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A Sense of Place: A Personal Exploration, Analysis and Re-interpretation of Diverse Places

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A Sense of Place

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-
A SENSE OF PLACE:

A personal exploration, analysis, and re-interpretation of diverse places

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-
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Abstract

Every city/place has unique, distinctive qualities. Individuals acquire a sense of place in accordance with their own experiences and perspectives, which may not be the same as the experiences and viewpoints of another person.

In this project, I explore, analyze, and re-interpret three places that have creatively and emotionally influenced me and remained in my memory: Times Square, New York City; Insadong, Seoul, South Korea; and Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia.

To comprehend and draw a sense of place, I observe, feel, and document the characteristics of each place through different methods and processes, based on my own experiences.

In addition, I integrate, apply, and transform my experiences and emotional reaction to the objects, obtained from each place, into new visual form to grasp how the built environment can be used as inspiration and stimulus in developing creative methods and processes in graphic design.

Introduction

A strange place, unfamiliar movement, unfamiliar people,
and a strange smell...

At one moment, it becomes a well-known place,
familiar movement, familiar people, and a common smell.

Cities are formed by each individual's experiences
and feelings, which are originated in a part of each place.

People see and feel places through their own status and given conditions—different occupations, backgrounds, character, and thoughts. Each individual learns a sense of place in accordance with his or her own experiences and perspectives, even in the same specific place.
Jane Jacobs

I am very interested in experiencing and observing the factors that constitute a certain place and make up the images of that particular place such as people's movements, the unique atmosphere, weather, scenery, culture, sounds, and odors of a place. For me, it is fun to get to know something within a place little by little as if I were solving a riddle. Based upon various experiences, I have realized that achieving a sense of place and lasting impressions involves all of my senses: sight, smell, touch, etc.

I think a place is like a huge canvas that can be dyed with various colors. Every place is interpreted and remembered differently by different people, giving them distinct ideas and experiences. Each individual acquires his or her own interesting points and images, even from the same place and the same object.

Some people might feel confused, uneasy, and scared in a complex and noisy place. However, in my case, I was born and raised in a typical urban environment: Seoul, South Korea. In Seoul the chaotically overflowing elements and complicated images were compelling, not confusing, and connected to another kind of energy lying hidden inside me. They offer me inexplicable intimacy and the inspiration for my creative activities. Conversely, I sometimes feel strange in calm and quiet places.

When I travel to a particular place, I first pay close attention to observing, recording and analyzing the well-designed visual elements that give it its identity. However, while considering the importance of these formal and functional elements, I have recognized that a sense of place is impressed by more than its visual and cultural pattern. When these parts are connected to my emotions and interpreted according to my own individual experiences and viewpoints, the sense of place becomes more aroused.

When working on graphic design problems, a sense of place is naturally drawn out as the elements of design harmonize with the atmosphere and the identity of a place agreeing with it, rather than as it lays stress on the successful results of simply visual elements. In other words, most of the great places of the world are not made by an infinite variety of good designs, but by people. A sense of place is aroused more actively when people are encouraged to naturally sink into the place and act in it; when it affects their emotions and feelings.

For my creative project, I explore, analyze, and re-interpret what constitutes my sense of place in three places: Times Square, Insadong, and Broad Street. This is accomplished through involved methods and processes.

Problem Statement

A variety of visual and cultural factors help form the understanding of identity of a place.

However, we are frequently met with places that have buildings, stores, and landscapes of a similar style. Due to the widespread use of the international style and modern design in the early 20th century, standardization and universality became a common language for a variety of visual fields. As a result, unique identities of individual places have become weakened.

However, each place must hold something special; it must protect the genius of its own environment to be recognized and recalled as a place being distinct from another place by people. This is the significant point that enables people to get their own sense of place and create their own memories in the place.

A sense of place stems from the nature that a certain environment maintains, and it is an identity that is explicitly distinguished from other ones. Creating a sense of place makes a distinction between style and design.^[1] It is not about applying motifs, using a certain color pallet or building in a specific genre. A local sense of place emerges when designers take their cues from the climate, the weather, the environment, and the human culture of a place.

We recognize that a certain sense of place has an attraction which gives us a certain indefinable well-being that we want to return to, time and again... It is not a temporary

response, for it persists and brings us back, reminding us of previous visits.^[2]

People notice different objects that exist within each of their own environments, and observe and interpret them individually. In other words, each individual person's sense of that place is acquired in accordance with his or her own experiences and perspectives, which may not be the same as the experiences and viewpoints of another person.

In 2001, the eminent geographer Yi-Fu Tuan wrote *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* on human geography. In his book, Tuan regards place and space not only as the fundamental element constituting the environment, but also as the element affecting human experiences. A place is the sanctuary of values held by individuals and a peaceful center where safety and affection are felt. People have direct and indirect, diverse experiences, and an unknown place is changed to a familiar and comfortable one through these experiences. When an area becomes a familiar place to us, we come to hold a feeling (or awareness)—a sense of place—towards that area. A strange abstract space becomes a meaning-filled, concrete place.^[3]

This theory is influential in developing my process and methodology towards interpreting my experiences and abstract emotional responses into a concrete design processes.

In my creative project, I explore different aspects of creative processes and methods to derive a sense of each place from my surrounding environment.

First, I examine ten distinct kinds of objects in the environment influencing a place's identity and my emotional reaction to each place: signs, people, city property, typography, wayfinding systems, alleys and streets, texture, trash and banal objects, neon signs, scents and sounds. Methodologies for unfolding this step primarily involve first-hand observation, photographing a range of physical elements, and my writing regarding the objects that interest me in each place. The outcome of this process is two 84" x 20" large maps.

Secondly, I transform my experiences and personal emotional responses affected by the objects and each place into visual, aesthetic form to learn how inventive graphic design and creative processes arise from diverse stimuli in the environment. The outcome of this process is four large-size posters—two 24" x 24" posters, two 24" x 36" posters, and an accordion-fold book—folded: 5" x 6" and flat: 50" x 12".

My creative project will provide designers and design students with the opportunity to realize how to creatively interact with their surrounding environment and improve their capability for exploring personal design methods.

^[1] A Sense of Place

^[1] John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 158.

^[2] BROWARD COUNTY-WIDE COMMUNITY DESIGN GUIDEBOOK, "Sense of Place," <http://www.broward.org/planningservices/senseofplace.pdf>, Accessed 20 November 2008.

^[3] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 7.



RUEDI BAUR

Ruedi Baur is an environmental graphic designer in Switzerland who engages in thorough research of a region using direct, first-hand experience and strong references to historical and cultural contexts. According to Baur, design is supposed to not merely provide service and information for visual decoration. It reflects various social and cultural characteristics implicating the meaning of the certain place; interprets graphic elements in a new way; and makes them into a physical work.

Ruedi Baur's work (Fig. 1) was included in a 2008 exhibition of French Projects held in South Korea. His work expressed the concept of 'direction and non-direction' through a maze made of jars and flags.^[4] The city system, like a maze, was matched with jars representing Korean sentiment, through which the spatiality was symbolized.

Through his sound and conceptual approach to the design process, I realized that graphic design is not just a simple, visual result. Graphic design can help people to sympathize with a place, and reflect their sensibilities.



[4] Nari Im, "Le design francais," *designhouse*, 14 July 2008, 54.

ONE BLOCK RADIUS

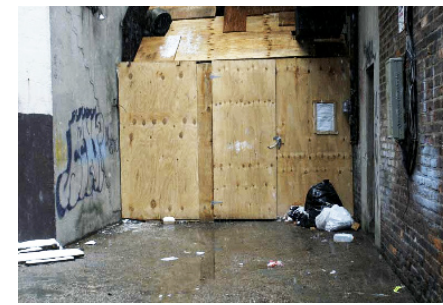
The psychogeographic documentary project called "One Block Radius" (Fig. 2), created by Brooklyn artists Christina Ray and Dave Mandl about a survey of the block where New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art built a new facility in late 2004.

To examine the surroundings of the museum, the information of this web site was divided into three main categories: observation, interaction, and response. Among them, observation was categorized into 22 smaller ones (Fig. 3). Through the photographic documentation of each category, the atmosphere of each street located on the circular block could be sensed.

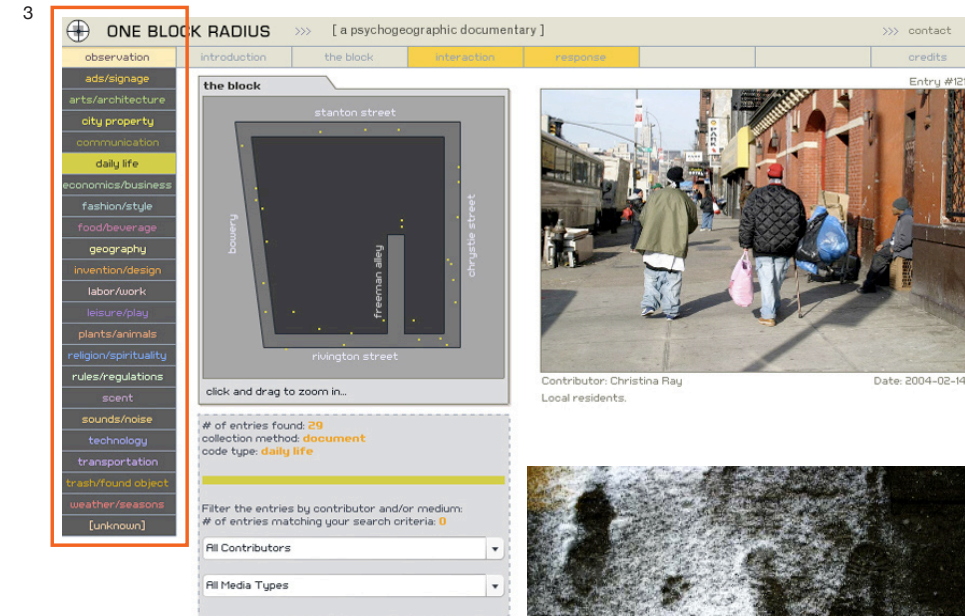
This project suggested two significant guidelines for initiating my creative project. First, it helped me develop an eye for looking at a familiar place from various perspectives. Second, it gave me the chance to observe an unfamiliar place in more detail.



A Sense of Place



Economics/Business



Communication



Food/Beverage



Weather

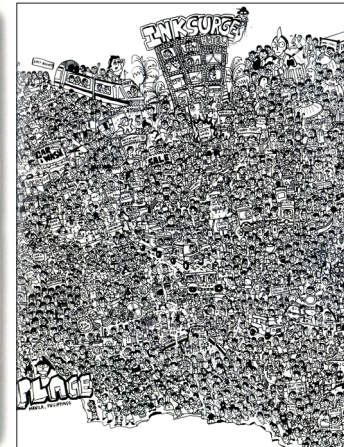
Trash/Found object

16117

PLACE: 35 DESIGNERS, 35 CITIES

Place is a creative research project that consists of 35 designers' experiences in 35 different places. The artists explore how the place affects their creativity (Fig. 4).

