University of Cincinnati

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I, Brian Y Kim, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture.

It is entitled:
Superficial Seoul: Cultivating the Episodic, Exotic, & Erotic in a Culture of Erasure

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Committee chair: Aarati Kanekar, Ph.D.

Committee member: Michael McInturf, M.Arch.
SUPERFICIAL SEOUL:

Cultivating the Episodic, Exotic, & Erotic in a Culture of Erasure

by  BRIAN Y. KIM
Bachelor of Design in Interior Design, 2011

A thesis submitted to the graduate school of the
University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

degree  MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

in the
School of Architecture and Interior Design
of the
College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning

committee chair  Aarati Kanekar
PH.D

committe member  Michael Mcinturf
M.ARCH

advisor  Aaron Betsky
M.ARCH

July 2016
Skin has become inadequate in interfacing with reality. Technology has become the body’s new membrane of existence.

Aggression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the present world, extending its limits without destroying it.

Near submimaries could be assembled in this belt of street technology, as some unverified cold-war myth had it.

SUPERFICIAL SEOUL

Collective can be pictured as bakers who ride infinitely at breakneck speed within an extremely limited space called “bong”. How could the collective chronological and spatial desire to be infinite be possible in any outside public space? Here is the paradox of the Korean public space called “bong”, which attempts to achieve infinity through extreme “finite-ness”.
SUPERFICIAL SEOUL
SUPERFICIAL SEOUL

CULTIVATING THE EPISODIC, EXOTIC, & EROTIC IN A CULTURE OF ERASURE

by

Brian Y. Kim
The incredible energy from Asian boom cities such as Seoul is rooted in the overwhelming density and culture within the city, supported by the underwhelming genericism within its urban form. This dichotomy of conditions has created a paradox in the city where identity is both precious and a commodity (a precious commodity) meant to be sold to the most efficient bidder. "Progress" was once the word for a brighter post-war future, but it has eventually turned into a symbol for urban disillusionment and neglect. For Seoul, this pinnacle of progress can be attributed to a significant piece of modern architecture that would set the impressive, and yet daunting, pace of the rapid urbanization of the city and its people: the Sewoon Sangga megaplex.

SUPERFICIAL SEOUL utilizes the controversial Sewoon Sangga site as a testing grounds for new urban experimentation that invert and amplify the specific spatial culture of the Korean “-bang” (room) that has become a reactionary by-product of the generic conditions of the city. Through this lens, concepts of erasure, transformation, and amplification will be expanded upon based on the foundations of the site’s loaded history and the city’s questionable trajectory.
THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE ALL FACTUAL, BUT THEIR JUXTAPOSITION IS ENTIRELY INCIDENTAL . . .
**SU•PER•FI•CIAL**

**adjective**
- existing or occurring at or on the surface.
- situated or occurring on the skin or immediately beneath it.
- appearing to be true or real only until examined more closely.

**su•per•fi•ci•es**

**noun** archaic
- a surface
- an outward part or appearance
Latin, super- (above) facies (face)

**su•per**

**adjective**
- of high grade or quality
- very large or powerful
- exhibiting the characteristics of its type to an extreme or excessive degree

**face**

**noun**
- the front part of the head that has the eyes, nose, and mouth on it
- the way something appears when it is first seen or thought about
SOUTH KOREA IS CURRENTLY THE 12TH LARGEST ECONOMY IN THE WORLD.

SEOUL HAS THE HIGHEST POPULATION DENSITY AMONGST OECD* CAPITAL CITIES.

*Nominal GDP is the gross domestic product (GDP) figure that has not been adjusted for inflation

*(OECD) Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SOUTH KOREA HAS THE **HIGHEST PLASTIC SURGERY** RATE IN THE WORLD.

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Procedures per 1,000 population, 2011</th>
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**THE FIRST MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN SEOUL'S URBAN MODERNIZATION WAS THE SEWOON SANGGA MEGAPLEX**
SOUTH KOREA HAS THE 2ND HIGHEST SUICIDE RATE IN THE WORLD.

“GANGNAM STYLE” WAS THE FIRST YOUTUBE VIDEO TO REACH ONE BILLION VIEWS*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
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<tr>
<td>PSY - “GANGNAM STYLE”</td>
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<td>Katy Perry - “Dark Horse”</td>
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<td>Enrique Iglesias - “Bailando”</td>
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<td>Miley Cyrus - “Wrecking Ball”</td>
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<td>Katy Perry - “Roar”</td>
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<td>PSY - “Gentleman”</td>
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<td>OneRepublic - “Counting Stars”</td>
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<td>Macklemore &amp; Ryan Lewis - “Thrift Shop”</td>
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<td>PSY - “Oppa Is Just My Style”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carly Rae Jepsen - “Call Me Maybe”</td>
<td>609k</td>
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*GANGNAM STYLE, number of views as of March 23, 2015 is 2,279,796,329
THE KOREAN WAR (UN) OFFICIALLY ENDED IN 1953 AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE KOREAN ARMISTICE AGREEMENT.

THE AVERAGE AGE OF APARTMENT BUILDINGS IN THE KOREAN CITY IS TWENTY-ONE YEARS.
THE INCREDIBLE ENERGY of Asian boom cities like Seoul depicts a fascinating environment that intensifies opposing conditions of old and new, movement and suspension, order and disorder, life and death. This type of urban situation of extreme density, erasure, and perpetual (over) development creates a social condition that is paradoxically reactionary to and reliant on its surroundings: a battle between losing the city (cultural identity) and being lost within the city (individual identity).

The motivation of SUPERFICIAL SEOUL is to tap into this tension through not only the city of Seoul, but a specific vehicle that is responsible for the velocity and by-products of the contemporary urban realm. This “vessel on the vast ocean called Seoul” is the SEWOON SANGGA megaplex located in the historic center of the city, and its by-products are the architectural infrastructure (keunseng) and spatial phenomenon (-bang) that has been created.

Possibly the most influential and controversial urban development in the history of the city, Sewoon Sangga (shopping center) was the first post-war modern project that set the tone for the urban fabric of the contemporary city, while simultaneously cultivating a culture of erasure through the city’s impressive and daunting trajectory. Could a city and its collective be understood through a single site and its resultant by-products? If so, should the site be held responsible/take responsibility for the present situation and possible future
outcomes? Should it remain a ruined monument of the past, or evolve hand-in-hand with the current trends of the masses? Or could it challenge the accepted rules, creating a new re-presentation and representation of the site?

This thesis doesn’t attempt to provide the answer, but possibly multiple answers via different modes of urban positioning, interaction, experience, and inquiry. Specifically, the treatment of an architectural icon that has quickly reached its limits, falling into a type of redevelopment nightmare, is tested by questioning the abundance of proposals that have either tried to maintain, delete, or coalesce the original icon. This is further tested by delving into the by-products of the megaplex icon, known as "keunseng" (neighborhood support facility) buildings and "-bang" (room) culture, that has become a type of infrastructure that holds the fabric of the city together and an urban defense mechanism that lives spatially within this infrastructure. Much like the favelas of Brazil and the row houses of Philadelphia, an architectural typology has the potential to become an infrastructural symbol once it establishes a level of adaptability to the point of being indefinite. Thus, the highly malleable nature of the "keunseng" has made architecture disappear into a "program incubator” wrapped within a membrane of visual stimuli (i.e. signage, image, technology).

