Re-politicizing the urban

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RE-POLITICIZING THE URBAN

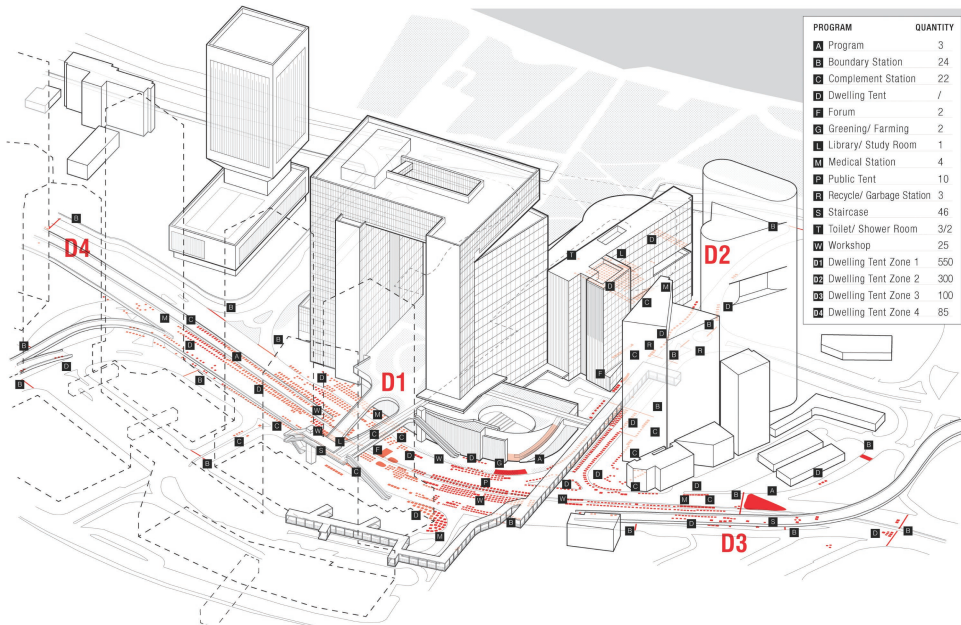## Commoning technicities in Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement

Gerhard Bruyns and Stavros Kousoulas

Introduction

Formally called "Occupy Central with Love and Peace" the 2014 Umbrella Movement was a civil undertaking that dominated Hong Kong's urban landscape for a period of 81 days. This period of unrest expressed a collective spatial claim across the entire Hong Kong territory. With the streets as the primary medium of protest, the protesters barricaded bridges, flyovers and any available form of accessible spaces within their collective and material body of protest (Figure 4.1). Using the umbrella as a symbol of passive resistance, the 50,000-member strong sit-in corroborated both social and material collective, developing in-situ functions, structures and services in support of those who voice dismay. The extraction of political debate away from the private realm, from the containment of a widespread interiority, brought political difference within the urban arteries of the world's third densest city.

More than a description of what occurred throughout these 81 days, this chapter will approach the Umbrella Movement as a problem-posing event: what problem was enunciated and how did the Umbrella Movement respond to it and transform it. To this end, we will approach commoning practices as processes of re-politicizing urban space. To qualify this, we will side with philosopher Brian Massumi and claim that the political is to be understood as that which is at once both collective and futural.[1] To support this claim, we will examine the material realities that catalyzed the Umbrella Movement by focusing on four key aspects. First, we will outline the premise of collective actions and the discourse of the commons by suggesting an alternative reading of commoning practices that does not focus on ideological drives and binaries but rather on the affective capacities that can produce a collective. Second, we will link the emergence of commoning practices to the spatial particularities of territories and in this case, Hong Kong's Special Administrative Region. By connecting this with Deleuze's and Guattari's understanding of territorialization processes, we will pave the way for an understanding of urban space that challenges the binary between the interior and the exterior, the private and the public.[2]

Consequently, following philosopher Gilbert Simondon, we will explore the notions of interiority and exteriority, not as fixed spatial terms but as animated and interchangeable conditions whereby culture and technology merge to allow for the (un)folding of affective and transformative practices of commoning technicities.[3] Finally, through a folded and membranic

PROGRAM	QUANTITY
A Program	3
B Boundary Station	24
C Complement Station	22
D Dwelling Tent	/
F Forum	2
G Greening/ Farming	2
L Library/ Study Room	1
M Medical Station	4
P Public Tent	10
R Recycle/ Garbage Station	3
S Staircase	46
T Toilet/ Shower Room	3/2
W Workshop	25
D1 Dwelling Tent Zone 1	550
D2 Dwelling Tent Zone 2	300
D3 Dwelling Tent Zone 3	100
D4 Dwelling Tent Zone 4	85

