The Dangerous 419

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the phenomenon of Nigerian fraud spam emails, known collectively as 419s. Throughout the thesis I will propose the 419 as a minor literary genre. Such classification provides a framework to investigate the multilayered nature of the 419, and the various issues it touches upon. Considering the 419 as minor literary genre also opens up a context to reason about the kind of threat such unbelievable and incredible narratives constitute. The 419's peril, I propose, resides in its own dissimilarity, but also affinity, to advertising. It is this contrast which brings the unstable minor nature of the 419 to stand as a threat to the powerful figure of advertising.

1   Introduction

Spam, once only a brand of canned meat, became synonymous with unsolicited emails, sent to a large number of addresses, with the underlying intention to sell products such as Rolex replicas or Viagra pills to their recipients. Spam is essentially distasteful advertising that arrives, in large quantities to our mailboxes. It is electronic junk destined to move into the trash folder. But as much as it is distasteful and unsolicited, it is also fascinating to many, including myself. Perhaps, interest results from its colossal volume and diversity comprising many sub-genres such as medical spam, email hoaxes, phising, or spam lit. But when I began to observe the phenomenon more attentively, one particular type, named simply 419, captured my attention.

The 419 began its life in the late 1970s in Nigeria, in the form of letters, then faxes and in the 1990s email became its prime medium (Glickman, 2005). The three-number handle derives from the Nigerian code law that persecutes crimes involving the impersonation of state officials (Glickman, 2005). In its original form the fraud consists of a game of appearances that leads to a confidence trick. The act begins with a email sent to a large number of addresses. Usually the email makes reference to a large sum of money which the *writer* has *found*, but that is stranded somewhere. The *writer* asks for the recipient's collaboration in transferring the mentioned funds to a safe foreign account, in order to make it accessible. As a reward for his collaboration the recipient is promised a fraction of the total sum. Victims who fall for this trap are normally asked early on to provide their personal details, such as full name, bank name, and account number which are normally used for credit card applications or checks forgeries. If the recipient is eager to take part in the proposed deal she will, at a later stage, be requested to transfer money to the sender's account and given the explanation that a lawyer needs to be payed to do the necessary paper work, or an official has to be bribed to set the process rolling, or identity marks have to be removed from banknotes. The result is foreseeable: the recipient complies with the requests but surprisingly not a single cent arrives to her bank account. Victims, like gamblers, struggle to admit they are loosing money, and go on agreeing to these

demands, while hoping that the promised fortune will arrive. Even when they realize that they have fallen for a scam, victims struggle to denounce it, as they are aware of the illegal nature of the business they have joined (Glickman, 2005, pp.465-469).

From the different reasons that made me choose to concentrate on the 419s, I believe the most relevant has been the incredible nature of the stories they narrate. The scam lives of the ability of the author to tell a convincing and enticing story. As a result the emails are full with inventiveness and seduction, but also ingenuity, which often results in extremely rich and unconventional narratives. In addition, each email is not an isolated entity, but is born from a process of text appropriation, which generates a network of very similar, but still different, stories. I must also mention the very interesting body of work developed on the topic, stretching from Anthropology (Burrell, 2012), Cultural Studies (Chude-Sokei, 2010), African Studies, and History (Apter, 1999) and (Glickman, 2005), which has not only guided my own research, but made it more compelling. Lastly, the fact that, alongside my research, I am developing an artistic project - *Narratives of Deception* - based on 419 emails, has been a strong motivation to dig below the surface of the 419.

I will begin the thesis by looking at the evolution of modern advertising during the last three centuries. This historical overview will serve as a guideline to understand why does advertisement and spam share the same genetic code, yet are unlike, and stand in different positions in relation to power, product, and consumers. If spam can be easily distinguished from advertising, why are so many efforts put into preventing spam from reaching our email inboxes? We will only be fooling ourselves if we believe spam constitutes a serious competitor to advertising, or even a danger to society. The probabilities of spam being a danger are even more remote if we focus on the 419, as in this type of spam no product is announced. The product's position is occupied the fantasy of becoming rich. Such facts make the 419 a quite ineffective fraud. Who in her right-mind is going to fall for it? Surely some do, otherwise the 419 and other email scams would simply cease to exist. According to the BBC News, in 2010 the British authorities reported more than 3000 cases of individuals being duped by spam schemes (BBC, 2011). In the same article a victim is quoted saying: 'They are so cleverly written, that you think, "Oh this is my salvation". I just sent my money off and fingers crossed and I hoped that something would materialize but of course it never does'. This leads me to believe, that for a scam to succeed the victims must be as naive and hungry for salvation as the lady quoted in the article. But despite the occasional catch, the 419 is bound to fail.

I will argue that is in fact the failure of 419 which opens up the possibility for it to have an afterlife as stories. However it is fair to ask whether these failed scams are in fact literature. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri's use the concept of minor literature, in reference to Franz Kafka's work. Being born in a German-speaking Jewish family Kafka

chose to write in German, but rather than conforming to the established high-German, Kafka opened up his writing to the distortions of Prague's spoken German. According to Deleuze and Guatarri this decision has made Kafka's work deterritorialized, political, and collective. At first the aforementioned characteristics appear to also resonate with the 419. Can the concept of minor literature be applicable to 419 spam? If that is the case, if the 419 is in fact minor literature, it needs to be asked how does this literary form threaten a multi-billion industry like advertising. In order to answer this last question I will look into Raymond Williams' view on advertising as a magical system to which we, in the industrialized Western world respond to. As this mythology speaks not only to advertising, but also to spam, it places the two on a plane that forces us to look at advertising through a perspective informed by the fantastical character of spam.

