



Communicating post-fossil fuel futures in popular culture

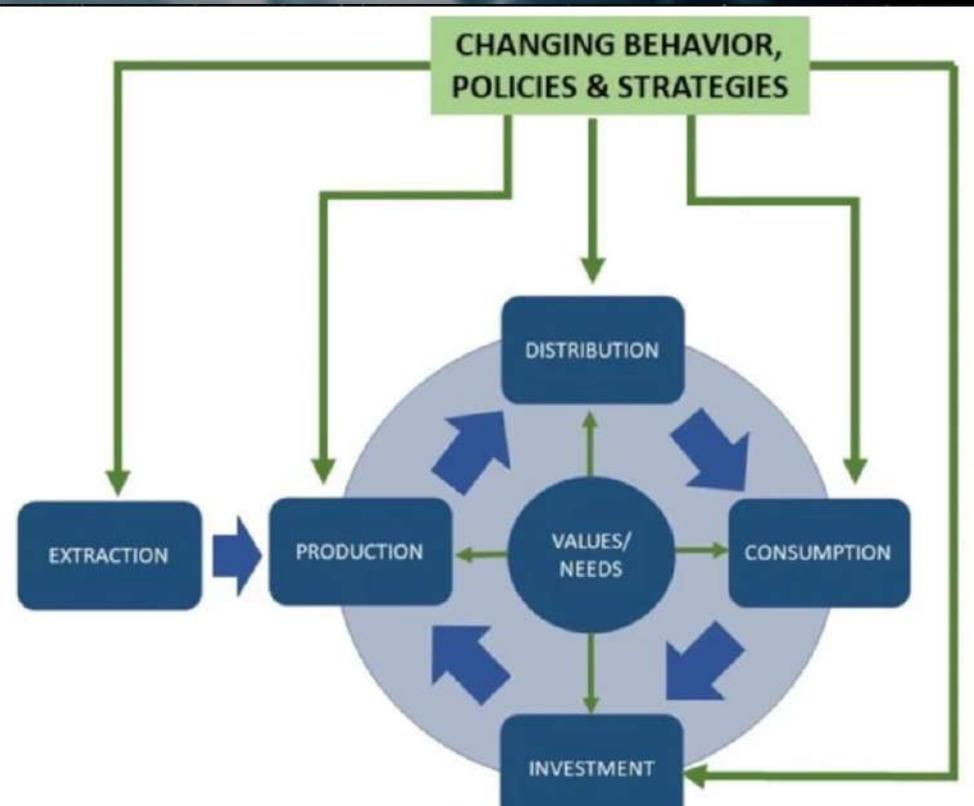
Jeffrey Barber & Karen Onthank
Integrative Strategies Forum (ISF)
Communicating for Sustainable Consumption & Production (CoCo)
December 1, 2025





Integrative Strategies Forum

To identify and foster **integrative strategies**
for building sustainable communities

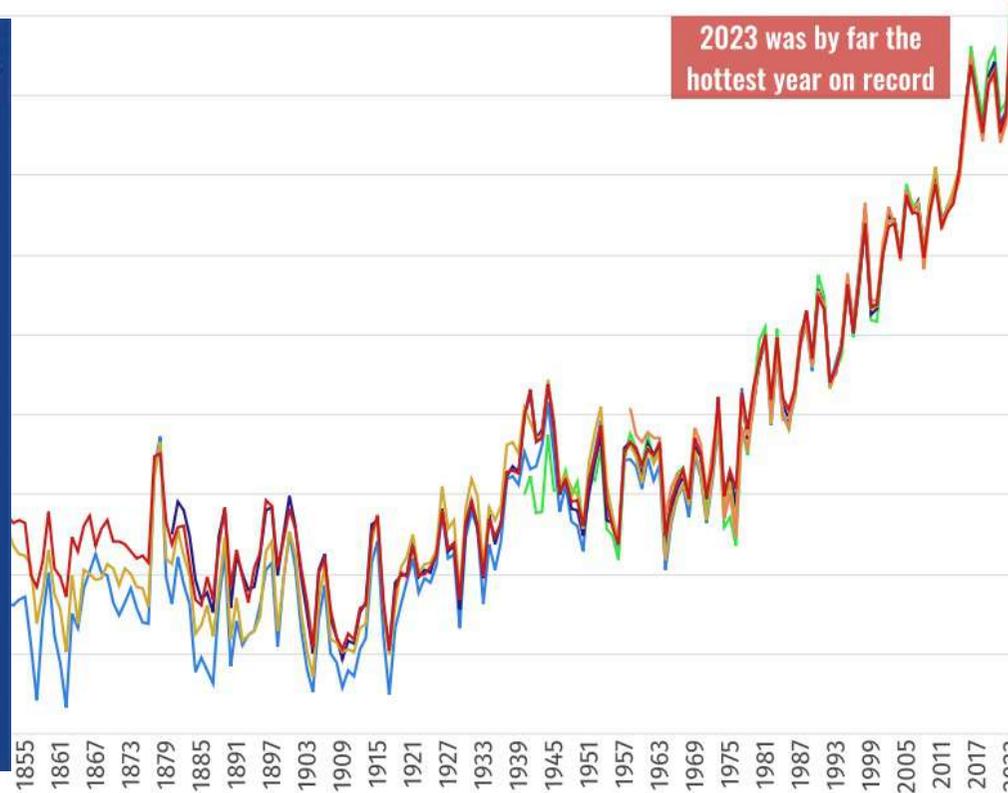
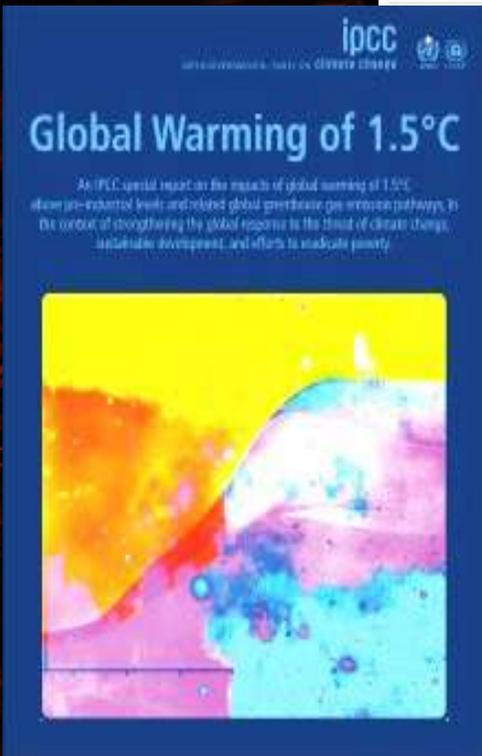


