

Keyun Xu

Prof. Honey Salvadori

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Photography Attitude Change: From Pursing A Perfect Photo To Exploring Stories

In the experience of my one-month photography research course, I have made significant changes to myself. I had never taken a photo of a stranger directly faced to the lens before. I used to pursue some perfect landscape photos, but they were lack of my own style. The one-month course allowed me to step into a new field, street photography, which is also a form of travel photography. In this essay, I will mainly share with my reflections of photos taken in my trip, and illustrate how photos use non-language to convey messages in a semiotic way.

I had my first taste of street photography in Brighton on May 11. I found a fantastic "one-hour rule": from very shy and nervous holding the camera to take pictures of pedestrians, to enjoy watching every moment and expression of pedestrians for only one hour. I enjoyed the anticipation of what would happen to them in the next second. On my first visit to England, I couldn't stop clicking on the shutter to explore everything that could be happening on Brighton street. There were many performances on the street, and families hang out together. Some families were having picnics in the park. I suddenly would like to focus on families this time.

The rain was coming, and the father in this photo was putting raincoats on his children. Although the camera focuses on the child, I want to show how the father in the picture uses his body language to express his protection and love for the child. In contrast to putting on his hat and letting his

clothes get wet, he put a raincoat on his children. He tried hard to keep the child out of the rain, and his actions spread the word of his children's protection. Semiotics is the science of meaning, and it plays a central role in studying signs in society. For a non-linguistic photograph, signs like body language become essential to communicate messages. (Bignell, 2002) First, the gesture of lowering his head allowed him to keep eyes on the child to see if he would be caught in the rain. In society, the image of a father's love is usually an emotional expression that cares about and guards children silently and is as firm as a mountain. His kneeling posture also reflects his love and affection for his children. Hands he holds onto the raincoat conveys a message as well. His left hand held the raincoat in place so hard that it wouldn't fall off the child or be blown away by the wind. The contrast between the father who can't see his face and the innocent child facing the camera is striking. A child's innocence comes from his father's protection, which becomes the main message of this photo. I tried to add a black and white filter to this photo, but I kept the color in the end. In Bignell's *Media Semiotics*, he points out that in a photograph, the signifier is the color and shape of the surface (Bignell, 2002). Although the black and white filter gives texture to the photos, I prefer to use bright colors to highlight the loving atmosphere in the family. What signified in this photo is the protective emotions the father conveys to his children, and his "sacrifice" in the expression of his love for his children.

The photo "father" was the first family photo I captured in a street photograph. I have gained some experience that the essential thing in street photography is to wait for the right moment and anticipate the movement of pedestrians. I met many families on the street: a mother and babies, a father and sons, a family of three, grandparents and grandchildren. The most impressed family is a mother with her two babies. She was sitting outside a restaurant and nursing her baby. After asking her permission, I took this picture. Color as the signifier in photography is important, which can also be denoted as the iconic signs. (Bignell, 2002) The first time I saw this mother, the desire of taking this scene was because of the color consistency. Her hair, clothes, children's hats, and their

clothes are blue, which echoes her kind expression. Blue, as the color signified as "calm," "quiet," can be significantly explained in this photo, which reflects this mother's calm when she feeds her baby. Compared this mother with the father in the photo above, the mother's expression of love to babies are different from the father's. Her love expresses in the way of her tender looks without any forceful behavior. She stroked the child gently, unlike the way the father held onto the raincoat. Based on the atmosphere shown in the photo, I chose to change the background to black and white filter locally and kept blueness in the center of the photo. A set of symbols that have become meaningful become the basis of important social information. (Bignell, 2002) Parents' friendly attitudes have become a sign of the changing times. In the past, many parents paid great attention to protecting their children's privacy. In my own experience, they usually passed me by quickly and avoided the camera. When I took these pictures, the parents were amicable and pointed at my lens to tell their children to look at me.

One of the most significant changes in my attitude of photographing is not putting too many efforts on shooting a photo with perfect frame or angle, but observing stories of people on streets instead. A radioactive mind is a mode recently I always use when thinking about people on the streets and reflection in my brain. It is merely a mind map of getting to the bottom of things step by step, thinking about what people I observe are thinking about. I started to think about stories of strangers before pressing the shutter. Considering about stories that the professor asked me to look for becomes an enjoyable exploration process. There are so many stories happening on the streets of London every day. London brings me a pleasant surprise: differences in social class did not affect people's peaceful coexistence. Beggars in London lie quietly in parks eating hot dogs, and it seems strange that middle-class people can chat happily with their families in the same park. Hidden social prejudices are fading, and there are much more respect and understanding than ever before.

In the south of London, Brixton has a great street culture. Streets and even alleyways are covered with graffiti, chairs, boxes and even jeans that have been deliberately artful. Here, you can talk to anyone in any industry and find out what they are doing. Unfettered life is the most prominent characteristics I felt in Brixton. We passed a flower shop, a sewing studio, and a skateboard park. These scenes reminded me of Brooklyn, New York, which we often watch in movies. Similar to the feeling here, movies always like to show people from different cultural backgrounds living in the same community very freely. Certainly, the film will dramatize their contradictions, implicitly expressing the issues of social class and racial discrimination.

One month photography practice is a good transition for me with the introduction of different genres of photography. At the beginning of the course, I even do not know the suitable camera parameter either shooting at daylight or night. I learned a lot about the norm of a professional photo. More importantly, I have found my interest during one-month practice. No matter which genre of photography I take, stories always play an essential role in a photograph.

Works Cited

Jonathan Bignell (2002) *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*. Page 1, 15. Manchester University Press. Second Edition.