

# A MODERNIST UTOPIA TAKEN OVER BY THE ORDINARY.

## *THE CONSECUTIVE LIVES OF THE SEUN COMPLEX IN SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA*

Joonwoo Kim

Bruno De Meulder

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### INTRODUCTION

Modernity impacted Korean society since late XIX<sup>th</sup>, early XX<sup>th</sup> century. During Japanese colonialism, modernization was propagated. This new development culture modeled on the West was transplanted repressively against independent self-awakening and nationalism (Kim, 1999). After independence in 1945, modernization kept being perceived as external import. It was not an internal awareness or aspiration that underpinned the development desire. Consequently, in the middle of XX<sup>th</sup> century, a large distance can be observed between the government's modernization ideology and actual daily life. The Korean War of 1950 evidently caused other dramatic tensions. Government focused strongly on rebuilding the national system for postwar recovery, but also on anticommunism. The quite new political elite of the freshly independent nation didn't necessarily conform its agenda to the tenets of modernization. The military coup in 1961 followed an unstable situation that followed, in turn, the citizen revolution of 1960 precipitated by the contested election of the first independent government. The military government felt the need to establish itself based upon a new vision, one that highlighted "modern" development and anticommunist rhetoric against North Korea. This was strongly supported by the U.S.A. that uplifted modernization into an ideology during the Kennedy era (Latham, 2000). The U.S.A. radically applied this ideology of modernization in its imperial involvements with nation building overseas.

Drastic modernization policies, the junta decided, were the way forward and would clearly demonstrate a distinction with the previous government. The instant development of a new society that was radically different from traditional cultures was central to the new policy agenda. Consequently, many development projects were launched simultaneously as political legitimacy depended upon the success of both modernization and fast industrialization. Modernization however, also went hand in hand with the promotion of a new, modern lifestyle for the Korean people. Of course, the aim was also to orient the attention towards economic development and industrialization, rather than towards political and social issues. In order for this to work, new development projects had to demonstrate effectiveness and contribute to substantial economic development.

The *Seun* complex is part and parcel of the development wave with which the military government drove the country forwards, towards new times, towards progress. No wonder that the *Seun* complex was this amazing mix of entrepreneurial spirit and modernism, the international paradigm that as no other hijacked the agenda of development by merging advanced techniques and organizational skills with a sense of the new, convincingly combining enthusiasm and solidity, newness and adequateness. The *Seun* complex is also – as far as mega-structures were concerned – a typical product of the modernist avant-garde of the time, especially in Japan. It is actually one of the rare realized mega-structures and as such demonstrates the distance between the ideal theoretical constructs, the imagineering of a new world of possibilities and the pragmatic realities of the real estate development of the time. It started as a project in itself, but was soon also imagined as catalyst for urban redevelopment in the inner city of Seoul in the late 1960s. Its site was a very particular strip of fifty meters wide and one-kilometer-long (a heritage of a brutal clearing by the Japanese colonizer in the 1940s). The plan for the mega-complex included a giant space for retail, public and collective services and a massive amount of apartments. Elevated decks were to link eight massive buildings along the 4 linear blocks, which were united into one mega-structure. As such the mega-complex delivered an urban infrastructure that reframed the inner city of Seoul by catapulting it in one straight line into the heart of modernity. Inherently joining modernity, becoming part of the modern world, fulfilling the promise of progress, inevitably implied the radical introduction of newness, the adoption of the international style, the adherence to this movement that gave these amazing and unique development decades its own architectonic idiom: modernism.

The *Seun* complex radiates all these expectations and promises. It was proudly advertised by the mass media as the biggest Asian mega-structure development<sup>1</sup>, as a showcase of the amazing possibilities

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Rem Koolhaas (1995 : 1069) mentioned that the *Golden Mile* complex in Singapore represented the first Asian segment of megastructure realized, but the *Seun* complex was built 4 years earlier and had a larger development scale than the *Golden Mile* complex.

that mega-complexes offered: a myriad of accumulated programs, compressed experiences and combined flows diverted over the dual-level circulation systems. The mega-complex is about intensification of modern urban culture that is enabled by increased density. The floor area ratio (FAR) was established around three and building height ranged from eight to seventeen stories at a time when Seoul was basically still a low-rise city. As advanced as it might have been, as much as it was a sign of the coming new times, it was not just the blind application of modernist recipes. In terms of density it rather aligns with the private investment of American real estate development and its speculative logics<sup>2</sup>. In terms of concentration and combination of programs it rather deviates from the dogmatic functionalism of European modernism. Perhaps also here it has more resemblances with the playful and experimental spirit of American modernism that had to conquer its place in the entrepreneurial and business culture of the U.S.A rather than with the European political climate of the welfare state. Anyhow, the *Seun* complex did not, as combination of form and norm, necessarily become a model for the city. It rather initiated a new urban development mode in Seoul, a new procedure: the continuous introduction of new concepts, more amazing combinations, the ever accelerating cycle of reformulation of norms and standards, the pursuit of newness, the continuously rearticulated and recalibrated quest for the better, more comfortable, more advanced. This inevitably implies that the *Seun* complex, this originally amazing compression of programs and flows, a cocktail of density and intensity, soon was outdated, no longer the pilot model of modernity.

