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Abstract

My dissertation will investigate South Korean urbanism through the phenomenon of commercial signs, one of the most prominent but understudied aspects of the cityscape in the country. Known as kanp’an (看板) in Korean, commercial signage refers to the prolific and often dense array of advertisements, generally consisting of billboards and neon-signs with store names and announcements hung on the exteriors of commercial buildings. From its first appearance in Korean public space in the early 20th century, commercial signage has prompted vigorous criticism, which sees it as a disruption of ideal and top-down government planning, a primary example of urban degeneration and alienation, and evidence of the complete loss of critical and public space.

Although commercial signs are often seen as a corruption of public space due to the inundation of consumerism and capital, I argue that these environments are a crucial part of everyday urban experience, where people can find new ways of being in common and making sense, which cannot be simply reduced to our general rubrics of spectacle, private consumption, or the culture industry. Instead of describing commercial signage as a given, objective entity, I focus on the diverse modes of interaction between urban populations and the affective dimensions of commercial signage, thus fostering a reconsideration of the relationship between urbanism and everyday life in South Korea. My goal is to reveal another way of thinking about Korean urbanism in the postwar period, which locates some of the more ethically and politically challenging models of urbanism and community in these commercially saturated environments. In doing so, I
offer a much more complex interpretation of urban space, and suggest new ways of looking at the interlocking realms of public, private, and commercial space in East Asian cities in general, and in postwar Korea in particular.
Dedication

For my parents.
Acknowledgments

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Vita

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Introduction

*Commercial Signage: The Groundless Ground*

This dissertation is a study about the phenomenon of commercial signage in contemporary Korean cityscapes. Although ubiquitous and prominent within commercial environments in South Korea, commercial signs remain understudied in terms of their complex social, political, and aesthetic implications. According to the Korean government’s categorization, the specific term for outdoor commercial advertisements in Korean is *kan’pan*, informally called a “flex sign” or an “acrylic sign,” which clearly refers to the materials that sign makers and designers frequently employ to make them.¹ The modern form of *kan’pan* in post-war Korea typically consists of a rectangular billboard installed on the surface of a roadside building, which is illuminated by fluorescent lighting that emanates through the semi-transparent film on which the sign has been imprinted. I will, however, be using the term sign (*kan’pan*) in a broader sense, to mean the prolific and often dense array of commercial advertisements, most often consisting of billboards and neon-signs, hung on the exteriors of commercial buildings. This dissertation will also address other types of signs encountered on city streets and on the interior spaces and surfaces of commercial buildings, including digital screens, temporary posters, and advertising scrims (*hyŏnsumak*), all of which are vital elements in

¹ ‘Flex sign’ has been popularly used in Korea since 1991, when the federal government limited the use of neon signs, as a purpose of preventing the shortage of electricity caused by the excessive number of neon signs. This changing policy of outdoor advertising then encouraged shopkeepers and sign designers to choose ‘flex sign’ as a new means of advertising for their business. Kim Young-bae, *Urinara ogoegwanggomurŭi ihae* [*Understanding the Outdoor Advertising in Korea*] (Seoul: Signmunwha, 1996): 107-108.
rendering the cityscape dynamic and vibrant. As will become clear, my definition of and interest in commercial signage is not technically bound; instead, I consider commercial signage to be a pivotal lens through which to investigate the diverse forms of urban life in post-war Korea, which have been deeply entangled with local commercial activities and practices of transnational capitalism. By drawing on six primary case studies of art and architectural works related to commercial signage, I explore the ways in which signs are used and experienced in daily urban life, in order to address complex issues of design, community, sovereignty, multiplicity, mood, affect, and public-ness in contemporary Korean culture.

The relationship between commercial signage and everyday urbanism in Korea has a long history, dating back to at least the early twentieth century when the country was beginning to undergo modernization under the Japanese occupation. Early forms of commercial signage first appeared in the country around 1900; these were hand-drawn or painted with ink, inscribed with Chinese and/or English letters, and displayed outside buildings, either on rooftops or on exterior walls and building façades.\(^2\) In the 1930s the number of commercial signs increased exponentially, as consumption culture became more prevalent as one of the driving forces in Korea’s modernization. Studying the urban cultures of Seoul, literary critic Koh Bong-jun has argued that one’s encounter with the modern metropolis of Seoul in the 1930s implied not so much one’s complete subjugation to the commercialized city space, but a complex encounter involving

multiple sensory dimensions, thus fostering the possibility of a new urban aesthetics.³

What is peculiar about Korea’s condition of urban modernity, however, is the fact that commercial signage was also considered the mark of national identity, because of the inscription of the Korean letter system, called *Hangeul*, as opposed to the Japanese lettering on commercial signs that prevailed in some Japanese-occupied urban places such as Ponjŏng (the old name of Myŏngdong, one of major commercial districts of Seoul).⁴ By the early 1960s modern forms of commercial signage came to dominate the country’s cityscapes, when South Korea began to fully modernize under the governance of the military leader Park Chung-hee. While the Park regime focused on large-scale architectural projects and urban infrastructures, it was unable to control the increasing spread of commercial signs, resulting in what many critics interpreted as a visually chaotic, and unharmonious commercial cityscape. Since then, continuous attempts have been made to regulate this proliferation of commercial signage, in favor of the construction of an idealized image of the city drawn from neo-Confucian aesthetic norms, and influenced by the pared down and austere aesthetics of modern architecture in the West.⁵ This template of the ideal city image—planned from the top-down—is still the primary motor behind criticisms about the visual chaos of unregulated commercial signage in Korea, and it is only very recently that other voices have entered the debate. These voices are beginning to acknowledge, at the very least, the ambivalent nature of commercial signage in the postcolonial urbanization process, which ought neither to be

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simply criticized for its chaotic visual qualities, nor uncritically valorized for its sensuously vibrant and excessive visual/textual character. The latter condition is often emphasized in foreign films and textual and visual accounts that focus on visitors’ imagination of the dynamic and densely populated commercial districts in Asian cities.

My approach to commercial signage in this dissertation differs significantly from the dominant readings of the material, which focus on its lack of visual coherency, urban meaning, and ethico-aesthetic possibilities. A certain strand of cultural studies has tended to emphasize the alienating nature of everyday city space in post-war Korea, due to the intense effects of commodity culture, as evidenced by the mass appearance of commercial advertisements in urban environments. This scholarship is predominantly inspired by Marxist approaches to urban space, perhaps most insistently evidenced in the work of Henri Lefebvre, and in Korea, by Kang Nae-hee. For example, Kang offers a critical account of Apgujung, the most representative and intense exemplar of urban commercial density in Seoul during the 1990s, in which he argues the commodities displayed in shop windows indiscriminately alienate most of those who are unable to purchase them, thus resulting in an uncompromising social stratification that is difficult to ameliorate. In this respect, no matter how complex and contradictory commercial environments may be, Kang’s theory of alienation vigorously criticizes the consumption-driven everyday city space in Korea, which he considers, in absolute terms, as an alienated place where no meaningful relationships between citizens can occur.

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While the particularities of commercial signs that I will be exploring in this dissertation are often specific to Korean urban spaces, it is well known that dense areas of commercial signage are a widespread urban condition found in virtually every East Asian city. The architectural and urban historian Peter Rowe has coined the term “neon environments” to characterize this East Asian phenomenon. Although this sign phenomenon has penetrated into every urban realm of East Asia, and not simply metropolitan areas, some of the representative commercial centers where the profusion of billboards and neon signs especially predominate include: the Shinjuku district in Tokyo (Fig. 1), Nathan Road in Hong Kong (Fig. 2), Nanjing Road in Shanghai (Fig. 3), Orchard Road in Singapore (Fig. 4), and the Daehakno district in Seoul (Fig. 5). While there is no single agreed-upon perspective for interpreting the phenomenon of commercial signage in Asia, it is fair to say that, like the Korean case, it has been criticized by architectural and urban scholars for its visually distracting and spatially disorganized characteristics. Perhaps the most influential critic in this respect would be Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. In his influential essay “The Generic City,” first published in 1995, his main thesis is that the commercialized city spaces of Asia, through their endless replication of postmodern architectural styles, and a plethora of blinking neon signs, eradicate regional identities, resulting in generic cities that are difficult to distinguish from one another. In a similar vein, the Hong Kong based critic Ackbar


10 Japanese architect Akira Suzuki insists that Tokyo in the new millennium has become the space of “invisible communities” that is operated by information technology and consumer culture, where individuals are hardly able to recognize the entirety of the metropolis but seamlessly meandering “the
Abbas offers a critical interpretation of commercial signage in Asian cities, insisting that the sign-filled urban environments of Hong Kong make it difficult for people to forge genuine relationships, since they “tend to avoid eye contact with one another,” and thus are completely alienated in the predominantly consumption-driven space of the everyday. Koolhaas’ article in particular has generated intense debate regarding his blunt critique of the urban identity of Asia, which fails to pay attention to the diverse and particular forms of everyday urban life that exist within these environments.

In contrast to these critical and unsympathetic understandings of commercial signage, I insist that sign-filled urban environments in Korea are the very field where meaning is constituted in unstable yet persistent ways. Although I do not entirely disregard or discredit critical interpretations, which tend to focus on the supposedly meaningless and alienating condition engendered by these saturated fields of visually distracting signs, I argue that one needs to be much more attentive to the specific urban contexts in which people actually encounter those environments in their everyday lives. For example, commercial bangs, simply meaning ‘rooms’ in Korean—public spaces which are ubiquitous in many of the commercial areas studied in this dissertation and the topic of my last chapter—are permeated by commercial signs inside and out, where people of different ages and social classes gather together to socialize without necessarily forming deep relationships, but sharing certain communal activities, such as singing, drinking, eating, watching DVDs, and bathing. And the seemingly authorless billboards


11 Ackbar Abbas, Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 76.
displayed on the surfaces of commercial buildings are, in fact, owned by local shopkeepers who run their own business and are aware of their relationships to neighboring shopkeepers and clientele, both known and unknown. Thus, it is necessary to carefully investigate the complex social relationships permeated through and at times enabled by this affective spectacle, in order to better understand the operative system of everyday commercialism in the country and its possibilities for fostering modes of community that are not immediately obvious and may even seem to be precluded by these very environments.

The recent scholarship on consumer culture in Korea opens up a new avenue for further speculation about the ambivalent nature of commercial signage, which is alienating and meaningful, institutionalized and subversive, and public and private. For example, architect Lym Jong-yup has revisited the Apgujeong district of Seoul, an area (over)populated by stylish bars and restaurants, in order to understand it as a place where unpredictable commercial and social activities occur, thus helping to forge a local identity that is not beholden to the design intention of architects and urban planners.12 In another study, Olga Fedorenko has investigated the dual nature of television advertising in South Korea in the 2000s, exploring it as both “a realm of public life” and “a commercial space controlled…by advertisers,” without either of these conclusions being incompatible with the other.13 She notes that television advertising can evoke shared sensibilities among television viewers, and reflect their forms of life, in terms of

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lifestyles, fashion, and working conditions, all of which can be mobilized as liberating forces, and a means for critiquing the institutionalized and commercialized forms of everyday life in contemporary Korea. But she also highlights that it reproduces common “ideological fantasies” that reinforce those capitalist structures. In an analogous way, commercial signage can be a liberating force in city space, in the sense that it, indeed, reflects the diverse forms of people’s everyday life in the public domain, even as it is also beholden to governmental restrictions and the same kind of “ideological fantasies” that Fedorenko raises in terms of television advertising.

In this dissertation, I also focus on the immaterial, ephemeral, and ethereal qualities of commercial signage, as well as the material and technological conditions influencing the formation of ordinary streetscapes in Korea. Each sign has its own tempo and rhythm, its own evanescent and affective qualities, which cannot be reduced to its manifest message or material support. Any narrow technologically or ideologically deterministic approach to commercial signage will thus fail to grasp the subtle expressive qualities of signs in the city and their affective singularities. My conception of commercial signage as an elusive yet persistent and affective urban phenomenon has encouraged me to emphasize the phenomenological dimension of the urban world, in

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15 In this respect, I am critical of sign designer Kim Youn-bae’s overemphasis on the materiality and craftsmanship of commercial signage over its immaterial and evanescent qualities. Kim Young-bae, *Urinara ogoegwanggomurüii ihae*, 12 and 93.
which a viewing subject cannot be artificially separated from the viewed objective world in any simple manner.

*Theorizing the Everyday*

I consider commercial signage to be a threshold that can encourage us to explore issues of community, sovereignty, affect, mood, and multiplicity in contemporary Korean cities. Since my study of commercial signage opens up the social, cultural, and political dimensions of everyday city space in Korea, it is fundamental to define what is meant by the ‘everyday’, aesthetically and ethically, in the Korean context, as well as to elucidate how my study of commercial signage resonates with the broader scholarship on everyday life that has been a pressing concern in the fields of cultural studies, politics, philosophy, aesthetics, urban design, art history, and architectural studies. My dissertation does not provide an exhaustive literature review of the scholarship on everyday life; rather, I theorize the idea of the everyday by drawing on three philosophical approaches to it in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, and Gilles Deleuze (and Felix Guattari). Although each philosopher’s work has rich implications for the multiple meanings of the everyday, they have rarely been discussed in terms of their relationship to the everyday in regards to urban environments, or the possible resonances between them.\(^\text{16}\) If a rough ‘family resemblance’ can be elucidated between these thinkers, it is in their emphasis on the everyday rather than the ideal, which is to say that all three encourage us to be attentive to the intricate fabric of everyday life.

as the point of departure through which we can understand the constantly changing world that is full of singularities.

Wittgenstein’s contrast of ordinary language games with the purity of idealized ones in his *Philosophical Investigations* is important to my project. It forces us to pay attention to words and sentences as they are “used” in particular ways: their imbrication within specific contexts, tonalities, and atmospheres, and ‘language games.’ Often Wittgenstein’s examples of language games unfold in the city, and for good reason, as the city is a rich atmosphere where language cannot be disassociated from its moods and modes of negotiation, contestation, agreement, or pleasure, as the case may be. And I extrapolate, as he does, from an understanding of language as inseparable from its implication in “forms of life,” as opposed to ideal and pure languages strictly regulated by predetermined rules, in my contrast between top-down, rule-bound urban planning and its attempts to clean up, regulate, and idealize the commercial nature of the city, and the more open, heterogeneous, and affective conditions of clashing commercial signage in urban environments. Wittgenstein understands that there is no outside to the ordinary, including the extraordinary and wonder, and even metaphysics itself.

Wittgenstein’s conception of the everyday, and its implications for our understanding of urban advertisements greatly differs from predominant notions of the everyday that criticize advertising simply as the visual representation of commodity fetishism and urban alienation, a position which can be detected in the writings of Theodor Adorno, Guy Debord, Henri Lefebvre, Jean Baudrillard, David Harvey, and many others. In the *Critique of Everyday Life*, the Marxist social and urban theorist Henri

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Lefebvre defines advertising as a completely institutionalized and commercialized system conveying consumer images that are oversaturated with sexuality and nudity. Lefebvre considers these sexually charged images to be lacking in “genuine sensuality,” which he believes has been lost in the ersatz realm produced by the culture industry.\(^{18}\) Similarly, David Harvey writes that advertising is geared to “manipulating desires and tastes through images that may or may not have anything to do with the product to be sold.”\(^{19}\) This line of thinking about advertising differs greatly from the potential that Wittgenstein’s thoughts on the everyday allow us to explore in this regard. He conceives the everyday as a flexible field that is not completely predetermined by rule following, but is shot through with alternate routes, deviations, misuse, and singular possibilities enabled by participation within a dense atmosphere of imbricated action and representation. According to Michel de Certeau’s discussion of the cultural meanings of Wittgenstein’s sense of the everyday, one’s seemingly mundane activities, such as reading, speaking, and cooking, are never simple habitual behavioral patterns but also moments of provocation, improvisation, and innovation that constitute what we understand by the dynamism and vitality of everyday life.\(^{20}\)

Heidegger has a sophisticated sense of the ordinary that has yet to be fully explored within the ever-expanding scholarly sub-fields of the ordinary/everyday. A great deal of this avoidance or misconception of Heidegger is due to the assumption that he is


deeply critical of the everyday. Although at times Heidegger seems to separate and elevate the ‘authentic’ from the ‘inauthentic,’ the ‘proper’ from the ‘improper,’ the world historical event from our ordinary entanglement, dispersion, and lostness within it, read more generously, he acknowledges that the everyday is where Da-sein begins and ends. So my approach is to take precisely those terms Heidegger seems to denigrate as the condition of the “they-self” (or “the One”) that is lost and dispersed in the “fallen,” inauthentic everyday—characterized by terms such as distraction, dispersal, entanglement, idle chatter, and curiosity—as positive ways for rethinking the everyday, and a tactic to explore looser modes of community. I am also influenced by Heidegger’s discussion of mood and attunement, which opens us up to the atmospheric dimensions of our worlds that are not simply cognitive, linguistic, or even representational. In Chapter Five, I will investigate in greater detail the Heideggerian understanding of the everyday, and its relationship with commercial signs in Korea.

In some resonance with Heidegger, Deleuze and Guattati try to unfold the affective dimensions of the world that have been less emphasized in philosophy, and they therefore take ‘affect’ as the crucial starting point of connection between becoming and sensation. In a chapter entitled “Of the Refrain” in A Thousand Plateaus, they explain some characteristics of the refrain: first, a child singing in the dark creates an atmospheric territory for him or herself; second, although the refrain creates a rhythmic territory, it is, however, transient, and contingent; it is open and vulnerable to the improvisations and interventions of other refrains.  

What a refrain generates is not a fixed physical boundary of space, but an aesthetic and artistic territory that constantly changes its contours as

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multiple refrains appear and disappear simultaneously. Hence the world created by these refrains urges us to think about the urban environments of commercial signage in a more flexible way, in which their sensory aspects create multiple territories and connections that are not subordinated to functionality, top-down planning, or even strict spatio-temporal coordinates.

However, Deleuze and Guattari’s way of taking the pulse of the world in terms of affect is not entirely new, particularly when it comes to commercial environments, signs, and the city. The German critic Walter Benjamin was also exploring the aesthetic and atmospheric territories of 19th and 20th century commodity culture in Paris, and we might even consider him a Deleuzian thinker avant la lettre, in his close attention to the affective dimensions of urban experience. In a brief section of his essay “One-way Street,” Benjamin describes how the neon light of a commercial sign reflects off a puddle on the asphalt ground and insists that it is the effect of this sensual reverberation that is more important than its manifest content or message. “What, in the end,” Benjamin notes, “makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says – but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt.”22 Although this may seem like a minor and insignificant observation, its implications are far reaching, as it is a powerful critique of any outright dismissal of the commercial realm as a ‘critical form,’ not to mention any overly rationalized, cognitive, representational, and transcendental reading of the everyday.23 In being attentive to the subtle affective moments in our commercial


23 Urban scholar Nigel Thrift notes that “emotions are largely non-representational,” from which he articulates that one’s emotional dimension cannot simply be explained by the materialized forms of
environments, I take the urban world filled with commercial signs as a terrain where we can seek to find the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of everyday urban experience, thereby enabling us to reenchant the space of the everyday.

*The Chapters*

This dissertation consists of six chapters, each comprising a case study that raises different, but nevertheless interrelated, issues of urbanism, commercial signs, and everyday life in South Korea. These case studies are all roughly from the last decade, and look at various projects related to commercial signage, ranging from government-led urban projects to control the proliferation of commercial signs to specific works of multimedia art, including installation, public art, photo-collage, painting, and video. Such artworks address commercial signage in its relationship to urban issues, public life and dilemmas related to the distribution of power and control in city spaces in the past decade.

The first chapter of my dissertation examines the recent mega-scale city design project *Design Seoul* (2008-present), administered by the mayor of Seoul, Oh Se-hoon between 2006 and 2011. In 2008, Seoul was appointed as *World Design Capital* (WDC) by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID). In embracing this opportunity, the city government of Seoul and specialists from many different sectors of Korean society attempted to renew the entire city under a number of guiding principles for the purpose of creating a ‘brand value’ for the city within the increasingly global economy. The major proponents of *Design Seoul* considered unregulated commercial representation. Nigel Thrift, *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 2007): 175-176.
signage as a threat to the integrity of Seoul’s urban design, and felt that the chaotic field of competing signs erected in the city over the last fifty years needed to be removed, and replaced by new types of signs that were under strict regulation by the city. In pursuit of this goal, Design Seoul published a series of books and pamphlets that proposed detailed guidelines about how the specific elements of commercial signage needed to be redesigned, with particular attention paid to size, color, lettering, typology, placement, and lighting.

What Design Seoul ultimately desires is a disciplining of the everyday urban environment, in which all the differences of sign design—which register the multiple commercial endeavors in the city by different shop owners and service providers—were to be removed and replaced by a homogeneous design conception implemented by the city. The question here concerns not just the formal aspects of the renewed signs, but the way the everyday is perceived in relation to the urban history of Korea. This strong desire to control ordinary commercial signs has a century-long history, stretching back to the early 20th century, which demonstrates a long-standing distaste for commercial signage and advertising, and its potential stupefaction and commodification of the urban environment. Often the models for an ideal cityscape—and its theoretical underpinnings—were borrowed from countries that were considered more advanced than Korea’s, including Japanese cities such as Tokyo, Odawara, and Takasaki, as well as examples taken from Europe. Design Seoul strives to achieve an idealized urban space by removing one of the most striking elements of the city: the dense atmosphere of clashing commercial signs, which often exists outside the realm of government-imposed, top-
down design.\textsuperscript{24} This chapter will establish the fundamental difference between a standard analysis of the city through a top-down model of power, and my own approach through more complex patterns of intervention and public experience.

In Chapter Two, I will explore a specific signboard renovation project for Kwangrim Plaza in Gunpo City, as a way of rethinking the possibilities of community opened up through taking everyday commercialism seriously. Kwangrim Plaza is a commercial building located in the central business district of Gunpo City. The renovation project was conducted in 2007, and was also broadcast on television as a four-part documentary film series. This project reveals the dynamic in which sign renovation projects are typically perceived in Korea: first, local and/or federal governments (or city ministries) implement them with little input from the shopkeepers affected, and subsequently use these renovation projects as a means of achieving publicity for their efforts in placing urban and civic needs over individual commercial interests; second, shopkeepers tend to resist these attempts to curb individual signage in the name of uniform aesthetic criteria, because these civic reforms constrain their pursuit of commerce and profit. In the series of films documenting the project, this thesis and antithesis is ultimately reconciled in an encouraging synthesis, in which, despite the shopkeepers’ strenuous objections to the renovation project, it is successfully accomplished through willing collaboration among the participants.

My goal is to problematize this reductive and stable dialectic in order to explore the complexities of the modes of interaction that occurred between the different

\textsuperscript{24} Design Seoul Story, a booklet introducing the Design Seoul project, considers the sign-filled neon environments prominent in the metropolis Seoul as a “third-world phenomenon,” as well as stating that such environments have eventually “destroyed the quality of life.” Seoul Metropolitan Government, Design Seoul Story (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2009): 31.
participants involved in the project. On a closer examination, the film series does not show a harmonious and smooth communication between the government and the commercial store and service owners affected, but rather a series of conflicts and disagreements, not only between the two parties but also within the realm of the shopkeepers and the government officials respectively. The well-planned schedule of the project provided by the city ministry is often interrupted and suspended due to clashing opinions about the very nature of the project. Although the narrative of the film treats those conflicts or interruptions as merely temporary obstacles in the inevitable achievement of this ambitious project, it is my claim that, as Jean-Luc Nancy might say, those interruptions, suspensions, and instances of dissensus in the smooth narrative are the critical moments in which a sense of community in the commercially bound environment emerges. The unexpected halts or delays of the project are thus crucial moments that open up an “inoperative community” at the heart of any drive to implement what Nancy calls “communities of essence,” which subsume singularities under organic wholes. Nancy’s notion of community put forth in his influential book, *The Inoperative Community*, is a central reference point for this chapter.

In Chapter Three, I will explore the complicated aspects of sovereignty that are carried out in the video works of the Korean artist Park June-bum, which simulate the step-by-step process in which small-scale commercial signboards are attached to the exteriors of ordinary commercial buildings in the miniaturized models he creates for his

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25 Jean Luc-Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, translated by Peter Connor, et al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991): 31. “Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called ‘unworking,’ referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension.”
videos. Park explores the fantasies and pretentions involved in our desire to control people’s perception and movements in everyday life, by seeming to manipulate urban situations, all of which explore the tensions between rule-bound behavior and the anomalies, diversions and free play that are always in excess of those constraints. In some of his videos, his own hands, without obvious connection to a body, are shown to reach in and manipulate every single activity, such that we are meant to understand them as an external power that dictates these acts from on high and from the outside.

Although at first glance it seems that Park’s work emphasizes the existence of an omnipotent power manipulating everyday life, one comes to realize that there is a more subtle relationship between sovereign power, represented by the physical hands in the films, and the activities of everyday life. In other words, in Park’s work there is no real hierarchical order between the two realms, in the sense that the “sovereign hands” always hesitantly follow what is occurring at the ground level, without completely grasping and overriding it. In Park’s videos, there is no panoptic system disciplining the scattered local activities from the center. Rather, there are multiple power relations or forces that are generated at multiple sites and scales. The binary structure between a point of mastery that is elevated above the ordinary, and an ordinary that is subordinated to this higher ordering level, is perpetually undermined in Park’s miniature urban worlds. To use Deleuze’s language, power relations always “move one point to another,” and generate “inflections, resistances, twists and turns” according to every change being made.26

In Chapter Four, I will explore the multiplicity of commercial signs represented by two different artists’ works: Jang Yong-geun’s photo collages of commercial signage,

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and Choi Jeong-hwa’s installations of large-scale commercial advertising scrims on the exterior and interior of buildings in different urban locations in Korea and abroad. Although both artists’ works operate in quite different contexts, reading those two together may raise an interesting thought experiment in relationship to commercial signs: what would happen if individual urban advertisements were collected and displayed on a single plane or place?

Jang’s photo-collage of outdoor commercial signage with numerous fragments, consisting of more than two hundred small photos of signage, suggests a distracted mode of viewing that would match its dispersed patchwork surface. One begins to notice that all the different commercial settings and signage bring out different textures and compositions of signs that coexist on this one plane. Choi uses fabric advertisement banners as the medium for his large-scale installations on the interior and exterior façades of existing buildings. By laying out a series of long bands of different advertisements, Choi also shows their diverse decorative patterns, in which the design of each sign lives in a vibrant and dissonant coexistence with all the others. Instead of the monotonous repetition of total design, the amalgamation of commercial signs in one plane or place shows the concealed forms of life in commercial settings, which are not always so easy to recognize within the dense urban fabric of the city. Despite the fact that each advertisement is produced by local sign designers, who often use pre-established design templates, the resulting cityscape is replete with a myriad of urban advertisements, which demonstrate remarkable variety in terms of visual/linguistic expressions, typographies, colors, and composition. These artistic projects put into (low) relief the issues of community, sovereignty, and singularity explored in the previous three chapters.
In Chapter Five, I focus on the French painter Manoel Pillard’s nightscape paintings produced during his trips to Seoul between 1998 and 2008, in order to explore the affective dimensions of commercial signage, and the way they can create a mood, and ultimately set up a world of sense that is simultaneously social, physical, and communal. Commercial signs in Korean cities do not merely communicate through words and representation, but rather impact us in affective and sub-representational ways. The issues of mood and affect pose a challenge to the typical ways of approaching commercial signs in Korean scholarship, which tends to treat them as an objectively observable and analyzable set of objects separated from experience, perception, and the body. In these accounts, perception in relationship to signage is often relegated to issues of visual clarity and legibility, in order to effectively control it, and to construct a well-ordered cityscape, with strong figure/ground relationships.

Against these empirical/scientific approaches, this chapter shows that Pillard’s paintings provide the viewer with the opportunity to perceive commercial environments in Korea as an affective domain in meaningful ways that can’t be reduced to legibility, clarity, or even linguistic meaning. His paintings capture the flickering and fleeting moments of everyday urban experience, or, put in a different way, the singularities of everyday life. And those singularities do not exist in the interior mind, nor in the outside world, but always in the field between them. The painted moments of these nightscapes, where the vivid flickering of signs are frozen in eternal time, paradoxically, expose the enticing temporality of these commercial environments, which are simultaneously fleeting yet fully saturated and compelling.
In the last chapter, I will examine another popular commercial urban phenomenon in contemporary Korea that attempts to loosely draw together—or perhaps, refract—the different strands explored in the previous chapters: the culture of *Bang*. Simply defined, *Bang* (房) literally means ‘room’ in the Korean traditional housing system. This traditional domestic typology was interrupted by Korea’s rapid modernization in the 20th century, but began to reappear in everyday city space from the early 1990s in commercial settings. By analyzing the work of three Korean artists/architects on *Bang* culture—Song Ze-ho, Yoo Suk-yeon, and Lee Bul (1999-2004)—this chapter demonstrates that these hypermodern places, often replete with a dense array of signs, can foster new modes of sociability, which consist of gathering in spaces that are oddly intimate, yet thoroughly commercial.

The *Bang* resists homogeneous, integral, and total design, because each space is operated by individual commercial agents, who together often occupy a single generic commercial structure. The identity of each shop is indicated through signs, which are placed not only on the exterior of the room but, indeed, all over the building, even spilling out onto the street. This spatial, semiotic, and affective condition renders the entire urban space as “a continual process of discontinuous transformation,” to borrow Howard Caygill’s perspicuous account of city space.27 Or, to put it in a different way, commercial *bangs* are replete with moments of “porosity” and “transition,” where rational spatial division and property ownership becomes blurred. Although there are definite senses of community evidenced in these spaces, they are always fleetingly convened, gathered, and dispersed, thus resisting any unifying notion of total or

hierarchical design, or absolute domination by commercial interests. A single commercial building often contains many different types of commercial endeavors, such as karaoke bars, laundry rooms, convenience stores, hair salons, and even churches. And, any given spatial unit in such a building is always being fragmented into multiple, smaller spaces by its use, and this multiplicity is not repetitive but is always differentiated and altered in relationship to the experience of its different users. The way this space is experienced is “popular” in the sense that it evokes the everyday mode of spatial experience of Korean people, who are accustomed to ‘gathering’ in spaces like a jjimzil-bang, meaning a public sauna, that are oddly intimate, yet commercial through and through. Hence it could be said that the hypermodernity of bang culture meets up again with the tradition of Bang in the reactivation of a spatial habit, which actualizes the desire of ordinary urban residents to gather in common: to freely sit down and enjoy the space that they have participated in making, in ways that are perpetually open and closed, singular, and collective, fragile and insistent, pleasurable yet critical, in ways that perhaps we are only beginning to understand and make sense of.
Chapter 1: The Entangled Everyday: *Design Seoul* and the Disciplining of Commercial Signs (2008-present)

*Designing Seoul*

On October 20, 2007, the members of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design announced Seoul as the 2010 *World Design Capital* (*WDC Seoul*) at the closing ceremony of their congress meeting held that year in San Francisco. The ceremony was immediately followed by the acceptance speech by Seoul’s mayor Oh Se-hoon, who held office from 2006 to 2011: “Design is a growth driver of the Seoul economy. We have surprised the world with the Miracle of the Han River and advancements in the IT sector. Now we would like to bring global attention to Seoul with strong design” (Fig. 6). This short fragment from Oh’s speech clearly shows the prime importance placed on design as a means of internationalizing Seoul, transforming the city into the hub of the Asian continent, and boosting the city’s economy in the 21st century. ‘Design’ is conceived as the driving force in this endeavor comparable to “the Miracle of the Han River,” which refers to the successful result of South Korea’s astonishingly fast modernization process in the late twentieth century after the urban devastation caused by

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28 “The World Design Capital is a city promotion project that celebrates the merits of design. Held biennially, it seeks to highlight the accomplishments of cities that are truly leveraging design as a tool to improve the social, cultural and economic life of cities, throughout a year-long program of design-related events” (source: [http://www.worlddesigncapital.com/what-is-the-wdc](http://www.worlddesigncapital.com/what-is-the-wdc)). Four cities have been designated as the World Design Capital since 2008: Torino (2006-2008) was first, Seoul (2008-2010) was second, Cape Town (2010-2012) was third, and most recently named was Helsinki (2012-2014). The next World Design Capital between 2014 and 2016 has not been decided yet and is currently in an open competition.

29 An article from the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) website, “World Design Capital Seoul 2010” (source: [http://www.icsid.org/events/events/calendar331.htm](http://www.icsid.org/events/events/calendar331.htm)).
the Korean War (1950-1953). So the concept of ‘design’ here refers neither to a neutralized aesthetics of form and space, nor to a subjective sense of design practiced by individual designers. Instead, ‘design’ is here understood as a highly systematized, institutionalized discipline that purports to achieve the country’s modernization in the new millennium, and heighten the nation’s competitiveness in the global market.

The 2010 World Design Capital project only lasted for two years and was, in fact, part of a larger urban design project undertaken by the Oh Se-hoon administration since the beginning of his term as mayor of Seoul in 2006. This project is often called Design Seoul, which is a term that groups two different urban design projects together: the 2010 World Design Capital Seoul (often abbreviated as WDC Seoul) and the UNESCO Creative City of Design Seoul (also abbreviated as UNESCO Seoul). Design Seoul is a huge project in terms of its financial investment; more than 300 million dollars has been spent on it since 2007. It is an ongoing initiative whose content is continually updated and revised in collaboration with groups of specialists from various design disciplines, including industrial design, architectural design, and urban design. The overall direction

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30 South Korea’s fast-paced modernization, represented by “the Miracle of the Han River,” can be understood as a common phenomenon that is often found in other Asian countries as well. “The Asian tiger” is the term that groups four different Asian countries together—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—and that characterizes those countries’ miraculously fast-paced, successful modernization process compared to other parts of the world. Bruce Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2005): 309-314.

31 The 2010 World Design Capital Seoul is the first series of two successive city design projects of Seoul, followed by the UNESCO Creative City of Design Seoul (appointed July 20, 2010), both of which constitute a larger whole entitled Design Seoul.


of *Design Seoul* has gradually changed with the election of the Park Won-soon as the new mayor of Seoul in 2011. He has been called a “social designer,” and he appears to place a greater emphasis on issues of social welfare and democracy than Oh Se-hoon.\(^{34}\)

*Design Seoul* establishes a comprehensive design strategy in a highly organized manner, and attempts to regulate a wide realm of city spaces on multiple scales, ranging from architectural works, the riverfront and skyline, road/pedestrian signs, commercial signs to bollards, fences, street furniture, manholes, wastebaskets, and even the uniforms of street cleaners.\(^{35}\) While large-scale urban projects such as “Design Seoul Street” and “Han River Renaissance” were the first projects conducted through the auspices of *Design Seoul*, there are also a series of smaller projects involving the creation of a visual symbolism for Seoul (called “Haechi”), which includes an appropriate typeface for public signs, and map icons to help tourists to quickly familiarize themselves with Seoul’s geography.\(^{36}\) Although both *WDC Seoul* and *UNESCO Seoul* were nominated by two different international NGOs, the basic design principle of each project is almost the same: an attempt to regulate and control the city through the disciplinary practice of Seoul Design Olympiad Division. The Seoul Design Headquarters also manages various subsidiary organizations including the Seoul Design Foundation and the Seoul Design Center. In addition, each of the 25 autonomous gu districts also has a separate design organization that supports the implementation of the city’s Design Seoul initiative."


design, often involving an active collaboration with the design industry.\textsuperscript{37} In this respect, the wide range of design projects that comprise Design Seoul can justifiably be called a ‘total design’ project; the Korean version of a gesamtkunstwerk for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

The use of the word ‘design’ is, needless to say, very broad, with all of these initiatives indicating how the city can be redefined and rebranded through the lens of design, from features of its traditional heritage to aspects of its most recent high-tech and consumer-driven cultures. ‘Design’ is now seen as crucial to the construction of an urban identity for Seoul, whether that is the widely revered, Confucian foundation of Korean traditional culture or commercial urban signage, as is evidenced by Design Seoul’s use of compound words such as “Culturenomics” and “Designomics.” It is clear here that the government has a deep investment in the belief that design can “revitalize the economy and enhance the quality of life.”\textsuperscript{38} Anthropologist Aihwa Ong considers WDC Seoul to be a crucial impetus for the city authority’s aspirations to “go beyond the old industrial model and become a world cultural city that hopes to rival or even surpass Tokyo or New York.”\textsuperscript{39} Although Design Seoul still emphasizes Seoul as a medieval city with a 600-year-old urban history, which demonstrates the staying power of Confucian culture

\textsuperscript{37} There are a few large-scale design industries that have played active roles in shaping the Design Seoul project such as Korea Institute of Design Promotion, Seoul Design Foundation, Seoul Design Center, and Seoul Fashion Center. UNESCO, Seoul: UNESCO City of Design, July 11, 2011 (source: http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=214437&set=5224D96B_2_175&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1). At the beginning of Oh Se-hoon’s term, the specialized design department, called the “headquarters of the design industry,” was first created under the city government, with the appointment of an industrial designer, Kwon Young-gull, as acting vice president of the department.

