

Working in parallel time-spaces: a methodology of retro-prospective anticipation

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Abstract

The space and time in which work takes place goes beyond the work space and the hours worked. Work is experienced in imaginary, projected, symbolic parallel time-spaces, at least as much as in the places and moments of employment. Accessing these dimensions needs more than explicit discourses and demands being able to collect, decipher and understand the implicit layers in work experience. In this perspective we propose studying fictional or part-fictional cases for a better understanding of organization life experience, based on the concept of anticipation, understood not as prediction but as implicit preparation for what might (have) happen(ed). The chapter gives examples of how to concretely study fiction, semi-fiction and science-fiction narratives about work and future work, and what kind of practical knowledge it produces, transferable to real work in real life.

Keywords: work narratives; science-fiction; semi-fiction; anticipation

The following text draws on the Unesco Chair “Art and Science for implementing sustainable goals”⁹ and its 2022-2023 work on fiction and organization studies. The chair’s conviction is that only the transdisciplinary integration of symbolic, artistic and scientific thinking will allow transforming organisations governance and management towards sustainable socio-economic behaviors and thinking, in a holistic and sustainable form of knowledge and practice. Integrating the arts and the imaginary to rational processes of thought and knowledge is experimented by the chair programs and projects in a variety of approaches, from the use of symbolic artefacts in management to the publication of science-fiction literature on the future of work.

Anticipation and fiction

Time-space is a modern and contemporary notion resulting from the interdependence of the two concepts of time and space. Time and space are related to one another, as established by particle sciences, astrophysics, mathematics, as by neurosciences (Eichenbaum, 2017; Buzsáki, 2013), cognitive philosophy (Green, forthcoming; De Brigard et al., 2018), psychology (Reavey, 2017) or social sciences (Adams et al. 2009), in the footsteps of

Parmenides, Leibniz, Bergson, among others. A given time-space defines a universe, of which there would be innumerable myriads, parallel, superimposed, intersecting (Everett, 1957) as postulated by string theory¹⁰. Astrophysics theories about multiple parallel universes are translated in social sciences in metaphoric thinking, for example on disciplinary space splitting (Hackley, 2010), or literal use in theorizing the new self in social network or avatars in technological “virtual” realities (Subbotsky, 2020), where “universes” is interpreted as cultural horizon, within which we behave, think, perceive and understand differently. In daily life we are permanently immersed in such different universes – among the more obvious memories and expectations, or the past and the present – which we interrelate by evocating, anticipating or jumping from one time-space to another: from dream to reality, from intention to act, from memory to creation, from your shoes to mine. Beyond the technologies of the “virtual”, the activity of simulation is ordinary and banal, whether it is the training to particular situations, the mental projection into others’ perceptions, the forecasting of more or less probable events¹¹, or the recollection of past memories. Simulation allows anticipation, in the sense of explicit or implicit preparation for what might happen¹². Explicit: when uncertainty is limited, predictions, forecasts, expectations, hopes, fears are possible, allowed and widely implemented in our daily life¹³. Implicit: when uncertainty dominates, preparation is no less possible: for example, a car driver prepares himself implicitly, below the threshold of consciousness, instinctively, for an unexpected vehicle. Or, at night, I am so ready that I jump and shiver at the slightest noise. Anticipation is an anchored mental functioning, underlying conscious life, as a constant mental operation, essential to living beings. It is inscribed at the heart of perception and its “anticipatory sensors” (Berthoz, 2015), which prepares us for a range of mentally “simulated” actions, in a complex and – by definition – uncertain world. Moreover, we “anticipate” the past as well, in the form of what might have happened differently: preparing to learn that what we thought had happened, maybe in fact happened but was different. From the discovery that my appointment is not late because he had written down tomorrow's date, to the discoveries of ancestors of mankind well before the beginnings of man, we are facing the past in the same way

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¹⁰ String theory: in particle physics, a theory that attempts to merge quantum mechanics with Albert Einstein’s general theory of relativity. The name string theory comes from the modeling of subatomic particles as tiny one-dimensional “stringlike” entities rather than the more conventional approach in which they are modeled as zero-dimensional point particles. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online. <https://www.britannica.com/science/string-theory>. Accessed 13 May 2023.

