



Awakening the Micro-history of Urban Cultural Development — a Research Method of Autoethnography

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Abstract: In this autoethnographic project, I use the saved photos as the starting point to record the community life in my childhood, and the oral self-life experience as a research method to record my interaction with the architecture. In order to record how to use these experiences as inspiration to help me complete the thinking process of design projects, I will use micro-historical theory as the basis of project development and explore how to use architecture as a carrier to awaken the micro-history of urban development.

Keywords: autoethnographic, micro-history, experience

1. Research part 1: Description

1.1 Introduction

The starting point of this formative research is my hometown. During the construction of New China in the 1950s, my hometown Luoyang became one of the eight major industrial cities in China. Experts from the former Soviet Union assisted us in urban construction. These Soviet-style buildings are mainly factories and residential buildings, and they have also become a symbol of cultural exchanges between the two countries.

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This area is the childhood of my parents and the place where I grew up. It records our activity footprint and growth memory. Although some memories are gradually blurred, I still clearly remember the exploration and interaction of this historical building when I was a child. These experiences deeply influenced me, even I have been to many cities and saw many historical buildings, I am still impressed by the historical buildings of this place where I lived when I was young. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to find the cause of this phenomenon.

1.2 Method: An autoethnographic approach

Autoethnography is a research method of autobiographical emotional arousal. It is a space where you write yourself spontaneously through ethnographic texts, isolating memory, history, performance and meaning (Denzin, 2006). At the same time, it also links the researcher's personal experience with broader cultural understanding (Ellis, 2004).

In this project I will continue to develop the research method of autobiographical memory mentioned by Alison Slater in the article "Wearing in Memory: Materiality and Oral Histories of Dress". It is mentioned in this article that the materiality of objects reflects their past experiences and relationships, although objects no longer exist in their original material form, their traces still exist (Slater, 2014). This tracking is the power of the carried memory. Because they often contain more detailed personal experience evidence or personal memory fragments related to the environment (Ingold, 2007). Canadian experimental psychologist Tulving mentioned that 'this is a process that begins with the witnessing or experiencing of an event or episode and ends with its subjective remembering' (Tulving, 1984). Although these episodic memories are easily disturbed by the outside world, these real sensory details, such as sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, as well as the details of sight, hearing and smell can make the traces of memory lasting, powerful and more convincing (Bernstein and Loftus, 2009).

After being inspired by this research method, I decided to trace my childhood experience from the preserved old photos as the material basis to find answer to the questions.

1.3 Hometown soviet architecture in memory: My childhood memoirs

The scene recorded in the photo is the back of my grandfather holding my hand and walking with me in a residential area.

I remember this road is the only way I go to and from school every day, but this road divides the architectural styles of Soviet residential buildings and ordinary residential buildings. This is a rainy day in the first month of my first grade. The school assigned an assignment to observe the snails' living habits and record the observation process. The teacher told us that snails like dark and humid places and they will appear frequently after the rain. So after school, I decided to look for snails along the building walls on this road, but the process was not that easy, I could only repeatedly search for snails on the walls of the two residential buildings separated by the road (Figure 1).

In the process, I observed that the architectural styles of the two residential buildings are quite different. One is a brick building combining red and white, and the other is a khaki building. Even the roof styles are very different and full of curiosity. I also found friends to discuss my little discoveries with them, and finally I found that the architectural form of the community I live in is different from their residential area.

In this way, I returned home with full of questions and kept pestering my grandfather and dad to narrate my findings, at the same time kept asking them why, because the elders are encyclopedias in the world of children. My grandpa said, 'These findings of yours are very interesting. Let the three of us go find the answer together'. So there was this photo of my father recording my grandfather taking me to explore the residential area. Grandpa told me the history of Soviet experts who came to support city construction at the beginning of New China, and pointed out these Soviet-style buildings to me. It is characterized by red brick and red tile walls, roof corners, and carved stone pillars at the door of the building as decoration (Figure 2).

This photo records the moment my family told me the history behind this building. It also left my self-discovery and interaction with my family, and it also left the memory of my initial understanding of Soviet architecture. Although this black-and-white photo made the characteristics of the building less obvious, I clearly remember the exterior style, brick color, texture and other features of this Soviet-style building that my grandfather told me. This triggered my thinking, why I always think of the history of these buildings.



