Summary of Stephen J. Klein’s “What is Technology?”

Delivered as a *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* Stephen J. Klein’s article is a document that serves to clarify “What is Technology?” Kline does this by grasping at a general understanding of the hardware, or artifacts, the mass public associates with the term. However, this article drills into the deeper implications of what technology includes, not only as a thing, but as systems. He specifically targets a concept he coins as “sociotechnology.”

Defining technology is no easy task when the term has so many layers. Kline starts by referring to “manufactured articles.” He ends this point with a conclusive summary referring to “Usage 1,” to explain technology.

He proceeds to describe how the hardware wouldn’t exist without the system of ideas and behaviors of people that manufacture those artifacts. This portmanteau of social systems and technology is his term “Sociotechnical Systems of Manufacturing.” He refers to this as ‘Usage 2’ to explain technology.

Klein continues, describing the techniques and knowledge required to make technology work. These are categorized, and labeled ‘Usage 3.’

The final category is a blend of them all, but provides an underlying channel for technology to exist. These are referred to as ‘sociotechnical systems of use.’ These include systems of infrastructure, embodiment, and application. Referring to the systems that technology is used for. He labeled this ‘Usage 4.’

In all, Klein was describing a chain link relationship existing through varying layers of technology. Where a common man may think only of a pencil as a technology for writing, Kline describes this technology as an extension of human writing capacity. The tool is not removed from the knowledge to make words, and the recipients of those words are just as responsible for the technology’s existence.

*Summary by G. James Mitchell*

Klein, S. J. (1985). What is technology? Bulletin of Science, Technology, & Society, 5, 215-218. Retrieved from: http://dtc-wsuv.org/wp/dtc375-spring15/files/2015/02/Kline-What-is-Technology.pdf