

Topological Construction in Public Space

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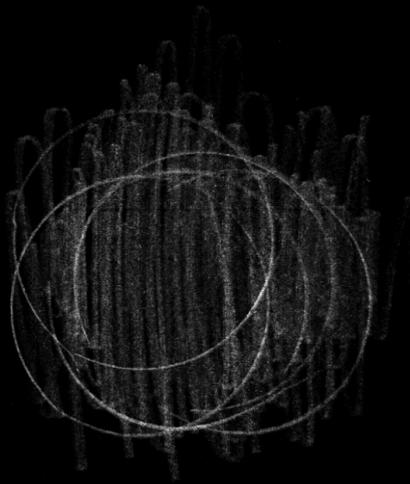
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Contents

Introduction	7
1. Topological Placeness	15
1. 1. Space of Memory	
1. 2. Similarities and Invariants	
1. 3. Topological Construction	
2. Appropriate Methodology	30
2. 1. Site-specificity	
2. 2. Construction Site	
3. Process of work	44
Conclusion	48
Bibliography	50



Introduction

Spatial studies and place theory have already been widely discussed, and methodological studies on their different aspects are still actively ongoing. The field is incredibly broad, and each branch of the field takes different method of approach. Particularly beginning in the 20th century the examination on space has become much more diverse and subdivided. Due to its spatial, geographical, and/or topological turns that have gone far beyond both philosophic and unphilosophic theories, modern spatial studies must be seen and construed from various angles. Within the broad field of spatial studies, this article will mainly focus on the methodology of topology. It is because, due to the ever increasing complexity of the city space, the method of an entirely new method of interpretation of space

along with its relationship is required for the time. As topology attempts to examine the relationships of the ones that do not change despite the transformation of space, it is seen as suggesting a new way of recognizing space and forming a place character through their connection.

Edward Relph, the geographer, diagnosed the modern changes in places that occurred after industrialization as a phenomenon of Placelessness, and proclaimed that individuals are losing the methods of experiencing, creating, and maintaining meaningful places. In such context, Relph argued that “the concept of place has to be investigated through the examination of firsthand experience in the world of phenomenological premise of all formal geographical knowledge, or of the relationship between the phenomenological foundations of place and geography.”¹ Such method of approach could be seen as asking individuals to be the principal agents occupying places and defining the meanings of places based on personal experience and intention. I do not entirely disagree with Relph’s type of study, but I do believe that such a study limits itself by adhering to the interpretation of perceivable geographical transformation, or change in place and the resulting change in sense of place. I base my criticism on the aloofness every individual holds from preparing countermeasures against unavoidable external changes, and the possibility of individual’s subjectivity of interpretation ruining a

¹ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, trans. Duckhyun Kim, Hyunjoo Kim, and Seunghee Shim [Nonhyung Publishing Co., 2017], 30.

place's diversity. I therefore argue that another type of approach towards perception of space and its interpretation should be attempted.

This artistic research project consists of a work of trying out new interpretation about relation and structure of public space by using topological space theory, and then connecting the interpreted concrete place to the methodology of effective art in the present time.

The first part of this article contains the attempts for the theoretical approach on how to interpret place. Three subjects based on the methods of topology will be discussed in this chapter. First point is about connecting place of reality with place of memory recovered through the process of retrospection. This is a method of spatial thinking through retrospection, and it recalls Walter Benjamin's way of thinking about the past to comprehend the present. Second point is based on the idea that similarities deduced from analyzing space of memory connect with the actual place as invariable coordinates. Retrospection inevitably gives rise to unfamiliarity. This is a phenomenon resulting from collisions between different times, and belongs to the category of impression rooted in personal experience. However, this unfamiliarity, which may very well be a mere personal impression, functions as a drive for deducing similarity, and it thus expands our viewpoint of a personal level into a wider perspective on invariable relationships. The permanently unchanging relationship found in this process, the "invariants", is coordinated as a constant within the actual space. And

lastly, by connecting relational [topological] structures materialized through all aforementioned processes, the article will approach toward the thoughts on topologically interpreted urban spaces.