The *Seun* complex on the rebound recycled itself, or perhaps more accurately: the *Seun* complex was recycled, partially mutilated, partially adapted. It transformed, incrementally through rotation waves of occupation, maintenance and otherwise through revisions, renovations and interventions. The sharp contrast of status, program and form with the surrounding urban fabric eroded and soon the neighborhood spontaneously invaded and appropriated the complex, weaving a complex web of relationships and interdependencies between the almost alien singular and monumental object and the finely meshed texture of the historical inner city. Only for a short time was the *Seun* complex an alien object, an icon of otherness and modernity, and the bold announcement of the new modern world that would systematically replace organic urban fabrics. Not so long after this audacious as reckless gesture, the modernist prosthesis was programmatically absorbed by the transforming city center and inverted in meaning. It actually started functioning as if it were a natural organ of the inner city. (fig. 1)

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Il-Seok Cha, who was a deputy mayor of Seoul from 1966 to 1970, contended in his book that the *Seun* complex was the first project developed by private capital inducement within the frame of a new strategy inspired by American municipal administration (Cha, 2005: 112).

This research discusses the origins and transformation of the *Seun* complex as a brave modernist adventure, inspired by the modernist ideas that circulated widely during the notorious development decades. It played a key role during the military government,



FIG. 1. THE SEUN COMPLEX, 1968. © SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF KOREA.

not at the least as tangible result of what the radical industrialization and modernization policy could achieve. A historical analysis of the complex will be combined with a spatial analysis of the modern building complex and its environment. First the development of the *Seun* complex is reviewed through a developmentalist perspective on modernism including an examination of the circumstances and intentions that led to build this mega-structure in which modern ideas were freely assembled, combined, mutilated and appropriated. This gives the necessary background to consecutively examine its transformation in its rapidly changing urban environment that even threatens the complex with destruction. While resisting this attempted destruction and the redevelopment of the site with a new culmination point of newness, the *Seun* complex has however integrated remarkably well within the surrounding neighborhoods, adapting itself to the cultural, social and economical changes that the dynamic surrounding urban fabrics induce within the complex. Therefore, revisiting both the subversion and the redefinition of the *Seun* complex within its neighboring area is a valuable entry point to apprehend the complex transformation of the mega-structure.

## MODERNIST UTOPIA UNDER DEVELOPMENTALISM

After its introduction during Japanese colonialism, modernism in the times of the post-Korean War was highly influenced by the U.S.A., which strongly supported economic development as part of and in combination with a strong anticommunist agenda. From 1961 onwards, the resulting specifically

Korean variant of the worldwide movement of modernism was then radically and systematically applied by the military government. The junta indeed undertook the building of a modernized country, to begin with by promoting and forcefully stimulating industrial development. Provision of modern infrastructure was an evident ingredient of this developmentalist program. The U.S.A had already established the International Cooperation Administration (I.C.A.) in 1955 to provide development loans and experts for developing countries, which supported “economic progress against Marxist inroads” (Latham, 2000). By offering expertise and means to allied nations, the U.S.A often seduced developing countries into development trajectories that not necessarily had sufficient resources and all in all only had limited institutional structures. The Cold War turned development into a race against time and mischief. Modernism, *nolens volens*, embraced and embodied developmentalism. Development projects invariably resulted on site in modernist buildings, factories and infrastructures. Modernism was, without questioning, regarded as cost-effective and efficient and consequently as an appropriate means of development. It was nevertheless also a dramatic change, hence the massive official propaganda that encouraged an anti-traditionalist mentality (Lu, 2011). “Life revolution” became the paradoxical mantra of the anti-communist junta. It is without saying that this dramatic modernization effort of the 1960s and 1970s was a radical top-down exercise. It is evident that the *Seun* complex was a cornerstone of this development policy as it was such a tangible showcase for “life revolution” (Pai and Cho, 2014). The structures were erected and completed from 1966 to 1968, making *Seun* the first multi-functional complex of apartments and shopping malls in South Korea. It became a mega-showroom of modern life.

The site of the *Seun* complex was an urban evacuation corridor cleared between April and August 1945, during Japanese colonial rule – just before the end of World War II and independence from Japan (Kang, 2001: 88-89). War was the primary reason to make a long empty space in the central area of Seoul. After independence and the end of the Korean War, this evacuated area was first zoned as a boulevard, but in reality it almost instantly filled with refugees. This corridor, which became an area notorious for prostitution, was then labeled as a slum area. The Seoul Metropolitan Government exchanged the so called slum area – a daily reminder of the miseries caused by colonialism and war – for a brand new modern complex, an image of the future city, the promise of development, and a materialized demonstration of the potential of modernization.