\textsuperscript{38} Design Seoul Story, 34. Another unpublished document called “Seoul Designomics” introduces the diverse range of design-related projects covered throughout Design Seoul, which includes each project’s economic value.

through material artifacts and historic sites, the city government now uses the word ‘design’ as a way to redefine the identity of Seoul in more flexible ways that integrate the old and the new in Seoul as integral cultural assets (Fig. 7). Such an emphasis on design throughout this mega-scale urban project is an unprecedented phenomenon in the country’s urban history, because Korea has neither a strong discursive tradition of urban design nor a shared understanding of what is meant by urban design among scholars and practitioners. For example, historic monuments or shrines located in Seoul such as Gyeongbokgung Palace and Jongmyo Shrine have been long considered important material examples of cultural heritage in the city, but they have not been widely discussed in terms of their ‘design’ implications. However, Design Seoul now reconceives them in terms of individual designers’ creativity and as designs that enrich the city’s history and culture. Even Hunminjeongeum, the first systematic writing system of the Korean language that was invented by the King Sejong (1397–1450) in 1446, is reintroduced in Design Seoul as a prime example of creative design lauded by city officials.

Despite the city government’s all-embracing notion of design that attempts to integrate all aspects of urban culture on the same plane, it should be noted that Design

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40 One of the examples showing the stereotypical way of introducing Seoul’s history and culture is a publication entitled Korea the Beautiful: Treasures of the Hermit Kingdom, written by a Korean historian Yoo Yu-shin in 1987. In this book, most of the contents are composed of ancient Buddhist paintings, ceramics, shamanism, Confucian culture, palaces, shrines, and historic monuments created before the twentieth century. The urbanization of Seoul during the twentieth century is briefly introduced in the later part of the book, but no particular emphasis is given to that. And it is important to note that this publication was made specifically at the time of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, which implicitly shows how the book represents Korea to the outside world through some carefully selected national heritages and cultural artifacts. See Yoo Yu-shin, Korea the Beautiful: Treasures of the Hermit Kingdom (Los Angeles: The Golden Pond Press, 1987): 164-177.

41 Ibid., 23.
Seoul still makes a clear distinction between tradition and modernity, industrial modernization and the contemporary focus on sustainable urban cultures. The section “Adversity” from Design Seoul Story, a booklet accompanying and introducing the concepts of Design Seoul, clearly identifies a series of disastrous national experiences—Japanese colonialism, the Korean civil war, and the poorly managed spaces of the everyday in the shadow of the speedy modernizations led by three successive dictators (Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and Noh Tae-woo)—that need to be reconsidered and overcome in order to create a new identity for Seoul in the 21st century. Design Seoul Story’s distaste for an unregulated and disorderly urban condition due to an industrial modernization based on quantitative growth, and a desire to supplant this with an organized design scheme is explicitly voiced in the text. Design Seoul Story also presents an explicit contrast between images of Korea’s natural heritage sites such as beautiful mountain ranges and rivers on the one hand, and images of mass housing blocks and commercial signs on the other, in which the latter is claimed to have “destroyed…[the] quality of life” (Figs. 8-9). This strong binary opposition pits natural and historical heritages sites in opposition to a more recent history associated with aspects of the unruly and disruptive effects of Korea’s rapid drive to modernize. Design Seoul places particular emphasis on the Neo-Confucianism-based Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) as the exemplary representative of Korean history and culture, in which discipline, hierarchy, and harmony were the primary values. Thus, one of Design Seoul’s main

\[42\] Ibid., 26.

\[43\] Ibid., 18-25.

contradictions is to push contemporary notions of design into the historical past, while simultaneously denigrating any modes of contemporary design that do not adhere to these Neo-Confucian values. These contradictions are never resolved and remain a driving force within its underlying structural make-up.

Viewed from the broader perspective of Asian urbanism, Design Seoul is one among many cases that reflects how Asian countries have tried to jump start a comparatively delayed modernization process in the new millennium, by hosting global festivals such as the “Olympics, art biennales, world fairs, and scientific conventions,” constructing a forest of corporate towers, and imposing “faux-European urban environments and lifestyles” in cities such as Shanghai. \(^45\) Not only are these spectacular urban projects designed to augment those countries’ economies and secure their sovereignty in international politics, they are also treated as the devices through which each government hopes to overcome a strife-torn twentieth-century history, which is often deeply associated with civil wars, colonialism, and military dictatorships. In South Korea, the remnants of Japanese colonialism are sometimes indiscriminately demolished for the sake of reclaiming sovereignty; meanwhile, historic buildings and national heritage sites are too easily torn down as well and replaced by sleek contemporary designs considered to have high economic value. \(^46\) One of the most recent cases in South

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\(^46\) The Korean urban historian Lee Kyu-mok examines the different aspects of the “distorted” cityscape of Korea under Japanese colonialism in his book *The Modern Korean Townscape*, in which he focuses on how the “divide-and-rule” policy operated by the colonizer distorts the authentic Korean urban form that is based on *feng shui* theory, supported by a number of examples, such as the imposition of the office of the Japanese Government of Korea inside the area of the Kyŏngbok palace, the primary office of administration in the Joseon Dynasty. Lee insists that the “residues” produced during Japanese colonialism caused the “abnormal modernization process,” and this can be recovered by searching for the
Korea is the ongoing project of the internationally renowned architect Zaha Hadid’s *Dongdaemun Design Plaza*. As a crucial part of the *Design Seoul* project, *Dongdaemun Design Plaza* (often abbreviated as DDP) has not only raised a lot of criticism from NGOs and architects, but also dramatized tensions between the city authority and local communities, due to the city government’s decision to demolish the iconic modernist *Dongdaemun Stadium* (1925) in order to make way for it. The government also forcefully expelled more than a thousand street vendors who originally occupied the surrounding area, without providing them enough compensation.\(^{47}\) In addition, the construction of the Plaza had to be temporarily stopped, because a number of significant historic sites and ruins, worth being designated as national treasures, were found in the middle of the construction.\(^{48}\) Many NGOs and local historians suggested preserving these material remains at their original sites. Ignoring these pleas, the city government decided to place those historic remnants on a nearby site, and then proceeded with the construction of the new Plaza. This example demonstrates how the city government of Seoul is obsessed with conceptualizing ‘design’ as the teleological means for fulfilling the nation’s modernization, often ignoring competing claims or even a more robust sense of the historical past. In this respect, one can sense that many current urban and architectural projects pursued in South Korea are still based on the idea of modernity as a linear progression that is entirely driven by the state, despite a government rhetoric that stresses authentic modernity through the cases of urban planning in pre-modern Korea. Lee Kyu-mok, *Hankukŭi dosikyŏnggwon* [The Modern Korean Townscape] (Seoul: Yŏrhwadang, 2002): 71-122.


the collaborative process between the state and the local community as a crucial part of the project. Although we cannot consider Design Seoul’s conception of modernity in exactly the same way as the “old industrial model” of the 20th century, as Aihwa Ong suggests, it is fair to claim that there is still the persistent idea that the nation’s modernity should be driven by strong government oversight.

By providing a broad overview of Design Seoul’s relationship to issues of design and urban history of Asia in the recent decades, this chapter aims to investigate the underlying conception of design prevalent throughout the entire project, paying particular attention to the ways that the practice of design is entangled with everyday urban life in Seoul. A fundamental question about the nature of the project is raised from the beginning, as one carefully unpacks the implications of the phrase “Design Seoul,” which combines “design” as a supposedly autonomous discipline and “Seoul” as a megalopolis that necessarily exists beyond the control of any systematic design. What exactly does it mean to “design” Seoul, a mega-city that is the second largest metropolitan area in the world with a population of over ten million, and over twenty million if the population from satellite cities and towns around Seoul are included? What can be designed and,


50 Seoul Statistical Yearbook 2012 states that the population of the entire city based on the 2011 survey is 10,528,774 (source: http://stat.seoul.go.kr/jsp/WWS8/WWSDS8115.jsp?cot=009). Meanwhile, Kim Joo-chul and Choe Sang-chuel discuss in their co-authored book Seoul: The Making of a Metropolis (1997) that Seoul’s population as a larger territory was reaching 20 million people already in 1993 with the satellite cities and towns “representing more than 46% of Korea’s total population”: “If we look at the Seoul
likewise, what cannot? If Design Seoul is a project that not only provides practical solutions to urban matters such as constructing necessary infrastructure and controlling the density and the traffic of the city, but also attempts to search for Seoul’s urban identity throughout the conception of “total design” and “integrative design,” one needs to critically inquire how the city elements of Seoul are redesigned in order to resonate with such abstract concepts of totality and integrity.\textsuperscript{51} Considering that Seoul is already a heterogeneous space comprised of many different social classes, ethnic groups, and urban dynamics, how does Design Seoul perceive the domain of the everyday in urban space filtered through a conceptual model of city design that tends to disregard the complex networks of metropolitan cultures?

By thinking about the everyday in relationship to Design Seoul, this chapter poses a series of questions about how the designed aspects of Seoul communicate with ordinary people; how this idealized, conceptual model of urban design actually works within the existing fabric of the city; and how ordinary people’s participation in Design Seoul unfolds in the affective and perceptive dimensions of urban experience. In thinking about these questions, I have kept in mind an excerpt from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, in which he raises a fundamental question or dilemma about the entanglement between a rule and its following in everyday life: “The fundamental

\footnotesize{Metropolitan Region (SMR), which includes the surrounding satellite towns and cities, the total population of the SMR is rapidly approaching 20 million, representing more than 46% of Korea’s total population (City of Seoul, 1993).\textsuperscript{5} From Kim Joo-chul and Choe Sang-chuel, \textit{Seoul: The Making of a Metropolis} (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1997): 3.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{51} In 2007, Forbes magazine announced that Seoul is the sixth densest city in the world, having “16,700 people per square kilometer” under the 1,049 square kilometers as the entire size of the city. The five densest cities around the world are Mumbai, India (1\textsuperscript{st}); Kolkata, India (2\textsuperscript{nd}); Karachi, Pakistan (3\textsuperscript{rd}); Lagos, Nigeria (4\textsuperscript{th}); and Shenzhen, China (5\textsuperscript{th}) (source: http://www.forbes.com/2007/12/14/cities-pollution-asia-biz-logistics-cx_tvr_1214densecities_slide_7.html).}
fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and that then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. That we are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules. This entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand." In this passage, Wittgenstein seems to suggest that a rule is not an absolute, non-negotiable point of departure, which we, subsequently, follow rigidly. Instead, he stresses that a rule is always inevitably entangled with multiple additions, adaptations, and applications made by groups of people who may encounter such a rule in diverse ways and through different “language games.” A rule is better understood as a practice with all its inevitable misreadings and variabilities, which unfold within everyday situations, and which generates forms of life that are more akin to gestures than rules. Taking inspiration from Wittgenstein’s notion of rule-following, this chapter argues that Design Seoul is marked by a fundamental dilemma and contradiction: it is an idealized, homogeneous design conception implemented by the city government, but which necessarily must include and rely on a heterogeneous body of participants (residents, visitors, planners, artists, designers, and shop owners) whose input must be accommodated, but is often not envisioned or accommodated for in sufficiently generous and imaginative ways. However, this does not mean that the disparity between “rules” and “rule following” is unbridgeable or futile: quite the contrary. After all, a rule or stable form of action, no matter how ephemeral, is enabled by the following as such. It is precisely the different affects and percepts unfolded in the domain of the everyday, which


53 Ibid., §23.
gives ‘real’ consistency to the symbolic attempts to give shape to the city by administrators and urban designers.

My attention in this chapter will focus on a close reading of three aspects of commercial signage addressed in Design Seoul: 1) the five series of “design guidelines,” 2) the images and representations of its ideal vision of Seoul in contrast to its conception of its inadequate and ‘fallen’ version, 3) and the Seoul Good Sign exhibitions.

*The Guidelines for Design Seoul*

The establishment of design principles and their application to actual city spaces is fundamental to Design Seoul. The conceptual part of Design Seoul is comprised of a series of “design guidelines,” which address detailed methods for redesigning five main categories of city space: 1) “public space,” 2) “public architecture,” 3) “public facilities” (such as benches and wastebaskets), 4) “public visual media,” which refers to various types of road signs and informational billboards for citizens and visitors, and 5) “outdoor advertisements.” These guidelines are only available in Korean as government documents available for consultation on Design Seoul’s website. They exist in the format of an ‘e-book,’ which is constantly updated by the city government. Each guideline is composed of the definition of each architectural/urban category, a set of manifestos that

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54 Those five design guidelines are specifically named: 1) The Design Guideline for Public Space, 2) The Design Guideline for Public Architecture, 3) The Design Guideline for Public Facilities, 4) The Design Guideline for Public Visual Media, and 5) The Design Guideline for Outdoor Advertisements. These guidelines are also called a “Design Seoul Fundamental,” which implies the significance of those guidelines in specifying the reconstruction of the city.

55 These guidelines are unpublished government documents that are only available in the Korean language through the website of Design Seoul and exist in the format of an ‘e-book’: (source: http://design.seoul.go.kr/n_designdb/ebookDesign.php). Several different existing versions of the guidelines have been updated since 2008, although the main format remains almost the same.
describe the problems underlying Seoul’s current urban condition, and a series of possible solutions. For instance, *The Design Guideline for Public Space* subdivides the entire city space of Seoul into nine elements: roads, squares, water-friendly spaces (such as streams and fountains), urban parks, urban spaces around public architecture, exterior parking lots, urban infrastructure, and open areas that are left unoccupied. The category of “square” is again subdivided into six different spatial typologies: crossroad squares, squares in front of stations, large central squares, neighborhood squares, landscape squares, and squares affiliated with architecture. This guideline is meant to establish a non-negotiable spatial typology of urban space in a hierarchical manner, such that any local city ministry or commercial agent can use it as a basic syntax in their future design practices.

These guidelines resemble a cladistic system, in the form of a branching tree. This means that there is an unchanging conception of a given idealized spatial category at the highest level, from which the rest of the detailed city elements are elaborated accordingly. *The Design Guideline for Public Space* clearly subcategorizes “public space” into nine different spatial typologies; however, it does not adequately conceptualize or even define what the term “public space” might mean ethically and aesthetically in its relationship to the *Design Seoul* project, thus leaving the core conceptual part of the guideline vague and inarticulate. For instance, the first page of the guideline defines “public space” simply

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57 A *Design Guideline of Public Space*, 34.

58 Unsurprisingly, the other four guidelines are similarly designed through the uncompromising classification and spatial hierarchy. For example, *A Design Guideline for Outdoor Advertisements* consists of two main aspects: first, dividing Seoul by five different types of “area” (central, general, commercial, preservation, and specialization); second, subdividing commercial signage by eight different types of
as a spatial typology that is accessible to “the public.” Then, in the following pages, the guideline hurriedly moves into a section that offers both criticisms about the poor conditions of Seoul’s public spaces, and solutions addressing how they can be improved in terms of visual order, safety, and efficiency. This overemphasis on formal solutions through spatial typologies seems to be their response to what they see as a condition of urban chaos engendered by individual capitalist pursuits at the expense of the public domain.

What lies behind this overemphasis on design guidelines and typological imperatives is the city government’s ambition to transform Seoul from a “Hard City” to a “Soft City”; a desire to remake the modern industrial city into a postmodern sustainable one. If a “Hard City” is defined by “function,” “efficiency,” “the automobile,” and “speed,” as this diagrammatical image shows (Fig. 10), a “Soft City” stresses qualities that are “human-centered” and “pedestrian-based”. A “Soft City” is one that can be


59 A Design Guideline for Public Space, 38.

60 Typology was a critical issue in the discourse of architectural form and space in the 1960s when the Italian architect Aldo Rossi first raised the importance of typology as a way of speculating about the historiography of architectural design in the West. But it is equally important to note that Rossi also leaves the possibility of a dialectical relationship between architectural typology and the contingency of design in various material settings, which gives us a lesson that the textures and senses of place are not easily subsumed by a predetermined system of design. And it was Anthony Vidler who pushed Rossi’s discourse of architectural typology into the realm of contemporary urbanism, as he provoked “the ontology of city” in the speculation of broad urban territories through the aid of maps, diagrams, and urban forms. Similar to Rossi’s idea of a dialectics, Vidler argues that, while typology is still an efficient way of thinking about urbanism, the perception of city should entail the deep speculation about an experiential dimension of city and the connectivity and disconnectivity between the various city elements. See Aldo Rossi, The Architecture of the City (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1982): 41; Anthony Vidler, “The Third Typology,” Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995, ed. Kate Nesbitt (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996): 261.
savored at “the speed of a bicycle.” This conceptual dichotomy is then elaborated by twenty-two principles (or key words/phrases) of urban design that Kwon Young-gull, the chief coordinator of Design Seoul, proposes in his book Designing Seoul, including “Genius Loci,” “Eco-friendly,” “Simplicity,” and “Fun.” In this book, Kwon introduces the various achievements of Design Seoul in greater detail, by emphasizing how each project has elevated the quality of urban life, and successfully transformed Seoul into an international brand. Similar to the ways that design guidelines overemphasize the strategies of transforming Seoul from a “Hard City” to a “Soft City,” Kwon reiterates the rhetoric that Design Seoul could turn Seoul into a city that is free of superfluous visual noise, and redesigned strictly under the principles of “simplicity” and “legibility.” The city government is thereby committed to removing what they consider distracting and superfluous urban design and imagery such as billboards and neon signs, while preserving selected symbolic monuments and places. As Kang Nae-hui and Yoon Ja-hyoung astutely point out in their semiotic analysis of Design Seoul, it privileges a strategy and technique of metonymic and paratactic design. They insist that the government selectively emphasizes certain aspects of the city’s culture and history, while excluding and excising other ‘disagreeable’ elements from their vision of Seoul’s urban identity.

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While this enactment of rules and their applications to actual city space are ubiquitous throughout *Design Seoul*, it is probably another guideline entitled *Signboard Design Guidebook* (2008) that best reveals how the city government attempts to control the practice of everyday urbanism at a microscopic level. The *Signboard Design Guidebook* provides not only examples of how commercial signs should be designed and *not* designed, but also a “checklist” for making a good commercial sign. This list is composed of a series of instructions about the legitimacy of signage design and construction with an emphasis on ten specific considerations: color, the elements of inscription, the quality of signboard, lighting, size, the number of signboards, location, permission, production and construction, safety, and management (Figs. 11-12). Based on the checklist, the *Signboard Design Guidebook* also provides a manifesto comprised of ten specific principles on how to make a “good signboard”:

1. Do not make a signboard too big
2. Make a signboard harmonious with the surrounding urban environment
3. Do not display too many signboards together
4. Refrain from overusing unmixed, primary colors
5. Apply letters with appropriate spacing
6. Distinguish the primary content of inscription from the supplementary information
7. Utilize a building’s façade as a distinct background
8. Make a signboard distinct from others (in terms of the use of typeface, color, iconic image, and materiality)
9. Avoid excessively sensuous and distracting composition
10. Perform regular maintenance

This checklist and the ten principles evidence the city government’s attempt to minimize all the ‘garish’ aspects of commercial signage in everyday urban situations,

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66 *Kanp’an tichain kaidūpuk* [Signboard Design Guidebook]: 3-4.
particularly by removing the excessive accumulation of commercial signs that have existed for more than a century, which create the dense atmosphere for which Seoul has long been known.\textsuperscript{67} It is also an attempt to return attention to the façade of ordinary buildings, which have long been submerged by the plethora of signs that all but cover their entire surface (Fig. 13). Recovering the underlying building façade is also a ‘defensive’ act of purification that attempts to secure architecture’s autonomy and essence by minimizing the intrusion of commercial signs. Appealing to a supposed universal distaste for excessive signage in Seoul, \textit{Design Seoul} nominates itself as an agent fulfilling the people’s desires to clean up the city, and thus casts itself in the light of a utilitarian civic project devoid of any ideological biases. However, it is imperative to note that this sign-redesigning process ultimately silences the voices of ordinary shopkeepers, as well as impacting customers, and those who traverse and territorialize city space in myriad ways, for the sake of protecting civic values.\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Design Seoul}’s deep intervention into everyday commercialism reveals its desire to control the everyday through a whole-scale redesign of the city’s signage.

A cartoon from \textit{Design Seoul}, entitled \textit{An Ugly City by Signboards, A Nice City by Signboards}, not so subtly indicates how each citizen should behave in a civic-minded way, in order to improve the quality of public space, by controlling everyday commercial

\textsuperscript{67} One can say that the earliest time period that commercial signage began appearing in the public domain is around 1900, as the country opened the sea ports and foreign capitals began penetrating into the domestic market, which instigated the rise of commercial activities in ordinary urban space. Huh Young-ran, Ryu Jun-bum, and Kim Je-jeong, “Han’guk kŭnhyŏndaesa sogŭi kŏrigwanggmulgwa karogyŏnggwan” [“The Street Advertisements and Streetscapes in the Korean Modern History”] in \textit{Seoul, Twentieth Century: Civic Life & Culture of the Last 100 Years} (Seoul: Seoul Development Institute, 2001): 617.

\textsuperscript{68} The five design guidelines constituting the conceptual part of Design Seoul obviously uses the term “public” as a core conception of urban design.
endeavors and their urban signifiers (Fig. 14). The cover page is composed of two images illustrating two very different urban settings: one is a streetscape imagined after the renovation of existing commercial signs, including two cartoonish characters who smile in appreciation of their environment; and the other consists of a collection of disordered streetscapes before the planned renovation. The negative image is essentially a collage composed of a number of photographs of commercial signs from many unidentified sources and locations amalgamated into an exaggerated image of urban chaos, in which the two cartoon characters have clearly lost their way in the midst of such a perplexing and placeless urban environment. The positive image registers a strong legibility so that navigation is clear and unambiguous even for first-time visitors to the city. Here Design Seoul seems to be influenced by the urban scholar Kevin Lynch’s notion of urban “legibility” as the crucial condition of good city design, which he outlines in his seminal book, The Image of the City, first published in 1960. The post sign renovation image is designed to present every single element of the street as clearly readable due to strong figure-ground relationships. This figure-ground relationship is derived from the Gestalt psychology, which has had a strong influence on Korean urbanism as a model for clarifying the relationships between architecture and urban space, commercial signs and building façades. In the chaotic collage image of urban signs,
there is a distinct lack of linear perspective, and a condition in which all the commercial signs collide with each other and generate confusion, and which render such figure-ground distinctions mute. By comparing these two strikingly different urban scenes, one can easily recognize Design Seoul’s attempt to replace, or at least control unruly signs and the commercial activities related to them, in favor of civic space that is highly regulated by governmental sanction.

Our close visual analysis of the cover page reveals that Design Seoul treats commercial signs as isolated city elements that can be easily attached or detached at will. But this attitude is precisely enabled by removing those signs from any connection to place, region, atmosphere, or sensory ecology, thus decontextualizing them from the milieus where commercial signs are located. Through this process, which is both an ideological and aesthetic strategy, the vibrant diversity of Seoul is characterized as a “generic city” dominated by the endless repetition of the same ‘kinds’ of commercial signage. However, Seoul is far from a generic city.

Because commercial signs are too hastily considered to foster modes of urban distraction, Design Seoul makes every effort to remove them in order to impose a legible, clear, and focused visual order. Korean architect, Kim In-chul, went so far as to claim in an interview that the amount of text and information delivered through commercial

“figure” being signboards and “ground” being the exterior (or façade) of commercial buildings, both of which need to be equally legible.

72 The renowned architect and urban theorist Rem Koolhaas characterizes the “Generic City” as the fundamental phenomenon in Asian cities. Rem Koolhaas, “The Generic City” in S, M, L, XL, edited by Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995): 1250. “In any case, the Generic City now also exists in Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa…. Some continents, like Asia, aspire to the Generic City; others are ashamed by it. Because it tends toward the tropical – converging around the equator – a large proportion of Generic Cities is Asian … this discarded product of Western civilization, through the resemanticization that its very dissemination brings in its wake.”
signage is in an inverse proportion to the cultural level of a country. That is to say, from his perspective, Korea is still culturally primitive due to the overpopulation of sign languages in ordinary city streets. But it is well worth considering that such a rich sensory environment, and certain states of distraction, might be a way of perceiving and experiencing the multiplicity and singularity of urban environments, which can foster new forms of civic and collective engagement. Singaporean critic Wei-wei Yeo writes about the distracting qualities of everyday urbanism in Singapore in a more positive light, with which people are capable of making sense of what they see in the midst of seemingly confusing, overwhelming commercial environments, which the author characterizes as acts of “constructive distraction.” If people can continuously react to and make sense of the city through their experience within such commercially saturated urban environments—after all, distraction is now an everyday phenomenon as well—we can conclude that there are spaces for improvisation, contingency, and the possibility of meaning to emerge that are in excess of their ‘given’ conditions, no matter how much Design Seoul might suggest they are inimical to public and communal life and fully generated by the ‘culture industry’.

73 Seoul Broadcast System, Kanp’an tosirul chŏmnyŏngada [Commercial signage dominates a city], June 25, 2007.

74 Wei-wei Yeo, “City as Theartre: Singapore, State of Distraction,” in Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes, edited by Ryan Bishop, John Philips, and Wei-Wei Yeo (London: Routledge, 2003): 260-261. “More importantly, there is the recognition that making sense of things through distraction is the norm in everyday perception…. the distracted mode of perception is at once unexpected and familiar…. Constructive distraction is crucial to the audience’s capacity for making sense of what they see before them, just as it is essential in the keeping of one’s balance in everyday city life where one has to cope with the incessant and potentially overwhelming supply of external stimuli.”
Idealizing Seoul

In their search for an ideal image of Seoul, Design Seoul engages in a continuous quest to identify good comparative urban design projects derived from European, Asian and North American examples. In fact, the idealization of western cities and the comparable devaluation of Korean cities are prevalent throughout Design Seoul. The case studies reported in Design Seoul construct a coherent idea of ideal urbanism that is mainly drawn from carefully selected images of foreign cities. For example, mayor Oh Se-hoon and other city officials participated in a series of oversea visits in 2008, to such cities as Esslingen and Hamburg, Germany; Basel, Switzerland; and Graz, Austria, where they visited a number of ongoing urban design projects, art fairs, and design museums that were eventually benchmarked for Design Seoul. They examined a variety of urban design examples, including commercial signs, bollards, fences, manholes, benches, and wastebaskets, as well as broader urban design projects for these cities. The website of

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75 Those case studies are somewhat unorganized and scattered around various documents related to Design Seoul. Except for a few publications distributed throughout bookstores in South Korea, such as Kwon Young-gull’s Designing Seoul, most of the raw materials are from the official Design Seoul website: http://design.seoul.go.kr/n_designdb/ebookDesign.php.

76 There are also numerous publications that are highly critical of the crude reality of Korean urbanism in favor of the ideal images of the city that they learn both from foreign cities and the pre-modern history and culture of Korea. The three books I am introducing are only a few of them: Choi Bŏm, Hankuk tichain, ŏdiro kanūnga? [Korean Design, Where Is It Headed?] (Paju: Angraphics, 2008): 29-36; Choi Bu-dŏk, Pyŏrange sŏn dosiwa kŏnch’uk [City and Architecture Standing on a Cliff] (Seoul: Misul Munhwa, 2002): 30-35; Lee Kyu-mok, Hankukū dosikyŏnggwan [The Modern Korean Townscape] (Seoul: Yŏrhwadang, 2002): 197-217.


78 There are a number of similar projects under Design Seoul that strive to learn how to design various city elements in elegant ways. A government document produced under Design Seoul, entitled as The Improvement Examples of Public Facility Design, is another good example in this light. Seoul Metropolitan Government, Konggong sisŏmul tichain kaesŏn sarye [The Improvement Examples of Public Facility Design] (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2008) (source: http://design.seoul.go.kr): 140-143.
the *Seoul Good Sign* exhibition, an annual exhibition based on a competition open to the public as part of *Design Seoul*, includes a separate page dedicated to an archive of “Good Signs from Overseas.” It includes photographs of street signs that are taken from a highway at the border between France and Spain, and from various locations in Milan, Munich, Barcelona, and Nice, as well as various unnamed cities in Brazil and Japan. All of those photographs are examples that demonstrate how street signs can exist in harmony with their surrounding urban and architectural environments, without generating too much distraction and dissonance. These images are often followed by critical reflections on Seoul’s distracting urban qualities. Interior designer Shin Hong-kyŏng diagnoses Seoul’s urbanism as “fragmentary,” “placeless,” and “disintegrated,” because it is overpopulated with commercial signs, underground shopping malls, and sound-absorbing highway walls. To solve the disintegrated urban form of Seoul, he proposes three cities as ideal models of urban design – London, Bristol, and Singapore –where all city elements work in harmony towards creating a strong and legible urban identity. Shin places particular emphasis on the integrative sign system and typography implemented by Bristol’s city government. Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that he chose Singapore as a good model of urban design as opposed to other nearby Asian metropolises such as Hong Kong and Shanghai, as the latter two streetscapes contain a myriad of distracting signs. What Shin considers a good model of urban design is both the coherent legibility of the

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city’s image clearly expressed throughout the cityscape, and the strong, guiding role of a centralized city government that is able to control the disparate commercial activities within a highly disciplined system.

Although human experience is a crucial consideration in the making of Design Seoul, its conceptualization tends to be reduced to a predetermined sense of the conditions of possibility for such experience, and the controlled design of its humanistic and civic backdrop, such as the redesign of pedestrian streets and the surfaces of their commercial corridors. In the chapter “Humane” in Designing Seoul, Kwon highlights the lack of a pedestrian culture in Seoul, and diagnoses it as the result of rapid modernization and quantitative growth in the late twentieth century. He insists that such a lack could be improved by learning from western examples of recent urban design reform, such as the “Ahwahnee principles” from New Urbanism in the United States and the “Urban Villages” movement in England, both of which emphasize the human-centered design of urban environments in the urban contexts of the 1980s and the 1990s. Kwon also compares and contrasts the Han River (the central East-West axis of Seoul), where automobiles have taken over urban space, with the Seine River in Paris, where residents and visitors alike can walk and enjoy the ‘romantic mood’ of the surroundings. He even extends this comparison by discussing two films shot respectively in Seoul and Paris: The Host by Bong Joon-ho (2006), and The Lovers on the Bridge by Leo Carax (1991). The Host raises issues about the contamination of the Han River, which goes back to the unchecked dumping of industrial waste and bad urban planning in the 1960s, while The Lovers on the Bridge presents an updated idyllic conception of the Seine in Parisian mythology. But

81 Kwon, 58-59.
there are real implications to this seemingly naive and Manichean comparison, as it provides the mood and flimsy rationale for Design Seoul to back modes of retrograde humanism, with its emphasis on public amenities such as cafes, widening pedestrian roads, and picturesque views, etc. Put in a different way, the solutions provided by Design Seoul are still widely driven by a designer’s point of view that treats those who navigate the city as passive urban strollers, and concomitantly, only understands human experience as a consequence of directed design practice.

Festivals play an important role in Design Seoul and act as further ways to create a realm of exception above and beyond everyday life in Seoul. Needless to say, their conception of ‘festival’ is totally opposite to the disruptive nature of festivals that the philosopher Henri Lefebvre had in mind, when he described the culture of festivals in ancient rural communities in Greece as the unfolding of “a prodigious diversity.” From 2008 to the present, a number of small and large festivals have been organized by Design Seoul, including Seoul Design Olympiad, Hi-Seoul Festival, Seoul Street Artist programs, Seoul Design Fair, The Design Korea Event, Seoul Design Festival, as well as a number of street performances and exhibitions.

82 Ibid., 59-60.

83 Lee Kyŏng-hoon also criticizes the series of “Pedestrian-friendly Street” projects conducted by Design Seoul as not reflecting the urban dynamism that is to some extent spontaneous and arbitrary. Lee Kyŏng-hoon, Seoul is not a City, 14-32.

84 “Before the series of revolutions which ushered in what is called the modern era, housing, modes of dress, eating and drinking – in short, living – presented a prodigious diversity. Not subordinate to any one system, living varied according to region and country, levels and classes of the population, available natural resources, season, climate, profession, age, and sex.” Henry Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness,” Architecture of the Everyday, edited by Steve Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997): 32.

omnipresence of festivals in Seoul’s ordinary urban spaces, *Design Seoul* conceptualizes festivals in an explicit opposition to everyday life. In his articulation of the role of festivals in *Designing Seoul*, Kwon uses the phrase “the escape from the everyday” twice in a single page, in the detailed program for the 2008 Hi-Seoul Festival. It is hardly surprising that these festivals are modeled on precedents drawn mostly from European and South-American models: the *Covent Garden* festival in London; “Rio Carnival” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and “La Tomatina” in Spain, which is a spirited tomato fight designed to promote both entertainment and civic-mindedness. One must ask: Why are these fairs necessarily drawn from cultures and traditions outside the country, even though Korea has its own long history of festivals?

It is not hard to see that *Design Seoul* conceives the industrialization and commercialization of the city over the past decades as highly problematic, and, thus, privileges various non-Korean models of festival as ways of enhancing the qualities of urban life in Seoul. Lefebvre’s notion of festival does influence *Design Seoul*, but in ways that are shallowly understood and put to opposite ends. *Design Seoul* is predicated on a belief that technical progress and the institutionalization of everyday life in modern society saps the richness and exuberance of daily life that existed in pre-modern times, in which festivals were not an external event but rather an intensification and extension of different kinds of festivals. See the chapters that describe the brief introduction of each event, fair, and other form of gathering: “Main Event” (p. 30-49); “Competition and Exhibition” (p. 84-107); “Fair” (p. 108-141); “Citizen’s Design Movement” (p. 160-177).

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86 Kwon, 408.

everyday life. Design Seoul’s programming of festivals is, thus, an attempt to revive the lost authenticity of everyday life in its close relationship with festivity, and to recover some imagined sense of a harmonious, organic community in the present. However, Design Seoul’s understanding and implementation of festivals is conceptualized as a counterpart to everyday life rather than integrated with it, such that one’s experience of them is more akin to passive reception of an external spectacle. If Lefebvre differentiated the festival from everyday life only in terms of the degree of “the explosion of forces” between the two, Design Seoul’s programmatic model completely separates them from everyday life in the city.

Japanese projects of public urban design are also hugely influential, and are carefully studied by the working members of Design Seoul, as they are considered ideal models for the formation of a harmonious cityscape through systematic government intervention (Fig. 15). For example, the table of contents of Guideline for the Cityscape Formation of Minato Mirai 21 Central District is quite similar to the one created by

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88 Henri Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life (Volume 1), translated by John Moore (London: Verso, 2008): 208. “The simultaneous emergence of families isolated from the community, of ‘private’ property outside of the collective systems, and of the power which certain families and certain individuals wielded over the community, destroyed that community from within. The crisis of the community, its dislocation, the distress of most of its members, went hand in hand with technical progress and social differentiation.”

89 Lefebvre, Ibid., 202. “Festival differed from everyday life only in the explosion of forces which had been slowly accumulated in and via everyday life itself.”

90 In a 2007 symposium entitled “Plans of Signage Culture Improvement for Raising National Competitiveness” a group of designers, architects, and city officials discussed how to improve the culture of commercial signage in Korea. In the symposium, Lee Sŏk-hyŏn analyzes the policies of outdoor advertisements in Japanese cities, including Ginza, Odawara, Asakusa, Sapporo, Shinjuku, and Kichijōji.

Tokyo, Todai, and Kawasaki: Color Scape Guidelines for Japan is another e-book available through Design Seoul website (source: http://design.seoul.go.kr), which is basically a collection of three different guidelines made by each local city government for the use of color in the creation of the cityscape in each city. Although the names of the translators are not identified, it is probable that this document was translated by the Design Seoul team.
Design Seoul, in the sense that it compartmentalizes the cityscape of Yokohama into a sum of isolated units, providing “activity guidelines” for how each element can be designed to meet the broader plan of maintaining a harmonious cityscape (Fig. 16).91 The Minato Mirai 21 project tore into the fabric of everyday urban space in 1980s, in order to make Yokohama a more international city, even to the point of controlling the range of color hues used in outdoor advertisements.92 The Marunouchi Nakadori Street Renewal Project in Tokyo, also analyzed by the Design Seoul team, provides another model for how the tripartite relationship between government officials, urban designers, and local residents could create a harmonious cityscape and build a sustainable community. Urban designer Kim Do-nyun argues that, unlike the precedents set by urban design projects conducted in recent decades in Korea, the intervention of large industrial enterprises into the Marunouchi Nakadori Street Renewal Project is not executed in a top-down manner.93 A branch of the Mitsubishi company, located within the renewal area, actively participates in the creation of community by hosting events, constructing conference centers and educational institutions, and providing an optical cable facility, all of which led to attracting an urban population in that area to increase the vibrancy of the city.94

91 1) activity floor, 2) pedestrian open space, 3) common space, 4) parking lot, 5) bicycle depository, 6) auxiliary installations, 7) color, 8) nighttime lighting, 9) architectural design, 10) skyline, 11) circulatory streetscape, 12) outdoor advertisements, from Minato Mirai 21 chungangji dosikyŏnggwanshong kaidŭrain [The Guideline for Cityscape Formation of Minato Mirai 21 Central District] (source: http://design.seoul.go.kr)


94 Ibid., 116.
All of the case studies discussed in this section show how Design Seoul conceptualizes an idea of urbanism drawn from a series of non-Korean (European, American, and Japanese) models of urban design. Considering that there is no strong tradition of urban design in Korea equivalent to the western history of architecture and city design (although there is a strong tradition of feng-shui, which emphasizes the relationship between nature and a built environment, and has been, de facto, the dominant urban theory in Korea since the 14th century), it is understandable that the city government of Seoul has endeavored to learn how other countries have dealt with the issue of urban design and public space. But it is clear that although Design Seoul designates itself as a “public” urban design project, its notion of the public is defined on a fairly shallow level, and is too often equated with the government’s unilateral intervention into the domain of the everyday.

