GLIMPSES OF AN URBANISM TO COME

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For urbanists the twenty-first century started on July 20th 2001 in Genoa[1].
In fact, behind the tragic events that took place during the infamous G8 summit in Genoa (20-22.07.2001), a deeper, far-reaching set of urban ideologies and tools emerged to form the basis of the spatial politics of the new century. If the vast deployment of police and force might be reminiscent of old-fashion anti-riot techniques, it was the unique and pervasive mix of digital and low-tech technology as well as ad-hoc suspension of basic civic rights the elements of novelty that truly belonged to the twenty-first century. Rather than exploring the political dimension of the summit, this research concentrates on the relevance of these events within the realm of urbanism; it utilises Genoa 2001 as a test ground to better understand the paradigms of the raising urbanism of the twenty-first century. Within this context, the tension between physical and digital domains staged during the summit surfaces as one of the most important and complicated paradigms that will define this emerging urbanism.

What conceptual models can we devise to understand such complex and fluid urban environments? How can these models be represented, that is, how can the public be engaged in the process of debating the nature of and making of civic spaces in cities? What challenges to traditional way of representing and modifying cities will the implementation of temporary infrastructures such as digital technology and law digital technology give rise to?

Urban planning emerged as an autonomous discipline in the nineteen century in order to regulate and managed the space of the growing industrialised city. Examples such as Engels' report on the conditions of the working class in England (1844) or Cerda's plan for Barcelona (1859) describe both motivations and tools underpinning the birth of urbanism. The need to provide acceptable living conditions by ensuring natural light and air shaped the physical form of the city. 1916 New York Zoning Ordinance perhaps represents the synthesis of all the abovementioned motivations.

However, nineteen century planning was still characterised by the implicit belief that the city can be single-handedly regulated and managed. Through the whole of the twenty century, the growing complexity of the metropolitan condition – both in terms of sheer size and lifestyles enabled by it – destabilised the relation between planning and physical reality. Traditional concerns such as hygiene and transportation gave way to more complex and virtual ones such as information or knowledge that became the real asset of metropolitan areas.

This trend finds a decisive moment in the 2001 G8 summit. As the management of cities shifts its attention from quantifiable parameters (natural light and air) to more immaterial ones (information and knowledge), so are control and security coming to replace cities' traditional political role as agora. As a consequence, the built environment becomes a backdrop, a palimpsest onto which ephemeral notions such as legal statuses, digital surveillance techniques, etc. are temporary deployed to allow an instantaneous change of the connotative aspects of cities. The physical image of the urban space is not only altered but also made irrelevant by overlaying an invisible, ghostly presence formed by the law and technology.

These observations not only begin to suggest the raise of new paradigms for the city of the twenty-first century, but they also question the tools architects have been deploying in understanding and intervening in urban environments. This paper not only aims at highlighting the characteristic of such urban spaces, but also sketches out three paradigms that question how urbanism can retain its relevance in the twenty-first century city.

Global Politics

The political background against which the planning of the G8 unfolds also constitutes one of the aspects of novelty in terms of planning and politics. Three main elements characterised the 2001 G8 as paradigmatic manifestation of twenty-first century politics.

First, traditional politics was replaced by security. Without any attempt to construct venues for political debate and mediation, the entire G8 was transformed into a military operation[2]. The erosion of space for negotiation will become very literal and real during the actual summit as virtually nothing but clashes between police and protesters will happen. It is a point in case that almost no trace of the actual discussion and decisions made during the summit outlived the event.

Secondly, traditional political parties were confronted with the emergence of a more fluid, variegated, and complex political subject which they ultimately fail to engage. About 800 groups with completely diverse agendas, backgrounds, and nationalities came together in Genoa under the temporary umbrella organisation called Genoa Social Forum. The demands of these intricate and composite political subjects could not be met by the uniform front constituted by traditional parties which shared position with remarkable consistency regardless of the coalition they belonged to.

Finally and, perhaps most importantly, Genoa represented a phenomenon that well exceeded national boundaries or political strategies. Although the summit took place in a specific location and was entirely planned by the Italian government, one can easily assume that Italy was operating under the tacit approval of all the adhering countries. In fact, at no point during or after the G8 did any of the participating delegations raise concern about the management of the event. Italy was simply implementing a spatial strategy that was implicitly subscribed by all members.

