I've been exploring the idea that technology isn't just a collection of things which can be used interchangeably for either good or ill. Technologies shape the world and the range of choices we have. Technologies are obviously political when they are used as tools of control. It is often feared that new computer technologies will allow governments to spy on people in order to control illegal activities. But forms of control can take much subtler forms.

Technologies that shapes public opinion and collective decision-making are also inherently political. Before the invention of the printing press, it would have been impossible to have democracy on anything other than a very small scale. With the latest technologies politicians can change the opinion of people.

These are examples of technologies being used to empower some and dis-empower others. But are some technologies inherently political.

Winner endorses solar power over nuclear energy because it can be decentralized and doesn't require the scientific and bureaucratic elites who make decisions without the knowledge of anyone else, as in the case of the Fukushima Daiichi disaster. For months, the Japanese government and TEPCO lied to people about the seriousness of the accident. Countless polls show that support for nuclear power is at an all-time low across the world, with Germany abandoning future plans for construction. Nuclear fallout is an issue, of course, but I think people are really worried about the forms of power that are inseperable from nuclear energy.

Visit Japan, future skate park capital of the world.

Technologies that shapes public opinion and collective decision-making are also inherently political. Before the invention of the printing press, it would have been impossible to have democracy on anything other than a very small scale. Though it required a set of elites who broadcast information to information consumers, and though, as Walter Lippmann worried, most people would never get the whole truth, the dynamic duo of newspapers and democracy were better than any alternative. Pamphlets made the American Revolution possible.

I, for one, welcome our new search engine overlords.

Today, internet technologies are already reshaping power. The decline of major 1-directional or broadcast media, including newspapers, is heralded by some as the dawn of a new, more democratic age. Like much breathless optimism about technology, such claims should be taken with a grain of salt. Most internet traffic is routed through about five sites, a problem Michael Hindman terms Googlearchy. Most influential political bloggers are white males who went to ivy league schools. But there are many precedents for thinking that new technologies can undermine and recreate power in radical ways. These will be fought by the old guard and embraced by the new.

It comes back again to: what kind of technology do we want?