

“I had the time of my life”

E: Wait! One, two — we go or Do we shoot on four or do we shoot on three?”

D: „Four. Everybody shoots on four, you know.“

E: „So it’s like one, two, shoot—fuck! One, two, three, shoot.“

D: „Right. One, two, three, bang“.

E: „Ok“.

D: „Not one, two, bang“.

E: Ok. Ya. Got ya“

Shot fired

(The Columbine Tapes—Conversation between Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold right before committing suicide)

In a post-9/11 era, after having seen the Arab spring fail—or something like that—on-site while living in Cairo, watching Homeland on Netflix after yet another boring Tinder date, with the word “post-truth” voted “word of the year 2016”, having the PDF version of the ISIS Magazine “DABIQ” lying on my MacbookPro’s desktop while having the physical copy of the latest iD magazine titled “Believe” on my coffeetable, sipping on my coconut water in my on-sale Calvin Klein’s, what should my reaction be towards an act of fanatic, extremist terror?

Are acts of deadly violence merely reoccurring human tragedies? Cases of brutal murder that often appear to be disseminated to first incite an emotional outburst of empathy and then manifest a constant state of fear?

Alternatively I would like to look at the issue of radicalization in a context that I believe might be a bitter-tasting stigma of my generation. Quoting Charles Taylor, the psychiatrist Juan Valdes-Stauber describes that radicalization and murder might as well be “bills of capitalism”. Those that are vulnerable and unable to adapt break on the societal system and finally pay with their own and with the lives of the clearly innocent.

While Valdes-Stauber states that most fanatics are not psychologically ill, the psychologist Peter Langman makes clear in his book “Why Kids Kill”, that the described cases of Highschool shooters are neither “just ordinary kids” nor necessarily psychotic. But definitely individuals with serious psychological problems. At the same time the mainstream media seems to play a tug-of-war between the description of a monstrous, blood-thirsty and ideologically brainwashed extremist individual that has nothing in common with “us” anymore and the idea of an exaggeratedly humane persona that could be “the mass murderer next door”. Often ridiculed by descriptions of their private life, gender and sexuality. News, ripe for the boulevard press and social media platforms.

Finally the burn-out syndrome might be a fitting comparison to the angle that I am taking on. As Valdes-Stauber describes, burn-out does not exist as a diagnosis. The true causes of the phenomenon often are anxiety disorder and depression. Similarly a clear typography of radicalized youth is impossible. But in a society in which the general trend seems to be the dematerialization of value and meaning through abstraction in capitalism, the phenomenon of young individuals that turn towards models of violence as alternative forms of identification, might be a result of just the same. Finally fragmenting the social body, spreading hate, fear and intolerance.

IDENTITY

A photo of a buff, male Neo-Nazi. His head is white, round and shaved. He has got pointy, jug ears, his mouth is opened slightly and crooked, his chin is extraordinarily large, his blonde eyebrows are almost invisible. He wears a blue Pitt Bull T-Shirt and Levis Jeans, jump boots and suspenders in black, red and gold. He holds a leash, a light grey poodle at the end of it. This image probably is photoshopped. The New York Post’s cover photo allegedly portrays Hasna Ait Boulahcen, the first female suicide bomber who died in the 2015 Saint-Denis raid following the Paris attacks. Only wearing jewelery, covered in a bubble bath, the shown woman is nude. The cover title is “Rub a dub dub... THUG IN A TUB”. The image and her virally spread persona characterization as “the party animal”, later turned out to have been a fake. Alexandre Bissonette’s last facebook post before he commits the Quebec city mosque shooting 2017, shows a dog wearing a Dominos pizza delivery outfit with the caption “I want one! #fridayfeeling.” On the 4th of December 2016 Edgar M. Welch was arrested after firing a gun inside the “Comet Ping Pong” pizza restaurant as a reaction to the #Pizzagate saga. While Salah Abdeslam, as well part of the November 2015 Paris attacks, aroused suspicion by an unusually large pizza order—in real life. A screenshot of the “Hitmen for hire” film by Columbine shooters Eric Harris