Spatial Paradigms

Despite the vast literature on the 2001 G8 summit, no accurate and systematic spatial analysis of the event exists. As described in the previous chapter, though, law and digital technology fused with the existing spaces of Genoa's historic centre to create an ad-hoc hybrid condition. Space was not to be understood as a detached and neutral background but rather as an integral planning tool. The exhaustive bibliographical and image-based material available on the organisation of the summit and the political debate that was generated shortly afterwards were nevertheless essential to develop this research, but only constituted a starting point from which to depart. The more relevant problems that became apparent in analysing the spatial politics of the summit concentrated on how to see and understand the emerging urban forms of the twenty-first century.

One of the major problems to understand Genoa is the difficulty to construct an overarching narrative able to make sense of the strategy to plan the summit. In fact, the objects deployed to re-structure Genoa are both high-tech and low-tech, they are often used by both protesters and the police to different ends, and serendipitously move between actual and virtual spaces. The constant shifting of their meaning requires more dynamic and complex paradigms to comprehend them.

Foucault's analysis of 18th century epidemics in urban spaces provides a useful framework to grasp the fluidity of borders and mechanisms of control. Particularly, how authorities have taken diametrically opposite measures to deal with either leprosy or plague can be revealing in the context of this research. Leprosy, in fact, is based on a model of exclusion: the leper is expelled from the city which is kept as pure as possible. Plague, on the contrary, give rise to an opposite paradigm: the city is separated from its surroundings, no one can leave it and actually people are confined to their houses where groups of doctors and nurses constantly survey the landscape and monitor how the disease spreads. In this case, ' the plague victim is encased, controlled and cured through a complex web of dispositifs that divide and individualise, and in so doing, also articulate the efficiency of control and power.'[3] Foucault brilliantly notices that the birth of modern political space occurs when the two paradigms are mixed: the leper is treated as a plague victim and vice versa. The mechanisms of individualisation are overlaid on that of exclusion typical of leprosy. On top of the typical binary duality between healthy and diseased, a more subtle set of techniques also articulate control. It results that in modern space it is impossible to univocally define the nature and meaning of walls, borders as they constantly shift between these two paradigms.[4]

These considerations closely echo the volatile characteristics that all mechanisms of control implemented in Genoa had. Their cumulative effect gave rise to a temporary city whose location was clearly identifiable and yet bore no resemblance to Genoa as everybody knew it. It suffices to observe some of the images that the photographer Armin Linke took during the event to immediately realise that we are confronted with unconventional spaces, deeply charged with political meaning and rather hostile to human presence. The lack of any activity and harshness of the

temporary walls and borders erected to protect the delegates give these images a surreal and sinister look we may have to become more familiar with in the coming years.

Whilst events like the 2001 G8 took place, architects naively continued to rely on the idea that urban spaces could be confidently understood and managed. In fact, architects' belief in structuralism as the intellectual framework through which stable meaning could be extracted from territories has created an ever-widening gap between our tools and the physical reality of cities. Perhaps, this impasse is best expressed by urbanism unquestioned belief that aerial plans are ideal vantage point from which the complex structure of landscape[5]. In Genoa a much more fluid and ad-hoc type of urbanism emerges. The objects deployed to organise the summit are not signs of a deeper, more stable organisation of spaces. These objects had only a transient effect on the landscape, they changed meaning according to the kind of actors utilising them, and did not signify anything more than themselves.
Looking at such spaces through the abstraction of aerial views is thus misleading and ultimately fails to capture the element of novelty contained in these phenomena. A much closer and more agile gaze is required.

By substituting fixed structures with paradigms we equipped ourselves with a more malleable and yet robust framework to move in such spaces. As outlined by Giorgio Agamben, they can be defined as "knowledge embedded in practice", navigational tools that "can guide the investigation also in the absence of rules and laws"[6]. They provide a more pliable and cautious way to guide research; paradigms – or exemplar cases, singularities – "can be repeated and thus acquire the capability of tacitly modelling the behaviour and the practice" of researchers.

