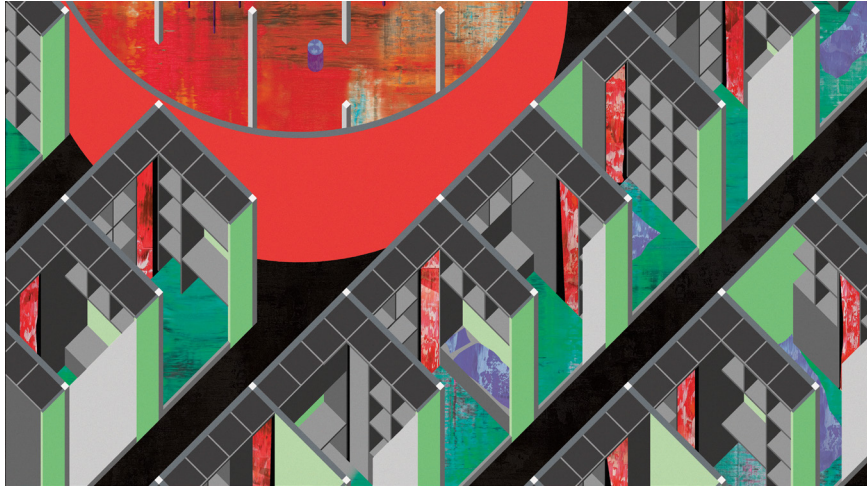


Alone Like the Horn of a Rhino

Reproduction, Affective Labor, and the Contemporary Boarding House in South Korea

Maria Shéhérazade Giudici



Black Square, *Out With A Bang: A Reinterpretation of the Goshiwon* (2019), axonometric view of the cells. Presented at the 2019 Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism. Drawing by the author.

At thirty years old, I lived in a *kosi-won* [*goshiwon*], a dormitory for the civil service examinations. I was not there to study for the exams; I had no place to go. A *kosi-won* was, as it is now, the cheapest and safest place for a thirty-year-old woman. For 20,000 won a day, it provided a room with three meals. It was small, but big enough to house one body; it even had a window that let fresh air in. It was a paradise, for me.

Choi Young-mi, “A Thirty-Year-Old’s Hope and Despair”

Poet Choi Young-mi describes 1991 as the worst year of her life.¹ Fired from her job, abandoned by her partner, Choi moved into a cheap *goshiwon* boarding house. In doing so, she frustrated the aspirations of her family, who expected her to do everything she could to regain her place as a “productive” adult woman—that is, be part of a couple and be gainfully employed. The idea of a single female over 30 living alone challenged the patriarchal hierarchy that informed—and continues to inform—the fragile ecology of South Korean society. Choi would not cook anymore, she would not clean or do her laundry, and she would not share her house with a male guardian.

The place that offered her a haven from forced domesticity is translated as “a dormitory for the civil service examinations.”² However, in the past three decades, the *goshiwon* has become much more than a niche response to a niche condition. It is one of the fastest-growing residence

1 Choi Young-mi, “A Thirty-Year-Old’s Hope and Despair,” trans. Clare You, in *A Megaphone: Some Enactments, Some Numbers, and Some Essays about the Continued Usefulness of Crotchless-Pants-and-a-Machine-Gun Feminism*, eds. Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young (Oakland: Chainlinks, 2011), 231–32.

2 Ibid., 231.

types in South Korea.³ Its popularity is considered a symptom of social and economic crises, as its inhabitants are single people with tight budgets.⁴ However, the goshiwon can be seen as the most evident index of profound transformations happening in the sphere of labor: on the one hand, the unwaged domestic labor that has held families together is increasingly being rejected by young women; on the other hand, waged labor is becoming ever more precarious and unstable.⁵



Sim Kyu-dong, self-portrait inside his *goshitel* room, Seoul, 2016.

However, which this uniquely South Korean phenomenon responds to pressures that are common to any post-Fordist society. In the transition from a profit-oriented liberal framework to a credit-oriented neoliberal system, jobs have become more “flexible”—that is to say, more precarious. Financialization becomes the key site for the extraction of value, while production is increasingly “immaterial.” In this context, the whole life of the individual is put to work, from their affects to their social relationships.⁶ If the male breadwinner and the female housewife were the archetypal characters around which residential architecture has been imagined since the mid-1800s, the goshiwon shows us how contemporary subjectivity demands new architectural alternatives in the workplace but also, and perhaps most importantly, in challenging what we really mean when we talk about *home*.

3 The statistics compiled by the National Emergency Management Agency reveal that the number of goshiwons grew from 6,597 to 11,457 between 2010 and 2014. See Information Disclosure Center for the Transparent Society, <http://www.opengirok.or.kr/3888>.