Global Mean Temperature Difference (°C) Compared to 1850-1900 average



■ Berkeley_Earth ■ ERA5 ■ GISTEMP ■ HadCRUT5 ■ JRA-55 ■ NOAA_Interim

1.4°C



2023 was by far the hottest year on record

Note: Data are from six datasets.
Source: WMO
Created on 18 March 2024



United Nations

UN News

Global perspectives, Human stories



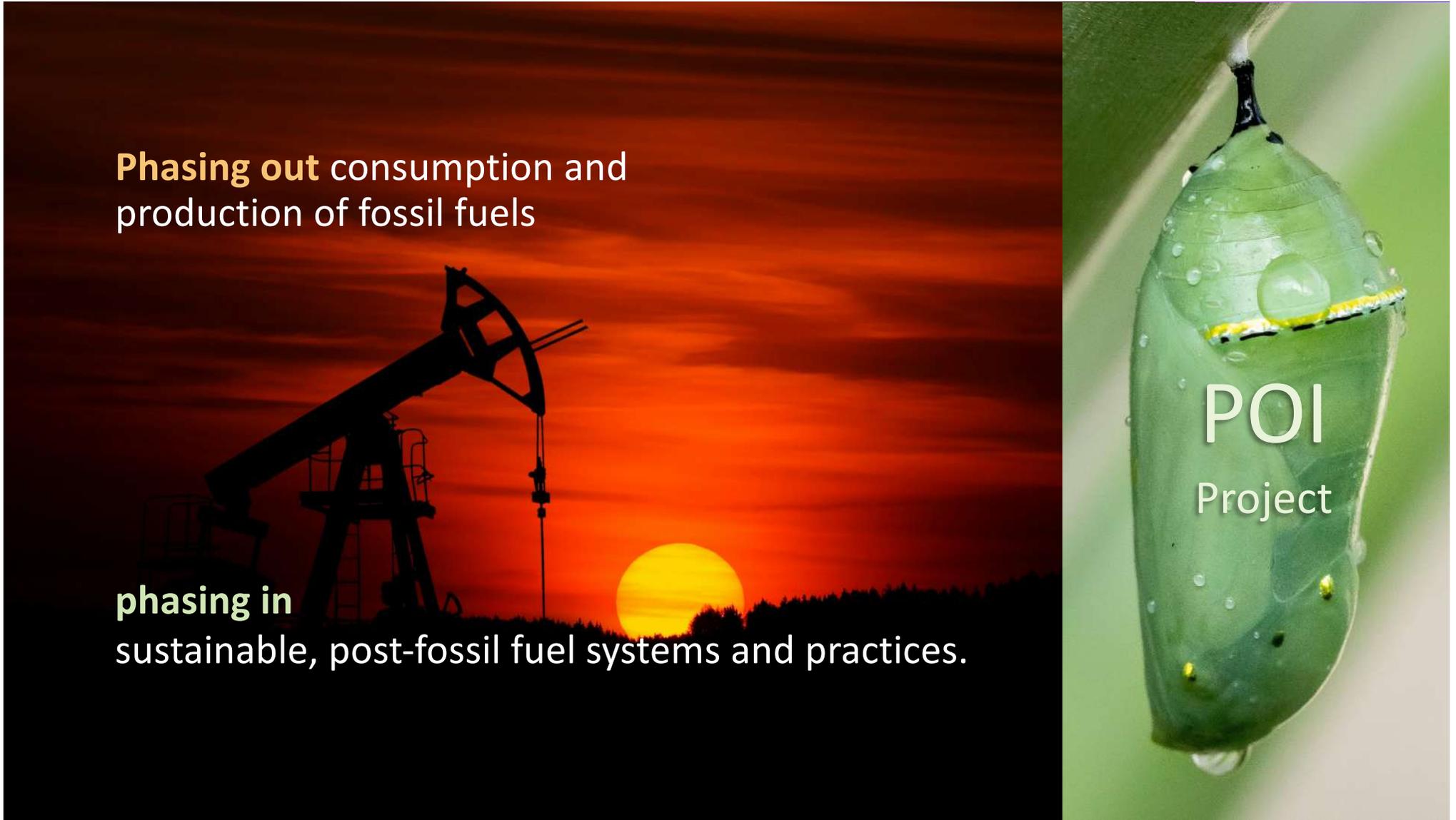
Phasing out consumption and production of fossil fuels



Phasing out consumption and production of fossil fuels

phasing in sustainable, post-fossil fuel systems and practices.

POI
Project





Imagining pathways to
sustainable post-fossil fuel futures

Phasing Out & In

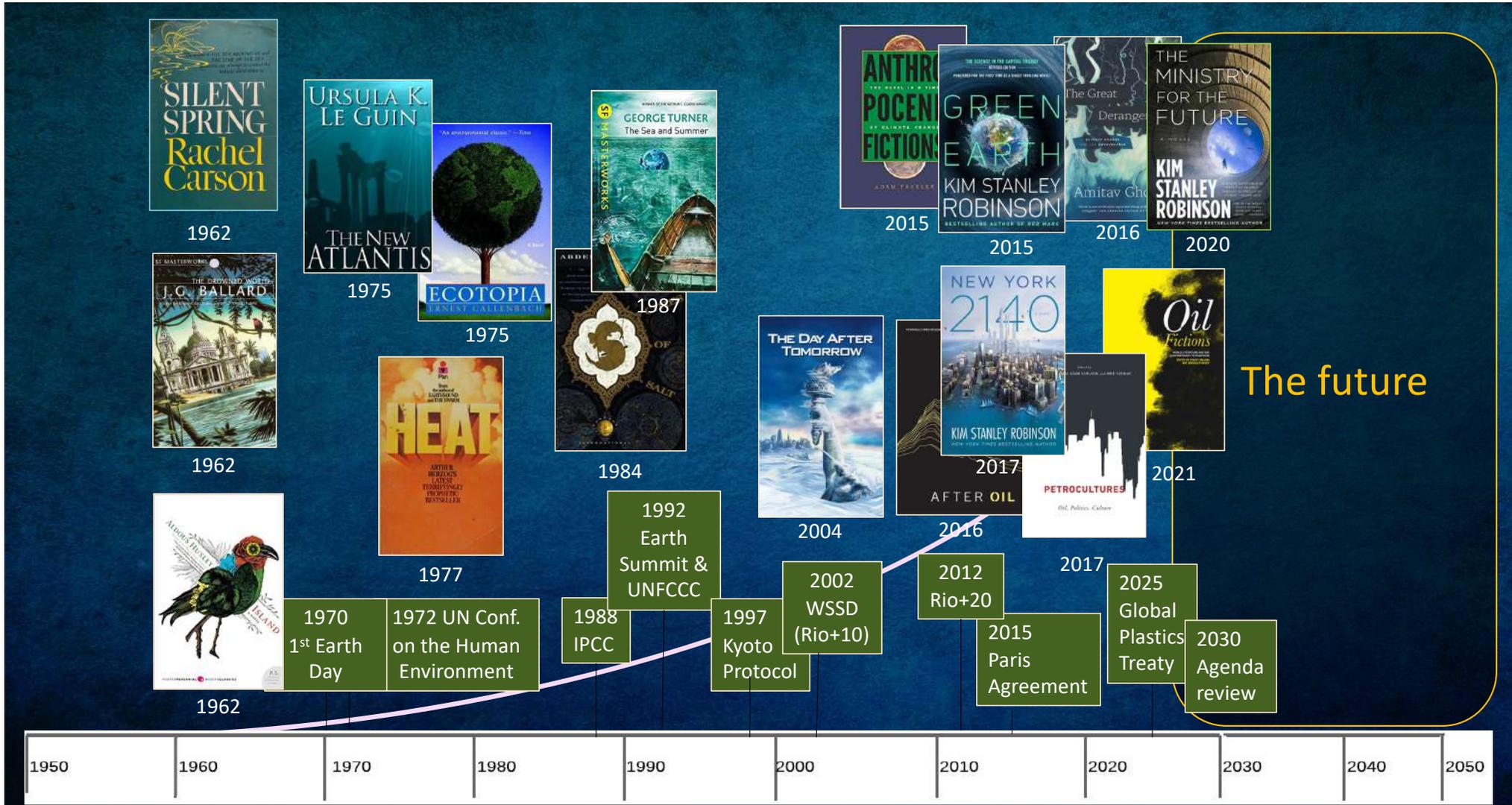
Mapping Frames, Concepts and Strategies
across Knowledge/Action Networks
and Communities of Practice
on Phasing Out Fossil Fuels



POI
Project

A futuristic space station interior with a large window overlooking Earth from space. The station's interior is dark with blue and white lighting accents. The window shows a view of Earth with a bright sun rising over the horizon, creating a lens flare effect. The text "How does popular culture portray the future?" is overlaid on the image.

How does popular culture portray the future?



* Geneva Environment Network (2024)

apocalyptic



dystopic



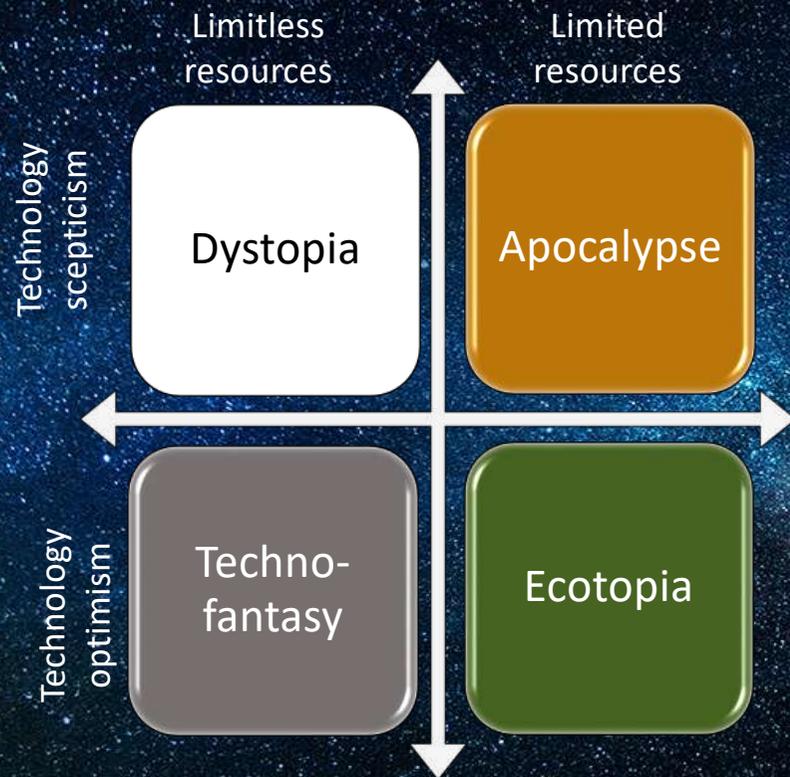
Photo by Brian McGowan on [iStockphoto.com](#)

