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Thomas Demand: Manipulation of Photography and Semiotics

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Thomas Demand: Manipulace fotografie a sémiotika

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Yu-Cheng Lin

Abstract

Tato esej zkoumá fotografická díla Thomase Demanda s ohledem na Peirceovu sémiotickou teorii. Zkoumá také, jak fotografie působí na sémiotiku a její vztah k divákovi. A jak se autor snažil vytvořit alternativní proces vnímání fotografie a přijímání informací. Dekódování umění pomocí Peirceovy sémiotiky by mohlo být užitečným nástrojem analýzy pro diváky i umělce. Umělci hledají způsob, jak prozkoumat sémiotickou složitost, aby mohli divákům předávat zprávy. Rozvíjení vysvětlení je cílem této eseje. V současné vizuální kultuře je publikum bombardováno přehrší mediálních a internetových obsahů. Navíc máme tendenci zpochybňovat autenticitu obrazu a jeho původ kvůli dostupnosti digitálních manipulací. Cílem této eseje je také analyzovat díla Thomase Demanda na tomto pozadí. Jedná se o případovou studii, která má osvětlit současnou fotografii.

Abstract

This essay examines Thomas Demand's photography works with Peircean semiotic theory. It also examines how photography works on semiotics and its relation to the viewer. And how the artist tried to make an alternative process of perceiving photography and receiving the information. Decoding the art with Peircean semiotics could be a useful analysis tool for both viewers and artists. Artists are searching for a way to explore semiotic complexities to send messages to the viewers. Developing the explanation is the purpose of this essay. In contemporary visual culture, the audience is bombarded with the overflow of media and internet content. In addition, we tend to question the authenticity of the image and its origins because of the accessibility of digital manipulations. This essay also aims to analyze the works of Thomas Demand with this background. It is a case study meant to shed light on contemporary photography.

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Introduction

The essay aims to analyze the visuality of the photography works of Thomas Demand. Analyzing through the indexical function, how the artist tried to make a variation processes of a viewer perceiving photography and receiving the information. Destabilize the traditional relationship of viewing, manipulating how viewers perceive the photograph and transforming the meaning behind them. In examining the relationship between semiotics and photography, developing the explanation is the purpose of this essay. It is a case study of visuality meant to shed light on contemporary photography and visual culture nowadays.

Also, by adopting the words of Rosalind Krauss pointed out the indexical function of photography. To understand traditional indexical relationships and how artworks are beyond them. Peirce's semiotic theory was adopted by Rosalind Krauss into photography theory. To deconstruct the symbolism behind replication of replication works from Thomas Demand's paper sculpture. Inspecting how contemporary photography works on semiotics and its relation to the viewer. To ask the question, why this kind of visualities and narration is emerging? Is it a response to the fatigue of the That-has-been and decisive moment photography era? And in terms of our visual world, why are they essential in the overloaded Internet and media image time?

Except for analyzing them with indexical function, Peircean semiotic triad of representamen, object, and interpretant will also be included. The relationship between two sign that Thomas Demand try to connect bring out new form of semiotic. The unscattered paper sculpture photographs from "The Stutter of History" to "The Dailies". He provoked the visual semiotic by creating an intriguing paradox of visuality with the artist's philosophy of art.

Chapter 1 Photography and Semiotics

Since the invention of photography in the 19th century, as Roland Barthes wrote, photography has been seen as evidence of reality.¹ It became the evidence of the event, and it was photographed precisely representing the reality that has happened. However, there are many different ways of representing something. There is a constant debate about photography in Peirce's triadic sign theory.

According to Peirce, "sign" can have three modes: Icon, Index, and Symbol. First, the icon, in his words: is "a mere community in some quality"²(W2 .56), which can also be understood as a likeness or similar to its object. Secondly, the Index is "whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact"³(W2 .56). For example, smoke is the index of fire, and by definition, photography, and films could also be seen as an index due to its direct result imprint from the light. The last one is the Symbol "whose relation to their objects is an imputed character"⁴(W2 .56). It could be an arbitrary or conventional relationship to what is symbolized. " And importantly, all the sign is simultaneously index, icon, and symbol.⁵

All the signs simultaneously have those modes as well as photography. But we can notice when Peirce mainly focuses on the index and icon. When Peirce himself analyzes the semiotics of photography, he mentions the precision quality of photography "point by point to nature." In that aspect, it belongs to the second class of signs, those by physical connection.⁶ On the other hand, he writes: "Photographs ... are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent"⁷ Coming up with an ambiguous conclusion that the rigidity of photography as a sort of validation can be indexical and its likeness quality makes it iconic.

