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People, Labor and Policy, Living and working

Preface

“Waiting for Godot”

Samuel Beckett’s masterpiece “Waiting for Godot” unfolds its narrative against the backdrop of a bleak world, depicting a period in modern history where contemporary and past traumas are laid bare and exposed (Beckett, Knowlson, McMillan, 2019). In the context of an imminent crisis that threatens the very nature of human existence, people are forced to think about the primary conditions required to begin a meaningful and purposeful existence.

When everything happened in silence and desolation, people began to think and explore a situation - meeting the needs of human life under the lowest conditions. In other words, when humans have to be faced with ruins, how to start building their own homes has become thinking across history.

Today, in some respects, this effort primarily involves establishing communication channels and promoting harmonious coexistence with others. In this case, the other represents an external entity or person with whom a concerted effort must be made to communicate despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles that may prevent such communication. This contact marks a crucial step in reigniting the embers of human interaction and understanding in a world rife with isolation and alienation.

Collective housing, shared bedrooms, collective production, and close connections with life seem to be among the many attempts by architects to re-establish connections between “ruins.” Today, the fragmented life and production are not manifestations of “ruins.” Life and production are almost forcibly divided. However, in an organic country house, the underlying collective bond can establish communication and promote harmonious coexistence with others. Furthermore, those rural collectives that survived the wave of urbanization seem to be forgotten by everyone, even themselves.

Therefore, the journey of rejuvenation requires an equally profound effort to communicate and coexist with the “other” within us. Like a self-revolution from country to city, this inner

state is a mysterious and dark realm, whole of repressed desires, buried fears, long-forgotten emotions, and primitive instincts. It is the habitat of our existence's animalistic and divine aspects, where the seeds of madness, dreams, delirium, and nightmares take root and flourish. The countryside is seen as the first remote point of human origin or as a nature rather than a product.

Perhaps, in thinking about these dilemmas, we must explore an alternative path to liberating human existence. Is it possible to imagine a state beyond the traditional boundaries of "inside" and "outside"? Can we work to reconcile these dichotomies without tearing down the metaphorical walls that separate our inner and outer worlds? These inquiries, shrouded in ambiguity, provoke contemplation as we move through the intricate thematic tapestry Beckett weaves in *Waiting for Godot*.

Introduction

The interaction between urban and rural areas has long attracted the attention of architects, scholars, and policymakers around the globe and has become the focus of various stages of the urbanization process in various countries. With its massive urbanization process, China has received global attention in many ways. Amid this transformation, according to this project's preliminary investigation, the massive urban development and city planning that has mushroomed in China over the past four decades has often erased, transformed, or neglected the original vivid rural landscape under the influence of substantive political mechanisms. In China's urbanization process, the spatial configuration and texture of the urban and rural landscapes, the industrial configuration, and the interdependence of their functions have significantly impacted this process (Sam, 2021). In this context, the relationship between urban and rural areas in contemporary China is undergoing profound changes. In this project, through in-depth descriptions and comparisons of urban texture and systematic combing of history, the influence and embodiment of political power in cities or neighborhoods is reflected by demonstrating different spatial textures and compositions or organizations.

The phenomenon of policy-driven spatial development and field, and the formation logic and space behind it, is one perspective that this project focuses on. This project profoundly explores the intricate interactions between urban and rural areas in China's ongoing

urbanization process, especially in rural areas facing urban development. In the early stages of development, the countryside was China's economic and political engine, and many industries were located in the vast rural areas. However, after the 1990s, due to policy issues, cities became the main battleground for China's development (Sam, 2021). By examining the significant changes in this relationship at the spatial, economic, and political levels, this project aims to shed light on the transformative shifts and sustained development that have shaped the urban-rural landscape of contemporary China. Through this exploration, we seek to understand how urbanization has redefined the dynamic relationship between urban and rural areas and extended its impacts on the lives of citizens and the broader socio-economic sphere.

On the other hand, the authority of the political instruments of government is also reflected in the planning and status of urban and rural spaces. At the same time, the rights of the aforementioned parties greatly influence people's lives. This influence extends to areas of livelihood such as production and distribution of the means of production, allocation of resources, distribution of benefits, housing, and employment. China's unique socialist state context determines that government and policy play a considerable role in development that cannot be ignored (Sam, 2021). In the project, different divisions of labor among different industries resulting from differences in productivity and means of production naturally create spaces of diverse forms.