Seoul Good Sign Exhibitions

While it is clear that Design Seoul is a total design project that attempts to control the various sectors of the metropolis through a set of pre-established design principles, that does not mean that every aspect of the design process is completely controlled by the city government. A series of Seoul Good Sign exhibitions provide pivotal examples showing how various individual voices and their affectivities unfold within the boundary

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95 Ko Dong-hwan, Chosŏnsidae sŏul tosisa [The Urban History of Seoul in the Joseon Dynasty] (Paju: t’aehaksa, 2007): 35.

96 Architectural historian Kim Sung-hong insists that the idea of the public in Korea has been formulated through “a stratified metamorphosis of conflicting values and ideas” in the moods of the nation’s convoluted history of the twentieth century represented by three major events – “colonialism, Communism, and military dictatorship.” Kim Sung-hong, “The Paradox of Public Space in the Asian Metropolis,” Germany-Korea Public Space Forum, edited by Kim Sung-hong and Peter Cachola Schmal (Frankfurt: KOGAF, 2005): 17.
of the strict design guidelines implemented by the city government. Seoul Good Sign is an annual competition of sign design operated through the Design Seoul project that began in 2007 with the slogan “A sign can be beautiful” (Fig. 17). Each competition participant is asked to submit four different photographs of sign design (façade view, close-up view, distant view, and nighttime view). Anyone can participate as there are no required qualifications, so that submissions can come from professional sign designers, shopkeepers who own the signs covering their premises, and local city ministries that get permission to submit sign designs in the name of original designers. It is a project that attempts to transform the commercial streetscape of Seoul by including the participation of ordinary citizens and individual sign designers acting as agents contributing to the reformulation of the streetscapes. The initiation of this exhibition series was the culmination of a decades-long collaboration between city officials, architects, urban planners, and industrial designers, and has produced a number of publications, conferences, and the creation of an NGO organization The Institute of Signboard Culture. However, as the odd combination of three different words (“Seoul,” “Good,” and “Sign”) implicitly demonstrates, the main impetus behind Seoul Good Sign is to define what a “good” sign is, which the city government, in fact, already declared, somewhat opaquely, to consist of three principles: distinctiveness, beauty, and harmony.”

97 There have been a total of six series of Seoul Good Sign exhibitions organized by Design Seoul committees, 2007 to present. The total number of design works finally selected by the committees is “two hundred one”: “fifty-nine” in 2007, “twenty-one” in 2008, “twenty-one” in 2009, “thirty-one” in 2010, “seventeen” in 2011, and “thirty-one” in 2012.


100 Signboard Design Guidebook, 2.
won, the head coordinator of *Seoul Good Sign*, addresses his abhorrence of the existing condition of commercial signage in his introduction to the exhibition booklet, entitled *A Casebook for the 2009 Seoul Good Sign*. He insists that present-day commercial signs in Korean cities are the main source of “visual pollution” that prevents the city government from making Seoul into a “beautiful” city.101

The winning project for the 2008 *Seoul Good Sign* competition, entitled “Skyflower,” attempted to historically contextualize commercial signage through three evolutionary stages: 1) an earlier modernist form of signage mostly consisting of fluorescent lighting, which often produces the distracting and flickering atmosphere of the cityscape at night; 2) an advanced form of contemporary signage consisting of LEDs (Light Emission Diodes), which produces a sharper and more even visual quality than fluorescent illumination; and 3) a future form of sign design that would generate a “sensuous” cityscape through the careful manipulation of lighting in its relation to the surface of a building (Figs. 18-20).102 This kind of temporal subdivision of sign design may make sense in terms of the internal progress of sign-design technology aesthetics, but this has little relevance to actual urban space, because all three are in use simultaneously throughout the city due to economic and design preferences. In fact, the 201 different sign designs submitted to *Seoul Good Sign* predominantly emphasize the aesthetic and formal values of their work to the juries of the exhibition, as if each participant were displaying an artwork in a salon or a gallery space. Although each


102 *2009 Seoul Good Sign Casebook*, 25.
participant was asked to strictly follow a set of design guidelines in producing their entries, there was clearly room for numerous variations in the designs. Since each sign is carefully designed to attract pedestrians from a distance and to differentiate themselves from adjacent signs, many of the designs put a strong emphasis on bold figural and iconic representations that quickly identify the shop. For example, a winning entry from the 2010 competition, “Run Bicycle,” displays a simple and forceful iconic image of a boldly rendered bicycle (Fig. 21). It is composed of a rectangular panel that contains both the image of the bicycle and the phrase “Run Bicycle” in Korean (달려라 자전거). It is a simple, straightforward design due to the combination of boldly contrasting elements consisting of a white background and black typography, which nicely conforms to the figure-ground relationship that is valorized by the competition juries. The shop owner of “Run Bicycle” carefully differentiated the level and size of each Korean alphabet character within the rectangular frame of signboard, so that it conveys a sense of dynamism and movement to the viewers. Specifically, it is the Korean verb “run” that is gradually lifted up in terms of position, which imaginatively evokes the bicycle ascending a hill. The shop owner also attempted to decrease the intensity of illumination, by tucking the LED lighting system behind the extruded signage, which allowed him to manipulate it to achieve a more subtle and delicate effect. Thus, it is clear that it would be problematic to assume that the designs submitted to Seoul Good Sign blindly followed the “checklist” provided by Signboard Design Guidebook, and passively implemented

103 The TV interview with the shop owner, Choi In-guk, reveals how he designed the sign of his bicycle shop in details to differentiate his own sign from others. “Good Sign 2010,” (from Home-story channel), produced by SP Media net (producer: Kim Yun-sang), December 16, 2010.

their rules without a subjective engagement with the design process. The difference arises when one pays close attention to all the subtle expressions found in each sign, either the choice of color, the arrangement of text and image, or the ways that those signs are experienced in ordinary city spaces. Each sign has its own unique characteristics that cannot be reduced to the universal principles of signage design. And it is difficult to schematically describe these signs with any of the clichéd keywords that are often used by the competition juries, such as “simplicity,” “beauty,” “nobility,” “functionality,” “harmony,” “creativity,” “thoughtfulness,” and “integrity.”

For instance, the officially published evaluation of “Run Bicycle” is: “A noble design in contrast to the poor nearby environments; careful proportion and change; a design work produced with admirable brevity that provides legibility and familiarity through harmony and integrity.” These comments neither mention the peculiar aspects of its distinct design, nor connect it to its particular urban context; they merely parrot pre-established vocabularies in which no genuine evaluation of each work’s singularity is made.

In examining the various aspects related to the Seoul Good Sign exhibition series, one fundamental question remains: what exactly is meant by a “good” sign? And who would be the target audience for such a good sign? Is there any practical purpose in designating a certain type of commercial sign as ‘good”? This leads me to touch on the Kantian discourse about the ‘good’ in order to rethink how this value judgment is made.

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in relationship to our aesthetic evaluation of the everyday. In the first chapter, “Analytic of the Beautiful,” of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, he explains that there is always a practical reason when we call something good (§4):

Good is what, by means of reason, we like through its mere concept. We call something (viz., if it is something useful) good for [this or that] if we like it only as a means. But we call something *intrinsically good* if we like it for its own sake. In both senses of the term, the good always contains the concept of a purpose, consequently a relation of reason to a volition (that is at least possible), and hence a liking for the existence of an object or action. In other words, it contains some interest or other.\(^{107}\)

In this passage, Kant argues that anyone who calls something good expresses a certain amount of interest in that which one refers to, whether “we call something intrinsically good” or “we like it for its own sake.” Such an interest is a rational product that conceptualizes what we feel in daily life via our cognitive faculty, as Kant indicates when he notes that “[g]ood is what, by means of reason, we like through its mere concept.” This conception of the good exists beyond the level of agreement between people; it subsumes the sensory dimension under the faculty of reason, through the enactment of the concept of a purpose. Kant writes: “Insofar as we present an object as agreeable, we present it solely in relation to sense; but if we are to call the object good [as well], and hence an object of the will, we must first bring it under principles of reason, using the concept of a purpose.”\(^{108}\) When one calls something good, it is initially generated from one’s aesthetic reflection about a thing that he/she encounters, which is however rationally constructed through one’s cognitive faculty. Strictly speaking, one does not like an object by itself when saying something is good. Instead, one conceptualizes his/her idea of the good, by explicating certain favorable aspects of an object as opposed


to other unfavorable aspects. An idea of the good is an abstract idea of an object found in the everyday world, an amalgamation of one’s sensory dimension and cognitive faculty. Since both sensory dimension and cognitive faculty are fused with an idea of the good as an abstract concept, communicating an idea of the good with others becomes extremely difficult. A conception of the good is derived from one’s subjective judgment and rational thinking process, which exists on the plane of singularity that does not necessarily coincide with other people’s conceptions of the good. One’s idea of the good is intrinsically formulated, and each idea of the good has finality, a particular kind of purpose, either conceptually or practically, that can be shared, but is generated from a subjective basis.109

Extending the idea of the good into our discussions of Seoul Good Sign, one can say that the members of Seoul Good Sign strive to create a system of sign design that is good for everyone. It seems that they consider these exhibition series as a means to achieve their ideals of making Seoul an internationally recognizable city of design, by registering the “concept of a purpose,” which Kant articulates, into the daily practice of sign design. By deliberately underplaying the fact that commercial signage is always produced by sign makers in consultation with shopkeepers whose interpretations of what makes a ‘good’ sign necessarily varies from instance to instance, Seoul Good Sign overemphasizes pre-established universal values of sign design, as if such values and principles could only be determined and constructed a priori, rather than a posteriori.

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109 Jean-Francis Lyotard reiterates the Kantian notion of the good, and its concept of an end in his book Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime. Lyotard writes that “[i]n what it is reasonable to judge good, one does indeed distinguish the wozu gut and the an sich gut, the ‘good for’ and the ‘good in itself,’ but both presuppose the ‘concept of an end.’” Jean-Francois Lyotard, Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994): 163.
Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* clearly argues against such a predetermination, when he notes that “[w]e explain the universality of aesthetic pleasure or the communicability of higher feeling by the free accord of the faculties. But is it sufficient to assume this free accord, to suppose it a priori? Must it not be, on the contrary, *produced* in us?” Deleuze asks us to rethink how the idea of the good is neither predetermined nor universal, but is instead “produced in us.” One always makes their own aesthetic judgments about commercial signage through his/her encounter with them in particular and singular geographies, atmospheres, weather, moods, lighting, and viewing angles, and not in terms of predetermined design principles. This is also at the heart of the *Critique of Judgment*, in which Kant proposes the idea of “reflective judgment,” which highlights one’s reflective process in perceiving the aesthetic values of a certain object without having a predetermined idea of beauty, which would qualify as a “determinate judgment.”

*The Entanglement of Design Seoul*

By examining how the notion of the everyday is theorized and practiced in the treatment of commercial signage throughout *Design Seoul*, this chapter has articulated that a strong binary opposition between the ideal and the everyday is omnipresent in the project both on macro and micro levels. On a macro level, the government’s desire to transform Seoul from a “Hard City” to a “Soft City” places a strong emphasis on the new

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111 Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 2. “Reflective judgment concerns itself with these objects in their particularity, as they are given. It judges them as if the rules that determined their possibility *a priori* were not sufficient to account for their particularity.”
design principles implemented through *Design Seoul*, in order to overcome all forms of urban and visual ‘pollution.’ The pursuit of a “Soft City” thus symbolizes the city government’s strong desire to make a radical break from the convoluted twentieth-century history of Korea, including the dirtier aspects of industrial modernization, and to impose a new urban system based on idealized models of urban design drawn from non-Korean models. On a micro level, each city element is carefully analyzed in relation to its potential redesign in terms of a number of design considerations based on autonomous and idealized typologies and morphologies, summarized in the design guidelines.

One might argue that this bifurcation between the ideal and the everyday is not a Korean-specific phenomenon. Indeed, we are reminded of the long tradition of utopian urban planning in the West, such as Ebenezer Howard’s “Garden Cities,” Le Corbusier’s “Ville Contemporaine,” and Frank Lloyd Wright’s “Broadacre City,” all of which demonstrate that architects and urban designers have persistently tried to impose ideal forms of life onto city spaces. However, it is imperative to note that *Design Seoul’s* obsession with these binaries is also deeply tied up with a set of binary modes of thinking derived from the convoluted modern history of Korea, roughly starting in the late nineteenth century when Korea first experienced the full onslaught of Western influence, and continuing over the course of the twentieth century, to include the traumatic experiences of Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and military dictatorships. Those internal and external conflicts and tensions felt throughout Korea’s modernization led citizens to become obsessed with a series of binary conceptions: between foreign influence and nationalism, between the colonizer and the colonized, between communism and democracy, between high elitist culture and low popular culture, between the culture
of commercial signs and disciplinary Confucian culture, and between a strong state and a weak civil society.\(^{112}\)

But how useful is it to stick to such binary oppositions in perceiving our everyday urban space? How could Design Seoul successfully redesign Seoul as an ideal city both on conceptual and practical levels, without erasing the tension between the ideal and the everyday? This is important to think about, because Design Seoul is primarily an urban project that is essentially achieved through changes made to the actual urban fabric of Seoul. No matter how sleekly street furniture and bollards are redesigned, they will be installed on the corners of a busy street full of automobiles, or not, such that complete design autonomy can never be sustained in actual urban contexts. And new sign designs are placed upon commercial buildings that are more than thirty-years old. As Jane Jacobs taught us several decades ago, a city cannot be designed as if it was an artwork.\(^{113}\) We have also examined various forms of citizen participation in sign design competitions organized through Seoul Good Sign exhibitions. Those instances enabled us to observe that an ability to follow the given guidelines of sign design is not simply a mechanical process, but is fused with private expressions and personal aesthetic tastes. Hence, Design Seoul is always already entangled with all the different voices, perceptions, and affects that cannot be predicted or subsumed within pre-established design imperatives. All of this recalls Wittgenstein’s remark in the Philosophical Investigations that “the

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\(^{112}\) Korean architect Choi Bu-deuk critiques the billboards displaced on the exteriors of commercial buildings for the lack of courtesy, which reflects the long tradition of Confucianism’s debasement of ordinary commercialism. Choi Bu-dŭk, Pyŏrange sŏn dosiwa kŏnch’ŭk [City and Architecture Standing on a Cliff] (Seoul: Misul Munhwa, 2002): 30-35.

ideal ‘must’ be found in reality.’” 114 Wittgenstein articulates our deep relationship to the everyday, such that we are compelled to “speak of the language of every day” as it is the only language we have.115 Put differently, even though we may acknowledge our desire to impose an ideal into our everyday living spaces, such a desire needs to be materially expressed in real urban sites.

Questioning the binary opposition between the ideal and the everyday also leads us to rethink the notion of “total design” anew, since we now realize that, even though Design Seoul might be a comprehensive urban design project that covers almost every aspect of city design, its actual practice is achieved through a necessary collaboration with government administrators, specialists in sign design, ordinary citizens, independent designers, and others. Although it is true that a great part of Design Seoul is operated by a dominating agent, the city government of Seoul, one should keep in mind that civic participation also plays a crucial part in shaping the details of the project. In the case of Seoul Good Sign, although each participant’s proposal is strictly confined by the given guidelines and design manifesto, this does not mean that the resulting sign designs are totally homogenized and subject-less.116 There are moments of improvisation and personal affectivities that one can locate by carefully observing each design, as the in-depth analysis of “Run Bicycle” has shown. At every moment, Seoul’s urban form is heterogeneous.

114 Wittgenstein, Ibid., §101.

115 Ibid., §120.

116 This leads us to go back to Wittgenstein’s point about the disparity between a rule and its following: “when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed.” Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §125.
If the guidelines of *Design Seoul* function not so much as absolute principles but as points of mediation between design ideas and their practices in actual city spaces, as well as between urban design and people’s experiences of it, we cannot simply treat those guidelines as a ‘cause’ and the completed projects as an ‘effect.’ Each guideline explicitly states a list of considerations that designers are supposed to follow when they are engaged in creating actual projects, but this does not mean that those practitioners will come up with the exact product expected by the guidelines. *Design Seoul* is an ongoing project, and the guidelines themselves remain under constant revision in terms of the details, thus reflecting changing political attitudes. There is no doubt that these guidelines are ‘the given,’ which serves as basis for the unfolding of diverse, creative designs done individually and collectively. But each participant’s sensory dimensions are also another kind of ‘given,’ since each person’s affectivity and perceptivity are not subsumed under the rational design principles that are implemented by the guidelines. At this point, we might register Gilles Deleuze’s philosophical discourse of “dualism” as a better model for thinking about the issue of rule-following. For Deleuze, dualism does not presuppose a fixed point in thinking about relations between things in the world. Rather, it opens up the multifarious networks between things that are always in flux. Deleuze’s definition of “the given” clarifies his point about dualism as the absence of a fixed point: “the given” is defined as “the flux of the sensible, a collection of impressions and images, or a set of perceptions.”\(^\text{117}\) If there is no stable, eternal condition of “the given,” except the collection of impressions and images that are constantly folding and unfolding over time, that requires us to pay attention to every detail, every subtle movement as singular

moments. Anyone wandering the streets in Seoul can be an agent who constructs and transmits the textures of the city, which are not limited to tangible urban form as a fixed material entity, but can also include ephemeral aesthetic affects, intangible velocities and speeds, and tonalities that are constantly generated by the interaction between bodies and urban environments. Design Seoul’s overemphasis on pre-established rules ignores how all the disparate design works might be experienced under specific urban situations, and constituted through acts of collaboration and dissensus.

[118] In Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, Deleuze defines the body as the “relations of motion and rest, of slowness and speed between particles.” And he continues to say that “[t]he important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as a form, or a development of form, but as a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles.” Gilles Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988): 123.
Chapter 2: An Inoperative Community: Senses of Community and the Signboard
Renovation Project of Kwangrim Plaza, Gunpo City (2007)

A Sense of Community in Korean Cities

Critic Kang Nae-hee points out that everyday life in 1990s’ Korea was dominated by the logic of consumer culture, thus asserting that commodity fetishism has widely penetrated into the ways that people experience city spaces. This chapter will explore how senses of community can arise within the midst of Korea’s commercially saturated urban environments, by examining the way that a local commercial building, Kwangrim Plaza, is operated by ordinary shopkeepers, and the way those shopkeepers interact with their local city government in relationship to a sign renovation project. My primary focus will be a four-part TV documentary film, entitled “Move! The Hope Expedition,” which was televised on the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) in 2007 and which recorded the day-to-day process of a sign renovation project for Kwangrim Plaza, (Fig. 22) in the city of Gunpo, which is a satellite city located on the outskirts of Seoul. Kwangrim Plaza is an eight-story building with one story underground, in which forty-five different shops are located. It is a ferroconcrete building, which is the most widely used method of building construction in the country today, and it was designed by a local architect and built by a local construction firm. Its exterior wall is finished with a number of small


\(^{120}\) Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), Ch’uldong! Hŭimangwŏnjöngdae \[Move! The Hope Expedition\] (SBS special documentary film series), no. 21-24 (July 2007): Each part of the series runs approximately twenty-five minutes.
ceramic tiles, which has long been one of the most popular materials for the construction of ordinary buildings in Korea since the 1950s. The interior space of the building is designed to maximize the number of rentable units, and is comprised of a main hallway, shop spaces, a staircase, an elevator, and a restroom on each floor. Hence, one can say that this is a fundamentally utilitarian structure, lacking any aesthetically sophisticated system of spatial organization. Maximizing the building’s real estate value seems to have been the primary imperative.

The renovation of Kwangrim Plaza is part of the larger urban design project that was ambitiously embarked upon by the city government of Gunpo in 2005, and was completed in 2008, with a budget that reached almost eight million dollars. This comprehensive urban project attempted to renew all the existing signboards for sixty-four commercial buildings in the central business district of the city, in which approximately 1,400 storefronts are located (Figs. 23-24). We have noted in the previous chapter that Design Seoul attempts to impose a highly integrative sign system onto the city, by replacing all the existing signboards with newly designed ones. If Design Seoul’s sign renovation reflects a recent case of a systematic sign renovation project conducted by the city government of Seoul, it is imperative to note that such sign renovation projects, often called *kanp’an jaejŏngbi* in Korean, are a widespread phenomenon throughout the entire

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121 Lee Jae-Young, 1950~1960 Yŏndae chongnojŏk kŏndaegŏnch’ungmurŭi hyŏngsikkwa ŭimi [The Form and Meaning of Modern Architecture in the Chongno Area from the 1950s to the 1960s], Master’s Thesis at Yonsei University, 2001; Kim Sa-Gang, Tosi karobyŏnŭl kusŏnganŭn pot’ong kŏnch’ugŭi hyŏngsikkwa ŭimi [The Form and Meaning of Ordinary Architecture on Urban Streets], Master’s Thesis at Yonsei University, 1999.


country, which in fact goes back to the modernization of the early twentieth century. Historical data shows that the Korean government has always been critical of commercial signage in the city, and has persistently attempted to remove legal and illegal urban advertisements and to replace them with new designs. Needless to say, such attempts have failed to stem the proliferation of signs in Seoul. It was not until after 2000 that the government began to refocus on the issue of commercial signage, and to devise a more systematic plan for redesigning the streetscape. If the city government of Seoul aspires to construct a sleek urban environment in the hope of transforming the city into the hub of Asia, thereby heightening the brand value of the city, many other local city governments in Korea, such as Gunpo, similarly strive to elevate the profile of their cities. Hence, this investigation of the sign renovation of Kwangrim Plaza is not an isolated urban project conducted by a local city government, but reflects a broader pattern of governmental intervention into the realm of everyday commercialism in the twenty-first century. The hundred-minute long documentary series, “Move! The Hope Expedition,” clearly has an educational purpose: to instill civic pride in Korean citizens, by highlighting how each shopkeeper in Kwangrim Plaza collaborated with each other to accomplish this important urban project through active communication with the local city authority.

In explicating the way that this sign renovation project for Kwangrim Plaza was planned and executed, and how this process was depicted in the documentary, this chapter pays particular attention to the various moments in which different members of the commercial community and the responsible city officials interacted with each other,

and how such modes of interaction relate to the visual and spatial characteristics of the building. The meetings and conversations between those stakeholders created a highly tense, and at times antagonistic, atmosphere, which the film tends to treat as mere obstacles that the city government had to endure and overcome for the successful achievement of the project and a new sense of civic and communal endeavor. However, I will argue that all the differing instances of tension, conflict, dispute, dissatisfation, and disagreement are vital elements that constitute a sense of community. Such instances interrupt the smooth, linear progress of the project, but nevertheless open up important issues of how these singularities can create a sense of togetherness on the basis of dissensus. This peculiar conception of community, or being in common, is derived from a French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s discussion of community, which is elaborated in his book, *The Inoperative Community*. Nancy notes that community cannot be fully established as a fixed form of predetermined gathering but is always “incomplete” and in a perpetual becoming. “Being in common” does not assume a perfect communion between those who are always already in a community, but rather implies a mode of being singular plural in which community does not subsume differences in organic wholes, but rather emerges through the mutual exposure of heterogeneity and difference. In this respect, Nancy’s notion of community raises a critical question of

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126 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 35.

127 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 58. “Being in common means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compaire (comparaisent), to the extent that they are
how one can understand dissensus and conflict within the Kwangrim Plaza sign renovation project, other than in terms of obstacles to overcome on the way to more humanistic goals of consensus, harmony, and civic pride.128

The documentary based on this project can be roughly divided into three parts, which I have characterized as follows: 1) The contested everyday, 2) Confronting the inoperative community, and 3) The (in)completion of the project. The order of those three different categories roughly follows the sequence of the narrative as it unfolds in the film: an introduction to the main story, the process of conflicts and negotiations between shopkeepers and city officials, and the completion of the project. Each part demonstrates how the social dynamics between the stakeholders involved in the renovation project is negotiated, and how these interactions manifest themselves on the surfaces of Kwangrim Plaza.

exposed, presented, or offered to one another.” See also Maurice Blanchot, The Unavowable Community, translated by Pierre Joris (New York: Station Hill Press, 1998): 5-8.

128 One prime instance of such a simplified notion of community is detected in the public speech of the new president Park Geun-hye, when she gave her brief impressions of being elected as the 18th president of the Republic of Korea in December 21, 2012. What is interesting in the speech is that she addresses a traditional form of collective life in pre-modern Korean society, which is called Ture (meaning a “farmer’s cooperative group”), as an ideal model of community, with which the citizens can improve the social, economic, and political conditions of the country in the twenty-first century. The following is part of Park’s 2012 election speech: “Korean citizens have protected the country by virtue of mutual assistance, such as Ture, for a long time. The spirit of living together and symbiosis, instead of living affluently by oneself, is a great asset that our ancestors have bequeathed to us. Now I will be in the forefront of immersing the spirit of living together and symbiosis into the different sectors of politics, the economy, and society.” E-daily Newspaper, December 21 2012, written by Lee Do-hyŏng, http://m.edaily.co.kr/news/NewsReadIssue.asp?PDIV=PT&NDIV=ED&newsid=01912246599760488&PartN=P13&HotCd=89; Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, with the keyword “Ture” (두레 in Korean): http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?cid=1607&docId=544716&categoryld=1607.
**The Contested Everyday**

The film begins by diagnosing the plethora of commercial signs in Korean cities both as an obstacle to constructing a beautiful cityscape and as one of the major threats to public safety for citizens. The opening scene of the film is comprised of different shots taken from various parts of Korean city streets, in which the viewer is bombarded by the impact of an excess of commercial signs. Viewers are introduced to each scene only for a split second, and this fast tempo makes it difficult to fully recognize the specific geographical contexts and detailed textures of those city spaces. This editing of the opening scene, which puts together hundreds of fleeting images of streetscapes in an intentionally disorganized manner, is quite similar to the ways that the cartoon *An Ugly City by Signboards, A Nice City by Signboards* is comprised of various street scenes taken from many different locations in Seoul (Fig. 14 in Chapter One). Although expressed through different media, the former through filmic montage and the latter through photo collage, both attempt to highlight the chaotic nature of the commercial realm filled with urban advertisements. The radical disconnection between each sign in the opening sequence only serves to emphasize the lack of systematic regulation of commercial signs both on an institutional and individual level. This opening scene compels us to hurriedly follow these quickly shifting images and treats viewers as passive spectators and consumers of this spectacle, which resonates with how Theodor Adorno viewed the spectator as a distanced, passive receiver of mass media controlled by the culture industry in early twentieth-century Europe.

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129 Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 21.

These fast-paced opening scenes of the streetscape are accompanied by the voiceover of a narrator, who calmly recounts the current state of Korean cities caused by the inundation of commercial signs, and points out how desensitized Korean citizens have become to the chaotic reality of everyday urban space. The opening scene is followed by a series of interviews with casual passersby on the street, shopkeepers, and signage specialists. Each interviewee expresses his/her personal opinions about commercial signage both positively and negatively. But it is quite evident that the film carefully focuses on interviews that are sympathetic with a critical standpoint against the proliferation of commercial signs, while deliberately de-emphasizing the positive responses to that urban phenomenon. These interviews tend to highlight signage-related accidents in which pedestrians are occasionally hit by falling signboards, the visual distraction caused by neon-signs, and the overheated competition between shopkeepers, which causes them to make their signs more flamboyant and bigger than others. The film enacts not only ordinary citizens’ opinions of commercial signage as vital sources of debate about the necessity of sign renovation projects; it also includes a series of interviews with various specialists in the fields of architectural design, building construction, and signage design to support these views. For example, Lee Seung-ho, a specialist in the ecology of urban design, explains how unhealthy it is for a person to be

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131 Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 21.

132 My investigation of one of the major newspapers in Korea – Chosun Ilbo – by using a keyword search for “signboard” (kan’pan) shows that there have been many ordinary citizens injured by falling signboards from street buildings. For example, a newspaper article published in November 28, 1936 describes that, due to a severe typhoon at the break of the day, fifty-three shops’ signboards fell. And, on August 19, 1962, a child’s death was caused by a falling signboard, which led the serious consideration of sign renovation.
overexposed to neon lights at night, because it may cause disruptions to bodily rhythms and the immune system, and contribute to chronic headaches and psychic disorders.\textsuperscript{133}

The film takes a recent government policy initiative on commercial signage, \textit{The Policy on Outdoor Advertising Signs}, as another starting point to stress the urgency of renovating the country’s streetscapes.\textsuperscript{134} In the opening scene, the narrator articulates the details of the policy by explicating the list of specific guidelines for displaying a sign on the outside of commercial buildings, including a rule clarifying that temporary advertisements glued on shop windows are legally prohibited, and a ban preventing shopkeepers from hanging commercial signs above the fifth story.\textsuperscript{135} The narrator stresses that based on the set of new regulation for signage put forth in the policy initiative, eighty percent of commercial signs currently existing in Korean cities can now be considered illegal.\textsuperscript{136} Although the details of the policy are at times opaque and contradictory, its main point is quite straightforward: each shop is permitted to display only one signboard on the outside of a building, unless otherwise specified.\textsuperscript{137} All local city governments are supposed to follow this homogenized system of sign control, although some exceptions are acknowledged in regards to the particular urban and architectural situations in many local commercial districts throughout the entire country. Just as \textit{Design Seoul} is

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\textsuperscript{133} Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 23.
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\textsuperscript{134} “The Enforcement Ordinance of the Policy of Outdoor Advertising Signs” was created by the ministry of public administration and security, one of the branches constituting the Korean government. The content is regularly updated: the most recent update of the policy, to which I am referring, was made in October 10, 2011. (source: Korea Ministry of Government Legislation, \texttt{http://www.law.go.kr})
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\textsuperscript{135} Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 21.
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\textsuperscript{136} Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 21.
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\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., no. 21.
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composed of a set of nonnegotiable “rules” and their quasi-mechanical “application” in actual city spaces, this signage policy clearly demarcates that everyday urban space in Korea is controlled by strong government intervention, in which the voices of ordinary citizens or shopkeepers are suppressed. However, the film underscores that the renovation project of Kwangrim Plaza is not just dictated by the pre-established signage policy implemented by the central government. The entire narrative of the film is, instead, dedicated to showing how the local city government of Gunpo actively communicated with the forty-five shopkeepers residing in the building, and worked together to make the urban project a collective endeavor. Most importantly, the film focuses on a single individual shopkeeper, named Lee Yong-mong (Fig. 25), who acts as the main protagonist of the film, and who played a crucial role in mediating between the city officials and his fellow shopkeepers. As a resident of the plaza, running a stationery store on the second floor, Lee volunteered to be the representative of the forty-five shopkeepers, and enthusiastically invested himself in communicating with both parties in order to help make the project a success. In one interview in the film, Lee explains why he decided to take on this role:

Who else will do this job (as coordinator of the sign renovation project in conjunction with the city ministry and other shopkeepers), unless I take command of it? As the shopkeepers in our building tend to be individualistic, they do not care about things that are not related to their private matters. Hence, I, as the only one who cares, need to pay attention to assisting this project, so as to cleanse the appearance of the building and differentiate it from others.138

As his words indicate, Lee is preoccupied with an idealized and paternalistic image of community and civic engagement, in which everyone needs to be goaded into it, and yield his/her personal interests for the sake of collective interests. Lee’s idealism—which

138 Ibid., no. 21.
also clearly involves deep misrecognition about his own complicity with the positions he critiques—is deeply frustrated and discouraged when he realizes that members of the Kwangrim Plaza community do not want to actively support the renovation project. Lee’s frustration about his fellow shopkeepers’ individualism only reinforces his own self-identification as a civic hero who is willing to sacrifice himself for the local commercial community. The film astutely takes up Lee’s position between idealistic communalism and rabid liberal individualism as a way to build momentum. Using this conceptual framework, the filmmakers show that in order to break this deadlock, and to revitalize the sense of community in this commercial realm, governmental power and guidance is required. It elucidates what appears to be a more benevolent and participatory model of urbanism by demonstrating how a government-driven urban project can be implemented through active communication and collaboration between government and private enterprise, rather than through aggressive top-down urban development. The film’s highlighting of the shopkeepers’ active role in the renovation project is a rare case in the historiography of urban design in the country, in which ordinary citizens are seen to be actively engaged with a government-led urban project in such an extensive manner. In the film, we see citizens’ active engagement with the project at a microscopic level, as well as their impact on the overall direction of the project.

Despite such an ostensibly democratic component of the Kwangrim Plaza project, it is imperative to note that a great deal of the project was conceptualized before any collaboration began. In a government publication, Gunpo City: Changing the Cityscape (2009), the city government illustrated what an ideal cityscape would look like, and how
an ideal community would be visually represented and constructed through design. \footnote{This catalogue was obtained when I visited the office of Gunpo government in 2009. The City Government of Gunpo, *Gunpo City: The Change of Cityscape* (Gunpo: The city government of Gunpo, year unspecified).} A photograph from the catalogue (Fig. 26) depicts an idyllic scene where children are playing by a water fountain with a clown performing nearby, and in the background, a commercial streetscape is rendered in which newly designed signs are installed upon the façade of each building.

The actual process of renovating *Kwangrim Plaza* begins with a small group meeting between Lee Yong-mong as a representative of the building’s community, and two city officials responsible for this sign renovation project—Lee Myung-soo and Roh Jae-young. The first meeting between these core members about the issue of sign relocation on the building takes place at a government office where the two city officials usually work. The film captures the scene of them sitting down together and laying out the different versions of the enlarged elevations of *Kwangrim Plaza* on a table, so as to discuss the detailed strategies to relocate each shopkeeper’s signage under the new integrative sign system. These elevations show what the final form of the renovation will look like after the project is completed, and when the newly designed signs are hung on the exterior of the building. Their primary concern is to ensure that all forty-five shopkeepers can display their respective sign on the exterior of the building, without disrupting the façade’s visual coherency. \footnote{*Move! The Hope Expedition*, no. 21.} The government officials emphasize that the internal unity of façade should be prioritized over the variety of sign designs displayed by individual shopkeepers. By using their fingers and pens to indicate different parts of the
elevations, they treat each sign as if it were a compartmentalized unit of space that they can freely manipulate, regardless of its resonance with other signs, or the fact that each sign is owned and strategically placed by a particular shopkeeper (Fig. 27). In the ensuing discussion, social relationships which are intrinsically evident in the architectural drawings are subsumed into a preoccupation with the internal logic of architectural design as an autonomous practice disconnected from the complex socio-political dimensions of everyday life.

A similar situation occurs in a later part of the film, when they meet with a signage specialist, Park Myung-chul, who demonstrates the possible effects of adopting a new LED lighting system. In a very striking moment from this encounter, which takes place in front of Kwangrim Plaza, Park makes a hand gesture as if he were actually gripping and installing a signboard on the upper part of the exterior near the top floor. Much as with the previously-discussed scene of Lee’s office conversation with the two city officials, one could say that this gripping action treats commercial signs as if they were merely formal objects that one might freely manipulate at one’s will.

A close investigation of the elevations of Kwangrim Plaza, which show the virtual image of the exterior composition after the project’s completion, also offers us an opportunity to perceive how the city government aspires to impose a pure form of architecture and cityscape throughout the renovation project (Figs. 28-29). An elevation simultaneously showing all three ‘frontal’ sides of the building’s exterior (Fig. 28) is the most revelatory in terms of the city government’s desire to achieve an

\[141\] Ibid., no. 23.

\[142\] By visiting the city government of Gunpo in 2009, I was able to obtain the architectural drawings (mostly elevations) of Kwangrim Plaza and other buildings that schematically show how the image of each building with a new signs system may look like.
autonomous form of architecture, relatively uninterruptedly by the arbitrary activities of everyday commercialism. In the new project configuration, the size of each commercial sign is radically reduced such that only its color and rough compositional shape is evident, and it is almost impossible to clearly read and identify its linguistic components. The elevation also demonstrates that all the signs are located in designated areas between windows, rather than on or around them. Not only is the size of each sign radically reduced, the basic composition of the sign is likewise significantly changed from a rectangular steel panel frame covered with plastic semi-transparent screens through which fluorescent lighting emanates, to an LED system in which the linguistic components of each advertisement are directly attached to the surfaces of the plaza. This redesigned signage system reveals a much greater portion of the exterior wall of Kwangrim Plaza than before, thus exposing its planar surface, which is comprised of tiles and windows. The rendered elevation is laid out on a completely white background, which further enhances the pared down and pristine form of the building shorn of its multitude of colorful signs, and disguises the highly deteriorated state of the building’s actual surface.