In this uncertain and mobile territory, paradigms will allow us to abandon the linearity of traditional urban research to directly zoom in on individual objects to trace the associations and agencies they created during the summit. We will not only be able to freely bridge between scales and actors, but also to equate the role of human presence to that of the objects utilised. By lowering the scale of the observation – e.g., the single object – larger urban configurations are now understood as territories colonised by a sort of epidemic; an intricate network of discrete objects of various scales, creating narratives of either control or empowerment on the public space of the city.


URBANISM OF OBJECTS

3,500,000,000 cm ┼ Satellite

┼ Cruiseliners

187,500 cm

10,000 cm ┼ Police Helicopter   ┼ SA 9 Gaskin   ┼ 40ft containers

┼ Fences

1,200 cm

┼ Defender   ┼ Plastic Shileds

8 cm

┼ Welder   ┼ Mobile Phone

1 cm
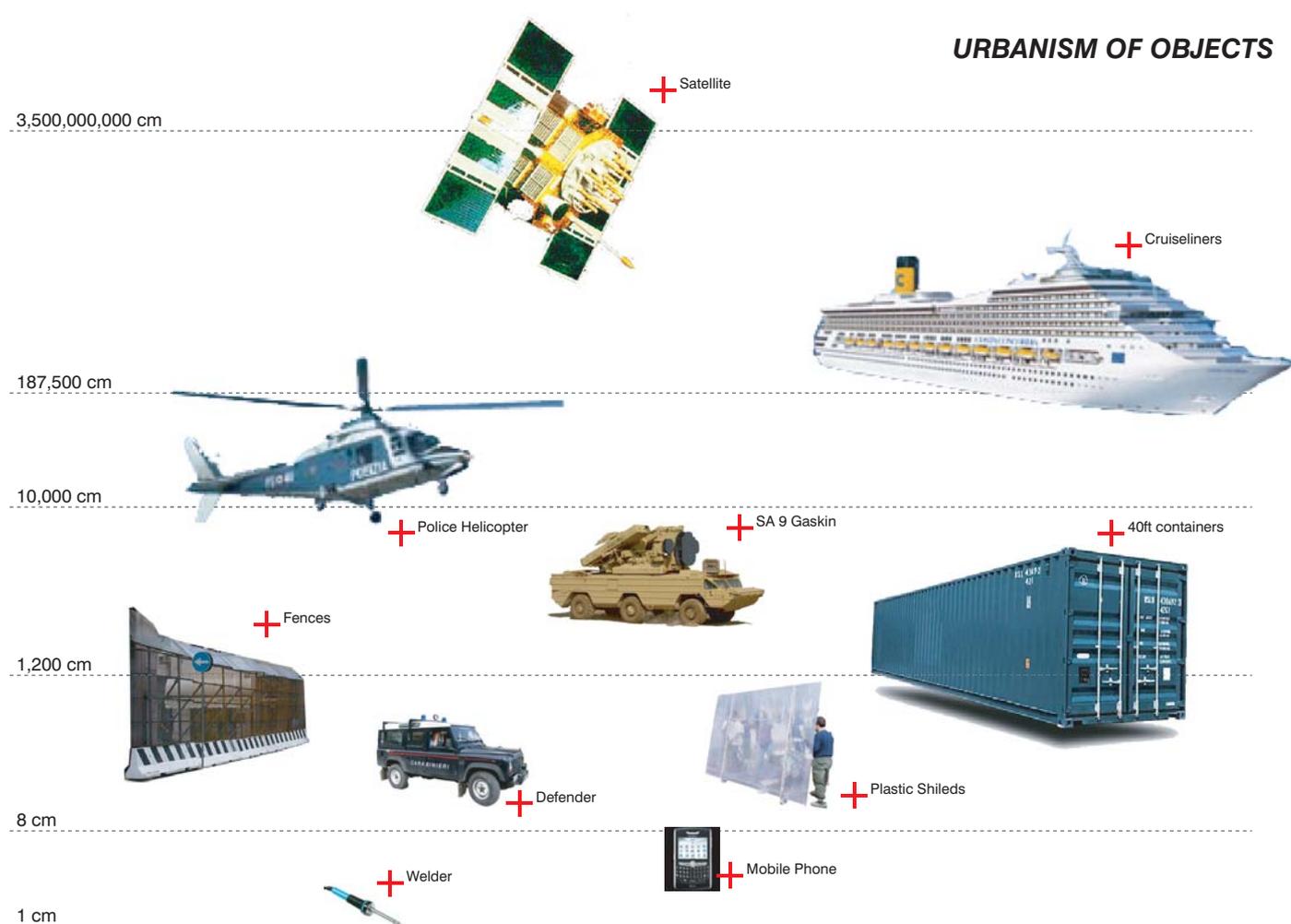
Fig.1 - A networked urbanism: all the objects employed can organised and understood through their scale.