PROGRAMS DISTRIBUTION IN UMBRELLA MOVEMENT

Figure 4.1   The 2014 Umbrella Movement's programmatic distribution and its spatial tactics. Surveyed at the time of the protest, the image places the various sit-ins and encampments in the context of Hong Kong's Admiralty area. The spatial programs vary between art creations, greening, library, study rooms, medical station, ablutions and public tents. Map by Kaka Ko, 2014.

understanding of the relation between the interior and the exterior, we will posit the importance of the Umbrella Movement as an urban event. In other words, we will claim that the Umbrella Movement and its commoning technicities effectively challenged a profound interiority, an extensive privatization that captures all forms of urban life and prioritizes solely what is of an isolated interest to one alone. As such, we will highlight the significance of the Umbrella Movement in its attempt to re-politicize the urban by opening to the potential of collective formations through bringing an interiorized past in touch with an exteriorized future.

Affective collectivity

The 2014 protests in Hong Kong were a city-wide social undertaking against the lack of universal sufferance. With more than 100,000 people at its peak, the gathering of crowds was a reactionary measure against suggested voting reforms to elect, as well as pre-vet, the city's Chief Executive. Termed the Umbrella Movement, the focus of the protests aimed at obstructing any form of pedestrianized and freely accessible space. Spanning nearly three months, the streets, pedestrian walkways and flyoversbecame facilitators of protest, used for rallying the masses, arranging sit-ins, installing obstacles across thoroughfares, whilst erecting makeshift student centers, medical centers and in-situ sleeping quarters. What for some appeared to be social unrest in specific locales of the city, in effect was a broad movement, delivering a decisive blow to the daily operations of a global financial center. Moreover, the Umbrella Movement highlights two key concerns related to both social and

urban spaces. First, the movement represented an "accessible to all" character, an instance of comprehensive social inclusion irrespective of rank or financial background in a city driven by economic status. Second, given Hong Kong's standing as one of the densest cities globally, the movement as a collective urban action exposed the profoundly privatized character of the city, whether enforced by government, developers or multi-national conglomerates in control of public amenities.

For Hong Kong, the wide-ranging privatization of space distorts both the *rights to* and *inclusion of* the individual, groups and social movements in spatial settings. Within Hong Kong, this involves many and diverse levels. First, Hong Kong, globally ranked fourth on the urban density register, is known as an environment with a general lack of usable space. Second, its developmental model relies on the mechanization of podium structures; extracting urban space from the collective civic surface – the streets – and repositioning it within "part public" and "part private" domains. Third, podium complexes – box-shaped multi-storey building bases that incorporate diverse functions – fragment the urban, compressing urban life onto constrained and highly regulated levels that are mostly elevated and therefore separated from the street.[4] The consequence is the sharp detachment of urban life from the urban space itself, leading to a reformulation of the political in all its collective claims, practices and expressions as a fully interiorized condition.

Consequently, this is one of the first problems that the Umbrella Movement poses: how can we understand the politicization of urban space beyond the binaries of private and public, accessible and non-accessible, interior and exterior? It is the failure of the public as a critical category – which in the case of Hong Kong is more than a conceptual caprice but rather the actual reality of urban life – that demands an understanding which can offer a much more nuanced account of the diverse, heterogeneous and at times contradicting "in-between" conditions of urban life that resist binary logics. At first glance, commoning practices succeed in doing so. From more traditional accounts of the commons like those of Ivan Illich and Elinor Ostrom (who understand the commons as an issue of governance) to Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's "Commonwealth" (who approach the commons as an alternative to the concept of property) or the more contemporary work of Stavros Stavrides (who conceptualizes commoning as a threshold of transformative potential), commoning practices – despite the different approaches to them – provide a viable alternative account on issues of urban struggles, seemingly avoiding the dangers of any stiff categorization.[5] In other words, approaches that understand the production of the urban as an ongoing collective "struggle" have the potential to indeed shed light upon it much more than just reformulating assuring yet stale dichotomies.[6] Nonetheless, we will claim that perhaps there is something flawed in the ways that the commons and commoning practices are utilized in current accounts of urban life.

