Introduction
Experiencing the New World of Work

JEREMY AROLES, FRANÇOIS-XAVIER DE
VAUJANY AND KAREN DALE

The New World of Work

Over the past few years, much has been written on the changing world
of work, with discussions focusing, for instance, on the rise of
automation (Spencer 2018), changes in the nature of the employment
relationship (Sweet and Meiksins 2013), the (failed) promises of the gig
economy (Cant 2019; Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta & Hjorth 2019)
or new ways of collaborating and co-producing (de Vaujany, Leclerq-
Vandelannoitte & Holt 2020). Importantly though, these discussions
are not novel, neither are the phenomena they seek to describe. The
history of work is full of *déjà vu*. Communities, participatory systems,
horizontality, democracy at work and nomadism are far from being
new topics per se. In the nineteenth century, the Arts and Crafts
Movement, socialist utopian communities, anarchy and Marxism had
already involved public debates around these topics (see Granter 2016;
Leone and Knauf 2015; Tilly 2019). Yet, there is clearly a renewed
interest for these themes in research attempting to grapple with the
multifaceted nature and the complex meaning of contemporary work
(see for instance Aroles, Mitev & de Vaujany 2019; Fayard 2019;
Simms 2019; Susskind 2020).

One of the guiding threads of many analyses of new ways of
working (and their matching forms of management) is certainly col-
laboration (Garrett, Spreitzer & Bacevice 2017; Spinuzzi 2012).
Collaborative techniques, practices, spaces and sensibilities lie at the
heart of this new world of work. This almost sounds counterintuitive,
in that the current world of work is often depicted as increasingly
fragmented, individualised, digitalised, entre/intrapreneurial, gig-
orientated and compartmentalised for the sake of flexibility, speed
and integration. Platforms, projects, complex matrix-based structures
and Artificial Intelligence allow the materialisation of the 'minimal'
form of socialisation and integration required to act together and most

1

of all to be constitutive of a society. In this world made of individuals 'alone together' (Spinuzzi 2012), in the neo-liberal and post-human context of our societies (Hayles 1999), collaboration is no longer a given maintained through structures, shared routines as well as public standards and institutions. Collaboration then requires new 'conditions of possibilities', continuously reinvented by those contributing to this new world of work. But strangely and paradoxically, collaboration, both in what is claimed about it and sometimes in its actuality, appears more as an individualistic form of collaboration (as opposed to what might have traditionally been thought of as collaboration). Communities are particularly evanescent and ephemeral. They become a strange utopia that is never really fulfilled, a cool, atmospheric, apolitical construct, far from the true public spaces and agora described and expected by Arendt (1998). Interindividual relationships prevail in a neo-liberal order that seems to be more than ever triumphant and calling indefinitely for novelty and rupture in ongoing work practices.

Focus of This Edited Volume

This volume revolves around two dimensions of the new world of work, namely (1) the *lived reality* (lived experiences) and (2) the claimed *novelty* of 'new' work practices. Experiences are varied, diverse and located within broader socio-economic conditions and relations; they also embody different interpretations of those relations. The lived reality of new work configurations is explored through many different perspectives in this edited volume. Some chapters, for instance, engage in an experiential, sensible or phenomenological exploration of the so-called new world of work. Such a stance provides deep insight into the embodied dimension of work practices (Dale 2000, 2005; Küpers 2014; de Vaujany & Aroles 2019) and allows accounting for the differential ways in which the aforementioned changes and transformations are experienced. In addition, it gives us a vocabulary to understand the fabric of obviousness and the taken-for-grantedness of our world, as it is produced by our moods, emotions, affects and activities. Other chapters provide more macro-level forms of theorisation around the manifestations of the new world of work and their implications for those involved in such work

configurations. This helps to locate new work practices within broader socio-economic, historical and cultural conditions and relations.

The issue of novelty is equally crucial to our understanding of new work practices. This volume argues that work, management and organising processes are full of spatio-temporal continuities and discontinuities that become manifested at different levels. The current world of work is necessarily different from, yet similar to, its predecessor: current collaborative practices and processes extend older ones, present forms of precarity reflect past ones, contemporary resistance to automation resonates with very old social movements such as the Luddites and so on. Chapters in this edited volume investigate and unpack these changes and repetitions in the ways in which work activities are both conceptualised and carried out in practice.

