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Radical Youth
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Andrea Karch
Sandberg Instituut—June 2017

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Geert Lovink
13-02-17
Amsterdam

When value and meaning are de-materialized, reality is abstracted to an endless flow of fragmentary images and symbols. A satirical post-modern irony and sadness, consumer- and network culture as well as lifestyle blend with real-life politics and terror. In the realm of feeling world forelorn the project puts emphasis on the psychology of a generation that turns towards models of violence as their dernier ressort to self-identification.

Within the context of Generation-Y, "Radical Youth" is based on the study of the right wing "Nipster" scene, the wave of European Jihadi youth and the phenomenon of rampage shooters.

This booklet gives an insight into the research that accompanies the video work. It contains three inspiring interviews with professionals working in the field of networkculture and extremisms. Where do these worlds— the one of youth- and network culture, lifestyle and consumerism and the one of violence and terror overlap? What does an "us" and a brutal "them" have in common?

The self-written, fictional stories are based on this research and on true events. Being performed in the video work, they create an intimate space between the viewer as hostage and the confronting character. A black box, "illuminating the violent depths that we inhabit —strangely polished surfaces that intersect with blood, sand, clutter, YouTube and Melatonin." (Rachel Rose O'Leary)

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ABOUT   Geert Lovink, founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures, is a Dutch-Australian media theorist and critic. He is the Research Professor at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Associate ProWfessor at the University of Amsterdam and the founder of internet projects such as nettime and fibreculture.

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AK   In your essay "Platform Capitalism", you state that researching ideology means to closely look at the here and now. In this context you discuss neoliberalism and right-wing populism. You describe that ideology rather manifests itself within the market than within the instituitons of the nation state. What is the relation of social media, symbolism and our psyche in this context?

GL   We need to be aware that we are dealing with real-time. Social media only has little context in itself. It rather is about direct connections, references, events and things we share. The speed and liquidity is important. It is a banal fact, but social media is the absolute opposite of reflexion, context, contemplation, analysis.

AK   Which role does quantity play?

GL   It's a personal issue. I would say that suffering from the information overload rather is the exception.

On the other hand one could argue that we all suffer from it. But this would mean that all of us are sick. The discussion I would like to have though, should be about a critical diagnosis rather than generalization. It should be about refining the terminology in its nuances. If we are all sick, we don't have to think anymore. Fact is though, that some are able to cope with it and others are not.

AK   Why is this discussion relevant?

GL   Well, it's very relevant in the context of your question. Why should we talk about radicalization at all? Radicalization is the exception, not the rule. But if we do not try to define a diagnosis, this might mean that we're actually all radicalized. Which might be the case, thinking of Brexit and Trump. Where certain majorities are created, that everyone thought of as insignicficant minorities for a long time. The so called Alt-right which meets on 4chan, for example. To make distinctions within these movements and events is important. And social media plays a very odd role in it. The issue is that we aren't able to make a clear distinction between the mainstream and the exception anymore. We have to deal with this confusion. The way you are studying is actually a recording of the self. Something you can then project on others, it is a mirror.

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AK   Are we entering an era of a new normality?

GL   To some extend yes, because it took so long until things like extremism, radicalization and the internet have established themselves as problematic. Actually you can't even call the digital, new media anymore.

AK   What's the relation of the human and technology? You call it "the rooted structures of the unconscious".

GL   This relationship has become very intimate. We carry our cellphone, which embodies our social being, very close to our physical body. You have to think about it on a metaphysical level as well.

AK   You also question wether or not we lose our ability to show empathy. In which way are emotions influenced?

GL   You do have more information about what's going on in your social circle but you can't react upon it directly.

It is an issue that this process is very different from the social interaction within a physical space. There are issues of filtering and mediation. I believe that it should be a political strategy to connect people more with each other in real life. For example, ones mind-set on the refugee crisis changes, once you actually meet a refugee personally. Getting acquainted is something very special. And it isn't impossible. We just have to restructure and rethink.

AK   What is today's role of romance?

GL   I think the biggest issue in the context of romance is the quantification of the emotional sphere. This process takes place via the data sphere. A surplus of data is collected. And if you're interested in this data, if you know how to get to it and how to analyze and visualize it, then within the process of quantification, it's possible to built-in a moment of manipulation.

AK   How do filter bubbles relate to this idea?

GL   Filter bubbles have always existed. Now the issue is quantification. In the past, being a sociologist or an anthropologist who had to collect these information has been very arduous. But today, machines do it for us. Well, actually not for us, but for advertisement agencies.

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AK   What impact does this have on an individual that is in the process of radicalization?

GL   If you seclude yourself from public life, online spaces offer confirmation. Radicalization is the implosion of daily life. It isn't the exception of daily life. Things, emotions, that exist anywhere, in anyone, implode.

AK   Which role do social media play when we think of an autonomous self that transforms into something that is directed towards the outside?

GL   Social media are active once there is an exchange. The passive idea of the spectatorship, the logic of the old media, doesn't apply anymore.

AK   If one breaks with ones real-life and identity, could this push an individual to turn towards extremism?

GL   Yes. I think so.

AK   You call today a "hegemonic era of social media",

describing social media as ideology. Does this mean that Facebook and Google have established supremacy?

