University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Introduction: geographies of the post-boom era

Denis Linehan and Caroline Crowley

A mother and daughter face Dublin in flames as the giant figure of Justice looms out of the darkness; a lone sheep lingers on a mountain track beneath a dilapidated Las Vegas-style sign announcing 'Hibernia'; a group of conspirators raise a giant Irish flag by the quayside, as lights from the office windows of banks twinkle ominously late into the night. These are images from artist Brian McCarthy's compelling collection *Boomtown*, notable for its critical observations on issues of economy, society and nationhood in this unprecedented period of crisis and turbulence in Ireland. McCarthy's vision captures the mood of a society stretched between rage and bewilderment, whose memories of betrayal burn. In his signature image *Boomtown*, McCarthy presents a crowded landscape of slum-like dwellings, cramped together on the hillsides, overlooked by an unfinished Tower of Babel. The allusion is towards the *favelas* of Latin America but this landscape seems also to be a striking observation on the ruinous effects of over-development. The dense landscape seems mired in despair. The tricolour hangs from the balconies of houses. The national flag is a constant motif running though his collection, billowing on emigrants' boats, or rising up from the street in preparation for revolution. In *Delirium* – another telling image – a prosaic Dublin shop-front is transformed into a Head Shop.[1] The window advertises 'Celtic Tiger pills' amidst a faded display of champagne, designer accessories, gold and a toy helicopter. As a comment on the character of the Irish banking sector and the practice of excess, it sums things up more clearly perhaps than the Nyberg Report (Commission of Investigation into the Banking Sector in Ireland, 2011).

The artist depicts money blowing up 'Easy Street' in front of the shop – like the credit that littered the Irish landscape with abandoned, unfinished houses. McCarthy's use of magical realism constructs a counterfactual landscape that is deliberately antagonistic to

the spectacle and narratives of the boom-time (Figure 0.1).

Figure 0.1 Brian McCarthy, *Boomtown*

His disruptive treatment of the Irish landscape, which has long been the repository of 'Irishness', eviscerates the images and iconography of the Celtic Tiger, a period of economic growth in Ireland that ran from 1995 to 2007.

McCarthy's work reflects the growing dissonance around the national narrative, as well as the groundswell of political dissatisfaction that characterises the contemporary scene in Ireland. Tellingly, while occasionally framing Ireland as South America or Asia, his work suggests that new perspectives, if not new maps, are required to evaluate Irish society; the turbulent qualities of the present call for new ways of seeing. Following the economic crash in 2008, Irish society has been thrown into a tumultuous period of adjustment. The social and economic consequences of the crisis present Irish society with a series of new challenges related to high levels of unemployment, emigration and the social impacts of austerity programmes. However, as the Celtic Tiger was as much an imaginative construct as a material one, Irish society is presented with a double-barrelled betrayal. The collapse of the Celtic Tiger represented not only the decline of a certain economic model but also the disintegration of the powerful national narrative that imagined the State as a

perpetual growth machine. The State's self-congratulatory story of its exemplary success, and with it the international community's portrayal of Ireland as a role model for globalisation, has imploded. From underneath its brash surface, the problems of inequity and imbalanced development have become increasingly apparent; anxious questions about the social dividends of the Tiger years and widening inequalities in Irish society shape the content of public debates and discourse (Kirby, 2010).

