the Angelus or Marian devotion. Instead, the performance reinforces the authority of the Virgin in the Irish imagination. However, the piece recovers the lived, embodied experience of the young woman Mary, prior to her construction as a religious icon. *The Renunciation* foregrounds crisis pregnancy as inherent to Christian ritual, and by extension, humanizes Mary and de-romanticizes the story of the Annunciation.

Home|work challenges the conception that religion belongs to a bygone era. The performance's site-specificity reveals not only the presence of the divine in secular spaces, but also the ways in which they coexist in daily life. *The Renunciation* poses a timeless, sacred figure amidst the modern social order. Busáras station embodies the rhythms, activity, and sociality of contemporary life: the mobility afforded by the bus station, the markets of exchange at work in the shops and through the inundation of advertisements, the networked connectivity of people on their phones as they pass through, the imposing stature of technology expressed by the digital schedule and billboard. Home|work's occupation of this hurried space arrests the (post)modern condition for a moment to reveal how the sacred lingers. It may be obscured, but it is *still* there.

Home|work thus explores how Mary might embody a pro-choice icon. Their image of her contests the overdetermined figure of desexualized motherhood advanced by church and state. Through mythic posing, *The Renunciation* conjures the nostalgic, cultural images of the Angelus only to rework them into a more contemporary figure, enacting a more inclusive understanding of belief by using the expression and language of prayer to connect with those who practice it. Subsequently, they empower the form of the Angelus and Marian imagery to affect positive change in making the Virgin Mary a radical icon of pro-choice politics. In embracing Mary as a figure of bodily autonomy and the Repeal movement, national belonging and identity are not uncoupled from Catholicism, but rather Catholicism is re-formed to accommodate feminist politics. This configuration, however, is not embraced by all Repeal activists, notably those who attest that patriarchy and Catholicism are inextricable. In the final chapter, I investigate constructions of national identity that eschew Catholic ideology; these subversive performances re-place the cult of Mary with pre-Christian emblems that assert the indigeneity of feminism in Ireland. As such, these intermedial, confessional performances strive to re-choreograph acts of stigmatization by positioning reproductive justice as inherent to an ancient, native Irish identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

From Magdalenism to Slut-Shaming and Witch Hunts to Online Misogyny: Reimagining Femininity in Tara Flynn's Not a Funny Word

> *What all religions do, however, is what most political systems fail to do—they prize and praise the figure of the mother.*
> *She is the* machine*, the hidden power. She is the ideal, the revered one, the truly loved.*
> –Anne Enright, "Babies: A Breeder's Guide" (2004) [emphasis added]

> *Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies, which were thus 'liberated' from any impediment preventing them to function as machines for the production of labor. For the threat of the stake erected more formidable barriers around women's bodies than were ever erected by the fencing off of the communes.*
> –Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (2004)

> *You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.*
> –Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975)

Actor, comedian, and author Tara Flynn had already been involved with the Repeal movement for years before she impulsively confessed her abortion story in 2015 at an Amnesty International Ireland event in support of global reproductive rights. By that time, she had already privately disclosed the truth to other pro-choice activists. Flynn explains that she was moved by the courage of the LGBTQ community during the marriage equality referendum earlier that year; people went door-to-door seeking support and her secret made her feel "cowardly" in comparison.[586] Moreover, she was angry: "Why was I staying silent to assuage the moral discomfort of strangers?"[587] Shortly after her confession, she wrote an

[586] Tara Flynn, "How Women Like Me Told of Our Abortions—And Ireland Set Us Free," *The Guardian* (UK), 27 May 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/27/abortion-ireland-women-like-me-broke-taboo-set-free, accessed 8 August 2021.

[587] Flynn, "How Women Like Me Told of Our Abortions."

essay published in *The Irish Times* recounting her story in print, proclaiming that she is not ashamed, but that she had felt shamed into silence.[588]

Flynn became the target of online vitriol almost overnight; Internet trolls relentlessly harassed her with clichéd anti-choice rhetoric: "murderer," "killer," "evil."[589] They resorted to slut-shaming: "Why not close your legs, slut?" "If you didn't want to get pregnant, shoulda used contraception, ya thick bitch!"[590] And yet, despite this verbal abuse, people posted notes of support and divulged their own abortion stories to her. As I recounted in the previous chapter, many people were talking about their abortions in public spaces: at rallies, on social media, and in newspapers. In spite of, or perhaps even in solidarity *because* of, the shaming and blaming, people felt compelled to confess their abortions.

Flynn's role as a public figure and dedicated pro-choice activist fueled the fervent backlash around her abortion confession. She was an easy target just as the celebrity of Sinéad O'Connor had made her one. Flynn was faced with swarms of trolling that caused journalists and tabloids to pester her for comment. The torrent dragged on for years with Flynn trying to endure while maintaining a digital presence to support the Repeal campaign.[591] She believes that the mistreatment was levelled at her "For being pro-choice. For being in an interracial relationship. For having the temerity to be a mouthy woman in the

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[588] Tara Flynn, "You Don't Talk About Abortion in Ireland: But I Have To," *The Irish Times*, 14 September 2015, https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/tara-flynn-you-don-t-talk-about-abortion-in-ireland-but-i-have-to-1.2344617, accessed 7 July 2021.

[589] Tara Flynn, *Rage-In: The Trolls and Tribulations of Modern Life* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2018), 129.

[590] Flynn, *Rage-In*, 128-9.

[591] Tara Flynn, "How Can We Survive the Social Media Rage?" *Irish Examiner*, 21 February 2020, https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-30983280.html, accessed 7 July 2021.

public eye."[592] Whatever its cause, the hostility aimed at her substantiates the secrecy of Two Women Travel and the anonymous abortion-seekers whose stories compose *The Renunciation*. Moreover, her experience reflects another iteration of the enduring immaterial labor of abortion travel performed by abortion-seekers.

This chapter concludes my exploration of abortion testimonies. While digital gender violence aims to intimidate and silence, Tara Flynn's work expresses how women and other menstruators create environments and dialogues of resistance. Subsequently, Chapter 4 links the thread of gendered violence discussed in Chapter 2, with the performances of visibility and resistance presented in Chapters 1 and 3. Despite attempts to discipline, shame, and muzzle Flynn, she continued to campaign for the Repeal movement. Her experiences as an abortion-seeker and a target of online gender harassment form the basis of her one-woman show, *Not a Funny Word* (2018), performed in the months leading up to the national referendum on the Eighth Amendment. In this aesthetic performance, Flynn uses comedy to assert a right to reproductive healthcare, to her sexuality, and to a voice in the Irish body politic.

Unlike Two Women Travel or *The Renunciation*, *Not a Funny Word* does not re-move or re-place the confessional body: Flynn closes the gap between the confession and the body articulating it; she is unapologetically the confessor. Moreover, Flynn's story is not a "hard case;" she is a woman who simply does not want to be pregnant. This makes her story conventional and unremarkable, while also exposing her to the kinds of malicious condemnation that were directed at her on social media. Flynn's hypervisibility is not the

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[592] Flynn, "How Can We Survive." Flynn is white and her husband is African American.

same as Savita Halappanavar's; as a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman, Flynn embodies a desirable Irish national identity. Yet, through her performance, she complicates the privileged and idealized qualities of both womanhood and Irishness.

By the time she performed her solo show in 2018, Flynn had already been confessing her abortion in public for three years, and she had been writing about the public response to her admission for almost as long. Thus, Flynn does not merely use her performance to seek compassion in humanizing abortion-seekers; she exposes and subverts the misogyny and violence directed at transgressive and sexualized bodies like herself by appropriating Catholic ritual—confession—and turning it against itself. She diverts shame away from herself and other abortion-seekers, thereby producing a space of shamelessness. *Not a Funny Word* is a work of agitprop theater as well as Flynn's rejoinder to online misogyny and digital gender violence. The viral backlash transformed her into a public spectacle across mediated networks; in writing and performing her show, Flynn makes a spectacle out of herself. While online harassment aimed to make her body shame*ful*, then her performance makes her body shame*less* using bawdy comedy, song, and dance to embrace her sexuality. She reclaims the power of women's corporeality that has been seized by a patriarchal culture that commemorates Marianism at the expense of women's lived realities. Thus, Flynn's performance exploits the ambivalence of women's visibility and erasure, revealing the ways that digital sites, tools, and practices are engaged in this ongoing project of regulating women's bodies. My intermedial approach—negotiating online and offline misogyny—sheds light on the material and discursive risks in reproductive rights activism. It simultaneously accounts for the full complexities of being an abortion-seeker in contemporary Ireland.

Like the work of the home|work Collective, Flynn's performance uses truth-telling to de-stigmatize abortion and humanize abortion-seekers. Her approach, however, situates her in a different activist context. While *The Renunciation* re-configures traditional images of the Virgin Mary to make her an emblem of abortion healthcare, Flynn's *Not a Funny Word* supplants Marian iconography altogether, re-placing the Virgin with the Celtic goddess Brigid. As such, Flynn's performance is a recuperation of a neglected history of proto-feminism as embodied in the figure of Brigid, and a re-assertion of a postcolonial discourse that associates Irishness with an indigenous Celtic past. Nonetheless, Flynn's performance reveals how people continue to redefine Irish identity and, how women in particular have been engaged for centuries in a project of self-definition amid hostile and regulatory threats from the Church and state. Despite the patriarchal manipulation of the image of the Virgin Mary and her various iterations (as Mother Ireland for example), a radical feminist politics has been transmitted through generations.

Speaking Out: Slut-Shaming and Popular Misogyny

This section investigates the backlash that emerged in response to Tara Flynn's abortion confession. To an extent, the hostility directed at her was predictable; as I examined previously, talking about abortion in Ireland has historically provoked ire. Flynn's situation paralleled the kinds of gendered criticisms that had been pointed at Sinéad O'Connor decades before. And yet, the intensity and scale of the torment were different; Flynn's confession escalated into public spectacle, garnering her attention online from trolls, politicians, and the tabloid media. In other words, her abortion and the misogyny it elicited went viral.[593] Digital

[593] I'm paraphrasing Emma A. Jane's statement that, in the last decade, "misogyny, in short, has gone viral" (*Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History* [London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2016], 3).

technologies were deployed as weapons meant to punish, humiliate, and control her transgressive body. This deliberate, systematic campaign against her reveals how misogyny and gender violence function perniciously online to patrol women's self-expression, actions, and feelings of (not-)belonging on the Internet. These reprehensible online attacks bolster the ongoing regulation of women's sexuality and reproduction through fear and intimidation. More broadly, however, the control of women's bodies across the Internet is entwined with the project to restrict women's access to public space—particularly those sites associated with power and political discourse.

As a result, this twenty-first century phenomenon is situated within a legacy of Western, theocratic culture that brands transgressive women sluts, whores, or witches—all different faces of the same archetype—to control women's physical and spiritual bodies. In associating women with licentiousness, and licentiousness with sin, women's bodies were marked evil and dangerous. The church and state thus succeeded in normalizing the regulation of women's bodies and souls. This subjugation manifests in the asexual and disembodied Virgin Mary who contrasts the threatening, sexualized, and corporeal woman. I locate Flynn's abortion confession and its viral reaction in this historical trajectory. This highlights how the control of women—*body and soul*—persists online where patriarchal ideology and misogyny are increasingly being normalized into digital practices. Moreover, these online practices depend upon gender violence and harassment that aims to terrorize individuals from political participation.

The expansion of civic life onto social media sheds light on how fervent and relentless attacks were directed at Flynn. Communications scholar Zizi Papacharissi attests that, as more and more daily living takes place online, our engagement with politics has

become increasingly affective; the individual negotiation of private life across public digital networks portends circumstances in which people are *feeling* their way into political discourse.[594] The pervasive mobility, personalization, and flexibility of online technologies enable individual sentiments and expressions to travel beyond private life into the vast recesses of public space.[595] Subsequently, clear distinctions between public and private sociality and behaviors are harder to maintain.

In feminist politics, however, the personal is *always* political. Flynn's abortion confession and the public scrutiny it yielded corroborates the stakes of the personal in politics. The misogynistic attacks aimed at Flynn on social media enacted performances of rage and derision in attempts to shame and silence her. These emotional and aggressive outbursts illuminate how Flynn's body, sexuality, and voice threaten contemporary patriarchy. They manifest "injuries" to masculinity (and heterosexuality and whiteness) that are "in need of repair and recuperation."[596] Thus, social media provides a highly visible, accessible, and diffuse environment from which to punish transgressors and maintain control of dominant discourse. As I outline below, this endeavor is underwritten by the affordances of social media and its algorithms, as well as the slippery way in which misogynistic images and discourses manage to become normalized into cultural institutions—on- and offline. Therefore, Flynn's experience underscores how computer-mediated interactions recreate and reproduce spaces of gender violence, thereby exposing the ways in which new media is not

[594] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 118.

[595] Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere*; and Paparcharissi, *Affective Publics*.

[596] Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Duke University Press, 2018), 32.

really new at all. What is notable about the chauvinistic abuse directed at Flynn, however, is its visibility and intensity.

After Flynn began openly speaking and writing about her crisis pregnancy, she was relentlessly targeted online. Social media sites—particularly Twitter—offered public, always-on, and instant access *to her* and users took advantage of that. She was called "evil," "a sinner," and "murderer," language that is typical of anti-abortion rhetoric. She was sent images of dead babies. She was subjected to the kinds of name-calling that have become customary for women to hear in online spaces: being called "bitch," "whore," and "slut." This casual, banal gendered discourse contributes to what media scholar Eugenia Siapera calls the "mainstreaming" of online misogyny—the inevitability that women and other marginalized genders will encounter sexism and misogyny on the Internet so it is not worthwhile to call it out.[597] Similarly, media and cultural theorist Sarah Banet-Weiser describes this phenomenon as the "popularizing" of misogyny; chauvinism is so routine that it operates invisibly.[598]

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[597] Eugenia Siapera, "Online Misogyny as Witch Hunt: Primitive Accumulation in the Age of Techno-capitalism," in *Gender Hate Online: Understanding the New Anti-Feminism*, ed. by Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 27. I'm working with Siapera's definition of online misogyny which includes negative experiences aimed at women and based on gender, including harassment, name-calling, doxing, and rape threats (21). Media studies scholar Karla Mantilla uses the term "gendertrolling" for similar online practices, including "gender-based insults; collective participation by a number of individuals; sustained attacks distinguished by their intensity, scope, and/or longevity; vicious language; and credible threats" ("'Gendertrolling:' Misogyny Adapts to New Media," *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 [2013], 564). In more recent discourse, however, trolling has come to describe a subcultural phenomenon in which users strive to disrupt and upset others online for their own amusement. This type of behavior may not have the same hostility and antagonism that characterizes cyberbullying and online misogyny (Whitney Phillip, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015], 2). The gendered violence and sexual nature of online misogyny are important to my study; therefore, I avoid using the term "trolling" to prevent collapsing these online practices. Online misogyny and trolling both share an asymmetrical social relation, however. Phillip explains that "the troll, regardless of [their] motives, is roping a chosen target into a game of which the target may not even be aware, and subsequently to which [they] cannot consent" (164).

[598] Banet-Weiser, 32.

Historically, misogyny has been the norm; it is built into institutions, laws, and social behaviors. As such, it functions as a hidden politics, taken for granted as "common sense" and "the way things are."[599] In this context, popular misogyny and feminism are "simultaneously residual and emergent."[600] They have operated in tandem for centuries, and yet, Banet-Weiser argues, our contemporary era represents a dynamic shift in which misogyny is mobilized to compete with feminism for visibility within and across mediated networks. Feminism has become popular, manifesting in forms such as celebrity feminism and corporate feminism. Hence, the digital contributes to "popularizing" it, circulating images and discourses championing women's empowerment through advertising, consumerism, and other neoliberal practices.[601] This increased visibility, however, does little to attain gender equity as a whole, instead basing women's progress on the ability *to be seen* rather than in institutional and lasting change. In the culture of visibility associated with pop-feminism, empowerment constructs better (neoliberal) economic subjects, not necessarily better feminist subjects.[602]

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[599] Banet-Weiser, 3.

[600] Banet-Weiser, 4.

[601] Banet-Weiser, 4. Banet-Weiser's theorization of popular feminism overlaps with the enduring ethos of postfeminism; see Rosalind Gill, "Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times," *Subjectivity* 25, no. 1 (2008): 432-445; Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009); and Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, eds., *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). In addition, Banet-Weiser asserts that popular feminism is driven by an economy of visibility predicated on capitalist logics; in other words, assertions of popular feminist empowerment are profitable, for individuals and corporations. This coincides with Catherine Rottenberg's investigation of neoliberal feminism that positions women as entrepreneurial subjects and individual enterprises (*The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2018]).

[602] Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009), 27.

