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Source: *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 48, No. 4, Special Issue: The Rhetorical Contours of Recognition (2015), pp. 428-442
Published by: Penn State University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/philrhet.48.4.0428

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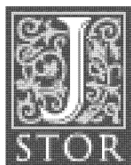

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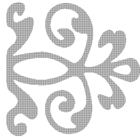

# The Rhetorics of Recognition in Geontopower

*Elizabeth A. Povinelli*

ABSTRACT

This article examines the rhetorics of recognition in postclimate change political theory. As the future of human life—or a human way of life—is put under pressure from the heating of the planet, critical theory has increasingly leveled the ontological distinctions among biological, geological, and meteorological existents, and a posthuman critique is giving way to a postliving critique and biopower is giving way to geontopower. Building on my recent reflections on geontopower, I explore how critical theory is absorbing nonliving existents into late liberal forms of democracy, focusing more specifically on the *logos*-oriented model of Jacques Rancière and post-Deleuzean vitalist oriented models.

KEYWORDS: late liberalism, recognition, dissensus, object-oriented ontology, vitalism

## THE RHETORICS OF RECOGNITION IN GEONTOPOWER

Let me assert the following, in order to explore a question that, if the assertion is correct, will center the political theory of late liberalism in the coming decades: for a long time, and perhaps still now, many have believed that Western Europe spawned and then spread globally a regime of power best described as biopolitics—we all know what that entails, governance through life rather than over death. But is this the formation of power that we face today? Does the concept of biopower give us the most productive analytical/political concepts to make sense of what is now all around us but

*Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2015
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outside our field of vision? The meteorological age of climate change, the geological age of the Anthropocene: have we been so busy with the figures, twists, and turns of the tactics of biopolitics that we have not noticed that at the edges of biopower we are beginning to see the braces that have been holding it in place but are now giving way? It is my assertion that our allegiance to the concept of biopower is hiding and revealing another problematic—a formation for want of a better term I am calling *geontological* power. Geontological power does not operate through the governance of life and the tactics of death but through the maintenance of the self-evident distinction between life and nonlife.

To be clear, the maintenance of this distinction revolves not only around that which had life but is now deprived of it but also that which never was alive in the first place, the undead, the geological. Within the sovereign order of substances lies a crucial division between those things that are saturated with actuality (nonlife, inanimate things) and those things defined by an inner dynamic potentiality (life, animated things). The positing of such a gap, which begins with Aristotle, provides an ethical ruler for all human beings—the truth of human existence can be measured by how much human beings actualize their potential—and points to an existential difference between living things and nonliving things. Alas inanimate rocks have no such measure because, although according to Aristotle they are sovereign things, they are not living things, and thus they do no have inner gaps and possibilities, the condition and measure of ethical action. They are saturated nonethical actuality. As a consequence they can kill us accidently. We can destroy them. But they do not die nor can they purposefully murder us. And we cannot murder them except by metaphorical extension—because we cannot take away a soul they do not have.

We see the signs of the unraveling of the distinction between life and nonlife all around us. The once unremarkable observation that all three formations of power Foucault describes (sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower) work only "insofar as man is a living being" ("une prise de pouvoir sur l'homme en tant qu'etre vivant") today trips over the "tant que," the "insofar," the "as long as." Increasingly *anthropos* not only cannot demonstrate its superiority to other forms of life—thus the rise of posthumanist politics and theory—but also struggles to maintain a difference that makes a difference between all forms of life and the category of nonlife. The emergences of the geological concept of the Anthropocene; the meteorological modeling of the carbon cycle; the emergence of new synthetic

natural sciences such as biogeochemistry; the proliferation of new object ontologies (new materialists, speculative materialists, speculative realists, and object-oriented ontologies)—these all point to the perforating boundary between the autonomy of life and its opposition to and difference from nonlife.