To do so, we will turn to a figure that is not usually associated with the discourse on the commons: philosopher John Dewey. Dewey's concept of "conjoint action" refers to the emergence of a public and its capacity to produce multiple effects from the continuously generative field of shared and collective practices.[7] What is crucial for our account is that Dewey understands the emergence of a public as the emergent response to a shared problem. Following philosopher Jane Bennett on her understanding of Dewey's theory, we can find a way out of paralyzing binaries whilst also pluralizing the discussion on the emergence of commons and their consequent political agency to a degree that no longer refers only to human collectives. Collectivity, following Dewey and Bennett, becomes transversal, promoting an account of the urban that includes humans, non-humans and everything in between (or what we will soon define as technicities). Bennett's position is that conjoint actions – when understood

transversally as always more-than-human – effectively modulate what is "possible" when approaching the public as a confederation of spatial bodies.[8] Put succinctly, a confederation of bodies, a collective, is never just a voluntary association; a collective is always produced by a common threat that over time constitutes a common problem.[9]

As such, a public emerges as a response to a particular problem, while the set of practices it develops are attempts to approach the problem, transform it and eventually reformulate it – one could say to problematize it even further. Therefore, a public, or better said, a collective, is a contingent, temporary and heterogeneous assemblage: not simply a gathering, an aggregate of individuals but rather an emergent whole with its own distinctive properties that are more than the sum of its parts.[10] The Umbrella Movement was a collective that emerged, acted and dissolved; in its duration, however, it managed to both transform and pose a novel problem; a problem that despite being local and specific, opened to a wider field of urban problems. Therefore, it is still relevant to speak about the Umbrella Movement precisely because we all share the problem that it posed. The similarities it might have with other movements and urban protests (from the Occupy Movement in the United States to 15-M in Spain and the Syntagma Square Indignant Movement in Greece) are, above all, similar and complex ways of treating urban problems: occupying urban spaces of symbolic financial or administrative power to (supposedly) seize and redirect that power itself. However, this is where the Umbrella Movement differs since its focus was never on one specific urban space but rather on the entirety of the urban space itself. In this sense, the Umbrella Movement highlights more than other comparable urban protests that the field of political actions and their practices are always relational. Bodies of the public are formed and later dissolved because of the effects they share: how to affect and be affected, what they can do and what is done to them when they come into a relation with each other and with urban space itself.[11]

Therefore, an effective account of commoning exposes just where most traditional accounts of the commons – like those of Illich, Ostrom, Hardt, Negri and even Stavrides – fall short: they treat those processes as "always-has-been," as consolidated, static instances of the past. In other words, they always function retrospectively, trying to explain away the complexity of the lived presence, of experience itself, in favor of an account that, despite being more "digestible," is not precise. As such, most traditional accounts of the commons constantly refer to "ideas" and "ideology": "they" chose to do so because "they" are part of the left/right/center. It is this reduction of the social to fixed forms that remains the basic error; taking terms of analysis as terms of substance.[12] What we propose is an account that examines commoning processes in terms of the affective power, the affective capacities that manage to indeed produce a collective public. In addition, we will claim that this alone is not enough: one needs to understand how these capacities are themselves produced, not as a result of ideological drives alone, but rather as a complex territorial assemblage of technicities.

The expressive and the possessive

As a city-state with the "Special Administrative Region" status, the reliance on the Chinese Mainland's financial systems, production services, consumption, infrastructure, tourism and labor force has helped sustain Hong Kong's future position in the global market.[13] Hong Kong has remained in constant oscillation through a geopolitical tension – a British-derived and Chinese-affiliated context that is "part of" and "separated from" British-Sino urbanization processes.[14] Geographer George C. S. Lin further elaborates on the interdependencies of this unique Hong Kong-Chinese spatial-economic system, outlining the interdependencies

of the Chinese economy that thrives on a land-centered urbanization model, feeding of land acquisition, development and the speculative nature of the property market, all for the pursuit of revenue.[15]

Planning wise, British directives steered clear from prescribing any socially specific planning framework. The Colonial Outline Plan, enforced between 1965 and 1974, was seen by many as a policy of "indirect rule." Indirect planning policies lacked in providing essential services to both locals and colonial expatriates equally. Colonial rule accentuated economic development first and foremost. Its understanding of the social dimension avoided articulating a socio-spatial guideline with the specific purpose of benefiting indigenous communities. This initiated a monopolization of the spatial system. Commencing in 1841, all land ownership was retained by the Colonial Office, monopolizing both the use and users of the land. With leasing periods ranging between 75 and 99 years, the Crown Coffer generated substantial incomes through rental and rate taxations.[16] The copyright held over space de facto exercised socio-spatial control. A gradual increase in population rates, the lack of housing and overcrowded colonial centers characterized a social model that produced architectural alternatives – often called "warehouses of the laboring class" – without focusing on immediate social concerns or their broader urban effect.[17]

