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'I WILL DO EVERYthing That Am Asked': Scambaiting, Digital Show-Space, and the Racial Violence of Social Media

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Abstract

'Trophy' photographs of African men and women who pose holding signs, either naked or in outrageously bizarre outfits and positions, are prized memetic images produced by 'scambaiters'. The unusual activities staged in these photographs and videos, such as men wearing bras, hitting each other in the face with fish, and pouring milk on each other's heads, invite viewers to enjoy and speculate about their origins. Scambaiter trophy images originate in sites devoted to users who wish to deter would-be scammers and they circulate widely on image-boards where they are often reposted without their original context. This visual staging of the savage African digitally extends previous visual cultures of the primitive, showing how durable these have proven, despite our current 'post-racial' moment. Scambaiter trophy images extend colonialism's show-space, rendering it even more powerful and far reaching, and allowing it to migrate freely into multiple contexts. This article argues for a new digital media archaeology that would investigate or acknowledge the conditions of racial coercion and enforced primitivism that gave rise to these digital imaging practice pictures. The author examines how sharing affordances on image boards and social media sites encourage users to unknowingly circulate abject images of race and gender.

Keywords

Africa • digital media • gender • race • social inequality • visual culture

A remarkable photograph circulated across at least 13 image-sharing websites, including Reddit.com, Explainthisimage.com, fasinfun.blogspot. com, Jawdrops.com and Wackbag.com, but could also be found further afield, at online venues such as 'Harmony Central.com', a site for music fans, and 'Asiantown.net', a site for the Asian and Asian American community.[1] This image, entitled 'Tickle My Pickle' by a user who posted it on Jawdrops. com, depicts two muscular young black men wearing bras, skirts, and white cubes on their heads, holding pickles in their mouths while they hold the body of another African man dressed in a white cloth tube suspended between them.

The symmetrical, heraldic arrangement of Africans as decorative objects arranged in a tableau on either side of an object (in this case, another person) is one instantiation of a meme much older than the internet: the 'classic primitive'. This image was viewed thousands of times on each site, produced dozens of comments, was 'liked' multiple times, and thus spread to personal, semi-private networks like Facebook and Twitter, where it was spread again (see Figure 1).

This is a shocking image. It is unaccountable; one cannot imagine any event in everyday life that would produce this behavior, type of costume, or posture, and thus the image invites users to come up with a caption for it, in other words, to account for it. This invitation to wonder and to participate by venturing interpretation, and thus to display wit, fuels the spread of images on the internet. It was posted under a caption that read 'Caption This Photo Please', 'guess what they're doing', as on Asiantown. net, or 'explain this image', as in Explainthisimage.com. The majority of

Figure 1 'Tickle My Pickle'. Available at: http://jawdrops. com/tickle-my-pickle/ (accessed 28 July 2014).

viewers found it 'hilarious', but at least a few professed discomfort with the image; one poster, 'iprecious', commented on 5 October 2011 that it 'looks like something you'd see from abu ghraib'. The image was not from Abu Ghraib, the infamous prison where American soldiers took photographs of prisoners in demeaning poses, often partially nude, photographs that went viral on the internet. It is similar in that this photograph stages the emasculation of the brown or black body through absurd and painful looking postures that invoke this and older traditions of abjection through photography. So if not at Abu Ghraib, where was the image produced? By whom? For what purpose?

Several comments on the sites where it circulated revealed the true story behind the image's provenance: 419eater.com. For example, 'F is for Fun' labeled it 'one of the greatest scambaiting pics **ever'.** The rest of the caption reads 'pretty funny, huh? For more laughs, and more on the whole '419 scam' and how to protect yourself, be sure to visit 419 eaters!'; 419eater.com, which claims over 48,000 registered members, contains thousands of similar photographs of black bodies, many of them naked and engaged in nonsensical acts, all of which have been made at the request of internet users who call themselves 'scambaiters', a group of internet vigilantes.

The men in this photograph entered into a dialogue involving advance-fee fraud, a '419 scam', with a person who requested them to create this specific bizarre image. This article will describe this image production practice in order to explain how racist imagery becomes an object that motivates the circulation of the social media machine by offering material designed to encourage recirculation and reduplication. Memes are part of the fuel that powers the internet's traffic in images, and an analysis of the origins and meanings of overtly racialized and sexist viral images such as these can tell us much about how racial and ethnic difference are enacted on the internet through visual means.