Genoa 2001: an urbanism of objects[7]

The preparation of the summit involved one of the largest police operations in Italy since the Second World War. This was justified by the precedent global meetings leading to Genoa's. Since the 1999 G8 summit in Seattle, all major gatherings had been characterised by clashes between the police and the protesters[8]. Although some of the anti-riot techniques deployed in Genoa had already been utilised in the previous meetings, the 2001 summit marks a new phase in the history of the G8. The cumulative use of disparate objects as well as the effect they produced on Genoa is certainly an element to acknowledge, but it is the extremeness with which they were employed that reveals a conscious and methodical project behind it. A careful look at all the objects that structured the summit is then necessary to forge new paradigms.

Shortly after deciding to host the G8 summit in Genoa, the left-wing government also requested to declare the state of the emergency for the duration of the global gathering. Through Giorgio Agamben's work, we have become familiar with the continuous use of the state of emergency or exception by modern governments; in this case, we are confronted with the paradoxical situation in which the state of emergency – always a result of sudden and unpredictable events – can be declare more than a year in advance.
This allowed the Italian government – in the meantime lead by the right-wing coalition – to search venues in Turin, Florence, Naples, and Padua months before the actual summit. Between July 13 and July 19 2001, the Schenghen Treaty is suspended: 140,000 people are stopped and searched at the Italian border and 2,000 of them were arrested before reaching Genoa. In the final weeks before the G8, the Italian police – also co-operating with LAPD to improve its anti-riot techniques – also searched: 10 car rentals, 119 hardware stores, 35 camping sites, 9 B&B, 123 homes, and 291 hotels in Genoa.
Between July 20 and July 22, an air-exclusion zone was planed around the city. Also, the following places in Genoa were closed: the airport, the port, two train stations, the Sopraelevata, all trams, and all building sites. About 200 digital devices were positioned to scramble or at least disturb digital signal to impede free communication in the city centre.
18,000 additional police agents moved in, 15,000 delegates were housed on 5 cruise liners which were docked in the commercial port. 5 more ships were also brought in to protect the participants to the summit. 28,000 local residents left Genoa and about 250,000 protesters camp around the city centre waiting for the summit. The entire cost of the preparation of the G8 is estimated around €125 million; however the final cost of the G8 is thought to be about three times higher.