As feminism spreads beyond the bounds of niche political spaces and into popular culture and commercial discourses, these "spectacular, media-friendly" expressions gain greater visibility than feminist idioms challenging patriarchal structures and systems of racism and gender violence.[603] Misogyny responds, intensifying its own desire to be seen. Whereas misogyny previously circulated by hiding within structures of power, "expressed primarily in enclosures (home, locker room, board room, etc.)," it "now increases via the connection, circulation, publicness, networks, and communication across and through those enclosures."[604] Consequently, misogyny circulates openly and noticeably across and within mediated networks wherever popular feminism is found. At the same time, it continues to be firmly entrenched in social institutions from the workplace to government and organized religion.[605] However, I argue that this process of regularization has always depended upon moments of intense visibility—periods when gender harassment emerges as public spectacle in order to enable its nefarious invisibility.

Consequently, Flynn received casual, everyday misogyny as well as targeted and systematic online harassment. She was subjected to fleeting comments, like being called an ugly whore, to sustained attacks by stealthy users. In particular, a handful of anti-choicers besieged her, continuously setting up fake accounts and posing as Repeal activists in order to gain access to her. Flynn and other Repeal campaigners were pursued by religious zealots,

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[603] Banet-Weiser, 4. See also, McRobbie; and Rosalind Gill, "Sexism Reloaded, or, It's Time to get Angry Again!" *Feminist Media Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 61–71.

[604] Banet-Weiser, 5.

[605] Banet-Weiser, 5.

extreme anti-choice smear campaigns, and social media bots.[606] Online abuse was so widespread that a group of Repeal activists launched a block tool, Repeal Shield, that protected subscribers from threatening pro-life accounts.[607] My primary concern here pivots on the language and imagery of online antagonism directed at women, and how quickly seemingly banal name-calling and slut-shaming slips into sexualized violence and threats that emphasize women's bodies. This strategy of digital gendered harassment relies upon a vocabulary of abuse that feminist media scholar Emma A. Jane identifies as "rapeglish:" graphic, sexualized language that insinuates a threat of sexual and/or physical violence.[608] This semiotic of toxic misogyny is amplified and supported by online techniques, including memes, photoshopping images, revenge porn, sextortion, trolling, doxing, identity theft, and cyberstalking.[609] Thus, digital tools—as well as the design and algorithms of social media platforms—drive the scale and spread of online misogyny and abuse.[610]

When the online harassment intensified, Flynn's abortion confession and its viral backlash made national media, transforming it into a spectacular event. The sexist name-

[606] For a troubling account of the verbal and physical abuse directed at Repeal activists both on- and offline (including Flynn), see Katie Goh, "Despite IRL and URL Abuse, Ireland's Pro-choice Activists Remain Strong, *Dazed*, 25 May 2018, https://www.dazeddigital.com/politics/article/40154/1/despite-irl-and-url-abuse-irelands-pro-choice-activists-remain-strong-repeal, accessed 10 July 2022.

[607] The Repeal Shield Twitter account (https://twitter.com/repeal_shield) has since closed. A compelling story about the block tool's creation and maintenance is available here: Brian Leonard, "My Repeal(shield) Story," *Abortion Rights Campaign Blog*, 19 May 2020, https://www.abortionrightscampaign.ie/2020/05/19/my-repealshield-story/, accessed 10 July 2022.

[608] Emma A. Jane, *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History* (London: Sage, 2017), 33.

[609] Jane; Mantilla. See also the articles included in the *Feminist Media Studies* journal's special issue about online misogyny which productively investigates the phenomenon as a global concern of technoculture (Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera, eds., *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 4 [2018]).

[610] Jane, *Misogyny Online*. See also, Adrienne Massanari, "#Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 3 (2017): 329–346.

calling and shaming—from “Why can’t you be prettier, and funnier?” to “Did you take your Prozac today, you dried up old cunt?”[611]—escalated after a politician tweeted about her. Barry Walsh, a member of the executive council of Fine Gael, the ruling political party, tweeted: “From what Tara Flynn says, she was pregnant and just couldn’t be bothered having a baby. So she had it killed. Why is she a feminist hero?”[612] Walsh may not use the same blatantly sexist insults, but his dismissive tone succeeds in belittling and scorning Flynn’s experience and self-knowledge. Likewise, his tweet exposes patriarchal anxieties about feminism, particularly how it represents a challenge to the biological imperative that women become mothers. With one tweet, Walsh animates how anti-feminist and patriarchal discourses comfortably flow between cultural spaces and the state. His position as a politician renders legitimacy to misogynist rhetoric shared in social contexts. Gender studies scholar Katherine Side observes how this kind of digital shaming is “overtly continuous with the Irish state’s historical strategies when undertaken by people associated with the state’s political institutions.”[613] In this manner, popular misogyny tends “to fold into state and national structures with terrible efficiency.”[614]

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[611] Flynn, *Rage-in*, 202, 203.

[612] Quoted in Harry McGee and Vivienne Clarke, “Varadkar Says Tweets by Barry Walsh Are ‘Unacceptable,’” *The Irish Times*, 17 November 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/varadkar-says-tweets-by-barry-walsh-are-unacceptable-1.3294277, accessed 13 June 2022. Walsh eventually resigned from his position due to public pressure over his criticisms of Flynn, including from Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.

[613] Katherine Side, “‘A Hundred Little Violences, a Hundred Little Wounds:’ Personal Disclosure, Shame, and Privacy in Ireland's Abortion Access,” *Éire-Ireland* 56, no. 3 (2021): 198-199.

[614] Banet-Weiser, ix-x.

Walsh's attention intensified Flynn's situation. The press fanned the flames and her anxieties by contacting her for comment on the abuse.[615] She avoided listening to the radio out of fear that news reporters would be talking about her.[616] This drew more attention online where social media users relentlessly antagonized her, creating multiple accounts to tirelessly abuse her and get around being blocked or muted. Racist comments were directed at her family, and finally, individuals threatened her with physical and sexual violence. She says, "Their anger is so disproportionate to what I have actually done that I'm worried that one or two of them might actually want to hurt me."[617] To an extent, this online antagonism accomplished its goal in limiting speech; Flynn temporarily left social media, restricting her ability to participate in public debate, share her own experiences, and even sustain her acting career.[618]

As such, digital gender harassment succeeds in not only *symbolically* punishing and silencing women; it induces stress, terror, and trauma, and can affect social and professional relationships. As I explored in Chapter 2, social media gestures produce mini-worlds that affectively engage users.[619] This affective experience—whether positive, negative, or indifferent—is embodied. In a study of the visual semiotics of misogyny on the Internet, art

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[615] Flynn, "How Can We Survive."

[616] Tara Flynn, "Online Abuse Eats Away at You," *Irish Times*, 17 Nov. 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/tara-flynn-online-abuse-eats-away-at-you-1.3295795, accessed, 10 July 2022.

[617] Ciara McDonnell, "Tara Flynn on Trolls and Post-referendum Life: 'There is a Little Beacon of Hope in the World, and it's Ireland,'" *Irish Examiner*, 27 June 2018, https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/arid-30851312.html, accessed 13 June 2022.

[618] Side, 198.

[619] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 117.

theorist Pamela Turton-Turner affirms that there is no distinction between *real* and *virtual* worlds for women and other marginalized genders; computer-mediated networks are as gender-biased and abusive as the "real world."[620] The notion that cyberspace functions "as a transcendental realm beyond the reality of our embodied selves" is a complete fiction.[621] As Flynn describes: "Your phone becomes a terrifying conduit. It used to be a door to an exciting world. Now it is a door being relentlessly pounded on at all hours, with people outside with weapons and threats, a door that refuses to ever shut, ever."[622] While the site of the harassment occupies a screen, its consequences are bodily and somatic. Flynn continues, "The [notification] pings themselves were painful, it didn't matter what they were announcing. A Pavlovian response: Bell rings; I've learned that it is poison."[623] Flynn's experience reveals how objecting to online misogyny comes at an emotional cost, reproducing trauma and not always purging it: "Abuse tears at us, tears little bits off us, death by a thousand cuts."[624]

The language and imagery of rapeglish re-animates established tropes and archetypes of sexualized violence. In its aims to dehumanize women, this misogynistic iconography triangulates the relation among sex, violence, and women's bodies. Social media succeeds in

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[620] Pamela Turton-Turner, "Villainous Avatars: The Visual Semiotics of Misogyny and Free Speech in Cyberspace," *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table* 1 (2013), 15.

[621] Turton-Turner, 15.

[622] Flynn, "How Can We Survive."

[623] Flynn, "How Can We Survive."

[624] Jasmine R. Linabary and Bianca Batti, "'Should I Even Be Writing This?': Public Narratives and Resistance to Online Harassment," in *Gender Hate Online: Understanding the New Anti-Feminism*, ed. by Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 268-269; Flynn, "Online Abuse Eats Away at You."

strengthening this routing in its visibility and access to its victims. Like Banet-Weiser, Turton-Turner professes that online abuse "propagate[s] a powerful resurgence of sexism engendered by misogynistic hate speech evident in popular culture generally."[625] In charting this genealogy of popular imagery, Turton-Turner compares contemporary online-slut shaming to the visuality of satirical illustrations of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These images stage misogynist messages masquerading as political commentary; they express anxieties about the disruption of the gender hierarchy, as well as obsessions with feminine, sexualized bodies. Thus, in their circulation in popular media, they transform the offending woman's body into a public spectacle of shame and derision.[626]

For example, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), came under scrutiny for being a powerful ally of select parliamentarians. Her influence in politics resulted in a barrage of media images and stories that exploited her sexuality while representing her as a neglectful wife and mother.[627] Male fears about her subverting appropriate gender roles manifest in exclamatory captions like "O! Times! O! Manners! The Women Wear Breeches & the Men Petticoats" (Figure 4.1). Additionally, her body is sexualized to discredit her as a loose woman, while simultaneously fetishizing her as an erotic object for the viewer. She towers over her male companions, giving her threatening prowess, and her facial features appear more masculine than delicately feminine (particularly

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[625] Turton-Turner, 2.

[626] Drawing on the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Silvan Tomkins, Lauren Berlant emphasizes that the *structure* of shame does not always correspond to the *experience* of shame. For Berlant, shaming does not necessarily yield feelings of self-loathing in the one who is shamed; rather, many different emotions are possible outcomes of shame (Sina Najafi, David Serlin, and Lauren Berlant, "The Broken Circuit: An Interview with Lauren Berlant," *Cabinet*, 31 [2008], http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/31/najafi_serlin.php).

[627] Turton-Turner, 8.

in Dent’s illustration). At the same time, she is an object of sexual arousal as depicted by the suggestive pun in the title, the Duchess’ hand slipping beneath the man’s apron, and the young boy lying on the ground peeking up her skirt. Her ostensibly unruly behavior, therefore, deemed her public humiliation a justifiable “source of both humour and titillation for male viewers.”[628]

Figure 4.1 Images of the Duchess of Devonshire: left, *A Certain Duchess Kissing Old Swelter-in-Grease the Butcher for his Vote*, published by H. Macphail in 1784 (artist unknown); and right, William Dent print, *The Duchess Canvasing for Her Favorite Member* (1784).[629]

In contemporary popular culture, the sexualization of women’s bodies is frequently conjoined with physical violence in disturbing ways. Turton-Turner also uses fashion advertisements from the middle of the twentieth century to the present day to demonstrate how brutality against feminine bodies becomes casually woven into quotidian visual culture;

[628] Cindy McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze: Prints of Women in Late Eighteenth-Century England,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 253, quoted in Turton-Turner, 9.

[629] The British Museum’s digital collections include these images and many more (not all satirical and misogynist) of the Duchess of Devonshire, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG25175 (accessed 15 July 2022).

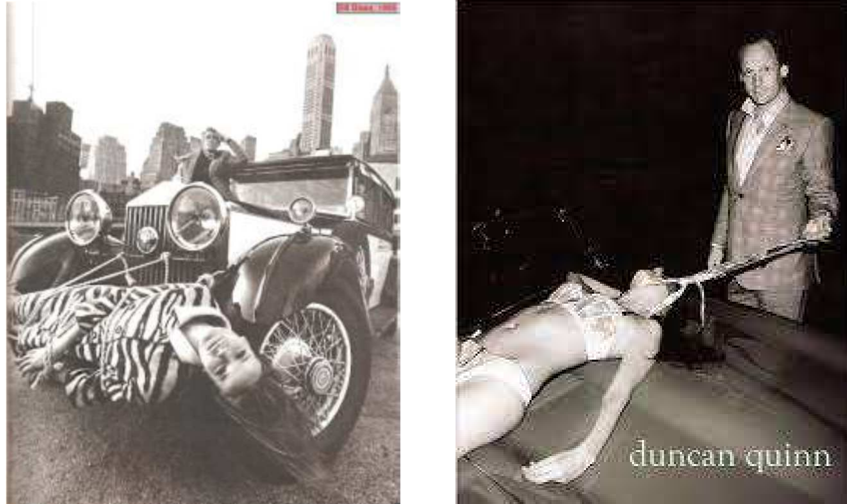

Figure 4.2 Porno-chic: at left, Bill Blass fashion promotion from 1966 (note the crucifix atop the building in the extreme left), and at right, Duncan Quinn advertisement from 2008.

however, other media including print and broadcast news, as well as thriller and horror films and television crime dramas like *Luther* (2010-19), *The Fall* (2013-16), *True Detective* (2014-19), and the fantasy series *Game of Thrones* (2011-19), traffic in sexualized and mutilated female bodies. If the eighteenth-century illustrations of the Duchess of Devonshire elicit warnings about women who traverse the appropriate boundaries of gendered social life, then nineteenth-century images represent fantasies of punishing those women. These images glamorize brutality and dehumanization, offering "chilling derivative sexual fantasies involving the death of women."[630] In Figure 4.2, a Bill Blass promotion juxtaposes wealth, glamor, and masculine power (the man casually leans against the car, positioned above and at the center of the shot) alongside a dead woman tied like an animal to a Rolls Royce. Likewise, in the Duncan Quinn ad, physical aggression against women and sexual desire are more strongly connected; the woman is revealingly dressed in lingerie suggesting that she is available for exploitation, and the man—wearing a Duncan Quinn suit, of course—strangles

[630] Turton-Turner, 5.

her by a cord tied around her neck. If the Duchess of Devonshire dominated male voters with the switch in her hand (Figure 4.1), then this man has restored the "natural" gender order.

Similarly, in his engaging comparison between the political (female) bodies of Marie Antoinette and First Lady Hillary Clinton, literary theorist Pierre Saint-Amand identifies what he calls "Marie Antoinette syndrome," a fear of women's empowerment that incites: "(1) the demonization and cloning of the woman's influence; (2) the accessibility of the woman's genitalia as the very organ of influence; and (3) a seizing of the woman's body by way of sexual appropriation."[631] This angst about the growing number of highly educated and authoritative women is particularly prescient regarding the visibility of popular feminism, particularly in how it circulates across mediated networks. Saint-Amand attests that, as First Lady, Clinton's greatest affront to male politicians was not that she had an office in the West Wing or that she led a task force on healthcare reform; the real injury to men in power was that "she managed to reproduce herself like a *feminist virus* in the ranks of women appointed to high-level positions" in the government.[632] Similarly, online slut-shaming seeks to stop the highly visible contagion of feminism leaking and spreading across the Internet. Misogyny has gone viral as a reaction against an alleged feminist virus contaminating cyberspace. When women and marginalized genders are perceived to be crossing the borders of their so-called legitimate places and entering the male domain, they must be degraded to stop up further seepages.

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[631] Pierre Saint-Amand, "Terrorizing Marie Antoinette," trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage, *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 3 (1994), 379.

[632] Saint-Amand, 380; emphasis added.