¹¹ Different categories of potential futures have been discriminated as projected, probable, plausible, and possible (Marchau et al. 2019).

¹² I adapt the definition given by Zamenopoulos and Alexiou (2020): “capacity to act in response to or in preparation for a potential future reality”.

¹³ For the application of the different levels of uncertainty to levels of preparation in strategy and policy making, see Van Dorsser et al., 2020.

as the future: what if something else was? What if this had happened instead of that? "What if", is the condition of becoming and strategic action. The children say: let us make as if...

Neither reducible to the ludic, childish nor poetic, the "as if" constitutes a sophisticated realization, the most accomplished perhaps, of adaptive reason. Pragmatist abduction is one of its form. The philosophy of "as if" (Vaihinger, 1911) extends pragmatism into fictionalism, which maintains that fictions fulfill a role in the discovery of truth. "Thought begins first with deviations from reality (half-fictions)" (Vaihinger 2005), to arrive at the pure fictions of ideal constructs, which are "in contradiction not only with reality, but with themselves", like a 'particle with no dimension' (Vaihinger, 1923:16). These fictional ideal constructs (never encountered in reality) are necessary for the pursuit of knowledge. "Vaihinger maintains, paradoxically, that the thought manages to solve theoretical problems and to master reality thanks to the use of fictions, that is to say of constructions which, however, deviate from reality" (Bouriau in Vaihinger 2005). Vaihinger introduces fiction as a thought process in the scientific method of truth-seeking. We could relate it to "thought (or mental) experiments" (Brown and Yiftach, 1996): since ancient times, numerous thinkers have stated and practiced that we can learn about the real world by virtue of merely thinking about imagined scenarios; this even constitutes a preliminary necessary condition for scientific experiment, consisting in imagining various circumstances relating to different hypothesis (Mach, 1908). Vaihinger takes the examples of legal, logical, or mathematical knowledge. For example, infinitesimals in mathematics are fictional ideations, which cannot by definition exist (since if one existed, a smaller one would immediately replace it, in an infinite regress). Vaihinger thus proposes a theory of knowledge in terms of fiction; could it be reversed into 'a theory of fiction in terms of knowledge'?

The power of fiction rests on the paradox of aesthetic emotion which holds in three propositions: 1) we are truly moved by fictions; 2) we know that the content of a fiction is not real; 3) we are truly moved only by what we believe to be real (Radford, 1975). This paradox extends to other domains than emotion: 1) fictional data produces true knowledge 2) we know that fictional data is not real 3) true knowledge comes from, and is about, the real. To claim to have true knowledge of Hamlet, for example to be able to predict his behavior, after reading Shakespeare's play would be illusory. However, we get from Shakespeare's artworks a real knowledge of the human psyche in a situation of power struggles for example. Without entering into the debates on the definitions of fiction nor its philosophical discussions, let us say that the

knowledge on the organizations which we can withdraw from fiction, as in natural sciences the knowledge produced by the introduction of the fiction of the atom (non-existent in the real), on the one hand is a verified knowledge of the real, on the other hand is unattainable by other methods. This is why using fiction to study the world of work, though paradoxical is justified, beyond simply predicting the future of work, for developing a true knowledge of work.

