Excerpted from *The Stutter of History*
Exhibition Catalogue for
"Thomas Demand: The Stutter of History"

The Stutter of History

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UCCA Edge

“And so they are ever returning to us, the dead.”

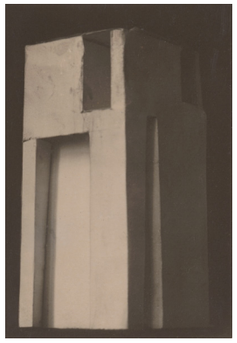
—W.G. Sebald[1]

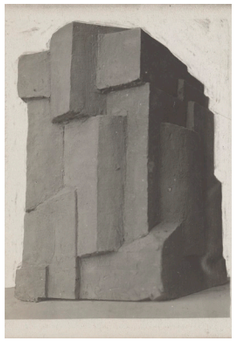
“What’s real? What’s not? That’s what I do in my act, test how other people deal with reality.”

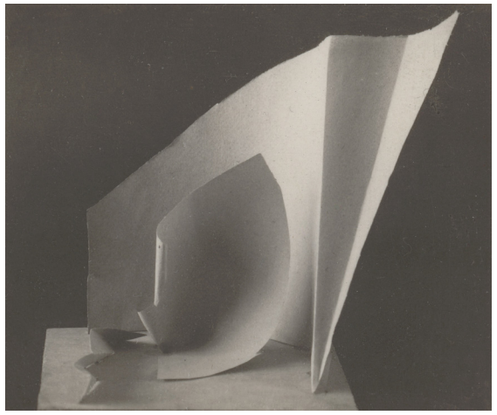
—Andy Kaufman[2]

The delicate gelatin silver prints are small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. Measuring somewhere around four by eighteen centimeters in their overall dimensions they offer a kind of "intimate immensity" that belies their stature. They are often shot in extreme close up but occasionally pull back to reveal the scope of an entire room. Most are photographed against dark backgrounds to accentuate their subjects' contours and give them a sense of weightlessness, as if they were floating in space, but others are bathed in a revelatory daylight that jarringly reinserts them in the flow of the everyday and the living. They were taken in Moscow during the 1920s and depict a wide array of architectonic models, ranging from the concrete—a maquette for a cinema/concert hall, for example—to the purely theoretical, in experimental volumes that eschew any utilitarian aspirations. These photographs are part of an archive of the foundational studies of form, space, and volume recorded in the work of the long-forgotten students of the experimental Soviet art school VKhUTEMAS, which was founded in 1920 as a counterpart to the school of the Bauhaus that had been established in Weimar Germany the previous year. Each student was required to document their aesthetic development by photographing their models before they were discarded. Some 300 of these photographs still exist, having been secreted away under beds and in closets all over the Soviet Union after the school's dissolution in the aftermath of Stalin's rise. These photographs depict aspirational buildings and unbuildable formal visions, each embodying the revolutionary dream of remaking the world. Decades after the plaster, cardboard, and paper with which these utopian visions were constructed have dissolved into dust they are survived by a few hundred authorless photographic prints that are haunted by lives lived and lost and dreams dreamt but left unrealized. Looked at either individually or collectively, these images depict a true utopia—a "no place"—as they were swept aside by the onrushing tide of history, only to find themselves relegated to the hidden recesses of cupboards and cardboard boxes, where they patiently wait to tell their stories.[3]

Looking at the mysterious formal apparitions recorded in the grains of these gelatin silver prints it becomes clear that there is no such thing as history with a capital "H." There is only a multiplicity of stories, and ghost stories at that. We've been taught to think of history as a parade of world historical figures and events, many of which have been seared into our memories by photographic images that have accrued a kind of feral iconicity fueled by their drama, the stories that they illustrate, and their constant dissemination and repetition. President Kennedy's head snaps backward over and over again as the Zapruder film plays







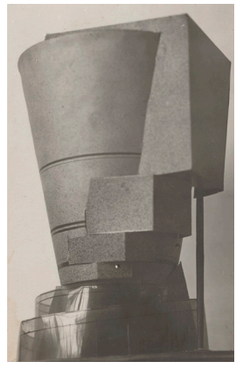
VKhUTEMAS (Workshop),
1920s, gelatin silver print, 7.4 × 5.2 cm

