<u style="display: none"> What Spam Means to Network Situationism </u>

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the intervention of a 'to seem' that replaces the 'to have',

in order to protect it on the one side, and to mask its lack in the other [1]

1. Introduction

In this essay we describe and theorize upon a spam data set hidden in the source code of HTML pages at the Bureau of Public Secrets, a website housing English translations of the Situationist manifestos and communiqués.[2]

We attempt to build upon a fruitful coincidence: what happens when internet interventionists, "code taggers" on a lucrative Spam mission, meet interventionists of the analog era, Situationist "wall taggers"? The textuality of both groups is aimed at reaching efficiency in a networked structure, be it socially or algorithmically coded; both engage a material and performative inscription so as to activate their discourse (i.e. to make it more efficient).[3]

We witness the action of a mode of writing modeled on graffiti and following the Situationist axiom: "Slogans To Be Spread Now By Every Means." By focusing on the comparable gesture of verbal propagation (slogans and spam lexicon as social viruses) and the instructional performativity of these texts, we trace a set of theories based on the fiction that Spammers and Situationists have appropriated one another's tactics.

Researcher Simon Ford recalls how one Situationist prophesized the digital future of détournement:

> [...] for the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem [...] collaboration with the technocrats of the military-industrial complex provided only one benefit: the reversal – through détournement – of its practices for revolutionary ends: "By laying the basis for a perfect power structure, the cyberneticians will only stimulate the perfection of its refusal. Their programming of new techniques will be shattered by the

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[1] Lacan, Jacques. "The Signification of the Phallus" in *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock Publications, 1977 (p 289).

[2] *The Bureau of Public Secrets* [http://bopsecrets.org]

[3] The equivalence between social and algorithmic codes at the level of performativity is a thesis defended and widely accepted by the critics of the newborn discipline of "Software studies". Cf, among others, Adrian Mackenzie (The performativity of code: software and cultures of circulation", *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (1):71-92, 2005) or Inke Arns ("Read_Me, Run_Me, Execute_Me: Software and its Discontents, or: It's the Performativity of code, Stupid", in *read_me: Software Art & Cultures Edition,* ed. Olga Goriunova & Alexei Shulgin, Arhus: Arhus University Press, 2004).

same techniques turned to its own use by another kind of organization. A revolutionary organization." [4]

As the prerequisite for revolutionary action is the publicity of language, we are concerned with how the hidden spam data set takes on the functions of language when it is surfaced by our investigation. We describe the process by which we stumbled across it, then we narrate our attempts at tracing its distribution throughout the net (monitoring user traffic, analyzing search formulas) and deciphering its proto-linguistic structures (the development of a spam idiolect). We eventually track the spam data set from the Bureau website, through an HTML architecture of redundancies and hidden links, to the Spammers' massive "closed hypertext universes": link farms. [5]

But what is at play in this interaction between the Bureau and the Spammers? We propose two opposing scenarios. The first hypothesizes that the Bureau has appropriated Spammers' tactics in the service of revolutionary Marxism: we enumerate the motivations for this appropriation and analyze the spam data set as a linguistic construct. The second claims that Spammers have squatted in the Bureau's archive of Situationist texts to hide data which is integral to their own profit-generating exploits: we explore the link-farms and describe their central function in the machinery of web-spam. The opposition of these scenarios helps us to establish a theory which we set as a fiction.

All of this is a pretext for discussing the multi-usage of data that can be read as texts that process signification through reading. This relationship is problematized into the these questions: how does a text go from private to public? How is the spam data processed into a system of communication? How does this flux generate a communal reading situation? Is the encounter between a page of Situationist slogans and a Spammer's table of prescription drugs keywords enough to raise an audience and achieve the publicity of political discourse?

Spam and Situationism alike have often been considered from an end-user perspective – in terms of target. Situationists target the society of the spectacle; Spammers target potential customers. In both cases, this target mode of inscription and enunciation has to be considered within the general frame of the Hacktivism ideology, with its roots and branches in both non digital practice and digital environments. One of the most relevant developments has been the Tactical Media Art practice of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) – as influenced by the Situationists and their correlate, Psycho-Geographers, but also by profit-generating organisations and their advertising/spamming models. Not coincidentally, one of the missions engaged by the CAE is an utopia of hypertext plagiarism, which resonates with the Spammers' coding of link-farms. [6] Another recent instantiation of this perspective is "Spam art", emanation of the net.art experimentations, whose ground of interventions has been the online communities of the 90s and early 2000s, and which constitutes work in spam's visible/legible dimension. [7]

Our perspective suggests a shift in the object to be played with: instead of observing the performative effects of spam that, being release in the public while distributed in already-formed communities of (even reluctant) readers, we investigate the mechanisms of the sub-texts and the

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[4]   Vaneigem, Raoul (19830 quoted by Simon Ford (2003).

[5]   A "closed hypertext universe", a term used by Loss Pequeño Glazier in his critique of hypertext fiction (as published by Eastgate Systems), "transfers hypertextuality into [...] a laboratory setting". The term laboratory resonates all the more in the context of a webspam economy driven by prescription drug sales. Glazier : 2002, p 88).

