

RE-CODING

SPACE:

HOW

PROTEST

REDEFINES

URBAN

ENVIRONMENTS

THROUGH

OBJECTS AND

ACTION

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, protest movements have played a central and significant role in the transformation of public spaces, influencing the way people appropriate places and objects, redefining the meaning of urban architecture itself. A Carnegie Endowment report shows that over 800 significant anti-government protests have erupted worldwide since 2017, spanning more than 150 countries, and 18% of these protests have persisted for over three months⁽¹⁾. In the United Kingdom, recent pro-Palestinian demonstrations have posed substantial challenges for law enforcement, costing approximately £46.8 million, involving over 60,000 officer shifts⁽²⁾. The data highlight how protests are major events that profoundly impact cities, reshaping political, social, and spatial dynamics.

Within these manifestations, temporary architectures take shape, generated by the physical occupation of space, which are transformed into structures capable of creating a new collective identity, awakening a new sense of community in each individual, and temporarily subverting existing normative, architectural, and social conventions.

In this context, ordinary urban objects that are part of the city itself are reinterpreted and transformed into spatial configurations that take on new and alternative meanings, becoming themselves active elements of protest, tools of protection, and sometimes iconic symbols of protest.

The architecture of protest emerges as a complex phenomenon in which body, space and ideologies intertwine in a game of appropriation and re-signification. When protesters, as bearers of certain ideologies, interact with the environment, they modify and alter not only its physical and spatial configuration, but also the collective perception of it, influencing the way it is inhabited.

This research proposes the re-signification of urban space as an object of critical analysis, exploring how temporary and disruptive events can transform its meaning and generate new modes of interaction. Protests, despite their transitory nature, leave traces capable of redefining our understanding of architecture, space and design, demonstrating how collective action can alter spatial dynamics and perceptions of the built environment. Space is not a static entity, but is rather shaped by the bodies that inhabit it and the practices that pass through it. In this sense, politics is manifested in the very act of occupying and transforming space and in the way objects are reused and reinterpreted outside their original functions. Objects designed for specific purposes become instruments of

resistance and symbolic re-elaboration, raising the question of how design is not only a functional discipline, but also a porous field capable of adapting and responding to the contexts in which it finds itself.

The visual analysis of these phenomena, through their detection and isolation, investigates how new types of objects emerge within protest movements as a result of functional strategies that respond to urgent needs through the spontaneous and adaptive reuse of ordinary elements. The study of different case studies allows us to analyse how, through their performative action, these new elements of protest become true ‘archetypes’ that can be repeated in different contexts. By adopting a speculative approach, this research helps to better understand how space is redefined by these objects, how it is organised and transformed in moments charged with meaning, opening up new imaginative possibilities for responding to unprecedented scenarios and stimulating reflection on how architecture can evolve in relation to different spatial dynamics. To deepen this analysis, the methodology of organising a workshop made it possible to explore the organisational and social dynamics involved in mobilising a group of people around a common goal. Interviews with protest participants provided a more intimate understanding of these aspects, giving voice to direct experiences. These different perspectives make it possible to study and understand the multiple dynamics that develop in temporary moments of protest, examining their aesthetics, symbolic value, and social and political impact on the re-configuration of urban space.

UNDER- STANDING PROTESTS.

Protest movements are moments of extraordinary intensity, in which space, body and action intertwine, revealing the performative potential of public space. They are not simply political events embedded in a predefined scenario, but take the form of acts capable of questioning and redefining the very meaning of space. Through the interaction between moving bodies and the urban environment, public space is no longer just a passive container, but becomes an active element, shaped by collective action and in turn generative of new possibilities of relationship and meaning.

Protest as a performative act

Protest is not merely the physical occupation of space but an act that challenges its preexisting definitions and uses. Public space during these temporary events is not a static identity; rather, it is continuously shaped by the actions of the protesters. According to Judith Butler, when bodies assemble in squares, streets, or neighborhoods, they do not simply occupy a space already defined as “public” but they question its very nature, transforming it into a political space through their presence and performative action. In this process, “*bodies enact new — more livable — modes of political life*⁽¹⁾.”

How protesters come together and how they challenge and redefine the materiality of urban space defines a performative dimension of protest itself. “When bodies assemble and move, they animate and organise architecture⁽²⁾”, highlighting how urban infrastructures become e actors in collective action. These elements become part of a broader process of transformation, building new types of relationships and redefining the boundaries of public and private.

The concept of performativity is fundamental to understanding the transformative power of protests, as gathering in public space is not limited to a political act, but becomes a practice that rewrites social reality. Protesters, through gestures, movements and occupations, do not just express dissent, but redefine the very meaning of what is public, expanding the boundaries of the political sphere.

1. Butler, *Bodies in Alliance: The Political Art of Existence*.
2. Hatuka, *The Design of Protest: Choreographing Political Demonstrations in Public Space*.

“As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment. And when crowds move outside the square, to the side street or the back alley, to the neighborhoods where streets are not yet paved, then some thing more happens.”

(Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly, p.71).

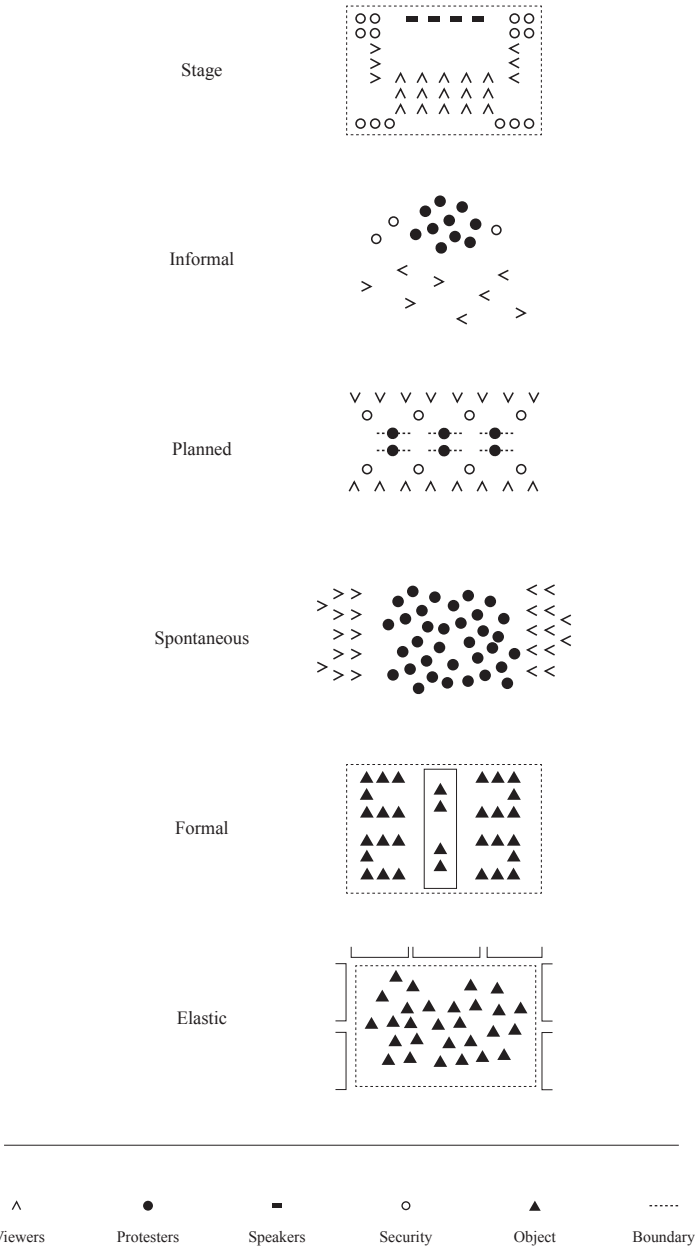
In this context, politics is no longer seen as confined to the public sphere, as distinct from the private; it constantly crosses these boundaries, revealing how politics is already present in non-traditional places and spaces, such as the home, the street or the neighbourhood. The act of gathering in a growing crowd, of crossing and moving through public space, not only challenges the boundaries between public and private, but also allows bodies to reclaim the public itself, creating and producing new forms of collective space.

The protest takes the form of a complex choreography, where bodies, hierarchies and different vulnerabilities intertwine in a play of spaces, movements, and symbols. Each demonstration is not just an action of resistance, but a reworking of public space through the body and its relationship with its surroundings. Its organisation is never random; every element—from its design to its arrangement of the bodies, from the power dynamics to the vulnerability of the participants—is designed to rewrite and challenge the pre-existing rules of space and power. The spatial organisation of the protesters follows ritual and symbolic patterns: rallies, marches, chants, each of which carries a profound meaning that goes beyond mere physical action. These gestures intertwine with the pre-existing order of public space, designed to reflect a certain political and civic identity⁽³⁾. Through collective action, each movement of bodies contributes to renegotiating the meaning and function of space, creating a symbolic alternative that reorients the environment towards a new meaning. Diverse posture—standing, sitting, lying down, moving, or standing still—carry different meanings inside protest movements, embodying specific forms of resistance depending on how they are expressed. The very act of organising internally, whether along a hierarchical pattern or a more horizontal one, means that the protests not only challenge power, but also renegotiate social and political hierarchies themselves⁽⁴⁾. [FIG.1-2]

3. Hatuka. The Design of Protest: Choreographing Political Demonstrations in Public Space.
4. Hatuka.

	Body	Setting	Distance
Spectacle	Respectful. Relative control of body (ies), rhythm dictated by the pace of ritual.	Emphasis on the stage, use of symbolic attributes, tends to be fixed.	Coordinated, defined.
Procession	Flexible, responds to adjacent bodies, minimum control of body(ies), rhythm dictated by the pace of movement.	Attention to the body, informal, dynamic, symbols held by the people.	Dynamic, changeable.
Procession	Respond to the object. Relative control of body(ies), rhythm dictated by practices associated with the object in place.	Emphasis on the assembly of an object(s) symbols built in place.	Mediated by objects.

Fig.1 Diagram of different types of protests.
Fig.2 Spatial diagram of different types of protests.



Bodies in action

Our bodies are products of historical processes, shaped and continuously regulated through exchanges of power and knowledge. While normally bodies move in space according to rules and norms predetermined by social, spatial and political conditions, moments of protest redefine and collectively readjust this structures to respond to immediate needs and desires.

This change gives rise to a temporary unity of actions and intentions, creating a condition that is simultaneously engaging and destabilising. In these moments, distinctions between individual bodies blur, while individuality dissolves into the whole of collective movement. The protesters, through their movement and actions take the form of a choreographed mass in which, while maintaining their autonomy, the bodies synchronise into a cohesive and intense collective flow. This phenomenon of unified action evokes a profound sense of equality and empowerment, creating the perception of being an integral part of an entity larger than the individual⁽⁵⁾.

The body plays a fundamental role in understanding protest movements. Bodies in action are not simply vehicles for expressing dissent: they become instruments of rupture, questioning the social and political order. As Sarah Hansen points out in her article *Bodies on the Line: The Performativity of Protest*, “the body is on the line, a body that not only affirms its presence in public space, but also exposes its vulnerability, configuring itself as an inescapable condition for political action itself⁽⁶⁾. ”

The body in protest, through its physicality, challenges not only the symbolic violence of institutions, but also the material structures of existing power. Exposing oneself in public is not just about reclaiming physical space, it redefines and questions the norms and codes that regulate it. Judith Butler, in *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly*, highlights how the collective action of bodies creates a form of “pluralistic performativity,” where the act of coming together constitutes a political discourse in itself, a demonstration of different voices, identities and demands. In this way, “the body acts as a form of expression, a tangible message that questions authority and opens up new forms of political visibility⁽⁷⁾. ”

The concept of *State of Exception* proposed by Giorgio Agamben offers a useful interpretative key to understanding the dynamics of protests. Demonstrations can be seen as moments in which ordinary laws and conventions are temporarily suspended, creating a space in which the social and legal order is questioned and power structures

5. Butler, *Bodies in Alliance: The Political Art of Existence*.
6. Hansen, *Bodies on the Line: The Performativity of Protest*.
7. Hansen.

8. Agamben, *Lo stato di eccezione*.
9. Butler.

challenged. In this absence of normative structure, the assembled bodies do not merely exercise a right of expression, but establish a new form of constituent power, rewriting boundaries and redefining what is public and what is private⁽⁸⁾.

The bodies of demonstrators become agents of spatial transformation, challenging constructions of power and rewriting relations between state and citizens, but also between individuals and communities.

Protest thus becomes a moment not only symbolising an action, but a bodily act that reshapes the context in which politics takes place.

As Butler suggest, “*bodies brought together create an opportunity for solidarity that is not limited to a strategic alliance, but imagines new configurations of common life*”. The corporeal dimension is not an accessory element of protest, but its essential core: through the body, the boundaries of politics, space and collective identity are redefined⁽⁹⁾.

Architecture as medium

Urban architecture, usually seen as a physical and stable container, turns out instead to be a constantly changing palimpsest during protests. Following Hannah Arendt's concept of ‘space of appearance, space only comes into full existence when it is activated by collective action. During a demonstration, the city becomes a stage of possibilities, where urban objects cease to be mere static elements and are transformed into instruments of resistance and re-appropriation. In this context, the urban landscape is no longer a static or passive construct, but becomes a dynamic actor that shapes and redefines itself through collective action.

A crucial example of this spatial transformation is Tahrir Square in Cairo. Although the square already had a symbolic value, the 2011 demonstrations radically altered its identity, transforming it from a passive political space into a focal point of the revolution.

The demonstrators did not just physically occupy the square, but actively transformed its space and function, giving it a new meaning and purpose withing the socio-political context. The Tahrir space, therefore, was not only the site of the action, but became an integral part of it, capable of reflecting and amplifying the protester's demands. [FIG.3]



Fig.3 Tahrir Square in 2020 and 2011

10. Arendt, *The Human Condition*.
11. Hamerz, Bengtson, *Urban Creativity: Essays on Interventions in Public Space*.
12. Hamerz, Bengtson.
13. Cassani, *All Good Vibes* (podcast).

The space of appearance, according to Arendt, is not necessarily physical but rather a metaphorical space that emerges between bodies. While physical locations are crucial for political action, politics itself are not confined to their pre-existence. As Arendt explains, the space of appearance “predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm,” arising wherever people gather in speech and action. It is the space between bodies that allows political life to emerge ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The physical and dynamic characteristics of Umbrella Square, in the Hong Kong protest of 2014, provide an example of how the protester’s ability to reconfigure the space fostered an environment of participation and porosity, transforming the site into a democratic public space. The infrastructure built by the protesters played a key role in sustaining the protest, allowing it to persist over time ⁽¹¹⁾. The public character of the protest, however, was not only the result of its spatial organisation, but also shaped by the protester’s interactions within it. Through a collectively created self-organised and self-managed space, the protesters transformed the square into a unifying political realm that all citizens could relate to. Like the demonstration in Tharir. Square, Umbrella Square exemplified a temporary yet profoundly impactful form of urbanism, embodying the spirit of adaptability and resistance at the heart of the Umbrella Movement ⁽¹²⁾. [FIG.4]

This examples illustrates how urban space, through the interaction between bodies and their collective action, can be continuously redefined and reconfigured, generating new meanings and opening up new political interpretations.

Urban space functions like a large digestive system, assimilating the identities of its inhabitants. The meaning of the city, therefore, resides not in its buildings, but in the people who live within it and animate it through their presence and actions ⁽¹³⁾.

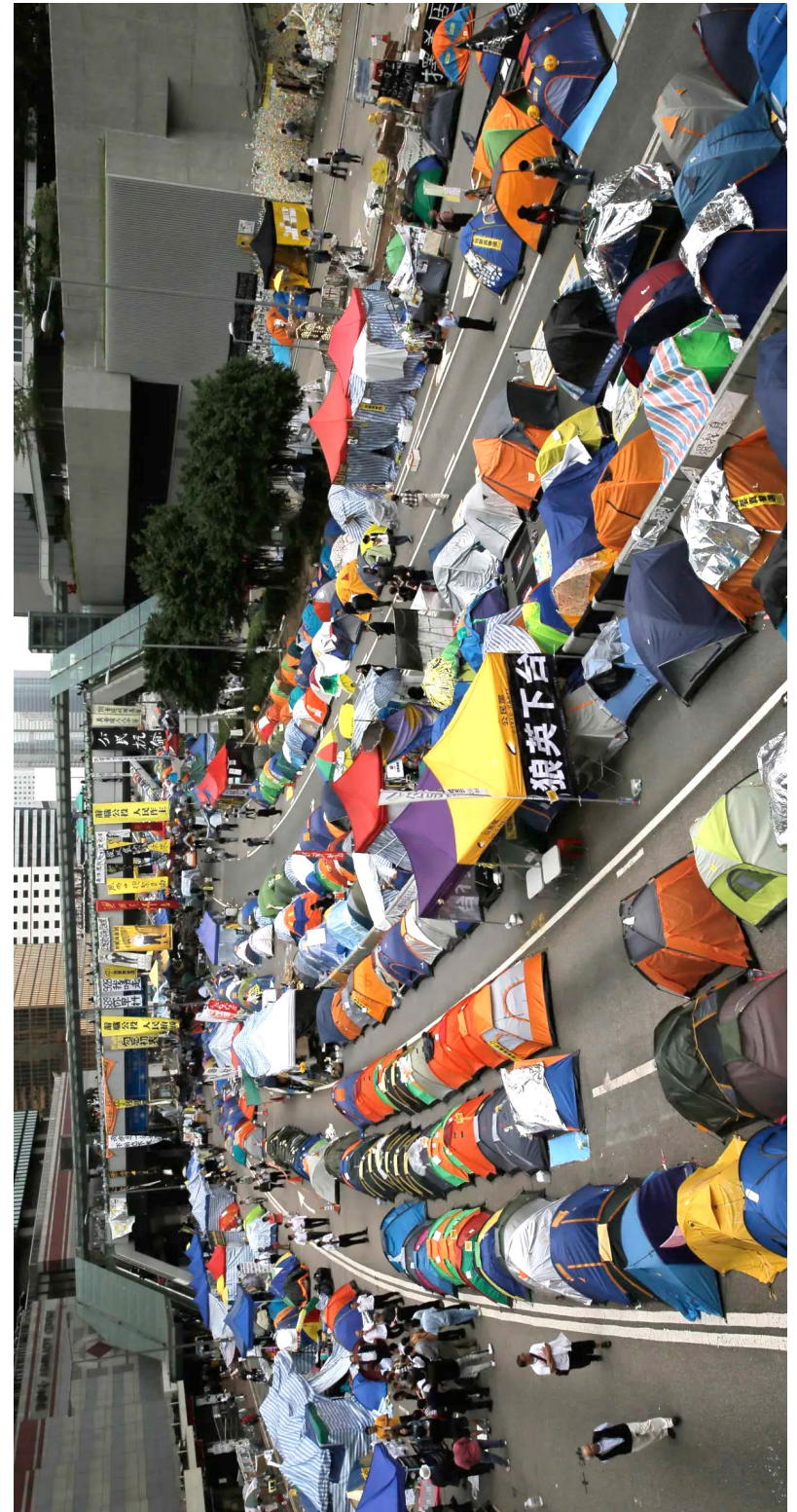
During a protest, this relationship becomes evident: architecture, which usually stabilises social rituals, becomes an instrument for subverting them. Thus, public space is configured as a container that takes shape thanks to the bodies and actions that inhabit it, becoming a place of social contestation and redefinition.