Each artist represents his experiences of seeing, listening, and feeling through the use of various media, such as books, T-shirts, videos, drawings, and photographs. They not only create a sense of place, based on their different points of view, but also represent the visual interpretations of the place.



KENNETH HIEBERT

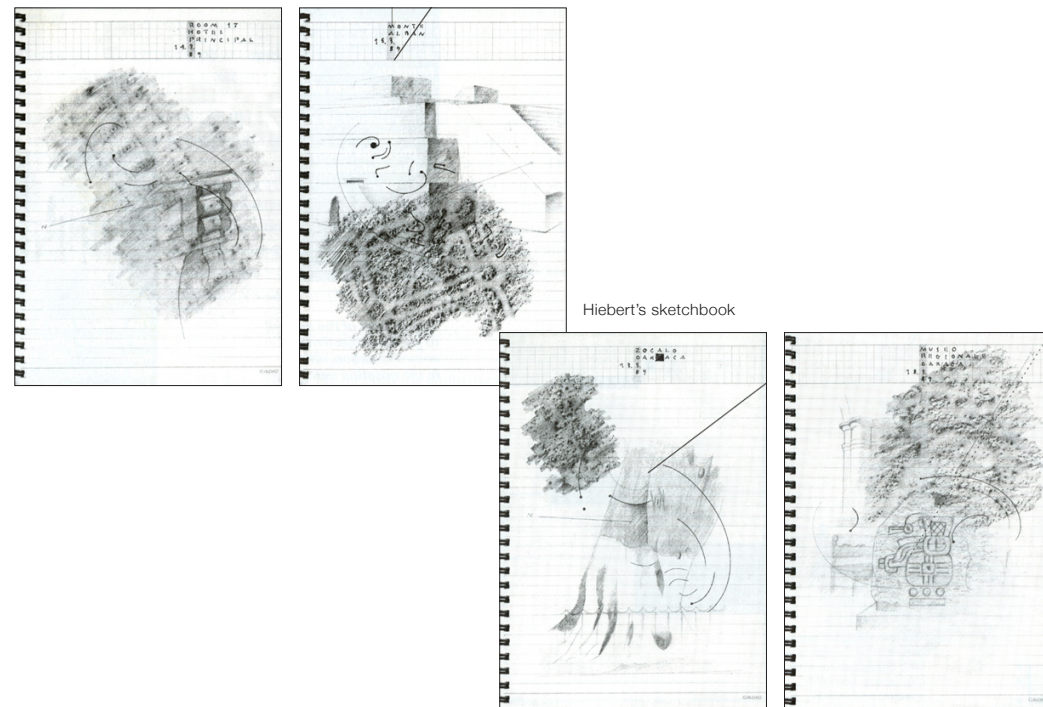
Graphic Design Processes: Universal to Unique was published in 1992 by Kenneth Hiebert, educator, graphic designer, photographer, and author. In this book, Hiebert presents the basic ideas of graphic design processes through a variety of contents: space, sign-symbol, word to image, texture and pattern, color, overlay, and time.

Each chapter illustrates the fundamentals and the principles of graphic design by means of systematic graphic design processes. Also, he offers a vibrant new way of seeing and resolving primary visual problems.

Particularly, in Chapter 4, Hiebert suggests new potential for graphic expression linked with drawings, rubbings, and photographs that are derived from his experiences at the Oaxaca Valley of Mexico (Fig. 5).

Hiebert says, “I travel to be surprised, amazed. The surprise and amazement has to get back into my work: agitate it (me); refresh it (me); change it (me) unexpectedly.”^[5]

A different set of images from his journey was interpreted through diverse aspects of visual forms.



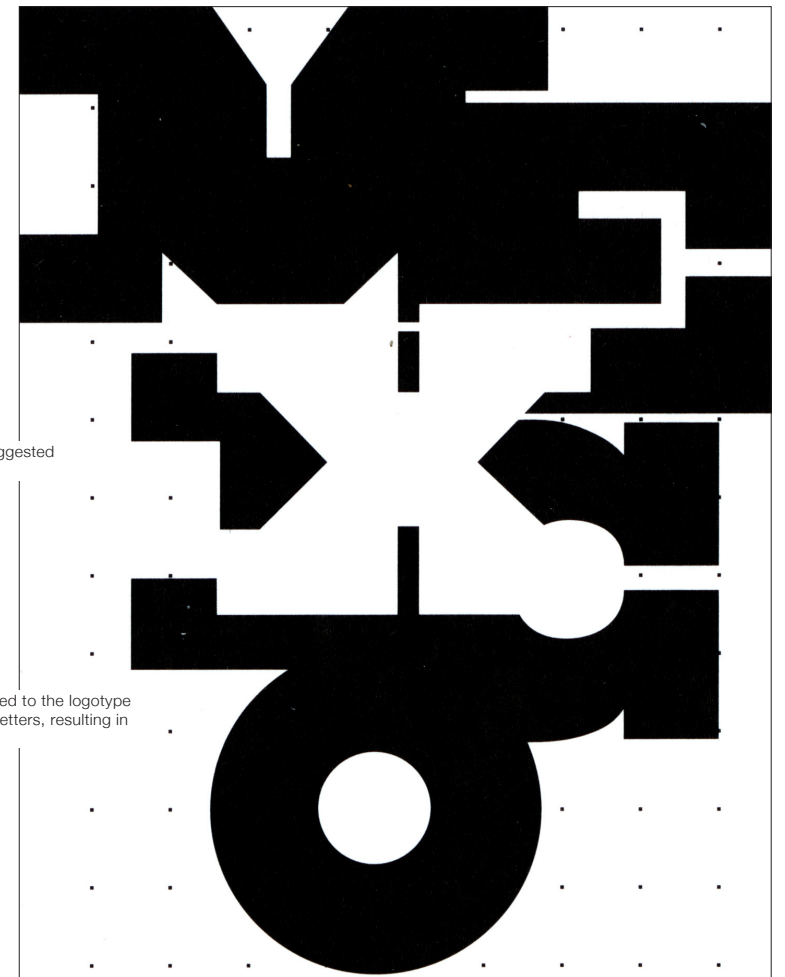
[5] Kenneth J. Hiebert, *Graphic Design Processes: Universal to Unique* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992), 106.

Hiebert uses travel experiences for stimuli and design vocabulary. Therefore, it provokes fresh graphic expression combining graphic form and content gathered from diverse locations.

As a graphic designer, I used this inspirational approach throughout the development of my creative methods and processes to better understand, feel, and interpret my surroundings.

Overlaying geometric elements is suggested by the stone relief in the drawing.^[6]

Texture and tonality are applied to the logotype for greater distinction of the letters, resulting in greater textural diversity.^[7]



[6] Kenneth J. Hiebert, *Graphic Design Processes: Universal to Unique* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992), 115.

[7] Kenneth J. Hiebert, *Graphic Design Processes: Universal to Unique* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992), 115.

FOTOGRAFIKS

Photography + Graphic Design = Fotografiks

Fotografiks is the equilibrium between photography and design through graphic expression that evolves from content, or fotografiks, photography with a graphic attitude.^[8]

In the book, *Fotografiks*, Philip Meggs says, "I am glad that David Carson titled this book "Fotografiks" instead of "Photographs," because it is as much about graphic design as it is about photography...Fotografiks implies an approach to photography based on a designer's viewpoint. Many designers take photographs. With their passion for the visual manifestation of abstract symbols, especially numbers and letters, they delight in documenting vernacular graphics in the environment."^[9]

In combining the photographs of David Carson and the writings of Philip Meggs, *Fotografiks* attempts to create relationships between images and words, based on individual viewpoints and individual sensitivities to objects found in the environment.

[8] Wikipedia, "Fotografiks," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fotografiks>, Accessed 10 January 2009.

[9] David Carson and Philip B. Meggs, *Fotografiks: An Equilibrium Between Photography and Design Through Graphic Expression That Evolves from Content* (Corte Madera, California: Gingko Press, Inc., 1999), 13.



Although the sign conveys a feeling of abandonment, this post office is still in operation. Sometimes ignorance is bliss; at other times it is freedom. Unschooling in proper letter spacing, this sign's maker was free to invent a new spatial syntax. [10]



A still image seeks the condition of the kinetic image through repetition, overlapping, and cropping. But a still image moves for no one, for to move negates its stillness. [11]

[10] David Carson and Philip B. Meggs, *Fotografiks: An Equilibrium Between Photography and Design Through Graphic Expression That Evolves from Content* (Corte Madera, California: Gingko Press, Inc., 1999), 80-81.

[11] David Carson and Philip B. Meggs, *Fotografiks: An Equilibrium Between Photography and Design Through Graphic Expression That Evolves from Content* (Corte Madera, California: Gingko Press, Inc., 1999), 82-83.



MEMORY JOURNEY PROJECT

When I visit a city once, or many times, each visit makes an absolutely different impression on me. Even though it is the same city, when I settle down, I feel and think differently, depending on if I am a tourist or resident.

Based upon previous experiences, ‘the project of visual narrative/my memory journey’ was carried out with photographic documentation that I collected at first hand in each place.

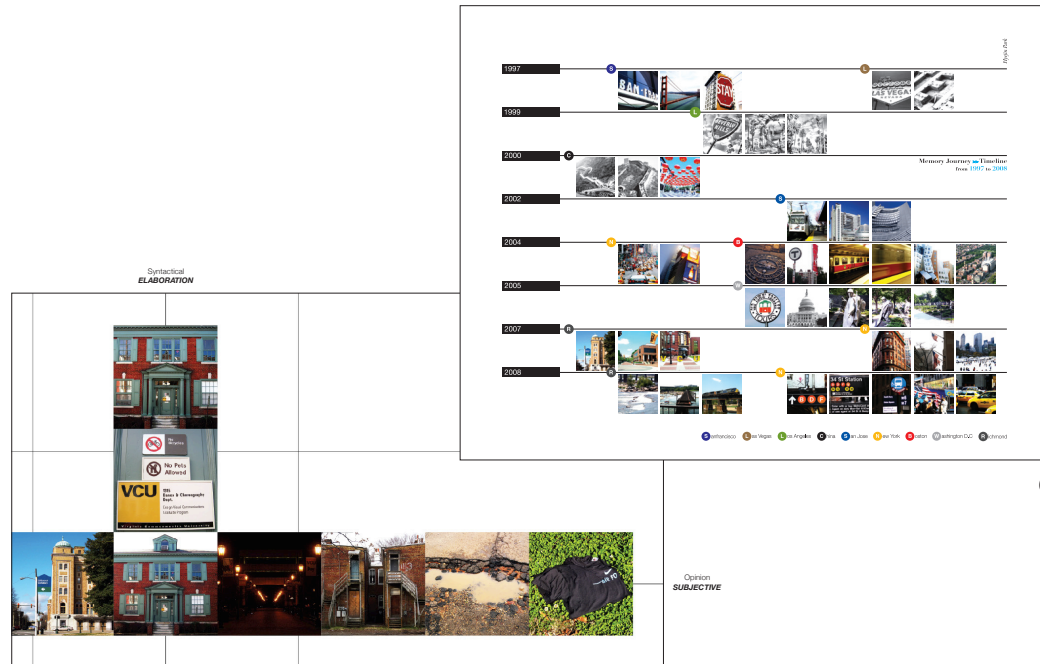
To develop my memory journey, I chose two different cities that I have a close connection to me. One is the city of Richmond in which I live; another is the city of New York in which I have visited many times. I explored my feelings, what I saw, felt, and thought in Richmond and New York; shot photographs that interested me emotionally and remained in my memory.

