

# VINES OF OPPRESSION

## Vines of Oppression: A Review of the Literature, Educational Criticism and Narrative Analysis of Social Media Research in Public Education

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A project submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master's of Education  
Graduate Department of Education in the  
University of Ontario Institute of Technology

### Author Note

Since beginning this Master's program I have married and had two beautiful children; so I want to first thank my husband Dan for his support and encouragement. Also, thanks to my two children, Beckett and Marlowe, for sacrificing quality mommy time so that I could complete this educational journey and for providing inspiration to hopefully better, in some way, their future educational experience. Thank you to Dr. Lorayne Robertson for her time, detailed notes and mentorship on this paper. Most especially, thank you to Dr. Wendy Barber who "gets my artsy," and has given me the space and support to be creative and who has challenged my ways of knowing.

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### Abstract

This arts-based educational inquiry paper is divided into three main sections; a review of the literature, an educational criticism discussing themes arising from the review of the literature, and a narrative analysis describing a proposed research project that did not receive district school board approval. The author applies Eisner's (1998b) structure of educational criticism and the paper exemplifies Barone and Eisner's (1997) seven features of arts-based educational inquiry. The research outlined is rooted in ideas stemming from the review of the literature, focused on the use of social media and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1985) to democratize theatre creation and consumption for high school students in a publicly funded board of education. Key themes, recurring through all three sections of the paper, are grounded in the review of the literature and include audience, creation, technology and theatre pedagogy. Throughout the paper, a kaleidoscope metaphor is applied to the themes; as one element shifts, the others simultaneously change. Subsequent related themes of re-conceptualized storytelling, audience-performer interactivity, liveness, and aesthetic literacy are also explored. The final outcome is an argument for changed theatre pedagogy.

**Vines of Oppression: A Review of the Literature, Educational Criticism and Narrative Analysis of Social Media Research in Public Education**

Throughout the history of dramatic performance, theatre and technology have been deemed “aesthetic enemies,” as Dixon labels them during his 2009 lecture on digital doubles in performance. Anderson, Cameron and Sutton (2012) ask us to see digital “technology not as a novelty or an enemy of ‘authentic drama practice’ but as a part of the landscape of our schools and communities that warrants critical attention” (p. 469). In the following review of the literature, educational criticism and narrative analysis are examined in answer to Anderson, Cameron and Sutton’s call for action, and are born from the realization that critical attention must be paid to the marriage of arts education and digital technologies. Further to this, arts-based educational inquiry is a valid method to study these issues (Eisner, 1998b).

Technology has been made out to be the corrupter of theatre, depriving it of its purity (Dixon, 2009). In *Poetics*, written approximately 335 BCE, Aristotle wrote about theatrical structure and placed spectacle at the bottom of his list of required elements of dramatic tragedy behind plot, characters, language, theme, and music (VI). Later, Jacobean Dramatist Ben Jonson fought against spectacular stage technologies that threatened the purity of his text (Dixon, 2009). Of course, the technology of Aristotle and Jonson’s times was rudimentary compared to the emerging technologies of today. Auslander (2008) claims that theatre and mass media are rivals, and not even equal rivals with media (primarily television at the time of his writing in 2008) dominating theatre. He

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stated, “The televisual has become an intrinsic and determining element of our cultural formation” (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 1, para. 5). Now, seven years later, it is digital and social technologies that far surpass television and theatre as the dominant cultural context in the digitized world and they are now the societal norm for the disbursement of information and entertainment to a liberated, mobile audience.

With a world of technology in the palm of our hands, literally in the case of smartphones, that far exceeds all of the technology available to Aristotle and Jonson in their combined lifetimes, it causes us to question what new technologies mean to modern theatre creation, the audience experience of theatre, and therefore theatre education. Theatre for centuries has clung to Aristotle’s dramatic structure outlined in *Poetics* (335 BCE). According to Aristotle, successful dramatic structure had to have a clear introduction or protasis, where the audience relates to the hero; a middle or epitasis, where the audience empathetically feels for the hero’s plight; and a clean ending or catastrophe, where the audience experiences catharsis.

Allen (2013), Bottoms (2010), Dixon (2009), and Boal (1985, 2002) all agree that in light of our technology-saturated society, and our changing audience expectations, Aristotle’s structure may no longer be relevant. Audiences now have the ability to replay, going forward and backward in time, allowing for analysis and repetition of the experience. Audiences are able to pause the story, entering and exiting the experience at will and with ease; view from various locations, from various devices; and choose what they watch from a

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variety of sources, accessing content at faster and faster speeds, all of which create very different audience expectations than simply viewing one live experience.

What follows is a review of current literature, comprised of 26 peer-reviewed journal articles and supplemented with 20 books that delve into the history and current workings of the theatre and the changing theatre education landscape. Also included in the review are some relevant articles written by artists currently working in performing arts, and some reactionary writings from audience members who have experienced tech-theatre. The artistic perspective is considered in this investigation; however, those currently working in the world of theatre creation are rarely published in peer-reviewed journals; instead they find different avenues to express their experiences. As Eisner (1998b) states, “There are multiple ways in which the world can be known: Artists, writers, and dancers, as well as scientists, have important things to tell the world” (p. 7).

Following the review of the literature is an educational criticism. Eisner (1998b) differentiates between connoisseurship and criticism as follows:

The word connoisseurship comes from the Latin *cognoscere*, to know. . . To know depends upon the ability to see, not merely to look. Criticism refers to the process of enabling others to see the qualities that a work of art possesses. Effective criticism functions as a midwife to perception. . . . Both connoisseurship and criticism are applicable to social and educational phenomena as well as to the world of art. (Eisner, 1998b, p. 6)

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Connoisseurship involves a “high level of qualitative intelligence in the domain in which it operates;” perceptivity to the “interplay of qualitative relationships;” and the ability “to experience those qualities as a sample of a larger set of qualities” (Eisner, 1998b, p. 64). According to Eisner (1998b), “classrooms are probably one of the most complex subjects of connoisseurship,” expertise in the subject matter, years and types of teaching experience, situational history, knowledge of students, school and community values all influence development of connoisseurship (p. 66). As Eisner (1985) illustrates:

If connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure. Criticism, as Dewey pointed out in *Art as Experience*, has at its end the re-education of perception... The task of the critic is to help us to see. Thus... connoisseurship provides criticism with its subject matter. Connoisseurship is private, but criticism is public. Connoisseurs simply need to appreciate what they encounter. Critics, however, must render these qualities vivid by the artful use of critical disclosure. (p. 92-93)

This puts arts educators in the unique position of being artistic and educational connoisseurs and critics of their own subject matter and pedagogy. The educational criticism in this paper draws conclusions based on the readings conducted during the review of the literature and examines Augusto Boal’s (1985, 2002) work and principles, making a case for how Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed is well suited to mediatized creation and performance.



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The paper concludes with a narrative analysis on the author's own conceived, and ultimately denied, research project and a reflection on how thematically fitting that denial was. Although unconventional, narrative analysis is deemed by many researchers to be a worthy form of data collection (Beattie, 1995; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Eisner, 1991, 1992, 1997,1998b). Connelly and Clandinin state,

Narrative inquiry is increasingly used in studies of educational experience. It has a long intellectual history both in and out of education. The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world (1990, p. 2).

Eisner (1991, 1997,1998b) advocated for the promise of alternative forms of data representation. One such form is that of narrative, as Eisner stated, "Stories instruct, they reveal, they inform in special ways" (1997, p.5). As theatre is about storytelling, and storytelling was a recurring theme in the review of the literature, it is an appropriate form to communicate the author's research experience and the challenges of conducting social media research in a publically funded board of education. As a teacher within the board for over a decade, having both a college diploma and multiple university degrees in performance arts and education, narrative is a valid method through which to inquire into how technology, theatre and education intersect.

### **Research Goals**

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“A doctoral thesis is expected to address a clear issue – the issue need not be simple, it need not be stated in a single sentence, it need not be conceptualized in traditional, empirical, hypothesis-testing terms, but it must be clear and explicit” (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 28). It is with this realization that although this paper is not a doctoral thesis, it is nonetheless under the graduate academic umbrella. The clear and explicit aim of this review of the literature is the exploration of theatre, audience and modern technologies and the impact of those on current dramatic pedagogy. As a result, it is intended to be received in the odyssean spirit in which it is offered. Drawing from a mixture of sources including 26 peer-reviewed articles; 7 performance arts articles; 20 books written by academics and artists alike; reflections; and script excerpts, this review of the literature is born out of beautiful and creative chaos, but as Nietzsche said in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, “One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star” (2008, Prologue, 5-2). Grounded in sources deemed legitimate by current academic standards of peer review, this paper begins inside, and then reaches outside of the proverbial ‘academic box’ to paint a full picture of the themes and their interconnectivity. In no way does this paper offer finite conclusions; however, it does attempt to offer a substantial examination of the state and concerns of modern theatre and theatre education in our digitally inundated culture.

Extensive reading has been conducted throughout this research process and no previous literature review that encompasses the depth and breadth of the themes presented in this paper has been located. Freshwater (2009) had a

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similar struggle, stating a scarcity in literature reviews and research examining theatre audiences (although much work was found examining television and movie audiences). Although his review of the literature may at first appear to be largely one-sided, this may be due to the overall resistance in performance arts to technologies and the perceived antagonism of many artists and artist-educators to technologies' encroachment on 'true art,' a resistance noted by many authors cited in the review of the literature (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Auslander, 2008; Dixon, 2009; Sakellaridou, 2014). Academics writing about dramatic pedagogy and technology are largely supportive of its benefits and inclusion and little is written to the contrary at this time (Anderson et al., 2012; Carroll, & Cameron, 2009; Davis, 2009, 2012; Dixon, 2009).

Through this research, what became apparent was the vast interconnectivity of themes when examining theatre, theatre education, and modern technologies. The ideas, often previously studied independently, blurred and overlapped much like the changing coloured shapes in a kaleidoscope. In a kaleidoscope, as one-element changes, thus the connecting elements simultaneously change. This metaphor is a fitting one within which to place this analysis; as technology changes, so does the experience of theatre. As theatre moves further into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and fewer spectators unplug from the rampant presence of their mobile devices to watch theatre in traditional fashion, the experience of the audience and their way of knowing, viewing and appreciating theatre, means more and more that the audience becomes part of the theatrical experience. The audience-performer interactivity, their ability to

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manipulate the aesthetic experience, follows the changing moves of the kaleidoscope. We, as audience become actors and changers of the lived experience, even as we text our friends or tweet about the production.

Notable Broadway actor Terrence Mann once said, “Movies will make you famous; Television will make you rich; Theatre will make you good” (Mann, n.d.). A central question to this work is: What happens when those disciplines blend so that one can’t entirely differentiate between them; or they get superseded by a greater technology that democratizes the creation and presentation tools giving creative power to the masses, instead of the few? The democratization of theatre has begun with the advent and accessibility of modern digital technologies. Anybody with a smartphone and Internet access can suddenly become the actor, and thus have an audience, YouTube will pay you should your audience grow big enough, and no agency corporation or director controls the creative product. This is the reality of performance arts today and it is a theme explored in the review of the literature.

The purpose of the following review of the literature is, in the broadest sense, to examine both the historical and current relationships between theatre performance, technology and theatre education. More specifically, this review of the literature examines how new technologies have affected theatre and spectator. Specifically, this work examines 1) how theatre creation is impacted; 2) how the performance is affected; 3) the concept of “liveness”; 4) changing audience expectations; 5) what this means for audience processing; 6) what this

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means for audience democracy; and finally, the author argues for 7) how theatre and performance pedagogy is (or rather should be) affected.

