

The multiple trajectories of coworking:
Reimagining space, work and architecture

by

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Abstract

Research into coworking has failed to take space seriously. I address this concern by analysing three ‘coworking spaces’ as meeting places constituted as a ‘bundle of trajectories’, following Doreen Massey’s (2005) reimagining of space. Understood as the product of lively interrelations and coexisting heterogeneity, I examine claims that these pay-to-access shared workplaces create the conditions for happenstance meetings between ‘like-minded entrepreneurs’. In doing so, I make connections with feminist and poststructural geographies concerned with relational performances, working bodies and diverse economic practices (Gregson and Rose, 2000; McDowell, 2009 and Gibson-Graham, 2006a; 2006b).

By researching through coworking, I make three interconnected arguments. Firstly, despite attempts to separate spaces of home and work, these boundaries are continuously negotiated and contested. Secondly, amidst claims that these architectural spaces are designed to feel like ‘fast-paced laboratories’ orchestrating chance encounters, I insist that embodied experiences can be far more ambiguous. Thirdly, I consider how the performative ontologies of diverse economies might fracture and infect the coherence of these apparently ‘entrepreneurial’ spaces. Together, this brings a new perspective to recent geographic scholarship on architectural inhabitations addressing concerns that there has been limited attention towards human subjectivities.

For Hattie

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Preface

This thesis is composed of all kinds of unexpected encounters. Together, these have been theoretical, empirical and personal, far exceeding the abstracting space of the abstract. As a project examining the multiple ways in which pay-to-access shared, collaborative workplaces – ‘coworking spaces’ – are designed and experienced, framing this research in relation to the recent ‘geographies of architecture’ has become increasingly difficult. As I have learnt more about the different experiences of those who were once ‘research participants’ – sharing concerns about our work projects and meeting friends and family – direct focus upon my three case studies has, at times, become far more ambiguous. Rather than attempt to mask these uncertainties, I have instead tried to write this thesis so as to emphasise (some of) the twists and turns of the research process.

This has led me to rethink how I understand space and spatiality (following Massey, 2005) making connections with different feminist and poststructural geographies concerned with subjectivities, working bodies and diverse economic practices (Gregson and Rose, 2000; Gibson-Graham, 2006a; 2006b; McDowell, 2009). As such, in this thesis I want to consider how the ‘things’ in question here, namely coworking spaces, might be better imagined less as ‘building events’ and more in terms of ‘meeting places’ constituted as a ‘bundle of trajectories’ following Doreen Massey’s theoretical-political re-imagining of space and place (Massey, 2005: 119). This is neither to abandon nor dismiss research surrounding the ‘geographies of architecture’, not least as my theoretical framing shares clear similarities and linkages whilst my methodological

approach remains attentive to the lively inhabitations and embodied experiences of architectural space. Rather, I frame my research in this way so as to provide the possibility of slightly looser associations and configurations of all kinds of spatial relations and ‘geometries’ or ‘modalities’ of power (Massey, 2005; Allen, 2003). In doing so, this helps address wider concerns that recent accounts of architectural inhabitations have had limited consideration of human subjectivities (Rose *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, I consider how my trajectories are entangled in (and exceed) this research process and, counter to my initial assumptions, the possibility that other economies are already here, even in places less likely (Gibson-Graham, 2008a).

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Introduction

The phenomenon of ‘co-working’, something that has exploded in the last decade, is evidence of a new attitude towards building use. Co-working can take several forms, but the most basic is the provision (for a fee) of a shared office facility (desks, conference rooms, coffee) for freelancers who want to get out their apartments and be sociable in an office setting... The hidden promise of co-working is of course serendipitous encounters with like-minded entrepreneurs. The amount of business-speak expounded on the virtues of co-working – and the conditions it creates for ‘creative collisions’ and ‘radical collaboration’ – has been voluminous.

(Saval, 2015: 305)

This thesis is concerned with the spaces, subjectivities and performative practices of coworking. Through examining three case study coworking spaces, I am interested in the multiple ways in which people are inhabiting and experiencing these particular workplaces. The above quotation hints towards the three interconnected aspects of coworking that I examine. These are that coworking spaces are understood as ‘new’ workplaces whereby people pay to ‘go out to work’ to perform in particular ways, that they are designed to create the conditions for happenstance meetings and that these workplaces therefore encourage and support ‘like-minded entrepreneurs’. In this research, I examine how such claims can rely upon highly problematic assumptions about space and subjectivity.

In recent years, there has been surge of interest in coworking as an apparently ‘new’ way to escape the loneliness of ‘home-working’ within popular literature (Jones *et al.*,

2009; Botsman and Rogers, 2010; DeGuzman and Tang, 2011; Davies and Tollervey, 2013; Jones, 2013; Schuermann, 2014), online news media (New York Times/Fost, 2008; Guardian/Snowdon, 2011; Guardian/Hamburgh, 2014) and web-based resources (Deskmag, 2014; Coworking wiki, nd). At the same time, coworking spaces have been gaining high-profile political support (Cameron, 2012; Umunna, 2012; Hancock, 2014). However, to date there has been very little academic attention that engages directly with these practices and spaces. It has been noted that currently ‘we lack the systematic and in-depth socioscientific analysis of coworking’ (Merkel, 2015: 135) and of those existing academic contributions, most accounts assume coworking as an inherently positive phenomenon receiving only minimal critical analysis (Gandini, 2015). Responding to these concerns, I will be examining the human subjectivities and experiences constituted in relation to the spaces and practices of coworking and how these heterogeneous associations are mediated through differing geometries of power. In doing so, I question notions of atomised entrepreneurial subjects putting on professional performances colliding into one another in fast-paced office workplaces. At the same time, I want to address the limitations of interpreting coworking as inevitably ‘neoliberal’. Central to my analysis is a move to address a broad failure within current research that leaves the spatial dimensions of coworking under-theorised whereby the spaces of coworking are often assumed to be either that of the architectural-container or of seemingly disembodied mobile workers ‘overcoming’ space.

1.1. Introducing the spaces and practices of coworking

At this stage, it is helpful to provide an initial definition as to what I mean by ‘coworking spaces’ and to situate my study in relation to existing research. Coworking spaces are broadly understood as shared, open-plan office-like workplaces that operate with a time-based pay-to-access membership model. They are said to offer flexible arrangements for individuals who benefit from serendipitous meetings between freelancers, entrepreneurs and remote workers who often do not belong to the same organisation or sector of work. Coworking is frequently cited as a loosely-defined ‘movement’ originating in San Francisco whereby independent and mobile workers can informally work together in a physical workplace (Coworking wiki, nd; Gandini, 2015). Brad Neuberg, attributed with founding such ‘movement’, suggests that it came about as a ‘solution’ to ‘traditional’ ways of working:

Traditionally, society forces us to choose between working at home for ourselves or working at an office for a company. If we work at a traditional 9 to 5 company job, we get community and structure, but lose freedom and the ability to control our own lives. If we work for ourselves at home, we gain independence but suffer loneliness and bad habits from not being surrounded by a work community.

(Neuberg, 2005: np)

The term ‘coworking’ is intended to refer to a particular shared working environment and therefore is distinguishable from the more general term of ‘co-workers’ who might be working together in an organisation or working in places such as coffee shops. As such, claims surrounding coworking tend to emphasise the importance of ‘co-location’ whereby ‘[k]nowledge workers are now untethered, able to perform tasks anywhere at any time’ (Johns and Gratton, 2013: 1).

It is worth noting here that there are various terms that tend to be used interchangeably for ‘coworking spaces’, for instance ‘co-working places’ and ‘work hubs’, often being conflated with business incubators, as well as sharing similarities with the rise of telecentres and serviced offices (Kojo and Nenonen, 2014). Recognising such ambiguity, what is said to distinguish coworking spaces from previous shared office workplaces (be they self-organised or otherwise) is the emphasis placed upon flexible contracts and the ‘values’ of the coworking ‘community’ (Merkel, 2015) composed of networked individuals ‘working alone together’ (Spinuzzi, 2012). I use the terms ‘coworking’ and ‘coworking spaces’ hereafter.

Recent academic research has posited coworking as a ‘new urban social practice’ that has rapidly expanded in response to the global financial crisis of 2007/2008 (Merkel, 2015: 122). It has been suggested that there are now more than 2,500 coworking spaces worldwide, particularly located in cities such as Berlin, Paris, London, Milan, New York and San Francisco (Moriset, 2014). Whilst the growth of coworking spaces tends to be treated as a ‘global spread’ with these self-identifying workplaces located in all continents, their prevalence is greatest across North America and Europe as well as Brazil (Moriset, 2014: 11). This apparent rise tends to bring together narratives of shifts towards entrepreneurialism and self-employment, claims of isolation among ‘home workers’ and the restructuring of urban spatial forms to prompt networked associations and chance encounters. By briefly discussing such claims, I shall outline how coworking spaces have been positioned as an apparent evolution of the (office) workplace (Saval, 2015), suggested to be understood as ‘serendipity accelerators,

designed to host creative people and entrepreneurs who endeavour to break isolation and to find a convivial environment that favours meetings and collaboration' (Moriset, 2014: 1).

Narratives of change and novelty, often linked to technological innovation, tend to be rooted in accounts of coworking. For instance, Lange (2011: 202) states that coworking spaces are emblematic of:

the collective-driven, networked approach of the open-source-idea translated into physical space. The creative sharing of space can be seen as an optimistic and self-governed reaction to the often precarious living and working conditions of today's creative workers, especially in transformative and crisis-driven times.

Such workplaces tend to adopt the spatial metaphor of being 'hubs' for rather dynamic and mobile professionalised networking to enable 'distributed, interorganizational, collaborative knowledge work' (Spinuzzi, 2012: 400). As such there are echoes of Richard Florida's (2002) 'creative classes' and Michael Porter's (1998) 'clusters' here, now with a distinctly entrepreneurial twist. This is reinforced by authors inspired by Jane Jacobs (1961), whereby it is claimed that it is face-to-face proximity that now matters more than ever for cities, growth and social mobility (Glaeser, 2011). It has even recently been suggested that there is an emergent 'coworking class' (Gandini, 2015: 202), although such a term is deployed much more critically than by the preceding authors.

While undertaking this research I have encountered frequent references, either implicitly or explicitly, to the online 'Coworking Manifesto' (Coworking Wiki, nd: np)

with appeals to notions of ‘collaboration, community, sustainability, openness, and accessibility’. This reinforces suggestions that coworkers are an apparently coherent group of people. For example, Lange (2011: 202) states:

They strive for independence in the way they make use of time, space and talent, yet long to be connected to other like-minded people – and not only on a virtual basis but in spaces of everyday physical encounter; they want to break out of the restricted and often solitary working conditions of office spaces or private homes and instead establish models that foster professional activities in a leisure-like atmosphere; they want maximum global flexibility including spending time in other creative cities (where similar co-working spaces exist) without being cut off from the local community sharing their mindset.

It is worth considering who ‘they’ are, here, as these apparently global professionals tend to be conceptualised as if they are bodiless and ungendered. A recent study in Milan (Colleoni and Arvidsson, 2014; cited in Gandini, 2015) suggested that coworkers are predominantly male ranging in age from 24-44, and are freelancers or self-employed. However, a prominent online coworking survey suggests that the number of female coworkers is proportionally increasing each year (Deskmag, 2014). Throughout popular and academic accounts, it is regularly stated that coworkers are eschewing ‘home-working’ so as to be sociable among ‘like-minded’ people:

Escaping the social isolation of the home office, being among likeminded people facing the same challenges and problems, gaining access to valuable knowledge and recognition, and enlarging one’s professional network are also strong motivations for freelancers to engage in coworking.

(Merkel, 2015: 135)

As such, there tends to be the assumption that coworkers go out to these workplaces to perform particular ‘versions’ of themselves in pre-existing spaces:

By using a coworking space, they establish a structured day at the office and draw a line that distinguishes their work from their private life, enabling them to balance the two.

(Merkel, 2015: 126)

This claim of drawing a line between ‘home’ and ‘work’ to enable (the coworkers’) ‘work-life balance’ is highly problematic as this thesis will discuss. Similarly, the owner of New Work City, a coworking space in New York, and co-author of one of the first publications on coworking insists that:

It isn't unusual for a single member to be working on a dozen different projects at a time. Ask people for a business card and they might have to rifle through a stack to find the appropriate ‘brand’ for the particular situation. One person might identify herself as a startup founder, a telecommuter, a contractor, a small business owner, and an artist... Welcome to the new normal of today's independent work model.

(Bacigalupo, 2013: 3)

This begins to hint towards the ways in which these workplaces are understood to be enrolled in particular professional branding, part of a ‘new normal’ of entrepreneurial work. Recent analysis of the evolving practices of virtual and physical networking among entrepreneurial actors is associating coworking with the production of new identities (Brydges, Ekinsmyth and Hracs, 2014). This includes, for instance, the emergence of ‘mumpreneurs’ (Ekinsmyth, 2011). Moreover, the branding of social entrepreneurs within networks such as The Hub involves the proliferation of a bland language of ‘change-making’, ‘impact’ and ‘making a difference’ (McRobbie, 2013). This has been interpreted to be part of a neoliberal regime of governmentality which furthers an ‘emerging economy of immaterial labour’ (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2013: 67). Indeed, the more critical accounts of coworking tend to evoke notions of

precariousness and ‘the social factory’ (following Gill and Pratt, 2008). As such, coworking has been linked to austerity politics and urban gentrification (Merkel, 2015, who cites Peck (2012) and Lees *et al.*, (2008) respectively) whereby coworking is situated in the context of a ‘neoliberal’ age. For instance, where Gandini (2015: 194) asks:

Do coworking practices and organisational arrangements effectively bear the potential to provide urban freelance knowledge workers with a physical space to reorganise their mobile and nomad worklife – who now regularly live at the borders of offline online practices of interaction and the production of work – and what are the eventual ramifications of these practices?

His response is much more apprehensive, suggesting that ‘the extent to which coworking spaces have become a catch basin for precarious workers remains in question’ (Gandini, 2015: 202).

It is therefore significant that in a government commissioned report *Unlocking the Sharing Economy* (Wosskow, 2014), coworking spaces have been connected to a rise of the so-called ‘sharing economy’. The recommendation for coworking spaces is that:

It should be possible for landlords to sub-let unused business space on a temporary basis without automatically giving tenants security of tenure. This will help to incentivise landlords to make better use of their property without tying it up indefinitely.

(Wosskow, 2014: 29)

The foreword from Conservative MP Matthew Hancock (2014: np) outlines such practices as ‘unlocking a new generation of microentrepreneurs’ citing the companies *AirBnB* and *PeoplePerHour*. Indeed, in 2012 UK Prime Minister David Cameron

launched his appeal for ‘Responsible Capitalism’ whilst standing in Hub Westminster, which would later become one of the case studies within this thesis. Reflecting upon this visit, he reiterated these claims:

Its core message is simple: there is a business in everyone. So what is the business in you? We need many more people to see themselves as entrepreneurs. To understand that each success story starts with a first step...what we need is additional space for them, sometimes space at the end of the day or even overnight. What we need is the British equivalent of the Silicon Valley garage - spaces that are cheap, flexible and available right now... That office that has lain dormant for years; the shop that’s been boarded up; the rooms no one ever uses’, we need to open up these spaces.

(Cameron, 2012: np).

His appeal is for more people to feel like ‘entrepreneurs’, apparently to be like Steve Jobs. To do so, they need flexible workplaces that will help guide them in the ‘right’ direction:

We’ve been throwing open the doors of government and letting the entrepreneurs in... sharing the water coolers, the lifts, the corridors. Some of these places are already opening up around the country - in fact I gave a speech in one of them last week. It’s called Hub Westminster. It’s at the top of the building that homes - that houses New Zealand House and you can rent an evening desk space there for just £40 a month.¹ Then if you decide to take the plunge, maybe quit your job, start your own thing, you can start renting a fulltime desk space and hire more as your business grows. So this is a brilliant idea and we want to help expand it.

(Cameron, 2012: np)

Such ‘water cooler’ moments have led to claims of the rise of coworking spaces as a ‘serendipity machine’ to be understood as a ‘disruptive business model for society 3.0’

¹ It is in fact at the bottom of the building. Far from the make-shift garage, this is a Grade II listed building whereby access to the top of the building, as later discussed in chapter 6, is controlled by security staff and swipe-card access. More regular access far exceeds £40.

(Olma, 2012), of increasingly blurred boundaries such that the ‘space/time frontiers between private and professional life become fuzzy’ (Moriset, 2014: 17-8). These encounters are further fostered by coworking ‘hosts’ who are said to help ‘curate’ these working environments by enabling interactions between coworkers (Merkel, 2015). It is suggested that at times, coworking spaces ‘appear to be more about people and connectivity than the physical spaces themselves’ (Kojo and Nenonen, 2014: 9). Amidst all these blurry boundaries, collisions and chance encounters of entrepreneurs performing different versions of themselves, these people tend to be understood as solid and bounded individuals.

So, by steering between these emergent studies of coworking, I analyse what strikes me as key gaps or assumptions that need to be addressed. The relations between spaces of ‘home’ and ‘work’ are under-examined, treated as distinct, static spaces that people move between. As such, this conceals different relations of power amidst claims that coworking mitigates isolation by getting out of the house and putting on a professional face. Chance encounters are central to coworking with the insistence that these workplaces are prompting ‘creative collisions’ (Saval: 2015: 305) or more prosaically ‘water cooler’ moments (Cameron, 2012: np), yet thus far we have little extensive empirical analysis that engages with the different inhabitations of these architectural spaces. Indeed, these chance encounters are assumed to be inherently positive either for some kind of ‘knowledge exchange’ or mutual support. With a few exceptions (for instance, McRobbie, 2013), these apparently ‘like-minded entrepreneurs’ tend to be understood as remarkably ungendered, disembodied and rather nomadic whilst assumed to share similar ‘values’ to each other. Moreover, these ‘entrepreneurial’ activities tend

to take the economy as a given, either that coworking is the benefit of an increasingly flexible economy or, conversely, that this is an extension of post-crisis neoliberalism. Furthermore, researchers often indicate being drawn into coworking somewhat accidentally. Pulling together these key issues, I turn to outline the focus of this research.

1.2. Research focus

The broad aim of this thesis is to understand the spaces, subjectivities and performative practices of coworking. I explore the different experiences and inhabitations of three shared, collaborative workspaces said to be designed for chance encounters between ‘like-minded entrepreneurs’. These coworking spaces are: the Moseley Exchange, Birmingham; Hub Westminster, London; and FunkBunk, Wing, Bedfordshire. In doing so, I focus upon three interconnected aims:

Firstly, this thesis addresses the current lack of empirical research concerned with the practices and spaces of coworking. Through drawing together research across my three case studies, I discuss how the spatialities of coworking extend well beyond the presumed boundaries of the coworking spaces. I examine the ways in which these workplaces are designed to be inhabited in specific ways, outlining how these designed intentions don’t always go to plan, even among the architects who established and continue to inhabit one of these workplaces. I will address the ways in which people are struggling with self-employment and ‘becoming entrepreneurial’ but also considering the small-scale changes that coworkers are undertaking in their lives in order to foster ethical sensibilities and interdependence rather than individualism.

Secondly, this research draws upon different feminist geographies concerned with relational performances, subjectivities, working bodies and diverse economic practices (Massey, 2005; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Gibson-Graham, 2006a; 2006b; McDowell, 2009) in order to analyse the different ways in which these workplaces are constructed, experienced and negotiated. I do so to expand upon recent research into the ‘geographies of architecture’ concerned with the lively ways in which buildings are animated and inhabited (Lees, 2001; Jacobs, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010; Lees and Baxter, 2011). By focusing upon the spaces and performative practices of coworking, this shifts theoretical attention beyond the lived experiences of buildings without losing touch.

Thirdly, these empirical and theoretical contributions are not distinct. Throughout I address how the trajectories of my academic performances have co-constituted this work. As such, I examine how ‘my’ research can be understood as embodied and performed through the practices and spaces of coworking exceeding the assumed boundaries of both the thesis and the coworking spaces.

1.3. Thesis structure

As I have already suggested in this preface, the theoretical framing of this research has unfolded according to interactions with coworkers as much as academic texts. In chapter two, **Spatial imaginations, working bodies and architectural performances**, I outline the ways in which I am bringing these ideas and literatures together to help advance analysis of coworking. This includes discussion of how ‘thinking space

relationally’, drawing principally upon Doreen Massey’s (2005) lively conceptualisation of space, helps understand places as the meeting of all kinds of social and material relations. As the chapter proceeds, I consider the ways in which different bodies, power and practices constitute particular workplaces before turning to situate this in relation to the recent ‘geographies of architecture’, the formative literatures of this research.

This leads on to chapter 3, **Negotiating uncertain methodologies**, which discusses how the trajectories of my research have exceeded the anticipated boundaries of both my case study buildings and the PhD process more broadly. By considering the different spatialities of my own academic performances, this chapter discusses how this research has been shaped by chance encounters, produced initially through interactions with architects, and more extensively, through coworking. It is therefore an attempt to situate my own ‘work’ and friendships with fellow coworkers. Having outlined certain trajectories of my research, chapter 4 includes my **Case studies overview**. I do so to briefly summarise the three different coworking spaces which have been the focus for my research. This will highlight immediate distinctions between the three workspaces in terms of their size, ownership, location and branding.

In chapter 5, **‘Going out to work’: Relational performances, professionalism and multiplicity**, I analyse how coworking spaces are constituted in relational ways such that these places of work cannot be treated as bounded containers. This chapter discusses instances whereby these spaces become entangled in attempts to reinforce particular narratives of ‘going out to work’, to appear as ‘professional’ but also in

attempt to counter the permeability of their ‘work’ into spaces of ‘home’. Although coworkers frequently deployed dramatological metaphors to evoke notions of performing particular versions of themselves ‘at work’, I consider how these performances are far less stable, saturated with power relations amidst claims of being able to ‘overcome’ space. In spite of attempts to limit these workplaces, I discuss how they remain open to chance encounters, be that moments of care or conflict.

Chapter 6, **Orchestrating experiences, architectural performances and ambiguity**, takes forward the understanding of coworking spaces as lively meeting places by considering how they are constituted through an entanglement of social and material practices. With all three workspaces being imagined in different ways, this chapter draws upon the recent geographic research into ‘building events’ to discuss how the workspaces are said to be orchestrating particular bodily interactions (Jacobs, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010). I pay particular attention here to Hub Westminster as it is the most ostensibly ‘designed’ workplace. Importantly, it continues to be inhabited by the (former) architectural practice that set it up. I examine the ambiguous experiences of the workplace said to be engineered for circulation so as to feel like a ‘fast-paced laboratory’ as well as particular claims about nudging or designing suggestive behaviours into the work environment. Drawing upon my own experiences as well as encounters with different coworkers (including the architects) I discuss how both geographies of affect and the nudging of libertarian paternalism have problematic understandings of bodies and human subjectivities. With the architects themselves acknowledging that there is a danger of over-emphasising the capacity for

architecture to influence interactions, I conclude by considering how workplace ‘hosts’ and managers influence the daily experiences of coworking.

It is in chapter 7, **Becoming entrepreneurial and other possibilities**, that I turn to discuss more closely the work projects of coworkers. Building upon analysis from the preceding chapters, I first examine how coworking spaces might be understood in terms of neoliberal governmentality, with the ‘normalising’ of entrepreneurial subjects. This connects with the architects’ claims that they are creating new time-limited institutions. However, through questioning my own pre-conceived understandings of capitalism that re-inforce hegemonic discourses, I rethink working practices by queering economic space through the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham and the Community Economies Collective. By inventorying some of the diverse economic practices such as self-employment, time-banking, attempts to work less and the renegotiating of care responsibilities, I discuss how this might help fracture and infect the apparent coherence of these apparently ‘entrepreneurial’ spaces.

In my **Conclusions** chapter, I summarise the main empirical findings of this research, connecting this to the theoretical contributions that I have made in this thesis. In doing so, I emphasise that future research into coworking must take space seriously as it so often is left untheorised or taken as a given. Theoretically, I discuss how this brings together a new perspective to recent scholarship on the geographies of architecture through bringing together feminist and poststructural geographies that intersect space, work and architecture. In doing so, this thesis responds to concerns that the geographies of architecture risk becoming the different ‘geographies of buildings’ (Jacobs and

Merriman, 2011: 219) by rethinking my case studies as meeting places composed ‘as a bundle of trajectories’ so as to emphasise the different kinds of relations that constitute the experience of these workplaces (Massey, 2005: 119). I shall discuss my methodological contributions in undertaking research *through* coworking, to restate the importance of talking *whilst* working and to emphasise how this research has been constituted through negotiating uncertainty, often challenging my own assumptions.

I now turn to a review of relevant literatures to help refine my research focus in order to address the gaps in existing research.

Spatial imaginations, working bodies and architectural performances

“What if I lose my job in 6 months? What if I don't get that next funding grant? What if that person I like doesn't fancy me?” These are peoples' concerns here... We've got to question the idea that architecture is just about making buildings.

(Research notes from conversation with architect, male, 30-35; Hub Westminster)

It is helpful to begin this literature review with the above notes to recognise how the direction of my research has been shaped, at least partially, by this particular encounter waiting for the kettle in Hub Westminster. Being told by an architect that there might be 'bigger' issues that they could be concerned with than necessarily making buildings is an intriguing, if troubling, proposition; troubling, that is, when you've just said that your research is in one-way-or-another about buildings! Yet it is precisely through addressing Jacobs and Merriman's (2011: 218-219) concern that geographers interested in architecture must engage more closely with architects (among other practitioners), that directly responds to their second concern that future geographic research about 'big things' risks becoming different 'geographies of buildings' (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011: 219).

The worries that the architect hints towards above – as part of the architectural practice that established the coworking space in which we were standing – are not, at least for me, calling for a shift in focus towards the more abstract; I do not set out an impossible

call for a focus upon ‘bigger things’. Instead, I wish to be attentive to how differing human subjectivities and experiences are constituted in relation to the spaces and practices of coworking and how these associations become entangled with these particular workplaces. As mentioned in the preface to this thesis, as my research has developed my focus upon the specifically *architectural* dimension of these places has, at times, become far more ambiguous.

Therefore, in this chapter I want to refine and develop the gaps and problems identified within the existing research into coworking by engaging with relevant debates in and beyond geography. This is broadly organised by connecting themes of space, work and architecture. I first outline how I imagine space as relational, practised and constituted through a multiplicity of trajectories (Massey, 2005). I argue that when places are conceptualised as bounded or static, whether that be buildings, bodies or continents, this conceals all kinds of powerful spatial relations. I turn to conceptualise power more fully in relation to bodies, performances and practices. From here I focus upon working practices – including those of the self-employed – ‘through the eyes of labour’ (Herod, 1997) or rather, the working bodies of different people (McDowell, 2009) to consider the ways in which working bodies are more than labour-power. This will emphasise how workplace relations, be that a factory, an office or a household, are constituted through more than solely capitalist relations. Having pulled together these elements, I turn to focus upon geographic research into architecture. Shifting from reading buildings as objects towards performances as ‘big things’ and ‘building events’ (Jacobs, 2006), I outline how we might focus upon practising architectures beyond buildings so as to avoid exaggerating the influence of architectural design to influence how people

experience different workplaces. In doing so, I conclude by outlining the research questions for this thesis.

2.1. Spatial imaginations

I can be one metre away from someone in the next telephone booth and nevertheless be more closely connected to my mother 6000 miles away.

(Latour, 1996: 371)

It's a small world but not if you have to clean it.

(Kruger, 1990: 'untitled')

The ways in which we imagine, embody and talk about space affect how we attempt to articulate our sense of the world. Consider the stories that are told by particular people who evoke powerful – and often very static – spatial metaphors when talking about those ‘at the margins of society’, ‘taking back control of our borders’, ‘coming out of the closet’ or being ‘at the heart of a renewed globalisation’. At the same time, consider how many different stories are denied or concealed by these apparently definitive and authoritative conceptualisations of space (*our* borders, *the* centre, *inside/outside*). Not only do social relations constitute space, geographers – but not geographers alone – have long been keen to emphasise how space constitutes social relations (Soja, 1989). Such spaces, such geographies, may be real as well as imagined. What if, for instance, ‘choosing the margin is a space of radical openness’; as a space for refusal and resistance (bell hooks, 1989)? Certainly, in recent years geographers have sought to destabilise pre-conceived spatial imaginaries of the centre and the margins. This is not,

however, to suggest that we can now somehow *overcome* space. As I will discuss, it is precisely such lively intersections of spatiality and sociality that I am concerned with in this research about the practices and spaces of coworking. To adapt the claim made by Doreen Massey and John Allen (1984): Geography (still) matters!

Yet despite the notions of ‘space’ and ‘place’ being commonplace for geographers, the ways in we understand these concepts are often asserted rather than discussed and their implications not always fully considered (Lefebvre, 1991; Smith and Katz, 1993; Massey, 1994a; Simonsen, 2004). As both quotes at the beginning of this chapter suggest, this is not just a concern for geographers alone. Indeed, I do not use artist Barbara Kruger’s perfectly succinct statement to contradict philosopher Bruno Latour’s claim. After all, he too would no doubt contest universalising claims that rest on a global/local dichotomy (Latour, 2005). Rather I want to be attentive to the particular urgency towards differing human experiences in the latter statement that hints towards more complicated and ambiguous associations of space, power and human subjectivities. Therefore, this opening section is used to discuss how my understanding of space and place informs this thesis.



Fig. 2.1 – It's a small world but not if you have to clean it. Barbara Kruger's (untitled) on the side of the Hilton Times Square Hotel, New York (photo credit: Wired New York, 2015)

2.1.1. Thinking space relationally

It has been suggested that ‘thinking space relationally’ is becoming something of a mantra or rallying call for early twenty-first century geographers (Massey, 1994b; M. Jones, 2009). Yet as Ash Amin (2007) – a key thinker in developing such work – notes, such ontological notion defies easy clarification. I would suggest that, broadly speaking, thinking space relationally is to contest assumptions that space is a discrete ‘container’ whereby heterogeneous processes happen. Rather space is continuously constructed through those heterogeneous relations (Murdoch, 2006; M. Jones, 2009). Space is not a given, nor fixed; neither a body nor a continent can be simply understood as pre-existing. Thinking space relationally, then, is to be concerned with material practices and modalities of power relations, understanding how these relations are differently constructed and negotiated spatially.

These approaches are by no means singular or cohesive, particularly given their prevalence and development over the last few decades. For many, new vocabularies help articulate a dynamic spatiality of folds, flows, networks, assemblages and performances (as just a few examples), rather than that of bounded, hierarchical spaces of maps, blocks and foundations. This can be quite destabilising for inherited ‘Western’ and masculinist claims to geographic knowledge and it certainly troubles notions of an underlying objective truth and certainty. To some extent it has been suggested that such work has gained such currency and ‘unreflexive churning’ because of these new conceptual vocabularies and spatial turns rather than new analytical insights that they may provide (Jessop *et al.*, 2008: 389; see also Malpas, 2012). Given such criticisms, I

feel it is important to outline carefully how I interpret space, place and relationality as this affects how I research and analyse the case studies within this thesis.

It is important to state early on that by focusing upon coworking spaces as particular places of work, I absolutely do not imply that the different social relations that constitute space are somehow only negotiated and contested in the ‘workplace’. Neither does it mean that these social relations are just about class and labour. Linda McDowell (2009: 220-1) helpfully outlines this point:

Neither the local labour market itself, usually seen as coincident with a town or city, nor a particular workplace – whether a factory, a shopping mall or a house in a suburb – is conceptualized as a self-contained space, as a discrete entity, with an existence prior to the social relations between embodied workers and their clients. Thus, the place (at whatever spatial scale) is constituted through and by interconnections, just as previous sets of social relations affect the ways in which practices and places are defined and work out in a particular time-period. Place is not a box or a container, but rather a set of social relations.

If I am to engage with the inhabitations of coworking spaces, this cannot be restricted to seeing what happens within the walls of a building at a particular moment in time. This extends well-established calls to analyse the gender relations and interconnections of spaces of ‘home’, ‘community’ and ‘workplace’ (Bowlby, Foord and McDowell, 1986). Feminist geographers have long argued that there are no neat separations between the economic and social, public and private, production and reproduction and home and work (Hanson and Pratt, 1995).

That is not to say that boundaries and categories are not necessarily being produced and maintained. I do not follow Nigel Thrift’s (2006: 140) provocation that ‘there is no such

thing as a boundary'. Whilst geographers and others have long troubled boundedness, for instance, insisting that they are fleshy, fluid and leaky bodies (Longhurst, 2001), denying ongoing, if momentary, categorization and exclusion strikes me as equally as problematic. Rather I seek to question the ways in which different boundaries are being constructed and contested. With an emphasis on heterogeneous processes constituting such spaces, care must be taken to avoid denying the existence of 'things' altogether (Featherstone *et al.*, 2013). As I shall later discuss, whilst encounters with the workplaces in my research are continuously changing, many of the social relations that constitute such spaces are stubbornly maintained. Having introduced an initial sense of 'thinking space relationally', it is helpful to consider more precisely contributions made by Doreen Massey (1994a; 1995; 2005) in thinking about space as this provides a theoretical thread that ties through with other geographic work to help me research the practices and spaces of coworking.

2.1.2. Three ruminations on space

Doreen Massey's long-standing commitment to developing alternative theoretical-political understandings of space and place remain highly valuable and important today. I have already insisted how significant spatial imaginations are in our everyday lives intertwining the more intimate to the more global, but here I wish to consider this assertion more precisely. It would be counter-intuitive to provide a linear narrative of Doreen Massey's influence upon geography. Not only do these contributions escape easy categorisation across the discipline, but much of this work has been produced collectively, within and outwith academic worlds (for instance, Massey and McDowell, 1984; Allen, *et al.*, 1998; Massey *et al.*, 1999; Hall *et al.*; 2013). There is also the risk

of singling out an individual academic, which seems unhelpful to both the wider debates that these ideas are part of, but also to the – at least in theory – collective contributions of geographic work more broadly. Nonetheless, there are whole books dedicated to how her ideas concerning spatial politics have informed those within and beyond geography (Featherstone and Painter, 2013). Whilst undoubtedly connected, it is perhaps more helpful to discuss *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984) in the broader context of the emergence of labour geographies later. The focus here is about reconceptualising space and place.

It is in *For Space* (2005) where Massey most fully articulates her thinking about space.

Here three ruminations are offered:

First, that we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny... *Second*, that we understand space as the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories co-exist... *Third*, that we recognise space as always under construction... It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far.

(Massey, 2005: 9)

It is helpful to unravel these ideas, providing a few examples in doing so, as I feel that initially these are quite demanding ideas to grapple with. As has already been hinted above, the first rumination about space as a product of interrelations is now well-established within much Anglophonic geographic research. This is a move away from a ‘Russian-doll’ interpretation of spaces of hierarchical scales. Despite the prevalence of the concepts of space and place among geographers, they have tended to be problematically held in opposition, albeit, in myriad ways. Space has often been

considered as abstract, empty and global, whilst place following humanist and phenomenological understandings that of the lived, concrete, and local (Tuan, 1974; Relph, 1976). Often deriving from Heideggerian modes of dwelling, place is often posited as rooted in history and is at risk of evoking essentialising notions of boundedness, stasis and coherence (Massey, 2005; Dovey, 2010). Consider, for instance, ‘blood-and-soil’ claims over *an* ‘indigenous’ identity in Far Right politics, or conversely, how claims to a neighbourhood might also be made by ‘local’ residents seeking to defend against being priced out of an inner city neighbourhood. As such, there are no inherent political associations to ‘place’.

At the same time, that is not to say that space annihilates place implying that there are no specificities of place. Instead, place might be thought of as a ‘constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus’ (Massey, 1994a: 154). Massey uses a walk down Kilburn High Street in London to imagine a ‘global sense of place’ that interconnects, but does not equate, local with global. This place is extraverted yet particular. It does not have a coherent, essential identity, nor does it dissolve away into the general. Rather it is provisional, produced through an on-going negotiation of co-existing heterogeneous relationships, practices and processes that in Massey’s terms are made special through the juxtaposition of trajectories ‘here-and-now’ and therefore all number of ‘thens and theres’ (Massey, 2005: 140). She evokes the notion of the ‘throwntogetherness’ of this meeting place (Massey, 2005: 141). This negotiation entangles human and non-human trajectories which in her Kilburn example includes interactions between her neighbours talking about the Irish Free State, a discontented Muslim newsagent selling *The Sun* featuring a story on events in the Gulf

and a series of colourful saris on display in a shop window. This place at that particular moment had been constituted through all manner of previous interrelations, those yet-to-be as well as those never made. This interpretation is outward looking without disregarding the significance of more intimate relations. Indeed, it has been twenty years since this walk. Many of those neighbours will have moved elsewhere, new shops come and gone and headlines changed.

Mark McGuinness (2000: 228) asks whether this experiencing of place ‘could easily be seen as a very particular white Western construction of a world of difference’. His concern is that visibly marked notions of ‘difference’ and hybridity are conflated with ‘blackness’ against an unproblematized ‘whiteness’. I think this is an important, if perhaps unfair interjection as Massey’s work has long sought to emphasis space as the dimension of multiplicity, which absolutely questions differing geometries of power shaping identities. As Geraldine Pratt (2009: 730) suggests:

Places are conceived as open-ended sites of social contestation, and spatial politics involve attending to the moments of closure whereby the identities of places are stabilized and particular social groups claim a natural right to that space or are entrapped within them.

Massey is certainly not seeking a claim to a ‘natural right’ to space/place. Nonetheless, McGuinness’ point insists that fleshy, material bodily differences co-constitute space and place. I shall return to this later.

This begins to lead towards the second rumination, that of space as the sphere of multiplicity. Earlier I mentioned how Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney,

claims that the UK is ‘at the heart of a renewed globalisation’. Massey has long been cautious of the notion of ‘globalisation’ for the frequent failure to recognise, consciously or otherwise, the dimension of multiplicity imbued with power. It is noticeable that Carney (2013: 9; 10; 2, respectively) locates London (a telling slippage from the UK), as the ‘place at the heart of the global financial system’ leading the way to ‘renew globalisation to the benefit of all’, whilst exclaiming that more than 125 years ago, London was ‘the world’s preeminent financial centre’. In terms of a narrative of (neoliberal) globalisation, a concern is that ‘developing’ or ‘emerging’ countries are behind ‘us’ ‘developed’ countries, but that *in time* ‘they’ will be more like ‘us’. There is the concern that this narrative risks asserting change as a linear queue which fails to recognise the political relations that produce inequalities in the current moment.² Carney wants to firmly keep London as the safe ‘home’ and ‘centre’ of global financial capital, undermining the claim of equilibrium and benefits for all whether that be elsewhere in the UK or in the world. The newness of this *renewed* globalisation is treated as a moment in time, failing to engage with how social relations are laden with spatial ‘geometries of power’ and simultaneously the many different histories and futures that coexist (Massey, 2005). This is why the claim that ‘[w]ithout space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space’ is made (Massey, 2005: 9). This ‘sphere of

² A previous interpretation of these ideas has been discussed elsewhere in Lorne (2014) as part of a Philosophy module within a *Postgraduate Certificate for Advanced Research Methods*. It is notable that the most fruitful engagements during this time were with an International Development scholar who found re-thinking the spatial limitations of ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries highly productive. She contacted me later saying: ‘how our understanding of space affects almost everything but very relevant to my work is how to translate to the ‘gap’ between the developed and developing worlds and other issues that spiral from there’. The pluralisation of worlds, the evoking of the idea of a ‘gap’ and the spiralling metaphor strike me as apt.

possibility' is the recognition of simultaneous plurality, that is, there is never a fixed singular space. This is a direct politically charged confrontation to 'there is no alternative'. Space is always open to change due to the continual criss-crossing of different trajectories, of different stories simultaneously intersecting. It could be argued that although discussion of globalisation has become more nuanced than those accounts Massey was arguing against, responsibility for such relations remain less so.

The third rumination is therefore an understanding of space that refutes the assertion that time is understood in terms of change, dynamism and movement, whereas space is its opposite, that which lacks such properties so that it is fixed plane or surface. Instead, Massey (1992) suggests for us to think in terms of 'space-time', which is not to say that temporality and spatially are the same, but that they are inseparable in that time cannot be thought of as spaceless, just as space cannot be understood as timeless. As such, with space always under construction, there is always an aspect of chaos, of chance encounters and happenstance juxtapositions yet-to-be-made. This is why she evokes notions of openness and indeterminacy in thinking spatially, differing from the static forms that were introduced at the top of the section. Drawing upon the Althusserian notion that 'there is no point of departure' (Featherstone and Painter, 2013: 1), this stresses that space is not distance between static places, it doesn't exist prior to the construction of identities or entities; rather 'things' whether regions, identities, or streets are constituted through the *negotiation* of processual associations. Massey (2005: 13) makes the call to shift associations of 'stasis; closure; representation' towards 'heterogeneity; relationality; coevalness' insistent that the condition of spatiality is conceived as lively, not 'the dead, the fixed' (as claimed by Michel Foucault (1980:

70)). Imagining space as ‘stories-so-far’ is to contest assumptions that there is an inevitable, determined future from a previous given point. Rather this understanding treats space as open and therefore as the dimension of the political.

2.1.3. Openness and closure of different time-spaces

Caution has been raised towards the potentially limiting vocabularies of open and closed interrelations (Rose, 2007) perhaps echoing concerns about the limits to progressive/regressive dichotomies (Castree, 2004). For example, Noel Castree (2004), uses indigenous land rights to discuss how a Left politics of place that may both be constitutive of inter-place solidarity *and* geographic separation. Given that he suggests that this is dependent upon particular contexts I wish to turn to two particular ‘time-spaces’ that relate to my research in order to consider how I read these particular concerns.

This can be done through the contrasting of two ‘time-spaces’, a science park laboratory and a rural home located around Cambridge, UK (Massey, 2005; Allen *et al.*, 1998; Henry and Massey, 1995). Initially, the science parks might appear to be the epitome of openness in that the high-technology workplaces, the conference calls around the world and the global mobility of the almost exclusively male scientists. These are clean, shiny spaces of the ‘new economy’ pushing forward a globalising world. This would appear to be in clear contrast to the ‘local’ home as idealised enclosed spaces of the rural middle-class ‘countryside’ where they would ‘return’ to meet their partners (in this instance exclusively female) and their children. This would appear to constitute a strongly gendered spatial division, simultaneously separating the ‘global’ laboratory

from the local home. Treating these spaces as distinct denies recognition of all number of social relations that constitute this apparently 'open' workplace.

Crucially however, upon re-thinking the terms of this openness this interpretation begins to alter and appear less coherent, not least when challenging a narrative that privileges *their* (the male scientists) experiences. As Massey (1995; 2005) discusses, these workplaces are facilitating and legitimising the performance of single-minded activities, with such masculine spaces being very tightly-controlled for the production of 'rational' thought. They are separated from the production processes, no crèches exist, children and signs of wider social life are seemingly excluded. These laboratories increasingly appear to exemplify closure, with them in fact being very restricted spaces. Yet the spaces of 'home', whilst not without the construction of particular boundaries, are spaces much more permeable to all kinds of material practices and activities. There is invasion of 'work' into the home, with material objects scattered about, alongside the creation of 'home offices'. This is not just the case of reversing the open/closed binary. To say these time-spaces are open is not to judge 'openness' as inherently politically progressive. Rather, important questions are raised towards how boundaries are constructed and how different relations are negotiated:

The real socio-political question concerns less, perhaps, the degree of openness/closure (and the consequent questions of how on earth one might even begin to measure it), than the terms on which that openness/closure is established. Against what are boundaries erected? What are the relations within which the attempt to deny (and admit) entry is carried out? What are the power-geometries here; and do they demand a political response?

(Massey, 2005: 179)

As I shall discuss in later chapters, this begins to rethink the suggestion that coworking spaces draw a line around ‘work’ and ‘private life’ (Merkel, 2015). Perhaps, though, this language of openness and closure can be limiting as one of my coworking space case studies uses ‘open’ as an organising concept and therefore such claims will be examined.

This conceptualisation of ‘place’ as open and the ‘privileging of routes rather than roots’ (Dovey, 2010: 5) is comparable, I think, to Deleuzian understandings of rhizomes and the lively spatial notion of assemblages that have been prevalent among geographers (McFarlane, 2009; Dovey, 2011; Anderson and McFarlane, 2011; Brenner *et al.*, 2011). Both interpretations exert positive, emergent constructions of space, rather than being treated in terms of deficiency. I am cautious of notions of ‘smooth space’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) or for that matter ‘spaces of flows’ (Castells, 2010) as these risk slipping into claims that boundaries don’t exist. I don’t want to hint towards frictionless smooth spatial interrelations. Admittedly, too, I feel more comfortable with the conceptualisation and vocabulary of space and place. This outward-looking construction of place is easier to debate with those coworking and it is often where these understandings of space and place differed that several key arguments arose.

Together, the above sections have introduced how I might begin to research coworking spaces that are constituted through the meeting of all kinds of spatial interrelations. In the following section, I want to think more carefully about how I might understand power as *embodied* and imbued differently within specific spatial and temporal

performances. That is, I want to examine how our bodily practices and performances are entangled within our differing experiences of space.

2.1.4. Power, bodies and performativity

Although it is widely accepted among geographers that power and space are closely intertwined, this requires careful consideration of how power might be understood. A useful starting point for me is to identify that power is not wholly negative and it is not simply a ‘thing’ that can be *wielded* in itself. Concurrently, power can also be productive and enabling (Allen, 2003). This is a significant manoeuvre as it differs considerably from other accounts of power. For instance, Richard Peet (2007: 1; my emphasis) suggests, most simply that ‘[p]ower means control, by a person or an institution, over the minds, livelihoods and beliefs of others’. Here, power is held *over* others and that emphasis is control over their *minds* is important. I wish to consider how ‘power is produced *in and through* social interaction’ (Allen, 2003: 40; original emphasis). Attentive to how power is dispersed throughout society, I am concerned with multiple modalities of power whereby the emphasis is upon the variously differentiating relations for which power is imbued throughout everyday life (Allen, 2003). This is not just ‘power over’, those more instrumental controlling relations, but also associational power with others, or power *to*, as enabling. Circulating power, Allen insists, is not doing the same thing everywhere, at the same time.

It would be remiss to neglect the contributions of Michel Foucault to such understandings of power, which, like feminist geographies, place much significance of the construction and disciplining of bodies in relation to power. Diffuse power can be

considered to be *exercised*, as techniques, knowledge, actions, discourses and so forth. Rather than power being centred, Foucault was concerned with networked, heterogeneous and dispersed relations of power from bottom-up through the ‘capillaries’ of modern life (Jessop, 2007). For Foucault, particular subjects are produced through particular sites of spatial power whereby bodies are controlled through ‘regimes of power’. With power animating all social practices, power may be most effective when it is not visible and therefore calls for attention to nuanced understandings of how seemingly every-day language and practices constitute particular subjectivities. As such discourses are ‘practices which form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972: 49). These discursive practices regulate our knowledge of the world and therefore power and knowledge are intimately related in often invisible and obscuring ways that serve the purpose of constructing subjectivity and social control (Burr, 2003).