Work and time-space

The space and time in which work takes place goes beyond the work space and the hours worked. Work is experienced in imaginary, projected, symbolic time-space, at least as much as in the places and moments of employment. These differ from the mobilization of the imagination in innovation or problem-solving processes for example, which consider imagination as a solution provider, a look-out-of-the-box tool. Imaginary time-spaces are places to live, not answers to questions. On the contrary, imaginary experiments have the capacity to raise questions of another kind. They establish "copossibilities" and can "bring on a crisis or at least create an anomaly in the reigning theory" (Kuhn 1964, quoted by Brown 1996). Thus the parallel time-spaces, fictional or imaginary universes tapping into "instinctive knowledge" (Brown, 1996) are constitutive parts of the true reality of work experience. Pragmatic philosophies have influenced organizational theories and put experience at the center of most contemporary organizational sciences approaches. The collection of lived experience, ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods, semi-structured interviews, all seek to be "qualitative", i.e. to qualify organizational experience as knowledge, and to draw theoretical knowledge from it. However, at the heart of these so-called qualitative methods, and of the community of researchers who practice them, there are dissensions: should the reality of lived experience be guaranteed, corroborated by accumulation, by verification of the facts? Or, if it remains unverifiable, absolutely subjective, how could it contribute to knowledge? The debate repeats the one that opposes the supporters of duplicable studies to researchers on unique, particular, singular cases. The uniqueness of the singular is similar to fiction: there is no "reality" in it, as something which could be found in any other case. Nevertheless, the study of "singular cases" produces science, though not in the sense of duplicable, generalizable knowledge, operating as a generalization of findings. "If not the aesthetic effect, what would be the use of a knowledge not valid elsewhere or on other occasions?" (Moriceau, 2004: 113). It is a qualitative knowledge consisting in "going up, from the drama that is played out here and now in the case, towards the problematic that will be repeated elsewhere and in other

times" (Moriceau, 2004). Not the knowledge of immutable general laws, it is an approximate knowledge of the problematic knots in organizational life, knots that often appear, that repeat themselves in variable forms, and produce those singular phenomena that the study of single cases observes. Studying singular cases leads to better understanding the recurrent organizational knots and how they will appear under different appearances and effects. Extending the issue of the singular, the case of the fictional meets the same opposition. If not the literary genre and associated authorial positioning, of what use would a fictional organizational experience be? Far from the discussion of objectivity and subjectivity, studying fictional or part-fictional cases has been recognized of value for the knowledge of organizational phenomena, giving access to a better understanding of organization life experience (Czarniawska, 2019), or to the different truths co-existing in a given situation (Igartua et Vega Casanova, 2016). How does it work concretely and what kind of practical knowledge does the study of a fiction produces, transferable to real work in real life?

Let's suppose that a teleworker recounts his experience of teleworking on a deserted island, for forty days, in total technical, food, medical and psychological autonomy. Except for the fact of his arrival and return, plus a few hundred emails and posts on blogs and social networks, nothing is verifiable from his story. A literary adventurer, this Web Robinson has everything of a fictional hero. A mythomaniac perhaps, a communicator certainly, an author, how could his story, which we will call semi-fictional in order to respect its assumed reality, be used as a case for a serious study on telework? Yet this is what we have produced.

The Worker on a Desert Island for 40 Days

In line with narrative approaches (Clandinin 2007), we studied the various narratives of this "WebRobinson" experience (Stich and Mairesse, 2022) and their reception: narratives produced by the author ("Gauthier"), before, during and after its unfolding; narratives produced by the media; snippets of narratives posted on social networks and exchanges with Internet users. We also interviewed ordinary teleworkers about their perception of an audio-visual summary-narrative that we produced ourselves, with the hero's voice-over commenting on images from his stay. Such data are of the order of romanticized reality or semi-fiction (Whiteman and Phillips, 2008). They do not document the reality of telecommuting, but they do provide access to a lived experience. Whether the experience recounted in the stories is verifiable or not, whether it was actually experienced by a real person, is ultimately irrelevant; the point of fiction, its initial paradox, is to experience what the characters experience, perhaps even more intensely than the real people around