In summary, the key themes, recurring through all three sections of the paper, are grounded in the review of the literature and include audience, creation, technology and theatre pedagogy. Initially, this review of the literature was conducted as background for what was to be action research, which will be outlined later in this paper. The research was going to merge Boal's (1985, 2002) Theatre of the Oppressed model, with modern technological tools, inside an educational context in order to reimagine modern storytelling, blur the lines between audience and performer, and potentially reshape theatre arts education in a publically funded high school setting. Although this action research was ultimately rejected by the public board, this rejection spawned a need for an in depth educational criticism based on the non-democratization of theatre experienced by the researcher in her district school board. This educational criticism considers how Augusto Boal's (1985, 2002) work in theatre democratization is appropriately suited to technologically-created and presented theatre, and conversely, how ironic it is that a public board of education, one that espouses a vision that they are leaders in technology, ultimately imposed centralized control of the technology available to drama teachers.

Based on the ideas of Augusto Boal (1985, 2002), an alternative plan for action research was formulated, which is included as a narrative analysis, a unique form of capturing qualitative research data as per Eisner (1991, 1992, 1997, 1998b 2002, 2009). This research, having been deemed ethically sound

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and supported by a university research ethics board, (REB # 14-029) was ultimately not approved by a district school board. The paper concludes with an explanation of how thematically fitting the denial of that research plan was, making links to both the literature review and the educational criticism.

### **Method**

For the review of the literature, the researcher examined 18 articles regarding the utilization of modern technologies in current theatre performance creation and presentation and how that is translating into the theatre arts classroom. Articles spanning years 2000 to present were the starting point. Educational and artistic databases such as Scholar's Portal, ERIC (Educational Resource Information Centre), Project Muse and ProQuest were searched using keywords such as 'audience empowerment,' 'history theatre technology,' 'theatre performance,' 'aesthetics,' 'liveness,' 'artistic literacy,' 'digital literacy,' 'performer spectator relationship,' 'theatre interactivity,' 'theatre participation,' 'digital theatre,' 'cyberdrama,' 'mediatized performance,' and 'web theatre.' During this process many additional questions began to surface, such as the notion of what constitutes "live" nowadays, and this led to new areas of exploration.

The research took on a living, artistic, quality that the author allowed for, as per Eisner (1997), following tangents that led to new paths, which then generated new questions and new readings. In sum, the methodology followed the movements of the kaleidoscope, pointing in new directions as each new theme emerged. The arts paradigm is as subjective as art itself. As Rollings (2010) states, "There is no one set of criteria for judging the artistic quality of a

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work of arts-based research just as there is no one paradigm for the beauty of a work of art” (p. 104). Or, as Eisner (1992) states, “Don’t shy away from the artistic features of inquiry or the aesthetic qualities of its product” (p. 30). The inquiry, conducted through this review of the literature, educational criticism and narrative analysis, may be construed as unconventional, but was undertaken as per Eisner’s (1991, 1992, 1997, 1998b) guidelines for meaningful qualitative research and is reminiscent of Dewey’s (1934) theories on education and art as experience. It is also supported by Schon’s (1987) ideals that “it is no accident that professionals often refer to an ”art” of teaching or management and use the term “artist” to refer to practitioners unusually adept at handling situations of uncertainty, uniqueness or conflict” (p. 16). As such, this unique arts-based educational inquiry became a work of art in itself. The presentation of the research throughout the paper embodies Barone and Eisner’s (2011) seven features of arts-based educational inquiry described further below.

### **Arts-Based Educational Inquiry Methodology and Features**

“Arts based research represents an effort to explore the potentialities of an approach to representation that is rooted in aesthetic considerations and that, when it is at its best, culminates in the creation of something close to a work of art” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 1). According to Barone and Eisner (1997):

The very concept of artistically based research is regarded as an oxymoron by more than a few members of the community. To them, research is a concept that is embedded in a scientific conception of method. The idea that something as personal and as subjective as art

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can perform a research function does not fit comfortably into their traditional views of research method. (p. 84)

Just because it is an untraditional concept does not make it any less valid.

Inclusion of arts-based inquiry in the academic research community shows that multiplicity in methodology is possible which leads to varied perspectives, altered perceptions and exploration of new avenues for knowing (Barone & Eisner, 2011). “Our conception of validity is rooted in the ways arts-based research helps us notice, understand, and appraise” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 85).

Barone and Eisner (1997) state, “the two arts-based genres that have gained most prominence and acceptance among credentialed educational researchers . . . are educational criticism and narrative storytelling” (p. 79), and these are the two genres used in this paper.

Arts-based educational criticism and narrative storytelling allow for the reader to visualize, empathize, challenge and question the author’s ideas and experience. No matter which form of expression is utilized, as Eisner (1998b) states, “the primary ideal for educational criticism is that it should contribute to the enhancement of the educational process and through it to the educational enhancement of students” (p. 114). According to Eisner (1998b), successful educational criticism has four facets: 1. description, 2. interpretation, 3. evaluation, and 4. thematics (p. 88). These will be explored in further detail as they ground the methods used in this research.

The first facet, description, “enables readers to visualize what a place or process is like. It should help them ‘see’ the school or classroom the critic is



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attempting to help them understand” (Eisner, 1988b, p. 89). Drawing on the principles of aesthetic literacy, Eisner (1998b) states, “one source of knowing is visualization. Another is emotion. How a situation feels is not less important than how it looks” (p.89). Description can occur, as demonstrated in this paper, in the form of metaphor, narrative storytelling and through the use of descriptive language. The description given is limited by what the author experiences, sees, or chooses to convey. However, as Eisner (1998b) illustrates:

In writing educational criticism, particularly the descriptive dimension, the writer always tells an incomplete story . . . In this sense a narrative, like perception, is inherently selective. But selectively, although partial and framework dependent, is a way of giving point to observations and thereby helping others learn to see . . . The skilled teacher knows what to neglect. The competent student knows what to focus upon. (p. 90)

Connoisseurs of arts and education are able to determine the picture that they wish to convey based on their expertise, research and experience.

Educational criticism paints a picture using language, which the author then interprets, inviting the reader to also interpret the picture described.

The second facet is interpretation. According to Eisner (1998b), “if description can be thought of as giving an account *of*, interpretation can be regarded as accounting *for*. Educational critics are interested not only in making vivid what they have experienced, but in explaining its meaning” (p. 95). Once the meaning making has occurred, then follows the third, vital, facet, evaluation. Eisner (1998b) believes that educational critics are unable to simply describe and

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remain detached observers; it is their charge to judge as well. Eisner (1998b) draws focus to education's goal to not only change students, but to also better their lives. Critics are able to appraise the good in an educational event "because schools are social institutions whose mission is educational, the significance of what transpires in schools is subject to criteria that allow its educational value to be appraised" (Eisner, 1998b, p. 98). Once the author describes the situation, it is up to them as critics to interpret and evaluate based on their connoisseurship as is demonstrated in this paper.

Through the first three phases of educational criticism themes surface that are specific to the situation, but are also common to education on a grander scale. Therefore, the fourth and final facet is that of thematics. In Eisner's (1998b) words, "the formulation of themes *within* an educational criticism means identifying the recurring messages that pervade the situation about which the critic writes. Themes are the dominant features of the situation or person, those qualities of place, person, or object that define or describe identity" (p. 104). By identifying the thematics specific to the situation and creating links to a larger area of study, such as subject matter, curriculum or education as a whole, one is able to advance understanding and move towards a better understanding of pedagogy.

The following review of the literature presents four primary themes; audience, theatre, modern technologies and theatre pedagogy; as well as numerous related secondary themes such as, but not limited to, audience-performer interactivity, liveness and aesthetic literacy. These themes are then

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further explored through an educational criticism and a narrative analysis that deal with a specific situation, but move to a greater area of study when considering ramifications for arts-based pedagogy and arts-based research. The author, through description, interpretation, evaluation and finally thematic, hopes to increase awareness and advance arts education. After all, “the aim of *educational* research is to further human understanding so that the quality of educational practice can be improved” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 85).

The following arts-based educational inquiry in the form of a review of the literature, educational criticism and narrative analysis also encompasses the seven features of arts-based educational inquiry as outlined by Barone and Eisner (1997). These include the 1. creation of virtual reality, 2. presence of ambiguity, 3. metaphorical and evocative language, 4. contextualized language, 5. the promotion of empathy, 6. insight and 7. aesthetic form. To argue for the strength, validity and generalizability of this methodology the author will examine each of these in further detail.

The first feature is the creation of a virtual reality, which the author attempts to do through the narrative analysis. According to Barone and Eisner (1997), “good art possesses a capacity to pull the person who experiences it into an alternative reality” (p. 73). If done successfully, creating a virtual reality for your audience during arts-based educational inquiry allows “old ways of seeing [to be] negated in favor of a fresh outlook, perspective, paradigm, and ideology” (p. 74). The second feature is the presence of ambiguity, Barone and Eisner (1997) suggest that, “stories be written in which teachers and students explicate

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and illustrate findings” (p. 74). This paper offers no finite conclusions, allowing the reader space to draw their own perspective. Instead, it paints a dynamic picture of the state of theatre pedagogy in a technological world, through one researcher’s experiences. In essence, it invites a new sense of “liveness” to the pedagogy of all drama teachers, as they explore their own use of technology in their professional practice.

Purposefully, much of the paper is written using expressive language that is “metaphorical” and “evocative” to enhance and express meaning, the third characteristic of arts-based educational inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 75). In education, how we communicate, and the language that we use with our students is integral to the pedagogical process. The fourth feature is the use of contextualized and vernacular language “so that the complexities adhering to a unique event, character, and/or setting may be adequately rendered” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 76). Language that is expressive and “thickly’ descriptive” allows for the writing to be “highly accessible to non-researcher readers (or ‘onlookers’) who can easily participate in making meaning from the text” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 77). The language with which one communicates their research greatly contributes to the fifth feature of arts-based educational inquiry, which is the promotion of empathy.

As Barone and Eisner (1997) state, “the ability to understand empathetically is the ability to participate vicariously in another form of life” (p. 77). By developing empathetic understanding in the readers, the researcher is better able to promote the reconstruction of their perspective (Barone & Eisner,

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1997). Arts-based educational inquiry is very much a product of the inquirer; it is far more deeply personal than traditional research writing. Barone and Eisner (1997) recognize this and include the personal signature of the researcher as the sixth feature stating that, “the author shapes the reality in accordance with his or her own particular thesis, or controlling insight, which the text is composed to suggest” (p. 77). Art, in all forms, is a personal product of the artist and the same is true of arts-based educational inquiry. Just as all art has some aesthetic form, so too does arts-based educational inquiry.

The final and most distinguishing feature of arts-based educational inquiry is the presence of aesthetic form. Barone and Eisner outline how this differs from traditional research forms:

The features of traditional quantitative research texts tend to be standardized. They generally include (in this order) a statement about the problem and its background, definitions of the methodology and design, a statement about the problem and its background, definitions of relevant terminology, a review of related literature, a description of the methodology and design, a presentation and analysis of the data secured, and a summary and discussion of the findings, which includes implications for further research. Unlike those of traditional quantitative research texts, the formats of arts-based research texts tend not to be standardized. (1997, p. 78)

One of the most common arts-based educational inquiry formats is that of the story, utilized in this paper as narrative analysis. The story

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format follows a basic pattern where there is a framing of the dilemma, followed by the middle of the story where complications ensue, and concluded with a resolution (but, not necessarily a solution). Barone and Eisner (1997) articulate the potentiality of storytelling in stating,

By the end of a story . . . its format and contents will serve to create a new version of certain educational phenomena. When readers re-create that vision, they may find that new meanings are constructed, and old values and outlooks are challenged, even negated. (p. 78)

It is the author's conviction that through this review of the literature, a thorough and complete arts-based educational criticism and narrative analysis, the reader, as audience of this research, begins to challenge conventional notions of theatre pedagogy.

