

**IN
BETWEEN
KOREAN
BANG
CULTURE**





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In Between - Korean Bang Culture

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ABSTRACT

Asian metropolises are often described as interchangeable, generic cities, defined by extreme growth. This is also true of the South Korean capital Seoul, which has developed from a city with less than one million inhabitants to a metropolis with more than 23 million inhabitants in just 60 years. The permanent transformation of the city leads to a high density and a general lack of space, which results in high dissatisfaction of the residents in the city. In response, so-called Bangs developed to meet the need for space in the city. The term Bangs refers to dynamic commercial spaces for cultural consumption that offer a wide range of activities, from online gaming and singing to bathing and saunas.

Against this backdrop the aim of this paper is to explain the concept and culture of Bangs. The urban phenomenon of bangs is located in the developments of the city of Seoul in order to relate the emergence to the urban, cultural and social context. The field study in Seoul shows the diversity of bangs and paints a detailed picture of how they are structured and used and what role they play in the urban fabric. It also discusses how the concept of public and private space differs in Korean culture and how Bangs provide a unique space for both individual and collective needs. Through the examination of the daily lives of city residents, a clear connection between the social and cultural context of Seoul and the development of bangs is revealed. The uniqueness of the bangs is not characterised by their spatial structures, but more by the way they generate community and at the same time a kind of demarcation. Bangs have become an essential part of the urban fabric in Seoul, reflecting the city's unique character and the social intricacies.



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KURZFASSUNG

Asiatische Metropolen werden oft als austauschbare Städte ohne Eigenschaften beschrieben, geprägt sind durch extremes Wachstum. So auch die südkoreanische Hauptstadt Seoul, die sich in nur 60 Jahren von einer Stadt mit weniger als einer Million Bewohner*innen zu einer Metropole mit mehr als 23 Millionen Einwohner*innen entwickelt hat. Die permanente Transformation der Stadt führt zu einer hohen Dichte und einem generellen Platzmangel, was zu hoher Unzufriedenheit der Bewohner*innen in der Stadt führt. Als Reaktion darauf entwickelten sich sogenannte Bangs, die das Bedürfnis nach Raum in der Stadt erfüllen. Der Begriff Bangs bezieht sich auf dynamische kommerzielle Räume für kulturellen Konsum, die Raum für verschiedenste Aktivitäten schaffen, von Online-Gaming über Singen bis hin zu Baden und Saunieren. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist das Ziel dieser Arbeit, das Konzept und die Kultur der Bangs zu erläutern. Dabei wurde das urbane Phänomen der Bangs in den Entwicklungen der Stadt Seoul verortet, um das Aufkommen der Bangs mit dem urbanen, kulturellen und sozialen Kontext in Beziehung zu setzen. Die Feldstudie in Seoul zeigt die Vielfalt der Bangs und zeichnet ein detailliertes Bild davon, wie sie aufgebaut und genutzt werden und welche Rolle sie im städtischen Gefüge einnehmen. Es wird auch diskutiert, wie sich das Konzept von öffentlichem und privatem Raum in der koreanischen Kultur unterscheidet und wie ein einzigartiger Raum für sowohl individuelle als auch kollektive Bedürfnisse geboten wird. Durch die Auseinandersetzung mit dem alltäglichen Leben der Stadtbewohner*innen zeigt sich ein klarer Zusammenhang zwischen dem sozialen und kulturellen Kontext von Seoul und der Entwicklung der Bangs. Die Besonderheit der Bangs zeichnet sich nicht durch ihre räumlichen Strukturen aus, sondern mehr durch die Art und Weise, wie sie Gemeinschaft und gleichzeitig eine Art Abgrenzung generieren. Bangs sind zu einem wesentlichen Bestandteil des städtischen Gefüges in Seoul geworden und spiegeln mit ihrem einzigartigen Charakter und die Feinheiten der Stadt wider.



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1 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 CITY OF BANGS	9
1.2 METHODOLOGY & STRUCTURE	13

2 | BECOMING MODERN SEOUL

2.1 CAPITAL OF THE KOREAN NATION	15
2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITYSCAPE	20
2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING	28
2.4 KOREA TOWARDS A DIGITAL POWERHOUSE	34
2.5 SOCIETY, RELIGION AND EVERYDAY LIFE	
KOREAN SOCIETY	38
SEOUL CITYLIFE	44

3 | THE BANG?

3.1 ORIGIN OF THE BANG	46
3.2 A BANG FOR EVERYONE	50
NORAEBANG	54
COIN NORAEBANG	62
MULTIBANG	70
ROOMCAFE	76
MANHWABANG	84
JIMJILBANG	92
PC BANG	100
DVD BANG	110
PS BANG	118
STUDYCAFE / DOGSEOSHIL	124
MORE BANGS	132
3.3 KEUNSENG - SPHERE OF THE BANGS	134
3.4 URBAN NETWORK OF BANGS	138

4 | A ROOM, A HOUSE OR THE CITY

4.1 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE	145
4.2 ENCLOSED AND OPEN SPACE	150
4.3 INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE	152

5 | CONCLUSION

5.1 SYNTHESIS	155
5.2 OUTLOOK	160
FIGURES	162
LITERATURE	166



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INTRODUCTION

1



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LUSH
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32
Forsyth

한글
한글

1.1 | CITY OF BANGS

Since the turn of the millennium, South Korea has risen to global pop culture stardom. The country has taken a leading role in pop culture with television series (k-dramas), movies, webtoons, gaming and electronics, setting standards and pushing boundaries. The Hallyu wave, which literally means “Korean wave,” sparked a surge in popularity for Korean culture in the Chinese-speaking world (including China) and Japan in the early 1990s, and from there spread to global dimensions (Jin, Yoon and Min, 2021). The K-wave has since generated worldwide fascination for South Korea and its capital city, Seoul.

Since the end of the Korean War, the country has undergone constant metamorphosis. It has worked its way from being considered a third-world country to being globally influential (Member of the G20; Ranked in the TOP 20 of annual Soft Power Survey by Monocle). The population of Greater Seoul has grown by more than 300 percent in the last 50 years. Now more than half of the country’s population lives in Great Seoul, which is also the centre of politics, economy, and culture. Seoul fits the scheme of the “generic city”, a rapidly growing city often criticised as interchangeable and without any identity. It is the embodiment of growth in a state of constant flux.

However, if one changes one’s perspective from the all-encompassing bird’s-eye view and looks at the social urban fabric it reveals that behind the reflecting glass facades and neon lights lies an unmistakable face. When studying literature dealing with the intricate urban structures of Seoul, one quickly comes across the phenomenon of bang culture. This culture is usually discussed in terms of the most widespread variants - Noraebang (Singing Room) and the PC-Bang. (Kim, 2008; Tudor, 2012; Peter G. Rowe, Fu and Song, 2021) At the 2004 Venice Biennale, the exhibition in the Korean pavilion entitled ‘City of the Bang’ was dedicated solely to this urban phenomenon.

Focusing on the architectural aspect of these commercial venues, the Bangs could be described as a junk space referring to Koolhaas, as a place that “knows all your emotions, all your desires” (Koolhaas, 2001).

The current state of research mostly pursues the goal of fitting the phenomenon into a theoretical framework. In this respect, there

*Fig. 1
(previous page)*

is an ambivalence in the approaches. Scholars such as Almanzan, Bennett und Choe (2016) describe the Bangs as an extension of the home and establish a new theoretical category of dividual space to better situate them in the urban context. Whereas Kim (2005) refers to it as part of the public realm.

In the western world, there is no comparable equivalent to these unique structures; only in Japanese cities similar spaces have developed (Choe, Almazan and Bennett, 2016). They escape the architects' realm of influence, their existence was never planned and yet they are ubiquitous, an essential part of the city landscape. In order to better understand the development, the complex urban and cultural context, this thesis looks at the phenomenon from different angles. This work deals with the question of which role this phenomenon plays for the city and Korean culture and, as a counter question, which role the city and Korean culture play for the Bangs?

1.2 | METHODOLOGY

This thesis is an interpretive investigation of documentary sources as they describe and reveal the Korean Bangs in order to build a framework for understanding this spatial type. It has a broader research approach to look at the city not as an isolated phenomenon but in the context of the history of the Republic of Korea and the peculiarities of Korean society.

The method integrates a literature review of English, German and Korean sources, including academic journals, institutional databases, and popular media, such as Websites and newspapers. The documentation evidences the phenomenon and its interpretation across a range of sectors.

& STRUCTURE

The study is organized into five sections. The first part gives an introduction to the topic. The second part deals with the surroundings in which the Bangs were born, the historical backdrop, the social milieu, cultural specificities, and the conditions of urban space. The middle section deals with the evolution of the Bang and gives a detailed description of selected Bang typologies. Together with fieldwork methods which include direct observations of Bangs in Hongdae, Seoul, and other city areas. The final part consisting of chapters four and five gives a theoretical placement and considers, by way of conclusion, the study's findings and relevance. It summarizes the discussion by reflecting upon the contemporary milieu of the Bangs.



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BECOMING MODERN SEOUL

2

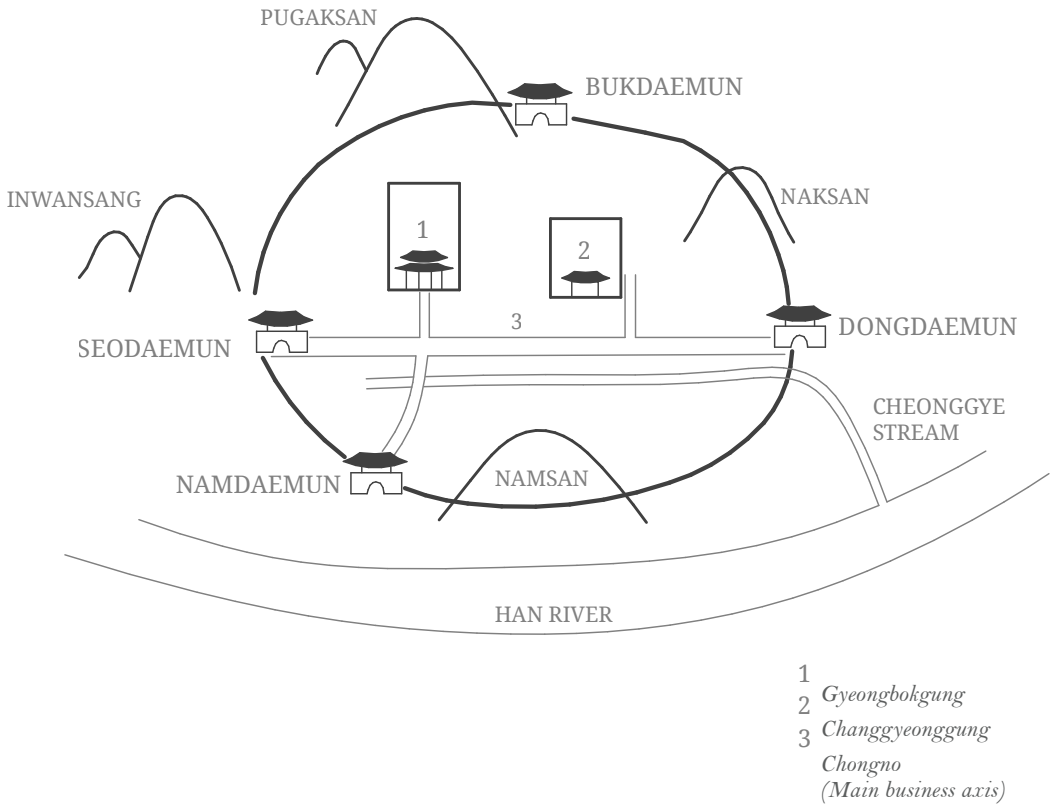


Fig. 2
Structure of Hanyang
in 1394

2.1 | CAPITAL OF THE KOREAN NATION

1392 – 1897	Joseon Dynasty
1897 – 1910	Korean Empire
1910 – 1945	Japanese Colonial Rule
1945 – 1948	South Korea under American Occupation
1948 – present	Division into North and South Korea Proclamation of the Republic of Korea First Republic 1948 – 1960 Second Republic 1960 – 1963 Third Republic 1963 – 1972 Fourth Republic 1972 – 1979 Fifth Republic 1979 – 1987 Sixth Republic 1987 - present
1950 – 1953	Korean War

The history of settlements where Seoul is located today dates back to the first century AD. But it was only during the Joseon (or Chosun) Dynasty (14th - 19th century) in 1394 that the city called Hanseong or Hanyang, now Seoul, was chosen to become the new capital. In the same year of the nomination, Confucianism became the country's central political ideology, even though Buddhist principles have been rooted in everyday life for generations (Yun, 2017). The choice of location for the city and the placement of major urban elements, including the road system and the city wall, reflect Chinese ideas of feng shui. (K.-J. Kim, 2012).

Hanyang lies protected between four inner mountains (Fig. 2), Inwangsan in the east, Naksan in the west, Namsan to the south, and Pugaksan in the north (Gelézeau, 2014). Additional fortification brought the 18km long city wall with five city gates named after the five virtues of Confucian Philosophy humaneness (仁), righteousness (義), propriety or etiquette (禮), knowledge (智), and integrity (信). The city layout included a street connecting the two main palace complexes from west to east called Jonggo Street. Essential government functions, and the first officially recognised markets were located along this road (Yun, 2017).

In 1446, under the sponsorship of King Sejong, Koreans adopted their own writing system: The Hangeul alphabet, replacing a complex system of Chinese characters used to represent the sound of Korean. The city's population experienced constant growth and

had to expand outside of the city walls in the late 18th century. Until the late 19th century Korea remained an agrarian country (Lee and Ramsey, 2011).

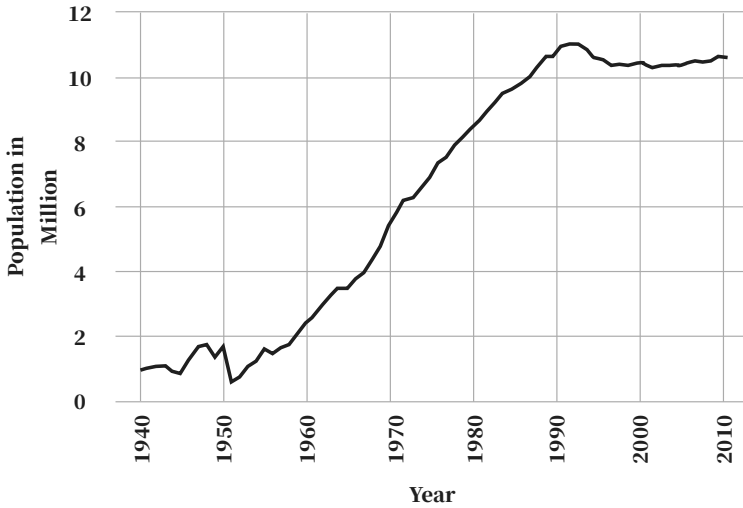
In 1910 despite all the efforts of authorities, the Joseon Dynasty fell under Japanese colonial rule. Japan used the capital as a show-piece to prove its newly gained power and changed the city's name from Hanseong to Gyongsong. To make Koreans dependent and to make them forget their own character, monumental buildings from the Joseon dynasty were deliberately destroyed. The city was to be modernised with radical means according to Japanese ideas. The Japanese colonisers only sought softer measures when massive resistance from Koreans triggered the Samil movement in 1919. After 35 years of occupation, imperial Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces, and Korea regained independence (Yun, 2017). But the support also brought the ideological conflict between communism and capitalism and eventually led to the country's division into two parts - the north and the south. Two separate Korean republics were established in 1948. Shortly after, in 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War turned Seoul into a battlefield.

After the tremendous destruction, by the end of the Korean war in 1953, both countries were left in a fragile state. With most of the facilities and natural resources situated in north - South Korea, with Seoul in ruins was left with very little (Kim and Han, 2012).

In the post-war period, the urbanisation process in Seoul accelerated. This led to the return of former residents, an influx of people from rural areas looking for job opportunities, and a significant baby boom. As a result, the population grew from 1.4 million in 1949 to 2.4 million in 1960. After the complete depletion of capital stock in the aftermath of the war, an export-centred economic policy with large-scale investments brought an era of industrialisation and massive technological development known as the "miracle of the Han River". General Park Chun Hee, who came to power in a military coup in 1961, is one of the main contributors to the success. Despite the authoritarian government and the suppression of his people, he managed to pull the nation out of poverty following his economic development plans. He was re-elected several times until his repressive dictatorship ended with his assassination in 1979 (Diego Giron, 2018).

The city's urban growth continued, with the population surpassing the mark of 8 million by 1980 (Fig. 3) under the oppressive regime of General Chun Doo Hwan (Yun, 2017). During this time,

the city's expansion found its pinnacle with the development of several satellite cities in the metropolitan area. Since development focused on the Seoul Metropolitan area as a political, economic, cultural, and social centre, the nickname "Republic of Seoul" developed (a satirical title criticising the dominant role of the capital)(Hill and Kim, 2000).



*Fig. 3
Population of Seoul
1940-2010*

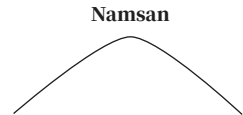
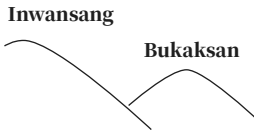
In the mid-1990s the nation became the 11th-largest economy in the world thanks to its rise from a third world country to an industrialised nation (Diego Giron, 2018). The nominal GDP per capita of Seoul grew between 1961 and 2014 by the factor 330 (Seoul Solution, 2016). Compared to similar city transformations in other countries, Seoul underwent the transition from a "labour-based" economy towards an economy based on service- and information-based industries squeezed into a much shorter period of time (Yun, 2017). The city's rapid change did not allow for any adaptation, neither by society nor by the built space.



Fig. 4, 1929



Fig. 5, 2009



A panoramic view of Seoul, taken from the same angle. In 1929 during the Japanese colonial period and 80 years later in 2009.

2.1 | CAPITAL OF THE KOREAN NATION

The history of modern Korean urbanism can be roughly divided into three major epochs, the first coinciding with the period of the Japanese takeover until the liberation in 1945. The second period took place between 1961 and 1988 under a developmental leadership, characterized by large-scale development projects and a building boom. The third began in the mid-1990s and continues to the present day, during which time Korea became modernized and opened up to the global influences. In comparison with Western countries, Korea's modernization has compressed a process that at times lasted around two centuries into a very short period of time (Jung, 2013).

The first changes in the urban fabric of Seoul happened in 1910 prompted by the Japanese colonizers shortly after they annexed Korea. The goal was to radically modernize the city following Japanese ideas and to make it into an efficient colonial and military city. Retaining the identity of the capital did not play the slightest role in the process. In 1912 a new urban masterplan was proposed, with strategies including a new design for the street structure and districts (Yun, 2017). The new street systems and their infrastructure would have a formative influence on the later development of the city. Unlike the West, where urbanization has been inextricably linked to industrialization and the transformation it has brought, Korea's urbanization has its origins with the oppressive rule of Japan. The cities were growing – the urban population in Korea the rose by 10 percent – in Seoul, in particular, the number of inhabitants has increased by a factor of five during this period (Jung, 2013). The main results of the urbanisation cycle of the 1930s and 1940s were the densification of the urban fabric and the horizontal development of the built environment (Yun, 2017). After the independence of Korea in 1949 the city was partitioned by the newly established Seoul Metropolitan Government into 7 autonomous gu (districts). In spite of the efforts to remove the vestiges of Japanese colonial rule, the transformation of the urban landscape caused by Japanese colonial rule was too profound to be simply erased. The end of the occupation, however, meant more hardships for Korea, which ultimately led to war and the division of Korea into two nations (Kim, 2003).

South Korea was finding itself in a poor economic situation with a

destroyed capital. The takeover of power by the military regime in 1961 marked the start of the development dictatorship, urban expansion and a construction boom. To bring about change for the nation, a growing industrial economy was set as the overarching goal to build a growing industrial economy. Although the leadership received much criticism, it was the most dynamic period in Korea's history, the large-scale expansion resulted in a completely different cityscape from the Japanese colonial era (Kim, 2003). For Seoul the strategy was radical urban renewal in the form of land redevelopment, called Jaegyebal. The enacting law simplifies the expropriation of land as well as the project implementation and is often the basis for large-scale demolitions. Existing structures of residential quarters are replaced by new, more profitable high-density developments of apartment complexes in order to house the fast-growing population of Seoul (Jang, 2018).

*Fig. 6
Expansion of Seoul,
1910 -1990*



In the mid-1960s, urban sprawl reached new heights (Fig. 6). Yet the housing development could not keep up with the rate of population growth. The authorities could hardly cope with the enormous development and plans were already outdated when they were published. For example, city planning followed the prediction of demographic growth for the next 30 year based on the past developments. The predicted population for 1965 was 1.141.486 people but the real population in 1966 was in fact 3.793.280 inhabitants (Kim, 2003)(Fig. 7). Despite this fact, several ten-year urban plans were issued. These plans should set the infrastructure for smaller developments and tackle the immense traffic problems (Gelézeau, 2014).

Population and density in 1934	Population	382.491
	Habitable area per person	65 m ²
Predicted population and density for 1965	Predicted population	1.141.486
	Habitable area per person	83 m ²
Population and density in 1966	Real population	3.793.280

*Fig. 7
Population Predictions
in the Explanatory Re-
ports on City Planning
Decisions*

A large number of construction projects were initiated by the Mayor of Seoul in his only short period in office which earned him the nickname “bulldozer”. He also started the construction of several dams in the Han River, which enabled the project of Yeouido Island (“Manhattan of Seoul”), an extensive development project of a sandy island, as part of a huge urban development plan along the Han River including the construction of housing and waterfront parks. In the same period the development of the Gangnam the area south of the Han River where until 1970 was still mostly undeveloped rice paddies and other cultivated fields. While Gangnam refers in this case to four present day districts: Seocho, Gangnam, Songpa, and Gangdong (Yun, 2017).

Towards the end of the 1980s, low-rise apartment buildings were converted into high-rise blocks and older housing was demolished and rebuilt, leading to an increase in population density and traffic congestion (Kim, 2003). The first public transport system to go into operation was the electric street-car railway back in 1899. However, walking remained the main mode of transport until the mid-20th century, when street-cars were replaced by buses (Fig 9), which were more flexible as they were not tied to fixed tracks. As Seoul grew and public buses formed a functioning network, residential areas expanded, and people’s radius of movement increased. In 1974 the first metro line “Line 1” launched operation. the circular subway line 2 was partially opened in 1982 and started operating 1984 in full distance. Subway line 3& 4 opened in 1985 to connect the north with the south of the city (Kim, 2003).

Criticism of the city’s efficiency-driven development intensified as the negative consequences became too obvious to ignore. The collapse of the Sampoong department store and the fall of the Songsoo Grand Bridge in 1974 cannot be seen only as a construction failure. As Seung (2016) writes, this disaster marks the “collapse of society, the logic of a modern Korea in singleminded pursuit of economic growth”.



*Fig. 8
 Current subdivision of
 Seoul into 24 districts*

The aspirations of authorities only changed when a civilian government took over in 1993. The centralized government system came to an end as well when the Seoul City council and 25 districts were formed, until 1995 the number of administrative districts increased (districts are divided by size of population) to a total of 25 gu[s] and 522 administrative dong[s]. (Fig. 8) One of the first projects of the new authorities was to turn the 16th of May Square (commemorating the day of the seizure of power by the military dictatorship), a 363,000 square metre asphalt area, into a huge park for the citizens (Kim, 2008).

The shift of focus also meant positive change concerning traffic conditions with the expansion of the metro lines, bus lines and taxis (Fig. 9). Which led to a steady increase of the average intra-speed. The subway network expanded when lines 5,6 and 7 started operating between 1995 and 2000. At this point the transportation system of Seoul consists of 3 layers, the underground subway, transportation on the roads and the elevated highways. New commercial zones grew around the subway stations (Kim, 2003).

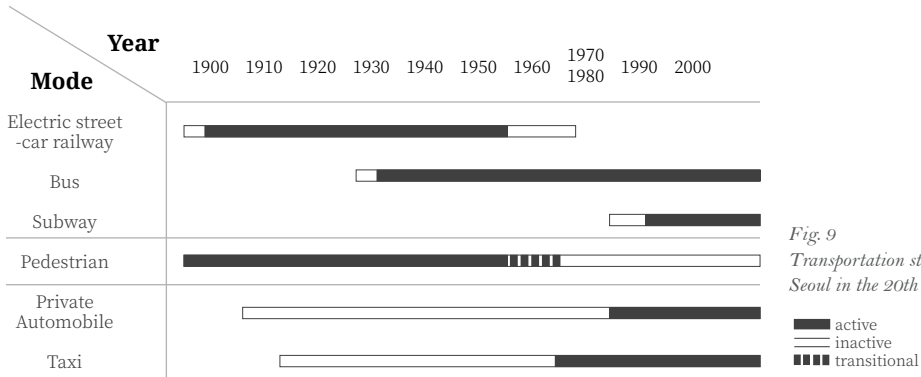


Fig. 9
 Transportation structure of
 Seoul in the 20th century

An engagement with public spaces, in the Western sense, did not occur until the early 2010s. A milestone was the 2002 Football World Cup, when large crowds gathered to celebrate their team without any political agenda his was followed by the Urban Renaissance Plan, which established new public spaces and restored old ones, such as Seoul Plaza – a public square in front of the townhall and Gwanghwamun Plaza – a boulevard symbolic for the city’s history. Other projects of the master plan included the Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project, which revitalized the Cheonggyecheon stream from a highway to a park, as well as several waterfront parks along the Han River (Seoul Solution, 2007; Gelézeau, 2014).