Perhaps the most important move was to subdivide the historic centre of Genoa into two zones. The RED zone fenced the actual historic core of the city where the delegates were. In this area – protected by 4mt-tall metal gates – no pedestrians were allowed except for the local residents that the police had previously identified by providing them with special passes. For the first time in a western, a democratic government prevented access to a large part of a city. Also, the following constitutional rights were suspended: right to protest, right express one's opinion, right to work and, for the first time in a western democracy, the right to freely circulate in public areas. In fact, only local residents which had been identified by the police could enter this zone. The red zone was surrounded by a buffer area called YELLOW zone; here too some basic constitutional rights were suspended. Although it was possible to enter this area, protesters and local citizens could only transit through it without stopping near infrastructural or institutional buildings designated by the police.
Finally, all protesters were classified according to the estimated danger they carried by assigning them a colour black identifies the most aggressive group, whereas blue, yellow, and pink were assigned to less threatening groups.
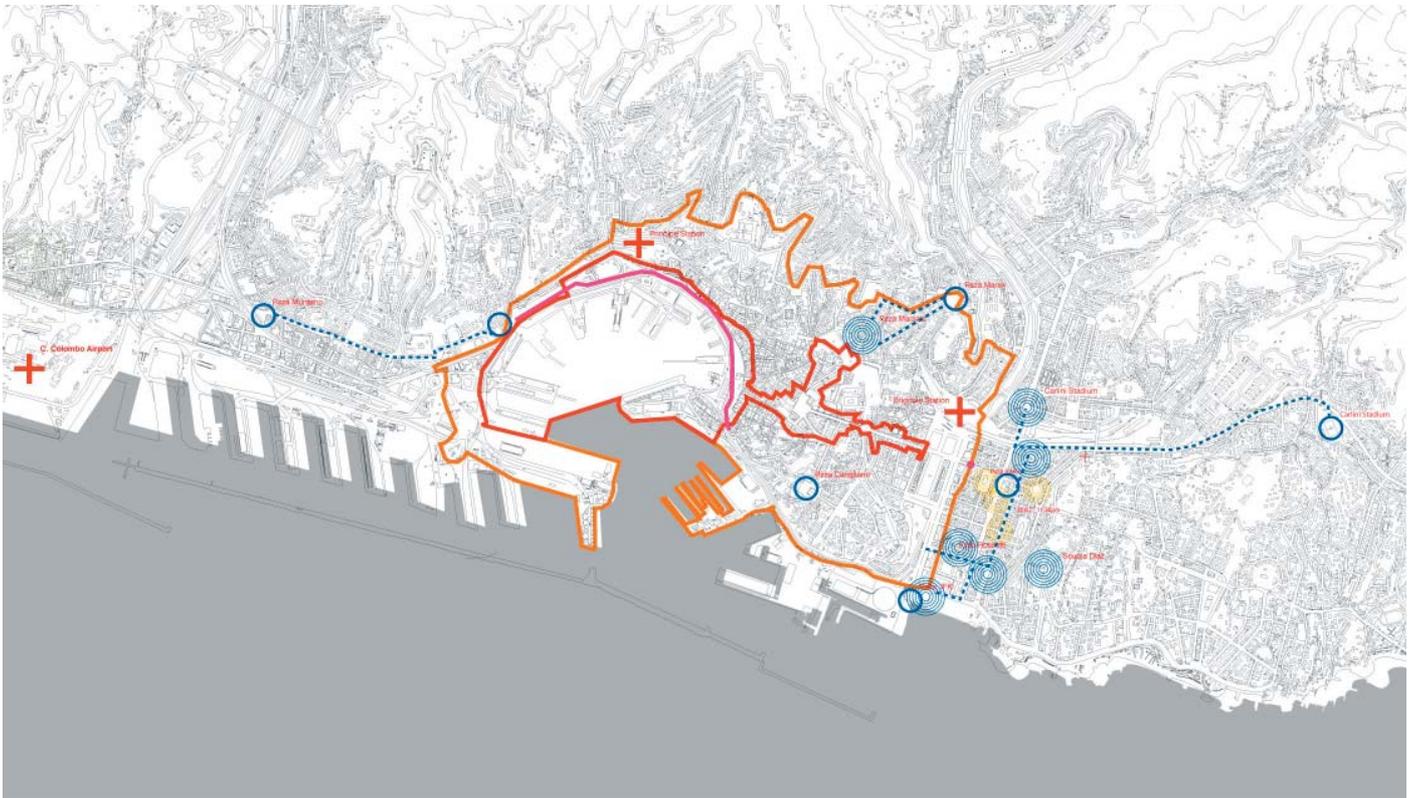
Fig.2 - Map of the clashes between the police and protesters including the perimeters of the red and yellow zone.


