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Nam June Paik and Avant-Garde as Pedagogy: Promoting Student Engagement and Interdisciplinary Thinking in the Undergraduate Humanities Classroom

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NAM JUNE PAIK AND AVANT-GARDE AS PEDAGOGY:
PROMOTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND INTERDISCIPLINARY
THINKING IN THE UNDERGRADUATE HUMANITIES CLASSROOM

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation demonstrates how avant-garde methods can be employed as pedagogical methods in the undergraduate Humanities classroom to promote student engagement and interdisciplinary thinking. The study first addresses pedagogy and avant-garde art within their historical contexts as separate, but related disciplines. Subsequently the study fuses pedagogy and avant-garde art and provides examples of in-class activities and out-of-class assignments that illustrate the ways in which avant-garde methods function as practical teaching and learning methods. Further, the study presents artist Nam June Paik, whose work exemplifies the theoretical and practical underpinnings of avant-garde art as pedagogy.

The dissertation champions the pedagogy of John Dewey, who called for a progressive educational system. It also argues for Paulo Freire's *critical pedagogy* and the Jesuits' *Ignatian pedagogical paradigm*, both of which serve as necessary complements in achieving Dewey's goal of an experiential educational environment. Dewey believed education should co-exist with life and should not be treated as a preparation for it, and thus his theories on aesthetics, in particular, argued that art is not severed from life, an idea shared by four avant-garde movements discussed in this study: Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and Fluxus. Each of these movements sought to change the political and cultural environment, while maintaining that art and life are on equal ground. These pedagogies, aided by avant-garde methods, encourage and challenge students to engage with and think critically about the world around them.

Dedicado a minha linda mãe, Leda, por sua força de vontade, carinho e amor.

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Before my arrival at UCF, I knew that I wanted to work with Barry Mauer. Although Mauer’s coursework was the most challenging, I managed to attain my third publication via an artistic project I completed in his “Visual T&T” course. Despite all of the difficulties in completing my Ph.D., Mauer continued to have faith in my research (and me), for which I am forever grateful. Thank you to my mentor Rob Taylor, who served on my Master’s thesis committee and gracefully accepted to be part of my dissertation committee, despite already enjoying his retirement from academia. Rob inadvertently introduced me to my partner Matt, who has been there through all the ups and downs of my academic journey. Much love and gratitude to you Matt, for putting up with so many nights alone as I stayed cooped up in my office working. I know that wasn’t fun for you, so let us now enjoy my newfound freedom.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

By employing avant-garde methods as pedagogical method, my dissertation promotes student engagement and interdisciplinary critical thinking in the college classroom. The works of media artist Nam June Paik fuse avant-garde art and pedagogy, and his methods provide resources for use in my courses, such as “20th and 21st Century Humanities and Technology” – a survey course on significant artistic, philosophical and technological developments since 1900. As an interdisciplinary instructor and researcher, I promote student engagement and encourage critical thinking about a wide range of topics, but must overcome students’ initial resistance about the relevance of the Arts and Humanities to their lives and careers.

Humanities majors are a rarity in my classes. The name Picasso causes eye-rolls around the room, and Kafka or Proust prove to be less-than-engaging for the majority of students. Those challenges begin to lessen when I re-drafted my curriculum in its entirety. I had spent time in class teaching students about the theoretical underpinnings of modernism and the avant-garde, but I did not realize that I could (and should) have students work directly with avant-garde methods, both in and out of the classroom. Students best learn about the avant-garde by doing the avant-garde. My humanities class focused on three major modern avant-garde movements: Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, so I started adapting avant-garde methods from these movements into my courses. While some activities were more successful than others, I nonetheless continued my experiments, a few of which are illustrated in my dissertation.

Soon, my classroom became a testing ground for the theories I was developing through my doctoral work. My research on Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism led me to the postmodern avant-garde movement Fluxus, which developed through collaborative efforts among New York

artists in the early 1960s. Paik was one of Fluxus' pioneering members. In researching Paik's work as an artist and teacher, the intersection between the avant-garde and pedagogy became clearer. While a fusion between the two is not a completely novel concept, there is room for continued exploration with avant-garde pedagogical methods, particularly in undergraduate courses.

For the sake of clarity, the issue of student motivation and engagement is separate within the context of this dissertation, as related to my own teaching experiences. The issue of unmotivated students was far less common than dealing with students who had the motivation to learn (or at least get a passing grade and move on), but difficulty engaging with the course subject matter and materials. My teaching experience in South Korea, in particular, is a great example of ongoing issues with student engagement and critical thinking, but not with a lack of motivation or desire to attain good grades. Thus, the focus throughout this dissertation is on the ways in which instructors can promote student engagement and interdisciplinary critical thinking.

The foundational portion of this study discusses the efficacy of modernist avant-garde methodologies particularly when combined with the methodologies of progressive education. The demonstration and discussion portion of my dissertation centers on two experimental activities I created for a humanities course, as well as the ways in which avant-garde pedagogy can aid other instructors in increasing student engagement and interdisciplinary critical thinking skills in their own classrooms.

Background and Statement of the Problem

In my experience of teaching a range of different humanities courses to undergraduates, I was often faced with a challenge: how do I engage my students in the subject matter of these elective courses? And, how can I challenge students to think critically about significant topics they often perceive as trivial? Teaching arts-related, humanities courses at the undergraduate level at both a state college and a private university, I often found that students lacked the desire to engage and think critically with course materials. The inability and/or lack of desire for thinking critically about any range of subjects are not solely the students' fault, as social, economical, political and cultural issues contribute to the problem. For example, in my experience teaching at a private business school in South Korea, students were often bright and dedicated in their studies, but had great difficulties in their attempts to form and share personal opinions. The difficulty stemmed from engrained cultural mores that forbade youngsters from speaking directly to their elders or anyone holding a position of power; in turn, forcing the teacher-student relationship to remain authoritarian – the teacher is the possessor of all knowledge and the student is a receptacle of information (i.e. akin to traditional educational models). Consequently, promoting interactive participation and critical thinking in a classroom culturally defaulted to being teacher-centered was often challenging.

In the American college classroom, the situation is not much different than South Korea. Students often lack the desire and skills to think critically. Many students do not succeed even when attempting to critically analyze a topic, as they were not previously taught critical thinking skills in secondary school; thus, encouraging students to think critically and creatively proved difficult in the U.S., as well as Korea. Students who embraced the challenge of analyzing course

materials via a critical lens were more often an exception, not the rule. Successfully guiding students to view the world through multiple lenses is rewarding for the instructor, because the door to understanding the world may have opened for the student in a way that may have never happened before.

Since my disciplinary expertise resides within the scope of the Arts and Humanities, most students were in my class to obtain required elective credits. In turn, the contextualization of course materials was key in engaging students with topics they initially perceived as trivial. “Pedagogy must always be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formations, and problems that arise in various sites in which education takes place;” thus, instructors must challenge students to understand context from a subjective and objective perspective (Giroux 37). Developing critical thinking skills in the classroom is neither an uncommon course objective nor a new concept. However, challenging students to think in an interdisciplinary way and transforming those thoughts into social action moves beyond the traditional notion of critical thinking. While I hope that what I set out to argue and demonstrate throughout this dissertation can be adapted to any classroom, regardless of discipline, I limit parts of my argument to practical examples derived from my personal teaching experiences. Based on an extensive literature review, a pedagogical fusion between avant-garde art and pedagogy has not been previously established.

Literary critic Shoshana Felman describes the issue of student’s lack of ability or desire to think critically; “teaching has to deal not so much with lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge. Ignorance, suggests Jacques Lacan, is a ‘passion’, inasmuch as traditional pedagogy postulated a desire for knowledge, an analytically informed pedagogy has to reckon

with the passion for ignorance” (qtd. in Giroux 44). A student’s lack of desire and proper skill set may lead her to seek a number of problematic solutions in order to successfully complete the assignment. For example, if the student is challenged to think about how Cubist painting is interconnected with contemporary rap music, she might ignore the writing prompt, plagiarize, or simply fail to do the assignment. The school’s library or writing center assist students lacking research or writing skills; however, interdisciplinary and critical thinking must be promoted within the confines of the classroom through engagement with course materials.

Thus, I propose a pedagogical method that promotes critical thinking by focusing on context and interdisciplinary connections at the assignment level. This pedagogical method is based on avant-garde methods and fulfills the goals of progressive education and critical pedagogy as developed and promoted by John Dewey and Paulo Freire, respectively. Dewey and Freire’s theoretical focus is relevant herein as it centers on *experience* and *action* in education, rather than the passive consumption of information. These methods help students overcome resistance to knowledge by encouraging them to develop a subjective relationship with the subject matter, therefore making them more personally accountable for the experience.

The instructor however, must ensure that the experience is relevant to the student’s personal context, and the avant-garde offers methods in which to create assignments that are experiential, interdisciplinary and creative. “John Dewey reminded us that it is equally important to maintain a connection between thought and action. He went so far as to say that the meaning of an idea depended on the results of it” (Riordian 27). Dewey argued that teachers must begin the learning process with the student’s experience. The goal of progressive education then, is to center education around the student – that way, the student is challenged to learn through

experiences that are based, and not severed, from her personal life. The philosophy of Dewey and Freire are discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

Consequently, the problem leading this research study is two-fold: First, I was struck by how often students struggled to understand the importance of course materials as it relates to their personal lives (subjective), as well as to the outside world (objective). Second, there is a need for a practical pedagogical method(s) to address the aforementioned shortcomings in a way that makes sense in the context of an undergraduate arts-centered, theory-based Humanities course. Academic discourse on avant-garde as pedagogy is generally focused on courses on the performance and composition of music and poetry, such as Adam Tinkle's theories of sound pedagogy (e.g. *Sound Pedagogy: Teaching Listening Since Cage*) or Alan Golding's work on the avant-garde poetry (e.g. *From Pound to Olson: The Avant-Garde Poet as Pedagogue*). However, research that more broadly argues and illustrates avant-garde methods as a form of critical pedagogy is still lacking.

Some exceptions exist, such as the works of Gregory Ulmer, who proposes a type of pedagogy for the age of electronic media – *post(e)pedagogy* – rooted in the avant-garde and maintains “no discipline base but is the exploration by means of art and autography of the relation between the student and knowledge” (Ulmer 42). While Ulmer offers a useful pedagogical method that is both interdisciplinary and subjectively contextual, his work presents some difficulty when attempting to apply it inside the classroom, such as students doing work before understanding the real reason behind it (e.g. the *popcycle*). Consequently, one of the goals of this dissertation is to illustrate avant-garde methods that are easily adaptable as pedagogical tool that move beyond the common focus of music and poetry. Additionally, I briefly illustrate a

few examples from artists and academics who have made creative and interdisciplinary connections between the avant-garde and critical pedagogy.

