The Self as Art

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This paper explores the impact of new digital practices of recording, storing and disseminating information about the self (such as 'lifelogging'/lifeblogging', self-tracking and quantification, and participation in online diary, photo sharing and social networking sites) (see for example Bell and Gemmell 2010, Felton 2013, Wolf 2010) on our understanding of ourselves and our lives as aesthetic objects. It focuses on three primary issues of interest to discourse analysis. First, it considers how different technologies for entextualizing the body (and the modes and materialities these entail) affect the kinds of 'virtual selves' we are able to create and the forms of social interaction these selves are able to facilitate. Second, it investigates how the volume and type of information collected with digital tools like wearable sensors, constantly available digital cameras, and pervasive environmental monitors affect aesthetic processes of selection and storytelling, and in particular, how narratives of the self are increasingly becoming collaborations between human agents and computer algorithms. Finally, it discusses accusations that contemporary practices of self-monitoring and self-presentation amount to a new form of 'digital narcissism' and examines the implications of these practices for understanding a number of key issues in discourse analysis including time/history, agency, reflexivity and identity.


Keywords: Narcissism, Identity, Reflexivity.