techno-
fantasy

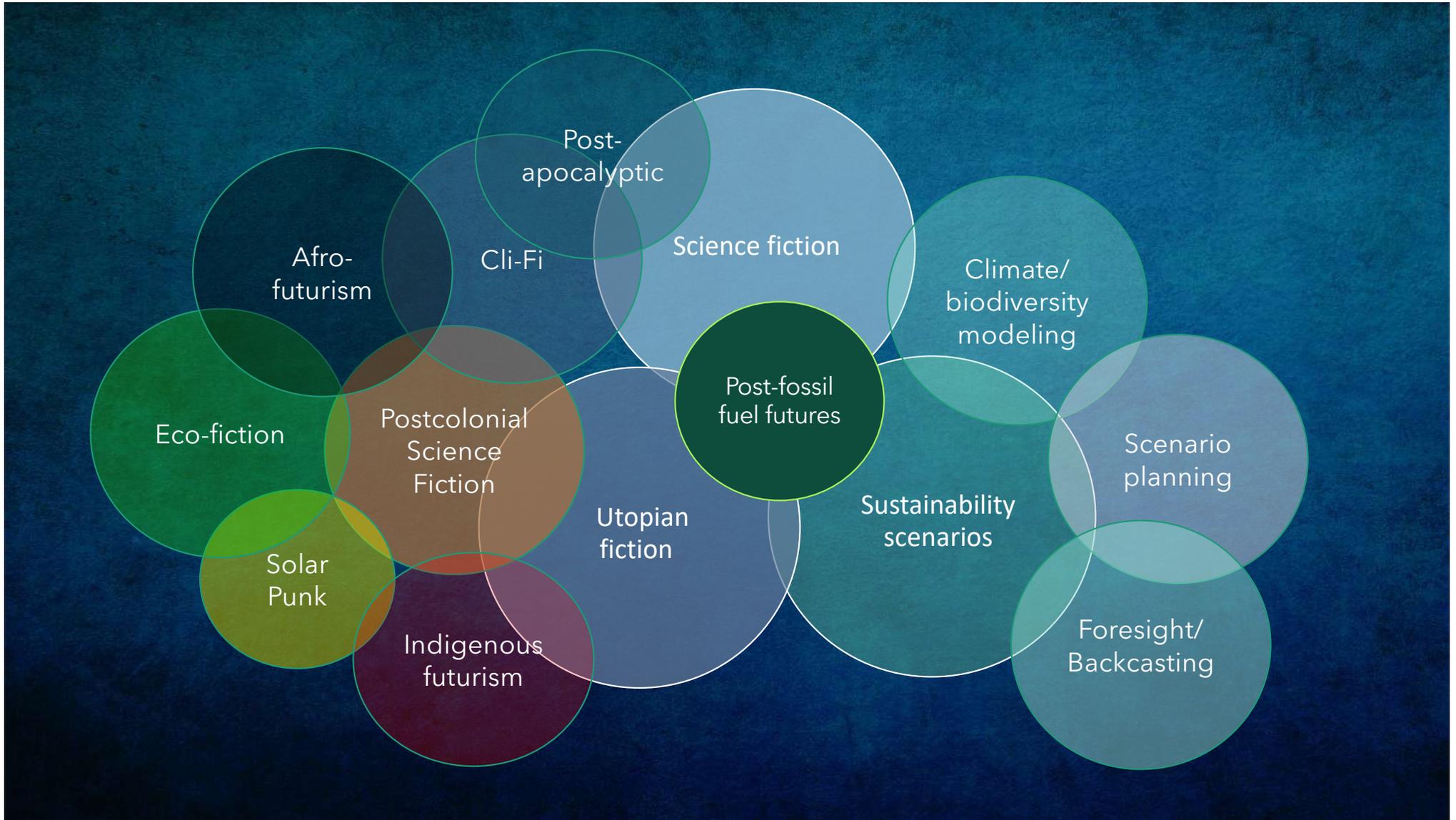


ecotopia





Limits vs.
limitless growth



Post-apocalyptic

Science fiction

Climate/
biodiversity
modeling

Post-fossil
fuel futures

Scenario
planning

Sustainability
scenarios

Foresight/
Backcasting

Utopian
fiction

Postcolonial
Science
Fiction

Solar
Punk

Indigenous
futurism

Eco-fiction

Afro-
futurism

Cli-Fi

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Opinion | Audiences want a
different climate change message.
Hollywood should deliver.

2023

Why does cinema ignore climate change?

B B C

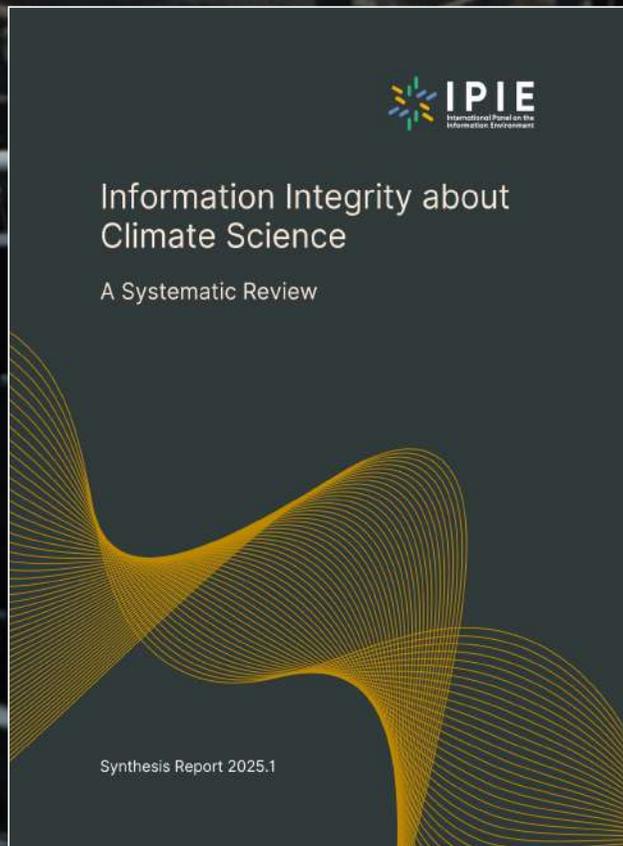
2020

Why Is Hollywood So Scared of
Climate Change? *The New York Times*

2019



Imagining **how** that “**phasing in**” plays out technologically, politically and culturally -- and how each of us is affected and engaged in the process -- is a critical challenge.



“The human response to the climate crisis is being obstructed and delayed by the **production and circulation of misleading information** about the nature of climate change and the available solutions.

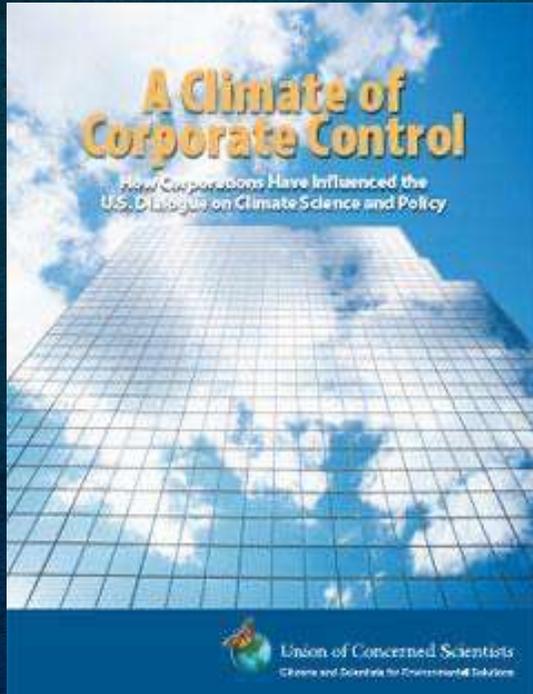
...powerful actors—including corporations, governments, and political parties— intentionally spread inaccurate or **misleading narratives** about anthropogenic climate change.”

“These narratives circulate across digital, broadcast, and interpersonal communication channels.

The result is a **decline in public trust**, diminished policy coordination, and a feedback loop between scientific denialism and political inaction.”