THE NOTION OF PUBLIC SPACE must be addressed through an urban phenomenon known as "-bang” culture (translated as "room") that has cultivated since the rapid modernization of Seoul. Brought to light by architect Kwang Soo Kim in his essay "The Other Public Space", this spatial/programmatic phenomenon questions normalized western views of "public space" through the lens of the intimate room. Unlike the westernized notion of "room", the Korean people have created a new reactionary condition where the "-bang" was birthed out of a type of desperate escape from the urban congestion. Referred to in this thesis as "urban defense mechanisms", these "-bangs" are fluid systems that live within the "keunseng" and take on multiple faces and velocities. The spontaneous-turned-normalized condition of "-bang" culture in Korea immediately puts expected notions of public space into question: does public space only exist within a westernized version of broad open space, or can public events within private spaces become the "other public space"? Further, what if qualities of this intimate scale of "-bang" was augmented to the scale of a large urban room, resulting in micro and macro conditions that ping-pong off each other to amplify and subdue public activities. This popular type of urban defense will be tested and re-presented in multiple forms, conditions, and experiences throughout this thesis.
SUPERFICIAL SEOUL pushes for sites of urban experimentation - a city condition where it can continuously test the limits of the socio-urban situation, challenge trajectories that seem suspect, and re-evaluate conditions that have grown obsolete. In some cases, the results may be generic and banal or shocking and indecent, but it is through these uncommon paths that allow new perspectives to surface and liberate itself from predictable solutions. Through a continuous loop of contradictions and complexities, the city becomes a "petri dish" holding a culture (social) and culture (biological) close to a microscope to be constantly studied and tested - sociology in the making.

1 www.merriam-webster.com
Located in the center of the Korean peninsula just 35 miles south of one of the heaviest militarized borders in the world, is a type of SUPER CITY; super not in sheer size or scale, but in cultural input/output, demographic flux, economic resilience, density, paranoia, and transgression. The city of Seoul is temporarily home to almost half of the entire country’s population, packing around 25 million people within the ever-growing metropolis. Rising from the heavy effects of 35 years of Japanese occupation, made worse by the following Korean Civil War, few cities have experienced the rapid and dramatic growth that Seoul has conditioned since its post-war trauma. Caught between big brother nations, continuous threats from the North, and the struggle of maintaining identity, the Korean people found solidarity by focusing its energy toward an urban rebuilding mantra known as the “modernization of the Fatherland” (gender male specific).

Through this mantra, the powers of politics, architects, and the people would be showcased and challenged, projecting a socio-political-urban culture not afraid to react to one another, perhaps in the hopes of continuously having to rebuild and reshape itself. This perpetual cycle of identity, image, and technology has fueled a cultural phenomenon within the city referred to here as the SUPERFICIAL (via erasure, image, amplification). If we can divorce the immediate negative connotation of the known word and focus on its origins, “super” (extreme, quality, powerful, excessive) and “ficial” (surface, generic, obvious, shallow) combine to create a paradox that speaks
to the urban culture of Seoul and will be further explored later in the document. However, in order to arrive at the contemporary condition of Superficial Seoul, one must first understand, to some degree, the events and situations leading up through historical Seoul.

OTHER ASIAN NATION

Perhaps one of the most influential east Asian countries of today and the most forgotten east Asian country of the past, Korea was virtually untouched by western influence until the 1860s mainly because of outside perception of having little global significance. However, in the beginning of the 19th century the image of the nation began to change as a type of lynch-pin for trade and political positioning amongst surrounding powers, hence the looming shadows of the great nations began to close-in: Britain and France from the west, America from the east, Russia from the north.

Under the rule of Taewongun’s policy of seclusion, Korea would be dubbed the “hermit kingdom” because of its resistance to foreign trade in fear of becoming a by-product of western colonization and befalling a fate of social clashes like its neighboring China. Korea would be unhindered by the military threats from the U.S. and France to provoke trading, and would remain tightly closed-off from the west. In the same light, Japan would sign a treaty of friendship with the U.S. in 1868 and taper off its commercial treaties with the major western powers, while refocusing its energy toward infiltrating Korean borders. It is important to note here Japan’s ability to emulate Western civilization and further cultivate it to their economic and military advantage. This would prove to be the significant source of how Western culture would second-handly enter Korea via the Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945. Thus, the negative feeling toward Japan’s violent and intense occupation/ modernization of Korea is paralleled with negative feelings toward Western policy and influence.

JAPANESE INFLUENCE

Japan would officially enter Korea through a series of deceptions and treaties (1876 Treaty of Friendship) that would begin to evaporate the closed-off ports of the former “hermit kingdom.” Because of Japan’s aggressive efforts to infiltrate and occupy Korea, this would lead to a significant moment when Korea’s borders and ports would officially be open to the outside world. This new cultural influence would change the future of Korea’s social, political, and economic environment, while also creating the foundation of what the urban fabric is today. What’s interesting here is that although Korea resisted - to a great degree - the acceptance of Western and Japanese influence, it can be projected that a certain paradox was created in this intense situation. While complete sovereignty was greatly desired by Korea, without Japanese and Western influence it may have been considerably difficult for modernization to have
occurred within Korea but at the same time it greatly wounded the psyche and identity of a proud autonomous nation. This would be an unforeseen compromise of having to destroy a part of itself in the name of modernity.

During the Japanese occupation from 1910-1945, the introduction of urban planning and modernization took shape as a type of posturing tool for military and political power masked in urban redevelopment plans. The organic and meandering conditions of the city center of Seoul would experience a series of redevelopments to implement a more rational order of grids and linear planning in order to create greater access and urban activity within the core of the city. Japanese temples and monuments would be situated within this planning, and many projects would be built and still remain in contemporary Seoul. From Japanese rule through the division of Korea until 1960, this strategy would further take shape through improving road systems, registering land and housing, planning land use designs, and expanding the city boundary. This would lead to an inverse from mainly rural to urban population growth from 3.4 percent to 14.4 percent, even though 95 percent of the overall population still lived in rural areas. The thirst for utopian urban life would begin, and the urban modernization of Korea would be set in motion.

MIRACLE ON THE HAN RIVER

After the abrupt end of Japanese occupation in 1945 and following the devastating Korean Civil War (“The Forgotten War”) from 1950-1953, a controversial Korean leader named Park Jeong Hee would seize control via a coup d’ état of the Korean Second Republic in 1961 and rule the people with a heavy military power. Park would be a major figure and turning point for Seoul’s urban transformation by implementing a series of redevelopment plans that would result in rapid economic growth, which would later be known as “The Miracle on the Han River.”

