

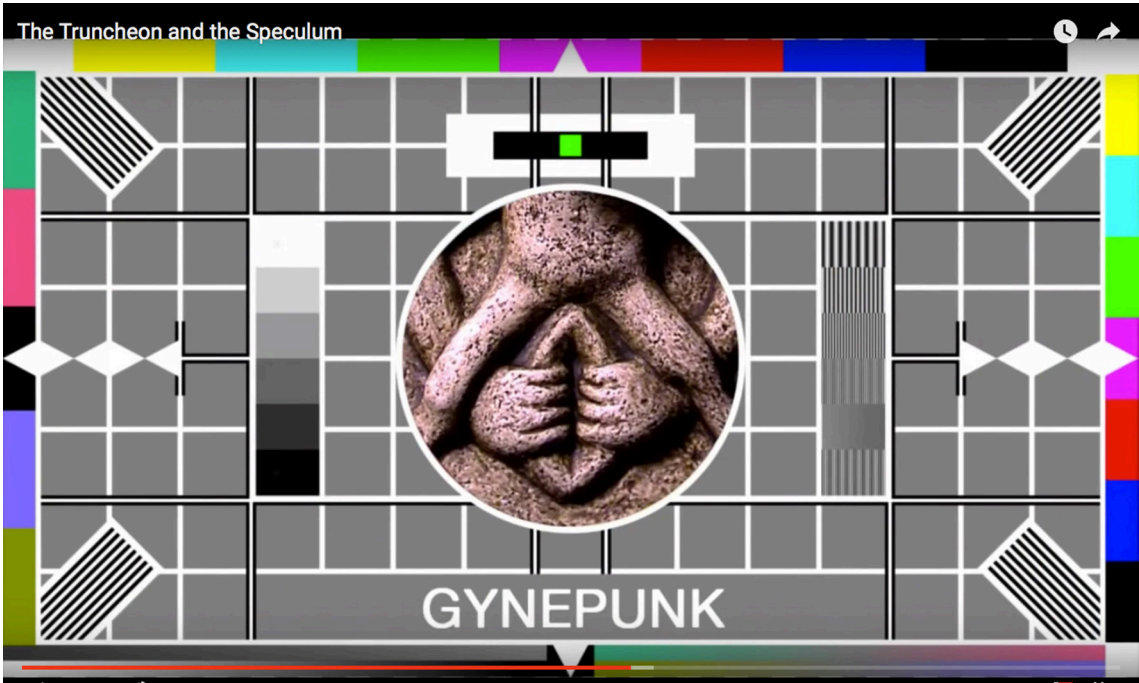
HOW IS IT MADE?

Towards a Post-Patriarchal State

JOANNE LAWS INTERVIEWS SARAH BROWNE AND JESSE JONES ABOUT THEIR ONGOING PROJECT 'IN THE SHADOW OF THE STATE'



Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, *Of Milk and Marble*, 2016; site-specific live performance; performed by Louise Mathews; photo by Miriam O'Connor



Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, *The Truncheon and the Speculum*, 2016; stills from live online broadcast written and directed by the artists, featuring Lisa Godson and Klau Kinky/ Gynepunk and presented by the Liverpool Biennial and archived online



Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 'In the Shadow of the State' legal drafting workshop, Dublin, 2016; drawing by Alwyn Gillespie

HOW IS IT MADE?

Joanne Laws: Perhaps you might explain how your collaboration came about and introduce some of your initial ideas in developing this major new project?

Sarah Browne/Jesse Jones: We'd known each other's practices for many years and felt that at some stage we would find the right opportunity to work together. In 2014, we started discussing a potential collaboration with Patrick Fox (then Director of Create), and later Rachel Anderson (then producer/curator at Artangel, London). We attempted to identify the greatest urgencies for us as artists at that time and felt there was a renewed need to examine and refigure the position of women in relation to a patriarchal nation state. From the beginning of our work together, law and its instruments have been a critical focus. The Irish Sea also loomed large in our imagination.

Our initial collaborative proposal centred on adapting Máiréad Ni Ghráda's Irish language play *An Triail* into a courtroom drama that would tour Ireland with a community cast. A proposed series of outside broadcasts would take the form of an interactive 'feminist chat show'. That proposal was unsuccessful, but subsequent discussions with Artangel ultimately led to a co-commissioning partnership with Create to produce a major new project which was formalised in 2014.