Today, in the centre of Seoul, buildings along the major road network extend to the property line, forming a continuous facade behind which the clutter of buildings and streets behind them disappears (S. H. Kim, 2012). Often criticised as a characterless, uncommunicative forest of concrete, this explosive urban fabric has buried most of Seoul’s historical layers. The urban development brought the city into a state where it’s residents where longing for a slower way of living, in need “for a place to which they could feel

	Area in square kilometer	Population in million	Population per km ² in thousands
Seoul	605	10,58	17
London	1.570	8,17	5
Paris	105	2,26	21
Beijing	16.801	20,69	1
Tokyo	622	8,97	14
New York	786	8,33	10

Fig. 10
Built-up urban area and
urban population density
comparison

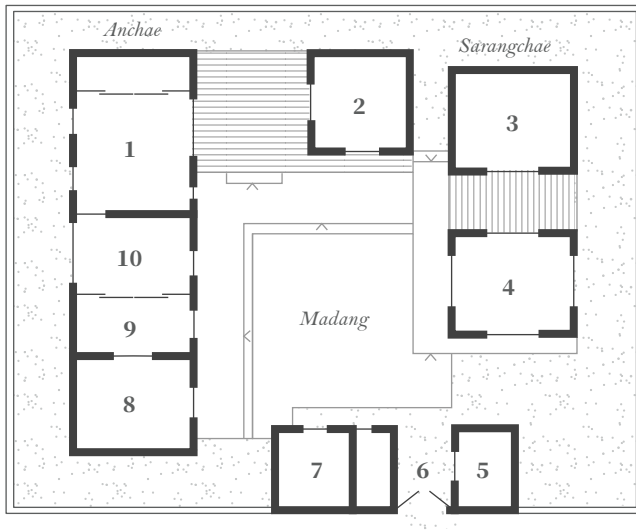
emotionally connected” (Yun, 2017).

Eventually, the direction of urban planning shifted towards the concept of the “soft city”, which promotes values such as communication and understanding, as opposed to the previous concept of the “hard city”, which places economic growth and efficiency as its primary goals (Yun, 2017). The city limits have not been changed since the 1960s, which led to a peak in population density in the 1990s. Although the population has been declining since then, it is still one of the densest urban areas in the developed world (Fig. 10). The average population per square kilometer has settled at around 17.000 (S. H. Kim, 2012; Seoul Solution, 201.

Due to the constant significant changes caused by economic, social and political factors Seoul is often referred to as a city of flux together with other East Asian metropolis, like Tokyo, with similar development (Choi, Foth and Hearn, 2009). In Seoul, this transformation is happening so quickly that the majority of buildings are younger than 60 years old (NSDI et al., 2021). The appearance of the city is changing at a rapid pace, so much so that parts of the city are barely recognizable within a few years(Chae, 2008).

“Seoul’s appearance
is the outcome
of the
paradoxical
combination of
‘too much planning’
and
‘too little planning’.”

*Kang Hong Bin, former
Vice Mayor of the Seoul
Metropolitan Govern-
ment (2005, as cited in
Kim, 2012)*



- 1 Anbang (Women's Room)
- 2 Geonnungbang (Daughter's Room)
- 3 Sarangbang (Master's Room)
- 4 Sarangbang (Son's Room)
- 5 Haengnangchae (Servant's Room)
- 6 Daemoon
- 7 Storage
- 8 Aretbang (Lower Room)
- 9 Gonnonbang (Crossing Room)

Fig. 12
Floorplan of a small traditional Hanok

2.3 | DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING

The traditional residential dwelling during Joseon Dynasty is called Hanok. The construction method shows regional differences, although the basic characteristics stay consistent. In a household, family members from several generations live together. Following the precepts of Confucianism, the male and the female, as well as the spaces for the servants corresponding to the social classes, were strictly separated. The regular layout of a Hanok consisted of the courtyards (Madang) between the buildings, the space for women (Anchae) situated in the inner area of the plot and the space for men (Sarangchae) towards the front but behind the servants' facilities (Haengnangchae) (Fig. 12). From the 19th century onward, the strict partition between the male and the female quarters became softer (Yi, 2016).



*Fig. 13
Urban housing near
Namdaemun in Seoul,
ca. 1900*

Until the twentieth century, urbanisation did not heavily impact this typology. But usually built on a relatively large site, surrounded by fences, the layout had to adapt to the smaller plots. Photographs show that around the Seoul area around 1900, a different type of Hanok was predominant. Shaped as a U, the buildings themselves, situated around one central courtyard, formed the enclosing walls of the plot. Evolving from this layout, a dwelling later known as the Urban Hanok appeared in the 1930s. This building type grew to be the primary type of housing until the 1960s. During the Japanese occupation, two additional housing types found their way into the country, the Japanese-style houses initially built for Japanese settlers and Western-style homes with

a strictly Western floorplan which significantly differs from the Korean layout (Jung, 2013).

Due to the fast industrialisation and the exponential demographic growth during the 1960s, the city could not keep up with providing housing for the constantly rising population, which resulted in housing policy being explicitly directed towards apartment development. Known to be the first apartment building in Seoul, the Jongam Apartments were built in 1958, followed by the Mapo Apartments in 1964, the first apartment complex (Danji) undertaken by Korea National Housing Corporation. Even though the city of Seoul invested almost 13 per cent of the city's annual budget in building new apartments in 1969, housing became so scarce that the issue reached even the wealthy upper class. Mayor Kim tried to promote the apartment as a symbol of modernity through government campaigns, but the hoped-for success failed despite his efforts (Gelézeau, 2011).

Mass housing in Korea is based on different political premises than in Europe in the 1960s. In contrast to the application in Seoul, apartment complexes were built in the city's periphery for the poorer population (social housing). In Seoul, on the other hand, the high-rise buildings located in the centre are aimed at the affluent middle and upper classes (Pedrabissi, 2017). Since the majority of Koreans were migrating from rural areas to the city, they were used to living in traditional style Hanoks, living in an apartment was not achievable; it was considered to be "substandard public housing designed for the poor". But in the mid-1970s, the city government's efforts started to impact South Koreans' idea of modern living when apartment complexes began to get equipped to a higher standard, well-developed neighbourhoods (Yun, 2017). Nevertheless, some time still had to pass until 1980, when apartment houses became associated with middle-class status. This change was, moreover, the outcome of a series of tax incentives for private developers designed to increase the housing stock. Starting in the Gangnam area South of the Han River, construction companies rushed into the apartment market and started lotteries for new apartments with vast numbers of participants (Jung, 2013). As Gangnam became the favoured place of residence, the housing- and land prices skyrocketed through a lot of real estate speculation; between 1963 and 1979, the land prices in Gangnam increased between 80 and 130 per cent (Yang, 2018). Taking advantage of government support and high demand, companies

focused on building large, luxurious apartment buildings generating enormous profits rather than providing affordable housing. Owning an apartment became South Koreans' new dream, representing wealth and symbolising social status and prestige. Even though compared to living in traditional Hanoks in villages, living in large-scale-apartment complexes no longer creates a spirit of community in a neighbourhood (Jung, 2013).

In 1974 already, half of the population was living in cities, and the urbanisation ratio kept growing, reaching 84 per cent in 1995 and even higher in the following year. To feed the increased housing demand, the Ministry of Construction and Transportation launched several long-term housing plans with the goals of building 800,000 to 1.2 million housing units during a span of five years, later followed by yet another five-year plan in 1988 which even exceeded the previous goals with a target of constructing 2 million units within five years. In the years after 1992, the goals remained around 500,000 units per year (Gelézeau, 2008).

The consistent housing shortage has been an ongoing national issue (Fig. 14) caused by the continuous economic growth of the country and the endless circle of speculation, control policies and rising house prices that goes with it. In 2000, the housing/household ratio on a national level finally hit 100 per cent; for Seoul, it still took ten more years to get to this mark (Jang, 2017).

Until the late 1980s, real estate speculation was an easy way to make money. Even though housing prices had dropped in 1998,

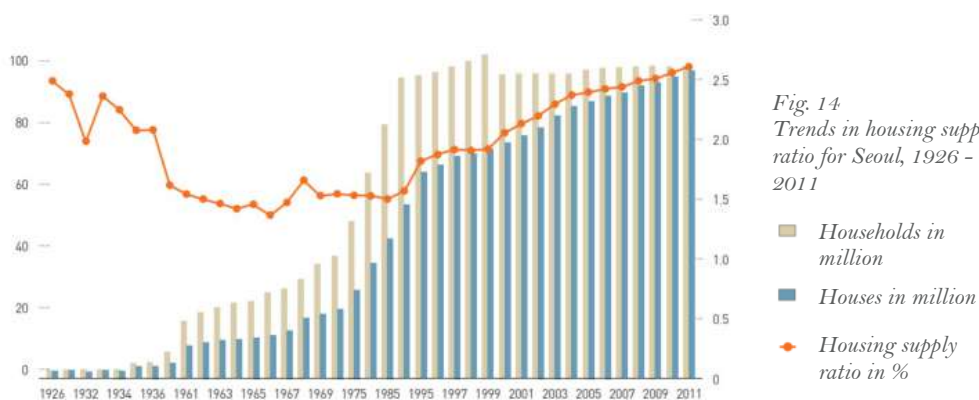


Fig. 14
Trends in housing supply ratio for Seoul, 1926 - 2011

deeply affected by the Asian financial crisis, the housing sector quickly recovered after 2001. During this time, housing prices surpassed pre-crisis levels due to the suppression of the price ceiling system, continuous high demands, and low interest rates (Ge et al., 2009). According to Korea Housing Finance Corporation, the Housing Affordability Index in Seoul has been improving since the late 1980s. However, it is still at a very high level which means that the general population of Seoul cannot afford to buy a middle-priced house with a regular income (Kim and Cho, 2010). And Gelézeau stated concerning Korean apartments, “the purpose of an apartment is to be owned, not to be rented to the working class as in many other countries”. Living in apartments is considered a status symbol which especially young Koreans are striving for (Sung, 2010).

ww

*Fig. 15
(next page)*



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COZY LOUNGE

노래방
LCD 화면
싸이월드
인터넷반주기

무선마이크 설치

노래방

BAR-P
BAR-F
BAR-P

2.4 | KOREA TOWARDS A DIGITAL POWERHOUSE

Korea's rapid economic growth was directly followed by the nation's transformation into a "digital powerhouse." This development was driven by both external and internal factors. With few natural resources, the country is heavily reliant on international trade, so the question arose: Where does Korea fit into the global market? Manufacturing-based economies were not an option, as Korea could not compete with the strong industrial economies of neighbouring countries like China. In response, they restructured their economic system and shifted their focus to high-tech sectors. The Korea Information Infrastructure (KII) was founded to push nationwide telecommunication technology and to promote a digital oriented education (Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008).

In 1982, Korea was among the first nations to establish an internet connection during the early stages of its evolution. With the Korea Information Infrastructure (KII) project kick-off in 1995 the expansion of the network started to make it the fastest and most advanced-information and communication network in the world. Which it remains until today. Initially PC Bangs were the first users of broadband services, until it became available for everyone in the late 1990s (Kilnam Chon et al., 2013).

The technological success is partly driven by Korea's macroeconomic environment and partly by cultural and social values. In this development digital media has become the symbol of progress, globalisation, and education" (Yoon, 2018). The population embraced technology early on, understanding its potential to shape the future. Digitalization has become pervasive in all aspects of culture, including architecture and urbanism (Ozaki, 2005). Even before the widespread introduction of smartphones, the ubiquitous use of online services such as banking and government services as well as access to entertainment media such as gaming and TV was the norm. Significant aspects of daily life have shifted to the digital world. Permanent access to social networks and digital media through the internet and mobile phones has changed the use of the city. The principle of centre and periphery is losing its rigidity, and the city itself is being used more intensively (Jang, 2013).

*Fig. 11
(previous page)*

Digitalization has become pervasive in all aspects of culture, including entertainment, and has led to the rise of K-pop, K-dramas, and other forms of Korean entertainment gaining popularity around the world. Additionally, the government has actively supported the entertainment industry, recognizing its potential to boost the economy and promote Korean culture. This support has included funding for production, marketing, and international promotion, as well as policies that encourage investment in the industry.(Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008)

Today, South Korea is one of the most digitized countries in the world. It has consistently ranked in the top three countries on the ICT Development Index (IDI) and has even been number one on the Digital Opportunity Index (DOI) in 2005, 2006, and 2007, both published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

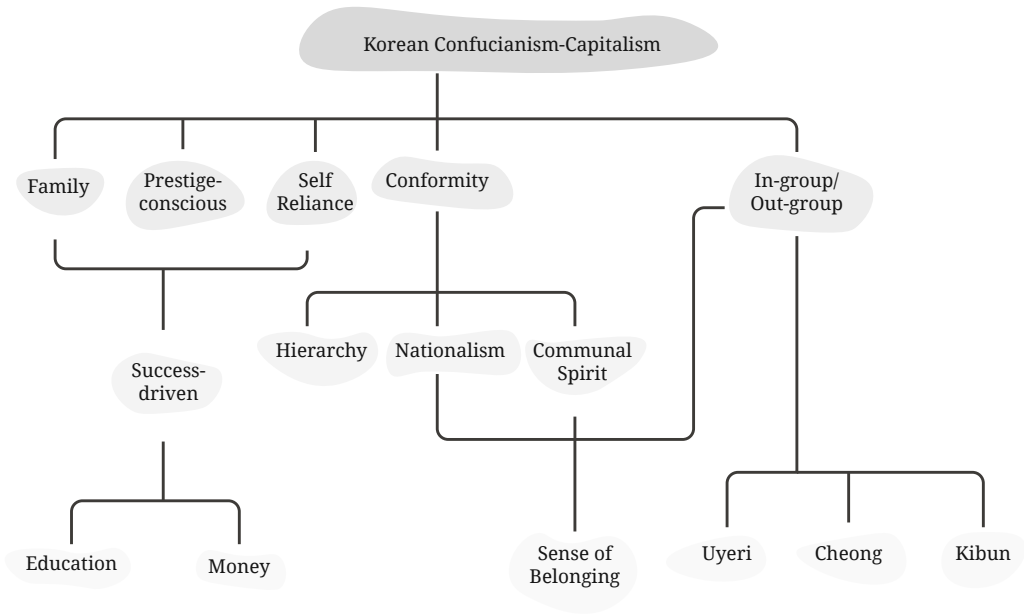


Fig. 16
"Value Tree"
Korean Confucian-Capitalism

2.5 | SOCIETY, RELIGION AND THE EVERYDAY LIFE

KOREAN SOCIETY

South Korea in present times developed towards a society based on the principles of democratic capitalism and free trade, highly influenced by western ideas. Over time the nation was formed by Shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Capitalism.

“a culture of contradictory views of self, as interdependent and as independent” (Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008)

Ever since Confucianism was chosen as the national ideology during the Joseon empire, it has remained as a basis for the Korean society. The substantial role which Confucianism played in forming the fundamentals for present society are important aspects to analyze. Confucianism is a complex theory based on the philosophical and ethical teachings of philosopher and teacher Confucius around 500BCE in China. As Yao (2000) puts it “Confucianism’ is more a tradition generally rooted in Chinese culture and nurtured by Confucius and Confucians rather than a new religion”. The belief system spread out throughout the Sinitic cultural sphere, with most notable impact on Japan and Korea. Written records of the ideas, values and practices can be found in the book called the Analects. Many scholars who analysed Confucianism tried to provide a clear and simple definition the term “Confucianism”, which has no counterpart in the Chinese language. Daniel Tudor would describe Confucianism as:

“a system of moral philosophy that originated in China in the teachings of Kong Fuzi (558–471BCE), a thinker known in the West as Confucius. It has exerted considerable influence over not just China but also Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and other East Asian states. At its heart is a belief that humans are improvable through cultivation and moral action, and that collectively, a harmonious society can be created when all members fulfil certain obligations.” (Tudor, 2012)

The time when Korea was stereotypically known for its strong Confucianism are long gone. Even though Confucianism is not an officially recognised social norm anymore, research of various

scholars reinforces that the legacy remains as a fundamental influence in shaping the modern Korean Society. (Choi, 2010; Mitu, 2015). In many parts of daily life it is still evident: “[...] moral system, the way of life, social relations between young and old, relations in hierarchy system and as a basis for some parts of the legal system”. (Sleziak, 2013)

The “Value tree” (Fig. 16) by Shim, Kim and Martin (2008) shows the values and concepts of contemporary South Korean Society that reflect the ideas of Confucian-Capitalism. The model is the is an adaptation of the value tree of the time when Confucianism was still the leading ideology. In the first row below Confucian – Capitalism are values for nowadays Korean society, which can be traced back directly to the keystones of Confucianism, they will be discussed in the following.

In-Group/Out-Group | Collectivism

The Korean nation is a group-based society, where people are not seen as single individuals but always as members of some group. Shim, Kim and Martin (2008) confirm through their collected interviews the prioritisation of the group over the individual. Each person must adapt to the group culture to achieve the goal of a harmonious society, as one of the interviewees states. Most experts agree that the intense feeling of belonging to a group (in this case: a nation) was one factor that pushed Korea to its economic boom after the war. When South Korea did not have today’, the fear of being socially isolated and losing the group’s stability was exceptionally strong (Pye and Pye, 1985).

As in other collectivistic societies, the distinction of who is part of the group – a member of the In-Group – and who is not belonging to the group – part of the Out-Group – is rather strict. This reflects the traditional concepts of Uri (“We”) and Nam (“Others”). The term Uri often is used with the meaning of “we” as the Koreans with a notion of national pride (Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008). But the notion of the word can mean something different for each Korean as Dr Ozaki (2005) found out, Uri can represent a group, which has the same concerns, or ideas; it can mean family, friends or relatives, it doesn’t necessarily have to a group consisting of Koreans. Other scholars defined the three most common implications of Uri as 1| a group of people (i.e. family); 2| an entity (i.e., your nation); 3| combining people through a possession (i.e., a house) (Choi, Kim and Choi, 1993). More generally speaking is

the Concept of Uri “we-ness” that the focus is not on the individual him-/herself but on the entirety of a group. When it comes to an exact definition for Nam - the others - it is a similar case as for Uri, the meaning is variable depending on the person. Since Nam is the antonym to Uri, Nam means all people except Uri. So, if Uri denotes all Koreans, Nam refers to all foreigners. Following this idea, Korean’s strong belief in the power of the group concurrently results in extreme discrimination towards outsiders of the group. It is, therefore, essential to distinguish whether someone is an in-group member or belongs to the out-group (Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008).

Self Reliance | Defined Social order

Since the aim was to sustain a harmonious society, a hierarchically defined social order needed to be followed, each person has a given role and must behave according to this role. Thus, social relationships and how to interact with one another are clearly defined, Confucius named five key relationships which form the basis for a functioning system: Parent and Child, Husband and Wife, Sibling and Sibling, Friend and Friend and between Ruler and Subject. All relationships except the one between friends are between a superior and a subordinate. The vertical order is based either on who has a higher rank or according to age. Respect for the elderly plays an important role, but it does not matter how much older another person is. (Tudor, 2012).

The importance of age and the hierarchical social order is also reflected in language and other interactions. It is common that one of the first questions when getting to know somebody is to ask for their age to understand how to act accordingly. The Korean language structure requires always considering the relationship with the interlocutor. Honorifics are commonly used to demonstrate respect towards elders or individuals of higher social standing. If one person is socially above the other, the “lower” person must use honorifics to speak about or with the other. In contrast to romance languages, the concept of speaking politely is way more common and complex. The form to address somebody changes, and the verbs, particles and special honorific forms for nouns and general honorific markers become necessary (Brown, 2011).

These vertical patterns are still visible in marriages, families, teacher–student relationships, and corporate environments. Pupils and students, for instance, are not allowed to contradict

their professors and teachers in school. Or the well-known tradition of Hoesik (회식), an obligatory dinner and drinks after work with colleagues. It is the norm within a company for the high-ups to “look after” their team. If the boss invites the team to dinner or drinks after work, this invitation may not be refused under any circumstances. On the other hand, lower-level employees are expected to show absolute acceptance of all decisions made by superiors (Sleziak, 2013).

Prestige Consciousness | Face

Tu, Ethicist and director of the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University (qtd. in Power, 2012) said about Korean and other Asian societies that they are “(...) cultures where image and face rank higher than honesty and straightforwardness”. In Korea, in particular, the public image is of utmost importance, whether it is a person, a family, or a company. The idea of preserving face or image changed drastically after the economic boom in the 1960s. The goal was no longer just to meet expected standards but to achieve an image of perfection to stand out. The face of a perfect person is no longer determined only by how well they fulfil their role in society but is now also defined by the acquisition of visible status symbols (Tudor, 2012).

The permanent consciousness about one’s status is deeply intertwined with the prevailing level of competitiveness. The “sharply competitive mentality of Koreans” combined with the constant drive to gain higher social status through achievements is another characteristic linked to the Confucian doctrine. The performance-based and competitive education system fosters a strong competitive mindset at a young age and intensifies in later working life. Already during school, children are exposed to high expectations to be accepted at a prestigious university later on. A typical school day doesn’t end with class lessons but continues with private tutoring until the late evening. Having free time in the afternoon to do sports or meet friends is an unthinkable prospect for many young Koreans (Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008). Koreans are often described as cold-hearted with such a strong will to win that they will risk their own lives to do so (Kong, 2008).

Conformity

Like other Confucian-influenced cultures, for Koreans conformity is something to desire. Behaving accordingly to socially accept-

ed conventions was and still is a virtue of Korean society going hand in hand with the strive for affiliation to a group. Whereas, for example, individualistic cultures pursue the freedom not to be defined by others and see conformity rather negatively, Koreans used it as “an instrument of social stability and unity”.(Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008)

Family

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SEOUL CITYLIFE

Life in Seoul takes place primarily outside the home. This is because the radius of human movement has increased with the growth of the city, as modern means of transport have developed to provide a dense and efficient network. This in turn means that distances have increased and so has the time spent travelling.

In Seoul, residents spend an average of 96 minutes commuting to and from work (this is not the total time spent in transport) (Hyun-jung, 2018). In comparison, the average commuting time in Vienna is 26 minutes (Statistic Austria, 2020).

As mentioned before, Japanese cities such as Tokyo and Seoul share similarities in terms of rapid change and density. They are also similar in their vibrant city life. Daily routines are characterised by continuous movement, with time spent outside home exceeding time spent at home. The city has become an extension of the home. In this context, the concept of “urban nomadism” was introduced in the mid-1980s as an interpretation of the Tokyo lifestyle. Similar to Tokyo, the nomadic lifestyle can also be found in Seoul, although to a different extent (Choe, Almazan and Bennett, 2016). The term refers to the fact, that the majority of activities that would otherwise be tied to one’s home, domestic functions such as eating, and recreation are outsourced to the city. One’s own home is now only for sleeping and storage. Most of the day’s activities take place in facilities throughout the city. This lifestyle is supported by the digitization of everyday life in combination with a never-ending multimedia offer and publicly accessible facilities with long opening hours.

The lives of many Koreans are characterized by a packed daily routine. They are exposed to constant pressure to perform, which means that in their younger years they study until late in the night during their school years until they graduate and at work, they are expected to work long hours. South Korea has one of the longest working hours in the developed world (OECD, 2020). According to the Korean National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (2007-2009), the average working time is more than 48 hours per week. This leaves little time for anything else (Kim et al., 2013).

The long hours spent on public transport are often used to relax by reading manhwa, watching movies, series, and entertainment shows, or simply to taking a nap. Thanks to the dense network of food services such as restaurants and convenience stores all

meals can be eaten away from home, eliminating the need to cook at home. Similar to the Konbini stores which are spread all over Tokyo, Seoul as well has a dense network of convenience stores. They offer a wide range of cold snacks such as gimbap, hot snacks such as corn dogs and the traditional gungoguma, as well as fresh, ready-made, or instant meals and drinks. Tables, chairs, a microwave, and hot water are provided for food preparation and consumption. Located in every corner of the city, they form an excellent local supply network, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Hageneder, 2000). Not only are convenience stores open around the clock but also Bangs and 24-hour cafes are an integral part of Seoul's 24-hour culture. There is a Korean saying that if you get 4 hours of sleep a night, you will make it through university. So, it is common to find students studying and working on assignments after midnight in 24-hour cafes or study cafes (Lee-Caldararo, 2021).

When observing Koreans' life, something else also catches the eye. Compared to other cities the pace of Seoul's daily life seems faster and more efficient such as deliveries, the subway and education. In his essay about constants and variables in Korean Society, Kong (2008) writes about the "Dalli-Dalli" culture "빨리-빨리" Korean for "hurry-hurry" (mostly translated as "Bali-Bali"). A Korean peculiarity caused by the feeling of never having enough time and being in a constant hurry. The result is a behaviour that simultaneously expresses impatience and dynamism. People racing the bus at the bus stop while getting on the bus or already opening the travel lock before entering a bathroom are some typical examples that are frequently observed. Also, the urban environment is more and more designed for time efficiency: Fitness programmes that have the same effect in less time and restaurants that reduce food preparation time to the absolute minimum to shorten customers' waiting time. Everything must become faster and more efficient to get as much done as possible in order to maximise the benefits and the outcomes.

“The bang is
an incarnation of
the room,
the house
and **the city,**
but does not belong to
any of them.

The city of the bang
oscillates between
the domestic realm,
institutionalize places
and **urban space.”**

THE BANG?

3

방

= 'Bang'

= a room

3.1 | ORIGIN OF THE WORD BANG

The literal translation of the Korean word “방” is “room”. But this translation only refers to the physical measurable space, to understand this term one needs to understand the cultural connotations it has. It refers to a “space for close interaction with others,” which carries different implications than the word does in Western languages (Kim, 2005). The origin for the word ‘방’ can be traced back as the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese logograph ‘房’ which stands for a simple square shape with a door (Kim, 2021).

Back in Joseon Dynasty in a layout of a residential building the Bang was a single room with a specific usage following the social rules of Confucianism (fig.XYZ in Chapter “Development of Housing”). Such as a Sarangbang the men’s room, a private space, into which no woman was allowed, for scholarly reflection and sometimes to entertain guests or an Anbang, which was the room for the lady of the house which only family members were permitted to enter, the Gonnonbang called the crossing room and Munganbang, which is the room of the gate section. Each Bang was a room assigned with a different purpose in a private house (Zlatarits, 2018).