Like a trifecta for social, cultural, and economic change, leader Park Jeong Hee would team up with mayor of Seoul Kim Hyun Ok (the “Bulldozer”) and architect Kim Swoo Geun in order to address the lack of provisions for the growing urban population. By creating major master plans and projects grounded in post-war utopian idealism, this would be the start of the formation of the future blueprint of Seoul. Park’s initial Five Year Economic Plan from 1962-1966 would turn into a prolonged almost twenty year plan from 1962-1981 consisting of a series of Second, Third, and Fourth Five Year Economic Plans (only to be cut short by his assassination in 1979). During this period, President Park would initiate the renowned “New Community Movement”, also known as the “New Village Movement” or “Saemaul Movement”, in an effort to modernize the rural South Korean economy. Officially launched on April 22, 1970, the movement would be based
on traditional Korean communalism which pushed for a type of local government and communal cooperation for the greater good of the community.9 Incentives would be provided for the villages that showed the most growth and commitment to the plan, and this would ultimately create a proactive environment where infrastructural and economic issues would be improved upon. The movement was greatly successful of decreasing the deficit between the rapid growth of major cities and the lagging rural small villages falling into poverty, but this would only sustain during the 1970s and early 1980s when the momentum of urban life hadn’t reached its peak. Once the country entered into a more developed and industrialized stage, the momentum of the movement would diminish and ultimately prove futile with the mass exodus of younger generations from the rural villages to the major cities. Further, major events like the 1988 Seoul Olympics would render the metropolis even more desirable, and demand more focus and diligence from politician and architect to redevelop and intensify the urban situation of Seoul. One of these major developments would be located at the heart of the historic city and be the major turning point within the urban modernization of Seoul: the Sewoon Sangga megaplex.

2 Ibid, 18.
3 Ibid, 23.
7 Kwak, Heui-Jeong. A Turning Point in Korea’s Urban Modernization: The Case of the Sewoon Sangga Development. 4.
8 Ibid. 3.
Going to watch Old Movies

Cinema Paradiso and the village hall movie theatre
Mussolini and Park Chung Hee
Italian neo-realism movies, and
The New Village Movement propaganda movies

In those days kissing scenes were forbidden,
They erased the dictator’s solemn expression
And drew on top of it a smile of black and white nostalgia

Travelling in time: the light fading in a film urging
Frugal mixing of grains with rice; there’s Korea, then called
The Eight Provinces of the Blooming Flowers.
Truth drains away somehow and the old Hell,
Without us noticing, mistily remains like a movie theatre in heaven,
We are sorrowful because we can never go back.
Every old movie seems beautiful

The sandwich board man leads me up the road!
The future died and reality became
The grown up Toto watching old movies through a rear view mirror,
Nostalgic for the neo-realist movies, he wipes away his tears of yearning

Cinema Paradiso! Sometimes a bridge on the Han River,
Just like an old film in a makeshift theatre,
Splits apart without any advance warning

- Yoo Ha
It is difficult to not be persuaded by the poetic nature of both statements and the apparent decency in which they come from, but aside from poetic intention, there is also a lingering sense of doom that accompanies the pedestal of precious architectural object. Fully in-line with the modern movement, the comparison of architecture as "vessel" and "soap bubble" presents a reading of architecture as an insular object injected with copious amounts of utopian ideals. The treatment of context as a striated "ocean" or "the result of an interior" further removes the architectural object from its surroundings by elevating architecture to a type of messiah caricature of savior and shaper of society. This disillusionment of modernism would eventually take form in the necessary backlash and dismemberment of architectural developments (Pruitt Igoe) and groups (CIAM) and become a trope of discussion as the wave of "-isms" followed.

Nonetheless, perhaps refocusing the conversation to the fragility of the surface of the soap bubble, and the diminutive scale of the vessel within the vast ocean, allows for another reading of modernist intentions. In this sense, if the exterior (context) were to resist the thin membrane of the architectural object to the point of deflection (and ultimately popping) what then of the soap bubble? If the vast ocean produced waves at the scale of monsoons, what
then of the vessel? If both leads to destruction, then what should replace the elements? Another bubble, another vessel?

Contrary to the heavy-handed urban utopias of Modernism, Corbusier’s attention to the scale of the intimate room seems to strike a different spatial awareness, one that does not demand the complete erasure of entire cities and cultures. Colin Rowe provides insight on Corbusier’s urban rooms and how “objects and episodes are obtrusively imported and, while they retain the overtones of their source and origin, they gain also a wholly new impact from their changed context.” Indeed, Corbusier repositions and reintroduces images, episodes, and objects that are held together by means of collage and staging within intimate spaces.

Prime examples of this “interior urbanism” are Corbusier’s Ozenfant studio (1922) and the paradoxical project of the Des Beistegui penthouse terrace (1931). In the Ozenfant studio’s main living space, three-dimensional elements collapse into a two-dimensional frame, and two-dimensional elements become appliqués to vertical and horizontal planes, blurring the boundaries of surface, solid, and sign. The ceiling grid folds downward as it becomes the frames of the window, the exterior exists beyond the grid and reads as a painted landscape, the mezzanine’s form is amplified by the juxtaposition of grid-to-curve creating an asymmetry to the space, the minimal furnishings are placed as objects on a canvas floating in their solitude.

Similar readings can be extracted from the Des Beistegui penthouse terrace (although more superimposition than collage) that materializes like a surrealist stage setting. Divergent to Corbusier’s more rational and brutal style, the Des Beistegui project was a departure for the modern architect where he would experiment with highly ornamental elements and intentional false readings of object, architecture, and city. The metropolis of Paris becomes an artificial background; the tree line, Arc de Triomphe, and Eiffel Tower are just barely visible beyond the new horizon of the white walls, they become “comical characters” of architecture and spectacle. The re-presentation of baroque furnishings and false fireplace against the unperceivable depth of the white walls creates a portal to another dimension—what is real, what is fake? One even begins to wonder if the almost too perfectly cut lawn is real or just another simulated plane of material. This type of architectural collage and superimposition contains an elusive undertone that forces one to reconsider normative objects and known contexts.

In a similar light, Kim Swoo Geun’s buildings and interiors also seem to reflect an apparent awareness that seemed to lack in his broader sweeping motions of urban erasure. Located in the Jongno-gu District and nestled amongst traditional Korean Hanok buildings, Kim’s SPACE Group of Korea Building (1977) has been heavily cited as the pièce de résistance of modern Korean architectural and spatial representation. Focusing on his concepts
of “ultimate space” and “human scale”, Kim created a labyrinth of compressed and overlapping spaces rich in texture, materiality, and program. Liminal and “middle” spaces echo traditional Korean spaces that create diverse thresholds and transitions between offices, sunken courts, gallery, theater, and reception centers. This intense layering of differing scales and material sensibility creates a very complex and intimate interior experience that challenges the architect’s heavy handed urban approach.

With these paradoxical projects in mind, perhaps the once “perfect and harmonious” breath should flow through an instrument that plays Mozart, or the breath is held to “play” John Cage. Perhaps the “vast ocean” is invited to flood the vessel and break embankments that then spawn new habitats and life-forms waiting for the next opportunity. In this light, we can begin to look at architecture as a type of active void and cultural repository where the built environment cultivates the circumstances in which events and experiences occur, and where an intentional reactionary relationship between architecture, experimentation, and environment is established.

"Creating a continuous dialogue with each other is very interesting; it might be the only reason for architecture, that's the point.”
- Cedric Price, Re:CP


"Creating a continuous dialogue with each other is very interesting; it might be the only reason for architecture, that's the point.”
- Cedric Price, Re:CP
November 17th, 1967

The moment of its completion was the beginning of its destruction. The Sewoon Sangga development was a post-war rehabilitation strategy for the historic center of Seoul that was desperately in need of urban development to help support the growing density within the city. The history of this site can be traced back to 1944 when the Japanese chose to erase a 50 m wide by 1.2 km long strip within the center of the Jung-gu district as a fire gap in fear of war bombings, and by doing so, created a type of scar in the middle of the district. With the abrupt fall of Japan and the end of the occupation, the void quickly became a solid by war refugees and squatters filling this area, bringing with them all kinds of illicit acts dealing with pornography, underground markets, and brothels. As part of the 1950 Seoul Restoration Plan, the solid - void - solid would become void once more as a means of implementing the large megaplex (returning to solid). In this case, we can see the site's history as a series of solid and void (or figure/ground) patterns, ending in architectural solid. Further, almost as if the megaplex retained memories of the site's past, Sewoon Sangga would also be notorious for housing illegal pornography and other illicit acts throughout its lifetime. With these factors in mind, could the fate of the building be held in the subconscious pattern of the site's memory and undeniably result in void?