We might consider subject formation in relation to construction of the body in terms of performance, perhaps most notably the work of queer theorist Judith Butler (1990; 1993), influenced by Foucault’s treatment of the body/subject as unstable. The notion of performance has long traditions in social theory. Erving Goffman (1956; 1967) uses dramaturgical metaphors to understand interactions, evoking notions of stage, zoning, masquerade and front and back regions (Gregson and Rose, 2000). Amidst such spatial terms, such understanding assumes a prior, conscious subject performing a script. Judith Butler’s notion of *performativity* is a strong counter to that of a knowing self. Central to this work has been to destabilise ideas of sex, gender and sexuality from patriarchal and biological binary oppositions of male/female. Rather than performing a script, it is the

repeated citational acts and gestures that Butler insists continuously constitute gendered subjects (Latham, 2003; Nash and Jacobs, 2003). This is distinctly anti-essentialist, there is no 'natural' male or female 'essence', rather it is through the *doing* of gender that these apparent gender binaries are sustained such that gender can be understood as a performative effect rather than a causal performance. In this way, disciplined subjects are neither stable nor coherent, rather they are provisional as the boundaries of these apparently heteronormative discourses are reproduced and subverted (Gregson and Rose, 2000; Latham, 2003).

Butler's anti-essentialist performativity has not been without disagreement, for example, with regards to questions of power and resistance. For instance, Nussbaum (1999: np) is strongly critical of Butler's call for women not to fight for political action through changing laws and material politics, but to make 'subversive gestures at power through speech and gesture'. Butler (1993) has disputed interpretations of agency within performativity that imply gender is something you can choose by putting on at the beginning of each day. Despite Butler's focus upon temporality, rather than spatiality, notions of performance have been adopted by geographers to destabilise notions of femininity, masculinity and sexuality (for instance, Bell and Valentine, 1995). Indeed, a focus on performance has been evoked in research into workplaces (Crang, 1994; McDowell, 1997). However, where Butler rejects the conceptualisation of knowing subjects, these early accounts imply Goffman's 'virtuoso, theatrical, anterior agents at one remove from power's social script' (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 441). Gregson and Rose (2000) suggest that instead subject positions are multiple and far less certain and stable. Moving beyond Butler's focus upon gender, Gregson and

Rose (2000) consider how we might understand space as performative and relational, so that rather than locating the bank (McDowell, 1997) or the restaurant (Crang, 1994) as pre-existing, we instead can examine the specific and multiple performances saturated with power that bring such spaces into being. In this way, performed spaces 'are not discreet, bounded stages, but threatened, contaminated, stained, enriched by other spaces' (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 442). Here we again see a helpful challenge to the problematic notion of drawing a line between 'home' and 'work' of the coworking space and the effect of centring such workplaces as 'hubs' (Merkel, 2015). These are, then, similar concerns as those raised by Massey (2005) with a focus upon the uneven ways in which these spaces are contaminated and associated.

A focus upon enactments, movements and gestures can be traced through into current work among some geographers interested in what might be termed 'non-representational theories' (Anderson and Harrison, 2010; following Thrift, 1996; 2008). Attention towards quotidian practices, 'non-rep theory' encapsulates a broad set of ideas but can be broadly considered a call to focus on fleeting embodied experiences, to emphasise the potential bodily registers and sensibilities in which we are connecting with the world around us. An emphasis is placed upon that which can be *felt*, often pre-cognitively. For instance, work on affect theory, which I shall discuss more fully in the context of architecture later, seeks to grasp at the inflections and intensities between more-than-human configurations, attentive to dynamic, multi-sensory bodily encounters (Lorimer, 2005). There are certain similarities with long-standing feminist concerns that contest the separation of mind and body. To some extent, the call to go beyond representation shares the concerns of Massey (2005) that that representational is

associated with static notions of space where there is instead a call to focus on the lively interactions with the world.

Yet whilst there has been considerable attention paid towards embodiment and bodily encounters, there are some cautionary notes to be made aware of that continue to bubble and surface among geographers (Bondi, 2005; Thien, 2005; Toila-Kelly, 2006; Pile, 2010). Liz Bondi (2005), for instance, raises particular concerns of a tendency towards technological masculinist language that is (to some extent ironically) disembodied and distancing. As well as this potentially problematic language, something I am also troubled by, a concern is that a focus on the transpersonal risks a disavowal of feminist politics of the personal (Thien, 2005). Caution, then, needs to be taken to avoid ‘a retreat from feminism and the politics of the body in favour of the individualistic and universalizing sovereign subject (Nash, 2000: 662).

Bringing together work on relational space, performative practices and bodily encounters are helpful guides for thinking through the everyday encounters that constitute ‘work’ in different ways and how coworking spaces are entangled within such spatial-temporal routines. Before turning to discuss specifically architectural performances, I first want thinking about how we understand ‘work’.

2.2. Working bodies and the place of work

I want to argue here for a scholarship that sees class through the lens of gender and race relations, that constructs class not as categorical positions but as active, ongoing and negotiable sets of practices that vary across time and space and that accepts that class relations, and ‘the economic’ more

widely, must include overall ‘ways of living’, including social relations within the home and the community as well as the workplace as more traditionally understood.

(McDowell, 2008: 21)

In this section I want to consider how spatiality and sociality constitute working practices and spaces of work. Despite the influence of geographers such as Doreen Massey, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift upon current cultural geographies – given their formative work in economic geography – here I will follow up on Hubbard’s (2011) claim that of late social and cultural geography has not really engaged with aspects of work. I consider the ways in which ‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ geographies have become increasingly blurred with the rise of ‘cultural economies’ shifting the epistemological, theoretical and methodological ways in which we might understand the geographies of work. Following Linda McDowell’s (2008) call above, I do not treat ‘work’ as somehow ontologically separate from wider ways of living, rather spaces and places of work and working identities are relational and performative. This leads to a consideration of how the spatial arrangement of workplaces are entangled within working processes.

2.2.1. Contesting economic/cultural binaries

There has been a long-held treatment of ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ as separate, discrete entities (Jackson, 2002; James *et al.*, 2006). Neoclassical location theory, for instance, treats workers merely as ‘inputs’, whilst an ontological shift with Marxist geographies emphasised capital-labour relations and class struggle as central to analysis of space (Jackson, 2002). Here, economic processes, chiefly the theory of accumulation, have

been understood as structuring factors. Whilst culture may keep capitalism going for Marx, culture plays no role at all for the individual rational choice of neoclassical economics (Barnes, 2006). However, Doreen Massey's (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour* helped pave the way for extending the hybridity of these two apparently separate issues, making theoretical connections between economy and culture, providing a foundational text for supporting a move (for some) towards post-structural economic geographies (Peck, 2013).

The rise of 'cultural economy' has developed since the 1990s emphasising much more fluid relations between 'the economic' and 'the cultural' (Crang, 1997; Massey, 1997; Thrift and Olds, 1996). This is not merely bolting on a 'cultural' component (Amin and Thrift, 2004). Rather, influenced by the 'cultural turn' in geography, economic enquiry has broadened and diversified its theoretical and conceptual framework (Barnett, 1998). This is not just relating to the rise of 'cultural industries', rather it is to think about the different ways in which culture and economy are entangled within all kinds of practices:

The question is not whether to rediscover economics or to go with the cultural, it is how to do both at the same time in ways that recognize the political significance of these intersections and provide a critical purchase on prevailing economic processes.

(Lee, 2002: 355)

Work informed by post-modernism and post-structuralism, blurring economic and cultural geographies has certainly not been celebrated by all (Rodríguez-Pose, 2001). Concerns have been expressed that such work risks 'killing' economic geography

apparently through limitations due to a lack of ‘rigour’ and ‘relevance’ and a solid political economy (James, 2006; see also Rodríguez-Pose, 2001). I’m not convinced that their boundaries need such policing. J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996; 2005), for instance, has sought to challenge the totalising idea of the Capitalist economy. She re-frames the capito-centric universalism of Capitalism by instead re-reading for economic *difference*. This doesn’t just ask more by broadening how ‘the cultural’ becomes entangled within ‘the economic’, but questions the apparent boundaries and actors of ‘the economy machine’ (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013: 3).

Therefore, I wish to briefly turn my attention towards the growing body of research concerned with labour geographies to think about how my research connects with but also diverges from a focus upon *workers*.

2.2.2. Beyond labour geographies

The term ‘labour geographies’ was first coined by Andrew Herod (1997:3) which explicitly sought to address employment issues through ‘an effort to see the making of the economic geography of capitalism through the eyes of labour’. Although these labour geographies have been a constantly evolving field (Lier, 2007; Castree, 2007, 2010), primarily but not exclusively deriving from economic geographers, the attention to workers shares an overriding Left-leaning politics (Castree, 2007). This work is said to be ‘united by a desire to reveal the multiple geographies that underpin the everyday worlds of work and employment’ (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2010: 211). Yet as Castree (2007) has noted, this research has exceeded the sub-discipline of labour geography,

both among geographers and other disciplines. It is here that I wish to make connections, given that my own research background is not from economic geography.

The sub-discipline grew out of concern for working-class men and women seeking to defend their jobs in capital-labour relations, primarily at least, in the ‘Global North’. A key theme of this work has been to insist that space shapes workers at the same time as workers are shaping space (Herod, 2001). Workers, as well as capital, have their particular ‘spatial fix’, and therefore the emphasis is placed on labour *geographies* rather than a geography of labour. However, the breadth of the sub-discipline is now considerable, it is links between employment relations and personal and workplace identities that are my concern here.

People don’t live their lives merely as commodity-labour power selling their capacity to work (Hudson, 2001) and within labour geographies, it has been noted that there is a tendency to conflate worker agency with trade union agency (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2010). As Ettlinger (2003) points out, there is a danger in assuming that all people in a workplace (unionised or otherwise) broadly share the same concerns according to Marxist-inspired geography which necessarily return to issues of class. To what extent can I focus upon *workers* in terms of both ‘working-class’? As suggest above, labour geographies tend to fail to put ‘*working people* at the center of analysis’ (Mitchell, 2005: 96; original emphasis). The suggestion is that ‘best’ analysis that raises questions about how people are living and wish to live in relation to work to counter concerns that ‘labour geography typically focuses on the employment aspect of a person’s or group’s

life, as if this can be separated analytically and ontologically from their wider existence'. (Castree, 2007: 859).

Yet it seems that labour geographers tend to treat post-structuralism with caution, if not suspicion (Castree, 2007). Here, global capitalism or neoliberalism tends to be understood as the context for labour geographers. As such there is a tendency for labour geographies to (re)turn to more abstract categorisations 'whilst neglecting the places they inhabit' (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2010: 228-9). Undoubtedly, analysis of 'neoliberalism' is pervasive across the geography and academia (Springer, 2010) as well as public debates more broadly. Indeed, as I shall discuss later in chapter 7, these ideas were raised with me by particular coworkers. Given the huge literature on such ideas, I find it easier to discuss my own struggles with 'neoliberalism' through these research encounters with coworkers. However, it is worth noting that Marxist-inspired accounts can often tend towards hegemonic understandings whilst Foucault-inspired accounts tend towards notions of discourse and governmentality, and the usefulness of attempts to reconcile these framings has been debated (Barnett, 2005). In relation to the practices and space of coworking, it is helpful to note how poststructural Foucauldian-inspired accounts can often focus upon the production and conduct of particular entrepreneurial subjects:

Neo-liberal strategies of rule, found in diverse realms including workplaces, educational institutions and health and welfare agencies, encourage people to see themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own well being.

(Larner, 2000: 13)

Not just the concern for economic geographers, however, neoliberalism ‘seems to be everywhere’ (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 380), including our academic performances. As I have presented aspects of this research over the last couple of years, I have regularly encountered rather sweeping claims of all things ‘neoliberal’ to be understood as almost a given *background* to research. Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b; 2008a) and the wider project of the Community Economies Collective have raised concerns about the performative effect of representing accounts that risk assuming no outside to a totalising capitalist/neoliberal space.

I shall develop these concerns in conversation with coworkers in chapter 7 to consider the production of ‘entrepreneurial’ subjects through Foucauldian-inspired accounts of neoliberal governmentality. Connecting this with the theorising of relational space and performative identities, I examine how power and bodies are productive of neoliberal subjects to understand how a discourse of entrepreneurialism and the ‘normalising’ of tired, working bodies is enacted by coworkers taking on the responsibility of ‘looking after themselves’. As such, I draw this together with the attempts to construct and maintain particular spatio-temporal boundaries in order to be more ‘professional’ and productive workers. This will help address a need for greater urgency in focusing upon how human subjectivities are entangled with the experiencing of these particular ‘entrepreneurial’ workplaces. Yet through considering how we enact performative identities, I will discuss the possibility to re-think alternative economic spaces and subjectivities and the theorising of new subjects (Gibson, 2014). By this I mean that we may consider the potential for something beyond discursively produced ‘neoliberal’ subjects of ‘the entrepreneur’ through the desire to cultivate non-capitalist economies

through ‘our sensing, thinking, feeling, moving bodies’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xvi). If, as I have already discussed, the ways in which embody, talk about and imagine space helps articulate our sense of the world, then what openings may there be for embodying alternative economic spaces, for cultivating new economic subjects? I next turn to consider embodying workplace geographies, before examining the ways in which embodiment and inhabitation are addressed within scholarship relating to the recent geographies of architecture.

2.2.3. Embodying workplace geographies

Workplaces – be that a factory, a mobile hair salon or a household – are social arenas for all kinds of interactions, of emotions, networks and embodied encounters not simply for waged labour relations. Linda McDowell (2009) has written extensively about the different ways in which fleshy, opinionated, tired, sexualised bodies become entangled with working practices. Focusing particularly upon high-touch service sector work that demands co-presence, she insists that attention is paid to the ways in which ethnicity, age, class, gender and personal characteristics are embodied as part of day-to-day routines of living and working. In a similar vein, tracing through the intersections of bodies and work, Carol Wolkowitz (2006) notes how ‘the body shop’ has transformed in meaning from the greasy mechanic workshop to the chain stores that sell products said to enhance and relax the body. Although often marginalised by economists, this follows considerable feminist theorizing of how bodies and work intersect, perhaps most famously for the air stewards in *The Managed Heart* whereby emotions are commoditised as part of a commercial experience (Hochschild, 1983). Subsequently there has been a wide range of research that takes bodies at work seriously, that

consider the ways in which working bodies, particularly but by no means exclusively, women's bodies, emotions and sexualities are manipulated or co-opted towards gendered stereotypes as part of working processes (Adkins, 1995). Not merely contained to 'the workplace', bodily work therefore involves work on the body.

As such, texts by authors such as Foucault, Butler and Goffman have been deployed to help understand how bodies in the workplace are shaped and performed. I have already discussed how some of these ideas have informed notions of performance and performativity. Despite literatures that take gender, work, power and organisations seriously, the ways in which space and place affect working practices frequently receive far less attention (McDowell, 1997). Indeed, this follows my concerns with a gap in literature on coworking. Instead:

The location and the physical construction of the workplace – its site and layout, the external appearance and the internal layout of its buildings and surrounding environment – also affects, as well as reflects, the social construction of work and workers and the relations of power, control and dominance that structure relations between them.

(McDowell, 1997: 12)

Space matters to how bodies and workplaces are co-constituted. Open-plan offices are often used as a contemporary example of Foucault's panopticism and how visibility and monitoring affect working practices (Felstead *et al.*, 2005; Gabriel, 2005).³ The potent

³ There is the danger of very crude appropriation of this institutional/architectural metaphor of the prison/office. Whilst parts of this highlights questions of power, surveillance and architecture, for instance panopticism and open-plan offices, I do not assimilate office workers as prisoners. The suggestion that 'the basic organising principle of the workplace is containment within a limited area' (Sayer and Walker, 1992: 210; cited in Crang, 2000) as labour control limits 'work' to the domination of 'workers' by capitalists is quite limiting. Ironically, as discussed in Scheer and Lorne (forthcoming),

spatial metaphor of the ‘panopticon’ follows Jeremy Betham’s design of the ideal prison, used to exemplify spatial mechanisms of power (Foucault, 1977). Here, guards are raised in a central tower, obscured from the view of prisoners so that they are unable to gauge when they were being viewed in their multi-storeyed cells around the outside. In this way, the threat of surveillance is constantly instilled through *disciplinary* power that is internalised so that prisoners regulate their own behaviour uncertain if and when they were being watched. We might consider, then, how a spatial arrangement of offices, and perhaps more recently, new technologies, contribute towards constant monitoring of worker. Daphne Spain (2000 [1986]:126) has drawn upon these ideas of spatial arrangement to stress how gendered divisions in the workplace reinforce worker hierarchies:

Tracing workplace design from the Panopticon up through the home office reveals the common thread of reinforcement of stratification systems through spatial arrangements. Whether the spatial segregation is overt, as with the Panopticon, or covert, as with landscaped offices, the effect is similar. Managers retain control of knowledge by use of enclosed spaces, and secretaries remain on open floors that allow little control of space or knowledge.

(Spain, 2000 [1986]: 126)

Focusing upon how office design reflects stratification within an organization, conventionally marked by a diagrammatic outline of distinct rooms within buildings, we consider how open-plan desks for secretaries and enclosed rooms for managers provide a reversal of panopticism as secretaries are positioned under the scrutiny of

prison architects do, however, tend to deploy a language of the contemporary city when designing for incarceration.

peripheral managers. Status, identity, privacy and enclosure all become associated with power relations constituting microscale interactions in workplaces.

Yet it has been argued that workplaces are increasingly organised and designed to foster creativity and movement. For example, Nigel Thrift (2005) argues that as changing ways of working demand increasing connectivity and rapid interactions between workers, workplaces are being redesigned so as to shift away from cellular offices towards ‘den’, ‘club’ and ‘touchdown’ spaces. This, he argues, follows the design logic of ‘geographies of circulation’ whereby rapid encounters between workers are replacing fixed, hierarchical offices (Thrift, 2005: 147). Similarly, increasingly organisational studies are paying attention to informal interactions around ‘photocopiers and water-coolers’ (Fayard and Weeks, 2007). As such, these studies are beginning to turn towards much more fluid, dynamic analysis of the non-representational and performative spacing of workplaces (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012), whilst John Law (2002: 21) has drawn the office into his analysis of heterogenous material relations of ‘economics as interference’. Analysis of workplaces, then, is turning to much more dynamic, lively accounts. As we begin to draw in the architectural dimensions, it is helpful to turn to discuss more fully geographic research that engages with architecture.

2.3. Designing and experiencing architectural space

So, you’re a geographer, you shouldn’t care too much about architecture. It’s for architects to make the argument about their role in the world, right? That’s not your problem... I think you have to be very careful as to what you are signing yourself up to.

(Architectural practitioner, male, 30-35)

Why should geographers care about architecture? Why should geographers care about architects? Certainly care should be taken not to conflate the two, something that architects themselves frequently do (Till, 2009). This moment marked an important – if somewhat hostile – research encounter, not least for leaving me with the immediate feeling of “well, why can’t I?!” Over the course of this recorded conversation at Hub Westminster the warning was that before proceeding further with my research I should focus on *either* micro-scale material design ‘nudges’ (the fleeting ways in which individuals inhabiting such workplaces are affected by spatial design) *or* macro-scale ‘urban systems stuff’ (‘basic notions of how people operate within systems of built forms and economic relationships and freedom. That’s the stuff that matters, ultimately’). ‘You need to take either of them as a given, as a context and focus on the other’ he insisted; have I read de Certeau’s (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*? What about Ed Glaeser (2011)? Either worry about the smaller, subtle conditions inside coworking spaces or the bigger, wider issues going on in the cities around them, not both.

This encouragement towards de Certeau’s work is illuminating as it sets up all sorts of dichotomies, macro/micro, outside/inside, structure/agency, strategies/tactics, powerful/weak, stasis/change and so forth. As I have already suggested above, an implication that needs to be challenged is that space is fixed, coherent and already-existing, whereas time is mobile, dynamic and temporary. Such a distinction is perhaps not surprising, given historical accounts of office buildings often focus upon their production by a ‘masterful’ architect or time-space manager and are represented by a bounded diagrammatic plan-view of organisational/architectural space. Consider, too,

how ‘epochal’ shifts often associated with technological innovation are said to be increasing ‘freedom’ from the office (and it is normally ‘the office’ assumed as *the* workplace). In this section I want to consider geographic work that engages specifically with architecture. I will first briefly discuss the limits of semiotic readings of built objects as both political-economic and cultural symbols. With a particular emphasis on offices buildings, I will trace the concerns that these accounts use architecture as a ‘referent’ (Kraftl, 2010: 405) at the expense of attending to the more lively inhabitations and ongoing productions of architecture. This will point me towards a discussion of a ‘critical geography of architecture’ (following Lees, 2001). Debating these recent developments, I will conclude by drawing together how these literatures combine with the preceding sections in this literature review to help inform my research.

2.3.1. Beyond symbolism

How might we understand coworking spaces as *architectural*? One way might be to read coworking spaces as a particular workplace typology through the historiographies of office buildings (Saval, 2015). Such an account might survey the rise and development of clerical houses or perhaps the office tower block as an architectural symbol, how these have developed in different parts of the world and how this has reflected changing work and society. This could draw upon the rise of the commercial office building citing a series of famous ‘master’ architects such as Louis Sullivan, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright or perhaps Robert Propst’s *Action Office*, the forerunner to the ‘cubicle’ and the ideas of German *Bürolandschaft*, or office landscaping (Duffy, 1992).

So, for instance, alongside Louis Sullivan's (1896: 408) claim that 'form ever follows function' you could connect Modern Architecture with the origins of the North American commercial office such as the Wainwright Building, St Louis built 1890-91. This may be used as an example of technological innovation through fireproofing, steel construction and particularly the incorporation of the elevator facilitating the rise of the 'skyscraper' (Gottmann, 1966). There is a danger, however, that such accounts turn towards a narrative of the architect-as-genius. Indeed, Sullivan himself claimed to have *discovered* the tall office building with 'his' Wainwright Buildings, a design he claimed was 'made in literally three minutes' (Hoffman, 1998: 24). It is notable that Hoffman (1998) counters Sullivan's claims, instead, suggesting that the Wainwright Building was more to do with the accumulation of capital than it was architectural 'brilliance'. This claim coincides more closely with debates within geographic accounts of architecture that have a tendency of treating buildings as cultural and political artefacts, as texts that can be read (Goss, 1988; Domosh, 1989; Duncan and Ley, 1993; Cosgrove, 1984), whereby buildings operate as a 'black box' from which we can hang other claims (Jenkins, 2002).

The notion that a building *reflects* social relations is significant here:

A building is more than it seems. It is an artefact – an object of material culture produced by a society to fulfil particular functions determined by, and thus embodying or reflecting, the social relations and level of development of the productive forces of that society. . . . A building is invested with ideology, and the space within, around, and between buildings is both produced and producing.

(Goss 1988: 393)

Goss was calling for connecting social theory with the production of architecture which by the 1980s had coalesced around debates surrounding more Marxist and more cultural semiotic readings of architecture, even if this distinction was perhaps more ambiguous. The office skyscraper provided a significant object for key contributions within such literatures. Historical geographic accounts of the office skyscraper in New York in the twentieth century, for instance, have examined how such buildings were expressive of corporate cultures and identities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Domosh, 1989). For Mona Domosh (1989), in the political-economic context of a changing New York, individual skyscraper buildings are treated as ‘landscape artifacts’. More than technological achievement, stylistic development or a product of land-value development, these artefacts symbolise particular cultural meanings, suggesting that New York’s skyscrapers operated as ‘material expressions of social legitimacy and economic power’ (Domosh, 1989: 352). It is significant that in her method for interpreting such case studies, Domosh moves away from structural factors towards the intentions of those said to have built the New York World Building, identifying the client, Joseph Pulitzer, and the hired architect, George Post, as the key actors in the building’s story. Her later study of the construction of Boston and New York in the nineteenth century was that the built forms of these cities were part of cultural landscapes inscribed with meanings constitutive of upper- and middle-class identities; these skyscrapers were not merely containers for money-making (Domosh, 1996).

Connectedly, Iain Black (2000) analyses the emergence of the purpose-built office building in a period of transforming legal and institutional structures surrounding banking in the City of London between the 1830s and 1870s. This work considers how

the architectural forms of banks were not only produced to accommodate for the increasing size of such operations but to gesture towards legitimising expanding financial power. Significantly, looking within the walls of these buildings, Black (2000) denotes that face-to-face personal relations and trusting networks associated with the intimate personal office were displaced by a more impersonal banking hall that could accommodate a wider public clientele. The grandiose scale of the architectural forms was compensating for the loss of intimacy. Similarly, the apparent new ‘openness’ of such institutions was the increased visibility of the entrance to the building. As such, we begin to see more nuanced associations of power and architecture.

We might consider the symbolic capital of advertising and architecture that is entangled within corporate office towers by analysing notions such as ‘identity’, ‘authenticity’, ‘power’ and ‘timelessness’ in relation to the office tower (Dovey, 1992; 1999). Consider figure 2.2. In this leasing advertisement, we have the depiction of four particular spaces of the office tower: ‘The Executive’, three men sitting around an oak-desk; ‘The Board Room’, two men looking down through a window on the city below; ‘The Reception’, a suited woman engaging in a conversation with a woman at the front desk of the building; and ‘The Engine Room’, a windowless open-plan office space with computers and a single androgynous worker. Here, power, patriarchal space and social hierarchy combine with architectural materials connecting architecture with ways of seeing workers and the city below. Rather than a homogenous space, this hints towards the different experiences of office space in a similar way to Spain (2000 [1986]) above.



Fig. 2.2. – The Executive, the Board Room, Reception and the Engine Room (photo credit: Dovey, 1992: 183)

Whilst Jane Jacobs' (1994) work on the City of London examines how architectural forms are harnessed as a display of power, she cautions against treating buildings as 'objects' which are severed from their social, political and ideological situations. This concern resonates with Jane Jacobs' subsequent work contesting the status of buildings as solid objects (2006; Jacobs *et al.*, 2007; Cairns and Jacobs, 2014).

Understanding buildings as solid can risk treating buildings as singular and finished with an emphasis either upon architectural style or being the product of ‘the architect’ separating the ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ of such spaces (Lees, 2001; Llewelyn, 2003). Here, the rather passive role of inhabitants, if considered, are rather insignificant. As Lees puts it:

[the] political semiotic approach to reading landscape in terms of the social and economic context of its production tends to discount questions about how ordinary people engage with and inhabit the spaces that *architects design*.

(Lees, 2001: 55; my emphasis)

This was a leading call for a move towards a critical geography of architecture. It is this shift towards a focus on the different inhabitations of architecture that I wish to turn shortly. It is worth flagging at this point that few buildings are formally designed by high-profile professional architects. As such, I share concerns that there is a risk of focusing upon ‘famous’ or ‘exemplar’ buildings or overstating the influence of architects (Jenkins, 2002; Sage, 2013). Nonetheless, I support Lees’ concerns that reading of architecture and landscapes fails to engage with the experiencing and inhabiting of architectural space.

2.3.2. Architectural performances

Of late, research by geographers and anthropologists has been bringing buildings to life.⁴ Recent enthusiasm has led social and cultural geographers to think less about

⁴ Elements of this section have first been incorporated into the paper *Practising Architecture Beyond Buildings* (Lorne, *under review*) in *Social and Cultural Geography*.

buildings and more about ‘building events’ and ‘big things’ (Jacobs, 2006). Emphasising the multiple producers and productions of what becomes to be known as ‘architecture’, much of this work has been challenging assumptions that buildings are solid, static objects whilst denouncing claims that architectural production is in the domain of architects alone. Treating buildings as unfinished is not an entirely new perspective (Lerup, 1977) with community and participatory design practices having long been recognised within construction projects (Day and Parnell, 2002) alongside a steady increase in attention towards ‘post-occupancy’ of buildings (Brand, 1994). Yet this work is distinctive in that buildings are animated through on-going processes of more-or-less human, more-or-less formal and more-or-less welcome actors that produce, maintain and destroy architecture in multiple ways. As Stephen Cairns and Jane Jacobs (2014) put it unequivocally: ‘Buildings must die’!

This body of work opens up alternative perspectives for understanding who and what produces what we typically identify as a ‘building’, and connectedly, derives new methods for researching such architectural encounters. The agenda was set by calls for ‘a more critical and politically progressive geography of architecture’ (Lees, 2001: 51; although see also, Jenkins, 2002) to shift architectural research beyond those previous readings of buildings. Loretta Lees (2001: 56) called for geographic research that would ‘explore the ways that the built environment is shaped and given meaning through the active and embodied practices by which it is produced, appropriated and inhabited’. Lees uses the example of a contested architectural symbol, a new public library in Vancouver, Canada, to focus upon the more ‘ordinary’ daily routines and happenings experienced in relation to the architectural space. Seeking to move beyond debates

surrounding symbolism, this paper set forth a geographic agenda that focused upon the social practices of ‘consumers/users’ and how they are significantly entangled within the lives of the built environment. (Lees, 2001: 76). This agenda parallels work on particular bodily encounters with the materiality of the city through skateboarding and possible appropriations of built space (Borden, 2001).

As such, recent work within social and cultural geography tends to treat ‘building’ less as a noun and more as a verb (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011). Attending to the lively embodied practices and performances associated with architecture, research over the last decade or so has animated buildings as polyvocal lived-in (Kraftl, 2009; Lees, 2001; Llewelyn, 2003) and living things (Jacobs, 2006; Strebel, 2011). Analysis of ‘big things’ includes tower blocks and shopping centres, schools and airports, with such accounts tending to draw primarily upon either geographies of affect or actor network theory (ANT) as a theoretical framing. It is notable that little of this geographic work on architecture has focused upon office buildings (with Jenkins’ (2002) historic account being a key exception), despite the continued interest in more representational geographies of ‘iconic’ architecture (P. Jones, 2009; Grubbauer, 2014). Therefore, this section draws through recent work on ‘non-representational’ geographies of architecture bringing this into conversation with my research on coworking spaces. Despite certain similarities, there are considerable theoretical differences within this sub-discipline and it is helpful to distinguish how these provide different theoretical possibilities for understanding how people and buildings cohere and co-exist. As I shall elaborate, I share Rose *et al.*’s (2010) concerns that both geographies of affect and ANT have limited analysis of how humans co-exist with buildings. This is not merely an

empirical ‘blind spot’ but rather is crucial for framing how I analyse architectural performances at work.

Geographers inspired by actor network theory (Jacobs, 2006; Jacobs *et al.*, 2007; Jenkins, 2002; Strebel, 2011; Yaneva, 2009; 2012) have sought to open up the ‘black box’ of architecture contesting the treatment of buildings as bounded. This approach inspired by Bruno Latour and science and technology studies considers the different human and non-human events, ideas and technologies that cohere to make a building (as quasi-object) hold together and fall apart. In doing so, this connects the quasi-object with other times and spaces. This was first exemplified by Lloyd Jenkins’ (2002) case study of 11, Rue du Conservatoire. Here, the boundaries of the building are understood to be permeated not just by social practices but as a node in a web of wider social and technological changes. The focus upon an ‘ordinary’ building purposely de-centres ‘the architect’ as a central actor within the office building’s story such that claims that it is solely architects, or even human actors, that ‘create’ buildings rapidly lose authority. There are clear similarities here with certain architectural practitioners working in the context of office and organisational design who deny the status of building as solid object, calling for attention to the ‘shearing layers’ of change over time (Brand, 1994: 12). This is most prevalent in the work of Frank Duffy and DEGW from the 1970s onwards concerned with how the changing roles of technologies in office work are crucial for design practice. The approach of ANT can provide a new way of thinking about buildings, or rather, building events, as it associates human and non-human actors enrolled into the same networks, so that power is understood to be *translated*. This approach is a fundamental challenge to the privileging of human agency. This work set

forth further accounts which have refined such approach, most notably Jane Jacobs' 'big things' (2006; but see also, Jacobs *et al.*, 2007; Strebel, 2011). This can provide an exciting, if at times tricky, way of tracing what holds the socio-technical quasi-object of the building together and helps them fall apart. Although not often cited, this work is not too dissimilar from Massey's brief notes on architecture:

In such varied ways, changes in physical architecture and in the immaterial architecture of social relations continually intersect with each other... the apparent solidarity of buildings, the givenness of 'the built environment'. That 'givenness' is just one moment in the constant process of the mutual construction of identities of people and the identities of place. Buildings, therefore, as precipitates of social relations, which go on being changed by them and having a life within them.

(Massey, 2001: 462)

Where this slightly looser association of material and immaterial relations begins to diverge, however, is the appreciation of how different 'identities' are entangled within the constitution of people and place which is multiple and contradictory. Although ANT recognises how human emotions and experiences interrelate with architectural space, interest in human subjectivities and feelings entangled within these encounters is limited (Rose *et al.*, 2010).

Understandings of architecture through the geographies of affect tend to afford greater capacity to more-or-less formal designers influencing potential inhabitations of buildings. Following Thrift's (2004: 64) premise that cities are designed or engineered to evoke 'a sense of push in the world', geographers working with affect have been using encounters with architectural space to momentarily pin-down how certain intensities are increasing or decreasing the capacities for bodies to act in space (Adey,

2008; Adey *et al.*, 2013; Allen, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008). In other words, they are exploring how the continuous redesigning of buildings has the potential to influence particular movements, feelings and flows such as a sense of homeliness, peacefulness or security. More nuanced atmospheres can be shaped through the choice of materials, inflections of light and shadow to affect the feelings produced between ‘more-than-human’ bodies such as the bubbling of tension and elation in a football stadium (Edensor, 2015). This reading of ‘affect’ is that of the capacity to move and be moved as that ‘sense of push’, but is also attentive to multi-sensory, haptic and bodily experiences. As such, this research shares interests with work from architects on atmospheres (Zumthor, 2006) and multi-sensory experiences (Pallasmaa, 2005).

There is the danger here that the capacity for architectural materiality to influence inhabitations whereby affective geographies foreground, even glamorise, the ability, particularly of architects, to control a more ‘discrete’ architectural space. Despite claims otherwise (Adey, 2008), I would suggest that there risks too much weight being given to the ability for designers to choreograph and engineer embodied experiences through architectural design. For instance, it is stated: ‘For architects and their buildings to be taken seriously, buildings must be imbued with the power to make a difference to their inhabitants’ (Kraftl and Adey, 2008: 214). As I have written elsewhere, through considering the professional, as well as theoretical, de-centring of architects in conventional projects (Lorne, under review), there is the need to question assumptions that perpetuate that ‘the architect’ as the most influential actor involved in construction projects (Sage, 2013). Rather, architects, if involved, can often have a more ‘peripheral’ involvement.

Peter Kraftl does mitigate this concern about the capacity to influence elsewhere:

Herein, affective states *may* be created by architects through the use of specific materials, colours and shapes; yet the point is that the precise effects of these rather generic design frames upon inhabitants' feelings ... are the unpredictable, ongoing result of how people are using, moving through, maintaining, refurbishing, adorning and interpreting architectural spaces.

(Kraftl, 2010: 408; original emphasis)

Kraftl and Adey (2008) argue that theorisations of affect examine the co-production of bodies and buildings encountering both more choreographed and unexpected inhabitations. They suggest that this is what Doreen Massey (2005) means by the 'throwntogetherness' of space, reiterating this by insisting: 'Architecture is essentially a way of predetermining what we are 'thrown together' with' (Kraftl and Adey, 2008: 226). To some extent I agree, particularly with regards to the chance of space that architecture might support (see also, Massey, 2005: 179-180), however, I would argue that architecture 'predetermining' space risks quite an introverted, even enclosed space of architecture compounded with the call to focus on the 'nitty-gritty' and the 'local' (Kraftl and Adey, 2008: 226). Moreover, this seems to counter an insistence that there is no pre-conceived space, no point of departure.

Despite these concerns, it is important to consider the role of affect and the *feel* of architectural experiences. Here, I turn to Degen *et al.* (2008) who consider the visual and practised experiences of designed environments – in this instance a shopping centre – whereby the design of the built space of the shopping centre draws and invites different people in varying ways. They state that the 'study of practiced engagements

remains attentive to the diverse, mobile, and relational subjectivities that work through public space' (Degen *et al.*, 2008: 1914). Specific performances are constitutive of gendered, sexualised, racialized and classed subjectivities. While office spaces may not be public spaces *per se*, this attentiveness to different, unstable subject positions is crucial with understanding workplace performances.

This leads to wider questions regarding the emphasis on the *pre-personal* and continuously provisional account of subjectivity within affect theory. Whilst ANT accounts of 'big things' can *recognise* – if not more fully examine – different emotions, subjects and experiences, those accounts of buildings with geographies of affect leave no room for recognising human subjectivity (Rose *et al.*, 2010). These concerns reflect wider debates surrounding the separation, conflation and, at times, confusion surrounding affect and emotion across geography (for instance, Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Pile, 2010). I find Phil Jones' (2012: 648) drawing together of affect with the multi-sensory most helpful here so as to recognise how the smells, sounds and haptic interactions with our environments affect everyday encounters. In this way, we might think of affective *capacities* whereby affect is not seen to operate on a 'singular register' rather as something 'unique to individuals'.

In relation to 'big things', Rose *et al.* (2010), negotiate these concerns of human subjectivities by paying attention to affect in terms of the *feeling of* the building with its distinctive smooth, glossy surfaces, yet extend this to consider the *feelings in* and *feelings about* buildings. A key issue is when do the intensities of buildings fade away

into the background as a result of different circumstances? The relations between human subjectivities and ‘big things’ may be far more ambiguous (Rose *et al.*, 2010).

It is helpful to consider intersecting interests in ‘nudge’ and libertarian paternalism here, as there are certain similarities with the geographies of affect, albeit with very different conceptualisations of human subjects. As with the geographies of affect, such work derives from extensive bodies of thought, however, it is the prominent text *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness* by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) that has received considerable political traction proliferating support for a ‘behaviour change’ agenda (Pykett, 2012). This draws upon notions of ‘choice architecture’, which includes, yet exceeds, specific focus upon the built environment, relating to the design of road layouts but also toilets and governmental forms (Jones *et al.*, 2013). The design of enabling environments places emphasis upon individuals making ‘better’ choices. Here subjects are conceptualised as more-than-rational, differing from claims of ‘neoliberal’ bounded rational subjects but also distinguishable from the geographies of affect, particularly, whereby there is more emphasis upon the brain, rather than bodies, of more-or-less conscious human subjects, driven by appeals to the neurosciences (Jones *et al.*, 2013). As I later discuss in chapter 6, it is a language of ‘nudge’ that the architects at Hub Westminster deploy.

Together, this begins to ask questions of how to combine the wider socio-material relations that congeal to hold a ‘building event’ together with recognition of different personal subjectivities and experiences of buildings. I could follow Lees and Baxter (2011) who seek to consider the building events of one particular emotion, namely fear,

by combining ‘the grand scale: broad or macro factors’ using ANT with ‘everyday life: the particular or micro factors’. For me, however, this raises questions about whether the building (even if it is denied status as such) should be the primary focus of my research concerns. I have already set out my hesitancy here, and whilst I maintain the architectural imports of coworking spaces, I argue that my approach must exceed this specifically *architectural* dimension without rejecting these contributions.

2.3.3. Practising architectures beyond buildings

This is an immaterial architecture: the architecture of social relations. And yet, social relations are practiced, and practices are embodied, material. Places are the product of material practices.

(Massey, 2001: 463)

Despite destabilising what we mean by ‘architecture’ over the last decade or so, are the recent ‘critical geographies of architecture’ focusing too much upon buildings?⁵ This may sound somewhat counter-intuitive and so it is necessary to elaborate somewhat. For example, John Horton and Peter Kraftl’s (2014) *Cultural Geographies: An Introduction*, dedicate a whole sub-chapter to ‘architectural geographies’. This topic is given similar room to themes of ‘identities’, ‘landscapes’ and ‘performed geographies’. They refer to ‘buildings’ throughout to connect past-and-present research stating that: ‘Architecture is fundamentally about turning spaces into places, and/or places into other places’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2014: 88). This appears to revert towards quite a bounded

⁵ Parts of this section were first included as part of my paper *Practising Architecture Beyond Buildings* for Social and Cultural Geography (Lorne, under review) which includes both data and analysis that is also part of this PhD research.

understandings of ‘place’. Their emphasis upon buildings had previously been set up by Kraftl (2008: 411) suggesting that with recent interest in embodied practices of inhabitation:

...there exist *more* critical and *more* performance-based geographies of architecture which are, for better or worse, not explicitly *about* architecture *per se*.

(Kraftl, 2010: 411; original emphasis)

I feel that this concern – and I think it is a concern – suggests an uneasiness about moving beyond buildings within such research. Yet counter to this, we might return to ask:

What are the spaces and spatialities of inhabitation and dwelling, and how can one delimit the spatialities and geographies of buildings? Where does a building begin, or end?

(Jacobs and Merriman, 2011: 214)

So, whilst the framing of ‘big things’ as that the apparent ‘site’ of a building cannot be separated from the wider context, particular geographies of affect tend to take the buildings as ‘specific spatial structures’ (Adey, 2008: 440). The spatialities of inhabitation are not just a case of spatial stretching out – that merging of networks as Latour would have it – but also the simultaneous co-existence of all kinds of associations. I want to move beyond, without ignoring, the work of both ANT and affect to think about the ‘politics of place beyond place’ so as to follow ‘the lines of its engagement elsewhere’ (Massey, 2009 *et al.*: 13). Certainly there are many similarities between Massey’s work on relational space and actor network theory which share a focus upon the networks of association of human and non-human actors. Both accounts

contest bounded notions of place and have an emphasis upon the processual ways in which ‘things’ or ‘places’ cohere. However, I feel that Massey’s accounts of place are enriched with a greater ability for examining the inevitable processes of conflict. There seems to be more emphasis upon the political dimensions of these ongoing spatial configurations. At the same time, the geographies of affect are helpful for considering how the chance of space is entangled with the *design* of architectural space, that is ‘releasing the potentials of the incomplete, of the yet-to-be’ (Till, 2011: 49; cited in Massey, 2005). Benefiting from Massey’s (2005) emphasis upon ongoing responsibilities, more-or-less formal design practices are examined in these accounts of the possibilities of space, which can be limiting within actor network theory. However, as has been outlined already, accounts that are primarily driven by geographies of affect often have a problematic lack of interest in human subjectivities and complex associations with buildings/places. Leading with Massey’s (2005) work on space has helped me negotiate beyond these two, often counter-positioned, theoretical framings.

As such, we might think about the experimental ways in which we can engage with architects into discussions of urbanism ‘through a broader conception of the role of ‘design’ in urban transformation’ (Dovey, 2011: 349-350). This wider use of ‘design’ is precisely the call made by Indy Johar (2009) in his speech *Community Generative Urbanism* at the Royal Institute of British Architects. He is one of the architects who set up and continues to inhabit Hub Westminster. His call was that it was the responsibility for architects to expand their design practices beyond buildings to think instead about designing in relation to directly social and economic dimensions. Such a call follows shifting perspectives within parts of education and ‘professional’ practice to move away

from making buildings towards ideas of ‘spatial agency’ (Till, 2009; Awan *et al.*, 2011). It is suggested that design should focus upon ‘clients’ rather than a building *per se* (Worthington, 2000). This is a move, at least in theory, to recognise that architecture is constituted through uneven spatial processes well outside the control of architects, whilst opening the possibility for acting beyond the limits of normative professional practice. Indeed, these particular architects are initiating projects that may not necessarily involve any conventional ‘architectural’ practice, such as setting up my second case study. This work is gaining great attention within the popular media as so-called ‘new radicals’ (NESTA/The Observer, 2014) and gathering support from British Prime Minister David Cameron as part of the Big Society agenda (foreword, Ahrensbach *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, following the calls made by Jacobs and Merriman (2011) I propose that geographers that take architecture seriously should engage with these expanded design practices, and in this thesis, I intend to do so as *part* of research into the practices and spaces of coworking.

2.4. Research aims and objectives

In the introduction of this thesis I outlined key gaps and problems within the existing research into coworking, that there has been a failure to theorise the spaces of coworking, that such workplaces are portrayed as workplaces to be designing for collisions between ‘like-minded entrepreneurs’ that are assumed to be positive and as expected. There are assumptions that these entrepreneurs tend to be treated as rather disembodied and knowing. There is also limited empirical research into coworking with less still that is undertaken *through* coworking. By bringing together different feminist and poststructural geographies, this literature review helps to theorise the associations

between space, work and architecture in order to examine the spaces, subjectivities and performative practices of coworking. As such, this thesis brings together three concurrent aims:

- To bring much needed critical geographic analysis of the spaces and practices of coworking;
- To draw together different geographies of relational space, performativity, subjectivities, working bodies and diverse economies into conversation with ‘geographies of architecture’ so as to understand the designing and experiencing of these places of work
- To analyse how the trajectories of ‘my’ research be understood as embodied and performed through the practices and spaces of coworking

In order to address these three interconnected aims, there are series of objectives that will be addressed:

- How do the spaces and practices of coworking relate to negotiating relations of ‘home’ and ‘work’ and how are their interrelating power relations being negotiated?
- In what ways are coworking spaces considered to be ‘throwntogether’ and open to the chance of space?
- How are the architectural spaces of coworking designed, felt and experienced in particular ways in an attempt to influence particular working practices?
- How are coworking spaces co-constitutive of ‘like-minded entrepreneurial’ subjectivities?
- Might there be openings for other economic possibilities?
- How can my academic performances be understood as constituted through coworking?

In order to pursue these objectives, a particular set of methods need to be deployed to help me undertake this research. I now turn to consider more fully how the methodological processes of this research have been negotiated.

Negotiating uncertain methodologies

I have moments of massive doubt. Don't share them with people! ... I wonder if you ever feel like this? I feel like a lot of the time when people say to me "what do you do?" I'm always telling them some version of a lie. I'm always kind of giving them the version that I think they'll understand or the version that will be salient to them... I suppose it calls into question whether I understand what I do? Or whether I'm so used to giving people a version of what I do, then maybe there is no definitive version of what I do?

(Coworker, male, 30-35; Moseley Exchange)

Writing 'my' research methodologies is an uncomfortable practice. It can risk assuming that I have distanced myself from the research process, as if to separate what 'I' did whilst 'out there, in the field' now that I am 'back here' in control of my written document (Katz, 1994). If following the advice of the coworker above, I could perhaps ignore the many surprises of the research, instead representing everything that follows as authoritative and intentional. Yet, as Gregson and Rose (2000) insist, our academic performances are saturated with power; these silences have serious consequences upon the production of knowledge. Just as the coworker concedes, I cannot ever fully know my position in relation to those that I have been working with. In fact, the spatial implications of *reflecting* upon the relations *between* 'researcher' and 'researched' relies upon making visible power relations and a transparent self (Rose, 1997). Anticipated spatial relations of being an insider/outsider were instead negotiated in far

more ambiguous, contradictory and uncertain ways. As the coworker above suggests, there is no definitive version. Therefore, in this chapter I want to consider this PhD process as a *negotiation* of a ‘bundle of trajectories’ for which I am entangled, following Massey’s (2005: 119) ruminations on the liveliness of space. Through making connections, and not making others, the research process involves a particular ‘throwntogetherness’ of more-or-less purposeful and accidental encounters (Massey, 2005: 141). Rather than denying the messiness of the research process, implying a false linearity of the autonomous researcher, I consider the interrelations of the different ‘cases’ within this research challenging assumptions towards the boundedness of both my research and the coworking spaces involved in this research. In doing so, I address how this research process can be understood as constituted through coworking practices.

