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Speculative Virontology: Malevolent Infrastructure against the Design of Infrastructural Intimacy in *Pulse*

Abstract: In this article, speculative virontology refers to a form of thought that revalues the biontological framework present in current queer theoretical and new materialist thinking. Using an archive of horror films, Paul Golding's *Pulse* from 1988 in particular, this article points toward malevolent infrastructure – the conceptualization of matter that is performatively terrorizing the closedness of mutually constitutive design of infrastructural intimacy and the immanence of biontology. Both intimacy and immanence depend on production of space and time which exclude forms of life that are not white middle-class cisnormative (re) productive heterosexuality and thus deemed not properly alive and outside of Being. The figure of the Virus upsets these processes of exclusion and divisions, and reorders conceptuality away from immanence and biontology toward what is non-biontological, toward that which is neither Life nor Nonlife.

Keywords: virontology; design; infrastructure; intimacy; malevolency; horror.

Introduction

In this article, the Virus is understood as a figure that reorders the horizon of thinking and what appears as possible to theorize. I call this theoretical reordering *virontology*, a compound of the terms "virus" and "ontology", as it describes the conditions of (im)possibility of thinking reality differently in most abstract terms. Virontology names a sort of view through the lens of matter beyond the reach of a particular form of life, that is, an act that escapes any simple binarism by becoming speculative and absolute. I am inspired by Claire Colebrook's and Elizabeth Povinelli's work on the figure of the Virus, as well as Quentin Meillassoux's work on speculative materialism. I take their concepts, figures and procedures, re-configure and apply them to the issues of design of material infrastructure, reimagining the materiality itself as an act that is antagonistic toward the (re)production of white middle-class cisnormative (re)productive heterosexuality. In Povinelli, the Virus is a figure that upsets the neat division between Life (*zoe*, *bios*) and Nonlife (*geos*), where the very difference between these is what enables contemporary forms of exploitation. The Virus is not

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contained or defined by this division, rather it both uses it and ignores it to straddle the difference between the living and the dead (Life) and inorganic (Nonlife). I take this together with Meillassoux's concept of the absolute and turn it into a non-biontological performative terror. Colebrook, on the other hand, finds in the figure of the Virus a possibility for imagining a world without organized life as such, that is, the world unmediated by human thinking and hence the world actively inhospitable and unwelcoming to the human form of life. The figure of the Virus points to the actively antagonistic materiality of inorganic non-life that is foreclosed to the organism. It is destructive to the organism, and the destruction itself is understood as the malevolence and radical closedness of the future that is outside/after the linear-circular time of life.

This figure of the Virus will be used to speculate about disrupting the *design of infrastructural intimacy* of (re)productive heterosexuality. There is a large archive of horror films and shows that depict various forms of infrastructure or its parts that act *against* humans such as *The Car* (1977), *Christine* (1983), *The Tower* (1985), *Pulse* (1988), *The Refrigerator* (1991), *Twin Peaks* (2017), and so on. In these texts electricity lashes out against inhabitants of a house, cars attack drivers on the road, lifts and refrigerators set themselves against those who would use them. The concept of *malevolent infrastructure* describes matter pushing against the exploitative attempt of (re)productive heterosexuality to build a closed environment for itself. While (re)productive heterosexuality shapes the matter that surrounds it in order to secure linear-circular temporality and closed space for its existence, that very matter possesses an aspect that is not only radically foreclosed to its heterosexist functionalisation, but it actively sabotages and terrorizes it.

I will focus on the depiction of energy infrastructure and electricity in order to enter into a dialogue with recent entanglements of new materialism and queer theory. Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter*, for example, uses a power grid failure to show how non-human beings of various materialities participate and act in such a human-made environment, underlining what she calls distributive agency enabled by thing-power. What Bennett and other relational theorists oversee, it will be argued, is that this power grid is part and parcel of the infrastructural intimacy of (re)productive heterosexuality. It is not enough for the agency of matter to be non-linear to escape functionalisation through the design of infrastructural intimacy. In contrast to the failure of the power grid as read by Bennett, the agency of energy infrastructure and electricity in Paul Golding's *Pulse*, which will be the focus of my argument, should be understood as an active counteraction of matter to inclusion in the intimacy of a single form of life, a *sabotage*. Speculative virontology, then, argues for resistance that, through the figure of the Virus, presumes *nihilative* performative malevolency and a terror created by the radical openness of space and closedness of time, which is disastrous for (re)productive heterosexuality.