“For the important reality has now become what lies behind. The matrix of the city has become transformed from continuous solid to continuous void.”

- Colin Rowe, Collage City

"The Case of Sewoon Sangga"
Jung-gu District Transformation

Late 18C

1907

1914

1917

1927

1958
Influenced by Western Modernism and Japanese Metabolism, architect Kim Swoo Geun envisioned the megaplex as an all-encompassing concrete micro-village borrowing from projects such as: Le Corbusier's Unite de Habitation, Kenzo Tange’s 1960 Tokyo Bay, SPUR's Asian City of Tomorrow, and Alison & Peter Smithson’s Golden Lane. The site runs perpendicular to the west-to-east flow of the city fabric and rests within the historic district known as Jung-gu. With the Jongmyo shrine to the north (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and the Namsan Mountain to the south, the site becomes a literal link between the important elements of tradition and nature, while also becoming a type of urban filter that hundreds, if not thousands, of bodies and objects move through on a daily basis. At one of these intersections is a fairly recent infrastructural intervention known as the Cheonggyecheon stream restoration project. This was a stream, turned highway, then turned back to stream (void, solid, void) project that allowed a green/blue belt to run through the center of the city. This provides an interesting condition at the first section of the megaplex where part of the destroyed building, remaining urban fossil, and new infrastructure all collide.

The structure of the megaplex is five bays wide and marches along the entire length of the site, only excluding the major street intersections. The facade treatment and heights of each section varies, but the floor datum and material quality all speak within the
same language. The interior make-up of the megaplex houses 48 different programs within 7 different sangga buildings, which include: housing, karaoke, clothing, art supply, sauna, disco ballroom, driving range, church, restaurant, pub, bank, dentist, CCTV, and etc. The bulk of the programmed space lives within the interior 3 bays of the column grid, while the flanking 2 exterior bays are utilized for car traffic below and pedestrian walkway above. The elevated pedestrian walkways were meant to span the entire length of the site, but unfortunately parts of the connections were destroyed or unrealized through its lifetime. Although the district has remained small to medium scale buildings, some parts of the district have incrementally grown in vertical scale, eventually catching up or exceeding the height of Sewoon Sangga.

MODERN FOSSIL

Monster, monument, fossil, “the ugliest building in Seoul”, by the time Sewoon Sangga was barely a young 20 years old, talks of its erasure was already in the air. This, of course, would not be a surprise in contemporary Seoul where the average APT (apartment) building lasts maybe 20 years. The cause for this conversation was because of the quick depreciation of Sewoon Sangga’s relevance and the lack of use for such a large development as a result of similar developments of this magnitude popping up in neighboring districts (Nakwon Sangga, Daewang Sangga, Yujin Sangga). The rapid acceleration of Seoul’s economy and urban development would leave the megaplex as a forgotten fossil. This is most apparent when the renowned head architect, Kim Swoo Geun, allegedly dismissed the project as his own, like a bastard child left to fend for itself.

Now, Sewoon Sangga is a middle-aged man in a vegetative state. Numerous redevelopment plans and visions have been speculated, but little has been implemented. “What to do with this monster”, is the ultimate question. Should it be erased, and if so, how much? Tabula rasa or a slow scraping? The first section of the megaplex has already been destroyed for the green belt plan that was quickly stopped because of further confusion and hesitation of development. Could the intervention then act like a type of organic matter, growing from the inside-out or outside-in? What about its immediate context of the Jung-gu district that has become a specialized programmatic asset to the city? Should the entire district walk hand-in-hand into complete erasure and allow the generic to take over? Or does the established culture become challenged, amplified, and resituated to allow new environments of experience, interaction, and exchange? Tapping into the culture (and counter-culture) is compelling. Large sweeping modern developments seem too obvious and hostile, but erasure is still certainly part of the culture, and utilizing the void is enticing rather than utilizing the solid. A partial example of this is the 1995 “Jung-gu city basic plan” where the option of demolishing Sewoon Sangga is finally presented. This was a fundamentally different approach compared to
prior redevelopment plans where the developers decided to keep the megaplex and erase the surrounding district for further modern and generic developments. But the 1995 scheme unfortunately still falls short in the fact that it pushes for the complete erasure of the fabric of the district, while including the megaplex (what remains?). What has yet to be seen is a proposal for the erasure of only Sewoon Sangga and the utilization of the important Jung-gu district as a type of anchor for the void, and the void as an anchor for the district. In this scenario, the void would act as a type of active grand alle and allow access and cross breeding between programs and specialized zones within the district, while simultaneously becoming a type of urban laboratory, much how the original megaplex was a modern experiment within the transforming topology and context.

DILEMMA OF THE DISTRICT

"It was in this labyrinth of thousands of diminutive shops that these wannabe scientists thawed their way into the electrifying world of electronics, a techno-topic horizon beyond the commands of textbooks. Nuclear submarines could be assembled in this belt of street technology, as some unverified cold war myth had it." - Hyun-Suk Seo

What has grown to be apparent since the inception of Sewoon Sangga is that it was successful in its mission to ignite the fire of urban modernization within its immediate and greater context; however, in doing so, an inverse condition of value between the megaplex and its district would be established. The fact of the matter is that the Jung-gu district has grown into a type of mythical cluster of controlled chaos, while the most compelling aspects of Sewoon Sangga is its success/defiance of expectations and degradation into a modern ruin (Tschumi). From figure/ground, the Jung-gu district reads as a heavy mass (body) housing a network of organic roads and alleyways (veins). From street level, the perspective is a total mess. People, signage, and technology all seem to collapse into a two-dimensional plane, but that is not to say this is necessarily a "bad" or negative condition. Almost immediately outside the bounds of the district (even just across the road) are modern developments of gleaming towers and office buildings that stand apart from the historic density and fabric of the Jung-gu district. This contrast is essential to the growth of a city that is beginning to lack the importance of difference. In this case, the district’s beauty doesn’t exist on parametric facades and overt architecture, rather, it lies deep within the district’s underlying complexity that has organically grown over time into an efficient monster of density and exchange. Within the urban chaos, there is an order that is respected by small and large businesses that rely on the district’s specific services and expertise in metal working, electronics, printing, and commerce. In fact, each of the four sections that the district is divided into has its own names and programmatic designations that are essential to the framework of both the district...
and the overall city of Seoul. Nested deeper in these zones are specific streets and alleyways that are known for their exquisite food, commerce, and specialty programs.