Therefore, this chapter first traces the challenges of situating research and the problems with attempting to pin-down my positionality. I discuss how I find notions of negotiations, conversations and performances a more helpful approach for understanding this research process. From here, I consider the connections already made leading up to the ‘beginning’ of this research and how these have shaped the process. Moreover, I insist that researching these case study workplaces was only made possible due to my varying living arrangements. I shall try to provide a sense of how my focus has shifted through the encounters throughout this research away from the geographies of architecture of coworking spaces. This includes a series of interviews with architects which led me to one of my case study coworking spaces which was established by an architectural practice that continues to inhabit the workplace. I outline

why interview methods were initially used and how the use of talk became far less structured as the research developed with research produced *in situ* through the practices of coworking. Here, I discuss why talking whilst coworking, supported by research note taking was selected as the most appropriate methodology, how this helped allow me to examine the more human experiencing of architectural inhabitations, but also the potential limits or contradictions with such methodological approach. Given that I have become good friends with many of the coworkers I consider how I negotiate the ethics of such relationships, but also, how my ‘work’ has become entangled in a diverse range of economic practices which exceeded the anticipated boundaries of the research. The chapter concludes with an overview of how I organised and analysed my research data and how this has been a critical process in transforming the research project to emphasise the importance of human subjectivities in the experiencing of the practices and spaces of coworking.

3.1. Research trajectories, multiplicity and me

There is a danger when presenting (or rather representing) research that it can imply that research is sequential, plotting the logical moves through different slices of the research process over time. This suggests that you read academic literature, go out to your determined spaces of research – ‘the field’ – then once you’ve ‘got enough data’ you ‘return’ to write-up what you found at the end of it all (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005). Such worrying treatment of the-researcher-as-explorer reinforces a disembodied and distanced masculinist form of knowledge production (Rose, 1993). Research becomes a triumphant ‘discovery’, the conquering of space over time. Yet it seems, problematically, that if academics are to perform as ‘professionals’ (for which I am

training to become, after all) then perhaps there may be the ‘need’ to control the serendipity of research processes and cover up the messy bits. That is unless you’re willing to open up the ‘black box’ of project management, to take a risk and ‘sail your academic reputation out to sea on a long boat and set it on fire’ (Jones and Evans, 2011: 585). This notion of the ‘autonomous’ individual researcher seems to follow the pressures of a particular linear temporality of working time within what seems to increasingly be seen as the ‘neoliberal academy’ (Crang, 2007; Klocker and Drozdowski, 2012a; The SIGJ2 Writing Collective, 2012).

Many feminist critiques of the production of knowledge have long contested masculinist claims and assumptions of abstract, disembodied and rational universal knowledge (Bondi and Domosh, 1992; England, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Katz, 1994; McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1993). Counter to claims of universal objective truth from the detached observer and pure subject, the production of knowledge is understood as situated and partial (Haraway, 1988). This challenges what Donna Haraway (1991: 189) calls the ‘god trick’, that of an apparent view from nowhere where research is treated as objective. As an initial response, Linda McDowell (1992) called for recognition of the positionality of the researcher and research ‘subjects’ to help address the power relations *between* them. Such boundaries of research are undoubtedly complex: ‘Where are the boundaries between ‘the research’ and everyday life; between ‘the fieldwork’ and doing fieldwork; between ‘the field’ and not; between ‘the scholar’ and subject (Katz, 1994: 67). We cannot be understood to be ‘outside’ of the research, instead Cindi Katz (1994: 67, original emphasis) suggests that this involves inhabiting an ‘unstable *space of betweenness*’. These relations are positioned, then, as something to be rendered

visible throughout the research process, something to be conscious of, a conscious ‘self-discovery’ (England, 1994: 82; McDowell, 1992). Yet this is not easy (Rose, 1997). For example, in her research involving interviews with company directors, Erica Schoenberger (1992) admits that she is not entirely sure what difference her gender, sexuality, class, race and so forth makes within the production of knowledge. Indeed, such accounts rely an awful lot upon conscious awareness of the landscapes of power to be rendered fully visible and knowable demanding an impossible ‘transparent reflexivity’ (Rose, 1997: 311). Yet it is also impossible to be fully immersed so as to claim to be in the same position as those research subjects. In setting out her own struggles, Gillian Rose (1997) discusses how the spatial relations of positionality rely either on fully recognising difference, understood as distance, or on an impossible sameness. How, then, do we avoid a distancing sense of power?

It is through her failure to fully know her position, Rose (1997) suggests an alternative understanding of power, and at the same time, space. Considering the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham (1994: 220), influenced by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, we might understand our research performances as *constitutive* rather than reflexive. As such, this avoids ‘revealing’ metaphors by instead shifting towards creative *negotiations* of power evoking notions of ‘conversation’ and ‘performance’ (Gibson-Graham, 1994). Rather than accounts that rely on consciousness, coherence and distance between, these understandings allow for contradictions, multiplicities, gaps and slippages. As such, this provides a more fluid and lively spatial vocabulary:

There is also a much more fragmented space, webbed across gaps in understandings, saturated with power, but also, paradoxically, with uncertainty: a fragile and fluid net of connections and gulfs.

(Rose, 1997: 317)

However, whilst Gregson and Rose (2000) discuss the discomfort of interview-based research, as I shall discuss later, my research methods continue to involve talking, however they became – more-or-less consciously – very conversational, often happening well beyond the coworking space buildings. The ‘surprising twists and turns’ of research also invite uncertainty through our written performances (Crang and Cook, 1995: 4). For instance, tracing the messy processes of his doctoral research, Ian Cook (1998), draws upon Massey’s (1994) explorations of Kilburn High Street, to consider how he, himself/ves – his embodied self/ves – might be considered a ‘place’ in a similar way. That is a place that moves and connects through space, taking his research beyond a bounded self towards ‘it-me-them-you-here-me-that-you-there-her-us-then-so-...’ (Cook, 1998: 30). For better or worse, the suggestion is that ‘...he’s all over the place’ (Cook, 1998). Aware of the dangers of ‘heroic’ privileging of straight, white male voices within autobiographical texts, I have instead attempted to incorporate uncertainty into this particular academic performance.

It is helpful to consider how Ian Cook draws upon anthropological research that increasingly recognises the multi-sited-ness of ethnographic research, challenging ethnographies that assume a boundedness of a place (Marcus, 1995). Multi-sited research, according to Falzon (2009: 1-2), is ‘to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space (because they are substantially continuous but spatially non-contiguous).’ Drawing upon Massey (2005) these accounts reject

treating places as a container for social relations that may be directly comparable to other bounded places, and by extension, generalised as universal knowledge (Falzon, 2009). At the same time, Marcus (2009) calls for an appreciation of doctoral research as a strategic site of methodological innovation in time and space. As such, to help consider how I might relate my case studies, I propose that it is helpful to consider further the ‘throwntogetherness’ of spatial interrelations constituting this research. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Massey does not explicitly set out a methodology to do so (Baldwin, 2012). The trajectories of my research are constituted through meeting with other trajectories (which are not just human), and thus are also composed of ‘a space of loose ends and missing links’ (Massey, 2005:12). That it is not to say that my research was not free from planning, however, as the following section will discuss, my research practices were shaped by a juxtaposition of different trajectories and connections made (and not made) through chance as well as intention.

This enlivened conceptualisation of space has implications for how I understand my cases within my research. A case cannot be treated as a concrete object bound by space and time (Taylor, 2013) rather they are radically dynamic. They will not be the same if I return. Likewise, my trajectories also differ from other researchers (Taylor, 2013). I want to turn to relate my cases with some of my stories-so-far. This research is multi-sited based upon three case study coworking spaces – three different buildings located in the Midlands and South-East of England (see also chapter 4) – as well as a series of conversations with architects, several of whom established one of these case study coworking spaces. Yet, as the previous section has stated, presenting the research in this way largely obscures my trajectories that connect these cases. The following section is

therefore an attempt to trace out just some of the particular connections that have shaped the design of this research.

3.2. Making connections, relating cases

At first glance, a doctoral research process seems to be, quite literally, a bounded project. I have been fortunate enough to receive funding for this work, and as such it is expected that I deliver a thesis over the course of three years (or so...). However, it is helpful to stretch this out somewhat in order to understand the shaping of this research. My original proposal positioned my research within the recent ‘geographies of architecture’ and part of my funding bid involved gaining external supervision beyond the academy. My supervisor, Phil Jones, knew architect and urban designer Joe Holyoak through research based upon regeneration within Digbeth, Birmingham (Jones and Evans, 2012) and contact had been maintained through engagements with MADE (a regional ‘centre for place-making’) who I would later work with during my Masters research. Phil arranged a coffee with Joe over which he agreed to take on this supervisory role. With the support of my department through the application process, I received confirmation of my successful application for funding to support a PhD starting in autumn 2011. This meant that I would have a break between my undergraduate Masters and PhD over the summer. Not long after this point I was contacted by my former undergraduate dissertation supervisor to undertake research for the Moseley Community Development Trust where he was a trustee. This paid research was to undertake a study of their money trail analysing their local economic impact (New Economics Foundation, 2002). They located me in their coworking space, the Moseley Exchange, whilst doing this research which introduced me to coworking and

some of the coworkers. This coincided with my developing interests in relation to workspaces and architecture. This would later become my first case study of the research and has become the coworking space where I have maintained strongest ties.

Having started my PhD with a broad interest in workspaces, Joe Holyoak put me in contact with his friend Frank Duffy suggesting ‘before you meet you should dip into some of his publications’. Frank is a former president of the Royal Institute of British Architects and co-founder of research-led architectural practice DEGW (he is the ‘D’). Unbeknown to me at the time their work on organisations and changing buildings was drawn upon by Stewart Brand (1994) in *How Buildings Learn*, which has influenced much of the ‘architectural geographies’ particularly those geographers who draw upon Science and Technology Studies including Jenkins (2002) and Jacobs (2006). Indeed, he was very supportive of geographic research associated with architecture. Somewhat cynically, it has proved helpful to ‘name-drop’ Frank when making contact with other architects. Contacts matter in architecture. A disapproving architect later described the RIBA to me as an ‘old-boys network’.

Yet, at this stage of the research I received an unexpected email from another architect who had discovered my (now-defunct) research blog. We met to talk about our research as she worked with Space Syntax (using a computer model-making system to predict and alter circulation of people, using Hillier and Hanson (1984)). Although we debated such a methodology, she encouraged me to read Jeremy Till’s (2009) *Architecture Depends*. I did just that and after reading through the book, he struck me as a good person to interview. Stumbling through some awkward half-questions, we got round to

talking about coworking at which point he mentioned the architectural practice 00:/ who had previously worked on the physical design of Hub King's Cross and had set-up Hub Westminster. They stood out as particularly 'canny architects' challenging what it is that architects might do. I had already been aware of the Hub Network, a global network of coworking spaces. I did a scoping study of Hub Westminster as a potential case study. It seemed to compliment the Moseley Exchange, as it was much larger, in a listed building off Pall Mall in London and part of wider network specifically targeting 'social entrepreneurs'. I discussed this with my supervisors who suggested that this sounded 'robust'.

The story-so-far, then, appears to be the usual case of incidental 'snowballing' and making connections through a loose network of contacts which can transform the data collection process (Crang and Cook, 1995). And to some extent it is. However, it is helpful to consider my mobility within these research practices. During this PhD I have mostly been living in my flat in Birmingham. The Moseley Exchange was easy to get to and I could pay for regular access to the workplace due to my research support grant. If I was to research Hub Westminster I would not be able to commute in from Birmingham every day for two months or so as this would be prohibitively expensive on my PhD stipend. I would have to find the money to pay to access the space for that time, too; 100 hours a month, membership would cost me £265! That is assuming that I am allowed to work there in the first place as I am not a start-up social or 'civic enterprise', something I discuss later. I was only able to do this research by living with my partner who was able to let me stay in her shared flat in London over the summer months, whereby I could cycle across the city to my case study. Having contacted one

of the ‘members hosts’ who run the day-to-day operations at Hub Westminster I received an email stating that I would be able to access the workspace for free if I was to work two shifts a month on every other Wednesday from 4-11pm. I accepted the offer and my second case study was agreed by my supervisors, Hub Westminster and my partner. I would start in July 2013.

Despite being located not too far from my hometown, I first heard about my final case study, Funk Bunk, Wing, Bedfordshire, through an informal conversation with one of my colleagues. That this coworking space was based not in a particularly ‘trendy’ or ‘fashionable’ location struck me as interesting contrast. Like the Moseley Exchange, it appeared to be targeting ‘creative’ sector workers, although it seemed much smaller. I would be able to cycle to access this case study as it was a twenty-minute cycle from my parents’ house who live in my hometown of Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, a ‘commuter town’ on the trainline which connects London and Birmingham. Fortunately, I would be able to pay for access to this more expensive case study again through my support grant.

By tracing the trajectories of research, so far, this suggests a certain ‘throwntogetherness’ of my research design negotiating intention and chance. Throughout my negotiations with my supervisors surrounding the suitability of these case studies, there appeared to be sufficient variation between them in terms of size, location, architectural involvement and purpose of the coworking space. These are not distinct places of work but rather are relational, with me being there changing them,

albeit just a little. Birmingham, Leighton Buzzard and London are all connected by the train line that Massey (2005: 118) discusses in terms of *travelling imaginations*:

So take the train, again, from London to Milton Keynes. But this time you are not just travelling through space or across it (from one place – London – to another – Milton Keynes). Since space is the product of social relations you are also helping, although in this case in a fairly minor way, to *alter* space, to participate in its continuing production. You are part of the constitution of you yourself, of London..., of Milton Keynes ..., and this of space itself... Space and place emerge through active material practices’.

(Massey, 2005: 118)

To travel between places is to move between collections of trajectories and to reinsert yourself in the ones to which you relate.”

(Massey, 2005: 130)

Understood in this way, it helps me to weave together my case studies, even in a modest way. I have not been travelling across space, back and forth, but rather across *trajectories*. My research is not a claim to have captured the essence of each coworking space, instead, the stories-so-far that this research engages with are when my trajectories have become entangled with a multiplicity of other trajectories. In this way, considering my research in terms of ‘[l]oose ends and ongoing stories’ (Massey, 2005: 107), this leaves my research open-ended, accepting of uncertainty and incompleteness. As such, I am not suggesting that it is appropriate, nor even possible, to undertake *direct* comparisons between each case study. Indeed, I am not using case studies as a way to make broad generalisations from my research, but rather to be attentive to complexity and particularity to help tease out certain theoretical and empirical themes

(McDowell, 2009). I now want to turn to consider the different methods within this research.

3.3. Talking with architects

The early stages of this project planned for a focus upon the designing and experiencing of multi-sensory work environments. This was inspired by architects such as Juhani Pallasmaa (2005) and Peter Zumthor (2006) who have explicitly sought to design for the embodied inhabitations of buildings, of touch, feel and atmosphere. As such, this research sought to add to the recent work on enlivened theorisations of architectural space among geographers, particularly those accounts which engaged with theories of affect (Allen, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010; Lees and Baxter, 2011).

I initially undertook a series of interviews with architects to try to get a feel for the contemporary state of architectural practice in the UK, but also to gather the extent to which architects were designing for inhabitation and different experiences and their capacity to do so. This was, in part, an move to respond to concerns raised by Jacobs and Merriman (2011: 219) who suggest that the ‘geographies of architecture’ risk becoming different ‘geographies of buildings’ whereby dialogues with architects, inhabitants among others are either one-way or absent entirely. In particular, they suggest that there has been a failure to listen carefully to architects. Jacobs and Merriman (2011: 219) propose that this is due to an uneasy relationship existing between architects and geographers:

To the sceptical architect, the analytical geographer may well appear to be unimaginatively weighed down by reality. To the sceptical geographer, the

speculative design architect may well appear wilfully ignorant of reality. More optimistically, yet still perhaps in the zone of mutual misapprehension, the architect might think that the geographer offers theory to their practice, while the geographer might see the architect or architecture as having nothing to say to the ways they conduct their research.

Therefore, this research sought to challenge this ‘mutual misapprehension’.

Unfortunately, this wasn’t always easy:

But what perspective do you bring to it as a social geographer that an architecture theorist doesn’t? ... Geographers are so interesting because they’ve claimed a territory called ‘space’ about twenty years ago and have clung onto it for dear life ever since. I know that Ed Soja, David Harvey and Neil Smith, this analysis of spatial concepts come from people who are trained as social geographers... but methodologically, what does a social geographer bring to the table, apart from a general discourse? ‘Coz they claimed space?

(architect, male, 40-50)

There is the danger when abstracting transcribed quotations from a conversation, reducing the complexity of lively interactions to text (Crang, 2005). The above quote appears quite confrontational, defensive even. Certainly, I felt pretty embarrassed following this interview. Moreover, this suggestion of geographers ‘claiming space’ left me feeling very uncomfortable. This particular encounter raises important questions as to the ways in which talking is used as a research method. To some degree, the above quotation conveys a sense of the emotions produced through this particular research meeting. Yet my overwhelming sense of embarrassment whilst sitting in his own office struggling to find a response (or for that matter, his frustrations with my questioning) and later, an enduring sense of my failure in responding to his claims critically, are less easily ‘captured’ by words on a page. Attention, then, must be paid towards the potential limitations and contradictions arising from talk-based methods in this

research. As Rose *et al.* (2010) caution, although people may report upon their experiences in relation to architectural inhabitations, these accounts may be far more complex and ambiguous than is articulated. People may more-or-less consciously mediate and self-censor their accounts, which also includes researchers (Jones, 2012). Indeed, whilst it may be impossible to *fully* know the ways in which research encounters are situated in webs of power, it is important to be continuously attentive to the content and context of the production of knowledge when talking and throughout the research process more broadly.

As the research developed, I adopted a far more conversational, open-ended approach to interviewing coworkers *in situ* to help examine different human experiences, histories and feelings. This responds to my concerns raised earlier relating to work on architectural inhabitations and the geographies of affect which are at risk of reporting on pre-cognitive bodily encounters beyond the personal by focusing upon transhuman and undifferentiated bodies (Thien, 2005). Through talking, this method was valuable for examining how human subjectivity interweaves with the experiencing of these particular working environments, even if we cannot take spoken accounts of feelings and experiences as a given. Given the potential limits of interviewing, this material was supported by maintaining a research diary to compare with interview transcripts. I could have, alternatively, followed Eric Laurier's (2004) study of *Doing office work on the motorway* by using video-ethnography to examine the weaving together of talking, working and moving. Whilst such an approach provides a useful insight into the *doing*, the unfolding of a series of events, there are clear limitations in relation to how anonymity could have been achieved and the practicality of such a research approach in

collective workplaces. Through my research diary, however, I tried to produce a sense of the richness of daily routines and encounters whilst interviewing, including drawing upon my own experiences. Similarly, as I shall discuss more fully below, whilst my research involved participative practices, this could not be said to be united around collective social and political action that often guides participatory research methods (Cahill, 2007). Whilst not claiming to follow participatory research methods, my conversational interviews and encounters certainly became far less structured than when talking with architects initially, guided by emergent discussions rather than a pre-determined list of questions. Whilst I maintain that talking methods provide a very helpful approach for this research to emphasise and examine human subjectivities, care has been taken not to take spoken accounts as granted. Indeed, within the empirical chapters of the thesis, I highlight several examples whereby claims made by coworkers and architects were, at different times, rather contradictory.

Through talking with the architect, here, I understood this to relate to his concern that there was a real danger that ‘architects’ are treated as a homogenous group, perpetuating the image of the ‘heroic’ architect as a particularly powerful actor within the built environment. Perhaps at the start of the project, I think that I too relied too much upon the idea of neat distinction between ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ of architecture (despite Lees, 2001; Llewelyn, 2003). In fact, similar debates have long existed among architects surrounding questions as wide as participatory design and unfinished buildings (Lerup, 1977; Habraken, 1972), social justice, collaborative practice and contesting inequality of the architecture ‘profession’ (New Architecture Movement, 1977; muf architecture/art, 2007). As such, I have addressed this much

more fully elsewhere (Lorne, under review). What I want to insist upon here is that through these initial interactions, my focus on architects and architecture was becoming far more ambiguous.

My interviews focused upon a loosely defined pocket of architects and architectural practices in the UK who are expanding what practising architecture involves. Several of these practices are identified within *Spatial Agency: other ways of doing architecture* led by a concern that the production of buildings should not necessarily be the primary concern for architects (Awan *et al.* 2011). Instead, they are calling for addressing and negotiating the relationship between architectural, social and political realms. In total, this part of the research has involved interviews with 18 people who are involved with architecture in practising or educational roles. The architects that took part ranged from (what might be uneasily termed) more ‘mainstream’ (e.g. former head of the Royal Institute of British Architects) to more ‘peripheral’ (e.g. collective of Part 1 architecture students) as well as with people working within architectural practices who were not architecturally trained. Notably, this includes several people who studied geography as undergraduates. As I shall discuss, the distinctions as to whether I was interviewing ‘architects’ or ‘coworkers’ became a lot more blurring, given that 9 interviews were undertaken whilst coworking alongside the architectural practitioners at Hub Westminster as well as many more informal conversations.

I had intended to undertake a staple of qualitative research, the semi-structured interview (Longhurst, 2010). Loosely-structured research interviews are helpful in eliciting rich sources of data in a conversational manner, allowing for a divergence from

planned questions as the ‘interviewee’ raises issues of concern (Longhurst, 2010). Indeed, several of my earlier interviews were along these lines. There were also several repeat interviews as the project developed which returned to the issues discussed more tentatively in the earlier stages of the research, in an attempt to maintain dialogue with the architects. Whilst it could be argued that, despite these ‘interviews’ being conversational in tone, this approach created an artificial environment, taking architects out of their daily routines. Indeed, over the last two decades or so, there has been increasing experimentation with more creative research methodologies (Crang, 2005; Lorimer, 2005). For instance, anthropologist Albena Yaneva (2009a; 2009b) follows the design processes of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture practice in their studio-laboratories. Although less focused on the architects at Hub Westminster’s different projects, most of my conversations with the architects occurred *whilst* coworking, sometimes when I was working as a member host in the coworking space, sometimes over a chance encounter in the kitchen. Most interactions were unplanned, and often quite mundane. As such, in the following section I consider how my research methods, including these interactions with the architects at Hub Westminster, are better understood as constituted *through* coworking.

Does this mean that the initial interviews with architects unrelated to Hub Westminster constitute the loose ends of this research, of unmade connections? Or more optimistically, connections yet-to-be-made? To some extent, I think they do. Yet, at the same time, these interactions have shaped my research trajectories, leading to my second case study as well as rethinking how I engage with geographic work on architecture. To be sure, my original concerns with designing for multi-sensory

experiences are still present in chapter 6 of this thesis. However, I think it's helpful to try to write how some of my ideas have travelled, not on some linear path of research 'discovery', but rather through negotiating all kinds of trajectories, meetings and practices.

3.4. Coworking methodologies

To date, there has not been much academic research into coworking. Perhaps the most prevalent research that has been undertaken is in relation to global web surveys (Deskmag, 2012). Aiming to encourage positive attitudes towards coworking, these accounts tend to analysis coworking as a particular trend, often represented in terms of the 'rise' and 'spread'. What I find more useful, however, are those methods whereby researchers are coworking. For instance, as Angela McRobbie (2013) notes how for nearly two years she had been observing Berlin's fashion sphere, drawing her into spaces of coworking. Elsewhere, Janet Merkel (2015) suggests that it was through her own experiences of coworking whilst using such spaces during her PhD research that provoked further interest:

In some spaces I felt like an anonymous customer, just like in a coffee shop, whereas in others I was immediately introduced to other coworkers, invited for lunch and evening events, and asked for my specific skills and interests.

(Merkel, 2015: 122)

My research performances blended an unstable hybridity of coworker-researcher-customer-host-friend- Following on from earlier, any attempt to somehow 'locate' myself is difficult. Moreover, as this research progressed, as friendships strengthened particularly in Birmingham, research encounters stretched out well beyond the

workplaces, be that to the homes of coworkers for dinner, coffee shops and pubs, retirement drinks and cycle trips, as well as group emails and text/Whatsapp messages. Several coworkers even came to my birthday do. Indeed, it makes it much trickier to establish when I am ‘working’ or not, as my research particularly at the Moseley Exchange fell into what Lisa Tillmann-Healy (2003) terms ‘friendship as method’. I shall discuss this further in the following section, but before then I want to consider embodying research through working.

Maybe the problem is that too few geographers participate in flexible labour, leaving them to write about it in the abstract. Maybe more geographers need to become ‘bodies at work’.

(McMorran, 2012: 490)

In a call for practising workplace geographies, this argument is levelled at geographers for failing to conduct research into work *through* the body, despite recent moves to address ‘methodological conservatism’ within the discipline (Latham, 2003). McMorran (2012) argues that calls from McDowell and Court (1994: 732) to focus upon ‘bodies at work’ has received only a muted response from cultural geographers. This echoes similar concerns raised elsewhere, including Hubbard’s (2011) reflections on social issues within *Social and Cultural Geography* where he states that only one of the 198 papers published in the journal’s last ten years focused explicitly on work, namely McDowell *et al.* (2005). I can’t help but feel that McMorran’s (2012) omission of Linda McDowell’s (2009) *Working Bodies* is a significant oversight here. As such, the equating of ‘labour’ with ‘work’ and paid employment for ‘brevity’s sake’ – despite recognising the significance of work ‘in the home’ – is a problematic move in addressing the overlaps and associations between different working practices, centring

work firmly in particular ‘workplaces’ (McMorran, 2012: 494). Indeed, such a declaration about flexible work among geographers seems to ignore the different struggles negotiating part-time work in the academy and childcare responsibilities, for example. As Klocker and Drozdowski (2012b) ask: how many papers is a baby ‘worth’? Despite these hesitations, the call to engage in research through embodied working methodologies is helpful. Certainly, classic texts such as those by Hochschild (1983) on emotional labour and Goffman (1959) on presentations of the self have had influence upon geographic approaches. It is notable that in Phil Crang’s (1994) study of working in a restaurant he came to undertaking his research indirectly *through* his part-time work. More recently, there has been research as the observer-passenger, shadowing stretched-out ‘mobile office’ workers (Laurier, 2004). When it has been suggested that among economic geographies ‘venturing beyond interviews is not as commonplace as it might be’ (Barnes *et al.*, 2007: 22), ‘talking whilst working’ maintains the importance of conversations within research (McMorran, 2012: 491).

Initially, I undertook more formal recorded interviews at the Moseley Exchange. As semi-structured interviews (following Longhurst, 2010), I sought to discuss coworkers working biographies, why they work at the coworking space, what their daily routines involve and how they feel about the workplace. These were, however, very awkward; they felt like ‘interviews’ and they took place in the rather staid meeting rooms upstairs. Even the coworkers mentioned afterwards how uncomfortable these felt compared to our regular discussions. Most coworkers didn’t use these meeting rooms despite being part of their membership. These first research encounters felt out of place compared to the ways coworkers usually work, socially and (even on the micro-scale)

architecturally. Notably, however, discussion with the management at the Moseley Exchange took place in their office separate from the main coworking space, which I suspect was partly out of routine, but partly so as to be out of earshot of coworkers (cf. McDowell, 1998). Whilst this primarily involved working alongside coworkers, this has also included interactions with many different workers, managers, member hosts, events staff and guests, cleaners, security staff, friends, colleagues, guests and family members of coworkers. Not all people were possible to interview. Unlike McMorran's (2012) work alongside other cleaners, whereby the workers raised questions surrounding the 'legitimacy' of doing research work outside of work hours, I was told by one of the coworkers: 'as long as you don't piss anyone off, no-one really cares what you do' (male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange). These research methods should not therefore be treated as a typical workplace study. I wasn't simply 'doing research' there, but sitting, talking and avoiding work like many others. It was once interactions became more regular I would ask the coworkers if it might be possible to sit down for a chat to talk a bit more about coworking. I therefore adjusted future recorded *conversations* whereby I gave them the choice as to where they would feel comfortable sitting.

As I participated in the everyday routine practices of coworking, levels of interaction change throughout the working day and week and as was suggested to me, you can 'opt-in' and interact to a greater-or-lesser extent. Often it would be difficult to fix a time in a coworker's diary to sit and talk about their work and I would be naïve to ignore that most of the workers would be aware that it was unlikely that they would generate any work through meeting with me. They were more than likely meeting out of generosity, curiosity or perhaps sympathy. Interestingly, many of the impromptu conversations

coworking could last longer than the proposed twenty minutes or so that I would try to schedule with the workers. Through becoming a coworking ‘regular’ I shared similar routines to those at the coworking spaces, although as the following section discusses, I never claimed to be in the same position. The recurring proximity of sharing the workspace, participating in the mundane social interactions such as making cups of tea strengthened trust and friendship. Usually after starting a conversation over the kettle, this would lead to discussion about my ‘work’ and would act as a prompt for ongoing conversations (I would later realise that this was a purposeful design at the Hub, discussed more fully in chapter 6). The fleeting encounters waiting at the kettle would become something of a strategic site for meeting and talking with coworkers about work *in situ* even if momentarily. I would usually take this opportunity to make clear that I am a researcher interested in the daily routines of coworking and sharing the workspace, so as to ensure that any notes taken about participant observation of people’s interactions within the buildings were overt (compare, for example, with Lees’ (2001) covert vignettes in the spaces of the Vancouver library). When going to a coffee shop to talk, my approach aligned with ‘go-along’ methodologies being perhaps more mobile than that of ‘hanging out’ (Kusenbach, 2003: 455 and 463). Yet as meetings were commonplace to coworkers, going to a coffee shop wasn’t disruptive to their everyday working routines.

In total, I undertook 40 interviews with coworkers, managers and hosts across my case studies, 9 of which involved practitioners working for 00:/, the architectural practice that established Hub Westminster. Informal and fleeting conversations with coworkers, however, are impossible to quantify meaningfully but constituted an important part of

the data collection over approximately 18 months. Although initial contact had been made whilst working at the Moseley Exchange prior to the PhD project, the formal research process began on 24th January 2012 as part of a pilot study, followed by six months working as a regular member. Following this period, I continued to drop-in to the coworking space regularly throughout 2013 and I still maintain contact with several coworkers today. Research began at Hub Westminster on 12th June 2013 with my first shift as a member host beginning on the 11th June 2013 and I undertook research on a near-daily basis whilst working there for two months. Research at FunkBunk began on the 7th November 2013 until closure at the Christmas period at the end of the year.

I would regularly keep a research diary noting informal conversations, routine practices and movements in relation to the case studies. We might understand this in terms of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1994) or perhaps ‘ethnography through thick and thin’ (following Marcus, 1998) whereby, rather than being apologetic for variability, gaps and pragmatism in research, we recognise that particular research dimensions can be more intensive. Whilst at my first case study I maintained a written notebook, but adapted to write directly into *NVivo* data analysis programme, given that it felt much more comfortable writing notes when around others also on their computers. Indeed, once I had transcribed recorded interviews, I used *NVivo* to analyse my research, following Bazeley (2007) but also in discussion with Dr. Maggie Kubanyiova as part of an *NVivo* course within my Postgraduate Certificate for Advanced Research Methods.

My research methods were slightly different whilst member-hosting at Hub Westminster. Prior to working there, I underwent basic training, shadowing member-

hosts and I signed a contract of my expected duties. My work involved a range of tasks from answering the phone from both internal security and external phone lines, re-arranging the workspace for daily events as well as re-setting the workspace for the next day. It also involved doing the washing up, wiping down surfaces and locking up the workplace at night. There were elements of Strebel's (2011) 'block checks' here as I had a routinized schedule to follow during my shifts. Whilst I had a formal checklist of jobs to undertake, one member host produced a post-it note that stated the work I 'really' had to do (see Fig 3.1). During these shifts, I would spend a lot of time aimlessly chatting to different people at the main host-desk or whilst washing up. I was advised that when I didn't have any immediate work to do I could do my own work and I would usually type up any quick research diary notes I had quickly noted down.

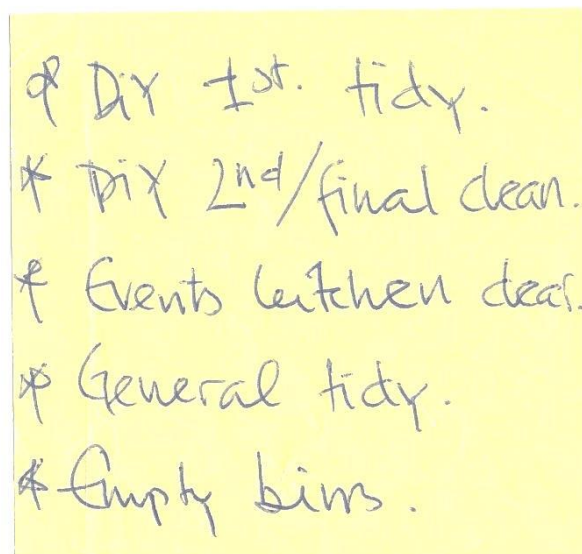


Fig. 3.1 – Shortened list of duties as a member host

Despite an emphasis upon the non-representational within the recent geographies of architecture literatures, many accounts incorporate photography (for instance, Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010; den Besten *et al.*, 2011; Lees and Baxter, 2011) as well as videograms (Strebel, 2011) into analysis of ‘interior’ spaces. Whilst coworking, I have taken quick photographs on my mobile phone at the three workspaces, however, I found this an exceedingly uncomfortable practice. Taking photos at Hub Westminster was fairly commonplace either for visitors or even for a modelling photoshoot, but was very rare at my other two case studies. I found taking photos of the workplace almost impossible because of the presence of people working; simply, it felt very intrusive. Aware of concerns that photography can be a potentially violent act, and that no visual imagery can be understood as innocent (Sontag, 1977; Rose, 2012), with a few exceptions, most photographs at Moseley Exchange and FunkBunk were taken first thing in the morning before others got to work. At Hub Westminster, I would usually take photographs once I had finished my cleaning routines at the end of the day, once my duties had been completed. It is at this point that I want to turn to consider how I negotiated relationships with coworkers and my ‘own’ work.

3.5. Negotiating ethics, work and friendships

Research in ... a time of uncertainty, and an era when knowledge as power is reinscribed through its value as a commodity in the global market place, presents tricky ground for researchers.

(Smith, 2007: 102)

Perhaps the most important aspect of this [friendship as method] is that we research with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love. Friendship as method is neither a program nor a guise strategically

aimed at gaining further access. It is a level of investment in participants' lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project

(Tillmann-Healy, 2003: 735)

I want to return to consider my initial discussion of academic performances in response to the problems with positions of power in terms of sameness/distance. I want to do so because it was frequently suggested that my 'work' was similar to that of the coworkers who were running their own business. In discussing this, I wish to consider how such approach to research involves particular ethical negotiations.

Certainly there are particular ethical procedures established in their research. For instance, written consent was sought for recorded interviews whereby names of those interviewed have been anonymised. On certain occasions, either by request or where it felt appropriate, I have further removed details to ensure full anonymity of coworkers, for instance, relating directly to any legal issues. At the same time, the decision was taken to retain the identification of the case studies, following McDowell's (2009) insistence upon the importance of location within workplace studies. Although at times this decision had led to uncertainty surrounding my capacity to *critique* such workplaces, given that they are welcoming of discussion and debate within such workplaces and that permission to was granted at each coworking space this seemed appropriate.

Yet the ethics of research extended well beyond those expected by the ethics review panel at my university. This research, and particularly at Moseley Exchange where I have had longest contact, became unexpectedly participatory. This is not, I should state,

participatory in the same sense as participatory action research (Kesby, 2005; Cahill, 2007). There has been no such mutual goal aligned around social justice *per se*, despite frequent conversations about social justice issues. Rather it has been participatory in that there was mutual support from other coworkers based upon friendship and care. Whilst this is of course not uncommon for ethnographic research, what is significant is that my research was often understood as my *work*. As such, coworkers expressed interest to help with my work and this was multi-directional.

I was helping them out with their work and they might often help with 'mine'. One coworker read through and debated my abstract for a conference paper that I would later give at the AAG based upon research at the Moseley Exchange. With the coworker who produces organic cycling t-shirts, I have been involved by providing advice on graphic designs. We talked through the difficulties of producing t-shirts that were free from child-labour and were pesticide and chemical-free cotton, for which I could bring in the geographic work on 'follow the thing' (Cook *et al.*, 2004). On several occasions, coworkers opened up their house for dinner or for a BBQ with their neighbours for which my partner and I were invited. Most unexpectedly, I ended up modelling t-shirts (see below). This has also involved a loosely-defined reading group based upon reading and debating *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto* (Hall *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, as social relationships have developed there has been a level of reciprocity between myself and particular coworkers. I have developed strong friendships through this project. It would become a joke that I should be writing down ideas whilst we went for a drink after work. The support from some coworkers helping me to try to make sense of my analysis along the way has been invaluable.

A constant concern when undertaking this research is that I have been paying – albeit through my research support grant – to work in the coworking space I was therefore in part a ‘customer’ at the coworking spaces. Dilemmas surrounding money transactions and gift-giving are not new to ethnographic research (Head, 2009). Whilst I may not be able to resolve this, I want to highlight how this payment for a certain number of hours in the workplace is just one particular economic transaction within the research. Indeed, as I have already mentioned above, my access to work in Hub Westminster was based upon reciprocal labour in exchange for research time. This is not to suggest there aren’t problems here, but rather, that there is economic difference. More than this however, I, too, have helped out coworkers work. For instance, if we take the photograph below, used in the advertisement of one of the alternative capitalist companies that produces organic t-shirts. I was asked if I would be able to help out by modelling the new t-shirts (see Fig. 3.2). As a friend and knowing his project, I was happy to help (something I discuss more extensively in chapter 7). He wanted me to cycle my recycled bicycle. Indeed, it is the bike that I have been cycling to commute to my case studies throughout this PhD project. If we think beyond ‘the bicycle as a field aid’ (Salter, 1969), this bicycle was salvaged and fixed by the Birmingham Bike Foundry co-operative in Stirchley, Birmingham. As a workers’ co-operative, they re-use donated bicycle parts so that any costs for bike repairs are labour costs, with money divided up among their team according to their need so as to cover living costs. By including this photograph here, I have sought to highlight the different possible economies that can begin to be made more visible by rethinking ‘the economy’, even if on a very modest scale, to contest prevailing academic accounts that presume ‘neoliberal’ this or that (Gibson-Graham,

2008b). This is no doubt only a small example but I discuss this more fully in chapter 7, writing in my uncertainty about these academic performances



Figure 3.2. – A short-lived modelling career (photo credit: ThomDavies)

3.6. Data management, coding and analysis

The use of NVivo data analysis software has been crucial in supporting the transformation of this research project. This relates to the storing and managing of research data as well as through processes of coding and analysis.⁶ Having transcribed all recorded research ‘interviews’ into Microsoft Word, including additional details about each encounter such as how we moved around the workplace and how the interview first came about, I imported these as well as research diary notes, photographs, project notes (such as ethics forms), publications and formal documents into NVivo.⁷ A constantly updated version was saved on a main laptop computer, and then date and time stamped copies of the NVivo project were saved each day on *Dropbox*, with an additional copy saved occasionally on an external hard-drive to avoid any big loss of data or analysis. All research data was anonymised in NVivo, particularly important given that I would be working on my laptop within the coworking case studies and saving backups in cloud storage.

A ‘project journal’ was maintained to document how my research analysis transformed over the course of the research process. This was quite broad, written almost as a stream-of-consciousness to record any analytical and methodological reflections within NVivo. This is important to undertake even if ideas are not fully formed or written in a

⁶ Ideas within this section have been considered previously in the unpublished module assessment ‘Advanced Qualitative Data Analysis (using NVivo) Assessment’ as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Research Methods.

⁷ As noted previously, whilst project journal notes had initially been kept in a paper research journal and typed up, later notes were either directly input into NVivo or straight after each research ‘event’ when I had a moment to type up thoughts. This was particularly the case whilst hosting at Hub Westminster.

particularly tidy or academic style (Bazeley, 2007; Charmaz, 2006). For instance, I recorded how I had initially stored and managed sources separately by ‘type’ yet this became increasingly problematic, not least in relation to the architects coworking at Hub Westminster. In the earlier stages of analysis, I noted:

There is a need for my research data to not be separated 'professionals' and 'case studies'. This is because I want the dialogues between these to be held together rather than enforcing a binary between the two. This relates to the theoretical underpinnings of my research, i.e. that buildings aren't just 'finished' or completed by architects but (architectural) space is constantly 'in the making' by multiple actors (cf. Massey, 2005). Professionals and 'users' of the built environment shouldn't operate in two distinct spaces (in theory or in Nvivo).

(NVivo project journal, 20/05/2013 11:33)

This provides an initial insight, if here in rather undeveloped form, of how instead of ‘siloeing’ research sources into ‘architects’, ‘coworkers’ or ‘management’, for instance, all interviews were brought together so that they can be analysed horizontally within the same internal source folder. As noted above, this was one instance of my analysis moving away from a previously held problematic distinction between the ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ of architectural space (cf. Lees, 2001; Llewellyn, 2003). This was also one of the earlier connections made with Doreen Massey’s geographic work.

I initially undertook iterative ‘first level’ coding that was very ‘close’ to the research data, a slow process picking up upon ‘everyday’ accounts, expressions and phrases. This was started whilst part way through the ‘fieldwork’ phase of the research and produced codes such as ‘can’t work from home’, ‘lack of collaboration’ and ‘look professional’. After some time, this generated an exhaustive list of coding nodes.

Indeed, over the course of analysis, many of these initial codes were merged. The re-ordering of nodes have been documented within memos which have been set-up to draw out connections and contradictions with my research diary notes, literatures and particular analytical ‘hunches’. Over time, as I continuously re-visited my initial analysis, particularly when I was no longer regularly working within the case study coworking spaces, I was able to analyse my data with more ‘critical distance’ (following Bazeley, 2007). By this, I mean that through this analytical tool it has been possible to sort these ‘grounded’ themes into hierarchies of nodes attached to broader, more abstract concepts guided by themes within relevant literatures to establish a more strategic coding framework.

For instance, connecting with my theoretical framing following Doreen Massey’s (2005) theorising of space, a parent node was produced entitled ‘emergent coworking trajectories’. Within this parent node are a series of nodes, such as the different spatial metaphors used to conceptualise the coworking spaces, different social relations of proximity and permeability and working performances. This parent node roughly maps onto what has become chapter 5 of this thesis. Similarly, a node about ‘architectural possibility’ was produced in a meeting with one of the architects at Hub Westminster. Initially understood in terms of the geographies of architecture and how architectural space might be designed to encourage particular movements, this was developed to focus beyond the more specifically *architectural* dimension. This shifted my analysis beyond building inhabitations so as to examine the different human experiences connecting with spatial theories relating to the possibility of space and chance encounters (Massey, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 2006). There was considerable data

emphasising the different histories and experiences of coworkers which exceeded the immediate inhabitations of the workplace as well as expressions of particular feelings about their experiences relating to elsewhere. It was therefore through these processes of data analysis that transformed the research project. Whilst the original architectural focus of the project remains evident in the second empirical chapter of this thesis, my coding framework in NVivo (see *Appendix B*) can be seen to roughly trace the empirical chapters of this thesis that exceeds this explicitly architectural research focus.

Certain theoretical developments, then, have been supported by managing sources in NVivo and arriving at new relationships between data. Bazeley and Richards (2005:131) observe the value of ‘taking stock’ when ordering research concepts and working with research ideas. This has not been *exclusively* as a result of using NVivo as a standalone research tool, however, rather it is a combination of the program, thinking more critically about the aims of the research, as well as through support and discussion with other academics and coworkers. This follows Bazeley’s (2007) argument that collecting together, reading and then interpreting data is merely the *starting* point for sound qualitative analysis. So whilst the formative literatures of the geographies of architecture strongly shaped the analytical themes within the parent node ‘designing and curating coworking spaces’ which broadly follows chapter 6 of this thesis, this was markedly different in the final empirical chapter as a focus upon and analysis of the economic practices and spaces developed over the course of the research. Indeed, it was through discussions about the more conceptual analysis with coworkers, particularly at Moseley Exchange, that reflects the inclusion of a ‘concluding discussion’ section in the final empirical chapter 7 as opposed to a ‘conclusion’. This follows Nicky

Gregson's (2005: 322) hesitations about the performance of academic writing and a concluding singular voice that can erase 'geographies of tension, contradiction, and polyvocality' which reflects my own stance developed in relation to 'becoming entrepreneurial and other possibilities'.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to convey a sense of how my research methodologies exceeded the presumed boundaries of both the coworking spaces and the research project. In doing so, I have discussed the fluidity, and to some degree, the experimental approach of this research constituted *through* coworking. Following critiques of abstracting and distancing accounts of research, I have sought to write something less stable. Undoubtedly, this research project has shifted through the meeting of different trajectories, some more expected than others. Therefore, I have not tried to provide an 'authoritative' account of what happened 'in the field' but rather a discussion of how this research process has been negotiated and is at times uncertain.

It has not always been easy to be conscious of the power relations that constitute my 'work' occupying a more ambiguous space of researcher-host-coworker-friend-.... This has, however, led to a questioning of my academic performances. This research has involved some powerful connections, access to the 'old-boys network' of the RIBA, the invitation to undertake work for the Moseley CDT but also the ability to live with my partner in London as well as with my parents. I am a white, middle-class man and whilst aware that these descriptions can be reductive, and my ability to fully know how this shapes research processes is never fully knowable, I have tried to illustrate some of

the ways in which power has saturated this research process for which I am entangled. Counter to any suggestion that this may be considered narcissistic, I have tried to incorporate some of the ways in which I am part of this research process. This continues throughout the rest of the thesis. I now want to turn to discuss more closely the three case study coworking spaces for which this research is associated.

Case studies overview

Having mentioned the three case study workspaces of this thesis within *Negotiating Uncertain Methodologies*, this section will provide a more specific overview of each of the coworking spaces. This includes where they are located, why they were said to have been established and an initial description of the buildings for which they are associated.

4.1. Moseley Exchange, Birmingham

The *Moseley Exchange* is in the Birmingham suburb of Moseley, roughly two miles to the south of Birmingham city centre. The building is located in the former telephone exchange building, built in the 1930s (Moseley Community Development Trust, 2010). It is on the Alcester Road, the main road connecting Moseley to Kings Heath to the south, and Balsall Heath and the city centre to the north, and is located on a major bus route through the city. Access to both the coworking space and the rest of the Moseley Community Development Trust (CDT) is via the courtyard through the passageway to the right of the front façade of the building (see Fig. 4.1). The Post Office currently uses the main entrance to the building.



