

The Dangerous 419 Spam

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Abstract

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

1 Introduction

Spam, once only a brand of spiced canned meat, became synonymous to unsolicited email, sent to large number of addresses, with the underlying intention sell products such as Rolex replicas or Viagra pills to their recipients. Spam is essential distasteful advertising that arrives in our mailboxes, in large quantities. It's electronic junk destined to receive a click over recycling-bin icon and vanish. But as much it is distasteful and unsolicited it also fascinating for many, including myself. Perhaps as result of its colossal volume, or its diversity, comprising many sub-genres such as medical spam, email hoaxes, phishing, or spam lit. But when I began to look more attentively to spam, one particular type, name simply 419, sized my attention.

The 419 first appeared in the late 1970s in Nigeria, in the form of letters, then faxes and in the 1990s email became their prime medium (Glickman, 2005). The three-number handle derives from the Nigerian code law that persecutes crimes involving the impersonation of state's officials (Glickman, 2005). In its original form the fraud consists of a game of appearances that leads to a confident trick. The act begins with an email sent to a large number of addresses. The email make usually reference to a large sum of money held in an African bank account. As the owner of this sum is often dead, the sender asks for the recipient's collaboration in transferring the frozen funds to a foreign account, so that the money becomes accessible. As a reward the recipient is promised to receive a fraction of the total sum. Victims who fall for this telltale are normally asked early on to provide their personal details, such as their full name, bank name, and account number, which is normally used for credit card applications or checks forgeries. If the recipient is eager to take part in the proposed deal he will, at later stage, be requested to transfer money to the sender's account, given 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 a foreseeable one: the recipient complies with the requests, but surprisingly no fortune arriving in his bank account. Victims, like gambles, struggle to admit they are loosing money, and go on agreeing to these demands, in hope that the promised fortune will arrive. And even when they realize that they have fallen for a scam,

victims are deterred from denouncing it, as they are aware of the illegal contours of the business they have joined (Glickman, 2005, pp.465-469).

Several reasons made decide concentrate more on the 419. In the first place the emails are in themselves fascinating. The scam lives in great part from the ability of the author to tell a convincing and enticing story. As a result the emails are pregnant with inventiveness and seduction, but also ingenuity, which often results in a quite amusing narrative. In addition, the narrated stories are no isolated entities, but are born from a process of text appropriation, from which network of very similar, yet different, stories are generated. I must also mention the very interesting body of work 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. And the very fact that I am currently developing an artistic project - *Narratives of Deception* - based on 419 emails, has been a strong motivation to go below the surface of the 419.

I will begin the thesis by describing the evolution of modern advertising in the last three centuries. This historical overview will server as guideline to understand why do advertising and spam, share the same genetic code, yet they are unlike, and stand in different positions in relation to power and consumers. This distinction makes us ask what is in fact the threat posed by spam. If spam can be easily distinguished from advertising, why are so many efforts put on preventing spam from reaching our email inboxes? We will only be fooling ourselves if we believe spam to constitute a serious competitor to advertising, or even a danger to society. The probabilities of spam constituting a danger are even more remote if we focus on the 419, as this type of fraud spam announces no actual product, but solely the fantasy of becoming rich. Such facts make the 419 quite ineffective as a fraud. Who in her right-mind will fall for it? Surely some do fall, otherwise the 419 and other email scams would simply cease to exist. According to The Guardian, in 2010 the British authorities were 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 materialise but of course it never does". This leads me into believing, that for a scam to succeed, the victims must be as naïfe and hungry for salvation as this lady. But despite the occasional catch, the 419 is bound to fail. I will argue that in fact it is the failure of 419 spam which opens up the possibility for it to have an afterlife as stories, but can they been seen as literature? Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri's use the concept of minor literature, in refer to Franz Kafka's work. Could the same concept be applied to the 419 emails? Being born in a German-speaking Jewish family Kafka chose to write in German, but rather than conforming himself to the established high-German, Kafka opened up his writing to the distortions of Prague's spoken German. This decision, Deleuze and Guatarri

