

'Trans-disciplinary conversations on transitions to sustainability'



Fear and Loading in the Anthropocene: Narratives of Transition and Transformation

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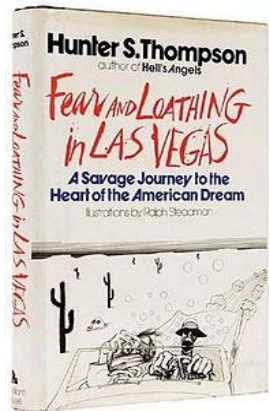
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- Background

- Established in the context of many of the initiatives outlined yesterday, stimulated by the Leonardo Da Vinci Internship a 'special fund' was created in Sociology which seeded the creation *Energy, Climate and Community Response Group*.
- Convened in June 2013 – Created and began analysis of an electronic print media data base of 3 national 13 regional titles on climate change (2,827 articles, Irish Times = 53.6%) articles and a related physical data set on Wind Farms just over 1000 but significantly more in Lexis Nexis)
- Analysed 41 submissions to the Climate Bill

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'capturing the zeitgeist of the 1960's at the very point of its collapse'....'lacks a clear narrative ... never quite distinguishing between what is real and what is only imagined by the characters' (Wikipedia)



a new epoch dissolving natural and human history into a single grand narrative called the Anthropocene (Age of Man), (Crutzen 2000).

'a strong case can be made that storytelling is one of humanities oldest and most powerful technologies' (2012: 13). Myths 'encode valuable knowledge...a potent tool for information storage and transfer' (Greer 18-19).

Drawing on Van Leeuwen's (2007: 91) the paper focuses on 'mythopoesis', the creation of narratives that provide legitimation for social action in public communication and everyday life.

story-telling is technologically mediated: the 'Gutenberg Galaxy' is now navigated via the world-wide-web

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- 'neither the idea of a "global climate" nor the phenomena that it designates are conceivable apart from the world-shaping of social practices, standardized instrument, orbiting weather and communications satellites, and computer models through which they are made manifest (Demerit cited in Clark 2010: 6).
- 'the spectacular visualisation of climate change in the media renders the abstract science of climate change culturally meaningful and politically consequential: geographically remote places literally become perceptible, 'knowable' places of concern and action (Beck 2010: 262).
- the concept of the Anthropocene should cultivate humility rather than hubris – the anthropogenic loading of the atmosphere with CO₂ and its equivalents is one trigger among a number of possible 'forcings' that makes humanity far from unique or special. Catastrophe in the civilizational context of big human history is, from the perspective of Earth history, simply one more contingent event (Clark 2010: 6).

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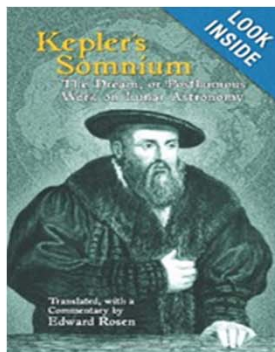
Somnium (Jazeel 2011) Earthrise, apollonian gaze, planetary imaginary, vision, a metaphor for transcendent moment where humanity can collectively rise above the challenges of anthropogenic climate change.



“something must be done!”



‘the narrative of risk is neither singing into the apocalypse, nor a wake-up call to reality – but about a narrative to dream differently- an alternative modernity which will have to create a new vision of prosperity which will not be the economic growth held by those worshipping at the altar of the market’ (Beck 2010: 626).

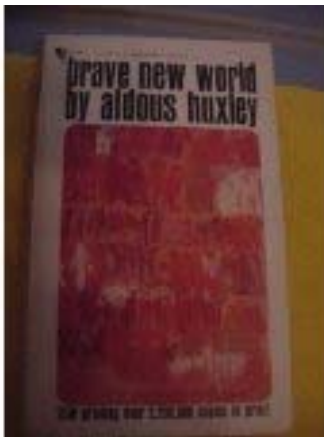


‘either (1) through the development of advanced technologies that would allow humanity to transcend its planetary boundaries or (2) through the political and economic enforcement of those boundaries Karlsson 2012).

