

**Thinking alongside *The Last Humanity*:
Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca in Conversation with
Katerina Kolozova,
Anthony Paul Smith and John Ó Maoilearca**

Abstract: This is a conversation in response to François Laruelle recent book, *The Last Humanity: The New Ecological Science*. Published in French in 2015, Anthony Paul Smith's English translation of the book is due to appear in November 2020. For this conversation, performance researcher Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca sent questions about the book to three leading scholars of non-philosophy who also have specific interest and expertise in the question of the nonhuman, animality and ecology: Katerina Kolozova, Anthony Paul Smith and John Ó Maoilearca. All quotations in the text are from Anthony Paul Smith's forthcoming translation (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

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Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca: By way of introduction, can I ask you each to say a little about how *The Last Humanity* sits for you with respect to Laruelle’s wider project? Why do you think Laruelle chose ecology as the next set of materials for non-philosophical treatment? What does non-philosophy have to do with ecology and/or what is the relationship between “the degrowth of philosophy itself” (Laruelle) and ecological crisis?

John Ó Maoilearca: I cannot be sure: that three of his critics/commentators/proponents have chosen to take up his approach via the interrelated perspectives of ecology, the animal, and the nonhuman, might well have struck him as a significant phenomenon, worthy of his own intervention and “correction.” It is surely not a coincidence that three of his early non-francophone readers have taken these allied stances. Also, the sustained theme of de-determination has taken a more concrete and eco-political form of “degrowth” in his recent work – so, that the damage to/harassment of the environment done by philosophical thought should itself need to be reoriented/inverted by non-philosophy, appears as an opportune assignment (i.e., just what Philosophy needs and non-philosophy is able to do). Finally, Laruelle’s latest works in Non-Philosophy V (NP V)¹ are broad in their range of themes – but that this last (?) phase should give an account of what the Human “is” finally, in non-philosophy, is probably necessary.

Katerina Kolozova: It is a project that seems to sit oddly within the overall work of Laruelle. I do find it surprising that he would choose to deal with the topic of ecology. To me, however, the book is primarily attempting to conceptualize human subjectivisation in terms of

non-standard philosophy, or the non-philosophical appropriation of quantum theory. The function of the notions of nature and the animal seems to serve the role of a juxtaposition (or “othering”) that defines the human, which is a classical philosophical function of these two ideas/concepts. In spite of ecology being the central theme, ecosystems, sustainability of the environment are not really the topic of the book, and that is why I never really perceived it as a book on ecology. What I find valuable in the book is the conceptualization of subjectivation: the human’s philosophical under-determination and the attempt to overcome anthropocentrism (even though I think that in this particular book Laruelle eventually fails at said task, perhaps because of the flawed conceptualization of ecology as subject-matter). Degrowth is treated as a philosophical task, or the task of philosophy. I argue that philosophical degrowth, if conceived as a critique of capitalism as philosophy, may yield radical political-economic critique and possibly provide a foundation for a political change. However, it is an inference I make with the help of Marx, rather than something I deduce directly from *En dernière humanité* alone.

Anthony Paul Smith: I always feel in a somewhat strange position when called to answer questions like these. That stems in part because – as a translator of someone’s work – there is a sense in which you are asked to take responsibility for the ideas and people will reach out to ask what so and so means as if the words and ideas are mine. With someone whose writing style is so particularly strange and precise within its own rules as Laruelle’s, this can be a bit more intense, since I find myself being asked to defend that style and so on. So I often find that I want to take a bit of a protective posture and any criticisms I may have about the book get shelved. In this instance, I agree a great deal with what John and Katerina have to say about the project. There is certainly something about non-philosophy that begs to ask questions that bring it

¹ Editorial note: Laruelle refers to his work according to a series of phases: Philosophy I, II, III, IV and V. Throughout, John Ó Maoilearca chooses to refer to these phases as Non-Philosophy or NP I, II, III, IV and V in order to avoid an unnecessary confusion between Laruelle’s project and standard philosophy.

close to ecological thinking. And I am glad to see Laruelle engaging with that. With that said, I do wish (and he signals that he knows some readers will criticize him for this) that he had engaged with the scientific form of ecology a bit more. I think the material that is being worked with is more accurately described as political ecology or ecological thought broadly understood, which is far more mediated and mediatized than scientific ecology itself is. Like philosophy, though, this ecological thought has spread out, as Laruelle describes, and for that I find it interesting that he's engaging with a growing, general form of thought and rightfully criticizing some of its aspects. As I say in the translator's introduction to *The Last Humanity*, there is no necessary connection between justice and ecology and we must be on watch for a rising ecofascism or appropriation of ecological frameworks by those Laruelle has elsewhere termed the "authorities."