us. As it is the case when drawing from a movie or a novel knowledge about real phenomena (for example understanding a murderer's psychology from looking at Hitchcock's movie *Psycho*), the treatment of semi-fictional empirical data allows by identification to access a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study (Watson, 2011; Whiteman and Phillips, 2008). In our case, for understanding the emotional experience of intensive telework, we studied the perception of the "fictional" situation of the teleworker Gauthier on his desert island by other teleworkers in ordinary situations. We show that this understanding results from narrative identification mechanisms (Holt and Zundel, 2018; Buchanan and Hällgren, 2019), by projection into the story. Identification was implemented from the beginning by Gauthier the storyteller himself, who, deciding to tell his experience even before he left, projects himself as the hero of the story to come, with which he will identify partially (other identifications taking precedence at times: to his colleagues, to the internet users, to his family). The understanding of these identification mechanisms allows us to conclude that, although the (semi)fiction study does not give access to the factual reality of telework, the teleworkers recognize in this extraordinary story their own experience of telework and its paradoxes of enslaved autonomy and connected loneliness, pushed to the extreme by the adventure narrated (the islander's freedom ... to subject himself to continuous working days in front of the computer; his feelings of isolation in the midst of the connection). The necessity for the adventurer of the setting in narrative appears finally as something else than his desire of visibility and mediatization: it is a question of his psychological and physical balance, and the fictionalizing narrative (the fictionalization of the real that his narrative operates) appears as a means of supporting and facing the constraints and paradoxes of this mode of intense work. It is then possible to derive from this some leads for managing well-being in periods of intense remote work.

A practical knowledge of the phenomenon thus results not from its direct study, but from the study of the fictions that deal with it. Fictional or semi-fictional genres bring us face to face with reality. An alternative reality, free from the constraints and presuppositions of ordinary reality, but based on it. The opposition between the truth (verifiability) of "scientific" data and the non-verifiability (error, fiction) of narratives has been criticized and overcome (Phillips, 1995), first because "data" are constructs in the same way as narratives (Brkich and Barko, 2013; Whiteman and Phillips, 2008), second because genres that transpose situations and information in the form of imaginary stories and metaphors use real facts either as a source of inspiration (fiction) or as content (semi-fiction) (Clandinin, 2007). The nature of

the acquired knowledge goes beyond accessing the subjective experience. In our example, the study of the ordinary teleworkers' perception of Gauthier's storytelling suggests telework is experienced in multiple heterogeneous ways: the ordinary teleworker lives on several simultaneous planes. On the one hand, there is the plane of ordinary life and constrained work, and on the other, an imaginary plane in which the teleworker survives in total autonomy on a deserted island, between isolation and connection, a paradise island and bondage with no way out. The imaginary world we are talking about here is not fantasy, dream, escape or entertainment. It is a part of reality. The plane of the imaginary is just as real, really lived, as the material situations, it is even possible that it is more real than the material concrete reality of the situated remote work situation. The time-space of the experience of work, and probably of any organizational phenomenon, is not unique. Without being endowed with supernatural powers, the actors of the organization live in several time- space, several parallel universes, not metaphorically but concretely. What happens if one of these planes, one of these universes, takes over? If we consciously build imaginary ideal organizational universes where working would only be fun? What would happen to the relationships between the actors of such inter-secant universes?

The Worker on a Desert Island for 40 Days

These questions are not purely formal: they are the subject of two of the science fiction short stories in the anthology on the future of work that we published in May 2023 (Stich and Nicot, 2023, *Travailler encore? Sciences et fictions sur le futur de l'emploi*). In the first, the worker in a state of weightlessness carries out his ordinary activity of technical maintenance in a space station, what he has always dreamed of. But at the heart of this ideal, the worst syndrome is lurking, from which he will not escape. The ideal working world is not ideal, and the planes fall back on each other in a catastrophic domino effect. In the second, the ideal avatar in the form of which, once again, the worker carries out his activity in dream conditions allows him to satisfy his worst instincts of domination and manipulation, evacuating any ethical limit. Other stories envisage multiple parallel universes functioning as a distorting mirror of each other, where the most emancipating work consists in creating yet another universe-bubbles, of inestimable value because they evoke with a staggering realism pieces of the forgotten reality. Or again, the total immersion in the euphoria of this creative work exalts employees and managers to the highest level. It is not a question of forecasting, of envisaging possibilities in the more or less short term. It is a question of anticipation in the strongest sense, that is