During mass demonstrations, the city, intentionally designed to highlight power structures and signify authority, is transformed into an exceptional space that interrupts everyday rules and redefines social and control dynamics. By occupying public spaces, where power and hierarchies are typically exercised, protesters challenge authority embedded within these spaces during their temporary presence. Through their bodies and actions they redefine the purposes and meanings of space, transforming urban space into a place where meanings, values and uses are constantly negotiated and rewritten through the interaction of bodies ⁽¹⁴⁾.

The meaning of space, therefore, is constructed through the interaction between bodies, power, and the architectural structures themselves, which, through their use and re-signification, become protagonists in the political struggle. The city is not only the stage on which demonstrations take place, but becomes an active subject participating in the creation and affirmation of new forms of visibility, resistance and social struggle.

14. Hall. *Symbolic Interaction*.

Fig. 4 Protest in Hong Kong during the Umbrella Revolution, October 2014



Time plays a crucial yet often underestimated role in the way protests reshape urban spaces. While protests are by nature ephemeral events, occurring within tightly confined temporal frames, their fleeting presence often leaves a profound and lasting imprint on both the meaning and the function of the spaces they occupy.

By drawing from Henri Lefebvre's theories on the production of space and Bernard Tschumi's reflections on architecture as a temporal and performative act, we can understand protests as moments when time becomes a dynamic tool for spatial reconfiguration and social transformation.

Lefebvre's concept of the production of space emphasizes its fluid and ever evolving nature not as a static physical entity but as a social construct that is continually shaped by interactions, rhythms, and practices. Protests disrupt these established rhythms, transforming urban spaces into powerful platforms for collective expression and contestation. The temporality of protests—whether they last hours, days, or weeks—becomes a defining element in their ability to reshape space and challenge its prescribed functions. These actions, as Lefebvre suggests, generate lived space, where practices and experiences give meaning to the environment in ways that transcend its physical design⁽¹⁵⁾.

Tschumi's idea of architecture as an event, in which space acquires meaning through the actions and interactions it hosts, highlights the temporary and impactful nature of ephemeral events that take the form of architectural moments. Architectural events “are like fireworks, short but vivid events that burn and disappear, which leave no trace but enter the collective imagination⁽¹⁶⁾”.

Although in my analysis protests are not just temporary events, but leave a lasting mark on space, Tschumi's metaphor allows us to understand how protest, as a temporal event within an architectural context, can generate new meanings, transforming the occupied space through new functions and uses, even if for a limited temporality. This ephemerality does not reduce their impact; rather, it becomes a source of power, as protests, through their concentrated duration, can leave enduring marks on the urban landscape, altering public consciousness long after the event itself has ended⁽¹⁷⁾.

15. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.
16. Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*.
17. Tschumi.

18. Butler, *Bodies in Alliance: The Political Art of Existence*.

Places such as parks, squares or street corners, which in everyday life have a neutral and functional role, are often transformed into stages of political expression. Here, the very act of gathering in a specific place, of physically occupying the space, questions and alters its original function. In this process, urban space is no longer a mere passive container, but is charged with new meanings, becoming a platform for collective action, solidarity and resistance. These disruptions highlight the constructed nature of space, revealing that the spaces we occupy are not fixed, but are in fact subject to contestation and re-appropriation. Through protest, people demonstrate how even brief and fleeting interventions can leave a lasting mark on the social and cultural fabric of a city. These acts of resistance reveal how time-limited actions can produce lasting changes in the way space is understood, experienced and used.

As Judith Butler argues, the very act of gathering is a political statement, claiming not only the space occupied by bodies, but also the way in which that space is organised, produced and reimagined. Protests, through their temporal disruption, challenge entrenched systems of power and create new opportunities for political engagement. They become not only a means of physical resistance, but also a performative act that reconfigures both the physical environment and the social structures that govern it⁽¹⁸⁾.

Protest become a “spatial enactment”, a deliberate staging of space intended to criticise and expose the dynamics of power and control that govern it. The action of protesting rewrites social values that are often invisible in the everyday use of space, revealing the tensions and contradictions that lie beneath the surface of everyday urban life.

In contrast to the slow and deliberate process of architectural design and construction, the speed and intensity of protest actions offer a new form of spatial engagement. Protests are, in this sense, an architectural medium in themselves, a communicative tool that allows for a rapid reconfiguration of space. By engaging directly with the environment and transforming it in real time, protests transform architecture into a means of explicit and urgent political expression. Collective contestation enables architectural barriers to be crossed, including spatial and ideological programs and tools of control. This performative interruption challenges conventional spatial practices and opens up new ways of understanding and interacting with the urban environment.

Architecture, in protest, functions both as a critical commentary on existing spatial conditions and as a tool for social change.

It becomes a barometer, capable of measuring the social, political, and economic dynamics of a place. Through protest, urban spaces are not simply occupied, but rethought as places of resistance, solidarity and transformative action. Architecture, in this sense, is not simply the creation of physical structures, but the ability to raise questions, provoke reflection and stimulate critical engagement with the spaces that define our collective lives. Protest, as temporary events, remind us that space is never static but is always in flux, shaped by the actions, practices, and social dynamics of those who inhabit it. Protests, in their refusal of the present and assertion of an alternative future, provide a powerful example of how time, space, and political action intersect to reshape the urban environment and the social fabric that it supports.

The concepts examined in this chapter explore how the dynamic relationship between space, body and action, within protest movements, become useful elements in studying how transformative moments reshape urban spaces. The interaction between moving bodies and their surroundings reveals how public space actively participates in resistance, capable of rewriting and redefining its original meaning. These ideas are useful for understanding how, in the next chapter, the re-signification of space is analysed on the scale of objects, and how these objects, through their performative qualities, interact with bodies in the context of protest. This research will explore how protest not only redefines space, but also transforms the use of everyday objects, giving them new political and social meanings.

THE ROLE OF EVERYDAY OBJECTS IN PROTEST: A VISUAL ANALYSIS METHOD.

0.2

In the context of protest movements, objects that usually belong to a functional and static order are reappropriated and reshaped to acquire new meanings.

These objects, often already present in the urban context, are no longer considered simply as everyday elements, but are transformed into tools of resistance, symbols of identity, and bearers of collective demands. Their performative transformation does not consist only of a reinterpretation, but of a real reshaping that involves a complex dynamic between bodies, objects and spaces. Indeed, in protest contexts, public space, traditionally intended to be used for functional purposes, are re-codified as sites of negotiation, affirmation, and struggle for visibility and rights, radically altering, in a temporary way, the urban fabric and the relationship between the body and its environment. In this scenario even everyday objects become catalysts of new meaning through their symbolic and functional reuse, challenging the existing orders.

This chapter explores the re-signification of space through protest movements, focusing on the scale of objects, analyzing how ordinary elements are modified and transformed during these temporary movements, and how this shifting in meaning contributes to the re-coding of urban space. Objects used in protest movement are studied through their performative actions, highlighting how they are

repurposed to adapt to new functions that change their original use, according to the protest necessities. These objects actively participate in a performative practice of urban re-signification, challenging the relationship between body and space. The interactions between people and objects not only show how objects are adapted to new functions, how protests grasps their intrinsic qualities and use them to identify new functions, but also how the agency of the object itself influences the actions of the protesters, shaping the spatial, functional and social dynamics within the protest.

The visual research method is used to identify topological elements recurrent in protest movement where we can see how by changing the function of an object, its change of meaning can reshape the urban context with its infrastructure and politics. By analysing photographs or video frames where objects are used as tools for protest, visual research becomes a method to identify emerging typologies, how they consolidate through their use taking on a recognisable and replicable form. This method helps observe how these new objects, during their use, are taking on a recognisable and replicable form, turning them into shareable patterns that are ready to be adapted and reused in other protest contexts. This methodology aims to understand both these temporary events and the means by which we perceive them. It is also a study of reality and the means by which we perceive it.

In the process of re-signifying objects, affordance and agency are two central elements crucial for understanding how found urban objects are repurposed in the context of protests.

The term affordance refers to the inherent ability of objects to suggest or facilitate specific actions based on their physical and material characteristics and context. Affordance is not a simply a static quality, but emerge from the interaction between the object, the human body and the environment, providing possibilities for use that can be reimagined and transformed, especially in protest contexts. The concept of affordance is essential to understanding how everyday objects, characterised by specific physical properties, are reinterpreted and repurposed.

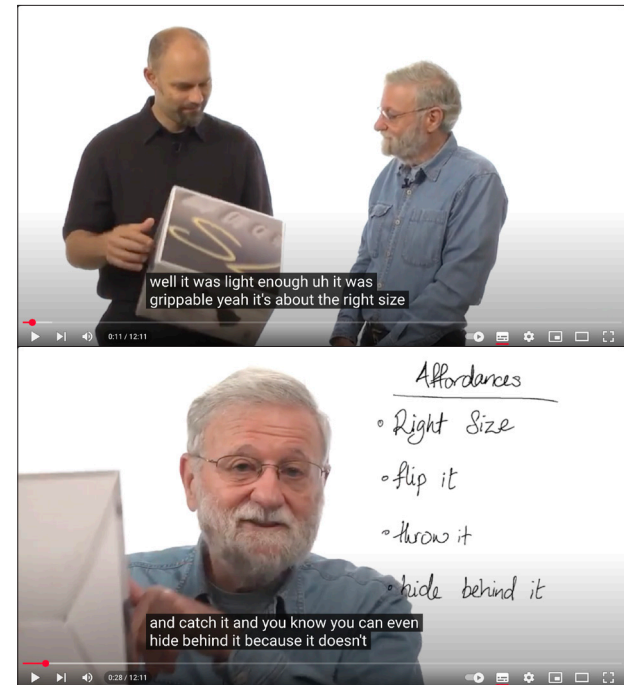
While these objects retain their original affordances — their inherent possibilities for action based on their design and materiality— they simultaneously acquire new meanings and functions as they are adapted to the needs of the protest. This process extends beyond mere functional transformation; it reshapes spatial dynamics, influences interactions between individuals, and contributes to the reconfiguration of the urban landscape as a site of resistance and collective expression.

The concept of affordance has undergone a complex and multifaceted theoretical evolution over the years, generating divergent interpretations that reflect the wide variety of disciplinary fields in which it is applied. Originating in the context of ecological psychology with James J. Gibson, the term indicates the “possibilities for action” that an object or environment offers a subject, meaning that is not a subjective construction, but a quality that is intrinsic to the object itself and emerges from the interaction between body and environment⁽¹⁾.

Donald Norman, within the sphere of design, however, reformulates Gibson’s concept of shifting the emphasis from the objective dimension to the perception of the subject, becoming the ability of an object to communicate its use through its design, “defining what actions are possible.” Embracing a more semiotic view of the term, design is seen here as a mediator between the object and its user, facilitating understanding and interaction. [FIG.5-6]

1. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*.

Fig. 5 Donal Norman analysis of a box as an example of how design suggests an action, illustrating affordance.
Fig. 6 Use of signifiers in design, with clear signage aiding user understanding of an object's function.



This view emphasises the cultural context and the user's experience of the object. Norman's distinction between perceived and real affordances shows that our interaction with objects is shaped by personal experiences, knowledge, and culture. The gap between what an object appears to offer (*perceived affordance*) and what it can actually do (*real affordance*) allows for more flexible and individualised interpretations⁽²⁾.

While on the one hand Gibson proposes an idea of affordance that is universal and inherent in the object, Norman promotes a perspective more linked to perception and subjective interpretation. In both cases, the two views have their limitations: the idea of universality proposed by Gibson runs the risk of being somewhat insensitive to the cultural and social contexts of the object's user, while Norman could reduce the concept of affordance to a purely semiotic phenomenon, setting aside the object's dynamic-relational potential.

Contemporary thinkers like Brian Massumi and Eric Manning are expanding the dialogue on affordance, pushing it beyond the boundaries of traditional theories. They reshaped the concept of affordance as something that develops dynamically, formed and refined through the continuous interaction between people and objects. For Massumi, affordances are not static qualities, but "emergent potentialities": they do not represent intrinsic properties of the object or characteristics perceived by the user, but rather a set of dynamics that are renewed over the time through movement and experience. This new perspective emphasises how bodies and objects co-configure in specific contexts, in a process in constant becoming and rewriting⁽³⁾.

Manning, in her concept of "preacceleration" as discussed in *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (2009), highlights how anticipation and tension play a central role in shaping interactions between bodies and objects⁽⁴⁾. This perspective underscores the dynamic, emergent nature of such encounters, where movement and potentiality are continuously negotiated and co-constructed. In this perspective, affordances are not already given, pre-existing data, but on the contrary emergent phenomena that develop through improvisation and collective negotiation.

These two reinterpretations of the concept of affordance by Massumi and Manning make it possible to go beyond the traditional dichotomies between the objective and the subjective, opening up new horizons for understanding the spatial and social dynamics involved in this person-object relationship, highlighting how affordances are intrinsically processual, relational and context-dependent in which they are found. In this sense, affordances are

2. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things*.
3. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.
4. Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*.

never once and for all given, but redefine themselves continuously in the course of interaction.

Agency, is another element to be taken into account in this process of re-signifying space through objects, and is understood as the capacity of an object to influence or guide actions, behaviours or decisions of people and other elements within a system. Although an object has no will or intentionality of its own, it can still play an active role in shaping relational dynamics through its physical, symbolic or cultural properties.

Objects exercise an influence beyond their passive existence, meaningfully conditioning human and spatial interactions around them. The concept of agency is closely related to affordance. If an object possesses intrinsic qualities that make its use perceptible through its form and structure (affordances), its agency lies in its ability to actively guide or suggest specific types of interactions or uses. In other words, an object not only reveals its potential functions, but also subtly directs or suggests the dynamics of its use.

Objects are thus not only background elements, passive and static, but become active participants in the transformation of space. Their agency allows them to become central elements in the reconfiguration of spatial and human dynamics, particularly in contexts such as protests, where their original meanings are reinterpreted in response to the social and political dynamics of the moment. This process thus emphasises the key role that objects used within demonstrations have in shaping the narratives of spaces, integrating their possibility with their ability to guide, influence and transform actions within those same spaces.

Understanding these concepts through different lenses offers a richer framework for analyzing spatial transformations within protest movements. They allow a better exploration of the spatial and symbolic dynamic interplay between individuals, objects, spaces, and ideologies, integrating concepts such as urgency, relationality, and temporality. This perspective highlights how affordances can act as catalysts for social change, helping to reshape not only the physical environment but also the social and political context in which they are embedded.

Through a literature review, the evolution of these concepts has been traced, following and understanding different lenses and highlighting how, in a contemporary perspective, we can consider them as central terms for discussing the re-signification of objects in temporary events. This is crucial for the next phase of the research, where we will investigate how objects are repurposed in protest settings. The understanding of affordance and agency offers insights

into how these objects take on new roles and meanings within the protest space, reshaping interactions between bodies-objects and space. By understanding the intricate relationship between what objects can potentially offer and how they are perceived and used, we can better understand the adaptive strategies that demonstrators employ to reconfigure everyday objects into tools for protest.

The selection of case studies presented in this thesis focuses on examples of ordinary objects that, in the context of protest, are reinterpreted and reposed as useful and representative tools of the resistance movement, subverting their original meaning. Through this transformation, not only their use is altered, but also the spatial and social dynamics of the protest are redefined through different modalities. The examples analysed show how, in the ephemeral context of the protest, ordinary objects acquire new functions in response to the demands for their attribution. This re-appropriation is not only functional, but also symbolic: objects become active elements of a performative practice that rewrites urban space, questioning the relationships between body, environment and power.

The analysis of these cases thus allows us to understand how the architecture of protest emerges from the interaction between materials, people and the urban context, temporarily transforming the city into a laboratory of new spatial and social configurations.

WHERE: Hong Kong,
 BUILT: first time in 2017
 ORDINARY FUNCTION: Traffic signalling device
 used to mark construction zones, redirect
 traffic, or indicate temporary hazards.
 REASON OF TRANSFORMATION: Neutralizing tear
 gas launched by law enforcement.
 METHODOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION: Inverted
 over tear gas canisters, often with water
 added to neutralize the gas.
 RELEVANT FEATURES: Lightweight, portable,
 durable, and resistant to heat.



The traffic cone, a common object in urban spaces, is typically used as a signalling device to mark construction areas, manage traffic flow or demarcate temporary hazards.

Its physical characteristics, such as its bright orange color and lightweight but durable design, make this object an ideal temporary marker in urban environments. However, this device has unexpectedly evolved into a versatile tool in contemporary protests, reshaping both our perception and use of it, ultimately becoming a symbol of the protest itself.

