Title	Ireland, China, Belgium, Finland: brokentalkers and the transnational connectivities of post-Celtic Tiger Irish performance
Author(s)	McIvor, Charlotte
Publication Date	2015
Publication Information	Charlotte McIvor (2015) 'Ireland, China, Belgium, Finland: Brokentalkers and the Transnational Connectivities of Post-Celtic Tiger Irish Performance' In: Experimental and Unconventional Irish Drama since the Revival. Brill
Publisher	Brill
Link to publisher's version	http://www.brill.com/products/book/beyond-realism
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/5818

Ireland, China, Belgium, Finland:

Brokentalkers and the Transnational Connectivities of Post-Celtic Tiger Performance

Charlotte McIvor

This chapter explores Dublin-based theatre company Brokentalkers' focus on the role of transnational networks in the future of the Irish arts through a close-reading of their performances, *In Real Time* and *Track*. *In Real Time* and *Track* ultimately present two overlapping stories of the role of the transnational in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland [1]. *In Real Time* animates European networks via an act of artistic collaboration, while *Track* stages an encounter with Dublin that brings participants on an exploration of the City Centre through the perspective of the Chinese community, both long-term residents and recent arrivals, living in Ireland. *In Real Time* literally enacts an inter-EU network physically manifested through actors' live and virtual bodies in theatrical time and space. *Track* challenges discourses of Irish nationalism and forces recognition of transnational networks of migrants in Ireland that reach outside the space of the nation and the EU.

Brokentalkers' work thus insists on transnational connectivities as the future of innovation in the Irish arts. They work against mainstream formalistic approaches to Irish theatre by heavily relying on media and employ non-realist performance aesthetics that reject notions of Irishness as a discrete or representative artistic discourse or even as the literal geographical site of innovation for their work. As Gary Keegan, one of Brokentalkers' co-founders, puts it, 'I don't necessarily feel that the work always has to originate in Ireland .... For us, we're trying to build an international profile. That's the ultimate ambition' (Crawley, 'Fleeting connections and sauna diplomacy'). Many contemporary Irish playwrights and companies such as 'Barabbas ... the company, Blue Raincoat, Charabanc, Corcadorca, Corn

Exchange, Fabulous Beast, Fishamble, Gúna Nua, Loose Canon, Macnas, Prime Cut, Pan-Pan, Performance Corporation, Red Kettle, Tall Tales and Tinderbox' create work that is, like that of Brokentalkers, often 'radically different from the primarily text-based tradition' (Jordan, p. 4). Companies like THISISPOPBABY and Calipo feature film and other media made expressly as part of the new work, in addition to experimenting with new performance environments such as THISISPOPBABY's presentation of their work in 'a performance, art and electropop space at the Electric Picnic Music Festival' (THISISPOPBABY, 'About Us'). Brokentalkers are ultimately distinguished from their contemporaries by their careful attention to not only stylistic and formal innovation through their rejection of text-based theatre and use of new media in performance or their cultivation of an international audience and set of collaborators, but also by their literal and thematic treatment of the interplay between the international and the intercultural in contemporary Ireland.

In Real Time engages themes of 'distance and the illusion of proximity afforded by technology' in order to question the intimacy that can be shared between two actors joined by 'real time' but separated by physical and cultural distance. The first productions of this piece in 2008 and 2009 at the Dublin Docklands Authority and Project Arts Centre in Dublin featured a rotating cast of Irish actors performing live with Flemish actress Dolores Bouckaert present via broadband in Ghent, Belgium, and projected onto a large screen in the center of the stage. [Figure 1] *In Real Time*'s most recent incarnations brought Brokentalkers to the 2009 Noorderzon festival in Groningen, Netherlands, and the 2010 Tampere Theatre Festival in Finland along with another Brokentalkers piece, *Silver Stars.* In the 2009 and 2010 productions, the live performers were Dutch and Finnish, again communicating with Ireland via broadband. While *In Real Time* was presented in English at the Tampere Festival, the Noorderzon festival performance was presented in Dutch.[2]

[Figure 1 near here]