Before arranging the timeline, I collected a lot of research components for accomplishing my final outcome. In the diagram (Fig. 6), I illustrated my memory journey about the time and location of specific memories. Also, I used a “imaging of information matrix” to organize images more easily that I wanted to communicate. A large number of photographs reveal the aspects of a subject through the matrix including objective and subjective terms. Also, the matrix is concerned with semantic and syntactic connections (Fig. 7). This process helped me contemplate the visual possibilities for seeing, collecting, analyzing, organizing, and developing visual information.

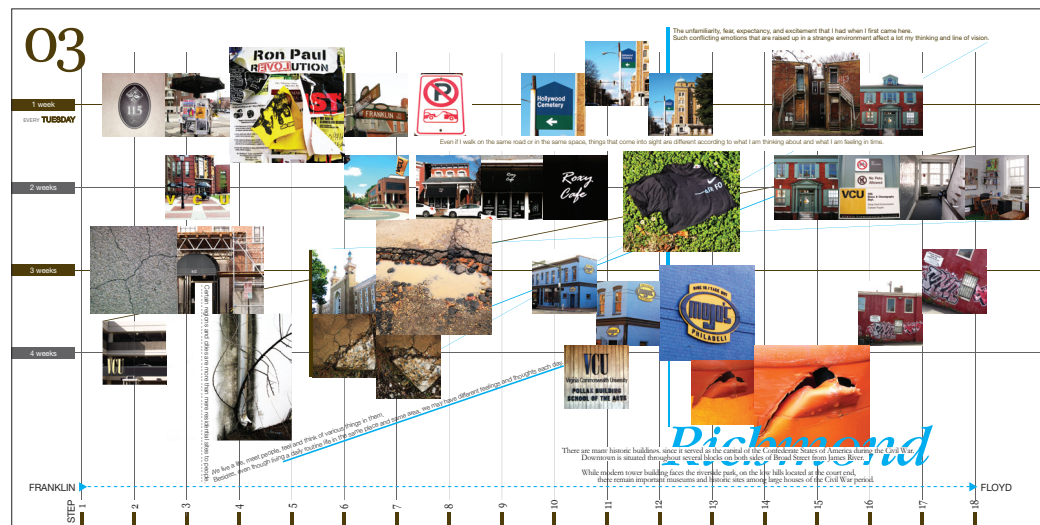
In the Richmond timeline, I photographed images from my everyday life in the city. In particular, I documented the signs, textures and refuse between my apartment on 515 West Franklin Street and the graduate studios at 1315 Floyd Avenue. Although I was travelling the very same route, the images taken on different days expressed different patterns of thought and feeling. The images obtained from exploring my memory although abstract, are a realistic depiction of my actual experiences and feelings (Fig. 8).

The New York timeline describes my journey story through the use of photographic documentation obtained from the city of New York. In the timeline, I strove to figure out the objects and places that caught my eye and evoked feelings as I walked through the city. The differing sizes of the photographs arranged in individual time were also related to the weight of my emotions (Fig. 9).

Precedents

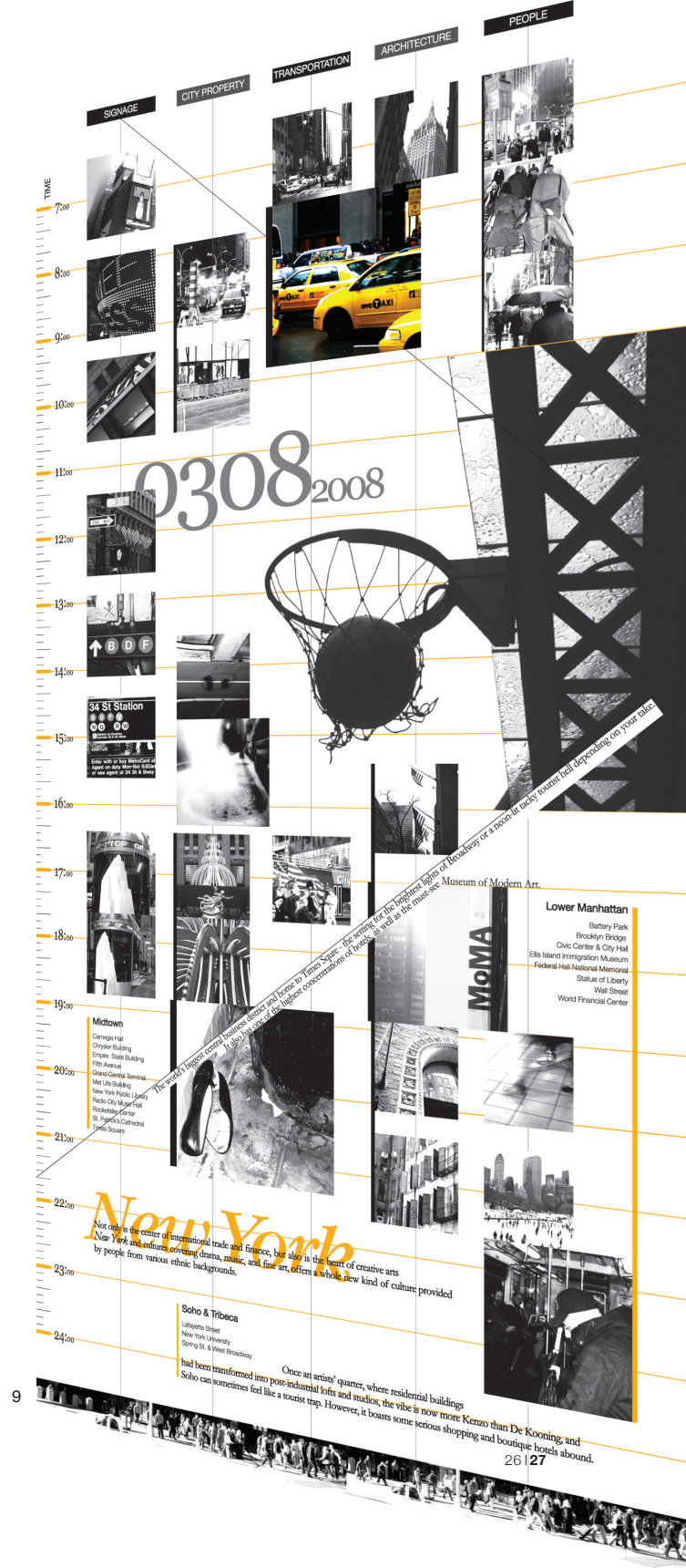


6



8

A Sense of Place



9

BUILDING PROJECT

In this project, we were required to transform the image of a discarded industrial building into a valuable place through a fresh point of view using various methods for expanding the potential of its visual language.

The building at 1815 High Point Avenue was located in a small-scale industrial zone, and the circumstances of the building were typical of an industrial area in the United States. Also, a variety of visual artifacts proved that there were intergroup relationships between various people around this building in the past. However, the building seemed to have lost the value and identity it once had.

To analyze the characteristics of the building in detail I examined those visual elements that appeared to be meaningful and which drew my attention.

After exploring the perimeter of the building and collecting artifacts, I developed a theme for my project: simplicity and complexity. I believe that simplicity and complexity exist everywhere and two opposite properties can be found within a single object. I illustrated these opposing features in a series of photographs (Fig. 10).

Moreover, we can observe and express the same object from a different point of view. For example, in the discarded trash around the building, I found the images of face of a puppy and the head of a bird (Fig. 11).



10 Complexity



Simplicity

11



VISUAL NARRATIVE PROJECT

In this project, we were asked to work on a single project interpreting an excerpt from the book *Einstein's Dreams* in the form of a short video.

We were expected to use, create, and organize various components developed in a series of assignments, dealing with sound design, type in motion, and static and moving image sequences. These elements were combined to create a visual narrative experience.

My selected text was **TIME IS ABSOLUTE.**

For the selected story, I thought about the object that could involve the main content of the story. To visualize the most important part in the story, I connected the existence of absolute time on two objects. One was the life and death of human beings; another was the geographical environment where power of human beings is inconsequential.

I took a series of images at a public cemetery and at the James River which inexorably flows through the city of Richmond. The sequential images were photographed from different camera angles and camera movement to approach the concept of my story.

The multiple sequences shot from different places were integrated. This process was intended to be an exercise exploring rhythm and repetition in a visual narrative through combining the sequential images (Fig. 12).

A visual score (Fig. 13) for a final movie was created based on my story excerpt. Composed of three factors dealing with audio, typography, and images. The appropriate time harmony and arrangements of tempo, chord, sound effects, and spoken voice were visually concretized within a frame of type and images fitting the story before a final movie was produced.

Working on this project provided me with opportunity to explore the existing environment in a new way. The established places were newly interpreted and depicted as another meaning in a visual narrative.



12 Edited Image Sequences
11" x 17"



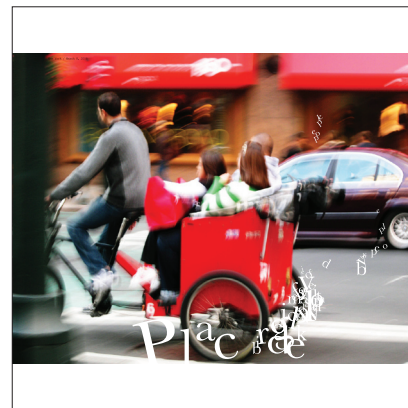
SNIPPETS PROJECT

In this project, we were required to generate typographic experiments using diverse materials and methods with collected “snippets” [12] as content. We were encouraged to pursue the following activities: discover new connections between form and content (syntactics and semantics); expand my typographic voice in new ways; and explore new methods and practices to expand the potential of typographical language.