Fig. 4.1. – Entrance to Moseley Exchange (photo credit: author's own)

The coworking space was opened in July 2009 by the *Moseley Community Development Trust* who are an independent charity and company limited by guarantee, founded in 2001 by The Moseley Society and the Central Moseley Neighbourhood Forum (now Moseley Forum) with support from the Moseley and District Churches Housing Association (Moseley Community Development Trust, 2010). According to the Land Registry (as of 9/4/2015), the building is owned by the Moseley Community Development Trust (co. regn. no. 4163271). The Community Development Trust states that it is ‘a community enterprise organisation. We are community-led and are doing it for ourselves, trying not to be dependent on others’ (Moseley Community Development

Trust, 2010: np). As a development trust they suggest that they are focused upon the Moseley neighbourhood, that they remain under community control, are involved in the regeneration of Moseley and are not-for-private-profit with the intention of being financially independent (Moseley Community Development Trust, 2010: np). Through partial financing through the European Regional Development Fund, the coworking space was established inside the shed-like structure at the rear of the Post Office building.

Once entering the passageway to the courtyard, up a ramp on the left hand-side brings you to the entrance of the Moseley CDT. The main reception, located on the left is permanently staffed by a CDT member, operates for both the Moseley Exchange and the upstairs room and office hire which contributes towards the running costs of the Moseley CDT. The majority of the CDT staff are located in a separate office behind the reception, which also includes a printer and post pigeonholes, with the manager located upstairs on the top floor. The coworking space itself is on the right, visible through a glass window from the reception, and is accessible through main glass doors from the corridor as well as a further smaller door which connects the toilet facilities. The coworking space itself is one large room, divided by a central wall with an archway. This loosely divides the coworking space into a 'main room' and a kitchen and meeting area (see Figs 4.2. and 4.3).

In March 2006, a design statement was undertaken by Mueller Kneer Associates (now Casper Mueller Kneer Architects) who won a competition to work with the brief provided by the Moseley CDT. Due to disagreements over cost and project intentions,

Mueller Kneer Associates were not subsequently involved in the redevelopment of the Moseley Exchange building (interview with Manager, male, 40-45). In this design statement (Mueller Kneer Associates, 2006: np) the Moseley Exchange was initially branded as ‘a new creative hub for the local community’. Subsequent leaflets describe coworking at the Moseley Exchange as part of ‘a new way of working. Members can meet, work, learn and set new projects in motion. It’s where collaboration and innovation go hand in hand’ (Moseley Exchange flyer). They currently characterise themselves as a coworking space which they suggest is:

...ideal for those who work as independents, or perhaps work from home part-time and seek to be part of a friendly and supportive community of coworkers. Or you may just need some local office space and a place for meeting colleagues or clients – we have that too! Many of our members are “solopreneurs” or new business start-ups.

(Moseley Exchange, 2013: np)

However, as the manager explained, there are no requirements as to which individuals, organisations or businesses can work from the Moseley Exchange:

We started out to try to target the creative industry sector but we realised that we can’t rely on the creative industry sector, other work patterns have changed so much, people may be a bit of creative sector, may be a bit of public sector, may be a bit of - it’s not like an alcoholics anonymous meeting, you know? We don’t expect people to stand up and say why they’re here. As long as it’s not illegal we don’t mind anybody being here’.

(Manager, male, 40-45; Moseley Exchange)

As discussed within *Negotiating Uncertain Methodologies*, my initial involvement with this case study was a brief research project undertaken for the Moseley CDT. I have spent the most time alongside coworkers at the Exchange whilst living in Birmingham and this has led to developing friendships with a lot of the coworkers inside and beyond

the walls of the coworking space. Like many of the coworkers who are not consistently using the workspace I have been involved with the Moseley Exchange for more than 18 months. Although I am no longer a ‘member’ of the Exchange, I am well known to most coworkers and the staff involved with the running of the workspace. At the time of undertaking the research there were approximately 50 ‘members’ of the Moseley Exchange, with roughly half of those members regularly using the workspace. Generally speaking, these members were approximately two thirds male and a third female.



Fig. 4.2. – ‘Main room’ within Moseley Exchange during event in kitchen (photo credit: author’s own)



Fig. 4.3. – Kitchen in the Moseley Exchange (photo credit: author's own)

4.2. Hub Westminster, London

Launched in 2011, *Hub Westminster* (recently renamed *Impact Hub Westminster*) is located at the corner of Haymarket and Pall Mall in central London, in close proximity to Trafalgar Square. It is housed across the entire first floor podium of New Zealand House. According to the Land Registry (as of 9/4/2015), given that the property is adjacent to Her Majesty's Theatre, parts of the building are owned by The Crown Estate Commissioners and New Zealand Government Property Corporation. It is significantly larger than the other two case studies, measuring at 12,000 ft². The building itself, designed by Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners (now RMJM) has Grade II listed status, with its initial construction between 1959-63 and was the first major office tower building in central London (English Heritage, 2013).



Fig. 4.4. – New Zealand House (photo credit: Nick Weall, <http://www.e-architect.co.uk/london/new-zealand-house>)

Hub Westminster is part of the global Impact Hub Network, which consists of 69 Impact Hubs across six continents, involving 11000 members and has 23 more Impact Hubs in the process of being set-up (Impact Hub, 2015). They state:

We believe a better world evolves through the combined accomplishments of creative, committed, and compassionate individuals focused on a common purpose.

(Impact Hub, 2015: np)

Although part of a network with shared goals, each Hub has a different ownership and governance structure. Hub Westminster was set-up by 00:/, who operate as a (former) architectural practice, who also include ‘researchers’ and ‘strategic designers’ and is funded 40% by 00:/, 40% Westminster City Council and 20% private investors, a

structure which is openly discussed by both 00:/ and Hub Westminster. The architects worked on the business model, architectural re-design and membership strategy for the workplace. They are no longer working directly on the running of the workspace, although retain their 40% equity in the project and they are based as ‘anchor tenants’ within the workspace. Westminster City Council provided a one-off conditional grant of £300,000 and equity and loan finance of £436,000, in order to create a limited shares company with under the status of a ‘Community Interest Company’ alongside the other two shareholders (Westminster City Council, 2011). The justification for funding the Hub Westminster is suggested that it:

will provide a highly supportive environment for enterprise and innovation, including residents who want to become self-employed or have recently started a business.

(Westminster City Council, 2011: np)

Within this public document, Westminster City Council express the importance of funding this project, referring to the context of ‘reduced public expenditure’ and the ‘challenging economic climate’. This is positioned in different terms by Hub Westminster who state that their primary aim is to support ‘impact makers’, that is ‘organisations with positive social and environmental impact at the heart of their missions’ (Impact Hub Westminster, 2015: np). As such, Impact Hub Westminster aims to ‘provide flexible access to workspace and curate a supportive, collaborative environment for these impact makers’ (Impact Hub Westminster, 2015: np). During the time of research, there were 465 members of the Hub Westminster, 260 who worked for organisations and the other 205 were individual workers.

I discuss access to the workspace more extensively in chapter 6, however it is helpful to provide a brief summary here. If you enter the main doors of New Zealand House there is a front-desk. Members of Hub Westminster can swipe through the security door and take the lift to the first floor. Guests to the workspace have to sign in at registration. If your name has been entered into the online list the previous evening, guests will be sent up. If you were not registered, a member host will be contacted via telephone and will come down to meet the guest and take them up to the first floor. Once you reach the first floor, the Hub extends across to the left and right. The main host desk is located in the middle of the ‘Studio Café’. The workspace is open-plan but has been loosely divided up into different spaces: Studio Café, Workshop 1, Workshop 2, The Stage, Strategy Lab, The Library/Long Table, Learning Lab, Greenhouse, Wikihouse and the DIY Kitchen (see Fig. 4.5 and 4.6).



Fig. 4.5. DIY kitchen (photo credit: author's own)



Fig. 4.6. – Workshop 1 facing the Wikihouse (photo credit: author's own)

4.3. FunkBunk, Wing, Bedfordshire

FunkBunk, established in 2008, is located in Glebe Close Farm in the rural village of Wing, just outside Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire. The site has belonged to the family who took over the site following the end of World War II (according to the Land Registry (as of 9/4/2015) and in interview with co-owner, male, 30-35), where it was used as a site for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force before becoming a dairy farm. The remaining buildings were saved from dereliction, with the building that FunkBunk is located in being used to house cows (interview with co-owner). The building was later converted into a shared office.

FunkBunk is described as a ‘workhub’ (‘a flexible, desk-when-needed, working environment’ (FunkBunk, flyer)). On their flyer, they advertise that they are:

for anyone who needs somewhere to work for a few hours, days, weeks or months (or even permanently). We welcome everyone from freelancers and home-based businesses to remote workers and part-time, working parents.

They suggest that people who might use the space are those who cannot work from home, because of noise, distractions, procrastination or solitude, and by working at FunkBunk, this will help increase their work productivity, but may also be used to hold a work meeting or to separate home from work. It also markets itself as a ‘shelter for stray creatives’ (FunkBunk, 2014: np) and as the co-owner suggests, reflecting upon their rural location, FunkBunk may be:

your *other* office, you don’t need to completely replace your working environment with working here, it’s more an addition to, so something you can fall back on and just come to occasionally.

(co-owner, male, 30-35; FunkBunk)

The workspace is smaller in size than both the two other case studies (see Figs. 4.7 and 4.8). It was previously two connected buildings, however, following difficulties with planning restrictions, the connecting workspace is now rented by an events company. The direct connection between the two buildings is maintained, however, and a shared kitchen and toilet is used by both organisations. There is a small table and seating space outside the kitchen which can be used by either members or the company opposite and there is a meeting room in the space rented by the events company which can be used by the coworkers. Most of coworkers either commute by car or by bicycle due to its rural location. At the time of the research, there were 6 regular coworkers with a dozen

people who sporadically use the workspace. These included engineers as well as graphic designers, writers and consultants and were almost exclusively men.

Having provided brief overviews for each case study within this thesis, I will now turn to my first empirical chapter to insist that these workplaces are far from singular, homogenous spaces.

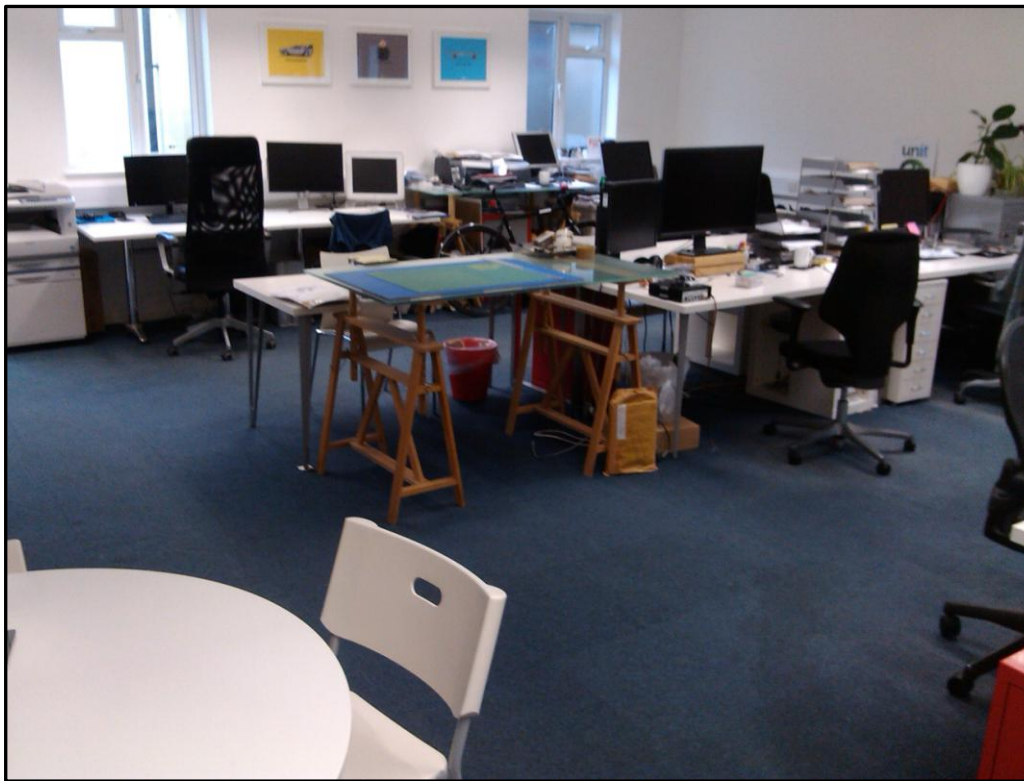


Fig. 4.7 – Main desks for ‘regular’ coworkers (photo credit: author’s own)



Fig. 4.8 – ‘Workshop’ and meeting table (photo credit: author’s own)

**‘Going out to work’:
Relational performances, professionalism and multiplicity**



This chapter examines claims that by ‘going out to work’ coworkers can separate spaces of ‘home’ and ‘work’ so as to present a more ‘professional’ self among ‘like-minded’ individuals. As I shall discuss, coworkers frequently deploy dramatological metaphors of ‘getting your workface on’ and being ‘in the zone’ when inhabiting coworking spaces to identify particular spatial performances. Evoking notions of performance and interaction as understood by Erving Goffman (1959; 1967) these shared workplaces are typically characterised as both a site for face-to-face exchanges between apparently like-minded people and as a ‘front of house’ to ‘make your home business look more professional’ (see Fig. 5.1). However, instead of moving between two static points whereby coworkers can perform particular ‘versions’ of themselves, I will consider how routine attempts to spatially and temporally separate ‘home’ and ‘work’, act to ‘fix’ unstable subjectivities. As such, my analysis aligns more closely with the notions of performativity (Butler, 1990; 1993) and performative space (Gregson and Rose, 2000). As we shall see, amidst claims of being increasingly ‘liberated from space’, certain coworkers are seeking to re-centre themselves ‘at work’ so as to ‘legitimise’ particular masculinities, and connectedly, ‘professional’ identities (Massey, 1995).

Coworking is often portrayed as ‘a new urban social practice’ growing as a response to the 2008 financial crisis (Merkel, 2015: 122) and championed as part of ‘a broader (albeit nascent) change in the economy: a switch from predominantly corporate environments to one that is much more fluid and dependent upon networks and collaboration’ (Greater London Authority, 2014: 13). I argue that amidst claims of change, fluidity and mobility there is also an awful lot of stubborn continuity

(McDowell, 2009; 2014). Given these pay-to-access shared workspaces are said to be ‘new’ or even ‘alternative’ workplaces composed of ‘like-minded’ individuals, I pay attention to embodied aspects of experience. If we understand these workplaces as ‘meeting places’ in terms of the ongoing co-existence of heterogeneity and multiplicity (Massey, 2005), I consider how coworking spaces are open to unexpected encounters holding the possibility for moments of conflict and care, challenging any notion of the workplace as singular or bounded.

Therefore, in this chapter I am concerned with conceptualising practices and spaces of coworking as performative and relational. By conceptualising coworking in this way, I move away from more typical accounts of work from within both economic and labour geographies whereby there has been a tendency to focus upon ‘the employment aspect of a person’s or group’s life, as if this can be separated analytically and ontologically from their wider existence’ (Castree, 2007: 159; see also Halford, 2005). This is not a move to reject research in economic or labour geographies, and I do not wish to downplay the importance of class relations and struggles (although in chapter 7, I consider how we understand class in relation to self-employment). Rather I pay attention to those feminist critiques of capitalist discourse which stress that the social and economic relations of work do not solely exist in relation to the ‘workplace’ but in all sites where work is performed (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Oberhauser, 2002). Although my research into coworking spaces shares certain similarities with sociological workplace studies that adopt ethnographic and case study methods, such research can risk treating the workplace as a placeless container, failing to consider the different ways in which space/place matters (McDowell, 2009). Extending Nancy

Ettlinger's (2003; 2007) concerns that economic geographies can privilege broader spatial scale which can risk perpetuating a fallacy that somehow workers share the same values, behaviours and history, I consider how coworking spaces are incoherent and provisionally constituted through all kinds of social relations. Therefore, following Massey (2005), recognising the specificities and similarities between my three case studies, this chapter will discuss how it is important to understand coworking spaces relationally and constitutive of multiplicity. This sets out my framing of coworking spaces for the following chapters.

5.1. 'Getting your work face on'

Any inherited assumptions that treat 'going out to work' as a straight-line journey between distinct spheres conceals all kinds of uneven social relations addressed (Hanson and Pratt, 1988). Focusing my research upon coworking spaces is neither to isolate nor privilege 'work' for geographic research. Counter to this, I insist that these particular spaces of work are entangled through all kinds of interrelations – and often the ongoing construction of boundaries – with spaces of 'home' as well as 'community'. This provides a starting point for my research into these apparently 'new' workplaces.

At the same time, I question popular claims such as '[m]y place of work ... is simply where I am' (Economist, 1999: 76; cited in Thrift, 2002), that work is now no longer a place but an activity (Duffy, 2008). Despite the enabling role that the technologies of networks, pipes and cables may have in accomplishing different working activities through homeworking and teleworking, affecting the times and spaces of (paid) work, I

too am cautious of journalistic hyperbole in relation to changing spaces and places of work (Felstead, 2011). Indeed, as Rachel Cohen (2010) insists, claims about changing spatial-temporal boundaries of ‘mobile work’ tends to focus on white-collar *working whilst mobile*, rather than *mobility for work* or *mobility as work*. It is significant, then, to consider how particular people are routinely paying to access these particular workplaces in order to get work done.

For many coworkers, whether those who had moved to set up their own business or those working remotely, they suggested that prior to accessing coworking spaces they had been working from ‘a home office’ as a primary workspace. If they needed to hold meetings, they would typically arrange to meet ‘clients’ in a coffee shop or at their client’s premises. Indeed, many people cited a lack of permanence and the prohibitive cost of working from coffee shops for extended periods, although several had tried renting more conventional serviced-office units. For those coworkers who work from home, and those who continue to do so sporadically, this arrangement was said to be challenging, albeit for different, often conflicting reasons.

The most frequently cited challenge facing those who were working from home was that this left them feeling isolated during their working day as a result of the lack of social interaction. There was said to be a desire for routine patterns of verbal and non-verbal encounters with colleagues. It was suggested that those working from their home might not leave the house for several days at a time as their ‘working’ and ‘living’ spaces co-existed. As one coworker who had recently set-up his own consultancy following redundancy states:

I set up my business, had a nice office in the attic, but was kind of feeling that when I wasn't with clients I was a little bit isolated and so it was essentially a social purpose to kind of find a good office environment where I would have some other people around so it wasn't just me either in my office or other organisations, [but] that social occasion.

(Coworker, male, 45-50, Moseley Exchange)

This emphasis upon feeling alienated (not here in the Marxist sense) was regularly stated in both recorded interviews and informal conversations with coworkers. For many, coming to a coworking space enabled daily interactions with other 'workers' even if these were somewhat mundane encounters:

If I don't speak to anyone all day, I'll go to the shop and I'll chat to the cashier for fifteen minutes and she'll think I'm mad! So I need to be around people, and even if I'm not talking to them, actually I don't talk to people much at all, but it's just nice to have people around me.

(Coworker, male, 25-30, FunkBunk)

The ability to opt into the daily routines of tea-making, 'small talk' or just sitting alongside other people was said to help them make it through their working day. More than this, however, the spatial-temporal dimensions of these encounters are said to be crucial for 'putting on' specific work performances. As one coworker insists, going to the workplace was less about seeing other faces and more about getting his 'work face on':

It's less of that for me because as I said I spend three or four days a week working at clients' offices, I don't really struggle with that social side of things because I always know ultimately, you know, I'll be somewhere where there's other people to chat to. So I don't have days on time when I'm not talking to anybody else. For me, it's purely the ability to focus, actually. I find that if I'm at home, I find it much easier to stop focusing, to get distracted, to go off and do other things than when I'm here and I think it's purely because there are other people working, you sort of *get your work face on*, as opposed to *not getting into that zone* when you're at home.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk; my emphasis)

Invoking a dramaturgical sense of performance, he suggests that he conduits himself in particular ways, 'getting your work face on', when in the presence of others at work. Understood in this way, the coworker implies that he consciously alters his behaviour to adhere to the 'norms' of others so as to maintain his work productivity. We might draw parallels here with significant geographic research into service-sector workplaces (Crang, 1994; McDowell and Court, 1994) which, as Gregson and Rose (2000) note, have previously tended to draw upon a understanding of performance (following Goffman, 1959) which pre-suppose a conscious agent performing a script. As McDowell (2009) later notes – moving away from Goffman's understanding of performance – the body work on *oneself* here assumes a fixed object that masquerades with a 'work face' when in a stage-like 'zone'.

Where coworkers might speak of themselves as autonomous agents, there was repeated suggestion that going to the coworking space helped bring about an improved routine so as to be more productive:

It makes you feel better, it puts you in a better headspace. I've always said happy workers are better workers, and it goes for yourself as well. If you're in a better mood, you work better.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

This chimes with the Foucauldian notion of *technologies of the self* (Foucault, 1988; see also Felstead *et al.*, 2005). Here the self-employed worker internalises the need to organise and self-police his feelings, to be happy at work, suggesting that the routine practices of going to the coworking space helps more-or-less consciously adjust and regulate his behaviour towards something ‘appropriate’. Yet despite treating mind and body as at least partially distinct (perhaps unsurprising, given the embeddedness of the apparently rational, universal Cartesian subject within ‘Western thought’ (Pile and Thrift, 1995)), several coworkers hinted towards the fluidity of such performances and their spatial-temporal dimensions:

[It’s] the act of going to a different space, head space as well as physical space.

(Coworker, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

If you’re coworking in a coworking space, I guess you are making a decision, a positive decision. Going into a coffee shop is different, even if you often work in a coffee shop it’s not the same decision because you are paying for coworking aren’t you? So that comes out of your salary, wage, whatever, and so there is something about the performance of doing that... your identity as a working person which is quite particular I think, even if the spaces are different.

(Coworker & board member, female, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

The act of going to these workplaces is not simply being in an abstracting, disembodied ‘headspace’ but rather getting their bodies into ‘work’ from ‘home’. Going out to a place of work, and paying to do so, is to ensure that they regularly reproduce and routinize their bodies so as to get ‘appropriate’ work done, to motivate themselves. The apparent direction of travel – ‘going out to work’ – and the spatial analogy of ‘being in the zone’ is crucial here:

It's like having a boundary and it's purely because I just can't work from home, or I've taught myself that I can't work from home.

(Coworker, female, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

It's good getting that mental space in a physical place to like switch on and off. And 'coz I work at home a lot, it means you don't sleep if you're working in the same space. It was good for that.

(Coworker, female, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

Understood in this way, attempts were said to be made to construct boundaries between home and work, although, as this chapter proceeds I dispute such boundedness of these spaces. Indeed, it is important to emphasise here, albeit through seemingly mundane practices, spaces of home are far from homogenous:

From a *workspace* point of view it's extremely useful, bearing in my mind before I moved here, I had five years of working in my spare bedroom which is just *there* all the time and then you didn't ever really turn off because there would be several times where my wife would shout upstairs, "right you're coming downstairs to chill out!" I'm like "yeah, yeah, be there in a minute" and two hours later she'd say "it's 10 o'clock, what's going on?", "sorry I've been pottering".

(Coworker, male, FunkBunk, 30-35; original emphasis)

We get a feel for the spatial-temporal rhythm that is co-constituted in a move to recreate a '9-5' routine:

So having a workspace like this to *come* to so that I leave *home* and come to *work* and I leave *work*, I might take everything with me and carry on at *home*, but I leave *work* and I go *home*. So I've got a definite working from home and working from work thing going on. So that's useful because if you need to just walk away, you can, you can leave it all here and say 'I'm not doing anything tonight'. You can walk away and then come back in the morning'.

(Coworker, male, FunkBunk, 30-35; original emphasis)

The separation of home and work is not distinct. Whilst he recognises his attempts to divide up his day, he may still bring his laptop home and carry on working if he didn't manage to complete all the tasks that he had set himself. For this coworker, his work tasks still 'invade' the home, although as we shall later see in section 5.3, this would not necessarily happen when coworkers sought to appear 'professional' when meeting 'clients'. Conversely, this would be very different among coworker-friends.

In part, coworking practices may be understood as *attempts* – unsuccessful as they might be – to resist *particular* working practices that blur the spatial-temporal boundaries between the household and the workplace:

Primarily, it was driven by the fact that I was finding it incredibly hard to work at home, very, very difficult. It wasn't that I was distracted to switch on the TV, or put music on or do something else. I was just I fundamentally found it very difficult to work from home, which may be relative to the fact that I live in a one-bedroom flat, so I was working from my lounge, but my lounge is actually a very nice living space. So I don't think it was the dimensions of the room or anything. I think it's the fact that I was trying to work in the same place that I relaxed and lived in, and so I decided to try and explore some alternatives.

(Coworker, male, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

I argue, however, that while there were attempts to distinguish spaces of 'home' and 'work' almost a 'longing' for the reconstruction of capitalist time, for certain coworkers this was simultaneously an attempt to reproduce a particular gendered time (Sirianni and Negrey, 2000). As I shall discuss, particular coworkers are seeking to 'fix' their working identities – by which I mean their attempts to stabilise *unstable* subjectivities – by inhabiting 'the workplace' to try to reproduce and privilege a separate space of work. In doing so, I shall contest the notion of a pre-existing autonomous subject, by emphasising the interrelationality and performativity of the practices and spaces of

coworking. Following Gregson and Rose (2000), this work derives more closely to Judith Butler's notion of performativity than Erving Goffman's performances.

5.2. Performing 'masculine' subjectivities and space as 'distance'

I think what's interesting is distance isn't dead but we are liberated from it, and I think as we've become more liberated from distance and spatiality we can have a more intelligent relationship with spatiality. We can choose it rather than having to have it and we can choose who we can have it with.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

For me, this declaration demands that we must take seriously the implications of how we theorise space. I insist that coworking spaces are constituted through the *interrelations* of 'home' and 'work' (among other places) and that we *must* be attentive to differing geometries of power. This coworker indicates that space can be imagined as an increasingly smooth surface; whilst we might dispute claims of the 'death of distance' (Cairncross, 1997), he suggests, technology is allowing us to increasingly *overcome* space. In this section, I will insist that space is lively and performative and that attempts to separate 'home' and 'work' re-inscribe particular, yet unstable, notions of 'going out to work' especially in relation to negotiating parenting practices. As such, I contest the notion that 'we' are 'liberated' from space, rather spatial relations are continuously, often stubbornly, remade in uneven ways.

Given the previous section, it is important to reiterate that working from home is not a new phenomenon, whether that be for low-paid outwork or self-employment (Halford, 2006) and more broadly, non-capitalist unpaid work such as caring labour that has long been ignored within 'mainstream' economic analysis (Gibson-Graham, 2006a). I have

already suggested that there are clear moves by coworkers to demark the times and spaces of ‘work’ (which equates ‘work’ as ‘capitalist work’, a move I challenge more fully in chapter 7). Here I wish to examine and contest the construction of these ‘work’ boundaries.

Rather than putting on a different face to perform a particular ‘version’ of themselves, embodying the coworking spaces as ‘work’ helped constitute a ‘fixing’ of unstable identities. Many coworkers who had started up their own business were working primarily from home stating that the overlapping of household and workplace was cause for much concern. A recurring theme was that they would be distracted by doing ‘housework’ such as laundry or cleaning, which would take them away from their ‘actual’ work, reinforcing an apparent separation between ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ spheres. However, this was particularly so for several male coworkers who were recent parents. Several fathers mentioned that they had young children and if they worked from home, there was the risk that the time-spaces of their work would be ‘disrupted’ by the presence of children.

Let’s take the instance of the coworker cited at the top of this section. He proclaims that ‘we’ could now have greater control over space and can choose where we work. Supported by technological change, he insisted that he could be ‘freed’ from space, or at least have greater control over his mobility. This changing relationship between work and space asserts a roving, mobile worker freed from locational ties and hierarchical categorised positions with the coworker even celebrating ‘liberation’ from space. The mobile subject in this instance is male and could afford to pay to access this coworking space. This spatial imaginary is echoed in the notion of a central ‘hub’. The workplace

is centred implying the home is somewhere you go ‘back’ to, rather than the ‘contemporaneous plurality’ of different trajectories (Massey, 2005: 9). As Adkins (2004: 146; cited in McDowell, 2014) notes, concerned by a masculinist bias within the mobilities paradigm which ‘reinstalls and idealises a disembodied, disembedded subject who moves unfettered across and within the social realm’. Freed from the constraints of being an employee (and more recently, no longer employing staff himself), he implies travelling across an increasingly smooth space. He can choose his work patterns. Yet the liberated ‘we’ becomes less certain when he added:

The added complication while I’d been at the Custard Factory [a nearby ‘creative’ Birmingham-based office and retail development] was that we’d had a baby, we’d had a son, and it was okay when he was a baby but as soon as he could climb the stairs you could forget working at home.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

This spatial ‘liberation’ can be understood as uneven, the underlying implication is that he goes out to work whereas for his partner, she is ‘off work’ doing the caring work whilst on a ‘career break’.⁸ This was the case for many fathers coworking where, to some degree, there seemed to be a ‘desire’ for a classed, gendered spatial-temporal re-enforcing of a ‘male-breadwinner family model’ (Lewis, 1992: 159). For instance:

The problem I’ve got is – I’m 31, I’m married, I’ve got a son, fortunately, fortunately we don’t have a mortgage ‘coz we’d paid it off when we were both working and we’d got more money coming in then we knew what to do with it. Now my wife, has never ever said, ‘you need to go out to work and do this’ but she doesn’t need to, you know, and it’s always there in the

⁸ I should emphasise here that this is not an assumption that I am making; the phrases ‘off work’ and ‘career break’ were used elsewhere in our conversation as well as discussion of her/his/their financial capacity to do so. From what I could ascertain, his partner works in the public sector.

back of your mind that your options are bounded by this reality of *a house and a wife and a kid and two cars and they're all anchors, you know?* So I kind of, I can understand these people, men particularly who have mid-term crises and go a bit postal, and it's all just bearing down on them.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange; my emphasis)

For many of the coworkers, it was felt that there was a need to try to bring some routine and structure to their working day which had to be free from 'unwelcome' distractions and domestic responsibilities. This was to ensure that particular connections were *not* made.

These unwelcome connections became apparent in a meeting at the Moseley Exchange discussing their future redevelopment plans. Immediately after the meeting I made these notes:

I'm sure the person driving this [potential redevelopment], the 'social entrepreneur', seems to be concerned about maximum usage and profit from the workspace first and foremost and it's sad to be saying this: For example, when it was mentioned that several recent mothers would have been interested in the space for working, when someone suggested that the re-design could support a crèche facility, this was laughed-off within 30 seconds. I confirmed this with [coworker, male, 35-40] later, he was concerned that this was the case too: Who is this redevelopment for? How 'different' is this way of working?

(Research diary notes, 21/06/2013 22:58)

He maintained that 'we don't want kids here'. If we are to understand space in Massey's (2005) terms of the 'throwntogetherness' of interrelations, attempts were made to construct particular social boundaries such that children would not be encountered. Apparently, for now, there was closure of the trajectories which may have otherwise been made possible with a crèche facility in the workplace. Yet the absence of children in the workplace was also built into the material architecture of the

workplace (see Fig. 5.2). Despite the emphasis upon the Moseley Exchange, the building was still used by the Moseley Community Development Trust. A false-roof was added to the walls that separated the corridor to mask the noise of the children attending the daily postnatal yoga sessions for mums and babies elsewhere in the building.



Fig. 5.2. – Moseley Exchange under construction. Preview photograph of a rather sparse Moseley Exchange ‘main room’ prior to opening. The false roof was later added above the white back wall to block out the noise of children. (Photo credit: Moseley CDT)

Similarities can be drawn here with Doreen Massey's (1995: 495; and later, 2005) work on science parks:

[S]ocial space is both an arena of action and potentially enabling/productive of further effects. Just so the places of work in these high-tech parts of the economy: they are not merely spaces where things may happen but spaces which, in the nature of their construction (as specialized, as closed-off from intrusion, and in the nature of the things in which they are specialized), have effects - in the structuring of the daily lives and the identities of the scientists who work within them. Most particularly, in their boundedness and in their dedication to abstract thought to the exclusion of other things, these workplaces both reflect and provide a material basis for the particular form of masculinity which hegemonizes this form of employment. Not only the nature of the work and the culture of the workplace but also the construction of the space of work itself, therefore, contributes to the moulding and reinforcement of this masculinity.

Although coworking spaces may not be as regimented and organised towards such abstraction, the defence against encountering children in more-or-less formal ways at the Moseley Exchange during 'work hours' *is* significant to the constitution of working identities. As the next section will develop further, this intertwines with certain claims of being 'professional'. Yet children still entered into the workplace from time to time, despite what certain coworkers may have wanted. At the more tightly secured Hub Westminster (discussed more fully in chapter 6) there were occasions whereby children came into the workplace (without the necessary security necklaces), whereby member hosts gave them a walking tour of the (much larger) workplace, provided them with crayons and they sat in a quiet corner for a half hour or so. It is notable, that in criticising David Cameron's 'Responsible Capitalism' speech in the 'eye-wateringly trendy' Hub Westminster, the Guardian's Simon Hoggart (2012: np) remarks: 'This is

how trendy it was: it has the only gents' toilet I have visited in London with a changing table and a waste bin marked "Nappies only". The bin was empty'.

I want to be careful to avoid generalisation, even stereotype, here. Static distinctions between public and private, of 'household' and 'workplace' are highly problematic. As Susan Halford (2006: 383) explains 'while such distinctions are still used to mark space and time, this is relational, contingent and unstable'. People are not just moving between two points, home and work and I certainly don't make the claim of male/female, public/private dichotomies. The boundaries between 'home' and 'work' are of course permeable, my concern is with the unevenness of this. I argue the 'going out' to work at coworking spaces involves re-negotiating gendered spatial divisions of labour given the 'collapsed' boundaries of home and work for these would-be 'home' workers (Halford, 2006). Indeed, it is a white, male depicted as the target market for such workplaces. Although there were roughly equal numbers of men and women coworking at Hub Westminster, there were more men at both the other two case studies, almost exclusively so at FunkBunk. Among those recent fathers at Moseley Exchange (or at least those who I recognised as such) their changing parenting practices rarely featured in our conversations. However, there is need to mitigate this claim slightly. I acknowledge that this is in part because when speaking with other coworkers, I suspect the *assumed* focus on my research was deemed to be about 'working life' rather than 'life involving 'work'' given my interest in coworking spaces and their design, however, I would propose that this very absence is constitutive of this separating of 'work' from 'home'. Linda McDowell (1998) made similar remarks in her study of financial bankers. Although this chapter emphasises the interrelations with other places,

particularly spaces of home, my project started with a more clearly defined focus on the architectural space of the workplace. I can't quite be sure when I began to consider my own research performances and address how power saturates assumptions of focusing on 'the workplace'.

I am certainly keen to avoid positing fathering practices in *opposition* to mothering practices, not less as such discourse essentialises a heteronormative, dual-parent family of mother and father (Cameron, 2000; Aitken, 2009). Through my informal conversations with coworkers at the Moseley Exchange it was often at lunch in the 'meeting' room where there would be passing mentions from a couple of fathers renegotiating their responsibilities and routines of walking or cycling their children to school in the mornings, for instance, as well as the real enjoyment of doing so. In Birmingham, I did regularly bump into a couple of the fathers in the mornings and evenings dropping off/picking up their children. For some, working from a nearby community workplace made these arrangements possible. We might consider Jenny Cameron's (2000) discussion of similar domestic work practices and household politics queering the household, to undermine a hegemonic heteronormative discourse. By examining 'domestic' class processes in a far more fluid way, analysis of everyday household practices and subjectivities is open to heterogeneity and economic difference. It is important to note that the detailed division of labour and micro-tasks on the factory floor can be central to workplace politics and union disputes, to be taken as serious matter. Yet similar tasks in the household can often be trivialised within political and economic analysis, equating and marginalising the domestic, the household and the feminine (Cameron, 2000). In this instance, I only had the accounts

of the coworkers. However, the re-negotiating of spatial-temporal practices of the coworking father holds the *possibility*, at least, to help refigure and renegotiate ‘domestic’ class processes.

Spaces of home and work are not pre-existing ‘stages’ where different performances are acted out. Rather the boundaries between coworkers and the coworking space are blurred, shifting and multiple. I suggest that this follows Gregson and Rose (2000: 441) who state that ‘performances do not take place in already existing locations ... specific performances bring these spaces into being’. It is the citational practices associated with ‘going out’ ‘to work’ that particular coworkers reproduced, yet going out to work might make new caring identities through different parenting routines. However, I now turn to consider how these spaces ‘legitimise’ particular ‘professional’ working identities.

5.3. Attempting to ‘legitimise’ professional work identities

Yeah, the facilities, it’s a nice place to come, get clients to come *here*. I suppose that’s, that’s, that’s one thing that changed massively when I moved here, working from home, people find out you’re working from home they immediately think you’re a bit less than you are, size-wise – which is fair – but also maybe in terms of your offering and in terms of your professionalism and your quality of service and quite often try and take the piss out of you and I was forever trying, people were saying, ‘come for a meeting’, ‘I’ll come over’. I was forever saying ‘well I’m out and about that day, I’ll come to you’, or we’ll meet in coffee shops, basically lying to kind of ‘so do you have to come to my house?’

(Coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk; original emphasis)

Being seen by potential ‘clients’ in the coworking space was said to help strengthen the image of yourself/your company to avoid people ‘taking the piss out of you’ (coworker above). Whilst this may echo the advertisement at the beginning of the chapter to

‘present a more professional front of house to clients’ (see Fig. 5.1), I want to consider how coworkers would appeal to being ‘professional’ was to articulate a particular ‘competence’, to be able to conduct themselves ‘appropriately’ to help secure work projects and funding bids (Fournier, 1999). Yet I want to discuss the construction of a particular spatial closure through paying for ‘membership’ and how this coincides with a desire to be around ‘like-minded’ people. As such this further disputes the notion of the coworking spaces as a pre-existing stage to perform.

The notion of being seen to be professional appeals to a particular *acting out* at coworking spaces. As with before, the advert for FunkBunk reaches for a Goffman-inspired sense of ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’. These workplaces, it was said, would help project this sense of performance, strengthening ‘brand association’ both in person and through their web presence:

And so on our signature on our email, we’ve got the [Company Outreach & Address] and the Hub Westminster and the reply in his [potential client’s] first email, the reply was ‘incidentally why are you at the Hub? How do you know about it? Very interesting space’ and I *knew* that that would happen because it’s got a reputation. So it’s good to create an impression, so it’s about public image to say I’m a member of the Hub.

(Coworker and host, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster; original emphasis)

This insistence towards reputation, impression and public image might lead us to consider how such workplaces provide a particular workplace display (Crang, 1994). Coworkers were suggesting that they could use the workplace to put on something of a show, give them a tour of the workplace, sell them a bit of a story, to help market themselves to potential clients:

It's quite an impressive building, when someone walks in for the first time – I'm a designer, it's a very designer-y environment – so they come in and it's like, FunkBunk, you tell them the story, the history of it, which is a pretty cool history... [Other coworker, male, 30-35] really likes that he's part of FunkBunk, just uses that as a selling point for part of his brand work as well, so that works really well.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

Yet those working alongside coworkers were also potential 'opportunities' for generating work. Such proximity could be problematic. For instance, when one coworker recruited another at one of the workplaces (who later transitioned away from the coworking space to a 'normal' office) and completed what was deemed an underwhelming job, it became known to others that this person didn't work hard/quickly enough. It is this more-or-less formal 'screening' that Storper and Venables (2004) cite as an important component of 'face-to-face' contact. To some extent then, there was an element of surveillance among potential coworker-clients. However, unlike Crang's (1994) restaurant workers said to perform a role to customers (following Goffman), there was no such clear demarcation between 'workers', 'managers' and 'customers'. There was often a twisting, if not a full reversal, whereby particular coworkers at the Moseley Exchange would, at times, hail themselves as 'paying customers' when frustrated with the strained relations that may often be understood as 'managers' versus 'workers' (despite no such organisational structure). At Hub Westminster, this relationship was considered different due to the 'hosts' – those who run the workplace from day-to-day, organise events and aid networking between 'members' – working alongside coworkers:

It's facing the problem of going into what I call saturation. You can't just have it totally full; you've got to understand really subtly how many people you can have on the books and how you moderate that to make it work.

That is heightened when your housekeeping goes to scratch so there is no back of house, *it's all front of house*, or it should be in my view.

(Coworker, male, 60-65, Hub Westminster; my emphasis)

Yet a bigger concern for the coworker was how creating a good impression along with practical considerations that were central to the longer survival of their organisation:

The other thing is essentially, we don't have a legal address, it's just a garden, and so in order to incorporate as a company, in order to be an education provider, in order to be registered in any sort of legal way and get big grants, 5, 6 figure grants we had to have a legal address and the Hub offers that for £20 a month. And so, that I do pay myself and I reimburse the money... It's a necessary part of our business plan and expansion, that in order to move for a community organisation into a business or a Community Interest Company or a charity, we need a legal centre and because we're a horticultural environment, we don't have anywhere and so the Hub offers that.

(Coworker and host, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

For a fee, start-up businesses could legally register their business and postal addresses at the coworking spaces. This formed part of their trajectory to move from a community group to a more formally recognised organisation. It is worth noting the slippage in language between referring to their organisation becoming a business/community interest company/charity. This coworker was paying to access as well as register at Hub Westminster to help bid for thousands of pounds worth of funding to sustain their organisation. Again, connections with spaces of home are made:

Most people here don't have another office. So they need it to be there. They could, I suppose, we could have one of our homes as that, but that's not right. That's not good for business, that's not good for the individual, it's not good from an accounting point of view, because it gets very messy.

(Coworker and host, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

These appeals to professionalization and ambitions of scale are not just that of displaying a particular image, but operates as disciplinary techniques such that they conduct themselves and their 'social enterprise' 'appropriately' and productively in a manner that is 'good for business'. In a similar manner, those who worked for themselves would consistently speak of themselves/their company as 'we' despite formally being a one-person company. Indeed, at two of the workplaces there would be either free (local government initiatives) or paid-classes either advertised, or taking place in, the coworking space relating to presenting yourself as a company, on social media, how to network more effectively and so forth.

There was often the perception of an ambiguous 'buzz' of the workplace that helps articulate working identities (Halford, 2005):

It's very non-conforming, it's kind of casual but still rigid enough to provide for a professional atmosphere.

(Coworker, male, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

They might have a ritual around setting up their laptops, or rituals around how they talk or how they share what they do, and you know [coworker, male, 30-35] might, it might important to articulate why it is that he's a coworker, that is part of his narrative of working, there's a very, very particular conscious decision to, so you know, and others might be much more passive about it.

(Coworker & board member, female, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

The co-presence and proximity with others, even if informal or barely involving interaction, helps to 'formalise' or make more 'rigid' their work:

I do think that humans are quite influenced by physical space. I think they're quite influenced by having something that's a bit formalised or a bit rigid in their life, why am I saying this, I know that if I run the business

from home that does not structure me in such a strong way. Equally, I would not bring people, business partners to my home.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Hub Westminster)

Concerns at Moseley Exchange emerged, however, about becoming ‘professional’, and conducting behaviour in particularly ways which were at odds with the original progressive ideals of coworking:

It almost seems that it’s become a bit more professional, and less, and a bit more formal. It takes the progressive element out of it. More professional. Before it started off as people in the creative industries, I know it still is, but it feels a bit more freelance professional than artists and students.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

Being among ‘like-minded individuals’ who were becoming ‘successful’ seemed to validate their decisions to set up their own company:

To physically see other people that you know, you can kind of *smell* [laughs], are going through the same issues as you, or that, you see these other people that you know personally, you have drinks in the afternoon with, are being successful. Then that drives you. That kind of like, that gives you, ‘they’re doing it, I know them, I know they’re not that different, therefore I know that I’m going to push for this as well’. I’m not meaning it in that – I believe competition is everything, but I think having direct contact with people that you can associate with and relate them to yourself helps you to have courage and you to have the drive to give it a go and push and things like that.

(Coworker, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

A tension emerges here. On one hand, the coworker champions the coworking space for providing a stabilising sense of people around being in similar positions, feeding off their successes to support them. However, on the other, as he states ‘competition is everything’, he is seeking to do so as a capitalist enterprise. We begin to see how the workplace relations encourage individuals to feel that they are making the ‘right’ move

(whether they chose self-employment or not) because of the emotional support of ‘similar’ people around them:

Well as a start-up company, when you start your company up, what’s your alternative? You don’t want to spend a lot of money on a building, there’s a lot of things you can’t do in cafés, you’re often distracted in your house ‘coz you’re living space is used for other things, so, and you’re often quite isolated ‘coz most of your friends are working for normal companies, so getting to know other people that are doing the same things, going through the same challenges, it helps you, it helps you have the confidence and realise that you’re not totally alone, and it helps you build other friendships that are more similar to your thinking or your approach to life. I think that is very valuable.

(Coworker, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

And then later:

So once they establish that basic premise of a prerequisite of all members, then you know that everyone here has that as well, shares that, and then something else then follows from that, in terms of community, in terms of collaboration, in terms of feeling excited rather than like, you know, working alone and being ‘I’m alone’, all I’ve got is the internet and my clients and my collaborators but I’m alone in my living room at my computer, whereas here you’re standing there and they’re doing that and I feel like I’m part of a movement and that gives you the encouragement and the energy to move on.

(Coworker, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

This assumption of a relative homogeneity of ‘like-minded’ individuals is problematic. In part, this is because it presumes a willingness of people wanting to have this ‘courageous’ goal as a ‘motivated’ self-employee. Yet among the younger coworkers in particular, this was never the plan:

So, talking about the bigger picture, the core issues, then you’re looking at, so now, how can I say? There’s no job for life, unless you make that job yourself, then you’ll never be employed for life. I worked at the last [architectural] practice, they said ‘yeah you can get your part 3 here’, it

came along, a meeting came along two weeks later. The two projects that I was working on fell through.⁹

(Coworker, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

Yeah, although the problem is they probably all *wanted* to be doing their own thing whereas I never really wanted to be doing my own thing. As in I wanted to be in a studio in a full-time job and have that security. And also, I think mainly because I never felt like, until recently, I didn't feel like my freelancing was a real job, like people would say, have you got a job yet? Like I used to dread Christmas times seeing all the family like: 'so how's the job-hunt going?' I don't think they ever understood what I am doing now, I'm making money, it's been very slow, like slow progress but it is a proper job, but because you're at home, it doesn't feel like it to you and it doesn't seem like it to anyone else. So, almost it is like going somewhere like that makes it a bit more real.'

(Coworker trialist, female, 25-30, FunkBunk)

These two instances are significant as it begins to open up questions raised recently by Linda McDowell (2014) who called for attention to be paid to younger men and women and their relations to a changing labour market in relation to the austerity programme of the Coalition government in the UK. These were two of the youngest coworkers (with the exception of myself), both of whom have earned university degrees (architecture and graphic design, respectively).