We also have to consider the technology of photography at that time. "Instantaneous photography" is usually used for scientific research, such as the famous horse's gallop movement from Muybridge in 1872. It is nothing like the technology nowadays that we may refer to as a snapshot from smartphones. The photography he talked about was the physical process of light-sensitive material then.

¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (1st American ed. Hill and Wang, 1981), 76.

² Albert Atkin, "Peirce's Theory of Signs", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/peirce-semiotics/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 4–11.

⁶ Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Art of Reasoning in Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 106.

⁷ Peirce, *The Essential Peirce*, 2:5–6.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Peirce's semiotics was gradually applied to interpreting art. Photography theorist Rosalind Krauss also adopted the concept from Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. She takes advantage of semiotics as analytical tools to elaborate photography theories. The next chapter will further discuss the greater structure of the Peircean semiotics system. Here will discuss the triadic sign theory to open up the link between photography and semiotics.

In Rosalind Krauss's article published in 1977, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," she discussed the indexical principle of photography. The photogram was seen as an Index because of its special camera-less photography. It is a technique that overlays the object above on photographic paper. Resulting in the silhouette image, or you may say it is the trace of the light during the exposure. As a result, she views it as a way of making the photography indexical: "that subspecies of the photo which forces the issue of photography's existence as an index"⁸. Except for the special photogram technique, she argued that "Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object".

From both arguments, they are struggling to clarify whether photography is more indexical or iconic. It can be connected to iconic relationships because of their likeness. She focuses on the index of photography, this effect how the viewer receives and interprets the meanings. The connection between photography and what is photographed is linked strongly with the physical process of mediums. Being a tool for documenting the light reflection inevitably couldn't escape from the strong bond of the index.

⁸ Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October*, Vol. 3 (1977): 75, The MIT Press.

All the sign is simultaneously index, icon, and symbol. Photography is the same. However, photography strongly emphasizes its indexical or iconic modes. The characteristic of "recording" confined its ability to extend to, for example, abstract and fantasies. If only serving as documentation materials would be plain and dull compared to other mediums. We can also see that photography is struggling with contemporary art. The possible ways for photography to fight the traditional notion of "The Pencil of Nature " are by seeking the special effects of materials. For instance, distortion, over-exposure, photogram, and film chemical manipulation. However, those are not the only way to evade the restriction of materials characteristics. The manipulations of the traditional semiotic functions can be seen as manipulations of the message-receiving process to the viewers. These have become artists' new tools to utilize in their works. And these same ways of resisting appear in contemporary photography stages are emerging.

Chapter 2: Peircean Semiotic in Contemporary Art

The manipulation of the message-receiving process can be explained by semiotics and its study in recent years. When receiving visual information, we tend to think of its meaning through the image's hints. We interpret them by our knowledge of culture, history, and art. The search for the meaning is similar to chasing the precise sign structure by semiotic study. As Peirce himself wrote, "Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign."⁹ Also parallel to Alex Potts's words, "a work of art functions as a sign simply by virtue of its being recognized as art."¹⁰ Under the premise of being interpreted, the sign and art could be deconstructed by the semiotic triad. Upon deconstructing the structure of the sign and art, we can realize how these structures present themselves situated in proper positions to deliver messages. Understanding how a particular part of its function and the processes of decoding the sign could be useful analysis tools. And what differentiates the message-receiving approaches between art and conventional sign structure?

Peirce developed a semiotic triad that indicates sign include representamen, object, and interpretant. In this structure, representamen is the vehicle of the sign, and the object is what the sign represents. Most importantly, the interpretant is seen as essential in the innovation of sign theory because the quality that a sign interacts with viewers only in being interpreted. The thought in the receiver's mind is decisive in the dynamic relationship between the object and the representamen. As Peirce wrote, "A sign, or representamen...It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign."¹¹ From here, we can see the interpretant play an important role in term of the further development and dynamic of triadic relation.

