

Do Artifacts Have Politics?

1. The Politics of Artifacts

Langdon Winner is a famous modern American political scientist and philosopher of technology. He studied technology from the perspective of political science, and on the basis of defining the concepts of technology and politics, pointed out that the political nature of technology was manifested in two aspects: technology was externally endowed with political nature; Technology is inherently political. He broke the previous separation of technology and politics into two fields to study their relationship, but integrated them to study and reveal the political value of technology.

Winner first systematically expounded that technology has political thought, which attracted universal attention. Traditional technology instrumentalism only cares about the relationship between human beings and the application of technology tools, and only cares about the production and application of technology, etc. This theoretical tendency leads to the neglect of the meaning of technology and the value of deep criticism. The idea of technology control based on technology instrumentalism cannot solve the problem of technology society. Because, the most fatal defect of technology instrumentalism is that it ignores the fact that technology has become the forms of life. The construction of those technological systems with human beings as part of technological operation, also reconstructs social roles and social relations. The technological environment controls the relationship between man and man. What we have found is not a passively applied technology but a whole technology that interacts with human behavior." Winner not only revealed the political value of technology, but also further deepened the understanding of technology political nature[2].

It is no doubt that the technological should be implicated in the political. But the reverse proposition that the political is embedded in the technological is also reasonable. Regarding the question, in what sense do politics inhere in technology, Winner suggests two ways that technology connects with politic in his paper:

1. Technological artifacts are produced to create a type of order or settle a dispute;
2. Artifacts mesh with a particular type of political arrangement.

Regarding the purpose that a technology be developed and used, Winner stated that technologies are ways of structuring the world and politics and technology are both methods to settle divisive and unify issues. While other social theorists had put forward that objects demand certain forms of action. Winner had suggested that technology's political force is enhanced by two mechanisms: the **technological imperative** and **reverse adaptation**[1]. The general failure on the part of social theory to address technological politics means that those in the humanities and social sciences miss the most significant aspect of their study. It remains a residual category.

Winner cited Mose's low-hanging overpass from New York to Long Island beach as an example. According to the information collected by his biographer, Mose designed the bridge with his obvious social prejudice and racial intention: the low degree of the bridge prevented buses serving low-income people from passing through the park road, effectively preventing minorities and the poor from reaching the beach. People on the upper level with cars can use the overpass to reach the beach. Winner argues that the political influence of a concrete thing like the overpass -- social injustice -- is built into the system, but this is not necessarily connected with the role of the overpass as an overpass. Winner says we think new technology is about efficiency, but the history of technology shows us that sometimes we're going to be disappointed. Technological change is sometimes a manifestation of human motivation, especially the desire for control, though this occasionally comes at the expense of cost savings. Technology that purposefully empowers politics. Winner also cited another example to illustrate his theory --- Long Island Expressway.

There are some criticisms of Winner's theory. For example, Caro maintains that the Long Island Expressway was built in addition to the parkway, and there are many alternative routes to Jones Beach were open to all. Civil engineers stated that the low bridges are there to stop all commercial traffic as they are always banned from parkways[1].

Pfaffenberger generates a typology of technology:

- **Exclusion, Deflection, Differential incorporation, Compartmentalization, Segregation, Centralization, Standardization, Polarization, Marginalization, Delegation, Disavowal.**

Pfaffenberger identifies three themes to eliminate their negative effects:

- **Countersignification, Counterappropriation, Counterdelegation.**

2. Discussion

I agree with the opinion that modern technologies not only order the world in certain ways and change life's texture, but also evade human control once they were embedded into human's life. I do agree with the Langdon Winner's theory that artifacts have politics. Actually, I have noticed many cases both in China and America that technology was used in unfair purpose. For instance, in China, Baidu is a company that specializes in Internet-related services and products, which include online advertising technologies, search engine. For greater profit, it provides fake information for the public. A college student died after visiting a Putian hospital recommended by Baidu[3].

3. Reference:

[1] Matthewman, Steve. *Technology and social theory*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2011.

[2] Winner, Langdon. *Technologies as a Forms of Life*. In, Winner, Langdon *The whale and the reactor: A search for limits in an age of high technology* [M]The university of Chicago press 1986.11

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Wei_Zexi