

THE ART OF THE WELL-BEING ECONOMY

TOWARDS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE -
CALL TO ACTION

www.weall.org
Dublin 2023-2024



WELLBEING
ECONOMY
ALLIANCE
IRELAND



OIFIG ARD RÚNAÍ AN UACHTARÁIN

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL TO THE PRESIDENT

Ms. Caroline Whyte
Ecological Economist
Feasta

7 December 2023

Dear Caroline,

On behalf of President Higgins, may I extend his warm greetings to all in Feasta and also to your colleagues in the WEAll Ireland Hub, ahead of your upcoming event on the wellbeing economy.

This event is a significant step in fostering dialogue on the wellbeing economy, in the aim of creating a more holistic and sustainable economic model that goes beyond purely financial metrics. In considering factors such as health, education, and social connections as essential components of a thriving economy, prioritising human wellbeing and environmental sustainability, and focusing on social goals, equity, and overall quality of life, the wellbeing economy can align with our shared vision for a more compassionate, just, sustainable, fair and equitable future.

The President commends your efforts in exploring how artists can challenge the dominant social landscape to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable society. Art has the power to shape perceptions and provoke meaningful conversations, making it a crucial ally in reimagining our economic narrative. The President was also delighted to learn that a short film by filmmaker Dónal Ó Céilleachar will be screened at this event.

In sending on his best wishes to all at Feasta and the WEAll Ireland Hub, the President expresses his sincere appreciation for your dedication to promoting the wellbeing economy. He wishes you all a most successful event, and he looks forward to the positive impact your endeavours will undoubtedly have on advancing the principles of the wellbeing economy in Ireland and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

Luke Sweeney
Secretariat

This 'call to action' was collated by Dr Peter Doran (Queens University Belfast/WEAll(Ireland)) with contributions from Caroline Whyte and Davie Phillip. The 'call to action' draws from the first or proto phase of our Community of Practice and attempts to capture some of the emergent conversations that will continue to inform our work. We are indebted to everyone who has contributed to those conversations during our 'deep dives' offline and online.

Original artwork by V'cenza Cirefice

To view the short film ('Seeding The Future') that accompanies this document, produced by Dónal Ó Céilleachair, go to: <https://vimeo.com/anupictures/letters>

December 2023-January 2024



QUEEN'S
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What use are poets in times of need?

(John Moriarty, 2009, *Dreamtime*)¹

We can't have a revolution without the grounding of art and culture

(Artist Cauleen Smith)²

Gary Snyder once wrote that the poetic mind, the mind of the creative artist, is a realm of wildness. Thus the eco-syllogism: The preservation of the world depends on the wild. The poetic mind is wild. Therefore, the preservation of the world depends on the poetic mind.

(Cited in John P Clark, 2019, p.316)



¹ John Moriarty, 2009, *Dreamtime*. Dublin: Lilliput Press

² Cauleen Smith, 2022, 'Cauleen Smith Interview', *Studio International*, 12 February. See: <https://www.studiointernational.com/cauleen-smith-interview-i-try-to-make-work-that-is-for-anyone-as-opposed-to-exclusive>

Contents

Invitation to Invocation	7
Our Initial Vision for a Community of Practice	12
Introduction: The Art of the Wellbeing Economy	20
Invoking Ireland Again: Island of Stories	27
Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures	24
An Interview with Rou Reynolds (Enter Shikari)	40
Cultural Creatives as Transformation Catalysts	51
An Invitation to Postactivism	55
Keeping Out the Giraffes	59
This is Not a Report	69
The Wellbeing Framework in the Republic of Ireland	80
Wellbeing Work in Northern Ireland	86
Community of Practice: Cultivating a Bridge	90
Navigating Paradigm Change: The Irish Language	95
The Power of the Dominant Social Imaginary	103
Interrogating Social Imaginaries	111
[In]Conclusions	123



We all need...

FAIRNESS

Justice in all its dimensions at the heart of economic systems, and the gap between the richest and poorest greatly reduced



We all need...

NATURE

A restored and safe natural world for all life



We all need...

PARTICIPATION

Citizens are actively engaged in their communities and locally rooted economies



Five needs at the heart of the Wellbeing Economy



We all need...

DIGNITY

Everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety and happiness



We all need...

CONNECTION

A sense of belonging and institutions that serve the common good



Invitation to Invocation

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance hub for the island of Ireland (WEAll Ireland) invites you – as an individual or representative of your organization/network – to join with us to build a Community of Practice in the art of the wellbeing economy. It is an invitation to join with other members of the Community of Practice in invoking a new set of economic and societal stories, grounded in fairness, dignity, connection, participation and deep regard for Nature.

This is a cosmo-local invitation: it is both local to the island of Ireland³ and it is a global peer-to-peer initiative in close collaboration with our friends in the worldwide Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll).

Rob Hopkins⁴, founder of the Transition Towns movement, put it well when he wrote of the fierce importance of creating compelling conditions to enable ourselves to think and act otherwise:

“*‘Longing’ is a vast, aching, yearning word. I’ve always felt that unless we are able to cultivate a deep and visceral longing for a low carbon future, we have no chance of ever creating it. It’s the question that obsesses me, how to cultivate a deep cultural longing for a post-carbon, more just, more equal world? I don’t have all the answers, but I know that it’s the 100-million-dollar question. I also know that, for starters, we can only do it by harnessing art, poetry, music, design, dance, story-telling and creativity.*”

WEAll Ireland is the local hub of a global network of individuals, organisations and governments (WeGo) dedicated to the transformation of our economic system in line with the imperatives of our socio-ecological crises. Our steering group is made up representatives from: Queens University Belfast, FEASTA⁵, Social Justice Ireland, The Playhouse in Derry/Londonderry, Cultivate and the European Health Futures Forum.

Our focus is on shifting the deep and embedded stories that currently obstruct and obscure the system change required to address climate justice and wider socio-ecological devastation. These stories form part of the DNA of day-to-day decision-making and non-decision-making in governments and corporate boardrooms. They frame and delimit popular understanding and critiques of the huge inequalities and ecological destruction that – we are told – are part of the price we must pay for aligning our shared fate with the vagaries and interests of impersonal financial and market forces that have taken the place of the indifferent gods that demand our sacrifice.

³ The Wellbeing Economy Alliance hub for the island of Ireland is organised across both jurisdictions, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

⁴ Rob Hopkins, 2022, ‘Why is now the moment for social imagination,’ Joseph Rowntree Blog, 16 May. See: https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/why-now-moment-social-imagination?fbclid=IwAR2FcaYLvm1HwXjL-re4wK-fQMfjcfO_jKcat9KBx3JYzVLEbsVquR7Pkr2E

⁵ Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability.

In line with analyses set out by one of WEAll's co-founders and friend, Katherine Trebeck, WEAll Ireland, supported by Carnegie UK, has focused on the work of exposing the dominant narratives that hold the current local-global economic system in place. Equally important is the role of the cultural creative and activist in amplifying new liberating stories of transition and accompanying practices, especially here on the island of Ireland, North and South.

As an important contribution to this work we are building a Community of Practice for those who are dedicated to shaping new stories and practices, notably artists and a wider community of cultural creatives. The Community of Practice will offer a platform for engagement with the latest thinking and research on the wellbeing economy, collaborations, partnerships with funders, and arrangements to curate creative outputs – all in the service of growing a movement across the island. We commit to act in deep solidarity with our global partners, including those who embrace ancient/new ways of knowing and being in the world.

Every great sea change....every great movement for social change and cultural transformations has been accompanied by and generated by compelling new imagery, literature, film, performances, song and poetry....not least here on our island of stories and story tellers.

The art of social change migrates freely from region to region, heart-to-heart, on the streets and in theatres, in boardrooms and lecture halls. Today we are in the midst of an unprecedented culture shift, a transition driven by the demands of climate and ecological justice and the imperatives of designing new economies that place planet, people and wellbeing first. A call to design new economies no longer trapped in myths or 'fairy tales' of growth without ends.



Fig 1. Credit: Barcode Escape, an example of culture jamming from Adbusters, The Media Foundation.

While welcoming the work of our governments, on both parts of the island, on wellbeing frameworks, outcomes and indicators, to guide and enhance the coherence of policy design, in the context of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, we believe that it will also take a lively social movement across the island – working with others around the world – to embed the deep societal narratives and practices required to challenge entrenched default commitments to the modern myth of infinite economic growth, a myth that powerfully serves as an alibi for entrenched forms of inequality and exclusion. We are calling for a work of imagination, a new moment of invocation in the spirit of Amhairghin, a work of speaking truth to power, a work we do on ourselves and in solidarity with others, including the ‘more-than-human’.

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance is part of a global movement. Compelling stories and those that resonate with our deeply felt aspirations – born of hope, vulnerability and solidarity – are finding expression. There is no movement without that which moves us....into deep cycles of reflection, celebration and liberation.

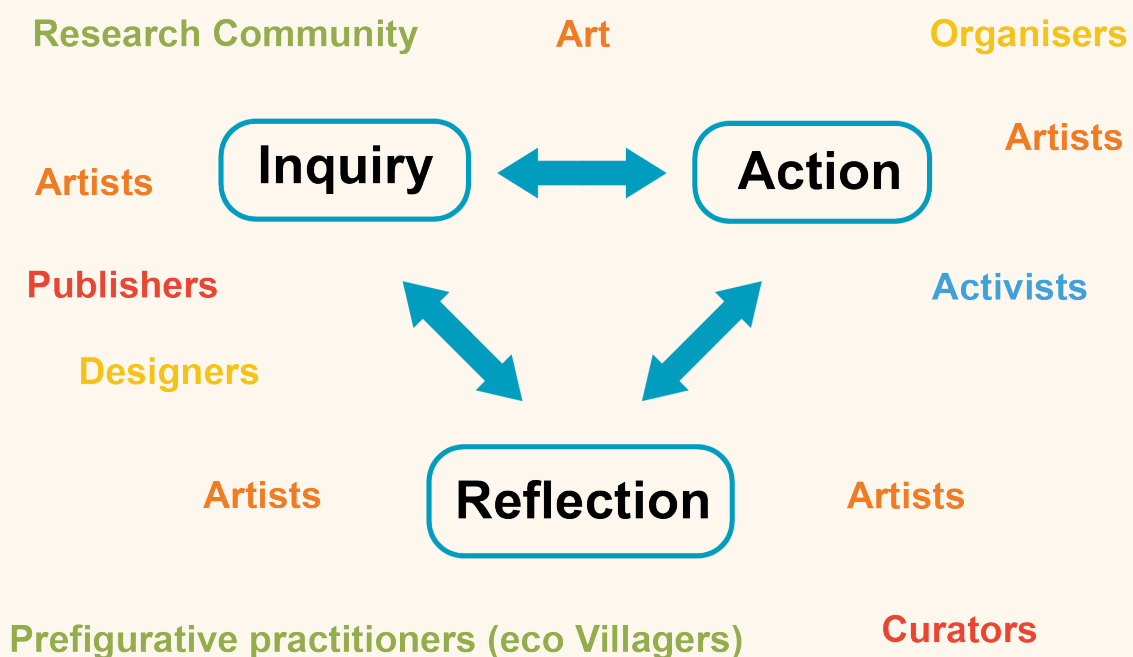


Fig. 2 The WEAll Ecosystem

We believe there is no greater challenge and that our mission to build a Community of Practice for creatives can significantly contribute to an emergent popular movement across our island and across the wider WEAll network. It will be dedicated to the just transition and the design of economic futures founded on the protection and prioritization of public goods, delivered within the parameters of Planetary Boundaries.

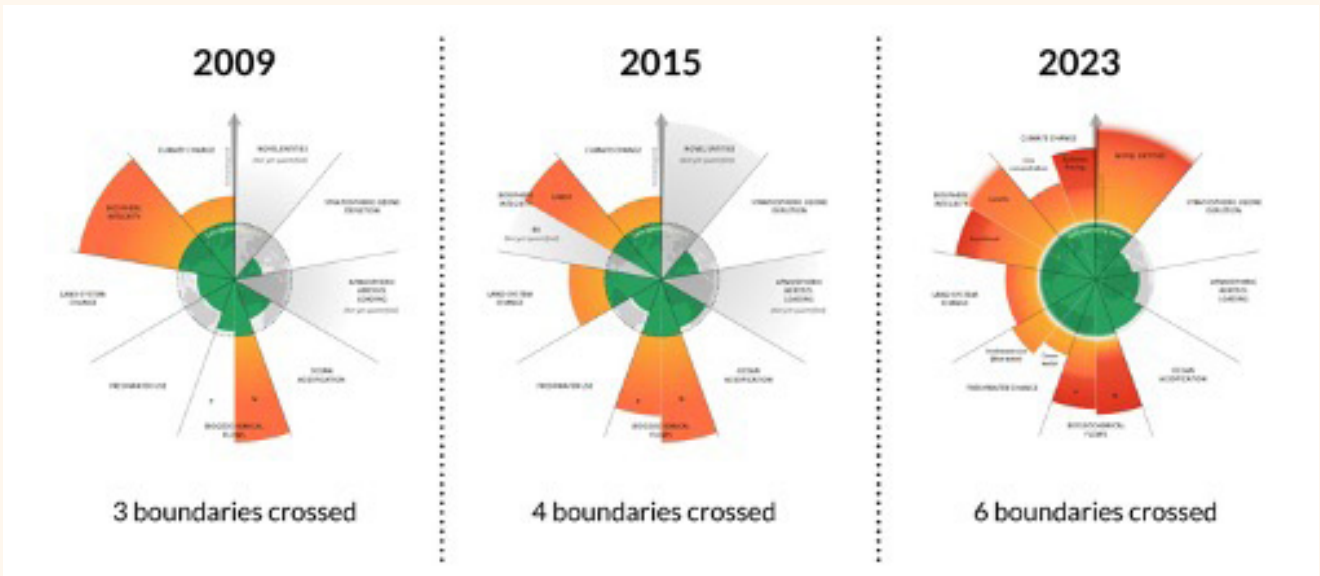


Fig.3 The 2023 update to the Planetary boundaries. Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0. Credit: "Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, based on analysis in Richardson et al 2023". Groundbreaking research at the Stockholm Resilience Centre in 2009 provided evidence that earth systems are crashing through safe operating thresholds. The latest research shows that of the nine thresholds, six have been exceeded: climate, biosphere integrity, land use change, freshwater change, introduction of novel entities, and biogeochemical flows

Artists from all disciplines - working alongside and as activists themselves - have a pivotal role in leading our collective inquiry into new 'social imaginaries' informed in dialogue with the pluriverse of emergent new regenerative narratives.

This work has a technical and policy component but must also dive deep into the philosophical, ethical and sensorial dimensions of our participation in phenomena such as consumerism, inspired by degrowth research, new visions of prosperity and work, and building on Planetary Boundaries research, such as that of our friend Kate Raworth on Doughnut Economics.

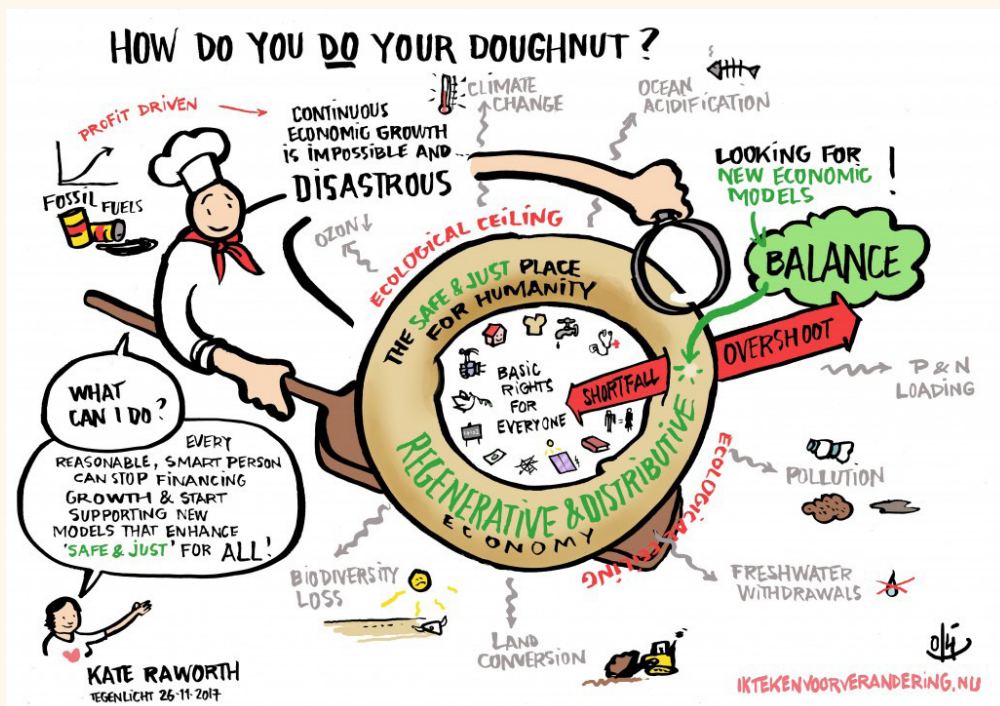


Fig. 4: Credit: 'How do you do your Doughnut?', by Olivier Rijcken, 2017.

WATER IS LIFE



AN ANNUAL

Our Initial Vision For A Community of Practice⁶

(1) A Community of Practice:

Our proposed platform is a *Community of Practice* for ‘Cultural Creatives’⁷ to animate and curate an island-wide conversation on emergent ‘social imaginaries’ in support of the wellbeing economy.

For our practice-based inquiry we shall draw from our island histories, narratives, mythologies and ways of knowing that are often first questioned, explored and generated in the arts and performance, in music and song, verse, movement, film, theatre, writing and other socially engaged forms. Consider how the words of Seamus Heaney’s translation of *The Cure at Troy* (Sophocles, fifth century BCE) have travelled the world along with the imaginary that gave rise to the practices of the Anglo-Irish peace process and the Belfast-Good Friday Agreement:

From The Cure At Troy

*Human beings suffer,
They torture one another,
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured.*

*History says, don’t hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.
So hope for a great sea-change*

On the far side of revenge.

⁶ Our proposal for a Community of Practice is very much a work-in-progress. We welcome suggestions and participation and aspire to make our initiative both radically inclusive and open-ended.

⁷ We define ‘cultural creatives’ broadly, to include all those who have a contribution to make to our collective inquiry into dominant economic narratives and the exploration, and cultivation of new ‘social imaginaries’ in support of the wellbeing economy. This includes artists who are socially engaged, activists who engage creatively with movement building and social change, the research community, the arts and activist community and its funders, and networks already engaged in transformative work around the economy, whatever the scale, whatever the context.

*Believe that further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracle
And cures and healing wells.*
(Seamus Heaney, Trans. Faber and Faber 2018)

Our inquiry will also engage with peers across the global WEAll network, including a number of experiments already engaging the arts. *'We can only do it by harnessing art, poetry, music, design, dance, storytelling and creativity.'* WEAll were actively involved, for example, in disseminating a piece of music composed with the express purpose of inviting choirs, street bands and community groups to participate in a collective musical response to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) held in Glasgow in November 2021. The piece, 'Enough is Enough' was sung and produced by the award-winning folk musician and theatre maker, Karine Polwart, with *Oi Musica* and the *Soundhouse Choir*.⁸

In the words of George Po, *'unless a social movement as a network develops into communities of practice it cannot become a system of influence. Communities of practice are of vital importance because, through them, people grow the necessary capabilities and structures that enable a new system to emerge – not as a social movement taking over institutions by force but by growing into a system of influence and thus becoming the new mainstream, making old structures obsolete.'* (George Po, 2018)⁹

The point at which a new system or systems emerge can never be predicted - nor should it be. It is the *sudden appearance* of a system that has real power and influence. Pioneering and prefigurative experiments embodying, anticipating and enabling new values and practices that have hovered at the periphery suddenly become the norm. These regenerative practices, developed by courageous communities, networks and individuals, contain the seeds of compelling futures, sometimes half-articulated responses to the great 'signs of our times', encompassing our deepest values and desires to live the lives we never dared hope for, cultivated in the fields of struggle, art and contemplation.

Only reflection has access to what is not an image, not an idea, but provides the place in which they may appear. In its 'surrender to that which is worthy of questioning. (Heidegger, 1977)

8 Full details at <https://letitgrow.scot>.

9 George Po, 2018, 'Transformative Communities of Practice as an Evolutionary Force,' in the Enlivening Edge Magazine, 25 January. See: <https://enliveningedge.org/columns/transformative-communities-practice-evolutionary-force/>

(2) Narratives that move: movement building

Inspired by the work of Marshall Ganz, we understand that social change and movement-building are closely linked to the power of story and narrative. Stories enter those places that move us...It is an understanding that has grown out of Ganz's own experience with the civil rights movement in the United States, an understanding that would deeply inform the music and rhythms of the civil rights movement in Derry and elsewhere in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s.

The Ganz approach foregrounds the role of narratives and social imaginaries in transmitting values and new understandings that are enduring and that can act as the bases for the necessary interplay of individual and societal change. For Ganz¹⁰ the purposeful social action behind every successful movement is built on the responses to two key questions that activists and creatives must put to themselves: 'Why?' and 'How?'



Fig. 4 From the graphic harvest of the WEAll Deep Dive at Cloughjordan Ecovillage

10 For background on the work of Marshall Ganz go to: <https://marshallganz.usmblogs.com/files/2012/08/Chapter-19-Leading-Change-Leadership-Organization-and-Social-Movements.pdf>

The ‘How?’ question is addressed by strategic considerations and is often bound up with questions of resourcing and discernment of opportunities for intervention and maximum leverage. The answer to the ‘Why?’ question is where it gets interesting. The question of ‘Why?’ one becomes involved in a new social movement or in responding to its invitations, engages us at the level of why an issue matters to us, why we fundamentally care, and an engagement with our most precious values.

It is in posing these questions to ourselves – and our potential constituencies – that the role of narrative comes to the fore. And narratives are key at this moment of societal transition driven by socio-ecological ‘signs of the times’. The very word transition – including ‘the Just Transition’ – implies a transition from prevailing or dominant narratives to new, enlivening stories, even if these are only partially articulated and contain elements of uncertainty. Joanna Macy has identified three areas or fields of action with distinct qualities: ‘Holding actions’ that consist of conventional oppositional actions, and refusals to tolerate immediate sources of injustice and ecological degradation; ‘Structural’ or ‘System’ change, which consists of work to build and pre-figure new societal forms and economies that enable new ways of being in the world and ‘being with’; and ‘shifts in consciousness’ or the ‘inner work’ that ensures that our transformations are comprehensive, non-dual and generative in every sense: generative of new meanings, identities, and stories that are intimately grounded in the local, the just, and the rhythms and cycles of the planet and the ‘more-than-human’.

The transition or transitions can be characterized as a movement from a prevailing or ‘Dominant System’ to an ‘Emergent System’ (Below), a journey that requires unprecedented acts of imagination, creativity, solidarity and cultivation.

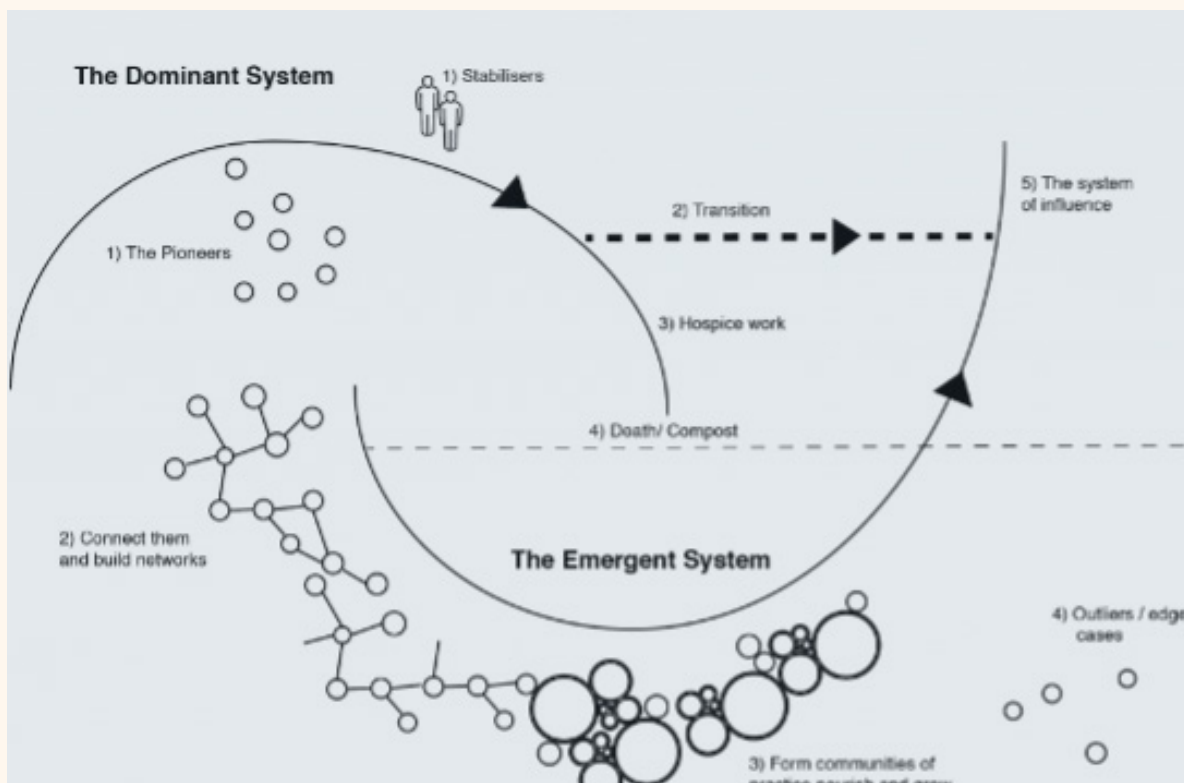


Fig.5 Birkana Institute: Cassie Robinson, in Stories for Life (2021)

(3) Ethos & Values: Connection & Care

Our Community of Practice will be sustained and cultivated by a continuation of our practice of ‘deep dives’, combining conviviality, learning, celebration, performance, and peer-to-peer network building in support for our respective engagements across the emergent movement for a wellbeing economy. We are activists, artists, researchers, students, community organisers, funders, carers and social entrepreneurs. Above all: we are citizens working and living in deep solidarity with the ‘more-than-human’, engaged with new forms of activism at the intersections of social, gender and ecological justice that combine deep care with emergent practices of transformation and regeneration. Our Community of Practice supports our aspiration to *‘think-with’* and *‘be-with’* – for we are relations before we are. ‘We relate therefore we are.’ We are part of a movement because we have shared, participated in, and shared stories that move us, comfort us in the face of failure, and call us into deep solidarity: ‘listening to collective unuttered wisdom, nurturing intrinsic, rather than productive value.’ (Dani D’Emilia and Daniel B Chávez, 2015)¹¹

We have taken to heart the words of Professor Tim Jackson who observes that art pays homage to the nature of the journey. Its sense of struggle. The power (and partiality) of resolution: not as an instant, a comfortable future, but as a goal hard-earned, easily lost and almost always temporary. These are the lessons for the wellbeing economy. For all of us... Vision, Resolution, Consolation. These are the tools from which to build a different future. *Our ability to live well, to flourish in less materialistic ways, is in essence an artistic endeavor.*

Sustainability is the art of living well, within the ecological limits of a finite planet.