Within the social dimension alone, indirect rule resulted in the segregation of ethnic groups. The classification of urban settlements into either Chinese or European quarters with limited spatial directives guaranteed the closeness of ethnic clusters, often with intangible boundaries. For social anthropologist Philip Mar, Hong Kong's rapid and succinct urbanization forced society into constant improvisation.[18] The combination of a general lack of lived space and excessive economic pressure meant a continued process of socio-spatial adaption. Piece-meal and ad hoc conditions typified survival practices, for families, groups and individuals in both private and public space.[19] In other words, Hong Kong's planning systems remain, since its conception, uneven and fragmented. Still, working within the very same legacy of planning, Hong Kong's current planning is strategized over two tiers: first, territorial (in the conventional, scalar understanding of the term) and second, sub-regional scales. While planning at a larger scale addresses the regional dimension of development, the omission of a social strategy linked to specific planning themes remains a clear oversight. The exclusion within planning to allow for scenarios to rationalize the social, deployed in either spatial and economic domains, deliberately bypasses the importance of the collective in both higher and lower scales of planning.

Instead, what we propose is to develop an account that questions the established approaches concerning both the social and the territory, especially in the case of Hong Kong. We understand the social as a diverse population of collectives that form on the basis of a common threat and a shared affectivity. Now we focus on a different understanding of the territory, one that expands it beyond issues of planning and scale alone. Political theorist and geographer Stuart Elden has pointed to the insufficiency of the term, claiming that the territory should be understood in terms of its relation to space rather than being constantly relegated to definitions that assign it to state planning or a discussion on border delineations.[20] In this regard, Elden suggests that perhaps we can understand the territory as "a political technology of land measure and terrain control."[21] While we fully subscribe to Elden's plea of approaching the territory as a political technology, we wish to complement what this political technology entails: more than an issue of measurement and control, we will rely on Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's understanding of the term and claim that the territory is a technology of expression and possession that operates in a fundamentally

non-scalar manner.[22] Moreover, when the territory is no longer connected with issues of scale and administrative planning, its importance literally transverses all levels of urban life.

Space is not yet territory; something occurs, something is at play when space transforms into a territory. From the branch of the tree that a bird resides in to the house that we live in and the street we wish to occupy, none of these have an "owner" unless an act of expression unfolds. In other words, the possessive is in primary relation to the expressive.[23] All forms of expression, from a bird's nest to a barricade on a street, constitute a fundamental form of possession. If space gains a certain level of consistency through the rhythms of the lived presence, a territory is created through forms of expression that affect and transform space itself, making it one's own in the process: each territory has an "owner" that through expressive acts has claimed it and possessed it. As such, any process of territorialization is an "act of a rhythm that has become expressive, or of milieu components that have become qualitative."[24] From the quantitative aggregate of individuals in space to the qualitative emergence of "their" territory.

Therefore, as we will see in the case of the Umbrella Movement, the act of occupying a street (a space that is called public only in legislative terms) involves a simultaneous deterritorialization and reterritorialization: what used to be a function becomes an expression, subsequently transformed into a function of another order. The function of the street is transformed to the expression of a territorial claim, while at the same instance, this expression is transformed and pluralized to myriad other functions that re-introduce the political in the form of a collective enunciation. This constant process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization affirms why a territory should be understood as a verb: to re/de/territorialize by deploying a political technology (what we will soon define as a collective, commoning technicity) that determines both the qualities of the territory itself, but crucially, of the subject that enacts it.

As such, the territory becomes fundamental in the production of subjectivity. The potential for heterogeneous territorial claims – or the absence thereof – determines what kind of urban subjectivities will unfold. In the case of Hong Kong's "territoriality," it becomes apparent that what is at play is a profound lack on behalf of its inhabitants for the capacity to possess as well as to express a (novel) territory. What is simply described as a lack of space, what is plainly advocated as urban density, is something with far more reaching consequences: in Hong Kong, one witnesses an absolute perversion, a fundamental distortion of the boundaries between the interior and the exterior. However, it is not a perversion that can open the radical potentiality of "another" future, a redistributing of the limits between the interior and the exterior in all their instances – from the body itself to the overcrowded apartment buildings, to the empty flyovers. It is rather a perversion that has as an effect the collapse of both the interior and the exterior to a stale, normalized, ready-to-consume model of privatized subjectivity, in terms of both its political and libidinal economies. We will claim that the Umbrella Movement developed political technologies – or, better said, technicities – to enunciate a territorial claim that would not only demand an interior and an exterior but also the power to disrupt at will the limits, edges and transitions between the two.