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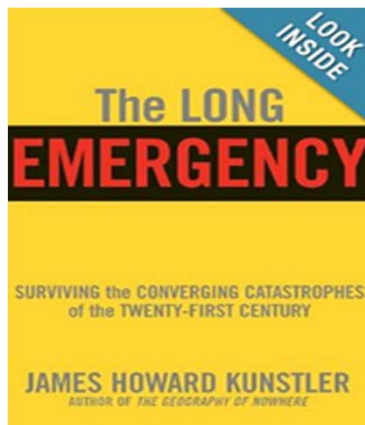


Soma (Silwa 2007) is an altogether more corporeal metaphor, bringing us back down to Earth it describes a variety of societal mechanisms, that despite demands for social change, provide a form of inertia and stability acting as a bulwark against collective action e.g. consumption, the divorce of politics and power in a globalising world and the trivialisation of academic/ scientific knowledge in media debates.



Its most recognisable formulation is the question 'Why won't we change?' Dreams are thwarted by the reality (the realpolitik and material reality) of climate politics

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- *Somnambulism* or sleepwalking (Kunstler 2005) cognitive dissonance to avoid the scale of transformation required.
- Ethnographic work on socially organised denial by Norgaard (2006). Refutation of 'methodological individualism' of de-contextualised public opinion surveys.
- Against "if people only knew" and different from 'climate denial' "we don't really want to know". This is where knowledge and even concern about climate change are present but deflected as a defence of everyday life by drawing on (or and integrating within) culturally available narratives. A potent way of situating business as usual within challenging or threatening narratives.

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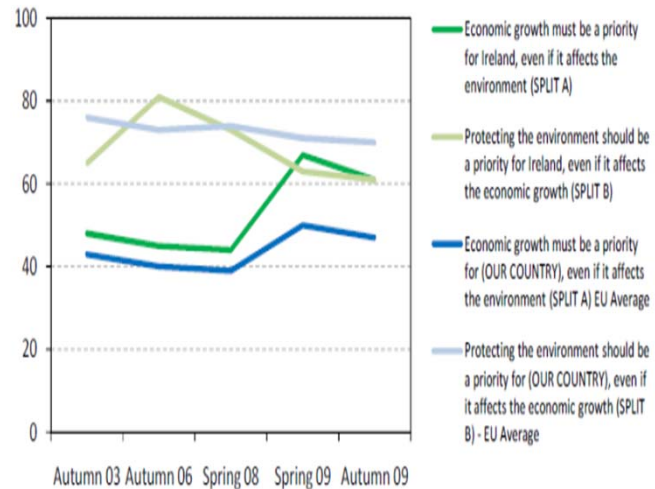
- Everyday life

- ‘the content of a **life-world** includes not only countless daily material interactions but also such inevitable speculations about the meaning of it all. A crucial dimension of the life-world is its **horizon**. In this sense, the transcendent is always part of the lifeworld (Williams 2012: 38).
- Using Kemode’s analysis of fiction to draw out three alternative aspects of narratives structuring every-day life.
 - *Salvation*, permeates religious cosmologies and secular views of progress, it is both immanent and transcendent in that either morality or technology can save us, in any event ‘something must or can be done!
 - *Everlasting cycles*, resonates with the idea of social learning: taking a generational perspective, each generation learns from the previous one, both imitating (mimesis) and adapting, recognising that progress tends to generate crisis. Sustainability seen as a process of social learning does have a role to play here.
 - Finally we have *destruction* which in Christianity and other religions is framed as apocalypse; in the secular realm is simply the culmination of interlocking crises.

