

Working in Between: A Study of Coworking Spaces in Montreal

Emile Auguste van Haaster

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Sociology) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

December 2025

© Emile Auguste van Haaster, 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Emile Auguste van Haaster

Entitled: Working in Between: A Study of Coworking Spaces in Montreal

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Sociology)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair  
Dr. Chris Hurl

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner  
Dr. Bart Simon

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner  
Dr. Pablo Mendez

\_\_\_\_\_ Thesis Supervisor(s)

\_\_\_\_\_ Thesis Supervisor(s)  
Dr. Chris Hurl

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Martin French                      Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Pascale Sicotte                      Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science

## ABSTRACT

### Working in Between: A Study of Coworking Spaces in Montreal

Emile Auguste van Haaster

This thesis investigates how coworking spaces are reshaping labour practices, social networks, and work mobility in the Greater Montreal region amid contemporary economic transformations. Drawing on Foucaultian perspectives of neoliberalism and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), it conceptualizes coworking spaces as socio-material infrastructures that both respond to and reproduce the tensions of flexible work, negotiating between autonomy and precarity, sociality and isolation, and flexibility and the need for stability. This research combines quantitative mapping of coworking spaces in Montreal, analyzing their geographical distribution and pricing structures, with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with coworkers and managers of these spaces. The analysis reveals that coworking spaces function as hybrid infrastructures of care and control. They mitigate some drawbacks of remote work, yet they also exacerbate self-responsibilization by shifting costs, risks, and self-management onto workers. Through ANT, the thesis traces how spatial design, technologies, routines, and commuting practices assemble networks that enact productivity, sociability, and accountability in everyday life. In sum, this thesis reveals how the logics of flexibilization and entrepreneurial subjectivity take material form, and are challenged, within these spaces. As such, coworking spaces operate as experimental infrastructures for the future of work: prototypes that make visible the negotiations through which workers, workplaces, and cities redefine the shifting boundaries of labour and life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my family and friends for their unwavering support, encouragement, and patience throughout this process. Their presence, understanding, and constant encouragement made this work possible.

I am especially grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Chris Hurl, for his continued guidance, thoughtful feedback, and steady support throughout the development of this thesis. His insights, encouragement, and generosity with his time were invaluable at every stage of this project.

I would also like to thank Dr. Bart Simon and Dr. Pablo Mendez for their time, insight, and constructive engagement as members of my thesis committee. Their feedback and perspectives greatly strengthened this work.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 – Literature Review .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Rise of Telework and Co-working Spaces .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Reframing the Debate: Remote, In-Person, and Coworking .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Theoretical Frameworks .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Neoliberalism .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Actor-Network Theory .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Linking ANT and Neoliberalism.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Methodology.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Research Questions .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Main Research Question .....	39
Sub-Questions .....	39
<b>Methods .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Data collection .....	40
Sample and Population .....	41
Quantitative Data Collection .....	42
Qualitative Data collection .....	43
<b>Ethical Considerations .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Quantitative Data .....	45
Qualitative Data.....	45

<b>Analysis .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Quantitative Data .....	46
Qualitative Data.....	47
<b>Chapter 4 – Coworking Spaces in Montreal.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>4.2 Pricing.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>4.3 Memberships .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>4.4 Mapping Coworking Spaces in Montreal .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Chapter 5 – Social Interaction &amp; Community Building .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>5.2 Socio-Material Production in Coworking Spaces .....</b>	<b>68</b>
5.2.1 Assembling Community through Presence.....	68
5.2.2 COVID-19: Interruptions and Rediscoveries .....	72
5.2.3 Community or Commodification? The Ambivalence of Sociality .....	76
<b>5.3 Professionalism, Visibility and Responsibilization .....</b>	<b>78</b>
5.3.1 Freelancers, Workers, and the the Balance of Productivity and Sociality .....	79
5.3.2 The Curators of Entrepreneurial Community .....	83
<b>5.4 Between Care and Control: Infrastructures of Behaviour .....</b>	<b>86</b>
5.4.1 Spatial Arrangements and the Discipline of Work .....	87
5.4.2 Amenities and Infrastructure as Soft Control.....	92
<b>5.5 Productivity and Sociality: Negotiating the Balance.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Chapter 6 – Reinforcing Work-Life Boundaries .....</b>	<b>98</b>

<b>6.1 Spatial Design and Ergonomics .....</b>	<b>100</b>
6.1.1 – Spatial Design of Coworking Spaces.....	102
6.1.2 Ergonomics .....	106
<b>6.2 Commuting .....</b>	<b>109</b>
6.2.1 Commuting as a ritual.....	110
6.2.2 Commuting and Neoliberal Responsibilization .....	111
6.2.3 Commuting as an ANT Assemblage .....	113
<b>6.3 Social Norms and Accountability .....</b>	<b>117</b>
6.3.1 Norms & Rituals of Behaviour .....	118
6.3.2 Accountability and the Social Panopticon .....	119
6.3.3 ANT Assemblages of Sociality .....	122
<b>6.4 Conclusion: Boundaries, Compromises, and the Future of Work .....</b>	<b>124</b>
6.4.1 Coworking and the Neoliberal Condition .....	124
6.4.2 Coworking through Actor–Network Theory .....	125
6.4.3 Care and Control: The Duality of Coworking .....	127
6.4.4 Theoretical Contributions .....	127
6.4.5 Implications for the Future of Work.....	128
6.4.6 Closing Reflection .....	129
<b>Chapter 7 – Conclusion .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>7.1 Restating the Problem and Purpose .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>7.2 Key Empirical Findings .....</b>	<b>132</b>
7.2.1 The Production of Sociality.....	132
7.2.2 Boundary-Making and Material Discipline .....	133
7.2.3 Post-Pandemic Reconfigurations .....	134

<b>7.3 Coworking as Dual Infrastructure of Care and Control.....</b>	<b>135</b>
7.3.1 Infrastructures of Care.....	135
7.3.2 Apparatuses of Control.....	136
7.3.3 ANT and Neoliberalism in Dialogue.....	136
<b>7.4 The Montréal Context and the Global Landscape .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>7.5 Implications for the Future of Work.....</b>	<b>138</b>
7.5.1 Re-embedding Work in Space .....	138
7.5.2 Shifting Responsibilities and Risks.....	138
7.5.3 Community as Governance.....	139
<b>7.6 Limitations and Avenues for Further Research .....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>7.7 Final Reflections.....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b><i>Bibliography .....</i></b>	<b>142</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Coworking Spaces in the Greater Montreal Region.....	57
Figure 2 Coworking Spaces in the Core of Montreal .....	58
Figure 3 Coworking Spaces and Public Transit in the Greater Montreal Region.....	60
Figure 4 Coworking Spaces and Public Transit in the Core of Montreal.....	61
Figure 5 Coworking Spaces and Bike Lanes in the Greater Montreal Region.....	63
Figure 6 Coworking Spaces and Bike Lanes in the Core of Montreal.....	64

## List of Tables

Table 1 Pricing of Coworking Spaces in Montreal.....	53
Table 2 Comparative Costs for Coworking Spaces in Montreal and Surrounding Areas	53

## Introduction

Work has undergone a profound transformation in recent decades. The spread of digital technologies, platform economies, and remote arrangements has blurred the boundaries of where and when work takes place. Within this shifting landscape, coworking spaces have emerged as hybrid infrastructures that promise both productivity and social connection. In cities like Montreal, they have become central to how independent and remote workers organize their professional and social lives.

Yet the success of coworking spaces also reveals a fundamental contradiction. These workspaces are designed to optimize work productivity, while simultaneously fostering sociality through co-presence, events and social atmospheres. What fosters these connections, the buzz, vibe and flow of people, can just as easily undermine focus and productivity. This tension between productivity and sociality lies at the core of this thesis.

From an economic standpoint, the Canadian coworking space market is projected to hold a value estimated to USD 3.25 billion in 2024 (Mordor Intelligence, 2025). This figure is expected to grow at a CAGR of over 8%, reaching an estimated USD 4.75 billion by 2029. This illustrates the growth in popularity and constant need for workspaces and alternative workspaces within the country. Many coworking chains such as WeWork, Spaces and Regus have become household names and are ubiquitous within all major cities in the country. The rise of both remote work as well as contract/independent work can form an explanation to the increased use of these spaces. Workers require a dedicated space, and a home office may not always provide the essential requirement such as space, privacy and social contact with other individuals (Robelski et al., 2019; Akhavan et al., 2023, p. 43-45).

Considering that coworking spaces generally cater to freelance, independent and contract workers, they must remain flexible, affordable and accessible (Merkel, 2019, p.538). For these users, coworking spaces allow these workers to “pool” their rent and offer lower prices than a traditional office space (Tremblay and Krauss, 2024). Furthermore, the space typically offers flexible policies wherein a user can adhere to a membership monthly rather than a long-term commitment. The space offers various amenities, and operational aspects such as custodial and internet services are typically managed by the coworking provider. On the other hand, many large corporations have forgone their traditional office space and adapted their model to form of coworking or have shifted to a form telecommuting, either fully remote or a hybrid work arrangement (Tremblay and Krauss, 2024, p.114). This strategy allows corporations to significantly reduce their need for office space, and at times, offload the cost of the office to the employee working from home instead (Tremblay and Krauss, 2024, p.114; Akhavan et al., 2023). Furthermore, this shift to a hybrid or fully remote work arrangement is often perceived as an unpaid benefit to the employee, offering greater flexibility and choice (De Peuter et al., 2017; Rose, 1999; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Sennett, 1998). Fully remote or hybrid workers are also, at times, users of coworking spaces as they try to mitigate the downsides caused by telecommuting, such as privacy or space issues, or social isolation due to the lack of social contact (Bouncken et al., 2020; Ursadettan et al., 2022).

The rise in both telecommuting and independent/contract work has been particularly exacerbated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and has significantly impacted the use of coworking spaces (Akhavan et al, 2023; Tremblay and Krauss, 2024). Lockdowns and public health measures coerced employers into developing methods to work in a “safe” environment by limiting physical contact between employees. With the increased use of information

technologies, platforms such as Slack, Zoom and Teams, to name a few, proved that telecommuting is a viable alternative to in-person work (Bouncken et al., 2023; Tremblay and Krauss, 2024). The legitimization of telecommuting has inevitably impacted the demand for coworking spaces. The pandemic also had serious repercussions on unemployment. Losses in revenue and the uncertainty of the future lead to layoffs and alternative employment (Akhavan et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2020). Contract and freelance work were prioritized as employers could justify paying for a specific task as opposed to having a permanent employee. Benefits and losses in productivity made it an easy choice for many employers (Taylor et al., 2020; Ruyter and Brown, 2023). Gig work or precarious work was on the rise as individuals were taking up various contracts to survive through their unemployment. In this context, working from home may have proven to be too difficult for these employees who resorted to use various coworking spaces to accomplish their various tasks. With the flexibility and affordable prices on offer, it proved to be a suitable alternative to a traditional office (De Peuter et al., 2017; Merkel, 2019, Bouncken and Reuschl, 2018).

This thesis examines how coworking spaces in the Greater Montreal region function as socio-material infrastructures that mediate the tension between productivity and sociality. It asks: How do the spatial, material, and organizational arrangements of coworking spaces shape how workers produce, interact, and experience community?

Two theoretical frameworks guide this analysis.

1. Foucaultian theories of neoliberalism illuminates how flexible labour regimes shift responsibility for productivity, well-being, and self-discipline onto individual workers through the logic of *responsibilization*.

2. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) provides a lens to trace how these ideals are materially enacted—how spatial arrangements, technologies, and non-human elements participate in shaping social relations and work routines.

This research draws on semi-structured interviews with coworkers and managers, field observations, and spatial mapping of coworking sites across the region of Montreal. This multi-method approach captures both the lived experiences of workers and the material geography that sustains coworking as a local and global phenomenon.

In sum, this thesis argues that coworking spaces operate as ambivalent structures of control and care. They mitigate social isolation, work instability and the lack of boundaries of remote work by providing a routine, structure and community. Yet, they can also extend neoliberal norms of self-management and self-regulation through subtle spatial cues. In doing so, coworking spaces illuminate how labor is liberated and constrained in our current labor force.

This thesis asks: How do coworking spaces, as socio-material assemblages, shape contemporary labour experiences under remote and flexible work arrangements? Drawing on Actor–Network Theory and a neoliberal analysis of labour, it examines how coworking spaces structure social interaction, reinforce work–life boundaries, and participate in the production of worker subjectivities in the Greater Montreal region.

## Chapter 1 – Literature Review

This chapter sets the stage for understanding coworking spaces by outlining the evolution of remote work and the rise of flexible work arrangements. It traces how digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic transformed expectations around productivity, presence, and autonomy, reshaping where and when work takes place. For many workers, remote arrangements offered greater flexibility, autonomy and work-life integration, allowing them to manage their personal obligations while maintaining professional productivity. Yet the rise of remote work has exposed significant limitations. Many workers report feelings of social isolation due to the absence of informal interactions, which undermines collaboration and mental well-being. Home-based work has also eroded the distinction between professional and personal life, leading to longer hours, burnout, and difficulty disconnecting from work.

In this context, coworking spaces have emerged as hybrid infrastructures that attempt to reconcile the opposing demands of productivity and sociality. They offer spatial discipline and technological resources needed for concentrated work, while fostering the atmospheres and encounters that sustain social connection. Yet the balance between these aims is fragile: what enhances focus can dampen conviviality, and what enables connection can disrupt concentration.

Coworking spaces therefore appear as hybrid solutions that blend the structure of the traditional office with the flexibility of remote work. They reflect broader shifts in how labour, mobility, and community are imagined. While they promise autonomy, networking, and well-being, they also reproduce neoliberal pressures by shifting responsibility for productivity, connection, and self-care onto individual workers.

By framing coworking spaces as both responses to the limits of remote work and as sites where broader ideals of labour are negotiated, this chapter establishes the foundation for the

theoretical framework. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) highlights how coworking spaces operate as socio-material networks in which people, objects, and technologies collectively shape how labour is performed and experienced. Foucaultian theories of neoliberalism reveal how ideals of autonomy and flexibility are internalized and enacted through these same arrangements. Together, these perspectives show that coworking spaces are assemblages where productivity and sociality are materially co-produced.

## The Rise of Telework and Co-working Spaces

To understand the emergence of coworking spaces, it is essential to situate them within the broader evolution of telecommuting and remote work. “Telework,” “remote work,” and “flexible work” all refer to arrangements that allow tasks to be performed outside traditional office environments (Mohammadi et al., 2022). Generally, telecommuting is feasible for people whose work could be automated or conducted through computers and information technologies; it continues to be reserved for more knowledge-based work. In contrast, the service industries that rely on human interactions, or communication by pen-and-paper and telephone, are less inclined to be done remotely (Mokhtarian 1991; p.321).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made telecommuting a necessity when governments mandated social distancing as a public health measure. Post-pandemic statistics continue to show a gradual return-to-work trend, but various studies reported in Statistics Canada estimates that approximately 40% of Canadian workers could plausibly be working from home (Mehdi & Morissette, 2021).

Who are likely to be the telecommuters today? According to studies by Deng et al. (2020) and Mehdi and Morissette (2021), the degree to which workers telecommute is shaped by three factors. The first being the level of education, with more educated workers being more

likely to carry out their tasks remotely (Deng et al., 2020). The second was the industry or the nature of the work: professional, scientific and technical services were significantly more likely to be performed remotely when compared to accommodation and food services (Deng et al., 2020). Finally, those who live in or near urban areas have more access to telecommuting work that are concentrated in larger cities (Mehdi & Morissette, 2021), hence excluding those who live in rural areas from working remotely.

While telecommuting has been practiced for many years, from the 1990s onwards, this practice became especially popular in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, roughly 41% of Canadian workers were working most of their hours from home (Morissette et al., 2023), compared to only 7.2% of Canadian working home in January 2020 (Morissette et al., 2023). During the various “waves” of infection peaks and throughout the period from mid-2020 to late-2022, the percentage of telecommuting workers remained around the 30% mark (Morissette et al., 2023). Alongside fully remote work, this led to notable shifts towards hybrid work arrangements, also called flexible work arrangement, where workers share time between in-person work and telecommuting (Morissette et al., 2023). By June of 2024, 15.1% of employees work most of their hours from home, which represents more than twice the number in January of 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2024). Telecommuters or “teleworkers” with at least some work done from a remote location represent 24.2% of the workforce in June of 2024 (Statistics Canada, 2024). Thus, nearly a quarter of the Canadian labour force is engaged in some form of telework -- although employers are now pushing back on this trend and trying to have employees come back to an in-person work arrangement (Cerullo, 2024).

These trends show that flexible work is now a mainstream mode of labour organization. The following sections explore how coworking spaces have evolved in response to this shift,

promising both efficiency and connection while embodying the contradictions of neoliberal flexibility.

## Reframing the Debate: Remote, In-Person, and Coworking

The growing trend towards a more remote/hybrid workforce has brought to light many areas of tension in the transition from in-person work to remote and hybrid work arrangements. The rapid spread, mostly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced opportunities and challenges for remote workers. Amidst the numerous drawbacks of remote work, coworking spaces have emerged as a solution for the spatial and social issues that are present, bridging the gaps in infrastructure, community, and autonomy for workers. This section seeks to explore three common tensions in the evolving work arrangements that coworking spaces attempt to address:

1. The increase of social isolation and the erosion of in-person social connections.
2. The challenges of maintaining a healthy work-life balance in both remote work settings and in-person work arrangements.
3. The trade-off between increased flexibility and autonomy, and the growing precarity of contemporary work arrangements.

These three dynamics help frame the current debate on the future of work, as well as setting stating the importance of coworking spaces and the role that they play in maintaining an equilibrium for the work force. They embody both responses and reinforcements to these pressures from purely in-person work to exclusively working remotely.

### *Combatting Social Isolation*

One of the most widely reported drawbacks of remote work is the experience of social isolation. The absence of informal, in-person interactions in traditional office settings often impacts workers' mental well-being and productivity (Moriset, 2023; Robelski et al., 2019). The

increased use of remote work inevitably affects the typical social interactions that workers have during work hours. Impromptu coffee chats and interactions are far less common. The lack of routine interactions in the traditional office space – such as hallway encounters, team lunches, work meetings and brainstorming sessions – remote workers can feel extremely detached from their peers and the organization culture as a whole (Keller et al., 2019). In their psychosocial study of remote work environments, Keller et al. (2019) observed that many remote workers were “repelled by working from home, reporting that they found teleworking from home unbearable as it led to social isolation and a permanent blurring of the boundaries between their private and professional life.” This finding emerged from their broader analysis of how teleworking affects employees’ health, motivation, and social integration (Keller et al., 2019; Brouwer and Mariotti, 2021; Sennett, 1998). The latter point will be further discussed in the literature review. This isolation is not only impacting individuals on a social level, but also having detrimental impacts on productivity, job satisfaction and leading to higher rates of depression and loneliness. As stated by Keller et al. (2019): “(Social) isolation is a stressor often reported to be accompanying home-based work. There is a significant increase in psychological stress and a reduction of work satisfaction with increasing isolation (hours of telework). Additionally, professional isolation was also found to be related to lower performance; an effect that was also moderated by the time spent teleworking.” Furthermore, remote work can create challenges for organizations, such as maintaining communication with employees and tracking progress on specific tasks. However, as Akhavan et al. (2022, p. 47) note, “a growing share of remote work (...) will be an issue for companies to keep in touch with their remote working employees (...)” These challenges, however, can be managed through deliberate coordination and the use of digital communication tools.

Given this context, and the reluctance to transition back to fully in-person work arrangements, coworking spaces have emerged as a potential response to this limitation by offering a social infrastructure to workers. These environments promise the benefits of spontaneous interaction and shared presence but without the rigidity of traditional office spaces. As Bouncken and Reuschl (2018) highlight, coworking spaces foster a new kind of professional community – one that is voluntary, flexible, and framed around shared values of autonomy, creativity, and collaboration. In other words, coworking spaces are not imposed on their users but rather chosen by them and catered to their needs. Workers are not assigned to a specific location or mandated to interact with specific individuals; this is done on a completely voluntary basis with “no strings attached”. This ability to “opt-in” to social interaction sharply contrasts to the top-down nature of office hierarchy. More importantly, scholars state the importance of coworking spaces and the pivotal role that they play in fulfilling social needs for their users. As mentioned by Bouncken, “Co-workers see their need to overcome social isolation fulfilled in coworking spaces” (2023, p.87).

And furthermore, “Coworkers tend to co-create a sense of community that they interpret as more genuine than corporate community that has been imposed” (Spinuzzi et al., 2019, p.117). This theme of “community” is mentioned by many scholars and can be defined as “(...) a network of independent professional, entrepreneurs, and small enterprises who share not only physical infrastructure but also engage – formally or informally – in knowledge exchange, support, and collaborative interaction.” (Le Nadant et al., 2018, p.122). For many scholars, this communal aspect of coworking spaces is the key selling point of the spaces and is often perceived as the main benefit that it attempts to offer. Importantly, this benefit seeks to solve a more pressing issue, that of social isolation, rather than being solely a bonus to its users. With

this heightened sense of community many studies have noticed enhanced job satisfaction, productivity and overall increases in well-being (Bouncken et al., 2018; Akhavan et al., 2023; Robelski et al., 2019). For others, such as freelancers it gives them an “opportunity to leave your house and not be locked in” (Bouncken, 2023, p.15). Similarly, as mentioned by (Akhavan et al., 2023, p.95), “For independent workers, the choice of working in a coworking space may also involve quality of work-life motivations, such as breaking out of isolation.”. This sense of community building, in other words, goes beyond a simple “community” but has completely reshaped the perception of the workplace and work in general for many workers.

However, the aspect of combatting social isolation and community building is not without its critics. Scholars such as Richardson (2017) argue that this benefit is often superficial and instrumental. Instead of being genuine and fulfilling specific needs, these communities are often shaped by spatial branding and an entrepreneurial identity. In this view, coworking sociality is reproducing marketized versions of belonging, where relationships are superfluous, shallow and shaped by narratives of entrepreneurial identity, self-promotion, and productivity. The lack of organizational identity leaves the door open to different issues such as privacy, confidentiality and competitive businesses co-working together (Rådman et al., 2023). This critique is also reinforced by Gandini and Spinuzzi (Spinuzzi, 2019; Gandini, 2015), who describe coworking as “working alone together”, rather than fostering genuine collaboration and community building.

Research even outlines that many coworkers seek coworking spaces not for deep relational ties, but as a mere manner to escape isolation and maintain employability, through networking and visibility in the space (Yacoub and Haefliger, 2024, p.107). As Garrett et al. (2017) observe, “the social environments of a CWS are mainly shaped by instrumental

motivations of the coworkers such as the reduction of loneliness, the need to maintain employability, and the access to shared resources, while spontaneous cooperation and emotional ties play a subordinate role.”. In other words, the true purpose of coworking spaces, according to some scholars, is masked by the ideal of community that is offered. In this sense, coworking spaces are aligned with neoliberal ideals and Merkel (2015) and de Peuter et al. (2017) suggest that space and sociality are simply commodified without fostering real social connections. Rather, the environments allow for the coworkers to market themselves and self-brand for professional development rather than deep connections.

Coworking spaces, in this sense, embody a paradox when it comes to breaking social isolation associated with remote work by fostering community. The nature of this community is often shaped by professional branding and identities, often paired with instrumental relationships that lack deep social connections. Belonging to these communities can have divergent purposes, that of solidarity and mutual care, and on another level, navigating shared spaces, accessing opportunities and maintaining a form of professional visibility. Scholars often describe coworking spaces as stages for the performance of a form of “network sociality”, a project-based, informal and ephemeral relationships perceived as economic resources (Gandini, 2015). In coworking spaces, this provides a sense of security for self-employed individuals who can find work and networking opportunities but must remain visible to “secure” future work opportunities (Gandini, 2015; p.707).

The social dynamics are not accidental, nor appear out of thin air, but are deeply embedded in the social and spatial design of coworking spaces. Open-layouts, conference rooms, shared spaces and events within the spaces help choreograph forms of social interaction between members (Bouncken et al., 2020; Merkel, 2015). In other words, community is not discovered,

but rather assembled through infrastructure, cultural and social entities that foster and nurture their enactment. In the case of some coworking spaces, hosts also play pivotal roles in connecting members and “curating” the space to specific types of workers and industries (Spinuzzi et al., 2019).

### *Maintaining Work-Life Balance*

In addition to social isolation, remote work also presents challenges around maintaining a healthy work-life balance. The possibility of working remotely is often celebrated for enabling greater flexibility (Brouwer & Mariotti, 2021), this flexibility. The routines can be tailored around personal responsibilities, such as children, pets and family members, personal goals, energy levels, and desires. As noted in their research, Krauss and Tremblay “All the users interviewed felt that they are totally free to choose their own schedule and manage their own time which makes them feel in control and autonomous in their life” (Tremblay and Krauss, 2024, p.81). Notably, choosing commute hours, distance and times is a clear deciding factor when choosing to work remotely or not, the ideal commuting time seems to be under 30 minutes, regardless of the work location (Tremblay and Krauss, 2024). However, this autonomy often comes at a cost of more permeable and flexible work-life boundaries. Without a physical or temporal separation between professional and personal life spheres, some remote workers might feel constantly connected and pressured to constantly respond to messages. This lack of boundary often leads to fatigue, burnout, and difficulty really disconnecting from work (Gregg, 2011, Brouwer & Mariotti, p.11). “Working time and workplace flexibility are often accompanied by an increase in workload, blurring of the boundaries of work and personal time, which in turn have an impact on the employee’s mental and physical health” (Piirsalu-Kivihall et al., 2023).