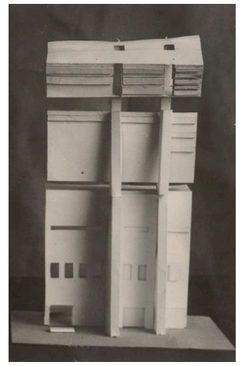
VKhUTEMAS (Workshop),
1920s, gelatin silver print, 12 × 8.8 cm

VKhUTEMAS (Workshop),
1920s, gelatin silver print, 5.6 × 6.7 cm

in an endless loop in our collective mind's eye. The Twin Towers come tumbling down on September 11, 2001. These traumatic images came to define their eras as symbols of systemic ruptures that remade the rules of their respective worlds. Significantly, in the US at least, they also became subject to a kind of censorial iconoclasm and fell into a pictorial no-fly zone. We rarely see them, yet they haunt the edges of our psyches with an overdetermined persistence. There is, however, another category of images that do not carry the same level of spectacular and cataclysmic gravitas. These are images that at first appear ordinary or banal, even if they might be connected to significant historical incidents, tangentially or otherwise. These images surround us, swirling around the eddies and currents of the flow of history before depositing their alluvial condensation in the offscreen recesses of our consciousness. This is the territory of the strangely familiar, where history, memory, and active forgetfulness come together in an uncanny embrace. It is on the porous frontier between these two categories of images where history begins to stutter and storytelling begins.

This stutter of history is the territory that Thomas Demand has spent the better part of the last three decades exploring, traversing, and mining. If the students of VKhUTEMAS were attempting to conceive a utopian world that couldn't or wouldn't be made manifest beyond the lens of the camera, Demand has undertaken a lifelong project to re-create specifically for the lens a world that has been forever mediated by images. In his large-scale photographic objects, history presents itself as a banal, gnawingly disturbing facsimile of episodes that we think that we might be able to identify, but in the end cannot. A room in which an explosion has occurred, a desk with a computer on it in a shabby workspace, a wall of shelves filled floor to ceiling with flat boxes. Seemingly devoid of human presence, these are some of the earliest images that Demand created, and they are rife with a constitutive paradox. They are uncanny in a number of different ways. Looking at them puts us at unease, as references to their sources—photographs of the room in which Hitler barely escaped assassination (*Room*, 1994), the unremarkable desk and computer of Bill Gates's dorm at Harvard (*Corner*, 1996), or the film archive of the director Leni Riefenstahl (*Archive*, 1995)—are at first glance hidden from us. Encased in Plexiglas packages and hung frameless, floating on the wall, these objects present an unmoored take on history that is represented in a monumental scale and paradoxically rendered mute. The more one looks at these works, however, the more one notices another level of unease developing under one's skin as something seems not quite



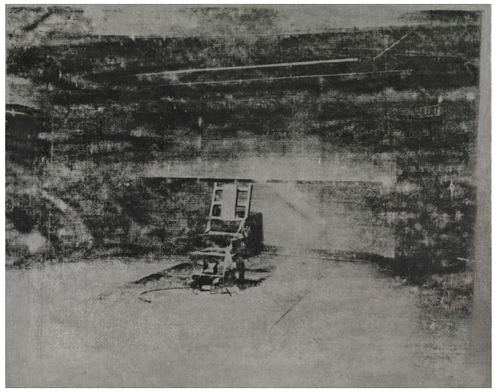


VKhUTEMAS (Workshop),
1920s, gelatin silver print, 10 × 6.5 cm

VKhUTEMAS (Workshop),
1920s, gelatin silver print, 12.3 × 8.3 cm

right. They are indeed uncanny images in the sense that Sigmund Freud discussed this idea in the German romantic writer E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "The Sandman," in which a mechanical replica of a woman known as Olympia is passed off as a real person and ultimately helps drive the protagonist to madness. Like Hoffmann's automaton, Demand's images may appear to depict the real world, but upon closer inspection they resonate with a fragile similitude that belies the fact that they are photographs of impermanent sculptural re-creations of images fashioned by the artist from paper and cardboard specifically for the camera. The key to the work of Thomas Demand is understanding this feedback loop between the actual histories that we inhabit, photographic documents culled from the media, and Demand's sculptural re-creations of them, which in effect relaunch his uncanny para-photographic versions back into our world.

