

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....7

*Daniel A. Finch-Race and Stephanie Posthumus*

Introduction: Developing French Ecocriticism.....9

## Part I Early Modern Economies and Ecologies

*Jeff Persels*

Through a Glass Darkly: Dominion and the French Wars of Religion .....25

*Pauline Goul*

The Vanity of Ecology: Expenditure in Montaigne's Vision of the New World.....43

## Part II Romanticism and Nature; Naturalism and Animality

*Karen F. Quandt*

Victor Hugo and the Politics of Eco-poetics .....61

*Claire Nettleton*

*Fauves* in the *faubourg*: Animal Aesthetics in Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* .....81

## Part III Nineteenth-Century Eco-poetics

*Daniel A. Finch-Race*

Eco-poetic Adventures in Rimbaud's 'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème'.....99

*David E. Evans*

Towards an Eco-poetics of French Free Verse:

Marie Kryszynska's *Rythmes pittoresques* ..... 115

## Part IV Twentieth-Century Ecological Thought

*Teófilo Sanz*

Marguerite Yourcenar's Ecological Thinking: Wilderness,

Place-Connectedness, Biocentrism, and an Ethic of Care ..... 137

<i>Christopher Watkin</i> Michel Serres: From Restricted to General Ecology.....	153
---	-----

## **Part V Millennial Bodies, Origins and Becoming-Milieu**

<i>Jonathan Krell</i> Ecoerotica in Stéphane Audeguy's <i>La Théorie des nuages</i> .....	175
--	-----

<i>Nikolaj Lübecker</i> The Individual as Environment: Watching Jean-Claude Rousseau's <i>La Vallée close</i> with Lucretius and Simondon.....	195
--	-----

## **Part VI Twenty-First Century Natural Limits**

<i>Anaïs Boulard</i> Writing (on) Environmental Catastrophes: The End of the World in Éric Chevillard's <i>Sans l'orang-outan</i> and Michel Houellebecq's <i>La Possibilité d'une île</i> .....	215
---	-----

<i>Hannes De Vriese</i> On the Meaning of Being Alone with Nature: Sylvain Tesson's Ecocritical Sincerity and Eco-poetic Sensuality in <i>Dans les forêts de Sibérie</i> .....	231
--	-----

## **Part VII Horizons and Prospects**

<i>Stephanie Posthumus</i> Engaging with Cultural Differences: The Strange Case of French <i>écocritique</i> .....	253
--	-----

Notes on Contributors.....	275
----------------------------	-----

Index.....	279
------------	-----

Christopher Watkin

## Michel Serres: From Restricted to General Ecology

**Abstract:** Michel Serres's relation to ecocriticism is complex. On the one hand, he is a pioneer in the area, anticipating the current fashion for ecological thought by over a decade. On the other hand, 'ecology' and 'eco-criticism' are singularly infelicitous terms to describe Serres's thinking if they are taken to indicate that attention should be paid to particular 'environmental' concerns. For Serres, such local, circumscribed ideas as 'ecology' or 'ecophilosophy' are one of the causes of our ecological crisis, and no progress can be made while such narrow concerns govern our thinking. This chapter intervenes in the ongoing discussion about the relation of Serres to ecology by drawing on some of Serres's more recent texts on pollution and dwelling, and this fresh material leads us to modulate existing treatments of Serres and ecology. I insist on the inextricability of two senses of ecology in Serres's approach: a broader meaning that refers to the interconnectedness and inextricability of all entities (natural and cultural, material and ideal), and a narrower sense that evokes classically 'environmental' concerns. Serres's recent work leads us to challenge some of the vectors and assumptions of the debate by radicalising the continuity between 'natural' and 'cultural' phenomena, questioning some of the commonplaces that structure almost all ecological thinking, and arguing that the entire paradigm of ecology as 'conservation' and 'protection' is bankrupt and self-undermining. After outlining the shape of Serres's 'general ecology' and its opposition to ecology as conservation, this chapter asks what sorts of practices and values a Serresian general ecology can engender when it considers birdsong, advertising, industrial pollution and money to be manifestations of the same drive for appropriation through pollution. A response is given in terms of three key Serresian motifs: the world as fetish, parasitic symbiosis, and global cosmocracy.

Michel Serres's relation to ecocriticism is complex. On the one hand, he is a pioneer in the area, anticipating the current fashion for ecological thought by over a decade. He was thinking deeply and at length about ecological issues at a time when few others cared to address the subject: 'I was one of the first, if not the first, to make ecology not just a matter of fundamental urgency but above all a philosophical and even metaphysical question.'<sup>1</sup> When we engage with Michel Serres's ecological thought, we are not simply reading a reaction to a recent critical trend, much less jumping on a modish bandwagon. This links to a wider point of crucial

---

1 Michel Serres, *Pantopie: de Hermès à Petite Poucette* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2014), 62 [hereafter *P*; my translation].

importance for understanding Michel Serres as an ecological thinker, since much ecological rhetoric – from philosophers and politicians – is reactive, seeking to respond to changes and problems, always on the back foot, always fighting a losing battle to ‘protect’ and ‘conserve’. Eschewing this responsive paradigm, Serres’s thought offers a larger ecological vision that can set a positive agenda for change. His proactive stance is driven by the question that he chooses to ask: whereas much ecological thought asks the question ‘how?’ (how do we reduce emissions? How should we think of ‘nature’ differently? How do we ‘save the planet?’), Serres insists on the deeper question ‘why?’ – why do we pollute? ‘What do we really want when we dirty the world?’<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, ‘ecology’ and ‘eco-criticism’ are infelicitous terms for describing Serres’s thinking if they are taken to indicate that attention should be paid only to particular objects (trees, animals, rivers) or questions (climate change, deforestation). For Serres, such local, circumscribed ideas as ‘ecology’ or ‘eco-philosophy’ are one of the causes of the ‘ecological crisis’, and no progress can be made while such narrow concerns govern our thinking. His work abounds with themes that would commonly be filed under ‘ecology’, but if he uses the term relatively little in his writing it is because of his fundamental conviction that it is impossible to isolate a set of discrete ideas under this label. As for the ‘criticism’ in ‘eco-criticism’, the notion has a very unfavourable reputation in Serres’s thinking. The academic culture of critique and criticism that produces one commentary after another has become an impotent and stale exercise in repetition,<sup>3</sup> and with *Le Parasite* [*The Parasite*] (1980) Serres turned his back for good on academic criticism and traditional university discourse (*EHP* 98).

Any attempt to evaluate Serres in relation to ecocriticism must therefore find a way to negotiate these two problems, namely that his thought resists becoming narrowly ecological, and that he eschews the culture of critique. If we allow Serres to challenge and rethink what we might mean by ‘ecocriticism’, we find that he provides us with a deep and robust reframing of ecological thought, and a proactive ecological political agenda.

