International Ecolinguistics Association

Article

The *'Ce qui nous concerne'* ('What matters to us') project and participative research with Rennes' civil society narratives: An ecosophical narratology

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Abstract

This article presents findings from participative small stories narrative research with civil society organisations in Rennes, France. The aim is to explore ecosophical narratology and, thereby, the adoption of ecosophical practices. Rennes has a long history of inclusive politics and civil society engagement which encourages positive discourse analysis and purposive change through research initiatives. '*Ce qui nous concerne*' ('What matters to us') is a longitudinal ethnographic project that is in the process of transcribing and collecting Rennes civil society stories as a corpus on the Huma-Num Nakala multimodal corpus platform. The project team is also currently in the process of developing an open-access interactive library on the Rennes 2 University WorkAdventure 2D collaborative platform. The project aims to accompany emancipatory pedagogic practices grounded on co-tellings and re-tellings. This article explores a purposive sample of three stories from the corpus in order to shed light on the linguistic and narrative work that each accomplishes, and the opportunities that each presents for ecosophical workshops and societal change. An ecosophical narratology inverts canonical story arcs, replacing individual overcoming by what Haraway would term "nets" of earthbound multispecies flourishing and imagining, privileging the role of the environment in narrative moment and resolution, time-scale and indexicality. Importance is thus given to earth-centred language and process rather than event. Through these stories, associative practices are both recounted and materialised, contributing to social and environmental justice.

Keywords: ethnography; small stories; civil society; interspecies imagining; ecolinguistics; ecosophy; narratology

1. Introduction

This paper starts with an expectation: that, given the years elapsed since the Brundtland Commission in 1987 and the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report (FAR) in 1990 (see Heise, 2008, p. 22), ecosophy and ecolinguistic recognition of our connectedness to the earth may now be found in common, everyday accounts. The stories discussed here come from a participative research project based in Rennes, France, that departs from that expectation and is allied with a parallel desire to continue to invest in storying practices. Like Haraway (2016, p. 40), the project wishes to encourage stories in "nets" that cup human and non-human lives. The focus of this article is, therefore, on what may be called ecosophical narratives, which share an ecolinguistic emphasis on the binding and shaping of our environment with and to language (Steffensen, 2018).

Ecosophy, as formulated by Naess (Naess & Rothenberg, 1989), recognises the intrinsic worth of the human and the non-human. It also recognises the need for change in policy and the difference between life quality (living with respect for self and others) as opposed to standard of living (access to consumer goods) (Naess & Rothenberg, 1989, p. 29). Ecosophy is a powerful rallying call in recent work in ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015), but it also underlies important works in critical biological studies (Haraway, 2016 [2003]) as well as in critical culture studies (Tsing, 2015). However, although ecosophical approaches are an ever more important aspect of contemporary organisation and action, questions of how to investigate, characterise and relay these bundles of experience, philosophy, discourse and praxis remain open. Dunlap and Brulle (2015, p. 3) qualify human activities as a "black box" within studies of human-driven earth system change, such as the Bretherton model. Little is known about ecosophical praxis at a meso level of organisation that is neither the macro of global trends, nor the micro of individual actions. This is despite the "drivers of anthropogenic climate change [being] deeply rooted in the routines of everyday life and the social structure of modern societies" (Dunlap & Brulle, 2015, p. 4).

Ethnographic research that employs participant-centred, or emic (Pike, 1967, pp. 37-42), methodologies is well-suited to lifting the lid on Dunlap and Brulle's black box and aligning with both political aims and local, meso, knowledges and practices (see Blommaert, 2006). By contributing to these knowledges and valuing them, ethnographies are in tight dialogue with science by and for society (Houllier & Merilhou-Goudard, 2016). Small stories (Bamberg, 2008; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Georgakopoulou, Giaxoglou, & Patron, 2023) approaches to narrative research can contribute to ethnography in three ways. Firstly, small stories emphasise responsiveness to the situation of telling. The centrality of talk-in-interaction in small stories brings attention to the local level as the "place of articulation of phenomena that may find their explanation beyond it" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 384) and foregrounds questions of social practice. Secondly, small stories, in their silences, shared references, allusions and hesitations, are of particular interest to subjective processes of meaning-making and

instantiation. This is important in interview situations (De Fina, 2009a, p. 246). Thirdly, small stories assist in studying creation of place, since their emergent form has consequences for how we can understand coordinates of time and space (De Fina, 2009b; Schiffrin, 2009). As such, small stories bring particular affordances to ecolinguistic interest in narrative. Stibbe points out that narratives enclose powerful social discourses and inertias (Stibbe, 2015). Narrative research is both ontological, concerned with being and its articulation, but also epistemic, concerned with our knowledge of ourselves and our world.

In the sections that follow, a purposive sample of stories from the '*Ce qui nous concerne*' ('What matters to us') project will be explored ecosophically. Firstly, we will discuss ecosophic narratology. Secondly, we will outline the interest of Rennes' civil society and the project methodology. Following this, we discuss three stories, drawing conclusions for interactional and semiotic resources and framing. Finally, we will underline some findings and draw conclusions.

## 2. Narrative research and the bases of an ecosophical narratology

Ecosophical narratology breaks with canonical approaches, and it is a break that aligns with small stories. Small stories, as noted, emphasise identities in interaction and the contingent, co-constructed and emergent quality of narratives. The heuristic "ways of (story)telling — sites — tellers" (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 22; 2020, p. 24) clearly illustrates small stories' recognition of the importance of social and material conditions. Similarly, "positioning" (Bamberg, 2008; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina, 2013) reveals what we can accomplish with small stories. Positioning analysis considers how stories are imbricated within wider social discourses and practices by looking at the events and characters that are emplotted and the co-actional circumstances of their telling.

The '*Ce qui nous concerne*' project adopts a small stories approach to narrative since it hopes, firstly, to capture stories in the making with participants who reflect on their practice in real-time, and, secondly, to link stories with processes of co-enunciation and re-storying. Small stories have pointed to some of the limitations of an extant narrative canon, such as the Labovian emphasis on formedness (Labov & Waletzky, 1997 [1967]) or the underlying existence of an Aristotelian (2016 [BCE 335]) conception of diegesis, at a remove from the telling present, that foregrounds individual, personalistic, movements of complication and resolution. An ecosophical narratology extends the rupture with the narrative canon that small stories suppose. This extension concerns: i) chronology, ii) story arc, and iii) semiotic means.