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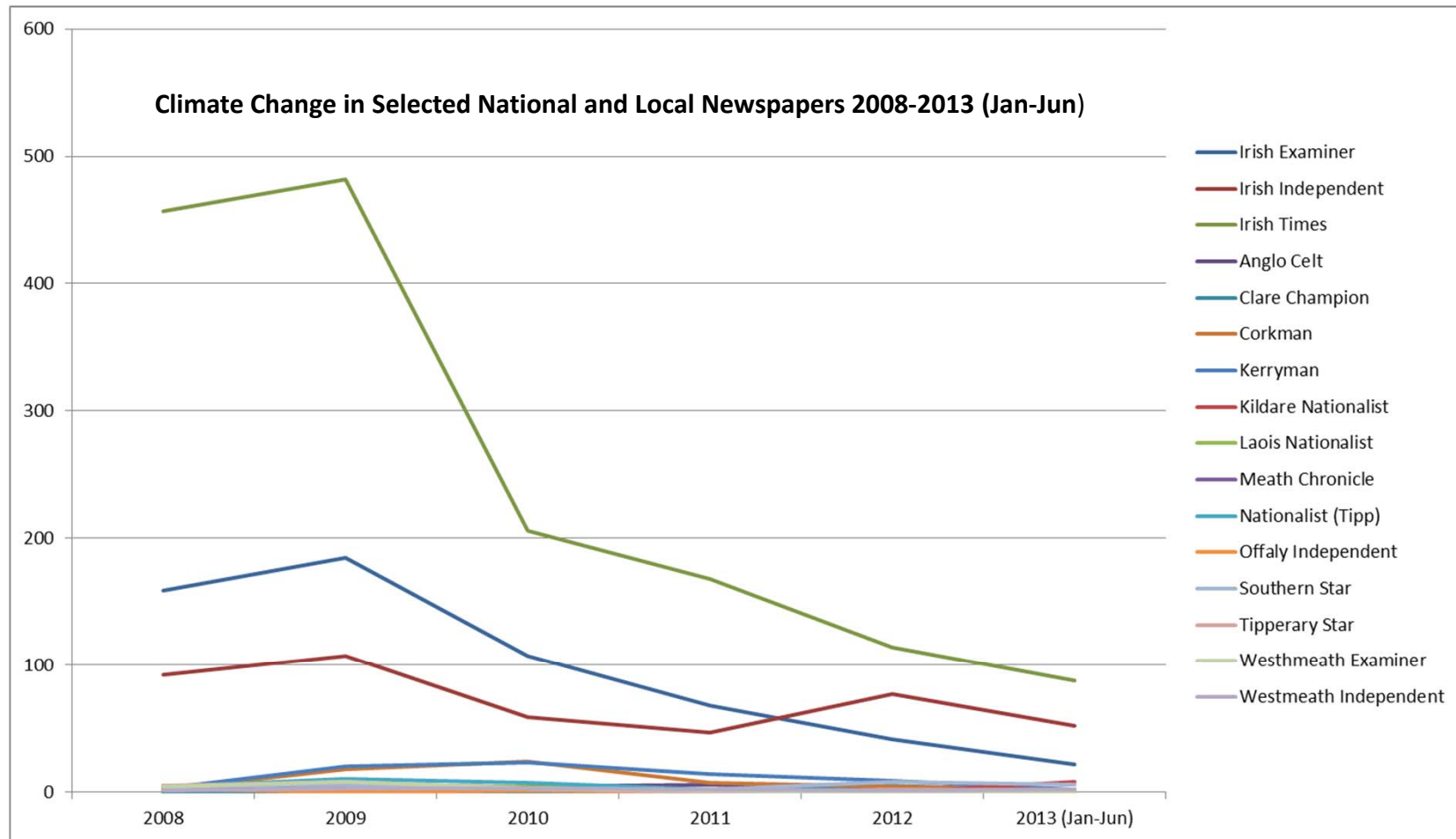


- By 2008 the discourses of climate change and green economy were already subsumed within a narrative of economic recovery, one necessitated by the fact that the story of the Celtic Tiger was no longer sustainable economically, politically, socially or culturally.
- Public concern about environment and climate had already 'cooled'



EBS 300 and EBS 313 pose test the proposition that fighting climate change can have a positive impact on the European economy. In 2008, 62% agreed with this (EBS 300), by 2009 this increased to 68%, and in 2011 (in response to the amended question that included references to energy and jobs), this rose to 78% (EBS 372: 36).