If online misogyny has intensified in the last decade, it is enabled by the affordances of digital platforms. Social media provide anonymity, always-on ambience, and intensity. These qualities fuel the increasingly personalized and sexualized nature of these attacks directed at individual women.[633] Significantly, well-known white women like Flynn gain the most media attention around online harassment even though women of color are the greatest targets of online abuse.[634] Locating this kind of gendered harassment within the context of online hostilities writ large ignores the ways in which women are targeted *for being women*. In attacking Flynn, trolls legitimize her white body as deserving of attention and repair—if

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[633] Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera, "Introduction," *Gender Hate Online:Understanding the New Anti-Feminism*, ed. by Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2. Also, Emma A. Jane, "'Your a Ugly, Whorish, Slut': Understanding E-bile," *Feminist Media Studies* 14 (2014): 531–546; Emma Alice Jane, "'Back to the Kitchen, Cunt': Speaking the Unspeakable About Online Misogyny," *Continuum* 28 (2014): 558–570; and Lisa Nakamura, "Blaming, Shaming, and the Feminization of Social Media," in *Feminist Surveillance Studies*, ed. by Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet, 221-228 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015). For more on online trolling as a cultural phenomenon, see Whitney Phillip's ethnographic account *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

Siapera situates the gendered violence directed at women online within the long development of capitalism as a socio-economic regime dependent upon the sexual division of labor. As women become more visible as technology users, then they are a rising menace to the status quo. If digital platforms and technologies are going to remain under the purview of a patriarchal and masculinist governance, then women must be silent onlookers who cede the territory of the digital. Notably, Siapera draws on the work of influential feminist-Marxist scholar Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) to declare online harassment the witch hunt of the twenty-first century: "online misogyny has to be seen as a form of primitive accumulation in the age of techno-capitalism, in which women's labour is stolen or denied, their knowledge and contributions ridiculed and denigrated, and where women's virtual bodies are banned from certain online spaces, just as women were once banned from the public sphere" ("Online Misogyny as Witch Hunt," 39). As Siapera stipulates, recent shifts in capitalism—toward neoliberalism and new modes of production centered around informational and cognitive enterprise—have minimized physical labor, leading to an increase in poverty, austerity, and financial precarity and thus, a new division of labor (37-8). Online gender harassment—as a cultural practice and behavior—makes visible and immediate these concerns in attempts to scare women away from participating in the technology that is integral to contemporary social life and the future of sociality and work. Siapera explicates, "the scale and impact are nowhere near the same, as the genocidal witch hunt cannot be compared with the forms of misogyny we encounter in today's digital environments. Yet the sexualized violence they evoke, the focus on women's bodies, the spectacular online attacks against prominent women aimed at disciplining all women, the ritual sexual humiliation through revenge porn and videos of women raped, the reduction of women to biological organisms with a reproductive function, their general degradation and dehumanization, all point to a similar dynamic at play" (38).

[634] Linabary and Batti, 254.

she confesses and repents of course. Her body matters because it possesses the *potential* to reproduce the nation. In contrast, those outside the ethnic and racial norms—namely, marginalized groups including, people of color, migrants, Travellers, and the gender variant—are targeted for their inability to reproduce the nation. But, this difference denies them the kinds of care and concern afforded to someone like Flynn; they are not recognized as vulnerable bodies.[635] Subsequently, they are refused private protections when their bodies circulate in public spaces.[636]

Thus, the shaming of women's bodies has persisted for centuries; social media succeeds in repeating and intensifying the practice.[637] As historian Lynn Hunt contends, throughout European history, "men could not relate to one another, politically or socially, without their relationship to women's bodies."[638] The hypervisibilizing of the feminine body strives to "recuperate masculine identity" and restore the "natural" order of patriarchal dominance.[639] In taking control of the woman's body and its borders, misogynist images and discourses affirm masculine authority in public spaces. Moreover, Siapera grants that these hostilities extend beyond shame to "deny full humanity to women."[640] As the object of a sexualized gaze or a violent fantasy, a woman is stripped of consideration and kindness. In

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[635] Butler, "Violence, Mourning, and Politics," 30.

[636] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 135-6. Chun is working with Hortense Spillers' influential theorization of flesh here.

[637] Banet-Weiser, 70; Siapera, 28.

[638] Lynn Hunt, "Introduction," *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 2.

[639] Banet-Weiser, 66.

[640] Siapera, 38.

the Irish context, her failure to measure up to the image of the Virgin Mary, asexualized and obediently maternal, marks a woman's body for shaming; and if a shameful body fails to repent, then she must be punished. Indeed, Flynn's experience illuminates these suppositions; she remarks, "As someone who put her face to something to humanise it, ironically, [I] get dehumanised."[641]

In an analysis of anti-abortion activist tactics, performance theorist Peggy Phelan stresses how individuals "manifest a persistent and pervasive fascination to see and thus to control the woman's body. In excessively marking the boundaries of the woman's *body*, precisely in order to make it thoroughly visible, patriarchal culture seeks to make *her* subject to legal, artistic, and psychic surveillance."[642] While popular feminism is driven by an economy of visibility, I argue that the logic of patriarchal ideology advances this visibility. The circumstances surrounding Flynn's abortion confession elucidate this point; while Flynn willingly disclosed her abortion story to gain understanding for the Repeal cause, the viral backlash made her physical and virtual body hypervisible through repetition to activate a stigma of shame.

Flynn, Hillary Clinton, Marie Antoinette, and the Duchess of Devonshire are examples of women whose bodies were made into public spectacles. While a figure like Marie Antoinette may have already cultivated spectacular attention on and through her body, her image (and those of the other women named here) manifests a display of shame produced *without* her consent.[643] Hence, while androcentric institutions and cultural regimes obscure

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[641] Flynn, "Online Abuse Eats Away at You."

[642] Phelan, 145.

[643] In addition to Saint-Amand's account of Marie Antoinette's body on display, see Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French

the functioning of misogyny, it comes out into the open to deal with particular transgressive bodies, rendering them highly visible as sluts, whores, or witches. In Flynn's case, mediated networks spatialized the arena of shame; in the onslaught of slut-shaming attacks, users inscribed moral outrage on Flynn's body. In marking her body a shameful one, they position her as one who has crossed the bounds of respect and decency. As a slut—a highly visible, sexualized feminine body—she's marked the antithesis of the lifeless, asexual, and doll-like figure of Marian statuary. Flynn's sexuality needs to be made apparent in order to punish her, while it also needs to be castigated as the site of the problem. As such, anti-choicers attempted to contain her polluting behavior by situating the problem as one of personal indiscretion. In other words, their goal was to still the spread of feminism—both the highly visible brand of pop-feminism and the more dangerous feminist activism that calls for abortion rights—by discrediting her as a shameful, corrupted body who should be discounted out of hand because of her turpitude. In marking the bounds of her body, they thus proclaim mediated spaces the purview of masculine authority.

The spectacular exhibition of digital harassment aimed at Flynn enacts an important intermedial display of shame and blame. These performances of abuse must be highly visible to deter and control other potentially transgressive bodies. In moments of resistance against cultural norms and state policies, spectacles of shame and blame are staged to weaken and dissuade further defiance. Against her will, Flynn became such a spectacle when she was targeted by online abuse and gender violence. In contemporary Ireland, women are still the core of the domestic sphere, even while attitudes toward gender equity have evolved.

Revolution," in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt, 108-130 (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

Contemporary constructions of Irish femininity convey secular and liberal values that celebrate a kind of global popular feminism based in visibility politics, empowerment, and inclusivity. Since the global downturn in 2008, popular media represents women as "stalwart recession survivors or as inspirational figures for the reconstitution of the Republic."[644] Hence, "the health of the nation is no longer represented by the image of shy, demure, awkward, easily embarrassed young women;" and instead, "the health of the nation is now more attached to strong, confident, attractive, glamorous women. Within this process of change, the notion of Irish women returning to the body image of the chaste colleen became increasingly repulsive."[645]

Ireland's evolving gender politics are dynamically embodied in the internationally renowned Step Dance concert *Riverdance* (1995), created by Americans Michael Flatley and Jean Butler. The dynamic show features the virtuosic performances of Flatley and Butler (who are both the children of Irish immigrants), supported by a chorus-line of additional step-dancers. *Riverdance* celebrates Celtic heritage (its first act is set in a mystical Irish past) and the migration of culture around the globe. Flatley and Butler exemplify shifting

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[644] Diane Negra, "Adjusting Men and Abiding Mammies: Gendering the Recession in Ireland," in *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture*, ed. by Conn Holohan and Tony Tracy (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 232.

[645] Tom Inglis and Carol MacKeogh, "The Double Bind: Women, Honour and Sexuality in Contemporary Ireland," *Media, Culture & Society* 34, no. 1 (2012), 79. "The stereotypical image of the shy Irish colleen, silent about herself and her emotional needs, reflects a historical reality in which there was a strict silence imposed on sex and sexuality in general and on female sexuality in particular" (Inglis, "Origins and Legacies," 26). The colleen figure is represented in the paintings of Thomas Alfred Jones (1823-1892) and Dion Boucicault's play *The Colleen Bawn* (1860). Barbara O'Connor identifies an iteration of this figure in John Lavery's painting of his wife, Lady Lavery, as Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1928), an image that was printed on Irish banknotes through the 1970s ("Colleens and Comely Maidens: Representing and Performing Irish Femininity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Ireland in Focus: Film, Photography, and Popular Culture*, eds. Eóin Flannery and Michael Griffin [Syracuse University Press, 2009]). I read the stereotype of the colleen as one of the many iterations of the Virgin Mary.

contemporary gender roles and the tensions with retaining tradition. Their performances are the epitome of modernity as they rapidly leap through the air with ease and grace. What's more, they move their arms in their dancing, a gesture that was banned by official Irish step dance. This technique, coupled with their dynamism and charisma, embodies a liberated sexuality.[646] Flatley's athleticism, "flexible and mobile torso, and his presentational smile" assert a masculine persona in the typically feminine space of concert dance.[647] As such, Barra O'Cinneide claims that "*Riverdance* brought Irish dance back closer to what it had originally been, putting back the missing ingredient of sex that had been distilled out of Irish dance by a mixture of Victorian piety and nationalist purity."[648]

Accordingly, Butler embodies the visibility of popular feminism; she is confident, sexy, and empowered—a virtuoso on her own. She is featured in "The Countess Cathleen," a scene described as "sensual, nurturing, independent and fierce, the power of women as they celebrate themselves, as they challenge men in a dance of empowerment."[649] While women are championed as equals to their male counterparts—or at least capable of going the distance with them in a contest—they are still expected to be attractive and strong, but not so tough that they cannot be caring. Consequently, this image of femininity maintains the stereotypical qualities fashioned in the Virgin's likeness, while adding a degree of

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[646] Aoife Monks, "Virtuosity: Dance, Entrepreneurialism, and Nostalgia in Stage Irish Performance," in *Performance, Feminism and Affect in Neoliberal Times*, eds. Elin Diamond, Denise Varney, and Candice Amich (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 153.

[647] Monks, 154.

[648] Barra O'Cinneide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon* (Dublin: Blackhall Publishing, 2002), 71, quoted in Monks, 155.

[649] *Riverdance*, https://riverdance.com/the-show/scenes/, accessed 13 July 2022.

independence and eroticism. Ultimately, this is not a new configuration at all, but an iteration of imagery that makes women's bodies the object of desire while demanding their modesty at the same time—a version of the *Venus pudica*.[650]

Figure 4.3 Jean Butler

Sociologist Tom Inglis and media scholar Carol MacKeogh conclude that women are in a "double bind," in which they are expected to be sexually alluring and desirable, but when boundaries are transgressed, they are often blamed for it.[651] Thus, Butler's performance embodies the idealized feminine figure: an object of desire (willingly) on display to celebrate women's empowerment, but who does so within the bounds of appropriate behavior. For all the innovations introduced by Flatley and Butler in *Riverdance*, the movement vocabulary of step dance is still rigid, contained, and precise; like classical ballet, the dancers' straight posture and vertical leaps orient their bodies upward as though rising to the heavens.

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[650] See Chapter 3. Social anthropologist Barbara O'Connor identifies the colleen as a figure who "manages the tensions" between "sexual repression and desire, and between the domesticated and the wild" (147). While the colleen's chastity reinforces the symbolism of the Virgin Mary, O'Connor recognizes iterations of the colleen that position her as an object of desire, while maintaining her humility. As such, I recognize a variation of the *Venus pudica* in these representations of the colleen.

[651] Inglis and MacKeogh, 70.

Ultimately, these are symbolic gestures of freedom that contrast with the legal and social constraints enacted on and across women's bodies. The mobility and stasis enacted by Two Women Travel, for instance, resonates with the restrained liberation of *Riverdance*. Recognizing both Butler and Flynn as public, bodily spectacles (albeit in radically different circumstances) exposes the diverse ways in which female sexuality is harnessed and manipulated to perform national identity on a global scale.

The online misogyny and digital gender harassment directed at Flynn thus make her body visible in order to repudiate it. Making women's (sexualized) bodies intensely seen strives to shame women who fail to live up to the asexual, disembodied mythic image of the Virgin Mary. The iconography of sluts, whores, and witches mobilizes images of shame, sin, and immorality. Despite the waning influence of the Church in Ireland, its aftereffects persist, a disciplinary role that Inglis and MacKeogh suggest has been taken up by the media.[652] The viral backlash aimed at Flynn animates these incessant consequences. The public slut-shaming of her is designed to continue the valorization of domesticity and subservience in women. Furthermore, the online hostility directed at her reveals how the apparatus of containment culture is imbricated in the dispersion of capitalist relations into all aspects of contemporary life. Social media sites require constant self-reflection and self-monitoring.[653] Papacharissi argues that these networks become incorporated into the "everyday arsenal of props for reproducing and reinventing personal and dominant narratives."[654] Digital

[652] Inglis and MacKeogh, 80.

[653] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 99; Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience," *New Media & Society* 13, no. 1 (2010).

[654] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 98.

practices, including those uses that are antagonistic and harmful, generate revenue for corporations from user data. Subsequently, media corporations directly benefit from the subsumption of everyday life into capitalist logics, including the disciplining of individuals, body and soul. The intrusion of social media into the intimate and personal spaces of one's life eliminates the possibility of an escape or respite from the disciplinary nature of gender violence and misogyny.

Staging Confession and National Shame: *Not a Funny Word*

As I have discussed, real-life abortion testimonies are vital to (de-)constructing feminist narratives that accurately depict individuals' experiences. To employ James M. Smith's term again, "speaking out" constructs "alternative versions to the nation's official story."[655] In this respect, Flynn's published writings about her abortion story represent a vital contribution to the recorded archive. Likewise, her theatrical performance, as an embodied confession and agitprop art, provides living proof of the need to legislate for abortion. Framed by the mediatized reaction to Flynn's abortion truth-telling years before, *Not a Funny Word* stages a potent response to popular misogyny. As writer-performer, Flynn creates a work of artistic and activist labor to assert the validity of her knowledge and experience. While her (virtual) body was shamed, harassed, and rendered a public spectacle *without* her consent, in *Not a Funny Word*, Flynn tactically makes a theatrical spectacle out of herself. The digital gender violence she endured characterized her as a "slut," making her body visible for scrutiny, surveillance, and control. In her show, she enacts a confessional

[655] Smith, "Retelling Stories," 43. See Chapter 3.

inversion by indulging in and enjoying the act of sexual disclosure. She thereby makes her confessing body a shame*less* spectacle, relocating disgrace onto a collective national body.

Flynn began writing her one-woman show before the Repeal referendum had been announced. Like home|work's *The Renunciation*, her show is a work of political theater designed to humanize abortion-seekers and generate support for the campaign. *Not a Funny Word* premiered in Dublin in March of 2018, a co-production between the Abbey Theater (the national theater of Ireland founded by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1904) and Thisispopbaby (a hip, ten-year-old company that "rips up the space between popular culture, counter culture, queer culture and high art").[656] Flynn's bricolage approach parallels the latter group's aesthetics; she combines cabaret, autobiographical storytelling, stand-up comedy, and parody. Despite some difficulties to book venues because of the content of the piece, Flynn's show toured to Cork, Galway, and finally a return performance in Dublin immediately prior to the Repeal vote in May. Arts critic Peter Crawley hailed it, a "frank confession and consoling comedy" that is "magnificently and shockingly daring."[657] Reviewer Chris McCormack describes the production as a "subversive cabaret."[658] Combining humor and poignancy, Flynn lampoons Irish culture and its hypocrisy in "a recollection of culture, faith and family."[659] As Crawley highlights about the piece, "'I can

[656] Thisispopbaby, https://thisispopbaby.com/, accessed 20 September 2021.

[657] Peter Crawley, "Theatre in 2018: Looking Back in Anger and Learning Lessons," *The Irish Times*, 8 December 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/theatre-in-2018-looking-back-in-anger-and-learning-lessons-1.3721049, accessed 7 July 2021.

[658] Chris McCormack, "Review: *Not a Funny Word* at The Complex, Dublin," *Exeunt Magazine*, 8 March 2018, http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-not-funny-word-complex-dublin/, accessed 3 June 2022.

[659] Crawley, "Theatre in 2018: Looking Back in Anger and Learning Lessons."

never tell anyone about [my abortion],' says Flynn, with light irony. Instead, she literally makes a song and dance about it."[660]

Not a Funny Word is among the handful of abortion-centered plays that emerged alongside the uptick in Repeal campaigning in the decade before the national referendum. Eva O'Connor wrote two plays, *My Name is Saoirse* in 2014 and *Maz and Bricks* in 2017; *Pulled* by Niamh Moroney was originally produced in 2016; and in 2018, both Eavann Brennan's *Get the Boat* and Laura Wyatt O'Keeffe's *Vessel* were staged. Flynn's production, however, is unique as a one-woman autobiographical show. Similarly, academic Susan Cahill disclosed her abortion story in a performance-lecture at the symposium "Theatre of Change" in 2016. Scholar-activist Ann Rossiter created and performed what she calls "an abortion monologue," *Making a Holy Show of Myself*, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2012. Hence, *Not a Funny Word* contributes to the recent impetus for "speaking out" about abortion, while also being among the rare examples of autobiographical theater performances that do so.