Figure 1
Publicity shot for *In Real Time* featuring actress Dolores Bouckaert
Image: Brokentalkers

Track remaps Dublin City Centre from the perspective of Chinese-Irish migrants whose presence disrupts clichéd expectations of Irishness and forces recognition of other narratives hidden behind familiar landmarks of the city. The piece is conceived as a walking tour: audience members depart in a group and experience the audio elements of the performance as well as directions for their own movement through city space by way of an MP3 player [Figure 2]. Live performers dart in and out of the group's path, staging scenes and vignettes, as a way of inviting questions as to what is a planned part of the performance and what just happens as daily life in the performance's path. *Track* premiered in 2006 as part of the We Are Here Festival in Dublin, returning in 2008 as part of the inaugural Dublin Chinese New Year's Festival [3].

[Figure 2 near here]

Figure 2
Audience members and *Track* performer Shidan Yu on O'Connell Street during 2008
performance.
Image: Brokentalkers

The Chinese-Irish and European collaborators on these projects call into question the 'Irish' in Irish performance and highlight the role of transnational connectivities in everyday Irish life. Following Inderpal Grewal, I use connectivities here to express that 'transnational connections ... produce groups, identities, nationalisms; [and] that the power of many discourses to be understood, translated, used in a variety of sites means that subjects become constituted and connected through ... new technologies and rationalities' (Grewal, *Transnational America,* p.23). The 'subjects constituted and connected through ... new technologies' in Brokentalkers' pieces, however, are not stable, and the actors' performances here call attention to the fragile nature of transnational connections easily broken or passed by in the midst of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland's economic and social uncertainties. *In Real Time* and *Track* break through the walls of the theatre into other physical and virtual spaces in

order to represent Irish performance and society as formations undergoing constant change driven not only by national but rather transnational pressures. Binaries such as mediated versus physical presence, the individual and the crowd, and Ireland and the rest of the world are continually collapsed through their work in order to demonstrate the porousness of these categories in the wake of contemporary technologies and the volatile state of the global economic market. Brokentalkers stage a post-Celtic Ireland whose future is increasingly linked into transnational networks, whether through economic investments, initiatives for cultural integration between EU member states, or the movement of migrants and emigrants in and out of Ireland.

Brokentalkers was formed by artistic co-directors Gary Keegan and Feidlim Cannon in the hopes of 'creat[ing] new, innovative and accessible live performance' ('About Us'). Their name, Keegan explains, 'is from a Native American story about two tribes who live next to each other....They speak the same language ... but one tribe speaks it differently, so the others call them brokentalkers' (Read, 'Two actors, two venues, one show'). Keegan's anecdote encapsulates Brokentalkers' orientation within the contemporary Irish theatre. Their work obviously challenges 'traditional ideologies of text-based theatre' ('About Us') within Ireland by presenting non-realist works that draw on a variety of performance mediums and media. Yet, Keegan's reference to different 'tribes' living next to each other in a shared space not only points to the formal and stylistic differences of their work, but also hints at the fragmented nature of post-Celtic Tiger Irish society more generally. Increased racial and ethnic diversity, the constantly shrinking power of the Catholic Church, the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, and the social and cultural impact of the Celtic Tiger's rise and fall have challenged not only the meaning of Irishness, but the very fabric of Irish society. As Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin argue, '... the emergence of informational capitalism and Ireland's semi-peripheral integration into it bring to the fore a cultural

