Record the Temperature of the Era and the Memory of the City with the Lens

Jun Xie[a]

Liaoning Communication University, Shenyang, Liaoning, China

[a]E-mail: 13322433666@163.com

Abstract

Cities are not only composed of buildings, roads and public spaces, but also shaped by people, things and objects living in them. As an important medium for recording reality, photography can transform fleeting life scenes in the process of urban development into visual memories with preservation value. Against the background of the rapid renewal of the city, old streets, old buildings, public transportation, neighbourhood exchanges and the living conditions of ordinary people are constantly changing, and many urban scenes with the characteristics of the times are gradually withdrawing from the reality. Therefore, video recording has a cultural value beyond aesthetic expression. It can not only present the changing trajectory of urban space, but also preserve the life experience of ordinary people, so that the process of the macro era can enter the public's vision in a more specific, real and sensible way. Based on this, the article analyses urban image records, explores the actual value of image records from different levels, and analyses the visual expression of urban memory in combination with image scenes such as streets, characters and daily life. On this basis, it puts forward specific practical paths to preserve the real traces of urban development with the help of the lens, so that Urban stories gain the vitality of continuous dissemination in images.

Keywords

Urban images, memory of the times, photographic records, urban culture, humanistic temperature.

1. Introduction

The development of cities is mainly presented to people in the form of road widening, building renovation, traffic improvement and public space remodelling, but what can really make people have memories and emotional connections is often those seemingly ordinary details of life. A once familiar street, an old-fashioned vehicle passing through the city, a group of children playing in public spaces, and even a short stay of the elderly on the street, may become the imprint of life that cannot be duplicated in a particular era. The value of photography lies in this. It is not just a simple copy of the real landscape, but also preserves the living conditions behind the urban development through the relationship between composition, light, characters and environment. Especially black-and-white images, their simple visual texture can weaken the sense of distance brought by time, making the viewer more directly enter the historical scene. In the face of the spatial changes brought about by the rapid renewal of the city, video creators need to extend their observation eyes from the grand cityscape to the life scene of ordinary people. In the process of recording the appearance of the city, they pay attention to people's emotions, actions and life trajectories, so that urban images not only have historical record value, but also reflect social life. Temperature.

2. The Actual Value of the Development of the Era of Video Recording

2.1. The Changes of the Times that Fix the Development of Cities

Urban space has obvious characteristics of the times, and roads, buildings, means of transportation and public facilities in different eras will leave unique visual symbols. Photography can fix these changes in a specific moment, so that the original continuous urban development process has a visual node that can be watched repeatedly. The street pattern, public transportation and people's travel methods in the old city seem to be just a life background, but they can reflect the changes in a city's economic level, lifestyle and social structure[1-2]. Compared with written records, images can place characters and the environment in the same picture, so that the macro process of urban development can be linked to the living conditions of ordinary people. For example, the old image of the city in Figure 1 is an example. The streets, vehicles and pedestrians in the picture together form the urban scene of a specific period. With the continuous advancement of urban construction, these scenes gradually become historical memories that are difficult to reproduce. Photography thus assumes the responsibility of "preserving the present", making today's seemingly ordinary urban life an important basis for understanding urban changes in the future. For image creators, recording urban development should not only focus on objects with visual impact such as high-rise buildings and landmarks, but also observe the details of streets that are easily ignored, so that urban changes can present a more complete time dimension.



Figure 1. Walking Through the Snow Beneath the Old City Wall

2.2. Preserve the Historical Imprint of Urban Renewal

Urban renewal means that the spatial function and living environment are constantly adjusted. Old places may be transformed, and traditional lifestyles will also change. Image recording can leave a traceable visual basis for this change, so that the disappearing or changed urban space can continue to exist in public memory. For a city, it is not only landmark buildings that really

have memory value. Ordinary streets, old-fashioned facilities and life scenes also constitute an important part of urban culture. The old-fashioned vehicles, street figures and public scenes with a sense of age in the picture reflect the unique role of the image to preserve the historical imprint of the city. Although the objects in the picture have withdrawn from the real life of some people, they have regained the narrative value because of the retention of the image[3-4]. The viewer can feel the life atmosphere of a specific era from the vehicle shape, character outfit, space layout and other details. Urban renewal is no longer just a process of "replacing the old space by the new space", but a historical process that can be constantly looked back on through images. Photographers should establish a sense of long-term recording, continuously take pictures of changing neighbourhoods, buildings and public spaces, so that the visual differences before and after urban renewal can form a complete record, and provide intuitive materials for urban cultural research and local memory preservation.