The visual landscape was a different place when Demand made his first works, but its transformation—its undoing—was always already present. When he began his studies at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1989, he was already living in an image world defined by the likes of Walter Benjamin, who identified photomechanical reproduction as a voracious transformational force; Guy Debord, who termed the new image-saturated postwar reality "the society of the spectacle," which was not to be thought of as "a collection of images" but as a "social relation among people, mediated by images"; and Jean Baudrillard, who outlined the "simulacrum," where our lives, memories, and history were said to have all fallen into the abyss of the hyperreal.[4] And all the while, as these writers wove tapestries of words theorizing our relationship to the increasing volatility and hypercirculation of images, artists like Andy Warhol merrily swam in these waters, pulling images out of the media slipstream and repeating them over and over again in his art before releasing them back into the torrent as a kind of image virus. By 1964, the year of Demand's birth, Warhol was already two years into his revelatory series of stars and *Death and Disaster* paintings, in which he used the silkscreen process to transfer onto his canvases publicity photographs of auratic Hollywood figures whose lives were suffused with tragedy or sickness, such as Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor, as well as horrific, if plebeian, news photographs of car crashes, suicides, and electric chairs gleaned from the flow of images in the press. In the case of the anonymous victims of his disasters as well as the recently deceased Monroe, the resulting paintings gave his subjects a second life, as they were serially repeated in stuttering, misaligned grids employing different intensities of black paint. In Warhol's work the dead are indeed ever returning to us, as Sebald suggests, although in the form of constantly replicating effigies. One might say the same of the work of Demand, who shares Warhol's replicating impetus while choosing to reconstruct decidedly unspectacular images of the disasters of the world out of a scaffolding made of paper.



Andy Warhol, *Electric Chair*, 1964

In the wake of today's hyper-accelerated proliferation of images through digitization, algorithmic machinations and ever-increasing speeds of internet transmission, Demand's choice to engage with the medium of paper to explore the power of the spectacle might at first seem counterintuitive. At the beginning, Demand's use of paper was a matter of expediency. Before completing his MFA at Goldsmiths College in London in 1992, he studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with the sculptor Fritz Schwegler, who encouraged him to explore the expressive and conceptual possibilities offered by models, which are, of course, often constructed out of paper. At first, Demand created single objects out of cardboard and paper: a sandal, a folded shirt and tie, a wheel of Camembert with a wedge missing, a banker's storage box. These were very much quickly constructed, "dumb" objects—in the sense of lacking speech (they didn't quite yet have a story to tell) but also in the sense of being modest and fleeting representations of the factual quotidian existence that surrounds us. These were the artist's first concrete attempts to forge an image of the world, and they purposefully lacked the solidity and gravity of works made in bronze or steel. They stood in for the objects that they represented but were never intended to "pass," as one could plainly see the evidence of their construction. Strangely enough, they were also never intended to be photographed. On the advice of Schwegler, Demand originally took up photography as a way to document these ephemeral paper reconstructions of everyday objects so that he could track his progress and keep a record of his work. As he began putting these objects next to one another, however, something else happened. One isolated object doesn't have much to say. Two objects juxtaposed begin a conversation that leads to a story. Additionally, as Demand began photographing these objects, he realized that he needed to make two versions: one to exist as an object in the world and another specifically cut to avoid the distorting effects of the camera lens. The process of making these constructions for the sole purpose of photographing them quickly became the basis of Demand's entire artistic practice. After choosing his source images, he uses colored paper and cardboard to painstakingly reconstruct the spaces they depict in three dimensions, for the most part at a 1:1 scale. He then photographs these scenarios

and subsequently destroys his models, leaving behind only their ghostly photographic doppelgängers.

