INTRODUCTION

It is surely not difficult to see that our time is a time of birth and transition to a new period. The spirit has broken with what was hitherto the world of its existence and imagination and is about to submerge all this in the past; it is at work giving itself a new form. To be sure, the spirit is never at rest but always engaged in ever progressing motion…the spirit that educates itself matures slowly and quietly toward the new form, dissolving one particle of the edifice of its previous world after the other, …This gradual crumbling…is interrupted by the break of day that, like lightning, all at once reveals the edifice of the new world.

Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, 1807

Literacy requirements in education are changing as the definition of literacy continues to evolve. Interpretations of the term in literacy learning will continue to change as new technologies emerge and assimilate into our daily work and private existence. Unless educators take a lead in developing appropriate pedagogies for these new electronic media and forms of communication, corporate experts – who do not have the same pedagogical knowledge as educators – will determine how people will learn, what they learn, and what constitutes literacy. According to Carmen Luke, the definition of literacy remains amorphous, and deliberately so (5). Literacy is a term that is currently being defined and redefined as society continues to incorporate new technologies into our daily lives.

At its most basic level, literacy is defined functionally as reading and writing (Morris & Tchudi 1996). The concept of literacy has expanded beyond this purely

functional perspective into three different models called the Circles of Literacy, created by theorists Morris and Tchudi. The Circles of Literacy state that basic literacy is simply the ability to decode and encode, to read and write (1996). Morris and Tchudi have included two additional spheres to the Circles of Literacy, relating to multiple literacies. Chen, Min, and Mannacero explain multiple literacies as:

a) Referring to the complex amalgam of communicative channels, symbols, forms, and meanings inherent in oral and written language (verbal and nonverbal) as well as the arts – visual arts, music, dance, theater, and film (including television, video, and technology).

b) Multimodal forms of representation or mixed varieties of meaning-making, shaped and presented in different ways.

c) An array of conceptual and stylistic elements that people use to create powerful products and aesthetic messages. Must be broader than language and account for many different sounds, signs (gestures), and symbols for construction and interpreting meanings.

(Chen, Min, & Mannacero 2002)

The second of the Circles of Literacy, critical literacy, refers to the "ability to move beyond literal meanings, to interpret texts, and to use writing not only to record facts but also to analyze, interpret, and explain" (Morris & Tchudi 12). Brian Street adds that the ideologies and practices of reading and writing are firmly rooted in the context of particular societies, and thus cannot be "isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely technical" (1). Ideals and notions of literacy and what it means to be literate are found in texts, and now a plethora of media – all of which students experience in a variety of

content-areas. Trying to understand what denotes literacy involves understanding how a society uses and values it. Technological advances are now complicating the way we think about literacy and literacy learning.

In this thesis, I will examine the fundamental changes that are occurring in defining literacy in our current technological era. The thesis progresses to discuss three theoretical approaches to the analysis of technology: instrumental, substantive, and critical. In each approach, I investigate philosophical and cultural characteristics of the theory in practice. Although both instrumental and substantive theories of technology have merit, I argue for a critical analysis of technology in literacy education.

A critical theory of technology determines the positives and negatives of the development and implementation of new technologies. This theory counters the notion of a technological utopia – where computers dissolve our problems and make our world perfect – as well as countering technological dystopia – where computers are society's damnation. A critical theory of technology balances these societal notions of technology, enabling both technophiles and technophobes to become critically aware of the influence technology has on societal functioning. Contending for the implementation of a critical theory of technology pedagogy in literacy education, I explore methods through which educators can empower their students with knowledge to create a more democratic and egalitarian society for the future.