In this dynamic, coworking spaces can provide an alternative to working from home, as well as working from the office. By providing a structured, yet flexible physical workspace, they can serve as a hybrid between the two, mitigating the downsides of both workspaces. Ultimately, they offer a spatial fix to the erosion of the physical boundary by providing a tangible separation between “home” and “work”. Scholars, such as Gandini (2015), suggest that coworking spaces, in a similar ideal, help “redraw boundaries between work and private life by creating semi-public work environments.” (Gandini, 2015, p.433). Similarly, many scholars echo similar thoughts when it comes to coworking spaces wherein these spaces impose a self-discipline through space, allowing workers to recreate a routine and enhance their productivity without reverting to rigid corporate office structures. With a rise in freelance and self-employed individuals, the option of reverting to corporate office structures isn’t always possible. “Many freelancers practice coworking as ‘boundary work’ [...] to create a structured office day with established routines and to separate their work from private life.” (Merkel, 2019, p.535). “Boundary work”, a concept first introduced by Gieryn (1983), refers to the active process of drawing and maintaining distinctions between different domains of life. In this context, it captures how workers materially and socially construct the boundary between professional and personal life.

Moreover, empirical findings from other studies, such as from Le Nadant et al. (2018), highlight that coworking spaces fulfill specific needs for a “structure” of work that workers seek. This refers to specific norms, expectations and a shared experience of “working alone together” while reinforcing a sense of order. Without formal office hierarchies, structures and work hours, coworking provides softer forms of discipline that mostly relies on voluntary adherence. Dressing professionally, booking shared conference rooms, respecting silent areas, interacting accordingly in common areas, as well as structured office infrastructure such as chairs, desks and

privacy screens all provide soft forms of discipline to their users. This provides a balance between autonomy, where work is purely guided by each individual user, with structure imposed by specific norms and rules. The sheer act of commuting to a space and “entering” a dedicated coworking space, for example as noted by a respondent in Le Nadant et al.’s study, provides a mental shift to “work mode” that often lacks when working from home (2018). When working from home, or even remotely, this “transition” or mental shift can often be challenging or impossible to replicate when compared to the traditional office spaces. Similarly, during their research, some have uncovered how coworking instilled a “working mindset”: “This building gives me a feeling that you are working here. When you enter, you have the mentality that now you’re working [...] you can deliver more than at home” (Rådman et al., 2023, p.898). Furthermore, this embeds values such as discipline, productivity, self-discipline and self-management akin to traditional offices.

Nonetheless, redrawing work-life boundaries are not a universal reality for all users of coworking spaces. In some cases, the lack of private spaces, closed spaces and frequent social interactions can introduce new forms of distraction, strain, lack of confidentiality and privacy “We talk with companies about their future strategies and therefore we can’t sit here and spread that because someone may start to understand which company we are talking to.” (Rådman et al., 2023, p.898). Confidentiality wasn’t the only mentioned issue in the literature: “One of the most frequently mentioned problems with regard to CWSs is the excessive noise level and the resulting distraction [...] Other people’s conversations, calls and conference calls can hamper the ability to concentrate and reduce productivity. The noisy atmosphere is in particular a problem for introvert members.” (Bouncken, 2023, p.115). In this sense, coworking spaces are flexible as they do not mandate users to continue using the space. Sound isolating booths, closed-offices are

often offered to mitigate some of the aforementioned issues. Additionally, autonomy and mobility are two big selling points, call intensive days can be worked from home or the office, and more “relaxed” days can be worked from in the coworking space.

Coworking spaces create a hybridized work environment that seeks to highlight flexibility while retaining a boundary between professional and personal lives for their users. This balance is achieved through spatial cues, community norms, spatial arrangement and the feeling of ‘working alone together’ without imposing a rigid discipline akin to traditional office spaces. As such, coworking spaces are aligned with broader ideals where workers are increasingly autonomous, self-regulating and self-managed in their work.

#### *Between Flexibility and Precarity*

Finally, while mobility and flexibility are frequently celebrated as benefits of remote work, these ideals often conceal new forms of precarity. Mobility and flexibility are often celebrated as the key benefits of remote work for freelancers, digital nomads and self-employed workers. These workers value the benefit of operating independently of a fixed location or schedule, often organizing their work hours and careers around the ability to work when they want. Coworking spaces have emerged as a key infrastructural solution to support and highlight this lifestyle, offering basic office necessities (ergonomics, stable internet, meeting rooms, etc.) and a professional environment without the long-term commitments and on an on-demand basis.

Coworking spaces thus enable the lifestyle of flexibility and autonomy. According to Lejoux et al. (2023), coworking has been instrumental in supporting both residential and occupational mobility, allowing workers to “live in area with a better living environment” while maintaining professional connectivity. One participant described coworking as the tool that allowed him to leave the urban agglomeration of Brussels for a more rural region, continuing to

work remotely for a Brussels-based company from the mountains of Grenoble (Lejoux et al., 2023, p.168). This goes in line with the urban exodus that is often associated with the rise of remote work, as many workers moved from major metropolitan centers to smaller cities and rural areas in search of better living conditions and affordability (Baudelle et al., 2023; Mariotti et al., 2023). Many workers, with the transition to remote work, decided to live in more rural areas where, first and foremost, their buying power is much greater, but also can enjoy nature and various hobbies that they practice (Kahn, 2022). The shift from vibrant downtown areas to more suburban areas is highly associated with this transition in recent years (Mariotti et al., 2023). Beyond their locations, coworking spaces also support mobility through their infrastructure and routines. Many coworking spaces are open 24/7 or have more flexible opening hours than traditional office spaces that is on offer based on membership tier that users opt for. Thereby, coworking spaces, through their memberships and offering are “embedding within the model massive amounts of flexibility” (De Peuter et al., 2017, p.691). Their responsiveness to the various needs attracts freelancers, startups and even some corporate employers that appreciate the flexibility and scalability that can be offered. Alternatives such as working from home, cafés or office spaces don’t offer as much flexibility, but more importantly the adaptability that coworking spaces provide. Their scalability, understood here as the ability to adjust memberships, space use, and services according to evolving professional needs, is enabled by pay-as-you-go models and modular service options. This illustrates how coworking spaces can be tailored to the demands of an increasingly flexible and entrepreneurial workforce navigating uncertain and variable working conditions (Rådman et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, this flexibility and “freedom” are often accompanied by other structural trade-offs. Literature cautions that this “flexibility”, “mobility” and “autonomy” are often masks

for deeper forms of precarity (De Peuter et al., 2017). The same flexibility that is offered enables greater worker mobility can also erode some institutional protections that previously existed. Self-employed, contract and temporary workers are on the rise (Standing, 2011) and face inconsistent income, lack of benefits, and social disconnection with their peers. As stated by de Peuter et al. (2017; p.691), “One of the paradoxes of coworking is that it reinforces the processes whose effects it is a partial defense against: coworking simultaneously reacts to and facilitates the fragmentation of employment into so many ‘gigs’, the rise of involuntary entrepreneurialism and the restructuring of firms according to a contracting-out model”. This passage highlights the reinforcement of involuntary entrepreneurialism due to the nature of work changing, from stable forms of employment to more ‘gig’ based work in comparison. Similarly, scholars have also highlighted the “feast-or-famine” (de Peuter et al., 2017; p.692) cycles of work, where at times one can be overloaded and experience tremendous growth before hitting a drought in contract-based employment with little to no recourse to legal protections and safety net.

As such, coworking spaces can be seen as both a solution and as a perpetrator of “flexible capitalism” (Skrede, 2012). Workers that have been dispossessed of employer-provided benefits and spaces now must buy back this type of infrastructure. Although this can be perceived as offloading the cost to the employee, it also opens the door to greater flexibility where the space can be catered to the exact needs and requirements, as well as on an on-call or as needed basis. Additionally, coworking spaces can also act as solutions to broader socio-political issues, as described by Janet Merkel (2019), some spaces operate as social enterprises. In this case, they “enable mutual funds for sick or maternity leave for members or to fulfil broader social and economic community development goals in neighbourhoods”. In this sense, coworking spaces are not merely physical infrastructures; in some cases, they are designed or operated to substitute

for support systems traditionally provided by employers to permanent staff. In other cases, these spaces offer childcare, gyms and other health benefits to their members (de Peuter et al., 2017, p.701). These initiatives suggest that coworking spaces offer vast possibilities for reshaping work and workspaces from sites of more individual resilience to broader forms of collective security.

Thus, while enabling spatial and temporal mobility to their users, coworking spaces also enable and exacerbate precarious work frameworks in our neoliberal society. For some members of these spaces, the model can be seen as empowering, offering a self-designed professional life that can be catered and scaled to specific needs. However, for other users, it can also reinforce the burden of individualized labour regimes brought on by our neoliberal reality. The promise of mobility, autonomy and flexibility, in this light, can be somewhat ambivalent.

## Conclusion

Remote and hybrid work arrangements have become prevalent in recent years, reinforcing the need for changes in the how, when and where work is being done. Coworking spaces emerge as hybrid infrastructures that mediate tensions between remote, and in-person work arrangements. These spaces seek to address the shortcomings of remote work, such as social isolation, work-life imbalances and work precarity by offering structured work environments, a clear demarcation between work and personal life, as well as a community. Yet, these benefits aren't without their drawbacks. Work precarity, ephemeral connections and individual responsibilities often align with broader neoliberal dynamics placing a larger burden on the workers, as opposed to employers. While some spaces replicate this neoliberal discourse, others experiment with forms of support mechanisms to help guide their users, suggesting that coworking spaces can both a response and a symptom to the current work fragmentation.

Building on this discussion, the literature opens up three key lines of inquiry that this thesis will explore:

1. How do coworking spaces produce and sustain social interaction and community among diverse workers?
2. In what ways do these spaces help reinforce, not blur, the boundaries between personal life and work life.
3. How do coworking spaces reflect and negotiate neoliberal ideals of flexibility, autonomy and responsabilization?

## Chapter 2 - Theoretical Frameworks

This second chapter introduces two main theoretical frameworks that guide the remainder of this thesis: Foucaultian theories of neoliberalism and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). When combined, they offer a multi-dimensional perspective to further analyze coworking spaces and the role that they play within our society. Coworking spaces are not merely by-products of our economic structure but also act as relational spaces where new forms of work, subjectivity and sociality are being shaped and reproduced.

As I will show, neoliberalism, particularly as Foucault theorizes it provides a powerful lens to understand the economic and ideological context in which coworking spaces have emerged. This initial framework highlights how responsibility has been increasingly offloaded onto workers by employers. Framed as autonomous entrepreneurs, individuals are tasked with managing risks, productivity and their well-being that were once the purview of supervisors (Foucault, 2008). Within this logic, coworking spaces reflect a shift toward individuated labor infrastructures, where workers must secure their own workspace, community and structure. However, while these spaces contribute to the responsabilization of labor, they also foster new relational arrangements. ANT further complements this view by enabling an analysis of the assemblage that coworking spaces represent and how these networks have since stabilized through various human and non-human actors, such as the space, furniture, technologies, individuals, and routines.

This complementary approach enables a nuanced understanding of how coworking spaces shape labor practices and individual subjectivities. It frames coworking spaces not only as a response to market needs, but as a socio-material assemblage that also seeks to respond to specific market needs. The chapter starts by presenting each framework individually, followed

by a synthesis that combines both frameworks for a richer and comprehensive analysis of coworking spaces in our current economy.

## Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a political and economic ideology that rose to prominence in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, advocating for free markets, deregulation, privatization, and a reduced role for the state in all economic affairs (Harvey, 2005). This ideology gained global influence through the policies of world leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The central tenant of neoliberalism is that free markets are most efficient and an overall superior mean of organizing society. State intervention is therefore seen as a hindrance to economic freedom and individual entrepreneurship (Brown 2015).

While neoliberalism initially emerged as an economic and political project, its influence extends beyond economic and market policy, shaping how individuals understand themselves and their relationships to work, productivity, and others. From a social perspective, it privileges values such as individual responsibility, competition and self-optimization, framing success and failure as personal achievements or shortcomings rather than outcomes of broader structural conditions (Foucault, 2008). In this paradigm, the social contract is reconfigured; workers and citizens are tasked with managing their own human capital, career development, and mental well-being (Lazzarato, 2009). The concept of *reponsibilization* drawn from Foucault's work on governmentality refers to the process in which individuals are expected to assume tasks, risks and requirement previously managed by institutions (Rose, 1999). Rather than having external institutions and pressure enforcing a form of control and discipline, neoliberal governance operates by cultivating a sense of self-management and self-optimization. In this sense,

coworking spaces can be seen as a spatial site of responsabilization, assume responsibility for configuring their own work routines, productivity, professional relationships and workspaces.

Neoliberalism's expansion into the labor market has been quite transformative. Long-term and stable forms of employment are slowly being eroded to offer more flexible, short-term, and contract or project-based employment, fostering a sense of insecurity (Standing, 2011). Workers are expected to constantly network, search for contracts and employment, and adapt to the changing needs of the market. Often toughed as empowering, it also shifts the risk and responsibilities from institutions and employers off to the workers (Brenner, Peck & Theodore, 2010). In this sense, workers are responsible for their own performance, productivity and well-being (Rose, 1999; Foucault, 2008). This responsibility isn't directly enforced, but rather brought on by a sense of self-surveillance and internalized discipline (Foucault, 2008).

Understanding neoliberalism is essential for analyzing contemporary work environments, including coworking spaces. Coworking spaces can be seen as key spaces that support and reinforce this ideology in contemporary labor markets. This is done through providing environments where individual autonomy and choice are emphasized and success and productivity are seen as self-imposed realities rather than regulated by external forms of discipline.

Coworking spaces have emerged, in recent decades, as embodiments of the numerous neoliberal labor transformations and shifts. Their proliferation must be understood in the broader context of neoliberalism that has profoundly restructured our economy around tenants such as flexibility, individualism and entrepreneurialism (Gandini, 2015). Serving as infrastructures of the gig economy by accommodating to a workforce increasingly composed of freelancers, contract workers, start-ups, remote workers and digital nomads, these spaces cater to those

navigating precarious working conditions and fragmented work lives. Often balancing between different contracts, workplaces and employers, many of these workers need a place to work and meet clients, in a flexible and cost-effective manner (Gandini, 2015).

Neoliberalism has co-constructed and promoted a work model where workers are no longer perceived as a part of a company, but rather as a self-sufficient enterprise (Lazzarato, 2009). As such, workers have flexible work schedules, are increasingly mobile, and constantly optimizing their productivity and market value (Lazzarato 2009). In this sense, they are no longer restrained by the confines of a traditional 9-5 work model, acting for a single actor, but rather are free and flexible entities that can optimize their schedule to their liking, convenience and needs. Coworking spaces strongly align with this ethos by offering a more on-demand access to proper work infrastructure, allowing them to operate at all hours, multiple locations and on extremely flexible conditions where memberships can be accommodated to fit their required needs. Desks, meeting rooms and digital infrastructure can be changed, selected and appropriately chosen for the specific needs of this new workforce. Additionally, membership-based models mirror the logics of subscription-based consumption and the need for constant adaptability that neoliberalism often entails (Gandini, 2015; De Peuter et al. 2017). In this sense, coworking spaces can be perceived as a spatial manifestation of the neoliberal tenants: individualism, entrepreneurialism and self-regulation (Gregg, 2011).

In addition to this, coworking spaces also have a “creative” and “autonomous” narrative surrounding the work of their members and users. Their branding and marketing often emphasize the community, innovation, and freedom that they cater to and offer. These terms resonate with the neoliberal perspective of precarious labor that is rebranded as a lifestyle choice that aligns with the aspirations and drive that workers need to survive and distinguish themselves in an

increasingly competitive work (Gill, 2010). Market instability associated with freelancing and self-employment is therefore reframed as a desirable and empowering opportunity and choice to workers. According to De Peuter et al. (2017), this seeks to normalize insecurity and precarious labor by masking it as opportunity, self-realization or a self-propelling mindset.

This entrepreneurial and flexible promise offered by alternative workspaces such as coworking spaces are often nestled in steeped in contradiction. While they claim to foster community, mutual support and greater flexibility, it's hard to deny their profit-driven motives as they operated in competitive urban environments (Richardson, 2017; Merkel, 2015). Some literature suggest that they commodify a sense of “community” and leverage it as a tool to attract more members and users, even though some of the social bonds and connections remain surface level and often instrumental (Richardson, 2017). This thin balance between being community-driven or profit-driven has significant repercussions on these spaces and the role that they play within the current economic context. This can sometimes even be perceived as a form of “affective neoliberalism” (Lorey, 2015), where human emotions and feelings shape and construct these neoliberal ideologies of autonomy, flexibility and self-regulation. Rather than being purely instrumental or imposed, these values are internalized through affective experiences that make precarity appear as empowering or desirable. Along those lines, the flexibility offered by coworking spaces has also been perceived by some scholars as a gateway to new forms of exploitation. De Peuter et al. (2017) introduces the concept of “flexploitation” to describe this changing landscape and the rhetoric of freedom and personal choices to legitimize and mask the exploitation from employers to employees. With a significant increase in freelance and contract work, there are significant gaps in job security, unions and benefits that have repercussions on workers (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Neff, 2012). In sum, the spatial flexibility mirrors a similar

flexibility that is increasingly imposed on workers, providing greater freedom at the cost of stability and security (Standing, 2011).

Coworking spaces are an embodiment of the contradiction in the neoliberal political economy. Once perceived as a solution to the symptoms of insecurity, isolation and the pressure imposed on workers when it comes to self-regulation, they have also provided the infrastructure and cultural frame to perpetuate and reinforce these neoliberal ideologies. However, they offer a new possibility for new solidarities and mutual aids, whilst being constrained by market and economic imperative. Understanding this ambivalence is key to framing these spaces within the broader context of neoliberalism, labor, and urban space.

In this thesis, “productivity” is not understood as a measurable output or performance indicator. Rather, drawing on neoliberal analyses of responsabilization, productivity is approached as a subjective and relational experience, a felt sense of “working well,” being focused, organized, and aligned with expectations of efficiency and self-management. Productivity, in this sense, is less an objective outcome than an experienced condition, one that workers are encouraged to internalize and continuously manage within flexible labour regimes.

## Actor-Network Theory

The Foucaultian literature on responsabilization is helpful in understanding how discipline can be maintained in remote working conditions, with workers effectively disciplining themselves. However, it can put too much emphasis on processes of individuation, while neglecting to consider how these spaces are constitutive of new forms of sociality. Actor Network Theory is helpful as a counterpoint here, with its focus on the emergence of hybrid forms of agency.

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour counterposes practices of *purification* and *hybridization*. As he explains, “Modernity is often defined by the constitution of two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand that of nonhumans in the other” (Latour, 1993; p.10). Purification refers to the tendency to separate and categorize things in mutually exclusive groups, such as nature and society or human and non-human. Along these lines, we can see how the Foucaultian literature on neoliberalism focuses on the work of transforming individuals into discrete units that can be isolated and rendered accountable. Rose (1999) mentioned that “Workers are responsible for their own performance, productivity and well-being” and this responsibility is “brought on by a sense of self-surveillance and internalized discipline”.

However, Latour argues that practices of purification are always accompanied by practices of hybridization. As he states, “The more we forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids, the more possible their interbreeding becomes” (Latour, 1993; p.12). Hybridization is the process of mixing things that are supposed to be separate. In the neoliberal discourse, responsibilities operate as a form of purification where the worker is isolated as the sole bearer of responsibility for his/her own productivity, well-being, and most importantly success. However, this responsibility shouldn't merely be placed on the worker, but rather on institutional systems in play that support their labour. ANT, in this case, seeks to examine labour not only as undertaken by individual workers but also by assemblages of various human and non-human entities that co-produce labour realities. Rather than seeing coworking spaces as static environments or simple organizational forms, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) draws attention to how they are assembled through complex networks of human and non-human actors. ANT highlights that processes of individuation, becoming a “worker,” a “freelancer,” or a “member”,

are never purely personal but depend on an entire infrastructure of objects, technologies, and social arrangements that make such identities possible. In this sense, coworking spaces are not just physical sites of work, but socio-material assemblages that afford new possibilities for sociation, collaboration, and collective life (Latour, 1993, p. 2). On the one hand, they are tools for individualizing autonomy and on the other they are dependent networks with a complexly distributed agency. Work responsibility, in this case, is not merely a shift from the employer to the employee, but a complex redistribution involving many different actants within the network.

Actor-Network Theory (referred to as ANT) emerged in the 1980s through the work of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law as a challenge to traditional sociological binaries between the social and the technical. ANT was initially developed to analyze how scientific facts are not discovered in isolation but rather produced through networks that includes numerous actors such as scientists, instruments, laboratories, protocols and other non-human entities (Latour 1979; Callon, 1986). These studies emphasized that scientific agency isn't solely located within an individual researcher but distributed across numerous different actants, such as tools, spaces, people and texts. Building on this foundation, ANT reconceptualizes agency as relational and distributed. Rather than viewing society as a pre-determined structure, ANT seeks to trace the networks that produce sociality through the co-constitutive roles of human and non-human actants (Latour, 2005). Mundane and simple objects such as doorstops can act as mediators that shape how action unfolds (Latour, 1996).

In the context of coworking spaces, this shift in perspective and conceptualization can be particularly useful. While Foucault's theory of neoliberalism emphasizes the responsabilized individual, ANT draws attention to the infrastructure, tools, spatial arrangements and individuals that co-construct this network. This framework allows us to see coworking spaces not just as

locations, but as material and social networks through which labor, agency and sociality are continuous being negotiated. Furthermore, the methodological principle of “follow the actor” allows for a grounded analysis of how society is negotiated through enrolment, translation and stabilization (Callon, 1986; Law, 1992). ANT acknowledges that these networks and processes are never permanent, networks are inherently fragile and contingent. In this sense, ANT not only looks at the stability of these networks, but also the frictions and failures that imposes reconfigurations.

Coworking spaces are extremely complex and heterogeneous environments that intertwine social life, work and digital infrastructure. Applying Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to these spaces will allow this thesis to analyze them not only as spaces or as a response to economic trends, but as a social-technical assemblage. These assemblages have been described in the literature as networks where human and non-human actors are constantly and consistently co-creating and co-producing work, identities, and relationality between them (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). In this view, these alternative workspaces are not neutral parties, but active participants in shaping the way work is undergone, experienced and governed.

Agency lies at the core of ANT and this theory seeks to identify the ways in which its distributed across the network. According to ANT, agency doesn't solely reside within human intention and institutional power, but is co-created by the relationship of different actors within a network. Furthermore, ANT stipulates that these actors are not only human but also non-human. When talking about coworking spaces, these ‘actors’ can take many different forms, from desks, to access cards, to managers, printers, coffee machines, spatial layouts, etc. and these all play crucial roles in structuring the workspace and conceptualization of work (Latour, 1992; Suchman, 2007). These material or spatial elements not only ‘support’ human activity but also

shape it, and at times can disrupt and interrupt. For instance, the lack of a dedicated desk in some coworking spaces fosters a sense of mobility, flexibility and change for many workers. But it can also introduce some instability to an individual's routine and a lack of permanence to one's workspace. Another notable example is a coffee machine in a coworking space. This machine can aid in enhancing productivity and concentration through the production of coffee and yet can serve to spark up conversations and social interaction within the space.

Coworking spaces aren't neutral spaces but are active sites within broader networks of labor. In ANT terms, they are enrolled in various projects of *translation*, a process through which different actors attempt to align heterogeneous elements into a coherent network (Callon, 1986). As Callon (1986, p. 224) explains, translation refers to "the mechanism by which the social and natural worlds progressively take form," through which actors "define and distribute roles, and mobilize others to achieve their objectives." While coworking spaces may not themselves undertake translation in the same way as a laboratory does according to Latour (1986, 2005), they host and stabilize multiple processes of translation enacted by their users. Freelancers, remote workers and entrepreneurs all have different goals and objectives when frequenting a coworking space, whether work-drive, networking, productivity or community-related, which are partially stabilized through the coworking space. The space, through its design and culture, mediates these goals and objectives. An example of this alignment is the concept of "community". For some, it represents a support network, for others, it is branded performance meant to attract clients, obtain a form of legitimacy and secure future work opportunities. This ambiguity reflects how coworking spaces are constantly hosting many overlapping processes of translation. As Richardson (2017) mentions, the communal ethos of coworking spaces often

reflects instrumental forms of collectivity tied to an entrepreneurial identity and branding rather than deep social bonds.

A second function of these spaces is that of their prescriptive materialities, the way space and their design subtly guide and structure behaviours. Features such as newsletters, community guidelines, conference rooms, social events and architectural cues (open-spaces, meeting rooms & common areas) serve to encourage or discourage collaboration. Similarly, technological infrastructure such as computers, headphones and internet connectivity help configures productive behaviours. These material and social elements embed values and expectations to their users, emphasizing productivity, flexibility, entrepreneurialism and sociality (Gregg 2011; Fox & Alldred, 2017). Importantly, these prescriptions do not determine user behaviours, they may be resisted or reinterpreted by the users, who can repurpose or ignore certain aspects of the space.

Thirdly, coworking spaces create what Latour (2005) calls “spaces of prescription”. Spaces of prescription refer to spatial or material arrangements that script or anticipate specific patterns of action that guide or constrain behavior within a network. Through this lens, ANT also serves as a tool to analyze spatiality in a manner that goes beyond simple design and location. In these spaces, behaviours, roles or functions are constantly being defined, redefined and prescribed by other actor (Akrich, 1992). These dynamics not only shape the ways in which work is done, viable forms of work that can be done within the network, as well as the sociality that emerges from this space. The design of a coworking space, for example, may facilitate encounters at shared tables or common areas, but restrict privacy or deep concentration. As coworking becomes increasingly standardized—especially through global chains—it also

reproduces spatial and behavioral norms that may not align with local needs or cultural work habits.