The next presented is the “appropriate methodology” as a strategy of art based on the current issues of the present time. Based on this, two practical methods for proceeding the project are suggested: The first is the appropriation of the methodology of “site-specific art”. The concept of “site-specificity” is one of the methodologies of modernism that comes from the phenomenological awareness of places, and has positioned itself as an attempt to reflect concrete places in contrast with the abstract concept of space. This is in line with the philosophical attempts of the 20th century to make theories of the actual space, and through the large-scale formative experiment such as Land art, new places that replaced the existing places were constructed and made themselves the targets of interest. This concept of site-specificity had been shown to have lost its validity through the concept of “discursive site-specificity” and “relational site/time-specificity”. However, it can be confirmed that due to recent achievements of brain science and cognitive science, the phenomenological reason for the place has been actively discussed again in the context of scientific research. This type of expansion indicates the broadening of the basis of philosophical thought of phenomenology, and at the same time, its scientific proof. Therefore, it is considered that there is enough room for review at the present time, and that is

why this article would work on re-contextualization with current situation by appropriating these methods.

Second, in this article, the concept of “methodology of construction site” is suggested to be borrowed in terms of structure and form. This construction site, which is generally understood as a place of construction or labor work, is a combination of “construction” and “site”, each of which also has a different inner implication. First, the term “construction”, derived from the Latin word “construere”, is interpreted to mean “together-build”. It is a term often mentioned in modern art, mainly used in the field of plastic art and architecture. The term “construction” is also associated with the constructivism movement, which was discussed in the context of the abstraction process. Moreover, according to Heidegger, site [ort] possesses the implication of a source that brings everything together and liberates the essence. This may be seen as going beyond the philosophical interpretation of the “site”; this seems to be related to how the site functions in actual space. As for this project, based on the conceptual reasoning that includes the internal and external meanings of the term, “construction site” is introduced as the topological point on the actual space. And the project also tries to make a new connection between these points through the method of topological relation analysis.

Finally, this article includes the content of the actual preparation and the process for the project. This comes in a form of expected responses to how the

project will be conducted in the actual space, and therefore, one should note that it may differ from the contents presented in the article in actual performance. The purpose of this article is to predict a diverse range of variables that may occur in the event of an actual project being conducted, by predicting as many of the factors as possible and detail about the process of the project. Also, this article attempts to make clear that these predictions are also an important process for the project. However, most of all, this project will hopefully function as a touchstone for the value of the experiment to be expandable or not—that is, to be reachable for a whole other dimension of results that may go way beyond the predictions—, by testing the limits and predicting the specific process of steps, rather than providing control or restrictions.

As a philosophic foundation of this research, methods of phenomenology and structuralism are being used. The attempt to reveal phenomena surrounding the concept of experienced place will be the starting point of this research. This particular chapter especially attempts to establish the basis for the phenomena that take place in actual space, through the careful observation and recording of the place in which the project will proceed. Method of geographical observation will be needed in this process of interpreting a place. And the process of reverting the result of the observation into a relational structure will be done according to the method of structural space description. I hereby clarify that all of the

aforementioned methods share a common task of materializing the description of topological relationship.

The purpose of this artistic research project is to attempt a new interpretation of the relationship and structure of space by using topological space theory. By connecting the concrete places thus interpreted with the methodology of art of the time, the project is also aimed at expanding the possibilities of experience and reasons in regards of the public space.

As mentioned earlier, space theorists or critical geographers focus on the change in places and try to interpret different phenomena resulting from the change in places. But topologists question what remains even after the changes in exterior and materiality of places. I hope that such an approach would lead us to the question on the ultimate meaning of a place unchanging regardless of sudden shifts in our era, not to the unrealistic criticism of the inevitable changes, not to arguments on preservation of space, or to recovery of a place's identity. A topologically interpreted space in a city is based on relationships. These relationships are based on the complexity of individuals, and they signify the relation with others itself. Many other interpretations of various relationships still exist. Questions based on such diversity and their answers will become a blueprint for the urban space of our era.

And a digression this may be, but in my personal opinion, this project should be carried out in an ambiguous position somewhere between ‘artist’ and ‘researcher’, as much as the ambiguity of the term “art in public spaces”.