The new LED lighting system seamlessly fits into the proposed sign renovation project, both practically and aesthetically. The signage specialist strongly recommends that the city government adopt LEDs for all urban advertisement, because it significantly reduces the usage of electricity, heightens the legibility of signs compared to the fluorescent lighting system, and removes the flickering effect that is considered to be a highly distracting, and unwelcome aspect of the current nightscape.\textsuperscript{143} Similar to the set

\textsuperscript{143} Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 23.
of guidelines implemented by Design Seoul, which consider legibility and simplicity to be the crucial aspects in designing the metropolis of Seoul, the specialist prioritizes the austerity and simplicity of commercial signs as an aesthetic norm that the city government should pursue. Although somewhat naïvely addressed, the sign expert’s aesthetic preference for the unornamented, austere surface qualities of architecture resonate with Adolf Loos’s arguments in “Ornament and Crime,” in which Loos sought to promote a modernist architecture immune from applied and excessive ornamentation, which he considered as antithetical to human “progress.” His remarks also reverberate with the modernist architect Le Corbusier’s conceptualization of architecture as a pure form illuminated by external light sources. When Corbusier writes in Towards a New Architecture that “[t]he light caresses the pure form: it renders,” he treats light as an external source that illuminates and manifest the essential form of architecture. Based on such an ideal model of architectural form, the existing surface of Kwangrim Plaza is seen as corrupted by applied decoration (commercial signs), and its illumination by multiple and disseminated light sources which emanate from within those decorative elements.

The elevation of Kwangrim Plaza raises another important issue, which is often discussed in the discipline of architecture: architectural transparency. One of the goals that the city government strives to accomplish in the project is to match each sign’s disposition on the building’s exterior wall with the associated store’s interior location. For example, if a DVD store is located on the fourth floor, the sign relocation plan tries to

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precisely locate its signage exactly on the surface of the fourth floor façade where the shop is located. Kim Dang-jin, a proprietor running an accessory shop on the first floor, noted in an interview that he is confused about how to match the location of signage on the building exterior with his shop’s actual location in the interior space, despite the fact that he has run his shop in the same location of the plaza for quite a long time.145

The issue of transparency as that relates to the relationship between exterior and interior at Kwangrim Plaza can be illuminated by the larger discourse of transparency in the historiography of modern architecture in the West, which was first extensively and systematically discussed by the architectural historian Colin Rowe and artist Robert Slutzky in their co-authored article entitled “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal” (1963). The main point that the authors make is that there are two different kinds of transparency in twentieth-century architectural design: “Literal transparency” refers to the translucent qualities of modern architecture in which one can literally look through the interior structural systems of a building from the outside via transparent glass panes covering the exterior of a building, which is best exemplified by Walter Gropius’ Bauhaus at Dessau (1925-26);146 “Phenomenal transparency,” on the other hand, enables viewers to perceive the structural system of buildings across the surface design, but not in terms of its translucent material, but rather through a semiotic/hermeneutical interpretation of façade composition.147 By conceptualizing these two types of

145 Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 21.


147 Rowe, Ibid., 160. “... while phenomenal transparency seems to be found when a painter seeks the articulated presentation of frontally aligned objects in a shallow, abstracted ace.”
architectural transparency, Rowe and Slutzky attempted to expand the idea of modernist transparency put forth by twentieth-century architectural practitioners and theorists who tended to rely on a kind of materialist determinism to justify aesthetico-ethical ends. Rowe and Slutzky offer a more complex, abstract idea of transparency, which does not entail a one-to-one correlation between exterior and interior.

To use Rowe and Slutzky’s terminology, the plethora of signs on the surface of the Kwangrim Plaza creates a fractured and differentiated surface that reflects the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the interior space in a ‘phenomenal’ sense, but not a ‘literal’ one. One might even argue that building’s surface replete with commercial signs offers a better idea of how all the different shops are confusingly located throughout the building than the proposed new sign system, or even actually navigating each floor of the building on foot. Critic Hal Foster also reads Rowe and Slutzky’s emphasis on phenomenal transparency over literal transparency as a threshold, by which we are encouraged to rethink the importance of a building’s surface in contemporary architectural practices. Foster writes that “[t]o favor phenomenal over literal transparency seems a minor transvaluation, but it marked the moment when, once again in architectural discourse, attention to surface began to be as important as articulation of space, and a reading of skin as important as an understanding of structure.”148 This quote shows Foster’s awareness of the shift from the literal to the phenomenal is not simply architecturally grounded; it implies an acknowledgment of the changing societal, and cultural conditions of the twentieth century, in which commercial advertising across all sorts of urban surfaces has become a dominant institutional force, and the logic of

consumption has deeply penetrated into the practice of architecture, as well as the practices of everyday life. In this respect, the complex image-saturated façade of Kwangrim Plaza urges us to pay careful attention to the ways that its surface is continually formed, transformed, and deformed over time, and how that allows us to begin to interpret the production and the reproduction of space.

*Confronting the Inoperative Community*

Although the sign renovation project proposed by the city government of Gunpo seems to make smooth progress, one comes to realize, as the story gradually unfolds, that there are indeed a number of conflicts, disputes, and moments of disagreement among stakeholders (Figs. 30-31). If the elevations of Kwangrim Plaza reflect the government’s desire to impose an ideal architectural form and cityscape through a pre-established design scheme, the film shows that such idealism is interrupted as soon as a series of meetings occur between city officials and shopkeepers, and numerous practical issues arise. The first group meeting involves approximately thirty shopkeepers and one city official, and it takes place in Kwangrim Plaza. Lee Yong-mong leads the group discussion as the voice of the shopkeepers, and introduces to them how the city officials plan to relocate each shopkeeper’s sign, reassuring them that this does not seriously disadvantage anyone in terms of visibility and advertising. The main point of the meeting is to provide each member of the building’s community an equal right to display his/her sign on the exterior of Kwangrim Plaza, by considering the building surface to be the collective ‘property’ of everyone.
Yet, such an effort to make the surface a zone with equal responsibility and representation soon becomes problematic, as they begin to realize that many of the shopkeepers have customarily spent large sums of money in order to purchase prime locations for their signs even though it is not a legally-sanctioned transaction. In one interview with a shopkeeper who runs a private DVD-theater (DVD-bang in Korean), he reveals that his purchase of the rights to the current location to display his own sign, situated at the center of the building’s façade, cost him approximately 20,000 dollars, which he paid to another shopkeeper who originally had the right to that location. This widespread but illegal practice of paying for a prime location for one’s sign on a building façade is often called a “premium.” The DVD-bang owner, considered it absolutely necessary to buy such a “premium,” because he thought that if he displayed his signboard near his actual location within the building, its effect would dramatically decrease, since his shop is located at the back side of the building, where there is significantly less pedestrian traffic. He thus strongly argued against the proposed relocation plan in the group meeting, arguing that an underground culture of ‘premium’ transaction is necessary and taken for granted in everyday commercialism, and is self-regulating, while the government’s plan was misconceived and unjust despite its ideal of equal representation.

While the “premium” was a critical issue challenging the city government’s sign relocation plan for Kwangrim Plaza, it is also imperative to note how, and in what kind of physical settings, this issue was discussed throughout the negotiation process between city officials and shopkeepers. When the core government project directors met with shopkeepers and began to discuss more practical issues, such as how to relocate each

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149 Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 21.
member’s sign and how much money each shopkeeper needed to pay for the project, they actually visited the proprietor’s shop, rather than discussing it in a group meeting, or through an impersonal, highly formalized documentation process. For example, we see the government officials visiting the concerned DVD-bang owner’s shop, while customers wait outside for their turn to enter (Fig. 32). The film captures a scene in which city officials and Lee Yong-mong visit the DVD-bang in the evening to try to persuade the shopkeeper, who raised the issue of the premiums in relationship to the relocation of his shop sign to the back of the building. They all proceed to sit down on couches, which are located near the front desk and begin talking in a congenial way. The city officials explain that they do not blame his involvement in the illegal transaction of the “premium,” but warmly explain how important this renovation project is for all members of the Kwangrim commercial community, and how a cooperative mood in regards to the sign relocation project will enhance the competitiveness of Kwangrim Plaza compared to the rest of the buildings in the downtown area. The film zooms in for a close-up of each participant’s face, such that we get better acquainted with the main characters in the film, while at the same time we begin to understand how the sign renovation project often develops and unfolds through daily conversations with ordinary shopkeepers. These conversation scenes, which constantly appear throughout the film, cannot be simply treated as background human-interest stories necessary for the development of the plot; instead, each conversation is a constituent element of an urban history of contemporary Korea, which allows us to experience the various perceptive and affective dimensions of

150 Unsurprisingly, this informal table conversation gradually becomes emotional and each one of them raises his voice, because there is an obvious conflict between the parties regarding what they want (or do not want) from the project.
ordinary shopkeepers, in response to changing urban environments. It is an oral history of urban design in the country, including issues of tonality, mood, and atmosphere that are often ignored or suppressed in the scholarship on urban history and design in modern and contemporary Korea, which tends to place primary emphasis on the genealogies and historiographies of cityscapes, or on spatial systems, urban morphology and typology. In contrast, the film moves repetitively back and forth between the scenes of conflict between the various groups of stakeholders. All these moments constitute the rich texture of everyday life in this urban environment, which offers us a better understanding of how government-driven urban projects are carried out in a close association with private enterprise.\footnote{Urban historian Son Jeong-mok’s series of urban history books about Seoul, entitled \textit{The Stories of Seoul’s Urban Planning} (5 volumes), are written based on both his historical knowledge about the urban history of Korea, and his personal experience as an urban planner in the city government of Seoul for more than thirty years, from the 1960s to the 1990s. These volumes focus not so much on the formal analysis of the series of design projects practiced by the city government as on the various fragmentary stories about administrators, architects, and other politicians, all of whom have indeed played significant roles in shaping the historiography of urban design in the past decades. Son Jeong-mok. \textit{Seoul dosigyehoek iyagi} (in 5-volume) [\textit{The Stories of Seoul’s Urban Planning}] (Seoul: Hanul, 2003).}

The \textit{DVD-bang} owner’s concerns about the ‘premium’ and fears of losing strategic façade space for advertising signs, became a pivotal moment in the process. In response, city officials came up with an alternative proposal to install four additional metal structures at the edges of the building’s front façade in order to compensate for the needs of shopkeepers who might be at a disadvantage in advertising their shops, because their redesigned signs were now to be displayed at the back of the building.\footnote{\textit{Move! The Hope Expedition}, no. 22.} This solution allowed the \textit{DVD-bang} shopkeeper to put an additional sign on the front façade, although it would be much smaller than it was before the renovation. One might say that
the shopkeeper’s complaints “unworked” the bureaucratic nature of the governmental urban project, to borrow Nancy’s words, and opened up a place from which the members of a local community were able to speak out by confronting the city government.\footnote{Nancy, The Inoperative Community, 31: “Communication is the unworking of work that is social, economic, technical, and institutional.”}

“Unworking” is understood here not as meaning the opposite of “putting to work”; rather, it is a dialectical practice, in which one is able to resist the imposition of a predicated thought or idea implemented by institutional power or capital. As Nancy notes, a community is full of such moments of “unworking,” and there are a number of scenes of disputes and conflicts that unfold throughout the story of Kwangrim Plaza, which demonstrate their resistances to imposed notions of equal representation and community. These instances of conflict, dispute, tension, dissatisfaction, and disagreement, which we continuously see in the film, indicates that Kwangrim Plaza is a much more interesting and dynamic community than Lee Yong-mong gives it credit for.\footnote{Nancy, Ibid., 31. “Community … encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension.”}

Such an “unworking” of the Kwangrim Plaza project becomes even more apparent when another practical issue of signage construction arises later in the film. Although installing four additional metal structures seemed to solve the issue of the “premium,” by giving every shopkeeper an equal opportunity to display his/her sign on a visible portion of the building’s exterior, the building construction specialist discovered that if all the new signs for the fourth and fifth floor shops were re-installed on the surface of Kwangrim Plaza, it would cause severe damage to its underlying tile surface. He noted that the 20-year old tiles could fall and possibly cause critical injuries to pedestrians. Replacing all the old tiles on Kwangrim Plaza would cost about 100,000
dollars in total, and the city government insisted that each individual shopkeeper would be required to pay for a subdivided portion of that cost.\textsuperscript{155} Not surprisingly, the shopkeepers were furious, and they requested that the city government provide special funds to pay for the replacement of the tiles. The city government offered instead to cover the entire surface of \textit{Kwangrim Plaza} with a set of aluminum panels instead of replacing the crumbling tiles.\textsuperscript{156}

One interesting aspect of the tile replacement issue was that the shopkeepers of \textit{Kwangrim Plaza} made an unannounced visit to the office of the city government to protest their imposed monetary contribution.\textsuperscript{157} The camera captures the scenes in which shopkeepers group together to deal with this issue, walk into the office of the government building, and, finally, conduct an unplanned meeting with those responsible city officials. Each group was quite resolute in its position: the city officials argued that \textit{Kwangrim Plaza} needed to be treated like other buildings in the city, while the shopkeepers asserted that it was the city government’s responsibility to take care of the tile issue, because there would have been no issue at all if the city government had not embarked on the project. Seeing that the negotiation process was not going smoothly, Lee Yong-mong suddenly requested a break and kindly asked the two city officials to leave the meeting room for a few minutes, so that the shopkeepers could have a private conversation about the matter. This was a rare moment in which the shopkeepers articulated their own space and needs,

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Move! The Hope Expedition}, no. 22.

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Ibid.}, no. 24.

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Ibid.}, no. 23.
and worked together, although fleetingly, in confrontation with issues associated with each shopkeeper’s daily practice of commercialism.

In the community of Kwangrim Plaza, the line between public and private is hard to clearly demarcate. A single shopkeeper’s private concern quickly becomes a shared matter with other members of this community, and further develops into an issue with public implications and resonance.\(^{158}\) Although one could assume that the shopkeepers in Kwangrim Plaza are primarily interested in preserving their privatized commercial interests at the expense of collective values, we need to consider, perhaps taking this as case study, if it is possible to entirely cleave apart modes of being in common from the so-called ‘vulgar’ realm of commercialism in contemporary Korea. The various moments of gathering, and the frequent debates and conflicts captured throughout the film, are instances that reveal how a community actually works in everyday life, and how the differing intensities of gathering and conflict unfold various facets of community-making.

It is important to note that every participant in the Kwangrim Plaza project continually changed his/her attitude toward the project throughout the renovation process. Their views about the nature of the project were not firmly consolidated at the beginning of the project, but rather constantly changed over time, as the shopkeepers interacted with one another and confronted new problems arising between themselves and with the

\(^{158}\) Two urban historians, Kang Hong-bin and Joo Myung-duck, assert that the public domain of contemporary Korean society has been colonized by the media culture and various forms of the culture industry, including local commercial activities penetrating every corner of mundane streets in the country. From my perspective, this is a simplistic, binary conception of the malleable line between the public and the private in Korean urbanism, and the urbanisms in other cultures as well. Kang Hong-bin and Joo Myung-duck, Sŏul eseı [Seoul Essay: A portrait of modernity, traversing Seoul by Kang Hong-bin & Joo Myung-duck] (Paju: Youlhwadang, 2002): 41.
government officials that they could not predict from the outset. The same holds true for the government officials involved in the project, as they resist, respond, and make accommodations to the positions of the shopkeepers over issues such as the placement of the signs in response to issues of equal visibility, and the budget for replacing the building tiles. Even Lee Yong-mong’s attitude and mood fluctuates throughout the film as he negotiates the practical, ethical, and aesthetic challenges of his role as a mediator between the two groups. His fragile subjectivity, which is modulated across and in resonance with his interactions, is unstable and exposed to others, and leads us back to Nancy’s inquiry about the body as a territory, an assemblage of multiple affects and percepts, which he poses as a question to us: “[w]hat is a body, a face, a voice, a death, a writing—not indivisible, but singular?”

The (in)completion of the project

Near the end of the film, a scene shows the construction of the new aluminum panels being added to the surface of Kwangrim Plaza at night, and some of the shopkeepers can be seen observing the installation process with attentive curiosity (Fig. 33). This scene is, undoubtedly, meant to create an image of resolution, a successful result of the long debates and conflicts between the city government and the commercial community, as well as between the shopkeepers themselves. Lee Yong-mong and other owners are shown encouraging each other, as one of the shopkeepers compliments Lee for his strong leadership, which has made this difficult task a success.

159 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, 6.

160 Move! The Hope Expedition, no. 24.
mood of the scene is also supported by the upbeat background music, which is in stark contrast to the foreboding music used at the very beginning of the film in conjunction with the images and narrative warning us about the dangers of insensitivity toward the plethora of commercial signs in the city.

However, a careful viewer of the film will soon realize that this ‘happy’ conclusion to the renovation project is more problematic than it seems. The scene right before this installation shows that the city government enforced the signboard project on two of the shopkeepers in the building, who refused to sign the consent form for the project, which was a legal requirement for the process to move forward. In the event, these shopkeepers refused to sign the form because they were disappointed in the way the process was conducted, in which city officials and Lee Yong-mong coercively pushed the project through without communicating adequately with them about its details. The film does include this scene of conflict, however, the narrator does not explain its outcome, and instead emphasizes, in the very next scene, the successful resolution of all the conflicts. Even though there is a moment of disjuncture between those two scenes, in terms of both the flow of narrative and the mood, the film attempts to suture up this disjunction in order to foreground the successful result of the project. Photographic documentation showing the surface condition of Kwangrim Plaza years after the completion of the project reveals that the building has been in a state of constant change, either because shopkeepers have replaced and displaced signs, or because of a change in ownership.

\[161\] Ibid., no. 24.
Comparing and contrasting the photograph of the surface of the building taken in 2007 (Fig. 34), soon after the project’s completion, to a set of photographs taken in 2009 is particularly revealing (Figs. 35-37). For instance, on Lee Yong-mong’s signboard for his stationery store on the second floor of the building’s surface, three words—“copying, bookbinding, and printing” (in Korean)—are inscribed directly upon the aluminum panel. These words were originally very small and not easily distinguishable from a distance, because of their drab color and the regularized typography, which did not differentiate the sign from adjacent signs. In the 2007 photograph (Fig. 34), one can barely identify the detailed sign design, produced through the LED system, unless one stands right in the front of it. However, the 2009 version (Fig. 35) shows a completely different kind of advertisement, in which the rectangular panel is rendered in bright yellow, and the typography is completely altered. In addition, while the 2007 version leaves Lee’s shop window unadorned, the 2009 photograph shows that the entire window is covered with an enlarged image of Taegeukgi, the national flag of Korea. Lee’s modified sign is now much brighter and stands out in comparison to the adjacent signs, which are less distinct in terms of color and design. This is an ironic situation, because it had always been Lee Yong-mong who was at the forefront of advocating for the necessity of executing the sign renovation project in order to reduce the conflicting and distracting array of signs on the building by removing the distracting qualities of the current sign system. The surface of Kwangrim Plaza is in constant flux because of shopkeepers’ continual alteration to their sign designs. This flexibility and transformation suggests that contrary to how the city government expected to regulate the façade, there is no way to definitively control its exuberant mutability. Thus, the city government’s effort to renovate the commercial signs
did not so much finalize the building’s identity, as open up further possibilities for transformation and differentiation within everyday commercial activities.

Such a non-determinability of the surface condition of Kwangrim Plaza suggests that there is no predicated or predictable form of community that emerges from this commercially saturated urban environment. Near the end of the film, Kim Dang-jin, a strong supporter of the project who runs an accessory shop in the building, astutely remarks that Kwangrim Plaza is a very unstable kind of community in which there are always residents moving in and out of the building, depending on each member’s individual situation. However, he argues, because of this unstable situation, all the current residents need to pay even closer attention to the ways they can collaborate with each other in subtle and flexible ways that are not beholden to imposed design strategies.162

Rethinking Community in Contemporary Korea and Beyond

In summary, this chapter has explored how a sense of community arose in one commercial environment in Korea, by examining the TV documentary, “Move! The Hope Expedition,” which narrates the sign renovation process of Kwangrim Plaza. This film offers us an opportunity to observe how a local commercial building was operated by shopkeepers, and how different modes of conversation, negotiation, and dissensus informed the placement of signs on the façades of the building. In doing so, the film provides crucial material for understanding the urban history of Korea, since it reveals how a flagship urban project operated by a city authority was deeply entangled in

moments of tension, conflict, and disagreement between shopkeepers and other stakeholders. In Korea, ideas about community are often defined in reference to particular forms of pre-modern ideals or through an idealized image and implementation of foreign design. In contrast, this chapter challenges such claims, by asserting that there are meaningful forms of community that can develop within the conditions of everyday commercialism and modes of governmental intervention in Korea. If initially the city government conceived an idea of a civic community as primarily an operative system that could be implemented by policies and practices, the dynamic and often confrontational community of Kwangrim Plaza complicated such an endeavor.

This case study of Kwangrim Plaza also raises a broader, more critical question about how we need to rethink the relationship between consumer culture, urbanism, and everyday life in the contemporary era, unrestrained by the overarching critiques of everyday life raised by Marxist scholars, such as Theodor Adorno, Guy Debord, Henri Lefebvre, Paul Virilio, and Jean Baudrillard. The theory of “spectacle,” first extensively addressed by Debord in the 1960s, elaborates how everyday life is oversaturated by the system of consumer culture, and how the vitality of one’s tactile and lived experience of the public realm is eroded by the domain and dominance of the image removed from our participation in its construction and connection to our needs and desires, thus rendering it a mere spectacle.163 By the same token, Paul Virilio, in his influential article “The Overexposed City,” asserted that there are no longer any obvious physical boundaries left in our media-saturated contemporary urban environments, and people’s experiences are now widely influenced by images, both virtual and real. These remarks suggest that for

163 Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle (New York: Zone Book, 1994): 12. “… all that once was directly lived become mere representation.”
these critics, contemporary urbanism in its spectacular condition is inimical to any robust sense of community. While it is true that the further inundation of consumer culture into everyday life has had profound implications for the possibilities of being in common, I have chosen to look at these supposedly alienated conditions as the very sites that we need to explore in order to identify and develop new modes of civic politics, as we begin to acknowledge that there are no utopian sites that will provide an uncontaminated counter-realm for such imaginations to occur. In his article, “The Spectacle of the Everyday,” curator Hou Hanru notes we may need to move away from the widespread notion of spectacle, which is deeply influenced by the Marxist critiques of everyday life, and instead try to redefine what is meant by the idea in the new millennium. He writes: “[w]e are living in the society of the spectacle. In spite of its alienating effects on our life and social relationships, it is one of the very fundamental conditions of our existence. We perceive the world and communicate with each other through the spectacle – a system of image production and representation dominated by the logic of market capitalism.”

Hanru’s remarks suggest that we need to construct our own communal territories by reterritorializing the systems of capitalism that dominate our urban environments.

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165 Hou Hanru (Commissioner) and Thierry Raspail (Director), The Spectacle of the Everyday: Xe Biennale de Lyon (Lyon: Les Presses du Reel, 2009): 25.
Chapter 3: Questioning Sovereignty: The Play of Commercial Signs in the Video Works of Park June-Bum

On Sovereignty and Everyday Urbanism in Contemporary Korea

The issue of sovereignty in contemporary South Korean cities is complex because there are always a number of different agents of power, as well as a variety of complicated power relations among these agents, including city governments, large corporations, NGOs, ordinary citizens, and shop owners. However, the scholarship on sovereignty within the Korean context has been primarily driven by discussions of political autonomy in relationship to other nations, territorial conflicts between Korea and neighboring Asian countries, racial colonialism, ethnic nationalism, the ideological conflict between democracy and communism, and the state’s relationship with big business. In this chapter, I explore urban and cultural implications of sovereignty in order to explore the complex relations of power in city space. I will problematize the meaning of sovereignty in the context of everyday life and contemporary South Korean

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166 For example, in The Making of Modern Korea (London: Routledge, 2002) Adrian Buzo conceptualizes sovereignty as a nation’s political autonomy in relationship to other nations, stating that Korea in its early modernization period (in the late nineteenth century) could not safeguard the nation’s sovereignty. Buzo focuses on the insufficiency of sovereignty because of the historical fact that Korea was subject to Japanese occupation in the first half of the twentieth century. Buzo claims, “The domestic drive for modernization during 1876-1910 was considerable, but it was simply not effective enough to safeguard sovereignty” (14). Meanwhile, the political scientist Lee Youn-ho investigates the relationship between the state and chaebol (a patrimonial conglomerate) by examining the changing governance in the nation’s modernization process in the late twentieth century. According to Lee, if the Park Chung-hee regime, Korea’s first military government, which began in the 1960s, established a close relationship between the state and the chaebol, then the succeeding Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo regimes tried to “regulate” the growth of those chaebol companies, such as Hyundai and Samsung. This approach by the latter two regimes can be understood as the government’s political strategy for heightening the state’s autonomy and thus a way to gain political power over those conglomerates. Lee Yeon-ho, The State, Society, and Big Business in South Korea (London: Routledge, 1997): 1-2.
urbanism through a close analysis of two video works by the Korean artist Park June-bum: *The Advertisement* (1’30”, 2004) (Figs. 38-40) and *Hypermarket 01* (3’00”, 2007) (Figs. 41-42). As a preamble to this discussion, I will provide an overview of some of Park’s other videos that explore similar issues.

From the beginning of Park June-bum’s career in the early years of the 21st century, this emerging video artist quickly became known in Korea and abroad for his so-called “hand” series of videos, which have been described by the art critics Kim Hyun-jin and Yoo Jin-sang as a form of “video formalism” in the sense that they tend to reduce the thickness of everyday phenomenon to a set of formal relationships. They are characterized by an interplay between the artist’s own hands, and various scenes and activities from everyday life occurring, for example, in a parking lot, at a crossroad, in shopping mall, or commercial strip. In his early work, Park often turns a small object or device, such as a remote control unit, into a giant monument (i.e. *12 Warp Gate*, 3’00”, 2002) by deceptively placing the object into an urban scene as if it were an actual part of city space (Fig. 43). In other videos, he conducts the performance of his hands attaching commercial signs to a commercial building, revealing how the structure evolves from an unadorned state to a condition whereby it is completely covered by advertising.

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168 Curator Lee Sun-young, in her introductory essay for Park’s 2003 solo exhibition held in the gallery Chǒngmiso in Seoul, states that she considers Park’s play with a remote controller in *12 Warp Gate* to be his gesture toward the world he lives in. Lee Sun-young, “The Exhibition of Park June-bum,” Gallery Chǒngmiso, Seoul (November 11 – December 7, 2003) (page number not indicated).
signs. Critics Yoo Jin-sang, Zoe Butt, and Bec Dean note that Park’s ‘hand play’ resonates with the tradition of Japanese puppet performance *bunraku* (文楽), also known as *ningyō jōruri* (人形浄瑠璃), in the sense that Park treats the video screen as if it were a theatrical space for a gestural performance. In its playful manipulation of the line between the everyday and the fantastic in everyday life, Park’s videos are reminiscent of Claes Oldenberg’s work such as *Lipstick Monument* (1966). Park’s *12 Warp Gate* turns familiar objects and images taken from everyday life into something unfamiliar, thus excavating the extraordinary dimensions of the ordinary.

In a number of videos, Park manually creates miniature cardboard models—of a house, an apartment complex, a battleship, a military tank, a church, or a mock-up dam—and then conducts performances with those cardboard models, which often include extreme close-up shots, which makes them appear as if they were life-size objects and places, thus forcing us to pay attention to details of the everyday world that we might ordinarily dismiss. Through his video performances, Park highlights the moments of ambiguity between reality and image that one often encounters in our media-saturated urban environments. In the making of each video, Park slightly tweaks the system of everyday life, either changing a color, or juxtaposing an alien layer of meaning within a

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169 There are a total of nine different video works related to commercial signage by the artist: *The Advertisement* (1’30”, 2004); *The Occupation* (7’30”, 2006); *Hospital and Pharmacy* (4’30”, 2006); *Hypermarket 01* (3’00”, 2007); *Hypermarket 03* (2’50”, 2007); *Hypermarket 4* (6’20”, 2008); *The Advertisement 2* (8’20”, 2009); *Sideless buildings* (6’30”, 2011); and *To let* (8’20”, 2011). Most of the videos can be watched on the artist’s personal webpage: [http://junebumpark.com](http://junebumpark.com).


171 I am particularly referring to the following videos made by the artist: *Structuralism* (10’00”, 2008); *Mock-up Dam 01* (4’20”, 2008); *Mock-up Dam 02* (10’10”, 2008); *Leaf Spring* (5’10”, 2008); *Making an Apartment* (3’00”, 2005); *Christian Church* (4’20”, 2007); *The Occupation 2* (4’30”, 2008).
banal scene of the everyday, such that his videos blur the line between the ordinary and the extraordinary and render them on the same level. Park does not simply reduce the tactility and corporeality of everyday life to visual-spatial expressions; rather, he treats each miniature model, or the miniaturized version of everyday life, as a way to release affective and perceptive dimensions that are enabled by everyday commercial urban environments, but which also deviate from their conditions of possibility. As the critic Susan Stewart argues, miniaturization can increase “the significance of the object within the system of signs,” as a reduction in scale and size may become an opportunity for us to look at familiar things anew with care and curiosity. By the same token, but with a somewhat different point of emphasis, Claude Lévi-Strauss notes that, “[a]ll miniatures seem to have intrinsic aesthetic quality.” Lévi-Strauss’s conception of the miniature is not confined to the assessment of small-sized objects; it also includes any artifact or means of expression, in which larger abstract systems or concepts are represented in a highly condensed manner. For example, he considers the Sistine Chapel to be a primary example of a miniature, regardless of its relative scale, because the narratives visually

172 For example, Park June-bum’s 600cc (1’50”, 2008) is a short video in which he records someone urinating. But Park makes the viewers wonder whether what they are looking at is really a person urinating, because of the pink color of the liquid pouring down to the urinal in a bathroom. Park does not intentionally show where the pink liquid stream comes from, and therefore he deliberately blurs the line between the everyday and the fantastical.

173 In a similar vein, critic Steven Gartside also notes that Park’s videos are the “triggers” through which the viewers may rethink the extraordinariness of the ordinary. Steven Gartside, “Objects of Curiosity: On the Work of Junebum Park” (an unpublished article available at Park June-bum’s webpage: http://junebumpark.com/content/1.pagez/3.texts/2011%20'objects%20of%20curiosity%20Steven%20Gartside%20EN.pdf) (page number not indicated): “They [Park’s performances] are a trigger to force the viewer to pick out the genuine everyday elements, to try and work out where the threshold of ordinariness lies.”


explicated in those paintings show, in condensed form, a comprehensive biblical worldview from Genesis to the end of the world.\textsuperscript{176}

One cannot treat Park’s active use of miniature simply as a technical device dissociated from the larger meanings of the work that he eventually tries to unfold through his performances. Instead, one should note that those miniature models, and his hand performances associated with them, are the apparatus through which he explores the socio-cultural and political dimensions of the milieu that he belongs to.\textsuperscript{177} As discussed earlier, Park’s \textit{12 Warp Gate (3’00’’}, 2002) is a video in which he deceptively locates various small objects such as a remote controller and a razor against the backdrop of a cityscape. In this work, he does not passively engage with the cityscape as an indifferent observer, but rather conceives it as the indeterminate and heterogeneous field in which the artist himself can add multiple layers of meaning.\textsuperscript{178} In doing so, Park challenges the pre-established socio-political and cultural system of the everyday world in a playful, child-like, yet serious, way, thereby suggesting that given societal conditions can always be questioned and experimented with. Walter Benjamin was also interested in children and their engagement with the word through imaginative play, and treated such play as a

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid.}, 23.

\textsuperscript{177} In a slightly different context, Park explains that he enacts the seemingly childish play shown in his videos as a means for claiming the hesitancy and indecision in people’s minds when they confront various events in everyday life. In his catalogue, Park states that “[p]eople are exposed to a state of neutral, passive and indecisive conflict. I intended to disguise this condition with childish and cynical expressions implying ‘I am interested in other fields. I won’t go outside of it.’” Park June-bum, \textit{Ab-solutely Faith-ful}, 41.

\textsuperscript{178} Again, Lee Sun-young also noted that Park’s \textit{12 Warp Gate} is a meditation on the relationship between the structure of society and a subject’s exploration within it, through which the artist tries to reveal the incompletion and porosity of the world in which he lives. Lee Sun-young, “The Exhibition of Park June-bum,” (page number not indicated).
threshold for trying to derive new meanings out of familiar material in the world.\footnote{Walter Benjamin, \textit{The Arcades Project}, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002): 390. "Task of childhood: to bring the new world into symbolic space. The child, in fact, can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: recognize the new once again."} In rearticulating Benjamin’s discussions of childhood, Susan Buck-Morss notes that children are often “less intrigued by the preformed world that adults have created than by its waste products.”\footnote{Susan Buck-Morss, \textit{The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project} (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991): 262.} According to Benjamin and Morss, children are intrigued by aspects of the everyday world that adults may simply ignore or dismiss as insignificant and worthless, and thus are often able to reinvent new rhythms and intuitive relationships with them.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 262.} In this respect, many of Park’s videos can be understood as a mediation of and meditation on everyday life.\footnote{Art historian Ko Dong-yeon also points out Park June-bum’s exploration of everyday life, and his constant acknowledgement and negation of various aspects of the domain. Ko continues to say that, even if Park pays attention to revealing the limitation of the system of the world he lives in, he does not attempt to subvert the given system. For example, taking \textit{3 Crossing} as an example, we can speculate that Park tries to reveal that the seemingly omnipotent power represented by the hands is not able to actually control the movements of people and automobiles. But Park does not claim to completely negate the impact of the sovereign hands at all; instead, he tries to visualize how those two different forces are intertwined with each other in a given milieu, thus implicitly showing how multifarious the field of everyday life is. Ko Dong-yeon, "Kungnae obuje misurii t’al obujeong: Obujeoseo sisut’emuro" ["Non-objectivity of Object Art in Korea, from Object to System"], \textit{Monthly Art}, April 2013 (source: http://www.monthlyart.com) (page number not indicated).} He deconstructs, distorts, and refracts the fabrics of everyday life not just for the sake of aesthetic pleasure per se, but for the purpose of excavating the unexplored dimensions of everyday life that are inherent in his world.
Deconstructing Sovereignty in Everyday Urbanism: The Advertisement (1’30”, 2004)

The Advertisement (1’30”, 2004), one of Park’s earliest videos, was made specifically in reference to the plethora of advertising signs that comprise the commercial cityscape in contemporary Korea (Figs. 38–40). It is a very short video, running for only 90 seconds, but the narrative engages viewers with an intense and metaphorical set of images that are taken from the space of the everyday. In the video, the viewers follow the artist’s step-by-step process of attaching new advertising signs to the bare exterior of a commercial building, which is itself a photograph of an existing cityscape in Korea. The blank exterior of the building, located at the far left corner of the photograph upon which the artist performs, is gradually affixed with numerous miniaturized photographs of advertisements, until the original shape of the building’s exterior becomes difficult to recognize. The background scene used for the video is taken from an unidentified location in Seoul and is composed of three urban strata: roads and pedestrian streets in the foreground, five different, small-scale commercial buildings in the middle ground, and a series of high-rise apartments in the background. The particular building Park manipulates for his video is a newly constructed one, on which no commercial signs have yet been attached. One assumes that he chose this building for his performative act of sign-attachment because it provides a clean, undisturbed plane upon which he can freely attach and detach the commercial signs, thus allowing him to show the lifecycle of an ordinary commercial building in Korea, from its tabula rasa state to its chaotic embellishment as it fills with various forms of urban advertisements. The background image Park utilizes also includes a construction site at the center, unoccupied and surrounded by fences. This empty space enables viewers to clearly see the rest of the
buildings located in the background, so they can concentrate on the play of the hands appearing in the foreground. Another photograph of the same scene taken by the artist years after the video was completed, shows that viewers can no longer see the buildings in the background because of the new high-rise building constructed in the previously empty construction site (Fig. 44).\footnote{A photograph from the artist’s webpage: \url{http://junebumpark.com/2004/TheAdvertisement/}.}

Most importantly, the video is fast-forwarded in at least double or triple speed. Thus, the video compresses what would be a very long process of sign-attachment within the temporality of the commercial cityscape, as well as the time frame of Park’s actual performance of sign-attachment. At the very beginning of the video, we see the artist’s hands prominently displayed, as they begin to manipulate a number of miniaturized signboards by hurriedly placing each signboard, one by one, on the building’s exterior. No doubt the fast tempo is meant to suggest the dynamic nature and frenetic pace of urban environments in Korea. In a city like Seoul, the rhythms of urban transformation are rapid, and the scale of urban development is immense, such that urban dynamism and perpetual transformation has become trademarks of the metropolis.\footnote{Architect Yoo Kerl uses the phrase “faster and bigger” to describe the dynamism and vibrancy of Korean urbanism and to explain the explosive pace of urbanization in Korean cities in the past decades and the overpopulation of skyscrapers and high-rise buildings in downtown areas of Seoul and other cities. Yoo Kerl, “Faster and Bigger” in \textit{Faster and Bigger}, edited by Yoo Kerl (Seoul: Space Publishing, 2007): 10-19.} The video is also assembled with sounds fabricated by the artist, and played at a normal speed, which mimic what a busy urban environment might produce, such as ambient noise emitted by fast-moving automobiles, the sounds of honking car horns, crowds of talking people, and buildings under construction. Thus, there are two different realms of everyday life in the
video: the visual-spatial stratum of city space that is fast forwarded, and the assemblage of sounds derived from the urban field, which is played at normal speed. What this creates is subtle dissonance that begins to deterritorialize the given coordinates of city space.