4 See Kim Da-sol, “Gosiwon, Modern Time Refuge for House Poor,” *Korea Herald*, September 24, 2017, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20170924000045>; and Kelly Kasulis, “Urban Living at a Bargain Price, but How Small is Too Small?,” *Boston Globe*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2018/02/02/urban-living-bargain-price-but-how-small-too-small/7SYgrEjdYdTxOY4HxTMnKL/story.html>.

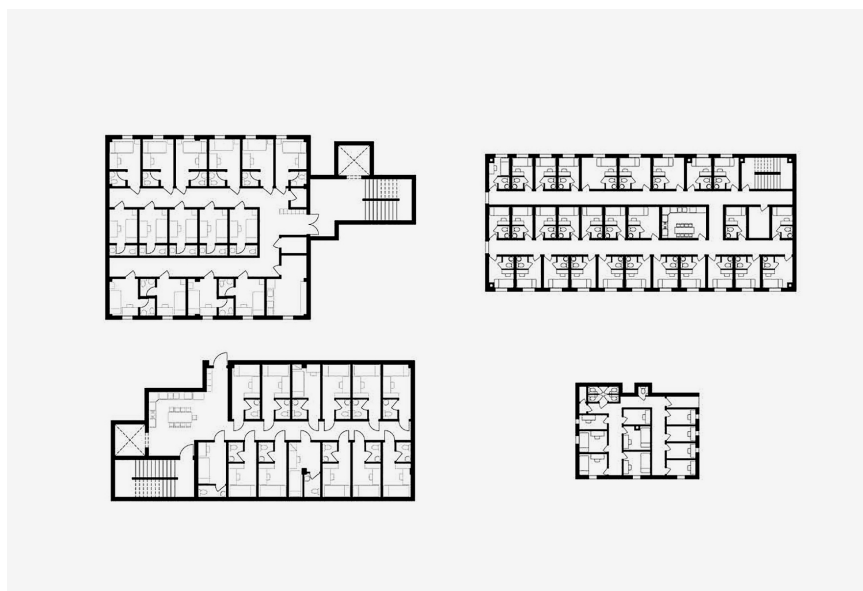
5 Both blue-collar and white-collar jobs are being threatened by the growth of short-term contracts in South Korea and in the West. In fact, the flexibility and precariousness that we generally associate with “no-collar” freelance work are becoming characteristic of most post-Fordist jobs. See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).

6 The philosopher Michel Feher has contextualized contemporary political subjectivity within the transition from a profit-based liberal system to a credit-based, financialized neoliberal system. See Michel Feher, *Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Zone Books, 2018).

GOSHIWON

The literal translation of the term “goshiwon” is “exam room.” Admission to a university is of primary importance for a large portion of South Korean society. The entrance exam requires intensive study and mirrors a number of other assessments white-collar workers will have to undergo in their lives, from licensing tests to competitions for the assignment of civil servant jobs. Exam culture has, in fact, been part of Korean society at least since the Joseon era (1392–1910), as tests were a customary part of the process for appointing government officials. While access to higher education was almost exclusively reserved for male students until World War II, opportunities for women to study and obtain civil servant positions have opened up considerably since 1945; today, the same pressure to succeed academically is felt by all teenagers.⁷ The origin of the goshiwon is hard to pinpoint, but it was likely well established by the 1980s, if not earlier.

Seoul is home to the country’s most important colleges and public institutions, and thus claims the majority of goshiwon units, and it is probable that the phenomenon emerged there; however, the typology has spread throughout all South Korean cities.⁸ Initially, the goshiwon was just a private room for study equipped with a desk, a chair, and an electric light, offering peace and seclusion to students in search of concentration. A room could be rented by the day, if needed. This type of room has not completely disappeared; however, as users tended to study through the night and would rent the same space for days or even weeks in a row, landlords started to furnish some of the units with beds. Today, the cheapest goshiwon units cost around \$300 per month and still resemble the original study rooms, offering a few desk-only rooms flanked by chambers with beds. In this building type, bathrooms are shared, and there is only one shower room, not unlike in a dormitory. In fact, the similarities are so prevalent that “goshiwon” is often translated as “dormitory” in English.



Examples of *goshiwon* plans offered to prospective clients. Drawing by the author.

7 The foundation of Ewha Womans University in Seoul in 1945 signaled the beginning of an attempt to establish equal opportunities for men and women in the academic environment.

8 In 2014, the National Emergency Management Agency counted 6,158 goshiwons in Seoul alone, 469 in nearby Incheon, and an additional 2,743 in the Seoul region of Gyeonggi-do. The largest number of goshiwons outside of the region—416—are to be found in Daegu. See Information Disclosure Center for the Transparent Society.

