# The Future of Technology:
# a Critical Response of *Enchanted Objects*

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In his book *Enchanted Objects: Innovation, Design, and the Future of Technology*, MIT Media Lab scientist David Rose speculates on our future with technology in relation to what he coins the terminal world, prosthetics, animism, and enchanted objects. Rose discusses the ways in which screen, prosthetic, and android based technologies have evolved in an overall unfavorable manner thus far, and notes the bleak futures that will stem from them. Furthermore, he argues that the enchanted object is one of the inevitable, as well as positive, paths for the future of technology (89). Through an analysis of Rose's argumentation against the terminal world, prosthetics, as well as his support of the enchanted object, the notion that each of these technologies share the same faults and will have a similar impact on our future will be discussed.

The first future Rose discusses is the terminal world, or what he calls "the world of the glass slab" (37). He states that screen technologies hold such a grand monetary value that they have dominated the market (39), and explains that screen technologies will only get thinner, larger, and more widespread, which has indeed been occurring since the book's publication in 2014. Yet, although Rose has made these accurate calculated stipulations about the future, I could not help but notice many flaws in his argumentation.

For one, Rose paints a dystopian vision of he future where screens spread across the globe and invade new spaces, largely funded by advertisers (41). But is the screen, when concerning advertising, really a new concept? Our peripherals have always been littered with advertisements. Even before the popularization of screen, radio developed as an advertiser-supported medium, and people held similar negative views towards the radio as they do now with smartphones (AdAge). Advertisements are simply a byproduct of capitalism, and companies will use any and every new technology that emerges to their advantage.

Rose also states that screens do not fulfill fundamental human desires in an enchanting way. That is to say, screens do not have historical contextual value, as "there is no magic device [...] whose possessor stares zombielike into it, playing a meaningless game, or texting about nothing" (43). To summarize, smartphones are not considered enchanting objects because they do not have a predecessor, or a familiar object that we can relate it to. What mystifies me about this statement is that phones are not representative of a single object, but rather a amplitude of different objects. Screens can be novels, notebooks, game boards, drawing isles, and so on. In another view, smartphones, in their most stripped down form, are simply tools. Just as a math textbook is just a pile of sheets bound together, a phone does not need to enchant, it just needs to function. Furthermore, Rose argues that screens fall short as they do not improve our relationship with computing, and yet we rely on these screens to code; screens are the visual gateway to our interaction with computers. Is visualizing a practically infinite array of information in a practically infinite array of formats not both improving our relationship with computing and deeply enchanting?

The second future Rose discusses is technology-as-prosthetic, or the internalization of computationional power (45). He mentions the irony of fantasy bionics, whereas the superheroes of our fiction have sense heightening abilities while in reality, people strive to curate what is sensed through the minimization of outer visual and auditory noise (47). One main concept Rose discusses is the HUD, or heads up display. The future of HUDs Rose describes is nearly an extension of his argument against screens: they will occupy nearly all glass surfaces. And according to his text, HUDs are in a dire need of redesign in existing technologies, in particular, Google Glass which simply clutters vision with digital noise and is clunky to wear. However, upon some research I found that the author's entire argument to Google Glass is extremely reactionary and not very constructive in regarding a vision of the future. The viral Google Glass advertisement was released on YouTube in mid 2013. *Enchanted Objects* was published in mid 2014. Google Glass could be, at this point, disregarded as a "meme": it kept people's attentions for a fleeting amount of time, is now almost completely irrelevant to the mass-market.

Rose also mentions that human memory is a primary candidate for technological prosthetics, as it is as fleeting as ever (50). The prime HUD would be a kind of "memory-enhancing prosthetic will provide the equivalent of a supercharged brain" (51). While reading this, I failed to see how a memory aid could enhance the brain. A glass HUD would more likely be an object that extends the memory using an outer source for the period of time the user is wearing it.

The most positive future, according to Rose, is the enchanted object: enhancing the objects we use on a daily basis and are familiar to us, and using tangible media such as sensors so that they become more delightful to use (82). He praises the Internet of things and the cloud as essential to the development of enchanted technology (96), which have often been criticized due to their lack of system standardization, life cycle maintenance, and security (Banafa).

Unfortunately, I find that these objects are usually frustrating. For the most part, the enchanted objects Rose describes react a certain way based on a set of algorithms, with the intention of convincing you to do or not do something. Imagine having a nagging mother embedded into all of your technologies. They can also be quite unsettling in themselves. The user can feel like they are being micromanaged and tracked by a bunch of embedded systems on their body at every waking (or sleeping) moment. Items such as an inflating wallet seem like a more inefficient and expensive way of doing what the 'ping' of a notification on a phone can do. And on that note, the point of most screen-based technologies are to converge a bunch of tools into one object; to declutter. Enchanted objects, while enjoyable to use, do just the opposite. And, just like Itskov's goal of creating mechanical avatars for humans to solve world hunger, the problems Rose mentions will not disappear with enchanted objects, they will simply change.

In conclusion, Rose discusses the ways in which screen and prosthetic based technologies have evolved in an overall unfavorable manner thus far, having no historical familiarity to us and cluttering our senses. Furthermore, he argues that a future involving enchanted objects is one of the inevitable, as well as positive, paths for the future of technology. However, his argumentation implies that the only enchanted objects that will succeed are the ones that are made successfully. This depicts the bias he has towards these enchanted objects: the fact that the reason he didn't like the Google Glass was because it was clunky and not yet ready for the market. Through an analysis of Rose's argumentation against the terminal world, prosthetics, as well as his support of the enchanted object, the notion that each of these technologies share the same faults and will have a similar impact on our future has been discussed.

Works Cited

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