actors	objects	scales	location

GENOVA SOCIAL FORUM

CARABINIERI

MILITARY

LAPD

TV CHANNELS

INDEPENDENT MEDIA

JOURNALISTS

Welder — 1 cm

Mobile Phone

White Bloc — 8 cm

Black Bloc

Plastic Shileds — 1,200 cm

Defender

40ft containers — 10,000 cm

Fences

SA 9 Gaskin

Helicopter — 187,500 cm

Cruiseliners

Satellite — 3,500,000,000 cm
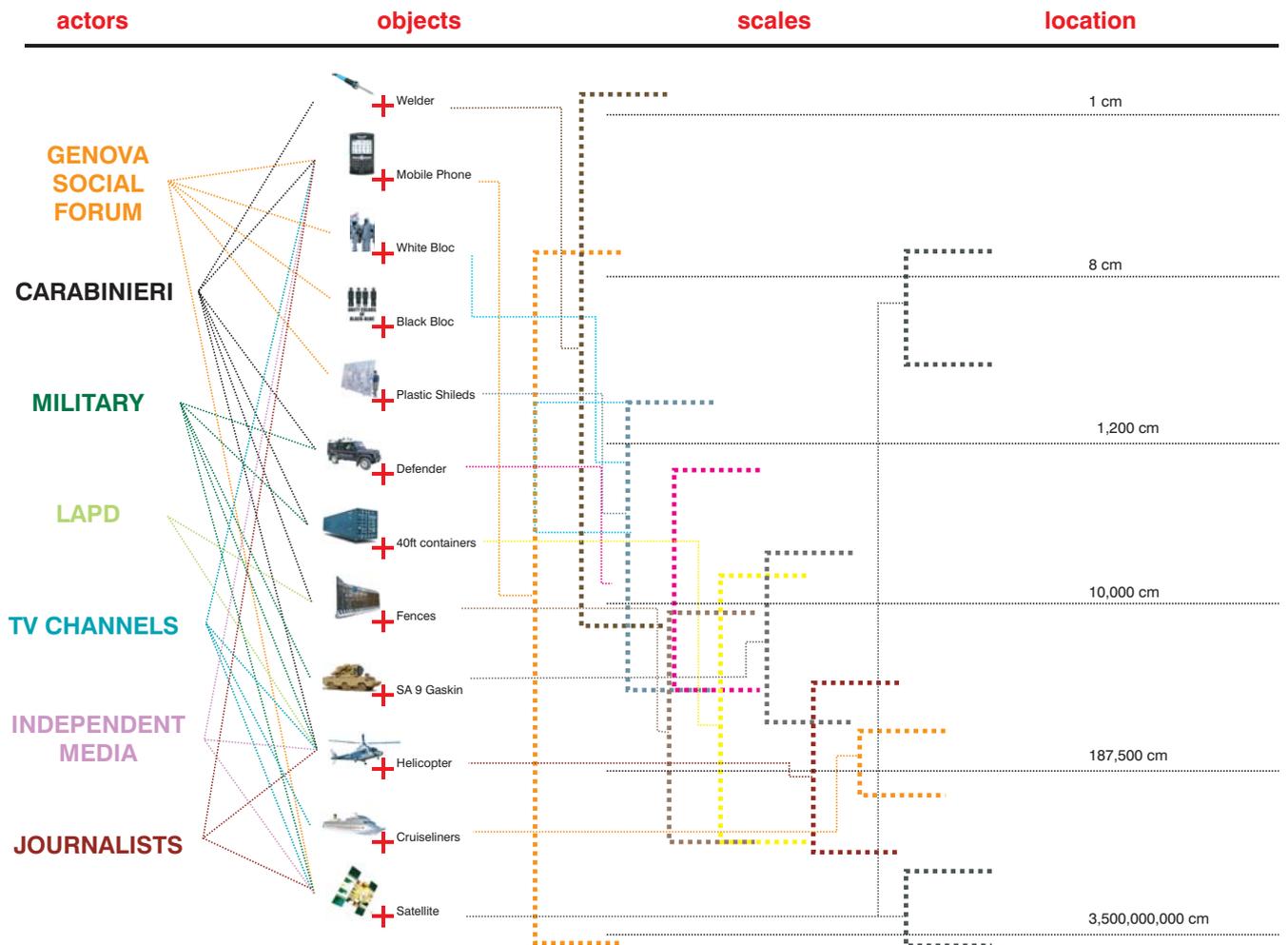
Fig.3 - A networked urbanism: all the objects employed can organised and understood through their scale.

Multi-scalar planning

The closer we look at the vast sum of people and objects coming together for the summit, the more we begin to detect a complex web of relations spanning across different scales and serving diverse, often contrasting, purposes. Visible and invisible phenomena need to be woven together to understand how contemporary urban spaces are more than what we can literally see or grasp through plans. Objects morphed from one scale of intervention to the next one, but they also leaped from the extremely large scale of global infrastructure to the infinitesimally small scale of the body. Sometime their physical presence was actually minuscule but through sheer repetition they managed to influence large areas; at times their effect was delayed in time and could only be appreciated in full long after they had been deployed. Multi-scalar urbanism is the paradigm under which these objects can be networked together.

