Winer’s point on some of the technology itself is inherently political (in its entirety) in my opinion definitely applies to the digital artifacts. The digitalization of information not only applies to media representations in a digital form but also applies to tons of applications that take advantage of digitized information. I’d like to give some examples of such digital artifacts that embody a specific form of power, standard, or authority in the social-economic system in which it is embedded.

* Beauty camera that uses facial recognition and artificial intelligence to automatically ‘correct’ and beautifies the user’s photo; adjustments like skin whitening, enlarges eyes, smaller & narrower faces are being applied the second that the photo is taken. Such an application is very popular in Asia. However, I think it reinforces and upholds unhealthy beauty standards in a way that’s deeply embedded in the culture itself.
* Dating apps that use big data and machine learning algorithms to ‘rank’ users attractiveness based on how others interact with your profile. In order to increase the ‘matching’ rate, people can only see user cards that are within their ‘standards/tiers’. Though there have been lots of media coverage on this topic, what I find interesting is even users are aware of such a mechanism, they are still willing to be apart of its segmentation knowing it’s unethical, arguing that in the end, they are still the beneficient.
* Voice assistant that uses NLP to reinforces certain language standards, unintentionally marginalize certain groups of users, especially in places where dialects and native language can be vastly different from the nation’s standardized language. In China, there are more than 50 different dialects, lots of citizens from the last generation who don’t have the opportunity to properly learn mandarin are having difficulty using and accessing such technology. I’d like to think that these tools impose some level of language biases, and made assumptions about the population’s educational level.
* VPN & Tor Browser also pose a difficult conversation in terms of whether its existence and universalize imposes security or threats in the long run. On one hand, the user’s identity and data are being protected, but it also opens up more criminal accesses and incentivizes unlawful, unethical businesses and transactions to happen.

Knowing all artifacts, including digital goods are political is not enough, how can we do better? Be mindful, might not be enough. Since each technology advancement comes with surprises in both good and bad. Who’s responsible for the technology use? Are we passively adapt to or actively shaping our relationship with technology and with each other? I’d like to think that designers and engineers are taking active actions and considerations in making better choices for the greater good, but the catch here is are we fast enough to correct, reiterate and make adjustment when harms are done to the community. As a designer, maybe all we can do is try to stay informed and constrained within the current sociopolitical context.