The young Korean architect Kim, Swoo-Geun, who studied in Japan, proposed the redevelopment plan for this sensitive site in 1967. He designed a new mega structure that echoes some of the modern spatial ideas from Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation*, the Smithsons’ Golden Lane Project and Kenzo Tange’s Plan for Tokyo Bay that is one of the projects that earmarked metabolism (Yoon, 1994; Son, 1997b; Choi, 2010). The original plan integrated streets and parking within

the complex as if all iconic components of modern life had to be incorporated in one structure that, in turn, embodied all aspects of modernity. The architect also proposed a redevelopment plan for the surrounding area that he considered as an outdated urban fabric with inadequate infrastructures (fig. 2 and 3). In the development trajectory of the architect, the redevelopment plan used the linear site of the *Seun* complex in that sense, namely as a catalyst for an urban renewal of the inner city. The road system would be adapted to conform to a grid pattern with a new type of building block. The plan for the *Seun* complex made a strong axis between two anchors in the north and the south (Yoon *et al.*, 1967: 46-49). The new mega-structure provided in fact an urban infrastructure that, while separating car mobility and pedestrian movement, supported a multiplicity of new modern programs, and as such it materialized a new vision of modern Seoul. While borrowing modernist languages and features, the architect combined and applied these in his own particular way: the specificity of the programmatic mix, density, and spatial articulation of the various programs, the size of buildings – rather in between the size of a building block and of a building than the appropriate size for either – and the assembling of the chain of buildings into a long mega-structure that functioned as a city in itself while articulating the center of the city. This synthesizing process included a notion of appropriation from international modernism – under the definition by Ashcroft *et al.* (2007) – that aimed to articulate modernized socio-cultural identities. Some might say it realized a modernist utopia.

The plan for the mega-complex was anyways an audacious and ambitious design for an urban infrastructure that while being integrated into the urban network simultaneously distinguished itself from the rest of the ordinary fabric. The complex's elevated decks, which were planned to be nine meters wide and seven and a half meters high on the second floor, were an important feature allowing for a pedestrian shopping mall to be protected from vehicles while realizing strong internal connections. It unified the assemblage into one figure, one complex.

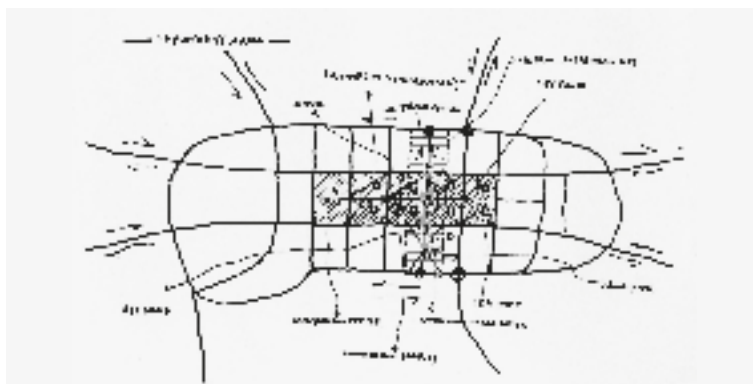


FIG. 2. CONCEPT DRAWING OF INNER CITY, SEOUL, 1967. SOURCE: YOON ET AL., 1967: 45.