As shown above, most of the commenters who posted their reactions to the 'Tickle My Pickle' image did not know that it was created within this context, as a punishment or prank on three African men who entered into an email exchange with internet vigilantes who sought to enjoy a laugh at their expense, and intended to share that laugh with as many people as possible. While a few, a very few, commenters on image boards where the pickle and diaper image appeared protested its overt racism, most gloated at the just and proper punishment of the internet's 'bad subjects': Nigerians. Had users of the sites where it was reposted known the genealogy of this Abu Ghraib-like image, its status as an artifact that testifies to the radical asymmetry between would-be scammer and the scambaiter, they might not have 'liked' or otherwise affirmed the image through digital means. Analyzing the memetic image practice that produced the thousands of scambaiter photographs that can be found on the many scambaiter sites that collect and archive them allows us to better understand racism's virality on post-digital platforms.

We need a social media image ethics that acknowledges the conditions of production of memes and their operation within an attention economy that includes racial abjection as both a product and a process. Media scholarship needs to explore the genealogy, distribution, aesthetics, and visual history of memetic culture, so much of which is racist, sexist, and comes to us from circuitous and pseudonymous paths. These channels of distribution can only be unearthed through a painstaking process of digital archaeology and uncovering. As Fusco and Wallis (2003) have written in regards to photography, race exists to be seen and consumed with pleasure; it is, itself, spectacular. As memetic pleasures figure ever more largely in our lives within digital media, the origins of these images matter even more.

Scambaiting photographs spread virally because they require human actors to create novel and striking, and therefore valuable, images, many of which are egregiously racist. 'Trophy' photographs of African men and women posed holding signs, either naked or in outrageous and bizarre outfits and positions, are prize memetic images. These images originate in sites devoted to users who wish to deter would-be scammers, and later spread to image-boards. They are made to travel, in both senses of the word. The unusual juxtapositions evident in these photographs, such as men wearing bras, hitting each other in the face with fish, and wearing watermelon halves on their heads exemplifies the bizarre, weird, and presumably harmless: in short, the viral.

The study of internet memes is a growing and vital part of the emerging field of visual digital culture studies. Because memes are often defined by their humor and whimsical nature – indeed, they circulate because of these very traits – they are seldom analyzed from the perspective of racial and gender critique.[2] Scholarship that traces the origins of memetic culture's racist and sexist image practices permits a critique of the digital that is badly needed in our so-called post-racial moment. Memes that depict the black body in abject and bizarre poses and situations are part of the long history of viral racism that spreads using user and audience labor. Like freak show and lynching postcards, scambaiter trophy images like 'Tickle my Pickle' rely on users who may or may not have an understanding of the conditions under which they were created, and the exigencies that brought these racialized bodies into these positions and these media forms.

Policing the Digital Primitive: Representational Violence in Memetic Culture

The 'sport' of baiting scammers starts out by an internet user receiving an unsolicited email requesting a sum of money; 419 scams take their name from the 'designation of the Nigerian criminal code referring to fraud and the adopted name for that genre of spam abroad' (Brunton, 2013: 102). These scams tell the recipient a sad story about a person living in a poor country, usually in Africa or Eastern Europe, who has access to vast riches that have been tied up by a dysfunctional government. As Brunton notes,

the canonical line – 'Hello! I am a Nigerian prince!' – has become a cliché, one that is unflattering and debasing to Africa and African internet users.

According to Wikipedia, scambaiters are 'internet vigilantes' who pose as a 'potential victim to the scammer in order to waste their time and resources, gather information that will be of use to authorities, and publicly expose the scammer'. These activities are 'done out of a sense of civic duty, as a form of amusement, or both'. The punishments are meted out in the name of justified retribution; many naïve and credulous internet users have been tricked out of large sums of money by internet scammers. Although the data varies, Byrne (2013: 73) and others agree that 419 scammers have done tremendous damage to both those they have defrauded and to the good name of African countries like Nigeria; although a minority of 419 scammers are from Africa, Nigeria has acquired a tainted identity nonetheless. In 2007, Zook claimed that US$3.1 billion were lost as a result.