and Dylan Klebold displays both boys wearing dark sunglasses and long, black, latex-like trenchcoats. “Directors will be fighting over this story”, Klebold said. The young mass murderer of the 2015 Charleston church shooting Dylann Storm Roof is dressed in black, wears polished lace-up boots, a black turtleneck, he has a dark blonde bowl cut and wears aviator sunglasses, a fashionable bomber-like jacket with two pro-Apartheid patches in primary colors. On one photo he is to be seen on a beach, the sun goes down behind him, a pinkish red and blue, one foot within the calm waves, posing in front of the writing that is drawn into the sand: “88”. Blogger truecrimerip.tumblr.com posts a collection of Roof’s selfies titled “yungbowlcut dylann roff angrily squatting in several places”. Discontinuous Dj and creative Herrenscheide@Instagram’s post depicts two dead bodies on a sidewalk in Berlin. Herrenscheide tagged his full name on one of the bodies, the caption reads: The peachy death by @brucelabruce.

Myself, a blonde, white, woman at the end of her twenties of Silesian origin and German nationality wearing black tights and a black turtle neck with a pattern consisting of altered logos. Generation Easyjet: Generation Easy Jihad, Amazon.com—And you’re done: Terror.com— And you’re done, YouTube—Broadcast Yourself: YouDie—Broadcast Mass Murder, Nike—Just do it: Rakka—Just do it. Evian—Live Young. Suicide—Die Young. I’m holding up Ohle, my queer friend’s orange-haired, sheepdog, black pudel mix and stage an evil stare into my iPhone 6 camera. 51 likes on my private Instagram profile. I’m disgusted and aroused, wondering what it is that we’re doing here.

Between symbols and aesthetics of youth culture and capitalist consumerism, is it possible to deconstruct thought and behavioral patterns that we as an “us” and extremists as a “them” might have in common after all? Can the decipherment and an attempt to understand let us recognize faults in our culture and thus prevent radicalization in some cases?

INFLUENCE

Going viral today seems to have become a sign of cultural and political relevance. The on- and offline obsession is often produced with the intention of going viral to begin with. It is all about the branding without the brand, reducing meaning to anti-statements. Meanwhile virality creates an exclusive community of consumers. Those who are able to read the symbols belong to the “in-the-know-crowd” and define themselves as the very same. Image and text often subsume a fetishism of violence, radicalization, extremism and the portrayal of sexuality just as much as a fashionable narcissism. Likewise in any social as extremist sphere.

sarahfuckingsnyder@Instagram is casually leaning on the fender of a DHL truck wearing the 200USD Vetements DHL bootleg T-Shirt and red fishnet tights. DHL’s CEO Ken Allen tweets a “Who-wore-it-better” photo, comparing his mundane selfie to the Vetements model on the runway. Ironically making the Vetements rip-off even juicier and creating a reactionary wave of youngsters buying the dull original company shirt off Ebay for just a tenth of the Vetements price. Herrenscheide@Instagram embraces his left Nike shoe, pushing it tightly against his face, sensually licking it along its top. Tough looking anoushkamarlene@Instagram wears the original flame-logo of the Skateboarding brand’s T-Shirt in black. 2.924 Likes, morgane_ig “Your vibes <3”, stxlna “Need that shirt”. A Gosha Rubchinskiy model blows out smoke in front of an Eastern European looking high-rise apartment block for a fashion ad. Wearing PACCBET in Trasher flames and political-seeming cyrillic type underneath.