Through the lens of ANT, numerous infrastructures found within coworking spaces can be further scrutinized and identified, further stating the role and purpose of these spaces in our current economic state. The less visible or background infrastructure is often overlooked and their impact in co-creating the cohesive network can't be overlooked (Star & Ruhleder, 1996). Their absence from the frontstage doesn't diminish their role or lack of agency, but rather the type of agency that they play in forming the network (Latour, 2005; Law, 2004). This type of agency, more commonly known as *quiet agency* helps shape how the network operates as a whole and remains invisible in comparison to other actors (Lee and Brown, 1994). ANT does not impose a normative or critical stance but rather a descriptive or relational framework to better analyze the functioning and role of coworking spaces. Instead of starting its analysis through the "worker" or the "workplace", ANT, in this context, can be used to propose a framework to trace associations and networks. Tenants, furniture, coffee machines, Wi-Fi, memberships must continuously act be coordinated, negotiated, and stabilized for the coworking space to function and thrive (Latour 2005; Mol 2010). As Suchman (2007) and Law (2009) mentioned, infrastructures are never neutral. They remain socio-technical assemblages that are constantly enacted through practice and power relations while constantly being negotiated.

Coworking spaces, as Spinuzzi (2012) and Gandini (2015) argue, should not simply be seen as passive spaces where work is enacted for the mobile worker, but rather as active infrastructures that produce and shape sociability, new forms of labor and collaboration. In addition to hosting numerous remote workers, freelancer and entrepreneurs, coworking spaces also play pivotal roles in shaping and reconfiguring what it means to work in "flexible" and

“precarious” work conditions (Moriset, 2013; Richardson, 2017). Following this logic, coworking is not only spatial, but also ideological. Furthermore, the spaces are materialized through space, desks, common areas, and their different actors, but also performed through the discourse of flexibility, autonomy, community and productivity (Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015; Capdevila, 2015).

In this thesis, ANT will be used to trace how these spaces are composed within Montreal and beyond, identifying who and what composes the network, and further determining how labor is performed, conceptualized and shaped through the interplay of the various actors of the network. It allows for a comprehensive analysis for both visible and invisible dynamics that shape what constitutes the coworking ensemble.

While Foucaultian approaches emphasize how neoliberalism responsabilizes the individual, ANT offers a counterpoint by reframing these dynamics as outcomes of networked relations. Rather than seeing the worker as an isolated subject, ANT helps reveal how responsabilization is co-produced by socio-material arrangements such as desks, platforms, access cards, spatial layouts, etc. In this sense, coworking spaces not only embody the neoliberal ideal but also show how this ideal is being negotiated and sustained within the space itself. ANT shifts the focus, in this sense, from individual subjectivity to a heterogenous assemblage through which subjectivity is constructed, negotiated and contested.

## Linking ANT and Neoliberalism

Despite their origins stemming from distinct traditions, together ANT and neoliberalism provide complementary insights into the analysis of coworking spaces in our society.

Understanding these spaces as well as their roles requires attention from an economic perspective, analyzing broader political transformation in the construction of labour and the

political economy, as emphasized by neoliberalism. ANT, on the other hand, sheds light on more in depth analysis of network of relations, materialities, infrastructures and most importantly, sociality and its construction within the political economy.

This thesis seeks not only to analyze coworking spaces as mere responses to neoliberal economic shifts and the transition to hybrid work arrangements, but to also see these spaces as locations where new subjectivities can emerge. These new subjectivities not only include neoliberal ideas of self-regulation, flexible work arrangements, but also new forms of community and social reproduction through a shared space.

Neoliberalism helps in depicting the current context as it frames coworking spaces within the broader political economy. It highlights how coworking spaces can reproduce dominant labor ideologies and changes, particularly, in the context of neoliberalism, the autonomy and freedom provided to workers. Paired with actor-network theory's concept of distributed agency, this thesis can adopt an in-depth approach to analyze coworking spaces and the pivotal role that they play. While neoliberalism reveals the broader social and material context, together the two frameworks demonstrate that coworking spaces and sites of emerging sociality. ANT, on its end, deepens the analysis by tracing the sociotechnical mechanisms in which coworking spaces operate. It sees the space as more than a simple location, but a complex network where heterogeneous actors co-produce the conditions of work. This doesn't only support the production of work, but how it is organized, experience and perceived.

In this way, both neoliberal and ANT reveal coworking spaces as material assemblages as well as ideological concepts in our current labour arrangements. While the former pressures workers, ANT provides a lens to analyze how this ideology is being enacted and negotiated through different networks and practices. Coworking spaces are, in this case, not only

workspaces, but a space where neoliberal ideals are negotiated and challenged by workers and the many other social and material factors that shape when, where and how work operates.



## Chapter 3 - Methodology

The objective of this thesis is to examine the role of coworking space for its users based on their lived experience, usage and past work experiences in different settings. In this chapter, four sections will outline the methodology surrounding this research project. Starting off, the research questions guiding my project will be outlined. From there, I will outline the methods that I use to answer these questions. Then, I will discuss the data collection methods. The third section will outline the ethical considerations. Finally, the data analysis methods will be outlined to complete this chapter.

### Research Questions

The intersection of Foucaultian literature on neoliberalism with Actor Network Theory opens a key problem space for this research. Both frameworks reveal the tensions that shape contemporary flexible work arrangements:

1. Balancing productivity with the desire for convivial spaces for sociability
2. Negotiating precarity in a context of increased autonomy
3. Establishing and sustaining work-life boundaries in a context of increased flexibility

Coworking spaces are at the center of these tensions promising a balance between community and well-being, yet operating through neoliberal realities of responsabilization, self-discipline, and sociality. At the same time, ANT makes it possible to trace how these ideals are enacted materially through technologies, routines and spatial design. In this context, this thesis focuses on how coworkers and managers experience and reproduce these dynamics in their daily

practices. Their lived experiences shed light on how abstract neoliberal ideals and socio-material arrangements intersect to shape contemporary work arrangements. The following research questions are therefore designed to investigate how these tensions are live, negotiated and materialized in coworking spaces.

## Main Research Question

What roles do coworking spaces play in reshaping labor practices, social networks, and worker mobility within the context of neoliberal economic transformations? Furthermore, how do these spaces function as socio-material spaces that produce and re-produce labor, sociality, and spatial practices within our current neoliberal context?

## Sub-Questions

How do coworking spaces embody neoliberal logics of entrepreneurialism, worker responsibility and flexibility, and who does this logic shape labor practices and the worker's perception of work? (Neoliberal specific)

How are coworking spaces assembled through heterogenous human and non-human actors, and in which ways do these networks mediate sociality, work organization, and everyday work routines? (ANT Specific)

How do coworking spaces enable or constrain workers' mobility, flexibility, and autonomy, and what does this reveal about the evolving relationship between labor and spatial practices?

## Methods

### Data collection

To answer these research questions an in-depth analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data was conducted. This research seeks to examine the state of coworking in the city of Montreal and explain the role of these spaces based off the lived experiences of various coworkers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the reasons behind the choice of using coworking spaces (or no longer using coworking spaces), their experiences using various coworking spaces, the benefits and drawbacks that are generally associated with such use and finally their perception of current employment trends.

The first data collection aimed at providing an overview of the coworking spaces currently available to individuals seeking such a space in the region of Montreal. By doing so, this research could examine the popularity of coworking based on how many workspaces currently operate, as well as their locations. This section represents the quantitative aspect of this research project. The method employed was data extracted from publicly available online mapping platforms, such as Google Maps and Open Street Maps. In addition to online mapping platforms, data was also extracted from business directory and review platforms, such as Yelp and Coworker.com, a publicly available website dedicated to finding coworking spaces around the globe. Both types of platforms provided information about specific locations, such as their names, addresses, websites and geospatial coordinates. The information was later verified with the data provided by the spaces directly through their websites (or social media accounts). This data collection strategy was employed as an individual who may wish to visit a coworking space would typically use such platforms to find an adequate workspace.

The second data collection was accomplished through semi-structured interviews with users as well as managers and owners of coworking spaces throughout Montreal. Users would provide some insight on the underlying reasons to the usage of coworking spaces, their lived experiences in such spaces as well as the benefits and drawbacks. Owners and managers would provide insight on the reasons behind opening a space, its inner workings, services offered and their objectives in owning/managing such a space.

## Sample and Population

For the quantitative portion, workspaces had to fit within the definition previously provided of a “coworking space”. To be considered in this study, the workspace had to be open to most workers, offer various amenities (coffee, parking, printing services, internet, etc.), have an active website/social media account, be a paid service for its users and offer flexible membership options. Spaces were sometimes “exclusive” to a specific industry and didn’t allow individuals from other industries to adhere to the space. Others were labeled as “open” on publicly available platforms (Google Maps, Yelp, etc.), but didn’t have an active website/social media account and the phone number associated was no-longer in use. For this study, these spaces weren’t considered as “open” if that was the case. Finally, memberships could vary from daily, hourly, weekly to monthly, spaces that required a long-term commitment of more than six months, were excluded from this study.

For the qualitative portion of this research, the sample of this research was chosen based off purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling strategy seeks to select participants based on predetermined criteria. This ensures that participants have specific knowledge and experiences that are relevant to the purpose of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Typical case sampling was used to select the participants of this research (n=13) (Patton, 2015). Two “typical

cases” were identified; the first for coworkers (or users) and the second for managers/owners of coworking spaces. Coworkers are individuals who frequented or are currently frequenting coworking spaces on a regular (daily/weekly) basis within the last 12 months. Managers/owners are individuals who work or own a space that fits within the study’s definition of a coworking space, and were, at the time of the interview, maintaining their position within the space.

The final sample was comprised of seven (7) coworkers, including three individuals identifying themselves as male and four as female. The sample also included six (6) managers/owners of different coworking space, split in equal parts male and female (three and three). In total, 8 of the total 13 were employed, two (2) worked for non-profit organizations, three (3) were self-employed and one was both employed and self-employed simultaneously. Participants represented a broad range of industries and professions. The sample included individuals working in information technology, creative industries, construction and estimation, as well as management or coordination roles. Use of coworking spaces was almost always daily, with some exceptions. Furthermore, the average length of each interview was slightly over forty minutes.

## Quantitative Data Collection

The initial data was collected from publicly available mapping and business directory platforms concerning coworking spaces in Montreal. Data was subsequently extracted directly through the specific website of each space. Data pertaining to the location(s), costs, amenities, type of desk, forms of memberships were collected. Specific coworking chains often had multiple locations, all accessible to their users through a membership with the chain. Daily, weekly and monthly costs were extracted when available and for all desk/office types that were offered by a specific location. Three categories of desk/office were labelled within this research

project. The first and least expensive were “hot-desks” which are desks, generally found in an open-space, operating in a first-come-first-served basis. The second were “dedicated desks”, that can also be found in open spaces but are reserved for a specific user. The third and most expensive option were “closed offices” which, as the name indicates, aren’t in an open-space and generally vary in size and configuration. Coworking spaces had larger offices for companies and teams, as well as individual closed offices. For this research, a single user was considered when regarding the costs for all types of desks/offices. The data was compiled in spreadsheet software for data management and analysis. The longitude and latitude were subsequently extracted from publicly available mapping websites to have the most accurate data when used in a further analysis. document, the longitude and latitude were extracted through Google Maps to have the most accurate data.

It is important to note that some places, although being noted as “open” on these platforms may no longer offer coworking to their users. For instance, some coworking spaces had websites that were no longer operational. When this was the case, an email was sent as well as a various phone calls to determine if the space was still active, with no answer, it was determined that the space ceased operations and was closed. Furthermore, it is possible that some coworking spaces aren’t publicly available on these websites, some coworking spaces were fully booked for their users and some may have opened/closed since the data collection.

## Qualitative Data collection

Two different interview guides were used to conduct the interviews. Coworkers and managers/owners had different set of questions. However, in most cases, managers/owners could also be considered as ‘coworkers’ as they typically had a full-time job in addition to managing/owning the space. Due to the semi-structured nature of these interviews, questions

were often unscripted and varied based on the previous answers of the interviewee and discussed themes.

Both coworkers, managers and owners were asked basic demographic data, such as their profession, industry of work, work policies pertaining to remote/hybrid/in-person work and type of employment (employee/contract/freelancer/entrepreneur).

Coworkers were asked more specific questions pertaining to their lived experience as a user of coworking spaces. The frequency of use of such a space and their underlying reasons to use a coworking space were asked during the interviews. Coworkers were also asked whether they have used many different alternative workspaces, such as a café or other coworking spaces.

Coworkers were asked basic demographic data such as their profession, the industry where they work, the frequency of use of coworking spaces as well as their current work policy pertaining to remote/hybrid/in-person work. Other questions seek to understand their point of view on coworking spaces, the rationale behind their use of coworking spaces, or the reasons why they stopped using coworking spaces.

Owners/managers were asked similar demographic data. In the case where owners/managers were also coworkers, similar questions were posed to them concerning their current work arrangements. Additionally, questions about the inner workings of the coworking space were asked, such as how many users, the workload associated to the space, the costs and selection process. Finally, owners/managers were asked open-ended questions pertaining to why the space was opened or purchased and what sets the space apart from other coworking spaces.

## Ethical Considerations

### Quantitative Data

The quantitative data collection was through publicly available websites, thus there were no ethical consideration when using this data. It is important to note that not all coworking spaces were considered as some may not be found on these publicly available websites. Others may have opened and/or closed since the data collection period.

### Qualitative Data

The interviews in this research were done on a voluntary basis. Participants were informed about the purpose, nature and scope of the research. Additionally, participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time before a specifically outlined date. All participants were provided with clearly outlined documentation about their rights, conditions of participation and confidentiality. Before conducting interviews, all participants signed a document outlining all these factors and were given a copy; either a paper copy or a copy by email, depending on what the participant wished to receive. To conserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used during the transcription process. The transcriptions were stored on an encrypted server and were password protected. Identifiable data was omitted from the following chapters in this thesis and the results are presented as interview excerpts.

### Analysis

Due to the varied nature of the collected data, two different approaches were taken to conduct an analysis.

## Quantitative Data

The mapping of various coworking spaces in the region of Montreal was conducted using RStudio, a development environment designed for statistical computing and data analysis. Leveraging various packages, this software was used for data cleaning, mapping and visualization. The “dplyr” and “tidyr” packages were used to clean and manipulate the data, handle missing values, and ensuring that the dataset was ready for further analysis. The “osmdata” package was utilized to map the region of Montreal. OSM or Open Street Map, is a free and open-source mapping project (Padgham et al., 2017). This package provided many data points, such as waterways, streets, highways, public transit routes and bike lanes (RStudio Team, 2023). The coworking spaces were plotted using the “ggplot2” package which allows to create visual representations of the region of Montreal with specific points based on the Longitude and Latitude of the coworking spaces. The spatial mappings were then exported directly from RStudio to be presented within this thesis.

Different spatial mappings were created based off existing literature. The presence of different modes of commuting can vastly impact the use of spaces: bike lanes, subway and public transit are indicators of the success of many coworking spaces (Mariotti et al., 2023; Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022). In total, six different visual representations were created, the first being, an overview of the region of Montreal was created with the coworking spaces being highlighted. This was also done with bike lanes and public transit being outlined. A more detailed overview of the downtown region of Montreal was produced though RStudio with the surrounding coworking spaces. This same visual representation was also created in two other forms: one being with the bike lanes and the other with available public transit, subway lines more specifically. These representations will be presented in the following chapter.

Other data points, such as pricing were also analyzed using RStudio. The mean, median, minimum and maximum cost of a coworking space was extracted. Prices were separated for the respective type of desk/office offered, “hot desk”, “dedicated desk” and “closed office”. However, only the “hot desk” and the “closed office” were considered due to their more common nature in coworking spaces. Daily and monthly datapoints were primarily used, as these forms of membership would typically cater to both “occasional” and “regular” coworkers. Many other forms of membership do exist, such as weekly, bi-weekly, or for a fixed number of visits and days per week.

## Qualitative Data

Interviews with both coworkers and managers/owners were transcribed and anonymized. Once this was completed, the transcriptions were imported to the *NVivo* software, from which the contents were codified. Both inductive and deductive methods were employed throughout the analysis. Inductive methods meaning that the identified themes were strongly related to the data that was obtained. Deductive method meaning that some of the themes were based on the existing literature surrounding coworking spaces that was previously mentioned.

The thematic analysis was conducted using the conceptual framework of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which emphasizes the interconnectedness all types of actors within a network, whether human or non-human (Latour, 2005). Through this approach, themes were identified based on their roles and influence within the coworking space, the network. By tracing the relationships between various actors, ANT provides a lens to understand the distribution of agency throughout the space. This analytical process can uncover the agency and influence across coworking spaces, thus offering a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and the role that it fulfills within society.

The thematic analysis was conducted in multiple stages. A first reading of the transcriptions was done to identify preliminary key concepts. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this first readings refamiliarizes one with the selected interviews. A second reading was then done and codified through the *NVivo* software based on the key concepts identified in the first reading. Segments of each transcription was codified to their corresponding themes. This first coding identified potential themes and sub-themes that could potentially be analyzed and scrutinized. Finally, a third examination of the interview transcriptions was conducted, identifying the final themes and sub-themes throughout. In total, four (4) central themes were identified and segmented into different sub-themes. Definitions were provided and categorized for each theme.

## Chapter 4 – Coworking Spaces in Montreal

### 4.1 Introduction

The recent proliferation of coworking spaces in Montreal represents a dynamic shift in how workspaces are conceived and utilized in the wake of the remote work surge. As companies and freelancer seek flexible alternatives to traditional office spaces, coworking spaces have become significant sites of collaboration, innovation and social interaction. Beyond serving as a mere workspace, they reflect broader socio-economic trends, such as the impact of the gig economy, the growth and impact of neoliberal policies and trends. This chapter delves into the coworking space landscape in Montreal, exploring the diversity and evolving demands of these alternative workspaces. Understanding this market is crucial to analyzing the role of these spaces in modern work culture, especially in Montreal.

As of the writing of this thesis, 161 spaces were identified using publicly available online mapping and business directory platforms with keywords such as “coworking” or “coworking space”. A total of 104 coworking spaces fit this study’s definition of a “coworking space”, with 2 of these spaces opening in the upcoming months. A total of 102 coworking spaces are currently available, at the time of writing this thesis, to workers in the Montreal region.

In sum, 55 “coworking spaces” were deemed unfit due to various reasons. These can include currently being closed 31 spaces for various reasons, this information was confirmed through the website, social media or notice of closure on Google. Some locations were exclusive to specific industries, such as e-commerce, healthcare workers or hairdressers, 11 locations fit this category. 6 locations were labeled as a “coworking space” on these publicly available websites but were other types of establishments, such as cafés or space rental locations. Finally,

9 locations did not offer flexible memberships and required long-term leases (over a year) to adhere to the space. These spaces required long and inflexible commitments with no possible to scale in a seamless manner. Additionally, some of these locations didn't provide "common" or "shared" areas to their users beyond bathrooms and storage rooms. In other words, the "social" nature of these spaces was completely omitted.

## 4.2 Pricing

The pricing structure across Montreal's coworking spaces in this study displayed notable variation, particularly in the flexible desk and closed office categories. Flexible desk arrangements, which encompassed both hot-desks and dedicated desks arrangements, were the most prevalent offerings. However, the distinction between "hot-desks" and dedicated desks was often ambiguous, resulting in misleading categorization and potential confusion for prospective coworkers. This lack of clarity likely impacts consumer decision-making and suggests a need for standardization in the terminology.

For comparative purposes, data collection emphasized on monthly and daily membership rates, as these options were most frequently available throughout the locations in Montreal. Weekly memberships are scarce, with only 15 locations providing a price structure for a flexible desk arrangement, predominantly operated by larger coworking chains. The prevalence of this structure among larger chains may reflect their capacity to accommodate a broader range of membership structures, fostering greater flexibility to their members and their potential needs.

In total, 61 coworking spaces provided daily passes for flexible desk use, while 83 offered monthly membership options in this category. Closed office options were slightly less available for day passes, with 37 spaces providing this service. However, the availability of monthly memberships for closed offices aligned with flexible desk options, with 83 spaces

providing this tier of membership. This distribution suggests a strong emphasis on monthly memberships for both desk types, likely due to demand from longer-term users and the operational stability it offers coworking providers.

At the time of writing, most coworking spaces did provide complimentary day-passes for potential users to experience a flexible desk setup, on the other hand, few locations provided this complimentary access for closed offices. The pricing structure for daily flexible desk passes varied widely, from \$10 to \$120, with a median price of \$30 and an average of \$36.78 (n=61). Monthly memberships for flexible desks showed an even broader range, from \$100 and capping at \$1,400, with a median cost of \$250 and an average of \$270.58 (n=83). This wide pricing spectrum reflects variations in amenities, locations and the clientele that the coworking space targets.

Closed office options were predictably more expensive, catering to those needing additional privacy and space. Daily rates for closed offices ranged from \$45 to \$185, with a median cost of \$95 and an average cost of \$91.89 (n=37). For monthly memberships, the closed office rates spanned from \$269 to \$989, with a median of \$625 and an average of \$600.77 (n=83). These higher costs reflect the additional amenities, and the private space included with closed office membership options.

Across membership tiers, similar amenities were typically included, though the scope varied by membership type and price. Monthly memberships commonly included 24/7 access, when available, Wi-Fi, coffee, a workstation, office chairs, power connections, kitchen facilities, and granting access to social and networking events. Day passes, on the other hand, provided the essential office amenities but often restricted access to business hours and limited access to social and networking events. Spaces with higher membership fees occasionally offered added

perks such as parking, gym access, mailing services, and sometimes virtual office or domiciliation, although these often came at an added cost as they weren't utilized by all users.

Geographical location emerged as a significant factor in coworking space pricing within the Montreal region. Spaces were categorized into four areas: Montreal, Laval, and the North and South Shores of the island. While coworking spaces outside of Montreal were less prevalent, prices within the city were often competitive or even lower than those in peripheral areas. For a monthly flexible desk membership, Montreal presented the lowest price at \$100 and the second-lowest average cost at \$255.92. In comparison, average prices for flexible desk memberships were 7.37% higher on the North Shore, 33.44% higher in Laval, and 3.66% lower on the South Shore. Closed office prices followed a similar trend, Montreal offering, once again, the second-lowest average cost at \$590.87. In contrast, Laval had an average cost of \$549.25 – 7% less than Montreal –, while the North and South Shores were 6.37% and 19.32% higher.

When comparing these alternative workspaces to traditional office spaces, it is important to take the square footage offered into account. Closed offices in coworking spaces average at around 150 square feet (not including the common areas). In traditional commercial office settings, the cost averages at around \$40 per square foot per annum, resulting in a monthly expense of about \$500 for a similarly sized private office. Though, at first look, these offices might appear less expensive – around \$500 compared to the average coworking space cost of \$600.77 – coworking memberships often provide greater value through included amenities and services. Additional and required costs, such as insurance, custodial services, and internet connectivity, which are typically separate in traditional office leases, are bundled into coworking memberships. Other amenities and common areas are also provided in coworking spaces and had to the rented square footage, such as kitchens, lounges, and meeting rooms. Moreover,

coworking spaces provide greater flexibility for their users, allowing for shorter and adaptable lease terms. Offices in coworking spaces are also scalable to accommodate business needs as they evolve over-time. This flexibility is valuable for small businesses, startups, or freelancers who may require varying levels of space at variable time intervals.

*Table 1 Pricing of Coworking Spaces in Montreal*

	Desk – Dly (n=61)	Desk - Mo. (n=83)	Office - Dly (n=37)	Office - Mo. (n=83)
Average	\$ 36.78	\$ 270.58	\$ 91.89	\$ 600.77
Median	\$ 30.00	\$ 250.00	\$ 95.00	\$ 625.00
Minimum	\$ 10.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 45.00	\$ 269.00
Maximum	\$ 120.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 185.00	\$ 989.00

*Table 2 Comparative Costs for Coworking Spaces in Montreal and Surrounding Areas*

	Montreal			Laval	
	Desk - Mo. (n=50)	Office - Mo. (n=39)	(n=8)	Desk - Mo. (n=8)	Office - Mo. (n=8)
Average	\$ 255.92	\$ 590.87	\$ 384.50	\$ 549.25	
Median	\$ 250.00	\$ 625.00	\$ 275.00	\$ 595.00	
Min	\$ 100.00	\$ 275.00	\$ 149.00	\$ 269.00	
Max	\$ 650.00	\$ 989.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 850.00	

	South Shore			North Shore	
	Desk - Mo. (n=9)	Office - Mo. (n=10)	(n=9)	Desk - Mo. (n=5)	Office - Mo.
Average	\$ 274.78	\$ 628.50	\$ 246.56	\$ 705.00	
Median	\$ 275.00	\$ 615.00	\$ 175.00	\$ 625.00	
Min	\$ 149.00	\$ 575.00	\$ 149.00	\$ 625.00	
Max	\$ 500.00	\$ 989.00	\$ 399.00	\$ 950.00	

## 4.3 Memberships

Membership options represent another crucial area of focus in this research, aligning with recent literature that indicates a trend toward a preference for closed offices over open-space desks (Barth and Blazejewski, 2023). Most coworking spaces provide a combination of open spaces and closed office options, with open spaces typically featuring both dedicated desks and “hot-desks”, the latter being the most prevalent option. However, the demand for more stable and personalized work environments seems to be increasing.