discourse prioritising individualism, entrepreneurship, mobility, flexibility, innovation, competitiveness both as personal attributes to be cultivated by the individual ... and as dominant social values. These displace earlier discourses prioritising national development, national identity, family, self-sacrifice, self-sufficiency and nationalism' ('Introduction: A Critical Perspective,' p. 13). Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin portray a shift during the Celtic Tiger from the collective to the individual constituting the unit by which to measure the strength of the Irish nation. They see his shift occurring as a result of the increasing influence of the ideological underpinnings of free-market neoliberal capitalism but also developing through social practice in the Celtic Tiger Era where '[f]rom the prurient focus on celebrities of the scandal sheets to the relentless narcissism of the quality press ... and the soap-box quixoticism of talk radio, problems are individualised, de-contextualized and sensationalized' (p. 8). Thus, when Keegan refers to 'tribes' in contemporary Ireland being unable to communicate with one another, this statement does not simply connote an argument about young theatrical innovators pitting themselves against a staid and homogenous theatrical establishment, but evokes a wider alienation of individuals and groups in Irish society that has been attributed to the social influence of the Celtic Tiger period. This alienation manifests itself as nascent tension between growing minority and majority ethnic communities, unprecedented expansion of the Irish prison system (p.9), and the consequences of mounting economic inequality during the boom, among other examples. The mission of Brokentalkers thus speaks to a perceived failure of community *and* communication in contemporary Ireland, in and outside the theatre.

Keegan's and Cannon's work has been mounted in a variety of spaces ranging from Dublin city streets to galleries to the internet. They have directed dance-theatre pieces in partnership with Junk Ensemble, created the internationally acclaimed *Silver Stars*, which tells the story of Irish gay men with a cast of largely amateur actors, and partnered

extensively with the Dublin Youth Theatre. This wide range of artistic collaborators testifies to Brokentalkers' interdisciplinary methods for creating work, but it also demonstrates Keegan's and Cannon's commitment to Irish theatrical practice as an enterprise not only aimed at diverse audiences but open to substantial participation from collaborators who represent minority, disadvantaged or non-professional constituencies. This inclusiveness amounts to an insistence that their collaborators are central to the future of Irish theatre and works against systems of prestige in the professional Irish theatre scene. While increasingly diverse numbers of companies, styles and approaches to making work have been introduced especially since the mid-1990s, it remains true that funding, critical acclaim and scholarly energy are most frequently directed towards the work mounted at mainstream venues such as the Abbey and Druid. This is not to argue that these companies do not produce work that is challenging, innovative and questions the inclusiveness of Irish society, theatrical or otherwise. Indeed, they do, and the amount of funding and scholarly attention received is a clear reflection of the infrastructure available to support large-scale production projects and the consistent quality of their work. However, Brokentalkers' range of artistic partnerships and their focus on social issues such as homophobia and the place of minority communities in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland insists that theatre be an art through which Irish artistic and social hierarchies are not only occasionally called into question but continually negotiated through experimenting with who gets to tell their stories onstage, how and where. Keegan and Cannon push stereotypical conventions of Irish theatre to their breaking point by mixing genres, prioritizing media literacy over the literary, adopting a collaborative approach towards writing, working with amateurs on professional stages and actively deconstructing narratives at the center of the Irish theatre canon. It may be asked whether the work of Brokentalkers can even be considered 'Irish' theatre, due to their conscious and vocal objection to Irish theatrical conventions as well as literary and thematic tropes. Crawley has

argued in relation to the presentation at the Tampere Festival in Finland of *In Real Time* alongside Power Corporation that 'the work of both companies unsettled any easy notions of identity, with Irish work that seemed more elastic than any national boundary' (Crawley, 'Fleeting connections and sauna diplomacy'). Their output, however, demonstrates a conscious and even reactionary engagement with the very productions that they reject as representative of Irish theatre and life. As a case in point, their first planned performance at Dublin's Project Arts Centre was a deconstruction of Brian Friel's seminal play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in Winter 2001. This production featured, among other adjustments, Keegan 'tearing out the pages of the script and eating them, until [he] vomited' (Read). After the script was sent to Friel's agent by the Project's solicitor, Brokentalkers' production was not allowed to move forward. [4]