Most scambaiter sites ask suspected 419 scammers to create photographs and videos that follow a set of very precise orders and requirements and send them as proof of their 'liveness'. These trophy images are collected in 'Trophy Rooms' on sites like 419eater.com, and are prized and shared among the scambaiter community as signs that they have gotten one over on the would-be scammers.[3] The splash screen for 419eater.com asks:

> What is scambaiting? Well, put simply, you enter into a dialogue with scammers, simply to waste their time and resources. Whilst you are doing this, you will be helping to keep the scammers away from real potential victims and screwing around with the minds of deserving thieves.

Scambaiters are quick to identify themselves as protective vigilantes who help keep the internet safe, and have a 'bit of fun' at the same time. Unlike US anti-immigration militia groups like the Minutemen, who patrol a different border, scambaiters operate under the sign of fun and amusement. They leverage memetic cultures and their hunger for striking images as a form of positive self-profiling. Scambaiting, dubbed a 'sport' and a 'game' on this page, is presented as an appropriate punishment: 'even if you are a newcomer, much fun can be had and at the same time you will be doing a public service.'

This 'fun' occurs at the expense of people whose racial and ethnic identities as well as their intention to connect with better-resourced internet users via email or chatrooms is highlighted and made violently visible in images like 'Tickle My Pickle'. For these users, the internet is not simply a place of free and agentive self-composition or self-presentation where memes are consumed, produced, and unreflectively enjoyed. It is not just a source of memetic power, the power to amuse or garner 'likes' from friends sharing a social networking service or image boards. Trophy photos are produced in exchange for the chance to earn money from an unsuspecting Westerner, an exchange that, as Burrell (2008) writes, many Africans rationalize as an

expression of 'vigilante justice rather than truly a crime'. As one Ghanaian informant told her, 'because they can't go to America they will take money from Americans' (p. 23).

Indeed, scambaiters' trophy videos are, in Burrell's words again, 'another space where the complex and problematic conditions of post-coloniality and embodied identity are played out' (p. 27) –a tactic or weapon of the weak, made as part of a bargain between poor users from marginalized and under-resourced locales who see themselves as vigilantes and less poor, if not rich, digilantes, both engaged in scamming the other. The Ghanaians Burrell interviewed valued and used the internet partly because it was seen as a way to connect with better-resourced Westerners who might want to help them; this was far from an exploitative relationship in every case.

How does memetic culture work to defuse the recognition of the most egregious racism under the sign of user-generated internet vigilantism, and to what extent is this sign invisibly but pervasively coded as white and male? While internet vigilantism can take many forms, as Gabriella Coleman (2013) has researched exhaustively and skillfully, scambaiting most often takes the form of requiring Africans to perform primitivism. The site makers of 419eater are intensely aware that this practice can read as racist and are eager to counter this perception: the 'Trophy Room' screen explains that:

> it should also be noted that scambaiters do not go actively seeking scammers of a particular skin colour. We only engage thieves who send us emails trying to steal from us. We do not target any particular type of person or country.

However, the images tell their own story.

As I have written elsewhere, the digital engenders a desire for the culturally familiar and primitive to anchor a sense of loss of control, of 'present shock' that is both desired and feared (Nakamura, 2002). And the African scammer is a particularly fearsome specter: marginalized yet impressively digitally-savvy. As Parker (2009) speculates, the rage of the scambaiter is informed partly by fear that globalization will make it possible for its object to come close, to invade his space, to compete in a global marketplace made smaller by digitization. Abject trophy photographs of African men in queered or feminized garb serve to keep this fear of a digital Africa at bay. It must be remembered as well that the production of trophy photographs and scambaiting in effect convicts advance-fee fraud participants before they have actually committed the crime. The digilantes who use this site justify the behavior as a deserved deterrent to crime rather than a punishment of crime.