As the preceding sections have outlined, there is the implication that if coworkers go to the coworking space they can put this professional, hard-working face on themselves, even if this is itself contested and unstable. Yet I want to be attentive to the provisionality of coworking bodies, concerned with negotiating bodily differences as well as dress. The image at the beginning of this chapter is remarkably similar to those

⁹ This was the support for his RIBA Part 3 architectural training to become a fully qualified architect, that never materialised as a result of his inability to gain practical experience.

highlighted within McDowell's (1997: 184) image of the head and shoulders of the heroic singular male trader, portrayed as a rational, disembodied, cool-headed figure. The implication here is of the patriarch in a dark three-piece suit cropped below the belt yet with a different self presented in his dressing gown. In discussing dress:

That kind of sets a tonality, I think, as well. Like, you kind of dress, I dunno, if there was guys in suits in here, to be honest, if people came and visited the place and they needed to work in a suit, it probably wouldn't be, it would probably feel too relaxed for them. But, I think, but people like being suited and booted, it kind of sets the tone. We're all super professional, everyone's running their businesses and doing proper stuff, but the core of the businesses in here are creative businesses, designers.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

In the two months that I was at FunkBunk, I only noted one occasion when a coworker wore formal clothing, which was for a meeting with a client. It was almost exclusively inhabited by men. They would mainly wear either jeans and t-shirt or polo shirt, sometimes featuring their company logos. The few occasions when women worked there, they would wear often similarly casual clothing. Although relatively casual in dress, Hub Westminster was far more likely to be inhabited by more formal wear, for instance men wearing suits often without a tie. The Moseley Exchange was somewhere between the two. There were no dress-codes for the workplaces. Yet I remember on an occasion when I first attended the Moseley Exchange prior to starting my PhD research proper being told by the manager half-jokingly: 'you look like you're dressed for tennis'. The emphasis on getting dressed and embodying the workplace is key here:

But, I went there, so it was just, it just gets you a bit more motivated, like gives you a reason to get dressed and stick to a schedule and make a bit more of an effort if you know you're going to be around other people.

(Coworker/trialist, female, 25-30, FunkBunk)

I can walk in the door and see what this organisation is about, I know it. Almost you can feel it, it's the way that people's shoulders go, all these things. All those human things you can tell at once.

(Architect & Member, male, 60-65, Hub Westminster)

Being around other bodies at work was important. It was made clear that these would be expected to be 'like-minded' people both as part of the coworking space but also the surrounding community:

Well I was considering this actually thinking about this driving here this morning and I knew we were going to be having this conversation and I was thinking well, what's kind of the same sort of distance from here? King's Norton. From where I'm travelling every morning, given the choice between the Exchange in King's Norton, or the Exchange in Moseley, where would I go, I'd go to Moseley every time. So, and I thought how about if it was Sutton Coldfield and yeah, I'd go to Moseley every time. So, being in Moseley it clearly makes a difference.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

As a neighbourhood in Birmingham, Moseley (or 'Moseley Village') has a particular narrative of being 'creative' or 'bohemian' which is becoming increasingly middle-class:

And the other thing as well, is that, there is a feeling, nothing to do with the Exchange, you know more to do with Moseley and how Moseley is perceived, and how Moseley people are perceived. There's a feeling that if you situated yourself here, you are going to be around people who are kind of *more like you*. They're probably a bit liberal, quite a lot liberal actually [laughs] and I know kindred spirits is probably a bit strong but you know, people, there's some sort of social and ethical congruence.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

The emphasis on similarity of coworkers was also suggested for Hub Westminster:

Yeah, it's interesting. I think because the Hub is sort of, similar vibe, similar minded, self-selecting group of people, you do probably get more of that than you get in other coworking spaces, just from limited experience of other ones, which is interesting.

(Architect, male, 30-35, Hub Westminster)

One of the hosts at the workplace disputed this 'like-mindedness', placing emphasis upon bodily experience:

When I started here I felt like a sore thumb, even though I was working with [an organisation based there], I was looking round going [intake of breath] and you could tell, I don't know what it was but you could just tell and every now and then I heard, 'my Dad's a teacher'. Yeah... I'm getting in now and I stumbled across someone's *LinkedIn* profile, grammar school, private school, I myself am from a comprehensive; later on it was so dire it turned into an academy. Where's that here? Where's the normal person? Look at the prices. £300, come on!

(Coworker, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster,)

This feeling like a 'sore thumb' has not, he suggests, remained stable. He then goes on to refine this further and in doing so acknowledging the partiality and uncertainty of his own position:

Obviously I'm going to look at it 'coz I'm Asian and I'm looking round thinking 'uhh, middle-class white haven!' [laughs]. Part of me thinks that... I don't see anyone else's mum who works in House of Fraser. Whose dad works in a butter factory like me? Fuck sake, hate this, I'm off! [laughs]. So I hear that other people's parents are doctors or engineers. Is there no-one else's mum who works in House of Fraser? I'm really pissed off with that.'

(Coworker, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

This was one of only a few occasions whereby the 'whiteness' of these workplaces was discussed during my research. However, it was not easy to discuss differences among coworkers. For instance, I *still* feel the awkwardness of asking one host whether the

workplace felt ‘a bit middle-class’. It’s worth noting that the coworker above felt that it was addressing cost that was important to address for access in a similar workplace that he helped set up outside of London insisting that people there didn’t have that much money to spend on rent. It was even suggested that certain coworkers were merely pursuing ‘vanity projects’:

Sat down with [member host]. One thing that he thought was quite an issue was having to do the washing-up duties. He took a cynical view, questioning those people who worked for some of the social enterprises, ‘caring about people far away’ yet failing to consider those people around them at the Hub. [He considered] tea-making as a way for encounter, but more tellingly thought [at the Hub there are] a lot of vanity projects [where the kitchen was] a place to be seen. I subsequently discovered that [member host] was leaving the Hub. He seemed pretty fed up when we met, basically telling me to take it easy when working here. I hope our talk didn't prompt him to leave!

(Research diary, 10/07/2013)

Therefore, the claims of ‘like-minded professionals’ frequently alluded to by many coworkers as well as academic literatures on coworking begin to look far less coherent. As such, I will turn to consider how we might rethink the constitution of such workplaces.

5.4. Spaces of conflict and care

I argue that coworking spaces can be understood in terms of Massey (2005) terms of the ‘throwntogetherness’ of place recognising the provisional meeting of multiple trajectories, practices and interrelations. Recognising the different geometries of power, I suggest that these spaces open the possibility for care towards others but also conflict and confrontation. These are not homogenous spaces:

It's not an organisation; it's a bunch of people from different places. There is no contract, there is no requirement of anyone, there's no responsibility from one person to the other person's organisation. The responsibility is wholly ethical, moral. It's a community thing isn't it? Getting on with other people and working, it's respecting other people for the sake of it rather than because you've signed a contract saying you have to.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

This account recognises the happenstance trajectories of people coming together; these different places are not just that of home and work (although as this chapter has discussed, this is of great significance) but in wider terms of the work they do, the ideas they have and share, and indeed, the potential conflicts that arise. His understanding of community is not fixed or ordered but fluid and provisional cohering around loosely-defined relationships of ethical responsibility towards others. In this instance, it is quite literally that '[t]he chance of space may set us down next to the unexpected neighbour' (Massey, 2005: 151). These are not, however, public spaces in as much as they are exclusionary pay-to-access workplaces.

Coworking spaces are not 'conventional' organisational office workplaces. Each coworking space has a basic set of rules for conduct in the workplace (which many coworkers signed but had no recollection of doing so) such as not using the coworking spaces for illegal activity, respect other coworkers and so forth. Yet most coworkers do not belong to the same firm:

Even though people here don't work on the same things together – so they're not colleagues but they are coworkers and so they're sort of like a colleague who is a friend that you don't work on the same thing with, you know? So you're actually developing social relations with people who don't have the awkward politics of things going wrong at work with, which is quite a nice thing. It's sort of like you get the reward of colleagues, coworkers, that you like, whilst not having the problem of saying person X has just mucked up my project, or person X has not delivered the thing that

I need to carry on and now it's badly impacted upon me and now I hate them and all the things that create the basic office politics.

(Coworker & architect, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

The emphasis on the social relations as distinct from organisational working relations was said to shape a much more *networked* set of associations rather than that of a top-down organisation:

I suppose it's almost the hierarchies of the conventional workspace which are almost removed in a sense because it's social relations you have with other workers rather than the work side of things.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

The culture of work is about the way that the work gets done, I would say, and the workplace culture is about its relations and tacit stuff, values and behaviours and norms and practices. So, the workplace culture can exist in isolation to the work, but the culture of work is utterly dependent upon the workplace culture ... So here we have a workplace culture, but we don't have a culture of work, because we're not working on anything collectively. *We're not working on anything that's unified or we don't have common goal. All we have to do is exist together in the space and not piss each other off.*

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange; my emphasis)

These 'flatter' networks of coworking relations are regularly suggested to be a central part of the what composes the 'newness' of these coworking spaces (Spinuzzi, 2012). To some extent, this framing of 'workplace culture' following norms, tacit knowledge and flatter hierarchies treads a similar path to what Nigel Thrift (2005: 130) suggests as 'performing cultures in the new economy'. Indeed whilst coworking I encountered conversations referring to those 'gurus' such as Peter Drucker and Michael Porter that Thrift (2005) cites as the circulating of new ideas as part of the 'rise of soft capitalism'.

Certainly, there was a sense of transition towards new relationships based upon trust and emotional ties of which these ‘new’ workplaces are part:

[‘Conventional’ offices] are competitive spaces. You’re competing for resources, you’re competing for attention, you’re competing for kudos, you’re competing for all sorts of shit to be honest, and I suspect as a consequence you’re a bit more wary of the people. You’ve always got an eye out for who’s going to shaft you, for who’s going to take the credit for something you’ve done. That doesn’t exist – you trust people less as a consequence. I maybe, maybe it’s naive – but I find I trust people here more, in an unquestioning way. It wouldn’t, I go out and I go and get a sandwich and leave my, just leave my laptop there, leave my phone, leave my car keys, I just leave everything on my desk and it hadn’t occurred to me that anyone was going to nick it.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

This follows Nancy Ettlinger’s (2003) focus upon emotive trust in her ‘relational’ and ‘microspace’ focus on workplaces whereby multiple networks of social interaction cohere in collaborative workplaces:

Within a lot of companies, there’s a sort of ladder which people are trying to sprint up and there’s a sort of latent competition that’s amongst people even if they’re very polite and friendly to each other, but that doesn’t exist here because I’m not trying to set up a food company or write software like [coworker, male, 30-35], or sell bouncy castles, so yeah, you’re absolutely right. And I think actually, probably amongst us we’ve got almost like an acknowledgement, or a shared understanding that we’re each trying to develop something ourselves, maybe excepting contract stuff like [coworker, male, 30-35], who is a flexible worker, but those of us who are trying to become entrepreneurs, [former coworker, male, 30-35], [coworker, female 30-35], myself, I think you kind of understand the pressures and stresses that are being encountered, day-by-day, and that probably helps foster that relationship between you. I’ve said that in a really rubbish way, it’s definitely an acknowledgment that we’re sharing the same positives and negatives on a day-to-day basis and I think we’ve all, I believe we’ve all got a strong interest in seeing each other succeed, which is really positive actually.

(Coworker, male, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

I pick up on the above idea of becoming entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial, and the fluctuating between being an individual and part of a collective, in chapter 7. Here, I want to stress these feelings of it being a hierarchy-free workplace:

I think the equality in a genuine coworking environment is quite important because if you get someone who comes in who is an extremely high earner or someone who is extremely important, or a CEO or something, but in a sense when they come in here they are just another member and that there's no hierarchy there, and that appeals to me. I like the idea of having very flat structures where people's pecking order is not particularly reflected in the hierarchies that people exist in, all those two-tier system which I think might have happened with that company [previous workplace where he rented a spare desk].

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

For this coworker, identifying as broadly Marxist, he was very vocal in challenging traditional class relations in the workplace, coworking held the possibility for more egalitarian community organisation of people. I want to support this move, however, as has been suggested above, as 'conventional' understandings of class relations in a company aren't in existence, different geometries of power *are* continuously negotiated. The power relations that constitute such spaces are not neutral or flat, but can be rather uneven.

There is the danger, here, of romanticising the coworking space in somewhat utopian terms as the more conventional class-based hierarchies of the workspace aren't immediately as visible to coworkers. These are not truly open 'public' time-spaces. As it is noted on one of the coworking space websites (anonymised) not all chance meetings are encountered: 'Although you might not be in early enough to see her, [the cleaner, female, 35-40] keeps everything clean and tidy throughout the building'. This is a significant inclusion, however, given that the staff member is contracted rather than

directly part of the team. Despite the apparently flexible working arrangements (for coworkers), this does not mean that there is no negotiating of workplace politics (McRobbie, 2002). This is addressed by one of the coworkers:

It's an interesting project because if you're in an organisation, you like it or lump it, but there's something interesting about the democracy here, isn't there? You've got to try and get everyone involved and somehow try and please everyone. But that's never going to happen.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

As Ettliger (2003: 152) suggests, actions in the workplace 'derive from a kaleidoscope of thoughts and emotions that emanate from different places associated with different spheres of life and different social networks'. Here, Massey's (2005) conceptualisation of place is helpful for understanding how coworkers may encounter different, even hostile, opinions. This is not just the 'face-to-face' contact that Ettliger's (2003) study offers, but this debate brings the 'global' directly into conversation with the 'local' of the workplace:

I think that kind of debate is very much encouraged, and since I've been at the Hub, I've participated in a lot of debates with people. Three or four to name a few, but one of them was with a lady from Tel-Aviv, and we were just talking about Palestine-Israel which is a very interesting subject in itself...If someone is killing someone there is no justification for it, you just shouldn't do it. But that debate brought that to light and they were justifying killing people because of ethnicity, background, class, etc. And being faced by that is very interesting.

(Coworker, female, 20-25, Hub Westminster)

Here we might bring Massey's (2005) theorising of space and place into conversation with Chantal Mouffe's (1993: 49; cited in Massey, 2005) work on agonism and democracy: 'Instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic

politics requires that they be brought to the fore, making them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation'.¹⁰ It became apparent that despite the suggestions of equality and tolerance, encounters with others can create moments of conflict. For example, it was suggested that at one moment in the Moseley Exchange, in reaction to the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, one coworker declared that 'my marriage was devalued on that day'. This event stayed with one coworker:

They're aggressive and they're a current coworker. It's funny [because] I had one liberal-minded coworker who said I don't want to hear about this because I have to work in the same space as that person and I'm appalled and offended that someone of those ideas is even sitting in the same space as me. Whereas, I find those ideas objectionable but I think, with my political head on, *you need to co-exist in the same environment* to create the conversations that would make someone less hard-line, I think. If you shut people down too significantly, they can just become more hard-line.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange; my emphasis)

Even though the coworker was there for his routine work, the coworking space is a material place for this conflict to be debated and negotiated. We might consider, then, 'how the company of strangers can become a basis for identity formation and collective creativity' (Amin, 2012: 37). Rather than shutting down this particular encounter, the 'need to co-exist' opens the possibility, at least, for progressive political debate.

Conclusions

Research into coworking spaces cannot focus upon what happens within the walls of the building alone. Indeed, much of the coworking literature tends to situate such

¹⁰ Despite the long-standing conversations between Doreen Massey and Chantal Mouffe, it was in fact one of the architects who first alerted me to her work originally.

workplaces as a particular site for increasingly ‘nomadic’ freelancers ‘working alone together’ (Spinuzzi, 2012). Whilst coworking may be portrayed as a ‘new urban social practice’ in light of the 2008 financial crisis (Merkel, 2015: 122), the conceptualisation of ‘space’ is often treated as a given and left un-theorised. We must be cautious of a spatial imaginary as ‘hubs of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination’ (Merkel, 2015: 133-134) whereby the workplace is prioritised as a stable, central ‘hub’ and a particular form of ‘knowledge’ is apparently legitimized. Such spatial imagination reinforces and privileges the notion of people ‘going out to work’ moving between two pre-existing spaces, home and work. This chapter has considered how such workplaces are constituted through spatial relations of contemporaneous co-existence. People do not move between bounded sites, rather it is precisely the interweaving of those spatial interrelations that construct particular spatial-temporal boundaries. The construction of such boundaries are unequal, negotiated differently and are unstable. People do not simply act out a different version of themselves – for instance, as ‘professional’, ‘father’ or indeed ‘coworker’ – which they bring with them to the workplace, but rather it is through re-inscribing practices that such identities are constituted, negotiated and entangled. The role that ‘going out to work’ plays here is not merely performing to a script, but rather relates more closely to notions of performance saturated with power relations and these are neither produced nor simply negotiated ‘within’ the workplace alone. Put simply, the spatiality of a coworking space is not that of a neutral workplace-container waiting for events to happen.

Coworking spaces have recently been likened to cities, resembling random encounters in public space whereby there is at least some reflection upon the implications of such

workplaces being pay-to-access (Merkel, 2015). A focus upon spatial *encounters* is a helpful move, yet as this chapter has discussed, coworking spaces cannot be understood as the wholly random colliding of increasing liberated, mobile atomised individuals. By paying attention to the embodiment of these encounters, the coherence of these spaces as full of ‘like-minded’ people begins to crack. It helps expose the more-or-less formal attempts to designate such pay-to-access workplaces as ‘professional’ and child-free. I have drawn upon Massey’s (2005) notion of ‘throwntogetherness’ to help recognise the multiplicities and difference of such spatial interrelations. Amidst claims of being a workplace to appear rational, competitive and autonomous, apparently for the suited, white professional man, we begin to see the meeting of multiple trajectories, of different histories, bodies and experiences with the encountering of expressions of emotion from compassion to aggression, and the presence of the ‘global’ with the ‘local’.

There must be consideration, then, of how these workplaces are differently experienced in the meeting of these encounters. This is important as we move towards the next chapter, where I consider more fully how the material, architectural space of the coworking spaces are designed to encourage and speed up networking and chance encounters. I have already hinted towards the significance of architectural space within the experiences of coworking through the construction of a false roof to block out the noisy presence of children alongside the temporary closing of the possibility of a crèche existing in the workplace. However, I shall argue that this is not just the case of architectural space to be understood as exclusionary, creating an inside/outside. I want

to argue that the designed intentions, and the different inhabitations of such workplaces, are much more ambiguous and complex.

Orchestrating experiences, architectural performances and ambiguity

A lot of what things like the Hub are about is almost setting behaviour conditions or protocols or *suggestive* behaviours, which would mean that things like setting up the space can't be divorced from who's going to be ending up running the space, and also can't be divorced from you having an on-going back and forth understanding of how it *may* adapt, how it should adapt, you know? In other words, you can't walk away from the construction project.

(Architect, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster; original emphasis)

In this chapter, I am concerned with how coworking spaces are co-constituted by human subjects and the materiality of buildings for which they are associated. I pay attention to the different ways in which people inhabit, work and move in relation to the workspaces to help understand how the different encounters, embodied experiences and routine practices animate these particular places of work. So far, this thesis has conceptualised coworking spaces as lively, heterogeneous 'meeting places' that can be understood to be 'thrown together' rather than as a static or bounded container. I have done so largely by focusing upon the different trajectories of coworkers, including my own. However, in line with Massey's (2005: 119) understanding of 'space as the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories', I want to consider how coworking spaces are produced through the congealing of different human and non-human relations, as a lively entanglement of social and material practices.

To help do so I draw upon recent interest in 'practising architectures' within social and cultural geography (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011) which is broadly concerned with non-

representational understandings of buildings, or rather, 'building events' (Jacobs, 2006; see also, Lees, 2001; Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010; Lees and Baxter, 2011). Instead of treating buildings as finished objects, this scholarship emphasises the multiple, ongoing embodied practices and performances that cohere to produce 'buildings', constituted by more-or-less human, more-or-less formal and more-or-less welcome actors that produce, maintain and destroy architecture in different ways. As we shall see, all three of the coworking spaces rejected assumptions that these material places are static and fixed. They do, however, all conceptualise the workplace in different ways. Moreover, not only are the coworking spaces never finished, neither can they be understood as the starting point for the buildings for which they are associated. Rather, in Massey's terms (2005: 9), the coworking spaces are constituted as a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far'. All of these buildings have been converted 'inside' to some degree, having previously been used formally, or otherwise, for other purposes. As the architect at the beginning of the chapter suggests, you cannot neatly separate the 'producers' and 'consumers' of architecture (Lees, 2001; Llewelyn, 2003) and indeed, those who led the formal redesign of each building continue to inhabit their respective buildings.

As such, I first consider how very different spatial-temporal metaphors are used to conceptualise each workspace having particular implications upon the changing ways in which the workspaces are designed, organised and experienced. I pay particular attention towards the claims of designing in 'suggestive' behaviours within this chapter. These claims resonate more closely with recent work on affect within the 'geographies of architecture' which pursue how the ongoing design and use of built spaces is said to

be orchestrated or choreographed such that they ‘may enable, channel or constrain particular kinds of movements – both by humans and non-humans’ (Kraftl, 2010: 408). As the architect from Hub Westminster proposes above, particular intentions are designed into these coworking spaces in an attempt to affect, or in the terms of the architects at Hub Westminster ‘nudge’ behaviours such as incidental meetings said to encourage the blurring of boundaries between inhabitants. Significantly, these happenstance encounters are portrayed, at least, as ‘ambiguous’ and ‘open’. As such I pay attention to the different ways in which boundaries are constructed and negotiated considering how architectural and other material interventions are variously ‘invitational’ and ‘seductive’ as well as ‘exclusionary’ and ‘manipulative’ (Allen, 2006).

However, considering the congealing and colliding of human subjects with architectural materiality, this chapter engages with recent debates surrounding the limitations analysing ‘affective’ capacities in relation to architecture (Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010; Lees and Baxter, 2011). I consider how analysis through geographies of affect and the nudging of libertarian (or soft) paternalism employed by the architects at the Hub, is restrictive due to their conceptualisations of human subjectivity. Subsequently, I consider here that there is always as an unpredictability of space despite attempts to ‘design’ or ‘engineer’ interactions through architecture. I caution against overemphasising the ability to engineer the built environment which risks masking uneven geometries of power and consider how the trajectories of different inhabitants and human subjectivities can alter, subvert or negate intended architectural affects. Indeed, where the architects themselves emphasise the importance of member hosts to

help curate workplace encounters, I consider their insistence of going beyond the *architectural* by focusing upon these encounters and tensions with workplace hosts and managers.

In this chapter, I will draw upon my own fieldwork notes and photographs to offer a sense of the rhythms, routines and feel of the coworking spaces, as well as detailing different experiences, informal conversations and interviews with coworkers. Given the considerable emphasis placed upon designed intentions by the architects at the Hub Westminster in comparison to the other two coworking spaces, I give more room to this particular case study. I do not intend for the other case studies to be directly comparable, but rather to act as counter-balances to contrast with to the claims made by those at the Hub.

6.1. Never call it finished

In a move to celebrate the dynamism of coworking spaces, the Hub Network (2012: np) affirm that you must ‘never call it finished’. They propose that coworking spaces must not be thought of as simply an office workspace with tables and chairs, instead they are places that should prompt ‘collisions, connection and catalyzation’ by ‘bringing people and their ideas together’ (Hub Network, 2012: np). They claim that the workspace should be designed to be ‘fluid’ and ‘flexible’ to create a sense of ownership for members through their ability to continuously re-arrange the architectural space and be mobile within the workspace according to their changing needs. More than just allowing different actions to occur, these coworking spaces are said to be fostering and enabling particular collaborative encounters. I argue that conceptualising coworking

spaces in this way has much in common with recent geographies of architecture that treat buildings as ongoing processes and performances. Although all three of these coworking spaces are imagined as lively and changing by those who initially established them, they are each conceptualised differently. I first turn to consider Hub Westminster as it was the most explicitly ‘designed’ of the three workplaces.

Hub Westminster

It’s a network. The Hub is *definitely* a network intensifier. Right? Networks, like money, occasionally need to boil down somewhere, they need a spatial fix. Capital needs a spatial fix, which becomes real estate, networks also need a spatial fix which becomes a range of meet-ups, clubs etc. The hub is an intensifier for networks, and that’s a good thing.

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; original emphasis)

With implied reference to David Harvey, the practitioner proclaims the Hub as a ‘spatial fix’ for networks to cohere. Indicating this ‘spatial fix’ to be positive, he interprets the Hub to act as a physical meeting place for temporarily bringing together the spatial distribution of members. The notion of a ‘spatial fix’ for Harvey (2014) is to emphasise a more sinister abusive ‘fix’ in response to the overaccumulation of capital at a time of crisis. Indeed, I briefly touch upon the significance of this in Chapter 7, as the *Hub Westminster* operates as an example of the architects’ plans for re-structuring capitalist economies in response to the 2008 financial crisis. Elaborating this stance of their architectural practice, however, he states that this is just one example their wider agenda, stating that ‘we create new institutions that set up new settings for economic and social behaviour’.

Initially at least, the architectural practice goes to great lengths to avoid foregrounding attention towards the architectural materiality of the workspace. Instead, they frequently deploy technological metaphors to help conceptualise the workspace. As such, they imagine the working environment as an ‘open platform for like-minded entrepreneurs’ (Civic Enterprise Fund, 2015: np). Indeed, where the architect at the beginning of the chapter talks about ‘things like the Hub are about’, he did not mean the bricks and mortar of shared workspaces but rather is conceptualising things that operate as web-like ‘open platforms’. Hub Westminster is said to encourage serendipitous encounters between ‘civic entrepreneurs’ through instilling particular ‘protocols’ (Architect, male, 25-30). In this they employ another technological metaphor whereby protocols are understood as the expected social behaviours that make particular connections operating more-or-less noticeably in the background. They operate more-or-less noticeably inasmuch as I was encouraged by one (former) architect to speak to coworkers who wouldn’t be aware of such ‘space manipulation’ (Architect, male, 25-30). These protocols are not considered to be set, written rules as such. Rather these are understood as designed interventions that initiate or ‘nudge’ particular behaviours and interactions within the workspace, which are may not necessarily ‘architectural’ *per se*.

Nonetheless, despite these moves, it is perhaps unsurprising that considerable attention is paid towards the material architectural space of Hub Westminster. Shifting slightly towards a more tangibly material architectural space are terms such as ‘infrastructures of use’ and the ‘ambient structuring of space’ (Hyde, 2012: 46). As one of the architects who worked most closely on the initial architectural design for the workspace explains:

We kind of came up with a plan which would allow people to use it, iterate it, change it and keep moving it around, and so for example, these high desks were meant for quick meetings, so you don't sit down.

(Architect, male, 30-35, Hub Westminster)

Echoing the approach outlined by the wider Hub Network above, Hub Westminster anticipates continuous movement and connections. As well as the apparently empowering adaptability of the space, particular designed capacities are intended to shape particular inhabitations to encourage members to move and interact. There are similarities to Jon Goss' (1993) consideration of indeterminacy of shopping malls said to manipulate movements. The following section discusses this alongside John Allen's (2006) emphasis upon the 'seductive' powers of architectural space, to examine the geographies of affect designed into the materiality of such workplaces. As we shall see, these designed intentions are far from predictable. The conversation above lasted for almost half an hour. Whilst shorter than many of my recorded interviews, I would propose that by no means was this a 'quick' encounter. After all, I wanted to hold as long a conversation as possible, to 'get' as much 'data' as possible. Moreover, the high desks that we were sitting at were one of my regular places to sit for many hours at a time. Whilst I established the high desks as a good 'vantage point' to observe daily routines, I think I first sat there as I was on the periphery, I knew I was not sitting it anyone else's seat. I would discover this also resonated with the two coworkers who routinely sat next to me.

Undoubtedly, there has been very careful consideration into the redesign of the workplace. Prior to redevelopment as the coworking space on the first floor of New Zealand House, the built space housed the Council Traffic Complaints Department.

From what I could ascertain, only minimal changes were made to the more permanent elements of the listed building, principally removing false roofs to expose service pipes. It was, however, already a part-open plan office workplace.

Moseley Exchange

Despite initial involvement from architects in the preliminary brief-writing stage, the Moseley Exchange abandoned the original architects' plans due to financial unviability. This *Design Statement* (Mueller Kneer Associates, 2006) conceptualised the Exchange coworking space as a 'new creative hub for the local community' targeting 'creative' and 'knowledge individuals'. The brief states: 'The refurbishment must allow for flexibility, respect the history of the site... The character of the spaces should foster creativity and innovation of the users... MCDT are keen to be left with uncomplicated building management systems and reasonable maintenance costs' (Moseley CDT, 2007: 4). As the architect's plans were never realised, the redesign of the building was led principally by the manager at the Moseley Community Development Trust.

Unlike those at Hub Westminster, the manager at Moseley Exchange was less convinced by 'his' ability to influence the movements of inhabitants:

I don't know whether many people think it's been designed or whether they think it's a room that's been thrown together but there was a little bit of thought that went into it [laughs]!

(Manager, male, 45-50, Moseley Exchange)

The uncertainty evoked by the manager imagining the coworking space as 'thrown together' as well as designed is apposite. Whilst this may appear to coincide with Kraftl

and Adey's (2008) suggestion that '[a]rchitecture is essentially a way of predetermining what we are 'thrown together' with', I have already emphasised that there is no *determining* spatial relations (Massey, 2005). The centre manager even goes as far as suggesting treating the coworking space as an 'empty box' waiting to be appropriated:

We created it under the analogy of you create an empty box and people come into it and fill it and populate it and put their ideas and their mark on it. As much as possible I've tried to let the coworking space create its own identity from the people who are in there and from its inception in August 2009 until now it's changed, it's morphed from one thing into another, not huge changes but slight changes, and with the group or the present members I would like that to be more, or I'd like them to feel that it's more of their own place rather than an anonymous box still.

(Centre Manager, male, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

Unlike the Hub Westminster's claims to be nudging behaviours, the centre manager states that you only need to provide basic requirements for coworking:

You provide people with a Wi-Fi connection, desks, and various facilities, space for meetings, tea, coffee and the rest will happen, and you never know quite what connections or what things will grow out of those people who come in. We knew some of the people who might come into the Exchange here, but some of the people have been people we didn't expect and there have been connections and things that have developed that we weren't expecting... When you're in a coworking space it is always changing so you're sharing the office with different people with different skills sets all the time, with the potential, not necessarily realised, but with the potential to learn new things all the time.

(Centre Manager, male, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

Although he implies that there is a liveliness to the coworking space, he sought to claim only minimal influence upon coworking practices through design. Yet we get a hint towards this where he states that *he's* tried to let the workplace change.

Far from an 'empty box', the stories-so-far of the 'Moseley Exchange' building has long-related to the changing spatialities of paid work, or lack thereof, in the area (see Fig. 6.1). Sitting facing the centre manager at his desk in the office, he remarked upon these changes:

It was originally a Postal Sorting Office. Then it was the Telephone Exchange and then the Telephone Exchange in the late 50s, early 60s, moved up the road 20 metres just past The Village pub, so that's the Telephone Exchange, so this was, this was transferred through public ownership into the Labour Exchange. It was the Labour Exchange, it was the Department of Social Security, so it was the Dole Office. And it was the Dole Office where UB40 got their 'UB40' – that's our only claim to fame – and this extension, this new extension where we're in now was where they used to queue up and get their dole cheques. Before we did the refurb we could see the lines in the carpet where they used to shuffle along to get their cheques. So all of the work that we've done for the coworking has been in the new extension, the original building has been pretty much left as it was with minor modifications and the lift, of course.

(Centre Manager, Male, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)



Fig. 6.1. – The former sorting office, Moseley (photo credit: Moseley CDT)

Whilst it may be symbolic that the ‘exchange’ title has been retained in the name of the workspace, it is the retention of the material, architectural space which is of particular importance here.¹¹ Despite plans otherwise, due to the aforementioned financial restraints, much of the previous building was kept. This has impacted upon the daily practices of coworking, exemplified by the centre manager. To some extent the power relations between the Dole Officer and claimants has resonance today with the office remaining in place where several of the managers and CDT staff now work. Due to the

¹¹ Were more archival material available, a similar excavation of the building’s trajectories might be unearthed in ways similar to Lloyd Jenkins’ (2002) study of 11, Rue du Conservatoire, an office building in Paris that transformed under ‘modernity’ in Paris. Here, the mundane building might help trace how Birmingham has transformed throughout apparent periods of industrial change.

lack of interaction and conversation between coworkers and CDT staff, this is regularly referred to as the ‘goldfish bowl’ by several coworkers. Without wishing to emphasise the point, we might consider how residual disciplinary mechanisms of power are embedded in the spatial arrangement of the walls overseeing the separation of the managerial office from the workers-in-waiting, although now the responsibility to find work shifts towards those who are paying to be present in the space (Foucault, 1977). It is notable, then, that the inherited powers imbued within the architectural space are forgotten within this narrative of an ‘empty box’.

FunkBunk

Located away from a dense urban area, the co-owner of FunkBunk suggested that he and his partner sought to position the workspace as ‘your other office’ as an alternative to working from home. This had particular resonance with design of the workplace.

Relating to his experience of other coworking spaces:

I’ve worked in some of the London ones myself, if I’ve got meetings with customers in London, then I’ll spend a day in London and work in one of the work hubs up there. ‘Central Working’ is nice, it’s very chilled, a café vibe to it all, but I do find myself getting a bit distracted because I’ll be just seeing what else is going on and then you’ll get the occasional person wanting to speak to you and see what you’re up to and stuff like that. So it’s always been a bit, I don’t know, I’ve always felt occasional in those sorts of spaces, because the chairs tend to be a bit hard, the desks are temporary, you get a corner to work in and I don’t find as if I could actually sit there for a good few hours and get some stuff done. So, when we set up this place we wanted it to feel like you could do an entire day there.

(Co-owner, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

In direct contrast with Hub Westminster pushing for temporary meetings, FunkBunk seeks the opposite in their much smaller workspace:

We kind of took some cues with regards to some proper desk kind of areas and seating, but still the majority of the space they're in [coworking space, South West England] are these benches and hard stools and chairs and things like that. But [they're] in a town centre. So I think that was one of the big differences in setting up a rural one.

(Co-owner, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

Their location matters to the design of the workplace. However, like Moseley Exchange, much less emphasis was placed upon designing-in particular encounters in the coworking space. In fact, there was much scepticism about designing for 'intensifying networks':

And I think, just if we were *forcing* people into that situation, it wouldn't happen. So in that sense, we cowork.

(Co-owner, male, 30-35, FunkBunk; original emphasis)

As with the other two workplaces, FunkBunk was not 'created' anew, but has inherited multiple lives:

Well I mean the site was a Women's Auxiliary Airforce Site, World War II, 150 to 200 people based here. There were tonnes of buildings like this up and down the road, all the way from here to the airfield that is about a mile and a half up the road... after World War II it was a dairy farm for years and farm machinery engineering workshops and things like that. So basically these buildings were basically just filled with tractor parts or cows, one of the two! This particular room was a cow shed for a while, I mean there was a big groove in the floor here where the feeding troughs were and then feed that spilled out the troughs would get licked up off the floor by the cows and left a huge groove in the ground which had to be filled ... There were trees growing through most of them and stuff like that but the place was for want of a better word derelict, this then got converted into a storage, well I've known it be a storage barn, a workshop, garages, storage barns again, even a florist's workshop in here at one point.

(Co-owner & coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

The decision to set up the coworking space was initially for friends to be sitting under the same roof sharing an office:

I was looking for an office at the time and my Dad said ‘why don’t you convert this plot and use it as your office?’ And I was, we were only a two-man company at the time and I said ‘that’s actually a bit more space than I actually need’, but then we’d be reading about coworking spaces in America, so warehouses being re-purposed for coworking spaces and we thought, let’s try it and give it a go! So, we converted it all, insulated it, plastered it, painted it, my Dad fitted the kitchen for us, and we were up and running. We were silly really, we did it without knowing anybody else would be interested... when we first started up, it was myself and a guy who worked with me, at the time, and [partner and co-owner], who were just rattling off the walls in here with four desks and a couple of chairs. It was an echoey space to work in!

(Co-owner & coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

As this section has already started to unravel, despite the ways in which these architectural spaces are intended to be inhabited, this is not always happening in practice. Therefore, the rest of the chapter turn to analyse the ways in which these workplaces are experienced in relation to such claims.

6.2. Visuality, boundaries and ambiguity

Focusing upon Hub Westminster, I want to consider how the workplace is designed to be experienced variously in exclusionary and inclusionary ways, often simultaneously. I place particular emphasis here upon *ambiguity*, to consider how the design of the architectural space is said to be ‘invitational’ as well as ‘manipulative’. Indeed, as was less frequently discussed, it is also highly controlled. I shall principally draw upon my research notes here to discuss my own encounters with Hub Westminster. Far from the distanced, knowing analyst, I encountered the workplace as an uncertain ‘outsider’ to

the 'members club'. My account is not a 'magic reveal' (Goss, 1993). Following Degen *et al.* (2008), recognising the importance of visual experience, I insist that that such experiences are multimodal, in that my own experiences were embodied and multi-sensory. This section therefore begins to set out how these working environments may be considered in the subsequent sections in relation to recent debates surrounding architecture, emotion and affect (Allen, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010; Lees and Baxter, 2011).

Having previously contacted Hub Westminster, I received an email from the head host who organises hiring member hosts, those who are given 'free' hours in the workplace in return for undertaking various tasks such as cleaning, answering the phone and locking-up. She arranged a time for us to meet in order to discuss my role working there over the summer. As such, I travelled from Birmingham down to London in the late afternoon of 12th June 2013, where I went to Hub Westminster for the first time:

Today I met with one of the main hosts at Hub Westminster, located on the first floor of New Zealand House, right by Trafalgar Square... I signed in with the reception desk downstairs who operate for all the building (corporate vibe I was getting). Got my pass and directed to the first floor... So, having come out of the lift to the first floor, I got slightly confused as to where the 'front' of the space is. In fact, there are two [actually there are three] entrance through-doors. Having bumped into someone else who couldn't work out where a 'reception' was (turns out it's a head host table, marked by a block - sort of like at a restaurant table number sign), I was greeted by one of the hosts (called [male, 25-30] it turns out), who welcomed me in to speak to [head host, female, 25-30], the person that I was scheduled to meet. I took a seat in the 'café' area. This is sort of a drop-in space where people are encouraged to hold meetings with non-coworkers. The atmosphere is busy, yet not overpoweringly loud.

(Research notes, 12/06/2013)

Situated within New Zealand House the process of actually getting into the workspace is highly controlled. On this occasion, my name was on the list of expected guests, added by the head host. If you did not have your name on the list by the evening before, security would make a phone call up to the member hosts of the Hub and a host would come down to collect you, a task I would later have myself as a member host. Signing my clip-on pass adding my name, the date, my organisation and signature (see Fig. 6.2) I was directed through the swipe-card only door towards the lift. I would later receive a swipe card that would allow me to circumvent this process, however, I did not receive this until over a month into my research due to holidays, much to the annoyance of the concierge (Fig. 6.3). As it turned out, coworkers are not allowed to use the red-carpeted stairs as these are for New Zealand Embassy guests only. In fact, with the lifts in the building requiring a special swipe-card to go above the lower podium portion of the building, the Hub was the only section of the building that I would ever get to see.

Before even getting to the workspace, then, it was apparent that this workspace had restricted access guarded by security/concierge workers and to a lesser extent the discretion of the member hosts from the Hub. This procedure, I was told, was a stipulation of the security for the building given the presence of the New Zealand High Commission. I never witnessed anyone getting ‘turned away’ whilst I worked as a member host, but then again, they would not have got passed security on the ground floor. In comparison, the Moseley Exchange has a reception desk at the main entrance of the building (that serves the whole building) whereby you have to sign in on a register and this is recorded on a computer spreadsheet by the main reception staff each day.



Fig. 6.2 – My visitor's pass at Hub Westminster

At FunkBunk there is an online booking form, however, as the co-owner worked in the workplace himself, there did not appear to be any record of attendance in the workplace. Given its location, it is unlikely that many people would stumble in. Yet, in order to be able to work at Hub Westminster as a regular member, you have to be accepted according to your 'social and environmental mission' via online registration and of course be able to afford to pay. There were, however, regular opportunities to book a place on the walking tours of the workspace and signing in guests who arrived together with you was straightforward. Interestingly, there was no mechanism for recording when people leave the workplace – unlike the clocking in and clocking out at Moseley – it was suggested this is based upon trust.



Fig. 6.3 – Swipe card to access Hub Westminster

Already you get a particular sense of this exclusivity, regulated and controlled by authoritative power which in one way or another that characterises securitised urban environments such as CCTV, security guards, doors and selective access. These exclusions have particular architectural enforcements, through the series of mundane technologies, the security doors and the online registration form, for instance. Chance encounters here are not to be encounters with just anybody. Just like the elite members' clubs all along Pall Mall, there is minimal signage to show that this place even exists (as with the other Hubs in London). Not being immediately visible is important.



Fig. 6.4. - View from lifts towards 'main' entrance. Photo taken in the evening when less busy (Photo credit: author's own)



Fig. 6.5. - Other view from lifts. The second and third doors are out of frame (Photo credit: author's own)

As you get out the lift on the first floor there are doors over the podium bridge and corner doors either side of the toilets (Fig. 6.4. and 6.5.). It was towards the door by the men's toilets that I first walked towards as that was where I could see people working at desks. I do not remember the welcome signs being by the door on my first visit and I think both sets of double doors were closed. I would later discover that this is to control noise in the podium floors of the building. There were signs saying no phone calls allowed on the podium bridge for this reason, although these signs were occasionally either disregarded or went unnoticed.

Upon reaching the 'Studio Café' space on the first floor I sat waiting for the head host in a corner table where I scribbled the following notes in my notebook:

Sitting in welcome area. Services exposed on the ceiling. Space purposely seems incomplete - bit rough in parts, bits in the corner covered with curtain and rail. Bookshelf made of cheap wood, no fancy varnish near here. Space loosely demarked with signs hanging from ceilings. A bit ambiguous. Awful lot of extension cables for laptop charging.

(Research notes, 12/06/2013)

It was not clear who are 'guests' and who are 'members', nor where any form of 'reception' desk was (see Fig. 6.6). This lack of legibility is not accidental. The theme of 'invitational' space recurs throughout their narrative of Hub Westminster, not just architecturally but as an 'institution'. They suggest that rather than 'pushing' people to move in particular ways, these invitational spaces are understood to be 'pulling' people in:

I think that ambiguity is good. Non-clearly programmed space – speaking of how might architects create possibility, course that's true – ambiguity

invites invitation and invitation is a creative act, so I think the fact the Hub is partially a coworking space, is partially a networking space, is partially also a club. Because it *is* a club. It is a members' club, of sorts. And it wants to be. We're here, the Cambridge Club, the Faculty of whatever, Commonwealth Club, Institute of Directors, of course we're here for a reason because we want it to be in club land and create an alternative club and a lot of people say The Hub is still exclusive, you're still behaving like a club. Yeah, so what? It's pretty open, you know?

(Geographer, 00:/, male, 25-30, original emphasis)



Fig. 6.6. – View of the Studio Café from my regular ‘safe’ seat. The entrance is behind the white pillar in the centre-left of the photo, with the hosts’ desk underneath the balloons (photo credit: author’s own)

It is helpful to unpack this combination of openness, ambiguity and an exclusive club. My initial response as outlined above was that this workplace is highly-controlled and closed in similar ways to Massey’s (2005) analysis of the high-technology science parks in Cambridge. This ‘prestigious’ location on Pall Mall next to other members clubs is vital to the workplace. The claim of the space being ‘pretty open’ would appear pretty

contradictory. This coworking space/networking space/members club seems to parallel similar claims of openness observed by Angela McRobbie (2002: 526) relating to working relations whilst networking at nightclubs:

The assumed youthfulness and the impregnable space of the club suggests that these are not such 'open-minded' spaces. Of course, all occupational groups develop their own ways of working, and nor is the club a novelty for artistic and creative persons *per se*. But there is an irony in that alongside the assumed openness of the network, the apparent embrace of non-hierarchical working practices, the various flows and fluidities ... there are quite rigid closures and exclusions.

As with the previous chapter, despite these workplaces being portrayed as 'open' and 'hierarchy-free', these rigid exclusions would to some extent extend to the architecture of the workplace. Were we to consider the building in terms of its spatial configuration following Hillier and Hanson (1984) then we might assume the permeability of the coworking space to be four or five doors separating the 'public' space from the 'private' space. This depth would indeed make the coworking space pretty exclusive. Yet as Jenkins' (2002) points out these accounts assume the openness or closure of a building as a singular uniform space, in terms of opening doors rather than questions of class, race and gender. Moreover, it assumes a static building, when even my brief example of accessing the workplace, as mundane as it may be, is through an accomplishment of socio-technical processes, having my name of the email list, getting passed the security guard and security door and into the lift, and so forth. Likewise, I am unable to access floors in the tower of the building through the lack of electronic access. Different people have differing access to the building.

However, I want to consider this emphasis on ambiguity. I could leave analysis as an insider/outsider binary. Within the workspace things are, as the geographer working with the architects suggests, a lot more *ambiguous*, and purposely so. With making things ‘open’ being a constant refrain, the suggestive ‘protocols’ are said to blur boundaries between different inhabitants, prompting *creative acts* of unexpected encounters through temporary, flexible and indeterminate material arrangements of a ‘non-programmed’ space. I encountered this on a walking tour with one of the hosts following my introductory meeting. The slow-paced ‘lap’ extended all the way around a central atrium space of New Zealand House and I bumped into a few people who I would later interview. Sitting back down in my ‘safe’ seat in the Studio Café I made some notes:

The space clearly looked unfinished and imperfect. It's loosely divided up into spaces which loosely demark different spaces and as we walked around the space, there is definitely a shift when you walk towards 'The Library'. Quiet, no books there, though. There are various spaces which you can book out for meetings. One of which is the Wikihouse, an Open Source house designed by [the architectural practice] which I hope to talk about with the team at some stage. The other space is a greenhouse for 6 people. You pay to rent these spaces. There were lots of plug sockets, moveable desks and walls and the space was loosely programmed. Round the back there were some of the moveable walls.

(Research notes, 12/06/2013)

Here the notion of a ‘club’ space follows more closely to Nigel Thrift’s (2006: 222-3) focus upon performing cultures in new economies whereby there is now ‘the construction of office spaces which can promote creativity through carefully designed patterns of circulation (Duffy, 1997; Worthington 1996)’. This, he suggests, follows changing ways of work which demand different encounters:

The design logic of the new office therefore moves from the old 'hive' and 'cell' spaces, based on institutionalized clerical processes and individualized enclaves which demonstrate the incremental rewards of career longevity, towards 'den' spaces and 'club' spaces, integrative spaces generating transactional knowledge via interactive group work and connected team projects on an as-need basis. Thus the space requirements of offices are increasingly engineered.

(Thrift, 2006: 223).

Here we see close correlation between the architects' claims of designing ambiguous spaces that enable creative acts and encounters and Thrift's concerns with a shift away from fixed, rigid workspaces towards the indeterminate, fluid and movable. As he has suggested previously (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000: 423), such office workspaces are said to involve 'exact staging of particular 'teamspace' and other spaces of circulation and interaction so as to produce maximum potential for creativity to unfold'. Similar claims have been made elsewhere by geographers who suggest there has been a shift in emphasis towards collective workspaces that prioritise 'change over stability, process over structure, mobility over stasis, and uncertainty over predictability' (Felstead *et al.*, 2005: 80; Felstead, 2011).

