Thesis - "Spam as Minor Advertisement"

1 TO DO

- write down the parts that need development or references
- build the bibliography

2 Abstract

The thesis begins by describing Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's concept of a minor literature, in reference to Franz Kafka's work. The decisions and features that bring Kafka's literary production to be considered minor are used to ask whether spam also constitutes a minor. If spam can found to be a minor, the question left to ask is within what major language is spam constructing its own language. My answer is advertisement, spam is minor advertisement. In order to sustain that position I will place the two languages side-by-side and describe the affinities and disparities between them. This juxtaposition will function as a map, not only of the differences and similarities, but also of the distortions spam performs on ads, and how by doing so it becomes a threaten to the advertising establishment.

3 Introduction

...

4 What is a Minor Literature?

In the work *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986) by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari the authors delve into a reading of Kafka's work. The chapter *What is a Minor Literature* is dedicated to the the notion of minor literature in relation to oeuvre of the Czech writer. Deleuze and Guattari describe minor literature not as a construction based on a minor language, instead 'it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.16). The reason why Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka's work as a minor literature is a two-fold. His birth within a German-speaking Jewish family, and a German education, in the context of the mainly Czech-speaking Prague positions him both within a linguistic and an ethnic minority. Although writing and speaking a major language - German - Kafka is part of the 'deterritorialization of the German population'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.16); Not unlike emigrants in their new country of residence, Kafka's was a foreign in his hometown, Prague. Beside that foreign condition Kafka decides to take distance from "correct" high German in his writings. Instead Kafka brings to his work the peculiarities and deformations of the German spoke in Prague, 'a deterritorialized language appropriate for strange and minor uses'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.17)

Deleuze and Guattari resource to the tetra-linguistic model proposed by Henri Gobard to explain Kafka's linguistic entanglement. The model is constituted by four languages: vernacular, vehicular, referential, and mythical. Vernacular refers to a territorial language, spoke mainly by rural communities; vehicular to the language used in everyday practical and transnational exchanges; referential to the language of culture; and mythical to a religious or spiritual language. The authors ask what is the relation Prague Jews, and consequently Kafka, to those four languages. Czech and Yiddish were vernacular languages, disregarded in an urban scenario, yet Kafka, unlike most Jew, was able to understand and write in Czech, which became important in his relation with Milena Jesenská. German filled both the vehicular and referential language, occupying the same role in the Austro-Hungarian Empire as English in today's world. And Hebrew, was the mythical language, associated with the foundation of Zionism and the state of Israel. Whereas 'vernacular language is *here*, vehicular language is *everywhere*, referential language is *over there*, and mythical language is *beyond*'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.23).

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire 'increases the crisis, accentuates everywhere the movements deterritorialization and invites all sorts of complex reterritorializations'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.24). In this movement Kafka does not opt for a '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 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 its roots, encompasses many places, and is not rooted nowhere particularly.

Deleuze and Guattari situate the revolutionary intensity of Kafka's writing in the minor and undefined language Kafka **chose** to write in. To write in a minor language is a choice, which implies that one is willing to allow his work to have no value, to become nothing. He will be willing, like Kafka was, to write in a language without masters, within which even its creator is a stranger; A language marked by its poverty, with no single define identity. This is the language Kafka explores. It is in it that he 'find[s] points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which language can escape'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.27). A linguistic territory has no single center of power neither clear boundaries toward what can and cannot be said(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.26).

In the beginning of the chapter Deleuze and Guattari describe three features of minor literature as being the deterritorialization of language, the political nature of every element, and the collective enunciation. I belief to be in position to better understand what the authors meant with these three features. In the first place, the already mentioned deterritorialized nature of Prague's German, which Kafka adopts and explores as his written language; While being the language of Prague's Jews, it derives from an international vehicular language, yet it is distant from the Czech territoriality(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.16).

Secondly, the authors defend that within a minor literature 'everything takes on a collective value'. The lack of talent and the impossibility of virtuosity that results from writing in a new, uncharted minor language, prevents enunciations from being inscribed within the work of a given "master". Such lack of ancestry allows for a minor literature to gain a collective meaning(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.17). Thirdly, they state that while in a major literature individual intrigues join to form a whole, in minor literature every intrigue stands-out on its own, and is political. In this scenario each 'the individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.17). As an example the authors refer to the family 'triangle' as being attached to other triangles, such as the commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical.