⁹ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Writings* (8 Vols.). (2.172). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

¹⁰ Alex Potts, "Sign" in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History*, (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 21

¹¹ Charles Sanders Peirce, *On Signs [R]*, MS [R] 798.

Many researchers of semiotics started to research Peirce's manuscript. More and more sentences were put on the debate table of these researchers.¹² "A sign, or representamen, is anything which so stands in relation to a second, called its object, as to be capable of determining a third, called its interpretant, to be in the same triadic relation to that object in which it stands itself. That is to say, the interpretant must be itself a sign capable of determining a sign of the same object, and so on, endlessly"¹³. We can see from this manuscript that the word he picks is "anything," and its relation to its object and later on capable of determining its interpretant, "anything" can be fictional or physical existence no matter the sign is referring real world or not. And the importance of these three elements is its relation within what he called "semiosis" the action of the sign¹⁴. And this action of the sign which influences or involve in within triadic relation is not separable as he wrote, "this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs."¹⁵

The writing above leads to another theory, "Infinite semiosis," which indicates a constant process of interpreting a sign. We can view the interpretant as a new sign so that the process will continue theoretically. The processes of interpreting will be endless until reaching the ultimate interpretant that Peirce coined in the later writing.

From his writing, we can also find out he viewed sign and representamen as equivalent. And also he changes the use of the term sign and representamen in his later writing. He replaced the representamen with the sign.¹⁶ Although this raises another contradiction. The sign was constructed and simultaneously included in the triad relationship is paradoxical. This paradox may also show that he focuses more on the relationship with the "semiosis" instead of the structure of these elements.

¹² Charles Sanders Peirce, *C.S. Peirce: on signs*, Zhao Xingzhi Trans, (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2014).

¹³ Charles Sanders Peirce, Syllabus: Syllabus of a course of Lectures at the Lowell Institute beginning 1903, Nov. 23. On Some Topics of Logic. MS [R] 478.

¹⁴ "being any semeiosis, or action of a sign," Charles Sanders Peirce, *Charles S. Peirce Papers, 1787-1951* (MS Am 1632) (318), (Houghton Library, Harvard University).

¹⁵ Charles Sanders Peirce, "But by "semiosis" I mean, on the contrary, an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs." *Pragmatism*, (1907), MS [R] 318.

¹⁶ "I formerly preferred the word representamen. But there was no need of this horrid long word." Charles Sanders Peirce, *Semiotic & Significs: The Correspondence Between Charles S. Peirce & Victoria Lady Welby*, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Pr, 1977).

Another Peircean semiotics scholar Liszka also mentioned the quality of the interpretant: "interpretant is a rule of translation or inference"¹⁷ As Peirce views interpretant as a "thought sign, "the receiver's interpretation or translation becomes the process of decoding the sign. By the time receiver get the information, the translation involves transforming the meaning into another context. The parallel connection when decoding a sign or an artwork is similar in terms of interpretation. They both discuss the sign or art and its relation to its meaning and interpretant, which shows in the viewer's mind. The structure of decoding a sign is similar to interpreting art. In contrast, they reveal themselves differently under a similar structure.

Contemporary art often functions differently compared to how road sign works with semiotics and always faces the criticism of being hard to understand. They usually provoke the normal message-receiving process, either skipping the object like the abstract painting. For example, we can find many examples like abstract painting, blurring photography, and untitled music work. All of them hide away the object they initially should be pointing at. "Art context can have the object or almost have no object...jump over and push away the object, push to long distances and nearly traceless."¹⁸ This results in the emphasis on the interpretant in contemporary art. The object in this relation becomes a vacancy, and artists are searching for a clever way to hide or push it away.

Comparing art throughout its development is also very different. From a recent semiotics study, some researchers point out the development of semiotics of art. "Before modernism, art primarily represent the object... During modernism, less and less focus on the object but on the representation itself. Post-modernism... the object of the art faded away."¹⁹ We can see the trend that the weight of the object gets cut out over time and is eventually hidden.

¹⁷ James Jakób Liszka, "Peirce's Interpretant." Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), 34.

¹⁸ Zhao Yiheng, "論藝術的自身再現", "Representation of Art" Literary and artistic contention(9)(2019), 82-84.

¹⁹ Ibid. Zhao Yiheng is a semiotic researcher in China, the article make a conclusion of the change of the semiotic development in art.