In terms of chronology, ecosophical narratives are compatible with an ecological recognition that different species and environments have different time scales (Kelleher, 2020). Stories can, therefore, reference events that exceed, or that are inferior to, one person's frame of action. They can also document *processes* rather than circumscribed and temporally isolated "events". The result is that stories need not represent a closed temporal/linear circuit of complication and resolution. Instead, stories are free to explore

different possibilities and the development, over time, of certain places, environments and interspecies actors. This affects the shape of story "arcs".

Classical narratology, due, in many cases, to an Aristotelian influence, has demonstrated a tendency to conceive of stories as pyramidal structures (Freytag, 2007 [1900]) with rising action, complication, falling action and resolution. Figure 1 reproduces this pyramidal structure in Freytag's terms. By "catastrophe", he referred to the opposition between forces set in motion by the protagonist and those beyond his control. Since this "arc" seeks closure, its temporal bounding is part of the intrigue. Events must progress in parallel with durative or background happenstance. This is a well-rehearsed point in both narratology (see Genette, 1966) and in sociolinguistics. Indeed, Norrick (2000) makes boundedness part of his classification of "narrative" discourse as opposed to "descriptive" discourse.
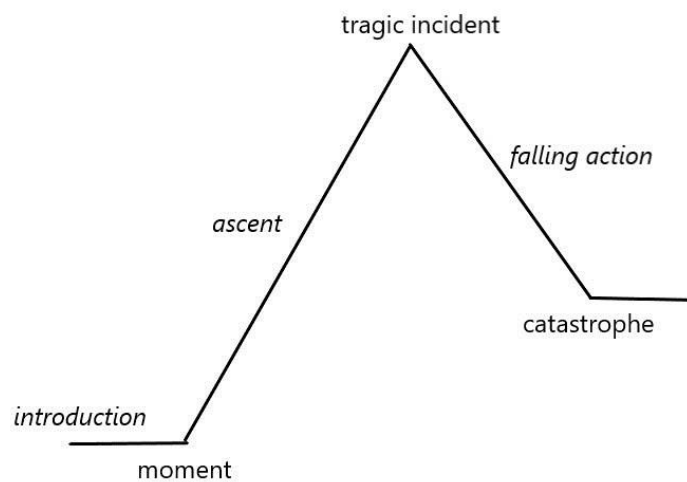

Figure 1: Freytag's "pyramidal" narrative structure

To raise a critical argument with respect to Figure 1, narrative "arcs", such as the one it portrays, have tended to pit white male protagonists against nature and circumstance. They are stories of overcoming. Key figures in life sciences, geology and the humanities have, in recent years, taken issue with such gendered, racial and anthropocentric coordinates. Yusoff (2018), for instance, raises the question of the ways in which the geological strata of the Anthropocene are also a record of slavery and dispossession. Stibbe (2015) criticises the perpetuation of pyramidal stories in fields such as economics and marketing. Haraway (2016) and Tsing (2015) both call for multi- or inter-species imaginings, entanglements and enfoldings that invert the story arc. The pyramid then becomes a basket, or a "net" (Haraway, 2016, p. 40). Figure 2 presents a possible depiction of such a "net".

Figure 2 has multiple strands for multiple actors. These different strands "entangle" different actors, providing occasions for different story paths. The Freytagian "moment" which is to say the narratological thrust, or tellability, what Sacks would term its "motive" force (Sacks, 1992, pp. 458-465), leads downward to cradle an incident that encapsulates the importance of an ecosophy, or its questioning, or, again, its application. The "spatial"

coordinates of the story have become interspecies environments and ecologies. Netted stories, by including other species, and by viewing the environment as agentive, not just a backdrop for human actions, perform different kinds of identity work. They recall Turner's citation on communitas, which is "the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others" (Turner, 1969, p. 127). And it is through this interspecies communitas that interspecies imaginings can flourish. These imaginings do not provide a "catastrophe" or a "resolution" but instead, in the spirit of small stories, point towards other tellings to come.
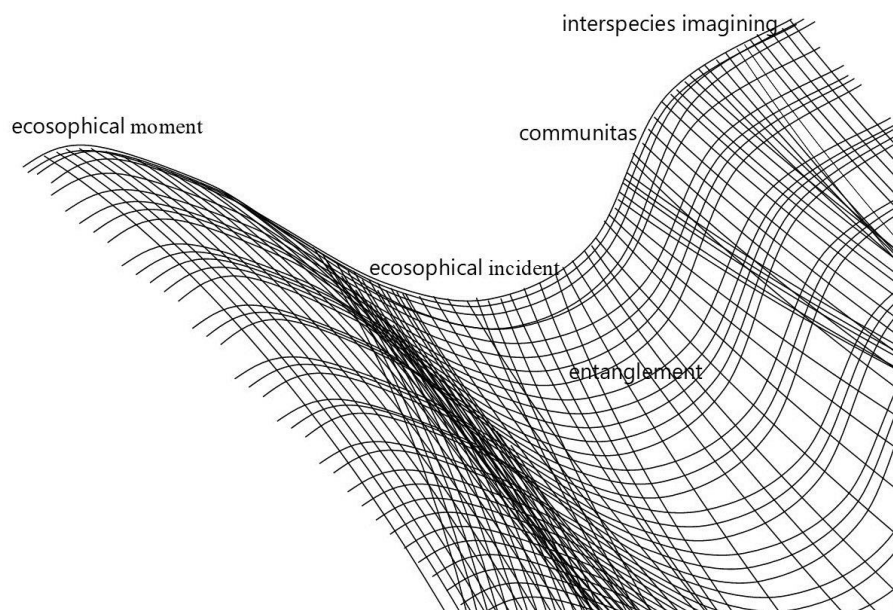
Figure 2: An ecosophical "netted" narrative structure

These tellings are, for humans, moments of semiotisation. A significant part of oral discourse revolves around the linguistic means employed. Rosenfeld (2019) makes a strong case for a return to earth-centred language and to inclusive terms that, in themselves, quite apart from their embedding in narrative, seek interspecies cooperation and belonging. Examples of "Gaea-centred" language would be: i) to not portray non-human species in mechanistic terms, but rather to emphasise "living organism[s] with whom extant animals co-evolved" (Rosenfeld, 2019, p. 6); ii) to accept that the Earth is not inert, but that rather it is dynamic and that our actions have real, lived, consequences; and iii) to reject stereotypical, gendered, anthropocentric, dichotomies (Rosenfeld, 2019, pp. 6-7).

