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A body is a body: The embodied politics of women's sexual and reproductive rights in contemporary Irish art and culture.

Kate Antosik-Parsons

The body politics of women's sexual and reproductive rights in Ireland is firmly embedded in the socio-political landscape that shaped the nation over the last one hundred years. Sarah Maria Griffin's poem, *We Face This Land* (2016) boldly reclaimed the body asserting: "A body is a body is a body […] Not a house. Not a city. Not a vessel, not a country" (Griffin 2016). Yet, over the course the 20th century and beyond, in hegemonic Irish literary and visual culture, a woman's body has regularly been equated to a vessel and a country.[1] Under Article 40.3.3, the Eighth Amendment (1983) to the Irish Constitution (1937), the moment a woman becomes pregnant her body is no longer her own because the fetus is granted equal right to life.[2] Ireland is the only country in the world to have such a provision written into its constitution. Thirty years later, under the *Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act* (2013) abortion was permitted only in the limited circumstances where to continue the pregnancy would result in maternal death.[3] Those who procure an abortion are criminalized and risk facing up to fourteen years imprisonment. With a referendum to repeal the Eight Amendment on the horizon, tentatively scheduled for May or June 2018, the socio-political landscape for reproductive rights in Ireland has reached a critical point.

This essay examines the power of visual images to address the lingering colonial legacies and subsequent patriarchal, postcolonial conditions that reinforce strict control over women's sexual and reproductive health in Ireland. Framed by a historical context, it analyzes contemporary Irish

art, visual culture and embodied activist gestures through the lens of feminism, focusing on how these images manifest gendered histories, assert visible resistance and gestures of solidarity, and importantly, reveal hidden journeys for reproductive healthcare. This essay, like the art it details, aims to counter the silencing of those impacted by the reproductive injustices in Ireland. On the issue of silencing, it is worth stating at the outset that term 'woman' is used throughout the discussion, though it is meant to be short-hand for women, non-binary people and transgender men. This can prove problematic as gender is not binary, and non-binary people and transgender men also need access abortion services. This essay does not seek to further marginalize non-binary people and transgender men, therefore 'pregnant people' is adopted intermittently in recognition of this. This essay illuminates how artists and activists in the Republic of Ireland engaged with feminism, exercise embodied politics to strategically subvert dominant ideologies, histories and politics, responding to the continuing struggle for reproductive freedom.

Historical Context

At present (2017) Ireland is midway through the 'Decade of Centenaries', a ten-year period ranging from 2012-2022 during which State sponsored events commemorate the centenary anniversary of events related to Irish independence. Uncomfortable truths are revealed when the official state-sanctioned "remembering" is juxtaposed against the peripheral voices of those who marginalized by dominant patriarchal historical and political discourses.[4] Although women actively participated in the Easter Rising (1916) and the War of Independence (1922), the conservative, Catholic rebellion that overthrew the colonial oppression of the British Empire merely substituted one patriarchal ideology for another. The repressive Catholic ethos that dominated every aspect of political and cultural life carefully policed women's bodies,

particularly sexuality and reproduction, as evident by the post-independence legislation that banned divorce (1925), the distribution of literature advocating birth control (1929), and the sale and import of contraceptives (1935). Laury Oaks (1999) argued these legislative restrictions coupled with the assertion in the Irish Constitution (1937) that women's duties best served the nation in the domestic sphere of the home supported "ideology that women should not participate in both 'reproductive' and 'nonreproductive life'" (p.179). Women's citizenship was intimately tied to their perceived maternal duties and private lives as enshrined under Article 42.1.1 and 42.1.2. of the Irish Constitution.[5]

In 1983, the pro-life Eighth Amendment that granted equal rights to mother and fetus was understood as a backlash against the liberalization of a post-colonial Irish society in the late 1970s in the wake of gains by second-wave feminists. Abortion in Ireland is bound up in nationalism and a strong desire to imagine Ireland as separate and distinct from Britain. It was prohibited under the *Offences Against the Person* Act (1861) but the Eighth Amendment blocked legalization without further referenda. According to Eardman (2016) the amendment was premised on religious and cultural traditions that historically differentiated Ireland's "sovereignty from England" (p. 44). In the United Kingdom, except Northern Ireland, abortion was legalized under the Abortion Act (1967) up to 22 weeks in cases of maternal life, mental health, health, rape, fetal defects, and/or socioeconomic factors. In Northern Ireland it remains illegal under the aforementioned 1861 act and *The Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland)* (1945) meaning women in the North, like those in the Republic, travel overseas for the procedure. It is with no small irony that the majority of the people from Ireland are forced to travel to England to obtain abortions.