<https://www.ipie.info/research/sr2025-1>

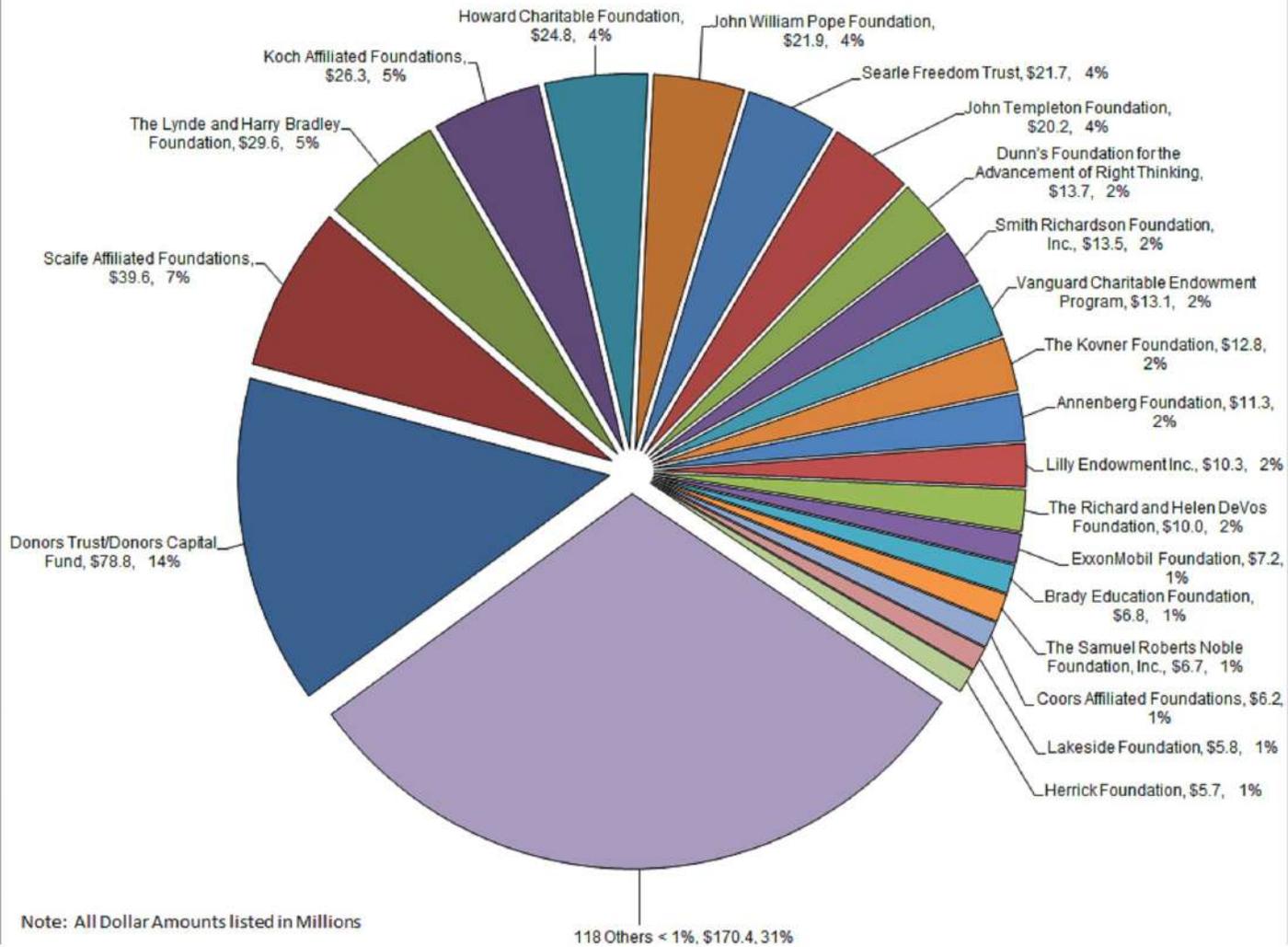
Ministry of Truth



A few powerful corporations have been tremendously influential in dictating how the public understands climate science and how the national discussion on climate policy has progressed—or *not* progressed.



Total Foundation Funding Distribution - 2003 to 2010 U.S. Climate Change Countermovement Organizations



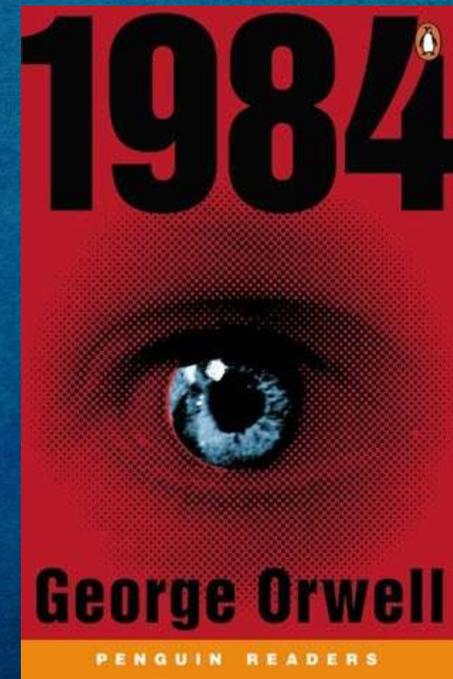
NewSpeak

"The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible...."