These reflections would lead to an analytic grid for working with participant contributions that engages, firstly, with the "shape" of the story and, secondly, with its semiosis. Thirdly, we will be concerned with the "what" of the story, which is to say, the kinds of practices that are recounted and the actions and implications of the associative actors within their social and interspecies environments. These practices and actions, in

certain cases, index clear discourses and processes that it is necessary to recognise and describe.

3. Data and methodology: Rennes as a case study and the coordinates of the 'Ce qui nous concerne' project

As noted in the introduction, this article presents findings from participative narrative ethnographic research with civil society organisations in Rennes, France. The aim is to explore the penetration and adoption of ecosophical practices (Naess & Rothenberg, 1989), which is to say practices that take ecology and environmental concerns as central. Rennes has a long history of inclusive politics and civil society engagement which encourages "positive" discourse analysis (Bartlett, 2012) and purposive change through research initiatives.

Rennes' third sector is very active, being foremost nationally for weight of its civil society (Bisault, 2011, p. 3). Rennes, as a site for an ecosophical case study, has several characteristics that underline its pertinence. In the first place, Rennes experienced brusque urban change and corresponding social and environmental upheaval. It was France's first post-war ZUP (zone à urbaniser en priorité — priority urbanisation zone) and first Citroën car factory outside Paris (Perrono, 2023). Under its mayor and adjoint, Henri Fréville and Georges Graff (Nakayama, 2020), in consultation with architect Georges Maillol, whole neighbourhoods were razed and built anew as three housing estates (Maurepas, Villejean-Kennedy and Blosne), as well as research and medical hubs, changed the face of the city. A large ring road, La Rocade, then drew a stark demarcation line between countryside and city and between different socio-economic and racial categories. It is a demarcation that many associations and actors challenge in the present.

The stories told by members of Rennes civil society, or third sector, are collected as a corpus on the publicly-funded Nakala multimodal corpus platform (Kelleher, Djagbre, Kouakou, & Briand, 2022) along with transcripts and photographs of artefacts and places. The project team is currently in the process of developing an open-access interactive library on the Rennes 2 University WorkAdventure 2D collaborative platform (Kelleher & Ramella, 2024; Ramella, 2023). WorkAdventure is a locally-hosted, ecologically-concerned virtual world that, through the use of avatars and innovative digital mediation, has the potential to change ontological and epistemological boundaries (Hansen, 2006), prompting emancipatory pedagogic practices grounded on co-tellings and re-tellings.

The discussion and analysis that follow concern small stories that are told in the course of semi-guided interviews with members of Rennes' civil society. Participants are contacted on the basis of their involvement with associations, non-governmentals and social initiatives. Interviews of 30 minutes to one hour concern the reasons for participants' involvement, their biography, their place within their structure, the type of actions that they like to carry out, and how they conceive of Rennes' third sector. These interviews are transcribed using ELAN (The Language Archive, Max Planck Institute for

Psycholinguistics, 2023) in order to offer the possibility of a linguistic annotation. Stories are isolated from talk using the following criteria: i) the existence of a sustained discourse unit over several turns at talk; ii) the employ of embedded characters and events; and iii) an orientation to process and change. Adherence to a small stories paradigm opens this research up to discourse units that are not necessarily cast in the past, and to stories-in-process as well as stories that are alluded to and co-constructed. Narratives are a form of practice (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008), and they are also an epistemic and ontological attribute that allows reflection and propagation of this practice.

Use of Nakala and of WorkAdventure is, therefore, a manner of participating in open science and in data sharing between participants and the university, and a means of advancing civil society's access to, and use of, these stories. In line with Damus (2023), by helping these stories to circulate beyond, but also within, university boundaries, the aim is participative science by and for society (Houllier & Merilhou-Goudard, 2016; Piron, 2019). These stories represent an oral archive, but also an invitation to think differently about the world we inhabit. In this light, the stories chosen for analysis in this article do not seek to interpret or fully represent the corpus; instead, this is a purposive sample (Campbell et al., 2020) that seeks not what the corpus says about these stories, but rather what these baskets of interspecies stories say about the place that is Rennes and the sector that is civil society.

4. Analysis and discussion of three story extracts

This section presents three extracts from the '*Ce qui nous concerne*' project. In each case, the segments have been transcribed to indicate turns at talk, laughter (@@@), pausing by length (slight pause (.) or longer pauses (..), (…)), marked shifts in intonation (up ↑or down ↓) and marked changes in debit (slower < > or faster > <). Annotations are minimal so as to unclutter the transcriptions. The French original is provided in italics, with a proposed English version under each turn. Participant names are given as initials. 'R' is the researcher, or interviewer. The analysis and discussion of these extracts will follow the framework outlined above, which is to say that attention will be paid to:

    I.   the "shape" of the story "arc" and its interspecies entanglements and imaginings;
   II.   semiotisation;
  III.   the "where", "what" and "how" of civil society narrative and practice.

This analytic progression is close to the heuristic applicable to small stories, namely "ways of (story)telling — sites — tellers" (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 22; 2020, p. 24), but with closer attention to questions of ecosophy. In each case, discussion of the extract will conclude on the perspective of working with this story in the context of subsequent workshops and associative initiatives.

4.1. Extract 1: Ker Yann Social Centre — MH's story of a palaver tree in the hazelnut garden — 5'46"

1   MH   *donc euh ça: et >puis aussi j'accompagne effectivement directement< des <projets d'habitants> hhh donc par exemple euh <hu:m le dernier en date euh on va dire c'est euh un projet> de: (…) :h d'arbre à palabres*

and so uh there you go and >then also I personally accompany< <residents' projects> hhh so for example uh <hu:m the most recent uh let's say is uh a> palaver tree (…) project

2   R   *mh*

3   MH   *qui a été euh du cou:p c'est un projet qui vient de deu:x deux habitants hhh donc je les ai mis en lien avec la direction de quartie:r hh euh leur euh projet a été eu:h financé co-financé par >l'association Rennaise des centres sociaux< hh et par euh par la vi:lle hhh: (.) euh pour euh en fait euh hum mettre en œuvre cet arbre à palabres hh (.) qui participe en fait au: >développement social< lo- local du: du quartier hhh donc c'est eu:h ça se concrétise en fait sous la forme euh de: d'inst- d'installations en fait hhh du: d'une armoire à li:vres de ba:ncs voilà d'un espace de rencontre à la disposition des habitants :hh euh donc ça c'est un des proje:ts j'accompagne aussi <par exemple un> projet de sortie l'été euh hhh heu: euh un projet aussi d'habitants de sortie euh collective (.) >à chaque fois< ce sont des projets en fait hh euh portés par euh un ou plusieurs habitants mais do:nt euh la visée est collective ce sont jamais des projets hh personnels (.) voilà qui ne s'adressent qu'à une de:ux euh hh trois personnes mai:s euh hh (.) qui s'intéressent à: à un certain nombre d'habitants en fait voire à tout le quartier*