At continental scale, Genoa was *de facto* transformed into an island within the European Community; the temporary suspension of the Schenghen Treaty– which, in 1985, removed physical borders between the ten adhering countries – between July 13 and July 19, 2001projected the city back in time. It is important to recognise that one of the first measures put in place aimed at reversing the more interesting and positive aspects of globalisation; that is, the processes of exchange and interactions that have given rise to cross-national, mobile communities. The use of legislative means to shape physical space is also important to point out as it simultaneously affects large territories and alters the status of single individuals.

At the regional scale, the immaterial infrastructure of law begins to mesh together more tangible means of control. Missiles ramps are installed at the airport, whereas all entry points to the city are closed. Particularly the port is separated from the city centre through a double-tier of 40ft –long containers. These are also used to defend the perimeters of the red and yellow zone. It is at this scale that the unique combination of law and physical object allows the police to temporary re-code building usages. Bolzaneto barrack is temporary transformed into detection centre which also happens to be located in an area where constitutional rights are substantially lowered. As previously suggested through the leprosy and plague analogy, it is in examples such as Bolzaneto that we begin to fully realise the implications of more abstract claims. Traditional analysis of the barrack would not capture the temporary and uncertain nature of these spaces. Architects have utilised typologies, tectonics, phenomenology to read spaces, however these important categories all fail to capture the quality of a space instantaneously recoded through law.

At the scale of the city, extremely different infrastructures of controls were deployed. Satellites and mobile devices monitored and made difficult telecommunication during the summit; whereas the subdivision of Genoa's city centre into a red and yellow zone was implemented through the use of almost primitive walls and barriers.

Finally, a number of micro-interventions directly targeted the scale of the body. Shops were boarded up, whilst all manholes in the red zone were welded to prevent any access to the sewage system. The cumulative effect of these discrete interventions (each welding is longer than 10 millimetres) turned all public surfaces in the city into a water-tight 'swimming pool' effectively obliterating any possibility of interaction between public space and its users. Also, about 6,000 particularly toxic tearing-gases were employed during the clashes; their impact on people's health has been the subject of an intense debate in Italy.[9] Ultimately the very status of the human beings participating was also re-classified in terms of security: four colours (black blue, yellow, and pink) were utilised to determine the degree of danger carried by each protester.

Fig.4 - Welded manholes in the red zone.

Fig.5 - Shops boarded up.

Fig.6 - A double layer of 40ft-long containers separates the port from the city.

Located technologies

Genoa 2001 also showed that technologies can have an empowering role once nested in the physical environment of the city.
The pervasive use of portable technology generated a multitude of images of the summit that exceeded any repressive tactic and circulated globally giving rise to a form of direct participation and interaction also typical of the twenty-first century.
This counter-strategy is suggestive of a different kind of urbanism. Rather than an all-encompassing, monistic approach, these portable technologies remind more of acupuncture; a type of intervention based on punctual, site-specific, agile moves whose final result relies on their accumulation through networking.
Moreover, they also showed that the urbanist's role is no longer limited to managing physical space. The visible and the invisible are reaching an increasingly equal power in shaping cities; technologies and communities that do not have a precise physical presence do yet have a cultural identity though the Internet. During the 2001 summit a heterogeneous mix of people of diverse political background, nationality, and even aspirations were able to come together due to possibility to exchange information and create awareness around political issues.

The last two paradigms require urbanists to go beyond the recent debate about top-down (structuralism) or bottom-up design. The shifts in scales and meaning are too abrupt and often serendipitous to justify an a priori strategy in reading landscapes. Regardless of whether we look at the networks of objects formed by protesters or the police, we will notice that the traditional approach to devise an ideological position first to then coherently implement has been reserved. In both cases, a more tactical approach is taken: technologies and spaces are not appropriated because of some pre-defined meaning but are rather organised to achieve the maximum effect at a specific time and location.

Spatial blueprint for the twenty-first century public spaces.

