An Auto-Ethnographic Study of Technical Theatre Arts and Design In the Academy

by

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B.F.A., University of Calgary, 2010

Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

in the Arts Education Program
Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2014
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Abstract

This study employs auto-ethnography and ethnography to investigate technical theatre arts and design in the academy. Qualitative data was gathered through informal interviews and conversations with peers from high school, college and university; colleagues in the professional theatre and the academy; experiences as a student, artist, teacher and researcher of technical theatre arts. The study examines what enables or constrains learning in technical theatre arts; student access to faculty members, equipment and adequate facilities; program choice; teacher training; industry involvement, networking and employment opportunity and curriculum reform. Poetic inquiry is used as an ethnographic tool and the findings support the use of enquiry-based methods to reinvigorate the curriculum. This study illustrates the strengths of an examined and updated technical theatre arts curriculum that adopts aspects of performance studies; explores potential interdisciplinary applications; and recommends changes to technical theatre arts and design curriculum in the academy.

Keywords: ethnography; technical theatre arts; production; performance studies; pedagogy; academy
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Tony and Theresa Carolan for teaching me what can come from a leap of faith, and to Paul, Eamon and Mary for leaping with me.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of my senior supervisor Dr. Carolyn Mamchur. I am grateful for her strength and sense of humour.

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of Dr. Lynn Fels. I am grateful for her generous and calm spirit.

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of Dr. Henry Daniel. I am grateful for his vast knowledge of performance studies and collaborative spirit.

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of Dr. Kirsty Johnstone. I am grateful for her rigour and warmth.

I would also like to acknowledge that this would not have been possible without those who helped to lay the groundwork, Don Monty, Douglas McCullough, Jim Andrews, Martin Herbert, Barry Yzereef, Douglas J. Rathbun, Drew Young, Laara Cassells, Anne Scrimger, Lynn DuFort, Joyce Grey, Tom Besse, Wayne Hudson, Cal Wilson and Brian Deedrick.

And all those who participated in the dialogue, thank you.
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Chapter 1.

Introduction: An Auto-ethnographical Exploration of Technical Theatre Arts and Design in the Academy

Institutional reflexivity is not a “natural” state of affairs in unstable and shifting communities of practice (Krautwurst, 2013, p.6)

This study uses the lens of auto-ethnography to investigate technical theatre arts and design in the academy. Ethnography can be described as qualitative research from an emic perspective or an “insider” point view. “Long-term engagement in the field setting or place where the ethnography takes place is called participant observation” (Hoey, 2013, n.p.). Auto-ethnography is, “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.1).

I will examine my journey as an insider, participant observer, of technical theatre arts and design and how it has shaped me as a student artist, an educator and a researcher. “[T]here has been surprisingly little ethnographic research concerning the academy as an institution…” (Krautwurst, 2013, p. 1). This study is based on my lived experience in technical theatre arts and design that serve as the fieldwork for my research.

“The importance of a reflexive application of fieldwork on fieldwork should not be underestimated in researching a university as a multi-sited ethnographic object especially if it is an institution with which the investigator is affiliated” (Krautwurst, 2013, pg.1). This means unpacking the experience of being a participant observer of technical
theatre education in the academy. I will employ the concept of “ekphrasis”\(^1\) or expressing one medium of art through another. Poetry will be used to illustrate the experience of studying, working, teaching and conducting research in technical theatre arts and design. “[P]oetry tells stories, expresses emotions, calls attention to the earth and living experiences, addresses philosophical issues, and promotes social justice. I claim there is no topic or issue that poets don’t address” (Leggo, 2013, n.p.)

Poetry contains the theatricality and language that is more evocative and reflective of the backstage “other” world of technical theatre arts and design than conventional academic prose. “[P]oetry is distinguished from prose by the intention of its creator to emphasize visual and aural elements” (Sartwell, 1991, p. 255)

This auto-ethnography begins with my experience as a student of technical theatre arts and design, and will move to my practice in the professional Canadian theatre, I will investigate my work as an educator of technical theatre arts and design in the academy and what I see as my role as scholar and researcher of technical theatre arts and design. Denzin suggests that auto-ethnography is a way of, “[v]iewing culture as a complex process of improvisation, it seeks to understand how people enact and construct meaning in their daily lives” (1996, p. 401). My research will invite the ethnographic voices of my community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) through informal interviews and conversations. These voices include professors and instructors in Canadian university and college theatre departments that offer technical theatre arts training as part of their curriculum. My investigation will also include professionals working in the theatre industry; that have crossed over into other industries; fellow students who shared my high school, college and university experiences as well as past and present students from other institutions and my own students.

\(^1\) Ekphrasis (also spelled "ecphrasis") is a direct transcription from the Greek ek, "out of," and phrasis, "speech" or "expression." It's often been translated simply as "description," and seems originally to have been used as a rhetorical term designating a passage in prose or poetry that describes something. More narrowly, it could designate a passage providing a short speech attributed to a mute work of visual art. In recent decades, the use of the term has been limited, first, to visual description and then even more specifically to the description of a real or imagined work of visual art - See more at: http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19939#sthash.nz74jZ47.dpuf (Corn, 2008, n.p.)
These conversations and informal interviews took place over the social media platform Facebook, via email and on the telephone. I am also pleased to note that two of the scholars whose work I cite in this paper, Beeb Salzer and John D. Ezell generously engaged in the conversation discussing their views on the question, “what do you see as the strengths, weaknesses, benefits and pitfalls of a technical theatre education and the current system for obtaining this education?”

Salzer and Ezell are two technical theatre artist/designer/educators who write about teaching technical theatre arts. Finding quality, up to date, sources for research in the area of technical theatre arts and design education can be challenging which is why I have chosen to include the voice of the current community of practice. One of the most common texts in technical theatre arts education, *Theatrical Design and Production: An Introduction to Scenic Design and Construction, Lighting, Sound, Costume, and Makeup* has been the go-to source, with updates since 1987. *Theatrical Design and Production* is a great and useful text, but its ubiquitous use is illustrative of the lack of other options.

I will outline the current status of technical theatre arts and design in the Canadian academy. Lastly I will make recommendations towards a course of action to strengthen technical theatre arts in the academy.

In addition to the reflexive auto-ethnography and the ethnographic conversations with my community of practice, I have conducted a review of the universities and colleges in Canada that offer courses, diplomas, undergraduate and graduate degrees. I have examined the technical theatre arts course offerings, course outlines or syllabi where possible. All of the research on the technical theatre arts and design courses was conducted online and information was sourced directly from the official program websites. The web addresses for each program is included in the References section of this paper. The courses reviewed are listed in Appendix A.

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This reflexive ethnographic work is important and timely because of the continued funding cuts and loss of programs in the technical theatre arts and design such as at Mount Royal University’s Theatre Department in Calgary, Alberta that was effectively cancelled in 2013. Jim Brennan, Chair of Theatre, Music and Speech stated, “It’s habitual to cut the arts. I think people think it’s an easy cut — non-artists think it’s an easy cut” (2013). A review of the pedagogy is long overdue in an increasingly unstable academic arts arena. “[E]ducation for creativity, innovativeness, adaptability, ease with difference and comfortableness with change...[is] education for instability” (as cited in Bolton, 2009, pg.6). I intend to use this study to illustrate the strengths and benefits of an examined and updated technical theatre arts and design education and its potential interdisciplinary applications and academic merit.

In the 1990’s Canada boasted 160 drama/theatre programs at 33 universities, nine university colleges and 17 community or independent colleges. Of those 160 programs, 23 focused on design or technical theatre arts, 13 offered a BFA in production design or technical theatre, six offered an MFA. The MFA is a terminal degree that does not lead to doctoral studies.4

In 2014 there are a total of 59 drama/theatre/performance post secondary programs in Canada. Twelve of these programs are BFA/BA degree programs in Technical Theatre Arts, Production or Design. The remaining programs are a little over half of what existed in the 90’s. There are a total of 22 BFA/BA degrees in drama/theatre or performance, including the previous 12, which contain some technical or production component. There are two theatre specific training schools, The National Theatre School and The Banff Centre. The Banff Centre, while an excellent program has limited space for students taking only a handful each year. Our university/college programs have dwindled from a combined 26 programs to ten. There are five excellent CEGEP programs, but unless you are in Eastern Canada these are not much help. The six MA or MFA programs have remained consistent in number if not location. The Canadian


academy has gained four programs BA/MFA/MA programs\textsuperscript{5} that are focused specifically on performance studies and two locations in which to undertake a PhD\textsuperscript{6} in performance studies. On the final day of writing this thesis, an additional Performance Studies undergraduate degree has been added to the English Department of Simon Fraser University under the direction of Peter Dickenson.

My research is rooted in the need to make myself, my art, visible in the text of the narrative of the theatre or performance that I create either collaboratively with a team of theatre practitioners and artists or in the silent, solitary performances that occur before the audience that remain suspended in the paint, the texture of the light or the articulation of a puppet. My research is rooted in my experiences as student, practitioner, teacher and researcher of technical theatre arts and in my passion to improve the pedagogical experience and employability of my students. “This project asks that I make myself visible in my text. I am the singular, universalizing in my singularity the crises and experiences of my historical epoch” (Denzin, 2000, pg. 402).

As scholars in some academic arenas we are taught early on that for research to be objective and therefore credible, our voice and opinion should not be reflected in our research. However, even the most scientific and sterile of experiments conducted in labs will always contain the undercurrent of the hand of the researcher, just as any creative work shows the hand of the artist in the brush stroke, the cadence, the choreography. I accept Denzin’s invitation, persuasion to, “embed this self in deeply storied histories of sacred spaces, and local places, to illuminate the unity of the self in its relationship to the reconstructed, moral and sacred natural world” (Denzin 2000, pg. 401).

Auto-ethnographic inquiry can encompass, support and inform other creative methods of qualitative inquiry including performative and poetic inquiry, research-based theatre and praxis-based research. According to Fels and Belliveau,

\textsuperscript{5} UBC Okanagan, University of Toronto at Scarborough, Brock University

\textsuperscript{6} York University, University of Alberta
Performative inquiry uses the frameworks, activities, and strategies of drama to explore the relationships and interactions between individuals, communities, and their related environments. An inquiry can be a question, an event, a theme, a feeling, a fragment, a fragment of poetry, or a phenomenon, explored through questions; What if? What matters? So what? Who cares? (2008, p.32)

Research based theatre, “encompasses work that has been variously termed verbatim theatre” (Paget, 1997), “performance/performed ethnography” (Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2005; Denzin, 1997), “documentary theatre” (Dawson, 1999), and “ethnotheatre/ethnodrama” (Saldaña, 2003), (Beck et. al. 2011. p.187). Praxis-based research is, “generally understood as the use of creative processes as research methods” (Kershaw, 2009, p.2) these research methods are all categories of identifying or naming the types of research and knowledge that exist within the practice of technical theatre arts and design. I have come to understand that the work I do as a technical theatre artist can be classified within most or all of these terms.

Poetic inquiry scholar, Monica Prendergast suggests that,

The potential power of poetic inquiry is to do as poetry does, that is to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way. Although a certain amount of contextualizing may be necessary for the fullest appreciation of poetry in a research setting… (2014, n.p.)

Poetic inquiry is a particularly useful tool in auto-ethnographic work. Prendergast classifies auto-ethnographic poetry as vox autobiographia/autoethnographia, where the poetry is written from, “field notes, journal entries or reflective/creative/autobiographical/autoethnographical writing as the data source.” (Prendergast et. al, 2009, p. xxii)

Ethnographic inquiry of the production process can occur in the form of a relationship to the script and its characters, the design or concept and our individual role in creating the performance. We experience the production process as an emerging inquiry because every production is unique. There may be the opportunity to work within the same script more than once in a career, but that same script is never produced and performed the same way twice. There are new challenges to solving design and directorial issues. Different personalities are reflected in the character portrayal.
Audiences react and interact with what is being offered to them by the performance. A reflexive, ethnographic methodology is an excellent qualitative tool for this research. “It challenges assumptions, ideological illusions, damaging social and cultural biases, inequalities and questions personal behaviours which perhaps silence the voices of others or otherwise marginalize them” (Bolton, 2009, p. 1).

“Knowing what to reflect upon out of the whole of one’s professional experience is not a clear process. The more it is focused, the more the truly important issue becomes elusive” (Bolton, 2009, p.8). The auto-ethnography that I am aiming to flesh out in this study is as elusive and ephemeral as any stage production I have worked on. Some of the experiences require excavation and dusting off to examine them for meaning. I have come to understand through the years of working on theatre productions in various roles that the specific show itself is almost irrelevant to those of us who are charged with its production. We all have our dream show that we would like to do, but ultimately the process that we go through is the same for every show, we need to actively engage with the work if we are striving to make meaning out of it. We must remember to, “DO. Think about what you’ve done. Do again, differently. Never do the same thing, but understand why and, especially, what this does to your process, to your thinking about theatre and to your practice” (Leroux, 2012, p. 150).

Calling upon my community of artists and educators to add their voices for this discourse is also critical. “Listening critically to the stories of those peers enables developmental learning from their experience. The exploration of experience, knowledge, values, identity is what matters, rather than any attempt to arrive at a true account” (Bolton, 2009, p.9). I recommend that all readers of this thesis review Appendix B, which contains a succinct summary and review of this document.
Chapter 2.

A Technical Theatre Arts Student

This chapter will trace my journey as a student of technical theatre arts and design from my first experiences in high school, through college and university to my current status as a graduate student. Focusing on what motivated and enabled my learning and what created constraints to my learning, I will introduce voices from my community to illustrate some of the conflicts that exist in regard to the pedagogical approach in teaching technical theatre arts and design. Some of the voices have asked to maintain their anonymity and some have not, which possibly speaks to the contentiousness of the differing positions. The poetry in this section evolved out of the reflexive practice in looking back at my experiences and attempting to reconnect with my past. The following poem contains derogatory terms. The terms are included to accurately convey the stigma that was attached to students in my high school who participated in drama and theatre and that the choice to follow this path was not without consequences and to share that discomfort with the reader.

2.1. High School

I had no interest in being
One of those “drama fags”\(^7\)
I was a visual artist.
An art geek.

\(^7\) I attended high school in the 1980’s. It was a less politically correct era and the term “fag”, although derogatory was not as value laden as it is today. All of the social ‘cliques’ in my high school were known by these kinds of labels that are no longer acceptable in 2014. e.g. Art Geeks, Music Nerds, Keaners, Stoners, Jocks, Basement Boys etc. These types group identity terms were typical of the era as epitomized in the John Hughes 1985 movie, “The Breakfast Club.”
You could hear them, the drama fags
Coming down the hall
Flamboyantly emoting over everything.
We sat in our space
ignoring them.

I had no friends
who were drama fags
Though I had my eye on a few of the boys
but had yet to take that long walk
down their hall.

One in particular, I liked
Had kissed him at a football game
He was older and blonde
casually called to me over his shoulder
“Hey, come down here with us.”

I hesitantly put my sketchbook in my bag
ignored the disgusted stares from the art geeks
and followed the blonde boy.
Down the rabbit hole
through the door that led – backstage.

According to Sir Ken Robinson, “there is a hierarchy within the arts. Art and music are normally given the higher status in schools than drama and dance” (2006). As a teenager I was aware of the hierarchies in the arts. In my high school, this was certainly the case. I had been encouraged as a younger child to participate in the arts through endless piano lessons and many weekend classes at the local art school where I developed a love for and proficiency in the visual arts. By the time I arrived in high school I self identified as a visual artist. The art department in the school was well funded and well staffed. The drama department however, was inhabited by one woman who singlehandedly taught all of the drama courses in the school in addition to classes in social studies. She was a tightly wound, over worked, wiry whip of a woman. Insanely wavy hair escaped all attempts to keep it neatly in place as she taught her students the basics of performance and production while begging local businesses for supplies to build the latest of her extravaganzas and staying at the school late into the evening to create the sets, sew costumes and hang the lights.

8 As quoted from Sir Ken Robinson’s 2006 Ted Talk, How Schools Kill Creativity
I was in awe of her. Looking back on the experience, the drama room was a place where I found similarly minded peers who, with their creative dramatics background, did not have a great command of theatre lore. They did know how to listen to each other, and they could work cooperatively for mutual solutions to common problems. They were marvellously flexible and imaginative. (Smith, 1988, p. 178)

The drama teacher wasted no time finding out what my abilities and interests were and throwing a paint brush in my general direction, she invited me to join in. “The art of theatre arises from a distinctive form of talent, an essential function of the theatre teacher is the recognition, nurturing and development of that talent” (Hobgood, 1988, p. 8). I was surprised to find that, while the “flamboyantly emoting” kids were there hanging about, there were also other kids who were figuring out how to build a tree that someone could be inside of with their faces and arms showing. Other kids were digging through a well hidden room off the side of the stage, referred to as the “hell hole” that held bits and pieces of old sets, older furniture, half used cans of paint, many garages worth of “stuff” that this wavy haired woman had collected and tucked away because it may be useful one day. In the late 1980’s the teachers in the art room were just starting to talk about recycling and reusing to make art more sustainable and this woman was already doing it out of necessity and creating worlds from what others had discarded.

I asked a high school classmate, Michelle Regenwetter⁹ what she felt the benefit of high school drama was for her. She replied, “I believe that anything that allows us to use our imagination is positive – so it creates an environment where people feel free. Drama is an environment that is inclusive to teens that may feel excluded elsewhere” (Personal communication, May 5, 2014).

Michelle Regenwetter was a classmate at Ernest Manning Senior High School in Calgary Alberta. The high school was home to the Louise Dean Program for Teenage Mothers operated by the Calgary Catholic Family services. The program integrated teenage mothers into the general high school population. There was a daycare located within the school for the children of the young mothers. Michelle was one of several mothers who were able to continue her education and be a mother with support from the school system. She and the other mothers were also able to participate in drama and other extracurricular activities due to the program.
While not interested in the performance side of what was happening in the drama department, I remember being intrigued by the backstage activities. There was a secret society, subversive feel to it that was attractive. I loved spreading paint from one side of the room to the other creating a large backdrop rather than being limited to the paper or canvas that was supplied to me by my art teacher. It was empowering to swing hammers, build a room from canvas flats, decorate it with found furniture and bric a brac. “We [were] taught production…all of this culminating in elaborate, expensive and wonderfully successful productions that the public flocked to see” (Smith, 1988, p. 179). The first time I climbed a scaffolding to hang a stage light, plug it in and then go into the lighting booth to turn it on was the action that sealed the deal. I had “the bug”.

Hummmmmmmmmmm.
The sound of
Thousands of
Volts.
Electrons
Waiting to be released into
Twisted copper strands.