which was uh in that respect it's a project <which was thought up by two residents hhh who I put them in contact with the neighbourhood administra ::tion hh uh their uh project was uh financed co-financed by >the Rennes association for social centres< hh and by uh by the city council hhh :: (.) uh to uh in fact uh hum make their palaver tree project a reality hh (.) which in fact contributes to :: the lo- local >social development< of the neighbourhood hhh so it's uh :: its final form in fact is as uh inst- installations in fact hhh as:: a bookcase as benches there you go as a meeting place that's open to all the residents :hh uh so that's one of the projects that I accompany also <for example a> project for a summer excursion uh hhh uh:: uh another project for residents for a joint outing (.) >each time< it's projects that in fact hh uh are proposed by uh one or several residents but who:se uh objective is inclusive they're never hh individual projects (.) aimed at just one or two euh hh or three people bu:t uh hh (.) which concern a: a certain number of residents in fact or even the whole neighbourhood

4   R   *d'accord hh là vous avez parlé du projet l'arbre à palabres euh pourquoi pourquoi ce nom*

l'arbre à palabres

okay hh you were speaking about the palaver tree project uh what what does palaver tree mean for you

5   MH   *oui (.) hhh alors pourquoi ce no:m et bien parce que: l'arbre à palabres euh bah la symbolique c'est euh le lie:u où euh la communauté se rassemble discute échange hh (.) prend des décisions hh donc euh pour les habitants qui eu:h qui >sont à l'origine du projet< bah c'était c'était un peu ça le hh euh l'objectif faire se rencontrer hh euh les gens du quartier dans cet espace-là h hh eu:h alors eux ils ont choisi un thème ↑quand même c'est euh la l'environnement la nature euh l'écologi:e euh hh*

yes (.) hhh so why this name and well because: palaver trees uh so their symbolism is uh the pla:ce where uh the community gathers to discuss and exchange hh (.) take decisions hh so uh for the residents who uh: who >proposed the project< uh it was it was that kind of thinking hh uh the aim is to bring people together hh uh people from the neighbourhood in that space h hh uh so: they chose a theme ↑that is quite it's uh the the environment nature uh ecology uh hh

6   R   *d'accord*

okay

7   MH   *le respect de l'environnement etc hh et eu:h leur projet en fait euh vise à ce que euh hh*

respect for the environment etc hh and uh their project in fact uh is aimed at that uh hh

8   R   *mh*

9   MH   *les différents groupes d'habitants hh euh de autour de ce square où est installé l'arbre à palabres hh puissent se poser échanger discuter mener des actions aussi hhh ou ne serait-ce que pique-niquer et passer du temps ensemble hh euh dans cet espace*

the different groups of residents hh uh around the square where we have installed the palaver tree hh can take the sun exchange discuss and also make a difference hhh or even just have a picnic and spend time together hh euh in that space

10   R   *et c'est où ça cet espace il se trouve où*

and where is that space where is it

11   MH   *:h alors il se trouve en proximité euh de: notre pôle enfance hh (.) et du jardin des noisettes >c'est notre jardin partagé< ↑au centre social hhh et euh les deux porteurs de projet sont euh les bénévoles de du jardin partagé en fait (.) donc c'est un peu en prolongation hh*

:h so it's right next to uh to: our children's centre hh (.) and the hazelnut garden >it's our shared garden< ↑run by the social centre hhh and uh the two

people behind the project are uh both volunteers at the at the shared garden in fact so it's a little bit like an extension of that project hh

12 R *okay*

13 MH *euh de de leur euh h: de leur espace de bénévolat le jardin partagé hh*

uh of of their uh h: of their volunteered space the shared garden hh

14 R *mh*

15 MH *et ils ont voulu amener aussi autre chose hh (.) autour de ce jardin hh euh pour accueillir les habitants parce qu'en fait déjà avec le jardin ils attirent beaucoup hh d'habitants y a pas mal de choses qui se passent et de lien social qui est créé hh euh à partir du jardin c'est un jardin qui attire l'œi :l qui voilà ils sont là aussi pour écouter les habitants donc ça a été le cas notamment pendant la pendant les périodes de confinement*

and they also wanted to bring something else hh (.) into relation with the garden hh uh to include residents because in fact already with the garden they attracted a lot of hh residents there's quite a few things that happen and social links that are created hh uh through the garden it's a garden that catches the eye which there you go they are also there to listen to the residents so that's been the case especially during COVID and periods of lockdown

16 R *d'accord*

okay

17 MH *hh où beaucoup de gens s'arrêtaient pour leur parler pour se confier etc :hhh et du cou:p ils se sont dit bon il y a un besoin de rencontre il y a un besoin de de lien euh qui remonte des habitants (..) et bien en proximité de notre jardin on va créer euh hh un espace un outil pour que les gens puissent se poser et se parler et faire des choses*

hh when lots of people stopped to speak to them and to confide in them etc :hhh and so they realised that there was really a need for a meeting place and a need for social links uh which was expressed by the residents (..) and so they thought of creating uh hh near our garden a space a resource so that people can rest and talk and do stuff

18 R *ouais c'est cool hh c'est intéressant ça (...) et puis ça manque ça fonctionnait beaucoup donc beaucoup de monde y vont beaucoup de personnes y vont là*

yeah it's cool hh it's interesting (...) and we really need that it worked lots so lots of people come lots of people come there

The story arc of Extract 1 is a very good example of a "netted" telling. It moves from a complicating action to resolution, but it is notable that the complicating action is the anomie, or lack of social link, caused by the COVID lockdown. The question of anomie can be considered an ecosophical incident in that it overtly affects relationships between

humans and other species. In response to this anomie, the story moves to questions of communitas and the possibilities of dialogue and cooperation created by the communal garden and the palaver tree. MH's account is almost entirely couched in the plural and concerns existential processes of coming together and communion. Like Haraway's "response-ability", it is a "praxis of care and response … in ongoing interspecies worlding" (Haraway, 2016, p. 105).

More than the people in the story, a central protagonistic role is held by the garden. As MH explains, "with the garden they attracted a lot of hh residents there's quite a few things that happen and social links that are created hh uh through the garden it's a garden that catches the eye" (Line 15). There is a causal movement in the story from the garden to the palaver tree. The latter is imagined as an extension of the first, so, although this is not, at least directly, interspecies imagining, the projection of subsequent actions is predicated on the existence of a first ecological initiative.