LCÓM: A significant recurring theme of *The Last Humanity* is the nature of the relations between human and nonhuman forms of life – specifically the conception of the relations within what Laruelle calls the "MAP system (Man, Animal, Plant)." Given my particular interest in nonhuman animals, I wonder if we can focus for now on talking through the general problem of how to understand "their common unity and their unilateral difference," "indivisibility" and "discretion," entanglement and distinction of human-animal life. How can we think these two things *together* rather than as mutually exclusive?

KK: Yes, the continuum of animality-vegetality-humanity is an attempt at overcoming anthropocentric thinking of animality, which I believe ultimately fails. Namely, the human is assigned the role of the "guardian" of the vegetal/animal world, and the position of humanity is determined as one of "avant-priorité" and "après-ultimité" in relation to animals and other forms of life. Laruelle insists on the distinction between the animal and the human not only in a way that would simply be consistent with his overall

methodology – seeking for the "identity of the last instance" – but also in a way that is anthropocentric in line with the classical traditions of philosophy. Humanity is a philosophical generality in a way that Marx would find problematic – an abstraction that is a mere philosophical generalization insofar as it is a unity of concepts, unification of differences, an *Allgemeinheit*. This type of generality or a conceptual unity prior to its subjection to *chôra* is criticized by Laruelle as *ensemblisme*.² Yet again, in this particular book, he fails to arrive at humanity's determination of the last instance beyond relationism (its definition via the animal and the vegetal) and beyond philosophical decisionism. Humanity seems to be extrapolated from the philosophical traditions unexamined and non-radicalized in order to be subjected to the non-philosophical operation of superposition, which is compelling. I find great value in it in terms of conceiving of subjectivation beyond fetishization and reduction to sets of identities, but I do not see it as very useful in terms of a post-philosophical reconceptualization of the human and its relation to the animal. In this sense, I have found John Ó Maoilearca's notion of the non-human far more inspiring for my own work, as well as Anthony Paul Smith's work on ecology.

JÓM: Togetherness can be thought of as a radical equality of all belonging on a plane of immanence, for example, though Laruelle would then say that even the plane of immanence is over-determined (by philosophy). "Togetherness" would work better, in my view, as belonging equally to the Real, but without any determination as to what the Real is, nor even what belonging to it means (as "participation," set-membership, expression, being-with etc). Belonging, equality, etc., are always "in the last instance." I say this because other aspects such as identity and difference, or entanglement and distinction can be treated philosophically (as real

² François Laruelle, *Tetralogos* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2019), 43, 51.

determinations of philosophy) or non-philosophically – as material for thinking about how philosophy attempts to determine the Real (of animals, humans, etc.). They could be entertained as philo-fictions – e.g., asking “on what continuum of difference and sameness do humans and animals lie?” (Singer, Regan et al.), or “through what irreducible differences do human and animal relate?” (Derrida).

APS: Piggybacking off of what John and Katerina have said, I think that Laruelle misses an opportunity here that is consistent with his other thought. Specifically, in the fictions he writes about humans as guardians (and I take fictions to mean the names that are lived out through the undetermined human) he repeats old stories; whereas non-philosophy opens up for new kinds of fictions, new kinds of naming. Had he engaged more with scientific ecology he could have extended the MAP system to think at the level of ecosystems, he could have included the worldless stones and thought our continuum with that worldlessness. Such a thinking could open up the degrowth of philosophy to a rethinking of the human from Black Studies, which I think is doing some of the most important work on the question of the human today. I am thinking of Jared Sexton’s call to rethink the lifeform we are from under the condition of the valorization of the slave who is landless. He writes that the landlessness of the unsovereign slave has a correlate in selflessness:

No ground for identity, no ground to stand (on). Everyone has a claim to everything until no one has a claim to anything. No claim. This is not a politics of despair brought about by a failure to lament a loss, because it is not rooted in hope of winning. The flesh of the earth demands it: the landless inhabitation of selfless existence.³

³ Jared Sexton, “The *Vel* of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign,” *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 4-5 (2014): 11.