Today, the vast majority of goshiwon rooms offer private bathrooms to all tenants. These facilities are small, tiled spaces, each containing a toilet, a sink, and a showerhead but no demarcated space for showering. The entire unit measures, on average, around 60 square feet—well below residential standards, as it is not legally supposed to serve a domestic function.⁹ The sketchy agreement that regulates the relationship between landlord and tenant is in no way comparable to an actual apartment rental contract: with a low or zero deposit, flexible conditions, and a short-term commitment, this arrangement is a last resort for those who cannot (or do not want to) rent an apartment. It is a solution that can be likened to living in a hotel or, to be precise, a boarding house.¹⁰

Typically, a hotel stay is shorter than a boarding house stay, and usually, boarding house residents work in proximity to their accommodations. While the hotel primarily provides a sleeping space and minimal cleaning services, leaving all other amenities as extras, the boarding house guest expects to receive a full range of services that would fall under the rubric of domestic work: food, cleaning, laundry. At least since the 1990s, as Choi's story testifies, people have been living in goshiwons, effectively using them as boarding houses. These establishments typically feature a shared kitchen that is kept stocked with rice and kimchi, and sometimes more, offering minimal food as part of the basic fee; social interaction between residents is minimal, and genders are often segregated by floor.

The largest concentration of goshiwons is still to be found close to educational institutions. However, students no longer comprise the majority of residents. Underpaid young workers, recent graduates, interns, and people in temporary employment situations make up the goshiwons' diverse populations. Equally diverse are architectural responses to this brief: while the basic room remains unchanged, most goshiwons are housed in retrofitted buildings, making for a range of unorthodox solutions. Rooms without a window are common, and little or no space is invested in shared facilities, apart from the kitchen. As many goshiwons are to be found in dense, mixed-use urban areas, they often colonize office buildings that have deep floor plates. This text is illustrated with the only goshiwon floor plans currently available—that is to say, drawings that interior architecture companies use to advertise their services to prospective landlords. Most represent converted buildings, and only the floor plan featuring actual load-bearing walls between rooms represents a purpose-built facility.

The transition from the exam study room to the boarding house model was likely completed in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. After this financial downturn, white-collar jobs that had been quite secure became increasingly precarious, and the steep deposit price for rental apartments, let alone access to ownership, became untenable for a large and essential segment of the urban working population, particularly in Seoul. Goshiwons are well positioned and cheap; they offer a clean environment and basic comforts, with the one proviso being that the resident has to be single. In Korean society, marriage is *de rigueur*, and singlehood is seen as a stigma, making the goshiwon residents, unless they are students, essentially social and economic failures: women who can't attract men, men who cannot pay for a proper house and a proper wife. However, as Choi reminds us, opting out of this script is not necessarily a tragedy and can, in fact, be a kind of liberation for those who seek to escape family life.

9 Regulations issued in 2000 prescribed that a single-person studio unit could not be smaller than 130 square feet; newer standards, issued in 2011, raised this figure to 150 square feet. See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Housing Dynamics in Korea: Building Inclusive and Smart Cities* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), 36.

10 On the boarding house, see Dogma and Black Square, *Like a Rolling Stone: Revisiting the Architecture of the Boarding House* (Milan: Black Square, 2016).

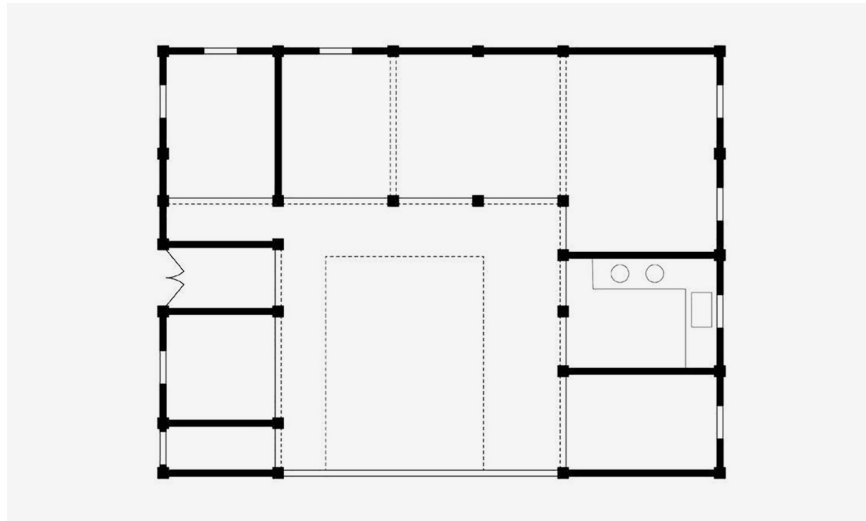
HOME: REPRODUCTIVE LABOR

In a traditional South Korean household—and much the same can be said for most other cultures—the wife provides labor in the form of cooking, shopping, cleaning, child-rearing, and, more generally, care. This typically involves care for the elderly, the young, and the sick, but also emotional care and support for all the members of the family, including the provision of sexual satisfaction for her husband. If performed at “home,” all of these services (food preparation, domestic labor, and sex) are construed as a woman’s “labor of love”—that is, unwaged. In a *goshiwon*, they need to be paid for.

