



Left: Tallulah Bankhead in a scene of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Lifeboat*, 1943
Opposite page: Thomas Demand, *Zeit (Tent)*, 2016

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The Mutiny on the HMS Bounty



THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED: my friend and I took a night train north over the Alps to Munich. The train was so full of bodies that I had to stand on the metal scuff plate, which flips up when the passenger car door opens. If the train car door opened, there would be no place for me to stand. Throughout the night, I worked together with the other

passengers at each train stop. We pulled on the car door handle, against those on the platform, to prevent them from boarding. We held the door against desperate and angry people no different from us—except that they were outside the train, not in, and there was no room for them.

We rode the night train standing shoulder to shoulder with strangers, drinking the Italian version of Night Train. The station at dawn was cold and chaotic. A giant man came toward my friend and I with a big unwholesome smile. He negotiated with my friend, who spoke German, and then we were slumped against the backseat of the man's Mercedes. He drove us into a park where there was a huge futuristic glass structure: the Olympic stadium. We followed the man into the structure, down a hall, and into a locker room to which the man had a set of keys. The locker room had cots in it, lined up. We gave the man some money and put our things into the lockers and then he drove us to Oktoberfest, our destination, where people drank beer, ate roast chickens, fought, sang, and lined up to take very long pisses. When we were finished with all that, we set out for "home," a locker room from the 1972 Munich Olympics Stadium. It was not easy to get there. We finally found the Olympic park, where we stumbled and wandered round. The park felt huge. It had no streetlights. We thought we would never find the stadium or our overpriced cots in the locker room. Instead we found a set of apartments. My friend broke a window and climbed in, and then unlocked a door for me. We slept on the carpeted floor of an unfurnished apartment, and in the morning went back to our locker room, our untouched cots, and took showers, to get ready for another day of drinking beer and lining up to piss.

Just now, searching for images of those apartments—the famous apartments where it all happened back in 1972, a history about which I knew not a single thing when I slept on the floor of the athletes' apartments where people might have been tortured before they were murdered—I came upon an image of rows of cots and thought I was looking at the locker room of cots that the German had rented to us. Those are the cots! I thought, amazed. I had Googled "Munich Olympics 1972." This was on my phone and it's true I don't see very well. Looking closer, I understood that the cots in the photograph, what I thought were cots, were actually coffins, each covered with a clean white sheet. The German man with the keys would have rented those out too; he wasn't sentimental, so maybe I'm making too much of this.



WHEN I HEARD THAT THE HMS BOUNTY HAD SUNK, I thought my favorite lounge and restaurant was underwater. No, someone said, the actual ship HMS *Bounty* had sunk. But wasn't it burned by the mutineers? It was explained to me that it was the replica they made for the movie *Mutiny on the Bounty* that had sunk. Was the HMS *Bounty* I knew, on Wilshire Boulevard, named after the model, or the original? Which is the real HMS *Bounty*? If asked, though I have not been asked, I'd know the answer. The restaurant, of course, on the ground floor of the Gaylord Hotel. It has not sunk, but they took the omelet off the menu a few years back, just around the time my favorite waitress died of old age.

The restaurant HMS *Bounty* is across the street from where the Ambassador Hotel stood. Robert Kennedy was shot there. In the years before it was demolished, you could only go into the Ambassador Hotel if you were part of a film or TV production crew pretending it was something other than its real true self. If you were part of a team disguising it as a fictional setting, and you were willing to pay, they would let you in to wander the place.

*Salt water on the tennis court can be quite a nuisance.
Don't forget your revolver, dear.
We are still alive, one of us said.*

Those are various lines from *The Sinking of the Titanic*, by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

*This is the captain speaking. It is now exactly
two o'clock and my order is: every man for himself!—Music!
The bandleader raises his baton for the last number.*

Hans Magnus is 87. He outdrank and outlived me every moment I was near him when we met two years ago in Denmark. One night I said something banal to him that I didn't myself believe about admiring Danish design. I pretended I liked it because it was omnipresent; it seduced me into thinking it was sensible, and superior, to normal plain life. We were in the lobby of a Danish hotel. The only thing in my sight-line that wasn't a soft gleaming Lucite or ceramic or white leather cube was Hans Magnus's dirty cigarette. He turned to me and said, about Danish design, "But would you want to *live* with it?" His cigarette smoke curled. That curl was the promise of the other world, the one lived without it: a bare room in Germany, soot coming down in tiny flakes.