Byrne (2013) argues that pre-digital forms of anti-black vigilantism such as lynching produced strikingly similar artifacts, such as postcards, that were designed to spread from person to person. She characterizes these trophy photos as shot through with racism; as she writes, the 'pervasiveness of the

tortured black body, as evidenced by these trophies, did not come about by way of simple whimsy' (p. 70). In her article, '419 Digilantes and the Frontier of Radical Justice Online', Byrne describes how the term 'digilante' has since been used interchangeably with terms like 'cybervigilante' since 2004 to describe 'do it yourself' justice online. Scambaiters demand these images as a means of punishing and policing black bodies, and justify it in the name of protecting the internet from fraud.[4]

There are dozens of scambaiter sites such as Scambaiter.com, Scambaiterhaven. com, and 419baiter.com; 419eater.com is the 'largest scambaiting site on the Internet', according to an admiring article that appeared in *Wired* in 2006. This article noted that the site's founder, a British man who goes by the pseudonym 'Shiver Me Timbers', started it in 2003, and depicts scambaiting as a positive example of the power and ingenuity of the digital commons (Andrews, 2006). Although its members defend their practices as race-blind, the trophy images collected on the site are almost exclusively of African men. And while the drive to 'real names' on social media platforms like Facebook and Google continues, memetic culture as created on image boards and sites like 419eater.com remains a space that continues to offer pseudonymity. As Davison (2012: 132) writes:

> for those Internet users who revel in the existence of racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive memes, a practice and system of anonymity protects them from the regulation or punishment that peers or authorities might attempt to enact in response to such material.

419eater.com is an exceptionally close-knit, extremely active community that provides FAQs, tutorials, a mentoring program, legal advice, and sample letters that will help would-be scambaiters lure their victims into producing pictures such as those described above. Their forums share resources, such as form letters, for convincing would-be scammers to pour milk over their heads, a popular trope found in many of the trophy videos and pictures in the 'Trophy Room'. They advertise a 'mentoring program', but the link is currently dead.

Scambaiting and the Subjugation of African Sexuality

In his monograph on spam, Brunton (2013) asserts that in order to understand transnational '419' culture, 'we need to bring something very different into this discussion to get proper perspective and to reframe and see 419 as a regional spam phenomenon in depth, with its own peculiarities as a family of stories. These are not ads for products – for porn or mortgages or relief from masculine anxiety – but an enormous narrative about the failures of globalization from which you, the reader, can profit' (p. 102). Indeed, scambaiter trophy images are not ads for products – 'for porn or mortgages or relief from masculine anxiety' – they are themselves porn, porn that both responds to and depicts masculine aggression towards the unruly and

digitally connected African male body. It is striking how sexualized these images are, suturing together older notions of the primitive as defined by the naked or outlandishly clad body (rather than the erotic – there are no 'sexy' pictures in the 'Trophy Room') in an attempt to counter the notion of the African as a savvy, information-age subject. Thus they mobilize the visual signifiers of porn, humor, and the sideshow oddity.

Many of these images depict black people as sexualized, nude, debased, and queered figures (see Figures 2 to 5). Photographs that depict African men posed with bananas or pickles in their mouths invoke a mockery of the homoerotic, mimicking oral sex. Images of arms tattooed with nonsensical or humiliating sayings like 'I give bj's' or 'Baited by Shiver' can be found in the 'Trophy Room' as well; some of the most lively debates within the forum spaces where these are posted for the admiration of other scambaiters relates to whether the tattoo looks bloody and painful enough to be real rather than Photoshopped. The user who shared an 'I give bj's' tattoo photograph on the 419 forum explained in great detail how he had elicited this particular image. He cites his own letter to the scammer, which reads: 'We require at minimum for you to send by email attachment HIGH QUALITY PHOTOGRAPHS of the following: 1. The first stage of the tattoo being applied to the inductee. If possible, photographs showing the tattoo artist actually applying the tattoo would give great encouragement to the board members and will result in your donation payment being a higher amount. 2. Photographs of the tattoo immediately after it has been completed, so that the board members will be able to ascertain it is real because of normal scarring or marking. 3. Photographs taken 24 hours later, showing the healed tattoo.' This desire and demand to see the 'scarring and marking'

Figure 2 'I Give BJ's' tattoo. Available at: http:// forum.419eater.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=178558 (accessed 28 July 2014).

Figure 3 Still from 'Scammer Security Trust' trophy video. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbzw ZtSnzOs (accessed 28 July 2014).

Figure 4 'Welcome to 419 Baiter', splash screen. Available at: http:// www.419baiter.com/ (accessed 28 July 2014).