The inside of the outside

Three characteristics typify Hong Kong's urban conditions: severe compactness, three-dimensional hybridity of its public-private spatial landscape and socio-spatial conditions of adjacency. Furthermore, with the China-orientated focus on urban development, Hong Kong's financial models depend on global trade and neoliberal protocols. Hong Kong is

dependent on hyper-consumerism that fuels material excessiveness, amalgamated through the vertical layering of infrastructure in an already overly dense setting. The historical development of high-rise dwelling models in the Canton region of China and in Hong Kong is rooted in the Tong Lau building typology.[25] The Tong Lau typologies typify the most basic Hong Kong housing unit. As a dwelling type, it has influenced most subsequent dwelling types, setting the minimum spatial and layout standards used until today. Drawing from the availability of material, customs and living standards, the Tong Lau shophouse has homogenized the space in which urban life has played out since the 19th century in its 700 ft^2 (65 m^2) floor spaces.

Beyond its architectural premise, the Tong Lau model is responsible for regulating social structures within a range of Asian cities. It has been influential in the modularization of current housing stock in its spatial requirements, its functional differentiation and room layout of one kitchen with a basic bathroom. The same model is attributed to Hong Kong's extremely compressed dwellings. Cage homes, subdivisions and rooftop dwellings have become widespread, all deriving from a single model. Beds placed along corridors, and upper floors subdivided to allocate additional rental spaces, with one family per room in some instances, are part-and-parcel of Hong Kong's acceptable dwelling norms.[26] Hong Kong's Housing Authority classifies the domestic landscape as a combination of rental (subsidized or public housing), privately owned dwellings (private sector dwellings) and temporary dwellings (interim, transition, squatter dwellings).[27] The 2016 housing survey cited the average floor space per household at 430 ft^2. On average, only 161 ft^2 (14 m^2) is allocated per person for livable space. In comparison, more than 90% of the territory's households live in accommodation of 753 ft^2 or less. The figures remain alarming, with 8.1% of almost 2.508 million housing units, averaging 215 ft^2 of space per household, with only 4.9% of the housing stock belonging to the private and permanent housing category.[28] Hong Kong housing typologies can be further differentiated into large-, small- and micro-scale homes. Large apartments may exceed 600 ft^2 (55 m^2). A mid-size apartment may total 484 ft^2 (45 m^2) in size. The most recent additions – capsule dwellings – are 20 ft^2 (1.8 m^2) and cost HK$5100 (658 USD) in rent per month.

Against the condition of the confined housing models, the residents of Hong Kong continuously adapt limited space to suit individual and social needs. The spatial practices and territorial embeddedness of Hong Kong remain specific to "a-post-colonial-Eurocentric–China-aligned" urban model. As such, fueled by socioeconomic diversity, the definitions of what is "interior" and "exterior" require a radical reformulation. This is necessary in order not only to show the explicit differences between that which is "inside" or "outside" in terms of urban conditions but at its core, in order to demand a new ontology of interiority and exteriority. In a neoliberal framework, the use of an interior urban space is linked solely to the retail economy, making consumer habits and practices the critical factor of comprehending and shaping the lived experience of the everyday. Therefore, the pressures exerted on the limits of space, square foot value and usability of the floor areas establish the grounding for a "square foot" (ft^2)-driven society. As such, the "ft^2" concept is equally linked to lifestyles of excess and tactical survival.

Reports indicate that the rates per square feet in small-scale rentable space are on average higher than those required by luxurious dwellings. The ones in need are therefore forced to accept domestic possibilities such as "cage homes" at sizes of 15 ft^2 (1.4 m^2) or makeshift sleeping quarters the size of a chair 2.5 ft^2 (0.23 m^2) offered by 24-hour McDonald's outlets, classified as "McRefugee's."[29] Photo essays capturing cramped apartments present "an interior vernacular" among low-income families, elderly and the unemployed that conforms

to a spatial-economic metric of compression. Single-room dwellings are reconstructed through additions, layering and add-ons. Transformations of household objects are tactical in adding layers of functions to balconies, doors, windows and ceilings. Hong Kong's penal point system for housing estates is a tell-tale sign of domestic tremors challenging the model against the needs of families.[30] As a mechanism of control to moderate behavior, the habitual penal code lists 28 common "prohibited" activities, regulating behavior and attitudes. The system documents external violations all equitable to space and size, harnessing policy as a regulatory metric.