Connecting these two concerns (experiences and novelty), this volume explores the following question: How is the 'new' world of work, envisioned since the late 1980s, lived and experienced? To address this question, we sought to put together a collection of chapters that would offer a provocative, diverse and hopefully agenda-setting account of the new world of work. Through various methodological approaches, theoretical lenses and empirical cases, this volume aims to provide an in-depth, qualitative, reflective and fine-grained analysis of new ways of working and new modes of organising. We contend that a critical, experiential and reflective stance is needed in order to go beyond (technologically driven) utopias, glamorising discourses and immaterialised visions and expectations that, more often than not, are mobilised to depict new work practices and the future of work in general.

Following this introduction, the volume is divided into three parts and comprises ten chapters. The first part focuses on a key tenet of new ways of working: co-presence, shared spaces and collaboration. In particular, it explores, conceptually and empirically, the immediate, sensible, embedded and co-present experience of work practices. The second part explores another key aspect of new ways of working and their experience, which seems to be the opposite of co-presence: digitalisation, although the two are intertwined and interrelated in contemporary work in ways that call out for a detailed exploration. It is an opportunity to explore further key temporal and spatial transformations at stake in new ways of working, in particular those activities that are more and more mediated by digital tools and platforms.

Lastly, with the third and final part, this volume explores the imaginaries, politics and narratives of new ways of working. This is an opportunity to stress the paradoxes, geopolitical absurdities and historical drifts sometimes produced by new ways of working in our experience of the world (of work). The first two sections of the volume focus more on the specificities of experiences of new ways of working, while the final section brings a broader historical and political sweep to bear on these changes. In the conclusion, we reflect on the changes and continuities explored in this volume through three dimensions: (i) creativity and changing skills; (ii) the time and space of work; and (iii) the changing nature of the employment relationship and beyond. In addition, this edited volume contains a foreword and an afterword, both of which offer insightful reflections on the future of work.

Part I Experiencing at Work

The first part of this volume comprises four chapters. The first chapter, written by Wendelin Küpers, is entitled 'Embodied Inter-Practices in Resonance as New Forms of Working in Organisations'. This first chapter is a theoretical consideration of new ways of working and what they mean in a relational and embodied way. It explores how a phenomenological approach can help to develop a more integral and relational understanding of embodied and resonant practices of new work in organisations. In such relational practices, material, economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions come together. Based on a phenomenology of embodied practising that sees work as situationally and temporally placed, the processual concept of 'inter-practice' is presented and explored. Afterwards, the relational mode of 'resonance', as developed by Rosa, is presented and critically discussed, with the chapter concluding with some implications and perspectives.

The second chapter, written by Fiza Brakel-Ahmed, is entitled 'Wherever I Lay My Laptop, That's My Workplace: Experiencing the New World of Work in a Hotel Lobby'. This chapter focuses on self-employed workers who work in hotel lobbies that were not primarily designed as co-working spaces. The number of self-employed workers has been growing exponentially over the past twenty years. In parallel, digital technologies have made it possible for people to work from literally anywhere in the world, providing they have the right devices and access to a Wi-Fi system. Self-employed individuals typically do

not have an office in a firm they can go to every day in order to work. Digital technologies open up an array of possibilities – working is possible anywhere and at any time. Self-employed individuals can choose to work from home, a rented hot desk in a co-working space, in coffeeshops, hotel lobbies and even on the beach in a sunny resort on a beautiful island. This chapter explores how *other* spaces, in this case a hotel lobby, can be turned into an 'unintended' co-working space through the agency of self-employed individuals.

The third chapter, written by Mickael Peiro, is entitled '"So Many Cool Things to Do!": Hacker Ethics and Work Practices'. This research is based on an ethnographic study conducted in a political hackerspace in France between 2016 and 2018. The fieldwork combines direct participation with a long-term presence in the community and years of archived exchanges and interviews with all the hackers involved in the initiative. This chapter explores the daily activities of a group of hackers, thus making it possible to experience new forms of organisation and social relations. The analysis of the relationships between the means and ends of the organisation studied suggests that, far from being confined to individual values and attitudes, the pleasure and power given to 'doing' represent organisational principles within hackerspace. It highlights the structuring of the alternative project and how the hackers organise themselves according to their ethics. The hacker ethic is reflected in the organisational tasks and the constitution of a legitimate order; it is not linked to rational, charismatic or traditional motives, but to a real power given to the 'doing': the do-it-ocracy.