As difficult and painful as the material consequences of the recession are, the shock of collapse has also thrown up a kind of social trauma. It has created a void in the national narrative: the question of national identity (along with the qualities and meaning of the State) lies in contention. In the resulting vacuum, anxious attempts to fashion a new national narrative in the post-crash era characterise contemporary debates. The collective memory of the crash, together with distrust of the political system and intense scepticism about the powerful role of international markets that displaces a sense of where power actually lies, challenges the contract that citizens make with their state. As Ulrich Beck has noted, faced by a mix of impossible demands from international markets and the EU, a 'fear of losing all sense of security, be it socio-economic or the mental security inherent in the national self-image' characterises the political climate in debtor countries like Ireland, Greece and Portugal (Beck, Bielefeld and Tietze, 2011: 8). Not only does Irish society have to deal with the economic and social crises of unemployment and emigration, but it also faces a crisis of identity. Society has to come to terms with the realisation that the narrative of progress was a fabrication based on a kind of 'casino capitalism', where the Government effectively absconded from its duty to protect the State's economic sovereignty by permitting the banking sector to borrow without limits and the property sector to build new developments and inflate prices regardless of demand. In a way, the recognition forced upon Irish citizens by the crash is the realisation that during the Celtic Tiger period 'we were not who we thought we were'. Not only that but 'the map was not the territory' either. Land, that entity at the core of the Irish psyche, became our downfall. These recognitions are immensely de-stabilising.

The arrival of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to Ireland, on 18 November 2010, is seared into public memory. This watershed moment can be recalled in Ireland in

the same way as older generations of Americans remember the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. On the evening of the announcement, the historian Diarmaid Ferriter reflected the national mood on TV3 when he raised the spectre of the sacrifice of the 1916 Easter Rising, a sentiment repeated in a remarkable editorial of *The Irish Times* the next day – a newspaper that rarely engages in nationalist rhetoric: 'Is this what Irish heroes died for?' for went the question. 'It is a milestone', said Ferriter. 'It is a terrible time. It's a time of great shame and great embarrassment and despondency' (Ferriter, 2010). In the midst of recession, on internet bulletin boards and radio phone-in talk shows, it is now quite common for people to talk about Ireland in the language of ruin. Filmed on the streets of Melbourne, Australia, a young Irish emigrant railed against the impact of the crash on his hometown in Tipperary: 'there is nothing there: nothing, nothing, nothing' (*Arrivals*, 2011).

The impact and attempts at resolution of many of these issues were revealed during the 2011 Irish presidential election. In the debates and manifestos presented by the candidates, questions of identity loomed large. These involved pleas to community, locality, core values, roots and national pride. That Michael D. Higgins, a poet, a lover of the Irish language and a politician whose values predate the excesses of the Celtic Tiger, was elected revealed something of the distance, or indeed the sanctuary, that Irish society sought from the recent past. The 2011 Global Economic Forum,[2] held at the sumptuously restored Farmleigh Estate in Dublin, provided a comparable opportunity for similar soul-searching narratives. It is revealing that in offering variously retrospective reappraisals of Irishness and Ireland at this meeting (involving, amongst others, Bono, Bill Clinton and the Goldman Sachs International chairman, Peter Sutherland), it was culture, community, locality and creativity that were grasped as the authentic touchstones of who the Irish are. Somehow, a return to the heartland seems to offer the antidote to the globalised cosmopolitan excess when the Irish 'lost their soul', while at the same time offering the elixir through which Irish pride and the national economy might be restored.

Spacing Ireland: infinite places and singular locations

As part of this regrounding, questions of geography have risen to prominence. At their heart, these pleas to culture, to core values and to Irishness underlie the significance of place and the relationships made in global networks. In this very real sense, the material and imaginative management of Irish space remains central to contemporary cultural, social and political entanglements. Embedded in this premise, *Spacing Ireland* invites readers to engage with the contours of transformation of Irish society through a series of distinct episodes and sites where change can be confronted. With the term 'spacing', we refer to the appropriation, settlement, mobilisation and geographical reconfiguration that occurred on a variety of scales and amongst a range of sites and subjects: the city, the holiday, the home, the road, the health spa, the migrant, the shopper, the travel writer. Some contributions in the collection acknowledge how the transformations wrought by the boom and its aftermath re-made place, reframed the qualities of social life, altered the landscape, fractured the national space and expanded social and economic relations of society into an ever-widening global network. Chapters intersect to varying extents with the boom and bust themes to explore the economic and social implications of the recession in terms of processes as diverse as cross-border development, farming knowledges, food movements, and the evolution of traditional Irish music. Observations on the overarching theme of 'change' run through the case studies and topics addressed in this collection, which are also attentive to the relationships between space, place, landscape, identity and society.