[6]   Following the title of chqpter 4 of Critical Art Ensemble (1994) : « Utopian Plagiarism, Hypertextuality, and Electronic Cultural Production ».

[7]   Web artists such as Jodi, mez, NN, Pavu or Frédéric Madre (who apparently coined the term "spam art" in an interveiw with Josephien Bosma in 2000 [http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0011/msg00049.html]) have "perfomance-spammed" a number of listervs, such as the Nettime, Eyebeam and Syndicate mailing-lists. For more information on the subject, see Camille Paloque-Bergès (2006).

structures of spam before any visible text, in the speech acts that make spam data into text and in the very construction of the readership. Thus, our object is not Spam emails, but the submerged part of the iceberg: the spam datasets which parasite the World Wide Web sites coded under the <display: none> tag.

In an attempt to implement what we have analyzed, we conclude by mentioning our project *A Bride in White Who is Not a Virgin*. Rather than target a readership, *A Bride* observes a readership being drawn in. By exploiting hidden inscription, *A Bride* makes use of HTML as a site of poetic intervention.

2. How to Stumble Upon a Hidden Spam Data Set

In February 2006, we were reading the page of May 68 Graffiti slogans at the Bureau of Public Secrets website.[8] We copied the entire page from the browser into a text-file, and at the bottom of the page we found a 2268-word text that had not been visible on the webpage. The text was a list of prescription drug keywords and phrases that reads like this:

> […] xanex withdrawal methods cod xanax how do you know if someone is on xanex xanax abuse xanax residue buy xanax without prescription drugs xanex syay in system purchase xanax xanax grapefruit alprazolam cheap does xanax cause alopecia overdose alprazolam xanax cheap zanax effects contraindications of zanax how many days does xanax stay in your system xanax addiction xanex order can you mix xanax with meth dosage of xanax for worry overnight xanax xanax fedex no prescription zanax photographs desipramine and xanax how long xanex stay in a persons system xanax and sexual behavior xanex picture buy xanax now drug detection times xanax what is alprazolam xanax pharmacy zanax thyroid difference xanax and xanax xr information on the drug zanax during pregnancy what is the difference between xanax and zanax xanex information adderall combined with xanax does xanax cause weight gain order xanax paying cod xanax deaths 2004 xanex cheapest xanax needed prescription generic xanex street name for zanax xanax cash on delivery overnight cheap xanax online no prescription do xanax show up on drug tests online xanax xanex xr xanax buy online chat discount alprazolam xanax 2 mg honduras xanax for sale […]

The list appeared to us as an anomaly, and we liked reading it so we posted it to our blog, Coupons≠Coupons.[9] With a web-traffic stats service, we realized that our found text was drawing in more hits to our blog than we usually received. The hits were coming from users Googling phrases that could be located in the text, such as: "lorazepam lethal overdose", "Is it safe to take xanex during pregnancy", "lorazepam dose in canine", "how long does xanex stay in body", "our vacation in mexico", and "urine detection times of klonopin".

At their highest, the search results pages listed as many as 231,000 results, and the Coupons≠Coupons blog was often second or third in the list of results, just below the Bureau website, which was consistently at the top of the Google searches that brought users to our blog. It appeared that we had found a sort of database of internet search queries combed for language relevant to the prescription drug economy.

We investigated one Bureau webpage – "Ode on the Absence of Real Poetry Here this Afternoon"[10] – which appeared at the top of one of the search results that brought a user to the Coupons≠Coupons blog. When we viewed the source code of the Ode, we found our list of spam

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8   "May 1968 Graffiti." Translated by Ken Knabb. The Bureau of Public Secrets.
    [http://web.archive.org/web/20060207101014/http://www.bopsecrets.org/CF/graffiti.htm].
9   *Coupons≠Coupons* [http://couponscoupons.blogspot.com/2006_03_01_couponscoupons_archive.htm]
10   Knabb, Ken. "Ode on the Absence of Real Poetry Here This Afternoon: A Poem in Dialectical Prose." (27 October
    1970). *BOP*. [http://web.archive.org/web/20060212120046/http://bopsecrets.org/PS/ode.htm]. (Accessed 10 April 2006).

keywords embedded at the bottom of the HTML inside the tag <u style="display: none">.[11] Website accessibility consultant Joe Clark writes:

> [...] <display: none> really means <manifestation: none> or <elimination: total>. An item assigned to <display: none> expunges itself. There's another option that can be used: <visibility: hidden>, in which, the spec tells us, "[t]he generated box is invisible (fully transparent), but still affects layout." The visual distinction, then, is between nonexistence and an empty bounding box.[12]

The tag <display: none> makes text in the body of an HTML page invisible when executed in a web-browser. Hidden text is made to be read by automated text readers, the most important being web-crawling spiders like Googlebot. Google has a reactionary discourse against certain forms of invisibility: "Hidden text" is the first problem-type listed in their form "Report a Spam Result,"[13] and their page "Information for Webmasters" recommends that webmasters "Avoid hidden text" as its first specification under "Quality Guidelines."[14] So why would a website publishing Situationist texts use HTML techniques defined by Google as web-spam? And why would the semantic content of such an exploit be the argot of the prescription drug economy?