Just a few clicks away the Nipsters of the Neo-Nazi YouTube vegan cooking channel “Balaclava Küche” wear “Haus Montag, Pirna” Shirts, their logo as well in the Trasher Skateboarding logo’s flames. Australia’s 18 year old “Ginger Jihadi” or “Jihadi Jake”, later Abdullah Elmir, wears a beige Adidas beanie matching with his beige Galabeya, holding up his index finger, a machine gun behind him on the 90’s-looking leather sofa. ISIS fighter AbuSarayah@twitter posts “@AbuAlbaraaSham he got nothing on this” including a photo focussing on his dusty Nikes showing off the iconic “swoosh”, combined with grey Nike socks. Another photo of him pointing the lens at his kicks, legs crossed casually lying in the trunk of a pick-up truck, looking out into the Syrian landscape, using the Sepia filter. A Neonazi hipster of the online community “Plattenbau Faschisten” blogs a photo wearing a Nike T-Shirt, New Balance sneakers and a Craft bike hat – behind him a racing bike and a tote bag with a black logo print. vivien-lrd.gruhl@Instagram posts a mirror selfie posing with a duckface and eyebrows “on fleek”, showing the hand-written sticker on the back of her smart phone: “Fuck AFA”¹. _lxna.x “You beauty”, vivi.rbe “You’re sooo beautiful”, “<3 <3 <3”. The mirror-selfie of Omar Mateen before he committed the Orlando Pulse Club massacre. He puts his index finger and thumb onto his chin and pouts looking at his prepaid Samsung phone. He wears the muslim Taqiyah, a black Galabeya and a Casio watch. #Casio #Jihad #Terror #Watch a must for each #terrorist #manhaj #syria. A former Dutch Royal Army soldier, now training jihadists in Syria is caught on

camera wearing the "The North Face" wind breaker jacket. An ISIS fighter holds a delicate kitten in his arms. Within the frame: the shotguns muzzle, a radio transceiver and his well-shaped beard—ISILCats@Twitter "My Mewjahid protectz me".

IRRELEVANCE

Although fashion designer Gosha Rubchinskiy argues that "brands are above the system", politically charged symbols like his own Hammer and Sickie pattern of the Spring Summer 2016 collection, describe the discrepancy between geo-politics, consumerism and youth culture without guarantee of accuracy. Fashion is an illusion, not reality. While trends and markets transcend geographical borders and ideological perimeters on the one hand, they create fetishized images of cultural appropriation and global politics on the other hand. Life becomes about putting your own meaning on top of someone else's or on top of something else's meaning. History is appropriated or replaced all together. While value and meaning are de-materialized, a satirical "post modern irony" gains influence on- and offline. "Words are just words they don't mean anything anymore", rapper Tyler the Creator stated after having been heavily accused of being sexist and rapist. Often banality reigns.

The HypePeace rip-off of the Palace Skatewear logo. The iconic triangle logo is colored in red, green and black while "Palace" is changed into "Palestine". hype.peace@instagram reposts @jennivijordan: the fashion stylist wears the white Palestine hoodie, off-white track pants, a camel windbreaker jacket and a camel baseballcap. She wears two long, dark braids and poses with what seems to be the young money hand sign, her head a little tilted to the side, looking down into the camera, statue-like. Her persona is situated in a garden surrounded by copies of ancient greek sculptures made out of what appears to be faux white marble. #hypepeace #sculptures #palestine #design #freegaza #hypebeast #palestinewillbefree #vicemagazine #highsnobiety. heydonprowse@Instagram "LOL want".

On Herrnscheide's Instagram account a photo shows a black man pointing at his celtic cross earring, he wears golden nail polish, several rings, his neat striped-shirt collar shows. Herrnscheide@Instagram himself poses on a couch with an AK-47 assault rifle replica. The caption reads "bye paris <3" at Paris Aéroport, 1,786 likes. Another posts shows two hooded men. One wears a balaclava, the other a hood, sunglasses and a black and white scarf. He gives the finger. Behind them the LGBT flag is displayed in an ISIS-like fashion. Location "Queerblock". Title "New world entertainment death squad".