If feminist struggles have focused on the recognition of women’s roles outside of the house, both as workers and as citizens, not much has been said about the asymmetrical conditions of labor *within* the house. In the West, this debate only flared up in the 1970s thanks to the Wages for Housework movement, when thinkers such as Silvia Federici, Selma James, and Mariarosa Dalla Costa engaged in an ambitious rereading of family life and domesticity by looking at them through the lens of “reproductive labor”—the work that modernity has taught us to see as extraneous to the capitalist economic cycle.¹¹ We could broadly define reproductive labor as “various kinds of work—mental, manual, and emotional—aimed at providing the . . . care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation.”¹² As proponents of the Wages for Housework movement argued, these efforts are productive and, in fact, essential to the survival of capitalism as they make life itself—the life of the waged worker—possible. This labor has always existed; however, its downgrading is a relatively recent and entirely strategic phenomenon. While it was once part and parcel of the productive cycle of agriculture and craft, in the past two centuries reproductive labor has been construed as an invisible, voluntary service rendered within the privacy of our homes.

Architecture has been both a tool and an index of this shift, naturalizing reproduction by constructing the house as a locus of desirable domesticity, and South Korea is no exception. In the 1950s, the problem of housing a displaced population turned into an opportunity to shape the ideal worker and his ideal family. By and large, prewar residential architecture still adhered to the features of the *hanok*, a traditional house that usually features a courtyard and is most often U-shaped. Programmatic functions were distributed following social hierarchy, and spaces were gendered.¹³ However, the actual layout was most often organized in evenly spaced bays, and underfloor heating was the only fixed element that established a programmatic difference. The *madang*, or courtyard, was the main space of the house, an open-air interior used flexibly for a variety of purposes, both productive and reproductive.¹⁴ The household of the *hanok* was managed according to strict asymmetries, but the usefulness of reproductive labor was neither denied nor hidden. Reproduction was present, visible, and even at times celebrated when the *madang* became the fulcrum of collective activities: the space could be used for kids’ play, for women’s crafts, for ritual feasts, or for sleeping during the warm season.

- 11 This critical tradition has produced a wealth of literature. Two of the most influential texts are Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women in the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972); and Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework: A Perspective on Capital and the Left* (New York: New York Wages for Housework Committee and Falling Wall, 1975). Here, I am not aligning with the Arendtian dichotomy of labor versus work; rejecting Hannah Arendt’s separation of reproduction (labor) from production (work) is a quintessential choice for a reframing of women’s unwaged domestic efforts. I am, rather, adopting the stance Kathi Weeks proposes in her 2011 book, *The Problem with Work*. Weeks chooses to use the two terms interchangeably precisely in order to challenge the pre-received cultural values that we attribute to the two terms. As Weeks writes, the Marxist tradition essentializes the concept of living labor, and the Arendtian tradition essentializes the concept of work, while both suggest that a “real” or “authentic” form of work or labor is either hidden or exploited by the other. See Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 14–15.
- 12 Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, “Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 15 (1989): 383.
- 13 Confucian values and rules of conduct established an extremely asymmetrical and hierarchical set of relationships between genders and age groups. See Eunkang Koh, “Gender Issues and Confucian Scriptures: Is Confucianism Incompatible with Gender Equality in South Korea?,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (University of London) 71, no. 2 (2008): 345–62.
- 14 Sang Hae Lee, “Continuity and Consistency of the Traditional Courtyard House Plan in Modern Korean Dwellings,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 3, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 65–76.



Plan of a traditional *hanok*. Drawing by the author.

By the first half of the 20th century, the hanok had been hybridized with two colonial models—the Western missionary house and a modernized version of the Japanese *machiya* townhouse. Both colonial styles presented a much more defined choreography of use than the hanok, pigeonholing reproductive activities in purpose-equipped rooms that followed a hierarchy that was neither social nor symbolic, but purportedly “functional.” In the postwar rush to reconstruction, these models became the basis for the creation of a new residential type that would later be applied on a large scale. By the 1960s, a large portion of South Koreans were living in units called “APTs,” from the term “apartment.”¹⁵ The APT layout follows a Western typological recipe—living room, kitchen, bedroom(s), bathroom(s). Each room is differentiated by its size, proportions, and equipment, and bedrooms have unequal dimensions, establishing a hierarchy between a couple’s master bedroom and their children’s rooms.