Speculative Virontology and Performative Terror

In asking whether the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics are adequate for what is emerging today, Elizabeth A. Povinelli casts a sideways look to this conceptual grid, and points to a different constellation of figures she considers more appropriate for contemporaneity. Instead of reaching for hysterical woman, masturbating child, Malthussian couple and the pervert as defining figures of biopower, and camps, plantations and solitary confinement as figures of necropower as the obverse side of biopower, Povinelli argues that these two are not enough for understanding contemporary late liberalism. What we need are new figures, figures of the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus. These figures outline a new power formation, a power no longer grounded either in life or death, *zoe*/*bios* or *necros*/*thanatos*, but a power formation called geontological power or geontopower. Povinelli defines geontopower as "a set of discourse, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife".[1] Geontopower is what enables the difference between Life and Nonlife, and it decidedly marks contemporaneity, even though it has been present alongside bio/necropower. Moreover, the functioning of bio/necropower depends on "subtending geontopower".[2] This subtending is reflected in the dominance of Western metaphysics as biontology, meaning "measure of all forms of existence by the qualities of one form of existence (*bios*, *zoe*)".[3] Bio/necropower and biontology go hand in hand. So much so that *geos*, the Nonlife, is removed from view as irrelevant exactly because it is cast as not alive, inert, never living and, thus, without agency, subjectivity, and need to be let living or made dead. Geontology and geontopower "make visible the figural tactics of late liberalism as a long-standing *biontological orientation and distribution* of power crumbles".[4] Bio/necropower and its attendant figures, tactics, and technologies "work *as long as* we continue to conceptualize humans as *living things* and *as long as* humans *continue to exist*".[5] Nonlife, on the other hand, is the death that has never been alive, the absence of life before the time of (human and animal) individuals and even species. It is "a time of the *geos*, of soulessness".[6] Nonlife is distinct from Life in the sense in which the vital is distinct from the inert, and the extinct to the barren. The vital and extinct presume Life and thus death, while inert and barren do not require anything alive ever. Late liberal power functions as long as differences between Life (death/extinction) and Nonlife are produced and maintained, which is given in a formula: Life (Life(birth, growth, reproduction)v. Death) v. Nonlife.[7]

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[1] Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

[2] Ibid., 5.

[3] Ibidem., italics in original.

[4] Ibid., 5–6, italics in original.

[5] Ibid., 8, italics in original.

[6] Ibid., 9.

[7] Ibidem.

The figure of the Virus (and the imaginary of the Terrorist) provides "a glimpse of a persistent, errant potential radicalization of the Desert, the Animist" because it "seeks to disrupt the current arrangements of Life and Nonlife" as for the Virus such a difference "makes no difference not because all is alive, vital, and potent, nor because all is inert, replicative, unmoving, inert, dormant, and endurant".[8] The Virus uses and ignores this difference for the purpose of extending itself, "it confuses and levels the difference between Life and Nonlife while carefully taking advantage of the minutest aspects of their differentiation".[9] The Virus "is an *active antagonistic agent* built out of the collective assemblage that is late liberal geontopower".[10] The figure of the Virus enables imagining and conceptualizing not only an active agent, but an agent that is both *active* and *antagonistic*, or, in my terminology, *malevolent*. What we have here is a means to revalue ontology of matter, as matter is usually thought of either in terms of Life or Nonlife, both kinds of which yield to functionalization within the (re)productive heterosexuality. Life, as biontologically described, is biopolitically and necropolitically shaped through four Foucauldian figures, while Nonlife is, in contradistinction to Life, conceptualized as inert, inorganic, unmoving and, thus, nothing-but usable and readily yielding to exploitation. What I call infrastructural intimacy, and which will be discussed in more depth in the next section, testifies to the fact that matter can be conceptualized as either inert, linearly or nonlinearly active/causative within the autopoetic bounds of (re)productive heterosexuality. In all three cases it is assimilated, functionalised, and exploited for (re)production. With the figure of the Virus matter itself changes from merely being-there and ready-to-hand to actively antagonistic and malevolent.