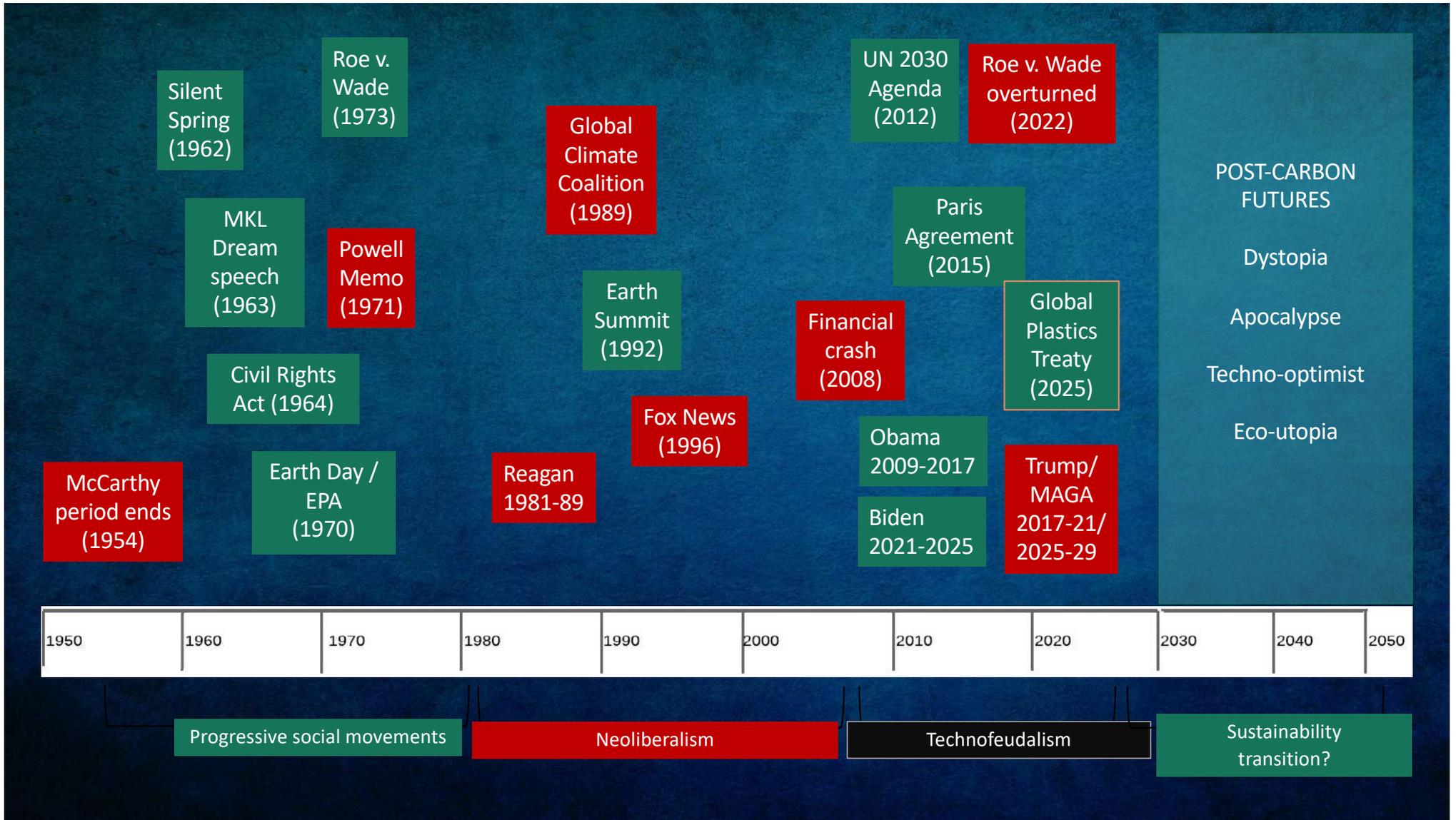
- George Orwell, Principles of NewSpeak

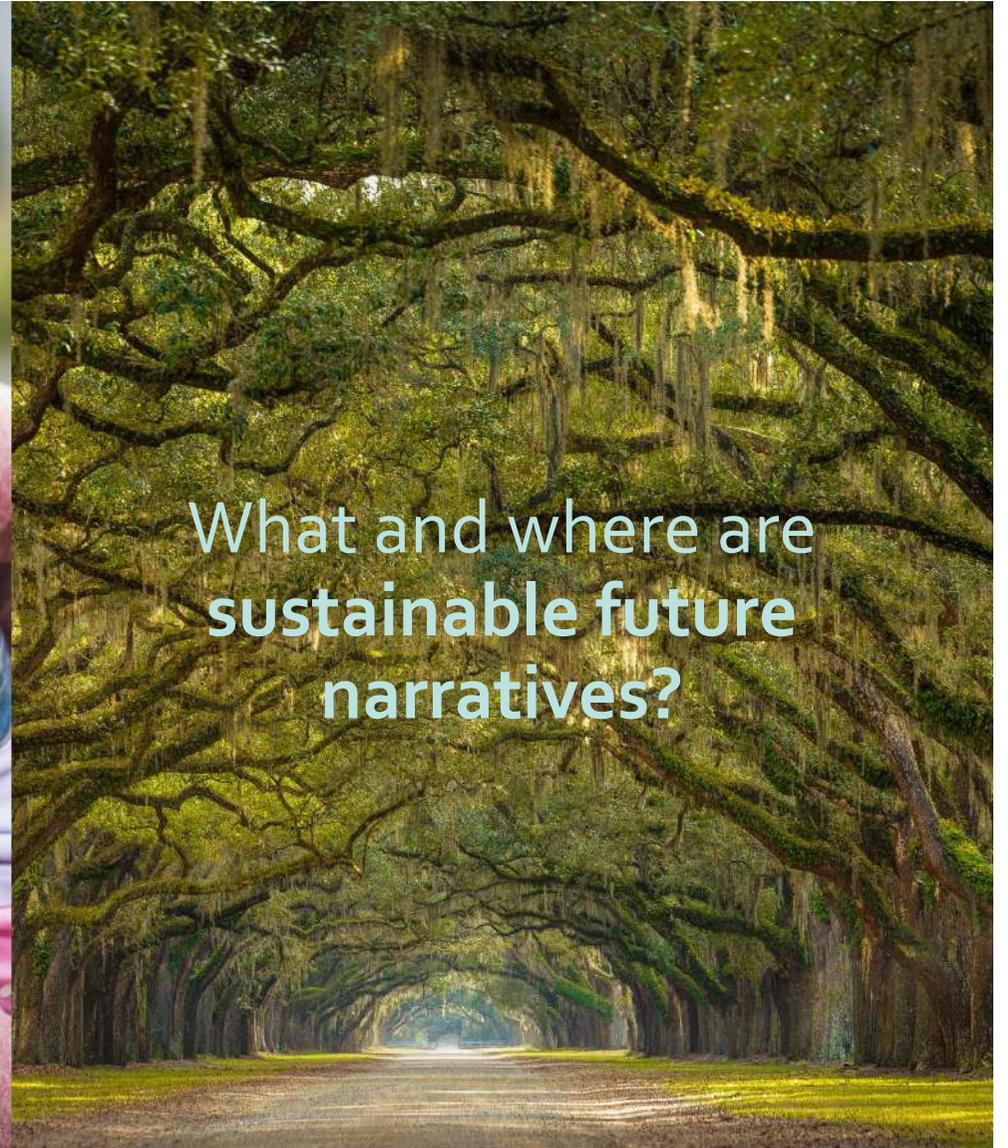
"Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable...

- George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language."

