ABSTRACT for Techno-Praxis: The Place of Technology in Research
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Remote Intimacies: technologies of the researching self

From Aristotle we have received the fundamental stratum for understanding *praxis* in its relation to what he categorised as the three basic activities of human beings: *theoria*, *poiesis* and *praxis*. The *telos*, or end goal of theoretical activity was the disclosure or unconcealing of truth, and for Aristotle, *techne*, skill or know-how in production was one of the five modes for such disclosure. *Poiesis* refers to the making of a work, any work that requires *techne* or skill in its making, and hence its end was production. *Praxis* was the process by which theory or know-how was practiced or enacted. In this sense, *praxis* concerns human agency in changing a world, with this world understood in theory, and altered according to skills or know-how in making. For Classical thinking, its concern focused on three domains: that of ethics as the *ethos* or habits of a people, that of economics, or the law of the household (*nomos* [law] of the *oikos* [household]) and that of politics, or the *polis* as gathering of the essential question of community. Hence, *praxis* had its agency in securing the building of a locale or ordered space of a people, its laws, customs and governance.

Both *techne* and *praxis* have undergone considerable change in meaning since Classical times, as has our understanding of the securing binding of a people in the human agency of production. We derive the word technology from *techne*. However, it now primarily is concerned not with the know-how in making, but with the means to production as an extension to or of the self. From the late 19th century *praxis* has been closely associated with the philosophical and economic theories of Karl Marx. Marxism was also termed a "philosophy of praxis," and often invoked strong critique of what was considered to be a naïve and instrumental understanding of the neutrality of technology within the Capitalist mode of production.

This paper, *Remote Intimacies*, endeavours to look at contemporary understandings of technologies of production in relation to how the question of research and the question of self and community are governed by a fundamental inversion: the self is now an extension of technology.

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Remote Intimacies: technologies of the researching self

About two months ago I was at the launch of a new campaign by Auckland City Council to construct itself as the city of creative industries. Creative industries within our contemporary perspectives are high tech, if not cutting edge or world leading in technological innovations for the information and communication sectors, the entertainment industries, and the value adding to production we associate with the culture industries, such as the arts, fashion, film and multi-media. One of the four or five presenters mentioned what she understood to be the new catch-phrase for this still young millennium, the phrase "remote intimacy." It initially struck me as an oxymoron, or a term whose two words in their conjunction only served to emphasise their incongruity. Perhaps only the most cynical of those who engage in smart communications technologies would actually use this term without an ironic edge. Perhaps … but, then, I have never fallen in love on second life! I want to explore this strange conjuncture a little, to see if in fact it does present an emergent horizon for thinking the relational possibilities for being human, or whether in fact it is much more prosaic, if not antiquated as that which has always constituted a concept of the self as a self whose relations to the world is fundamentally one of questioning, which is to say, as a self as researcher.

The overarching theme of this postgraduate conference is *techno-praxis, the place of technology in research*. As I have intimated above, praxis refers to human agency, action or practice. The title to this event would suggest that a questioning of the praxis of technology, or what we could call human agency or practices with technology, implies or infers a question of place: how technology is placed in research. Or, where in research does one locate the technological? However, the title might also be read a little differently, with its hyphened *techno-praxis* suggesting that agency or practice is inherently technological; not that there is praxis that may implicate technology and a human agency or praxis that may not, but that all praxis is technological, and that this hyphened *techno-praxis is* the place of technology in research, that research as a human practice, whether theoretical, critical or applied, is bound to a particular place, or placement, located within the boundary established by praxis being inherently or essentially technological.

So, from what we have said so far, on the one hand we want to think along the lines of questioning how human relations happen, how an intimacy happens with respect to distancing and nearing. We think of the intimate as that which is close, or brought close, hence that which was distant. In this sense remote intimacy presents its paradox, a paradox of remote nearness. And, on the other hand, we have two (at least) interpretations of the overarching theme of the postgraduate conference. Does the technological now determine human agency such that research as a human practice is always already given its place in the technological or is the question of place more open than this, and does the openness of "place" infer a less determinate role for technology? But, are these two series or lines of questioning already linked, already themselves deeply related precisely to the question of research. But, what is research?