GL   Yes. Although it constantly changes. But since 2008 the market economy doesn't exist anymore. There are only different manifestations of the same forms. And a powerful concentration, an absolute monopoly. We're in a state of consolidation.

AK   If social media embodies ideology does extremism represent the media and the consumption of media instead of true political or religious ideology?

GL   Yes, definetely. Ich don't know how exactly but I wouldn't seperate these two anymore.

AK   Is ideology turning into lifestyle?

GL   In that sense, yes. Of course you shouldn't take this whole idea too literal. It doesn't apply to society as a whole. Today, neoliberalism embodies these issues within individual subjects, not within the collective. Ideology is something one experiences and lives individually. Just like the sharing economy, for example. Ideology doesn't act from the outside-in anymore but from the inside-out.

AK If we all mirror ideology towards the outside, are we all products?

GL Well, we are all entrepreneurs. We all produce insane amounts of data. Maybe it's also about producing value. But what are these values? In the Marxist sense of the word—does this value then produce profit and surpus value? And who profits from it? What does profitable then mean in its context? What if this data doesn't mean anything anymore? Maybe this bears hope, that at some point all this data might become redundant.

AK   What's the relevance of symbols for citizens and adolescents?

GL   Symbols are just as powerful as always. This is very visible in branding. Symbols like Nike, for example.

AK   Consumption doesn't know geographical borders. Nike is just as popular among, let's say "the ordinary citizen" as it is among extremists. ISIS fighters show off their sneakers on Twitter, just like we do.

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GL   That's true. Symbols are travelling objects. They don't necessarily lose their meaning but change it. Social media are enormous machines of distribution. Distribution is their only purpose.

AK   You quote Slavoj Žižek, saying that "the societal fear of bad intensions has been replaced by the management of the contradictory consciousness". What does this mean?

GL   Well, it is about exclusion. The biggest difference in comparison to the past is, that we process the flow of information much more now. Everythingis calculable. The measuring of the world has come to an end.

AK   What's the influence of trolls, fake news, fake likes, the chaos, in this context?

GL   No one claims that the data is accurate. Data doesn't say anything about a person, you know? Of course this steers confusion and uncertainty. But uncertainty has always existed. It just had a different name.

AK   Are you referring to technical innovations like the telephone?

GL   That as well. But I'm trying to say that in the past it was called propaganda.

AK   Are social media propaganda then?

GL   Yes. Social media are specific forms of propaganda. This is nothing new, that's the problem. And that we simply don't know where it's coming from.

AK   Am I also producing propaganda myself?

GL   Yes. It would be so easy, if we could simply be sure that this or that piece information is distributed by "the ministry of good intensions" or something like that. But this is the issue of our times. You can't reduce anything to only one source anymore.

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Anne Leiser
07-04-17
Bremen

ABOUT   Anne Leiser is a trans-disciplinary social science researcher. She wrote her BA on the perceived experiences of former right-wing extremists and continued with a one-year fellowship. Researching on right-wing extremism and radicalization processes, working closely with EXIT Deutschland. She is now pursuing her Ph.D. in Psychology with her current research on the use of the Internet and the role of political Internet memes in public discourses and social movements.

AK   To what extend is social media ideology?

AL   I don't think that social media are ideology. Because I don't think that there is a common mindset behind them. In the first place, social media are just a tool. Just like traditional media were in past as well. Social media themselves do not have any other function. Of course processes take on different forms when online. In form of filter bubbles for example. Wether the online filterbubble is more powerful than filterbubbles before the internet is not researched or proven though. In the past people were also mostly surrounded by like-minded others and did not have access to other influences, opinions and so on. I'm asking myself what to compare with. Do you compare the inversions of social media to other media? Do you compare it to a time before social media or a time in which these media would not exist at all? If so, would there be a vacuum or would something

else take their place? I believe that all processes that are visible online can also be found offline. In a different intensitiy or scale.

AK   To what extend are brands ideology?

AL   I also don't believe that brands are ideology. Maybe aspects of brands are ideological. Google might be an example. Brands are symbols of ideologies. The swastika as well. Or brands that are worn by the right-wing extremis scene. Brands represent a group affiliation of course and can display where one stands, ideologically.

But I believe that ideology concerns action. Ideology has the clear endeavour to change society or maintain the staus quo. Whereas a brand orginally only strives to be sold commercially. The consumer doesn't necessarily want to change something by buying the brand. Just a few maybe.

While researching the right-wing extremist scene in Germany I interviewed dropouts that clearly followed an ideology. Before dropping out of the scene, they truly believed that they did good for the world. They said things like "I don't have any problem with Ali being my neighbour but I believe that he would be better off somewhere else. And our German society would be better off without him, too." The whole idea is rather some kind of social Darwinism. It's not as simple to judge people as it is usually done by the public. Those former extremists really didn't reflect that their action was something evil to other people. They simply had the feeling of not being heard. Within the extreme right scene they felt like they had a voice, gave others a voice and protected their rights. The rights of those that are oppressed by the system. There is a lot of mendacity among the members of these groups and many conspiracy theories.

AK   Why do they have the urge to do good or better in the first place?