While finishing his graduate studies at Goldsmiths, Demand conceived what we might think of as his first mature work. *Diving Board* (1994) is an almost grisaille rendition of a complex of diving platforms with a grandstand. This work is somewhat unique in his oeuvre as it is not based on a photograph but was solely reconstructed from the artist's memory of the pool in which he learned to swim as a child and is not rendered in a 1:1 ratio (a monumental task that human and paper could not have achieved). When it was first exhibited in a group show at Munich's Haus der Kunst in 1994, *Diving Board* provoked an array of responses that associated its imagery with Nazi Germany, the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and, more specifically, the well-known diving sequence of the film *Olympia* (1938), Riefenstahl's legendary documentary of those games commissioned by the Nazi regime. Demand was keenly aware that this work might generate these associations, given its display within the walls of Haus der Kunst, which was originally built by the Nazi regime as a showcase for approved German art. Nonetheless, this reaction speaks to the power of the cinematic images that Riefenstahl created and their viral longevity within the stream of historical consciousness, as any grandstand and modern-looking German diving structure now might automatically be associated with those images and that historical moment. In fact, this swimming complex is a paper reproduction of an entirely different memory, that of an artist who was born in Germany in 1964, 28 years after Riefenstahl's documentary was made. In *Staircase* (1995) Demand once again worked from memory, this time constructing a three-dimensional paper sketch of a staircase at the school he attended in his youth. Its floating structure ascends to the top of the picture, with its painted red, minimal railing snaking through the image like some kind of modernist Laocoön. This image evokes the form-follows-function ethos of Germany's Weimar Republic–era Bauhaus school and, more specifically, legendary staircases like the one created by Bauhaus emigré Mies Van der Rohe for the Arts Club of Chicago (1948-51). These two early works by Demand set up a dance between personal and collective memory and the power of images as they are shaped and flow through both of these arenas. If the diving platform and the staircase are triggers of a kind of architectural Proustian remembrance for the artist, each of them also cleaves to the diametrically opposed visual cultures of German fascism on the one hand and, on the other, the utopian design aspirations of the adherents of the Bauhaus school, most of whom fled Germany to escape the tyranny of the former. It's

Leni Riefenstahl at a Stadium, Nuremberg, 1934

impossible to separate these historical readings from the deeply personal remembrances of the artist who constructed these images, as they are each in essence screens on which memory and history collide and the beginnings of many potential but unspoken stories are triggered.

Another work made around the same time opens up Demand's images to the act of reading in the sense of being open to the construction of a narrative in the viewer's mind. In *Room* we are confronted with a shambolic site of destruction in the form of a room that has been blown apart. A table has collapsed onto the floor and is populated with a single crushed sheet of paper. Chairs have been thrown about and broken. Windows have been blown out of their frames. Ceiling tiles have been loosened. What's happened here? What era is it? Is this the eerily haunting aftermath of some kind of natural disaster or deliberate act of destruction? Or is it merely a scene of entropic dissolution and architectural neglect? The image itself does not offer us many clues, and this leaves it open to endless narrative speculation, but its source is a photograph of one of the most dramatic historical failures of all time: the doomed attempt by Claus von Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators to assassinate Hitler in July of 1944. Demand has suggested that he was attracted to reconstructing this image because of its frequent appearance in his childhood schoolbooks, a fact that itself demonstrates the mutual imbrication of history and memory in the world of images. In a sense we might think of Demand's *Room* as the artist's first disaster picture in the spirit of Warhol, or as a cool paper invocation of Géricault's *The Raft of Medusa* (1819). Despite the exactitude and cleanliness of his paper simulation we are left with both a foreboding sense of the ongoing disaster that this event failed to stop and a nagging uncertainty about what exactly happened.

The historical bookend to *Room* is Demand's *Office* (1995), which he made the following year. Here we are confronted with another site of destruction in the form of an office that has apparently been ransacked, with its cabinets and file folders emptied out all over the floor and table. A lone articulated office lamp bears witness to the scene as haphazardly strewn sheets of typing paper created by Demand remain blank, refusing to offer clues as to their purpose or the information they might have held. In fact, these sheets of paper stand in for files denoting secret observations about the lives of individuals living within the borders of a police state. Here Demand uses paper to create an image about the moral and political implications of its use in secret police archives, as this is a reconstruction of a photograph of a ransacked office of the Stasi, the East German secret police,

after the fall of the Berlin Wall. If *Room* offered a strangely frozen replication of a moment of internal resistance within the Nazi regime that might have signaled the beginning of its end, *Office* encapsulates the conclusion of its aftermath in the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic. When seen alongside these two scenes of destruction, Demand's monumentally scaled work *Archive*, with its hyper-orderly stacks of beige cardboard boxes, provides a fascinating triangulation of his early approach to German history in the form of a re-creation of Riefenstahl's film archive. While the uninformed viewer might be unaware of the political and cultural implications of this source image, once they are known it is impossible not to think about the filmmaker's connections to the Nazi regime. Significantly, this is neither an homage to Riefenstahl nor a reconstruction of any of her problematic if startlingly innovative images, but rather a physical re-creation of the brute materiality of her archive, with all its unspoken implications. What's represented here? What aesthetic or historical ghosts are contained in these boxes? Given its source reference, *Archive* is a radically iconoclastic image, depicting the weight (both physical and cultural) of the arc of an artist's career in the form of reel upon reel of celluloid while denying the viewer a look at those images. Its rigorous, almost minimalist, seriality offers a different take on the act of preserving information (or in this case a filmic legacy) than that of *Office*, with its carnivalesque undoing of years of collecting incriminating secrets in the interest of political oppression. *Archive* is also a quiet picture of another kind of disaster, as embodied in the career of an undeniably brilliant filmmaker who made a choice to make work in the service of an immoral regime. In these three works one takes in the entire trajectory of twentieth-century German history in what might have been a moment of ground clearing for Demand—in the sense of dealing with that complicated legacy before being able to move on to other stories. Then again, these works are as much about the circulation of images and the politics of memory as they are about the specific moments that they document.