The social link through communion with people and environment that is at the heart of the story is felt in the earth-centred language. In Line 5, MH gives the theme of the project itself as, "it's uh the the environment nature uh ecology uh hh". This is a "meta" comment since MH is referring to the project description. However, MH goes on to specify the agency of the project and the way the environment is appreciated in its own right, "the different groups of residents […] can take the sun exchange discuss and also make a difference hhh or even just have a picnic and spend time together hh euh in that space" (Line 9). The garden, finally, is a "a space a resource" (Line 17). So, although this garden is performing a social function, it is also a space in its own right, with its own logic and characteristics. Like the hazelnut (the garden is called the '*noisette*'), it is a small space rich in promise. MH emphasises a positive space, one that is not empty but that is filled by the garden itself. The events are communal and reflexive: talking, taking the sun, being together, making a difference. One can equally note the simple language that MH employs, her frequent uhming and ahhing as she looks for the words she feels best describe the project and the quiet, unassuming way that she explains the logic of the association.

The palaver tree project is attached to a social centre whose actions concern a large fringe belt contiguous to the Rocade highway that runs around Rennes, and that separates dense housing from open countryside. Constructed symmetrically on either side of a wide, concrete, central avenue, this fringe belt, known locally as the '*dalle*' (concrete slab), is composed of several high towers interspersed with transversal bars. There is a large supermarket and, in front of this, the social centre where MH works. The '*dalle*' was originally conceived of as a middle-end development for the post-war population boom and the accelerated urbanisation driven by the then-mayor. Following the recession of the nineties, its population has changed. Apartments are either leased out seasonally to university students or mobilised as HLM ('*habitation à loyer modéré*' — fixed rent accommodation) that are increasingly inhabited by low-income families closely concerned with processes of migration and immigration.

By referring to this project as a "palaver tree", therefore, there is an explicit alignment

with discourses that advance the dignity and worth of African cultures, and that coincide with the dignity and worth of ecological spaces. This is to say that MH is countering discourses of social determinism. However, instead of invoking questions of employment, equality of opportunity or rights to consumer goods, she draws a correlation between human worth and communion within a garden/space/resource. These threads of analysis could be drawn out in further work with this story so as to enquire what other spaces are available in the '*dalle*' and how they could be invested. It is interesting to note that this is part of the current work of the '*Histoires Ordinaires*' ('Ordinary Stories') association (2023).

4.2. Extract 2: ESS Cargo & Cie — N's story of a training day — at 1h05'37"

1   N   *et donc du coup le la photo @@ eh en fait donc c'était pendant notre parcours de d'accompagnement et en fait le:: ↑titre de la formation c'était la posture entrepreneuriale et en fait c'est (.) mais déjà moi tout cet accompagnement je me suis jamais trop sentie euh (.) à ma place parce que c'est très ESS 'fin moi je viens du secteur associatif un peu (..) pur et dur un peu militant même si je ne suis pas du tout la plus militante enfin j'ai fait mes études à Brest dans des milieux anars et tout ça donc pas du tout milieu ESS quoi @*

and so as a matter of fact the the photo @@ uh in fact it was taken during our professional training course and in fact the:: ↑title of the course was entrepreneurial stance and in fact it's (.) but already from the start the whole course well I'd never really uh (.) felt at home because it's all very SSE (Social and Solidarity Economy) and I come from a (..) hard and uncompromising third sector background with activist roots even if I'm not personally the most activist there is and I did my studies in Brest in the anarchist movement and that kind of thing so not at all SSE @

2   R   *ESS pour toi c'est l'économie sociale et solidaire*
SSE for you is Social and Solidarity Economy

3   N   *ouais*
yeah

4   R   *okay d'accord*
okay that's fine

5   N   *et donc du coup et même dans toute la formation on est (.) 'fin voilà je sentais bien que je n'étais pas (.) à ma place mais j'étais trop contente d'être là quand même parce que ça se décentre un peu de ton point de vue euh (.) c'était apprendre de nouvelles choses et tout ça (.) mais bon (.) c'était quand même pas facile tout le temps et ↑là cette formation on était on était dans la voiture on faisait du covoiturage et en fait on ét- on était là avec euh le nom de la formation posture de l'entrepreneur non c'était*

yeah and so as it was and even during the course (.) you know I didn't feel like I (.) fitted the profile but I was really happy to be there even so because it gave me new things to think about uh (.) and new things to learn and so on (.) but it

(.) really wasn't easy all the time and ↑for that part of the course we were in the car and we were sharing the trip down and in fact we were we were talking about uh the title of the course entrepreneurial stance no I'm wrong it was

6	E	*posture du leader non*
		leadership stance wasn't it

7	M	*ouais c'est ça leader-*
		yeah that's right leader-

8	N	*leadership un truc comme ça*
		leadership or something like that

9	M	*posture de l'entrepreneur et leadership c'est ça*
		entrepreneurial and leadership stance that's it

10　N　*ouais c'est ça et on était là mais c'est quoi cette formation de pourrie::: euh @@@ (.) bon on y (.) 'fin (.) bon en gros pendant quasiment ↑une heure que c'était près de Lannion on a un peu démonté le truc en disant @@ 'fin mais laisse tomber quoi et là déjà on arrive dans le:: dans le lieu et moi je trouve ça un peu sensible au à l'environnement de manière 'fin je suis sensible et @ aussi à l'environnement hhh et donc du coup on arrive dans un lieu mais hyper (.) euh peaceful 'fin quoi il y avait des petits potagers:: euh il y avait une ↑yourte euh dans laquelle on faisait l'atelier (..) on était euh garé euh on voyait euh on avait vu euh la mer et tout ça donc déjà tu arrives tu te prends (..) un peu ta claque bon tu passes une heure à faire ton petit gnagnagna @@@ t'arrives et ça te calme direct quoi et moi ça m'a vraiment tout de suite (.) parlé de lieux et ça m'a vachement apaisé*

yeah that's right and we were like what's this course going to be like could it be any worse:::: uh @@@ (.) and we were (.) carrying on for nearly an ↑hour because it was near Lannion and we had pretty much finished criticising it to death @@ and had given up on the day when finally we arrived where the course was where it was being hosted and I'm very sensitive to my environment well in any case I'm sensitive and @ also sensitive to my environment hhh and so there we were in this incredibly (.) peaceful place with little vegetable gardens::: and there was a ↑yurt uh where we did the workshop (..) we'd uh parked uh and looked out uh at the sea and took it all in and already when we arrived (..) it had completely changed our outlook and so we felt bad about having spent an hour ripping it off @@@ because we were like taken aback and straight away (.) I felt touched by the place and incredibly soothed