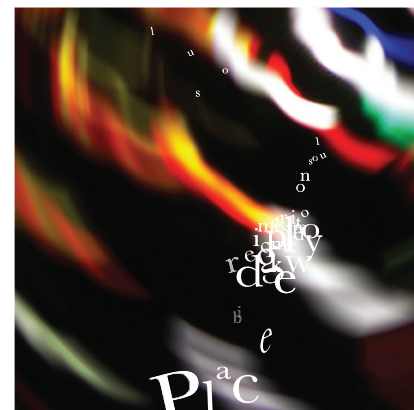
During this seminar, snippets found from my surroundings were transformed into typographic form. I chose to present nine of the 10x10 inch experimental posters. The contents of posters were generated by an interpretation of my thoughts and feelings regarding with places that I experienced, such as New York, the James River in Richmond, and Seoul.

[12] snippets: experiments invisible language and typography. Jot down irresistible blurbs from books you are reading, movies you are viewing, the newspaper, the news station. be aware of the flood of visual ephemera surrounding you and extract idiomatic and enigmatic phrases that are strangely mundane and weirdly sublime. Rob Carter

In order to develop the snippets in visual form, I tried harmonizing form and content. Also, I focused on expressing my feelings gained in each place either metaphorically or concretely in the visual form made by mixing up several components, such as photographs, typography, and various kinds of paper.



To experience is to learn

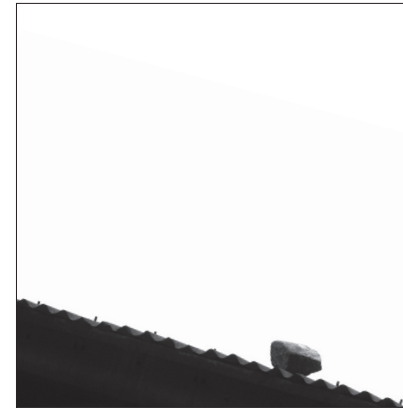


Place is deeply imprinted on the soul

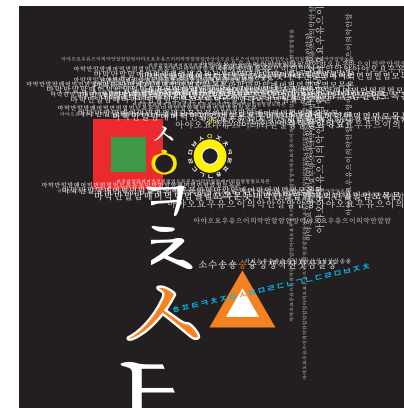
A Sense of Place



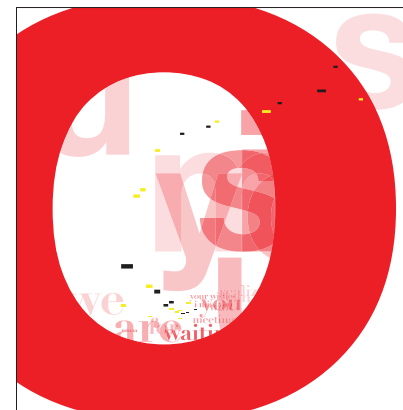
Complexity



These are traces showing that somebody was here before.



We are tormented by noise of various kinds



Whisper something to you



PHOTOGRAPHY FOR SELF-EXPRESSION

Currently, many people can record images of their own conduct and feelings on their own initiative. However, photographs do not put objective images on record but caught via the camera lens reveal an individual temperament and great originality.

My intention in this article is to examine how people generate their own images through the use of various types of cameras from distinct perspectives and by many diverse techniques. Moreover, we examine how different ideas and images are drawn from the same subject, and sometimes from a plain and hackneyed object through various photographic techniques and angles. Another world, seen from various camera angles, generates diverse thoughts, results, and meanings.

Today, people create their own images through the use of various types of cameras: digital cameras, cellphone cameras, film cameras, etc., from distinct perspectives and by many different techniques. According to Susan Sontag, however, the earliest photographers thought of the camera as a kind of a duplicating machine; as if, while people operate cameras, it is the camera that sees the object. Moreover, it was viewed that the photographer produces non-personal, objective images only as a strict observer. However, no one can take an identical picture of the same object. The rationale behind this is that photographs do not present objective images. The images caught via the camera lens reveal an individual temperament. In other words, what is recorded by a camera is not only the 'act of seeing' as a simple activity, but also the 'act of seeing via a photograph.' Everyone has a different nature and enthusiastic sensitivity. This condition coincides with the

notion that no one takes a picture of an object in an identical manner.

First of all, a photographer can make his own interesting points and images even from the same object through the use of his or her own new perspective and method. I am curious—what if different people (having different occupations, backgrounds, character, and thoughts) take a photograph of the same aspect of a particular place. Based on this query, when I visited a specific place, I conducted an experiment with my traveling companions. After selecting the place, we went there to experience what drew our attention in a certain fixed time, what objects were interesting, and how they were experienced. This experiment helped us not only to observe the photographs as a product made by the camera, but also to understand the intentions, ideas, and even the preferences of the photographer, without any detailed explanation.

Secondly, we derive our own distinctive characteristics from a variety of visual results by different photographic techniques. For instance, in representing the reality in the frame, Walker Evans reconstructs an object in the figurative framework of a space and emphasizes a unified theme in the picture, rather than drawing the object in the screen as it is. In approaching an object, he maintained balance with the object almost all of the time. The composition of photographs might feel monotonous, but this method aims to make only the essential elements of the object stand out in space, regardless of the movement of the object (Fig. 14).

On the other hand, William Klein, a representative photographer in the United States, preferred proximity photography, taking pictures of objects from very short distances, using a 35mm wide-angle lens. He broke the order and rules of photographs as a genre of the time and showed daring and powerful expressions in the history of photographs. In addition, Klein employed various compositions and camera angles. He selected the most extraordinary forms and presented an original essay of a theme, not an objective report, in order to convey the theme of his photographs to people. Klein captured the confusion and anxiety of New York through his camera's lens reflecting his own perspective and viewpoint as well as the fear he felt while traveling through the city, filled with lively moving advertising, neon signs, typography, ideograms, and people (Fig. 15).

However, we view and interpret objects through our unique vantage point and perspective even though we are in the same city. The camera captures them based on our own ideas and draws new images and meanings within them. In other words, we can figure out and analyze objects found in a place more precisely with various angles and techniques. We also can extract other thoughts, results, and meanings from the objects. From my experience, when I was traveling in New York City, my eyes fell upon diverse objects, which were captured on my camera through a mindset. It was completely opposed to Klein's viewpoint: I did not feel fear of any kind looking at the neon signs, but rather, I felt flamboyant and energetic. In another case, when I saw a McDonald's sign in New York, I recorded my eyes' movement through a structure of different images with various angles and techniques. In the following continuous images, people will be able to

recognize my thoughts and the trace of my gaze. This was expressed with different understandings and experiences on the object through a camera. Likewise, we can figure out the personal disposition and ideas of a person by the image that was gained through another methodology (Fig. 16).

Finally, photographs, even if they are of an overly worn-out subject matter, following the interpretation and actions of the photographer for the subjects captured through the camera lens, they can find new meaning through one's individual point of view (Fig. 17). Objects, which are too easily seen in people's daily lives, have difficulty being engraved into their eyes. These images are the objects that I found in the public space during the time when I visited New York. I might just pass by these objects since the material is common and banal; however, I tried to catch them with a camera to make them a part of my memories and experiences and the recollection of old times. At that time, I thought perhaps the material that is most usually seen at a place is the one that shows the most of that place, and the daily life related to that place. What is more, I thought such material reminds me of the most essential sentiment of that place. However, objects, which are boring or banal, best show the capacity of a camera to "observe". This experience lets us realize recording things by camera is not only the 'act of seeing' as a simple activity, but also the 'act of seeing via a photograph.' (Fig. 18)

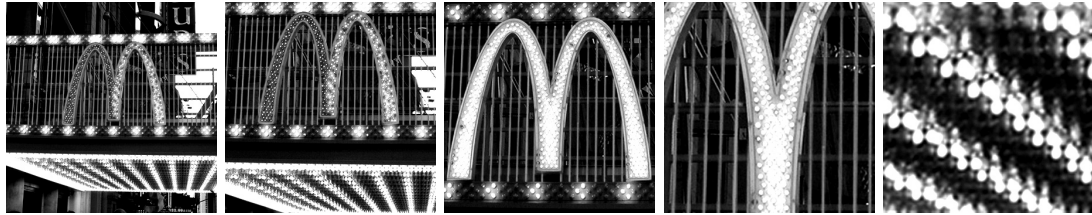
To sum up, picture-taking is a method of allowing us to have new perspectives. Furthermore, the object found in a place can be interpreted as a fresh viewpoint through the camera according to each person's own individual experiences and point of view.



14



15



16



17



18

No one can take an identical picture of the same object. The rationale behind this is that photographs do not present objective images. The images caught via the camera lens reveal an individual temperament. In other words, what is recorded by a camera is not only the 'act of seeing' as a simple activity, but also the 'act of seeing via a photograph.'

Susan Sontag

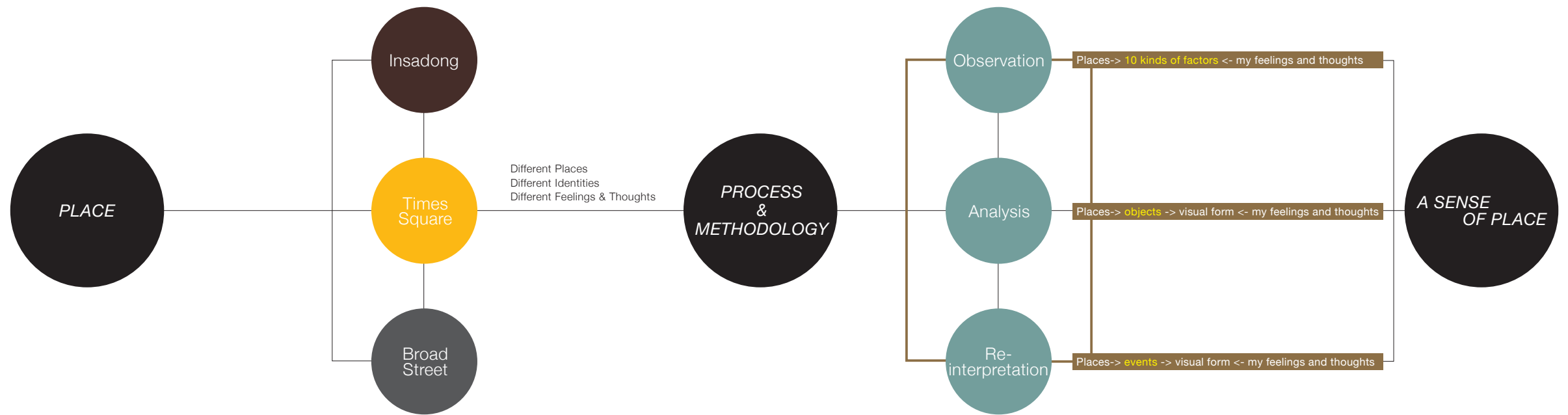


Process and Methodology

As I began developing my project, the process of circumspect observation and exploration in many different places provided me with opportunities to have various experiences and broad thoughts about the places: every place has its own uniqueness and identity; how the features give me certain inspirations; how the inspirations could be reflected in my creative methods and processes; how a sense of place affects my emotional qualities; and what roles the various aspects of a place have as design sources.