Hummmmmmmmmmm.
Massive metal machine
Three coloured levers
One red, one green, one black
Dozens of identical sliders
Directing the energy
Toward the lights
Hummmmmmmmmmm.
Pull out
Twist
Push back
Lock
Click
Count

Hummmmmmmmmmm.
Light, texture, colour
Dazzling, dim
Shadow, shape, sculpt
Singular spot
Or banked bright
Fading to black

Hummmmmmmmmmm.
I am one of the last generation of students that knows the thrill of the sensation of the transfer of power through an analog lighting system; consoles from the 1950’s that would arc if you happened to touch the controls and the patch bay at the same time, jolting you just enough to remind you to be safe--jolts that would never pass current safety standards. My first encounters with stage lighting and design were quite literally electrifying and dangerous, but appealed to the visual artist in me because I could physically control the nuances of mood through the lighting in a way that cannot occur with the present technology. The experience of being a small dark room, filled with loudly humming electrical dimmers that took upper body strength to operate is a far cry from now when I can control the lighting systems with my smart phone or iPad.

In addition to these first exciting experiences, I was fortunate enough to be taught by someone possessing the three elements characteristic of master teachers in any subject:

- Comprehension of the field.
- Ability to diagnose the needs of the students.
- Capability of bringing students into actual interface with the field.

(Smith, 1988, p. 171).

In my senior year of high school, my first drama teacher retired and was replaced by the sort of drama teacher that was the antithesis of the three elements of a master teacher. The replacement, “fail[ed] to realize the fundamental values of theatre study through production process” (Smith, 1988, p 180). The department no longer met the needs of all of the students involved and became that place where the plays chosen were outside of the scope of high school students and were cast based on popularity. The stage where I had spent the last two years was mothballed because the replacement lacked the technical knowledge to operate the space. In 1988, when I was in high school, there was a “trend to employ non-certified personnel to “coach” such extracurricular activities (i.e. drama productions) among some school districts” (Smith, 1988, p. 177). It was a discouraging transition and one that could have easily pushed my interests back into the visual art classroom.
Looking back at these first experiences has allowed me to see where some of my own biases were born. I experienced the difference between theatre that is produced with knowledge of and a true respect for the technical components of the process and an environment where those are an afterthought. Working with a teacher who empowered me to express myself through lighting or set design vs. another that used the technical assignments as a type of consolation prize laid the groundwork for an embodied resistance and defensiveness to the performance side of the process.

How to be a theatre student.

Study dance  
To appreciate the body

Study voice  
To hear the speaker

Study acting  
To know vulnerability

Study set design  
To value place

Study properties  
To understand possessions

Study light  
To know darkness

Study sound  
To know silence

Study costume  
To know identity

Study paint  
To feel colour

Study theatre  
To create meaning.
2.2. College

A new program had been launched at Mount Royal College (now University) that caught my attention. I enrolled in the program in its second year and along with many of my classmates\(^{10}\) have been able to carve out a career in this challenging industry in a large part due to the training I received in that program. My Mount Royal certificate reads that I was awarded an Arts and Science diploma for my completion of the Theatre program.

A technical theatre artist or designer, works in the production or backstage areas of theatre. The production areas include lighting, sound, properties/special effects, costumes, scenic arts, set carpentry (which includes rigging), technical direction, production management and stage management. The field is growing to include multimedia applications such as projections. Within lighting, students learn concepts that include knowledge of trigonometry, electrical theory and colour theory in analogue and computerized environments. Sound students learn concepts including logarithms, acoustics and digital editing. Costume students learn to construct and cut patterns, drape fabric, sew and tailor clothing. Set carpentry students learn to build complex scenery to safety code specifications, utilize shop equipment including large power tools like table saws, jointer/planers and drill presses. They study the mechanics of rigging, hydraulics and automation, read complex drawings and interpret designs. Scenic artists learn to make the scenery come alive through an understanding of light, shadow, texture and colour. They study art history, film, photography and anything that can teach them about visual images. Technical directors, production managers and stage managers learn to manage people, schedules, project management, psychology and communications.

\(^{10}\) Our graduating class has maintained a high level of graduates working within the arts & entertainment industry. We include TV & film actor Alan Van Sprang, currently starring on the CW series Reign, screen writer and creator of Teletoon hit Fugget About It, Willem Wennekers, previous artistic director of Quest Theatre and current executive director of Vertigo Theatre, Rose Brow, Equity stage manager and MRU Faculty of Continuing Ed. Instructor Niesa Silzer, Walt Disney Imagineering consultant, Darren Wilkie, comedian and voice actor, Tony Binns, scenery & lighting designer and Augustana University faculty member, Adam Parboosingh, Stage Left (disability theatre) artistic director Michele Decottignes.
Properties and special effects students I have left to last as it is the most complex of these disciplines as it can often encompass all of the rest. Properties students learn building skills (small and large power tools, welding equipment, construction techniques). They learn to build, refinish and upholster furniture. They must know how to sew, sculpt, paint, carve and mould. Properties students also need to understand basic electrical theory. They are often required to gain certification in MSDS, WHMIS\textsuperscript{11}, firearms possession and acquisition and pyrotechnics. Properties students learn about weapons and weapon safety. Properties students often need to know how to cook and deal with food safety. They must understand how chemicals interact with each other. Properties students are like archaeologists, learning to dig through endless storage facilities, flea markets and online sources for rare or obscure objects. They learn about puppets, masks, dead bodies, decapitated heads and medical equipment. Properties is a vast and complex discipline that has an endless learning curve.

The program I undertook in 1990 included courses outside of technical theatre arts. I was required to take courses in art and architectural history, humanities, psychology, sociology, three English courses, theatre history and professional development. These liberal arts courses were in addition to acting, movement and voice in my first semester followed by specific courses in lighting, sounds, properties, costumes, stage management, set construction, scenic painting, technical direction, production management and mandatory involvement in department productions (4 per year). I did not sleep much those two years, but the comprehensive foundation that I received is undeniable.

At that time, the students in the performance stream and technical stream began the learning process together. In the first semester, the technicians acted and the performers operated as technicians. This methodology ensured that there was not an, ‘us vs. them’ atmosphere between the technicians and performers. From the beginning we were taught that theatre was a team sport and that to best understand the role of each individual we were to experience first hand what that involved. Moving into our

\textsuperscript{11} MSDS – Material Safety Data Sheets, WHMIS – Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System.
second semester we began to specialize in our preferred areas while taking those liberal arts electives that rounded out our college education. It was during these two years that I received one of the most important pieces of advice that ensured my survival in this industry. The advice was, do not limit yourself to one department. If you want a career in theatre, learn it all because you never know what department is going to be hiring when you need a job. Learn the management, the marketing and history as well as the practical skills and you will always be able to pay your rent.

Whatever a graduate’s star turn\textsuperscript{12} is, they may be thankful that they were indoctrinated with the other disciplines because for a spell they may find themselves in posts where they double in brass. Many an ex-student finds himself or herself juggling sets, lights and costumes.

(Bay, 1988, p. 162)

It was an education in creativity, innovation and adaptability. Assigned as the head of props for the department production of \textit{Agnes of God}\textsuperscript{13} directed by Tom Besse, I was charged with finding the solution to making the lead character, Sister Agnes, a novice nun experiencing stigmata, bleed from her palms during the climactic scene of the play. The director wanted ample amounts of blood to come from the actress’ hands to soak the front of her white habit, which also had to wash clean every night. Under the guidance of the Properties instructor Lance Olson, I experimented with different blood recipes on various fabrics searching for the correct blood formula that would flow freely, read as the correct colour under stage lighting and wash out every night without staining. Once the correct recipe was discovered, the delivery system needed to be designed.

The actress had only a short time to put the apparatus on under her costume, as we could not risk her ‘bleeding’ too early in the act. This meant that the running crew\textsuperscript{14} would need to strip the actress down, get the device onto her body, redress her and get her back on stage quickly, silently and in the dark. Surgical tubing was taped just above

\textsuperscript{12} A role or performance in a play, film or show that results in that individual being classified as a “star”, popular and/or successful celebrity.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Agnes of God} written by John Pielmeier, published 1982.
\textsuperscript{14} A theatrical term used to describe the members of the production or technical team who supervise, operate and/or facilitate the ‘running’ of the show. Generally refers only to those technicians involved with the actual performance.
the inside of her wrists, running up her arms, down her torso to a colostomy bag that was taped behind her thigh above her knee. Hidden in the sleeves of her habit were two small dials that would normally be used to control an I.V. drip so that she could start the flow of blood.

As sometimes happens, the solution worked great in rehearsal, only to become a disaster on opening night. In order to start the blood flow, the actress needed to kneel down and squeeze the colostomy bag with the back of her leg. At the climax of the show on opening night, with friends and family, peers and college dignitaries in the audience, the actress squeezed down hard on the bag, which responded with a thunderous FART, but no blood. Again she squeezed the bag with her leg and was rewarded with another tremendous FART and spurting, B-movie-like blood shooting from her wrists. Watching from the wings I felt horrible as the audience, crew and actresses struggled to control giggles. It was a major problem that would need to be solved before the next show.

There have been innumerable moments of failure or chaos during theatre shows, and it is one of the reasons that people who work in theatre love it so much. It is live and unpredictable but theatre happens within fixed timelines and solutions to problems must happen quickly. There is no time to ruminate on mistakes because the show must go on.¹⁵ “The arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one’s choices and to revise and then to make other choices” (Eisner 2002, p.6)

This anecdote is also an example of how the production process for technical theatre arts is not unlike a laboratory for science students. Research is conducted, theories are tested, prototypes are built and beta tested and often times the experiments fail and that is where the real learning occurs.

When I was a college student there was a difference of opinion in the professional theatre community concerning the technical theatre training attributes at the University of Calgary vs. the Mount Royal College program. The general consensus was

¹⁵ There are of course times when the show should not go on due to matters of safety, illness or other unforeseen circumstance.
that students who went to Mount Royal could make theatre, students who went to the University of Calgary could talk about making theatre. While this is not necessarily the case, as is plainly evident by the number of successful theatre companies launched by University of Calgary alumni,\textsuperscript{16} it was an early lesson to me about the different expectations between college and university programs. This differentiation has troubled me in my own work as a student who ultimately graduated from both programs. A colleague who has taught lighting and design at a college in British Columbia since 1989 and who holds an MFA from the University of British Columbia contends,

Theory and history are important foundations, but nothing makes a good theatre technician like doing lots of shows. Programs at Colleges or Universities vary greatly in how much hands-on experience the students get. Obviously, the ones where the students get to do lots of shows are the better ones for technical theatre training. Technical theatre is not an idea, it is realized in the show. (Anonymous. Personal communication, May 8, 2014)

Again, participation in the production process of as many shows as possible during training develops superior technical theatre artists, because they have essentially had more time in the lab to perfect their skills. The following statement from Dr. Samer Al-Saber, current Mellon Postdoctoral fellow and visiting Assistant Professor of Theatre at Davidson College in North Carolina argues another side of this complex debate within the academy

Technical theatre education presents a challenging area of scholarly study for a number of reasons. First, it is one of few degrees that do not necessarily qualify its holders to enter a union and be considered a professional upon completing one’s education. As a result, the profession undermines the education and vice-versa. Second, technical theatre is often taught as an area of technical expertise rather than an area of creative thinking and production. While students may emerge as well qualified "technicians" or even "designers," very few are taught to be good active citizens, thinkers, or critics of the status quo. Technicians of theatre may be reduced to the function of labourers, who have not sufficiently been integrated into the intellectual and artistic pursuits of theatre makers. Some designers and technicians become known as trail blazers; however, they tend to be very few and their activism does not necessarily

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Theatrical companies launched by University of Calgary graduates include; One Yellow Rabbit, Ground Zero, Loose Moose Theatre, Theatre Transit. 
\end{flushright}
emanate from well-founded historical, scholarly, and intellectual pursuits in a program of study.  
(Samer Al-Saber. Personal communication May 4, 2014)

These two statements epitomize the polemic atmosphere that exists among educators and practitioners of technical theatre arts and design. It must be said that there are many students who are not interested in anything more than being a well-qualified stagehand.

*I personally did not go to theatre school to be a theatre-maker, I wasn’t necessarily a servant, but I didn’t intend on creating my own work, ever  
(Niesa Silzer, Personal communication, May 5, 2014)

“Most theatre students go to school to gain practical experience” (Marranca, 1995, p. 58). However, I am grateful that the Mount Royal program in which I began my studies was well balanced in terms of hands on technical training, performance and more traditional academic requirements. It was university transferable allowing me into third year status in the Theatre and Film Department at UBC.

2.3. University

I finished the two-year program at Mount Royal and worked for a year at Loose Moose Theatre in Calgary before deciding that I was not quite finished with my education. I applied to study theatre design at the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria and was accepted by both, but chose UBC due to rumours of impending program cuts at UVIC. This was not a happy transition for me, and one that I have spent much time second-guessing and trying to analyze for several years.

I was not a successful theatre student at UBC. It was big and impersonal and there was a clear division between performers and technical/design students. It was the first time I encountered the university system where I was being taught by a T.A. rather than a professor. The problem I had with this was that because I had spent two years in at a hands-on college program, my practical skills were more developed than the T.A.’s who had more theoretical knowledge than me. I was excessively frustrated and I foolishly shut myself off to any possibility of learning something new. The experience of
coming into a program or department with an established skill set and attempting to fit a new format is one I have heard echoed by colleagues. This experience is similar to that of Sholem Dolgoy, faculty in the Ryerson Theatre School who is a member of my community of practice. He shared that his application to the National Theatre School in the 1960’s was initially rejected because they had determined from his resume that listed some professional experience that he was over qualified for admittance.\(^\text{17}\) I left UBC without completing my third year and have harboured feelings of failure because of this.

In conversations within my community as I prepared for this thesis, I was able to unpack this experience with Robert Gardiner, the Acting Head of the UBC Department of Theatre and Film. On faculty since the 1980’s, Robert had been one of my professors during my short stay at UBC. He was able to provide some departmental context that may have affected my experience. When I enrolled at UBC in 1993, the department was in a transitional phase, which included restructuring the technical and design BFA to fit new mandates proposed by the university. Also, at that time, designing shows inside the university did not count as research activity for faculty members. As a result, in order to accumulate research credentials, the faculty were forced to move their design practice out of the university, which split their focus.\(^\text{18}\)

Taken as a whole, the teaching artist field comprises diverse individuals who see their work in varied and complex ways: as artists who teach as part of their professional responsibilities; as arts educators working in school and community settings; as cultural workers who employ the arts for positive social change; as activists who use the arts to improve people’s lives and circumstances; as professional artists and performers who supplement their income with teaching; and as clearly identified professional teaching artists. (Anderson & Risner, 2012, p. 1).

I do not know if understanding that the department was in a state of transition at the time would have changed my perception of it in the moment however, learning it was in flux was tremendously freeing for me now and has allowed me to view the experience with fresh eyes to determine what I did learn from it, rather than what I did not.

\(^\text{17}\) Personal communication recorded May 23, 2014
\(^\text{18}\) Summary of personal communication February 7, 2014
In retrospect, I realize that my time at UBC greatly expanded my skill as a scenic artist. My previous training with Laara Cassells at Mount Royal College had taught me how to create multi-layered techniques to painting marble, wood grain, stone and trompe l’oeil. At Mount Royal we had sufficient floor space to create these detailed finishes with our surfaces lying flat. At UBC I was forced to learn to create them on a vertical plane. I learned that as a student I needed to be able to interact directly with the person whose knowledge I am trying to gain. I have learned that when I close myself off to the possibility that there is something for me to learn I gain nothing. I also learned that changing your path mid-journey creates options you had not previously considered.

Beeb Salzer is a prolific writer on technical theatre and design and long time Professor of Theatre at San Diego State University. I contacted him directly regarding this thesis and he was kind enough to provide some words of wisdom for my research. His words are indicative of many theatre students’ experience, including mine.

Everyone taking theatre design and technical courses will have a unique reason for being in one program or another. A very few schools seem to turn out successful graduates, out of proportion to other schools. Students vie for admittance for a good reason. But many other considerations direct students to study with a particular mentor in a particular part of the country, to find a school that gives them many chances to design actual productions, that provides scholarships, where friends are already enrolled, where living expenses are reasonable, where the theatre building is well equipped, where certain kinds of plays are done, where there is training in TV and film as well as theatre. The list goes on. And then, some people never finish or never start graduate work because they already have the tools to work professionally. School selection, as well professional success is a crapshoot.

(Beeb Salzer. Personal communication. May 8, 2014)

I chose to go to UBC after Mount Royal based on the recommendation of a trusted instructor, but ultimately it was not the correct fit for me. As a student choosing a school, you make the best choice that you can and the outcome of your choice is at times beyond your control. I do agree with Beeb Salzer, that school selection and professional success in this industry is in fact a ‘crap shoot’. However, I also know that the overall health of the program within the university, the interest level of the faculty in working directly with students, and the commitment of the individual student are all factors that can aid or constrain the learning process.
In conversation with some of my classmates from Mount Royal College, I have also discovered that, although my experience was overwhelmingly positive, that is only my experience. Leah Waddington Cooney, who graduated from the program at the same time as me, having worked with the same students, faculty and guest artists in the same facilities notes,

> My thoughts regarding the training I received at MRC was that we always seemed that we were always, due to funding restrictions, behind the times with technology. There were only a very few people to have access to the computerized lighting board before we graduated with the Nickle Theatre\(^{19}\) being completed only at the end of our second year. Almost all the theatres in the city at the time were running with this type of equipment but we only had access to manual (analogue) boards in the Wright Theatre\(^{20}\), so as we emerged from our two years of hard fought training, we were already obsolete. That was very deflating.

> (Personal communication, June 3, 2014)

I was one of those few that had access to the new computerized lighting board and that access was precisely what qualified me for my first professional position. This is another example of the ‘crap shoot’ that Salzer speaks of. In addition to trying to choose the correct school in the right location, the production assignments you are given during your time in a program also affect your learning outcomes. I will further address the importance of productions as teaching tools in a University setting in the ‘Teaching’ chapter of this paper.

2.4. University – Take Two

I left UBC in 1994 and stepped into the world of professional theatre. I did not resume my theatre studies until 2007. Although I always regretted not finishing my degree, life and career continued on with professional theatre work, finding a direction as a technical theatre educator, having a family and putting off school until I had more time.

\(^{19}\) The Nickle Theatre was built and opened at Mount Royal College in 1992. It featured computerized lighting systems and state of the art sound systems for the era. It is a blackbox theatre with seating on two levels and three sides of the performance area.