Figure 5 'King of Retards'. Available at: http://www.zoklet.net/bbs/showthread.php?t=45481 (accessed 28 July 2014).

produced by a painful tattoo reveals overt sadism towards the black male body. The demand for 'high quality photographs' from African individuals who are frequently derided on the forums for their lack of technological sophistication indexes the visual pleasure derived from the spectacle of suffering, pain, and blood that they reveal.

Some images depict African men posing naked with objects hanging from their genitals in response to a scam-baiter's demand (Byrne, 2013). Many of these feature black men and women holding up paper signs with slogans like 'I take it up the ass' or 'I can't believe it's not butter'. The 'Trophy Room' of 419eater.com and other scambaiter websites contain hundreds of photographs and videos of this kind.

Few women's images appear in the 'Trophy Room'. Many of the images that include them depict them naked, holding signs that say things like 'Welcome to 419baiter'. The header of 419baiter.com features a photographic image of a naked black woman posed with a sign welcoming the user to the site (see figure 4). This photograph of a nude woman's black body taken under duress invokes an earlier and ongoing history of sexual subjugation. The nudity in this image refers to the trope of primitive Africa, as do many others on the forum, but it is exceptional because women are far less commonly found in the Trophy Room. The majority of scambaiting occurs between white or European men and African men. In some ways, this is no surprise, for the digital gender divide in Africa is extreme; it has been dubbed the 'second digital divide'. A report commissioned by Intel and released in 2013 found that:

> on average, 23 percent fewer women than men are online in developing countries. This represents 200 million fewer women than men who are online today. In some regions, [such as sub-Saharan Africa] the size of the gap exceeds 40 percent. (p. 4)

Most other images in the archive depict African men in abject positions, holding signs that mock them. One example features a man standing in a field holding a large white sign painted with red ink block letters, which reads 'King of Retards'. He has a somber expression on his face, implying that he may understand the humiliation intended in the production of this image (see Figure 5). Others depict Africans wearing fruit or vegetables on their heads, clothed in women's underwear, or pouring milk over each other's heads in a parody of Christian baptism. A screen capture from a video created in response to a scambaiter demand depicts two African men, bodies still wet with milk, in light-coloured bras slapping each other with fish, while a crowd looks on (see Figure 3). This image of African male bodies cross-dressing in women's underwear renders it both perverse and performative, implying a homoerotic relationship or activity. However, a very different type of photograph of an African woman in a blue headscarf holding a paper sign that reads, 'I WILL DO EVERYthing that am asked' stands out in its frank and honest depiction of how the traffic in memetic digital images on social networks is generated (see Figure 6).

She is not smiling, and she is not naked or posed with any prop other than her sign. This image did not go viral, unlike the three African men in bras holding pickles in their mouths; indeed, it fails to meet any of the requirements of virality. A Google image search did not find this photograph on any sites other than those referring to my own research. This image eloquently attests to the power of the meme to visualize an intensely unequal power relation. It is not viral because it is not shocking or surprising. It didn't spread widely, but neither is it dead. It is undead media, a digital visual image of economic and neocolonial duress that can neither disappear nor can it speak for itself.
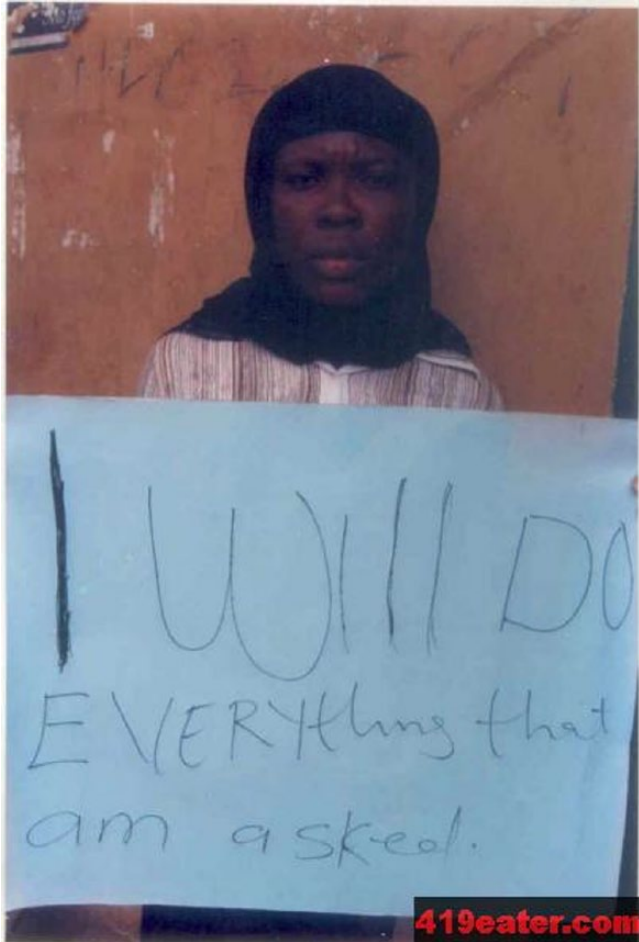
Figure 6 'I WILL DO EVERYthing that am asked'.
Available at: http://forum.419eater.com/forum/
album_showpage.php?pic_id=34 (accessed 28
July 2014).