2 Spam and the Ads

Gilliam Dyer (1982) succinctly describes advertising as an intermediary between the production and consumption of manufactured goods. By generating a steady demand for products or services, advertising ensures that the quantities of products introduced in the market are met with equal amounts of consumer demand. Dyer traces the history of advertising as we know it today, beginning with its first appearance in the newspapers which started to flourish during the seventeenth century. The advertisements from that period weren't much different from the classified sections present in today's papers. Mainly directed at wealthy audiences, they announced luxury products such as tee, coffee, wine, cosmetics, lottery and theatre tickets. Using a formal language, the advertisements provided direct information on the announced products. In the eighteenth century advertisements' recommending tone began to shift to a more rhetoric discourse. Advertisements would employ the voice of an expert, such as a *physician*, who served as a rhetorical figure, asserting qualities of the product in question, such as "the most excellent and approved". Dyer mentions how common it was for these experts to use their authoritative voice to convince consumers to buy their snake oil:

> It is worth remembering that the eighteenth century was an age of quacks, 'empirics' and tricksters. These were men who enjoyed a considerable influence and social standing. They both made and peddled an alarming variety of pills, purges, solvents and elixirs for which extravagant claims were made. The quacks attracted attention to their wares by indulging in the most repulsive details of the diseases and scourges they claimed to be able to cure. Their promises were matched by spurious testimonials elicited from miraculously cured sufferers, who were preferably 'dukes and other

noble personages of this kingdom' (Dyer, 1982, p.24).

This past form of advertising greatly resembles today's spam. In both cases there is an attempt to create a credible character, who's rhetorical figure is used to persuade the consumer to buy the product in question, such as the case with the email from Dr.Dave[1].

In the two following centuries advertising did not suffer much change. However, by then advertising began to spread to the city streets. Until the nineteenth century advertising was mostly confined to the newspaper column, but by then it started making its way into the city street. Advertising became increasing disseminated, through posters and leaflets. The same change in advertising's behavior that can be witnessed in the past has now been replicated in the present by spam. Spam and advertising not only invade the territories through which they initially communicate their message, but they also quickly expand to other media. Spam is said to have started in 1994 with Canter & Siegel's message to 5500 Usenet discussion groups announcing the "green card lottery" (Wikipedia, 2013b). Nowadays spam can not only be found in emails, but also blog comments, Wikipedia articles, or instant messages. In each one of these media, spam tries to disguise itself as the typical forms of communication. In emails we might read a message that could have been sent by a close friend or our bank, in Wikipedia spam might disguise itself as an article, or insert promotional links into existing articles (Wikipedia, 2013c); On a blog, spam might vaguely resemble a comment, such as:

> This post is so help to me! Thanks for share.ugg boots for cheapdiscount ugg bootsugg boots cheapcheap ugg bootsugg boots on salediscount ugg bootsugg boots for menugg boots outletugg boots for kid-shttp://bestdiscountuggboots.webs.com/http://bigdiscountuggboots.blinkweb.com

It is interesting to note that advertising has also been able to artfully adapt to its hosting medium. In the mid-nineteenth century advertisers felt dissatisfied with the restrictions newspapers imposed upon the content and dimensions of advertisements. An advertisement wasn't allowed to extend beyond the width of a newspaper column, or employ large and black typefaces. Faced with these limitations advertisers began exploring ways to circumvent them. One of these tactics was the repetition of the product's name endlessly throughout the newspaper column, or the use of small letters to draw the product's name in *small* font-size (Dyer, 1982, pp.25-26). More then one century later, and under a very different context, that of BBSs, computer clubs, and hackers, this same technique became popular under the name of ASCII art. Faced with the limitations of computers from 1970s and 1980s, ASCII art became a popular solution for creating images or large font-size text, which could be exchanged among users (Wikipedia, 2013a), as in the example below.

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[1]See Appendix 6.1, page 22

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                   .,:ldxkkkkkkkkkkxol:’.
               ’cdkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkko:.
            .;dkkkkkkkkkkkkkkxxkkkkkkkkkkkkko,
         ’okkkkkkkkkdc;’.            ..’;cdkkkkkkkkc.
         ’dkkkkkkkd:.                      .:xkkkkkko.
       .dkkkkkkkx;.                          .:xkkkkko.
      ckkkkkkkd’                               ,xkkkkkk,
     dkkkkkkx,                                  ;kkkkkkl
    .xkkkkkko                                    .dkkkkko
    dkkkkkkc                                      okkkkkl
   ckkkkkkl  .....                                dkkkkk,
  .kkkkkkx ;XMMMMMNd  WMMMMMMK: .MMMMMM,  OMMMMN ;MMMMM, .kkkkkx
  ckkkkkk; WMMW.OMMM’ WMMMckMMM cMMMMMMd  OMMMMM.dMMMMM,  ckkkkk,
  xkkkkkk  NMMMo:,,,  WMMM.cMMM.OMMWkMMN  OMMMMMoXMWMMM,  .kkkkkl
  kkkkkkx  ’OMMMMXl.  WMMMONMMW.WMMOlMMM. OMMWOMNMMOMMM,  .kkkkkd
  kkkkkkx    .lOMMMW’ WMMMOxdc.,MMM1,MMM1 OMMWlMMMMlMMM,  .kkkkkd
  xkkkkkk  XMMM oMMMd WMMM.    oMMMMMMMMK OMMW.MMMO:MMM,  .kkkkkl
  ckkkkkk, kMMMcOMMMl WMMM.    KMMMx:WMMM.OMMW XMMo:MMM,  ckkkkk,
  .kkkkkkx lONWWXOc  OOOO.    OOOO. kOOO,dOOO lOO.,OOO’ .kkkkkx
   lkkkkkkl             ,kkk.    ;kkkkxo:.              okkkkk,
    dkkkkkkc            NMNMX    oMMoclOMMo            okkkkkl
    .xkkkkkkl           OMK.NMd  oMM.    oMM,         .dkkkkko
     .dkkkkkkx’         :MM; cMM’ oMM.    :MM:        ,xkkkkkl
      ckkkkkkko.       .WMMWWWMMN oMM’ .cNMK        ’dkkkkkk;
       .xkkkkkkkd,      OMX    .WMx oMMMMWNOc     .;xkkkkkko.
         ,xkkkkkkkko,.                       .;dkkkkkkkd’
          ’okkkkkkkkkxo:’..            ..,:okkkkkkkkkl.
            .:dkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkxdddxxkkkkkkkkkkkkkko,
              .,lxkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkdc’
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And, to come full circle, this same technique had a rebirth in the 2000s as way of sending typical in-your-face spam messages without actually writing terms such as "discount", "Viagra", or "promotion" which allows spam-filters to easily classify the message as spam (Shankland, 2008).