The use of the word in the traditional sense remained until the 80s, only in the 90s its concept changed. At this point the Bang merged from the private realm into the public. It was no longer a just a single room inside a private house. A Bang became a place outside of the domestic realm. It became the name for commercial spaces providing room for social interaction always connected to a specific activity of cultural consumption. The places were never planned in this way but arose out of a necessity and form now the daily landscape of Korean Cities as an important urban environment (Park, 2018).

A Bang in the sense as it is researched in this paper is a commercial space for cultural consumption in an urban environment. Each Bang is linked to specific activities. The spaces are rented, or access is permitted for the time span paid for. The time span can reach from the time it takes to sing one song up to 24 hours.



3.2 | A BANG FOR EVERYONE

In Korean urban space the concept of the Bang can also be found in places with different names, which work in the same manner as a Bang. The term is often equated with words like -shil (실), -room (룸) or -cafe (카페) after the noun of the act that is taking place. In some cases, the names are used interchangeably, such as the PC Bang, which besides being called Bang it is often referred to as a PC Cafe, the two names still refer to the same facility (Park, 2018).

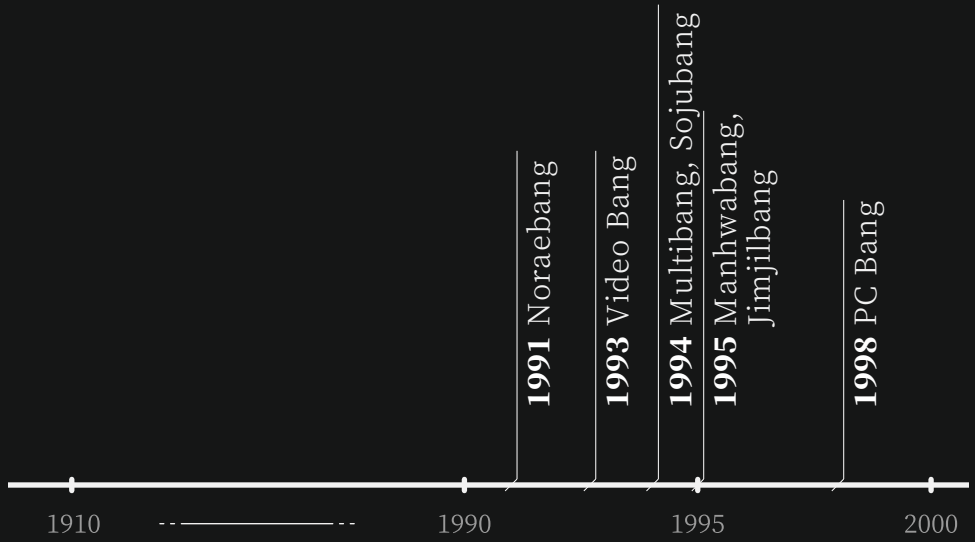
Activities that are usually connected to the domestic home, like watching movies, watching TV, playing video games on the PC or gaming console, playing board games, singing, studying, having private conversations, spending time with friends, but also fundamental activities like sleeping, bathing, and being intimate, take place in these spaces.

Not only in Korea, places like Bangs developed, but also in Japan. For example in Tokyo equivalent spaces to the Korean Bangs developed: Karaoke Box - Noraebang, Kenko land - Jimjilbang and Manga Kiss combines the activity of PC Bang, DVD Bang and Manhwbang (Choe, Almazan and Bennett, 2016).

Like Korean culture, Japanese society is also strictly hierarchical, with correct manners and etiquette being crucial. In addition, there is a similar corporate structure called Zaibatsu (Sleziak, 2013).

The following chapter analyses the most common Bangs. In particular, the functionality and characteristics of the various Bangs will be examined by means of graphical processing of on-site recordings. Furthermore, the historical development and architectural features will be discussed.

Fig. 17



2002 Boardgamebang

2003 PS Bang

2007 Studyroom/-café

2010 Partyroom

2015 Escaperoom Café

2016 VR Bang, Coin Noraebang
gains popularity

2005

2010

2015

2020

Fig. 18

Timeline of the Bangs' appearance

해당

NORAEBANG (SONG-ROOM)

노래방

Noraebang can be considered the Korean version of karaoke, literally it translates to ‘Song room’. Unlike European karaoke bars, where there is one big, shared space with one karaoke machine, the Korean version splits into separate single rooms, each equipped with a private karaoke machine. These venues can be found in every corner of the country.

Singing has a long tradition in Korea, even before karaoke became popular there. It has always served a social purpose, allowing people to sing together with family, friends, and peers to “cultivate community spirit and harmony” (Joo, 2019). Singing is considered more than just a leisure activity in Korea, with Park Moo-Jong, chief editor of The Korea Times, once “once declared singing as ‘the national sport’ of Korea” (2007 qtd. in Tarocco and Zhou, 2007).

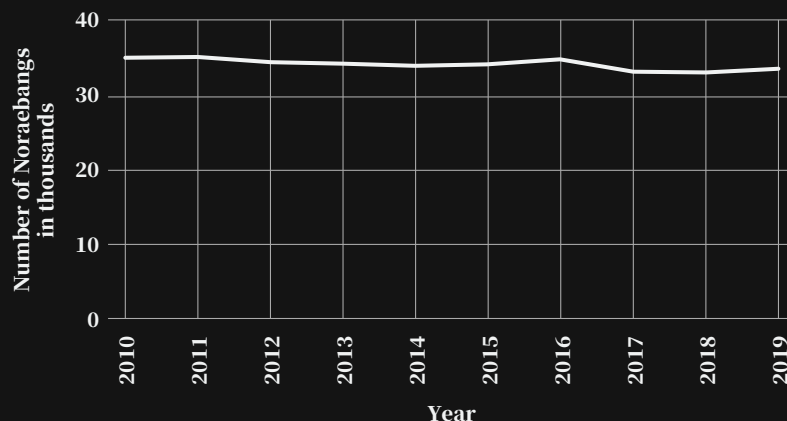
Koreans like to tell the story that they were the ones who invented the Karaoke Box and thus karaoke itself. Even though karaoke became popular in Korea only in the late 1990s whereas in Japan it was already emerging in the late 1970s and the company Clarion was already producing karaoke machine in Japan for business use in 1976 (Tarocco and Zhou, 2007). In addition, the word karaoke has its origin in Japan where the words “kara” means empty and the “oke” is an abbreviation for the English orchestra (Howard, 2006).

According to various researchers, karaoke slowly started to evolve in Korea after it was introduced to the people in the port city of Busan in the early 1990s. From where it spread out to the rest of the nation during the following decade (Song, 1998; Tarocco and Zhou, 2007; Joo, 2016). The first machine was installed inside a small booth to entertain waiting costumers of a gaming centre Busan in 1991. The concept struck a nerve of society and within the following two years approximately 15.000 venues opened. At this point Noraebang as the name of this business model was composed (Joo, 2016). But the hype of Noraebang didn’t hit before the late 1990s, when it reached widespread popularity (Park, 2019). The number of Noraebangs (except two minor lows) was constantly rising until the year 2011, when it reached its peak of over 35.000 venues in the whole country (KB Financial Group Research



Fig. 19-21 (left to right)

Institute qtd. in Park, 2019)(Fig. 22). Recently the Coin Noraebang, a new type of Noraebang has gained great popularity. Instead of a fixed fee per unit time, the payment is made per song (see in the following chapter).



*Fig. 22
Noraebangs in South Korea,
2010-2019*

A Noraebang consists of several individual rooms which can be rented for a short time but also a whole evening. The rooms fit at least a group of 4 people and are furnished with a karaoke box where the group can indulge in singing, completely isolated from any outside influences. The interior varies from minimal to deluxe versions. But the basic equipment always consists of comfortable seating, a karaoke machine, a table, and a heavy songbook and often tambourines. There is always the option to buy beverages and snacks, in some cases even alcoholic drinks can be ordered to the room. Some places also allow to bring your own drinks, with names like Party Noraebang they are easy to identify.

Noraebang is a popular social activity in South Korea that attracts people of all ages. It is often used as a place for after-work drinks, which in Korean culture is known as Hoesik (see chapter 2.5 Korean Society). Hoesik is strongly linked to the expression of social hierarchy, even the planning of going to a Noraebang, the seating arrangement inside the establishment, and the singing order are all determined by social order, following the age of the individuals or the company hierarchy. Often these after working hours are when important business deals are made. However, due to the emphasis on seniority, gender division, and public etiquette in Korean society, it is not easy to communicate freely with others in the workplace. Therefore, private conversations often take place only when going with colleagues to Noraebang (Cho, 2002).



Fig. 23

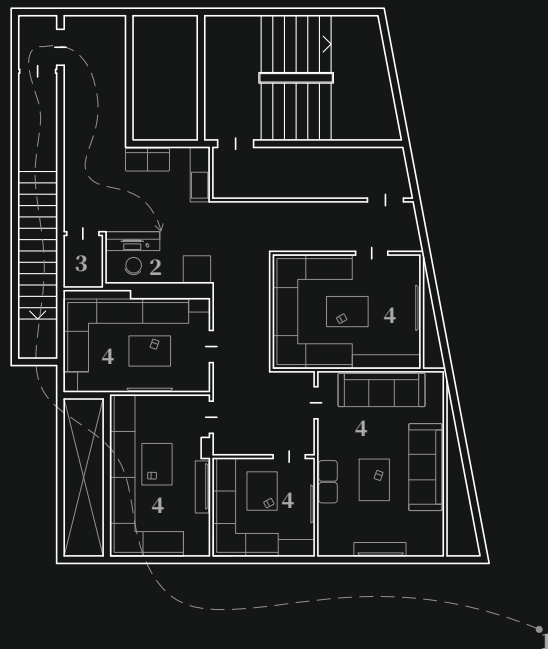


Fig. 24

Floorplan of a Noraebang

Location: Underground
Capacity: 5 Rooms

1 Entrance (accessible via staircase into basement directly from streetlevel)

2 Reception
3 Bathroom

4 Singing Rooms

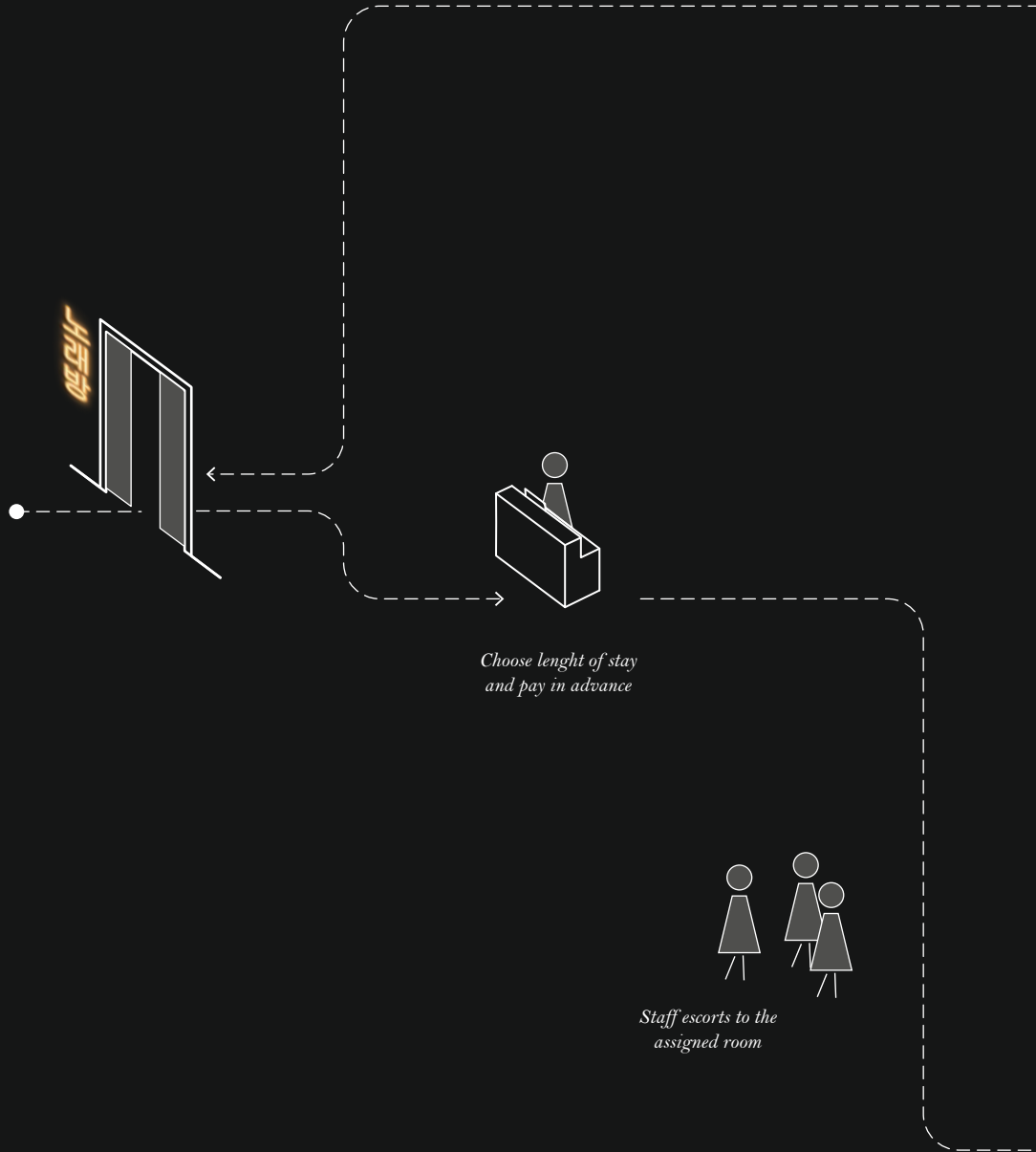


Fig. 25

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Choose song
Sing, dance and cheer for others
Order drinks and snacks



제임스 버틀러

COIN NORAEBANG

코인노래방

In the past years the Coin Noraebang gained great popularity. Instead of a fixed fee per unit time like in the traditional Noraebang, the payment is made per song. Which makes it a cheaper and more appealing to a younger audience.

The two major differences between a Noraebang in the traditional sense and a Coin Noraebang are the size of the cabins and the price difference. A cabin of a Coin Noraebang only fits one or two people sometimes it measures less than 2,5 square meters. The furnishings are simpler compared to a classic Noraebang. At the entrance, a registration machine welcomes customers, after registering, a vacant booth can be selected. Payment is made in the booth itself, either per individual song or as a package for several songs. Since the room is not rented for long time periods, Coin Noraebangs are less expensive than the traditional Noraebangs. Although payment is made via machine, there is always staff taking care of the place, sometimes assisting with the payments, and handling the occupancy of the capsules and cleaning after each customer. In the hallways, vending machines for beverages, snacks, and cuddly toys are sometimes installed. Mainly located in the basement, their entrance is always marked with huge blinking neon sign on the corner of a building.





*Fig. 26 (left page)
 Fig. 27 (above)*

*Booth in a
 Coin Noraebang
 in Sinchon, Seoul.
 Basement of a Keunseng*



*Fig. 28
Hallway of a
Coin Noraebang
in Sinchon, Seoul.*

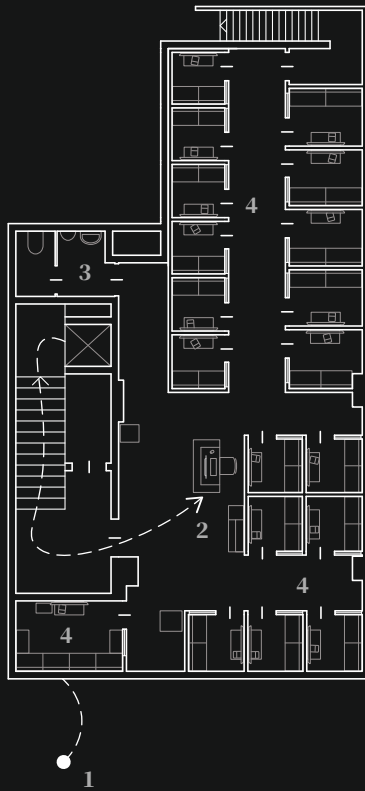
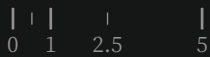


Fig. 29

Plan of a
Coin Noraebang
Location: Underground
Capacity:
19 Singing Cabins

1 Entrance (accessible via
staircase into basement
directly from streetlevel)
2 Reception (or register-
ing machine)

3 Bathroom
4 Singing Cabins

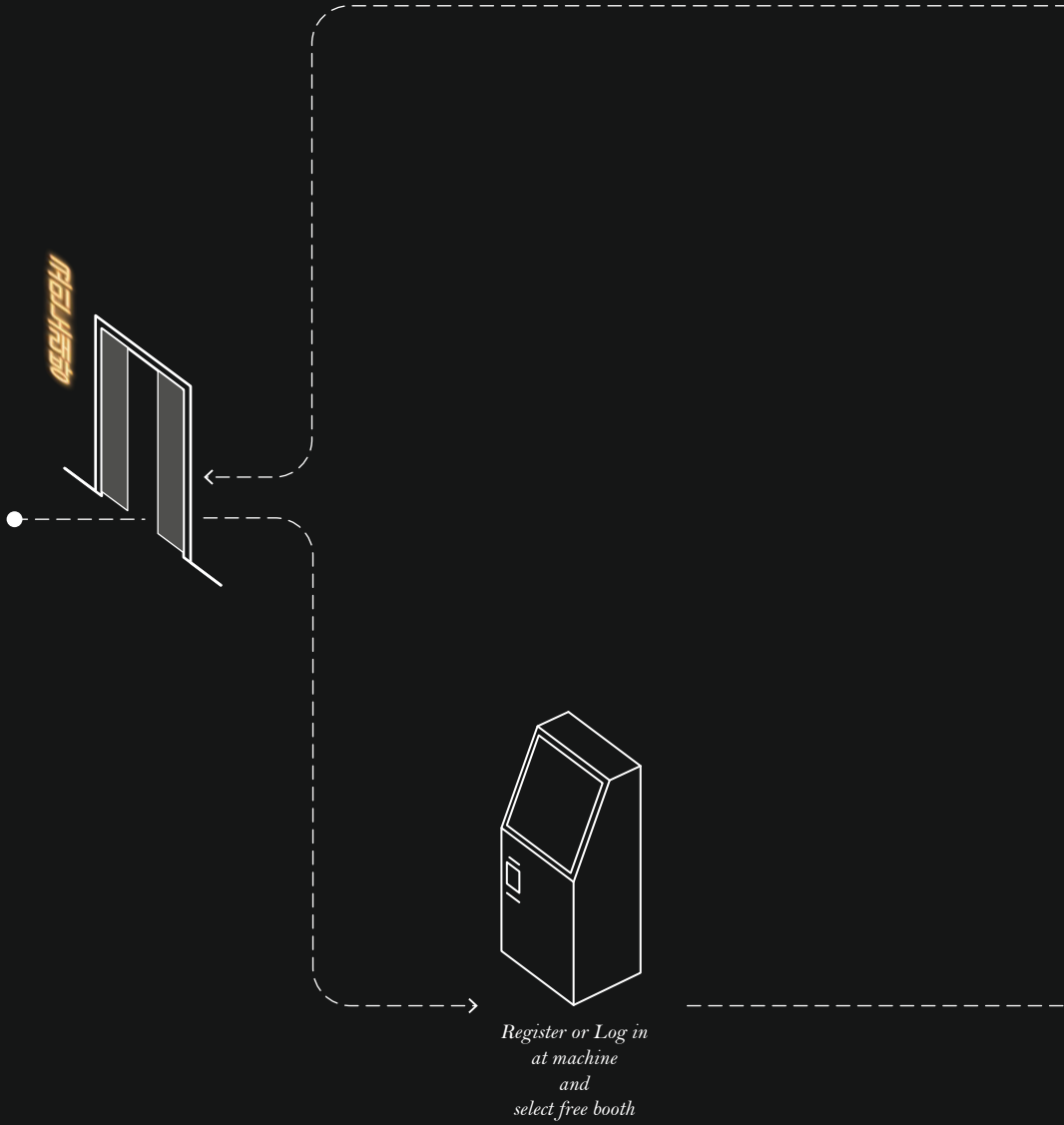
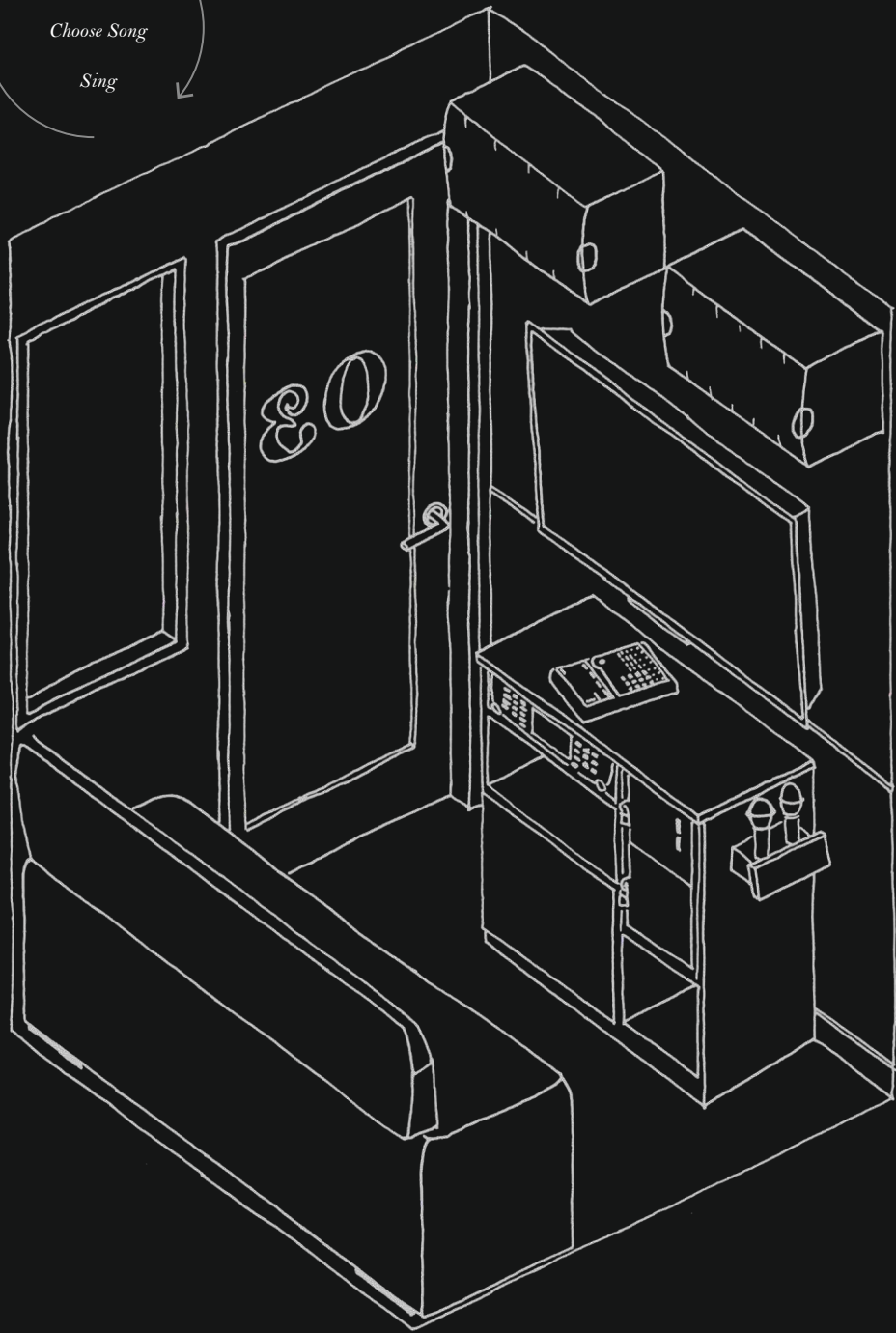
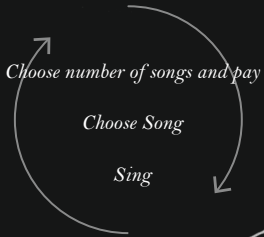


Fig. 30



04040

MULTIBANG

멀티방

The Multi Bang is the evolution of the Noraebang, combining multiple activities such as karaoke, gaming consoles, and movies. This concept was introduced in 1994 by “Korea Soft” as a rest area equipped with a multimedia system (Park, 2018).

The present set-up as a multipurpose entertainment space usually consists of a snack buffet at the entrance and private rooms equipped with various gaming consoles, karaoke machines, and couches. The interiors are colourful and simple. The interiors of Multi Bang locations are typically designed with colourful and simple decor. Upon entering, visitors are required to change from their private shoes to provided slippers. Usage fees and hours are available in 1-hour increments, and for the duration of their paid time, visitors can play all the games in the venue’s extensive library and can always help themselves to the buffet.

The Multi Bang is a popular destination for students and young people looking to spend time with friends. It’s not uncommon for groups to spend an entire afternoon or evening at the venue, enjoying the various activities and amenities available.