I first started addressing issues on lack of engagement and critical thinking in a sophomore level course at Seminole State College entitled, “20th and 21st Century Humanities and Technology.” The course was mainly comprised of first and second year non-humanities majors, and while some of the materials were a bit complex for such a young group of students to understand, every semester I was pleasantly surprised when several students developed radical connections between seemingly disconnected topics (e.g. Surrealism and electronic dance music). However, I also failed at least one student every semester for plagiarism, often due to the student’s lack of interest in the course materials.

I began to develop a pre-writing exercise in hopes of increasing student engagement and the overall quality of their written work. The pre-writing exercise is a graded project proposal that tasks students with narrowing down a topic of their choice, while contextualizing it through preliminary research. An added bonus of these pre-writing exercises is that it allows students to stay on schedule with their work, while receiving instructor feedback before, during, and after the writing process. Even though it is a graded component, not all students turned in their project proposals. While grading the proposals generated more work on my end, I felt the effort was entirely worth it, as these proposals helped guide the students through the assignment process, and it also made grading easier for me in the long run, as I received higher quality essays to grade.

Most learning and knowledge building occurs during the process stage, and to a lesser extent, during evaluation/feedback after the student completes and submits their finished work.

Thus, students are at the height of their engagement with course materials when completing the pre-writing exercise, which was often the most challenging part for them. However, the challenge was countered, whether students realized or not, by their personal investment with the materials. Instructors allowing students to choose the assignment topic encourages them to become more personally connected to the learning process. Of course, I never had 100% of my students engaged 100% of the time, but experimenting with the learning process by using interactive lectures and multi-layered assignments did increase student engagement. I have since applied this approach to every course I teach, and will delve deeper into more specific aspects of this process in chapter four.

While the modern avant-garde did not develop materials specifically for educational purposes, their research and creative methods nonetheless contained elements of critical pedagogy serving the purpose of their own socio-political and artistic agendas. The modern avant-garde sought to resolve, or at least challenge, traditional notions of art and did so by first choosing an issue(s) (e.g. Fascism, institutionalized art, Freudian thought), and subsequently experimenting with changing the accepted perspective of the topic at hand. For example, drawing on the works of Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists created automatic writing as a way for an individual to tap into his/her subconscious in order to write in an uninhibited manner.

Encouraging students to interact with difficult materials via experimentation allows them to experience the subject matter in new and different ways. But instructors find it challenging to incorporate avant-garde art into the classroom while still serving the institutional agenda. Instructors may not have the freedom to incorporate radical experimental methods in class, as more radical methods can fail to meet institutional guidelines. For students to pass the course and

move onto to the next phase of their studies, their evaluation is based on the fulfillment of formal education requirements, such as ongoing attendance, participation, a grade average above 70%, and adherence to academic integrity. As instructors, we may fuse avant-garde methods with our curriculum, but these methods – radical or not – remain confined to the greater structure of the educational institution. Despite such confinement, however, avant-garde methods can be used to meet other significant institutional goals like media literacy, critical thinking, and civic engagement.

While seeking new ways to engage my students with hands-on materials like photography and video, my research led me from experimental avant-garde methods to studies on progressive education and critical pedagogy. As I searched for additional information on the *TV Lab*, (an experimental TV channel that housed Paik as an artist-in-residence in the early 1970s), I came across an article discussing video art, avant-garde experimentation, and the Catholic involvement in the development of media studies. The article then led me to a pedagogy entitled the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, also known as IPP. The IPP was developed by the Society of Jesus and is based on the 450 year old spiritual exercises of the order's founder, Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

The Jesuits, a fraternal clerical order of the Catholic Church, have long been dedicated to fostering education and maintain a stellar reputation for high quality schooling from secondary education through graduate school. Despite IPP's long history however, the Jesuits did not release an official practical guide on how to employ the pedagogy in the classroom until 1993, and even within Jesuit institutions, there are many opportunities for increasing faculty familiarity with ways to employ IPP (Defeo 175). The following chapter thoroughly discusses how IPP

parallels critical pedagogy, and contributes to the experiential processes of progressive education.

Many avant-garde artists saw themselves as problem-solvers, such the Minimalists who exposed the essential identity of an object by turning to rational and mathematical approaches to visual arts that “removed subjective, emotional and symbolic sources of innovations” (Crane 54). Methods used by the avant-garde, coupled with IPP-derived content, provide a framework in resolving the ongoing issues with undergraduate students failure to grasp the significance of arts-based education. The relationship between the avant-garde and progressive education may first appear dissonant, as the former was often anti-humanist and irrational, whereas the latter, particularly in following Dewey’s philosophy, was the exact opposite. However, I argue their relationship is complementarily beneficial: the avant-garde benefits from being brought into discourse on pedagogical practices, as critical pedagogy provides the needed humanistic and rational foundation; whereas critical pedagogy benefits by adopting various avant-garde practices that were created to promote freedom and creativity of the mind in both experience and action. The avant-garde and progressive education are both collaborative and experiential; therefore, the connection between these two disciplines is natural and mutually beneficial.

Students frequently fail to grasp the significance of the Arts and Humanities to their personal and academic lives, which in turn contributes to the issue of lacking engagement and interdisciplinary critical thinking. Fostering a learning environment that encourages experimentation in the process of knowledge creation can act as a catalyst in transforming students’ thought processes from passive to active. The proper tools in which to critically think and analyze dense materials are required in order to transform students into active participants in

their own learning process. I argue that such tools are those derived from avant-garde methods, such as collaborative art pieces like Fluxus performances, or experimental writing like Winston Weathers' *Grammar B* (e.g. collage/montage writing style similar to those of the Futurists).

Ironically, *Le Papyrus*, a French-language periodical created by F.T. Marinetti in 1894, was not only the stylistic pre-cursor to the Futurist Typography (and possibly Weathers' writing theories), it was also the reason behind Marinetti's expulsion from Saint François Xavier, a Jesuit college in Egypt (King). Consequently, instructors can aid in students' liberation process by employing pedagogical tools like Marinetti's literary reinvention process, as such methods provide greater ease in students subjectively contextualizing themselves within the subject matter, while also providing a platform in which to create meaningful interdisciplinary connections among course materials.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

By making subjective connections with course materials, students are able to channel their own experiences as they relate to the subject matter being taught. Consequently, students can also find personal significance in materials they originally discarded as trivial. For example, one of the students in my 20th Century Humanities course had a profound fondness for rap music, and was none too thrilled with being tasked in listening to Brian Eno's minimalist masterpiece, *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (1978). The student begrudgingly accepted the challenge, while arguing that no other musical style could ever be better than rap. Upon returning to class the following week, he thanked me. Turns out, he also held a part-time position as a massage therapist and found Eno's music to be perfect for his job. For this particular project (a variation of which is highlighted below), I purposely assigned the students an album that was contrary to

their musical preference. While some students disliked the music even after listening to the album, other students were thankful to have been introduced to music their own biases would have prevented them from enjoying in the first place. I wanted to challenge students to engage with unfamiliar materials, while simultaneously developing a subjective connection to said materials and soon found out that the avant-garde movements being taught in class could actually serve as methods in which to teach the students about other course topics.

In addition to projects and assignments, the avant-garde methods addressed in this dissertation can be used to create in-class activities, such as lectures and group exercises, as well as in re-developing a curriculum at the institutional level. The main focus herein, however, is on the practical application of avant-garde as pedagogy at the assignment level. I illustrate the benefits of two assignments (e.g. an electronic dada project and a performance art piece) created using the pedagogies discussed in chapter two, as well as limitations and future opportunities. Consequently, the dissertation is divided into two disciplinary sections, pedagogy and art, which are initially discussed in their own contexts and subsequently brought together to illustrate its unified uses in the classroom.

Throughout my teaching career, students in my Humanities courses have frequently asked me to justify the significance of course materials being taught. Most students not only had difficulty understanding how and why they should relate to subjects like Dada, John Cage, experimental film or Charlie Chaplin, they also had difficulty connecting topics with one another. Much of the time, students not only saw their education as wholly separate from their personal lives; they seemingly understood life to occur in a vacuum. Thus, it quickly became

obvious I had two immediate challenges to overcome in my classroom: the lack of student engagement and poor interdisciplinary critical thinking skills.

To highlight how instructors can promote student engagement and interdisciplinary thinking, I turned to Paik's multimedia artworks. Paik's artistic methods and creative output provide an example of the theoretical and practical approach to an arts-centered pedagogy that is personal, political, and interdisciplinary. Paik's work was inherently political as he sought to transform human relationship with technology from passive to active, and he approached this problem from a personal and interdisciplinary perspective. The proliferation of television in the 1950s fueled Paik's belief that society had become subservient to the very types of technology it purported to liberate. Of course, new types of media technology like television were anything but liberating – they merely created the illusion of individual freedom. In his 1928 book *Propaganda*, Edward Bernays, famous for creating the technique for manipulating public opinion (i.e. the engineering of consent), argued that:

In theory, everybody buys the best and cheapest commodities offered him on the market. In practice, if every one went around pricing, and chemically testing before purchasing, the dozens of soaps or fabrics or brands of bread which [sic] are for sale, economic life would become hopelessly jammed. To avoid such confusion, society consents to have its choice narrowed to ideas and objects brought to its attention through propaganda of all kinds. There is consequently a vast and continuous effort going on to capture our minds in the interest of some policy or commodity or idea. (39)

The media gave power to Bernays' brilliantly frightening ideas by providing an avenue in which to swiftly feed propagandistic information directly to the masses. Of course, Bernays

infamous theories were written long before the introduction of television. Orson Welles startled an entire nation with his 1938 radiobroadcast of “The War of the Worlds,” and then, the reputation and distribution of his 1941 masterpiece, *Citizen Kane*, was nearly destroyed via media manipulation by newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst. Particularly in its prime, mass media like radio and newspapers were powerful enough to influence the emotional pulse of a nation; however, when adding television to the mix, a visual medium easily accessible in one’s home, the repressive aspects of one-way media devices became more pronounced.

Paik concerned himself with resolving the issue of indoctrinating, one-way communication media by transforming the media object into an art object. By removing television from its originally passive context as a propagandistic device alive in people’s homes, and placing into an artistically active context that called for participant interaction, Paik was attempting to resolve the problem of humans’ alienation and subjugation to new media technologies. To solve the problem, Paik situated himself within the context of his artworks (e.g. his identity as a global citizen seeking to break communication barriers), and used various avant-garde methods (e.g. collage, impromptu performance) as a form of experimental research. While his work was not created to be pedagogical, he utilized avant-garde methods throughout his career for the purposes of democratizing art and media, in turn empowering the people, not the establishment. As such, his creative processes served a political purpose in restructuring knowledge creation and acquisition, which I argue can be used in the classroom to engage students with thinking critically.

