

Dr Conor Mckeown
c.cmckeown.2@research.gla.ac.uk

07462122722

31 Lyndhurst Gardens,
Glasgow, G20 6QX

To the Chair of the Selection Committee,

As a specialist in digital theory, with an established publication record, future publication prospects, experience attracting research grants and experience teaching film studies, digital media studies and digital media production, I hope you will consider my application for the position of Assistant Professor in Film Studies, Specialising in Digital Theory and Practice. Responding to the desired qualifications and experience within the application description, I believe my research in digital theory, including media archaeology, media-ecology, software studies, interactivity, media philosophy and game studies make me an excellent fit for the department. At the same time, my experience in and continued dedicated to digital media production will allow me to develop and co-ordinate new taught modules for Trinity moving forward. For an early career researcher, I have already gathered extensive teaching experience in a range of subjects at both The University of Glasgow's Film and Television department, and from the degree program at Fife College. Although my focus has most often been on film studies and digital media production, I have always endeavoured to allow my interdisciplinary experience to shape taught courses, making them more philosophically and methodologically broad whilst satisfactorily theoretically deep. Already, my research interests, fostered at Cambridge and expanded through doctoral study at Glasgow, situated at the locus between screen-media, technology and contemporary philosophy, have allowed me to influence undergraduate and graduate level tuition. Given the commitment to developing digital theory and practice as core components of the curriculum at Trinity, I believe my work could further the exciting teaching and research within the department and beyond.

I was awarded my PhD in 2017 from The University of Glasgow. In my thesis, "Videogame Ecologies: Interaction, Aesthetics and Affect", I engaged with a number of international, independently developed digital games, analysing their underlying technical 'ecologies', suggesting how digital dependencies can prompt an engagement with the entanglement of matter and meaning discussed within new materialist scholarship. My interdisciplinary work required a novel methodology that combined the investigative, media archaeological practices inherent in code studies with the performance focused research of scholars such as Karen Barad and Jane Bennett. Engaging with specific game functions, I wrote numerous computer programmes that simulated elements of gameplay then close read the functions I had created, discussing their ecological nature, from the micro level outwards. In all, my thesis found a powerful correlation between the functioning of contemporary videogames and the recent ontological shifts within contemporary philosophy; just as Karen Barad has suggested a fundamental 'entanglement' and a drive to move away from thinking about 'things', focusing instead on phenomena, the digital media I creatively analysed revealed important 'intra-active' qualities that set them aside from other media. Videogames, I suggested – when read through my critical lens – are an invaluable philosophical tool for understanding recent innovations within the humanities.

At present, I am working with Steven Connor and the Open Humanities Press towards a publication of the thesis.

Building on my PhD research, I have begun to shift my focus towards a study of the environments in which digital media are created – the software ‘engines’, ‘platforms’ and API’s that accelerate but also encode contemporary creativity. Within digital games development, to focus on one of many examples, the tendency to develop modern games within these environments – such as Unity, Unreal and, more recently, Amazon’s Lumberyard – has prompted an outpouring of creativity from otherwise disadvantaged voices within the gaming community such as predominantly female development teams, non-white and LGBTQ+ independent developers. At the same time, however, there is a serious lack of study into how developing alongside these environments shapes the work produced or the audiences that consume them. It is my hope to engage in further study of these software environments, including the now more affordable than ever Adobe Creative Cloud, to discuss to what degree creatives working within these fields are generating novel cultures or else simply extending the reach and feature sets of these technologies.

Since receiving my doctorate, I have received a grant from the Scottish Graduate School of the Arts and Humanities to undertake an MSc in Interactive Technology at the University of Glasgow. This funded research has allowed me to work with numerous members of the computer science department including Professor Stephen Brewster and Dr Matthew Barr within the HATII institute for digital humanities. This has enabled me to further hone my doctoral research, developing my software design skills in a manner that enables further experimentation and generating engaging outcomes for my research. I am currently working towards a project aimed to make users more aware of their place within a digital ecology. Although at its early stages, I hope to publish the software online and the findings of the controlled testing in 2018.

I have three years’ teaching experience in a broad variety of subjects. This, I believe, could be an invaluable asset to Trinity as my teaching interests cross the boundaries of film studies/design but also transgress borders of digital technology and online media. Over the years in The University of Glasgow, I have been responsible for my own courses, lectured on others and provided seminar tuition for others still. In generating materials for the core course, Film Analysis, I endeavoured to stay true to the needs of the module while updating the course as much as possible to engage with contemporary concerns within film and media studies. In a similar fashion, in 2018 I have begun teaching on the Film History, Aesthetics and Genres course where I have helped Dr Rebecca Hamilton shape the course into an object and material focused course, developing new forms of assessment such as introducing a curatorial element into their work. While at Fife College, Dunfermline, in their creative industries department, I taught computer game design, animation, digital modelling, and computer programming. I was responsible for over one hundred students, with varying capabilities. My experiences with teaching conventional, close-reading centred film-studies, less conventional, micro-historical, object-centred film studies, as well as my experience with production and digital-media, have prepared me to contribute to a wide range of potential subjects at any University.

Given the commitment to digital theory and practice expressed by Trinity, I believe my teaching experience and desire to build new courses could be an excellent contribution to the department. I am most excited by the opportunity to take up supervision of

students in the Arts and Technology Research Laboratory and look forward to leading practice-based research into questions surrounding our digital society. At the same time, I am excited by the prospect of bringing my expertise to influence the undergraduate dissertations of current and future students. Beyond this, moving into the development of new courses, I would be interested in exploring the possibility of following on from the Digital Storyworlds elective module, seeing in what ways this module could be expanded to contain more elements of digital production as a potential method of research. If possible, perhaps a new module could be introduced (or, in time, Master Level module or course) that placed an emphasis on new methods (such as 3D design, integration of 3D design into visual storytelling and visual essays, or even basic software development) for exploring questions of digital media and digital theory.

While I have experience fostering relationships with other academics, students and departments, I continue to work on my public outreach, regularly attending and presenting at conferences and workshops internationally. Having presented more than once at the annual Screen conference, SCMS, having most recently presented at the Games Philosophy conference and with my upcoming paper at the Edinburgh TransImage 2018 conference, to name but a few, I have a proven track record of attempting to bring my research to the attention of a slightly broader academic audience. I also contribute on several boards including British DiGRA (the digital games research association), a contributor to Vector, the British science fiction magazine, and as an editor of the Press-Start Journal in Glasgow. I would like to retain these activities and extend them, generating links between my existing research communities and the academic collectives at Trinity.

In summation, my numerous publications in peer-reviewed journals, collected books and conference proceedings, several years of teaching experience, drive to develop new and exciting research, pending publications, awareness of the importance of global research excellence and a willingness to contribute towards maintaining Trinity's excellent international reputation make me an excellent potential candidate for the position. As stated in the position advertisement, one of the duties expected would be to assist in encouraging the growth of Film and Screen Studies in a broad manner. My interdisciplinary background and experience would enable me to do just that.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope you will extend an invitation to interview to enable us to further discuss the future of film and digital theory at Trinity.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Conor Mckeown