The fourth chapter, written by François-Xavier de Vaujany and Jeremy Aroles, is entitled 'Experiencing Making: Silence, Atmosphere and Togetherness in Makerspaces'. This chapter describes the 'experience of making' in two makerspaces, one located in France and the other in the United States. In particular, this chapter focuses on three concepts – silence, atmosphere and togetherness – in order to flesh out, or make visible, the specificities of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and Do-It-Together (DIT) processes in makerspaces. Craftsmanship, making and do-it-ocracy are prominent elements of the so-called new world of work. The authors mobilise Merleau-Ponty's work and an aesthetic perspective on time and place in order to delve into the experience of making. They propose the concept of New Collaborative Experiences (NCE), which is defined as new modes of feeling and expressing the self

and the world in a context that requires collective production and coordination, as a way of illuminating the two ethnographic accounts presented in this chapter.

Part II Digital Platforms and the New World of Work

The second part of this volume consists of three chapters. The fifth chapter, written by Debra Howcroft, Clare Mumford and Birgitta Bergvall-Kåreborn, is entitled 'Exploring Inequalities in Platform-Based Legal Work'. The aim of this chapter is to examine the neglected area of platform work and inequalities. Drawing on Acker's theoretical frame of inequality regimes, this study investigates whether platform work reproduces and/or augments inequalities. Extant research on platforms has focused predominantly on lesser skilled work based on repetitive transactions; in contrast, the authors explore experiences of higher-skilled work, specifically the provision of legal services. A qualitative approach was adopted based on participants using the People Per Hour (PPH) platform, which offers high-skilled professional services targeted at the small-business market. The study is situated in the context of structural disadvantages in the legal profession. The authors show that persistent inequalities within the offline legal profession are not simply mirrored, but amplified in platform work, contesting any optimistic claims that platform work has the potential to act as a leveller.

The sixth chapter, written by Jamie Woodcock, is entitled 'Workers Inquiry and the Experience of Work: Using Ethnographic Accounts of the Gig Economy'. This chapter considers how research that puts the workers' perspective at the forefront can be placed within a critical dialogue with the researcher. While there have been accounts of resistance taking place across Europe in delivery platforms, these have tended to take a broader analytical lens, rather than focusing on the specific practices being experimented with. In this chapter, the author presents a reflection on the experiences of joint writing with workers in the gig economy. The chapter is intended as a corrective to much of the abstract academic research on the 'gig economy'. As such, it is both an empirical and methodological intervention – presenting an account of this work from the perspective of a worker themselves, while also arguing that it is from this perspective that the work can be not only critically analysed but also transformed.

The seventh chapter, written by Claudine Bonneau and Jeremy Aroles, is entitled 'Digital Nomads: A New Form of Leisure Class?'. This chapter draws from Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* to explore whether digital nomads can be seen to constitute a new form of leisure class. Digital nomadism refers to a mobile lifestyle in which freelancers, digital entrepreneurs or remote workers combine work with continuous travel. In particular, this chapter problematises digital nomadism through four dimensions, namely differentiation, emulation, visibility and institutionalisation. Drawing from a qualitative analysis of the mainstream promotional discourse underlying digital nomadism, this chapter shows the existence of a whole set of economic activities based on selling a romanticised work/lifestyle to others. These commercial propositions, which rely on online storytelling and visibility, constitute efficient means of emulation that contribute to framing images of success. This 'Veblen-inspired' analysis generates a source of questions not only relevant to the study of digital nomadism, but also to miscellaneous aspects of the new world of work.

Part III Politics, Imaginaries and *Others* in the New World of Work

The third part of this volume comprises three chapters. The eighth chapter, written by Gibson Burrell, is entitled 'Bypassing the Stage of Copper Wire? New Work Practices amongst the Peasantry'. This chapter is concerned with changes in work practices amongst the 'peasantry' still working upon the land in twenty-first-century India. This population may sound very far from the conventional understandings of shifts in technology that regularly affect how work is done in the 'West' but the rise of ICT technologies, especially the smart phone, have at least the potential to shift practices upon the land that have remained unchanged for centuries. Before the twenty-first century, large infrastructural requirements saw the triumph of copper, so that in some senses a whole material civilisation developed around the electrical and conductive properties of this metal. However, this centralised mode of organising based upon copper has become threatened by a Digital Revolution. New forms of working are allowed by the post-copper technologies and materials of the twenty-first century, but this chapter asks: How widespread and how deep does this rematerialising of organisation actually go?