The concept of *virontology* describes this reconfiguration of ontology toward matter that is active, antagonistic, and malevolent. As a compound of virus and ontology, virontology aims to encompass the re-evaluation of ontology of matter, moving from matter-as-inert/(non)linear to matter as that which lashes out when assimilated and functionalised or, rather, that which actively *sabotages* the inclusion into the cycle of (re)production. Povinelli writes that the imaginary of the Virus is the Terrorist, and so speculative virontology can also be understood as an ontology of the matter that *terrorizes*. This ontology moves away from biontological framework, so much so that it is no longer ontology as it is usually understood, hence the adjective *speculative*. According to Quentin Meillassoux, speculative is "every type of thinking that claims to be able to access some form of absolute", while metaphysics (which can be equated with biontology here) is "every type of thinking that claims to be able to access some form of absolute being".[11] The absolute that is speculatively thought cannot be an absolutised being/Being, it cannot be a part of biontological framework. It follows that we need another kind of thinking that is not limited by Being and its attendant

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[8] Ibid., 18–19.

[9] Ibid., 19.

[10] Ibidem., italics in original.

[11] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008), 34.

categories and concepts however absolutised, all the while keeping the absolute as the "object" of speculative thought.[12] What is absolutised in this case is sabotage, malevolency, and antagonism – acts, rather than what is (Being/substance/essence). Speculative virontology enacts *nihilative* performative terror and malevolency in order to release the grip of (re)productive heterosexuality as a form of life and its attendant biontological conceptuality.

Design of Infrastructural Intimacy

Infrastructures are *sine qua non* of both human and nonhuman life as we currently know and live in the global West and North. As Ara Wilson writes, infrastructures "shape the conditions for relational life".[13] Michelle Murphy defines infrastructures as "spatial arrangements of relationship that draw humans, things, words and non-humans into patterned conjunctures".[14] These conditions for relational life and patterned conjunctures include transportation, energy, communication, and water and waste infrastructures, the study of leads to "understanding the concrete force of abstract fields of power by allowing us to identify actually existing systems rather than a priori structures".[15] Infrastructure is best thought of as "a constructed 'real' techno-material-symbolic assemblage that, at least in intention, underpins, enables, and conditions the context for more visible enactments".[16] Wilson sees infrastructure as a condition for intimate relations, heterosexual or non-heterosexual, and in that sense she writes about infrastructures of intimacy. She claims that "tracing circuits of pipes and cables embeds intimate relations in unpredictable junctures of material and symbolic power".[17]

I take Wilson's insight one step further with the concept of *infrastructural intimacy*. As Wilson writes, "an eye toward infrastructure [...] links blow jobs to urban planning" and reveals "how official intentions can be betrayed by a plurality of uses, including the way men, transwomen, and sex workers *repurpose* public spaces for transactions".[18] Non-heterosexual individuals and those who are sideways to the normative sociality, like sex workers, merely repurpose the existing infrastructure. Wilson notes that queer forms of life usually repurpose the found infrastructure, such as infrastructure for bodily waste (like public bathrooms), but also non-residential

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[12] For various possibilities cf. Emmanuel Alloa and Élie During, eds., *Choses en soi: Métaphysique du réalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2018).

[13] Ara Wilson, "The Infrastructure of Intimacy," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, 2 (2016): 247.

[14] Michelle Murphy, "Chemical Infrastructures of the St. Clair River," in *Toxicants, Health and Regulation since 1945*, ed. by Soraya Boudia and Nathalie Jas (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), 104.

[15] Wilson, "The Infrastructure of Intimacy," 248.

[16] Ibid., 274.

[17] Ibidem.

[18] Ibid. 259, italics mine.

zones like parks or "decaying infrastructure of defunct industries or neglected public sites".[19] Infrastructure, and relational life that infrastructure assumes and aims to enable, is not built for the purpose of being lived in by those who are sideways to the cisnormative (re)productive heterosexuality. Queer individuals merely use it, and do not live within it. Infrastructural intimacy names the fact and the processes through which (re)productive heterosexuality builds the infrastructural environment for itself. The only intimacy within the built environment that is made possible by the various infrastructures is of (re)productive heterosexual kind. Infrastructures are constructed for the purpose of (re)production of (re)productive heterosexuality and the sex/gender system it requires. Such a built environment does not allow space for any other form of life, hence the repurposing and mere use, instead of feeling at home in it.