\(^{20}\) The Wright Theatre was the original theatre performance venue at Mount Royal College. A traditional proscenium stage with fly tower and analogue lighting systems.
In 2004 I joined the Drama Department at the University of Calgary as the Properties Master. Colleagues on faculty there suggested that I pursue an MFA within the department, as there were others in the department doing the same. I pointed out that I had not finished my undergrad degree, but neither had one of the others doing graduate work, so they thought I would be able to qualify under the same criteria. This was not to be. At the time I was disappointed but I also knew that I was in a unique position. I had the ability to finish my undergraduate degree for free thanks to the collective agreement in place at the university and I had allies in the department willing to support me with time off to take classes as needed or to work with me privately on directed studies. “Listening critically to the stories of those peers also enables developmental learning from their experience” (as cited in Bolton 2009, p. 9). I had a great volume of technical theatre and design knowledge available for me to access through my more senior colleagues who were only too happy to share their methods.

Being both a student and a teacher concurrently at the University of Calgary caused me to examine both how I learn and how I teach. There were times when I was sitting alongside fellow students in one class and teaching them in my class the following day. Returning to the role of student showed me how much I had come to rely on what I already knew, rather to that search for new answers and solutions to creative problems. Some of my most creative work had come out of not knowing how to solve the problem and having to be innovative. Rediscovering myself as a student reignited my comfort with inexperience. Choreographer Twyla Tharp suggests, “Each new challenge is a way to protect your inexperience, make you remember something you never had a chance to forget. When it’s all done, you bring it back to your craft, stronger and wiser” (2006, p. 167).

I worked at the University of Calgary from 2004 – 2010 and was also a student there for most of that time. It is the location of my longest engagement as a participant observer of a functional model of a technical theatre arts training institution. During those years I was involved in the production process of over 60 plays. Due to my dual purposes for being at the university: employee and student, I do not consider my pedagogical experience to be normative. I would argue that because of the cross-purpose, the instruction I received was superior to that of my classmates. I was at an
advantage in terms of access to lab space, theatre space, technology and faculty, which has coloured my perception of the program. As such, it is more appropriate to speak to my experiences with that department through the lens of a teacher rather than a student. My experience as a student at the University of Calgary did inspire me to pursue graduate studies, which I will discuss in the ‘Researcher’ section of this paper.

I loved being a technical theatre arts student. When I was at Mount Royal it was an exhausting process because there were no rules at that time about how many hours students could be required to stay and work on a production. This prepared me for the reality of trying to eek out a career in theatre. At UBC I learned what I did not know and chose a path that led me to an unplanned career as a technical theatre arts educator. At the University of Calgary I was a privileged and indulged student and I was wise enough to know it and take full advantage of it. “There is no denying... the importance of – and the need to argue for the explorations that take place or should take place in those spaces: the images and sounds discovered, the articulation of the hitherto unexpressed.” (Greene, 1985, p.127).

In the next chapter I will reflect on touchstone points in my career in the professional theatre and how it was shaped and informed by my technical theatre education.
Chapter 3.

Being a Technical Theatre Artist

Backstage smells the same in every theatre I enter. It is my sacred space, with scents that transport and calm as incense wafting from a thurible. I inhale and let the bouquet of melting gels, warming velvet, saw dust, hemp rope, moulding paint, steel and sweat communicate the history of this place.

In this chapter I reflect only on the pivotal theatre appointments I have held in my career. The ones in which I was able to either sit comfortably in my existence as a professional theatre artist or where some element was lacking that steered me back to my path. In each of these five cases, there are clear ties between being a theatre artist and the academy, which has been a defining factor in how I have evolved as an artist. Thanks to the advice I received to not limit myself to one production department, I have been able to find work as a stagehand, properties master, lighting designer, set designer, scenic artist, costume designer, stage manager, technical director and production manager. All of the fundamental skills for these positions I learned as a technical theatre arts student within the academy. My first love as a student was lighting and my original intent was to have a career as a lighting designer.

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21 A vented metal vessel suspended by chains used for burning incense during worship services.
22 Gels are the coloured plastic film used in frames attached to stage lighting instruments to change the colour of the light emitted from the instrument. They were originally made of gelatin, which is why they are now referred to as ‘gels’.
As it happened, the year that I graduated from Mount Royal College, the first Canadian tour of *Phantom of the Opera* was being mounted by Garth Drabinsky’s company, Livent. The tour was scheduled to begin with a three-month engagement at The Jube (Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium in Calgary, Alberta). The head of the technical theatre stream of the Theatre Department at Mount Royal College was well connected to the professional community and was able to bring some of the pre-production work onto the college campus. The set of *Phantom of the Opera* incorporated voluminous draperies that required alteration to fit the stage dimensions of The Jube. The Wright Theatre at Mount Royal College was one of the few theatre venues in Calgary that was equipped with a fly tower. A fly tower was needed to suspend the draperies as the seamstresses altered and hemmed them. The draperies weighed hundreds of pounds and exceeded the weight that the arbors of the fly system could accommodate. The students were essentially hired as counterweights to assist the fly system to hold the draperies up. This sounds like a thankless job, but it allowed us, the students to watch professionals in action, work along with them and make connections.

A number of us were invited to be at The Jube to observe the installation of the draperies into the auditorium. I was in that group, and with the brash boldness of youth decided to introduce myself to the head electrician for the show. He was kind and showed me all of the lighting equipment that would be used for the production and the lighting design that they would be working from. He told me that the lighting designer

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24 The Live Entertainment Corporation of Canada, Inc.  
25 Fly towers are prevalent in proscenium theatres. They house the fly system that contains the rigging for stage scenery and lighting equipment to be ‘flown’ into and offstage. Fly towers are typically a minimum of double the height of the stage area to accommodate scenery.  
26 Arbors hold the counterweights of a fly system. The counterweights are typically steel plates that can be added or removed in relation to the onstage weight being lifted. They travel on tracks (typically vertically) as the ropes of the system are pulled to move curtains, lights, scenery, stage effects and performers (e.g., in *Peter Pan*).  
27 A fly system is a series of lines (hemp or steel ropes), blocks (pulleys), counterweights and related devices within a theater that enables the lifting of components such as curtains, lights, scenery, stage effects and performers (e.g., in *Peter Pan*).  
28 The head electrician oversees the installation of the lighting design into the venue, manages the lighting crew and often operates the lighting console during performance.
was going to be hiring an assistant and encouraged me to apply. I did and was rewarded with my first professional gig as the assistant to the lighting designer for the touring production of *Phantom of the Opera*. It was a fabulous position to have straight out of school and one that exposed me to the cutting edge lighting technology at the time. It was an opportunity that came as a direct result of my affiliation with a recognised program in the academy and because I was the fortunate student that had access to and experience with the new computerized lighting control systems.

*Phantom of the Opera* was a young lighting designer’s playground. With original lighting designed by Richard Pilbrow29, the show is a spectacle of nuance and texture. The lighting moves seamlessly from endless candlelit corridors to the Phantom’s underground world, to the shining and alive pageantry of the masquerade ball and the flickering descent of the infamous chandelier crashing to the stage. I never failed to be drawn in by the simplicity and elegance of the design that was able to elicit a powerful emotional response from the audience night after night. The fortitude required by the cast and crew of the large-scale Broadway-style touring shows is impressive. Doing eight shows a week, month after month is gruelling. Keeping each show fresh requires dedication, humour and perhaps a small amount of madness.

After 96 performances of *Phantom*, and the prospect of heading to Regina, Saskatchewan for the winter I decided that going on the road for an extended time was not for me. I had a long-term boyfriend (the blonde haired boy I had followed down the rabbit hole) and decided that I preferred to stay in Calgary for the time being. Thanks to having *Phantom* on my limited resume, I was able to secure some work as a stagehand doing pre-production work for *Theatre Calgary* and *Alberta Theatre Projects*. I was spending a lot of time at the *Loose Moose Theatre Company*, home to Keith Johnstone’s

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29 Richard Pilbrow (1933 ) is a Tony Award nominated lighting designer. Born in the UK, Richard was a co-founder of the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT), the Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD), the Society of Theatre Consultants (STC), the Association of Lighting Designers (ALD), and the Theatre Projects Trust — LAMDA Stage Management and Technical Theatre Course. He is the Honorary Chairman of Light Relief the UK Registered Charity to support those in need in the entertainment lighting profession. http://www.richardpilbrow.com/Richard_Pilbrow/Biography.html
training ground for Theatresports™. My boyfriend was the technical director. The production stage manager/general manager had resigned and I was able to step into the position, again due to the comprehensive training I had received in the academy. This job demanded more of the liberal arts knowledge I had acquired at Mount Royal, rather than the technical knowledge. The mandatory general electives at Mount Royal were divided into four categories, Numeracy & Scientific Literacy; Values, Beliefs & Identity; Community & Society; and Communication. In a theatre management position, I needed to be able to manage budgets, communicate effectively verbally and in writing with clients, manage staff, interpret contracts and copyright. Jessie Johnson-Carr is a valued member of my community of practice. She is a well-respected scenic artist who graduated from the University of Calgary with both a BFA (2001) and MFA (2004) in drama. In a conversation regarding the diversity of the training she received in the technical theatre arts program there she stated,

*To this day I thank my 18 year-old self for taking that program. As an artist and even working in the industry as commercial artist it was the best education one can ask for. The technical theatre program taught me how to be a project manager…. that’s where I learned to be the professional I am today.*

(Personal communication, May 9, 2014)

I had not planned on being in any form of theatre management, but was grateful to have the knowledge base to be able to so. “Nowadays society and the theatre are changing so fast we cannot be sure of anything at all; all the more reason for training to have a comprehensive basis in all disciplines …” (St. Denis & St. Denis, 1982, p. 80). My technical theatre arts education had prepared me to be adaptable and to be comfortable with change.

Working at Loose Moose, formed in 1977, was a unique experience because it was so tightly tied to the University of Calgary Department of Drama and a sort of

30 In some countries 'Theatresports' is a trademark and copyright owned by Keith Johnstone and managed by the International Theatresports Institute.

31 http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/TeachingLearning/Departments/GeneralEducation/Courses/index.htm

32 Personal communication, recorded May 9, 2014. Jessie Johnson-Carr is a scenic artist and has been a sessional faculty member at the University of Calgary Department of Drama.
unofficial annex of learning due to Professor Keith Johnstone, world renowned expert on improvisation in the theatre and *Loose Moose* founder. It is one of the most successful business models for a theatre that I have witnessed and I would argue that its 35-year success is due to the commitment to training its performers and technicians. The model at *Loose Moose* is that stage time or the opportunity to perform for the audience is tied to two things. First, you must attend the weekly improvisation class taught by Keith Johnstone, or one of the senior improvisers. Second, you must give back to the theatre in the form of time. You are required to serve as an usher, box office attendant, bartender or concession person for a certain number of hours per month to earn stage time. Other than three of four fulltime staff, the company produces a show most weekends of the year staffed by volunteers.

When I worked for *Loose Moose* beginning in 1992, the majority of volunteers were University of Calgary drama students and Keith Johnstone was a professor in the Department of Drama.\(^{33}\) It was not unusual to hear a debate that had started in a class at the university carry over to the theatre at *Loose Moose*. Johnstone said, “If you don’t have to kick the students out after school, something is wrong”\(^{34}\) (2012). It was a theatre company that had one foot in the academy and another firmly planted in the professional realm. The more senior improvisers would be hired, through *Loose Moose* for corporate or private shows. When I left my position at the University of Calgary in 2010, the head of the Department of Drama was *Loose Moose* alumni Clem Martini. Kathleen Foreman\(^{35}\), another ‘Mooser’ was a full professor on the faculty. Other ‘Moose’ regulars including Rebecca Northan taught in the department as sessional instructors. Martini and Foreman had been regular senior improvisers when I was at *Loose Moose* and Northan was a U of C drama student. For me, the Loose Moose/University of Calgary affiliation demonstrated a positive ongoing relationship between the academy and the professional theatre community.

\(^{33}\) now professor emeritus
\(^{34}\) http://theatresports.com/keith-johnstone-interview-clips/
\(^{35}\) Kathleen Foreman passed away in September 2013.
While having a regular paying theatre job at *Loose Moose* was good for my wallet, it was not a creative position and I was craving that dark, backstage, messy existence. I headed off for what was to be my short-lived experience at UBC. I found the lower mainland of British Columbia a tough nut to crack in terms of getting professional theatre work. I did not have the same contacts that come from being associated with the local university or college. By pure dumb luck I saw a job posting looking for a theatre technician who was knowledgeable in several production areas, preferably lighting, properties and scenic paint. The position was at Douglas College in New Westminster, BC. I applied and was hired because of a reference from opera director Brian Deedrick who had been my acting instructor at Mount Royal College. He had also directed two of the plays while I was a student there, so we knew each other well. By happy coincidence the faculty member who was responsible for hiring for the position had also given Brian his first professional theatre job. This was completely serendipitous. Barely twenty-two years old, I should not have been considered for the position, but the recommendation and the hiring committee taking a chance put me on my career path as an educator. From day one I felt at home. The Stagecraft Program at Douglas College was very similar to the Mount Royal College program in terms of its hands on production experience, but did not share the broader base of liberal arts electives.

I view my time at Douglas College where I emerged as a professional technical theatre artist. Within the structure of my position at the college, I was able to hone my skills as a scenic artist and props builder. I was given the opportunity to design sets and lighting for the shows produced by the department. The experience was much like being a graduate student in a university theatre department; while I was improving my own skills set through practical application, I was also reinforcing and expanding my knowledge through teaching and mentoring the students. I was given a great deal of creative latitude and discovered a love for the creation of puppets and masks.

The creation of puppets and masks involves a different mode of creative agency for me than lighting design or scenic art. It is a process that I have a love/hate relationship with because I find it emotionally taxing. Puppet and mask creation is the technical theatre art form where I am most likely to express or reveal something that I may not in the other mediums I work with. It is the place where my own voice is most
present in my work. Ronnie Burkett, Canada’s acclaimed marionette creator and performer said,

*Originally if you go back hundreds of years, the real bad boys, the renegades, were puppeteers. I mean, Punch-and-Judy men were always run out of town for mimicking politicians and the church. And you know there’s a whole tradition of that in many cultures where wandering puppet showmen were the voice of the people.*

At Douglas College, I created my very first large-scale puppet for the play *Brecht on Brecht*. The puppet, named Mr. Wilson, needed to be seven feet tall. He would be required to walk into the theatre through the audience. His ear would be removed every night of the show and reattached. The fingers of his right hand would articulate. His arms would be severed from his body with streams of ‘blood’ being released as they were torn from his torso. In order to be able to manufacture this puppet so that he would suit the needs of the script, I also had to understand the context of his character within the text. Understanding required research on Bertolt Brecht, McCarthyism, Nazis, Marxism and Epic Theatre. I needed to engage those practical research skills gained in the academy. I also needed to approach this puppet much as an actor prepares a character, which I learned to do as part of my technical training. Mr. Wilson was very heavy and bore an accidental striking resemblance to British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He was difficult for the performers to manoeuvre. Resetting his arms and ear was time consuming for the crew. However, he was an effective character and an invaluable experiential learning experience for me.

I have discovered that it is quite impossible for me to build a puppet without embodying it with some part of myself. “It is the closest thing we have in the ordinary human world to the transmigration of the soul from one body to another, or from one creature to another” (Gross, 2011, p. 4). I find that I leave a bit of myself behind in each

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36 http://www.straight.com/arts/puppeteer-ronnie-burketts-world-has-strings-attached
37 *Brecht on Brecht: An Improvisation*. Arranged by George Tabori from various translations of Bertolt Brecht’s philosophical musings. (1967)
38 Brecht’s concept of Epic Theatre was based on the concept that a play should not cause the audience to emotionally identify with the characters or the plot, but rather than they should be moved to rational self-reflection on the issues presented.
one and as such have even experienced a degree of separation anxiety when handing a puppet off to a performer. “There is something in the puppet that ties its dramatic life more to the shapes of dreams and fantasy, the poetry of the unconscious, than to any realistic drama of human life” (Gross, 2011, p. 1). Each one is like a child of mine. I know it intimately. How each joint is connected, every hair on it’s head where I have placed it. I have articulated all of its movement while crafting it into being. When I see the grand and astounding puppets that have been created for shows like Warhorse and The Lion King, or the fully realized characters of Ronnie Burkett’s imaginative marionettes, I have passionate and visceral response to them. My empathy for the creator comes from knowing the hours of research and meticulous detail that goes into each one. 

Like imaginary playmates
With personalities and physical traits that exist
only because I placed them so.
Forming them to this existence with hot glue and thread
My forearm becomes their spine.
My fingers forming the shape of their words
as my voice speaks them by proxy.

The puppets I have built have been human, both living and dead. They have been animals and plants and they have been personified objects. When you are a builder of puppets, you see life in objects (Gross, 2011). You become aware of the underlying personality of things. I spend a great deal of time in my research exploring my relationship with puppets and the effect they have on me and my students has shown itself to be a site of reflexive inquiry that is not as present in some of the other production areas.

When I left Douglas College in 1998 I was a young mother. I spent the next six years as a freelance lighting and set designer and occasional puppet builder. I was picky about which shows I would take on and which I would not because I was more focused on home life. With two small children, theatre life became more complicated. Long days and late nights in the theatre were troublesome to balance with the needs of our growing family. This challenge of balancing work with family is a topic that generated a lot of feedback from my community of practice. Amanda Fox was my student assistant at the University of Calgary and a young mother at the time. She was debating adding to her
family and we had many conversations about balancing motherhood with a career in theatre. In regard to being a mother and a theatre artist Amanda shared,

Being a mom is a 24/7 job and working in the theatre isn’t a 9-5 commitment either. My partner and children learned to accept and respect that sometimes I wasn’t home for dinner or to read bedtime stories. My kids couldn’t assume that I would drive them to a birthday party on a Saturday. More than once, a sick day for my toddler was a day curled up in a theatre seat with a blankie, or my husband would be the one to stay home. If everyone expected me to be an infallible ‘super mom’ I would have felt a lot of guilt, regret and eventually burn out.

