

"I had the time of my life"

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The issue of radicalization might be a bitter-tasting stigma of Generation-Ym, "bills of capitalism" (Charles Taylor). At the same time the mainstream media seems to play tug-of-war between the description of an ideologically brainwashed individual and the idea of "the mass murderer next door". News, ripe for the boulevard press and social media platforms.

A clear typography of radicalized youth is impossible, though. But in a society in which the dematerialization of value and meaning seems to be a general trend, the phenomenon of young individuals that turn towards models of violence as their dernier ressort to self-identification, might be a result of just the same.

IDENTITY

A photo of a buff, male Neo-Nazi. His head is white, round and shaved. He has got jug ears, his mouth is opened slightly and crooked, his chin is extraordinarily large. He wears a blue Pitt Bull T-Shirt and Levis Jeans, jump boots and suspenders. He holds a leash with 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 a raid following the Paris attacks. Covered in a bubble bath, the shown woman is nude. The cover title is "Rub a dub dub... THUG IN A TUB". Her whole story 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." An ISIS fighter holds a delicate kitten in his arms: ISILCats@Twitter "My Mewjahid protectz me".

Between aesthetics of youth culture and capitalist consumerism, is it possible to find commonalities between an "us" and a dangerous "them"?

VIRALITY

Going viral today seems to have become a sign of cultural and political relevance. It is all about the branding without the brand, reducing meaning to anti-statements. Image and text often subsume a fetishism of violence and the portrayal of sexuality just as much as a fashionable narcissism. Likewise in any social as extremist sphere.

An Instagram post shows a man embracing his left Nike shoe, sensually licking along its top. While ISIS fighter AbuSarayah@twitter posts "@AbuAlbaraaSham he got nothing on this", including a photo focussing on his dusty Nikes showing off the iconic "Swoosh". A Gosha Rubchinskiy model wears the label PACCBET in the Trasher Skateboarding logo's flames and political-seeming cyrillic type underneath. Just a few clicks away the Neo-Nazi Hipsters of the vegan YouTube cooking channel "Balaclava Küche" wear "Haus Montag" Shirts. Their logo as well in the Trasher Skateboarding logo's flames.

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

IRONY

Although fashion designer Gosha Rubchinskiy argues that "brands are above the system", politically charged symbols describe the discrepancy between geo-politics, the free market and youth culture without guarantee of accuracy. 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 ontop of someone or something else's meaning. History is appropriated or replaced all together. A satirical "post modern irony" gains influence on- and offline.

The fashion ad of rapper Tyler the Creator holding hands with a boyish-looking man. A black heterosexual man displays a homosexual relationship with a white man. Both wear the white cotton shirt of his label "Golf Wang". It carries the celtic cross, covered in LGBTQ rainbow colors.

DELUSION

Human events blend with consumer- and network culture. Their images 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.

When illusion is mistaken for reality, identities are perceived as truth. While reality is abstracted to a meaningless surface, violence represents a lashing out against symbols rather than against reality. Simultaneously fame and spectatorship have become the currency of our 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. Meanwhile Sam Hyde, comedian and founder of alt-right affiliated sketch comedy group "Million Dollar Extreme" became 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 on anonymous darknet message boards. "Want 4chan-worthy pictures later?". The community answered with "Sure".

IDEOLOGY

The images discussed here describe two worlds that we are all subject to. While terror itself has become a good consumed by us just as we consume products, networks and the media, there might be a glitch between the psychologically ill perpetrator and what happens within our culture. Extremism might be viewed not purely as ideology but rather as a form of protest and youth subculture.

To be hurt, to break on finding ones own identity, to search for a counterdraft of ones parental home, to feel isolated and lonesome, to look for romance or adventure, is "ordinary". But to let political ideology grow from these grounds, paroles are needed. It is as well our responsibility to open up a discussion rather than to try to explain away what we can not understand.