AL   That's interesting. No one really knows. There are also many people that are oppressed but

that don't radicalize, that don't resort to violence. But one reason appears to be the notion of not feeling at home in your home country. European Jihadis are often converts. These are often people that don't have a distinct cultural identity. In psychology there are theories about basic human needs. One is the "need for belonging", being part of something. If this is not the case and when an individual feels excluded or perceives his or her group as marginalized, then something is missing. This individual or the whole group then doesn't belong to the middle of society. Besides an individual needs to experience self-efficiacy, being able to accomplish something. I think that many miss that feeling. Another factor is the "perceived thread". Every human being needs to feel safe. An act of terrorism is an example—the fear of being attacked. Or, a classic, the pension that supposedly is being cut while refugees that have never worked for this country would get pocket money.

Our interview partners were in leading position within the scene. Two of them were philosopy students that discussed wether or not Hitler was a vegetarian. They claimed that everyone should become vegan now to really save the world. Ideas that you would rather expect from the left. But these were people that really looked for meaning and that were ambitious. They weren't stupid but also didn't exactly have the best opportunities so to say. But what is the last drop that makes the cup run over and lets one individual turn towards extremism and not the other, can't be proven.

But I don't believe that those who resort to violence in order to be heard are sicker than others. If you say that you immediately blame those that actually are ill of being evil. That is simply not true. Then you're trying to explain something away that you can't understand. You need a lot of empathy to be able to put yourself in this position.

AK   In your survey "Gewalt im Diskurs", you looked at the propensity towards actual violence in comparison to the aggression that users display online. Is there a relation?

AL   Yes, I looked at what the factors are that define wether or not people get together to actually protest outside

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in the streets. It is similar to what we just talked about: A sense of injustice, self-efficiacy and a social identity. We found out that self-efficiacy doesn't play such a big role online. I think that a lot of what happens online is just an outlet to blow off steam.

AK   Have you read about the case of Marcel Hesse? After announcing plans of murder on deep web message boards, the 17 year old boy killed his 9 year old neighbour and posted images of his actions within the deep web.

AL   Just because these cases of violence are more visible in our media at the moment doesn't mean that they also occur more often. Acts of violence and murder have actually decreased. Insofar we can definetely talk about the individual relation of the deep web and Marcel Hesse but we can't conclude that social networks lead to violence and murder.

AK But making those plans public online and then being confirmed by encouraging comments—isn't something happening there?

AL   If you leave people up to a system without boundaries and limits they do go very far. A human being is concerned with his or her position of power. If there is no accountability, no penalty, if a human being is not held responsible for his or her actions, then violence usually reigns. No matter wether we're talking about rape or war crimes or performance art from the 60s for example. The darknet is a legal vacuum.

AK   Are you familiar with the #pizzagate and Edgar M. Welch? He fired a rifle in the Comet Ping Pong pizza restaurant because of rumours, involving child sex abuse and Hillary Cliton, that were going viral on platforms like 4-chan.

AL   Media always are a megaphone of the public. Or a mirror of public perception. But things are portrayed in certain ways. The worst news are on the title page and everything that is more nuanced isn't even included. That's the case with the old and with

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the new media. With the internet though, people have the feeling that they can take control. Over which information they consume for example, how they share information and how they react upon it. But this is an illusion.

In my current research I compare conventional political participation with self-expression online. When you share an article on Facebook and you get 20.000 reactions on it, you feel like you have contributed to the discourse. This isn't the case when voting for example. Online, this tremendously big and complicated system that is politics, is stripped down to the individual. That's the point.

AK   It seems to me, that today symbols are being abstraced. Is social media eliminating meaning?

AL   I disagree. At the moment I deal a lot with meme design. Internet memes are symbols that have a lot of meaning. They transport so much via the image. Symbols are able to change. The swastika is an example. Today everything is changing faster though. Also the meaning of a symbol and how it is perceived and by whom. Many memes originate from 4-chan and often have a right-wing background. Not only Pepe the Frog but many others find their way into the mainstream or the other way around. But telling people what to do, to share, to say and to think only excludes them. Which might then lead to a backlash like we can observe now— Donald Trump.

Besides, memes are meant to make one stand out from the crowd. These are groups with their own identity, language, with their own norms of what is accepted and what is not. But you can't always say things in your offline life, that you say on 4-Chan or 9-gag.

AK   Is there still a difference between the on- and the offline life?

AL   The online life is just as real. I do believe that they merge a lot. Of course this doesn't apply to everyone. There are also many people that choose not be that interconnected. On the other hand there are video games like "Second Life" in which people play with their identity. Men that try out female roles for example. But maybe this lies in

ones personality anyway. If this person would have played theatre on a stage, he might as well have chosen a female costume. Besides we all behave differently and accordingly to the different social circles that we're part of. Social media only is a mirror of what we do in our social life anyhow.

AK   Is there any danger of the loss of identity?

AL   I think that many people don't feel at home in a fast-paced society anymore. If you think about Hillary Clinton and the TTIP debate—there are a lot of people that don't want a global village. This is also an issue that the EU is having. That you constanly have to identify as one. But I believe that this process takes place too fast. There is a plentitude of individual identities, small and fragmented factions. "I'm a transqueer person", "a modern Muslim", for example. A collective image of society doesn't apply anymore.

