

Everyday Automation: Experiencing and Anticipating Emerging Technologies

by Sarah Pink, Martin Berg, Deborah Lupton and Minna Ruckenstein (eds.) (2022) Abingdon and New York, Routledge, pp. 250.

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Do you know when you are typing, and your phone tries to guess the subject and suggests the next word? Or when Alexa talks to us and suggests results on a specific topic? These are examples of automation in our daily lives. *Everyday Automation: Experiencing and Anticipating Emerging Technologies*, edited by Sarah Pink, Martin Berg, Deborah Lupton, and Minna Ruckenstein, provides a comprehensive examination of the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automated decision-making (ADM) on our daily lives. Despite their messy and shifting nature, as outlined by the contributors in this volume, AI and ADM are characterised by algorithms. Therefore, *Everyday Automation* suggests an exploration of the everyday and situated relationships with automation, aiming to humanise it while emphasizing the impact, presence and perceptions related to ADM and AI.

This is an edited volume that puts forward a research agenda structured around an interdisciplinary way of exploring everyday automation. The book dialogues with and expands on contributions from more-than-human theory, Feminist Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and scholarships tackling the everyday engagements of humans and non-humans with algorithms and digital infrastructures. If Kate Crawford (2021), reviewed in TS 1/2022 by Federico Cugurullo, provided readers with a reflection on the places (earth), practices (labour and classification), forms of knowledge (data), elements (affect) and organizations (state) implicated in the many stages of AI development and implementation, this book proposes a focus on the mundane engagements between humans and AI, presented in the form of ADM. This approach acknowledges the humans involved in every stage of the design, delegation, and implementation of automated systems. Bringing people and their daily practices to the discussion around automation allows striking a balance between industry portrayals of automation as a perfect solution and the view of data-driven decisions as cruel and reductionist. Through this book, the contributors focus on the human part of automation processes and allow us to consider the practical, experiential, social, and political implications of automated technologies in everyday life.

The first part of the book encompasses Chapters 1 to 4 and is named “Challenging dominant narratives of automation”. It provides an overview of moments where imaginaries, vi-

sions and narratives around automation are challenged, echoed, or multiplied by our daily practices. In Chapter 1, Lina Rahm and Anne Kaun analyse newspaper clippings on automation in the Swedish press from the 1950s to 1980s. They examine mundane ways of imagining technological change and the visual depiction of such processes. They reveal how public discourse on innovation and automation oscillates between confirmation and demystification of technology, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea of natural and inevitable technological progress. Sarah Pink, in Chapter 2, discusses the role of trust within industry, policy and research sectors shaped by a techno-solutionist innovation paradigm, as the market of ADM transport mobilities. She shows how the coupling between trust in automation and human ethics disconnects the everyday worlds where ethics and trust are experienced from those where automated technology is designed and developed. Looking at future imaginaries of ADM transport mobilities, trust is situated as something that needs to be generated so that people will (correctly) use automated technologies to solve societal problems. In Chapter 3, Deborah Lupton introduces a sociocultural reading of how digitised surveillance was deployed or anticipated in the year following WHO's pandemic declaration, highlighting the implementation of digitised surveillance in social and political contexts and effects. She anchors the chapter in three concepts: digitalisation, datafication and dataveillance to explore Covid as a calculatory process that despite heavily relying in surveillance practices and in the implementation of digitised Covid solutions, still had little impact on populations living in data poverty and potentially leading to the exacerbation of existing disadvantages and discriminations. Chapter 4 discusses the implementation of automated attendance systems in classrooms. Neil Selwyn discusses how the implementation of facial recognition technology in Australian schools – part of an automated attendance system – is connected to a broader dominating educational logic that conditions contemporary school reform to disintermediate the interaction between teacher and students, reducing the student's subjectivities to data points and diminishing teachers' capacity to deal with emergent classroom dynamics.

