The Entangled Everyday: Design Seoul and the Disciplining of Commercial Signs

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Abstract

This article claims that the recent mega-scale urban project Design Seoul is a case illustrating the entanglement of institutional interventions onto everyday city space and varying reactions from individual agents of power. Nominated by two international NGOs—the ICSID (International Council of Societies of Industrial Design) and UNESCO—Design Seoul, which lasted roughly from 2007 to 2011, is the first extensive urban project in the history of Korea. In order to make the project move forward, the ministry of Seoul and groups of specialists from different sectors of society attempted to renew the entire city under a number of guiding principles in the hope of making Seoul a brand city. Despite the dominant views that Design Seoul is considered a pivotal exemplar of a top-down model of power in the urban realm, this article claims that such an ostensibly one-directional project in fact operates through more complex patterns of intervention and public experience, in ways that various agents of power related to the project read given design guidelines and practice them in aleatory and creative ways.

Keywords: the entangled everyday; Design Seoul; disciplining; commercial signs

1. Introduction

On October 20, 2007, 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 in San Francisco. The ceremony was immediately followed by the acceptance speech of Seoul's former 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." This short fragment from Oh's speech clearly shows the prime importance of design as a means of transforming Seoul into the international hub of the Asian continent, and boosting the city's economy in the 21st century, with 'design' as the driving force in this endeavor. The comparison to "the Miracle of the Han River" refers to the success of South Korea's astonishingly fast modernization process in the late twentieth century following the urban devastation caused by the Korean War (1950-1953) (Cumings, 309-314). 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, the word 'design' is here understood as a highly systematized, institutionalized discipline that purports to achieve the country's modernization in the new millennium, and to heighten the nation's competitiveness in the global market economy.

By taking Oh Se-hoon's remark as a threshold, this article aims to investigate the underlying conception of design that is prevalent throughout Design Seoul, paying particular attention to how 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 metropolis existing 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) (Forbes, 2007)? What can be designed and, likewise, what cannot? If Design Seoul is a project that not only provides practical solutions to urban matters but also attempts to search for Seoul's urban identity through such concepts as "total design" and "integrative design," one needs to critically inquire how the elements of the city of Seoul will be redesigned in order to resonate with such abstract concepts. Given that Seoul is a heterogeneous space comprised of many different social classes, ethnic
groups, and urban dynamics, how does Design Seoul's conceptual model of city design, with its apparent disregard for the complex networks of metropolitan cultures, conceive anew the domain of the everyday urban space?

In order to examine such inquiries on this mega-scale urban project, this article offers three analyses. First, it implements a theory of the everyday as it relates to urban design, speculating on the complex urban meanings implicit in Design Seoul. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein challenged predicated notions of the everyday in ways that bring forth possibilities of linguistic intervention, improvisation, and inflection upon the complexities entangled with urbanizations and the varying instances of urban experience. Second, this article offers a detailed analysis of the guidelines of Design Seoul, especially those related to the renovation of street signs. Third, in order to examine the ways in which those guidelines are realized and experienced in daily urban settings, this article makes a case study of the series of ongoing online exhibitions of commercial signage titled Seoul Good Sign, which will encourage us to look at how the supposedly disciplining urban project actually opens up several opportunities for newly designed signs to reflect individual expressions and affectivities.

2. Rethinking the Everyday through Design Seoul

By thinking about the everyday in relation to Design Seoul, this article 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, this article draws attention to excerpts from Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, in which he raises a fundamental dilemma about the entanglement between a rule and its following in everyday life: "The fundamental 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" (Wittgenstein, 43). In this passage, Wittgenstein seems to suggest that a rule is not an absolute, non-negotiable point of departure that one must follow in a rigid manner. Instead, he stresses that a rule is always inevitably entangled with multiple additions, adaptations, and applications made by groups of people who respond to a rule in diverse ways and through different "language games" which are, according to Wittgenstein, "part of an activity, or a form of life" that become manifest in inflected and improvisational manners (Wittgenstein, 10).

Hence, a rule is better understood as a practice that includes inevitable misreadings and variabilities, unfolding within everyday situations in varying rhythms and tempos, and generating forms of life that are more akin to improvised gestures than predicated rules (Wittgenstein, 42). Taking inspiration from Wittgenstein's description of rule-following behavior, this article argues that Design Seoul is marked by a fundamental dilemma and contradiction: it is an idealized, homogeneous design conception implemented by the city government, which necessarily must include and rely upon a heterogeneous body of participants (residents, visitors, planners, artists, designers, and shop owners) whose inputs must be accommodated. But these unforeseen inputs are often treated in insufficiently generous and imaginative ways. However, this does not mean that the disparity between 'rules' and their actualizations is unbridgeable or futile: quite the contrary. After all, a rule or stable form of action, no matter how ephemeral and limited, is enabled by its observance in practice. It is thus precisely the different affects and percepts unfolding in the domain of the everyday which give consistency to the symbolic attempts by administrators and urban designers to shape the city.

