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Commentary for alt.chi paper Consider the moon: human-computer bricolage of extended objects

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Commentary

For alt.chi paper
Consider the Moon. Human-Computer Bricolage of Extended Objects

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The first time I read 'Consider the Moon. Human-Computer Bricolage of Extended Objects' I spent approximately five hours. Sure, I am a slow reader, but this would not explain how to me it seemed that time simply flew by as I was progressing through the steps constituting the 'Prologue for extending the Moon'. No, that is not a fancy name for a complex equation or some philosophical statement which requires hours of rumination. It is a series of carefully selected, varied, and engaging activities, put together by the authors to exemplify the extension of objects, in this case the moon, through human-computer bricolage. Curious yet? You'll have to read the article, because I will not divulge more about the Prologue. Make sure, though, you have the next couple of hours free before your start.

In addition to its engaging content, the paper also makes a significant theoretical contribution by proposing the concept of 'extended objects'. It ingeniously links extended cognition – the idea that thoughts, perceptions or memories are not solely the result of cognitive processes, but make use of external support like abacuses, glasses or post-its – with evocative properties of objects, transforming them in vehicles of meaningful (social) action as objects of reflection and conversation.

As food for future thought, a further theoretical strand to which 'extended objects' could be linked is actor-network theory. Although, the paper does not explicitly discuss the 'division of labour' between individuals and objects, it implicitly suggests that the former act upon latter in the course of their extension by means of other (digital) objects.

Besides its theoretical novelty, the paper is also designed to offer a much needed solution to overcoming one of the most prominent challenges to social order – anomy. It showcases a series of steps leading to the re-creation and extension of none other than the moon, a familiar but much neglected presence in our nightly existence. The authors argue that, by collecting digital representations of the moon coming in different forms, sizes, durations, shapes, functions, on various platforms, we can reconstruct it into an 'extended moon', whose functionality will lead to closer, more meaningful engagement with each particular materialisation of this celestial object. Thus, the popular idea that technology is a medium and catalyst for estrangement gets turned on its head by means of showing how we as agents – responsible for and aware of our actions – can act upon technology, transforming it into a vehicle for enhancing our involvement with society, broadening our understanding of objects, and strengthening our commitment to other individuals.

To conclude, anomy as disengagement from the hear-and-now can manifest itself at different levels and in various ways. At work, by checking updates on social networking sites, we can uncouple from tedious tasks. At home, by watching TV at dinner, we can casually extricate ourselves from conversations with close family members. While reading any text, by rushing through it, we can fail to engage with the narrative laid out by the authors. Although this is more and more the case with scientific papers, this article eludes this fate. By performing the activities outlined in the Prologue, the reader extends the text, which reaches beyond the computer screen and engages the individual in front of it.