**Reflection Paper**

By Harsh Sharma

'Do Artifacts Have Politics?' by Langdon Winner is surely a thought-provoking paper I've read in a while. Winner begins with a simple question, 'Are technologies actually neutral, or can they be used to create gaps in society when deployed by people in power?' Personally, I never saw technology as a tool to create social and political distances. Obviously, technology shapes society, but could it be used willingly to have certain effects in a community? Langdon made me rethink! And yes, technology is not entirely neutral, especially when its deployment is controlled by the greedy and the powerful.

The paper exposes two distinct examples of misconduct of artifacts to have a willful long-term impact on society. Undoubtedly these changes favored one side of people than the rest. The construction of low overpasses was actually brilliant, but alas for all the wrong reasons! Robert Moses's parkways were constructed in such a way that won't allow buses to travel through them, essentially keeping the lower class outside of his public park. To this day the Long Island political constitution is affected because of the 'marvellous' usage of structures. What puzzles me is, why a single person was completely responsible for designing the structures of an entire part of a city. Obviously, he was a genius, no doubt about that, but there should have been a city council that ultimately finalized the design. No single person should have such authority because power tends to corrupt souls; even the good ones!

The second illustration showcases what seems to be an advancement in technology disguised as a machinery of increased efficiency that was actually used to crush the dying souls of labors. At Cyrus McCormick's reaper manufacturing plant, a new untested machine was introduced in the production line. On the outside, it was an investment of $500,000 to upgrade the plant manufacturing unit and achieve faster and better castings. But the machine certifiably produced inferior products. Seems like a bad investment. However, the machinery was introduced to intimidate the workers and dissolve any labor union. Bad investment? The incident took place in the 1880s and today I think the labor unions are more prominent and centralized. But honestly, who knows!

The author also discusses the tomato harvester and how it adversely changed the lives of rural agriculture producers. The university officials, who invented and modified the harvester, faced a lawsuit charging them that they were using government funding to develop technologies that benefited private companies. I'm personally in a grey area with this one. On one side the allegations make sense but on the other hand, we need to develop our existing farming techniques in order to keep up with the growing population. If not done so we risk starving people without enough farm produce. So starving people or richer companies, tough line to draw.

Langner then proceeds to discuss authoritarian and democratic approaches of handling these technologies, specifically nuclear energy. Society in general agrees that democracy works. But there are specific situations where democracy could be unstable, slow, and not effective. To manage a ship, argue Friedrich Engels, you need a captain and an obedient crew. There are some very specific situations where people need to give up on their will and follow an authority, mostly for their benefit. For example, handling of atom bombs needs a centralized and rigid command of chain which is independent of the government. Similarly, if we adopt nuclear energy its maintenance would require an authoritarian approach.

This is where Langer expresses his concerns and argues that if we continue moving in this direction then we are essentially giving up control to a few individuals. And though his concerns are valid, I don't agree completely. Because nuclear energy is the only way forward, we can't really completely on solar energy which is argued as a more democratic form of energy. The paper was written in the 1980s and we have come a long way, and some 40 years later, have become more accepting of nuclear energy. So far, we have managed to keep a good balance.

So yes, technologies could have political impacts; some dreadful impacts and can create segregation when controlled by narrow-minded people like Robert Moses. But I think our current society is a good example that new inventions and adopting technology is the better way forward. The thing that we need to take care of is that the power of changing artifacts shouldn't lie on a single person, because, power corrupts! Rather it should be handled by a group of well-informed and technologically advanced people.

***REFERENCES***

1. *Engels, F. (1872). On Authority. In K. Marx & F. Engels (Eds.),* ***Selected Works****, Vol. 2 (pp. 87-93). Progress Publishers.*
2. *Pinch, T., & Bijker, W. E. (1987). The social construction of facts and artifacts. Social Studies of Science, 14(3), 399-441.*
3. *Winner, L. (2005). Technological Politics: Thinking About Technology, Democracy, and Power. University of Illinois Press.*