Or even at the scale Laruelle is working at, the rethinking of the human-animal relation undertaken by Zakiyyah Imam Jackson in her recent *Becoming Human* springs to mind as important.⁴ I think Laruelle holds on to a need to give dignity to the human, but the ecological continuum opens up to the idea that there might be a better way to defend the human than dignity, that the defense might involve a rethinking of ourselves as abject, as something that can be eaten, rather than holding on to the old dreams of European Man.

LCÓM: So, how does Laruelle’s conception of these relations here sit with respect to your own approach?

KK: Laruelle’s other writings have been of greater use to my own project that is concerned not only with the preservation of animal life on the planet, but also with that of humanity insofar as animality - or that which is susceptible to “animalization” or “dehumanization” as a political procedure - could be categorized as “material resource” for capitalist “value production.” Laruelle’s human-in-human, John Ó Maoilearca’s non-human, and Marx’s (non-positivist) objectivism have led me to the conception of the human as a radical dyad (an epistemological tool borrowed from Laruelle) of the physical (“animal”) and the automaton of signification or the transcendental (that begins with the natural languages but can be extended to artificial languages too and technology more generally). The radical dyad has enabled me to defend animality and physicality from capitalist exploitation, enabled through their transformation into “resource material” for commodity production, without establishing a hierarchy among the forms of life with humanity as the criterion, and without the hierarchy between “value” (monetary, and otherwise) and matter or physicality.

⁴ Zakiyyah Imam Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

JÓM: I would like to split off Laruelle as a human biography from his invention of non-philosophy (at least NP III). Despite everything, my deep suspicion is that Laruelle, as well as inverting many canonical ideas from the Western tradition, also retains prejudices stemming from that tradition through a host of causes in his background and education – humanist ones being amongst them (but also ones about the central truth of psycho-analysis and Marxism – the usual twentieth century French investments). And of course, so do I (and everyone else) – though they might be a different set of such retentions. NP III however, as a force of thought, pushes against any determination of the “human” that would privilege any one species or a species property (thought, language, intelligence, art, creativity, sociality, love, labor, victimhood, etc.). Now, I cannot help the arrogance of saying that my work endeavors to be true to that orientation or posture of NP III. Yes, this sounds like saying that I am being “more Laruellean than Laruelle” – but I think that NP III is the most Laruellean phase, so really it is Laruelle being more Laruellean – at least by my definition! So, my work on diagrams, film, animality, and mysticism, are very much amplifications of NP III equalism (the middle two being focused on animal/film as animal).

APS: As I have said before, I have a real sense of duty that I am often called on to give an account of Laruelle’s work. For me, Laruelle’s non-philosophy gave me a method for how to engage with thinking about thinking. How to think the materiality of thought, of the books we are reading, their transmission, and so on. That allowed me in my first book to approach the task of thinking about “nature” in dialogue with ecology and for rethinking religious thought and practice, both within philosophy and outside. So I found the work of the period of Philosophy III the most impactful to me for the pure structure of the method and I found Philosophy IV, where Laruelle begins to play around with

the material of philosophy and some other discipline = X as instructive for what that could look like as a practice. But as Laruelle himself says, “Laruelle does not exist.” I do not think the project of non-philosophy is about creating a superego figure out of the human being François Laruelle. This is a matter of a project begun and explored by him, but able to be taken up in very different ways by other people. As with ecology, I do not think there is any necessary relationship between non-philosophy and what Laruelle himself does with it, but I do find much of it fruitful and refreshingly divergent from some orthodoxies in eco-philosophy and the environmental humanities more generally.