argue, brought Kafka's work to become deterritorialized, political, and collective. At first sight the aforementioned characteristics, appear to resonate also with the 419. Can that mean that the concept of minor literature is also applicable to 419 spam? If that is the case, if the 419 is literature, it needs to be asked how does this literary form, ineffectual 419, threaten a multi-billion industry like as advertising and the Capitalism economical system, which rely upon it. In order to answer that last question I will look into how Raymond Williams' perception of advertising as a magical system, to which we, in the industrialized Western world, assent to. As this mythology speaks not only to advertising, but also spam, it places the two on a plane that forces the lies of advertising to become as denuded as they are in 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 products will be consumed and there won't be a excess of produced goods. 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 ads from that period weren't much different from the classified ads 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 ads provided direct information on the announced products.

Still in the seventeenth century the plain recommending tone from the ads began to shift to a more rhetoric discourse. Ads would employ the voice of an expert, such as a *physician*, who served as a rhetorical figure, asserting qualities to the product in questions, 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 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 adverting can be easily associated to today's spam. In both cases there is an attempt to create a credible character, who uses his rhetorical figure to persuade the consumer to buy the product in question, such as the case with the email from Dr.Dave¹.

In the two centuries that followed not many changes were introduced to advertising. A major change that took place concerned the presence of ads. Until the nineteenth century ads were mostly confined to newspaper column, but by then they started making their way on to is the city street. Advertising became increasing disseminated, with posters and leaflets hitting the city streets. Once again the same behavior that was witnessed in the past of modern advertising, is replicated by spam. In both case do not only invade the territories through which their message is communicated, but also 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). Today it can not only be found on emails, but also on blog comments, Wikipedia articles, or instant messages. On each one of these media spam tries to disguise itself as the their typical forms of communication. On emails we might read a message that could have been sent by a close friend or our bank; On a Wikipedia spam might disguise itself as an article, or insert promotional links on to 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-
shhttp://bestdiscountuggboots.webs.com/http://bigdiscountuggboots.blinkweb.com

It is interesting to note that camouflaging has also been a resource employed by advertisement. In the mid-nineteenth century advertisers felt dissatisfied with the restrictions newspapers imposed upon the content and dimensions of ads. An ad wasn't allowed to extend beyond the width of a newspaper column, or employ display layouts. 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 solution for creating images or large font-size text, which could be exchanged among users (Wikipedia, 2013a), as in the example bellow.

..''''..

¹See Appendix 6.1, page 20

., :ldxkkkkkkkkkkkkxol:'.
 'cdkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkko:.
 .;dkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkxkkkkkkkkkkkkkkko,
 'okkkkkkkkkkdc;'. ..';cdkkkkkkkkkkc.
 'dkkkkkkkkd:.. :xkkkkkkko.
 .dkkkkkkkx;. :xkkkkkkko.
 ckkkkkkkd' ,xkkkkkk,
 dkkkkkkx, ;kkkkkkkl
 .xkkkkkkko .dkkkkkko
 dkkkkkkkc okkkkkkl
 ckkkkkkkl dkkkkkk,
 .kkkkkkx ;XMMMMMNd WMMMMMMK: .MMMMMM, OMMMMN ;MMMMM, .kkkkkkx
 ckkkkkk; WMMW.OMMM' WMMMcKMMM cMMMMMMd OMMMMM.dMMMMM, ckkkkkl
 xkkkkkk NMMM0:, , , WMMM.cMMM.OMMWkMMN OMMMMMoXMWMMM, .kkkkkl
 kkkkkkkx 'OMMMXl. WMMMONMMW.WMMOlMMM. OMMWOMNMMOMMM, .kkkkkd
 kkkkkkkx .lOMMMW' WMMMOxdc.,MMMl,MMMl OMMWlMMMMlMMM, .kkkkkd
 xkkkkkk XMMM oMMMd WMMM. oMMMMMMMMK OMMW.MMMO:MMM, .kkkkkl
 ckkkkkk, kMMMcOMMl WMMM. KMMX:WMMW.XMMo:MMM, ckkkkk,
 .kkkkkkx lONWXXOc 0000. 0000. k000,d000 100.,000' .kkkkkkx
 lkkkkkkkl ,kkk. ;kkkkxo:. okkkkk,
 dkkkkkkc NMNMx oMMoclOMMo okkkkkkl
 .xkkkkkkkl OMK.NMd oMM. oMM, .dkkkkkko
 .dkkkkkkkx' :MM; cMM' oMM. :MM: ,xkkkkkl
 ckkkkkkko. .WMMWWMMN oMM' .cNMK 'dkkkkkk;
 .xkkkkkkkd, OMX .WMx oMMMMWNOc .;xkkkkkkko.
 ,xkkkkkkkkko, . ;dkkkkkkkkd'
 'okkkkkkkkkxo:'.. .., :okkkkkkkkkkl.
 .:dkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkxdddxxkkkkkkkkkkkkko,
 .,lxkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkdc'
 .;codkkkkkkkkkkkkkkdl:,.
 ..',;;;,'.