After the Long Depression that took place during the last quarter of the nineteenth century small industrial enterprises joined together in order to be better positioned to face another crisis. They also understood the necessity of ensuring the existence of a section of the market that would consume their products. These combined efforts

resulted in the beginning of monopolies - a small number of large manufacturing companies controlling large sections of the market. Their financial power allowed the monopolies to create large and expensive marketing campaigns, against which smaller manufactures simply couldn't compete. It was also in this period that household products began to be mass produced. Into the market came several products, some new, others old, but with many identically looking replicas. In order to ensure the consumption of all these products, advertisers had to come up with a strategy. Its name was branding - an image based form of difference - that came glued to the product. Whereas until then one would simply ask for a bar of soap at the local drug store, at this point advertisers had to make sure consumers asked for Pears Soap. Advertising moved from announcing a product to the public into building a recognizable image, an identity, for it (Klein, 2001, p.6). All these facts combined with the possibility of creating large and expensive campaigns, resulted in an explosion of both advertising and branding. For the majority of the thriving companies 'the act of branding was becoming a larger and larger focus of their businesses. For these companies, the ostensible product was mere filler for the real production: the brand' (Klein, 2001, pp.15-16).

With the world entering the twentieth century, and advertising gaining a more prominent and vital role in both the American and the British economy. At this point advertising began exploring new forms of consumer persuasion, and using the newly found discipline of psychology. Advertisements started to use positive images to engage the consumer, such as health, prosperity, or attractiveness. On the opposite end of the spectrum advertisers also found guilt to be a particularly powerful feeling, and one which could be employed as a persuasive tool. Ads were not only promising happiness to those who bought the product, but also guilt to those who resisted, leading them to act, buy, and engage with product (Dyer, 1982, pp.35-36). In spam the same kind of tactics can be witnessed most prominently on emails announcing weight-loss programs, sexual enhancers, or cosmetic surgery. Hito Steyerl (2012) interprets the pictures present in these forms of spam as images of perfect humans whom constitute a negative image of the real humanity. The images reveal an army of photoshopped, sexy, skinny, smiling, horny, and rich humans, who are there to address all of us who do not look like that, and seduce us into becoming as perfect as them. By being shown the perfect bodies and perfect lives from these super-humans we become discontent with our own and begin to wish for that magical pill, that extreme diet, that profitable deal, which will warrant us a happy and perfect life. These are images that generate the same sort of discontentment and resentment that advertisers began to explore in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Figure 1: Images from medical spam

Despite all the outlined parallels, one must not pretend that spam and advertising are one and the same thing, because they are not. On a very practical level one can look at the different positions they occupy in the global economy. Whereas advertising has become essential to the capitalist economy, by making sure that produced goods are met with equal amounts of consumer demand, spam is, on the other hand, overtly marginal, acting only within the fringes of the economy. And while ads are to a certain measure convincing, spam is unconvincing and incredible. The two stand in very different positions in relation to power and the product. Advertising possesses power, legitimacy, and authority, being consequently able through the use of rhetoric to persuade the consumer to buy. Spam on the other hand has no authority or power. As for the product, one is never sure about its integrity. Who will buy legal drugs from an email like the one from Buy-Canadian-Meds[2]? And not to mention cases like the 419, where there is no product to be seen. In the 419's case what is advertised is the possibility of becoming wealthy by cooperating with the sender in a very dubious scheme. In these cases what might persuade the recipient is not the rhetoric but a confidence trick, aimed at gaining the recipient's trust, so that the scam can be acted out. According to this characteristics spam stands in a very different position from advertising. In fact I believe it to be rather hard for spam, and specially product-less spam to be misread as advertising, or even be able to succeed. The outstanding different and unique nature of spam makes it fail. However, I argue that it is due to failure that spam, and the 419 in particular, turns into fantastic stories.

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[2]See Appendix 6.2, page 23

3 Minor Literature

It is inevitable to ask whether a *failed* form of trickery, like the 419 is in fact literature? Can the stories that result from unsuccessful scams become literary texts? In order to provide answers for these questions I will employ as a basis for my argument Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of minor literature. In *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986) Deleuze and Guattari interpret Kafka's work as a subversion that takes place within the confines of the major German language. The chapter *What is a Minor Literature* delves into the classification of Kafka's oeuvre as minor literature. In it the authors describe minor literature not as a development of a minor language, but 'rather that which a minority constructs within a major language' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.16). Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka's work as minor literature for two reasons. Firstly Kafka's birth within a German-speaking Jewish family, and a German education, in parallel to a life in the mainly Czech-speaking Prague positions him both within the linguistic and ethnic minority. Not unlike emigrants in their new country of residence, Kafka was foreign, but in his own hometown, Prague. But he also decided to become a foreigner to the "correct" high German, by choosing to bring into his writing the peculiarities and deformations of Prague's oral German.