This special situation hasn’t gone unnoticed by the city developers, but ironically multiple strategies have been taken in order to relocate the businesses from the city center to the city perimeter via predictable homogenous developments of glass, steel, and concrete. This, of course, would prove to be faulty and irresponsible on behalf of the city planners since it directly opposes what the people and the urban condition is telling them. One such example was during the Cheonggyecheon stream recovery project from 2003-2005, when the government attempted to relocate the local businesses affected by the project to a new comprehensive building on the outskirts of the city in Jang Ji-Dong, known as the “Garden Five” development. However, even with government encouragement the occupation rate of the building would only reach 10% due to the expensive rates of space and the inefficient location and design of the building. Korean architect Kwang-Soo Kim rightfully has noted, “in Korean cities, reality always went ahead of planning, and planning always ignored reality.” Indeed, it is clear that the central positioning of the Jung-gu district is vital as an access point to all of the surrounding businesses within Seoul, and to try to remove or relocate the district to the edge of the city would completely destroy the built-up culture and specialized programs embedded into the heart of the metropolis. Further, this seemingly inevitable “redevelopment” of the district seems to loom over the shop owners and potential investors (which has led to lower production and economy), and this has undoubtedly cultivated a culture of confusion and paranoia in which no one seems to have an answer for. The dilemma is quite clear now: something must be done to resuscitate the district, but if it leads to mass erasure of the district it would result in the destruction of valuable industrial networks unprecedented in Seoul, and the further destruction of a cultural identity. With the stabilized modern economy of South Korea, are more district-scale developments truly necessary? As stated before, could the answer be in the erasure of only the Sewoon Sangga megaplex in order to allow the district to breathe new possibilities? Reminiscent of the Japanese modernization of Seoul, history may have to repeat itself through the destruction of identity in order to save identity.

4. Ibid, 96.

Below
Jung-gu District Program Zoning
Facing Page
One of many proposals for Jung-gu District redevelopment
TIMELINE OF RESISTANCE

1995

1997
1997 January 11. Ulsan, Korea. A 34-year-old Hyundai Automobile Company employee sets himself on fire in front of riot police, protesting the implementation of a new labor law; ultimately causing 90% burns to his body.

1998
1998 December 23. Seoul, Korea. Over 1000 riot police participating in an operation to storm and capture a Buddhist temple attempting to remove over 100 monks were met with intense counterattacks. The “rebel” monks were in conflict with another faction over the management of millions of dollars in Buddhism funds, and the opposition expelled them out of the temple and occupied it.

2001
2001 November 18. Seoul, Korea. Over 10,000 workers rallied to protest the government’s industrial restructuring and reduction of workers’ rest days program. A model of a government leader’s head was suspended at the site of the event.

2002
2002 September 13 in Seoul, Korea. 20 Korean young men cut off their little fingers in front of an audience, protesting then Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s decision to visit the Yasukuni Shrine.

2002 March 15. Seoul, Korea. A protester uses a propane gas tank to spew fire at riot police. Over 400 self-claimed decommissioned spies who were recruited by the intelligence department and trained to infiltrate North Korea staged a demonstration, demanding that the government give them compensation.

2002 November 13. Seoul, Korea. At a campaign rally, Millennium Democratic Party presidential candidate Roh Moo-hyun encountered a parade of farmers demanding that the government protect the domestic agricultural product market, and an egg thrown by demonstrators just happened to hit Roh Moo-hyun in the face.

2002 November 15. Seoul, Korea. At a campaign rally, Millennium Democratic Party presidential candidate Roh Moo-hyun encountered a parade of farmers demanding that the government protect the domestic agricultural product market, and an egg thrown by demonstrators just happened to hit Roh Moo-hyun in the face.
2003 April 2. Seoul, Korea. A large group of protestors clash with riot police, protesting the Roh Moo-hyun Administration deploying medical and engineering personnel to Iraq.


2004 March 22. Seoul, Korea. A Korean young man climbed to the top of a 16-story building near the United States Embassy and jumped off after a 4-hour stalemate with police, but fortunately falling onto an air cushion that was already laid out thereby only suffering light injuries.

2004 August 15. Seoul, Korea. In front of the American Embassy in Seoul, Korea, protesters tear up a large American national flag demanding the withdrawal of troops stationed in Korea and urging the government to cancel the order to send over 3000 Korean soldiers to Iraq to provide aid and reconstruction.


2006 May 2. Seoul, Korea. A local beekeeper stands on a Japanese national flag, using 187,000 bees covering his body to represent the 187,000 square meters of Dokdo (Japanese Takeshima), protesting Japanese claims of sovereignty over the islands.

2006 June 24. Seoul, Korea. A football [soccer] fan drops his pants on the street to show his dissatisfaction. That day, during last round of the 2006 Germany World Cup group stage, the Swiss team defeated the South Korean team 2:0. Korean football fans used 4.2 million emails to “bomb” the World Cup official website, believing the Swiss team had a handball in the penalty zone.
2007

March 1, Seoul, Korea. A decommissioned spy placed 5 dog heads in front of the Japanese Embassy, to symbolize those traitors who supported Japanese colonial rule and to commemorate the 88th year of the March 1st Movement.

May in Incheon, Korea. Protestors opposing the United States stationing troops in Incheon took a two-month old little pig and quartered it.


2008

June 28, Seoul, Korea. Demonstrators tore up a huge caricature of Korean President Lee Myung-bak. 2008 April, the Korean government and the United States reached an agreement on the import of American beef. Beginning from 2008 May 2 till now [2008 July], almost every night has seen over 100,000 citizens staging protests in downtown Seoul, believing that the agreement will increase the risk of introducing mad cow disease.

December 18, Seoul, Korea. Korean opposition party members use hammers to smash open the Parliamentary Committee's doors, protesting the ruling Grand National Party's plan to sign a free trade agreement with the United States; a melee broke out in the Parliament building.

2011

July 26, Seoul, Korea. Several dairy farmers wearing mourning clothes lit a coffin on fire and poured milk on their bodies, demanding that the government increase dairy prices. The Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement was approved by the United States Congress on the 12th, but for the agreement to formally come into effect still requires that it be passed by the Korean National Assembly.

August 1, Gimpo Airport in Seoul, Korea. Hundreds of demonstrators carrying three coffins, protesting Japan lawmakers insisting on going to the disputed islands, charge into the main hall clashing with security personnel.
The Seun Shopping Mall Kid's Love 1

Like I'm between a rock and a hard place, mind on fire
Howling like a coyote on a summer's day
Life depends on the sexual urge
I was hanging around that place – masturbation and despair –
Lusting after all forbidden fruit

Rows of stores with scratched up second hand goods
Consolled me. I was then already
An outdoor record player, my voice unrecoverable –
Olivia Hussey, Chelsie Chan and the starlight killer of that summer

Hunting for Seka the porn queen and pirated Beatles discs
Refusing registration tottering about in my search for the world
My mind chock-full of pirates
Pointing me to the song of the invisible road

"Blue" books hidden in the pages of my text book
Is the body of the devil I fell in love with
All sorts of credible truths are sucked into the naked body
The black hole of dark futility
Like the devil in the finale of sacred books
I wanted to be magnanimous but all I could achieve was
To despairingly evade death in the cramped cellar
Face to face with the romance of tomorrow

Tombs incessantly consume you waiting for life
Revolting in my youth, savagely wounded
I was overwhelmed by the assassin sunlight
The fever of the world penetrated into my bones and lit them
Forbidden life-enticing light invoke all of me from underground
I am the swindler of reason. Beaten spirit, cracked memory bod-
s I bargain away with the light of the stars.