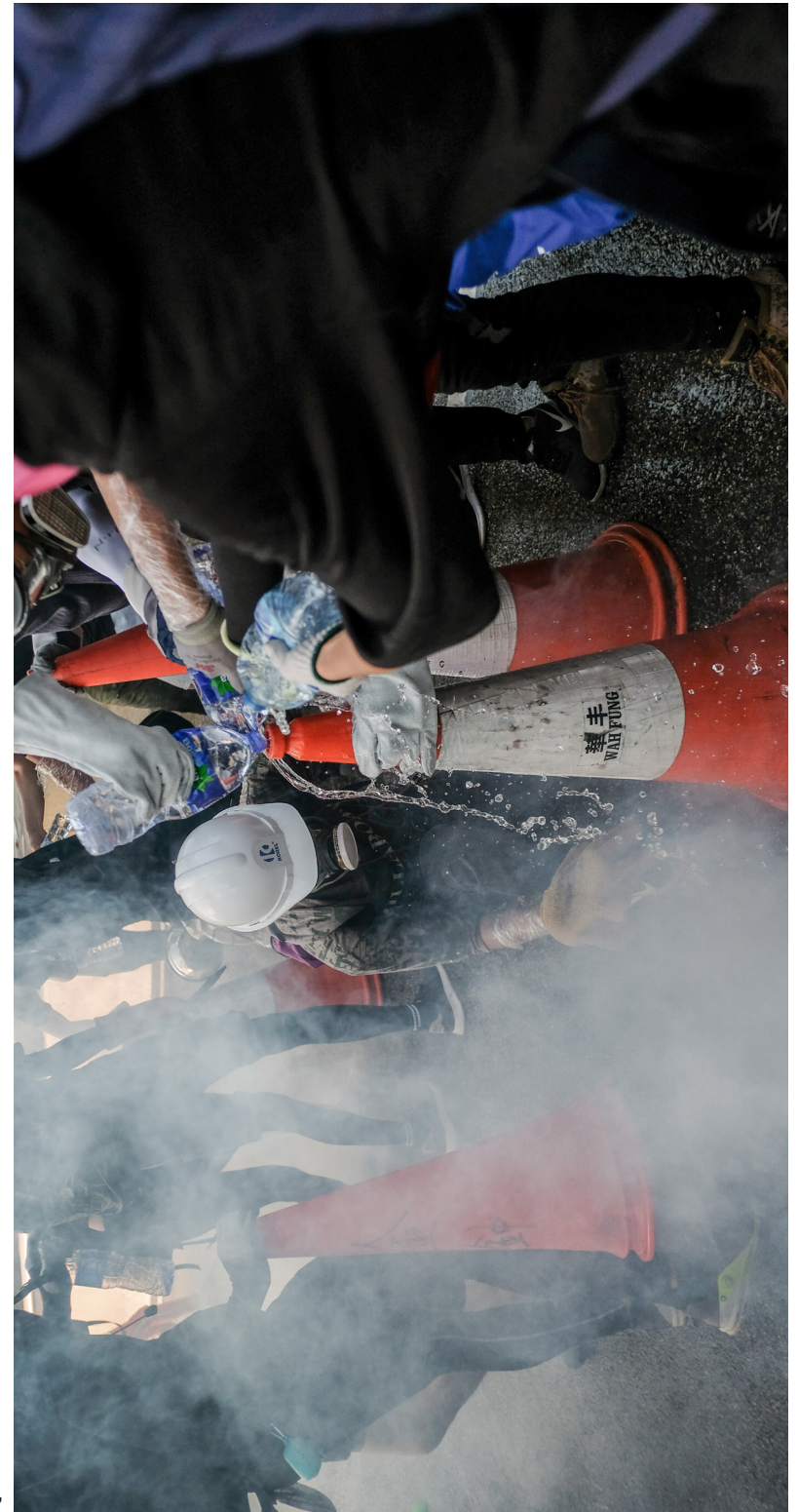
A particularly emblematic example occurred for the first time during the Hong Kong protests in 2017, where protesters used cones to neutralise the effect of tear gas grenades launched by the police. [FIG.7] By quickly placing the cone over the smoke grenade, protesters reduced the spread of the gas and gained time to secure the area or move away. This transformation reflects the protesters' adaptability and creativity in confronting violence and aggression, effectively reshaping the object's role within a highly charged socio-political environment⁽⁵⁾. [FIG.8-9]

The object is not limited to being a static, passive, and inert element as when it performs its original function within the urban landscape, but becomes an active protagonist that contributes to defining the social and relational dynamics of the context in which it is inserted. During a moment of extraordinary urgency, in which the forces of order, in an attempt to repress the protest, launch tear gas against the demonstrators, the latter are forced to find quick and effective solutions to counter the attack. Time is limited and the need to respond quickly pushes the protesters to devise alternative and decisive methods, turning common objects into instruments of defence.

"Firefighters", the demonstrators in the front line were nicknamed because of their strategic role in counteracting the effect of tear gas thrown by the police. These groups, positioned just behind the front lines, operated with extreme speed and efficiency with the readiness to intervene as soon as a teargas grenade was thrown⁽⁶⁾.

5. Handi. In Hong Kong. Protesters Use Traffic Cones as a Shield Against Tear Gas.
6. Handi.

Fig.7 Protesters Extinguishing Tear Gas with Water and Traffic Cones in 2019.



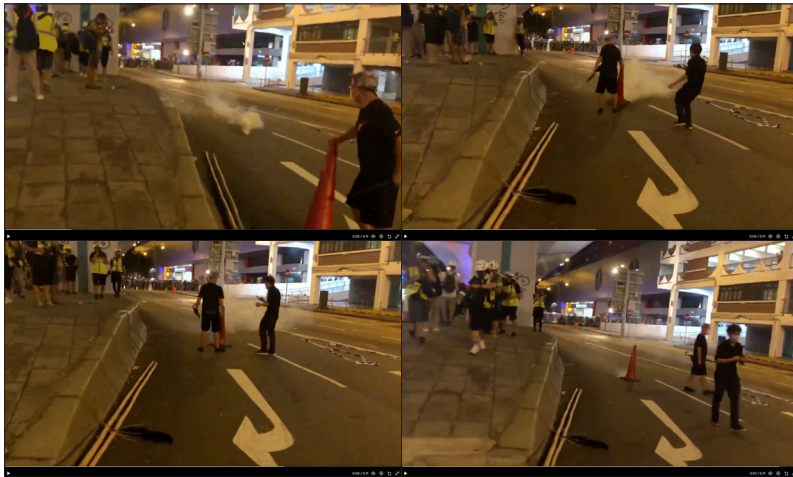
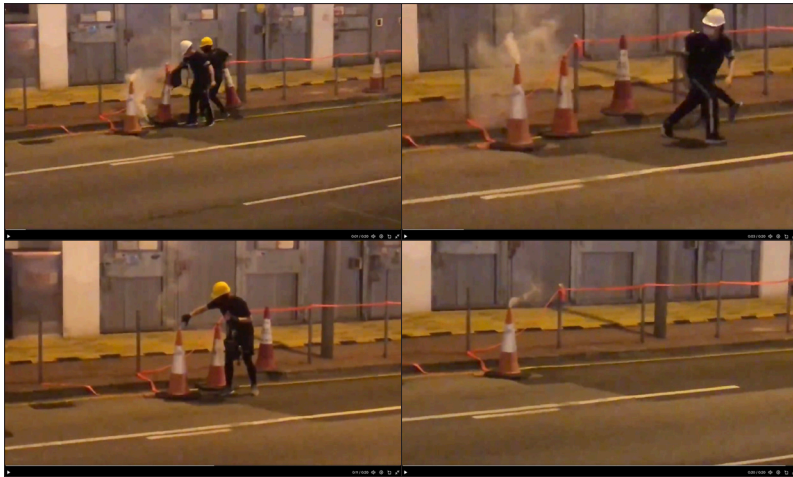


Fig.8-9 When Tear Gas Shell Comes In, They Place a Traffic Cone on Top Creating a "Chimney" to Stop the Gas Spreading; Then Pour Water into the Chimney to Douse the Shell.

7. Dapiran, City on Fire: The Fight for Hong Kong.

Through the use of the traffic cone they were able to neutralise the gas by placing it on top of it, blocking the gas from spreading. This seemingly simple but incredibly ingenious tactic was actually the result of weeks of experimentation and adaptation in the field.

The cone is quickly recognised as an ideal tool to counter the effects of tear gas. Placed over the grenades, it acts as an improvised "chimneys" limiting the spread of gas in the air. In some cases, protesters pour water through the top hole to extinguish the smoke, further neutralising the effect of the gas. When water is not enough, they resort to alternative solutions, such as throwing wet cloths over the tear gas to smother its release. This combination of ingenuity and quick action underlines the protesters' ability to adapt everyday objects to the needs imposed by the conflict situation.

Its conical shape, compact and containing, suggests a new function thanks to its physical characteristics, transforming it into an instrument capable of containing and neutralising gas. The cone is no longer perceived as a simple traffic element, but as a dynamic tool, which through its physical properties (*affordances*), facilitates a direct and functional interaction with its surroundings. Its physical properties naturally indicate how it could be used in a different context, offering creative and immediate solutions in response to threats, such as the use of tear gas.

In a situation of urgency, where time and resources are scarce, protesters manage to respond to immediate needs by transforming the use of everyday objects. In this case, the agency of the traffic cone is not limited to a simple practical response to the contingent situation, but becomes an act of resistance and transformation. From an object intended for traffic management, the cone reinvents itself as an instrument of collective protection, a symbol of resilience and adaptability, capable of confronting violence and repression, while at the same time challenging its original function.

The re-signification of an object like the cone, which in other circumstances would be considered insignificant or even trivial, demonstrates how objects can take on totally new meanings and functions in response to emergency situations. In doing so, the protesters not only take over and transform physical space into a new kind of territory, but also claim the right to rewrite the very function of the objects that populate that space.

Antony Dapiran, an Australian lawyer, writer and activist inside the Hong Kong protest, said in his book *City on Fire: The Fight for Hong Kong* "they have been developing these tactics over the last few weeks, and every week they get better organised. I don't feel unsafe with the tear gas. Actually, none of the young protesters fear the tear gas now⁽⁷⁾". These strategies, as Dapiran emphasises,

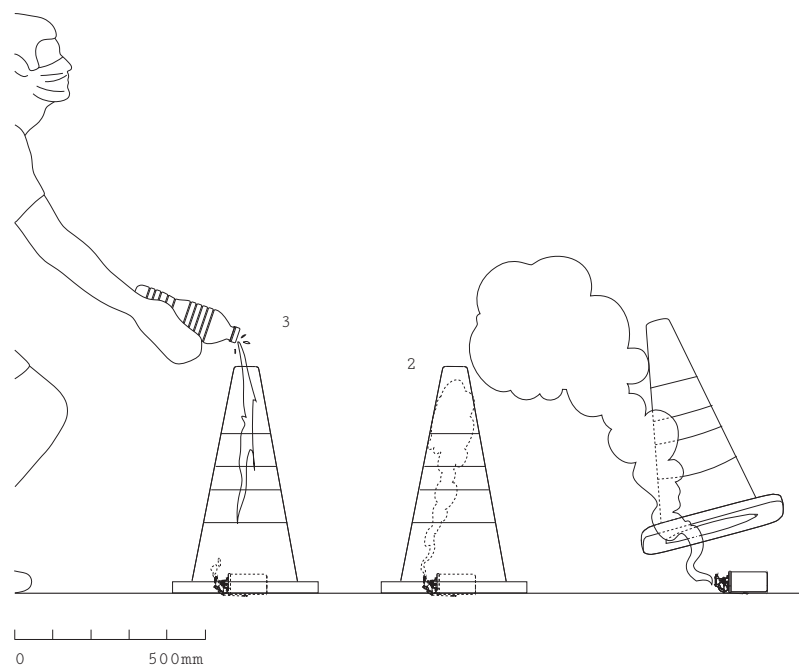
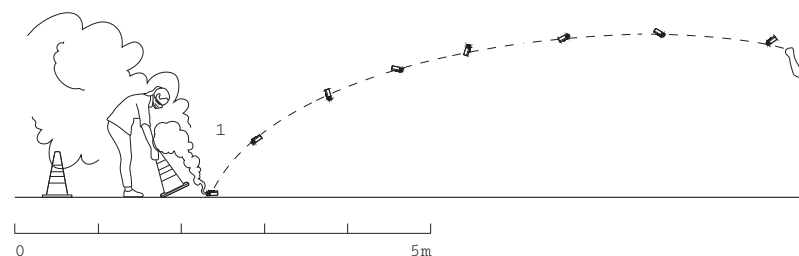
initially the result of field experimentation, have rapidly evolved and consolidated to the point of becoming an almost “ordinary” practice among protesters.

This practice of using the traffic cone to neutralise tear gas quickly became an entrenched tactic, a standardised and recognised approach within the movement. The speed with which this technique was learnt and replicated reflects the protester’s ability to adapt and organise themselves, turning an emergency solution into a reliable and repeatable strategy. This confidence, gained by protesters through direct experience in using this technique, has made the method a consolidated and “reliable” practice to adopt in emergency situations, to the point of eliminating the fear of tear gas⁽⁸⁾. The evolution of this technique has made the method not only effective, but also symbolic: it represents a shared knowledge, a collective response that transcends improvisation to become an integral part of the movement’s operating methods. The cone, from being an occasionally employed tool, has become an imprinted element in the visual and tactical memory of the protests, a well-established and almost intuitive technique for the protesters.

The reconfiguration of the use of the cone not only highlights the readiness and ingenuity of the protesters, but also demonstrates how an apparently banal object can acquire new connotations and meanings in a protest context. The cone thus becomes a fundamental element in spontaneous architectures of resistance, transforming itself from a tool of urban management into a symbol of collective resilience and strategic adaptation in the face of conflict.

8. Dapiran, *City on Fire: The Fight for Hong Kong*.

1. Traffic cones were placed over tear gas canisters thrown by the police to shield demonstrators from the gas.
2. The shape of the cone trapped the gas inside, creating a barrier that reduced its dispersal and provided protesters with temporary protection during confrontations.
3. Protesters would pour water through the top opening of the traffic cone, using it as a makeshift tool to extinguish and neutralize the tear gas, effectively reducing its impact.



Variations

The traffic cone element finds a significant role within protest movements due to its easy availability. Often retrieved directly from roads, urban construction sites or warehouses, this element becomes an active and versatile tool during protests. Its physical characteristics, lightness and manageability make it an immediately available object for multiple practical and symbolic uses.

More ordinarily, the cone is adopted as an instrument of [FIG.10] defence against the forces of law and order. It can be thrown to create a physical barrier, hinder the advance of officers or temporarily interrupt their actions. In this sense, the cone is not used to inflict damage, but rather to protect the protesters, slowing down or limiting the repressive action of the authorities.

The cone becomes, therefore, much more than a practical object in this context. It becomes the concrete result of a strategy of resistance in which bodies, exposed to forms of institutional violence, respond and defend themselves by transforming common tools into means of protection and defiance. The object itself loses its original functionality and acquires a new symbolic and operational meaning that contributes to this process of re-signification and collective empowerment.

Very often the traffic cone is also used, during protest movements, as a megaphone [FIG.11]. Thanks to its conical shape, the object allows the sound to be amplified, allowing the voice to expand and

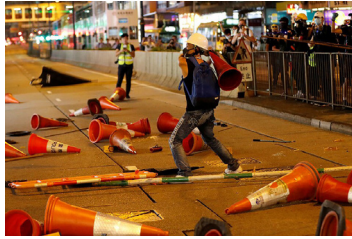


Fig.10 Hong Kong Demonstrators Throw Traffic Cones as a Defensive Weapon.
Fig.11 A Pro-Democracy Protester Jokingly Uses a Traffic Cone as a Loudspeaker During an Anti-Government Rally at Victory Monument in Bangkok.



be more intense. This simple but effective re-appropriation makes the traffic cone an ideal tool for communication in protest situations, where making one's voice heard, or communicating with other people is often a primary necessity.

In 2023, activists and residents of San Francisco found an ingenious way to protest the spread of self-driving cars in their city. By placing traffic cones on top of the sensors that guide the vehicles on their bonnets, they managed to send them into a tailspin, blocking them completely. [FIG.12]

9. Kerr, Protesters, Armed with Traffic Cones, Are Immobilizing Driverless Cars.
10. Mann, Kingston Halloween Traffic Cone Pranksters Reveal Stunt Was 'Protest Against Uber.'
Fig.12 Members of Safe Street Rebel Place a Cone on a Self-Driving Cruise Car in San Francisco.
Fig.13 People Dressed as Traffic Cones Block the Road in Kingston.



This gesture of protest highlighted the critical volatility of self-driving cars, which, despite advanced technological systems, remain easily influenced by unpredictable elements of the real world, and thus unsafe and easily manipulated⁽⁹⁾. In this context, the traffic cone becomes a means to disrupt the operation of a technology that many consider invasive and not yet ready to be integrated into

everyday life. The protesters, by obstructing the sensors of these cars, re-appropriate the territory of urban space, taking back an area perceived as provincialised or dominated by corporate interests, those of the companies of these self-driven cars.

An interesting case happened in Kingston, London in 2015 when a group of friends *dressed up* as traffic cones for Halloween. [FIG.13] They obstructed the passage of cars by placing themselves in the middle of the road, although their intent was not political, as one the participants suggested⁽¹⁰⁾.

The gesture, however, evidenced by the clear visibility of their costumes and the significance they had as traffic controllers and delimiters, intrigued passers-by, who joined the boys in further blocking the road and starting a spontaneous urban protest in favour of the regular taxis (which were allowed to continue their route) and against the Uber taxis (which were blocked and thus forced to change their trajectory).

This performative act of wearing a traffic cone costume transforms the individual wearing it into a personification of the object itself and the action it performs, that in this case of blocking,

diverting the movement of urban traffic. In this case, however, the cones have amplified this function by using it as a physical symbol to stop vehicles and let others pass. The very agency of the cone object, in the form of a dress, therefore influences the action of the wearer, who must reconsider not only the role of the object in space, but also the system it represents, and of those who, like taxi drivers, find themselves in conflict with it. In this case, the performative action of impersonating the traffic cone, an object traditionally imposed by an authority, becomes a freely appropriate tool to contest it, questioning its systems.



