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# A CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF TECHNOLOGY AS A RELATIONAL ACT OF CREATION

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Author: Tertia Tay

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## ABSTRACT

How far do the creation of technological artefacts and the formation of being and culture intertwine? This thesis presents a philosophical and sociological reflection of technology as an act of creation, with the aim of renewing our understanding of human-technology relations.

Contemporary theories have rightly sought to realign the technologically-deterministic leanings of earlier classical accounts, by placing primacy on user agency, user experience and socio-techno constitution of human evolution. However, there seems to be an over-prioritizing of user authority as the human that is scrutinized in such human-technology relations often refers to a generalized perspective of the user. Critical questions encircling how technological artefacts and systems are designed, how they function as a social artefact, the emphasis on high technology (or hi-tech), and how users and designers consider and aggregate their positions and power in their relationship with technology have thus far been overlooked.

This thesis largely draws upon the field of the philosophy of technology, bolstered by theories from sociology, science and technology studies (STS) and design. In a bid to avert compacting the complexity of technology in rigid and essentialist ways, technology as a social activity of creation, and not itself as a phenomenon, is taken as the object of study.

Four genres of productive technological activity—divine, scientific, industrial and use—are identified and threaded along a loose historical narrative. As a social activity of creation, technology is studied in its four forms: as a practice of production, as a tool used to create, as a knowledge (i.e. a skill or a technique) acquired and applied, and finally, as an act of volition (Mitcham 1994). Subverting the essentialist trap of earlier classical accounts, technology, in its variety and complexity, can then be reified in terms of the tangible experiences and relations fostered and eroded by it.