Art is more than an instrument in this project. It’s the very nature of it. [Professor Tim Jackson, 2023, WEAll Ireland Webinar]

Beings – human and the more-than-human – do not precede our relating (Donna Haraway). We are relational all the way down. In our Community of Practice we can do no other than ‘think with care’ for – through community – that is our practice: relationship and connection. With Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) we have come to know and experience that ‘relations of thinking and knowing require care and affect how we care.’¹² Joan Tronto¹³ reminds us that care includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world...which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web.

11 From the Radical Tenderness Manifesto, 2015.

12 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, London: Minnesota Press.

13 Joan Tronto, 1987, ‘Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12, no.4: 644-63, cited in de la Casa, 2017.

(4) Commons by Design [Form and Content]:

Our *Community of Practice* will be convened & designed to support our anticipatory art of commoning. In this practice we seek to prefigure a keystone of the emergent wellbeing economy:

Our practice as commoners [verb., commoning].

In the words of our friend David Bollier [and the late Silke Helfrich]¹⁴, the world of commoning represents a profound challenge to capitalism as a worldview because it is based on a very different way of 'being in the world' [ontology]. This is not widely appreciated because many people continue to view the commons through archaic perspectives – which is to say, through the lens of deep separation and radical individualism.

In genuine commoning we learn to practice a new orientation to the world because its actions are based on a deep relationality with everything – the human and the 'more-than-human'. 'Actions are not simply matters of direct cause-and-effect between the most proximate, visible actors; they stem from a pulsating web of culture and myriad relationships through which new things emerge.'

Our Community of Practice will be cosmo-local: WEAll Ireland will focus on cultivating our Community of Practice on the island of Ireland, establishing intimate connections with communities and organisations – public and private - here on the island, while embracing and welcoming the participation and learning of our planetary peers who are already engaged in this work across and beyond the global WEAll network. Our selection of case studies (below) is a modest illustration of the deep wells of inspired activity already taking place across our networks of peers and across the world.

The commons are a pervasive, generative, and neglected social lifeform. They are complex, adaptive, living processes that generate wealth through which people address their shared needs with minimal reliance on markets or states. A commons arises as people engage in the social practices of commoning, participate in peer-to-peer governance, and develop collaborative forms of provisioning in the course of using a resource or care-wealth. While every commons is different, all ultimately depend on the physical gifts of nature and on sharing, collaboration, mutual respect and gentle reciprocity. (Bollier and Silfrich, 2019:74-75)

¹⁴ David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, 2019, *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*, Canada: New Society Publishers.

(5) Language: Thanks to a long literary tradition of dissent and playfulness, often drawing attention to the essential instabilities of language and imposed narratives, we have ready access to traditions of critical thinking and practice. The insights of Machado de Oliveira on the interplay of language, modernity and coloniality – including attempts to fix particular meanings as ‘objective’ and ‘universal’ in the service of the powerful – are themes that have also been explored in modern Irish literature and theatre, not least in the work of Field Day and Brian Friel’s play *Translations*.

An early intuition that has informed the work of the WEAll Ireland hub is the importance of our experience of a diversity of languages on the island, and the particular history and experience of the Gaeltacht.

As Professor Peadar Kirby commented in his WEAll Ireland webinar (see below), many people on the island are well aware of the experience of living between a dominant language and their indigenous linguistic and mytho-poetic traditions. ‘The experience of speaking a language that has been so actively and forcefully marginalized is that it takes us to very different imaginative spaces. So our daily experience is one of living *‘idir dhá chultúr’*, we even write books about it. I suggest that as we become more and more aware that humanity itself is now living between two cultures, that of the dominant destructive paradigm and the new paradigm bubbling up in so many spaces and cracks, that our Irish experience of living *‘idir dhá chultúr’* takes on a very important significance.’

We are hopeful that our Community of Practice will continue to commit significant attention to this dimension of our island experience, which opens up a special solidarity with indigenous voices and communities across the world who are playing a significant role in disrupting our Western-authorized narratives and ways of knowing....Ways that are often implicated in histories of extractivism, colonialism, patriarchy and ecocide.

We embrace and look forward to further investigating the insight that formed one of the key conclusions at the *‘Exploring Language as a Resource for Sustainability’* workshop organised by The Burren College of Art, Cloughjordan and Popal: ‘Earth-based Cosmology / Cosmeolaíocht Cré-bhunaithe: Irish inhabits an earth-based cosmology that puts humans in their proper place while respecting the feminine. Everything is connected in this inherently systemic understanding of the world. This inner knowing is where the treasure resides and it’s time to recognize and protect it. *Language, tradition, music, biodiversity and the environment are all inextricably intertwined and share a common experience of loss.*¹⁵

15 Chris Chapman and Martin Hawkes, 2023, Language as a Resource for Sustainability ‘Tá Dóchas

Our thanks: We are indebted to the host of scholars, activists and thought-leaders who have given generously of their time during our series of online webinars and at our ‘deep dive’ events at The Playhouse in Derry/Londonderry and Cloughjordan Ecovillage. We offer a particular thanks to our guest speakers, including Katherine Trebeck, Kate Raworth, Professor Sandra Waddock, Boston College, Professor Tim Jackson, Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity, University of Surrey, David Bollier, Schumacher Centre for New Economics, MA., Professor Peadar Kirby, Cloughjordan, Matthew Noone, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Mel White, Cloughjordan, Dónal Ó’ Céilleachair, Anu Pictures, Eóin Ó Cuinneagáin, Cáit Ní Riain, Damian Gorman, Brian O’Doherty and the cast of ‘Beyond Belief’, the community members and staff at Cloughjordan Ecovillage and The Playhouse, and many more...We acknowledge the special inspiration and support of WEAll Global, including Marina Gattás and Kate Petrik.

WEAll Ireland is: Caroline Whyte (Feasta), Peter Doran (Queens University Belfast, School of Law), Davie Phillip & Mel White (Cultivate and Cloughjordan Ecovillage), David Somekh (European Health Futures Forum), Kevin Murphy (The Playhouse, Derry/L’Derry), and Seán Ó Conláin (Feasta). Social Justice Ireland is also part of our steering group.

Next steps:

If you would like to get involved in our Hub or our Community of Practice, or to stay informed about them, **please sign up to their mailing lists by clicking on the QR codes below.** We’ll keep you posted on our plans, which include:

- a **series of Community of Practice webinars**
- a **conference in Ireland on wellbeing/post-growth economics to be held in June 2024.** This event will follow on from the seminal ‘Beyond Growth’ conference that took place in Brussels in May 2023 .

WEAll Ireland Hub mailing list



Cultural Creatives Community of Practice mailing list



INTRODUCTION:-

ART OF THE WELLBEING ECONOMY

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance is about building a movement and the co-creation of powerful new ‘narratives of hope’ to shift the terms of the policy debate about repurposing our economies and a just transition to Wellbeing. We do not anticipate a singular new imaginary but a pluriverse of possible worlds, just worlds for the human and the more-than-human. Pluriverse – as opposed to the ‘uni’verse – refers to a world of radical inclusion, radical inclusion of ways-of-being-in-the-world [ontologies] and ways of seeing: not a reduction to relativism, but a perspective on power as a disruptive inquiry into the historical imposition of a ‘one world’ narrative aligned to an imagined Euro-modern centre. The pluriverse refers to the Zapatista call for a ‘world fit for many worlds.’ It is an appropriate perspective for an island imaginatively positioned between worlds: *in-between* (*‘idir dhá chultúr’*).

That shift is already apparent in multiple local-global conversations, dialogues and emergent practices across the world and across the island of Ireland, where visions of community and societal ‘progress’ are being re-visited and re-invented in the image of: *Nature, Fairness, Participation, Connection, and Dignity* [the foundation of all human rights].

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance is part of an ecosystem of popular, academic and policy conversations that go under many names, informed by a rich vocabulary of dissent and critique.

DeGrowth / Post-Growth

Wellbeing Economy

Frameworks Post-GDP

Sustainable Prosperity

Post-Development

Buen Vivir

Doughnut Economics

Decolonial

There is growing consensus around a realization that our dominant economic narratives are not innocent.

Jason Hickel, Carolyn Merchant and Sylvia Federici¹⁶, and many others have traced the emergence of a dominant European narrative of 'disenchantment', based on a radical and patriarchal dualistic philosophy of science that reduced Nature to the status of a lifeless object, to the work of Francis Bacon (1561-1626)¹⁷ and René Descartes.

It was this unprecedented narrative, associated with the European Enlightenment, that helped sanction the enclosure and privatization of common land, 'as land was rendered but a thing to be possessed' and it was enclosure that would in turn, enable this narrative of separation [dualism] to rise to cultural dominance, removing ethical constraints on processes of possession and extraction. Land became property. Living beings became things or, in Heidegger's words, 'standing reserve.' A genocidal assault on women's bodies was launched in a bid to violently incorporate social-reproduction into the carceral disciplines of capital and commodified labour. Ecosystems were translated into 'resources' and 'natural capital'

¹⁶ Federici, Silvia, 2004, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia

¹⁷ Attorney General to England's King James 1, who was also responsible for using torture against peasant rebels and heretics.

The European enclosures were followed rapidly by the colonial appropriation of ‘cheap nature’, a process that was always essentially, in the words of Aimé Césaire, ‘a process of thingification.’¹⁸ Tim Jackson at the Centre for Understanding Sustainability (CUSP) tells us that our dominant economic metaphors are complicit with science.

‘As the philosopher Thomas Kuhn once pointed out, there is no ‘naked eye’. We see the world through our own distinct cultural lens. The lens through which scientists saw nature in the nineteenth century was tinted irredeemably by a fast-growing, brutally disruptive form ...leading to huge social inequalities, horrendous working conditions and the disenfranchisement of vast swathes of the population from the land, from political power and from economic self-sufficiency.’ (Tim Jackson)

Shifting the narrative, surfing the zeigeist

In *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a Grown Up Economy (2019)*, WEAll co-founder Katherine Trebeck problematizes economic growth and national addictions to GDP, arguing that in the industrialised world the great challenge is not to remain competitive, or to increase efficiency or production. The challenge is to ‘slow down without derailing, to reimagine progress beyond more of the same.’ For Trebeck¹⁹ and WEAll the challenge for humanity is to ‘make ourselves at home in the world’.

WEAll Ambassador, Báýò Akómoláfé, agrees, ‘Times are urgent, Let’s slow down.’

In a radical challenge to civic society to rethink our approach to political and societal change, Akómoláfé sees much that is tired and too familiar in the hyper-active campaigns and slogans of NGOs. He discerns that the urge of the times is not to create another conventional social movement, not to fix a broken system but to acknowledge our inherent power to summon other worlds. To invoke and prefigure otherwise.

In a vision that he describes as ‘postactivism’, Akómoláfé comes close to our vision for a Community of Practice for cultural creatives and others committed to the art of the wellbeing economy. Akómoláfé envisages, ‘In these human-scaled circles of rejuvenation, we will weave a new social fabric; a new world will be tantalizingly present and dynamic reality, not a distant ideal. In these places of ‘vulnerability’, we will reclaim a terrain that is free from the paralyzing influences of NGO-speak and politics.’

Wellbeing economies are not merely the objective. Wellbeing is the art. Welcome to the art of the wellbeing economy.

¹⁸ Aimé Césaire, 1955, Discourse on Colonialism.

¹⁹ Trebeck, 2019, p.214

This is an invitation to artists, creatives, activists and citizens alike.
Art is the very nature of it.

The tools for the art of the wellbeing economy:

Vision.

Resolution.

Consolation.

These are the tools from which to cultivate a different future that is as compelling as it is un-thinkable. That is otherwise than being.

Jackson cautions us that our ability to live well, to flourish in less materialistic ways, is in essence an artistic endeavor. Sustainability *is* the art of living well, embracing ecological limits of a finite planet...limits that are at once strangely liberating and sublime for they invite us to a home-coming, a cosmic love story. An invitation to fall in love with the first miracle: the miracle of walking upon the earth.

Jackson has encouraged us to see our work over the next years not as an adjunct to the technical change or economic reform that we so badly need but as the very heart of the transition to a wellbeing economy.

“

For, as the great Indian novelist, Amitav Ghosh, has observed, this is perhaps the most important question ever to confront culture in the broadest sense - for let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination.

(Amitav Ghosh, 2016:9)

”

WATER PROTECTORS



FROM STANDING ROCK
TO THE SPERRINS

Counter-mapping in the Sperrins, V'cenza Cirefice, County Tyrone, Ireland

V'cenza Cirefice is a PhD researcher at the National University of Ireland Galway. She is also a visual artist and activist engaging with ecofeminist and environmental justice issues. Cirefice's research and activism has covered issues from divestment from fossil fuels, reproductive justice, period poverty, food sovereignty, refugee solidarity, to feminist geopolitics and feminist political ecology.

Dalradian Gold are seeking planning permission for a huge gold mine and processing plant near Greencastle in the Sperrin Mountains. The communities resisting this project report that they have faced criminalisation, intimidation and oppression, mirroring legacies of conflict and colonialism.

For her PhD research Cirefice, is writing about 'Resistance to extractivism in the Sperrin Mountains through a feminist environmental justice lens' (2019 - 2023).

This project uses an artist, activist, participatory methodology to explore resistance to extractivism by making visible the worldviews, experiences and practices of those engaged in anti-mining activism in the Sperrin Mountains, County Tyrone. In doing so this project aims to highlight voices from frontline communities that are facing environmental injustice, foregrounding their resistance and agency and countering narratives of passive victims in rural peripheral areas exploited by neoliberal extraction.

Further, it aims to foreground situated and local communities' knowledges, practices and counter-narratives to extractivism and to advance scholarship and policy by contributing to a gap in the understanding of how extractive processes and resistance play out in Global North contexts, especially in the North of Ireland with its unique socio-environmental setting.

Sources:

Temporal School of Experimental Geography, Cirefice, V'cenza. See: <https://tsoeg.org/associates/vcenza-cirefice/>



Using a methodology of activist engagement, photovoice and counter-mapping, this project is exploring the ways in which people relate to each other and the more-than-human world. These ways of being and seeing the world are often relational and deeply rooted in place, with the land and with each other. They represent ways of being that exist despite extractivism.

Website: <https://extractingus.org/exhibitions/despiteextractivism1/exhibition/vcenza-cirefice/>

Keywords: Extractivism, ecofeminism, art, counter-mapping, coloniality, community, environmental justice, resistance, power.

Links to wellbeing economy: Extractivism, environmental justice, neoliberal extraction, community, social movements.

Invoking Ireland Again: Island of Stories

Stories in Ireland do not belong to the past.

They do not age.

They move through time.

One of our most ancient stories tells of two tribes living on the island: the Fomorian people who made war with the Tuatha DéDanann.

A war between darkness and light, they said.

A war, according to Jason Kirkey²⁰, between two peoples experiencing the world in two opposing ways. The Tuatha Dé Danann, content to live with nature, ruled only through the sovereignty of the land. The Fomorians, not so content, are possessed with Súil Milldagach (that is the 'destructive eye' which eradicates anything it looks upon) and intent on ravaging the land.

In John Moriarty's description this is a battle, a moment of utmost importance for Irish mythology. A battle between a people intent on shaping Nature to suit them and a people who, surrendering to it, would let Nature shape them to suit it.

Kirkey poses the question, 'Might it be said that we are standing at a moment which recapitulates this same mythic motif? Has our culture become Fomorian Súil Milldagach writ large? An examination of our tendencies toward environmental destruction in favour of, and as a means to human wealth and progress, seems to suggest this.'

For Moriarty, we now resemble Fomorian *seeing* more than Tuatha Dé *vision*. We have the collective Súil Milldagach: a culture so dominated by the ocular, the grasping eye, that all other senses are now subject to the sovereign, the eye, the slave to the screen: the spectacle.

'The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep.'

(Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967)

²⁰ Jason Kirkey, 2007, *The Song of the Silver Birch: Healing the Human-Nature Relationship in the Irish Druidic Tradition*, Naropa University, November 29. See: <https://www.jasonkirkey.com/articles/silverbranch.pdf>

The ancient poet, Amhairghin Glúngheal, stood at the prow of his ship, coming up the shore in Kerry. He travelled with the Sons of Míl (Milesians, who we know today as the Celts), seeking to settle on the island of Ireland.

As Amhairghin placed his right foot on the ground, he chanted:

*I am a wind in the sea
I am a sea-wind upon the land
I am the roar of the ocean
I am a stag of seven fights
I am a hawk on a cliff
I am a tear-drop of the sun
I am fair...*

Amhairghin led the Milesians into battle with the Tuatha Dé at the hill of Tailtiu. Victory went to the Milesians and a treaty was agreed that delivered over the land to Amhairghin and the Milesians, and everything below land to the Tuatha Dé.

From the Great Song from Which All Things Arise

Amhairghin – reputed to have been Ireland’s first Druid – led the Milesians into Ireland through song. Indeed, his name translates to ‘Born of Song.’ The name is significant because of its association with the ancient Irish notion of ‘Óran Mór’, which – in one account – refers to the primordial sound of invocation – to ‘*The Great Song from which all things arise.*’

Tragically, it seems, while Amhairghin brought the Milesians into what could have been, for them, a radical initiation into the Óran Mór, they chose invasion instead and took the land from the Tuatha Dé. ‘They chose Súil Milldagach, and we still hold mythically to that choice today.’

Kirkey notes that ‘we can see this in the story of Amhairghin, singing the world into creation. Through the power of voice and song he sings the unity of all things and through this, form arises – the cosmos of Ireland comes into being, allowing the Milesians to land.’ (p.40) ‘Amhairghin, ‘born of song,’ and the song which it is born from is the Óran Mór.’

For writers such as Moriarty and Kirkey, the original choices that lay before Amhairghin and on his arrival in Ireland – continue to exist for us today. The Óran Mór symbolizes the music of consciousness arising as form – from the ground of all being.

“

There as a mountain, there as a tree, there a stone, and there a person; each form is at its most basic nature made up of this limitless and enlightened awareness.

”

The arising of forms, the act of shaping consciousness itself is the music of Óran Mór.

To see things as the poet and the mystic see – to see things as they are, as the Óran Mór, the divine ground of beauty from which all things emerge, is said to be the antidote to Súil Milldagach.

‘Soul and nature are one; they are the wildness of the world and the wildness of the self. To free ourselves from one is to alienate ourselves from the other.’ (Kirkey, p.43)

‘The nature which we are estranged from is not the phenomenal world; it is the soul, wildness, which is most often found in nature. Connecting with trees, mountains, rivers, and animals is good, but unless we recognize and work with that from which we are really estranged, the soul and the Óran Mór, we will not truly be healed.’ (Kirkey, p.47)²¹

The preservation of the world depends on the wild. The poetic mind is wild. Therefore, the preservation of the world depends on the poetic mind.

²¹ MacEowen, Frank. *The Celtic Way of Seeing: Meditations on the Irish Spirit Wheel*. Novato: New World Library, 2007. 71

Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures (GTDF)

Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures is an international collective engaged in artistic, cartographic, pedagogical and relational experiments that 'aim to identify and de-activate colonial habits of being, and to gesture towards the possibility of decolonial futures'. Much of the work is based out of Musqueam land, where the University of British Columbia is located.

Conscious of the multiple and varied diagnoses of the present – and the proliferation of many visions of preferred futures – the collective seeks not only to imagine but to enact the world differently, and to address what they regard as the deep roots of an underlying illness: namely –

A global modern-colonial imaginary in which being is reduced to knowing, profits take precedent over people, the earth is treated as a resource rather than a living relation, and all of the shiny promises of states, markets, and Western reason are subsidized by the disavowed harms of impoverishment, genocide, and environmental destruction.²²

22 Primary Colours/Couleurs primaires, a multi-year arts initiative designed to place Indigenous arts at the centre of the Canadian arts system. See website: <https://www.primary-colours.ca/projects/45-gesturing-towards-decolonial-futures>

EDUCATION
AS *un*travelling
UNCONDITIONAL REGARD
for ones **BEING**
COMPASSIONATE WITNESSING
& **CHALLENGING**
for ones **DOING**

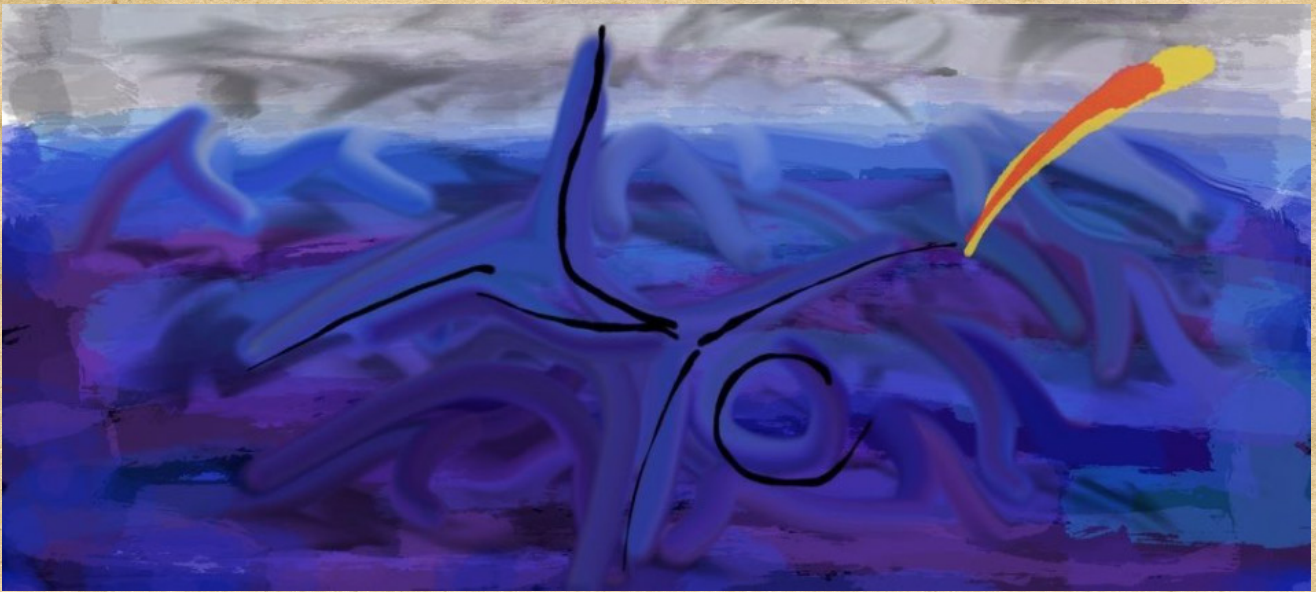
GESTURING TOWARDS **DECOLONIAL
FUTURES**

Credit: Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, Drawing by Mo Drescher.

[With Permission]

For the collective, decolonization is not an event nor is it a formula but a complex, multifaceted life-long and life-wide practice that offers no assurances. For the collective, simply learning about colonial power relations does not in itself necessarily disrupt the dominant frames of knowing and being of colonial-modernity that are, themselves, constituted through these relations:

Thus, artistic and pedagogical practices of hospicing/midwifery offer complementary tools and strategies that may interrupt the power of this knowledge regime and thereby loosen its grip on our individual imaginations and our collective imaginary. In doing so, they open the possibility of pluralizing not only what we know, but also how we know and who we are, so that we might learn to know and be otherwise. But this is merely a possibility, not a guarantee.



GTDF is also a 'practice' about 'hospicing worlds that are dying within and around us with care and integrity' 'while also assisting with the birth of new, potentially wiser possibilities'. The collective seeks to hold space for difficult conversations and silences without relationships falling apart, recognising and taking responsibility for harmful modern-colonial habits of being 'in ourselves and around us' that cannot be stopped by the intellect, by good intentions and by spiritual, artistic or embodied practices alone.

Participants seek to interrupt modern-colonial addictions, including addictions to the consumption of knowledge, of self-actualization and of experiences, and dis-investing in desires for unrestricted autonomy, authority, certainty and control, while creating validation to create spaces of accountability and response-abilities, for exiled capacities and for deeper intimacies.

GTDF's decolonial perspective is informed and inspired by 'Indigenous' analyses and practices that affirm that the current global problems are not related to a lack of knowledge but to an inherently violent modern colonial habit of being, structured by four denials:

- The denial of systemic violence and complicity in harm (the fact that our comforts, securities and enjoyments are subsidized by expropriation and exploitation somewhere else);

- The denial of the limits of the planet (the fact that the planet can not sustain exponential growth and consumption);

The denial of entanglement (our insistence in seeing ourselves as separate from each other and the land rather than "entangled" within a living wider metabolism that is bio-intelligent); and

- Denial of the depth and magnitude of the problems that we face: the tendencies 1) to search for "hope" in simplistic solutions that make us feel good/look good; 2) to turn away from difficult and painful work.

Each of these denials has been mapped onto the dimensions of 'violence', 'unsustainability', 'entanglement' and levels of preparedness to recognise the 'depth' of problems.

