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## Thinking about the technique, thinking about the work activity: a psychological view on human-machine relationships in an era of automation

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Debates around automation and work have (re-)emerged strongly in the public sphere, stemming from growing concerns about a “new era” of workplace automation and its impact on the future of human work. While not new, these concerns are rooted in a plethora of narratives heralding a complete dissociation between the social and technical realities. Drawing more upon speculative future scenarios of work than on empirical approaches, these projections propose to assess the potential for machine substitution while operating multiple simplifications. Conversely, we propose an analysis of the human-machine relationships through a theoretical and empirically understanding sustained in the work activity analysis. Our research comprises two ongoing studies: a study with automated driving expert researchers to explore the status of human drivers as levels of vehicle automation increase; the second study is developed in a cork industrial cluster which has been going through technological change, principally through the incorporation of automated machines. The human-automation configurations analysed revealed the irreducibility of the embodied know-how. A paradox then arises: to a certain extent, automation promotes a progressive “sidelining of the body” and, consequently, all embodied practices would be apparently divested; however, key here is how, at the same time, automation calls for the body’s intelligence in an imperative way. We put forward two interlinked strands of reflection: (i) in their relationships with machines, workers constitute a repertoire of embodied arbitrations (“sensitive universes”) by incorporating the limits and potentials of automated machines; (ii) to gain access to this operative language is a challenge, for instance, in order to train new workers, inasmuch as there is a persistent tendency to detach the technical operation of the objects from the social world which, in fact, gives meaning to them and makes such technical functioning possible.