Clearly, there can be no one definitive answer to such a question particularly in the sense that each discipline, or even sub-discipline, may have such different suppositions concerning what this world is as that to be researched, the entities that may or may not be "discovered" and the methods or processes by which one may proceed. From my own experience on the University Postgraduate Board (former DSB) and the Ethics Committee, I am very much aware, even within the relatively small community of researchers constituting AUT that there are incommensurable paradigms at work in terms of research methodologies and the supposed entities that are available for research. Even with particular faculties of the university there are incommensurable research paradigms. For example, there are those who will establish their research methodology as empirical and those who will be phenomenological. As we are well aware each methodology in fact establishes in its differences particular claims as to epistemological frameworks and the resulting entities that may be knowable or implied ontologically. So, how can we approach this question "what is research" without simply presenting either the most general platitudes, or the most naïve dogmatisms? And will approaching this as a question help us at all in thinking more clearly the *what* or *how* of technology with respect to human practices?

But a prior question occurs to me, prior to the question of research, or at least arises with that question. Is "research" a particular human activity fundamentally different from all others, and if so in what way might it be different? Certainly we want to emphasise that whatever we are, we are what we do. It is not that we exist and then begin to act in the world. We are our doing in the world, we are fundamentally praxis, our agency or practicing, and our "world" is our surrounding world of things more or less near or distant, more or less useful or useless, more or less understandable or not understandable. Moreover, because we *are* our doing in the world, we are always underway with this doing. It is not that we are and then get underway; our being is the under-way-ness of our projects, more or less complete or incomplete, known or unknown, both anticipated for what they (we) will be in the light of what they (we) have been. We are fundamentally futural, living in and as the incomplete project that we are. In this anticipatory existence, we anticipate or project ourselves into, for example, the end of this talk, into tomorrow, into the end of the year, into the end of our life and so on. This is us, our existing. In as much as we project, our existence is fundamentally open to possibility; we are our own possibility, uncertain, but not entirely haphazard or chancy. We live this open possibility that is ourselves. And along the way of this open possibility is what we might call experience and learning.

In many respects what we call research is precisely this. Or to put things differently, it is only because we in our everydayness are this open possibility to a future, that we have located a particular orientation to this openness that we name *research*. What makes research different? As anyone who genuinely experiments with their possibility to be would know, in relation to the openness of the future we can get a little lost, or entangled in things. This suggests we lose a connection between that open possibility and where we have been. The projection that encompasses the project is an ex-trinsic place to the one we occupy. Who has not lost their way a little in the eccentric questioning that encompasses genuine questioning or research? There is needed something that binds us to the openness of the genuine question, that does not close down the openness but enables us to follow its open path. This we call rigour in research. But we should not think of this "rigour" as a necessary adherence to a methodology that stymies genuine creativity in questioning. This is not the notion of rigour I am considering.

Genuine research or questioning takes us from the familiar, from the domestication of our disciplinary boundary, from the family of patriarchs or matriarchs we variously identify as our supervisors or leading researchers in the field. I say "genuine research or questioning" to differentiate a disposition to open possibility from much of what we do or undertake as research, which is to rehearse as questioning answers that are all too familiar. We move into foreign territory but need to return what is foreign to ourselves; or rather we are the return in translation of what is foreign. From one language to another, from the presentation of a phenomenal world to the discursive regularities that encapsulate the relations of that world, from the obscure sheltering of an understanding of things to the clarity of an exposition, the binding of rigour happens in the self as translator. In this sense, one does not look so much at research as the novel and creative invention of a new thought or substance, but rather as the exquisite translation of what was always already there into a new prose of the world. This binding rigour is inherently creative, projective, anticipatory and incomplete, and to be considered as a particular case of our everyday engagement with the world.

