Peggy Phelan said performance’s only life is in the present. Sven Lützicken said that such performances are so much a part of the spectacle of our society that they operate in the same way as the reproductions that Phelan claimed cannot be performances. Boris Groys said that there is no such thing as a copy, that we are simply dealing with original presentations of the absent original. Slavoj Žižek described our reality as wholly consisting of representations (or what we may refer to as ‘simulacra’

So why did the artist Thomas Bresolin bother to go through an anti-capitalist durational performance, situated within a gallery, which then, by default, places it as a performance made up of acting, rather than action. Thus becoming an image-object, neatly sitting within the structure brandished for critique by the artist.

The durational performance was carried out over a week in March. The artist, led a group of participants “to explore the militarisation of resistance based on radical principles and ideas [. . . ] the role of direct action and activity and its relationship to resistance [. . . ] the activity and mindset of militant groups and the idea of non-pacifist activity within wider social movements [. . . ] Involving physical and mental training to prepare for the inevitable apocalypse and collapse of capitalism”.

This exploration was carried out in the gallery, where they also ate and slept.

“In the struggle we reproduce precisely those dynamics of power we seek to oppose”.

In light of acknowledging this, amongst the other problems, of collectivism, Federico Campagna argues that to truly oppose the socio-political structure around us, we need to view ourselves through (what could be perceived as) the lens of neoliberal individualism. In order to escape the fundamental flaws of collectivism, which render us the “abstract conglomerates” of perhaps the same commodity relations that define us as consumers and fits within the anthropological categorisation and definitivism of capitalism. Increasingly, just as with performance, we see leftist protest and ideology subsumed by capitalism. This absorption into developed capitalist spectacle is exemplified in the Militant Training camp when viewed as a reenactment for entertainment, or, as Pollock would put it, an act (in the theatrical sense).

The truth is that predominantly such acts are only accessible as images. Capitalism has incorporated, as with most ‘movements’, leftist culture as an identity-brand, including trends in performance, such as Happenings. Originally Happenings developed as a way to explore the participatory politics of the time, based in group experiences that transcended Debord’s nascent notion of spectacle. They were conceptually positioned against consumerist and spectacular culture, yet the capitalist recuperation of Happenings thus produced images for consumption from a mutated form of ‘A Happening’, which lay firmly within the spectacle of which it was originally attempting to be apart from (i.e the notion that The Happening initially contained

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1 Term coined by Jean Baudrillard.

2 James Butler, http://piercepenniless.wordpress.com/2012/01/12/survival-on-nanni-balestrini/

3 the “common practice to look at humans through the collectives they supposedly belong to [. . . ] these collective abstractions, which we thought we could dominate and use as our ventriloquist’s dummies, finally end up possessing us, forcing us into complete silence.” Federico Capagna 2012 http://th-rough.eu/writers/campagna-eng/discipline-writing-and-collectivity
truthful, rather than spectacular, actions). The Happening as an action became an act and an image of itself.

The Militant Training Camp became what today we might term an ‘image-object’, just as it is a commodity of the experience economy. To term The Militant Training Camp as such is not necessarily to flatten it, as the commodity too is a “condensation of social forces.” In Hito Steyerl’s take on Walter Benjamin’s things, she deems things to be conglomerates of desires and power relations. Furthermore she suggests if the thing produced can avoid conjuration, or “unmediated and uninterrupted chaotic powers, that capitalist commodification and general resentment thrives” then the ‘thing’ too, can be affective.

Is it then affecting to repeat such militant actions daily? And within the safe context of gallery performance? At first the Militant Training Camp appeared to be a representation of its own title. As the week went on it began to reenact itself as something that also existed outside the project and gallery. It too became an image of itself. Repetition was a key component; morning runs and exercises, afternoon discussions, evening brainwashing. It parades as ‘direct’, yet it is a false representation of what I know direct activism to be.

In our much of our use of web 2.0 platforms, as supposedly in our sex lives, reproduction is our ontological impetus. Take the now standard ‘reblog’. Is this gesture of existence our only autonomy? Hopefully not. The durational performance and repetitive actions over the week however, appeared to be an attempt to create presence, and thus solipsistic existence. This existence was manifest as though to produce a stasis of the ideologies within the camp; using presence as proof of existence. We can view this proof (and the reproductive nature through which it is achieved) as being the contemporaneous, Westernised equivalent of survival. So too can we see the symbolic protests, re-enacting modes of the ‘camp’, as part of, or perhaps adopting, this reblogging, reproducing, presence as a method of ‘surving’.