### **Review of the Literature**

The following review of the literature begins by offering an operational definition of theatre derived from the literature surveyed in this work. It further examines the history of audience repression including the constraints of Aristotle's dramatic structure and the attempts by some artists to empower their audiences. The review then moves towards current technologies and their effect on audience, dramaturgy and the overall reconceptualization of storytelling. The author notes a significant gap in the literature regarding technology and teaching drama. Finally, the review focuses on what all of this means for current theatre pedagogy in a digital and technology-driven culture.

## **Defining Theatre**

To Shakespeare, the whole world was a stage. Sakellaridou (2014) states, the theatre “is by definition a physical space teeming with life” (p. 35). Boal (2002) agrees that any construction built specifically to house shows is theatre. But, as artists, it is evident that theatre is more than just a building or a space. Theatre can be as simple as the “repetitive acts of our everyday lives” (Boal, 2002, p. 11). But, an artist sees theatre as more than just daily human mechanisms. According to Boal (2002), theatre is “the art of looking at ourselves” (p. 15), it is “a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, instead of just waiting for it” (p. 16). Theatre is the art of knowing and questioning ourselves, performing what we know, or want to know. Boal (2002) states, “Artists are witnesses of their times” (p. 17), echoing the late actress and Method guru Stella Adler who stated, “The theatre is a spiritual and social X-ray of its time” (Adler, n.d.). To Rancière (2009), theatre is simply “bodies in action before an assembled audience” and can include dance, acting, mime etc., (p.1).

Rancière (2009) clearly states that there “is no theatre without the spectator” (p.1). Jerzy Grotowski (1968) in *Towards a Poor Theatre* defined theatre as “what takes place between spectator and actor” (p. 32). Essentially, “theatre is the capacity possessed by human beings – and not by animals – to observe themselves in action. Humans are capable of seeing themselves in the act of seeing, of thinking their emotions, of being moved by their thoughts” (Boal, 2002, p.11). Theatre is human expression, for human consumption.

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The theatre discussed in this review of the literature encompasses all of these aspects; it is the living art that offers up an examination of humanity, allowing audiences to grasp and question what it means to be human. Theatre is the space between; it is the relationship that forms, and the conversation that occurs, between those that are producing the art and those that are consuming it; to continue the metaphor, theatre exists in the indistinct edges of the overlapped shapes and colours of the kaleidoscope, in this case between actor and audience. Theatre is not dependent on location; you can do away with plot, costumes, character, set, sound and script. The only thing indispensable is the relationship with the audience. As Peter Handke in his play *Offending the Audience* (1971) states, “You are the topic . . . You are the centre. You are the occasion. You are the reasons why” (p. 21). Audience is the root of theatre; without audience, theatre would not exist so this is where the examination begins – by looking at the audience.

### **A Historical Retrospective and Overview of Audience**

As actress Shirley Booth succinctly stated, “the audience is 50 percent of the performance,” whether that audience is live in a physical theatre or at home, a large group or a single individual (Booth, n.d.). Any place gets magically transformed into a theatrical space simply by the presence of an audience (Newman, 2012). For many, the audience holds more importance than the art itself. Herbert Blau (1990) presents the audience “not so much as a mere congregation of people as a body of thought and desire” (p. 25). Often one thinks of audiences as it – as one. As Freshwater (2009) points out, an audience is



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made of individuals who each have their own responses, who bring their own cultural reference points, political beliefs, sexual preferences, personal histories, immediate preoccupations, interpretations, likes, dislikes, and more. All of this influences how each individual experiences the event. How the audience experiences the art, the lens through which they view the art, their interactions with the art, and their community shape the art. With this in mind, the reader is challenged to reflect on this excerpt from Wagner's (1986) play *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, made famous as Lily Tomlin's one-woman show:

Did I tell you what happened at the play? We were at the back of the theatre, standing there in the dark, when all of a sudden I feel one of 'em tug at my sleeve, whispers, "Trudy look!" I said, "Yeah, goosebumps. You definitely got goosebumps. You like the play that much?" They said it wasn't the play that gave 'em goosebumps, it was the audience!

I'd forgot to tell them to watch the play; they'd been watching the audience! Yeah, to see a group of people sitting together in the dark, laughing and crying at the same things...well that just knocked 'em out! They said, "Trudy, the play was soup, the audience, art. (Wagner, 1986, p.12)

The history of theatre shows us a history of the spectator; theatre is derived from the ancient Greek theatron, meaning to see. The term audience has its origin in the latin verb audire 'to hear' (Freshwater, 2009). To see and to hear,

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both are critical elements of the experience, but theatre encompasses all of our senses, it's a holistic experience. Sadly, as outlined by Sakellaridou (2014), the history of theatre also shows us a gradual pacification of audiences. Theatre began in relation to religious observances. In ancient Egypt, religious rituals involved the imitation of events in a god or goddess' life. In ancient Greece, plays were part of massive religious festivals celebrating the god Dionysus. In the religiously inspired festival theatre, the audience was actively involved in the celebratory nature of the performances. The plays were performed in streets and fields, audiences sang, danced, chanted and celebrated along with the performers. A shift slowly occurred to having specified roles for the audience within the ritual performance – such as call and response.

The plays began to become more formalized with the work of Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes moving from the streets into amphitheatres. This began the complete segregation of the audience who then merely watched the performance within the Greek amphitheater with separate stage and seating. The dissociation of audience from performer continued with the advent of electricity and stage lighting. The segregation was finally completed with the darkened auditorium realized in the naturalist theatre of Paris and Moscow at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Naturalist theatre was marked by realistic depictions of primarily middle-class life performed on stage to an audience sitting en masse, in the dark, watching (Sakellaridou, 2014).

### **Audience empowerment.**

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According to the literature reviewed (e.g., Boal, 1985; Brecht, 1935-36; Sakellaridou, 2014) the argument for the empowerment of the spectator is in no way new, but seems to have gained renewed strength over the past decade coinciding with the advancement and accessibility of modern technologies. As long as there has been theatre, and therefore audience, the argument for active versus passive spectatorship has been present. Plato, who thought that theatre as it was structured in his time (428 BCE – 348 BCE) was purely to entertain the ignorant, wanted a different theatre, putting community into action by involving them through movement (Ranci re, 2009). According to Ranci re, theatre has:

A rather delicate dramaturgy of sin and redemption. Theatre accuses itself of rendering spectators passive” . . . “It consequently assigns itself the mission of reversing its effects and expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their consciousness and their activity. (2009, p.6-7)

As Sakellaridou articulates:

No doubt, theater art in itself, realizing the restrictive effect of its institutionalization (both through the growing formality of the writing and the development of theater architecture), tried various strategies through the ages in order to remedy the audience’s alienation and passivity. The aside, the soliloquy, the use of a chorus, and the presence of a narrator were some of the strategies employed by the classical theater to reestablish the lost link between the actor and the spectator. (2014, p. 14)

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Historically, there is much agreement with Plato's opinion of traditional theatrical masses being ignorant, mindless consumers of whatever the playwright and actors are selling (e.g. Boal, 1985; Brecht, 1935-36; Ranci re, 2009). It seems that "To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act" (Ranci re, 2009, p. 2). This notion of theatre leading to ignorance, created solely for the entertainment of the unwitting, incapacitated spectator leads Ranci re (2009) to two conclusions: the first is that theatre as it is now is bad and should be stopped at all costs. The second is that society is in need of a different theatre, "one without spectators" as Ranci re states (2009, p. 2). He of course, is not implying an empty theatre but rather theatre "where those in attendance learn from, as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs" (Ranci re, 2009, p. 2). There have been some pioneers of audience empowerment, and the creation of 'different theatre' however; they historically have been few and far between (Boal, 1985, 2002; Brecht, 1935-36; Ranci re, 2009; Sakellaridou, 2014).

### **Audience and social consciousness.**

According to Boal (1985), one such pioneer was Bertolt Brecht, who lived from 1898-1956, an advocate for the demise of audience voyeurism and creator of socially conscious theatre. Brecht sought not to destroy the institution of theatre, but instead to repurpose the theatre for a new social use. Brecht (1935-36) attempted theatre that made spectators aware of the social situation with the hope that they would be inspired to alter it. Brecht was not the only practitioner to "shock" audiences into consciousness, but was best known for addressing the

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perceived passivity of theatre audiences (Boal, 1985). He put his audiences through a process of alienation, which he considered “necessary to all understanding” (Brecht, 1935-36, p. 768).

Some of the alienation techniques he utilized were direct audience address; episodic action; inclusion of songs and film; and leaving the lights up in the house; all designed to encourage the audience to view social conditions that had previously been taken for granted (Boal, 1985). What Brecht did not want is for “spectators to continue to leave their brains with their hats upon entering the theater, as do bourgeois spectators” (Boal, 1985, p. 104). Brecht (1935-36), regarding his own work says, “The spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simple empathy with the characters in the play” (p. 768).

Another innovator in audience empowerment and social consciousness, inspired by the work of Brecht, was Augustus Boal (1985, 2002). He created the Theatre of the Oppressed to educate audiences by making them active witnesses to issues of culture, oppression and citizenship with a goal to inspire challenge and change (A. Boal, 1985, 2002; J. Boal, 2010; Vettraino, 2010). Boal took his performances out to the streets democratizing theatre through accessibility (Boal, 1985, 2002). Boal’s work will be elaborated on in the educational criticism.

According to Boal (1985) and Brook (1968) experimentation in theatre with regard to audience participation, distancing, engagement and education continued, most especially during the 1960’s through the 1980’s. The

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experimental theatre movement attempted to challenge the passivity of audiences and the definition of what constitutes theatre (Brook, 1968).

Experimental theatre director Peter Brook (1968) described his work as creating "... a necessary theatre, one in which there is only a practical difference between actor and audience, not a fundamental one" (p. 150). Simultaneous to this, the technology sector was in creative overdrive. The advent and availability of new technologies developed at a far faster pace than ever before. Anderson et al., (2012), Dixon (2009) and Kuling and Levin (2014) all agree that digital technologies are just another development along the same lines as the printing press and the industrial revolution. They also concur that digital technologies have gone further than the printing press in shaping our culture and communications, providing widespread democratization of knowledge, and placing creative tools in users' hands. The accessibility of modern technologies alone heightens creative potential and calls for a creative revolution (Dixon, 2009).

### **Technology and Theatre**

Technology in theatre practice is in no way new (Anderson et al., 2012; Auslander, 2008; Dixon, 2009; Irwin, 2011; Kuling & Levin, 2014). Since Ancient Greece and the implementation of Deus Ex Machina to solve issues arising in plot, theatre has involved technology whether it is pulleys lowering the "god" down to Earth, stage lighting or Twitter (Dixon, 2009; Irwin, 2011; Kuling & Levin, 2014). Kuling and Levin (2014) point out that digital technologies are just another development along the same lines as the printing press and the industrial

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revolution. Yet, digital technologies have gone further than the both the printing press and industry to shape our culture and how we communicate, receive, produce and locate information and entertainment (Anderson et al., 2012; Auslander, 2008).

Dixon (2009) states that as early as the 1920's, Robert Edmund Jones an American theatre designer working in that time, thought that the fusion of cinema and theatre promised a unique and powerful new art form. Tannahill (2014), Anderson et al., (2012), Davis (2012), and Auslander (2012) all reason that the possibilities of theatre created through technology will continue to expand as technology continues to develop. According to Newman (2012), we are now in an age when audiences are increasingly ready to interact with performances.