Thus, the research question driving this dissertation is: How can instructors employ avant-garde methods to engage students in thinking critically and interdisciplinary about

significant topics they generally perceive as trivial? The notion of interdisciplinarity, in particular, is central to developing student engagement and critical thinking, hence its emphasis throughout this dissertation. Critical pedagogy argues that students' can only be liberated from oppression by first recognizing their reality and then actively changing it via a holistic engagement with experience. The "holistic engagement with an 'individual's contextual reality,' rather than a fragmented world view based on the distinct tenets of academic disciplines," is necessary in "reframing education as knowledge creation" (Muller 129). Knowledge formation arises from subjectively engaging with one's personal context, which is partly realized through interdisciplinary thinking. Students can begin understanding their reality by situating themselves within the context of the subject matter (e.g. an assignment topic) first, and then creating objective interdisciplinary connections among course materials.

A parallel research question I attempt to answer is: How can Paik's avant-garde methods of artistic creation be adapted as a form of critical pedagogy in the classroom? Modern avant-garde movements and their relationship to progressive education motivate much of the theoretical bases throughout this dissertation. Coupling avant-garde with pedagogy offers a radical, arts-centered approach to teaching – an approach that promotes student engagement and interdisciplinary thinking by making course materials subjectively relevant and creative to students. While research materials on these individual topics are abundant, research regarding an avant-garde derived, arts-based critical pedagogy is rather limited. Thus, my dissertation adds to the existing, yet limited discourse on avant-garde as pedagogy.

The avant-garde methods created and employed in my humanities course as pedagogical methods are illustrated in greater detail in chapter four; however, to provide a brief introduction

and context to these methods, the basics are outlined below. For example, instead of a traditional written assignment, students can be prompted to create a short manifesto based upon their interpretation of the musical album randomly assigned to them. A manifesto allows for greater fluidity in language, as well as personal expression. For example, students are not limited to a specific linguistic style, so they can simultaneously practice Grammar B, while also subjectively discussing their contextualization and reaction to the music. Providing students with an example of a previously written manifesto (e.g. Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises*), can aid them in understanding the unique linguistic qualities and tone of an art manifesto. Below is a basic outline of an avant-garde as pedagogy assignment:

Choose topic:	The Beach Boys' <i>Pet Sounds</i>
Research context:	The who, what, why, when, where, how of the album and band
Create experience:	Manifesto based on student interpretation of the album's meaning
Discuss and reflect:	Self-reflection of the experience
Evaluate work:	Formal grading process

The purpose of the assignment is to introduce students to unfamiliar music, and provide them with the freedom to create their subjective interpretations of the album's meaning. The *context* and *reflection* components act as separate, but related pre- and post- writing assignments, whereas the *experience* is the formal essay or project. The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm drives how the assignment builds upon itself, moving from context to evaluation, and the experience component is derived from various avant-garde methods. Paik's creative process flowed similarly to what is outlined above: he moves from conducting thorough research of a particular object to continuously experimenting with ways in which to change that object.

I challenge students to adapt Paik's fluid process in completing their own assignments; however, I also keep in mind the possibility of last-minute curriculum changes due to differences in students' skill level. Even if students hated the album assigned to them, this assignment can successfully engage students with an arts-related topic and gave them a starting point in which to express their subjective opinions. However, knowing they would not receive a high grade if the assignment were nothing more than a personal opinion piece, students had to embrace the challenge of relating to the album in a critical and interdisciplinary way. Students were required to use the course textbook to aid them in making connections between the album and other topics covered throughout the semester.

This dissertation itself follows some of the same steps of the pedagogical method that I discuss and demonstrate above (and throughout): I begin by discussing and establishing context on respective elements of pedagogy and the avant-garde, then I move on to illustrate how Paik's creative process highlights a symbiosis between pedagogy tools and avant-garde methods. Subsequently, I demonstrate how avant-garde pedagogy can be appropriated in the undergraduate classroom to promote student engagement and interdisciplinary thinking, and finally, I wrap up the discussion by reflecting on my experiences in creating and applying these avant-garde methods to my courses. In essence, I am practicing what I am preaching in both my dissertation and my classroom.

The major topics of discussion from chapters two and three of the dissertation are outlined in the flow chart below:

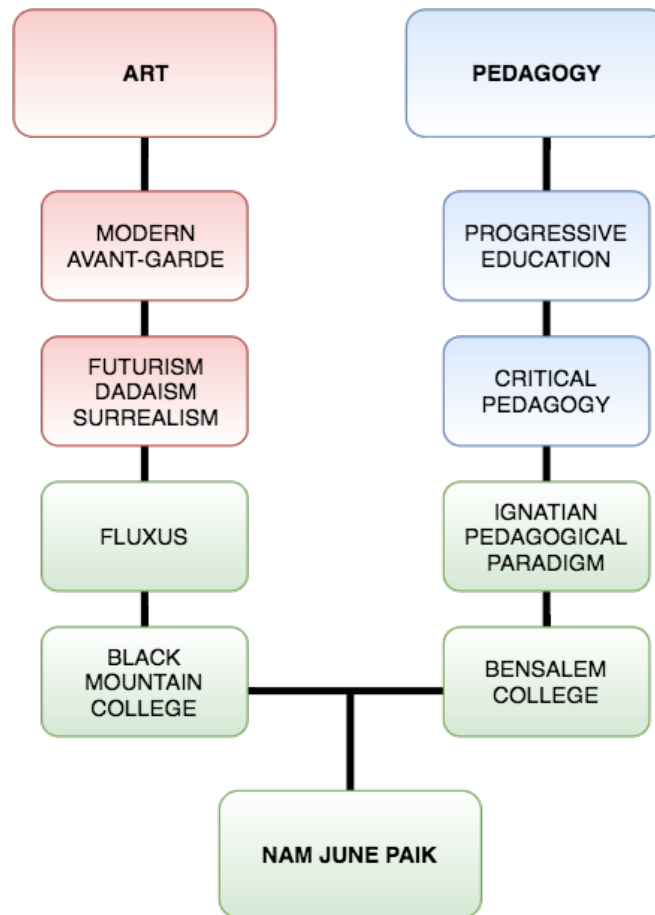


Figure 1: Dissertation Flow Chart

Significance of the Study

Life is fundamentally interconnected, and the pedagogical methods I discuss and demonstrate in the following chapters serve to illustrate life's interconnectedness to students by promoting critical thinking focused on interdisciplinarity. It is not simply a matter of connecting materials, theories, ideas or objects with one another, but also connecting them with the student's own life, hence making the base point of the exercise of a personal nature. The avant-garde offers a unique approach in making materials experimental yet approachable, as well as promoting the notion of art and creativity as a process that an individual experiences, even

through its many failures. The experimental and fluid nature of the modernist avant-garde, which also promoted democratic freethinking, is why I chose to turn to these movements, particularly Futurism, Dada, Surrealism and later, postmodernist Fluxus.

Some of the benefits of employing avant-garde methods include, but are not limited to, allowing students to fail, to experiment, to create, to (re)invent and to think about any topic from a personal, socio-political and interdisciplinary perspective. Employing avant-garde methods in class does present some challenges, however, such as time management. Students cannot be encouraged to embrace failure in a way that causes their overall grades to suffer – this would a frustrating and time consuming experience for both instructor and student. Rather, failure can be encouraged in a theoretical sense. So, a student who completes an assignment by meeting minimum requirements, and submitting it in a timely manner, receives a passing grade; however, failure can be built-in to other graded components as well, such as the pre- and post- writing exercises.

Let us suppose that a student is tasked with creating a stop-motion video that uses mash-up images from the Internet. Despite a student's diligent effort and the creativity she put into completing the assignment, the technology goes awry and compressed the images creating a distorted look throughout. In this case, failure should not be reflected in the student's grade, as it is due to unforeseen circumstances occurring during the creative process. Such a failure parallels chance events common in avant-garde art, such as those in the works of Cage. However, since students will still perceive such failures as detrimental to their course grade, instructors should seek to discuss different types of failure, such as those intertwined with life that does not lead to failure in an educational environment.

The benefits of employing avant-garde methods in the undergraduate college classroom are abundant, however, and can further benefit the disciplines within the Arts and Humanities as a whole, as well as having a positive impact on students. Creating a subjective connection between the student and course materials works to encourage the student's own interest in the topic at hand, so that the information (i.e. experience) can unravel in ways that allow for the discovery of new knowledge, even if it only initially occurs on a personal level. Additionally, when students are encouraged to express their personal opinions, be it positive or negative, they often feel happier and more empowered as individuals – at least that has been common feedback that I have received from my students throughout the years. When students feel they maintain some level of control over their education, they are more likely to be engaged in activities, both in and out of the classroom, as well as to produce higher quality work. However, instructors must strike a balance between encouraging students to voice their personal opinions and engaging them to become more informed, well-rounded persons.

Often times a younger student dislikes a particular artwork for no other reason than ignorance, as they have not yet been given the proper tools in which to create an informed opinion. Encouraging students to contextualize the subject matter by conducting outside research allows them to develop an objective perspective. Also, instructors have a better chance of guiding students to understanding context if the topic is already of some interest to the student. Whether or not students begin a course project with a topic that interests them, they should still be tasked with contextualizing the assigned topic to their personal circumstances first, as it functions as a means to increase their engagement. For example, a student is assigned *I Love Lucy* for a media studies project on the American sitcom. Unfamiliar with the series or any of the

characters, she does some preliminary research (as part of her pre-writing exercise) in order to contextualize the show. In her research, she discovers that Lucille Ball was the first female television executive. Since the student is a business major, she can connect to the topic in relation to Ball's role as a powerful businesswoman in Hollywood.

Engaging students in the classroom is the first step to challenging them to become engaged outside of class. Citizenship – a foundational aspect of progressive education, including the practices of critical pedagogy and IPP – can occur after student engagement and critical thinking have been developed in the classroom. Educational philosopher Henry Giroux argues how citizenship may be promoted through critical pedagogy:

Pedagogy is a public practice largely defined within a range of cultural apparatuses extending from television networks, to print media, to the Internet. As a central element of a broad based cultural politics, critical pedagogy, in its various forms, when linked to the ongoing project of democratization can provide opportunities for educators [...] to redefine and transform the connections among language, desire, meaning, everyday life, and material relations of power as part of a broader social movement to reclaim the promise and possibilities of a democratic public life. (46)

Due to its ubiquitous presence in today's society, Giroux rightfully claims technology to be a *cultural* apparatus, and how its democratization can and should lead to civic engagement that function within the educational institution, and beyond. My dissertation research does not strictly align itself with all elements of critical pedagogy, such as offering a staunchly political perspective like Freire did throughout his career; however, my focus as an instructor has been in engaging students with the topic, and then inspiring them to thinking critically about that topic. I

argue that the initial engagement between student and topic is a vital first step in all modes of instruction, be it lectures, in-class activities or formal assignments, because without that initial engagement, students will likely never become passionate enough about a topic to become civically engaged.