02. BRICKS

WHERE: Hong Kong,
BUILT: 2019
ORDINARY FUNCTION: Building material typically used for construction and paving.
REASON OF TRANSFORMATION: Blocking roads to impede police vehicles and disrupt traffic flow.
METHODOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION: Stacking bricks into structures resembling mini-temples or small Stonehenges, with two vertical pillars supporting a horizontal beam on top, creating stable yet easily deployable roadblocks. Often also attached to the ground with superglue.
RELEVANT FEATURES: Modular, heavy enough to stay in place but small enough to be carried and repositioned quickly.



11. Englefield, Brick Arches Roadblocks from Hong Kong Protests Resonate as 'Anyone Can Replicate'.
12. Elser et al., Protest Architecture: Barricades, Camps, Spatial Tactics 1830-2023.

The use of bricks as a tool inside protest movement is not a new thing. Their high availability meant that they were commonly used in different parts of the world, both to build barricades and as a defensive weapon [FIG.13]. However, it is when bricks are used in unconventional ways, exploring their potential and developing new strategies, that they acquire a new dimension: becoming elements capable of influencing spatial dynamics and re-coding the urban landscape.

During the Hong Kong protests in 2019, the brick-element evolved into an actual architectural form, capable of rewriting both the space it occupied and the dynamics it influenced. During the “be water” movement, protesters of the democracy movement developed a new method to block streets using hundreds of small archways, each made of three ordinary bricks, with two placed upright and a third one as a roof, sometimes attached to the street surface using superglue [FIG.14]. In larger groups, these ankle-high formations, using mostly the paving stones of the side walks and pedestrians zones, formed effective roadblocks that paralysed rush hour traffic in places and slowed down police emergency vehicles⁽¹¹⁾. When one of the structures was touched by the wheel of a vehicle, the falling top brick buttressed the other two and impeded or prevented further travel⁽¹²⁾. These barricade-type of structures acted as a more porous membrane than a closed boundary, they became almost symbol of the movement, winning also design prizes. Bricks, due to their physical characteristics - heavy enough to remain stable in place, yet light enough to be easily transported and quickly positioned - proved to be the ideal material for the construction of these barricades. Initially made of timbers and other less effective objects, brick barricades proved to be more functional and durable.



Fig.13 Bricks used as weapons in Palestine.
Fig.14 Hong Kong protesters used superglue to fix the brick to the street.

13. Guardian reporter, Mini Stonehenges: Hong Kong Protesters Take on Police, One Brick at a Time.

However, the bricks in Hong Kong were also used quite conventionally as projectiles (*weapons*) [FIG.15] and walled up to form a more traditional-style *barricades*. [FIG.16]

The bricks used were the same bricks that made up almost all the pavements on the street sides of the city of Hong Kong, which were often bordered by metal fences. To make these brick structures, arranged as “brick henges”, the protesters dismantled approximately fifty kilometres of fencing using a simple flat wrench to then extract all the bricks from the pavement and arrange them into these new structures that took their place inside the roadway.

The removal of these fences freed up sections of pavement, temporarily reorganising urban space. This marked the beginning of a process in which the bricks that made up the flooring were repurposed into structures designed to block traffic or slow the advance of police vehicles. These took the form of arches, stacked piles, or bricks and concrete glued directly to the ground⁽¹³⁾.

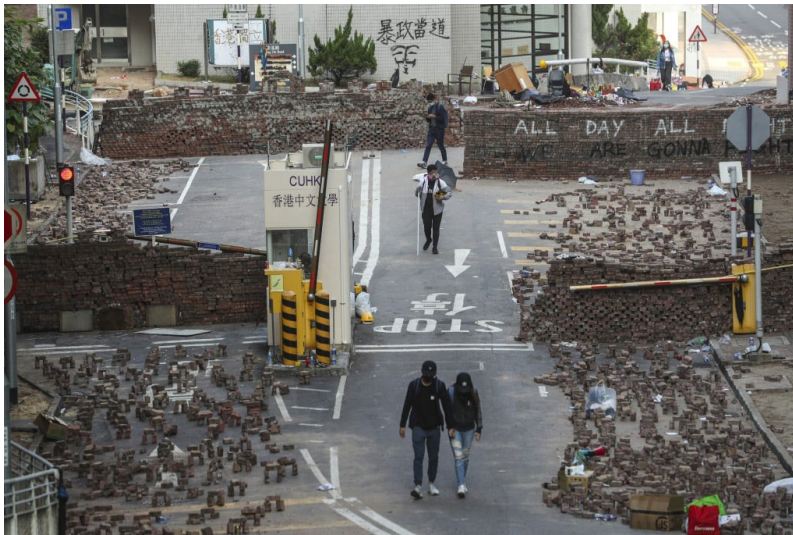


Fig.15 Protestors Throw Bricks onto the Road in Wong Tai Sin District, Hong Kong.
Fig.16 Barricades and Brick Arches Block the Main Road in Hong Kong.

14. Devabhaktuni, Traces of Protest and Curb-Scale Infrastructures in Hong Kong.

This displacement of the bricks from the pavements, a common feature of urban paving in Hong Kong, left gaps and empty areas in the pavement, producing irregular surfaces.

Immediately after the end of the protest, authorities swiftly moved to reassert control over the urban space by repairing the gaps left by the removal of bricks and dismantling the remaining barriers. After the protest, the city's pavements remained without fences for weeks, allowing the roads to extend outward creating a wide open space.

Shortly afterwards, in the places where the bare vertical poles remained, the Department of Transport attempted to use red and white police tape to mark the perimeter that the fences ran along [FIG.17] and later replaced it with a bright red plastic chain laced to the vertical poles by passing it through the small hooks on either side of the poles. [FIG.18] These initial interventions signaled that the recently cleared street would not remain open for long. It would soon be restored to its original state—controlled and confined within the limits set by the authorities—reinstating a visible order that stood in contrast to the temporary openness created by the protesters.

Soon, new, high-quality steel fences replaced those that had been demolished, and new steel plates were added to the concrete base to make them unbreakable [FIG.19].

Originally, the traditional red bricks that made up the city's pavements were fixed on top of a coarse bed of sand and earth, a soil that was not too compact and allowed it to be easily dug out to reach the water mains running underneath. This malleability of the fabric of the pavement also made it possible to easily quarry the bricks, using them as construction material for the arched sculptures.

Where large areas of the pavements had been stripped of their component bricks, Highways Department workers replaced them with large pours of concrete or bitumen, transforming the surface of the pavements into rough and uneven, thus altering the normal smooth and regular surface of the bricks and erasing the micro-types of brick layout, unique to each Hong Kong pavement⁽¹⁴⁾. [FIG.20-21-22].



Fig.17 Quickly Restored Sidewalks, with Vertical Pedestrian Fence Elements Linked with Construction Tape.
Fig.18 Plastic Chain Linked Vertical Fence Posts for Several Months in Parts of the City.
Fig.19 New Fencing Fixed with Anti-Theft Bolts.

Fig.20 Traditional Brick Arrangement on Hong Kong Sidewalks.
Fig.21 Pavements in Mong Kok District of Hong Kong Not Glued Down Three Months After Rioters Tore Up Bricks.
Fig.22 Twitter post from @LeoAW



Leo Weese
@LeoAW · Follow



It seems the Transportation Department is opting not to replace the disastrous barricades that edge most our roads, and are frequently upcycled as road blocks. No riots, only urban development!



6:22 AM · Oct 28, 2019

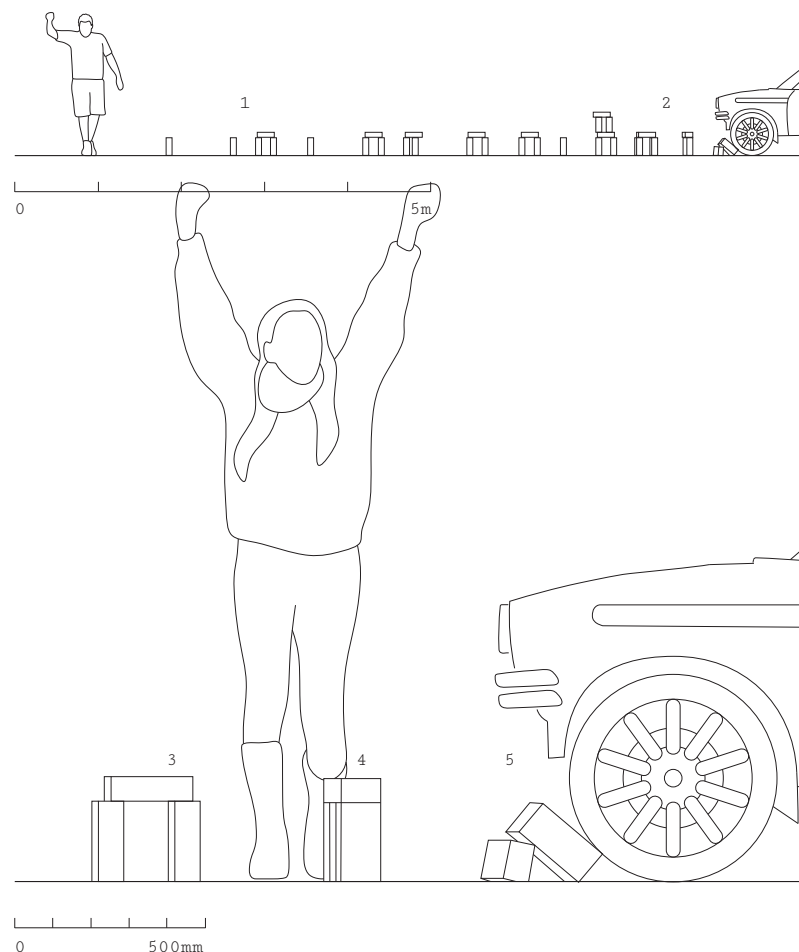


This difference in materials has a profound effect on the urban fabric of the city. The clear separation between the two surfaces - on the one hand, the geometric order of the bricks with their regular orientation, on the other, the anonymous grey of the concrete - creates a clear contrast that testifies to what has happened: on the one hand, the state's attempts to quickly restore the urban infrastructure, and on the other, the protester's intervention, which has altered the physical landscape in ways that are unlikely to be completely erased⁽¹⁵⁾. This contrast highlights how the action of the protesters contributed to a re-signification of the urban material, transforming its connotations and meanings, and leaving indelible traces of that historical moment in the fabric of the city.

The sidewalks became one of the most striking indicators of the 2019 protest's impact on the city. This process not only physically altered the urban landscape, but made the pavements an emblematic space of the conflict, a tangible symbol of the tension between the protesters' desire for change and the state's efforts to maintain control. The traces left by the protests stand as visible reminders of a period marked by intense political struggle and state intervention, highlighting how even the smallest urban elements can hold profound political significance.

14. Devabhaktuni. Traces of Protest and Curb-Scale Infrastructures in Hong Kong.

1. Protesters lifted bricks from block paving slabs in the city and rearranged them into pattern of bricks arches across many streets.
2. The brick arches were too high to be driven over easily, so they served to block the streets from traffic.
3. The arches were made from two vertical bricks with a third laid horizontally across the top.
4. They were arranged in patterns across the street.
5. If hit a vehicle's wheel the arches would collapse, forming a buttress that blocket the wheel.



03. BAMBOO CANES

WHERE: Various
BUILT: from 1990
ORDINARY FUNCTION: Usually used for various purposes like furniture, crafts and in some culture also scaffolding and housing structures.
REASON OF TRANSFORMATION: Creating physical blockades and serving as symbolic representing resistance and urgency.
METHODOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION: Bamboo canes were lashed together to form large tripods, often with a protester seated at the top to make removal more challenging.
RELEVANT FEATURES: lightweight, easily transportable, and quick to assemble, allowing for strategic deployment in various urban environment.



16. Elser et al., *Protest Architecture: Barricades, Camps, Spatial Tactics 1830-2023*.
17. Pa Reporter, *Police Describe Seeing Bamboo Structures at XN Newspaper Protest*.
18. Harper, *Extinction Rebellion's Tensegrity Structures Have Rekindled the Spirit of Early High-Tech*.

Made popular in England in the 1990s by *Reclaim the street movement*, the tripod became a typological element used in protest movements, also in contemporary ones⁽¹⁶⁾.

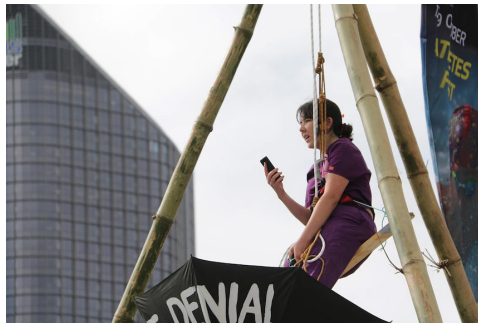
Made from three long poles joined together and positioned to form a three-legged structure, these tower-like footholds allow protesters to climb to the top and tie themselves to the structure, forcing the police to intervene with lifting platforms to lower the footholds. Often a small floor is also provided for activists to sit on, making the structure more stable.

This type of structure is often used in urban contexts where there are few trees to provide a similar elevating function. In these contexts, bamboo is an unusual material for this type of structure, especially in urban settings, compared to the traditional materials used for this type of work, such as metal poles (taken from scaffolding) and solid wood poles. [FIG.23]

The choice of bamboo was the result of several experiments which led to the conclusion that this material was the most suitable for tripod construction. Compared to other materials such as solid wood or scaffolding, bamboo is much lighter, yet equally strong, easy to handle and work with. In urgent situations, speed in the choice of materials is crucial, as the tripod structure must be assembled and erected in a very short time. One particularly interesting case involves the Extinction Rebellion, a global movement promoting non-violent action to raise awareness of the climate crisis among governments. The bamboo tripod typology is often used in their protests where each tripod consists of three bamboo poles tied together with ropes to form a pyramid shape. With a length of around 3-4m, the structure of the tripod is easy to erect, climb and can be stored in the back of a van. Protesters usually take less than two minutes⁽¹⁷⁾ to erect it, as usually preassembled in a nearby location, far from surveillance⁽¹⁸⁾. [FIG.24-25] Tripod legs can also be adjusted based on the location and surface, as they can suit also sloping terrain by adjusting the placement of the legs by pushing them into the ground. In some cases, the tripod became a super-tripod, which was created by assembling the original tripod element on top of three other tripods, and a hollow pipe was usually used to connect the poles of the upper tripod legs to each tripod below.



Fig.23 Cobbing. Scaffolding tripod.
Fig.24-25 Woman from Extinction Rebellion Suspends Herself Over Brisbane River from a Tripod on Victoria Bridge.



19. Newman, Protest Architecture: Structures of Civil Resistance.
20. Newman.
21. Newman.



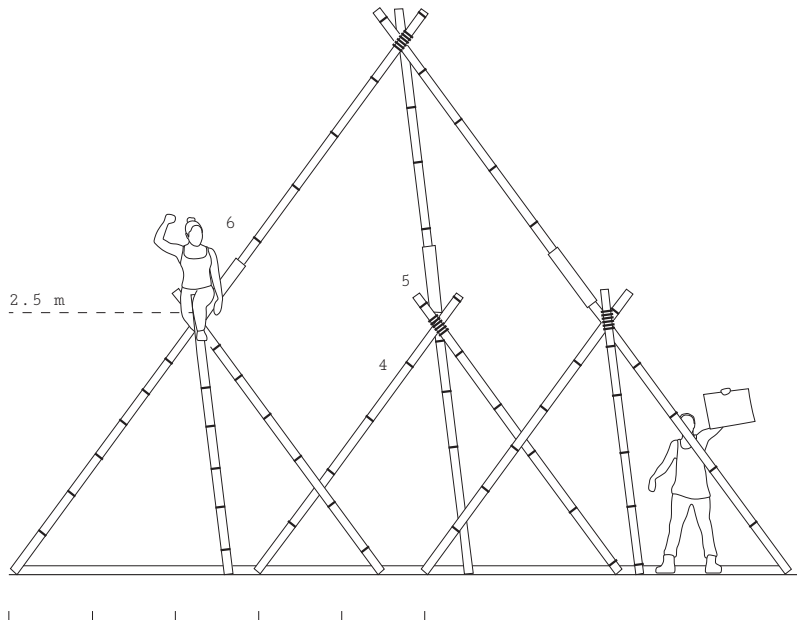
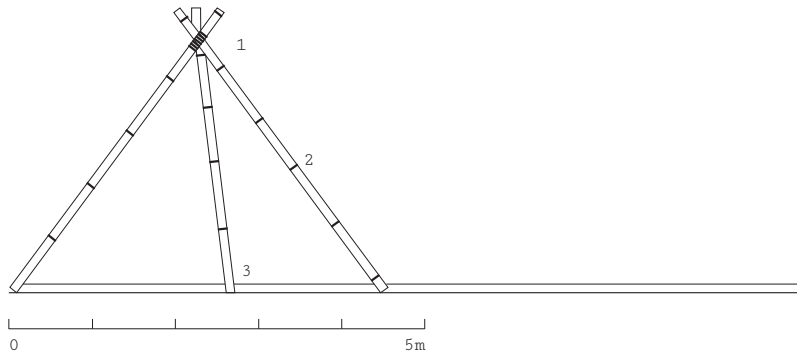
The height of the tripods is not a matter of chance, but adds a strategic and political dimension to the protest. In many European countries, according to standard police practice, if the structure exceeds 2.5 metres, a specialised support unit is required to operate at height. Adopting this height allows activists to position themselves above it, making it difficult and costly for the police to remove them⁽¹⁹⁾. The use of a specialised unit means that the dismantling process requires significant time, resources and logistical preparation⁽²⁰⁾.

Not only does this make the tripod type particularly effective, but it also contributes to slowing down the action of law enforcement by extending the time available for the protest itself. During this time, the activist's message can be amplified and made more visible, thus increasing the impact of their demand. Positioning themselves at that height becomes a deliberate tactic, as the time spent on top of the tripod becomes crucial element for the activists.