LCÓM: Again, very much linked to the questions above: How do we move from this understanding of unity and difference to the question of *equality*? I would like to understand more about the distinction Laruelle wants to retain between humans and animals. To what extent do you think it is indeed possible to retain this distinction without making it hierarchical and/or reverting to a model of human exceptionalism? And indeed, how can this distinction be upheld if there is “no metaphysical human nature” or if MAP is “no longer species according to a biological distribution”? On the one hand, Laruelle seems to be directly critical of “man’s metaphysical priority over the two other kinds of life” – animal and plant. He claims to reject “his assumed superiority and his sufficiency of measure for the others” in favor of a “plane of immanence of life where each of the three kinds of life is equal to the two others.” And yet, in other parts of the book, it could perhaps be construed that Laruelle is repeating the standard gesture of measuring animal life according to human norms.

To give some examples - he says: “We grant only a mitigated belief to those who... affirm that the animal not only knows but knows that it knows, confusing... invention and learning linked to need with the most abstract knowl-

edge, calculation with mathematics, and habits of the den with knowledge of the cosmos.” But doesn’t this amount to a return to the old practice of measuring animals according to human standards and to reassert animal knowing as “merely” instinctive, habitual, etc.? Or again, elsewhere, he states: “the nonhuman animal remains at the border of language, it cannot think algebraically, admit the ruin or collapse of its transcendence, make an ethical decision.” But is this not to deny animals “language” because they do not communicate according to norms of human language? Finally, he also seems to assign a “privilege” to the human on the grounds of its exclusive access to “the power of the algebraic imagination”; for instance, when he suggests that it is “man who alone occupies Reason-in-person and its algebraic nature.” Or like, in terms of the quantum, he states that: “Man and animal share culture, they could even share philosophy, but do not share the power of quantum physics.”

I gather that this is not intended as a hierarchical distinction, and Laruelle is clear in other parts of the book that human, animal and plant are three equal kinds of living things, but why do these kinds of gestures not (to use Laruelle’s own language) serve to “reestablish an avatar of the old anthropological cut”? Might it not be objected that Laruelle is presenting algebra and quantum physics as superior forms of thought denied to nonhuman animals (in a not dissimilar fashion to Badiou’s use of set theory)?

KK: Yes, we are again returning to the problem of subjectivity centered thought (as a problem of structure, not semantics), which cannot be but any other form of subjectivity except human (it therefore becomes a problem of semantics too), rendering his “ecology” anthropocentric. Ecosystems, if studied scientifically, can be imagined without the human subject participating in them in any way whatsoever. A non-philosophical addition to such study could be postulating the problem of human survival as part

of the problem of maintaining eco-systems. Reducing ecology – and as a consequence eventually (or even, necessarily?) cybernetics too - to a science of humanity seems like a philosophically spontaneous act on the part of Laruelle. The fact that he has replaced philosophy with quantum theory does not make his project less philosophical - the principle of philosophical sufficiency seems to be replaced by the principle of “quantum sufficiency.”

JÓM: Briefly – to tackle all of the examples you cite above in how Laruelle seems to be falling foul of his own charges against philosophy... Normally, when it is a question of making apparent judgements against philosophy’s judgements, I would say that he is not guilty of such “tu quoque” (or “what about”-ism) because in NP III it is not another statement of the same philosophical register but a gesture in thought that tries to deflate and level all claims to authority. It avoids the kindred liars’ paradox (“this statement is not true”/“I am lying”) by not only being a different logical type of statement (being self-referential or about statements) but a performative gesture. Yet in this phase (NP V) and in *The Last Humanity* these statements you cite can appear – at best – as still performative (of a philo-fiction) – which is to give them the benefit of the greatest doubt in my view; or they can appear as a final resolution, or most perfect model, for all non-philosophy, through quantum mechanics and algebra. Alas, I cannot take that latter option seriously, as it finalizes what cannot be finalized. So, when you ask, “to what extent do you think it is indeed possible to retain this distinction without making it hierarchical and/or reverting to a model of human exceptionalism?” – I do not think it is possible in NP III, but suspect it has already happened in NP V (in my darker moods).