Park endeavors to make viewers believe that what they are looking at in the video is not a merely fictional image but a real urban scene by utilizing *trompe l’oeil*, an age-old painting technique that began to be widely used in the paintings of walls and ceilings in the Renaissance architecture of Western Europe. It is a technique that is intended to trick the eyes of the viewers through the hyper-realistic qualities of what is represented, as if what they are looking at were the visual and spatial extension of their everyday world. In *The Advertisement*, Park utilizes photo-collage as his deceptive method, instead of using a painterly method, so that he attaches a set of photographed images of signboards onto the blank exterior of the building.

Park’s photo-collage process, analogous to the *trompe l’oeil*, can be divided into three stages. First, he took a photograph of a cityscape in Seoul and used it as the background of the video. Second, he took another set of photographs of commercial signs that are obtuse and acute in terms of their angles, instead of upright and perpendicular, which he intended to use for his video performance. Third, he carefully attached those photographs to the blank exterior of the building in the far right corner. What is noticeable in this collage process is that Park meticulously placed the askew angle of each photograph in line with the angle of the designated building façade that is likewise askew, such that he fabricated a collaged image of an ordinary commercial building filled

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185 Lee Sun-young, “The Exhibition of Park June-bum,” (page number not indicated).
with urban advertisements in his video. Thus, in his video, Park creates what curator Yim Eun-kyung calls a “distorted reality,” a hyper-realistic cityscape that is in fact constituted by flattened-out, two dimensional images of urban advertisements.\(^\text{186}\)

Despite the visual domination of the artist’s hands in *The Advertisement*, the viewers soon realize that Park manipulates his hands on the screen with a sense of reticence, playfulness and humor, thereby depicting them as somewhat clumsy and fragmentary body parts that are not in control of what he is evidently grasping at. The rapid tempo of the video actually makes his oversized hands appear hesitant and awkward rather than dominating and in control.\(^\text{187}\) It is as if the ability to manipulate and ‘handle’ the performance of attaching the signs was struggling to accomplish the task within a severely limited and compressed stretch of time. In speculating on the symbolic meaning of the hands, viewers might initially associate them with some kind of administrative or capitalist entity, such as the Korean government’s attempt to control the proliferation and distribution of commercial signs, or the infiltration of big business into the domain of the everyday and its colonization of small-scale commercial activities. However, by carefully watching what those hands actually perform in the video, the viewer soon notices that they only move those signs around the surface of the façade


\(^{187}\) Park registers a sense of playfulness and humor not only by speeding up his videos, but also by creating a situation that is derived from everyday life, which is however somewhat distorted and de-contextualized from the way that we may experience in daily life. *600cc (1’50’’, 2008)*, another of Park’s videos, would be one good example. In the video, Park video-records the situation in which he pours a constant stream of water into the urinal without showing the body attached to the stream, thus leaving it ambiguous whether the liquid stream comes from the artist’s body or from something else that is not a human being (i.e. a machine). And the color of the stream is pinkish red, which again makes the viewers wonder whether what they are looking at is someone urinating or simply a stream of colored water that is nothing to do with urinating.
instead of removing them from the field, or paring them down to a less visually chaotic appearance on the surface of the building. Government intervention would typically consist of removing all the distracting signs, and replacing them with less distracting ones in the hope of constructing a well-ordered cityscape. Instead, viewers might better understand those hands in terms of what Adam Smith called “the invisible hand.” Smith’s theory demonstrates that the system of a market economy in capitalist society is not entirely driven by governmental intervention imposed from the outside but instead is operated through its own system of interaction and exchange between stakeholders. In their reading of Smith’s theory, political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out that capitalist intervention into the commercial realm might initially intend to fully control the market economy, but ends up being entangled with everyday conditions that it does not control.\textsuperscript{188} In this respect, what we see in Park’s video is a complex relationship between the oversized hands and the myriad small-scale forces of everyday commercialism represented by the photographs of commercial signs.

However, the cultural meaning of the hands in The Advertisement, and in Park’s other videos as well, has been understood in an overly simplistic way by art critics and historians in South Korea. In analyzing another Park video, 3 Crossing (1’43’’, 2002) (Fig. 45), art critic Kang Soo-mi explains that the artist’s hands controlling the movements of pedestrians at a busy city crossing represents “the invisible structure of power” in contemporary society, thus suggesting that those hands entirely discipline and

\textsuperscript{188} Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, \textit{Empire} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001): 86. “A first synthesis of these two levels is confided to the ‘invisible hand’ of the market: the capitalist ‘intends only his own gain,’ but he is ‘led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intentions.’”
institutionalize the field of everyday life. In the video, the artist creates an imaginary situation in which his oversized hands seem to control and manipulate the pedestrians and automobiles at the crossroad of a busy street in Korea. In order to construct the video, Park recorded an ordinary scene of a busy crossing from an elevated position, perhaps from the rooftop of a building. He then superimposed his hand performance on top of the recorded street scene. Similar to *The Advertisement*, Park tripled the normal speed of the video, resulting in many of the same effects. In *3 Crossing*, the oversized hands only faintly appear to control the pedestrian’s movements at the crosswalk, as they never, in fact, grip or dictate any movement at all. Precisely, the opposite. Despite the visual effect that may suggest that those hands act as a transcendent power, what is actually occurring in the field is that their attempt to manipulate clearly lags behind the movements of the pedestrians and thus are never in control of them. In this respect, Kang Soo-mi’s reading of those hands and their performance does not fully grasp the way that Park undermines traditional notions of sovereignty through the subtle manipulation and disjunctions enabled by the tempo and temporal affects of the video. If traditionally, a sovereign entity is supposed to be an absolute, indivisible, autonomous, and

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190 In explicating Foucault’s conception of power, Deleuze also notes that Foucault himself was aware of the difficulty of separating the mastery of the everyday and those mastered by it. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 71. “... [I]t passes through the hands of the mastered no less than through the hands of the masters (since it passes through every related force).”

191 In a similar vein, curator Lee Sun-young also offers an interpretation of the same video using the Leviathan model of power proposed by Hobbes. Lee considers the presence of the artist’s hands in the video to be the symbol of the disappearance of community in the hyper-modern society in a negative sense. She considers the presence of the oversized hands to be an invisible source of power that is radically codified, such that ordinary people may have difficulty understanding where such a power is generated. Lee Sun-young, “The Exhibition of Park June-bum,” (page number not indicated).
unconditional source of power and mastery, the performance of the hands undermine such notions. Another description of Park’s 2008 Berlin exhibition suggests that his hand performances represent “heavenly action on earth,” because of their visually dominant quality. These critical remarks on sovereignty in Park’s work suggest a reliance on Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan model of sovereignty, in the sense of a binary model of power consisting of a transcendental sovereign state on one hand, and ordinary citizens who lack such power on the other. Hobbes’ Leviathan model might still be useful for us to understand the political history of modern and contemporary Korea, as the role of the Korean government has been unprecedentedly strong, and the tensions and conflicts between the sovereign state and civil society have been prominent throughout Korea’s twentieth-century history. However, as sociologist Hagen Koo pointed out, governmental interventions into the domain of everyday life are not, in practice, so much top down and one-directional as reciprocal and interactive with various groups of civil society.

Power as singular, uninterrupted and unidirectional force is thus questioned in *The Advertisement*. Each time Park conducts a sign-attachment performance, the façade composition is altered and a new configuration is established, which is soon disrupted in turn. Park’s performance articulates the perpetual transformation of a cityscape

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193 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write that “[a]ccording to Hobbes, the single wills of the various individuals converge and are represented in the will of the transcendent sovereign.” Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 84.

194 Hagen Koo, “Strong State and Contentious Society,” *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, edited by Hagen Koo (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 231. “Although the state has played a critical role in setting the dominant direction and framework of social transformation in Korea, concrete processes of social and political change have not been determined simply by the state’s directives but have been intimately shaped by the specific ways in which individuals, groups, or social classes have reacted to state actions and to their experiences of social change.”
significantly influenced by, and in resonance with, the dynamic activities of the commercial realm of the city. Power within this realm is multiple, capillary, and contingent within in this urban domain; a condition which is captured in Park’s complex video. *The Advertisement* reactivates the interconnectivity between a series of sign-attachment performances, thus giving shape to Deleuze’s definition of power as “an action upon an action” and “a relation between forces.”195 Significantly, Park does not show the body to which the oversized hands belong. He leaves such connectivity open to the degree that we can’t even be sure that they are the artist’s hands. In other words, by leaving the identification of the oversized hands open-ended, Park encourages viewers to further speculate about “how is power practiced?” rather than asking “what is the source of power revitalized in the video?”196

A careful observer of *The Advertisement* will also realize that each singular act of attaching a sign to the building is slightly different from the next act of attachment. That is to say, there is no moment of repetition, strictly speaking, but rather a series of micro-differentiated performances. To some extent Park seems to know where to put each piece of photographed sign, and how the final form of the building surface will look like.197 The video as a performative act in itself, however, fosters an open-ended improvisation of hand gestures. This non-repetitive play with commercial signs is not unrelated to the very fact that this video is a labor-intensive work. To conduct the performance of sign

195 Deleuze, Foucault, 70.

196 “Therefore we should not ask: ‘What is power and where does it come from?’, but ‘How is it practiced?’” Deleuze, Foucault, 71.

197 Perhaps this pre-established idea about the sign-attachment process enables Park to complete his performance in such a short amount of time, even though it is compressed at least two times more than its playing speed.
attachment, the artist needs to use his own fingers to grip each photograph. When carefully watching the video, viewers will grasp those subtle moments of difference and repetition in which Park carefully handles each photographed sign with various intensities and speeds. Sometimes he uses all of his fingers to firmly press each piece onto the building; and, at other times, he only uses his forefinger and middle finger. All those subtle instances of Park’s performance are suggestive in that they urge us to consider that there are many subtle movements and performances, and acts of tact, that are coursing through the commercial cityscape, which is too often considered purely as a realm of disembodied spectacle, visual alienation, and commodity fetishism. The supposedly characterless signs assembled by the artist shown in The Advertisement are indeed all different from each other, in terms of size, color, materiality, typography, composition, etc. And this diversity and the variety of ways in which each sign is treated by the artist challenges the stereotypical understanding of urban advertisements in Korea, which are usually seen as an endless repetition of similar designs, rendering the city space homogeneous and monotonous. The cityscape full of urban advertisements is not so much comprised of empty signifiers, but, to borrow Guattari’s term, an “ennunciative assemblage,” involving gestures, tact, performance, and affect.

By actively utilizing the technique of fade in-and-out in The Advertisement, Park treats the narrative represented in the video as open-ended, thus introducing the viewers

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198 A description about the exhibition entitled Pete and Repeat, held in Zabludowicz Collection located in London, brings the issue of repetition in thinking about contemporary art, saying, “… any reproduction is always first and foremost a mode of production and … nothing is ever truly the same twice.” (Source: http://www.zabludowiczcollection.com/london/exhibitions/pete-and-repeat).

to an urban realm where the myriad events and commercial practices are perpetually unfolding and modifying. Technically speaking, there is indeed a beginning and an end to the video, however, that is never linked to the static completion of the commercial building’s life at any fixed temporal moment. Right from the beginning of the video, viewers are introduced to a fabricated urban situation of a frenetically busy commercial place combined with the ambient noises of city streets. The artist’s hands immediately appear as the video begins to play, but it is crucial to note that those hands are inserted into the preexisting field of the everyday, not vice versa. That is to say, the sovereign hands do not create the field of the everyday cityscape in Korea from a tabula rasa urban condition. Instead, the hands are part of a larger urban world in which there have always been an uncountable number of commercial activities. Similarly, the fading-out effect of the video enables viewers to speculate that the hands will continue to play with the images of the photographed signs, even though the video must stop playing at its designated ending point. There is a development of visual narrative in the video, since the viewers are able to observe how a blank surface is gradually filled with a plethora of commercial signs. But the video provides neither a resolution, nor a perfectly implemented civic improvement project. Rem Koolhaas claims that Asian cities can be characterized by the idea of “the Generic City,” a result of rapid growth and modernization from a tabula rasa state to a fully developed industrial or consumer city.

200 In this respect, the fact that Park plays his performance in the midst of a busy urban center, in which various commercial activities have already proceeded, is in a drastic contrast to how Koolhaas understands the nature of urbanization in contemporary era from a tabula rasa to a fast growth. Koolhaas, “The Generic City,” 1253. “All Generic Cities issue from the tabula rasa; if there was nothing, now they are there; if there was something, they have replaced.”

201 Rem Koolhaas, “The Generic City,” 1253. “All Generic Cities issue from the tabula rasa; if there was nothing, now they are there; if there was something, they have replaced it.”
However, we do not see such a drastic transformation of city space in Park’s video. He simply adds one more layer to the urban condition by echoing and subtly altering preexisting urban rhythms and tempos.

The deconstruction of the conventional idea of sovereignty throughout The Advertisement echoes another important issue: the modified relationship between capital and sovereignty in the age of globalization and consumer culture. In the “post-sovereign political world,” as political scientist Robert Jackson calls it, there is a necessary rethinking of traditional notions of sovereignty, in order to forge other conceptual models that may better reflect the influence of globalization and commercialization shaped by international relations, telecommunications, and tourism.\footnote{Robert Jackson, Sovereignty (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007): 139.} In speculating about the complex interrelationships between the different agents of power in today’s world system, we cannot simply rely on the Leviathan model of sovereignty proposed by Hobbes, in which an idea of the sovereign is perceived as the representation of a single, transcendent, and autonomous power.\footnote{Jens Bartelson, A Genealogy of Sovereignty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 153. “To be sovereign is, in essence, to be representative … ‘it is the Unity of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented, that maketh the Person One.”} In The Advertisement, we note that there is no single transcendent power but rather an assemblage of forces, which constitute the complex network of power relations. The visual domination of the artist’s hands is diminished as soon as the video starts due to its rapid pacing, and the narrative formulated throughout the video does not suggest that the artist’s hands come from on high, and above the field of everyday life. Those hands are inserted ‘horizontally’ into the
narrative of the video as opposed to ‘vertically,’ as if they were no more than one among a multiple of forces existing in the commercial realm.204

Another of Park’s videos, *I Parking (5’25’’)*, 2001 (Fig. 46), adds further complexity to the issues raised in *The Advertisement*. Similar to *3 Crossing* that we analyzed earlier in this chapter, in *I Parking* the artist utilizes hands to manipulate the constant movement of drivers and automobiles in an unidentified parking lot in the city. He video-recorded the busy scene from the rooftop of a building and simultaneously overlaid a series of hand gestures on top of it, as if the hands were conducting and controlling the movements of every driver and his/her automobile. This double-recording makes it appear as if the hands are actually physically engaged with the movement of each individual and car. However, this is far from the case, as these juxtaposed scenes come from two completely different videos. Similar to the ways that *The Advertisement* generates a sense of comedic gestural jerkiness through the fast-paced tempo of the video, *I Parking* produces a humorous situation in which the oversized hands’ manipulation of drivers and automobiles keeps failing. Thus, the hand performance ends without being able to actually influence the flow and rhythm of vehicular movement. The art historian Miwako Tezuka also points out that both the left and right hands in the video look slightly different from each other in terms of their size and color. She explains that “the left hand belongs to a woman and the right to a man, in fact, to the artist himself.”205


Indeed, a close observation of the video reveals that the fingers of the left hand are not only thinner than the ones of the right hand, but are also manicured; in contrast, the right hand appears to be darker in color and looks larger than the left one. By subtly distinguishing the hands, Park undermines notions of a unitary subjectivity in relationship to the everyday.

In a similar context, Jacques Derrida raises the issue of multiplicity and its relationship to subjectivity in his reinterpretation of van Gogh’s series of “shoe paintings,” by reading Martin Heidegger and art historian Meyer Schapiro’s scholarship on van Gogh’s paintings against the grain. In his famous essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger noted that the shoes depicted in van Gogh’s paintings surely belong to a female peasant.\(^{206}\) However, Derrida points out that there is no undisputable reason for us to conclude that those shoes belong to a peasant woman, nor as Schapiro claims, to the artist himself. In fact, there is no proof that these shoes belong to a single autonomous individual.\(^{207}\) For Derrida, neither Heidegger nor Schapiro seriously considers the possibility that van Gogh’s shoes may not ‘belong’ to either peasant or artist, or even to one sex. In a similar vein, \textit{1 Parking} invites viewers to refrain from a precipitous, proper, and appropriating reading of his video, and encourages them to actively engage with the meaning-making process of the video, which is left vague and indeterminate by the artist.\(^{208}\) The multiplication of meanings inherent in the video thus makes it difficult to


\(^{208}\) In analyzing the culture of camera obscura in the nineteenth century, art historian Jonathan Crary reads the ways that people experience the huge black box as a machinic assemblage, by arguing that the viewing subject and the viewed object through the device cannot be completely separated from each
simply consider the forces activated through the video as a representation of power imposed from the outside the scene of representation.

Viewers can also detect the contingent viewing condition of *The Advertisement* by looking at the photographs that record the gallery space in which the video was exhibited (Figs. 47-50). Park presents at least four different modes of viewing. First, he presents a scene of an unidentified spectator sitting on a chair and watching his video installed in the corner of the gallery space (Fig. 47). Second, he displays a photograph in which we see a group of children and a teacher watching Park’s video installed in an apse-like space in the gallery (Fig. 48). The third photograph shows *The Advertisement* being projected from the ceiling of the gallery with spectators looking down at the video screen on the floor, while another of his videos, *Making an Apartment*, is projected on the gallery wall (Fig. 49). Lastly, Park displays a photograph of a visitor taking a photograph of his video, which is also projected on the gallery wall (Fig. 50). At first glance, these photographs seem to be no more than the visual records of spectators’ various viewing experiences captured by the artist in the gallery spaces. They seem to indicate a desire on the part of the artist to record as many subjectivities and viewing conditions as possible, as if to match the multiple and divided self implied in the fragmented subjectivity embodied by the hands in the video. The collection of people’s various viewing

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other. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992): 30-31. “Perhaps the most important obstacle to an understanding of the camera obscura, or of any optical apparatus, is the idea that optical device and observer are two distinct entities … The camera obscura is what Gilles Deleuze would call an assemblage, something ‘simultaneously and inseparably a machinic assemblage and an assemblage of enunciation,’ an object about which something is said and at the same time an object that is used.”

experiences generates an imaginary community, in which traces of their experiences and perceptions are loosely assembled.

*Commercial Signs and the Multiplication of Sovereignty: Hypermarket 01 (3’00’’, 2007)*

*Hypermarket 01* (3’00’’, 2007) is another one of Park’s videos in which he performs multiple acts of sign attachment (Figs. 41-42). It is a three-minute video in which the artist attaches a set of photographed signs to the photographed background of the video, which is composed of cut-and-pasted images of a museum building, a stadium, shopping malls, church spires, and city monuments. Although this video does not seem to be based on any particular geographical location, anyone who can read Korean quickly notices that this work is largely derived from artist’s home town of Daejeon. In the foreground, viewers can see that elements, such as foundation stones, trees, a lamppost, a free-standing signpost, and a crucifix are scattered on the cut-and-pasted photographic image of a grass field. Right behind this collaged scene in the foreground, one can see another set of images being put together on a façade, which seems to be taken from a museum or a government building. The still shot of the video shows all the different images of commercial signage and church spires placed together on various parts of the building.

210 There are total three different versions of *Hypermarket* available through the personal webpage of the artist: *Hypermarket 01* (3’00’’, 2007); *Hypermarket 03* (2’50’’, 2007); and *Hypermarket 4* (6’20’’, 2008).

211 *Hypermarket 01* is also introduced with a different name, *Mosaic City*, in a blog post. In that blog post, the unnamed author describes the video as the artist’s commentary on the rapidly changing urban conditions of his home city Daejeon, especially the Tunsan district within the city. (Source: [http://blog.naver.com/PostView.nhn?blogId=dac2008&logNo=140122113964](http://blog.naver.com/PostView.nhn?blogId=dac2008&logNo=140122113964)).
By reading the language inscribed on each image of commercial signage, viewers can recognize a number of popular Korean-based shopping malls, which include Homplus, E-mart, Hi-mart, Kim’s Club, Hanaro-mart, Kosa-mart, Homever, and Samsung Tesco. There is also a Walmart sign among other Korean-based companies’ advertisements. Behind the façade, viewers can also see more images of commercial signage, and spires belonging to Protestant churches located in Seoul and other cities.212 Park intentionally mixes both domestic and international elements, as well as putting both commercial and the religious elements on the same photographic plane. Most of the commercial signs appearing in the video are familiar; however, the way they are assembled together is radically unfamiliar, such that the collaged cityscape offers the viewers an uncanny sense of place.213 In the making of this video, Park does not seem to rely on a sense of nostalgia or regional identity, but rather the name of his home town exists together with an international corporate company – Samsung – which implies the city’s participation in the global economy. Likewise, the Walmart sign located on the rooftop of the building is placed in parallel with another sign for the largest church in

212 Urban historian Zoh Kyung-jin explains that the explosion of church spires, and their flickering neon signs at night, represents the chaotic nature of cityscape in South Korea and the increasing number of city churches that have moved away from traditional expressions of divinity in their architectural design. Zoh Kyung-jin, “Tosi sogŭi kyŏnggwan pyŏnhwahanŭn ŭimiwa kū saeroun kanŭngsŏng” [“Landscape in Urbanism: Changing Meanings and Its Possibilities”], Ideal Architecture, December 2001: 169.

213 Hypermarket 4 (6'20'', 2008) is another of Park’s videos that can be understood along the same line. In the video, he conducts the performance of sign attachment, by using the façade of a commercial building located in the city of Berlin, Germany. Upon a highly ornamented façade that is reminiscent of the Baroque architectural style, Park attaches various photographed images of commercial signs drawn from Germany, including some well-known German brands such as Volkswagen, Deutsche Bank, and Mercedes Benz. Meanwhile, he also attaches some local brands such as Hotel Berlin, H.M, ace, Nordsee, Bauhaus [also a brand name], Erotica, KaDeWe, JOPP, and Turret. What is interesting in this video is that Park uses the Korean style of sign attachment to attach all of these various images of commercial signage upon the façade of the building located in Berlin. This performance thus creates a very peculiar façade that is neither entirely German nor Korean, because the materials are by themselves genuinely German but the way that the façade is composed is obviously Korean. Hence, it can be argued that Park creates an in-between space that does not belong to either of the two countries.
South Korea: Yŏūidosunbogŭmgyohoe (translated as Yŏūido Full Gospel Church). This mega-scale church is located in the Yŏūido, an island in the middle of the Han River where the national assembly is also located. In Hypermarket 01, the line between tradition and modernity, and the commercial and the non-commercial, is thus deconstructed by the artist.\(^{214}\) This inharmonious coexistence between different realms of power thus radically hybridizes the conventional sense of place attached to a regional identity. The artist produces an abstract plane upon which the relations between various images of city space are juxtaposed with each other, thereby transforming familiar places and identities into a more heterogeneous field of exploration.\(^{215}\)

The hybridization between locality and globality can also be elucidated from the title itself: Hypermarket 01. With this title, Park seems to claim that today’s market economy in South Korea is indiscriminately influenced by transnational corporations, while acknowledging that there are still small-scale, local merchants and commercial agents that are not as highly organized as the transnational corporations. Park intentionally mixes both the local and global companies in the video, through which he deconstructs any clear-cut line of separation between the global and local market economies. He creates an abstract and unstable plane on which he places all the various

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\(^{214}\) Such a deconstruction of the binary set of relations, and the emphasis on the hybridization of everyday life instigated by the rise of consumer culture is reminiscent of what pop artist Richard Hamilton reflected in his depiction of 1960s American consumer culture in which kitsch objects dominated the entire realm of everyday life. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (Volume 2) (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004): 390. “Moreover, the interior is thoroughly penetrated by the outside world; distinctions like private and public are effaced by commodities and media …”

\(^{215}\) Architectural historian Kim Kwang-hyun argues that a sense of place in contemporary Korea is not only bound by either cultural heritages or natural landscapes, but also generated by people’s encounters with the various forms of commercialism in daily city experience, such as the 24-hour convenient stores that are widespread throughout the country. Kim Kwang-hyun, “Hŭibakhan tosiwa yŏksaŭi changso,” *Journal of Architectural History in Korea*, June 2007: 214-226.
kinds of commercial forces, without necessarily attempting to arrange them in a systematic way. These hyper-realistic and hyper-commercial aspects of the contemporary city were already discussed in detail by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. In his essay “Hypermarket and Hypercommodity” (1981), Baudrillard claims that the hypermarket is “the model of all future forms of controlled socialization.” In this essay, he considers societies saturated with images that are radically driven by consumption culture as a highly controlled field of everyday life, whereby each citizen is perpetually influenced by an inundation of consumer imagery. In the same essay, Baudrillard continues to insist that the hypermarket is the “retotalization in a homogeneous space-time of all the dispersed functions of the body, and of social life.” Baudrillard’s interpretation of the hypermarket suggests a loss of sociality within everyday life; it is the homogenizing and fabricated space of the everyday in which each body is subject to the fragmenting operations of capitalist economies. But in Hypermarket 01, we encounter a set of complex relationships between different billboards, the artist’s own hands, and the rest of the city elements appearing in the video. Photographed signs are distractingly scattered around different locations within the frame, either upon the walls of the building, on a rooftop, or at ground level, such that there is no perfectly harmonious visual system or spatial hierarchy in the video. What is at stake here is the assemblage of varying points of power relations that are constantly generated by the artist’s performance of sign-attachment. A large-scale Walmart sign is placed upon the rooftop of a building, but its massiveness is counteracted by another sign for a local shopping center, E-mart.


217 Baudrillard, Ibid., 76.
which is located in the far-left corner. At best, what we may be able to grasp through such an analysis is just one instance among the infinitely multiplying forces indicated in the video.\textsuperscript{218}

Park’s peculiar manipulation of the photographed images of commercial signs offers a different way of interpreting the influence of consumer culture in modern Korea, and the artistic responses to that phenomenon in the past decades. Park’s playful manipulation of commercial signs stands in drastic contrast to the ways that Korean artists in the 1980s were critical of the permeation of consumer culture into everyday life. This is dramatized in a number of paintings and woodcuts produced by the artistic movement called Minjung misul, a term translated as “the art of the masses.”\textsuperscript{219} Minjung misul emerged out of the critical mood of political unrest that was prevalent in the 1980s, when South Korea was governed by the former military leader Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988), a dictator who suppressed citizens’ rights to voice their own political opinions in the public domain. Minjung misul was a collective endeavor by Korean artists who sought to actively engage with social issues and to criticize the oppressive nature of the government.\textsuperscript{220} While the understanding of this artistic movement would require a careful examination of its historical trajectory throughout the 1980s, as well as its relationship

\textsuperscript{218} Even when Park includes a series of photographs of his videos in exhibition catalogues or other publications, he does not simply arrange them as static images. In publications such as Video Book Video and Manchester Project, Park deliberately arranges a series of still shots of his videos in a sequential manner, such that the viewers can experience those series as moving images by quickly flipping the pages. Park June-bum, Video Book Video (an exhibition catalogue) (Seoul: Gallery Hyundai, 2010); Park June-bum, Manchester Project (Seoul: Press Kit Press, 2011).

\textsuperscript{219} Kim Young-na, 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Korean Art (London: Laurence King, 2005): 260; Historian Bruce Cumings defines the term minjung either as “masses” or “common people,” although he considers the latter a more accurate term. Bruce Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun, 376.

with preceding artistic movements such as Monochrome art in the 1970s, another crucial characteristic of the movement was its abhorrence of consumer culture.  

For example, Oh Yoon’s 1980 woodcut – *Marketing I: Chioktō [Marketing I: The Drawing of Hell]* (Fig. 51) depicts a dystopian world where commercialism dominates the entire milieu and ordinary people are tortured by a number of devil figures who represent capitalism and consumer culture. Advertisements of some well-known commercial brands such as Maxim and Coca Cola are distributed throughout the image, and one can even see that the brand name “Coca Cola” is inscribed on the body of one of the devil figures in the far-left corner. These figures are derived from traditional Korean Buddhist paintings, and they brutally butcher innocent bodies in the most grotesque and violent ways imaginable. In the woodcut, a clichéd binary opposition is obvious between those who are depicted as powerless, and the devils that have become empowered through their embrace of consumer culture. It is clear that the artist is deeply

**221 Ibid., 260. “Minjung art (the art of the masses), which entered the scene in the 1980s, differed greatly from Monochrome art in that it was more a part of the minjung cultural movement than purely an art movement.”**


**223 Kim Young-na, *Ibid.*, 262.**
concerned about the penetration of consumer culture in Korean society in its early stage of globalization.

Both Park and Oh deal with the issues of everyday life and consumer culture in modern and contemporary Korea, although each artist interprets the implications and influences of consumer culture quite differently. Park treats the recollected images of commercial signage as a means to create a fictional narrative through which he does not make a clear separation between everyday life and consumer culture. In contrast, Oh makes a drastic contrast between the two, by associating the presence of consumer culture with the images of hell drawn from Buddhist paintings. In the Hypermarket 01, Park treats the photographed images of advertisement as a critical means of urban identity, and, like The Advertisement, demonstrates that anyone can actively engage with these images without ever needing to entirely grasp their cause, source, or mode of power. In Chiokto, Oh places an emphasis on a unidirectional delivery of power, by depicting the set of advertisement images as the omnipotent source of power. In Park’s video, however, there is no such homogeneity, because of the way that all the various sign images are assembled together without creating a coherent whole. The plane activated in Park’s video is radically fragmented because of the coexistence of all the different commercial agents, which creates a heterogeneous field. In a field where multiple power relations are complexly entangled, each member of the commercial community becomes engaged with power dynamics. If Baudrillard argues that it is difficult for us to know “who manipulates whom” in consumer society, Park invites viewers to speculate about various modes of engagement within given urban situations in
which social positions and power relations can’t be reduced to manipulator or manipulated.\textsuperscript{224}

In the \textit{Hypermarket 01}, Park illustrates a flexible, smooth subjectivity that navigates the world of consumer culture in an immanent way. Hardt and Negri outline this new type of subjectivity in terms of a shift from “civil society” to “the multitude”:\textsuperscript{225}

“The multitude” indicates a new type of subjectivity in the post-war capitalist society that is even differentiated from a “civil society,” given the fact that civil society (i.e. NGOs) is often critical of the intrusion of capitalism into the domain of the everyday based on a binary conception between capitalist encroachment and the sovereignty of each individual. This new subjectivity is rather closely related to capitalism and internalizes the rhythms and moods created by that system, not “completely subjugated to the laws of capitalist accumulation.”

Park June-bum explores the issue of sovereignty in its relationship with capitalism, and treats those commercial signs as an inevitable part of contemporary urban life in Korea. In his video, he does not clearly identify who manipulates the field of everyday life or who is being manipulated, but illustrates a new politico-economic subjectivity that works imminently with the capitalist structures that now permeate every domain of everyday life.\textsuperscript{226} The appearance of the artist’s hands, disconnected from any bodily representation, leaves open the possibility that the viewer is not merely supplementary to, or a in a state of prosthetic dissociation from, what is occurring in the video but rather is part of a

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\textsuperscript{225} Hardt and Negri, \textit{Empire}, 328, 397.

\textsuperscript{226} The idea of subjectivity implied in Park’s video is similar to what Foucault once called a “homo economicus,” an economic person who seeks to find his/her identity in the midst of the growing capitalist society in the eighteenth century. Michel Foucault, \textit{The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79}, edited by Michel Senellart and translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 292. “Homo economicus strips the sovereign of power inasmuch as he reveals an essential, fundamental, and major incapacity of the sovereign, that is to say, an inability to master the totality of the economic field.”
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dispersed multitude, which navigates and intervenes within the flow of capital and the penetration of consumer culture in everyday life.

*Commercial Signs, Multiplicity, and Korean Urbanism*

This chapter will focus on two particular artworks in which images of commercial signs are featured: Jang Yong-geun’s *Sign* and Choi Jeong-hwa’s *Anybody Anything Anyway*. Both works were first introduced to the public in 2004. These artists have put together many different images of urban advertisements on the same artistic plane. Jang’s work is a large scale photo-collage, and Choi’s installation project consists of hanging a number of advertising scrims (commercial banners made of plastic) upon the exterior of a museum. ‘Assemblage,’ the common approach to both Jang Yong-geun and Choi Jeong-

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227 One can argue that the 2000s, roughly speaking from early 2000 to 2008, is the period when the culture of commercial signage flourished to a great degree. Some instances of urban history that might have influenced its proliferation include: the country’s rapid urbanization in the past decades, which allowed local merchants to occupy small-size lots in the city space, the removal of a curfew regulation and the proliferation of night culture, the development of digital printing and its widespread application to the making of commercial signage, the popularization of the commercial bang (room) culture and the explosion of neon signs, the country’s continuous move toward globalization and the corollary growth of small business in the commercial centers, and others. However, it is equally important to note that such a proliferation of signage culture has gradually been regulated by the Korean government, since those urban advertisements were considered the prime example of urban degeneration and an obstacle to creating an ideal cityscape. As discussed in Chapter One and Two in greater detail, new signage policy has been legislated and those commercial signs have been gradually removed and replaced by newly designed ones. The first comprehensive regulation of commercial signage occurred in 2005, when Lee Myong-bak, the former mayor of Seoul, embarked on the restoration project of Cheonggye Stream, which entailed the renovation of commercial signs displayed alongside the stream, which goes across the central axis of the old downtown Seoul. A few years later, Oh Se-hoon, the next mayor of Seoul, even more vigorously and systematically endeavored to renovate the existing commercial signs as part of the Design Seoul project. Although it is true that urban advertisements are still a prominent part of the commercial cityscape in contemporary Korea, they are nowadays subject to stricter controls in terms of their form, material, color, and language, all of which are carefully designed by the Korean government and local city ministries. In this respect, perhaps one can argue that the 2000s decade was at the crux of the commercial everyday reality, and that the various forms of locally produced urban advertisements, ubiquitous throughout the entire realm of city space in the country, represented a dynamic, vibrant urban culture, incomparable to those in other countries.
hwa’s work, is here to be understood in Deleuzian terms as an “increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections.” It is this relationship between multiplicity and connection in their work that will be the focus of this chapter. Both artists put together numerous examples and fragments of urban advertisement, as if they were offering an exemplary representation showing how city spaces in Korean cities are permeated by them. But their work does not just mimetically reproduce preexisting urban compositions and rhythms. There is a qualitative leap and deviation pervasive in their work, which Deleuze and Guattari express as an “increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity.” Both artists’ work allows us to grapple with the new perceptual and affective dimensions enabled by these environments.

Photo-collaging the Everyday: Jang Yong-geun’s Sign (2004)

Jang Yong-geun’s interest in the contemporary city begins with a simple, but powerful, question: “Is it possible to capture the character of the city in only one image?” If Jang is interested in how he can poetically account for the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the city in one image, that image would, of necessity, not only have to account for the representational aspects of the city, but also its affective dimensions as well. What Jang tries to show through his practice is not just the structural complexity and material richness of Korean cities, but also the affective and perceptive bodied and disembodied experiences that are integral to such environments. One thing is clear: any

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image that attempted to capture the entire afflatus of the city would need to demonstrate an altered sense of what completeness means. First, the image would need to find the formal means to attempt to compose in a way that could capture as best as possible the vast range of structures, events, and affects as interconnected phenomenon; and Second, the image would need to be generative in that the quest would be driven by its impossibility, which would necessarily entail multiple explorations of related images that could potentially extend and refract and perhaps even disengage from the question as initially posed.

Jang Yong-geun utilizes photo-collage as his means of expression in exploring the multiplicity and heterogeneity of contemporary Korean urbanism.²³⁰ In order to construct Sign, Jang has undertaken a number of field trips to many different Korean cities, although his home city, Daegu, seems to be the primary location where he took the vast range of photographs used in the work.²³¹ In these field trips, Jang captured what critic Cho Jin-geun calls “a specimen of images.”²³² Some of the “specimens” used in his work include: commercial signboards, street banners, consumer goods on display, flyers advertising prostitution, the entrances to city motels, the staircases of karaoke bars, security cameras installed in department stores, commemorative banners for those who

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²³⁰ Art critic Park Young-taek considers Jang Yong-geun’s series of photo-collage works as the visual representation of the homogeneous and totalized space of the everyday in contemporary Korea, which greatly differs from how I would like to read the artist’s work as instances of multiplicity and heterogeneity. Park Young-taek, “Tosich’aejip: Tosiga palsanhanŭn yongmangŭ imijidŭl” [“Collection of City Images: The Images of Desire produced by the City”] (An unpublished article that was obtained through the personal contact with Jang Yong-geun).