This ambiguity became apparent the longer I spent at the workplace. Sitting in the 'Learning Lab' space of Hub Westminster, towards the quieter far corner of the workspace, I was talking with a young architect (male, 25-30) who had previously worked with the architectural practice based there (albeit not directly on this project) and had subsequently established a similar coworking space elsewhere in the South East. He still works as a member host at weekends in the workspace, but had worked with me on my first shift a few days previous. It was during this shift whilst we had been wheeling tables around for an event the following day that began to talk about my

research and how it intersects architecture and coworking. He agreed to sit down for a chat for my research when things were less busy and a few days later we were sitting talking for several hours about the changing practices of architects, behavioural economics, agonistic pluralism and the demographic of who is coworking. As with most of the recorded conversations, I asked where he wanted to sit (see Fig. 6.7; we were sitting to the left corner of the table). I didn't realise at first, but this was more significant than I had expected as following transcript of our conversation would suggest (A=architect, C=Colin):



Fig. 6.7 – ‘Socialable angles’ in the Learning Lab. Photo taken following after our conversation (photo credit: author’s own)

A: Alright these tables have been designed so it's not like that cubicle mentality of 'this is my desk'; the angles are all skewed so you're never quite sure what, that blurring of the line, boundary...

C: *You're not simply sitting opposite each other or facing away?*

A: I don't know if you know this but when you get a seat on the same table as someone and you look up and you've had to engage in eye contact with them because there's that blurring on the boundaries, which at first, I could imagine when you first move in here it's a bit 'umm, hello', but I'm used to it now.

C: *Because it's different from what most people have had before?*

A: Yeah. As I say, I think most people are used to that cubicle, 'this is my space', no-one's going to interact with me now, I'm going to get down to work.

C: *So it's purposely ambiguous, this table, then?*

A: Yeah. And so the angles, they're trying to make them sociable angles, so they've got this bit where we're sitting, there's a reason why I pulled out that chair and made you sit at right-angles, this angle rather than...

C: *... where I was going...*

A: ... in that chair sitting opposite me. There was a reason why I sat you there [laughs]!

C: *I've been manipulated [laughs]!*

...

A: If you read Richard Sennett's *Fall of Public Man*, there's one chapter where he's talking about having a barrier increases sociability, you talk over your fence with a neighbour because having something there... but something permeable is quite important.

This reference to Sennett (1977) relating to different permeable boundaries is notable. It is these ideas that inform the Hub's design. There are a series of different tables with similarly ambiguous designs throughout the workspace, for instance, the 'Studio Café' where I first sat down on my first visit has curved triangular tables for small meetings which are said to invite others to join in. These ideas run throughout the workplace:

So if workshop 1 was a room, workshop 2 was another room, this, we're sitting in another room, it wouldn't work would it? If it was literally open door, you might say that's close enough, identities thing, this is one space but when you walk around, I think it think it frees people up a bit, *you don't have to make the decision, do I go into this room?* Okay I'll just meander round, there's normally seats there, but I don't want to sit next to that guy, there's not that obvious, walk into a room, oh I don't want to sit with anyone, oh, I'll walk out again.

(Architect, male, 20-25, Hub Westminster; my emphasis)

These design intentions are to influence people to become more sociable. This follows closely, then, Kraftl and Adey's (2008) concerns with the ways in which the changing composition of bodies and architectural materiality enables and constrains bodily capacities through affect registers and the pre-cognitive. You move somewhere *without thinking*. Another of the architects in the workplace (who incidentally is cited by Thrift (2005) in his research into the circulation of office spaces) elaborated upon this as we sat in the Studio Café as the bustle of the workplace began to die down for the evening (A=architect, C=Colin):

A: It's uneven, it's a very uneven environment. It's not an even environment. Every bit isn't the same... And you're not quite sure where the boundaries are. You as a geographer talked about the concept of boundaries which is a very important idea, actually. You didn't mention the second word which is borders. What's the difference between a boundary and a border?

C: ... I wouldn't be sure...

A: Well boundaries are things drawn by politicians for instance, a red line around something, a border guard, is okay, guarding a boundary often but the border itself is very, very blurred ... the border itself is actually where a lot of innovation happens, it's the most interesting place, 'coz it's got lots of things happening. Border country is really interesting! Sennett is good on this ... This place is full of borders, I think. It hasn't got many boundaries, precise boundaries. Although we said geographically this area is meant to be where the drop in is, etc. it's pretty vague because that end of it often has, human nature is people that don't have fixed desks kind of have, they

may be coming here a few days a week, *they kind of get a rhythm because it's one less thing you need to think about*. You walk to the same place each time and sit down there.

C: Which is what I did.

A: You will. You will, think about it. It's the same about getting on a bus. You go. The reason you do it is because it's one less thing to think about ... So this has got lovely ambiguity about it, it's an ambiguous place. It's full of ambiguity which of course which is what makes cities what they are, the richness of the city is all about these things and of course we, I learnt about cities because we were working inside buildings, but buildings become so large 8,000-10,000 people inside buildings, they were like little towns. So, the *politics of space* was extremely advanced in office buildings.

(my emphasis)

As well as re-iterating emphasis upon rhythms and movements that happen without thinking, the architect here again draws upon Richard Sennett distinguishing between boundaries (as seemingly fixed and impermeable) and borders (as permeable and a zone of interaction). It is notable that Sennett (2015: np) turns to a similar vocabulary as Massey (2005) to talk about space in terms of openness or closure, as well as sharing emphasis upon space *and* time:

In the public realm, openness can be defined in terms of built fabric and its context; in the focus on membrane/borders rather than boundaries or centres... openness is the dimension of time, evolutionary time which challenges the closed, over-determination of form and its correlates of equilibrium and integration.

However, Sennett (2015) resorts to an open/closed binary, providing examples of two opposing 'systems', which Massey (2005) would contest, I think, given her emphasis on the liveliness of space always under construction. Yet what is significant from this architect's use of Sennett is the comparison with cities and the politics of space. If we draw upon Massey (2005: 179-180) who, too, considers the architecture as city of

chance encounters interpretation, we consider the multiplicity of space emphasising the different geometries of power that shape the terms of openness and closure of different spatial relations. That the architect doesn't see many guarded boundaries is because he can swipe passed the guarded door seemingly without thinking. Indeed, I believe he had free access to the workplace. Not everyone can have access as easily.

As the geographies of architecture of the last decade have argued, there is a danger of treating architectural space as a static, immutable object, which would reduce notions of openness and closure as the moving through fixed rooms and doors. Instead, we understanding the architecture in terms of *performance* we might understanding the designing and experiencing of these workplaces as much more complicated and multiple:

The 21st century is all about paradox; and you want to be both secure *and* accessible, yeah? So how do you create a place which is both secure and accessible? ... So I think that's a key architecture question which is – and people don't frame the problems in that way, they frame it either it's got to be secure *or* is it's got to be accessible. Seldom do you see people framing problems as, think about it, we want to be both, here, collaborative and quiet, yeah? – so how do we achieve these things in different parts of the space, in different parts of the space of course. You start to zone it, you start to use time... but no it's not rigid.

(Member & Architect, male, 60-65, Hub Westminster)

Whilst we might understand the design of the built space as distinctly controlled by exclusionary power, reinforcing an inside/outside binary, the suggestion here is that the boundaries between 'members' and 'guests', 'insiders and outsiders' can be a lot less clear. The claims are that the architectural space may be associated with creative or seductive power (Allen, 2006). Responding to Jon Goss (1993) recognition of the

indeterminacy of the shopping mall, John Allen (2006) calls for a need to recognise the ‘pull’ as well as the dominating ‘push’ forces:

Crucially, however, such spaces are designed to bring about an affective response ... a way of being that can evoke a feeling of openness and inclusiveness. What goes on in such spaces, how they are used, is circumscribed by the design, layout, sound, lighting, solidity, and other affective means that can have an impact which is difficult to isolate, yet nonetheless powerful in their incitements and limitations on behaviour.

(Allen, 2006: 445)

As such, I wish to turn to consider how such debates inform my understanding of the designing of this workplace.

6.3. Circulation, atmospheres and a sense of push

There has been much interest among critical geographers in recent years surrounding the production of affect. Architecture is frequently used to help pin down how affective registers influence what Adey (2008: 438) calls ‘to move and be *moved*’ or what Duff (2010: 893) suggests is the ‘pull and push of place’. For instance, Adey (2008) suggests architects are increasingly focusing upon engineering atmospheres and moods to choreograph and engineer embodied experiences through architecture and it is perhaps unsurprising that the architects at Hub Westminster claim to influence behaviour, movement, collaboration and so forth. What is significant to their claims, I think, is how there is connection made between designing to affect movements and how the feel of the workplace is said to encourage a particular response to the financial crisis:

It’s a bit of an odd one because it’s, the whole point of *this* Hub, compared to say Islington, was that this came at the point just after the crash. So this was all about, instead of talking about potential solutions, it was about

actually trying to push them forward very fast, so we tried to create this to look, *to feel a bit like a lab*. So all the surfaces are hard, everything's a bit white, it's a bit less 'prune' as compared to the other Hubs and that was kind of a deliberate move. It was maybe a bit more fast paced, the acoustics were meant to be a bit more hard, everything like that, so it was meant to be a fast-paced thing... the main thing was to try and create enough scope for it to deal with whatever came up. So it's basically creating like a 'super-studio', so we provided the core infrastructure which we thought would be needed for any arrangement of this space to occur, if that makes sense?

(Architect, male, 25-30; my emphasis)

The architect here evokes a language of 'pushing' forward, of a 'fast-paced' atmosphere of work which corresponds with what Nigel Thrift (2004: 64) would conceive of as a 'sense of push in the world'. Drawing upon the multi-sensory, tactile properties of the workplace, the smooth white floors and the hard-sounds (they even planned to have cooler and warmer zones of the workplace) this 'laboratory' atmosphere is intended not just as space for thinking about things but to 'get things done'. And quickly. This was not just declared by the architects, but also by the member hosts:

The directors of [the architectural practice] are also the executive directors of Impact Hub Westminster, so they firmly believe that it's not just about the buildings but it's how you design the buildings that impact upon you and how you're doing it. If we look at Impact Hub Westminster now, the way that it looks with the stripped back ceiling, it's to give the feeling of a laboratory hence we *feel* the space, we call it as a space where you can incubate your ideas, incubate your business. So as I say, stripped back ceilings, it's to look like a laboratory.

(Member host, female, 30-35; original emphasis)

With an emphasis upon us *feeling* the space, this workspace is said to be shaped so as *to move* and be *moved* (Adey, 2008). Indeed, being mobile, bumping into people and having quick meetings is part of the daily rhythms of the workplace, as I noted:

[Host (male, 25-30)] is always walking, on the phone, talking to people, just walking, always walking. Oh, there goes Vivian Westwood.

(Research notes, 13/08/2013)

I asked him about this when I managed to record an interview with him. Fittingly, we did a mobile interview around the coworking space:

So, walking, helping me think and negotiate, trying to sell somebody, or educate them about the Hub, solving a problem with the space or trying to find something, brainstorming, I don't know how I brainstorm. I usually brainstorm whilst doing something else, might be walking, sleeping, I brainstorm a lot.

(Host, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

It is suggested that being mobile around the office is seemingly less-than-conscious. Certainly walking around the workplace and the lack of visual prompts that might clearly define which spaces are for 'guests' frequently happened for those new to the building. There would regularly be guests at the Hub – I was forever pushing the furniture around when I was hosting to accommodate different events and re-setting tables and chairs at the end of the day – and the ambiguity of the workplace often lead to people walking past the drop-in 'studio café':

People attending events and guests mostly follow signs, although for most people it is not obvious exactly where to go. This space tends to witness impromptu meeting and people passing up and down on their phones. It is also the space where most planned meetings take place. Many people have their clip on visitors badges. People tend to look confused, but are often greeted by member hosts. If they have a meeting, they will normally be told to sit down and the person they're meeting will be notified. This doesn't always go to plan if member hosts are elsewhere or if visitors just start walking around the office. There is nothing stopping visitors doing this.

(Research notes, 13/08/2013 14:15)

Indeed, as has already been set out by the architects, this lack of clarity, this ambiguity and the rapid movements are said to be purposeful, to get people to meet and to encourage people not to stay put for too long. To some extent the hosts would get a bit frustrated when guests would start walking around the workplace, often following them to ask who they were looking for, however many hosts would just let them wander. They were, after all, through 'security'. Yet similar 'invitations' are designed into other aspects of the workspace. For example, one of the architects emphasised how they sought the 'DIY' kitchen to be a micro-space of unexpected encounters, where members would be able to fall into conversation with people they previously did not know (see Fig 6.8. and 6.9.). Despite the large number of people who would use the workspace each day, there were only two kettles in the kitchen. This was a direct move to make people wait whilst the kettle boils, to get members to offer to make tea for those also waiting (I couldn't help but immediately draw comparisons with the instant-kettle in my shared university office kitchen discouraging staff from lingering in the kitchen and narrow corridors for too long!). Similarly, the kitchen sink was designed, and then later re-designed to further emphasise that people should start talking while waiting to wash their dishes. As the architect above suggests, this eye contact might not feel comfortable at first, but this was a move to push for particular interactions. This, too, is implied as 'expert' design for which people might not be consciously aware of.



Fig. 6.8. – The DIY kitchen ‘Escoffier’s’ with ‘The Library’ to the right and Workshop 2 to the left (photo credit: author’s own)

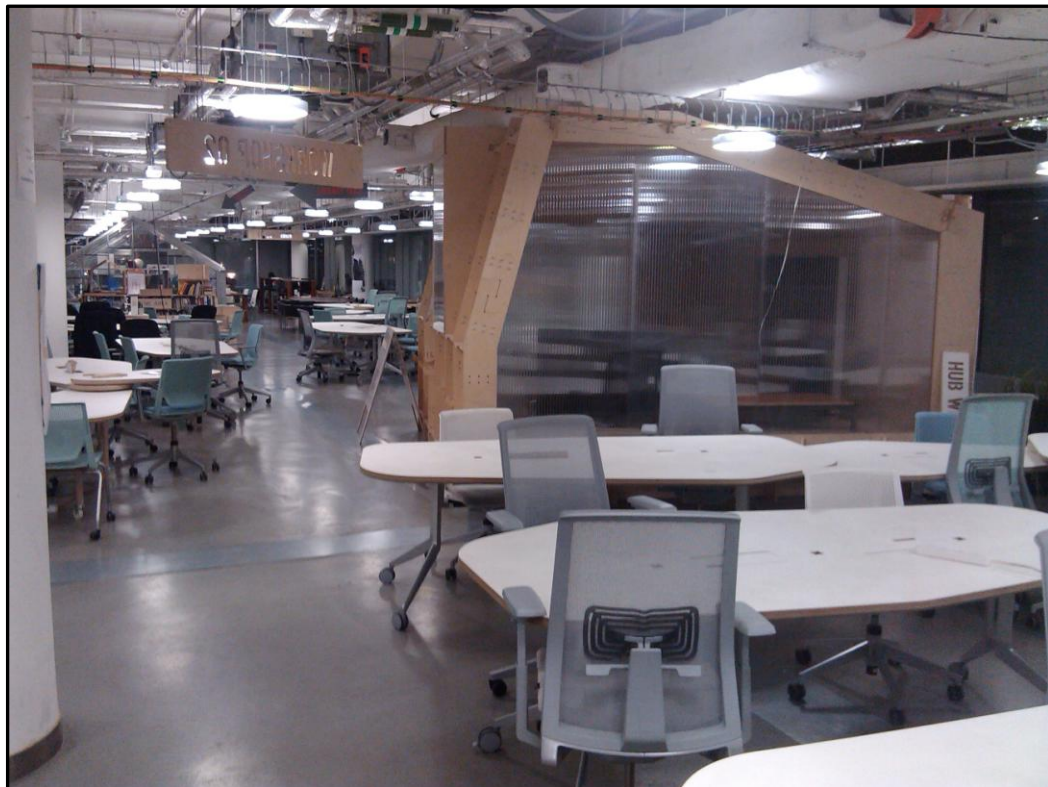


Fig. 6.9 – Approach to the DIY kitchen. The WikiHouse separates Workshops 1 and 2. Tables and chairs back in place ready for tomorrow (photo credit: author’s own)

In relation to the geographies of architecture literatures, then, this channelling and meeting would appear to resonate with Peter Adey's (2008) calculative architecture of the airport, whereby triggers designed into the architecture prompt unconscious, pre-cognitive moves. The architects themselves however characterised the more subtle ways in which they were designing as 'choice architects' who are 'nudging and creating settings for better behaviour' (architectural practitioner, male, 30-35). Their design practices were considered to be underpinned by the soft paternalism of 'nudge' (following Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). This seems to be a *gesture* towards the ideas of 'nudge' as they are only loosely-based upon claims of more neuro-cognitive behavioural studies research; to some degree, I suspect that this appeals as a way to legitimise a sense of affecting change whilst corresponding with the 'experimental' narrative to such work. As Pykett (forthcoming) states:

the project of neuro-architecture sets out to address perceived deficiencies in the evidence offered by architects, who are sometimes said to be too reliant on intuitive conjectures about how buildings affect occupants.

Indeed, a recently commissioned research project from NESTA (2014: np), which involves the Impact Hub GmbH, appears to be seeking such connections in a move to 'delve deeper into the world of neuro-architecture and cognitive studies around individual and group creativity'. What is most striking here is the emphasis upon 'better behaviour'. Rather than the rationality assumptions of the so-called *Homo Economicus*, the architects setting-up and continuing to contribute towards the (re)design of the workplace, rely upon a fairly conscious, more-than-rational actor prompted to make 'better' decisions through networking (Jones *et al.*, 2013). Hence, there is an emphasis upon the *invitational* rather than coercive. Differing from the more coercive pre-

cognitive registers of affect, the architects suppose a series of more-or-less conscious, bounded entrepreneurs that need a bit of a prompt in the ‘right’ direction. These claims have become increasingly frequent whereby similar notions of creating ambiguity, a sense of ownership and blurring between ‘public’ and ‘private’ through spatial design nudges have been reported elsewhere, for instance, in relation to street redesign (Jones *et al.*, 2013).

It is significant, however, that there is slippage in this conceptualisation of the nearly/more-than-rational self when considering their own interactions as a team. During a conversational interview with one of the architects (over two hours or so, moving from the ‘Wikihouse’ – due to another meeting about to take place – going through to the ‘Strategy Lab’), there was slippage between notions of transparency and bounded singularity, and the occupying of a more lively space composed of at least two bodies:

A: In the nudge book, they talk about a paternalistic – and I sort of subscribe to that in the sense that, again, the term may not be that useful because it has weight, people have preconceptions about what that means, kind of paternalistic libertarianism in the book – but I think that whatever they mean by that is embodied I think within how we like to think we operate within [architectural practice] so ultimately the thing that really keeps you in check is *transparency* and collectivism within the organisation... so there’s something we’ve constantly struggled with and even today there was discussion in a very matter of fact way about how we’re working right now in the Hub which was about the degree to which, when you’re physically working on a problem and you’re mulling over and *you’re in that space with someone else* because we never try and do things in isolation there’s a 2+ *kind* of team members sort of approach.

C: That’s a conscious ...?

A: As I've said before we've sort of gone through growing pains and phase changes ... [but] one of the mantras that we're trying to bring to ourselves is this idea that a project can live as a, we've called it, a protocol and that protocol is that to really run a successful [architectural practice] project, at its core you need *1+1.1 people*, and what that meant was that you'd come along and either say 'hey guys, I think we really should be doing this', or in reality things would emerge much more organically with conversations and stuff but ultimately with people who are really committed to making something happen in one way or another and then the *0.1 person* who is almost like a much more tacit paternalistic in some governance role of basically saying 'I will commit to spending a little bit of time to come and see how you guys getting on, are you healthy? Are you eating well? Are you alright?'

(my emphasis)

Interjecting as I asked about conscious decision-making, the architect adopts a language of corporeality, of the growing pains or phase changes as their team develops, implying something more liminal and overlapping. Yet their notion of any project involving $1+1+\dots + 1.1$ presumes (near) autonomous individuals. This parallels Luce Irigaray's (1993; cited in Rose, 2003) critique of masculine mode of thinking which relies upon '1+1+1+...' notions of distance between solid bodies. However, for the architects, the additional 0.1 is that extra little 'paternalist' nudge from the outside. This, then, seems to diverge from those geographers of affect concerned with that 'outside of consciousness' between bodies (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 28), whereby this 'betweenness' relies on a far more porous and fluid account of (not merely human) bodies interweaving, a mode of analysis which, too, can be considered to involve masculinist distancing (Thien, 2005).

Whilst the geographies of affect and behaviour change of libertarian paternalism might offer different conceptualisations of the self and subjectivity, both take seriously the

ambient power of architectural space (Allen, 2006). Indeed, Jones *et al.* (2010: 494), critical of the claims and techniques of behaviour change insist that:

If choice architectures are to become veiled in a web of ambient registers of power, it becomes crucial that their initial design and implementation should be an object of ongoing deliberative reflection.

One of the architects addressed why they felt nudge was important, when I asked about their responsibilities when nudging:

What's the Hub about again? Radically better world. And the environment, right? What do we know about recycling? With a bit of nudging you can really, really change behaviour. What is the Hub about? Nudging and creating settings for better behaviour. What are we not doing? Connecting all these dots. Interesting, right? Really interesting. I've complained about it and since then we have these colourful [bins] which are good. We still have that big round bin, it's not gone. The same thing still happens, it invites people to separate their waste and just chuck it all in, the whole Tesco's bag, the whole Pret bag. So, my point is that most nudges happen by default, not by design. And that's a problem because they encourage often bad behaviour. I think being purposeful around your nudges and almost seeing nudge behaviour as almost lean start-up behaviour – this is the hypothesis, I'm going to test it – is unbelievably valuable. Are there ethical responsibilities? Yeah, sure. I don't want to, you can be really libertarian about it, oh, the state! and all sorts of do-gooders have no right on imprinting their nudges on society but then again that's bullshit because advertising's one big nudge. You know what I mean, so the market can do it but the state can't? Bad people can do it to make a profit and good people can't do it?

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

I consider the implications of 'creating settings for better behaviour' more fully in the following chapter as well as their relationship with 'the state' given they later contradict this claim. Nonetheless, the suggestion is that circulation and movements can be governed through designing the spatial arrangement of the coworking space. It is significant how this becomes entangled with selling a particular 'experience' and how

this goes beyond the role of architectural design but also incorporates the curating role of member hosts:

But not only do I do tours here, but I also do, whenever we have events, I'll introduce potential clients to what we're about, because obviously, people who are booking the space, yes they are booking the space, but they are also *booking into an experience*.

(Member host, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster; my emphasis)

Together, this might follow research concerned with how affect is co-opted as part of urban experience, yet any experiencing must not presume a singularity of affective registers (Degen *et al.*, 2015). Connecting this with the contested conceptualisation of human subjectivities above, this follows Tolia-Kelly's (2006: 213) concerns that affective atmospheres can be 'particularly inattentive to issues of power; negated is a focus on geometries of power and historical memory that figure and drive affective flows and rhythms'. As such, I want to look more closely at how these accounts limit, contest and subvert those designed intentions and affective atmospheres.

6.4. Different experiences and human subjectivities

The accounts given thus far would suggest that people are seemingly constantly on the move, interacting and networking given the corporeal and sensory pushes that the workplaces are said to deploy, as Thrift (2002) would have it the 'geographies of circulation' at work. Yet things are more complicated. Kraftl and Adey (2008) would no doubt insist upon the possible affordances of affective materiality, rather than determining causality. Whilst Hub Westminster may have been designed to feel like a laboratory, this can also be understood as an expression of masculinity, exclusivity and

single-mindedness (Massey, 2005). This echoes concerns raised about the immediacy and potential singularity of affective capacities which evade the different geometries of power that shape people's experiences (Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Jones, 2012). Therefore, despite claims otherwise (Adey, 2008), I feel that there is a danger of glamorising the capacity of designers, particular architects, to influence inhabitations (Lorne, under review).

A workplace can after all be simultaneously a space of humour and enjoyment for one person, and at the same time, a space of intimidation and harassment for another. That is not to say that the material architecture does not matter, indeed, different 'microspaces' of a workplace may well exaggerate or heighten particular feelings at any given moment. Yet where one coworker stated, retrospectively, that 'obviously it was a very manly atmosphere' (Coworker, female, 25-30, FunkBunk), this was never expressed by the regular male coworkers, likewise the comments on it feeling like a 'white, middle-class haven' (Coworker, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster). The point is these feelings are to some extent *personal* and therefore I am cautious of those accounts that rely on the pre-personal and the non-historicist geographies of affect which risk masking all kinds of power relations between different people in and beyond the workplace. Yet these feelings are contingent. For instance, whilst stating precisely that they didn't feel like others in this 'white, middle-class haven', this feeling of exclusion would later shift: 'It feels like you're back at uni again, helping enough other. We're all doing our projects but there's that kind of shared get-go feeling'.

As such, I wish to shift analysis away from the geographies of affect given the evacuation of human subjectivities in accounts of architectural encounters (Rose et al., 2010; Lees and Baxter, 2011). Notably, one coworker drew upon the notion of feeling at ‘home’ when working at the Hub Westminster:

I think people have to feel comfortable in a space, no? You have to feel like the space is a home, in a way, or you have to feel very natural in that environment in order to be creative, in order to be inspired, in order to be intuitive and things like this... I am a believer that in relation to building, you have to pay attention to what is the problem at hand. So, I believe in relation to architecture, I believe different personalities have different preferences for different architectures and I believe equally different problems have different relationships with architectures.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Hub Westminster)

In connecting this, he evoked spatial notions of intuition that cannot be easily represented in words:

I believe that *intuition happens at a very internal space*, that *you have a deep inner feeling in yourself*, often you cannot actually verbalise that intuition. You can't put it into words, you just have a feeling and I think part of this idea of the feeling is that you can't fully verbalise, you can't fully rationalise, but you intuitively know that something is worth investigating. So you go off and you try to rationalise it.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Hub Westminster; my emphasis)

Here we get a sense of the inability to articulate his feelings and the ability to express these in words. Crucially, though, his inability to consciously express these feelings are perceived to be in an ‘internal space’. Indeed, this would appear to follow what Steve Pile (2010: 12) refers to as the ‘unthought thoughts’ that distinguishes a split between emotional and affectual geographies. He later appeals to a ‘distancing’ from the

workplace environment driven apparently by his individual, entrepreneurial vision of himself:

I can't spend all the time here. It doesn't work for me. But I'm very much a person who works as an entrepreneur, I'd like to go it my own way, I'm not, I don't need to be in an environment.. I can sell, I can market myself, but I also have a very internal vision of who I want to be, or whatever I'm planning on, it's not a collectivist vision that I've developed by having discussions with people. It's a deep feeling that this is what I want to do with my life and it's quite personal.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Hub Westminster)

Yet, the implied stability of claims about himself are complicated by, contradicted even, by statements previously suggesting that he was introverted and wished to sit on the periphery of the workplace. As I noted from our first meeting in the DIY kitchen:

He asked if I was the first person in, in the morning, where would I sit? I said that somewhere in the middle, by the greenhouse so I could see what was going on, being around other people etc. He said he is totally different. He wants to sit in the corner where he can be away from people. Went with the hub and spoke analogy. He openly admitted to being introverted. He had concerns that the people who run the place are very open to noise and action and that he needs more isolation in his work with the option for encounters (much like this one)... He argued that, in his work, his working practices and the way that he operates his ideas, he needs enclosure and time to dwell on his thoughts before he lets them surface.

(Notes from research diary, 18/7/2013)

Yet, to requote from previously, he insists that he is driven by embodying, smelling, even, other 'successful' people:

To physically see other people that you know, you can kind of *smell* [laughs], are going through the same issues as you, or that, you see these other people that you know personally, you have drinks in the afternoon with, are being successful. Then that drives you.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Hub Westminster)

As such, this leaves me far from certain as to the intertwining of human subjectivity and architectural encounters. This was not consistent. There is a parallel here with Rose *et al.*, (2010) in the suggestion that the coworker might try to bring about some kind of ‘rationality’, yet this is complex and ambiguous, such that we cannot take what he says as a given. Where he does claim to be more certain is in his insistence on his ‘internal vision’ – and not a collective one – as an apparently entrepreneurial subject. I take up these claims more fully in the following chapter.

It is worth stressing that collaboration was not always desired among coworkers, but rather as something they could opt into or out of:

Coz you know, I don’t know where I’d sit in that spectrum but I’ve got a business to run and you know, sometimes it’s head down and there’s a lot of focus as everyone is busy working and there’s nothing funky or you know, it’s sort of collaboration with a small ‘c’, you know?

(Coworker, male, 40-45, Moseley Exchange)

I wasn’t getting much work done ‘coz I kept on talking [with a social enterprise team on a big table in workshop 2]. So I quite like there [pointing at ‘our’ regular seats] and I think most people, even if they don’t have a certain desk designated to them, those people have areas that they work in. It’s like anything. You have a certain place on the bus you pick, and a certain toilet cubicle you pick. It’s in our nature isn’t it!

(Coworker, female, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

Echoing the bus metaphor from earlier, the insistence is that there is a previous place we choose based upon some kind of personal decision, down to their personality or shyness, mood, and so forth. A lot of the time people are coworking they’re trying to block out their pretty mundane surroundings:

Without a doubt, the worst days in this place are the days when you forget your headphones. Oh man, you've got to sit there all day and listen to air conditioning.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange).

Coworkers would regularly refer to the importance of the 'atmosphere', 'buzz' or 'energy' associated with the workplace, however, this would be understood to be dynamic depending upon the mixing of the architectural materiality and people coworking. Far from the 'glamour' of architectural design, often this was expressed as very unexciting:

I also think it's a *quiet* environment, and I think it's got a lot of natural-light, so I think it's a mix of social support you get when you're here and the environment I find quite conducive to working.

(Coworker, male, 50-55, Moseley Exchange; original emphasis)

What is significant to consider is this 'social support', those encounters of care and conflict discussed earlier. This is significant because it highlights the multiplicity of human experiences, so if we compare the following expressions:

[It's] that atmosphere 'coz your average creative has got a certain mind-set and they're a bit more, I suppose it goes with the creativity, have a bit of a laugh, I dunno, maybe I'm making sweeping statements but, so, absolutely, I think the atmosphere is a *good* atmosphere to work in.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, FunkBunk)

I was the only girl. It was slightly intimidating walking in but it wasn't like, everyone did seem really friendly, although I wasn't sort of chatting with them all day. I didn't, once I'd been there for a bit, it did just feel like you were at work.

(Coworker trialist, female, 25-30, FunkBunk)

The latter conversation was undertaken away from the coworking space and for me it insists the need to recognise, however fluid, human subjectivities and consider how this may simultaneously be a good atmosphere for the ‘average creative’ but also a ‘very manly atmosphere’. The experience of these coworking spaces involved (unprompted) memories of and comparisons with former workplaces, whether that be their ‘home office’ but also working as an employee from a shared office. This would be addressed in terms of personal feelings about people at work:

It’s the energy, I think. It’s not so much, because I don’t, we are social one way or another, sit down and have cups of tea and stuff but it’s more that it’s the feeling of other people doing work around me and not in a bellyaching, ‘I really hate my job, I don’t want to be here, sat looking at the clock every two seconds’ but it’s just that there is a certain energy about the place, that, I don’t know, I’ve worked better – I work a lot better here.

(Coworker, female, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

The extent to which social relations were felt to influence the experience of the workplace led to suggestions of the near insignificance of the architectural space:

‘Coz coworking to me is almost *sans* building, it is almost entirely the experience of human relations and the building is just a facilitator. So I certainly think that it’s not the environment that changes you but it’s the awareness that one pulls one’s punches in that space, because at the end of the day, just because some people in that space haven’t been that conducive towards change, doesn’t mean that we should offend them, I suppose.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

This passive role of non-human actors within these ‘building events’ could rapidly change here, for instance, when the wi-fi internet connection dropped out leading to a coworking ‘failure’. Alternatively, the atmosphere of ‘trust’ among coworkers became more fragile, when, for instance, somebody walked into the building, going into the

quieter kitchen section of the workplace and stealing a computer monitor without being seen. Yet the experiencing of uneasiness was most intensely felt among particular coworkers and managerial staff:

This isn't meant to be harsh nasty criticisms, I just think this is the way that it is. It has become a bit of a library in there and it isn't, the people who run it on a day to day basis aren't approachable, [Manager, male, 45-50] who essentially is on the board, he is the chairman I think, even [centre manager, male, 35-40]'s approachable and he'll cheerfully walk through the space without saying hello to anybody unless you are on the important list which is essentially anyone who can benefit him, you know...

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

The centre manager was not unaware of the tensions. However, these were heightened due to the centre managers between seen as in opposition to coworkers, particularly given the separation of 'their' office from the coworking space:

So in relation to when we were interviewing in the lounge area, I would probably say that if an employee of the space comes in, the walls that have been built around us and some of the difficult situations that have happened in the past over the whole space of my being there are a natural blocker to sometimes thinking 'umm, maybe I shouldn't say that'. But I would probably hold onto that thought and wait for them to leave and then say it, rather than not say it. But I am aware of that dynamic sufficiently that I would say that when you're interviewing other people, if you've got the upstairs, if you've got an office there where you're interviewing people or the white room or something, but there it's a bit cool and clinical there, so I would probably agree that it's not the nicest environment to discuss things in, but at least it's private.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

Whilst privacy for meeting and phone calls was frequently expressed as an issue, the separation between 'workers' and 'managers' was far more ambiguous at both the Hub and FunkBunk. Rather, member hosts at the Hub were tasked with connecting and encouraging networking, as emphasised by Spinuzzi (2012) and (Merkel, 2015):

I try and think about it like this: it's like, I see myself as kind of curating the environment and you're kind of managing an ecosystem. The bare bones of my role, I can piss a lot of people off if I'm like 'yeah, come on in! 300 people come into the space!', you know the people running fledging businesses have their head down, you can easily screw up, you've probably seen me do it, yeah that's when you see me running around really well! But you know, curating an environment.

Indeed, this notion of curating the environment follows Merkel's (2015) analysis. These curating processes were said to support empowering coworkers to be able to 'hack' the architectural space:

Change it. Literally, as in I need a wall over there, like those things. Like, where the hell did those things come from? The problem with [the architects] they just build shit! But that's what you're supposed to do if you're anybody. Like the boys at [company], are a good example, they made a mess, and I'm like I've got to clean it up ... (interrupted by staff member)... I love this. This is great, this is, it's kind of gone actually right now, but this morning, I don't know if you watched but did you see the photographer earlier today? The photoshoot? That's cool. It is a space where you can do that. As much as it was seizure inducing, people were just hanging out there and nobody cared, you know, it's assume. Hacking the space, like okay, I need a studio, they kind of asked me and we're just like 'yes! Just do it!' and like other places were like well, if you could sign this... just do it, you know.

The importance of hosts in facilitating and speeding up networking practices was perceived to be crucial to the future of coworking. Whilst early iterations of these shared workplace may have focused upon a shared, cheap work environment, they were concerned with fostering innovation and entrepreneurialism:

Coworking, in cities, is changing. Rapidly, rapidly. You know when Hub Islington was founded 2004, 2005, there was hardly any coworking space, now, it's *everywhere*... So, everyone understands an innovation model that brings the outside, in. Or that blurs the boundaries between the inside and outside, right?

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster; original emphasis)

As such the architectural practice would insist that their practices as architects should go beyond buildings and instead towards enabling this blurring:

But equally, we are shedding space, more so outside London, but even in London we see that people are starting to understand the value of space isn't necessarily going to be the real estate, actually, you can do stuff with the space which is hosting the community. So, the premium is not space, the premium was *never* space. Space is only really relevant as an access point to wider value, access point to networks, innovation, to funding, to coaching, to all these things. That's the *real* value of space that provides you access. Big question then for the Hub and coworking spaces is: so, should we really go for a bigger, shinier, meaner building? Or should we recognise that the point about space is access points, should we provide what we are good at hosting, connecting, offering added-value, content, finance, networks of tacit knowledge and stuff and all these kind of things? Low-transaction value, access to professional services, to temporary staff, etc.

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

Rather than the 'shiny building', these architects are concerned with the more-than-representational imports of architecture, but crucially, operating beyond buildings as their main concern.

Conclusions

Chance encounters are of great importance to the designing and experiencing of coworking spaces. They are, after all, one of their selling points. However, the extent to which they can be orchestrated or engineered is much more ambiguous and crucially, continuously varies among different people. As such it is helpful to consider John Allen's (2003) emphasis upon 'multiple modalities of power' in relation to these architectural performances. At most exclusionary, a series of social-material accomplishments must happen before people may get through the doors into the

workplace. It is far easier for some to enter than others. Whilst they may be exclusive, highly controlled, even, these particular boundaries are permeable and changing. A theft of a computer monitor exemplifies the more unexpected visitors, while if Wi-Fi internet connections fail daily work practices become markedly harder to accomplish. Yet, what I think is most significant to such building events here is the ways in which they are said to be designed to encourage happenstance meetings; an engineered production of serendipity. The relations of power are much more complicated than that of inclusion/exclusion getting into the 'club'. Indeed, it is significant that such spaces were often conceptualised as ambiguous and paradoxical. At Hub Westminster, in particular, there is much more emphasis placed upon blurring boundaries, bringing the outside in through invitation as much as coercion and through encouraging movement and interaction.

The claims made by architects as well as member hosts at Hub Westminster is that it is intended to 'feel like a laboratory'. This claim provides a strong insight into the ways in which architectural spaces are carefully designed to generate particular kinds of responses. Although visibility is important to these encounters, design was said to encompass the generation of multi-sensory experiences, to be fast-paced, to have smooth floors, to sound hard. This differs from Moseley Exchange and FunkBunk (re)designed to muffle unwelcome noise and feel slow-paced, respectively. Yet this laboratory-like design is said to be a response to the financial crisis of 2008, to cultivate not merely 'thinking' but 'doing'. This resonates with a certain singularity to such claims of enabling an apparently disembodied, masculinist space of knowledge production, the laboratory. Where the architects sought the workplace to be

‘invitational’ rather than just ‘manipulative’ in order to speed up networking, they rely on notions of a bounded, if not fully rational actor. As such this account, as well as those from geographies of affect, is problematic in the way that human subjectivities are conceptualised. Whilst a multiplicity of bodies may be continuously interacting in close proximity, more-or-less actively, the extent that the architectural materiality affects inhabitations can be minimal. Crucially, personal feelings and circumstances can vary greatly. Most prosaically, something as mundane as a deadline may render those chance encounters less likely. Likewise, coworkers who suggested they were more introverted may resist participating in the advocated networking practices. For all the appeals to circulation and movement, many coworkers – including the architect designers themselves – may sit at a desk staring at a computer, blocking out noise with headphones.

We have seen how the ongoing curation of particular atmospheres is entangled with hosts ‘selling an experience’ to potential new members. Certainly this incorporates the temporary renting of particular ‘micro-spaces’ to hold meetings, yet more broadly, this relates to the role of hosts speeding up networking among members. The importance of hosts within coworking has been noted elsewhere (Merkel, 2015) and certainly this was crucial to the original strategy of the Hub Westminster. Importantly, this is part of a much wider aim of ‘setting up new social and economic institutions for better behaviour’ which, as I was bluntly told, suggests we might need to rethink the importance placed upon architectural space. Part of this involves a move away from the symbolism of architecture towards more dynamic encounters, which follows closely with the recent interest in ‘building events’ among geographers. However, part of such

claims, as we shall see, is to situate coworking within wider moves of ‘becoming entrepreneurial’ to encourage ‘new’ ways of working. So far in the thesis, I have purposely not focused too directly on the ‘work’ of coworkers so as to avoid prioritising economic practices as if they were somehow part of a separate sphere of life (Mitchell, 2005). However, at this point I want to focus more explicitly upon such projects to consider the significance of claims and practices of ‘becoming entrepreneurial’ within these apparently ‘new institutions’. Given the interrelations between all kinds of spaces, such as the household and community (as discussed in chapter 5), I want to be attentive to *economic difference* whilst considering the ‘co’ in coworking. I shall consider what possibilities might exist alongside and beyond a capitalist discourse of entrepreneurialism and competition.

Becoming entrepreneurial and other possibilities

Is it a kind of sneaking facilitation of neoliberalism and is it plugging directly into the flexible economy which almost requires, where business is actually wanting more flexibility from its workers which is essentially more tenuous contracts, more piece work, more payment by results, less investment in individuals, less training, more self-employment? And that's a peculiar thing as well because if everyone was self-employed there would be by definition less exploitation, in the Marxist sense, because people would be keeping their own surplus value... so I don't know whether that's pro or anti, really...?

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

Are the spaces and practices of coworking further entrenching and legitimising 'neoliberalism', supporting the notion of self-directing, autonomous individuals who are working increasingly insecure jobs? Or, is coworking mitigating such individualisation and insecurity? These are questions that in one way or another I have been asked – and have asked myself – throughout this research.¹² Framing the question in such a way is perhaps unsurprising given the political current whilst undertaking this research. Throughout this period, UK Coalition government ministers have been vocal in encouraging self-employment and furthering calls for people to be 'entrepreneurial'. Self-employment rates are now suggested to be at their highest in forty years whilst the average income from self-employment has fallen by 22% since 2008/09 (Office for

¹² Whilst the quotation of the coworker above is more nuanced – informed by Marxism – I am more often asked: 'so is coworking good or bad, then?'

National Statistics, 2014).¹³ The emergence of coworking spaces coincide with claims of the rise of the ‘sharing economy’, which according to Conservative MP Matthew Hancock is ‘unlocking a new generation of microentrepreneurs’ (Hancock MP, 2014: foreword). At the same time, there is a championing of the potential of ‘social enterprises’ running formally public services, whilst private companies are increasingly delivering contracted-out public services as part of the localism reforms (Raco, 2013). Standing directly on stage at Hub Westminster, David Cameron declared that ‘open markets and free enterprise are the *best imaginable* force for improving human wealth and happiness’ (Cameron, 2012; original emphasis). On the same stage months later, Richard Branson would launch his call for social entrepreneurs to ‘do good through business’ (whilst promoting his new book). Angela McRobbie (2013) has reflected upon this intrusion of neoliberal principles among social enterprises occupying a bland language of ‘change-makers’, as well a particular business culture fostered through television shows such as *The Apprentice*.¹⁴ Neoliberalism, then, ‘seems to be everywhere’ (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 380), even if it means different things to different people (Larner, 2003; Barnett, 2005; Harvey, 2005; Ong, 2006; Springer, 2012).¹⁵ Undoubtedly, my initial response throughout this research could be boiled down to a constant refrain within much critical scholarship that ‘neoliberalism is bad for poor and working people, therefore we must oppose it’ (Ferguson, 2010: 166). However, I can’t help but have sympathy with James Ferguson who then suggests: ‘I sometimes wonder

¹³ Although, as I shall later discuss, determining who is ‘self-employed’ is tricky to pin down (Hotch, 2000).

¹⁴ An episode was indeed filmed, in part, at Hub Westminster in 2014.

¹⁵ This list is unrepresentative of the volume of academic scholarship that engages with ‘neoliberalism/neoliberalisation’, such is the extent to which the term is deployed.

why I should bother to read one after another extended scholarly analysis only to reach, again and again, such an unsurprising conclusion' (Ferguson, 2010: 166).

There is the danger of running into a caricatured 'neoliberalism' as bogey monster here, rather than, for instance, being sensitive to hybrid, particular and contingent neoliberalisation (Springer, 2010) and the nuances between different conceptualisations. Yet where Cameron says that the best imaginable way of improving happiness and well-being is through the free-market capitalist economy, maybe it is *our* imaginations, performances and responses that are restrictive? I have increasingly felt concerned about framing my research – both in terms of its representation here, but also my research encounters with coworkers – whereby the practices and spaces of coworking are assumed to be *inevitably* capitalist or at best doomed attempts at resisting capitalism/neoliberalism. Rather, following particular feminist critiques of political economy, I want to question *a priori* readings that fit coworking practices into a certain *logic* of 'The Economy', 'Capitalism', 'Neoliberalism' at risk of representing a monolithic, all-pervasive unified whole. Raising this concern is in no way to deny or ignore the proliferation of precarious working arrangements or the self-disciplining of coworkers. Quite the opposite, as the first part of this chapter will discuss. However, as this research has developed I have become less certain in my critique. Instead, I have been re-reading for *difference* and *multiplicity* to consider what alternative and non-capitalist relations I have been encountering, rather than looking for coherence and logic (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; 2006b).

I can envisage the hesitancy, scepticism even, of such approach. Gibson-Graham and the community economics collective from whom I take inspiration were criticised then (Peet, 1992) and continue to be criticised now (Harvey, 2015). Yet in this spirit, I am not merely closing my eyes and wishing capitalist exploitation away. Nor am I suggesting these workplaces are some kind of utopian space; these are pay-to-access workplaces which are not freely accessible to all despite claims of ‘lowering the threshold to access’ (Architect, male, 30-35; Hub Westminster). What I want to do is consider the *diverse* economic practices that were happening in relation to coworking, much of which extend well beyond the walls of the coworking spaces. Indeed, I have already hinted towards this when discussing those coworkers negotiating childcare responsibilities. What if, then, we are to rethink economies not as exclusively capitalist but instead ‘in terms of the coexistence of different kinds of transactions... different ways of performing and remunerating labour’ (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003: 17)? The coworker quoted above would variously identify as, for instance, an anti-capitalist, an unpaid teacher giving free coding lessons, a colleague, a friend, a remote worker and currently not a worker at all, having opted to take several months out of paid employment after mutually leaving his previous employer. His quote begins to hint towards economic difference, challenging his own (Marxist) presupposition towards class and practices of (self)exploitation. Might we generate a possible space for taking into account the coworking practices which include gift-giving, self-employment, work in-kind, childcare, volunteering and time-banking? Are all those who are self-employed considered to be exploited despite not necessarily having their surplus labour appropriated (Hotch, 2000)? Certainly not all people coworking consider themselves to

be self-employed any or all of the time. Similarly, should labouring bodies necessarily be understood as being subjected to ‘neoliberal’ modes of conduct?

As such, this chapter is broadly composed of two halves. I first want to discuss how coworkers are negotiating and struggling with becoming ‘entrepreneurial’. As such, I draw principally upon Foucauldian-inspired understandings of neoliberal governmentality to consider how notions of autonomy and freedom circulate among coworkers. I consider, too, the particular mediatory role of these workplaces claimed to be ‘new institutions’ for enterprising behaviour. However, I want to then turn to J-K. Gibson-Graham’s work on queering the economy, incompleteness and openness, to consider how coworkers are involved in diverse economic practices. Through inventorying all kinds of transactions relating to coworking, as well as the ways in which coworkers *are* questioning their ‘work-life imbalance’, I highlight ways in which certain people are considering interdependence and co-operation. A concluding discussion, drawing in comments from coworkers, will consider how the multiplicity of the spaces of coworking could be thought of in terms of paradoxical space.