3. How Situationists Appropriate Spam Tactics – 1st scenario

For the moment we will hypothesize that the Bureau of Public Secrets has appropriated the spamdexing convention of hidden text. Hidden text is the calling card of a Search Engine Optimization technique known as spamdexing. The most common spamdexing practice is keyword stuffing: Spammers load their webpage's <body> and <meta> tags with repetitive lists of keywords and phrases lifted from popular search engine queries. This accelerates the webpage's performance in search engine results, so spamdexing is considered an unethical or "black hat" hacker technique. Search engines are in effect spammed when their web-crawlers are tricked into producing irrelevant search results. Web-spam manifests in search engine results whose content merely "talks the talk" – a kind of semantic steroids.

This has two consequences for the Bureau's visibility as a condition of its hidden spam texts. First, an estranged crowd is attracted to read the Situationist manifestos. Second, the Bureau activates the program of action that posits political action through public discourse infiltration.

In the service of revolutionary Marxism, hidden text becomes a progressive means by which the ethical imperative of the Situationist slogan is "Spread Now by Every Means." Thinking they've found a FAQ on xanax overdosing, unsuspecting search engine users are directed to the Bureau's page of May 68 slogans, likely their first exposure to Situationism. But each time a user is guided to the Bureau or (more frequently) passes their eyes over its listing in the search results, up to 25-word samples of the hidden text are visualized. Users are drawn to the Bureau's manifestos not for their slogans, but for the semantic relevance of temporarily surfaced fragments of spam data. Effectively, the hidden text itself becomes the slogan; the spam data approaches an encyclopedic rendering of plagiarized search formulas that bots traffic between naïve search engine users and deceptive HTML.

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[11] Four days later, the source code of this page was viewed again, but the tagged spam text was gone. This change and similar others can be tracked using the Internet Archive's *Way Back Machine* [http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.bopsecrets.org/PS/ode.htm] (3 April – 7 April 2006). We noted the irony that our already invisible spam text had disappeared from a page called "Ode on the Absence of Real Poetry Here this Afternoon." But the spam data set wasn't entirely gone from webpages at the Bureau. An internal search for "xanax" yielded 228 results [http://www.bopsecrets.org/sitesearch.htm]. This is the number of webpages on the Bureau server that contained hidden spam data sets. Later searches for keywords in the spam data set yielded zero results.

[12] Clark : 2003

[13] « Report a Spam Result », *Google* [http://www.google.com/contact/spamreport.html]

[14] « Quality Guidelines *», Goolge [http://www.google.com/intl/en/webmasters/guidelines.html].

A parallel would be the empty rhetoric of political sloganeering, used to inflate public opinion of civic management. For the Situationists, slogans are most effective when constructed from plagiarized elements as détournement. Situationist slogans thus add a radical value to mere rhetoric, propagating liberatory theory through the practice of subverting discourse.

The Bureau, it would seem, has committed a détournement of net-capitalism's performative discourse. We can imagine a number of motivations for such an exploit, all of which might be thought of as tactical contributions to an anarcho-Marxist agenda of exposure and disruption of present conditions. As such, the Bureau's infiltration of the web-spam economy is an engagement on four fronts: first, insofar as Marx's opiate has concretized into prozac, Situationist web-spam shocks the expectations of prescription drug users by forcing itself into the top of their search results; second, the Bureau's spamming demagnetizes the hidden tools of profit-hungry Spammers and in doing so resists uses of the internet that fuel consumer desire; third, the Bureau's spamming mobilizes a critique of Google's "Quality Guidelines," defying the authority of Google's ubiquitous corporate neutrality;[15] lastly, the Bureau undermines the value of the very historical texts it promotes by implanting prescription drug spam as their dialectical subtext, a gesture of Marxist self-criticism perhaps.

If the dated urgencies of Situationist prose are still timely critiques of present conditions, the Bureau's intervention into the economy of prescription drug web-spam can be thought of as remodeling Situationist tactics to make them perform more efficiently within contemporary network technologies. As a way to gauge the efficacy of the Bureau's innovation, we might use a certain proto-Situationist text as a litmus test. Guy Debord and Gil Wolman's "A User's Guide to Détournement" (1956), which is online at the Bureau website,[16] celebrates "deceptive détournement" as "the détournement of an intrinsically significant element." Outfitting détournement for networked interfaces like search engines means reading the Bureau's spam data as "intrinsically significant"; that is, the spam data predicts actual search queries and is accordingly "deceptive" when embedded invisibly in the Bureau's HTML. In mentioning the possibility of detourned clothing, Debord and Wolman write "we find the notion of disguise closely linked to play"; from which we can infer the semi-ludic anarchism of masking a spam exploit with the very prose to which the spam is intended to draw attention. Debord and Wolman describe "ultra-détournement" as "the tendencies for détournement to operate in everyday social life," and they go on to write that "[g]estures and words can be given other meanings, and have been throughout history for various practical reasons." Insofar as the internet hybridizes public and private space, the speech acts of users' search engine queries constitute hybrid social actions. Our search engine behavior is tracked and fed into databases: the Bureau's use of search engine data against prescription drug users, Spammers, and Google alike is an unprecedented mode of détournement. Just as Debord and Wolman wrote in 1956 that "the premises for revolution […] have begun to rot," the Bureau understands a half century later that the moldy rinds of any such premises have long since *evaporated*. A lost cause is justified only by an invisible action, and we can look to Michel de Certeau to articulate one explanation for why the Bureau Spams its Situationism: "The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them."[17] In order to seduce the browsing user, Situationist texts must first seduce the search engine bots; and neither will be seduced by the clever slogans of May 68 graffiti. The Bureau has converted a secret discourse intended to build profit for Spammers and corporate entities into a secret discourse working to spread revolutionary consciousness. The repulsive is turned on its head in a tactical reversal.