Monthly memberships are the most commonly available option, with 83 locations offering this type of membership for both closed offices and flexible desk setups. In contrast, only 61 locations provide day-passes for flexible desk arrangements, and a mere 37 locations offering day-passes for closed office memberships. The relatively high daily cost of closed offices, averaging at \$91.89, further suggests a shift among coworking spaces toward encouraging longer-term memberships, likely to foster more predictable revenue streams for the coworking spaces. Given the current economic volatility and rising interest rates, this trend toward securing stable, long-term memberships could become more prominent as coworking spaces seek financial resilience. Day-passes for flexible desk arrangements are also high compared to their monthly counterparts. With an average daily cost of \$36.78 and a monthly rate averaging at \$270.58, it would only take about eight days of use per month for a monthly membership to become more economical than the daily pass. This further supports the trend to more predictable revenue streams, incentivizing users to commit to monthly memberships rather than opting for sporadic daily access.

Despite the trend favoring longer memberships, some coworking spaces have introduced alternative membership models to cater to diverse needs. Several locations offer partial

memberships, granting access for a set number of days per week – such as two or three days – rather than the “unlimited” access provided by monthly memberships. This option is particularly appealing to individuals who follow a hybrid work model, balancing days at the coworking space with remote work from home. Additionally, some coworking spaces provide bundles of day passes, allowing users and prospective user to customize their access patterns on a weekly, monthly, or even yearly basis, further enhancing the flexibility and functionality of the space.

Memberships at coworking spaces often extend beyond simple workspace access to include additional services tailored to businesses and individuals. Many locations offer supplementary membership options, such as domiciliation, meeting rooms, storage and virtual office memberships, to accommodate varying professional needs. Among these, business domiciliation stands out as one of the most provided add-ons. In some spaces, this service is included in monthly or annual memberships, while in others, it is offered at an additional cost. This allows individuals and businesses to establish a professional mailing address separate from a private residence, which can lend credibility and privacy to these individuals and businesses. Meeting and conference rooms are another valuable feature, often available through standard memberships with varying access levels. Some memberships grant members unlimited access to these rooms, while others include only a few hours per month. Most coworking spaces also allow non-members to rent these rooms by the hour or by day, although members generally have priority to book these spaces. This flexibility appeals to freelancers, startups, and even larger firms looking for occasional meeting spaces without the need for long-term commitments. Storage solutions are available in select coworking spaces, this service usually comes at an additional cost. Standard memberships might include a small filing cabinet, with larger storage options available for users with more substantial storage needs. Finally, some coworking spaces

offer virtual office membership add-ons, enabling businesses to establish a more professional presence without a physical space. Beyond a mailing system, this includes receptionist services, phone answering systems, and access to an exclusive network of entrepreneurs and businesses. This model suits more remote businesses or those requiring minimal physical footprint but value professional administrative support.

# 4.4 Mapping Coworking Spaces in Montreal

Figure 1 Coworking Spaces in the Greater Montreal Region



\* Red points indicate coworking spaces. Dark lines represent major highways; lighter grey lines indicate primary roads and boulevards.

Figure 2 Coworking Spaces in the Core of Montreal



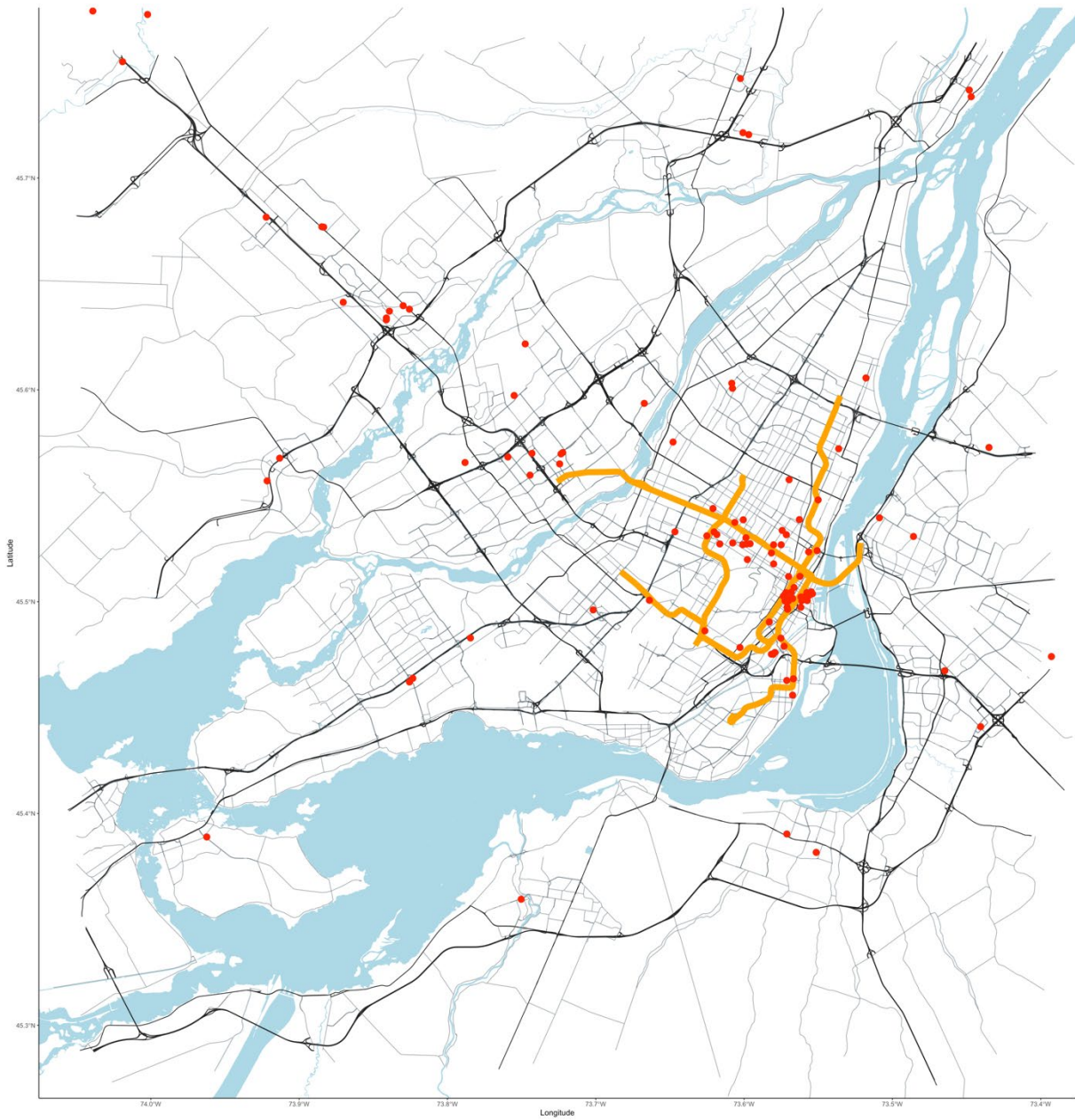
\* Red points indicate coworking spaces. Dark lines represent major highways; lighter grey lines indicate primary roads and boulevards.

The majority of coworking spaces are concentrated within central Montreal, particularly in its downtown core. This clustering of workspaces suggests a high demand for alternative and flexible workspace options among professionals and businesses in the city's core, likely due to the area's concentration of economic activities, hubs and nearby amenities. The density of spaces in this area may also reflect the preference for coworkers, such as freelancers, small businesses and startups due to its central location. While coworking spaces are widespread, they are

relatively sparse in suburban areas, such as Laval and both the North and South Shores. This pattern illustrates that coworking is primarily an urban phenomenon, as mentioned in the literature (Mariotti et al., 2023). However, the select presence of coworking spaces in the suburban areas could suggest the emerging demand for remote workers and small businesses seeking alternative arrangements near residential neighborhoods. Additionally, these visual representations illustrate the proximity of coworking spaces to major thoroughfares, such as highways and large boulevards. In more suburban areas, coworking spaces are extremely close to major highways. Such as the case in the West end of Montreal, close to highway 40, in Laval, near highways 440 and 15, on the North Shore, nearby highways 640 and 15, and finally on the South Shore, nearby highways 10, 20 and 30.

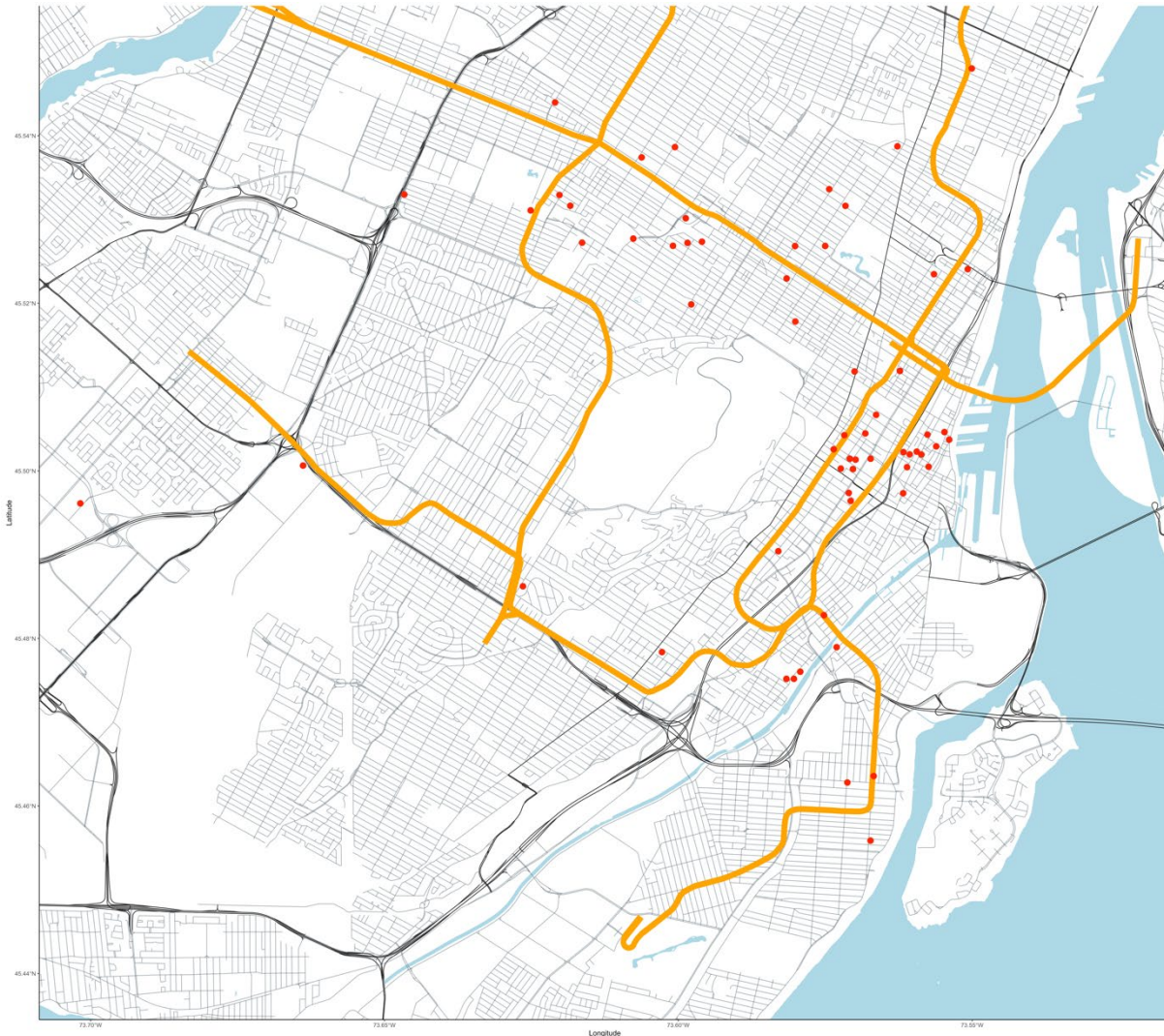
These visual representations reveal potential areas for expansion, especially in high-density residential and/or commercial zones outside of the core of Montreal. Coworking spaces are less prevalent at this time, but this may change overtime with urban sprawl. Combined more office decentralization (Johns et al., 2024) and the perpetuated use of remote and hybrid work models, more coworking spaces may open their doors in these areas.

Figure 3 Coworking Spaces and Public Transit in the Greater Montreal Region



\* Red points indicate coworking spaces. Dark lines represent major highways; lighter grey lines indicate primary roads and boulevards; the orange line represents the Montréal metro network.

Figure 4 Coworking Spaces and Public Transit in the Core of Montreal



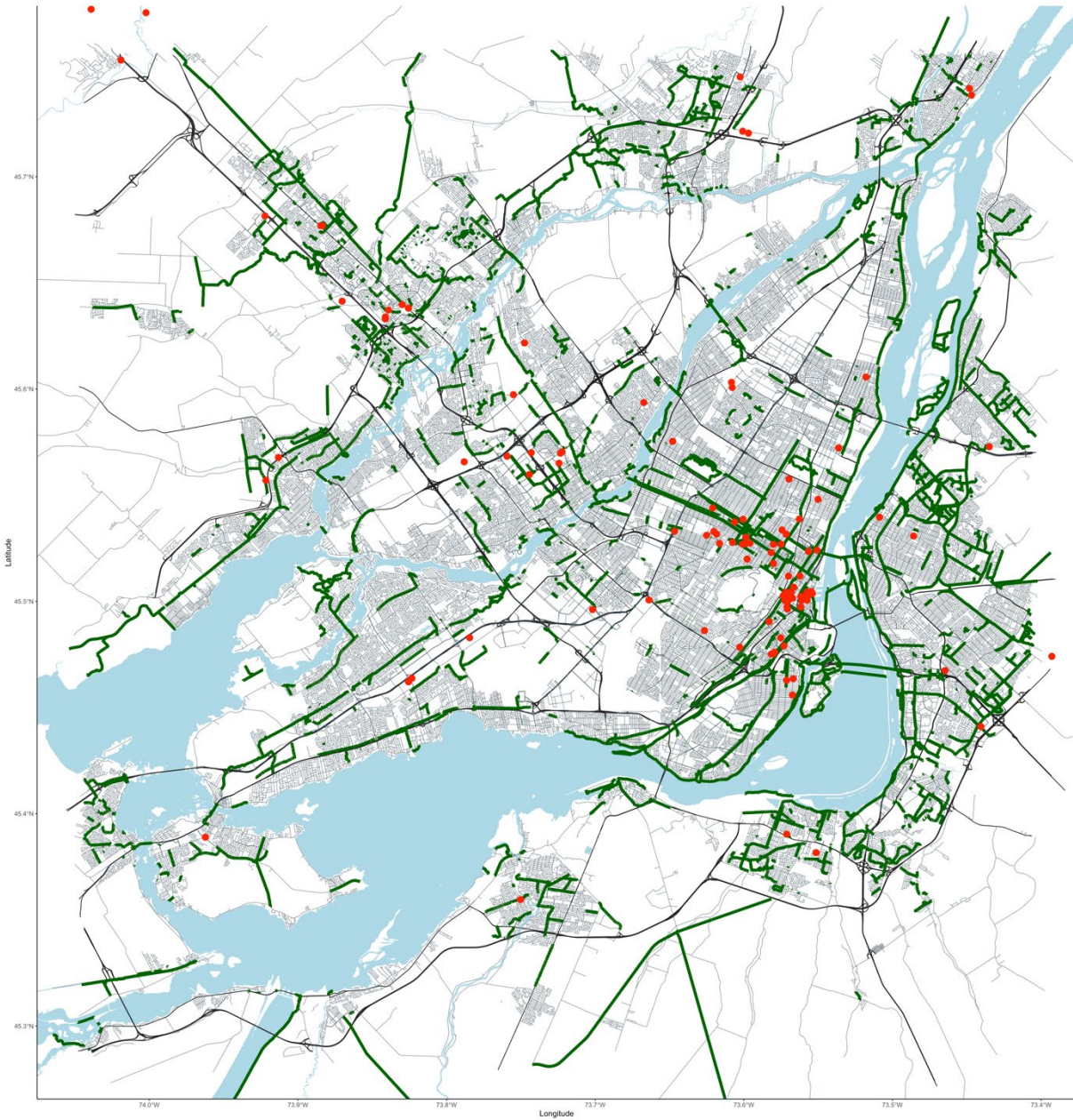
\* Red points indicate coworking spaces. Dark lines represent major highways; lighter grey lines indicate primary roads and boulevards; the orange line represents the Montréal metro network.

An analysis of Montreal's public transit, more specifically the metro system reveals a strong correlation between the proximity of coworking spaces and public transit. The proximity of these spaces to metro stations highlights the socio-economic factors influencing their location. Public transit is often concentrated in high-density areas, where a larger population base justifies the financial viability of the system, which can be seen in the Montreal region. Additionally, metro lines can also connect residential neighborhoods with job-rich areas, such as the downtown core of the city, enhancing the accessibility for a range of workers.

Two primary insights emerge in this analyze. Firstly, coworking spaces are more frequently located in densely populated areas, where public transit facilities the flow and commute. Secondly, these spaces are concentrated in or near job-rich zones, where professionals and businesses tend to cluster. The positioning meets the demands of convenience and flexible work environments, as well as urban planning priorities to attempt to reduce the dependence on cars and promote alternative and sustainable transportation methods, such as the metro in Montreal.

Furthermore, coworking spaces are available and more appealing to a diverse target population. Individuals who may not own a vehicle can have alternative transportation methods on hand. By situating themselves along these lines, as seen in the visual representations, a larger demographic can be attracted to the use of the space. This can greatly reduce commute times and accessibility.

Figure 5 Coworking Spaces and Bike Lanes in the Greater Montreal Region



\* Red points indicate coworking spaces. Dark lines represent major highways; lighter grey lines indicate primary roads and boulevards; green lines indicate cycleways.

Figure 6 Coworking Spaces and Bike Lanes in the Core of Montreal



\* Red points indicate coworking spaces. Dark lines represent major highways; lighter grey lines indicate primary roads and boulevards; green lines indicate cycleways.

Bike lanes offer an intriguing point of comparison alongside public transportation methods in examining urban infrastructure and accessibility. There is a notable relationship between the presence of bike lanes and socio-economic factors such as population density and income levels (Zhao et al., 2024). In densely populated urban areas such as Montreal, higher population density is strongly associated with an extensive and developed network of bike lanes. Compact urban settings increase the demand for alternative methods of non-motorized

transportation, encouraging the expansion of a cycling infrastructure to accommodate the needs of individuals relying on alternative transport methods.

Analyzing the visual representation of Montreal's bike lane network, a clear proximity between coworking spaces and the extent of this bike lane network emerges. This relationship can be attributed to higher population density and the presence of businesses and office spaces, which drive the demand for coworking spaces, as well as transit options, such as bike lanes. This can have benefits to the users of coworking spaces, offering them alternative modes of transportation. Furthermore, it depicts the correlation between population density and business/office location to the proximity of coworking spaces.

Conversely, in less densely populated areas, the network is less prevalent, which can be seen on the North and South Shores, West Island and other peripheral areas of the city. Interestingly, the coworking spaces in these areas are commonly found near the bike lanes, which can depict the correlation between population density and the need for alternative workspaces. This contrast between urban and suburban bike lanes highlights the interconnectedness of coworking space distribution with urban planning, population density and the availability of alternative transportation methods.

## Chapter 5 – Social Interaction & Community Building

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses one dimension of the thesis's central research question by examining how coworking spaces, as socio-material assemblages, produce and sustain social interaction under remote and flexible work arrangements. While coworking spaces are often celebrated as solutions to the isolation of remote work, this chapter interrogates the mechanisms through which this solution is proposed. In other words, the mechanisms through which sociality is assembled, stabilized, and experienced in these spaces. Drawing from ANT, this chapter explores how coworking spaces are networks of human and non-human actants, from managers, spatial arrangements, technologies, users, physical space, etc. that together co-produce the socio-material conditions for interaction, professional engagement and community building. Rather than taking community and sociality as a direct outcome of the space, ANT proposes to analyze how they are actively constructed through the extensive network formed in the space.

In parallel, the chapter incorporates a Foucaultian analysis of neoliberalism, particularly drawing from the concept of responsabilization, to consider how the space and its network shape and govern work subjectivities. Users are portrayed as flexible and self-managing workers, responsible for maintaining both productivity and social visibility within uncertain labour conditions. This resonates with Sennett's argument that flexible capitalism corrodes stable routines and long-term narratives of work, pushing people to continually perform adaptability and cooperation (Sennett, 1998). Coworking spaces are ambivalent infrastructures that promise both productivity and sociality, offering tools, routines, and atmospheres to enhance focus and output while fostering social connection and belonging. In this sense, coworkers are asked to be

both efficient and social, a dual demand that echoes Rose’s “entrepreneurial self” and the everyday self-management it entails (Rose, 1999).

This chapter is guided by a core dilemma: the tension between productivity and sociality. Coworking spaces promise both but often generate tensions between the two. While workers attempt to be productive, they also seek social connection — and these aims align only unevenly. Through an analysis of user narratives and practices, the chapter demonstrates how coworking spaces are dynamic spaces and actively play roles in shaping the balance between productivity and social connection in contemporary labour conditions.

## 5.2 Socio-Material Production in Coworking Spaces

The socio-material production of coworking spaces involves not only enabling work but choreographing the rhythms of productivity and social exchange. Coworking spaces emerged as hybrid infrastructures. These networks are designed to support productivity (through ergonomics, Wi-Fi, routines) while also facilitating social interaction (through co-presence, events, atmospheres). Yet the two goals frequently conflict: what enables sociality (buzz, openness) can undermine productivity (noise, distraction), and vice versa. Sociality in coworking spaces, in this sense, is not a precondition, but a socio-material outcome shaped by spatial arrangements, atmosphere, shifting user needs and user behaviours. As Latour reminds us, “the social is not a special domain of reality but a trail of associations between heterogeneous elements” (Latour, 2005, p. 5). In coworking, such associations include spatial affordances, technologies, and event formats that together enable and also limit both focused work and social encounter (Akrich, 1992; Callon, 1986). This view that reinforces the idea that both productivity and sociality in coworking spaces emerge through these various associations of elements.

### 5.2.1 Assembling Community through Presence

Coworking communities and their emergence can be understood through the socio-material alignment of multiple actors interacting together to respond to the limitations and drawbacks of remote work, particularly social isolation, team fragmentation, and the erosion of routines. What workers seek here is not only a desk or a workspace but a balance between concentration and sociability. Atmosphere must allow focus while also enabling encounters that counter the isolation of remote work. As Amelia put it:

“Moi, je veux que ça soit professionnel. Travailler chez moi, ce n’était pas mon but, il fallait un espace adapté à mon métier.”

This shows how coworking atmospheres are asked to deliver on both productivity and sociality, even though these aims often pull in different directions. This alignment is reinforced by numerous efforts from coworking space managers and owners whose efforts and design strategies attract, engage and support freelancers, remote workers and entrepreneurs. Coworking spaces offer proper ergonomics and social environments that simultaneously enable focus and interaction. Collectively these actants help to stabilize the coworking network. As Zoe, a manager, expressed:

“Notre objectif, c’est de créer des maillages entre eux. Que ça devienne aussi une opportunité de rencontrer un spécialiste en autre chose.”

Importantly, coworking has often been highlighted in the literature as an elective practice. Unlike traditional offices, participation is never imposed; it is sustained only when users repeatedly return and engage with others in the space. This has been echoed in Le Nadant’s (2018) research that specifically noted that community and its creation is purely voluntary and not imposed on its users. This voluntarism also aligns with the appeal of “third places” that offer sociability without the formalities of home or office (Oldenburg, 1999). Francois described this process as affective and intuitive:

“Je crois beaucoup au feeling. Donc, prends le temps et vraiment trouve ton espace.”

This “trial-and-error” selection process, testing different spaces, layouts, atmospheres and user groups, shows how belonging is not simply discovered but assembled and chosen by the coworkers. Spaces become meaningful through repeated acts of alignment. This takes many different forms and is user specific, such as choosing a location in close proximity to seamlessly integrate into daily routines and rhythms, adapting to noise and décor, and even gauging the “vibe” or the “buzz” produced by the space and its assemblage. For instance, Francois chose a space “à dix minutes à pieds de chez moi”, allowing him to flexibility attend half-days and still integrate home routines. By contrast, other users such as Marcus, emphasized that parking and accessibility are key to his choice, despite having a longer commute to get to and from the workspace. Parking allowed him to balance his family responsibilities with coworking attendance as he could easily pick up his children after work, something that would be more difficult if he had to pay for parking or commute with public transit.

Affective atmospheres, or the “vibe” of the space are central to every user. Lighting, décor, sound and occupancy all shape whether a space feels vibrant or not. As Annie and Sophia both remarked, when fewer coworker showed up, “ça répondait moins à mon besoin”, highlighting the value of co-presence in the coworking space. Furthermore, some like the flexibility that these spaces offered in tailoring their spaces, as compared to the more rigid structures of traditional office spaces. Amelia noted that she enjoyed having her closed office and being able to decorate and express her creativity. This closed office allowed her to decorate, paint and tailor the space to her liking, something that was impossible in her previous workplace where she only had a curtain as a divider. A closed office also allowed her to have a more

permanent setup for work, as compared to constantly having to store her equipment. Managers on their end also contributed to sustaining this vibe. As Julian explained:

“Le fait que je suis ici, les gens se sentent à l’aise de me parler... c’est leur espace et moi, je m’occupe que les choses se passent bien.”

Scholars have observed similar dynamics elsewhere. Richardson (2017) critiques coworking sociality as superficial, shaped more by branding and entrepreneurial identity than by solidarity. *Likewise*, Spinuzzi et al. (2019) note that managers actively curate interactions, showing how sociality is choreographed as much as it is spontaneous.

Julian, the new proprietor of a coworking space, mentioned that he had been a coworker for years and knew his peers very well. The previous owner wished to change business ventures and the coworking space needed a new owner to continue operating. Julian had mentioned that the previous owner was rarely present and so it was more difficult for users to mention pain points and improvements that could be brought on.