Summarizing 'reproductive injustice' in Ireland, Ursula Barry (2015) argued,

> bodily integrity has been displaced by the public physical dissecting of women's bodies; choice has been displaced by calculating risks between a pregnant woman's health and her life; privacy has been displaced by secrecy; compassion has been displaced by the threat of long-term imprisonment; reality has been displaced by denial. (p. 120)

Secrecy and denial consequently contribute to the silencing of women who seek abortion, as will be discussed in detail later. This concept of reproductive injustice aligns with what Ronit Lentin (2013) termed "the biopolitics of birth," the multiple ways in which Church and State, from the foundation of the Irish Free State to the contemporary pluralist Republic, collude to regulate women's bodies and curtail reproductive freedom. This encompasses the residential institutions like the Magdalene Laundries and mother and baby homes to obstetric violence of medical procedures like non-consensual hysterectomies by Dr. Michael Neary at Our Lady of Lourdes maternity hospital in Droheda and the chilling, long-term effects of symphysiotomy.[6] It includes the policing of pregnant migrant women and the 2004 Citizenship referendum, that provided that children born on the island of Ireland to parents who were both foreign nationals would no longer have a constitutional right to Irish citizenship and by extension the present system of direct provision for asylum seekers in Ireland (p.131)[7]. The Eighth Amendment is an extension of the biopolitics of birth, exercising power over the bodies of all pregnant people in Ireland, not only those who seek access to abortion, but any reproducing body because the National Consent Policy specifically excludes medical consent in maternity care.

The Embodied Politics of Feminism

The feminist art historical approach adopted advances that art can facilitate deeper understandings of political, cultural and social power relations. It scrutinizes imagery bearing in mind, as the second-wave feminist adage asserts, the personal is political, while acknowledging that individual experiences are not universal, nor are structural inequalities distributed evenly. Lucy Lippard (1984) distinguished political art from activist art arguing: "'political' art tends to be socially concerned and 'activist' art tends to be socially involved – not a value judgement so much as a personal choice. The former's work is a commentary or analysis, while the latter's art works within its contexts, with its audience" (p.75). Participatory in nature, activist art aims to empower individuals and communities by actively addressing power structures generated through dialogic processes.[8] While some of the work discussed is 'activist', all can read as 'political' in so far as their subject matter represents the body politics of Irish reproductive rights. Furthermore, the images and gestures are considered in terms of their corporeal or bodily engagement with 'embodied politics', defined by Natalie Fixmer and Julia T. Wood (2005) as "personal and often physical, bodily action that aims to provoke change by exercising and resisting power in everyday life" (p.237). For the purposes of this discussion, embodied politics are identified as "personal acts of resistance in local sites where injustices occur" (p.238). In Ireland, women's bodies are the physical and metaphorical site where injustices occur, deploying them in art, visual culture and activist gestures constitutes interventionist acts of resistance.

Illustrating Gendered Histories

In 2015, the double volume *The Abortion Papers Ireland* was released bearing Alice Maher's disquieting large scale charcoal and chalk drawing *Kneeling Girl* (2001) from the series *The*

History of Tears (2001) on the cover.[9] Against the dark, heavily layered charcoal background rendered on calico fabric, the figure of a young woman has fallen to her knees. Nude, save for the fabric gathered around her hips, she cradles the tears leaking from her eyes gently as they trickle down her body, catching them in the cloth before they flow into a pool of water accumulating in front of her. The futility of her action evident as the seeping bodily discharge evades containment. The tactile surface of the drawing is characterized by a series of erasures, deliberate gestures enabling an accumulation of delicately rendered lines. Although *Kneeling* Girl was not explicitly created in response to the issue of bodily autonomy in Ireland, when the editors of *The Abortion Papers* selected Maher's work for the cover, it deliberately invited consideration about how women's reproductive experiences in Ireland might form their own history of tears; a hidden history, one of stigma and shame underscored by silence and erasure. First released in 1992, *The Abortion Papers Ireland vol. 1* was dedicated by editor Ailbhe Smyth "to all Irish women who have ever had to travel abroad for an abortion" (p.6). Between 1980 and 1992 an approximate 49,707 travelled abroad to the UK for an abortion. By the end of 2016 a further 118,996 made the invisible journey to access healthcare. In this context, works like *Kneeling Girl* question how art and visual culture contribute to a nuanced understanding of the gendered histories of body politics in Ireland.

<Insert Figure 1 ARC Poster>

Gendered histories are engaged on a number of different levels. Visual artists are vocally engaged with activism, as is evident by the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the 8th, which at present has over 2000 artists living in Ireland who have pledged to support repeal.[10] In direct response to the growing campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment, the Coalition to Repeal the 8th,

representing 50 different organizations throughout the country, was formed. In July 2016, the Artists Campaign to Repeal the 8th released a special edition print of Jim Fitzpatrick's *Countess Markievicz* (2016). Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz (1868-1927) was an artist, suffragette, and revolutionary nationalist who was a combatant in the Easter Rising and later a politician. Imprisoned on several occasions, Markievicz was sentenced to death for her part in the Rising, though the sentence was commuted because she was a woman. In Fitzpatrick's bust portrait of Markievicz, she wears her Irish Citizen Army military uniform, the strap of her Sam Browne gun belt visible, emphasizing that she was radicalized. This image tangentially references Fitzpatrick's earlier iconic portrait of the Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara (1968), evoking a rebellious spirit. The group's logo, a white 8 inside a gray circle overlaid with a red X, is worn as a badge pinned on her lapel. The notion that Markievicz, amongst her many accomplishments, was also a trained artist, would affirm her professional support for the campaign for repeal fits neatly within the subversive narrative of her gendered, revolutionary activities. Proceeds from Fitzpatrick's poster sales were used to fund the group's continued advocacy.