0 1 2.5 5

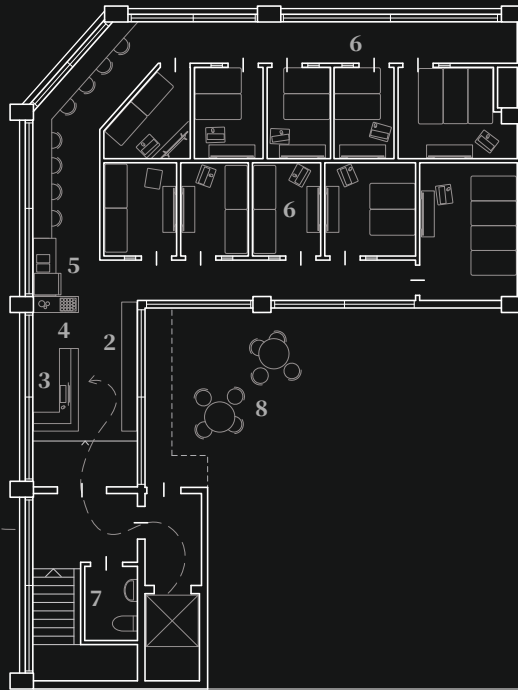


Fig. 31

*Floorplan of a
Multibang*

*Location: 5th Floor
Capacity: 10 Rooms*

*1 Entrance (accessible via
elevator or staircase)*

2 Shoelockers

3 Reception

4 Game Library

5 Buffet

6 Rooms

7 Bathroom

8 Rooftop Terrace



Fig. 32
Room in a Multibang
in Hongdae, Seoul

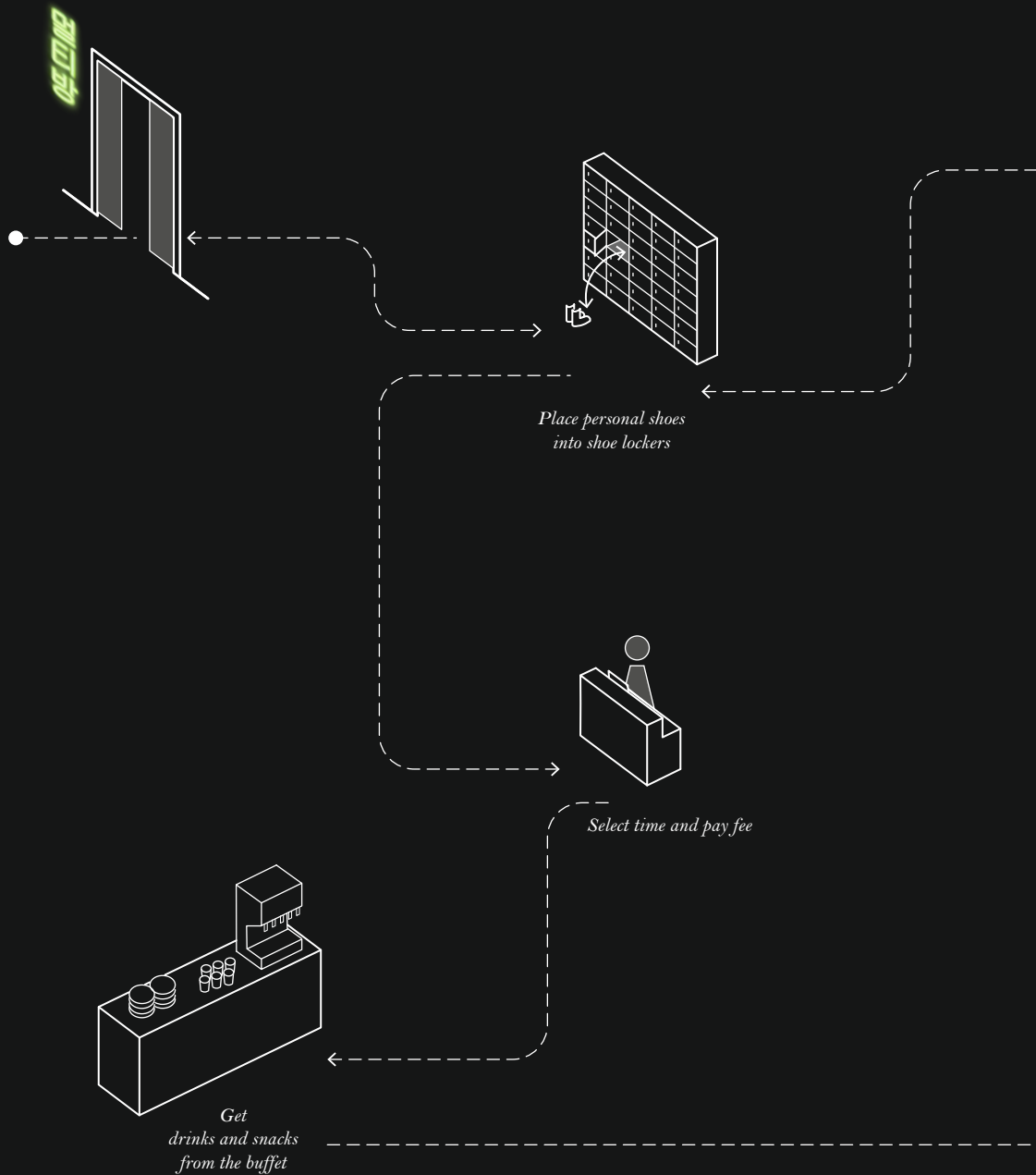
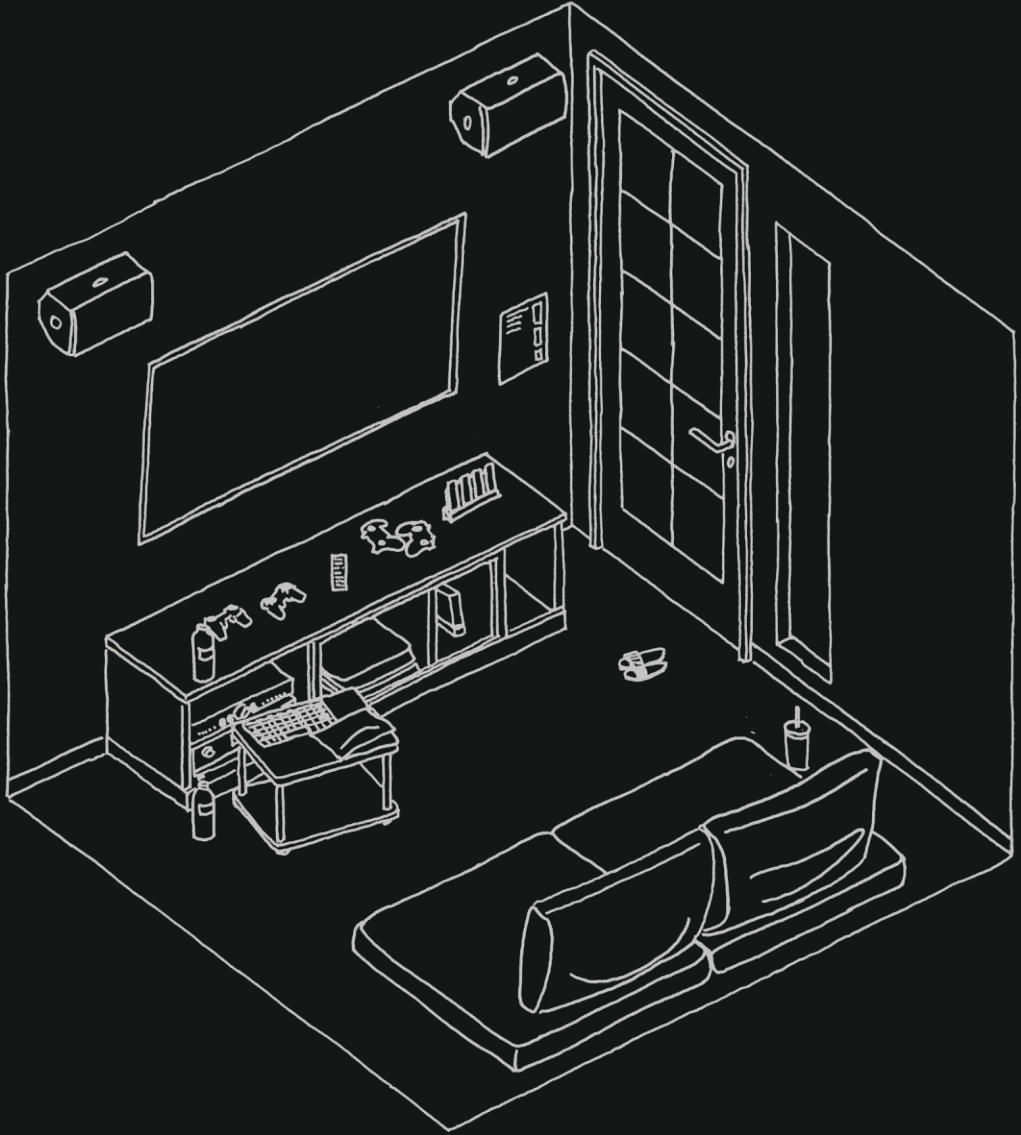


Fig. 33



해가평

ROOMCAFE

룸카페

A Roomcafe follows the same concept as Multibangs, which consists of small rooms or booths and a buffet in the entrance area. It emerged after stricter regulations were put in place to prevent minors from entering Multibangs.

Compared to Multibangs, the programme offers less multimedia entertainment. For an hourly fee, customers can rent a small room in the Roomcafe, which is furnished with mattresses, a low table, and a TV (sometimes with streaming options). The buffet offers a variety of hot and cold snacks, beverages, board games, blankets, and cuddly toys. The rooms have unique and colourful interiors.

Roomcafes are popular among students and pupils, from small groups to large groups, but also as a dating spot, as a fun, safe, and affordable place to spend quality time together in a cosy and comfortable environment.



Fig. 34 (above)

Fig. 35, 36 (next page)

*Cabin in Roomcafe in
Sinchon, Seoul.
Cabin structure built on
one open floorplan, walls
end 1m below ceiling,
total of 22 cabins*

*Cabin size:
approx. 2m x 1,45m,
shoestorage below raised
floor of cabins*



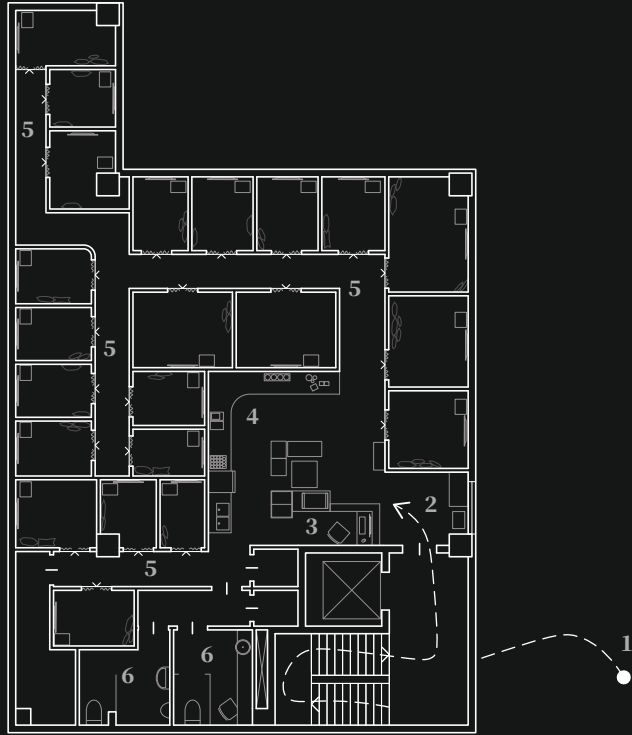


Fig. 37

Floorplan of a Roomcafe

*Location: 5th Floor
 Capacity: 22 Booths*

- 1 Entrance (accessible via elevator or staircase)*
- 2 Hyun-Gwan*
- 3 Reception*
- 4 Buffet*
- 5 Booths*
- 6 Bathroom*

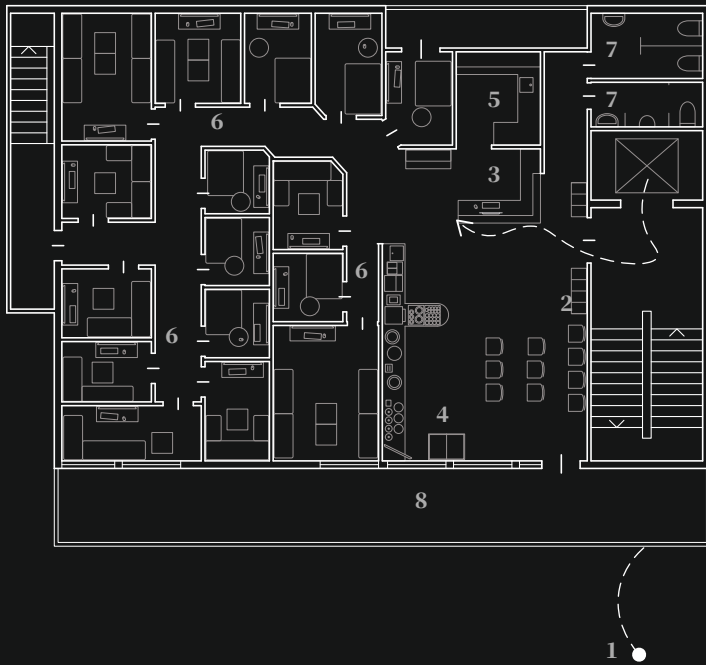


Fig. 38

Floorplan of a Roomcafe

Location: 3rd Floor
 Capacity: 16 Booths

1 Entrance (accessible via elevator or staircase)
 2 Shoelockers
 3 Reception
 4 Buffet

5 Kitchen/Storage
 6 Booths
 7 Bathroom
 8 Balcony

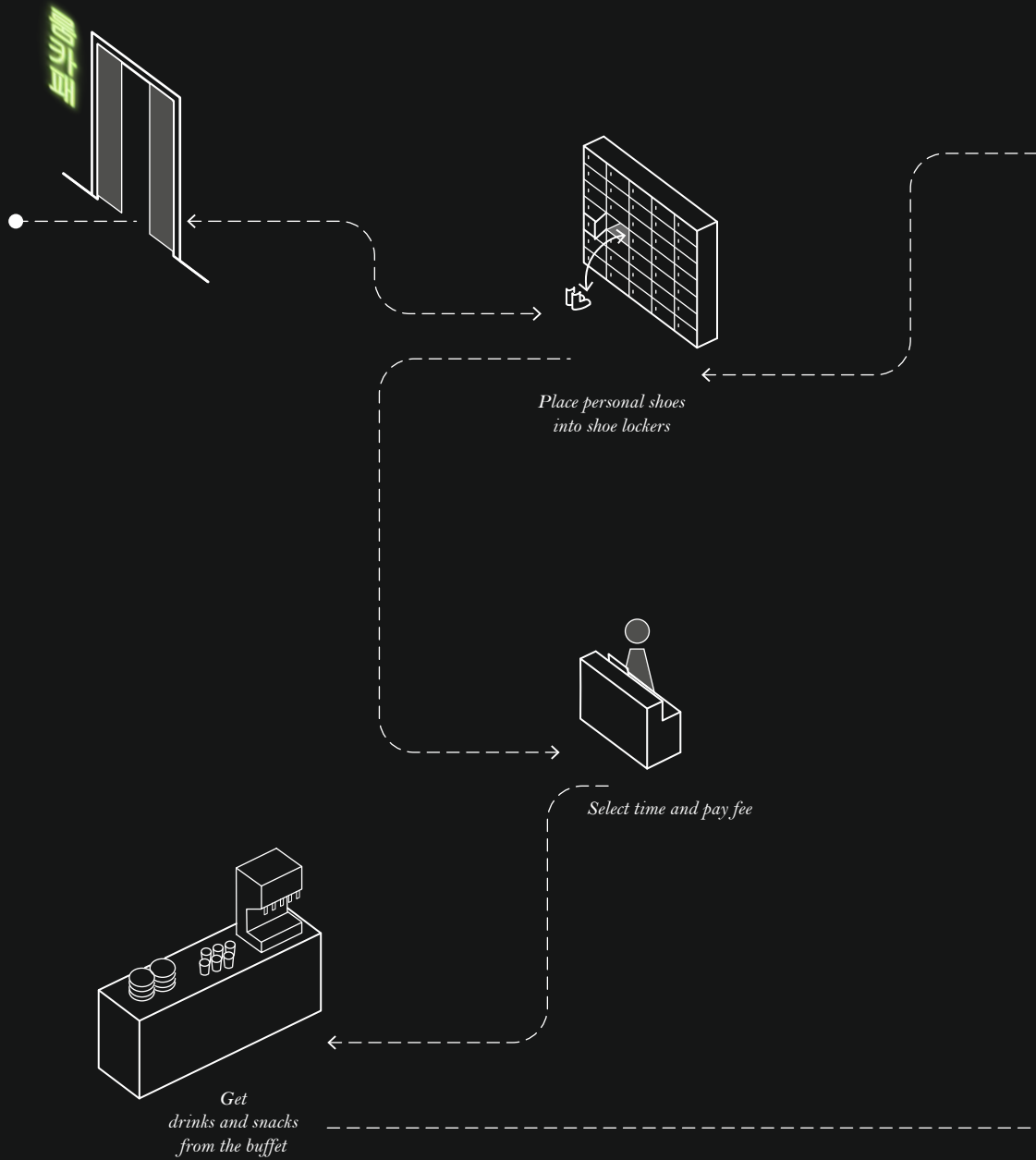
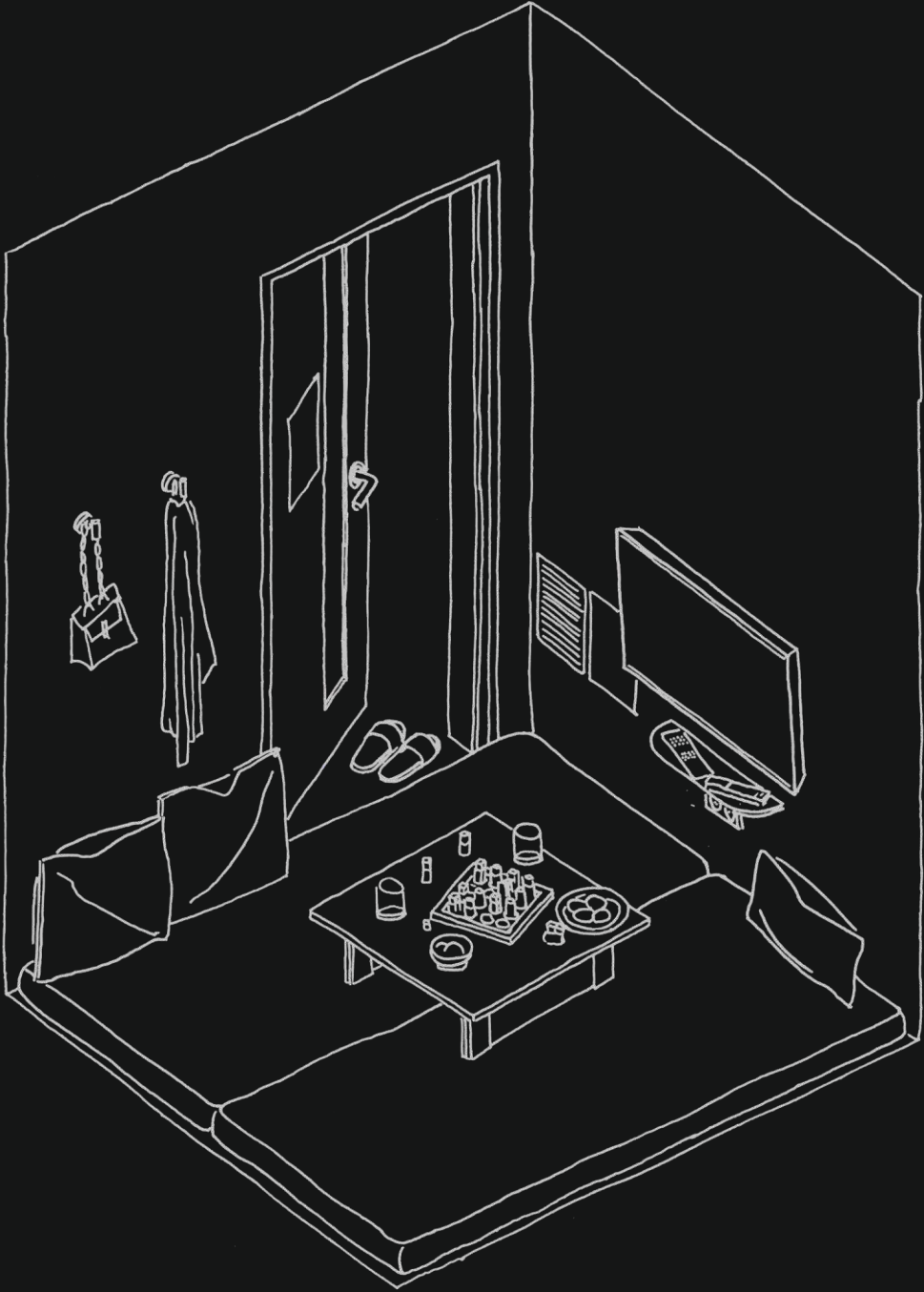


Fig. 39



음향음향

MANHWABANG

만화방

The concept of Manhwabang (Manhwa means cartoons or comic books in Korean) - comic book cafes - existed even before the 1980s, but the current set-up only emerged in the then newly emerging Bang milieu. It wasn't until 1995 that they began to take on the design of present-day Manhwabangs (Park, 2018).

These cafes started as simple places to read comics inexpensively, but they transformed into complex cultural spaces offering an increasing number of services, such as television, streaming, and slot machines (Korea Creative Content Agency, 2012).

A comic book café is a place where you can read comics peacefully without having to buy them. It is a comic library with small capsules or tents for relaxation. The use of a Manhwabang follows a certain procedure: first, everyone must take off their shoes at the entrance and replace them with the provided slippers. Then, personal footwear is locked in one of the small shoe lockers. Only then can one enter the location. At the counter, you pay for the time you want to stay. Usage fees start at half an hour and increase in one-hour increments upwards. Depending on the place, the staff will either allocate a cabin directly or allow one to choose a cabin. The reception at the entrance also functions as a bar, offering a wide selection of snacks, pasta dishes, sweets, and drinks. The cabins are typically no larger than the footprint of a bed and often one can sit but not stand upright. The matted capsule equipment includes a small table, pillows, a small lamp, and sometimes a foot massage device, slot machines, and a curtain for more privacy.



*Fig. 40 (above)
Shoe lockers in a
Manhwabang
in Hongdae, Seoul*

*Fig. 41 (next page, left)
Manhwabang in
Hongdae, Seoul*

*Fig. 42 (next page, right)
Manhwabang in
Hongdae, Seoul*



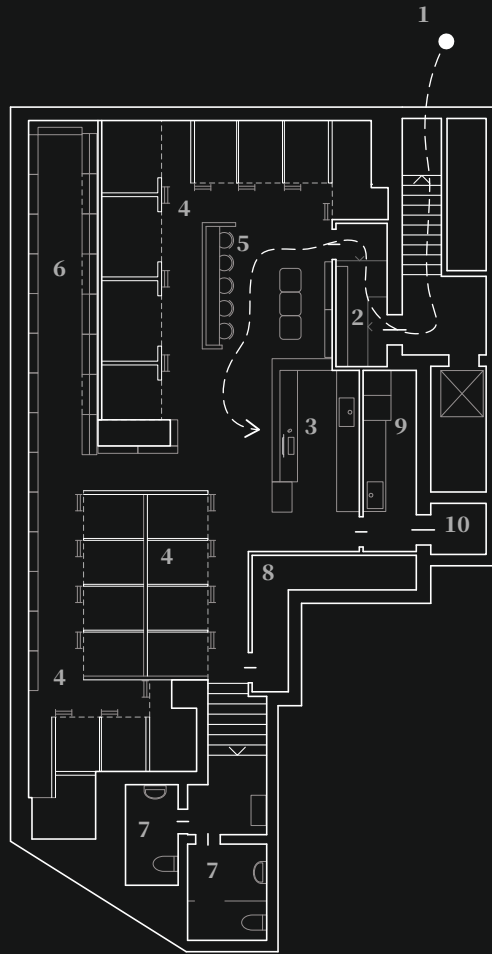


Fig. 43

*Floorplan of a
Manxwabang*

*Location: Underground
Capacity:
39 Booths + 5 Seats*

- 1 Entrance (accessible via
elevator or staircase)*
- 2 Shoe Lockers*
- 3 Reception and Bar*
- 4 Private Booths*
- 5 Seats*

- 6 Comic Library*
- 7 Bathroom*
- 8 Smoking Room*
- 9 Kitchen*
- 10 Storage*

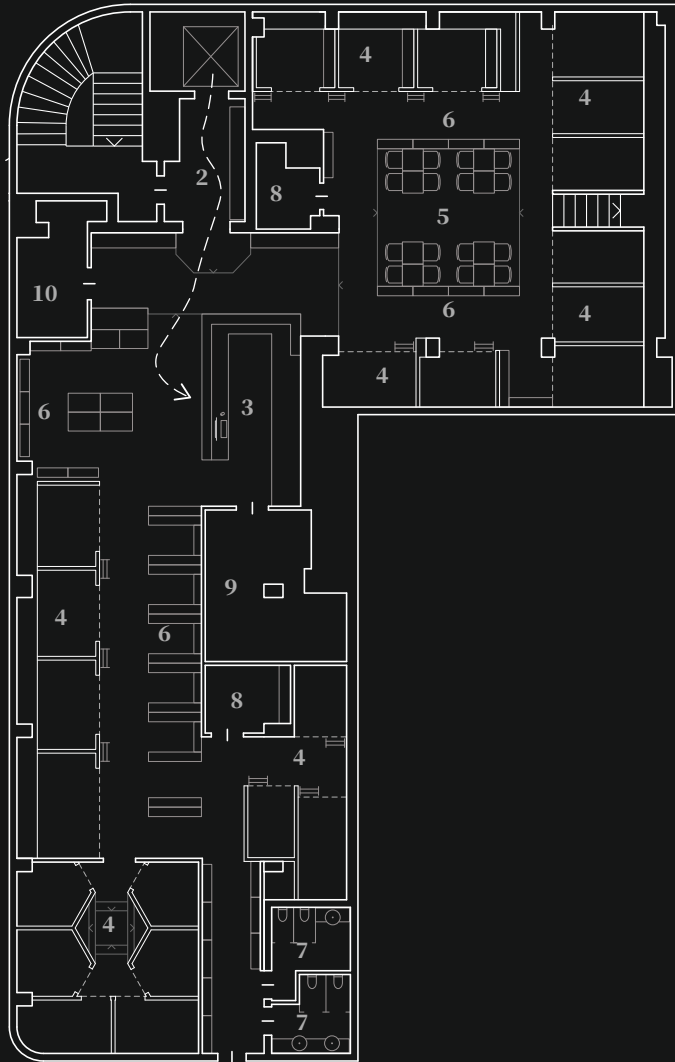


Fig. 44

*Floorplan of a
 Manhrwabang*

*Location: 4th Floor
 Capacity:
 48 Booths + 16 Seats*

- 1 Entrance (accessible via elevator or staircase)*
- 2 Shoe Lockers*
- 3 Reception and Bar*
- 4 Private Booths*
- 5 Seats*
- 6 Comic Library*
- 7 Bathroom*
- 8 Smoking Room*
- 9 Kitchen*
- 10 Storage*