Not surprisingly, limited treatment of the group's work thus far has focused predominantly on their rejection of the Irish text-based literary theatre. However, in this respect, their work suggests affinities with the very authors that they reject, including Friel and most other authors in the modern Irish dramatic canon, who have consistently played with the limits of language and text. Their work with media, however, begins to push their textual experimentation into newer territory for Irish theatre and performance. Brokentalkers' use of media by way of their rejection of textual literary conventions has consistently forced a confrontation with the role of transnationalism as constitutive of Irish performance. Their work engages the transnational as Keegan and Cannon strive to '... put together shows that can tour internationally, that are appropriate and adaptable to any city in the world, any festival' ('Brokentalkers') in addition to 'tracking' the lives of minority communities within Ireland. Brokentalkers insist on an immediate connection between their work and a Dublin that 'changes on a week by week basis. The country is in a real state of transition and that transition is kind of fast. You'll notice something about Dublin that is very different than the

way that it was the week before' ('Brokentalkers'). Their rejection of coherent or linear story lines with *In Real Time* and *Track* embodies this state of constant change by exploring and performing new and unpredictable encounters that invite multiple perspectives on their meaning as well as directly involving audience members in creating these moments through various modes of audience participation as constitutive elements of the performances. By turning to the performances themselves, it is possible to chart how Brokentalkers articulates a relationship among theatrical form, experience and venue that places the transnational at the center of visions for the future of 'Irish' performance.

Keegan and Cannon created *In Real Time* out of a fundamental distrust of the seduction of technology and the opportunities for intimacy it presents by seeming to put people in constant contact even when they are separated by great distances. Keegan insists, 'The interface with the technology is not a substitute for immediacy ... that's what got us going' (Read). Dolores Bouckaert, the Flemish actress with whom Cannon and Keegan collaborated on the first two mountings of the piece in 2008 and 2009, chides the audience at the end of the piece: 'You can all feel each other.... I don't feel a part of this. I can't feel anything. It feels wrong. I feel cold.' [5] *In Real Time* flirts with a fetishization of liveness, mourning Bouckaert's distance by compensating with other performative gimmicks that aim to make up for her absence by enhancing other 'live' aspects of the event. The audience learns that Dolores has never met or rehearsed with the other actor in the piece, does not know her colleagues' gender before they come onstage, and will be directing their every movement and feeding them their lines. The performance happens literally 'in real time,' an unrehearsed live performance dependent not only on the performer on stage and screen, but on continuous verbal responses from the audience cued by a screen onstage, and on an audience member coming forward to pull the plug on the connection with Dolores to end the piece.

This performance, however, escapes being a nostalgic lament for physical presence that blames the failure of mediatized contemporary connectivities for melancholic experiences of dislocation. *In Real Time* rather problematizes Brokentalkers' original assertion that distance can never be a substitute for proximity, that 'there' can never attain the status of 'here' through multiple moments of theatrical transcendence. At the start of the piece in its January 2009 run at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, a performer with a mic pack miraculously appears on a large white X on the stage, her 'actor-ness' chafing against Dolores' performance of everyday life seated at a table in her own home (though obviously with the theatrical frame of the camera around it). Within seconds, through filmic images on the screen (maps, a model of a city street), narration, and a love scene between Dolores and another female actor, the Dublin actor (also referred to as Dolores during introductions) is pulled into re-enacting the story of Dolores' loss of 'the one she loves the most.'

This love scene was the first high point of affect in the piece, and came as an exquisite surprise in a piece that started off as clinically experimental. A projected text asks the audience to consider their position as spectators in the theatre and participants in the theatrical event in a manner reminiscent of Austrian playwright Peter Handke's 1966 *Offending the Audience*, an unacknowledged but unmistakable influence [6]. Yet, with the love scene, *In Real Time* began to develop here into quite something else. The elegiac beauty of the actors connecting across the distance by miming physical touch at the edge of Dolores's screen is doubly or triply mediated for the audience. But the connection between the two actors, even if only physically embodied at the level of action, works to stir its audience through stage tricks that mimick romantic rituals and speeches recounting emotional experiences of loss and longing. The actor playing Dolores in Dublin that evening delivered a rose through a hole that Dolores then pulled from the back of her television in Ghent and the audience let out a collective gasp. A screen within a screen within a screen, the theatrical

machinery is well exposed, but it does not matter. Buoyed by moments like this, Dolores'

presence through absence becomes not a performance of theatrical and personal loss, but a

possibility that does not point to an either/or assessment of the quality of physical versus

virtual presence. Rather, *In Real Time* activates what emerges *between* the actual and the

virtual. In the words of Handke regarding his own *Offending the Audience,* Brokentalkers

effectively 'use the theatre to protest against the theatre of the moment' (Joseph, Handke, and

Ashton, p. 58) by staging alternative models of experiencing narrative and theatrical presence

in the space of the theatre itself.