Among the scandalously sparse secondary literature on Serres, ecology is one of the themes that has received a comparatively thorough treatment. As we embark on the current study, it is helpful to survey salient perspectives on his work. Often

- 
- 2 Michel Serres, *Le Mal propre: polluer pour s'approprier?* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2008), 57 [hereafter *LMP*]; *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, trans. by A.-M. Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 40 [hereafter *M*].
  - 3 Michel Serres and Luc Abraham, ‘Un entretien avec Michel Serres’, *Horizons philosophiques* 10.2 (2000), 97–116 (99; 105) [hereafter *EHP*].

at stake in discussions of Serres as an ecological thinker has been the relation between a broad sense of 'ecology' as general interconnectedness of all knowledge and all fields of inquiry, and a more specific sense pertaining specifically to the 'natural' world. This distinction is brought into play by Sydney Lévy in his introduction to a special edition of the journal *SubStance* (1997) on Serres's ecological thinking. Lévy frames his understanding of 'ecology' in terms of Serresian interdisciplinarity, tracing 'local, tenuous, perilous' passages between different fields.<sup>4</sup> Of particular note in the issue is Paul A. Harris's 'The Itinerant Theorist', in which Harris elegantly articulates the broader and narrower senses of ecology in his contention that 'Serres attempts to evoke an intimate, visceral knowledge of nature in order to redefine the nature of knowledge', in what Harris terms a Serresian 'cultural ecology'.<sup>5</sup> Both the natural world and the universe of knowledge are to be thought, analogously, as complex open systems of interconnection that do not sacrifice the empirical and material on the altar of the general and the abstract.

In her doctoral thesis (2003), Stephanie Posthumus evokes the relation between the broader and narrower senses of ecology in her discussion of Serres's ecological thought. She unfolds the broader sense through careful studies of the motifs of structures<sup>6</sup> and *réseaux*<sup>7</sup> [webs] in Serres's thought, arguing that the author of *Le Contrat Naturel* [*The Natural Contract*] (1990) is elaborating his eco-philosophy (in the narrower sense) in terms of his 'vision interconnectée du monde [interconnected vision of the world]';<sup>8</sup> while refusing to identify with narrowly ecological concerns.<sup>9</sup> Making a finer set of distinctions within the two categories of 'broad' and 'narrow' ecologies,<sup>10</sup> Posthumus distinguishes between the academic discourse of 'scientific ecology', the 'ecological consciousness' that names a mere awareness of ecological concerns, and the 'ecologism' that takes action on the basis of those concerns. She further differentiates between the 'ecophilosophy' of Serres's more theoretical texts, the 'ecopoetics' of his treatments of literature, and the 'ecopolitics'

---

4 Sydney Lévy, 'Introduction: An Ecology of Knowledge: Michel Serres', *SubStance* 26.2 (1997), 3–5 (3).

5 Paul A. Harris, 'The Itinerant Theorist: Nature and Knowledge/Ecology and Topology in Michel Serres', *SubStance* 26.2 (1997), 37–58 (39; 44).

6 Stephanie Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie chez Lévi-Strauss, Tournier, Serres' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2003), 71–100.

7 Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie', 186–99.

8 Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie', 194 [unreferenced translations are mine].

9 Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie', 221.

10 The terms 'broad' and 'narrow' are mine, not Posthumus's.

of *The Natural Contract* and *Hominescence*, concluding that the three ecologies are almost impossible to isolate from each other.<sup>11</sup>

In the article ‘Translating Ecocriticism’ (2007), Posthumus develops her Serresian insights, using them to shine a light on some of the shortcomings of anglophone ecocriticism in terms of five themes: ecology; science; nature; language; humanity. Through a threefold insistence on 1) the inextricability of the broader and narrower senses of ecology in Serres’s eco-philosophy, 2) his affirmation of humanism in an ecological context, and 3) the refusal of ecology – in the broader sense – to distinguish between ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ interconnectedness, Posthumus is able to offer Serresian thought as a corrective to some of the more unreflective Romantic sensibilities of anglophone ecocriticism. *The Natural Contract*, she insists, ‘is not a call to get back to nature, to a less technological way of life’,<sup>12</sup> but encompasses a broader idea of ‘living together’<sup>13</sup> in a way that cuts across the nature-culture divide. Serres’s usefulness for ecocriticism, according to Posthumus, is manifold: he offers ‘exactly what a new generation of ecocritics has been looking for as a way to combine both an urbancare and earthcare politics’;<sup>14</sup> his *Grand Récit* [Great Story] of the universe helps us ‘avoid an all or nothing attitude towards scientific discourse’;<sup>15</sup> he helps cultivate scientific literacy within ecocriticism;<sup>16</sup> his rejection of linguistic philosophy and his insistence on the empirically encountered material world offers ecocriticism ‘a foundation for reasserting a materialized language in a literary world’;<sup>17</sup> he helps us think the global ‘without erasing local differences’;<sup>18</sup> he ‘presents us with a field of literary texts that would otherwise be excluded from a strictly nature-oriented ecocritical approach’.<sup>19</sup>

In ‘Vers une écocritique française’ (2011), Posthumus returns to the shortcomings of anglophone ecological thought, the monolingualism of ecocriticism, and its neglect of literature. Setting Serres in opposition to an Anglo-Saxon ‘return to

---

11 Posthumus, ‘La Nature et l’écologie’, 229.

12 Stephanie Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism: Dialoguing with Michel Serres’, *Reconstruction* 7.2 (2007), 37 paragraphs, <<http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/072/posthumus.shtml>> [accessed 27 May 2016], paragraph 11.

13 Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism’, paragraph 12.

14 Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism’, paragraph 12.

15 Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism’, paragraph 17.

16 Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism’, paragraph 18.

17 Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism’, paragraph 28.

18 Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism’, paragraph 35.

19 Posthumus, ‘Translating Ecocriticism’, paragraph 37.

nature<sup>2</sup> – which, Serres insists, would merely spell the victory of town over country<sup>20</sup> – she argues that ecocriticism must be able to yield an ecological politics,<sup>21</sup> which is precisely what Serres's natural contract provides. Once more, she insists that (narrowly) ecological themes cannot adequately be addressed apart from a (broad) ecological way of thinking that embraces all fields of knowledge,<sup>22</sup> and that prevents *The Natural Contract* from being reduced to a thesis on environmentalism.

The present chapter intervenes in this ongoing conversation by bringing some of Serres's more recent texts into the limelight.<sup>23</sup> This fresh material leads us to affirm, and to challenge, existing treatments of Serres and ecology. I affirm the insistence on the inextricability of the narrower and broader senses of 'ecology' (which I call 'restricted' and 'general' ecology) in Serres's approach, but the new material leads me to challenge some of the vectors and assumptions of the debate by radicalising the continuity between 'natural' and 'cultural' phenomena, questioning some of the commonplaces that structure almost all ecological thinking, and arguing that the entire paradigm of ecology as 'conservation' and 'protection' is bankrupt and self-undermining.