Website: <https://decolonialfutures.net/>

Suggested reading: [Hospicing Modernity: Facing humanity's wrongs and the implications for social activism, by Vanessa Machado de Oliveira.](#)

Key words: ['hospicing modernity', coloniality, decolonial futures, knowledge regimes and pluralization, dimensions of denial.](#)

Links to wellbeing economy: ['Global modern colonial imaginary', decolonial, systemic violence and appropriation.](#)

GESTURING TOWARDS DECOLONIAL FUTURES

Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, an arts and research collective²³, have created a list of seven 'responsibilities' related to intellectual and affective labour to guide collective experimentations. These responsibilities are to be considered in the practices of storying the past, living the present and weaving new futures. They are offered in a gesture of support to balance political mobilizations and existential entanglements. They might offer a starting point for our Community of Practice: prefigurative orientations that might invite, invoke and excite compelling futures:

Relational responsibility: Recognizing the persistence of systemic separations and inequalities, and working toward healing, reimagining, and regenerating relationships and modes of social re/production that honour both interdependency and autonomy, so as to ultimately dismantle inherited social, economic, political and epistemological divides;

Trans-local responsibility: Rethinking uni-directional flows of knowledge and paternalistic notions of progress and development by rooting practices in local, community-centred contexts, problems, and solutions, while also attending to global contexts and structures, and the interdependency of all beings, recognizing that a change in one place affects change elsewhere and that our ethical obligations are boundless;

Pluri-vocal responsibility: Considering how to ethically engage and be affected by different ways of knowing and being while respecting the integrity of each, the unique gifts they offer, acknowledging limitations and potential tensions between them. Challenging the dominance of Western rationality, Enlightenment humanism, and liberal frameworks of justice that dominate in mainstream ethics traditions and theories of change, while recognizing the difficulties and complexities of doing so;

Intergenerational responsibility: Cleaning up the literal and figurative toxicity of harmful and extractive social-ecological relations that compromise the possibility for life in the present and future, and fostering relationships and forms of social-ecological organization that can uphold and regenerate the material, intellectual, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing of present and future generations of all beings;

Experimental responsibility: Recognizing that all strategies of transformation have gifts, risks, and limitations and thus should: be crafted and enacted with both short- and long-term considerations; be subject to thorough analyses of possible effects on different populations, but without utility-maximization and with a recognition of the role of uncertainty; be rooted in a commitment to depth, curiosity, and see failure as important and generative; be engaged with constant reflexivity and re-evaluation, rather than be understood as closed resolutions;

23 <https://decolonialfutures.net/>

Self-reflexive responsibility: Taking seriously the complexities, complicities, difficulties and paradoxes of doing this work by naming and denaturalizing power dynamics and structures of harm, tracing and historicizing different approaches to addressing shared problems, identifying points of tension and competing investments, and identifying and interrupting circular patterns of problem solving and critique; and

Improvisational responsibility: Being able to throw plans and manifestos out of the window and to rethink responsibilities from scratch in order to be present to walk, breathe and dance with what is in front of us, with sensitivity towards different temporalities, sensibilities, and constellations of power and affect, and the unexpected, while remaining attentive to possibilities for mobilizing productive interruptions, and committed to deep listening and learning in order to make only different mistakes.



SAWEL MOUNTAIN



CORRATARY HILLS





Field Exchange 2022 (Tipperary, Ireland)

Brookfield Farm | Tipperary

Supported by Creative Ireland's Creative Climate Action Fund with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

Field Exchange is an Irish project where relationships between agriculture and creativity are examined and invigorated to combat climate change. It was presented on Brookfield Farm on the shores of Lough Derg, the first edition of Field Exchange took place between June and September 2022.

An exchange programme of creative agricultural topics was facilitated on the farm and were further contextualised and amplified by Model Plot, a sculptural planting by artist Deirdre O'Mahony in collaboration with the Loy Association of Ireland. Artist John Gerrard contributed a unique presentation of his simulation titled Corn Work. The Exchanges provided farmers, food producers, artists, experts and the interested public, time and community to collaborate.

In 2003 Field Exchange was one of 43 successful projects to receive support through the new Creative Climate Action Fund II, which includes 3 Shared Island projects. Over 2004 and 2005 Field Exchange will connect farmers, creatives, and experts to share knowledge and devise solutions for the challenges confronting farmers and rural communities in a shifting climate. Farmers from North Tipperary have been invited to join a dedicated Community of Practice, focused on sustainable farming practices, skill-building, and creatively addressing the challenges through a series of Field Exchange Days and Harvest Gatherings.

Website: <https://www.brookfield.farm/pages/field-exchange>

Keywords: **Agriculture, biodiversity, climate change, farm design, soil fertility, local food sharing, creatives, farmers, behavioural transformation.**

Links to wellbeing economy: **Agriculture, biodiversity and climate action, art, farm design, soil fertility**



Rou (Roundhouse-Kick Roughton) Reynolds is the **lead singer, electronics, and lyric writer for the band Enter Shikari**, a British post-hardcore band formed in 2003. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Gandhi Mate, Gandhi – Lyrics (Shikari)

*Now, I don't know about you,
But I don't think the primary purpose of your life,
Of my life and the entirety of the human race is just to blindly consume to support a failing
economy and a faulty system.*

*Forever and ever until we run out of every
resource,
and have to resort to blowing each other up to
ensure our own survival.*

*I don't think we're supposed to sit by idly, whilst we continue to use a long-outdated system,
that produces war, poverty, collusion, ruins our
environment and threatens every aspect of our health, and does nothing but divide and seg-
regate us.*

*I don't think how much military equipment we are selling to other countries, how many
hydocarbons we're burning, how much money is being printed and exchanged, is a good
measure of how healthy our society is.*

An Interview with musician Rou Reynolds of *Enter Shikari*

Rou Reynolds, lead vocalist, keyboard player and writer with the UK rock group *Enter Shikari* In conversation with WEAll's Marina Gattás and Peter Doran, Queens University Belfast/WEAll Ireland)
[Website: www.entershikari.com]

Our local music scene, when growing up, was incredibly broad and alive, and community driven. Music provided a wonderful space and it was the only thing that I really knew. The music scene was thriving and alluring.

I grew up in St Albans in Hertfordshire where the Conservative council had a big mistrust of alternative music. They viewed the scene as a haven for drugs and violence when, in fact, the truth was the complete opposite. We put on shows, which was difficult because the council tried to stop us and shut us down in our one venue, our youth club. Our youth club was threatened with demolition by the landowner. Miraculously it is still there.

There was immediate distrust of authority and frustration on my part.

I could see what music does for young people-music is such a root to your identity and creating relationships with the broader community. Music can invite young people out of troublesome circles and into community-based safer circles. That was my first experience.

I have studied musical history and was big into anthropology. Music has always been something that has brought human beings together. We have used music in ceremonies to bring people together around campfires...from time immemorial. Music festivals are the last bastion of that kind of unity, that kind of all-inclusive gathering.

Music is open to everyone. In a strange sense it is wonderfully dictatorial and can make you feel something that reminds you of our shared vulnerability.

Over the decades the world has become more and more divisive. So music has taken on a deeper purpose around creating local communities, creating opportunities to address issues. These conversations are broader and deeper than usual.

Special role of music

Music, comedy, art, literature and entertainment can introduce a topic that, perhaps, would normally make people quiver with annoyance or boredom. In our early days we'd be called a 'political band' and we hated the label.

Music is so immediately emotional it can be a way to introduce subjects and ideas in a way that isn't overly formal or difficult to access. It remains challenging and hard to do. It remains difficult to write music that is going to inspire a conversation or a reconsideration of something. Nevertheless, it is one of the best tools that we have.

As a kid I would listen to Rage Against the Machine without necessarily picking up on the intricacies of their lyrics. I wouldn't get the references to South American politics. I hadn't a clue but there was an allure to their music that I was drawn to, that sensuous righteous indignation. There was clearly a passion behind their music, so it was immediate and intriguing.

Even instrumental music can do this. It can make you think of something that blossoms into a new thought.

The Recording Industry

We have taken a decision to start our own record label.

The music industry is extremely distorted by capitalism: the music we produce is treated less as an art form and more as a commodity, as are the musicians themselves. It's a real mine-field.

We were lucky to be influenced by hardcore punk. The New York scene in the late 1980s and 90s was an incredible influence. The fearlessness of those scenes showed that you can do these things yourself and you don't need to sign your rights away and sign your songs away.

A lot of bands and acts do the whole thing, they get hyped, hyped, hyped and then the media move on to the next hype and you get sort of dropped and forgotten, whereas we've really concentrated on the human connection aspect that has been the pivotal thing for us since day one. That's really a kind of philosophical thing as well as about the music for me.

Influences

One of the first big influential moments for me was the Occupy Movement. If I took one thing from that, it was the worldwide acceptance of the idea that we live on a finite planet while our economic system ignores this simple observation. It blew my mind to consider that we

are born into this incredibly well established system, which is instilled in all of us. It's not so much that we don't question it, we don't even think about it. The system of market-based economics is instilled in us like the air that we breathe, and we take this for granted. Many people are going back to Marx and to more ecologically focused writers. These issues have not been addressed and we have not progressed. We have regressed, with this neoliberal outlook which has now become so pervasive and taken over the whole world.

The frustrating thing for me has been the complete lack of communication or conversation about these issues: we live on a finite planet, but our system demands infinite growth.

We can't keep going on with 'Business as Usual'.

In the last few years Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) has been interesting because it's a different perspective on everything. In a few generations time I don't see our economic system looking anything like what it is today, given the damage it does to our psychology, ecology, and mental health.

I have spent a long time thinking about these issues and once wrote a book, *A Treatise On Possibility*. The one thing we know about the universe is that it is in a constant state of flux. We have to resist rigidity. Refusing change is one sure fire way to die, looking at it from an evolutionary perspective.

My overarching outlook on the world is that we need to embrace imagination. I think we need to look seriously at how things can be fundamentally changed. It's my own view, from what I have experienced, that the system we have now is incredibly dangerous on almost all fronts.

One book that was pivotal for my thinking was Richard Williamson and Kate Pickett's *The Spirit Level* (2009). It's brilliant in its treatment of the breadth of the damage that our current economic system does.

I also remember watching people like Peter Joseph's early documentaries and his speeches at the *Zeitgeist Movement*.

Utopian fiction can also make you think in completely different ways about how the world could be, could operate and be organized in different ways.

Meditation's contribution to creativity and attention

We have noticed with the YouTube charts, after one minute, the graph tracking people who've watched a video starts to fall off. After five minutes it's off the cliff, and there's about one percent of people who are still with you.

When you look at the online platforms that are enjoying success at the moment, it's Tik Tok, Snapchat, even Instagram. These are all based on the idea that, basically, a video should not be more than 20 or 30 seconds long maximum.

There's some great content out there at those durations but, when you want to address something that takes any degree of thought or explanation it's utterly impossible.

That worries me greatly because young people who are growing up with all these pressures to join such platforms – and pressures to make their own content, to have a sense of purpose or sense of validation that comes from internet content – it can all be so damaging to mental health.

Our attention spans are just becoming more and more limited as we're bludgeoned with short, sharp hits of dopamine.

Meditation teaching

During the first year of the pandemic, I did a lot of livestreamed meditation sessions. We'd just talk about my experiences and try and give people an introduction to meditation. We'd do small sessions online and it seemed to go down well.

I ended up doing a short podcast where it's basically just ten episodes, offering an introduction to meditation. I think, for a lot of people, it actually helped so I ended up doing a podcast with ten episodes. Meditation has become a must-have tool in one's toolbox if one wants to stay sane in this society. We are so saturated with noise and intensity. Today, science has taken meditation and shaken away the excess religious trappings that we don't particularly need. For me yoga and meditation are, well, just a way of life.

Music and Meditation

I aim to make music somewhere in the middle, soothing, to provide a breathing space. Listeners can escape their fears and stresses while, at the same time, I avoid putting their minds to sleep. I want to enliven minds rather than completely soothe an audience into a kind of slumber.

Some of our audience have gone on a journey with our music and are more open than others to social commentary. Communicating big ideas. There's a bit of a trend today.

There's a space for all kinds of music. With my peers, there are people who've gone on a bit of a journey, who have really opened up in their music and become more open to social commentary. That's quite amazing for us now that there are other bands into our kind of scene.

Of course we have always had father figures like Billy Bragg and the *Sex Pistols* who beat a trail. Our peers include the metalcore band, Architects. Taylor Swift's lyrical journey has also been super interesting; she is clearly on a new trajectory.

[Reynolds cited a favorite example of a song that deals explicitly with his social commentary on the dominant economic system, Gandhi Mate, Gandhi.]

The rhythms of GDP and beyond...

I think the 'p' [politics] word and the 'e' [economics] word are a turn off in lyrics. You have to present these ideas imaginatively. In 'Gandhi Mate', Gandhi, I start the song with a rant, almost mimicking online bloggers raving at a webcam. In that song I introduced a critique of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and got away with it because of the song's flamboyance and bombast. I deal with everything from the military-industrial complex to hydrocarbons and printing money.

Gandhi Mate, Gandhi – Lyrics

*Singer One: Now, I don't know about you,
But I don't think the primary purpose of your life,
Of my life and the entirety of the human race is just to blindly consume to support a failing
economy and a faulty system.*

*Forever and ever until we run out of every resource and have to resort to blowing each other
up to ensure our own survival.*

*I don't think we're supposed to sit by idly, whilst we continue to use a long-outdated system,
that produces war, poverty, collusion, ruins our environment and threatens every aspect of
our health, and does nothing but divide and segregate us.*

*I don't think how much military equipment we are selling to other countries, how many hydro-
carbons we're burning, how much money is being printed and exchanged, is a good meas-
ure of how healthy our society is.*

*But I do think I can speak for everyone when I say:
We're sick of this shit!*

*Time to mobilize.
Time to open eyes.*

We are not a quiet pocket of resistance.

This is real and we cannot afford to fail.

Act with, act with persistence.

This is real and we cannot afford to fail.

[Singer Two: I am the established order.

Respect me and fear me.]

Singer One: F.k you! We hold no respect.

And when tomorrow comes we're gonna step on your head!

Pig!

Band: Calm down, Calm down, mate.

Gandhi mate, remember Gandhi.....

This was the first time we put forward an economics issue and it was a success in terms of economic messaging. Some people do get it and they are in the choir, while others – of course – just want the music.

*[Shikari's 2020 album, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, was issued with an accompanying book, to critical acclaim. The album is peppered with tracks that celebrate possibility: 'Crossing the Rubicon', 'The Dreamer's Hotel', 'Modern Living...', 'Apocaholics Anonymous', 'TINA', and 'Elegy for Extinction', and 'Waltzing Off the Face of the Earth']*

Global Green at Electric Picnic & Roskilde DK Festival

Electric Picnic (Global Green), Ireland

For 16 years, Global Green has been a vibrant and dynamic area at Electric Picnic, Ireland’s largest music and culture festival. Curated by Cultivate and featuring contributions from over 30 organisations and hundreds of artists and activists, Global Green has evolved into a hub of creativity and conviviality. Over three days, the area hosts a wide array of activities, including local food stalls, thought-provoking exhibits, a community garden, and a variety of artistic and cultural expressions, including spoken word, music, and dance in its Village Hall.

GLOBAL GREEN
2023

ELEMENTS OF CHANGE
TALKS | DISCUSSIONS | MUSIC | PERFORMANCE | ACTIVITIES
Cultivate, in partnership with the **Irish Environmental Pillar**, have created this space for meaningful discussions, engagement, activism, and action.
The Environmental Pillar is comprised of 26 environmental NGOs, and works to promote environmental sustainability and protection of the natural environment.
<https://environmentalpillar.ie>

THE GLOBAL GREEN GARDEN
Coordinated by **Community Gardens Ireland**.
Community Gardens Ireland is a volunteer network of over 100 community gardens and allotments in existence since 2011 that advocates for more allotments and community gardens throughout Ireland, along with seeking additional support and protection for these essential community spaces. cgireland.org

GLOBAL GREEN FOOD PROJECT
Slow down and savour the delights from **Happy Valley Coffee**, a refreshing kombucha from **My Goodness**, or delectable toasty from **West Coast Toast**.
Produce sourced from **Cloughjordan Community Farm**.

ACTIVATE LOCAL AND GLOBAL ACTION
Stalls, games and activities from a diverse group of campaigners, NGOs and social enterprises. This vibrant area includes **Fablab Makers**, **An Taisce's Climate Ambassadors**, **Community Energy**, **Concern**, **Self Help Africa**, **Irish Cycling Network**, and **Tits Up** (recycling art photography). **Cloughjordan Ecovillage** and **Cloughjordan Community Farm** with their giant **Connect 4 Resilience** and **Jenga** and **Bycycle Powered Apple Pressing**

ARTIVST ARENA
Get ready for interactive games, treats, and various activities that will engage and inspire you. **Léargas** and **Creativity and Change** collaborate to foster cross-border social cohesion. **Dance for Change**, explore citizen science and participate in workshops on poetry, rap, and art.

VILLAGE HALL
This year's lineup promises to be unforgettable, with a variety of incredible acts taking the stage. Dublinia's funk poets, **Shakalak**, return to elevate our spirits. Activist/Rapper **The Accidental Rapper** returns for his second year after leaving the audience in awe last time. **Ja'Ne**, known for her enigmatic and neo-souful stylings, is also back following her triumphant performance in 2022

cultivate

Global Green's Elements of Change tent fosters meaningful conversations and inspires individuals to imagine how their local communities can thrive amidst the formidable social and ecological challenges we are facing. The Artist tent harnesses the transformative power of creativity and diversity through a series of workshops and performances; participants engage with art as a tool for social change and personal transformation. Global Green has helped to raise awareness of sustainability issues among thousands of festival goers each year. By providing a platform for dialogue, action, and inspiration, the area serves as a catalyst for positive change.



Roskilde DK Festival, Denmark



For over fifty years, tens of thousands of volunteers have united to bring Northern Europe's largest genre-spanning musical festival to life, forming a temporary urban metropolis in the south of the city from which the festival takes its name. For the eight days of its duration the festival becomes Denmark's fourth largest city.

In 2023, the Roskilde Festival Charity Society- who have run the event on a not-for-profit basis since 1972 - adopted a new theme and mission statement to inform their curatorial approach to the event: 'Utopia'. This theme guides decisions on the musical line-up, the choice of artworks and the provenance of the food on offer.

The 'Utopia' theme was arrived at following consultation with the Society's network of activist groups, NGOs, and artists to discuss the major challenges of the day. The overwhelming feedback was a recognition of the unprecedented challenges facing young people in the world today, a generation living through the climate and biodiversity crises, wars in Europe and the Middle East, and financial insecurity.

Attendees at the 2023 event were invited to not only imagine but to fully immerse themselves in what a better world could look like, and to explore the zeitgeist where culture, experience and the polycrises meet to generate new imaginaries.

Since its inception in 1971, Roskilde has turned over more €55 million for humanitarian and cultural charities, with an estimated 13-15 million Danish Krone (€1.8m) raised in 2023.

Groundswell, Lannock Manor Farm, Hertfordshire, England

Entering its eighth year, The Groundswell event provides a forum for farmers and anyone interested in food production or the environment to learn about the theory and practical applications of Conservation Agriculture or regenerative systems, including no-till, cover crops and re-introducing livestock into the arable rotation, with a view to improving soil health.

Groundswell is a practical show aimed at anyone who wants to understand the farmer's core asset, the soil, and make better informed decisions. It is a two-day event featuring talks, forums and discussions from leading international soil health experts, experienced arable and livestock farmers, agricultural policy experts, direct-drill demonstrations and AgTech innovators.

With wide appeal across the food and farming spectrum, Groundswell is relevant for conventional, organic, livestock, arable, landowners or tenant farmers.

Groundswell was founded by the Cherry family on their mixed farm in Hertfordshire. John and Paul Cherry have farmed for over thirty years, converting to a no-till system in 2010.

Electric Picnic: <https://www.electricpicnic.ie/>
Roskilde Festival: <https://www.roskilde-festival.dk/en/>
Groundswell: <https://groundswellag.com/about/>

Keywords: [Music, performance, dialogue, sustainability, utopia, polycrises, youth, conviviality, creativity, immersive learning, regenerative farming, rural transformation.](#)

Links to the wellbeing economy: [Polycrises, dialogue, learning, utopian and immersive learning, food, regenerative practices.](#)

CULTURAL CREATIVES AS TRANSFORMATION CATALYSTS

By Professor Sandra Waddock, Boston College Carroll School of Management

One important aspect of transformational system change is the need to shift core narratives or what are sometimes called social imaginaries. Such narratives are important stories or cultural myths on which people rely to tell them what the world is like and how they should behave in it with respect to other people, social institutions, and even nature. The role of art and, importantly, some artists as transformation catalysts working to change problematic existing narratives towards new narratives that re-imagine how the world might be and provide hope for the future cannot be overestimated.

That is because inspirational and even sometimes difficult artistic images and productions have significant power to change minds (and mindsets) in ways that are too often unrecognized. And mindset or worldview shifts, according to change theorist Donella Meadows, are critically important keys to bringing transformational change about because they influence attitudes and ultimately behaviors.

Art, for example, can foster greater understanding and boost awareness of difficult and controversial situations. That's what Norman Rockwell's 1964 painting of six-year old Ruby Nell Bridges' walking to a newly-integrated New Orleans school surrounded by US Marshalls, called the [Problem We All Live With](#), did. Similarly, Pablo Picasso's [Guernica](#), widely considered his most influential work, graphically explored the horrors of war in ways that leave little to the imagination and, in so doing, raised consciousness about that issue. Paintings, however, are not the only influential type of art. Photography, too, can be an impactful way of getting people to see things that they don't usually want to see, as did Nick Ut's 1972 photo [The Terror of War](#), depicting young children being firebombed with Napalm. Or consider the impact on social consciousness around various issues like interracial relations of television and movie productions. For example, Star Trek depicted [the first interracial kiss](#) on television, or Ellen DeGeneres's groundbreaking revelation of the fact that she is gay on her own show [Ellen](#). And on the inspirational side, photographs from space, including 1968's [Earthrise](#) and 1972's [Blue Marble](#), helped changed peoples' perceptions about the status of our planet in the universe.

Music, too, has fuelled civic activism in support of civil rights, including, for example, some of Woody Guthrie's songs like *This Land Is Your Land* (originally a protest song, which actually talks about people going hungry and restricted access to public lands), and South Africa's national anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, which helped Blacks and supporters protest the Apartheid regime. Novels and short stories, theatrical, film, and video productions, comedy shows (like *Saturday Night Live* in the US), dramas, poetry, and community-based art, as well as impactful sculptures, posters, and other forms of art are powerful vehicles for tapping the imagination and creating new ways of thinking—the new social imaginaries that are needed.

That is because art in its many manifestations taps imagination, emotion, and can foster connectedness (or highlight disconnection). It can help people see the world in new ways, enhance awareness of social and other ills, and shift understanding of humans' place in the world. In doing that, art plays a vital role in shifting cultural understandings, potentially building empathy for unlike others, including other-than-human beings and nature itself. Powerfully deployed, art can help people rethink what it means to be human, and also empower people to build social movements that dramatically change the world (think of the protests in the US during the 1960s and protests against Apartheid in South Africa). In that respect as artist Favianna Rodrigues said in 2013: 'Artists are central, not peripheral to social change. ...Artists don't think like policy folks. They don't think like organizers. And this is a good thing. They think big, visionary ideas.'

Art can be transformative when it helps shape new cultural values based on social imaginaries that re-envision the world in positive and constructive ways. It can foster, when used effectively, values of connectedness, dignity for all, collaboration, equity, voice, and democracy, not to mention a flourishing natural world. For those gifts and inspirations, we should be grateful to artists who inspire the types of shifts in narratives and social imaginaries that generate positive change in our world.

We will Dance with Mountains (Online course organised around the ideas of Dr Bayo Akomolafe)

Organised around the postactivism of Dr Bayo Akomolafe, 'Dancing with Mountains' is a course/carnival of learning for those who believe that the present times call for unprecedented forms of organisation, bold new thinking in the direction of 'exquisite formulations', and a form of coming together that emphasizes that people are not reducible to their jobs.

The course includes lectures by Dr Akomolafe, teachings by revered guests, dance, cooking together, eating together, play with children, making sanctuary, exercises, one-to-one encounters, weaving rituals, gatherings and creating new assemblages of power.

Described as 'an aesthetics of the endtime', the course is an exploration of Dr Akomolafe's 'postactivism' as a pragmatic politics of rethinking accountability, social justice, and responsivity in the ruins of modernity. It is not a course premised on gaining mastery or getting to the point, but 'an unspeakable travelling together from points-of-no-return, an ungrammatical vocation' of walking into failure, a falling-apart-together, a fugitive ethnographic study of the hidden worlds lurking behind white sight, a decoration of the walls of the cracks, a cultivating of bewilderment together.

The course introduction invites would-be participants to a carnival of departure in teaching, creating together, and leaning into the exquisite:

'We Will Dance with Mountains is an animist carnival-festival, a subterranean convergence of disarticulated bodies desirous of a new politics, and a cartography project set upon exploring vast terrains of failure as a gesture of refusal in a time when resistance not only feels inadequate to the task of decoloniality but programmatically linked to the continuity of the status quo.'

Session offerings include:

- A trans-local community of 1500-2000 fellow students, artists, teachers, others, midwives, children, elders, wanderers and otherwise from across the planet weaving a rich tapestry of cross-cultural inquiry and possibilities;
- Regional meet-ups where possible;
- Specific agoras for Black folks, People of Colour, and White-identified people;
- Artist collaborations;
- Music, dance and theatre;
- Prayer
- Emergent curriculum.

Website: <https://www.dancingwithmountains.com/>

Keywords: [Postactivism, social justice, modernity, whiteness, accountability, fugitive ethnographies, animism, festival, gatherings, learning, decoloniality.](#)

Links to wellbeing economy: [Modernity, whiteness, decoloniality, failure, cross-cultural inquiry.](#)

AN INVITATION TO POSTACTIVISM

By Dr *Báyò Akómoláfé*, WEAll Ambassador

[We invited the poet, scholar, activist and father, Báyò Akómoláfé, to reflect on the role of our Community of Practice and the artist in amplifying the Wellbeing Economy Alliance's deep inquiry into our captivity by the dominant capitalist and neoliberal stories of our times and in bringing new stories to life.]

I think that our captivity is fundamentally sensorial. This is the reason why I am fond of speaking about ontological mutiny or sensorial apostasy. This language reaches out for the same kind of affect without wanting to terminate at legible and fully intelligible futures.