As anthropologist Rosalind Poignant (2004) has described, scholars who study the racist archive of photographs taken of unwilling subjects who are either long dead or impossible to access must undertake an impossible task. These photographic subjects were deprived of voice and agency in the very act of being photographed, yet they did possess them, and researchers must try to hear these voices. 'I WILL DO EVERYthing that am asked' is a failed meme, but it uses the platform and the semiotic gesture to speak directly to the racialized and gendered power relations between scammer and scambaiter, and is thus invaluable if we want to really know our memes.

Africa is part of the traffic in memes; but, as is the case with coltan, an absolutely essential mineral in the production of mobile phones, these images

are extracted as resources, and do not produce value in their own local context. I do not believe that these images circulate and are prized or viewed as 'hilarious' in the same way on African image boards. Africa's role, at least in these viral images, reflects, in Burrell's (2008: 23) words, 'their disadvantaged position within society and the world, using the very representations of Africa defined apart from and against them by hegemonic forces'. As Limor Shifman (2014: 28) usefully reminds us, memes replicate not only because they are bizarre and therefore interesting in themselves, but also because they invite the use and remixing of familiar images in unusual contexts. Like the 'Kilroy was here' image, internet memes 'involve bizarre, weird, and unexpected juxtapositions'. Memetic culture is the 'show-space' of the post-digital age, and in the case of scambaiting 'Trophy Rooms', it leverages the spectacle to reproduce consumable images of a perverse Africa. As the 22nd law of the internet says, 'Pics or It Didn't Happen'.

Memes serve a social function as well. The use of and enjoyment of internet memes such as 'Keyboard Cat', and the 'Gangnam Style' video and dance, endow digital visual capital or enhanced 'networked individualism' upon the user. Meme circulation builds feelings of connection and identification with specific online communities. As Shifman (2014: 34) writes, 'users simultaneously indicate and construct their individuality and their affiliation with the larger You-Tube, Tumblr, or 4chan community' when they upload, share, or consume internet memes. Reddit, a major image sharing site or 'board', features 7 million users, who have dubbed themselves 'redditors', a term that highlights both their sense of group identity and active involvement with and regulation of the site's content. These communities are often studied and admired for their ingenuity.

Facebook, Twitter, and others have come under fire as extractors of free labor and exploiters of user generated content (Scholz, 2013; Terranova, 2004). Memes are the grist that allows these mills to grind; yet somehow the political economic critique of the social networking industries seems not to have tainted them. Because they invoke pleasure and fun, memes float free of the networks that they fuel. They travel within a body, but are not themselves part of it. They are, always, *vital media* (Kember and Zylinska, 2012). As Jenkins et al. (2013: 1) declare of social media: 'if it doesn't spread, it's dead', forcefully reminding us that digitally-connected users are the distribution infrastructure of the new media system, and that we all have a hand in working it, to our benefit and detriment.