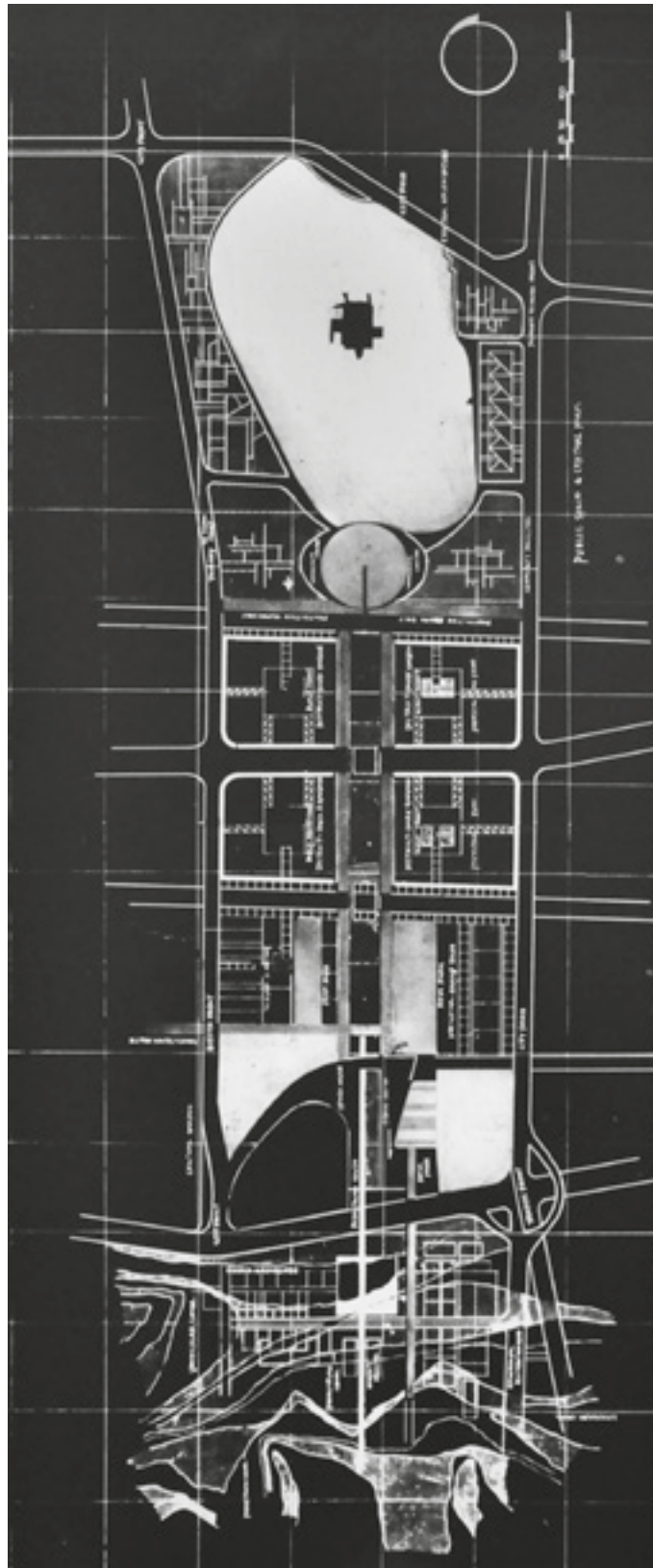


FIG. 3. REDEVELOPMENT PLAN OF THE COMPLEX AND SURROUNDING AREA, 1967.  
SOURCE: YOON ET AL., 1967: 46-47.

The ground floor of the main building was originally designed as two one-way streets on either side of the site and a parking area, which anticipated the increase of car use in the future and integrated the complex into the existing Seoul Street Plan<sup>3</sup>. Newly appropriated modern designs were also applied in the *Seun* Complex: a rooftop “ground” as open space, an atrium for natural lighting, and varying building heights for a pleasing urban skyline (Yoon, 1994: 16-17).

The plan for the *Seun* complex was soon linked to and, in its own particular way, integrated into the high-speed elevated motorways project in the inner city of Seoul (fig. 4). The system of elevated motorways considered several lines (such as a circular and penetration ways) which were designed to pass through the inner city without crossing and extended to the outside of the city. One of the longest elevated motorways, the *Cheonggye* motorway that was completed in 1969, actually crossed over the *Seun* complex. As such the complex was not only embedded within (and part of) the historical street pattern of the inner city, but was simultaneously also part and parcel, in a sense, of the motorway grid that soon would be the spatial structure of metropolitan Seoul. Anyways, these two radical projects – the *Seun* complex and the *Cheonggye* elevated motorway – presented citizens with a new vision which was as radical the resulting ground reality was dramatic. The two projects, needless to say, imposed themselves within the urban space in order to adapt the city to the speed and efficiency of the new times, the times of development. For the *Seun* complex, this imposition didn’t however imply a distortion of the existing urban fabric as it simply fitted in the urban gap created by the Japanese colonial regime.

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The previous Seoul Street Plan designated the site of the *Seun* complex as a boulevard, but a construction committee approved a plan of the *Seun* complex on the understanding that it would add new elevated pedestrian ways with the vehicle lanes on the ground.

## METAMORPHOSIS AND SUBVERSIONS OF THE MEGA-COMPLEX

The *Seun* complex, from its design and site clearance to its construction, was completed in 3 years despite a limitation of technical knowledge and a shortage of construction materials. The military government considered the complex as a crucial element of its policy and gave this development high priority. The plan of the complex maximized land-use and density and considered the site as a clean sheet, implying a *tabula rasa* approach<sup>4</sup>. The site was understood as a free space throughout the Korean War and Japanese colonial era. After the war, policy makers and architects viewed the site as chaotic and felt the need to erase the slum housing of war refugees that had invaded the site. Public authorities were simultaneously eager to demonstrate the new logic of a modern city created by mega-structures. The plan of the *Seun* complex was to a large extent autonomous.

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A notion of *tabula rasa* was a basis of cognition to see Japanese land after World War II by Metabolism group (Koolhaas and Obrist, 2011). The matter has been disputed that architect Kim Swoo-Geun had a similar view of *tabula rasa* and Metabolism (Son, 1997b: 118).





FIG. 4. CONCEPT DRAWING OF ELEVATED HIGHWAY, 1967. © SOURCE: SEOUL MUSEUM OF HISTORY, 2014: 59.

It was a large structure with emphasis on internal networks, without meaning that it was not well integrated within the inner city. It actually did fit in the grid of the inner city. The ground and elevated deck plan added a new system of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. As if it were, prostheses, it surely did not disconnect, but rather added an extra circulation capacity in an anticipation of the attraction of the complex that anyways intended to intensify the city center dramatically<sup>5</sup>.