4.0.1 other minorities

The decision to become minor, and the consequences that result from such choice, is not confined to literature. Other major discoursive practices have their own minor languages. Marcel Swiboda describe how African-America and Afro-Caribbean musical manifestations consitute instances of a minor culture. Swiboda locates the first minor aspects of these musical genres in the deterritorilization of English which they performe. Since the mentioned genres employ a language usually responsible for uttering a dominant culture, minor culture formations need to find ways of appropriating that language so that it can utter those non-dominant manifestations, or in Swiboda's words 'to render them sonorous'. As an example Swiboda mentions the politization the English language performed by Jamaincan-British poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson. Kwesi Johnson inscribes Creole-English, as a way of challanging the oppression of dominant English language. The second minor aspect is present in transformation of the personal and singular on to a collective perspective. As an example of this collective addressing Swiboda mentions the figure of a hiphop MC, whom despite being an individual voice with a personal style, it is part of the hiphop collective entity, without which it could not exist(Swiboda, 2005).
[ADD: minor cinema]
Another contemporary popular discourse that I believe qualifies as a minor language is spam(**?**).

4.0.2 spam, a minor language

Deleuze and Guattari's definition of minor literature can be summed up as a choice of a minority operating within a major language. This minority chooses to indulge in a practice without masters and only having a poor vocabulary to work with. Such decision might result in a practice with no recognized valued.

Spam, once only a brand of spiced canned meat, became a synonym to unsolicited emails, sent to large number of addresses, with the underlying intention of selling products such as Rolex replicas or Viagra pills, or even extort money from its recipients through a convincing narrative. Although it is ostensibly a marginal and often deceptive practice, can spam be considered to be minor?

Spam is known for its **poor vocabulary** as one can testify by reading a few spam emails, where typos and unorthodox uses of English abound example. ADD poorness of language might be deliberate

Those who create it, choose to take part in **a practice with no apparent value.** So is the case, that large quantities of spam need be created and send out, in order for it to be success. statistics

Deleuze and Guattari recognize the language deterritorialization, the collective enunciations, and a latent political meaning, as the main features of minor literature. Are these marks are also visible in spam?

The most visible feature of spam appears to be its **deterritorialization of language**, which results from the *mode of address* in which these emails are written. Although sent in bulk to millions of addresses they address the reader intimately and directly one. Spam authors are clueless about the recipient's gender, nationality, social strata, occupation, etc; essentially they know nothing expect one's email address, yet they try to make each recipient feel like the only lucky receiver. Another source of linguistic instability results from the employment of an English, that despite trying to become vehicular and international, due to a lack of proficiency results in highly distorted versions of English ADD Bloomaert - English indexes

Spam also becomes a **collective enunciation**, since it is no longer inscribed in a lineage of given a "master", or possesses a clear authorship. The language is not the result of the work of a single identifiable individual, but has shifted to the realm of a collective or authorless enunciation. This process happens due to several factors. Firstly no single author can be singled out in most spam messages. Even in the cases fraud emails incarnations, where writer-narrator draws the reader into an enticing money-gaining narrative, this character is essentially a fabrication from the real author, whose true identity is nowhere to be found. Secondly, and partly a result from the authorless nature of spam texts, spam turns into a material, prone to appropriation, which happens not only within the circles of spam production, but also in art-world, for whom spam seems an endless and rich sandbox, pregnant with material to appropriate. Within the spam production realm we can testify the intense borrowing of materials from one email to email. Spam emails are essentially assemblages of previously specimens, which are borrowed on to the composition on new emails. This process of appropriation becomes clean if one follows a given writing character across the cluster of emails written under that name. At the point of my research I came across an email whose posing author identified herself as Alicia Kones, the daughter of Kipkalya Kiprono Kones, Kenyan's former roads' minister who died in plane accident. Miss Kones asks the reader to help her keep her father's fortune, before her stepmother gets hold of it. On searching for more emails written by Alicia 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, Fatima, Susan, Amina, Fatima, Dalila, Esther, Joy, and Mercy - quite a few daughters even for wealthy man. Although the story each incarnation of Miss Kones told was essentially the same, there were many variations among the found email bodies. I was witnessing appropriation in progress, that spread the little traces of authorship of these text could have through a collective network of author-plagiators. Moving outside the realm of spam production on the sphere of contemporary art create, we see spam collective utterance spreading on to many appropriations by artists. One example is the piece *More Songs of Innocence and of Experience* by Thompson & Craighead `http://www.thomson-craighead.net/docs/songs.html`. 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-songs, with spam email's as their lyrics. The songs are accompanied by MIDI version of light music that make you want to reach the mute button as quick as possible. ADD More examples