A question that we have to ask about Demand's works is whether or not we need to know their backstories. Is it enough to simply read them through the filter of historical events or personages, or does this information simply give us access to one basic level of cognition, while suppressing other possible readings? Do we need to know that *Podium* (2000) documents the site of an inflammatory political speech given by Slobodan Milošević in 1989 commemorating Serbian nationalists' observation of the six hundredth anniversary of the battle of Kosovo that would presage the horrors of the subsequent wars and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans? The small podium, with its signs of human presence—microphones and a water glass—shrinks in significance underneath the quasi-fascistic graphic design of its stage. This pretty much says it all, so perhaps that's everything we need to read this image. Significantly, this is one of the few works by Demand that offers any graphic clues as to its origins and significance. His reproduction of the numerical rendition of the years "1389" and "1989" in the stage backdrop had an overdetermined ideological connotation within that context that would produce the oncoming human tragedy. Similarly, we might ask if it's important to know that *Poll* (2001) was based on an image of a series of desks at one of the secure centers where the Florida recount was taking place for the 2000 US presidential election that pitted Al Gore versus George W. Bush. As it turned out, the future of an entire global order and millions of lives were at stake in this political battle over paper, centered here on a few hundred hanging chads—incompletely punched holes in the ballots next to the candidates' names. In Demand's version we see stacks of sorted ballots with no traces of holes piled next to phones, file folders, and the flashlights used to determine whether the ballots had been acceptably "punched." Unusually for Demand's work, *Poll* was created contemporaneously with the event depicted and was exhibited prior to its denouement—the swearing in of Bush as the forty-third president of the United States in January 2001. These stories certainly give us direct access to the underlying original narrative content of Demand's sources, but in his willfully provisional re-creation of these images the record skips a beat, the photograph comes slightly out of focus, and the film jumps from its sprockets. There are indeed ghosts that haunt these works, only some of which are the people who once occupied these spaces, the lives that would be erased as a result of these events, and the stories that their source images once told. The truth is that the gaps in Demand's paper constructions, their slightly imperfect replication of images of a world that no longer exists and is lost in time, allow other things and other stories to creep in and inhabit their corners and hide under their tables. The unease of the uncanny is generated here, in their material re-creation of a past reality that seems at once familiar and decidedly strange. It is in these gaps—both metaphorical and sculptural—that Demand's works begin to speak their own language and the fragile outlines of history begin to fall into a series of staccato utterances that address not only the occurrences being depicted but the precarious construction of history itself, be it in the re-imagining of a non-existent nationalist racial past or in the failure of an ideological group of jurists to uphold democracy. History's

disastrousness when it is deployed in the service of political ends can rival the consequences of its most tragic events.

When we don't know the story, sometimes disaster is quietly implied. In Demand's work *Control Room* (2011), for example, the artist has constructed some kind of generic industrial-scientific complex arrayed with consoles replete with unrecognizable gauges, multiple control levers, computer screens, and read-outs. Surprisingly, the desks are also populated by file folders full of papers and what appear to be operating manuals. As with all of Demand's work, this space is devoid of any visible human presence, its blank screens implying that this is a dead space. After an initial scan of this image, it is clear that something is not quite right here. We notice that the plastic tiles of its illuminated dropped ceiling have all come loose and hang precariously over this abandoned control room. Only after learning that this is a re-creation of a technician's cell phone image of the abandoned and severely damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in the aftermath of Japan's 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami do we begin to question the mute serenity of this image, which in the end is about technological hubris and the illusion of control. Sometimes disaster is far from spectacular in its visible effects. Demand's *Ruin* (2017), on the other hand, becomes a kind of stock image of all the disasters that circulate in the news media around the world. This nearly colorless depiction of a destroyed room, with its universally recognizable plastic chairs buried in rubble, is a flat and banal counterpoint to the Grand Guignol of Warhol's silkscreen car crashes. We don't need to know that the original source image captured children playing in this wreckage of a home in Gaza after a missile strike, as images like this have becoming depressingly interchangeable and circulate digitally as generic markers of an almost pornographic deployment of disaster and suffering. Demand's intentionally blank paper repetition of one of the endlessly interchangeable tragedies of contemporary conflict makes us question the very circulation of these images in the political economy of suffering, resistance, and exploitation that has come in part to define our contemporary culture of image consumption.