It is my understanding that white modernity or European modernity effectuate some kind of captivity. It has a hold on our subjectivity. It has been engaged in the manufacturing of the subject. The manufacture of the dissociated self who is alone, trapped...dependent on systems that perpetuate suffering. In that sense, there is what looks like an invitation for us to lose our way. I'm speaking now with the cadence of my elders who, in our proverbs from West Africa, would say that 'the times are urgent, slow down'. That in order to find our way now, we must become lost.

I think 'getting lost' is a kind of craft. You might almost think about it as the logic of the fugitive. *If art is anything it is about reframing those boundaries that we're used to and allowing ourselves to wander, and move, and notice the world in different ways.*

So, if capitalism is some kind of sensorial work...if economies and economics, and how we move around the world...if the normative is sensorial, then the work of decoloniality, the work of coming to different kinds of futures is a mutiny of some kind.

I'm very wary about attempts to gather geniuses in a room so that we can supposedly devise the next kind of system in the world, because that notion already presumes that we are somehow outside of these systems. It presumes that all we have to do is think about the next system. That's very anthropocentric, very hubristic, to believe that we can just do that.

We are implicated, we are part of the world that we critique. Right? So my work centres and revolves – meanders and lurks – around the idea of cracks. Where a crack is understood as an opening of some kind, as some kind of generative incapacitation or failure.

Brothers and sisters, that's what you are calling for. What your work feels like to me is an invitation to stay in the cracks of failure. That's where art thrives. Not on the surface but in the subterranean, in the sub-altern. That's where new subjectivities are born.

We need a craft of some kind, or politics, that notices and celebrates these openings.

Postactivism

Postactivism is a matter of irruptions and eruptions, breakthroughs, cracks, flashes, fissures, fault lines, discontinuities, blasts, splits, rifts, ruptures, seismic shifts, world-ending openings, miracles, strange encounters, and the yawning maw of a monster. It is my way of describing the flows and possibilities that proceed from the moment when things no longer fit.

I think the best way to come into this, to dance with this question is to, first of all, notice that it is not framed with humanist understandings of agency, centralized in the self or in the life of the mind. So I'm not starting with the 'empowered individual.' Right? That's the history of the liberal world order. We could trace that history, starting back from 1948 and Hiroshima and all the things that that world did to try to coalesce around the ontology of the human: creating institutions, the United Nations, NATO, the World Health Organisation, the IMF.

It was an ontological project and we're still in that ontological project. So it becomes very, very difficult for people to understand 'the world' apart from starting from what we know. Where do we start? My instinct is not to think in terms of *individuals* taking action. It is to notice that action is constantly happening around us. It doesn't revolve around human intentions. The world is constantly weaving desire in multitudinous and surprising and unexpected ways. And we are enlisted in these weavings. We might like to think of ourselves as the originators of action but we are not the originators.

We are part of ecologies of acting '*together with*'.

So, in that sense, postactivism is not the next thing to do. Right? I never think of it as 'here's a fresh set of ideas that you can run with.' I think of it as an interruption in the field. An interruption in the field...like a crack, like an opening, a disruptive, prophetic opening that weaves us differently.

Let me paraphrase the French educator, Fernand Deligny. It's not the spider that weaves the web. The web is not the project of the spider. The web is the project of the web. There is a sense in which we want to reduce it to the units that we are used to, like the idea that the spider weaves the web. No. The project of the web is the web.

So I am thinking about all the ways that we are being enlisted, compelled and summoned into new kinds of work. And these new kinds of work perhaps look nothing like work. It may

look as ordinary as being the father of an autistic child. This is ordinary everyday living.

Postactivism is not the way I describe a superior form of being that guarantees solutions. It is not “post-” in the sense of being a successor narrative, a deeper truth, a surer track to utopian worlds, a formula for saving the world. Instead, it is the site where continuity becomes impossible, where “the world” in its colonizing completeness feels less compelling than that one riven place that sprouts alien notions, and where the solutions of the highway seem inadequate to a now unusual, more-than-human, arrangement.

A frothing crack opens in the ground, enacting a break in the seamless totality and knowability of things, disrupting the exclusivity of human agency and inquiry, dispersing vitality, and expanding sociality to include things we hadn't considered. *Everything changes, becomes stranger. Alien.*

This is *postactivism*. When we have come to the end of the rope, to the very end of the world, and there are no more words.

Syncopation

I'm working along these lines of thinking with other posthumanist scholars to craft something that I call chiasma. This is ethnographic work, working within the cracks. It's a fancy word for how we trace...how we begin to trace our sensorial affinities with land, with what we're eating, with how we move with other beings. And how this invites us to take on new shapes. The instigator here is not the empowered individual or the human self. It is the crack. The cracks become instigators for a new kind of politics and imaginaries.

Another way that I think about these cracks is syncopation. I'm not going to go deep into rhythm theory to explain that but when a groove or a piece of music is disrupted, new elements come in and enhance dance-ability. The idea of syncopation is like a mass disabling event. What I'm trying to say here is that at some level the supremacist projects and narratives are being disrupted. This includes disruptions to the clearing of whiteness... which should not be identified with white people. Whiteness is a geonengineering project...a cultural project, which can enlist black bodies too. It can enlist cyborgs if it wants to. It's not about the colour of one's skin.

This supremacist project is being disrupted. We're beginning to feel the world in different ways. You can speak of mass traumatic intergenerational effects, spilling and disrupting the individualizing work of whiteness. You can speak about about the eco-, sexual, political disruptions afoot. You can speak about pandemics and viruses, and microbial activisms.

At many levels we're being disrupted even in the ways we tell stories and anticipate the future. I'm thinking that these cracks that are emerging everywhere are opportunities,

openings of some kind. I think of them as political agents in their own right.

We'd like to put a band aid on these disruptions. Whiteness polices the cracks. Psychology is the policeman of capitalism, right?

So there's a sense in which we're moving towards the posthuman to address a very human crisis. Our responses take different shapes. It can be archival in one place. It can be story telling in another. It could be speculative fabulation in a different place.

It's an ecology of multiple practices instigated by this disruption that I describe as postactivism.

KEEPING OUT THE GIRAFFES

Foreword by Professor Tim Jackson

**Art is more than an instrument in this project.
It's the very nature of it.**

When the moon rises, said the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, the sea covers the land and the heart feels like an island in the infinite. Children understand this feeling. Look! Look! It's the moon, they cry. The moon! They turn their own moon faces up towards you. Delight and trepidation finely balanced there. Look at the moon, Daddy!

Who are these children, you ask yourself? Where do they come from? The truth is they're strangers. Visiting us from another country. It's called the future. Your children are not your children, said Kahlil Gibran. You may house their bodies but not their souls. For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

A few years ago I was installing some insulation in our home on a Sunday afternoon. My daughter, who was young at the time, was helping me. We were pressing thin strips of adhesive-backed foam into the corners of windows and doors to keep out the draughts. At least, that's what I was doing. She was doing something else.

Will this really keep out the giraffes? she said.

You can hear the five-year old mind at work. How did they get into our garden? Can this tiny strip of plastic really keep them out? 'Cos everyone knows how tall and thin they are. They can probably squeeze through the tiniest cracks. And what will happen if they do? Will they tangle us up in gangly limbs at breakfast time? What kind of cereal do giraffes eat, anyway? And will I meet them on my way to school?

My daughter was a millennium baby. She has a certificate from the Queen to prove it. Her age will always track the passing years of the twenty-first century. How old will you be in 2050? She will be 50. It's her century. The one in which the climate (and many other ecological battles) will either be won or lost.

Her class held up placards, back in the noughties, when the UK led the world on climate legislation. It's our planet! But where are we now? What will it look like in 2050? Will there still be giraffes in it?

These are her questions. And mine.

I've thought a lot about those giraffes. At first I mistook them for a childish interpretation of a weekend chore. But with Kahlil Gibran's help and the memory of my daughter's moon-face, raised inquiringly, I see I was mistaken. The giraffes are there. They really are in the garden.

The task is real. Keeping out the giraffes matters.

There are lots of puzzles in our failure to combat climate change. One of them is the many easy things we routinely fail to do about it. Like draught-stripping, for example. Insulating our homes makes unassailable sense. In the midst of a cost of living crisis, it makes even more sense. It saves us money, lowers our carbon footprint, reduces our exposure to Putin's aggression. It makes our lives safer and more comfortable.

And yet they don't get done, these simple things. Time and time again. The technologies work, the economics are favourable, the results are demonstrable. But our political attention is missing. Or our priorities are elsewhere. Climate is bottom of our list. Rainforests are a long way from here.

Our lives instead are taken up with daily tasks. Putting the kids on the bus. Getting to work on time. Surviving shopfloor politics and email overload. Foraging for groceries. Throwing together meals. Binging on Netflix. Collapsing into bed. Eat, sleep, repeat.

We count ourselves lucky to make it from one end of the day to another. Locked in routine. Lost in anxiety. Striving for status. Keeping out the giraffes. For everyone knows (and instinctively fears) the havoc that long-necked creatures wreak when they slip through the cracks in our lives.

That isn't all there is, of course. Our lives routinely rise above routine. Relationships matter. Family matters. Hope for the future matters. And we constantly strive to keep those hopes alive. The daily grind is lifted from obscurity by the colour of our dreams. Our aspirations soar on rainbow wings.

We continually crave a better life for ourselves and our children. Occasionally, we escape into moments of unadulterated pleasure. And from the loose fabric of fantasy and the radiant colours of desire we create and maintain a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives.

**For everyone knows (and instinctively fears) the
havoc that long-necked creatures wreak when they slip
through the cracks in our lives**

What is the objective of the consumer? asked the anthropologist Mary Douglas in an essay on poverty written over thirty years ago. It is to help create the social world, she said, and find a credible place in it.

This deeply humanizing vision of consumer lives is also a forgiving one. We would like to condemn materialism as greed and damn consumerism to hell. But we are locked into its social logic by our own symbolic attachment to stuff.

Matter matters to us. And not just in functional ways. Beyond the immediacy of material sustenance –food, clothing, shelter – consumer goods provide a kind of language through which we communicate. We tell each other stories through material things. And with these stories we create the narratives that sustain our lives.

This task – and I am coming to the point now – is a fundamentally artistic one. Technology is important to its functionality. Science furnishes the understanding. Artefacts offer a language. Goods and services provide what Amartya Sen called our capabilities for flourishing.

But the task itself is an act of creation. A creative gesture. It calls on our imagination, our hopes, our vision. It engages our values, our identity, our sense of a shared humanity. Society hangs on the gossamer thread of collective dreams. It always has done.

Living is an artistic endeavour. That's my point. Art doesn't portray life. Life doesn't imitate art. Life and art play endless swing-ball in each other's back yard.

The uniquely human adaptation of artistic expression is as strong a force in our shared history as were the steam engine, the semi-conductor and the internet. Infinitely more so. The stories we told, the visions we saw, the dreams we shared: these were the building blocks of civilisation, the harbingers of progress, the bringers of hope.

In making this claim, I'm not attempting to privilege artists. Art and celebrity are crudely intertwined in the modern mind. But celebrity isn't the essence of art; just its expression in a confused culture, adrift from its moorings in shared meaning.

Nor am I trying to suggest that art can rise above our culpability for ecological change. That would be ridiculous. The hands of the artist are stained with the blood of empire. The lifestyle of a successful popstar can beggar the carbon footprint of a sub-Saharan nation. Art mis-catalogued too many abuses and stood silent through too many atrocities.

But it also suffered these atrocities. It bore witness to the cruelty that people inflict on one another. It gave voice to the oppressed. Spoke up for the dispossessed. It understood our joy and commiserated in our sorrow. Art whispered to us in our own language.

The heart has reasons, reason does not know at all, said the French philosopher Pascal. Art speaks to and from the heart. In its purest form, the artistic endeavour is a form of creation. One that we're all engaged in.

I think I probably came to this realisation early on in life. The written word was my escape from the voluble relatives whose conversation I could barely puncture with my half-formed hopes and dreams. Writing plays was a way to tame that volubility and make a kind of sense of it. Telling stories was a way of living life to the full. Connecting with the experiences of others. Journeying along the road less travelled.

Almost as soon as I had set out on it, I was called away from that task, by a calamity that drew me out of my daydreams and into the immediacy of the world. The meltdown of Reactor no. 4 in Chernobyl in April 1986 was a wake-up call to the aspiring playwright, hoping for fame. My own parents had dragged me to CND rallies to protest against nuclear weapons.

But the dangers of civil nuclear power brought home to me the leviathan power of runaway technology.

The next day I walked into the offices of Greenpeace in London and asked them to find me something to do. They set me working on the economics of renewable energy. Overnight I became an accidental economist. And since that moment, I have looked up from that task barely long enough to write a few radio plays. And to insulate a few kitchen doors of course.

That journey took me not to London's West End, but briefly at least to Westminster's inner sanctum, when I was appointed as Economics Commissioner on the UK Government's Sustainable Development Commission where I wrote a book that effectively put paid to my playwrighting career.

For now.

I'm not going to say for good!

But the last decade or so has been an extraordinary roller coaster journey through one of the most painful conundrums of our time. What I call the dilemma of growth. A kind of can't live with it, can't live without it struggle to imagine a different kind of economics, informed by a different vision of progress.

Prosperity without Growth was not a work of art. I like to think it's reasonably well written of course. But its intended audience was policy-makers. In fact, in its original form it was a report to the British Prime Minister at the time. The first ever such report to a standing premier that dared to question the shibboleth of growth.

And I think my working assumption was that if I made it as accessible as possible and as logically coherent as I could, the force of its arguments would carry the day. The policy proposals would be adopted and things would change.

Call me naïve. In retrospect I was. I got a glimpse of that when, the day before the report was launched I received a phone call telling me that number 10 [Downing Street] had 'gone ballistic'. This was not the way to win friends and influence people!

But in the intervening years, I've been surprised and humbled by the number of people Prosperity without Growth did reach, way beyond the intended audience. And I've also had to watch in horror as its recommendations were ignored over and over again. I began to realise – or perhaps to remember – that logic does not always carry the day.

The heart has reasons, reason does not know at all.

And when I sat down in the early months of the pandemic in 2020 to write another book. I realised it had to be, not so much a sequel as a prequel to the earlier one. A more philosophical piece. Telling the human stories of those whose work had inspired my own work. And those whose vision might inspire all of us to imagine a better world. 'Economic wisdom, wrapped up in poetry' in the words of one of my favourite reviews of the book at the time.

Post Growth – life after capitalism allowed me to connect with the playwright within. It reminded me of the power of human story in the task of collective imagination. It's too early to say whether Post Growth will be any more successful in changing the political agenda. But it's clear that any attempt to change our world must recognise a fundamental truth. It must speak a language people understand.

Science can sketch the nature of the problem. Technology can facilitate the solutions. Economics can point out the costs and the benefits. Art engages the soul. It speaks to the moon-struck child in us. It whispers to the giraffes.

Art looks like the perfect addition to our instruments of change. And yet I want to resist the call to think of art this way. Perhaps art can succeed where policy fails. Perhaps we can sketch and compose and sculpt our way towards a wellbeing economy. Perhaps celebrity artists can lead us by example towards sustainability.

But this line of thinking falls into too many traps. That art has traction in politics. That poetry speaks truth to power. That art is instrumental at all. Some of these things may be partially true. But the biggest danger of all lies in subjugating artistic endeavour to reason. Because doing so risks robbing art of meaning. And meaning is something, I suspect, we'll badly need

in times to come.

Instead I want to propose that we keep art free to play a far more vital role in the emotional fabric of our lives. Three roles in fact: vision, resolution, consolation. Let me finish by speaking briefly about each.

I'm fascinated by the proliferation of post-apocalyptic visions of the world. From Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* to David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*; from Saci Lloyd's *Carbon Diaries* to Will Self's *Book of Dave*. And perhaps most poignant of all, dark though it is, Cormack McCarthy's elegiac novel *The Road*.

Literature is replete with memories of the future. And the astonishing thing is that, even for someone like me who has worked for over three decades in the science of the future, these stories have an extraordinary and unexpected power. They connect me to tomorrow in a way that scenario models somehow fail to do.

Perhaps even more striking are the visions of our inner world. I think for instance of Rembrandt's allegories, Chopin's nocturnes, Rodin's sculpture. In Rembrandt's iconic *Return of the Prodigal Son* the father's strangely feminine hands rest on the shoulders of the returning son, whose torn and tattered garments somehow radiate a golden light. In an amazing early pencil sketch of the roadside scene in the parable of the Good Samaritan, he offers an extraordinarily intimate portrait of the altruist within. Beneath the noise of human strife, Rembrandt reminds us, lies a fragile interior space worth knowing about, worth protecting.

These visions are not always comfortable. They're not without conflict and suffering. But here is another of art's lessons. As an environmentalist, I'm struck by our professional tendency to try and flatten the conflict landscape. To want to rush immediately to the promised land. But as a playwright, I'm acutely aware of the rules of the game. The essence of drama is conflict. The arc of the story requires a protagonist, a call to arms, a quest, a series of trials, a reversal, transformation, a journey home.

Resolution through conflict.

Art pays homage to the nature of the journey. Its sense of struggle. The power (and partiality) of resolution: not as an instant, a comfortable future, but as a goal hard-earned, easily lost and almost always temporary. There are lessons here for the wellbeing economy. For all of us.

**This is where we need the consolation of art.
Its understanding of sorrow, failure, and loss.
And it's intimations of transcendence**

When the moon rises, said Lorca, the bells hang silent and pathways appear impenetrable. The way ahead is gone. Our children turn to us and ask: where now? Which way do we go?

What would it take for us to admit that we don't know the answer? That we're lost. That our best attempts to combat climate change have failed. That our economies are bankrupt. That our technologies are broken. That our politicians have let us down. That restraint lost its fight with desire. Justice its struggle against inequity. That our vision of progress was an illusion. A dream we once had. A story we told our children to stop them getting frightened by the moon.

This is where we need the consolation of art. Its understanding of sorrow, failure, and loss. And its intimations of transcendence. Nobody eats oranges under the full moon, said Lorca, who would die at the age of 38 from an assassin's bullet. One must eat fruit that is green and cold.

You're not alone in fear, he says. And in the same breath dares to suggest: the time for oranges will come again. Loss is only part of the arc of the story. Reversal is only temporary. Art teaches us to look beyond the glitter of triumph and the shadow of disaster. And to detect beneath them the echoes of immortality.

Vision, resolution, consolation. These are the tools from which to build a different future. Our ability to live well, to flourish in less materialistic ways, is in essence an artistic endeavour.

Sustainability is the art of living well, within the ecological limits of a finite planet. Art is more than an instrument in this project. It's the very nature of it.

So let me finish by encouraging you to see your work over the next years not as an adjunct to the technical change or economic reform that we so badly need. But as the very heart of the transition to a wellbeing economy.

Adbusters Media Foundation (Canada)

Adbusters Magazine is a bi-monthly 'journal of the mental environment' and the central publication of a global collective of writers, artists, designers, musicians, poets, philosophers and punks.

In their own words, since 1989 the Adbusters team have been:

'Smashing ads, fighting corruption and speaking truth to power. We're trying to forge a new way of living, create a whole new cultural vibe to escape the capitalist paradigm and halt humanity's slide into a 10,000-year dark age.'

The collective have been at the forefront of popular actions designed to raise profound questions about the grip of capitalism and its media complex, from the annual 'Buy Nothing Day' protests to 'Occupy Wall Street.'

Editor-in-chief, Kalle Lasn, is the bestselling author of Culture Jam (1999), Design Anarchy (2006) and Meme Wars (2012). His video 'Mindbombs' typifies the high impact visuals combined with radical critique: <https://www.adbusters.org/podcast/hummingbird>

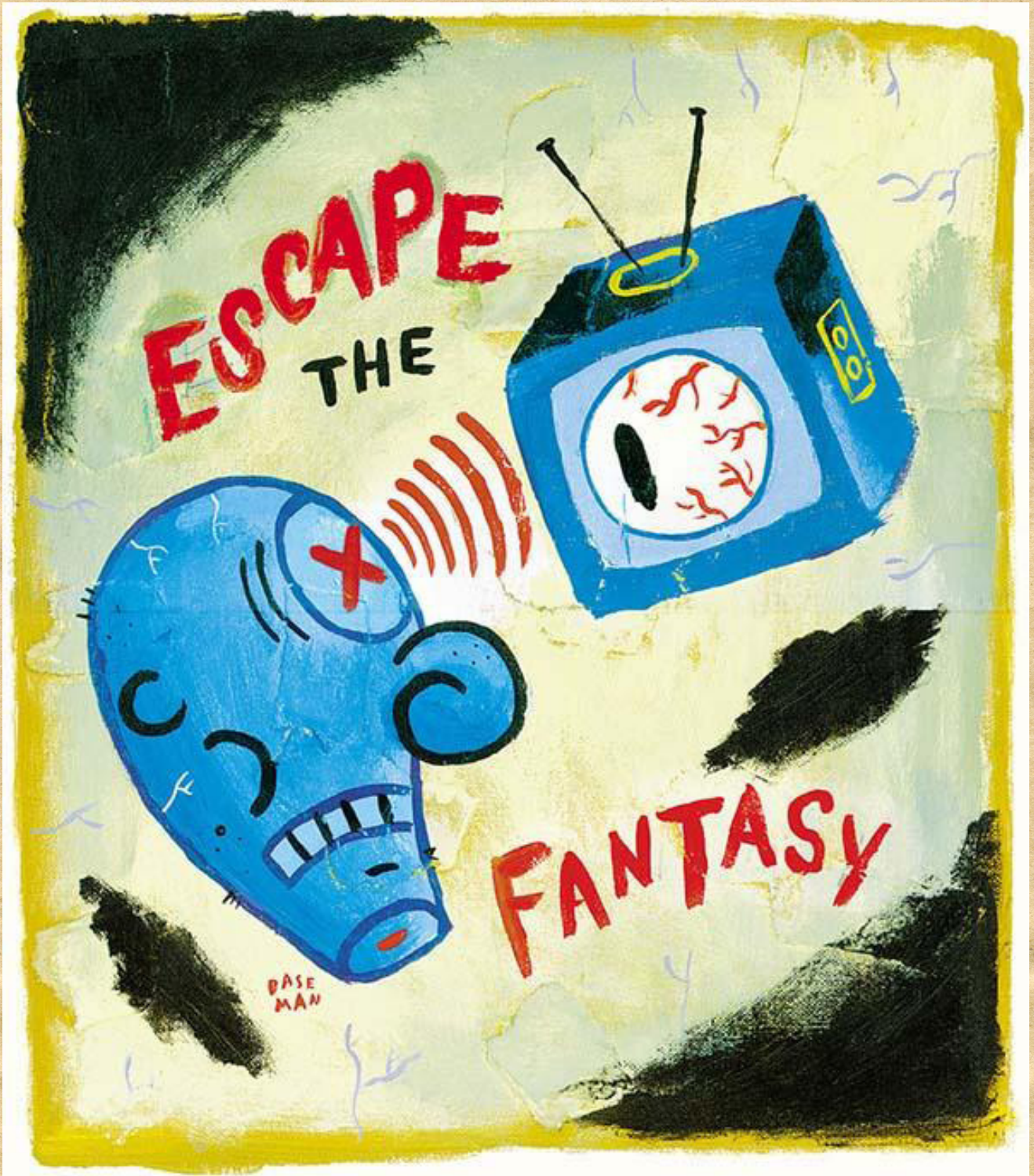
Born in Estonia during World War II, he lived in a displaced persons camp before gaining refuge in Australia.

Adbusters are best known for their spoof advertisements and 'culture hacks' designed to subvert dominant advertising and corporate memes from within [using some of the cleverest designers and subvertisers in the world].

ESCAPE



from
Calvin Klien



Credit: Adbusters Magazine Media Foundation, Canada.

THIS IS NOT A REPORT

By Peter Doran

There is a story about the painter J.M.W. Turner. As Turner returns home one evening from his work on Hampstead Heath, a local resident approaches him and asks to have a look at his painting, his day's work. After surveying it for some time the resident says, 'Mr Turner, I have lived in Hampstead for forty years but I have never once seen a view on Hampstead Heath like that.' Turner replies, 'No. But don't you wish you could?'

*In his *The Great Derangement* (2016), the celebrated Indian novelist, Amitav Ghosh, observes that the Anthropocene, especially climate change, presents a challenge not only to the arts and humanities, but also to our common sense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general. The challenge derives, in part, from the fundamental practices and assumptions that guide the art and humanities:*

To identify how this happens is, I think, a task of the utmost urgency: It may well be the key to understanding why contemporary culture finds it so hard to deal with climate change. Indeed, this is perhaps the most important question ever to confront culture in the broadest sense - for let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination. (2016:9)

Ghosh reminds us, for example, that culture generates desires - for vehicles and appliances, certain kinds of gardens and dwellings - that are among the principal drivers of the carbon economy. For example, a speedy convertible excites the consumer not because of any love for metal and chrome nor because of an abstract understanding of its engineering. It excites because it evokes an image of a road arrowing through a pristine landscape and the consumer associates the car with freedom, with mediated memories of figures like James Dean and Peter Fonda, Hollywood road movies, and sophisticated advertising. Ghosh points out that the artefacts and commodities that are conjured up by desires are, in a sense, at once *expressions and concealments* of the cultural matrix that brought them into being. (2016:10) He adds:

This culture is, of course, intimately linked with the wider histories of imperialism and capitalism that have shaped the world. But to know this is still to know very little about the specific cultural activity: poetry, art, architecture, theatre, prose fiction, and so on. (2016:10)

As Turner intimated to his interlocutor on Hampstead Heath, the function of the artist can be to invite the onlooker to revisit the familiar, to embark on a journey of *unconcealing* what has been hidden in plain sight in the most familiar landscapes, as well as, and perhaps as the necessary precursor, for *reimagining* the social.

In this paper we are introducing an early intervention planned by WEAll's hub for the island of Ireland. The intervention is designed to identify, mobilise and excite emergent conversations about alternative 'social imaginaries' to counter dominant economic narratives across the island [and the world], drawing on the genius of cultural actors and their networks. We envisage a special and distinct role for cultural actors-activists as animators of social reflexivity and socio-ecological change as the cornerstones of the wellbeing economy.