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 allow 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 in better position to face another crisis. They also understood the necessity to ensure the existence of a market section for consuming 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 strong positions allowed them to make use 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 massed produced. From the factories into the market, came many products, some new, others old, but with many similar looking twins. 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 the produced products (Klein, 2001, p.6). All these facts, combined with the possibility of creating large and expensive campaigns, brought both advertising and branding into a explosion. The actual effects of that explosion only began to really be felt in 1990s. 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).

Going back to where we left, with the world entering the twentieth century, and advertising gaining a more prominent and vital role in both American and British economies. At this point advertising began exploring new forms of consumer persuasion, and the newly found discipline of psychology became a useful help. Ads started to appear associated with positive images that would engage the reader, such as health, prosperity and attractiveness. On the opposite end of the spectrum advertisers also found guilt to be a particularly powerful feeling. Ads were not only promising happiness to those who bought the product, but also guilt to those who resisted it, leading them to act, to buy, to 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 ourselves and will 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 both 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. While advertising possess 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. In fact, who will buy legal drugs from on an email like the one from Buy-Canadian-Meds²? And not to mention the cases, such as the 419, where there is no product to be seen. In those cases 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. The enumerated characteristics make spam stand in a very different position from advertisement. In fact I believe it to be rather hard for spam, and specially product-less spam as 419 to be misread as advertising and be able to succeed. The outstanding different and unique nature of spam makes it fail. However, I will argue that it is due to its failure, that spam, and the 419 in particular turns into fantastic stories.

²See Appendix 6.2, page 21

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 be a literary form? In order to provide answers for these questions I will employ, and base my argument on 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 the authors describe minor literature not as a development of a minor language, but rather 'rather that which a minority constructs within a major language' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.16). Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka's work as a minor literature for two reasons. Kafka's birth within a German-speaking Jewish family, 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 a foreigner 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 the German spoke in Prague.

Deleuze and Guattari resource to the 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. Withing this wave 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 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 an underdeveloped language, Kafka was making a deliberate choice towards a poor language, without defined identity or masters. 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 does also constitute a minor language? In order to answer this question I will rely on three features Deleuze and Guattari accredited to minor literature: its deterritorialization of language, collective enunciation, and latent political dimension.

Like the tensions felt in Kafka's writing, from the intersection of the vehicular high-German and Prague's vernacular German, at the surface of the 419 it is possible to detect a deterritorialization of the English language. 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 Kones³. If on the one hand spammers need to employ English, the world's current vehicular language, in order to reach as many readers as possible, independently of their nationality; On the other hand, its imperfections expose the real, fraudulent nature of the 419. Harvey Glickman (2005) proposes an explanation for these linguistic distortions found in 419 emails. Glickman believes they are a conscious choice from the authors. According to his argument, by adopting a defective English the authors exploit the racist stereotype of Africans being considered naïve, corrupt, and illiterate, in hope that it will lead the readers into believing that nothing harmful will come out of a deal with someone so innocent. I disagree with such position, and do not believe that the author of a 419, whom is able to write in elaborate and convincing English, will give that up in order to sound naïve and illiterate. In fact I see the naïve and illiterate as being the ones - the actual recipients - who is not able to detect the imperfections, and is desperate enough to fall prey of the scam. These are not the intended recipients of a 419. The author idealizes a rich recipient, who will put *actual* money into this deal, not 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 expected