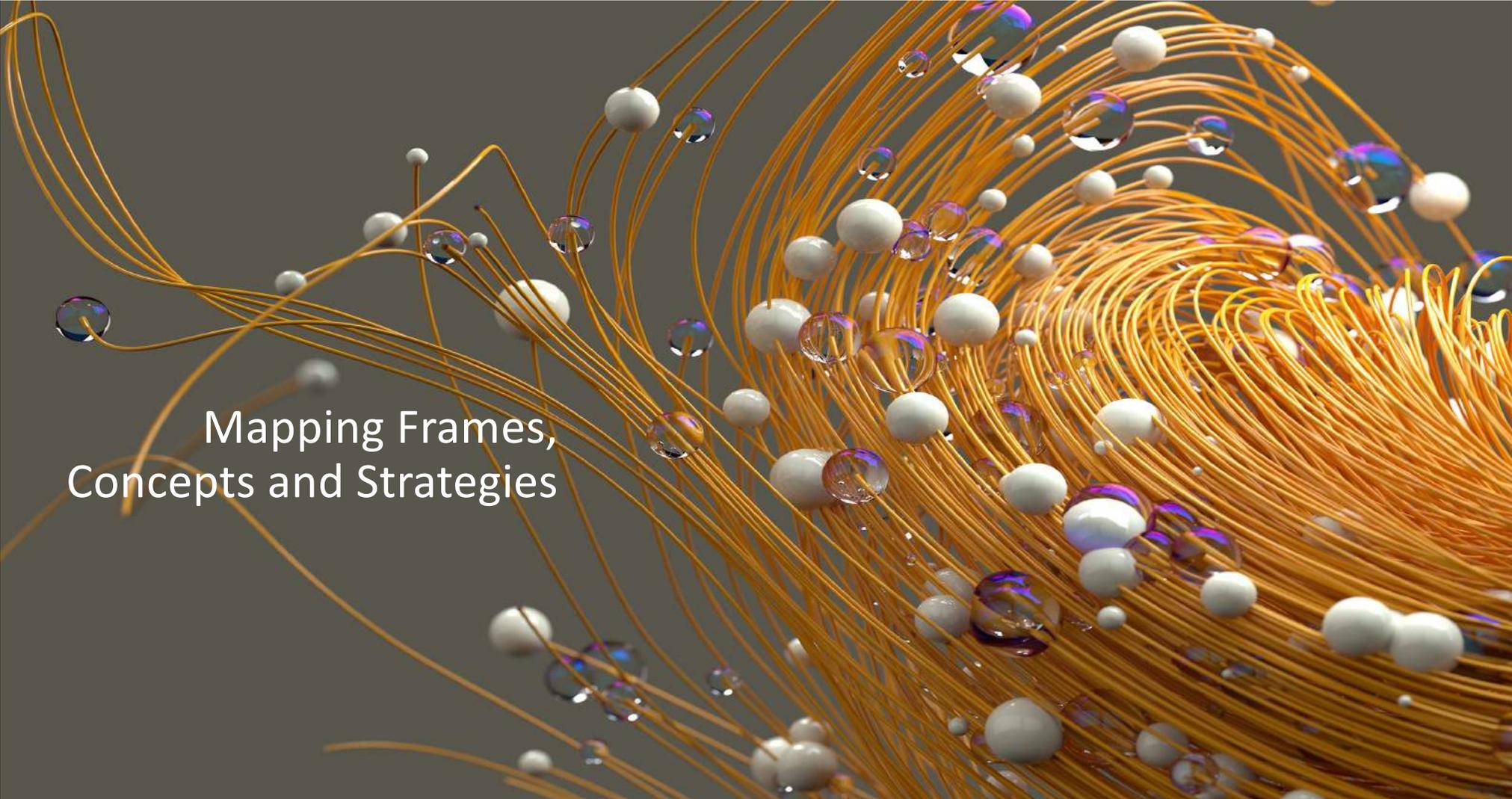






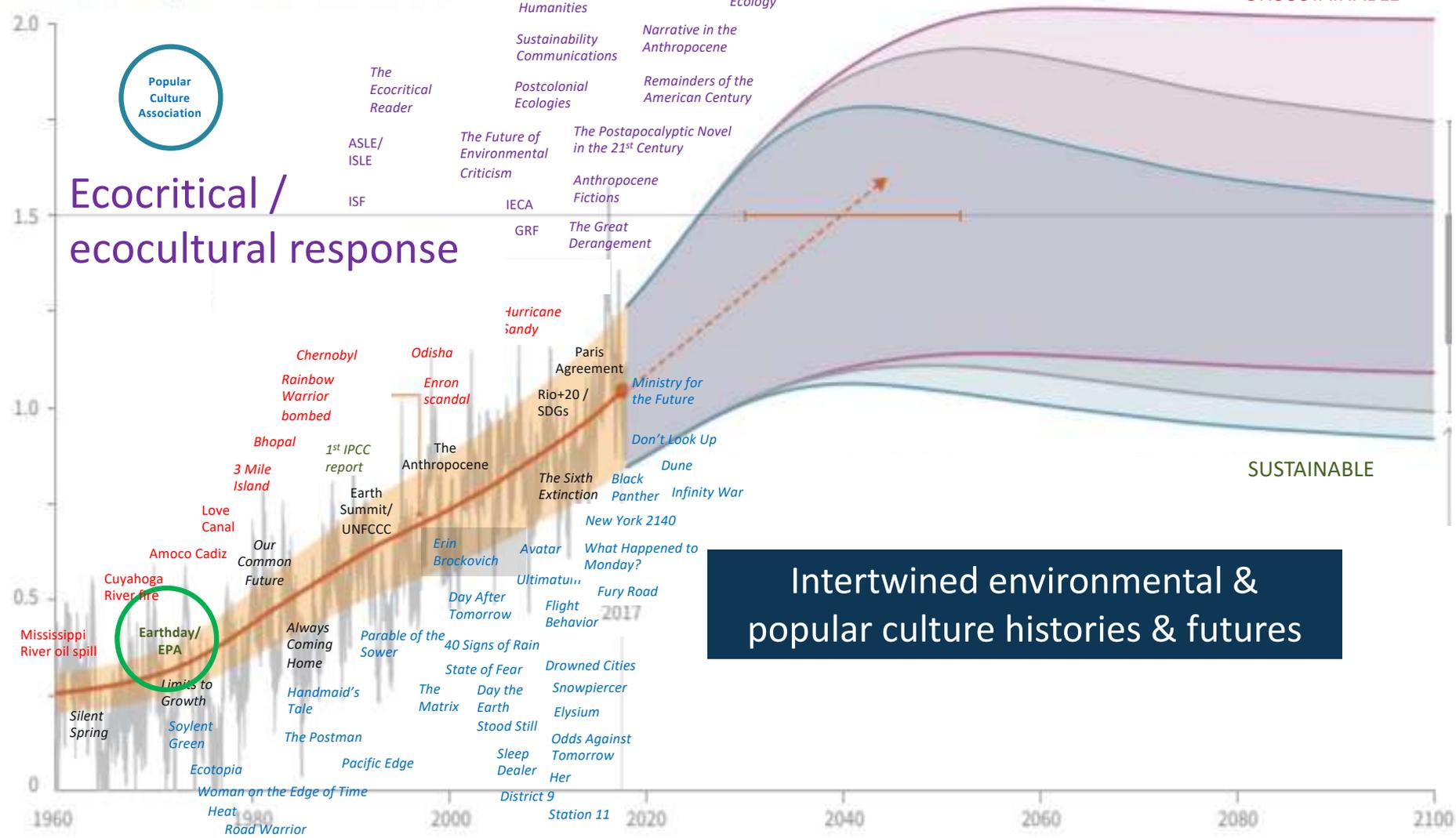


What and where are
sustainable future
narratives?

An abstract 3D rendering featuring a dense, swirling mass of thin, golden-orange lines. Interspersed among these lines are numerous spheres of varying sizes. Some spheres are solid white, while others are transparent with a rainbow-like iridescent sheen. The overall composition is dynamic and complex, set against a dark grey background.

Mapping Frames,
Concepts and Strategies

Global warming relative to 1850-1900 (°C)



Ecocritical / ecocultural response

Intertwined environmental & popular culture histories & futures

Popular Culture Association

UNSUSTAINABLE

SUSTAINABLE



#BreakFreeFromPlastic

The global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution.

Since its launch in 2016, more than 13,000 organizations and individual supporters from across the world have joined the #BreakFreeFromPlastic movement to demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and to push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.



Talking Trash

The corporate playbook of false solutions to the plastic crisis





Global Plastics Treaty

What it is and how you can help end plastic pollution.



Plastic & Climate

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF A PLASTIC PLANET





Established in 2011, the IECA is the association for environmental communication professionals engaged in teaching, research and scholarship, media and creative arts, policy, and advocacy across the globe.

We are committed to nurturing understanding and practice that moves the world toward environmental sustainability for all.

REGISTRATION OPENS

18 DECEMBER 2024

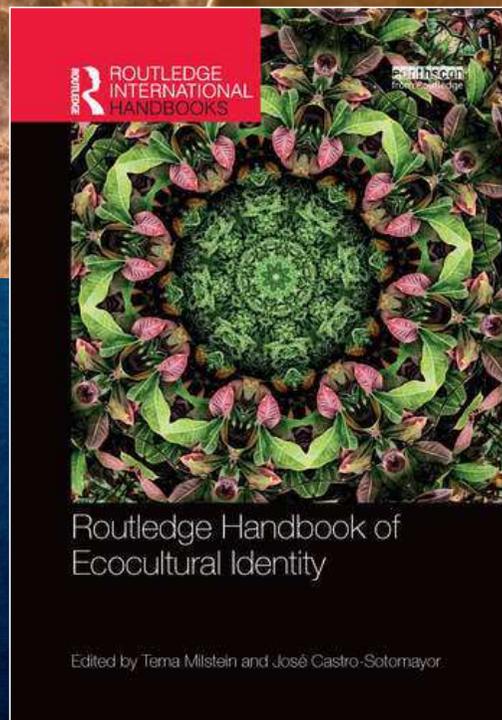
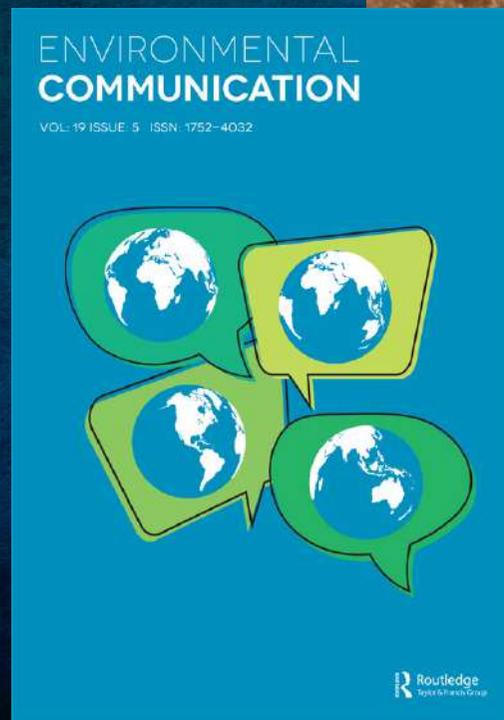
EARLY BIRD RATES END

31 MARCH 2025

CONFERENCE ON COMMUNICATION AND ENVIRONMENT

**COCE 2025
TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA
23-27 JUNE 2025**

**Environment and Communication:
Shifting Perspectives, Creativity, and
Conviviality from the Edge**





To support and advance the work of people who study rhetoric in a variety of disciplinary contexts.



Exploring the Rhetorical In/dignities of Carbon Capitalism and Post-Fossil Fuel Transitions

