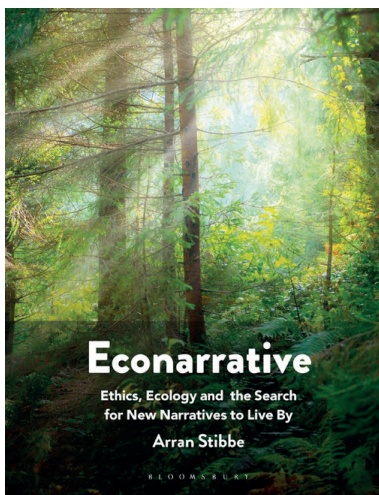


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**Maria Bortoluzzi**

**Econarrative. Ethics, Ecology, and the Search for New Narrative to Live By**

*Arran Stibbe. 2024. Econarrative. Ethics, Ecology, and the Search for New Narrative to Live By. London: Bloomsbury Academic (1<sup>st</sup> edition), 288 pp., £ 24.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781350263116*



<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/econarrative-9781350263116/>

The book is a must-read about the power of narrative and the pervasive influence it has on how we experience reality, and how we construe identities in relation with all living beings, human and beyond the human. The book is well in line with Stibbe's previous books, in particular *Animals Erased* (2012) and *Ecolinguistics* (2015, 2021). And it is an expansion on his long-standing research which offers readers alternative views and practices to counteract those dominant forces that have brought the ecosystems that life depends on at an alarming level of devastation and danger. Throughout his research work, Stibbe has offered insightful perspectives on the way language and other semiotic systems on the one hand can negatively contribute to the problems of Anthropocene, and on the other they can instantiate positive viewpoints, practices and respectful examples through communicative choices. This is the way forward for Stibbe: reflecting on present-day complexities and moving together (human and more-than-human) towards ecocultural instantiations of identities and relationships to live ethically in ecological justice. Figueres and Carnac (2021) would advocate for 'stubborn optimism', whereas Stibbe summarises it with the expression 'care and respect'.

*Econarrative* offers diverse views and multiple perspectives. The voice of the book addresses the reader as kin, as co-explorer and companion of the complex area in which stories interlace with identities, relations, past, present and the future we all have to face together. Exploring the complexity and variety of narrative, the book establishes a network among domains and disciplines following the principle that we need language and other semiotic modes to instantiate our reality and reflect on it in all life domains and research fields. Narrative (verbal or visual) is constitutive of several research areas and text-types we use to construe, project and understand our world.

With this volume, Stibbe addresses readers from different research areas beyond the strictly linguistic and narratological ones: literature studies, ecocriticism, economics, media and film studies, leadership studies, etc. This includes scholars and students alike since the book is written in a remarkably clear style while issues are discussed in their complexity and subtlety. Tables and summary sections guide the reader through main principles and definitions needed to follow Stibbe's argumentation. In the introductory chapter, for instance, key aspects of narration from different and complementary research frameworks (narratology, linguistics, visual communication) are presented and discussed. Stibbe gives the reader a map of the complex narration territory by identifying fundamental concepts and landmarks on the basis of multidisciplinary frameworks.

In Stibbe's words, econarratives "are narratives that involve not only humans but also other species and the physical environment in interaction with each other" (3-4). The aim is to explore 'econarratives' in their multifaceted instantiations. Thus, the introductory chapter establishes the foundations for the research carried out in the volume through the innovative lens of econarrative principles, ecocultural identities and relations which can "help us rethink the basis of our culture, society, economic systems and our relationships with other species and the physical environment" (4) in a mutual relation of care.

The chapters that follow the introductory one present a categorisation of narrative discourse which cuts across fiction and non-fiction, verbal and multimodal text-types in a dialogue between different econarratives. As Stibbe mentions, the book follows a kind of 'timeline'. I would add that it is a timeline that comes full circle: the analysis starts from texts about cosmogonies, myths and stories of the earth creation (Chapter 2 "Beginning"); then the book moves to the present time of life appreciation (Chapter 3 "Identifying"; Chapter 4 "Emplacing"; Chapter 5 "Enchantment"); and then it looks into the possibility of a better future (Chapter 6 "Leading"; Chapter 7 "Feeling"; Chapter 8 "Persuading"). In Chapter 9 we come full circle with "Ending", narratives about the end of times. This chapter relates back to where we started: new life, new eyes to see it and new narratives to instantiate it.

The keywords identifying each chapter (reported above) are both discursual and ethical categories, as well as perspectives which open to a territory of interwoven narratives and econarratives to find and experience the path of ecocultural identities within relationships of mutual care.

Following a timeline trajectory, the book is an explorative journey in time (in relation to individuals and communities, human and beyond), but also in place since this metaphorical journey is rooted in our common, irreplaceable, fragile earth which supports human and more-than-human lives while giving meaning to relations of care and support.

Stibbe believes that econarrative and an outlook on ecocultural identities require transdisciplinary approaches and sensitivities: this kind of study cannot be comprised within any single discipline because it “involves different ways of knowing, that include the scientific, analytic, empathic. Experiential, embodied, creative and practical” (235). *Econarrative* concludes by advocating new stories for ecocultural identities of care and respect and thus actively promotes new beginnings.

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**Maria Bortoluzzi** is Associate Professor of English Language in the Department of Languages, Literatures, Communication, Education and Society at the University of Udine (Italy). Her research interests include ecolinguistics, critical discourse studies, multimodal and multiliteracy awareness for language teacher education (English as foreign/additional language). She has published extensively in these fields. Her recent publications deal with plant representation, identity representation in online communities, critical multimodal discourse for ecological awareness raising, and multimodal approaches for language and ecoliteracy education. Latest co-edited volume with Elisabetta Zurru (Open Access): *Ecological Communication and Ecoliteracy* (Bloomsbury Academic 2024).

[maria.bortoluzzi@uniud.it](mailto:maria.bortoluzzi@uniud.it)