The fashion ad of Tyler the Creator holding hands with a boyish-looking, white man. Both wear the white cotton shirt of his label "Golf Wang". It carries the celtic cross, covered in LGBT rainbow colors. For the launch of his 2016 Golf Wang Shirt Tyler tweeted a detail shot of its print: Trump with the Hitler mustache, "Donald J. Trump, 2016-2020, We Fucked Up, Gold".

While in his music video "Bitch Suck Dick", Tyler rides topless on a white rather dumb-looking horse. Reminding the viewer of the photo of the topless, reddish, flesh colored Putin on the brown Quarterhorse. An editorial ad shows Mykki Blanco's tattoos, the Star of David on his chest, "Pony Boy" written down underneath and "Smile Kid" above his left nipple. An image of an antisemitic protestor in Berlin, July 2014: He holds up the victory sign with his right arm stretched out like the Hitler salute. The "88" is tattooed in Gothic type on his lower arm. He wears sunglasses and the Palestinian Keffiyeh, a poster of Sayed Arafat is held up in the background.

The homemade video that Pekka-Erik Auvinen uploaded to YouTube before committing the Jokela School Shooting 2007. With an open facial expression, pointing his semi-automatic pistol at a point close to the camera's lens he wears a black T-Shirt stating his misconceived motto that actually originated from Darwinist theories: "Humanity is overrated".

INTEGRITY

Human events blend with consumer- and network culture. Likewise propagandistic images as well as footage of real-life tragedies are to be found in every niche of popular culture and go all the way up to twitter accounts of political leaders, activists, entertainers, artists and eventually into our national consciousness.

Sia and Kendrick Lamar's "The greatest" music video. Sia wears smeared rainbow colored make up on her cheeks. The song lyrics accompany a diverse party crowd that is seen on the dancefloor, struggling for freedom on a dance night. Sia sings "I'm free to be the greatest, I'm alive. (...) Don't give up, don't give up, don't give up, (...)", Kendrick answers her with "Hey, I am the truth. Hey, I am the wisdom of the fallen - I'm the youth." The choreographers dance wildly with expressive gestures and facial expressions. The music fades out slowly into silence, the

group is gunned down on the dancefloor. The disco lights are still moving while the clubs' back wall is chattered by what appears to be gunshots. Dim rays of sun beams fall onto the amorphous bodies. Sia is still breathing. In a following scene a group of dancers stands together in a dislocated-looking bundle, hiding their faces, pressing their bodies closely onto each others. Just another click on YouTube and one finds the original cell phone video of the Orlando Pulse Club Massacre. A man clasping two other clubgoers tightly, huddled together in the corner of the bathroom's floor. The coloring of both scenes, dark red highlights and earth tones, a certain unsharpness.

In Milly Pye's "Too many people" video one frame shows two guys at a game-hall. The white man's hair style has a striking resemblance with James Holmes of the 2012 Aurora shooting. His extraordinary, neon orange hair color and his slight curls as well as even the actors faceshape almost identical to the spree-shooter's. He wears camouflage-like pants and a black T-Shirt spelling "Coexist" made out of different symbols: The crescent moon (C), the peace sign (o), the gender equality sign (e), the Star of David (x), the pagan sign (i), the Ying and Yang sign (s) and the Christian cross (t). The black man next to him, casually leans on his shoulder absently and does not look at the camera. A few years earlier, user "realface13" tried to sell a 500 USD mask depicting James Holmes' face on eBay. "Halloween is only a month ahead. SHOCK EVERYONE YOU KNOW! There is nothing scarier than crawling into James Holmes' mind and wearing his face", was the eBay offers description text.

The photo of the assassination of the Russian ambassador Andrey Karlov, taken by Turkish photographer Burhan Ozbilici was awarded World Press Photo of the Year 2016. The assassin, at the time a 22 year old Turkish police officer Mevlüt Mert Altıntaş, is captured in an energetic movement. His legs are spread apart in a dynamic stance, he throws his left arm up into the air, bolstering his paroles with the stretched out index finger, while pointing down to the floor with his hand gun. He wears a neat white shirt, a dark and slim necktie, a belt with a simple silver buckle and polished, classic leather shoes. The man supposedly shouted "Allahu akbar" in Arabic, then continued in Turkish within the captured moment. The scene is situated in a white cube environment, surrounded by the exhibited landscape photographs—"Russia through Turks' eyes".