Figure 1 & Figure 2. Architectural characteristics of Soviet-style residential buildings

The conscious recall based on the information stored in the photo is called episodic memory (Halbwachs and Coser, 1992). The opening of this kind of memory helps to connect some scattered memories, which play a role in connecting the previous and next memories, so I continue to expand this scenario. My childhood experience continues to develop my thinking direction.

Because these Soviet-style buildings occupy most of my childhood life, I often shuttle between the external or internal spaces of the area, because the unit allocation method adopted by the Soviet-style residential buildings allocates the first floor to the left and right families. This is also a typical Khrushchev architecture in the middle (Figure 3). The design of this type of residence strictly controls the area of the kitchen, bathroom, aisle and hall, so the residents' living distance is very close, which also promotes the interaction between neighbors and gives me the opportunity to observe the residents in the space (Figure 4). Daily activities or participate in these activities in person. In the early morning, there will be elderly people doing Tai Chi exercises outdoors. My grandparents and two or three friends will go to the vegetable market to rush to the morning market to buy fresh vegetables. I can clearly see the trajectory of the people living here.



Figure 3. A corner of the kitchen in a Khrushchev-style residential building



Figure 4. Khrushchev-style residential buildings

Normally, after having lunch with my family at noon, I will soon come from home to the outdoor venue to spend a happy afternoon with my friends. This is the most precious time of our day, with sunshine at noon. Under the warm and bright light, sometimes we would put sandbags together in the open space at the door of the house or play various small games belonging to our childhood. During this lunch break, we don't have to rush to school. Most residents also choose to rest at home. Therefore, we have enough free space to run freely, and the laughter of my friends and I have also been echoed in this area.

1.4 Research conclusion of autoethnographic project

Through recalling various forms of life experience, I gradually got some thoughts on the first question. Whether it is residents in the community or as a subject experiencer or observer, these daily life trajectories are constantly increasing the interaction with this historical building. Because these are the experiences that I actually participated in, they will remain in my mind with clear perception. Although such memories cannot completely restore the emotional production state of the experience at the time, such "emotional intensity" does not Will not affect the reliability of oral recall (Rives, 1989).

It is through close interaction with residential areas that I have a better understanding of the construction characteristics of these buildings. Because the spatial background of all activities is carried out under the background of this building, and the history of social development is reflected in the building, through the repeated experience of the experiencer, these histories can be deeply impressed, and the history in the building can be awakened. It is to enhance the interaction between the experiencer and the building.

Recording these real memories helps me to dig deeper into my childhood experience. During this process of thinking, my heart focuses on my perception. It seems to lead me to shuttle through these fragments, and at the same time, it awakens me. The memory of the characteristics of Soviet-style architecture has brought me back to the starting point of my understanding of this period of history, and using this as a starting point to trigger more memories of living in this space, let me once again

perceive my close interaction with historical buildings. In the end, I was surprised to find that the answer has always been hidden in my experience.

2. Research part 2: Proposal

2.1 Background

The design site is located in the Glasgow Central Business District and on the Bath Street, commercial buildings around the design base are around 76% tall. This road is named in memory of the convenience of the public bath established by water entrepreneur William Harley (Figure 5). However, through the site function investigation, it is found that there is no trace of this historical story on the current street. People continue to use modern space function planning to use space (Figure 6). This phenomenon aroused my curiosity about this "hidden history", so I found a concept called "micro history".