### **Defining technology.**

What comprises technology, the seemingly arch-nemesis of traditional theatre? Technology in the form of stage lighting, sound amplification, and recorded music and sound effects, seems to have been ingratiated into the theatre world and is now standard practice (Auslander, 2008). The technology which is the focus of this paper, refers to online and digital technologies and incorporates smartphones and tablets, personal computers, social media and video upload sites as well as video and audio capture, editing, animation and creation applications. In this paper, the author is referring to any digital or online technology that can be used in the process, creation, performance or viewing of theatrical production. Carroll and Cameron (2009) used the term *mobile telephone* in lieu of cellphone reasoning that these devices are “portable and

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personal media platforms rather than the underlying technical infrastructure” (p. 296). This review designates them as smartphones, as the media platforms that they encompass have further developed since Carroll and Cameron’s time of writing. Although the technology in this paper can refer to that housed in home computers, laptops or tablets, the smartphone is what is in the hands of the majority, 70%, of high school students according to a Harris Poll conducted in The United States and released by Pearson Education (2014). Therefore, smartphones, due to their relative accessibility, and previous successful inclusion in similar research (Davis, 2009; 2012) would be accessible for this study’s purposes and be the primary creation tool referred to when looking at creating mediatized performance or cyberdrama in an educational setting.

### **Defining tech-theatre.**

Auslander (2008) states, “mediatized performance” is performance that is circulated on television, as audio or video recordings, and in other forms based in technologies or reproduction” (Chapter 1, Section 1, para. 12). Cyberdrama falls under the umbrella of mediatized performance. As Davis (2009) states, the term cyber “is from a Greek work which meant to ‘steer or navigate’,” which is interesting as steer and navigate are active verbs that would imply active participation (p. 150). According to Davis (2009), the term ‘cyberdrama’ was first used by Janet Murray in her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* wherein Murray defined cyberdrama as “a reinvention of storytelling itself for the new digital medium,” “As a new generation inundated by technology emerges, it will take participatory form for granted and will look for



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ways to participate in ever more subtle and expressive stories” (Murray, 1998, as cited in Davis, 2009, p. 151). Davis states that for Murray, the key features of cyberdrama are story and interactivity and that participants “have expectations regarding participation and active engagement” (2009, p. 151). Theatrical cyberspaces “provide us with different spaces and opportunities to create roles, respond to situations and interact with others to tell stories” (Davis, 2009, p. 49).

Tannahill (2014) attempts to classify web-theatre stating that it must have “live-action observable by an audience in real time” whether they share the same physical space or not (p. 12). When examining web-theatre, or theatre using digital technologies, it is important to note that there are two distinct categories: 1) theatrical pieces created within technology and 2) theatrical pieces featuring technology (Tannahill, 2014). An example of an instance of theatre created through technology would be a live-stream performance where the actors all collaborate in real time to create the performance for an audience simultaneously viewing them through devices. An example of a piece of theatre featuring technology could be the incorporation of YouTube clips in a performance or a live Twitter feed that the actors play off of during a live traditionally staged performance. In a post-Marshall McLuhan time where the medium and the audience must be considered as integral to the message, it is an important classification to make. With new technologies offering us unique and accessible creation tools, the tools themselves, who uses them, and how they are used, become important factors in theatre dramaturgy. However, the most contemptuous argument in the war between technology and theatre concerns

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what constitutes a live performance, and whether live experience trumps mediatized versions of audience experience.

### **Liveness.**

As actress Maggie Smith once said, “I like the ephemeral thing about theatre, every performance is like a ghost - it's there and then it's gone” (Smith, M., n.d.). It has long been argued that immediacy is the essence of theatre; the fact that every performance is live and therefore different, each moment captured only by memory, existing in the immediate now. Those that hold theatre sacred often use this as the basis for their argument as to why it is superior to mediatized forms of entertainment (Auslander, 2008; Baker, 2013; Sakellaridou, 2014). As Auslander (2008) states, with regard to the historic battle between theatre and technology: “such analyses take on the air of a melodrama in which virtuous live performance is threatened, encroached upon, dominated, and contaminated by its insidious Other, with which it is locked in a life-and-death struggle” (Chapter 2, Section 4, para. 6).

Mediatized performances seem to oppose the notion of “liveness.” “The common assumption is that the live event is “real” and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real” (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 1, para. 7). Sakellaridou (2014) sees theatre as live and human, in need of its people or it faces certain death; and web-theatre as a “dystopian alterative,” a “phantasmatic, posthuman, virtual cyberstage” (p. 35). Eric Bogosian in the introduction to his raging one man show, *Pounding Nails in the Floor with my Forehead*, describes theatre as follows:

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Medicine for a toxic environment of electronic media mind-pollution . . .

Theater is ritual. It is something we make together every time it happens. Theater is holy. Instead of being bombarded by a cathode ray tube we are speaking to ourselves. Human language, not electronic noise. (1994, xii)

Theatre marks a cultural value that rallies against distraction, insincerity and hypocrisy, and liveness is deemed to be of the utmost importance, rooted to the meaning and purpose of theatre work (Baker, 2013). Baker (2013), reflects that mediatization is seen as a horrific cultural loss and equated with the war on terror, global recession, climate change and contributing to a climate of non-caring (p. 18). To Auslander (2008), live performance is most affected by new technologies' dominance, and he believes it is of the utmost importance that we examine the place of live performance within a digitally inundated culture.

Live, as Auslander (2008, 2012) stipulates, is a historical term born from the advent of radio and whether the audience was hearing a real time (live) or recorded audio offering, that now falls on its default definition of being physically and temporarily co-present. Auslander argues that Greek theatre wasn't live because there was no means of recording it. It is only when the technology exists, that live theatre can exist – it must have its opposite in order to be defined, and as such, they are dependent on each other. The differentiating label of an event as live came into being, not with the gramophone, but with the radio. The gramophone, with its mandatory handling of a physical record, made it obvious that one was listening to a recorded event, but the radio blurred the lines

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(you couldn't see, or physically touch, who or what was producing the music or program). Up until the radio, the difference between live and recorded was self-evident, and therefore the language required to label it hadn't yet been put in place (Auslander, 2008).

The concept of liveness changes over time in relation to technological changes; "new ways of thinking and talking about a new medium will not arise until there is a social need for them" (Auslander, 2012, p. 4). Again the kaleidoscope metaphor is invoked, society is changing technology, while simultaneously technology is changing society, and both are changing language and thinking, while all of this is impacting what constitutes liveness and theatre.

For an example of this kaleidoscopic metaphor in action the author refers to Auslander's (2008) example of the television. Auslander outlines how, at first, TV was primarily a broadcast of various live events. As years passed and TV developed, more "canned" or prerecorded shows snuck into the lineup and immediacy was no longer a key selling point. Yet, TV's popularity grew instead of diminished. Television was "thought to make the home into a kind of theatre characterized, paradoxically, by both absolute intimacy and global reach" (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 7). According to Auslander (2008), "television's essential properties as a medium are *immediacy* and *intimacy*" (Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 5), just as our computers are now, an environment in themselves. The medium is the context. Just as the television became an "intrinsic and determining element of our cultural formation" (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 1, Section 1, para. 4), so too have computers and the technology that

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they encompass (Anderson et al., 2012). From video-capturing in most hand-held devices from phones to tablets, to connection via the internet, to social media sites that allow for upload of personalized content wherever, whenever, technology has become part of our cultural identity, or as Anderson et al., (2012) phrase it, part of the “landscape of our schools and communities” (p. 469).

According to Auslander (2008), there is some disagreement between earlier classifications of live and mediatized. Auslander points out that live performance is often a product of media technologies. For instance, as soon as electronic amplification is used what we hear is the “vibration of a speaker, a reproduction of the sound picked up by a microphone, not the original (live) acoustic event” (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 2, Section 3, para. 2). Auslander asks us to consider: If you are a spectator at a live performance, but sit far away from the stage, instead viewing the performance on a large television screen, are you actually a participant of that live performance? “Within our mediatized culture, whatever distinction we may have supposed there to be between live and mediatized events is collapsing because live events are increasingly either made to be reproduced or are becoming ever more identical with mediatized ones” (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 2, Section 3, para. 20). Some examples of these blurred performances are film made into theatre (Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Legally Blonde* and *Dirty Dancing*) and sporting events which use playback, have media breaks for commercials, and large screen televisions playing the game as it occurs. Film is often seen behind live orchestras or dancers. We can restart live programs through cable, rewind and pause them.

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Many live concerts, especially of pop artists, recreate music videos on stage; and at most rock concerts now it is the glow of phones swaying in the air instead of lighters capturing the concert via video while simultaneously participating in it.

According to Auslander (2008):

The incursion of mediatization into live performance is not simply a question of the use of certain equipment in that context. It also has to do with approaches to performance and characterization, and the mobility and meanings of those within a particular cultural context.”

(Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 21)

We are seeing “live performance’s absorption of a media-derived epistemology” (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 21).

According to Auslander (2012), the term *live* is being used with regard to many modern mediated concepts such as websites (a website is said to go live), Internet and social liveness (such as instant messaging and texting), and live recordings (filmed before a live studio audience). “Liveness is not limited to specific performer-audience interactions but to a sense of always being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated co-presence with others known and unknown” (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 2, Section 3, para. 36). The liveness that we now value as a society, as Auslander posits, is how fast entities respond through technology. The speed of response makes the experience feel “live” even if it is not. The feeling of liveness comes from our engagement with technology; if we interact with computers as we do with other humans and we get an almost immediate response then that makes a claim to

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liveness (Auslander, 2012, p. 6). In Baker's research conducted in 2013, comparing the audience experiences at both a live theatrical event and simultaneous live-stream of the same theatrical event, audiences in both counted their experience as live. The key was that it was happening in real time.

Following the historical pattern, as seen with theatre and television: "The mediatized form is modeled on the live form, but it eventually usurps the live form's position in the cultural economy. The live form then starts to replicate the mediatized form" (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 5, Section 1, para. 1). He states that, "This historic dynamic does not occur in a vacuum, of course. It is bound up with the audience's perception and expectations, which shape and are shaped by technological change and the uses of technology influenced by capital investment" (Auslander, 2008, Chapter 5, Section 1, para. 2). As Davis (2012), and Nicholls and Philip (2012) point out, audience reaction and engagement are far more important than the tools used to create and present the creation. As Auslander (2012) and Davis (2012) articulate, the feeling of liveness can be created during mediatized performances by using real time interactions, connection between audience and performer and instant feedback from audience to performer. Both Davis (2012) and Auslander (2012) agree that liveness is about human contact and connections. Liveness is in itself "alive" like the kaleidoscope image, its definition perpetually changing based on technology, human perception, expectations, and experiences.

### **Dramaturgical considerations.**

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As Shakespeare wrote in *As You Like It*, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” highlighting with poetical finesse the theatre’s examination of human connectivity (II, sc. Vii). This was never truer than it is today, living in a world interconnected by technological webbing. Abercrombie and Longhurst, writing in 1998, propose that new technologies mean that instead of thinking of audiences as ‘dispersed’ (watching a single television programme in separate locations) or ‘simple’ (watching a live event in a single location), we should now think of them as ‘diffuse’ (watching whatever we choose, from wherever we choose, through various means, potentially on a global scale).

Hughes (2008) observes the dramaturgical nature of our performance-based society and cites YouTube as an example of where the “performative pull of new media is coupled with the performative push of our desire to perform” (p. 31). Hughes also discusses the reciprocal relationship of humans and technology. How humans and technology change each other is integral to the dramaturgy of new theatre. It is through digital venues such as YouTube, FaceBook, Vine and Twitter that we are able to construct our own, personal theatrical works further blurring the lines between audience and performer and altering traditional theatre practices. For example, Tannahill (2014) argues that YouTube has created a fifth subject for monologues. Traditionally, Western theatre has had four primary addresses for characters to direct their monologues towards, God, audience, another character and self, but with the advent of YouTube it seems a fifth is created that blends all of the other four (p. 9).