to say "speculative forecast" (instead of real science), which produces an epistemic value through saturation (Adams et al., 2009). Predictable uncertainty produces the state of anticipation, when the interest for the actual is replaced by the focus on the future, known through its speculative possibilities of actualization. A result of the growing environmental uncertainty and the proliferation of forecasting, the anticipatory attitude becomes a daily way of life, an affective state made of excitement, anxiety, and thirst for knowledge, a way of orienting oneself temporally after the loss of the old linear chain past-present-future. The temporal colonialist chain in the name of a progressive "present", a one-way arrow between the "savage" past and the enlightened future, is destabilized under the retro-prospective effect of a shifting and uncertain future (ibid.: 247). The regimes of anticipation are not reserved for the imaginary or the literature: biogenetics and the perspective of embryonic optimization, accounting audits that anticipate future scenarios, risk mitigation strategies by simulating disasters, are very present activities in our real organizations. In a distorted echo of the work that takes place on parallel fictional narrative planes, our present is organized essentially in terms of futures that must be experienced before they happen (ibid.: 248). To "make experience", to make feel, to make believe: prospective anticipation is a politics of affects. Biotechnologies, nanotechnologies, artificial intelligences, with their unimagined potentialities, press us towards anticipation: do with what could happen as if it were there.

Anticipatory researchers

The collection of science fiction that we edited (Nicot and Stich, 2023) is interspersed with texts by researchers, who between the pages of these plunges into the multiple universes of the future of work seek to keep their heads up, to think about what is, in relation to what could be, to rely on alternative models of organization, to add to or subtract from the anticipation. The alternation of literary writings and analytical texts produces a two-speed prospective effect. Acceleration: the experience of working in simultaneous parallel planes assisted by AI is rushing towards us, to the point that some accounts have almost nothing futuristic about them, such as Katia Lanero Zamora's "Parallax". Braking: the definition of work in Diderot's and D'Alembert's *L'Encyclopedie* (1751) given at the end of the preface of the anthology has lost none of its relevance: "Work: daily occupation to which man is condemned by his need, and to which he owes at the same time his health, his subsistence, his serenity, his good sense and his virtue perhaps¹⁴." The old family, collective and ritual values come back to life in the face of technological, political or capitalist transformations.

¹⁴ « occupation journalière à laquelle l'homme est condamné par son besoin, & à laquelle il doit en même tems sa santé, sa subsistance, sa sérénité, son bon sens & sa vertu peut-être. » *L'Encyclopédie*, 1st edition, 1751, Vol. 16, p. 567.

Magic and sorcery, animal-totems and alchemists of the code, inhabit multiverses where human and non-human workers merge, where affects fuse with and are mistaken for objects. Research loses out here: the researchers' texts often lack the writing quality of fiction writers, which strangely verifies Schütz's prediction: "The safeguarding of the subjective point of view is the only (yet sufficient) guarantee that the world of social reality will not be substituted by a non-existent fictional world constructed by the scientific observer" (2007, cited by Moriceau 2018). Here, the safeguarding of the subjective point of view guarantees the fictional worlds of social reality, which the scientific observer attempts to substitute for the existing.