The design of the *Seun* Complex is a showcase of how modernism was mobilized across contexts and cultures and to what this process did lead. Several modernist features indeed characterized the complex: a high-rise concrete structure with elevators and invariably open function, elevated decks (that to a certain level separate different modes of transport), a roof garden, functional floor plans and rationalized organization. The specific application of all these features was however unprecedented. It was not necessarily the outcome of profound study, but rather the spontaneous result of a fast experiment, as a showcase of success, progress and development that was instantly needed. Design elements were employed directly without inquiring into the specificity of urban contexts and cultural differences.

In addition, the modernist features of the *Seun* complex were also folded and adapted for a multitude of practical reasons and economical, political and cultural considerations of various natures.

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There were conflicting opinions on the elevated pedestrian system. The Barbican Centre as a modernist enclave in the City of London was isolated from its surroundings by its elevated pedestrian system and was criticized for that (Van Gameren and Van Der Putt, 2011). On the other hand, elevated pedestrian systems can thicken the street level and support to pedestrianize urban centers with multilevel accesses (Yoos and James, 2016).

The Seoul Metropolitan Government planned to construct this complex by the infusion of private capital because of insufficient public funds (Son, 1997a : 140). The participation of private developers was stimulated by maximizing density for financial profitability. So the *Seun* complex was designed to fully fill the site, including roads and pedestrian passages. To begin with, the residential function was mainly added to increase the building density (Mokcheon architecture archive, 2014: 237). Evidently the private investors also imposed changes to some parts of plan. They for example asked to convert half of the ground floor into a commercial area (instead of it being a parking area in the original plan), and many of the public facilities suggested by the architect in the original scheme such as an elementary school, community centre, and public offices were canceled due to limited public support and because of restrictions of regulations, or simply because they were not on the public investment agenda of the time. The modernist utopia underwent indeed a metamorphosis in the process between architectural conception and real estate realization when practicalities, investments, regulations and public programs and finances had to come together as pieces of a puzzle.

Meanwhile, the government shifted its concern to other developments to keep showcasing its developmentalist ideals for receiving widespread support while seeking to rival the Communism of North Korea through economic development. During the 1970s, the government focused on the development of the southern part of Seoul, crossing the Han River where a completely new, modern town could be realized that gave a practical and enthusiastic answer to the growing housing needs. Most development projects were concentrated in Southern Seoul, and private investment was promoted through institutional support. Public interest in the mega-complex naturally shifted to the newly developed modernist town that not only would have better infrastructure, but also was of a completely different scale and ambition altogether.



FIG. 5. REDEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR SEUN DISTRICTS 2 AND 3. © SOURCE: SEOUL MUSEUM OF HISTORY, 2010: 78.



FIG. 6. INVITED INTERNATIONAL DESIGN COMPETITION FOR SEUN URBAN ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (FRED KOETTER [WINNER] / REM KOOLHAAS / TERRY FERRELL / PETER EISENMAN). SOURCE: SOHN ET AL., 2004.

The *Seun* complex, once opened, aged rather quickly in an environment where consumption massively invaded the urban culture (Lee, 2009). In the beginning, the housing and commercial functions of the *Seun* complex were targeting the middle- and upper-middle class residents. However, the rapid popularization of the modern apartment and the dynamic transition to modern culture produced many competitors. In the 1970s there was always a larger and more modern project under construction in Seoul and the *Seun* complex, amidst the historical but also slightly messy center, soon lost its aura as the most advanced, the most modern, the most prestigious. Residents moved to the new towns developed in the southern part of the city, and consumers sought out modern department stores and supermarkets that started to spread systematically into the expanding urban landscape. The main focus of the complex, in terms of occupation, shifted gradually, but not less systematically, to deal with the new electric and electronic products needed and produced by the boom of the electronics industry. The *Seun* complex became an important specialized center on the electronics market in South Korea in the 1980s. However, another big competitor in this domain appeared in the late 1980s. Additionally the government also supported new players by relocating the electrical and electronic manufacturing functions in the *Seun* complex out of the central area (Seoul Museum of History, 2010: 69-70). The complex decreased again as a hub of electronic market, and barely maintained a business presence by means of small-scale businesses in electronics and inventory handling in the 1990s and 2000s.

While the government first aimed to catalyze redevelopment in the inner city around *Seun*, it then changed its focus to new development projects. The modernist utopia was thus abandoned and left without care by its initiators and finally became – at least in the view of conventional urban planning – an obstruction to the development of the surrounding areas. Modernist design had attempted to increase the scope of development to balance with the *Seun* complex by restricting small-scale redevelopment through the urban management plan (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2009) (fig. 5). As a result, the complex's surrounding area has retained its old buildings and unplanned street patterns. The extreme opposition of contexts between the complex and its old neighboring areas has often been



FIG. 7. SEUN REDEVELOPMENT PROMOTION PLAN, 2009. SOURCE: SEOUL METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT, 2009.