Consequently, urban life in Hong Kong is not only captured by the profound interiority of cadenced square feet; it is also regulated by them, coded by a density that ceases to be a matter of domesticity and rather becomes the only potential for expression – and, therefore, the only potential for a territorial claim. One is allowed and afforded to express only in specific manners, only within the dense interiority of an urbanity that no longer knows any degrees of separation from an overcoded domesticity. In Hong Kong, the urban and the domestic are one, without having had the chance to fold upon each other. This is precisely what the Umbrella Movement will introduce in Hong Kong's urban life: the liberating gesture of the fold itself. To better understand this, we should not approach the interior and the exterior as terms that stand in opposition but rather as relative and interchangeable. The first step toward that is to complexify the relation between them: we shall no longer speak of interior and exterior alone but rather include two more crucial terms. Following Deleuze and Guattari in their interpretation of Jacob von Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt*, we now have a pluralized, fourfold understanding of territories. As such, Deleuze and Guattari claim that any individual

> has an exterior milieu of materials, an interior milieu of composing elements and composed substances, an intermediary milieu of membranes and limits, and an annexed milieu of energy sources and action-perceptions.[31]

Firstly, the exterior milieu refers to all the material components, and all the other individuals that surround an individual. Every milieu, in this regard, depends on multiple assemblages that are exterior to it. We should proceed with caution though: claiming that something is exterior to an individual has nothing to do with a notion of spatial proximity or the lack thereof. The exterior milieu deals with the contingency of encounters that may effectively amplify or diminish the power of an individual. On the basis of this contingency, one that relies on the agential force of the encounter itself, any milieu has an exterior that functions as the potential catalyst that can lead it toward new individuation.[32] Next to the exterior aspect of a milieu stand its interiority, all the internal components and regulatory principles that arrange the articulation of flows within it.[33] Therefore, both the notions of the exterior and the interior are relative, since what appears as an interior milieu in relation to an exterior one is, consequently, the exterior milieu for its own internal components. As Deleuze puts it,

> the outside is not a fixed limit, but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside.[34]

The limit where the inside becomes outside and vice versa is the membrane, or what Deleuze and Guattari call the intermediary milieu.[35] The membrane is inseparable from the fourth aspect of the milieu: the annexed or associated milieu through which sources of energy

and information pass by. Without the presence of an associated milieu, as regulated by the membrane, the individual may sustain itself, but it does never transform itself. Through an associated milieu, energetic and informational sources are captured, individuals find meaning in each other, "futures" and "commons" are produced. In addition, the associated milieu, more than a spatial concept, is a regime, a gesture, a "style" of performing the exchange of energy and information between individuals. It is also what is fundamentally absent in the urban life of Hong Kong. The monopoly of an extended interior that annihilates at once both the outside, the membranic limit and their associated exchange, leaves no room for anything other than the privatization of everything – in the sense of an absolute interiorization, where all that matters is what is internal to me, what is of my private interest. Consequently, this profound interiority obstructs the formation of anything political, precisely because it obstructs the formation of anything collective and exteriorized. Therefore, Hong Kong and its urban experience is de-politicized not due to an ideological impulse but due to its spatially produced interiorization. As such, the Umbrella Movement was the radical exteriorization of this profound interiority so that a limit could be articulated and traced again so that collectives could indeed form to exchange information and energy (beyond bank account transfers), so that urban technicities could be "commoned" in order to re-politicize the urban.

Commoning technicities

If the production of a territory – of its interior, its exterior, its membrane and associated milieu – involves the deployment of a political technology, then we might understand it better by introducing a concept that manages at once to include human agency, technological effects and the transformations of the (built) environment. To do so, we will turn to Gilbert Simondon and his concept of technicity. If we aim to avoid reductionism, Simondon advices us, we should study beyond the technical objects to the technicity of these objects as a mode of relation between humans and world.[36] In this sense, one can move from architectural objects and their urban arrangement to an architectural and urban technicity which operates in terms of reticularity: located within assemblages, reticularity is the immediate relation of events and actions that occur in a given structure which however is understood in terms of its potentials for action and has to be studied in affective terms. Simply put, technicity deals with how humans relate and transform their environment through technology and how these relations transform all of them in their own – humans, technology and environment.

