Technological determinism and the sense of Self

Although the notion of technological determinism (TD) has long been under attack, it is still tacitly accepted. In the public discourse it underpins descriptions about how new digital technologies are revolutionizing the social world.

TD comes in two main variants, hard and weak. In the former it states that changes in technology directly cause changes in social relations; in the latter, that technology has an influence but falls short of causation. In opposition to TD, proponents of the social construction of technology argue that it is rather social forces that influence technology, with social shaping of technology view accepting that people and technology are continually influencing one another. Similarly, post-phenomenology holds that technology and society are co-constitutive, thus that people are both changing and changed by technology.

Yet, the nature of digital communication technologies requires an extension to this analysis because of the modalities in which these are agents of and influence change. They differ because not only do they drive change in society at large, but also at an individual subjective level. Furthermore, in that they operate in proximity to the essence of human beings, thus close to our sense of Self. This has at its core reflexivity, thus the perception that we are at the driving seat of our experience and the awareness of the perceptual world.

This presentation is going to reflect on the theoretical implication of TD from a digital humanities study about the influence that digital communication technologies have on the sense of Self.