Yet, these vibes or atmospheres are not universally accessible and can at times be prohibitive. Language, costs, professional alignment and norms can often restrict participation in the co-creation of the atmosphere. While the branding of these spaces often emphasizes inclusivity, many spaces implicitly cater to specific professions or social groups, excluding those unable to afford the costly memberships or fit the professional profile. Examples of professions can vary from one space to another, from statisticians, to programmers, to 3d modelers to tattoo artists in some instances. Coworking spaces, in most cases cater to knowledge work, in other words, stationary and cognitively demanding roles that often are centered around the use of a

computer. In Montreal and its surroundings, for example, some coworking spaces cater to specific sectors, while pricing and membership models vary considerably. Options range from single day passes to flexible monthly arrangements, with costs stretching from a few hundred dollars to several thousand per month, thereby reinforcing exclusivity.

In short, the communities in coworking are less about pre-existing bonds, or discovering bonds but more about affective alignment and co-creation. Belonging is contingent on attendance, co-presence, and the overall vibe or atmosphere of the space. This fragility makes coworking spaces dynamic but also unstable sites of social life. Rather than uncovering pre-existing relationships, affective alignment refers to the way users, objects and spatial cues come to resonate with each other. Co-creation, in this sense, emphasizes that community is performed into existence through repeated interactions and the assemblage of both human and non-human elements, rather than being discovered or pre-existing. As Thrift (2008, p. 175) suggests, “affects are not owned or contained by subjects but circulate through bodies, technologies and spaces, creating fleeting alignments and forms of togetherness.” In the case of coworking spaces, these alignments are sustained only as long as these networks remain active.

### 5.2.2 COVID-19: Interruptions and Rediscoveries

Although coworking networks had been stabilizing for years, the COVID-19 pandemic acted both as a catalyst—highlighting the value of co-presence—and as a rupture, disrupting the fragile alignments that sustained these spaces. Public health measures, such as social distancing, restricted gatherings and imposed curfews throughout the province of Quebec (INSPQ, 2023), had detrimental impacts on some spaces. Many workers described this period as extremely isolation and disruptive to their routines, social contact and social interactions. This disrupted both the productivity routines of workers (loss of structure, difficulty focusing) and the social

rhythms that coworking had sustained (loss of co-presence, growing isolation). In many cases, coworkers stopped attending coworking spaces altogether as memberships were cancelled or suspended, and daily attendance sharply decline or, at times, was completely non-existent. Spaces that had once been lively became empty, depriving workers of the buzz and informal encounters that had previously sustained both social and productive energy. Early assessments of pandemic work patterns noted both productivity frictions and the loss of everyday social cues that scaffold concentration and belonging (Sostero et al., 2020). From an ANT perspective, the pandemic ruptured the coworking network, dismantling established alignments, as the associations temporarily broke down. Without these everyday interactions, the network could no longer stabilize itself, exposing its dependence on continuous co-presence. But it also initiated new processes of reconfiguration as spaces, users, and technologies sought to adapt to altered conditions. Merkel (2015) highlights how coworking serves as a form of boundary work, enabling freelancers to reintroduce spatial and temporal separation between home and work. Through routines, commutes, and the act of “going to work,” coworkers materially and symbolically reconstruct boundaries that facilitate discipline, focus, and productivity. With its persistence us of remote work due to public health concerns, the pandemic underscored both the fragility and the importance of these ritualized practices.

Both the human and non-human actants, such as the physical location, furniture and other equipment found in it, that structured this space were temporarily dismantled or significantly altered, which forced a certain renegotiation of their roles throughout and following the pandemic. For instance, ANDREANNE, a manager of a coworking space on the North Shore, mentioned that the access to the space was done with biometric security, more specifically with a fingerprint reader. Although this was an extremely practical, simple and effective way to access

the space, the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic prevented its users from safely accessing the space. To mitigate this issue, a new access method was implemented, with significant delays due to the public health measures. During this dark period, many other restrictions changed how spaces could be used and how people interacted. Common areas were closed or strictly limited, which disrupted the casual encounters, shared routines, and social atmosphere that had made coworking meaningful.

On the other hand, the pandemic amplified the sociomateriality fragility of work as a whole. The need for impromptu interaction, routines and physical co-presence of other workers were highlighted for many workers. This highlighted the ongoing dependence on physical spaces for sustaining sociality. For many workers, the shift to a fully remote *modus operandi* was extremely isolating and depressing. This prompted a new problematization of remote work and a renewed demand for alternatives. In many other ways, coworking spaces had to adapt and reconfigure their business model, material and digital infrastructures to accommodate the evolving needs of the remote workforce. This illustrates how coworking networks remain fragile and contingent: disruptions and breakdowns force continuous adaptation if they are to endure. The pandemic revealed this clearly, as shifts in work policies and changing user demographics required coworking spaces to recalibrate their rhythms of co-presence and reassemble their communities.

Prior to the pandemic, the target demographic of some of these spaces catered mostly to freelancers, business owners and autonomous workers. With the onset of the pandemic and the economic uncertainty paired with the fear of the virus, caused a huge shift in membership and coworking use.

“Le premier mois du coworking, on a perdu peut-être la moitié de nos membres. Tout le monde est comme, je n’ai plus de job.” – Victor, Manager

Following the pandemic, coworking spaces have seen completely changed userbases and members. Demographics have also changed, giving opportunities for employees with remote and hybrid work arrangements to frequent these locations to have a break from the isolation at home. Whereas coworking previously attracted mainly freelancers and entrepreneurs seeking flexibility and community (Merkel, 2015; Gandini, 2015; Le Nadant et al., 2018), my interviews show that a new segment of salaried remote employees have since joined these spaces. This shift is significant because it signals the “normalization” of coworking as part of mainstream work arrangements rather than an alternative to them. For many participants, coworking now serves as a middle ground offering the social energy and structure lost in home offices without the rigidity of corporate spaces, echoing the same balance between productivity and sociality identified throughout the literature.

“Tous ceux qui étaient là pré-pandémie, il y a peut-être un 10% là-dedans qui est de retour, mais sinon, c’est carrément nouveau.” – Isabel, Manager

In the aftermath, and even during the pandemic, coworking spaces underwent a process of reinvention and adaptation. They often positioned themselves as key mediators of work sociality. These spaces and networks have had to navigate the evolving work and public health landscape, while maintaining neoliberal imperatives such as self-regulation and autonomy but also curating personal work environments that are both professional while being conducive to

productivity and social interaction. While the need for sociality and structure had always been central to coworking (Merkel, 2015; Gandini, 2015), the pandemic amplified its importance by showing how fragile these networks could be when in-person interactions disappeared. As such, beyond merely providing a workspace, coworking spaces have responded to the growing need for impromptu and structure social interaction, offering a middle ground or a hybrid between the isolation of remote work and the rigidity of traditional office spaces. Offering both casual and purposeful interactions, professional networks can be reinforced while providing its users with a sense of belonging.

Their ability to continuously adapt to the changing landscape that is labor demands, and corporate policies will inevitably determine their continued relevance. Some of these coworking spaces have reestablished their networks and have successfully adapted, however, many have struggled to change and regain the stability they once had. Ultimately, coworking's future depends on whether these fragile networks of co-presence and atmosphere can be sustained, despite ongoing disruptions.

“La pandémie est arrivée à peu près, grosso modo, un an après qu'on ait été ouverts. Ça a fait très mal au point de vue financier.” – Clara, Manager

### 5.2.3 Community or Commodification? The Ambivalence of Sociality

From an ANT perspective, the productivity–sociality balance is continuously negotiated: sociality sustains productivity, yet productivity imperatives often instrumentalize social relations. Sociality here is fragile, continuously generated and renegotiated through associations. Latour (2005, p. 65) reminds us, “the social is not what holds us together but what is held together.”. As

such, sociality exists through the interplay between users, managers, spatial arrangement and technologies. Sociality in coworking is often instrumentalized toward productivity — being alongside others sustains motivation, visibility, and employability, even when genuine ties are absent. Networking becomes both a social and productive demand. Often it rests on the comfort of being alongside others. This mirrors Wittel’s diagnosis of “network sociality,” where ties are maintained for visibility and opportunity rather than depth (Wittel, 2001), and is echoed in coworking research on instrumental collaboration (Gandini, 2015; Spinuzzi et al., 2019). As François explained: “Si tu as un meeting, c’est no go. Mais à me concentrer sur quelque chose, genre si je dois rédiger un doc, si je dois lire un article scientifique, j’aime bien avoir ce brouhaha autour de moi.” His comment highlights that for some, the value of coworking lies less in engagement than in the presence of others nearby. At the same time, this presence is precarious and not always consistent. When the atmosphere thins out and fewer people attend, the sense of belonging to the space quickly collapses and user needs no longer feel fulfilled. As Sophia reflected: “Les dernières fois que je suis allée aussi, il y avait un petit peu moins de monde. Fait que là, ça répondait moins à mon besoin...” Her account illustrates how coworking sociality is fragile: it depends on rhythms of co-presence that can easily falter, leaving the space feeling hollow rather than supportive. The coworking space itself does not guarantee community. Rather, it provides the material conditions that might help create and maintain it through the layouts, rituals, co-presence. For instance, workers have diverse goals in the space, but their interactions are mediated by the array of actants that exist within the space.

Sociality in coworking is contingent and dynamic. It stabilizes only when rhythms of co-presence are maintained — when infrastructures, events, and spatial configurations support interaction. When these rhythms falter, the sense of community quickly dissolves. Conversely,

disruptions, such as policy changes, shifts in work arrangements, or technological updates, can reconfigure or even dissolve these associations. Thus, coworking sociality is not a fixed trait but a negotiated and continuously enacted process, where actors must be enrolled and aligned for it to materialize. As Gandini (2015) describes, coworking fosters a form of “network sociality” — connections sustained for visibility and employability rather than deep ties. Similarly, Sennett (1998) warns that flexible capitalism corrodes stable routines, re-casting cooperation as performance. Together, these perspectives highlight how social relations in coworking are increasingly instrumental, serving as both a resource for productivity and a form of self-branding within neoliberal work cultures. This is the source of coworking’s ambivalence: spaces can feel vibrant and resonant one day, and hollow or instrumental the next.

The instrumental nature of coworking sociality also points toward a broader transformation of work subjectivities. The same dynamics that make social interaction productive are tied to neoliberal forms of responsabilization, where workers must continually perform and manage their professional image. This tension between social connection and self-discipline leads directly to the question of how professionalism and visibility are enacted within coworking spaces.

### 5.3 Professionalism, Visibility and Responsibilization

Coworking spaces are also sites where neoliberal subjectivities are both produced and reproduced. Workers are responsabilized to act as self-managing professionals who must maintain productivity while remaining socially visible and engaged. As such, they have to structure their own time, regulate their productivity, maintain a form of professional visibility as well as continue to maintain their professional networks in the absence of more traditional institutional networks that previously existed. This reflects Rose’s (1999) concept of the

“entrepreneurial self” as an individual who internalizes market rationality and sees labour as a personal project that has to be constantly maintained. As Sennett (1998) argues, flexible capitalism corrodes stable routines, demanding constant adaptability and output. Contrary to traditional offices, coworking spaces lack the rigid hierarchy and imposed routines that comes along. In ANT terms, discipline is redistributed into material and procedural “scripts” that guide behaviour without overt command (Akrich, 1992). Instead, workers have to find their own form of discipline, professionalism and routines, often mediated through soft form of governance. Community norms, spatial cues, and peer expectations are some examples of soft governance that help workers have this routine and discipline in the space. Coworking spaces don’t simply provide flexibility but responsabilize workers to manage the contradictions of productivity and sociality simultaneously: they must maintain disciplined output while also sustaining a visible, networked presence.

### 5.3.1 Freelancers, Workers, and the the Balance of Productivity and Sociality

Coworking spaces are characterised by the presence of workers, or coworkers, thus making them the principal actors within the space. Whether freelancers, remote employees, entrepreneurs, business owners, or even hybrid workers, their presence and continued use of the space helps construct it. Sociality and professional dynamics are not given outcomes but processes that occur within the continuous interaction between members of the space. The routines, interactions, habits, patterns and use of the space directly shapes the environment, while also being shaped by it. These factors also contribute to the stabilization or, on the contrary, the destabilization of the network.

Unlike traditional offices, choosing to work from a coworking space allows individuals to tailor their environment to achieve the right balance between productivity and social connection.

Yet this autonomy is double-edged. From an Actor-Network Theory perspective, it requires workers to constantly re-align the human and material elements that make work possible like spaces, technologies, routines, and social interactions. Without institutional scripts or oversight, individuals become responsible for stabilizing their own networks of productivity and social connection. This constant calibration of space, affect, and performance turns autonomy into a form of labour in itself, reflecting the broader neoliberal demand that workers continually optimize their environments and selves. Sennett argues that precisely this short-term, project-based calibration unsettles character and erodes stable commitments, even as it rewards performative flexibility (Sennett, 1998). This is in line with neoliberal ideals where workers are empowered to make sensible and logical decisions concerning their work. This decision is often motivated by other external considerations, rather than pure necessity. Many interviewees noted that the co-presence of others positively influenced their experience, even in cases where there were no direct interactions with others. In coworking spaces, unlike traditional offices, work environments are selected, which leads to more organic forms of interactions rather than a form of hierarchical pressure or coercion.

Workers tested cafés, coworking spaces, and libraries to calibrate this balance. Here again, autonomy translates into a responsibility to optimize both productivity and sociality — a central neoliberal demand placed on contemporary workers. These spaces were often tested multiple times to really figure out the specifics that were desired and properly fit their needs. Multiple factors such as occupancy, noise and distractions, and infrastructure that was provided, were assessed during the visits and testing periods. Regularity in the use and attendance of the spaces helped foster a sense of trust, relationships, knowledge exchange and collaboration among members. Something much more likely to occur in a coworking space in comparison to more

transient settings such as a café or a library. In the neoliberal context, workers function as responsabilized subjects. Their success depends on their ability to select the “right” space, regulate their own productivity, and maintain a professional image — all without institutional support. At the same time, many also seek routine, companionship, or a sense of belonging, showing that coworking is driven as much by affective and social needs as by productivity. Their presence can help introduce norms, expectations and habits to new users. Their participation in events, interactions and rituals determine the extent to which sociality can be fostered within the space.

“Pour ceux qui cherchent des espaces, je pense que l’important, c’est vraiment de tester.

Moi, je crois beaucoup au feeling. Donc, prends le temps et vraiment trouve ton espace.”

– Francois, Coworker

The presence of others fosters engagements and interactions; however, it is also important to note that the absence of it can have destabilizing effects on the space. This can lead to the disruption of the network overtime. Some days are less popular, which leads to less use on specific days when trends have been noticed. In more extreme cases, the attendance may be further reduced or completely abandoned altogether. This was a challenge that was also noticed during and after the pandemic, where some locations struggled to regain a stable userbase. In some cases, coworking spaces shut down temporarily, and in some cases, completely. This highlights the need for continuous engagement, participation and attendance of human actants in the space for the network to continue to succeed. When co-presence thins, the felt rewards of

attendance diminish, a dynamic consistent with studies showing that the “payoff” of coworking hinges on sustaining shared rhythms (Parrino, 2015; Spinuzzi et al., 2019).

“Les dernières fois que je suis allée aussi, il y avait un petit peu moins de monde. Fait que là, ça répondait moins à mon besoin...” – Sophia, Coworker

Another valued aspect of coworking spaces is also their heterogeneous userbase. Contrary to traditional office spaces, where workers typically sit with the rest of their team, coworking spaces expose individuals to various backgrounds. This exposure is conducive to creativity, collaboration, innovation and mostly encouraging and leads to interesting interactions among members. This diversity is defined not by the coworking space or the network, but through the human actants that share the space. It’s a key differentiator from other workspaces and even from cafés. Trust needs time to be built, and the transient interaction in a café or a library wouldn’t build a connection that leads to a form of knowledge exchange. On the other hand, corporate structures have a hierarchy or a goal-orientation rather than a fluid and self-directed objective in interactions.

“Ça amène une vie. Ça amène à des collaborations que tu n’aurais jamais pensées.” – Julian, Manager

The co-presence of multiple human actants can also be a point of tension for some users. Confidentiality, noise, distractions and competition are all factors that have often been mentioned or discussed in the literature (Garrett, 2017; Richardson, 2017; Bouncken and Reuschl, 2018).

These factors are considerations in the decision-making process, but also an ongoing process in how and when coworking spaces are used. Some participants reported that their attendance was often tailored and influenced by other factors such as meetings and calls, opting to work from home on days requiring greater privacy. In other cases, where productivity was a focus, social cues can be used to manage interaction and reduce distractions, such as wearing headphones, or using a more isolated desk or space. The flexibility that is offered with these spaces enables human actants to self-regulate their attendance, occupation and extent of engagement.

“Si tu as un meeting, c’est no go. Mais à me concentrer sur quelque chose, genre si je dois rédiger un doc, si je dois lire un article scientifique, j’aime bien avoir ce brouhaha autour de moi.” – Francois, Coworker

Workers are active users and co-creators of the professional and social networks that exist in coworking spaces. Their presence, interactions and participation shape the atmosphere, interactions and ultimately, the survival of the space itself. Without paying customers, long-term viability can’t be assured, and many spaces, according to managers, do not operate on a for-profit basis, but rather cover their expenses without necessarily generating a profit through their use.

### 5.3.2 The Curators of Entrepreneurial Community

Coworking space managers and owners, in the context of ANT, can be perceived as key mediators, responsible for maintaining both the sociality and material stability (Latour, 2005; Capdevilla, 2015). Their role is to assure the proper functioning of the space, its long-term viability, and continued improvements. In addition, they also actively shape the environment by curating an environment that is conducive to social interaction, as well as organizing formal and

non-form networking events and seminars. This can be as simple as organizing a birthday lunch for a member, to a more “formal” 5@7 event in the space. Contrary to traditional office spaces, managers do not enforce a strict hierarchy, but more of a community-driven framework. In doing so, managers subtly shape norms of behaviour, professionalism, and engagement. Their role blends hospitality and discipline — organizing events, curating atmospheres, and encouraging productive presence without coercive authority. Yet this sociality is not always tied to productivity. Several interviewees described a desire for connection that was detached from professional obligation — moments of casual talk, shared meals, or companionship that provided comfort rather than strategic value. This ambiguity underscores that coworkers do not only want to be efficient entrepreneurs but also seek the everyday sociability and friendship often missing from remote work.

“Le fait que je suis ici, les gens se sentent à l’aise de me parler... C’est leur espace. Moi, je m’occupe que les choses se passent bien.” – Julian, Manager

One of the primary roles and responsibilities is to curate an environment that encourages interaction and engagement. Networking events, workshops, seminars, social gatherings, all reinforce social bonds and lead to both social and professional exchanges among the members. However, their roles can go beyond event planning. Managers can play informal roles in connecting individuals who may benefit from one another. Introducing coworkers to one another, forming partnerships, encouraging knowledge sharing in organic and structured ways. For instance, VICTOR a manager of a coworking space, organizes events every month. In this artistic event, he, and other members of the space, create an immersive audio-visual experience

that is open to visitors. Leading to this monthly event, he regularly holds “jam sessions”, in these events, coworkers co-create an atmospheric and psychedelic experience. These “jam sessions” aren’t merely musical moments, but experience that reinforce the collective and creative nature of the space.

“ Ce soir, on jam à 7 heures. Même si tu joues à un instrument de musique. [...] C'est vraiment une musique qui est spirituelle. Qui passe à travers nous. Qui ne nous appartient pas. On essaie d'être comme des antennes qui connectent.” - Victor, Manager

Managers, as previously mentioned, play numerous roles in the spaces that go well beyond social facilitation. They are responsible for managing and maintaining non-human actants in the space, a topic that will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. Access and reservation systems ensure smooth access to the space for the users. Wi-Fi, furniture and amenities ensure that work can be done in a productive and efficient manner. Amenities such as coffee, tea, snacks, lounge areas, etc. are non-essential features of the space but can greatly enhance the experience of individuals. Custodial services, cleaning and proper maintenance also ensures that the space will continue to function and will accommodate its users. Upholding basic comfort and hygiene can have significant impacts on the overall user experience. As such, active presence of an on-site manager seems to positively influence how members interact with the space and their overall satisfaction. The absence of management had lower level of engagement and dissatisfaction among members, additionally, it can be harder to anticipate the evolving needs of the members and improvements that can be made to the space. These insights suggest that coworking spaces are not simply neutral backdrops for flexible work, but carefully

structured environments where autonomy and discipline are tightly interwoven. The following section considers how infrastructure itself acts as a mediator between these logics — shaping behaviour, embedding expectations, and enabling (or restricting) coworker agency.

“Les gens se sentaient seuls dans tout ça. Ils ne se sentaient pas écoutés. Le fait que je suis ici, les gens se sentent à l’aise de me parler.” – Julian, Manager

## 5.4 Between Care and Control: Infrastructures of Behaviour

Coworking spaces operate at the intersection of two logics: they are infrastructures of care that sustain both productivity and co-presence, while also acting as disciplinary environments that subtly structure conduct, regulate interaction, and responsabilize coworkers. As Clara, a manager, explained: “Tu viens ici parce que tu veux être productif, mais tu dois te créer ta propre structure.” Her observation reflects how coworking users are expected to construct and maintain their own disciplinary routines in the absence of formal oversight. Drawing on ANT, this section considers how non-human elements, such as space, technologies and amenities, act as mediators that co-construct sociality and regulate behaviour. From a Foucaultian perspective, these same arrangements constitute a *dispositif* (Foucault, 1980): an apparatus that governs not by coercion but through spatial design, architecture and soft guidance through everyday routines. This tension, between care and control, shapes how coworkers experience coworking not only as a site of freedom, but also as a subtle constraint.

From open desk layouts to flexible seating arrangements to communal areas and shared kitchen spaces, the various areas of a coworking space guide social norms, productivity, and sociality between members. For instance, an open layout promotes visibility and impromptu

social interactions, while lounge areas and kitchens are more conducive to informal zones of engagement. These are prescriptive materialities that subtly guide how coworkers behave, interact, and move through the space. This spatial scripting can enhance and constrain different forms of sociality. Vibrant environments can be beneficial for some users, while others seek isolation, privacy and reduced stimulation. As one manager noted: “*C’est un espace de création... Les gens veulent être dans un environnement créatif, inspirant, tout ça, une vibe autre qu’un espace de bureau.*” (Victor, manager). The atmosphere of the space, such as the lighting, décor, ambiance, presence of windows and sunlight, also serve as non-human actants, shaping how coworkers behave. Technologies—such as Wi-Fi routers, booking systems, Slack channels, and access tools like keys, biometrics, and security chips—function not only as enablers of work, but also as subtle coordinators of presence, rhythm, and access. They orchestrate presence, access, structure time, but can also facilitate interaction. These various tools regulate participation, work and reinforce rhythms and behaviours for each worker. In this way, coworking infrastructures operate as mechanisms of control, embedding norms, routines and behaviours. The following section will further explore these non-human actants as active participants in the production of work culture, social interaction, and labour subjectivity. Together, these socio-material infrastructures form the foundation upon which coworking sociality and subjectivity are continuously enacted, regulated, and recalibrated.

#### 5.4.1 Spatial Arrangements and the Discipline of Work

Spatial arrangements shape not only how social interactions occur, but also how behaviours are structured and disciplined within coworking environments. According to interviews, open areas are particularly conducive to fostering social interaction among members;

they tend to minimize physical and psychological barriers, making it easier for individuals to engage and connect (Bouncken and Reuschl, 2018; Capdevila, 2015). Spatial configuration studies similarly show that visibility and proximity raise encounter rates but can also increase distraction, forcing continual boundary-work (Allen & Henn, 2007; Oldenburg, 1999). To address this, some individuals prefer to rent out closed offices in coworking spaces or utilize various cues to indicate to their peers that they are currently working and do not wish to be disturbed. Wearing headphones—a widely cited tactic among coworkers—serves as a soft boundary, signalling non-availability without explicit rules. For some, the open layout fosters significant interaction but can be overwhelming, prompting them to use the space less frequently, seek quieter places on busier days, or others opt for closed offices to reduce distractions and regain control over their workspace. Conversely, workers situated in isolated areas of the coworking space may rarely interact with others, transforming the space from a vibrant social hub into a routine work zone with limited interaction (MARCUS). However, the workspace of a team or an individual is only half of what coworking spaces tend to offer. As members, shared and common areas are present where individuals can converse, interact and socialize. Thus, the size of the coworking space and the type of office or desk chosen can profoundly influence the level of social interaction that is experienced.

“Les espaces ouverts permettent des échanges spontanés, mais en même temps, si tu as des ‘meetings’, c’est no go.” – Francois, Coworker

Access to windows, natural light, and pleasant views also appear to enhance members' overall well-being, encouraging attendance and fostering a sense of community within the space.