APS: I share a lot of your concerns, Laura. I think the question of equality requires a consideration of violence. Because of the imbrica-

tion of metaphysics and politics, when we talk about equality we are in some sense also talking about the acceptable or unacceptable nature of violence being done. In terms of the distinction that Laruelle wants to maintain between the human and the animal (or the plant, for that matter), I think it comes down to this: that violence (the minimum necessary) can be done to the animal. That might sound like grounds for cancellation and as an “ethical vegetarian” (whatever that means) I certainly have some qualms about Laruelle holding this distinction. I worry that it repeats certain other French philosophical thinking on this that always feels like a sleight of hand and a failure to own the real vertigo of immanence. We see it in Bataille, Deleuze, and others when they say (in what strikes me as very Hegelian) everything is the same but the human is the one that knows this, or everything is nothing but the human is the one that can think this void, or something along those lines. (Interestingly, this form of exception is common to Christian philosophy of religion where Christianity is the best religion because it knows it is a religion or an imperfect relation to the divine and since it is imperfect and knows it that means it is better than the determined religions like Judaism and Islam.) That said, I think what Laruelle is doing at least is honest and opens up to the difficulty of thinking equality as such between species, lifeforms, ecosystems, and so on. It is easy to talk about equality or the lack of violence when one is at a distance to that violence. But what happens to this equality in situations where violence is confronted between other animals or the violence visited upon species by aspects of the ecosystem that we cannot quite call “life” in the same way? Perhaps there is no metaphysical essence to any of that and what is to be explored is whether or not we have a unilateral duality of equality and violence. There is an invitation in this book, I think, to push back against some of the easy ethical statements of environmental philosophy and mediatized ecology.

LCÓM: Throughout this book, and in other writings, Laruelle refers to the “generic” hu-

man (and in the translation of the MAP system to “Man” rather than the human). Women are briefly mentioned at the start, and race referenced once. So how are we to understand differences among humans in this context or to respond to possible concerns that the reference to the generic constitutes a(n all too philosophical) universalizing gesture - just at this time when the difference of lived experience produced by systemic racism in particular (including in the form of environmental racism) is so brutally evident?

KK: The question of political “translatability” of Laruelle’s generic categories of subjectivity, humanity, the “world,” etc., has been raised by many critics referring to most of his works, his overall oeuvre, that is. I believe that the genericity of these categories can be put to political use if intersected with other universals that do not refer to subjectivization exclusively, such as “identité sexuée” or “the victim,” but also to concepts such as “labor force,” or epistemic categories that render thinking the political in universal categories possible. The non-philosophical radical or generic subjectivity can be placed in historical, political, cultural, human, non-human and post-human contexts of discussion and, if the theorizing subject discusses realities – and the “identities of the last instance” of those realities – of a particular kind, such as subjugation or exploitation on gendered basis, or racial and cultural basis, we will be able to a) explain those realities in structural terms, and b) in terms of subjectivization. There is a relatively extensive discussion of “sexual difference” in the book, and its prominence in a discussion on ecology would be somewhat strange had this book not been, in fact, about human subjectivization in nature and the imminence of its destruction. Again, there is a relational and mutual – supposedly the result of the procedure of “superposition” – determination of the feminine and masculine that feminizes the masculine and the other way around. It is comparable and moreover homologous to the thesis that “the

human is animalized by the animal” and the other way around – Laruelle’s ecological proposal seeks to “humanize the animal.” The problem with this approach, which seems to move away from Laruelle’s classical position of unilaterality and the method of unilateralization (or dualysis), ensues from the book’s centeredness on humanity/human subjectivity in a discussion that is supposed to explicate ecosystems and human responsibility in relation to the systems at issue.

JÓM: I can imagine that Laruelle might acknowledge that these are indeed pressing issues (e.g., “environmental racism”) but not problems for him (given his own age, biography, interests). Normally, Laruelle would say that any anthropological determination of the human by philosophy is typical of the latter’s harassment of Man and so to be resisted in non-philosophy. The appalling ramifications of that harassment, beginning with philosophy but transformed in political programmes of hierarchical difference soon after, have always been marked by non-philosophy in all its forms: the current obscenities, though rooted in history, are symptomatic of this ongoing harassment. What arises to resist them, however, may only be a further set of obscenities (“moral guidances”). For comparison, Levinas forwards ethics not as a solution to dilemmas but the basis of them (conflicts of freedom and responsibility); similarly, for non-philosophy every solution to a conflict of equality will determine that equality in some way that has pernicious results (even when it is as broad as sentience, or vibrant matter). I myself do not think that such chauvinistic regard is necessarily “bad” in a moral sense, so long as what is being disregarded is already outside of the “structure of regard” to which it is subjected – i.e., that any inflicted “pain” is itself limited in its uptake/regard by the “victim.” Responding to Katerina’s work on pain as universal here, I think it is virtually universal, but actually only inflicted within limited domains – though by “limited” I mean something still extremely wide in scope, such as

carbon-based life. In short, neutrinos, say, are so small as to be actually immune to our interferences (outside of a particle accelerator). Indeed, their size simply is their disregard of our regard/interference, made flesh.

