

Technology—A Powerful Tool to Build “A Brave New World”

Yanlin Zhu (B00812966)

September 10, 2018

TA: Harry Critchley

Technology—A Powerful Tool to Build “A Brave New World”

Generally, People believe that technology is a double-edged sword determined by how to use it. However, in the article *Do Artifacts Have Politics*, Winner (1980) downplays the wide-accepted technology-innocent view and lays greater stress on the opposite view—politics is an inherent property of technology. He illustrates his point in two ways. One is the intentional utility of technology for the political purpose and the other one is technologies born with particular kinds of political relationships. To support his view, for the first one, he gives an example of the man-made obstacle of the bridges of New York City. Robert Moses, a highly respected engineer, who involved his social-class bias and racial prejudice into the design of the bridges by deliberately lowering the altitude of bridges to prevent public transits on his road which finally shaped the city in a hidden and unnoticeable way. For the second point, he emphasizes that some artifacts, especially the atom bomb, are intrinsically related to politics. The nuclear weapon is a naturally anti-democratic power that demands a strict control which is authoritarian—"controlled by a centralized, rigidly hierarchical chain of command closed to all influences that might make its workings unpredictable" (Winner, 1908, p. 131). In the end, he concludes that people are willing to accept technological innovation and make drastic changes in a rapidly changing world. However, it is essential to know the politic concepts behind those technologies otherwise, people may be blinded.

I agree with most of his points since politics is the arrangement of power and authority and technology is a powerful tool. I believe that where there are people

around, there will be politics. Just like Moses’s case, even though the principles of architecture, physics, mathematics, and chemistry used by him are objective and innocent, it changed when getting into practice. As long as we use technologies, it is unavoidable that political elements will be involved during the process of implementation. Actually, many of the common technologies we are familiar with are originally designed for the military or political purpose like radio, GPS and even sunglasses. For instance, the Internet, in particular, is the well-pretended technology among them. It was developed by the U.S. Department of Defense for the arms race of the Cold War and turned from military to civil use in the 1990s. Nevertheless, its political property was never changed, especially with the thrive of big data analytics, it became a more powerful tool to build “A Brave New World” of Huxley. Imagine that every trace people left on the Internet will be collected, analyzed and implemented into social media. People will easily be controlled, blinded and manipulated by the influence of auto-playlist of YouTube, political advertisements and well-filtered information on social media in this novel, quiet and hidden way.

In conclusion, though the progress of technologies, especially the flourish of AI and Big Data in recent years, will benefit people’s life, we shall never forget its political property and raise the awareness of its risks. Remember that technology is the foundation of the “*Brave New World*.”

Reference

Winner, L. (1980). Do Artifacts Have Politics? *Daedalus*, 109(1), 121-136. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024652>