These factors are often considered in workplace design (Vischer, 2008). For some, being confined to a specific location due to various constraints doesn't illicit any skepticism about the spaces and renders it a "mere office" rather than a great location to work in (Kamran). For others, the benefit of dedicated office space and a way to "let loose" is a refreshing alternative to working from home (ANNIE, EMMA). The ability to spread out, rather than being confined to a makeshift office on a dining room table, provides greater comfort and mitigates many of the daily disruptions associated with multi-use home environments. Many interviewed individuals expressed a desire to escape traditional office arrangements, as well as escape the makeshift home office. To this end, the décor of coworking spaces can often deviate from more conventional office designs, opting for a more "cozy", personalized and artistic feeling. Décor can follow seasonal trends and holidays, and greatly enhance the experiences of coworkers, creating a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, particularly enhancing the more relaxed and informal nature of these spaces. Additionally, this atmosphere can also enhance productivity and creativity for many individuals. Coworkers highlighted their opportunities to customize their workspace, noting that adding a personal note contributes to their comfort and overall satisfaction. This can often be a conversation started with their peers and shows their personality enhancing the community. In more formal office settings, such customization is often impossible, or complicated to implement. Additionally, this personalization can help co-create an atmosphere in the space overall. Contributing with coworkers to enhance this atmosphere, which is a welcome change from home offices. Beyond improving well-being, and enhancing productivity and creativity, the informal and relaxed atmosphere fosters more organic and frequent interactions between members. Managers often make deliberate spatial design choices to support rhythms of work and well-being, as Clara illustrates:

“Un des points qui est vraiment, en tout cas, particulier, probablement ici, c’est le fait qu’on n’a pas énormément de fenêtres et on a choisi de privilégier les fenêtres pour les postes de travail, là où les gens travaillent à cœur de jour, alors que les salles de réunion n’ont pas tant accès à des fenêtres que ça. Pourquoi? [...] Ça, ça a été des discussions, puis un choix qui a été fait de façon réfléchi.” – Clara, Manager

Unsurprisingly, areas such as kitchens and lounge areas were key facilitators of social interaction. Communal spaces for eating, casual conversations, and impromptu meetings and encounters greatly enhanced the communal aspect of the space, as well as the coworking experience. Some locations featured outdoor areas, which during the warmer months, can further enhance sociality and connection between members. Due to the somewhat scheduled nature of work, these spaces often held more ritualized meetings and gatherings. Shared routines and informal synchronicity also shape how sociality unfolds in coworking environments. As Amélie noted: *“J’aime bien que les gens arrivent plus ou moins à la même heure... on dirait que ça donne un beat à ma journée.”* This rhythmic alignment helps anchor the workday and reinforces coworking as a socially attuned practice. Coworkers shared meals and met at this common space at somewhat regular intervals. These spaces also served as venues for informal and formal meetings, fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, networking and engagement between coworkers, other guests, and managers of the space. Similarly, meeting rooms, an essential feature of coworking spaces, play an important role in facilitating these more formal meetings. Importantly, these rooms are accessible to guests, which broadens their utility, but also exposes the coworking space to more individuals, adding to the serendipitous nature of these spaces.

Beyond the internal layout, spatial accessibility also shapes how social and professional routines develop. The ability to easily reach a coworking space determines not only attendance but also the frequency and regularity of these shared rhythms. Delving deeper into accessibility, coworking spaces currently operate in many different locations and individuals have greater flexibility in choosing an appropriate location. Commute times were a recurring deciding factor for many. The consensus was that a commute of fifteen to twenty minutes was ideal. Traditional office spaces are fixed and can't be moved, this represents an important gain, as many coworkers have drastically cut down on their commute times. This has many different repercussions, such as enhancing their presence in the space, in comparison to their traditional office spaces. Hour-long commutes reinforce the idea that their time is currently being wasted, especially in a post-pandemic state where remote work was shown as a potentially viable alternative to these longer commutes. As such, individuals saw that their in-person attendance, at least in comparison to the office, drastically increased, providing greater opportunities for social interaction.

Opening hours and accessibility were a point of contention for many owners and users. Flexibility can easily be enhanced or restricted due to building and workplace policies. While some coworking spaces permit 24/7 access, this isn't universal. Restrictions on access after standard working hours may arise due to building regulations, hosted events in the space, as well as membership tiers. For instance, day pass users often are required to leave the space when management and the staff leave the space. Users and managers alike frequently cited 24/7 access as an extremely valuable perk. In cases where it was unavailable, managers viewed it as a major drawback and were, at the time of the interview, searching for alternative locations to mitigate this issue (Andreanne et al CIE tech). Although this flexibility was rarely fully utilized by coworkers, the occasional necessity was a deterring factor for potential users to a specific space.

This limitation has adverse effects, such as discouraging prospecting members, reducing the size of the overall community and, thus, hindering the growth of the space. While physical access alone may not create sociality, it influences who can participate in shared rhythms and thus shapes the size and cohesion of the coworking community. Additionally, for the workers who prefer weekends or late nights, this can be a catalyst for closer bonds with peers present at those times. Fewer people in the office can, for introverted individuals, facilitate contact and interaction with others.

Compared to traditional office spaces and home office spaces, coworking spaces are inherently more conducive to social interaction due to their spatial arrangement. Home offices, with their inherent limitations and privacy concerns, discourage shared use, though such arrangements sometimes take place. Traditional office spaces often lack the open layout and communal spaces of coworking spaces. Open layouts increase visibility and foster communication among workers, setting coworking spaces apart as more socially engaging environments. Furthermore, their location can be inconvenient for workers, increasing commute times.

#### 5.4.2 Amenities and Infrastructure as Soft Control

Beyond physical layout, coworking spaces use amenities and infrastructure to subtly shape behaviour, facilitate sociality, and maintain user engagement. Available resources create opportunities for collaboration and networking, and provide amenities for those who wish to visit these spaces. Standard amenities—desks, Wi-Fi, lighting, coffee stations, and shared kitchens—enable basic functionality and provide common ground for user interaction. Some additional amenities can include reception areas, projectors, technological equipment, gyms, storage, etc. which can also enhance usage and the sociality of the space.

These essential amenities, such as Wi-Fi, lighting and power sources, along with the physical spaces have obvious implications in enabling the sociality of the space. Internet and electricity permit users to adequately work in the spaces, encouraging continued use and the perpetuation of the coworking concept. Furthermore, Wi-Fi, combined with conferencing tools, allows coworkers to maintain external networks and extend the reach of their social interaction beyond the space.

Shared amenities such as lounge areas, kitchens and coffee stations serve as hubs where members will naturally gather. These communal spaces are accessible to all coworkers and are designed to facilitate impromptu encounters and conversations. This can lead to meaningful connections and professional networking. For instance, a shared coffee machine provides a setting for spontaneous discussions, which can lead to knowledge sharing, collaboration and more stable relationships between members. Similarly to traditional office spaces, these spaces are easily accessible and represent high-traffic areas that are lacking in home offices. Event spaces, sometimes found in coworking spaces, also contribute to an increase in social interaction. Some spaces hold events to share knowledge, creations and art forms. Most of these showcase a form of collaboration between members where each contributes to specific parts. These events also build relationships but also enhance the vibrancy of the community and share them with guests and others. Most notably, (JASON) mentioned that each member takes part in a monthly immersive experience that incorporates various expertise of each community member. Held monthly during full moons, these events highlight how coworking spaces become sites of collective creativity, where tools, infrastructure, and shared rhythms converge. This is a perfect example of collaboration, co-creation and participation in a community. The “jam sessions” occur within the space at night, where they use various tools, amenities and musical instruments

that are found within the space. These all contribute to the development of the community, the creation of their art as well as the social interaction between various members in an effort of collaboration.

“Le coworking doit aller au-delà de la simple location d’espace. Il doit proposer d’autres services et créer une communauté active.” – Zoe, Manager

Other infrastructure such as meeting and conference rooms can also be catalysts for collaboration and knowledge sharing. These rooms, equipped with whiteboards and projectors, support collaboration while offering spatial privacy—blending visibility with discretion. This fosters a culture of mutual learning and collaboration and overall allows individuals to brainstorm together and tackle more intricate tasks. Additionally, these can offer more privacy and confidentiality for their users, allowing them to meet clients in an isolated and private environment. On the other hand, many co-working spaces also offer phone booths, which provide an isolated and private environment for those who have longer meetings and phone calls. Phone booths mitigate the need to work from home due to privacy concerns, allowing workers to remain in the space while managing confidentiality. This further enhances the quality of life of coworking members, encouraging them to continue to frequent the space and limiting the downsides of working from the space. These infrastructural features illustrate how space is curated not only for comfort but also to regulate flow, behaviour, and time within the coworking environment. In some cases, the popularity of the phone booths was notable, and plans to add unit were strongly hinted at by the manager. This was the case for CIE TECH, who stated the convenience, but also the hassle-free use of these amenities when coming to a coworking space.

“Les cabines téléphoniques insonorisées, c'est ce qui manque le plus... Ça permettrait aux gens de gérer des appels sans être dérangés ou déranger les autres.” – François, Coworker

Although not an extremely popular amenity, wellness and recreational amenities were sometimes included with the use of the coworking space. Gyms, meditation rooms and in one case an ice-rink and basketball court allow members to collaborate in other wellness activities. This also promotes physical and mental well-being, while utilizing the expertise of some of the users of the space by hosting events held by members of the space. In some cases, yoga instructors, for instance, also held another position, requiring them to use a coworking space, but were nonetheless able to host various events in the coworking space. In a similar vein, outdoor spaces can also, as previously mentioned, support sociality. Favorable weather conditions, a rarity in Montreal, allows members to engage in outdoor activities and events. It also enables work in an outdoor environment, with a form of privacy and security, in comparison to working from a café. Amenities are not neutral; they act as infrastructural agents that orchestrate behaviour, structure time, and cultivate a rhythm of presence that reinforces coworking's sociability. These amenities distinguish such spaces from home offices and traditional offices. Furthermore, it encourages presence in the space and enables individuals to have positive work experiences, further enabling the enactment of sociality.

## 5.5 Productivity and Sociality: Negotiating the Balance

Coworking spaces are celebrated as infrastructures that promise both productivity and social connection. Yet these ideals are entangled with deeper contradictions: the same spaces designed to enhance focus and collaboration can also produce tension between concentration and community. As the final section of this chapter, this discussion brings together three key dynamics explored in this chapter: the socio-material production of sociality, the shaping of subjectivities, and the lived negotiation of productivity and social connection within flexible yet uncertain labour conditions.

Coworker frequently described the ability to choose when and where work takes place in their daily activities, which seems to be a big selling point of flexible work arrangements and coworking spaces. However, there are drawbacks and limitations wherein this flexibility often functions less as a privilege and more as a workaround to structural absences—like unstable income, care responsibilities, or lack of institutional support. It's a way to manage client fluctuations, family obligation and their mental health in the absence of traditional support networks in office spaces. As Francois shared: “On pouvait arrêter de travailler tout seul de chez soi [...] et rejoindre des espaces de coworking”. This return to a more structured environment such as a coworking space was not driven by office nostalgia, but by the limitation of working alone in a space that wasn't initially designed to work in. Similarly, he noted that “Je ne voulais pas être dans un café, mais chez moi ce n'était pas une option nonplus. Le coworking, c'est entre les deux.”.

Coworkers are continuously managing their time, productivity and professional visibility. They are responsible for choosing their workspace, engaging with their peers, and striking the right balance between focus and sociality. This reflects Foucault's notion of governmentality,

where power operates not through coercion but through internalized norms and self-discipline. Coworkers are responsabilized to manage their productivity, curate professional presence, and absorb the risks of unstable labour markets. As Clara, a manager, described, “Tu viens ici parce que tu veux être productif, mais tu dois créer ta propre structure.”. For some users, flexibility can also become an additional source of stress. Some coworkers even feel obligated to justify their presence—or more often, their absence—because of the sunk cost of membership fees. As Sophia expressed, “Je viens surtout les jours où je me sens productive. Mais quand il n’y a pas assez de monde, j’ai l’impression que ça ne vaut pas la peine.”. This illustrates the affective dimension of coworking, feeling seen, being in a dynamic environment, staying motivated and being surrounded by others. In this sense, coworking spaces are built around a double demand: they promise productive focus while simultaneously fostering community. Yet, these two ideals do not always align. The same openness that encourages interaction can disrupt concentration, and the desire for social connection can conflict with the need for solitary focus. Coworking spaces respond to these competing pressures but rarely resolve them. In sum, they offer flexibility within a framework that continually asks workers to perform both efficiently and socially. The central tension, then, lies between productivity and sociality — between the imperative to remain focused and visible, and the equally human desire to connect and belong. Coworking spaces mediate this tension, offering neither pure isolation nor full community, but a socio-material compromise shaped by both care and control.

## Chapter 6 – Reinforcing Work-Life Boundaries

One of the most visible challenges of remote and hybrid work has been the erosion of boundaries between professional and personal life, a tension widely reported by workers navigating new work arrangements. Building on this thesis’s central research question, this chapter examines how coworking spaces shape labour experiences by materially and socially reinforcing work-life boundaries, while maintaining flexibility and autonomy. Home offices, or makeshift home offices, offer greater autonomy to the workers but erode the boundaries delimiting work and personal lives. As Marcus described: “When I worked from home, I was always half-working, half-doing house chores. It felt like I never really stopped working, because my computer was always there”. This blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries between work and home reflects a broader transformation of labour under flexible capitalism. As Richard Sennett (1998) observes, “the new capitalism dismantles the routines that once gave workers a sense of sustained narrative and closure in their lives” (p. 31). In flexible work arrangements, “time becomes episodic and fragmented; the capacity to sustain commitment erodes” (Sennett, 1998, p. 58). The absence of clear temporal or spatial boundaries leads many workers to experience a “permanent state of unfinished labor,” where the home becomes an extension of the office. In some cases, this may lead to extended work hours, distraction, and social isolation. In contrast, traditional offices offer a sharp work-life boundary but lack the autonomy, adaptability and convenience of remote work settings.

These developments reflect a broader neoliberal logic of responsabilization, where the management of time, discipline, and well-being is increasingly offloaded onto individual workers, intensifying precarity while celebrating autonomy. Under such conditions, productivity becomes both a moral and social expectation — workers are encouraged to perform constant

availability and self-optimization, extending the workday into spaces and times once reserved for rest or personal life. As Sennett (1998) notes, flexible capitalism “invites workers to treat instability as a virtue,” turning adaptability and responsiveness into new forms of discipline (p. 65). This extension of work time blurs the distinction between productivity and personal fulfillment, reinforcing a condition where being productive becomes synonymous with being social and connected. Coworking spaces have emerged as a hybrid solution: they combine the flexibility of remote work with the clearer boundaries and routines associated with more traditional offices. In doing so, they attempt to contain the endless workday by reintroducing material and social cues that distinguish between work and leisure. Yet, the very spaces designed to restore balance also encourage new forms of performative productivity — being visible, accessible, and sociable within the space becomes part of maintaining one’s professional identity. This provides its users with better tools for time management, self-discipline and organization. Coworking spaces also provide their users with dedicated and ergonomic workspaces, opportunities for social interaction, potential for networking, and a routine.

This chapter further reinforces how coworking spaces reinforce work-life boundaries more effectively than home offices while maintaining a greater sense of flexibility, autonomy, and well-being in comparison to traditional offices. The spatial design, physical separation of work and home, and the establishment of routines all play crucial roles in building healthier work habits, sustaining productivity and well-being. In this light, coworking spaces represent neither the rigid separation of traditional offices nor the boundaryless fluidity of home-based work, but rather a socio-material compromise where boundaries are materially and socially enacted while preserving autonomy. This chapter examines how coworking spaces reinforce work-life

boundaries through three dimensions: spatial design and ergonomics, commuting practices, and social norms of accountability.

## 6.1 Spatial Design and Ergonomics

The erosion of work-life boundaries has become one of the defining challenges of contemporary flexible labour. The same technologies that enable mobility and autonomy also tether workers to constant availability, creating an expectation of uninterrupted productivity. As Sennett (1998) argues, flexible capitalism erodes the stable routines that once gave structure and closure to work life, replacing them with a perpetual demand for responsiveness and adaptability. Similarly, Brouwer and Mariotti (2021) observe that flexible work arrangements blur the temporal and spatial lines between professional and domestic spheres, often leading to fatigue, burnout, and a diminished ability to disconnect. In the same vein, Piirsalu-Kivihall et al. (2023) highlight that workplace flexibility is frequently accompanied by “an increase in workload and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal time,” with clear impacts on employees’ mental and physical well-being. In this context, productivity has migrated into the intimate spaces of everyday life, redefining what it means to be a ‘good worker’—one who is always available, self-disciplined, and visibly active. Coworking spaces emerge as a spatial response to this overflow, providing a material and social boundary to contain the expansion of work into the home.

These blurred boundaries illustrate that work-life balance is not only a personal struggle but also a spatial and material one. Coworking spaces make this tension visible by translating abstract pressures of productivity and presence into physical layouts, routines, and infrastructures that seek to stabilize where and when work begins and ends.

Work-life boundaries are not simply the result of individual choices but are materially structured through spatial design and ergonomic infrastructures. Rooms, layouts, desks, and chairs are not passive settings but active elements that shape how workers organize their time, posture, and routines. For remote workers, improvised setups such as dining tables or couches often collapsed distinctions between work and leisure, while traditional offices imposed rigid boundaries at the expense of autonomy.

Coworking spaces position themselves as a middle ground. Through deliberate spatial design and the provision of ergonomic infrastructures, they provide both symbolic cues and material supports that reinforce healthier boundaries. From a neoliberal perspective, these infrastructures reflect the responsabilization of workers, as costs and choices are individualized. In other words, the responsibility for maintaining productivity, comfort, and well-being is shifted from employers to individual workers. Rather than being provided with office furniture, health programs, or time structures by organizations, for instance, workers must now make strategic decisions about where, when, and how to work. Coworking spaces embody this shift by offering the infrastructure once associated with the traditional office, but only to those who can afford or choose to access it, thus transforming self-management into a marketable service.

From an ANT perspective, materiality itself—lighting, partitions, chairs, and desks—acts as an agent that co-produces behaviours and boundaries. This means that these objects are not neutral backdrops but active participants that guide and stabilize certain practices. For instance, the arrangement of desks enforces patterns of co-presence and visibility, while the placement of partitions, meeting rooms, or quiet zones subtly directs how and where social interaction or concentration occurs. In this sense, coworking spaces do not simply contain work—they help to enact it by mediating how people move, interact, and perform productivity within the space.

This chapter explores how coworking spaces mediate a central dilemma of flexible work: the tension between productivity and sociality. While neoliberal forms of responsabilization encourage workers to self-manage time, discipline, and output, the same conditions produce new forms of isolation and disconnection. Coworking spaces attempt to reconcile these competing pressures by providing infrastructures that sustain both focused work and social connection—a balance that remains fragile and constantly negotiated.

### 6.1.1 – Spatial Design of Coworking Spaces

The spatial organization of work has long oscillated between two imperfect poles: the traditional office and the domestic workspace. On one hand, the office offers structure, resources, and social proximity but enforces rigid hierarchies and surveillance that can feel alienating. Sennett (1998) argues that such environments erode creativity and autonomy, as “authority and structure replace initiative and cooperation” (p. 54). The daily commute, uniform layouts, and managerial oversight together produce a disciplined but often depersonalized space. On the other hand, remote work appears to grant greater freedom and flexibility, yet this autonomy often results in isolation and the erosion of spatial and temporal boundaries. Brouwer and Mariotti (2021) highlight that working from home frequently blurs the distinction between professional and domestic life, while Piirsalu-Kivihall et al. (2023) show that such flexibility is often accompanied by heavier workloads, fatigue, and an inability to disconnect. What initially seems like liberation from corporate space can therefore translate into new forms of control, where workers are expected to be endlessly productive, reachable, and self-disciplined.

Coworking spaces emerge as a negotiated compromise: they borrow the flexibility of home-based arrangements while reintroducing spatial distinctions that resemble traditional offices, creating an environment that both structures and supports work-life balance. Through

deliberate spatial design, these spaces reintroduce physical cues—dedicated work areas, communal zones, and ergonomic infrastructures—that help delineate where work begins and ends. In this way, coworking spaces materialize a form of balance: they borrow the flexibility of home-based arrangements while restoring the environmental and social supports once provided by the traditional office.

Oldenburg's concept of "third places" emerged in the context of late twentieth-century industrial and post-industrial capitalism, as social life became increasingly divided between home and work. In *The Great Good Place* (1989), Oldenburg distinguished between three main spheres of everyday life: the home, associated with privacy and family life; the workplace, tied to productivity and economic discipline; and "third places," informal sites such as cafés, pubs, and community centers where social cohesion and civic interaction could occur outside both domestic and professional hierarchies. These categories were never universal—they reflected the spatial logics of Western capitalist societies, in which industrialization had separated the spaces of production and reproduction.

In this lineage, coworking spaces can be understood as a "fourth space" that arises under flexible, neoliberal capitalism. They blur the once-clear distinctions between Oldenburg's categories by integrating elements of all three: they are commercial spaces that imitate the sociability of cafés, the comfort of home, and the professional infrastructure of the office. As Sennett (1998) observes, contemporary capitalism demands constant adaptability and self-presentation, pushing workers to find new spatial forms that reconcile productivity and social connection. Coworking spaces materialize this reconciliation—they are simultaneously sites of work and sites of sociality, producing both economic output and a sense of belonging. Work,

socialization, and personal life intersect in these environments, sustaining productivity while fostering collaboration and well-being.

From an Actor-Network Theory perspective, spatial layout is not a passive backdrop but an active actant that configures behaviours, routines, and interactions. Lighting, partitions, pathways, and acoustics do not merely decorate space; they actively participate in the establishment of work-life boundaries. They guide movement, regulate visibility, and distribute attention—determining who encounters whom, how sound and light travel, and where certain activities can or cannot occur. Through these material mediations, the space orchestrates rhythms of concentration and sociability, encouraging productivity while limiting distraction. The materiality of the coworking space thus does more than support activity: it organizes it. Zoning, partitions, lighting, pathways and acoustics are all spatial features of the space that have tremendous repercussions when it comes to work-life balance. After further discussion with the owners and managers of the space, it was very clear that a lot of thought was put into the spatial conception of the space to enhance this distinction.

While co-working spaces can be seen as a hybrid solution to the growing demands of remote work, we can also see how these spaces are themselves spatially divided in a way that facilitates different kinds of work- and non-work-related relationships. Three main zones can be identified in most coworking spaces, each serving its purposes, with a fourth that can be added but isn't always offered by all locations.

1. Work areas: Quiet, distraction-free and adapted workspaces. These are often open areas, resembling libraries with larger tables and a communal aspect to work. Although physically open, these zones are regulated by shared norms of quietness, coworkers generally avoid conversation or take calls elsewhere. As Gandini (2015) notes, this form

of “working alone together”. Merkel (2015) adds that such spatial etiquette sustains productivity while countering the isolation of home-based work.

2. Collaborative Spaces: Meeting and conference rooms offer space for collaboration, teamwork, brainstorming and discussion. Dedicated spaces of this nature ensure that work areas are not affected by potential distractions. Additionally, phone booths are another form of collaborative space that is increasingly offered in the workspace (Bouncken and Reuschl, 2018). This allows users to take phone or video conference calls in a quiet and isolated environment. Reducing distractions for those both in and out of the booth.
3. Social Spaces: Kitchens, lounges and dining spaces can be defined as “non-work” spaces that seek to encourage socialization and a clear demarcation between work and leisure. This allows users to disengage from work temporarily.
4. Wellness Spaces: This includes meditation areas and physical activity spaces, which can take many forms, from yoga studios to small gyms or multipurpose rooms. While not present in every coworking site, such amenities are increasingly common in larger or premium spaces that promote a “holistic” approach to productivity and well-being. In Montreal, for instance, Espace Waverly features access to a seasonal ice rink, Regus offers in-building gym facilities, and Crew Collective & Café hosts yoga and mindfulness sessions for members. These examples illustrate how wellness infrastructures are becoming integrated into coworking design, reflecting an effort to spatially balance work intensity and self-care. In doing so, coworking spaces position well-being as part of their value proposition, aligning with neoliberal ideals of self-management and individual responsibility for health and performance.

Through this complex interlay of zones, coworking spaces can, through various non-human agents, create physical boundaries between work and leisure or social activities. Furthermore, the material reality of these spaces is what distinguishes one from another. A coffee machine, microwave and dining table represent a social space. Desks, chairs, lights, monitors and keyboards, on the other hand, display a work area that is adapted to the workforce, signifying that work is currently being conducted. Together, these zones form a socio-material network that enacts boundaries between work and leisure. Rather than dissolving distinctions as in home offices or rigidly enforcing them as in traditional offices, coworking spaces materialize a hybrid arrangement where productivity and sociability coexist. As Shepherd (2020) shows, even in precarious work arrangements, organizational practices and informal relationships remain crucial for sustaining motivation and belonging—an insight that coworking spaces materialize through their social infrastructures, which simultaneously sustain productivity through discipline and boundaries while nurturing sociality through openness and presence.

### 6.1.2 Ergonomics

Beyond spatial layout, ergonomics constitutes another critical actant in shaping the work-life divide. Desks, chairs, and technological tools do not simply enhance comfort—they materially discipline bodies into postures and routines that sustain productivity. (De Peuter et al., 2018). They can improve posture, well-being and comfort while further distinguishing the boundary between work and leisure. Under neoliberal labour regimes, responsibility for proper infrastructure is shifted from employers to individual workers, a process described by Rose (1999) and Sennett (1998) as the “responsibilization” of the worker. In this context, the management of one’s physical workspace becomes an extension of self-discipline and

professional identity: choosing the right chair, maintaining posture, or upgrading equipment is framed as a personal investment in productivity.

These working conditions are “precarious” not only in an economic sense but in a material and bodily one. Home workspaces are often unstable, temporary, or improvised—what Lefebvre might call “spaces of necessity” rather than of production. The lack of proper equipment, coupled with the expectation of sustained productivity, generates a form of embodied precarity in which comfort, health, and efficiency depend on individual resources rather than collective support. In this way, precarity manifests less through contract insecurity and more through the everyday vulnerability of working bodies—strained by screens, posture, and the absence of adequate ergonomic support.