In keeping with Artangel's working method, we carried out one year of research, followed by an evaluation, and one year of production. This intense period of research in relative privacy allowed us to develop our methodology and to plan upcoming activities. The project began as an enquiry into how women's bodies have historically been symbols of political hope and freedom, yet were materially forced to endure painful injustices by the state. Drawing on post-colonial and counter-revolutionary narratives, we felt that the Irish experience in particular is well-placed to critique modern concepts of statehood and capital. We were excited to consider this feminist inquiry through a transnational project residing in dual legal jurisdictions, and believed it was important to produce research that would not only illustrate the past, but offer logic to decode contemporary realities.

JL: Can you outline the project's various phases?

SB/JJ: During our first year of research, we followed our instincts through a succession of interviews, archive visits, meetings and field trips to sites such as: the Blasket Islands, the Dublin to Liverpool ferry, feminist and women's libraries, and the Royal College of Gynaecology and Obstetrics Museum in London. We also visited courtrooms, sat in on the symphysiotomy trials and began engaging with the Northern/Irish Feminist Judgments Project.¹ This was an incredible learning experience and opened up the law to us in a very detailed and performative way. As part of their final programme, we were privileged to present our first public hearing of 'In the Shadow of the State', entitled *The Voice Emerges*.²

In March 2015, we initiated our application to the Arts Council's 'ART: 2016' centenary programme, and were later shortlisted and awarded funding as one of nine open call projects across art forms. We then assembled our core team of collaborators: legal academic and activist Máiréad Enright, midwife Philomena Canning, composer Alma Kelliher, material culture historian Lisa Godson, photographer Miriam O'Connor and Derry-based curator/producer Sara Greavu. We realised the importance of site-specific live performance for the project, as a platform to test our collaborative voice, activate our research and share the expertise of our collaborators. We planned a series of four events in Ireland and the UK, comprising private legal workshops (to examine the 'touch' of the law, with an invited group of women) and subsequent public performances.

During the first year we developed *Burn in Flames: Post-Patriarchal Archive in Circulation*, which offered ways to perform the project rather than trying to describe it. We identified everyday objects and named them as evidence of the late-capitalist oppression of women. In an active form of critique, these items were imprinted with the *Post-Patriarchal Archive* stamp and placed back in circulation. Using a performative lecture and workshop format, we presented key research inquiries, such as the construction of 'feminine hygiene' or the nature of 'patriarchal time'.

Audience members were invited to bring their own materials to be stamped. We gave presentations in Ireland and the UK in a variety of community, activist and academic contexts, partly as a way to build an engaged audience for the project.

Of Milk and Marble was staged in Derry in March 2016, in a home frequently raided during the Troubles. It featured a single performer



Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, *Burn in Flames: Post-Patriarchal Archive in Circulation*, 2015

(Louise Mathews) at the kitchen table, for a day-long run of performances with small audiences of around a dozen people.

The Truncheon and the Speculum was staged in July as part of the Liverpool Biennial 2016. This live internet broadcast from the radical community bookshop News from Nowhere explored historic state violence enacted through gynaecological means. It identified the *Contagious Diseases Acts* of the 1860s as a key moment in the legislation of state violence against women. Featuring material culture historian Dr Lisa Godson and self-identified 'cyborg witch' Klau Kinky, of the Catalan collective Gynepunk, this performance proposed supplanting state-sanctioned broadcasts into domestic spaces. A transnational audience was invited to this online platform to question the terrestrial illegalities of reproductive rights for women.

Staged in September 2016 in the Pillar Room of the Rotunda Hospital (the first lying-in hospital in Ireland and the UK), *The Touching Contract* proposed new ways of understanding how we encounter the touch of the law every day, with and without consent. The immersive performance featured a soundscape composed by Alma Kelliher. A legal score, devised in collaboration with Máiréad Enright and an invited group of women in Dublin, determined how audience members chose to participate. The performance will be newly adapted and re-staged in November 2016, with a different cast, for the former juvenile courtroom in Toynbee Hall, London.

JL: What are your thoughts on the range of women's campaigns and feminist projects that appear to have gained momentum this year? Do you think they have been heightened by the 1916 centenary, which has brought our relationship with the past into sharper focus?

JJ: I think we had a mature and brave centenary actually. It could have been a jingoistic nightmare, but I think overall there was an appetite for reflection. When you spoke to people they were linking it to the defeat of the water charges and to the fight for equality and anti-austerity. There was a feeling of responsibility, of not leaving it to the government to decide. The centenary was a great imaginative spark that really kicked off with Waking the Feminists, when the Abbey missed the zeitgeist and a backlash ensued.³ An eruption of publicness emerged out of private conversations that women were having for a long time without being heard. When it started, it was like an avalanche.