In a number of Demand's works, both the strategic and the philosophical implications of repetition and the doubling aspects of mechanical reproduction become his subject in a rather self-conscious exploration of his own studio practice. In *Copyshop* (1999), for example, we see a wide-angle perspective on the most generic scene of late twentieth-century mass reproduction: a neighborhood copy center. Under the numbingly institutional glow of hanging neon light fixtures in a room so nondescript that

Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, Fukushima, 2019

its blank acoustic ceiling tiles practically become decorative, a convocation of seven photocopy machines sit in varying states of attention. There is something about the deadpan nature of this image and its meta-commentary on Demand's practice of re-creating images of the world in (as opposed to on) paper that makes it almost comedic. One can imagine Jacques Tati's character Monsieur Hulot bumbling around this room attempting to make copies of an official document but forever being frustrated by paper jams and "replace toner" warnings. The pathetic office-park uniformity of *Copyshop*'s decor, with its infinite and eminently accessible potential for reproducing the world, is bookended by the warm explosion of color in *Atelier* (2014), which is a re-creation of a photograph of Henri Matisse's studio that Demand carried around for many years. Here we see the multicolored remnants of Matisse's paper cutouts, strewn across the golden parquet floor of his studio with a kind of nonchalant sprezzatura as he worked. In Demand's paper re-creation of this photograph, Matisse's cuttings become markers of the negative space of the artist's creative process and an acknowledgment of both the delicate ephemerality and the endless possibilities offered by the medium of paper.

It's easy to miss the almost slapstick comedic quality of many of Demand's works. In *Landing* (2006), for example, we see the aftermath of a highly unfortunate accident at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England. As the story goes, a visitor was headed up a staircase to what they thought were the painting galleries only to trip on their shoelace when they realized that they were on their way to the pottery wing. The resulting pratfall ended in the destruction of two Ming-era vases that had been displayed on the landing. The irony of Demand's meticulous and exacting paper reconstruction of this scene of destruction is not lost on us, as his own model would itself later be relegated to the recycling bin after it was photographed. The conservation and preservation of material culture that is the sine qua non of museums is here explosively undone by an unfortunate choice of location, poor wayfinding signage, and a fall worthy of Buster Keaton. A similar Keatonian absurdity underlies Demand's epic stop-motion animation *Pacific Sun* (2012). In this film the artist reconstructed two minutes of security footage from the cruise ship Pacific Sun as it was hit by gigantic waves during a tropical storm off the coast of New Zealand. Removing the employees and guests, Demand spent months painstakingly conjuring with paper and cardboard the shambolic flow of chairs, tables, storage cabinets, paper plates, computer monitors, and, rather hilariously, a single potted plant as they careened back and forth below

Film still, *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967)

Henri Matisse, Hôtel Régina, Nice, 1952

deck. The ultimate absurdity here is Demand's excruciatingly fastidious act of re-creating a few moments of uncontrolled chaos as the natural world unexpectedly buffeted the manufactured engineering of the boat. In his directorial reconstruction of this almost Brechtian disruption of the happy middle-class dream of a cruise ship holiday, the artist becomes a choreographer of the world around us, using paper to reconstruct a random ballet out of the flotsam and jetsam of the inert and starkly unremarkable objects that silently populate our lives.