3. Unpacking 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." Each guideline is composed of the definition of each architectural/urban category, a set of manifestos that 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 layout of the city into nine elements: roads, squares, urban parks, water-friendly spaces (such as streams and fountains), urban spaces around public architecture, exterior parking lots, urban infrastructure, and open areas that are left unoccupied (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2009). 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 its 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 elements are elaborated accordingly. Likewise, The Design Guideline for Public Space clearly subcategorizes "public space" into several 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. (Unsurprisingly, the other four guidelines are similarly designed through uncompromising stratified and spatial hierarchies.) For instance, the first page of the guideline defines "public space" simply as a spatial typology that is accessible to "the public," which is an evident tautology that does not go far enough as to what the term 'public' specifically means. 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 a response to the perceived condition of urban chaos, engendered by individual capitalist pursuits at the expense of the public interest. But such a solution lacks what architectural theorist Anthony Vidler calls "the ontology of city," which he sets forth in the course of examining the broader urban territories through the aids of maps, diagrams, and urban forms (Vidler, 1996, 261). By critically reassessing Aldo Rossi's discourse of architectural typology, Vidler argues that while typology is still an efficient way of thinking about urbanism, the understanding of the city should also entail a deeper introspection about the experiential dimensions of the city, and the connections and disjunctions between various city elements, that cannot fully be drawn out in the terms of typological methodologies.

What lies behind the uncompromising overemphasis on design guidelines and non-speculative typological imperatives prominent in Design Seoul is the city government's ambition to transform the metropolis from a "Hard City" to a "Soft City," a desire to remake the modern industrial city into a postmodern sustainable one (Fig.1.). If a "Hard City" is defined by "function," "efficiency," "the automobile," and "speed," as the diagrammatical image shows, a "Soft City" stresses qualities that are "human-centered" and "pedestrian-based." A "Soft City" is also one that can be savored at "the speed of a bicycle." This conceptual dichotomy is elaborated by twenty-two principles (or key words/phrases) of urban design that the chief coordinator of Design Seoul, Kwon Young-gull, proposes in his book Designing Seoul in greater detail, which includes conceptions such as "Genius loci," "Eco-friendly," "Simplicity," and "Fun" (Kwon, 2010, 95-98). In his 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 internationally recognizable brand city. 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 this mega-project could turn Seoul into a city that is free of superfluous visual noise, and be redesigned entirely under the principles of "simplicity" and "legibility." This vision resonates with architect Adolf Loos' conceptions of austerity and restraint of decorativity as signs of urban evolution from the previous century (Loos, 1998, 169). 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 critics 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 (Kang and Yoon, 2010, 197-198).

Fig.1. A Diagram Showing the Conceptual Model of Design Seoul (©Seoul Metropolitan Government)

While this enactment of rules and their applications to the actual city space is ubiquitous throughout Design Seoul, it is probably another guideline entitled Signboard Design Guidebook (2008) that best reveals how the city government is attempting to control the practice of everyday urbanism at the microscopic level. This guidebook provides not only examples of how commercial signs should be ideally designed, but also a meticulous "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 (SMG, Signboard Design Guidebook, 7-8). Based on the checklist, the Signboard Design Guidebook also provides a manifesto comprised of ten specific principles on how to make a "good signboard" (Signboard Design Guidebook, 3-4):

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.

The checklist and the ten principles evidence the city government’s attempt to minimize all the 'garish' aspects of commercial signage in everyday urban situations, 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. 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.2.). 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 the city, 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, and impacts customers and others who traverse the city's space in myriad ways, for the sake of protecting civic values. 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 Design Seoul, entitled 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 endeavors and their urban signifiers (Fig.3.) (Lee, 2007). 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 cartoon 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 and 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 high degree of legibility, so that navigation is clear and unambiguous, even for first-time visitors to the city. Here Design Seoul seems to be influenced by urban scholar Kevin Lynch's notion of "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. In the book, Lynch characterizes legibility as "the ease with which its parts [of a given city image] can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern" (Lynch, 1960, 2-3). The purpose of this sign renovation is to present every single element of the street as clearly readable through strong figure-ground relationships. This figure-ground relationship is derived from Gestalt psychology, which has had a strong influence on Korean urbanism as a model for clarifying the relationships between its architectural and urban spaces, commercial signs and building façades. In the chaotic collage image of urban signs, there is a distinct lack of linear perspective, and conditions under which all the commercial signs collide with each other and generate confusion, rendering 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 a 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 easily be added or removed at will. But this attitude permits the removal of those signs from any connection to place, atmosphere, or sensory