I think the foundation was laid with the same-sex marriage referendum, in terms of society's expectations for equality. As someone who is left-wing, I generally feel quite alienated from Irish politics, but the shared sense of victory felt after the vote for marriage equality was very empowering. We had achieved something that 10 years ago would have been impossible.

It was a loosening of the Catholic state noose and the prescribed arrangement that emerged from the fallout of the Irish Civil War. Over the last year, the pro-choice movement has gained momentum, with increased symbolic and public visibility bringing the campaign to the fore. It is a very hopeful and creative community – inventive and humorous in its dissent. In many ways, the interconnected issues of marriage equality, Waking the Feminists and repealing the Eighth are underpinned by the question: What kind of society, love, marriage, life, choices, autonomy do we want? Nobody ever asked us that before. It takes confidence to stand up and ask for these things. They require

imagination. The centenary allowed these issues to be vocalised and there was an appetite for questioning from all sides.

When I was growing up during the Celtic Tiger, people were confident, but it was a shallow, material confidence: they could get a job, a good wage, travel, buy property and so on. I think we have a different type of confidence now that is more grounded in social issues, social change and the fact that we are all in it together. As artists, we intervened into that space to ask: What might our national culture look like if it embraced these experiences? How could it find radical and inventive ways to articulate itself, not as historical revision, but as a way to challenge fundamental ideas about art and how it relates to the political?

JL: You recently stated that women are only mentioned a handful of times in the 1937 Constitution of Ireland. Perhaps you could elaborate on how this document intersects with women's everyday lives in the twenty-first century?

S.B: 'Woman' is mentioned only three times in the Irish Constitution, in article 41.2 and in the Eighth Amendment, article 40.3.3. Article 41.2 neatly conflates womanhood with motherhood and the institution of the family, in relation to work within the home, which is recognised as a 'necessity', 'duty' and 'support'.

The Eighth Amendment equates the right to life of a woman who is pregnant with that of a foetus. In effect, this means that Ireland is one of very few countries in the world that has a constitutional ban on abortion. However, what isn't so widely discussed is that this article impacts on all issues of consent for pregnant women, for example requesting or refusing certain tests or procedures. This means that medical professionals act as legal interpreters. These legal artefacts attest to how we are viewed by the state. The Eighth Amendment hovers as an implied threat over all women living in Ireland who could become pregnant. Should this happen, we will live in a state of exception where our human rights are suspended.

JL: Can you outline some of the methods you have developed to document the project?

SB/JJ: We have worked hard to find sensitive, appropriate and critical means to document the project. The drafting sessions were for invited groups of women who remain anonymous unless they choose otherwise. These sessions were not recorded, videoed or photographed, but we took extensive notes, as did our legal collaborator, Máiréad Enright. We worked with two courtroom artists, Alwyn Gillespie and Priscilla Coleman, who made drawings of the proceedings. By using this strategy of representation, we could make evident the presence of law in everyday places and situations, while also respecting the participants' privacy.

As artists who often work with moving image, we had the strong sense that we didn't want the outcome of our work together (about tactility and the body) to take an image-based form. We delegated the visual sense of the project to our photographer-in-residence Miriam O'Connor, who created a photographic record that does not attempt to be 'objective' documentation. O'Connor photographed a series of key gestures devised and choreographed by performers, but we didn't record the performances themselves, which are documented extensively through rumour and first person accounts. Traces of the project also exist online on our twitter account, @pparchive, and through the monthly newsletter we deliver to our mailing list subscribers via intheshadowofthestate.org.

Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones are visual artists based in Dublin. Their collaboration, as a feminist practice, brings together mutual concerns. They have each made numerous works within and outside gallery spaces, and have extensive experience working in collaborative contexts and through public art commissions.

Notes

1. Northern/Irish Feminist Judgments Project was established by legal academics and feminists across the UK and Ireland to reopen cases over the last 40 years and re-write the judgments from a feminist perspective

2. In Green Street Courthouse, Dublin, the artists staged *The voice emerges from the body/the speculum enters the body/architecture surrounds the body*, which comprised presentations by material culture historian Lisa Godson, philosopher Tina Kinsella and legal historian Linda Mulcahy, with a subsequent screening of horror film *The Entity*

3. When the Abbey Theatre launched its programme to mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising, only 1 out of the 10 plays programmed were written by a woman and 3 out of 10 were directed by women. A group of theatre professionals (Waking the Feminists) held a public meeting at the Abbey Theatre and soon after, the board and director issued a public statement on their plans to develop a comprehensive policy on gender equality, and to programme more work by women artists