But our use of de Certeau is not altogether accurate, because Spamming is in no way alien to the

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[15]   The Organic Spam web community [http://organicspam.com] – formed to "Shake and Awaken the Monopolist Search Engines" – exposes ways that Google uses AdSense revenue to profit from search engine spamming.
[16]   Debord and Wolman : 1956
[17]   Michel de Certeau : 1984, p. xix.

propagation of radical ideology. In 1994, Serdar Argic and Hasan B-) Mutlu spammed Usenet newsgroups with propaganda denying the genocide of Armenians by the Young Turks during World War I. Argic and Mutlu used an Awk script to trigger pre-fabricated responses to posts containing the words "Turkey" or "Armenia," attacking the posts' authors with subject headings like "A mouthpiece for the fascist x-Soviet Armenian Government."[18] Besides the sheer volume and repetition of these posts, their automation was recognizable because it was triggered by the phrase "turkey wings."[19] The ambiguity of turkey – as food or country – became a trap, luring in and marking the Spammers' interventions *as* Spam. The Spammers' technical inability to recognize this slippage was a failure located in the semantic field, a pitfall which the Bureau's spam intervention avoids. Briefly analyzing the Bureau's spam data set illuminates the textual strategies that have been appropriated by the Bureau in a gesture of Situationist plagiarism.

The spam data set can be analyzed as a meaningful text constructed along two semantic vectors – lexicon and orthography – in a distinct syntactical mode. First, lexicon: the primary reason we can refer to the Bureau's hidden spam text as a data set is the volume of its keyword repetitions. The spam data set is a series of prescription drug keywords strung together with an exhaustive stock of potentially-Googled phrases relating to the prescription drug economy. The five most-repeated words in the set are xanex, diazepam, lorazepam, ultram and alprazolam, their uses combining to over 1000 instances.[20] If we think of these keywords as *public* because they have slipped into the public domain as brand-names, then another set of keywords in the spam data set can be marked as *private* – those which take the form of neologisms. There are at least seven instances of neologism in the spam data set: "wwwwailersskiclubcom", "direcdynunet", "tramadolcom", "cccom," "onlineonzekatnl," "eaglemyftpsitenet", "myonlinemedsbiz". Speculating as to the function of the neologisms in the hidden spam data, borrowing the "easter egg" metaphor from cartography and programming makes a reasonable hypothesis possible. Easter eggs are anomalies or surprises built into design apparatuses by their author.[21] As easter eggs, the neologisms provide a way for the spam data's author to track the hidden text around the net: if one the neologisms were Googled, copies of the hidden text would be found. The neologisms afford the Bureau a certain authoritative bird's eye view over the spam data's performance and distribution. Data sets containing easter eggs are often referred to as "poisoned" because they are plagiarism-resistant,[22] and in this way we might think of the spam data set as positively infected by its author's seal of originality. We wouldn't be surprised if this uncovered quality of the spam text is the mark of a Situationist exploit: plagiarizing some Spammer's readymade spam resource and reversing its power flow.

Second, we can describe the spam data set orthographically. One of the several spamdexing techniques at work in the data set is "typo spam," a technique that incorporates common misspellings of keywords into the data. Typo spam calculates ineffective readerly performance, and in doing so expands its own performance on search engine results pages. Some examples of typo spam in the spam data set: "priscriptions", "perscription", "onlije", "anax", "identifacatiom". As with numerous other textual strategies, misspellings can be understood as an ethical imperative employed to engage ideological conditions. In "Zarathustran 'Pataphysics," poet Steve McCaffery describes the "clinamen" as "the

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[18]   or "The Criminal SDPA-ASLA [Social Democratic Party of Armenia–Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia] Grandparents of The Gum Brain."

[19]   Two sources were useful for this information: DeVoto (2004) and Verbitsky (1997).

[20]   xanex – 445 repetitions; diazepam – 165 repetitions; lorazepam – 155 repetitions; ultram – 148 repetitions; alprazolam – 92 repetitions

[21]   Popularized easter eggs include the non-existent "Paper Street" added to maps to make plagiarized versions of them easy to catch, or the "secret track" that begins after a few minutes of silence at the end of a CD.