In the words of Cornélius Castoriadis, 'what is required is a new imaginary creation of a size unparalleled in the past, a creation that would put at the center of human life other significations than the expansion of production and consumption, that would lay down different objectives for life, one that might be recognized by human beings as worth pursuing'. (Castoriadis 1996, p.143). Castoriadis understood this change as a revolutionary challenge to the psycho-social structure of people in the Western world in particular, in their attitude toward life, in their imaginary, implying an abandonment of the capitalist imaginary with its pseudo-rational and pseudo-mastery of the world in pursuit of an impossible dream of infinite expansion of material production. Alongside economic transformations this will demand deep democratic changes, including a decentralisation of democratic power and the transformation of the modern state in favour of participative models of grassroots decision-making.

In fact, the changes will probably go much further. Changes in the structure and trajectory of democratic institutions may be essential dimensions of the transition, but it is increasingly apparent that, for the Western mind and institutions, the shifts in the dominant narrative will run deep: disrupting notions of linearity, constructions of duality, and temporality, to name a few. Overarching challenges will be shaped by a post 'Euro-modern' sensibility informed by decoloniality and a push back against the entrenched monocultures disseminated by the institutions of 'Whiteness'.

Our work on the island of Ireland invites a special inflection of the global work on the 'wellbeing economy' given our peculiar European and colonial history. Our work can, for example, be described as an act of knowledge-sharing, rooted in solidarity with the Global South and pursued as a dimension of post-development work, drawing from two formative legacies of the island's histories and socio-ecological transformations: Our European identities and coloniality. By coloniality we do not refer to the obvious infrastructures and impositions of colonialism but to the traces, signatures, subjectivities and languages that remain the legacies of the island's formative experience as a petri dish for colonial interventions.

We may imagine ourselves at an angle to the anglosphere, basking in our guilt free positioning as both recovering colony and third richest country in Europe, but we have little countervailing sense of what exactly the absence that haunts our modernity might be (Michael Cronin)

The underlying vision of WEAll Ireland is the conviction that the dimensions of a wellbeing economy or economies are already emergent, globally and on the island of Ireland, and must come to fruition through a *social movement* that is grounded in our own local experiences while networked and supported in a dialogue with a global movement dedicated to shifting the dominant economic narrative of capital or neoliberalism. Our challenge, confronting planetary emergencies that are both social and ecological, is to courageously name and offer analyses of dominant economic narratives associated with “capitalism” and “neoliberalism” and their precursors in modernity - including coloniality and patriarchy – and to bring a new visibility and coherence to emergent counter- narratives and practices across the island.

Wellbeing Economy Ireland Hub

The Wellbeing Economy Hub Ireland²⁴ initiative was launched in late 2020 when two Irish charities, the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability (Feasta)²⁵ and the European Health Futures Forum (EHFF)²⁶ and I joined with Social Justice Ireland and Cultivate: The Sustainable Ireland Cooperative²⁷ to form an island-wide hub. I was introduced to the Feasta members and the EHFF by our friend and co-founder of the global Wellbeing Economy Alliance, Katherine Trebeck, after parallel discussions about founding an Irish hub in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

While members of the steering group bring generations of policy work and engaged scholarship to the steering group of the Irish Hub, we are also inspired by radical voices of leadership in Ireland, including that of the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, who has committed a series of speeches to calls for a new economics designed to respond to the depth and scale of the planetary emergencies. Higgins has, for example, told an OECD conference that “new ideas are, thus, now required and, even more, their communication to citizens – ideas based on equality, universal public services, equity of access, sufficiency, sustainability. New ideas are fortunately available in the form of an alternative paradigm of social economy within ecological responsibility, but they must find their way on to the public street.”

24 <https://WEAll.org/ireland>

25 www.feasta.org

26 www.ehff.eu

27 www.cultivate.ie



Fig 1: President Michael D Higgins with Professor Tim Jackson, ESRC Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity

Narrative as Invocation

In his book, *Invoking Ireland* (2005) (*Áiliu lath n-hÉirend*), John Moriarty (1938-2007), the Irish poet, philosopher and mystic from the County of Kerry, drew from his immersion in the world of Irish and global mythology to alert us to a schism or rupture between what Western humanity has become and how humanity might still choose to live. His writings and stories were delivered from a place called otherwise, a parallel 'Ireland' called *Fódhla*.

Moriarty's 'dreamtime' points to an approach to narrative, language and the imaginary that is distinctive and characteristic of indigenous cultures. Machado de Oliveira notes that indigenous storytelling can manifest in ways that are different from how it manifests in modernity. She explains:

....stories are not human-made tools of communication that aim to index the world into language, or to word the world. Instead, stories are entities that visit and move things in the world, in nonlinear time; they are stories that world the world.

The multiple stories of other worldly beings recorded at the National Folklore Collection (NFC) in Dublin – beings often described as intelligent, powerful and sentient – are often invitations to honour kinship and practices of reciprocity. They invite reverence and an honouring of our mysterious entanglements with the hiddenness of the worlds around us, invite us into moments of enchantment. The tellers can be lost for words when asked if their stories are 'true' or if they are dealing with the realms of 'myth or reality'.

Machado de Oliveira comments:

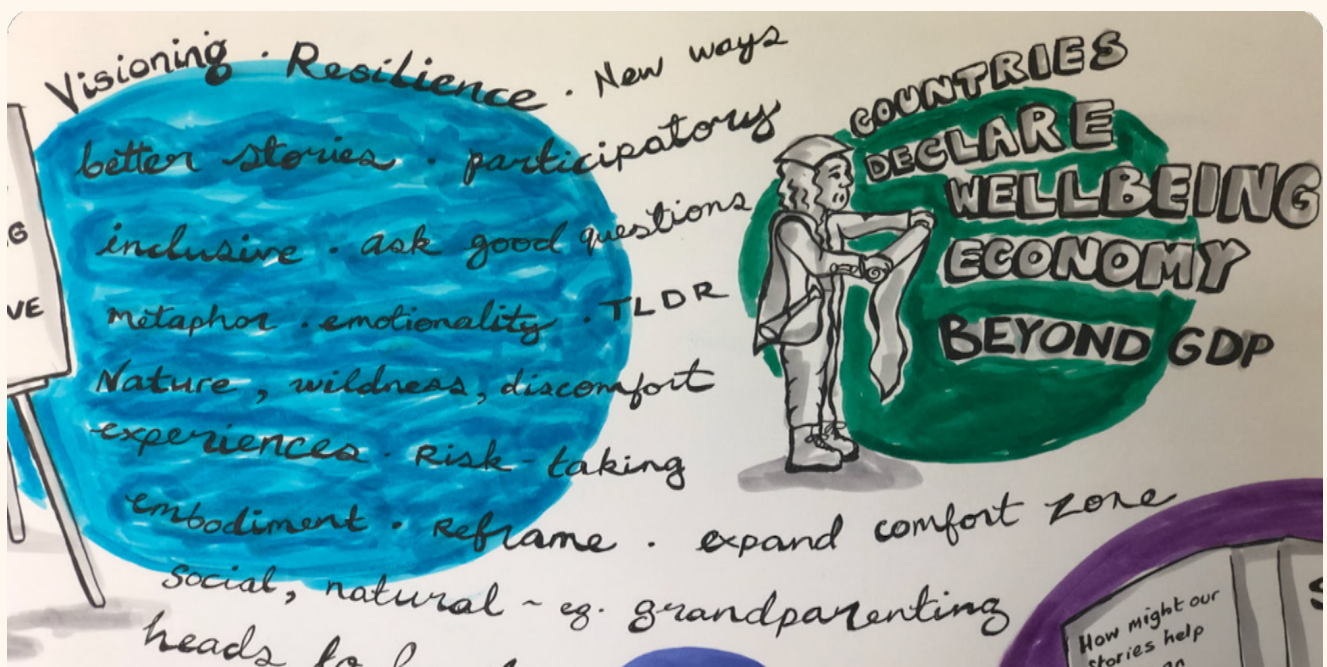
Instead of 'Is the story true?' or 'What does the story mean?' – questions that come from the expectation that stories will describe reality and convey a fixed meaning – the approach to storytelling [illustrated here] invites us to ask, 'What is this story trying to move?' and 'What does it do over time and to time itself?' The story of the small sentient beings at a very basic level may be trying to move us into a more respectful relationship with the land, with forests, and with other forms of life. The evocation of unseen manifestations of relationality may move us to consider how we are related and accountable to what is unknowable, things that are not visible or imaginable within and around us.

For the popular Irish writer and broadcaster, Manchán Magan, the figure of Amhairghin reveals a language that not only reveals things but calls them into being. 'While empirical facts, rational thinking and measurement seem to have been a major concern for the past few centuries, there is something bigger. There is something bigger about myth: it is about human beings finding meaning in the world. We do that through creating stories.'

Amhairghin's words are a gift to ourselves from the ancient past, grounding us to this land but also hinting that we are connected to all things in nature. Long ago we understood this, we understood the world as happening, as emergence, not as things...

Mangan ponders that some of the older and oddest words in the Irish language poke at the embers of old fires once thought to have died out, possibly because the ancient language is based on an awareness that sound is an energy – a vibration capable of carrying and transferring information within it.

Moriarty contends in his writings that there is still enough of Dé Dannan in all of us that we can sometimes hear and see beyond the coarse world of European modernity to the more subtle world or imaginaries conjured up in the ideal of Fodhla.



Narratives and Power: Stories that move

For Vanessa Machado de Oliveira²⁸ modernity is not a corrupt project of the West that needs to be defeated and replaced with a more righteous and virtuous non-Western alternative, but rather something that is now (unevenly) part of all of us, conditioning the ways we experience reality. Situated alongside the term 'coloniality', modernity for Machado de Oliveira, cannot be understood in isolation from its association with processes of appropriation, extraction, exploitation, militarization, dispossession, destitution, genocides, and ecocides.

Coloniality refers to the enduring manifestations of colonial relations, logic and situations – even after the official decolonisation of formal structures of governance. It represents a global hegemonic form of power that organises bodies, time, knowledge, relationships, labour, and space according to economic parameters (i.e. exchange value) and to the benefit of particular groups of people, with or without formal colonisation. For Machado de Oliveira, many indigenous peoples see the manifestations of colonialism as symptoms of a deeper and older form of violence that happens at ontological and metaphysical realms – the realm of “being”:

This deeper, older violence is the imposed sense of separation between ourselves and the dynamic living land-metabolism that is the planet and beyond, as well as the theological separation between creature and creator. This imposed sense of separation, or separability, is based on human exceptionalism, the idea that humans are a superior species that deserve to conquer, dominate, own, manage, and control the natural environment.

Human exceptionalism is also the basis of anthropocentrism, which places humans at the centre of, and as the most important entities in, the world.

She describes a process of 'wording the world' as a chief characteristic of modernity/coloniality:

If the primary orienting project of modernity/coloniality is to control and engineer reality through objective unequivocal knowing, this process can only happen through fixed categories of meaning. Knowledge production in this context focuses on certainties, objective descriptions, and moralizing prescriptions. This reflects a desire to index the totality of the reality of the world in unambiguous language that can describe it objectively.

For Machado de Oliveira, 'wording the world', drives the privileging of meaning within modernity/coloniality, with the privileging of the search for meaning and the valorization of that which is deemed meaning-full, while ignoring that which is deemed as meaning-less.

28 Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, 2021, *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, California: North Atlantic Books, pp.17-18.

‘This obsession with meaning overrides other sensibilities...’

Importantly, modernity/coloniality have the capacity to imprint the wording of the world as the only possible [uni-versal] relationship with language, meaning, knowledge – and, consequently – with the world. ‘It also imposes its own meanings as neutral and objective representations of reality. This power to define reality is inseparable from colonial power and the multiple forms of violence of colonialism and coloniality. Many critics refer to this process as epistemic or cognitive imperialism.

Translations

As Machado de Oliveira comments, there is an ongoing process of mis-translation that results from the epistemic or cognitive closure that results from the modern tendency to colonize our relationship with language itself, or ‘wording of the world.’ She notes that within modernity/coloniality, being is defined by reason and it is the certainty of knowing through description/prescription that anchors the security of being. Machado de Oliveira believes that most critics of modernity overlook the implications of this ontological trait, resulting in an active misrepresentation of alternative worldviews – alternative ways of being in the world – as mere variations of the process of wording the world of modernity. This restriction of the pattern of translation makes it impossible to communicate a relationship with language that is not about describing or constructing reality.

This mis-translation is constituted by a series of disavowals or ‘constitutive denials’ – identified by de Oliveira, including a denial of the limits of the planet and of the unsustainability of modernity/coloniality and its associated imaginary, including the incompatibility of the earth-metabolism with exponential economic growth, consumption, extraction, exploitation, and indefinite expropriation. Other constitutive denials associated with this dominant imaginary include denials of systemic historical and ongoing violence that are associated with modern lifestyles, their comforts and securities; the denial of human entanglements with the wider living metabolism that is bio-intelligent; and a denial of the magnitude and complexity of the problems faced by humanity, and the tendency to posit simplistic questions/answers instead of facing root causes and complex predicaments.

Social Imaginary

De Oliveira’s work is important in the context of our consideration of the role of the ‘social imaginary’ and the wellbeing economy because she shares – with other intellectuals – a conviction that modernity predetermines what can be heard, what can be deemed real and possible, indeed what can be imagined as desirable and ideal, and how we are supposed to feel, behave and communicate within these parameters. And here’s the rub: this constitutive conditioning of the modern subject operates faster than thought itself; in other words, it operates faster than thought itself as it structures our unconscious.

To illustrate how this conditioning impacts on and frames our cognitive dispositions, Machado de Oliveira offers Sharon Stein's 'CIRCULAR' exercise, which identifies eight embedded or expected intellectual, affective, and performative dispositional patterns that modernity has imprinted in our unconscious and that it rewards. These will be particularly apparent to those working in the academy. She notes that 'These patterns may prevent us from sensing, relating and imagining otherwise, but since they are perceived as normal and natural, there is virtually no incentive to notice them or to interrupt them. In fact, for you to be functional and intelligible within modernity, you have to use them.' She explains:

Within modernity's framework of legibility, it is difficult to invite people to see the problems with these patterns. That is because generally, in order to get people's attention, we must present problematic patterns as obstacles to modernity's progress. However, when we do this, there is a tendency to respond by trying to transcend these patterns in search of moral purity, political authority, or (collective or individual) advancement – each of which is deeply rooted in modernity's frames.

It is therefore not simply a lack of information that leads to the reproduction of colonialism, including within efforts to decolonize, but also enduring affective investments in, and desires for, the continuation of its promises and pleasures. Thus, Stein suggests that any pedagogy of decolonisation needs to address, with both critique and compassion, common circularities that emerge in efforts to make change that nonetheless seek to retain or restore the following colonial entitlements and desires:

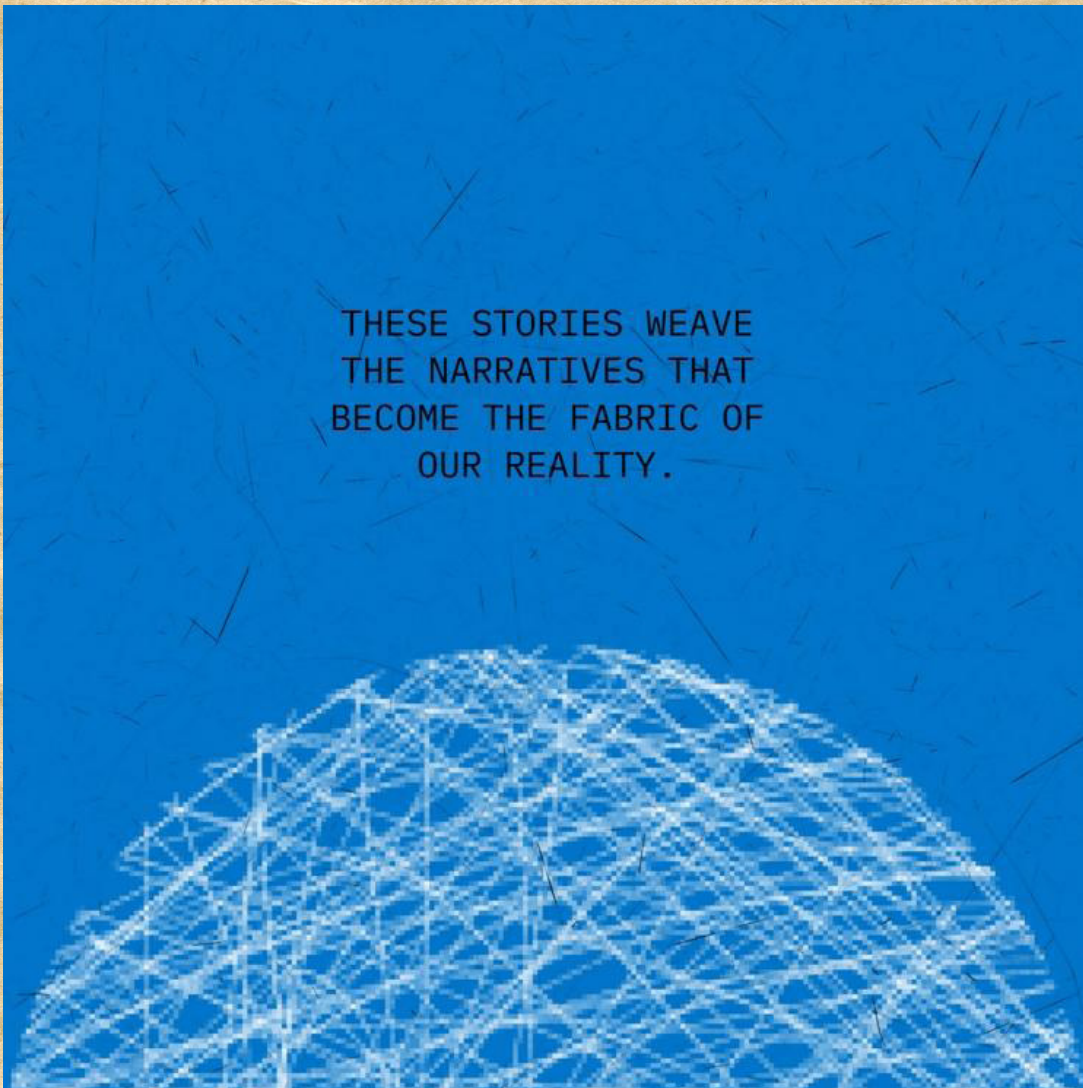
- *Continuity* of the existing system (e.g. "I want what was promised to me")
- *Innocence* from implication in harm (e.g. "Because I am against violent systems, that means I am no longer complicit in them")
- *Recentering* the self or majority group/nation/etc (e.g. "How will this change benefit me?")
- Certainty of fixed knowledge, predetermined outcomes, and guaranteed solutions (e.g. "I need to know exactly what is going to happen, when and where")
- *Unrestricted* autonomy, wherein interdependence and responsibility are optional (e.g. "I am not accountable to anyone but myself, unless I choose to be")
- *Leadership*, whether intellectual, political, and/or moral (e.g. "Either I, or my appointee, is uniquely suited to direct and determine the character of change")
- *Authority* to arbitrate justice (e.g. "I should be the one to determine who and what is valuable and deserving of which rights, privileges and punishments")

And finally, *Recognition* of one's righteousness and redemption (e.g. "But don't you see that I'm one of the 'good' ones?")

Stories for Life - 'The economy is re-designable'

Stories for Life is an inspired collaboration led by Wellbeing Economy Alliance with the Green Economy Coalition, The Spaceship Earth and Friday Future Love. The project's focus is an 'invitation to create new economic stories' that reflect our humanity and can ultimately lead to the design of an economy in the service of life.

Narrative, for WEAll, is integral to all aspects of uprooting the old and re-creating the new global economic system. 'It is how we communicate about the economy that will ultimately create the base of power that is needed to call for the change to the system.'



In WEAll's theory of change, knowledge feeds that narrative, which feeds the powerbase which ultimately can reorient the system.

Stories for Life is an open inquiry, exploring the role and power of stories in helping shape a 'more beautiful, viable, life-sustaining world.' Key themes include:

- The Narrative of Separation: An exploration of the deep narrative that shapes our relationship with reality and so our economic design.
- The Narrative of Interbeing: A re-introduction to the deep narrative that can help us repair our relationships and redesign our economy.
- Story Reconnections: Healing as reconnection.



Transition by Design

The 'Stories For Life' team believe that we need stories that help us better understand how we're connected with the natural world and each other.

The idea of interconnection, for connection, is in stark contrast to our current narratives that promote separation – separation from nature and from each other - as the prevailing story. Stories of interconnection can be rooted in the stories of our lives, 'And through these stories, we can then build an economy that is in service to humanity and the environment'. The dominant narrative leaves us vulnerable to a social imaginary that presents humans as innately competitive, isolated and battling in a zero-sum world against other forms of life.

In the process, the very qualities that we now know to be crucial for our evolution, including kindness, compassion, cooperation, empathy, diversity, care and humility, are presented in the corporate media as soft, weak and as inhibitors to 'success'.

Guided by this narrative of separation, isolation and alienation the dominant economic system has been designed to run on extractive production processes and disposable consumption experienced as shallow compensations for lives that too often hunger for meaning, connection and contact with our formative call to 'live with' and not exclusively for our isolated selves.

Website: <https://WEAll.org/storiesforlife>

Key words: 'Stories for life'; narrative; transition by design;

Wellbeing economy links: [narratives and kindness, compassion, cooperation, empathy, diversity, care and humility.](#)

THE WELLBEING FRAMEWORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

By Caroline Whyte

“ We know that our existing measures of economic performance fail to measure matters such as damage to the environment and voluntary work. They also overlook equality of opportunity, distribution of wealth and income and only value public expenditure on the basis of the inputs used, not the outcomes achieved.... ”

We will develop.... a set of wellbeing indices to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring.

- “Programme for Government: Our Shared Future,” June 2020

With these words, the Republic of Ireland’s newly-formed governing coalition joined the ranks of many other governments - along with the UN - which are developing Wellbeing Frameworks. Their aim is to achieve a deeper understanding of the context in which crucial policy decisions such as budgeting take place.

At least 300 such frameworks are currently being produced worldwide, covering varied regions and ranging from to the local to the international level.

Ireland’s Wellbeing Framework was primarily developed by the Department of An Taoiseach, in partnership with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The National Economic and Social Council contributed by convening a Stakeholder and Expert Group with representatives of different economic sectors, and by producing a working paper on consultation on the Framework.

Various well-trodden paths were followed in course of the Framework’s creation. Its design was heavily influenced by existing models elsewhere, in particular those of the OECD and New Zealand.

A decision was taken to compile a ‘dashboard’ of different indicators of wellbeing, rather than to try and aggregate them into a single index. Indexes have the advantage of producing a single, easily comparable figure. GDP itself is an index, as is the Genuine Progress Index

(GPI) developed by Clifford Cobb, and the Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDWe) measure developed by Carnegie UK. Visual comparisons of GDP with GPI or GDWe can strikingly communicate the shortcomings of GDP that were aptly summed up in the coalition's statement above.

However, indexes oblige their creators to weight activities such as the environment and housework against each other, potentially generating confusion and false dilemmas. Arguably, they can also encourage inappropriate monetisation. For example, if environmental damage is judged to cost a certain amount, then one might assume that one can simply pay for the damage and then carry on with business as usual - when in fact the only way to prevent the damage from continuing, and indeed getting worse, is to change the underlying economic and political dynamics that are triggering it.

A dashboard, if well-designed, can help to sidestep these risks. However, its multiple measurements make it much more complex to grasp, and it cannot be directly compared to GDP or other indexes.

Since indexes and dashboards can each play a useful role in different contexts, a strong case could be made for producing both, and some countries have taken this path. In Ireland, independent preliminary research on developing a National Welfare Index was carried out in 2017 by Feasta and the German academic institute FEST. Their embryonic NWI diverged strikingly from GDP growth in the period between 2000 and 2014²⁹. The German NWI continues to be produced by FEST at both national and local levels (for some of the Bundeslaender). Meanwhile, on the dashboard side, the Irish government's Wellbeing Framework was launched in 2021. It contains between two and four different indicators for each of eleven dimensions, including the environment, subjective wellbeing, health, education and wealth. Every year since 2021 a new report has been released in which each indicator is compared with itself five years ago and with the situation in other countries. Some indicators are also assessed in terms of equality and sustainability.

The overall emphasis on improving wellbeing measurement and the broad range of dimensions is very welcome. However, some important areas - notably biodiversity - are not included in the Framework at present. Moreover, the Framework's evaluation methods can lead to misinterpretations. For example, the 2023 report states that "overall performance is positive across the indicators in 10 of the 11 dimensions. Only one dimension, the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity, shows a negative performance."

This framing - particularly the use of the word 'only' - implies that Ireland is doing well overall, and some politicians have echoed it. Yet, while a healthy environment is certainly not the only factor needed to achieve a wellbeing economy, there is no doubt that the

²⁹ <https://www.feasta.org/2017/10/18/significant-discrepancies-between-irish-peoples-overall-wellbeing-and-irish-gdp-levels-during-the-period-2000-2014-according-to-new-study-published-by-feasta-and-fest/>

environment's current precarious state presents a grave danger to overall wellbeing. If you are driving a car which is running efficiently, has sturdy tyres and good suspension, but which is hurtling straight towards a cliff edge, it seems a little premature to deduce from this that you are 'doing well'.

Some analysts therefore call instead for an 'economic doughnut'³⁰ based dashboard, which includes hard planetary boundaries that cannot be transgressed without undermining overall societal wellbeing.

The comparison-based method for assessing each indicator in the Framework presents other problems, too - especially when the indicators concerned are themselves of questionable relevance. Overall, housing was coded green for progress in the 2022 Dashboard. However, there seems no doubt that in real life, Ireland actually has a housing crisis at present. To more accurately reflect this, a 2022 Social Justice Ireland survey on preferred indicators suggests the replacement of some of the existing housing ones with alternatives³¹, based on what matters most to people who responded to the survey.

Another dimension that generates controversy is wealth and income. Despite widespread acknowledgment worldwide that GDP growth is a poor measure of progress, 'wealth expansion' still appears to exert a gravitational pull on virtually all wellbeing frameworks worldwide, including the Irish one. Three out of the Irish Framework's four indicators concerning wealth and income are based on the assumption that more is always better (even for those who are already well off), both on the household and the State level³². However, these assumptions are not borne out by empirical evidence concerning societal wellbeing³³. Moreover, a large body of evidence³⁴ indicates that it is not possible to decouple increased rates of resource consumption (which is closely linked to increased wealth and income) from dangerous environmental damage.