## Towards a general ecology

The proposal for a 'natural contract' remains Serres's most widely known contribution to ecological thought, narrowly conceived. Though Serres seeks to avoid the label 'ecological', it is not quite correct to say that the natural contract has nothing to do with ecology. In an interview included in *Pantopie* [*Pantopia*] (2014), he

---

20 Stephanie Posthumus, 'Vers une écocritique française: le contrat naturel de Michel Serres', *Mosaic* 44.2 (2011), 85–100 (88).

21 Posthumus, 'Vers une écocritique française', 90.

22 Posthumus, 'Vers une écocritique française', 91.

23 The discussion will interact mainly with the work usually considered to be Serres's most 'ecological': *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Bourin, 1990) [hereafter *LCN*]. In addition to this common reference, I will explore the impact on the debate around Serres and ecology: *La Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2008) [hereafter *GM*]; *Biogée* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2010) [hereafter *B*]; *Habiter* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2011) [hereafter *H*]. My reflections are informed by interviews in which Serres clarifies his arguments: Michel Serres and *Clés*, 'Michel Serres: "Nous traversons la plus importante mutation depuis la préhistoire!"', *Clés* (2014), <<http://www.cles.com/enquetes/article/michel-serres-nous-traversons-la-plus-importante-mutation-depuis-la-prehistoire>> [accessed 27 May 2016]; Michel Serres and *Pouvoirs*, 'Entretien avec Michel Serres: le droit peut sauver la nature', *Pouvoirs* 127 (2008), 5–12.

expands on his aversion to the ecological in a way that helps us to gain a better appreciation of how he situates his own natural contract:

*You have proposed a 'natural contract'. Was this a foray into ecology [une démarche écologiste] on your part?*

No, certainly not. I have studiously avoided the term. There is a confusion today around the word 'ecology' between its use by politicians and by scientists. In political discourse, ecology is the ethical concern to keep nature – understood as a virgin and wild species – protected against human violation. In science, ecology (*oikos-logos* – knowledge of the milieu, of the habitat) is a different thing altogether. The biologist Ernst Haeckel defined it at the end of the nineteenth century as a very sophisticated science that tries to gather together all the geological, chemical, biological, vegetal and animal interactions that constitute a milieu – for example, the biotope of Mont Ventoux. (P 233–6 [my translation])

The two senses of ecology here are in direct opposition: the first, restricted sense reinforces the dichotomies of a thoroughly human politics and a wild or unkempt nature, or of human environmental damage in opposition to a virgin or unspoiled world; the second sense seeks to find links, dependencies and passages between all of the entities in a given milieu, travelling across dichotomies and back again. While Serres does not write about ecology in the first, restricted sense, his thought is most certainly ecological in the second sense – insisting on links and continuities across apparent divisions and differences.

The most fruitful way to understand Serres's contribution to ecology in the aforementioned narrow, political sense must necessarily pass through his elaboration of an ecology in the broader, scientific sense. I introduce the term 'general ecology' to describe this latter ecology in Serresian thought, proceeding as it does not by drawing distinctions and creating oppositions in the spirit of academic 'criticism', but by seeking translations and equivalences between seemingly disparate areas of thought or domains of existence.

### **Malfeasance: is everything ecological?**

The radical subversion of dichotomies in Serres's general ecology is shown more clearly through specific examples than through abstract discussion, and adopting an approach that foregrounds particular instances of general ecology will help to clarify how Serres forces us to understand the world differently, refusing to set the 'natural' world and human action against each other, and forcing us to revisit aspects of our world and society that we do not commonly associate with ecological concerns. Taking the lead from *Malfeasance*, and incorporating discussions of other key ecological texts, we shall see how Serres frames the phenomenon of pollution not as something utterly foreign and alien to non-human ecology, but as



something fundamentally in continuity with it. If Serres is correct in this regard, we must recognise that the great majority of our environmentalism is built on an assumption that actively hampers clear ecological understanding and intervention.

Serres approaches the phenomenon of pollution not by asking how it can be reduced, but why it is produced. He answers by arguing that it is only one instance of a universal desire, shared by humans and the non-human alike, to occupy space, and to make it unusable by others. Pollution, in short, is a mode of appropriation.<sup>24</sup> Understood as an action that fulfils the desire to occupy space, pollution can be seen alongside other territorial activities that cut across the customary divide between nature and culture: ‘just like animals, we sully the place we want to make into our own nest.’<sup>25</sup> The tiger that urinates to mark its territory is engaging in an action qualitatively equivalent to the multinational corporation dumping its effluent. In micturating on its terrain, the tiger is merely asserting itself as ‘master and possessor’ of its lair (*LMP* 113; *M* 85). Although we have a curious tendency to assume that conventions of property are an exclusively human trait, Serres insists that animals also mark, possess and protect their property and goods (*P* 250).

We may be tempted to dismiss pollution as an unfortunate and avoidable by-product of industrial processes, but Serres insists that to do so is to prevent ourselves from understanding its deep motivation, hence from addressing it in anything but a superficial way. At the very least, Serres is inviting us to reflect on whether we have misunderstood the meaning of pollution:<sup>26</sup>

When rich countries discharge their industrial waste in the mangroves of poor countries, are they not also seizing and re-colonising them? When, on the other hand, inhabitants of a place protest against its designation as a nuclear storage site, do they revolt against a medical risk or against a power exploiting the right to expropriate them? ‘We want to keep our own homes,’ they shout. (*LMP* 67; *M* 48)

Could it not be that in polluting we are exercising that deepest of human (and non-human) desires to appropriate a place in the world, or to appropriate the world itself?

---

24 In common with most Serresian themes, this idea does not emerge *ex nihilo* in its most developed form in *Malfeasance*. It is adumbrated in *Le Parasite* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1980), *Rome: le livre des fondations* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1983) and *Statues: le second livre des fondations* (Paris: Julliard, 1987).

25 Michel Serres, *Rameaux* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2004), 195 [hereafter *R*; my translation].

26 This interrogative mood is indicated by the question mark at the end of the book’s subtitle in English and French (*Le Mal propre: polluer pour approprier?*; *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*). The interrogative is a pedagogic tool, rather than a genuine doubt, as it is clear that Serres sees a Leibnizian translation from pollution to property.

Moving from the 'hard' (physical, material pollution) to the 'soft' (symbolic, informational, linguistic pollution), Serres finds a similar appropriation of space in the cacophony of multiple voices – in the choral hymns of a Greek tragedy, or – to take Steven Connor's example – in the chants and songs of the home fans at an Arsenal football match.<sup>27</sup> In such a sporting context, the noise generated by the crowd acts as a weapon, 'a muniment of din to crush the opposing team',<sup>28</sup> and it is the vocal appropriation of space – more than the geographical location of the turf – that makes the fixture a 'home' tie. In this aggressive occupation of space, the baying crowd is obeying precisely the same logic as the songbird's chirping (*P* 249–50) – likewise a strategy to occupy space – or the sound of a noisy aeroplane, car or motorbike that rings out victory over the space that is occupied (*LMP* 57; *M* 40). In both 'hard' and 'soft' ways, pollution is the signature of the will to power (*LMP* 92; *M* 68).