In the rest of the article, I will focus on energy infrastructure and more particularly on electricity. They are chosen for theorization because of their central place in the culture of the global North and West, but also because electricity has become a figuration of queerness in new materialism. Both of these, the infrastructural social dominance and figurative queerness, rest on biontological framework. Electricity and energy infrastructure, together with various infrastructures connected and dependent on it "have proliferated to the point where they now reach into every aspect of contemporary life".[20] While electricity was already indispensable for the second industrial revolution, as materialized through Fordist capitalism, it is inextricable from the "far-reaching and profoundly transformative socio-technical transformations" of the so-called fourth industrial revolution. As Abram, Winthereik and Yarrow write, "the majority of people in Europe and America, at least, live in what we might term an 'electromagnetic field' to which they have become thoroughly habituated and whose scope is growing".[21] Electricity recedes from view, "it participates in daily routines familiar to the point they are taken for granted; it is channelled by infrastructures designed to conceal their workings; and it is known through expert technical vocabularies with which few non-specialists are conversant, as well as through poetry and popular language".[22]

The presence of energy and electricity is so much taken for granted in everyday life that, like most of the infrastructure when it functions without fail, becomes a neutral background on which our lives play out. Bob Johnson shows that our everyday lives embody and incorporate fossil fuels in at least five ways: ambient energy, congealed energy, polymerized energy, embodied energy, and propulsive energy. In all of these, electricity plays a role in some way. For example, ambient energy is "the habitat and habitus of home through lighting, and air conditioning", while embodied energy is "remaking the bioenergetics of food security by both taking us outside of nature's nitrogen and phosphate cycles (e.g., artificial fertilizer and phosphate mining) and

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[19] Ibid., 254.

[20] Simone Abram, Brit Ross Winthereik and Thomas Yarrow, "Current thinking – an introduction," in *Electrifying Anthropology: Exploring Electrical Practices and Infrastructures*, edited by Simone Abram, Brit Ross Winthereik, and Thomas Yarros (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 3.

[21] Ibid. 3, 3–4.

[22] Ibid., 4.

providing the background refrigeration and propulsion needed to fatten granaries in a complex global food system."[23] Energy and electricity produced from fossil fuels is in everything and everywhere. It is everywhere, in the sense that these infrastructures constitute both the background and foreground of social existence. They constitute the condition of possibility of sociality in both spatial and temporal terms. Electricity and electricity infrastructures are "phenomena increasingly embedded in the ordering systems, *including the ontologies, by which we live*".[24]

Nowhere better have electricity's material properties and its manifestations been developed for the purposes of critical theory than in new materialism. I will provide a close reading of Bennett's conceptualization of power-grid failure, as it offers a figuration of queerness and vibrant materiality that are supposed to escape rigid ontological conceptualizations that essentialise and substantialise. I argue that this conceptualization of materiality still moves within biontological framework, and thus yield to functionalisation by (re)productive heterosexuality, that is, to being transformed into mere materials to be used for the construction of a single form of life's built environment and then turned into waste and discarded. Energy infrastructure and electricity it transmits should be thought of as an assemblage, according to Bennett. Assemblage here denotes "ad hoc groups of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within."[25] An assemblage encompasses all sorts of bodies and beings of variable materiality, so much so that the electric power grid includes "a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, heat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire, and wood – to name just some of the actants."[26] Each of these has its own power of agency (vital force, as Bennett calls it), as well as the assemblage taken as a whole. However, that whole is conceptualized otherwise than closed and autonomous. As Bennet writes "precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly "off" from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective, a 'non-totalizable sum'. An assemblage thus not only has a distinctive history of formation but a finite life span".[27] Throughout its "life span", an assemblage possesses distributive agency understood as an "agency as a confederation of human and nonhuman elements".[28] It is distributed because it is constituted "across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts".[29]

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[23] Bob Johnson, *Mineral Rites: An Archeology of the Fossil Economy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 3.

[24] Abram et al., "Current thinking," 4, italics mine.

[25] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 23–24.

