

The virtual rebel: Mon semblable!

by Victor Tsilonis

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Despite round-the-clock social networking and a lively interest in events of national historical significance, the virtual rebel has little to show in real-time for his -- or her -- engagement. Victor Tsilonis, editor of Greek journal *Intellectum*, recommends taking some air.

Contrary to the widespread belief -- mainly, but not exclusively, of the 50+ generation -- the virtual rebel is a common figure and not at all rare among the youth. Scientific studies have shown that the personality of the virtual rebel has certain features, independent of sex, which doesn't actually matter.

The virtual rebel is 20 to 40 years old, better educated than his or her IQ (i.e. his academic degrees are more numerous or of a higher grade than his IQ would suggest), and has at least one computer and probably two: one at the workplace and one at home. He or she has one or more social network accounts (Facebook, Myspace or Twitter, most of whose names are quite funny when translated in Greek) and, regardless of the language he or she speaks, be it Greek, Hungarian or Celtic, enjoys using foreign, English names, which have better impact on his or her cerebral cortex.

Finally, rather than using classic web-browsers like Internet Explorer or the "Fox on Fire" (Firefox), he or she doesn't hesitate to try new web-exploring programmes with impressive names such as "rockmelt" or the suggestive "flock", which helps the virtual rebel maximize his or her participation in the social networking "revolution".

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The world of virtual reality and digital social networking is exactly the environment in which the virtual rebel evolves as a personality, diffusing his or her energy for around three to four hours a day. Nevertheless, though the observation of this virtual world is constant, given that he or she spends between 11.25 and 15 minutes online per hour, 16 hours a day, not including 8 hours sleep (although the phenomenon of the sleepless virtual rebel exists too), his or her involvement is rendered, or tends to be rendered, the most important and intellectually demanding activity of the day.

Hence, virtual reality is the space where he or she constantly rebels in various ways: the virtual rebel observes friends' and acquaintances' websites, discovers via existing friends interesting new personalities and potential partners for his virtual revolution, vividly expresses his own opinion about current events, updates his personal status, discusses intensely on pages and friends' "walls", uploads short poems or revolutionary songs, and boldly states his preference to everything his virtual comrades courageously write by clicking on the "like" button.

On the anniversaries of revolutions that he or she typically never experienced, such as the "No" Anniversary of 28 October 1940 [when Greece refused to allow Mussolini its use its ports and airports for his African campaign, plunging the two nations into a war Greece unexpectedly won -- ed.] or the Greek military's suppression of the students' uprising in Athens on 17 November 1973 [killing dozens, an event considered to have been crucial to the fall of the dictatorship the following year -- ed.], he uploads songs of Sofia Vempe's and Manos Loizo's [patriotic folk singers associated with resistance to fascism and the dictatorship -- ed.], pens a few of his own slogans concerning the historical facts, and perhaps upload photos of epic World War II battles or the huge banner with the word "Freedom" flown from the School of Engineering of the University of Athens in '73.

In real life, however, the virtual rebel is in a permanently dormant state or, at best repeats like a perfect genetic copy the mistakes of his or her parents. He or she abstains from elections or, if he or she does vote, supports traditionally and uncritically the party of his parents, because "that is what he or she knows". The reason for this is that 99.99 per cent of virtual rebels at some point forget that the Internet is actually an extension, and not a replacement, of real life, the latter tending to becoming less and less important by the day.

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As time passes, the actions of the virtual rebel are increasingly limited to "like" clicks. This way he or she admirably attends the opening of the new Toulouse Lautrec exhibition at the Tellogleio Foundation in Thessaloniki, the Athens leg of the latest U2 world tour, the recent action of Sfina collective, etc. At some point, however, he or she gets bored even doing this, and stops clicking "like".

But while the revolution in the digital world goes on, in the real world nothing seems to change and never will, not only for the virtual rebel, but for anyone else too. That's because the virtual rebel is you, the virtual rebel is me.