APS: Laruelle had been using *Humain* more in recent texts, so I was surprised to see him revert back to *Homme* here. The old saw about how this gets at the singular universal is not satisfying anymore, at least not to me. It also leaves him open to all sorts of misinterpretations by people rightfully angry and suspicious of the world. That said, the generic human is not the same thing as the universal Man of the Enlightenment (and here I think Laruelle is interestingly read in dialogue with Sylvia Wynter’s work on the “genres of Man”). This is not a pretended reduction of human beings down to their minimal essences, but a total stripping away of essences as such. This is why, after engaging with Laruelle’s non-philosophy in my doctoral dissertation, I came to the philosophical work on Blackness and Slavesness in theorists like Frank B. Wilderson, Jared Sexton, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman and others. There the more fuzzy parts of non-philosophy’s stripped bare human is given more “undetermined form” in focus in the affirmation of the powers of that human lifeform denied humanity: the Black slave. The victim that Laruelle talks about cannot simply be universal, even if it is generic, but what is generic is seen most clearly in the most abject (from within the perspective of the world’s determinations). I do not think Laruelle is necessarily going to do that, though of course other Francophone theorists have taken that up in other idioms and with other methods, but I do think non-philosophy offers resources for that project. In short, the differences between humans are matters of hallucinated determinations and the generic human is one way of seeing that those differences do not call for “help” from one genre of the human to another. I think that the task of non-philosophy in this regard is

to see something that Fred Moten gets at when he writes, “I don’t need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid mother-fucker, you know?”⁵

LCÓM: I like this quote from the book very much:

It is urgent that we test with new principles the knowledge we are able to have about life and recenter ethics and epistemology on the “encounter,” as we now say, with the animal and plants. This encounter calls for a new concept of MAP equality, a reevaluation of the notion of “human nature” and its degree of destruction.

Now, this may be the wrong thing to ask of this book and/or too potentially instrumental an approach to non-philosophy, but I am interested in what this book adds to our understanding of how a non-standard ecological ethics (or non-ecological ethics) is to be practiced and what it means for how humans treat animals (and plants)? Laruelle seems to be critical of the form of moral guidance that comes from standard ecology, calling for a new ethics of life that would be “a life without daily guidance.” But what is Laruelle’s objection to “guidance” in this context? Does this broadly correspond to the distinction that Deleuze makes between ethics and morality, insofar as Laruelle suggests that ethics “must guide life in an immanent way rather than govern it”?

Secondly, in *The Last Humanity*, Laruelle says that he does “not particularly defend an attitude of empathy or compassion” and criticizes ecology and animal ethics for an “affective monism” that fails to see empathy as but one strategy amongst others. So what additional practices are needed to move beyond the sentimental ecology

⁵ Fred Moten, in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013), 140-41.

that Laruelle criticizes? And finally, what does non-philosophy mean for how we live – our “ethico-ecological comportment” - if Laruelle is clear that it “does not mean absolute equality of treatment between living things”? Laruelle touches on the treatment of animals in the Conclusion to *The Last Humanity* – suggesting that we should treat them “humanly” and according to an axiom of “least suffering for the animal.” But is there not a problematic power imbalance retained here if Laruelle refuses to grant the possibility of ethics to animals themselves – for instance, when he says: “Ethics is not for the animal in-itself who needs it but cannot provide it by itself”?

KK: I agree, it is a beautiful quote but unless in the main tenets of his project (*En dernière humanité*) humans are decentered leaving behind the present spontaneous philosophical anthropocentrism, unless it becomes a scientific account of ecosystems and the protection of environment that is based on science and makes non-philosophical, scientific use of philosophical material, we will remain encircled by the principle of philosophical sufficiency even though this surely was not Laruelle’s idea (with the book we are discussing). Please, see above how and why Laruelle’s other works combined with Marx have served me better in developing a similar project (of non-philosophy). I am afraid to say that here he remains spontaneously philosophical, perhaps due to the illusion that such danger is avoided thanks to introducing quantum theory in the space previously occupied by philosophy.