Describing these home offices as “ephemeral” points to their impermanence and adaptability: dining tables, couches, or kitchen counters are repurposed as workstations only temporarily, never fully belonging to the realm of work. This spatial instability mirrors the broader uncertainty of flexible labour, where boundaries between work and personal life are provisional and constantly rearranged. Coworking spaces, by contrast, attempt to stabilize these conditions by externalizing the infrastructure of productivity—offering standardized, ergonomic settings that materialize discipline and support social presence.

“I worked at my kitchen table for months, and my back was killing me. At the coworking space the chairs and desks are actually made for working eight hours, it’s a huge difference”. – Sophia

Coworking spaces partially alleviate this burden by providing baseline infrastructure—desks, chairs, and ergonomic setups—as part of membership. While users often supply their own devices, the provision of core equipment reduces the material inequalities of improvised home offices. However, coworkers are encouraged to bring their own devices (when a semi-permanent membership is chosen). In some spaces, equipment is either offered as a complimentary amenity or available for rent at a discounted rate for members, opening more possibilities for coworkers. The initial investment may be inconvenient, as it's offloaded to the workers, however, renting such equipment can be a good gateway to see if the investment may be worth it at a lower cost. Furthermore, basic tools, such as a mouse and a keyboard, can easily be used and generally require a lesser investment than a monitor *per se*. When it comes to a proper office, desks and chairs remain the largest expense, an expense that is covered by the coworking space and included in all memberships. Even so, this process reinforces neoliberal responsabilization, as workers are still expected to ensure that their workspace is adequate for maintaining productivity, health, and performance. As Sennett (1998) observes, “the new capitalism places the burden of adaptation on the individual, who must continuously manage uncertainty and self-discipline” (p. 9). The material infrastructure may be provided, but its management—adapting the tools, personalizing the setup, and optimizing comfort—remains an individual obligation.

Ergonomics thus neither resolve the full burden of responsabilization nor replicate employer-provided setups. Instead, coworking spaces enact a hybrid arrangement: material infrastructures that both alleviate the precarity of home offices and subtly discipline workers into productive routines.

## 6.2 Commuting

The practice of commuting embodies one of the central dilemmas of modern work: it is both a burden and a boundary. On the one hand, the traditional home–office divide required daily travel that consumed time, generated fatigue, and reinforced hierarchical expectations of punctuality and presence. Yet on the other hand, commuting also provided a temporal and spatial transition—a ritual that marked the shift from personal to professional life and back again. As Sennett (1998) notes, the routines of industrial work once provided a narrative rhythm to daily life, giving workers a sense of closure at day’s end. With the rise of remote work, this ritual largely disappeared, and many workers described how the absence of a commute blurred the rhythms of starting and ending the day. Wajcman (2015) and Mazmanian et al. (2013) similarly observe that digital connectivity extends the workday beyond physical boundaries, dissolving the natural pauses that commuting once enforced.

Traditional office commutes therefore reinstated clear separations but at the expense of time, autonomy, and well-being. Conversely, remote work eliminated travel but also eroded the psychological decompression that movement once provided. Coworking spaces emerge as a spatial compromise within this tension: they reintroduce commuting in shorter and more flexible forms, allowing workers to benefit from the ritual of transition without the burdens of rigid office travel. Brouwer and Mariotti (2021) highlight that these “micro-commutes” can serve as a self-imposed routine that restores rhythm and structure to flexible workdays, reinforcing the perception of work as a distinct and embodied practice.

From a Foucauldian perspective, commuting can reflect a sense of responsabilization. Time management, mobility, and self-discipline become individualized duties: the worker must optimize not only their productivity but also the logistics of getting to work efficiently. What was

previously framed as an employer-managed obligation is now a matter of personal optimization, reinforcing Foucauldian ideals of self-regulation. From an Actor-Network Theory perspective, commuting emerges as an assemblage of actants—doors, metro passes, bicycles, smartphones, schedules—that collectively stage the rhythms of entry and exit into work.

The following subsections examine commuting through three dimensions: commuting as ritual (6.2.1), neoliberal responsabilization of mobility (6.2.2), and ANT perspectives on commuting as an assemblage of human and non-human actants (6.2.3).

### 6.2.1 Commuting as a ritual

Interviewees highlighted that commuting operates as both a physical and psychological transition between personal and professional roles. As a ritual closure, it marked clear boundaries—boundaries that remote work often eroded. In the absence of a commute, home-based workers reported constant overlaps between household labour and professional obligations, such as taking calls while folding laundry, answering emails while cooking, or balancing tasks with childcare. Lila emphasized the importance of commuting as a transition: “The metro ride was kind of my reset button. It’s when I switched into work mode, and on the way back I could leave it behind”. Far from being an advantage, this seamless transition intensified boundary blurring, leading to overwork, stress, and difficulty disconnecting. This opened the door to issues of overworking, stress, and a complete inability to disconnect from professional obligations.

For workers who commonly engaged with clients and/or managed a team of workers, shifting from a home office to a coworking space offered a more professional and structured workspace for colleagues, peers and clients. This established more professional boundaries, reinforcing professional legitimacy and credibility, as well as helping to maintain a proper

dynamic with their employees. Startups and freelancers often felt the obligation to start from a home-based workplace due to the low operational costs and the lack of formal obligations, such as a lease. However, from a neoliberal perspective, this normalization of home-based work can also be understood as a form of exploitation, as the costs and risks once absorbed by the organization, such as rent, equipment and infrastructure, are transferred to individual workers. (Sennett, 1998; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Ross, 2009). As Gill and Pratt (2008) note, flexible work often disguises dependence and vulnerability under the rhetoric of autonomy and choice. It was often mentioned that, despite the initial attractiveness of remote work due to lower costs, autonomy and flexibility, the home workspace was often inadequate. Working from home rapidly became disruptive, unproductive and negatively affected work enjoyment. Coworking spaces thus emerge as a corrective mechanism to this dynamic: they reintroduce shared infrastructure and social interaction while maintaining flexibility and self-management. Commuting as ritual therefore represents neither the rigid obligation of traditional office life nor the boundaryless collapse of remote work. In coworking contexts, it becomes a flexible, chosen transition that restores boundary-making while maintaining autonomy.

### 6.2.2 Commuting and Neoliberal Responsibilization

From a neoliberal perspective, commuting in coworking arrangements reflects responsibilization: what was once an imposed necessity under traditional office structures is reframed as an individual choice. Workers are expected to optimize their routines, selecting spaces, schedules, and transport modes that maximize productivity and minimize inefficiency. As Rose (1999) argues, neoliberal rationalities encourage individuals to govern themselves through continuous acts of optimization—transforming everyday practices like mobility into sites of self-discipline. Interviewees frequently emphasized commute considerations when

choosing coworking locations, often preferring sites within 15 minutes of home and accessible by walking, biking, or public transit. One participant explained, “I chose my coworking space mainly because I can walk there in ten minutes. It’s close enough to feel convenient but far enough that I actually ‘go somewhere’ to start my day.” Another remarked, “When I used to work from home, I would just roll out of bed to my laptop. Having to leave the house now, even if it’s a short trip, makes me more focused.”

This framing of mobility as a personal responsibility, where time, cost, and well-being must be managed by the worker rather than guaranteed by the organization—aligns with neoliberal ideals of autonomy and self-regulation (Sennett, 1998; Wajcman, 2015). One interviewee described commuting as a “productive break,” explaining, “That walk or bike ride to the space is my reset. It’s the point where I mentally switch from home mode to work mode.” The bottom line is that workers are expected to optimize their own work: through their chosen environment, commuting practices, and daily rhythms. Schwanen and Wang (2014) note that such ‘autonomous mobilities’ express freedom only superficially; beneath them lies a moral imperative to remain efficient and available.

In this sense, coworkers have greater autonomy over their commute. The ability to choose one’s workspace based on distance, transportation mode, and schedule reflects personal preference and flexibility. Yet, this autonomy is double-edged—freedom from corporate routines comes with the expectation of self-governance and time management. As one participant noted, “There’s no one telling me when to arrive, so I have to hold myself accountable. If I stay home too often, I just end up working longer hours anyway.” Many interviewees reported that one of the main reasons for selecting a specific workspace was dictated by commute considerations, with most preferring locations within a 15-minute commute of their household, achievable

through walking, cycling, or public transport. Another described how weather and distance influenced their choice: “In the winter, I make sure to pick a space near the metro. In summer, I bike—it’s faster and clears my head before I sit down to work.”

Coworking thus transforms commuting from a burdensome obligation into a ritual of choice and efficiency. The 15-minute distance and flexibility in mode of commute allowed coworkers to retain the benefits of routine without feeling that time was wasted. This reconfiguration exemplifies what Sennett (1998) calls the ‘moralization of flexibility’—workers internalize efficiency and self-management as ethical virtues. As one member summarized, “I used to hate commuting, but now it feels like part of my workday—it helps me draw a line between work and home.” In this light, commuting in coworking contexts represents neither the rigid obligation of office regimes nor the uncontrolled collapse of remote work. Instead, it is responsabilized and individualized, reframed as a personal optimization project that blends autonomy with new burdens.

### 6.2.3 Commuting as an ANT Assemblage

From an ANT perspective, commuting is not an isolated individual choice but part of a complex socio-material assemblage. Latour (2005) reminds us that social action is distributed across heterogeneous networks of human and non-human actants; commuting, in this sense, is an enacted network rather than a simple routine. Transportation systems, bike lanes, digital apps, weather, and human routines all interact to shape how transitions between home and work unfold. Locking a door, scanning a pass, walking, boarding a bus, or checking Google Maps are not trivial acts but material practices that enact boundaries between work and personal life. As Schwanen, Banister and Anable (2012) argue, mobility is a socio-material accomplishment that links affect, technology, and routine in shaping daily rhythms. Similarly, Jain and Lyons (2008)

describe commuting as an embodied ‘in-between’ space where individuals mentally and physically prepare for the transition between roles.

Within this framework, commuting serves as a ritual closure, a symbolic, structured and repetitive activity or routine that can aid in creating a clear demarcation between professional and personal obligations (Jain & Lyons, 2008). Zerubavel’s (1981) notion of temporal boundaries is useful here: by repeatedly performing actions such as locking a door, boarding a metro, or scanning a coworking pass, workers materially mark the threshold between home and work. Bissell (2010) further highlights how these embodied routines anchor the affective rhythms of everyday life, turning movement itself into a stabilizing practice. This shift or transition is therefore more than purely psychological—its materiality can be seen through the physical and affective performance of boundary-making.

Furthermore, despite the constant nature of a commute, there is also variability, which helps mitigate the “mundane” and boring aspects of it. The when, where and how it happens can greatly vary and is part of a constant relationship between the worker and his/her environment. Many factors contribute to this decision, such as the occurrence of meetings, children’s school schedules, weather-related systems, health, traffic, etc. This can, at times, be mediated by other factors, such as digital applications: calendars, meeting platforms, Google Maps, Waze, etc. Allowing workers to fully adapt, plan and optimize their preferences, commutes and decisions. In other words, commutes are never an individual choice and are often shaped by other non-human actants.

Moreover, the entry and exit of a workspace can help in defining one’s current role and boundaries. Arriving at space after a commute creates a sense of “I’m at work now,” reinforcing a psychological and physical distinction between the two roles of an individual. As Lila

explained: “Just locking my apartment door and then opening the coworking door makes me feel like I’m switching roles. It’s like a little mental trick, but it works”. Similarly, leaving the physical workspace signifies a transition back to personal life. This work-life separation, although not impossible in a home-based office, is much more difficult to replicate in such a context. Doorways, in various literature (Le Nadant, 2019; Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Garrett et al., 2017), have at times been depicted as “portals” or “thresholds” between different realities, and, as such, a transformation occurs during its passage. Similarly, entering and exiting a coworking space exemplifies this transition and transformation of the user (Turner, 1969). The lack of proper infrastructure in a home office reflects this lack of transition. Most individuals were working in a space that served another purpose than an “office,” which led to a lack of proper distinction. When space isn’t an issue, it is possible that the transition or transformation can be properly felt from a home-based office. However, the distinction remains less clear due to the proximity.

However, when it comes to the clear segmentation of work-life boundaries, the coworking solution remains permeable. Digital connectivity, which can be perceived as an actant that facilitates the flexibility and autonomy of work, can also lead to more invasive habits. Professionals are always connected or have access to work even after physically leaving a workspace or an office.

“Even if I leave the coworking, Slack is still on my phone. I get pings at night, so the boundary is never perfect” – Elias

Emails, phones and messaging apps allow this constant tethering to coworkers, managers and clients. The expectations associated with work have changed since the onset of digital tools of such nature, which also allow a form of tracking or monitoring of employees (Kopplin, 2023). In this sense, commuting in coworking contexts is neither a neutral backdrop nor a purely personal ritual. It is a socio-material enactment of boundaries that provides structure, yet remains permeable under conditions of digital hyper-connectivity. (Kopplin, 2023).

## 6.3 Social Norms and Accountability

Work-life boundaries are also enacted through social norms and practices of accountability. Remote work often left workers without external cues or collective expectations, amplifying self-discipline pressures. Traditional offices, by contrast, imposed boundaries through rigid oversight and formalized codes of conduct. Coworking spaces occupy a hybrid position. Norms around dress, booking rooms, respecting silent areas, or gathering at coffee machines foster accountability and belonging without top-down control. From a neoliberal perspective, these norms exemplify responsabilization: workers internalize self-management through peer expectations. From an Actor–Network Theory perspective, these non-human elements—coffee machines, booking systems, door locks, and even signage—act as material mediators that stabilize behaviour and reproduce norms. Rather than inscription devices in the strict Latourian sense (Latour, 1987), they can be understood as mediating technologies that translate social expectations into spatial routines. As Latour (2005) suggests, objects participate in the “distribution of agency,” ensuring that moral and organizational order is maintained through their everyday use. Booking systems, for instance, provide structured access to shared spaces, while coffee machines establish ritualized moments of sociality that signal pauses in the workday and reaffirm communal belonging.

The following subsections examine these dynamics: first, norms and rituals of behaviour (6.3.1), then neoliberal self-regulation through peer accountability (6.3.2), and finally, an ANT perspective on how material artefacts and social practices assemble new forms of order (6.3.3).

### 6.3.1 Norms & Rituals of Behaviour

Interviewees emphasized that coworking spaces cultivate norms and shared rituals that shape how work and social life unfold within them. Practices such as dressing professionally, booking time in meeting rooms, lowering one's voice in designated silent zones, or gathering at communal nodes like kitchens and lounges functioned as symbolic cues that marked a transition into "work mode." These behaviours created accountability through peer visibility: one's presence, punctuality, and level of engagement were noticed by others, producing a subtle form of discipline without the need for managerial oversight. Shared rituals such as coffee breaks, lunchtime gatherings, and even informal drinks after work further reinforced rhythms of sociability, ensuring that boundaries between work and personal life were not entirely collapsed into constant productivity.

"When I see everyone around me focused, I feel like I should be focused too. At home, I'd get distracted more easily because no one was watching" – Nora

Compared with home offices, where the absence of collective expectations left individuals to self-discipline in isolation, coworking spaces provided external cues and communal rhythms that helped structure the day. By contrast, traditional offices formalized these same dynamics through hierarchical oversight and codified regulations, which often felt rigid or oppressive. Coworking spaces thus occupied a hybrid position: expectations were informal yet widely recognized, flexible yet still binding. Workers described how these norms supported their productivity while also reminding them to take breaks, eat meals, and interact with peers.

From a neoliberal perspective, these rituals exemplify responsabilization: the responsibility for sustaining community, tidiness, and professionalism was shifted onto individuals themselves. For instance, the lack of custodial staff in many spaces meant that coworkers collectively managed cleanliness, reinforcing a norm of respect and accountability for shared areas. Similarly, coworkers often felt pressure to embody professionalism as part of their “brand,” knowing that their behaviour could influence potential collaborations or client impressions within the space. From an ANT perspective, these dynamics were not simply the product of human will but were co-constructed with non-human actants: the placement of coffee machines encouraged pauses and encounters, open-plan seating fostered interaction, and booking apps or whiteboards made expectations of shared use explicit.

In this way, norms and rituals in coworking spaces represent neither the absence of accountability characteristic of home-based work nor the rigid managerial oversight of traditional offices. Instead, they materialize a socio-material compromise: boundaries and belonging are sustained through a blend of peer expectations, infrastructural cues, and individual responsibility.

### 6.3.2 Accountability and the Social Panopticon

Coworking spaces also cultivate accountability, though in ways distinct from both home offices and traditional workplaces. To understand this, it is helpful to recall the metaphor of the panopticon—first conceptualized by Jeremy Bentham and later elaborated by Michel Foucault (1977) in *Discipline and Punish*. The panopticon described an architectural arrangement that enabled constant visibility without direct coercion: because individuals never knew when they were being observed, they internalized surveillance and began to regulate their own behaviour. For Foucault, this became a broader model of modern disciplinary power, one that operates

through the internalization of norms rather than the overt exercise of force. Traditional offices, in this sense, embody a hierarchical mode of surveillance in which managers and supervisors monitor employees through schedules, evaluations, and formal oversight (Lyon, 2001; Ball, 2010).

In home offices, by contrast, oversight is absent, leaving workers vulnerable to extremes: either lax discipline or blurred boundaries that lead to overwork, stress, and burnout. Here, the Foucauldian logic of responsabilization becomes particularly visible—control is displaced from management to the self, and workers become both the observer and the observed. The expectation to remain responsive on email or visible on digital platforms reproduces the disciplinary gaze in virtual form (Gregg, 2011; Wajcman, 2015).

Coworking spaces strike a balance between these two models through what might be called soft surveillance or a “social panopticon.” Rather than formal monitoring, accountability is enforced through the subtle presence of peers. Workers are aware that their behaviours—arriving late, taking extended breaks, appearing distracted—are visible to others. This shared visibility creates a mild but productive pressure toward self-discipline and professionalism. As one participant explained, “You don’t want to be the only one scrolling on your phone when everyone else is working.” Yet unlike in traditional offices, the consequences are reputational rather than contractual: one’s credibility or professionalism may be questioned, but not one’s employment security.

“It’s not like a boss watching you, but you know people can see if you’re just scrolling or wasting time. It’s kind of like a panopticon, but softer, because it’s your peers” – Marcus

From a neoliberal perspective, this soft surveillance exemplifies responsabilization. The burden of discipline is shifted from managers to workers themselves, who must internalize responsibility for appearing productive, professional, and engaged. Freelancers and entrepreneurs in particular described feeling pressure to “represent their brand” through their conduct in the space. For employees whose companies maintained memberships in coworking spaces, presence was encouraged but rarely mandated; as one manager explained, attendance was sometimes incentivized through informal rewards such as paid lunches, but never enforced through formal sanctions. This reflects a broader neoliberal ethos: workers are expected to regulate themselves, optimize their visibility, and manage their reputations as part of their labour.

From a Foucaultian perspective, accountability in coworking spaces can be understood through the notion of the *dispositif*—the ensemble of spatial arrangements, technologies, and norms that together discipline and regulate behaviour (Foucault, 1980). Visibility is not merely interpersonal but structural, mediated by the design of open seating, transparent partitions, and glass walls that make one’s presence and engagement continuously observable. These architectural and technological features constitute what Foucault would call a spatial apparatus of discipline: a configuration that encourages self-regulation through exposure and spatial order. Digital booking systems, door codes, and time-stamped entries into the space similarly organize conduct, producing subtle forms of surveillance and accountability without direct oversight. As Allen (2011) and Philo (2012) note, contemporary workplaces mobilize such *dispositifs* to “govern through space,” translating architectural openness into moral and behavioural expectations.

From an ANT perspective, these same elements can also be read as socio-material mediators: human and non-human actants that co-produce accountability through interactions. The Foucaultian *dispositif* and ANT assemblage thus converge in showing how discipline and agency are distributed across people, technologies, and spatial forms. Together, they construct an environment in which accountability is diffuse, collective, and internalized.

In this sense, coworking accountability is neither the absent oversight of remote work nor the rigid surveillance of traditional offices. It is a negotiated compromise: soft, peer-based, and infrastructurally mediated, simultaneously fostering autonomy and subtle pressure to conform.

### 6.3.3 ANT Assemblages of Sociality

From an Actor–Network Theory (ANT) perspective, the social norms and accountability of coworking spaces cannot be reduced to human interactions alone. They are enacted through socio-material assemblages in which non-human actants play a decisive role. Coffee machines, door locks, whiteboards, booking apps, open-plan seating, and even the placement of furniture all contribute to structuring behaviour and shaping boundaries. These artefacts do not merely support social life—they actively configure it.

For example, the location of a coffee machine in a shared lounge encourages workers to pause, socialize, and participate in informal conversations, producing moments of ritualized interaction. Similarly, open seating arrangements foster encounters among strangers, reinforcing a sense of community through incidental proximity. Booking systems and whiteboards, on the other hand, inscribe norms of order and fairness into daily routines: they regulate access to meeting rooms, prevent conflict, and sustain expectations of professional conduct. In this sense, these infrastructures operate as what Foucault (1977) would call disciplinary mechanisms—subtle instruments that guide behaviour through spatial and procedural organization rather than

coercion. As Allen (2011) notes, spatial arrangements “govern conduct through affect and layout,” materializing authority without explicit hierarchy. In this way, infrastructures themselves function as disciplinary devices, shaping how work, sociability, and accountability are distributed across the space.

Interviewees often highlighted how these small material details structured their practices. One worker described how sitting in an open area created “a pressure to look busy,” while others noted that moving to a lounge area signaled a legitimate break. The simple act of scanning a pass to enter the building or swiping into a meeting room reinforced the transition into professional roles, much like commuting rituals. Even mundane elements such as lighting, desk placement, and acoustics influenced how long workers stayed, when they interacted, and how boundaries between focus and leisure were enacted.

From this perspective, coworking norms and accountability emerge as network effects, rather than top-down impositions. They are co-produced by humans (coworkers, managers, visitors) and non-humans (coffee machines, booking platforms, architectural layouts) in ways that blur the line between social and material causality. As Latour (2005) reminds us, agency is always distributed: no single actor dictates order, but rather it arises from the heterogeneous associations of people, technologies, and spaces.

In this sense, coworking spaces embody neither the absence of infrastructure characteristic of home offices, nor the rigid architectures of traditional workplaces. Instead, they represent a hybrid assemblage in which norms and accountability are constantly negotiated through the interplay of human and non-human actants. The coworking environment is therefore not only a social community but also a socio-material network that enacts boundaries, fosters accountability, and sustains work-life balance.

## 6.4 Conclusion: Boundaries, Compromises, and the Future of Work

This chapter has demonstrated how coworking spaces reinforce work-life boundaries through three interrelated dimensions: spatial and ergonomic infrastructures, commuting practices, and social norms of accountability. Together, these dimensions highlight the ambivalent role of coworking in shaping contemporary labour: not as a radical departure from existing models of work, nor as a simple replication of traditional offices, but as a socio-material compromise that responds to the contradictions of flexible work arrangements.

Across spatial design and ergonomics, coworking spaces provide physical and material infrastructures that stabilize productivity and well-being. Purpose-built layouts, dedicated zones, and ergonomic tools reintroduce the sense of separation and professionalism absent from improvised home offices, while avoiding the rigid hierarchies of traditional workplaces. In commuting practices, coworking reinstates the ritual of movement that marks the transition into and out of work, but does so on terms that emphasize flexibility, proximity, and choice. And in social norms and accountability, coworking fosters shared rituals, peer expectations, and soft forms of surveillance that encourage professionalism without direct managerial control.

In each case, the same conclusion emerges: coworking is neither liberation nor constraint, but a hybrid form of labour infrastructure. These spaces simultaneously enable autonomy and impose responsibility, generate sociality while reinforcing discipline, and sustain boundaries even as they blur them.

### 6.4.1 Coworking and the Neoliberal Condition

One of the central arguments of this thesis has been that coworking spaces cannot be understood apart from the wider transformations of work under neoliberalism. From a neoliberal

perspective, coworking epitomizes the logic of responsabilization, whereby duties once borne by employers and institutions are outsourced to individuals. The responsibility to maintain an ergonomic workspace, to manage commute times, and to cultivate professional accountability all fall on workers, who must absorb the risks and costs of these arrangements.

For example, while coworking spaces provide desks and chairs as part of membership, the responsibility to secure additional technological tools—monitors, keyboards, or specialist equipment—remains individualized. Similarly, while commuting to traditional offices once represented a fixed requirement imposed by employers, the shift to coworking frames mobility as a matter of personal optimization: workers select locations, routes, and modes of transportation that best suit their own schedules and preferences. Even in the realm of social norms, the burden of maintaining cleanliness, professionalism, and engagement is distributed onto coworkers themselves, who must collectively self-regulate.

In this way, coworking spaces illustrate how neoliberalism reshapes the very infrastructure of work. They embody an ethos of autonomy, flexibility, and self-management, but one that simultaneously intensifies precarity by transferring costs, risks, and responsibilities away from organizations and onto individual workers. The promise of freedom is inseparable from the pressure to continually optimize oneself, one's time, and one's environment.

#### 6.4.2 Coworking through Actor–Network Theory

Yet neoliberalism alone does not fully capture the dynamics observed in coworking spaces. This thesis has also shown that the practices and subjectivities of workers are co-produced by material arrangements, infrastructures, and non-human actants. Actor–Network Theory (ANT) makes visible the socio-material networks through which coworking operates. However, these spatial and material dynamics also resonate strongly with Foucault's (1977)

conception of disciplinary power. The organization of space—its visibility, openness, and circulation—functions as what he termed a “diagram of power,” exemplified in the panopticon, where architecture itself becomes an instrument of behavioral regulation.

