

## Dicer Troll

### I

What sort of perverse evolutionary gambit necessitated these text-objects? And how did such ornate verbiage and wordplay come to be employed in the mass-marketing of fake male stimulants? Almost always found floating dead in the spam filter, return-addressed to a single name- a short, common, American one. Subject-headed with a single syllable, usually a greeting: Hey, Hi, Hello, Aloha- occasionally a guttural Eh or Ugh; the contents all in red, the tone excessive, as if providing counterpoint the plainness of the wrapping. Clearly not the product of human intelligence- instead, the product of a complex filter-evading algorithm resulting in bizarre phraseologies, repetitions, misspellings, and near-Spoonerisms: dice-throws into a vast set of possible pharmacological hardon consumers. Several hundred of the things show up each week, only to be expunged a month later in summary erasure.

Representative of an effective strategy on some level or the mass-mailings would simply stop; a crazed perpetual motion machine, continually cycling out of some botnet with the rare order trickling back in: enough to keep the apparatus going, enough orders to keep the spammer in stolen bandwidth (According to sources, the sales conversion rate is around one in 12,000,000). Occasionally and against all odds, like a sperm beating out a combination of condom and spermicidal trap, the message finds purchase. It's a numbers game, too cheap to meter: it convinces someone that they should disclose sensitive information to this most spurious and untrustworthy of sources.

Similar words repeat across the missives, altering pairings, context, forming a palimpsest of interconnected quasi-poems... The Viagra come-on is hidden in an attached image-file, illegible to spam filters. In order to evade the filters, text must be included in the message, and the text must have certain attributes lest the statistical filters flag it. What are these attributes and, more importantly, why do they gravitate to excess, to the libidinal and excretory or half-formed and dreamlike? Maybe the spelling mistakes are intentional, perhaps this human-like error is one way of defeating the filters. The zombie nets and backdoor-worms that perpetrate the delivery perhaps also participate in the mutation through data-mining operations. Constant flux is a necessity: notorious spammers, depeered, reemerge successive generations later with new content that alters itself according to the replication and customization strategies prescribed by this form of natural selection.

Who could believe that he/she has received this thing from her friend Carol- a poem this twisted, repetitive and bizarre? Carol would have to be sociopath and because variations on this poem come not just from Carol, but from Michael, and from Courtney ad infinitum, it's as if a whole race bearing banal Anglo-Saxon first names had sprung up to assault the target. The 'poetry' contained in the message- with its not-quite-random

imagery, always exceeds rationality, always hints at Beckett-like exhaustion or a form of intelligence below (or above) human.

But we (except for that 1 in 12,000,000) know that this storm of poems and personae are data-mined fictions, that their author is not human; that their author is channeling in inhuman stratagems, those of the bot servers; that the 'poems' are early evidence of mimicry of human by machine.

Atomization of language into its constituent parts, recombinative, regenerative: infinite Monkeys on an infinity of typewriters, the unimaginable vastness of that point near infinity at which all possibilities are exhausted. It is this strategy of exhaustion that drives the spam-poem business: of the 11, 999,999 recipients, a few consider ordering Viagra, quite a few lack basic common sense, quite a few are functionally idiots, quite a few are insane. It takes a high level of exhaustion of screening techniques, mental defenses, intelligence, etc. with variation and selection, to break down the immensity of machinic and human mental defense.

According to Bataille, poetry is the ritual sacrifice of language. These text-objects are at heart sacrificial- representing the breakdown, the destruction of the common, of the easily interpretable. So it is with Arcimboldo's subjects...

## II

Arcimboldo fascinated his patrons with objects of painterly and conceptual complexity that were masterfully executed, sometimes cartoonish, occasionally flatfooted, often grotesque but -first and foremost- highly weird. They must have been regarded in their time as minor miracles of interpretation and alchemy- portraits that were outrageous and disturbing and somehow poignant, reeking of carnality, of death, and imbued with a weird glamor.

Barthes saw Arcimboldo's primary force as poetic- he saw a structure that was doubly articulated, like language. He was fascinated by the structural incongruity of Arcimboldo- the subject is drawn twice. He was further drawn to the excess and extremity of Arcimboldo- flesh is not merely displayed, it is flayed.

In some archetypal sense, Arcimboldo precedes Darwin. His is a process of formal allusion to genetic formation, to interspecies determination, to the extended phenotype. He realizes -visually, formally- the radical notion that the human is comprised of and heir to fish, birds, and vegetable matter. He also suggests that the food chain is unresolved, reversible: that the human form ultimately is sacrificed for, becomes food for these 'lower' forms.

Atomization of the figure into its constituent parts is a form of sacrifice- sacrifice of the whole to the part, and if the part is morphologically similar to another species, that species can 'fill in' the whole.

Painting in Arcimboldo's time, especially realistic mimicry, caused the painter to be regarded as a type of alchemist- he took the allegory further to reveal that the recognizably human was in fact teeming with other forms of life.

Similarly, Rococo anticipates Darwin and the radicalization of form through mutation- it is form gone mad. It is an early example of matter progressing beyond the merely manmade and then beyond the 'natural' into simultaneous post-human, post-natural form. It is characterized by excessive display. It is form idealized and then rotted. It is also pre- and counter-Marxian: use-value is superseded by symbolic value, often use-value is entirely obliterated. Objects with low inherent use-value often become the host to parasitic filigrees of formal invention. It is an example of the perversion of the object, beyond its type, beyond use.

Did Arcimboldo and the Rococo have a common protogenesis- say, ergot poisoning? Or was something itchier, more libidinal at work? Both have a common motivator that is established: excess. Both feed on excesses of time and detail, on excesses of taste and its shadow- the grotesque. Arcimboldo's subjects are not peasants, but figures of fashion and taste. The beasts or vegetation that fuse into them, uncommon ingredients in subject formation and yet- simultaneously- the most common: those of the dinner table and the entrance-hall, or of 'nature in season'. This combination of style and vision in excess, grotesquerie, and perversity exceeds rational use-value, exceeds taste and approaches horror.

### III

An impulse toward something like Horror Vacui is also identifiable in these poems- a case against not just emptiness, of empty space, but also against the undecorated, the unadorned. Adornment in these texts seems to militate to excess automatically as if unchecked by the Protestant and Marxian reflexive morality prefiguring Modernity. The asceticism of Fordism, of The International Style, and of the pronouncements against decoration and excess of expenditure seem inconsequential here. Here the equation is reversed, emptiness is inefficient- it offers no disguise, no countermand to the filter's relentless probing- the empty is flagged and discarded as obviously machine-generated or mass-mailed.

In nature, excessive adornment is checked by the inherent negatives of excessive expenditure: growing horns too ornate can make it difficult to survive. There is a use-value check in nature that finds its equivalent in cultural production; there are projects and productions that become too expensive to exist: Heaven's Gate, the excessively-conceived film that famously bankrupted it's studio as well as Heaven's Gate, the science fiction-inspired cult that imploded with the suicide of most of its members. The intensive, excessive demands of adornment often result in destruction. And yet excess of adornment is also selected-for in the cases of the peacock's tail and the stag's antlers. A battle rages between the minimal and the excessive, between the ascetic and the ornamental.

Is it possible that these text-objects represent a coming-full-circle of excessive adornment into use-value? Is it possible that 'more is more' is on the uptake? What about their function on the allegorical level? As Arcimboldo's allegory exceeds standard usage to become monstrous, these texts contain an allegorical resonance: there is an identifiable element of the monstrous to them. The question is: is it purely accidental? Are they merely the results of sophisticated data mining and filter-evasion with their monstrosity, their 'meaning' merely provided by human projection?