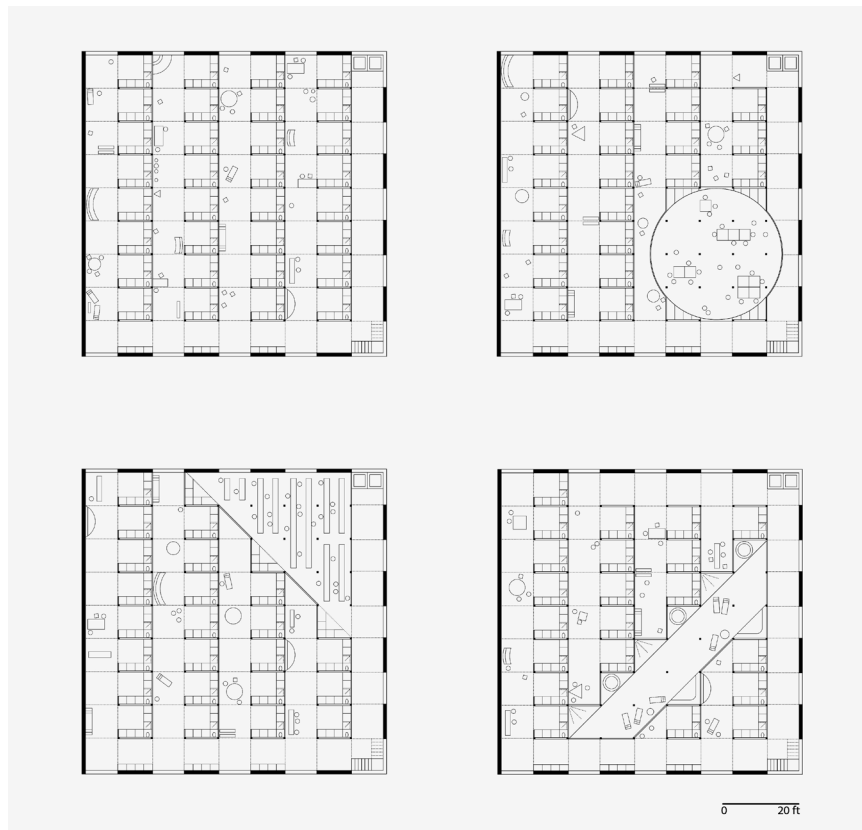
All of these features might seem “normal,” but it is crucial to underline the fact that there is nothing inherently normal about the family unit they prescribe. The nuclear family is, in fact, a cultural construct normalized by the ubiquity of the APT model; moreover, the APT layout erases the reality of reproductive labor by reducing it to a mere mechanical task supported by the appropriate technology (stove, laundry machine, dryer). In reality, the burden of reproductive labor did not disappear; at the same time that they were completing these tasks at home, South Korean women entered the waged labor market en masse, working for longer hours than their male counterparts and being paid half the amount, or less, of the men’s salaries.¹⁶

In this context, the goshiwon seems like a radical proposition: women can stop providing their reproductive labor for free, and they can even buy such labor for the care of their own selves from the goshiwon landlord or landlady. They can “go alone like the horn of a rhino,” as proposed by the early Buddhist text *The Rhinoceros Sutra*.¹⁷ But women are not the only subject for whom the goshiwon is a direct response to the relentless ubiquity of the APT model. Even before becoming a form of housing, the goshiwon represented a respite from the stifling environment of the family apartment; students focused better when outside of the home than when they were in proximity to their parents. The goshiwon offered them an opportunity to autonomously decide their daily rhythms and to escape supervision.

¹⁵ For more information on APTs, see Valérie Gelézeau, *Séoul, ville géante, cités radieuses* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2013).

¹⁶ See Kyung Ae Park, “Women and Development: The Case of South Korea,” *Comparative Politics* 25, no. 2 (January 1993): 127–45.

¹⁷ Drawing upon *The Rhinoceros Sutra*, Gong Ji-young’s 1993 novel *Go Alone Like the Horn of a Rhino* (무소의 뿔처럼 혼자서 가라) (1993; repr., Seoul: Open House, 2013) is an exhortation to seek personal autonomy. The book has had a profound impact on popular culture, provoking debate on the predicament of women in Korean society.



Black Square, *Out With A Bang: A Reinterpretation of the Goshiwon* (2019), typical plans. Presented at the 2019 Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism. Drawing by the author.

Architecturally, the goshiwon is the explicit opposite of the APT. Often recycling the features of non-domestic structures, it follows a hypostyle, deep “typical plan”¹⁸ articulated with flimsy partitions—very different from the thin APT slabs, which are subdivided with load-bearing walls. But most importantly, the goshiwon internalizes work—indeed, its very starting point is a desk—and externalizes reproductive labor. Reproduction is not hidden but, rather, is centralized in shared kitchens and laundry facilities run by the goshiwon owner with the help of hired cleaners; moreover, it is ejected back into the city, where goshiwon residents can easily buy both food and sex.¹⁹ This inversion does not imply that the goshiwon model leads to a more equitable division of labor than the APT, as the tasks of the wife are provided by poorly paid workers. The goshiwon owners hire cleaners—most often women, sometimes migrants from mainland China or Southeast Asia—to maintain the establishment; these cleaners have no job security or benefits, and, indeed, the independence of women choosing to opt out of the “home” model comes at the price of someone else’s exploitation.²⁰

What the goshiwon does offer is a challenge to the norm of what “home” is and therefore, perhaps, a space in which to rethink a future beyond traditional domesticity. It would be impossible, however, to pry open this space without questioning the other half of the story: If the goshiwon externalizes reproductive labor to internalize work, what kind of work are we talking about?