(Personal communication, June 3, 2014)

Julia Henderson, my academic theatre colleague and PhD candidate at UBC also commented on balancing family life with theatre life when both partners are in the theatre,

It is impossible if both partners work in the theatre, (unless you have a lot of family help or enough money for a nanny)... that is why I am becoming an academic. It was toooooooo hard with both of us having a crazy unpredictable schedule. (Personal communication, June 3, 2014)

Being a mother and a theatre artist changed the work that I accepted and produced. I was hesitant to commit to long-term projects, preferring those with quick turn-around times. I was more likely to take on work where I could do the bulk of the preliminary preparations from home, so I was limited by the lack of tools and space I had under my own roof. Interestingly, being a mother and a theatre artist has often paralleled being a mother in the academy. When I began my training, there were very few women in Calgary involved in the education of technical theatre artists and few that were mothers. In my early career, the few women that I encountered in the theatre industry at the time were also rarely mothers. As I contemplated motherhood, I was aware that I might have to make a choice between career and children. As my career progressed into the academy, I found that the women I encountered were also less inclined to be mothers. In the prelude to her auto-ethnographic one-woman performance, Mamafesto! (Why Superheros Wear Capes) Deanna Shoemaker writes, “we sandwich writing and teaching, thinking and reading, between . . . all the stuff we do as mothers and . . . as partners and spouses . . . [I]t’s just sometimes too much . . .” (Carver & Lawless as cited in Shoemaker, 2011, p. 191).
Support that I received for being a mother in theatre and the academy often came from the men I worked with who were fathers, rather than other women. My role as a mother who is also a theatre artist and academic has been a factor in my professional life and prompted my return to the stability of theatre creation within the academy in light of the unpredictability of freelance work.

In 2004 I was hired as the Properties Master at the University of Calgary. The position came complete with a massive shop space that was mostly mine alone to build, paint, teach, think and play in. As a theatre artist functioning within the academy, it was an almost perfect situation. I had a supervisor who was intent on allowing me to be creative and teach without being bothered by the bureaucracy of the university and attempted to shelter me from most concerns outside of the walls of my shop. I had adequate funding to meet the material needs of the shows we were producing and the students I was teaching, with enough of a buffer to acquire new products to experiment with and new tools to build with. Most importantly, I had a group of fellow theatre arts technicians and designers who wanted to ‘play’ and collaboratively create theatre.

When I first arrived, the Drama department was preparing to produce the play On the Open Road\textsuperscript{39} as the second show in the season. The play takes place in a post-apocalyptic United States and the main characters are wandering the abandoned highways pulling a cart of remaining treasures with them that include famous works of art. The scenic carpenter, Martin Herbert, in addition to being an extremely gifted carpenter was also a talented visual artist who was interested in recreating the artworks by actually painting them, rather than printing the images onto canvas. Being the properties master, the decision on how to make the art pieces was mine. Having begun my creative life as a visual artist, I too was also more interested in painting the art by hand rather than faking it with a computer and printer.

Together, Martin and I recreated thirteen famous works of art in oil including Van Gogh’s \textit{Starry Night}, Caravaggio’s \textit{Bacchus}, Monet’s \textit{Woman With a Parasol}, Vermeer’s \textit{Girl With a Pearl Earring}, Ingres’ \textit{La Grande Odalisque}, Da Vinci’s \textit{Lady With an Ermine}

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{On the Open Road} (1992) Steve Tesich.
and a full-scale Styrofoam replica of Michelangelo’s sculpture, *Dying Slave*. We did this in a period of twelve weeks. It was one of the most challenging tasks I have undertaken in the production of any show, but it was also one of the most rewarding. It was a treat to spend the first twelve weeks of my employment at the university, in my own shop space peacefully painting the day away, reconditioning my creative muscles that had become stiff from underuse.

Being a professional technical theatre artist and designer within the academy has a degree of safety. It comes with a regular pay cheque, benefits and a pension. It comes with a built in audience and better than average facilities. Some would argue that it is too safe and lacks the freedom and risk to be considered creditable theatre for research creation in the Academy: An Anti-Manifesto of Sorts". Canadian Theatre Review, Volume 150, p 97-99.


unfortunately becoming increasingly difficult. The education that I had received had prepared me to be comfortable with change and instability. I made the difficult decision to leave in order to remain motivated in my work as a theatre artist.

In the next chapter I will reflect on my evolution into an educator of technical theatre arts and design. I will recount some of the touchstones that have already been discussed and expand on my role as an educator within those experiences.
Chapter 4.

Emergence of a Technical Theatre Arts Educator

This chapter engages in a reflexive inquiry of my transformation from student to teacher of technical theatre arts and design in order to “question [my] attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand [my] complex role(s) in relation to others” (Bolton, 2009, p.13). I find it impossible to isolate matters of curriculum from the teaching of that curriculum and have chosen to focus on the teaching aspect of this complex discipline.

Theatre as an instructional field has much to explain to make itself understood. Among those who need to heed the explanations are the field’s teachers, most of whom benefitted from no particular orientation to pedagogical theory or practice, although they are expected to teach effectively in a complex discipline of daunting diversity. (Hobgood, 1988, p. 1-2)

Like the majority of technical theatre arts instructors in the academy, I have no formal teacher training. “Most faculty are reluctant to discuss teaching in terms of an academic discipline possibly because they feel their own academic preparation was lacking in this area” (Pagen, 2004, p. 223). My teaching experiences stem from my employment. I offer an ethnographic accounts of my teaching experiences to illustrate the discoveries that I have made in three very different departments where I was employed: Douglas College Stagecraft Program, Mount Royal College Conservatory for Theatre, Music and Speech and the University of Calgary Department of Drama. I learned some significant factors that affected my effectiveness as an instructor. This chapter presents ethnographic accounts of my teaching experiences to illustrate the discoveries I have made through the experience of teaching. These discoveries are: the
importance of mentorship for teachers of technical theatre, student access to teachers; space for experimentation and research; continuous learning for the teacher and trust.

I am an accidental educator.
I never planned to teach
I stumbled onto the educator path,
which has led me ever further
down the rabbit hole
to find new delights and riddles in sharing
this Wonderland - this theatre of teaching

4.1. The Importance of Mentorship for Teachers of Technical Theatre

Theatre is an industry and an art form that is dependent upon direct mentoring from supervisors and peers for the transmission of knowledge and training in the academy and the professional field. “For centuries, mentoring has been used as a vehicle for handing down knowledge, maintaining culture, supporting talent and securing future leadership” (Darwin, 2000, p. 2). When I was hired for a support staff position in the Stagecraft Department at Douglas College, my only goal was to gain financial stability and hopefully make some theatre connections in the lower mainland. I did not anticipate that 70 percent of my day-to-day work would include mentoring and teaching students. I soon learned that the success of the Douglas College program (as well as one of its greatest downfalls) is that the support staff carries a great deal of the teaching load. If the job had been posted as a teaching position I would not have applied, because I would not have felt qualified, but once again, my technical theatre training had in some manner, prepared me for this, too.

As in medicine and law, our training methods involve a great deal of peer teaching where the more advanced students mentor the newer ones. At Mount Royal College, as a second year student, I had played a role in training the first year students in more junior positions while I was the crew head for lighting, properties, scenic paint and stage management for department productions. These were exactly the areas I was responsible for supervising and instructing at Douglas College. I knew how to train the student crews because I had done that already. I was happy to show the students, all I
knew about technical theatre production. I was inexperienced as a teacher and several of my students were older than I was. I was foolish enough to not first consider if, “knowledge of a subject matter is enough to teach that subject matter” (Pagen, 2004, p. 219). Instead I flung myself headfirst into this new challenge.

I dug out my old school texts and notebooks to review the lessons that I had been given and so that I could use them as my own. “Those of us, who attempt to teach theatrical design, sometimes mimic our own teachers and sometimes devise new methods to fill the fissures opened up by changing circumstances” (Salzer, 1995, p.116). My strategy was to both borrow what had worked for me as a student and to try out some new ideas. From a pedagogical point of view, this was perhaps not the best practice. It “supports the notion that college and university teaching is one profession that allows its members to practice on their clients with little formal training” (Pagen, 2004, p.227). I was learning to teach by teaching, but without an official mentor of my own to guide me through the process of learning to be a teacher. I had experienced both good and poor teachers in my own education. I knew that there were supremely talented technical theatre artists and designers who were horrible teachers. “One looks in vain for general statements attesting to the qualities and attitudes needed in one who is or who would become an especially effective instructor of students interested in theatre” (Hobgood, 1988, p. 6). I only knew the qualities and attitudes of the instructors who were effective for me as a student and set out to mimic those, so in a sense those effective instructors I experienced served as my first teaching mentors in absentia.

Douglas College was where I laid the foundation of my journey as a teacher. It is where unforeseen I fell in love with teaching and found, “that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart” (Palmer, 2007, p. 11). I was able to develop my teaching skills through a method of trial and error, the error usually being the insertion of my own ego into the process. I became reasonably competent and comfortable in my role, and was given time there to mature into it. “Theatre teaching of high quality builds on a foundation of emotional and intellectual commitment” (Hobgood, 1988, p.6). I was committed to staying in the educational realm of theatre, because I was finding joy in helping the students to be successful. I felt an emotional attachment to the Stagecraft department because it was a community I fit in to. I was intellectually challenged
because I was applying my technical theatre knowledge to teaching rather than straight production work.

When I was working at Douglas College and Mount Royal College, I developed a passion to become one of those teachers that you remember as having made a difference in your life,

The power of our mentors is not necessarily in the models of good teaching they gave us, models that may turn out to have little to do with who we are as teachers. Their power is in their capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives. (Palmer, 2007, p. 21)

When I joined the Drama Department at the University of Calgary, I was more aware of how those around me were teaching than I had been as a student. I observed the different techniques and approaches that were used not only with the students but also in communicating with fellow teachers. There were a handful of professors and instructors at the University of Calgary that I would classify as master teachers of technical theatre. They were working artists with, “a comprehensive approach to talent development and a record of preparing working artists” (Gister, 1988, p.vii) Generous with their time, resources and talent, they challenged me to improve as a technical theatre educator. “Mentoring is a mutuality that requires more that meeting the right teacher: the teacher must meet the right student” (Palmer, 2007 p. 21). After muddling through my first years of being an educator at Douglas College and Mount Royal without any direct guidance on how to teach, I finally had not only technical theatre and design mentors, but ones I valued as educators. “There is an ethereal quality in mentoring relationships, and magic is available to anyone willing to stand in the right place” (Darwin, 2000, p. 8). U of C became the right place, with the right mentors, where I could take all of the enthusiasm for teaching that I had discovered at Douglas College and the drive to be a master teacher that I was not able to correctly harness at Mount Royal College and develop a style and approach that was satisfying for me and effective for my students. I was able to study diverse instructional methods being used to teach the complex discipline of technical theatre arts and see that it is “impossible to claim that all good teachers use similar techniques: some lecture non-stop and some say very little;
some stay close to their material and others let loose their imagination” (Palmer, 2007, p.10). I now recognize that “[t]he way I teach is to try to identify a talent within my students and to nurture it rather than being prescriptive” (Jampolis as quoted in Isackes, 2009, p.126). For some this means a standard lecture and lab approach and for others it means one on one time in the shop with student assistants, learning through an apprenticeship or mentoring methodology. One of my former student assistants Scott Morrison commented,

There is a web of knowledge out there for students. That said, as a student I had no idea of how many disciplines one must study and keep current with in order to keep up with current industry practices. University level practicum courses and assistant jobs helped me to customize my education. (Personal communication, May 2014)

For some students, a more individualized academic approach in the form of directed studies that could help them to develop their research skills, relevant to the work that they would be doing in technical theatre arts is more useful. Overall I would assess that my teaching style is very much based on a mentorship model, where I find the student’s time is best spent on the things that are hardest for them as individuals to learn. (Isackes, 2009). My entire teacher training is the direct result of informal mentoring and I suspect that it will be some time before that changes for teachers of technical theatre in the academy. There is still very much the opinion in regard to technical that,

[W]e barely have enough time to teach them what we can as far as the art and craft of design is concerned. Designers are smart people. They know how to plan in advance, know how to organize other people – skills that transfer to be a good teacher. (Tsu as quoted in Isackes, 2009, p. 129)

I think this is a short sighted point of view and am in agreement with Pagen that, “When considering the future of higher education, theatre educators must begin to discuss, formally, teaching in higher education.” (2004, p. 228) As indebted as I am to the teaching mentors I have had, I think that it would be better for students and teachers of technical theatre arts if there were an increased focus on some level of formal teacher training for instructors and faculty. “It is one of the great ironies of theatre scholarship, that what most of us do, few of us study” (Gillespie, 2004, p.ix).
4.2. Student Access to Teachers

My main goal as a teacher has been to be accessible to my students. I had discovered while I was a student at UBC that it is difficult to learn from someone that you have little access to. In *The Heart of a Teacher* (2007), Parker J. Palmer shares that she was lucky to have been blessed with mentors at crucial stages in her life where her identity needed to grow. I have also been uniquely blessed with phenomenal teachers and mentors since my earliest school days, men and women who made themselves available to me. I believe that my love of learning is a direct result of the ease of access to the majority of my teachers. “The way I teach, I would say, certainly owes a great deal to the way that I was taught” (Lynch as quoted in Isackes, 2009, p.126).

By the end of my first year of employment at Douglas College, I had discovered that I enjoyed teaching the students as much or more than the portion of my job that was strictly related to the operation of the college theatre as a roadhouse for external clients. I derived satisfaction from watching the students come into the program and evolve into functioning theatre technicians. The Douglas College administration and the union did not recognize the teaching performed by support staff or compensate them for it. As a result there was some frustration and reluctance among my peers in regard to teaching and mentoring students, and students who felt a lack of guidance in the shop and theatre spaces. I felt a responsibility to the students and I was determined to behave as a teacher; accessible, present and interested, regardless of whether I was monetarily compensated or my contribution to the learning process formally recognized.

During my time as sessional faculty at Mount Royal, I became so consumed with portraying the perfect technical theatre arts educator; I failed to be an effective one. “The theatre teacher’s role is to assist the student toward achieving the highest level of development he or she is capable of” (Hobgood, 1988, p. 14). I was aiming for my own

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43 Road house – is the term used in the theatre community regarding a venue that is primarily used by travelling or non-resident companies who rent the facility for their productions.

44 I challenged the BCGEU (British Columbia Government Employees Union) job description of the Douglas College Stagecraft support staff in 1995 and was able to successfully lobby to have instruction of students added and the pay scale notably increased. It has not been challenged or increased since.
higher level of achievement with not enough regard for my student's achievement. The reality of teaching, as discussed by Maxine Greene demands of you, “a reaction which cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you” (1978, p. 24). This was a time when I needed to trust my technical theatre training, which had taught me to be creative, innovative, and adaptable. Instead I chose to try be someone that I am not. The teacher I portrayed in the classroom for my students at Mount Royal was false, because I was not teaching from the heart about my passion for theatre. At that point in my journey as an educator,

[my] obsession as a teacher had not been with helping students learn what they wanted and needed to know, but rather with (a) showing the students how smart I was, (b) showing them how knowledgeable I was and (c) showing them how well prepared I was for class. I had been putting on a performance whose true goal was not to help the students learn, but to act in such a way that they would have a good opinion of me. (Thompkins as cited in Palmer, 2007, p. 28-29)

Looking back, I see the teaching post at Mount Royal College as a failed experiment. I can recall most of my past students by name, because by and large I am interested in them and I believe it is more important as an educator (and a human) to be 'interested', than 'interesting'. At Mount Royal I was trying too hard to be ‘interesting’. I cannot name any of my students from Mount Royal, because they were not my focus as they should have been.

One of the benefits of the properties shop at the University of Calgary was that it was a dedicated Drama Department space that was never accessed by any other department or outside rental group. (I will also speak to the uniqueness of this shop in the Space for Experimentation and Research section below.) It was the space where I taught my classes, built properties and scenery for the department shows and where I had my office. This meant that I was physically, almost always present in the learning space that my students were occupying and generally available to observe, answer questions or demonstrate techniques with little or no notice throughout the day. This enabled me to supervise student assistants, independent studies and more traditionally formatted classes simultaneously. It allowed for dialogue and learning to emerge in an organic, relaxed way. I was often criticized by fellow instructors for being overly
available, or that I was allowing the students to ‘use me’, but I am of the opinion that my very purpose as a teacher is to be ‘used’.

It is a case of allowing oneself to be used. It is not always understood that to be used is not always a diminishing experience. There is a proper use between friends, lovers, married couples, mother and child and also tutor and student. To be used can be enlivening for both the user and the used. (Graves, 2007, p.15)

### 4.3. Space for Experimentation and Research

As an educator of technical theatre arts and design, I am concerned with space for experimentation and research, not only physical space, but emotional and creative space. “Educational institutions have always claimed that the productions they mount are laboratories for classroom work, the equivalent of science labs” (Salzer, 2004, p.148). Production work is extremely valuable, but limited in time. A typical production period is six weeks. During the production process a student may only have access to the equipment associated with the production area that they are assigned to for that show. As discussed in Chapter 1, I was able to gain employment after I graduated from Mount Royal College due to access I had to computerized lighting equipment that my classmate, Leah Waddington Cooney, did not have access to. Open shop access gives students the option to experiment with equipment, building and paint methods outside of the constraints of production. Without easy access to practice with the equipment they will be using in the field, students are less prepared for employment on program completion.

Like Salzer, “I am a person who needs to make things. It matters little if it is a painting, piece of furniture or an article” (Salzer, 1995, p.viii). Through the making of things I am learning, experimenting, researching and often, clearing my mind. The properties shop that I had at the University was a fabulous functional lab for the students to make things, experiment and conduct research in a well equipped technical theatre laboratory with table saws, band saws, welding equipment, a healthy supply of consumable materials and a vast amount of open space in which to conduct practice-based research. Practice based researchers are “not ‘discovering’ new tools, they are carving them. And with the tools they sculpt, so too a space opens within the [research]
community where passion and rigor boldly intersect out in the open\textsuperscript{45} (Leavy, 2009, p.1). Arranging a laboratory for lighting students is generally a more complicated process. Lighting students require access to the actual theatre in order to truly experiment with the medium. “Lighting is not mysterious, but it is an artistic endeavour” (Bay, 1988, p.167). All artists need studio time and access to their materials in order to master their craft. Sound design has perhaps become the most accessible of the technical theatre media for students to experiment with thanks to the affordability of iPads equipped with GarageBand\textsuperscript{46} or any of the other readily available sound editing programs. “I’m really old fashioned where process is concerned: research and exploration, and learning who you are as a person and why this particular play is something that would be important to do in this day and age” (Tsu as quoted in Isackes, 2009, p. 36). There is no replacement for,

\begin{quote}
on the ground learning in the shop, you aren’t going to learn to paint better sitting in a classroom. You’re going to paint better, by painting. You aren’t going to learn lighting design sitting in a classroom, you’re going to learn it going into the theatre and messing around with the lighting. (Johnson-Carr, personal communication, May, 2014)
\end{quote}

At the University of Calgary, we were fortunate because we did not have to compete with rental groups accessing our shop and theatres spaces to generate revenue for the university, but not all drama and theatre departments have this luxury. The SFU School for Contemporary Arts and Ryerson Theatre School are both examples of departments that struggle with student access to the theatre facilities due to external revenue generating rentals.

\begin{quote}
We are in an unfortunate position where we don’t control our theatre, so the theatre is in the domain of the department that is in the business of making money, so renting out rooms for conferences. We have grandfathered in “x” number of days in the winter term and that’s all we get, so my ability to use the theatre as a classroom, in a classroom
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} Leavy’s italics.