While Demand has turned his attention to the effects of the natural world—and specifically the ocean—in *Control Room* and *Pacific Sun*, he has also been interested in our culture's production of "nature" since the beginning of his career. For his work *Clearing* (2003), for example, the artist constructed over 270,000 paper leaves to create an idyllic scene of a forest with a golden light pouring through its canopy, while in *Pond* (2020) he rendered a scene completely filled with water lilies. Both works are monumental in scale, filling the viewer's field of vision horizontally to create an almost immersive environment. Demand's pond partakes in the hackneyed discourse of beauty generated by the dissemination and wall-poster popularization of Monet's *Water Lilies*, while *Clearing* speaks to the unfounded Romantic vision of a pure, unadulterated, prelapsarian nature. Neither of these so-called natural worlds have ever existed outside of the philosophical frameworks of humankind, and Demand's paper reconstructions of these scenes are no less artificial than these utopian "no places." In the end Demand's images ask, in a world so fully suffused with artifice, "what is the natural?" Similarly, in *Grotto* (2006) the artist famously attempted to ask this question by calling our attention to the legacy of the aesthetic theory of the Sublime in nature in relation to the power of photography to form (or deform) experience and personal memory. To produce this image Demand used 36 tons of cardboard to construct a life-size underground cavern before preserving its image photographically. Like the stalagmites and stalactites it depicts, which have been built up geologically over millennia out of the mineral content of dripping water, Demand constructed this work out of layer after layer of cardboard. The image it re-creates is one that we might have seen many times before in the thousands of postcard images of caves sold in gift shops around the world. The artist gathered hundreds of these postcards, and the final photographic version of *Grotto* becomes an ideal condensation of our collective image of a cave that has itself been mediated by the long history of photography. In this work, the terrifying grandeur of the eighteenth-century philosophical Sublime becomes the Instagram generation's idea of a photo-op, and the spectacle of nature is reduced to a daily post. As if to accentuate the point that neither the Sublime nor the Instagram photo are any less constructed than the other, Demand allowed the model for this work to be preserved (just this one time, unlike all of his previous or subsequent models), and it currently sits on view in Milan in a basement gallery at the Foundazione Prada along with vitrines full of his research. Perhaps the sheer weight of its factual material existence and its case-study approach to the concatenations of memory and photography led Demand to allow for *Grotto*'s continued physical existence alongside its photographic counterpart: a kind of memorial to the mutual imbrication of objects, memory, and the process of photography.

Personal memory and collective remembrance are the polestars of much of Demand's practice. For example, *Heldenorgel* (2009) depicts the inner workings of an outdoor organ that constitutes a sonic monument to the victims of World War I, while *Tribute* (2011) portrays a spontaneous shrine that arose in the wake of a tragic mass panic at a rave. In both of these works the artist addresses collective structures of mourning and how we remember the dead. While one is a permanent if intangible tribute composed of musical notes that echo throughout the landscape, the other is a makeshift, transitory monument constructed hastily through the uncoordinated actions of anonymous individuals and then preserved and circulated in photographs before its eventual disappearance. Both images convey the fragile impermanence of memory—one with the commissioned immateriality of a musical score and the other with a bricolaged altar destined for the waste bin—that lies at the material and conceptual core of Demand's artistic practice.

In 2008 Demand made a radical move in his practice that in retrospect seems like an almost inevitable closing of a circle in a shift from the monumental to the personal and quotidian. For his "Dailies" series the artist started to construct paper models re-creating personal photographs taken with his iPhone on walks through his neighborhood and in the places he traveled. Domestically sized and printed with a soon to be defunct Diasec transfer process, they are framed in a manner similar to traditional photographs and depict seemingly ordinary and at times humorously absurd moments that we all pass by unawares each and every day—chewing gum stuck in the grill of an air return, plastic cups inserted into the holes of a chain link fence, an empty frozen yogurt cup with its pink plastic spoon, laundry sitting inert in the window of a clothes dryer, or a taut dog leash wrapped

Installation view, 2006, *Processo grottesco*, Fondazione Prada, Milano

Postcard Heldenorgel Kufstein, E. F. Walcker & Cie, Ludwigsburg, 1931

around a light post, its captive located somewhere off screen. Standing in creative opposition to the grand scale and topics of his larger historical works, they emphasize an intimacy and attention to the minor episodes and often overlooked moments of ad hoc grace, wonder, and hilarity that populate our lives. Every *Daily* seems to offer the opening sequence to a story that remains to be written. Who left that bar of soap perched precariously on the edge of the sink in *Daily #21*? How long has that pile of mail been accumulating beneath the mail slot in the front door in *Daily #37*, and what does it portend? What was written on the yellow photocopied poster with the takeaway tags that is stapled to the telephone pole in *Daily #34*? "We pay cash for homes"? A phone number to report a missing pet? Perhaps the invisible dog from *Daily #28* went missing? These works are both an autobiographical account of the artist's movements through the world and a celebration of the narrative power of minor events and situations. Although this series has a quickly approaching expiration date, as the materials and process needed to print these works is quickly disappearing, the *Dailies* will nonetheless continue to offer a complementary personal counterpoint to Demand's more monumental photographic reconstructions of the marginal images of history. When history stutters, Demand's *Dailies* fill the gaps.