²³¹ With a population of around 2.5 millions, Daegu is the fourth largest metropolitan city in South Korea, after Seoul, Pusan, and Incheon (Source: http://www.daegu.go.kr/Statistics).

²³² Cho Jin-geun, “Kobarhanŭn lenjŭ ch’aejiphanŭn nun” [“The Lens of Accusation and the Eye of Collection”] (An unpublished article that was obtained through personal contact with Jang Yong-geun).
died in a subway accident, and the traces of car accidents rendered on highway asphalt (Jang’s other photo collages directly related to these specimens include: Road Kill (2004) (Fig. 52), Asphalt (2009) (Fig. 53), and Witness (2010) (Fig. 54), Screen (2004) (Fig. 55), Jjirasi (2008) (meaning ‘flyers’) (Fig. 56), Lotto (2009) (Fig. 57), Inn (2010) (Fig. 58), Karaoke (2004) (Fig. 59), and Supermarket (2010) (Fig. 60). The specific number of photographs used in each photo-collage varies; however, most of them are comprised of more than a hundred individual photographs. In most of Jang’s works, there are rarely any blank spaces as the entire picture plane is suffused by images, as if to insist, through formal means, that there is no area in the contemporary Korean cityscape that is undisturbed by the penetration of commercial activities. The size of each photo-collage is approximately 150 by 100 square centimeters, but the size of each photographic unit is quite small, although one can still identify the textures and compositions of each of them when closely examining the details. Jang usually places these photographic units within a grid dictated by horizontal and vertical lines, although there are always some deviations to this format. Jang actively utilizes this regularized grid-based spatial division, but also makes subtle variations to it by rendering the vertical lines discontinuous and disjunctive from each other, as if to show how the city space is experienced by a mode of continuous discontinuity that is both disciplined and unruly.

By carefully looking at Sign (Fig. 61), one can readily detect the coexistence of repetition and difference, continuity and discontinuity, territorialization and de-territorialization through the ways that the artist weaves together the photographs of

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233 Some of Jang Yong-geun’s photo-collage works follow the strict grid system: Road Kill (2004), Screen (2004), Jjirasi (2008), and Karaoke (2004); whereas, some of his other works do not: Asphalt (2009), Witness (2010), Lotto (2009), Inn (2010), Supermarket (2010).
commercial signs. *Sign* is comprised of more than two hundred photographs of commercial cityscapes of Korea, in which innumerable images of urban advertisements are compactly, and complexly, put together. By evenly distributing photographs of commercial cityscapes that superficially look similar to each other, Jang maximizes, one might say exaggerates, the chaotic and excessive aspects of commercial urban space that are so often denigrated within Korean culture. Thus, at first viewing, it is difficult to find any particular point of attention or concentration, as one’s eye is drawn paratactically across the units of the photo-collage. Each photographic unit, when examined closely, does have a spatial depth that often allows one to find the perspectival point for each unit photograph, but the overall effect of the collage means that there are over two-hundred different perspectival points within a single picture plane, thus diffusing any sense of unity of depth through patterned repetition. This actually tends to create a tactile effect that begins to eat away at or insinuate itself into the photo-collage’s representational aspects.

The lack of visual harmony, as well as the lack of any single point of emphasis in *Sign*, encourages viewers to roam freely, and explore diverse forms of urban life, relatively unrestrained by any predicated way of engaging with this assemblage. In contrast to Kevin Lynch’s idea of urban “legibility,” based on gestalt theories of “good form,” *Sign* does not emphasize strong distinctions between figure and ground, but rather produces a somewhat patterned mosaic of figure/ground oscillations that tends to contribute to the flattened nature of his composition. Viewers of *Sign* will find both *figure-like grounds* and/or *ground-like figures* in Jang’s work.
Heidegger’s notion of a “groundless ground” is a way to think about these relationships within the broader philosophical discourse of everyday life. As one way of articulating how a seemingly groundless situation can open up to a significant field of social interactions, Heidegger provides an example from everyday social interaction: “The groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its being public, but encourages it. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter.” Heidegger finds the lack of a firm and deep grounding of certain forms of communication not merely as an obstacle to be overcome, as many have suggested, but rather an opportunity to explore the multiple realms of discourse without deep appropriation and prior knowledge. Thus our communicative possibility in its ‘authentic sense’ does not necessarily have to be poetic or philosophical to be meaningful. In this vein, the myriad linguistic expressions in Jang’s photo-collage of countless soundboards are like the domain of ‘idle talk,’ in the sense that those expressions are often comprised of commercial catchphrases, clichés, and dry information, but which offer “the possibility of knowing everything without any previous appropriation of the matter.”

234 Heidegger, Being and Time, §169.

235 Heidegger, Ibid., §169. “Idle talk, which everyone can snatch up, not only divests us of the task of genuine understanding, but develops an indifferent intelligibility for which nothing is closed off any longer.”

236 In another essay, Heidegger also articulates how being is interrogated by, and entangled with the groundlike, groundless world of everyday life: “Being is intrinsically groundlike, what gives ground, presences as the ground, has the character of ground. Precisely because it is groundlike, groundgiving, it cannot need a ground. The groundlike is groundless, what grounds, what presences as basis does not need the ground; that is, it is without something to which it could go back as something outside of it; there is no longer any back, no behind itself, but pure presencing itself.” Heidegger, Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom, 170-171 (re-quoted from Lee Braver, Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012): 173.
Reading some of the details of *Sign* will help us have a better sense of what particular aspects of commercial streetscapes the artist was trying to grasp through each photographic unit, and how he finally combined those disparate images as a heterogeneous whole (Figs. 62-65). Photographs of various kinds of urban advertisements are located throughout *Sign*, and include billboards found on the exterior walls of buildings, advertising scrims hung temporarily on buildings and public walls, and easily detachable advertisements pasted onto glass windows. Quite a number of these advertisements are considered illegal, according to the sign regulation policies implemented by the Korean government. Those advertisements are, in most cases, locally produced by small sign design businesses that are ubiquitous throughout Korean cities. Kim Young-bae, an experienced sign designer who has conducted extensive research on Korean signage culture, notes that there were approximately 13,000 sign design shops in 2001.²³⁷ Although there are many clichés and repetitions in the signs produced by these shops, if one looks closely at *Sign* it is clear that each one is distinct from all the rest in terms of form, language, size, location, and urban milieu.

Strictly speaking, there is no repetition, although some critics such as Cho Jingeun and Park Young-taek consider his work to demonstrate precisely that, such that his work is seen to illustrate the banal monotony of consumer imagery in city space.²³⁸ But it is eminently clear that the artist is continuously experimenting with the photographic

²³⁷ Kim’s research is based on the statistical data provided by the Korean government in 2000. Kim Young-bae, *Changsga toenün kanp’an andoenün kanp’an* [A Prosperous Signboard, A Failing Signboard] (Seoul: sijirak, 2001): 139.

²³⁸ Again, what Jang visualizes through his collage work is radically different from how Koolhaas reads the nature of “the Generic City” as an endless repetition of “the same simple structural module.” Koolhaas, “The Generic City,” 1251. “The Generic City is fractal, an endless repetition of the same simple structural module; it is possible to reconstruct it from its smallest entity, a desktop computer, maybe even a diskette.”

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units: sometimes he sutures dramatically different signs together, and makes this evidently clear to the viewer; at other times he emphasizes the continuity between photographs by choosing two signs similar in color. In another instance, Jang captures electricity lines traversing a commercial building, which then visually connect to another series of lines traversing another building’s façade, as if creating a sense of a “discontinuous transformation” in everyday urban space. Many of the billboards are depicted in relationship to various atmospheric and urban contingencies, for example cast shadows, a particular urban scene unfolding within the photograph, light reflecting off of windows, and advertising scrims fluttering in the wind. Jang captures the ephemeral instances of everyday urban experience encountered during his forays into familiar city space, which are intimately related to his bodily movement, viewing angles, aesthetic choices, and unexpected encounters. The resulting photo-collage is thus not just a distracting visual collage comprised of clichéd and stereotyped images of commercial signs; it is an assemblage of affective and perceptive moments generated out of an aesthetic encounter with these remarkably varied signs that are both singular and generic.

Jang Yong-geun’s Sign also provokes viewers to rethink the complex urban history of Korea. If the large-scale urban planning projects initiated by the central government are still considered the dominant aspect of Korea’s urban history, there is

239 Howard Caygill, Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience (London: Routledge, 1998): 121. “In the description of the city there is no distinction between what is fixed and permanent and (its feared opposite) what is transitory – rather, everything is in a continual process of discontinuous transformation.”

240 Some unit photographs of Sign capture a fleeting moment when commercial banners are flipped aside because of the blowing wind, so that viewers are asked to unexpectedly read the Korean alphabets in a reversed manner. The focal point of this particular unit photograph is toward the façade of the commercial building located across the street, from which viewers are able to not only have the sense of depth, but also virtually have a sense of place, as if they were standing in the actual place and being aware of the atmospheric conditions of that moment (i.e. the fluttering of a banner by the blowing wind).
still an equally important aspect of urban vitalization, which has been driven by groups of ordinary shopkeepers, real estate companies, unnamed builders, and ordinary citizens that have contributed to the formation of both residential and commercial city fabrics. Regarding this dual heritage of Korea’s urbanization process in the second half of the twentieth century, Kim Kwang-soo and Cho Min-suk note that aspects of this second form of development was at one point encouraged by the government: “Because the South Korean government did not have enough capital to develop larger scale public projects in Seoul, a ‘Land Restructuring Plan’ was introduced in 1966 that was designed to encourage the private development of large numbers of small scale, speculative residential and commercial buildings.”

Jang represents this other side of Korean modernity in Sign, which has been overshadowed by the more spectacular modes of urban modernization undertaken in the country.

But Jang’s work is more accurately a patchwork of the effects of such small-scale interventions, which draws out the contingent, embodied, and aesthetic dimensions of urban life. In regards to Sign, it might be useful to raise Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the difference between “embroidery” and “patchwork” in A Thousand Plateaus:

A more significant distinction would be between embroidery, with its central theme or motif, and patchwork, with its piece-by-piece construction, its infinite, successive additions of fabric. … its space [patchwork] is not at all constituted in the same way: there is no center; its basic motif (“block”) is composed of a single element; the

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242 Architectural historian Lee Sang-hun notes that the distribution of commercial signs over the exteriors of ordinary commercial buildings is, in itself, a peculiar architectural phenomenon in modern and contemporary Korea that is not found elsewhere, which he calls as “the modernity of Korean commercial architecture.” Lee Sang-hun, “Framegwa p’yopi: Han’guk sangŏpkŏnch’ukūi kūndaesŏng” [“Frame and Surface: The modernity of Korean commercial architecture”], The Proceeding of Korean Association of Architectural History 2005 Conference, Seoul, Korea.
recurrence of this element frees uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of
embroidery.\textsuperscript{243}

According to Deleuze and Guattari, “patchwork” proceeds as a “piece-by-piece
construction,” with no central focus or hierarchy, but rather through an emphasis on its
performative and contingent processes that release rhythmic values rather than
harmonies. The repetition of the photographic units in \textit{Sign} operates like the squares in a
patchwork, repeating and releasing the rhythmic values of everyday life.\textsuperscript{244} But it is clear
that the rhythms in Jang’s \textit{Sign} work between the grid-like organization of the surface,
which resonates with an embroidery-like system of urban zoning and planning, which
attempts to divide the city into functional, aesthetic, and social hierarchies.\textsuperscript{245}

\textit{Spectacularly Trivial: Choi Jeong-hwa’s Anybody Anything Anyway (2004)}

Choi Jeong-hwa is an internationally recognized Korean artist, who has been
engaged with the Korean art scene since the late 1980s, and works across many different
media in order to explore contemporary popular culture. Choi’s essay, “Spectacularly
Trivial,” a one-page artist’s (autobiographical) statement, is a thought provoking account

\textsuperscript{243} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 476.

\textsuperscript{244} Deleuze and Guattari do not consider a partial impression or fragmentary image subjugated to the
broader domain, thus suggesting that we not to rely on the strict binary opposition between the part and
the whole. Instead, they consider the entire sphere of everyday world to be comprised of the myriad
fragmentary instances that are in no sense integrated as “a harmonious whole.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix
Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}, trans. Rober Hurley, Marx Seem, and Helen R. Lane

\textsuperscript{245} The idea of urbanism conceived by the government and the groups of architects and urban planners in
contemporary Korea is still resonant to the idea of city historically conceived by the modernist architects
in the early twentieth century utopianism in European culture, such as Ludwig Hilbreseimer’s idea of city
as a living organism, in which “the elementary cell” (an individual room) should be a coherent unit that
could formulate an “urban organism” in such a way that the relationship between a unit space and a
larger urban space is always organically related and coherent. Manfredo Tafuri, \textit{Architecture and Utopia:
of how he understands everyday life in a contemporary world that is inseparable from consumer culture. In it he relates how he sees trivial objects as a way to open up onto the extraordinary dimensions of the everyday:

I was told by my mother that, when I was very young, I came in and out my house every five minutes. And, whenever I came into the house, I brought something from outside and left it on the floor. What I brought into my house were things like buttons, safety pins, threads, pebbles, colored papers, … All of them were trivial, but I saw them as dazzlingly beautiful things like jewels.

A tiny button that someone dropped off became thousands of plastic baskets, and a piece of faded pink thread became a hundreds-meter-long piece of fabric.

These short paragraphs illustrate how playing with everyday objects in his childhood, and his memories of that play, later become significant instances for his mediation of and meditation on the philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of everyday life. Things like buttons, safety pins, and colored papers are indeed “commodities” that are mass-produced, distributed, and purchased under the operative system of capitalism, and Choi is not ashamed to confess that he is a commodity “fetishist,” with a deep aesthetic and affective connection to them. He actively seeks to find ways that he can ‘re-enchant’ the world of commodities to which he has already become so accustomed. Similar to the way that one of the most prominent theorist of so-called ‘new materialism’ Jane Bennett finds “the liberatory possibilities internal to consumption” in analyzing a 1998 Gap TV

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246 One of Choi Jeong-hwa’s interviews shows his deep interest in the issue of everyday life: “I was more interested in objects that were invested with use in daily life, cheap gadgets and utensils that I encountered in markets and on the street, things that are ordinarily thought to be disposable.” Choi Jeong-hwa, “the Artist’s Voice,” Asian Art News 5, no.1 (January/February 1995): Korea Supplement, 10. Re-quoted from Shwu-huoy Tzou, Cultural-specific and International Influences on and Critical Perceptions of Five Asian Installation Artists: Gu Wenda, Yanagi Yukinori, Xu Bing, Miyajima Tatsuo, and Choi Jeong-hwa, A Doctoral Dissertation at Texas Tech University, 2000: 280.


248 Choi, “Spectacularly Trivial” (page number not indicated).
advertising called “Swinging Khakis,” Choi treats his everyday world saturated by commodity culture as an affective arena from which to release potentialities which can never be entirely overwritten by the systems that enable them.249 As is evident from his essay, Choi considers plastic objects to be “dazzlingly beautiful,” even though he is well aware that not only are they a staple of mass production, but they are also an environmental threat due to their persistent accumulation within our eco-systems. But in his attentiveness to plastic as a medium and form of mediation he transposes it into a sublime object that overwhelms its stable place within our cognitive and conceptual grasp. Besides officially exhibited artworks, Choi also pays attention to the minute instances of everyday experience through photography. In a photograph entitled simply “Image,” he captures a plastic basket on a city street containing colored straws, in which he is attentive to their asymmetrical arrangement (Fig. 66). As Choi makes clear in his statement, he is not just interested in objects by themselves but also the ways in which those objects are arranged, sorted, and used in people’s daily lives.250

Choi Jeong-hwa’s Anybody Anything Anyway (2004, Seoul) carries forth and elaborates on many of these interests first articulated in “Spectacularly Trivial.”251


250 Choi, “Spectacularly Trivial” (page number not indicated). “It is not that there are only materials and colors. I stick to figurative aspects. While figurative images generated by arrangement and accumulation are the most important parts of my works, people gave me the words “popular” and “kitsch” as the subtitles representing my work by simply considering texture and color. Why not seeing the beauty made by fissures and grains of baskets [paguni in Korean], instead merely focusing on the basket itself?”

251 Spectacularly Trivial (2008) is also the name of one of his artworks. It is a wooden door installed at the entrance to Arko Art Center in 2008. The design of this installation is quite simple: Choi gathered a number of discarded timbers at construction sites, and assembled them by making three different cubes of same size, to be put at the entrance, as well as making hinged doors that clearly demarcate the line between the inside and the outside of the museum more than before. In this work, Choi surreptitiously assumes a critical stance toward the serenity and authority of museum by adding the crudely designed door at the entrance, which seems not perfectly harmonious with the mood engendered by the presence
(Figs. 67-70). The Seoul version of *Anybody Anything Anyway* is one of a series in which the artist specifically assembles fabric advertising banners into large-scale advertising scrims. Other works in this series include: 1) the Copenhagen version of *Anybody Anything Anyway*\(^ {252} \) in 2005 (Fig. 71); and 2) *Elastic Taboo* exhibited in Vienna in 2007 (Fig. 72).\(^ {253} \) Kim Seung-duk and Franck Gautherot, the curators of *Elastic Taboo*, a group exhibition of contemporary Korean art, introduce Choi Jeong-hwa as an artist who is deeply interested in the activities of everyday urban life, and a contemporary nomad attentive to the indigenous commercial culture of Korea: “He [Choi] is a real lover of Seoul, and he collected the cheap synthetic fabric banners that constantly and illegally cover every street publicizing anything new that is offered for buying. They come in nice colors, and with the fantastic geometrical Korean Hangul alphabet whose lettering of museum. But this public artwork seems to loosen the rigid mood that prevails in the masterpiece, and it instead encourages ordinary citizens to become familiar with the space of institution.

\(^ {252} \) This Copenhagen version of *Anybody Anything Anyway* is basically quite similar to the Seoul version, which I will discuss in greater detail in this chapter, in terms of its formal characteristics and its relationship with the nearby environment. Perhaps the big difference between the two would be their locationality: the Seoul version is located in the middle of the downtown Seoul where one confronts the myriad other urban advertisements that are nearby; the Copenhagen version, however, is located in the downtown area in which one does not find such distracting commercial cityscapes. While Choi Jeong-hwa’s Seoul version of *Anything Anybody Anyway* can be an extension of the existing commercial cityscapes onto the architectural space, the Copenhagen version stands out in the downtown area, in which one does not find any dazzling, flamboyant commercial cityscapes at all. In some sense, Choi’s installation becomes part of the busy urban scene, a spectacular scene that is rather alienated from the prevailing mood of the public space, which has an entirely different cultural history of everyday commercialism in Denmark from the one in Korea.

\(^ {253} \) Both versions of *Anybody Anything Anyway* can be found in the category “public art” from the artist’s webpage: [http://www.choijeonghwa.com](http://www.choijeonghwa.com). *Elastic Taboo* is most likely the same kind of installation of advertising scrims on the exterior of a building located in Vienna, Austria. One interesting if very minor thing to note is that *Elastic Taboo* is found in the category entitled “image collection” instead of “public art,” where *Anybody Anything Anyway* is categorized. Does this mean that Choi Jeong-hwa essentially differentiates *Anybody ... from Elastic Taboo*, even though the concept of the work and its practice are mostly the same? Or, does the artist deliberately ignore any conventional categorization that he has assigned, thereby fusing the line between public art and image collection, as if the representation of public art can be no more than an image collection, and vice versa?
submerges the whole cityscape.” These fabric banners are often cheaply made by anyone who would like to advertise a product or event, and they are denigrated as visual pollution and a prime example of urban degeneration, which government officials endeavor to remove.

Choi proceeded to display those collected fabric banners on an advertising scrim affixed to the surface of a building that is often considered one of the architectural masterpieces in the historiography of Korean modern architecture: the *Arko Art Center* designed by Kim Swoo-keun in 1979. It is a pared down building comprised of a series of geometrical masses of varying sizes clad in red brick. As architectural historian Jung In-ha has noted, Kim Swoo-keun was interested in creating a building that was an “enclosed but endless space,” comprised of variously sized rooms, which influences the diverse forms and visual rhythms of its exterior appearance. We can still glimpse these volumetric complexities from photographs, which were taken during the installation of Choi’s work. But these are predominantly masked and, in a sense, disavowed by Choi

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255 Kim Swoo-geun is a first-generation modernist architect who had once studied in Japan and came back to Korea where he actively practiced between the 1960s and the 1980s, leaving many significant projects of various scales and typologies. The main characteristics of Kim Swoo-geun’s architectural design can be summarized by his persistent search for the points of compromise between the identity of Korean architecture and his modernist aesthetics that was also partially influenced by Kenzo Tange. Some of Kim Swoo-geun’s representative projects include: National Buyeo National Museum (1967), Sewoon Commercial Complex (1968), Seoul Olympic Main Stadium (1977), Arko Art Center (1979), and the Embassy of the United States in Seoul (1983). Jung In-ha, “A Study on the Figurative Characteristics of Kim Swoo-geun’s Architecture,” *Journal of Architectural Institute of Korea*, vol.74 (December 1994): 166.

256 Jung In-ha, “A Study on the Figurative Characteristics of Kim Swoo-geun’s Architecture,” 166.

257 Jung In-ha, *Architecture and Urbanism in Modern Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013): 92. “Kim wanted to keep these places [in designing the Space Group building] as separate as possible while connecting them through intermediary spaces to form a continuous sequence. This is the essential diagram that guided the whole design process for the building, the totality of which Kim referred to as his ‘enclosed but endless space.’”
Jeong-hwa, as the scrim in its finished state completely covers the underlying façade. Put differently, the spatial complexity and depth evinced in the Arko Art Center is flattened out by the artist. Anybody Anything Anyway is thus also an example of the artist’s encounter with this architectural masterpiece, and perhaps an artistic gesture meant to negate and work through the mythic presence of this canonical building located in the busy Daehakro commercial district of Seoul. It is also an attempt to address the relationship between more traditional notions of architectural autonomy and the heterogeneous field of everyday life. Choi Jeong-hwa’s Anybody Anything Anyway simultaneously criticizes and acknowledges Arko Art Center as a space of institutional power, in his attempt to both harmonize with and increase the tension between the sublime beauty of the masterpiece and the chaotic display of advertisements on the scrim.

In order to investigate such a dissonant relationship between the museum building and his installation project, one needs to carefully read the detailed textures and linguistic expressions detected in the work. Similar to Jang’s photo-collage, Choi’s installation is comprised of a number of advertisement banners that were originally created by individual merchants and commercial agents, which were never intended to be assembled together in such an intense spatial proximity. Each banner is, in most cases, composed of the enlarged name of what is being advertised and a phone number, all in different sizes and typographies. There is no prominent use of images in Choi’s work. A banner with the title “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” is repeated four times in Anybody Anything Anyway. Two banners of that performance are located in the lower part of the installation, and are physically adjacent to each other, although their disposition is slightly differentiated in terms of angle. The other two banners are located at the top, and viewers
can see only half of them, as they are folded onto the rooftop of the building. This horizontally-oriented banner, which was normally displayed at pedestrian level, is now elevated and inverted upright in terms of its display, which requires the viewer to cock his or her head to read them. Another example is a banner entitled, “Munmyo (Sŏnggyun’gwan), which appears twice in the installation work. This banner was produced by the city government of Seoul to announce that the venerated shrine Munmyo from the Joseon Dynasty had tentatively been selected as a world heritage site. One of the two scrims is displayed on the wall both inside out and upside down, similar to the previous example, through which the artist continuously tweaks the representational system of commercial banners, thereby provoking different responses to them.

Why does Choi Jeong-hwa make such repetitions and subtle differentiations in the advertising banners on the scrim? Jane Bennett insists that “the ‘same’ repeats but with a twist.” Her point is that every time we encounter the world governed by global capitalism, for example in advertising, an example she specifically draws upon to make her argument, new affective and perceptive instances arise out of a seemingly repetitive system of commodity distribution, representation, and transaction. In this respect, Choi Jeong-hwa’s Anybody Anything Anyway illustrates that the world we live in is always differentiated, inflected, and multiplied in material and affective ways that can’t be captured by the sorts of repetition and uniformity engendered by commodity culture.

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258 Munmyo is one of the representative Korean shrines that prospered in the Chosŏn dynasty, which is located within the area of Sŏnggyun’gwan, the most respected national academy at that time.

259 Jane Bennett, The Enchantment of Modern Life, “But, outside of it, difference itself can persist within repetition; each rotation is recognizably close but not identical to the one before. In this spiral repetition, the ‘same’ repeats but with a twist.”

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Not surprisingly, Choi focuses on the atmospheric and affective qualities of sign languages inherent in those assembled advertising banners. In one interview, Choi has noted that he is deeply interested in exploring the onomatopoetic qualities of the Korean language through his artistic practice, which, he believes, encourages us to resonate with a city space that is predominantly driven by consumer culture in meaningful ways. Colloquial expressions such as bagul-bagul and aal-rok dal-rok, translated as “noisily crowded” and “multicolored” respectively, are instances through which the artist considers how Koreans associate themselves with the rich textures and affectivities of the everyday world.\(^{260}\) These affective and inflected moments are detected in *Anybody Anything Anyway* by the way that Choi covers the building’s exterior with a number of advertising banners, and invites viewers to look at various sign languages that are placed together on the same plane in greater detail, and which are highlighted by their differing modes of typography, size, lettering, and distancing.\(^{261}\) In this regard, curator Kim Hee-jin writes that “Choi collected not vessels, but ‘atmospheres’ … [s]mells of life, spirit resonances of life; he collects animated spirit resonances one by one.”\(^{262}\) *Anybody Anything Anyway* illustrates “forms of life” that are heterogeneous but also entangled together. For example, a government-owned advertising banner, which is meant to warn

\(^{260}\) This short interview with Choi appears in the *Elastic Taboos*, a publication based on the 2007 exhibition of Korean contemporary art held in Austria where his *Anybody Anything Anyway* series were presented. Kim, Seung-duk and Franck Gautherot (curators), *Elastic Taboos: Within the Korean World of Contemporary Art* (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2007): 62.

\(^{261}\) Although with a highly pejorative connotation, Michel Serres also conceives advertising as an affective driver that engages people’s sensorial dimension, instead of simply considering it as a material entity. “advertising images and phrases that reduce the access roads of our cities to a garbage can, a perpetual background noise with its deafening din.” Michel Serres, *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, translated by Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011): 49.

\(^{262}\) Kim Hee-jin, “Choi Jeong-hwa Conveys the Spirit of Life.”
against illegal parking on city streets ("Illegal parking control, CCTV under operation"), is put on the building’s exterior, adjacent to another banner of a chauffeur service ("Chauffeur services 1588-5596"), which is thoroughly commercial by its nature (Fig. 70). In another instance, a banner advertising a Japanese pop singer’s performance ("Amuro Namie") is grouped with another commercial banner that announces a sale of Burberry products ("Burberry, 70~50%, 3217-0141") (Fig. 70). By placing these banners that are drawn from many different urban contexts on the same place, Choi creates visual pleasure and tensions that are generated by the coexistence of all the different advertising banners in terms of their forms, contents, and agents related to them.

This odd coexistence of diverse agents of power transposed onto the surface of the museum building thus complicates the political dimension of *Anybody Anything Anyway*. It places two seemingly unrelated strata – the institutional and the commercial – together on the same plane, without subsuming either of the constituents to the other.\footnote{Such a coexistence of different subjectivities is also found in Choi’s other projects, including *Spectacularly Trivial* (2008), *Happy Together* (2008), and *Hachi* (2009). For example, in *Hachi* (2009), Choi Jeong-hwa’s installation project as in *Anybody Anything Anyway*, elements of the institutional and the everyday are put together and become a heterogeneous whole. Historically, *Hachi* has been used as the symbolic icon of the metropolis of Seoul, designed after the moment a growling tiger has looked toward the viewers, thereby giving them a sense of bravery and power. Choi Jeong-hwa was asked to design his own version of *Hachi* by the city government of Seoul, which was to be located in front of the Seoul Olympic Stadium when the 2008 Seoul Design Olympics was about to be convened as part of the part of the ongoing Design Seoul project. In completing this project, Choi used a number of discarded plastic water bottles that he collected from various places, including wastebaskets located in several different banks, for example, and pasted them upon the existing stone statue of Hachi. In this collage process, Choi compressed each plastic water bottle until it became a completely flattened piece, with which he was able to cover the surface of the existing *Hachi* statue made of stone, creating a visual effect where the plastic bottles look like numerous fish scales, especially when they reflect the sunlight. The resulting image of the so-called “plastic Hachi” (as art historian Kang Tae-hee called it) gives viewers a sense of the sublime. However it is ironic to note that such an aesthetically sophisticated design of Hachi is made out of numerous ‘junks,’ which again reminds us of the way that *Anybody Anything Anyway* was made by Choi. At any rate, it is important to be reminded that this “plastic Hachi” was well received by the city government of Seoul, as well as by those who visited the Seoul Design Olympics. Despite the somewhat satirical nuance inherent in Choi Jeong-hwa’s “plastic Hachi,” we realize that he was able to find a moderate line of mediation between what the city government expected from the project and his own}
Choi treats the *Arko Art Center* as an open field in which he audaciously attaches a number of cheaply-produced advertising banners in order to challenge the authenticity, autonomy, and aura generated by this institutional structure, thus aiming to deconstruct its mythic presence by indiscriminately displacing commercial “junk” on its surface. However, Choi Jeong-hwa also assembles those banners without forging a critical and resistant standpoint against institutional power in any explicit and forced sense. In this light, art critic Park Shin-eui has noted that Choi Jeong-hwa’s nuanced, often ambivalent, political position in relationship to institutional power (such as museum) resonates with some of the stances of Korean ‘new generation’ art of the 1990s. According to Park, “new generation” artists are often characterized as “simply enjoying subverting the old legacies in a variety of experimental modes involving pastiche, deconstruction, the body, disguise, irony, absurdity, and so on.” Choi however does not pursue this path either, as he considers his installation project an uncharted territory where those two strata can coexist in order to explore deadlocks and tensions, without resorting to binary positions, as if to say that this is where we must necessarily dwell in our contemporary era without the alibis of irony, distancing, collusion, or definitive resolutions.

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artistic practice as a mediator between the institutional and the everyday, thereby not completely dismissing the political dimension of the artwork.


265 As art historian Claire Bishop once differentiated “making a political art” from “making art politically” in her discussions of a Swiss artist Thomas Hirshhorn’s work, thereby considering Hirshhorn’s work as an example of the latter, we similarly find that Choi’s installation attunes viewers to a political dimension that has always been inherent in the space of the everyday, although he does not necessarily produce “a political art.” Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 123-124. "Hirshhorn is well-known for his assertion that he does not make political art, but makes art politically ... artists such as Hirshhorn are reasserting the autonomy of artistic activity as a separate discipline.”
Chapter 5: Commercial Signs and Mood in the Paintings by Manoel Pillard (1999-2008)

*Mood, Affect, and Seoul’s Nightscapes*

Manoel Pillard, a French painter who has spent most of his life teaching fresco and mosaic at the *L'École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris, first visited Seoul in 1998, and became “fascinated” by the city’s restless, flamboyant nightscapes, embellished with countless billboards and neon signs that spill onto the city streets.266 Pillard’s impressions led him to depict these neon spaces, which resulted in a solo exhibition, “The Nightscape of Seoul [Nuits de Seoul],” in Seoul several years later (2005) (Figs. 73-74).267 Instead of simply considering Pillard’s series of paintings as graphic representations of the city’s nightscapes, this chapter takes this body of work as an opportunity to speculate about issues of mood in relationship to commercial cityscapes, an aspect of urbanism that is seriously understudied in the Korean context in comparison to the attention paid to more obvious issues and topics of architectural and urban history. In doing so, this chapter will also bring Pillard’s paintings in conversation with Heidegger’s account of mood as a way of mediating and meditating on the phenomenological dimension of everyday life.

For the ‘Nightscape of Seoul’ exhibition, Pillard submitted twenty different oil paintings illustrating Seoul’s nightscapes comprised of bright neon lights, based on his

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267 This exhibition was held in the Pyundonamu gallery, located in Sagan-dong (one of the major gallery districts in Seoul), from April 22 (Friday) to May 8 (Sunday), 2005. Before having this Seoul exhibition, Pillard also had an exhibition of Seoul nightscapes in 2002, at the Korean Culture Center in Paris.
visits to the major entertainment-driven commercial districts in old Seoul, such as Chongno, Dongdaemun, Hyehwa, and Insadong. In an interview with the *Arirang* newspaper, Pillard noted:

On my first night in Dongdaemun, I was so fascinated by all the neon lights that surrounded me. The lights inspired me to draw nightscapes of Seoul. When I saw them, I could not stop walking, so I moved from one street to another throughout the night … [as well as] going to places like Insadong and Chongno.

In his paintings, Pillard scrupulously renders each commercial sign in great detail—including the Korean letters inscribed on them, as well as the effects of color, light, and shadow—evidencing a great deal of care and curiosity. Most strikingly, he captures the way the multiple neon signs create a particular mood and atmosphere in Seoul’s nightscape. Pillard’s expression of the city’s nightscapes is not only visual but also multi-sensory: he is attentive to “all sorts of smells from the small restaurants in the narrow streets of Dongdaemun,” from which he begins to create his own image of the city.

Originally from Paris, the modern metropolis in which Walter Benjamin tirelessly sought to find urban meaning through an attentiveness to the atmosphere of commercial culture, Pillard finds the nightscapes of Seoul incomparable to any place else in the

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268 My interview with Pillard (conducted in 2008).


271 “French Artists Thrive on Bars to Vision, Understanding,” *The Chosun Ilbo* (A daily newspaper), May 4, 2005 (The name of the writer is not indicated).
world, even to Tokyo, in which a myriad of neon signs predominate.\textsuperscript{272} He is particularly attracted to the Korean letters inscribed on signboards, which he finds more “graphical” than the rather “abstract” lettering found on signs throughout the Shinjuku commercial area in Tokyo.\textsuperscript{273} By learning how to read and write rudimentary Korean from both his Korean wife and students attending his classes in Paris, Pillard is able to discriminate and represent both what the sign means and their graphic impact.\textsuperscript{274} Pillard, however, is quick to clarify that he is primarily interested in the formal aspects of the nightscape, with a focus on “keeping pictorial order through composition, form and color, as well as opposition and contrast of lighting conditions.”\textsuperscript{275} However, as he has recounted in a number of interviews, he is also deeply inspired by the sensory and “atmospheric” dimensions of Seoul’s vibrant nightscape, which is best experienced by immersing oneself by traversing those areas of the city on foot or by car.\textsuperscript{276}

\textsuperscript{272} Pillard notes that “[n]ight of Paris is different. There is a very small amount of neon signs in the streets. Neon signs are present in only certain areas like the Champs Elysees and Pigalle.” (My interview with Pillard, conducted in 2008).

\textsuperscript{273} My interview with Pillard (conducted in 2008): “In 1982, I drew in Tokyo – I did a series of small pastel paintings in the Shinzuku commercial area that is full of pleasure and games of the capital … Those paintings featuring Tokyo are more abstract, and are very different from those paintings featuring Korea. In Korea, I wanted to be faithful to and respectful of the Korean letters, called Hangeul, as well as the different symbols of publicity. As a result, the paintings of Seoul are more graphical than the ones of Tokyo.”; Sohn Woo-hyun, the secretary general of The Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation, also notes, in his introductory remark to Pillard’s 2005 Seoul exhibition, that his nightscape paintings illustrate “the geometrical exquisiteness” and “poetic coziness” of the city. Sohn Woo-hyun, “A Message of Congratulations,” \textit{Manoel Pillard, “Nuits de Seoul”} (An Exhibition Catalogue) (Seoul: Gallery Pyundonamu, 2005) (page number not indicated).

\textsuperscript{274} Pillard notes that “Whenever I had questions over Korean letters, Korean students at my school in Paris would help me with them. They even helped me make humorous Korean titles for my paintings.” Park Chung-a, “Seoul Neon Inspires French Painter,” 16; Chung Jae-youn, “Alloktallok kanp’an … sŏurŭi pame hollyŏsŏyo” [“Variegated Signboards … Bewitched to the night of Seoul’], \textit{Chosun Ilbo} (A daily Newspaper), April 19, 2005.

\textsuperscript{275} My interview with Pillard (conducted in 2008).

\textsuperscript{276} My interview with Pillard (conducted in 2008).
in the atmospheric qualities of the city derive not simply from his private ‘feelings,’ but also from the “mood” of these commercial environments, this suggests that his paintings are complex modes of negotiating affects that are neither the ‘proper’ domain of a subject nor the external effect of the material and formal assemblages that comprise these cityscapes.