We and our anthology's researchers face the writing requirement posed by Moriceau (2018:53): "to propose other being-in-the-worlds, even a symphony of new worlds." Or again (55) : " It is above all a question of restoring this experience, of making the effect of these additional dimensions [the body, the narratives, the materiality, the space, the affects, the practice, the gender, the memory, the territory, etc.] felt, of evoking, of giving to see and experience ". To bring up the implicit, the forbidden, the unspoken, the neglected or the rejected: the meanings of the work are hidden, and they are mostly symbolic meanings. These meanings, intended to orient the conceptions of work, are carried, described, explored by science fiction writings, as temporally dependent meanings (sense making), not from the point of view of the intermittence or permanence of the meaning of work and its elaboration (Tommasi, 2020) but from the point of view of referential time-spaces. In a given time-space such work (for example to check the good functioning of a decompression valve of a space station) makes sense completely for its operator. In another collateral time-space, simultaneously, at the same moment, this same work is unbearable. The simultaneity of time-space in which work is lived makes the question of meaning undecidable, including for the worker himself. Many of the published short stories attest to this: meaning and nonsense coexist in the parallel universes where work is experienced. How could we explore these dimensions of meaning in work through realistic empirical studies? The simple definition and delimitation of the distinct and connected time-space where work takes place would require a kind of observation that is itself diffracted on several distinct levels: observing the operator, his surroundings, his actions, his effects, his feelings, but also his distractions, his dreams, those of his gestures that are only thought about, etc. In addition to the complexity of collecting these data, their nature would be problematic. Which disciplines would have the power to locate and identify them, and how could such interdisciplinarity be legitimized? Studies of fictional or semi-fictional data get around these difficulties, particularly because they come

in the constructed, prepared form of more or less linguistic, more or less discontinuous, more or less signed narratives. Linstead (2018) calls the researcher mobilizing art for research to produce "critically affective performative texts": texts in a broad sense, including literary or fictional writing, performances, or experiments, for engaging the subjective poetic and affective as well as the political and social critique This could be a definition of fictional or semi-fictional literary texts. The story of the "worker on a desert island for 40 days", in itself a novel title, we have shown is a text of this kind: permanently affective, allowing narrative identification, it "performs" in the sense of the living arts and not in the sense of Austin. "Performed" on several parallel stages, the media stage, the organizational stage, the mythical stage, the intimate stage, it unfolds from beginning to end a memorable, rehearsed, replayed story. What the researcher can - and should - add to fictional texts, by studying or producing them, is an understanding of how they function, in particular how they are diffracted on several levels and how by doing so they describe reality and its diffractions. Linstead identifies four "moments" through which such texts operate: the poetic, the political, the aesthetic, and the ethical. When it comes to (science) fictions and the possible futures of work, identifying these moments, planes, or universes in which work is lived according to different meanings, is the responsibility of the anticipatory researcher. Science fiction authors, like the architect of the Matrix, construct plausible interlocking universes in which workers experience the meaning of their activities with varying degrees of happiness. These are "thick sensory descriptions" (Taylor and Hansen, 2005). The researcher, unprepared, and not mastering the appropriate writing processes, is not suited to the production of such texts; it would demand an immense amount of work of him. Instead of this laborious reconversion, we propose to rely on science-fiction texts in order to understand on which planes, in which time-spaces, the meaning of the future-already work is played out, by analyzing where their effectivity comes from.

For example, the "Cadre Spationaute (the spaceman manager)" by Fabien Fernandez operates in two superimposed universes: one is his ideal work environment, the other his "real" social life (of which we will know nothing except his teammate jobs titles and that his companion leaves him). On these first two levels are grafted two others: his own internal time-space, corporeal and mental; and the time-space of the controllers who observe him. The "moments" by which this text acts are identifiable: poetic (the ballet in weightlessness of the spaceman alone in front of the sidereal and black emptiness), political (the social downgrading), aesthetic (the vision of the blue and white