FIG. 8. DEMOLITION FIRST BUILDING OF THE SEUN COMPLEX. © SOURCE: SEOUL MUSEUM OF HISTORY, 2010.

criticized by politicians and professionals who, stereotypically identified the *Seun* complex as a cause for urban decline – which led them to decide to superimpose a new utopia by subverting the old modernist one.

At the start of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century, the Seoul Metropolitan Government invited eight international architects to propose a new configuration of the area after the *Seun* complex's expected demolition (fig. 6). This new plan won public approval, particularly from the owner-landlords group of the first redevelopment district, which included one block of neighboring area and the first building of the complex. As a pilot project, the first block of the *Seun* complex was demolished in 2009 and turned into an open space with the intention of creating new green corridors (fig. 7 and 8). The aspiration of developmentalism seems to still be alive in the XXI<sup>st</sup> century, but simultaneously appears to have turned against the realizations of previous waves of development. It seems that one cannot conceive progress and development without the destruction of the past and the erasure of previous urban developments. This late form of modernism as “self-destruction” (Berman, 1983: 121), following Marshall Berman's Marxist interpretation of modernism, gave an indication of what was to come: an endlessly repeated metamorphosis of the barely new modern world for again more development. This is found in the subversion of the *Seun* complex by the redefinition of its future, a reinvented ideal, a new and more modern project of the future.

## ADAPTATIONS AND NEW ALLIANCES

After demolishing a first building, other residents realized the flaws in this plan and opposed further redevelopment “by destruction”. Citizens also recognized the modern building's value, as well as the relationship with

the neighboring area, which has gradually and organically developed into an urban manufacture industry area of high intensity. The *Seun* complex has indeed been transformed and during that process tuned to the script of the neighboring area. It adapted almost spontaneously to the local contexts. Finally, the Seoul Metropolitan Government decided to preserve the rest of *Seun* complex and changed plans from redevelopment to regeneration in 2013.

Transformation began during the decline period of the *Seun* complex. Various practical aspects, especially economic, political and cultural changes, reduced the vitality of commercial and residential functions in the complex. However, the structure has adapted to meet the new demands of Seoul's inner city and surrounding businesses. Changes to its structure have been managed by individual ownership under associations of owners and tenants. They could not enact systematic countermeasures against external changes, but individual actors spontaneously found alternative solutions to maintain the mega-complex as an economically vibrant structure. In addition, the physical characteristics of *Seun* also allowed for easy internal and external transformations, adaptations and reprogramming operations. The mega-structure became reinterpreted as a platform with wide floor areas and systematic concrete column structures providing openness of space and which can accommodate a diversity of programs, aggregation of specialties, and allow interactivity within and outside the complex<sup>6</sup>. These features fostered new linkages between *Seun* and the neighboring area. In time, these linkages became a symbiotic relationship with mutual support from each player.

The *Seun* complex ceased to be a mega-complex for the middle class that included a shopping mall and apartments, and promptly reacted to transform into a specialized market place and office space for electric and electronic components and products. The *Seun* complex could position itself within the new electronic market given the increasing demand of the new industry, and was adapted to accommodate new functions according to changes in the market. In addition, the commercial functions, reacting to demands and market concerns, spontaneously made strong connections with the surrounding area, which supported it with basic materials, electric components, techniques and producing facilities. These supporting businesses could locate around the *Seun* complex thanks to the low rent fees and a good location in the inner city, which was made possible by existing physical conditions and exclusion from strong redevelopment plans targeting large-scale regeneration. These related functions clustered as a city industry block and linked with the electronic market in the complex (Seoul Museum of History, 2010; Lee, 2011). This coexistence of the *Seun* complex with its neighborhood ranges from handling producer goods to producing products with sale functions in various fields,

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The characteristics of such platform – openness, diversity, aggregation, and interactivity – are based on the ten principles of platform identified by Zef Hemel in his analysis of the Seun Complex as a platform to develop a learning society in Seoul (Hemel, 2015: 181-185).

such as electronics, electrical materials, metal, machinery, ironwork, and printing (fig. 9). Recently, businesses have specialized in the fields of CCTV, game machines, lighting, sound systems, and karaoke machines. The *Seun* complex has also diversified its functions under market demands and hosts finance and insurance offices, a tourist hotel, a horticulture cluster, printing offices and design stores.

In addition, the apartments have been adapted to office and storage functions, which are linked with the commercial functions of the complex. After the first occupants of the *Seun* apartments had moved to the newly developed area in Southern Seoul in the late 1970s and 1980s, the type of residents in the complex changed from families to urban workers. Lack of education facilities and public spaces in the surroundings stimulated this shift. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, high demands for offices in the city center have gradually transformed modern housing units into office functions. Housing units have been divided into two or three offices, depending on the requirement. The *Seun* complex could supply moderately priced offices and storage places in the city center. Apartments in the first to third blocks have been fully changed to office and storage functions, while the last block maintains its residential functions for urban workers.