RSA 2026, May 21-24
Portland, Oregon

MAPACA Mid-Atlantic Popular &
American Culture Association

1990



1970

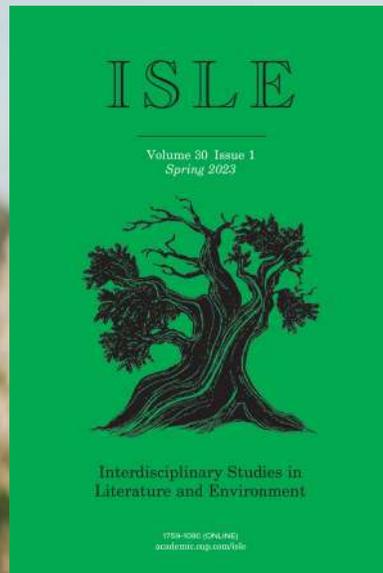


1992

Association for the Study of
Literature & Environment



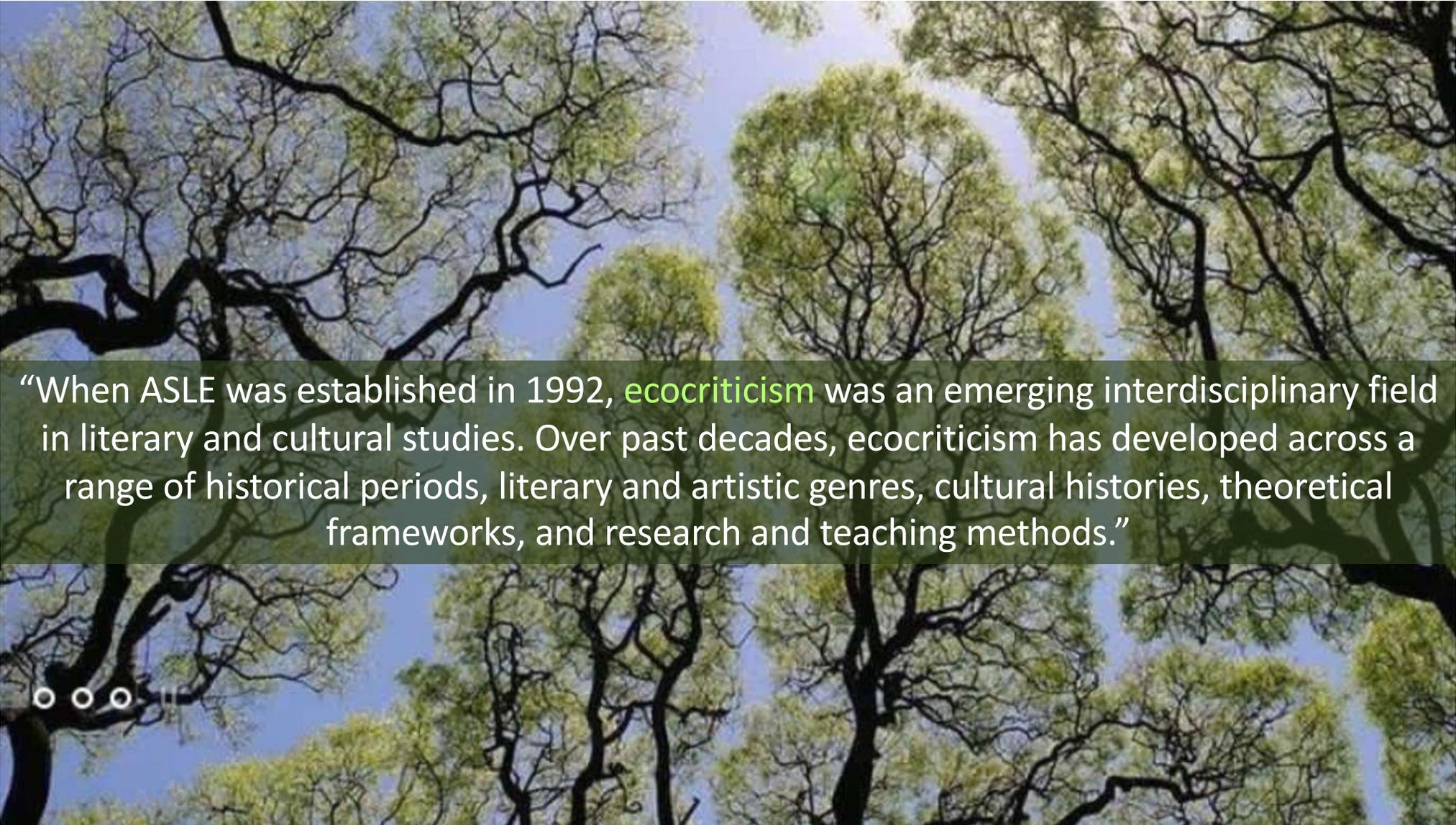
1992



The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) seeks to inspire and promote intellectual work in the environmental humanities and arts.



Our vision is an inclusive community whose members are committed to environmental research, education, literature, art and service, environmental justice, and ecological sustainability.



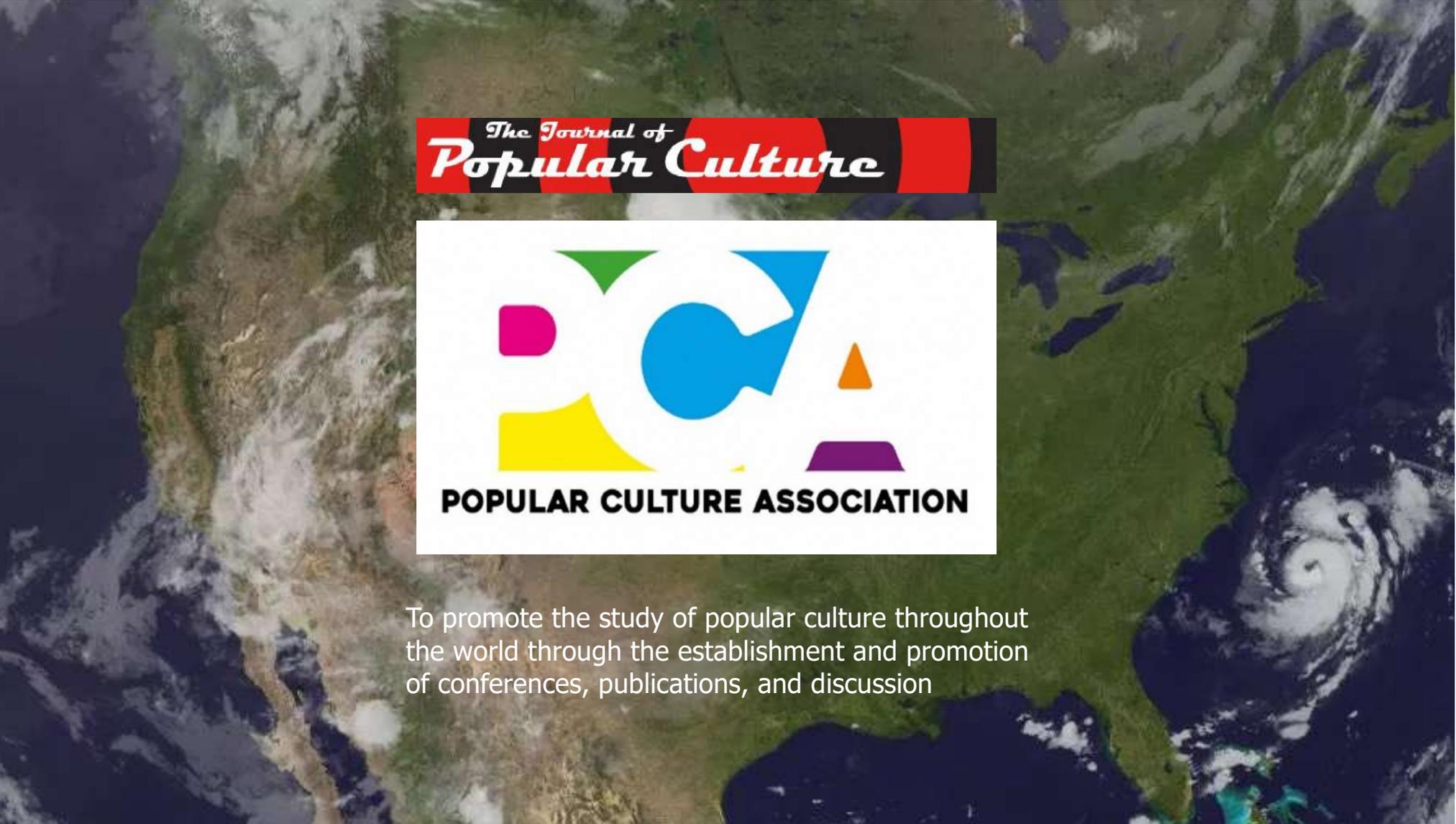
“When ASLE was established in 1992, **ecocriticism** was an emerging interdisciplinary field in literary and cultural studies. Over past decades, ecocriticism has developed across a range of historical periods, literary and artistic genres, cultural histories, theoretical frameworks, and research and teaching methods.”



asle-uki



ASLE-PAKISTAN



*The Journal of
Popular Culture*



To promote the study of popular culture throughout the world through the establishment and promotion of conferences, publications, and discussion

1970

The New York Times

1970

6 1000 The New York Times Company

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 1970

Millions Join Earth Day Observances Across the Nation



Clean Air Act of 1970



Thousands jamming 42nd Avenue yesterday in response to a call for the regeneration of a polluted environment. View is north from 42d Street, with Central Park in background.

