


Provided by the author(s) and University College Dublin Library in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

<b>Title</b>	Ríastartha - Introduction
<b>Author(s)</b>	Kavanagh, Donncha
<b>Publication date</b>	2014
<b>Publication information</b>	Campbell, N., Desmond, J., Fitchett, J., Kavanagh, D., McDonagh, P., O'Driscoll, A. and Prothero, A. (eds.). Myth and the Market : Proceedings of an interdisciplinary conference held in Carlingford, Ireland 19–21 June 2014
<b>Publisher</b>	University College Dublin. School of Business
<b>Item record/more information</b>	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10197/5819">http://hdl.handle.net/10197/5819</a>

Downloaded 2018-01-22T03:07:22Z

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd\_oa) 

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



## ***Ríastartha* – Introduction**

Donncha Kavanagh

*University College Dublin*

In 1968, Ray and Charles Eames released *Powers of Ten*, a short film depicting the relative scale of the universe in factors of ten. Starting with a picnic in Chicago, the film shows the original image from ten times further out every ten seconds, until we eventually reach the far edge of the universe. Then we zoom rapidly inwards, into the hand of the picnicker, magnifying by ten every ten seconds, until the film ends inside a proton of a carbon atom. It's a wonderful wee movie and well worth seeing at [www.powersof10.com](http://www.powersof10.com). Most strikingly, it demonstrates how order and disorder are implicated in one another, how the micro and the macro can be uncannily similar, and how the 'world' can shift its shape as one's point of view changes. These themes are also reworked in ancient myths, which are often stories about order and disorder jousting with one another, where local narratives about small groups speak to wider social and cosmic issues, and where shape-shifting characters abound. We have grouped this selection of papers under the title *Ríastartha*, which translates as 'contorted (though Kinsella (1970) coins the term 'warp-spasm') and speaks to the shape-changing attributes of the trickster, but also to the way in which order and disorder and the micro and macro are mutually implicated in a kind of cosmic Gordian knot.

Philip Roscoe's paper is about conceptions of evolutionary order imposed by competition, and, in particular, how neoliberal notions of spontaneous order have inserted themselves as a fashionable fantasy informing macro-economic policy and local practices in markets and organisations. Similar to the way *Powers of Ten* zooms in and out, there is a contemporary narrative that how order comes to be at the level of the gene also operates at the level of individual market transactions as well as the economy and society. Roscoe demurs from this story, arguing that turning Darwin (via Dawkins and Dennett) into a grand theory capable of explaining the behaviour of genes and market actors is an 'extraordinary leap' and is best understood as a form of mythopoeia, or myth-making. He makes the compelling point that the genes-eye view would have us see firms as mere containers for firm-level routines, which would lead us to the more than peculiar position of claiming that firms exist only to preserve practices like capital budgeting. More broadly, extending Dawkins' biological theory into a theory of society seems inappropriate given the prima facie evidence that ants, while they may make interesting structures, don't make movies like *Antz* (1988) nor do they send ants to the moon. Humans are different and a theory that buries these differences seems incomplete at best, and dangerous at worst. In particular, universal Darwinism loses any sense of historical reflexivity, with each situation being akin to a step in a Markov chain, wherein it is inconsequential how one got to a particular position; moreover, the fact that *this* position has been achieved, rather than innumerable potential others, provides the basis for a normative celebration of the status quo. Universal Darwinism, according to Roscoe, is the 'myth of myths' that seeks not only to explain the social and economic world, but also to justify actions that seem perverse and profoundly inhuman.

For Roscoe, the writings of the Austrian economist Frederick Hayek were important in legitimising a view of the market as an extension of – rather than a mere analogy with – an environment that ruthlessly and neutrally selects that which fits best. Hayek has a more central role in the paper by Stephen Dunne, Jo Grady, and Chris Grocott, which describes particular instances of 'shape-shifting'. First, it explores the peculiar phenomenon where the basic principles of neo-liberalism are, not only retained, but also actually *sustained* by the current eco-

conomic crisis. Indeed a paradigm's shape-shifting ability – as in the capacity to incorporate and feed on anomalies that should undermine its foundations – is perhaps a paradigm's *defining* attribute. Second, their paper considers more individual examples of shape-shifting, specifically the case of Hayek who, while advocating a philosophy of openness, seems to have worked to close down certain forms of conversation. They also examine the curious case of Karl Popper who promulgated the idea of falsification yet was strangely silent when it came to holding the influential Mont Pelerin Society, of which he and Hayek were prominent members, up to the standards laid out in *The Open Society* (Popper 1940). Dunne, Grady and Grocott's story describes and analyses how power is practiced, in terms of the power to determine who has the power to speak and how they can speak, as well as the power to know.

Shape-shifting also features in the other two papers that make up this section, both of which focus on the character of the Fool and the Trickster, two liminal and related entities that feature in many myths and in the folklore of various cultures. Anna Zueva-Owens focuses on the Fool's capacity for subversion and destabilisation, and the Fool's ability (and duty) to speak to power, even if this can be dangerous. This aspect of the Fool's character neatly captures some of the themes in the first two papers, which could be read as being about how to construct knowledge, the specialised nature of economic and managerial knowledge, and, more broadly, the problem of who has the right to speak. Linking the archetype of the Fool with the writings of Levinas, Zueva-Owens argues that the Fool is coterminous with ethical action and creativity, and she uses this to map out an idiosyncratic role for the contemporary corporate responsibility (CR) manager – one of organisational Fool – that provides a legitimising frame for critique within an organisational hierarchy. Echoing March's ([1976] 1979) writings on 'sensible foolishness', she works to define and celebrate a creative, critical and yet marginal role for the CR manager.

Cameron takes in a wider field of vision – analogous to the step changes in *Powers of Ten* – as his paper studies, not only the Fool, but also the related characters of the Trickster and Devil, and, most appropriately for this conference, their collective conjunction with changing understandings of money and the market. Much of his sparkling analysis is centred on Goethe's *Faust* – written in the late eighteenth century when 'modern' money was coming to be – where the Devil, the Trickster and the Fool are brought together in one manifestation. He also analyses a musical comedy from the 1820s, Artois and Rochefort's story about the 'Money Devil'. The ambiguous relationship between money and the devil continues to be explored in contemporary popular culture, as in Martin Scorsese's film, *Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), which is based on Jordan Belfort's story about his hedonistic life as a stock swindler, drug addict and convict. The movie boasts the most number of uses of the word 'fuck' in a non-documentary film, which is interesting given Cameron's gloss on that swear-word's origins, and indeed Belfort's own assertion to 2,500 souls in Dublin last month – each paying between €50 and €120 – that, 'Getting rich is fucking easy'. Quite.

*Powers of Ten* brings the viewer on a rapid and memorable journey from a picnic to the cosmos to the interiority of life itself. Similarly, these four papers, and indeed the wider collection of papers in this volume, presents us with a kaleidoscopic picture of the complexity of money and markets, and how a mythical perspective can weave a thread of insight into our contorted understandings of these fascinating phenomena.

## References

- Kinsella, Thomas (1970) *The Táin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
 March, James G. ([1976] 1979) 'The Technology of Foolishness', in James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (eds), *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations*, , Bergen: Universitetsforlaget.  
 Popper, Karl R. (1940) *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.