The October 13th 2015 twitter post by Donald J. Trump,realDonaldTrump@Twitter, using the Pepe Frog meme. Pepe has the iconic features of Trump, the exceptional, yellow hairstyle, the shape of his mouth and facial expression and is portrayed behind a podium as president of the United States. @codyave: @drudgereport @BreitbartNews @Writeintrump „You Can't Stump the Trump“.

DELUSION

When chaos prevails and illusion is mistaken for reality, identities are perceived as truth. Reality is being abstracted to an endless flow of fragmentary images, that describe the gap between psychologically ill lone perpetrators and what is wrong with our culture. Simultaneously fame and spectatorship have become the currency of our postmodern social capital.

The NBC media package of Seung-Hui Cho's, the Virginia Tech shooter, consisted of 25 minutes of video, 43 photographs and 23 pages of PDF text that was last modified after the first shooting. In one of the aired video snippets, Cho seems to be sitting in a hallway. He wears the hood of his black and grey sweatshirt casually. First he looks into the camera, then starts nodding his head slightly, looks down to the floor and says: "This is the end." He pauses, adds "End of the road" and his look wanders off into space.

The fake Reuters twitter account that claimed that the attackers of the Quebec mosque massacre were two white supremacist shooters allegedly called David M.J. Aurine and Mathieu Fournier. Aurine was found out to be an actual person called Davis M.J. Aurini. An alt-right supporter from Canada who retweeted the fake Reuters post: "Time to come clean: David Aurine is my twin brother, left handed, works with Antifa, wasn't raised by wolves like me." While another post of the same account claimed that the alt-right media personality Mike Cernovich has been the Fort Lauderdale airport gunman and that the republican Rick Wilson attempted the assassination of Donald Trump. Meanwhile Sam Hyde, comedian and founder of alt-right affiliated sketch comedy group "Million Dollar Extreme", frequently has been misattributed as the "lone white gunman" suspect in gun violence tragedies in the United States. Becoming the avatar of online trolling campaigns after terrorist attacks, #NoHydeNoPeace.

In March 2017, 19 year old Marcel Hesse killed his nine year old neighbour by stabbing him 58 times. He posted video and photo footage of his actions and himself posing beside the lifeless body to an anonymous darknet message board. "Willst später 4chan reife bilder?" ("Want

4chan-worthy pictures later?).“Klar.” (“Of course”).

IDEOLOGY

While meaning is being abstracted into a meaningless surface, violence represents a lashing out against symbols rather than against reality. The images discussed here embody multiple manifestations of representation-as-violence. Describing two worlds that we are all subject to—one of dreadful terror on the one hand and one of the harmless imitation of (political-) radicality on the other hand. Touching common grounds within consumerism, extremism might as well be viewed not purely as ideology but rather as a form of protest and youth subculture. Terror itself has become a good consumed by us just as we consume products, networks and the media.

To be hurt, to break on finding ones own identity, to search for a counterdraft of ones parental home, to feel rejected and isolated, to get lost in solitude, to look for romance or adventure in herorism and pain, is “ordinary”. But to let political ideology grow from these grounds, paroles are needed. While feeling world forelorn, in a confused search for tenderness, seeking authority and recognition some individuals might find certainty in fanaticism and turn towards brutal extremism as their dernier ressort to self-identification.

Both of these worlds citing an urgency, a new normality, a liquid world, (out of-)order. Within the collapse it is as well our responsibility to prevent.

There was a shot fired.

I didn't want to do this. I had to do this.

(The Columbine Tapes—Conversation between Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold right before committing suicide; Seung-Hui Cho—Video footage)

Endnotes:

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