In both historical phases – boom and bust – the modernisation of Irish society during the Celtic Tiger and its subsequent demise was a 'spatial drama' involving transformation in the material landscape and the imaginative representation of the island. Fuelled by what the progressive Irish think-thank TASC has characterised as the Dublin Consensus – a mix of neoliberal and entrepreneurial discourses that consistently denied growing inequality and social exclusion – the Tiger years were read as the 'best of times' (Fahey, Russell and Whelan, 2007; Jacobson, Kirby and Ó Broin, 2006). The Celtic Tiger was very successful at generating a coherent image of Ireland in absolute terms – the most globalised, the most successful, and so forth. These sentiments were represented in portrayals of Ireland as a knowledge economy that emphasised the liberating capacity of information and communication technology (ICT), particularly from the constraints of geography. In the

archive of the boom-time, there is an interview in *Business Week* with one key figure in the Celtic Tiger story, Mary Harney, the leader of the now defunct right-of-centre political party the Progressive Democrats and then Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, where she was depicted as a New European. She remembered 'her country in the 1980s as an inward-looking place, locked into age-old doctrines and rivalries' (Baker, 1999). She concluded that to deal with the challenges of globalisation, '[g]eography has to be irrelevant'. With this vision came new depictions of Ireland on the global stage.

On the cover of Harney's 1999 Asia Strategy Group report (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 1999), Ireland is depicted floating in the South China Sea. In this image of the island liberated from geography, Ireland is shown connected to the global cities of Beijing, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore and Tokyo. The fantastical map mirrors the notion of the space of flows that became the signature of power and spatial organisation under neo-liberal forms of globalisation (Castells, 1996). This type of geographical spectacle was a sign of the times and reflected new sentiments and perspectives created in Ireland in the face of material transformation of place and economy. The reconfiguration of the Irish geographical imaginary ran concurrent with new experiences of time and space in Europe and the world: the vibrant juxtaposition of near and far reflected in ICT, new modes of working and travel, and the rapid rise in the influx of migrants and international corporations. Spatial transformation occurred so quickly that debates abounded about how the progression 'has also been a process of estrangement. Home has become as unfamiliar as abroad' (O'Toole, 1997: 173).

The geographies of boom and bust mark the landscape. The boom is represented in the spectacles of construction and motorway expansion, the housing bubble, and the significant regeneration and transformation of the built environment and public space. The bust is represented in ghost estates, zombie hotels, half-empty trophy airport terminals, vacated retail units and the cars of emigrants for sale along country roads. These transformations have had innumerable local impacts with both positive and negative legacies. In Cork city, the Docklands became a place where certain visions of a 'New Cork' coalesced. Planners and speculators were inspired to imagine a cosmopolitan post-industrial future: a Docklands of Desire. An addictive cocktail of urban boosterism and commercial

speculation coveted the land for waterfront living, new-generation office space, luxury apartments, spa hotels, concert venues and exhibition halls. These visions were moored to the passions of the Celtic Tiger. However, as is the case in so many places around Ireland following the crash, this is a vision that lies in tatters. On YouTube, a low-resolution film of the €1 billion Atlantic Quarter project proposed for the docks is amongst the lasting echoes of the boom.[3] This computer-animated film of 'Cork's passport to the future' begins with a journey into outer space, where the viewer orbits the Earth for five years and then returns through the atmosphere to Europe, then Ireland and finally to Cork in 2013 to witness the arrival of two towers designed by Norman Foster, surrounded by a new quarter of hotels, exhibition centres and even more apartments. A close look at the towers reveals a waterfall plunging from the rooftops. Like the apparitions of the Virgin Mary that periodically appear in the Irish countryside, this vision of cosmopolitan and extra-modern progress was a symptom of the transient grip on reality that typified so many boom-time plans.