The relationship and contradiction between the productive forces and the means of production, which is the basis of social formation, affects and determines the way of production and life of people, especially the laborers; on the other hand, based on the productive forces, laborers, and production profits, and in response to the fair way of distribution (Lefebvre, 2009), the project puts forward the argument that the space is also a kind of distribution and tries to explore further the relationship between the production and life of the laborers in different industries and the space they require. On the other hand, based on productivity, labor, and production profit, the project argues that space is also a form of distribution and tries to further explore a more reasonable and suitable relationship between the production life of workers in different industries and the space they need.

Literature Review

The urban grid: the embodiment of political rights and the space in its context

Lefebvre's seminal work laid the foundation for understanding the power dynamics inherent in urban space. He argues that in capitalist societies, the means of production, including the space in which production occurs, are controlled by capitalists, while workers create the products of their labor. This power dynamic, rooted in wealth accumulation, produces a stark contradiction between creative labor and its beneficiaries. Lefebvre's insights suggest that a large part of production depends on natural resources, including labor and rural space, which are considered manifestations of nature. In contrast, urban centers are products of human production, distinct from the natural world.

Urban space is carefully planned and organized under the control of political authorities to create distinct categories of social space. These spaces are neither exclusively urban nor exclusively rural and appear disconnected from production and production processes. Such spaces have many manifestations within the confines of the project's research site, which the project tentatively refers to as ruins formed in an urban grid propelled by political power.

Vittorio extends this argument by emphasizing the role of the urban grid in shaping the urban landscape. Urban grids represent premeditated spatial divisions influenced by political and economic forces, including profit distribution, resource allocation, and private property ownership. The interplay between labor, time, and land within these grids is critical to understanding changes in the urban fabric and the dynamics of power or policy.

Vittorio's study of the urban grid highlights its parallels with historical colonial behavior. The concept can be traced back to ancient Egypt, where meticulous urban planning expressed political power. Unlike the gradual development of rural areas, urban colonization occurred quickly, forming different classes within the urban grid. Infrastructure, public services, private assets, religious institutions, markets, and intersections coexisted, creating a complex network of social and spatial relations.

Legal norms and territorial boundaries become prominent in the urban grid, with walls, fences, and borders protecting private property and institutional authority. Vittorio's concept of urban islands emphasizes the economic maximization strategies and political decisions inherent in the development of urban power. The islands represent distinct zones with varying access, use, and ownership degrees, further reinforcing power dynamics within urban space.

Comparing the West and China: Workers' Lives and Production

Jacoby and Cheng provide a unique perspective by comparing Western and Chinese approaches to urban planning through the lens of collective housing. They argue that Western urban planning emphasizes abstract and conceptual public spaces primarily serving the capitalist ruling class. In contrast, the Chinese approach focuses on concrete spatial transformations in which specific spaces belong directly to populations within defined boundaries. This approach is based, on the one hand, on the unique Chinese socialist state context and the worker as a class subject, and on the other hand, on the decision to derive from the network of acquaintances and common thinking of people from the same era who are closely connected due to blood, work, commune, and enterprise, and not only relying on legal frameworks.

Collective spaces in China embody a different governance model emphasizing the people's role as masters. This approach highlights Chinese society's delicate relationship between individuals and social groups. Cheng's interdisciplinary urban design perspective reveals the complexity of spatial organization in China and its potential to inform the construction of urban networks. In Cheng's historical study, a comparison of the historical development of collective space in China illustrates the changing relationship between the production and life of Chinese workers as the understanding of the subject of power and the dynamics of policy evolved from close integration to enforced separation; and, at the same time, from the worker as the subject of the appropriator of the means of production to the capitalist's control of both the productive forces and the means of production. Under such dynamic changes in power and policy, space as a direct manifestation illustrates a profound change in social distribution.

The urban grid and examining workers' homes and factories as instruments of control, colonization, and social transformation reveal the complex interplay between power, space, and social organization in the urban environment. Lefebvre's critique of capitalist power dynamics and Vittorio's exploration of the urban grid as a form of colonization provide valuable insights into the shaping of urban space. In addition, the comparative analysis of Western and Chinese approaches to urban planning presented by Jacoby and Cheng emphasizes the diversity of spatial configurations and their impact on governance and social norms.

As we delve into the dynamics of urban space and its evolution, we must recognize the

multifaceted nature of power, spatial control, and society.

Case study: People's Commune

The people's commune was a major early attempt at socialist transformation in China, which grew out of the task forces of the Great Leap Forward (Lu, 2006). Initially divided into rural and urban communes, the urban commune developed into a Chinese unit as China industrialized. The people's commune then played a massive role in the development of production during the late Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution and is also seen as an architectural space for thinking and experimenting with the realization of communism in China.