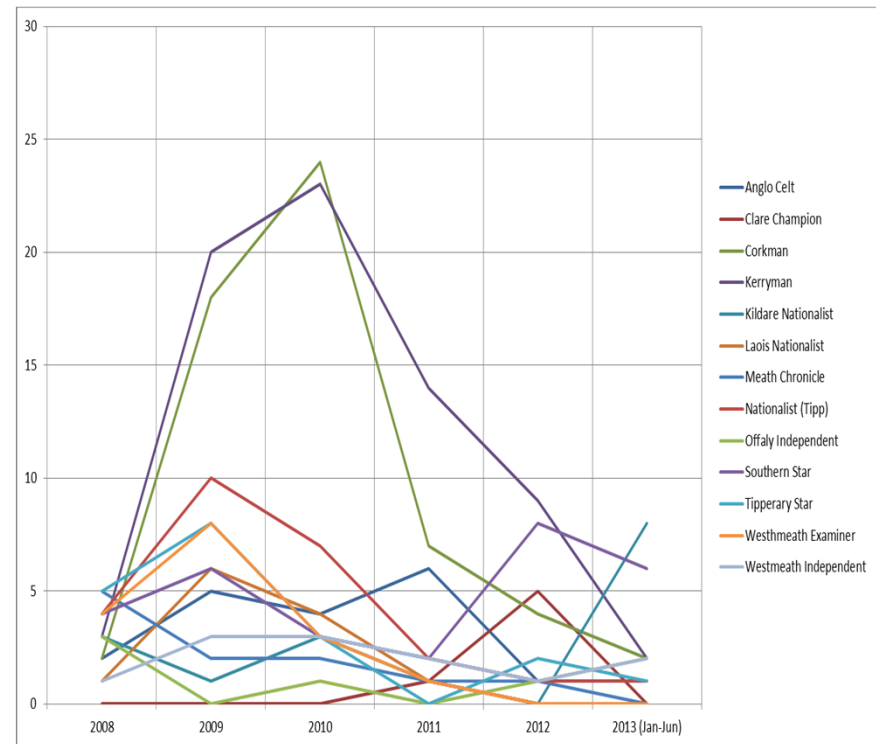
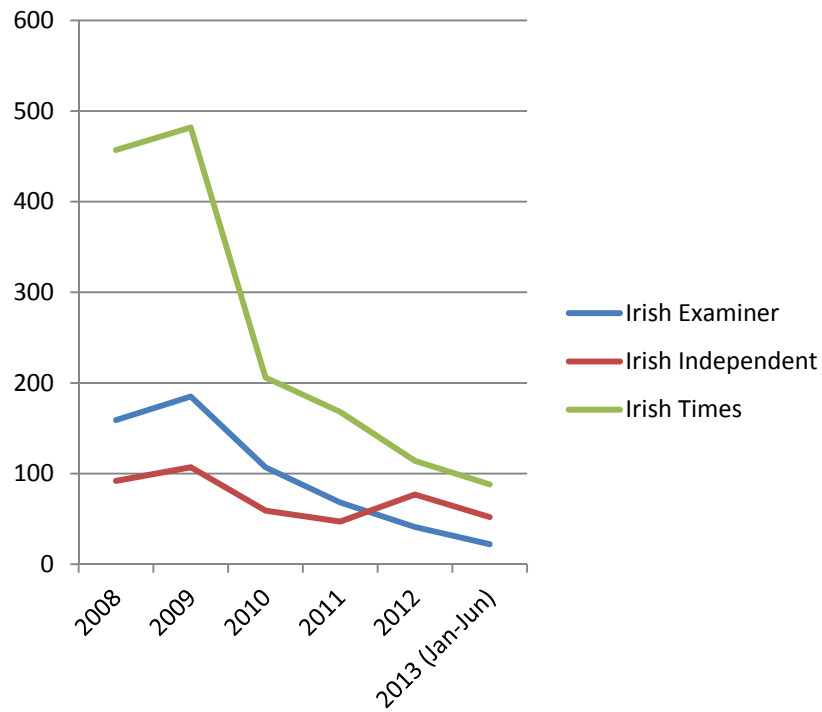
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Climate Change in the Irish Examiner, Irish Independent and Irish Times 2008-2013 (Jan-Jun)



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- Summit needs to be done!
- This time its different (but so are we!)
- Scary Science (talk about the weather)
- The Never Ending Story (of climate legislation)
- **Crazy Greens and the Green, Green Grass of Home** (How the apocalypse of climate change legislation became Ireland's Sustainable Model of Agriculture).
 - The journey from the appearance of a scientific report Teagasc/ UCC 2009 to a narrative appealing to green growth, carbon sequestration, climate justice and business as usual.



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