We now might begin to see that there are two predominant ways to think about research, or at least two ways, as there are probably many more. These would equate with how we think about what research supposedly delivers, that is, a better understanding of the world. We are already well aware of the two most traditional paradigms for approaching a questioning of things; one being what could be termed within particular discourses as interpretative and subjective, and one being its obverse, objective and definitive. These constitute the two great divisions of the humanities and the sciences that have dominated our sites if not seats of learning at least from the beginnings of Modernity, whether we variously mark that threshold from the emergence of Galilean science or some time later with the emergence of Kantian critique. What initially differentiated them in fact goes back at least to Aristotelian categories of truth, where the disclosure of truth fell fundamentally into two types: the truth of that which may be none other than as it is and the truth of that which may be other than as it is. The first category encompassed *physis*, or things in their essential nature; the second comprised that which was made by human beings. As things made, these things might not have been made or made differently according to particular design and know-how. These things were governed by *techne* as a predominant mode of disclosure, where *techne* referred to the rules or know-how for production. Certainly by Modernity research tended to be divided into that questioning whose arena was the essential nature of things, governed in a hierarchy of the physical sciences dominated by mathematics and physics and a questioning into the products of human labour variously divided between the arts and the human sciences, more or less caught in the undecidability of its methodological directions with respect to the exactness of the physical sciences and the interpretative frameworks of cultural productions.

We started with a notion of remote intimacy and its paradoxical juncture of two terms. If we think of intimacy as a closeness or nearing, it is also a disclosing or opening. Equally, remoteness as a distancing, we could consider to be a concealing. Of course, this paradox can be though of as that of the question in itself or as such, the very question of the question or even the place of the question: how does one think that which is unthought, or what has been an outside to thought? How is the remoteness of what is unknown brought to the intimacy of disclosure? We also started with a question of the place of technology in research and the degree to which this place is an open possibility or already determined for human agency or practice. What was decisive for modernity, a modernity we are still entangled with, is precisely the place of technology in the resolution of the paradox of remote intimacy. How can we understand this? We can note two decisive moments that already emerged in the

Renaissance: science, or the exact knowledge of the physical world becomes an instrumental science, a science of instrumentation: what bridges the infinite void between a conscious self and a world of things is the *techne* of instrumentation and measurement that supposedly extracts the mechanical laws of the universe. This moment is decisive in its break from Classical or Aristotelian thinking. If for Aristotle the disclosure of truth falls to *episteme* or science with respect to an essential and invariant nature to things, and *techne* or know-how in making with respect to things that might have been otherwise, Galilean science will afford the possibilities of *techne* in order to disclose *episteme*, certainly something that we, today, hardly find unsettling, though it would not have been possible for Classical thought.

Coincident with this is the invention of perspectival space, or the representation of the world according to a geometrical order. Perspectival construction is a *techne* in which the infinite void separating the human gaze and the thing is bridged by a picture plane geometrically equidistant between the two vanishing points of self and world. This picture plane is immaterial, a virtual projection, neither self nor world but precisely the abstract model for representation itself, as that immaterial presentation of a world to a knowing self. In this sense, the world becomes picture. We initially encounter this virtualised and projected self formalised in Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, and then established as the modern self in Kant's transcendental subject of representation. Certainly by the 20th century, the *techne* of instrumentation and the *techne* of world picturing became the instrumental technologies by which we had our guarantees of knowing. *Physis*, or the essential nature of things became that which gave up its truth technologically and instrumentally. And, as we are aware, the world became a resource for human production. Human being equally became a vital or essential resource for production. Human being equally became the object of an instrumental science.

