

My ambition is to convince you that you are like me.

Tempted by the same chemical abuse.

Paul B Preciado, 'Testo Junkie'

GIVE IT A SHOT

VVV

ON VIOLENCE, VISIBILITY, VIRUSES

Donatella Della Ratta

Twothousandfour. Less than a year after the so-called 'liberation' from Saddam Hussein, and as Iraq establishes its first 'democratic' government, several local guerilla militias are engaged in armed fights against the US-led coalition occupying the country. The Abu-Ghraib scandal has just happened, ISIS' leverage on the ground is growing, and George W Bush is about to be elected President of the United States for the second time.

Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg launches 'Thefacebook.com', originally conceived as an online student directory featuring photos and personal information. Nintendo announces the release of its 'Revolution' console, later renamed Wii.

At hotel Nikko in San Francisco, California, a bunch of tech entrepreneurs are gathered for the first 'Web 2.0' summit, an event that will enter history. The social web is born there.

'Like many important concepts, web 2.0 doesn't have a hard boundary, but rather, a gravitational core', says Tim O'Reilly, the hippie-yuppie who fathers the social web.

Its 'gravitational core' is the so-called user engagement. Web 2.0 capitalizes on the 'collective intelligence' of the Internet crowd, on the billions of people who produce, modify, exchange data on a daily basis. Data is the new goldmine.

The social web looks at users as data producers and data carriers.

The content, the quality of what they carry

is not as relevant as the amount, the quantity of data, their speed in circulating, their virality in spreading around.

'If it doesn't spread it's dead' is the new mantra of the web 2.0.

Spreadability and virality drive information closer to genetics. Web 2.0 renders all things into spreadable data, regardless of content, message, quality. Regardless of the users themselves, as they are just 'spreaders' of information. Social and financial value grows around this dynamic: the more, the faster, the better.

Virality quickly expands from the domain of information and marketing toward a pervasive techno-social condition defining and commodifying the whole sphere of human relationships. The more 'likes, shares, retweets', the higher social capital (and financial profit).

Virality is the emerging paradigm of the early days of the social web, affecting even the domain of politics.

In 2011 the entire Arab region succumbs to the virality principle. The 'domino effect' by which so many countries -from Libya to Egypt to Yemen – fall prey to the revolutionary virus spreading from Tunisia, first as a hashtag on Twitter and then on the ground, seems to prove that virality works with politics as well as in web marketing.

Dictatorship after dictatorship falls, in a row, in a matter of weeks or months, while more hashtags are created, and more countries become affected/infected.

It doesn't really matter how and why the revolutionary idea is spread; what counts is that it conquers by viral infection.

Viral contagion has finally materialized as the quintessential techno-social (and political) condition in the early days of the web 2.0.

But soon the Arab 'Spring' descends into a cold winter, fallen dictatorships resurrect stronger than ever, civil war takes over, leading to destruction and displacement. Rather than materializing the allegedly progressive values promoted by the marketers of the social web, sharing for the sake of sharing has led to gloom and violence.

Virality no longer means participation, progress, wholeness but rather chaos, violence, disruption.

Virality is the enactment of terror by means of participatory culture, ISIS' terrifying shots being the best example of this new understanding of spreadability.

'If it's dead, it spreads'.

Terrorism is the new virus, the counter-revolutionary hashtag spreading on social media as much as on the ground. ISIS' visual media blends with its military takeover. ISIS films and kills, shoots and shoots at. Violence triggers visibility, visibility activates violence. The shooting cycle never ends.

But ISIS' approach to shooting is two-dimensional. We are still in the first decade of the social web, the early days of data culture. ISIS' shot concerns the visual and the military, the frame and the target. It's taken from a distance. It aims at. It needs a camera or a gun, a technology that extends the body. It's not directly about the body but, rather, about its killing and filming prostheses.

In the late era of the social web the shot becomes three-dimensional and organic. The shot is swallowed, injected, digested. The shot is intravenous, it's administered subcutaneously, it's inoculated. It's ingurgitated and disappears becoming transparent. It invades the body, it becomes the body. It changes it, modifies it, re-engineers it.

The 3D shot of the late social web is the 'pharmaco-pornographic regime' invading the body with microprosthetic and incorporated technologies. No longer extensions, they have melted with the body. They control and surveil it but, also, they make it come. To produce pleasure, and profit through pleasure.

This is a drug shot: injecting hormones to change sex, taking the pill not to get pregnant, administering gonadotropins to produce more follicles and have more chances to get pregnant, swallowing Viagra to have a more performative erection, getting vaccinated to produce immunity against the brand new virus.

It is also a cum shot. It is about managing daily sex life through period tracking apps telling you how to avoid getting pregnant, or when to try to get pregnant, or when to undertake an IVF procedure. Or about engineering and quantifying sexual pleasure through connected sex toys, enabling data gathering from your orgasm duration and contractions, and sharing the data so to 'optimize' and maximize pleasure.

Commercials for these connected sex toys sell pleasure through the aesthetics of war, evoke the idea of a military target, promote a device that successfully 'aims at' and 'achieves' it. The cum shot incorporates the military shot and makes it 3D. The body is the ultimate battlefield. The body is the enemy to defeat and the land to conquer and subjugate.

Until now the body had managed to escape control and surveillance, hit the streets, subvert the order and create revolutionary chaos.. now control and surveillance are incorporated within the body in the name of maximizing its pleasure. Cumming requires Invasion and subjugation.

In the era of the late social web we no longer need to carry data as if they were entities external to us, bits and frames. We carry data inside us. We ourselves are the data. Our menstrual period is the data, our orgasm is the data, our immunity is the data. In the datification of everything, organic feelings are turned into data. Menstrual pain, sexual arousal, length and intensity of ejaculation. Consistency of the cumming.

We inject and swallow up the shot.

We digest and assimilate the shot.

We cum and want to cum more.

The shot swallows up everything, as we swallow it.

List of sources

Della Ratta, Donatella (2018). *Shooting a Revolution: Visual Media and Warfare in Syria*. London: Pluto Press.

Jenkins, Henry (2009) 'If it Doesn't Spread, it's Dead (Part One): Media Viruses and Memes', Confessions of an Aca-fan, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p.html

O'Reilly, Tim (2005). What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software. *O'Reilly Media*, www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html.

Preciado, Paul B. (2013). *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. New York: The Feminist Press.