2.1 Examples

Some artworks, such as Joseph Kosuth's installation work *One and Three Chairs* (1965), even deconstruct the sign and show them separately. Placing one chair in the middle, on the left side, is a photo of the chair, and the other side shows the text of the definition from the dictionary. So there is the actual chair as the object, a photo of the chair as the sign, and a dictionary definition as the interpretant. This example just shows the viewers that there is some element of semiotics in art, which simply shows them. Instead of seeing the triad semiotics relationships, it becomes three elements equally positioned at the plain surface. It is merely an example of the relationship between art and semiotics. It also calls up the question of Duchamp's *fountain* (1917) of what kind of object should be considered art. Or everything merely bases on the context surrounding it and makes something become an art. As he writes, "When objects are presented within the context of art (and until recently objects always have been used) they are as eligible for aesthetic consideration as are any objects in the world,"²⁰ When art stays in the place of being interpreted, interpretant will dominant the sign function, interpreted as art in the context of art.

Interpreting art is subjective and arbitrary, it causing ambiguous status for art. It is hard to understand why it is an art and what is not. Whether there is meaning behind it is vital, for instance, whether it is responding to art history or society nowadays instead of being a purely visual or aesthetic decoration that speaks nothing. From this point, how artists express their meaning is important. Do they show their messages to the viewers at first glance? Or do they hide it under the surface or not showing at all? Countless artworks, whether paintings, sculptures, or photographs, can be decoded and interpreted with semiotics. As a result, there are many forms of the relationship between art and its semiotics. As long as the art is recognized as art, the interpretation will never end.

²⁰ Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writing*, (The MIT Press, 1969), 16.

As the term “semionaut” was coined by Nicolas Bourriaud. He talked about the relationship between artists and signs nowadays, “the artist navigates throughout the signs. They find their way into the huge forest of signs that we are living in today, which is increasingly overcrowded with objects and signs, obviously. So this exercise of navigation is more and more complex...Artists are semionauts who invent pathways throughout today’s global culture.”²¹ Indeed, from the transition semiotics, researchers have observed. The change in the quality of the usage of semiotics is noticeable. Moreover, the unlimited possibilities of using them allow artists to experiment with their medium with complex messaging processes. The possibilities consisted of different types of the element of semiotics, the position of semiotics, across time and history, intercultural, and across public to art. All the signs can be used by the artist to build new imagination of the meaning.

For example, Thomas Demand takes a historical photo as a reference to his paper model photography. However, the viewer can’t find the historical photo in his exhibition. Those two photographs across the more than half-century timeline intertwine together and form new meanings created by the artist. And the similar approach from the Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto can also be explained in this way. His series “Portraits” photographing the wax statues in Madame Tussauds London. There are both replicas of the replicas across history and resulting in different meanings and visuality. His other series, “Theaters,” photograph the theatre worldwide for twenty-three years. However, viewers can only see the overexposure white screen illuminate the interior surrounding. He transforms the played movie on the screen into a blank light square. Every frame of the film was hidden behind the overexposure white, turning the movie into his art of emptiness and philosophy of life.²²

²¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *The problematic of time in contemporary art*, transcription of a lecture by: Ami Asher (October 2013), (Bezalel Academy of Arts, December 2012), <http://maarav.org.il/english/2013/10/03/the-problematic-of-time-in-contemporary-art-nicolas-bourriaud/>.

²² Sugimoto Hiroshi, *Until the Moss Grows*, (Common Master Press, 2013), 126.

To conclude, there is a particular type of form we can notice in contemporary art. The complexity of the usages of semiotics is tremendous. And obviously, the manipulation of the message-receiving process can be explained by semiotics. As Nicolas Bourriaud pointed out that “Artists are semionauts”²³ searching for the possibilities to explore its complexities. Although upon reviewing the artworks, those mechanisms were hidden behind. But when discussing its meaning and digging deeper inside the works, semiotics becomes a crucial part of the art for both artists and viewers.

²³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *The problematic of time in contemporary art*, transcription of a lecture by: Ami Asher (October 2013), (Bezalel Academy of Arts, December 2012), <http://maarav.org.il/english/2013/10/03/the-problematic-of-time-in-contemporary-art-nicolas-bourriaud/>.