From an ANT perspective, the physical layout of coworking spaces is not a neutral backdrop but an active participant in shaping boundaries. Lighting, partitions, seating arrangements, and acoustic treatments influence not only how workers interact with each other but also how they experience the division between work and leisure. From a Foucaultian standpoint, these same arrangements can be seen as spatial technologies that internalize discipline: visibility, proximity, and openness cultivate self-regulation and productive conduct without direct supervision. Similarly, objects such as coffee machines, booking apps, and access cards do not simply facilitate behaviour but actively configure it: they create rhythms, enforce norms, and sustain accountability. In this sense, ANT and Foucault converge—both reveal how power and agency are distributed across human and non-human elements, materializing discipline through design.

Commuting, too, appears as an assemblage of human and non-human actants: bicycles, metro passes, smartphones, weather conditions, and traffic infrastructures all co-produce the daily rituals of entry and exit. Even social norms cannot be disentangled from their material supports: shared lunches are sustained by dining tables, social breaks by lounge areas, and accountability by the visibility afforded by open-plan design.

By foregrounding these socio-material networks, ANT demonstrates that the subjectivities of workers in coworking spaces are not only ideologically produced but materially enacted. Responsibility and autonomy are co-constructed through the association of humans and

things, highlighting the everyday, practical ways in which neoliberal logics are translated into lived realities.

### 6.4.3 Care and Control: The Duality of Coworking

Taken together, neoliberalism and ANT reveal coworking as a dual infrastructure of care and control. On the one hand, coworking provides care by alleviating the isolation, instability, and lack of boundaries characteristic of remote work. Workers described how the social atmosphere of coworking reduced loneliness, how ergonomic setups prevented strain and injury, and how commuting to a nearby space reinstated healthy routines. Coworking thus offers forms of stability, well-being, and community often absent from individualized home offices.

On the other hand, coworking also functions as an apparatus of control. The infrastructures that provide comfort also discipline: ergonomic chairs shape posture and productivity, open-plan seating enforces visibility, and coffee machines structure the timing of breaks. The responsibility for sustaining these infrastructures is shifted onto individuals, who must internalize norms of professionalism and accountability. The freedom to choose a coworking space becomes inseparable from the obligation to continually self-manage.

This ambivalence captures the broader contradictions of flexible labour under neoliberalism. Coworking resolves some of the problems of remote work while simultaneously reproducing the very pressures it seeks to alleviate. It is both solution and symptom, remedy and reinforcement.

### 6.4.4 Theoretical Contributions

The contribution of this thesis lies in bringing neoliberal theory and Actor–Network Theory into dialogue to analyze coworking spaces. While neoliberalism highlights the structural

logics that frame coworking—responsibilization, flexibilization, entrepreneurial subjectivity—ANT reveals the concrete practices and material assemblages through which these logics are enacted and sometimes contested.

By combining these frameworks, this thesis avoids both reductionism and abstraction. Coworking is not reduced to ideology alone, nor to materiality in isolation, but is understood as a site where economic rationalities and socio-material networks intersect. This dual approach shows how subjectivities are shaped by both structural discourses and everyday interactions with infrastructures, artefacts, and spaces.

In doing so, the thesis advances a broader methodological point: the study of contemporary labour requires attention not only to macroeconomic transformations but also to the micro-materialities through which work is organized. Neoliberalism explains why responsibility is displaced onto individuals; ANT shows how this displacement is operationalized in practice.

#### 6.4.5 Implications for the Future of Work

The findings of this thesis also hold implications for how we understand the future of work. Coworking spaces are not marginal or peripheral phenomena but emblematic of wider shifts in labour organization. They reflect broader trends toward hybrid work arrangements, flexible infrastructures, and individualized responsibility.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of coworking has become even more pronounced. As organizations experiment with hybrid models, workers seek alternatives to both permanent home offices and centralized corporate headquarters. Coworking offers a model of distributed yet structured work, one that aligns with demands for autonomy while still providing community and infrastructure. Yet the expansion of coworking also raises questions

about inequality and precarity. Access to well-equipped coworking spaces often depends on financial resources, location, and occupational status, potentially reinforcing divides between workers who can afford such infrastructures and those who cannot.

Policy implications follow from these observations. If coworking is to serve as a sustainable model of the future of work, there is a need to consider how its benefits can be more equitably distributed. This could involve public support for coworking infrastructures in underserved areas, regulations that ensure fair labour protections for independent workers, or partnerships that integrate coworking into broader urban planning strategies. Rather than treating coworking as a private luxury, it can be envisioned as part of a public infrastructure of labour, supporting both economic productivity and social well-being.

#### 6.4.6 Closing Reflection

In conclusion, coworking spaces matter not simply because they provide desks, Wi-Fi, or meeting rooms, but because they embody the shifting relations between labour, space, and subjectivity. They are laboratories of the contemporary economy, where the contradictions of autonomy and accountability, flexibility and precarity, care and control are negotiated on a daily basis.

Coworking spaces are not utopian alternatives nor dystopian traps, but compromises: socio-material responses to the tensions of neoliberal labour markets. They remind us that the future of work will not be defined by ideology or technology alone, but by the infrastructures and practices through which workers, objects, and institutions continually renegotiate the boundaries of life and labour.

As such, coworking spaces should be understood as both products of and responses to the neoliberal condition. They reveal the extent to which responsibility has been shifted onto

individuals, but also the ways in which workers collectively and materially reconstruct boundaries, communities, and routines in response. They are not simply spaces of work, but spaces of negotiation—between freedom and discipline, autonomy and obligation, self and collective.

The study of coworking thus offers a lens onto the wider transformations of the labour force. It shows that the future of work will likely resemble not the total freedom of digital nomadism nor the rigid conformity of the Fordist office, but the ambivalent compromises of coworking: infrastructures that enable while they constrain, communities that support while they discipline, and networks that distribute both agency and responsibility.

In the end, coworking spaces are best understood not as endpoints but as prototypes—material experiments in how to live and work under the shifting conditions of contemporary capitalism. They do not resolve the contradictions of neoliberal labour, but they make those contradictions visible, tangible, and negotiable. In this visibility lies their significance: they show us what the present of work looks like, and perhaps what its future will be.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

### 7.1 Restating the Problem and Purpose

This thesis examined coworking spaces in the Great Montreal region and more specifically how they function as socio-material infrastructures that mediate the tension between productivity and sociality. The rise of coworking spaces is inseparable from broader transformations in the organization of work. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the diffusion of remote and hybrid work arrangements, revealing both their potential and their limits. Home offices offered freedom and safety but also isolation, fatigue, and the blurring of work-life boundaries. Traditional offices, in contrast, offered structure and sociality but at the expense of flexibility and well-being. In this context, coworking spaces have come to occupy an ambiguous middle ground, a hybrid infrastructure that promises to combine the best of both worlds while resolving the shortcomings of each. From the outset, this project framed coworking not merely as a functional response to logistical needs, but as a mirror of neoliberal labour rationalities and as a networked arrangement of human and non-human actants. Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986) and a Foucauldian conception of neoliberalism (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999), the research explored how coworking spaces assemble material, technological, and affective infrastructures that govern the ways people work, interact, and imagine their professional selves.

The central research question guiding this work was: How do coworking spaces, as socio-material assemblages, shape contemporary labour experiences under remote and flexible work arrangements, particularly in relation to productivity, sociality, and work–life boundaries?

Through a mixed qualitative methodology combining semi-structured interviews with coworkers and managers, field observations, and spatial mapping across the Greater Montréal region, this thesis traced how coworking spaces mediate the tension between productivity and sociality in our labour force.

## 7.2 Key Empirical Findings

### 7.2.1 The Production of Sociality

In Chapter 5, this research demonstrated that the sociality of coworking spaces is neither spontaneous nor organic. Rather, sociality is assembled through the alignment of human and non-human actors, users, managers, furniture, layouts, lighting, digital platforms, and rituals of presence. In ANT terms, “community” is not a precondition but an effect of networked relations. Interviewees described how subtle elements like the social “buzz” and rhythm of daily attendance shaped their motivation to return to coworking spaces. François, for instance, noted that “j’aime bien avoir ce brouhaha autour de moi”, stating co-presence rather than direct collaboration is what he finds comforting in these spaces. Yet this comfort is fragile. Attendance isn’t always a guarantee, as Sophia remarked, “ça répondait moins à mon besoin.” The vitality of coworking sociality depends on continued attendance and the material stability of the network; when either factor falters, the sense of community and belonging can easily erode.

Managers were pivotal in maintaining this sense of community. Zoe emphasized that “notre objectif, c’est de créer des maillages” revealing that social interactions are often choreographed rather than purely organic. Events, curated encounters, and shared spaces all play roles in sustaining this network. This illustrates how the social in coworking is always mediated

by spatial and managerial infrastructures, a phenomenon ANT allows us to trace beyond human intentionality. At the same time, the voluntary nature of participation reveals neoliberal undercurrents. Workers “opt in” to communities framed around a sense of autonomy and flexibility, but these very ideals also limit the depth of sociality and community building. As Gandini (2015) argues, coworking enacts network sociality oriented toward employability and visibility. Interviews confirmed this form ambivalence, many coworkers were seeking a sense of exposure, to be seen, available and continuous being productive in the workspace while representing their own labour, or that of their company. Thus, while coworking promises community, it often delivers a marketized version of social life, shaped by self-branding, self-presentation, and economic interests when seeking new work opportunities.

### 7.2.2 Boundary-Making and Material Discipline

Chapter 6 shifted focus to the reconstruction of work-life boundaries within coworking spaces. Home offices were often described as confusing, spaces where work never really stopped because access to work was always there. Coworking spaces reintroduced boundaries, both spatial and temporal, desks and offices spaces marked zones of productivity. In contrast kitchens and lounges were reserved for rest, leisure and socializing with other coworkers. Commutes, which were erased with home offices, helped many coworkers in creating a ritual to distinguish work from home. From an ANT perspective, these boundaries materialized through a distributed network: furniture, lighting, architecture, commute routes, and, in some instances, digital keycards or keys. From a neoliberal lens, they reveal responsabilization of workers by shifting the discipline and management of worker’s labour from organization to the coworkers. Workers are responsible for paying for their office space and managing their work schedules in some instances. The ergonomic chair, the quiet room, the reliable Wi-Fi—these are no longer

entitlements, but commodities bundled into membership tiers. Commuting was also shifted onto workers. Interviewees frequently emphasized the importance of proximity, most often within a 10-15 minute radius of their homes by various transport methods, whether by walk, bike or car. Short commutes enabled a form of structure and physical demarcation of work and personal lives without the long commutes to the office which were previously their reality, aligning with the neoliberal ideal of self-management. Through commuting, ANT reveals how a simple practice such as commuting can act as a ritual of transformation enabling the work persona each morning and having the opposite effect later in the day.

### 7.2.3 Post-Pandemic Reconfigurations

The pandemic destabilized networks of co-presence. Managers such as Victor recalled losing “la moitié de nos membres” almost overnight. Yet coworking spaces displayed resilience throughout the curfews, restrictions and limits that were imposed by government authorities. Access systems were reconfigured and adapted, layouts were redesigned and, most fortunately, the reality of both remote and hybrid work arrangements were normalized. In its aftermath, coworking space demographics also drastically changed. As Isabel noted, “Tous ceux qui étaient là pré-pandémie... c’est carrément nouveau”. The userbases completely changed and what was formerly dominated by freelancers and entrepreneurs, accommodated corporate remote employees seeking an alternative solution to social isolation brought on by remote work. This diversification reinforced coworking’s identity as both a commercial service and a social infrastructure. In ANT terms, the pandemic forced a re-assemblage: non-human actants (sanitizers, plexiglass, booking apps) joined the network. New relationships were forged, and a new reality was imposed on coworking system with new actants coming into the picture. From a

neoliberal perspective, these changes illustrated resilience of coworking spaces through different adaptations and changes.

## 7.3 Coworking as Dual Infrastructure of Care and Control

The empirical findings converge around a key conceptual claim: coworking spaces are infrastructures of both care and control. They offer forms of support and stability absent in home offices (or other remote work arrangements), such as a community, better office ergonomics and a proper routine through the commute associated with “going to work”, while reinforcing the neoliberal logic that made such supports necessary in the first place.

### 7.3.1 Infrastructures of Care

Coworking provides care by mitigating isolation, offering physical comfort (through ergonomics and a dedicated workspace that is often absent from home offices), and restoring daily rhythms or routines. The “buzz” of co-presence also plays an important role in humanizing work by providing coworkers with fellow coworkers to interact, communicate and spent time together, a form of re-humanization of work. Ergonomic setups protect the body, while short commutes preserve time and energy, while still offering a proper disconnect between work and personal lives. Managers frequently emphasized their role as facilitators of well-being, crafting atmospheres conducive to focus and comfort. Such arrangements mirror broader cultural shifts toward wellness capitalism, a form of commodification of mental health and work-life balance. Coworking spaces do not only rent out desks but a state of being connected, productive and freed of potential distractions in a dynamic workspace.

### 7.3.2 Apparatuses of Control

Coworking spaces also play a role as an infrastructure of control. Open layouts increase visibility, booking systems require some planning ahead of time and the constant possibility of network and fear of missing out cultivates a need for attendance.. As Foucault (2008) observed, neoliberal governmentality operates not through coercion but through self-governance, the internalization of norms that render workers responsible for their own optimization, coworking spatializes this principle. The freedom to choose one's workspace entails the obligation to perform continual choice and self-curation. Workers internalize forms of surveillance, through a feeling of constantly being watched thus the need to be productive, albeit while remaining social, and entrepreneurial. Even the aesthetics of the space, décor items such as plants, minimalist décor, motivational slogans, perform ideological work, translating discipline into lifestyle aspiration. In this sense, coworking stabilizes precarious labour.

### 7.3.3 ANT and Neoliberalism in Dialogue

Bringing ANT and neoliberalism together clarifies the politics of materiality. ANT exposes the “how” of governance, the concrete mechanisms through which spatial design, technology, and atmosphere act. Neoliberalism explains the “why”, i.e., the broader rationalities that make workers accept and even desire such arrangements. The two frameworks converge: ANT grounds the abstract forces of neoliberalism in the tangible networks of everyday life. In coworking, the neoliberal imperative of self-management has materialized in desks, routines, and digital access cards; the promise of autonomy is stabilized by Wi-Fi routers and coffee machines. Autonomy becomes a freedom that is meticulously assembled.

## 7.4 The Montréal Context and the Global Landscape

While the coworking phenomenon is global, the Montréal region provides a distinctive vantage point. Its bilingual and multicultural workforce, affordable urban core, and post-industrial economic base provide fertile ground for the flourishing of alternative work arrangements. Field observations revealed a diverse ecosystem: downtown spaces catering to tech startups and creative industries; suburban hubs offering proximity and parking for hybrid employees; and boutique sites emphasizing artistic or ecological values. This variety reflects not only different user demographics but different interpretations of what “community” means. For some, it is professional networking; for others, it is social belonging; for still others, it is merely the comfort of shared solitude. However, these spaces also reproduce urban inequalities. Membership costs exclude lower-income workers, while spatial concentration in central districts mirrors broader patterns of gentrification. Coworking thus participates in the neoliberal urban imaginary—a city marketed as flexible, innovative, and mobile, yet increasingly inaccessible. Comparatively, Montréal aligns with global trends identified in European and North American literature (Akhavan et al., 2023; Bednář et al., 2023). The post-pandemic boom in hybrid work has diversified coworking’s clientele but also intensified competition, pushing operators to differentiate through branding and amenities. This commercialization risks hollowing out the cooperative ethos that once distinguished coworking from conventional office rental.

At the same time, Montréal’s scale and cultural density allow for small, community-driven models to persist alongside corporate chains. Spaces that emphasize local networks, mutual aid, or creative collaboration illustrate that alternative futures remain possible within neoliberal constraints, micro-resistances that re-imagine work beyond mere productivity.

## 7.5 Implications for the Future of Work

Coworking spaces illuminate the evolving infrastructure of work under digital capitalism. They are not anomalies but symptoms, material articulations of a deeper transformation in how labour, value, and sociality are organized.

### 7.5.1 Re-embedding Work in Space

The year following and during the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped as no longer confined to a specific place, coworking signals another partial re-spatialization of labour. Despite technologies enabling work from anywhere, the need for a dedicated workplace persists. Workers seek to structure their time, discipline their body and have a clean demarcation or break between home and work. This suggests that the future of work might not, in many cases, be fully virtual, but somewhat anchored in a hybrid work arrangement. A growing trend us that workplaces are mandating specific days in office for their team members.

### 7.5.2 Shifting Responsibilities and Risks

Coworking also exposes the ongoing privatization of work infrastructure. Employers have, in some cases, greatly reduced office spaces, thus externalizing spatial costs, transferring responsibility for ergonomic health, social well-being, and professional networking to individuals. This raises policy questions around labour regulation and taxation: when the “office” is privately rented by workers, who bears responsibility for safety, insurance, or accessibility? Furthermore, who should bear the costs associated with office rental or household space when talking about a dedicated home office for some individuals. This deepens the individualization of labour and offloading of costs onto workers. Work becomes a personal project sustained by consumption, buying the right tools, memberships, and routines to remain employable. The

coworking model thus showcases neoliberalism's ideal, converting structural insecurity into opportunities for self-branding.

### 7.5.3 Community as Governance

Community, long celebrated as the antidote to alienation, becomes a new mode of governance. Through shared norms, peer expectations, and affective atmospheres, coworkers police themselves. Informality replaces hierarchy, but the disciplinary effect endures. This has implications for how organizations may increasingly adopt “coworking logics” within corporate offices: open layouts, flexible seating, and “choice-based working” are spreading as cultural ideals. Understanding coworking, therefore, is crucial not only for urban sociology but for anticipating the moral economy of post-industrial work—an economy where connection is both a need and a commodity.

## 7.6 Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

This thesis carries certain limitations. The fieldwork was confined to the Greater Montréal region and concentrated on knowledge-based workers. Future studies could adopt comparative approaches examining coworking in smaller cities or contrasting Montréal with other global hubs like Toronto or Paris to reveal how different labour markets mediate coworking's form and meaning. Methodologically, while interviews and observations provided rich insight, integrating more ethnographic work could yield some interesting results. For instance, analyzing online platforms used by coworking spaces such Slack communities, could showcase how virtual infrastructures intersect with physical ones. Theoretically, there remains room to deepen the dialogue between ANT and neoliberalism by incorporating more

perspectives that question whose labour, care, and flexibility are rendered visible or invisible in these networks. The literature highlighted a significant discrepancy when it comes to unpaid household labour between men and women in a couple. Future research might also explore non-Western models of shared workspaces to challenge the Western, middle-class bias embedded in much of the literature. Finally, longitudinal studies could assess whether coworking's promises, community, well-being, autonomy, endure over time or fade as novelty wanes. For instance, many workplaces have strayed away from the remote work or hybrid work options resorting to three to five days at the office. Although this allows users to continue using coworking spaces, it removes the once dire need to socialize with fellow workers and becomes more complex to continuously frequent those workspaces.

## 7.7 Final Reflections

Coworking spaces crystallize the contradictions of our era. They soothe the loneliness of remote work while monetizing connection; they promise autonomy while demanding relentless self-discipline. In their polished interiors and curated atmospheres, we glimpse both the exhaustion and the ingenuity of neoliberal work culture. Seen through Actor-Network Theory, coworking reveals how productivity and sociality are materially assembled—how desks, chairs, bodies, and emotions intertwine to produce the feeling of “working well.” Seen through neoliberalism, it exposes how those very infrastructures of comfort reproduce inequality by turning well-being into a private purchase. The Montréal case illustrates that these tensions are not abstract but lived daily by workers navigating fragile networks of care and control. Coworking's endurance will depend on its ability to balance these forces, to remain not only a site of production but also one of genuine connection. Ultimately, this thesis argues that

coworking is less a solution than a symptom and stage for the ongoing negotiation between freedom and precarity that defines contemporary labour. It embodies the paradox of modern work: that the pursuit of autonomy now requires ever more intricate infrastructures to sustain it. Coworking, in this sense, might be the architecture of our time, a space where the promises and burdens of neoliberalism coalesce, materialized in glass walls, communal tables, and the hum of quiet productivity.

## Bibliography

- Akhavan, M., Hölzel, M., & Leducq, D. (Eds.). (2023). European narratives on remote working and coworking during the COVID-19 pandemic: A multidisciplinary perspective. Springer Nature Switzerland. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26018-6>
- Barth, A. S., & Blazejewski, S. (2023). Agile office work as embodied spatial practice: A spatial perspective on ‘open’ New Work environments. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 39(1), 101258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2022.101258>
- Bednář, P., Danko, L., & Smékalová, L. (2023). Coworking spaces and creative communities: Making resilient coworking spaces through knowledge sharing and collective learning. *European Planning Studies*, 31(3), 490–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1944065>
- Berend, B., & Brohm-Badry, M. (2022). *New Work: Sovereignty in the postdigital age: Turning point for entrepreneurs, HR professionals, coaches and employees*. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-38525-5>
- Bouncken, R. B. (2023). *Awakening the management of coworking spaces*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Bouncken, R. B., Aslam, M. M., & Qiu, Y. (2021). Coworking spaces: Understanding, using, and managing sociomateriality. *Business Horizons*, 64(1), 119–130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.09.010>
- Bouncken, R. B., Aslam, M. M., Gantert, T. M., & Kallmuenzer, A. (2023). New work design for knowledge creation and sustainability: An empirical study of coworking spaces. *Journal of Business Research*, 154, 113337. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113337>

- Bouncken, R. B., Ratzmann, M., Barwinski, R., & Kraus, S. (2020). Coworking spaces: Empowerment for entrepreneurship and innovation in the digital and sharing economy. *Journal of Business Research*, 114, 102–110.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.033>
- Catacora, D. (n.d.). Coworking by the numbers: 2024 data and trends that offer insights into the future of flex.
- Cerullo, M., Picchi, A., & Edt, P. (n.d.). These major employers are making workers return to the office.
- Clifton, N., Füzi, A., & Loudon, G. (2022). Coworking in the digital economy: Context, motivations, and outcomes. *Futures*, 135, 102439.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2019.102439>
- De Peuter, G., Cohen, N. S., & Saraco, F. (2017). The ambivalence of coworking: On the politics of an emerging work practice. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6), 687–706.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417732997>
- Deng, Z., Messacar, D., & Morissette, R. (2020). Running the economy remotely: Potential for working from home during and after COVID-19. Statistics Canada.  
<https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202101000001-ENG>
- Fast, K., & Jansson, A. (2024). Working in the comfort zone: Understanding coworking spaces as post-digital, post-work and post-tourist territory. *Digital Geography and Society*, 7, 100103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diggeo.2024.100103>
- Fouquet, C. (2020). Espace de coworking : Entre espace physique et sollicitations virtuelles de travail. *Temporalités*, 31–32. <https://doi.org/10.4000/temporalites.7761>

- Gandini, A., & Cossu, A. (2021). The third wave of coworking: 'Neo-corporate' model versus 'resilient' practice. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(2), 430–447.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549419886060>
- Gieryn, T. F. (1983). Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: Strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists. *American Sociological Review*, 48(6), 781–795.
- Gregg, M. (2011). *Work's intimacy*. Polity Press.
- Howell, T. (2022). Coworking spaces: An overview and research agenda. *Research Policy*, 51(2), 104447. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2021.104447>
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Le Nadant, A.-L., Marinos, C., & Krauss, G. (2018). Les espaces de coworking : Le rôle des proximités dans les dynamiques collaboratives. *Revue Française de Gestion*, 44(272), 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.3166/rfg.2018.00233>
- Mehdi, T., & Morissette, R. (2021). Working from home in Canada: What have we learned so far? Statistics Canada. <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202101000001-ENG>
- Merkel, J. (2015). Coworking in the city. *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 15(1), 121–139.
- Merkel, J. (2019). 'Freelance isn't free.' Co-working as a critical urban practice to cope with informality in creative labour markets. *Urban Studies*, 56(3), 526–547.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018782374>
- Mohammadi, M. Y., Rahimi, E., Davatgari, A., Javadinasr, M., Mohammadian, A. K., Bhagat-Conway, M. W., Salon, D., Derrible, S., Pendyala, R. M., & Khoeini, S. (2023).

- Examining the persistence of telecommuting after the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Transportation Letters, 15(6), 608–621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19427867.2022.2077582>
- Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The great good place*. Paragon House.
- Rådman, E., Johansson, E., Bosch-Sijtsema, P., & Raharjo, H. (2023). In search of member needs in coworking spaces. *Review of Managerial Science*, 17(3), 881–907.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-022-00546-4>
- Robelski, S., Keller, H., Harth, V., & Mache, S. (2019). Coworking spaces: The better home office? A psychosocial and health-related perspective on an emerging work environment. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(13), 2379.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16132379>
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ruyter, A. de, & Brown, M. D. (2023). *The gig economy*. Agenda Publishing.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. W. W. Norton.
- Spinuzzi, C. (2012). Working alone together: Coworking as emergent collaborative activity. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 26(4), 399–441.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651912444070>
- Spinuzzi, C., Bodrožić, Z., Scaratti, G., & Ivaldi, S. (2019). “Coworking is about community”: But what is “community” in coworking? *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 33(2), 112–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651918816357>
- Statistics Canada. (2023). Working most hours from home: New estimates for January to April 2022. <https://doi.org/10.25318/11F0019M2023006-ENG>

Statistics Canada. (2024, July 5). Working from home, June 2024 (The Daily).

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240705/dq240705a-eng.htm>

Tremblay, D.-G., & Krauss, G. (2024). The coworking (r)evolution: Working and living in new territories. Edward Elgar Publishing.

<https://www.elgaronline.com/configurable/content/book/9781802209181/9781802209181.xml>

Yacoub, G., & Haefliger, S. (2024). Coworking spaces and collaborative practices. *Organization*, 31(1), 87–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505084221074037>