The tone and style of the play exploits Flynn's skills, talents, and expertise as an actor, writer, and comedian. Nonetheless, like *The Renunciation*, Flynn's play is circumspect about her abortion. She recalls the experience with a degree of immediacy, however, her relation to time and space differs vastly from that staged in Two Women Travel's travelogue. Theater scholar Lisa Hall Hagen argues that staging the *act* of abortion collapses the distance between the procedure and pregnant people's experiences.[661] Flynn tells the story of her

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[660] Crawley, "Theatre in 2018: Looking Back in Anger and Learning Lessons."

[661] Lisa Hall Hagen, *Examining the Use of Safety, Confrontation, and Ambivalence in Six Depictions of Reproductive Women on the American Stage, 1997-2007: Staging 'The Place' of Abortion* (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 2010), 5.

abortion rather than re-enacting the activity of the procedure, thus providing some distance and comfort for the audience; however, her use of the confessional mode foregrounds the truth of her circumstances, confronting the audience with her transgressive body. As such, *Not a Funny Word* negotiates spectacle and authenticity, revelation and concealment, agitation and consolation. These dichotomies are inherent to confession, particularly in how it promises private access to the expression of illicit and taboo behaviors. Flynn's performance engages this tension, reveling in her willingness to publicly disclose her intimate life. Consequently, in emphasizing her corporeality, she confronts the audience with her female sexuality.

Figure 4.4 Tara Flynn performs *Not a Funny Word*

Flynn employs the confessional mode to celebrate, rather than denigrate, her sexuality. She disrupts the historical uses of confession by employing a strategy of confessional inversion. While home|work Collective's *The Renunciation* utilized confessional intervention to disrupt audience expectations, Flynn's "confessional inversion" enacts a deliberately "playful disentanglement" from the sexual identity imposed upon her by

the structure of confession itself.[662] Flynn self-consciously embodies and uses the negative terms and paradigms that have been lodged against her—slut and witch—upending them and re-directing their power. In Flynn's hands, these words are no longer insults, but embody a kind of collective reclamation and repurposing that liberates women from systems of shame and control. She uses these configurations to challenge sexual policing, proclaiming a kind of pleasure and power from these labels. Her ownership of being a slut or witch conjures the army of activists in black Repeal shirts marching in the streets for the right to bodily integrity.

Language and discourse represent a small part of Flynn's confessional inversion. She also exploits her body and its sexuality. Historically, the ritual of confession held an important role in controlling women by keeping them ignorant about sex. Sociologist Tom Inglis explains how "women *especially* were made to feel ashamed of their bodies. They were interrogated about their sexual feelings, desires and activities in the confessional. Outside the confessional there was a deafening silence. Sex became the most abhorrent sin."[663] Flynn's performance shatters the silence around sexuality, indulging in the desire and titillation that comes from talking about sex unabashedly rather than using it as a disciplinary maneuver. Her confessional inversion turns the concept inside-out; instead of whispering and hiding, she makes a spectacle out of herself and she enjoys it!

In this confessional inversion, the physical presence of Flynn's criminal and shame*less* body manifests social transgression and danger, but in a playful, bawdy, and

[662] Gammel, 9.

[663] Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, 188; emphasis added.

humorous style. To make this clear, the show opens with Flynn's greeting, "Hi, everyone! I'm Tara and I'm a filthy slut!"[664] As though responding to the popular misogyny pointed at her, Flynn refuses silence and shaming, instead co-opting the abuse for her purposes. In her study on the staging of abortion in American theater, Lisa Hall Hagen claims, "the practice of live theatre and the subject of abortion (as well as the procedure itself)" perpetrate the "cultural crime of breaking boundaries."[665] In this correspondence, Hagen draws on performance studies scholar Richard Schechner's theorization that "the interactions played out in the theater are those which are problematical in society, interactions of a sexual, violent, or taboo kind concerning hierarchy, territory, or mating."[666] As such, the subject matter of Flynn's performance locates the work on dangerous ground; additionally, in Flynn's identification as a "filthy slut," she embodies a feminine sexual body, highlighting the hazards of different *kinds* of bodies on stage. Hence, Flynn's performance exposes her body. Onstage, she is accompanied by musician Alma Kelliher at the piano, but otherwise, the stage is empty—the only set piece a flat, triangular shape lit up in blue just off-center against the upstage wall (see Figure 4.5). There is nowhere for Flynn to hide or escape, and likewise, the audience is confronted by her transgressive body. Hagen establishes the correlation between theater and abortion on the stage: "because of the liveness of the event, it is 'disobedient' in its live presentation of an act kept tacitly distant, safe or controlled."[667]

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[664] Tara Flynn, *Not a Funny Word,* unpublished playscript, 2018, 3.

[665] Hagen, 10.

[666] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1988]), 243.

[667] Hagen, 10.

Thus, the co-presence of the spectators—representators of society—and Flynn's criminal and shame-less body manifest danger and social transgression.

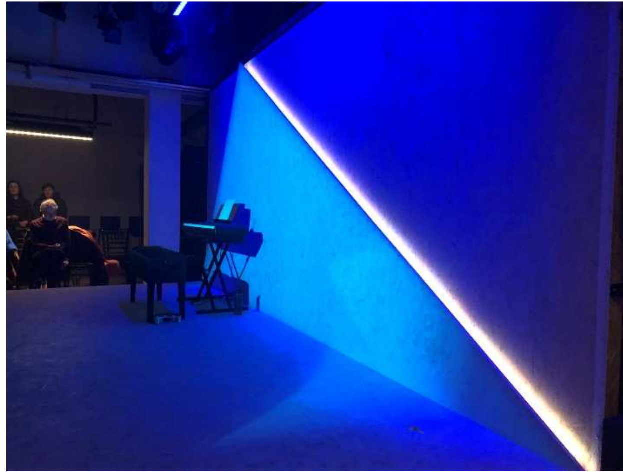

Figure 4.5 The stage set for *Not a Funny Word*

Flynn's disobedient performance uses elements of theatrical spectacle—song, dance, and parody—to put her body on display. After her quick salutation, she launches into the first of three songs she intersperses throughout her narrative. Next, she recounts an awkward, not-so-romantic tryst that led to her unplanned pregnancy in 2006. She quips, "there was no way you could get pregnant from an unsatisfactory fumble in lumpy Styrofoam" (9). Following a *Mission Impossible*-esque covert investigation to obtain information on how to procure a legal abortion, she proceeds with her subsequent journey to the Netherlands for the procedure: "On *Tripadvisor* a reviewer writes, 'The canal area is worth the trip. But this is the only reason you would need to come to Utrecht.' Not the only reason," she jokes (20). While this story forms the basis of the dramatic action, Flynn weaves in humorous commentary and satire. She spoofs a public service announcement in "So You're Pregnant in Ireland?" concluding that "you're valid now, and can apply for what's known as the Extremely Irish Passport" (7). Flynn uses comedy to expose the hypocrisy of the situation

and to laugh at her own “messiness.”[668] She believes her self-deprecating style makes her story relatable, while also adding distance; she asserts, “Humour implies distance.”[669] Flynn is an exhibitionist as she negotiates telling jokes, role-playing, and singing and dancing.

Nonetheless, Flynn’s performance is sincere in her public disclosure of intimate details from her private life. She stages serious moments too, particularly concerning her family. She recounts the moment when she nervously confessed her abortion to her mother; her mum replies, “What else could you have done? [...] You did the responsible thing. You did the right thing” (25). Flynn tells a moving story about her proudly Catholic grandfather and his “damnation complex”:

> Granddad never committed a mortal sin. A few pranks, cycling his bike home from the pub after one too many, an excessive devotion to Michael Collins, maybe, nothing major. That wasn’t what weighed on him.
> He was poor. Really poor. With five daughters—one of them being Mum—he did everything he could to bring money in. He took milk from their one cow and sold it at the creamery. He worked the roads for the County Council. He sold fish door to door from a van—like Avon, but with fish.
> What weighed on him most, was always being at the bottom of the list when they read out the donations for Easter Offerings at Mass, in descending order, and the priest giving him dirty looks in front of the whole village. It made him feel like he had failed his family. Failed his God.
> But it was also a priest that saved him. His damnation complex got so severe, he was sent on a retreat. He fasted. He prayed. He went to confession. It was at one of these that a priest said, “You think you’re such a sinner? You’re going to hell? Well I take all your sins on me. They’re on my soul now. I’ll deal with them. I take your sins on me. You’re a good person. Get on with your life. You’re free.”
> And just like that, Granddad was healed. (15)

These poignant scenes add emotional depth to Flynn’s situation and persona, while also heightening her public display.

[668] Mick Lally and Tara Flynn, “Interview: Tara Flynn on ‘Not a Funny Word,’” *An Áit Eile*, 5 May 2018, https://aae.ie/tara-flynn-not-funny-word/, accessed 19 June 2022.

[669] Lally and Flynn, “Interview: Tara Flynn on ‘Not a Funny Word.’”

In his analysis of confessional performance, performance theorist Christopher Grobe argues that audiences "demand not authenticity, but the spectacle of crumbling artifice; not direct access to the personal, but a sidelong view of the persona falling away; not straight-ahead fact and sincerity, but the roundabout truths of an ironic approach. We want the truth, of course, but we want it hard—because the strain authenticates."[670] Confessional performance induces a desire for authenticity and sincerity; however, the mediated form possesses a quality of artifice. Flynn embraces this paradox in accentuating the piece *as* performance and herself *as* performer. Through song, cartoonish characters, clever quips, and offhand jokes, she embraces the playful spectacle of theatre; just as quickly, she swings to poignancy that offers an instant of crumbling artifice. This shifting ground of her performance leans into the strain of delivering truth from an oblique position. Thus, her performance constantly negotiates the slippage between intimacy and exhibition, pathos and laughter, confrontation and distance.

Mass media fuels the ubiquity of the personal; from reality television to social media and blogs, confessional spaces abound.[671] To reiterate, confession depends upon a power relationship: a listener—even a virtual one—must be present to hear the confession.[672] If theater animates problematic interactions (to paraphrase Schechner), then the intersection of theater and confession makes apparent the inequity of a relationship in which the silent spectator bears witness to the confessing performer. Phelan explicates, "women and

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[670] Grobe, vii.

[671] Heddon, 161.

[672] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 64. Foucault claims that "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know" (64).

performers, more often than not, are 'scripted' to 'sell' or 'confess' something to someone who is in the position to buy or forgive."[673] In the discourse of sexuality and the regulation of bodies, those individuals who fail to follow social and cultural norms are excluded and erased.[674] For Flynn, getting an abortion made her invisible—the lived reality of her sexual, feminine body is foreclosed by the mythic presence of the disembodied, asexual figure of the Virgin Mary. Thus, her shame*ful* body must be kept out of sight. But when Flynn admitted her abortion, she was made hypervisible as a "slut," her sexualized body made a display because it was shame*ful*.

In *Not a Funny Word*, Flynn makes a spectacle out of herself; she is shame*less*. The judgement that one is "making a spectacle out of oneself" has a decidedly gendered complexion. As literary and critical theorist Mary Russo observes, a man exposes himself in an "operation [that is] quite deliberate and circumscribed."[675] For a woman, on the other hand, "making a spectacle out of herself ha[s] more to do with a kind of inadvertency and *loss of boundaries*."[676] A man is an active agent, while, for a woman, exposure is apparently beyond her capacity to control; the threat of exposure lurks everywhere and might happen at any time. In crossing the margins between ordinariness and spectacle, concealment and display, her body is made both legible and transgressive. While online misogyny excessively

[673] Phelan, 163.

[674] Judith Butler, "Sexual Inversions," in *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, ed. by Domna Stanton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 354.

[675] Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 53.

[676] Russo, 53; emphasis added.

marked the bounds of Flynn's shame*ful* body, transforming her into a "slut," Flynn's reclamation and exhibition erodes these borders.

In manipulating the show of her own body and identifying herself as a "filthy slut," Flynn destabilizes the spectator/performer-listener/confessor relation.[677] She refuses to be a shame*ful* body who seeks atonement and forgiveness. Cultural theorist Lynda Goldstein argues that feminist performance artists who deploy sexual confession "articulate a subject always under erasure within an oppressive regime, while also producing that subject through repeated confessions."[678] Flynn's *Not a Funny Word* operates at the site of this ambivalence between erasure and visibility, and control and display. The lived reality disclosed by her confessional performance exposes the ways that her feminine sexuality is expurgated and dismissed by Irish law and the "mob" who targeted her online. Yet, at the same time, in making a spectacle out of herself as a "filthy slut," Flynn animates an unruly body driven by sexual desire, and what's more, she enjoys it! This ambivalence positions Flynn's confessing body not as one who is purged by her sexual truth-telling, but rather as a body that extends catharsis—through laughter—to the listener. Thus, she negotiates the "old drama of containment and breakthrough," and she has a lot of fun while doing it.[679]

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[677] Lauren Berlant suggests that shamelessness may be a limiting political aim: it "is structured as a moment of clarity within normative frames." She draws a distinction between shamelessness as a political end and as a political tactic. She explains, "As a political end, I want the end of erotophobia, the fear of sexuality as such that produces so much shaming pedagogy around it. As a political tactic, shamelessness is the performative act of refusing the foreclosure on action that a shamer tries to induce. […] But if I act shamelessly, I also might be daring you to shame me again, and come to love the encounter with shame. This shapes the hyperbolic spaces of outraged shamelessness in the right-wing media. Bring shame on, they say, we're shameless; so give us your best shot!" (Najafi, Serlin, and Berlant, "The Broken Circuit: An Interview with Lauren Berlant").

[678] Lynda Goldstein, "Raging in Tongues: Confession and Performance Art," in *Confessional Politics: Women's Sexual Self-Representations in Life Writing and Popular Media*, ed. Irene Gammel (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 107-108.

[679] Grobe, vii.

Reclaiming Irish Femininity through Carnivalesque Laughter

The week before Flynn published her abortion story in 2015, journalist Róisín Ingle disclosed her own. The reaction against both of them—unmarried women who openly admitted to having abortions because they simply did not want to parent or be pregnant—was swift and hostile. Flynn writes, "We got abuse, both vicious and vocal. We were told we were 'too much,' that we were scaring people. But we knew that wasn't true."[680] This characterization of excess from their confessing bodies exposes the discomfort of truth-telling as a narrative mode. More importantly, however, it reveals collective anxieties about female bodies who refuse to be quiet and unseen. They are viewed as exhibitionists—spectacles of excess that threaten to spread like a feminist virus.

This section deepens my theorization of the ways that Flynn makes a spectacle out of herself through her use of comedy. I position her performance within the carnivalesque spirit that radically subverts and upends the authority of Church and state. Hence, she is shame*less* in order to spotlight how the nation is shame*ful*. She performs a grotesque and unruly body as both a site of satire and its limit, thereby exposing the ways in which seemingly harmless, casual misogyny slides into institutional authorities that terrorize women and other marginalized genders. In doing so, she highlights the way in which spectacles of shame operate covertly and overtly through sexualized violence and threats. As a (consenting) public, bodily spectacle, Flynn is an unruly woman. Her narrative embodies a kind of inverted social world in which an Irish woman candidly discusses her sexuality and sex life, poking fun at herself and others, and thereby acting the fool. Descended from the folk humor

[680] Flynn, "How Women Like Me Told of Our Abortions."

exhibited during carnival in early modern Europe, the carnivalesque idiom enacts a topsy-turvy world characterized by a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions."[681] In this temporarily chaotic and disordered world, elements of high culture and the divine are infused with the material and earthly, what literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin calls the grotesque: "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" transferred "to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity."[682] Thus, carnival laughter "builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state."[683] The carnivalesque delights in a temporary subversion raising implications for how power might be upended, altered, and ultimately restored.

The carnivalesque enables an understanding of shifting social formations, interrelations, and the political, thereby making it useful in extrapolating how Flynn's performance animates truth, subversion, and spectacle all at once. Flynn's role as an actor and a *comedian*, in particular, are central to how she constructs her incongruous performance. Theatre historiographer Gary Jay Williams productively applies Bakhtin's theorization of the carnivalesque to interrogate how the comic actor becomes an "embodiment of a whole force-

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[681] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1968]), 10.

[682] Bakhtin, 19-20.

[683] Bakhtin, 88.

field of social energies" and not merely "an ornamentation of a text."[684] Viewing the *female* comedic actor as an embodied, kinetic agent of performance is particularly important because women are frequently identified by surface appearances[685] and they are not taken seriously as comics.[686] Thus, foregrounding Flynn's comedic performance underwrites how she uses the idiom of the carnivalesque to upset the dominant order; her deployment of humor pushes beyond entertainment and pleasure to radically subvert the authority of the Church and state through the performance of her unruly, sexualized, female body. Bakhtin asserts that the carnivalesque "belongs to the borderline between art and life."[687] Theater studies scholar Marvin Carlson recognizes this as cultural performance, "the *sensuous* playing out in the form of life itself."[688] Consequently, Flynn's performance—simultaneously exaggerated, parodic, and exhibitionist while being autobiographical and confessional—exists along the edge of reality and fiction, experience and fantasy, and what Grobe identifies as "containment and breakthrough." An engagement with the carnivalesque makes plain how Flynn overtakes the façade and illusion of theatrical spectacle to construct a cultural performance that radically reimagines women's femininity and sexuality. Her unruly body on display embodies a femininity that is dynamic, somatic, sensual, bawdy, playful.