JÓM: Yes, political programmes, as determinations, may hurt as much as heal. As for going beyond “affect”: certainly “empathy” is itself restrictive (a sophisticated version of cuteness perhaps). What of the least empathizable – like COVID-19? Without turning to Kantian duty (which is still selective), one can imagine that a regard for X (e.g., these particular deaths) is not based on having loved X (e.g., loving animals).

This would be in between affect and intellect (rational law) – i.e., a kind of posture created or imposed from both within and without – so not all of our “doing” (COVID-19 may be an “agent” already doing some of this “moral” work in adopting a new posture for us).

APS: In a response to my friend Eric Daryl Meyer’s book *Inner Animalities: Theology and the End of the Human*,⁶ which I read around the time I was completing the translation of *The Last Humanity*, I was thinking about similar issues. The response, entitled “Closer, or the Pleasure of Being Eaten,”⁷ had me thinking about the fantasy that philosophers have when they think analogically about ourselves to other animals. So Nietzsche clearly wants to think he is a bird of prey, but obviously he was much weaker than that. Lots of people want to think they are wolves (Deleuze, for example), but if we are honest are not most of us closer to cows? At least some of us are and there is capacity in thinking our closeness to cows. I think that how non-philosophy has stripped us bear of our philosophical determinations has a far more powerful, if terrifying effect than Laruelle’s seemingly sober words let on. Thinking in dialogue with Eric’s book I wonder if the ethical program might be one of finding pleasure in our own being eaten. If it is possible to give up on the human fantasy of never suffering, of never decaying, of a death that we do not experience. I wonder if that might bring us into a different kind of ecological and ethical relationship with the rest of what is around us.

LCOM: Again, this may be too instrumental, but are there specific implications of Laruelle’s work for our relationship to “anti-animal violence”? Where would you situate this book or non-phi-

⁶ Eric Daryl Meyer, *Inner Animalities: Theology and the End of the Human* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

⁷ Anthony Paul Smith, “Closer, or the Pleasure of Being Eaten (*Inner Animalities* Book Event),” *An und für sich* (April 5, 2019), <https://itself.blog/2019/04/05/closer-or-the-pleasure-of-being-eaten-inner-animalities-book-event>.

losophy more broadly with respect to animal activism? Is the focus more on the epistemological basis for anti-animal violence or epistemological violence rather than violence in the physical sense? In the text, he alludes to the need for “the defense of the animals” by humans; particularly from “the despotic or sufficient individual, who reduces the animal to the state of a consumable object and abuses its sensible nature as a suffering animal.” But how should we understand this given that he also rejects any “absolute or ideological decision” to “refuse to train and consume animals” as symptomatic of, what he calls, “the Principle of Ecological Sufficiency”? I am also thinking of the place where he promotes [the new] ecology, “as a way of thinking rather than of eating” which might be seen by some as dismissive of an obviously key site of animal suffering and violence.

JÓM: As I have already said, Laruelle is prejudiced (as are we all), but nonetheless what I say about a posture between thinking and affect could be used here: it is not so much eating vs. thinking but eating-as-thinking, beyond any voluntarism – think of the effect of red meat on the human brain (especially for U.S. meat-eaters!) and thereafter on other behavior - see Jane Bennett on this kind of agency. Can we decide and voluntarily control our appetites, change our thought through eating? Yes, and no – we can attempt to “nudge” the effects of food on our thought so that the involuntary Real might be conducted in some way by our actions – but there may be both foreseen good consequences and other unforeseen consequences that are deemed far worse.

KK: Yes, I would say that (at least) my animal rights activism or stance on “anti-animal violence,” as well as our relative projects of (post/non-philosophical) science of the non-human and the ensuing politics of anti-capitalist critique of animal exploitation, are enabled by Laruelle’s epistemology rather than his politi-

cal philosophy, including the one treating the animal. Laruelle invites certain responsibility towards the animal, certain protection that becomes the moral duty of humanity, but at the center of this protectionist stance seems to nest the paternalistic anthropocentrism I have spoken of in my previous answers. In that sense he reminds me of Donna Haraway's "anti-animal violence stance," her advocating of affinity with the animal, nonetheless concluding that humanity is endowed with a particular kind of superiority, moral at least, and her argument remains anthropocentric. I think that Derrida is far more radical in his anti-anthropocentrism and vindication of the figure of the animal as the basis of overcoming philosophy's sufficiency and circularity (I am referring to his Cerisy symposium on the animal).