When the notion of remote intimacy was mentioned at that Auckland City Council function, the presenter was of course referring to the most contemporary information and communication technologies, to internet technologies, to virtual places or locations such as Second Life, My Space, U-Tube, Face-book, virtual worlds enabled by remarkable developments in digital technological innovation. We note the foregrounding within this event of the KAREN network provisions, essential for the most contemporary approaches to network research, the instantaneous transmission of data, real-time video-conferencing and so on. I want to emphasise something though, from what I have been saying: while these are new horizons of disclosure as to the possibility of human agency, what they most decisively disclose is their already concealed possibility in the very foundations to modernity that our Eurocentrically derived now global culture locates so readily. Authentic existence in the virtuality of digital screen spaces happens precisely because our fundamental understanding of experience itself has been, for at least 500 years that of a virtual plane of projection of the world; our knowing has been authenticated in the virtual spaces of representation as such. And our relations to what is, either with respect to things or human beings, has been mediated by instruments that extend the body, that are extensions to the body.

It is interesting in this regard to consider two inventions at the end of the nineteenth century that became so remarkably decisive for our contemporary mediated existence, two inventions that were to be prosthetics for insufficient or deficient bodies: the typewriter and the telephone. The typewriter was invented as a mechanical writing keyboard for the blind, such that the blind could communicate efficiently and effectively in writing. Ironically, it was never taken up widely for this purpose. However, it became the essential device in the

bureaucracy of the emerging office worker, and became a major vehicle for the employment of women. We can of course trace the successive histories of that keyboard from typewriter, to computer, to mobile telephonics. The telephone emerged from experiments with enabling the deaf to hear. Again, ironically, it also became an essential device for the bureaucracy of the emerging office worker, but also for a phonics at a distance, a *tele*-phonics, a remote intimacy or remote connectivity. Of course the third coincident invention at the turn of the 20th century was cinema, a realisation of a prosthetic screen of projection as representation of the temporal image which by the mid 20th century would become a *tele*-vision, or a seeing at a distance. If we read here a trajectory of bridging a distance, of a self's experience or realisation of an elsewhere, it is not so much in the de-realisation of one's place, as much as the realisation of the Other place, for one's locale or place was necessarily bound to the site of the screen.

One of the most common metaphors for the now ubiquitous screen is that of a window or portal, an opening onto an elsewhere, and indeed this is how we might have interpreted what I just said about the realisation of the Other place. It is as if we look through the screen and onto an elsewhere. The screen itself disappears, falls into forgetfulness, along with all of its accompanying hook-ups: keyboard, cables, IT support staff, software licensing, viruses and so on. But we need to remember that "screen" is a noun and a verb. While a screen is enabling with respect to offering a perspective on things, it also frames, excludes and screens us. By this I mean that we cannot separate out the question of technologies, their place, the question of research and the question of surveillance and identity. We could already trace the coincidence of these issues with the emergence of Galilean science and perspectival space, though we can clearly register how in the 21st century identity and surveillance are contingent on the same technologies that construe our communicative possibilities and sense of place. If to research is to project into an ex-trinsic or ec-centric locale, to dwell in the foreign or remoteness of what is concealed or hidden, to what extent can we still say, along with Michel Foucault, it is not that everything is interesting but that everything is dangerous? By this question I mean to what extent do we recognise that the same technologies by which we undertake research, by which we assume we are ready to risk everything on a radical questioning, are precisely those technologies that shore up and guarantee our identity, reassure us that we are locatable, that the Other place is in fact recoverable eventually to the global itself. In short, while technologies are the contemporary mediums in which research happens, and technologies may also be the objects of research, to what extent are technologies recognised for the manner whereby they conduct us, survey us; provide us with our place and identities supposedly as the ones who know.