If we can engage students in a topic and encourage them to think critically about that topic, then we have won at least part of the battle. In turn, the major significance of my argument throughout this study is in demonstrating how instructors can employ avant-garde methods in a variety of classroom activities to make the learning process more robust and engaging without overwhelming students. The avant-garde often has a reputation of being abstract and difficult, which is relatively true among several different movements; however, much of that difficulty is tied to attempts in defining and understanding the abstract works that were created and derived by movements such as Surrealism. Despite its theoretical difficulty, numerous activities such as automatic writing can be extracted from the avant-garde and applied to a college curriculum.

As briefly mentioned before, automatic writing is a tool developed by the Surrealists to aid in liberating the mind by tapping directly into the subconscious. While its theoretical basis can be traced back to Freud's writings, automatic writing is a great example of a simple, yet effective activity that can be employed without much restriction in relation to student grade level or the discipline being taught. The pedagogical aim of automatic writing is to entice students to write without formality. In South Korea, students were so accustomed to formal writing only, that they hardly ever developed their writing skills outside of the graded essay. With short, impromptu, informal writings, students not only had a chance to further develop their writing skills, they were also able to do so without the stress of a graded assignment.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Issues in applying avant-garde based pedagogical methods in an undergraduate classroom may reveal itself twofold: first, by the students' sheer rejection of the method, which is manifested by not wanting to complete the assignment, or failing to do so for a number of reasons such as laziness or misunderstanding. Second, by limitations on the course subject matter being taught, as avant-garde based pedagogy employs an arts-centered approach to the humanities studies most closely associated with the disciplines of English, Media, Communication, and Film. While I believe that the pedagogical examples I discuss in my dissertation can be applied to a wide range of courses, they were developed within the confines of the aforementioned disciplines, which are all within the Arts and Humanities. Since I have not taught physics, for example, I am unsure if and how such tools would function in a science classroom, but I believe they would, as scientific methods of investigation were often used by the avant-garde, albeit in a less regimented manner. Regardless of the subject matter being taught, despite all attempts to get students personally engaged with the materials, there may be a disconnect between the student and their desire to learn and/or relate to the topic at hand.

When I first began teaching college, a veteran professor exclaimed that, "no matter what you do, there will always be at least one student, at any given moment in time, who will hate you." His intention was to point out that instructors have to consistently deal with variations in students' mood and levels of engagement. It is simply impossible to have every single student engaged throughout every single minute of class time, as even the best student will eventually have a bad day and be less engaged. Instructors must constantly be aware of the possibility for a change in plans, and be willing to adapt to it as quickly and efficiently as possible. The methods

and tools that I discuss throughout this study were developed to help engage students in difficult but significant material they often perceived as trivial. However, the pedagogical methods discussed are meant to be an additional aid, and not a fool-proof solution, in promoting and increasing student engagement and critical thinking processes in the classroom.

Another limitation is the limited time in which I have to directly engage with my students, often no more than the 16 weeks that comprise the normal length of an academic semester. Thus, no part of my dissertation research is anthropological in nature, as I have not kept track of students' progress after leaving my classroom. Without keeping tabs on students from the beginning of the course to years after its completion, it is not possible to ascertain whether students took action in real life to solve an issue brought to their attention through course materials. Thus, the "action" element of critical pedagogy and IPP, remains murky without ongoing anthropological research. On various occasions my students have self-reported that a particular assignment, or the course as a whole, had a positive impact on their personal and/or professional lives, but the extent of such impact would only be speculative without further research. Since I did not set out to conduct an ongoing anthropological research project, I do not see this as a drawback to my argument; it does, nevertheless, present a research opportunity for one who may be interested in the ongoing impact of education after a course, and/or its respective degree, is completed.

Significant Movements and People

Listed below are the major movements and their respective key players that will be discussed throughout the dissertation. Beginning with the pedagogical perspective and moving towards avant-garde methodologies, the discussion culminates with how Nam June Paik serves

as a working example of the fusion between the avant-garde and pedagogy. In order to better understand how I arrived at the practical classroom components I devised in my teaching experiences, the movements and terms highlighted below provide the foundational and theoretical context to my research:

1. Progressive Education and John Dewey
2. Critical Pedagogy and Paulo Freire
3. Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm
 - a. John Culkin
 - b. Marshal McLuhan
 - c. Bensalem College
 - d. Black Mountain College
4. Avant-Garde
 - a. Futurism
 - b. Dadaism
 - c. Surrealism
 - d. Fluxus
5. Nam June Paik

Chapter Breakdown

The remaining chapters are organized in such a way as to introduce pedagogy and then the avant-garde, and subsequently discuss the fusion between the two, which is used to demonstrate how elements of avant-garde methodology can help push forward the agenda of contemporary progressive education in the undergraduate college classroom. Throughout the dissertation I will reference Paik's works as examples of how avant-garde methods can be used for pedagogical purposes. While Paik's works were not developed with the intent of being pedagogical in nature, despite his own experiences as a college instructor, I argue that his art nonetheless provides a great example of avant-garde pedagogies in practice. In addition to Paik's

art works, I also discuss experimental schools like Black Mountain and Bensalem College, and how each serve as examples of the ways in which avant-garde art were employed as pedagogical methods at the classroom level, as well as the institution.

Chapter two focuses on pedagogy. Tracing pedagogy to John Dewey's philosophy of education, chapter two begins by discussing and contextualizing the progressive education movement and its importance in developing pedagogical methods that focused on student engagement and critical thinking. While the radical progressive education movement dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, we will then fast forward to the critical pedagogy movement of the 1960s, started by Freire. Chapter two not only contextualizes the importance of pedagogy as a teaching methodology, but also how and why we need to continuously evolve in our teaching strategies – from class to class and semester to semester. Otherwise, instructors run the risk of simply regurgitating and delivering information in the least engaging ways possible, and turning otherwise bright and engaged students into mere receptacles of information.

Chapter three focuses on avant-garde art. The chapter begins by discussing the experimental research aspects of three modern avant-garde movements – Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. The research component of these avant-garde movements provides a baseline for avant-garde as pedagogy, even without any direct connection to its possibility for adaptation in the classroom environment. I briefly discuss the development of each of the three modern art movements, as well as their respective research agenda. Subsequently, I connect the respective influence of Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism to its postmodern successor: Fluxus. In discussing the development and influence of the Fluxus movement, I introduce Nam June Paik, the video

artist who inspired much of my research, and whose artworks serve as an ongoing example and object of study for my dissertation work.

Chapter four focuses on pedagogy and art. The chapter demonstrates examples of the synthesis of the avant-garde and pedagogy in the classroom for the purposes of student engagement and interdisciplinary critical thinking. Consequently, two examples of how avant-garde methods can serve as a pedagogical aid are illustrated. More specifically, each assignment incorporates elements of both avant-garde methods and IPP, both of which can be found in the appendix at the end of this dissertation. The assignments below were designed with the intent to also contribute to fostering collaboration among students, developing media literacy and social skills, as well as allowing students a platform in which to experiment creatively. The outcome of robust and easily adaptable activities, like those below, lie in students' possessing a deeper breadth of knowledge of course materials, while simultaneously feeling empowered in being encouraged to express their personal opinions and abilities. Assignment examples discussed:

1. In-class activity: performance art piece – using a written prompt, groups collaborate to create a 60 second performance (Appendix B).
2. Out-of-class assignment: electronic dada project – create a video collage based on a randomly selected philosophical perspective and art movement (Appendix C).

CHAPTER TWO: PEDAGOGY

[Art] quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms.

– John Dewey

This chapter argues the merits of several pedagogical models that shifted away from traditional models of education. By traditional, I refer to any type of teaching activity, assignment, or philosophy that places the instructor as the active participant in knowledge making and the student as the passive recipient. Traditional education models are teacher-centered, and often consist of lectures and activities, such as multiple-choice exams, that rely upon rote memorization to achieve academic success. While there have been great strides made towards the advancement of progressive education, or what is now being termed “21st century education,” room for further progress remains, both in the United States and in developing countries. The U.S. educational system is in need of major reforms, particularly to get away from the flawed concept of “teaching to the test” so prominent in secondary education.

Consequently, the pedagogical approaches illustrated throughout this chapter offer ways to move away from teacher-centered education; however, due to my personal teaching experiences, the focus herein is on the undergraduate college classroom and not secondary education; however, this does not signal a limitation in the applicability of the pedagogical models discussed to K-12 classrooms, or to graduate education. In fact, some of the pedagogical approaches illustrated herein are more easily applicable to secondary education, though I will argue the merits in applying those methods at the college level. “Creating art and making meaning from art *require* understanding, understanding that is complex. This is the kind of

understanding needed for engaging in sophisticated scholarly work, preparing for demanding knowledge-based jobs, and working through the dilemmas of living in democratic societies” (Marshall et al. 9, emphasis in the original). I argue that avant-garde processes, as well as the works of Nam June Paik, offers pedagogical methods in which students can be challenged to conduct such complex thinking.

This chapter also provides a historical contextualization of the progressive education movement that began around the mid-1800s, and each of the movements and key figures I discuss are part of my overall argument in regards to the elements that can be employed in the classroom to foster student engagement and promote interdisciplinary critical thinking. Progressive education is commonly associated with philosopher John Dewey, who is also credited with creating the concept of pedagogy as a university discipline. I begin by addressing the progressive education movement in relation to Deweyan ideals, as his philosophies are not only fundamental in the evolution of education from a passive to an active model, but they help guide and connect various other approaches used in my dissertation, such as Fluxus and the two pedagogies discussed below.

Two key contemporary pedagogies directly contributing to the progressive educational movement are critical pedagogy and Ignatian pedagogy. As I will argue, progressive education is as applicable and necessary for the advancement of today’s educational system as it was when originally proposed by Dewey. Furthermore, I argue for the inclusion of critical pedagogy and IPP into the discourse of progressive education, and my own argument of how these three distinct, yet related, pedagogical movements provide a foundation for fostering student engagement and interdisciplinary critical thinking in the classroom.