In politics this is called "Issue voting". You don't vote one political party because of its political program anymore but you vote according to certain points of arguments. The rights of homosexuals or the situation of refugees for example. I think that politically, something very exciting is happening at the moment. The new left is not the old left and the new right is not the old right anymore.

Social media expose this diversity way more than before. This is why I personally don't really believe in filter bubbles. It might have been a mainstream bubble before, you know? I think in the end its not so much about the loss of identity but the constant change of identity.

AK   As Generation Y, do we have a stronger desire for the social then other generations before us?

AL   I don't think so. I don't believe that human needs change so fast. But the question is how do we cover these needs? Social media managed to connect people digitally. This system developed out of an empty niche, a necessity. In this case, wanting exchange without having to be in the same physical space.

The strenght of social media always has been that people could form groups. Marginalised groups were able to form their communities. Sometimes this can be disturbing but it can also be beneficial. The LGBT community is one of the positive examples.

But all of this has to be seen in relation. In the past people probably also found their ways to connect to like minded people even though they weren't surrounded by them.

On the other hand, in the context of the study that you mentioned, we did find out that people actually believed that there is consensus within the German society on certain topics. For example, they felt like there was consensus on what is the correct opinion on the topic of refugees. Which of course isn't true.

AK   You mostly disagreed with my hypotheses. Is it nonsense to to look for a relation between violence, extremism, even murder and capitalism? Or to put it into relation with the times that we live in?

AL   I do believe that inequality fosters anger and aggression. I don't believe that the internet changes us so much that we develop different needs. But certain mechanisms are defintely encouraged online or proceed differently. There definetely is a change. It's not like everything is the same as always. But if you really compare with the past, most things have actually improved. That's why I think this pessimism expresses a certain distrust of anything that is new. This applies to all technologies. I think people connect with each other through the internet. But I don't believe that people radicalize more because of the internet. Seen in relation, all of that is not so dramatic. Terror attacks occur very seldomly. There're bigger problems actually. Of course I do understand the fear but I personally am more afraid of intolerance. If a whole society suddenly stops showing hospitality, the damage is incredibly big.

But these opinions that now echo within these filter bubbles, the notion of censensus—how do they influence the public discourse? It is very likely that this influences our conscience, and our perceiption of reality and truth.

Kim de Groot
21-04-17
Rotterdam

ABOUT   Kim de Groot is a design researcher. She is part of the lectoraat Communication in a digital age and teaches new media at the Willem de Kooning Academy. Kim's research deals with the inverted relation between image and reality. Images are no longer created to represent a reality but to manage it. Kim examines images as informational objects and traces the relations between image, event and media.

AK   In your book "Image Management" you write that the relation between the image and reality has become inverted. What does that mean?

KDG   A photograph is meant to frame what you're looking at, what you call reality. The ubiquity of the camera, your smartphone that you carry on your body, produce images that are closer to you than those that were taken with an analog, or with the camera before the smartphone. This kind of image is part of a social and technological environment. An Instagram image for example, is time based. It is processed on a platform and directly acted or reacted upon. This image gains a manipulative quality. It steers an actual event. The image is actually writing a kind of reality.

In my publication I analyse the oil spill disaster in Mexico. 12 livestream cameras were put on the wreckage. Each in a particular framing of the oil spitting out. It was

almost poetic. At the same time there was this Twitter account with live tweets. Lateron the public sentiment that was represented in this live tweet influenced the reaction of president Obama towards the crisis. I really felt the inversion in this moment. It was almost like a live choreography, a puppet play.

AK   Doesn't this apply to history as well? To biblical images? Images, wall drawings or statues were also perceived as truth and were used as tools to control people. Only that the process was slower then.

KDG   Yes, definitely. You could say that this is propaganda. It is also a manipulative image or language. If you're asking if this is something new, than no. But it is about the awareness of people and how one uses the image nowadays. The literacy in rewriting reality is something fascinating. Which is also part of the meme culture—you are aware that you can subtitle what you are doing or what other people are doing. It is a very interesting form of communication.

20   AK Do you think the image has become more democratic?

KDG There definitely is something happening on an individual level. And between the relation of the personal and the global. Something personal can suddenly become something big. But I don't know if that is called democracy. I think it is about hierarchy. Network media change the hierarchy in communication.

AK   You also said that images move from representation to the performative and from visual to the infrastructural. Images no longer represent the reality but manage it. How does this work?

KDG   Software works according to certain codes and has certain protocols built-in. The interface and the functions that YouTube is based on for example. Instagram or Facebook, too. Those structures introduce a way of relating to someone else. How do I, via the software that I have at hand, relate to the other. And of course this interaction is limited because of the softwares particular design. If you want to talk about psychology—There is a term called

"Mimetic Design". We want what someone else wants. This is the cyclic process that we go through every day, looking at our Facebook scroll. Facebook, for a big part being based on images or videos. "Managing" is the term that fits here. Also "power". If you have a hard time positioning Facebook as what it is, then it becomes a very powerful tool in relation to the topic of truth and post-truth. The fact that many people read their news via Facebook, not knowing that these are news channels that are made to distribute fake news, which are made up by people on the other side of the world. Those people are not aware of the politics of Facebook, of its algorithms. Then a certain reality is constructed for them.