First, I asked myself, which city that I had experienced and specifically what location in a selected city, could explain my body of work. Among the cities that I had experienced, Times Square, New York City, Insadong, Seoul, South Korea, and Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia, have been selected as my places for developing my creative project.

This creative project was carried out starting from general scope and expanded to observation and analysis of more specific scope. It was not elicited visually and verbally at once, but developed step by step.



WHY TIMES SQUARE?

From my view, Times Square is the center of America. It is a place that shows America and its identity. I can experience crowds of glamorous and busy people, different kinds of shops, up-to-date information, and multiple signs with vivid neon. These factors make me feel a sense of place. Furthermore, I can meet people from a variety of races, as well as see the various graphic items reflecting the magnificent characteristics of Times Square.

When I was traveling in New York City, I felt flamboyant and energetic, and my eyes fell upon diverse objects such as vivid neon signs, advertising, architecture, landscape, and people. Moreover, almost all aspects of Times Square made my feet walk lively and quickly. These sorts of responses led me to build new sights and gave me inspiration for my creative process.



WHY INSADONG?

From my view, Insadong is attractive for several reasons.

Physically, Insadong is well-known for its traditional businesses, such as craft stores, art galleries, antique art dealers, coffee shops, and restaurants. It is the place in Seoul for visitors wanting to experience traditional aspects of Korea. I think that Insadong is the best place to represent the conventional image of Korea. The terrain and culture differing from other places in many respects present vivid visual and cultural contrasts. A traditional Korean atmosphere and flavor that are not generally easily felt and the Korean factors given off from every corner of the places, bring cozy and comfort feelings to my heart.

For all these reasons, I can acquire a different sort of inspiration from Insadong, which I have rarely gotten from other places in Seoul.

I realized that if I had not been away from Korea even for a while, I would have never been able to get that feeling.



WHY BROAD STREET?

From my view, Broad Street offers me various images, some familiar and some strange.

As an inhabitant, not a tourist, I scrutinized into this place several times to explore what constitutes my sense of place. Also, I sought for how an unfamiliar place can become a familiar place, based upon my experiences.

My belief is that it is a significant challenge for a designer to find inspiration and stimuli in any place from the exciting to the mundane.

For all these reasons, Broad Street has been selected as a third place.



I. OBSERVATION

My process and methodology began with gathering documentation through first-hand observation and exploration in a specific places: Times Square, Insadong, and Broad Street.

First, I began by absorbing the ambience of each particular place I visited, rather than simply trying to find a specific issue.

I enjoyed roaming from place to place and gathering photographic documentation of found objects, which aroused my interest and kindled my emotion.



II. ANALYSIS Different **PLACES** & Different **IDENTITIES** & Different **FEELINGS**

The second step was to analyze the characteristics of each place in great detail. A scrupulous observation was executed to grasp the unique colors and characteristics exhibited by each place. To research the unique identity and establish a sense of place, I visited the same spot at different days and hours of the week. I made a thorough and concrete analysis of the objects, people and their actions, and the cultural and visual elements by the use of my eye, my senses, and my camera. Picture-taking is a method of allowing me to see things as part of an environment in a new perspective. Found objects in each place can be interpreted anew through the camera. Additionally, I recorded my various feelings and thoughts affected by the objects—the detailed records influenced my creative process and visual language as the tools of thought.

Creating the map of My Journey in Place (Fig. 19) was the first stage in developing my methods and processes. This map consists of the images of objects that captured my eyes during my navigation in each place. During this process, I listed **10 categories** on the map to understand more precisely how I felt about each place and how each object contained in my photographs stimulated my feelings. I selected the best images from numerous photographs that gave the strongest impression of that place.

Signs / People / City Property / Typography & Communication / Wayfinding Systems / Alleys & Streets / Texture / Trash & Banal Objects / Neon Signs / Scents & Sounds /

WHY 10 CATEGORIES?

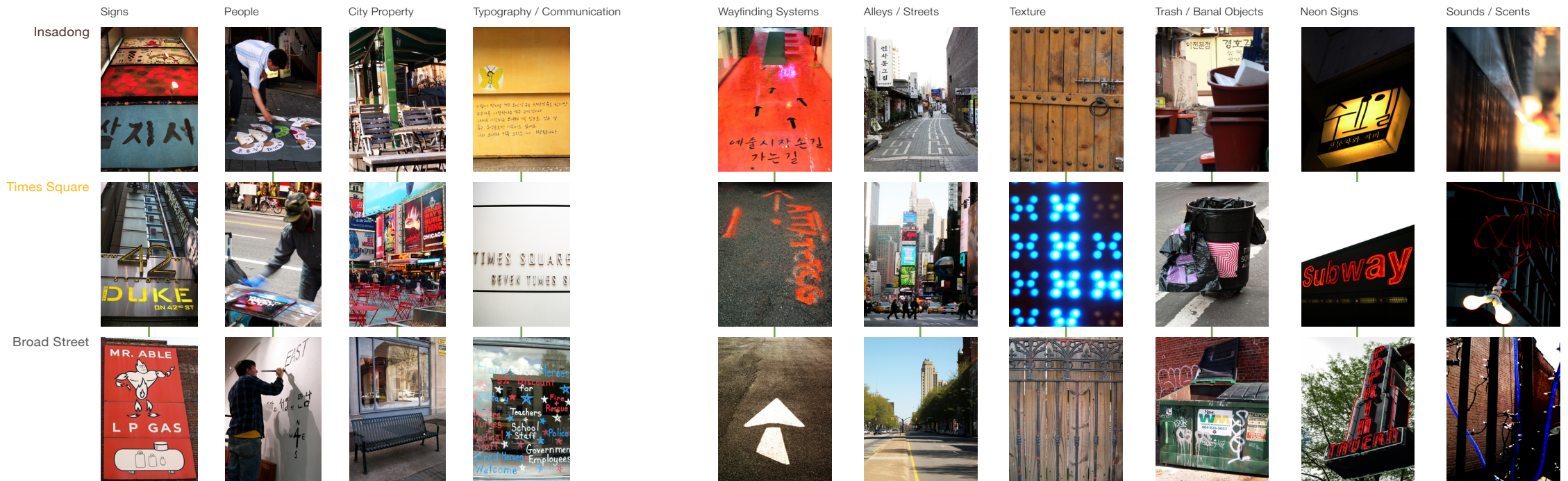
When I conducted research on a sense of place, I connected with a website called Project for Public Spaces (PPS). This website is to help people construct and understand many public spaces in different countries and different communities. Also, PPS has a lot of information and examples of work regarding environmental design and placemaking.

PPS comments that “the power of 10 is a concept we use to think about places beyond singular uses, activities, and features—layering these functions and attributes of a space creates a richness and exponential synergy that all great places have.” [13] PPS suggest that a city must have 10 attractive destinations in order to make a successful place; those 10 destinations must form 10 good places people want to visit; and those 10 good places must

have 10 things that we can enjoy and experience in the places.

The information acquired from PPS inspired me to organize the images captured through my camera's lens into ten categories for seizing my emotional reaction to a sense of each place. Furthermore, I chose photographs having the images of similar objects in order to more accurately understand the characteristics of each place compared to each other. To obtain the visually unified images, I employed similar camera angles, distances, and compositions as methods in the same found objects from distinct places: Times Square, Insadong, and Broad Street.

[13] ONE BLOCK RADIUS, “observation,” <http://oneblockradius.org/obr.html>, Accessed 20 March 2008.



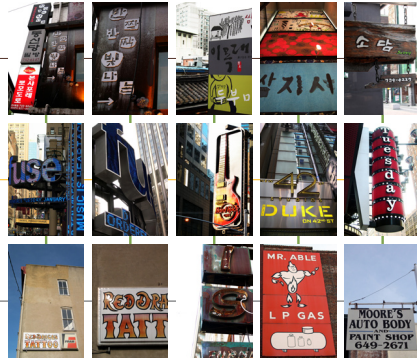
A Sense of Place

I
nsadong

T
imes Square

B
road Street

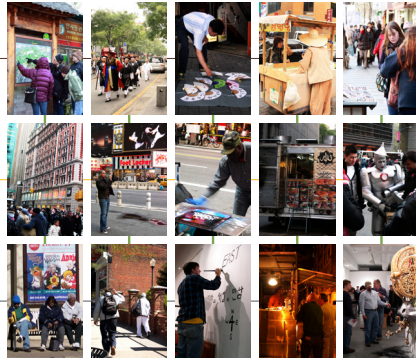
Signs



A sign is one of the most significant factors—it reveals the peculiar characteristics of a certain place. I can grasp the traits of a place through signs. Signs have to harmonize with the surrounding environment, as well as give life to its characteristics. However successful a sign system might be, if a sign is irrelevant due to a non-unique color or its arrangement in the place, it cannot be regarded as a successful sign.

I thought to myself how I would feel if all those fascinating and splendid signs of New York existed in Insadong. Would my feelings be the same? Could they be recognized as successful signs?

People

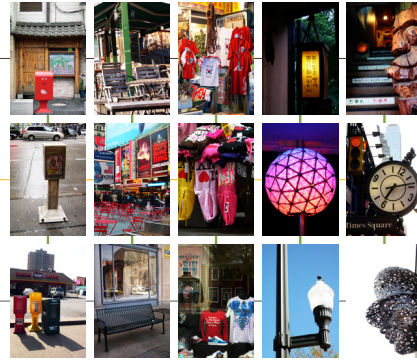


When I observe people's motions and facial expressions in a certain place, I can sometimes figure out their feelings about the place, as well as their purpose in the place. The actions and expressions of people play a pivotal role in creating the atmosphere of the place. Additionally, the cultural and visual elements of the place are also formed according to the kinds of people visiting the place (whether there are more tourists or local residents).

Many foreigners would like to visit Insadong and Times Square because these places have unique spatial colors. On the other hand, Broad Street is a place where the local inhabitants, rather than visitors, usually participate in activities.

I get to feel and share a lot of new things with many people in a certain place. Through this process, the specific place comes to be retained in my memory and mind.