However, I do not discuss these pedagogies only in relation to one another or to the progressive education movement; rather, I argue that Dewey's philosophy, critical pedagogy and IPP are contributing elements to the structure necessary for avant-garde methods to be successfully employed in the classroom. In other words, pedagogy is fundamental in understanding the process of teaching and learning, whereas the avant-garde is fundamental in understanding the fusion between life and art. In their book, *Art-Centered Learning Across the Curriculum*, professors Julia Marshall and David M. Donahue argue there is great value in using contemporary art as a teaching tool, stating that "art-centered learning, which involves applying the thinking strategies of art to knowledge in other disciplines, allows learners to develop habits of mind that are not only useful for learning across the curriculum but also will be critical to their development as learners and to their learning future" (11). Placing both together – avant-garde as pedagogy – creates a teaching and learning method designed to promote student engagement, facilitate interdisciplinary critical thinking, encourage creativity and transform learning into an active, experience-based process that is not separated from life.

Progressive pedagogues (which include Dewey's philosophy, critical pedagogy, as well as IPP) and avant-garde artists both believe the learning process to be a fundamental part of human existence; they did not believe that art or learning should be severed from life, but should be one and the same with our daily experiences, mundane or otherwise. Although they share a foundational belief in *experience*, pedagogy and the avant-garde are different from one another in relation to how one goes about experiencing an event. For pedagogy, the primary focus is on the process of teaching and learning, as well as the collaborative relationship shared between teacher and student. In general, the progressive instructor is meant to be a knowledgeable,

passionate guide who is dedicated to ensuring students develop their own informed opinions and actions.

For the avant-garde, the artist is focused on experiencing art as life and life as art, as there is no real separation between the two. For example, a mundane event like making a salad can be transformed into a performance art piece (e.g. Alison Knowles' 2016 piece "Make a Salad"). The avant-garde is progressive by definition, as it continuously seeks to break away from traditional or normative forms of art and artistic expression. Oftentimes, the avant-garde artist is not interested in reinventing an old idea, passively consuming culture or learning by memorization; rather, the avant-gardist seeks to create new concepts, collaborate with others, to learn by experience, and to turn everyday objects, ideas and moments into art (Paik's earlier multimedia video installations serve as one example). Although historically, avant-garde movements have come and gone rather quickly, their impact on how we view the world, art, and even education, has continued for decades after a movement's demise (think of Surrealism as one example). Numerous avant-garde methods for learning and creating art remain relevant and valuable as teaching tools today, and we can revive such methods by structuring them within the scope of an established progressive pedagogy.

The pedagogical approaches discussed herein are brought to fruition in the classroom by employing the avant-garde (the methods of which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter). As previously mentioned, pedagogy provides the structural foundation for how to approach teaching and learning, while the avant-garde provides the material and the methods to facilitate teaching and learning. In addition to historically contextualizing the pedagogical movements identified as fundamental to progressive education, I will discuss aspects of two

experimental schools, Black Mountain College and Bensalem College, as a way to demonstrate how avant-garde as pedagogy functions at the level of an educational institution. Thus, the primary focus of this chapter is on the pedagogical approaches referenced above, and the secondary focus is on the avant-garde and its relationship with pedagogy.

Progressive Education and John Dewey

A total of 19 U.S. states still allow corporal punishment in public schools, with statistics from one set of federal research data indicating that, on average, a public school child is hit every 30 seconds somewhere in the United States (Strauss). Such a horrific statistic is demonstrative of an unacceptable flaw in our educational system, as well as how progressive education remains the exception, not the rule. Since corporal punishment is still an acceptable “tool” in “educating” students in classrooms across the country, the teachers and schools who believe in the acceptability of such abusive behaviors do not have the student’s best interest at heart. The continued acceptance of corporal punishment is indicative of complex layers of sociopolitical, economic and cultural issues (e.g. high rates of poverty, illiteracy and bigotry prevalent in the American South) where student abuse is not only permitted, but also welcomed.

The complex mélange of issues continuing to permit the existence of an obvious flaw in our educational system, while fascinating, are outside of the scope of this dissertation. I highlight corporal punishment to illustrate the societal need for progressive education, and how far we are from really achieving it. Since this study is not anthropological, I did not collect large amounts of data to demonstrate whether progressive education has a strong hold within our educational system. However, based on my literature review of Dewey’s philosophies, critical pedagogy, and

IPP, it is clear that progressive pedagogies are needed for the 21st century classroom, but remain in the periphery of the educational system.

My teaching and learning experiences have been exclusively at the college-level with students of legal adult status; thus, I cannot directly speak to the limitations, successes or opportunities of progressive pedagogies in the secondary classroom. I can, however, suggest ways to adapt avant-garde methods as pedagogy in non-college classrooms. Thus, educators should not limit themselves to only employing pedagogies that are aimed at one particular discipline or age group versus another, as I have adapted pedagogies for my college courses that were originally designed for K-12 education. Also, an interdisciplinary approach to pedagogy is becoming increasingly common, with the sciences turning to the humanities as a way of making science more dynamic and appealing to students. “With today’s emphasis on standards, proficiency testing, and international comparisons, it is easy to forget the artful side of science; it is easy to forget – or fail to even realize – that science has a potential to enrich everyday life, vitalize experience, and provide us with aesthetic satisfaction” (Pugh et al. 9-10).

In their article “Science, Art, and Experience: Constructing a Science Pedagogy From Dewey’s Aesthetics,” educational psychologists and professors Kevin J. Pugh and Mark Girod, discuss a Deweyan-based pedagogy they specifically designed and implemented for use in science courses. First, we need to understand Dewey’s theory on aesthetics, which is primarily focused on the fusion between life and art, as he “seeks to bring art back into the fold of the sociocultural and the sociotemporal, making aesthetic experience less elite and escapist and more applicable to everyday life experiences” (McClelland 45). Pugh and Girod’s argument focuses on using the aesthetics of science (instead of art) as a tool to promote student engagement inside

the classroom, and civil action outside of it. Their argument parallels mine in that its main focus is on driving student engagement and critical thinking inside the classroom, while simultaneously creating a learning environment that is dynamic, collaborative and relevant to real-life scenarios and experiences. Also, by employing Dewey's aesthetics in a science classroom, Pugh and Girod are engaging students with interdisciplinary thinking (e.g. art and science) and challenging them to properly contextualize the subject matter in order to understand and appreciate its original intent.

Historical contextualization is important, as students must first learn a topic's context (e.g. the rise of Fascism in Mussolini's Italy), in order to fully appreciate why that moment is significant. For example, in my 20th Century Humanities course, students were introduced to a wide array of philosophical perspectives, artistic movements, and technological developments from 1900 until the present day. We began the semester by discussing the works of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, co-founders of the Cubist art movement. Knowing that uttering the name "Picasso" would cause eye-rolls throughout the class (as students generally find his work innately boring and irrelevant), I was challenged to engage students with a significant topic they perceived as neither interesting nor relevant to their personal and/or professional development. I began all class lectures, discussions, activities and assignments with discussing the generalized notion of context; soon thereafter, students began to show higher rates of engagement, and they began demonstrating a deeper understanding of the revolutionary importance of Cubism (as evidenced by increased class participation and the evolution of more critical discourse), as well as an appreciation for Picasso, even if they still subjectively disliked his artwork.

For example, we spent class time analyzing and discussing Picasso's famous 1907 oil painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (*The Young Ladies of Avignon*), which features five women with disjointed, angular limbs and an unnatural facial construction. Never has a single student admitted to initially liking this particular Picasso painting, precisely because it features an unnatural, almost menacing rendition to the female figure, as well as lacking vibrancy. Simply put, students found the painting ugly and distressing. I encouraged students to provide their subjective feedback about the painting, and everything they liked or disliked about it. After students were done venting their frustrations as to why we should ever "waste" class time discussing *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, I began offering students snippets of information that aided in contextualizing the piece. In the process of contextualizing the painting, students began to understand why it is regarded as a game-changing masterpiece in the visual arts. The unnatural perspective and portrayal of the human body, and a reimagining of femininity presented in the piece was the stepping stone in the development of the avant-garde movement of Cubism and a radical departure from previous movements of European painting.

While most students still subjectively disliked the painting, after the artwork was contextualized, students demonstrated a greater appreciation for the piece. Developing context is fundamental in aiding students to make the move from a subjective and generally uninformed opinion towards an objective perspective based on critical analysis. In Deweyan terms, "when an art product...attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life experience" (Dewey 3). Dewey describes a common issue afflicting many disciplinary topics, as all information will eventually become historical in nature. Instructors failing to

engage with a subject matter's historical context first may allow their students to become disengaged and skeptical of the content from the onset. Dewey's argument highlights the issue of failing to transform all learning into dynamic and relevant real-life experiences.

If I taught Cubism from a merely historical perspective (detached from its original context or a contemporary reading), I would fail to engage students with the significance and relevance of Picasso's work or the Cubist movement. Students would be much happier doodling in their notebooks than listening to my regurgitation of details regarding Cubism's importance. However, discussing Picasso and Cubism in its original context (e.g. who, what, why, when, where, how), while simultaneously engaging students with the art via a simple, but interactive class discussion, transforms Picasso from an uninteresting dead guy into a revolutionary artist who altered the perspective of artmaking.

Again, when students are introduced to a historical topic in its original context via a dynamic and participatory discussion (i.e. in-class group projects or creative activities), they are far more likely to engage with course materials and retain information. For example, a study by Pegrum et al. used podcasting as a practical and creative tool to promote student engagement with science, while stressing the importance of contextualization. Their results indicated that "the structure of the creative podcasting assignment encouraged students to use a deep approach to learning, involving contextualisation of their assigned chemistry concept. It was found that many did adopt such an approach, with positive effects for their motivation and assignment marks, but no direct significant effect on their exam performance" (149). This particular study was conducted with undergraduate students in an entry-level chemistry course and demonstrates how students engaged with materials presented through the use of dynamic and participatory tool (e.g.

creative and collaborative podcast). Additionally, students who contextualized the content beyond the previously presented information earned higher overall assignments grades.

Pugh and Girod, also recognize the importance of engaging students with the original context of a scientific revolution in order to engage them with why a topic is still relevant today. A parallel of Picasso in the science classroom is the now seemingly boring notion of the Copernican Revolution.

Today the concept that the earth revolves around the sun is so ordinary that we do not even think about it twice. But it was once an exciting and disturbing possibility that inspired new actions and transformed the way people thought about the earth and humanity in some surprising ways. Hence, one way of crafting ideas out of concepts is to help the students appreciate and experience the birth of a concept as an idea. Doing so may involve such things as helping students understand the historical context in which the concept first originated and helping them recognize the important transformations that resulted from it. (Pugh et al. 15-16)

What Pugh and Girod argue above is directly derived from a century-old Deweyan idea. Dewey strongly believed instructors must cease treating education as a preparation for life; rather, education must be seen as life itself. Education is to be a dynamic environment, one where students are learning by experience and not by dictation and memorization.