According to Heidegger, one of the defining features of mood is that it has always already existed in our everyday world, as it is neither artificially created nor subjectively generated. Thus, mood is a kind supplé ‘given,’ which allows us to encounter the world as a world in particular ways. Whether or not someone is in a certain emotional state, or in a seeming absence of such a state, he/she is always surrounded by, and “thrown” into, a certain worldly mood, in which he/she forms relationships with the surrounding world.277 Thus, as Heidegger writes, “we never master a mood by being free of a mood, but always through a counter mood.”278 Hence, our experience of the everyday world is always ‘colored’ and modulated by mood. At another point, Heidegger also notes that “[m]ood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something.”279 Mood creates a world that hangs together, thus allowing us to take an interest in it in the first place, and to begin to ‘make sense’ of it affectively before we might even be able to accomplish that conceptually. Thus, being ‘in’ a certain mood necessarily entails our perception of all the details,

277 Heidegger, Being and Time, §135. “The expression thrownness is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over.”

278 Heidegger, Being and Time, §136.

279 Heidegger, Ibid., §137.
textures, and tonalities that constitute the materialized world we live in. Being in a mood enables us to locate ourselves in the field of everyday life and find meaning within it, which Heidegger calls “association in the world with inner-worldly beings.” Pillard’s paintings are, similarly, a threshold between the articulated nightscapes of Seoul as material entities, and his subjective engagement with them as an artist, which opens up a larger affective territory in which the myriad relations between neon signs, bodies, cities, paint, and canvas are explored and negotiated. Heidegger clarifies that this ‘in-betweenness,’ or what I am calling a threshold, is a defining feature of mood: “Moods are not placed in the subject or in objects; we are, together with beings, trans-planted [ver-setzt] into moods. Moods are the all-enveloping force that comes over us and things together.”

Michel Haar also makes a similar point, noting that “[t]he tonality of each moment, that resonance which is never twice the same, which Heidegger calls Stimmung … [is] neither a purely interior ‘state of mind,’ nor a matter of fact, but rather a manner in which the world gives itself.” As Haar indicates, mood also encourages us to be receptive and responsible for the ‘manner’ in which the world gives itself.

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280 Heidegger, *Ibid.*, §67. “The phenomenological exhibition of the being of beings encountered nearest to us can be accomplished under the guidance of the everyday being-in-the-world, which we also call *association in the world with inner-worldly beings. Associations are already dispersed in manifold ways of taking care of things.*”


283 Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber write in this regard that “this world is neither the totality of objective facts nor a merely subjective experience. World is rather the human realm of meaningfulness that precedes the distinction between the subjective and the objective.” By the same token, Vinegar also clearly points out the in-betweenness of Heidegger’s mood that is neither subjective nor objective. “For Heidegger, mood can’t be reduced to the realm of psychological ‘feelings’ or any anthropological understanding of ‘lived experience.’” Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber, “Moods and Philosophy,” *Philosophy’s Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking*, edited by Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber (New York: Springer, 2011): 4; Vinegar, *I am a Monument*, 17.
Painting Seoul’s Nightscapes with Wonder

Looking at Pillard’s series of nightscape paintings, the most characteristic aspect one notices is that he depicts them as faithfully and meticulously as possible, while also trying to capture the impressions of his urban experiences. In order to faithfully depict the visual and linguistic expressions of street signs in his paintings, Pillard took a number of photographs of Seoul’s nightscapes, and used them as visual evidence, to help him recall and draw the signs in all their specificity. He moreover utilized a series of croquis drawings as a complementary means, in order to better elucidate the affective and perceptive responses to a given nightscape: “I contemplated each significant spot of the street for a long time,” Pillard notes, “and drew croquis on my small notepads for composition. I also took lots of photos for fixing my visual memory for a detailed description.” By using both croquis drawings and photographs in preparation for his paintings, Pillard attempts to mediate between his ‘subjective’ engagement with the vibrancy and dynamism Seoul’s nightscapes, and an accurate and ‘objective’ depiction of what exists out there in the city.

In Pillard’s Chongno IV (2008) (Fig. 75), he paints the spectacle of a city street, comprised of a number of local neon commercial signs. While he evenly distributes the signs throughout the picture plane, Pillard leaves a dark background, which makes the vibrant colors of the commercial signs pop out in a forceful way. Moreover, he carefully includes the Korean text on the signs no matter how banal: Hobak-chumak-taep’ojip (Pumpkin-tavern-pub), Tchimdak (steamed chicken), Hop’ū-soju-noraemuryo (Beer-soju free karaoke), and Tultulch’ik’in (Two people’s chicken). Without fully grasping the

284 My interview with Pillard (conducted in 2008).
linguistic connotations that each sign might have in Korean urban culture, Pillard intuitively understands that these signs create a particular urban sensibility. Although not visually prominent, one also notices the silhouetted images of pedestrians at the bottom edge of the painting where they inconspicuously blend into the dark background.

However, viewers can also find indications of non-representational qualities in the Chongno IV. At the upper-right corner of the painting, Pillard juxtaposes a DVD signboard, upon which the advertising phrase “I Love DVD, 영화관” [meaning a ‘movie theater’] is inscribed, with another neon sign of a billiard room that spatially projects toward the viewer. The billiard sign is designed with three vertically arranged balls painted in light blue, orange, and green. If one looks closely, it is clear that the three circular balls are free-floating in mid-air, as if magically suspended over the city street, rather than firmly attached to a sign extruding from the commercial building depicted in the painting. Pillard deliberately chose not to draw the rectangular framework of the sign, such that he was able to emphasize the textures of the DVD sign located right behind it. In the process, Pillard captures how the DVD sign’s neon elements change over time, by differentiating the subtle gradations of color as they transition from light blue to orange to green. Furthermore, part of the light blue ball begins to merge with the blue tonality emanating from the DVD sign directly behind. Likewise, the green ball on the billiard sign is visually connected to the bottom of the DVD sign, where the lighter hue of green flashes. Unlike the previous instance of the light blue circle, here viewers can see how the merging of two different hues of green creates a blurring effect at the borders, which engenders a soft tonality to the painted nightscape.

Pillard’s attentiveness to both geometrical exactitude and the sensory effects generated by neon lighting can be understood as a way of familiarizing himself with the textures and subtleties unfolding in these commercial districts. Pillard begins afresh, simply by being receptive to what these nightscapes have to offer, without making any hasty aesthetic and ethical judgments. Pillard does not assume, as David Harvey writes, that advertising is the arena in which ordinary sense making is replaced with desires and tastes controlled by commercial agents. Instead, Pillard explores these nightscapes as enticing and intoxicating environments that evoke a sense of wonder, which precisely can’t be entirely controlled and captured by capitalist structures. What Pillard focuses on is grasping the mood generated by the assemblage of signs. It is as if he were attempting to articulate an overarching mood, but one that vibrates with and is enabled by a multitude of singular rhythms and tempos expressed through his loving attention to the details of each sign. In the Kantian sense, Pillard is engaging in a mode of “reflective judgment” in perceiving the commercial environment, without assuming it through any ‘determinate’ ideas or concepts associated with the ideal image of the city. Because Pillard is so attentive to detail, one might say that his aesthetic perception of this space opens up to an approach that one might characterize as a mode of “ontological

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286 My interview with Pillard (conducted in 2008): “Despite much criticism toward the commercial signboards in Korea, I think signboards with diverse neon lights magnify the night scenes of Seoul. The kinds of neon signs widespread in Seoul are not found elsewhere. That is why they are part of the ‘Korean cultural patrimony!’”

287 Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity*, 287.

288 Aron Vinegar explains, Kantian reflective judgment is “an aesthetic judgment in which pleasure has no predetermined ‘bound,’ nor any a priori ‘concepts,’ that would assure us of its claims for assent.” Vinegar, *I am a Monument*, 163.
generosity” in that he allows the plenitude and excess of these environments to appear and be responded to in different ways.

Pillard’s attentiveness to the details of the nightscape as a means of recording his affective and perceptive impressions and memories of a given milieu, resonates with Heidegger’s insistence on the notion of “facticity” as the conceptual ground that leads us to speculate about the meaning of being in the everyday world we live in. Heidegger relates “facticity” in contrast to “factuality,” another corollary term used in his explication of mood and attunement in Being and Time. “Facticity is,” Heidegger writes, “not the factuality of the factum brutum of something objectively present, but is a characteristic of the being of Da-sein taken on in existence, although initially thrust aside.”289 “Factuality” denotes the constituents of the everyday world that are considered “objectively present,” something one can analytically approach from a distance. Meanwhile, “facticity” is “a characteristic of the being of Da-sein,” which cannot be objectively analyzed in any simple way. Instead, it is a ‘groundless ground’ upon which one begins to speculate about his/her ontological existence in the texture of the world. Whether or not one is really able to take those textures of the world as ‘signs’ for ontological exploration depends upon how receptive and attentive one is to them in their “ontic and existentiell way.”290 What Heidegger intends by the “ontic” is neither opposed to the ontological, nor external to it; instead, the “ontic” can be understood as the materialized version of “a pure expression of being” that is always near us, out there, but

289 Heidegger, Being and Time, §135.

290 Heidegger, Ibid., §135.
inseparable from our ontological engagement with the world. Pillard attunes himself to the enticing visual world filled with neon lighting, thereby trying to grasp both the representational and non-representational qualities of the milieu. Needless to say, this receptive engagement with the world is inseparable from gathering it into a certain configuration, and Pillard does not hesitate to reimagine the ontic and factual dimensions of these nightscapes in order to explore their atmospheric dimensions.

In contrast to Pillard, many critics and historians are more attentive to the indifference, flatness, and leveling down aspects of these urban environments than to their joyous or vibrant aspects. In his article “Why the Mood in a Room and the Mood of a Room Should be Important to Architects,” philosopher Herbert Dreyfus insists that the mood in a room is more or less self-generative, and thus cannot be fully manipulated by an architects’ design practice. The mood of a room is, according to Dreyfus, something that has been preordained and carefully crafted by architects, in such a way that one is able to predict what kind of mood it might evoke to those who are encountering the designed space. In contrast, the mood in a room is always undetermined and changeable, and is thereby dependent on the kinds of activities and events spontaneously unfolding with them. Dreyfus’s contrast between the moods in and of a room, first of all, suggests that architects need to be more attentive to the experiential dimension of space. Mood is not so much manipulated by architects’ design practice, no matter how sophisticated their work might be, but rather is shaped by the interrelationship between their designed work

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and people’s activities occurring in it. Acknowledging that the scholarship of mood has been largely ignored in the discipline of architecture, as well as in philosophical debates, Dreyfus opens up the issue of mood in further speculating on the spontaneity and indeterminacy of architectural space in the contemporary era, thereby evoking the significance of the immaterial, affective dimensions of space.292

One flaw in Dreyfus’ account is that he seems to have a highly traditional and organic sense of mood, which is predicated on exactly the designed events he claims to be critiquing. By stressing how “focal practices” such as family gatherings and baseball games generate a shared mood, thereby engendering “a self-contained world,” Dreyfus considers commercialized places such as McDonald’s and airport lounges as places where such ‘focal practices’ are unlikely to occur.293 Dreyfus excludes the possibility of such moods unfolding in urban environments where there is a more dispersed and aleatory mode of contact between people and their material world that does not necessarily generate any “self-sufficient world.”294 But it seems highly problematic to assume that an airport lounge — a bustling environment where a multitude of people are coming and going to various locations around the world — or a McDonald’s restaurant— is inimicable to discussions of mood and community. It is far from impossible to imagine a situation in a McDonald’s where a conversation can strike up about a presidential election between total strangers. This kind of environment might even encourage such

292 Dreyfus, Ibid., 23. “Clearly, moods are important for making situations matter and it’s important to design spaces that encourage appropriate moods. Yet in writings on architecture, and in philosophical debates, moods have been largely ignored.”

293 Dreyfus, Ibid., 36-37. “They are not likely to occur at a McDonald’s nor in an airport lounge, but they can occur in homes and churches, and also baseball games.”

294 Dreyfus, Ibid., 36. “… with the possible exception of our modern sense of moods as fleeting and private.”
contacts and exchanges. Likewise, we could easily imagine the excitement and joy waiting for a flight to take off, or the anticipation as we wait to welcome a returning friend or loved one, as well as boredom, anger, alienation and fear. Again it is precisely the liminal and commercial condition of the airport that enables us to move between such moods. In fact, one might argue that it is precisely the world of our everyday, uncanny, and ‘distracting’ spaces that need to be attended to and respected with the same degree of ethical import that Dreyfus elucidates in terms of mood “in” spaces, which can accommodate ‘focal practices.’

While the components of Pillard’s paintings derive from cityscapes that are familiar to Korean citizens, comprised of images of commercial signs and their lighting effects, the resulting images offer viewers a somewhat unfamiliar and uncanny sense of these places. If Freud defined the uncanny as “[w]hat one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open,” what we see from Pillard’s nightscape paintings is not so much the disclosure of something that was completely hidden, but rather a slight distortion of the ordinary fabric of the cityscape that has always been present and near. The painting Kōriwa kanp’andūl (2004), translated as “Streets and Signboards,” shows the tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary in the Seoul nightscape (Fig. 76). In the signboard located at the right-hand corner of the painting, inscribed with the Korean letter Hŭnginhoegwan (meaning Hŭngin hall), presumably a Korean-style barbeque restaurant, Pillard warps the letters in subtle ways.

295 Heidegger, Being and Time, §178. “However, alienation cannot mean that Da-sein is factically torn away from itself. On the contrary, this alienation drives Da-sein into a kind of being intent upon the most exaggerated ‘self-dissection’ which tries out all kinds of possibilities of interpretation, ...”

The first character Hŭng (written as 홍 on the signboard) is slightly aligned to the left, in relationship to the central axis and the three other characters, while the second character in (인 in Korean) is located on the central axis, but it is rendered smaller than the first one. In addition, the final consonant (ㄴ) of the second character is bent slightly upward, which makes the character even smaller than usual. The reduced size of the second character is, again, contrasted to the third and fourth characters hoe (회) and gwan (관) that appear relatively larger than the first two. The resulting effect is that the last two characters are more emphasized than the first two, which linguistically implies that viewers are to pay attention to the generic term ‘hall’ (회관) as opposed to the specific name of the restaurant (흥인).

The fact that Korean is still a foreign language to Pillard, perhaps enables him to pay closer attention to the graphic dimensions of language over its linguistic ‘meaning.’ In turn, this renders the cityscape in a different light, so that viewers are enchanted or reenchanted with it, thus encouraging curiosity. Pillard creates a sort of intimate distance from the hurly-burly of the city space full of commercial signs in Korean cities through his practice of photography, thereby defamiliarizing it in order to meditate on its urban meanings in a calm manner.²⁹⁷ Heidegger notes that “not-staying” and “distraction” are two primary characteristics of one’s being-in-the-world with curiosity, and these come together in Pillard’s movements through the commercial nightscapes of Seoul.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Heidegger, Being and Time, §173.
Pillard’s foreignness to the Korean language, and his ability to experiment with it in his paintings, might also be fruitfully approached through Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a “minor literature.” In the chapter titled, “What Is a Minor Literature,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari write that “Prague German is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses.”

Being a Prague German, Franz Kafka does not write in perfect high German. By the same token, he cannot fully communicate with Czech who are not familiar with German, because Kafka is able to only speak and write fluently in German. What is more paradoxical is the impossibility of his *not* writing, which means that he cannot help but express his thoughts and affectivities as both an ordinary man and a writer, even though he is aware of the difficult position in which he finds himself. This is how Kafka’s work is considered a minor literature, a work that is written by a minority member who works in a major language (a Prague Czechs using German). The important point for Deleuze and Guattari is that because of this linguistic minority, Kafka’s writing begins to invent new forms of expression by dismissing the metaphors and symbolisms that have been embedded in the German language. Instead, his writing develops what Deleuze and Guattari call “tensors” or “intensives,” which are produced in the “the incorrect use of prepositions” or “the abuse of the pronominal” in unexpected ways.

Pillard’s ‘painting’ (instead of ‘writing’) of Korean letters inscribed on signboards is also a deterritorialization of their linguistic

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300 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 16. “... the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise.”

301 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 22-23.
meanings, thereby inviting viewers to focus on the internal rhythms, distortions, and inflections generated within his series of paintings.

The Gray Everyday as an Affective Possibility

Through Pillard’s twenty different oil paintings of Seoul nightscapes, the artist pays attention to two seemingly different types of urban moods: one lively and joyous, the other toned-down and desolate. If Chongno IV (2008) depicts the active nightscape in rendered in intense color and dynamic composition, Kōriwa kanp’andŭl (2004), depicts a monotonous nightscape with only a handful of neon signs that faintly radiate a subdued colored light that barely pierces the blackened sky. The dark, even tonality detected in this painting, as well as few others, does not necessarily mean that he considered those areas to be alienating or boring in any obvious sense (Some of these paintings include: Ŭduun pam (Dark Night, 2004) (Fig. 77), Hoejip (Sushi Restaurant, 2001) (Fig. 78), and Han’gugū siktorak (Korea's Eateries, 2001) (Fig. 79)). Instead, he considers both atmospheric moods as essential to his exploration of the diverse aesthetic dimensions of the city. As Heidegger notes, the seemingly pallid lack of mood is still a mood that is intricately entangled with our experience of the everyday world.

By comparing and contrasting two particular paintings Pillard has drawn on based on the same exact scene, Kanp’andŭl (Signboards, 2001) (Fig. 80) and Hyŏng! ŏjiga (Brother! Where are you going, 2001) (Fig. 81), one can see that he does not objectively depict the nightscape precisely as it is shown, but instead reflects on his affective and perceptive responses to it. Initially one does not notice any significant visual differences between the two paintings, which consist of a similar composition of the exact same
scene, where only a few different shops and their signboards are located alongside a narrow commercial street. The signs are for a pizza restaurant (피자투고), glass shop (로얄안경), pharmacy (약), barbeque restaurant (마포 숍불갈비), a pub (형! 어디가), and a few other shops whose signs are partially drawn. However, a close examination of the details of both paintings reveals that there are subtle differences between them in terms of composition, tonality, and color. For example, the pharmacy sign (약) in Kanp’andŭl is rendered slightly smaller than the one in Hyŏng! Ŭjiga, as well as in a different hue. Regarding the pizza sign (피자투고) located right above the pharmacy sign, Pillard depicts only half of its entire shape in Kanp’andŭl, thereby distributing those two signs visually contiguous to each other. Whereas, in Hyŏng! Ŭjiga, he renders the entire image of the pizza sign, as well as arranging it so that it is visually distinct from neighboring signs. In another instance in Kanp’andŭl, Pillard draws the contour line of the glass shop’s sign (로얄안경) with thin red lines, which contour the right and bottom sides of the neon sign, while the left and top are left blank. In contrast, in Hyŏng! Ŭjiga, Pillard renders the previously blank left side of the sign with spiral neon lighting moving from top to bottom. This clearly shows his attentiveness to the flickering movement of neon lights, which undergo subtle but perpetual changes at every moment.

This visual analysis indicates that, as our previous case studies have already addressed, he focuses on visualizing his affective and perceptive responses to the given nightscape through his paintings. Regardless of the overlapping urban forms and spatial disposition of commercial signs between Kanp’andŭl and Hyŏng! Ŭjiga, each painting is explicitly distinct in terms of the moods and affects that unfold. Thus, the experience of a
single place is doubled and becomes both tied to and disconnected from the painter himself, such that viewers are able to find a semi-autonomous plane from which to construct their own affective responses to the textures of the nightscape that he depicts.\(^{302}\)

His rendering of the nightscapes creates zones of resonance, which creates the conditions of possibility for a shared mood between the painting, the viewer, and the city.

The ways that Pillard depicts pedestrians in his paintings is also attentive to how mood arises from bodily engagements with the city. Pillard depicts the presence of pedestrians in works such as *Chongno 1*, 2001 (Fig. 82), *Chongno 2*, 2001 (Fig. 83), and *Chongno IV* (Fig. 75). In these paintings, however, they only appear as silhouetted images, backlit by neon and fluorescent lighting, such that it is impossible to detect any specific facial features or gestures. It is interesting to consider that Pillard’s deliberately sketchy rendering of pedestrians allow us to connect with them precisely due to their sub-individuality, as they are neither individuals nor generic types. In the Heideggerian sense, these pedestrians are the “They,” the neuter “One” that is indistinguishable, and is supposedly the caustic substance that dissolves particular Being. Heidegger carefully elaborates this point in section four of *Being and Time*, by providing a specific example of using public transportation:

\(^{302}\) Brian Masumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, no.31 (Autumn 1995): 84-85. “... the difference between sadness and happiness is not all that it’s cracked up to be. ... The disconnection between form/content and intensity/effect is not just negative; it enables a different connectivity, a different difference, in parallel.”; Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 3. “Tereza was born of the rumbling of a stomach.’ That is how the novelist Milan Kundera describes the genesis of one of his characters.”; Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 164. “Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them.”; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 317. “To express is not to depend upon; there is an autonomy of expression.”; Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 2. “In fact, it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities. ... Affect is born in *in-between-ness* and resides as accumulative *beside-ness*.”
In utilizing public transportation, in the use of information services such as the newspaper, every other is like the next. This being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Da-sein completely into the kind of being of ‘the others’ in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unacertainability, the they unfolds its true dictatorship. We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way they enjoy themselves.303

On a surface level, Heidegger is clearly pejorative in his account of the “they” which, not surprisingly, is articulated through his account of how ordinary people encounter each other within commercially saturated urban environments. In response to Heidegger’s discussions of “the they,” Henri Lefebvre notes:

    In so much as it is Being-with-one-another, Dasein stops being itself and the ascendency of others rids it of its Being, all the more so because the other is They, the indeterminate, neuter Man: in Heidegger, Alltaglichkeit opens the way to a loss of direction, to dereliction and disquiet.304

Everyday experience in city space is thus governed by consumption culture, which blatantly dissolves strong bonds with other people. Lefebvre understands Heidegger’s notion of the “They” and the “Everyday” as a rigid conceptual counterpart to Da-sein, and the space in which close communal bonds of community are rendered impossible.

    In contrast to Lefebvre’s interpretation, I would claim that Heidegger does not make any clear-cut distinction between Da-sein and the “They.” To the contrary, the “They” is vital to being in common with others in the everyday world, and it is never simply opposed to authentic modes of Being. Heidegger elaborates on this point, by writing that “[a]uthentic being one’s self is not based on an exceptional state of the subject, a state detached from the they, but is an existentiell modification of the they as an essential existential.”305 Heidegger is clear that so-called ‘authentic’ modes of existence

303 Heidegger, Being and Time, §127.
304 Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life (vol.1), xviii.
305 Heidegger, Ibid., §130.
emerge from our modification of the everyday and are not simply counter to them. The “They” as a generic entity is not a degraded version of a singular being, but rather implies a momentary becoming-other in order to resonate with the primordial condition of our being simultaneously in and out of a world. Thus, Pillard’s ghostly yet fully material pedestrians provoke us to think further about the possibility of connectivity and community and not just alienation and a ghostly loss of self or public sphere.

_Flickering Neon-Signs and the Temporality of the Everyday_

Thus far, we have looked closely at some of Pillard’s nightscape paintings of Seoul, by considering them as an opportunity for exploring issues of mood in neon-lit commercial environments. Pillard has a fine sense for the allusive and ephemeral conditions of city space, as if his painterly practice was a way of perceiving the essence of being in the commercialized world. It is important to emphasize that his nightscape paintings are first and foremost works of art that explore “nighttime” as a complex temporal dimension. In this regard, it is imperative to note that a number of Pillard’s paintings include commercial signs whose neon or fluorescent lights are in constant fluctuation, perpetually flickering or blinking, such as illustrated in _Haejukseon [Pirate Ship]_ (2004) (Fig. 84), _Ojingeojip [A Squid Restaurant]_ (2004) (Fig. 85), and _Saerowoon_

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306 In this line of thought, Heidegger also notes that “[t]he ‘I’ must be understood only in the sense of a noncommittal formal indication of something which perhaps reveals itself in the actual phenomenal context of being as that being’s ‘opposite.’” Heidegger, _Being and Time_, §116.

Technology [New Technology] (2001) (Fig. 86). In Haejukseon, for example, Pillard carefully renders the spontaneous and momentary neon flickering generated from at least two different local pub signs: Haejukseon (해적선) on the left side of the painting and Hof Town (호프타운) on the right side (also advertised with another sign where viewers can find its English words ‘Hof Beer’). In depicting the blinking neon sign of Haejukseon, Pillard draws a series of horizontal lines that divide the vertically extruded signboard into smaller rectangular boxes. Then, he visually differentiates some of the smaller rectangles by their colors, from lighter to darker, thereby marking different territories of tonal intensity to remind us that the sign is in constant flux. Even within each marked territory of color, Pillard meticulously expresses the varying degree of intensity and hue, thereby giving life and energy to the painted surface. Meanwhile, on the right-hand side of Haejukseon, the painter creates a more dynamic sense of time, by painting the ‘Hof Town’ sign, comprised of four different smaller advertisements, in bright blue, red, and white. Out of the four different signs, the flickering sign in the center illustrates the vibrant, dynamic movement of neon lighting. Pillard is vigilant in grasping the sign’s moment of transition from one part to another, by visually expressing the alternating rhythm of neon lighting between blackened arrow-shaped neon bits and full-brown signs with varying degrees of blue color. He renders some downward arrows brighter than others, while showing others completely darkened, so that he revitalizes the encapsulated, two-dimensional depiction of neon lighting painted on canvas, imbuing it with a sense of flickering intensity.

His rendering of the flux and movement of neon lighting is frozen in paint at a particular moment. The rhythms and tempos generated from these signs at each split-
second are rendered autonomous, implying that the lifecycle of each neon sign in such a commercial environment is independent from the standardized and natural flow of time.

Heidegger addresses this autonomy of time:

“Time evidently takes its regular course, unfurls almost like the regular pulse of some unassailable monster: sixty seconds in every minute, and sixty minutes in every hour. Yet does time consist of hours, minutes, and seconds? Or are these not merely measures in which we entrap it, something we do because, as inhabitants of the earth, we move upon this planet in a particular relation to the sun?”

Heidegger uses the term “entrap” in an active form, to suggest our capacity to freeze time in discrete portions that can be quantified. But perhaps there is another sense of autonomy that implies a letting be, that attempts to render a time that does not “flow” but is, instead, sporadic, dispersed, pulsating, scintillating, and entangled with the material forms of everyday urban life. This ephemeral sense of time, paradoxically, always exists in the present, precisely because it is untimely. Instead of being preordained by the idea of time that is infinite, which Heidegger calls “the vulgar concept of time,” one can concentrate on the singular moments of time that are evinced through Pillard’s depiction of flickering neon-light. What I think is so striking about these paintings is that it is precisely their fixity and stillness in paint that evokes their singular temporality and their ephemerality. Jean-Luc Nancy notes in a discussion of the everyday in relationship to

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309 When James Tweedie describes the blinking neon signs prevalent in Asian cities as “an enticing dream of the future city,” he is not fully attentive to the singularity of neon blinking that is always located in the present moment, only loosely bound by the standardized and institutionalized conception of time. James Tweedie, “Interlude 3: Neon,” Cinema at the City’s Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia, edited by James Tweedie and Yomi Braester (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010): 92.

310 Heidegger, Being and Time, §424. “The main thesis of the vulgar interpretation of time – that time is ‘infinite’ – reveals most penetratingly the leveling down and covering over of world time and thus of temporality in general in this interpretation.”
painting: “As soon as we make it [the instances of the everyday] appear—in a thought, a painting (just as one used to speak of a ‘theater of everyday life’)–we lose it, we make it come forth as an event, or we make an event spring up in contrast to it, eclipsing it.”

But would it be fair to say that some gifted artists are able to get as close as possible to “instances of the everyday” precisely through a painterly appearance? If so, then surely Pillard is one of them.

Chapter 6: Between Public and Private: Cultures of the Bang

Bang Culture and Commercial Signage in Korea

In the year 2004, an established Korean architect Chung Gu-Yon in collaboration with three emerging Korean architects – Kim Kwang-soo, Song Ze-ho, and Yoo Suk-yeon – hosted the Korean pavilion for the 2004 Venice Biennale Architecture Exhibition, entitled “City of the Bang,” which can be literally translated as “City of the room.” The architectural projects dealing with bang culture in that show, as well as other essays related to them, resulted in an unpublished catalogue of the same title.312 This was a pivotal moment as it marked the first time bang culture, which had been flourishing since the early 1990s in Korea, was thoroughly analyzed and explored on an international stage, thereby bringing both domestic and international attention to this particularly Korean phenomenon.313 Although the bang phenomenon was the topic of exploration five years earlier by another contemporary Korean artist Lee Bul in the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, where she presented an installation piece entitled Gravity Greater Than Velocity I and II, the 2004 architecture exhibition was the first time that the bang was not approached as an isolated spatial typology, but rather as an urban condition with profound implications for thinking about modern and contemporary Korean society.314

312 My analysis of bang culture in this chapter is predominantly based on the catalogue of the 2004 “City of the Bang” exhibition: Chung Gu-yon (commissioner), City of The Bang: 2004 Venice Biennale 9th International Architecture Exhibition (Seoul: The Korean Culture & Arts Foundation, 2004).


As Chung Gu-yon made clear in his introductory essay for the catalogue, their investigation of bang culture was an attempt to refocus attention on an overly weakened and suppressed public domain, due to the military governance and modes of censorship that had been dominant from the early 1960s to the 1980s, and which found renewed and altered commercial forms in the 1990s. “City of the Bang” provided a wider theoretical framework for thinking about the bang in relationship to the everyday, raising crucial issues of consumer culture, the relationship between the public and private sphere, tradition and modernity, politics, technology, and urban infrastructure. When encountering Korean scholarship on bang culture, one is often confronted with recurring phrases used to describe it, such as “the space of desire,” “a gift of multiple entertainment,” “a dividual space,” “a mutant spatial typology,” “a Dionysian space,” “a space of virtual reality,” “an escape from home into urban space,” “a living organism,” “a virus and an antibody,” “a community of online and offline space,” “a buffer zone between the ideal and the real,” “a borderline between everyday life and transgression,” and “an imaginative space.”

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Amateurs (1999) for the Venice Biennial. The piece features two karaoke capsules, playing classic love songs from the 1950s, accompanied by a video projection, ... both the karaoke capsules and the cyborgs are a product of the technological explosion at the end of the twentieth century, when the proliferation of multi-media entertainment and new technology deeply infiltrated into the realm of the banal everyday life.”


Literally translated as ‘room,’ the Korean word *bang* (written as ‘방’ in Korean and as ‘房’ in the kanji character) originates from a spatial unit that is constitutive of pre-modern Korean houses, which are typically one-story wooden structures, often tile or thatch-roofed, and comprised of a square-like courtyard (often called a *madang* in Korean), with multiple rectangular *bangs* (‘rooms’) surrounding it. ³¹⁷ Even though there have always been numerous commercial places where people can gather together in public and yet still feel a sense of intimacy and privacy throughout the modern urban history of Korea, 1991 marks the appearance of the first *bang* in the city of Pusan. ³¹⁸ It was a *noraebang*, meaning a privatized karaoke bar, and it quickly became a popular site of enjoyment by the public. ³¹⁹ This was an era in which the socio-political tensions between the military government and civil society were diminishing. At that time, South Korea was being driven by an increasing demand for democracy, accompanied by the increasing effects of globalization that had already started after the successful hosting of the 1988 Seoul Olympics game, and when consumer culture became a dominant part of everyday life within city space. As the *noraebang* became a popular commercial place for people to gather and enjoy singing songs in an intimate spatial setting, numerous other types of *bang* typologies gradually emerged, such as the *Jjimjil-bang* (public saunas),


*DVD-bang* (a privatized movie theater), *PC-bang* (a PC-game center), and *manhwa-bang* (a reading room for cartoons). It appears that the tradition of *bang* is primarily found in Korea and Japan. For example, there are similar entertainment places such as DVD-rooms and karaoke bars in Taiwan, but they are simply called an *MTV* (a movie television) and the karaoke bar a *KTV* (karaoke television), from which the same connation of a sense and experience of intimacy and privacy is missing, but that is paramount in Korean *bangs.*

In Japan, karaoke bars, which provide an intimate spatial setting for groups to gather, and Mangga Kissa (meaning a ‘comic house’), where one can sit and read cartoons in an extremely tiny space by oneself, are closer to Korean *bang* prototypes. These *bang* typologies are the kinds of place in which a wide range of people can gather together, regardless of their age, gender, and social class. And, there are other *bang* typologies that are associated with the prostitution industry, which are primarily frequented by male adults, including *hyuge-bang* (a rest room), *chŏnhwa-bang* (a phone room), *yuri-bang* (a mirror room), *yŏttŭkki-bang* (an eavesdropping room), *hwasangdaehwa-bang* (a webcam room), and *kayoseksŭ-bang* (a Korean pop-sex room).

It is interesting to note that the word *bang* is used not so much as an independent word but more as a suffix (‘-bang’) that is combined with other words to indicate the specific kinds of activities that comprise their place. And this naming is not so much

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320 Lee Kyeong-dal, "Han’gugūi pangmunhwa" ["The Bang Culture in Korea"], Maeilsinmun (A daily newspaper), April 22 \textsuperscript{nd} 2010.


322 Kim Myong-hwan and Kim Jung-sik, Sŏulŭi bammunhwa [Seoul’s night culture], 182.
officially designated, or carefully planned by architects and designers, but rather open to practical purposes in a way that one is able to personalize any space through giving it a *bang* designation. For example, in an apartment where there are different rooms, one may designate the character of a room by naming it as a study room (*kongbu-bang*), a playroom for children (*nori-bang*), or whatever activity is supposed to unfold in any given room. A personalization of *bang* has expanded from the domestic to the urban realm, where it has fused with the popular culture entertainment facilities that are widespread throughout the country. *Bang* culture turns the entire urban-commercial realm into an intimate and affective territory that is full of refrains, in which people continue private activities within the public domain, such as bathing, gaming, and drinking. In this sense, it is worth considering how closely Chung Gu-yon conceptualizes the *bang* phenomenon as a threshold to broader urban and architectural implications:

The *Bang* does not generate a new typology, nor is the *bang* accommodated in an indeterminate space. Instead the *bang* is in a constant state of metamorphosis to accommodate the banal but strict prototype of the building itself. It is fundamentally beyond the control of architect and planner: it is ‘other’ architecture without architects. The city of the *bang* leaps directly from the village to the city of information technology, without passing through the utopias of the modernist city and the revisionist model of the postmodern city. The holistic concept of a continuous and organic spatial configuration spreading across the city is replaced by the discontinuous and transpatial network instantiated by the emergence of the *bang*.324

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323 Journalist Kim Se-won notes that the French language makes a clear distinction between public and the private realm. The French word *chamber* indicates a room where a bed is located, which indicates the most private realm in a house; in contrast, *salle* means a designator that is followed by the specific function of space, which is similar to the way that the Korean word *bang* is used as a suffix (i.e. classroom as *salle de classe*, bathroom as *salle de bain*, living room as *salle de sejour*, and restaurant as *salle a manger*.) The difference between *salle* and *bang* is that, while *salle* is used to only indicate the public space, *bang* is much more broadly used so as to indicate both the public and private spaces. Kim Se-won, “Noraebanggwa tchijilbangŭi sahoeahak” [“The Sociology of Noraebang and Jjimjilbang”], *Donga Ilbo* (A daily newspaper), July 23rd, 2004.