The underground shopping mall of my mind is congested with the
cri of the coyote
Unlike a scratchy outdoor record player
I will sing a pirate song and love with the one-eyed pirate's eye.

-Yoo Ha
URBAN BETRAYAL

The Seoul Capital Area is the second largest metropolitan in the world and its population is at around 25 million people (and rising), which accounts for half of the country’s population. The magnetism of the city is undeniable here as the socio-economic surge of the capital city has swiftly grown within a single generation’s time. With this constant speed of development, the growth of the city is incessant to the point of being relentless. In this case, urban development does not automatically imply a more widely shared prosperity. Rather, this creates an inverse condition where the urban realm becomes a competitive arena of economy and status.

Could the seemingly limitless prosperity promised by the metropolitan image have all been a lie? In many rapidly growing cities, including Seoul, the access to a comfortable urban lifestyle is only available to those who can stay on par with the fleeting economic, social, and urban environment. The numbers game of economic and urban development all point toward a prosperous city, however, the congestion of livable (and affordable) space and the serious consequences of rapid urbanization presents a grim reality that questions notions of “progress” in the city. The original belief of “urbanism for the people” has turned into “urbanism in spite of the people”, where the metropolis keeps moving forward, despite the

“Sometimes the density of the city is unbreathable. So I need a breathing apparatus. The camera gives me the oxygen to survive the city. Definitely, I will survive longer than the Korean city in which the average age of apartment buildings is twenty-one years.”

-Young June Lee
disillusioned territory it may leave behind. This type of “urban betrayal” takes form in Seoul in the high suicide rate, low birth rate, and dangerous aging index (ratio of elderly people to children) that are all real factors within the metropolis.

Nevertheless, it is the basic, almost instinctual nature as humans to adapt given environments and alter given situations. The people of Seoul are no exception. In order to deal with an urban condition that has become at times unbearable, specific programs have been invented as a type of “urban defense mechanism” against the city’s environmental and socio-economic pressures. These renegade programs take form in “-bangs” (rooms) that host a number of different public activities within intimate spaces. The people have become the by-products of the city and are now surviving on the architectural by-products of the city – which is parasite and which is host?

APT & KEUNSENG

The APT and keunseng are similar architectural products birthed from the rapid modernization of Seoul. Unabashed by their banality, each stem from an uninspiring architectural foundation that chooses quantity over quality, and efficiency over everything. An alarming example of this is when the Seoul government announced a seemingly impossible goal of building 2 million new homes within the Seoul metropolitan area starting in 1988, and within merely four years these goals were accomplished. This undoubtedly puts into perspective the absolute aggressive nature of the speed of development within Seoul, and the volatile experience for any occupant within this environment. Eventually, through the popularized expansion of the APT, many satellite cities would surround the capital city by using this infrastructure, and the city population would grow to half of the entire country’s population within fifty years. Now, almost anyone and everyone is living in, or strives to live in, an APT building and this has become a type of socio-economic status symbol within the city.

The importance of the impact of the APT typology is how it quickly replaced the multi-dimensional traditional Korean house, known as “Hanok”, that utilized an “L” or “U” formal layout around an open courtyard space, known as the “Madang” (court). The “madang” is culturally and spatially important because it was used for many important public and private affairs such as funerals, weddings, birthdays, and events, and acted as a public buffer space for the surrounding private family member rooms. It is evident with the APT that this multi-dimensional “hanok” has now collapsed into a two-dimensional plane of the APT where the “madang” has disappeared and the relationship of private and public space has altogether evaporated. If this is the case, then where has the “madang” retreated to? Has it completely disappeared or has a new mutation of this public space been recreated? The answer lies in the mysterious urban “-bang” that has become the new “public space” and
the inverse spatial representation of the "madang". It is a highly intense interior space that does not open up or cherish the natural light like the "madang". Instead, the "-bang" thrives in the dark caverns of the urban realm where the event has become the source of light and energy. But where do these "-bangs" exist and how are they represented in the city? This is where the "keunseng" (neighborhood support facility) makes its appearance. The "keunseng" was originally used to bring commercial facilities into residential areas, but architecturally has no relation to its actual surroundings. This is mainly due to the even-handed development of "communities" within Seoul that seem to all meld into carbon copies of one another. Hence, the "keunseng" is nothing more than a generic 3-4 storey concrete box that makes up an alarming 92.7% of all buildings within Seoul.4

"The excess of the urban tattoo eventually counter-magnetizes buildings, its visual statement being so loud that eventually buildings disappear." - Peter Ferretto5

As mentioned earlier, the keunseng can be understood not as building typology, but as a type of infrastructure because of its mass production and ultimate genericism of structure bearing no relationship to site or program. This building-turned-infrastructure that creates the majority of the urban fabric is erased even further by the appliquéd of image and technology that wraps the exterior surface (perhaps it's non-identity of structure begs defacement). This "urban tattoo" of visual stimuli is the ultimate erasure of all that is left of architecture within the context of Seoul. However, in a sense the appliquéd also serves as a superficial preview to the multiple episodes of "-bangs" that fester within the structure. Once the superficial membrane is breached, one soon uncovers that the "-bang" is a "boundary area where the legal and illegal, rules and deviations, the normal and the abnormal, and the sane and insane come across". Indeed, in an environment that seems to pride itself on order, autonomy, and discipline, the internalized "-bang" seems to turn its back on social taboos and freely bathe in the glory of sex, leisure, and abundance. In a grand sense, this can be a projection of how a society begins to negotiate/defend itself from a generic socio-urban culture that demands prescriptive behavior and superficial expectations.
"The psychic core of a room is like a reverie. The room, an individual’s place of periodic repose, either inspires or inhibits creative thought. Insight, fantasies, and imagination are fueled by the psychological space of the private interior."

- Steven Holl

BANGS

There are many different types of "bangs" that exist within the keunseng fabric of the city: PC-bang, game-bang, movie-bang, comic-bang, multi-bang, and etc. Within these numerous "bangs" there are two specific types that stand out as direct references to the urban environment of Seoul: the norae-bang (singing room) and the jjimjil-bang (sauna room). These two "bangs" are at once similar and opposing with the activities associated with each program: one is high velocity and perpetual spectacle, while the other is low/zero velocity and extreme leisure. Their complete inverse relationship is what allows both "bangs" to reach a type of suspension through over or under stimulation, and is perhaps an amplified reaction to the density and delirium of the city.

NORAE-BANG

The "norae-bang" (singing room) is similar to what the western culture relates to as “karaoke” (originating in Japan), however, the "norae-bang" is specifically Korean in the fact that it takes place in a smaller scale and is not so much a private act in public space (exposed singing), but a public act in private space (intimate performance). The layout of this type of program is usually a main corridor that connects 10 or more small singing rooms that range in size from 95 sqft to 375 sqft. What the "norae-bang" lacks is space it over-compensates with feverish energy and speed. The contained quarters allows for the energy of the singing party (usually ranging from 3-15 people) to concentrate and explode within a continuous loop of song, dance, and debauchery. Representative of the speed of re-re-re-developments in Seoul, the norae-bang uses sing-sing-sing in the hour-based timeframe in order to maximize efficiency, economy, and ecstasy.