Dewey's work is not without criticism. A main criticism of Dewey is that, while he provides incredible insight into a needed revolution in society (i.e. the democratization of education), he fails to provide a methodology (i.e. how can education be democratized). In other words, Dewey's theories, such as employing art as an experience, liberalizing secondary

education, and using aesthetics as a teaching tool, are just that, theories. Dewey does not provide a specific model in which to practically apply his theories to the classroom; however, a methodology may be developed from Dewey's theories and applied to education in a variety of contexts, such as employing hands-on activities, rather than exams as a means of evaluation. Additionally, Dewey's educational theories conflict with the capitalist environment in which they are practiced (i.e. free-thinking and critically minded individuals serve no purpose to businesses who want "docile and trained personnel for their offices and factories and voting sheep for their parties") (Norvack). The contradictory relationship between progressive education and capitalism is not a flaw in Dewey's idealistic educational system; rather it is demonstrative of one of the difficulties in adapting and employing his theories on a mass-scale.

Considering common core and standardized testing is the teaching norm in nearly all U.S. states, Dewey's theories, by default, venture away from regulatory educational requirements often needed to receive state or federal funding. While Dewey's work has been extensively influential in the evolution of our education system, his philosophies are still not the standard approach to education, particularly when considering Deweyan style pedagogies such as problem-based learning, are a relatively new approach in education. However, his work became foundational in the creation of an avant-garde college, which will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter. Even so, there are no real limitations, financial, social or otherwise, that truly prevents a teacher from adopting some of Dewey's ideas into the classroom. Hence, the reason this dissertation is focused on pedagogical methods that can be easily appropriated into a course on at least a basic assignment level.

The main limitation to adapting avant-garde methods as a pedagogy (in promoting progressive education) is the instructor's hesitation. Although the hesitation to employ arts-based methods in the classroom may be prominent at the secondary school level, it does exist at the college level, particularly with instructors who do not feel comfortable with venturing too far from more traditional modes of communication and lesson planning. In education, traditional modes of communication and lesson planning center around the teacher and not the student; thus, the teacher-student relationship in the classroom becomes part of what Freire called "banking." As Freire argues:

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite...The students...accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence. (72)

The passage above illustrates the importance of Deweyan ideals in pushing forward progressive education, which is fundamentally tied to promoting student engagement and hands-on experiences. A curriculum that appears to be student-centered does not necessarily guarantee that the accompanying lessons and lectures avoid being dull and indoctrinating.

Freire's seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was originally published in 1968, about 34 years after Dewey's *Art as Experience*. While Freire's work does not directly reference Dewey, they both argue for a complete overhaul of the educational system. Dewey focused on U.S. public schools promoting a learning environment rooted in experience and not rote

memorization, whereas Freire focused on the Brazilian educational system and the ways in which teachers could liberate impoverished individuals from political, cultural and economic oppression. Dewey's work has not become the status quo in the educational system, but many of his theories have been adopted. In turn, it can be easy to forget just how revolutionary his theories were given their original context. When taking into account the rigidity of the U.S. educational system, particularly before WWII, it is not difficult to see how Dewey's theories would have been received with controversy.

However, traditional education is focused on an environment where schooling and real life are detached from one another, as students are not allowed to question the teacher's authority, thus becoming receptacles for information. Furthermore, traditional education does not challenge nor encourage students to think for themselves, much less engage them with materials in a creative and experiential way. Thus, the importance and relevance of Dewey's work is seemingly endless, particularly because his theories place a student's personal life on the same level as their educational life. Dewey's works on *aesthetics*, in particular, argues for the collaborative fusion between art and life (rather than the subordination of one to the other), and is a key element in the development of groundbreaking concept of learning *through* experience.

"Dewey's aesthetics provide a conceptualization of what it means to engage in a particularly meaningful and transformative experience, and his writings on ideas provide insight into the role that the learning of concepts may play in such experience" (Pugh et al. 10). Problem-based learning is a current pedagogical practice directly related to Dewey's notion of aesthetics, albeit not arts-focused. Problem-based learning offers an environment that encourages learning through the process of solving real world problems. Problem-based pedagogy is meant

to be practical, engaging, collaborative, and applicable to real life; thus, it offers instructors a contemporary solution to creating a synchronous relationship between education and life.

Progressive Education and the Avant-Garde

The language of art is an acquired language, and to the degree that the arts in any community of culture fail to flourish, to the degree that they are denigrated by any variety of external forces, marks the failure of effective education and communication.

– Kenneth McClelland

Paik, and other avant-garde artists, also sought the harmonious fusion between art and life. In fact, Fluxus' performance art is an example of artists creating art in a way that imitates life. In the 1960s, New York became a stronghold for the Fluxus movement, numerous artists created art works precisely to highlight that a distinction between life and art should not exist. Examples of such art pieces include Paik's "Flux-Tours" (a guided tour of various sites in New York City's SoHo neighborhood) (1976), Alison Knowles' "Make a Salad" (1962/2012), Ray Johnson's mail art (1943-present), or George Maciunas' "Fluxhouse Cooperative Building Project" (1966-1975), which began the revitalization process of SoHo neighborhood with the purchase of buildings on 80-82 Wooster St. and 16-18 Greene St. ("Fluxhouse Cooperatives").

"In determining why art is important to life, it is no understatement that to consider with Dewey that art, to a great degree, *is* life" (McClelland 55, emphasis in the original). As Dewey argues in his 1934 book *Art as Experience*, "instruction in the arts of life is something other than conveying information about them. It is a matter of communication and participation in values of life by means of the imagination, and works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living" (208). The Fluxus art projects mentioned above

offer examples of Dewey's theory on art as experience – from a practical standpoint – as each art piece transforms a mundane activity into an artistic performance.

The theory of life and art applies to an educational setting as it does to an artistic one. Is there a valid reason why performance art cannot be employed in the classroom to promote student engagement and critical thinking? I argue that such reasons do not exist, besides instructors' unwillingness or inability to reform their own educational curriculum in order to allow for more interactivity and creativity from themselves, as well as their students. As an Arts and Humanities instructor, I strongly believe in employing art, especially the avant-garde arts, as a pedagogical tool to drive forth Deweyan ideals of democratizing and liberating education focused on engaging students with the real world, rather than sheltering them from it.

The following chapter further discusses the avant-garde and its relationship with pedagogy; however, in relation to the argument herein, Deweyan scholar Philip Jackson further explains the vitality of a relationship between school, life, art and experience as:

Our interactions with art objects [as consumers] epitomize what it means to undergo an experience, a term with a very special meaning for Dewey. The arts do more than provide us with fleeting moments of elation and delight. They expand our horizons. They contribute meaning and value to future experience. They modify our ways of perceiving the world, thus leaving us and the world itself irrevocably changed. (33)

Jackson's explanation is applicable to pedagogical methods seeking to promote experiential learning, and it also serves to substantiate the importance of the Arts and Humanities as a whole. The commodification of education through for-profit schools and the increasingly negative

narrative of Arts and Humanities degrees being “useless,” as if they do not provide students with a financially stable future, demonstrate the need for the adoption of progressive education.

A fictional example of how art can be transformative to human experience, particularly when employed as a progressive pedagogy in the classroom, comes from the film *Dead Poets Society*. In the film, Robin Williams plays Mr. Keating, a passionate high school English teacher who uses poetry as a means of liberating the minds of his students, who have been successfully indoctrinated in the rigid environment of an all-boys prep school. In the first classroom scene, a student reads aloud from a curriculum-mandated book of poetry that begins by offering instructions on the proper way in which to read poetry and how to mathematically evaluate the inherent “greatness” of a poem. After the student finishes reading the book’s introduction, Keating calls the ideas “excrement,” and proceeds to demand students to rip out the introductory chapter. Most students are hesitant to do so, as that would be destruction of property and dissent towards the supposed built-in power of a published work.

The perceived authority in the classroom is the instructor and not the textbook; students had no choice but to oblige Keating’s seemingly odd wish. Keating explains that:

In my class...you will learn to savor words and language. No matter what anyone tells you, words and ideas can change the world...I have a secret for you...We don’t read and write poetry because it’s cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race and the human race is filled with passion... Medicine, law, business, engineering; these are noble pursuits, and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love – these are what we stay alive for.

The above monologue in *Dead Poets Society* demonstrates how Arts and Humanities instructors can use their classroom authority to contextualize the significance of the subject matter they teach – a contextualization that is key in helping students understand the inherent value in what arts and humanities disciplines offers to the content and process of critical and interdisciplinary thinking. “Reason, rather than being an antecedent,...actually gains its vital energy through passion. Deliberation’s science, its experimental mode, is at the same time deliberation’s art, as reason becomes fully implicated in the passionate phase of activity” (McClelland 54). While Keating’s teaching methods are histrionic to an extent and not wholly representative of the reality of teaching high school, the character’s passion and personal approach to students serves as a conduit in promoting student engagement. Dispassionate and disconnected teachers encourage dispassionate and disconnected students. Without initial student engagement, the process of critical thinking and analysis does not have a chance to flourish.

“In a Deweyan pedagogy, emphasis would be placed on not just getting students interested and developing deep understanding, but getting students to engage in their own ‘passionate experimentation’ of the content” (Pugh 18). Instructors who develop lesson plans and course materials based on avant-garde methods as pedagogy can more easily promote students’ creativity and experimentation in the classroom. Similar to the experience of fellow colleagues, I have taught courses outside of my field of expertise, including ones that I was less than passionate about; hence why I chose to employ a topic I am passionate about – avant-garde art – to the teaching and learning process in my classroom regardless of subject matter. Granted, I enjoy greater freedom in curriculum changes at the college level, than if I were teaching primary or secondary school.

In order to be effective and engaging instructors, we must challenge ourselves to experiment with the course materials in creative ways (e.g. challenging students to create and conduct guided classroom lectures), to find new interdisciplinary connections, to complete our own assignments, and to strive to be as creative as possible in order to inspire students to do the same. Instructors should complete their own assignments not only for the sake of honest transparency of practicing what they preach, but to understand the process from the view of the student. Instructors who complete the assignments they give out to class are better equipped to see incongruities in the work, possible challenges, as well as more obvious opportunities for success. In practice, being creative means using various teaching methods and mediums to convey the information (e.g. online, in-class, lecture, group presentations, videos, etc.), as well as challenging students to engage with the content in less traditional ways (e.g. video blogging, group performance, solo monologue, impromptu writings, etc.).

Critical Pedagogy and Paulo Freire

Education as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination – denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people.