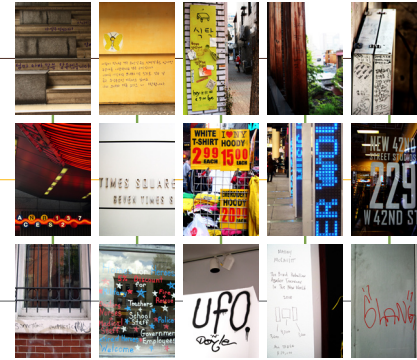
City Property



There are a lot of facilities, such as benches, street lamps, mailboxes, and sculptures in public places. Each facility should be able to show the unique color of the place. It is important that each facility displays its own individual character, but it is more essential that all of them form a harmonious and integrated image through which people can understand the characteristics of the place as a whole.

I think that this process of close observation of an object in a place becomes a critical part when I am designing visual media related to its environment. As facilities arranged in a place get naturally soaked through the unique atmosphere of the place, when I design certain visual elements to be set in an environment, the first step is to analyze the overall characteristics of the environment.

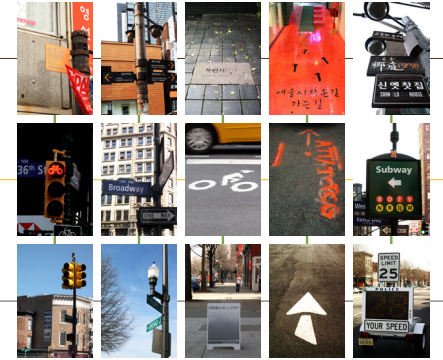
Typography / Communication



Typography establishes a greater sense of place, organizing various visual elements combined into an environment. In order to show the peculiar characteristics of a place, not only visual beauty itself, but also the context and harmony with the surrounding environment, need to be taken into consideration.

Typography in the signs or advertisements helps me seize the ambiance of the area. The scribbling on the streets is another tool that people use to communicate with one another. These expressions of different individualities can stimulate the sensibilities of those who visit the place, as well as offer another kind of freshness of that place.

Wayfinding Systems



Wayfinding systems orient us in space; they inform us about where we are and instruct us on how to move from place to place. Effective wayfinding systems ease safety concerns and help people to feel more secure and comfortable in urban environments. They help us to find our way more easily, and to acquire knowledge about the urban landscape in any city or country.

I think that a successful wayfinding system reflects the culture, history, and characteristics of its residents, and does not encroach upon the genuine appearance and natural conditions of the environment.

I
nsadong

Alleys / Streets



Texture



Trash / Banal Objects



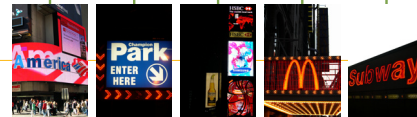
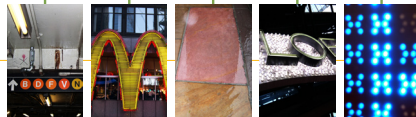
Neon Signs



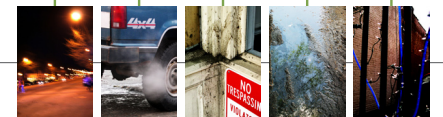
Sounds / Scents



T
imes Square



B
road Street



I come to understand a place naturally as I walk through its alleys and streets. Alleys and streets can significantly affect my movements or directions to go.

Alleys and streets play an important role in forming the image of the place and making it recognized by different people.

A sense of place begins from these minute and small parts. I can sometimes feel the unique spatial features in a certain area only from feeling the texture. The texture enables me to remember a place metaphorically and sentimentally.

Recently, many architects say the architecture has priority in creating experiences rather than visual beauty. In other words, architects place a priority on the texture of materials over the colors. In this way, architecture works in a perfect harmony with nature. In other words, texture can draw on the spatial characters of the place better than other factors.

We might just pass by these objects since the material is common and banal, however, I think perhaps the material that is most often seen at a place is the one that shows the most of that place. It shows the daily life of a specific place. Moreover, such material reminds me of the most essential sentiment of that place.

Neon signs are a visual element that illuminate a place and give more vital life force. I can feel more dynamic visual rhythms and depth of a place through splendid lights, colors and a succession of messages on night streets.

I believe that the development of neon signs is closely related to the night life of the public place. A city like Seoul where I was born and grew up has splendid neon signs because the night life in such a place is dynamic and the people enjoy their lives until late at night. They make the people feel they can move around the city safely even late at night. Additionally, they are like close friends to me who deliver many messages.

The dynamic motions of the neon signs are a significant factor providing energy to the night life of the public place.

Scents and sounds help me remember my experiences and memories in a place. Furthermore, they remind me of experiences I had in that place as well as other similar experiences; they stimulate my memory and sensitivity.

On the first contact with a place, visual elements first help me realize the place, but the scents and sounds created from the place strongly influence my memories and feelings. These factors cause me to have a strong emotion about the place at times.

From my standpoint as a Korean in America, the emotions of a place caused by the smell are very different when visiting a Chinese town than when visiting a Korean town. Scents sometimes make people feel a certain area as a distant place or a near place.

ANALYSIS *continued*

The individual categories in the map (Fig. 19) contain reasons for choosing these factors, photographs, and expressions of my thoughts and feelings within them.

I examined the thoughts I had in the individual places and how they could be reflected in my graphic process through detailed contents written within the map.

While arranging my numerous image cuts, I realized that an impression of each place stored in my memories were perceived respectively different to me even though they are similar targets discovered within each place. Sometimes magnificent, sometimes calm, sometimes with a depressed feeling...

These images are a collection of memories in my extremely personal thoughts and feelings. If somebody visits the same place, they will surely hold different feelings and images in their memories.

This process allowed me to recognize the essential patterns and elements organizing the identity of each place and provided me with the opportunity to view the objects in the environment more deeply and broadly.

A group of visitors who experienced the map in the exhibition could understand how I extracted a sense of place from the individual places, while reading the gist of my thoughts and feelings obtained from each place in the map.

Through the images on the map, many viewers would be able to recognize how the cultural and visual patterns of each place (Times Square, Insadong, and Broad Street) create their own atmosphere, and how the characteristics of those visual elements are closely related to the place.

All factors creating the environment and atmosphere within a certain place are harmoniously unified. For example, sound, smell, emotion, people, and events have an important relation to that place.

Guy Debord

III. RE-INTERPRETATION

My next step was to re-interpret the objects discovered within each place through the use of typography, photography, and illustration. It was based upon my viewpoints and thoughts combined with my emotions associated with the objects. Emotional reactions to each object was embodied in this process.

For a more explicit understanding, I selected objects that made the strongest impression on me and which communicated a sense of place most strongly. I examined the visual language of these objects and generated a series of posters that re-interpreted that language in a new context.

Additionally, I shot a series of sequential images intended to visualize an essential aspect of my emotional reaction to the objects in each place: Times Square, Insadong, and Broad Street. These images offer an alternative viewpoint where I was able to feel and observe the place more specifically than with single images. The sequences also allowed me to better remember my emotional reaction to a place and therefore to interpret that aspect better.

The posters served as interpretations of my reaction to found objects and used distinctive visual language and techniques.

The posters provided me with the opportunity to explore the visual possibilities and a new way of looking for developing design problems. As a result, I was aware how a designer could make a visual interpretation of a place be in proper harmony with it and to convey to an audience a true sense of that place.



TIMES SQUARE

When I was traveling in Times Square, I photographed an array of objects and elements in the environment that captured my attention. Seeing a McDonald's neon sign, I was mesmerized by its flamboyance.

Neon signs illuminate a place and give vital life force. I feel the dynamic rhythms and intensity of a place through splendid lights, colors, and a succession of messages that fill the streets at night.

ENERGETIC, Poster, 24" x 24"

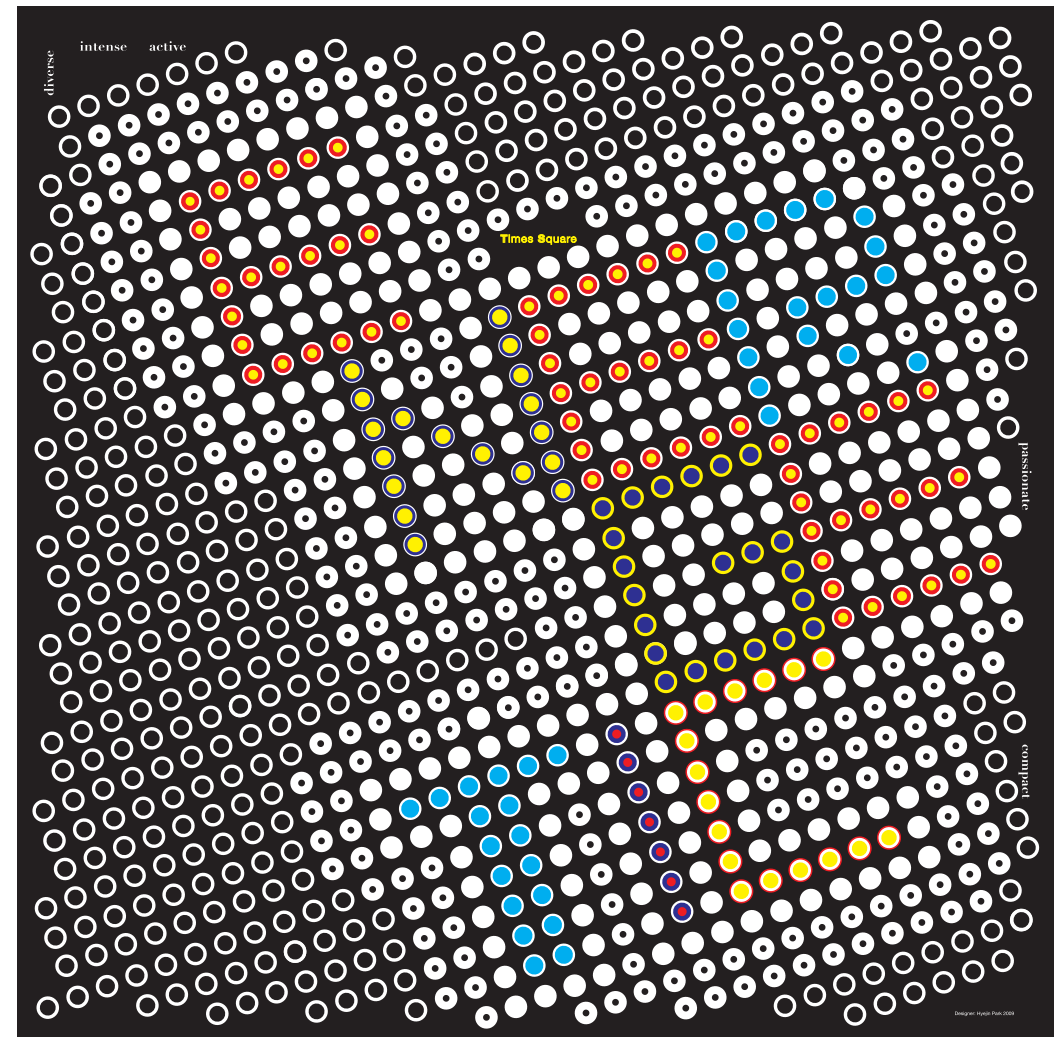
To express the "energetic" feelings felt from the McDonald's neon sign, the repetitive patterns discovered in the sign were re-interpreted into typographic form. Different colors were given to each letterform and pattern based on the repetitive pattern discovered in the sign, hoping to communicate "energetic feelings."