³See Appendix 6.3, page 22

ideal ones. Authors are actually clueless about a recipient's gender, nationality, social strata, occupation; essentially they know nothing except 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, bring the 419 into a further 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 Samuel⁴. 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 event of Osama bin Laden assassination, over which we previously, only had a birds' eyes view provided by the mass-media. The fact that these two perspectives are superimposed, as are fiction and reality, and the intimate voice through which millions of readers are addressed, brings spam into an unstable and undefined territory, which I see as a significant contribution for its deterritorialization. And the referred traces of 419's deterritorialization are further amplified if 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, it has been replicated in other African nations, and countries such as Singapore, Russia, and Honk-Kong (Glickman, 2005). As pointed out by Lois Chude-Sokei (2010) is somehow surprising that this 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 requires 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 develops in the vehicular cyberspace, the non-space of telecommunications, where individuals territoriality amount to little. Chude-Sokei sees 419 as being in a similar position to one once occupied by Jamaican reggae and dub. Both Nigerian email scams and Jamaican musical productions 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 collective value' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.17). The lack of talent and the

⁴See Appendix 6.4, page 22

impossibility of virtuosity that results from writing in a new, uncharted language, prevents enunciations from being inscribed within the line of a given “master”. The language opens up towards 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 “available” to adopt a collective meaning. In fact the 419 production does not result from the work 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 enticing money-gaining narrative, he or she is essentially a fabrication from 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, stuffed with material ready to be utilized in the most diverse ways.

Within the realm of 419 production we can testify the intense borrowing of materials from one email to another. 419s are largely assemblages of previously specimens, which are borrowed on to the composition of new emails. This process of appropriation surfaces if one follows a given writing character across the group of emails written under that character’s name. At a certain point of my research I came across the previously email by Fatima Kones⁵, the daughter of Kipkalya Kiprono Kones, Kenya’s former roads’ minister, who died in 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, that was spreading the same story through a multitude of versions and variations, turning a single entity on to a dispersed network of texts.

Moving outside on to the sphere of art production, we see spam collective utterance spreading on to many appropriations by artists. One example that has been active for more than ten years is the *Spam Radio*⁶. 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 who reads received emails, joint with ambient music from the monotik label. The combination of the music and the steady rhythm and monotone of the synthetic voice, and the soothing spammers’ words, bring a New Age calming character to the broadcast. A more recent work that deal with 419 spam is *More Songs of Innocence and of Experience* by Thompson & Craighead⁷. The work emerged as a response to a commission for the online exhibition *Our Mutual Friends*, which

⁵See Appendix 6.3, page 22

⁶<http://www.spamradio.com/>

⁷<http://www.thomson-craighead.net/docs/songs.html>

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 that make you want to reach the mute button as quick as possible.



Figure 2: *Spam Radio's* website

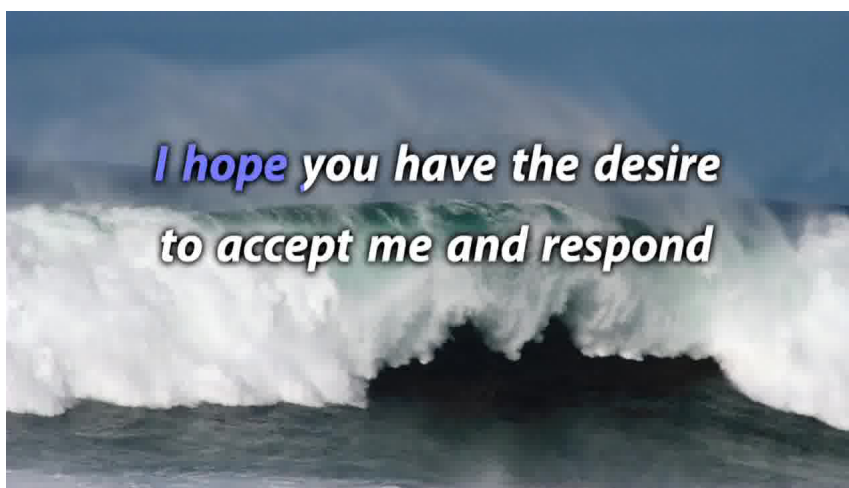


Figure 3: Still from Thompson and Craighead's *More Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