AK   What does this mean, especially for young people? Those that struggle to define their own identity.

KDG   I can only answer this as a Facebook user myself. The ability or the idea that you can create an identity is interesting and complicated at the same time. There are two sides to it. On the one hand I think it can be unhealthy. Spending time looking at other people. On the other hand, you also go to the theater or watch a film looking at other people. But somehow I think that this is something else. **21**

AK   Speaking in terms of my research on radicalization I think that psychologically, it's an issue of being unable to construct an identity or to fit in. Then one over-identifies with something else. Through the internet. On the other hand I find it interesting that in youth subculture or fashion extremism seems to be very present as well. I wonder if this also has an influence on real life. I mean, fashion is only fashion. But if you're constantly consuming terror and lifestyle at the same time, what does it do to your real life?

KDG   I started a project about the Alt-right, 4-chan and the meme war that is going on under the flag of Kek. Violence or the plans for that kind of violence are also expressed on platforms like 4-chan. Comments like "I'm going to kill you", "Stay away from school tomorrow". Sometimes these threats become true. It is an explosive mix of counterculture and a new kind of religion that uses trolling as their main form of communication. At the same time you

could call it far-right propaganda, these platforms are very openly anti-feminist, racist and fascist.

AK   Just a few days ago, an American citizen shot a 70 year old pedestrian. First the shooter pulled out his phone to stream the murder live on Facebook, then he took out his gun to shoot the innocent victim. It stayed on Facebook for 2 hours.

KDG   What's that about? I'm wondering whether it's wanting acknowledgement or—I don't know. Every person is different and has his or her own reaction to what happens on Facebook or to what you see on a daily basis. You gave an example of how people radicalize when looking at ISIS' videos. What is interesting is that radicalization is powerful and prominent, almost tangible. It is very material, you really act something out. The majority does not radicalize. With your last example, I had to think about sensitivity. Your body and your mind. The construction of your sensitivities. A very personal summary of who you are makes the meet-up with Facebook either explosive or implosive. In my publication I talk about 'happy slapping'. That is a very soft version of this. 'Happy slapping' means that people stage fights and put them on YouTube. It used to be a trend. Now it seems as if this has extended to applying violence live. There is an inversion in a way, too. Let's say real life is on the internet and the fictional is outside. It is such a twisted version of reality. But again this is only speculation—

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AK   In which context did you look at the concept of 'happy slapping'?

KDG   I saw it as a precursor, a light version of radicalization. Violence is something that other people want to look at. And people go very far to recreate a violent situation. Although your example is real, 'happy slapping' is about the imitation of violence. Violence, sex and porn—those topics get the most views.

AK   Would you go so far as to say that social media turns us into sadists?

KDG   No. I wouldn't say that. I think it is more of an example of 'thrill seeking'. It has to do with group dynamics.

AK   You wrote that meaning is no longer only created in the visual and representational aspects of an image but in the relations it creates between users, other images, media and real life events. How does this apply today in our current society?

KDG   This is also related to trolling, exposing peoples personal lives and data on the internet. There is the example of the Korean "Dog Poo Girl". You talked about first getting your phone out and then shooting another person. I think the gun and the phone have an interesting relation. The first girl that took a photo of the "Dog Poo Girl" in the metro and posted it online instantaneously—it was such a violent act. This image is a form of betrayal of someone else. It is about what we see in the image but also about the act of posting it. And of course the direct relation that it creates of an enemy and a victim. This girl, being the one with the rightful image in her hand, telling someone else to behave differently. A sort of collective punishment. Of course, this already exists, the internet is just a magnifying glass. But it was a global issue within ten minutes. This extreme exponential exposure of something personal is also violent. This image has a very significant relational meaning. It's about now, it's about me and you, it's about me judging you. Another example are surveillance camera's.

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AK   Do symbols lose their value, their meaning? And what is the relation of this idea to virality, to memes?

KDG   I think it's also about the relation between artistic strategies and public culture. Artistic strategies are introduced or merged with popular culture. This whole classic discussion in the art world between real life and art—I guess that the distinction was never there. The application of subversive strategies. Well this is not only an artistic tool but also a very political, activist and cultural practice. I would say it's a part of a very visual, literate world where these strategies are embedded in the way we communicate. Artistic strategies are introduced into daily communication. Memes are just one aspect of online visual culture that offers a playground to test it out.

AK   What happens with these images once they're taken out of the online world and then applied into real life?

KDG   Every action of re-using and copying changes a bit of the meaning. Used by different people and in another context, yes then it is a continuous change of meaning but it is not about losing it's meaning. It's referencing to its meaning. It's the idea of "floating signifiers". A visual object or an image that is copied. Let's say there is one on the web, it has been seen and copied so many times that you don't know anymore what its origin is and you apply your own meaning to it. Anyway, I don't see a real division between images that are taken out of the internet and are used offline. I think they are overlapping.

AK   These floating signifiers could be things like "Pepe the frog", or the "Fashy" memes. The "Fashy" memes are interesting. They actually came from the Alt-right scene. At some point they were applied by the left and then they were everywhere. It's also interesting that the term 'Fashy' actually originates from the word 'fashionable'.