Deleuze and Guattari employ a tetra-linguistic model proposed by Henri Gobard to explain Kafka's linguistic entanglement. The model consists of four languages types: vernacular, vehicular, referential, and mythical. Vernacular refers to a territorial language, spoken mainly by rural communities; vehicular to the language used in everyday transnational exchanges; referential to the language of culture; and mythical to a religious or spiritual language. The authors ask what is the Prague Jews', and specifically Kafka's relation to those four language typologies. Czech and Yiddish are vernacular languages, disregarded in an urban scenario, yet Kafka, unlike most Jews, was able to understand and write in Czech. German filled both the vehicular and referential function, occupying the same role in the Austro-Hungarian Empire as English occupies in today's world. And Hebrew, was the mythical language, associated with the foundation of Zionism and the state of Israel. In spacial terms the 'vernacular language is *here*, vehicular language is *everywhere*, referential language is *over there*, and mythical language is *beyond*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.23).

With the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the movements of deterritorialization increase and new and intricate territorialities are formed in the heart of Europe. Within this wave of new migratory movements Kafka does not opt for the 'reterritorialization through the Czech. Nor towards a hypercultural usage of the German... Nor toward an oral popular Yiddish' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.25). Instead he chooses an intermediate route, by bringing the Prague's German into his writing, and exploring it beyond its previous boundaries.

> [H]e will tear out of Prague German all the qualities of underdevelopment that it has tried to hide … He will turn the syntax into a cry that will embrace the rigid syntax of the dried-up German. He will push towards a deterritorialization that will no longer be saved by culture or by myth (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.26).

In other words Kafka places the *here* of the vernacular language into *everywhere* of the vehicular language. He casts a language that despite having roots, is not locked to anywhere in particular, and is able to encompass many places.

Deleuze and Guattari situate the revolutionary intensity of Kafka's writing in the minor and undefined language Kafka chose to explore. By deciding to write in a underdeveloped language, Kafka was making a deliberate choice towards a poor language, without a recognizable identity or ancestry. It is in that language that Kafka 'find[s] points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which language can escape' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.27). Can it then, based on the outline interpretation of Kafka's work, be affirmed that the 419 also constitutes a minor literature? In order to answer this question I will rely on three features Deleuze and Guatarri accredit to minor literature, namely the deterritorialization of language, its collective enunciation, and a latent political dimension.

Like the tensions felt in Kafka's writing resultant from the intersection of the vehicular high-German and Prague's vernacular German, at the surface of the 419 is possible to detect a deterritorialization of the English language. Due to the unpolished English of most of the 419 authors, but also their copy-and-paste writing methods, it is common for spam emails to be filled with typos, unorthodox grammar, unusual expressions, and awkward punctuation. Such is the case of the email from Fatima Kones[3]. On the one hand spammers need to employ English, the world's current vehicular language, in order to reach as many readers as possible. On the other hand, its imperfections expose the real, fraudulent nature of the 419. Harvey Glickman (2005) proposes an explanation for these linguistic distortions. Glickman believes these imperfections are a conscious choice from the authors. According to his argument, by adopting defective English the authors exploit the racist stereotype of Africans being considered naïve, corrupt, and illiterate, hoping that it will lead the readers into believing that nothing harmful will come out of a deal with someone so innocent. I disagree with Glickman's position, and do not believe that the author of a 419, whom is able to write in an elaborate and convincing English, will give that up in order to sound naïve and illiterate. In fact I see the naivete and illiteracy as being qualities belonging to the recipients who are not able to detect the imperfections, and are desperate enough to fall prey to the scam. Interestingly these are not the intended recipients of a 419. The 419 author idealizes a rich recipient, who will put *actual* money into the deal, not

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[3]See Appendix 6.3, page 24

someone with an empty bank account. But the fact is that 419 emails are sent in bulk to millions of addresses, and consequently their recipients might not be the ideal victims the author would wish to scam. Authors are actually clueless about a recipient's gender, nationality, social strata, occupation; essentially they know nothing expect one's email address. Despite that shortcoming they try to make each recipient feel as the single lucky receiver of their emails. This untangled net of expectations, appearances, and facts, brings the 419 into a destabilized territory.

Another disjunction of the 419 can be witnessed in messages that employ big world events to justify the presented narrative. That is the case with the email from Sgt. John Samuel[4]. In the example the assassination of Osama bin Laden, reported by a soldier who took part in it, serves as the justification for the appearance of a large sum of money, and the following deal proposal. Through it we are given a personal and close, but also fictitious, perspective on the heavily mediatized Osama bin Laden assassination, over which we previously only had the birds' eyes view provided by the mass-media. The fact that these two perspectives are superimposed, as are fiction and reality, through the intimate voice by which millions of readers are addressed, brings spam into a further unstable and undefined territory, which I see as a significant contribution for its deterritorialization. These traces of deterritorialization are further amplified when one takes into consideration the technological context of its production. As already mentioned, the 419 was first developed and perfected in Nigeria during the 1980s and 1990s, and is in great part still associated with this country, although it has become replicated in other African nations, and countries such as Singapore, Russia, and Hong-Kong (Glickman, 2005). As pointed out by Lois Chude-Sokei (2010) it is somehow surprising that a form of cyber-crime comes from a country like Nigeria. If commodities such as electricity, running water, and roads are scarce, one can only imagine what the access to a computer and an Internet connection will be like. Yet, it was this lack of resources that propelled Nigerians to perfect a form of cyber-crime that did not required high levels of technical expertise, permanent access to online machines, or stable Internet connection. It simply demanded the ability to tell a convincing story, that would titillate the victims' greed. It is interesting to note that although the 419 has a very strong vernacular association to Nigeria, it exists in the vehicular cyberspace, the non-space of telecommunications, where specific territoriality amount to little. Chude-Sokei sees the 419 as being in a similar position to one once occupied by Jamaican reggae and dub. Both Nigerian email scams and Jamaican musical production originated and perfected their forms in the backwaters of the industrialized world, yet they gained world-wide fame, and became replicated outside the country where they first appeared.