It is important to note here that this is not an observation based on online culture and appropriated as a prism through which to view IRL. Firstly, the corporate reality, which is the product and producer of sites of mass culture, tied with the physical and cognitive human requirements to produce and use the vehicles for one’s whimsical ‘reblog’, as such, for me engenders not two spaces of ‘on’ and ‘off’ line, but simply one reality containing both. And this single reality is made up of constant reenactments of spectacle, often via simulacra.

To go back to Bresolin’s work then presence, accomplished through reenactment (or perhaps ‘reblogging’) is not only a trope used in a social(-political) capacity (that is inevitably spectacular - the burning of the Guy could be proposed as an early example of this), but also one inextricably

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4 described by James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II in The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage

5 Walter Benjamin’s term for taboo, illusion and fetish in practices which tap into the Language of Things without ‘proper’ reflection


7 via constant reproduction/re-representation, obvious examples often in social media (i.e reblog/reweet/share)

8 Guy Fawkes was hung for attempting to blow up the Houses of Parliament on 5th November in 1605, in England people still ceremoniously burn effigies of Guy Fawkes (or ‘The Guy’), although perhaps not the most literal reenactment, due to the binding of threads of the narrative (of how - gunpowder - he was to attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament with how he was executed), the sentiment is often worryingly still there.
tied to art, in particular performative practices (take Marina Abramovic’s Seven Easy Pieces9, and/or Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.ORG Reenactment of Marina Abramovic and Ulay’s Imponderabilia), and even more in particular in performances such as the above mentioned Happenings. For Kaprow, a Happening was "A game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing." This art is not only reenacted, or recuperated today as the Society of the Social in an experience economy; in forms such as flashmobs10, but also in forms within the arts frame from which it originated, as seen in a MOCA exhibition Art as Life11. Continuing this vein, Bresolin organised a repetitive experience - of reenacting an, albeit imagined, militancy.

So increasingly it seems we are only able to communicate within the context of the spectacular, and our tools of language are increasingly only operating to reenact the spectacle through the communication of our understanding of our relation to everything else. The person, the body, the institution that we have become as a result of this is one of the Young-Girl. The Young-Girl is a term coined by Tiqquin in Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl to describe the socialising of capitalist ideology, in particular via construction notions of ‘choice’ of ‘identity’ governed by one’s identity still fundamentally being controlled by capitalism as being one of The Consumer, “a polar figure orienting, rather than dominating, outcomes.” If the language by which we communicate is constructed through, and by, spectacle, (and we too are components of this) then is the image of struggle the only semblance of protest that can survive? If yes, then it assumes that the only way cries can be heard, can survive, is by entering into one’s ‘controlled’ incorporation into capitalist society of the spectacle, essentially smothering one’s dissent.

Marxist sociologist and political philosopher Antonio Negri said that, “There is a revolutionary society which lives within this shit of developed capitalism. Marx brought us to this limit, which for him was hypothetical, but for us is real.”12 Twenty years on, this ‘revolutionary society’ described by Negri threatens to revert back into hypothesis, in that it has become an ideogram contained within an environment of image-symbol (consumer) language.

Where is the subversion within this work then, if everything becomes part of the same codes of communication that Bresolin outside of the performance has stated that he himself is personally against? Perhaps it was through an acknowledgement of the same failures of activism and capitalism was enacted through the employment of the authoritarian figure embodied by the artist during the Militant Training Camp? To an extent this did provide, along with presence, a reflection that questioned rather than represented the forms in action.