The second part, "Embedding automated systems in the everyday", is composed of Chapters 5 to 9 and focuses on how automation has crept into our more intimate and personal moments and the consequences of this movement. In Chapter 5, Jenny Kennedy and Yolande Strengers propose a gender reading of digital assistants. In their work from 2020, Kennedy and Strengers tackle how digital assistants revisit outdated gender stereotypes (Strengers and Kennedy 2020, reviewed in TS 2/2021 by Linda Paxling). In their contribution to "Everyday Automation", they expand on their previous work by exploring how gender is programmed into these assistants and how their decisions are bound by ADMs seeking to automate distinct manners of care, resembling "women's intuition" or the feminised work historically connected to bearing high levels of emotional intelligence. This specific performance of gender is a way of facilitating the acceptance of caregiving coming from digital assistants or "smart wives". Heather Horst and Sheba Mohammad, in Chapter 6, focused on the Echo Look, an Amazon device that uses AI to collect social media data on clothing and provide people with suggestions and recommendations on outfit options. What the authors highlight is how users make sense of Echo Look practices, the context of its use and the limitations of this machine, that is, what Echo cannot see, like different fashion contents and contexts. Chapter 7, authored by Jakob Svensson, exposes the ways in which people get entangled

with algorithms on a daily basis. He explores how algorithms and algorithmic automation are imagined in a newspaper's newsroom and the socio-institutional practices embedded in these imaginaries. Svensson argues that the way the newsroom staff imagine the algorithm also frames the calculations of the algorithm itself. For example, imaginaries of algorithmic automation as labour-saving and time-efficient afforded the construction of an algorithm responsible for sorting the newspaper's frontpage and which news reach readers. Consequently, the algorithm optimized the journalists' time and allowed them to focus on the content. In Chapter 8, the focus of the analysis lies on office-based workplace tracking devices. In this chapter, Stine Lomborg explores self-tracking at the workplace. Through empirical work in Denmark, he shows us how everyday AI solutions at work try to advance a homogenisation of work values while forgetting that users actively contribute to the uses of technology and continuously shape and reappropriate digital systems to their own ends. The last chapter of this section, written by Magnus Bergquist and Bertil Rolandsson, presents a discussion on the delegation of decision-making to ADM devices in healthcare. In their text, it becomes clear that ADM is an opaque and ambiguous tool which allows workers and professionals to improvise and be creative in managing healthcare, granting healthcare workers the capacity to perform even more complex and nuanced practices.

The third and last part – Chapters 10 to 14 – titled “Experimenting with automation in society” discusses the many different engagements, practices and relations established with automated technologies in the everyday. In Chapter 10, Martin Berg looks at robotic process automation in the workplace and how companies create value propositions in relation to their products and specific ideas about what work is and what it can become. By looking at the discursive practices of two companies – UiPath and Blue Prism –, Berg argues that companies employ a certain vocabulary around change, re-imaginings and transformation that situates and performs work practices as part of an automated future. Julia Velkova, Dick Magnusson and Harald Rohrer examine in Chapter 11 how energy companies and tech start-ups use ADM systems in smart thermostats and how it impacts the relationships between the privacy of our homes, energy infrastructure providers, and data-driven companies. In this process, ADM becomes a form of mediating algorithmic logic that “binds together, mediates, and transforms relations between multiple economies and ‘social worlds’ brought together by a common concern with temperature” (p. 172).

Chapter 12 unveils the ghostly presence of prisoners training and creating AI. Tuukka Lehtiniemi and Minna Ruckenstein explore the Finnish company Vainu and how it employs prisoners to perform data labour. In highlighting how the company tries to conceal the subjects that are part of processes of automation, the authors explore how the ghost work of incarcerated bodies, and their invisibility is an integral part of obscuring and occluding the way AI mechanisms are trained. Chapter 13 proposes as a research design an ethnographic approach to dissecting the future of automated mobility solutions and explore how this type of research creates new ways of engaging with the social implications of ADM and the context in which this technology is being deployed. The authors in Chapter 14 provide a way of addressing current ad politics and accountability. If advertisements used to be publicly available to anyone, now they have gone “dark” and are visible only to whom they are targeted. This moves everyday engagements with advertisement away from overarching public

scrutiny, raising a series of concerns about tailored discrimination, predatory advertising, and the circulation of misleading political advertising. The rise of “dark ads” is followed by a concern with their accountability and the authors try to contribute with a methodological way of addressing this through back door access and auditing practices.

Summing up, the book adds value to anyone interested in how our most intimate and mundane routines are structured around automated processes and the possible consequences of this move. It enlarges the chorus of STS scholars demanding a more serious engagement with how AI and other automated processes became part of our everyday lives and how different actors like companies, invisible workers and devices are implicated in our ways of engaging with technology. A potential way of moving this research agenda forward would involve delving into issues that were not extensively examined in “Everyday Automation”, such as the environmental costs implicated in the production, use and discard of ADM devices (e.g., Crawford and Joler 2018) and the aesthetic experiences part of everyday engagements with algorithms and AI (e.g., Phan 2019).

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