The third and last feature Deleuze and Guatarri associate with minor literature is its political dimension. I have identified the 419's political dimension at the two levels. On one level 419's political dimensions elicits from the representational misconceptions that are inherit to it. Jena Burrell (2012) based on field work with young Ghanaian spammers, from Accra, describe the picture these young individuals have of "the Western Other" as being the reverse of the stereotypical image the West has of "the African Other". According to this set of images Africans are poor and victims of famine, while Westerns are rich and greedy. The later image of the opulent Western, is essential for the spammer to deal with their guilt. As one of Burrell's interviewees stated, 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 a greedy thief helps into making 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 low living conditions of a large percentage of the Nigerian’s population⁸, 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 their share of the country’s wealth. The song *I Go Chop Your Dollar*⁹ by the Nigeria actor Nkem Owoh provides a vivid portrait to the sentiment felt by those who commit 419 towards their victims, whom in the song are called “mugu”, a Nigeria pidgin-slang term for fool.

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

⁸According 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, or if doesn't, I will argue, is even more desperate than the perpetrators. And if the scam happen to result in profit, no part of it will be invested into the public good, but rather pave their way into becoming part of the elite and perpetuate 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 life-style that follows a successful 419¹⁰



Figure 5: Stills from *Yahoozee* music video

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

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 origin of 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 financial fraud scam. 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. In a nutshell BBI's political ballet consisted of the following moves: the first elections under his rule held in 12 December 1987 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 can be formed, yet IBB's claim that none of the applying associations broke with tribal and religious divisions suspended the process; To replace them two new parties come 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 and the art of con is not only metaphorical (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

Are the specific “fullfilment” of these three features - deterritorialization, collective enunciation, and political dimension -, which Deleuze and Guatarri recognized in minor literature, sufficient to classify spam as minor literature? I believe so; And more

than ascertain the 419a literary appraisal, and elevate its cultural value, they reveals us the 419 in depth, bringing to the surface its multifaceted and complex nature.

4 The Dangerous 419

If it is ascertained that the 419 constitutes a literary genre, why isn't it free to circulate and disseminate, and instead, is fought with the spam filters? What are the dangers contained do 419 narratives entangle, which justify such treatment? Deleuze and Guattari's defend that:

Minorities, of course, are objectively definable states, states of language, ethnicity or sex with their own ghetto territorialies, but they must also be thought 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 forms of spam, as unstable and undefined, as the 419, do also possess that same disruptive potential, which might withhold the possibility of bringing advertising to its own unstable and undefined territory. Yet, it seems unlikely that an entity, so overtly deceptive as 419, is able to constitutes a threat to a structure as vital a power in the capitalist economy as advertising. If it actually did, what would it mean for advertising? What would be the actual threat?

Raymond William (1980) describes advertising as a magical system. William argues that our society is often criticized for being too materialistic, whereas in fact it doesn't seem truly materialist. If that were the case, Williams argues, an ad would only have to announce the product's qualities, and no extra claims needed to be made. However, evidence suggest that ads which make extra promises, such as "beer X will make you fell 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 which a group of individuals believes in - functioning within our high-tech and rational society. When we respond to these extra claims made by ads, and buy the advertised products, we are essentially buying the fantasy of what we would like to be. The product is simply a pretext for the fantasy we are paying for. Spam, such as the 419, is also magical, since it does also rely on fantastic claims. Given that no product is announced, but only the fantasy of becoming rich, when one engages in the scam, one is following the fantasy which it promises. The scam requires one to believe in the fantasy in order to succeed. Similarly, advertising makes fantastical claims about the benefits of products. However, unlike 419's likeness to fail, advertising's fantastical

claims result in more sales. This means that, as Williams argued, a magical system is successfully in practice within advertising. When that fact is juxtaposed with 419's own failure, it places the 419 and advertising into a relation, which I will argue, becomes a threat to advertisement.

