

# Watt's Happening?

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## Technology: *always a double-edged sword*

If you have become a regular reader of *Watt's Happening*, you may be starting to think that a technological fix will solve most of our problems. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Don't get me wrong, switching to clean energy is a critical piece of the "building a better world" puzzle. Technology got us into this climate change, pollution, biosphere destruction mode, and we will be relying on smarter technologies to help us get out. Building a better world today is exactly what we have to do, but even more important, in my opinion, is the building of better minds.

Each new technology creates subtle yet profound changes in the way we see and interact with the world around us. These changes, strangely, are rarely noticed, as each becomes "the new normal." But let's look at a few with fresh eyes.

### TIME

The humble clock, for instance. Introduced in the fourteenth century, a clock is a powered machine whose "product" is an output of minutes and seconds. In the real world, the natural world, the world in which we physically exist, "time" is measured in terms of spinning planets and evolutionary time scales where millions of years are like seconds.

Both relativity and quantum physics, two of the most advanced and successful scientific theories in human history (understanding them has made advanced computers, cell phones, GPS and much more possible) have no need of time. It would appear that in the real world of nature, time does not actually exist, but is instead a completely human construct.

Clocks have literally changes our minds. First they



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made us time-keepers (we measured the interval of every aspect of our lives), then time-savers (our drive to efficiency and speed), and now, some would say, time-servers.

In a modern world made up of seconds and minutes, where “now” is all important, nature’s time is irrelevant. In fact, in a world of clock time, nature herself becomes irrelevant.

Wow, and that’s just the clock. How about the printing press, the telegraph, radio, television and now the world-wide web? Each has created dramatic changes in the way we live, how we see each other, and how we treat the natural world and see our place within it (or above it).

## THE FIRST INTERNET

The telegraph is one of my favourites. Introduced in the mid-1800’s as the newest way of using that newfangled thing called electricity, the telegraph was the first instantaneous means of mass communication, suddenly shrinking time and distance to zero.

It was hailed as the beginning of true international understanding and the key to world peace, uniting humanity for all time. Of course, none of that happened, but lots of other unforeseen things did.

The telegraph allowed a sudden surge of irrelevance to flood the world. As the telegraph quickly wrapped us in wires and electricity, people

were inundated with irrelevant facts, news of distant events that they were powerless to affect, and a flood of meaningless entertainment.

The telegraph launched the information age, and the invention of “information as a product to sell,” a commodity based on novelty and curiosity that could be bought and sold irrespective of its use or actual meaning.

Thus the telegraph created a world-view based on irrelevance and entertainment, a world we are busily perfecting today. A flood of information out of context creates a profound sense of powerlessness and impotence as well. In the sparkle and glare of speed and limitless quantity, the local and the natural are eclipsed and seen, for the first time in human history, as unimportant. The effect of the Internet today, I would argue, is the effect of the telegraph times infinity.

Yes, we need a rapid change to clean energy technologies, for many obvious, practical and critically important reasons. But much more than new machines, we need new minds not so rooted in the “me” and “now” of today but more in touch with the past (from which we can learn) and the future (which we must protect).

Today more than ever before we need minds that are eager to embrace not just clean energy, but also conservation, compassion, and preservation of the natural world.

## Quick Fact:

**MANITOBA WILL BACK UP AMERICAN WIND:** *Manitoba Hydro has inked a \$1 billion deal with a major midwest-U.S. utility that will enable it to “bank” excess wind power created in North Dakota inside its large hydroelectric reservoirs. Excess juice produced in midwest wind farms will be stored in Manitoba reservoirs when demand is low, then sent back south when demand is high. Other hydroelectric provinces, like British Columbia, could do the same for neighbouring provinces, using their hydro reservoirs as backup batteries to help reduce reliance on coal.*