Keegan and Cannon reference the inspiration for this performance as deriving from

their childhood experiences of waiting for audio tapes from family members who had

emigrated. They muse: 'I remember as recently as the 1980s when most of my family were

in Australia they would make tapes of their voices and we would wait for these tapes.... There

was more anticipation on receiving one of those than any movie or any event I can remember

as a child' (qtd. in Tuck, p.122). Their citation of contemporary Irish emigrant histories of

family members working and living in Australia links the past, present and future of Irish-

born emigrants with new migrants in Ireland who crowd internet cafes 'full of people from

somewhere else who are making connections using Skype or email sending messages back

home' (Tuck, p.122). They criticize, however, the acceleration of technology and its

implications for the depth of emotional connections over distances:

> ... we are living in a world of instant gratification or instant satisfaction.... The
>
> anticipation is no longer there and I think people take less care perhaps about what
>
> they write in an email than they would if they hand wrote a letter or if they were to sit
>
> down and record a tape.... What we are trying to discuss is the ultimate shortcoming,
>
> that it is not the same as actually just being in the same space (Tuck, p. 123).

Their criticism of the potential of technology to further and continue relationships is surprising given what their performance of *In Real Time* has accomplished for them in practice as a company – they have been able to travel throughout Europe and work directly with several international collaborators. Furthermore, their fetishization of letter writing in particular seems to favor a 'text-based ideology' not unlike the one they reject in terms of theatrical practice. Likewise, their love affair with the tape is strangely reminiscent of Krapp's in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape,* summoning an image of Irish theatrical canonicity even while in the act of dismissing it. Yet, while Keegan and Cannon may cling stubbornly to the superiority of physical presence in shared space, *In Real Time* still insists through performance that other modes of presence and participation not be left unexplored. A complete rejection of media and the digital would mean foregoing the chance to theorize the mediatized connectivities that characterize daily life and longing in internet cafes lining every Dublin street and that stretch back through Irish emigrant histories in various digital and analogue forms. These Skype chats and furious sessions of text or instant messaging animate the frequently transnational networks that link migrant communities to their families and loved ones abroad in places many still regard as home. The weakness or strength of these connectivities as accessed through technological means remains an open question but *In Real Time* should be viewed ultimately as a provocation rather than condemnation regarding technological intimacy.

     Track takes a different approach to questions of intimacy by interrogating individual identity in public space. The performance stages an encounter with Dublin that questions who controls shared memories of the City Centre and how memories of public space construct the boundaries of Irish national belonging. After all, Dublin is not only the capital of Ireland, but holds architecture closely associated with the fight for Irish independence in the early

twentieth century, such as Dublin Castle, the past center of British administration in Ireland, and the General Post Office, whose walls preserve material traces of that fight in the shape of bullet holes from the Easter Rising. An older Chinese male narrator lays claim to reimagining these histories as the group turns onto O'Connell Street, when he asks them to avert their eyes from Daniel O'Connell's looming form and directs their attention instead towards the angels dancing around O'Connell's feet. This act of refocusing attention from the Great Liberator to what is going on beneath his feet points towards perspectives literally hidden below and underneath nationalist symbols.

The 2008 remounting of *Track* in the context of the inaugural Chinese New Year's Festival positions the performance as part of an attempt to integrate the Chinese-Irish community into the rhythm of Dublin's yearly calendar and acknowledge their contributions to Irish society. While the experiences of *Track's* Chinese narrators as those made strange in a (perhaps) strange land can map onto the other experiences of minority communities in Ireland today, the focus on their experience in fact registers that diversity is not new to Ireland. The Chinese community, a well-established minority group that arrived in the Republic and the North of Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s ('The Chinese Community in Ireland'), defies claims of Ireland's status as a monoculture prior to the mid-1990s [7].

