

The 'What matters to us' project and participative ecosophical narratology

William Kelleher¹

¹University of Rennes 2

¹william.kelleher@univ-rennes2.fr

Keywords: narrative research; ethnography; small stories

'What matters to us' ('Ce qui nous concerne') is a small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2007; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008) participative ethnographic research project with civil society organisations in Rennes, France. Rennes has a rich history of civil society engagement. This encourages 'positive' discourse analysis (Bartlett, 2012) and purposive change through research initiatives. 'What matters to us' is a longitudinal project in three phases: i) the composition of a corpus of stories told by members of civil society organisations (reference deleted for peer review), ii) the creation of an interactive library accessible through a 2D virtual world based on the open-source WorkAdventure platform that is locally hosted and ecologically-concerned (Kelleher & Ramella, 2024; Ramella, 2023), and iii) the facilitation of emancipatory pedagogic practices focused on re-tellings and co-tellings. This paper, firstly, explores some stories from the corpus employing an ecosophical narratology (reference deleted for peer review) that concerns the shape of story 'arcs' and their time scale (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015), the semiotisation of the story world, and ecosophical (Naess, 1989) and ecological sociolinguistic considerations (Kelleher, 2020). Ecosophical narratology embraces stories that emplot longer-term sharing and interspecies cooperation, or what Haraway (2016: 40) terms stories in 'nets', earth-centered language (Rosenfeld, 2019) and associative practices that are both recounted and materialised. The term 'ecosophy' has been chosen in lieu of 'econarratology' (James & Morel, 2020) since this latter term is strongly associated with literary studies, although this boundary blurs with the work of Caracciolo (see for example Toivonen & Caracciolo, 2023). Following the exploration of the corpus of stories, the paper goes on to present activities from the 'What matters to us' project's second and third phases, relying on the WorkAdventure library whose digital mediation has the potential to change ontological and epistemological boundaries (Hansen, 2006). These phases are workshop-based, and lead to new imaginings and new tellings. Findings suggest that the third sector in Rennes, and its stories, are responsive to ecosophical values and to the links between humans and their environment. The 'What Matters to Us' project thus values new and digitally-mediated ways of preserving orality and contributing to social and environmental justice (Blommaert, 2006).

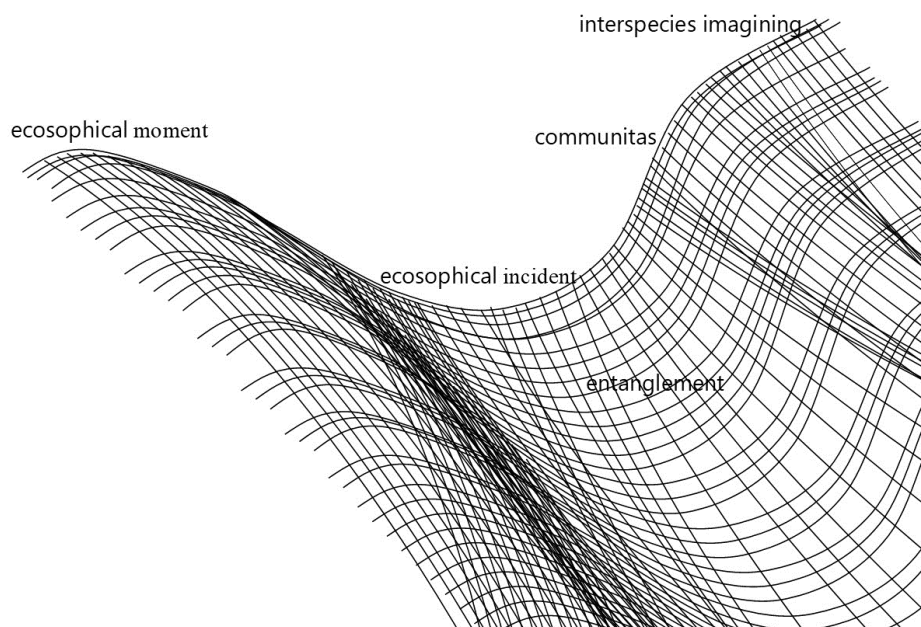


Figure. 1: An ecosophical 'netted' narrative structure. Image credit: William Kelleher, [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

References

- Bartlett, T. (2012). *Hybrid voices and collaborative change: contextualising positive discourse analysis* (M. M. Lazar Ed.). New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- Blommaert, J. (2006). Ethnography as counter-hegemony: remarks on epistemology and method. *Working papers in urban language and literacies* 34. Universiteit Gent, University at Albany, Tilburg University, King's College London. Retrieved 05/02/2024, from <https://wpull.org/product/wp34-ethnography-as-counter-hegemony-remarks-on-epistemology-method/>
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Analysing narratives as practices. *Qualitative Research*, 8(3), 379-387. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794106093634>
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Hansen, M. B. (2006). *Bodies in code: interfaces with digital media*, New York and London, Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203942390>
- Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- James, E., & Morel, E. (Eds.). (2020). *Environment and narrative: new directions in econarratology*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Kelleher, W. (2020). For an ecological critical approach: sociolinguistics in the shadow of climate change // Pour une approche critique écologique : la sociolinguistique à l'ombre du changement climatique. *The Mouth: Critical studies on language, culture and society*(6), 13-64. Retrieved 05/02/2024, from <https://themouthjournal.com/issue-no-6/>
- Kelleher, W., & Ramella, D. (2024). Espace des Langues espace d'exposition Ce qui nous concerne. <https://play.workadventu.re/@/universite-rennes-2/metavers/ce-qui-nous-concerne-2> . Université Rennes 2.

- Naess, A. & Rothenberg, D. (1989). *Ecology, community and lifestyle: an outline of an ecosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Ramella, D. (2023). *Espace des Langues*. University Rennes 2. Retrieved from: <https://play.workadventu.re/@/universite-rennes-2/metavers/accueil-villejean>
- Rosenfeld, C. (2019). From Prometheus to Gaea: a case for earth-centered language. *Language and Ecology*, 2019, 1-16. Available from <http://ecolinguistics-association.org/journal>
- Toivonen, H. & Caracciolo, M. (2023). Storytalk and complex constructions of nonhuman agency: an interview-based investigation. *Narrative Inquiry*, 33(1), 61-90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.21062.toi>
- Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.