In light of the innumerable interventions that characterise the transformation of Ireland over the last two decades, to interrogate questions of 'space' and 'place' offers a wealth of opportunities to understand the nature of major social, cultural and economic change in contemporary Ireland. *Spacing Ireland* recognises how the events of the last twenty years or so reshaped Irish society, unravelled its ethnic and cultural homogeneity, and restructured the links between different parts of Ireland to one another and the relationships that Ireland has with Europe and the rest of the world. Transformations in Ireland came into being through the political and cultural contingencies of place, the nation and the global. These forged new relationships to place, new forms of settlement, and new ways of moving around. As considered in this collection, the chapters reveal the struggles and terrains of modernisation. Place became a site of consumption, performance and circulation – one shaped by concerns about transformation and the political contexts of corruption, environment, planning and quality of life. The profound restructuring of senses of place and cultural location was not unique to Ireland. These are phenomena found in all rapidly modernising societies. Its uniqueness revolved around how transformations were interpreted through the plasma of existing histories and identities. Given these conditions, geographical perspectives are well placed to comment on recent times.

In *Spacing Ireland*, the contributors share a common concern for space and, embedded in their special area of interest, each registers the spatial signature of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath to varying degrees. The diversity of the topics addressed in the collection and the plurality of spaces they represent are an essential part of the book's appeal. Ireland is a turbulent place. It is fruitful to consider the contemporary geographies of the island through the various and multiple forms where change is expressed. Given, as noted by Law and Urry (2004: 390), that 'in the twenty-first century … social relations appear increasingly complex, elusive, ephemeral, and unpredictable', a broken line of flight through contemporary Ireland, as represented in the diverse urban and rural contexts considered in the collection, seems an appropriate strategy.

In bringing these discussions to the page, we seek to avoid a sense of exceptionalism and singularity. While the impacts of the recession have been profound, these kinds of impacts are neither unique to Ireland nor to this historical period. Like other countries caught up in the maelstrom of globalisation over the years, Irish society was obliged to negotiate a rolling and multi-scalar process of restructuring that re-engineered the social context of everyday life, altered the nature of work, and challenged closely held notions of identity and ontological security. Consequently, we expect that the material addressed in *Spacing Ireland* has some purchase in comparative contexts. Nor have we worked on the premise that one version of Ireland ceased and another took over once the boom stopped. Long-term and deeper structural changes, continuities and legacies reverberate through these times. As such, elements of the collection insist on the significance of rootedness and continuity in the ways that space, economy and society are organised in Ireland. In acknowledging these issues, the collection provides a kind of antidote to the post-crash literature in Ireland and to the superficial views of Ireland often expressed in the commentary pages of the *New York Times* or *Der Spiegel.* Ireland from afar may well look like a laboratory for globalisation and its disasters but it is not simply that, as attention to place always reveals.

As editors, our concern when putting the collection together was to identify authors who could explore the intersections between everyday life and global exchanges through the contexts of the 'stuff' and banalities of contemporary everyday encounters: food,

housing, leisure, migration, music, shopping, travel and work. These are the multiple layers of space we now inhabit. In all of these areas, the unstable socio-spatial relations forged in this epoch that framed the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger have produced more complex relations between the individual, space and society (Sonnabend, 2003). These realities have arisen because of globalisation, because of information technology, and the intensification and increased complexity of social and cultural mobility. In *Spacing Ireland*, we interrogate the social and cultural dynamic of life against the background of these experiences. We argue that these fluid social and cultural geographies provide rich insights, sometime overlooked in systematic reviews that tend to emphasise economistic and prognostic readings of Ireland.