[22]   Entry « Copyright Easter Eggs » on the wiki *Open Street Map* [http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/index.php/Copyright_Easter_Eggs].

minimal swerve of an atom in a laminar flow" which he uses as the model for "a poetics that deliberately introduces error into linguistic systems of constraint to initiate the interplay of chance and necessity."[23] The typos in the restricted economy of the Bureau's data set renders McCaffery's willed typo as a pragmatic (rather than poetic) strategy of the greater spam ecology. The logic follows that if typos are inevitable, their anticipation should be a source of profit, or in the case of Situationist plagiarism, a tool for the construction of radical coherence. The Bureau's opportunistic investment in error mobilizes the clinamen in the service of revolutionary Marxism, re-forging the break between "chance and necessity" that a spam poetics delivers to McCaffery's theoretical construct.

We can also describe the spam data set syntactically. The text is composed of continuous phrases that take an abundance of syntactical forms – from single words to complete sentences – which model the potential speech acts of natural language. The phrases are ordered in a discontinuous parataxis – what spam researchers call "phrase stitching"[24] – to form a massive block of prose without punctuation. These phrases are sometimes matched by search engine queries for the exact phrase. But more often, we find that the individual words from search query phrases are distributed discontinuously throughout the spam data set. In effect, these search engine queries construct new phrases from the spam data set's lexical abundance, because search engines don't attend to continuous syntactical order unless such a parameter is defined by the user. As an object of detournement, the Situationist slogan retrieves the original performativity of its plagiarized material, just as the phrases distributed continuously and discontinuously throughout the formally abundant spam data text retrieve the performativity of search engine queries.

The remediation of the Situationist slogan onto the net has appropriated spam as its medium-specific circulation-agent. While the formal centerpiece of the Bureau's May 68 Graffiti page are its slogans, the spam data set accumulates revolutionary capital from its hideout in the source code. The Bureau's hidden spam data set displaces the ideological primacy of the slogans it was plagiarized to promote.

4. Why Spammers Squat on Situationist Texts – 2nd scenario

Unfortunately, reading the Bureau's spam data set as a secret agent of revolutionary Marxism ignores a central feature of the hidden spam text itself. It is not a text at all, but a hypertext. This new aspect of the text augments its function as a spam resource. Each of the spam data set's phrases is a link that only bots are intended to follow. Clickable access to the links is denied by the <display: none> tag; to follow these links, humans must view the page source, copy the URLs, and paste them into a browser. Each link connects the spam data set to a network of pages, implicating the Bureau in a profit-driven spam-ring and calling into question our earlier hypothesis that the Bureau appropriated the techniques of Spammers for its political agenda. We can hypothesize more accurately that the Bureau is a passive relay in the web-spam economy, not the exploiter but the exploited. We note that the above work of analysis – describing the hidden spam text as a language – is relevant not only to the mistaken hypothesis that it supplements, but also to the hypothesis we're currently putting forward. We'll now describe the structure of the greater spam network to which the Bureau's spam data hypertext is a point of entry.

Roughly 1000 links connect each phrase of the spam data hypertext to pages at a host website implicated in the web-spam economy, so that the phrase "day next ultram" reads like this in the HTML: "day next ultram."[25] Pages like

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[23] McCaffery: 2001, pp 17, 25-26.
[24] Gyongyi and Garcia-Molina: 2005.
[25]   Quoted from the spam data hypertext in the Bureau's HTML. It links to the host *Freak's Macinstosh Archive*, a hacker

[…/day-next-ultram.html] form a massive hypertext system known as a link-farm, which is a cluster of inter-linking hypertexts that perform strategic search optimization functions for web-Spammers. Pages of link-farms are only linked to; they do not contain outbound links.[26] Each page in the Bureau's link-farm, following the same formal structure, contains lists of links pointing to the entireity of other pages in the link-farm, which are formally identical to one another. Each link-farm page is linked from a phrase in the hidden spam data hypertext, and this phrase is repeated in the page's URL, <title> and <meta> tags. Link-farms increase the Google PageRank of websites to which they link, because PageRank is determined by the number of links to a single page. The keywords repeated in [http://freaky.staticusers.net/ultram/day-next-ultram.html] ("day next ultram") constitute the search query for which this page is intended to receive a high ranking.[27]

The significance of link-farms to the web-spam economy is their relationship to search engines, which has two major features. First, link-farm pages themselves never show up in search engine results because of a <meta> tag addressed to search bots: <meta name="robots" content="noarchive">. Thus link-farms are never indexed into the history of the internet, enabling a certain level of security against spam hunters. The second aspect of link-farms' relationship to search engines is this line of script, found within the <head> tag of one of the Bureau's link-farm pages (our emphasis):