These three income and wealth indicators could be replaced by indicators which emphasise

30 <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>

31 https://www.socialjustice.ie/system/files/file-uploads/2022-11/Social%20Justice%20Conference%20Nov%202022_Chapter%208.pdf

32 The fourth economic indicator, 'Households making ends meet with great difficulty', is clearly vital and should be retained.

33 See for example <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2018.1535895>

34 While some widely-publicised recent research appears to indicate that there is a direct correlation between income level and experienced wellbeing, a careful reading of this research makes it clear that that correlation is far from universal. It depends to a large extent on factors such as the degree of control that one has over one's life and the degree to which one believes money to be important in life: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2016976118> Moreover, there is striking evidence that a number of countries with relatively low average incomes are nonetheless quite successful in achieving high levels of wellbeing among their residents - to the extent that they are outperforming some higher-income countries: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab842a>

With regard to State indebtedness, there is currently a lively debate at the EU level on the extent and specific circumstances in which this might be problematic. See for example <https://meta.eeb.org/2022/11/09/enabling-the-eu-wellbeing-economy/>.

the need to maximise economic and social security and stability within environmental limits. On the State level, an assessment of the role that Ireland plays in contributing to - or detracting from - the wellbeing of those living in other countries around the world would also be more beneficial than the current implied emphasis on maximising Ireland's wealth compared to that of other countries.

The Department of Finance was granted the remit of deciding which indicators in the Framework were to be particularly associated with sustainability. Again, if we are to escape the gravitational pull of 'wealth expansion', it seems important to invite other voices such as the Department of the Environment, the EPA, and academia into this discussion.

In the context of an all-island approach, some alignment of indicators or framework development should be pursued between the two jurisdictions.

Finally, a clearer connection between 'bottom up' Visions for community wellbeing, and assessments - such as those carried out by the Public Participation Networks in Ireland - and the 'top-down' Framework would be very beneficial, for both practical and ethical reasons.

In the shorter term, as we have seen, the Wellbeing Framework's development may well generate more questions than answers. Yet this could be no bad thing. An important step towards shifting to a different economic narrative and vision is identifying and challenging the hidden biases and assumptions in the existing one. The work on the Framework is welcome, in part, because it is helping to create a vital space for reflection about our assumed and actual societal goals. The resulting discussion is ongoing and vibrant.

Culture Hack Labs

Culture Hacks Lab (CHL) is a non-profit consultancy supporting organisations, social movements and activists in the creation of cultural interventions for systems change. The Lab operates as a decentralised network of researchers, movement leaders, social scientists, strategists, artists, communications and political strategists.

The CHL process is based on an integrated set of tools and techniques to track, research and intervene in cultural narratives. In their own words, 'We capture and map large volumes of social data using the Culture Hack Platform. We then analyse the networks, language and deep logics to develop insights and content to evolve culture... We come together to create narrative interventions that cut to the heart of the dominant culture.'

So how do they do this?

Working with land defenders who form part of the Diaspora and Ancestral Nations of Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Turtle Island and Milpanérica (Alaska, Canada, US, México, Guatemala, Salvador and Honduras) the Lab gathered activists to 'hack the narrative of land ownership' in pursuit of a transition that will liberate people and 'Mother Earth'.

An agreed set of principles designed for the 'land ownership' hack include:

- We return to the land and the land returns to us: Structural inequalities, social injustice, climate, social and spiritual polycrises have at their foundation the separation between people and the network of life - between communities and their territories, between our being and the earth. Can we think of ourselves beyond an individualistic and human-centric identity? Returning to relationships of interdependence with the land and all beings that exist on it, is the root of any cultural change.

- The Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth: we invite you to free yourself from the prison of private property, we must tear down the fences so that life can move freely again.

Governments, corporations, churches, armies, the rich who have monopolized the land and created violent laws to privatize it, must return what was stolen. Can we reimagine the management and organisation of life and territory beyond property? Can we create collective identities that recover our belonging to the earth?

The Lab has organised a self-directed curriculum or learning journey with a view to democratising its approach, methodology and tools. The eight-module educational tool supports narrative practitioners in their understanding of the ontological shift that will be necessary to disrupt the core assumptions that underpin capitalist modernity and equip practitioners with the tools to transform the critical narrative landscapes of our times.

Website:

<https://medium.com/postgrowth/designing-a-liberatory-world-be37bdbd9d0a>

Key words:

'Culture hack'; narrative methodologies; capitalist modernity; culture; narrative frames; ethics; neoliberalism; non-dualism; ontology and epistemology; pluralism; post-human.

Wellbeing Economy Links

Narrative methodologies, neoliberalism, the post-human.

WELLBEING WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND - TRANSITIONS VIA DEEP CULTURAL INQUIRY

Over the past 10 years, knowledge of wellbeing policy and practice has increased substantially. Carnegie UK has been part of this international movement, contributing to learning about the concept of wellbeing by developing a SEED framework that outlines what wellbeing means across different aspects of our lives.

In 2015, the report of the Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland - organised with Dr Peter Doran and John Woods through the QUB School of Law - influenced the outcomes-based approach and focus on wellbeing in Northern Ireland's draft Programme for Government. Around the same time, the reform of local government in Northern Ireland gave the 11 newly created local authorities the responsibility for leading community planning processes. Community Plans identify priorities for improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of local districts and their residents, beyond local government electoral cycles into the long term.

Community Plans have the potential to act as local wellbeing frameworks. Independent analysis commissioned by Carnegie UK found that all of the Community Plans had adopted the language and substance of wellbeing, but that local government was charged with responsibility for delivery with little support. The political situation destabilised and in 2017 the Assembly was suspended. Therefore in 2017, Carnegie UK committed to providing whatever support that could develop the potential of community planning to improve wellbeing in the region. The subsequent Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland project provided financial and in-kind support to Community Planning Partnerships in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Derry City and Strabane District Council; and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council.

Over the course of the three-year programme, Carnegie UK and the three Community Planning Partnerships developed a peer-to-peer support model that built on existing strengths, and focused on learning from each other and from international best practice to overcome shared challenges. Project design and delivery was supported by an Advisory Group that included representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, civil society, and key stakeholders from the wellbeing and outcomes community based outside Northern Ireland.

Commoning and Relational Approaches to Governance: Notes on a deep dive hosted by Zack Walsh and the Commons Strategies Group (Germany, 9-12, 2019)

By Zack Walsh

Our way of making sense of the world— our paradigm— shapes our ability to respond to crisis. Once a paradigm is established, it is extremely hard to think and behave outside its limits. The ecological crisis is a very intimate, as well as being a political and institutional crisis, because it calls on us to question the established paradigm within which society operates. It calls for a moment of deep liberation, liberating ourselves not only from unsustainable ways of being, but also from the old tools and languages that limit our responses.

In this sense, the eco-crisis calls for a transformation at the deepest level—at the level of our way of making sense of the world. Ontology is the study of how we perceive the nature of being. Reading political and economic texts through ontological perspectives allows us to uncover the underlying hidden assumptions informing them.

Different frameworks of governance presuppose different assumptions about reality (Stout and Love, 2019). Today's mainstream political and economic discourses are increasingly sterile and unfit in large part because they are based on incorrect assumptions about the nature of being. The whole explanatory apparatus informing mainstream politics and economics is fundamentally Eurocentric and outdated, informed by centuries' old science and philosophy.

In this moment of crisis, rethinking governance requires more than re-thinking organizations, structures, and positions—it requires re-thinking the underlying belief systems, value systems, and ethics that inform them. We must re-examine our assumptions about humans and nonhumans, agency, rationality, and society.

The commons

This is especially true within the discourse on the commons. The logic of the commons is so different from liberal democracy and market capitalism that it is necessary to rethink the ontological premises informing it. Elinor Ostrom's institutional analysis and development framework, for example, is the dominant approach to understanding the commons, yet it takes for granted many of the same foundational assumptions of standard political and economic thought. Shifting the paradigm within which we understand governance offers immense transformative potential.

In their latest book, *Free, Fair, and Alive* (2019), the cofounders of the Commons Strategies Group, David Bollier and Silke Helfrich suggest that commons governance should be informed by an ontology that thinks fundamentally in terms of processes and relations, called process-relational ontology. Bollier and Helfrich use process-relational ontology to develop an alternative framework for exploring the commons across three inter-related dimensions— provisioning, peer governance, and social life. Across each of these dimensions, they coin new terms to describe patterns for enacting the commons which are vital, but which were largely missed or underexplored by mainstream governance frameworks, including the Ostrom framework. Making an OntoShift, or ontological shift, toward process-relational ontology helps provide a better apparatus for explaining the complexity and diversity of the commons and offers much greater potential to transform society via the logic of the commons.

References

David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, 2019, Free Fair and Alive: The insurgent power of the Commons. New Society Publishers, Canada.

Margaret Stout & Jeannine, M. Love, 2019, Integrative governance: Generating sustainable responses to global crises. London, UK: Routledge.

Website:

https://commonsstrategies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Ontology_as_a_Hidden_Driver_of_Politics.pdf

Keywords:

[‘OntoShift’, commons, paradigm, Eurocentric, humans and nonhumans, capitalism, process-relational ontology.](#)

Wellbeing economy links:

[the commons, ontology, market capitalism, liberal democracy, agency, relationality, society.](#)

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE - CULTIVATING A BRIDGE TO MOVEMENT BUILDING FOR A WELLBEING ECONOMY

By Davie Philip

This proposed objective of the WEAll Hub Ireland intervention is to mobilize a Community of Practice for 'Cultural Creatives' working at all levels of society and across sectors (e.g. local government, higher education, community development, business), together with their sponsoring bodies, to support WEAll Hub Ireland's work of animating and curating an island-wide conversation on the wellbeing economy.

Embedding the CoP within a Social Movement

- The **Wellbeing Economy Alliance** is part of a global movement driven by social and ecological crises ("Planetary Boundaries")
- The Community of Practice will be a "cosmo-local" platform: Representative of practice across the island while supported and engaged with a **global** movement building a new economy.
- Artistic practice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for social change

The Community of Practice is our chosen platform for embedding cultural and creative activism, research and community engagement within the emergent social movement across the island for a wellbeing economy. The Community of Practice will combine the objectives of the wellbeing economy and its values with a consistent mode of building respectful relationships and conviviality across the island and with our peers across the world. It will be cosmo-local. We understand that artistic practice can play a decisive role in social change but is not, in itself, a sufficient condition for bringing about that change. Our Community of Practice must be embedded within a movement.

Recognizing the transformative potential of CoPs in facilitating knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the advancement of a field of practice, WEAll Ireland decided to use this approach to progress the idea and to bring together creative practitioners, activists, and researchers from across the island to serve as ‘cultural catalysts,’ igniting the collective imagination around the concept of a well-being economy.

A ‘proto’ or pilog phase of the Community of Practice (CoP) was formed that initially included just the Hub partners and staff from Carnegie UK, who funded the initial stage of the project. Through weekly online interactions a process was developed and a diverse group of creative practitioners and activists were invited into the CoP that we called, ‘The Cultural Creatives - Community of Practice.’

There are three characteristics of a community of practice³⁵:



Source: <https://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice/>

1. Domain: Participants have a common interest or challenge that connects them, guiding their learning and actions.

The Cultural Creatives proto or pilot CoP has been united by a shared interest and commitment to delving into the economy’s role, examining the consequences of our current growth-based system, and recognising the transformative potential of artists and creative practitioners in reshaping the narrative towards a well-being economy. The initiative brought together the invaluable insights and contributions of storytellers, poets, singers, filmmakers and writers.

35 <https://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice/>

2. Community: Participants pursue this interest through joint activities, discussions, problem-solving opportunities, peer-sharing and relationship building.

The Cultural Creatives proto CoP thrived through various activities, including online sessions with international researchers and thinkers and two 'Deep Dive' sessions in the Derry/Londonderry-based Playhouse and Cloughjordan Ecovillage where members delved into the wellbeing economy principles, discussed the myth of growth, and explored the transformative potential of artists in social change. Participants also shared innovative ideas on how we might collaboratively transition towards a wellbeing economy based on love, care, community, meaningful work, purposeful lives, and prosperity for all.

3. Practice: While the domain provides the general themes of interest for the community, the practice is the specific focus around which the community develops, shares and maintains its core of collective knowledge, ideas and resources.

The CoP has been rooted in a practice centred on harnessing the power of culture and creativity to shift worldviews to drive change. Deepening this practice enhances our capacity to influence and inspire a shift in societal narratives towards a wellbeing economy.

Communities of Practice and commoning have some similarities, especially in how they emphasise working together to achieve shared goals.

- **Domain & Common Pool Resources (CPRs):** CoPs revolve around the free exchange of knowledge, the cultivation of skills, or the creation of valuable assets in a shared area of interest. Commoning encompasses traditions and actions associated with shared resources, with the goal of ensuring fair access and responsible use.
- **Community & Community in Commons:** CoPs focus on building relationships and interactions among members. In commoning, the "Community" is the group of people who manage and benefit from shared resources, and they make decisions together. While they're a bit different, both highlight the importance of the community.
- **Practice & Commoning Practices:** CoPs revolve around the exchange of knowledge, the cultivation of skills, or the collaborative creation of valuable assets. Commoning encompasses practices, traditions and actions associated with managing, protecting or creating shared resources.

The commons also embodies the values and principles at the core of a wellbeing economy, providing a vision and pathway towards a more equitable, regenerative, and resilient future for all.

The People's Palace of Possibility (For Utopian Scheming and Rageful Dreaming) - With the Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP)

The nomadic 'People's Palace of Possibility - For Utopian Scheming and Rageful Dreaming' is an outdoor installation co-developed by Dr Malaika Cunningham, a researcher with the Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP).

The installation provides a dramatic space for citizens to investigate 'how we find energy for change - despite our fear and anger about the future'. The project is rooted in utopias, the mystery of utopias which have gone before, become misplaced, or gone wrong. It is also rooted in the impulse for escape, for doing something radically different from life as we have come to know it.

Cunningham has developed a monthly blog series, 'Collecting Real Utopias', inspired by the writings of the sociologist Erik Olin Wright.

Wright argued that optimism is necessary for the world to be transformed - people must believe that other worlds are possible in order to change it. They cannot face the oppressive forces of capitalism with an agenda limited to destruction. They also need desirable, viable and achievable alternative visions of society.

Wright acknowledges the contradiction in his concept of 'real utopias' and embraces this tension between 'dreams and practice', positing that rather than using utopias as the wholesale re-imagining of society at large, we can seek out and learn from smaller, more specific utopian endeavours that are already out there in the world.

These projects, according to Wright, represent fissures within consumer capitalism and by understanding, expanding, and supporting them, citizens can collectively oppose and rebuild harmful social structures. In an introductory blog, Cunningham cites the example of the 'Soul Fire Farm', an afro-indigenous centred community farm committed to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system in New York State.

Contact: [Dr Malaika Cunningham, CUSP Research Fellow](#)

Website: ['Collecting Real Utopias' blog series:](#)

<https://cusp.ac.uk/themes/a/blog-collecting-real-utopias-no1/>

[Website: Real Utopias with Erik Olin Wright:](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8tEfo7rFSQ>

[Keywords:](#) [Utopia](#), ['energy for change'](#)

[Wellbeing economy links:](#) [Capitalism, practice, 'fissures within consumer capitalism'](#)

Idir Dhá Chultúr: NAVIGATING PARADIGM CHANGE

By Peadar Kirby

Idir dhá chultúr: I'm trying to grasp the challenge of a bilingual event that does not resort to instantaneous translation as if all languages are composed of equivalent meanings.

- In choosing 'idir dhá chultúr' I presumed that all English speakers would get it, certainly speakers of French or Spanish would have no difficulties: entre deux cultures, entre dos culturas.
- My intention is to bring you on a bilingual journey, refusing to allow the minority language be marginalised as happens so often when it defers again and again and again to the dominant language. So it's an aspect of the constant struggle between monoculture and diversity. Indeed I'm more and more convinced that biodiversity requires linguistic diversity. In trying to model such diversity, some participants won't understand everything being said so I invite you to savour the sounds as well as understanding the meaning, and hopefully learning some lessons about navigating paradigm change and what our native language offers us. Mar sin, ar aghaidh linn ar an mbóthar.
- Trí mhór-théama agam: an teanga, athrú paraidíme, agus mór-acmhainní ó shaíocht na Gaeilge chun sinn a threorú ar an mbealach; I'll begin with language, move on to paradigm change and end by proposing three major resources from our Gaelic tradition as guardrails for navigating paradigm change.

Teanga/Language:

I want to communicate something about living 'idir dhá cultúr', what it is to speak a language, the language of our place and people for millennia, but which has been forcefully marginalised, had its institutional life destroyed over 400 years ago, been driven underground and treated with derision and disdain by the powerful, and to speak this language under the all-pervasive shadow of the world's most powerful and dominant language which also happens to be the language of our colonisers.

This is the experience of a lot of humanity, though a bit unusual in Europe. All so-called indigenous people live between two cultures and their songs, stories, dances all shout this out. This is why both the IPCC and the IPBES reports again and again emphasise the vital importance of indigenous languages and cultures, particularly their understanding and practices of community and environment. There is a consciousness of different worlds of meaning and desire, of feeling, that is unique to those of us who speak languages constantly under the oppressive and powerful shadow of a dominant language like English. For generations, Irish speakers have lived with the awareness, reinforced by the dominant culture all the time, that this is a dying language, and this is painful, making us feel very vulnerable.

One of the great difficulties is that English carries the curse of monoglotism namely that many of its speakers presume that it is up to others to speak to them in their language rather than making any effort to learn the language of others. Furthermore, to borrow a phrase used by Tim Jackson, English 'is stained with the blood of empire'. Many languages are so stained (French, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, German, Russian). The experience of speaking a language that has been so actively and forcefully marginalised is that it takes us to very different imaginative spaces. So our daily experience is one of living 'idir dhá chultúr', we even write books about it. I suggest that as we become more and more aware that humanity itself is now living between two cultures, that of the dominant destructive paradigm and the new paradigm bubbling up in so many spaces and cracks, that our Irish experience of living 'idir dhá chultúr' takes on a very important significance.

Tá aiste iontach ag Liam Mac Cóil nach eol do mhórán é: 'Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na focail'. Ar ndóigh tá a fhios ag cách conas a mhaireann na daoine ar scáth a chéile, ach de réir Mhic Chóil sa Ghaeilge tá gach rud ceangailte lena chéile, athraíonn na focail nuair a cheanglaítear iad le focail eile. Ní féidir an duine ina aonar a shamhlú sa Ghaeilge, i gcónaí bíonn sí nó sé ceangailte le háit nó le daoine eile. Fiú maireann sé seo i mBéarla na hÉireann nuair a bhuaileann tú le duine don chéad uair agus is í an chead cheist ná 'Where are you from? Do you know so-an-so?' Is teanga éiceolaíoch í an Ghaeilge dá bharr, a deir Mac Cóil. The self-sufficient neo-liberalised individual is really very difficult to imagine in Irish, we are always connected. We don't even have words for Yes and No, acceptance or refusal of something in Irish must always be connected to the subject being accepted or refused; nor a verb for possession: we may have the use of things but the exclusivity and individualism of possession is foreign to the language. These are some of the reasons why our leading Irish-language novelist Liam Mac Cóil calls Irish a very ecological language. In saying all this, of course, I'm not belittling English. We are very lucky in Ireland to speak English fluently, and the envy of many around the world. But I am convinced that the emergence of English as our vernacular language throughout most of the island a little over 100 years ago and the swift retreat from Irish, has left huge wounds, the healing of which we may just be beginning to undertake.

Navigating Paradigm Change:

There are different access points to the realities of the dominant and the subaltern paradigms: some enter through the lens of post-colonialism but at this moment in human history, we are able to understand in a fuller way the nature and implications of the paradigm change now facing all of humanity as we address the realities of climate change, biodiversity loss and the urgent need for social transformation. This is my starting point into the issue of paradigm change:

Tim Jackson in his talk at the end of March fleshed out some of the central elements of paradigm change, where we are at and how it may be blocking our advance to a new paradigm:

- He quoted Mary Douglas asking what is the objective of the consumer and answering that it is to create the social world, and find a credible place in it. Tim adds that the problem now is that ‘we are locked into its social logic by our own symbolic attachment to stuff’
- But if society as Tim said ‘hangs on the gossamer thread of collective dreams’, the collective dream that dominates is a consumerist one. Isn’t that a big part of the problem?

‘Sé an fo-teideal a chur mé ar an gcaint seo ná ‘navigating paradigm change’: cén Gaeilge a chuirfeá air? Eolas an bhealaigh a aimsiú? Treoracha a fháil? Ach cá chuige? Cá bhfuil ár dtríall? Where are we going? From the collective dream of consumerism to a new collective dream, one that we see the contours of only very very vaguely right now.

The best analysis of dominant paradigm I know comes from Laudato Sí (107):112: this ‘authentic humanity’ is where we need to go, ‘a new synthesis’ like ‘a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door.’ Osclaímis an doras..

It is relatively easy to describe elements of what the paradigm change is about: from growth to degrowth, from extraction to regeneration, from linear to circular. I don’t particularly see that Irish speakers bring anything unique to the consideration of these topics though of course we have lots to say in Irish about them. I gave a webinar recently on ‘dí-fhás’, indeed I coined the word and had to fight off the use of dí-fhorbairt which I argued misunderstood the concept. But that’s an aside. There are two dimensions to paradigm change that I want to focus on: from the individual to the community, and from the global to the local. It’s simply not adequate to treat either of these crucial dimensions in the universal, abstract, scientific and technological terms which are so central to English: these are dimensions that must be

rooted in the particular, they need history, belonging, feeling, sensibility. So for the rest of this talk I want to offer three guard rails from our native tradition that to me are essential to navigating paradigm change for us in Ireland.

An chéad cheann ná Dúchas:

Tosóidh mé le dán ó Chathal Ó Seascaigh óna leabhar nua ‘An Tír Rúin’ ina iompaíonn sé a thírdhreach dhúchais, an ceantar as ar fáisceadh é ina dhúiche chruthaitheach agus samhlaíoch: tagraíonn sé ‘don ghaol idir ainm agus áit’ agus don ‘cleamhnas ceana seo a cheanglaíonn an duine le dúiche’ agus trí bhainne cíche na Gaeilge’ mothaíonn sé ‘na glúnta ginealaigh ag cuisliú ionam’.

I won't even try a translation of this beautiful poem by one of our leading poets, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, but instead I'll offer a description in English which ends up flat and devoid of the emotional charge that it communicates in Irish. The poet transforms his physical native place of Donegal into a creative and imaginative space through exploring the relationship between name and place, the fondness that connects person and place which through the breastmilk of Irish allows the genealogical generations to pulsate in him. It verges on the sentimental in English; it throbs with profound resonances in Irish.

Let's apply this to the wellbeing economy. I'm sure many of us can contribute to a discussion of what it means. But if you ask me to translate it into Irish, I struggle because it's too abstract for the Gaelic mind. I'm drawn to the rich and everyday word ‘slán’; we use it for goodbye but in essence it's a word that is all about wellbeing. So it's nothing new. The question is what do we need to live in a way that is slán, what might an eacnamaíocht slán look like, and the one dimension the Gaelic mind will instinctively know is that it's intimately connected, as Cathal Ó Searcaigh expressed in his poem, to place, to ancestors, to tribe, to security derived from belonging, to health, and to spirituality. Those of us who pray and worship in Irish in the Catholic tradition meet it all the time, slánú. We can connect it also to a topic Máire Ní Annracháin finds in some contemporary poetry in Irish, echoes of the connection between the flourishing of nature and right kingship that was so strong in Gaelic Ireland. The flourishing of nature depends on the right use of power. Léargas é seo ar shaibhreas an dhúchais Ghaelaigh a bhfuilimid beag beann air don chuid is mó. Tá sé thar am dúinn filleadh air.

What I'm suggesting here is that a deep engagement with place, with community - with uncovering the layers of meaning, feeling, desire that such an engagement can uncover - helps flesh out in a much fuller way what a wellbeing economy and society requires. And that this assists greatly the challenge of navigating paradigm change, of giving us some better sense of cá bhfuil ár dtírial, where are we going.

This brings me to my second theme: **Pobal:**

Back to Jackson's gossamer thread of collective dreams: let's put the emphasis on the collective for a moment. What collective? Again we are back to the connectivity, what connects us and how might it open us to look anew at the familiar, chun eolas an bhealaigh a fháil, a chabhródh linn cur chun bóthair. Partly because it was driven underground, Irish is a much more collective language than English and its culture flourishes collectively. It is very interesting to see the liveliness of poetic composition in Irish today, including rap, and the re-emerging of collective spaces for poetry-making akin to the éigsí of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Ar ais go Liam Mac Cóil: úsáideann sé focal an-shaibhir 'béascna' agus is dóigh liom gurb ionann é agus paradigm an Bhéarla. 'Séard is brí leis, dar leis 'gréasán teibí a mhúnlaíonn agus a cheanglaíonn rólanna sóisialta, réimsí eolais, agus luachanna rangaithe. Fágann an bhéascna a lorg ar an duine aonair, ar an bpobal, ar a n-iompar agus ar an gcaoi a smaoiníonn siad'. Mar sin, chun teacht ar bhéascna nua, baineann sé le réimsí eolais nua, luachanna nua agus gréasáin nua a cheanglaíonn le chéile an duine aonair, an pobal, agus a n-iompar.

I'm arguing that we have a word in Irish for paradigm that helps to identify what is involved: values in a ranked sense, social roles, fields of knowledge and the ways these link and connect the person with the wider society, the ways of thinking and acting that dominate. It's a bit more grounded than Pope Francis. Of course, any language can provide alternatives but in Ireland the lens that Irish gives become essential. 'Sort súile na hintinne iad focail na teanga' a deir Micheal Cronin, the words themselves open our eyes to see our surroundings in a new way, to see new possibilities and this endeavour is essentially a collective one. Irish does not allow, cannot conceive of this as an individual endeavour. Impossible.