The People's Commune was designed and built with detailed and responsive collective regulatory guidelines proposed by the central government. In this program, the central government divides the daily life of the commune into four sections: the political system, the housing program, the educational facilities, and the public facilities, with the four sections as the main directions, and under each direction, there are two to five specific expressions, clearly stating the ratio of the area of construction and the ratio of the per capita for each type of facility. (Lu, 2006) University professors and students were the leading designers, and the representatives of the construction collectives carried out the design based on the guidelines issued by the central government. (Lu, 2006)

The form of the people's commune fully embodies the critical elements of communism: collectivity and sharing. The commune consists mainly of a production area and a residential area, with large factories in the production area as collective production areas. The residential areas have different housing types and public services, including single apartments and family suites. Only the bedrooms are private in these apartments and suites, while the rest of the space is shared with other residents. Such spaces are seen as a response to communal living, and people use these spaces to illustrate their passion and desire for communal living.

There are also public services within the living area that fulfill the basic needs of life. These public services are built and used collectively by the collective and do not belong to a specific individual. These include, but are not limited to, administrative offices, police stations, fire stations, medical and childcare facilities, nursing homes, schools, postal and telegraph

offices, banks, shopping malls, passenger terminals, etc., which are also designed and built for the use of the workers in the area. (Lu, 2006)

Conclusion

In the shadow of Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," a profound exploration of the human condition in a world marked by desolation and isolation, we journeyed through the intricate intersections of urban and rural dynamics in contemporary China. As our essay unfolded, we traced the threads of power, policy, production, and life, weaving together a narrative that unveils the multifaceted landscape of urbanization and its profound impacts on society.

Henri Lefebvre's groundbreaking insights into urban space as a battleground of power dynamics served as our compass, guiding us through the labyrinthine urban grids that shape our world. Lefebvre's assertion that the means of production, including the spaces where production unfolds, are controlled by capitalists while workers labor to create the products of their efforts revealed a stark contradiction at the heart of contemporary society. This contradiction, rooted in wealth accumulation, brings to light the critical role of natural resources, labor, and rural spaces in the production process, juxtaposed with the emergence of urban centers as products of human creation.

Our exploration further illuminated how urban spaces, meticulously planned and organized by political authorities, give rise to a unique category of social spaces. These spaces, neither thoroughly urban nor entirely rural, seemed disconnected from the creation and production processes. Within this context, Pier Vittorio Aureli's work extended our understanding, emphasizing the role of urban grids in shaping the urban landscape. Urban grids, as Vittorio posited, represent premeditated spatial divisions influenced by political and economic forces, including profit distribution, resource allocation, and private property ownership. Within this intricate framework of grids, we uncovered the intricate interplay between labor, time, and land, central to understanding the evolution of the urban fabric and the dynamics of power and policy.

Vittorio explored the concept of urban grids as a form of colonization, evoking parallels with historical acts of conquest. In contrast to the gradual progression of rural regions, the rapid development of urban areas led to the emergence of distinct social classes within the urban grid.

Infrastructure, public services, private assets, religious institutions, markets, and intersections converged, creating a complex web of social and spatial relationships. Legal norms and territorial boundaries assumed prominence within the urban grid, guarding private property and institutional authority. Vittorio's concept of urban islands underscored economic strategies and political decisions, manifesting as distinct zones with varying access, use, and ownership.

In parallel, the comparative analysis presented by Jacoby and Cheng offered a unique perspective, juxtaposing Western and Chinese approaches to urban planning. Their critique of Western urban planning, which emphasizes abstract and conceptual public spaces primarily serving the capitalist ruling class, was counterbalanced by examining the Chinese approach. The Chinese model, rooted in concrete spatial transformations and collective ownership, emphasized the people as the country's rulers. This approach underscored the delicate relationship between individuals and social groups, with shared thinking and networks forming the basis of spatial organization.

As we navigated this intricate thematic tapestry, we uncovered the profound interplay between power, space, and societal organization within the urban environment. As a symbol of control, colonization, and social transformation, the urban grid emerged as a powerful lens through which to understand the complex dynamics shaping our cities. From Lefebvre's critique of capitalist power dynamics to Vittorio's exploration of urban grids as forms of colonization, our journey unveiled the intricate processes that mold urban spaces.

In conclusion, our exploration reminds us that the urban-rural dynamic in contemporary China is undergoing profound changes, shaped by the interplay of power, policy, production, and life. As we grapple with the evolving landscape of urbanization, it is crucial to recognize that the multifaceted nature of power, spatial control, and society requires nuanced and thoughtful approaches to address the complex challenges of our urban world. By unraveling the threads of urban and rural dynamics, we can hope to forge a path toward a more harmonious and equitable coexistence in the urban landscapes of tomorrow.

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