Deleuze and Guattari defend that within minor literature 'everything takes on a

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[4]See Appendix 6.4, page 24

collective value' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.17). The lack of talent and the impossibility of virtuosity that results from writing in a new, uncharted language, prevents enunciations from being inscribed within the line of a given "master". Due to the fact that the language opens up a collective meaning. Considering that the 419 is not inscribed in a lineage of any given "master", or has a defined authorship, it is also prone to adopting a collective meaning. As a result of its cut-and-paste writing methods, the 419 production does not emerge from the efforts of a single individual, but from a collective. No single author can be identified in most 419 messages. Despite the presence of a writer-narrator who introduces the reader to the enticing money-gaining narrative, he or she is essentially a fabrication of the real author, whose true identity is nowhere to be found. As the result of its authorless nature, the 419 becomes a material prone to appropriation, which happens not only within the circles of 419 production, but also in the art-world, where the 419 and other forms of spam appear as an endless playground, full of material ready to be utilized in the most varied ways.

Within the realm of 419 production we can testify the intense borrowing of materials from one email to another. As already mentioned the 419s are largely assemblages of prior specimens, which are borrowed to the composition of new emails. This process of appropriation becomes apparent if one follows a given character across the group of emails written under that same character's name. At a certain point of my research I came across the previous email by Fatima Kones[5], the daughter of Kipkalya Kiprono Kones, Kenyan's former roads' minister, who died in a plane accident. On searching for more emails written by Fatima Kones I was confronted by the same story, told by the same character, but under a different first name. I found emails from Aminali, Cindy, Nora, Samira, Susan, Amina, Dalila, Esther, Joy, and Mercy, quite a few daughters, even for wealthy man. Although each incarnation of Miss Kones told essentially the same story, there were many variations among the them. I was witnessing a process of appropriation, one that was spreading the same story through a multitude of versions and variations, turning a single email into a dispersed network of texts.

Moving on to the sphere of art production, we see spam's collective utterance spreading on to many appropriations artists have found for it. One example that has been active for more than ten years is the *Spam Radio*[6] by Richard Airlie and Ian Morrison. The work is described as being 'focussed on turning spam (junk) email into an Internet audio broadcast'. The broadcast comprises a text-to-speech voice that reads received emails, accompanied by ambient music from the *monotik* label. The combination of the music, the monotone and steady rhythm of the synthetic voice, and the soothing spammers' words, bring a New Age calming character to the

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[5]See Appendix 6.3, page 24
[6]http://www.spamradio.com/

broadcast. A more recent work that deal with 419 spam is *More Songs of Innocence and of Experience* by Thompson & Craighead [7]. The work emerged as a response to a commission for the online exhibition *Our Mutual Friends*, which revolved around Charles Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend*. The artists decided to explore the resemblances between Dicken's romanticism and realism, and the language of contemporary spam messages. The end result became a series of karaoke videos, with spam email's as lyrics. The songs are accompanied by MIDI version of light music.
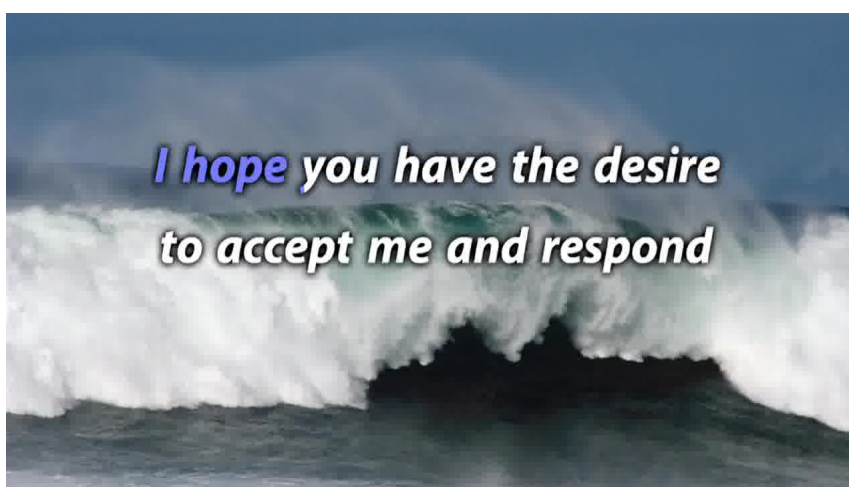

Figure 2: *Spam Radio's* website

Figure 3: Still from Thompson and Craighead's *More Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

The third and last feature Deleuze and Guatarri associate with minor literature is its political dimension. I have found the 419s political dimension to reside on two levels. Firstly 419's political dimension elicits from the representational misconceptions that are inherit to it. Based on the field work developed among young Ghanaian spammers from Accra, Jena Burrell (2012) describes the picture they construct for "the Western Other". The image, towards which they direct their scam efforts is an inversion of the stereotypical image the West has of "the African Other". According to this set of

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[7] http://www.thomson-craighead.net/docs/songs.html

images Africans are poor and victims of famine, while Westerns are rich and greedy. The latter image of the opulent Westerner, is essential for spammers to deal with their guilt. As one of Burrell's interviewees states, that his friends did not resent his scams, instead "'they say the white man is the biggest thief'". This perspective of the Western man as being a greedy thief helps to make the scam morally acceptable. Andrew Apter even finds a certain level of 'righteous third world banditry to the Nigerian 419' (Apter, 1999, p.274) and points out Nigerians' awareness of the West's complicity in the fraud, in its unmeasured hunger for profit. Given the poor living conditions of a large percentage of the Nigerian's population[8], and the large sums of money that flew out of the country or slipped into the elite's pockets, during Nigeria's oil-boom, it is only natural that spammers, and Nigerians at large, want a share of their country's wealth. The song *I Go Chop Your Dollar*[9] by the Nigeria actor Nkem Owoh provides a vivid portrait of the sentiment felt by those who commit 419 towards their victims. These victims are referred to in the song as "mugu", a Nigeria pidgin-slang term for fool.