The technicities of the Umbrella Movement attest to a blatant and visible "Guerrilla urbanism" or, in other words, a "piracy" of the open space. Most of the student protesters congregated in Admiralty in Central Hong Kong, with side protests occurring in Causeway Bay, Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui. In all instances, what stood central were efforts of repossessing a territory in order to invent new forms of expressing one's collective and exteriorized self. Herein a variety of techniques supplemented the relaying of information and the actual tactics of claiming back portions of the city. Social and printed media formed one side of the movement's strategy, with extended sit-ins materializing its physical presence. Graphically crafted messages juxtaposing the yellow umbrellas over slogans and actual site images demonstrated the spatial emphasis of the movement. Banners stretched across and from bridges, communicating protest slogans and facilitating crowd control. The more subdued messages were stencil-sprayed onto structures and bridges. Sticky notes running up and along concrete walls gave expression to Hong Kong's very own Lennon wall, transforming a public staircase into a yellow, pink, blue and green dotted opinion wall – an idea copied from Prague's response to the murder of John Lennon. Vehicular flyovers had yellow cardboard posters pasted across railings in more than seven languages.

In its physical form, the movement focused its efforts on Hong Kong's central business district's thoroughfares. The usually busy thoroughfares and flyovers of Queensway road, running across Hong Kong Island, was one primary arterial network of interest. Queensway road's vehicular and tram traffic flows were paralyzed, with road blockages installed at incremental distances. Similar actions were evident on parallel thoroughfares of Harcourt and Lung Wo Roads. Hybrid barricades, five layers deep, that held together steel bars and orange traffic cones with plastic ties or transparent wrapping material – itself a sign of transient structures – formed the bulk of traffic barriers strategically positioned for maximizing city-wide impact. Different from protests in other parts of the globe that focused on occupying a specific place of interest, the Umbrella Movement caused a widespread emptying of the streets by expanding throughout the city itself (Figure 4.2). With the effective isolation of the central region's three-lane roads, most of the area's linked pedestrian bridges and walk–overs became further points of interest. Claiming larger flat areas, temporary camps, comprising numerous tents, shaded netting and vertical screens, characterized the political setting of passive resistance. For others, the mere sit–in, with people scattered across roads, either sleeping, talking, discussing, and even studying, was deemed a necessary function to support the sit–in.

With its strong emphasis on space, the technicities of the Umbrella Movement were deeply linked to the specific characteristics of the occupied places. Reclaiming all available open spaces via territorializing practices provides dormant contestation with a material

Figure 4.2 The usually busy thoroughfare of Queens Road East in Central Hong Kong during the protester lockdown. Vehicular and tram traffic was paralyzed for the entire protest period. Road blockage can be seen in the left-hand side as well as in the distance of the image. The emptying out of city space stands on equal footing to rescripting functional determinacy. Anonymous photographer, 2014.

form and setting. The exteriorization of interior elements, for example, stairs and steps constructed across a road barrier, helped protesters cross between the urban lanes, mobilizing actions between venues (Figure 4.3). Moving between both the visible and invisible aspects

Figure 4.3   The exteriorization of the interior elements, for example, stairs and steps seen here situated across a road barrier. These steps helped protesters cross between the urban lanes, mobilizing actions and crowed control. Anonymous photographer, 2014.

of political assemblages, the Umbrella Movements' material expressions – the encampments, amassing vigils and barricading walkways with the aims of disrupting public circulation across the city – demonstrate how encompassing sites of resistance mutate and grow using local and culture-specific skills. The identification of barricade locations, the planning of encampment facilities using street profiling, the sourcing of living and medical supplies, building materials, the harnessing of construction techniques relying on the knowhow of constructing bamboo scaffolding and the layout, planning and construction of make-shift study centers as well as the organizing of temporary houses collectively point toward the uniqueness of a local technicity.

In addition, streets could switch between functions at different times. Although seen as the established space of demonstration, the road would gradually transform from a place for 100,000 crowds to a peaceful site for a sit-in for 10 or less (Figure 4.4). Open-ended and undetermined useability changed the nature of street pockets into programming and reprogramming micro-forums and small camps. Showing no aggression to outsiders, make-shift lodgings, medical and first aid tents, 24-hour study centers across thoroughfare barriers, as well as waste recycling centers under bridge flyovers and political discussion points were instances that through commoning technicities the potential for a new urban subject appeared. By reclaiming a territory and, consequently, negotiating anew the relation between the interior and the exterior, the politicized collective and the de-politicized private were exposed and challenged. In its totality and with the scale at which the Umbrella Movement

Figure 4.4   A side view of the Umbrella Movement's interiorization of the street scape. The variety of tents, enclosures and pergolas exteriorizes debate whilst interiorizing the pockets of street scape. Anonymous photographer, 2014.

was deployed, the spatial "reminder" of the defiant urban movement remains the street, the urban expressway, a once empty and lifeless exterior site, temporarily interiorized for the sake of a profound urban expression. Radically different from the normative associations of a squalid exterior beyond the threshold of the domestic door, the street becomes the place where technicities, materialities and concepts converge, relinking the spatiality of the city to a site of externalized and enacted memory-in-the-making.