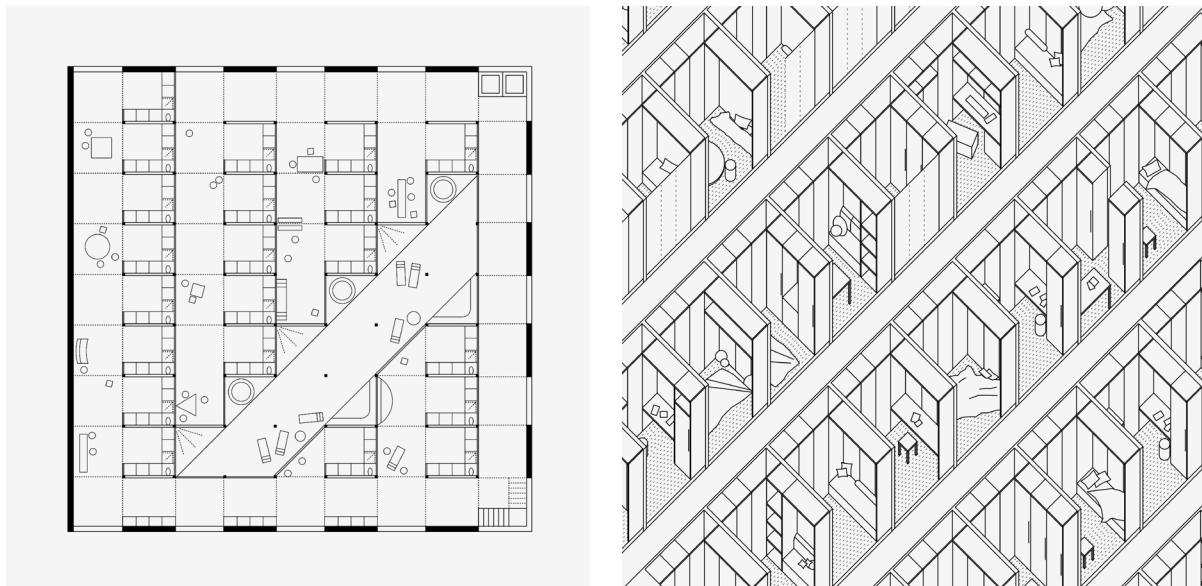
¹⁸ See Rem Koolhaas, “Typical Plan,” in *S, M, L, XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 335–50.

¹⁹ In South Korea, about 20 percent of male adults pay a prostitute at least four times per month, and the number of women involved in the trade is estimated to be around 300,000. Male prostitution is a less frequent occurrence, but the market is growing steadily. See JiHye Kim, “Korea’s New Prostitution Policy: Overcoming Challenges to Effectuate the Legislature’s Intent to Protect Prostitutes from Abuse,” *Pacific Rim Law and Policy Journal* 16, no. 2 (2007): 493–523; and Lucy Williamson, “South Korean Host Bars—for Women,” *BBC News*, September 18, 2012, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19570750>.

²⁰ See Hye-Kyung Lee, “Migrant Domestic Workers in Korea: The Effects of Global Householding on Korean-Chinese Domestic Workers,” *International Development Planning Review* 2, no. 4 (December 2006): 499–514.

CITY OF ROOMS: AFFECTIVE LABOR

In *The Rhinoceros Sutra*, “going alone” is seen as a form of liberation from the ties of our social existence. However, life in a goshiwon is neither ascetic nor necessarily emancipatory. If it represents a welcome exodus from the APT for some, for others it is an emergency solution. All goshiwons do have one thing in common: they are a market response to a situation of housing pressure. For this reason, there is no established model, and while the cell is repetitive, it would be impossible to pinpoint a specific building type. Much as Thomas Butler Gunn wrote of the New York boarding house in 1857, the range and quality of services offered in goshiwons vary greatly.²¹ In the worst cases, the goshiwon is a residential solution to the new urban poor, not dissimilar from the United States’ single-room-occupancy housing. Even in the best cases, though, the users’ choice of an impermanent accommodation reflects the precariousness of their working conditions. The majority of goshiwon residents are educated, and most work in the tertiary sector. All of them suffer from the same economic insecurity. These workers are completely removed from any form of traditional domesticity, but paradoxically, their jobs—regardless of their gender—operate in spheres that are similar to that of the APT-dwelling wife: care, management, transfer of knowledge. Be they employed in education, service, or creative industries—from IT to graphic design to hospitality—the most important skill of these post-Fordist workers is communication. More specifically, we could define an ample part of their work as “affective labor,” as it mobilizes, produces, and exploits affects.²² Affective labor does not coincide with reproductive labor—that is to say, the effort needed to support daily life itself, from childbearing to cooking—but it does share with reproductive labor the same existential condition; in both cases, the same set of “affective” skills is mobilized, while the worker’s very subjectivity is made productive and, therefore, exploited.

