

Céad Míle Mugáil – A Hundred Thousand Muggings

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The Gathering: cynical marketing initiative or um.... well, just that really. How else to describe a campaign designed to siphon tourism and, more importantly, investment dollars from members of the Irish diaspora? For the unashamedly middle-class Uncle Sam, and not forgetting first cousin Todd, the chance to return “home” is an invitation to be milked as a cash cow for a State going through the tortures of Austerity. Céad Míle Fáilte? More like a hundred thousand muggings.



But The Gathering is much more than the exploitation of a diasporic community and their mythologised relationship to a normative, white, Anglo-Celtic ideal of “the old country”. The “them” in the tag line of the campaign – “invite them home” – directly refers to family and friends and all the affective connections implied by those relationships. It attempts to enrol the entire national population in entertaining this diaspora, asking communities and individuals to create events to be attended by international visitors or expatriates in order to fleece them of their cash, I mean, show them the craic.

The imperative of the campaign is commanding Irish residents to expend physical and emotional energy and to exploit their personal connections for the wealth of the nation. The affection felt by the diaspora for a mythical Ireland is not all that is at the core of this campaign. It is also, and directly, the meaningful social relationships and social energies of the domestic Irish population.

The Gathering is ultimately about the incorporation of interpersonal and meaningful sociality within the national economic plan: it is the tourism division of what Mario Tronti calls “the social factory”. This concept is used to describe the conclusion of developments associated with post-Fordism through which various life processes, once deemed exterior to the commodity relation and the alienating logics of work, have become integral to the economic calculations of capitalism. In the social factory, money is made, sometimes directly, from affect, cognition, and care.

Examples are in the software, audio/visual production and advertising industries where the mental and affective investments of workers and consumers alike add intangible value in the production of commodities. The socially meaningful practices of digital media consumers of YouTube, Facebook or computer games are also emblematic of this condition as they voluntarily contribute unpaid content, but also generate revenue through the production of consumer data extensively mined and sold to advertisers.

This industrialisation of sociality also takes the form of what Mel Gregg calls “presence bleed” as mobile communication technologies blur boundaries between work and intimate personal life. It can also be found in the logic of “workfare” programmes, lifelong training initiatives and in the expanding phenomenon of unpaid corporate internships like JobBridge. In the social factory, often pleasurable and (quasi-) voluntary social activity, like hosting a party for a visiting relative, works to service the economy, assuming the alienating, expropriating and commodifying logics of industrial capitalism.

The Gathering similarly exploits interpersonal sociality and transforms inalienable human relationships into valuable economic tools. In doing so, it permeates the whole of life and the entire social body with the economic demands of the Irish State. The imperative to “invite them home” is therefore an imperative to invite the economic project of a debt-addled State into your home, into your life and into your meaningful relationships.

With a hundred thousand of these welcomes, it is not only Uncle Sam, and first cousin Todd, who are being mugged by The Gathering.

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