11	B	*ah tu t'es sentie à ta place*
		ah you felt that you fitted in

12　N　*oui carrément d'ouf (.) @@ et donc du coup en fait on commence (..) 'fin la formatrice a été vraiment hyper bienveillante et tout ça 'fin et puis les gens avec qui on était on sentait aussi qu'on était sur uh (.) une énergie commune quoi (..) et euh en fait déjà on a commencé par euh démonter le leadership @@ et donc du coup la fille elle a tout revu sa formation quoi (.) en disant on est passé du leadership à la coopération et comment on fait pour la coopération*

et comment on fait pour qu'un projet il avance et de dire que en fait le leadership c'était ce n'était pas personnifié mais c'était pour qu'un projet avance il faut qu'il y ait des rôles qui soient occupés (..) et que ça peut tourner mais qu'en attendant il y a toujours des gens qui sont un peu plus moteurs que d'autres 'fin voilà et en plus ce que j'ai apprécié pour une fois dans une formation c'est que tous les participants ont amené leur leur savoir (.) et donc il y avait plusieurs points de vue qui se répondaient et du coup ça permettait pour moi d'avoir un peu une analyse un peu plus fine de l'intérêt plutôt que quelqu'un qui déballe sa science et qui donne son point de vue mais il n'y a pas d'autres personnes pour euh (.) rentrer en contradiction

yes definitely totally (.) @@ and so in fact we started (..) well the trainer was really very kind and giving and everything and with the people there we also felt that we shared a uh (.) a common energy you know (..) and uh in fact we had started by critiquing leadership @@ and so the trainer she totally readapted the course to our needs (.) and commented that we had gone from leadership to cooperation and how could we envisage cooperation and how did we move a project forward and we realised that in fact leadership is not in a person but it was a function that allowed a project to make headway and there were roles that needed to be accounted for (..) and that a project can work but in the meantime there are always people who are more active than others and so on and above all what I appreciated for once in a training course is that all the participants pooled their their knowledge (.) and so there were different points of view that answered each other and like that I could get a finer analysis of the point of the course instead of like in those courses where someone shows off everything they know and gives their viewpoint but there's no one to uh (.) challenge or question it

As in Extract 1, this story is concerned with a sense of community that derives and draws its power from the environment. Whereas N and the rest of the members of the association begin a trip to a training session in Lannion with very critical views of the day ahead, both the place and the pedagogy surprise them. N had been involved in the anarchist movement, and in founding a new association, she has been obliged to align with Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). Sometimes referred to as "circular" economy, SSE places an emphasis on questions of recycling and on the implication of third-sector initiatives in company processes. This, in turn, requires an importation into associative thinking of concepts, and discourses, derived from the private sector. What reconciles N with this aspect of the training is, precisely, the peacefulness of the place and the way the training is organised around what one could term the tenets of "popular" education (see Vennin, 2017). Popular education advocates for flexible, in-situ pedagogies that are ground-up and premised on the free and equal exchange of different knowledges.

    This story is not cast in the same way as Extract 1, however. Its arc moves from the individual to the collective. The environment and questions of natural entities such as the

sea, or the land, are not part of a planned progression. Instead, these entities serve as a source of "entanglement". Their presence, and their inherent logics, destabilise the human protagonists and allow them to be open to a shared pedagogic initiative. In N's semiotisation of the environment, there is a mix of mediated and unmediated impressions. The training site is described (in Line 10) as incredibly peaceful, with vegetable gardens and a yurt; this is then juxtaposed with the sea that serves as an overarching motif. What is very important in interpreting these elements is that N describes herself as sensitive in both interpersonal and environmental terms. One should note N's frequent self-correction and repair, as well as her tendency to scatter markers of hesitation and deference such as '*un peu*' ('sort of') or ''*fin*' ('you know') and leave her sentences either incomplete or completed by formulaic expressions such as '*et tout ça*' ('and everything').

The story arc and questions of semiotisation seem to warrant an interpretation of responsible human action rather than interspecies imagining. This is coherent with the role of the association ESS Cargo & Cie, which centres its action on reciprocal relations between students and civil society, with an important emphasis on gender. N's responsibility is an '*épicérie gratuite*' or free grocery store for disadvantaged students. The story, therefore, favours social, rather than ecological, equality. This story is what Georgakopoulou (2007, pp. 50-55) terms a "shared" story in that whilst N is the one telling it, the other participants can validate or correct the information given and the interpretations reached. This can be seen in Lines 6-9 and 11. Interestingly, therefore, this story represents a significant, shared, shift in operational discourse and praxis that can occur because of entanglement with Gaea-centred elements. In the context of transformative pedagogy and reflection on this story, a productive line of thought and of retelling could concern times in which our environment has become similarly entangled with our lives and with our decision-making processes.

4.3. Extract 3: Bourg l'Évêque — M's story of volunteer work — at 5'00

1   M   *l'associatif m'a toujours euh on va dire uhm attirée (....) parce que euh on va dire j'ai un profil qui correspond pas spécialement à l'entreprise (...) c'est à dire que pour moi gagner beaucoup d'argent ou faire gagner beaucoup d'argent à l'entreprise (..) juste pour gagner de l'argent on va dire que que ça ne sert pas à grand-chose derrière ce n'est pas quelque chose qui me (..) qui me transcende (..) qui est pour lequel j'ai envie de de de vraiment travailler beaucoup (..) euh:: voilà travailler plus pour gagner plus ce n'est pas trop moi @@@ c'est pas trop ma devise euh même si c'est toujours bien euh de gagner euh c'est (..) c'est important il faut bien manger mais euh (..) euh je me reconnaissais plus dans les valeurs associatives (..) j'ai fait un peu de bénévolat euh mais vraiment euh très peu euh dans dans certaines associations (..) euh comme une association de quartier à Cleunay qui n'existe plus maintenant (...) euh mais euh je n'avais pas beaucoup d'expérience en en association (....) euh j'ai répondu à une offre euh pour être ici chargée de communication à mi-temps (....) euh à l'époque où je travaillais à l'escape game où j'étais eh également à mi-temps donc ça pouvait*

se mettre ensemble on va dire (....) et euh et finalement donc je n'ai pas été prise (.) mais on m'a proposé le poste euh au-dessus donc de coordinatrice (..) là non plus je n'ai pas été prise (....) et pour finalement un an plus tard qu'ils me rappellent et qui me disent que je suis prise (..) parce ce que les personnes n'ont pas fait euh on va dire euh fait l'affaire