Much like the brazen banality of the APT, the "norae-bang" is shameless in its overt use of kitsch and theatrics to create the experience of the space. The basic interior features of a "norae-bang" is broken up into a handful of elements: screen, stage, seating, special effects, and stimulation. The main focus is eternally on the scrolling text and lucid imagery on the screen - almost hypnotic in its representation - as the figure of the performer dances and moves while engulfed in special effects and stimulation of lights, sounds, and inhibition blockers. This act of diversity in experience and action has created a type of communal activity that brings people together rather than dispersing into the concrete wilderness of the city. The singing is almost secondary to the actual purpose of the space, which is to create a collective public space that has been fully integrated into the urban culture and is a
means of dealing with everyday trials, relieving stress, and escaping reality.

Additionally, in some cases, this program of delight has also adopted a more controversial element that takes the form of “norae-bang” female “helpers” known as “doumi” girls. Perhaps another reminder of the failing libido of the city, the doumi compensates by providing “special” entertainment for the going rate of $120 USD/2 hours. In this scenario, the program of “singing room” is nothing more than a superficial veil for eroticism and temporary sexual satisfaction. The Korean government’s attempts to erase such a program seems all too futile as the number of doumi services continues to rise in popularity, and has even crossed the Pacific into American K-towns in cities like Los Angeles, Fairfax, and New York. It seems the memories of the underground scene of music and erotica that festered in Sewoon Sangga has naturally deposited its seed into the crevices of the urban fabric, and the “ -bangs” have chosen to adopt the illegitimate offspring.

“If a norae-bang is a place where the various conflicts contained within society caused by individualistic desire and collective culture are resolved through the ritualistic conjuring of mass hysteria, a jjimjil-bang is a place of reconciliation or an armistice of conflict through relaxation. The "fatigue" created by the velocity of Korean society is the connecting medium between the two spaces.” 

-Kwangsoo Kim

JJIMJIL-BANG

The “jjimjil-bang” (sauna room) is slightly deceiving in its name since it is more of a general “-bang” that consists of many other existing “-bangs” such as PC-bang, game-bang, comic-bang, norae-bang, and etc. However, the overarching theme in the “jjimjil-bang” is the notion of endless leisure and extreme relaxation. Unlike the “norae-bang” which demands the greatest amount of energy and participation, the “jjimjil-bang” asks nothing of the user, other than a mere $5-10 USD for a 24-hour pass. Hence, an array of people differing in nationality, social status, gender, and physical appearance are all mixed-in within this cultural melting pot known as “jjimjil-bang”.

The sequence of procedures when entering the “jjimjil-bang” is much different than its norae-bang counterpart. Rather than breaching the exterior membrane into the immediate depths of hysteria and stimuli, one must enter the jjimjil-bang almost in a ritualistic manner. By shedding one’s second skin of clothing, image, and status, then literally washing and scrubbing the naked body before entering the public space, this entire process...
has clinical and spiritual undertones. The experience is also very different than anything else. Time is not your enemy here. Rather, time is not meant to be considered. Contrary to the constant hustle and bustle of the city, this democratic accessible space is an oddity within the urban construct of Seoul mainly because of its desire to cater to everyone by providing a type of “nothingness”. Aside from the array of “bangs” available for use, the true program of the “jjimjil” (sauna) is to literally do nothing but deposit one’s body into different climactic and atmospheric conditions. Hot and humid, cold and crystal spaces are used to sweat out toxins, regenerate the body, and cleanse the body for relaxation and medicinal purposes. Large social living rooms are gathering spaces for watching films on projection screens, sleeping next to strangers, gossiping about the latest pop sensation, or simply to sit in silence. Since the jjimjil-bang has no age, sex, or social requirements associated with the program, it may be that this is one of the only spaces left that can truly be labeled as a communal public space. Here, boundaries are almost forced to go down, and the rigid atmosphere of outside forces are left at the door. Perhaps this type of space and (non) program is the future of super-dense cities, where escape can only take shape within an infinitely finite spatial condition, known as “bang.”

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3 Ibid, 11.
6 Ibid.
7 Kim, Kwang Soo. The Other Public Space: The Korean “Bang” Culture. 15.
9 Ibid, 4-5.
12 Ibid, 6.
In my adolescence, day after day, My singular joy was to repeat, 
On the bridge of the Seun Shopping Mall, 
The names of foreign film actresses: 
Ornella Muti, Lindsay Wagner, Alida Valli... 

Seun Shopping Mall: this place 
Cut me down in the name of desire. 
The shops of my cells were crammed with... 
Tracy, Cicciolina, Genesis, Hustler 
And all sorts of Japanese-made electronic ware. 

Seun Shopping Mall made short work of thousands 
Of facsimiles of me while the hunger of my craving 
Made the mall prosperous. 

Returned to high secluded rooms 
In 8 millimeter erotic movies the 
World of porn cut into my love. 
A hand-glass reflecting under the skirt of 
A female teacher: 
Enslaved, I would furtively ogle lascivious acts 
In the mirror of a second floor room 
Of the Eunha Motel, clinging to the window. 
Oh! She is my asshole. 

Sometimes John Holmes – the West’s most potent stud – 
Urged me to stick a glass bead in the tip of my penis. 
A desire to be a film director was spurred on 
By a blonde actress. 

There is no truth, 
Only a meretricious truth: you can get everything you crave for. 
There is the Seun Mall: 
Today as well I am a slave, speeding endlessly towards 
The elusive mirage on the other side of the spirit’s desert. 

In the hive of dark craving on the inside of my own body 
A swarming buzzing …….. 
This endless whirring will end in death. 
The mirror of desire will finally set me free 
Only when the swarming compulsion goes, after 
The pupils of my eye burst. 

- Yoo Ha
SUPERFICIAL SEOUL
The incredible energy from Asian boom cities such as Seoul is rooted in the overwhelming density and culture within the city, supported by the underwhelming genericism within its urban form. This dichotomy of conditions has created a paradox in the city where identity is both precious and a commodity (a precious commodity) meant to be sold to the most efficient bidder. "Progress" was once the word for a brighter post-war future, but it has eventually turned into a symbol for urban disillusionment and neglect. For Seoul, this pinnacle of progress can be attributed to a significant piece of modern architecture that would set the impressive, and yet daunting, pace of the rapid urbanization of the city and its people: the Sewoon Sangga megaplex.

SUPERFICIAL SEOUL utilizes the controversial Sewoon Sangga site as a testing grounds for new urban experimentation that invert and amplify the specific spatial culture of the Korean “-bang” (room) that has become a reactionary by-product of the generic conditions of the city. Through this lens, concepts of erasure, transformation, and amplification will be expanded upon based on the foundations of the site's loaded history and the city's questionable trajectory.

SUPERFICIAL SEOUL: Cultivating the Episodic, Exotic, & Erotic in a Culture of Erasure
2002  2006  2009  2009

TRANSFORMATION

CHEONGGYEcheon STREAM

2002  2006  2009  2009

132  133
AMPLIFICATION

NORAE-BANG (SINGING ROOM)

JJIMJIL-BANG (SAUNA ROOM)
ERASURE INTERSECTION
REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

URBAN PALIMPSEST MODEL
Definitely, I shall survive longer than the Korean city in which the average age of apartment buildings is twenty-one.

06 | SUPERFICIAL_GRAND OPENING
Skin has become irremovable in maintaining with reality. Technology has become the body's new membrane of existence.

Nuclear submarines could be assembled in the bell of steel technology, as some unveiled cold war myth had it.