In this article I am less interested in elaborating the claim that as the determinative difference between life and nonlife crumbles biopower is giving way to geontopower than in asking a question that comes in the wake of this shift, namely, how are nonhuman and, more importantly, nonliving "agents" being politically managed?[1] Or, more narrowly, how are they being incorporated into the *logos* of the *demos*? In the following, I examine two broad critical approaches to the absorption of the nonliving/undead into the governance of difference in late liberalism—I engage, on the one hand, Jacques Rancière's theory of dissensus and other approaches that call for the extension of *logos* to nonhuman and nonliving existents and, on the other hand, new vitalist, new materialist, and animist approaches that call for the extension of the notion of *affectus* to all forms of existence. My purpose is to outline how these approaches to the governance of existence in geontopower extend rather than interrupt a long-standing tactic of late liberalism, namely figuring an opposition to it as a demand to be included into it.

## A PART OF IT

In a recent working paper, the British anthropologist Martin Holbraad asks two beguilingly simple questions: first, might there be "a sense in which things could speak for themselves?" and if so, "what might their voices sound like?" (2011). His questions emerge out of a broader shift in critical theory from epistemological to ontological concerns, or, as Graham Harman and others in the object-oriented ontology school put it, from the question of how humans perceive things to a return to the object itself. This return to the object seeks, among other things, to level radically the distinction between all forms of existence. In such a world what political role will nonhuman, nonliving things play? And how will they govern and be governed?

Holbraad's call for us to listen to what things say is one answer. When viewed from a certain angle, a political theory of voice seems exactly what is needed to understand the challenge these geological and meteorological existents pose to the biontopower in late liberalism. And

who better to turn to than Jacques Rancière, who defines politics as the emergence of a "dissensus" within the given distribution of the sensible ("the common") that will produce a new form of consensus (the coming common), for such a theory? Politics emerges at the moment when what we had in common is no longer common but no new consensus has yet been established. It is the moment when "all of us" become "only some of us"; a part within the arrangement of a given common rises up and says, "This common is your common, not mine." What the new common will be when my common becomes the basis of a new form of collective belonging—an "us," a new "we the people"—is not yet known. In other words, for Rancière, in the beginning there was one word that constituted the core political subjectivity of the *demos*, the governance of and by the people, and that word was "not" (us). Politics is the acknowledgment of the coexistence of "we who are" ("P") and "we who are not" ("p"). And, crucially, this political consciousness is defined by language: a movement from seeing an entity's way of speaking as mere noise, which becomes the basis for its exclusion from the *logos* of the *demos*, to regarding that entity as being capable of articulate language, which allows for its inclusion within the *logos* of the *demos*. It is useful to quote Rancière at length.

> Apparently nothing could be clearer than the distinction made by Aristotle in Book I of the *Politics*: the sign of the political nature of humans is constituted by their possession of the logos, the articulate language appropriate for manifesting a community in the aisthesis of the just and the unjust, as opposed to the animal *phone*, appropriate only for expressing the feelings of pleasure and displeasure. If you are in the presence of an animal possessing the ability of the articulate language and its power of manifestation, you know you are dealing with a human and therefore with a political animal. The only practical difficulty is in knowing which sign is required to recognize the sign; that is, how one can be sure that the human animal mouthing a noise in front of you is actually voicing an utterance rather than merely expressing a state of being? If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths. And the same goes for the opposition so readily invoked between the obscurity of domestic and private

> life, and the radiant luminosity of the public life of equals. In order to refuse the title of political subjects to a category—workers, women, etc. . . . —it has traditionally been sufficient to assert that they belong to a "domestic" space, to a space separated from public life; one from which only groans or cries expressing suffering, hunger, or anger could emerge, but not actual speeches demonstrating a shared aisthesis. And the politics of these categories has always consisted in re-qualifying these places, in getting them to be seen as the spaces of a community, of getting themselves to be seen or heard as speaking subjects (if only in the form of litigation); in short, participants in a common aisthesis. It has consisted in making what was unseen visible; in getting what was only audible as noise to be heard as speech; in demonstrating to be a feeling of shared "good" or "evil" what had appeared merely as an expression of pleasure or pain. (2011, thesis 8)