Chapter 3 Analyzing Thomas Demand's Works

To illustrate the process in our head when receiving visual information and forming a concept in our mind. Returning to Demand's works, take *Bathroom* (1997) as an example. He usually draws materials from newspaper reports and historical photographs. The photo constructed by the paper model of the scene creates a familiar but bizarre atmosphere.

While Demand tried to challenge the relationship between, or let's say, making an extension of the sign relation of photography. Or, more specifically, we can view it as a response to photojournalism. Destabilize how viewers perceive the photo and the message. Political issues behind the news photographs are shown differently from traditional documentary photography. From the documentary era of "decisive moment" to the digitalized world nowadays, the meaning of photography has evolved to a new visual form. Nowadays, we tend to question the authenticity of the image and its origins because of the accessibility of digital manipulations. The validation of photography was diminished by technological evolution. The visual culture also changed when documentary photography faded away, and the screen and short video popped out.

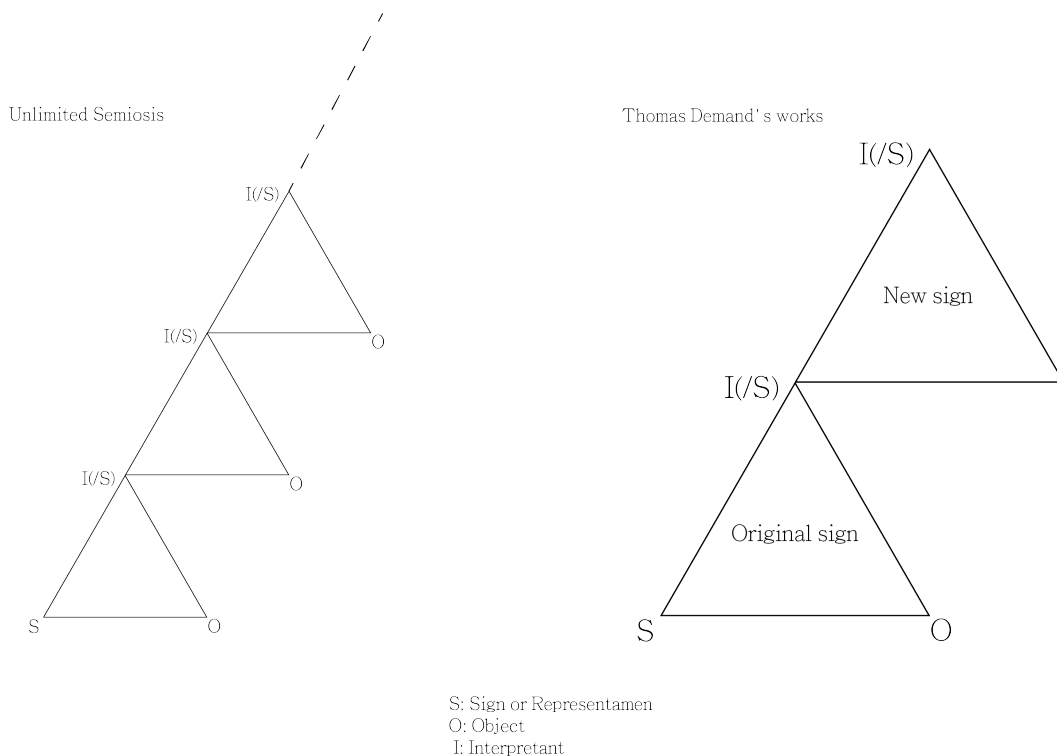
3.1 "The Stutter of History"

In the case of his works, when the viewer sees the photograph, they receive no more information than a polished paper model. The detail was removed, and the limited visual information allowed the viewer to make a projection. They may assume an event or accident may have happened. It could be daily objects, for example, the bathroom curtain or the bedsheet with the bedside lamp. More specifically, in the photograph *the Bathroom* (1997), constructing an everyday scene by paper model, we can see the creased white paper foot mat on the ground. The water in the bathtub creates a strange feeling of something unfinished. Behind this, no depth-of-field photograph was actually implying a news report of the death of a politician Uwe Barschel, Minister-President of a German state. Based on the material of the newspaper report and old photographs, Thomas was not the photographer of that very incident nor the investigator. But he was forming the idea from his own perception of the incident. He received the message of the photograph, and based on his subjective perception, he created the paper sculpture and photographed it.