The new occupations of the *Seun* complex generated new alliances and broad networks with actors of all kinds in the surrounding area. The main commercial area in the complex brings in sales of electronic products, research and development (R&D), and after-service and supporting functions. Supporting functions, such as small-scale productions and component supplies, were placed on the upper floors of the complex and its surrounding areas (Kang, 2001: 143-144). Wide networks of customized production consisted of thousands of small-scale factories and stores that handle various make-to-order processes in the neighboring area and generate, thanks to the flexibility that comes with the number and maneuverability, an industrial tissue that is as resilient as it is urban. This urban production was however seen by the public authorities as a negative function, and was pushed for relocation outside of the inner city in the 1990s and 2000s. Nonetheless, this alliance and network between the complex and surrounding area has, despite this disregard, proved its value and necessity for a locally grounded urban production industry. Spontaneous transformation from the bottom led to the fabrication of an urban metabolism that matches remarkably with the architect's original intention, although it was realized the other way around, by means of the continuous shifting programs that organically adapt themselves to new economic conditions. Where the mega-structure materialized and represented the metabolism envisioned by the architect, it was actually the continuous process of programmatic adaptation and fine-tuning to market conditions that enabled this mega-structure – originally an alien

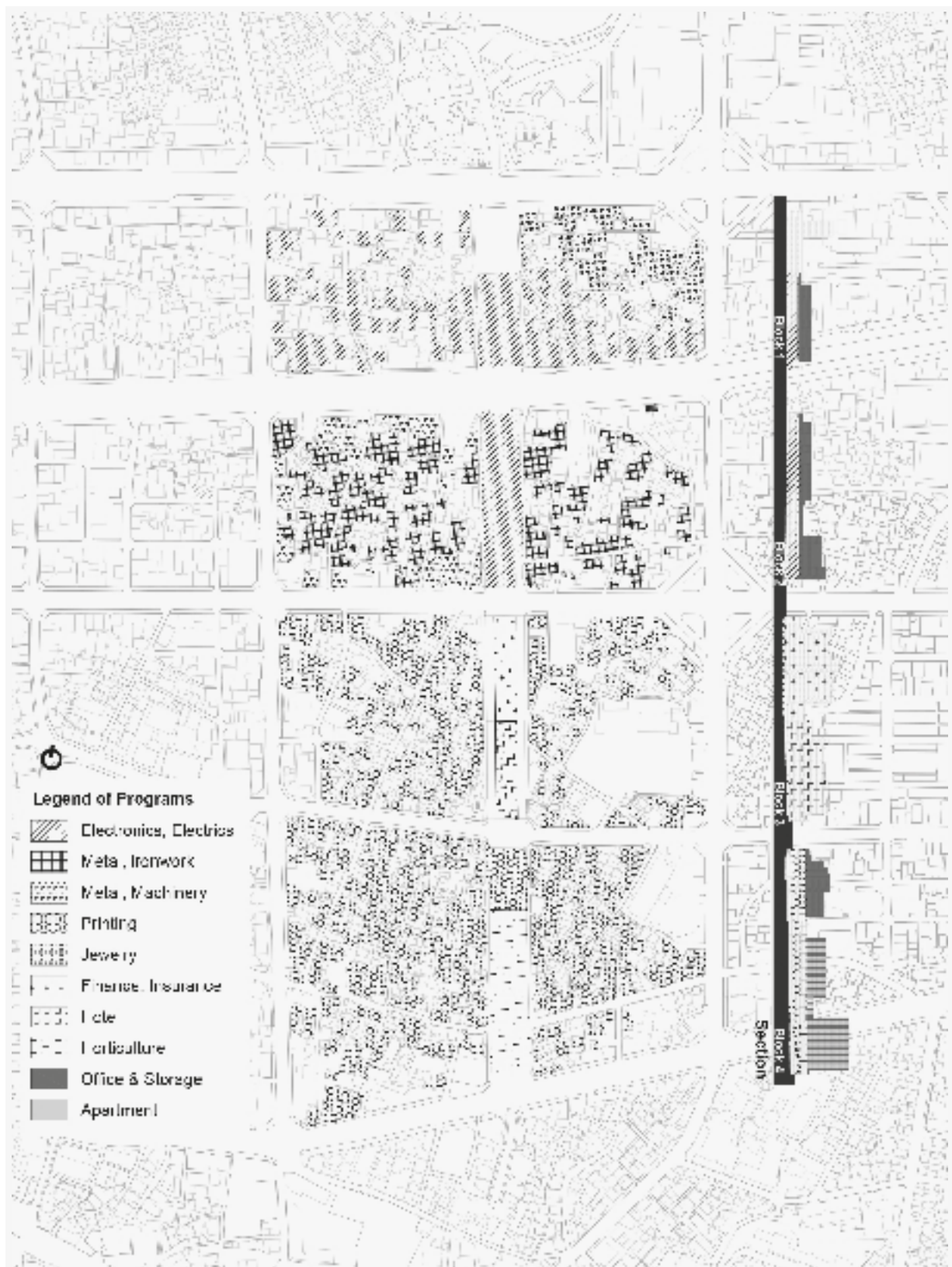


FIG. 9. MAIN PROGRAMS OF THE SEUN COMPLEX AND ITS NEIGHBORING AREA. © SOURCE: ELABORATION BY JOONWOO KIM, 2016, BASED ON LAND USE MAP INCLUDED IN SEOUL METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT (2015: 25).