'Rise and Repeal', the 5th Annual March for Choice (September 2016), organized by the volunteer organization, Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), also invoked women's nationalist revolutionary efforts for contemporary reproductive freedom. ARC's signs and pamphlets featured a woman, more specifically a suffragette, holding aloft a 'Rise and Repeal' banner. The figure was appropriated from the masthead of *Bean Na hÉireann* (Women of Ireland), a monthly magazine published by the nationalist, socialist, feminist organization, *Inghínidhe Na hÉireann* (Daughters of Ireland) of which Markievicz was a member, as well as the artist that designed the original masthead for the early 20th century publication. The color and composition of ARC's

own logo of yellow, green, and purple draws parallels with the tricolor flag adopted by UK suffragettes that was white, green, and purple. ARC (2016) explicitly framed the march uniting historical efforts for political sovereignty with contemporary bodily autonomy: "The Easter Rising sought sovereignty and self-determination for Ireland. Today, we seek the same control over our own bodies. No longer will the Irish State strip us of our basic human rights" (abortionrightscampaign.ie). Coupling women's historical efforts by referencing the efforts of revolutionary groups like *Inghínidhe Na hÉireann* with contemporary activism demonstrates how the past can be activated in the realm of the visual. By grounding the embodied actions of protest in historical visual culture, ARC established a visual identity that claims a specific lineage to and continuity with Irish feminist concerns from the turn of the 20th century.

< Figure 2 Speaking of IMELDA>

Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A, a London-based group engaged in art activism, strategically utilizes humor and satire in interventionist actions to expose critical incongruities, in a similar manner to the Guerrilla Girls. I.M.E.L.D.A stands for Ireland Making England the Legal Destination for Abortion, 'Imelda' was the code word used to provide information on abortion services to Irish women when it was illegal to do so. *The Pro-choice Proclamation* (2015) was staged on the steps of the General Post Office (GPO) during the national broadcaster *Raidio Telifis Eireann's* (RTÉ) event *Road to the Rising* recreated life in 1915 in anticipation of the centenary commemoration of the Easter Rising. In 1916, the Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army seized control of the GPO from the British, on the steps of the captured building the rebels read out their *Easter Proclamation* (1916). The proclamation was significant for several reasons, but for the purposes of this analysis its importance was that it asserted 'religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens". This was the first mention of gender equality

and was particularly important given that under British law at that time women were not allowed to vote. Although women were active combatants in the struggle for independence, they were subjugated to the patriarchal dictates of the conservative Catholic government after independence. Dressed as suffragettes, entirely in red, Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A chained themselves to a pillar of the GPO for over two hours declaring a proclamation of bodily autonomy, calling on women of Ireland to assert ownership of their own bodies.

Ailbhe Smyth (1992) argued that abortion needed to be considered in the "broad context of reproductive freedom and in the even broader context of women's historical struggle for social and political selfhood" (p.146). Twenty-five years later point this is still alarmingly relevant. *The Pro-choice Proclamation* drew connections between gender in Irish society, martyrdom and reproductive rights. It is notable that just steps from where the women stood, were the sites of two sculptures that depicted masculine heroism. Directly inside the GPO, Oliver Sheppard's bronze statue *Death of Cúchulainn* (1935), the epitome of martyrdom, represents the self-sacrificing Irish mythological hero in his moment of death, his body bound to a pillar in defeat. The visual similarities between the bound bodies are remarkable, demonstrating Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A.'s embodied performance reclaimed the vision of equality promised over a century ago. When the bodies of those that Church and State have sought to control are activated in this particular way they disrupt dominant narratives. Meanwhile, across from the GPO once stood the granite capped *Nelson's Pillar* (1809), that bore the likeness of Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson (1758-1805). A tribute to the victorious British naval hero it visually defined the public streetscape in the colonial era. The presence of the pillar was contentious in the Free State, and in an iconic gesture that unofficially marked the 50-year anniversary of the Rising, it was blown up

by expelled IRA members. Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A.'s embodied actions recall the rebellious actions that sought to destroy the pillar as a commemorative symbol of power. *The Pro-choice Proclamation*, channelling that insubordinate spirit by directly inserting women's bodies directly into the public realm, suggested that embodied politics can subvert 'official' histories.

Visualizing Resistance and Solidarity

Visibility is at the heart of the contemporary movement for Irish reproductive rights and there has been a noticeable shift around openly talking about the abortion issue. Arguably one of the most distinguishable visual contributions to the pro-choice movement has been *Project Repeal,* the white letters that boldly proclaim "REPEAL" against the backdrop of a black sweatshirt. Launched July 2016, creator Anna Cosgrave (2016) cites as inspiration, Gloria Steinem unapologetically wearing an "I had an abortion" t-shirt from the 2004 project by the same name designed by American activist Jennifer Baumgardner in collaboration with Planned Parenthood. Cosgrave's garment "outerwear to give a voice to a hidden problem" aimed to generate conversations about the lack of reproductive freedom in Ireland and initiate a conversation about why the Eighth Amendment should be repealed. Proceeds are donated directly to the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC). Sold initially at a pop-up store, demand was so high that it sold out within an hour. Garnering considerable attention, four months after its release *University Observer*, University College Dublin's student newspaper, published an article contemplating the jumper as a fashion statement. Adam Lawler (2016) argued "in a campaign about bodily autonomy, a wearable message is all the more powerful." It's popularity with people in their early twenties is not surprising given that the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) representative of 345,000 students in third level education voted overwhelmingly to support a repeal of the

Eighth Amendment (USI 2017). Images widely circulated on social media of high profile celebrities wearing it, for example Vivienne Westwood, Brendan Courtney and Rory O'Neill (drag queen Panti Bliss), and more recently, American presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, further its popularity.