civil society has always uh how can I say uh drawn me (….) because uh let's say I have a profile that doesn't really fit in with company culture (…) I just think that for me earning packets of money or making packets of money for a company (..) just for its own sake lets say that that doesn't have any kind of higher purpose it's not something that (..) it doesn't do it for me (..) or for which I want to to to really work hard (..) uh so there you go working more to earn more isn't my thing @@@ it's not my motto uh even if it's still good to earn it's (..) it's important one has to eat but uh (..) uh I see myself fitting in much more with the values of civil society (..) I've done some voluntary service uh but it was really very little uh in a few associations (..) uh like a neighbourhood association in Cleunay which doesn't exist anymore (…) uh but uh I didn't have any real experience in in associations (….) uh I replied to a job offer uh to be communication officer on a part-time basis (….) uh at the time I was working at an escape game where I was also part-time so it would have been possible to do both let's say (….) and uh in the end so I wasn't hired (.) but I was offered the position uh next up which was coordinator (..) but I wasn't hired for that position either (….) and then a year later they called me back and asked me to work for them (..) because the personnel they had chosen hadn't lets say been up to the job

2   R   *mhm*

3   M   *donc euh ouais c'était un sacré coup du destin @@@ je suis d'accord*

          so uh yah it was a real stroke of luck @@@ I agree

4   R   *ouais (.) ça j'imagine on peut revenir un peu sur ta expérience au niveau du bénévolat*

          yah (.) I can imagine we can come back a little to your experience as volunteer

5   M   *j'ai j'ai pas fait grand-chose euh j'ai été euh une fois bénévole à quartier d'été à Rennes je ne sais pas si tu vois c'est un festival toujours qui se passe l'été aux Gayeulles*

          I didn't I didn't do much uh I was uh one-time volunteer in a summer neighbourhood project in Rennes I don't know if you've heard about it it's a festival that takes place every summer at Gayeulles

       (0.55)

6   R   *ah mhm*

7   M   *je j'ai voulu (.) ouais c'est un festival de musique un petit peu de quartier qui se passe aux aux Gayeulles*

I I wanted (.) yah it's a music festival that's mostly rooted in the neighbourhood that's organised in in Gayeulles

8   R   *ouais ouais*

yah yah

9   M   *et donc euh en fait j'ai été bénévole là (..) après uhm (.) c'est pas spécialement quelque chose qui ne m'a pas plu (..) uhm je me suis pas trop reconnue parce que j'étais plutôt uhm (...) on était beaucoup de bénévoles et c'était un peu difficile de trouver sa place je trouve*

And so uh in fact I was volunteer there (..) but uh (.) it's not specifically something that I found satisfactory (..) uh I didn't feel acknowledged because I was mostly uh (...) there were a lot of volunteers and it was difficult to find where to fit in I think

10   R   *uhm*

11   M   *et euh (.) et après donc euh vu que j'ai été souvent au chômage euh ce n'est pas un secret dans la communication c'est très dur de trouver un travail*

and uh (.) and after that so uh seeing as I was often unemployed uh it's not a secret in the communications sector that it's very difficult to find a job

[...]

12   *sur les postes de chargés de communication puisque euh on est beaucoup (..) on est beaucoup (.) et euh l'entreprise cherche tout veut toujours un mouton à cinq pattes c'est à dire qu'il faut être euh à la fois chargé de communication euh (..) développeur informatique euh graphiste enfin voilà on doit faire avoir énormément de compétences (...) c'est difficile à trouver (..) et à remplir toutes les cases et donc euh en fait euh c'est là où je me suis dit bon (..) plutôt que de chercher le un boulot toute la journée et de rien faire de ma vie (..) on va euh je me suis proposée sur euh France Bénévolat (..) euh le site France Bénévolat pour euh (..) uhm me proposer en tant que communicante chargée de communication pour une euh pour une association (..) et j'ai postulé pour une association du quartier où à l'époque j'habitais Cleunay (..) et donc euh juste à côté qui était vraiment juste à côté je me dis comme ça je n'ai pas besoin de prendre la voiture ou le bus et j'y vais à pied (..) et euh je suis restée six mois là-bas où j'ai refait toute la charte graphique de cette petite association là (..) c'est une c'etait une conciergerie de quartier (...) en fait il y avait*

as communications officer because uh there're so many applicants (..) it's saturated (.) and uh companies always want the golden candidate which is to say that you need to be a communications officer uh (..) web developer uh graphic artist you're getting my point you need to have a huge skill set (…) it's difficult to find (..) and to meet all these expectations and so uh in fact uh it was then that I told myself (..) that instead of looking for a job every day and not moving ahead with my life (..) going uh I applied as volunteer with uh France Volunteer Services (..) uh the France Volunteer Services site to uh (..)

uh to propose myself as comms communications officer for a uh for an association (..) and I applied with a neighbourhood association in the neighbourhood where I was living at the time Cleunay (..) and so uh just next door which was really just next door I said to myself that like that I didn't need to take the car or the bus and I could go there on foot (..) and uh I worked there for six months and I renewed that small association's visual identity (..) it's it was a neighbourhood locker room (…) in fact there was

13   R   *ça c'était en quelle année*

what year was that in

(0.45)

14   M   *euh oh là uhm (..) alors attends je vais essayer de te retrouver l'année @*

uh oh uh (..) wait a second I'll try to remember the year @

15   R   *@@@*

16   M   *euh je suis ici depuis deux ans et demi donc c'était deux-mille vingt (...) ça devait être en deux-mille dix-neuf deux-mille (.) deux-mille dix-huit deux-mille dix-neuf je pense (..) il me semble (..) au moins ça c'est sûr deux-mille dix-huit c'était après mon départ euh de mon précédent travail (...) et donc euh:: c'était plutôt sympa on avait un petit local dans le centre social de Cleunay (..) et euh donc c'est une conciergerie donc les gens déposent euh (..) déposent des affaires on vient les chercher plus tard on va faire des petites courses aussi (..) mettait en relation les bénévoles (...) euh qui se proposaient par exemple pour faire du bricolage chez une personne ou alors garder un chat ou je ne sais pas (.) et euh donc on mettait les gens en relation (..) et donc moi j'ai fait un petit peu de communication Facebook euh Instagram qui ne fonctionnaient pas non plus normalement à l'époque (..) et euh il y avait un petit site internet aussi les mises à jour (..) @@ ça a commencé comme ça et euh*

uh I've been here for two and a half years so it was in twenty twenty (…) it must have been in two thousand nineteen two thousand (.) two thousand eighteen two thousand nineteen I think (..) it must have been (..) at least what's for sure is that two thousand eighteen was after I left my previous job (…) and so uh :: it was pretty fun we had a little space in the Cleunay social centre (..) and uh so it's a locker room so people left uh (..) left their stuff and came and got them later we also did little errands too (..) coordinated the volunteers (…) uh who offered for instance to do some DIY for someone or to look after a cat or I don't know (.) and so we put people in contact with each other (..) and so I did a bit of social media communication on Facebook uh Instagram which wasn't working like it should have at the time (..) and so there was a little web site with updates (..) @@ it started like that and uh