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Tannahill (2012) believes “strongly in the humanizing capacity of YouTube to broadly disseminate narratives and experiences, particularly those of otherness (p. 11). YouTube has changed the monologue giving society a free and democratizing tool that allows any user to upload their personal theatrical creation, or control what they witness as audience.

Our “‘modes of attention’ are subject to change over time as developments in technology provide us with new forms of perception” (Banes & Lepecki, 2007, p. 4). Allen (2013); Anderson et al. (2012); Auslander (2012, 2008); Irwin (2011); and Tannahill (2014); all agree that 21<sup>st</sup> Century technologies have vastly changed the way we view television, movies and theatre. Therefore, if how we tell, view, and receive stories has been changed by technology they reason that how we create and communicate theatre is undergoing change as well, since theatre is just another way that we tell stories.

According to Allen (2013), the way that we watch drama is changing our expectations of drama. We are not linked to one-time viewings such as in Aristotle’s time. Today, with our various methods of viewing theatre and media, audiences have different demands for their entertainment. Technology is “changing the ways in which future generations will view the entire concept of storytelling” (Allen, 2013, p. 11). As Allen (2013) points out, being an “audience member is no longer a temporary state” and the “moments between viewing become mere pauses” (p. 11). To elaborate on Allen, media consumers now have PVR to record TV, Netflix makes available entire television seasons at once

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to binge watch, and there is a plethora of reality television, pause buttons on 'live' TV and so on.

Allen (2013) questions whether modern audiences want traditional conclusiveness to their stories; without a climax or solution the stories could potentially continue indefinitely with audiences dropping in when they wish. Allen (2013) describes drama with such open-endedness of plot as videogame style storytelling, where you see characters, how they react to choices they make and their interactions with each other. Allen also believes that new technologies allow audiences to engage with dramatic content in a way that is even more naturally connected to our innate human instinct to explore and investigate the world around us. With technology allowing us to access theatre from around the world, wherever we wish including our homes, location, and time have both been freed.

### **Location empowerment.**

Several theorists have commented on the topic of location empowerment (e.g. Allen, 2013; Boal, 1985, 2002; Newman, 2012). As already stipulated by Boal (2002) and Sakellaridou (2014), theatre is any construct created for the purpose of housing a performance. Location considerations when creating and presenting theatre have always been important (Aristotle, 335 BCE; Allen, 2013; Boal, 1985, 2002; Newman, 2012). According to Newman (2012), the comfort or discomfort; smells; lighting; audience formation; and accessibility of the venue, all impact how the audience will experience and process the creation being presented. As Allen (2013) points out, being an audience member in Aristotle's time was a fairly uncomfortable experience and therefore influenced his

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expectations of what makes good theatre. Modern technologies have created more options for presentation locations through the ability to stream from anywhere via the Internet and allow the audience to be able to view theatre from the comfort of their own homes, or virtually anywhere their smartphones get reception. Newman (2012) illustrates, that as soon as we remove theatre from traditional auditoriums we no longer have “conventional performer-audience structure to contend with, just a space with which to play” (p. 55).

Allen (2013) observes, “The environment in which one experiences an event has a powerful influence on one’s expectations and aspirations for the event” (p. 10). With the advent of mobile technologies, we carry that audience experience with us wherever we go. Aristotle’s (335 BCE) theatre viewing environment was not one of cushion and comfort as modern live or cinematic theatres or homes are, where much of our role of audience now takes place. Allen (2013) questions how much of Aristotle’s audience discomfort influenced his theatrical ideals. He elaborates that Aristotle’s desire for strong, conclusive and satisfying drama could easily have stemmed from his physical discomfort. In order to justify his sitting on stone benches, theatre had to be engaging and then cathartic, leaving the audience satisfied. If that were the case then simply our vast changes in viewing environments would alter the structure of theatre creation (Allen, year).

By removing conventional stage and seating, location can further blur the line between those who are watchers and those who are watched. To Irwin (2012), this makes the passive term *audience* no longer relevant, preferring the

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more active term *user*. Newman (2012) prefers the term *witness* to *audience*, considering the act of watching but with an awareness of their role which is more empowering.

Irwin (2012) suggests that the accessibility to dramaturgical tools and control for the viewing audience creates a power shift, giving the power to the user. Technology gives the audience the capability to be an audience from anywhere, to the point where laws have been put in place to create viewing parameters, such as it being illegal to operate a motor vehicle while using a smart phone. Some, like Sakellaridou (2014), do not see this shift as a positive, claiming that when spatial boundaries collapse, it forces audience participation which can lead to anxiety, compliance, and involuntary participation, and that taking the shared space out of theatrical performances dehumanizes it. Yet, these traditional theatre spaces can make audiences feel disempowered, especially, as Newman (2012) points out, in an age when audiences are ready, and expecting, to interact with the performers.

### **Audience emancipation.**

Ranci re (2009), unlike Boal (1985, 2002), does not believe that to emancipate the audience we have to turn the audience into actors – instead he believes that every audience member is already an actor in their own individual story and that seeing a theatrical production is part of that story. “An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators” where spectators “play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story” (Ranci re, 2009, p.

22). Aristotle's dramatic structure, seen as rendering the spectator powerless, was vehemently disliked by both Brecht and Boal for its cultivation of the ignorant (Boal, 1985, 2002; Bottoms, 2010; Brecht, 1935-36). Building on both Irwin (2011) and Allen's (2013) writing regarding the performer-audience power shift, it seems that by giving spectators tools, and therefore the power to view what they want, when they want, from where they want, the emancipation of the audience begins, although there seems to be a gap in literature written specifically about this topic. It is not surprising to the author that in a democratized and mediatized society, where we constantly interact with each other and technology, where seemingly live, instantaneous feedback is the expectation and norm, that perhaps audiences desire that same empowerment from their theatre; however, the author has not located any literature discussing audience studies on this topic.

### **Technology and Theatre Pedagogy**

Foreman-Wernet and Dervin (2013) argue that arts convey truth and beauty and offer a special way of knowing. But how does that knowing occur? What does shared power, creativity, and a mediatized theatre delivery system mean for audience processing and therefore theatre pedagogy? The modern mediatized audience requires a special set of media literacies in order to navigate and process such creations including, but not limited to, distributed cognition; transmedia navigation; visualization; collective intelligence; networking; and negotiation (Anderson, Cameron & Sutton, 2012). These new literacies take into account visual and multi-modal representations and centre on the

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dissemination of information delivered through, and with, digital technologies (Hughes & Tolley, 2010). However, the arts have always required a special literacy from its viewers, that of aesthetic literacy (Smith, 2008) which is a blend of knowing and feeling.

The phrase, 'aesthetic modes of knowing,' presents something of a contradiction in our culture. We do not typically associate the aesthetic with knowing. The arts, with which the aesthetic is most closely associated, is a matter of the heart. Science is thought to provide the most direct route to knowledge. Hence, 'aesthetic modes of knowing' is a phrase that contradicts the conception of knowledge that is most widely accepted. (Eisner, 1998, p. 33)

According to Eisner (2002):

The body is now considered a source of understanding: some things you can understand only through your ability to feel. Knowledge, at least a species of knowledge, has become embodied. It is intimate. To know has taken on a biblical meaning. (p. 381)

### **Aesthetics and aesthetic literacy.**

The word "aesthetics" is derived from the Greek word *aisthanesthai*, "to perceive, to feel". Contemporary scholars have placed emphasis on "meaning" as a primary determinant in aesthetics (Joshi, Datta, Fedorovskaya, Luong, Wang, Li & Luo, 2011, p. 97). Art is constructed out of symbols (Joshi et al., 2011; Smith, 2008), therefore to understand art "and its aesthetic principles requires cognitive interpretation of these symbols. Such an interpretation

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depends to a large extent on what is familiar and habitual in the existing cultural environment” (Joshi et al., 2011, p. 97). In other words, how we see, understand and interpret these symbols evokes emotion and changes our perception of the world.

According to Rancière (2009), as theatre spectators, we are asked to join an aesthetic community; a community structured around disconnection, a community of being apart, together. An aesthetic community is “a community of sense, or a *sensus communis*” comprised of three parts 1) “a certain combination of sense data: forms, words, spaces, rhythms and so on.” 2) tension between what is presented and the absence of what is not presented 3) how the data are assembled, intertwining of contradictory relations (p. 57-58). Rancière explains that we are a community in as much as we are all part of humanity, and are watching the same production performed; however, we each experience and interpret that piece of theatre art in different ways based on what medium we are watching the performance through or if we are experiencing it in person, our own individual backgrounds, culture, likes and dislikes, romantic inclinations, gender, mood, etc. As Rancière illustrates:

The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other. (2009, p.16)

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Ranci re argues that any spectator comes to know and interpret art through his or her own embodied experiences whether watching as an active spectator (if viewing the work of Brecht and Boal) or a passive spectator (if viewing a production following Aristotle’s dramatic structure) – what they take away from the art has been understood through their own ways of knowing (2009, p. 13-14).

Ranci re believes that the emancipation of the spectator begins with equality and the realization that looking is an action, and as individuals we interpret what we see – and interpreting the world is a means of transforming it (Ranci re, 2009).

“The aesthetic is not only motivated by our need for stimulation; it is also motivated by our own need to give order to our world” (Eisner, 1998, p. 38).

Therefore, to synthesize the views of Eisner (1998) and Ranci re (2009) in the search for form and order through aesthetics, we are meaning making and furthering our knowing, which is the basis for theatre pedagogy.

### **Empowering Students Through Technology**

As Anderson, Cameron and Sutton (2012) point out, giving students the tools of creation is not enough. Arts pedagogy must change and embrace technology in order to engage, educate and empower the students. Societal dependence on technology in all aspects of life has altered what it means to be human. Academics agree (Anderson & Cameron, 2009; Davis, 2009, 2012; Canadian Public Arts Funders, 2011) that drama researchers are in danger of being left behind if the research community does not embrace the transition to digital society. Drama researchers are beginning to realize how technologically enhanced drama processes make for innovative and engaging learning and



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research. Anderson and Cameron (2009) argue, “Researchers in drama education need to examine how these new technologies might be applied appropriately to learning not as a bolt on, but as a way to extend the creative possibilities of the art form” (p. 17). Extension technologies include smart phones, social media, virtual spaces, the Internet, digital recordings, blogs and wikis. When our attention turns to *how* students will interact online, instead of simply looking at the technological tools, our focus switches to the themes of aesthetics and engagement (Davis 2012).

According to Carroll and Cameron (2009), the majority of students already use this technology for socializing. By using it as part of dramatic practice in education, it allows us to heighten their knowing by engaging with their cultural production.

The generalised co-operative social expertise operating in the digital environment has the same possibility to be used in hybrid drama forms. Drama appears to be particularly well placed to make use of the dramatic tension generated between individual and group knowledge within the various intertextual forms that make up social media. (Carroll & Cameron, 2009, p. 296)

In these online interactive sites students are learning, and learning how to use and repurpose, cultural symbols (Carroll & Cameron, 2009). Cultural symbols, as previously mentioned (Joshi et al., 2011; Smith, 2008), are the basis in developing aesthetic literacy; therefore, are at the root of theatre pedagogy.