– Paulo Freire

Freire first expressed his philosophy on education in his 1959 doctoral dissertation, which then led him to write the groundbreaking book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Shaul 31). Freire's pioneering work on establishing a model for critical pedagogy continues to be renowned worldwide and I use parts of his argument herein as support for my own philosophy of education. Freire's methodology was developed with a primary focus on helping underprivileged

and illiterate individuals in the poor, rural regions of northeastern Brazil to become functionally literate and develop an awareness regarding the realities of their oppression. My work, however, seeks to engage literate individuals with course materials in order to promote a deeper level of critical thinking and encourage social action; thus, serving to fulfill a key component of critical pedagogy (i.e. students' becoming fully aware of their own oppression that stems beyond social economic status or literacy level).

Freire's personal devotion to Catholicism and his passion for helping the poor led his work to be widely used by Catholics throughout northeastern Brazil (Shaul 31). The Jesuit presence in Freire's hometown of Recife, particularly through the Catholic University of Pernambuco, was likely familiar with Freire's pioneering work on pedagogy and may have employed elements of it in the later development of the Ignatian pedagogy. Also, like Paik's avant-garde methods, critical pedagogy seeks to break from the status quo of capitalist ideology. Although they exist in different contexts, the modernist avant-garde, progressive education, and critical pedagogy (and as we will see later, IPP), share a common goal in breaking the oppressive powers that often lead to the indoctrination of the mind and the passivity of mass society.

Critical pedagogy is a fundamental tool in promoting student engagement and critical thinking. As discussed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critical pedagogy is a socio-political movement and educational philosophy that directly attempts to liberate humans from their inherent state of oppression by means of educating students through their personal context, and not that of the instructor. Critical pedagogy shares a symbiotic relationship with progressive education, as it offers a style of teaching and learning based upon students' social context and life experiences – a notion central of progressive education. That is, critical pedagogy seeks to

fulfill progressive education's goal of creating a collaborative, experiential and engaging learning environment that inspires students to take civil action in real life. To be more specific, Ira Shor defines critical pedagogy as:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (129)

A goal of critical pedagogy in the classroom is to elicit change through social action, such as students becoming involved in local politics by setting up a protest for a specific cause. For example, a student becomes distraught that a recycling program is missing in her neighborhood due to her home residing on an unincorporated plot of land belonging to the county, rather than the city. The mundane task of taking out the trash filled with numerous recyclable items, challenges the student to think more critically about the environment, which in turn inspires her to contact the county to inquire about recycling opportunities for her neighborhood. As Shor describes, critical pedagogy starts with employing our daily habits as a way of analyzing aspects of daily human life (e.g. taking out the trash), and subsequently seeking to understand how such aspects affect our personal circumstances (e.g. sense of political displacement due to living in an unincorporated territory).

To arrive at a critical pedagogy in the classroom, teachers must be prepared to liberate students from oppression by allowing them to develop a critical consciousness of the world's power structures, and the ways in which they can fight to change such structures, even if some

students are uninterested in doing so. “Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world [through context], will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (Freire 81). Thus, the matter of critical consciousness generally functions on three levels: 1. Encourage students’ engagement with course materials, 2. Challenge students to think in a critical and interdisciplinary way about the materials. 3. Take action. *Conscientização*, which loosely translates from Portuguese as *critical consciousness*, “refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take actions against oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 35, translator’s note). Critical consciousness occurs when students become aware of their oppressive powers, in turn using knowledge as a means of liberation. Freire refers to this collaborative existence between teacher and student as “co-intentional education.”

A classroom that employs a co-intentional approach to teaching and learning seeks to create a more balanced relationship between the teacher and the students. “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach [*sic*]” (Freire 80). A collaborative relationship between teacher (leadership) and students (people) is not to imply that the teacher’s significance ceases to exist. Naturally, the teacher will possess more “knowledge” than most of her students, but principal in the theory of critical pedagogy is for the instructor to use said knowledge as a means of ensuring that her students are not further indoctrinated; rather, that her students are guided towards an individual critical consciousness so they are fully prepared to take action that will elicit real change in the world.

Some instructors may perceive that act of guiding students towards critical consciousness as a form of indoctrination; however, I argue that guiding is a different instructional process than indoctrinating. Teachers will not cease to be the “authority” in the classroom, but we should not tell students what and how to think; instead we must give them the proper tools in which to do so themselves. If a student presents a fallacy in her argument, for example, a good instructor should guide the student to understand why it is a fallacy rather than simply stating that it is. Students must be guided to learn, understand and practice key components in progressive education such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and in depth analysis of subject matter, as that guidance should allow students to disseminate good information from bad, or better understand the complexities of our political system, or perhaps to discern the nuances of a modernist painting.

In the classroom, I approach my students with honesty and tell them that I do not have all the answers. I also tell my students that I am in class to do more than teach; I am there to learn from them as well and that, in fact, I actually expect to do so. What I do not expect at the beginning of the semester is for my honest and brief opening monologue to be so strongly received by my students. Students are both shocked and delighted at the notion of an instructor acknowledging her own ignorance – a few admitted they had never been in a classroom where a teacher actually admitted to not having all the answers. Instructors should be willing to admit their own ignorance to students, as that is the vital first step in creating an experiential learning environment that encourages students to think on a critical and interdisciplinary level. A co-intentional educational setting seeks to restructure power in the classroom, in turn making it

easier for both teachers and students to directly engage with one another (and course materials), in a way that promotes creativity and a deeper level of understanding.

Critical pedagogy offers a focused and practical approach to teaching and learning that seeks to fulfill Dewey's overarching philosophy on progressive education, which also seeks to not only criticize cultural norms, but to also encompass a political sphere, much like avant-garde art. As critical pedagogue Peter McLaren argues:

When we teach critically we often fear that we might be manipulating our students in ways that escape our observations. But the alternative is not to teach, not to act, to remain pedagogically motionless. Teaching critically is always a leap across a dialectical divide that is necessary for any act of knowing to occur. (476)

Just as instructors desire their students to think critically, instructors must teach critically or they will fail in their ability of generate new knowledge for themselves and the students. Teaching, learning and thinking are critical activities that, in order to move beyond superficial meaning making, require active participation from all parties involved.

In turn, McLaren calls for a *revolutionary* critical pedagogy, as the contemporary form of critical pedagogy has become stale and irrelevant, particularly in relation to its original context. The revolution, as McLaren describes, is one with a primary focus on:

Creating pedagogical spaces for self and social transformation, and for coming to understand that both are co-constitutive of building socialism for the twenty-first century [that in turn creates] a revolutionary praxis for the present in the process of creating a permanent revolution for our time. (480)

A revolutionary critical pedagogy continues the original sociopolitical agenda of critical pedagogy, but the idea of creating a *revolution* is to ensure that critical pedagogy, as a tool, remains relevant in today's classrooms. McLaren recognizes that critical pedagogy, in order to remain relevant, must follow its own philosophical underpinnings that reinvents itself and places its theories within the given educational and social context.

Consequently, a curriculum based on critical pedagogy must evolve alongside societal and cultural changes, which includes having an awareness of context from both a subjective (i.e. personal) and objective (i.e. societal) perspective, as “one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized” (Freire 50). My lesson plans center on a subjective/objective context, as I have found that allowing students to voice their personal opinions about course materials – such as a dislike for Picasso – empowers them. By encouraging students to voice their subjective opinions, instructors help them to break from the power structures inherent in traditional, teacher-centered education. “To deny the importance of the subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people” (Freire 50). Like instructors, students have subjective opinions; however, it is the instructors' responsibility to ensure students experience the objective side of course materials. Without an objective perspective, students learn to rely solely on personal opinion, in turn preventing them from experiencing reality (i.e. the reason why Picasso is a significant figure in the development of the arts). A balance between the contextualization of the subjective and objective must exist in order to bring about a deeper level of critical thinking and knowledge making.

Incorporating the subjective/objective context into a course assignment is one of several elements that go into creating engaging course materials that promote interdisciplinary thinking (detailed examples are illustrated in Chapter Four). Through the teaching and learning process, instructors cannot allow their course materials and pedagogical tools to become stale, boring or irrelevant. Instructors can avoid the decay of their course materials by literally practicing what they teach. The key to successfully adapting and employing the avant-garde as a pedagogical tool is for instructors to directly engage with the avant-garde themselves, such as experimenting with activities like Surrealist automatic writing or Fluxist performance art.

Critical Pedagogy and the Avant-Garde

Modern avant-garde art movements like Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, as well as the postmodernist Fluxus, are not inherently pragmatic in nature, nor were their expressed intent on the teaching and learning process. However, “the avant-gardist conception of art makes common cause with the tradition of critical pedagogy insofar as they are both tied to a project of collective emancipation” (Kenning 321). A foundational element shared by critical pedagogy and the avant-garde lies within developing and employing ways to alter the status quo created to keep the masses passive and ignorant. The context of such emancipatory action varies greatly from one avant-garde movement to another, as well as within schools of critical pedagogy itself, but they nonetheless seek to move away from the societal norms. The emancipatory actions of critical pedagogy and the avant-garde alter the way we speak, read, write, and create, in turn becoming a tool of liberation from sociopolitical, cultural and/or economic oppression.

For example, to celebrate industrialism (however misguided such actions may appear today), the Futurists called for machine noise to become musical compositions, whereas the

Dadaists created nonsensical language to combat bourgeoisies' pro-war agenda. Following the work of Sigmund Freud, Surrealists created art as manifestations of human unconsciousness, and Fluxist artists' transformed mundane objects and activities into artistic performance. The avant-garde is a vehicle for critical expression of ideas and its call to action drives real social change, such as combating a world war, the museum system or the establishment itself. The modernist avant-garde, even with various geographical locations, ideologies and time periods of existence, all engaged with art and life in a critical way.

To say most avant-gardist attributes lack pragmatism would be misguided, as the Dada movement, for example, was both non-sensical with its various poetic performances like Hugo Ball's "Karawane", as well as practical like their cut-and-paste collages. The notion of pragmatism and non-sense are not mutually exclusive, as being non-sensical, at least for the Dadaists, was itself a form of rebellion against the status quo of the bourgeoisie. "Against its confinement in the specialized sphere of high culture the avant-gardistes demanded that art become practical once again and attempted to organise a new life praxis from a basis in art – a basis, that is, in values opposed to exploitation, rationalist means-end thinking and the pursuit of profit" (Kenning 321).

The idea of "praxis" is central to both progressive education and critical pedagogy and it is foundational to explaining why avant-garde methods are an ideal, practical tool in which instructors and students can experience critical pedagogy's theoretical basis. While praxis can apply to various cyclical modes of experiential learning (e.g. car repair), avant-garde methods are particularly relevant due to their artistic and ideological nuances. Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci explains how "the philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the 'simple' in their

primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life” (qtd. in Lemert 210). Thus, in the realm of experiential learning, avant-garde methods provide material for a deeper intellectual analysis (i.e. thinking) that serves as the basis for the practice (i.e. doing).