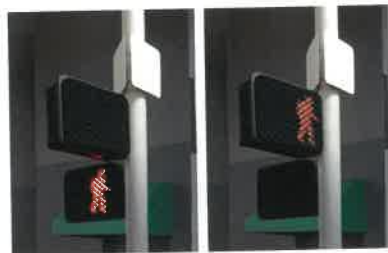
SMOKE FROM A CIGARETTE is always called blue. We know just what they mean when they say the smoke is blue. It's literal—it is bluish—but a specific blue that is the compression of reality into sign.

The paradox of reality constituted as sign: that's the tension in surrealist photography, according to Rosalind Krauss and any reader who submits to her vision. Bear with me. Because what about the paradox of reality constituted as sign—a photograph—of a sign constituted as *reality*? That's the tension in a Thomas Demand image. The special connection to reality, "with which all photography is endowed," according to Krauss, does not quite apply. It does and does not apply. Krauss likens photography to fingerprints. To the rings that cold glasses leave on tables. A photograph, she writes, is closer to a death mask or the tracks of a gull on a beach than it is to a painting or sculpture. But in this case, the photo is not a trace of reality, the glass ring on the table, the tracks of the gull on the beach. It is a trace of a reconstructed and materially blank model of reality, hand-built from paper.

Another German, Hanne Darboven, inscribed human time—via music—onto the picture plane, onto paper. *Timeswings* are human breaths, the life she spent working, supposedly eighteen hours a day, slept little, smoked constantly. It's all there in those swings. Thomas Demand uses paper to make images that exclude human time. He tombifies reality. It is not made dead, but made impossible. The images are vacuums. They do not suffocate us, since we are only looking. But much can be felt through the eyes. I don't know about you, but a whiff of suffocation is enough for me.



IN THE ONE WITH THE COFFEE CUPS it's as if someone has just left the picture-frame. "The human presence is suggested because someone was just there," the artist says. And yet, the difference between "just there" and "gone" is all the difference in the world.



"THIS ONE IS ABOUT EFFICIENCY," he tells me, of the stoplight made of paper. It goes from the walk symbol to don't walk, to walk, to don't walk. To me it is about sequence and perpetuation as parallel time, non-human time. A mechanism of alternation as endlessness. Whenever kids did "Pete and

Repeat sitting on a fence," I felt a special form of living death. Not bodily. An erasure resulting from the knowledge that a parallel universe existed, one occupied only by Pete and Repeat in perpetual motion, on a fence in the airless void of the universe.

Tallulah Bankhead is the first one into the lifeboat in the movie *Lifeboat*, after a German U-boat blows up a merchant marine vessel she was on. She is the foundational condition of the lifeboat, and movie: woman, fur coat, brandy, typewriter, diamond bracelet, sarcasm. She is the tennis court with saltwater on it. Things float past: real flotsam. People climb on, the other few survivors, a movie cast. A stranger, the last one pulled on board, is the great conceit of the film. "*Danke schoen*," he says to them. He turns out to be the captain of the U-boat. And he lies, although not about the boat leaking.

There is a palazzo on the Grand Canal that I remember as a melting clock, a melting building, one side sinking, the other shored up and restored. It's called the Palazzo degli Scigni. The Contarini family owned it. Scignio means casket, which is a container for bodies or gold. The Contarini family employed Palladio. I cut my hands making my rotunda from foam core. My rotunda was empty of people and ideas. It was a copy and a copy can make a volume that might be filled, but mine, as I said, stayed empty.

Top: Thomas Demand, *Daily #15*, 2009
Bottom: Thomas Demand, *Ampe1 (Stoplight)*, 2016

Top: Still from Alexander Kluge's film *The Sinking of the Titanic: A Poem*, 2004
Center: Thomas Demand, *Daily #12*, 2009
Bottom: Thomas Demand, *Backyard*, 2014



IN ALEXANDER KLUGE'S FILM about Hans Magnus Enzensberger's sinking *Titanic*, an image flashes by, a still that is a colored illustration of people in a theater. On the screen is a sinking ship, peril in progress. A woman in the back of the theater is standing, her arms thrown high in fear and anguish. She is watching a movie of

a sinking ship. It is a fiction, but her terror is real. Except it can't be, since it's a drawing.