Track thus intentionally draws attention to the hidden histories and futures of the Chinese community in Ireland. In the midst of the performance, a young Chinese woman in a red raincoat darts through the crowd. Told to look for her through the recorded narration on their MP3s, the audience follows her through the streets, never catching up to her as she releases red balloons into the sky along the way, briefly accompanied by music played on a violin by another Chinese woman in a raincoat [Figure 3]. The group follows her to no avail and finally arrives at a Chinese restaurant to share a meal. The young Chinese woman performs as a symbol of interruption posed against the urban landscape, differentiated from

265

the crowds and architecture around her through the visual assertiveness of her form in the shiny red raincoat. The red obviously references the color of the Chinese flag and ostentatiously marks her difference against the grey landmarks of City Centre. The chromatic overload of the actor's body transforms her into a walking metaphor for the hyper-visibility of minority groups in Ireland, yet the distance between her and the audience chasing her through the streets performs the isolation of those positioned on the margins of Irish society.

[Figure 3 near here]

Figure 3
Publicity still for *Track*
(Image: Brokentalkers)

Nevertheless, the young female narrator's story is not one of a suddenly new and strange Ireland of which she is an alienated representative. The journey on which *Track* leads the audience asks them to reconsider the steps they are taking at each moment and to think about what alternative paths through the city have been neglected through complacency. The long and marginalized history of the Chinese in Dublin becomes representative of these

missed opportunities and an invitation to consider the groundwork laid in preparation for more contemporary engagements with the transnational and intercultural in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. The red plastic raincoat inspires a flash of recognition that literalizes the otherness of the performing narrator, but this woman in the raincoat refuses to stay still as a fetishization of difference or be led by her audience. Rather, the narrator in the red raincoat is always moving, one of a larger crowd, but insisting that the audience members fall into her physical track, rather than trace familiar memories through the streets of Dublin.

These performances ultimately highlight changing priorities within the Irish arts vis-à-vis internationalism and the transnational as reflected in a growing emphasis on the international circulation of Irish arts abroad, the openness of Irish arts to international trends and collaborations, and the role of interculturalism and cultural diversity in determining the future direction of Irish arts. Áine Shiels and Joshua Edelman point to the evolution of the Arts Council's Arts Plans from 1995 to the present, as well as the 2005 creation of Culture Ireland, the 'state agency for the promotion of Irish arts worldwide, working under the aegis of the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport' ('Culture Ireland'), as sites through which to track these changing priorities. They argue:

> From an opening position [in the 1995 Arts Plan] in which the international dimension is viewed as a market opportunity – a chance for Irish production companies and artists to add audiences while engaging in beneficial cultural relations – the Plans move towards a position in which the idea of the international also carries with it certain responsibilities which may affect the production of art itself. (Shiels and Edelman, p. 149)

Edelman and Shiels trace 'the idea of the international' in relationship to 'certain responsibilities which may affect the production of art itself' in terms of the effects of EU cultural policy such as the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 'which extended the influence of the European Union' aiming for 'enhanced artistic mobility and intercultural exchange' (Ibid, p.149) and increased cultural and social diversity in Ireland due to inward-migration. [8]

In Real Time and *Track* dramatize the multiple uses to which culture has been put in Ireland and the EU at large post-1990s in terms of negotiating internationalism and the transnational through the arts by staging experiences of inter-EU collaboration and narrating the experiences of minority communities within the Irish nation-state. These performances do not merely comment on the contours of cultural policy and individual agency within these structures of collaboration but were enabled by the funds associated with the expansion of the arts as a tool of social and cultural diplomacy and outreach in Ireland and the EU. For example, Brokentalkers acknowledged at the Tampere Festival that 'much of this exposure ... could only happen with support from Culture Ireland' (Crawley). Artistic inspiration thus becomes entangled with financial and material resources, where the support available for international travel and circulation potentially creates new conditions for art to be made, affecting not only the exportation of Irish art, but its very focus in the moment of creation. Shiels and Edelman claim that as recently as 2002 in the *Arts Plan 2002-2006* the 'idea that external trends should influence Irish art was an important but relatively new concession to shared cultural development' (p.150). The increased resources for movement of artists in and out of Ireland arguably intensify transnational influences on the Irish arts scene, a change matched by the growing presence of minority communities who have inspired discourse on interculturalism and the arts within Ireland. The Art Council's 2010 *Cultural Diversity and the Arts Research Project: Towards the Development of an Arts Council Policy and Action Plan* prioritizes interculturalism in the future of Irish arts planning despite the economic

