

TECHNOPOLITIK : THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPACT OF MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY

To borrow from a riddle of old: which came first, the technology or its policy? Technology-determinists might argue that the future of society lies in the continued evolution of its technology, an assumption predicated on the economic and social effects of innovations such as paper, gun powder, the printing press, cotton gin and automobile automation. While the resultant mass-paradigm shifts (towards democracy, imperialism or industrialization) are indeed palpable, it is this very fact that lends me to argue that history forces *policy* into the front of the determination question. Knowing from precedent how integral technology is to the progress of society, the dissemination of information and the ultimate proliferation of ideology, policy makers have become increasingly adept at ensuring that innovation never strays too far from the legal framework under which said innovation is meant to thrive. And thrive it will, but according to who's agenda remains the ultimate question.

There are many contemporary manifestations of the fundamentally parental role of policy over technology: the copyright-centered regulation of the replication and distribution of digital media; the restraint over controversial medical practices such as stem-cell research; the contentious debate over increasing federal access to personal electronic files; the allocation and acquisition of the radio spectrum; the ongoing (and likely non-resolvable) battle over content and culture between civil libertarians and self-proclaimed moral authorities; and, most importantly, the ever-growing realm where technology is almost entirely presumed and propagated by a reigning policy maker's underlying political ideology: the military. Given these facts, it becomes increasingly apparent that at the very least, policy will always determine the framework (if not the very nature) of technological innovation.