2.3. Show the Humanistic Temperature of Ordinary Life

Urban memories ultimately need to be carried by specific people. Buildings will change, roads will be widened, and public facilities will be updated, but the emotional relationships and life states formed between people are often more likely to trigger memories. Images combine the actions, expressions and living environment of ordinary people, which can make the macro narrative of the times fall into specific life experience. In real life, the life images of the characters do not deliberately create grand scenes. The characters either stand, walk, or communicate around daily activities. It is these natural states that make the picture have a real life atmosphere. Such records do not pursue the special identity of the characters, but present the city through the living conditions of ordinary people. The temperature of society. The elderly, children, workers and neighbours in the camera can all become the narrators of urban stories. Their life trajectories and urban space are intertwined, forming the background of urban culture. Video creators should reduce the single pursuit of "typical characters", put their observation eyes on ordinary life, and record subtle emotions on the basis of respecting the true state of the characters, so that the photos can not only explain "what has changed in the city", but also answer "how people living in the city feel about this change". So as to enhance the humanistic value of urban images.

3. Urban Memory and the Temperature of the Times in the Lens

3.1. Feel the Urban Development from the Changes of Streets and Alleys

Streets and alleys are the most direct spatial carriers of urban life, and they are also important windows for observing urban changes. Compared with urban landmarks that have been planned and designed, ordinary streets and alleys are easier to retain the real traces of residents' lives. Their spatial form, commercial facilities, transportation and crowd activities can form a recognisable imprint of the times. After entering the streets, photographers can start from a specific location, integrate roads, buildings, shops and characters into the same picture, and find clues to urban changes in spatial relationships. The streets in the old photos may be crowded and simple, while new buildings, roads and public facilities may have appeared in the same location in the new image. After comparing the two sets of pictures, the trajectory of urban development will be clearer. Therefore, image recording should not stop at a single shooting, but should establish a continuous observation method to record representative neighbourhoods in stages[5-6]. Such shooting can transform urban development from abstract concepts into visible spatial changes, and also allow residents to reconnect their personal memories through familiar streets. For the dissemination of urban culture, the video narrative cut from the streets and alleys has a strong sense of closeness, and it is easier to form an urban memory with public participation.