AUT is called a "university of technology." In a very real and most pressing sense, this is simply a truism, something that may say very little, in the sense that every university is a university of technology, whether named as such or not. Whatever institutional configurations we may want to name today, they are all institutions of technology, if by institution we refer precisely to the place where human praxis happens, where institutions are particular sites of human agency: familial, governmental, industrial, virtual, or universal. Praxis is techno-praxis, as there is no outside to the instrumental mediations of human agency, as extensions to or of the self in its dealings with a world. But, I am always intrigued by the ambiguity of the possessive in expressions such as "university of technology," or "institution of technology." There is always the possibility of a double reading here, or the openness to a closed and decisive encounter with technology and research. AUT may certainly be a university whose every mediation is contingent on some techno-practice,

whose every exchange, undertaking, mode of teaching or research or administration is reliant on the techno-prosthetics of extensions to the human. In this it is no different to any other university, except possibly in naming this decisive relation where others might actually think they are not "applied" in this sense.

But AUT may also be that university in New Zealand, along with a handful elsewhere in the world, which recognises that its primary object of enquiry in whatever research it is undertaking in whatever discipline or sub-discipline, is the extent to which technology is the mediating determination of our research frame. This means the necessity to keep the question of technology, its instrumentalism and determination continually in frame, precisely as that which frames and delivers us to the possibility of questioning. As a university of technology, I would suggest this does not simply mean we are primarily concerned with what is termed "applied research" or that we are particularly attuned to the professionalisation of research, particularly oriented to industry, to the relevancy of a knowledge economy or smart industries. It is not that these are not worthy ambitions, and much of what we in fact do very well. Rather, I would emphasise in addition, if not in advance, that as a university of technology, we have as a orientation to continually question the technological as such and its determining role in construing the very framing of our endeavours.

I commenced with a brief mention of Aristotle's three basic categories of human activity: theory, production and practice. I want to conclude by providing something of an update on these Aristotelian categories offered by Michel Foucault in his own critical philosophy of technology, in what he referred to as "technologies of the self." He suggests there are three modes for the exercise of power, an exercise of power that is productive of selves. One is discourses of power, which are supposedly rational and explanatory of the world, equivalent in a sense to Aristotle's "theory." You are listening to a discourse. You are assuming that the speaker is speaking the true, that what he is presenting, while contestable, is supposedly rational and supportable. It has been supposedly thought through as relevant and topical for the event we are sharing today. While it is not overtly referential as a presentation, its author could provide you with a broad range of critical writings on technology to support his position.

There are, secondly, for Foucault technologies of power, that are productive of or enabling for human design, roughly equivalent to Aristotle's "poiesis" or production. This opening address happens somewhere, in a room that frames us all and discloses a technology of power in its design. My presentation was "written" on an IBM ThinkPad and my delivery was enhanced by an audio prosthetic. I cannot begin to separate out the multiple framings of technological interventions that produce this event itself. It didn't just happen, nor is it the transparent vehicle for the pure meaning of discourse. Technologies of power in their *tele-*functioning establish the locus from which I am able to speak as well as the reciprocal locus from which you can speak.

And there are what Foucault calls "practices" of power. Now, unlike discourses and technologies of power, practices are neither rational nor consistent: they are tactics that use discourses and technologies even against themselves. Practices of power are partial, incomplete and will fail but be recouped every time via the rationality of discourses and technologies. Practices of power, in this sense are wild and aberrant. This presentation again is not the disclosure of the full meaning of what I would want to have rationally delivered. What I actually wrote is a partial engagement with what might have been said otherwise; it is

tactical rather than complete. And who can say what you actually heard, what you may or may not remember, what fragments will resonate with you or leave you indifferent. Who can say how it will make sense with respect to what follows or will simply be an introduction now out of the way, finished with. Perhaps this is how we need to approach this Aristotelian category of praxis. Who in their research has not experienced the aberration and wildness of practice; who has not has recourse to reign in and salvage one's small experiments in thinking by the rational discourses of others? If we maintain something like this perspective on praxis, perhaps the hyphenated *techno-praxis* does not necessarily infer the instrumental determinacy of techno-rationalism. But, then, along with Foucault, we would face other risks, perhaps more pleasurable and possibly more threatening. For, in the recognition that practices of power use the rationality of discourses and technologies to their own ends, we realise, along with Foucault, that in research it is indeed that it is not that everything is interesting but that everything is dangerous.

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