< Insert Figure 3 Repeal Image here>

Repeal Project attracted unexpected interest from the advertising industry. In October 2016, Carphone Warehouse, a mobile phone company, debuted a series of controversial 'femvertising' billboards and bus shelter ads that boldly proclaimed "We're Pro-Choice" with the smaller tagline "the only place you get to choose your phone, your plan and your network." One featured an image of a blue button with 'we're pro-choice' in white letters pinned on to the chest of a denim jacket. It attempted to embody a DIY, feminist 'activist' aesthetic, while peddling to consumers the freedom to choose the mobile phone suited to their lifestyle. Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI) received over forty complaints subsequently ruling that Carphone Warehouse was to cease using the word 'pro-choice' in advertising campaigns (Murray, 2016). The company stated:

> The campaign features seven topically themed advertisements around the subject of choice. The language and imagery used in the campaign is designed to be deliberately striking, engaging and thought-provoking. We are not making any comment on the current debate in Ireland nor are we seeking to trivialize the issue. (*Irish Times,* October 26, 2016)

In no way was the company campaigning for, or making donations to aid Irish reproductive rights organizations, they were capitalizing upon the momentum of Irish activism for profit. ARC countered:

> …selling mobile phones by appropriating the unfortunate struggle for basic human rights belittles our efforts. It's a slap in the face, not only to the thousands of women who travel every day, but the thousands who cannot travel for various reasons. (2016)

Arguably, Carphone Warehouse aimed to leverage the popularity of *Repeal Project*, indicated by similarities of wearing issues on the body as well as the language used to contextualize each image.

The embodied visibility of the jumper led to a strategic intervention in Irish politics. In a staged action on September 26, 2016, just days after the March for Choice in Dublin, Ruth Coppinger, Bríd Smith, Richard Boyd Barrett, Gino Kenny, Mick Barry and Paul Murphy, six Teachtaí Dála (TDs), members of Dáil Eireann, unashamedly revealed their REPEAL jumpers. Meanwhile, Coppinger pointedly questioned Taoiseach Enda Kenny: "You've been here since 1975, but during that time a total of 165,000 women had to travel outside the State for an abortion while you were in the Dáil. Did you ever give those women a second thought when you were making decisions?" (Lord, 2016). Kenny responded, "while your t-shirts may be black with their writing white the reality is Ireland's abortion law stand-off is not a black and white issue" (O'Cionnaith 2016). Over the following months the jumpers caused a desired disturbance as complaints and broader calls for parliamentary dress code reform abounded (Finn, 2016). Their disruptive presence resulted in the live broadcast Dáil TV feed deliberately adopting a sideways view of

these representatives to unofficially censor and conceal their jumpers (Carlow Nationalist 2016). This illustrated the subversiveness of the garment when worn in a deliberately provocative manner to participate in acts of resistance, particularly in the seat of legislative political, and importantly patriarchal, power. The embodied politics of reproductive rights seeks to interrupt traditional power demonstrating that it isn't just "business as usual". Public gestures of activism, protest and civil disobedience can be understood as 'performances' because they draw upon aesthetics and politics, employing tactical uses of embodiment and symbolic uses of language (Fuentes 2015).

Nearly one month later in a related embodied gesture, TD Bríd Smith stood to debate the Private Members' Bill, the proposed 35th Amendment to the Irish Constitution. Wearing a plain black sweatshirt bearing a Coalition to Repeal the 8th badge, she engaged in an act of civil disobedience when she produced a packet of illegal abortion pills, defiantly challenging:

> You could arrest me for having it and give me 14 years, but you ain't going to do it because what's on your books and what's in your laws you know that if you dare to implement it you would bring hell-fire and brimstone down on top of this house… (www.breakingnews.ie, 2016)

Holding up illegal abortifacient in *Dáil Eireann,* Smith invoked the spirit of the earlier Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) and their subversive actions. On May 22, 1971, 49 women from the IWLM travelled from Belfast to Dublin on the train illegally carrying, with intent to distribute, large supplies of condoms. This watershed action in the history of reproductive rights in Ireland was the subject of the recent musical, *The Train* (2015) that celebrated the bravery of the IWLM who flouted the laws to challenge the rigidity of Irish

society at that time. Forty-five years later there was a symmetry in Smith's gesture that exposed the hypocrisy of legislation that criminalizes women for importing mifepristone and misoprostol. Though Smith was not charged for blatantly flaunting the law, it would be mistaken to dismiss this law as unenforceable, given the recent cases of the women in Northern Ireland who were charged under similar restrictive legislation for obtaining the abortion pills.[11] When taking this specific context into account, Smith's action was a gesture of solidarity, as well as one of embodied politics, particularly when one considers that Smith is the only TD to have publically spoken about her own abortion.