Considering that both the 419 and advertising speak to that same mythological register, the 419's failure, when placed side-by-side to advertising success, exposes that lie of advertising. 419's overtly deceptive nature lets us to look upon advertising and realize that it also relies on a certain amount of trickery and false claims, to construct a mythology in which we believe in. If that system of beliefs begins to be deconstructed, the role of advertisement, as reliable mechanism to warrant consumers for products, becomes seriously endangered. It is then only logic, that the current establishment and economy, which rely upon advertisement, try to keep other magical systems, that not only share a fantastical dimension with advertising, but that are outstandingly marginal, from becoming as visible as the ads. Their juxtaposition could spread a similar kind of resentment, as the one falls towards the incredible promises made in 419s, to spread into our perception of advertising.

I wouldn't say that the presented argument entirely justify the efforts put on preventing spam's proliferation. A powerful and central structure as advertisement is unlikely to suffer any serious blow from a entity as frail as the 419. And it would naïve to disregard the annoyance which is to receive large volumes of spam, or the large amount of wasted resource it provokes, or even their fraudulent nature. However, the possibility of spam acting as an advertising's debunking mechanism should be taken into considered. And although that specific threat might be buried under the many dangers ISP, system admins, users, and legislators adjudicate to spam, it is nonetheless a presence which is undeniable and discomfoting.

5 Conclusion

The essay revolved around the question of what threat is posed by spam that justifies all the efforts which are put on protecting Internet users and the whole infrastructure from spam.

I began describing the history of modern advertising, as away to understand how they both have many resemblance, yet they are unmistakably different. Despite their affinities, particularly their persuasive languages, and ads past's resemblance to today's spam, the two stand in very different positions and territories. Spam seems inapt to stand as a threat to advertising. That possibility becomes even more absurd when the 419 spam genre is taken into consideration, as in it announces no product, but only the fantasy of becoming rich. And it does it in such unconvincing and

incredible way, that it paves its way into failure as a scam.

I have described how 419's failure allows it to become literature. And by considering the features Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri ascertain to instances of minor literature, and through the dissection of 419's money-appearance-narratives, the arguments and events which endorse them, the social context from which they are born, and the forms of appropriation they are subject, it was possible for to argue that the 419 is a form of minor literature.

Yet this argument did not answer why, being it a literary genre, the 419 isn't free to circulate, and is instead, fought with the spam filters. I replied by arguing that 419's threat lays on the very fact that it constitutes a minor literary genre. Being minor, it possesses the possibility of contaminating the established majority with its unstable movements.

To describe what those movements were I employed Raymond William's description of advertising as a magic system. William's perspective revealed advertising as being based on fictitious claims as 419s. Both speak to same mythological register, yet unlike spam, advertising succeeds. This contradiction I argued reveals the lie within advertising, the false claims, upon which advertising is based. It show how it also relies of set of fantastic to sell us products.

I conclude by noting that in the current state of affairs advertising is unlikely to suffer any serious blow from spam. Yet the proposed argument appears as more logic than the strictly utilitarian arguments to justify the war on spam. But more essentially, I believe this thesis gave me that chance to unravel less apparent layers of the 419, which both explain the general fascination for its stories incredible, and the inherit fear they might provoke in monolithic structures such as advertising or the economy.

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 " naturally returning your HGH to more youthful levels!

As a doctor, I must say! 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'FX 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 online customers choose our pharm

The image shows a screenshot of a spam email with four panels of fake medicine listings. Each panel has a title, a list of medicine names with prices, and a 'All Meds' link.

Panel Title	Medicine Name	Price
Meds for Men	Cialis	1.75\$
	Cialis Soft Abs	2.50\$
	Levitra	2.50\$
	Propecia	0.52\$
	Viagra	1.85\$
	Viagra+	4.85\$
Meds for Women	Acemiplia	1.81\$
	Clomid	0.45\$
	Deflucon	0.72\$
	Femal Cialis	1.11\$
	Femal Viagra	0.97\$
	Nexium	0.55\$
Antibiotics	Amoxicillin	0.52\$
	Augmentin	1.59\$
	Bactrim	0.40\$
	Cephalexin	0.24\$
	Cipro	0.35\$
	Levaquin	0.95\$
	Other	
Painkillers	Arcoxia	0.38\$
	Celebrex	0.59\$
	Diclofenac Gel	9.00\$
	Flexeril	0.89\$
	Toradol	0.59\$
	Tramadol	1.50\$

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

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