Racism's Virality

Does it make sense to talk about racist memes as viruses that inhabit the internet's body? A 2013 headline from *The Onion*, a widely read humor newspaper and website, declared that 'YouTube reaches a Trillion Racist Comments', skewering with deadly accuracy the famously hateful commenting culture to be found in the meme stream's favorite video broadcasting site. As this headline reminds us, racism is less a virus in the internet's body than it *is* that body. Racism is precisely that discontinuity,

break, or glitch in online discourse that characterizes moments of rupture: paradoxically, although it is ubiquitous, it is the atypical thing that works to garner attention through affect (Nakamura, 2013a). It is the glitch in the network that talks back to us, the engine that makes other things move, and as such it is a basic part of the ecology of media circulation on the internet.

The surreal, bizarre, and racist-baroque photographs seen in the 'Trophy Room' are an eloquent testament to the power of the internet to victimize and to offend. However, it is not really the digital network that has produced a new racist aesthetic system – the set of conventions seen in scambaiters' trophies visualize *an exercise in racial power* for its own sake. Scambaiters create these photographs to document their power over another, abject body. These photographs exemplify the circulation, distribution, and traffic in uncanny digital images of a spectacularized primitive and queered African masculinity. Tracing the travels of scambaiters' trophy images through their origins and throughout different contexts helps us to archaeologically understand racism's memetic histories as viral media and its digital future.

The wide reach of these 419 'trophy' meme photographs attests to their value as memetic visual currency. The visual similarities between lynching photographs, images from Abu Ghraib, and scambaiter trophies demonstrate that racism has always been 'viral' media. These images of African bodies in compromised and compromising positions collected within a digital 'Trophy Room' resemble other archives or virtual spaces where such images are collected. As Polchin (2007: 208) writes, lynching photographs and postcards were often displayed on mantels in US homes accompanied by family pictures. Scambaiter trophy websites are one of many instances in which images of black bodies emplaced in emasculating or absurd situations have wandered far afield and come to be displayed and collected via social labor.

Abject images of racialized others were 'viral media' long before the internet; audiences in the early 20th century, for example, eagerly attended events where they observed 'professional savages' such as the indigenous women, men, and children from North Queensland, who as Poignant (2004) has documented in her book *Professional Savages*, were displayed as a 'family' by RL Cunningham at the Barnum Museum and in traveling shows. The audience was an integral part of the advertising infrastructure; they purchased and circulated postcards, gazed at posters, and spread this media widely. As Poignant writes, these people who posed in 'native dress' for Western audiences

> became enmeshed in Western systems of mass entertainment and education, involving display and performance, which marked the emergence of the modern world as spectacle, as it was configured in the fairgrounds, circuses, exhibition halls, theatres, and museum spaces. I call the arena in which this engagement took place the show-space. (p. 7)

Exotic bodies belonging to Filipino 'savages', Zulus, and 'Chinamen' were exhibited as well at World Expositions during this period, and photography, one of the first viral media, circulated these pictures for future enjoyment. Poignant notes that the early 20th century was as anxious about rapid technological progress as our own, and these images and performances of race spread as part of a tactic of cultural management. The memetic image of the savage has proven extremely durable, even in our current 'post-racial' moment, characterized by the denial of racism. The internet has extended colonialism's show-space, rendering it even more powerful and far reaching and allowing it to migrate freely.

US audiences have a long history of compelling Africans, Filipinos, Aborigines, and other subaltern groups of people to perform themselves as primitive. Indeed, modernity is defined by the promiscuous proliferation of images, their traffic between sites distant and at one time unconnected. The vastness of the space between the production and the reception of the image was a sign of its technological reach.

And while it is quite possible that the 'performers' in these scambaiting media are 'in on the joke' – the complacent expressions of the African audience of the fish-slapping video imply that the production of custom-made nonsensical media for scambaiters may be nothing out of the ordinary – these viral media are nonetheless *shameful*, if not shaming. As Poignant wrote in her study of Sally, Billy, and the other people imported from New South Wales who were exhibited in sideshows and expositions by RA Cunningham, it is almost impossible to obtain information about how her subjects felt about the whole enterprise. They were not only long dead, they were themselves, media, rather than its creator. They left no record behind. To quote from the film *Blade Runner* – they were not *in* the business, they *were* the business.