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[684] Gary Jay Williams, "Case Study: Molière and Carnival Laughter," in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, Phillip B. Zarrilli, Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams, and Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, 2nd edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2010 [2006]), 215.

[685] Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987).

[686] Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995).

[687] Bakhtin, 7.

[688] Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Third Ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2018 [1996]), 27; emphasis added.

The grotesque emphasizes corporeality, all the life forces and functions associated with the body, a configuration that Bakhtin associates with "the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth."[689] Significantly, Bakhtin's exemplary images of the grotesque are a series of terracotta figurines depicting "senile pregnant hags," and what's more, "the old hags are laughing."[690] For Bakhtin, these images illustrate the ongoing process of liberation, destruction, and renewal of the carnivalesque; however, Bakhtin does not account for the role of gender in the formation of the body politic. Taking up his grotesque image, Russo asks, "why *are* these old hags laughing?"[691] Russo counters that Bakhtin's grotesque, "the fruitful earth and the womb," manifests traditional images of the earth mother, the crone, and the witch.[692] She cautions, Bakhtin's grotesque body threatens "an easy and perilous slide from these archaic tropes to the misogyny" which links the female body and primal, earthly elements.[693] As such, the grotesque risks leaving "a static and universalistic notion of the feminine securely in place."[694] Instead, working with Bakhtin's supposition that the body is "*process and semiosis*," Russo develops a model of the

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[689] Bakhtin, 21.

[690] Bakhtin, 25.

[691] Russo, 73.

[692] Russo, 1. Bakhtin, 21.

[693] Russo, 2. Russo's intervention is not the only feminist reading of Bakhtin's work. Julia Kristeva's study of Bakhtin is probably the most influential feminist analysis. Combing Bakhtin's carnivalesque with the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, Kristeva develops a theory of abjection, arguing that the repressed maternal produces anxiety because of the expulsion of bodily fluids and wastes—the un-containability of the polluting elements of society and nature (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982]). Kristeva's work also draws on Mary Douglas.

[694] Russo, 29.

grotesque body that is gendered, but also malleable, unfixed, and full of potential—"a grotesque that moves."[695] A feminist reading of the carnivalesque and its grotesque body therefore *destabilizes* regressive images and signifiers that suggest a natural affiliation between the female body and earthly elements.

In her song "Burn Her She's a Witch" Flynn confronts the digital gender harassment that was leveled at her. In referring to "the mob" (11) who came after her online, she transforms the insults, violence, and misogyny into song and dance:

> Close your legs, slut, you asked for it
> Baby killer, stupid bitch
> Man hating monster, childless demon
> Burn her, she's a witch (13)

While these insults were designed to shame and blame her, Flynn exploits them for her public spectacle. This move, however, is not exclusively about wrenching back control over the narrative; Flynn's song locates the online mob's behavior in a longer history of women's oppression, the witch hunts. She invokes the same anxieties about the female body and sexuality that manufactured the figure of the witch and fueled a systemic and organized campaign of terror and torture to persecute them.[696] The witch is another iteration of the whore/slut archetype; they are "dangerous and unpredictable," undermining "maiden virginity with their unapologetic sexuality. They don't submit themselves to their husbands,

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[695] Russo, 29; emphasis original.

[696] In the fifteenth century, amidst popular insurgencies, epidemics, and feudal crises across Europe, a formalized doctrine of witchcraft developed "by which sorcery was declared a form of heresy and the highest crime against God, Nature, and the State" (Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* [New York, NY: Autonomedia, 2004], 165). The first witch in Western literature is Circe, a sorceress who appears in Homer's *The Odyssey* from the eighteen century BCE (Catherine McCormack, 143).

nor are they exclusive with their partners."[697] Hence, the witch is aligned with the slut, a body who overflows the edges of appropriate and idealized femininity. In contrast to the timelessness, purity, and asexuality of the Virgin Mary, the witch possesses an ageing, lusty body that bleeds. Flynn conjures these associations in her lyrics, repurposed from the online vitriol spewed at her. This time, Flynn poses as the abusers, staging a witch hunt against herself. In turning the spectacle of the witch hunt into the spectacle of a song and dance, Flynn animates the mounting excitement of the hunt as her song rapidly and playfully catalogues all the various transgressions of the witch (see Figure 4.6):

> She's a stupid, gormless, immature, evil, callous, ruthless witch
> She's a vicious, heartless, frigid, horny, doesn't know her own mind bitch
> Love them both (13)

Additionally, Flynn links these conceptions of women to an anti-choice slogan, "Love them both." Her performance counters the rhetoric of pro-life groups, questioning their claims to morality when they insult her and threaten her safety: "We love them both, don't want you to regret / Unnatural acts could lead you to your death" (12). Through the intonation of this popular phrase, Flynn reveals how popular misogyny operates by stealth, sneaking its way into banal expressions like "love them both" while obscuring violent ideas about women's sexuality, knowledge, and authority. Flynn's song replicates the way that the online misogyny aimed at her easily slipped from name-calling to a campaign of terror.

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[697] Catherine McCormack, 119. Witches, literally "wise women," were thus feminine, and associated with immorality, lust, sin, and Satan, as well as emotionality, weakness, and a lack of control (Siapera, 35; Mary Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland* [New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989], 166). As feminist theologian Mary Condren clarifies, many of these women were traditional healers and thus, in being "close to the natural, they were a threat to the supernatural" (Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, 167). Federici explains how the witch hunts succeeded in destroying "a whole world of female practices, collective relations, and systems of knowledge that had been the foundation of women's power in pre-capitalist Europe" (103).

Furthermore, Flynn buttresses these associations with lyrics that recall the crimes attributed to witches and juxtaposing them with contemporary gendered behaviors:

> Woman made my cows sick – BURN HER
> There's hail in June – BURN HER
> She's almost 39! – BURN HER
> She reads too many books – BURN HER
> I heard she doesn't wax – BURN HER
> She was crying in the pub – BURN HER
> I've lost the remote – BURN THAT WITCH
> My wifi's slow – BURN HER TO THE GROUND (12-13)

Flynn's song builds to a crescendo as she humorously points out the ludicrousness of connecting things like sick cows and slow wifi to a woman's behavior. The thrill of the witch hunt intensifies with each line as the refrain "BURN HER" drives to a climax. Flynn's presence, however, reminds us of the issue of consent around this campaign of terror; alongside the growing pleasure of "the mob," we simultaneously feel the mounting fear of the accused undergoing this relentless harassment. Her confessional inversion exposes that there is fun to be had from pushing the bounds of the confessional mode and exploiting public appetite for "confessing monsters."[698] Yet, her performance as the unruly body who endured a campaign of terror exposes the limit to this fun. In situating the misogyny directed at her within this longer history of women's subjugation, Flynn aims to recover the history of subversive and transgressive women who resisted patriarchal violence.

Additionally, Flynn's reclamation of the witch locates her among other activists and artists who have embraced the figure of the witch. Second-wave feminism developed a desire to recover women-centered knowledges and experiences, particularly women's expertise on

[698] The pleasure of over-confessing is part and parcel of Flynn's creative work more broadly. In her essay collection *Rage-In*, for example, she ruminates on a range of personal declarations from the pleasures of masturbation to her experiences as a large breasted woman, and how she feels a bit like a bad feminist because she gets her legs waxed.

abortion and contraception. The witch emerged as an emblem of this struggle. In the 1960s, the group W.I.T.C.H (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) was founded in the U.S., and the 1970s European Wages for Housework campaign adopted the slogan, "Tremble, tremble, the witches are back!" Currently throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, feminist activists are adopting "*bruja* feminism" to champion reproductive justice and other social causes like labor organizing. Like Flynn's call to recuperate native Irishness, *bruja* feminists adopt *la Bruja* (the witch) as a producer of ancestral culture with Mesoamerican or African roots.[699] In the U.S., feminists associated with the pagan religion wicca have been organizing to influence local and national elections following the defeat of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in 2016. The group #WitchtheVote and others across the Americas are using digital *brujería* and witchcraft to post videos and photos of themselves casting spells and hexes affecting politics.[700] These examples evince how individuals seek to retrieve witch politics and thereby alter visual and media culture and discourses.

Furthermore, Flynn's performance highlights the urgency of reforming the witch; the digital harassment targeting her and other marginalized genders substantiates how the figure persists in the social imaginary. Woven into slut-shaming discourses, the witch persists in popular misogyny as a negatively imaged weapon wielded by anti-choice activists and, even more dangerously, by state actors like politicians and judges. Most recently, the U.S.

[699] Norell Martínez, *Bruja Feminism & Cultural Production: Reclaiming the Witch in the Neoliberal Era* [dissertation], UC San Diego: 2019.

[700] Norell Martínez, "*Brujas* in the Time of Trump: Hexing the Ruling Class," in *Latinas and the Politics of Urban Spaces*, ed. by Sharon A. Navarro and Liliana Patricia Soldaña (New York and London: Routledge, 2021); Alora Paulsen Mulvey and Jessalyn Keller, "Brooms, Brunch, and Ballots: Popular Feminism, Instagram, and Feminized Electoral Politics," SCMS Conference Paper, March 2022.

Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* cites from judicial decisions written by Matthew Hale, a seventeenth century judge who sentenced at least two women to death for witchcraft.[701]

Figure 4.6 In Jesse Jones' immersive video installation *Tremble Tremble* (2017), Olwen Fouéré embodies a giant in what Jones calls a bewitching of the judicial system.

Near the end of the show, Flynn strikes a more serious tone in recalling some of the online harassment and abuse that she suffered after disclosing her abortion story:

> I'm not one of the exceptions, you see. Mine was a 'bad abortion'—one I chose for myself. "Murderer," they'll say. "You should be killed yourself." They'll send me pictures of babies, dead near birth, covered in blood, and say that's what I've done. They try to shame me in soft voices, or tell clients not to book me, or set up fake social media accounts to follow me again when I block them. One guy has set up so many, I'm convinced he's a little bit in love with me. Well, they do say 'love them both'.

[701] Ken Armstrong, "Draft Overturning *Roe v. Wade* Quotes Infamous Witch Trial Judge With Long-Discredited Ideas on Rape," *ProPublica*, 6 May 2022, https://www.propublica.org/article/abortion-roe-wade-alito-scotus-hale, accessed 22 June 2022. See also, the final court opinion written by Justice Samuel Alito, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. ___ (2022), https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf.

> They twist my words into some kind of murderous boast and they're proud of themselves. I deserve the abuse, y'see, 'cos I'm a filthy slut. Some of them wonder if there's a way to permanently silence those of us who speak out. And no one calls 'them' extreme. They save that for women like me. It cuts. Or for us witches, it burns. (23)

Flynn uses the refrain from her song "Burn Her She's a Witch," but she is not lighthearted here. In contrast to the displacement of the abortion-seekers in *The Renunciation* and the temporal and geographic distance of Two Women's Travel's digital travelogue, *Not a Funny Word* asserts abortion-seekers corporeality and humanity through Flynn's physical presence. Avoiding laughter in this moment, Flynn reveals what is at stake around abortion discourses. Her experience reveals how, "when a certain kind of institutional Irish eye looks at women, it sees a rather daunting witch, a voracious female."[702] Her performance reveals the violence behind this gaze.

Re-placing the Virgin: Brigid's Pro-Choice Native Ireland

Flynn's performance further leans into the public display of excess bodies to reimagine definitions of Irish womanhood. Alongside the witch's unapologetic sexuality, independence, and earthiness, Flynn reinstates the authority of the pre-Christian, Celtic goddess Brigid. In elevating these figures, Flynn eschews the idealized image represented by the Virgin Mary. Her performance rejects those qualities associated with the Virgin's divinity—asexuality, disembodiment, acquiescence. Flynn indulges in her own corporeality to regain the power of the female physical body—earthly, low, bawdy, and dynamic. Through creating a space of carnival laughter, Flynn invites her audience to embrace their

[702] Herr, 32.

corporeality, not fear it. Thus, she defies qualities of the sacred that position the body as a burden.

Consequently, *Not a Funny Word* opens not with an abortion confession, but with a confession that she is "a filthy slut." She sings the song "State of Shame," not to admit her own sins and seek absolution, but rather to purge the nation of its own sinning behaviors and anxieties. Flynn's body refuses to be shame*ful*, instead directing the shame at contemporary Ireland and the legacy of the Catholic Church. Her song traces a history of Celtic Ireland as it is depicted in the popular imagination, sustained by tourism and diasporic nostalgia similar to that conveyed in *Riverdance*. She sings,

> Welcome to Ireland. Hop 1, 2, 3, 4
> '*Fáilte*' [Welcome] on the Arrivals door
> Land of rainbows, island of mist
> Of cliffs and monoliths, stones to be kissed. (3)

Flynn constructs an image of a rural Ireland, "exactly like the postcards," characterized by its natural beauty and idyllic landscapes untouched by modern industry (3). Next, she uses St. Patrick to symbolize a shift toward an oppressive, but still romantic, version of Irishness predicated on Catholicism:

> St. Patrick arrived, holy hot takes
> 'Throw a parade, he banished some snakes'
> Brigid forgotten for shamrocks and blame
> He covered us all in a cloak of shame. (3)

In Flynn's historical account, the Church brings shame to Ireland, and as the song's chorus repeats, "Shame, shame the state of our shame / Shame, shame's the way" (3). In contrast, Flynn conjures an ancient, pre-Christian Ireland exemplified by goddess worship and the sexual body; she sings,

> Once, we were fearsome, none of us frigid
> All of us goddesses, each of us Brigid
> Forged of iron that rains couldn't rust

Celebrating bodies, loving our lust
Strength burning bright, an eternal flame
Now our warrior queens are cloaked in shame. (3)

Flynn thereby charts the displacement of a native Irishness that existed before the importation of Catholicism.[703] Her imagery connects St. Patrick (minimizing his role in Irish history to "banish[ing] some snakes") to those superficial and commercialized symbols of Irishness—parades, shamrocks, the Blarney stone, and rainbows—while Brigid represents an indigenous Ireland characterized by goddess worship, warrior queens, ironworks, and pleasure in sexuality. As such, Flynn blames Catholic conservativism for this "state of shame," and she professes it to be a foreign import. Quite simply, shame is not *really* Irish. Her song aims to exorcise the spectator's national shame by revealing it to be contrary to native Irish identity.

As Flynn's story reveals, Ireland's containment culture has material consequences for herself and other women who are forced into quietly and secretly traveling, but, as Flynn retorts, "you won't see our shame on a postcard" (4). *Not a Funny Word* situates this shameful conservative (and commercialized) nostalgia in opposition to the lived realities of Irish women. Her unruly, shameless body performs a radically different notion of femininity than that represented in the figure of Virgin Mary. Instead, she invokes the image of Brigid, thereby embodying a different representational economy of Irish femininity—one derived from pre-Christian, indigenous Celtic iconography. This approach situates her in a feminist

[703] Feminist historian Gerda Lerner argues that ancient goddesses held extraordinary powers through their female sexuality. Mesopotamian kings and priests gradually adopted the authority of these goddesses and replaced them with male gods (see Chapter 7 of *The Creation of Patriarchy* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986]). Likewise, focusing on Celtic/Irish history, Mary Condren traces the co-optation and destruction of the goddess and matricentered societies as patriarchy developed. In pre-Christian Ireland, goddesses had a triple form (represented by the Triple Spiral on monuments and sacred stones), "the never-ending cycle of infinitude," depicted by the Maiden, Mother, and Crone to embody the cycle of birth, life, and death (*The Serpent and the Goddess*, 25; see also Chapter 2).

tradition alongside other subversive and political artists who use protofeminist antecedents to challenge conventional definitions of Irish womanhood. These mythic figures uncover a complex female history that emphasizes matrilineality, women's authority, and knowledge production. Moreover, these figures represent women as sexual beings in charge of their own destinies. As such, they reclaim the female genealogy that events like the witch hunts attempted to eradicate. These embodiments challenge the standard of femininity created in the image of the Virgin Mary in modern Ireland, while also challenging the legitimacy of Mary as representative of authentic Irish-ness. Thus, Flynn's performance reconfigures the intersection of female identity and Irish national identity. Significantly, her performance reveals how women have been engaged in a longer project of self-definition in the midst of hostile and regulatory threats from the state and Church.