The circulation of a cleverly reappropriated archival photograph of Peig Sayers (1873-1958), the famous Irish language *seanchaí* (or storyteller) of the Blasket Islands, on social media platforms FaceBook and Twitter featuring the *Repeal Project* jumper, encouraged deeper scrutiny of the historical powers of Church and State that seek to render invisible women's experiences. It depicted the older woman wearing a shawl around her head and shoulders, her hands in her lap, seated in the interior of a traditional Irish cottage, on the upper half of her body the ubiquitous 'REPEAL'. Famed for her skilled retelling of life on the rugged Blasket Islands, Co. Kerry, Peig's autobiography was compulsory for secondary school students in Ireland and as a result, often elicits a negative reaction from those who remember the text as laborious. Peig was part of a larger oral tradition of storytelling that was largely dominated by men, and she "strategically borrowed and refashioned male forms" (Radner & Lanser, 1993, p.12). Sara Baume (2015) valued Peig's contribution to the oral history of Ireland on the basis

that she "spoke for generations of poor, uneducated Irish women who never had the opportunity to speak for themselves." Peig's appearance in the jumper alludes to the harsh treatment women in Ireland have faced under conservative, Catholic ideologies. Amid bitter debates about the legalization of contraception and 'politics of procreation in Ireland' Diarmuid Ferriter (2009) detailed:

> …an older woman who attended a women's health seminar in Dublin in 1979 organised by the Contraception Action Programme 'claimed that the earliest Irish-language editions of Peig Sayers' account of her life on the Blasket Islands [published in 1936 and regarded as an important autobiography in the context of women's experiences in isolated rural environments] included a reference to a primitive form of cap, or diaphragm, made from sheep's wool. This reference was later purged. (p. 39)

The notion that Peig, a figure that seemingly embodied the conservative, nationalist vision of womanhood via rural, Catholic Ireland, detailed primitive forms of birth control, strictly forbidden by the Catholic Church is incredibly subversive. Peig's altered image embodies the current plight of women in Ireland by investing it with the historical efforts to legalize contraception in 1970s Ireland as well as to undermine the idealized vision of the monolithic 'Irish woman' enshrined in the Irish Constitution and perpetuated through dominant Irish literary and visual culture.

<insert Figure 4 Repeal Mural >

Solidarity is one found in different aspects of the visual imagery created to address the struggle for reproductive rights. On July 8, 2016, an eye-catching mural by Dublin street artist Maser was

unveiled on the external wall of the Project Arts Centre located on Essex Street in Dublin's Temple Bar. Against a bright blue background Maser rendered a giant red heart with white text, "Repeal the 8th." The heart form features repeatedly in Maser's art, specifically the print series *Maser Loves You*, and in various guises on his street art. Juxtaposing 'Maser Loves You' with a call to 'Repeal the 8th' the mural deployed the idea of love in relation to bodily autonomy. It was removed after Dublin City Council (DCC) informed Project Arts Centre that it violated planning permission because it was painted on a permanent structure and was not in keeping with the style of the area (McDermott, 2016). This response was puzzling given that in the prior year the *Yes for Equality* mural referencing the same sex marriage referendum slipped past these restrictions. During the week of its existence Project received over 200 letters of support and 50 letters of complaint. Anticipating a backlash, the artist reflected on the documenting of the mural on social media: "Thank God for social media. If we didn't have that I'd be a bit disappointed. It got shared thousands of times, job done" (Freyne, 2016). The controversy surrounding this mural echoes that of another censored Dublin mural, Pauline Cummins's *Celebration: The Beginning of Labour* (1984), which was painted on the wall at the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, and was a commissioned mural that depicted two naked women holding a pregnant woman aloft in what appears to be a joyful moment as she embarks on birthing her child.[12] Known for engaging with women's sexuality, reproductive rights, and 'woman-centred' childbirth in Ireland, one speculates that Cummins's particular representation of pregnant, laboring bodies, presented in a manner that was perceived as a threat to the medical establishment, revealed an uneasiness about images that promote a corporeal, embodied knowledge. Interestingly, When the *Repeal the 8th* mural and *Celebration: The Beginning of Labour* are placed in proximity, it is evident that visual images promoting women's reproductive

autonomy provoke strong responses when placed in the public realm. This suggests the subversive power of embodied actions, particularly when women's bodies engage in strategic acts of resistance.

<Insert Figure 5 Repeal Nails here>

After its removal, the mural was 'rebirthed' through acts of resistance when its image when viral, reproduced on silk-screened on t-shirts, co-opted by Facebook users for profile pictures, displayed in shop fronts, decorated on gourmet donuts from Augnier Danger and emblazoned on women's manicured nails by the hip nail bar Tropical Popical. The mural countered the isolation that women that have had abortions face, for comedian Tara Flynn it represented "giving the oppressed a voice, saying: you're not on your own" (O'Brien, 2016). Outraged by the censorship, Grace Fitzgerald and Katie O'Kelly staged a protest in front of Project encouraging people to gather with their faces painted blue, while some held photographs of its former existence. Protest has been valuable tool of resistance throughout the history of the struggle against reproductive injustices, particularly in Ireland as detailed in the aforementioned gestures of the IWLM. Deploying their bodies in this act of resistance, the protestors demonstrated that erasure of the mural would not serve to erase the realities pregnant people face in the shadow of the 8th amendment. One protestor was cognizant of this: "Blue paint will not get rid of the stories of women having to go abroad in order to get medical treatment" (Devine, 2016). Maser's heart functioned as a visual call to arms, a reminder that despite efforts to suppress its message, mimicking the denial that women from Ireland access abortion, the grassroots movement will continue to mobilize, resisting efforts to deny reproductive justice.