Aisling:

Gregory Glaeys' wonderful book traces the imposition of the collective dreams of consumerism on society, and locates the greatest challenge for humanity as being how to foster a culture of sociability that alone can wean us off our intense consumerism, conas pobal a chothú. But what Glaeys doesn't advert to is the linguistic dimensions of this dominant culture: the advertising industry, the development of the shopping mall all happened first in the US and the UK. Tá cultúr an tomhaltachais fite fuaite leis an mBéarla go príomha cé go bhfuil a thionchar le haithint ar fud fad na cruinne anois.

Glaeys advises a return to the utopian tradition which for 500 years has been the principal source of critiquing luxury and the inequality that fuels it, and seeking a society that lives simply in equality with one another and with nature.

What most people, such as Glaeys and indeed even many Irish speakers don't realise, is the rich utopian tradition that exists in Irish poetry and song, what we call the *aisling*, vision poetry, an *aisling pholaitiúil*: the political vision. Ceapann an-chuid Gaelgeoirí go bhfuil traidisiún na haislinge an-choimeádach ag féachaint siar ar na Stiobhartaigh a thiocfadh chun na Gaeil a fhuascailt, rud nár tharla ar ndóigh. Ach, an amhlaidh atá? Cabhraíonn taighde Bhreandáin Uí Bhuachalla linn an traidisiún seo a thuiscint ar bhonn eile, mar go gcothaíonn sé cumas maireachtáil as domhan samhlaíoch eile, gan bheith gafa ag an gcóras mar ata sé faoi láthair ach dóchas a bheith againn go bhféadfaí é a athrú ó bhonn chun saol I bhfad níos fearr a chothú don phobal. Léiríonn Ó Buachalla gur chothaigh sé tuiscint pholaitiúil forleathan i measc na nGael I bhfabhar réabhlóid na Fraince nuair a tharla sé. As I say, the *aisling* tradition of seeing Ireland as a beautiful woman seeking a prince (Bonnie Prince Charlie) to come to free her from the oppression of the Protestant English rule has been seen as a very conservative tradition but as interpreted by Breandán Ó Buachalla, who has done extensive work on it, we can now see it as the capacity to live outside the dominant system. Indeed the scathing critique of that dominant system that characterises the *aisling* is something from which we could learn, while keeping alive the expectation of transformative and liberating change. So, I suggest we need a similar capacity in our times for the transition we are undergoing.

Mar fhocal scoir

I am proposing here that essential aspects of paradigm change require a deep engagement with place and with community in all its many dimensions. For those of us who live on this little island, this cannot happen with any depth if we don't reengage substantially with the possibilities offered by the language spoken here for over two millennia, a language showing rude signs of vigour and health today even as many dismiss it as useless and irrelevant. I sum up three of the contributions it can offer as

Dúchas; Pobal: *Aisling* – these are the guard rails Irish gives us for the transition. I hesitate to translate these words because to do so is to lose a lot of their rich particularity. So I have opted more to describe them and open them up.

Let the journey begin, cuirimis chun bealaigh...

Irish Museum of Modern Art – Earth Rising, Ireland

As a space for dialogue and understanding, the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) recognises the significance of the climate crisis as one of the greatest challenges of our time.

The annual ‘Earth Rising’ Festival, set in the historic grounds of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in Dublin, will be a catalyst for creative thinking, imagination, and individual agency in tackling this and related issues, reimagining a more sustainable and liveable future for generations to come.

The four-day Festival of Creativity and Hope, consisting of free events and experiences aimed at addressing the climate crisis and inspiring collective action towards a sustainable and hopeful future, seeks to provoke, inspire, and empower audiences to become agents of change.

IMMA Director, Annie Fletcher, believes that public institutions like IMMA can play a significant role in the climate emergency, mobilising the museum for civic action. That role includes ‘listener’ and ‘convenor of expertise’ as well as a ‘space for joy’ in the face of climate anxiety. The museum will make civic and pedagogical space for a kind of ‘civic assembly’, to convene and engage citizens, using culture and the arts to mobilise environmental citizenship.

Fletcher believes that culture – be it art, music, theatre, literature, painting or film – creates a kind of intimacy, an opportunity to zoom in from big ideas to the level of the embodied human observer and participant. Zooming in from big overwhelming questions, culture and the arts create moments of intimacy or connection, providing a powerful tool to allow for a different kind of space for reflection and action.

While it is not the obligation for all artists to do this kind of work, Fletcher believes that it is both useful and interesting for IMMA to investigate this role for the arts in the context of the climate emergency.

‘Art describes and gives us a sense of understanding and, literally, imagining. It is a space where we can find and recover a sense of agency.’

Given the historic importance of the site at Kilmainham, Fletcher is keen to turn the Irish Museum of Modern Art into the ‘jewel in the crown’ of passive refurbishment and restoration. ‘These walls tell a particular story of survival...I am fascinated by how we might reoccupy the building as sustainably as possible.’

Alongside the Earth Festival, IMMA itself is destined to be transformed – in terms of its buildings and landscape – into a story of reuse, rework and sustainable restoration. Fletcher adds: ‘We are very committed to this journey and to thinking this journey out loud.’

The Festival has already attracted 9000 participants and IMMA looks forward to convening an even bigger community that can both sustain itself and begin to inform the Museum’s own journey of transformation.

Website:

<https://imma.ie/>

Keywords:

Arts, climate change, civic space, imagining, agency, ‘space for joy’, intimacy.

Links to wellbeing economy:

Imagination, climate change, arts, agency.

THE POWER OF THE DOMINANT SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMAGINARY

By Peter Doran

One of the most powerful ideologies used to obscure patterns of global and national accumulation and systemic inequality is the ideology of “growth”. Late-stage neoliberal forms of carbon-driven capitalism are further empowered by attempts at the enclosure and colonization of the human imagination and emotion by forces of consumerism, advertising, celebrity culture and the manufacture of our consent engineered through the use of neuro-algorithms and a plethora of therapeutic industries.

Consumerism is more than a set of material practices at the end of a capitalist value chain: the infrastructures of consumerism - including Hollywood, large swathes of the traditional media and social media platforms and gaming industries - are factories of dreams and pacification. Consumerism is the bearer of a modern and colonial ontology, a way of being-in-the-world for modern subjects and objects, a legacy of a troubled and troubling relationship with modernity and its ways of understanding time. As such, our debates about transforming economics are also debates about contested meaning itself.

De/Tachment

In the stunning American movie, *Detachment* (2011), substitute teacher, Henry Barthes drifts from school to school, classroom to classroom. During one month-long assignment in a failing public school, Barthes finds a connection to the students and teachers who are all, in their own ways, experiencing deep loss of connection, and are negotiating a world so bereft of love and attention that they have become invisible at work and at home. In a pivotal moment in the film, Barthes delivers a no-holes-barred monologue to his students:

How are you to imagine anything if the images are always provided for you? Doublethink. To deliberately believe in lies while knowing they're false. (Detachment, 2011)

In a real sense, the nature of modern mass mediated consumerist ideology, accelerated by the onslaught of social media - ‘capitalist realism’¹ - poses a direct threat to wellbeing at the most subtle levels of human experience: attention and intention. The nexus between attention and power plays out on many levels, with the most disempowered being the least capable of commanding attention and the loudest voices being those fuelled by capital. The

1 Mark Fisher, 2009, Capitalist Realism. London: Zero Books.

granting and claiming of attention can unconsciously reinforce already-problematic power dynamics, such as gender dynamics.

A fertile ground is being prepared for a popular alignment with corporate-sponsored denial of the depths of the world's socio-ecological predicament, an undermining of innate human capabilities for critical and transformative responses. In the words of the Chan scholar, Peter Hershock², through the consumption of mass media and its associated commodities, human attention is being exported out of our immediate situation:

“*This compromises relational depth and quality, effectively eroding presently obtaining patterns of mutual support and contribution, and triggers further and still more extensive commodity consumption. As this recursive process intensified beyond the point at which all major subsistence needs have been commodified, consciousness itself is effectively colonised. The relational capabilities of both persons and communities atrophy, situational diversity is converted into circumstantial variety, and the very resources needed to meaningfully respond to and resolve our suffering or troubles are systematically depleted.* (Hershock 2006:26) ”

As Žižek³ has described, capitalism relies on a structural disavowal based on an overvaluing of individual belief - in the sense of inner subjective attitude. So long as we believe (in our hearts) that capitalism is ambivalent, we are free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange - settling for an ironic distance. This corporate-sponsored rupture, summed up in Saul Alinsky's observation that 'most people are eagerly groping for some medium, some means by which they can bridge the gap between their morals and their practices', goes to the heart of the debate on wellbeing, redefining prosperity and understanding consumerism. For the choices that confront us are not merely about our relationship with the world and others. The choices must also embrace a much older conversation about our relations with the self: on our subjectivity.

The capitalist complex of micro-practices - most visible in the outworkings of the operation of mass media, advertising and the culture of consumerism - represent the culmination of a deeply ambivalent tradition in Western thought that has resulted in a profound 'breach of faith toward everything that is'. For Apfel Marglin, Bush and Zajonc (2002)⁴ it is this breach, first articulated by René Descartes, that not only enables unprecedented levels of human control and manipulation of the social and natural worlds but also lies today behind a deep alienation and meaninglessness. Since the 16th century, 'control' has been a key strategic value informing the explosion of technological development associated with the rise of Euro- modernity and its influence over other parts of the world. Hershock notes that what we

2 Peter Hershock, 2006, *Buddhism in the Public Sphere*. London:Routledge.

3 Slavoj Žižek, cited in Fisher, 2009, p.13.

4 Frederique Apfel Marglin, Mirabai Bush and Arthur Zajonc, 2002, 'Healing the Breach of Faith with Everything', Conference Paper. See: <https://www.arthurzajonc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Healingthe-BreachofFaithTowardEverythingThatIs.doc.pdf>

refer to generically as ‘technology’ is actually a particular family or lineage of technologies that have arisen and been sustained through a complex of political, social, economic and cultural forces, focused on the value of exerting control over our circumstances to enhance *felt independence*. This strategic value has delivered military and ecological destruction on a scale hitherto never attained, having co-evolved with and serviced the rise of the modern nation state (Scott 1988)⁵. Hershock notes that although we remain related to others and to our environment, the prevalence of sovereign claims to control fosters a dichotomous perspective on that relationship - a splitting into the objective and subjective - that facilitates treating our relations with others as either actually or potentially instrumental:

“ *No longer intimately continuous with all things - that is related internally - gaps open up in what I can attend to or hold in careful awareness. By ignoring what intimately connects who ‘I am’ with what ‘I am not’, I render myself liable to being blindsided - subject to accidental or fateful events of the sort that cause the experience of trouble or suffering. (Hershock 2006:90)* ”

For Hershock, the realisation of convenience and control comes at a huge human and public cost in terms of an erosion of relational quality, resulting in a mounting incapacity for appreciation and contribution. He observes in the market valorisation of convenience and choice both general narrowing of our horizons of personal responsibility and, over time, a severe compromise of relational capability and attunement. For Hershock, degraded environments are inseparable from degraded consciousness, in a dual pattern of degradation that at once devalues what is experienced and lowers experiential quality. In one of his most radical claims, Hershock goes so far as to suggest that the colonisation of consciousness is in many ways a more critical threat to our possibilities for realising truly liberating environments than is the depletion of soil, the fouling of our rivers, lakes, seas and skies.

Theatre as Resistance

In an essay calling upon artists to pursue the truths of the times we live in through honest, socio-politically responsive work, Scottish playwright David Greig⁶ argues that one of the key roles of theatre is to resist ‘the management of the imagination by power’. He paints a picture of the influence of the dominant economic ideology on our core cultural mythology:

“ *The institutions of global capital manage the imagination in the first instance through media institutions. Hollywood cinema, the television and newspapers of the great media empires like Fox, CNN. These forms create the narrative superstructure around which our imagination grows. In this way we learn to think along certain paths, to believe certain truths, all of which tend to further the aims of capital and the* ”

5 Scott, James C, 1999, *Seeing Like A State*, Yale: Yale University Press.

6 Joyce McMillan on David Greig for Scotsman Festival Mag., August 2007

continuance of economic growth. Once the superstructure is in place, our own individual creativity will tend to grow around it and assume its shape so that the stories we tell ourselves, the photographs we take, and so forth, are put in the service of the same narratives and assumptions. (Greig, 2007)

For Greig, however, very few imaginations are totally colonized, just as very few are totally liberated. In most minds there is a back and forth - a dialogue and questioning between challenge and assumption. By intervening in the realm of the imaginary, however, power continually shapes our understanding of reality.

Consumption - or consumerism - is one of the key sites for the deployment of contemporary presuppositions concerning *the self*. Expertise has forged alignments between broad socio-political objectives, the goals of producers and the self-regulating propensities of individuals. A complex economic terrain has taken shape, in which the success of an economy is seen as dependent on the ability of politicians, planners and manufacturers and marketers to differentiate needs, to produce products aligned to them and to ensure the purchasing capacity to enable acts of consumption to occur. While political authorities can only act indirectly upon the innumerable private acts of consumption, it is the expertise of market research, of promotion and communication, underpinned by the knowledge and techniques of subjectivity, that provides the relays through which the aspirations of ministers, business and the dreams of consumers achieve mutual translatability. Mark Fisher's notion of *capitalist realism* encompasses much more than the quasi-propagandistic way in which advertising - and its associated infrastructure - operates. It is what he describes as a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action.

In the process, the dominant economic ideology of our times engages in what Fisher names as an 'amoral affective engineering':

“

Morality has been replaced by feeling. In the “empire of the self” everyone feels the same without ever escaping a condition of solipsism. (Fisher 2009:24)

”

Noting the prevalence of mental health challenges - notably those among university students with whom he had worked - Fisher calls for a conversion of these problems into effective sites of antagonism and campaigning, describing affective disorders as 'captured discontent'.

Similarly, Tim Jackson (2010) has challenged the dominant 'social logic of consumerism' which has linked prevailing understandings of prosperity with the accumulation of material wealth. He notes a consensus in the academic literature on the existence of a 'social recession' in modern Western society, with rising rates of anxiety and clinical depression, increased alcoholism and binge drinking, and a decline in morale at work.

Berardi notes that the technical definition of depression is the deactivation of desire after a panicked acceleration and calls on us to see depression not as a mere pathology but also as a form of knowledge. He adds that when dealing with depression the challenge is not to bring the depressed back to normality, to reintegrate behaviour into the universal standards of normal social language. Rather, the goal is to change the focus of the sufferer's depressive attention, to re-focalize, to deterritorialize the mind and the expressive flow. The goal in therapy is to offer the possibility of seeing new landscapes, to overcome the obsessive and repetitive refrain. At the level of society Berardi anticipates a reconsideration of the notion of wealth and its association with purchasing power, so that a new emphasis might be placed on enjoyment. For it is in the disciplinary culture of modernity that has equated pleasure and possessing that many of our problems have their origin:

“

...and economic thinking created scarcity and privatized social need in order to make possible the process of capitalist accumulation. (Berardi 2009: 214- 215)⁷

”

We have known for some time that modernity and its exemplary mode of material transmission in the form of capitalism and neoliberalism have only progressed by imposing collateral damage on society and nature. Indeed, for Carlisle, Henderson and Hanlon (2009) wellbeing *is* the collateral damage. They agree that the science of wellbeing - and its critique - are reconnected by, and subsumed within, an environmental critique of modern consumer society.

Our 'social recession' manifests in a number of symptoms that flow from a disintegration of social ties or what Zygmunt Bauman (2002)⁸ described as *social liquidity*, including consumer society, wherein all things, goods and people are treated as consumer objects. Liquid society is the result of a long process that has accelerated from the early 1980s along with neoliberal forms of capitalism: it is a mobile, transient, precarious society in which the disintegration of social ties reaches levels that have been hitherto unknown. Bonaiuti (2012:41)⁹ has linked this disintegration to:

i) The spread of individualistic behaviours and to positional competition;

ii) A contribution to the loss of wellbeing in contemporary societies; and

iii) A loss of resilience of social organisation when faced with external stress (both economic and ecological); and

iv) A clue to comprehending why contemporary societies seem to show little reaction when confronted with the multidimensional crises we are now facing.

⁷ Franco 'Biffo' Berardi, 2009, *The Soul At Work*, Boston: MIT Press.

⁸ Zygmunt, Bauman, *Society Under Siege*. London:Polity, 2002.

⁹ M. Bonaiuti, M. 'Degrowth: Tools for a Complex Analysis of the Multidimensional Crisis', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*(2012), 23:1, March, pp.30-50.

Many of us are now familiar with the argument that advanced societies are hitting up against the planetary boundaries (Rockström et al, 2009)¹⁰ and ‘social limits’ (Raworth 2012)¹¹ associated with myopic behaviour and hyper individualism. But what if the ‘social recession’ is not only undermining psychological wellbeing but also undermining our ability to respond to the associated ecological crises. As Bauman (2005) has observed, ‘Imagining the possibility of another way of living together is not a strong point of our world of privatised utopias’.

As individual and organisational members of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance - set within a network of networks, movement of movements, dedicated to re-imagining and designing economies in the image of our wellbeing - it is clear that our primary challenge to the dominant narrative must be cast in a new language and style.

If the main threat to the dominant economic narrative could be found in logic alone, the battle of ideas over a new economy would have been won and lost years ago.

The creative challenge is two-fold:

- To render visible the power and interest that sits behind the dominant narratives told and retold across policy, educational, and media platforms; and
- To enable spaces and platforms for emergent alternatives to flourish in the pluriverse: a world that can celebrate many worldviews.

10 Rockström, J., W. Steffen, K. Noone, Å. Persson, F. S. Chapin, III, E. Lambin, T. M. Lenton, M. Scheffer, C. Folke, H. Schellnhuber, B. Nykvist, C. A. De Wit, T. Hughes, S. van der Leeuw, H. Rodhe, S. Sörlin, P. K. Snyder, R. Costanza, U. Svedin, M. Falkenmark, L. Karlberg, R. W. Corell, V. J. Fabry, J. Hansen, B. Walker, D. Liverman, K. Richardson, P. Crutzen, and J. Foley. 2009. Planetary boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity. *Ecology and Society* (2009), 14(2): 32. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/>

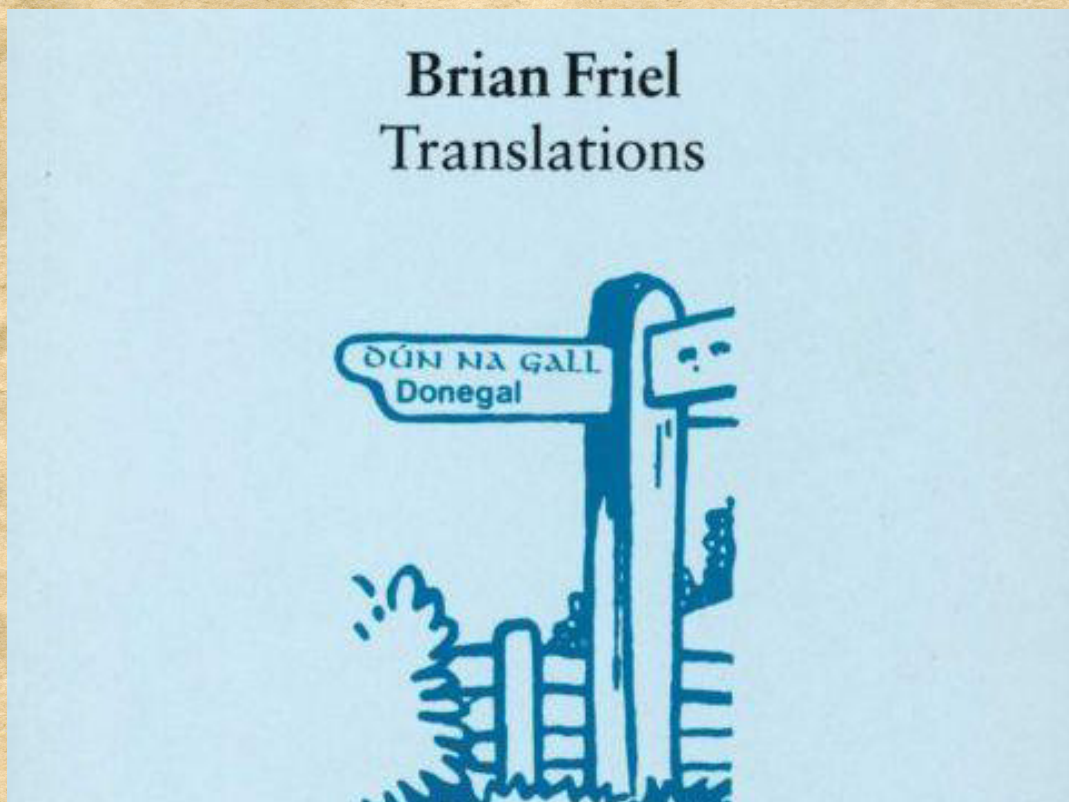
11 K. Raworth, A Safe and Just Space for Humanity, Oxfam Discussion Paper, February 2012.

Field Day Theatre Company [Ireland]

Field Day began in 1980 in Derry as a cultural and intellectual response to the political crisis in Northern Ireland. Playwright Brian Friel and actor/director Stephen Rea set out to identify and develop a new audience for theatre.

They established Field Day at the height of the so called 'Troubles', and the project had at its core the idea of the theatre as a 'fifth province of the mind', a place where political imaginaries could be explored in new ways.

Friel's critically acclaimed *Translations* was the first of many Field Day plays to show at Derry's Guildhall before travelling throughout Ireland and the world. The plays produced by Field Day asked the audience to 'unlearn' the Ireland they knew, 'the received ways of thinking about it and to learn new ones'. And it is precisely on this issue of unlearning and learning that *Translations* rests, a play considered by Seamus Deane to be Field Day's central text.



De Souza³⁶ recalls that Deane once observed that it was the search for an alternative imaginary that brought Friel to understand the role of art in a broken society. Citing Friel himself, De Souza notes that his plays are concerned with ‘man in society, in conflict with community, government, academy, church, family – and essentially in conflict with himself.’ (Ardagh 255³⁷, cited in De Souza)

From its beginnings as a theatre company, Field Day also developed into a publishing company. Its founding members, Brian Friel and Stephen Rea, were quickly joined by Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Tom Paulin, Tom Kilroy and Davy Hammond. Publishing collaborations followed with celebrated writers such as Terry Eagleton, Edward Said and Frederic Jameson.

Since the mid 1990s, Field Day has become synonymous with the development of Irish Studies. It has acted as a focus for scholars seeking to question the paradigm of Irish history and literature and in so doing, it has contributed to the international debates in postcolonial theory and various strands of cultural history.

Peter Doran³⁸, Sinead Mercier and Michael Cronin³⁹ have cited the power of Friel’s Translations – notably in its implicit linkage of coloniality, language and dispossession – as a parable with echoes of the island’s ecological dispossession and transformation during the Tudor experiment in Ireland that joined language extinction with territorial extraction.

Contact: **Stephen Rea**

Website: www.fieldday.ie

Key words: ‘Troubles’, translations, ‘the fifth province’, language.
Links to wellbeing economy: Political imaginary; language, exile.

36 De Souza, Michelle Andressa Alvarenga, 2014, ‘Translations: A Movement Towards Reconciliation’, in ABEI Journal 16:109.

37 Ardagh, John, 1994, Ireland and the Irish: a portrait of a changing society. London: Hamish Hamilton.

38 Doran, Peter, 2022, ‘Translations: Language and Ireland’s Ecological Transformation’, in The Irish News, 27 December.

39 Michael Cronin, 2019, An Ghaeilge agus an Éiceolaíocht/Irish and Ecology, Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta, Ireland.

INTERROGATING SOCIAL IMAGINARIES FROM A POST-DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

By Peter Doran

As an island of communities and narratives we occupy that position of “in betweenness” of which Seamus Heaney wrote⁴⁰.

If dialogues on a wellbeing economy are to participate in and draw from the richness of Irish imaginaries, they must begin with a certain fidelity and, perhaps, risk-taking that opens up stories that even precede and exceed narratives of the nation and its fractures. Country, note Kearney and Gallagher⁴¹ is a different concept from nation and marks a commons of earth and elements: a shared ecology of lands and waters: -

“*But if a country marks a space before the nation, there’s also a space beyond it – and it goes by the name of cosmos. This is a site that transcends all frontiers – a fifth province of mind that exceeds the four provinces of north, south, east and west. It is the Finistère of hope where all pilgrimages lead, going back to the navigations of ancient Irish monks – diasporas of risk allowing for new possibilities of thought. Such a migrant cosmos was, we believe, a catalyst of the great cultural enlightenment that ignited a whole revolution of ideas in the extraordinary generation of 1916.*”⁴²

Field Day⁴³ writers, dramatists, and activists have worked hard to remind us of the influence of the significance of the “Cultural Revolution” within Irish history in the 19th Century. Brian Friel, in particular, wrote to remind us that the colonial imperative is to destroy all memory of what went before, for the new colonial order is always founded on amnesia. And central to the project of erasure is language.

40 Seamus Heaney (1987), “Terminus”.

41 Kearney and Gallagher (2017), pp.41-43.

42 bid (2017), p.42.

43 See www.fieldday.ie/about/ Field Day began in 1980 in Derry as a cultural and intellectual response to the political crisis in Northern Ireland. Playwright Brian Friel and actor/director Stephen Rea set out to identify and develop a new audience for theatre. Friel’s critically acclaimed *v* was the first of many Field Day plays to show at Derry’s Guildhall before travelling throughout Ireland and the world. From its beginnings as a theatre company, Field Day also developed into a publishing company. Its founding members, Brian Friel and Stephen Rea, were quickly joined by Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Tom Paulin, Tom Kilroy and Davy Hammond. Since the mid 1990s, Field Day has become synonymous with the development of Irish Studies. It has acted as a focus for scholars seeking to question the paradigm of Irish history and literature and in so doing, it has contributed to the international debates in postcolonial theory and various strands of cultural history.

The Metaphors We Live by: Darwin and the 'struggle for existence'
From **Tim Jackson's Post-Growth: Life After Capitalism (2021)**

Darwin's theory of evolution offers a prime example [of the power of metaphor]. Its central metaphor asserts that life is always and everywhere a relentless 'struggle for existence'. The thermodynamic aspect of this struggle...is a more or less quantifiable feature of material processes. But the 'struggle' itself is not an objective reality. It's a metaphor. A powerful one for sure. It evokes seemingly trustworthy visions of life as the domain of scarcity, irreconcilable conflict, endless competition and the inevitable dichotomy of victory or defeat. But it is still a metaphor.