Flynn first introduces Brigid in "State of Shame," although the Celtic goddess emerges constantly throughout *Not a Funny Word*. Chris McCormack describes her as "a source of comfort" throughout the play.[704] Indeed, Flynn conjures her during some of the loneliest moments of her abortion journey. When Flynn confirms what she had feared—she is, in fact, pregnant—she seeks the goddess' help: "Brigid? Are you there? Brigid wouldn't be afraid. She'd be wise and certain. Where was she when I needed her?" (13) Later, as Flynn prepares to travel abroad for the procedure, she looks for solace in Brigid again: "I wish I had [Brigid's] strength. I wish she were traveling with me. Though we'd never get [her] sword through security" (19). At the medical clinic in Utrecht, Flynn turns to her again: "I hear my name. *I don't want to have an abortion*. I need one. I haven't changed my mind,

[704] Chris McCormack, "Review: *Not a Funny Word* at The Complex."

but if I had a magic lamp right now, Brigid's eternal flame, I'd wish all three wishes not to be here" (21). In evoking Brigid's presence throughout, Flynn positions the Celtic goddess as a proto-feminist icon, highlighting attributes and symbols of her cultural heritage: her sword, eternal flame, and cloak (as referenced earlier in the song "State of Shame").

Flynn's construction of native Irish-ness that she introduces in "State of Shame" relies upon the Brigid of folklore. In the image of Brigid, Flynn advances a more capacious understanding of both womanhood and Irish identity than that enabled within the confines of Marian devotion. Hence, Flynn constructs a version of Brigid that affirms feminine sexuality, recovers bodily autonomy, and asserts these embodiments to be more Irish than a devotion to the Virgin Mary. As Flynn proclaims, "When I think of Irish women, it's Brigid I think of" (5). This somber statement contrasts with Flynn's jibe to the audience that "unable to cope with an unplanned pregnancy, I felt like a failure. Not like those Real Irish women you hear about, Peig or Deirdre of the Sorrows or any character ever played by Siobhán McKenna" (15). Flynn thus lampoons a kind of limiting Irish womanhood as represented in: the romantic rural past, embodied by the famous Irish language storyteller, Peig Sayers (1873-1958); the mythic cultural past, manifested in the self-sacrificing heroine of folklore, Deirdre of the Sorrows who was so devoted to her lover that she died by suicide rather than being forced into marriage with her kidnapper; and popular media's imagined cultural identity, projected on and across the body of Siobhán McKenna (1922-1986), celebrated star of the stage and screen whom playwright Brian Friel called the "personif[ication of] an idea of Ireland."[705] This moment highlights "the roundabout truths of an ironic approach" in which

[705] Following McKenna's death, playwright Brian Friel remarked, "For people of my generation, she personified an idea of Ireland" ("Siobhán McKenna," *James Hardiman Library Archives*, Galway: National University of Ireland, https://archivesearch.library.nuigalway.ie/NUIG/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=

Flynn accentuates the burden of representation for Irish women who fail to live up to the (not-so-)Real femininity of modesty and obedience.

Figure 4.7 Photograph of Peig Sayers (at left), and a still from the film *Playboy of the Western World* (1962), starring Siobhán McKenna as the tragic colleen, Pegeen Mike (right).

Contrarily, Flynn embodies a more expansive definition of Irish womanhood while simultaneously parodying the limited, conventional one predicated by Marianism. Flynn models her femininity after Brigid and other Celtic goddesses from folk culture. As stated

CalmView.Catalog&id=T20, accessed 20 June 2022). McKenna played a variety of tragic Irish folk heroines, and she is also known for her performances of Irish literature. Irish audiences best remember her for reviving the role of "Pegeen Mike" in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in 1951, a role she also plays in the 1962 film (dir. Brian Desmond Hurst). Notably, she played the Virgin Mary in the film *King of Kings* (1961, dir. Nicholas Ray).

Condren situates the legend of Deirdre of the Sorrows within a number of Irish sagas about women who die of shame or suicide, "rather than consent to the loss of their sexual integrity" (*The Serpent and the Goddess*, 77). Famously, playwright John Millington Synge (1871-1909) was writing a play *Deirdre of the Sorrows* at the time of his death. His play was later finished by his fellow Irish Literary Revivalists, writer William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) and actor Maire O'Neill (1886-1952) in 1910. Author-activist Eva Gore-Booth wrote a dramatic, non-tragic version of the myth called *The Buried Life of Deirdre* (1930). Theater scholar Cathy Leeney argues that Gore-Booth reimagines Deirdre as a subversive figure who challenges conventional definitions of Irish femininity while maintaining an "ethical and spiritual power" ("The Space Outside: Images of Women in Plays by Eva Gore-Booth and Dorothy Macardle," in *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. by Melissa Sihra [London: Palgrave Macmillan 2007], 56). I trace these histories to emphasize the wide-ranging appeal of recapturing ancient, pre-Christian Ireland in art and cultural media—a project that variously served republicanism, postcolonial independence, and, as I argue in this chapter, a brand of postcolonial feminism.

previously, she introduces this model in the song "State of Shame," establishing one of the primary themes of *Not a Funny Word*: early Celtic Ireland valued matrilineality and women's authority while modern culture degrades them. Flynn symbolizes this displacement in juxtaposing Brigid/Celtic goddess and St. Patrick/Catholic saint. She develops it further in introducing Brigid to her audience:

> You know about Brigid? I mentioned her in the song? Not a saint, no. They made her a saint later and she became so mainstream her cross became the emblem for the national broadcaster [RTÉ], but Brigid was so much more than a holy logo. She was a Celtic goddess. She brought spring. She was a swordsmith and not too shabby at wielding one herself. She's the goddess of fire and fertility and healing, with power over pregnancy, conception and labour. Goddess of poetry and light. Of beer! Of all society, all classes. Goddess of multitasking, really. Forget Patrick—we should be throwing parades for her. (5)

In her depiction of Brigid, she situates Irish women and culture within a complex historical narrative, highlighting the roles women once enjoyed as fearsome and powerful warriors and ruling queens in ancient Celtic clans.[706]

Feminist theologian Mary Condren calls Brigid the "most powerful female religious figure in all of Irish history," "whose shadows still move over Ireland."[707] Brigid originates as a Mother Goddess in the *Tuatha Dé Danaan*, the "People of the Goddess Danu," a pantheon of Irish deities from ancient myth.[708] Extant stories assign her a collection of positive qualities previously associated with multiple Irish goddesses.[709] Celtic goddesses were protectors and regenerators of the land, and, as an earth goddess, Brigid was "the great

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[706] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, 62-63.

[707] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, 55.

[708] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, 57. I'm using the more common Anglicized name Brigid; the goddess' name appears variously in the Irish language as *Brigit*, *Brighid*, and *Bríd*.

[709] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, 59.

guardian of fertility and the land."[710] According to lore, her cloak possessed healing powers and she tended the perpetual fires that burned across all of Ireland. Many of her qualities subsequently comingled with historical accounts of Brigid the Abbess of Kildare (453-523) who became a Christian saint.[711] Flynn references a number of these symbols and myths. For example, St. Brigid is the patron of poetry, healing, protection, and blacksmithing, among others. In "State of Shame," Flynn emblematically links female strength to iron ("Forged of iron that rains couldn't rust") and female desire to an eternal flame ("Celebrating our bodies, loving our lust / Strength burning bright, an eternal flame"). Flynn casts St. Patrick—and thus the Catholic Church—as appropriator of Brigid's cloak, wielding it as a weapon of shame rather than a mark of strength: "He covered us all in a cloak of shame" (3). While Flynn blames St. Patrick, however, the absorption of Brigid into Christianity provides a sense of how women's authority was expunged from society and culture.

The image of the mother goddess was gradually eroded from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Rather than effacing it entirely, this iconography was integrated into a Christian context, largely through popular imagination and embodied practices and customs.[712] As Condren recounts the Catholic church and its clergy worked to stamp out the feminine presence in the Church, including the monastic settlement at Kildare that Brigid had

[710] Pamela Berger, *The Goddess Obscured: Transformation of the Grain Protectress from Goddess to Saint* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 71; also Loftus, 48-49.

[711] See Seán Ó Duinn, OSB, *The Rites of Brigid: Goddess and Saint* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005), 57; Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*.

[712] Berger; Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*; Elaine Pagels, "What Became of God the Mother? Conflicting Images of God in Early Christianity," *Signs* 2, no. 2 (1976). Berger recounts the destruction of mother goddess statuary during the missionary endeavors of the fourth and fifth centuries (37). Evidence reveals that statues continued to be discovered as late as the ninth century, attesting to the persistence of popular belief.

established. In early Ireland, the land had been associated with “protective, multiple, female figures who often mysteriously combined strength, age and ferocity with beauty, youth and fertility.”[713] The Christian missionaries, however, brought the notion of woman as a seductress whose sexuality is a source of evil.[714] As dance and performance studies scholar Ninotchka D. Bennahum deduces, “the demoting of the female goddess and replacement of her primary importance with a male god led to the idea of the good and the bad woman: the evil, sinful woman—Eve […]—and the righteous Virgin Mary.”[715] Thus, discourses around women—and their bodies—changed. Berger avers that, by linking the emblems and imagery of the earth mother or mother goddess to “one of the worst sins of Christendom, female sensuality,” the Church successfully eradicated the female component in divinity.[716] As such, the accretion of the Virgin Mary/Mother Ireland and the land in modern Ireland was conceived in goddess worship. Likewise, Mary retains elements of ancient goddesses.[717]

Medieval art historian Pamela Berger postulates that Christianity’s embrace of syncretism drove its successful diffusion, at least in part.[718] In the sixth century, Pope St. Gregory strategized the preservation of indigenous sacred sites, believing that people would gather in familiar places that could thereby be incorporated into Catholic practices, rites, and

[713] Loftus, 50.

[714] Loftus, 49.

[715] Ninotchka Devorah Bennahum, *Carmen: A Gypsy Geography* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 91.

[716] Berger, 38.

[717] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*; Marie-France Boyer, *The Cult of the Virgin: Offerings, Ornaments, and Festivals* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

[718] Berger, 2.

customs. Hence, priests blessed the waters of pagan sanctuaries replacing the idols with God.[719] The cults of saints and the veneration of Mary gradually fused with and superseded pagan rituals and feast days.[720] Accordingly, Brigid was aligned with St. Brigid. The pagan ritual of *Imbolc*, which commemorated the start of spring and included agricultural rites, was transformed into St. Brigid's Feast Day, the first of February, but retaining elements of folk practices. Berger explains that "a pagan tilling and sowing ceremonial was transformed into the Feast of Saint Brigid, and that the pagan mother goddess, whose symbolic 'belly' or 'womb' was envisioned as producing the season's crop, was superseded by the Christian saint who, until modern times, was honored at *Imbolc*/Saint Brigid's Day with baked grain cakes and stalks of grain."[721] As an earth goddess, Brigid's associations with fertility and sexuality were expunged as she was incorporated into Christianity; Catholic monks "made [Brigid] a virgin, identified her as a second mother of Christ, and honored her as a kind of symbolic matriarch of all Ireland."[722] Brigid is among the three patron saints of Ireland along with Patrick and Columba. In his historical account of Brigid, Father Sean O'Duinn regards her "the great link between pagan past and Christian present."[723]

Nonetheless, Flynn's version of Brigid rejects many of the pivotal qualities that form her distinctly Catholic sainthood, namely virginity and maternalism. Instead, her performance recovers those attributes that define Brigid as a Celtic goddess—sexual

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[719] Ó Duinn, 57-58.

[720] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess,* 160.

[721] Berger, 71-72.

[722] Berger, 73.

[723] Ó Duinn, 226.

pleasure, fortitude, and authority. Condren proposes that, in the goddesses tradition, "the figure of [Brigid] is not an object of *worship* but a metaphor through which we can engage imaginatively and creatively with a female tradition of ethics and divinity."[724] Similarly, in *Not a Funny Word*, Flynn metonymically uses Brigid to project a feminist Irish-ness that has its source in the ancient world: Irish women are Brigids, not modest colleens or mammies. Flynn's conception of Brigid celebrates her as an icon of an indigeneity that valued the sexuality and biological realities of women's bodies—an icon to commemorate a time before patriarchy and Catholicism restricted women's roles in society and censored their sexuality. In this return to an authentic cultural identity, Flynn's play expresses resemblances with other feminist artists who creatively adopt various folk figures: Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh use the Sheela-na-gig in their art installation *Sounding the Depths* (1992), and a pair of anonymous artists currently install clay Sheela-na-gigs in public places around the island in the ongoing street art venture *Project Sheela* (2020-); visual artist Jesse Jones employs the imagery of the witch in her immersive video installation *Tremble Tremble* which premiered in 2017 (see Figure 4.6).[725] Hence, the reinvestment in these feminine emblems is not novel; they are open to a variety of re-imaginings, including serving popular feminism and commercial profit, as *Riverdance* evinces in its rendering of the colleen—simultaneously nostalgic and traditional while displaying individual liberation and achievement.

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[724] Mary Condren, "Brigit: Matron of Poetry, Healing, Smithwork and Mercy: Female Divinity in a European Wisdom Tradition," *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 18 (2010), 6-7.

[725] For more on *Sounding the Depths*, see Hilary Robinson, "Disruptive Women Artists: An Irigarayan Reading of Irish Visual Culture," *Irish Studies Review* 8, no. 1 (2000): 57-72. *Project Sheela* is available at the website: https://www.projectsheela.com/.

The Virgin Mary, however, is conspicuously absent from *Not a Funny Word*. Flynn dis-places the cultural iconography of the Virgin Mary, and re-places it with the iconography of Brigid. In this representational exchange, Flynn refuses to perform a shameful body as constructed by Catholicism and demands acknowledgment—and celebration—of (female) sexuality as defined by ancient Irish culture. Hence, Flynn animates the images and practices of a different symbolic economy, one that asserts women's equality, authority, and sexuality—one substantiating the power of corporeal and earthly forms. When Flynn foregrounds sexuality and the pleasure that can be derived from it, she suggests a radically different representation of womanhood than that historically represented by Our Lady. Her performance disrupts a simplistic virgin/whore dichotomy, extending beyond this polarity to assert the complexity of sexual identity. In the previous chapter, I investigated how *The Renunciation* exposes the hypocrisy of the Annunciation narrative—commemorating Mary's consent to carry a child while denying pregnant people in the Republic the same choice. In explaining the Annunciation and its subsequent Hail Mary prayer, home|work member Siobhán Clancy explains, "*we are told Mary* exercised her agency in consenting to becoming pregnant."[726] This telling—by whom and to whom—is what I want to interrogate in relation to Flynn's performance.

Clancy's remark draws attention to Catholic discourses that interpret and explain that Mary said "yes" to the angel Gabriel's *announcement*. To reexamine art historian Catherine McCormack's critique of a consenting Mary, she asserts, "Her sexuality is denied to her before she ever has a chance to experience it: Mary falls pregnant as a girl with a forced

[726] Clancy, 154; emphasis added.

conception (the work of the Holy Spirit) that censors even the possibility of *physical pleasure*."[727] The regulation of women applies not only to when and under what circumstances to bear a child; this censorship—notably *self*-censorship—also applies to the enjoyment of sexual acts. Mary's only role is to miraculously have a child, and the act of procreation springs from God.[728] She is deprived of the experience of sexual intercourse, and thus, in this arrangement, she (apparently) willingly surrenders sexual pleasure. Hence, Mary becomes an asexual and pure being, who gladly relinquished her sexual desire for the sake of motherhood.

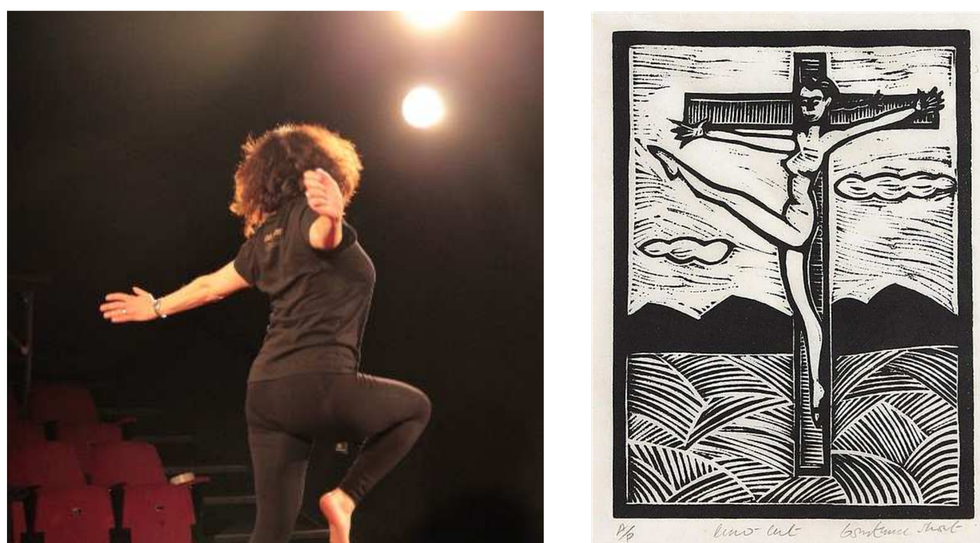

Figure 4.8 A female tradition of divinity through the goddess figure: Tara Flynn in *Not a Funny Word* (left), and a lino-cut print, *Dancing at the Crossroads* (1996) by Constance Short, exhibiting feminine performances that joyfully embrace the feminine body.