(megalomaniac) object that aimed to be the preview of modern times, that wanted to be the model for the metabolic transformation of the city – to actually be absorbed and appropriated by the surrounding quarters. Instead of being a benchmark of the future, of the new city, instead of being counterpart of the historic city center that was going to be modeled after it, the mega-structure was actually invaded, cannibalized and absorbed by the messy and dynamic industrial tissue surrounding it. The environment took measure of the mega-structure and all its parts, understood the potential of its locational assets in terms of position, measures, solidity, accessibility, variations, etc. and, as if it were a didactic demonstration in industrial ecology, unfolded a process of invasion, diffusion and multiplication.

In 2015, the Seoul Metropolitan Government advanced institutional support for the revitalization of the *Seun* complex by improving public infrastructure. The government sponsored a competition calling for plans to revitalize the complex's elevated pedestrian walkways and reunite them with the neighborhood area. The Seoul Metropolitan Government hoped that this intervention would promote local business and gradually improve the physical environment through the investment of private capital. The first phase of this construction will begin in the first and second blocks in 2016. The elevated pedestrian area is one of the legacies of the modernist utopia. This legacy can be a key to transform the old mega-complex and revive an aging modernist utopia by introducing new perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

This contribution follows a three-part structure to examine the *Seun* complex firstly under the aegis of developmentalism, secondly in terms of the metamorphosis and subversions of the mega-structure, and thirdly by reading into the complex's adaptations and new alliances. The *Seun* complex was reviewed through a developmentalist perspective on modernization including various transformations of the mega-structure. The mega-structure powerfully advertised modernization featuring high-density development as a means to catalyze dramatic urban changes.

The site, a quite particular strip in the urban fabric of the historic center that had been cleared during Japanese colonial period, was seen as appropriate, if not ideal, for making a new mega-structure. The project used the availability of this strong urban mark to introduce a new typological and urban logic that in a certain way initiated the modern city. The *Seun* complex is a modernist experiment where the archetypical modernist features were folded and adapted. As can be imagined with an operation of this kind, pragmatic practicalities of various kinds,



involving a multitude of stakeholders, all with their own agendas and requirements, meant that the concept, plan and finally the realization of this mega-structure changed significantly during the process. In addition, the government's developmentalist ideals extended to new urban horizons soon after realization. This accelerated the decrease of the complex's vitality. It finally entailed the self-destruction of its parts as another aspiration of developmentalism gained ground.

Nevertheless, the *Seun* complex has gradually generated connections with its neighboring area in spite of the drastically changed urban environment. Several industries in the surrounding area have supported the *Seun* complex by filling in vacant spaces and facilitating the emergence of new functions under the new demands of inner city. This network has developed as a complex of urban industrial clusters in the central area of Seoul. Both the market and the government have tried to redevelop the *Seun* complex and its surrounding areas, but these strong and wide alliances have stopped the subversion of the mega-structure and protected it from the cycle of endless developmentalism.

The *Seun* complex, though constructed according to the tenets of modernism, has been transformed by the practical demands of the city. Despite rapidly changing urban environments, the mega-structure plays a role as a production hub, while the old buildings and outmoded surroundings nourish clusters of urban industry. The once glamorous modernist utopia of the *Seun* complex knew short-term glory and then underwent a critical and down-to-earth industrious subversion; finally, it almost turned into prosthesis for the industrial neighborhood that surrounds it. It gives a particular beat to the heart of Seoul.

**Joonwoo Kim** is a doctoral researcher at the OSA research group (Urbanism & Architecture) of the Department of Architecture, KU Leuven. He holds a European postgraduate master in urbanism from KU Leuven and TU Delft for which he completed a thesis concerning the socio-economic border of Brussels. With a bachelor of architecture and a master of urban design in Korea, Joonwoo also has a background in architecture and urban design. In addition, he participated as a senior researcher in several urban planning practices in Korea. His current research focus is on developmental urbanism in Asian contexts. By means of both historical urban research and spatial analysis, Joonwoo is interested in the origin of market-oriented urbanism in Korea and the related shift from postcolonial to neoliberal approaches.

**Bruno De Meulder** studied civil engineering-architecture at the Department of Architecture, KU Leuven (Belgium), where he also obtained his doctoral degree, and where today he teaches history, theory and practice of urbanism. His teaching takes place mostly through urban design studios that he also cherishes as a key tool for research and practice. His focus is on issues of urbanism in the postindustrial and postcolonial era. Bruno De Meulder is currently working on an international oeuvre engaging with dispersed urbanism and what Dennis Cosgrove labeled promiscuous territories. He is the coordinator of the MaHS and MaUSP postgraduate programmes and heads the OSA research group (Urbanism & Architecture) at the aforementioned department.

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