downturn which some predicted would lead to the departure of new migrant communities attracted by the boom. Both social change and government-level planning for the arts then point increasingly towards 'the importance of two-way cultural relations, rather than the one-way promotion of monolithic Irishness' (Shiels and Edelman, p.150). Brokentalkers bring this theory to life, complicating even a 'two-way' understanding of cultural relations, which could be understood as Ireland taking and bringing back work and influences *into* the country. They rather explore multiple networks and connectivities through their work that originate inside, outside and in between national spaces and identities. Their work derives from the particular social and economic circumstances of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, but in doing so, challenges the boundaries of the Irish nation-state as a coherent or fixed space.

Michelle Read finally situates their work thus: 'Irish theatre may still be somewhat in the thrall of its literary past, but I suspect that Brokentalkers are gathering support for the here and now' (Read). The 'here and now' that Read refers to expresses the philosophical and theatrical thrust of Brokentalkers' dramaturgical techniques. Their theatre responds to the intersection of technological innovation, social change and lived experience of the seemingly everyday and mundane. Their work is driven neither by mediatized gimmicks nor by a formal rebellion against the Irish theatrical canon's penchant for the so-called literary, but rather by faith that an energized response to the here and now in multiple medias, settings and theatrical formats that use everyday lives and experiences can perform a deeper diagnosis of the complexities of contemporary life in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and beyond. For Keegan and Cannon, the theatricalization of this moment must not only let go of the text, but acknowledge the power and influence of transnational connectivities that drive the changes occurring daily in Dublin's streets and shape a very new definition of Irishness that will become essential for the twenty-first century. This is a future driven not only by the growth of minority communities within Ireland, but by the increasing integration of Ireland into EU

and global economic markets, and perhaps more regrettably, a recent turn back towards emigration for Irish-born workers. This latest development, however, will not simply reverse the history of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, returning the nation to one distinguished by social homogeneity, high rates of emigration and relative cultural insulation, a narrative of Ireland's past which is itself highly questionable. Rather, the future is one in which new connectivities between Ireland and the transnational will continue to be forged through the experiences of recent Irish-born emigrants and the 'new Irish', who perhaps, as in the case of the Chinese-Irish community, were not that new after all.

Notes

[1] I use 'post-Celtic Tiger Ireland' to describe all events during and after the economic boom due to the paradigm shifts brought on by the boom in not only the economy, but Irish society and national identity at large, especially regarding immigration. This strategy borrows from postcolonial studies where the prefix 'post-' is understood to refer to 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, p. 2). Although the beginning and end dates of this period are debatable and difficult to place, and the social and cultural shifts that accompanied economic growth were not necessarily obvious from the outset, the 1990s to the present brought enormous changes ranging from the decriminalization of homosexuality to significant weakening of the role of the Catholic Church to an unprecedented expansion of minority communities within Ireland against the backdrop of sudden and unstable financial growth. The context of the rise and fall of the 'Celtic Tiger' is therefore useful in framing this period broadly.

[2] This performance in Finland represented the first time that an Irish theatre company participated in this festival in its 42-year history.

[3] From the Dublin Chinese New Year's Festival to Africa Day to the Dun Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures, a recent proliferation of internationally-themed festivals in the Republic followed the upheaval of the Celtic Tiger. These public festivals celebrate economic partnerships, symbolize accomplishment, vie for profit, and strive to create connections between Irish-born and migrant communities, as well as Ireland and the world at large. The aims of these events are complex and often contradictory. These negotiations animate the growing pains of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland's struggles with identities and self-definition in the context of domestic and global spheres.

[4] Gary Keegan (Brokentalkers), e-mail message to author, 7 June 2011. Gary Keegan and Feidlim Cannon (Brokentalkers), in discussion with the author, 24 February 2009.

