

Technology and the structure of desire

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Abstract

The influence of technology on behavior is extensively studied in all kinds of contexts, both within and outside academia. In the development of new technologies, more and more attention is being paid to how behaviour is and can be changed with technology and under which (political, ethical) conditions this is justified. The debate on persuasive technology is perhaps the strongest illustration of this. However, there is little attention for the influence of technology on a less visible dimension of humans, which is nevertheless of eminent importance for the way in which technology influences them, including their behaviour, namely desire. In this paper, I examine how technology influences desire. An analysis of the structure of desire will contribute to understanding how people are formed and even shaped by technology. In the analysis of desire, inspiration will be found in the thinking of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, in particular regarding the distinction he makes between the object of desire and the cause of desire, as well as the distinction between need, demand and desire. This analysis will make clear why the autonomy discourse is insufficient to understand how a critical relation to technology is possible. The application power of this view is briefly illustrated by the example of Tinder.