Overall, the commoning technicities associated with the Umbrella Movement highlight two key aspects. First, with the recognition of the streets as the prime protest mechanism, the political focus was expelled from the confides of inner political chambers. For the entire duration of the "Umbrella Movement," exteriorizing politics and the politics in the street forced the civil discourse to be expressed in the lanes of motorways, re-coupling civic issues with specific urban settings. Second, through these commoning technicities, political expression materialized as exteriority, reaffirming the unfolding of interior-driven "quotidian" processes within the protest setting. This is precisely what the commoning technicities of the Umbrella Movement were after to exteriorize the interior by manipulating the limit between the two – the street – so as to radically transform the ways that energy and information are exchanged in the urban. This liminal manipulation did not operate in extensive terms, those that one could fragment, measure and place in scalar taxonomies. On the contrary, it was on the level of the relational lived experience that the transformative effect of the Umbrella Movement would manifest. In other words, what was occupied was not the street per se, but rather the means of informational and energetic exchange, the membrane that regulates the associated milieu itself. As such, the technicities of the Umbrella Movement can be understood as an act of radical folding that attempts to re-politicize the urban by bringing its interiorized past in touch with an exteriorized future.

Conclusion

The act of folding the interior to the exterior, the public to the private, through the technicities of the Umbrella Movement, is neither merely spatial nor merely temporal; it is both at once. In this sense, the fold is purely experiential, but is an experience that precedes, transcends and determines individual urban experience. As Simondon claims, at the level of the polarized membrane, the interior-past and the exterior-future face one another.[37] Therefore, conceptualizing the occupied street as the membrane brings forward not just a new understanding of space, but also a new understanding of time. The interior can now be understood temporally, as that which individuates in a slow, established and regulated rhythm; next to it, the exterior now becomes the moment of the unexpected encounter, that which is by default collective and futural (since an encounter involves always more than one and is always about-to-come). As such, the interior is no longer what is separated spatially from an exterior but rather a past that cannot exteriorize: a past that individuates in a rhythm so weak and slow in tempo that it is imperceptible. What matters then is how we can expand the affectivity of the past, how we can become (on) the limit that would catalyze an encounter that can literally make the urban past burst open so that the potential of a differentiated urban future can emerge. It is obvious that such an encounter, as well as all that it comes with – from its technicities to its territory – comes from the future: interior urban past and exterior urban future, that is the polarized vitality of the occupied membranic street.

Let us come full circle: what is the problem that the Umbrella Movement posed as an urban event? We are now able to respond clearly: through its commoning technicities, the Umbrella Movement attempted to seize control of the limit of urban production itself,

both in its particularity to the urban conditions of Hong Kong and to its shared concerns with an urban life that tends toward an absolute interiority and privatization. This double characteristic, being able to address both the local and the global at once, is also what makes the Umbrella Movement a pure urban event. Different than a historical event (as something that simply takes place at a given moment), a pure event is primarily a problem-poser: it brings forward a question, forces one to think about its causes and repercussions and determines the singular and ordinary points that encompass all its historical actualizations, past, present and future, producing a difference that can make a difference.[38] In other words, a pure event brings new information, new meaning into the world. As such, the Umbrella Movement produced novel urban meanings, a novel understanding of the relation between the urban interior and exterior that can indeed re-politicize the urban, albeit in a manner we are not familiar with. This absence of familiarity is, after all, the most important characteristic of any political act. In occupying the membranic limit of the street, through its diverse population of commoning technicities, the Umbrella Movement managed to unleash a set of urban intensities that, paradoxically, separated the political from the personal and the familiar, suggesting the production of a new, effective collectivity that had its foundations on a process of mutual estrangement. After all, as Massumi underlines, "the political is not coming home to a familiar face … the political acts in the name of a life we have not lived. It acts for the life we have yet to live."[39] As such, the political is what can make one stranger to oneself but in a manner that is shared: to collectively become other than what we are, to collectively allow our urban present to escape from the interiority of its past, placing it into contact with the unexpected exteriority of an urban future that our technicities can produce.

Notes

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8 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 95.
9 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 95.
10 Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2016).
11 Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 137; Regarding affects, we refer to Deleuze's and Guattari's reinterpretation of the Spinozian term *affectus*, as well as to the later uses of the term (by Massumi, Gregg and Seigworth among others) that form the body of what is now called affect theory. For

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