In the Peircean semiotics, his subjective perception is interpretant of the incident image. Based on this interpretant, he created the paper model and photographed it. This photograph becomes a new sign. This new photograph he made its interpretant would be viewers' thoughts at first, but if the viewer were informed of his creating process. The new interpretant of the photograph will match exactly to Demand's interpretant. They are the same because viewers were informed of his process of modeling and photographing. This interpretant is this process. And this photograph, as a sign itself, is his process of creating. And the object they point at is also this very process. Eventually, the three elements are the same thing and pointing at the same thing.

Instead of becoming the Unlimited Semiosis, the examples of Demand's work stop immediately at the second layer of the loop. The new interpretant was locked because of acknowledging the author's clear intention. The moment viewers suddenly realize the methods behind the photograph, realizing this idea, the idea here would be the interpretant. The sign itself, which is the photograph, also points at the process. The object, the paper sculpture, which does not exist anymore still there in the photograph, being represented as the object of the process.

Another response to the historical context from Thomas Demand is the photograph *Room* (1994). The photograph itself is a roll of broken window frames made of paper. And the ceiling was bent down, and on the ground was a giant wooden board and sticks in disorder. It seems like just been attacked or a hurricane struck. The story behind the photograph is actually an assassination attempt on Hitler at his headquarters in Rastenburg in 1944. It was organized by a group of acting and retired army officers and some civilians but eventually



failed due to the change of the meeting place. And the reference to his photograph is actually based on the photograph of Adolf Hitler's official photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. Thomas Demand took the original photograph from him and turned it into a paper replication. So we can see the identical shape of the wooden board and the approximately placed sticks topple over.

The artist manipulates our perception of architectural spaces. The interior space was turned into unmanned spaces. Viewers have no clue about the scales of the spaces built by paper models. However, there is some historical context, but it can't be seen at first glance. The detachment feeling here raised confusion and poked the viewers all the time. Roland Barthes's writing of the *studium* and the *punctum* of photography. He wrote: "It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally ... that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions."²⁴ And the *punctum* an interrupting element: "is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."²⁵ In his idea of the *studium* is not only deeply connected to cultural knowledge but also refers to the photographer's intentions: "to recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions"²⁶

Initially, the *punctum* refers to the visuality that provoking to the viewers and "pierces our psyche"²⁷ on the spot. However, Thomas Demand's works delayed the time when the *punctum* happened. From the photograph itself, there is *punctum* that they looked like the spaces and object we have in our daily life but are uncanny because of their perfect texture without traces of use. On top of that, the time when *punctum* happens is no longer confined to the time upon viewing the photograph itself. Instead, it happens after viewing Demand's photographs, when the connection between Demand's photograph and original photographs is revealed. It extends to becoming the punctuation between the photograph and the original sign: the original photograph.

²⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 25-26.

²⁵ Ibid., 26-27.

²⁶ Ibid., 27-28.

²⁷ Thomas Demand and Hal Forster, *The Dailies* (Expanded Edition), (Mack, 2023), 65.

And the *studium* here connects to the artist's intention and interpretation of two signs. The relationship between the two signs embodies the manipulation of the symbolized messages. His glossy and clean paper model punctuates the viewer's mind with the German national collective memory of the tragedy. The unmanned spaces without the figure, the faces, and the action, strike with a heavy historical context. The objective perspective brings up the eerie feelings that subjective documentary photography can't make. Moreover, there is no photojournalism showing *punctum* in this not obvious way. But the effect of the photograph hanging around while viewers contemplate the whole meaning, the connection between two signs and the photograph they are looking at. The hidden meaning ambush the viewers with the cover of paper disguise.

The control of the interpretant is the key to the bizarre feeling. So as Laxton wrote about his work: "The extreme lack of visual information in Demand's photographs denies the viewer any narrative satisfaction, or any knowledge of objective information, unlike that promised by media images."²⁸ With the visuality that pauses viewers thinking processes, plus the strong *punctum* that happens after the revelation. They both work out and turn the photograph into many layers of meaning.