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KDG   Yes, exactly. Fashion and fascism. It relates to what you were talking about before, this mix of terror related images and consumerist images. Fashion is also a really powerful in the images it produces. Maybe you could say that it is not only attracting people to look at it but to become part of it. The camera makes us perform. It is easy to perform the reality that you want. You can try it out and experiment with your friends and even have fun. I'm not talking about fascism here but about fashion and the images that it creates. We are just *(thinking)* like sheep.

AK   Would you say that social media equals ideology? Since we are talking about fascism and sheep.

KDG   *(laughing)* No, no. Like I said before, it's important to know the construction of social media and the way in which you are part of the construction. It is important to be aware. The next question could then be: What are you doing about your position within this social media construction? And I think that this awareness is very much embedded in the way designers and artists already look at reality.

AK   I'm generalizing now but do you think that we as a society or my generation have a desire for the social?

KDG   I think "the social" as a term has its own meaning. It is such a hyped term, an easy label to say "we are doing things 'together'". What pops up in my mind is the term "relations". How do we relate? When we wouldn't think, how could we still share? What do we share? This sort of scary area of something very emotional or instinctive. That what touches us. Right now with the Mona Lisa collective, I'm interested of getting into what I describe as the "subconscious social". Rituals, mantra's, music.

AK   It is a poetic term, the "subconscious social". But what do you do mean with it?

KDG   There is a lot of irrationality right? And, it's terrible to say but we as humans are, in a way, all irrational.

So what is interesting in relation to how you look at radicalization and extremism and how it's embodied by the youth, is to look outside of your group. What form does irrationality take in our lives? Not being extremists. But do we still seek it? And where do we find it? It is also just a mode of being, the "not knowing"? But maybe this is a positive side while you would call extremism the negative one. What are non violent forms or irrationality and how do they relate to...

25

AK   ... love.

KDG   Yes. Or maybe bodily sensations?

AK   If we are so consumed with looking at violence online, I wonder about what happens to our ability of showing emotions like empathy.

KDG   Maybe we are actually overly empathetic? In the sense that we are so open for the other that we reach a level of "What can I copy from the other?". Like consuming the other, but not in a positive sense. Not like really listening to someone else, not in the sense of being open and truly interested. But more in the sense of "How can I use you to become a better me?". Well, in the classic sense of the word "empathy" is defined as having a "feeling for the other". The internet is the classic concept of the gaze. You are gazing at someone, but you are not really getting something back although it seems to be the case, but actually it's not. It's a very asynchronic form of communication.

AK What happens if real events become tools of the media? Fake news or simply wrong news, for example. What does this do to us as a society?

KDG There is a sort of classic discussion in it of authority and truth that is a hard one to crack. It is also a symbolic discussion. The awareness of fake news is creating a more critical attitude which I think is good. On the one hand I wonder whether fake news isn't really just an invented term? Wasn't news always a bit fake or incidental, fake by accident? What does it do to us? Fake news—When I approach it as a maker, or as a designer I think what is interesting about it, is that it becomes clear that we are living in stories made up by people. Because that would trigger creativity in people. I don't only see the negative side.

AK Maybe fake news just tries to sell us fake news to steer panic or to distract us from the real news.

KDG Yes, yes. It creates chaos. What about chaos? You can't live without it. I also have to think about this example: the moment when Trump acted upon fake news. Apparently it takes 10 hours to debunk fake news. Trump strategically made use of this gap in time. He got the story going so well that even after the news were debunked, he already had people on his side. I see it, this is a very designer-maker kind of answer, as an interesting strategy that you could use yourself. How could that be a method to communicate?

AK Is there something that we need to change?

KDG For the future, I hope that there will be a huge distraction off facebook. *(laughing)* Social media is actually so boring as well.

I can't really predict the future, for example where social media is heading. Maybe we could reinvent the camera and the act of making images. There is space for invention. After the fact that a meme is chosen as president of the United States—what happens next?

***(thinking)* It makes me think about populism. What is populism? Populism has a very negative connotation. But what is popular? I'm curious what forms populism can take to change the political system as we know it.**

26

1   Death

OASIS

She looked out the back door of the late 80s pick-up truck. It had two wooden benches stretched vertically and parallel to each other along the trucks loading space. Desert ground passed by, cut horizontally by a dusty, light blue sky, a perfect gradient. High-speed. Wind. A thought about the past—How to shield a face when glass shatters through space?

A glitch and what then looked like the skeleton of a second car. Like stale colored bones on the horizon, reflecting the bright sunlight. The driver of the second car rose from the sand. His head overflowed with blood, dripping. A ruby red liquid, thick on the fine white sand.

First an ivory stone with a pattern of grey dots. Red spots on the slightly transparent, corporal surface. Then the two bodies. One close to the cars left front door: its blue bra and stomach exposed, the arms dislocated, grey dust in the streaks of the bodies hair. On the other side, the second body. Evenly grey and evenly cold. She stroked the second body's cheek, opened the eyelids, and let the bodies hair slide through her stretched out fingers. She pushed the bodies chest. And pushed. Again. The sound of a bodies insides—fluids, movement, a vacuum. She carved out the sand from under the bodies fingernails and opened its mouth. She touched its teeth. A corpse, fragile and suddenly small.