\textsuperscript{46} GarageBand is a software application developed by Apple Inc. that allows users to easily compose and edit music and soundscapes
setting is somewhat limited.  

(Dolgoy, 2014, personal communication)

In addition to a well-equipped physical space to experiment and work in, in order for learning to occur and it is imperative that the students be the ones doing the production work. At Douglas College and Mount Royal College, the students were responsible for building and painting the set, acquiring and building all of the props, sewing all of the costumes, all of the lighting and sound requirements. The show belonged to the students showcasing their creativity. At the University of Calgary however, this was not the case. The sets, properties and costumes were staff responsibilities that only a handful of student assistants became directly involved with. Students worked on the lighting, sound and stage management only. However at U of C, BFA and MFA students carried some of the design load, while at Mount Royal and Douglas College, students vary rarely were given the opportunity to design. “Students only learn by designing, so it is a nefarious practice for faculty to hog all the juicy shows” (Bay, 1988, p.161) and likewise, students only learn to paint, build and sew by doing these things. They require space to put the methods we teach them into practice while they are at school in order for them to be successful when they graduate. As teachers we need to know when to back off and let the students dive in and attempt what we have taught them. They will make mistakes and they will have successes and they will learn from both.

The question of space for learning, leads me to emotional and creative space for students. Technical theatre arts and design are a form of performance and that performance requires an emotional connection to the work. Technical theatre arts and design students need to be encouraged to embrace the performativity of their craft. “They’re artists. They must have some poetry in their souls” (Salzer, 1995, p.12). Maxine Greene tells us that we should never allow our work to become routine and mechanical, rather than we need to be engaged with it and reflective on it. “No matter how technical my subject may be, the things I teach I care about – and what I care about helps define my selfhood” (Palmer, 2007, p.17).

47 Sholem Dolgoy, Director of Performance Production, Ryerson University.
It can be challenging to change attitudes to view the technical arts as performance. Technical theatre arts students can be at risk for being perceived as in a supporting role to the acting or dance students. “Courses and workshops in technical theatre…are not simply an underhanded way to accomplish the necessities of set construction and decoration; they are a part of an appropriate university curriculum” (Hopkins, n.d., p. 89). As part of a university curriculum the learning process for technical theatre arts and design students warrants a deeper level of interpretation and examination that they are often provided. The parallels between these two disciplines, performance and technical theatre arts, have become a fascination and a new pathway for me. The awareness that there was something more going on in my properties shop than simply creating university theatre productions prompted me to undertake graduate studies and enter onto a new path as a researcher of these complex social structures.

In the shop
when we
discovered how
contact cement, dried on sheets of plastic
then stretched lovingly
over plastic bones
creating sinew and skin-
that was performance.

(You should have been there)

In the shop
when we mixed pigment
with water
and allowed them intermingle
and flow, just so, into each other
in a dance of hue and transparent liquid-
that was performance.

(You should have been there.)

In the shop
where he stood
and told us that our life’s passion
and hours, muscles aching, bent toward
creation – was not art, not creative, not important
and we boldly responded “fuck you” -
that was performance.
(You should have been there.)

For technical theatre arts and design instructors, “bringing one’s students to a point where they independently pursue and generously appreciate the complex art of theatre provides the ultimate reward for the women and men who devote their lives to theatre education” (Hobgood, 1988, p.19). It is our job as technical theatre arts teachers to provide students with the space and support to do just that.

4.4. Continuous Learning for the Teacher

In the period of time from when I had left Mount Royal as a student and returned as a sessional instructor, the sound design technology at the college had made a significant leap forward. Sound had not yet fully succumbed to the digital revolution until my time at Douglas College. I had little experience with the type of digital editing technology (that has now become so ubiquitous it can be achieved by a ten year old with an iPad), and students were becoming increasingly computer savvy. “How fast must teachers of design run just to keep up with the technology, the aesthetics and of course, the students?” (Salzer, 2004, p.151-152). When I had learned sound design, it was as an analogue, tactile art that required precision and patience. Editing was done with a sharp ear and sharper razor blade. When I returned to teach it, it had become a computer function. There was a learning curve to overcome in order to teach this new technology to the students. At this point I realized that if I were to continue to teach that I had to make a concerted effort to keep up with the rapidly evolving technology and the students learning it.

I had a student whose ground plan was destroyed when somebody else got glue all over it. What he did was teach himself the computer program SketchUp, literally overnight, and produce a three-dimensional view of his project, much to the admiration of the other kids in his class. If they need

48 Style and format directly based on Saldaña, J. (2006). This is not a performance text. Qualitative Inquiry, 12(6), p. 1091-1098.
to learn a CAD [computer-aided design] program they'll learn it.”
(Kellogg as quoted in Isackes, 2009, p. 36 & 125)

In order to be an effective teacher I have to remain a lifelong student of technical theatre, constantly seeking new information and technology for my students. “The theatre requires more than clever minds and willing hands; it demands a full commitment in the use of self (body, mind and spirit)49 and an alert awareness of contemporary life (social, ideological and cultural)” (Hobgood, 1988, p.8). As I student, I was at times frustrated by instructors who either no longer worked professionally in the theatre or had never done so at all. As a teacher of technical theatre arts I believe that part of my responsibility to stay up to date with theory and technology includes applying that knowledge in the professional theatre, outside the walls of the academy. There is a Catch-22 in training to be a theatre designer in the first place and this being that, “the major employment site for designers who want to work in live theatre is the academy.” (Isackes, 2009, p. 130) With nearly 130 institutions offering degrees in technical theatre arts and design in the U.S., some technical theatre arts and design educators are concerned that we are training more technicians and designers than there is a need for, some remain at the school where they trained, to design and teach.50 “It’s not just the kids and curricula that need to be addressed. It’s the faculty members, many of whom have no real world experience themselves” (Schoeneman as quoted in Hoffer, 2011, p. 51).

Howard Bay (1988) lamented that the most depressing thing to hear in a theatre is “we don’t” or “we can’t” do it that way. It can be challenging to inspire the older generation of theatre makers to try new techniques and can be equally challenging to convince the younger generation, “all of whom are deeply involved on the computer” (Yeargan as quoted in Isackes, 2009, p 36) to trust low-tech solutions. Theatre

49 Hobgood’s parentheses.
technology, like all technologies now, is evolving at a faster rate than ever before. If we, the teachers, hesitate in embracing it, we miss the opportunities offered to create new pathways of knowledge, potential for employment and new methods for our students. “When in the course of evolution it is time to bridge the technologies, or to make adaptations in an evolutionary sense, the adaptive strategy is always flexibility. The animals that can do both what has been and what is coming are most likely to survive” (Goines, 1999, p. 16).

4.5. Trust

Full time positions in university and college drama, theatre or performance departments do not open up on a regular basis. When I was hired by the Department of Drama at the University of Calgary I was the first new hire in nearly fifteen years. The department dynamic was firmly established and I was determined to fit in and gain their acceptance before trying out any ideas for change or improvement. “Jerome Robbins liked to say that you do your best work after your biggest disasters” (Tharp, 2004, p. 214), and my biggest teaching disaster had been at Mount Royal College. I had several years to reflect on where I had gone wrong at Mount Royal and I was excited at the prospect of working with students again. Freelance theatre work never fulfilled me in the same way that working with students does. In my experience, professional theatre lacks the quality of playfulness and willingness (or option) to make mistakes as theatre in the academy.

The students at the University of Calgary were as firmly set in their dynamic as the faculty. My predecessor who had also been one of my properties instructors at Mount Royal College was well loved by the students. It is difficult to replace a beloved teacher. It took time to build relationships with the other staff members, faculty and students. I wanted the job at the University of Calgary to be a long-term position so it was essential to be actively aware of my attitudes. I had to fight negative habitual actions, such as trying to make a situation form to my thinking rather than being open to new ideas. I had to sit back and watch and listen to these students and instructors in their own established environment, I had to learn to be involved, but not so involved that I was inattentive or dismissive of the actions and values being performed around me. I
had to give the students and faculty time and room to allow me into their creative space both metaphorically and literally. Being collaboratively creative requires trust. I had to earn that trust before I could be indoctrinated into the group and invited ‘to play’.

In a teaching situation, listening, initially includes an opportunity for the student to relax, confident that s/he is being heard…If a student can hear their own voice they may be able to play with another voice without feeling that the other voice destroys their own

(Graves, 2007, p. 16-17).

At both Douglas and Mount Royal, I only had my students for a year or two at most. At the U of C I had them for four years and had time to develop an understanding of who they were as individuals. John Dewey suggested, “The principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized in the degree in which individuals form a community group” (Dewey, 1963, p. 25). I now had twice the amount of time to build relationships and become a trusted member of their educational and creative community. More time with the students offered me more ‘data’ to tailor my teaching methods to my students.

The structure of the four-year BFA program allowed us, instructors and students, time for conversation and dialogues to emerge while working alongside each other in the shops and studios. The teacher/student continuity of four years rather than two allowed for a more in-depth, trusting relationships to occur between student/teacher and student/student.

In the teaching situation, as in many others, it begins with trust. Trust between tutor and student is built up in a number of ways. The student must be given enough time…Second, it depends on a particular kind of friendship, which involves restraint and reticence.

(Graves, 2007, p. 15)

With many of the undergraduate students those four years covered the formative years between ages 18 and 24; years when many young adults are developing a stronger sense of identity. The shop spaces and the theatre were safe places to debate and discuss issues of gender, politics and parents. It was a place where people fell in love and out of it. It was where some discovered a talent they did not realize they had or
had to face the reality that they did not have the talent they had hoped. Through all of
this was a ongoing conversation and dialogue, sometimes seemingly about nothing, but
always truly about something. It is in these conversations that I first began to realize the
emerging and hidden curricula that were happening in my shop, although I did not have
the language at that time to articulate what I was observing.

I was instinctively aware that,

the most important conversations, heard and unheard, emerge from play.
Play is a form of physical talking. If we look at the work of Piaget, play is
the basis of future development: from circular reactions, through sensory
motor intelligence to casual understanding.

(Graves, 2007, p. 16)

At the University of Calgary, while observing how the students and faculty
interacted, particularly in the properties shop, I began to see that the shop spaces and
the theatre were a place of transformation, creativity and often healing. There are
diverse levels of human communication that occur while working on a production with
other people. There are complex forms of learning that are taking place.

They call it a ‘play’ for a reason
As children, play allows us
To create and explore worlds we can master
Conquering fears and trying on different roles
We negotiate, resolve conflict, learn to make decisions
And self advocacy.
As we grow, we forget how to play
We are told to leave childish pursuits behind.
We stop creating, fail to master our own lives
Develop fears and become trapped in our roles
We compromise, avoid conflict and loathe decisions
We advocate for everyone, except our true selves.
Theatre invites us back
To remind us the power
In ‘play’.
If you have never thought about why these stage stories
Are called ‘plays’
Stop and remember the last time you felt
Invincible, creative and brave.

“There has recently emerged a welcoming new climate within both higher
education and theatre education, one that encourages us to think about what we do and
why we do it" (Gillespie, 2004, p xii). After a few years of being established within the Drama Department at U of C. I began to think about what I was doing as an educator and why I was doing it in addition to just trying to decide how to do it. I was, after all an accidental educator. I have approached teaching much as I have approached technical theatre arts and design, through research, experimentation, trial and error and learning from my mentors. When I find a method that works, I tuck it away in my toolbox to use next time I am faced with a similar problem but like a theatre production, “classroom situations are always new and never alike twice” (Greene, 1978, p.6). which is perhaps part of the appeal for me. The process is always adapting and evolving. Now that I have undertaken graduate studies in Arts Education, I have a greater understanding of how I teach, why I teach the way that I do, the realities of teaching technical theatre arts in the academy, what I think works and what I believe needs to change.

The following chapter is an overview of how research plays a role in technical theatre arts and design for students and educators. It provides a framework of my research goals and how I seek to apply them in the advocacy of reform for technical theatre arts in the academy.
Chapter 5.

Technical Theatre Arts Technician and Designer as Researcher

In this chapter I examine my role as an emerging researcher in the interdisciplinary fields of theatre and higher education. I outline some of my research goals for technical theatre arts in the academy, and make specific recommendations for reform in the current technical theatre arts and design curriculum. The recommendations are for changes in curriculum format and outlook that will allow for greater interdisciplinary collaboration and the exploration of technical theater arts as creative research. While research has always been a function of my work as a technical artist and designer in the theatre in order to realize the design of a play, my role as a researcher of the processes and practices of the discipline of technical theatre arts and design and its pedagogy is relatively new.

5.1. Research and the Technical Theatre Artist or Designer

I am an artist, a storyteller, a poet, a theatre designer and a researcher. My narrative as researcher began the first time I put pen to paper and brush to canvas. My creative activities have always served as places of research and discovery; if I add red to blue I am rewarded with purple; if I compose my words just so I feel something; when I position a light in a specific location I am communicating an idea with the audience. I was told from a very young age that I am ‘talented’ and while this may be true, I think what I actually am is a person inclined to work creatively. Comedian John Cleese stated
that “creativity is not a talent, it is a way of operating” (1991). As a child I observed that by being creative one could solve problems and find answers, I was conducting creative research.

My father is known by friends and family as “MacGyver”, and I have always been inspired and motivated by his ability to find solutions that others may not come up with. As an example, when I was about eleven, I dropped the keys for our boat off the end of the pier where it was docked. The lake water was murky and deep so we could not see the keys. Rather than cancelling the boat excursion, my Dad got out his ever-present toolbox and disconnected the radio speaker from inside our camper van. He opened the speaker and removed the magnet inside that helps to create the sound waves that are emitted. Dad took the magnet, attached it to a fishing line which he dropped into the lake and within minutes had fished the lost keys out of the water and into his hand. I was aware from a young age that a little knowledge combined with the willingness to think outside of the box can net results... and lost keys. I self identified as an artist and writer very early in life, but only recently have begun to view my creative work as research and myself as a researcher.

To be a researcher of the discipline technical theatre arts and design is unusual. To be a researcher of the pedagogy of technical theatre arts and design is even more unusual. The research done by technical theatre artists and designers is normally in the direct service of the production. “Drawing on long standing theatrical tradition, some directors still feel only they can research and synthesize critical and historical material” (Gainor & Wilson, 1995, p.70). Theatre technicians are not generally viewed as researchers, however, there is a great deal of research that goes into a quality production of a play.

51 From a speech on “Creativity” given by John Cleese at Hotel Grosvenor House, London England 1991

52 MacGyver – The hero of an American television series of the same name who was know for being able to arrive at creative solutions to dire and/or dangerous situations with minimal time and materials to work with. The series ran on the ABC network from 1985-1992.
I was encouraged as a student at Mount Royal College to do research that related to my technical work in theatre. Students were encouraged to research everything from the composers of the music chosen for sound tracks to the biographies of the playwright and the histories of the location of the story being told. We were expected to have an understanding of why our creative choices mattered.

I put the question to my community of practice, “Were you taught, as a student technician to think about ‘why’ you were making the choices you were, why you painted the floor a certain colour, why the carriage should be white and not blue, why the furniture should be blue and not brown, why wear black?” Some responses included:

*I'm going to say that it depended. When designing – yes, you had to have a why you were choosing the light or paint colours. And sometimes those answers were budget related. As a technician – no. The why was because the designer wanted it that way.*

(Niesa Silzer\(^{53}\), Instructor, Event Management, MRU. Personal communication, July 8, 2015).

*I was taught to do this IN DEPTH as an acting student. So when it came time to do it as a scenic painter (which was on the job …not in school) it seemed like an obvious and necessary approach*

( Julia Henderson, UBC PhD. Candidate, Personal communication, July 8, 2014).

*Nope. Yes as an actor for sure, but never did I hear or realize that stage sets were based on deeper ideas other than creating a flowing set that looked right.*

(Jody Quine\(^{54}\), Singer/Songwriter, Improviser, Personal communication, July 8, 2014)

“Ironically, it is common practice to encourage students in acting classes to research their roles, but in production they are rarely prompted to such explorations” (Gainor & Wilson, 1995, p. 70). An important part of the technical theatre arts training for

\(^{53}\) Niesa Silzer was a member of my graduating class at Mount Royal College. She has served as the stage manager for the Canadian and United States touring productions of *Ragtime* and *Mamma Mia!* She also holds a BFA from York University and a Masters in Hospitality Administration from the University of Nevada. She now teaches Event Management at Mount Royal University (previously College).

\(^{54}\) Jody Quine is a singer/songwriter, improviser, and graphic artist. We worked together at Loose Moose Theatre and she attended the University of Calgary Drama Department.
some of my colleagues and me was to consider ‘why’ we made the creative and aesthetic choices we did during production. It has been my experience in some settings however, that technicians are not asked to consider why they are making the creative choices they are, and the actors are not necessarily being taught to question the staged environments they are working in.

As an artist, designer and teacher of technical theatre arts and design I have learned the importance of interdisciplinary research to my work. Knowledge of art history, for example, plays a large role in a technical theatre artist’s toolbox. “Audiences are conditioned by the accumulation of centuries, and you must pick out of the debris the precise artefact relevant to a given script. The right material might be hidden in the margins” (Bay, 1988, p. 166).

An effective technician or designer is a broad researcher. “Scanning a designer’s library you will come upon the damndest publications: Household Hints for the Gentlewoman, Manual of School Buildings in Rural Pennsylvania for 1868, Guide for the Home Carpenter, Slave Quarters in the Tidewater Plantations55 and on and on” (Bay, 1988, p. 166).

