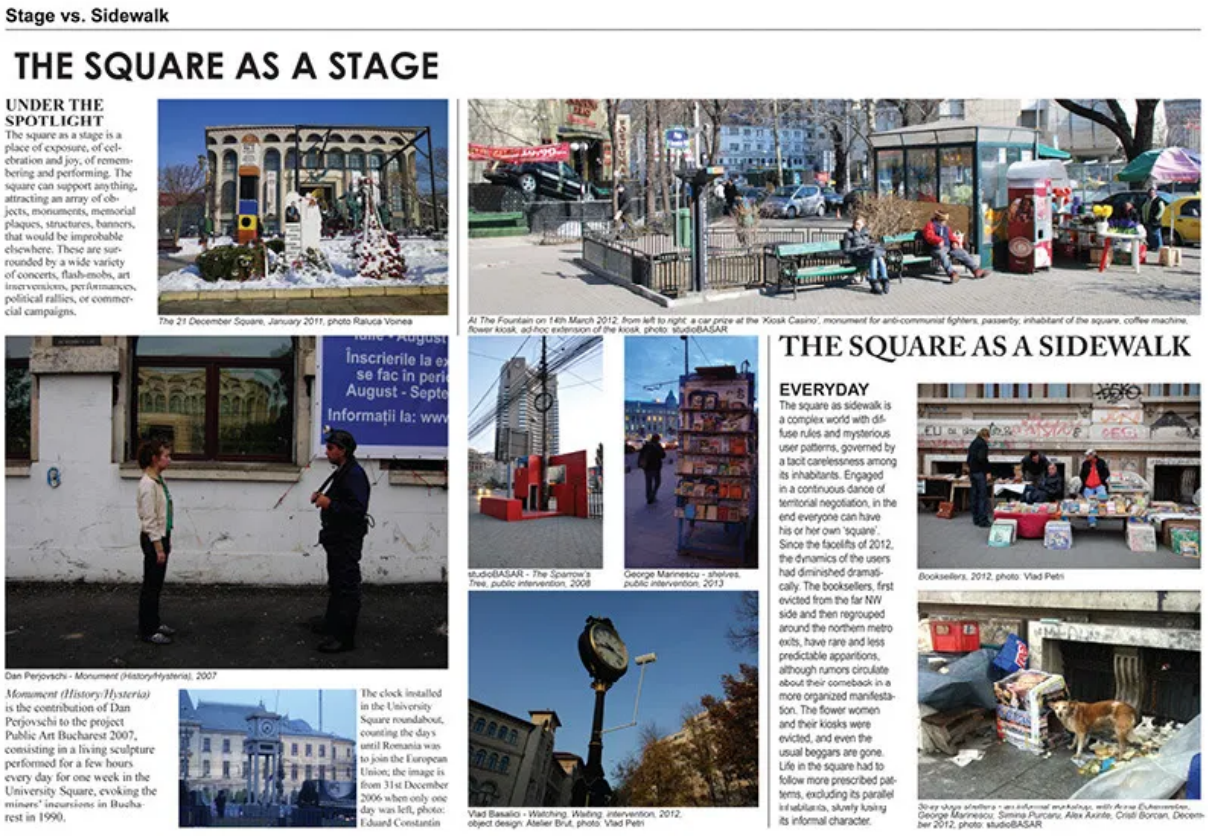
Sam Hind

Planning for Protest



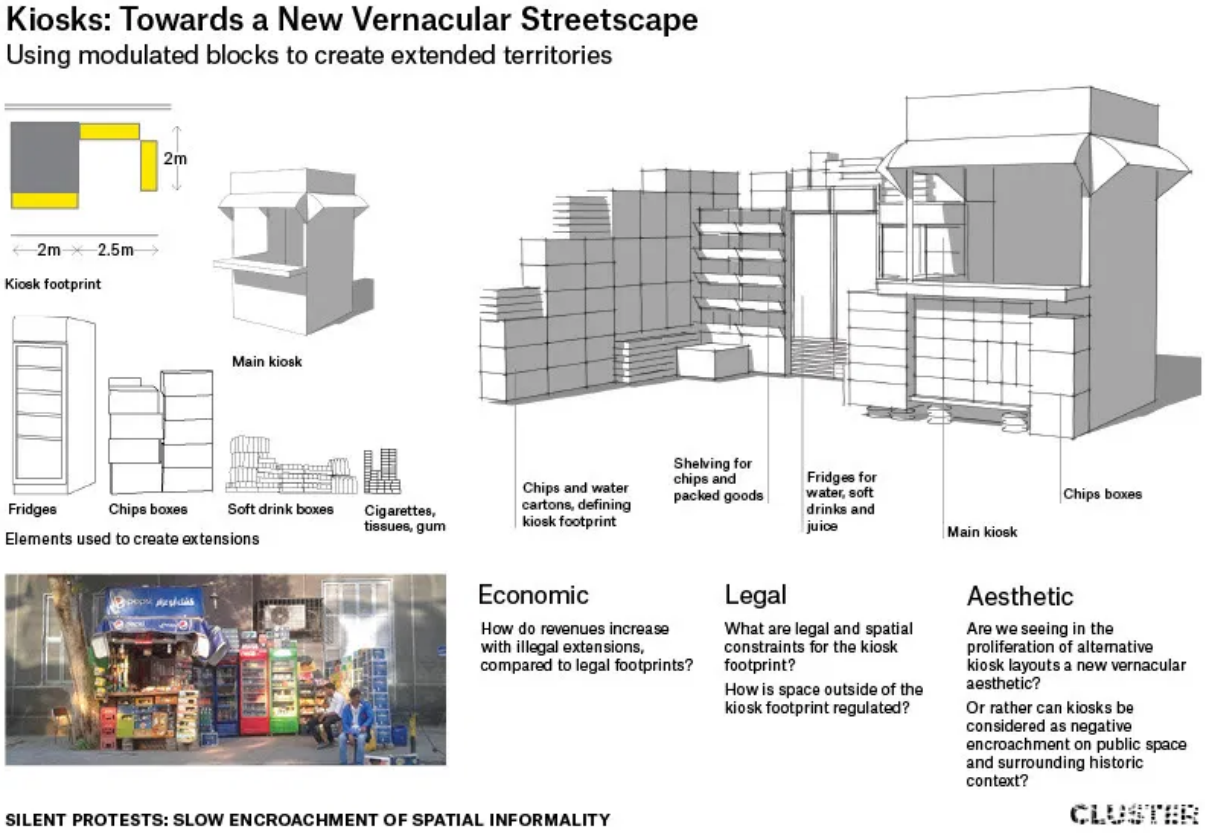
The Occupied Times has a fantastic missive (http://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=12335) from a project calling themselves *Planning for Protest (http://www.planningforprotest.org/)* on their website at the minute. Organized for the Lisbon Architecture Triennial, the project is designed to "explore both the social and architectural definitions of protest in light of the current global financial crisis":

> Planning for Protest came about as a conversation over what was happening in these flashpoints throughout the world, with a special focus on how the very spaces in which they took place helped to shape or form, if not circumvent, the success or failure of each cities' public mobilisation. Inasmuch as the mass convention of peoples creates the voice of these protests, we wanted to see how the streets and squares, its buildings, form the backdrop of these protests' stages.

12 architects/architect offices were brought together to compile a unique set of 'typologies' of each urban protest movements taking part around the world. Athens, Berlin, Bucharest, Cairo, Dublin, Istanbul, Lisbon, London, Madrid, New York, Rome and Sao Paulo are all represented.

Although they say in the Occupied Times article that they wanted people to "see how the streets and squares, its buildings, form the backdrop of these protests' stages", I think it actually does far more than that. In fact, the project actually works to show how the streets, squares and buildings of each protest movement *aren't* in the background at all, and *aren't* mere 'stages' for the apparently more theatrical human actions laid on top. In all cases they are active, *foregrounded* actors in the nature of protest. The built environment is a primary facilitator of protest. If you delve into the case studies you'll actually find that most work with this notion anyway, describing, as an example, how the design of city squares can affect the shape, volume, mobility and intensity of protests (see the photo above from Studio Basar (http://www.studiobasar.ro/?cat=3&lang=en) – Bucharest).

Another example can be seen in the image below. It is taken from *Cluster's (http://www.clustercairo.org/)* Cairo effort and contains some compelling graphics elucidating the impact of vernacular structures on the urban fabric. As a form of 'slow' protest, Cluster argue that street vendors are helping to contest the nature of public space. In marking out their territory they are helping to define and delineate the margins of acceptable, agreeable behaviour. Although at the bottom-rung of the urban hierarchy (below NGOs, residents, real estate developers etc.) their efforts to stake a claim to the city environment do not go unrecognized – at least to Cluster. This 'encroachment of spatial informality' in the form of creeping vernacular architectures, whilst identified by the group as an alternative force to the 'urban protest as spectacle', nonetheless provides a compelling example of contemporary urban protest.



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