7.1. Working for yourself

It could be argued that along with the ‘consumer’, a contemporary idealised citizen-subject is that of the ‘entrepreneur’ – the so-called aspirational, hard-working individual who takes responsibility and provides for themselves, motivated ‘to work hard and get on’ (Williams *et al.*, 2014: 2802). It is significant that many of those coworkers that I worked alongside over the course of 18 months or so had adopted a language of entrepreneurialism, albeit less as a figure and more as a process:

I would never describe myself as an entrepreneur, because I don't feel like one. I think an entrepreneur is somebody that really changes things and I don't think I'm changing anything, I feel like just have a good business idea and can make it work. I think entrepreneur implies somebody much more... just somebody that is quite revered by people, I suppose, I think it's a name you have to earn or a title you have to earn, you know if you start a consultancy or something you're not an entrepreneur. I think you have to be quite radical to be an entrepreneur and I don't think you should just go round saying... I think you can be *entrepreneurial* but you should earn the title of entrepreneur. I'm a business-owner, I'm a start-up, I work for myself, I don't know whether that's downplaying what I do but I think it's a different thing.

(Coworker, Female, 30-35, Moseley Exchange; original emphasis)

You cannot, it is suggested, just brand yourself 'an entrepreneur', that is something that is reinforced over time. It is notable, however, that a year after this conversation, the coworker would later define herself as an entrepreneur without such questioning. Notably, she seemed somewhat dismissive of social/professional networking events that were orientated towards 'female entrepreneurs' due to their explicit emphasis upon gender. This might follow the suggestion that women entrepreneurs increasingly treat entrepreneurship as gender-neutral, but also align with an unproblematised masculine 'norm' (Lewis, 2006). Throughout my research, 'the entrepreneur' was being explicitly connected to claims of masculinity: the alleged rationality of the lonely hero, the patriarch, the venturing explorer.¹⁶ Doing gender and doing entrepreneurship frequently intertwined yet this tended to coalesce around *the* entrepreneurial figure as a nomadic white, male (Bruni *et al.*, 2004). Richard Branson was present in body and spirit

¹⁶ Indeed, the word entrepreneur is said to derive from the French '*entreprendre*' when means to undertake, or to do, with usage in sixteenth century France relating to military expeditions (Cunningham and Lischeron, 1991: 50).

throughout these coworking spaces. The apparent masculine norm of entrepreneurship tended to be connected to a narrative of socio-economic change by coworkers:

I think that more people are setting up their own businesses, there are more start-ups around, sole traders, small bands setting-up. The home entrepreneur, the 'mumpreneur', you've seen these words banded around, and you're not really seeing big factories and stuff, my dad works in a factory and has been working for them for 8, 10 years, and he can see the workforce dwindling, so kind of seeing the nature of the workforce changing. So, we're seeing, as before, there was a big massive company with big massive offices... Insecurity as well. When I was on the community forum those people saying 'back in my day; yeah, quit one job and walk into another one'. How the hell are you going to do that now?! That doesn't happen, I don't think it does anyway. So that whole shift has happened.

(Coworker, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

The coworker proclaims that more and more people are becoming entrepreneurial subjects responding to a broader narrative of change in the labour market. His father was said to typify the decline of 'masculine' work of the factory worker and yet for his generation this is said to have shifted towards work that is more precarious and part-time. The flexibility of labouring bodies and active individualism severing and fragmenting ties with traditional structures of employer-employee relations follows a well-established, yet certainly disputed, narratives from Fordism to post-Fordism (Harvey, 1989). Such accounts, as McDowell (2009) highlights, follow a wider motif of 'change' and there is reason to be cautious of such epochal shifts. For instance, the term 'mumpreneur' is a highly contested one. It can be variously understood as sexist and liberating and where for some this provides hybrid identification as both a business owner and a 'good mother', for others this reinforces the male normativity of entrepreneurship and the boundaries of work and family; where are the 'dadpreneurs',

for instance (Ekinsmyth, 2011)?¹⁷ However, this mixing of capitalist ‘productive’ and non-capitalist ‘reproductive’ practices does begin to hint towards recognition that the economic identities of ‘worker’, ‘consumer’ and ‘entrepreneur’ are multiple and hybrid, where workloads are certainly not bound to an essentialised ‘economic’ sphere (Larner and le Heron, 2002).

Expanding upon the arguments put forward in chapter 5 in relation to ‘professionalism’, the coworker draws in the particularity of the coworking space to emphasise making yourself more ‘productive’:

So that’s where I think coworking comes in, where if you are starting up at the moment, how do you connect those business connections, how do you still have that idea of going to work, as opposed to, okay I’ve got ten minutes before I need to make the dinner, I can pick up the laptop and answer some emails, that’s not a proactive, productive way of working is it? Or, the kid’s going to wake up from his afternoon nap; I’ve got half an hour.

(Coworker, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

In an increasingly fragmented working day (apparently with the assumed continuation of parenting responsibilities), the coworking space is said to enable the cultivation of a very particular subject, a particular ‘type’ of person:

So they’re smaller, a one-man, two-man band, so it’s coworking from the sense that there’s that energy there that you don’t get in say Morrison’s at the checkout, where you’re a person being employed just to go click, click, click, scanning the barcodes, you don’t get that do you? You don’t get that

¹⁷ Carol Ekinsmyth (2011: 105) defines ‘mumpreneur’ as ‘an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business-ownership. It is often a self-confessed attempt to achieve higher levels of work–life integration, and a desire to be, simultaneously, a ‘good mother’ and a successful business owner’.

types of people here, ahh, I'm just coming in and I'm just here for a salary, there's that kind of, because they've started up a business themselves.

(Coworker, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

Coworkers often commented that 'we're customers' at the workplace (Coworker, male, 30-35; Moseley Exchange), 'the customer has to be at the very centre' (Coworker, male, 35-40; Moseley Exchange). Expanding arguments made earlier in the thesis, these entrepreneurial individuals are obliged to be taking it upon themselves to manage their lives (Miller and Rose, 2011) and paying to do so. This follows that the art of governmental power is exercised through the 'government of oneself' (Allen, 2003: 77) and if we consider the ways in which coworkers would talk of their one-person companies as 'we', this is beyond the selling of a 'reassurance' to customers, but also to themselves:

The contemporary trend away from long term labor contracts, towards temporary and part-time labor, is not only an effective economic strategy, freeing corporations from contracts and the expensive commitments of health care and other benefits, it is an effective strategy of subjectification as well. It encourages workers to see themselves not as 'workers' in a political sense, who have something to gain through solidarity and collective organization, but as 'companies of one'.

(Read, 2009: 30)

However, as we shall see later in this chapter, coworkers do not forgo the possibility of negotiating or resisting such subjectification. It is significant that one coworker picked up on a different 'mentality' of coworkers at the Moseley Exchange compared to the paid management of the community development trust:

I think *it's more a mentality*. Because they're telling us to be a certain way, but there are parameters, and it's all about time and about how people operate in that space, it's not that, you know, there are loads of rules or

anything, but I think some of the people who work in their mind set, they're not coworkers, they're here to do a job, and that's fine because you're always going to employ people to do that, you know a slightly basic function, but they've got to respect the fact that sometimes we can't go home at 7 o'clock if you're right in the middle of something. Literally, I was here the other night and somebody was closing the curtains, turning off the lights whilst I was still working, and yes I'd gone over my time but I don't know. That's a massive conversation and I don't know what the answer is to that, but I think it is, they've got this idea but they don't buy into the idea themselves... What if there was an amazing meeting going on, would they just interrupt and kick us out? So you can't expect people to work in an unstructured way in a coworking space where we're meant to break down those barriers, those rules of routine and jobsworthiness, and then they kick us out at 6 o'clock, it doesn't work.

(Coworker, female, 30-35, Moseley Exchange; my emphasis)

The mentality of these entrepreneurial individuals is not that of staff who work routine hours, for her, she cannot simply stop working at closing time. However, being alongside those with a similar 'mentality' operates to normalise the feelings of bodily exhaustion working multiple jobs:

The managing director here, he just saw me, I was just absolutely shattered. I was doing three different jobs, I was trying to look after [another coworking space outside of London], then I'm answering more emails and I look up and it's like: 'Alright? I recognise that face. You're starting up something aren't you? Okay cool'. Just to hear that, yeah this happens [from someone else]. Just to hear the fact that you will feel shit, you feel exhausted. Ah, thank God for that. Shoulders relaxed. I'm not thick. I'm not doing something stupid here. This just happens".

(Architect and Host, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

When he encounters fragility and insecurity, the response is to re-affirm such feelings as normal and re-occupy the centre ground as the venturing entrepreneur. Many of the coworkers were running their own company – often several companies – alongside paid work elsewhere to supplement their income more-or-less regularly. As such, they drew direct comparisons:

I do three days a week back at the [regional office of employer] working on [major sporting event], so it's a happy medium. It's not a happy medium actually, it's really hard, because it's two completely different ways of working. So the job I've got back at the [other employer] is very admin-based, it's quite boring, the project is fantastic. It means I'll go and work on the [sporting event] during the summer but going in there, being in a room of people I suppose that are very, very different people [to those] that I meet in the coworking space and the people I go and have meetings with who are very passionate and very, they care that everything they do, they don't have weekends, they don't have weeks, they have their job and they have their life and those two are one, I think.

(Coworker, female, 30-35; Moseley Exchange)

Reiterating the particular character of the coworker, a clear spatial-temporal delineation was made between these different jobs: 'they come in, 9 o'clock, go for lunch, go home at 5 and there is a mass exodus when they leave at 5 o'clock and it's very, very remedial work' (Coworker, female, 30-35, Moseley Exchange). Yet when she is working from the coworking space, she suggests that she feels that she is with people who are passionate about their work, people who love their jobs to the extent that they *become* their work. Whilst all coworkers were perceived to be 'entrepreneurial', distinction was made for those who were self-employed compared to those who were remote workers/employees. This leads to a worrying lack of consideration for their 'work-life balance':

They don't have a job and then they go home and switch off, it's one thing. They have their life and their job, it's everything, it's all tied together. And you do get people like that here, people like [start-up coworker, male, 30-35] who is obviously a business owner and other people who are really invested in what they do, but then you have other people like [employed, male, 30-35], [employed, female, 40-45], [employed, female, 55-60], who I suppose really enjoy what they do but again it's a different dynamic [as they are employees].

(Coworker, female, 30-35; Moseley Exchange)

It's funny what [coworker above] was saying earlier, she doesn't really like working at her office with her other job that she does 3 days a week, and maybe don't like is too strong a statement to say, but I can tangibly feel very different coming here than I do to [other employer], and I acknowledge part of it is the fact that I have to drive 40 miles there, but it's beyond that, it's knowing that your purpose, you're *raison d'être* for getting up in the morning, your energy is being pointed absolutely directly at something you're trying to develop and grow. Providing you strongly believe in that there's nothing more motivational really, I don't think. 'Coz everybody's got to work, but the fact that it's something you passionately believe in, I almost feel kind of lucky that I'm being able to do that.

(Coworker, male, 30-35; Moseley Exchange)

Here their self-employed working lives become entangled with perceptions of freedom to be autonomous:

On the one hand there's a sense of autonomy and autonomy is very important of course, and that's especially within the creative sector there's a connection between autonomy and creativity, and so we're free now, free to do what we want, free to help somebody, but that can turn into self-exploitation, so where do you stop and where does work begin and end? You know? I suppose in clocking in and clocking off at the very least there's a clear difference between your time and your labour time. So that's one of the challenges, I've certainly had to cope with self-exploitation.

(Coworker & board member, female, 35-40; Moseley Exchange)

This coworker and board member is certainly not unaware of the challenges that she faces. Compared to the first coworker above, she is more vocal about the dangers of blurring her work-life balance and how factory-like clocking in and out consisted of more clearly defined boundaries of 'time' and 'labour time'. Despite working for herself, she does hint towards at least the possibility of helping others with their work. This move towards self-employment has involved the need to learn a wide-range of skills themselves. For instance, one coworker took on the risk of investing over £8,000 for his company's products, the coworker has also had to develop an understanding of

copyright, manufacturing and outsourcing processes, as well as marketing, communications and so forth. This has also involved paying legal fees when a copyright breach claim was made against their company (as such, details anonymised). Although this caused a great deal of stress, something we have discussed at great length, this tended to be seen as tolerable because pursuing work they loved was motivation enough. There would seem to be something of a contradiction here as rather than the rational, calculative economic subject, the suggestions are all about passion and emotion.

Yet, many of the coworkers that I met were in precarious working and living arrangements. For instance, one graphic designer at the time of interview was freelancing, but selling her prints to an intermediary organisation who would sell her work to fashion and textiles companies. She did not get to see who bought her products so as to avoid her directly selling to those companies and was working solely on commission for any sales with no guaranteed salary. As such she felt unable to move out of her parents' house:

But the thing is though, it can be so up and down and that's why I'd never thought that I can definitely move out – because I'd just know that from month to month, this month I don't know how many I've sold and I've always got it in the back of my mind that I could have gone back to selling three a month and you just never know.

(Female, 25-30; further details removed on request)

Yet given that this was the perceived norm of her industry, the responsibility was hers to keep up portfolio work through additional freelancing alongside retail employment to increase her chances of work in her sector:

Over the last couple of years I've changed my mind so many times, now I know I'm glad I kept on with it. I went from "there's no point in doing this and no-one thinks I've got a proper job and it's embarrassing, I'm still having to get part-time jobs", to thinking "I'm so glad I carried on because that's the only reason I've got this job because I brought up my portfolio and I would have never got it if I hadn't have been freelancing". So although it really wasn't what I wanted to do, it was worth carrying on with and doing the odd crappy job, struggled for three years of my life now hopefully for a career that I'll have for many a year, let's hope so!

(Female, 25-30; further details removed on request)

What is most striking is the taking on of blame herself in what McRobbie (2002: 522) calls 'a de-politicizing, de-socializing mechanism' surmised by the refrain: 'Where have I gone wrong?'. Whilst some have been more 'successful' than others as self-employed workers, from my research it is notable that *younger* coworkers seemed particular instable in their working arrangements (McDowell, 2014). They can be understood to be caught between market forces and casualization of freelance work or not really being paid in the way they would if they were an employee.

So whilst this section has discussed how coworkers seem to be orientating themselves along entrepreneurial lines as individuals, I want to turn to consider more closely how the setting of the coworking spaces mediates notions of entrepreneurialism. In doing so, I want to particular the spatial dimensions of power associated to these coworking spaces.

7.2. Spatial and political implications of 'making institutions'

So we've had market liberation but no social liberation, no economic liberation. That's fundamentally at the heart of much of the evil that we experience and I think entrepreneurship *is* required, venturing *is* required in public services, in the housing system, in the energy system. The solutions

aren't going to come from the state and they're *not* going to come from big corporates. So where are they going to come from? From citizens being enterprising and venturing.¹⁸

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

So as a tactic we build time-limited institutions... We create new institutions that set up new settings for economic and social behaviour.

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

Although all three coworking spaces could be said to use a language of entrepreneurialism, this was certainly most pronounced at Hub Westminster. They perceived themselves to be more than a space for freelancers or mobile workers, but building 'time-limited institutions' (Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster). Here a link is drawn between entrepreneurship and social and economic liberation, a merging of citizenship with a capitalist language of venturing and being enterprising towards calls for social enterprises and 'changemaking'. Whilst 'solutions' will not come from corporates, we are told, neither will they come from the state. Such suspicion of the role of the state, and the assumed inability of the state to improve well-being led me to question further, where a response came:

Are you effectively asking why [architectural practice] believe entrepreneurship is the solution for the current conundrum we're in, economically, socially, environmentally? Well, you know, I don't know. We know there are better systems and they're already being piloted and tried often in the UK to give you more human self-worth, more of an opportunity to share your strengths, not just your weaknesses, et cetera. So,

¹⁸ I question this universal claim of no social liberation. Where we were explicitly talking about work and entrepreneurialism, this claim of *no* social liberation whatsoever (of an apparent binary between oppressed/liberated) and how this intersects with, for instance, aspects of gender, 'race', (dis)ability strikes me as highly problematic.

it's true in housing, in energy, in public services, it's true in the workplace where too many people are labouring under conditions which are not of their choosing and actually entrepreneurship is a way out of that.

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

As with before, a clear Marxist reference is made here, and I shall later pick up on the spatial implications of conceiving entrepreneurship as a *way out*. Bandinelli and Arvidsson (2013) are concerned that different from 'changemakers' of the past (they cite Lenin and Mao!), these 'changemakers' self-brand in such a way so as to attract funding to try to make that change happen. Where I have previously suggested that such workplaces help 'legitimise' work, it is suggested that these coworking spaces help constitute an awkward hybrid identity, accelerated following the financial crisis:

[C]hangemaking represents a spectacular marriage of the socially engaged goals of social movements to the pragmatic and profit-oriented approach of business, somehow constructing a figure who has the charisma of both the virtuous political activist and the high-flying chief executive officer (CEO) wannabe.

(Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2013: 68)

Drawing upon Foucault, they suggest that actualisation of the self through 'changemaking' is to be achieved through being orientated towards the need – and ultimately, the priority – to turn and maintain a profit by running it 'like a business'. This need to draw upon a language of social enterprise was also noted at Moseley Exchange:

I think there's definitely a sense of 'let's have more entrepreneurial people' ... because that is the mood at the moment, so pre-Coalition, end of New Labour era, we need to be entrepreneurial, you know, Gordon Brown championed social entrepreneurship, obviously we then had Big Society that jumped on the bandwagon to some extent, but Gordon Brown started it, but we slotted very well conceptually to the idea of social enterprise, then of

course, problems with public funding, that was a source of funding, shit! We can't get that money, we're going to need to be entrepreneurial, so we were already starting to talk that language, not doing much but talking the language.

(Coworker & board member, female, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

As was suggested in chapter 5, many of those coworkers who may fall under the broad umbrella term of 'social enterprise' were moving towards becoming Community Interest Companies to make it easier and more flexible to get access to funding. Indeed, the Hub Westminster is registered as a Community Interest Company which *is* part funded by the state. There would seem to be something of a contradiction here given their claims about the solutions not coming from the state, or at least a counter to the caricatured notion of 'the state' as a governmental thing. Confirmation of funding from Westminster City Council (2011) stated that the Hub:

...will provide a highly supportive environment for enterprise and innovation, including residents who want to become self-employed or have recently started a business. It will provide a combination of highly affordable workspace through a time-based membership approach, peer to peer business support, and high quality events and lectures.

It is notable that there is expression of those *wanting* to become self-employed. For the architects there are appeals to such workplaces in terms of a 'collective' which draws people in:

The Hub, I would say the hub is trying to be infrastructure for a collective who happen to share certain ethical and moral feelings about the world, so the nature of the people who initially were *curated* in a sense into the space, because we could have come out and said ‘hey, there’s a new space in central London, it’s a hot-desking space, this is the cost for a desk, who wants a desk?’ and that would have led to one outcome. So far less, if you like, *social* purpose.

(Architect, male, 25-30, original emphasis)

This is why the architects invoke the notion of institutions to shift focus beyond their ‘conventional’ focus on built objects. This appeal to ‘a collective’ opens up an interesting tension given the individualism of the entrepreneurial figure:

A lot of people jump on the enterprise agenda because it’s hot, start-ups are hot, but it’s good for me to think, ‘why do I believe this again?’ and there is something profound in this which is to do with how are people, what are the conditions for people to be at their best? You know. Elinor Ostrom’s work... it’s *all* about institutions and it’s profound stuff and it’s kind of empirical, institutional behavioural economist, so the stuff that she writes about, under which conditions are people more able to generate good collective outcomes than others ... I believe that institutions, good institutions set up good behaviours, and without good institutions man-kind is lost. You know? If you game it to market rules, you get market outcomes. If you game it socially-just collective institutions you get socially-just collective outcomes.

(Architect, male, 25-30, Hub Westminster)

Where Elinor Ostrom is associated with ideas of commoning her focus seems to be supported, to some degree at least, by notions of rational choice, extended here by the architect above as the nudging – gaming, even – of better (or best) behaviour of the conscious, if not fully rational self. Moreover, the architects regularly cite ‘radical transparency’ as central to this project, however, again, this relies on the assertion of fully-conscious, knowable agents (Rose, 1997). David Cameron (2011) provides the foreword to the architectural practice’s *Compendium for the Civic Economy* as an

example of the ‘Big Society’ in action, appealing to collective responsibility towards others, but only within the ‘common sense’ privileging of the entrepreneurial figure of the individual and the creation of favourable conditions for the market, driven from the ‘bottom-up’:

The idea at the heart of the Big Society is a very simple one: that real change can’t come from government alone. We’re only going to make life better for everyone in this country if everyone plays their part – if change in our economy and our society is driven from the bottom up ... it shows the type of entrepreneurship that generates civic action and the Big Society, and what it can achieve.

(Cameron, 2011; foreword)

There seemed to be uncertainty and a certain discomfort towards Cameron’s support and how a similar language shapes political debate:

Sometimes I can’t help but feel a bit annoyed by this language of collaboration, innovation, social innovation which effectively masks a lot of the actual issues out there.

(anonymised; Hub Westminster)

And a lot of people that I know from being there from the start were feeling like it was a very radical, exciting place, now feeling that it’s become part of a different agenda, that they don’t want to be part of.... And so I guess that critique that people have is very much justified and I think it’s just a question, my point is it’s an ideological question it comes back to, well how is it that you want to create change? Do you want it to be by being really radical and leaving yourself out of political influence, or do you want to have political influence and be less radical?

(Architect, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

The architect, pre-empting critique, suggests that you have to compromise so as to have a more central influence or cling to the periphery longing for political alternatives. This would suggest a two-dimensional plane of insiders/outsideers. This seems to follow what

Clive Barnett (2005: 9; drawing upon Sedgwick, 2003) highlights as ‘simplistic image of the world divided between the forces of hegemony and the spirits of subversion’ whereby radical academic discourse seemingly automatically sorts collective action (good) into opposition with individualism (bad). These material workplaces would appear to be spaces for the individual entrepreneur-customer to buy-into.

Indeed, my initial reading of particular claims on a poster board in the workplace would appear to reiterate such concerns (see Figure 7.1.). The claim that there is **NO MORE ‘JOB FOR LIFE’** has resonated uncomfortably with me ever since I noted that it was one of the principles motivating, or perhaps ‘truths’ justifying, Hub Westminster. My immediate reaction was that such claim asserts flexible labour as a given. Rather than challenging this sense of loss, it would seem that there is an acceptance, even a championing of such working arrangements implied to bring about individual independence. Not only is this work less permanent, but it would appear that ‘we’ must respond to these multiple employers who demand different tasks changing, potentially, by the minute. From the perspective of routine daily practices, it is striking that here working time is represented not by regulation of the clock but by the personal wrist-watch. This *temporal* claim is juxtaposed with other *spatial* assertions, namely ‘**THE FACTORY IS EVERYWHERE**’ and ‘**HOME WORKING IS GOING UP**’. This may be understood as the further blurring the spatial and temporal boundaries of ‘home’ and ‘work’ as our capacity to work is now consuming all times and spaces (although as we shall see in the follow section, this is only one particular interpretation which centres on capitalist work). For learning, the architects suggest this involves shifts towards self-direction and the responsibility of individuals to work in peer-to-peer

institutions, particularly online. Where they suggest ‘**SHARED WORKPLACES IS GLOBALISING**’ it becomes less clear whether their ‘institutions’ relate to spatial proximity of the workplace or something more networked and ‘distant’.

One of the architectural team elaborates on his understanding of institutions through a particularly unexpected comparison to explain how they orchestrate space:

So institutions at large are network intensifiers, they can be good at – a Nazi march in Berlin is also a network intensifier for a particular purpose that is utterly objectionable et cetera. But that’s what it is, it’s a certain type of time-limited institution with a certain set of rules in terms of Nazi’s law of flags, fire, youth forms and marching. And the Hub is a different kind of network intensifier. But also its purpose driven: it uses spatial orchestration in a sort of way to communicate certain values and it drives through a certain aim, a very, very different one obviously, one that’s about individual empowerment in interdependence, so individual, but social, empowerment.

(Architectural practitioner, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

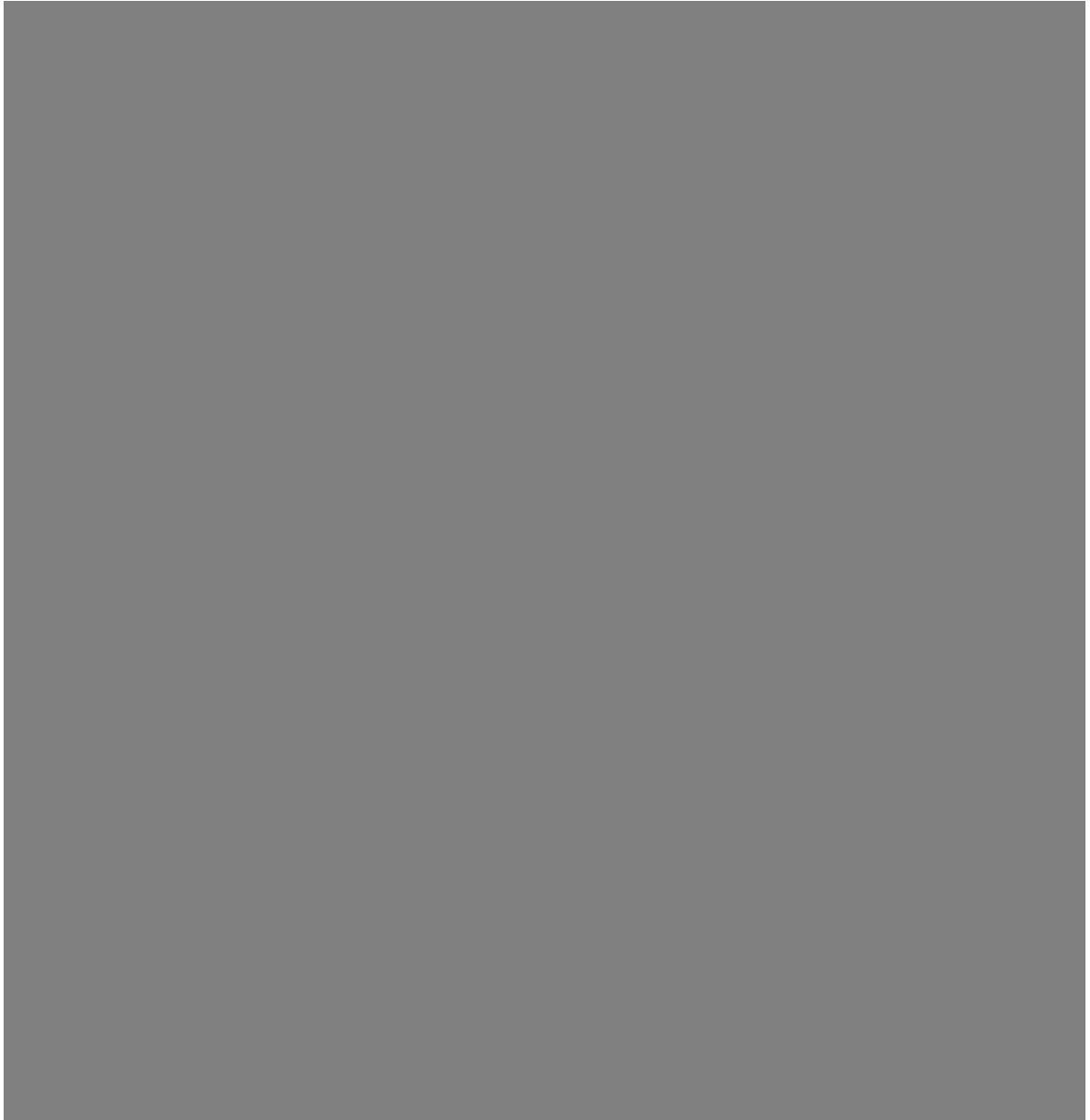


Fig. 7.1 – Collage photograph of poster board made by 00:/ by the side entrance to Hub Westminster (photo credit: author's photo)

Beyond the very uncomfortable comparison, this notion of institutions being time-limited would suggest that this ‘institution’ is more about the spatial proximity of networks cohering *in* architectural space. Indeed, one of the hosts concerned that the workplace was becoming overcrowded asks:

My question to you: how would you move Hub Westminster? Imagine that as a physical thing. If you’re moving the physical space, can I move my community? If I want to move from SW1, to NW1, does it work? Is it because of the space?

(Host, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster)

Part of the architects’ wide-ranging program for an ‘Open narrative’ is one that moves from closed/regulated to open/peer-to-peer (see Fig. 7.2.). In these terms, the workplace *is* a pay-to-access workplace. As in the previous chapter, ‘it’s pretty open’, yet it wants to be a ‘club’. Retaining a certain boundedness, this arrangement of space, follows, I think, John Allen’s (1999: 203; original emphasis) concerns relating to Foucault’s diagrams of power whereby: the only mediations which actually come into play in Foucault’s analysis are site-specific practices. This then makes it difficult to conceive of how power is transformed *through* rather than in space. Moreover, as chapter 6 discussed, even the spatial orchestration of this ‘regulated’ workplace is far from predictable and doesn’t always go to plan. We run into a problem, I think, as to whether we understand a kind of loosely everywhere capitalist space – ‘the factory is everywhere’ – or whether the new institution of the shared workspace is a particular spatial enclosure for entrepreneurs which is somehow more ‘real’ (as the suggestions of coworkers in chapter 5).



Fig. 7.2 – Part of 00:/s ‘Open narrative’ (Photo credit: 00:/)

In the case of the latter, this institutional space appears as ‘the prison house of synchrony’ (Massey, 2005: 36) which picks up on Massey’s (1992: 80) complaint surrounding Foucault’s flat, dead ‘notion of space as instantaneous connections between things at one moment’ counter to the lively geometries of power space-time. Where the architect at the beginning of this section considers their ‘tactic’ to be making institutions as a ‘setting’ for new behaviours, this retains a pre-existing notion of space that Massey (2005) is keen to contest.

However, as I have already discussed, coworking spaces are intertwined with spaces of ‘home’ and ‘community’, that of the co-existence of multiplicity. Feminist geographies have long-stressed that work does not only relate to capitalist paid work. It seems that such capitolocentric analysis (including Figure 7.1) almost set out to dismiss such spaces, as if I was willing to draw no other conclusions. Yet perhaps problems with this

analysis are my own doing, as I couldn't get past the notions of venturing and enterprise to consider the hopes of fostering interdependence. As such I want to turn to re-think the claims of the times and spaces of work to consider the economic *difference*.

7.3. Re-reading spaces of coworking for economic difference and multiplicity

For the rest of this chapter, I want to destabilise the coherence and hegemony of capitalocentrism that my initial analysis seemed to be reaching for. I do so to consider economic heterogeneity inspired by Gibson-Graham and the Communities Economic Collective to consider all kinds of different non-capitalist markets, transactions and enterprises that are happening in relation to coworking (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; 2006b; 2014; Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013). This has not been an easy move for me to make, as it renders less certain, less comfortable my critique of capitalism as if it something that I need to be identifying and contesting *even more than ever* in this post-crash 'age of austerity'. Trying to write this chapter has seemed a bit experimental, if at times seemingly 'wrong', directing attention away from what must be my important critique. However, increasingly, I have felt that seeking something of an 'authoritative' critique seemed highly problematic.

My re-reading has not just come about through academic texts (not wishing to downplay this influence) but through conversations with coworkers debating questions like: How might we work less and live better? How might I reduce my environmental impact of commuting? Or of my company? What possibility might there be for time banking? There is a switching between 'I' and 'we' within many of these questions, which typifies some of the relations of interdependence that many coworkers fostered,

or at least hoped to foster. I suggest that these questions of well-being *are* potentially generative of post-capitalist politics and closing down such ideas as naïve optimism *within* capitalism is mistaken. Rather than just seeing the practices and discourses of governmentality as limiting or dominating, Gibson-Graham (2006b) highlight Foucault's concern with enabling and productive power. Connectedly, she finds pertinence in Butler's (1993) destabilising of dominant gender binaries:

Exactly how subjects 'become,' and more specifically how they may shift and create new identities for themselves despite the seemingly hegemonic power of dominant discourses and governmental practices, is what interests us here.

(Gibson-Graham, 2006b: 24)

As such, I want to consider how coworking identities are never closed, but are ongoing, open to performing other possible subjectivities. Therefore, my academic performances are part of this process. As my partner has insisted, moralistic judging, telling them that they voted for the wrong political party or saying they can't see what's *really* happening is hardly a helpful starting point for encouraging better worlds. Very few coworkers were explicitly 'anti-capitalist' or even mentioning 'capitalism'. However, many, many people *were* questioning – even if in our fleeting conversations – whether working longer hours to buy more stuff and defining themselves as their work was good for their well-being and their relationships with others. This, I think, does connect with the ethical project that the Community Economies Collective are enacting:

We are interested in specific ways of practicing ethical economic interdependence and liberating the self, including practices of work-life time balancing, surplus sharing, care for our encounters with human and non-human, commoning of property, investment in reparative action for environments and in infrastructure to support future generations.

(Gibson, 2014: 286)

To re-think economic practices in these terms is not to deny concerns raised in the previous sections about entrepreneurialism, nor is to suggest that coworking spaces are somehow a utopian, flat workplace. Rather it is to recognise moments of non-capitalist economic possibility for individual and collective well-being, even in places less likely.

To help bring the potential of diverse economies to this research, I want to return to figure 7.1. My initial reading and critique of these components of the workplace was that it was a championing of increasingly flexible and precarious, self-responsibilised, fragmented work that presumes a capitalist economy and capitalist space. Yet the performative effect of this representation discourages, even denies, the possibility of non-capitalist practices, as they are all subsumed under a hegemonic capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006a). Therefore I want to destabilise the times and spaces surrounding 'work', queering the economy to think through an anti-essentialist ontology to help perform other worlds.

Let's start with the claim that '**HOME WORKING IS GOING UP**'. Home working, here symbolised by the detached house, is being treated as work that is perceived to contribute to the capitalist economy which coheres around particular gendered understandings of what constitutes work. Home working is designated as monetised,

financial work which ignores any ‘domestic’ unpaid work and I suspect that paid domestic work was not being considered here, either. Throughout these empirical chapters I have drawn upon feminist geographies that have challenged the subordination of ‘the household’ to ‘the factory’, of home and work (Massey and McDowell, 1984; Hanson and Pratt, 1995). Even in recognising that unpaid labour constitutes often a greater number of hours of labour than paid work, reversing this to emphasis the household maintains the problematic binary, perhaps through attributing value to unpaid labour to constitutes the economy in its’ ‘entirety’ (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003). This ‘we’ takes on further spatial metaphor with the declaration that increasingly ‘**THE FACTORY IS EVERYWHERE**’. Indeed, I have already introduced how the workplace at the Hub Westminster was designed to ‘feel like a laboratory’ and how the Moseley Exchange built a false roof to block out the noisy presence of children from the workplace, yet here the ‘we’ apparently takes on the unbounded spatialities of masculinity, namely the ‘Web 2.0’ factory. I am very cautious of this notion of the ‘factory without walls’ in a post-Fordist era (whether seen in a more positive or negative light), as if society is a factory or a social factory (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Gill and Pratt, 2008). Angela McRobbie (2010: 75) challenges the centrality of the ‘factory’, particularly within accounts from those autonomous Marxists:

[Autonomous Marxists] do not disavow the political importance of everyday life and other social institutions, but the movement of their analysis follows a line from the workplace outwards to the ‘social factory’. This workerism/factoryism is, I would argue, counter to the most influential radical thought across the social sciences and humanities in recent years where other sites are invested with just as much political meaning as the factory floor. Such sites are deliberately not labelled as factories for the very reason that this implies a hierarchy and a pre-eminent place for wage

labour and class politics.... The question then is, how do feminists working in cultural studies and sociology return to the workplace?

It is this question that nods towards thinking about the spatial relations of my research in different ways. J-K Gibson-Graham (2005: 98) provide a helpful move which destabilises the meaning of the ‘factory’ by drawing upon Jacques Derrida:

...the very identity and positivity of factory is gained within a socio-linguistic structure that associates what goes on in a factory with reason, objectivity, mind, man, and economy. These dominant terms reinforce each other, differentiating the kind of production that takes place in the factory from the kinds of production taking place in households, backyards, streets, and fields, endowing it with greater “reality”, independence, and consequence.

Lisa Brush (1999: 161) highlights claims of ‘[m]aking things and making things happen is masculine; caring for people, especially reproducing the next generation, is feminine’ reinforcing gendered stereotypes. Indeed, the language of ‘makers’ and ‘doers’ was frequently cited along with this notion of ‘laboratories’ echoing Chancellor George Osborne’s (2014) budget for a ‘resilient economy’. I want to unfix this spatial metaphor. If we also understand such spaces as performative:

So-called “non-economic” activities said to take place in the domestic realm – the display of emotions, the performance of sexual and gendered identities, socialization, training, and caring – are not only also practiced in the public realm of the factory as a site of efficient production, rational calculation, and profit maximization. The presence of the excluded other “within” renders the Identity unfamiliar and hollows out its meaning ... Suddenly the stability of what we understood as “factory” begins to crumble.

(Gibson-Graham, 2005: 99)

I have already introduced aspects of caring, display of emotions, trust and so forth among coworkers. However, previously I was interpreting these in relation to a capitalist economy. I have therefore highlighting many fractures in any perceived totality, already.

The economy is the ‘point of entry’ for Gibson-Graham in her re-reading for economic difference, particularly through an anti-essentialist understanding of class. It is helpful for me to consider class not as a social grouping but as social processes of producing, appropriating and distributing surplus labour (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Hotch, 2000), so as to help distinguish between the different activities that coworkers undertake. Where necessarily labour is understood as the labour that a worker needs to perform in order to meet her or his culturally determined basic standard of survival, surplus labour is that which is produced in excess of necessarily labour (Marx, 1977; Hotch, 2000). Typically, Marxist-inspired analysis sees non-labourers exploiting labourers by appropriating their surplus labour and as such political movements revolve around class solidarity and similarity among workers (Resnick and Wolff, 1987). I have already discussed how the notion of ‘the worker’ often ignores unpaid caring labour (and I still here calls from the political Left that want power to ‘the working man’). Self-employment is problematic here, too, as the distinction between necessary and surplus labour is blurry and can differ hugely between people and different scenarios (Hotch, 2000). The coworker at the beginning of this chapter articulates this particular analytical ‘problem’ for Marxist analysis of class processes which tends to treat self-employment as a largely pre-capitalist mode of production (Hotch, 2000). To be self-employed is not easily defined, but also, is differently experienced. On the one hand,

self-employment often means self-exploitation, working comparably many more hours than employed workers, embarking on a continual searching for jobs with no guarantees, and being caught up in endless low-paid work. On the other, it may be understood as allowing for flexibility of spatial-temporal working arrangements, of being able to choose particular jobs so as not to have their identities bound to their work and being able to refuse work for several days or perhaps longer.

I have already discussed how some of those self-identifying self-employed coworkers are also undertaking either part-time, or short-term employed work, as well as being self-employed. An anti-essentialist class analysis allows for consideration of how coworkers can simultaneously occupy multiple class positions, working for themselves but also being employed. They might – or as mentioned, might not – perform unpaid caring labour. This analysis reads for *difference* and *multiplicity*. Thus Gibson-Graham (2006b: xxxii) seek ‘a “subversive ontological project of ‘radical heterogeneity’ ...to bring into visibility the great variety of noncapitalist practices that languish on the margins of economic representation’. By bringing all these different practices of our daily lives to the surface, the aim is to ask questions about how we might survive well as well as take collective responsibility. Surplus may be selfishly accumulated and kept, *but* it may too be shared (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013).

The assumption made by David Cameron when standing in Hub Westminster is that the self-employed workers will set up their own capitalist enterprises and once they start making enough profit they will move elsewhere as they expand. The coworking space is assumed to operate as an ‘in-between’ space between the home-worker becoming the

capitalist business hiring employees. This also assumes that all those who are self-employed seek profit maximization and the accumulation of capital. This is not as simply explained in the case for those social enterprises which have a ‘goal’ to achieve alongside, although perhaps subsumed by, profit-seeking:

So is the social entrepreneur, is that somebody who needs to be celebrated because they realise the limitations of capitalism, or are they just collaborators who are cheerfully getting paid very well to destroy the public assets and public ownership, which goes in a way against the co-operacy of principles that a coworking environment should stand for in the first place, you know?

(Coworker, male, 30-35; Moseley Exchange)

This echoes Jenny Cameron (2010) asking whether this is business as usual or economic innovation? The term ‘social enterprise’ is not legally recognised, and can vary considerably. Presumably, David Cameron champions such projects as part of the ‘Big Society’ because social enterprises are increasingly enlisted to deliver welfare services (Amin, 2009). Perhaps. Yet either way, I think it is helpful to differentiate such alternative capitalist organisations. This exists for other coworkers, too. As one coworker suggests:

And even if they’re not social enterprise, maybe they’re thinking about their work in relation to the community they work in, the area they work in, the city they work in, and they see themselves as contributing in some kind of positive way and it’s not as simple as they’re all trying to be Richard Branson. So that’s what I find quite interesting, how entrepreneurship, when you try and look at all its complexities, you realise it isn’t all about capitalism and a greediness that we’d associate with that.

(Coworker & board member, female, 35-40; Moseley Exchange)

I want to therefore consider these complexities. I draw mainly upon Moseley Exchange as it was at the coworking space – located nearby to where I had been living for several

years – where I maintained strongest friendships with coworkers and developed a wider insight into their working and living practices.

7.4. Performing other possibilities

A coworker produces organic cotton t-shirts for outdoor sports. He works part-time as an employee for an engineering company as well as own company with his working routines usually split between Tuesday and Thursday at his employer, Monday, Wednesday, Friday for his company with the occasional weekend mixing his sporting activities with promoting his t-shirts (although this has altered slightly of late given changes to his living circumstances). He insists that for the t-shirts he makes that manufacturers must not use child labour or pesticides for the cotton. To ensure this, he travelled to several factories in Portugal and Turkey to ensure as much as possible that the production of these t-shirts are as suggested and made his decision based upon the trustworthiness of the manufacturers to fulfil these requirements. The labels are stitched in Birmingham (cycling to the sewing company where possible) as is the printed artwork, printed in non-toxic ink. His mum provides room at her house to keep his stock and he posts his t-shirts at the post office which is within the Moseley Community Development Trust building. He is currently trying to established closed-loop production so that old t-shirts can be recycled back into the manufacturing process.

Through my research I became good friends with the coworker – part of this involved helping out with the ‘modelling’ of his t-shirts along with several other friends (in exchange for lunch), as well as helping find a photographer (see Fig. 3.2). We have long discussed his project – talking about ‘following the thing’ and his constant desire

to reduce environmental impact. I suggested to him that his project was represented in *Take Back the Economy* (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013: 14) as an alternative capitalist enterprise: ‘Organic cotton company that uses no herbicides or pesticides’, his reply is shown in figure 7.3.



Fig. 7.3. – Screenshot from WhatsApp conversation with coworker

He is seeking to limit the growth and profit of his company for both his own and wider health and well-being. Not something that can be understood as apparently ‘local’ given his decisions affect the toxicity of soil where manufacturing takes place. The actions taken by this coworker, as small as they may seem, affect humans (and more-than-humans) in different countries. Whilst the coworker cites the Moseley Exchange as the home of his company – legally, but also in terms of emotional ties – he is looking to take responsibility for connections made with other places (Massey, 2004). Similarly, at Hub Westminster, a green technology company ‘entrepreneur’ insisted that he had to meet those who he would be working with to get a ‘feel’ for how they operate, to establish trust and a friendship to ensure that they shared similar aims. Both examples contested the abstracting concept of ‘the market’:

...markets are not just about negotiations between faceless buyers and sellers, but can foster long-term relationships based on trust and governed by the desire to make markets serve social and environmental goals; how growth is not just about getting bigger nor necessarily better, but can be rethought and redefined in novel ways in light of ethical commitments.

(Cameron, 2010: 9)

Reframing his activities and the t-shirt company by recognising the diversity of economic practices allows for recognition of the ethical decisions of the coworker. Surely, that he is seeking to reduce carbon impact and profit motives is to be supported rather than discarded as insignificant, co-opted or illusionary? It is significant, then, that the coworker associates his goal to limit growth and profit to the margins, perceived as unpopular compared to a central capitalist imperative. I shall return to this spatial metaphor shortly.

Earlier in this thesis, I have discussed how although coworking may invoke highly controversial and offensive meetings, there were also expressions of the care for others. In discussing the informal relationships and exchanges, one coworker suggested that it felt like that of an informal union:

It doesn't have that formality about it, but it might start to initiate at least the sharing of challenges, risks that you're facing and actually who knows, maybe you can consolidate what you do in partnership with others and they can help with the work load or life-work balance going out the window and I dunno, facilitate that more easily by connecting with other people, perhaps? So, I'm trying to suggest that there are ways in which people can organise themselves in a less-formal way but it's not just that everybody's sitting back and suffering.

(Coworker & board member, Moseley Exchange, Female, 35-40)

Whilst this could be discarded as self-employment leading to more fragmented, non-unionised work, understood in terms of diverse economies, we can at least recognise all the kinds of reciprocal, gift, voluntary, caring as well as paid exchanges that happen every day in the coworking spaces. Inventorying such activities helps – if only in a small way – to subvert a capitalist economic discourse. So, we can consider how coworkers were sharing advice and experience on a reciprocal, friendship basis. For instance, the web-developer at the beginning of this chapter helped re-design the coworking space website as well as spending many hours guiding fellow coworkers as to how they can re-develop their websites. He, too, teaches coding for beginners for free at a nearby community centre. Attentive to economic difference, we might consider the coworkers who regularly volunteered to help the homeless in Birmingham providing food and hot drinks, reacting against an injunction to force homelessness away from the Moseley and Kings Heath area. Thinking about the coworking space itself, we might

also recognise the community member who donated the post office property to the community trust, and how this differs again from the European funding that it received. The same could be done at Hub Westminster. The organisation operates as a Community Interest Company whereby there is an ‘asset lock’ on profit-making that has to be re-invested whilst their events catering is provided by the People’s Supermarket – a food cooperative – based, in part, at the Hub.

Suddenly, more and more cracks, no matter how small, begin to emerge. We might consider how one of the staff at the Moseley Exchange helped set-up and organises the Moseley and Kings Heath time-banking group where people exchange their time rather than money (see Fig 7.4 and 7.5):

The norm is work tied to formal employment where we get a wage. But this hides the potential for work to be oriented towards collective solutions for all of us. Working collectively, for ourselves, allows us to revalue work not just as a means of getting money, but to develop meaningful relationships with others.