The thematic focus on spatiality moves beyond common-sense notions of geography as fixed, as still, to a version of social and cultural geography that appeals to the infinite connection of places while simultaneously cherishing their singularity (Solnit, 2011). The epoch of conceiving the entire spatial emplacement of Irish social life in the parish, the county or the nation has come to an end. Our conceptualisation of space has shifted from localisation to the space of relations (Massey, 2005). Some of the impacts and experiences of the spatial dramas of contemporary Ireland can be grasped conceptually within new directions in human geography that have animated the interpretative frameworks through which place and society are understood. In particular, the rise of relational geography has unravelled the view of place as a discrete spatial unit by emphasising how people and processes are continuously entangled in powerful undulating spheres of influence and connections (Amin, 2004; Massey, 2005). Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 203) ask us to consider 'a map that … is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits'.

Place remains a powerful mode of experience and encounter, and its historical legacies will always shape the present. But geographers have also demonstrated that place becomes constituted through multi-directional relationships that can override the boundaries of the nation state (Marston, Jones and Woodward, 2005). The congruence of spatial theory and lived reality remain at our fingertips. Migrants, emigrants and those who stay behind use email, social networking sites, Skype, online chatting platforms and mobile

phones to connect across time zones and distant sites. These spatial propositions –
theoretical and empirical – that run through the collection, encourage the reader to grasp
how the geographies of Ireland are changed or changing. The book is divided into three
parts that work through well-established concepts such as belonging, mobility, space,
consumption, culture and place, but in innovative ways that fragment well-worn
categorisations and present a rich substrate for novel geographical thinking and analysis.

Part I: Spacing belonging

In Part I, the collection explores the revolving intersections of identity politics with place. In
the opening chapter, 'Ghost estates: spaces and spectres of Ireland after NAMA' (National
Asset Management Agency), Cian O'Callaghan interprets the now iconic ghost estates of
half-finished and empty houses that litter the Irish landscape and have become a symbol of
the abandoned excess of the Celtic Tiger. The geography of such estates charts the fevered
speculation, uneven development, and unsustainable commuting and consumption patterns
of the boom while the stark hauntology of these post-crash spaces confronts its values. This
chapter tracks the discovery of the ghost estate and the ways in which it has been
implicated in debates about the Irish economic crash, complicating ideas of home and
community. The chapter shows how the spatialities of the ghost estate extend beyond
bricks and mortar to range into a whole imaginary composed of narratives of loss, rage and,
surprisingly, hope.

In Chapter 2, ''Of course I'm not Irish'': Young people in migrant worker families in
Ireland', Naomi Tyrrell shifts the focus to immigration, a rather novel phenomenon for Irish
society experienced during the second half of the boom, following the accession of new EU
member states in 2004. She explores the precarity of migrant families and the impact this
has on the lives of '1.5 generation' teenagers, particularly in the context of the recent
recession. Rather than aligning with the migrant/non-migrant binary, differences within the
migrant youth category are highlighted, and rather than concentrating on their national
affiliations, the local socio-spatial practices of youth migrants together with reflections on
social integration are explored. She discusses how their own reflections on social integration

relate to their intentions to remain in Ireland, return to their 'home' country or migrate to a new destination.

Sally Daly picks up on the theme of Ireland's new migrants to query other manifestations of place, experience and identity in the context of horticultural production in Chapter 3, 'Migrants in the fields: making work pay'. Public discourse and policy debates on immigration highlight the role of migrants in filling labour and skill shortages, especially in those jobs that grew increasingly unattractive to Irish workers during the boom. Drawing upon her ethnographic research into horticulture, an increasingly specialised and technologized agricultural sub-sector notorious for its long hours and physically arduous work, Daly reveals how uneven production within horticulture, aligned with changes to state welfare provisions, affects migrant workers and their families. Even with post-Celtic Tiger Ireland's rising unemployment rates, horticulture remains contingent on the availability of migrant labour. But the impermanent nature of horticultural production has direct implications for the reproduction and integrity of transnational families and Daly's work uncovers some of the human cost of locally produced food in contemporary Ireland.