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Few academics are publishing research on technology and drama as many dramatists are resistant to the inclusion of technology in performance arts creation and education, seeing it as a dehumanizing force (Anderson et al., 2009). The Australian academics Anderson, Cameron and Carroll (2009) gathered together a small but progressive group of researchers in this field to examine technologically enhanced drama education, stating:

Drama educators are uniquely placed to offer the possibility of engaging students in culturally framed exploration using technology to create exciting new learning ... If drama education is to draw upon the real world knowledge and experience of participants, then educators and practitioners must begin to explore the new practices, problems and stories emerging from their students' own explorations and experiences. (p. 2)

One such researcher, Dr. Sue Davis (2009, 2012), has created cyberdrama; drama created using digital media and online spaces. Davis' work describes a pedagogy wherein students develop multi-media skills, have opportunities to interact with others, build characters and dramatic context, and access a wider audience for their creative work. Davis (2009) states that "Drama, whether it occurs in a face-to-face mode or online has human interaction at its core. The system and processes for creating cyberdrama are about people" (p. 165).

Drama is about human narrative and interaction and has always been part of our society and educational landscape, but this doesn't mean that our current teaching practices are appropriate to build new types of tech-theatre.

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Davis (2009) realizes that our pedagogy must change, that it isn't enough to simply add technology on to our already existing practices; we must infuse it throughout, just as it is fully integrated into the daily experiences of adolescents. She says, "Teaching with technology is not just about how to use the hardware and the software, but is also very much about people, processes and a range of different interactions" (p. 149).

Through the writings of Anderson et al., (2009), Auslander (2008, 2012), Boal (1985, 2002), Davis (2009, 2012), Evans (2008), and Nicholls and Philip (2012), the theme *interactivity* consistently surfaced, crossing the boundaries between drama, technology and education. According to Evans (2008), there are two types of interactivity. The first is passive interactivity, which is about interpreting. Television is an example of passive interactivity; we have the control to turn it on or off, choose what we watch, and interpret the show but have no power to change the action. The opposite then is active interactivity wherein we are helping to construct text and/or action. Digital technologies give the audience a sense of control that TV can't, even if that sense of control is, at times, fabricated (Evans, 2008).

Interaction, as defined by Davis (2009), is "engagement from participants, with opportunities for input and responses which show the impact of the user's input" (p. 151). Davis elaborates, pointing out that for interactive spectators it isn't enough to simply give input; for engaging collaboration and interactivity to occur participants must feel that their input will have an impact on the drama. Evans (2008) also observes that an audience's perception of engagement, or how much

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input they have, is vital to an experience being deemed interactive by them and directly correlates to their notions of “agency and control” (p. 202). In Davis’ cyberdrama *Cleo Missing*, audience interactivity occurred as some feedback given by audience members through the website forum was incorporated and helped drive the drama. As observed both in readings (Anderson et al., 2009; Davis, 2009) and through the author’s personal, practical and professional experience, the focus in schools on using technology is still access to that technology and proficiency with that technology, which is not enough in drama education. Interactivity is most important to effective drama and learning processes and therefore we need to focus on how we interact with technology and how we use technology to interact.

Davis (2009) has written about two cyberdrama creations for which she was an artist-researcher; both were created in educational settings and both had students as creative leaders. One drama was a work entitled *Cleo Missing*, a drama that was created through uploading various materials (video clips, text, photo stories and audio clips) onto a web page. The second a drama, entitled *The Immortals*, was staged using student-created YouTube video clips and writing in character on blogs and wikis. Both cyberdramas were under the umbrella of process drama, a style of drama that does not start with a script and allows for collaborative interactivity and for participants to help drive the action (Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed is process drama as well). Both allowed for the co-creators (students and Davis) to interact and have power over the creation. However, with *The Immortals*, spectators could view the material but their power

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over the performance and input was minimal. *Cleo Missing* only had some interaction through forums on the site which selectively influenced the drama (Davis, 2009). Davis observed that when there seemed to be little audience participation, or less viewership, the student creators felt this impact and were less motivated.

What did motivate the students according to Davis (2009) was the notion of a potential global audience for their work. Unlike Aristotle's time, with its limited worldview, today's students are digital global citizens and this shapes their awareness and perception of the world. During *The Immortals*, Davis' students seemed very interested in the potential audiences that they may attract using YouTube to showcase their work. One of Davis' students stated; "I think it's making drama more accessible for more regular kinds of people, not just actors and actresses" (2009, p. 164). Through her work with both productions, Davis states that she noticed:

The way participants seemed to become particularly connected and engaged when their experiences were framed by technology . . . It seemed that the use of various recording technologies framed the performance and in those moments the performers achieved a sense of connection with their roles and a kind of heightened awareness (p.163). Davis (2009) observed that the technological tools of creation gave students freedom to build role and dramatic context outside of the school, which made the creation and learning process more immediate and real. Also, she saw that utilizing cyberspaces and online communications allowed students a new and

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heightened way of knowing, empowering them by giving them interactivity that stemmed beyond classroom walls and opportunities to access a larger audience.

### **Educational Criticism**

According to this review of the literature, a dichotomy is evident – the submissive view of the audience and the view that the audience can participate. In contemporary society, everyone becomes an audience all of the time. We log on to social media to make a post and instantly are privy to what all of our contacts are also posting, we see streaming commercials on billboards as we drive, and stream TV and movies during our commute. Being an audience member is now just part of everyday life. Engagement with media is so constant that performance is deeply infused into everyday life and we've become unaware of it. Life is a constant performance; we are audience and performer simultaneously. We live in a dramaturgical world of selfies and status updates, instagrams and snapchats, tweets and blogs, constantly producing our own art of self, and voyeurs to others' characters. As technology continues to progress, empowering audiences by placing tools of creation and the ability to both broadcast and view art in their hands, it reasons that theatre creation will move away from Aristotle's dramatic structure, adhered to for so long, towards new formats that embrace qualities that technology has afforded us.

It seems, from Davis' (2009) research, students, (young members of the aforementioned dramaturgical society), both create and view theatre; they crave participation in the dramatic event. According to the review of the literature (Newman, 2012), modern audiences have an expectation of participation. What

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could that mean for current and future theatre pedagogy? There may be a creative revolt against traditional theatre structure and the role of audience within it. At the root, it is a revolt against Aristotle's outdated dramatic structure that keeps its audience submissive and disempowered. Aristotle outlines a structure that controls the audience by means of coercion and empathy. In order to redefine our art and pedagogy, or to revolutionize them, we must look at the problems with the traditional structure.

### **Aristotle's Dramatic Structure and its Irrelevance in a Digital World**

Aristotle wrote critically about theatre's dramatic structure in *Poetics* (335 BCE), a skeleton that has largely remained intact since. It is awe-inspiring to think that a format theorized over two millennia ago would still be relevant in theatre creation today, especially considering that "Aristotelian dramatic structures were seen to render the play's protagonist – and by extension the spectator who identifies with her – as a more or less passive victim of the unalterable forces of fate and nature" (Bottoms, 2010, p. 480). Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, director and critic David Mamet (2010), adheres to Aristotle's classic dramatic structure in his work, stating that it is the most democratic of all theatre, in his opinion. However, Mamet (2010) also says that:

Drama is about lies. Drama is about repression. As that which is repressed is liberated – at the conclusion of the play – the power of repression is vanquished, and the hero (the audience's surrogate) is made more whole. Drama is about finding previously unsuspected

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meaning in chaos, about discovering the truth that had previously been obscured by lies, and about our persistence in accepting lies. (p. 69)

So, by his own admission when watching a modern Mamet play, an audience, through their own inaction and by way of a surrogate, is coerced into accepting lies on route to becoming more whole, which does not sound very democratic.

Boal (1985) entitles the first section of his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*, “Aristotle’s Coercive System of Tragedy” which examines the tragic structure, as well as the creation of an Athenian imperialist protagonist who, by virtue of his very creation and prominent role in the dramas of that time, further disenfranchised the audience. Although Aristotelian dramatic structure is not the only theatrical model, it is one of the most recognizable and still widely utilized theatrical forms in the world, with the majority of dramas still adhering to it. The relevancy of the Aristotelian dramatic structure has, however, been questioned (Allen, 2013; Boal, 1985, 2002; Ranci re, 2009).

One reason for irrelevancy is that Aristotle accepted inequalities and injustice as reality and therefore “he does not consider the possibility of *transforming the already existing inequalities*, but simply accepts them” (Boal, 1985, p. 23). To Aristotle, happiness was derived from obeying the laws set out by the ruling classes, which worked well for the ruling classes, but created great inequality for those who fell powerless under the laws. Although technologies, and tech-theatre, do not erase such inequalities, (as those without access to technology are powerless) there is no longer a blind acceptance of such disparities.



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Boal (1985) and Hauser (1951) examine the birth of the tragic hero at the centre of Aristotle's theatrical structure. According to Hauser (1951), theatre's roots in parades, feasts, and celebrations began with the people, the chorus, and the mass as the protagonist. Theatre became "aristocratized" when Thespis "invented" the protagonist and the scripted protagonist-chorus dialogue, which reflected a dialogue between the aristocracy and the commoners. The tragic hero came to fruition when the State began funding the theatre and using it for political means, to educate and control the people. The tragic hero exemplifies certain characteristics that the masses were encouraged to embrace such as loyalty, as well as some tragic flaw that would lead to the hero's downfall, such as pride or anger. The masses would learn through empathy for the hero's plight, recognition of the flaw in self and, finally, through catharsis to change their own behavior (Hauser, 1951).

Boal (1985) delineates that according to Aristotle's dramatic structure, first the audience develops empathy for the hero as they work towards happiness but due to their tragic flaw, or hamartia, they move away from happiness and towards misfortune. The hero, at some point, will realize his error, and so too will the audience, through their empathy, realize their own flaws. The hero then faces a great catastrophe, a violent death of a loved one, or of himself, brought on by this tragic flaw. Finally, the audience enters a state of catharsis. Having been terrified by the horrific catastrophe, they make a point of purging themselves of their own flaw so as not to meet the same tragic end as the hero. In simpler terms, good behavior is scared into the audience. This is not an empowered

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audience; this is an audience terrified into conformity. As Boal (1985) recognized, “all of man’s activities – including, of course, all the arts, especially theater – are political. And theater is the most perfect artistic form of coercion” (p. 39).

### **Boal: Dramatic Structure and Coercion**

According to Boal (1985), “Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy survives to this day, thanks to its great efficacy. It is, in effect, a powerful system of intimidation” (p. 46). The basic task of Aristotle’s system of tragedy was “the purgation of all antisocial elements” which was done through audience manipulation (Boal, 1985, p. 46). Like Boal, Ranci re (2009) sees the classical stage as a place for the audience to see the vices and virtues of humanity played out fictionally, which in turn was to prompt them to change their behavior. Post-viewing, the audiences were to embody the moral of the play. According to Boal (1985), the defenseless spectators, lulled through empathy and coerced through the tragic structure, are educated through osmosis. Brecht illustrates the difference between traditional dramatic structure and his style of epic theatre as the following:

The dramatic theatre’s spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too –  
Just like me – It’s only natural – It’ll never change – The sufferings of  
this man appal [*sic*] me, because they are inescapable – That’s great  
art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they  
weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought that –  
That’s not the way – That’s extra-ordinary, hardly believable – It’s got to

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stop – The sufferings of this man appal [sic] me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh. (1935-36, p. 769)

Audience coercion was in place prior to Aristotle's writings, seen as early as the ancient theatre festivals of Dionysus, where the audience was manipulated to laugh or applaud by clagues placed in the audience. Clagues were instructed to applaud, or react, during a performance at certain times to motivate the audience to react similarly (Auslander, 2008). Audience coercion still exists in television shows that have audience laugh tracks to cue us when, with what emotion, and with how much emotion is appropriate to respond, or in movies when the type of music playing evokes a certain emotional response or expectation from the audience. Clagues may also exist in modern day social media, where individuals feel pressured to respond to tweets regarding social justice issues. #BringBackourGirls and #paris are examples of this, as they tap into our emotion and empathy and we, the audience, perceive a need to respond in the most immediate way possible, by tweeting, re-tweeting and expressing our empathy online. But, the coercion of Aristotle's structure is far more powerful as it taps into audience emotion and processing by means of evoking empathy and is dangerous due to its subtlety.