Insofar as we consider the commercial activities of the Bang as constitutive aspects of contemporary urbanism in South Korea, as Chung Gu-yon argues, we are forced to acknowledge the fact that we are unable to define the city as a stabilized entity that is fundamentally controlled and regulated by the actions of architects and planners. Moreover, it is also crucial to note that in South Korea, where there is no tradition of architectural modernism equivalent to movements and official organisms in Western Europe such as the Bauhaus and CIAM, we must seriously think about the crucial role everyday practices of commercial architecture play in Korean forms of modernity, in which the role of architects and planners are not the driving factors. In this respect, the architect Min Hyun-sik considers the indeterminacy of the bang space as a possibility for overcoming the functionalist ethos of architectural modernism, and a way to acknowledge the aleatory and contingent nature of Korean urbanism.\footnote{Min Hyun-sik, Kŏnch’ugege sidaerŭl mutta: Min Hyun-sikŭi han’guk hyŏndaegŏnch’uk ilgi [Questioning the Epoch to Architecture: Min Hyun-sik’s Reading of Korean Contemporary Architecture] (Paju: Tolbege, 2006): 107-108.}

As Kim Kwang-soo pointed out in his article “The Other Public Space: The Korean ‘-Bang’ Culture,” the word bang needs to be differentiated from ‘room’ despite the similarity between the two. Kim understands ‘room’ as a predominantly private realm, an enclosed space surrounded by walls in which one is protected from the collective behaviors and communal events occurring on the outside.\footnote{Philosopher Edward Casey conceptualizes ‘room’ as a mediator between place and space. “‘Room,’ a word of very specific architectural significance,” Casey notes, “has also served in philosophical discourse to mediate between place qua topos and place qua chôra, and more generally between place and space.” Edward Casey, The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 313.} In contrast, he conceptualizes ‘bang’ as a semi-privatized social space, upon which a sense of
community is superimposed so that the line between the private and the public becomes blurred:

The name ‘-bang,’ which derives from traditional Korean dwellings, can be translated as ‘room,’ but does not have the private or personal implications the word has in western languages. This is because in Korean society, a ‘bang’ has been more meaningful as a space for ‘close interaction with others,’ than as a private space for an individual. As recent as 50 years ago, the concept of privacy did not even exist within Korea. However, the unbearable revolutionary changes within the residential culture caused by the rapid modernization and urbanization… effectively caused the following: the ‘bang’ which was subordinate to a dwelling space was ‘exiled,’ or even forced to ‘run away from home’ into urban space.327

According to Kim, with this movement away from the dwelling space and into urban space, the bang is no longer an isolated spatial typology, but rather a broader urban symptom and new public arena in which people begin constructing a sense of community by sharing the same leisure activities together, but not in any organically cohesive way. This kind of collectivity has not always been welcomed. For example, the architect Lee Kyŏng-hoon insists that the proliferation of bangs exacerbates modes of conflict between people due to their constrained spaces, as opposed to more open public venues where multitudes also gather in common without any necessary connection.328 In the same vein, the urban historians Kang Hong-bin and Joo Myung-duck consider the explosion of bangs as a degenerate, commercialized form of the public realm within civil society, and a mode of popular culture that signals the general lack of sophisticated discourse on the public sphere in Korea, which had been suppressed by strong military dictatorship for the past decades.329 But why not consider that the explosion of commercial bangs prompt


328 Lee Kyŏng-hoon, Seoulŭn dosiga anida [Seoul is not a city yet], 131-132.

329 Kang Hong-bin and Joo Myung-duck, Sŏul eseı [Seoul Essay], 41-42.
new kinds of public domain and senses of community that are counterparts to officially designated public spheres, such as civic squares, and other sanctioned public spaces?330

The blurred boundary between public and the private found in bang culture is also a valid way to understand commercial signage in the Korean urban context. As the case studies of the previous chapters have shown, commercial signage is not only a site of politicization in which multiple agents of power are complexly entangled together, but also an affective territory that exists beyond any interventions imposed by those agents. The series of sign renovation projects that the Korean government has continually conducted for the past decades, which are meant to be “public” urban projects, still retain a heterogeneous appearance, which is indicative of the continuing presence of individual shopkeepers’ gestures and voices in materialized form. The cityscapes comprised of commercial signs are often considered to represent the society of the spectacle; they are read as an indiscriminately flattened surface dissociated with the depth of inner space, in which passersby can lose their senses of orientation and place without being able to construct meaningful relationships with others. However, it should also be noted that many of those commercial signs are visually pleasing and communicative, and invite passersby to the various entertainment facilities located in each commercial building. In such sign-filled urban environments, passersby are not so much passive consumers, but rather active performers who continue to engage in relationships with others through activities such as drinking, singing, bathing, and gaming. In this respect, bang signs are contact zones not only between shop owners and customers in ‘real,’ lived space, but also between commercialized public spaces, and the private affective domains in an

imaginative sense. Although the visual aspects of individual bang signs are still important, what is more crucial to note is that the assemblage of all the different bang signs create an urban sensorium, from which one begins to make affective relationships between bodies and everyday city space. The multiple and overdetermined characteristics of bang signs thus defy any simple definition of commercial signage as merely a means of visual and textual communication, sufficiently explained (away) by commercial and ideological imperatives. Simply put, they require us to further think about the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of commercial signage in relation to bang culture.

Aignifying Bangs

Each bang typology has gradually transformed in response to changing cultural trends and social atmospheres, such that the identity of bangs has likewise transformed. If the noraebang, for example, was first introduced to the public in the form of a jukebox installed within a small, enclosed karaoke booth, usually located at the corner of a civic game center, it has evolved over time to receive a broader range of people, and thus became a much more cozy and intimate space than when it first appeared. And, as the competition between different noraebangs became more intense, the so-called multibang (multi-room) emerged as a new typology in 2006. The multibang is a room in which one is able to experience several different activities at the same time, including watching

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331 Not every bang displays the Korean alphabet bang (방) on its commercial signage in any explicit sense. However, in the context of the Korean urban culture, it is not so much difficult for one to recognize whether or not a commercial sign belonging to an entertainment place is considered a commercial bang. For example, a signage with the inscription of a “PC Zone” does not specifically indicate the Korean word bang. However, Korean citizens who are familiar with bang culture can immediately recognize it simply as a different way of naming a PC-bang.
DVDs and television, playing board games, enjoying karaoke, and using the internet. The multibang is an assemblage comprising elements of a noraebang, DVD-bang, board-game bang, PC-bang, through which the singularity of each bang typology is integrated and simultaneously generates a new kind of singularity. This is an example of how the noraebang has mutated and multiplied in association with other preexisting commercial bangs, thereby showing how plastic certain bang typologies can be. In turn, this new spatial typology is used by ordinary people in unexpected ways that are in excess of its different components. Now multibangs are not just used as multi-purpose entertainment spaces, but also places young couples frequent to have sexual encounters in domains that are less expensive and perhaps more anonymous, yet still intimate, than expensive inns and motels. The point here is not to make hasty judgments about these new bang environments based on moralistic grounds, and to explore a certain excess of pleasure, use, and occupation beyond the stable signification of bang typologies through what Deleuze and Guattari have termed an “asignifying rupture.” As soon as one imposes an identity on the noraebang, its typology evolves through the mutations of everyday commercialism, our active encounters with them, and produces unexpected behavior that is always in excess of any designated activities taking place within them.

This constant mutability of the bang typology and its use instructs us not to be overly dependent on a semiotic model that tends to predicate a fixed, mechanical relationship between bang culture as a signifier, and the various activities occurring

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within the field as the signified. The possibilities of the bang’s continual mutation and multiplication can be further explored by investigating the architect Song Ze-ho’s contribution to the “City of the Bang” exhibition (Figs. 87-89). One of his images included in the exhibition catalogue is particularly striking: it demonstrates how commercial bangs are both regulated by given forms, typologies, and consumer cultures and are also deviant from them due to the actions of ordinary people who experience them (Fig. 89). Song Ze-ho’s contribution is a fictional image of bang culture that assembles numerous images of both traditional domestic and contemporary commercial bang spaces and the activities occurring within them. At first glance, the image appears to be the architect’s radical imagination of the negative impact of what the wild and chaotic proliferation of commercial bangs has engendered within the domains of everyday life. Throughout the image of the bang, we encounter a number of pornographic images of women, and photographs that seem to be drawn from erotically charged video games, which one assumes would be played by a paying male client. Adjacent to such pornographic images, the architect depicts actual interior scenes of bangs, such as manhwa bang and PChang, where people are preoccupied with watching cartoons or playing games and barely interact with those who are seated next to them. At the far left corner we encounter images of traditional Korean paintings that depict scenes of everyday life. Specifically, Song Ze-ho reimagines the paintings made by a well-known painter of everyday life, Kim Hong-do (1745-1806), who left a number of famous paintings about the everyday lives of both low-class peasants and upper-class aristocrats in the late Joseon Dynasty. Some aristocrats are cavorting with Korean geishas in their

334 Song Ze-ho presents in total eleven different images of bang culture in the “City of the Bang” exhibition catalogue, from page 76 to 97.
private houses, in what is evidently an early form of prostitution culture in pre-modern Korea. So there seems to be an implication that Song Ze-ho is attempting to make a connection between pre-modern prostitution and bang-era manifestations of it.

This image also includes the scene of a child’s play room (noribang), in which an innocent-looking child is surrounded by colorful rubber balls that are intended to protect children from unexpected accidents. A fragmentary scene of a jjimjilbang (public saunas) is depicted in the lower-left corner, where a group of people are bathing and enjoying a cup of Starbucks coffee, juxtaposed with a still shot from the film Matrix. These bang images are all integrated into an idea of bang culture, spanning from pre-modern Korea to 21st-century consumer society, from urban space to a virtual reality. The size and form of each photograph are different: some are shaped as a perfect circle, while others are folded, and appear as distorted trapezoids, or slightly curved rectangles. By purposefully distributing these images across the picture plane and visually reconnecting them by a series of curvilinear pink lines, the architect creates a new network of connections between these realms. In the process, viewers can perceive the historiography of bang culture in Korea from a kitsch phenomenon towards more ethical and aesthetic interpretations of their imbrication in urban environments. Each bang image seems self-contained, and individualized, but at the same time they are all connected in such a way that the entire scene looks like a living organism. The analogy of bang culture to a biological creature is rendered explicit by phrases inserted at different locations within the image, which makes reference to both biological and technological achievements, such as the “human genome project” and the “world wide web.”

organism, it is one that has no pre-established direction of development, but is contingent upon a set of unexpected events and activities that critically influence the identity of this living, breathing cultural entity.

The white ground that subtends the image does not seem to “signify” Korea as a self-contained, pure entity, or as “the land of morning calm,” to recall two dominant and clichéd ways of representing Korea’s national identity. Instead, it proposes the possibility that everyday urban cultures in Korea, such as the bang, unfold across an indeterminate field, from which new sets of relations perpetually appear and disappear, thus creating a series of ephemeral territories. Song Ze-ho’s complex image-assemblage also definitively undermines the clichéd and idealistic interpretation of urbanism that dominates Korean scholarship, which always sees a degraded and comprised capitalist-driven urbanism artificially superimposed on a supposedly pristine and traditional pre-modern condition. His complex image undermines this conceit by demonstrating their complete and utter coimbrication. By deliberately dispersing the images of the bang in the image, Song attempts to create a field that lacks any spatial, ethical, or urban hierarchy.

Song Ze-ho’s fictional image of bang culture delivers a supple historical account of it, which is attentive to its mutability, but also to its real manifestations in its occupation of ordinary low-rise commercial buildings within the cityscape. The proliferation of commercial bangs is the product of an everyday commercialism operated by local shopkeepers’ commercial activities and financed by small-scale loans, which give rise to a specific building typology in which multiple bangs are located. These ordinary commercial structures are called keunseng; an abbreviated term for the longer composite word keunlinsengwalsisŏl, which in a literal translation means a
“neighborhood support facility” (Fig. 90). Keunseng are usually occupied by a variety of commercial businesses that are unrelated to each other, such as a church, bank, pharmacy, nightclub, billiard room, study room, karaoke bar, laundry shop, convenient store, yoga center, etc. As the research on Japanese urbanism conducted by Jorge Almazan Caballero and Yoshiharu Tsukamoto demonstrate, a similar building typology called a zakkyo is also found in Japanese cities, which means a “coexisting miscellany,” which refers to “multi-tenant buildings containing a mixture of offices and recreational establishments.” Although located in different cultural contexts, both keunseng and zakkyo represent the informal sector of urban architecture in both countries that are predominantly operated through local commercial activities, and which challenge any attempt by architects to protect the autonomy of the architectural surface from the penetration of urban advertisements. It would appear that the mode of financing and spatial occupation of these structures is most capable of fostering and responding to the contingency required to operate and, one might argue, experience these spaces.

Since there are usually multiple tenants occupying a single keunseng building, both their outer and inner surfaces often demonstrate a fragmentary appearance comprised of disparate individual signboards that are in constant transformation. Like the white background which supports the mosaic of multiple crisscrossing networks of


337 An architectural historian Kim Sung-hong offers an analysis on the stereotypical way that various commercial places are spatially distributed in keunseng, in which the seemingly unrelated places such as a church, study rooms, a billiard room, restaurants, and karaoke bars are complexly assembled together. Kim Sung-hong, Tosigŏnch’ugŭi saeroun sangsangnyŏk [A New Imaginative Power of Urban Architecture] (Seoul: Hyeonamsa, 2009): 295-296.

activities in Song Ze-ho’s imagination of bang culture, the generic, banal, and undecorated architectural surfaces of the keunseng offer blank walls of possibility for the colorful signage attached to them, and the myriad of activities that take place within them. The keunseng building is thus an undefined territory that is creatively altered by multiple tenants whose different advertising strategies directly influence the formation of the heterogeneous forms of its appearance and occupation. This emphasis on multiplicity and flexibility over hierarchical stratification is further evidenced by the fact that it is even difficult to identify a dominant façade on these structures because, in effect, in most keunseng there is no designated frontality. Instead, all the exterior planes are the “face” of the building. Likewise, the experience of interior space is often disorienting, particularly when they are large, multi-story buildings containing numerous commercial tenants (Figs. 91-92). As a result, one’s way-finding ability in such a building is not primarily guided though a predetermined map or even directional signs, but rather through a more aleatory perception signaled by a palimpsest of scattered advertisements and fragmentary images that a visitor might recall from previous visits. The understanding of this space thus requires a habitual mode of perception based on one’s bodily encounter with the building’s surface and interior spaces.

If we consider the proliferation of bang spaces in Korean cities not just as the radical commercialization of everyday urban space but as an extension of one’s bodily engagement in the public sphere through various forms of tactile experience (bathing, gaming, singing, drinking, chatting, etc), it is imperative for us to raise the issue of the body in speculating about bang culture in a deeper sense. In this respect, the anthropologist Song Do-young’s photo-based poem, entitled “Pieces of My Body on the
Street, or City of *Bang,*” which was included in the 2004 exhibition catalogue, is an important poetic meditation that offers a way into thinking about the broader implications of bodily perception in relationship to the city and *bang* culture. Song Do-young’s short poem is worth quoting in full:

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This is a story of my
body that lives in a city.
Roaming around the city
my body’s
Pieces,
I spread out.
suddenly waking up,
I can see a re-assemblage of those pieces
Sometimes I used to travel
deep in the city
or far away from city, of course
wherever I get to, my eyes are full of joy
my ears are dancing softly.
coming back home, I fall in dream about giving a talk to someone
so I write on my diary
the story about today’s journey to city of the *bang*.
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By displacing each line of poetry with a related image rendered on semi-transparent paper, Song Do-young adds other intangible images to the ones generated by the poetry, thus enacting the porosity of the different *bangs* as they begin to merge with each other through this poetic, oneiric, and sensory urban navigation. His way of representing a body is fragmentary and metonymic in its focus on the bodily loci of the senses, such as the ear, mouth, eye, and nose, images of which he distributes throughout the textual/visual assemblage.

What is most interesting is that his manner of representing those bodily organs is accompanied with a text that does not have any direct correlation to it. For instance, an extreme close-up of an eye, disconnected from its body in his photo-essay, is placed next

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to the phrase “suddenly waking up,” from which one is hard-pressed to draw on any explicit meaning. Thus, we are not guided to identify organs as “part” of an organic human body, but rather as an apparatus-perceiving-organ disconnected from a specific body, and deeply imbricated with city experience. Or, we are offered a close-up view of a nose inserted within the short phrase “I spread out” that does not make any explicit sense, or manifest connection between image and phrase, but rather provokes us to rethink how our sensation and perception negotiates between bodies, movement and commercially saturated urban environments. This “spreading-out” of bodily organs into city space surreptitiously negates any upright, complete sensing body in the conventional, organic and holistic sense of the term, but it does powerfully capture some of the effects of distraction, fragmentation, and dispersal that are characteristic of capitalist urban experience. As if to address this issue, Song offers a photograph of a very ordinary *keunseong* building in the later part of his poem, with numerous commercial signboards attached to its surface, including the phrase “I can see a re-assemblage of those pieces,” which seems to run counter to what is depicted, and seems to deliberately leave us in an ambivalent condition between falling together and falling apart. Here the scaffolding of classic Marxist theories of alienation in regards to the city are not entirely dismissed, but nor are they merely accepted. No amount of “cognitive mapping” will begin to make sense of these environments, and perhaps Song is subtly indicating that this is not what is desired or needed here.
Mapping the City of the Bang

If the signage that is intimately connected to the bang is seen neither as functional means of communication nor simply in terms of its formal and decorative qualities, but rather imbricated with a sensory dimension that cross-cuts the organic and inorganic, how can we give some specificity to this connection in regards to its manifestation in particular neighborhoods and cities? The signage connected to commercial bangs is “performative,” in that bang signs often include action words such as ‘singing’ and ‘drinking,’ which invite one to be actively engaged with the activities that are supposed to occur in those places. The signscape in Korea is full of texts and images, which one should conceive not so much as signifiers that mercilessly flatten out into a purely formal and semiotic realm, but are rather thresholds that enable one to experience bangs and other commercial environments.

In this respect, architect Yoo Suk-yeon’s project entitled School Park, also included in the “City of the Bang” show, is a good example illustrating the performativity of bang signs, and how their principles can be extended into their relationship to architectural and urban scenarios. School Park is the architect’s project for the design of a public school, which was to be constructed on the island of Jeju located in the South Sea off the coast of Korea. As its title implies, Yoo’s project combines two different spatial typologies, a school and a park, that seem to be unrelated. Yoo deliberately blurs the boundary between these typologies, thereby claiming to expand the definition of a school as both an urban park and a community space.\footnote{Chung Gu-yon claimed, several years before Yoo Seok-yun proposed her project of School Park in the 2004 Bang exhibition, that architects are encouraged to conceive school both as an educational institution and the center of a local community. In an article, Chung insists that designing the spatial organization of school requires flexibility and indeterminacy, which can thus quickly reflect the constantly changing needs of the modern city.}

She asserts an expanded definition of a
school, not as an isolated educational institution, but as a participatory field, in which school children and members of the local community can share their everyday lives together.\textsuperscript{341} The proposed project represents a miniature city of kinds, where seemingly disparate activities occur simultaneously.\textsuperscript{342} The specific facilities that Yoo proposes to integrate through the project include: playgrounds, senior citizens’ centers, management offices, day care centers, local libraries, and gymnasiums.\textsuperscript{343} The contingency and indeterminacy of the spatial units illustrated in her architectural model is worth a closer look, as the architect has carefully designed each unit with various action words, such as “eating,” “cooking,” “playing,” “exercising,” and “dancing,” as the defining features of those units (Figs. 93-94). Although Yoo does not directly address the issue of signage through this diagrammatical model, one can elucidate similar principles explored in her project, in terms of spaces defined by “doing things with words,” and not as denotative or self-enclosed semiotic systems. They wait to be read and practiced in new ways and with different tempos and intensities by their newly invoked community.


\textsuperscript{342} Yoo Suk-yeon conceptualizes the idea of bang in her School Park project as a constantly changing territory that is not subordinated by the hierarchical spatial design, thereby posing the set of contrasts between “fixed” and “changeable,” between “one-way” and “multi-way,” between “hierarchical” and “non-hierarchical and distributed,” between “intentional” and “accidental,” and between “tree” and “mesh.”

\textsuperscript{343} Yoon Doo-hyun, “Hakkyo kaebangae chumin’gongwŏnhwa haeya” [“Making School Open and transforming It into a Civic Park”], Munhwa ilbo (A daily newspaper), November 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2007.
In looking at the details of this diagrammatical model, one can see that the set of “action words” inscribed on its surface is not homogeneously laid out but is carefully differentiated in terms of their typography, color, size, proportion, angle, and the inscribed word’s positioning in relationship to the designated spatial unit. While some words are capitalized and clearly legible, others are not. For instance, at the center of the model, one can see the verb “WATCH”—which is indeterminate in terms of its corresponding spatial unit—inscribed in large upper-case letters, while other words adjacent to it, such as “eat,” “cook,” “research,” and “work,” are printed in much smaller lower-case lettering. Although Yoo does not articulate the reasons behind such visual differentiations, one can speculate that these typographical differences reflect modes of behavior in their imbrication with multiple affective terrains. But it is also crucial to note that a single action word is never repeated exactly in the same manner or in the same place on the model. For example, the word “exercise” appears multiple times in Yoo’s project, but does not indicate any specificity in terms of its use and function, although every time it appears, it is differentiated from other instances by size, proportion, color, and the thickness of its lettering. For instance, at the bottom of the model, the word “exercise” appears three times in a row. The one on the far left is inscribed in upper-case lettering in white, in contrast to another inscription of it in yellow, which is marked by narrower spaces between the letters than the one next to it. Right beneath the upper-case instance of the word, one finds two different words, “play” and “swim,” which seem to indicate the specific kinds of exercises that the architect has in mind for each spatial unit. Meanwhile, the word “exercise” is repeated once more in the right-hand corner of the model in lower-case lettering, but at a much larger scale compared to the first two. This
last inscription is not followed by any additional words, such that the specificity of the
word “exercise” is left indeterminate by the architect.

Density, and the lack of it, is another characteristic that marks the differing modes
of the spatial distribution of action words in the diagrammatical model. While most of the
spatial units are covered with several different action words, one can find some units,
which only contain a single word. One of the spatial units located in the middle is, for
instance, inscribed with four different action words, including “listen,” “watch,” “speak,”
and “LEARN” (only the last word is capitalized), all of which are densely assembled as if
this particular rectangle indicated a multi-sensory domain, different but analogous to the
sense of city space explored in other projects included in the “City of the Bang.” In
contrast, on the upper right side of the model, one finds another room where only one
action word, “work,” is inscribed. Each spatial unit has its own density comparable to
other units, which does not necessarily imply that the action is functionally isolated. But
why has the architect left such a prominent blank space here, while in other locations she
has visually elongated a word (e.g., “work” and “bath”) both vertically and horizontally,
such that a given spatial unit is completely filled with a single action word? In some
sense, I think, Yoo stops inserting action words in certain spatial units, as if she were
anticipating, and leaving the possibility open, for other activities and events to arise. She
carefully speculates about the activities that might occur in those spatial units; however,
at the same time, she does not attempt to dictate the characteristics of each unit in terms
of its functionality and spatial use. By treating the diagrammatical model as an open
arena where multiple activities can occur, Yoo registers a space that is at once
institutionalized and open-ended, and where the performative aspects of language are a participatory force in shaping the usage of a given space.

Yoo Suk-youn’s diagrammatical model is reminiscent of the series of “message maps” that Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown introduced in their co-authored book, *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972, 1977), a seminal text that addresses the conditions of architecture and the city in the postmodern era. Venturi and Scott Brown claimed that conventional maps of city space, such as land-use maps and distribution maps, which are often used for administrative purposes, hardly accounted for the striking “atmospheric qualities” of an urban location such as Las Vegas, which was visually enticing and spatially complex due to the plethora of neon signs along the Las Vegas Strip. In contrast, their “message maps,” which focus on illustrating atmospheric effects such as lighting and mood, were alternative ways of attempting to represent such affective qualities that could not be reduced to issues of space or morphology. One of the most striking “message maps” included in the book is the “Map of Las Vegas Strip Showing Every Written Word Seen from the Road,” which illustrates all the names of the commercial buildings and signs on the Strip inscribed and placed on the ground (Fig. 95). What this map emphasizes is not a geographical exactitude, but rather the density and intensity of the Strip in terms of the number of hotels, casinos, and signs that are distributed throughout the area. Instead of visualizing the actual shapes of those buildings, the map reflects the atmosphere of the strip by variations in lettering, scale, bolding, directionality, and palimpsesting, which offer a more effective way of showing the complexity and affective vibrancy of Las Vegas. This map is also comprised of multiple

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points of view, seen from a number of directions, in terms of viewers’ actual and virtual positions within the Strip. Likewise, Yoo Seok-yun’s diagrammatical model focuses on the ambiguity of everyday language and its imbrication with one’s sensory participation, which is contingent on the activities opened up by them. Both Venturi and Scott Brown and Yoo Seok-yun use the linguistic dimensions of everyday space to explore the affective, perceptual, and embodied complexities of urban experience not primarily through an attention to the meaning of words, but in terms of how they literally and physically make sense.

*Placing the Body in Bang Culture*

This chapter has examined how the *bang* culture in contemporary Korea can be a point of departure to explore the affective and perceptive dimensions of everyday life in the country. Song Ze-ho’s work illustrates that *bang* spaces cannot simply be considered the signifiers of consumption culture in which an individual’s behavior is preordained. Instead, *bang* spaces enable those who enter into them to explore a realm that upsets hard and fast distinctions between public and private, interior and exterior, thus creating spaces of possibility where unscripted events and activities can occur. In this light, I turn to my final example in this chapter, by looking at two works by the well-known contemporary Korean artist Lee Bul.

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345 Such message maps are also found in Korea, which are produced by commercial agents and citizens who want to illustrate their living places based on particular city elements. For example, a group of students who attended Yonsei University in Korea, located at the Sinchon commercial district in Seoul, made a series of message maps in 2007 and 2008, in which they compiled major restaurants, bars, and some popular commercial places that may help new students quickly get a sense of place.
Lee has produced a number of sculptural pieces and performances on themes of the human body in technocratic society, but only two artworks are directly related to bang culture. The first series, *Gravity Greater Than Velocity I & II* (Fig. 96), introduced at the Korean pavilion of the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, is an installation work that is performative and participatory by nature.\(^{346}\) It is comprised of two upright karaoke booths, which invite viewers to step into the enclosed space to sing, but also to follow a set of guidelines provided by the artist. Each booth is designed so that only one person can enter at a time. The booth is simple in its construction, painted white, and devoid of any decorative elements. The artist renders the edges of the booth as round and smooth, as if she were proposing a karaoke booth from the space-age. Lee’s design partially reflects earlier forms of karaoke bars in contemporary Korea, when individualized booths began to be popular in the 1990s. This is spatial typology where only two or three people at most could enter and engage in a more intimate experience.

When entering Lee’s *Gravity Greater Than Velocity*, there is a user’s guide instructing the visitor on how to use the karaoke machine. Comprised of five sequential steps, the first one – “Stand and Face the Monitor” – implies that a song has already been playing before anyone has entered the booth. “Please note,” the artist writes, “that a song is already in progress. This is normal. You have entered into an endless loop of songs that began before your arrival and will continue after your departure.”\(^{347}\) In the second guideline, the participant is offered two ‘choices’: either decide to enjoy the song that is

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\(^{346}\) Her other works *Cyborg* and *Majestic Splendor* were also displayed in the main exhibition hall, as part of the same show.

\(^{347}\) Lee Bul, “Gravity Greater Than Velocity + Amateurs: A User’s Guide” (a one-page guide describing how one is to use the karaoke machine; written by the artist and accompanied at the Biennale in 1999).
playing, or if not, simply wait for it to end. The third instruction allows one to choose a song to play while another song is already playing and almost finished. The fourth guideline states that, “[t]he cancel button will not work. There is no way to undo your accidental choice, [but follow what is playing].” The last (fifth) guideline, or perhaps thematic statement, is as follows: “every word you sing is an exhausted language, but it can still tell, without irony and without nostalgia, a story that belongs to you only.” This is an intriguing statement, because it notes that a song can simultaneously consist of an exhausted language that is common coinage—one might say, entirely clichéd—yet it can also be fully related, at the same time, to a singular affectivity and body. No matter what kinds of clichéd narratives may be played out in the video, users can “sing” them in particular ways that create a contact zone between their bodily affects, and the meanings and affects accumulated in words already spoken, displayed and exchanged within the commercial realm.

The disconnect between image and text in *Gravity Greater Than Velocity* is another characteristic to consider in terms of the cultural meanings of bang culture in Korea. Art historian Woo Jung-ah notes that what the video screen in the booth differs significantly from the lyrics of the song that constantly pop up in the monitor as subtitles

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351 *New York Times* journalist Ken Johnson noted that Lee Bul’s *Gravity Greater Than Velocity* represents the “programmed technological and cultural system” in Korean society. Another important point, which Johnson does not point out, is that one is not passively subjugated by the cultural system, but rather actively finds the points of resonance in contact with the narratives that are mass produced and technologically dictated. Ken Johnson, “Art Review; Lee Bul – ‘Live Forever,’” *The New York Times*, June 14 2002.
while the song is playing. Thus one experiences the work as an assemblage of disparate and out of sync elements.\(^{352}\) The monitor installed in the karaoke booth projects a video by Lee Bul, entitled *Amateurs*, which shows a scene in which Korean school girls in uniform are frolicking in a forest that resonates with the clichéd “love songs,” which are the only music genre available to choose from.\(^{353}\) Lee Bul does not provide any clear answers to how one is to respond to these multiple images, sounds, and narratives, as if to suggest that meaning is simply produced out of our affective engagement with these seemingly closed and depleted cultural clichés.

*Live Forever* (2002) (Figs. 97-101) is the second karaoke series that Lee Bul produced. In some regards it is similar to her earlier series, however in this reiteration, the video screen is doubled, with one screen inside the karaoke booth, and another large one placed outside the booth and in the gallery space. Another apparent difference is that we no longer see the upright form of a box-like karaoke booth: the artist has now transformed it into the form of a spacecraft, coffin, or futuristic race car.\(^{354}\) Instead of standing while singing, one lies supine on a couch-like capsule, which is much smaller than the 1999 version, but large enough for a single person. *Live Forever* is comprised of three karaoke pods (or shells) in a row, which are aligned in the gallery space. Each pod contains a microphone, headphone, and a monitor, so that singing a song in the pod does


\(^{353}\) “The karaoke capsule invites the visitor to accompany songs from a wide selection in velvet-lined acoustic privacy, appropriately reminiscent of ‘2001: A Space Odyssey.’ This piece is combined with the seemingly incongruous video projection ‘Amateurs,’ which shows fragments of Korean school girls at play.” Lee’s Gravity Greater Than Velocity was here reproduced with some modifications. An Introductory Page of Lee Bul’s 2001 Solo Exhibition, entitled *The Divine Shell*, held in the BAWAG P.S.K. Contemporary, located in Wien, Austria, from February 16 to April 1, 2001 (source: [http://www.bawag-foundation.at](http://www.bawag-foundation.at)).

not reverberate out into the gallery space. Art historian Kataoka Mami calls Lee’s karaoke pod a “fleshless body in which only the sensory functions remain.”

The monitor of each pod plays three different videos produced by the artist—*Amateurs*, *Anthems*, and *Live Forever*—none of which corresponds to the songs played in each pod. The monitor of each pod is connected to the large screen that is projected onto the gallery wall, so that the simultaneous projection of the three pods’ monitors onto the larger screen generates a visual spectacle of six different but intermingled narratives—three videos and three lyrics—in one space.

Curator Rachael Kent provides an extensive description of *Live Forever* and its implication in regards to issues of the body in Korea’s technocratic society and beyond:

*Live Forever*, Lee’s most ambitious karaoke work to date, comprises three karaoke ‘pods’ that resemble small, sleek white cars with lavish leather upholstery. Viewers are invited to enter a pod, one person at a time, closing the hatch above them and entering an insulated, private world in which they can sing along to their favorite tunes without fear of intrusion. Pop songs are presented on a dashboard screen, activated by remote control, and the singer’s voice is subtly enhanced using sound-optimizing technology. … The title of this installation is telling, suggesting on the one hand the live performance endlessly repeated, in different permutations by different individuals. On the other it suggests the desire for immortality, as embodied by the cyborg and monster, which we all aspire to—and which technology draws us tantalizingly closer to, with each generation.

As Kent notes, *Live Forever* is a piece in which the artist experiments with how a body engages with the entertainment machine, and how it performs within a technico-commercial realm that significantly influences the ways our bodies are experienced and

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356 Mami, *Ibid.*, 33. “For *Live Forever*, Lee produced three videos: *Amateurs* (1999), which features female high school students frolicking among themselves in a forest; *Anthem* (2000), which features an urban landscape with an elevated highway; and *Live Forever* (2001), shot in a hotel lounge in what appears to be a resort. These we may read as symbolizing respectively primitiveness/immaturity, modernization, and internationalization.”

represented, as well as the ways that private feelings are put in contact with the public
domain. As each performer steps into the coffin-like enclosed space, he or she is invited
to have an utterly isolated experience in it. However, he/she is also offered a way to
entertain him/herself by manipulating the karaoke system as a means to claiming his/her
presence in the public domain, which is then transposed to the large screen.358 Gallery
visitors outside the pods cannot hear the participants singing inside, but the projected
screen offers visual rather than audio evidence of their performance. This forces us to be
attentive to how we are exposed to one another, and how the ratios of our sensory
apparatus are crucial to such endeavors.359 Woo Jung-ah interprets this kind of exposure
in an entirely negative and alienating way, by excavating the etymological sense of the
word “karaoke,” which literally means “an empty orchestra” (kara [카라] means “empty,”
and oke [오케] means “orchestra”).360 By associating this implication of “empty orchestra”
as either a form of music that is to all intents and purposes “mute,” or disconnected from
its voice. Woo considers Live Forever as an exemplary simulacra event in the
Baudrillardian sense that what people ultimately encounter is an assemblage of
transposed visual and aural images, in which the singularities of the performers’ voices
and gestures—the ‘grain of the voice’ as Roland Barthes might say—are sacrificed. But it
is precisely this kind of emptying out, displacing, and reconnecting that forges new
modes of contact between the participants within the pods and in the gallery space.

358 “New Museum to Present Lee Bul,” Artdaily.org (an online art newspaper),
http://www.artdaily.com/index.asp?int_sec=2&int_new=848#.Ug53H7Qr_IU.

359 Lee Bul (an introductory page for Lee Bul’s Exhibition entitled Live Forever), Fabric Workshop and
Museum, http://www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/Artists/ArtistDetail.aspx?ArtistId=589b5af0-1883-
461d-9e69-1e8f2ebc0fcf.

360 Woo Jung-ah, Ibid., 111.
Simply put, Lee encourages us to speculate on the uncanny nature of how commercial culture forces us to think harder about our affective connectivity to each other and the spaces we currently share and would like to share in the future.
Conclusion: Commercial Signage: An Ethical Approach to Korean Urbanism

In this dissertation, I have explored contemporary South Korean urbanism in the new millennium, by taking commercial signage as a privileged way to explore issues of design, community, power, sovereignty, multiplicity, mood, affect, and public space. Contrary to the prevailing notion that considers commercial signage to be a disruptive and anarchic urban phenomenon, I have tried to envisage the ways in which its widespread dispersion throughout everyday city space, rather, reflects the diverse forms of life in the urban realm, which lie beyond modes of design and regulation that architects and urban planners have been preoccupied with in past decades. The resulting cityscape comprised of multiple commercial signs is spectacular, but the idea of spectacle implicated in the Korean urban context does not imply a unidirectional imposition of meaning generated from an external agent of power.\textsuperscript{361} Instead, it is a self-generative, spontaneous, unpredictable, and heterogeneous sensory world that is formed by shopkeepers, sign designers, government officials, local architects, consumers, passersby, and other related stakeholders.

*Design Seoul* was a massive urban design project primarily led by the city government of Seoul, yet its actual operation also depended on ordinary citizens’ intermittent participation, which ultimately shaped the project. Likewise, my case

\textsuperscript{361} By referring to the government’s overemphasis on the spectacular image for the recent government’s architectural project that does not sufficiently illustrate how it will be used and experienced in a daily basis, called the *Sejong Government Buildings Complex*, architect Seung Hyo-sang insists that contemporary Korea is still significantly governed by the logic of the spectacle, in the sense expressed by Guy Debord. Seung Hyo-sang, “Spectacle sahoeŭi p’ongnyŏk” ["The Violence of the Spectacle Society"], *The Kyunghyang Sinmun* (A daily newspaper), April 23, 2014.
study of Kwangrim Plaza sign renovation project demonstrates that the signboards arrayed on the building need to be understood as visual traces of ordinary shopkeepers’ day-to-day commercial practices, which constitute a vital part of the country’s everyday urbanism. Furthermore, the local government’s plans and intentions to clean up the visual appearance of the building were continuously frustrated, altered, and interrupted, and ultimately resulted in significant changes in negotiation with local shopkeepers. Park June-bum’s videos illustrate the subtle relationship between the sovereign, oversized hands in his videos, which attempt to reach in and manipulate everyday commercial activities, and the continuous unfolding of singularities that are unpredictable and alter with every performance of sign attachment that the artist makes. Those singularities are events creating a threshold through which one begins to perceive the phenomenological dimension of the everyday urban world. And each event, impression, or inflection is not just the result of a single individual’s isolated practice, but rather a complex amalgamation of the myriad practices and impressions generated by multiple participants including active, yet inorganic materials.\(^{362}\)

Not only is commercial signage an aesthetically rich urban phenomenon, it also poses an ethically challenging question as to how one can relate to and participate in contemporary Korea’s thoroughly commercialized urban environments. Because commercial signage is often considered as a cause and symbol of chaotic urban reality, it often leads to a conclusion that these environments need to be completely redesigned following a strict set of pre-established guidelines. Jang Yong-geun’s photographic

\(^{362}\) As Deleuze has noted, singularities are a set of events, but those events are “pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual,” rather than belonging to the dimensions of “denotation, manifestation, and signification.” Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, translated by Mark Lester and edited by Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990): 52.
practice begins with a skeptical, almost pessimistic, view of the complete permeation of consumption culture in Daegu’s everyday city spaces. In his series of photo-collages, Jang configures images of consumption culture and commercialized urban environments on the same plane, as if to suggest that we only begin to envisage how new patterns of sociality might emerge from our given environments when we resist trying to rise above them.

While commercial signage has long been criticized for its inability to foster enriching forms of community and meaning, one cannot help but acknowledge the fact that people find pleasure and comfort in these kinds of urban environments. The atmospheric and linguistic affects of commercial signage are an important point of mediation through which one begins to be attentive to the textures and subtle expressive qualities of our urban environments. We immerse ourselves in them as a way to begin mapping out new aesthetic terrains. Commercial signage – as a site of politicization, as well as a terrain where the singularities of the commercial everyday flourish–is the groundless ground, in which urban meanings perpetually fold and unfold in contemporary Korea.
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