Serres discerns another common structure between 'natural' and 'cultural' appropriations of space in his comparison between advertising campaigns and epidemics, both of which function as 'machines à fabriquer de l'invasion [invasion-making machines]' (*B* 96) that spread 'virally'. Corporations mark their products in the form of logos and brand names, harnessing all their consumers as willing co-workers charged with scattering their symbolic ordure (*LMP* 37–8; *M* 25) to demarcate their territory. As much as any form of pollution, advertising is about appropriating space – a point that Serres makes through rewriting Jean-Jacques Rousseau's quotation on the origin of civil society:

The first one who, once he had measured out a plot, bought it to besmirch it with his brand so that it proclaimed: 'this is mine and I am the best', and who in fact found people naive enough to let him steal their view, and become his slaves, invented advertising. (*LMP* 70; *M* 50 [translation altered])

The paradigm of appropriation through pollution is also found in the 'golden excrement' of money – a proxy pollutant that serves to appropriate territory and goods just as effectively as sully them (*LMP* 66–7; *M* 48). For Serres, 'the polluter pays' is an evident tautology, mirroring the equivalence of money and excrement (*LMP* 67; *M* 48) found in Freud's discussion of the anal stage of development (*EP* 9). In the case of the carbon tax, a polluting appropriation covers and doubles another in a seamless emphasis: polluter pollutes.

---

27 Steven K. Connor, 'Play Grounds: The Arenas of Game', *StevenConnor.com* (13 February 2008), <<http://stevenconnor.com/playgrounds.html>> [accessed 27 May 2016]; *A Philosophy of Sport* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 57.

28 Connor, 'Play Grounds'; *A Philosophy of Sport*, 60.

The same logic of appropriation through pollution similarly obtains in the 'soft' realm of language. Writing one's signature is a way of sullyng – thus taking ownership of – a document or page, and language more broadly is a means of appropriation: 'can I now say, describe, show what I perceive? No; I have no language at my disposal to do this because all languages come from the networks through which I perceive the so-called real, and that prove there is nothing that cannot be said' (*LMP* 101; *M* 75). Pollution slips easily from the field to the book, from the hard to the soft, from the *pagus* – into which excrement is turned by the ploughing of oxen – to the *pagina* whose parallel lines of text mimic the agricultural furrow (*LMP* 35–6; *M* 23).

Serres also sees a continuity between pollution and phenomenology. The presuppositions in terms of which we perceive the world are sophisticated strategies of appropriation (*LMP* 100), what in another discourse might be called confirmation bias or the minimisation of cognitive dissonance. Thinking that we see and understand things directly, what we encounter is already polluted as it passes through a series of appropriation strategies, such that one is unable to describe that which does not or cannot be appropriated by anyone (*LMP* 102). Serres draws a direct analogy between meaning and pollution when he claims that 'by splashing about in this foul rubbish of meaning, we appropriate the world' (*B* 166 [my translation]).

In all of these examples of appropriation through pollution, Serres insists on the continuities between the 'natural' and the 'cultural'. There is no fundamental division between the 'hard' and the 'soft', no original dichotomy between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' pollution (though such a distinction can of course be introduced later): 'the spit soils the soup, the logo the object, the signature the page: property, propriety, or cleanness. The same word tells of the same struggle; in French, it has the same origin and the same meaning' (*LMP* 11; *M* 3). The dog that barks, the nightingale that sings, the deer that bellows, the hunter who sounds the horn, the lecherous voyeur who whistles at a woman, the company that buys advertising to brag about its products, the warring army, the writer, the perceiver of the world – each is seeking to extend its territory; everyone is urinating in the swimming pool (*LMP* 59; *M* 42).

It could well be objected that Serres is mixing apples and oranges: advertising and brand names are not threatening to destroy the earth; the circulation of money does not pose an immediate ecological danger; the chants of a football crowd do no physical harm; the chirping of songbirds precipitates no ecological crisis. So, why try to argue that they are manifestations of the same phenomenon? What is to be gained, practically speaking, by grouping all these disparate behaviours together under the banner of appropriation through pollution? The reply is quite simply that we cannot understand what motivates, or what is at stake in,

actions and behaviours which are ‘destroying the earth’ until we allow ourselves to see them in their non-atomised context. The desire to treat narrowly ecological questions without reference to any of these other phenomena is an instance of the partial thinking that insists on separating the ‘natural’ from the ‘cultural’, preventing us from asking the ‘why?’ behind the ‘how?’, and from discerning the links that would help us to understand – thus to respond to – ecological questions more adequately. Serres laments that ‘we deal with pollution only in physical, quantitative terms, that is by means of the hard sciences. Well no, what is at stake here are our intentions, decisions and conventions. In short, our cultures’ (*LMP* 87–8; *M* 63).

If we follow Serres in making these links across natural and cultural boundaries, we must acknowledge that polluting behaviour is an extension of patterns and ways of acting to be found in the ‘natural’ world, not something monstrously unnatural that threatens to destroy the pristine ‘natural’ patterns upon which it supervenes. It is important to note that for Serres ‘nature’ does not mean that which ‘given’ as opposed to artificial or constructed. In *Rameaux [Palm Sunday]* (2004), he explains: ‘how to define it? By its original sense: what was being born, what is born, what will be born; that is, a narrative of newborn events’ (*R* 134 [my translation]). Serres evokes birth as a figure of the new, as opposed to a linear continuation of a pre-existing story. That which is born departs from the predictable ‘format’ to introduce a new chapter such as the emergence of life on Earth. Within this frame, we might reasonably conclude that pollution could constitute just as decisive an event in the narrative of the world – or of a particular ecosystem – as the emergence of life itself. By this definition, it is far from clear that pollution is unnatural; there is nothing more natural than pollution.<sup>29</sup> The importance of this realisation is that, if true, the entire paradigm of ecology as ‘conservation’ and ‘protection’ is exposed as bankrupt, for it arbitrarily seeks to protect certain manifestations of the very same behaviours that it is militating to exclude. Ecology pursued on this basis undermines its own justification.