The longer they stay there, the stronger their message becomes and the greater the visibility of their cause, attracting the attention of the public, media and press. This strategy offers activists the opportunity to provoke deeper reflection on the issue they are addressing, giving a time dimension to their protest action.

The simple and replicable design of these typologies makes them usable in different situations and contexts, making them recurring elements in various protests around the world. The tripod typology is therefore not only replicable for its easy installation, but becomes a symbol, a totem representing the protesters' ability to defend the land while maintaining their own position⁽²¹⁾.

1. Three bamboo poles were lashed together using rope, individually and then together. This allowed them to be carried in a bundle than spread apart.
2. The structural bamboo poles are strong enough to climb up.
3. The bases on the tripod were restrained from spreading outwards by wire triangle.
4. Three tripods were arranged into a triangle pattern to form the base of the super tripod.
5. Protesters climbed on top of the tripods to attach the upper tripod and occupy the structure.
6. Short pipes were used to connect the poles of the fourth tripod onto the top of the other three.



Variations

Bamboo canes are widely available in many parts of the world, particularly in India and across Asia, where bamboo is extensively cultivated and integrated into various industries. In the construction sector, it is commonly used for scaffolding, thanks to its strength, flexibility, and fast renewability. [FIG.26-27] Given its widespread presence in urban environments, bamboo often plays a crucial role in moments of protest. Its structural properties make it an ideal material for assembling temporary barricades, support frameworks for makeshift shelters, and other ad-hoc constructions that facilitate protest activities. Additionally, bamboo poles frequently serve as physical supports for banners, flags, and signage, reinforcing the visibility and impact of collective demonstrations. [FIG.28] Bamboo scaffolding is one of China's oldest building techniques, yet while its use has been restricted on structures taller than six stories in mainland China for safety reasons, it continues to shape Hong Kong's urban landscape⁽²²⁾.



22. Bradsher. Building a Bamboo Bulwark Against the Hong Kong Police.

Fig.26 Facade of a Building Just Off Nathan Road
Fig.27 Traditional scaffolding building system.
Fig.28 Cleanup Operation After the Hong Kong Protest.



In Hong Kong, bamboo took on an even more tactical function, similar to the use of “brick arches.”

Demonstrators reused bamboo poles from city construction sites and scaffolding to create ground grids designed to *slow the advance of law enforcement* [FIG.29]. The bamboo canes were arranged horizontally, forming a grid structure resting on brick piles positioned exactly at the points of intersection between the poles, creating a modular barricade that can be easily assembled and adapted to the urban context. In some cases, large plastic bottles were also added to these structures and used as additional disruptive elements to block and slow down the advance of vehicles, thus increasing the overall effectiveness of these improvised barricades⁽²³⁾.



Another variation of using bamboo involves arranging them in a tripod formation, similar to the previous examples. In this case, the structure is assembled by fixing the bamboo canes together with zip ties, while the base is reinforced with bricks to ensure stability.

Additional bamboo canes intersect at the top, connecting several tripods into one large infrastructure [FIG.30]. This strategic adaptation highlights how local materials, deeply rooted in a city's architectural identity, can be recontextualised in protest movements as symbols of resistance. By incorporating bamboo into their protest strategies, demonstrators not only made use of a versatile and readily available material, but also embedded their acts of resistance within the city's architectural and cultural heritage.



23. Bradsher.

Fig.29 District Central Hong Kong, 13th November 2019.
Fig.30 Bamboo Barricades Erected by Protesters to Hinder Police Force Movements Towards PolyU.

In many cases, bamboo is used in its original function - as a structural support. In protest contexts, particularly in temporary shelter situations, it becomes an ideal element to support fabric canopies or temporary structures. Its combination of lightness and strength makes it highly functional for these spatial configurations. To ensure stability, additional weighted elements are often placed at the base, allowing the bamboo poles to securely support tent-like structures which are anchored at their tops [FIG.31].



During farmer’s protest in 2021 at the Ghazipur border in Delhi, demonstrators used bamboo sticks to build their shelters. In addition to the dwellings set up inside the various trucks parked along the occupied highway,

protesters utilized bamboo as a primary building material for additional temporary shelters erected directly on the road⁽²⁴⁾. These structures, tied together with rope and covered with waterproof fabric, formed resilient and functional enclosures, providing protection throughout the period of the occupation ⁽²⁵⁾. The National Highway 24 becomes, from transit infrastructure, a place of temporary habitation, reconfigured as a space of permanence generating new social dynamics within the urban space.[FIG.32]



24. Shafiqna India. Farmers in No Mood to Relent! Build Concrete Structures. Waterproof Tents at Protest Sites.
25. Baruah. Farmers’ Protest at Singhu: Trolleys Return to Punjab for Harvest, Sheds Take Their Place.

Fig.31 Farmers Use Bamboo Cane to Construct Protest Camp.
Fig.32 Khandelwal, Saumya. Aerial View of the Protest Camp in Delhi.

04 . UMBRELLA

WHERE: Hong Kong
BUILT: 2019
ORDINARY FUNCTION: Usually used for rain protection.
REASON OF TRANSFORMATION: Creating a physical protection from police camera surveillance.
METHODOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION: The umbrella was directly attached to the surveillance cameras, nullifying the surveillance and facial recognition function.
RELEVANT FEATURES: Lightweight so easy to carry and handle, affordable and widely available, multifunctional, resistant.



26. Winn, Hong Kong Protesters Implement Methods to Avoid Facial Recognition Technology and Government Tracking.
27. Smith, In Hong Kong, Protesters Fight to Stay Anonymous.
28. The Telegraph, Innovative Hong Kong Protesters Use Lasers, Traffic Cones and Street Signs in Battle with Police.
29. The Telegraph.

The umbrella is a recurring object in protest movements, widely used for its practical ability to shield protesters from tear gas, pepper spray, and water cannons. [FIG.33-34-35] However, beyond its immediate function as a protective tool, it carries a strong symbolic dimension. In the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, the umbrella became a symbol of resistance, visually encapsulating the resistance and unity of the demonstrators. Its widespread presence transformed it from a simple material accessory into a political symbol of the protest itself⁽²⁶⁾.

Analysing the recurrence of the umbrella in the images of the Hong Kong protest, we see that this object goes beyond its function as a physical shield, assuming a crucial role in protecting the privacy of the protesters. It became a defensive tool against surveillance cameras, helping to keep secret identities and protect participants from digital tracking. In this context, the umbrella not only protected the protesters from the coming physical violence, but also against the intrusion of their privacy from the Chinese government⁽²⁷⁾.

"It's raining, open your umbrella" is a recurring phrase in the protest videos, a code to warn protesters to open their umbrellas and protect themselves from surveillance cameras that might film them⁽²⁸⁾. The umbrellas were not only used as tools for individual privacy protection, but through their repetition created a single large covering under which the protesters could hide. This compact, moving mass, similar to a large cloud made of umbrellas, obstructed the visibility of surveillance cameras, making it difficult to identify individual participants. [FIG.36]

Government surveillance was a pervasive threat during the Hong Kong protests, where facial recognition systems and digital tracking were used to identify and monitor demonstrators. Protesters in Hong Kong worry that they are being observed and tracked when they hit the streets, and that simply participating could leave them vulnerable to government reprisals.

More than a thousand people have been arrested since the pro-democracy protest against china growing control over Hong Kong started in June⁽²⁹⁾. Protesters, in this context, choose umbrellas as a readily available item, using their qualities as a potential to transform this objects in something else.



Fig. 33-34 Anti-Extradition Protesters React After Tear Gas Is Fired by Police During Clashes in Wong Tai Sin in 2019. Fig. 35 Studio Incendo. Protesters Brave Heavy Rain as They March Against the 2019 Hong Kong Extradition Bill on Sunday, August 18, 2019.

30. Jacobson, Hong Kong Protesters Use Laser Pointers to Deter Police, Scramble Facial Recognition.

The umbrella was also employed to shield police surveillance cameras, directly blocking their view. Attached to the device by bands or zip ties, its handle allowed it to be firmly anchored, while the spherical shape of the umbrella ensured complete obstruction in all directions, making surveillance and facial recognition ineffective. [FIG.37]

During this pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong, demonstrators found other ways to implement methods to avoid facial recognition technology and government tracking both online (through AirDrop and Telegram, both untraceable ways to send informations) and on the streets. Laser pointers have become a thing in these protests, as they were widely available, as protesters can buy them for 10 dollars at any electronic store⁽³⁰⁾. These devices, emitting powerful beams of green or blue light, were used to blind surveillance cameras, create flare on lenses and disorient police forces, making it more difficult to identify protesters and deter people from taking photos amid political turmoil. [FIG.38]

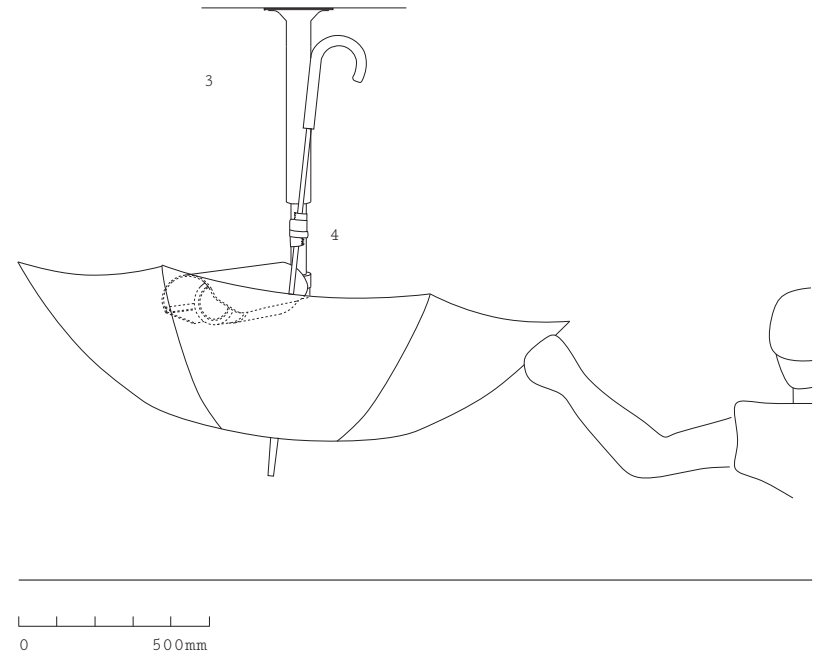
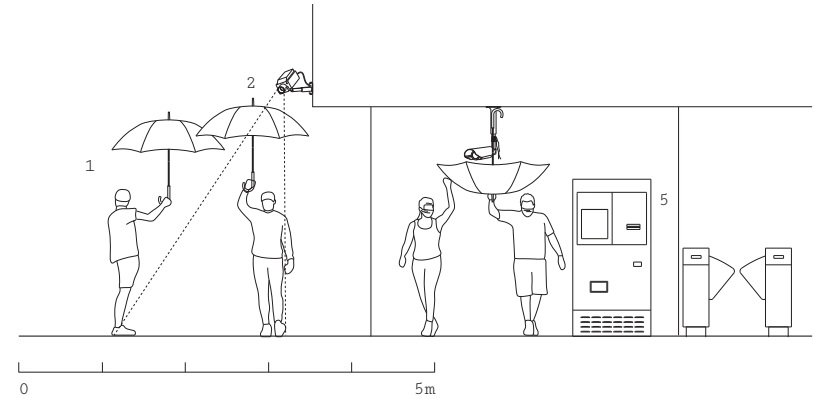
The use of these technologies, and in particular the use of the laser and umbrella-shield typology, during the Hong Kong protest contributed to a radical redefinition of the city from a hyper-surveilled space into a territory temporarily opaque to government control. In a context where every face, voice or gesture was traceable by the authorities, protesters sabotaged the function of surveillance through these different strategies of obscurity. Wearing masks, protecting themselves with umbrellas, blinding cameras with lasers, allowed them to escape the logic of recognition and to dissolve into the urban landscape as anonymous entities, subjects untraceable and thus momentarily free from identification and repression.



Fig. 37 Hong Kong Demonstrators Attach Umbrellas to Surveillance Cameras to Avoid Recognition.
Fig. 38 Kwan, Anthony. A Police Officer Stands Guard with a Gun as Protesters Aim Laser Pointers at Him Outside the Mong Kok Police Station.



1. Umbrellas were used open to protect demonstrator from surveillance cameras around the city.
2. The surveillance cameras' detection beam was unable to identify and recognize faces, which were obscured by the coverage of umbrellas.
3. Umbrellas were often directly attached to surveillance cameras using tape, ribbons, or other securing materials, obstructing their view.
4. By directly attaching the umbrella to surveillance cameras, this method proved to be more durable and effective in obstructing their view.
5. The demonstrators, in order to avoid being tracked, purchased metro tickets using only cash instead of bank cards, opting for single-journey tickets.



05. WATERPROOF TARPAULIN

WHERE: Madrid
BUILT: 2011
ORDINARY FUNCTION: Material used in commercial stores for packaging.
REASON OF TRANSFORMATION: To create protection and shelter in the protest camp while redefining the public space for political assembly.
METHODOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION: Large blue tarpaulins and waterproof construction materials were used to cover the square, creating a canopy that shielded protesters.
RELEVANT FEATURES: Lightweight and easy to transport, durable, adaptable to different uses, inexpensive and readily available.



31. Brown et al., Protest Camps in International Context: Spaces, Infrastructures and Media of Resistance.

“In the context of protests, the convergence and union of bodies in physical space constitute the core of the movement itself and its impact in urban space. However, a protest is not reduced to the mere presence of protesters: its dynamics and political development emerge from the intertwining of material objects that constitute the elements of the city itself (objects found within the urban context), physical geographies (environment, built architecture, climate), media representations (newspapers, social networks) and local or national regulations that influence its configuration. It is through these entanglements and adaptations that the emblematic symbols of protest are generated. Sustained protest requires bodies, and bodies require protection. In protest camps, this protection is often entrusted to lightweight, flexible and adaptable materials: textiles⁽³¹⁾.”

Used in a variety of ways, from clothes to banners, from blankets to tents, the element of fabric is not only a logistical support, but a fundamental element that allows protesters to inhabit the space and prolong their presence over time. The fabric becomes a porous element acting both as a shelter from different climatic conditions, but also provides contingent “intimacy” to create a context of stability and security in what is also a temporary living space. The fabrics most commonly used in protests often come from the world of construction or industrial use, chosen for their strength and adaptability. In addition to their practical function, textiles act as an architectural devices that shape and transform the urban landscape, momentarily redefining its morphology.

Since 15 May 2011, for about a month, Puerta del Sol has been transformed into a protest camp, characterised by a large blue tarpaulin cover that has visually redesigned the space of the square. The idea of occupying the main square of a city and transforming it into a protest camp was directly inspired by the revolutions in the Arab world, in particular the mobilisation that took place in Tahrir Square, Cairo [FIG.39-40]. The model of the tents used by Egyptian protesters in the desert, due to their simplicity and replicability, became a reference for Spanish activists, who adopted a similar solution for the occupation of the Puerta del Sol. The encampment not only guaranteed protection and permanence in the urban space, but also redefined the square as a place of political aggregation and collective resistance. [FIG.41]



Fig. 39-40 Annotated Photo from BBC (Over Reuters Photo) of Tahrir Square, Cairo at the Height of the Protests.
Fig. 41 Madrid, Puerta del Sol on May 19, 2011, the Encampment at the Foot of the Statue of King Carlos III.

32. Elser et al., Protest Architecture: Barricades, Camps, Spatial Tactics 1830-2023.
33. Elser et al.

During the night of 15 May, the protesters organised themselves into working groups, divided into management categories (infrastructure, food, cleanliness, expansion and communication) and started to build the camp starting with a jaima structure, a kind of tent commonly used in North Africa. ‘They used four rubbish containers, scaffolding, and a building-site canvas, insulating the interior with carton boxes⁽³²⁾. Shortly afterwards, during the night, the police removed the tent, leaving everything in a tabula rasa.

However, as the number of protesters increased, the square began to fill up more and more, and people set about rebuilding it. The floor was covered with cardboard, used as a construction and insulation material, creating a large carpet, interrupted by paths in some areas. Taking advantage of the existing infrastructure of the Puerta del Sol square, the protesters started to pull ropes from the lampposts to the equestrian statue, and to build improvised pillars out of wooden laths and plastic tubes, on which they hung pieces of blue tarpaulin, thus forming a huge hanging canvas that covered almost the entire area of the square.

Challenging the law that camping would be prohibited in that square, protesters dedicated to handling the materials, which came from discarded large commercial stores, especially from packaging production, were in charge of dispensing the materials to other people in order to build their own ‘huts’ in a ‘do-it-yourself’ way. Tied to these vertical pillars, which served not only as supports, but also as waste bins and rest areas, the huge tarp evoked “a certain maritime image to a city without a beach: fluttering in the breeze, at times seeming to evoke the movement of water⁽³³⁾.” [FIG.42]

Underneath this canvas, a small metropolis was gradually being built inside the main one - a kind of symbolic state that implied a radical questioning of how things function. Hand in hand with self-construction went a system of self-government via assemblies, where work was voluntary.

A true community was formed, with a distinct division of functional areas, from sleeping areas, rest areas and perimeter areas served for public assemblies. The organisation achieved high levels of self-management, creating areas for children’s activities, stands for food and drinks and even an area for lost property. The cloth becomes an element that not only rewrites spatial norms, but also redesigns their management.

