

Mads Holm, *A Shift of Mood*

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About Common Ground draws material from time spent in Athens, Copenhagen, Detroit, Glasgow, Moscow and New York. The sense is one of an immersion. Holm drinks deep of the city as a means to take in its troubles, tensions and vitality. The sense is also one of distance in that he is a witness seeking to weave local minutia from his journeying into a grander global tapestry. Holm describes his work as attentive to tensions between 'collective consciousness and the influence of advanced capitalism'. He sees himself attuned to 'what seems ungraspable, fascinating and scary'. Each showing of his work selects and arranges material differently. Not surprisingly, *About Common Ground* thrives on fractured narrative, on gaps, evasions and chance collusion of images in the production of meaning.



Rehearsal, 2104



Ready II, 2015

Protesters are the focus of *Ready II* and *Solidarity IV*. The face and hands of a young man are blacked up as if to revolt theatrically against the oil industries. The arm of an older man is arced as his

comrade attaches a red armband in preparation for a rally. The armband is a focal point for a shared passion and commitment.

Theatre is also a feature of military and state authority. A photo image of desert scrub with an oncoming tank has been transposed onto a large material backdrop, its edges blurring with the rocky landscape as if to add realism to military training. Schnöggersburg is an urban fabrication constructed by the German armed forces for purposes of tactical exercises. It has an industrial zone and a slum to replicate the anticipated terrain of urban warfare. *Schnöggersburg X's* makeshift mosque is a plaything for a military swarm. The urban landscape is also treated as a mobile set in *Reformational*. A palm tree is uprooted violently and caught in what must be the claws of a giant crane. In each and all, one is taken by the grim reality in these acts of transforming urban space.



Helmand, 2016



After Control, 2015

Every theatre needs an audience, every act a witness. *Rehearsal* plays on a positioning of figures watching each other in anticipation. They are an inert gathering on a throughway dwarfed by a private architectural imperium in the style of Moscow's Stalinskie Vysocki. What is witnessed is, in

effect, a crisis. It is not so much the consumerist calamity suggested in *Carrefour*. Rather it is polarization of state authority and civil protest through an increased militarization of urban terrain and civil society. It is as if lessons from the Middle Eastern conflict are brought to bear upon another resistant populace. Collective mobilization and low-fi resistance arising from the financial crash is now that to be controlled.

With this a noble tradition is threatened. Hannah Arendt, writing in the 1970's under the shadow of Nixon and the Vietnam War, found great hope in the idea that civil disobedience could become part of the American constitution. The tradition of civil disobedience holds to values of voluntary association and principles of non-violence. It demands that the mutuality inherent in all promises and civic bonds is not broken. Dissent implies consent, Arendt argued, and so civil disobedience stands as a remedy for the failure of institutions.



Schnögersburg, 2016



Solidarity, 2016

Hardt and Negri also recognise the constituent power of a multitude. Writing in 2000, they found great potential in globalisation for unleashing the creative power of an insurgent force. In 2003, when millions took to the streets across the globe in protest against the oncoming war, optimists saw this multitude taking shape in an unprecedented scale. It was, of course, ignored by the powers

that be. For the Retort collective, the 'multitude as a force was born into – out of – the experience of defeat'. Still, dreamers saw the potential of social media to mobilize the forces of liberation (à la Arab Spring) before being awoken by the sheer scale of surveillance and control permeating everyday lives through the self-same network. The point here is to recognize a marked decline and a shift in mood as we negotiate new times.

After Control, when viewed in relation to its accompanying photographs, alludes to this. From the driver's perspective, the shock and disorientation from the initial incident (or crisis) is followed by the need for readjustment or a realignment with the new norm. It is as if the show must go on - if this is indeed possible at all. Our point of view of the crisis is distanced from the action by the use of a strong reflective veil. The witness is framed as a self-questioning subject so that we too are obliged to consider our own role and position in relation those already framed.

It is a role not without dilemmas. 'How sweet it is to watch from dry land when the storm-winds roil', writes Lucretius. 'But there is nothing sweeter', he adds, 'than to dwell in towers that rise on high, serene and fortified with teachings of the wise'. Distance and privilege are to be balanced with responsibility and commitment.

The public sphere is seriously challenged when neoliberal governance militarizes civic space and protest. It is argued that power increasingly circumvents the public sphere so as to avoid the constraints of reasoned critical debate. Fragmentation of the public sphere also contributes to severing the 'mutuality inherent in all promises' Arendt speaks of. In the face of such fears, Holm is drawn to the theatre of protest with its camaraderie, wit and creativity. It is a carnival of acts and ideas which can rekindle hopes that we shall overcome. Holm is also right to doubt its effectiveness.

The open-ended and exploratory nature of his work attests to this. These questions can reach the very marrow of what it is to be a photographer in times like these. Indeed, these questions should reach the very core of what it is to be in times like these.



Reformational, 2015



Carrefour, 2016.