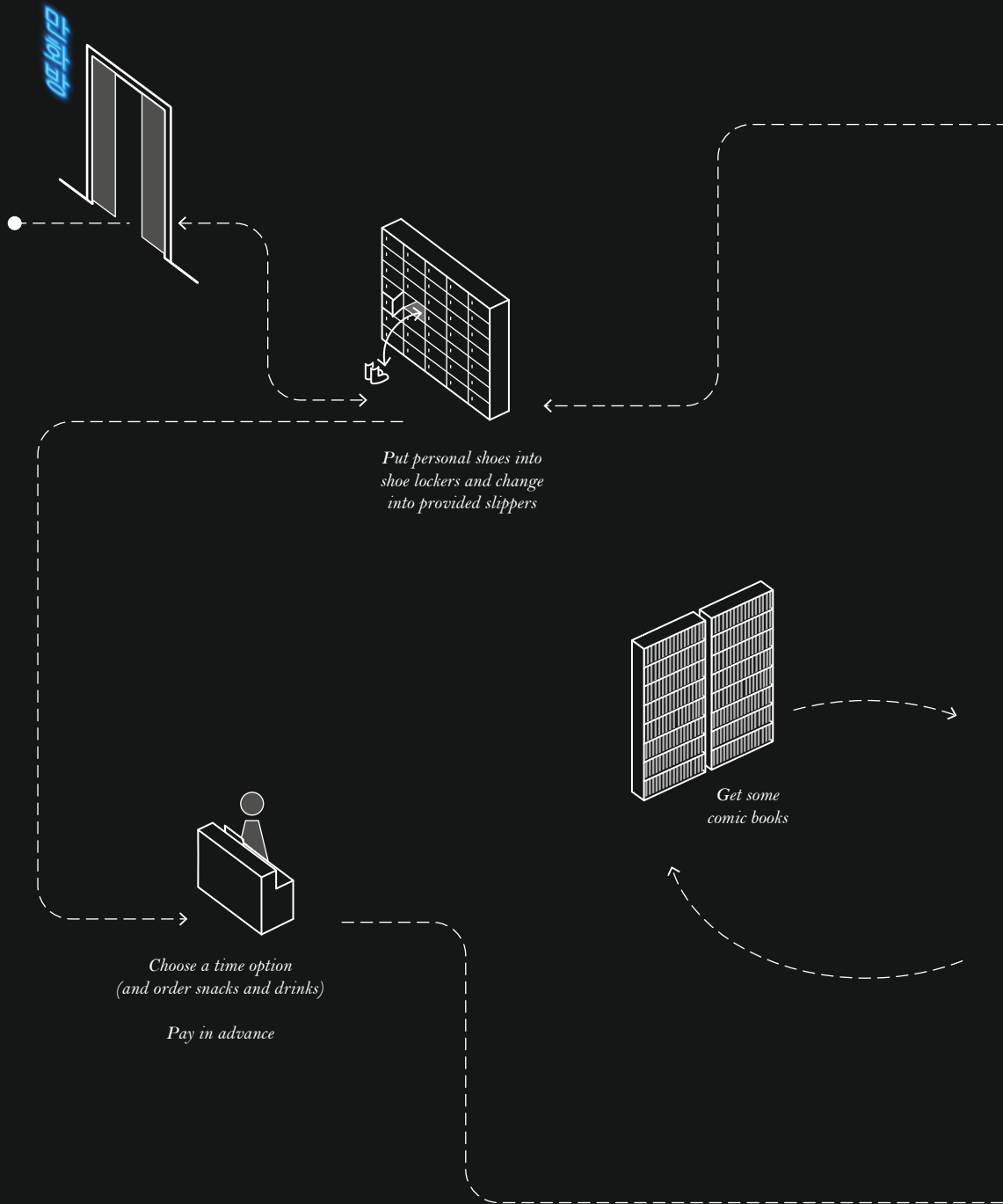
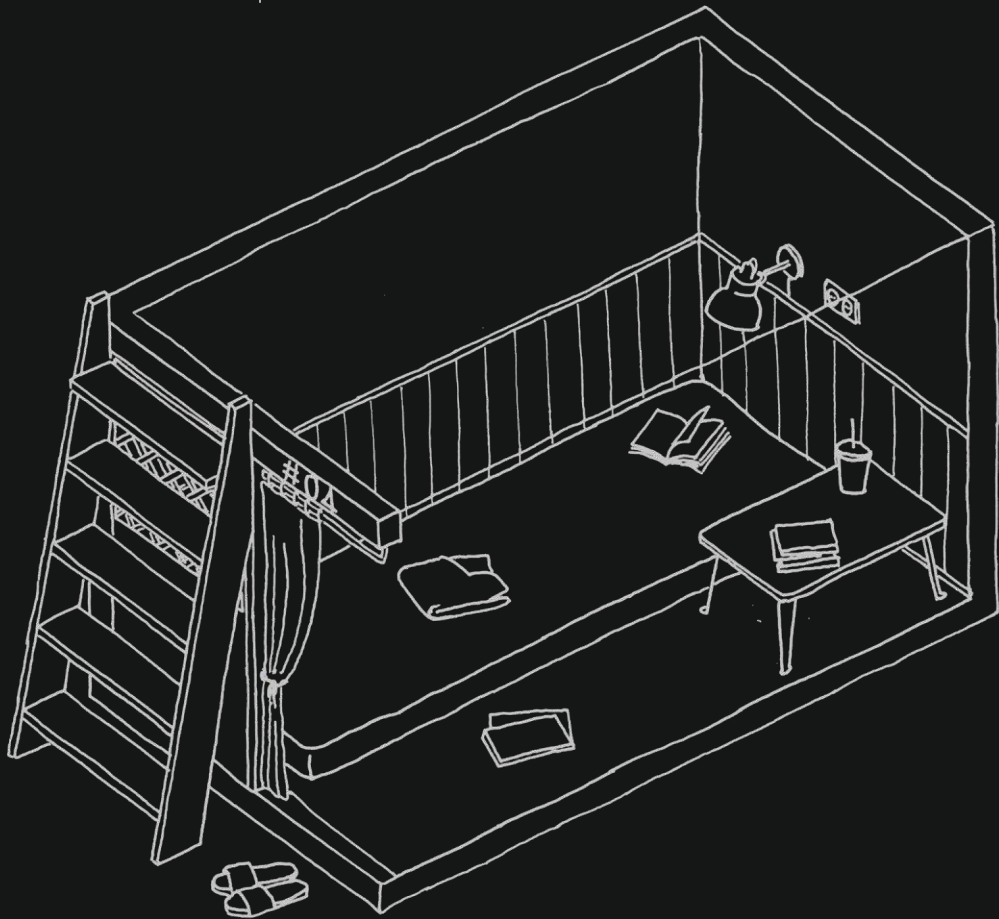


Fig. 45



썸즈빅방

JIMJILBANG

찜질방

Jimjilbang (literal translation 'hot therapy room') is a Korean bathhouse which started spreading in urban spaces in the 1990's. Only little research has been conducted on traditional Korean bathing culture. But according to some Chinese sources about early Korean bathing customs, bathing had a religious focus, meant for spiritual purification more than for cleansing the body and with the implementation of Confucianism, naked bathing of men and woman together was frowned upon. In the early 1900's Japanese settlers who moved to Korea tried to introduce Japanese bathing culture. During the 1960's and 1970's Japanese, influenced public bathhouses called Mogyoktang emerged. As private bathrooms became more common, visits to public bathhouses decreased, and people only went there on special occasions. This circumstance led to the emergence of new forms of bathhouses (Vierthaler, 2016). According to Kang (2007), the first Jimjilbang opened in Seoul in 1992.

A Jimjilbang is a fusion of a Mogyoktang bathing house, a sauna, and a western spa resort. It differs from the Bangs mentioned before. It blurs the boundaries between what is individual and what is public.

The standard layout consists of various saunas, pools, massage tables, entertainment facilities for adults and kids, gastronomy, and resting- and sleeping areas. The facilities are distributed over a section for women, one for men, and a more extensive area which is shared. Using a Jimjilbang means following a specific procedure of entering and engaging in the place (see following pages).

In the mid-1990s, the number of Jimjilbangs increased exponentially, tripling within ten years. (Vierthaler, 2016) The venues have long opening hours, often 24 hours and seven days a week.



*Fig. 46 (previous page)
Bathing area in a
Jimjilbang, with hot and
cold pools and sitting
showers*

*Fig. 47 (above)
Shared area in a
Jimjilbang*



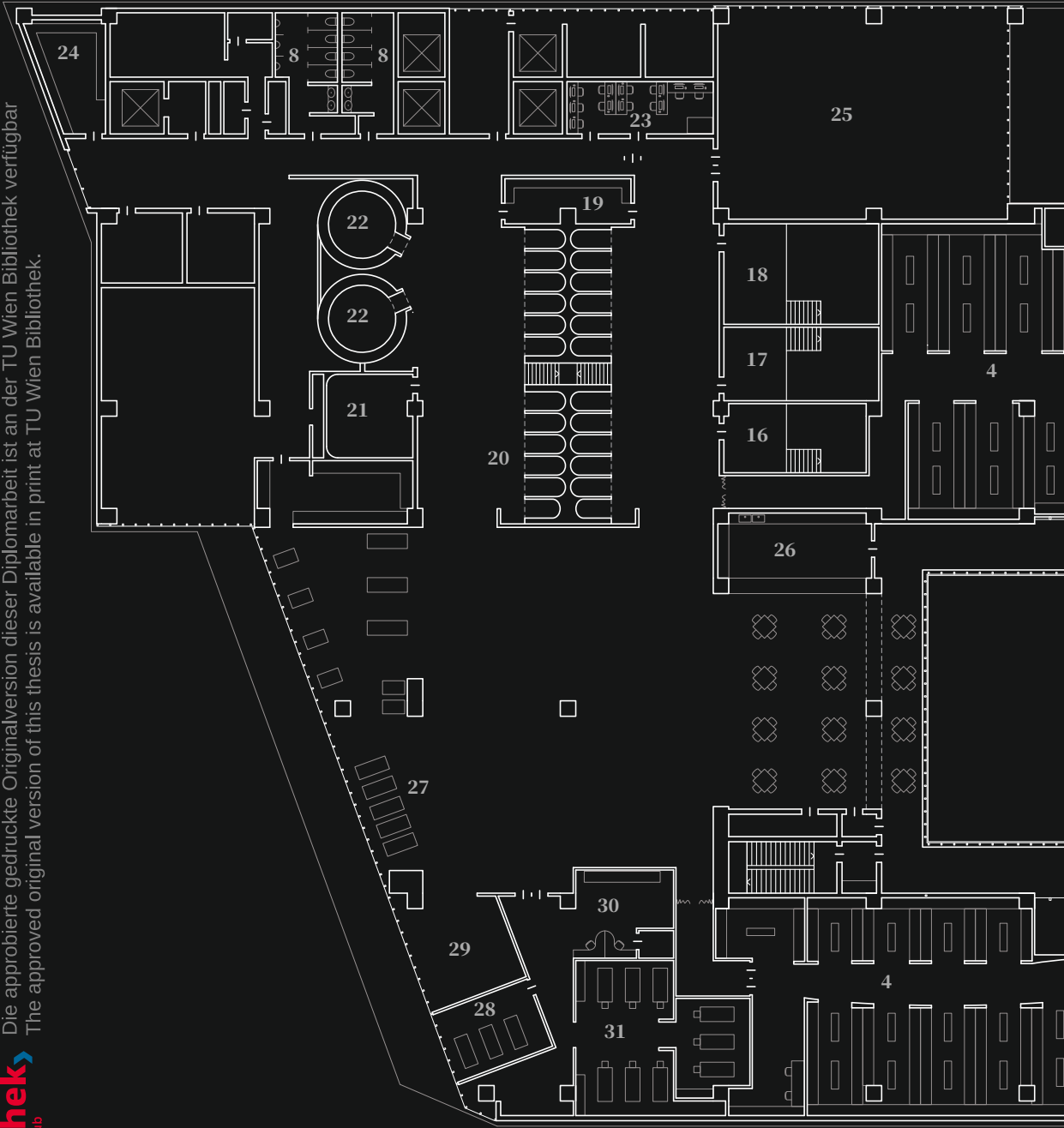


Fig. 48

Floorplan of a
 Jimjilbang

Location: 10th Floor
 of a Shopping Complex

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Entrance / Front Desk | 7 Powder room |
| 2 Shoe Lockers | 8 Bathroom |
| 3 Entrance men area | 9 Body Shower |
| 4 Locker room | 10 Sitz Showers |
| 5 Barber shop | 11 Scrubbing Room |
| 6 Ondol sleeping room | 12 Warm Pools |



- | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 13 Cold Pool | 19 Ice Room | 25 Movie Theatre | 31 Sports Massages |
| 14 Steam Bath | 20 Infrared Caves | 26 Korean Restaurant | 32 Entrance Women Area |
| 15 Dry Sauna | 21 Pine Tree Sauna | 27 Massage Chairs | 33 Sitz Bath |
| 16 Atopy Treatment Room | 22 Red Clay Charcoal Sauna | 28 VIP Room | 34 Garden Atrium |
| 17 Light Salt Sauna | 23 PC Room | 29 Kids Room | 35 Office |
| 18 Hinoki Room | 24 Foot Massage | 30 Nail Art | |

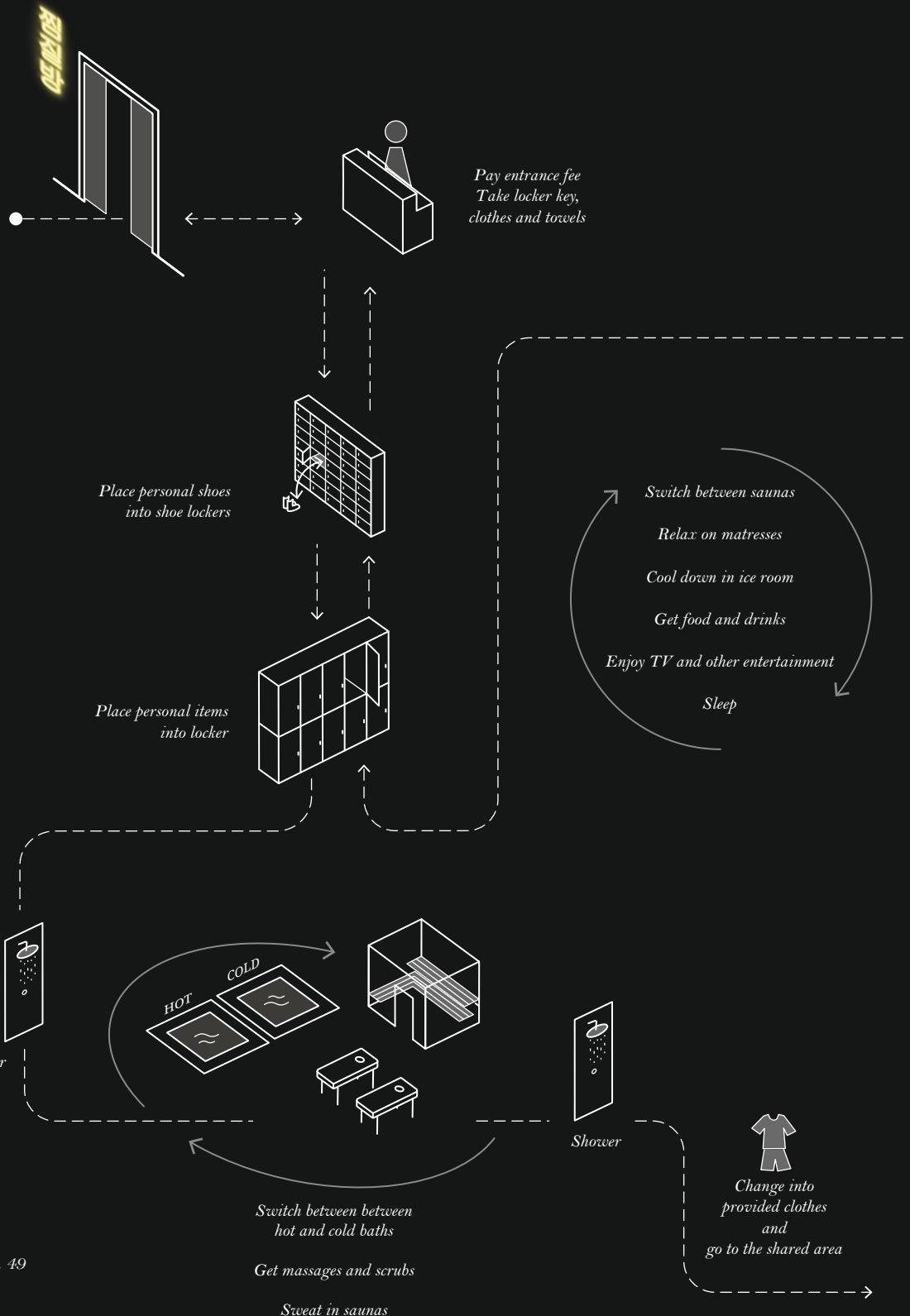
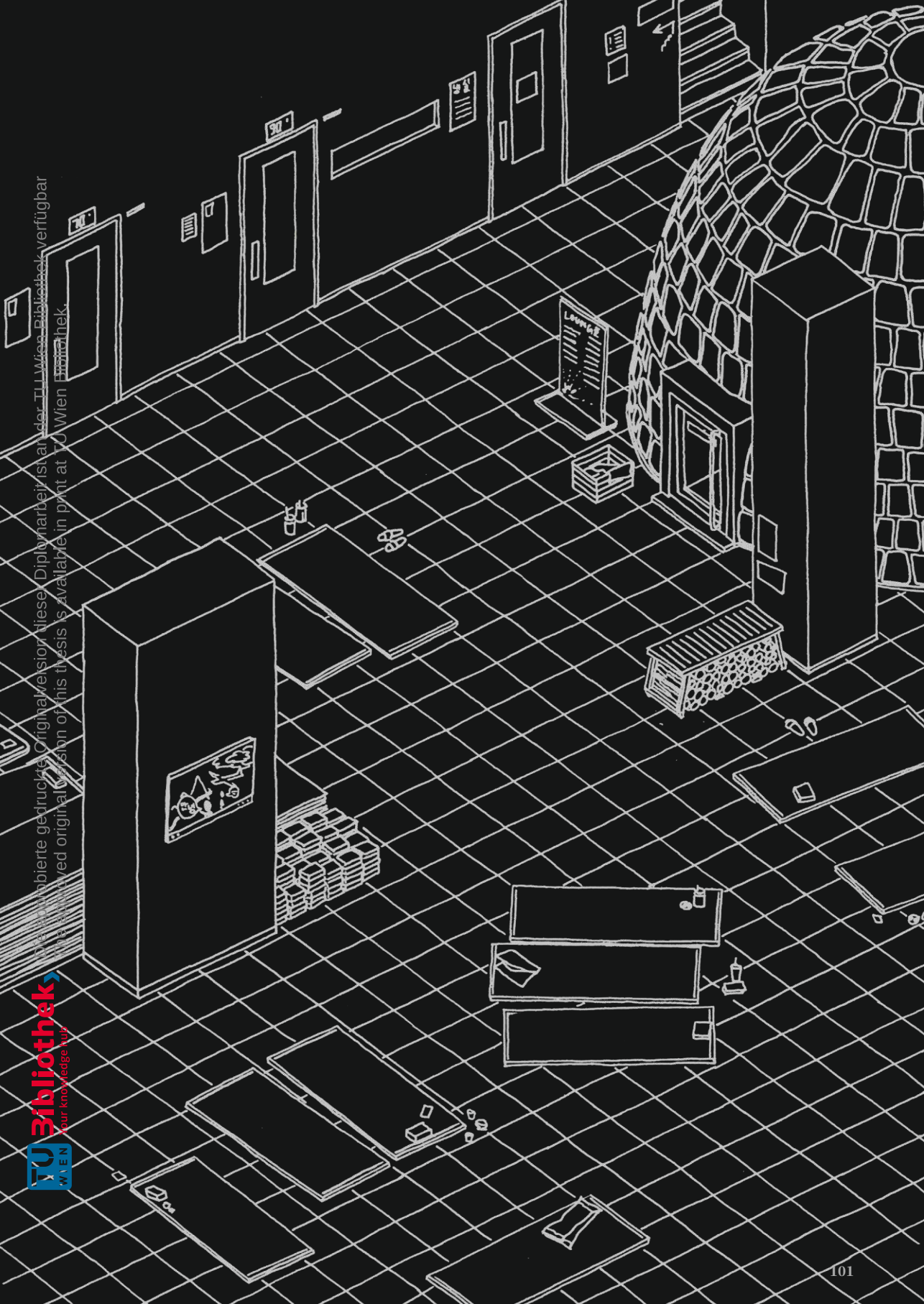


Fig. 49

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PC BANG

PC방

A PC Bang is not a local version of a western synonym of an Internet cafe, as "for Koreans, the PC Bang is a social space that traverses online- and offline co-presence" (Huhh, 2007).

In 1994, the first internet connection was introduced to South Korea, but a fast internet connection was not accessible to every household, and a broadcast connection was limited to true enthusiasts (Huhh, 2007). To change this situation, the government started a campaign with the slogan: "Although our industrialisation was late, let's start informatisation in advance", aimed to prepare the nation towards a digital-oriented future (Yang, 2017). In 1995, the first commercial examples of internet cafes with fast connections emerged in Seoul. Mainly located around universities, the places didn't provide more than internet and printers for their customers (Huhh, 2007). Two years later, the first official PC Bang opened in Gwangjin-gu, Seoul, still mainly used by university students and office employees to study and work (Oh, 2020). Even though the government attempted to encourage the public to engage with upcoming technologies, the number of Internet-Cafes remained low until 1998. But two events in 1997 acted as catalysts to a boom of the PC Bangs after 1998; Numbers went from 3000 in 1998 to 15.150 within just one year (Huhh, 2007).

Following the event of the 1997 economic crisis in the Asia-Pacific region, the Korean government had to drastically restructure the economy, which led to high unemployment rates. Without a job, people have much free time but little money to spend, making the PC Bang a perfect venue (Darier, Maël and Nurnus, 2016, n. ,2016). The rate to use a computer was usually around 1,000 ₩/1 hour, which is equivalent to 0,75€/1 hour (Chee, 2006). In addition, the PC Bang was an ideal business opportunity to start Self-employment instead of hunting for a job in the poor labour market. The second event was the massive success of the introduction of the computer game Starcraft Blizzard and the first online multiplayer game called Linage to the Korean market. According to Huhh, the rise of the online gaming industry goes hand in hand with the rise of PC Bangs. The atmosphere of the place changed from a quiet library space into a social open cafe, selling snacks and beverages, and even food delivery was allowed (Oh, 2020).

By 2000 the IT industry grew so much that even the most remote households owned a computer with ADSL Highspeed internet access (Oh, 2020). Despite the nationwide home-broadband implementation, the number of PC Bangs remained high for about ten years.

The situation only changed when the first smartphones and mobile games reached the public at the end of 2009. The interest in PC Bangs slowly started to decline until today. After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 and the accompanying restrictions on public life, the number of PC Bangs again significantly decreased (Fig. 50). In 2020 more than 4500 PC Bangs were registered in Seoul (Oh, 2020).



Fig. 50
PC Bangs
in South Korea
1998 - 2022

A large open space with rows of computer desks equipped with only high-end equipment. The places are Cafes with permanently installed PCs, comfortable chairs, and a perfect internet connection, mainly used for online gaming. The scene one experiences, entering one of the many PC-Bangs after walking down the staircase into the basement is one of wildly flickering forest out of huge computer screens.

Each seat is equipped with a big screen, headphones, an illuminated keyboard and mouse and a powerful computer. The places are open 24 hours - 7 days a week, although kids under the age of 16 are not allow in the time between 10pm and 6am. People on average spend more than 2 hours there with every visit (Korea Creative Content Agency, 2021a).

Customers must register via a digital kiosk, where an account must be opened, with a user ID and a Password. An option on

how much time one wants to spend must be selected and be paid in advance. The time can always be extended. With the account, one can log in to any free computer in this venue. Once logged in, endless option what one wants to do pop up. The range goes from simply searching the internet, various online streaming websites to most importantly many options for online games for single players but also on multiplayer platforms. For streaming websites no personal account is necessary to watch movies or a series. But for games a personal account for the specific game is required.

There is no need any more to leave the place if you get hungry or want to have a drink. You can order food and drinks to your table without even getting up from your seat. With a few clicks you can go through the menu on the computer you're logged in and order coffee, soda, hot and cold dishes, or other snacks to your seat number. After you decided on the payment method, within a maximum of 15 minutes someone of the stuff will bring the order to your table, where you pay immediately.

People from different age groups can be seen in PC Bangs, the major groups are school kids and university students. For school kids their home is not a good place to play games because parents put a lot of pressure on their kids to study to get into a good university, so it's very likely, that the parents don't like their kids to play games instead of studying (Huhh, 2016). People come on their own, friend groups and couples spend time together playing computer games, either with each other or against each other. One of the main reasons to come to a PC Bang besides playing games is to hang out with your friends or colleagues (Korea Creative Content Agency, 2021b). Groups of students would gather around chatting, discussing, and playing against each other or having a break from gaming and having a cigarette in the smoking room (often included in the layout). Especially in winter, when it's too cold to meet outside, PC Bangs offer a cheap place to gather with friends since the price to stay for an hour is significantly lower compared to other indoor entertainment facilities (Chee, 2006).