(Chatterton, 2006: np)

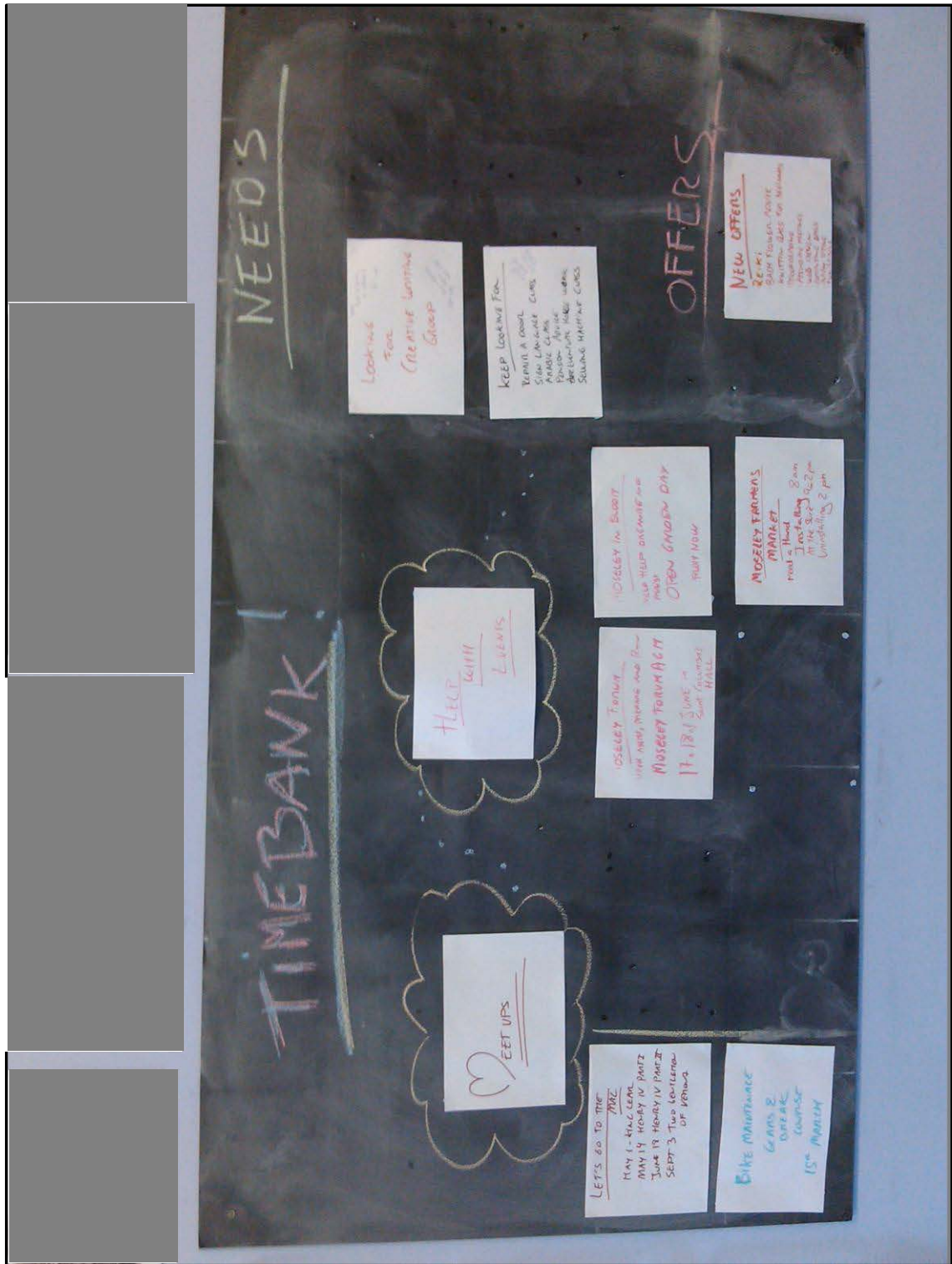


Fig. 7.5 – Moseley ‘Time Exchange’ time bank in entrance to Exchange building (photo credit: author’s own)

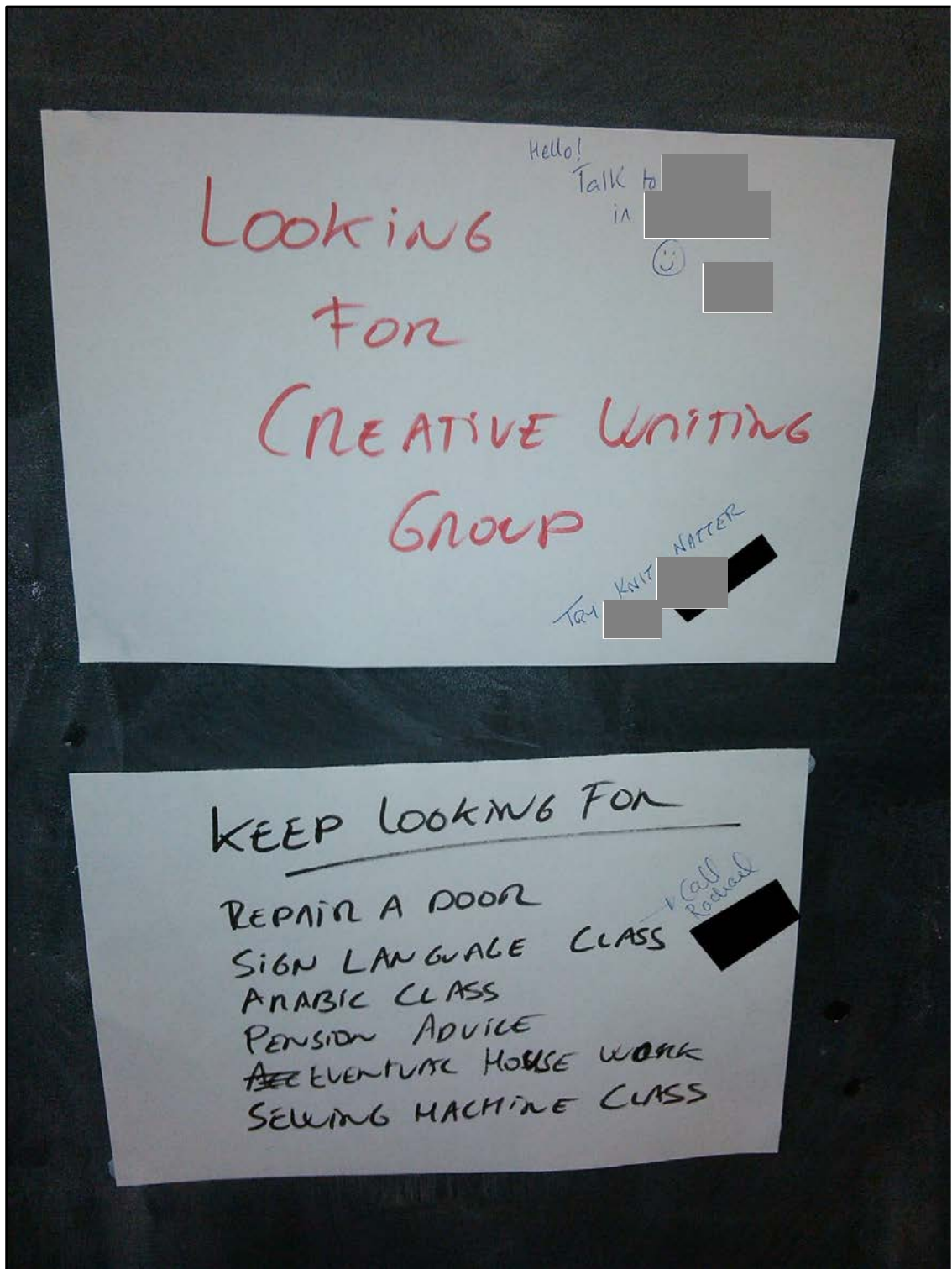


Fig. 7.6 – Close up of time bank board in entrance to Exchange building (photo credit: author's own)

Advertised here in the entrance between the Exchange and the rest of the Community Development Trust building, the time-bank is not by any means exclusively for coworkers but all those in surrounding areas.¹⁹ The time spent working through time-banking is removed from capitalist waged relations. This return to time is helpful for my analysis. Where the board in Hub Westminster featured the personal wristwatch and self-regulated time, we move towards time which is collectively shared and exchanged, or what we might call an ‘ethics of time’ (Popke, 2014: 969). In *Take Back the Economy*, where again the working day is represented by the 24-hour clock (rather than the personal watch), the performative effect of this representation is not of the clock on the factory wall – the clocking in and clocking out – but the different ways in which our daily lives involve all kinds of different tasks, capitalist and otherwise. This understanding of time was given as a justification for coworking so that instead of driving to work, spending wasted un-paid hours commuting, whilst polluting the earth, the coworker could now cycle to a workplace maintaining sociability alongside colleagues.

In fact, it was usually discussions of work-life balancing whereby coworkers would think about how they might live better. Counter to the interpretation of those coworkers with no ‘outside’ to their work such that running their own company overwhelms all aspects of life (coworker, female, 30-35; Moseley Exchange), elsewhere such distinctions were more ambiguous:

¹⁹ A similar project was discussed in the ‘Take back the economy’ session in AAG in 2014, whereby the Los Angeles time-bank had gained momentum across the whole city-region.

I've got problems with the idea, the concept of work-life balance, because I think the idea that there is such a clear demarcation is problematic. It leads you to a model of thinking about work that probably isn't healthy. It suggests that work is something to be endured in return for the delayed gratification of whatever it is, two weeks in the south of France, half a gram of coke, whatever. If you ask my wife, my family, they'd say I'm always working and to some extent they're right, I always am, but that's kind of because my work is thinking. And the idea of stopping that is not attractive to me at all, 'coz my brother-in-law is doing that, he's stopped thinking and as a consequence of stopping thinking he's making some really fucking stupid choices...

(coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

The coworker was beginning to question, if somewhat bluntly, the effects of work on well-being. What is perhaps most helpful, though, is the questioning of the benefits of working such high-pressure work:

He earns, man, he must earn 3, 4 times what I do, guess what? His outgoings are 3, 4, 5 times more than mine, so the shit just ratchets up a level, and I'm looking at him thinking, I would be stashing that in the bank and I'd probably do that for five years then I'd turn round to Ernest and Young and say 'I'm off for three years on a yacht around the world and you can still your job up your arse', but he's such a slave to it. So it's kind of, I like that I've got that example in my life and I get to see it 'coz it kind of keeps me, it keeps me knowing that it's no better. It would be no better, and it would probably actually be much worse.

(coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

Amidst somewhat brash comments, I'd suggest that there is the *potential*, at least, for resisting those accounts of neoliberal governmentality as above. This opens a space for possibly *working less*:

Now it seems to me that it's a different facet to the freedom that I've spoken about today, which is about re-organising your relationship with capital, re-organising your relationship with your employer and all of those people who could come in and benefit from a coworking space, by understanding that their employer needs to have less power over them. But that's about how can I be less exploited, and maybe in just everyday terms, how can I

have a better quality of life? And those things are great. One of the things that one could forward about coworking and organised coworking and the arrangement of the coworking space, one could put those things forward not just to celebrate those aims in themselves, but also with the idea of working *less*.

(Coworker, male, 30-35; Moseley Exchange)

Here, the coworker shifts from the notion of their employer having power over them, towards the transformative possibilities of the power to work less, a different take on ‘freedom’ and autonomy than those subjected to power of governmentality. Now, of course, this is not a possibility for everyone to simply change how they live, however, it is the ethics of surviving well of Gibson-Graham that is what this coworker is enacting. It is significant, too, that whilst the coworker identifies as anti-capitalist, it is when he relinquishes the coherence on his Marxism that he fits the language to articulate these possibilities. It is helpful to quote him at length here:

I’ve spoken earlier about how working less is socially beneficial because it gives people, in non-political terms, it gives people time with their family, time with their friends, time to relax, time to recover the energies that work has taken out of them, but also it gives them a chance, if they are so inclined, to create civic and political engagement which seems to me as someone who is politicised, is that one of the dilemmas of the ordinary working person is that your democratic power in relation to people full-time who are trying to destroy your democratic power or trying to subvert it, think-tanks and lobbyists and politicians and the whole alliance of professional agitators, is really hard to compete with them because if you’re working 40 plus hours a week, then you simply don’t have the time, nor the energy to become civically minded, or to become politically engaged. If the person who then organises a demo or writes letters on behalf of Amnesty International, that’s a little bit, that’s great and I don’t want to knock that, but if someone wanted to do more of that and they wanted to release themselves from the alienation that they experience, then in order to do that they need more time available which goes back to worker autonomy, perhaps working for oneself, but also the ability to reduce ones hours in relation to an employer or working for oneself and simply taking on less work? I don’t know.

(Coworker, male, 30-35; Moseley Exchange)

Across many of these examples is discussion of improving individual health and happiness, and importantly, at least the potential beginnings of more collective well-being. I suspect that again criticisms would be levelled at such claim that whilst several coworkers are experiencing fairly precarious paid work arrangements, other coworkers might be perceived as typically middle-class and fairly secure. That probably describes a lot of academics, too. However, there is no ‘right place’ for community economies. ‘Too bad’, to paraphrase Gibson-Graham (2009: 158), if these are spaces of well-heeled coworkers, ‘they perform labor, engage in transactions and have ethical sensibilities too’. These processes of cultivating subjects, liberating the self and resubjection help us re-think the constitution of subjects in relation to the economy:

The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our day is not to try to liberate the individual from the economy . . . but to liberate us both from the economy and from the type of individualization that is linked to the economy. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.

(Foucault, 1982: 785)

Similarly, Judith Butler’s performativity helps think about the new discourses and subjectivities that are always uncertain and open. In the final section of this chapter, I consider the spatial dimensions of these economic possibilities.

7.5. Concluding discussion

These are pay-to-access workplaces. For some, there is an appeal to a particular sense of professionalism and entrepreneurialism, whilst for others, there holds the possibility for contesting such individualistic capitalist discourse. How, then, might we theorise

such ambiguity and contradiction? For me, this has involved questioning my preconceived assumption of capitalism/neoliberalism's totality and coherence. As Bondi and Laurie (2012: 6; my emphasis) ask:

If neoliberalism 'recognises' political resistance as the performance of neoliberal subjectivity, there is no way of resisting that which remains wholly outside neoliberalism. In other words, there is no *uncontaminated* form of, or space for, political resistance.

With this notion of contamination, it is again helpful to turn to one of the coworkers here:

But is it that actually people who spend time inside the coworking environment start to *become infected*, even if they're not political, they become infected by the idea that they can do something on their own? And maybe it takes several years for those ideas to come through, but they're rather attracted to the idea that actually working on one's own is not the path to all riches, but maybe they quite like the idea of working less, and actually that's a possibility that's opened to them... The benefits to society don't have to be explicitly political in itself, but that benefit is political in a way 'coz those people might have more time for their families and they might have more time for their hobbies and interests. And those things are mundane and if you like non-political, but if that's political those are important, and those are in themselves benefits to society.

(Coworker, male, 30-35; Moseley Exchange; my emphasis)

To me, this suggests that such ways of working may hold the potential to 'create a desire for new forms of class politics, perhaps even in those with no desire for that desire' (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2000: 2). Adopting the leaky, bodily metaphor of becoming 'infected', the coworker here is hinting towards the possible openings that might happen over time with and alongside capitalist discourses. The fluidity of this bodily metaphor is apt, given that the economy is often conceptualised as a bodily whole. We regularly hear economic analysis of the market further 'penetrating' more of

more aspects of social life. Rather than bodies necessarily being subjected to an ‘invasion’ or ‘penetration’ from a universalising, phallogocentric capitalism, the coworker here considers how this may be much more porous and fluid with the potential to disrupt (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 141; drawing upon Sedgwick, 1993). This resonates with Gibson-Graham’s (2006a) use of the economy as an entry point to contest the notion that this is a sphere *immune* to ethical intervention. This bodily notion of becoming infected and infecting hints towards more ambiguous coexistence with other infections.

In this way, it is a reminder that the spaces of coworking cannot be assumed as a singular capitalist space. The spatial relations of this involve occupying at once a hegemonic discourse of capitalist enterprise and at the same time the possibility for something else. Yet where Doreen Massey’s (2005) theorisation of space-time in terms of multiplicity, simultaneous co-existence and openness is crucial to my own understandings, the language of openness becomes slightly trickier to employ here given the prevalence of ‘open’ among the coworking spaces themselves (Castree, 2004; Rose, 2007). Perhaps we might imagine this open-endedness in terms of paradoxical space, that is ‘spaces that would be mutually exclusive if charted on a two-dimensional map – centre and margin, inside and outside – are occupied simultaneously’ (Rose, 1993: 140). In this way, people are not just subject to capitalism, nor is the only ‘way out’ resistance in that of capitalism/anti-capitalism. Rather this understanding is more contradictory and fluid, if less coherent or certain. Discussing this with a coworker, he declared:

It's about daring to embrace a bit of disorder and chaos... It's outside the standard corporate arrangement, inherently about creating an anti-office. A push against dull and boring but with an appetite for change.

(Research notes from conversation with coworker, male, 35-40, Moseley Exchange)

Tentatively, perhaps, this coworker evokes a glimmer of those positive affects – in evoking notions of embracing and pushing – through capturing a notion of change and becoming *interdependent* that the community economies collective hope to foster? Certainly, this accepting of disorder suggests that there is no pre-conceived sense of being doomed to failure or a foregone conclusion. Moreover, through our conversations this coworker often alluded to his project involving something more 'spiritual' and more-than-human. Even elsewhere, the 'rules' of entrepreneurialism gave way to something less defined and more communal:

I think there, I wouldn't say there's a rulebook, I'd say, but there's a *common ethics*, that you kind of adapt to.

(Architect, male, 25-30; Hub Westminster; my emphasis)

Again, we *might* see the beginnings of something more collective. The ongoing task is whether this commonality is understood as a bounded sense of community, as in the exclusive 'club', or whether this might extend to visions of 'being-in-common' (Nancy, 1991; cited in Gibson-Graham, 2006a), that of economies as diverse as communities and of our working lives. As for the spaces of coworking:

Is it actually putting forward the idea that traditional, I'll call small conservative architecture is almost locking in, or rather locking out the possibilities of changing a building, or it doesn't allow for the flexibility of the social relations inside it? The ideal building would democratically and organically shift according to the requirements of its users in a way that doesn't stop, maybe, people shifting their ideas from being a fully-

employed person with locked down hours and locked down pay, and all those things, and shifting their ideas into collaboration, co-operation, working for oneself, and so forth.

(Coworker, male, 30-35, Moseley Exchange)

Perhaps my interpretation might seem wilfully optimistic, naïve even. Yet if my performances are constitutive of academic knowledge, including the writing of this thesis (Gregson and Rose, 2000), then leaving this chapter open-ended with multiple voices seems more helpful than ending with an authoritative critique. Certainly whilst my initial concerns surrounded notions of ‘entrepreneurialism’ and ‘venturing’, and how these might be bound to the workplace as if it is a separate sphere, whilst these concerns may continue I can’t help but want to occupy a more positive, less certain space, encouraging non-capitalist alternatives, even if they are only beginning.

Conclusions

I get bored when you get to the finer detail and I can really appreciate the finely detailed windows and stuff, I can look at that, but it's not something I'm drawn towards spending my time... I suppose I ended up drawing a personal line in the sand, conscious of the fact that trying to find work in the current climate is far harder and what I wouldn't be prepared to do, and the line in the sand was about projects which are about social justice, are about democratising life in organisations or in by some addressing of inequalities, and addressing issues around homophobia and access and things, and which are genuinely about peoples' voices.

(Former architect, male, 55-60)

I've never been quite sure how to situate the above quotation in this thesis. It came from one of my early interviews, sitting in the Nottingham Contemporary art gallery with a former architect once involved with the *New Architecture Movement*. He had left work as an architect in the public sector to work as a facilitator for schools and workplace re-design and organisational change. As one of the 'loose ends' outlined in my methodology, this quote might simply be understood as transcribed 'data' awaiting analysis elsewhere (cf. Lorne, under review). Yet perhaps this hasn't been such a loose end, after all. Coincidentally, the architect had previously visited the Moseley Exchange, suggesting that from what he could see from the entrance, there didn't appear to be much *coworking* going on. Many aspects of our conversation have resonated throughout this research process. He expressed great interest in geography and the contributions of geographers, maintaining that he really liked Doreen Massey's writing on politics. He did, however, suggest that he had to wrestle with *For Space*

(2005). In this thesis, I have tried to make some of these connections, to analyse how the designing and experiencing of these workplaces *is* associated with all kinds of social concerns.

Yet in doing so, I have been struggling with some of my own uncertainties. One of these concerns relates to the importance of different people's voices. As a geographer, I agree with the insistence that we embody more-than-human worlds, and that a commitment to addressing such associations must be continued (Whatmore, 2006). However, whilst analysing the lively ways in which social and material relations are entangled, I have found it difficult to 'let go' of a focus on what might be called 'the social', given that, if pushed, I'd consider that I am a social *and* cultural geographer. Nicky Gregson (2003) has previously noted how there has been a reluctance to consider how paid and unpaid 'economic' practices, for instance in relation to spaces of home and the body that has long concerned feminist geographers, are intertwined and associate to the 'social', which is in itself a particularly slippery term. For me, here, this has involved being attentive to different people's more 'personal' experiences within my analysis, aware that I cannot take spoken words as a given. These different experiences may of course be ambiguous, washing away that line in the sand between fine architectural details and the routines and politics of everyday life. However at times I have found it difficult to move towards the pre-personal and non-verbal embodied capacities and affordances that cohere around a particular series of buildings.

It is through my encounters and relations with coworkers that the broad aim of this thesis has shifted in order to analyse the spaces, subjectivities and performative

practices of coworking so as to examine claims that these are places of chance encounters for like-minded entrepreneurs. As particular workplaces, coworking spaces are often celebrated as ‘new’ or ‘alternative’ workplaces for the increasingly nomadic freelancer associated to increases in self-employment and changing entrepreneurial ways of working. I have brought together different feminist and poststructural geographies concerned with the lively multiplicity of space, the instability of human subjectivities and bodies at work as well as diverse economic practices into conversation with the work on architectural inhabitations. This has provided an original theoretical framing for understanding the practices and spaces of coworking. This has helped me examine a series of interconnected questions: How can notions of ‘going out to work’ in coworking spaces be understood as relational performances; how are these particular workplaces designed to encourage chance encounters and how are they experienced; how are these spaces constitutive of entrepreneurial subjectivities; and what other possibilities might be possible?

I will summarise my thesis chapters before discussing the argument of the thesis as a whole. This leads on to the key contributions that I have made before discussing future research possibilities.

8.1. Chapter summaries

By discussing the ways in which the three coworking spaces can be understood to be constituted through a multiplicity of trajectories, of relational performances, social and material practices and different economic practices, this project has been influenced by all kinds of encounters which have questioned the primacy of focusing upon

architectural performances. Instead, by drawing out the instability and relationality of human subjectivities, the different chapters of this thesis have picked out particular dimensions associated with space, work and architecture.

In my **Introduction** chapter, I situated the spaces and practices of coworking into a broader context of critical geography given the limited research that currently exists on this emerging phenomenon. This highlighted my concerns that by treating such places as pre-existing architectural containers designed for collisions between a coherent group of like-minded, professional coworkers, this conceals all kinds of power relations. At the same time, I set forth the problems associated with claims of the ever-mobile entrepreneurial and disembodied coworker now able to ‘overcome’ space.

By drawing through these problems in chapter 2 – **Spatial imaginations, working bodies and architectural performances** – I brought together a series of feminist and poststructural geographies concerned with relational space, performative practices, working bodies and diverse economies in order to focus the aims and objectives of this thesis. This incorporated a sense of how this research project shifted beyond a focus upon the ‘architectural’ dimensions of space and why I found it helpful to move beyond contemporary debates within the ‘geographies of architecture’ literatures that this research was originally influenced by.

In chapter 3 – **Negotiating uncertain methodologies** – I sought to emphasise how this research has been constituted *through* coworking. This stressed how the research process has involved negotiating methodological uncertainty and embracing, at times,

experimental research methods. Amidst moves towards non-representational theories within geography, I have insisted upon the importance of talking whilst working, emphasising the conversations within coworking. At the same time, this involves rethinking my own academic performances, being open to unexpected encounters which included developing friendships. Space can never be understood as *beyond* power, rather power saturates my academic performances and I have tried to engage with this through writing the stories-so-far of this research process. This followed on to my three **case studies overviews** in chapter 4 that provided a brief summary of how these coworking spaces are being understood by those who established them, along with a few general details about each building.

Chapter 5 – **‘Going out to work’** – insisted that future research into coworking spaces must take seriously the spatial-temporal interrelations with other places, in particular how coworking often involves *attempts* to separate spaces of ‘home’ and ‘work’. I have countered claims that these are distinct, pre-existing spaces whereby coworkers can perform particular versions of themselves to suggest instead that the performative effects of ‘going out to work’ constitute attempts to ‘legitimise’ particular working practices. Yet by drawing upon Doreen Massey’s (2005) ‘throwntogetherness’ of space, this chapter outlined how despite these attempts of singularity and closure, these workplaces are always open to chance encounters and therefore ongoing negotiations.

In chapter 6 – **Orchestrating experiences, architectural performances and ambiguity** – I examined more closely the multiple modalities of power that circulate these workplaces, with particular focus upon Hub Westminster, the most explicitly

‘designed’ work environment. This chapter considered the claims of designing to invite, coerce and nudge workplace inhabitations so as to speed-up networking practices among entrepreneurial individuals. However, drawing upon both claims of nudge and geographies of affect, I argued that both accounts rely on problematic conceptualisations of bodies and human subjectivities. As such, I have analysed how architectural inhabitations are differently experienced and far more ambiguous than planned.

It was in chapter 7 – **Becoming entrepreneurial and other possibilities** – where I focused most closely upon the different projects of coworkers. This was located as the final empirical chapter, so as to avoid privileging particular accounts that centred on ‘work’ as a distinct sphere. I discussed how Foucauldian-inspired accounts of neoliberal governmentality and discourses of entrepreneurialism can be understood to saturate the spaces and practices of coworking, helping to ‘normalise’ tired, working bodies. However, by rethinking how I understand economies as diverse, I have ‘inventoried’ and been part of cultivating other non-capitalist possibilities that start to fragment apparently entrepreneurial, capitalist space. These possibilities are perhaps only relatively minor, and not without contention or ambiguity, however, it was through addressing my own preconceived notions of ‘the economy’ through conversations with coworkers as much as academic texts, that it became possible to imagine other economies.

8.2. Key contributions

This thesis has argued that coworking spaces might be understood as ‘meeting places’ constituted by a bundle of spatial trajectories. This has been to examine claims that these are workplaces for encouraging collisions between like-minded entrepreneurs. As such, I first outline my original contribution towards research into coworking by discussing my theoretical-informed empirical contributions. I turn to focus more closely on my original theoretical contributions towards relevant work in geography, before concluding with how this shapes my methodological contributions.

8.2.1. Multiple trajectories of coworking

This thesis has explicitly addressed a widespread failure to theorise the spatial dimensions of coworking. Through extensive discussion of my three coworking space case studies, I have used Doreen Massey’s (2005) lively spatial notion of spatial trajectories to insist upon the open-ended multiplicity of these workplaces that runs counter to assumptions that they are pre-existing spaces. By doing so, I counter claims that coworkers ‘establish a structured day at the office and draw a line that distinguishes their work from their private life, enabling them to balance the two’ (Merkel, 2015: 126). I have addressed failures to consider how such spatial-temporal boundaries are constructed and experienced differently. For instance, through discussing how several men who are fathers were more-or-less consciously seeking to ‘separate’ spaces of home and work by ‘going out to work’, this has questioned the spatial implications of positioning coworking spaces as ‘*hubs* of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination’ (Merkel, 2015: 133-4; my emphasis). By theorising spatial interrelations

in terms of ‘contemporaneous co-existence’ and a ‘multiplicity of trajectories’ this provides a helpful re-framing which runs counter to accounts of the spatialities of coworking being equated as the office space ‘container’ (Spinuzzi, 2012).

This thesis builds upon the emergence of the more critical accounts of coworking (Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015). To some degree, these should be recognised as exclusive workplaces, be that by a security door restricting access or the prohibitive costs to be a regular ‘member’. Although accounts often mention the ‘reduced’ cost of coworking compared to renting a ‘conventional’ office space (Spinuzzi, 2012), there is remarkably less recognition that this cost is still limiting. At Hub Westminster, for instance, although they seek to ‘lower the threshold’ for access, there was still the maintaining of it being considered an exclusive ‘members’ club’. As it was put: ‘it’s *pretty* open, you know?’ By providing in-depth empirical analysis of the different embodied experiences of coworking, I have opened up the widespread assumptions that coworking involves a community of ‘like-minded’ people, contesting the coherence of such grouping. This has been through recognising different histories, bodies, and experiences, as highlighted, for instance, by heated discussions about same sex marriage and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Sometimes it seems that claims made about coworking, of fleeting networked associations, come very close to the processual language of poststructural, anti-rooted notions of place. Where there is a crucial difference – that I have brought out through this research – is that these spatial relations are imbued with *power* which continue to construct particular boundaries, even if these are negotiated and at times contradictory.

In doing so, I have challenged the narratives that portray the practices of coworkers as bounded entrepreneurs bumping into one another. Therefore, I insist that future research into coworking needs to take space seriously rather than untheorised.

8.2.2. From building events to the eventfulness of place

From the very beginning of this thesis, I have discussed how my attention has shifted away somewhat from the ways in which these particular *buildings* cohere. Given the breadth of discussions that occurred throughout this project, I have found that it has been difficult to frame these experiences principally within the geographies of architecture literatures. Undoubtedly, the ongoing architectural performances that congeal to produce these spatial forms of the coworking space – and particularly the ways in which they are designed to encourage chance meetings – is significant to understanding coworking spaces. However, I have found it helpful to shift away from the explicitly architectural dimension. As such, this diverges from Horton and Kraftl's (2014) architectural geographies that emphasise a focus on buildings, aligning more closely with Jacobs and Merriman's (2011: 214) questioning of 'how can one delimit the spatialities and geographies of buildings?'

That does not mean I have rejected these literatures. I have, for instance, examined how theories of affect – as well as bringing in neuro-architectural claims of nudging behaviours – are embedded within the *orchestrating* of these workplaces. Where I have noted at times there can be particularly rigid boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, by being attentive to the nuanced ways in which these workplaces are designed and experienced, I have outlined how this involves 'multiple modalities of power' that are

more subtle, ambiguous and complex, for instance, the ‘invitational’ as well as ‘manipulative’ and ‘coercive’ (Allen, 2003). Paying attention to the ‘nitty gritty, material-performative details’ *has* been important (Krafft and Adey, 2008: 214). Yet I insist that these are never deterministic and, crucially, are experienced *differently* by coworkers and the more formal designers who indeed remain as inhabitants, part of the ongoing production of these spaces.

Similarly, this framing connects to ANT in terms of networks of associations, but in looser, more indeterminate ways whereby there are more complex and ambiguous *human* relationships with these workplaces. Coworking might ‘fail’ because the internet drops out but also because someone feels that they could no longer work around the homophobic comments made by another coworker (who, speculatively, may in turn feel that their departure was a ‘success’). This thesis, then, shares concerns raised by both Rose *et al.*, (2010) and Lees and Baxter (2011) in that there has been limited conceptualisation of human subjectivity in relation to building events. For instance, the presentism of affect theory has limited scope to analyse those comments of the coworker reflecting upon previously getting distracted by his now-mobile child that influenced why he left working from ‘his home office’ to inhabit the coworking space. At times, I have struggled to be convinced that the geographies of affect provide the most accessible framework for negotiating the politics of work, gender and space. Admittedly, this is because I find it difficult to fully ‘relinquish’ the complex human dimensions of relations in more affect and ANT-inspired accounts of building events (I may be mistaken, but I do wonder if Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979) ever went home when investigating the *Laboratory Life* study?). As the architect at the beginning

of this chapter noted, he was keen to address conflict in relation to social justice issues and despite theoretical similarities, Doreen Massey's theorising of space and place provided the more helpful tool for distinguishing between the *different kinds* of spatial interrelations that constitute these workplaces.

As such, by making shift from building events towards the eventfulness of place, I feel this provides a more helpful set of theoretical tools – and language – to engage with the politics of these interrelations. With an emphasis upon the multiplicity of trajectories, of stories-so-far, this insists addressing a multiplicity of voices, histories and embodied experiences that I have sought to listen to, engage with and indeed, question. This is, I think, a concern that underlies Massey's (2005: 111) claim that 'the chance of space must be responded to'. It connects the inhabitation of these workplaces with particular political dimensions. This was felt strongly in terms of the interrelations with spaces of home, but I have also drawn upon coworkers' projects that contest a local/global binary through association with factories and workers located thousands of miles away. Thinking through the 'politics of place beyond place' has helped me understand the kinds of spatial relations in which the practices and spaces of coworking are entangled (Massey *et al.*, 2009: 13). Framing research in this way, then, provides an original contribution by re-framing how we might continue to take architecture seriously as geographers, but shift our focus beyond buildings without losing touch.

8.2.3. Cultivating other possibilities

Throughout this thesis, I have stressed that the ways in which we talk about, embody and imagine space affect how we try to make sense of the world of which we are part.

To reiterate an important point long made by feminists, theoretical positions aren't some abstract idea, but are continuously informed by our lived experiences. As I have tried to write through this thesis, by engaging with coworkers and others, the focus of this research has shifted. Methodologically, I have found that some of the most engaging aspects of the research process have fallen 'outside' the expected boundaries of the research process. This has demanded questioning some of my own assumptions. Perhaps the most 'solid' of these assumptions related to that of 'the economy'. By considering the positive stances cultivated by J-K Gibson-Graham *et al.*, as well as through the actions of coworkers, these interventions have inspired me to rethink the possibilities of cultivating different academic insights.

Focusing upon the unstable subjectivities and emotional bodies of different coworkers, I have struggled with the political dimensions of entrepreneurial claims set forth by the architects and others. This is not new to geography, given the widespread understandings of how 'neoliberalism' can be understood to affect all spheres of life. Yet I have increasingly felt that the effect of this analysis seems to *reinforce* the impossibility of other worlds. Certainly, the notions of becoming entrepreneurial are entangled with political questions of class, ethnicity and gender in relation to these coworking spaces. For instance, I have considered how these pay-to-access workplaces might be understood as a 'white-middle class haven', a place where children are not welcome, or as a 'flexible solution' for 'mumpreneurs'. This contributes towards Linda McDowell's (2009) insistence upon recognising continuity as well as change, given the often hyperbolic claims of changing ways of working. The negotiation of these places involving negotiating politics. This point is reiterated by Jane Wills (2013) in *Essays for*

Doreen Massey who calls for re-orientating how politics and place occupy our academic imaginaries. Indeed, it is notable that it is a language of ‘space’ and ‘place’ that Jane Wills uses here. This therefore calls for consideration of the interventions of academic practices. I did not intend to focus upon the working projects of coworkers, yet as I became closer to many of those coworkers through my methodology of researching through coworking, I occupied a much more ambiguous position. As such, I have made methodological contributions by addressing concerns that geographic research interested in working practices has largely failed to participate in such working practices (McMorran, 2012). Amidst what Hayden Lorimer (2015: 180) notes, hesitantly, as the turn to the ‘radical empiricism’ of non-representational geographies, I have insisted that there is no need to give up just yet on talking as part of our research methods.

This has, however, come about through rendering less certain particular ideas and assumptions. The hopeful enthusiasm of those time-banking in Moseley is something I found particularly inspiring. Likewise, how can I not encourage someone wanting to reduce the carbon impact of their working and living arrangements seeking to limit the profits of their work? Certainly, coworking practices are not some utopian way of working, however, it was through cultivating particular relationships, that I could recognise, and in a very small way be part of, noncapitalist transactions that are already here, even in relation to places less likely.

8.3. Future work

This research process has opened up a series of avenues for future research. The focus on working relations, whether paid or otherwise, exceeded what I had originally intended and although I was welcomed into the homes of several coworkers, it would be important to extend such accounts in the future. In particular, there appears to be two key aspects of association between wider living arrangements and coworking. Firstly, the younger coworkers that I met were all at least partially ‘self-employed’ in their working arrangements, often also work casual temporary jobs. From what I could ascertain, despite being aged in their late-20s, they are unable to afford to live away from their family homes. Indeed, of the three particular coworkers that I am thinking of here, none of them fit the image of the 30-something white male pictured in the advert at the beginning of chapter 5 or ‘the next Steve Jobs or Bill Gates’ as David Cameron was championing. In the context of austerity politics whereby it is younger generations that have been some of the hardest affected, it would be of great importance to examine the living and working arrangements of these younger workers. This is consistent with comments made by Linda McDowell (2014), both in terms of the effects of self-employment on younger generations and the restating of importance of how class is entangled with gender and ethnicity as well as generational change.

Secondly, there were clear moves to discourage children being present in the workplace and the rejection of a crèche facility because of comments such as ‘we don’t want children here’. Given the increasing decline in recent years of public sector jobs, which proportionally employ more women than men and have historically had better provisions for taking maternity and paternity leave, these arrangements are likely to be

very different for those who are self-employed and unable to receive Statutory Maternity Pay. Given there was considerable informal advice discussed by coworkers in order to try to help others, it would be helpful to examine what legal rights are available to self-employed workers limited to contract law, rather than employment law, for instance? In both instances, this might involve wider consideration of the way in which regional differences are significant, an approach that has been beyond the scope or scale of this project. This would be important to examine further given that two of my case studies are located in the South East of England. In future work on coworking, I would want to pursue further these relations with housing and living.

Within this project, I have perhaps downplayed an emphasis upon technologies so as to emphasise the importance of bodily encounters and human subjectivities. This is, in part, due to my suspicion towards claims of being ‘free to work anywhere’. Future work might trace the rise of particular ‘sharing economies’, for instance, how houses and vehicles are incorporated into so-called micro-entrepreneurial practices, given the recent rise of *Air BnB* and *Uber*. Certainly, I have been cautious of claims throughout this research surrounding narratives of change as epochal shifts (McDowell, 2009). Given that coworking has been drawn into claims surrounding the ‘sharing economy’ (Woskko, 2014), it is crucial to note here how the term is rather crude, masking as much as it highlights. It is notable that towards the end of my research, the previous championing of these ‘peer-to-peer’ technologies were met with more cautious tones from the architects, particularly given recent high-profile boycotts. Whilst these coworking spaces may be said to provide some informal support, this is not that of a unionised workforce. In fact, unions in the UK seem to have made limited attempt to re-

frame how collective unions may help support the growing numbers of self-employed workers in the spirit of Jane Wills (2013) and Janet Hotch's (2000) attention to the representing of self-employed workers working collectively, and the potential for non-capitalist forms of production.

There are implications relating to the role of 'the state' here, too. It has not just a case of 'withdrawal' or 'shrinking' of the state as these two of the three coworking spaces have been funded by either the UK government or EU development fund. Yet such vocal championing of social enterprises delivering public services is something that needs closer examination as we look towards extensive cuts in services (cf. Amin, 2009; Raco, 2013). Having attended events led by the architects from Hub Westminster (supported with some funding from a conglomerate outsourcing company) this would appear to be a key concern. And yet, conversely, there *are* some exciting conversations that are coalescing around such architects and coworking spaces that might not draw such easy conclusions. This returns to my initial interest in architects, particularly those participating in much wider practices than conventionally *architectural* projects. The setting up of Hub Westminster is a good example of this. Future research into these expanding practices and extending these conversations would greatly enrich these geographic debates. It is notable that *Atelier d'architecture autogérée* (studio for self-managed architecture) (2015) are working on a broad research project *R-Urban* that includes Kathy Gibson, yet current debates in the geographies of architecture have yet to make these connections. I argue this is because of the assumptions that architects – as one particular 'profession' involved in practising architectures – necessarily 'do buildings' (Lorne, under review). Further research should extend such projects.

This, then, returns to the importance of thinking space as a political as well as theoretical endeavour that Doreen Massey has so explicitly pursued. Certainly, I've found the work of Gibson-Graham and the Community Economics Collective hugely inspiring, shifting away from my pre-conceived (and unquestioned) understandings of class, and of the future of Left politics. Given the 'crisis' of political Left in UK and across Europe more broadly, it has been easy to forget that there are positive stances that we can occupy, as ambiguous and uncertain as they may be. My performances as an academic are saturated with power, I recognise that I embody that white, middle-class male depiction of the 'entrepreneur' in the advert at FunkBunk, that I would not have been able to undertake this research if I hadn't had funding or been able to live at my partner's flat and 'work flexibly'. Certainly, I shall contribute towards time-banking but also think about how I can help perform other economies. This, then, raises questions of work and our ethical sensibilities as academics down the corridor as much as working with those down the road (Gibson-Graham, 2008a).

8.4. Concluding remarks

In this thesis, I have analysed the practices and spaces of coworking in relation to three different coworking spaces. I have argued that these workplaces might be better imagined less as 'building events' and more as 'meeting places' constituted through 'bundles of trajectories' to be attentive to the different ways in which these workplaces are experienced. In doing so, I have questioned their widespread portrayal as new workplaces for like-minded entrepreneurs who collide into one another. I have done so by researching *through* coworking over more than 18 months. Being attentive to the practices and inhabitations of coworking, I have explicitly focused upon the importance

of spatiality and subjectivities to coworking practices. This has examined how routinized attempts to 'legitimise' working identities involve the construction of different spatial-temporal boundaries of 'work'. Yet, I too, have emphasised that there is also a chance of space that cracks the apparent coherence of these likeminded spaces. Whilst claims of engineering fast-paced encounters are important to the experiencing of these places, I have insisted that caution must be taken so as to not over emphasise these claims, doing so by consider how human subjectivities and bodily practices are entangled within the constitution of such places. I have shifted focus beyond the architectural dimension without losing touch, to reframe debates about the ways in which these places of work are encountered and negotiated through everyday lives.

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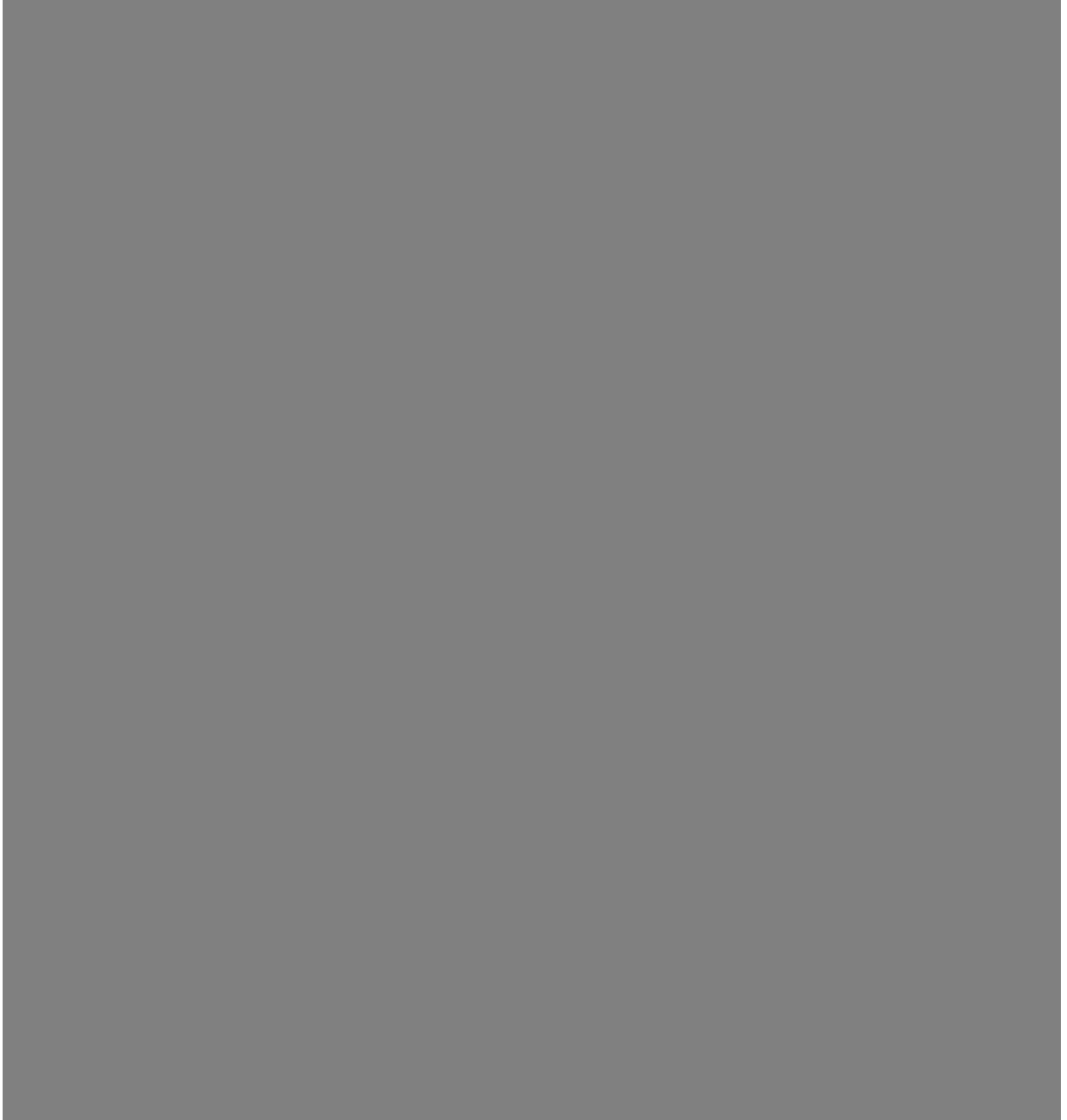
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Appendix A – List of research interviewees



Appendix B – Example of NVivo coding structure and analysis

The screenshot displays the NVivo interface with a 'Tree Nodes' list. The list contains various nodes related to 'Designing and Curating Coworking Space'. The nodes are organized into a hierarchy, with 'Tree Nodes' expanded to show sub-nodes. The 'Sources' and 'References' columns show the number of items associated with each node.

Name	Description	Sources	References
Designing and Curating Coworking Space	The ways in which coworking spaces are conceptualised and designed to encourage certain interactions	0	0
Coworking methodologies	The production of researching work through coworking	4	6
Practising Architecture Beyond Buildings	Expanding ways of doing architecture	0	0
Emergent coworking trajectories	Meeting of social relations between and among different people/firms	1	3
Conceptualising coworking space	Ways in which the coworking spaces are conceptualised by architects/managers	10	35
Different conceptualisations of coworking spaces	The range of ways people conceptualised what coworking is	0	0
Burying into experience rather than renting space	People not being sold the workspace but the things going on inside through the workspace	7	10
Why use coworking space	Different reasons why people used the coworking space	16	31
Who is coworking	Considerations of who is using these spaces	4	8
Coworker conceptualisations		0	0
Negotiating practices between architecture and working	The relationships between working practices and architectural workplace	12	18
Flatter structure of organisation - not colleagues	That coworking space doesn't have hierarchies because not part of same organisation	10	32
Coworking failures	Coworking failing to work due to lack of meaningful interactions	10	24
Proximity and permeability		33	139
Power geometries	Uneven relations of power constructing and negotiating boundaries	4	6
Core community	The relatively stable / recognisable core of the coworking spaces	13	25
Permeability of businesses and knowledge sharing	The open boundaries between different people and business in these spaces	6	14
Work generated through coworking	Relating to actual work that has come about through coworking - not guaranteed	12	22
Fluid relationships in coworking spaces	Networks of social relationships and power relationships more fluid than other structures	4	7
Need for physical co-presence	Limits to Skype etc. need to be around others - embodiment	3	5
Copying strategies	How coworking space mitigates risks as well as validation and support - embodied sense of being around others	8	14
Trust	Feelings of trust in coworkers - even if unknown	7	15
Conflict	Encounters/becoming moments of conflict	5	10
peer-to-peer learning		1	3
Working Performances		9	27
Local context and connections		15	48
Economic spaces and practices	Change and continuity in ways of working	5	13