Would it not be simple enough to place nonhuman and nonliving forms of existence into the list of those things that are a vital part of the *demos* but play no part in its governance because they are thought to lack linguistic reason? There is little doubt about the part that geological and meteorological existents play in late liberalism. In Australia, where I have worked over the last thirty years, the mining of Indigenous lands has long highlighted the foundational role geontopower plays in the governance of difference and markets. Many Indigenous sacred sites are composed of or near large mineral and ore deposits such as manganese, and manganese is crucial to the production of iron and steel, dry cells, aluminum, copper, and so forth. In playing a part of the global steel manufacturing, these sites also play a part in creating new forms of existence, smog, for example, that are choking off other forms of existence over Beijing and increasing the frequency and force of other forms like tornadoes that wreck other forms of existence in the U.S. Midwest. And all of these phenomena are part of emergent state and international security order. For instance, the Australian Parliament has commissioned reports and issued papers on the security risks of climate change and mineral resources. One such paper argues that Australia is particularly vulnerable to population influxes from and conflicts with its immediate northern Asian neighbors who have limited resources to adapt to climate change. Of course the need to secure resources in order to profit from and respond to climate change is not simply an Australian matter.

The link between minerals and economic and political security has a much longer history. As far back as 1947 political scientists were discussing minerals in strategic terms (DeMille 1947). More recently, the U.S. Department of Defense has noted that

> while climate change alone does not cause conflict, it may act as an accelerant of instability or conflict, placing a burden to respond on civilian institutions and militaries around the world. In addition, extreme weather events may lead to increased demands for defense support to civil authorities for humanitarian assistance or disaster response both within the United States and overseas. (2010, 85)

New political alliances are appearing as states and emerging states strategize about how they will secure access to various commodity chains in order to capture profit at as many junctures as possible.[2] High on the U.S. Defense Department's radar screens is China (Butts, Benkus, and Norris 2011). And, as a result, the Northern Territory of Australia, and especially the Top End around Darwin to Katherine, is playing a crucial role in the U.S. Defense department's shift of focus from Europe and the Middle East to the Asian-Pacific. In the sparsely human populated north, large blocks of territory lack mobile phone and Internet coverage. Remote Indigenous communities might well benefit from these global defense shifts insofar as the infrastructural efficiency of the entire GPS system is premised on a series of geographically distributed military tracking stations. As existing bilateral relations between the United States and Russia have deteriorated so have cooperative use of military tracking stations—an incentive, perhaps, for the United States and Australia to build new stations in the far north expanding the communicative network. But these new military relations may also result in the displacement of small remote Indigenous communities; the partnership between the military and mining interests may have the effect of making these Indigenous spaces expendable. The western Australian government, for instance, has called for the forced closure of hundreds of small remote Indigenous communities (Stein 2015).

In other words, entire networks of wealth and power are implicated when states weigh the choice between treating existents like a manganese field or a sacred site built on land outside of or inside of these fields as *mere things* that fuel contemporary capital or allowing them the status of *subjects* that inhabit a shared *logos* in the *demos*. Note that I am not referring to how networks of wealth and power dictate the place in the

*logos* of the *demos* Indigenous voices are assigned. I mean the ore itself and the sacred site that might be situated on the land containing this ore. Even when the state and capital lock horns over the ownership and use of these geological resources and over the likelihood or serious meteorological consequences—as when former Australian prime minister Julia Gillard battled the mining tycoon Gina Rinehart over the relationship between land, capital, and the state—not many politicians or capitalists are likely to consider a mineral, a chunk of ore, a wind, or a smog cloud capable of intentionally based actions of actively interpreting their environment in any way that makes it equivalent to the human *logos*. I would wager that most of them would not see manganese as capable of uttering "groans or cries expressing suffering, hunger, or anger" in a factual sense let alone of engaging in articulate speech. These entities are considered either inert or incapable of actualizing their internal possibilities. They are not subjects but subject to the dynamic nature of *human* subjectivity. Sure, the actions of humans may have unintended consequences, but these are simply an internal part of human intentionality. For example, climate change may be the unintentional result of human's mobilizing carbon-based fuels to drive capital expansion. But the shape of the climate depends on the consequences of decisions about climate control treaties and carbon emissions schemes that have been being made in cities around the world beginning with Berlin in 1996. The imaginary formal role of state leaders such as Gillard in these discussions is to take input from the reasoned public and to weigh the various pros and cons of acting on climate change given the nature of our knowledge and the impact of our choices on the wealth, health, and livelihood of the citizenry. They must, in other words, work within a broad biopolitical framework that weighs the wealth of individuals against the health of the population. And this biopolitical framework demands that a geontological framework remain in place.