The name of the exhibition *House of Card* at MOCA Toronto in 2022 and the photo book *House of Card* (2020) show Demand's relationship to architecture. Especially the architecture model and interior spaces he created for his photographs. Demand started his artistic career as a sculptor after studying architecture. Later on, he began to use photography as a means of recording his works. From the spaces he creates for the historical event, we can also feel the corporeal relationship with the interior space. He used large-scale Sinar film cameras, and the final print usually was brought up to the scale as real-life size. With the perceptual experiences the viewers have, as if experiencing a space that is fiction and does not exist. In comparison, it strangely connected to the historical event, placing the viewer in the void between paper and history. The architecture model plays an essential role as the object in the semiotic triad. It allows viewers to look into the space of the "building" and connect two signs through these paper models.

²⁸ Susan Laxton, "What Photographs Don't Know." *Photography Between Poetry and Politics: The Critical Position of the Photographic Medium in Contemporary Art*. Ed. Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest. Leuven: Leuven UP, 2008. 89–99. Print.

An example to clearly illustrates the relationship between the paper model and the photograph is *Model* (2000). This photograph shows a paper model of an architecture model. The white model was standing on the paper atelier table on the right side of the composition. Again, the original photo was also taken by Adolf Hitler's official photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. Comparing the two photographs, we can see that Demand removed Hitler and architect Albert Speer, replacing them with a clean background and perfect paper model. The model in the photograph is Speer's model of the German pavilion (Deutsches Haus) for the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* in Paris in 1937²⁹.

From the photograph *Model* (2000), there is also an interesting intertextuality between the original photo and Demand's work. They are both photographing the model of the architecture. Heinrich Hoffmann photographed the architectural model that symbolizes the great power competition between Deutsches Haus and the Soviet pavilion at the Paris Exposition.³⁰ It emphasizes the propaganda for the image of great nationalism. While Demand used quite the opposite, erasing all the figures and details. Remove the visual elements and the traces of history, becoming a denial of the monumentality the Nazi regime try to build. Although the structure of the two photographs is identical, there is a difference in that the Demand builds up both model and the photograph. On the other hand, the model in the original photo is not built by the photographer. The symmetrical identical structures between the two photographs share the same form but result in different meanings across the timeline of history.

²⁹ Donna West Brett, "Banality, Memory and the Index: Thomas Demand and Hitler's photographer," *Photographies*, 9:3, (2016), 235

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

3.1 “The Dailies“

The same-name series, “*The Dailies*,” was published in 2015, and the new expanded edition was published in 2023, including the article from Hal Forster. Instead of dealing with monumental scenes and historical context, *The Dailies* showcase the scene people may encounter in their daily life. It is a series based on the snapshot of the smartphone he initiated in 2008. Nowadays, smartphones dominate the visual culture with giant social media platforms. Again, he tried to respond with his signature paper sculpture. The indexical function of photography in the digital era shifts dramatically. The series provoke our perception of unfamiliar familiarity within the contemporary visual culture. Instead of dealing with the collective historical memory, this time, he turned it into the individual visual imprint of one’s daily life. Moreover, there is a contrary between the randomness of the snapshot by smartphone and the delicately set up paper model photograph with a large camera.

As Hal Forster writes in this photo book, “Demand plays the appearance of noncomposition against the fact of composition, and the result is a set of paradoxical images that appear both very meditated and almost random.”³¹ Again, Demand plays the qualities that exist in the two photographs. One is randomness, and the other is meditated composition. Extracts what it symbolizes and merges two qualities. There is a dramatic turn of topics from great history to mundane daily picture-taking by phone. But the manipulation between the two signs still remains.

Nowadays, images are buried under the avalanche of the unlimited snapshot produced every day. Moreover, beyond the questioned credibilities because of Photoshop, artificial intelligence also joins this production of the imagery world. Not only credibility but also technology development shakes authorship and originality. The visual culture of overflow images also highlights the characteristics of “*The Dailies*,” the clean paper model different from the over saturate images and videos from Instagram, Youtube, TikTok, etc. So did the example of “Theaters” from Sugimoto Hiroshi. We can’t see the movie playing in his “Theaters” photographs but a white square, nor can we see the original photos made by Demand’s phone. They both showcase the plain visuality and hide the object respectively with their own tricks. “The Stutter of History” also functions in the same way. We could see a clear path in Thomas Demand’s response to visual culture along the way, from photojournalism to Internet visual culture. They all successfully perform precise visuality with the application of semiotics which is hiding the object.