Documenting Hidden Journeys

Social media, a powerful tool to distribute information across broad audiences, has played an important role in the campaign for reproductive rights. On August 19, 2016 the hashtag #TwoWomenTravel began trending on the microblogging site, Twitter. Composed of twenty-three tweets, the biography for @TwoWomenTravel read: "Two Women, one procedure, 48 hours away from home", it documented in real time the journey of a woman and her friend to Liverpool for an abortion. Each publically visible tweet was directly sent to @EndaKennyTD, the Twitter account of then current Taoiseach. This recalled comedian Grainne Maguire's (2015) earlier live tweeting of her period to Kenny. Each aimed to render visible women's corporeality in the public sphere to highlight the restrictions of women's bodies in Ireland. The monotony of the long days were draining for @TwoWomenTravel: "Feel might collapse from exhaustion. No sleep. Friend calm. Brave." The singular corporeal journey temporarily converged with other bodies as they encountered others from Ireland: "Forced to leave Ireland, @EndaKennyTD joined by more Irish in waiting room, waiting for our loved ones." Emphasizing the support of loved ones, @TwoWomenTravel brought a different perspective to this divisive issue, elaborating upon the idea 'someone you know' has had an abortion. It compelled people to question how they might support a woman in this situation. The trending hashtag reached the notice of celebrities including comedian James Cordon: "Today, @TwoWomenTravel but you're not on your own in this. So many people are with you. X" (Corden, 2016). With over nine million followers Cordon's message had enormous potential to bring the plight of @TwoWomenTravel and the women of Ireland to an audience nearly double the entire population of the Republic. Irish Minister for Health, Simon Harris, responded directly to the account: "Thanks to @TwoWomenTravel for telling story of reality which faces many. Citizens Assembly - a forum to discuss 8th & make recommendations" (Harris, 2016). This message was

the only public acknowledgement of this journey made by a member of the Fine Gael, the majority political party.

The images depicted the mundane: the view from a bus window; the floor of a waiting room in a clinic; a television on the wall of a café; curtains blocking the light from a hotel window. They were evocative because they did not depict an identifiable person, or the body in its entirety. One knee, the smallest tip of a finger, these were visible reminders of the women behind this account. Unlike the imagery utilized by anti-abortion protesters where the fetus is completely disembodied from the maternal body, the body fractured @TwoWomenTravel's images called attention to the invisibility of these women. Furthermore, one doesn't need to have knowledge of her reasons for terminating her pregnancy to empathize with her. The implied gaze of the camera's lens, that of her friend, enabled the viewer to identify with the position of the waiting friend. These images are reminiscent of Emma Campbell's *When They Put Their Hands Out Like Scales* (2012), a video work and photographs that depict voyages women from Northern Ireland make to terminate pregnancies. Prefacing the most powerful image by @TwoWomenTravel: "Not the first or the last bleeding woman about to face the long treck [sic] home." It revealed rumpled hotel bedsheets, stained with the faint wash of her blood as it seeped from her tired post-abortion body. This highly affective image captured the cruelty of exiling women for their healthcare choices. The stain on the sheet suggested that no sanitizing of Irish history could completely erase the invisible stain of the reproductive injustices committed.

<Insert Figure 6 Case Studies Here>

It is significant that in recent years an increasing number of artworks have identifiable subject matter that relates specifically to abortion journeys. *Renunciation* (2015), a performance by

home|work collective inspired by the Angelus, one of the only to mention trans men, detailed different experiences of those who travel. Siobhán Clancy's participatory workshop *Choosing Choice: Packing up abortion stigma* invited six people who travelled for abortions to share their personal accounts and create collage cardboard suitcases representative of their experiences. *Case Studies* (2013) was both the process and the resulting artwork meaning the work existed as both the safe space for the dialogic exchange of experiences as well as the material objects each participant created over the course of the workshop. *Case Studies* provoked an understanding of the complexities of individual experiences as well as how visual art can enable a sense of solidarity when activating embodied experiences. The suitcases represented 'abortion tourism', a phrase that describes the phenomena women travel to jurisdictions where abortion is legal. This stark understanding of 'tourism' is compounded by the fabrication of a holiday for pleasure to conceal the true purpose, as evidenced by a tag on the suitcase: "Scheduling annual leave and holiday pay. Counting the hours and days the pounds and cents… waiting, anxiously 'Looking forward' to our abortion/holiday seeing the sights – inside the clinic". It contained a pregnancy test, a urine sample cup and a pair of heart shaped sunglasses. Another case bore a painted yellow submarine, juxtaposing the reference to Liverpool as a holiday destination for Beatles fans with that of its more somber destination for abortion seekers. The importance of *Cast Studies* is two-fold, it revealed hidden stories of travelling for abortion; the planning, the emotional and financial hardship, the secrecy and lies, while created a space where those who had abortions could share their stories without fear of condemnation. Clancy (2013) aimed to bring a nuanced understanding to the subject by avoiding "type of sloganeering they may typically associate with political discourse on the subject of abortion." Similarly, Katie Gillum's *Women Have Abortions Everyday - Its Just One Choice* (2013), a short film funded by the Irish

Family Planning Association and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, dispelled myths about abortion placing it within the larger framework of life's decisions and pathways. Likewise, Melissa Thompson's earlier documentary *Like a Ship In The Night* (2006) focused on four, anonymous women, as they unpacked their reasons behind their decisions to end their pregnancies. Putting these stories in the public realm with compassion and sensitivity enabled these artworks and embodied gestures counter the stigma and cultural silencing those who chose to terminate a pregnancy.