They left the bodies behind. Looking out into the landscape. Stark shadows. A sepia filter. Death. A matter of seconds.

27

YOUTUBE

She hid behind the door. Then crawled underneath the desk, using her elbows to drag her stone-like body along the walls. The room was beige in color and somewhat fragmented, pixelated.

Shots of an AK-47 were echoing in what appeared to be the hallway. She was waiting for them, both in terror and the absolute thrill of physical pain. Then they reached the room and shot him dead, right next to her. His body was jumping up and down on the cold floor, torn apart by the pressure and the quantity of bullets. Those shots did not echo, they were firm and fast, fired uniformly in sequence, one after another after another. Then they left.

Just as she was wondering why they did not kill her as well, they returned and shot her, too. She felt the waves of pressure that were going through the air, her limbs in shock. She fell onto the side of her upper body and watched her skin tissue tumble down onto the ground. She knew that she was still alive. She was aware that she could not die. I can not die, she said.

It is strange how even in our most real dreams we can not imagine or feel our own death. Actually we don't even really care about our own death.

28

FOREST

She sat beneath the common beech, looking out onto the fir forest. Everything was immersed in blue mist. The moist forest floor, the fallen leaves, orchestrated a soundscape of noise. The single sounds, impossible to locate or attribute. A perfect organism. Nothingness.

Her breathing stopped and commenced uncontrollably. She put her hand on her left shoulder. Her right thumb pressed in anxiety against her neck. She has been wanting to die so badly and so often, lately. Now she thought her heart would explode. It was all too beautiful.

SHOWER

It was running all over her. High pressure. Wet. Steam. Liquid. It was running over her arms, her neck, her collarbone, her breasts, her belly button, her legs, until it reached her feet and blocked the drain full of someone else's hair. Only her skin felt—indifferent. She couldn't feel running water on her own body anymore.

She had to think of him. And this moment in which he said that he doesn't feel anything anymore. She was sure now, that he probably felt too much.

Do people actually really jump in front of trains? Or do they just stand there, waiting?

TIME

It all matters much less than we like. Nothing really matters. But time. Only time matters much more than we like.

29

SLEEP

This kind of sleep that feels like one has processed. Processed the past. Discarded each one of these years. This kind of sleep that makes one wake up just blank. One of these days he might as well just wake up and feel like everything was fine. Feel that everything is actually just fine. And feel that he belongs.

GLASHAUS

Wenn das Liebe ist. Was ist dann Hass? Wenn das das Leben ist. Was ist dann der Tod?

If this is love. Then what is hate? If this is life. Than what is death?

VALUE

Unlike what we have learned in our childhood. Value is only a conception. She was worthless. Like biodegradable cigarette filters—decomposing naturally.

STOCKHOLM

The two of them climbed into the car2go Mini Cooper and drove around the city aimlessly. Sharing a package of pineapple chunks and a few bottles of Indian Pale Ale. Marlboro's.

On the radio the host talked about the Stockholm attack that had just happened the day before. While Swedens newspapers were discussing whether to ban all vehicles from the city center, the German radio host referred to the Berlin christmas market attack. Endorsing the calm and confident reaction of the public.

While listening to the show, they started joking in the car. "The entire production of vans should probably be ceased. and they should stop making potatoechips, too".

They stopped at the health food shop to get her the Ginkgo Biloba food supplement and organic Melatonin based sleeping pills. Standing in front of the shelves of vitamins, she remembered the YouTube video that was released shortly after the Stockholm attack. Taken from street level it shows a trace of blood on the neat shopping streets pavement. In between what appears to be shreds of metal or plastic there is a shot of around two to three seconds, showing something like a corpse.

She was never quiet sure if this was a human body or the murdered dead pet dog that is mentioned on the english Wikipedia page. It took four days until Facebook began deleting images of badly wounded or dead victims.

BREMEN

They got out of bed at 2PM. And sat down on the terrace of that bar. The sun was out. It was warm. A breeze. They complained about the smell of this man's cigar and his grey, thinned-out ponytail. Long hair on a man really turned them off. They ordered rounds of cooled white wine. At 3PM they got the first shot of Vodka and a glass of tap water. Thyme and a slice of lemon.

She said she was about to get into a relationship with this 65 year old dude. She really dug his lifestyle, "like seriously" she said. She was already imagining herself living in his house. Her friend noted that she didn't think that this was a sufficient reason for starting a relationship. A pause. She answered that it wasn't like that. She said it simply was part of who he is. She said each time that she would open the fridge, there would be wine. "Like, always" she said. There was no point to it.

Her voice amplified with time. She really blew up. There was a notion of hatred towards people that wore washed out black cotton socks in black pumps with plastic heels.

Suddenly she yelled she was sorry. "Sorry", for being such a fucking Nazi about all of that.

A woman in her late fifties sat at the table in front of them. She turned around slightly, then turned back again, shaking her head.

At central station Siri popped up. "How can I help you?" she asked her. "You can't". She screamed. Like literally. "Fair enough." Siri said.

RICHARD SPENCER

YouTube.com/watch, "White nationalist Richard Spencer punched in the face while doing interview". He wears the purple shirt and tie.