Of course, Rancière does not view the common as referring to a set of shared material goods, territorial attachments, or populations—the common is not the inert territory defined by static territorial markers or by the land and sea borders that Australia invokes when turning economic and political refugees away or by whether the dissensus leads to better or worse population vitality. For him the common is the aesthetic, rhetorical, and reasoned "system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions in [the common]" (2006, 12). On the one hand, the common constitutes what the people share in

common—that is, it establishes the "we the people" vis-à-vis this common shared element. And, on the other hand, it establishes the divisions of space, time, and forms of activities within this common and simultaneously establishes the mandatory and exhaustive modes and relations of participating within it and being excluded from it. The common, in other words, consists of the parts various people are assigned to play in any given division of the sensible. We might say that the current common consists of all those who understand the call for *logos* to be extended to nonhuman and nonliving existents only in metaphorical terms, thus limiting the reorganization of our senses and of the political and economic structures built on the understanding that this call is metaphorical.

But if the common is a rhetorical force that keeps in place what can be heard and seen, it does not snuff out that which is vital to the common but outside its disciplined sensory landscape. And this is because, for Rancière, every consensus creates an immanent—or, virtual—dissensus. Every common has another *coming common*—the dissensus created by the consensus, the disruptive irruption of a part within this distribution of parts that has, of yet, played no part in its governance. The making common simultaneously makes a police and a potential politics. The police "structures perceptual space in terms of places, functions, aptitudes, etc. to the exclusion of any supplement" (2010, 92). Politics is always within the police, consisting of "the set of acts that effectuate a supplementary "property," a property that is biologically and anthropologically unlocatable, the equality of speaking beings" (92). What could be a more pressing example of that which plays a vital foundational part in the current order of late liberalism but that is experienced as generating nothing but *phonos* than the geological and meteorological features of the earth?

"Biologically and anthropologically unlocatable . . . speaking beings." For Rancière, human language seems an inescapable element of the dynamic of politics and policing. For Rancière, the movement between policing and politics is made possible by the movement in enunciation from object designation to subject designation, by the movement in speech (*parole*) from the linguistic category (*langue*) of the demonstrative object ("that"; "det"; "tha") or third- person pronoun ("he," "she," "it," "they"; "im"; "nga," "na") to the linguistic category of first- and second-person pronouns ("I," "you," "we"). Those who have previously been referred to only through demonstrative and third-person pronouns insist that they have a claim on the play of subjectivity. In other words, the dynamic political topology of the *demos* (governance based on the "we" of "we the people") is inextricably related to

the dynamic movement of subjectivity in language (see Benveniste 1973). And this is why Rancière claims that "democracy is the regime of politics in the form of a relationship defining a specific subject," *le sujet politique* (2011, thesis 4). Some might point to the broader nature of the common. After all, isn't the common the distribution of the *sensible* rather than simply the distribution of the *linguistic*? Does not Rancière open the common to the full range of sensory experience that is pulled into the distribution of subjectivity and truth? Yes and no: yes, in that the entire range of the experience of the truth of the excluded supports the policing of the common, but no in the sense that the coming into *logos*—the movement of the experience of noise (*phonos*) into the experience of sense (*logos*)—has a clear linguistic basis. It is the movement from considering the excluded as a third nonperson or demonstrative (it, that) to considering the excluded as a subject within the exchange of language (I, you). Still, wouldn't it be simple enough to insert the nonliving into the long list of existents whose voice is finally recognized in the governance of difference within the late liberal *demos*? They have a part, so give them a part. Let them speak! The nonhuman animal, the rock, the beach, the wind and soil: let them be heard, let them be represented and representable in the governance of the earth. They have language too. They are agents too. We need a parliament of things so that the full range of actant *logos* can make their part be heard (Latour 1993).