[5] All quotes from the performance are taken from the 2009 production of *In Real Time* at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, which I saw on 22 January 2009.

[6] Handke's play stages an analysis of theatrical performance in the guise of a performance by enlisting performers to recite a play-by-play of the anticipated or expected behavior of both themselves as actors on the stage and the audience's conventional understanding of attending the theatre in terms of ritual associated with attending the professional theatre such as taking seats, reading a program, and conversing with neighbors at intermission. *Offending the Audience* utilizes this performative frame to critique not only mainstream realist theatrical production but also the class politics of participating in and attending conventional professional theatre performance.

[7] Since the launch of the Dublin Chinese New Year Festival, the programming has indeed increasingly foregrounded this history, as the Dublin Chinese New Year Festival Committee in 2010 argued that its program of events now included a greater emphasis on 'embracing

links with our Irish past' ('Dublin City Chinese New Year: 12-21 February, 2010, The Year of the Tiger'), mostly including exhibitions of artifacts from China brought back to Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, this move towards explicitly foregrounding Sino- Irish connections in the past while also emphasizing contemporary business opportunities positions China as a resource through which Ireland has benefited and will in the future, rather than Ireland as a country currently being transformed in part by its Chinese residents.

[8] The EU's 'Agenda for Culture' introduced in 2007 struggles with these priorities as its three stated objectives are encouraging 'cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; culture as a catalyst for creativity; and culture as a key component in international relations' ('The European Agenda for Culture'). This language accommodates relations between and within nation-states, as well as intercultural dialogue versus international relations. While an encounter between Ireland and Belgium could indeed also be framed as intercultural, the programming associated with this term such as the 2008 Year of Intercultural Dialogue focuses primarily on the relationship between majority and minority communities within EU member-states as well as addressing wider debates around immigration and national belonging in the EU at large.

References

Brokentalkers. 'About Us.' Accessed 25 July 2010: http://brokentalkers.com/about_us/

'Chinese Community in Ireland.' Accessed 17 October 2010:
http://www.irelandexpo2010.com/the_chinese_community_in_ireland

Culture Ireland. 'What We Do.' Accessed 25 July 2010:
http://www.cultureireland.gov.ie/aboutus/whatwedo.html

Crawley, Peter. 'Fleeting Connections and Sauna Diplomacy.' *Irish Theatre Magazine*. 19 August 2010. Accessed 28 November 2010:
http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Features/Current/Fleeting-connections-and-sauna-diplomacy

'Dublin City Chinese New Year: 12-21 February, 2010, The Year of the Tiger' Brochure. Accessed 8 October 2010: http://www.dublin.ie/uploadedFiles/Culture/Chinese%20Brochure%20English%20version.pdf

European Commission. 'The European Agenda for Culture.' Accessed 29 November 2010: http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/doc399_en.htm

Grewal, Inderpal. *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms.* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005.

Jordan, Eamonn. *Dissident Dramaturgies: Contemporary Irish Theatre.* (Dublin; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2010).

Joseph, Artur, Peter Handke and E.B. Ashton."Nauseated by Language: From an Interview with Peter Handke." *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn, 1970), pp. 57-61

Kirby, Peadar, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin. 'Introduction: A Critical Perspective,' in Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (ed.), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy.* London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2002, pp. 1-18.

Read, Michelle. 'Two actors, two venues, one show.' *Irish Times.* 23 June 2008. Accessed 24 July 2010: http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/features/2008/0623/1214046995289_pf.html

Shiels, Áine and Joshua Edelman. 'Internationalization and the Irish State's Relationship with Theatre and Opera,' in Hans van Maanen, Andreas Kotte and Anneli Saro (ed.), *Global Changes-Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries.* Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009, pp. 146-75.

THISISPOPBABY. 'About Us.' Accessed 14 June 2011. http://www.thisispopbaby.com/about

Tuck, Sarah. "Theatre as 'Civic Space': rethinking identity and authenticity." *Printed Project: 'The Art of Living with Strangers.'* Issue 10 (October 2008), pp.122-26.