To recall Cheryl Herr's "erotics of Irishness," the repression of sexuality and anxieties about the body manifest an "internal censorship" that produces an anti-erotic

[727] Catherine McCormack, 59; emphasis added.

[728] Lerner, 188.

gaze—ignoring the physicality of the body, its vitality and sensuousness.[729] For Herr, this repression was enabled by the erasure of an indigenous, female-identified prehistory.[730] Flynn's displacement of the iconography of the Virgin Mary with that of Brigid takes seriously Herr's assertion. Flynn rebuffs the abstract, disembodied, and supernatural qualities expressed through Marianism, making them appear strange to native Irishness. In embodying a femininity that is bawdy and humorous, sensuous and dynamic, loud and vital, profane and earthy, poignant and pleasurable, in short carnivalesque, Flynn animates a radically different kind of Irish femininity (see Figure 4.8).

Flynn's connection to Brigid recalls a longer feminist project of resistance against the Church and state. This iconography has resurfaced at various times throughout history in the service of self-definition and liberation. Both Brigid and St. Brigid have appeared before as pro-choice icons. Even while the Catholic Church rendered Brigid a virgin, she retained her ancient connection with fertility.[731] Significantly, one story tells of Brigid making the fetus of a pregnant nun "disappear"—a story that gradually vanishes from various editions of saints' lives.[732] In the introduction to *The Irish Journey: Women's Stories of Abortion*, Medb Ruane recounts a version of this tale: "Saint Brigid met a young woman who had a crisis pregnancy. Brigid was renowned for her work with fertility in all its forms—once, a wooden altar had sprouted blossom under the force of her healing touch. Brigid prayed, then she blessed the

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[729] Herr, 31.

[730] Herr, 32. Herr advocates recovering archaeological formations, Neolithic structures such as mounds, cairns, tumuli, and field monuments, that add female-identified content to claim "alternative somatic and social texts" (24).

[731] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, 75.

[732] Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, 76.

woman, laid hands on her womb, and the fetus miraculously disappeared."[733] Ruane's configuration posits a Church-sanctioned history of legal abortion in Catholic Ireland.

In this context, Flynn's summoning of Brigid during her abortion journey becomes particularly meaningful. As Ruane does with St. Brigid, Flynn positions the goddess as an advocate and facilitator of women's healthcare. Near the end of *Not a Funny Word*, Flynn relates one of Brigid's "biggest feats:" "She performed an abortion. A young nun in trouble came to her and Brigid made her womb empty again. They called it a miracle then. Funny, they don't talk about that one" (25). Flynn uses this story to highlight the selective memory of the Catholic Church in configuring those actions deemed appropriate and worthy of sainthood. But she also positions this story as evidence of a native practice of women's healthcare in Ireland that includes abortion. Her play uses Brigid's mythic iconicity to argue that abortion has always been indigenous to Ireland.

Legal scholar Ruth Fletcher contends that, in the aftermath of the X Case in the 1990s, pro-choice discourse "depict[ed] abortion as an ancient indigenous practice—as part of the fertility services performed by such an icon of Celtic Christianity as St. Brigid."[734]

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[733] Medb Ruane, "Introduction," *The Irish Journey: Women's Stories of Abortion* (Dublin: Irish Family Planning Association, 2000), 6.

[734] Fletcher, "Reproducing Irishness," 384. Flynn's interpretation of Brigid as a native, proto-feminist icon also has a precedent in the first wave feminist movement in Ireland. The women's nationalist organization *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* (the Daughters of Ireland), founded by Maud Gonne in 1900, strove to revitalize the significance of Celtic heroines. The group, made up of women dedicated to the cause for independence but also working formally with other activist movements including women's suffrage and labor union organizing, published essays, lectures, articles, poems, and plays recounting Celtic legends and folktales. They also held classes for children to teach the Irish language. Significantly, they staged widely popular *tableaux vivants* and plays communicating the stories and iconography of Celtic mythology. Each member adopted a pseudonym after a pagan Irish goddess to protect their identities (many of them were working women who feared reprisal in their workplaces). In a lecture about the goddess Brigid delivered to *Inghinidhe*, Gonne proclaims that the Celts have always "reverenced the feminine equally with the masculine principle" (Maud Gonne, "The Goddess Brigid," *United Irishman*, 3 November 1900, in *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings, 1895-1946*, ed. Karen Steele [Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004], 190). Thus, Gonne positions the Irish Revival as a feminist project as much as a commitment to nationalism. For a productive feminist analysis of their *tableaux vivants* and plays, see Shonagh Hill's book *Women and Embodied Mythmaking in Irish Theatre* (Cambridge, UK:

This re-emerged during the Repeal movement with actions regularly planned for St. Brigid's Day. In 2018, filmmaker David Keeling produced a short film "Saint Brigid" with a pro-Repeal message.[735] Previously, in the 1990s, the activist group Youth for Choice printed a pamphlet featuring St. Brigid. These examples reveal how Brigid and other Celtic Christian iconography have been part of a pro-choice activist strategy for decades (see Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9 Repeal campaigner dressed as St. Brigid, from Oliva Harris' photoessay (above, left); Artists Campaign to Repeal the Eighth banner featuring Celtic goddess imagery in a re-imagining of the tarot card "Six of Swords" (above, right); and an Abortion Rights Campaign flyer (below)

Cambridge University Press, 2019). A more historical account of the group's work and members can be found in Margaret Ward's *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London and East Haven, CT: Pluto Press, 1995 [1989]).

[735] David Keeling's film is available to view online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG61E4-iceQ.

As Flynn's performance reveals, feminist discourse seeks to reclaim Brigid from Catholic sainthood to commemorate her significance as a pre-Christian pagan goddess. In advancing Brigid as an image of Irishness, Flynn's performance creates a space in which the collective cultural past can emerge in service to a more equitable national imaginary. Brigid represents a figure who precedes the damage done to women's rights by the Catholic Church. However, reproduction in Ireland has been intricately bound to racial difference—not all reproductive bodies are imagined as reproducing Irishness.[736] Thus, a romantic conjuring of a pre-Christian, Celtic Ireland risks affirming Irishness on white, settled bodies, ignoring the history of Travellers and the expanding migrant communities on the island. In her reflection on the Repeal campaign, Fletcher identifies these traps, "moments of drawing on a postcolonial, rather than decolonial, desire to differentiate and develop, to become civilized and civilizing."[737] Fletcher elaborates on how Irish emigrants living abroad were motivated to become involved in the Repeal campaign, and yet activist politics failed to draw attention to the state's responsibility for emigration and its dependence upon inward migration. As I investigated in Chapter 2, Repeal rhetoric often relied on conceptions of Irish society as barbaric, backwards, and outmoded as evidenced by Savita Halappanavar's death. In her abortion testimonial published in *The Irish Times*, Flynn writes, "Thousands have travelled. Thousands have risked 14 years in prison for buying pills online. Thousands more have put their lives at risk by doing things that wouldn't seem out of place in a Victorian horror story. Except it's happening today. Right now."[738] The formulation that contemporary Ireland is

[736] See the case of Savita Halappanavar in Chapter 2.

[737] Fletcher, "#RepealedThe8th," 241.

[738] Flynn, "You Don't Talk About Abortion in Ireland."

stuck in the Victorian Age reveals a preoccupation with being perceived as a cosmopolitan, globalized nation. This postcolonial perspective seeks to shame people into becoming more civilized and "First World," while failing to acknowledge how legislation like the 2004 Citizenship Referendum evinces a contradictory perspective of national belonging.[739] Thus, a national imaginary that engages the past in looking to the future needs to account for present-day realities.

Lastly, in the final moments of *Not a Funny Word*, Flynn revisits the theme she established at the beginning in "State of Shame." Her confessional inversion offers collective national absolution; like the performers in *The Renunciation*, Flynn supplants the authority of the clergy to absolve spectators for their sins. Flynn's pardon, however, which comes in the waning moments of the play after she has revealed the private details of her own "sin," liberates others who have had abortions. In a moment of pathos, she addresses the spectators, "Some people, here tonight, have had abortions. We're in every shop, every college—even every Mass" (25). She fosters solidarity in switching to the collective "we," embracing her place among those who may be sitting in her audience with secrets of their own. She then addresses her fellow abortion-seekers directly: "You might have been told you're going to hell. I don't believe that. If you do, well, I take your sins on me. I'm going anyway. I have a very big backpack. I take your sins on me. They're on my soul now. I'll deal with them. You're free" (25). Evoking the story of her grandfather and his "damnation complex," Flynn explicitly takes on the role of the priest in offering absolution.

[739] See Ruth Fletcher, "Post-Colonial Fragments: Representations of Abortion in Irish Law and Politics," *Journal of Law and Society* 28, no. 4 (2001); also Katie Mishler, "'It's Most Peculiar That This Particular Story Doesn't Get Told': A Reproductive-Justice Analysis of Storytelling in the Repeal Campaign in Ireland, 2012–18," *Éire-Ireland* 56, no. 3 (2021), 90.

In Catholic ritual, the sacred space of the confessional offers salvation; the struggles of earthly life will lead to liberation if one confesses and seeks absolution. The physical body is an obstacle to be overcome in this context. Flynn's performance, however, negates the concept of corporeality as encumbrance in service to the state. She creates a different kind of sacred, confessional in which the body becomes a formidable site of identity, compassion, and vitality, and not something to fear or banish. She meaningful embraces and acknowledges the corporealities of fellow abortion-seekers, and, by inviting her audience into a space of shared carnival laughter, the spectators are encouraged to accept the bodily, too. Implicitly, she displaces the authority of the Catholic Church, replacing it with an indigenous, pre-Christian belief system. Flynn's declaration "I take your sins on me" is particularly powerful in that she herself is the one who has done the confessing, *and* she endured online harassment, threats, and abuse for it. Despite this, she asserts that the need for absolution lies squarely with the audience—at those people who are indifferent to the injustices done to her and others with crisis pregnancies.

Finally, Flynn teases the audience here with a false ending to her play, suggesting for a moment that she will conclude in a somber, pensive space. Resonating with the thematic content of *The Renunciation*, she declares, "12 women travelled today. Or took pills. Or used coat hangers. Or worse. And we're part of all of them. Every time someone leaves, we travel with them. (*Lights down)*" (25). Flynn echoes the testimonies performed by home|work, locating herself among them. In invoking the complicitly of the public, Flynn's performance functions as a sort of call to action. While the lights fade providing the audience with a brief moment to reflect on their responsibility, Flynn denies the audience the kind of contemplative space generated by home|work's re-worked Angelus.

In *Not a Funny Word*, the lights bounce back up and Flynn amends her conclusion: "Listen, this isn't that divisive. We're being told to be afraid of each other—that there are two warring sides, that women are scary. That sex is shameful, when it's fucking fantastic. (Be safe, obviously. Take precautions: you don't want to end up like me, standing on a stage telling the world about your hooha.) People make mistakes, sexy mistakes…Ireland's a compassionate country, I know it. Maybe even a sexy one" (25). As such, Flynn closes her show with an assertion of *Irish* sexuality—for all genders. With characteristic lewd humor, she pivots her call to action: this is a call to embrace sexuality. Flynn asserts a kind of national identity that she claims has been there all along buried by shame. Once again, she calls for a return to a more authentic national identity—one that expels shame and replaces it with a radical kind of care that embraces sexual pleasure.

To drive her point home and further emphasize her unruly body, Flynn distills this idea into a musical finale that ends the show. Using the Irish slang for sex, she tells the audience to "Ride for Ireland"—it's their patriotic duty to have lots of sex and enjoy it. She implores them, "Do it for your country, for the women of the past / From where we sit they took a lot of shit so let's set them free at last" (26). Flynn's rebellious persona radically reconfigures the body in the Irish context. As Herr argues, "the represented body has become an anti-fetish in Ireland, a turnoff."[740] So, Flynn rallies her audience to make the body a turn-*on*, but not through the kind of commercialized empowerment that dominates popular discourse; rather through the frame of Ireland's *true* cultural past—their female-identified pre-history.

[740] Herr, 33.

Flynn advocates for the possibilities of embracing sexuality rather than oppressing it—of making sex public—by positioning it as a shared and unifying experience. Her song calls for a sexual, Irish revolution. In the chorus, she sings:

> Ride, for Ireland
> Get down on your knees
> Ride, for Ireland
> Who cares if someone sees
> Ride, for Ireland
> Might as well in this weather
> Ride for Ireland
> And maybe we will come…together (26)

These lyrics, particularly the last line, evoke the kind of lewd punning weaponized against the Duchess of Devonshire centuries before; however, Flynn finds amusement in bawdy humor, deploying it as a communal force, rather than as an instrument for shaming. She thereby equates sex with a national duty to reform society and cast-off a (Catholic) history of shame and internalized repression about the body. Subsequently, *Not a Funny Word* becomes Flynn's manifesto for not just normalizing abortion, but normalizing women's sexuality. She demonstrates great affection for Ireland as a place of compassion *and* simultaneously, "maybe even a sexy" place—perhaps even, given her reclamation of the authority of Brigid, maybe even a sexy, *sacred* space.

Flynn's call is not for the kind of sexiness depicted by popular feminism with its surface-level emancipation. This is not what could be labeled a *Riverdance*-style of Irish feminism that celebrates attractive women who can compete with their male counterparts, but who are willing to adopt the role of nurturing mother without complaint. In her emphasis on sexuality, Flynn is less interested in exhibitionism for the sake of empowerment than in illuminating how the spectacle of sexuality operates in Irish culture as a hidden and repressed attribute that becomes buried under cultural icons like the Virgin Mary and transgressive

figures like witches that are manifested to justify violence and harassment against women. Importantly, Flynn's experience and theatrical performance highlights how mediated networks reproduce and advance these normative practices. While reproductive rights remain fiercely contested, we must recognize how discourses on sexuality circulate on- and offline, not exclusively as products of a culture war, but rather as evolving and re-emerging formations of a longstanding and ongoing project of controlling the bodies of women and other menstruators.

CONCLUSION:
"Thank God for Abortion:" Staging the Sacred in Feminist Politics

In 2015, abortion clinics across the United States began shutting their doors; many were in conservative, rural communities, but significant numbers of them were in more left-leaning, liberal areas as well. At the time, New York City-based artist and activist Viva Ruíz was shocked that these closures were not garnering more outrage and publicity. In response, Ruíz developed *Thank God for Abortion* (2015-), a multimedia art project that has since grown from protest materials and ephemera to include art installations at a church and gallery, t-shirts and tote bags, a pro-abortion anthem music video, and a NYC Pride parade float.[741] The cornerstone of *Thank God for Abortion* is its logo: four hands reach up as though releasing a dove that soars away with its wings spread wide. Above the image, the simple message "THANK GOD FOR ABORTION" appears in neat typography. Ruíz's divine communiqué merges spirituality, joy, and reproductive rights. Like home|work Collective's *The Renunciation*, Ruíz claims sacred iconography in the service of pro-abortion politics. The insignia expresses gratitude while celebrating faith *and* abortion. It is provocative and profoundly beautiful, like Tara Flynn offering absolution to abortion-seekers.

Now, seven years after its inception, Ruíz's *Thank God for Abortion* is drawing more attention since the U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* eroded the federally mandated right to abortion.[742] Political trends in Ireland and the U.S. have seemingly reversed course, leading journalist Maureen Dowd to observe, "Ireland leaped into

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[741] "Mission Statement," *Thank God for Abortion*, Chocolatina Actions, 2015. https://www.thankgodforabortion.com/about, accessed 22 July 2022.

[742] *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. ___ (2022), https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf.

modernity, rejecting religious reactionaries' insistence on controlling women's bodies. America lurched backward, ruled by religious reactionaries' insistence on controlling women's bodies. Once, Ireland seemed obsessed with punishing women. Now it's America."[743] Dowd's assessment evokes the imagery that runs throughout this study of a postcolonial and modern Ireland propelled into the future (like the energetic and graceful leaps of the *Riverdance* step dancers). Meanwhile, America awkwardly staggers behind, reinvesting in Christian doctrine that signifies an apparently bygone era. These sharp delineations between past and future, modern and historical, new and old, progressive and regressive, liberal and conservative, are the kinds of binaries this dissertation has troubled. While I have uncovered the lingering influence of Marianism in contemporary, liberalizing Irish culture, the rollback of reproductive rights in the U.S. similarly reveals the authority of a patriarchal God lurking in the shadows of state governance.