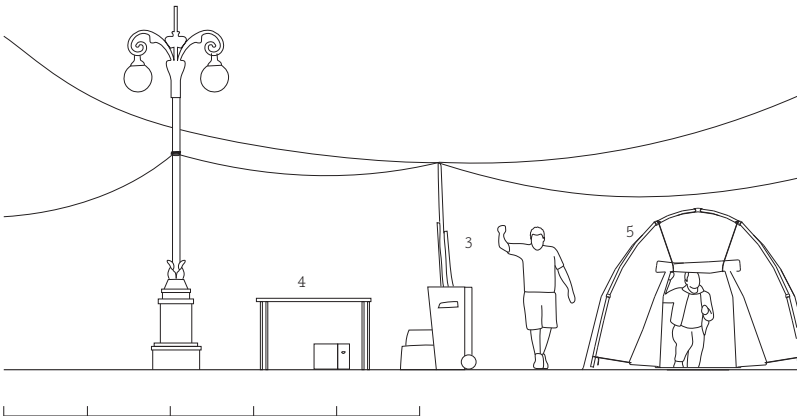
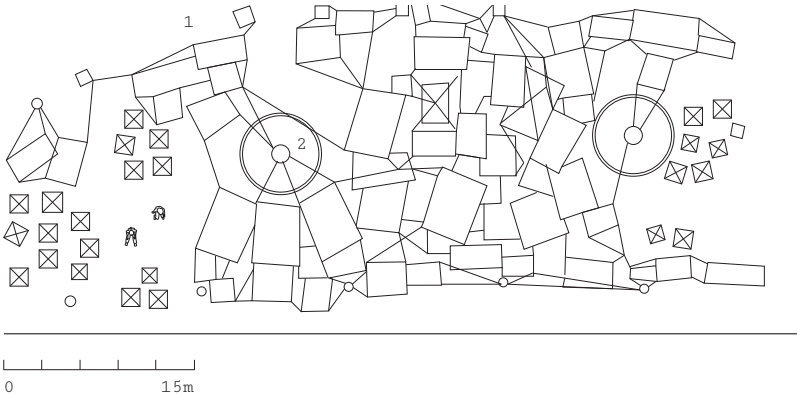
Through its ability to delimit, protect and organise, it allows a new interaction with the urban environment, but above all introduces

community and collective dynamics, creating a space that is not only inhabitable, but becomes the theatre of an organisational and relational experience, where participants can explore alternatives in the shared management of space and collective living. [FIG.43-44]



Fig. 42 Detail of the Fabric Roof During the 15M Movement Protest in Madrid.
Fig. 43 Aerial View of Puerta del Sol.
Fig. 44 15M Encampment. n.d. Photograph. Public Space.

1. The roof was made of tensioned ropes and water-resistant fabrics, sourced from waste materials provided by local businesses in the city.
2. The structure made of wires and fabric was attached to street lamps, which acted as pillars, supporting the temporary architecture of the protest space.
3. Self-made supports were constructed from discarded materials and served as reinforcements, rubbish bins, and foundations, demonstrating the multifunctional and adaptive strategies employed in the protest space.
4. Working group stands were created to facilitate discussion, organization, and information sharing during protests.
5. Dome tents were set up as shelters during the protests.



In one form or another, violence also plays a role in almost all the typological elements investigated in this thesis. In the context of protests, the objects that define these new spatial typologies often emerge in direct response to violence, in response to threats, whether physical, symbolic or political⁽³⁴⁾.

Violence determines in part how these structures are organised, conceived, how objects are chosen, assembled and repurposed with functions of personal and collective protection, defence, or disruption and diversion for external threats. A traffic cone is not only a traffic management device, but becomes an essential element for the protection of protesters from tear gas; bricks from passive building elements become active actors to limit the advance of violent police forces, while umbrellas from devices to shelter from the rain become shields of protection both physical but also of personal identity and privacy.

These objects not only answer to a certain kind of violence, but anticipate, reflect and challenge it, becoming tools through which individuals protect themselves and at the same time establish their presence in space. Bodies defend against a form of violence, and it is this violence and the strategies implemented to protect themselves that transform these objects, that give them new meanings. In this tension between violence and resistance, the materiality of these elements is rewritten: they are no longer mere tools, but become an integral part of the tactics of defence and affirmation, redefining the way space is occupied and experienced in protest. The need to defend and protect oneself, combined with the urgency of the moment, shapes these new types of objects and spaces, transforming the very meaning of collective action and the way it is inscribed in the urban context. This is not just a physical gesture, but a political act: a tangible statement of how violence on public spaces is challenged through the re-appropriation and strategic re-use of what is immediately at hand. [FIG.45]

34. Elser et al., Protest Architecture: Barricades, Camps, Spatial Tactics 1830-2023.

Fig. 45



Temporality, as analysed in Chapter 1, plays a key factor in the re-signification of these objects in the field of protest. The production of space within a protest and its urgencies, its temporalities, is really changing the significance of the objects themselves.

The space of dissent, of contestation, is constructed in the immediate with resources limited to those available in that context in which the action takes place. The emergency also plays an important role in the re-proposition of new functions and forms of these ordinary objects, transforming the original meaning of the objects with its strict temporality. In a context of urgency, where the amount of time is limited, protesters must quickly adapt the objects they have available to new needs, finding practical and symbolic solutions that respond to the contingent situation. This process requires a continuous search for alternative affordances, in which the object loses its original function to take on new valences, linked to the need for immediate action. Improvised design, dictated by limited time, challenges traditional design conventions, adapting to the changing conditions of these movements. The object is transformed into a dynamic tool, capable of fulfilling political and social functions not contemplated in its original design, but which emerge through interaction, context and the community that re-appropriates it.

The architectures of the protest are designed to optimise time for action, a fundamental aspect for the success of a 'site take', i.e. the strategic occupation of a place through the construction of temporary structures. These elements need to be assembled quickly, such as tripods, which can be erected in a few minutes, or bamboo barricades, which can be erected in less than fifteen minutes. To ensure this speed of execution, the structures adopt lightweight materials and modular or easily transportable configurations, allowing for rapid adaptation to the changing conditions of the protest.

The speed with which structures are dismantled is also an important factor: move and move infrastructure quickly to avoid police intervention. Sometimes, protesters have to assemble, break up, disband and reorganise in different locations, as in the 'be water' strategy adopted during the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

35. Newman, *Protest Architecture: Structures of Civil Resistance*.
36. Butler, *Bodies in Alliance: The Political Art of Existence*.

The aesthetics of protest architecture are deeply influenced by urgency and necessity. Improvisation and precariousness are not only consequences of rapid construction, but become themselves distinctive and recognisable elements of these temporary infrastructures. The lack of resources and the immediate need for protection or delimitation of space lead to the use of salvaged materials and essential construction techniques, creating structures that appear rudimentary, yet functional. This simplicity is often interpreted as a return to the archetypes of living, evoking images of primordial shelters or improvised huts, where form strictly follows function and adaptability becomes the guiding principle⁽³⁵⁾.

Protest architecture is defined by a porous identity, never rigidly defined, in line with the 'do-it-yourself' culture and the desire to actively construct one's own space. In addition to their strategic function in achieving the goals of the protest, these structures express spontaneous creativity, experimenting with alternatives even if they initially appear provisional or improvised. The construction itself becomes an act of collective participation, where the transformation of space is not only a necessity, but also an expressive gesture that challenges architectural conventions and opens up new possibilities of appropriation and use of urban space.

Analysing how these aesthetic practices intertwine with the infrastructural dimensions of activism offers a broader perspective for understanding protest movements, their political and social impact and their way of redefining space. These new typologies become temporary infrastructures that physically and symbolically support collective action and are fundamental, as discussed by Butler, "to the very struggle of certain ideals⁽³⁶⁾". The aesthetics of protest become not only a visual language, but an infrastructural dimension that holds bodies, materials, symbols and space together, shaping collective action.

Design and technology are often seen as distinct entities, yet their boundaries blur when observed through the lens of protest architecture. Objects, in the framework of protest, not only serve as tools but also become technologies in themselves, reshaping the way we perceive the distinction between what is design and what is technology. These objects—whether traffic cones, bamboo barricades, or fabric shelters—are not just passive tools; they are active agents that anticipate, respond to, and shape the spatial and political dynamics of protest.

The visual analysis, as a methodology, shows, in this research, with concrete examples of images and frame of videos, how protest objects function as a form of technology in that they enable specific actions, creating a framework through which bodies interact with space. The moment of breaking the loop—when an object is repurposed within a protest—reveals its latent technological potential. For example, a simple umbrella becomes a shield against tear gas, a means of hiding and a visual sign of resistance. These acts of appropriation highlight how everyday objects gain new meanings when embedded in collective action. This fluidity of meaning is integral to an understanding of protest architectures not as simply spatial configurations, but as evolving systems of tactical adaptation.

Performativity is a central concept in the methodological framework for investigating these new typologies. Performativity here refers to the way objects and actions, through repetition, generate meaning and solidify as recognizable strategies. Repetition does not merely reinforce use—it transforms it. When an act is performed enough times, it transitions from improvisation to codified practice, shaping both spatial and social patterns. The recurrence of certain protest objects in various movements worldwide—whether traffic cones used after Hong Kong in other part of the world, or bamboo in blockades...—demonstrates how repetition consolidates strategies into a shared repertoire of protest methodologies.

Repetition plays a crucial role in both the effectiveness and visibility of protest design. Patterns emerge not only in the physical arrangements of objects but also in the tactics employed by protesters.

By detecting different typologies of object re-signification in protest movements and analyzing images that capture their repeated use—examining how an object is used, its function, and its recurrence

37. Newman, Protest Architecture: Structures of Civil Resistance.
38. Ma et al., Why Protest Tactics Spread Like Memes: When Items Like Umbrellas and Leaf Blowers Are Subverted into Objects of Resistance, They Become Very Shareable.

across contexts—we can trace patterns that uncover deeper structures within these movements. These patterns are not merely incidental; they act as a form of collective intelligence, shaping strategies and reinforcing the spatial language of dissent. Through repetition, objects and actions acquire a symbolic charge, becoming more than just practical tools—they turn into recognizable markers of resistance, institutionalised elements. A traffic cone used to cover tear gas canisters, a bamboo barricade assembled in few minutes (riproporre tutte le immagini di prima), or a blue tarp stretched across occupied space—all of these, when seen across multiple protests, create a shared visual and tactical vocabulary.

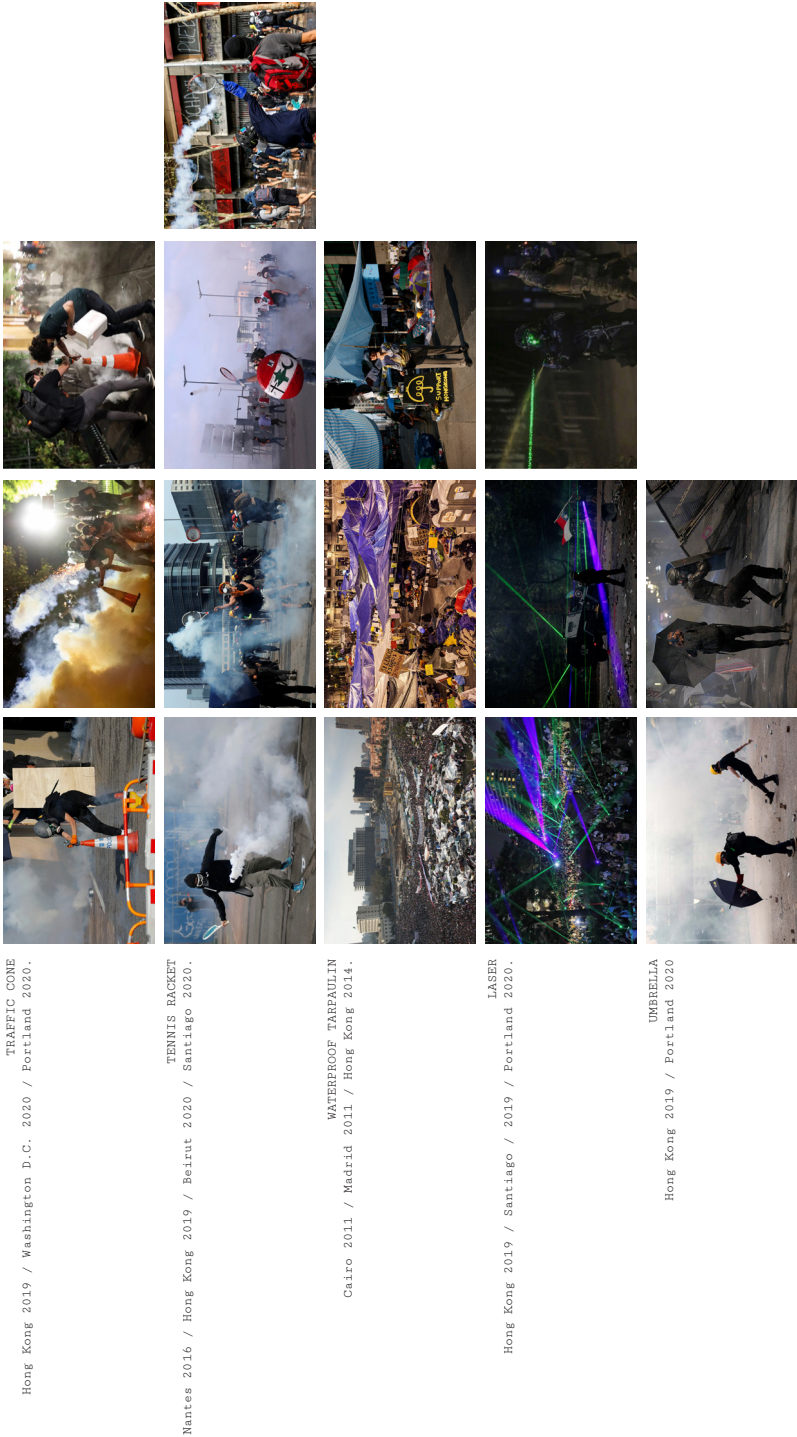
These recurring elements inscribe themselves into the collective memory of protest movements, making them instantly recognizable and easily replicable. The act of repetition amplifies their new meaning, turning these new objects into real shared typological elements⁽³⁷⁾.

A video from Hong Kong in August 2019 captures a group of protesters rushing through a cloud of tear gas to cover a canister with an orange traffic cone. After 9 months, the same action, with the same typology was repeated across the world, in Minneapolis during a black Lives Matter protest.

In two different places, during two different movements, the same thing happened. Footage of protests circulating on social media reveals many such parallels, where everyday objects are repurposed with remarkable ingenuity across different contexts. Other elements such as leaf blowers that disperse tear gas, hockey sticks and tennis rackets that deflect canisters back at authorities, and high-powered laser pointers that disrupt surveillance cameras, form typologies that appear in protests across different parts of the world. Same object, same use, different place⁽³⁸⁾.

Patterns do not emerge solely from the reuse of physical objects; they also manifest in the ways these objects are deployed. By amplifying these repetitions—tracing their occurrences, examining their transformations, and understanding the forces behind them through this visual research—we can reveal how protest architectures evolve. Repetition solidifies tactics, turning them into established practices that can be adapted to new and different contexts. It institutes new ways of occupying and interacting with space, gradually embedding itself into the cultural and political fabric of protest movements. Repetition generates visibility. When an act is repeated enough times, it not only reinforces itself, with its new use, but also signals continuity and durability.

than a singular event. Protest architectural typologies, through their iterative nature, demonstrate how space can be continuously reclaimed, modified and redefined. The presentation of this example emphasises how these repeated gestures create a network of knowledge, where techniques are shared, adapted and re-executed, ensuring that resistance is not only momentary but lasting. These new types of protest, developed through interaction with people, demonstrate how space can be continuously modified and redefined through their collective use and appropriation. The fact that they have been repeated and used in several contexts with the same function makes them “archetypes”. The same gestures, repeated, create a sharable network of knowledge, in which techniques are shared, adapted and pursued.



TRAFFIC CONE
Hong Kong 2019 / Washington D.C. 2020 / Portland 2020.

TENNIS RACKET
Nantes 2016 / Hong Kong 2019 / Beirut 2020 / Santiago 2020.

WATERPROOF TARPAULIN
Cairo 2011 / Madrid 2011 / Hong Kong 2014.

LASER
Hong Kong 2019 / Santiago 2019 / Portland 2020.

UMBRELLA
Hong Kong 2019 / Portland 2020

SPECULA— TIVE SCENARIOS.

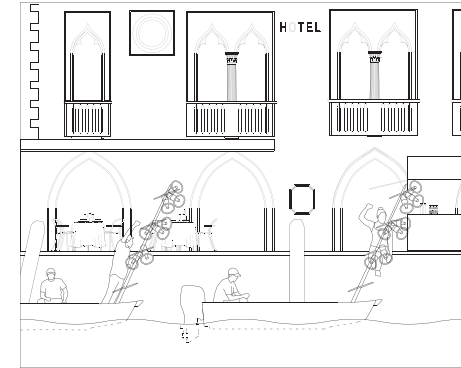
INTRODUCTION

.03

In this chapter, I explore the practical application of Christopher Alexander's book *A Pattern Language* to develop speculative scenarios related to protest situations⁽¹⁾. The aim is to imagine how alternative dynamics might manifest within different public space scenarios, analysing how these spaces might be transformed according to different organisational and social models. Using this approach, we investigate how design not only defines the environment, but also shapes political interactions, highlighting the crucial role architecture plays in shaping collective practices and political struggle.

1. Alexander. *A Pattern Language*.

ITINERANT NO-GRANDI NAVI PROTEST



The problem of cruise ships and large vessels entering the Venetian lagoon has caused various environmental, cultural and social tensions on the island in the last years. An essential element in countering centralised decisions that are harmful to the lagoon is to transform the urban maritime space into a place of active participation for protest. This pattern aims to integrate the needs for mobility, expression and resistance, linking the social fabric to an innovative protest practice that enriches the broader scheme of urban regeneration and democratic participation.

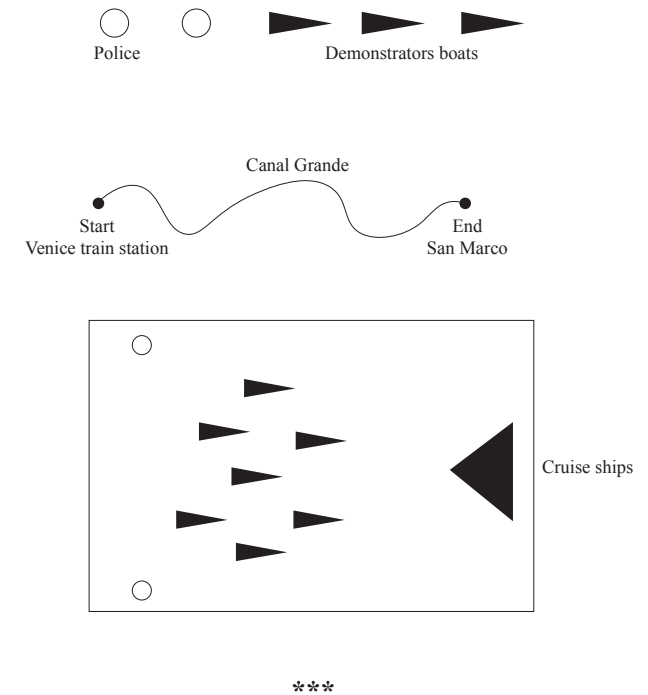
The “Grandi navi” that dock in Venice compromise the environmental, social and cultural balance of the city, imposing a model of development and tourism that excludes residents and damages the historical heritage.