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I don suffer, no be small
Upon say I get sense
Poverty no good at all, no
Na him make I join this business

419 no be thief, it's just a game
Everybody dey play am
If anybody fall mugu,
Ha, my brother I go chop am

National Airport na me get am
National Stadium na me build am
President na my sister brother
You be the mugu, I be the master

Oyinbo man I go chop your dollar
I go take your money and disappear
419 is just a game
You are the loser, I am the winner
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[8]According to The World Bank, poverty in 2010 affected 62% of the Nigerian population. http://data.worldbank.org/country/nigeria

[9]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1nKR3gYRY8

Figure 4: Stills from *I Go Chop Your Dollar* music video

However Chude-Sokei (2010) argues against this image of an African cyber-Robin Hood, by reminding us that the victims often belong to the same community as the spammers, and, I will argue, are even more desperate than the perpetrators. And if the scam happens to result in profit, no part of it will be invested into the public good, but rather paves scammmers' way to become part of the elite and repeat its greedy behavior. The same way "I Go Chop Your Dollar" justifies the 419, the song "Yahoozee" - a clear reference to "yahoo boys", the pseudonym attributed to young Nigerian scammers - glorifies of the lifestyle that follows a successful scam[10]

Figure 5: Stills from *Yahoozee* music video

On another level, 419's political dimensions appears to be greatly intertwined with Nigerian's past political establishment. Andrew Apter's essay *IBB = 419: Nigerian*

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[10] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBP2RkKsryg

Democracy and the Politics of Illusion (1999) elaborates on this relationship. In the essay Apter maps the development of the 419 to Nigeria's 1980s and 1990s political establishment. The essay revolves around the comparison of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, commonly known as IBB, who governed Nigeria from 1985 to 1993, and the 419. In it Apter describes the political dance, comprised of democracy's false starts and stops, which allowed the IBB to remain in power for 8 years. The general's political ballet began with the first elections under his rule held in 12 December 1987. The voting process were annulled by the National Electoral Commission due to a shortage of ballot boxes and irregularities. On May 1989 the six-year ban on political parties is lifted and new parties are allowed to form, yet IBB claimed that none of the applying associations broke with tribal and religious divisions and the process was suspended. To replace them two new parties came into being, the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention. Both parties were IBB's fabrication, which warranted him control over the political *democratic* process; Between 1991 and 1993 IBB annulled, disqualified, and rescheduled several elections, until the population revolted in June 23rd, 1993, which resulted in IBB's resignation. During those demonstrations Apter mentions seeing one protester holding a placard with the words "IBB = 419". Apter argues that such analogy between the general Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida and the art of con is not only metaphorical one (Apter, 1999, p.287). IBB's fabrication of a fictitious democracy, with all its external signs, but no real democratic processes was in itself a 419, in which the entire external appearance was crafted in order to look believable and appealing, whereas in fact none of it existed below the surface that served as a cover for the real deal. Furthermore, it was that pristine appearance that allowed IBB to build a fortune for himself while being the head of state.

Figure 6: General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida

At this point I believe it is possible to answer whether the fulfillment of these three features - deterritorialization, collective enunciation, and political dimension - which Deleuze and Guatarri recognized in minor literature, are sufficient to classify spam as

minor literature. I believe so; And more than ascertain the 419's literary appraisal, and elevate its cultural value, they reveal the 419 in depth, and bring up to the surface its multifaceted and complex nature.

4 The Dangerous 419

If it can be ascertained that 419 spam constitutes a literary genre, why is it then prevented from being disseminated and circulating? Why is it fought with spam filters? What are the dangers entangled in 419 spam narratives that justify such treatment? Is there any serious harm that can come from something so incredible as 419 spam? Deleuze and Guattari defend the status of minority literature on the following grounds:

> Minorities, of course, are objectively definable states, states of language, ethnicity or sex with their own ghetto territorialities, but they must also be thought of as seeds, crystals of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or majority (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.106).

Given that such unstable movements are inherent to minorities, it is very likely that a minor literature, as unstable and undefined as the 419, does also possess that same disruptive potential. The seeds of 419 spam might hold the potential to bring advertising into its own unstable and undefined territory. Yet, it seems unlikely that an entity, so overtly deceptive as 419 spam, is able to constitute a real threat to the structure of advertising - as vital to and powerful within the capitalist economy as it is. So if a threat exists, what is it? What factors put advertising and 419 spam in a position that causes the former to be fearful?