I am not quite afraid to die. I am not afraid of the act of dying. Of transition. There is a motor lodge called the Portal Motel and I thought it was in Lucerne, but it's in Lone Pine, the town of Lone Pine, unless there are two. Two portals. The Portal Motel seems like a good place to go. I am not afraid of dying, like I said. What I fear is to be dead. I dread the end. Not coming, but arrived.



IN A SHIP NOVEL I'M FOND OF, couples licit and illicit are always sneaking off into staterooms. The novel's narrator walks past a door wedged open. He sees a girl in post-coital glow ironing the white uniform pants of the ship's wireless operator. The wireless operator lounges on the bed, nude. "Do not disturb" is not words, but a shape—a vertical rectangle with a hole at the top. Also, it's

a relation: a tag that sits on a doorknob, or latch. It can be any color and still recognized, even red.



THE EXTERIOR OF THE CAMBRIDGE apartment where Tamerlan Tsarnaev lived only exists as something to look at in light of the event, the bombing of the Boston Marathon. When the public, and power, shine lights to say this ordinary and glum house is where a terrorist lived, the source is born.

The source is created in the wake of destruction, a properly Hegelian birth. As an ordinary and glum apartment house, this place did not exist as an image. It existed only as a house, like millions of others.

The blossoms of cherry trees, like the ones that fill the background of the image of Tamerlan Tsarnaev's house, are the manifestation of an

eternal return, but a simple one. Spring. Nature doesn't need us, and nor do Pete and Repeat, but I'd rather live among trees than in that part of the mind that contemplates eternity. Seasons take place in time. Eternity means outside of time rather than endless. We do not know that cherry blossoms will eternally bloom. Each time they bloom gives a joy that feels like a miracle. Feels, in other words, like a singular event.

Snow, another cyclical wonder, is the world's attempt at self-burial. Then it melts.

I really don't like it when I have one ear pressed against the pillow and I start to hear my heart beat. Who can sleep with all that noise?



A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS IN EUFALA, ALABAMA, for a family reunion, not my own. I stopped at a thrift store. Walking the aisles, I came upon a dolls' house with a bright yellow plastic roof. I know that roof, I told myself, I know that house. The tulip silhouettes on the window shutters. I knew everything. I peered in the little windows at the little kitchen and the tiny bathroom and the photograph of wood-grain papering the "den." This dolls' house was stained and dirty—it

had a layer that marked it as not mine—but its rooms were primal scenes to which I held claims. It was a menagerie of everything that grips me and won't let go. The little house already owned me, so there was no need to buy it.

It is amazing what, from the past, you can drag into your net, only to find that it has never left your net.

At a restaurant in Dorsoduro the old waitress insisted we not order, and instead, she commanded that we be served the catch of the day. The catch of the day was these burglar-mugged little fishes, bottom feeders that looked like cartoon drawings of bank robbers, obtuse subproletarian faces, deep-fried. As a bourgeois, my decency was offended. Or maybe I was offended that these little scofflaws got caught in a dragnet, and I felt for them. Anyway, that waitress forgot to bring silverware.

"How do I transform paper into gold?" From *Arbeit*, Alexander Kluge.

It's said that capitalism relies on a system of selling something you don't own to someone who doesn't want it. Which is identical to how a Lacanian defines love. The lover makes a gift of his banality as if it were a wonder. He pretends to offer something more than his banality, a piece of the world that reflects his love and that he does not, in reality, possess. In both cases, love and futures, you force something you don't own onto someone who does not want it.

Capital requires the confidence that you can do business with time. Alan Badiou says the revolution to come only seems impossible if you swallow the lie that the present is not. Once you see how impossible life already is, then the possibility of a real true actual emancipatory horizon comes into view. Got it?

Thomas Demand, *Sprungsturm (Diving Board)*, 1994

Top: Thomas Demand, *Regen (Rain)*, 2008
Bottom: Thomas Demand, *Werkstatt (Workshop)*, 2017



MANY WANT TO SPECULATE ON THE FUTURE, the after-capitalism, but first we must define capitalism. If we don't define it, we cannot know its properties, or declare its death, or its triumph, or even identify its health, ailing or robust. You have to understand capitalism perfectly to know if the universe of free markets is shaped like a cake doughnut, a three-torus topology, or is, in fact, a limitless reality, as it wants us to think. Just to be clear, I don't count myself among those who do understand it, not even imperfectly.

The robotic arms on an auto assembly line work together so smoothly, they are almost intimate.