The massive arrival of large ships (cruise liners and large-scale shipping) causes congestion, environmental damage and increasing alienation of residents, who feel excluded from decisions that directly affect their city (Conti, 2020). Expressions of dissent in the lagoon are often limited to verbal statements or sporadic protests, unable to develop into an organised force. On the contrary, the direct involvement of citizens in actions of demonstration and declamation favours the regeneration of public spaces and the strengthening of the community.

The proposal of a typology for an itinerant protest against large ships could help Venetian citizens to make their dissent heard and to highlight how this situation has become detrimental to the environment in which they live. A visible and recognisable element for the protest against large ships is a concrete way to:

1. *Make the protest more visible in the lagoon environment.*
2. *Make the demonstrators active participants in using a platform to spread their message of protest in a collective and dynamic way.*
3. *Exploit the inherent mobility of small Venetian boats to move the debate to the same place of reconquest, the sea.*

Design and realise a modular structure - a monopod - that is installed on traditional Venetian boats to transform the phenomenon of protest into a participatory and visible intervention. The solution consists of several steps: the realisation of a structure made of recycled materials to be fixed on the prow of the boats. The structure must be easily mountable, removable and adaptable to the dimensions of the Venetian boats. Install steps on the shaft of the monopod so that participants can climb up to different levels, ensuring visibility. Install adjustable megaphones on the various levels, positioning them to amplify the protester's messages in multiple directions, creating an "echo" effect throughout the surrounding area. Use modular and sectional elements so that they can be rearranged differently according to the vessel while still respecting the same functional scheme. Provide written media, such as banners and panels, to emphasise the message of protest. Organise pre-installation sessions where, through a collaborative process, protesters can discuss communication strategies and collectively choose the path for the itinerary.



This pattern not only addresses the problem of large ships in Venice, but also integrates into a network of minor patterns that embrace citizen participation and the creative use of public spaces. Each monopod, although based on the same functional core, is transformed into a unique work, shaped by experience, specific context and collective creativity. The system's flexibility and modularity allow it to evolve continuously, adapting to new observations and social transformations, thus guaranteeing a protest that is always current and evolving.

Christopher Alexander's methodology, articulated through the concept of 'Pattern', offers a powerful insight to investigate the spatial and organisational dynamics within protests. In his work, architecture is considered not simply a tool to shape the physical environment, but a means to structure society and create more harmonious and peaceful living conditions. Described as 'socialist' because of the character of community planning and the creation of environments that respond to collective needs, this approach contrasts sharply with the neoliberal paradigms of the 1970s, the period in which the book was published. Neo-liberal thinking prioritised individualism, market-supported economic growth and reliance on spontaneous order, while Alexander's vision promoted intentional design of spaces capable of fostering social cohesion and collective engagement, thus creating a sharp contrast between self-regulated and spontaneous systems and those deliberately constructed to meet shared human needs.

The system developed by Alexander is very important in design thinking, it allows designers who design systems how to develop a project, starting from a deep understanding of the problem in terms of form — what you want to realise —, and context — the kind of activity you want to do and its constraints —.

The method is based on an empirical judgement of adaptation between form and context, highlighting how this relationship enables all kinds of meaningful activities to take place and the creation of structures that generate new possibilities for interaction and transformation. In the design exercise of the protest against the large ships, the methodology used allows for the exploration of different dynamics of interactions, arising from an alternative scenario to the usual streets and squares, attempting to investigate another large public space: the sea.

Investigating hypothetical typologies for a protest in this new spatial scheme, we investigate how a protest can take place in a fluid and mobile space such as the sea, analysing the consequent organisational, social and political dynamics, raising questions about what space really means in such a context.

WORKSHOP AS A METHOD.

To investigate alternative possibilities and typologies of protest, speculating on the use of urban objects as tools for constructing protest elements, I decided to conduct a workshop. The workshop, as I conceived it, is not just a practical event—a space for testing new typologies and strategies through the repurposing of urban elements for protest. Rather, it becomes as a methodological tool to critically examine the organizational dynamics of protest movements: who participates, how the relationship between participants and space is structured, and how the process of re-signification is set in motion.

The choice of a workshop as a methodological approach comes from the need to experiment with new typological and spatial configurations for protest, exploring how existing urban elements can be repurposed and transformed into functional tools through collective processes. Compared to the previous chapter, in which I approached the speculative design approach to create new typologies individually, this participatory format allows for a broader perspective. Whereas in that phase the work developed mainly through an exercise of personal imagination, the workshop introduces a collaborative dimension that more closely reflects the actual dynamics of protest movements. The emerging typological elements analysed earlier in the thesis are not the result of isolated design, but rather arise from the interaction between several subjects, direct experimentation and constant adaptation to the needs of the moment.

The workshop thus becomes not only an opportunity to test new typological configurations, but also a device for the investigation of the social dynamics that drive the coming together of multiple bodies during protest movements. By involving several participants in this process of re-imagination of new protest typologies, is it possible to observe how strategies of construction emerge from the dialogue and interaction of people, allowing a broader understanding of the processes that transform ordinary elements into instruments of resistance and appropriation of public space during these temporary events.

As a first step in the organisation of the workshop I had to think about the theme of the workshop itself, what I could get people to do, how and for what purpose.

I thought of continuing what was the speculative part of the thesis, of re-imagining and conceiving new speculative typologies for protest, in a way that took into consideration Manning and Massumi's affordance theories, in which they investigate the ability of bodies to tune into each other and to generate new configurations of action in a fluid and non-predetermined way. (→ Chapter 1)

If in the previous chapter I imagined scenarios and elaborated new typologies using only my own experience and subjectivity as an individual and a designer, the creation of a workshop seemed to me an interesting tool to take up the idea that the process of re-signification of objects - already analysed in the visual analysis of the different typologies - is actually a process of co-creation that develops through bodily and collective dynamics. This process results from encounters between different people, ideologies and sensitivities, allowing the potential of objects to be investigated and transformed into new possibilities of use, which are continuously negotiated and collectively co-constructed.

Starting from this pretext, therefore, I decided to organise the workshop as if it were a collective speculative session through which participants are invited to rethink common and urban objects with the aim of transforming them into typologies for protest. Having different perspectives allows for a greater and more complete exploration of the transformative potential of objects, and the role of design as a tool to investigate, question and open up new possibilities.

COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

In order for the workshop to be successful, I needed an audience and, therefore, developing a clear and effective strategy was crucial to its success. I therefore began to think about how I could communicate the workshop and through which format this workshop could be expressed, with its themes, methods of participation and intended objectives.

The poster seemed to me to be an ideal medium to explore for communicating the workshop, as it allows the essential information - title, date, time, address, contact details and a Qr code for further information - to be summarised in a single space, while at the same time attracting attention and stimulating interest in the topic.

The poster is also a support that physically interacts with the context and the public space, configuring itself as a tool that is consistent with the themes dealt with by the workshop itself. The possibility of placing it in strategic places would also allow it to reach a heterogeneous audience, encouraging spontaneous participation. The same layout developed for the poster was reproduced in a digital format suitable for distribution on social platforms, in particular my Instagram account.

For the graphic development of the poster, I chose to visually represent the theme of the workshop, i.e. the creation of objects from urban elements, through images of them. Taking some of the same elements analysed in the visual research (-> Chapter 2), and other recurring elements in the urban context, I used them as the background image of the poster.[FIG.61]

After various experiments with layout, fonts and image selection [FIG.62], the option I finally adopted was to create several posters, each dedicated to a selected urban object. For the digital version, I used the same graphic elements, but repeated in sequence.[FIG.63]

Fig.61 Some of the images chosen for the communication.
Fig.62 Poster layout tests.

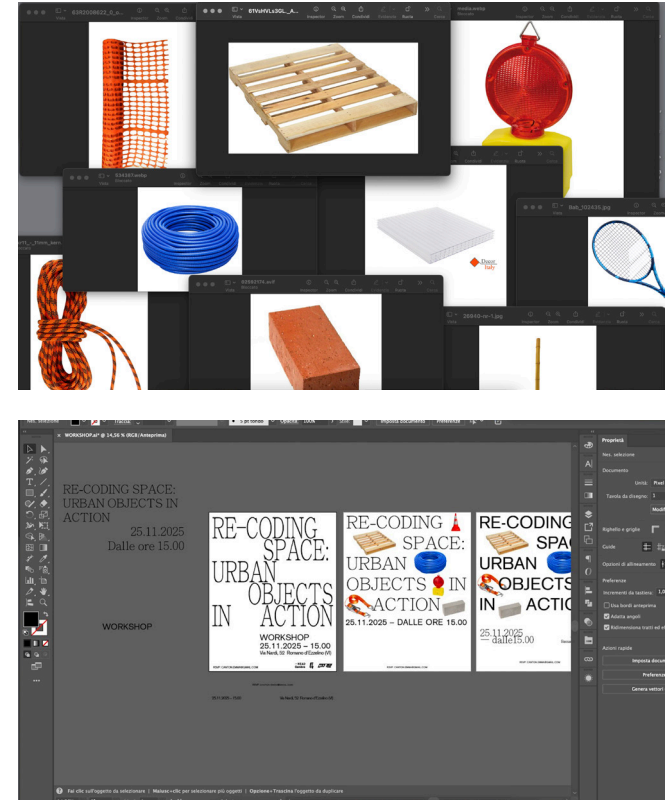




Fig. 63 Final poster's layout.

PLACE AND SPACE

In the early stages of planning the workshop, I identified Geneva—the city where I currently study—and Bassano del Grappa, the city where I grew up in Italy and later turned my attention to—as possible locations.

Although Geneva represented an interesting context in which to hold the workshop, the lack of a deep connection with the territory and the language barrier could have made it more complex to organise, communicate and participate in the workshop itself. Conducting it therefore in a more familiar context would have given me more confidence and agility in the research and in the management of materials, logistics and the involvement of participants.

In addition to the practical aspects, the choice of Bassano was particularly significant in the current Italian political context, where the issue of protest and its relationship with public space is becoming increasingly relevant. Conducting the workshop in a familiar environment not only facilitated access to all the material resources that I needed for the organisational aspect of the workshop, but also provided an opportunity to test the project within a socio-political context rich in meaning. This setting allows for a more sensitive approach and critical reflection on the processes of re-signifying public space during the workshop development.

The search for a suitable space to host the workshop was a complex process, conditioned by several logistical, climatic and institutional factors. Initially, I had made contact with an artists' association in my city, which organises musical events and temporary exhibitions in a space made out of a container located along the river that runs through the city centre. This place, characterised by a strong experimental and independent dimension, seemed to offer the ideal context for a workshop based on participation and the re-signification of public space.

However, the adverse weather conditions of the winter months, together with the poor accessibility of the area in case of rain, made it necessary to explore more feasible alternatives. At the suggestion of the same association, and thanks to a contact with the councillors of a neighbouring municipality, I had the opportunity to evaluate another space, this time of an institutional nature: a municipal villa periodically used for exhibitions and cultural events.

The local administration expressed interest in expanding the villa's functions, aiming to transform it into an open hub for civic participation and community development initiatives, and the following

meeting with the councillors, both with backgrounds in architecture, confirmed their enthusiasm to host an experimental project that would interact with the local context and the community.

However, at an institutional level, some concerns were raised about the nature of the workshop. The topic of protest, central to my research, was perceived by the mayor as problematic, as it was associated with conflictual dynamics and potentially dissonant within the public image of the administration. In order to make it possible for the workshop to be held inside the villa, it was proposed to me to modify its focus, avoiding explicit references to the protest, so that it could be integrated into the official programming of the municipality and guarantee its visibility and support.

Although this condition offered the opportunity to institutionalise the project and broaden its dissemination, it clashed with the actual intent of the workshop, which aims to investigate the practices of appropriation of public space in relation to protest dynamics. The impossibility of keeping the conceptual core of the research intact led me to reject this possibility and turn to a self-managed solution, which would guarantee full freedom of experimentation and coherence with the project's objectives.

The final decision therefore turned towards an industrial warehouse owned by the parents of a friend of mine. This space, mainly used for production activities during the week, was partially repurposed outside working hours to host a sustainable fashion project of a small local business. The initiative focused on repurposing discarded clothing to create new ones and promoting them through dedicated events. This environment seemed particularly appropriate, not only because of its logistical accessibility, but also because of the nature of the location itself, which was already characterised by processes of transformation and material re-signification.

The context of the warehouse, with its dual productive and experimental function, aligns with the workshop's aims, providing an environment that concretely reflects the dynamics of re-appropriation and re-interpretation of space, central to the research. [FIG.64]



Fig. 64 Workshop venue.

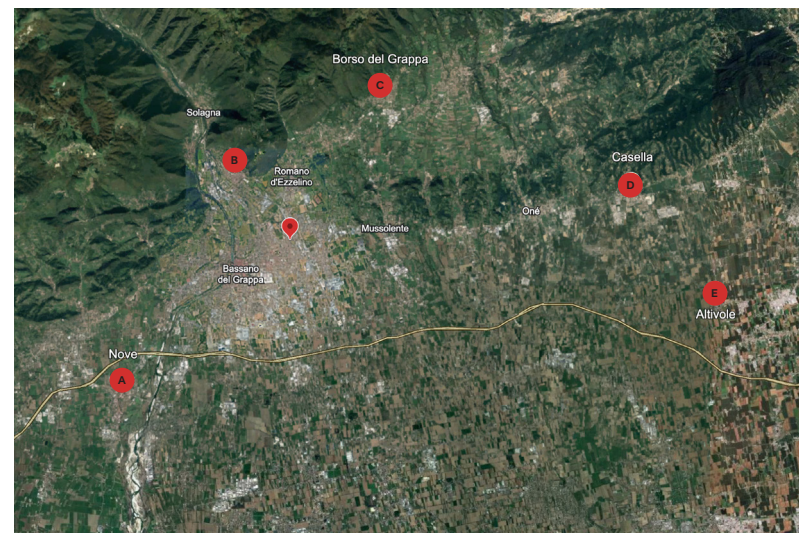
MATERIALS

The practical activity of the workshop consisted of creating typologies from existing elements of the urban context. Consequently, the process of collecting materials was shaped both by my initial selection of desired materials and by the availability of what I was actually able to obtain. As the first step in sourcing materials, I reached out to several construction companies and building material suppliers, from small businesses to larger, more established ones, within my city and nearby areas, in order to borrow elements to be used in the workshop.

The geographical context of Bassano del Grappa, and more generally of the Po valley area, was a further advantage in the search for materials for the workshop. The presence of a widespread industrial fabric facilitated the identification of companies willing to provide resources, while the network of personal connections, often linked to local production contexts, made the finding of necessary materials even more accessible. [FIG.65]

In companies supplying building materials for construction, I found new materials available, temporarily granted with the possibility of return. At the same time at small local production companies, I was able to recover a significant amount of waste materials, integrating the principle of reuse of objects that would otherwise have been destined for waste.

Fig.65 Map of locations where workshop materials were collected.



A



B



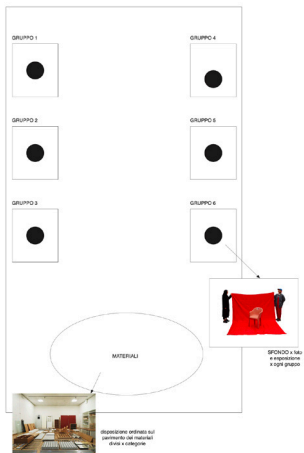
C



D



E



The selection of materials for the workshop was guided by both practical and research factors. On the one hand, the choices were dictated by the availability of the scrap materials I was able to retrieve and those provided by the companies that collaborated with me, allowing me to explore certain solutions. On the other, certain decisions were influenced by the visual research developed in Chapter 2, which explores how specific elements can be reinterpreted in protest contexts, becoming tools of expression and resistance.

Within the workshop, an area was created for the visual collection of the works produced. This space made it possible to photograph the final results together with the people who designed them, offering a visual trace of the process and the different interpretations that emerged during the activity.



The need to give back to the companies some of the materials borrowed from them imposed restrictions on the use and experimentation of the urban objects, limiting the possibility of alterate the objects by cutting, dismantling or making significant structural changes to them.

However, this limitation were actually seen as an opportunity to adopt a more flexible and porous design approach, challenging participants to explore other opportunities of techniques of assembling, joining and building with limited resources. In this way, the workshop promoted a deeper reflection on the potential of design under restricted conditions, encouraging the use of quick, versatile and easily replicable methods, similar to those used in protest practices, where the need to act rapidly and with accessible means becomes crucial. [FIG.66]

In addition to the materials used to conduct the workshop, visual and graphic supports were prepared to facilitate the explanation of the activities during the workshop. These materials included both reference images, taken from the visual research developed in (-> Chapter 2), illustrating the functions of the different types of protest; inspirational images selected were made available to participants by offering visual references during the activity.