Fig. 51 (previous page)

Fig. 52 (above)

*PC Bang in
Hongdae, Seoul.
Located in the basement
of an office building*



Fig. 53
 Entrance to a PC Bang,
 Hongdae, Seoul.
 Located in the basement
 of a Keunseng

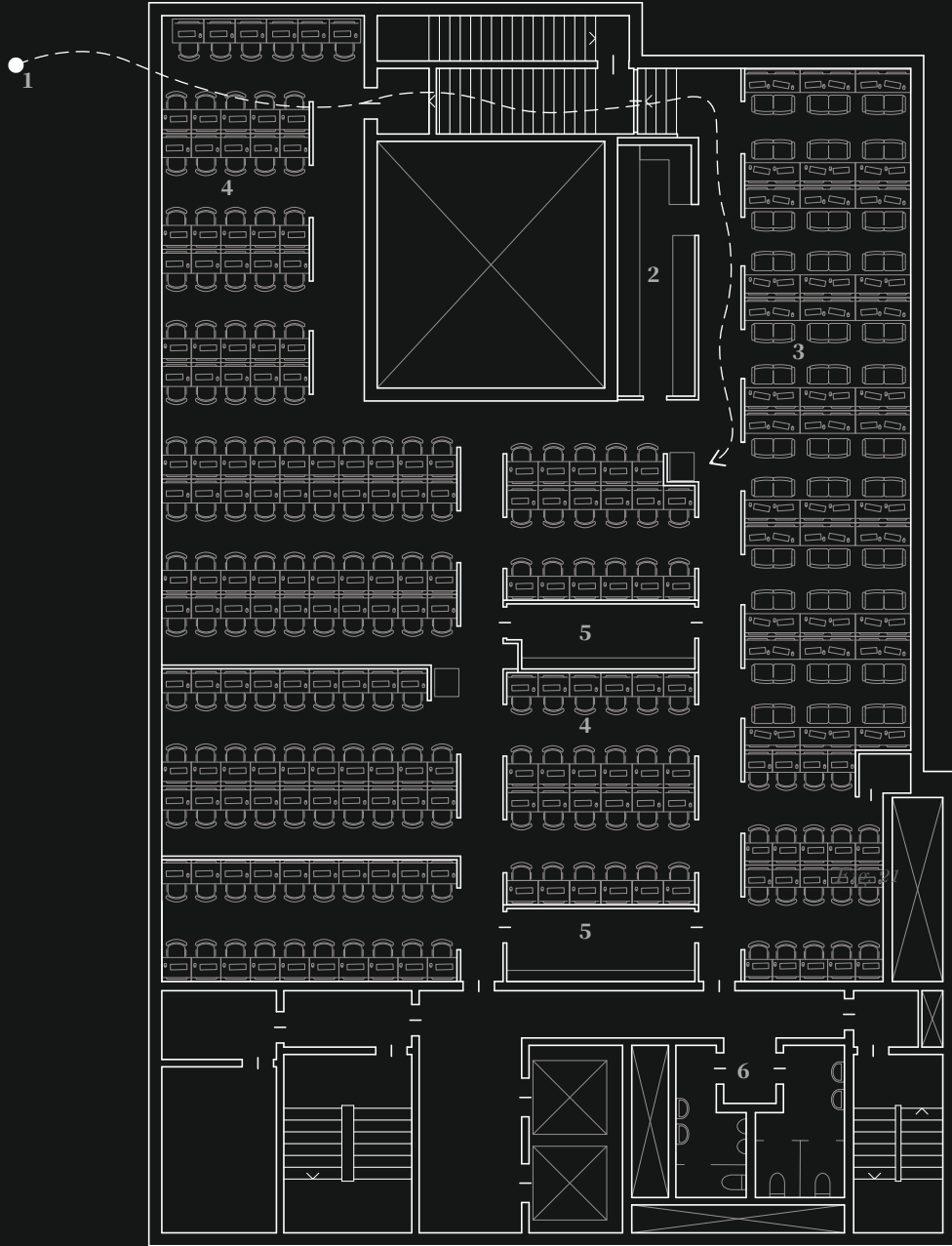


Fig. 54

*Floorplan of a PC Bang
Location: Underground*

*Capacity:
187 Single Seats
36 (x2) Double Seats*

*1 Entrance (accessible via
staircase into basement
directly from streetlevel)*

*2 Reception and bar
3 Couples Seats*

*4 Standard Seat
5 Smoking Room
6 Bathroom*

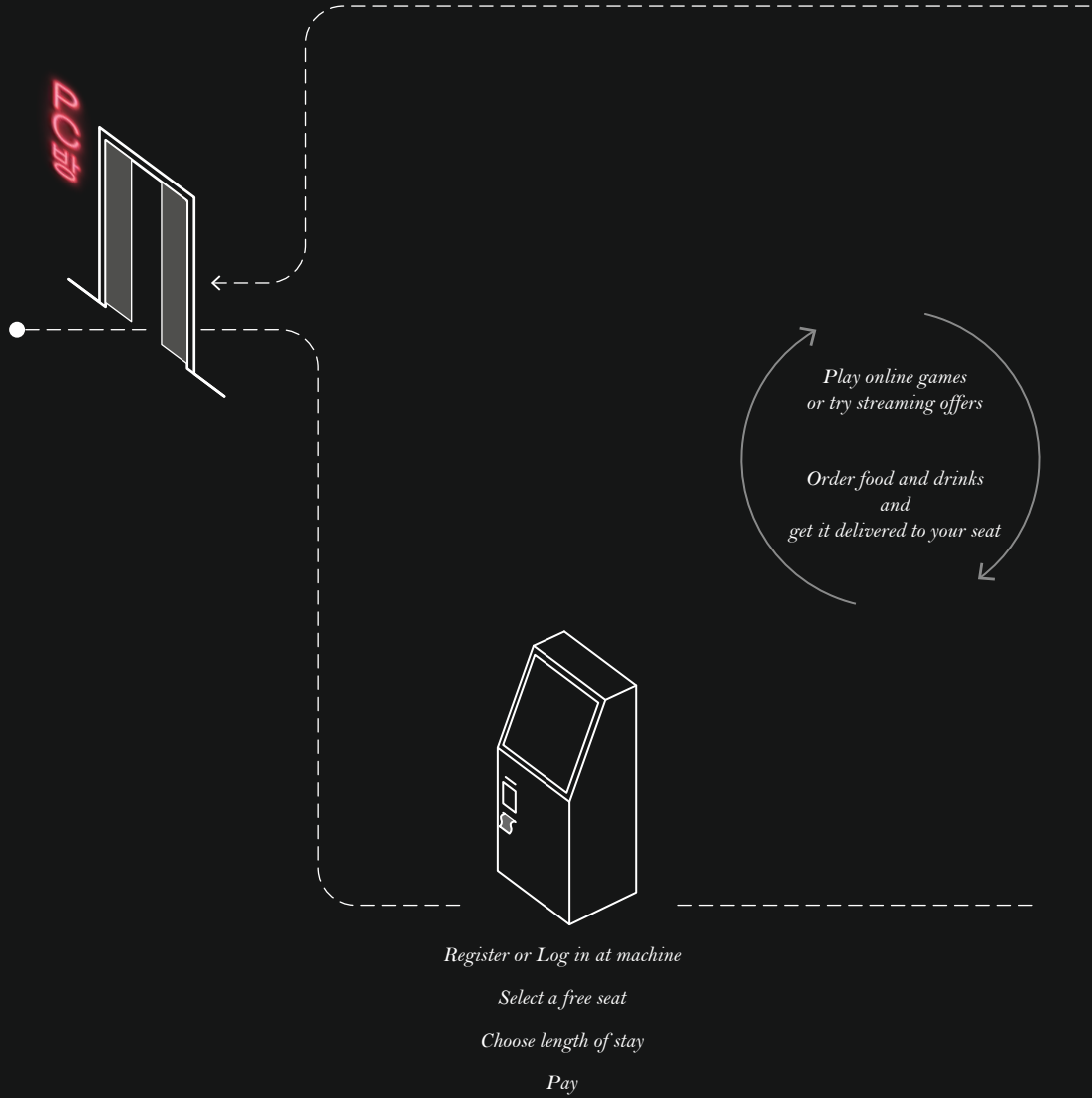
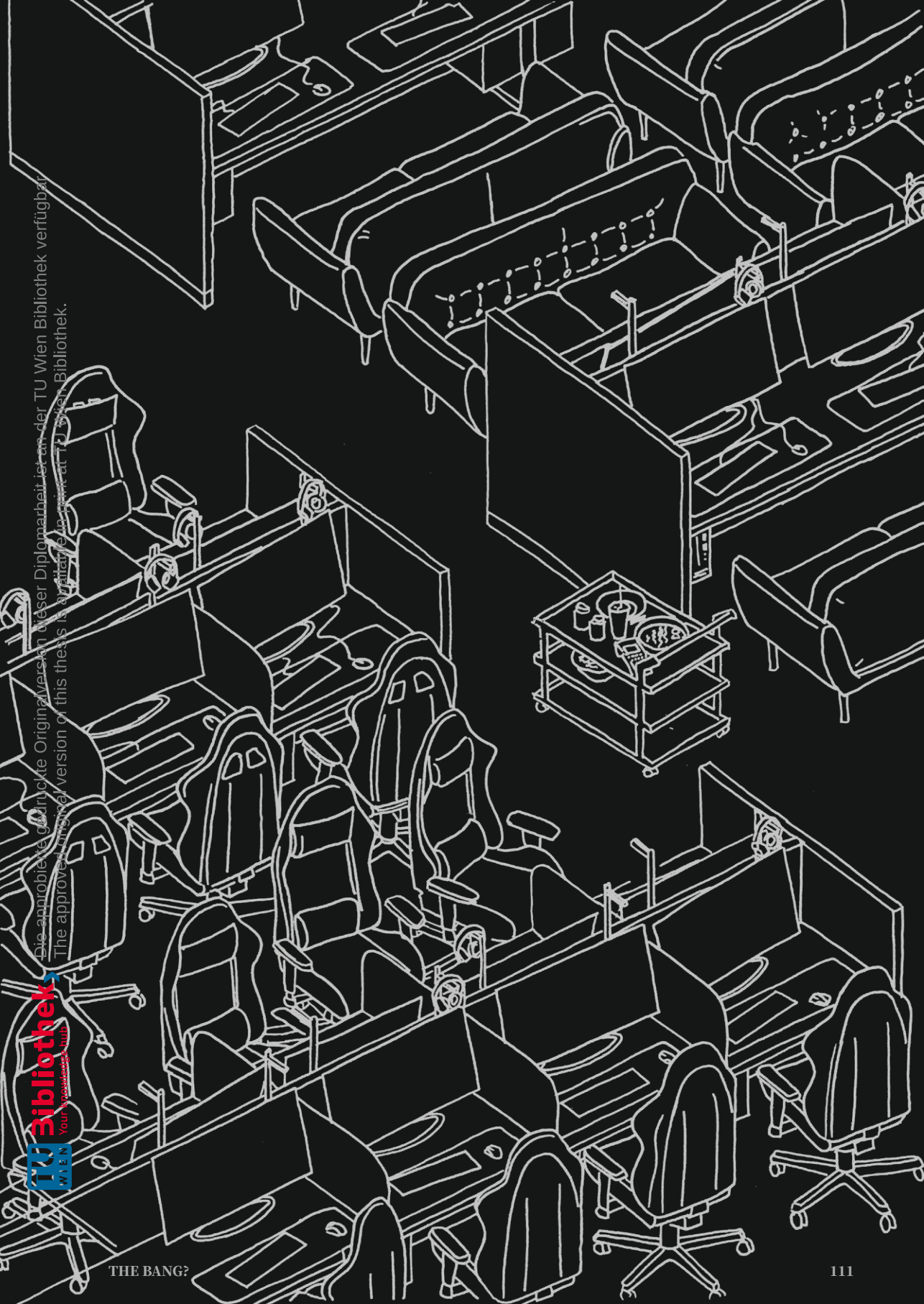


Fig. 55



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DVD BANG

DVD 방

There is little information about the evolution or the beginnings of DVD Bangs. But Park (2018) states that the concept of the DVD Bang has been around for quite some time. As early as 1995, the first Bangs invited people to watch movies in private cubicles. At that time, films were being played from video cassettes, so they were named Video Bang correspondingly.

The usual layout consists of windowless capsules with simple interior. Before entering a DVD Bang, everyone must take off their shoes and slide into a pair of slippers prepared at the entrance. The entrance area with the counter is full of DVDs arranged by genres, where one can choose the movies to watch. The booth is rented for the runtime of the movie. To get a booth one selects a film and orders at the counter, where it is possible to get snacks like chips and ice cream or beverages. After ordering the receptionist guides through narrow hallways to the room and he starts the movie from the counter a few moments later. The movie can only be paused or stopped by the employees. The room itself is equipped with big cushions, blankets and mattresses, an integrated sound system and a big TV screen. Some places offer a private bathroom with each room.

DVD Bangs are famous dating spots for young Koreans to get some quiet, private moments without spectators. The facilities are seen as cheap alternatives to hotels, where people can spend some private moments together. The cabinets often have windows towards the hallway, so people inside don't get "too" comfortable. This instance is one of the reasons people under 21 years are not allowed to enter.

According to Choe, Almazan and Bennett (2016) there were around 50 facilities scattered throughout the city in 2012.





*Fig. 56, 57
(previous page, left to
right)*

Fig. 58 (above)

*DVD Bang in
Sinchon, Seoul.
Private Cabin with ex-
ternal, private bathroom*

0 1 2.5 5



Fig. 59

*Floorplan of a
DVD Bang*

*Location: 5th Floor
Capacity: 17 Rooms*

*1 Entrance (accessible via
elevator)*

*2 Shoe Lockers
3 DVD Library
4 Reception*

*5 Private Rooms
6 Bathroom*



Fig. 60

Floorplan of a
DVD Bang

Location: 2nd Floor

Capacity: 8 Rooms

1 Entrance (accessible via
staircase)

2 DVD Library

3 Waiting Area

4 Reception

5 Room with Private
Bathroom

6 Room with Shared
Bathroom

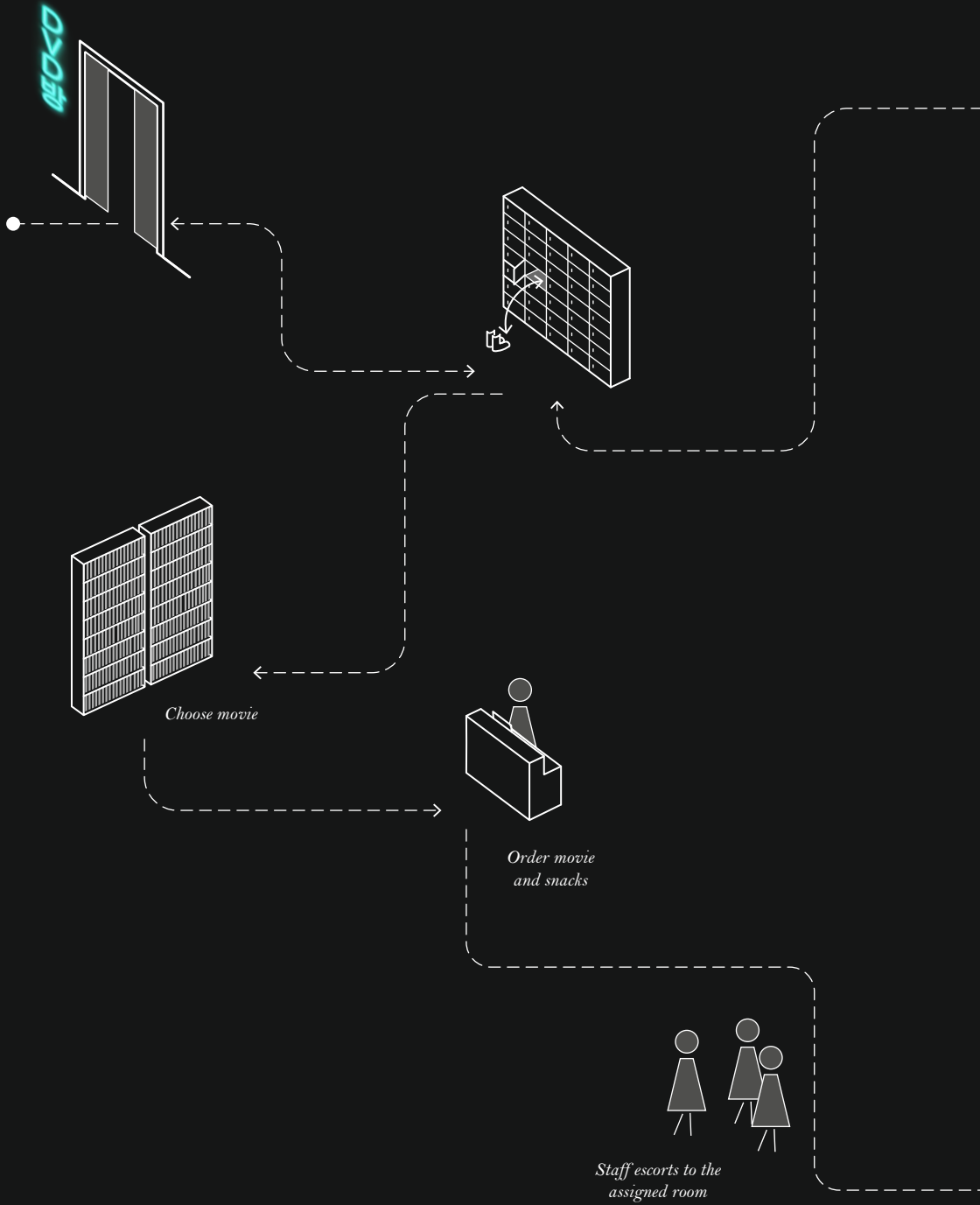
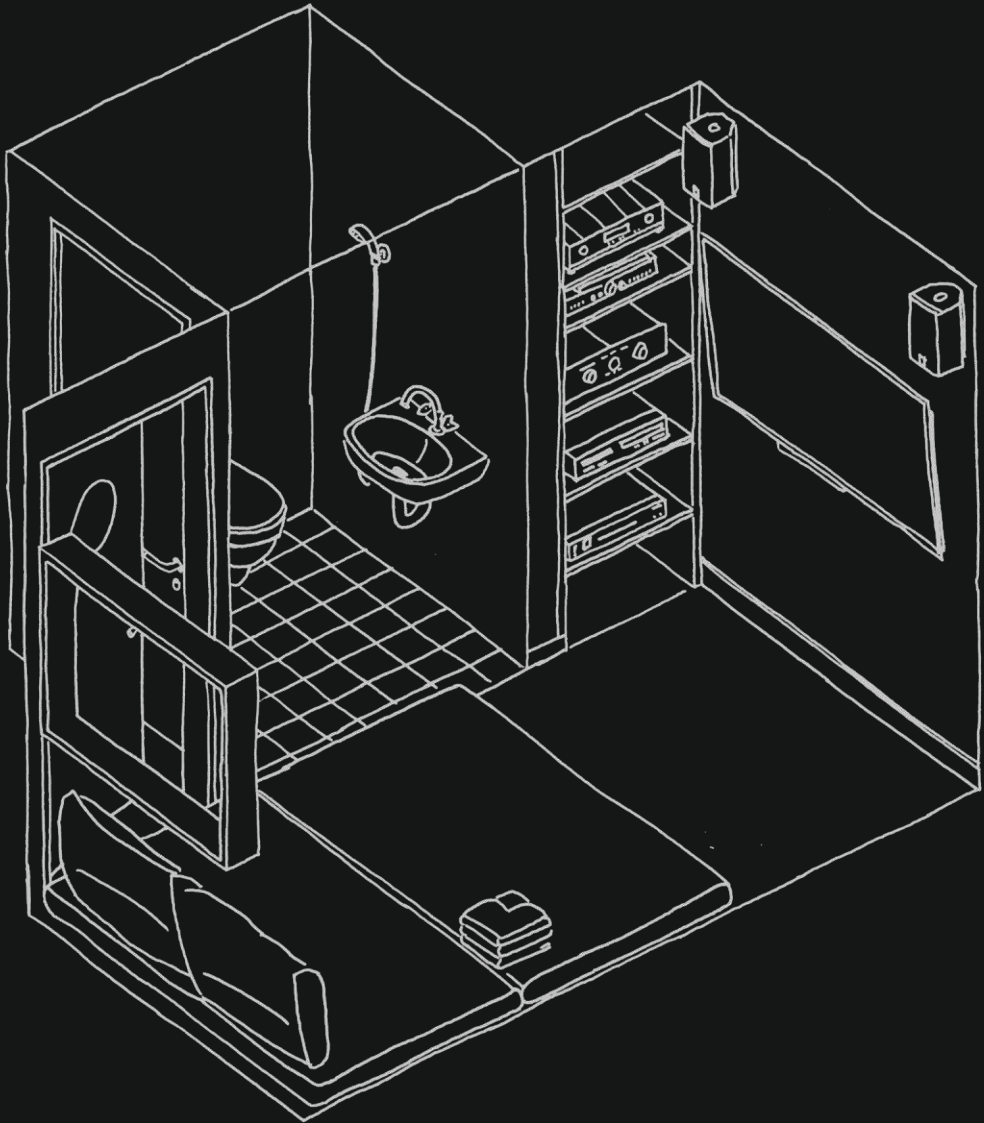


Fig. 61



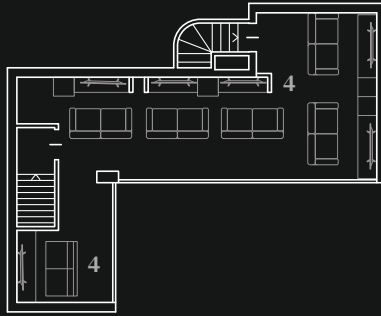
독서일기

PS BANG

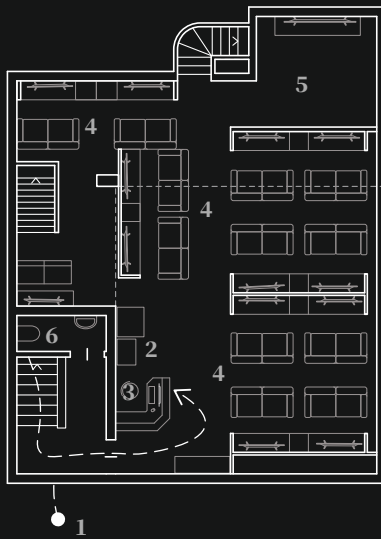
플스방

“PS” (pronounced “pulse”) is the Korean abbreviated version of PlayStation, and as the name indicates is a PS Bang a venue for playing PlayStation. During the ever-increasing specialization of Bangs, in 2003 the first PS Bang opened as a more specified version of the Multi Bang (Park, 2018).

Unlike other Bangs, there are no individual cabins here. Everything takes place in one room furnished with comfortable couches and huge monitors equipped with PlayStations, and sometimes other gaming consoles as well. In addition to gaming, PS Bangs also offer food and drinks, with a range of snacks and soft drinks available for purchase.