## Practising general ecology

Serres’s exposure of the self-undermining nature of ecology as conservation leaves open the question of a more adequate ecological paradigm. In the light of Serres’s general ecology, we must strongly resist the mistaken notion that ‘nature’ is something ‘other’ to be protected. We must stop seeing pollution as a purely human destruction of a purely natural world. But what must we think and do instead? We

---

29 I am grateful to Stephanie Posthumus for highlighting Serres’s insistence on understanding nature in terms of birth (*naissance; naître*).

need better environmental imperatives than to protect and conserve, but what are they? What sort of ecology (in the narrow sense of the term) can arise if the very divisions between the natural and cultural, between the subject and the object, are contested? What imperatives can an ecology engender when birdsong, advertising, industrial pollution and money are considered to be manifestations of the same drive for appropriation through pollution? Serres has much to say on these questions, and the forthcoming section proposes to bridge the gap between the aforementioned principals of general ecology, and a specific, determined set of ecological practices. This bridge is tripartite, highlighting three important motifs in Serres's thought that take us from the fact of general ecology to its behavioural and institutional outworking.

### The world as fetish

The first important move in the practice of general ecology is to replace the artificial dyads of nature/culture and subject/object with the subtler notion of the fetish. Serres derives his notion of the fetish from Auguste Comte's evocation of Earth as the *Grande-Fétiche* [Great Fetish] in *Synthèse subjective* [*Subjective Synthesis*] (1856), and he uses it to describe the current relation between humanity and the world, where a fetish is understood as an idol made by human hands that is invested with a transcendent power (*H* 169). In the case of the world as fetish, the stakes are higher. It is not at all Serres's claim that we invest the world with some spiritual or religious power, but that we depend upon the world: it is our condition of possibility. Nor is Serres suggesting that the world in its brute materiality is a human artefact. Such a patent falsity, he hastens to point out, was never the claim in relation to the fetish. Fetishists did not create the block of marble or the log of wood from which they carve their idols any more than we created rocks and the soil (*P* 269). When Serres says that the world is a fetish, he means that we depend upon it, it depends upon us (*LCN* 51),<sup>30</sup> and we produce that which produces us. This change has a subtle but very important consequence: if we depend upon the things that depend upon us, the concept of 'us' itself is necessarily changed (*RH* 141). Is it not just as appropriate, Serres wonders in *L'Incandescent* [*The Incandescent*] (2003), to say 'we are raining' as 'it is raining'?<sup>31</sup> To whom or to what should we attribute the weather when culture is natural, and nature is cultural?

The strength of fetishism as a notion for comprehending our current relation to the habitable world is that it understands the fetish-maker and the fetish as both

---

30 See also Michel Serres, *Récits d'humanisme* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2006), 138 [hereafter *RH*].

31 Michel Serres, *L'Incandescent* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2003), 338–9 [hereafter *Inc*].

subject and object.<sup>32</sup> In other words, humanity is changed by its new relation to the world just as much as the world itself is transformed. Having treated the world as an object, we find ourselves to be its objects,<sup>33</sup> and we have also become our own fetishes, bringing about our own birth through the intermediary of the world that depends upon us: *homo causa sui*.<sup>34</sup> Just like the natural world, the human is no longer (indeed, never was) something that is given, but rather something that is constructed by our thoughts and actions (*Hom* 24), as well as by the world upon which we depend: ‘we are our own ancestors, Adam and Eve, through the intermediary of the Earth and of life, which we mold almost at our leisure.’<sup>35</sup> Our mastery of DNA and the atomic bomb put our birth and death in our hands, and having become our own handiwork we are no longer the same (*P* 204; see also *R* 40). Serres names this complex intertwining of dependency and agency *natura sive homines* (*E* 256; *C* 176).

Serres’s insistence on the world as fetish is related to, but goes beyond, the notion of the Anthropocene as defined by the Anthropocene Working Group<sup>36</sup> of the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy.<sup>37</sup> The Anthropocene is – if a

---

32 In this respect, it bears affinities with his notion of the quasi-object that is elaborated in *Le Parasite* and elsewhere. The quasi-object, Serres stresses, is also a quasi-subject, and fits comfortably into neither category (objectivity or subjectivity). The quasi-object is also a quasi-subject because it designates a subject that would not be a subject without it. *Le Parasite*, 302; *The Parasite*, trans. by L. R. Schehr (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 225. When Serres evokes the relation between humanity and the world, he prefers Comte’s notion of fetishism, rather than the quasi-object. The fetish foregrounds the dialectic of creation (the created creates its creator) in a way that, while not necessarily absent from the quasi-object, is not emphasised. While it is conceivable for a quasi-object to be ‘natural’ and unmade, manufacture of some description is indispensable to the notion of the fetish.

33 Michel Serres, *Hominescence* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2001), 214 [hereafter *Hom*].

34 Michel Serres, ‘Le Temps humain: de l’évolution créatrice au créateur d’évolution’, in *Qu’est-ce que l’humain?*, ed. by P. Picq, M. Serres and J.-D. Vincent (Paris: Le Pommier, 1999), 71–108 (107).

35 Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Éclaircissements: cinq entretiens avec Bruno Latour* (Paris: Bourin, 1992), 255 [hereafter *E*]; *Conversations on Culture, Science and Time*, trans. by R. Lapidus (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 176 [hereafter *C*].

36 Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy, ‘Working Group on the ‘Anthropocene’’, *quaternary.stratigraphy.org* (23 February 2016), <<http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/workinggroups/anthropocene>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

37 Colin N. Waters, et al., ‘The Anthropocene Is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene’, *Science* 351.6269 (8 January 2016), <<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/351/6269/aad2622>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

little homophonous wordplay might be permitted – anthropocentric because it registers only one direction of influence: human beings are changing the earth and the climate. The idea of the fetish, by contrast, acknowledges the mutual influence of world and humanity on each other. Nor is Serres's recuperation of Comte's *Grand-Fétiche* to be confused with James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis.<sup>38</sup> The grave error of this latter hypothesis, Serres argues, is to treat the earth as a living entity, whereas life is defined by reproduction (*P* 278). The earth has no offspring, thus it is not alive. Serres considers that the intentionality and teleology ascribed to the world in the Gaia hypothesis is naive and unscientific – an opinion that he makes very clear in response to a direct question about Bruno Latour's Gifford Lectures on 'Facing Gaia' (2013): 'I recognise, of course, that the earth, considered as a whole, possesses certain characteristics of life – self-regulation, in particular – but that is where it stops. The earth does not evolve in the Darwinian sense of the term' (*P* 274–5 [my translation]).<sup>39</sup> Serres is a little hasty in his criticism of Latour, since the latter explicitly distances himself from Lovelock's description of Gaia as a 'living organism',<sup>40</sup> reading the ascription of life and intentionality to the planet as an analogue of Louis Pasteur's hesitant granting of agency to bacteria in *Les Microbes organisés* (1878). In 'The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia', the third of his Gifford lectures in Edinburgh (21 February 2013), Latour frames his acceptance of the agency of Gaia with the acknowledgment that 'the philosophy of biology has never stopped borrowing its metaphors from the social realm',<sup>41</sup> and he is explicit in stating that 'it is not that Gaia is some "sentient being" but that the concept of "Gaia" captures the distributed intentionality of all the agents

---

38 James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

39 The fetish is conspicuously absent from Latour's writings on ecological themes, including the French version of his six Gifford lectures on 'Facing Gaia' (University of Edinburgh, 18–28 February 2013), in which Gaia is constructed not as a fetish but as a collective term for a distributed proliferation of agencies. 'Facing Gaia: A New Enquiry into Natural Religion', *University of Edinburgh* (18–28 February 2013), <<http://www.ed.ac.uk/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour>> [accessed 27 May 2016]; *Face à Gaïa: huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).