In Chapter 4, 'Raising the emerald curtain: communities and collaboration along the Irish border', Caroline Creamer and Brendan O'Keeffe turn the spotlight on Ireland's own international border where migration is a daily routine. They critique EU, British and Irish policies that have sought to improve crossborder connections and to address long-standing fractures in social networks and natural trading hinterlands in a bid to sustain rural communities. They argue that in spite of the 1998 Belfast Agreement, the Celtic Tiger boom, and the shift in perception of the border from fraught barrier to site for collaborative action, the area continues to be characterised by underlying structural problems including peripherality and high unemployment. Their case studies reveal the disconnect between the short-term nature of funding programmes on which local economic development along the Irish border depends and the lived realities of its communities.

Part II: Mobility, space and consumption

In Part II, the contributors turn their attention to questions of mobility and consumption in urban and rural contexts. Denis Linehan brings these themes together in Chapter 5, 'Reading the Irish motorway: landscape, mobility and politics after the crash', where he presents a reading of the new Irish motorway network as a contested space at the heart of discourses of the boom and its subsequent bust. As the Celtic Tiger's workers and socialites pulsed along them, these arteries challenged notions of progress and heritage, drawing on symbols of mythology to legitimate the social and environmental change they wrought. In the current period of recession and 'peak oil', the Irish motorway network may symbolise little more than a fruitless act of political and economic hubris.

In Chapter 6, 'Lone parents, leisure mobilities and the everyday', Bernadette Quinn regrounds the discussion with a look at the challenges of one marginal societal group and their space in contemporary Ireland. Her chapter is concerned with lifestyle and quality-of-life issues, particularly with the role of free time, leisure and holidaying in the lives of lone parents during the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath. As the majority of lone-parent families in Ireland are headed up by women, the study investigates the spatiality of leisure by exploring how the spaces of the home and local environments variously facilitate and limit lone mothers' mobility and engagement in leisure activities. It shows how women develop new understandings of space through engagement with leisure and establish strategies for countering the weight of constraints routinely faced in the course of their everyday lives.

Everyday urban space is the topic addressed by Philip Lawton's work on urban policy. In Chapter 7, 'Rethinking the liveable city in a post boom-time Ireland', Lawton examines the limitations of recent planning policy and practice in Ireland, which envisions urban space as the nexus of unproblematic interaction and the 'good life'. In so doing, he addresses the perceived connections between the pursuit of an imagined social reality on the one hand, and the unlimited urban expansion and redevelopment that was at the core of the property boom on the other. He also imagines a role for NAMA in reorientating the Celtic Tiger view of land use and development away from private gain and towards the public good.

The tensions between private gain and public good also come to our attention in Sara McDowell's contribution. Chapter 8, 'Flocking north: renegotiating the Irish border' shows how the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger has impacted on the everyday geographies of people living on both sides of the Irish border. This chapter explores the ways in which the Republic of Ireland's changing economic fortunes has influenced how people conceptualise and negotiate a political border that has become increasingly permeable. These have occasioned new patterns of consumption with more and more 'euro shoppers' flocking north to avail of cheaper goods. McDowell reveals how the malleability of the boundary with Northern Ireland has arguably exposed the delicate nature of the island's political geography.

Consumption is at the heart of Aisling Murtagh's Chapter 9, 'Growth amidst decline: Ireland's grassroots food growing movement'. She evaluates the rise of community gardens in Ireland, and more recent adaptations of the 'grow your own' movement, such as a new demand for allotments. While many in society moved in sync with the Celtic Tiger economy, some questioned its sustainability and, at the grassroots level, micro-spaces of an alternative society at odds with the dominant model of economic development emerged, including new spaces for food growing. As boom turned to bust, interest in these growers and their growing spaces appeared to ripple out across society. Murtagh asks if these 'spaces of hope' can go beyond their early populism and mature to something more than just an alternative.

