

Between people and technologies, we produced new languages. Some, we co-authored: new words and strange idioms bleed out from tiny screens, edging into everyday use, agitating and teasing at the boundary between RL and that pixellated, vast territory of digital life. But others spill forth from systems themselves, their syntax decided by algorithms, their sentiments unknown. They feel oddly familiar, intimate; they speak to all of us, to our desires, they cling to 'we' and 'us' and 'you'. Start dreaming, because the dream has never been so close to reality. Others speak the narrative of software; words suspended in new grammars, encoding actions, instructive, building invisible architectures to shape interaction, to 'design' experience. They are familiar words in odd constellations, clouds of punctuation in all the wrong places. In crossing over, from RL into that digital elsewhere, language extends: bots become caught in tautologous conversation; broken systems babble their own techno-vernacular; poetry becomes automatic, compiled from an infinite list of speculative phrases. The algorithms run riot. It is useless to remind you that this is a frustrating and dangerous thing because you have been living with it for years. Caught between sentiments real and imagined, spoken and generated, who speaks? Our friends have been sent to a hidden folder; filtered, analysed, then discarded.

In 1937, one Ken Daigneau won \$100 dollars for conceiving the word "spam", rumoured (but never confirmed) to be an abbreviation of "spiced ham". Forty-one years later, 593 people linked by Arpanet (the progenitor to

the Internet) received an unsolicited message. "Spam" became a byword for communication that was unwanted, uninvited. It was a message sent regardless of whether the recipients were "interested or not". Undesired, indiscriminate. In 2007, the seven-billionth can of spam was sold. Now, over 200 billion spam emails are sent every day.

At some point, maybe in the 1980s, spam made a transition from canned ham – via BBSs and MUDS – into USENET postings, and later infected our email. Thanks to a man named Brad Templeton, spam has a history: the term took a hold, he says, in the "real time multi-person shared environment, which is to say a shared world where users can chat, move around and interact with locations and objects in the environment", the ancient world before Sims and World of Warcraft. "Spam" was referred to as the data that flooded a computer, designed to crash it, or the endless gibberish written by a hijacked chat window. Templeton even identified the first moment that the ubiquity of USENET messaging became used as a way to enlist individuals for help. In 1988, from jj@cup.portal.com a student claimed his college fund was running out: HELP ME! he sent to unknown recipients. Next came MAKE MONEY FAST! Then, perhaps inevitably, in 1994 came Global Alert for All: Jesus is Coming Soon, named "The First Giant Spam" by Templeton, and, depending on your outlook, you may agree. In this history, a plea for help pre-dates the sting, the fraud, the confidence tricks and 419s. Spam was not always and only "blackmail... [for the] profane rapture of consumption". Do not despair because we have a perfect solution for you.

Horny, skinny, drugged, littered with degrees and diplomas, laden with replica luxuries – “perfectible”, “flawless”, “immovable” faces surge our inboxes. Subjects are watermarked in bubble writing, offering us the world.

Take a pill and feel yourself a tremendous mad bull. **I try. The bull never comes.** Edgy as ever @ # ! @ #! @!\$. **But if spam images advertise an off-world of perfection, smooth and hard and ever-ready, then 419s – three numbers that have become a shorthand for fraud, taken from a piece of Nigerian legislation – come from a more vulnerable, needier, poorer world, one that hovers at the intersection of the real and the automated, reflective of a “crisis globalisation”. These are not projections of future selves, but faked intimacies, whispers to draw you in to lucrative deals. Their politics are laid bare: I need you, they say. We really appreciate your business. These messages – still unwanted, unsolicited – link to a world that is split by neoliberal claims to free markets and democracy, and a desperate politics of economic inequality, conflict, hunger and disenfranchisement. Spam is not without territory; it does not float in the system, looking for a home. 419s originate predominantly from South Africa, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Kazakhstan, Pakistan and India. The Canadian pharmacy, the world’s number 1, is run from Ukraine, but hosted on botnets and “bulletproof” Chinese web hosting. Likewise, those deposed kings, Gaddafi’s widow, Mubarak’s wife, the son of an imprisoned politician seeking a friend for an investment opportunity, even the C A N A D I A N D R U G S T O R E selling you the very best Viagra – they may not be real, but perhaps they are merely avatars created, necessarily, by an**

uneven world. You feel shy and self-conscious every time you have to appear in public.

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The probability of any event is the ratio between the value at which an expectation depending on the happening of the event ought to be computed, and the value of the thing expected upon its happening.

Bayes’ theorem, the basis one of the most powerful filtering systems in the world, sifts signal from noise; meaning from junk. Developed by the Reverend Thomas Bayes in 1736, it works by assuming that probability is a partial belief, rather than just the frequency of things. Through a process of training, repetition, the filters learn the strange language of the spammers. Viagra and refinance. Replica, Rolex, good price. Language is reduced to probability. My friends are ground into spam.

On the Internet, our bodies find a mobility they are otherwise denied. Online, our experience of each other is abstracted, subject to glitches, breakdowns, filtered over and over. In-between places but in fact, in no place at all, these words here are stripped down, devoid of their use. Inflected with poor spelling, bad grammar, translated and re-translated, or injected with r%gue symbols to trick the Reverend, they slip through to us, here on the other side, in the hope of something in return.

I’ll wait on you.