Richard Spencer retweets Night-shade556 #TheresNothingMoreSexier Than man who's not afraid to wear purple.

This is not a typo.

He says we had entered a new world where these "leftist protesters"—
a black woman interrupts. "Do you like black people?", "Yeah, sure" he says.
The pin on the left collar of his neat grey suit jacket. "Uh, it's Pepe, it's become kind of a symbol".

A black shadow within the frame, a blurr, a glitch. A hollow sound. Like something that falls and bursts on
concrete ground. A fist on human flesh.
A fist on a face. A fist on Richard Spencers face.

I came in like a wrecking ball
I never hit so hard in love
All I wanted was to break your walls
All you ever did was wreck me
"Anybody done this yet?" Jordan Freiman@Twitter, 21 Jan 2017 ,
2,884 Retweets, 4.477 Likes

INSTAGRAM

And yet another photo of a womans angular torso. Her moist sternum and collarbone stressed. Wearing a Nike sportsbra and two silver necklaces. There might be two large silver or golden earrings. Or only streaks of wet hair, lips. A harsh flash made visible the pearls of sweat and a shiny skin-colored surface.

4 Extremism

ERIC

He applied to his Ph.D in neuroscience with a photo of himself next to a spitting Lama. A week later he was offered a 30,000$ grant and free tuition.

She didn't ring the bell but texted him on Tinder that she was at his door. They went upstairs and had a box of Maki-Sushi. He talked about Marxist theory while she complained about not having made enough to afford her Bare Minerals make-up this month. Until they finally ended up having anal sex on the couch. Eventually he went to bed alone. Thinking about what he actually felt that alienated from.

The next day, after his morning run, he declined the Universities offer. And sat down in his parents Eames Lounge Chair. He swallowed one of his neighbours Ritalin pills and finished his green smoothie. He concluded that he was unhappy because he was unhappy. And it didn't matter because it didn't matter.

He bought a Glock 22 pistol, a Remington 870 Express Tactical shotgun and a high-powered rifle. He got 3.000 rounds of ammun-ition for the pistol, 3.000 rounds for the rifle and 350 shells for the shotgun. He bought a Guy Fawkes mask at 86 Street, went to Sothebys at York Ave, 71st Street, wounded 17 and shot dead 33 people including himself.

"Want 4-chan worthy images later?"
"Sure."

PHILIP

He detested the false consternation over political events. Most people knew nothing, anyway. "In solidarity with Kobani" the banners of his own comrades read. Being held up, far away. In safety.

His dad always told him to be more selfish. But he didn't see how "a simple life" would do it for him. High school, university, a career, a family, a car. He wanted to help. And he was angry.

He contacted the "Lions of Rojava" via their Facebook page. Then booked a ticket to Istanbul. There he got into a cab and finally crossed the border into Syria. It wasn't that hard. Really.

Three tall boys raising the red flag of the German Anti-Fascist Action, short Antifa, on top of a tank. The network's symbol, a red and a black flag against a white background. Red bandanas cover their faces, one holds an automatic shotgun. Behind them the Syrian sunset, peach and baby blue.

He dispersed, he plundered, he killed. Humans. He told them that he wanted to go back home. Two weeks later he was on a plane. Convenient.

He wasn't sure anymore whether he did the right thing or not. They are two sides of the same coin. And he still was disgusted by the sight of Evian water and student's days at the "party mile". Vodka energy. Hedonism.

He joined a boxing team and met this other guy. They started talking. Later they started praying together. Five times a day. After a while they replaced books by YouTube videos.

They shared that they both had loved the smell of freshly baked arabic bread on the streets. And that together, they detested the West even more.

What to do about a youth that loves death more than life?

MELANIE

It was yet another day of job interviews. Again, probably unsuccessful. She wore a suit that she always thought of as a Hugo Boss look alike. The one she saw other women wearing in the cities. Medium-high heels, faux leather and plastic, a little bow. Her hips looked rather unflattering. She had this middle-class voice and dry hair.

She never really minded the Kebab restaurant on the corner of mainstreet. But she always thought that they would be better off back home. Her town would be better off without them, too. She knew that it would not make a difference to her personally. But still— it was simply becoming too much. Just like McDonalds had become too much.

While "travelling the world", as they say, she did enjoy her stays in Turkey, in Egypt, in Morocco. But she could still feel the looks of men on her body. Two teenagers cat-called her just the other day. Because of her behind on the racing bike. Just because those teenagers were Germans too, doesn't mean that she doesn't still feel their looks just the same. She just chose to edit this out.

Anyway, she was still living with her parents. She was still on welfare. She still did not have her own car. She still did not have a boyfriend.

She was over political correctness. And Europe was falling apart.

She wanted to save her culture. Well, she wanted to save an image. An image of her future. Something that she had imagined for herself. You know, before.

That night she lit the wick of his molotov cocktail. He threw it directly into one of the windows of the former school building. Flames rose, a crackling sound first then a steady sough. Just like waves in the ocean. Orange against blue, grey fog. "Proud, different, national! Fuck democracy! We are ready for war!" she screamed and was finally heard.

And then suddenly there are these kind of people. People that actually want other people to burn to death.

Colophon

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