The eerie atmosphere pervading Genoa during the summit – which some eminent critics compared to the silent streets of a medieval city hit by the bubonic plague –opened up the twenty-first century notion of urban spaces .
In fact, starting from the G8 summits that followed Genoa, the organisation and control of the public areas dramatically tightened. Some events such as the 2007 summits in Heiligendamm (Germany) and Sidney (Australia) have literally appropriated the techniques first deployed in Genoa by fortifying inner cities (Sidney) or by substantially limiting civic rights in public spaces (Germany).
The implications of Genoa have also been visible in events whose approach was symmetrically different. That is the case of the Canadian G8 organised in Kananaskis in 2002 or 2004 G8 summit in Seaside (USA). Both locations were so secluded that even delegates from the participating countries struggled to reach them. Nature came into play to provide what was artificially constructed in Genoa.

Also the sudden reconfiguration of existing spaces for temporary uses has also been increasingly employed as a means to control. For instance, at the 2008 Democratic convention in Denver, USA existing parking areas were converted in temporary prisons. This tactics has now becoming customary way American police deals with large gatherings: temporary jails were also used at Obama's inauguration speech as well as in New York.

The spatial tactics utilised in these meetings can also be utilised as paradigms that allow us to frame and comprehend a whole series of recent spatial phenomena.
The proliferation and raising popularity of walls, islands, and other "primitive" spatial means to demarcate territories has been encouraged and legitimised by 'testing grounds' such as Genoa.
It suffices to think of places such as Dubai where artificial islands have become 'standard' modes of development or the large infrastructural investments the US government is making along the border with Mexico.
If the urbanism of the twenty-first century is increasingly relying on control, subdivision, and hardened borders, one of its milestones can be traced in events such as those of Genoa where such spatial devices were first implemented.

Conclusions

The 2001 G8 summit casts an image of the coming urbanism that is both sinister and menacing.
Beyond the gravity of what happened, this research though seeks opportunities to begin to re-think how we define contemporary urban spaces and how we can intervene in them.
What appears to be no longer viable is a narrative that describes globalisation as a smooth, accessible environment whose homogeneity has neutralised conflicts. Through Genoa we can outline an image representing globalisation that is rather turbulent and marked by increasingly violent conflicts. Nevertheless, this is the battlefield of the urbanism of the twenty-first century.
At the same time, our role is to fully grasp the complexity and novelty of what took place in Genoa. The role that digital, invisible technologies will have in shaping tangible parts of cities, their implementation towards inclusive ends rather than controlling ones are the challenges the twenty-first century is presenting to urbanism.

Our capacity to understand the implications of the G8 in Genoa will determinate whether urbanists will contribute to the permeation of digital technologies into daily life to engage wider publics or will passively witness the suffocation of free areas in cities.

Fig.7 - Plan of Dubai as portayed in a developer's brochure.

NOTES

[1] July 20th 2001 is the day the 27th G8 summit opened in Genoa, Italy. It also the day Carlo Giuliani – a 23 year-old protester – died during clashes with the police becoming the first person to die at a G8 summit. A comprehensive account of the events occurred during the two day can be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/27th_G8_summit

[2] For more details on the attempts to construct a political arena to discuss global issues see, Giulietto Chiesa, *G8-Genova*, Turin: Einaudi, 2001

[3] Michel Foucault, The Abnormals (London: Verso, 2003) quoted in Giorgio Agamben, Metropolis, available at *www.generation-online.org/p/fpagamben4.htm*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] On the critique of structuralism as a means to read territories see, Stefano Boeri, *USE: Uncertain States of Europe*, (Milan: Skira), 2003. p.430-2.

[6] Giorgio Agamben, *What's a parsdigm?*, available at http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben/articles/what-is-a-paradigm/

[7] Most of the data on the organization of the summit are taken from transcripts of the various trials and independent commissions set up by the Italin government in order to ascertain responsibilities for the events occurred in Genoa. In particular, Questura di Roma, Vice Questore Aggiunto della P. di S. FABOZZI dr. Mauro: Vertice G8 Genova - Relazione di servizio. Available at http://www.piazzacarlogiuliani.org/pillolarossa/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=160

[8] Clashes between the police and protesters also happened at: World Economic Forum in Davos (16-17.04.2000), International Money Fund and World Bank meeting in Prague (26-28.09.2000), IMF and World Bank meeting in Nice (7-9.12.2000).

[9] Edoardo Magnone, Enzo Mangini, *La Sindrome di Genova*. Genova: Frilli, 2002.

[10] Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, New York Times, 20 July 2001.