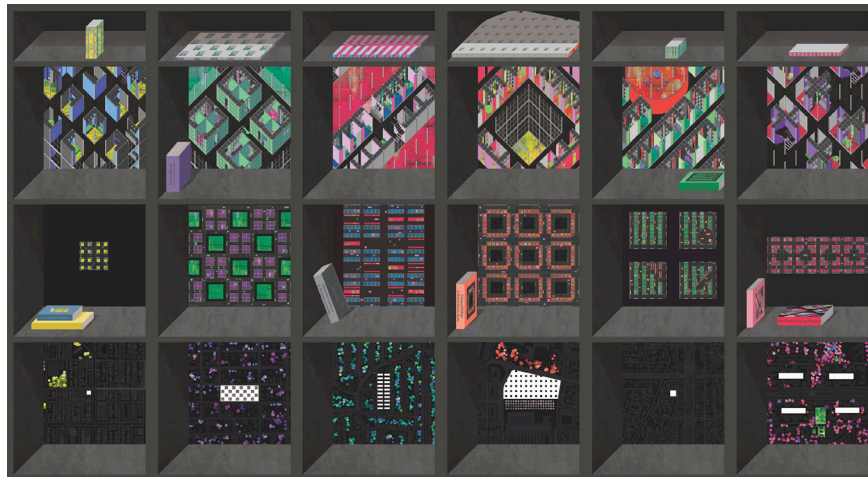


Black Square, *Out With A Bang: A Reinterpretation of the Goshiwon* (2019), typical plans and axonometric view of the cells. Presented at the 2019 Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism. Drawing by the author.

- 21 Thomas Butler Gunn ironically describes the variety of social environments to be found in different boarding houses depending on their inhabitants’ class, ethnicity, political affiliation, and so on. See Thomas Butler Gunn, *The Physiology of New York Boarding-Houses* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1857).
- 22 For the definition of affective labor, see Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 89–100; and Kathi Weeks, “Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics,” *Ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007): 233–49. Hardt’s definition ascribes affective labor to those roles-within post-Fordist production—that have an explicit affective value, but I would rather argue that any immaterial labor is essentially affective, following Maurizio Lazzarato. See Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emory in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–47.

While the blue-collar or white-collar worker living in an APT would lead an anonymous work life and come back to the tight-knit bond of his or her family in the evening, the no-collar²³ workers of the goshiwon find extreme abstraction and anonymity in their cells but are increasingly asked to invest emotionally in their jobs.²⁴ Affective labor harnesses the entirety of the worker's personality for gain: the product cannot be separated from the worker anymore. Reproductive labor is perhaps the most extreme form of affective labor, a job one is “never done” with. The very blackmail that makes this labor subjectivity so problematic is that it requires such a high degree of emotional involvement that it camouflages what is an effort into something we are supposed to enjoy—and the other way around.

It is thus morally acceptable to exploit these workers, as they are perceived as “doing what they like.” Affective labor—viewed as a passion and not a chore—never stops, and the goshiwon workers bring it “home” with them, to a desk in their cell. Copywriting, scripting and coding, translating and editing, designing, accounting—goshiwon units are the background for all kinds of work that can be done with a laptop. A complete inversion of the modern paradigm is at play here: work now shapes the home, and affects rule the workplace.



Black Square, *Out With A Bang: A Reinterpretation of the Goshiwon* (2019).
Proposal for six projective scenarios inspired by the goshiwon model located in Seoul, Singapore, London, Rome, Houston, and Hong Kong. Presented at the 2019 Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism. Drawing by the author.

The exploitation of affective labor is not dissimilar to that of reproductive labor. In both cases, the most painful issue is the appropriation and commodification of what we love the most—family, friends, art, creativity, sex. What emerges is, then, both at home and in the workplace—assuming such a distinction can still exist—the need to imagine a spatial form that could help reclaim a degree of agency not only over one's efforts but also over one's affects.²⁵ There has been little or no architectural experimentation with the goshiwon, regardless of its commercial success. This is a missed opportunity, as pushing the boundary of what the goshiwon is and