³¹ Thomas Demand and Hal Forster, *The Dailies* (Expanded Edition), (Mack, 2023), 33.

Chapter 4 Architecture Project “The Triple Folly”

The Triple Folly is the architecture project the artist Thomas Demand cooperates with Caruso St John Architects in Denmark. The pavilion consists of three volumes for textile manufacturer Kvadrat, except for the paper architecture model he created for photography. It is the first actual architecture project Demand created and built. Playfully, three volumes are designed to look like the paper object: a sheet of legal paper, a paper plate, and an American soda jerk's hat. With the artistic idea, importantly, the final work looks like the paper model he created for his photograph. They complete a masterpiece which is the architecture and also the artwork. The idea of turning the paper model in his photograph into an architectural structure with interdisciplinary cooperation is worth discussing the connection with his photography practice. And how it relates to the concept of Demand and semiotics throughout the thesis.

Demand again dives into the exploration of using semiotics, but this time with different scales and different fields. Obviously, with different mechanisms of semiotic theory. From previous writing, we acknowledge that Demand creates photographs with paper models. And those paper model photographs became the sign, became something we try to decode and interpret. In this case, semiosis works quite the opposite.

Return to triad semiotics relationships, including sign or representamen, object, and interpretant. In Demand's paper model photograph, the paper model is the object. And the photograph itself is the sign or representamen. However, the paper model itself no longer exists after shooting. Suppose we view this architecture as a new sign and his old series as an old sign. This time, the object of the old sign generates the new sign. He had the styles of the paper model first and created the real architecture in reality. This new sign is actually for the purpose of looking like the paper model in his works. The paper model is the object in the photograph. As a result, reversely, the new sign looks like the object in his photograph. Once again, he finds a way to twist it unusually.

Another obvious example is the work of Kusama Yayoi, the Untitled (Pumpkin Sculpture) (2007). The yellow pumpkin with black dots emerged in her painting for the first time. It has become her iconic work of her. After pumpkin painting in her early works, she started to create the installation of several pumpkin installations around the world. Similarly, although the object is fictional or may not exist in real life, it could still be represented itself by creating a new sign of it referring to the object in the original sign.

Conclusion

Despite the art reviews often focus on the sensual experience with our subjective feelings and ignore the rationality of the artists' intentions. The systematic methods behind the works are usually hidden behind them. There is still the possibility to organize alternative analysis methods. Semiotics analysis provides a possible way to depict or interpret. Artists employ the creative practice of using the sign and challenge with a reverse direction, and both enrich the possibilities of other aspects of art and contemporary photography. Art and its extension of the meaning could have a clear pathway of viewing and understanding.

"Index, Punctum, Document and Representation" as "the four horsemen of the photographic apocalypse"³². Rubinstein argued that in the face of 21st-century photography technology development and algorithm revolution, photography might perish because of the restrictions of the above characteristics. However, if taking Thomas Demand as an example, I view his works as the assemblages of that four characteristics. Instead of leading to the end of photography, I believe he brought it back to life with a brand-new perspective. He works on semiotics and its relation to the viewer. The precise manipulation of semiotics portrays the contrary of the meaning and messages.

Nevertheless, the restriction of photography exists indeed. Nowadays, the visual culture is bombarded with the overflow of media and internet content. The rapid changing of imagery worlds already makes That-has-been and decisive moment photography fade away. How photography survives and conquers the avalanche of an overloaded visual world is a complex problem. Maybe just as Gilles Deleuze said: "There is no need for fear or hope, only to look for new weapons."³³

The interpretation of the world is everywhere, not only confined to art. Therefore, the application of semiotics in art has become an extendable craft. Proficiency in this craft could be another tool to be applied in the artists' arsenal. As Nicolas Bourriaud pointed out that "Artists are semionauts" searching for a way to explore its complexities. In the future, we could find more and more artists becoming the craftsman in the art of sign and sign of art.

³² Daniel Rubinstein, *What is 21st Century Photography?*, Photographers' Gallery Blog (2015), https://www.academia.edu/13589216/What_is_21st_Century_Photography

³³ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October*, Vol. 59 (1992): 4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828>.

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