Fig 2. A Proposal of Façade Design Based on a Set of Design Guidelines (©Seoul Metropolitan Government)
ecology, thus decontextualizing them from the milieu in which the commercial signs are located and perceived in a myriad of different ways. Through this process, which is both an ideological and aesthetic strategy, the vibrant diversity of Seoul would be transformed into a "generic city," resonating with architect Rem Koolhaas' claim that the contemporary city has become a space where no meaningful differences in cityscapes are detected, and all look the same, due to the influence of transnational capital and its intricate relationship with architectural and urban design practices (Koolhaas, 1250). However, Seoul is far from a generic city.

Because commercial signs are so hastily considered that they 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 signage is in an inverse proportion to the cultural level of a country (Seoul Broadcasting System, 2007). From his perspective, Korea is still culturally primitive by virtue of the overpopulation of sign languages in ordinary city streets. But it is worth considering that such a rich sensory environment, and certain states of distraction, might be legitimate perceptions and experiences of 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 distancing qualities of everyday urbanism in Singapore in a more positive light, in which people are capable of making sense of what they see in the midst of seemingly confusing and overwhelming commercial environments, which the author considers as acts of "constructive distraction" (Yeo, 2003, 260-261). Hence, if people can continuously react to and make sense of the city through their experience of such commercially saturated urban environments—after all, distraction is now an everyday phenomenon as well—can we not then 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?

4. Seoul Good Sign Exhibitions

While it is clear that Design Seoul is a comprehensive design project that attempts to control the various sectors of the metropolis through a set of pre-established design principles, this 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 boundaries 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." Each competition participant is asked to submit four different photographs of sign design (façade view, close-up view, distant view, and nighttime view). Since there are no required qualifications, anyone--professional sign designers; shopkeepers who own the signs covering their premises; or local city ministries that get permission to submit sign designs in the name of original designers--can participate in the competition. It is a project that attempts to transform the commercial streetscapes of Seoul through the participation of ordinary citizens and individual sign designers. 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 NGO organizations. However, as the odd combination of three different words—"Seoul," "Good," and "Sign"—implies, the main impetus behind Seoul Good Sign is to define what a "good" sign is, based upon the city government's three principles: "distinctiveness," "beauty," and "harmony" (Signboard Design Guidebook, 2). Jeong Kyung-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, 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," preventing the city government from making Seoul into a "beautiful" city.

Some of the winning pieces nominated through the exhibition series illustrate how such a conception of good signage can be actualized. The winning project for the 2008 competition, titled "Skyflower," is an early example, proposing a conceptual model of how signage design could dialectically evolve over time. It attempts to contextualize commercial signage through three evolutionary stages: 1) a modernist form of signage, mostly consisting of fluorescent lighting, which often produces the distracting and flickering atmosphere of the cityscape day and night; 2) an advanced form of contemporary signage consisting of LEDs (Light-Emitting Diodes), which produces a sharper 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 (A Casebook for the 2009 Seoul Good Sign, 25). What this piece conceptualizes is a linear progression from the modernist to a future model of signage design, proposing a clutter-free cityscape that can help heighten the brand value of Seoul.

Such an evolutionary model of sign design is applied to other works with distinct designs and constructed in various locations. Tŭlkkae iyagi, translated as A Story of Perilla Seeds, is one among them. The rectangular billboard is lit not by fluorescent lighting but indirect light from above and from both sides, and the letters announcing the name of the shop are inscribed in calligraphic form, creating a smooth and eye-comforting feel. Its background color, unlike the signage discussed above, is not distracting, and blends harmoniously with the tones of the nearby cityscapes, in accordance with the meticulously invented city government's rules. The size of letters within signs is in most cases minimized in relation to the overall composition of the façade, which is intended to reduce the sense of chaos and distraction induced by the plethora of commercial messages and images on the streets of current cityscapes. At times sign design becomes explicitly figurative, visually reflecting the kind of business it denotes and thus producing a sense of transparency in the public domain, as in the laundry shop sign in the form of an enlarged clothes hanger.