The ninth chapter, written by Edward Granter, is entitled 'Critical Theory and the Post-work Imaginary'. This chapter presents an analysis of the intellectual heritage underlying the new world of work and seeks to illustrate continuity and disjuncture in the dynamics of what could be termed 'post-work imaginaries'. Advances in production systems and technology, particularly around automation and robotics, have been accompanied in recent years by a resurgence of debate about the future of work. Many contemporary accounts inhabit a utopian space where radical change is desired and envisioned. They point to profound, possibly revolutionary, change in the nature of work – perhaps the end of work. They place work at the centre of social life as presently known, and in so doing tend to offer up a critique of capitalist society *in toto*. During the twentieth century, Western economies grappled with the issue of automation, at the same time finding themselves oscillating between consumer-fuelled expansion and economic crisis. This produced an intellectual engagement with automation and post-work that has much in common with that of today's 'post-industrial utopians'. Even stretching back into antiquity, utopian thinkers imagined a world without toil, and so the notion of 'post-work', or the 'end of work' exists in the context of a long and distinctive intellectual heritage.

The tenth chapter, written by François-Xavier de Vaujany and Aurélie Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, is entitled 'Exploring the New in Politics at Work: A Temporal Approach of Managerial Agencies'. This chapter argues that new ways of working imply a crisis both of communities and politics in our societies. The authors introduce the concept of 'co-politicisation' to make sense of the transformative political power of managerial agency in society. In the context of ongoing work transformations, managerial agency increasingly seems to become a political agency, through its potential to transform society and the sense of togetherness. However, in the meantime, politics has entered into crisis – individuals express their own voice, but without building, in turn, any meaningful or resonant collective and community. This chapter argues that a temporal approach is needed to understand such a crisis of community. Drawing from Paul Ricoeur's thought on a 'crisis of the present', the authors suggest that new ways of working may be missing practices likely to produce the extra-temporality that managerial agency needs to perform. Without this extra-temporality, the managerial agency of new ways of working just keeps weakening our sense of togetherness.

References

Arendt, H. 1998. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aroles, J., Mitev, N. & de Vaujany, F. X. 2019. Mapping themes in the study of new work practices. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 34 (3): 285–299.

Cant, C. 2019. *Riding for Deliveroo: Resistance in the New Economy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dale, K. 2000. *Anatomising Embodiment and Organisation Theory*. Basingstoke: Springer.

2005. Building a social materiality: Spatial and embodied politics in organizational control. *Organization*, 12(5): 64–678.

de Vaujany, F. X. & Aroles, J. 2019. Nothing happened, something happened: Silence in a makerspace. *Management Learning*, 50(2): 208–225.

de Vaujany, F. X., Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, A. & Holt, R. 2020. Communities versus platforms: The paradox in the body of the collaborative economy. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 29(4): 450–467.

Fayard, A. L. 2019. Notes on the Meaning of Work: Labor, Work, and Action in the 21st Century. *Journal of Management Inquiry*. DOI: 1056492619841705.

Garrett, L. E., Spreitzer, G. M. & Bacevice, P. A. 2017. Co-constructing a sense of community at work: The emergence of community in coworking spaces. *Organization Studies*, 38(6): 821–842.

Granter, E. 2016. *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hayles, N. K. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Küpers, W. 2014. *Phenomenology of the Embodied Organization: The Contribution of Merleau-Ponty for Organizational Studies and Practice*. New York: Springer.

Leone, M. P. & Knauf, J. E. 2015. *Historical Archaeologies of Capitalism*. Abingdon: Springer.

Simms, M. 2019. *What Do We Know and what Should We Do about the Future of Work?* London: SAGE Publications Limited.

Spencer, D. A. 2018. Fear and hope in an age of mass automation: Debating the future of work. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 33(1): 1–12.

Spinuzzi, C. 2012. Working alone together: Coworking as emergent collaborative activity. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 26(4): 399–441.

10   *Jeremy Aroles, François-Xavier de Vaujany & Karen Dale*

Susskind, D. 2020. *A World Without Work*. London: Allen Lane.

Sweet, S., & Meiksins, P. 2013. *Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tilly, C. 2019. *Work Under Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.

Wood, A. J. Graham, M. Lehdonvirta, V. and Hjorth, I. 2019. Good gig, bad gig: Autonomy and algorithmic control in the global gig economy. *Work, Employment and Society*, 33(1): 56–75.