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<SCRIPT LANGUAGE="JavaScript" ><!--// urlgo='h' + 't' + 't' + 'p://' + 'toppills.info' + '/search.p'
+ 'hp?aid=233&said=s&qq=alprazolam'; document.write('<a href="'+urlgo+'" id="xlt"
target="_self" style=display:none>click here</a>');window.open("", "_self");
document.getElementById("xlt").click(); //--></SCRIPT>
```

Note that the link "click here" is hidden by the <display: none> tag in the JavaScript: the code effectively camouflages each gate to the link-farms behind an invisible pop-up which the user's browser is programmed to instantly click through. This script is intended to redirect users to a pseudo-search engine results page containing ads linking to online casinos and prescription drug companies.[28] The page is called a scraper site because it scrapes its content from the web as part of a profit-generating advertising scheme. The link-farm script delivers different content to search engine bots and search engine users, performing a "black hat" technique known as cloaking. The <noarchive> tag keeps bots from indexing the link-farm pages, and the script tricks them into reading the link-farm's content as the content of the scraper site. In a Google search for prescription drugs, the scraper site will surface based on Googlebot's claim that it contains the Bureau's spam data set, which is nowhere to be found on the scraper site itself. The Bureau's spam data hypertext increases the PageRank of the link-farm by linking to it over 1000 times, in turn generating income for the companies advertised on the scraper site. The link-farm's redirection of search engine users to the scraper site is indeed the end-game of the spam-ring in which the Bureau is implicated.

But the Bureau is not the only squat of the spam hypertext. By Googling the neologisms discussed in the first hypothesis, we found nine websites, each hiding numerous spam data hypertexts (with different keyword sets than the Bureau's), their links connecting them to at least twenty-six link-farms. Given the nature of the websites, it's probable that both the servers hiding the spam HTML and the servers housing the link-farms are all victims of web-spam.[29] In this way, the Bureau and its

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site devoted to security issues. [http://freaky.staticusers.net/ultram/day-next-ultram.html].

[26] A few of the link-farm pages have links to [google.com] heading up their list of internal links.

[27] Another aspect of the Bureau's link-farm is the paragraph of scrambled text at the top of each page, each with identical form but slightly different content. We assume that this nonsense prose is used to confuse search engines into not taking note of the link-farm pages as functional web-spam.

[28] Example of a scraper site: [http://www.paysefeed.com].

[29] Descriptions of a few of the spammed websites: Freaky's hacker resource website; a girls summer camp in Quebec; a Santa Monica community newspaper; Shoshke-Rayzl's personal homepage; The Association of Genealogists and

Situationist text archive is not significant; it's just one among a random sampling of poorly secured websites. But the lucrativity of the exploit makes its intrusion into the Bureau's Situationist text archive significant: the exploit is a recuperation of damages the Situationist texts inflict upon the logic of capitalism. The Spammers' squatting casts a decoherent spectre of net-capitalism over the illuminating coherence of Situationism, marking a blinding reversal of Raoul Vaneigem's "reversal of perspective." By using the web-presence of the Bureau's Situationist texts to accumulate profit – and doing so with the stealth of just a few hundred kilobytes of server space – the Spammers have *perfected a refusal* of Situationism's revolutionary agenda.

5. Conclusive Perspective on Inscription in a Networked Textual Economy

Our fictional hypotheses assumed that either the Situationists experimented with, or were the guinea pigs of an experimentation with, a causal equation: the power of words is that they gain expression through a symbolic adhesion with their medium. Situationist slogans are inscribed in a symbolically liberated discursive space. This liberation occurs when symbolic function is transformed via representation: in the case of the Situationists, the wall is no longer a means of ordering urban life in accord with the will of power structures. Through détournement, the wall becomes a sheet of paper on which the people can inscribe their counter-orders for everyday life. Structure, via Situationist intervention, shifts from medium of oppression to medium of expression.

This mode of engaging the apparatus has a history that goes back to Marxist praxis as reinterpreted by, notably, the Frankfurt School, the Situationists, and more recently, the Tactical Media artists. One of the latest re-implementations of this praxis lies in the Hacker philosophy that the medium is to be bent to the needs of the worker. According to a popular programmer saying, if there is a solution, there is a hacker (i.e. a "code-worker").[30]

It's seductive to see the exploits of Hackers – the origins of Spamming – as the ultimate reinterpretation of Situationism in the digital era. But this necessitates a reconfiguring of the transformations that occur in the shift from analog to digital. The Situationists wrote on walls, and their détournement of social structures worked inside linguistic codes. Their engagement tackled the superstructure, as identified with cultural power. Hackers and Spammers write inside the walls, working not on the level of superstructure but infrastructure: they decompose and rebuild the wall itself. By injecting spam data in websites that have nothing to do with the spam business (probably via URLs and IP hijacking), like parasites looking for hosts, they get close to protocol programming of infrastructures as computer networks. Hence, the notion of structure is important, but should be re-approached in terms of protocol in order to avoid an inexact metaphor: we are not confronted by a symbolic page with directive data but with material code that performs orders as an action. This is a literal performativity, not the symbolic performativity of slogans. Protocol is defined by Alex Galloway as:

> a set of rules that defines a technical standard. But from a formal perspective, protocol is a type of object [...] a language that regulates flow, directs netspace, codes relationships, and connects life-forms. Protocol does not produce or causally effect objects, but rather is a structuring agent that appears as the result of a set of object dispositions. Protocol is the reason why the Internet works and performs work.[31]

Researchers in Archives; a health advice forum; an Asian biotech supplier; a support group for perinatal loss; The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration.

[30] Admittedly, this plays into the mythology of hackerdom and the fantasy of an intellectual resistance embodied in the hacker class of creative workers as envisioned by McKenzie Wark, among others (cf. *A Hacker Manifesto*).

[31] Galloway : 2004, pp 74-75)

Even though Spammers hack their way into the workings of the internet, they shouldn't be confused with Hackers. The most obvious reason for this is their relationship to the notion of work. Hackers embody the Situationist notion of subversive leisure ("Ne jamais travailler"), whereas Spammers are all about making money. But then, Spammers, branching out of the Hackers' communities do not "want" to work: they use a leisure activity (i.e. hacking as inherited from computer science students pulling pranks) as a means to make money.

More important are the differences in their participation in the general economy of community-making. Link-farming is an extreme form of parasitism: Spammers use more or less legal resources to create spam-rings that draw in users searching for items in the prescription drug economy. Link-farms have been ironically nicknamed "mutual admiration societies"[32]; the vocabulary around these practices relates to an utopian mode of social organization based on principles of internal reward and auto-administration. As such, the Spammers' internal rewarding is a kind of general cheating: Spammer-X, in *Inside the Spam Cartel*, describes the lack of ethics in the relations between Spammers and the websites they promote, or even between Spammers themselves.[33] Scams and frauds are not only directed towards potential naïve consumers but are also at play between the Spam professionals.[34]

A less obvious reason that Spammers shouldn't be confused with Hackers is the part that Spammers play within the logic of orders and counter-orders in a hypothetical networked society of spectacle. The orders (or counter-orders) that Hackers or the Situationists give value operate according to the logic of the manifesto: they represent an ideology, i.e. they speak in a set of cultural images rendered efficient via expression. Their performativity manifests linguistically through a series of imperatives:

OCCUPEZ LES USINES

LE POUVOIR AUX SYNDICATS

ABOLISSEZ LA SOCIETE DE CLASSE

A BAS LA SOCIETE DU SPECTACLE

ABOLISSEZ L'ALIENATION

ABOLISSEZ L'UNIVERSITE

L'HUMANITE NE SERA PAS HEURESUE TANT QUE LE DERNIER BUREAUCRATE NE SERA PAS PENDU AVEC LES TRIPES DU DERNIER CAPITALISTE

MORT AUX FLICS

LIBEREZ AUSSI LES TROIS HOMMES ARRETES POUR PILLAGE LORS DES EMEUTES DU 6 MAI [35]

The Situationist slogan is echoed in texts such as Steven Levy's *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* and Mackenzie Wark's *Hacker Manifesto*, and these merely amplify a multitude of voices in the Hacker landscape. In the Spammer environment, a slogan can no longer be taken at face value. The representational level is all pseudo-language, an artifact fabricated out of a contextual and pragmatic economy. While the words are interchangeable (the drug jargon can be replaced by the sex lexicon), the only remaining imperative is infra-representational, pure function. While the idea of direction has

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[32] Mutual admiration societies: an antiphrasis that recalls the ties between Hackerdom and SpamDoom.

[33] Spammer-X: 2004.

[34] That would be the perspective taken by the "criminal-hacker" film series *Hackers* (*Hackers*, by Ian Softley, 1995, and *Hackers 2: Takedown*, by Joe Chappelle, 2000).

[35] Occupation Committee of the Autonomous and Popular Sorbonne University. "Slogans to be Spread Now by Every Means" (16 May 1968, 7 PM). *May 68 Documents*. Translated by Ken Knabb. *BOP* [http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/May68docs.htm].

acquired a relativistic cultural meaning, the idea of directive has been restrained to the technical meaning of instruction. Here is an array that orders the actions of robots: <meta name="robots" content={"index, follow"; "noindex, follow"; "index, nofollow"; "noindex, nofollow"}>.[36] Directive discourse is combinatory and data is submitted to it, waiting for its orders: the code takes over.

The radical difference between the actions of Situationists and Spammers resides in their different modes of engagement with the spectacle. Situationists claim a will for rupture and the revelation of that which is hidden. Spammers insert themselves in the general enterprise of design and interface of the net by parasitizing and profiting from it without (arguably) provoking disruption. Spammers don't disturb the surface of network propriety, which is constitutive of the average internet user and dominated by the maintenance of "continuity." Galloway writes in *Protocol* that "the internet is able to use the application layer to create a compelling, intuitive experience for the user."[37] Either the transformation set in motion by the Spammers will be observed only in the long run, or we must adopt a different perspective of what the spectacle has become. Spammers graft their operations onto efficient information systems. Net artist Christophe Bruno explains:

> Google is not a spectacle provider that imposes a brand, a particular content or an ideology. It draws its strength from its withdrawn position, from the spectacle provided by the set of all the content publishers: mere internet users, bloggers, message-boards, news-magazines . . . i.e. potentially mankind as a whole. The Adwords system taxes the circulation of browsing, the flux of desire, and it has to respect the speech of the internet as much as possible because this speech is its raw material. In the same way as global companies now incorporate environmental arguments in their marketing discourse, Google has become the promoter of an ecology of speech. But the other face of ecology is vampirisation. [38]