<Insert Figure 7 Case Studies Here>

The symbolism of the suitcase, in an Irish context, also represented the hundreds of thousands of Irish women and men who have emigrated from the Irish shores.[13] Furthermore a connection can be drawn between the figure of the emigrant and women who must travel abroad for abortions. The *X-ile Project* (2015-present), a series of photographic portraits depicting women who have travelled for abortions underscores this point, while the "X" in the title drew parallels with the X-case. The image of an exiled woman whose reproductive freedom forsaken by her nation is a powerful one. Similarly, Sarah Pierce's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, a crisp, solitary ferry rail ticket from Dublin port to London terminals also addressed the issue of exile from the Irish nation. It is dated April 24, 2016, Easter Monday, one hundred years after the Easter Rising that signaled the beginning of the armed struggle for Irish Independence. Though the single ticket does not disclose the purchaser's circumstances, its presentation in a glass display case, a nod to 'break glass in case of emergency' and by extension, the UK's role as a pressure release valve for Irish women seeking terminations, also suggested the sobering, solitary journey.

Ben Hickey's *Pearl* (2016) a photograph of a woman seated on a suitcase with the Dublin Poolbeg towers in the background similarly referenced travel and the legacy of colonial history. The image alluded to John Lavery's *Portrait of Lady Lavery as Kathleen Ni Houlihan* (1928) the iconic image of Hazel Lavery in the guise of the literary figure that personified Ireland as an old woman who calls her sons to take up arms. Lavery's image featured on Irish banknotes from 1928-1970, the metaphorical commodification of women's bodies. In *Pearl*, a suitcase bearing airline destination luggage tags was substituted for the emblematic Irish harp, implying that her travel has already occurred. Considering *Pearl*, with its historic references to money, alongside that of *Case Studies, X-ile Project* and *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* different factors associated with traveling for abortions emerge, including cost, absence from work and the feelings of physical and psychological exile of women, it is important to note that the right to travel only extends to certain types of women. These works provocatively question how hierarches of class, race, age, ability, economic and immigration status function to divide women into two groups, those who can travel for abortions and those who cannot.

In terms of contemporary cultural production visualizing reproductive injustices, at present the author is unaware of any artworks that overtly address Irish experiences of the abortion pill. It has been illegally imported by people in Ireland for at least thirteen years, as the Dutch organization Women on Waves (WOW) has supplied pills to women in Ireland since 2004. This reflects the double marginalization of women who cannot travel and put themselves at great legal risk to take illegal abortion pills. Áine Phillips's performance *Aspiration* (2014) addressed 'backstreet abortions' in addition to bodily experience and visibility when she physically

wrestled with 700 clothing hangers. The hangers symbolized 'back-street', unsafe and illegal abortion methods in which women use a sharp object or wire such as a knitting needle or clothes hanger to break the amniotic sac, signifying desperation and the potential danger women risk to control fertility. For Phillips 700 represents 1% of 70,000 women worldwide that die annually from backstreet abortions (Singh, et al. 2009, p.32) linking national and global reproductive issues. The title, *Aspiration* denotes the action of drawing fluid by suction from a vessel or cavity: a gynaecological procedure that is associated with abortion. Aspiration also represents desire, hope or focus towards a goal, suggestive of the goal of recognizing the bodily autonomy of reproductive bodies in Ireland. At various points of the performance, Phillips repeatedly sang 'a song for X'. The symbolism of this is that X was the anonymous name given to the 14-year-old girl at the heart of the X case (1992), the landmark case that tested the Eighth, resulting in further referendums, notably the 13th Amendment that clarified women had a right to travel to obtain abortions.[14] X also bears a more sinister Irish reference, for in the early 1950s an Irish woman referred to as 'Mrs. X' in the newspapers, later revealed as Mamie Cadden, was sentenced to 56 years in prison for procuring abortions for eight women (Conroy, 1992, p.128). At protests Irish pro-choice campaigners frequently place two pieces of black tape in an X over their mouths referencing the X case and the continued silencing of women with regards to reproductive control of their own bodies. When Phillips raised her voice in this way, she united the specific struggles for reproductive control women's bodies in Ireland with ongoing global struggles, in her embodied protest was a refusal to be silenced.