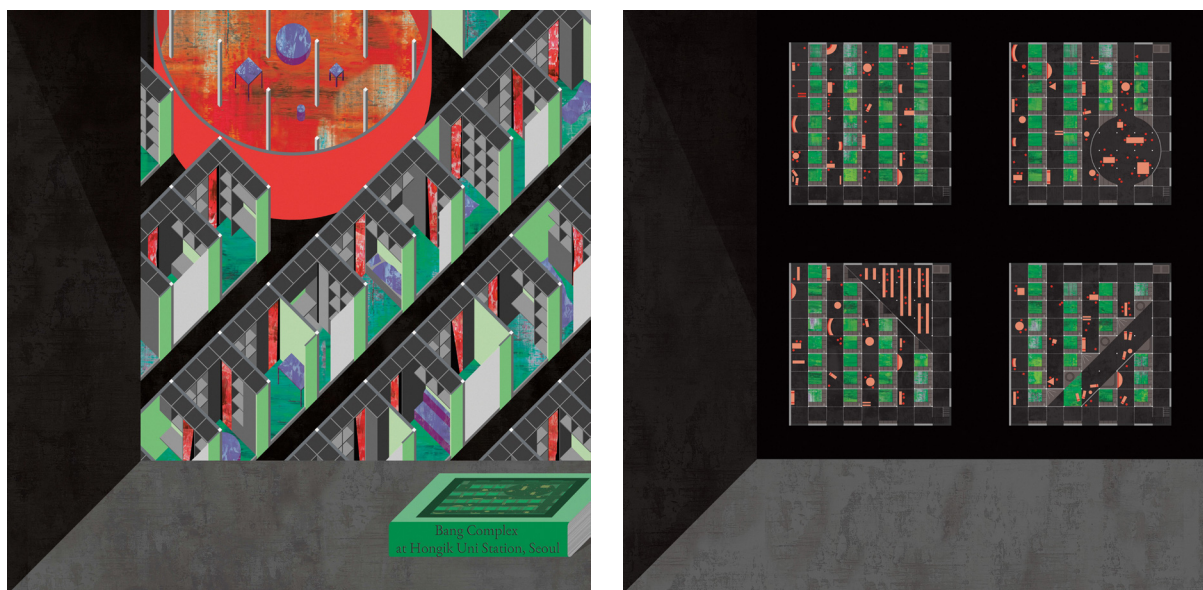
23 Andrew Ross describes the “immaterial,” “affective” worker as “no-collar” since the dress codes of the past do not apply to this category. Andrew Ross, *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

24 Arlie Russell Hochschild defines this condition as “the managed heart.” As the term “affective labor” was not yet widespread at the time of her writing, she called it “emotional labor” in her seminal book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

25 In the past decade or so, upmarket equivalents of the goshiwon have spread out under a variety of different names such as “goshitel” (from “goshiwon” and “hotel”), “oneroomtel,” and “officetel.” All of these products, while offering larger units and more comfort, essentially follow the goshiwon model.

does could advance the debate about the discontents of affective labor.

The current scale of the cell makes it impossible to organize furniture in any other configuration, but a slightly larger cell could open up different possibilities of use—the room could be again rented as a work space, for instance. Current cells offer just one solution that is still very conventional in terms of what it means to work (at a desk) or rest (in a bed). Less typologically defined units would encourage the users to actively reimagine their lives. In fact, in South Korea there is a widespread practice of renting a room (called a *bang*) by the hour for a variety of purposes, from business meetings to social occasions—*karaoke-bang* and *tv-bang* are commonly on offer, as domestic spaces are quite limited. By substituting the current cell with a generic one-bay hanok, the *goshiwon* offers an environment that is neither domestic nor explicitly productive and, yet, is both at the same time, delivering on the promise of neutrality and flexibility.



Black Square, *Out With A Bang: A Reinterpretation of the Goshiwon* (2019), typical plans and axonometric view. Presented at the 2019 Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism. Drawing by the author.

Another aspect of the *goshiwon* that should be challenged is its spaces of reproductive labor. As we have seen, buying exploitable reproductive labor is hardly a solution; it does help highlight a problem, and it does offer some women an alternative, but it is not a redemption for all. A response to this problem could be to make this labor more social, to see it as a form of self-valorization. For instance, the Embassy Network—originated in San Francisco, but now operating in a number of countries across the Americas and Europe—is currently experimenting with a communal living format in which the collective organization of domestic tasks is seen as the very root of the residents' autonomy and agency. By including the organization of cultural activities and the provision of emotional counseling in their description of domestic work, the Embassy Network experiments with the possibility of exposing the creative character of reproductive labor. Although the houses in the network are not-for-profit "communes," it would be possible to apply some of the network's management principles even to commercial enterprises; in fact, the sharing, owning, and renegotiating of the reproductive task outside the limits of traditional family life could be a radical alternative that the *goshiwon* has the potential to support. This would only be possible by celebrating the spaces of reproductive labor, increasing their size, and radically rethinking them—from the laundry room to the kitchen. Today, *goshiwon* kitchens are often sim-

ilar to APT kitchens and can become places of socialization, ritual, and politics, as the madang had been until recently. Labor is, after all, never an individual pursuit.

Seoul is a city of rooms. It is, so to speak, splintering from within, as people react to the rigidity of the social diagrams they are asked to conform to. If this process has, until now, only been a response to a crisis, it might well become, in the future, the start of an architectural project that would change the way we think about the postindustrial city at large.

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AUTHOR

Maria Shéhérazade Giudici is an architect and founder of the publishing and design platform Black Square. She teaches at the Architectural Association and the Royal College of Art in London and directs *AA Files*.

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