They can achieve maximum closeness, one machine part to another, without touching. They are not like humans. A shop floor of robots needs no bathroom booze, no love in a closet, no hand-to-hand combat with labor bosses. Each time the machines pause their perfect movements, we see a still life. They become fixed, inanimate, in their tiny pauses. We know a little about those shut out, when the robots came. Those shut out did not lurk at the factory gates. They went to the service industry. (The service industry is not actually "an industry." As an idea, it is divided into broad categories: "producer" and "consumer" services. But really, the only way to define the service industry is that it is everything that is not manufacturing or agriculture. It isn't really a thing. It's a not-thing.)



VOLINS CONTINUE TO BE MADE. There have been many copies of the famous Stradivarius. In the early twentieth century, you could order one, advertised as "real," in the Sears catalogue. It was a copy. My friend's brother-in-law stole a real Stradivarius, one of

the seven hundred in existence, *fecit Cremona 1734*. My friend's brother-in-law was a talented orchestra violinist. No one ever saw him play the stolen Stradivarius, and he never told anyone he had stolen it. He kept it in a locked case and took his lie to the grave. After he died, my friend's sister, his widow, planned to take the violin to a famous violinmaker to be appraised. The famous violinmaker called the FBI after looking at a photo of the instrument. From appearance alone, he was instantly sure it was a specific violin that had gone missing thirty years before.

A violin is made slowly, by hand. Everyone knows this. It cannot be crafted by machines, even for the Sears catalogue.



An image of a pizza box in front of the green glow of an exit sign. A reconstruction of an apparently real pizza box in front of a real exit sign. This is a site-gag: the real true original *was also made of paper*.

I'M NOT THE FIRST TO ASSERT that reality itself has become a novel, false, an ideology. Many understand this, that reality is an argument for itself, and not a real true thing.

He showed me the blueprints, which were quite elaborate, and my take-home comprehension was this: runners that lead, and doors that don't open. "Public," he said pointing to an entrance, "but you cannot enter."



THE CELLS KNOW EVERYTHING, right down to the stars. God was ejected when we traveled from the closed world to the infinite universe. We were also ejected. Everyone was suddenly homeless. The stars remained the same, except moving and not fixed, not part of our world.

What is objective and definite? Or rather, what is the sound of what is objective and definite? Feminine screams, and the breaking of glass. Female screams and crashing, crunching, breaking glass.

In the Doge's palace in Venice there is a room that was once the largest indoor gathering place in all of Europe. Capacity was two thousand important men. The Doges ruled Venice for six hundred years. There were one hundred and twenty of them. The term of service was life. Around the upper edges of this grand salon, on all four walls, are painted portraits of all the Doges. All the Doges, that is, but one, a single Venetian Doge who is represented by no portrait; instead, there is a black banner, and, under the banner, text in Latin that reads: here is the space reserved for Marino Faliero, decapitated for crimes.

Faliero was Doge for only one year. One year of six hundred. One Doge of one hundred and twenty. And yet: anyone who has ever been in the great salon of Venice, once the largest gathering indoor space in all of Europe, in fact anyone at all asked to name a Venetian Doge, a single one, any Doge, will name Marino Faliero. Or at the very least, a person, when asked, will say, "The one whose memory they tried to *erase*. That's the one I recall."

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The Palazzo Ca' Corner della Regina, Fondazione Prada's exhibition venue in Venice, is a building like the ones just described. It is a magnificent edifice both outside and in, bound up with history and fates, as is most likely every other splendid building on the Canal Grande. This is a building that confronts the visitor at the very first glance with its situation as a whole, because one not only encounters here the house itself but is at the same time surrounded and taken in by its overall atmosphere. A tour of this house that has already navigated so many centuries absorbs the visitor more in situations than in aesthetics and object designs. Even spending time in the "unfurnished" house cannot really be separated from moods, feelings, and affects, and is therefore more of an emotional than a rational experience, comparable in this way to the more ordinary experience of broad versus narrow, brightening versus darkening. But how must the building then be transformed to its very core when Anna Viebrock fills it with things or objects, with furniture and pictures that always bear personal traces of thinking and dreaming? Gaston Bachelard spoke of a house as our corner of the world, of the poetics of space. "As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty." And he goes on to note: "There is no dearth of abstract, 'world-conscious' philosophers who discover a universe by means of the dialectical game of the I and the non-I. In fact, they know the universe before they know the house, the far horizon before the resting-place..."

Top: Thomas Demand, *Exit*, 2017
Bottom: Thomas Demand, *Konstellation* (Constellation), 2000