<Insert Figure 8 *Aspiration* Here>

Pairing hangers with the maternal figure, *Aspiration* can read against the iconic scene from the cult film *Mommie Dearest* (1981), Christina Crawford's autobiographical account of child abuse

she endured at the hands of her adopted mother Joan Crawford. In the scene, Joan Crawford, played by Faye Dunaway, discovered Christina has hung up her clothes on wire hangers. Crawford exclaimed "No Wire Hangers", ripped the clothes from the closet and then beat her daughter with a hanger. Though a symbol of abortion, the wire hanger, framed in the context 'bad mothers', provokes examination of the perceived dichotomy between good and bad mothers. Lentin (2013), paraphrasing Gerardine Meaney, argued, "Ireland has a long history of pitching 'Good (Catholic, Married) mothers' versus 'Bad (Unmarried) mothers" (p.133). Potentially more transgressive is the deliberate decision not to become a mother, for as Smyth (1992) argued "In a society where motherhood remains virtually the only secure source of canonised validation for the vast majority of women, the decision not to be a mother is deeply subversive and risky" (p.144). It is relevant that UK 2016 statistics show nearly half of women (47%) from Ireland accessing abortion are those who are already mothers (p.79). This problematizes the constructed binary of good/bad mothers, for when women who are already mothers terminate a pregnancy, they are likely prioritizing the lives of their children. The interlocking hangers of *Aspiration*, nearly impossible to separate out as individual forms, suggested the nuances and the tangled complexities of women's reproductive lives. This work, like the others discussed, demonstrates the power of the visual to negotiate the ever-changing socio-political climate in Ireland.

Conclusion

This essay argued that embodied politics is a feminist strategy utilized by those advocating for access to abortion in Ireland. Although only a handful of examples from Irish art and visual culture that visualize reproductive rights have been examined, the sheer number of artworks,

exhibitions, illustrations, dance and theatre productions identified in the course of the research for this essay indicate Ireland is in the midst of an important cultural shift. The intersections of gendered histories and activism in several images including *The Pro-choice Proclamation* drew upon the physical and metaphorical bodies of women aligning the personal with the political. The *Repeal Project* and related imagery illustrated how a simple word, worn on the body, can provoke discussion of reproductive rights. Out of Maser's censored mural came acts of public solidarity and resistance as well as one of the most recognizable symbols associated with the contemporary pro-choice movement in Ireland. The live tweeting of an abortion journey by @TwoWomenTravel made the personal political by rendering visible the invisible journeys for reproductive healthcare. Entanglements of visual art and body politics in *Case Studies* and *Aspiration,* amongst other works, represented the complexities of decision-making and lived experiences, while countering the cultural denial and erasure of those experiences. It is particularly striking how most of the images examined highlight the gaps and silences of the stories of those who have left Ireland to exercise autonomy over their pregnant bodies, the journey itself is an act of embodied politics. Although embodied politics strategically employ resistance, it is important to acknowledge that structural changes are needed to produce societal change on a larger scale in Irish society. While the reproductive rights movement has momentum behind it, now is not the time for complacency, patriarchy is persistent, ever shifting and adapting in a bid to maintain power. As the constitutional referendum draws closer, there is a pressing need to engage in meaningful conversations about the repeal of the Eighth Amendment and access to abortion. Art and visual culture offers innovative ways of fleshing out the nuances and complexities of women's reproductive lives, encouraging examination of the reasons why reproductive freedom is of paramount importance in Ireland.

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[2] 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.

[3] This legislation resulted from the tragic death of Savita Halappanavar (October 28, 2012). She attended National University Hospital, Galway with a miscarriage, however when was clear the pregnancy could not be saved she requested a termination. This request was denied, as she was told 'This is a Catholic country.' She developed septicaemia and died of multiple organ failure. See Holland, K. & Cullen, P. (2012, November 14) Woman 'denied termination' dies in hospital. *Irish Times*.

[4] The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is responsible for State sponsored events advised by a non-partisan expert board composed mainly of academic historians.

[5] 41.2.1 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."

41.2.2 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.

[6] During symphysiotomy the pubic bone is sawed in half to widen the pelvis during childbirth. It was carried out without consent on birthing women in Ireland (1950-1980), long after it was used in Western Europe. It was advocated by Catholic-run maternity hospitals instead of caesareans in order to prevent limiting the number of births. Women who underwent symphysiotomies suffered incontinence, difficulty walking and chronic pain.

[7] In Ireland, asylum seekers are institutionalized in direct provision where they reside until refugee status is granted. They cannot work, obtain state funding for third level education or social welfare benefits. They often live in appalling conditions, sometimes an entire family housed in a single room with shared cooking facilities, and sometimes they are unable to cook their own meals, eating what DP facility provides them. See Carl O'Brien, 'State fears reform of system will attract asylum seekers,' *Irish Times*, October 28, 2013.

[8] Joseph Beuys, Adrian Piper, Suzanne Lacy and Tania Bruguera are associated with dialogic activist art.

[9] *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 1* was re-released with the publication of the second volume in 2015.

[10] Artists Cecily Brennan, Eithne Jordan, Alice Maher and writers Paula Meehan, Lia Mills, Mairead O'hEocha and Rachel-Rose O' Leary founded The Artists' Campaign to Repeal the 8th.

[11] In 2015 a 21-year old woman was charged and found guilty for supplying poison to induce a miscarriage and unlawfully procuring an abortion. The case was brought after her housemates reported her to the police citing her lack of regret. In another a mother purchased and distributed

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[12] On Cummins' work see Antosik-Parsons (2015).

[13] See Antosik-Parsons (2014) on visualizing migration in contemporary art.

[14] 40.3.3 This subsection shall not limit freedom to travel between the State and another state.