[26] Ibid., 25.

[27] Ibid., 24.

[28] Ibid., 21.

[29] Ibid., 23.

Energy infrastructure is a good example of an assemblage for several reasons. Firstly, it is a "material cluster of charged parts that have indeed affiliated" and which, due to the affiliation within a single whole, produces particular effects.[30] Secondly, all elements of the electric power grid and energy infrastructure act together and in unison, though, Bennett underlines, "their coordination does not rise to the level of an organism" and lastly, this acting together and being in unison, its "jelling endures" a multiplicity of acts that disturb the wholeness of the assemblage.[31] All of this serves Bennett to describe what she calls thing-power and out-side of vibrant materiality. It is an attempt to "theorize a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension".[32] For Bennet, thus, the failure of the electric power grid expresses the vibrant agency of the multiplicity of bodies included in that particular assemblage. The failure is an effect of the thing-power acting across ontologically heterogeneous fields, leading to unexpected and surprising events. The failure, finally, is vibrancy-, power- and life-affirming event which enables novel becomings.

Malevolent Infrastructure and the Virus

Lightning and electricity have played an important role in films since the beginning, the most famous example perhaps being the one from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) when the robot is enlivened by the electric current. And of course, there is James Whale's *Frankenstein* from 1931, and all other versions of the story throughout the decades. However, in these and similar films, electricity and energy infrastructure are used as a means to a certain end. Electricity is used to bring to life inanimate beings. Those beings, then, reveal and fulfil their purpose until the end of the film. Electricity is used to jump-start the narrative, to shock the narrative into existence. In other words, it is appropriated and functionalised for the purposes that lie outside of it. Electricity, through energy infrastructure, is forced into being a means to some end. There is another archive of cultural texts that refuse to be appropriated. The archive contains films with what I call malevolent infrastructure, in contradistinction to the infrastructure that simply (and lively/vibrantly) fails as Bennett describes, which lashes out against white middle-class cisheterosexual (re)productive human appropriation. In these films, energy infrastructure and electricity unsettle the design of infrastructural intimacy and the immanent biontological framework through performative terror.

Claire Colebrook argues that we need to find a way to think about the body outside of this framework which is defined by the general concept of life and the living. This thinking of the body outside life includes the figure of the Virus since the virus must be thought of more in the lines of "rampant and unbounded mutation" than a

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[30] Ibid., 24.

[31] Ibidem.

[32] Ibid., 20.

living being.[33] The virus "does not maintain itself, and is not a living system precisely because it *is* only in its parasitic capacity to open other life forms to variations that would not be definitive of an autopoietic relation".[34] Furthermore, "a virus is nothing other than a process of invasion, influx and (to a great extent) *non*-relation".[35] The figure of the Virus breaks open an autopoietic relation, the relation of self to self, the self-relation by working a non-relation into that self-relation. Colebrook adds that "a virus does not have a world", it is a process "with no sense of relation" so it forms "politics devoid of survival".[36] What these performatively malevolent films show, I argue, is an introduction of non-relation into the immanent relationality of infrastructural intimacy. What they *do not* show is the failure, which remains bound to the biontological immanence. It is not enough to fail cisnormative (re)productive heterosexuality. Instead, while (re)productive heterosexuality autopoetically forms its world, the Virus as malevolent infrastructure *actively disrupts* this closure of materiality into a world. The outside of Life and Nonlife *malevolently irrupts* into such an intimately built environment.

Pulse (1988) by Paul Golding is the film I will read closely for the irruption and active disruption of malevolent infrastructure against immanent infrastructural intimacy. The opening scene shows a barren landscape with smoke rising from the power plant on the horizon. There are thick storm clouds with occasional lightning flashes. Lightning strikes the ground, as shown in the foreground, and the scene switches to electrical equipment in the power plant spiking because of the nearby strike. A power generator begins revving, and electricity humming while the opening credits roll. The camera moves around the machines that produce electricity, showing from various angles all sorts of transistors and transmitters. The camera then moves outside and shows a huge electrical power grid that stretches toward the horizon. In the last scene from the opening credits, a network of huge towers and cables is superimposed on the image of the city glowing at night. An identity between energy infrastructure and the urban environment, the city itself, is suggested. And then a single cable leads us to a bedroom where a white, comfortably middle-class, cisnormative heterosexual couple is asleep. They are Bill (Cliff de Young) and Ellen (Roxanne Hart). They are woken up by a noise their neighbour across the street is making demolishing his own house from the inside. A flash of light is seen momentarily, and later the police find a lifeless body in a pool of water. The camera shows a cable smoking, leading us to believe that the neighbour was electrocuted.