In the hands for the Social Darwinists, the narrative turned dangerous. It was the political theorist Herbert Spencer who coined another metaphor: the 'survival of the fittest'. By casting life as a struggle and bestowing a 'natural' supremacy on the survivors, Spencer's metaphor promotes the dubious doctrine that 'might is right'. It sowed the seeds for eugenics: a doctrine of pursuing racial purity which had profound and tragic consequences well into the twentieth century - most notably of course during the Holocaust - and is visible in the xenophobia and racism still haunting society today.

Darwin himself was deeply taken with the metaphor of struggle. He attributes this to his reading of Thomas Malthus's famous Essay on Population, which argued that population will always outstrip the means to nourish it...The central metaphor at the heart of evolutionary theory came from an economist. Not just any economist, as it happens, but one with a very specific set of political views which involved (for example) withdrawing support from the poorest in society because it was a lost cause. Suffering could never be eliminated, so why bother trying, Malthus concluded. (pp.86-87)

Michael Cronin picks up where Field Day left off but embarks on an entirely new chapter and journey too: an ecological and linguistic one. In his wonderful *Irish and Ecology-An Ghaeilge Agus An Éiceo- laíocht* (2019), Cronin reconnects questions of colonialism, forced amnesia and political ecology. He notes that language situates people in their environment in terms of both description and narration – telling you where you are and what's around you and where you come from – so the project of removing the Irish language from public life has – as one long-term consequence – been the alienation of people from their own surroundings. Cronin cites Brian Friel's play, *Translations* (1980), which explores the experience of a displacement and exile when agents of colonialism impose English translations of Irish place names. The play's school master cautions "that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen – to use an image you'll understand – it can happen that a civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape....of fact."⁴⁴ Cronin adds that it can also happen that a people can find themselves imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape *tout court*:

44 Brian Friel, 1980, *Translations*, p.43.

*The population shifts to a language which bears no relationship to the environment in which they find themselves. The ecological consequences are profound in that the connection to place and history – a sense of which is central to the creation of a sustainable and resilient localities – is seriously fractured.*⁴⁵

Transitional discourses are inherently preoccupied with the realm of the *in* between...the question of what is passing and what is to come, and how. The island of Ireland's transition is multi-layered, replete with double fidelities and even the tantalising prospect of a new constitutional moment of birth. Cronin captures this dilemma for the post-colonial Republic of the *in between* in an observation by Palmer, Baker and Maley⁴⁶:

We may imagine ourselves at an angle to the Anglosphere, basking in our guilt-free positioning as both recovering colony and third richest country in Europe, but we have little countervailing sense of what exactly the absence that haunts our modernity might be.

For Cronin, it is the absences from this past that are now coming back to haunt Ireland's present in terms of our relationship to the environment. The English Tudor experiment in (language) extinction and (territorial) extraction made Ireland the ideal laboratory for a form of ecological dispossession that would be replayed endlessly in various corners of the Empire.

For Sharae Deckard⁴⁷, Ireland's historical development has been profoundly shaped and continues to be shaped – not only by its colonial history – but by its role as a politically weak and unevenly developed semi-periphery within the European economy and the capitalist world system. Deckard draws on the work of Jason Moore, a leading theorist who attempts to integrate ecology into our understanding of world capitalist systems.⁴⁸In Moore's environmental history of capitalist cycles of accumulation, the capitalist world-system is constituted not only through periodic reorganisation of geometries of power and economy but through the remaking of socio-ecological relations. In other words, world hegemonic systems of capital did not merely organise and re-organise resource and food regimes, these systems were also socio-ecological projects.

As such, the capitalist world-system does not merely possess an ecological dimension but is inherently constituted by ecological regimes and revolutions that periodically reorganise and renew the conditions of accumulation to allow intensified appropriation of ecological surpluses.⁴⁹

45 Cronin (2019), p.14.

46 Palmer, Baker and Maley (2019), p.15.

47 Deckard, S. (2016).

48 Moore, J. (2011), pp.108-47

49 Deckard, S. (2019), p.148.

The territory of Ireland played a significant role in the emergence of these different cycles of systemic accumulation as a laboratory for new forms of expropriation, from 16th century plantation to 21st century neoliberal austerity. Ireland functioned as a frontier and testing ground for new techniques and imaginaries that were crucial to the formation of the Atlantic economy and to the expansion of the capitalist world-ecology.

For Deckard⁵⁰ the island served as a geographical stepping stone for transatlantic settlement and as a laboratory in which to trial techniques of privatisation and expropriation. Immanuel Wallerstein⁵¹ went so far as to suggest that it was as if Ireland were the blueprint for America. Those most engaged in the colonisation of Ireland – Humphrey Gilbert, Walter Raleigh, Richard Grenville – were also those who took a leading part in the planting of the first colonies in Virginia. Deckard⁵² notes that the radical simplification of nature can be clearly seen in the context of the Irish plantation, where mass deforestation fundamentally transformed the ecology of Ireland, accompanied by radical forms of dispossession of indigenous populations and targeted destruction of non-human species and flora, including wolves and broad-leaf trees, in order to facilitate the importation and production of exogenous crops and commodities for export, and to eliminate the social and cultural bases for the reproduction of pre-capitalist forms of life. She adds that the significance of land and agriculture is almost overdetermined in Irish historiography, yet it is crucial to understand the transformation of Irish environments not merely as a product of colonialism but rather in relation to the larger early modern revolution in capitalist accumulation: “The reorganization of Ireland’s biologically diverse bogs and forests into rationalised sites of capitalist monoculture was crucial to the erosion of Irish self-sufficiency and the integration of the island into capitalist world-ecology.”⁵³ The infamous annals of Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (ca. 1598), composed at Spenser’s 3000-acre settlement in Muster, not only captured tales of Irish insurrection, tactical famine, conquest, and plantation, but of “the ecological plenitude of Irish nature, conveniently emptied of its indigenes, [is] released for capture as ecological surplus,”⁵⁴ marking a historical shift from a feudal to capitalist mode of production, embodied in conceptions of abstract social nature as “tabula rasa” ripe for social re-engineering.

Spenser dedicates an abstract mathematical part of his work to the imagination of a scheme for English plantation, with plans for a grid-like remapping of the island.

50 Ibid (2019), p.150.

51 Wallerstein, I. (1974), p.

52 Deckard, S. (2019), op.cit, p.150.

53 Deckard, S. (2019), Ibid., p. 150.

54 Ibid. (2019), p.151.

Mercier and Translations

For Sinéad Mercier and her co-authors⁵⁵, Brian Friel's *Translations* is a parable of how high modernist ideology disrupts local metis and knowing, detailing the impact of a major topographic survey on the fictional rural Irish speaking community. The play is based on the colonial mapping of the island of Ireland in the early 19th century – the first such exercise in a British colony – in what Mercier describes not only as an economic and scientific campaign, but as 'Lawscaping on an imperial scale.'⁵⁶ In the play, Friel describes how Gaelic place-names are recorded with anglicised names or clumsy phonetic translations. In the process, the survey, for Mercier, legitimises these corruptions and distortions in a way that served to undermine the local sense of place and being-in-the-world. Through the resulting distortion of language and place, the land is withdrawn from its inhabitants; from the communities that have lived there for generations. In the word of one character in the play, the translations are experienced as a kind of exile.

Mercier describes how the process of translation, as captured in Friel's play, achieves the three essential features of modernity: rationalising and categorising all phenomena, optimising knowledge to instrumentalist ends; reducing pre-Enlightenment beliefs to mere superstition; and partitioning Nature from humans in order to better mould and instrumentalise it for the separatist ends of humans in power.⁵⁷ Mercier observes how systems of knowledge, such as the law, codify these processes of modernity – largely in the form of capitalist social relations, part of an outworking of what James Scott⁵⁸ attributes to the European Enlightenment and its outworking in a high modernist ideology that sought to create civilian populations from people, and resources from nature. Friel's *Translations* foregrounds this process of State-enforced legibility through quantification and calculation, resulting in the withdrawal from communities of landscapes and their intimate ties, meanings and relations, including landscapes of meaning. A kind of exile.

55 Mercier, S. (2020), p. 7.

56 Lawscaping refers to the role of law in imposing a modern grid of calculation and abstraction on local landscapes, rendering them for conversion to the universal languages of transaction and private property.

57 Ibid, (2020), pp.8-9.

58 Scott, J. (1998).

The OntoStory of the Modern West, from Free, Fair and Alive: The insurgent power of the commons, by David Bollier and Heike Selfrich (2019)

The moment is ripe for those of us in the secular West to ponder the general belief system developed during the Renaissance and expanded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the capitalist societies that arose from it. We moderns live within a grand narrative about individual freedom, property and the state developed by philosophers such as René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke. The OntoStory that we tell ourselves sees individuals as the primary agents of a world filled with inert objects that have fixed, essential qualities. (Most notably, we have a habit of referring to “nature” and “humanity,” as if each were an entity separate from the other.) This Western, secular narrative claims that we humans are born with boundless freedom in a pre-political “state of nature.” But our imagined ancestors (Who exactly? When? Where?) were allegedly worried about protecting our individual property and liberty, and so they supposedly came together (despite their radical individualism) to forge a “social contract” with each other. As the story goes, everyone authorised the establishment of a state to become the guarantor of everyone’s liberty and property.

Today we are heirs to this creation myth explaining the origins of the liberal, secular state. The story transfers theological notions about omnipotence (God, monarchs) to the sovereign state (presidents, parliaments, courts). The Leviathan state acts with sovereign power to privilege individual liberty over all social affiliations or identities based on history, ethnicity, culture, religion, geographic origin, and so on. The primary elements of society are the individual and the state. As one commentator notes, liberalism assumes a human nature “that causes self-interested, atomistic individuals with independent, static preferences to compete in an effort to maximise their own benefits with little or no regard for the implications for others. In this political form, representation is won through competition among sovereign individuals and majority rule.”

The Pluriverse

In many ways the work of Field Day, Friel and others anticipated or pre-figured the emergent politics of the pluriverse: a challenge to the closures of colonial systems of knowledge and practice, now given expression in new post-development movements in the Global South. Post-development is a critical school of thought in development studies that situates our dominant economic narratives within a rich critique of Euro-modernity and patriarchy, thus extending our horizon of critique beyond the confines of political economy. The focus of post-development scholarship is on a critique of modernity or Western dominance and its close association with enabling histories of colonialism, patriarchy and ecological destruction; while scholars engage with indigenous and social movements offering diverse local alternatives based on their own “Epistemologies of the South”⁵⁹. Some important figures associated with this critical movement are Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, Serge Latouche, Majid Rahnema, Silvia Federici, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies.

For Escobar⁶⁰ “Epistemologies of the South” is one of the most compelling frameworks for social transformation to emerge at the intersection of Global North and the Global South, theory and practice, and between the academy and social life, in many decades. Advocates do not claim to have arrived at a fully formed general theory but have sought to outline trajectories for “thinking otherwise:”

*....precisely because it carves a space for itself that enables thought to re-engage with life and attentively walk along the amazing diversity of forms of knowledge held by those whose experiences can no longer be rendered legible by Eurocentric knowledge in the academic mode, if they ever were.*⁶¹

Escobar suggests that Epistemologies of the South might be useful to those who have been at the receiving end of those colonialist categories that have translated their experiences, turning them into lacks, or simply rendered them utterly illegible and invisible.

Escobar’s work on “the pluriverse” can support a new conversation about the wellbeing economy by shifting the horizon of our imaginative encounter with these concepts (“wellbeing” and “economy”) to our contested histories and legacies of European modernity and colonialism (or incorporation into the modern world-ecological system of capital and accumulation). This would be both an act of solidarity with other colonised territories, including indigenous communities, but also an act of solidarity with our own past insofar as it has become a container of silences and absences.

59 Santos, B. (2014).

60 Escobar, A. (2020), p.67-68.

62 Escobar, A. (2020), p.67.

For Escobar⁶², while the occupation of territories by capital and the state implies economic, technological, cultural, ecological and often armed aspects, its most fundamental dimension is ontological: it is built on specific assumptions about the very nature of existence. From this perspective, what occupies territories is a particular ontology, “that of the universal world of individuals and markets that attempts to transform all other worlds into one single world.” It is from this position that we derive the Zapatista dictum and counterpoint: “A world where many worlds fit.” Political ontology refers to the power-laden practices involved in bringing into being a particular world or ontology.

For Escobar, a crucial moment that helps us to understand the persistence of occupying ontologies is the conquest of America, considered by some as a point of origin of our current modern/colonial world-system. He notes that the most central feature of the single-world view doctrine has been a twofold ontological divide: a particular way of separating humans from nature (the nature-culture divide); and the distinction and boundary policing between “us” (civilized, modern, developed) and “them (uncivilized, underdeveloped), those who practice other ways of worlding (the colonial divide). Escobar adds⁶³:

These (and many other derivative) dualisms underlie an entire structure of institutions and practices through which the single world is enacted. Many signs, however, suggest that the globalized world so constructed is unravelling. The growing visibility of struggles to defend mountains, landscapes, forests, territories, and so forth, by appealing to a relational (nondualist) and pluri-ontological understanding of life is a manifestation of this crisis. The crisis thus stems from the models through which we imagine the world to be a certain way and construct it accordingly.

This conjuncture and the questions it raises define a rich context for Escobar’s approach to political ontology and the pluriverse. On the one hand he seeks to understand the conditions under which the idea of a single globalised world continues to maintain its dominance (the dominant economic narrative). On the other, he seeks to engage with, record and support the emergence of projects based on different ontological commitments and ways of worlding. For Escobar and his colleagues, the pluriverse is a tool for making alternatives to the one world plausible (to those of us living in the “one world” narrative), and second, for providing resonance to those other worlds that are interrupting the one-world-story, including some that are already emergent in Ireland (e.g. experiments in commoning). Is this not also a worthy project for a Community of Practice dedicated to the inflection of a particular experience, an experience of the ‘in-between’ worlds located at the interface of Euro-modernity and as host to the early colonial project with all of its legacies and residues - not least in the sphere of political economy - on the island of Ireland.

The notion of the pluriverse has two main sources, according to Escobar. The first is theoretical critiques of dualism and “post-dualist” trends in scholarship associated with the

62 Escobar, A. (2020), p.73

63 Escobar, A. (2020), p.73.

so-called ontological turn in social theory. The second is the perseverance of nondualist philosophies (or cosmovisions) that reflect a deeply relational understanding of life, such as Muntu and Ubuntu in parts of Africa, and Pachamama or Uma Kiwe among South American indigenous peoples. Relational ontologies are also current in Buddhist philosophies and practices of mind-body. Movements in Europe to restore practices of commoning, energy transitions and the relocalisation of food are also linked to foundational critiques that push back against the dominant narrative of capitalist modernity. As we have investigated in other parts of this 'Call to Action', there is also an opening to these alternative ontologies and epistemologies lingering in the Irish language and wider mytho-poetic traditions.

Designing Futures

Buen Vivir and the Politics of the Pluriverse

"In the name of Annah the Allmaziful, the Everliving, the Bringer of *Plurabilities*, haloed be her eve, her singtime sung, her rill be run, unhemmed as it is uneven!"

— James Joyce, [Finnegans Wake](#)

A central premise of this paper is that new and old knowledges produced in struggles for the defence of "relational worlds" are often the most farsighted and appropriate to the present conjuncture of modern problems. And there is none more problematic than our dominant economic narratives, as the one percent - the structural embodiment of exclusion, crude accumulation and plunder - have seized not only the means of production but the means of installing their preferred narratives [and obfuscation] at the heart of expansive technologies of communication and consumerism, to the point of colonising dimensions of subjectivities.

In South America, for example, notions of *Buen Vivir* ("Good living") or collective wellbeing in accordance with culturally appropriate ways and the rights of nature have emerged as living practices. *Buen Vivir* implies an alternative philosophy of life that enables the subordination of economic objectives to the criteria of ecology, human dignity, and social justice.

This relational approach to wellbeing is expansive, embracing relations not only with other humans but with the more-than-human (Nature) and with the constitutive relationships of interiority or relations with the self. Deep attention to those relations with the self help integrate the quality of our "self-care" to the integrity of our relationships to other beings. In the words of the Zen practitioners, the "way out is in."

Escobar notes that debates about "degrowth", the commons and *Buen Vivir* are "fellow travellers," constituting important areas of research, theorisation, and activism for both Epistemologies of the South and for political ontology. To think about wellbeing or *Buen Vivir* in the register of the politics of the pluriverse, navigating new ontological horizons, is to have two thinks at a time (at least two): wellbeing is no longer confined to the notion of the human or the collective but is caught up immediately in

considerations of our entanglement with fellow beings and communities. It is no accident that Ireland is among the first European Union states to seriously entertain the incorporation of the Rights of Nature in her constitution.

The pluriverse is not a template nor a decisive or pre-determined outcome but an orientation, inspired by the Epistemologies of the South, and informed by an acceptance that we are facing modern problems for which there may be no modern solutions, as they are limited by the closures and blind spots that have been part of the ontological investments of Euro-modernity. Ontologically speaking, Escobar continues, one may say that the current crisis is the crisis of a particular world or set of world-making practices with origins in the European enlightenment. Transition implies a movement towards the opposites or alternatives, posited as a multiplicity of worlds (the pluriverse)...a multiplicity of possibilities that have not been exhausted by the Eurocentric experience or imagination. A world of “both-and”, a world that is both European and open to thinking and being otherwise, not least as an act of epistemic and ontological solidarity. On the island of Ireland that solidarity is not limited to a relationship with others but is a deep act of solidarity with an opening to our own past, an opening to an undoing of our coloniality where that experience has been one of closure.

Ontologically, Escobar continues, the invisibility of the pluriverse points to a sociology of absences: what does not exist *is actively produced as non-existent* or as a noncredible alternative to what exists, notably relational ways of being. The colonial attack on the Irish language and attempt to erase memory was one example of these attempts to actively produce the “non-existent.” Writers such as Cronin, Kirby and Manchán Magan are deeply engaged in excavating and recalling deep patterns of thought and relationality that remain part of our linguistic heritage.

Kinship Project & Staying with the Trouble Symposium, Cork, Ireland

KinShip is a long-term public artwork, developing a variety of public activities at Tramore Valley Park in Cork, starting in 2022. Tramore Valley Park has been the site of great environmental change. From 1964 to 2009, this site was used as a landfill for Cork city.

The KinShip art project offers artists and interested communities an opportunity to gather, and to respond creatively and critically to the ecological and climate action challenges.

‘Kinship’ as an approach to addressing climate action is a concept borrowed from feminist scholar and theorist Donna Haraway. It recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and acknowledges the complex relationships and networks that exist within ecosystems. Kinship in art practice emphasises the perspective that humans are not dominant over, or separate from other living entities, but that we co-exist interdependently within a complex ecology.

Haraway also emphasises the need to confront the reality of damaged places (such as Tramore Valley Park), acknowledging that many environments have already been irreversibly transformed due to human activities. Rather than turning away from these places or seeing them as lost causes, she argues for an ethics of response and response-ability. She urges us to grapple with the entangled histories and ongoing consequences of environmental damage and to act within these contexts.

KinShip organised a curated exhibition of creative works, *Tentacular Thinking*, carried out over 18 months in Tramore Valley Park, Cork.

‘Tentacular Thinking’ was inspired by the term coined by Haraway, and refers to a way of thinking that embraces the interconnectedness and complexity of the world. Tentacular thinking encourages all of us to move beyond rigid boundaries and pre-existing hierarchical structures, instead embracing networks of connections and interdependencies.

Staying With The Trouble Symposium

An accompanying symposium showcased underlined the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and the input of diverse forms of knowledge in addressing rights of nature and climate action. By embracing multiple perspectives and ways of knowing, the symposium remained engaged with the complexities of the issues at hand when confronting environmental degradation.

The opportunity to bring the Exhibition and Symposium together was made possible by the Munster Technological University Arts Office, under the Create La Ceile fund.

The KinShip Project led by artists LennonTaylor is created in partnership with Cork City Council and a large community of collaborators and contributors, it is supported by the Creative Ireland, Creative Climate Action Fund.

Website: <https://www.lennontaylor.ie/whats-on/midden-chronicles-kinship-tentacular-thinking-exhibition-and-one-day-symposium-staying-with-the-trouble>

Keywords: [Public art](#), [ecofeminist thought](#), [‘staying with the trouble’](#), [Haraway](#), [kinship](#), [Tentacular Thinking](#), [Rights of Nature](#), [Climate Action](#), [landfill](#)

Links to Wellbeing Economy: [Kinship](#), [interdisciplinarity](#), [climate action](#), [rights of nature](#), [public art](#), [intrinsic value of all living things](#), and [multiple ways of knowing](#).

[IN] CONCLUSIONS

Ireland can occupy a special role in movements towards a pluriversal response to calls for Wellbeing Economies and Just Transitions⁶⁴, including solidarity with movements linking decolonial politics with the positing of Buen Vivir and related notions of wellbeing based on a profound shift to relational ontologies (“ways of being in the world”). Ireland has always been between stories...a place “in between” where histories of colonialism have partitioned memory, language, ecology and territory but only up to a point. Just transitions on the island of Ireland can embrace not only our socio-ecological crisis but afford opportunities for re-imagining ways of belonging across the island.

There are already signs of an emergence of pluriversal politics on the island, with the recent irruption of demands for a relational turn in our recognition of Rights of Nature. It is interesting to note that these early calls for a pluriversal politics have emerged in the borderlands of Donegal and Derry. Local authorities in Derry and Donegal, among others, have embarked on public consultations on what a Rights of Nature approach would mean for their local policies. The Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity Loss in the Republic of Ireland has received a number of expert submissions also calling for a recognition of Rights of Nature as an appropriate response to the biodiversity crisis, including calls for an amendment to the Irish Constitution.⁶⁵ The Assembly’s call for a constitutional referendum on the Rights of Nature has been repeated by the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action.

- Wellbeing in the context of pluriversal politics is a call to human / non-human conviviality. According to this approach, Buen Vivir, for example, is not solely a political alternative for redistributing economic resources or providing a more sustainable and cleaner environment, but also a proposal to open up life to a cosmos of worlds that would be intra-connected through respect, a proposal for a politics that, rather than requiring sameness, would be underpinned by new departures, to the far side of difference.
- Buen Vivir, in the context of the wellbeing economy policy debate in Ireland, is a call for a solidarity with social movements posing alternative responses to the modern challenges of climate change and ecological breakdown, in ways that respond to the claim that solutions couched in modern epistemologies and ontologies cannot produce answers to the problems that modernity-as-closure has presented. This is the observation at the heart of Akomolafe’s call for a postactivism. The wellbeing economy policy debate must become an invitation to think otherwise; to bring something new into our world. For this

64 Ireland is confronting calls for two just transitions: one is the familiar transition to a new socio-ecological order; the second, convergent transition, refers to the prospect of constitutional change on the island under the terms of the Belfast-Good Friday Agreement. These transitions and narratives will, ultimately, converge and inform one another.

65 See the Peter Doran et al. (2022), Rights of Nature submission to the Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity Loss submitted by the Environmental Justice Network Ireland, available here: www.ejni.net

reason, wellbeing and transition discourses share something profoundly in common with the work of art and cultural creativity.

- This is not solely a response to the urgent contemporary need to find dialogues, convivial well-living, and understanding between increasingly polarised ideological extremes, but also to the modern yearning for connectedness with oneself (as reflected in some forms of radical mindfulness, where questions of power, oppression, gender and race are not set aside), other human beings, and earth beings. There is a deep longing for a renewed life of interiority, even the contemplative, as we increasingly encounter the fact that the physical exhaustion of the earth's capacities and boundaries has an index in our experiences of mental exhaustion, which shows up in epidemics of tiredness, depression and addiction in response to disconnection. Wellbeing in the register of the pluriverse is a call to reconnection and entanglement that includes a mindful embrace of the re-enchantment of life as we cultivate a return to our senses and with the sensorial.

If our reception of wellbeing narratives in policy deliberations does not herald a disruption of the dominant stories that silence and subjugate the strange and unfamiliar landscapes of the pluriverse, we must look again. Let the wellbeing economy and its Community of Practice become an invitation to render the familiar unfamiliar in the anticipation of the unexpected. There are contemporary cultural and political narratives and openings that have already disturbed what was once thought to be the stable languages and practices of our post-colonial landscapes.

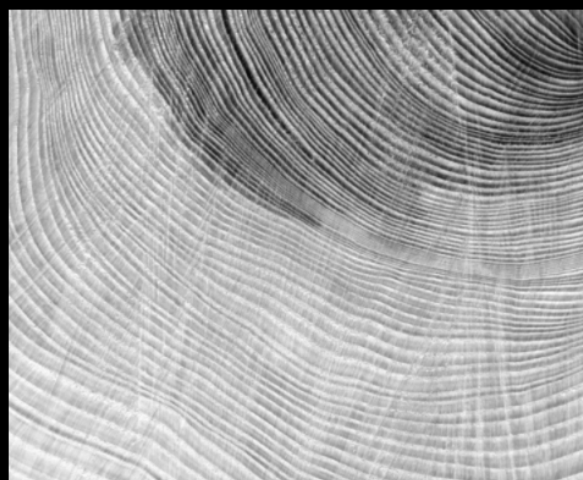
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INVITATION: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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Excerpt from The New Mythology by Mel White

It started the way all things start to grow.

It started with slowing
down.

It started with stopping.

It started when we stopped pushing forward
and pulled back into the earth. It started a cycle
of rebirth. When trees had shed their leaves.
When people stopped believing in eternal

growth. It started with letting go
of greed; with letting there be winter
so that seeds could sprout again.
It started in a dark place.

It started in barren soil, in former carbon sinks
where forests were clear felled;
in arid desert scrub, where nomads dwelt;
in the ears of those who could hear

the whispers of water; in stories told to their daughters.
It started with listening to the moon.
It started in silence. It started in unspoken dialects.
It started without violence.

It started with a vision.
When mankind was asleep, it started creeping
into dreamtime and wrapping round our feet
with the tenacity of bindweed. It started to unite us,

to rewrite the pathology learned in our childhood.
It started a new mythology; a new awareness
that the biosphere is shared. People started to care;
started to look for solutions. It started a revolution.