Part III: Culture and place

In Part III, the collection explores diverse cultural practices and some longstanding representations of Ireland. In Chapter 10, 'Ancestors in the field: Irish farming knowledges', Caroline Crowley looks at knowledge in agriculture, a key indigenous industry. Not only does the agricultural sector have a significant role to play in Ireland's economic recovery from recession but success seems to call for a flexible and entrepreneurial approach to innovation among farmers. The chapter considers the limitations imposed on this role by existing farming knowledge cultures/networks and the hegemony of productivism, and suggests the

role of knowledge mediators in the re-embedding of knowledge creation and knowledge use in place.

Ronan Foley looks at the rise of the spa during the boom in Chapter 11, 'Health and wellness or conspicuous consumption? The spa in Celtic Tiger Ireland'. Spas are interesting sites in that they can simultaneously comprise contradictory spaces of reflective mindfulness and striking excess. The impact of the Celtic Tiger is reflected in the ways in which health and cultural performances were re-commodified within the modern spa space as luxurious and pampered spaces. While performances of health at the spa have always been a mix of the curative and the social, with the downturn, health-based narratives appear to have been rediscovered.

In Chapter 12, 'Traditional music here tonight: exploring the session space', Daithí Kearney takes the reader on an autobiographical tour of the pub session. Through this novel filter, as well as taking a look at the evolution of traditional music itself during the Celtic Tiger years especially, the chapter also explores concepts of identity and tradition in a changing Ireland. It considers the complex relationship between music and the economy, a link that is central to the geography of Irish traditional music. With a new-found appreciation for the value of 'culture' in healing Ireland's damaged image internationally, the downturn offers a new opportunity for Irish traditional music to develop in response to the political and economic environment.

Patrick Duffy, in Chapter 13, 'Through American eyes: a hundred years of Ireland in *National Geographic* magazine', concludes the collection with a chronicle of feature articles on Ireland since 1915 and its representation as an exotic other on the edge of Europe. From newly independent state in the 1920s, whose past was embedded in American experience through immigration, the contrast between American material living standards and the pre-electric Irish countryside up to the 1950s permeated the *National Geographic*'s (NG) commentary on Ireland. Even during the brash years of the Celtic Tiger, NG's representations of Irish landscape and society frequently reached back to its earlier lyrical imagery of a laid-back, misty isle. The recession, as well as a perceptible reassessment of

cultural values at home, will likely facilitate a reprise of NG's more enduring images of a timeless Ireland in the future.

Hubris, Crisis, Regeneration – like characters from some epic poem who roam the land in search of absolution, debates on these grand themes and their daily expression in the twists and turns of their cousin Austerity occupy the current Irish imagination. All have their own geographies mediated by an increasingly turbulent politics and culture that shift across time and space. One day, the EU has our fate in its hands, the next day, the outcome of a general election far away multiplies our concerns. As Captain Boyle laments in Seán O'Casey's 1924 play, *Juno and the Paycock,* it seems 'th' whole world's in a terrible state o' chassis'. In holding such things to account, and linking their impact to the ordinaries of everyday life, we have aimed in this collection to supply new lines of thought and to open up effective ways of interpreting the ongoing transformation of people, place and landscape. Nobody doubts the grave challenges facing contemporary Irish society, not just in terms of economic recovery but also finding the politics needed to create a just society and a country that has the integrity to know who it is and what it means. Perhaps fragments of the answers – shards of hope – are to be found in *Spacing Ireland*.

Notes

1   Head shops, selling drug paraphernalia and 'legal highs', began to open up around the country after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger.
2   A follow-up to the inaugural forum in 2009 and the subsequent establishment of the Global Irish Network that calls on the experiences and imaginations of the Irish diaspora as well as those of people at home and abroad with an interest in Irish affairs and the future of its economy (see www.globalirishforum.ie/.
3   See www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyK6r5YpiKo.

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