Such theories of temporal evolution and proper form may make sense in terms of the internal progress of sign-design aesthetics, but they often have little relevance to actual urban space: all three temporal divisions, for example, are in use simultaneously throughout the city, due to economic and design preferences. Indeed, various sign designs submitted to the exhibitions predominantly emphasize their aesthetic and formal values to the juries of the exhibition, as if each participant were displaying an artwork in a salon or a gallery space. Although each 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.8). It is composed of a rectangular panel that contains both the image of the bicycle and the phrase "Run Bicycle" (달려라 자전거 in Korean letters). 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 the whole 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...
the exhibitions, and passively implemented their rules without a subjective engagement with the design process. The difference arises when one pays close attention to all the subtle expressions of each sign, whether 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 cliched 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.

Furthermore, if the design guidelines of Design Seoul (including the ones offered for Seoul Good Sign) 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 view 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 produce designs that are in perfect accord with the guidelines. While these guidelines are 'the given,' serving as a basis for the unfolding of diverse, creative designs that are realized both individually and collectively, each participant's experience is another kind of 'given,' since each person's affectivity and perceptivity are not subsumed under the rationally-determined design principles imposed through the strict guidelines. At this point, we might register Gilles Deleuze's philosophical discourse of "dualism" as a better model for thinking about the issue of Wittgenstein's rule-following. For Deleuze, dualism does not presuppose a fixed point in thinking about relations between things in the world. Rather, it opens us up to 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" (Deleuze, 1991, 87). If there is no stable, eternal condition of "the given," aside from the collection of impressions and images that are constantly unfolding over time, then defining "the given" requires us to pay attention to every detail, every subtle movement as singular moments. Anyone wandering the streets of Seoul can thus be an agent who constructs and transmits the city's textures, which are not limited to tangible urban forms as fixed material entities, 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 (Deleuze, 1988, 123).

5. Conclusion

By examining how the notion of the everyday is theorized and practiced in the treatment of commercial signage throughout Design Seoul, this article has shown that a strong binary opposition between the ideal and the everyday is omnipresent in the project, on both the macro and micro levels. On the macro level, the government has sought to transform Seoul from a "Hard City" to a "Soft City" by placing a strong emphasis on the new design principles implemented through Design Seoul that overcome all forms of urban and visual 'pollution.' The pursuit of a "Soft City" thus symbolizes the city government's 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. On the micro level, the potential redesign of each city element is carefully analyzed in relation to a number of design considerations which are based on idealized typologies and morphologies.

Questioning the binary opposition between the ideal and the everyday also leads us to rethink the notion of 'total design' anew. As this article has proposed, even though Design Seoul might be a comprehensive urban design project that covers almost every aspect of city design, its actuation is only achieved through a collaboration with administrators, specialists in design, ordinary citizens, local sign designers, and other stakeholders. Although it is true that a great part of Design Seoul is directed by a dominating agent, which is 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 manifestoes, this does not mean that the resulting sign designs are totally homogenized and subject-less. That is to say, the inherent heterogeneity and multiplicity of Design Seoul leads us back to Wittgenstein's point about the disparity between a rule and its following. There are, indeed, moments of improvisation and personal affectivities that one can locate by carefully observing each sign design, as the in-depth analysis of
"Run Bicycle" has shown. At every moment, Seoul's urban form is heterogeneous and, inevitably, complexly entangled with fabrics of everyday urban life, from which one can explore new ways of thinking about everyday urbanism in contemporary Korea.

Notes
1 Source: http://www.worlddesigningcapital.com/what-is-the-wdc.
2 Source: http://www.icsid.org/events/events/calendar331.htm.
3 Here I use the term SMG within the parenthesis as an abbreviation of the 'Seoul Metropolitan Government.'
4 It is noted 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. See Huh, Ryu, and Kim, "The Street Advertisements and Streetscapes in the Korean Modern History," 617.
5 Sign designer Kim Young-bae proposes Gestalt psychology as the theoretical solution to the distracting urban condition of Korean cities caused by commercial signs. In The First Sourcebook of Signboard Design School, he emphasizes the harmony between "figure" and "ground." Here "figure" refers to signboards and "ground" to the exterior (or façade) of commercial buildings, both of which need to be equally legible against the supposed backdrop. Institute of Sign Culture, Kanp'an, tichainil paeda, 25-26.
6 These words and phrases are from the comments for the winning pieces of Seoul Good Sign, both in 2010 and 2011 (with my translation). Seoul Metropolitan Government, "The List of Winners and the Evaluation of Each Work for the 2010 and 2011 Seoul Good Sign Competitions" (source: http://sgpd.seoul.go.kr:8081/seoulgoodsign).

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