Raymond William (1980) describes advertising as a magical system. He argues that although our society is often criticized for being too materialistic, in actual fact it doesn't seem truly materialist. If that were the case, Williams argues, an advertisement would only have to announce the product's qualities, and no extra claims would need to be made. However, evidence suggest that advertisements which make extra promises, such as "beer X will make you feel manly, young and friendly", are more successful than the ones than don't. Raymond Williams sees this validation of a product beyond its actual capabilities as a form of magic or mythology - an organized system of non-logical actions that a group of individuals believes in - functioning within our high-tech and rational society. When we respond to these extra claims made by advertisers, and buy the advertised products, we are essentially buying a fantasy of what we would like to become. The product is simply a pretext for the fantasy we are purchasing. Spam, like the 419 spam, is also magical, since it also

relies on fantastic claims. Given that no product is announced but only the fantasy of becoming rich, then when one engages in the scam one is chasing the fantasy that it promises. The scam requires one to believe in the fantasy in order for the scam to succeed. Similarly, advertising makes fantastical claims about the benefits of products. However, unlike the likelihood of 419 spam's failure, advertising's fantastical claims result in more sales. This means that, as Williams has argued, a magical system is successfully in practice within advertising. When that fact is juxtaposed with the failure of 419 spam, it places the 419 and advertisements into a relation, which I will argue, becomes a threat to advertising. We are presented here with two magical systems, but where 419 spam stands in a marginal position and therefore fails, advertising's power, legitimacy, authority, and polished discourse ensures it succeeds.

Considering that 419 spam and advertising both speak to the same mythological register 419's failure, when seen side-by-side with advertising's success, exposes the lie of advertising. 419 spam's overtly deceptive nature provides a critical awareness that we can then apply to advertising. This awareness sets the ground for the realization that advertising also relies on a certain amount of trickery and false claims in order to construct a mythology that we are willing to believe in. If that system of beliefs begins to be deconstructed, as happens through juxtaposition with spam, the role of advertising as a reliable mechanism to produce consumers for products becomes seriously endangered, and there begins what Deleuze and Guatarri would describe as a movement of deterritorialization. Within this agitation advertising's mythical dimension, to return to Gobard's four-fold typology, becomes exposed and destabilized to a point where the mythos of advertising, that holds together its ontology, comes into relief. It is then only logical that the contemporary capitalist establishment and economy which relies upon advertising, try to keep other magical systems, as is the case with spam, from being seen next to advertising. Spam not only shares a fantastical dimension with advertising but is outstandingly marginal. Their juxtaposition could spread a kind of resentment, similar to the one felt towards the incredible and unbelievable promises of 419 spam, one which could then negatively affect our perception of advertising.

The argument presented above does not entirely justify that such large efforts are made to prevent spam's proliferation. Such a powerful and central structure as advertisement is unlikely to suffer any serious harm from an entity as frail as the 419 spam. It would also be naive to disregard the annoyance of receiving large volumes of spam, or the large quantities of wasted resources it effects, or even their fraudulent nature. Despite those facts, the possibility that spam could act as a mechanism for debunking the authority of advertising is one which should be taken into consideration. If spam succeeds in deterritorializing advertising's mythical construction, the political dimension of spam, which Deleuze and Guatarri outline as a feature of minor literature, is put into effect. The authors of 419 spam are oblivious

to the fact that what they are creating is considered minor literature, a form that has the power to undermine the dominant literature of advertising. Considering this spam becomes political, at an almost pathological level.

5   Conclusion

The sections within this thesis evolved through a series of zoom-ins on a journey to understand the territory 419 spam occupies in the field of wider cultural production. In each section the focus became increasingly narrow, which I believe allowed me to reveal connections between advertising, spam, and the Nigerian 419 spam. Each of these entities was situated within its historical and geographical context. This form of definition made it possible to understand how the construction of advertising's discourse fed into the development of spam's discourse. This shared history has resulted in a great number of common characteristics being held between spam and advertising, yet the two are unmistakably different. Spam became a sort of a "bastard cousin" to, or second-rate version of advertising. Although spam touches on the fringes of advertising, is not well resourced, nor recognized. This division becomes further accentuated when the particularities of Nigerian 419 spam are considered, as the announced products common to most spam are entirely absent from this specific form. What takes the place of the product is a dream - the fantasy of becoming rich - that is promised in exchange for the recipient's cooperation. I proposed that when this fantastical construction is placed side-by-side to advertising, it initiates a movement, which uncovers the lie of advertising. Because advertising, as argued Williams, is itself a thriving magical system, when seen in relation to the failing 419 spam, it exposes advertising as a construction also built upon the same kind of fantasies. Within this movement, it is not only advertising that becomes exposed, but also the centrality of rhetoric within Western discourse, that which privileges the persuasive power of arguments over facts.

In my second section I outlined Deleuze and Guatarri's use of Henri Gobard's four-fold linguistic typology to define the category of minor literature. Constituted by a vernacular, a vehicular, a mythical, and a referential language register, I have also made use of this terminology to help me define 419 spam within this category. Not only was this typology a helpful guideline to consolidate the definition of minor literature, but it also provided tools to look into the core composition of 419 spam. The conflict between the vehicular and the mythical language registers established an understanding of the deterritorialized space inhabited by 419 spam. With its historical roots in Nigeria, the 419 stretches as far back in the country's history as General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's corrupt government, who was able to hold on to power for seven years and build a vast fortune, all through an elaborate art of con.

The space of 419 spam is also deterritorialized by the heavily mediatized events that in the context of the emails, are put under the personal perspective of those who have lived them. These first-person testimonies function as the rationale for the money-appearance-narratives, central to the scam. The referential language - the language of culture – emerges from spam's collective enunciation. Understanding this helps us make sense of the origin and impetus for the abundant appropriations and recontextualizations artist makes of spam, such as those mentioned in section 3; *Spam Radio* by Richard Airlie and Ian Morrison, and *More Songs of Innocence and of Experience* by Thompson & Craighead. Lastly, I came to demonstrate how the political dimension of 419 spam comes into effect when it is seen side-by-side with advertising, by exposing the mythical language upon which advertising is constructed.

I should clarify that although the 419 poses a threat to advertising, the danger does not reside in the possibility of the 419 or spam taking over the role of advertising. The moment spam would take over advertising, would finish the possibility of spam becoming minor literature. It would lead it to be a major literature instead, just like advertising. Lets then hope that the 419 and other forms of spam continue to exist, evolve, and make their way into our inboxes, but also remain marginal, unbelievable and imperfect.