Energy infrastructure and electricity are first used for producing immanent infrastructural intimacy. As with the macrolevel set in the opening credits where the city and the energy infrastructure are equated, so at the microlevel a tight relationality

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[33] Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press and Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2014), 136.

[34] Ibidem., italics in original.

[35] Ibidem., italics in original.

[36] Ibid., 137, 139.

between individuals, family and energy infrastructure is produced. For example, in one of the first scenes, Ellen shows her stepson David (Joey Lawrence) how she and Bill had moving bars constructed over the windows in order to feel safer. The bars move at the command of a switch button, enclosing the child with the parents in the safety of their home. Ambient energy is important: light creates a warm home atmosphere during the first family dinner. All other kinds of energy are also present in the guise of home appliances filling the background of every scene, in the car that is used by the family to transport David from the airport, in the airplane, etc. In all of these, electricity plays a fundamental role, a role of enabling what is called an everyday life. But it does not take long before electricity becomes more menacing.

In a series of three scenes, we are shown David watching a baseball game alone in the house, then the camera moves to the pole outside the house where electricity crackles across the cables, and we are then again back in the house where the television set begins to lose reception. The picture shows vibrating waves across the screen covering the programme. In another symbolically pregnant scene, we are shown a juxtaposition of the pole carrying the power cables with electricity buzzing and flashing, and David looking from the window at it in the background with the focus on the electricity, while the house and David are blurred. The threat is clear, and the threat is coming from the outside though that outside is also (infrastructurally) implicated in the inside. A Moebius strip of the outside and inside is formed, and the scene for the performance of terror is set up, while functionalisation of electric matter is made obvious through the insistence on showing various electricity-powered objects such as lamps, a microwave, television set, video recorder. We are shown a close up of the inside of the television set, all of its tiny pieces and parts that enable the proper flow of electricity and the television signal. In this case, though, there are tiny currents of electricity popping up while the voices of women and men warble. The tiny currents wildly disrupt the programme, but also melt constitutive parts of the television set. Drops of molten material unite, suffused with the electric current. The refrigerator also begins to act strangely. All the strangeness stops when the parents return home at the exact right moment, except the television that does not want to switch off. The electrician explains the next day that the pulses of high voltage fried it.

Another telling juxtaposition is shown after David breaks into the neighbour's house looking for clues as to what happened to their neighbour. He meets a "crazy man" who claims to know what is going on, and while moving down the hallway, the camera pans toward the floor with its soggy carpet and shows us a fried circuit board with wires every which way over a framed picture of a couple – the owner of the house and his wife, both of them now dead. The glass on the frame is broken, shards of glass centring on the women's figure. The juxtaposition again frames electricity infrastructure (the circuit board) as that which not only threatens but actually destroys cisnormative (re)productive heterosexuality. In this case, the man is earlier in the film directly killed by the electricity, while his wife has died of unknown causes but we are led to suspect electricity had something to do with her death, and are shown their

dead front lawn, which became yellow and dried up after she died.

The most intensive malevolent irruption occurs in several scenes in the second half of the film. The first scene is focused on David locked in the garage. The camera moves into the sitting room with the television set on, showing only lines on its screen while it emits the sound of a quiz show, where a contestant shouts "They lived happily ever after". The host adds "And you will, yes!", while the electricity crackles along the wires. It is as if the murderous pulse mocks both the domesticity of the characters and the viewers' expectations. Electricity then cracks the gas pipe in the garage. David attempts to run, choking and coughing, finally breaks out of the space with the car. The scene ends with his parents returning home at just the right moment. Afterwards, in the scene with the distressed Ellen we learn from the "crazy man" that "it ain't a thing. It's a signal. A pulse. Kind of like… a voice. So, what you gotta do is to get rid of anything in your house that might have ears to hear it." The second life-threatening encounter with the malevolent electric pulse is a Hitchcockian bathroom scene, where Ellen is almost cooked to death by the shower, become disruptive because of the pulse. She is saved by Bill but suffers blisters all over her body and is taken to the hospital burns unit.