When African men are compelled by scambaiters to perform the abject primitive, they produce the material artifact – the rare and uncanny image – that fuels much social media activity. And while the system of incentives that motivated Sally, Billy, and the other North Queenslanders to pose for photographs was very different from that which motivates would-be scammers who end up in the 'Trophy Room', there are some similarities. In the first case, racist science justified the abduction and display of people of color. In the second, neoliberal and neocolonial economics provide the motivation – scambaiters make these images of themselves because they constitute the best of a poor set of options for entrepreneurial and digitally connected Africans to exploit America and Europe as it has, itself, been so thoroughly exploited.

As Jenna Burrell (2008: 15) writes: 'the emergence of Internet scamming destabilizes an assumed relationship between technological and socio-economic progress.' The Ghanaian internet users she studied, some of whom admitted to having tried these scams themselves, used photographs, fake ID cards, webcams, and other imaging practices to create images of African-ness

that could meet a foreigner's expectations in ways that would give them a 'strategic advantage' and evoke pity or empathy. These internet café users used the network to reach out to better resourced internet users, often through chat rooms, to bring into being an African self that is deserving of help, desirous of education or improvement of one's country, or otherwise attractive to the imagined reader. They were attempting to be professional Africans.

Scambaiter trophy media have circulated promiscuously over time and space and context because they do everything that memetic images must do to spread. They marry wonder, curiosity, and rarity with a durable, indeed deeply traditional and familiar, image of African masculinity that reveals new anxieties about the power of the global South to travel over digital networks.

Genealogies of Race, Gender, and Violence in Memetic Culture

Scholars of race, gender, and technology have been looking to the margins of digital media's official histories for some time. Tara McPherson's (2011) essay on the whiteness of Unix and its origins in a new style of software defined by modularity and Wendy Chun's (2011) research on the 'ENIAC girls' and women's roles as software remind us that digital media history's most iconic artifacts are often its most racialized and gendered as well. McPherson and Chun's work disrupts the received narrative of software history, re-inserting lost or forgotten information about race, gender, and the design of systems and their platforms.

This work is exceptional, both in terms of its quality and in relation to the field of media archaeology. The field of media archaeology would greatly benefit from considerations of race, gender, and the body as part of the study of digital artifacts. It is not possible to attend seriously to the 'hardcore' physicality of machines without attending to the specific conditions of its production, and the bodies that make this technology are part of the production process (Nakamura, 2013b). As Parikka (2013: 54) writes, the field's emphasis on 'materiality, platforms, and temporal processuality' signals a turn to the material … at the expense of considerations of race, gender, and class, as if these things were completely unrelated to the internal logics of data machines and their design, production, and functioning in the world. And as John Durham Peters has aptly noted, what's missing in this focus on the thing-ness of technology is 'people' (cited in Parikka, 2011: 56). But people are a crucial part of the infrastructure of archiving, transmission, and circulation of digital media, and not all people are made to perform equally within this assemblage.

the Center for 21st Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and Yale's Gender and Women's Studies Department.

Notes

1. This image was tracked using the Google Image Search utility on 21 May 2014.
2. Because memes are new digital media practices there is a scarcity of academic writing about them. Shifman (2014) and Davison's (2012) valuable work on memes examines them in detail but with little reference to race or gender.
3. Artist Graham Parker (2009) has collected a remarkable archive of Nigerian-made scambaiter photographic tableaux in his collection *Fair Use*. These were created as follows: after either being approached by or purposely seeking out a person whom they suspect of running an advance-fee fraud scam, the scambaiter

   starts out by claiming that he is chiefly troubled by the idea that he might be talking to a machine generating this letter automatically. He wants to go up the chain of command, he says: he wants to know that he's speaking to a person. So he proposes a kind of Turing Test. (p. 13)

   Parker's project includes several iterations of African people in costumes reproducing a painting of Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, James Dean, and Humphrey Bogart playing pool. As he writes: 'it's a peculiar pathology that seems to drive this activity' (p. 19): although the images reproduced in his work depict a style of compulsory performance that is far less demeaning than most scambaiter trophy images, they demonstrate the 'boorishness and casual racism' disavowed by scambaiters themselves.
4. Geographer Matthew Zook agrees with this characterization. As he puts it, the photographic trophies on 419eater.com 'trick scammers … into producing photos of themselves holding sexually explicit signs that are then used to publicly ridicule and dehumanize them' (Zook, 2007).

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