APS: I think for me the concept of violence is often really incoherent or at least slippery within environmentalism and animal ethics. I would like to see much more attention given to the questions of violence (and I know both John and Katerina have given thought to this in different ways and I very much appreciate the centering of suffering in Katerina's work). So I do not quite know how to respond to this. Maybe what Laruelle gives us here is an invitation to do that work when he says ecology may be a way of thinking and not eating. That is, we really do need to take some time to think about violence a great deal more. Why is it that I cannot kill an animal (I do not think anyway), but I am willing to go get my head kicked in or kick in someone else's head at an anti-fascist/anti-police protest? Why do I cry when I see the slaughterhouse, but get excited when I see a crowd of protestors violently turn back the police? Are those affects simply expression of a political metaphysics and so of a kind of determination, or do they speak to a real desire for justice beyond determination (like Benjamin's justice that is necessarily particular)?

LCÓM: Finally, Laruelle frames *The Last Humanity* as a work of "eco-fiction, a new ecologi-

cal science parallel to science-fiction." But might there also be a role for the arts in coming to know the animal in a non-standard way?

APS: Yes, absolutely. There are some really wonderful artists working in this regard and doing very experimental things, though I think I have to speak more about the ecological relationship as such rather than the animal in particular. For someone who has been obsessed with ecology and environmental political activism since I was ten years old, I have a surprising aversion to "nature art" or the valorization of "nature" (it is all a lie and ultimately an entirely colonial fantasy). So what I would love to see is eco-fictions that move beyond the philosophical decision of nature and the city, or the animal and man, and that get real weird. I am talking ketamine weirdness, Sun-Ra as eco-theorist, or just working from the recognition that nature is perverse. I think there are some folks moving in this direction already. In philosophy the recent book by Malcom Ferdinand, *A Decolonial Ecology: A Caribbean Perspective*,⁸ explores different fictive figures in environmental thinking to great effect. The fiction of Jeff VanderMeer, specifically his *Southern Reach* Trilogy,⁹ is really powerful in this regard (and Benjamin J. Robertson's study *None of This Is Normal: The Fiction of Jeff VanderMeer*¹⁰ is a great companion volume). As a side note, the best book in that trilogy, *Annihilation*, has a real hallucinatory feel in its description of a "tower" (which is somehow also a tunnel) that I could not help but think about in the very hallucinatory chapter in *The Last Humanity* entitled "The House of Philosophy Is in Ruins." I also think the experimental music of RRose and Space Afrika does interesting things in this regard sonically.

⁸ Malcom Ferdinand, *Une écologie décoloniale: Penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen* (Paris: Seuil, 2019).

⁹ All three books - *Annihilation*, *Authority*, and *Acceptance* - were published in 2014 by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

¹⁰ Benjamin J. Robertson, *None of This Is Normal: The Fiction of Jeff VanderMeer* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

JÓM: Given my answers above, this possibility of the work being a fiction gives me hope that, along with the rest of NP V, it is performative, taking quantum mechanics, algebra, music, or, here, ecology, only as new alternative models for new non-philosophies. Alas, I fear he has invested so much in quantum mechanics in particular by now that it is indeed being taken as a definitive model (that is why I rarely address NP V in my approach). Of course, I could be wrong and Laruelle is still holding something back from us!

KK: Toward the end of the book, the use of superposition, in understanding, positioning the human and thinking subject with regard to the real of the animal, whereby the two begin to condition one another, is a good starting point for an emancipatory politics of the non-human animal or simply of the animal. Quantum theory enables a “dedoubling” of the generic human subject in its two states - the animal and the rational, without an interrupted continuity. In that sense, there is still potential for a more radical animal politics in that book. As far as art is concerned, I believe in its aspect of performativity (understood non-philosophically) it remains a powerful political tool in the animal liberation struggle.