planet Earth), ethical (to take care of those that one downgrades). They are imbricated and interdependent, and reverberate from one universe to another in distinct forms. In the intimate corporal universe of the spaceman, the poetic moment diffracts itself in sensations of floating and suspensions, the aesthetic in rhythm, the political in headaches, the ethical in aberration. But these same moments are also diffracted on the universe of the controllers, and on that one of the social life. We could analyse how the poetic of the weightlessness is resonating in the controllers' world as weighing responsiveness to stress: the idealization of work is countered, or counters, the politics of efficiency, at the cost of the worker's health. His health represents the worker's pledge and bet in his quest for the ideal in the face of the constraints of objectives – this is what the case tells. This is how science fiction stories bring out knowledge about work, or the future of work: they show quite explicitly how the critically affective performing moments diffract across the different time-spaces at different speeds (of sedimentation would say Deleuze) and according to variable segmentarities. For the duration of the reading, the whole thing creates a world, which collapses in the last page, by the collapse of the moments on each other. By identifying the different planes of sedimentation, we can induce the mechanisms interrelating the planes, and understand their reliability or fragility through studying the collapse.

What happened?

The interweaving of meaning-making moments in the various universes is complex to expose, though experienced simply by reading. What is experienced then is the intertwining of meanings at multiple and co-existing levels in multiple time-space. The underlying question that the reader asks himself: could it have happened differently? what happened? is the "utilitarian" reduction of the central question posed by the story: what happened to bring us to this point, to make the future of the work look like this? The functioning of the short story, its literary process is to describe the intersections between the different worlds only at the final moment. Until then, we remain suspended, wondering what has happened (and not what will happen), what has brought this spaceman to this situation of being unable to act, as in nightmares where the legs no longer respond to the brain's injunctions to start running, while he repeats to himself how happy he is to be doing this work, here. Deleuze (1980:235) characterizes the genre of the short story precisely by this question: what happened? Not on the mode of the investigation but on the mode of the unknowable, of the imperceptible, and not "because it would speak about a past of which it would not have the possibility to give us the knowledge anymore" (p.237). What is this almost nothing, which makes something

happened? The science-fiction short story transports the interrogation by doubling it in a 'mise en abyme'. What could have happened for these characters to get to where they are? The search for what will happen is equivalent to the search for what (perhaps) happened: this is where the expression "prospective anticipation" takes on its meaning. We could add: retro-prospective anticipation. What science fiction (its authors) makes us experience about work is this: what do we not know, that we cannot know, that we ignore, neglect or refuse, which will make our work in the future come to this? The above example shows how neglecting the bet on health taken by workers to balance their quest for an ideal work in face of the pressure for results would lead to forbidden-or-definitive breakdowns – a worthy learning for HR management. For the most part, the scholars in the anthology fail to keep the questioning in its intact tension. One gives a glimpse of a technological cause (completed indistinguishability between AI and humans). Another returns to the recurrence of old human obsessions, ambition, domination, bestiality. A third reformulates the imagined fictions in current rational terms, thus operating a subtle reversal of the imaginary into extrapolation of the current and of the anticipation into prediction. The last reversal seems to us to be the most pernicious: by translating utopia (or dystopia) into realistic rational terms (the discovery of a universal, free and inexhaustible energy becomes access to a universal income; the uselessness of work becomes the reduction of working time; the network of self-organizing machines ensuring the general equilibrium becomes an almighty reliable computer), the fictional paradox is brought down to the level of logic and rational choices. These procedures are specific to research, which here attempt to circumscribe the contributions of fiction to the question: how, why, would we get there (or not)? The researchers' worries is about the preparation of possible futures, not about the mystery of their possibility, which the short stories address through plots that keep the reader on the edge of his seat, caught in the unanswered question: What would make us have made these universes happen, where work consists of trying to remember what is real? where work aims at gaining access to impunity behind the most unsuspected avatars? where the ideal work is the worst of all? The question of what happened, put in the future (what will have happened) produces an opening on intersecting parallel universes, not where tomorrow's work will perhaps take place, but in which all work is ever and always carried out. Anticipation in this retro-prospective way leads to a reflection and an understanding perhaps able of thwarting futures that are too risky, but above all capable of teaching us researchers to re-think time and the place of work, their concrete reality, as multiple interwoven fictional time-spaces, and to identify the passer-by, the passage points – and perhaps the costs – of travelling from one to another.

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