If this poster is observed from far away, one can feel the dynamic energy of the neon signs in Times Square.

Additionally, I recorded my eyes' movement through a series of sequential images taken from varied distances (Fig. 20).



20



ENERGETIC, Poster, 24" x 24"

INSADONG

After visiting and photographing Insadong, I generated two additional posters that represented the emotions I experienced in that place. These were titled, “*emptiness*” and “*emotional resonance*.” The *emptiness* poster used Korean typography to represent my feelings walking around the numerous alleys in the city. The other poster, *emotional resonance*, represented my emotions more abstractly, using metaphor and an integration of photographic imagery and Korean typography.

EMPTINESS, Poster, 24” x 36”

In this poster, empty spaces found within Korean typography reflect the features of the opened and closed alleys in Insadong. The empty spaces are left to evoke emotional resonance and allude to the possibility of empty places found within a city.

Type style, size, and placement are arranged to represent the stretching alleys. The inherent Korean sentiment of Insadong is amplified by using Korean typography.

EMOTIONAL RESONANCE,

Poster, 24” x 36”

In this poster, I tried to represent the indescribable emotional resonance and memories I had of Insadong. I used an image of raindrops to reflect the sense of tranquility I had experienced and to give the poster a poetic effect.

The following messages are based upon my notes I took while I was in Insadong. These feelings were re-interpreted through the integration of visual elements in two posters, and the contents of my writing were used in the posters as visual elements.

*How can I feel a sense of place in **Insadong**?*

There are a number of alleys in a row at Insadong.

They have endless elements in many spots that intrigue my curiosity and sentiments as I am solving a riddle.

This seems to leave a certain aftertaste and convey a mysterious sense of something new and hidden, existing somewhere in the alleys.

The aftertaste of something being unfinished, and a feeling that continues being felt within a sense of place, brings me tranquil and placid feelings.

MY FEELINGS
in
INSADONG

I 그 골목 안에는 무엇이 있을까?

나를 <sup>막힌 골목과
또인 골목은 각각의 묘미가 있다.</sup> 인사동에서 거닐듯,
<sup>How can I feel
a sense of place in Insadong?</sup> 거닐듯 통개, 그곳- 장소성을 발견하고,
느낄 수 있나?

인사동에는 수 많은 골목이 즐비해 있다.

^{There are a number of alleys in a row at Insadong.}
거스개끼리 ^{riddles one by one,} 하나하나 풀어나가듯,
호기, 심리, 나의 정서를 자극하는 무수한
요소들이 곳곳에 존재해 있다.

이런 마치 나에게 다가지 않은 어떠한
저녁을 남기는 듯 하고, 골목 어딘가에
새로운라 숨겨진 무엇이 존재할 것 같은
신비감을 전해준다.

<sup>This seems to leave a certain aftertaste and convey a mysterious
sense of something new and hidden, existing somewhere in the
alleys.</sup>
<sup>정초한에서
느껴지는 무엇인가 끝까지 알은 여운과 연결되어지는 느낌은 나에게
관찰하면서도 차분한 느낌을 가져다 준다.
The aftertaste of something being unfinished, and a feeling that continues
being felt within a sense of place, brings me tranquil and placid feelings.</sup>

Either opened or closed, alleys have their own special charm.

emptiness

가득함, 정연함 보다는
어느정도의 무질서함, 약간의 비어있음과 혼돈
Some degree of disorder, some emptiness,
or chaos rather than fullness or orderliness

EMPTINESS, Poster, 24" x 36"

A Sense of Place



EMOTIONAL RESONANCE, Poster, 24" x 36"

BROAD STREET

My next series of photographs focused on a visit to Broad Street in the city of Richmond. I walked the street observing the objects it contained. I was mesmerized by an unstable sign hanging from an old building. It was rusty, broken, and faded. It looked as if it might fall at any moment.

What if I had found the sign in a different place? Would it also make me stop and stare, or even to take its picture? My answer would be No. The reason is that the sign represented the insecurity that I already felt at this place. I could not take my eyes from it.

INSTABILITY, Poster, 24" x 24"

This poster focused on communicating my unstable mental state symbolized by the apparent instability of the storefront sign. To represent my feelings of instability, I used overlapping layers of the sign image that had been given motion blur. The irregular linear patterns denoted my insecure psychological state.



INSTABILITY, Poster, 24" x 24"

IV. BROAD STREET PROJECT

To strengthen my body of work, I decided to explore parts of Broad Street in more depth.

In my other studies I focused on representing a sense of place using visual or cultural elements. In this project, I realized that I could collect additional information by focusing on senses other than sight.

Another difference in this study was that I would be experiencing the city not as a tourist or occasional visitor, but as a resident.

When I visit downtown Broad Street, I usually feel lonely and like a stranger even though I have lived nearby for the past two years. When I visit a new place it becomes more familiar with the passing of time. In the case of Broad Street, this period of adjustment has taken longer than usual.

I therefore attempted to find the reasons for this sense of alienation in my studies.



BROAD STREET PROJECT *continued*
FIRST FRIDAYS ARTWALK

To better understand my feelings about Broad Street, I experimented with time of day, exploring the same pathways and locations at different times of the day (in the morning and at night). Through this process, I could acquire a more varied collection of images and feelings. For the nighttime analysis I decided to visit Broad Street on one of the monthly First Fridays art walks. This would provide a strong contrast to my daytime visit that happened on a normal weekday.

In comparing these experiences, I discovered two very different emotional reactions to the “place” of downtown Broad Street. The vitality and excitement of the art walk greatly decreased the sense of not belonging that I felt during the day.

The contrasting emotions I felt in the same place were interpreted by use of photographs, personal written observations and notations of sights, sounds, and lights. The final project is in the form of an accordion-fold book (Fig. 21).

The following messages are my thoughts that I made a note on a piece of paper while walking on Broad Street.

My experiences and thoughts on Broad Street

How do I feel when I am on Broad Street?

*This place holds an event called **FIRST FRIDAYS ARTWALK** on the first Fridays of every month.*

It is a lively day when people can experience a variety of exhibitions and music, as well as talk with each other until late at night.

Even late at night, it is hard to find any fear or strangeness in this place.

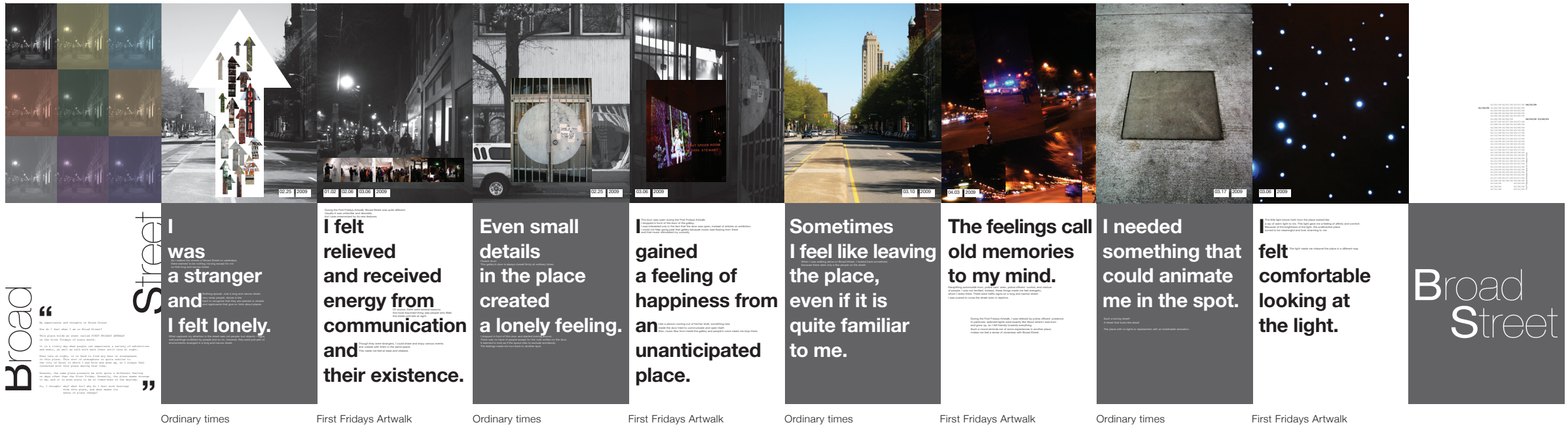
This sort of atmosphere is quite similar to the city of Seoul in which I was born and grew up, so I always feel connected with this place during that time.

However, the same place presents me with quite a different feeling on days other than the first Friday.

Normally, the place seems strange to me, and it is even scary to me at times—even in the daytime.

So, I thought: why? what for? why do I feel such feelings from this place, and what makes its sense of place change?

The same **PLACE**
Different **FEELINGS**



21 **FIRST FRIDAYS ARTWALK**, Accordion-fold book, flat: 50" x 12", folded: 5" x 6"



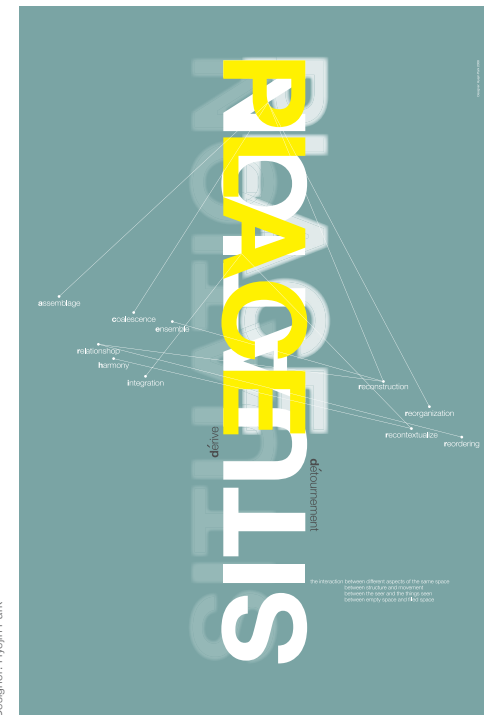


A Sense of Place

The 2009 MFA Thesis Show gave me an opportunity to talk with many visitors about my creative project and to share my thoughts with them. For the exhibition, before installing my design work, I needed to develop a plan for arranging my work in a way that would communicate effectively to the audience.