40 Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia*, xvi.

41 Bruno Latour, 'The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia', *University of Edinburgh* (21 February 2013), <<http://www.ed.ac.uk/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour/lecture-three>> [accessed 27 May 2016], 34:41–7.

that are modifying their surroundings to suit themselves better.<sup>42</sup> Latour is not suggesting that the Earth can reproduce itself, nor that we understand it as living in a straightforwardly biological sense. Though Serres's criticism of Gaia rings true for Lovelock, it rings hollow for Latour.

Fetishism undermines the dichotomy between the given and the constructed, hence the artificial division between manipulation and conservation/protection. There can thus be no self-coherent minimalist or non-interventionist environmentalism. To withdraw from the world is not to preserve its purity, naturalness or sacredness, but to draw an arbitrary line between some actions of appropriation through pollution, and others. Furthermore, there never was a nature that was free from the impositions and manipulations of culture because human culture is an excrescence of natural rhythms.

## Symbiosis

If the condition of the world as fetish means that it is no longer possible to try to 'conserve' or 'protect', we must modulate the way in which we conceive our relation with the world, moving from a moribund host dying at the hands of its insatiable parasite to one of parasitic symbiosis. We must understand that the change of outlook that Serres is pressing on us is no trivial or obvious one. The paradigm of symbiosis stretches wide and deep, challenging some of our deep assumptions and predispositions. Serres argues in conversation with Latour that the approach of seeking to 'cure' or 'eradicate' cancer is misguided:

We must always reformulate this question: What is an enemy, who is he to us, and how must we deal with him? Another way to put it, for example, is: What is cancer? – a growing collection of malignant cells that we must at all costs expel, excise, reject? Or something like a parasite, with which we must negotiate a contract of symbiosis? I lean toward the second solution, as life itself does. (*E* 281; *C* 195)

Rather than seeking to eliminate cancer, Serres wagers, we will find a way to 'profit from its dynamism', to live with it in a parasitically symbiotic relation. Similarly, he warns that if we try to eradicate a microbe, it will mutate as many times as necessary, and kill ten great-grandchildren of the child whom we inoculate against it (*B* 146). It would be better to seek to understand how it receives, stores, processes and emits information, in order to find a mutually beneficial symbiosis. Like all diplomacy, such an approach must begin by learning to speak the language of the other.

---

42 Bruno Latour, 'The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia', 40:26–43.



This example from pathology hopefully suffices to show that Serres's symbiosis is not a 'motherhood and apple pie' response to the environmental crisis, and is no trivial or 'common sense' paradigm to embrace. It will doubtless raise the objection in the minds of some readers that symbiosis forecloses any possibility of radical, contestatory or disruptive politics. Does symbiosis mean that we are to find a way to live together with, say, racist ideologies and oppression? Where is the possibility for dissent in a system where we seek a way to live together with every enemy, however objectionable? Surely, are there not times when we need to oppose and eradicate? There are, indeed, and symbiosis radically undercuts such objectionable ideologies. To find out how this is the case, we need to turn to the third of the three Serresian motifs that will help us cross the bridge from general ecology to determinate ecological policy: the motif of cosmocracy.

### **From multinational democracy to global cosmocracy**

On a collective level, the paradigm of parasitic symbiosis needs to be accompanied by what Serres calls a new cosmocracy. The old politics was, as its etymology suggests, an irreducibly urban affair at a time when the *polis* could rule the *pagus* as the subject to its object. Today, we no longer live in the same sort of city – one that can separate itself from the earth surrounding and sustaining it – and a new *polis* comes with the need for a new politics. One feature of the new politics offered by Serres is the end of relations of tribal belonging or group affiliation (*appartenance*), in favour of a double affirmation of universality and singularity. The old politics entailed a series of necessary affiliations – to family; to village and community; to nation – facilitated by the difficulty of connecting over distance with people who do not share one's affiliations. The political paradigm of this period was citizenship: affiliation to a particular, geographically determined collective with its own structures and laws. Today, Serres argues, affiliation is on the wane, and it has been overtaken by an increasingly aggressive affirmation of individuality, and a growing sense of the universal, of humanity as a whole beyond its local affiliations (*P* 229–30). It is a change facilitated by the triviality and ubiquity of information storage and retrieval, and by the ease of connecting almost any individual on the planet with any other in a virtual space that does not obey geometric boundaries (*GM* 165–6). This dual affirmation of individuality and universality has come to fruition in the twentieth century, with the increased assertion of individual identity over corporate affiliation, and the increased awareness of humanity as a whole, as well as of the world as a contemplable whole. The new politics is not one of citizens or states, but of

individuals who know themselves to be part of humanity; not of the general, but of the singular and the universal.

The simultaneous emergence of a growing sense of human universality, and a growing individualistic resistance to group affiliations, opens the way for what Serres calls a new 'cosmocrazy' – a political system that seeks to cultivate peace between humanity and the environment in the same way that current democracies seek to preserve peace among the citizens of a nation (*LMP* 98). Cosmocrazy is a political system in which not only human interests are represented (as in democracy) – a system that finds a way of formally incorporating the interests of non-human actors in the political process.<sup>43</sup> Cosmocrazy is a truly global politics, and Serres takes care to distinguish it from the current multinational system that obeys the old paradigm of affiliation. On a number of occasions, he recounts the time that he encountered Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations (1992–6). Serres, asking about the possibility of the organisation performing the function of a world assembly, found himself corrected by the Egyptian diplomat: 'it is not a "global assembly"; it is an "international assembly" where each civil servant is present to defend the interests of his government against the interests of the government facing him across the table. So, kiss goodbye to the world!' (*P* 262 [my translation]). Boutros-Ghali could find no one to talk to him about air or water as such, for everyone responded that their role

---

43 Serres's cosmocrazy bears close affinities to Bruno Latour's 'parlement des choses [parliament of things]'; an idea that can be traced in Latour's work as far back as *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* [*We Have Never Been Modern*] (1991). Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), 197. An important distinction can be made between the two along the lines of the difference between Anglo-Saxon democratic politics and the French Republican model. Latour's parliament of things is an extension of representative democracy: each human and non-human 'concern' receives political representation in the parliament. Serres's emphasis, by contrast, is not on the communitarian notion of each interest group receiving its voice at the table, but on the commonality of all the members of the cosmocrazy. It is precisely the sort of tribal belongings and group affiliations perpetuated (if not fostered) by Latour's parliament of things that are challenged by the universalism of the Serresian cosmocrazy: members of a cosmocrazy do not seek representation for their particular lobby or set of concerns; their concern is for the whole. Serres's twin prongs of individualism and universalism stand in contrast to Latour's gathering of 'concerns', which remain instances of Serres's unfavoured notion of *appartenance*. For a clarification of the difference between republicanism and democracy in this context, see Jules Régis Debray, 'Êtes-vous démocrate ou républicain?', *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1308 (30 November 1989), 115–21.

was to represent the interests of their own government (*EP* 22). Serres concludes that there can never be an intergovernmental solution to environmental problems because the international system is based on affiliation, predisposing everybody to ignore global concerns (*EP* 22). The UN remains an institution of affiliations, resistant to the emergent twin values of individuality and universality.