3.2. Record the Temperature of Life from the Characters' Stories

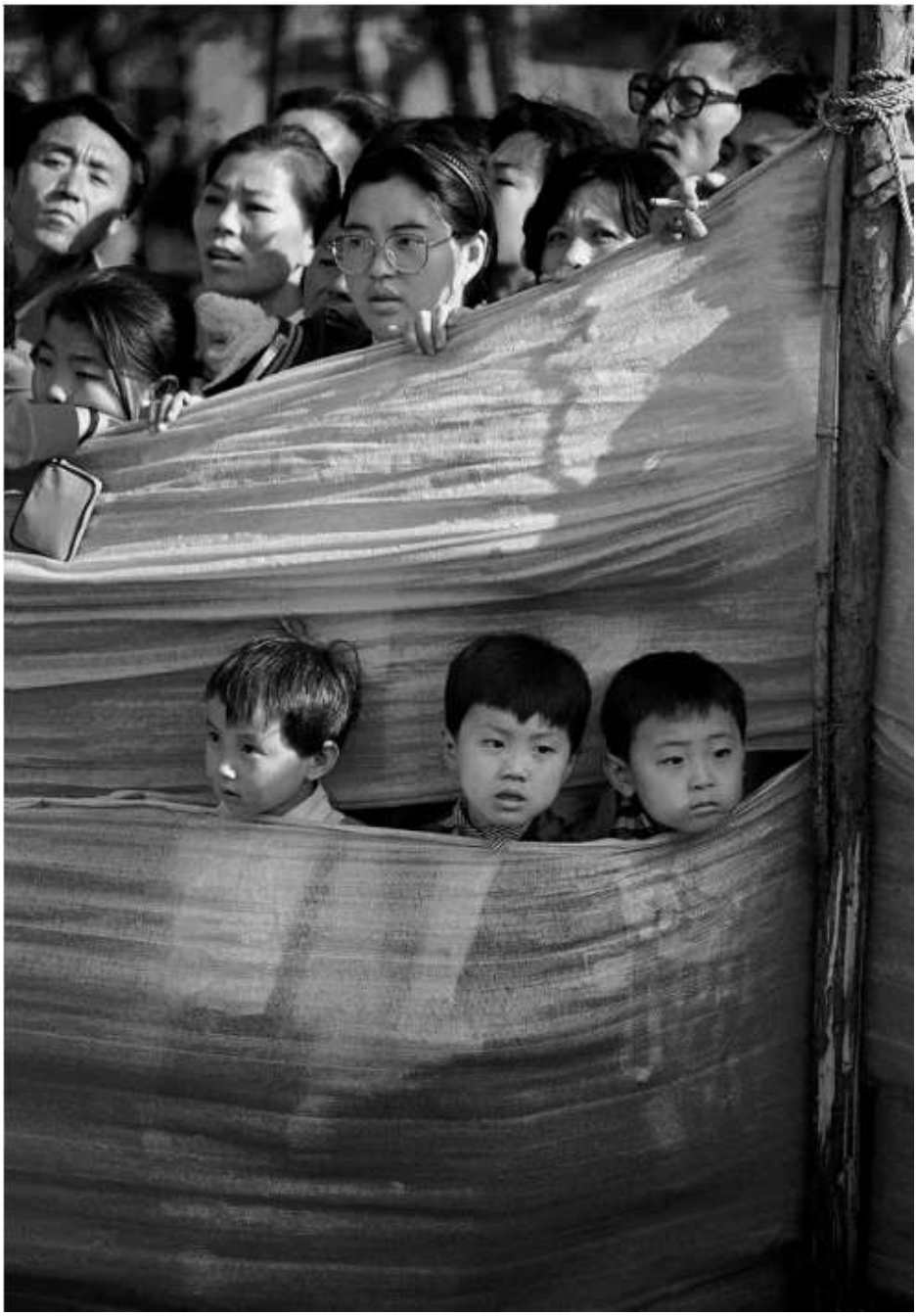


Figure 2. Three Children Find the Best View in the Crowd

Characters are the most emotionally infectious elements in urban images, and human actions can give static space a sense of life. Photographers focussing on characters does not mean that they only pursue dramatic moments. An action, a gaze, and a conversation in daily life are also of record value. Scenes such as children playing in public spaces, communication between the elderly, and workers taking a short break on the street can reflect the lifestyle of a specific period. As shown in Figure 2, multiple groups of character images present pictures of children, the elderly and ordinary citizens participating in daily activities. The characters are not shaped into abstract symbols, but maintain a state of life in the natural environment. The simple expression gives the images a strong sense of reality[7-8]. Photographers can build story clues around the characters and record the life changes of a family, a worker, a group of neighbours or even a community through continuous shooting, so that the story behind a single photo can

be extended. The value of the character story also lies in connecting personal memory and urban memory. When individual life is recorded, the history of urban development is no longer just macro data and construction achievements, but will present a more specific emotional appearance, so that the audience can feel the real impact of the changes of the times from the character's experience.

3.3. Retain the Memory of the Times from Daily Scenes

The most easily ignored daily scenes are often the most representative of the life texture of an era. The items people use, the ways of leisure, the neighbourhood relationship and the activities in the public space all have distinctive characteristics of the times. When these lifestyles gradually change with the development of society, images become an important way to preserve daily memories. Photographers can aim the camera at a chair, a bicycle, and a public activity space on the street. They can also record ordinary scenes such as children's games, the elderly resting, and residents talking. These contents do not have the form of grand narratives, but they can form the most detailed texture of urban memory. The scenes of children, the elderly and street activities in the picture reflect this kind of recording method of "seeing the times from a small place". The photo does not deliberately emphasise the achievements of urban construction, but allows the viewer to perceive the rhythm of life of a period through the natural relationship between the characters and the environment. The continuous accumulation of daily images can also form visual archives with local characteristics, so that people in the future not only know how a city was built, but also how people at that time lived, interacted, and used public spaces. Photography records realised the extension from preserving the landscape to preserving life.

4. The Practical Path of Telling the City Story with the Lens

4.1. Go Deep into the City Scene to Capture the Real Moment

The vitality of urban images comes from the real scene. Only when entering a specific living space can we find details with the value of the times. Photographers need to establish a sense of long-term observation, avoid focussing on shooting only when major events or cityscapes change, but integrate records into daily life, and familiarise themselves with the neighbourhood environment and character status through repeated visits. During the shooting process, observation routes can be established according to the spatial characteristics of different areas, and the old city, commercial streets, residential communities, public transportation stations, etc. can be continuously recorded, so that different areas can form complementary image materials[9]. The real moment often does not take the initiative to find the lens. It may appear on the street on a rainy day, or it may occur between the brief communication between residents. Therefore, photographers need to be patient and wait for expressive pictures without interfering with the normal life of the characters. In some street images, this live recording method is reflected. There are no obvious traces of posing between the characters and the environment, so the picture retains a strong sense of life. Deep into the scene also means respecting the complexity of the city itself, not only shooting the neat and beautiful side, but also recording ordinary neighbourhoods and real life, so that the city image can present a more complete social picture.