Props artists’ research,
- the perfect recipe for stage blood
- How to tie a hangman’s noose – so it will fail, every time
- The perfect magnetic ‘blinky’ light
- …and more

Lighting designer’s research,
- Oil lamps of numerous eras - Greek, Egyptian, Restoration.
- The colours in a Monet painting.
- How sun reflects off snow
- …and more

Sound designers research,
- Music, ancient instruments, the perfect 1970’s doorbell
- The differences in dog barks
- Television commercial jingles
- …. and more

55 Bay’s italics.
Costumer’s research,
Cut and drape and texture
Fashion and fit and form
foundation garments
... and more

Scenic artists research,
Trompe l’oeil
Adhesives
... and more

Technical theatre artists
Research all sorts of things.
... and more
... and more
... and more

Research for the purpose of the play has always been an enjoyable occupation for me, so the transition into examining ‘why’ in addition to ‘how’ and ‘when’ was a natural one. Research matters in the applied field of technical theatre arts and design, but also for furthering our understanding of the pedagogy of technical theatre arts and design, the challenges and limitations, and what steps are required to create a healthy vibrant practice of theatre arts.

Too many theatre departments for too long have been frozen in place, changing details but avoiding examining what might be their full potential role in the university and (...) society...how many of today’s theatre departments will be around ten years from now? (Schechner, 1992, p.8)

5.2. Reasons for Research in Technical Theatre Arts and Design Pedagogy

As a student and as an educator I have witnessed Theatre Department budget cuts, loss of faculty and support staff positions, courses and program cancellations and have become interested in developing strategies to strengthen the position of technical theatre arts and design in the academy. As a technical theatre arts researcher and educator, I am concerned that any compartmentalization or self-segregation of an art weakens its position in a modern academy that is increasingly focused on inter and
 cross-disciplinary study. “Interdisciplinary” has become a buzzword in the academy as we energetically try to find ways to transcend the traditional boundaries of our discipline in teaching, research, and creative activity…” (Gainor & Wilson 1995, p. 69).

The emergence of technical theatre arts and design studies as a discipline in the academy was a long and complex development beginning primarily in the English literature departments. The first North American university credited with a theatre program that was inclusive of production as part of the curriculum was Carnegie Tech in 1913. The program was created by Thomas Woods Stevens and according to Shannon Jackson was almost intuitively interdisciplinary, “likeness and unlikeness were drawn in relation to other forms; a relation to architecture, painting and music that emphasizes drama’s graphic, material, temporal, sonic and spatial elements” (2004, p.65).

“In this kind of climate, theatre programmes are not deemed a sound investment” (Hurley, 1998 p. 1). It is critical at this point to ensure that the performance and the production streams of our departments are participating in an interdisciplinary dialogue within the academy and with industry, promoting the application of a technical theatre education beyond the theatre walls. “[I]nterdisciplinarity is a necessary survival strategy in a period when the performing arts are under increasing attack as inefficient “extras”, both in the university and in public culture” (Hurley, 1998, p. 1). Acting, performance and

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56 Gainor & Wilson’s quotation marks.
58 Carnegie Tech or Carnegie Institute of Technology is Carnegie Mellon University’s College of Engineering. Located in Pittsburgh PA.
applied theatre have been recognized as valuable training in other fields such as law, education and health care.

The dramatic arts are a rich vehicle for exploring the complex relationships between doctors, patients and families. Theatre also provides a framework to reflect on the rapidly evolving ethical, legal and social implications of emerging technologies and treatments (Performing Medicine, 2014).

I contend that there are also applications for technical theatre arts and design to make a social contribution and that dedicated research into the pedagogy and process could ensure that it is “well-positioned to take advantage of the changes apparent in academic culture” (Hurley, 1998, p. 2).

In addition to the stability of technical theatre arts and design in the academy, there is a need for research on whether the pedagogical needs of the technical theatre arts students are compromised within the current system. As an educator of technical theatre arts and design students, I have observed that their pedagogical experiences are often determined and adversely compromised by the curricular needs of the performance and directorial students. From the outset, the technical student is at a disadvantage for time spent on their discipline and the value of the lessons offered during that time. Bay suggests that successful training demands that,

[All aspirants, whether in sets, costumes or lights take everything, including all technical courses. They will be haggard at the end of the first year, but they will know what colour medium does what to their fabrics and that all is possible in the shops, even if a saw is a strange utensil. (Bay, 1988, p. 161)

59 Applied theatre is an umbrella term under which grassroots theatre, social theatre, political theatre, radical theatre, reminiscence theatre, prison theatre, theater of the oppressed, theatre for health education, community-based theatre, museum theatre, theatre for development, theatre in education and popular theatre practices are embraced. For more information, see Applied Theatre: International Cases Studies and Challenges for Practice (2009) Prendergast M. & Saxton J. (Eds.)

Often it is not until their second year of studies that the technical theatre arts student can begin to focus on their art form, while the performance student has already had considerably more time with their specialty. Beyond being relegated to a supporting cast for performers, technical theatre arts and design students also risk seeing their courses slowly being phased out, as theatre departments seek to manage budgets, and to turn to performance studies as the new curricular focus.

My recommendation for research on the pedagogies and various applications of technical theatre to happen now is motivated by “a sense that practitioners and theorists alike are questioning these old ideological assumptions” (Dolan, 1993, p. 424). Artists, researchers and teachers require a solid grounding in the traditions, literature and practice of their discipline. Exposure to and understanding of the tradition and history is “not restrictive, but liberating. Mastery of the basics is pre-requisite for innovation” (Ezell & Londre, 1988, p.44). Recognition of the creative research enacted within the art of technical theatre arts and design is critical if we are to legitimize the practice beyond, scenery, paint and falling chandeliers.

To return to the beginning of this thesis and the questions posed by Fels and Belliveau (2008), “What if? What matters? So what? Who cares?” I ask:

What if the pedagogy and practice of theatre arts and design fails to evolve to keep pace with the changing academic climate or respond to the new paradigm of interdisciplinarity in performing arts?

Without serious intervention theatre arts and design will likely become relegated to a few generalized courses that provide basic instruction to support the production needs of departmental productions. Professional performance has changed to embrace new technologies like multimedia projections, and within universities performance studies is gaining popularity as a site for innovative interdisciplinary research. “Performance studies is a small but growing discipline that has recently emerged from theatre studies, expanding to become an interdisciplinary study of performance cross-culturally and in a range of social and cultural contexts.” (Sawyer, 2010, p. 12).
Academic and professional theatres continue to battle shrinking funding opportunities. If we do not teach our technical theatre artists how to exist and thrive within this new paradigm, they risk becoming antiquated and unnecessary. Similar to performance artists, technical theatre artists and designers have the potential to be the new avant-garde and influence a new culture of performance. With these goals in mind I suggest the following recommendations for curriculum reform.

5.3. Recommendations to Strengthen the Technical Theatre Arts and Design Curriculum in the Academy

In this thesis, I have given myself the task of using the insight gained through ethnographic study to reimagine what the curriculum for technical theatre arts and design could be. In my commitment to continued advocacy for the betterment of technical theatre arts and design in the academy, I propose four key transformations that need to occur:

a) Technical Theatre Arts as Creative Research

b) Collaborative Creation by Technicians and Performers

c) Stage and Design Beyond the Theatre; and

d) Alternative Methods in Production Programming

My objective is to outline a model for a pedagogy in the technical theatre arts that promotes interdisciplinarity, utilizes aspects of performance studies and breaks down existing stereotypes and hierarchies in theatre production that could be adopted into existing technical theatre arts and design departments. These changes to current curriculum could provide technical students with an education that is more capable of developing critical and creative thinking and problem solving skills that are transferable across other disciplines. These changes would increase the interdisciplinary profile of

technical theatre arts and design and increase the stability of these programs in the academy.

I have suggested changes based on the idea that the technical theatre arts and design can be sites of praxis based research, reflexive inquiry and creative research. They are also a form of performative inquiry.

Performative inquiry creates opportunities for students to interact reciprocally, to take creative tasks, and to come to an understanding of the “real world” in an interactive and reflective way…performative inquiry stimulates creative and critical thinking, motivates and encourages students their learning, and frames and communicates complex situations or concepts within a context that makes these ideas or issues meaningful and applicable. (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p.43)

These recommendations integrate aspects of performance studies and support my theory that the production process is performative and can be used as arts based inquiry and creative research for university students. Performance studies is at heart, interdisciplinary according to Jon McKenzie,

Performance studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that draws from the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. It focuses on the pervasiveness of performance as a central element of social and cultural life, including not only theater and dance but also such forms as sacred rituals and practices of everyday life, storytelling and public speaking, avant-garde performance art, popular entertainments, micro constructions of ethnicity, race, class, sex, and gender, world fairs and heritage festivals, nonverbal communication, play and sports, political demonstrations and electronic civil disobedience, sex shows and drag performance—potentially any instance of expressive behavior or cultural enactment. (2005, n.p.)

The following recommendations are intended to promote greater interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary learning opportunities for collaborative creation, creative research and performative inquiry for technical theatre arts and design student in the academy.

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62 McKenzie’s quotation marks.
5.4. Technical Theatre Arts as Creative Research

*Be aware, chart, share, reflect, never become a bit player in your own* ‘system’, *defy old habits while drawing upon their experience* (Leroux, 2012, p. 99).

The production process in theatre contains several touchstone points that should be utilized for technical theatre arts and design students to undertake reflexive praxis including; script selection; build/installation; technical and dress rehearsals; show and strike. I suggest that the production process as it is contains organic spaces for inquiry. Louis Patrick Leroux encourages theatre students to, “Be aware, chart, share, reflect, never become a bit player in your own ‘system’, defy old habits while drawing upon their experience” (Leroux, 2012, p. 99). Leroux’s words of encouragement are meant for the performers, but these are equally appropriate for the technical theatre arts and design students.

Strike in particular is a gift of reflexive potential. It allows us time to reconcile how we negotiated our relationships with our fellow collaborators, the material we worked with, what we have created, artistic choices we made and how they affected the fabric of the show. “There was a reason for biology students to draw what they saw under the microscope or when they were dissecting a frog” (Salzer, 2004 p. 153). Strike is an opportunity to “dissect the frog” of the production process and reflect on how all of the internal processes have succeeded or failed.

Documenting the process followed in order to be show ready is often a large grade point for a performance student, but almost never a requirement for a technical theatre arts student, so that at the end of a show, they have no notes to refer back to in order to reflect on creative and aesthetic choices they may have made in a moment. Maxine Greene said, “to learn and to teach, one must have an awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new, and this kind of awareness must be linked to imagination” (Greene, 1995, p.20). By providing our technical theatre arts students with a system for reviewing their own creative research they will be better equipped to recognize their own artistic imprint on a collaborative arts discipline.
The production process offers technical theatre arts and design students several different options for beginning a reflexive inquiry of their creative work. The reflexive inquiry could include beginning a journal, an ongoing collage or sketchbook. Lynn Fels has developed a creative system for reflection that she calls ePostcards. “ePostcards are simple. All you need is: A stop moment. A quote from one of the readings. An image. Create a postcard-length narrative of your stop moment, what you learned, and why it matters.” (Fels, 2014, p.18). For technical theatre arts students, the reading could be from the script they are working with or other reading they may have been assigned in a technical theatre arts course, or research they have needed to do in order to perform their production assignment. An image could include a photo of the production component they may be working on such as a costume or set piece. The postcard length narrative offers just enough space for experiences of wonder, revelation, frustration or elation to be noted without becoming overwhelming for students who are not regularly required to write about their technical work.

Fels ePostcards are an excellent fit with the production process as they present a moment to stop, reflect and move on during a hectic period. Perhaps beginning with their reading of the script, technical theatre students could find a quote within the text from which to begin their production inquiry. As a student of Lynn Fels at Simon Fraser University, I was fortunate to have experienced using ePostcards as a method for sharing observations, ideas and dialogue with my fellow graduate students. The ability for technical theatre students to present their ePostcards in a secure online forum to share their processes could be invaluable.

Continuing through the production process, the ePostcards could be encouraged after the build and install period to examine how build time is experimentation time. Building a play is creativity at its peak. Build is playtime. Build is the time for generosity, cross-pollination and sharing ideas. This is a process that requires individual skill and technique, but also demands an intra-disciplinary openness and willingness to dialogue.

Build normally happens over a 4-6 week time period, with a weekly production meeting with all of the departments to sit and communicate ideas, progress and problems. Production meetings are a place where the build process can be orchestrated into a harmonious co-creation or it can become a place of contention, resistance and stress. Production meetings are an excellent tool, to teach students the skills they need to communicate well in any collaborative process. These skills include 1) attentive and careful listening, 2) visual and oral communication of concepts of colour, space, texture, tempo and architecture 3) reaching consensus. There are many times during the production process that the technical artist will be required to make changes to work that they have already invested time and emotion into. Being able to accept those changes and continue to be creative is an important lesson that could be shared and discussed using Fel's ePostcard method.

Continuing on to technical rehearsals, they are a process rich with imbedded ritual, cultural tradition and are a physically and emotionally exhausting experience. The rituals involve preparing the space by bringing tables and table lamps into the audience area for the designers and director to convene and collaborate. We run hundreds of feet of Clearcom cable so that stage management and the lighting and sound operators and flymen can communicate and we test it to ensure we can be heard speaking directly into each other's ears. In the theatre there is a hush, not unlike when you enter the main chamber of a church.

As part of the cast and crew you can sense that something is becoming alive, like Frankenstein’s monster. The play is jolted into being with thousands of volts of electricity pulsing through humming dimmer racks, transformed into coloured and textured light pointed at the stage and the actors. The technical crew don “blacks”, the costume of the technical theatre artist. The ‘rules of play’ are reviewed with everyone in the room, no talking unless asked to, no moving unless directed to, stop speaking your line when told

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64 Clearcom is a brand name of a headset communication system used in a majority of theatres, also commonly shortened to ‘coms’

65 Flymen operate the rigging system above a proscenium stage flying scenery in or out of the stage area as needed. The term is generally accepted as a masculine term and rarely updated to ‘flyperson’.
to, no eating, drinking, smoking on stage, in the wings, in costume. If the prop is not yours, don’t touch it. If it is yours, don’t touch it if you aren’t on stage. Be ready, be quiet, be attentive, “none of this is in the text. Theatre is action: a movement, ineluctable, unstoppable, violently throwing itself upon its inevitable catastrophe. Everything else is hypothetical.” (Leroux, 2012, p.97)

Theatre is visual and asking technical theatre arts students to document their process without a visual image would be a wasted opportunity. Asking technical theatre arts students to choose only one or two visuals for an ePostcard could be an exercise in focus, what is drawing their eye? What might draw the audience member’s eye?

It is a tradition in many theatres for performers and technicians to write thank you notes to each other. For some the thank you’s are offered as the show opens before an audience, for some, thank you’s come on the closing night. The ePostcard could be a unique opportunity for both technical and performance students to have a platform for sharing their thanks with the entire cast and crew rather than individual to individual. The cast and crew could do both, offering first their hopes and expectations for the coming run of the show and ending with thanks and reflections of the performance period. To finish off, the final ePostcard from the technical theatre arts students would come from their experience of the strike.

Employing Lynn Fel’s ePostcards during production could provide a much needed opportunity for technical theatre students “to revisit, critique, reconsider, reimagine choices of action, responses, and decisions taken during a particular pedagogical activity as well as in our every day lives” (Fels, 2014, p. 6) Positive reform in technical theatre arts curriculum does not need to be a long arduous process as there are many existing methodologies and practices, like Fels, that have already been successfully implemented into non-technical theatre arts courses.
5.5. Collaborative Creation by Technicians and Performers

Collaborative creation is already taught in many theatre/performance departments, including Simon Fraser University\(^{66}\) and The University of Calgary\(^{67}\) geared toward acting or performance students. In a collaborative creation course, as a class or in small groups, students learn how to, take a concept, create a performance around it and then perform it. The performance could be anything, a scripted piece, dance, an improvisation or an art installation. Without the technical or design students also in the process, performance students are missing alternate points of entry into their collaborative creation. What would occur if the performance evolved from a series of lighting cues created by the technical students or if the lighting was performed live on stage in response to how the dancers moved?

Thanks in part to the emergence of performance studies, there is a growing trend toward interdisciplinary creative collaboration within the arts. Collaborative creation is taking place between the visual arts and music and between dance and film and many other combinations. Consequently there is a wealth of innovative performance that could occur if the entry point into the creative inquiry came through the technical theatre arts, for example in the form of scenic painting or costume design. Teaching both performance and technical students that the process does not always need to be one of, "script, rehearsal, build, tech, perform," informs them that perhaps the process can begin elsewhere or that perhaps there is already performance occurring in the interstitial spaces of their process that they can explode through inquiry and playful intervention.

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\(^{66}\) FPA 285-3 Interdisciplinary Studio - Composition/Collaboration. An introduction to the techniques of artistic composition as experienced in a collaborative interdisciplinary studio environment. The emphasis is on the creation, analysis and critique of new compositions created in collaborative groups by students in dance, music, theatre, film/video and visual art. Prerequisite: FPA 111 and one of FPA 122, 130, 145, 150, 160, 170 or permission of the instructor.

\(^{67}\) Drama 364 – Performance Creation, Explorations in personal/group creative process; facilitation of performance forms that may include sound and movement exploration, storytelling, ritual, mask, puppetry, and the collaborative creation of original performance. Theory and history of performance creation is integrated with practical experience.
Collaborative creation can help to level the playing field and break down theatre conventions and hierarchies that insist that only directors have creative vision and that only performers perform. Group creativity scholar, R. Keith Sawyer suggests that the key components of creative collaboration are,

*Improvisation:* in most forms of group creativity, the creativity happens in the moment of the encounter. In music and theater, the performers are not mere interpreters; they are creative artists.

*Collaboration:* the creativity of a group cannot be associated with any one person. All members contribute and their interactional dynamics result in the performance.

*Emergence:* emergence refers to collective phenomena in which, as it is said, ‘the whole is greater than the sum of the parts’. Recent studies of emergence by complexity scholars suggest that emergent phenomena are unpredictable, contingent and hard to explain in terms of the group’s components.

(Sawyer, 2006 p.153)

All three of these are components that I regularly observed at Loose Moose Theatre. Improvisation was the creative practice undertaken as the group collaborated together to create a weekly comedy show. What emerged was often entertaining for the audience and experiential learning for the improvisers, but sometimes it was neither. Sometimes a performance failed to garner the desired results, but sometimes failure is part of creative research.