OCEANIC POPULAR CULTURE ASSOCIATION

The official blog of the Oceanic Popular Culture Association Conference



NEPCA

Northeast Popular Culture Association

FWPCA

FAR WEST POPULAR CULTURE ASSOCIATION

Midwest Popular Culture Association

MAPACA Mid-Atlantic Popular & American Culture Association

SWPACA

Southwest Popular/American Culture Association

PCAS / ACAS

Popular Culture / American Culture Association in the South

IIPC

International Institute for Popular Culture

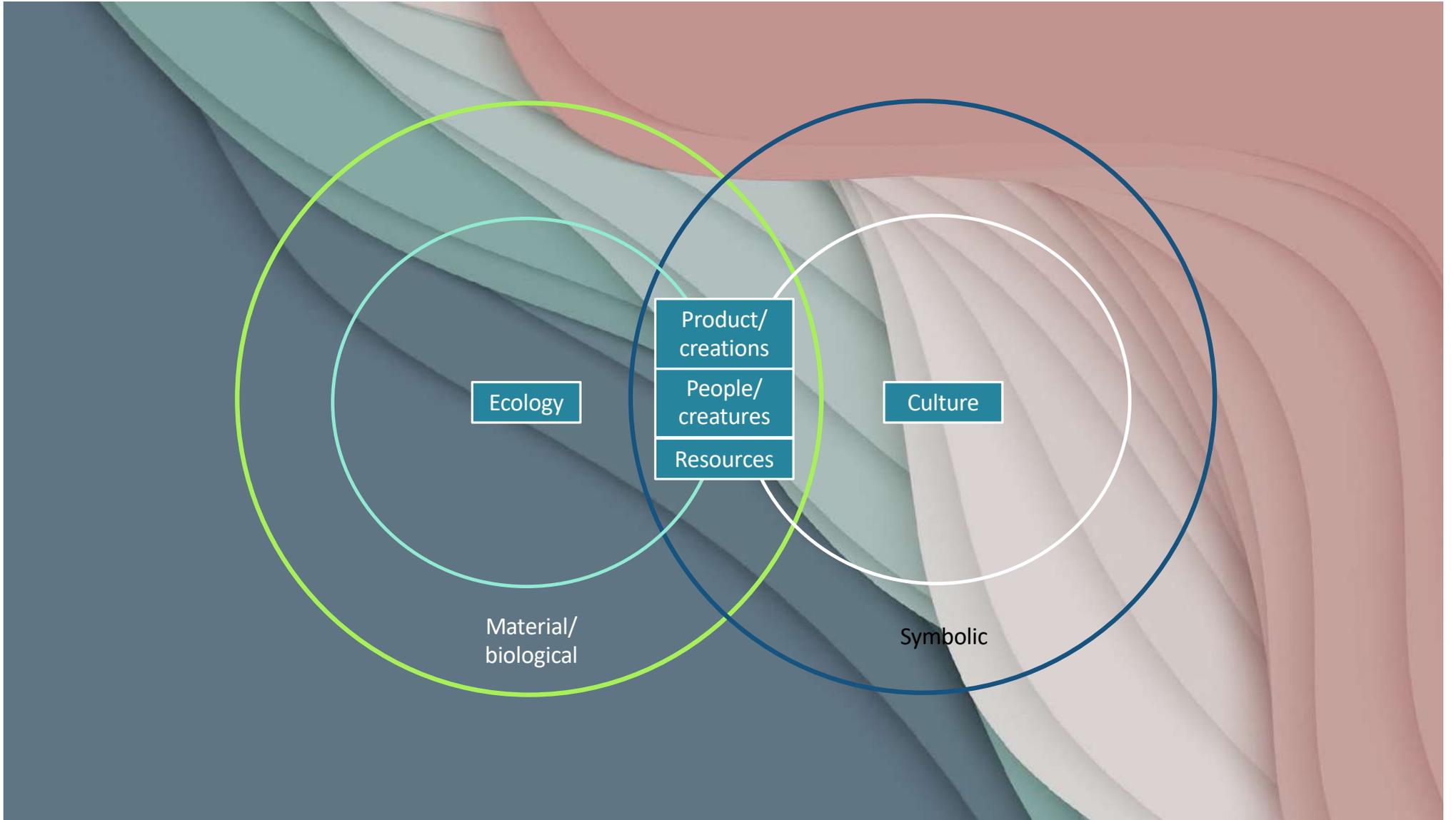
PCAANZ

Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand

The European Popular Culture Association (EPCA)

Ecology & Culture Area





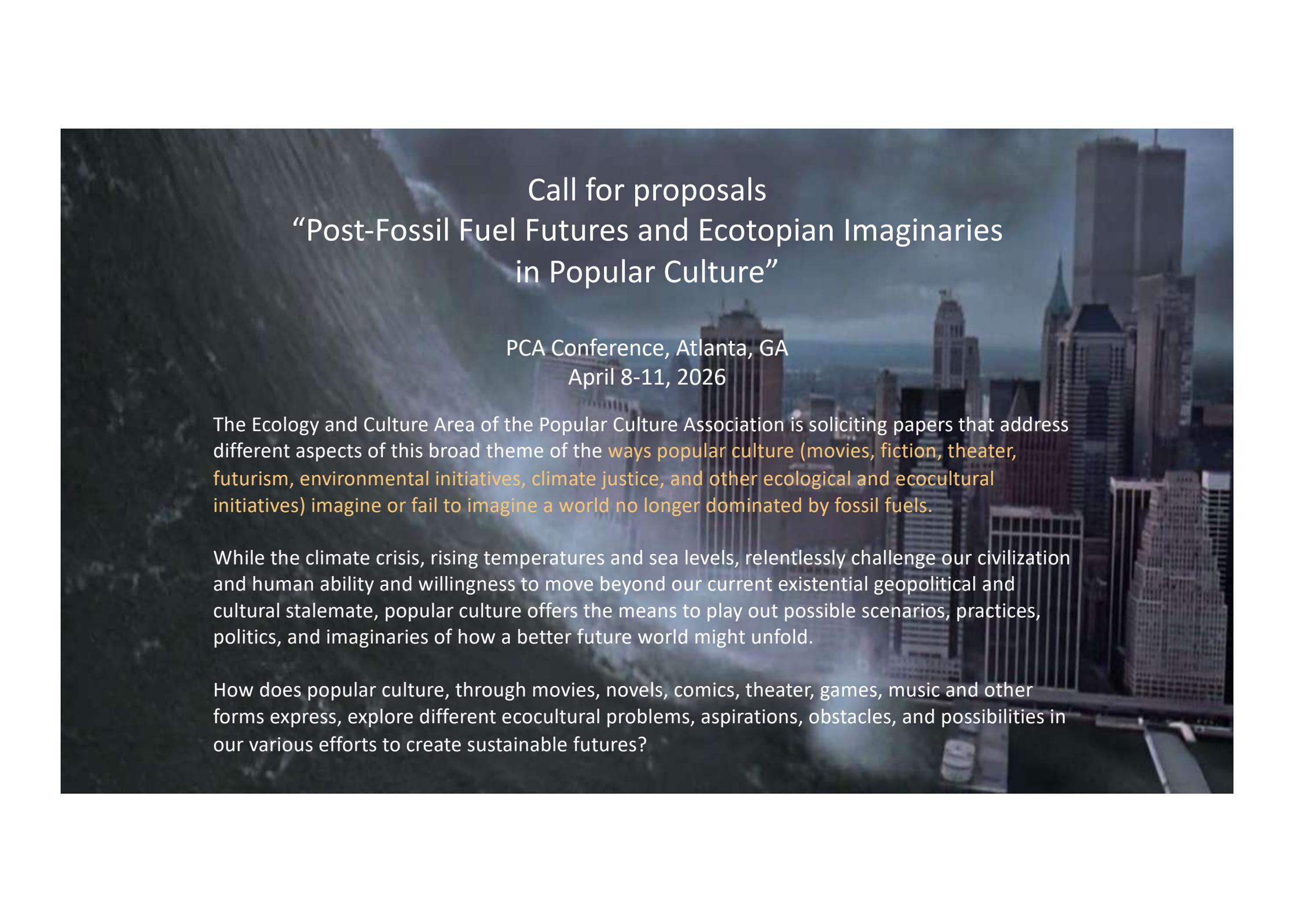
Ecology

Product/
creations
People/
creatures
Resources

Culture

Material/
biological

Symbolic



Call for proposals “Post-Fossil Fuel Futures and Ecotopian Imaginaries in Popular Culture”

PCA Conference, Atlanta, GA
April 8-11, 2026

The Ecology and Culture Area of the Popular Culture Association is soliciting papers that address different aspects of this broad theme of the **ways popular culture (movies, fiction, theater, futurism, environmental initiatives, climate justice, and other ecological and ecocultural initiatives) imagine or fail to imagine a world no longer dominated by fossil fuels.**

While the climate crisis, rising temperatures and sea levels, relentlessly challenge our civilization and human ability and willingness to move beyond our current existential geopolitical and cultural stalemate, popular culture offers the means to play out possible scenarios, practices, politics, and imaginaries of how a better future world might unfold.

How does popular culture, through movies, novels, comics, theater, games, music and other forms express, explore different ecocultural problems, aspirations, obstacles, and possibilities in our various efforts to create sustainable futures?



Phasing Out
& In



Integrative
Strategies
Forum