Figure 5. Character introduction by William Harley

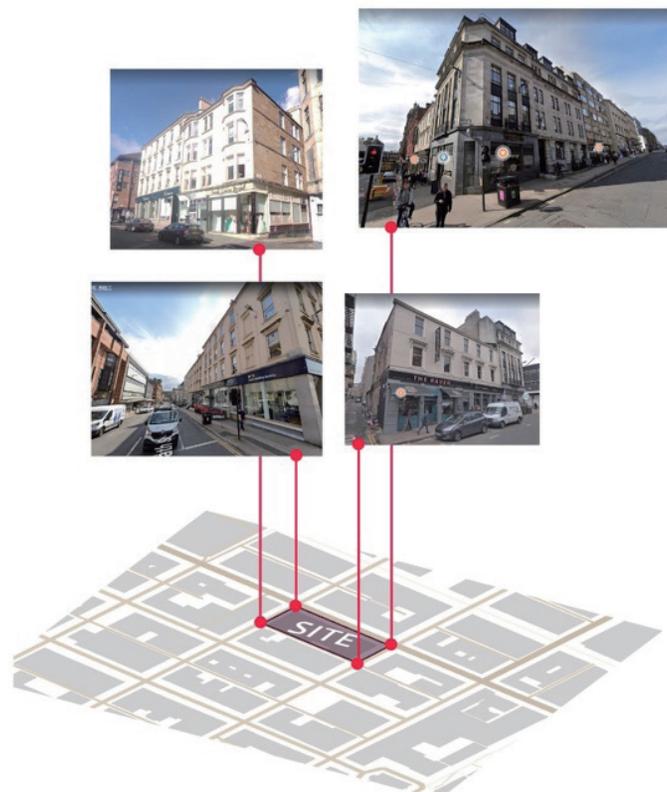


Figure 6. Bath Street site analysis

The term "microhistory" comes from the American historian George R. Stewart's "Pickett's Allegations: The Microhistory of the Final Attack on Gettysburg" published on July 3, 1863.

This historical research method emphasizes the focus on smaller units than "macro history". Micro-history research

has two more notable features. The first is that this research method emphasizes smaller units than “macro-history”, such as individuals, a specific location, and an unusual thing. (Although these things are insignificant in history) in-depth research. The modern historian Levi proposed that the reduction of the research scale of microhistory does not necessarily have to be restricted by the spatial scale (Levi, 1992). This also means that multiple aspects of the macro-historical process can be observed through "fragmentation" research at a specific time and place. The second is that micro-historical expressions make history more attractive to the public. Because this form of research usually uses unconventional expressions or descriptions. For example, Ginzburg's masterpiece "The Cheese and the Worms" tells the daily life of the miller in the first person to reflect the social development of Italy in the 16th century (Ginzburg, Tedeschi and Tedeschi, 1992). This kind of unfolding description can naturally bring more details of social development to the audience, because the social environment's constraints and restrictions on personal ideological activities are an aspect that cannot be ignored.

So far, most micro-historians have deconstructed macro-analysis-focusing on shorter time frames, but these branches interact across time and space. The details on the historical timeline have been added to help people understand some of the experiences that have happened but are under-documented.

2.2 Studio project idea generation

This reminds me of the historical background of the autoethnography project and the street history stories of the studio project are essentially micro-history, because they both present smaller historical stages. I think it is an indispensable part of this city, whether it is a major historical event or a small historical site. These "micro histories" have been integrated into today's cities in different ways. The micro-history of a city represents the living conditions of ordinary people in the city, and it is a history with deeper affinity and warmth. So I tried to combine the background of my autoethnography research project to bring me new ideas.

As a space user of Soviet-style houses, I have established a close relationship with these buildings through my own life experience and observation of the lives of other residents. This makes me still clearly remember the architectural form and location of these historical buildings years later. The historical period of architecture and the background of social development and history are shown to the public with architecture as a carrier. Extending further to the studio project, it can be found that the users of the street architecture have no interaction with the development history of the bathroom construction. This historical story is obscured by people's memory, so I want to uncover this obstacle through space design. Compared with the construction site explored in the autoethnography project, the building I live in was built in a specific historical period. History shrouds the building, but the design site building itself has no specific historical significance, the historical story is reflected in the street, so can I put the history of bathroom development in a certain space, and through the continuous interaction between people and space To awaken people's memory of history?

Combining the above exploration process, I determined the design idea of my studio project. I plan to restore the real bathroom scene in Bath Street to provide space users with the most intuitive mapping experience and make up for the lack of leisure areas on the street. The clue to the development of space is not that I only focused on William Harry's era. In order to increase the diverse experience of visitors, I will show the complete bathroom development process and extract the characteristics of bathroom development in each period. Space design element. When visitors develop in chronological order, they will understand the development characteristics of the bathroom and commemorate the history through their own experience and spatial interaction, rather than just placing a memorial board somewhere and recording a piece of history in words on the street.

I think my autoethnography project has brought me new design inspiration, enabling me to discover the importance of the interaction between people and historical buildings in awakening the micro-history of the city by pursuing my own experience. These studies are like a clue that runs through and places me on the design site to think about how to find and solve some existing problems.

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