Collaborative creation is practice-based artistic research. It is experiential, reflective and communicative. One of its main concerns is finding ways of making available for others the tacit knowledge that usually characterizes artists’ creative processes. In making such knowledge available for reflection and communication, the practice-based researcher participates in the production not only of art but also of new knowledge on procedures and creation/devising processes that may be of benefit to other theatre artists, scholars and researchers. Using all aspects of the theatre/performance space as a lab for creative inquiry; lighting equipment, projection and multimedia, sound systems, scenic elements as well as performance surfaces, students would learn to frame a question that can be investigated through different starting points within the medium. Students would examine how their individual arts
disciplines can come together collectively to define a research question, to investigate and creative a unified product and,

outline their relationships to each other and suggest that each function is only meaningful in terms of the whole set. One cannot discuss a single frame without referring to the others, because it is only within a pattern of relationships that a specific phenomenon takes place. (Schechner, 2003, p.18)

For example, rather than beginning from a script, students may choose to begin building a collaborative project from a piece of music, art, a photograph or image and bring in other elements of performance and production to experiment with the diverse directions that their inquiry could take.

Creative collaboration that is inclusive of the technical theatre arts and design students provides an opportunity for them to see their own creative agency within a piece of theatre that they may not see otherwise. The ability to work collaboratively is a skill that is gaining more demand with employers. Creative collaboration promotes interdisciplinary research: the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) offers a grant for a Collaborative Research and Training Experience.\(^{68}\) The academy is increasingly seeking to collaborate with industry and vice versa, “Universities can be major resources in a company’s innovation strategy” (Pertuzé et al., 2010, p. 83) A curriculum outcome that demonstrates the development of collaboration skills could make technical theatre arts in the academy more secure and marketable.

5.6. Design Beyond the Stage

Teaching technical theatre arts students to design beyond the confines of the stage is a particularly difficult curricular change to make, but one that is critical if technical theatre arts and design are to survive in the academy.

Theatre’s connection to its audience is threatened by issues of accessibility: high ticket prices, an abundance of cheaper, more convenient, technological alternatives (television, movies, the internet), and, perhaps most importantly, lack of relevant content in a diverse world. Site-specific theatre— theatre adapted to the architecture and/or landscape of pre-existing communal spaces— serves as a possible solution for communities attempting to engage changing demographic groups with shared cultural experience. (Randle, 2011, p.1)

Theatres on university campuses are revenue-generating spaces that are used by multiple departments. Some are dedicated spaces for the theatre department, but many are not. Theatre, music, film and dance departments negotiate for performance and classroom time in them.

Teaching and learning on campus takes place within specific physical settings that are integral to the process. However, these same facilities now threaten to impede the implementation of more student-centered and flexible learning approaches being introduced in higher education worldwide. (Jamieson, 2007, p.1)

Multi-use performance spaces create another set of challenges. The floor is the right surface for the dancers, but the cellos cannot rest on them without creating holes. The fresh white ceilings and maple walls create lovely acoustics for the musicians but are a theatre lighting nightmare. The university wants to rent the space to outside paying customers, but the departments need time in them to teach and perform. “The theatre department hasn’t had free use of the University Theatre space since first moving from the old campus to the new one in 1998” (McEwen, n.p. 2012). Performance studies has perhaps found the way around the infrastructure issues that plague theatre departments.

Performance studies often do not require a theatre or a dedicated performance space. Performances can be site specific or occur in found environments, which could limit the opportunities for the technical and design students to partake in the process. Consequently to remain viable and current, theatre design educators would be wise to explore how to teach these students to take their design ideas out of the theatre

69 Google search of the phrase universities with theatres for rent resulted in 10,000,000 hits. A review of the first ten pages of results showed universities in Canada and the United States for rent including SFU, UBC, University of Calgary, University of Victoria, Ryerson, York, University of Alberta, Dalhousie.
machine and into non-traditional spaces. Richard Schechner suggests that a theatre is simply a place to enact or stage a performance and that some preparation of that space, "transformation of space into place" is all that is required for a theatre to be constructed. (Schechner, 1988, p.174). Technical theatre arts and design students need to encouraged to concern themselves with these site specific places of theatre and devise new methods for designing for them.

Auslander quotes Herb Blau who wrote, “it is theatre [...] which haunts all of performance whether or not it occurs in the theatre” (Auslander, 1995, p.180). Theatre practitioners need to trust that embracing some aspects of performance studies does not mean that we cease to be theatre. Many of us who are designers are reluctant to admit that performance studies is forcing our hand and causing us to have to rethink what theatre design is, but if we do not keep pace, it will leave us behind. “Discipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected space of disciplinary monotony” (Foucault, 1979. trans. Sheridan, p. 141). Technical theatre arts and design is being held back by its own protected space of disciplinary monotony and fear of change.

Understandably, some faculty who teach technical theatre arts and design are resistant to approaching theatre design in a manner more akin to performance studies, as some were resistant to embracing computerized technologies into the theatre. Beeb Salzer asked, “What part of the training from our old bag of tricks is still valid and what part should be deracinated? Thinking about these questions I sometimes feel as if I am being dragged by a speeding train (2004, p. 152).

“Whether they acknowledge it or not, Theatre departments in general are training students for little more than the largely moribund institutions of mainstream regional theatre, even to the point of having their theatre buildings imitate regional theatre architecture” (Marranca, 1995, p.57). Marranca is perhaps a bit harsh, however many technical theatre arts students are on a path that has not wavered from what is was 20, 30 or even 40 years ago, when your only option after you graduated was to look for a job at the local theatre company. Some students graduate from theatre departments and create fledgling companies, where they are often met with the harsh realities of the
overhead costs of renting a legitimate theatre venue. With the knowledge that theatre can happen anywhere, graduated theatre studies and technical theatre arts and design students will be less dependent on sources of government or corporate funding to realize their artistic vision.

“I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (Brook, 1968, p.7) If we teach theatre design in accordance with Schechner’s proposal, that holding the concept of space into place equals theatre, then we are positioning ourselves to take design beyond the walls of the theatre building that constrains us. Czech scenographer Josef Svoboda said,

If a characteristic of theatre is the act of transformation, which converts a stage into a dramatic space, an actor into a dramatic character and a visitor into a spectator, then even theatre space, architectonically speaking, must achieve a higher quantitative level and be transformed. After all, it’s not a matter of theatre space but of the space for a production, therefore, production space and that is fundamentally different from theatre space (1993, p. 20).

It may be necessary to devise, within the curriculum for theatre design, room for more than one approach to theatre design. Departments might offer one course that speaks to designing within the walls and architecture of the traditional theatre and another that speaks to a more transformational, scenographic approach to found spaces 70. Benedict Anderson suggests that, “The discursive nature of site-specific work involves site as subject. Site-specific performance is predominantly actualized by responding to the physical conditions, spatial atmosphere and history of the site. (2013, p.109). Anderson’s point allows me to circle back to the idea of an interdisciplinary collaborative creation approach where a production concept may come directly from the place chosen for the performance. Anderson also argues that, “Theatre space is principally forged by capital” (2013, p. 109). That dependence on capital or the continued

70 In a review of the course listings of the technical theatre programs in Canada, the only institution, which listed a course where site specific scenography is part of the syllabus, was at the University of Regina.
ongoing financial dependence for infrastructure within the academy is a key factor that puts technical theatre arts and design at risk for being cut during times of budget reform.

Accepting elements of site-specific scenography into the technical theatre arts and design curriculum would offer a level of flexibility that does not currently exist in most departments. This flexibility alone would ensure some fiscal relief for straining departmental budgets. Theatre Departments that are less dependent on the physical infrastructure of the University to meet the curricular needs met by production, leaving the theatre spaces available for outside rentals may be appealing to Universities facing budget cuts. Technical theatre arts students also need to be made aware of specific non-traditional theatre avenues that are available to them. These include film and television, themed parks and events, multi-media production, education and health care. If program shortfalls could be lessened by moving one show per season out of the theatre walls, that could result in greater security for technical theatre arts in the academy.

5.7. Alternative Production Programming

There are deep-rooted challenges involved in show selection for a theatre department. In her paper, *Knowledges That Matter: Practicing Performance Studies Through Theatre Studies* (1996), Jill Dolan references the theatre pedagogy of Ellen Gainor and Ron Wilson, “while theatre studies is forging coalitions with other disciplines, it has yet to be intra-disciplinary. Has yet to work through the knotty binary of theory and practice that bifurcates our departments and our work” (Dolan, 1996, p.13). Live performance productions presented as a theatre season to a public audience are one of the most important learning opportunities available to a theatre or performance studies student. They are the equivalent of a practicum to an engineering student. “Theatre’s inner workings and strategies can only be truly understood through production experience” (Leroux, 2012, p. 150).

There is shockingly no research literature on show selection procedures in university or college theatre departments. I was able to locate one article on show selection in high schools, but this was in direct relation to issues of censorship. There
was one document from the University of Lethbridge Play Selection Committee that primarily outlines the operating procedures of the committee itself.⁷¹ I posed the question to my community of practice, “How does a university theatre department select its show season?” and received the following answers:

Two of our shows are chosen by the graduate students in directing, encouraged to remember how many men/women (actors) there are to cast

(Prof. Stephen Heatley, UBC, Personal Communication, June 2014).

We always choose based on a good play with good roles for students (actors) across the years – not just graduating. In some schools there is a clear graduating class - NTS⁷² for instance where they probably consider certain students and roles for them.

(Prof. Valerie Campbell, University of Calgary, Personal Communication, June 2014).

Sometimes a play or even a season has been chosen based on the research interests of faculty members. If this is the case and there may not be the appropriate actors available, the department will ask professionals to participate in the project. All this is determined by budget. Sometimes faculty members make up the cast. I was once involved in a production at the University of Windsor that was entirely professional (no students used at all). You can imagine what the students thought of that!

(Dr. Barry Yzereef, University of Calgary, Personal Communication June 2014)

“I think it’s also connected to the larger question of ‘what exactly is the purpose of university productions?’ Is it for faculty to conduct research? For students to train on a variety of styles/genres? For a masters student to select whatever is best for them? Or (and I know this is part of the Studio 58 model) to sell tickets and make revenue?”

(Valmai Goggin, Artistic Director Theatre Transit, Personal Communication June 2014).

⁷¹ Link to University of Lethbridge Season Selection Principles & Procedures, Approved by Drama Department for Implementation April 19, 2010 http://www.uleth.ca/finearts/departments/drama/season-selection-principles- procedures

⁷² National Theatre School
Trying to balance the canon with new works, Shakespeare vs. Shepherd, one faculty member who will only direct musicals, another only Ibsen, can be a hair pulling, knock out battle of egos. Additionally there is normally a gender imbalance among the student body.\textsuperscript{73} You may have twenty-five third year female actors and four males and the department head insists that you present \textit{Hamlet}. Many departments choose their upcoming season based on the strengths and weaknesses of their senior class actors or dancers and their graduate directing students. As a result the public performance opportunities, which are themselves a critical learning environment, are more inclined to benefit the educational needs of the performers more than technical theatre artists. Rarely is the season chosen to highlight the creative historical research that the MFA lighting designer wants to do or because the senior undergraduate class consists of exceptionally talented scenic painters.

Philip Auslander asks, “How can we forge common cause and community around disciplinary practices that remain exclusionary?” (Auslander 1995 p. 182). Why are we programming our shows to benefit only half of our students? There are few things more frustrating to a technical theatre arts and design student than a season of Brecht inspired present day, minimalist, black box shows. Minimalism offers technical theatre arts students limited options for creative exploration of the script. To quote Dolan we need to “talk about institutions and how they enable or obstruct the production of certain knowledges” (Dolan 1996 p.9). In the majority of theatre departments across the country that were reviewed for this study, the current curriculum is obstructing the production of knowledges for technical theatre arts and design students through an antiquated construction of departmental play production formats.\textsuperscript{74} I asked Sholem Dolgoy at Ryerson Theatre School, “would it be fair to say that your shows are being chosen based on your performers?” to which he replied, “Oh, one thousand percent. Yes.” (Personal communication, May 2014)


\textsuperscript{74} Informal interviews with long serving faculty members in theatre departments at UVIC, UBC, SFU, University of Calgary, University of Alberta, Ryerson, Mount Royal University indicate that show selection processes are much the same in 2014 as they were in the 1990’s and previous to that, focusing on the directing and acting students before the technical and design student
My experiences, as a technical theatre arts student and instructor, have inspired me to consider, the pedagogical purpose of the university production (i.e. Mainstage). I suggest that shows should be chosen to provide equal creative research opportunities to both technical and performance stream students. Equity could be easily achieved in a three show mainstage season by allowing the performance faculty to choose one script, the technical and design faculty to choose another and to encourage a collaborative original show or series of collected collaborative creations produced by the students in the performance and technical streams with faculty support. What does this approach solve? It ensures that the technical theatre students are provided with the space for their work to lead the creative vision and direction of the show. Flipping the creative process so that a component of production is the starting place rather than a script creates an inverted situation that provides a unique experience for the performers to perform in response to the environment designed and created for the experience, rather than in support of the needs of the script.

We can no longer teach or even study theatre as we have in the past. Those of us in theatre production programs will find ourselves increasingly marginalized or isolated in our institutions if we do not include in very fundamental ways the new population (students of colour and others) constituting our student bodies...the path breaking scholarship in (other) fields is revolutionizing the ways in which we see ourselves and the places we look for knowledge.

(Dolan, 1993, p. 426)

The direct benefits of my recommendation to the betterment of the current curriculum and the security of technical theatre arts and courses and programs are significant. First, it provides the technical theatre arts students the opportunity to take the creative lead on the production. Second, it provides an opportunity to flip the traditional hierarchies and processes of theatre practice and arrive at a new site of creative inquiry. Third, this recommendation distributes the workload associated with season selection more evenly among faculty. In addition to distributing the workload there is a diminished possibility for season selection to become a power struggle.
5.8. **Summary of Recommendations**

The academy has become increasingly interdisciplinary and in order to maintain a presence within the academy, technical theatre arts and design must also embrace its interdisciplinarity. A transition toward greater interdisciplinary and collaboration presents the technical theatre arts and design with the opportunity to make their presence known on the academic campus. It is a time of transformation when we can embrace a new identity as creative researchers and artists in our own right. Technical theatre arts and design departments have successfully evolved in the past with the advent of co-ed campuses, racial and gender equality, computers and computerized lighting, sound and CAD\(^{75}\) technologies. By incorporating aspects of performance studies, there is a transformative avenue that can be accessed for this pedagogical revisioning of technical theatre arts and design studies offers students an education that is designed to develop critical and creative thinking and problem solving skills that are transferable across other disciplines. Technical theatre artists and designers who are taught to approach their work inside or outside the walls of the theatre in a curious, collaborative and creative spirit may become leaders in their field.

5.9. **Conclusion**

Through the lens of auto-ethnography this study has investigated technical theatre arts and design in the academy. I have employed my emic view of this complex discipline as a student, artist, teacher and researcher. The auto-ethnography describes what I have observed, witnessed and experienced as a participant observer in the educational and professional theatre. According to Macionis and Plummer, participant observation involves the researcher taking on a role in the social (in this case educational and professional) community under observation moving between the role of participant and researcher. (2005, n.p.) The benefit of this type of study is that the other participants do not change their behavior due to being observed, however the downfall is the potential inability of the researcher to maintain objectivity. “The social researcher

\(^{75}\) Computer aided drafting.
immerses herself in the social setting under study, getting to know key actors in that location.” (Macionis and Plummer, 2005, n.p) The location of the study has been the colleges, universities and theatre companies that have been home to my technical theatre arts education and career as a lighting and set designer, properties builder, scenic artist and educator and the participants have been my fellow students and colleagues - my community of practice.

The unpacking of my personal narrative in these auto-ethnographies has been challenging. Rather than a gentle stroll down memory lane, the reflexive process has required me to investigate the decisions I have made, actions I have taken and people I have affected. I have had to call into question my own cultural capital and the assumptions and biases that are attached to it. “). My personal connection to many of the institutions and people discussed further problematize the study in that my intent has been to not paint any one of them in an unflattering light, rather to simply present my observations as objectively and honestly as possible so that I may gain insight from my own and our collective experience in order to make technical theatre arts education better for my students and fellow educators.

While a number of members of my community of practice were willing in principle to discuss these topics, there were many that were not willing. Theatre in Canada is a small community and theatre education is even smaller. As a community of practice we guard our relationships and alliances closely and rarely jeopardize them. The academics most willing to talk were those established in tenured positions. Other willing participants were former classmates and students who have made careers outside of the traditional theatre. Those who did participate did so with gusto and have generated additional

76 The etymology of the term “unpack” is uncertain and has been credited to both Carl Rogers, Lev Vygotsky, however the first usage of the term “unpack” as a figurative meaning for “analyze” rather than “remove from a container” has been traced to 1596 according to http://english.stackexchange.com/questions/147397/unpack-as-analyze-rather-than-remove-from-container

research projects with new partners that may not have happened without this study. “It should be noted that these kinds of studies, while important and suggestive are not yet full-scaled ethnographies of particular academic institutions and their relationships to their surroundings. That work that remains to be done is crucial” (Krautwurst, 2013, p.4).

5.10. Findings

Theatre must change the world or
The world changes no matter what.
Change the theatre, not the world.

(Daniel Brooks, 2012, p.106)

What I have discovered from this study is that my earliest theatre education experiences still resonate the most strongly with me. “The idea of first impressions receives much attention, as does the impact they have on business, personal, and social interactions.” (Lawson, 2009, n.p.) The teachers that have had the most affect on my technical theatre arts education have been those that demonstrate the three characteristics of a master teacher in any subject; comprehension of the field, ability to diagnose student needs and the capability to help students interface with the field. (Smith, 1988). Auto-ethnographic research has caused me to consider the importance of quality first and second year undergraduate experiences for students. Attrition rates from first to third year remain high in many programs78 and this is perhaps because technical theatre arts educators and the current curriculum are not doing enough to engage those early level students. Issues of technical theatre arts and design student retention warrant further research.

In addition to the vital importance of improving those early technical theatre arts education experiences for first and second year technical theatre arts and design students is an ongoing commitment from the academy to develop opportunities for intra and interdisciplinary collaboration. My experience and feedback from the community

78 Statistics Canada (2008) shows the national undergraduate dropout rate at 43% for universities, 69% for colleges and CEGEP and 66% for institutions listed as “other”. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/2008070/t/6000008-eng.htm
confirm that with or without a liberal arts base, the ability for technical theatre artists to move between production departments with an option to apply their skills outside of the theatre is critical to their employability on program completion. “Curricula needs shaking up and more enquiry-based methods introduced” (Bolton, 2009, p. 9). The addition of enquiry-based methods to the existing curriculum could offer more useful skills across a broader range of application.

To be a researcher of the discipline of technical theatre arts and design is unusual. To be a researcher of the pedagogy of technical theatre arts and design is more unusual. The limited number of technical theatre artists and designers and technical theatre educators who document their methods and share their knowledge can be an impediment to finding quality sources for research purposes.