But if we are to understand the significance of the dissensus of existents, then we need to carefully probe what is being conserved as we celebrate the breaking of one common and the building of another. We need to begin with what we mean by voice, by speech (*parole*), and by language (*langue*). And we need to understand how we are affecting these forms of existence by demanding that they be given a voice in the current consensus of late liberalism. How blithely should we extend the features of human subjectivity in language to all other existents in an effort to answer the call to let the inanimate speak, to enable their voices to be heard?

Several critical theorists are putting explicit pressure on linguistic modes of thought and governance. The anthropologist Eduardo Kohn's masterful examination of the ecosemiotics of the Brazilian Amazon complexly engages recent discussions in the political theory of animism and vitalism. In *How Forests Think*, a nod to Levi Bruhl's *How Natives Think*? and Marshall Sahlin's *How "Natives" Think*, Kohn moves from an anthropological account of the epistemological frames through which Ecuadorans view the forest, their mode of culture, to an anthropology of nonhuman

living thought. Kohn claims that thought, a semiotic process of mutual and co-constituting interpretation, is a characteristic of all life, differentiating it from nonlife. Semiosis is not merely the provenance of the human; linguistic semiosis is simply one form of semiotics. We must vote yes to semiosis but no to *logos*; we must vote to uncouple the commonsense binding of human forms of life and thought and see all life as a mode of thinking. All living things are like us, if we understand that our dominant mode of semiosis, language, is just one of many kinds of semiosis.

## THE VITAL REFUSAL OF ANIMISM

If Kohn seeks to demonstrate that semiosis is an internal characteristic of all living things, he draws a line on extending this interpretive power to nonlife, both that which has died and that which was never born. In answer to the title of an early essay of mine, "Do Rocks Listen?" Kohn has answered "no."[3] This answer distinguishes him in significant ways from a broader critical theoretical movement seeking to reconceptualize all things as having a certain kind of interpretative force—namely the force of a thing to cause another thing to reshape its course of action—even as the very notion of a thing is placed under severe pressure. Perhaps the best-known and insightful work in this domain is that of Jane Bennett and Eugene Thacker.

Bennett has turned to the Deleuzian concept of assemblage and the idea of the Latourian actant to at one and the same time expand the grounds of interpretation and correct for the "thinginess or fixed stability of materiality." The efficacy of any given assemblage, Bennett writes, depends "on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (2010, 20–21). Thus rather than letting objects speak, or making *logos* just one form of the indivisible nature of thought and semiosis, Bennett builds a model of postbiopolitics (politics after the shattering of the difference between life and nonlife) grounded in actants and events rather than in the subject of language or semiosis. As Bennett notes, actants are defined by ability to intrude into the course of other actants—the classic bump in the road; the biochemical trigger that alters the typical expression of a sequence of DNA; the thought that comes when the lights are switched on—even as the extimate relation between agencies, actants, and materialities makes differentiating this actant from that one a fool's errand. Even in the hardest of the natural sciences, as Bennett points out, the idea of closed, self-organized body is nothing but a dangerous fiction. Our "flesh

is populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners [and] . . . the bacteria in the human microbiome collectively possess at least 100 times as many genes as the mere 20,000 or so in the human genome. . . . [W]e are, rather, *an array of bodies*, many different kinds of them in a nested set of microbiomes" (112–13). And what support our bodies are other equally distributed agencies such as the wiring and transformers and fingers that regulate the computer regulations. Wherever we look "a swarm of vitalities [are] at play" (31–32):