Despite feminist gains, a transhistorical framework of misogyny endures, continuing to regulate women's sexuality, visibility, and access to civic authority. Globally, reproductive rights are consistently debated and challenged; legislation is never fixed. Ireland joins countries like Argentina and South Korea where activists have achieved wide support for the legalization of abortion services. Concurrently, the U.S. joins countries like Poland, El Salvador, and Nicaragua where legislation that had previously legalized abortion has been revoked. These rapidly shifting circumstances necessitate ongoing examinations of the role of the sacred in daily life, particularly its influence on gender roles, sexuality, and representation. In this conclusion, I explore Viva Ruíz's interdisciplinary art project as one

[743] Maureen Dowd, "Opinion: Irish Eyes Aren't Smiling," *New York Times*, 16 July 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/16/opinion/ireland-abortion-roe.html, accessed 28 July 2022.

such examination. *Thank God for Abortion* claims religious and moral ground for abortion care and does so by featuring queer bodies and people of color. As such, Ruíz reimages and reimagines political and divine cultural spaces. In their use of Catholic iconography, Ruíz unveils the ways that Marianism haunts the margins of gender representation in American cultural spaces. Ruíz's performance plays with the iconicity of these symbols and images. At the moment of their reproduction, the re-appropriation and re-presentation actualizes alternative embodiments of womanhood, embracing the divine while challenging the conventional, narrow confines of femininity. Thus, Ruíz's project expresses the political potential of intersectional feminist corporealities in reproductive justice activism.

While pro-choice discourses frequently avoid religiosity, *Thank God for Abortion* fully embraces the terrain of the sacred. As the creator and performer of the work, Ruíz's identity informs the project's manifestation of space both through her bodily presence and in the performative utterance, "Thank God for abortion." They call *Thank God for Abortion* "a queer Latinx sex worker-originated artistic intervention."[744] Ruíz, who identifies as queer, grew up in Queens to Ecuadorian immigrant parents. Raised Catholic, they are a retired sex worker who identifies NYC nightlife culture and LGBTQ community activism as their institutions of education. *Thank God for Abortion* utilizes these aesthetics and tactics; it exists through ephemera and art objects, but more importantly, it manifests social space that is celebratory, communal, and divine. It is an affirmation and a spiritual aura derived from Ruíz as the evangelist. Legal and social policies that aim to control people's bodies and reproduction advance an agenda of heternormativity and patriarchy. The talking points

[744] Viva Ruíz and Aliza Shvarts, "In Conversation: Freedom, Abortion, and Art," *Brooklyn Rail*, May 2022, https://brooklynrail.org/2022/05/criticspage/Viva-Ruíz-with-Aliza-Shvarts, accessed 22 July 2022.

associated with anti-abortion strategies—so-called traditional family values, protecting children from sex and debauchery—are positions that underwrite compulsory heterosexuality and biological determinism. Consequently, these rhetorical constructs delegitimize queer, gay, trans, and gender variant communities. Ruíz subverts these messages through their devotion; in *Thank God for Abortion*, the presence of Ruíz's queer, Latinx body actualizes a celebration of God's grace and abortion. As Ruíz proclaims, "Let's have pleasure and ecstasy, divinity, perfection, and abortion and God in the same sentence, the same space."[745]

Figure 5.1. *Thank God for Abortion*: still from the "Thank God for Abortion Anthem" music video

Thank God for Abortion is not just a logo or slogan on protest materials; in its various iterations, it stages performances of divinity, queerness, sexuality, and celebration. These performances produce a shared space that merges sacred worship and abortion care. Ruíz incorporates costumes and props that utilize Christian symbols. What's more, placing these symbols on queer bodies reimagines the authority of this iconography. For example, in their music video, "Thank God for Abortion Anthem" (2020), Ruíz preaches at the altar of a

[745] Viva Ruíz and Camila Valle, "Interview: Viva Ruíz Wants to Thank God For Abortion," *Interview*, 27 July 2022, https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/viva-ruiz-wants-to-thank-god-for-abortion, accessed 28 July 2022.

church dressed as the Pope or a bishop (see Figure 5.1). They wear a white pantsuit and a stole that extends to the floor with THANK GOD FOR ABORTION written in large gold letters. Ruíz's light purple hair is covered with a gold-trimmed miter that reads ABORTION across the front. Similarly, on their Pride parade float, "A Joyful Noise: Thank God for Abortion" (2018), Ruíz evokes the imagery of the Virgin Mary (see Figure 5.2). They wear a white pantsuit this time accompanied by a floor-length cape. On their pink hair, they don a rayed fillet with the letters spelling ABORTION arched around their head. In these performances, Ruíz is surrounded with other queer brown and black bodies who dance and rejoice together, all dressed in clothing emblazoned with the *Thank God for Abortion* insignia. The merging of queer aesthetics and Catholic emblems reinscribes these public spaces expanding notions about who engages with abortion politics and religious dogma.

Figure 5.2. Viva Ruíz at a *Thank God for Abortion* action.

The performative "Thank God for abortion" contributes to the production of radical, sacred space in Ruíz's performance. This sentence articulates a prayer or a sermon. To read or speak the statement is to praise God and give thanks for abortion—for the ability to decide when and under what circumstances to be pregnant. In repeating the affirmation, in its reproduction on clothes and banners, it becomes normalized through repetition; thus, Ruíz's

project strives to normalize abortion as commonplace healthcare, while also assimilating the conjunction of faith and abortion. Ruíz's provocative assertion, "Thank God for abortion," both disrupts and orders. While the statement initially shocks, Ruíz relentlessly adorns clothes, banners, and signs with this ecclesiastical message. In enfolding the performance space into the message and the message into the site, Ruíz challenges abortion stigma and respectability politics. They celebrate abortion-seekers and others who have had abortions by reiterating the message as well as in visually marking the space as one for commemorating abortion. *Thank God for Abortion* thus forges a sacred social space around abortion care.

Importantly, Ruíz extends the religiosity of *Thank God for Abortion* to mediatized spaces. Their evangelizing strategizes the use of digital media and tools, while simultaneously exploiting how their intermedial performance animates a resistance framework for bodily autonomy. Ruíz encourages their social media followers to post selfies displaying their *Thank God for Abortion* gear. Thus, Ruíz's activism informs not *where* people gather, but *how* they come together to form community, assert identity, and generate collective subjectivity. *Thank God for Abortion* produces a mediated congregation, remotely and asynchronously formed across digital networks to spread the word of divine abortion and reproductive freedom. For those with marginalized genders and identities, like Ruíz, digital networks may afford a degree of safety not available on the streets; wearing a *Thank God for Abortion* shirt in public spaces is more precarious for a queer Latinx woman of color than for a white straight woman, for example. And yet, as Tara Flynn's experience evinces, digital gender harassment and online misogyny are persistent and threatening strategies.

Ruíz's music video, "Thank God for Abortion Anthem," illustrates how their art and activism defies the borders of representation across topographical and media borders.

Microcast on YouTube, this video delivers its controversial message through popular social media. It opens on a group of people protesting in the street with signs reading "Abortion NO! Guns YEAH!" and "GOD HATES YOU." Their angry chants are garbled and nonsensical. Suddenly, a series of loud airhorns and electronic beats interrupts the scene. Animated doves fly into the shot and surround the protestors. Two doves swoop to the pavement where they transform in a burst of light reminiscent of a mandorla into two people dressed in white who usher the protestors into the church. Inside, Viva Ruíz preaches, through song and dance, the gospel of bodily autonomy and sexual liberation, with backup from a DJ and choir, while congregants dance in the pews. This scene is glorious in its queer aesthetics, making use of camp, drag, and voguing.[746] The "Thank God for Abortion Anthem" is not just about visibility for queer folks and people of color; it expresses collective identity, producing a space of faith and reproductive freedom created by, for, and about bodies who are not typically recognized as needing access to abortion care.

Like many of the abortion-seekers I have discussed previously, Ruíz's lived experience embodies the assertions developed in their art. Ruíz's identity as Latinx, queer, and as someone who has had two abortions is an important aspect of the production of space—a space of care that extends beyond the most visible identities of reproductive politics. Ruíz explains, "'Thank God for abortion' felt like a very natural thing for me to say. Here's where I'm coming from: God loves me, and blesses the two abortions I had, and celebrates my rights, my autonomy, and my sovereignty. And that also connects with

[746] Ruíz's music video has parallels to Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" (2012) which also blends political action and live musical performance in the setting of a church. The Russian guerrilla feminist activist group, however, enacted an unauthorized takeover of the church, while Ruíz's staging is an aesthetic performance recorded for asynchronous, remote consumption. Notably, the lyrics of Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" ask the Virgin Mary to become a feminist and banish Putin.

queerness. It is intersectional and goes every which way. If you're fighting to do what you want with your body, it's about personhood."[747] Ruíz's identity evinces the significance of intersectional abortion activism. American abortion campaigns typically foreground white, cisgender women. In contrast, the "Thank God for Abortion Anthem"—and the broader *Thank God for Abortion* project, for that matter—asserts a radical, sacred, and exultant space led by queer people of color. These bodies choreograph transformative spaces that reconfigure the perception of which bodies need access to abortion services. Ruíz's work changes conceptions of what abortion-seekers look like, as well as conceptions of nonreproductive bodies.

Moreover, the "Thank God for Abortion Anthem" exemplifies the way that Ruíz merges the sacred, queerness, and sexual body politics. In doing so, they highlight how these categories are not so discrete—to paraphrase Ruíz, these categories go every which way. Ruíz's intermedial performance exposes the overlap among them. The viewer's attention is drawn to the queerness in Christian iconography, the joy in sexuality, and the sexiness of divine belief. They assert that abortion is not antithetical to the divine; it is part of a spiritual life that recognizes the value of reproductive healthcare to *all* bodies and souls—queer, gay, straight, trans, nonbinary, cis: everyone needs access to medical services and knowledge to make informed choices. Hence, Ruíz locates the abortion debate within larger activist concerns about bodily integrity and sexual freedom. They foster solidarity with gay, queer, and trans movements, groups that are typically not invested in abortion rights campaigns.

[747] Alex Fialho and Viva Ruíz, "Interview: Viva Ruíz talks about *Thank God for Abortion*," *Artforum*, 22 June 2018, https://www.artforum.com/interviews/viva-ruiz-talks-about-thank-god-for-abortion-75854, accessed 22 July 2022.

Likewise, Ruíz positions queerness as part of Christianity, and not any more antithetical to it than abortion.

Ruíz's re-appropriation and re-production of Catholic imagery recalls the work of feminist Chicana artists who adopt the transnational figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In Mexico and the U.S., Our Lady of Guadalupe is a polyvalent symbol; she is an image of colonial imperialism in representing the Catholic Church's role in converting and conquering indigenous peoples. At the same time, however, the Virgin is a revolutionary icon embraced by rebels seeking national independence from Spanish colonizers in the nineteenth century, and later adopted as in image of the Chicano rights movement in the U.S. in the 1970s. Feminist artists including Ester Hernandez (b. 1944), Yolanda López (1942-2021), and Alma López (b. 1966) have re-presented the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in service of feminist liberation (see Figure 5.3).[748] Thus, an image that strove to oppress and dominate populations has been incorporated into nationalist, indigenous, and identity-affirming iterations. In particular, Ruíz's *Thank God for Abortion* resonates with Chicana feminist work that embraces the Virgin as a divine image of strength against male domination.

Ruíz's body is a site of resistance against traditional constructions of femininity and womanhood. In repurposing Catholic iconography, they reinscribe these symbols with new meanings and investments in feminist, queer, and radical embodiments that challenge the mythic ideal embodied by the Virgin Mary. The separation of church and state is a featured

[748] For more on these artists, see Leen's "*Virgen* Transatlantic: Religious Iconography in Irish and Chicana/o Art." The work of Peruvian artist Cecilia Podestá, particularly her performance piece and photograph series *Virgen del Legrado* (2009), operates in this tradition. Podestá uses the Virgin's local, Andean iteration via the Virgin of Panecillo, a Marian statue in Quito, Ecuador. See María Célleri, "From the Virgen del Panecillo to the Virgen del Legrado: (Trans)national Feminist Struggles for Reproductive Rights in the Andes," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 41, no. 2 (2020): 1-25.

Figure 5.3. Reimagining Marianism in the tradition of the Virgin of Guadalupe: at left, Viva Ruíz; middle, Yolanda López's "Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe" (1978); and right, Cecilia Podestá's *Virgen de Legrado* (2009), captioned: "*Soy creyente porque tengo fe y sé que Dios no me abandonará ahora que tengo miedo de morir durante ésta: mi decision más difícil*" ("I am a believer because I have faith that God will not abandon me while I fear for my life during my most difficult decision").

part of an American cultural ethos. The political arena is supposedly sanitized of religious influence in legislation. But Christian rhetoric and imagery abounds in national rituals. This has only increased in the last several decades. On the one hand, conservatives push an image of womanhood predicated upon compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention proclaims, "honor the rich and valuable contributions of full-time wives and mothers who through their *service* and *self-sacrifice* have strengthened their families, enriched our nation and pleased our God by honoring his purposes in their lives each day."[749] On the other end of the anti-choice spectrum, activists have incorporated the language of human and civil rights as well as feminist discourses. In this conservative branding of "feminism," women can "have it all;" they do not need to sacrifice having a family, nor do they need to have an abortion to compete with men at work. This "feminist"

[749] Quoted in Joseph E. Early, Jr., "The Role, Place, and Purpose of Southern Baptist Women, 1979-1987," *Baptist History and Heritage* 54, no. 2 (2019), 16; emphasis added.

figure is represented in the media by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Barrett, who is Catholic, is championed for being a dedicated wife and mother of seven children (two of whom are adopted from Haiti) while pursuing a career in law and rising to the highest levels of that profession. Thus, supporters argue, Barrett embodies a new kind of women's liberation that centers an equal spousal partnership in family responsibilities.[750] Accordingly, women's gains in the workforce can be attained, not through abortion rights as the gateway to gender equity, but through expecting men to take on an equal share of domestic and childrearing responsibilities. Ironically, these critics overlook the same achievements in Barrett's predecessor: Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was also a wife and mother (of two children by comparison). Nonetheless, in celebrating Barrett, these professed feminist conservatives neglect the complexities of class and financial status in choosing to parent; they ignore the role of financial stability, affordable healthcare, subsidized childcare, paid parental leave, and an accommodating workplace in deciding if one is going to birth and parent a child. Most importantly, this perspective advances the biological imperative that women and other menstruators become mothers, a role they should adopt without complaint.

Consequently, this image of "feminist achievement" perpetuates the imagined false ideals of purity and goodness epitomized by Marianism. She (willingly) consented to motherhood, securing a future of self-sacrifice and submission for all women and menstruators. Mary symbolizes maternity as a woman's responsibility, a role that one must be willing to sacrifice for and endure. These images sanitize her from sex, sensuousness,

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[750] For example, see Erika Bachiochi, "Opinion: Amy Coney Barrett: A New Feminist Icon," *Politico*, 27 September 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/09/27/amy-coney-barrett-supreme-court-nominee-feminist-icon-422059, accessed 21 July 2022.

physical touch, corporeality; the Immaculate Conception absolves her from stain and sin. Thus, she's enshrined in a narrow construct of morality grounded in obedience and virtue. When women and other menstruators are denied bodily integrity, they are punished for having sex—for failing to accept these false ideals. When Ruíz's queer, brown body re-appropriates and re-presents Marian imagery, they defy these associations. Ruíz refuses the linkage of womanhood, reproduction, and motherhood—especially as a body who has had abortions and who celebrates them. They refuse the linkage of purity and whiteness, of procreation without sex, that are venerated in the Virgin. Like Flynn, Ruíz indulges in their sexuality, proclaiming it to be divine rather than a site of shame or fear. *Thank God for Abortion* thus manifests evolving scenarios of worship. Ruíz's project creates an unapologetic and celebratory space, updating and reimagining Marian and Catholic imagery in ways that are joyous and life-affirming, while embracing feminist, intersectional politics.

Ruíz's project stages a sacred space that includes abortion care, but also, by virtue of its creation from and of their queer, Latinx body, the project manifests a space of divinity that embraces those bodies and identities who are frequently excluded from reproductive rights discourses. Ruíz's presence, their body as a divine facilitator; they carry and deliver the message of abortion and its holy purpose. As such, *Thank God for Abortion* embraces a theology that constructs the Virgin Mary as a feminist icon, like that invoked by home|work's *The Renunciation* and the Virgin in Meehan's poem "The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks." These iterations of Mary reclaim her experiences as a young woman with a crisis pregnancy, refusing to see her as an asexual being but rather as a biological woman who bleeds and who conceived a child by intercourse. This is the kinetic and somatic Mary manifested Yolanda López's and Cecilia Podestá's self-portraits (Figure 5.3). Alongside

these representations, *Thank God for Abortion* reveals the possibilities of a feminist abortion politics that embraces the authority of the sacred to nurture an inclusive and expansive understanding of reproductive rights discourses. As an evolving and shifting project, Ruíz's work looks to the future, oriented to the potential of solidarity and collectivity in centering the experiences of queer, non-white individuals in the fight for reproductive justice.

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