Upper gallery level



*Double hight spcae
 lower level*

Fig. 62

Floorplan of a PS Bang
 Location: Underground
 Capacity:
 19 Sofas
 + 1 Private Lounge

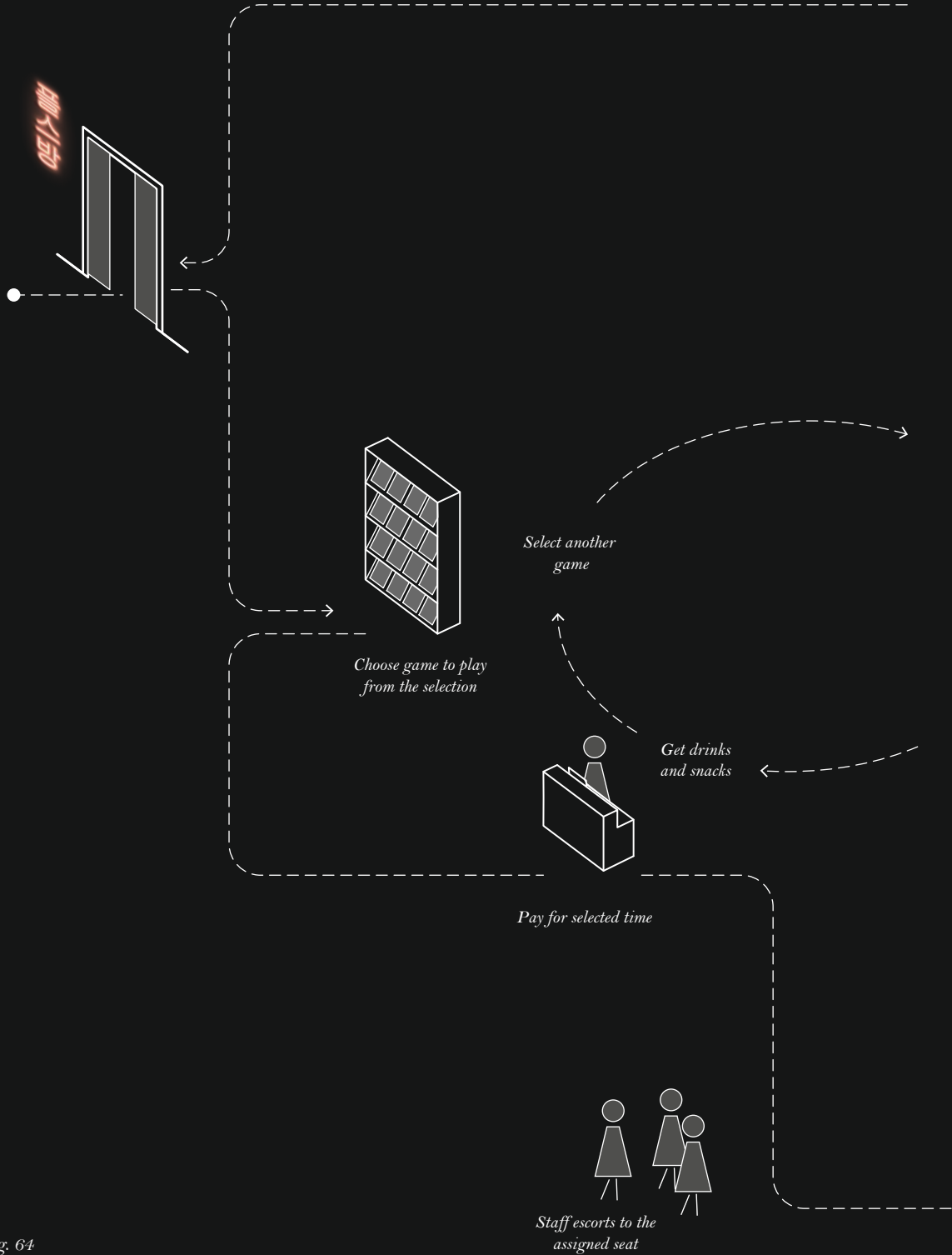
1 Entrance (accessible via
 staircase directly from
 streetlevel)
 2 PS-Game library
 3 Reception

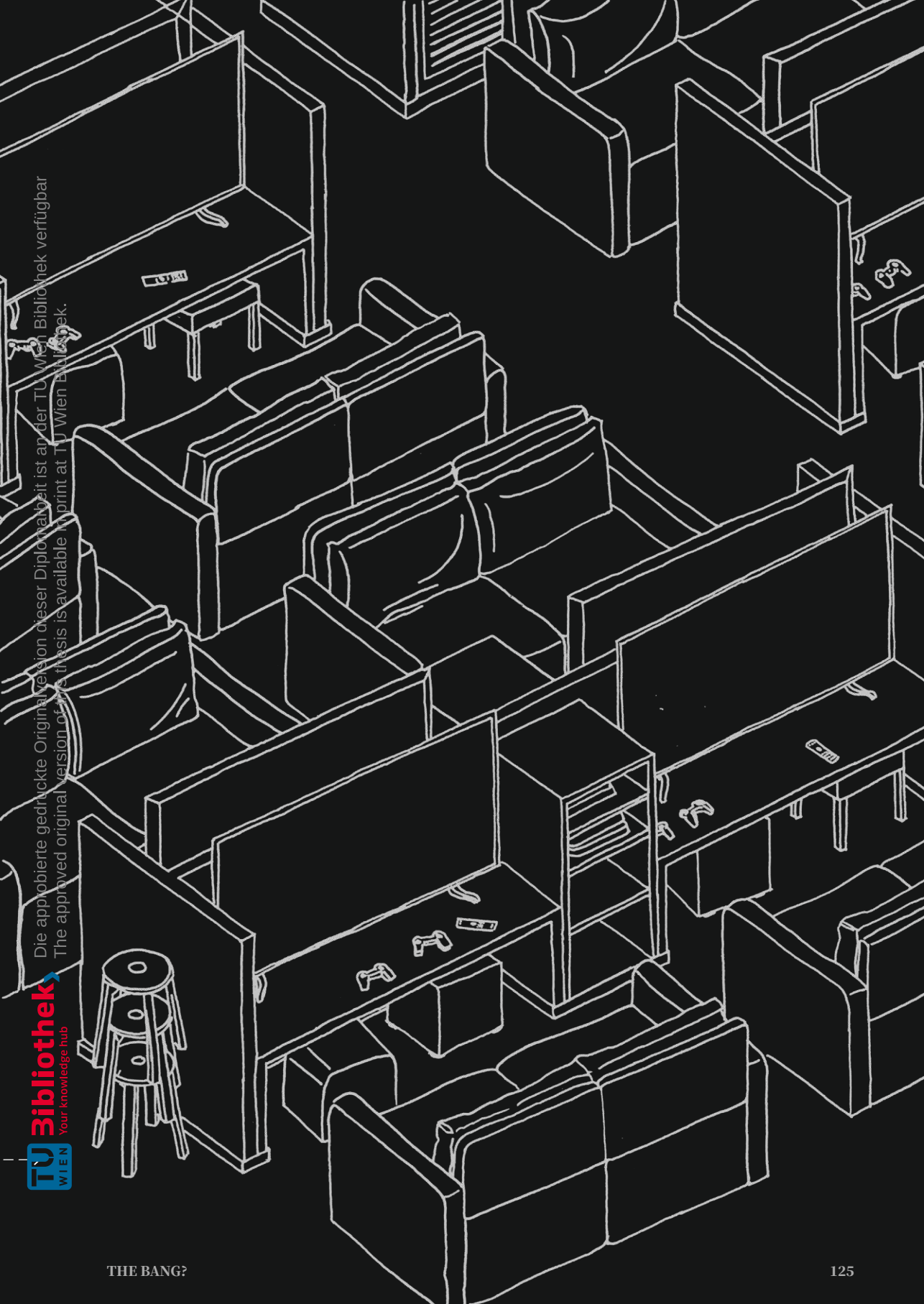
4 Gaming Sofas
 5 Private Lounge
 6 Bathroom



Fig. 63
PS Bang in Hongdae,
Seoul.
Located in the 5th floor
of a Keunseng

Fig. 64





150615

STUDYCAFE | DOGSEOSHIL

스터디카페

A study cafe is a place to study or do assignments in quiet mainly used by students, it appeared quite recently in 2017 (Park, 2018). The names Dogseoshil (독서실 - Reading Room) and Study Cafe are often used interchangeably (Hornby, 2009).

There are different types, sometimes study cafes are equipped like a cafe with a counter and staff and in other cases you can only log in through a registration machine. The business model without on-site personnel is more common. In addition to workspaces these venues also provide coffee machines, printers, folders, fridges, water dispensers and lockers for self-service. Many of the Studycafes are open 24 hours, 7 days a week. A seat can be rented once for a couple of hours, but there is the possibility to get a membership for returning costumers. The layout consists of one or two big rooms with desks. Sometimes a distinction is made between learning workplaces where absolute silence is expected and computer workplaces. In addition to that some places have tiny booths to enclose oneself and not be distracted by other people walking by while studying. The cabinet fits no more than a small desk and a chair. Completely cut off from the exterior one's sense of time slowly diminishes.



Fig. 65
Studycafe in Seoul

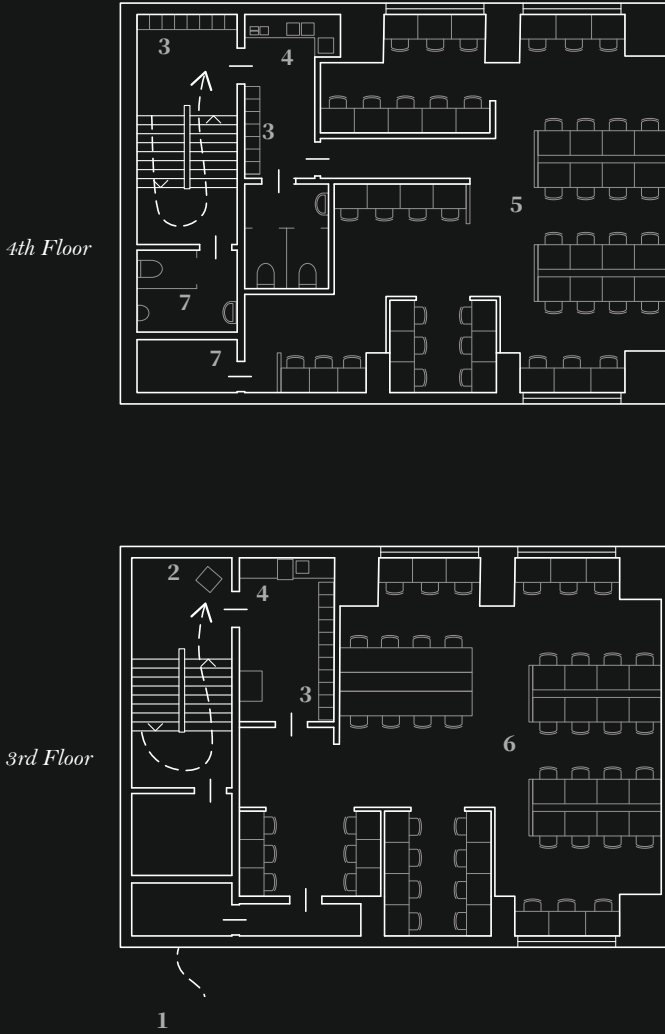


Fig. 66

Plan of a Studycafe

Location:
 3rd + 4th Floor
 Capacity: 90 Seats

- 1 Entrance (accessible via staircase)
- 2 Registering Machine
- 3 Lockers
- 4 Service Area (Printer Waterdispenser and Coffemachine)
- 5 Study Zone
- 6 Notebook Zone
- 7 Bathroom





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Fig. 67

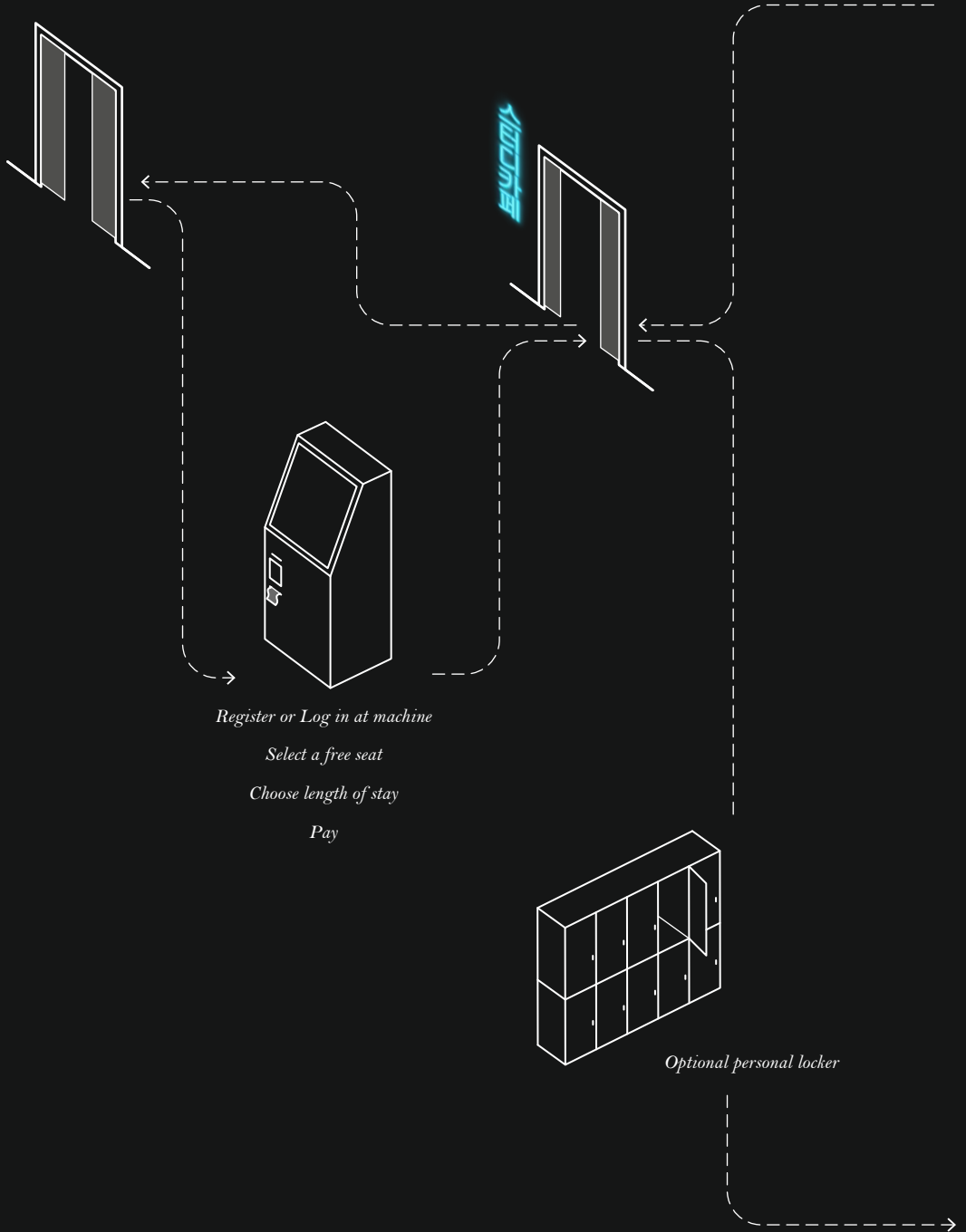
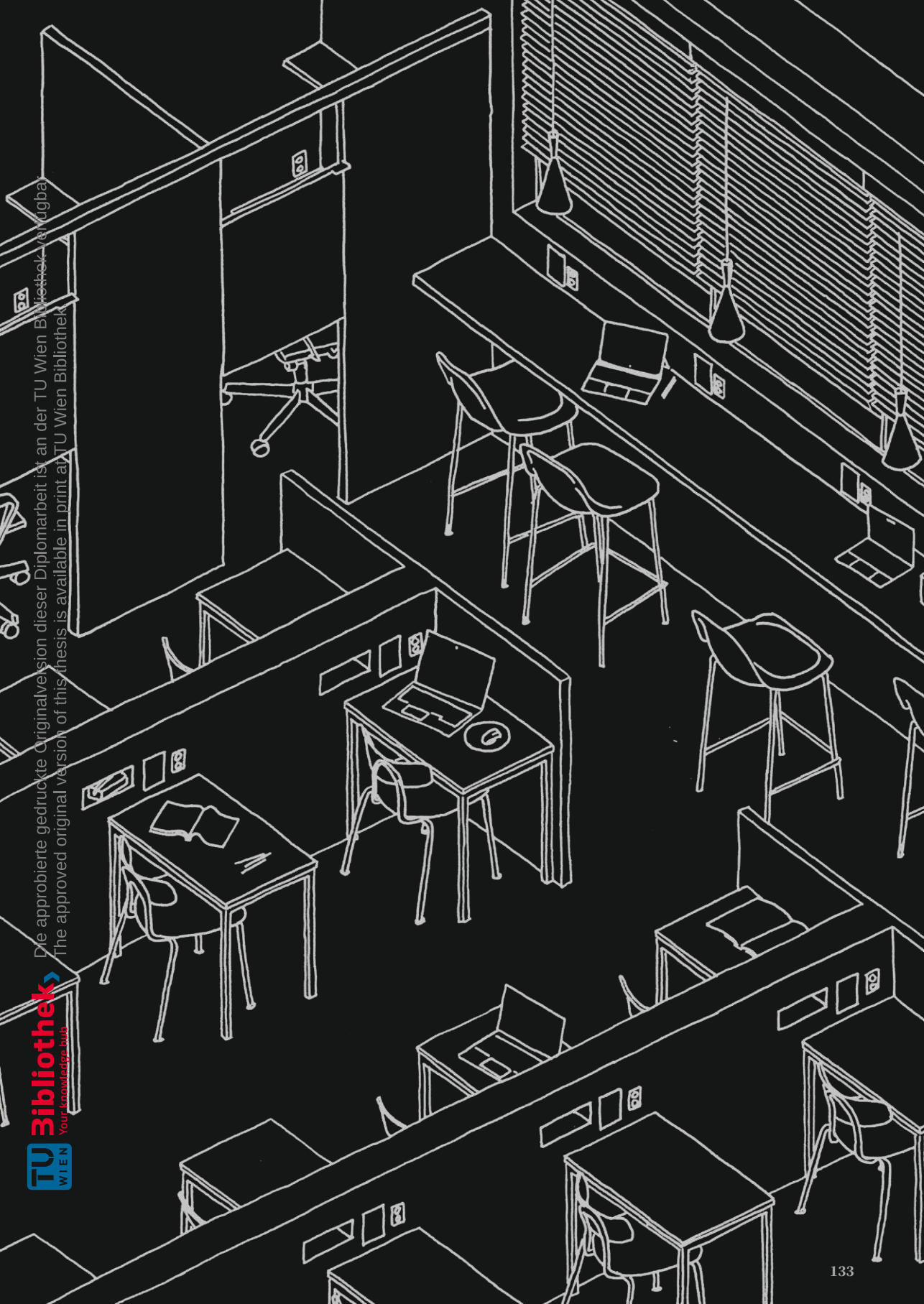


Fig. 68



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OTHER BANGS

In addition to the mentioned types of Bangs, there are many other specialized variations. This reflects the constant development of new spaces and business models that cater to the change in demands. Examples of these other Bangs include:

- Boardgame-Bang
- Hyugyebang
- Sojubang
- Screen-Golf Bang
- Ping-Pong Bang
- Partyroom
- ...



Fig. 69
High-rise Keunseng in
Sinchon, Seoul

3.3 | KEUNSENG - SPHERE OF BANGS

Bangs do not generate new building typologies, they provide the program for a building. Instead, they exist independently of any specific architecture and are not limited to a particular building type. Because the concept of bangs is not tied to spatial rules, and because the Bang culture is constantly changing, they can be found in buildings of any size and at any level. They are sometimes located in basements or in spaces that would otherwise remain vacant, as a visual connection to the exterior is not essential. Instead, a priority lies in disconnecting from the exterior.

But in most cases Bangs are in buildings stacked together with other facilities such as churches, schools, restaurants, cafes, offices and other facilities. This layering of uses is often found in what is known as a Keunseng (neighbourhood facility), the most common type of commercial building. Contrary to this multi-storey layering of commercial functions in Western cities are only on the ground floor of residential and office buildings.

The original purpose of a Keunseng was to provide appropriate facilities for a residential area. Usually built on a 130m² - 330m² plot, they are between three and five storey high neutral grid frames that provide room for flexibility (Kim, 2005). The elevation area is limited, corridors and entrance areas are reduced to the minimum, as visible in the floorplans of the previous chapter.

The facade will disappear behind a wild mix of sign boards, giving an idea of the density and diversity within the building. However, since there is no architectural connection to the exterior the way in which it is perceived and inhabited remains hidden (Lee, 2014). The Keunseng with its wide-ranging possibilities emerged over time as the most economical option, after designing and testing various typologies for specific functions (banks, offices, etc.) during the rapid modernisation process of the city. Meanwhile this type makes up for more than 90% of all the buildings in Seoul. Despite the widespread of this building type, it remains outside the scope of architects, as it lacks any architectural aspirations and offers is a neutral framework adapting to any kind of program. Sang-Hun Lee refers to the Keunseng as the perfect example of the “negotiation between form, program, and economic forces, though without aesthetic mediation” (Lee, 2014).



*Fig. 70 (left)
High-rise Keunseng with
Offices, Drawing School,
Cafes, Shops, Parking
and a Jimjilbing in
Hongdae, Seoul*

*Fig. 71 (right)
Keunseng PC Bang, Bil-
liard Bang, Soju Bang,
Club and Restaurant in
Hongdae, Seoul*



Fig. 72 (top)
Keungseng in
Sinchon, Seoul

Fig. 73 (bottom)
Typical streetview of
Keungseng in
Gangnam, Seoul

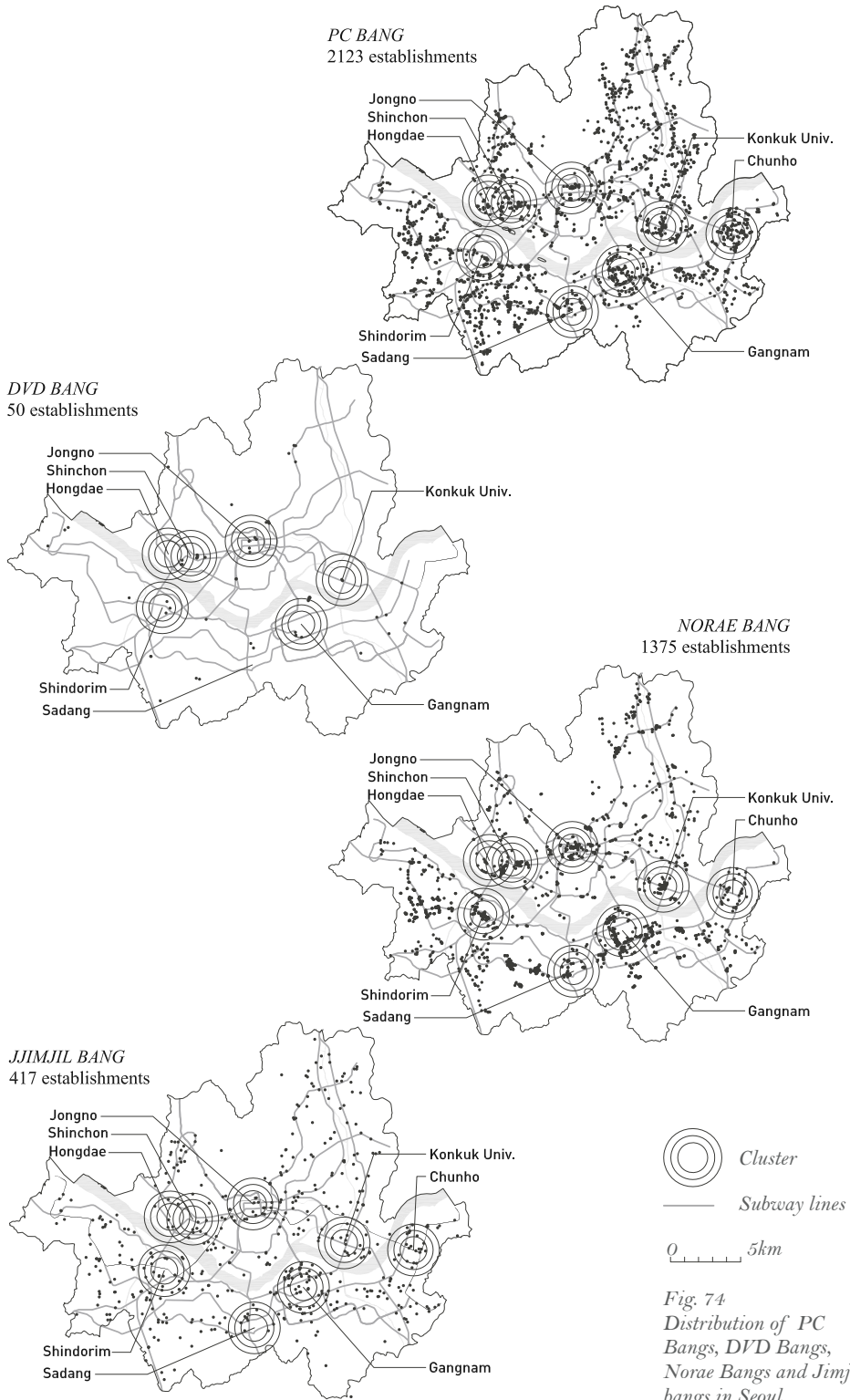


Fig. 74
 Distribution of PC Bangs, DVD Bangs, Norae Bangs and Jimjil-bangs in Seoul

3.4 | URBAN NETWORK OF BANGS

Bangs form provide infrastructure which is not obvious in the urban city scape since it is not connected to an architectural feature. They can be found all over the city. But the diagrams by Choe, Almazan and Bennett (2016) clearly shows that they cluster around heavily frequented train and subway stations (Fig. 74).

However, it can be assumed that the cluster is much denser than shown, since the data is based on a search with google, which was only the 5th most used search engine in the Republic of Korea at the time of writing. With a share of only 2% of all search queries, while Naver, the most used search engine, has a share of 72%, google is obviously not widely used in Korea (Kilnam Chon et al., 2013). The Bangs form an invisible structure, like a fungus that has spread throughout the city. A system that fulfils the desires of the time. A network that is omnipresent and yet invisible.

A field study in Hongdae, Mapo-gu, in the east of Seoul and north of the Hang River, was conducted to draw a detailed picture of the distribution of Bangs within a neighbourhood. This area is located around two highly frequented metro stations: Hongik-University Station and Sinchon Station. It is popular among young adults, with three prestigious universities nearby: Hongik University, Yonsei University, and Ewha Women University. Observations were made during the day and in the evening. The selected area is in walking distance (20 minutes) of the metro station Hongik-University Station.

Cafes, small shops, pubs, restaurants, and other entertainment facilities fill the area. It is crowded throughout the day, but in the evening, the streets really come alive with music, blinking neon lights, and people gathering. Crowded restaurants, with people waiting in and line or standing outside just to have a smoke.

In the area examined a total of 65 Noraebangs including Coin Noraebang, 13 PC Bangs, 12 Room Cafes, 4 Jimjilbangs, 4 Manhwa-bangs, 2 DVD Bangs, 2 PS Bangs, 2 Multibangs and 3 Study Rooms could be found at the time of recording (Dec 2022). The Bangs are clustered around the metro station and along the main shopping street (Fig. 75).

*Fig. 75
Distribution of Bangs
around Hongik Station*



*Location of research
area*

0 50m 100m 200m

-  *Studycafe*
-  *Multibang*
-  *PS Bang*
-  *DVD Bang*
-  *Manhwabang*
-  *Jimjilbang*
-  *PC Bang*
-  *Room Cafe*
-  *Noraebang*
-  *Exit 1-9 of
Hongik University
Metro Station*







*Fig. 76 (previous page)
Entrance to Coin Norae-
bang in Hongdae, Seoul*

*Fig. 77 (above)
Entrance of a Keunseng
in Hongdae, Seoul*



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4

A ROOM,
A HOUSE
OR THE CITY

*Ancient
Chinese*

公共

[Kou - Kyou]

↓ *same characters,
different pronunciation & meaning*

Japanese

公共

↓ *same phonetic letters,
different meaning*

Korean

공공

[Gong - Gong]

4.1 | PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

The concept of private and public is the underlying principle of classifying spaces in western cities. Often depicted in the juxtaposition of home and the city. However, this binary distinction fails to capture the diversity and complexity of Bangs. The multiple interactions between the different dimensions that make up the concept of these space are difficult to comprehend (Choe, Almazan and Bennett, 2016).

The prevailing view of the body of research agrees that Western concepts of public and private cannot adequately describe the cityscape of Seoul and other East Asian cities (Jang, 2018).

Nevertheless, the term “public” is also used in Korea. The Korean word for “public” is “Gong-Gong” (공공), derived from the combination of two phonetic letters taken from Japanese and converted into Hangul. The Japanese characters in turn were taken from ancient Chinese but are used with a different pronunciation. The modification of the term for each of these languages somehow shows common ground but it also indicates that the perception of what “public” means is fundamentally different in these countries. In Chinese, the word is a combination of “openness” and “togetherness” (S. H. Kim, 2012). In Japanese language the ideogram combines meanings of “official” and “governmental” in the first character and the second one initiates “togetherness” (Boling, 1990). As the word was taken from the Japanese language during their colonial rule, it has a negative connotation for Koreans, something they would rather avoid (S. H. Kim, 2012).