In the third scene, the final clash with the disruptive pulse plays out between the father, the son, and the pulse. The pulse attacks Bill when he returns, from his neighbours' home to his house at night to check it after the attack on Ellen. The waste disposal unit swallows a piece of broken glass in front of him, but that appears to be a red herring. After switching off the power, he moves down to the garage, where the automatic door motor spits out a screw that hits him in the face. While he is laying down, David moves around the house trying to find him. He enters the bedroom with the television on showing a creepy scene from a film, featuring a distressed woman and a humanoid baby lying on the floor cooing. The child and the humanoid baby are in the same screen space, the child on the right and the baby-in-the-TV on the left. The TV image is occasionally interrupted with electric static lines, while it emits distorted electronic sound. The TV then emits a ray that moves across David's face. He stares hypnotised for a while and then breaks off shouting to stop it. After much running around the house in danger of being electrocuted or killed in some other way, the encounter, or rather attack, culminates in flames bursting out of every electric socket, engulfing the house in fire. After almost falling into the electrified water, Bill and David escape the house. The police drive the father and son to safety, and the film ends with the toy clock crackling over the head of a child, Stevie, in another house in the neighbourhood. Stevie pulls the plug, but we now know very well it is futile against the disruptive force of the pulse.

This performative terror of a malevolent infrastructure leaves radically changed spacetime compared to the spacetime that the form of life once present there built for itself. What used to be a cosy and warm immanence of infrastructural intimacy, after the onset of the pulse becomes burning wood, melted plastics, and electrified and deadly water. The house is left uninhabitable and in ruins. White middle-class

cisnormative (re)productively heterosexual humans are evacuated never to return, while the pulse continues to spread throughout the unsuspecting neighbourhood. This is what Colebrook describes as thinking through extinction or outside the human organism-world relation. Once the human world is left without humans, the task is to think outside/beyond all forms of life. The ending of organic timelines and the events of extinction lead toward conceptualization of inhuman and unlivable futures that are radically closed off to the human form of life by which it is meant to be habitable, hospitable, and functionalisable. It is spacetime without the possibility of adaptation and sustainability, without praxis, production, work or labour. In that sense, speculative virontology moves away from the new materialist affirmation of living, multiplicity, productivity, becoming, potentiality, and futurity which are all thoroughly biontological terms, and toward the pure terror that *nihilates* the binary couple of Life and Nonlife.

Conclusion

What does the Virus do then? First and foremost, with the figure of the Virus the field of conceptualization in general is reconfigured. As the question itself suggests, the Virus is not concerned with what something is but with what something does. This move is necessary in order to move away from the immanent biontological and biopolitical framework that is implicated in the dominant form of life, white middle-class cisnormative (re)productive heterosexuality. As *Pulse* shows, such a form of life produces for itself an immanence of infrastructural intimacy where everything is premised upon (re)production of such a form of life. The Virus straddles the difference between Life and Nonlife and uses it for its own purposes, if it is possible to talk about intentionality as it is usually conceived. The Virus is not only indifferent toward biontological and biopolitical differences, and with that also indifferent toward the difference between immanence and transcendence, but it actively disrupts them. In other words, the figure of the Virus leads toward the thinking that is non-ontological, that *nihilates* both Being and becoming. That thinking I am calling here speculative virontology.

The figure of the Virus requires the performative beyond/without the ontological – acts, not substances. In that regard, a speculatively virontological approach can be applied to other concerns as far as the non-ontological view is followed, the view that it is *nihilative* acts and effects that are primary and not beings/Being/becomings. But these acts and effects also need to be reconfigured, as these have materiality that is beyond the ontological and immanence/transcendence divide. What is more, acts of this reconfigured and virontological materiality are nothing but absolutely disruptive and irruptive, seen from the biontological-immanent point of view. They are non-Being and non-becoming. Speculatively virontological matter is absolute malevolence for the immanent biopolitics/biontology. It is *nihilative*, performative terror for white middle-class cisnormative (re)productive heterosexuality and the world that it built for itself.

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