**Irish Influencers**

**Clinton Institute for American Studies, Tuesday, June 16, 2020, First Floor Seminar Room**

**Organizer: Professor Diane Negra**

**Keynote Speaker: Professor Alison Hearn, University of Western Ontario, "We're All 'Influencers' Now: Reputation, Creditability and Selfhood in the Post-Neoliberal Era"**

The shift to digital culture has been conspicuously marked by new forms and channels of (financialized) social influence. In Alice E. Marwick’s account “Social media has brought the attention economy into the everyday lives and relationships of millions of people worldwide, and popularized attention-getting techniques like self-branding and lifestreaming.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Digital reputation-building has become associated with the rise of the “influencer” whose ability to leverage their own perceived “credibility” and “authenticity” for the benefit of other brands is a notable element of early twenty-first century marketing techniques and their diffusion into everyday life.

This event seeks to consider these developments in the context of Irish nation branding and perceptions of a shifting sphere of Irishness by showcasing a range of academic perspectives on new circulatory channels for Irishness in the global economy. Specifically, it tracks the emergence of a celebrity-driven, post-recession enterprise culture and hones in on a crop of new Irish celebrities who exert considerable influence over the meanings of Irish nationality and ethnicity, often highlighting a perceived capacity to retain an innate Irishness alongside transnational intelligibility and commercial appeal. This balancing act is struck through heavy promotional use of social media such as Instagram and Twitter and is expressive of a pronounced cultural shift toward the idolization of the entrepreneur. Attention to Irish influencer culture has peaked of late with the publication of Sophie White’s Instagram addiction novel *Filter This* and the RTE Player Original series *Influencers* in which presenter and “social media addict” Pamela Joyce emulates her celebrity idols.

New Irish (micro)celebrities customarily exhibit personae that are tailor-made for digital circulation and/or tabloid representation and are linked to low-brow and sometimes ephemeral entertainment forms; in recent years they have come to displace an older set of Irish stars associated with “quality” cinema and literature. We might consider in this light *Love Island*’s Maura Higgins*,* UFC champion Conor McGregor, YouTube Let’s Plays vlogger Jacksepticeye, post-punk band Fontaines D.C., comedian and emigration blogger Maeve Higgins, Rubberbandit and podcaster Blindboy Boatclub and fitness, nutrition and beauty bloggers including Roz Purcell, Rosanna Davison and “Make Up Fairy” Joanna Larby.

Symptomatic of “the heightened consumption of celebrity discourse under surveillance capitalism,”[[2]](#endnote-2) all of these figures are strikingly associated with post-financial crash Ireland and its intensified neoliberal imperatives. They incarnate dynamics Allison Page and Laurie Ouellette have characterized as follows: “constituting oneself as a marketable brand functions as a prerequisite to navigating precarity; similarly, garnering fame and visibility through social and digital media platforms like YouTube and Instagram is proffered as a mean to surviving and thriving under late capitalism.”[[3]](#endnote-3) At the same time, some of these celebrities perform or inspire a cultural ambivalence around their positioning (Conor McGregor repeatedly undermines his brand through ham-fisted attempts at promotion, Blindboy Boatclub simultaneously critiques neoliberal ideology and seeks to build an advertiser-friendly multi-mediated profile). We might speculate that the generational shift playing out in the field of Irish celebrity harmonizes not only with the discourses of post-Celtic Tiger recovery but also the ways in which Ireland is perceived to have hit a “sweet spot” of (post-referenda) social progress, separation from the dark legacies of the Catholic Church, the corporatization of affect and a sense of “post-race” civic ease.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Symposium papers will attend to the complexities of such representation and their implications for articulations of Irishness.

* Sharae Deckard on Tana French (UCD)
* Ryan Dorrian on Fontaines DC and Irish Hipsterism (UCD)
* Marcus Free on Jarlath Regan (Mary Immaculate)
* Shannon Lawlor on jacksepticeye and gaming influencers (UCD)
* Kelly Davidson (IADT) on Stephen and David Flynn, the Happy Pear Brand and Green Irish Capitalism
* Anthony McIntyre on Conor McGregor (UCD)
* Donal Mulligan on Panti Bliss and Motivational Speaking (DCU)
* Eleanor O’Leary on Maeve Higgins (IT-Carlow)
* Rachel O’Neill on Irish Wellness Bloggers (Warwick)

1. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, & Branding in the Social Media Age*. New Haven: Yale U P, 2013, p. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Suzanne Leonard & Diane Negra, “Stardom and Celebrity,” In *The Craft of Criticism: Critical Media Studies in Practice*, Eds. Mary Celeste Kearney & Michael Kackman, New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Allison Page & Laurie Ouellette, “The Prison-Televisual Complex,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2019), p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Diane Negra & Anthony P. McIntyre. “Ireland Inc.: The Corporatization of Affective Life in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* Oct. 13, 2019 *https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1367877919882437* [↑](#endnote-ref-4)