01 | SUPERFICIAL SINGING ROOM

02 | SUPERFICIAL INDUSTRIAL EXPO
The excess of the urban theater eventually counter-magnetizes buildings, its visual statement being so loud that eventually buildings disappear.

The suave elevated pedestrian deck served as a black market for all sorts of illicit stimuli, populated by vigilent peddlers who would whisper, on the obtrusive quiet, to lifelong Pinocchio before dragging their hands to a handsome collection of barely recent Playboys and Penthouse. Hidden behind shadowy displays of immoral periodicals on mountains of false tennis.
A "program strip" and "path strip" was created in order to determine the multiple events and movements that would take place throughout the entire length of the site. This, of course, is not prescriptive, rather it is an episodic condition where multiple levels of interaction can be achieved with technology, image, people, and nature. However, the zoning of each urban bang (or "room") was important to the district's overall setup. Each zone within the site is an amplification or re-presentation of the established zoning within the district. This zoning is taken further into levels of allegory and mysticism when each urban room begins to re-deposit its own condition within the city. Truly a place for experimentation and the belief in trial and error, even failure, there is a feeling of social, sexual, and urban liberation within this strip.
There are three main levels of movement working within the project. The "graphic ground" is a stark black and white contrast to the colorful stimuli that surrounds the site. This element folds itself through the site and is directionally laid out to the recorded movement found within the history of the site. The "main path" is 25 feet wide and placed on the traditional axis of the northern grid that is aligned with the ancient Jongmyo shrine. This is the main path that incorporates different levels of velocity (walking, running, biking) that begin at the near entry of the Jongmyo Shrine and ends at the southern end of the site facing the Namsan Mountains. Inscribed along the path is the poem by Yoo Ha, "The Seun Shopping Mall Kid's Love," that reinforces the memory of the past but simultaneously reveals the subversion of culture, sex, and identity within the city.

The "meandering paths" are intentionally meant for slower velocity exploration. These paths shoot off from the main path and weave into the density of the surrounding district. These are not random, rather, they are based on specific alleys of interest and movements found within the existing context. In a sense, as one moves higher and away from ground level, one will begin to spiral away from the traditional bounding box of the existing site and into the complex density of the district.
The first urban room focuses on the perpetual speed of new technology paired with the renegade program of “singing room” established by Korean culture. The singing room seemingly has no rules, only perpetual excitement to a continuous loop of auditory and visual stimuli is the focus. In this case, the singing room becomes an infinitely finite condition where the users are continuously playing “catch-up” with the music, perhaps a fitting metaphor for the urban condition of the city. Time, in this case, is the enemy.

Architecturally, the concrete box of the Korean “keunseng” has been inverted into an open-air concrete labyrinth paired with gabion walls filled with old technology. As the site slopes downward toward the Cheonggyecheon Stream, the singing labyrinth maintains its height to the original ground grade level, which allows passersby to literally walk on the walls that create the labyrinth and occasionally look down into the spaces of singing, dancing, and debauchery. Further, rising from these masses is a perpetual scaffold that creates a contrasting light structure that holds platforms that allow escape from the energy below, or a degree of further exhibitionism and performance.
The second urban room takes hold of the mysticism of the district and makes it a complete amplified reality. The industrial zone of the district has one of the most acclaimed reputations within the socio-economic realm for its unprecedented specialties in metal working and innovative industrial/technological solutions. This concentration of mad scientists has created a lasting mythic quality to this industrial zone where rumors of “nuclear submarines could be assembled in this belt of street technology, as some unverified Cold War myth had it.” In that case, what if the site allowed for these brainiacs to showcase these amazing qualities that seem lost deep within the district? What if it was a way of putting a stamp within the city proclaiming their importance and right to be there? Thus, this urban room becomes an industrial expo that is a posturing tool for the people of the district.

Further, the presentation of a known object, in this case the massive nuclear submarine, that holds ties to past (and present) socio-political issues, suddenly creates a tension within the center of the historic district. There is an important re-introduction of scale with the new object compared to the lost modern megaplex. This large expo space can be utilized for objects, performances, and protests.
The third urban room questions notions of surface, image, architecture, and space. In this urban density, image and technology has won the rights of the surface of buildings. "Facade" does not exist in this city fabric. But how can this overt stimuli be reinterpreted here? How can we bring architecture or notions of space back into the equation? This zone of the district is historically for printing, which means it can also be seen as the birthplace of signs and images. Keeping that in mind, the intervention utilizes a continuous ribbon of image that becomes the spatial boundaries that introduce the bare minimum of what constitutes "space" and "architecture". The thin membrane or "surface" can become a spatial tool instead of a pure appliquéd to a building.

The ribbons are wound up in two main mechanical cranks that can be released to create spatial forms. The points in which the ribbons can pivot around are based on the structural points of the paths above. By utilizing the infrastructure for the ribbons, this allows an infinite amount of variation to create multiple conditions depending on the desired environment. The "urban tattoo" of the city fabric has now become a space-making tool while simultaneously creating a spectacle of itself.
The fourth and last urban room can be considered the inverse of the first urban room. This part of the district is the food and leisure zone which is comparable to another renegade program popular in the city: the sauna room. The sauna room is the complete opposite condition of the singing room, but still yields an experience of suspension. Suspension can be achieved either in hyper speed or extreme slowness. In the sauna room, time is not an issue. Complete and utter relaxation is the key, and one floats from station to station, program to program, enjoying his or her own time and speed. Further, socially and culturally there is no other program in the city comparable to that of the sauna room. There is no separation of class, race, beauty, sex, and creed, which all seem so narcissistically important in this society.

Architecturally, a proper park condition is blanketed on the undulating surface that holds the program underneath. Different apertures puncture this surface to allow ventilation and also a type of sharing with the public that has not been offered before. In this case, the sauna room is visually and olfactorily accessible to the events happening below. Freedom of exhibitionism and voyeurism is the key. Hallucinatory smoke and erotic bodies begin to erase the taboo of sex and address the issue of a failing urban libido.
The Singing Room has been reduced to a handful of key elements: the enlarged music screen, the graphic ground, the wall of transgression, the gabion wall of dead technology, and opulent furniture. There is a deliberate juxtaposition and tension of the grit of the urban density captured by the concrete walls and graveyard of built-up technology, with the superficial opulence of images and objects.
The Industrial Expo is depicted here in two conditions: the "nuclear submarine" as object, scale, and history, and the "protest" as object, scale, and history. Acts of transgression are vital to the life of the Korean people. Freedom of political expression is heavily prevalent in the culture of the city, and this undoubtedly alters the way the urban environment is utilized. The site can be altered into a mode of solid, or a mode of void, depending on the mood of the masses.
The Continuous Image is depicted here in a compress-and-release moment where the ribbon has created space both under and outside the confines of the infrastructure. Different types of erasure are presented on the surface of this image—both two-dimensional and three-dimensional voids—that creates false edges, continuous surfaces, and transformative spaces. This specific depiction utilizes one side of the ribbon as a repeated mural of the historic fabric of Seoul, while the other side is a repeated mural of different signage and image that has overtaken the fabric of the city.
The Social Steamer is seen at the corner of one of the meandering paths. The large sphere is a reinterpretation of the main gathering relaxation space that is found within sauna rooms. This is a unisex space that has a circular ramp that rises from the sauna pool below to the main path above. Different levels of sensory interaction is available to the curious bystander and it is encouraged to take part in this new site of freedom and expression.
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