The pieces in my exhibition were developed methodically and had a close correlation to each other. I decided it was best to arrange the work project-by-project, in the order in which they were created

I observed many visitors absorbed in viewing the images and reading the intimate thoughts I had written about the objects I documented. (second image, left, on opposite page).



Designer: Hyejin Park

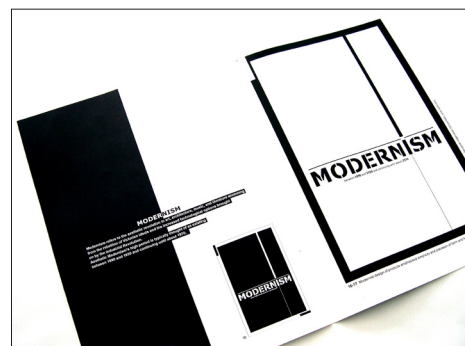
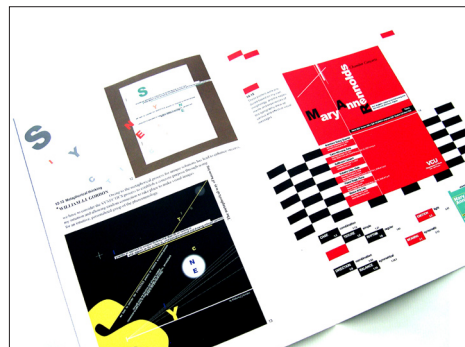
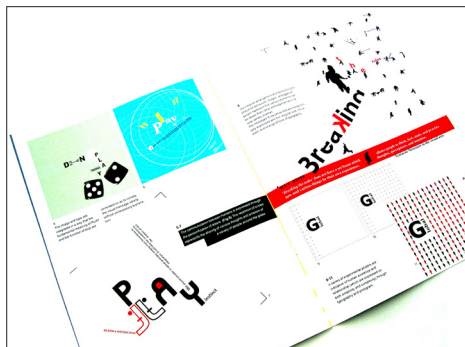
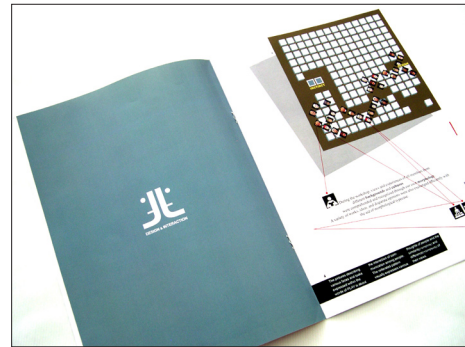
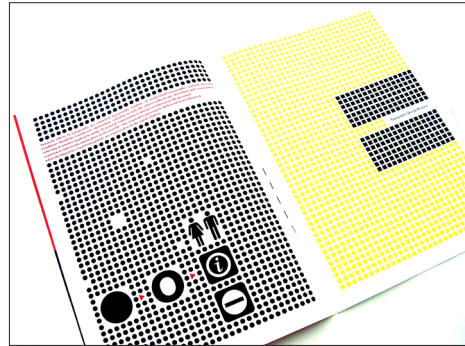


Designer: Alex Egner

One of the exhibition visitors expressed sympathy with my views and feelings regarding the places.

Visitors carefully observed the posters that re-interpreted the objects into new visual form. Of these posters, the poster using Korean typography drew a lot of attention. I was asked to explain more specifically about the key concepts and contents of my posters. My heart was full of joy and pride at that moment, as a graphic designer and, by extension, as a Korean designer.

I really appreciated all the people who visited my exhibition and who allowed me to share my experiences and thoughts in diverse places.



I believe that the best solution can often be found by a process of trial and error. I often experience phases of intentional and unintentional trial and error until I achieved the desired result.

At first, I intended to investigate how wayfinding systems incorporate the regional distinctiveness and the lives of the people based upon the characteristics of culture. While performing research on the topic in Korea and the United States last summer, however, I realized that my approach was too limited. Accordingly, I thought that it was significant to understand a place gradually putting more value on the importance of feeling and understanding a “sense of place” to obtain a visually favorable graphic design outcome.

Through this process, I conducted several experiments on how I could reflect the image of a place in visual form, and this experience provided me with various possibilities for representing urban spaces and the experience of being in them.

Based upon my personal experience, I explored how I felt in a place and how I could apply elements discovered in the environment to creative processes.

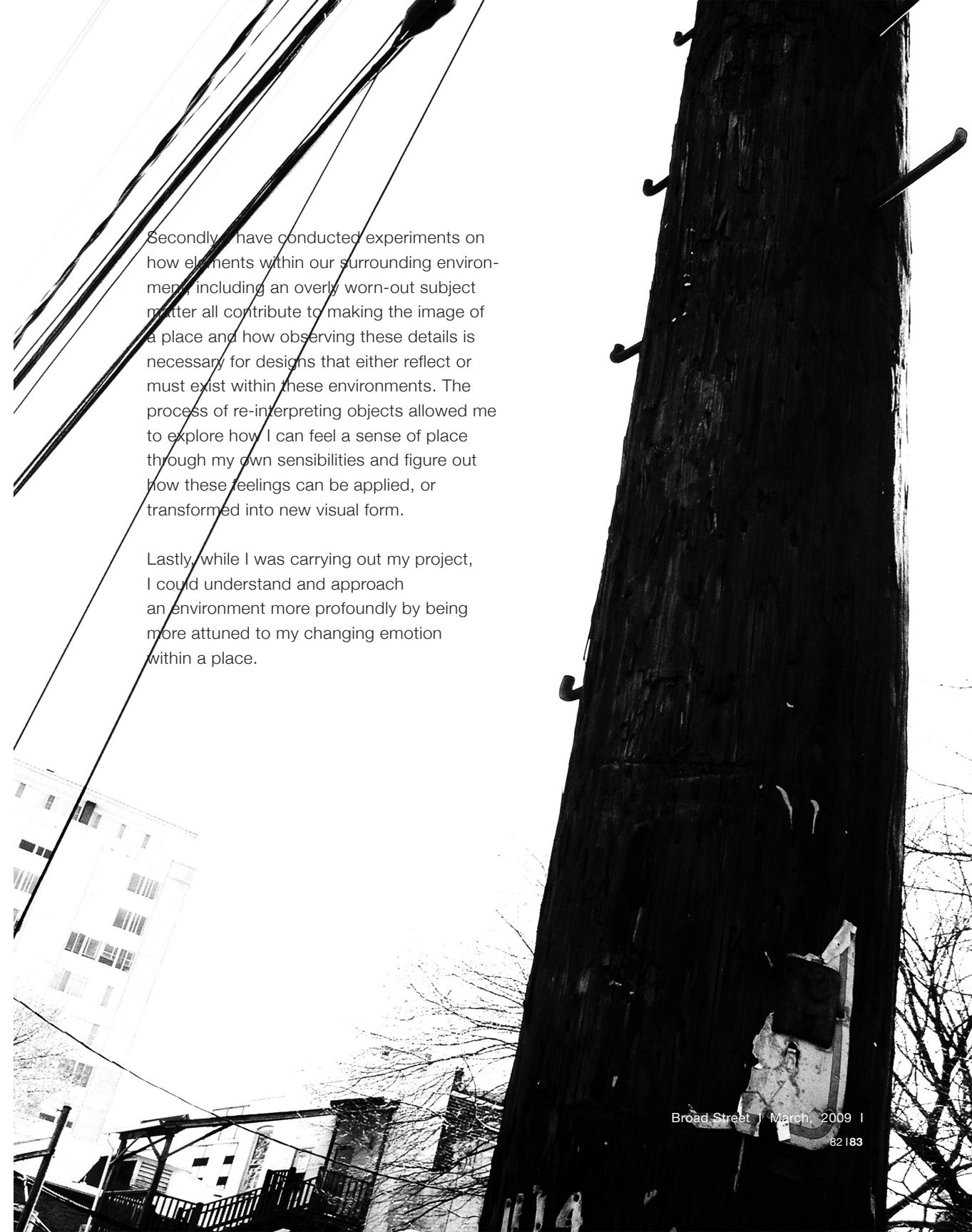
The main part of my project is expressed through re-interpreting, in visual form, the personal thoughts and feelings I had in each place. Although methodologies applied in each process differed, I understood a sense of each place based on my personal opinions, experiences, and views originated from the root of the place at large.

First of all, I could figure out the identity of an environment by examining the characteristics of the place in person. As a graphic designer, I have done a lot of work on visual identity and know the significance of considering the current state of the environment in which it will function.

I have realized from my creative project that the value of design is not merely limited to visual beauty; it is important for the results of a design must harmonize with the place to be remained in people's memories. It will create a sense of place.

Secondly, I have conducted experiments on how elements within our surrounding environment, including an overly worn-out subject matter all contribute to making the image of a place and how observing these details is necessary for designs that either reflect or must exist within these environments. The process of re-interpreting objects allowed me to explore how I can feel a sense of place through my own sensibilities and figure out how these feelings can be applied, or transformed into new visual form.

Lastly, while I was carrying out my project, I could understand and approach an environment more profoundly by being more attuned to my changing emotion within a place.



I deem that the processes and methods I developed in this creative project are only an initial step in understanding the role of feelings in experiencing and representing a particular environment. Although these processes were carried out based on my personal opinions and views, the steps that I went through will enable me to explore wide and diverse visual possibilities in solving graphic design problems. Furthermore, when I work on another research and design project in a certain environment, these techniques will let me know how to approach it with more sensitivity.

Since my project derived a sense of place from diverse places, it has included the cultural characteristics of each place as well. The work related to Insadong was exhibited at Capital One in Richmond, Virginia (Fig. 22).



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To get to know and experience new environments, I will explore additional places as an extension of my project and apply the processes and methodologies used in my project to new work. Moreover, I intend to develop and transmit to design students and designers, in the field of graphic design, various processes, knowledge, and ideas regarding the methodologies that I used. This can possibly provide them with the opportunity to acquire a new attempt and inspiration.



A Pattern Language

Alexander · Ishikawa · Silverstein · Jacobson · Fiksdahl-King · Angel

Oxford

Lynch: The Image of the City

SONTAG On Photography

PICADO

BARTHES

Camera Lucida

HILL AND WANG

Jackson

A Sense of PLACE, a Sense of TIME



AMERICAN SIGNS

Lisa Mahar

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William H. Whyte

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A User's Guide

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Space and Place

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A TOMATO/UNDERWORLD PROJECT

Sign Sources



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