

Critical Reflection on Part I of *Enchanted Objects*

In the first part of the book *Enchanted Objects*, David Rose explains four different futures that he foresees for technologies that are being developed today. He describes the context in which these futures are made possible as well as their downsides and advantages.

He begins by describing what he calls the Terminal World, characterized by glass slabs invading the public and private spheres in the form of screens. For Rose, this future resembles what we already experience today, simply with an incremental amount of screens in an incremental amount of places. The author rejects this future as it does not allow a comprehensive and encompassing relationship between human beings and the objects. The screen remains passive, waiting for its content to be seen or for interaction with an individual. Rose could be even more critical of this future that we see rising increasingly. The content presented in these screens reminds me what Baudrillard has called a simulacrum: a simulation of reality that has no more references to it (1988: 169). This hyperreal future leads towards a disconnected relationship between human beings and the simulated truths presented in advertisements and social media.

The second future envisioned by Rose is one of prosthetics. It furthers our needs for enhanced human abilities, our desires to become superheroes. This future respects and takes into account the human qualities of individuals but amplifies them in order to achieve more. The computing power takes place within oneself, embedded in the body or on wearables rather than on external screens, and augments the corporeal set of skills. According to Rose, this future is not quite there yet as it does not provide enough critical information to overcome the distracting effect of the gadgets. However, Rose argues that this form of technology could eventually allow for a more comprehensive future by letting people share their perspectives of the world. This last point is important and relates nicely to Marshall McLuhan's definition of technology as the extension of the human body (1964: 11). In his famous chapter "The Medium is the Message", McLuhan discusses the idea that the relevant part, namely what he calls the "message", of any technology stands in its forms (as opposed to its content), since it's the medium itself that "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (1964: 1). With this definition in mind, he expends this concept to the human senses stating that they filter our experience in the same way any chosen medium does. Therefore, one needs to realize how not only prosthetic technology but any kind of technology inform the way we understand our experiences of the world.

The third future is animist, a replication of life, and concerns the social robots that are developed nowadays. These robots tend to be created in order to accomplish one or a few different tasks. For Rose, it is obvious that people will continue requesting humanlike machines as a way to interact with technology since we tend to

anthropomorphize what surrounds us and develop relationships more easily with non-human objects. But the risk with animist technology is explained through the uncanny-valley theory: the discomfort emerging from objects that poorly imitates the human form. Besides this issue, Rose believes that human-machine interactions founded on humanlike relationship could bring more advantages than disadvantages.

Finally, the fourth future is one of the enchanted objects, ordinary objects enhanced by sensors or actuators to produce extraordinary behaviors. These objects can become meaningful, insightful and delightful in everyday life. The everyday life aspect of these objects makes them easy to interact with and their extraordinary capabilities bring them to the enchanted level, one of fairytales and fantasies. Some argue that technology evolves too quickly to keep enchanted objects up to date, but Rose believes that over-the-air updates can overcome this problem by adding new functionalities to objects by way of connecting them to the cloud. Though, Rose ints towards the respect of traditions to achieve enchantment successfully. I believe that the Internet of Things nowadays does not push this aspect enough even though it is particularly important in order to integrate technology in a respectful and effective way to specific contexts. According to Nansen and al. (2014: 88), everyday objects are social as they have their own histories, affordances, and relations with one another as well as with human beings. In my opinion, respecting their cultural meanings allows for a better intersection between the digital and the physical world, which strengthens the notion of enchantment.

The structure followed by David Rose to express his vision of the technological futures is compelling as it can be rooted nicely within the framework of media studies. Each future brings new issues to reflect on and provides, as a whole, an encompassing overview of what to expect in the following decades.

Bibliography

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