Designers are visual people, little prone to writing. When they do it is most often a how-to article that stems both from their inclination to solve technical problems and the difficulty of explaining theory. We all find it easier to teach facts and techniques than to teach concepts. We struggle to intellectually explain with linear language and art based on emotional responses to visual communications. (Beeb Salzer, 2004, p. 145)

The lack of documentation also makes a review of the curriculum, practices and processes more difficult to assess. Beginning the dialogue about the practice and pedagogy of technical theatre arts and design as a community is a critical tool for any improvement to take place. “There is a strange paradox in the attempt to position oneself as an inhabitant of unclaimed territory, for the gesture itself not only maps the territory but stakes the claim” (Jackson, 2001, p.85). Positioning myself as a researcher of the pedagogy of technical theatre arts, my goal is to continue the dialogue and advocate for the betterment of technical theatre arts and design in the academy. “A creative leap is required to support widening and deepening of perspective, the effective ability to mix tacit knowledge with evidence-based or explicit knowledge.” (Bolton, 2009, p. 16)
(What is this thing we do? Theatre…)

One hour call. Arriving one by one
To perform our ritual
(Why research it? Teach it?)

Thirty minute call Currents of anticipation as
Lights are checked, sets placed
Final preparations made
(Why spend time and money?)

Twenty minute call The house is open
The audience enters the theatre
murmuring quiet questions
of what is to come
(What purpose does it serve?)

Five minute call Places.
Assume your place in the dark.
Occupy the shadow of the wings
and operation booths, like confessionals
where we whisper the commands and responses of our ceremony.
(Engaged/ing, affected/ing, educated/ing.)

Go Q1 The house darkens
(Connected/ing)

Go Q2 The curtain opens
Single chords of silence breaking sound
Illumination as stage lights
Reveal performers
Go Q3 Reveal narrative
Go Q4 Reveal life
Go… Through all of the cues, to the end
Go Blackout.
Go The curtain has closed, the houselights on
The audience rises to leave
leaving us spent, relieved of our posts
until call time comes again.
(To engage, to affect, to educate.)
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University of Lethbridge
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**British Columbia**

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University of the Fraser Valley  
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Thompson Rivers University  
http://www.tru.ca/arts/vpa/theatre.html

University of British Columbia  
http://www.theatre.ubc.ca/index.shtml

University of British Columbia Okanagan  

Langara College, Studio 58  
http://www.langara.bc.ca

**Ontario**

York University  
http://theatre.finearts.yorku.ca

Ryerson University  
http://www.ryerson.ca/theatreschool/

University of Toronto Scarborough  
http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~registrar/calendars/calendar/Theatre_and_Performance_Studies.html

Brock University  
http://brocku.ca/humanities/departments-and-centres/dramatic-arts/degree-programs/production-and-design

Sheridan College  

Fanshawe College  
http://www.fanshawec.ca/programs-courses/full-time-programs/thp1-intro
Cambrian College
http://www.cambriancollege.ca/Programs/Pages/programDetails.aspx?code=PAT

Humber College
http://www.humber.ca/program/theatre-production

Algonquin College

College Boreal
http://www.collegeboreal.ca/locations/details/campus-de-sudbury/

St. Clair College
http://www.stclaircollege.ca/programs/postsec/music_theatre/

Queen’s University
http://www.queensu.ca/calendars/artsci/Courses_of_Instruction_6.html

University of Waterloo
http://www.waterloou.ca

Manitoba

University of Manitoba

Newfoundland

Memorial University of Newfoundland
http://www.mun.ca/english/undergrad/theatre_specialization.php

Nova Scotia

Dalhousie University
http://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/school-of-performing-arts/theatre.html

Acadia University
http://theatre.acadiau.ca

Quebec

Concordia University
http://theatre.concordia.ca/programs/undergraduate/theatre-performance/
McGill University
http://www.mcgill.ca/english/node/338

John Abbott College Montreal
http://www.johnabbott.qc.ca/prospective-students/programs/career-programs/561c0561a0-professional-theatre-acting-design-options

Cégep de St. Hyacinthe
http://www.cegepsth.qc.ca/services-la-population/ecole-de-theatre-0

Cégep de la Pocatière
http://www.cegeplapocatieri.qc.ca/cecm.Accueil.html

Option-Théâtre du Collège Lionel-Groulx
http://www.optiontheatre.clg.qc.ca

National Theatre School
http://ent-nts.ca/en/

**Saskatchewan**

University of Saskatoon
http://www.arts.usask.ca/drama/

University of Regina
http://www.uregina.ca/finearts/theatre.html
Appendix A.

Institutions Offering Courses, Diplomas and Degrees Involving Technical Theatre Arts and Design Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Certification Offered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>Grant McEwan University</td>
<td>Two Year Technical Theatre Diploma</td>
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<td>Red Deer College</td>
<td>Two Year Technical Theatre Diploma</td>
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<td>MFA Design &amp; Technical Production</td>
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<td>University of Lethbridge</td>
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<td>Production, Design &amp; Stage Management</td>
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<td>Capilano University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Douglas College</td>
<td>Stagecraft and Event Technology Diploma</td>
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<td>UVIC</td>
<td>BFA Comprehensive Theatre Studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SFU</td>
<td>BFA Production/Design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>University of the Fraser Valley</td>
<td>Technical Theatre Diploma</td>
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<td>Trinity Western University</td>
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<td>BFA Interdisciplinary Performance</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>MA Performance Studies</td>
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<td>Sheridan</td>
<td>BFA Performance Studies w/some tech</td>
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<td>SOUTIEN TECHNIQUE EN GESTION DE SCÈNE</td>
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<td>Theatre Arts</td>
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<td>Theatre Production</td>
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<td>John Abbott</td>
<td>Theatre Production</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cégep de St. Hyacinthe</td>
<td>Theatre Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centre d’études collégiales de</td>
<td>Theatre Production</td>
</tr>
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</table>

* Some programs may have additional components or options.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Certification Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>montmagny</td>
<td>Option-Théâtre du Collège Lionel-Groulx</td>
<td>Option-Théâtre - Gestion et technique de scène *</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Theatre School</td>
<td>Production</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Set &amp; Costume Design</td>
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<td>Scenography</td>
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<td>University of Saskatchewan</td>
<td>BFA Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Regina</td>
<td>BA Theatre &amp; Performance Design/Stage Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* On 07.24.14 I was notified that Simon Fraser University has added an undergraduate certificate in Performance Studies through the English Department under the direction of Peter Dickenson. There is no start date available at this time on when that program will become active.
Appendix B.

Thesis Presentation

An Auto-ethnographic Exploration of Technical Theatre Arts and Design in the Academy
Claire Carolan

Institutional reflexivity is not a “natural” state of affairs in unstable and shifting communities of practice. (Krautwurst, 2013)

My thesis is titled An Auto Ethnographic Exploration of Technical Theatre Arts and Design in the Academy

Before I continue I want to explain the format of my power point presentation.

In the recommendations section of my thesis I suggest Lynn Fels ePostcards concept as a tool for creative inquiry in technical theatre education and so I decided that Lynn's format would be a nice framework for this presentation.

Most of the images on the slides show my work in the theatre as a lighting and set designer, properties master, scenic artist and as a teacher of technical theatre. Since my research has included autoethnography the images of my own work provide an visual to this presentation.

The slides contain as suggested by Lynn, a visual image, a quote from the literature, or in this case from my research.
The purpose of my research has been to investigate technical theatre arts and design in the academy and consider the benefits of an examined and updated technical and theatre arts and design education. I was moved to do this research because as a technical theatre artist and educator I have an interest in the health and stability of this discipline in the academy.

When I began the Arts Education program, I knew that I wanted to be able to develop a vocabulary to speak to the concerns that I have about how we teach technical theatre arts and how to make the curriculum stronger and more applicable in an increasingly interdisciplinary academic environment. During my studies here at SFU, the Mount Royal College theatre program, one that I had attended and know to be an excellent learning and training program for technical theatre was discontinued during budget cuts at that University. I decided that in my thesis I wanted to be able to address the potential in reimagining in the curriculum of these kinds of programs rather than simply cutting them.

In my study I have considered, what enables or constrains learning in technical theatre arts including student access to faculty members, equipment and adequate facilities the choice of program; teacher training of technical theatre educators; industry involvement in determining the curriculum, networking and employment opportunity inquiry and curriculum reform.

Technical theatre arts and design have a wide array of potential interdisciplinary applications and academic merit.
METHODOLOGY  Autoethnography/Ethnography
               Interviews and Conversations
               Poetic Inquiry
               Quantitative Research

The methodologies used in my study are ethnography and auto ethnography, informal interviews and conversations and poetic inquiry combined with a quantitative review of the technical theatre programs in Canada.

The existing courses in Canada that offer technical theatre courses in support of a performance program, leading to a diploma, BA, BFA, MA MFA or PhD were reviewed using the information available on the home websites of each program, their location and the details of each. This information provided an baseline of where technical theatre in Canada is at present and where it was when I was a technical student.
Ethnography is the study of human social interactions. It examines the behaviours, and perceptions that occur within communities of practice such as teams, organizations, and institutions. Auto-ethnography is the understanding of the self within those groups.

The purpose of ethnography is to gain insights through the collection of detailed observations, interviews or field notes into people’s experiences, opinions and actions as well as the location they inhabit or role they play in a particular group. The informal interviews and conversations with my community of practice are the ethnographic field notes for my research. My reflexive examination of my own role as student, teacher, artist and educator within those roles is the autoethnographia data for my research.
The informal interviews with my community of practice took place in person, on the phone, via email and on Facebook. Some of the informal interviews involved multiple people and others took place one on one. There were few predetermined questions asked.

The consistent starting point of the conversations was the question

“what do you see as the strengths, weaknesses, benefits and pitfalls of a technical theatre education and the current system for obtaining this education?”

From this one question, I allowed my community to take the conversation in whatever direction they wanted. Some talked at length and others only responded to the one question. From the responses, other predetermined questions were posed to the group based on themes that emerged from earlier interviews. For example, there was a great deal of interest in discussing the show selection process in the academy. It was a point that came up consistently in the conversations so it was one that I chose to revisit with as many community members as possible.
Poetic Inquiry – the poetry included in the thesis has been written from three voices. My own voice and my experience in the technical theatre, the collective voice of my community of practice and in response to or directly out of the relevant literature.

The words are, to quote Prendergast, “reflective, creative, autobiographical and autoethnographical” and operate as qualitative data. Some of the poems are participant-voiced and present some of the emotional aspect of the participant’s experience. Others are based on the literature.
The poetic inquiry of my personal experience required me to reflexively examine my lived experience as a technical theatre student, artist and educator. It is researcher-voiced. I do not keep a journal, so in order to re-engage with the specifics of those experiences I needed a tool that could help me reconnect. Creating a poem of my early experiences in technical theatre as a high school and college student provided me a means to recall events and emotions that I may not have been able to simply through memory. Creating the poems was an exercise in placing myself in my own memory and working to decipher the pieces that could be important points of inquiry vs. sentimental recollection. This is a complex task that requires the researcher to be objective, honest and reflexive rather than reflective.

Read poem

Poetic Inquiry of Personal Experience

HmmmHmmmmmmmmm.
The sound of
Thousands of
Lights.
Electrons
Waiting to be released into
Twisted copper strands.
HmmmHmmmmmmmm.
Massive metal machine
Three coloured levers
One red, one green, one black
Dozens of identical sliders
Directing the energy
Toward the lights
HmmmHmmmmmmmm
Pull out
Twist
Push back
Lock
Click
Count
HmmmHmmmmmmmm
Light, texture, color
Dazzling, dim
Shadow, shape, scale
Singular spot
Or banked bright
Fading to black
Hmmm Hmmmmmmmm
Poetic inquiry of a collective experience.

Through the informal interviews and conversations with my community of practice I gathered field notes in the form of emails, Facebook discussions and transcripts of telephone conversations. In these notes and transcripts I could see the collective experience of my community, the similarities with my own lived experience and the differences. Common themes of frustrations or constraints that existed within our experience as students, artists or educators as well as positive recollections of learning experiences that were effective and valuable as well as the varied personal successes or failures we have experienced. These transcripts and field notes formed the base of some of the poetry, such as this piece from Chapter two. This poem is a composite of what members of my community expresses as important to the study of technical theatre and what we learn from studying these topic areas.

Read poem
Poetic inquiry of the literature. I was able to use poetry as tool for gaining understanding and meaning from the literature. Literature-voiced poetic inquiry is less common than ethnographic or auto ethnographic poetic inquiry. Poetic inquiry of the literature allows the researcher to interpret the text, find a way into the theoretical text and find a personal connection to or understanding of it. This is the case with this piece from chapter four which is based directly on Joey Saldana’s “This is not a Performance Text” and the poem “I am an accidental educator” also in Chapter 4 which is a poetic response to Parker Palmer’s writing in The Courage to Teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life.

Read Poem
In addition to the collective voices of my community of practice, the literature that I have accessed to support my work has come from a wide array of sources. There is very little existing literature on the teaching or pedagogy of teaching technical theatre arts and design in the academy. As a result I have constructed a framework for myself drawing on the broader knowledge base that has been published for other similar disciplines.

Beeb Salzer is a rare lighting and set designer and educator who has written a great deal on teaching technical theatre arts and design, while maintaining a career as a designer and writer. His work is the most relatable for me out of the literature cited.

Norman Denzin’s work in qualitative research using ethnography and auto-ethnography offered a methodology in which to situate my research.

Monica Prendergast introduced me to poetic inquiry as a tool for deciphering and extracting meaning from the ethnographies and auto ethnographies.

Lynn Fels offered a very important piece of the equation for me, which was a solid example of how arts based inquiry could be introduced into the existing technical theatre arts curriculum through the addition of creative inquiry that the students can undertake during the process of their work without adding an unmanageable load to an already busy production process. These four scholars in addition to many others in their fields have already constructed a framework on which I can continue to expand my own research.
Identify the technical theatre arts as a site for interdisciplinary, arts based inquiry in an effort to strengthen and stabilize its position in the academy. The addition of enquiry-based methods to the existing curriculum could offer more useful skills across a broader range of applications improving the opportunities for interdisciplinary application of the skills and knowledge attained by technical theatre arts students.
Begin a dialogue within the technical theatre arts community on the nature of the pedagogy and the future of the discipline within the academy. As a community we have understanding of our unique set of skills and knowledge. Together we could identify new areas of creative expression to be explored by our complex discipline, new academic applications for our students as well as potential educational and social arenas that could benefit from individuals with a technical theatre arts and design education.
Creativity is about generating ideas or producing things and transforming them into something of value. Technical theatre is also about generating ideas, producing or transforming things, spaces and events into something of value.

Creative research involves being inventive, ingenious, innovative and entrepreneurial. Identifying technical theatre arts as creative research, which I feel that they already are, rather than only the production and design of theatre shows or events, could change the way that students view and value their technical theatre education and the way that the academy views and values the departments that offer these programs.

I have taught many individuals who believe they are not very creative, until they begin to explore their creativity through technical theatre arts and design. Creativity is an increasingly valuable commodity in the modern world.
In this thesis, I have given myself the task of using the insight gained through ethnographic study to reimagine what the curriculum for technical theatre arts and design could be.

In my commitment to continued advocacy for the betterment of technical theatre arts and design in the academy, I propose four key transformations that need to occur:
Creativity is about generating ideas or producing things and transforming them into something of value. Technical theatre is also about generating ideas, producing or transforming things, spaces and events into something of value.

Creative research involves being inventive, ingenious, innovative and entrepreneurial. Identifying technical theatre arts as creative research, which I feel that they already are, rather than only the production and design of theatre shows or events, could change the way that students view and value their technical theatre education and the way that the academy views and values the departments that offer these programs.

I have taught many individuals who believe they are not very creative, until they begin to explore their creativity through technical theatre arts and design. Creativity is an increasingly valuable commodity in the modern world.
Creative Collaboration is another piece of the valuable creativity commodity.

Engaging in creative research as an individual is the first step, but what makes this commodity even more valuable for our students is the ability to work creatively with others to achieve a common goal. Creative collaboration that involves the technical theatre students alongside the performance students during the conceptual and development phases, rather than as an addition after the performance aspects are decided creates a platform for learning these skills and encourages both the performance and technical students that the long existing hierarchies of the theatre do not need to determine every show that they are involved in. It is an opportunity for the technical student to find a voice and place within the theatre for their own creative agency and expression of ideas. It encourages community vs. individual processes, working toward a shared goal. It fosters communication and language skills as well as nurturing leadership ability. In an increasingly diverse and global community, collaborative creation encourages finding common ground, coming to consensus and achieving an outcome.
Design Beyond the Stage

, in addition to creative research and collaborative creation, Design Beyond the Stage is another element of a new curriculum for technical theatre arts and design. As technical theatre artists we can be constrained by the physical walls of the theatre, limited by the equipment available to us and stifled by shrinking budgets in our academic departments and in the professional theatre. Promoting the creation of shows for site-specific theatre, theatre in found spaces or shared spaces as a component of technical theatre training is a way of freeing the students and theatre educators from those physical and financial constraints of traditional theatre production and design, which could again, be a valuable commodity to newly graduated students seeking to make theatre in new ways.
My last recommendation is Alternative Production Programming and it is a key element to making my three previous recommendations work. In order for there to be creative research that is practical and useful, public performance opportunities for creative collaboration pieces and support for site specific explorations, the faculty and departments need to be in agreement about supporting these activities. If departments remain committed to a standard 3 or 4 show season that is faculty or directed and designed, only draws from the canon and without classes and facilities that create space for cross pollination and direct interaction between performers and technical students, then there is no audience or outlet for the creative research and collaboration that could be taking place.
The academy has become increasingly interdisciplinary and in order to maintain a presence within the academy, technical theatre arts and design must also embrace its interdisciplinarity. Creativity and collaboration are increasingly valuable commodities and desirable aspects of an education in the academy.

A transition toward greater interdisciplinary and collaboration presents the technical theatre arts and design with the opportunity to make their presence known on the academic campus. It is a time of transformation when we can embrace a new identity as creative researchers, collaborators and artists.

Thank you.
References


Photo Credits

Slides 1, 3, 8-14, 16 & 18 – Claire Carolan
Slide 4 – Kathleen Foreman
Slide 5 & 6 – Gavin Semple
Slide 7 – online sources
Slide 15 – (clockwise from top)
Images 2, 3, 4, 6 & 8 – Claire Carolan
Images 1, 5, & 7 – Gavin Semple
Slide 19 – Alberta Theatre Projects (scenic art, Claire Carolan)