Is the explicit objectification of Bresolin’s process and acquisition of presence a reclamation and reconfiguration of representation? If protest feels symbolic then can explicit reenactment and symbolism actually be a means to air, rather than relinquish, one’s dissent? Is that all we have? A march is organised via notifying the Police who can symbolically kettle the happy-to-appear-defeated left. The activist symbolically smashes a bank window. Does she then draw money out

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10 “a group of people who assemble suddenly in a place, perform an unusual and seemingly pointless act for a brief time, then disperse” (from wikipedia)

11 “Explore documentation generated by the 29 Los Angeles-area art schools, academic institutions, arts organizations, museums, and artist-run spaces that reinvented a diverse selection of Kaprow’s Happenings” 2008 http://www.moca.org/kaprow/

12 Diary of an Escape Antonio Negri, p.149 Polity Press 2010
of her overdraft with a debit card and go into a shop to buy a product? Students symbolically sit-in in a campus no-one cares about, reenacting May ‘68 and ‘symbolically’ allowing themselves to be pepper sprayed, which can then become an image-icon symbol, viewed online and re-represented over and over and over again. Generally preaching to the converted who in their viewership (or ‘support’) clock up hits and cash for Google. A corporation. All these symbols not only actively exist and are recuperated into the capitalist economy, but the ideological symbol that is beamed across the world is this: the left are the underdogs. No-one wants to join a loser, and bald politicians apparently can’t get elected.

So for Thomas Bresolin it seems that the tools were the same. Mining presence via reproduction of capitalist anti-symbol, remaining situated within neoliberal compositions. The only difference is that in this context the performed symbol is different; his act is one of winning. The act is one of ‘effecting’ (even if this is within the limits of the performance and with consenting participants). In a conversation with Matthew Gandy\textsuperscript{13}, Mark Fisher said we have lost the capacity to imagine a different society; that Fukyama’s the end of history has worked, and we can no longer imagine a non-capitalist future.

The Young-Girl\textsuperscript{14} only speaks in spectacle – is the clawing back of an imagined alternative done with the same spectacular paintbrush that has the means to highlight serfdom in order to reject it? Can the use of presence begin to be part of a lexicon of symbols through which we communicate, access an understanding of, and announce a hope for, transformations of the spectacular contexts and relations that still unavoidably define the proposition of any alternative?

The performativity of capitalism fuels neoliberal ideology of work-as-play\textsuperscript{15}. An adept use of performance and play may start to posit any-accessible-alternative. If first we have to re-discover the tools to imagine an alternative relationship to a capitalist system, then it seems that using the tools of symbolism and spectacle, which we know, may be the only apparatus we have at this moment, to play at finding a new imagination.

\textit{Thoughts on the Eternal Internet Brotherhood [EIB], from a Distance.}

\textit{How does EIB function within this paradigm $^{\text{^^^}}$}

That we consist of reenacted spectacle, whereby to critique we exist within, and use the same methods from, said environment?
And if we are only now starting to re-find our ability to imagination an alternative, is EIB implicated within this too?

When I was in Athens in March, I felt that the redundancy of action was not experienced as strongly as in the UK. Further, the impotence felt by those who wanted to imagine an alternative had been created through structural governmental brutality - although not completely devoid of

\textsuperscript{13} http://thewhitebuilding.org.uk/?the-white-building-weekend
\textsuperscript{14} Again, from Tiquin, http://canopycanopycanopy.com/16/preliminary_materials_for_a_theory_of_the_young_girl
\textsuperscript{15} Sven Lütticken, \textit{An Arena in Which to Reenact}, Life, once more: forms of reenactment in contemporary art, Rotterdam: Witte de With, Centre for Contemporary Art, p.25
spectacle. All this to say there seemed to be a more ‘obvious enemy’: the forces that strive to strip away fundamental instruments for re-imagining. However, if we take death and failure as a starting point\textsuperscript{16} (for a new imagination), is the moment we are at in Greece exactly that of new imaginations? Maybe it is now what vision taken from these new imaginations that should be considered, and not, in fact, how to become in order to access the renewed consciousness.

If hypothetically we say this is fact, then I ask: is ‘play’, in the escapist format of EIB, the best means to help build a new vision? Is it omitting the process of building and instead presencing?; living within the stasis of continual reimagination.

In actual: the way I feel right now is that we (here and in Greece) are not in a place where any autonomy is presently available in order to build a different backdrop. And that, yes, in fact all we can do is try and find ways to truly claw back an imagination owned by our self. Another question in regard to this is: Does EIB allow a new imagination to be found? How?

After writing this I have come to suppose that [at this point in time] I can only desire personal revolutions. These have been subsumed once, so we have to be very careful with the personal revolts and finding an imagination of our own. As, if you blink, you may find that that imagination too has been sold.