17   R   *@@*

(0.40)

18   M   *même si je ne connaissais pas d'associatif c'est assez étrange j'ai toujours été attirée (..) je ne sais pas comment l'expliquer (..) mais j'ai toujours été attirée euh certainement par mes valeurs (....) mais euh je n'ai jamais trop franchi le pas c'est drôle en tant que bénévole en tout cas*

     even if I didn't know much about association life it's pretty strange I've always been drawn (..) I don't know how to explain it (..) but I've always been drawn uh I'm sure it's the values (….) but uh I'd never really taken the step it's funny as volunteer anyway

     (2.63)

19   R   *oh du coup-là votre présence ici euh c'est en fonction de votre exp- disons votre expérience en matière de communication marketing et tout ça (....) pas forcément il y a euh un bagage euh associatif*

20   oh so your position here uh it's because of your exper- let's say your experience in communication marketing and so on (....) not necessarily because of your background in associations

21   M   *associatif non ouais*

     associations yah no

This third story is, in many ways, a counterexample to the first two extracts: it is told in the first person, it is a very personal account of finding one's place in the associative sector, and the teller, and her story, orient to a very clearly defined discursive configuration which is fast capitalism and corporatism. Its story arc then, at first sight, would not enter into Haraway's netted, interspecies imagining. The teller presents a solitary journey that moves from unemployment to voluntary work to finding employment as a communications officer. However, there are two very significant modulations of a stereotypical pyramidal story arc. In the first place, the teller is a young woman who, therefore, contributes to combatting gender discrimination in her field. In the second place, a sense of associative communitas is achieved by rejecting the capitalist emphasis on individual success and corporatism. M states in Line 1 that "*travailler plus pour gagner plus ce n'est pas trop moi*" ("working more to earn more isn't my thing"). The slogan, "*travailler plus pour gagner plus*" was famously coined by ex-French president Nicolas Sarkozy, known for his right-wing, liberal policies. This is to say that, in her story, M rejects those discourses that Haraway and Tsing, and ecolinguistics, would also wish to reject.

It is through associative implication, additionally, that the teller of this story is reconciled with the ecology of the sites she describes and their human and non-human inhabitants. Thus, although this participant does not orient specifically to other species or to interspecies imagining, *her values*, which are increasingly drawn from the civil society sector, *do*. This is to say that the associations where she became a volunteer and then communications officer, are concerned with a natural park in the North East of Rennes,

and with caring for the cats and people who came to the locker room (Line 16). One could note, however, that large multinationals are not dismissed out of hand; M, for instance, (Line 16) works to curate her association's Instagram and Facebook pages. Questions of self-esteem and of personal realisation are also emphasised in the story. M does not continue her work with the summer neighbourhood project (Line 9) because she does not feel that she is sufficiently considered at an individual level.

Semiotic resources in this story concern, predominantly, associative initiatives and the neighbourhoods within which these associations are active. Little mention is made of environments beyond, nor of other species, except in passing, when M refers to cats left in the locker room. This story, therefore, presents an interesting case of progressive integration into, and adoption of, associative values. The story is offered as a biographic exemplification of this integration. These values could be summarised as a "taking account" of the other and of inclusive practices in order to offer care for the many different inhabitants of a neighbourhood. It is a good example of the Harawayan "response-ability" but not of a specifically "ecosophical" approach. It has been included here as a limiting instance of an ecosophical narrative. In workshop reflection, one could question how associative actions could be made more inclusive and more responsive to interspecies communitas.

5. Conclusions

The point is made repeatedly in studies of language and ecology (Stibbe, 2015, 2018; Haraway, 2016, 2016 [2003]; Tsing, 2015) that praxis can change in parallel with discursive change. As Steffensen notes (2018), this is not the epistemically weak point that discourse can assist in changing practice (what he terms "social osmosis"), but rather the much stronger point that our environment is both structuring of and structured by discursive practice. Narrative is related to material being in the world. It is a privileged vehicle for new incarnations and imaginings of this world. And it is surely for this reason that ecosophical movements increasingly insist on the necessity for different kinds of stories, ones that are qualitatively different from the ones that have gone before and that escape imperial-colonial narrative tropes (Yusoff, 2018).

This article has been written from a perspective of analysis and praxis. The stories that have been discussed are all part of an online corpus (Kelleher, Djagbre, Kouakou, & Briand, 2022) that is in the process of being rendered in a 2D virtual world (Kelleher & Ramella, 2024; Ramella, 2023) where stories, artefacts, transcriptions and versions will be interactive and associated with haptic objects that successive workshops will be able to revisit and retell, as part of emancipative and co-creative pedagogies. Each story above has been presented in its own account, not in order to describe this corpus, but rather to shed light on ecosophical practices in Rennes. Rennes, as a case study, with its history of left-wing activism and the strength of its civil society sector, serves as an access point to understand the penetration of ecosophical praxis and narrative.

The purposive selection of these three stories, which were extracted from wider interviews and the ensemble of the corpus, delineates three positions: i) a privileging of communitas and of the place of the social collective within ecological spaces; ii) a move from the personal to the equative, within an entanglement of the human and the non-human; iii) a progressively personal and biographic articulation of associative discourses and positionings. In each case, the practices recounted offer an inversion of a story "arc" in order to extend the possibility of alternate narratives that are not centred on individual overcoming, but that, instead, cradle a plurality of actors in a netted and non-competitive way.

On the one hand, these may be considered ecosophical practices, in that they have at their heart living with respect for human and non-human entities. However, they may also be considered anthropocentric in that their focus is still decidedly on human welfare and social upliftment. The three extracts triangulate an associative discourse that challenges fast capitalism and atomistic individual consumption. They also modulate social development with recognition of ecological concerns. They suggest that civil society in Rennes and its stories are responsive to ecosophical values and to the links between humans and their environment.

Acknowledgements

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