Far from thwarting political engagement, the twin affirmation of individuality and universality provides Serres with a powerful set of political tools. Let us consider the example of racist ideology that was raised as a potential objection to Serresian symbiosis at the end of the previous section. Racism is the very definition of an ideology of belonging (as opposed to one of universality), creating local groups of affiliation and setting them against each other in just the way that Serres condemns the multinationalism of the United Nations. Racism has no place in his cosmocracy. How does racism differ from the cancer with which Serres seeks to live in symbiosis? In the following way: the equivalence is not between cancer and racism, but between human death caused by cancer and racism. Serres does not argue, let us remember, that we should let cancer ravage the human population on the basis that it has as much of a right to exist as we have. Symbiosis is not a *laissez-faire* policy of 'live and let live', but an intricate, high-stakes game of diplomacy that must serve the interests of both parties. Just as Serres's symbiotic response to cancer is one in which it no longer kills people, but has its energy harvested in productive and beneficial ways, so a symbiotic response to the curse of racism would be to identify and redirect the lust for affiliation and domination that lies at its heart.

In place of the outdated assumptions and institutions that underlie the current resistance to a new politics, Serres offers at the end of *L'Incandescent* a thought-experiment that he entitles 'Appel aux universités pour un savoir commun' ['Call to Universities for a Common Knowledge'] (*Inc* 407–8), to which he appends the outline of a curriculum for the first year of university studies (*Inc* 409–10). The proposal is built on the twin observations that the hard sciences have attained a level of general acceptance transcending national affiliation (universality), and that world cultures form a mosaic tapestry of diverse forms and colours (individuality). It is important to point out that the suggestion is not to create an international monoculture, but to bring together the multicoloured Harlequin of culture and the monochrome Pierrot of the sciences in the same curriculum. Nor is Serres calling for the homogenisation of education, since one third of the curriculum in his plan for the first year remains dedicated to the individual student's speciality. The innovation of the curriculum is that it marries specialisation with the sort of cross-disciplinary training characteristic of Serres's 'tiers-instruit

[troubadour of knowledge]’ (*GM* 158) – a formation that would forestall the mutual suspicion and rivalry between academic disciplines, which merely mimics the competition between national interests in current multinational institutions. It would, furthermore, be a global curriculum taught in academic institutions across the world – a feature that reflects the emergence of the new universality, replacing Neolithic affiliations.

Only one who is educated in the sciences, humanities and arts can respond adequately to an ecological crisis that knows no boundaries between the natural and the cultural. Only such an individual would be ready to embrace Serres’s proposal for a global (as opposed to multinational) institution – an assembly that he playfully names *WAFLE* (Water, Air, Fire, Life, Earth), at which non-human interests would be represented alongside those of humanity. Such an assembly is, Serres freely admits, a utopian proposal in the context of contemporary politics ruled by the logic of affiliation. But, taken together with his proposal for a new curriculum, it presents a concrete political vision that takes seriously the inextricability of nature and culture in general ecology, and the twin assertions of universality and individuality at the expense of local affiliations.

## References

- Connor, Steven K., *A Philosophy of Sport* (London: Reaktion, 2011).
- , ‘Play Grounds: The Arenas of Game’, *StevenConnor.com* (13 February 2008), <<http://stevenconnor.com/playgrounds.html>> [accessed 27 May 2016].
- Debray, Jules Régis, ‘Êtes-vous démocrate ou républicain?’, *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1308 (30 November 1989), 115–21.
- Harris, Paul A., ‘The Itinerant Theorist: Nature and Knowledge/Ecology and Topology in Michel Serres’, *SubStance* 26.2 (1997), 37–58.
- Latour, Bruno, *Face à Gaïa: huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).
- , ‘Facing Gaia: A New Enquiry into Natural Religion’, *University of Edinburgh* (18–28 February 2013), <<http://www.ed.ac.uk/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour>> [accessed 27 May 2016].
- , *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes: essai d’anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997).
- , ‘The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaïa’, *University of Edinburgh* (21 February 2013), <<http://www.ed.ac.uk/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour/lecture-three>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

- Lévy, Sydney, 'Introduction: An Ecology of Knowledge: Michel Serres', *SubStance* 26.2 (1997), 3–5.
- Lovelock, James, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- Posthumus, Stephanie, 'La Nature et l'écologie chez Lévi-Strauss, Tournier, Serres' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2003).
- , 'Translating Ecocriticism: Dialoguing with Michel Serres', *Reconstruction* 7.2 (2007), 37 paragraphs, <<http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/072/posthumus.shtml>> [accessed 27 May 2016].
- , 'Vers une écocritique française: le contrat naturel de Michel Serres', *Mosaïq* 44.2 (2011), 85–100.
- Serres, Michel, *Biogée* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2010).
- , *Habiter* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2011).
- , *Hominescence* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2001).
- , *La Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2008).
- , *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Bourin, 1990).
- , *Le Mal propre: polluer pour s'approprier?* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2008).
- , *Le Parasite* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1980).
- , 'Le Temps humain: de l'évolution créatrice au créateur d'évolution', in *Qu'est-ce que l'humain?*, ed. by P. Picq, M. Serres and J.-D. Vincent (Paris: Le Pommier, 1999), 71–108.
- , *L'Incandescent* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2003).
- , *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, trans. by A.-M. Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).
- , *Pantopie: de Hermès à Petite Poucette* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2014).
- , *Rameaux* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2004).
- , *Récits d'humanisme* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2006).
- , *Rome: le livre des fondations* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1983).
- , *Statues: le second livre des fondations* (Paris: Julliard, 1987).
- , *The Parasite*, trans. by L. R. Schehr (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- , and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Culture, Science and Time*, trans. by R. Lapidus (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).
- , and Bruno Latour, *Éclaircissements: cinq entretiens avec Bruno Latour* (Paris: Bourin, 1992).