### **The Role of Empathy**

Actors "seek ways of engaging with their audience to evoke empathy" a term Theodor Lipps first used in early 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe the relationship between art and observer (Frazzetto, 2012, p. 466). Frazetto notes that human

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beings have a neurological framework for empathy. Research conducted at the University of Parma in Italy showed that “our visual-motor system is activated as if we were executing an action that we are simply watching: the brain simulates that action” (Frazzetto, 2012, p. 466). It is arguable that this system is also activated when we respond to evocative stories and posts on youtube, social media and facebook, believing that our humanity is adequately expressed in online media.

Boal (1985) describes empathy in the context of Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy as follows:

*Empathy* is the emotional relationship which is established between the character and the spectator and which provokes, fundamentally, a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character: whatever happens to the latter, happens vicariously to the spectator. (p. 102)

According to Boal (1985), empathy in Aristotle’s structure is the emotional tie to the tragic hero’s plight and involves two emotions: pity and fear. However, empathy can be invoked through many other emotions and is not limited to pity and fear. “The only indispensable element in empathy is that the spectator assumes a ‘passive’ attitude, delegating his ability to act” (Boal, 1985, p. 102). Boal explains that, because empathy occurs through passivity, catching the spectator unaware, “Empathy must be understood as the terrible weapon it really is. Empathy is the most dangerous weapon in the entire arsenal of the theater and related arts” (1985, p. 113). Empathy, a powerful educator, is one way that

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we learn (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1998b), but it must be utilized appropriately for educational purposes. Empathy evoked through pity and fear to unsuspecting spectators does little to democratically educate (Boal, 1985).

### **Boal and Education**

An examination of Boal's (1985, 2002) Theatre of the Oppressed and its emancipation of actor-spectators through education is offered as an alternative dramatic form to Aristotle's structure and an ideal platform for creating educational tech-theatre. The late Boal's body of work offers reasoning and insight into the use of technology for production and consumption of theatre and the importance of placing creation and viewing tools into the hands of the masses.

According to Boal (1985), the main objective of the Theatre of the Oppressed was "to change the people – 'spectators,' passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (p. 122). Boal blurred the line between performer and audience, tearing down the 4<sup>th</sup> wall, often inviting the audience members to become the performers, or at the very least, to enter into a dialogue with the performers.

Boal (1985) differentiates his theatrical structure from that of both Aristotle and Brecht's, stating:

Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him.

Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the

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right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case, a 'catharsis' occurs; in the second, an awakening of critical consciousness. But the *poetics of the oppressed* focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the [protagonic] role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action! (p. 122)

Just as Auslander (2012, 2008) stipulates with regard to technology, Boal (1985) states with regard to theatre, "The proposal of a new system does not arise out of a vacuum. It always appears in answer to esthetic and social stimuli and needs" (p. 173). We create new technology when there is a need for it, just as we should be creating new, empowering, technology-driven theatre, as there is a need for it. "Each public demands plays that assume its vision of the world" (Boal, 1985, p. 174). It reasons then that the public of today, especially the media-entrenched younger audiences, demand plays wherein they have control of creation and interaction. As well, they desire to have their theatre presented to them through the technology that is at the root of their communications, a context that speaks to their aesthetic literacy.

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Boal (1985), and the People's Theater, conducted experiments in collaboration with ALFIN (an Integral Literacy Operation) in 1973 in the cities of Lima and Chiclayo in Peru. ALFIN's methodology was derived from the critical pedagogy work of Paulo Friere (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This work draws on Boal's reflections on the experimentation of that time as he utilized the technology available then, cameras to be precise, in order to empower the Peruvian people where language failed. His experimentation took place in a time when the government was attempting to eradicate illiteracy, which ran rampant in Peru, a country with many languages and dialects. Boal, using the main objective of theatre, or poetics, of the oppressed, to empower the spectators into transformers of dramatic action, looked at a means of using technology to teach literacy and empower the people. Boal (1985) states, "If we are going to give the people the means of production, it is necessary to hand over to them, in this case, the camera" (p. 122). Educators taught the students, in this case illiterate adults who spoke various languages and dialects, how to use the technological tool (the camera), and sent them off to answer questions by taking pictures that captured their vision of their responses. Boal observed that the use of photography might capture symbols that represent a community or social group.

### **Production Pedagogy: Boal's Ideals in 21C Digital Spaces**

As previously discussed in the review of the literature, symbols are necessary in knowing through aesthetic literacy. Boal (1985) illustrates that often theatre groups are unable to communicate with an audience because their symbols hold no bearing for that audience. By teaching the participants how to

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use the technology and allowing the participants freedom to control that technology for creation, the participants were able to capture their own symbols and create their own way of knowing through aesthetic literacy. Drawing on this reasoning, allowing students to use their technologies, showing them the creative potential of that technology, and allowing them to capture their own symbols, should create deeper ways of knowing for them. This type of production pedagogy is essential to the teaching of theatre in the 21C. Boal (1985) states, “The *poetics of the oppressed* is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself” (p. 155)! Shouldn’t our mandate as arts-educators be to empower students to free themselves, to think and act for themselves, not only in creative disciplines but as part of their development towards fully-formed adults?

According to Boal (1985), theatre is “A very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theater and utilize it as a tool for domination” (p. ix). By giving spectators the tools of creation, viewing and performance through tech-theatre, we are empowering spectators and drawing them into action. As arts educators, if we give the tools of creation and communication to the students (tools in this case being both the tools of artistry that we teach, and tools of modern technologies) then we emancipate them from the classical educational structure and empower them to develop their own aesthetic literacy.



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Modern society's dependence on technology in all aspects of life has altered what it means to be human by changing how we interact, communicate and experience the world (Carroll & Cameron, 2009). Theatre is rooted in oral traditions and collective celebrations that explore, examine, reflect on, rejoice in, reinterpret, create and share symbols of the human experience. As previously stipulated, technology has changed how we interact, communicate and experience the world and therefore technology has also changed the symbols we value as an aesthetic community and our experience of theatre, and therefore should change our creation of theatre and performance arts education.

The performer to spectator relationship is much like the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student. Traditional teacher-centred models, wherein the power lies with the educator, have moved aside in favour of student-centred models of education (Nicholls & Philip, 2012). In a parallel evolution, so too has theatre seen the rise of experimental relationships between performers and audience seeking to better engage and empower the spectator. In this vein, my goal was to conduct research that empowered students, putting them in control of their education and becoming directors of the creative process.

Through principles of the Theatre of the Oppressed outlined earlier in this paper, students were to experience 21C drama pedagogy, using digital technologies in the palm of their hands. What follows is a narrative description of the events that unfolded during this arts-based qualitative inquiry.

### **Personal Narrative: Bourgeois to Boal, Educating for Empowerment**

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What follows is a narrative analysis of the author's experiences conducting social media research in a publically funded board of education. Narrative analysis, or "Portraiture," a term used by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) for a methodology wherein she seeks "to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science" (p. 3) was selected as the format because it was my personal research experience and own narrative story to tell. As Hunt (1987) states:

Your common sense ideas and your unexpressed theories, growing out of your own personal experience, provide enormously rich sources of knowledge about human affairs. By beginning with yourself, therefore, you are taking advantage of this rich reservoir – tapping what you know about yourself and others to bring out your experienced knowledge on topics that psychologists would call interpersonal relations, self-awareness, individual differences, teaching and learning, and so on. (p. 1)

This narrative is a piece of personal writing for research purposes that synthesizes recurring themes from the review of the literature and the educational criticism and places them in a real life context. The narrative is written in the first person as it is my experience and, like Eisner (1998b), I want you to know that it is a human being, with reason, passion and personal investment, who is writing this. As Beattie (1995) states:

To write narratively, the writer, who is unprotected by the objectivity and the distancing provided by other forms of writing, confronts those

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'powerful emotions,' struggles with them for the purpose of putting them on view for 'the world beyond the self,' and hopes to remain unscathed.

(p. 3)

To further validate narrative or portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) refers back to the educational theorist Dewey, stating:

Dewey's classic *Art as Experience* (1934/1958) underscored the need not only to capture the cognitive, social, and affective dimensions of educational encounters, but also to find frameworks and strategies for representing the aesthetics of teaching and learning. If we wanted education to be artful – beautiful not merely pretty, creative not merely competent, discovery not merely mimicry – then, suggested Dewey, we would have to find ways of envisioning and recording the experience that would not distort its texture and richness. This would require joining aesthetic and empirical approaches, merging rigor and improvisation, and appreciating both the details and the gestalt. Dewey referred to the arts – to music, poetry, drama, and painting – to illustrate his views regarding the representation of social reality. (p. 6)

This review of the literature was initially planned as action research, entitled *Vines of Oppression: Giving Digital Life to the Theatre of the Oppressed*. My primary research question was, "What is the impact of social media on the adolescent experience of process theatre creation?" Second, I wanted to look at how digital technologies affect dramatic arts teaching practice. I was going to record the process and the products that the students created. I was excited at

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the prospect of collecting arts-based data, as it is distinctive, “our data are embodied, our data breathe, dance with presence and possibilities for new learning” (Fels, 2012, p. 53). As Lea (2012) elaborates, “the potential of drama as research is fully realized, not when one translates data into a play, but when the dramatic activities shape the presentation in the same way as quantitative research uses numerical data through all stages” (p. 61).

I’ve been a drama and dance teacher for the same publicly funded school board for the past eleven years. I’ve witnessed first hand the fear that many performance arts teachers have towards the incorporation of new technologies in the performance arts classroom; especially those that are reshaping human to human contact. Through this research, I was hoping to explore what has been deemed the great corrupter of theatre; therefore, my research focus was on what new technologies, specifically social media, could do to further theatre arts education.

I planned to have senior high school students utilize Augustus Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, a form of process drama, to create and present web-theatre with a social consciousness to their peer student body using social media sites Vine and Twitter. Emerging from an extensive review of the literature, themes such as liveness, interactivity, audience empowerment, shared creativity and audience and performer processing were to be at the forefront of my research. Also, as a research bonus, I was going to explore what the six-second time restraints of Vine could do to reconceptualize storytelling. How would the students tell their stories for their peer audience? Would the stories be only six

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seconds long, or would the students use episodic clips to tell one tale? Would the clips be small, disjointed parts of a larger story, or be connected, cohesively, by time and place? My hope was that through the utilization of new technologies and through the familiar social media forums, students would be able to create and connect with material in new and more immediate ways, and create deeper ways of knowing for them, and through their process I would experience deeper ways of knowing about my artistry and my pedagogy. Eisner (1998a, 1998b) and Dewey (1934) both believe that the human ability to know is directly related to our aptitude to form meaning from experiences. Both also believe that arts are intrinsically part of human experience. Through artistic experience “the maker himself or herself is remade. The remaking, this recreation is at the heart of the process of education” (Eisner, 1998b, p. 56). Experience, art and education are all part of the metaphorical kaleidoscope. The research experience was to occur in the most respectful way, with many safety measures in place to protect the students involved. The University Research Ethics Board had approved the project (REB # 14-029).

The research was to be conducted in the following phases:

### **Phase 1:** Groundwork

Parental information and permission forms were to be sent home and collected, as well as having a face-to-face information session with parents and my principal. Also, during phase one, an unbiased third party was to conduct and capture on video, independent pre-research interviews with the students to

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establish the knowledge and comfort level they were starting the project with.

Included below are some examples of the type of questions to be asked:

1. What does theatre mean to you?
2. Do you think theatre is relevant in contemporary times (can speak personally and/or larger society)?
3. Describe your experiences as an audience member. (can include theatre experience in school or outside of school, audience participation and audience interaction)
4. What does oppression mean to you?
5. Describe where you see oppression in your own experiences.