As with all of Demand's work, the *Dailies*' invocation of the banal mysteries of everyday life contributes a revelatory antidote to the more heroic pitfalls of much contemporary large-scale photographic practice. This is where Demand separates himself from his peers. Even when dealing with historical subjects, his works are as much about the modeling or social construction of those events as they are about the events themselves. Ultimately, his project is about stripping away the veneer of history—whether personal or political—and remodeling it in a way that replaces the grand narratives with the revelatory act of storytelling. As he's suggested, "I guess the core of it is making the world into a model by redoing it and stripping off the anecdotal part, that's when it becomes an allegory, and the project becomes a metaphor. Making models is a cultural technique—without it we would be blind."[5] Perhaps this is why he departed from his practice of sculpturally reconstructing the world to focus his lens directly on the preparatory models of architects and designers in his "Model Studies" series while he was in residence in 2011 at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Whether offering us fragmented and unadulterated views of the flimsy and surprisingly provisional maquettes of midcentury architects like John Lautner and contemporary architectural firms like SANAA, or the radical paper dress patterns of the fashion designer Azzedine Alaïa, Demand's "Model Studies" reveal that the world around us is constructed on a foundation of paper.

In Ali Smith's fictional contribution to this volume, we encounter a protagonist who seems to have become infected by some kind of Kafkaesque ailment that turns everything they touch into paper, starting with their own writing table. Things fall apart, the center cannot hold, and yet the writer still writes, the architect still builds, and Thomas Demand keeps making his models. Smith's literary diagnosis of the seismic vibrations of Demand's practice leads me to observe that all of his works share an uncanny sense of being almost but not quite solid while turning everything they touch—objects, histories, and disasters—into equally malleable paper entries heralding the openness of a different kind of storytelling that opposes the definitive judgements of historians. In the totality of its material experience the flow of paper from Demand's studio is devoid of overt human presence, while its eddies and currents are home to ghosts whose stories are softly whispered in a stuttering drawl. One imagines that perhaps Demand has been lying all along and there is a vast warehouse repository of thousands of his paper model constructions piling up in a heap, resembling something akin to the final scene of *Citizen Kane*, with its crane shot surveying the vulgar treasure hoard of its eponymous character. In this expansive archive of paper, we would see stories colliding with one another and ghosts moving from model to model in a kind of frenetically unmoored spectral haunting. But this is definitively not the case, as all but one of these models has returned to dust or perhaps been unceremoniously recycled into the cardboard box that Amazon just dropped on your doorstep. In the end, the ghosts who inhabit these paper memory palaces don't need the physical structures that Demand built to create his photographic objects. They live in the inexact gaps in his paper constructions, in the mise-en-abyme between his sculptures and their source images, and in the uncanny dissonance created by his final photographs and the world that we inhabit.

1. W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse (London: Harvill, 1997), 23.

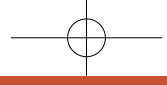
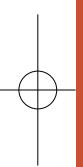
2. Andy Kaufman, quoted in H. Peter Steeves, "Quantum Andy: Andy Kaufman and the Postmodern Turn in Comedy," in *Why So Serious? On Philsophy and Comedy*, ed. Russell Ford (New York: Routledge, 2018), 124.

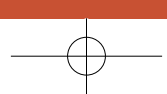
3. In his presentation at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale and again in his exhibition "Model Studies" at the Graham Foundation in Chicago in 2013, Demand included a large group of photographs from the VkhUTEMAS school alongside his first group of *Model Studies*.

4. Guy Debord's *La Société du Spectacle* was originally published in Paris by Editions Buchet-Chastel (1967) and was reissued by Editions Champ Libre (1971) and Editions Gallimard (1992). Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), 2.

5. Thomas Demand, quoted in conversation with Russell Ferguson, in "An Idea and Some Pieces of Paper," in *Thomas Demand: The Complete Papers*, ed. Christy Lange (London: MACK 2018), 29.





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