This provided a broader understanding of the thesis research and the other methodologies used to investigate this process of resignification of space through the use of objects [FIG.67]. Materials such as paper and pens were provided for participants to discuss their project ideas and to note down their thoughts and reflections. [FIG.68]

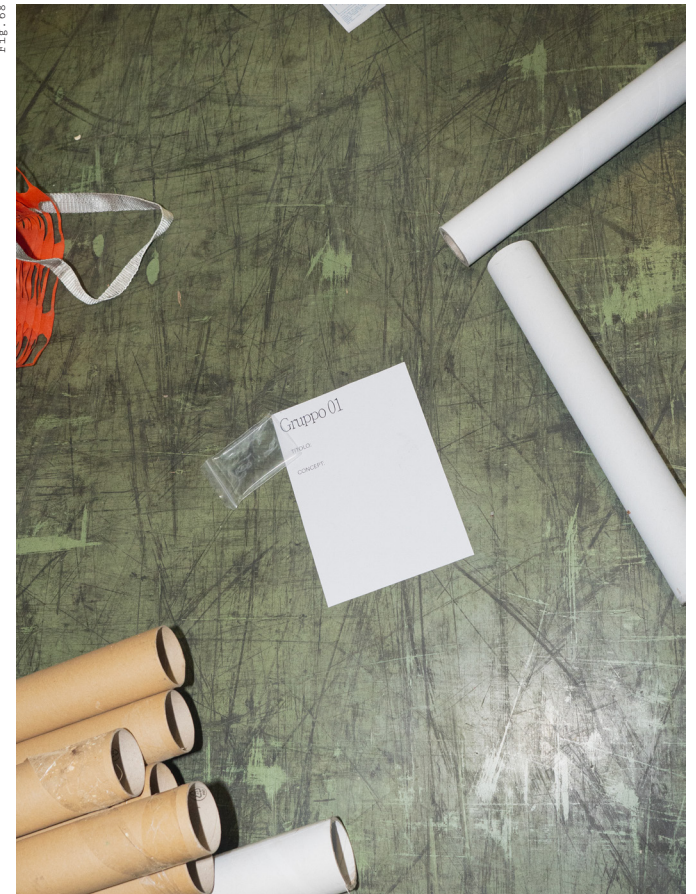


Fig.66
To make the assembly and construction of the typologies easier, each group was provided with materials that did not require special technical skills to use. This approach was influenced by typical protest construction practices, where quick and accessible methods are adopted to ensure inclusive participation. Materials such as tape, ropes, straps and zip ties were suggested to allow for quick and adaptable assemblies, responding to immediate needs and offering practical and replicable solutions.



Fig. 67

Fig. 68



ACCESSIBILITY

The communication of the workshop was structured through various diffusion channels, including the affixing of posters at various strategic points in the city, word of mouth and the publication of content on social media. In particular, promotion took place through Instagram stories shared both on my personal profile and that of Toomee, the clothing brand that hosted the event, and through the profiles of friends and acquaintances. [FIG.69] Potential participants could then express their interest by contacting me via e-mail, through the e-mail address on the poster, or through direct messages on Instagram. This method allowed me to estimate the number of interested parties and to adequately prepare the logistics and procurement of the necessary materials in the days leading up to the workshop date. The collaboration with a small local brand helped to expand the network of contacts and arouse greater interest in the event, also given the fact that the brand itself shares some of the values proposed by the workshop, such as the reuse of existing materials to generate new elements. In addition, the possibility of displaying the posters in various venues in the city boosted the visibility of the initiative, helping to attract some of the participants. [FIG.70]

An interesting element that emerged during the participants' welcoming was the heterogeneity of the participants, belonging to different age groups and with very different backgrounds and experiences. Some of the attendees have an active role in protest movements, others were more interested in the social issues discussed, while another part of the attendees were more attracted to the initiative because of its planning and practical character.

This factor allowed us to have different opinions, ideas and ways of interacting with the objects, the space and the participants themselves, contributing to a dynamic and participatory research environment, open to accommodate the topics of the workshop and my research.



Fig. 69



Fig. 70



A MODEL FOR COLLECTIVE PRACTICE

.04

The workshop had an organisational structure that focused mainly on the introductory phase, which included a general explanation of the workshop's objectives, an introduction to the research behind the initiative, and an in-depth discussion of the themes and materials that the participants would explore during the course of the activity.[FIG.71]

The organisation of the next phase, that dedicated to the design of typologies, took place in a totally spontaneous and self-managed manner. As can be observed in protest movements, in which protesters organise themselves into functional groups, each with their own roles and specificities, this was also the case in the workshop. Some participants formed working groups based on personal affinities or similar knowledge, while others preferred to work individually on the realisation of their own typology, thus fostering a horizontal decision-making process within the workshop itself.[FIG.72]

The absence of an imposed hierarchical structure allowed participants to negotiate autonomously ways of collaboration, experimenting with different forms of collective construction, reproducing the dynamics of self-organisation fundamental to protest practices.



Fig. 71

Fig. 72



What motivated you to come to the workshop?

Luca, 25, art restoration student

"I wanted to try something new, the desire to experiment and use creativity, seeking a different experience."

Anna, 24, psychology student

"I became aware of the workshop through seeing the poster posted on social media, which immediately caught my attention: the architecture of protest seemed like an interesting topic I had never heard of, and curiosity drove me to participate.

Using creativity and lateral thinking to give new life to urban objects, although it initially seemed stimulating to me only on an ideational level, was in fact also useful on a practical level, as I had the opportunity to channel my creative skills into the creation of objects that were not only symbolic, but also effective. The workshop, therefore, helped me to discover a new way of thinking about objects, through a new way of thinking about creativity I became aware of the workshop through seeing the poster posted on social media, which immediately caught my attention: the architecture of protest seemed like an interesting topic, one I had never heard of, and curiosity drove me to participate.

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David, 23, maths student

"I found out about the existence of this workshop by word of mouth and it immediately piqued my interest: although I had participated in numerous protests, I had never been involved in a working group investigating architecture. I think it was an extremely useful experience because not only is the use of urban materials to create effective objects in the context of a protest exactly what happens in reality, but also because of the opportunity to exchange knowledge and ideas with other groups."

Ester, 24, Interior design student

"I decided to take part in the workshop because I found the topic to be extremely interesting, and that it concealed many facets behind a single theme.

In particular, I found that the topic dealt with very topical issues - first and foremost that of reusing and giving a new life and new meaning to existing objects or waste - but approaching them from a different and original perspective, also allowing people from outside the design discipline to approach it. In fact, true design is often hidden behind all those everyday objects to which little attention is paid, and I found it very interesting to focus on them and be influenced by their form to build new narratives".

Do you think the workshop helped you to see things differently?

Did it allow you to approach design in a new way or gain new perspectives?

Luca, 25, art restoration student

"The use of discarded materials and unconventional shapes, which could not be selected in advance as in a traditional design project, certainly influenced my approach, forcing me to use the available materials, but also prompting me to rethink certain objects. This workshop helped me to think outside the box, and also gave me the opportunity to observe how other people approach the creative process compared to me based on their own creations."

The workshop generated a variety of different outcomes, reflecting the different perspectives and sensibilities of the participants. Those who did not come from the sphere of activism developed their own typology from the development of an independently chosen narrative, inspired by contemporary events or specific protests of interest to them, creating functional tools for the event itself. The older participants, on the other hand, interpreted the process of typology design not only as a purely design exercise, but as an act of protest in itself. Each, embodying a cause they are particularly attached to or feel the need to protest for, created a typology that directly expressed their political commitment, almost as if the typology itself was the protest in itself.

A subsequent analysis of the results of the workshop, which confirmed some of the observations that had already emerged during the presentation of each of the works developed, allowed me to identify, as in the previous chapters, recurring patterns in the participants' approach to objects and, in particular, how different typologies related to self-defence developed. The emphasis on the function of protection manifested itself not only as a practical response to a need for security, but in some cases also as a deeper reflection on the space of protest as a possible site of conflict and resistance. The recurring repetition of multiple design proposals for devices to protect the body from repression, such as defence elements against tear gas, collective defence solutions and devices to limit the advance of the forces of law and order has contributed to the creation of this pattern, of a constant that, as in visual analysis, has made recurring patterns visible in the protesters' thinking.

The evolution of this design strategy can be seen as a direct reaction to the current socio-political context in Italy, where the intensification of repressive measures against public demonstrations, even non-violent ones, has influenced the perception of the risk associated with protest. In recent months, in response to the Meloni government's new security decree, Italy has witnessed an intensification of the use of repressive force by the police during public demonstrations. In October 2024, during a pro-Palestinian procession in Rome, police dispersed the demonstrators with charges and tear gas, causing numerous injuries⁽¹⁾.

1. ANSA. Scontri al corteo pro-Palestina a Roma.

2. Adnkronos. Forte Portuense, scontri tra manifestanti e polizia.
3. Repubblica Torino. Studenti in piazza a Torino, scontri con la polizia.

This was also the case during the eviction at Forte Portuense⁽²⁾ (December 2024), during the student protests in Turin and at the anti-fascist demonstrations in Bologna (November 2024) in which there was a major repressive intervention⁽³⁾.

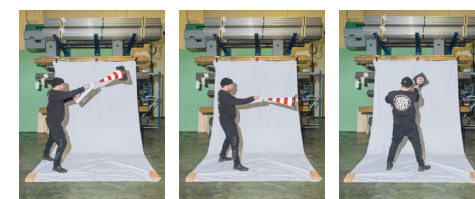
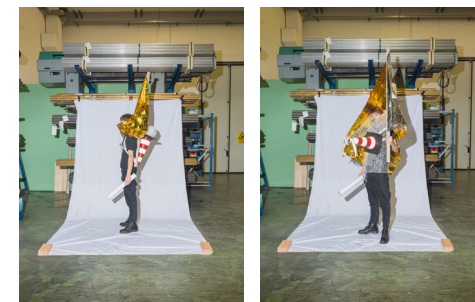
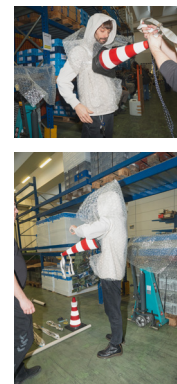
The fact that any form of protest is increasingly criminalised and the use of repressive force during demonstrations increased, has probably prompted participants to devise and implement tools not only to protect themselves, but also to protect collective identity. The typologies proposed, in this sense, are not merely devices for physical protection, but become true symbols of a reaction to the contemporary Italian socio-political context, in which the increasing repression of dissent is redrawing the boundaries of civil liberties.

Observing these recurrences therefore offers a deeper understanding of the social dynamics at play and how these shape and rewrite the spatial and typological design of events.

In this case, the analysis of the patterns that emerged during the workshop highlights how the contemporary design of demonstrations not only responds to needs for political visibility, but, as also analysed in the case studies, also focuses on the safety and protection of protesters as vulnerable individuals.



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ARAS (Nicola and Giacomo)

Aras is a multifunctional system of revolt.

Aras is a strategic protocol divided into four acts:
advance - resist - attack - establish.

Ares is an object that reconfigures five easily available elements:
a cone - two straps - a cardboard tube - an emergency thermal blanket
a backpack - a defensive spike - an iron club - a flag holder / part of a barricade.

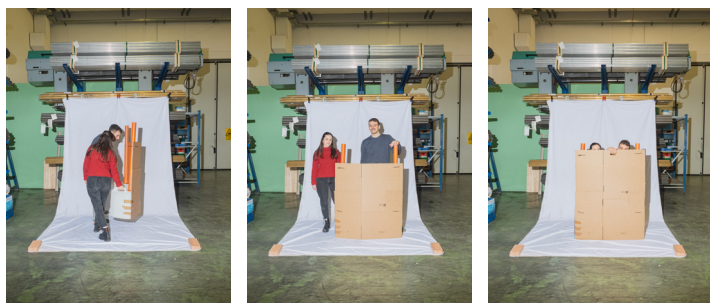
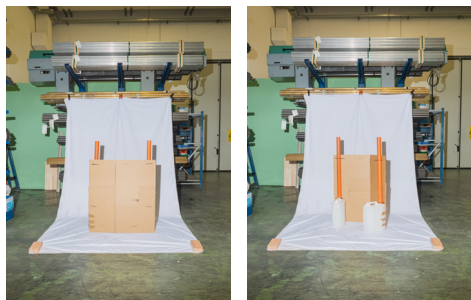
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BALLO IN MASCHERA (Ester, Anna and David) MASQUERADE BALL

The project consists of the creation of 3 gas masks to be used in urban clashes in case of tear gas.

Materials: plastic canisterst, twine, bubble wrap, double-side tape, tape.



SCIOPERO IN CANTIERE (Luca and Sara) CONSTRUCTION SITE STRIKE

Our project consists of a mobile barrier made from construction materials.

It is equipped with two practical handles that allow it to be moved. The two canisters, when filled with water, make it more stable. The cardboard makes the barricade light to carry, and for violent protests it serves as a shield against mild attacks, while for peaceful protests its surface can be used to write and express what one is protesting about. There is a handle that can be used to raise it. The barrier can be folded to 90 degrees for protection from two sides and to reduce its size.

Materials: 1 box, 4 zip ties, 2 pvt pipes from construction sites, 2 plastic canisters



LIMITATIONS

.04

The workshop found that limitations affected both the process and its organisation, as well as its outcomes. One of the limitations that prevented a full exploration of the materials was their availability. As previously mentioned, some materials selected for the workshop had to be returned, which meant the typologies created could not be preserved intact, as they had to be disassembled. However, some of the participants decided to take their creations with them, demonstrating how some of the typologies developed in the workshop could indeed find a practical use outside of this experimental context.

Time, similarly to what happens in protests, is a determining agent in shaping the activity and defining its impact. The limited time available for organising the workshop itself was on the one hand limiting in that I was unable to contact in time local activist associations with whom I could collaborate, or similarly design or architectural firms specialised in participatory practices that could offer further design and methodological perspectives to the workshop.

On the other hand, however, I think that this restriction, both in the management of the workshop and in the actual duration of the practical process of realising the typologies, actually allowed me to better understand the same organisational dynamics that occur in protest movements. The limited time contributed to modifying the strategies to be used, the meanings, but also the ability to affect reality, just as happens in demonstrations, in which every action must be calibrated in relation to transitory temporal circumstances.

In the course of the workshop itself, having a limited temporality recreated a situation of urgency similar to that of protests, directly influencing the ways of interacting with objects. It pushed the participants to explore the possibilities of objects in a limited timeframe, facilitating an immediate understanding of their transformative potential, similar to the rapid reinvention of the available elements into instruments of protest during demonstrations.

The final choice of location, the result of a negotiation process, ultimately proved to be particularly suited to the context of the workshop. Despite the limitations of visibility in relation to the institutionalised spatial context of the municipal villa, these turned out to be less relevant. The lack of public exposure was compensated for by the dynamics of self-management

that allowed for a more direct connection with the participants, material suppliers and the space itself.

The architectural typology of the shed proved ideal for reflecting this self-managed dimension and adaptable to the very nature of the workshop as a place of collective production and experimentation.

The space itself, from being a functional container has itself undergone a project of re-signification through the holding of the workshop, transforming it as a spontaneous public space, where people, coming together with a shared objective and through their collaboration have shaped a co-creative space, creating a true temporary community.

WORKSHOP AS A METHOD

.04

The workshop is not only a way to investigate protest issues through the proposed activities, but becomes an active methodology to explore how space and the body interact in protest dynamics.

Through its organisation, communication and management, the workshop becomes a tool to explore how people gather, organise, and interact within protest contexts. It interrogates the organisational and social dynamics that emerge when groups come together and reflects on how their participation is influenced by the surrounding space, context and motivations that drive their engagement. The workshop is not just a place of design, but an environment in which protest dynamics and spatial strategies, reflected in organisational and participatory practices, are staged in real time.

The exploration within the workshop of new typologies of objects or spaces through the process of resignification can be considered a form of participatory design in itself.

The spontaneity with which the participants divided into groups to realise their design proposals highlights how the typologies realised are in fact co-created and co-produced in a natural way, as happens in protest contexts, where actions and organisational strategies are the result of shared and collective participation. The fact that the participants worked in groups approaching collective work makes it visible how the process of design new typologies, which respond to common needs, is a form of collective design in itself.

The workshop thus also becomes a tool for opening up a broader discourse on design methodologies oriented towards a more participatory approach, both in the field of design and architecture, focusing on the direct involvement of people. This methodological support therefore promotes a more inclusive and democratic vision of design, in which each participant becomes an actor in the creative process.



FINAL REFLECTIONS

Re-coding space is a research project investigating the phenomenon of adaptive reuse of objects in protest movement driven by urgent and community needs and conducted by users, outside conventional design processes. It explores the underlying forces behind the non-professional reuse of ordinary urban elements, driven by necessity and not limited by geography, economy, or scale, aiming to uncover the motivations and strategies that shape these spontaneous adaptations across diverse environments.

This research highlights how, through temporary interventions, protesters manage to reveal profound critiques of the built environment and its governing structures, challenging them through the definition of new spatial typologies and strategies. The project examines contexts in which reuse emerges from urgency, due to the scarcity of materials, the need to quickly adapt to clashing situations or the impossibility of access to formal resources, and how this reuse of elements already present in the urban context is transformed into smart spatial solutions with wit and beauty, thus making space intrinsically ecological. A traffic cone transformed into a tool of protection from tear gas, bricks evolved into barriers to block the access of outside forces, a bamboo cane turned into a tool to assert a position or claim space, an umbrella converted as a shield against oppressive surveillance, and a tarpaulin repurposed as an element of shelter and community unity.

The varying methods explore how these different typologies have developed within protest movements, and, by focusing on the particulars and peculiarities of such inventive responses, seeks to uncover a form of intelligence born out of different immediate needs, challenging architects and designers to rethink their roles, not only as authors of space, but as facilitators of adaptive, open-ended processes shaped by communities themselves. Re-coding Space explores how protest spaces embody, a creative resilience that develops outside institutional contexts, but manages to deeply re-signify the city.

Recognising these ephemeral architectures as a legitimate form of spatial practice opens up new design perspectives that value spontaneity, resourcefulness and collective action as fundamental forces in shaping our shared environments. This aim to shift the perspective on design, valuing spontaneity, resourcefulness, and collective action as essential forces in shaping our shared environments.

LIST OF FIGURES

BOOKS

[Fig.3] “Tahrir Square in 2020 and 2011”. Photograph. il manifesto. Accessed February 7, 2025. <https://ilmanifesto.it/200-milioni-usa-piazza-tahrir-continua-a-perdere-lanima>.

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