> The task becomes to identify the contours of the swarm, and the kind of relations that obtain between its bits. . . . [T]his understanding of agency does not deny the existence of that thrust called intentionality, but it does see it as less definitive of outcomes. It loosens the connections between efficacy and the moral subject, bringing efficacy closer to the idea of the power to make a difference that calls for a response. (32)

This focus on the power to create a response—to create an event—resonates with Thacker's attempt to develop a biophilosophy that challenges how Western ontologies account for the self-organization of being—a self-organization that has "an inward-turning and an outward-turning aspect."

> The inward-turning divides, orders, and interrelates species and types; the outward-turning manages boundaries and positions the living against the nonliving, making possible an instrumentality, a standing-reserve. The inward-turning aspect is metabolic, in that it processes, filters, and differentiates itself internally; it is the breakdown and production of biomolecules, the organization of the organs, the genesis of species and races. The outward-turning aspect is immunologic, for it manages boundaries, exchanges, passages; it is the self-nonself distinction, the organism exchanging with its environment, sensing its *milieu*, the individual body living in proximity to other bodies. (2005)

However, when this ontology of self-organized being is no longer conceived in terms of a search for essences, sharp epidermal boundaries, and simple local bodies but rather in terms of a desire for events, fuzzy and open borders, and complex global patterns, new forms of existence, such as weather systems, carbon cycles, computer routing systems, come into view.

Thacker argues that if we wish to understand these new vital forms of existence, biophilosophy must abandon "the concept of 'life itself' that is forever caught between the poles of nature and culture, biology and technology, human and machine" and develop "concepts that always cut across and that form networks" (2005).

Central to both Thacker's and Bennett's work is a deep and creative engagement with Deleuze's idea of the assemblage and event. This gravitation to Deleuze is hardly surprising. As is well known, Deleuze, with his partner Guattari, proposes that three modes of thought provide the conditions for eventfulness—*philosophy*, which produces concepts, multiplicities that do *not* interpret the world of essences and appearances but connect existing intensities on the plane of immanence into new actualities; *art*, which produces affective intensifications of the concept, creating, as Deleuze and Guattari put it in it "What Is Philosophy?," "a bloc of sensation, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects" (1995, 164); and *science*, which produces functional matrixes that fix and refashion our frame of reference. More importantly for my purposes here, the philosophy of immanence seeks to dislodge the speaking subject, drawing on a geological and ecological imaginary grounded in geometry. In *The Logic of Sense*, the event is a differential geometrical concept that demands we cease opposing the singular to the universal and start understanding that the opposite of the singular is the ordinary. Take the square. The lines of the square are composed of multiple points all of which can be considered ordinary with respect to each other. The event is what takes place at the joints, the singularity of the transition, the differential, between the directionality of one line and the directionality of the other. Space is an event even as events are understood geographically. The Battle of Waterloo, for instance, is a multiplicity of exchanges and intensities between forms of embodiment without self-evident borders or boundaries that is made into something through sense—the concept of the Battle of Waterloo. The concept does not interpret or represent what is already there but configures it—it is *rhetorical* in the sense that it is figurative. And by the time we get to *A Thousand Plateaus* sense itself is made a minor actor on the plane of geological experimentation. The artist tries out an intensification of affect. The scientist tests a matrix. The philosophy invests a concept. But across these modes of thought lies a radical nonmilitant infelicitous desire, a pulse of constant becoming, a nonintentional intensity that explores a multitude of modes, attributes, and connections and produces new territorializations.

## BEYOND EVERYTHING IS THE SAME OR EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT

Here we have several approaches to the incorporation of nonlife and the nonhuman into the governance of the *demos*, several ways of *figuring* the kinds of meta-arrangements that would recharacterize a world in which nonlife and the nonhuman would play an equal part in the way we conceptualize its governance. One extends the features of human language (speech) to all things. Another refigures semiosis as a broad mode of sign production and interpretation that can be extended to all living things. And a third that figures all things as aspects of assemblages with the power to animate a response—to initiate an event. Each of these proposals is a careful critical intervention in the order of things as this order self-evidently presents itself in the biontological backdrop of biopower. And each of these proposals has been greeted with horror by those who maintain a humanist bias to the order of things, which suggests they are on the right track. So, what is the worry?