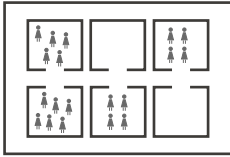
Many researchers are addressing the issue of private and public in a wide variety of ways. Oldenburg (1999), for instance, focuses in his work not only on the distinction and boundaries between public and private, but also introduces another term for spaces that belong neither to one nor the other. He calls spaces that are neither home nor work “third places”. Those places provide psychological comfort and support and give space for like mind and like interest.

The German Korean Philosopher Han (2007) notes that Asian cities have fewer boundaries. It is often not easy to understand where one house begins and another ends. In comparison to this, Western cities have clear borders and boundaries are omnipresent, which creates a sense of confinement whereas in Asian cities,

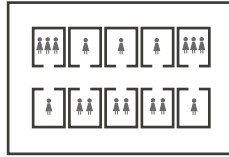
things are able to flow. A clear demarcation between public and private as seen in the West is difficult because the boundaries are less defined. The detailed analysis of Bangs based on the dichotomy of public and private reveals limitation of this principle and questions their universal application.

Since the 2000s, a scientific interest in how Koreans occupy free spaces in the city has emerged, with various publications discussing how and to which extent city dwellers occupy the city. Multiple articles in the architecture magazine SPACE (Space, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) examines how people create “urban scenery”. The articles explore the topic on three different scales. The book *Borrowed City* by Seoul based architects also deals with this topic through a graphic exploration (Bruno, Carena and Kim, 2013).

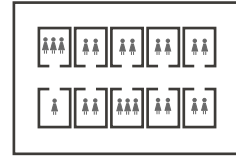
Separate Booths



Noraebang
 Booths for more than
 4 people

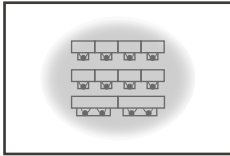


Coin Noraebang
 Small booths
 for max. 3 people



DVD Bang
 Small booths
 for 2-3 people

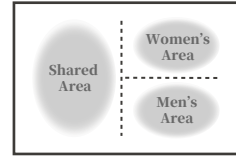
Open Layout



PC Bang
 Open space with single
 and double seats

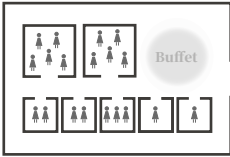


PS Bang
 Open space with double
 seats

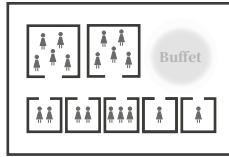


Jimjilbang
 Open areas secluded in
 women, men and shared
 area
 (Access to the shared area is
 only granted with provided
 clothing, the other two areas
 are nude areas)

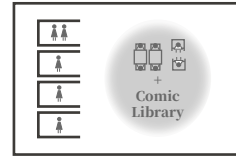
Mixed Layout



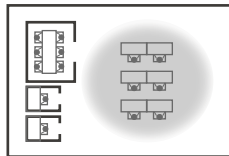
Multibang
 Enclosed booths in
 different sizes
 (Open buffet area in the entrance)



Roomcafe
 Enclosed booths in
 different sizes
 (Open buffet area in the entrance)



Manhwbang
 Small open booths,
 open seats and open
 comic library



Studycafe
 Open space with single
 seats, enclosed rooms
 for groups and single
 booths

Fig. 79
 Bang layouts

- Open Space
- Enclosed Space
- Booth, open on at least one side
- Partitioning of open areas

4.2 | ENCLOSED AND OPEN SPACE

The comparison of open and enclosed space plays an important role on two levels. On the one hand, on the urban level and, on the other hand, in the interior of the Bangs.

In East Asian cities, the faces of the buildings, the façades, did not face the street. The houses showed their backsides, the spaces for meetings are hidden behind the excluding walls. The communal culture of space is not characterised by an open square but by the sheltered courtyard (S. H. Kim, 2012; Jang, 2018).

Similarly, the concept of bangs in Korean culture embodies the idea of hidden spaces that provide a sense of protection and intimacy. Instead of open spaces, communal culture takes place indoors, separated from what is happening outside. They are designed to create a comfortable atmosphere for small groups of people to meet and share but can also be used by individuals seeking privacy. By creating these secluded areas, the culture places great emphasis on the importance of community and personal relationships.

Just as the uses of the Bangs are different, the layouts are also different. The floor plans of the Bangs can be divided into three different layouts: Separate Booths, Open Space, and Mixed layout (Fig. 79). The separated booths provide a protected, enclosed space, as in Noraebang, Coin Noraebang, and DVD Bangs. In open spaces like at Jimjilbang, PC Bang, and PS Bang, there are no boundaries, and one is always among people. Thirdly, there is the mixed layout, a combination of partitioned spaces and open areas, such as the Roomcafe, Multibang, Manhwabang and Studycafe. The Studycafe, for example, is a large room with many individual workstations, but also individual booths and rooms that can be used by groups.

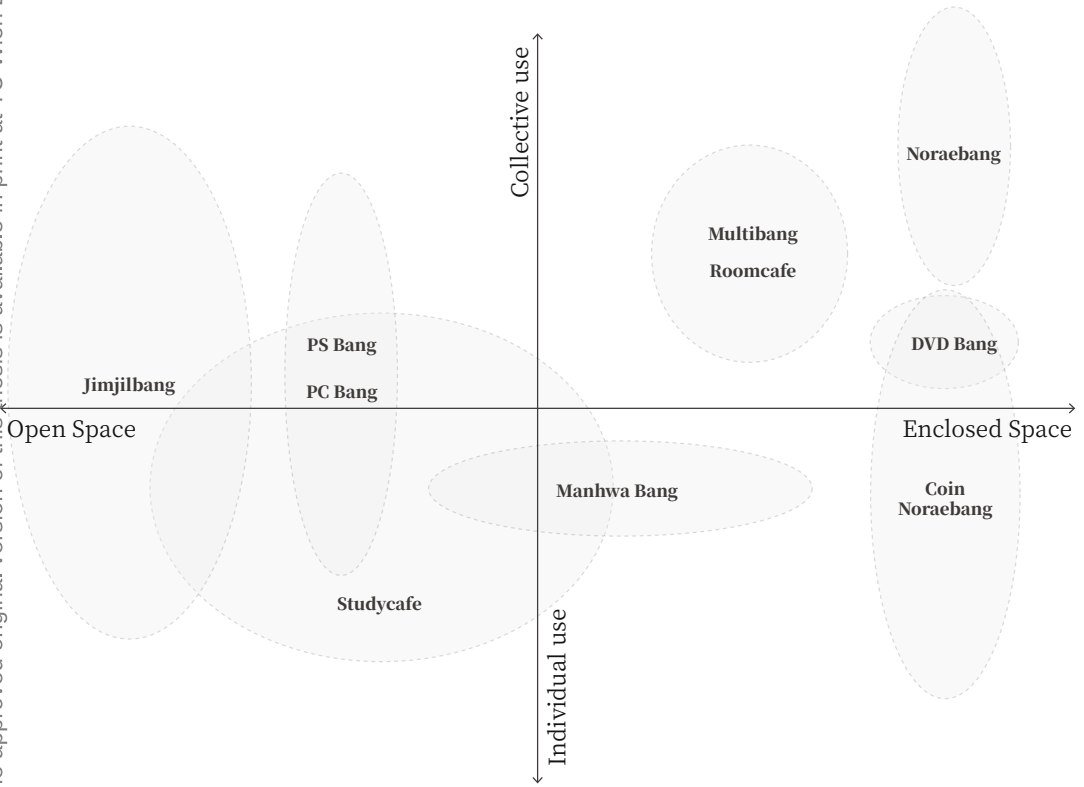


Fig. 80
Scope of Bangs according to space and use

4.3 | INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

Bangs support both individual and collective needs. However, not every bang can be utilised individually and collectively at the same time. A traditional Noraebang, for example, is a place to enjoy singing and dancing. Sharing this experience together in a group gives stability in a society that highly values group belonging. Likewise, PC Bangs provide space to interact with others, to have fun and compete, instead of gaming alone at home. Besides the experience to go to Noraebang is used to reinforce social networks. Often connected to corporate environments, to unwind with colleagues after business meetings or work dinners. As the visit often takes place in the context of work some people feel forced to join and therefore associate the visit with a mandatory rather than a relaxing activity (Shim, Kim and Martin, 2008).

In the scheme on the previous page (Fig. 86), the bangs described in detail in chapter 3.2 A Bang for Everyone are evaluated according to spatial and social criteria. The classification is made on 2 spectrums based on the architectural features (open & enclosed spaces) and the types of socialisations (individual & collective use). It is based on a visualisation by Iwaoka Laboratory that classifies places of daily life from both private and public realm in terms of access and use. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, a binary division of the Korean urban structure into public and private would not do justice to its complexity.

Instead, reference is made to the spatial arrangement and the relationship of the spatial structure to the social function is questioned. The illustration shows that bangs, like study cafés, have an individual use despite their open architecture. PC bangs and PS bangs have a similar usage pattern, as they are visited by individuals as well as groups. Noraebang and Coin-Noraebang both have individual booths and karaoke is sung in both, but the classic Noraebang supports a sense of community and the Coin-Noraebang is mainly used alone or in pairs. The illustration highlights the fact that Bang extends to both ends of the spectrum and shows that social use is not related to spatial distribution. Not only the activities differ but also their social function.



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CONCLUSION

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5.1 | SYNTHESIS

The development of the Bangs is strongly linked to the development of the city of Seoul and Korea's social fabric. Bang culture found its beginnings when the city's population and building boom reached its peak. The constant flux of the city, with a focus on growth, destroyed and buried any historical layer. As a result, most of the buildings are younger than the people who live in them. Seoul reached a turning point when its residents no longer accepted the government's sole objective of economic growth and its negative consequences for the city. Instead, they began seeking a different kind of life with a deeper emotional connection to the city. However, until this moment providing spaces for its residents was never of importance for the authorities. Additionally, the living situation of Koreans changed from smaller village structures with communal support to dense urban living in anonymous apartment complexes.

The rapid changes in Seoul also included the digitalization of society, together with ubiquitous internet, as well as improvement in private and public transportation. These changes extended the living radius of people to the whole city and allowed life to take place in constant motion, free from temporal or local boundaries. However, social development did not keep pace with the rapid development of the built environment and the economy. The ideas of Confucianism remain a strict framework of Korean society, and the influence of capitalism, adapted through globalization, added another layer of expectations and competitiveness. Acting according to the complex social hierarchy, strong collectivism, and the expectations from society and family to reach the highest goals in a hyper-competitive surrounding remain crucial, leaves high social pressure particularly for the younger population. In this urban and social context, Bangs have found their way to flourish, providing a space for people against the harshness of work and school environments and the constant social pressure.

Just as the Bang, once a room in a residential dwelling, has moved from the domestic realm to the city, the daily life of Koreans has also shifted from the home to the city. The need for space in the city gave rise to these dynamic cultural consumption spaces corresponding to certain activities and programs. Activities that are usually connected to the domestic home for leisure but also fun-

Fig. 81 (left page)

damental activities like sleeping, bathing, and being intimate, take place in these spaces.

An important factor in why Bangs have become such a widespread phenomenon is that they are constantly evolving. The concept of bangs is not a static idea, but one that is constantly adapting, responding to different needs with new specialisations. Over time, each type of Bang has evolved, and new types have emerged to meet the demands of Koreans.

Through their diversity and flexibility, Bangs create spaces for all kinds of social needs. People use Bangs out of contradictory reasons; some want to escape the public eye, and others want to be surrounded by people to observe and to be seen. Bangs provide a framework which supports both: The sense of community in Korean culture with spaces like PC Bangs and Jimjilbangs where you can spend time alone or with others, either way you always feel part of the community by sharing the spaces as you always see what others are doing. On the other hand, there are small boxes like the Room Cafes where you can escape these stares, meet with friends, and enjoy each other's company to escape the strict rules of everyday Korean life and forget everything that is happening outside.

Unlike Western societies, community life does not take place in open spaces, but is sheltered from the outside world. Correspondingly, the network of bangs is not visually perceptible in the streetscape. It is necessary to look behind the almost identical, repetitive facades of the Keunsengs to discover this urban phenomenon, which is an essential component of the city's unique character. Although Bangs are an essential part of the urban fabric, they escape the boundaries of architecture. They are an excellent example of how cities are designed by architects and planners, but society finds its own way of taking over. In the city built with the main goal of being efficient, and every space is used to make profit, Bangs emerged as a way of giving space back to the residents.

Furthermore, the concept of public and private in Western cities is difficult to apply in Seoul. Comparing cities within the Western world is instructive because they have similar underlying social structures. In Asian cities, however, there is a very different social foundation underneath the urban fabric. As a result, some aspects of the urban landscape may seem incomprehensible from a Western perspective because the complex connections are not

obvious to us. We have a different understanding of how a city should work. But it is important to understand the cultural and social nuances when analysing urban environments.

Fig. 82
 Number of Noraebangs
 and PC Bangs,
 2018 - 2022

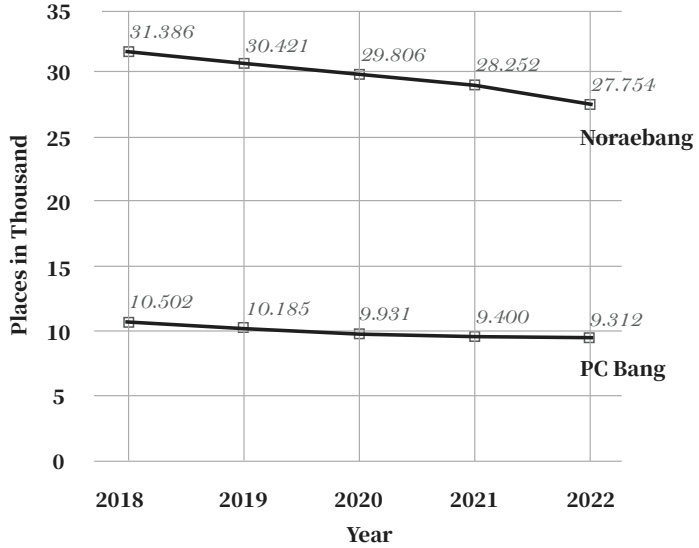
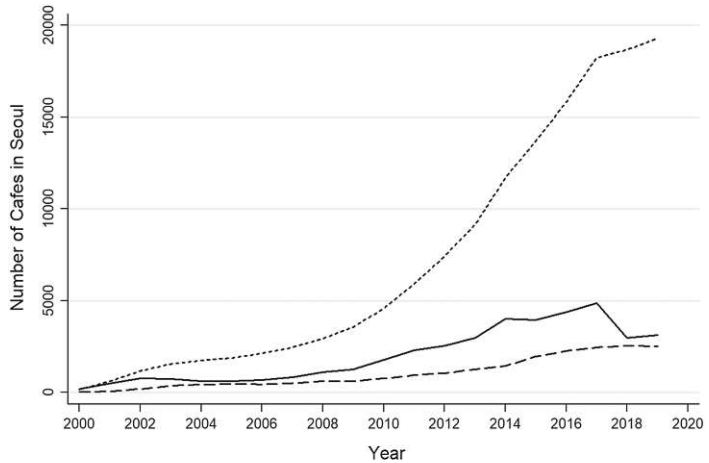


Fig. 83
 Number of coffee shops
 in Seoul, 2000 - 2020

— open
 - - - close
 survival



5.2 | OUTLOOK

In recent years, a slightly decreasing number of Bangs has been recorded. At least for the most researched cases of PC Bangs and Noraebang (Fig. 82). While there are various reasons for this decline, one that stands out without a doubt is the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, which forced many locations to close due to the lack of revenue. Another reason is that Koreans are now working fewer hours compared to previous generations, with a legal limit of a maximum of 52 working hours per week. Younger Koreans, in particular, are less willing to work as many hours as their parents and, instead of spending time in Bangs or with colleagues in the office, prefer to spend their time alone, with family, or with friends (Park, 2019; Jeong, 2022).

This shift in trend begs the question of what this development means for the city. Despite the negative trend in Bangs, the number of cafes in operation is steadily increasing (Fig. 83) (Park and Jang, 2022). This indicates that the way people use the city is changing, and there is a shift towards using cafes as a place to socialize and relax. This, in turn, shows that the way the city is used is changing, but the need for space in the city outside the domestic realm remains.

FIGURES

Figure 1
Commercial street in Hongdae. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 2
Structure of Hanyang in 1394. Redrawn by the author. Source: Kim, H.M. and Han, S.S. (2012) 'Seoul', *Cities*, 29(2), pp. 142–154.

Figure 3
Population of Seoul 1940-2010. Data sourced from The Seoul Research Data Service (2022) Available at <https://data.si.re.kr/data/%ED%86%B5%EA%B3%84%EB%A1%9C-%EB%B3%B8-%EC%84%9C%EC%9A%B8-%EC%98%81%EB%AC%B8%ED%8C%90/325> (Accessed: 27 January 2023).

Figure 4
1929. Min Choong-sik (1929) Seoul 1929, © Min Choong-sik, courtesy: Seoul Museum of History.

Figure 5
2009. Choi In-ho (2009) Seoul 2009, © Choi In-ho, courtesy: Seoul Museum of History.

Figure 6
Expansion of Seoul, 1910-1990. Redrawn by the author. Source: Yun, J. (2017) *Globalizing Seoul: The City's Cultural and Urban Change*. Edited by A. Rudkin. Oxfordshire: Routledge (Planning, History and Environment Series).

Figure 7
Population Predictions in the Explanatory Reports on City Planning Decisions. Source: Jung, I. (2013) *Architecture and Urbanism in Modern Korea*. University of Hawai'i Press. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wqfd5> (Accessed: 26 January 2023).

Figure 8
Current subdivision of Seoul into 24 districts. Map drawn by the author.

Figure 9
Transportation structure Seoul 20th century. Source: Kim, K.-J. (ed.) (2003) *Seoul, Twentieth Century: Growth and Change of the Last 100 Years*. Seoul Development Institute.

Figure 10
Built-up urban area and urban population density comparison. Source: Seoul Solution (2016) 'Seoul Urban Planning'. Seoul Metropolitan Government.

Figure 11
Noraebang, Sinchon. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 12
Floorplan of small traditional Hanok. Redrawn by the author. Source: Rowe, P.G., Fu, Y. and Song, J. (2021) *Korean Modern: The Matter of Identity: An Exploration into Modern Architecture in an East Asian Country*. 1st edition. Basel: Birkhäuser.

Figure 13
Urban housing near Namdaemun in Seoul, ca. 1900. Source: Jung, I. (2013) *Architecture and Urbanism in Modern Korea*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Figure 14
Trends in housing supply ratio for Seoul, 1926 - 2011. Source: Seoul Institute (2013) 'Geographical Atlas of Seoul 2013'.

Figure 15
Appartement buildings. Photograph taken by the author (2019).

Figure 16
"Value Tree" Korean Confucian-Capitalism. Redrawn by the author. Source: Shim, T.Y., Kim, M.-S. and Martin, J.N. (2008) *Changing Korea: understanding culture and communication*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing (Critical intercultural communication studies, 10).

Figure 17
Building by night, Hongdae. Photograph taken by the author (2022).

Figure 18
Timeline of the Bangs' appearance. Data sourced from Park, K.S. (2018) *사회문화적 변화 양상에 따른 방(房)의 형성과 도시공간적 특성 연구: 홍대지역을 중심으로* [A Study of the Formation and Urban Spatial Characteristics of 'Bang' Following the Socio-Cultural Change - Focused on Hongdae Area]. Thesis. 서울대학교 대학원. Available at: <https://s-space.snu.ac.kr/handle/10371/144513> (Accessed: 12 July 2022).

Figure 19
Noraebang, Hongdae. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 20
Noraebang, Hongdae. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 21
Noraebang, Hongdae. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 22
Noraebangs in South Korea, 2010 -2019. Source: Lee, T.-S. (2019) 노래방 현황 및 시장여건 분석 (Analysis of the current state of karaoke and market conditions). Online. KB Reasearch. Available at: <https://www.kbfg.com/kbresearch/report/reportView.do?reportId=1003832> (Accessed: 6 January 2022).

Figure 23
Noraebang, Hongdae. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 24
Floorplan of a Noraebang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 25
Inside a Noraebang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 26
Coin Noraebang in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 27
Coin Noraebang in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 28
Hallway of a Coin Noraebang in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph taken by the author (2021).

Figure 29
Floorplan of a Coin Noraebang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 30
Inside a Coin Noraebang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 31
Floorplan of a Multibang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 32
Room in a Multibang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 33
Inside a Multibang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 34
Cabin in Roomcafe in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 35
Cabin in Roomcafe in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 36
Cabin in Roomcafe in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 37
Floorplan of a Roomcafe. Drawing by the author.

Figure 38
Floorplan of a Roomcafe. Drawing by the author.

Figure 39
Inside a Roomcafe. Drawing by the author.

Figure 40
Shoe lockers in a Manhwabang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 41
Manhwabang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 42
Manhwabang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 43
Floorplan of a Manhwabang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 44
Floorplan of a Manhwabang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 45
Inside a Manhwabang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 46
Bathing Area Jimjilbang. Source: <https://www.arnablog.com/2012/10/one-night-at-korean-bathhouse.html> © resortfit_sb

Figure 47
Shared area in a Jimjilbang. Source: <https://liasian.wordpress.com/2015/02/12/korean-travel-tip-3-save-money-on-accommodation-with-jjimjilbangs/>

Figure 48
Floorplan of a Jimjilbang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 49
Inside a Jimjilbang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 50
PC Bangs in South Korea, 1998 – 2022. Data sourced from Korea Creative Content Agency (2019) 2018 대한민국 게임백서 [2018 White Paper on Korean Games]. Korea Creative Content Agency. Available at: <https://www.kocca.kr/kocca/bbs/view/B0000146/1841350.do?searchCnd=1&searchWrd=&bbsId=B0000146&cateTp1=&cateTp2=&useYn=&menuNo=204154&categories=0&subcate=0&cateCode=&type=&instNo=0&questionTp=&ufSetting=&recovery=&option1=&option2=&year=&morePage=&qtp=&domainId=&sortCode=&pageIndex=5>. and Korea Creative Content Agency (2021) 2021 대한민국 게임백서 [2021 White Paper on Korean Games]. Korea Creative Content Agency. Available at: <https://www.kocca.kr/kocca/bbs/view/B0000146/1846226.do?searchCnd=1&searchWrd=&bbsId=B0000146&cateTp1=&cateTp2=&useYn=&menuNo=204154&categories=0&subcate=0&cateCode=&type=&instNo=0&questionTp=&ufSetting=&recovery=&option1=&option2=&year=&morePage=&qtp=&domainId=&sortCode=&pageIndex=2>.

Figure 51
PC Bang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 52
PC Bang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 53
Entrance to a Keunseng. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 54
Floorplan of a PC Bang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 55
Inside a PC Bang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 56
DVD Bang in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 57
DVD Bang in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 58
DVD Bang in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021)

Figure 59
Floorplan of a DVD Bang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 60
Floorplan of a DVD Bang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 61
Inside a DVD Bang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 62
Floorplan of a PS Bang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 63
PS Bang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 64
Inside a PS Bang. Drawing by the author.

Figure 65
Studycafe in Seoul. Source: http://genie24.co.kr/default/online/02.php?com_board_basic=read_form&com_board_idx=49&top=4&sub=1&&com_board_search_code=&com_board_search_value1=&com_board_search_value2=&com_board_page=1&&com_board_id=22&&com_board_id=22_id=22

Figure 66
Floorplan of a Studycafe. Drawing by the author.

Figure 67
Studycafe in Sinchon, Seoul. Drawing by the author.

Figure 68
Inside a Studycafe. Drawing by the author.

Figure 69
Keunseng in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 70
High-rise Keunseng with Offices, Drawing School, Cafes, Shops, Parking and a Jimjilbing in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 71
Keunseng PC Bang, Billiard Bang, Soju Bang, Club and Restaurant in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 72
Keunsengs in Sinchon, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 73
Typical streetview of Keunsengs in Gangnam, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 74
Distribution of PC Bangs, DVD Bangs, Noraebangs and Jimjilbangs in Seoul. Source: Choe, S., Almazan, J. and Bennett, K. (2016) 'The extended home: Dividual space and liminal domesticity in Tokyo and Seoul', *URBAN DESIGN International*, 21(4), pp. 298–316. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/udi.2016.10>.

Figure 75
Distribution of Bangs around Hongik Station. Drawing by the author. Data was obtained from the search engine NAVER in April 2022.

Figure 76
Entrance to Coin Noraebang in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 77
Entrance of a Keunseng in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2021).

Figure 78
Derivation of the word public in Korean. Drawing by the author.

Figure 79
Bang layouts. Drawing by the author.

Figure 80
Scope of Bangs according to space and use. Drawing by the author.

Figure 71
Keunsengs in Hongdae, Seoul. Photograph by the author (2022).

Figure 82
Numbers of Noraebangs a Pc Bangs, 2018 -2022. Data sourced from Jeong, J.-H. (2022) 'Covid takes a toll on all types of indoor businesses', 6 February. Available at: <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2022/02/06/business/industry/small-businesses-Covid19/20220206070012900.html> (Accessed: 23 March 2023). and Jeong, J.-H. (2022) 'Pubs and Noraebang suffer post-Covid as Koreans' after-work activities evolve', 3 August. Available at: <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2022/08/03/business/industry/korea-leisure-pc-bang/20220803173135228.html> (Accessed: 23 March 2023).

Figure 83
Number of coffee shops in Seoul. Source: Park, K. and Jang, S. (Shawn) (2022) 'Do coffee chains have strategic superiority? An examination of the intra-regional and size strategies of coffee chains', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 105, p. 103254. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103254>.

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