All this comes down to the meaning of performing text in the networked economy of writing. After developing our comparison to its ultimate point in the logic of a fictional theory, all we can do is observe the "doings" of the Spammers' textual inscription. Inscription at its minimal point, a performance without transparent happening, a writing without straightforward readership, has consequences in the economy of digital text. One of the most burning topics in security literature today has to do with filtering the information overload in general, and of spam in particular. This focus on a form of noise that seems to emerge from nowhere (considering that the link-farms are conventionally invisible) tells a lot about how the net is being reworked by various conceptions of representation and function. Those who today "tag" the network with graffiti code in a confrontational mode of politics, be them hackers or hacktivists, programmer artists or poets,[39] have to step out of a dialectical praxis (inherited from the likes of the Situationists) and look towards the "third man" of the protocol which the Spammer embodies quite well.

6. A Bride in White Who is Not a Virgin

What if it were to force a disjunction between performing a hidden text and performing writing? [40]

A Bride in White Who is Not a Virgin[41] is an observation project gathering data on internet search habits. The project homepage is a white background with no visible text or clickable links, but with data coded

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[36] « HTML Author's Guide to the Robots META tag », in *The Web Robots Pages* [http://www.robotstxt.org/wc/meta-user.html].
[37] Galloway : 2004, p 64.
[38] Bruno : 2004
[39] Graffiti code as subversive programming, as in Codeworks, Software art, net art, Hactivism, Extreme Programming, etc.
[40] Bergvall : 1996.
[41] [http://a-bride-in-white-who-is-not-a-virgin.org]

with HTML. As an HTML text, it employs a single technique to distribute itself into the networked economy of webspam: users who view the source code will find a 14,000-word spam data set in the HTML,[42] tagged with the value <display: none>. User traffic is documented via the data gathered by SiteMeter. There is a second HTML page on the site consisting of a brief statement and links to both the homepage and the traffic stats.[43]

User access to *A Bride* is determined for the most part by a private use of the net: consumers in the prescription drug economy who discover the page in a list of Google search results (i.e. they see the project title and a sample of the spam text). Then there is a less frequent readership which can be defined as public: users from the digital art/literature community who are guided to the side entrance at the […/info.html] page.

Observing *A Bride*'s traffic allows for the emergence of a split definition of what networked readership is; this split is based on a process of double reference. The spam set, considered as data, engages a private reading activity relying on denotative reference and a mostly utilitarian use of communication, which does not mean that the data is not articulated language with grammar and rhetorics – limited in scope, but still at work in the managing of spam data through web search. As we have previously seen while developing the second scenario, a spam idiolect arises so as to determine the navigation of online drug potential customers. Displaced from one context – the word economy of spam on the Internet – to another – the aesthetic dispositive presented as an artistic experiment – changes the textual scope of this data.

In the first case, textualization is progessive, and the reader/customer is constructed through her own discovery of spam networks. Expectations can arise, but never frozen, as they are taken into account by the spam strategists along with anti-spam technological innovations (filters, robots, etc.) - thus the fast evolution of the textual economy on the spam market.

In the second case, the spectator sees her position augmented from reader to observer via the dispositive : she observes network phenomenons. This position immediately renders the spam text a public one, and suggests an analysis : framed by an interpretation dispositive based on traffic surveillance and maintained via *A Bride*, it is also staging a network textuality dynamics based on invisibility. Thus the website has two readerships : one entirely focused on information as a means to access a product and another attentive to a critical information on these very means.

This obvious distinction seems necessary to state, because the double reference, which is a conventional process, is poorly stressed in aesthetic theory, where readership is usually considered within the realm of literary deciphering and interpretation (an agreeable audience). This mode of analysis, in the context of informational aesthetics, lacks the reiteration of the double reference process, or, to be more exact, this multi-functional dimension of the text. Here we are making profit not from the fact that a text can trigger multiple interpretations (the open text theory) but that at a sub-interpretation level, there is a textual practice that has a loose relationship to determination. This is not to say that the reception of a text is not determined by its encoding, be it linguistic or algorithmic, but that this determination is not straightforward, takes on multiple (re)programmings, and above all has to be confronted by its contextual value.

Thus *A Bride*, for what it's worth as an experiment, is an attempt to monitor the use value that emerges from the traffic around it, this value being correlative to contextual value and to the interpretation of the information resulting from it. The documentation of this traffic is twofold: technical data (geographic locations, IP addresses, search engine queries, etc) and pages of search engine results. A pleasure of reading (in the literary sense) is triggered by the idiosyncratic formulas created through

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[42]   This super spam data set was synthesized from a number of discrete spam data sets found on servers from various corners of the internet. These data sets were found by googling the neologisms from the initial spam data set we found at the Bureau of Public Secrets, as described above.

[43]   [http://a-bride-in-white-who-is-not-a-virgin.org/info.html]

users' search tactics, as well by the impression of reading the web backwards. Further use of the data has yet to be determined.

<div align="center">*</div>

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<div align="center">*</div>

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