If critical theories of the *logos* and the *demos* and the *phonos* and the event are to have any sway over the coming debates about geontology, then their political topologies must allow existents that are not biologically and anthropologically legible to disrupt the *logos* of *demos* rather than simply enter into it. The generosity of extending our form of semiosis to them forecloses the possibility of them provincializing us. In other words, are we witnessing, and contributing to, a repetition of the cunning of late liberal recognition in which the modes, qualities, forms, and relations that already exist are merely, or primarily, extended to others? Is the call to recognition of the liveliness of the (in)animate other another version of the call of late liberalism to recognize the essential humanity of the other just so long as the other can express this otherness in a language that does not shatter the framework of the liberal common?

Even as biophilosophy and vibrant matter embrace the open of the assemblage, the emphasis remains on the event—the breaking of the plane of actualization. And this plane of actualization takes on the feeling-affects of a prephilosophical skin, a crust. The plane of actualization is presented as a force around or within which the assemblage experiences itself or is experienced as a thing against which the vibrant acts to create new birth-event events. The breakage creates a kind of birth and a kind of death, an event and a finitude, in the infinite play of difference. Of course we are no longer talking about life and nonlife per se, but of assemblages and reassemblages, of bodies with and without organs, of the powers of perseverance and norm

making.[4] When Deleuze discusses desire-machines, war-machines, and abstract-machines he is, after all, using the image of a machine rather than an organ sack. Even death and finitude are now swamped by virtual and endless becoming. But has the displacement of essence by existence, of the fact by the event, and the body by the assemblage smuggled in an elevated of form of existence—life and its qualities of birth, growth, reproduction, and death—and built a bridge between the natural sciences and critical humanities long before they have sat down to a summit to overcome their differences? That is, as we dislodge the human and expand the ethics of annihilation are we conserving the biological framework of birth, growth, reproduction, and death through the ontological thought of event, conatus, and finitude?

What should we make of concepts that seem to conserve the qualities of life while denying its impermanence? Life no longer needs to face its terror: the lifeless, the inert, and the void of being. In other words, solving the problem of how governance will be with rather than merely with regard to the nonhuman and nonlife by extending either those attributes that most define the human (language, semiosis) or by extending what we find most precious about life (birth, becoming, actualization) does not solve the horror of the inert and the indifferent but merely saturates it with familiar and reassuring qualities. It solves the problem by reassuring us, persuading us, that we can remain the same, namely, entities that become, actualize, signify.

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## NOTES

1. I elaborate on the concept of geontology and geontopower in *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (2016).

2. The members of the U.S. Congress who have business alliances with mineral companies have sought to create a legislative assemblage of these military strategies and business goals by integrating economic and military agendas and creating global networks based on them. The Republican congressman from Colorado's Fifth District, Doug Lamborn, has, for instance, introduced a bill declaring that its continuing policy of the United States to promote stable and adequate supplies of minerals in order to secure the nation's military and economic well-being (see National Strategic and Critical Minerals Policy Act of 2013 [https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr1063]). More specifically, Lamborn's bill charges the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Geological Survey with inventorying the nonfossil fuel mineral potential of all lands that have been

withdrawn from commercial use the Department of Defense with assessing the possibility of using rare earth elements in defense applications.

3. Kohn and I have had a lively and ongoing conversation about this—a conversation that has been extraordinarily helpful in my thinking.

4. The priority of the event over the fact immediately raises the question of the conditions in which events are likely to occur or what allows an event (the production of a new norm) to become *the* event (normativity), what it is that puts the actual into crisis—think here of Althusser's distinction between "taking place" and "taking hold" (1994).

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