- , and *Clés*, ‘Michel Serres: “Nous traversons la plus importante mutation depuis la préhistoire!”’, *Clés* (2014), <<http://www.cles.com/enquetes/article/michel-serres-nous-traversons-la-plus-importante-mutation-depuis-la-prehistoire>> [accessed 27 May 2016].
- , and Luc Abraham, ‘Un entretien avec Michel Serres’, *Horizons philosophiques* 10.2 (2000), 97–116.
- , and *Pouvoirs*, ‘Entretien avec Michel Serres: le droit peut sauver la nature’, *Pouvoirs* 127 (2008), 5–12.
- Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, ‘Working Group on the ‘Anthropocene’’, *quaternary.stratigraphy.org* (23 February 2016), <<http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/workinggroups/anthropocene>> [accessed 27 May 2016].
- Waters, Colin N., et al., ‘The Anthropocene Is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene’, *Science* 351.6269 (8 January 2016), <<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/351/6269/aad2622>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

## Notes on Contributors

ANAÏS BOULARD holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the Université d'Angers, at which she teaches classes on French grammar and Comparative Literature. Her work focusses on images of destruction, pollution and catastrophes in the Anthropocene in contemporary French and North American fiction. She is a member of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment), EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and the ÉcoLitt research programme (Université d'Angers), which explores interactions between literature and environments in non-anglophone literature.

HANNES DE VRIESE holds a PhD in French Literature (Université de Toulouse – Jean Jaurès; Universiteit Gent), and teaches at the Université de Toulouse. His research interests include ecocriticism, ecopoetics, literary geography, and the notion of the landscape in contemporary Caribbean and European literature. He has published several articles and book chapters on Claude Simon, Patrick Chamoiseau, Daniel Maximin, and Jean-Loup Trassard.

DAVID EVANS is Reader in French at the University of St Andrews. He works on nineteenth-century poetry, and is the author of *Rhythm, Illusion and the Poetic Idea* (Rodopi, 2004) and *Théodore de Banville* (Legenda, 2014). With Kate Griffiths, he co-edited *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture* (Rodopi, 2008) and *Institutions and Power in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture* (Rodopi, 2011). He is one of the General Editors of *Forum for Modern Language Studies*.

DANIEL FINCH-RACE, having taught French and Italian at the University of Cambridge in addition to completing his PhD at Trinity College (2012–15), is Teaching Fellow in French Studies at the University of Southampton during 2016–17. His research primarily entails ecocritical interpretations of nineteenth-century poetry. His explorations of Baudelaire, Dante, Rimbaud, Tennyson, and Verlaine appear in *Dix-Neuf*, *French Studies Bulletin*, *Green Letters*, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *Modern Language Review*, *Romance Studies*, and two edited volumes (*Matters of Time*; *Textures*). In 2015, he co-edited *Textures* (Lang) with Jeff Barda, and an ecocritical issue of *Dix-Neuf* with Julien Weber.

PAULINE GOUL is a PhD candidate in Romance Studies at Cornell University. She works at the intersection of ecocriticism and French Renaissance Studies,

developing a doctoral thesis about the notion of an 'ecology of waste' in the context of the colonisation of the New World in the sixteenth century, with reference to the works of François Rabelais, Michel de Montaigne, André Thevet and Jacques Cartier. Her research on Le Corbusier, the zero waste movement, and the environment of Rabelais' *Quart Livre* has been published in *Forum for Modern Languages Studies* (2014) and in *Global Garbage* (Routledge, 2016).

JONATHAN KRELL is Professor of French at the University of Georgia, USA. His current research focusses on the contemporary French novel and its relationship to the environment; previous publications centred on myth criticism. He is the author of *The Ogre's Progress* (University of Delaware Press, 2009) and *Tournier élémentaire* (Purdue University Press, 1994), and has translated Michel Tournier's *Le Miroir des idées* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998) and *Eléazar* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

NIKOLAJ LÜBECKER is Associate Professor of French at St John's College, University of Oxford. He has published three monographs: *The Feel-Bad Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015) examines the role of unpleasure in the work of directors such as Claire Denis, Lars von Trier, Gus Van Sant, Lucile Hadžihalilović, Brian de Palma, Bruno Dumont and Harmony Korine; *Community, Myth and Recognition* (Continuum, 2009) analyses different conceptualisations of community in texts by André Breton, Georges Bataille, Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes; *Le Sacrifice de la sirène* (Museum Tusulanum, 2003) considers the relation between poetry and politics in Stéphane Mallarmé's writings.

CLAIRE NETTLETON (Pomona College) is a specialist in French decadent literature, animal studies, and the visual arts. She has published in *Antennae* (2013), *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* (2014), and a special issue of *Dix-Neuf* on ecopoetics (2015). Her book manuscript, adapted from her doctoral thesis at the University of Southern California, is entitled *The Artist as Animal in Nineteenth-Century France*.

JEFF PERSELS is Associate Professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of South Carolina. He has edited, co-edited and contributed to volumes on early modern scatology, theatre and ecocriticism, and authored a number of related articles. He is currently completing a book project on the ludic qualities of sixteenth-century French vernacular religious polemic.

STEPHANIE POSTHUMUS is Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at McGill University. Working in the field of contemporary French literature, she has published numerous articles on philosophies



of nature and ecology, and on representations of landscapes, environments and non-human animals. Her book *French 'Écocritique': Reading Contemporary French Fiction and Theory Ecologically* is forthcoming with University of Toronto Press. With Louisa Mackenzie, she co-edited *French Thinking about Animals* (Michigan State University Press, 2015).

KAREN QUANDT (PhD Princeton University, 2011) is Assistant Professor of French in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Delaware. Aside from the aesthetics of landscapes and intersections between poetry, music and painting, she researches ecocritical approaches to nineteenth-century French art and literature. She has published articles and book chapters on connections between Hugo and Delacroix, Lamartine and the art of poetry, Hugo and the ecogarden, and Baudelaire and pollution. She is working on a monograph about Victor Hugo and the poetry of nature.

TEO SANZ is a musicologist, Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the Universidad de Burgos, and Vice-President of AICL (Association Internationale de la Critique Littéraire). He is a member of EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment), GIECO (Grupo de Investigación en Ecocrítica, Instituto Franklin-UAH) and SIEY (Société Internationale d'Études Yourcenariennes). His research chiefly focusses on ecocriticism, Marguerite Yourcenar, and relations between music and literature. He is the author of *Música y literatura* (Universidad de Burgos, 1999) and *Cómo leer a Marguerite Yourcenar* (Júcar, 1991).

DR CHRISTOPHER WATKIN is Senior Lecturer in French Studies at Monash University, Australia. His research interrogates fundamental positions and assumptions in contemporary French thought, including questions about God, humanity and philosophy. His most recent books are *Difficult Atheism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011) and *French Philosophy Today* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), and he has published articles on a range of recent and contemporary thinkers, including Alain Badiou, Roland Barthes, Jean-Luc Nancy, Quentin Meillassoux, Jacques Rancière, Paul Ricoeur, and Michel Serres. He is currently completing the first comprehensive English-language introduction to Michel Serres's thought and writing.