The **political dimension** is quite visible in spam and becomes all the more palpable if one takes into account Nigeria's - a country which became commonly associated with spam - political and economic context of the last thirty years. Andrew Apter's essay *IBB = 419: Nigerian Democracy and the Politics of Illusion* (1999) provides an lucid account of the political dimension of **spam's "419" genre**No prior description is given. The essay is constructed around the comparison between General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, commonly known as IBB, who governed Nigeria from 1985 until his resignation 1993 after much public discontentment, and "419" financial fraud, for which Nigeria became famous for. The handle "419" derives from the Nigerian code law that persecutes these sort of crimes. The fraud consists of a game of appearances that leads to a confident trick. Initially the victims, normally foreigners, received letters or faxes from a Nigerian businessman proposing a highly profitable deal; later on email became the common medium through which the victims were approached. When faced with such a lucrative proposition the foreign partner only has to advance a small amount, in order to pay fees or lawyers, and the profit is guaranteed. In reality he falls pray of his own greed, giving out the requested *small amount* and never receiving the promised fortune. Given the low living standards of a great portion of the Nigerian population, under both the colonial and the pos-colonial regimes, and the large sums of money that flew out of the country or slipped into the elite's pockets during the 1970s oil-boom, Apter sees a certain level of 'righteous third world banditry to the Nigerian "419" '(Apter, 1999, p.274). He also points out that Nigerians are aware of the West's complicity in the fraud, in its unmeasured hunger for money. The song *I Go Shop Your Dollar* by the Nigeria actor Nkem Owoh provides a vivid portrait to the sentiment felt by those who commit "419" towards their victims, but also the game of appearances that the "419" sets up in order to succeed in gaining the trust of its pray.

```
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\cite{DG86}
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
```

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

But Apter goes further into the political dimension of "419". He describes the political dance, comprised of democracy's false starts and stops, which allowed the IBB to maintain power until 1993. In a nutshell BBI's political ballet consisted of the following moves: the first elections under his rule held in 12 December 1987, which 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 parties can be formed, yet IBB's claim that none of the applying associations broke with tribal and religious divisions suspended their creation; Two occupy their place two new parties, the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention were created; The two parties were both 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 = 499". Apter argues that such analogy between the General and the art of con is not metaphorical but real(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 whole 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.

<u>DEVELOP in order to include</u>: Another of the traces of this underlying political strand elicits from the **clichés** that abound in spam. Authors resort to stereotypes to give life to their characters, to authors-narrator, and reciprocally have quite a stereotypical vision of westerns. Those choices are a syndrome of a larger problem, with the lack of knowledge and preconceived ideas about the foreign other at its center. Jena Burrel, based on her field-work with the population of young Ghana's spammers, reports that when posing as Africans, spammers integrate into their character the 'Western archetype of the African other'. Burrel describes them as *self-aware mimics*, specialized in representing their online persona based on Western archetypes of the African Other. In this way spammers respond to the expectations of a foreign gaze, by providing the expected image, such as the poor orphan, the attractive woman, the corrupt politician, or the Christian pastor. (BURRELL).

Based on the outlined choices, and marks of the practice of spam on to its language, I believe it is possible to affirm spam constitutes a minor. However one question remains unanswered: **Within what major language is spam building its body?** My intuitive answer is advertisement. Spam appears essentially as advertisement, with very similar persuasion tactics. Similarly to advertisement, spam aims to persuade the reader to buy the product or service it announces. Some times the claims on the product in question are legitimate, other times they are not. Yet, despite those facts there seems to be a significant difference in the way spam and advertisement are perceived.

One is seen legitimate and has carte blanche to take-over our visual and aural surrounding, at anytime and in every context, whereas spam, just as the handle indicates is seen as distasteful, unsolicited, and deceptive junk, which must be kept away from our vulnerable selves. Why is there such a distinct treatment concerning these two forms of marketing? Where does the difference between the two reside?

5 ads spam, spam ads

TO BE WRITTEN - similarities - differences - spam distortion of ads * what does the minor signify to major In his book *The Discourse of Advertising* Guy Cook introduces advertisement by stating that:

> Ads use fictions, word play, compressed story-telling, stylized acting, photography, cartoons, puns and rhythms in ways which are often memorable, enjoying and amusing . . . The words and details of ads often come to people's minds more readily than those of novels and poems and plays, and they are often recalled with more laughter and enthusiasm. Yet it is often a love-hate relationship: one which frequently causes unease, and in which the love is often denied. It seems that with many ads, we suffer a split, contradictory reaction: involuntary spontaneous enjoyment, conscious reflective rejection. (p.3)

Such definition seems applicable not be only to ads, but also to spam. We could replace every occurrence of the term *ads* for *spam* and infer that this description still maintain its truth. One can affirm that spam and ads are not that dissimilar. But **what are actually the similarities between the two?**

If spam and advertising have these many points in common it needs to be asked why they trigger such different reactions. **Why are adverts free to intrude on our visual and aural surroundings while great efforts are put on keeping spam away from our eye?** briefly describe spam combat techniques; spam from being send out, reaching our email accounts, and being hidden from the recipient's sight.

Could the **difference as previously suggested reside in the fact that spam is minor advertisement**?

In that case **what does spam signify to the major language of advertisement?**

References

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. University of Minnesota Press, London, 1986.

Marcel Swiboda. *The Deleuze Dictionary*, chapter Becoming + Music. The Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2005.

Andrew Apter. *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa*, chapter IBB = 419: Nigerian Democracy and the Politics of Illusion, pages 267–307. The University of Chicado Press, London, 1999.