### **Phase 2:** Introduction

Just as I would when teaching any arts skill set I would introduce the students to the Theatre of the Oppressed concept, approaches and history in an appropriate manner, and for the purpose of this research, capture their process through observations and video. In this case, the students were to be lead through introductory workshops that allowed them to experiment and familiarize themselves with the Theatre of the Oppressed approach through games and activities as outlined in Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2002).

### **Phase 3:** Creation

Phase three was the actual process work and creation of Theatre of the Oppressed style Vine videos and Tweets which, for research purposes, would be captured through observations and recordings of their creation process prior to their creations going live. The premise of creating socially conscious, interactive

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theatre for their peers through the utilization of social media was to be outlined. It was their turn to be creative and use the tools, normally associated with socializing and entertainment, for the purpose of sparking discussion and hopefully motivating positive change. What this was to look like was, of course, to be left to the students to decide.

### **Phase 4:** Going Live

Phase four would be the actual performance, when we publicly presented the Vines and Tweets and went “live.” The research would be captured through digital footprints on Vine and Twitter of both the performances and the audience’s reactions and input, also through face-to-face observations of students both online and in person in class.

### **Phase 5:** Post-Mortem

Following the performances a reflection on both the process and performance would occur. The research would be captured through post-research questions and focus group questions conducted by a third, unbiased party, and the responses recorded. Included below are some examples of the type of individual questions to be asked:

1. What is theatre to you, now? Has the concept of theatre changed?
2. Did the use of technology in this project impact the relevancy of theatre for you?
3. Speaking as an audience member, did the use of technology impact your experience?

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4. Speaking as an actor, did the use of technologies impact the actor-audience relationship?
5. Has your understanding of oppression changed through this process?
6. Has your awareness of oppression changed through this process?

Finally, a post-mortem whole group reflective discussion, lead by the primary investigator, would occur and the responses recorded. The post-mortem discussion topics would be as follows, with pertinent tangents considered a welcome edition.

1. Do you think that using technologies (our phones and tablets, Vines and Twitter) is a good teaching strategy in general? In a drama class?
2. Did this process make you feel vulnerable?, elaborate?
3. Do you think this approach would make drama class more inviting for students?
4. Did you feel your creativity was impacted by the use of this technology? Was your creative process impacted?
5. Did the use of technology make you feel more or less in control, elaborate?
6. Overall, was this a positive or negative drama experience for you, elaborate?

The school I work at, where the research was to be conducted, is labelled a technology-enhanced, progressive school, has an active Twitter account and boasts of being a forerunner in the board for having a BYOD program. Ironically, my publicly funded employer, the board, denied my research request citing social



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media policy as the reasoning. I was instructed by a board representative that social media sites such as Twitter and Vine are not approved educational mediums within the board and therefore, they were unwilling to even discuss it at their ethics and research committee meeting. The denial was not based on Vine being rated 17+ on the “App store,” and to clarify, the only person who would be posting to a Vine account was me, and I am long past 17. The sole reason given by the board was that social media sites like Vine contain potentially inappropriate material for students to view, (of course, so does TV, Netflix, the internet, the wrong streetcorner in any city). I could not help but reflect, isn't it our job, as educators, to teach students the critical media literacy skills that they require to make appropriate choices when using social media sites, just as we would advise them to avoid those dark and potentially dangerous streetcorners? “But just as oppression exists in the corridors of power within big business, so it exists in the corridors and classrooms of schools throughout the world” (Boal, 2010, p. xv).

I was told that if I wished to gain even the consideration of the committee and perhaps proceed with my research I would have to use an approved Learning Management System (LMS) such as Moodle to house my students' digitally created theatre. Of course, the immediate disconnect to a wider student, and perhaps global, audience and the freedom of accessibility to creation tools is instantly controlled, and the students, both the creators and the audience, are immediately disempowered. As Nicholls and Philip (2012) articulate, “Most learning management systems have much to offer in terms of content

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management and tracking of student records. However, working creatively with the communication tools, and realizing a lively interpersonal 'dynamic' in these systems is challenging" (p. 589). The board member who declined my research couldn't understand how the tools could possibly make a difference. There are some lessons this board member could take from the arts to better understand the importance of these tools in the research process. According to Eisner (2009), "Education can learn from the arts that form and content cannot be separated. How something is said or done shapes the content of the experience" (p. 7). Also, as Eisner (2009) pointed out:

Education can learn from arts that nuance matters. To the extent to which teaching is an art, attention to nuance is critical. It has been said that the devil lives in the details. It can also be said that the aesthetic lives in the nuances that the maker can shape in the course of creation. How a word is spoken, how a gesture is made, how a line is written, and how a melody is played all affect the character of the whole, and all depend upon the modulation of the nuances that constitute the act.

(p. 8)

Certainly, the tools of creation are a worthy nuance in education, and integral to the form, content and creation experience. Furthermore, Boal (1985) states, and rightly so, that if we are going to empower the people we must give them the means of production, whether that be a camera as when Boal did literacy work with ALFIN in 1973, or in current times, digital technology or social media. In the case of my research, those in power restricted the means of production.

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Of course, in a board where web content restrictions sprawl across the computer screen and those with the most power (at the board, administration) have the most open accessibility to the online world, and the students (the spectators being controlled) have the most restrictions this shouldn't have come as a great surprise. "Education is tied up so tightly in its own web of red tape and bureaucracy that real learning, the rich and deep learning that needs to be there often, struggles hard to escape" (Vettraino, 2010, p. 77). On a related tangent, I passed my ideas by faculty at a school for the arts in a different public board, and they concurred that similar restrictions would be placed on them. This may be indicative of a broader zeitgeist of the times, and further proof that Boal's work is still relevant today, noting that in 2008 he was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and has made a significant social impact. Despite resistance to move forward with utilizing the technology that students are already using outside of school, bureaucratic structures within schools need to begin to support creative ways to improve arts pedagogy for 21C learners. Echoing what Brecht once said of the bourgeois audience attending traditional theatre, is the board of education, with their restrictions to accessing creation tools and information, not asking their students to leave their brains with their hats upon entering the school?

### **Conclusions**

Eisner (1991, 1997, 1998b) advocated for the promise of alternative forms of data representation such as the educational criticism and narrative analysis presented in this paper. I presented both the criticism and the narrative with the realization that they formed an unconventional approach to a research paper;

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however, I agreed with Kilbourn (1999) who said, "Passion is not served well by the writing rules of multiplicative corroboration, and yet we need passionate, credible accounts if we are to stay alive to teaching" (p. 31). Through the discourse of the review of the literature, educational criticism and conveying my story narratively, I wished to highlight the challenges that performance arts educators are facing and an academic injustice that is prevalent in drama pedagogy today. Just as the aristocracy controlled the theatre, as it was the powerful purveyor of information for its time, we now have those powers that control access to technology and digital tools of creation, but this needs to change, as "education is the practice of freedom" (Vettraino, 2010, p. 72).

Today we still have the controlling powers (the board) attempting to exact its will on right and moral behavior by keeping the power to itself instead of teaching its citizens (the students and teachers) how to properly use empowering tools. The board is not allowing the students to make informed choices as they are denying them any choice. The students are only able to access what the board wants them to see, instead of empowering and educating them to make appropriate choices. Surely this is an important 21C skill that we are ethically bound to help students develop. As Susan Bennett (1997) states in her book *Theatre Audiences*, "There appears to be a strong correlation between audience participation and audience political empowerment" (p. vii). Clearly, there are boards that fear their students having such empowerment. Two public boards in the GTA had similar restrictive policies and bureaucracies.

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Modern audiences, having been left in the dark for so long, are demanding empowerment. Just as Deus Ex Machina, Latin for 'god from the machine,' ruled the classical theatre, our society now seems ruled by a 'different god from the machine,' digital technologies. Our culture has become, technologically voyeuristic in nature, constantly watching others and desiring that people watch our character, a different or best version of ourselves that we act out through social media, making us audience and actor simultaneously. This is especially true of our students. The lyrics of a recent pop song by St. Vincent (2014), entitled Digital Witness, successfully sum up our technology-drenched society's dramaturgical nature:

Digital witnesses, what's the point of even sleeping?

If I can't show it, if you can't see me

What's the point of doing anything?

What's the point of even sleeping?

So I stopped sleeping, yeah I stopped sleeping

Won't somebody sell me back to me? (Clark, 2014)

The way that we watch drama is changing our expectations of drama and how we tell our stories.

In our dramaturgical society it is natural that we turn our back on the constraints that Aristotle and his classical theatre structure have imposed on us and become active, conscious participants in the performance experience. Through electronic venues such as Vine and YouTube, theatre can be reimagined and democratized, shedding light on the awakening audience. We

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are experiencing a renaissance in spectatorship, a cyclical journey for audiences from the highly participatory street festivals celebrating Dionysus where theatre was born to the interactive audiences controlling their participation through media. Yet, it isn't a true circle, as, according to Auslander (2010) the technology in question that allowed for this resurgence of interaction didn't exist in the years in between, and you need the technology to define this necessity. Also, a circle implies that we are the same society as in previous times, which we indeed are not. Like the ever-changing kaleidoscope, we are a culture forever being shaped by, and in turn shaping, technology; there will never be a time where we will "unknow" this way of being.

Our artistry, how we communicate our stories, understand and appreciate aesthetics, educate and come to know, are all a reflection of our innate humanity and change as our humanness changes. Eisner (1998a) states:

The arts inform as well as stimulate, they challenge as well as satisfy.

Their location is not limited to galleries, concert halls and theatres. Their home can be found wherever humans choose to have attentive and vital intercourse with life itself. This is, perhaps, the largest lesson that the arts in education can teach, the lesson that life itself can be led as a work of art. In so doing the maker himself or herself is remade. The remaking, this re-creation is at the heart of the process of education. (p.

56)

According to Nicholls and Philip (2012) technology-rich learning spaces should (a) be able to be changed, moved, reconfigured; (b) move beyond traditional

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pedagogies; (c) leave room for as well as inspire creativity; (d) support, inspire and energize various teachers and learners; (e) be adaptable to various purposes; and (f) allow for collaboration as well as formal educational structure. This list sounds like almost every vast and empty drama classroom. Drama classrooms are shaped, not by what is in them as that is usually very little, but by the creative faculties of the teachers and students who enter them. This is one of the rare and very real places in a school where humanity becomes evident, front and centre. Since we no longer seem to separate technology from our human experience, we must bring technology to the dramatic classroom, embrace it, and create with it. The technology is not enough; as arts educators we must ensure that the online creation space is “aesthetically and pedagogically well integrated” (Nicholls & Philip, 2012, p. 588). Technological platforms are just another empty stage or drama classroom offering up a new venue for creative performance.

It is hoped that going forward the board of education changes its policies and allows their staff to conduct sound technological research, especially in the arts where such exploration is desperately needed. I still aspire to bring this research plan to fruition, because as Eisner (1992) said, “When you have a conviction about what you want to study or how you think it should be studied, my advice to you is to pursue that conviction. Try to realize that vision even when all around you people have doubts about your sanity”(p. 29). Instead of fearing technology in performance arts education let’s allow our students a safe haven to experiment, create and empower themselves using digital tools. It is, in fact, these ever present technologies that are at the centre of students’ social lives.

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Bringing this to their educational experience gives it a rich and meaningful purpose, while simultaneously offering drama educators the much needed opportunity to teach students appropriate, safe and effective ways to master digital skills and navigate the rapidly changing world in which they exist.

Production pedagogy, with students as creators, is the future direction in arts education. As an artist, educator, and researcher I leave the reader with the following quotation to ponder from Augustus Boal (1985), "The theater is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it" (p.122).



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