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6 Appendix

6.1 Email from Doctor Dave

From: Dr Dave
Subject: Weight Loss Programs

"As a cosmetic surgeon I'm always on the look out for new supplements that I can share with my patients to help improve the quality of their lives as they age.
And that's why I want to introduce you to Gen'FX, a powerful solution to combat the inevitable aging process by stimulating your body to produce more of your own human growth hormone â€" naturally returning your HGH to more youthful levels!
As a doctor, I must sayâ€¦ I am VERY critical of many of the natural anti-aging products available today.
But I would whole-heartedly recommend Gen'FX to anyone who wants to naturally increase their HGH levels and improve their overall health as they age."
"If you are concerned about the effects of aging and want a solution that can help you lose weight, gain lean and toned muscle and optimize brain function, Gen'FX is the solution for you.
Scientists have long known about the powerful anti-aging effects of human growth hormone (HGH), and Gen'FX includes a blend of ingredients that are scientifically proven to naturally raise HGH levels, helping you look and feel better than you have in years." Try It FREE* For 60 Days! You must love it - or we'll refund your money!
We back Gen'FXâ„¢ with an industry leading 100% No Risk Money-back Guarantee that gives you 2 full months to test our product!
If you're not absolutely thrilled with the results during this time, simply return any unused product in the original containers and we will refund 100% of your product purchase price, minus shipping and handling.
`http://pzwart3.wdka.hro.nl/django/acastro/collect_spam/spam/3`

6.2 Email from Buy-Canadian-Meds

From: Buy-Canadian-Meds

Subject: A recent survey proven that the majority of customers choose our pharmacy!

Meds =A0= for =A0Men	
Cial is	1.75$
Cia lis =A0So ft=A0T abs	2.50$
Levi tra	2.50$
Prop eci a	0.52$
Viag ra	1.85$
Via gra=A0 +	4.85$
(65+) All Meds	

Meds =A0= fo r=A0W omen	
Aco mpl ia	1.81$
Clom id	0.45$
Defl ucan	0.72$
Fem ale=A0 Cial is	1.11$
Fem ale=A0 Viag ra=A0	0.97$
Nexi um	0.55$
(45+) All Meds	

Anti bio= tics	
Amox icil lin	0.52$
Augm enti n	1.59$
Bac tri m	0.40$
Cep hale xin	0.24$
Cip ro	0.35$
Leva qui n	0.95$
(60+) All Meds	

Pai nki= l lers	
Arc oxia	0.38$
Cel ebre x	0.59$
Dic lof ena c=A0Ge l	9.00$
Fle xer il	0.89$
Tora dol	0.59$
Tra mado l	1.50$
(39+) All Meds	

```
http:
//pzwart3.wdka.hro.nl/django/acastro/collect_spam/spam/105
```

6.3 Email from Fatima Kones

From: Fatima Kone
Subject: Hello My Dearest,

Hello My Dearest,
My name is Miss. Fatima Kones , 23 years old originated from Nairobi-Kenya, East Africa, Female, tall, slim, fair and a very good looking girl that loves traveling and dancing, a student, that loves to be loved, I want you to also understand that your Age, distance,Religions does not matter to me, kindly permit me to contact you through this medium, I am compelled to contact you via this medium for obvious reasons which you will understand when we discuss details of my proposition.
My father was the former Assistant Minister of Home Affairs and the Kenya road Minister Mr. Kipkalya Kones had been on board the Cessna 210,which was headed to Kericho and crashed in a remote area called Kajong'a, in western Kenya.
After the burial of my father, my step-mother has threatened to kill me because of the money my father deposited in one of the banks in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in my name as the next of kin before his dead which amount is ($10.7USD) Million United State Dollars. I travelled down to Burkina Faso to withdraw the money so that I can start a better life and take care of myself.
Fatima Kones
`http://pzwart3.wdka.hro.nl/django/acastro/collect_spam/spam/88`

6.4 Email from Sgt. John Samuel

From: Sgt. John Samuel
Subject: Hi

Hi ,

My name is Sgt. John Samuel US ARMY serving the World and my country in the most honourable way I know I can, in AFGHANISTAN right now, in a nutshell, I am an American soldier serving in the Military with the Army 3rd infantry division. With a very desperate need for assistance,I found your contact particulars during my email search and picked up courage to contact you for your assistance.

Some money in various currencies were discovered in a room at a farm

house near one of Osama Bin Laden's old house in Kabul-Afghanistan during a rescue operation, I happened to be one of the soldiers that led that operation that day, so it was agreed by Col. William E. Cole the head of our battalion that some part of this money will be shared among both of us before informing anybody about it since both of us saw the money first. This was quite an illegal thing to do, but I tell you what? No compensation can make up for the risk we have taken with our lives in this hell hole, my brother in-law was killed by a road side bomb just few months ago, and I cannot count how many times GOD has saved my life down here.

Now i found a very reliable way of sending a trunk metallic box containing the amount of United States Dollars worth Twelve Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars(US$ 12.5 Million) as you must agree with me it has been hell on earth trying to keep this money safe from people's eyes for all these while and with this opportunity all I need is just someone capable I can trust 100% I can send the box to. So if you can assure me of your honesty I will go ahead and send the box to you for safe keeping till I am back home and I will gladly give you 40% of the money.

If this okay with you please get back to me with the following so i can get the box across to you.

1. Your full name
2. Contact address
3. Telephone number
4. Occupation.
Waiting to hear from you.

Yours in Service.
Sgt. John Samueln
US ARMY
http://www.army.mil/
http://pzwart3.wdka.hro.nl/django/acastro/collect_spam/spam/94