4.2. Focus on Ordinary People to Dig up Emotional Stories

Urban stories need characters to tell. Although the life experience of ordinary people is ordinary, it can refract social changes and the development of the times. Video creators can carry out long-term observation around community residents, workers, the elderly, children and other groups, and find shooting themes with emotional value through the life trajectory of the characters. As shown in Table 1, different character groups have different record focusses.

Children can pay attention to the game style and growth environment, the elderly can observe their connection with the community space, and workers can capture life moments from work scenes and daily states. Character records should not stay at the level of portrait presentation, but should also combine characters with living environment, family relationships and professional status to form a more complete image narrative. Continuous records can further present the connection between the life trajectory of characters and changes in urban space, so that personal memory can be naturally transformed into urban memory, and enhance the humanistic temperature and emotional power of urban images.

Table 1. Main Points of Attention in Photographing People

Subject	What to Observe	Approach	Emotional Value
Community residents	Daily life and neighbourly relations	Follow everyday activities over time	Show the warmth of community life
Children	Ways of playing and environments for growth	Capture natural moments from daily life	Preserve memories of growing up
Older people	Living conditions and ties to the community	Record interaction with the everyday environment	Retain memories shaped over time
Workers	Workplaces and conditions of daily life	Focus on genuine moments of labour	Show the strength within ordinary life
Ordinary people	Personal experience and spatial change	Build a sustained photographic record	Connect personal and urban memory

4.3. Pay Attention to the Formation of Continuous Records of Urban Changes

Urban memory has obvious time attributes. A single photo can save the moment, but it is difficult to fully present the process of urban change. The establishment of a continuous recording mechanism can make the same place, the same person or the same life scene form an image contrast at different time nodes, so as to present the trajectory of urban development more clearly. Photographers can choose representative streets, communities and public spaces as fixed subjects, maintain a relatively stable shooting angle in different seasons and years, and sort out the time, place and character information of the image. After long-term accumulation, the originally scattered photos can form visual archives with time clues. For urban renewal projects, spatial changes can be recorded before, during and after the transformation respectively, and the processes of building demolition, construction and environmental improvement can be linked to changes in residents' lives; for ordinary people, growth, relocation, career changes and other life trajectories can be recorded through stage portraits and life scenes[10]. The value of continuous recording is to make the image move from "instant preservation" to "process witness", so that the time scale of urban development is connected with the time scale of personal life, and leaves more complete and continuous visual evidence for urban memory.

5. Conclusion

Cities are constantly being built and updated, and many familiar streets, buildings, means of transportation and lifestyles will gradually change, and photography can transform these changes into visual materials that can be saved, watched and disseminated, so that the fleeting life can instantly become sustainable. Really vital urban images should not only focus on

magnificent buildings and urban landmarks, but also need to take the camera deep into the streets, communities and the life scene of ordinary people, and find details with the significance of the times from ordinary scenes. Video creators should maintain the attitude of real recording, form continuous urban visual archives through long-term shooting, and expand the communication space with the help of digital media, so that more people can participate in the joint preservation of urban memories. In this way, the lens leaves not only the image of a certain place and a certain moment, but also the emotional traces left by a city in people's lives. The times are moving forward, and those carefully recorded ordinary lives will also become the most warm memories in the history of the city.

References

[1] Arnold, E. (2019). Aesthetic practices of psychogeography and photography. *Geography Compass*, 13(2), e12419. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12419

[2] Boyer, M. C. (1994). *The city of collective memory: Its historical imagery and architectural entertainments*. MIT Press.

[3] Erfani, G. (2021). Visualising urban redevelopment: Photovoice as a narrative research method for investigating redevelopment processes and outcomes. *Geoforum*, 126, 80–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.07.021

[4] Hayden, D. (1995). *The power of place: Urban landscapes as public history*. MIT Press.

[5] Huyssen, A. (2003). *Present pasts: Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*. Stanford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503620308

[6] Lynch, K. (1960). *The image of the city*. MIT Press.

[7] Moore, G., Croxford, B., Adams, M., Refaee, M., Cox, T. J., & Sharples, S. (2008). The photo-survey research method: Capturing life in the city. *Visual Studies*, 23(1), 50–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860801908536

[8] Pauwels, L. (2016). Visually researching and communicating the city: A systematic assessment of methods and resources. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 1309–1330.

[9] Pink, S. (2011). Amateur photographic practice, collective representation and the constitution of place. *Visual Studies*, 26(2), 92–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2011.571884

[10] Tormey, J. (2013). *Cities and photography*. Routledge.