The marriage between avant-garde and pedagogy is both complex and infrequent. The relationship is complex as pedagogy provides a clear and structured platform for how to teach and learn, whereas the avant-garde seeks to destroy such clarity and structure in the process of creative experimentation and learning. The foundational creativity and experience intrinsically lacking in pedagogical theories such as critical pedagogy, can be pragmatically brought to life in the classroom through a multitude of different creative avant-garde methods. Fluxus performance is exemplary of critical pedagogy in its ability of create an experience that simultaneously fuses life and art together, an approach Paik took with his own artistic process. “Fluxus art always tends to carry questions within itself and the questions ultimately aim to integrate the oppressive” (Jeongwha 24).

For example, both Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and Paik’s sexually charged performances like *Opera Sextronique*, question authoritarian and oppressive powers, even if unable to provide direct answers. *Opera Sextronique* is an interdisciplinary musical performance fusing together a classical instrument (cello) along with the “classless” notion of sex. The piece is performed by a Julliard trained female cellist (Charlotte Moorman) under various levels of nudity, and speaks to the feminist position of women musicians and sexuality’s presence in nearly every form of art, except music. At its core however, *Opera Sextronique* is a rather simple project and could be easily adapted to the college Arts and Humanities course, minus the nudity,

of course. Paik's art often focused on using one medium to transform another (e.g. *TV Clock*) or to convey seemingly unrelated information (i.e. opera and sex).

Boal's work is more explicitly aligned with Freire's critical theories, as Boal created performance art specifically designed to include the passive, non-participatory viewer. In the model of progressive education, including critical pedagogy, it is imperative that the teacher-student relationship be collaborative in nature. The same applies to the avant-garde, where artists promoted democratic approaches to art via creative collaboration. "What is special about the Fluxus event is that the artist and the audience have the exactly [sic] same relationship," (Jeongwha 32) which are illustrated in Boal and Paik's performances. Consequently, "Fluxus aesthetics that showed the possibility of communication through direct actions [i.e. performance art] parallels the educational model with emphasis on the learning effect of experience," (Jeongwha 40). As illustrated above, Dewey's call for experience-based learning and Freire's desire for liberation from sociopolitical oppression become more powerful tools when employed along with an avant-garde method like Fluxist performance.

A series of photographs by British photographer Jo Spence offers a more explicit example of the fusion between critical pedagogy and avant-garde art. Spence was a prolific photographer, beginning her career following more commercial and traditional avenues such as photographing families and weddings. However, her work quickly became highly political and often focused on social and feminist themes. In one particular body of work, *Remodeling Photo History* (1979-1982), Spence created a series of 10 staged photographs that "attempt to reanimate, in critical feminist terms, an understanding of the popular in its original 'political' significance. In doing so Spence seeks to turn the avant-garde towards the popular, and transform

the popular through the avant-garde” (Wilson 184). In one of the photographs, Spence is shown reading a book entitled “Freud,” with a [photograph of Freud](#) bracing the cover. The expression on Spence’s face, while donning a pair of googly eyeglasses, is that of sheer, but delighted madness. Spence’s work seeks to shock the audience through its juxtaposition of the popular and the avant-garde.

Siona Wilson, an Associate Professor at CUNY’s Graduate Center, explains the underlying juxtaposition in Spence’s work:

The catalyst for Spence’s effort to break down the opposition between “popular” and “avant-garde” came from a different kind of popular practice, one that drew upon the idioms of “folk culture” for political ends. Spence turned to the radical pedagogy of the Brazilian writer Paulo Freire and the adaptation of his ideas for theatrical purposes by his compatriot, Augusto Boal. Both engaged with the popular politically and aesthetically as being of the people and by the people. (198)

In order to understand Spence’s work, we must first understand its context. Although she created *Remodeling Photo History* in radically different political times than either Freire or Boal’s work, Spence’s photographic series is nonetheless reflective of political oppression, albeit in the context of the feminist struggles in 1970s Britain. By applying critical pedagogy to the popular notion of femininity, Spence’s photographs successfully questioned the notion of popularity, while simultaneously transforming avant-garde into a tool of critical expression.

Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm

Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, or IPP, offers a method that parallels elements of critical pedagogy as outlined by Freire, particularly the notion of *praxis* (i.e. action and reflection). IPP,

along with critical pedagogy, functions as part of a progressive educational model aiding in the development of well-informed and socially conscious individuals by creating a thorough understanding of course materials through context and direct experience in the classroom. Although I was previously familiar with Dewey's work on aesthetics and Freire's critical pedagogy, it was my stumbling upon IPP that gave rise to the idea of avant-garde as pedagogy. As theories on how IPP could intersect with avant-garde methods continued to develop, the research led back to Dewey and Freire's work.

The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm uses five elements to encourage and challenge students to think in a creative and critical manner about all information presented to them. The five elements of IPP are *context*, *experience*, *reflection*, *action*, and *evaluation*, all of which are foundational components in building an Ignatian curriculum. The IPP is based on the Spiritual Exercises of 16th-century Basque priest and founder of the Jesuit order, St. Ignatius of Loyola; however, IPP was not actually published as a pedagogical method until 1993 by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE). The rather late publication date for IPP is indicative that the Jesuits, albeit not explicitly stating so, developed a parallel pedagogy to Freire's 1960's work on critical pedagogy. A direct link between IPP and critical pedagogy may not exist, but IPP's focus on the praxis of action and reflection nonetheless makes it a pedagogical method aimed at a critical and progressive model of education in the classroom.

A distinctive feature of the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm is that, understood in the light of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, it becomes not only a fitting description of the continual interplay of experience, reflection and action in the teaching learning process,

but also an ideal portrayal of the dynamic interrelationship of teacher and learner in the latter's journey of growth in knowledge and freedom. (ICAJE, paragraph 23)

To achieve liberation, a direct and sustained relationship between teacher and student must exist throughout the learning process, which shares an ideology with critical pedagogy and the need for liberating the oppressed. As Freire argues, “the role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of *doxa* [thinking] is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of *logos* [reason]” (italics in the original, 81). Due to Freire’s identity as a Catholic, his use of *doxa* and *logos* can be interpreted in a religious context; however, like IPP, critical pedagogy exists in a range of educational settings, regardless of discipline or religious affiliation.

To appreciate the significance and relevance of IPP as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, regardless of discipline, we must first understand its five components, with *experience*, *reflection*, and *action* being central to the IPP model, whereas *context* serves as a pre-learning and *evaluation* as a post-learning exercise. Below is a brief explanation of each element, taken from the Jesuit’s publication, “[Ignatian Pedagogy – A Practical Approach](#)”:

1. Context: As teachers...we need to understand the world of the student, including the ways in which family, friends, peers, youth culture and mores as well as social pressures, school life, politics, economics, religion, media, art, music, and other realities impact that world and affect the student for better or worse...From time to time we should work seriously with students to reflect on the contextual realities of both our worlds (12).

2. Experience: Any activity in which in addition to a cognitive grasp of the matter being considered, some sensation of an affective nature is registered by the student. In any experience, data is perceived by the student cognitively. Through questioning, imagining, investigating its elements and relationships, the student organizes this data into a whole or a hypothesis (15).
3. Reflection: The memory, the understanding, the imagination and the feelings are used to capture the meaning and the essential value of what is being studied, to discover its relationship with other aspects of knowledge and human activity, and to appreciate its implications in the ongoing search for truth and freedom. This...is a formative and liberating process. It forms the conscience of learners...in such a manner that they are led to move beyond knowing, to undertake action (16).
4. Action: Refers to internal human growth based upon experience that has been reflected upon as well as its manifestation externally. It involves two steps: interiorized choices (i.e. after reflection, the learner considers the experience from a personal, human point of view), and choices externally manifested (i.e. meanings, attitudes, values which have been interiorized, made part of the person, impel the student to act, to do something consistent with this new conviction) (18-19).
5. Evaluation: Comprehensive assessment probably will not occur as frequently as academic testing, but it needs to be planned at intervals, at least once a term. A teacher who is observant will perceive indications of growth or lack of growth in class discussions, students' generosity in response to common needs, etc. much more frequently (19).

These five elements have one combined goal: to aid in the development of a well-rounded, well-informed individual who seeks to be civically engaged in their communities and to engage and promote positive social action in the world. IPP offers a detailed set of instructions on executing a type of critical pedagogy in the classroom – a pedagogy that ultimately seeks to fulfill the goals of a progressive, Deweyan education. In other words, IPP is a pedagogical *model* that promotes critical pedagogy as a *theory*, both of which aid in building the foundational elements towards a progressive educational *system*.

The avant-garde provides the pedagogical process with the methods and materials in which to accomplish the above. For example, students can be tasked with creating a video collage as a visual representation of their understanding of a topic such as Marshall McLuhan's the "medium is the message." A hands-on project, like a visual collage, draws elements from Paik's avant-garde video art, creatively engages students, and simultaneously encourages them to think in an interdisciplinary and critical way about the topic. Challenging students to work with a practical tool (i.e. video), as well as theoretical materials (i.e. McLuhan), particularly when employing elements of the avant-garde, is a challenging process for the instructors as well.

However, the teaching and learning process of employing the avant-garde is aided by adapting it to an existing pedagogy like IPP. In turn, the fusion between avant-garde methods and pedagogical models transforms the avant-garde into its own pedagogy. In relation to IPP specifically, *experience* becomes the main assignment component, while *context* is the pre-learning and *reflection* is the post-learning exercise. *Evaluation* occurs during and after the conclusion of the assignment and *action*, the most complex element in the IPP, is likely to take place in a future moment unbeknownst to the instructor, rather than during the course.

This dissertation's greater focus is on undergraduate, rather than secondary, education; thus, using the element of context, in particular, varies greatly depending on the educational setting in which it is deployed. Context, as IPP describes, will not work well in a college classroom, because the focus is on teachers developing a context specific to each of their students. High school teachers interact with students five days a week, for an entire academic year, whereas college instructors may only see their students once a week for the course of a semester. Nonetheless, IPP is highly adaptable and applicable to a wide range of educational settings, regardless of disciplinary focus or religious affiliation; hence the intrinsic value in transforming avant-garde methods into pedagogy.

A former Jesuit seminarian with extensive teaching experience, discusses the significance of IPP and its relevant applicability to various educational settings:

I've always thought the IPP to be perfect pedagogy for any educational system. It doesn't reinvent the wheel. But what makes it groundbreaking and special is the insistence of the foundational importance of context. Context re/orients the person and encourages connection while inoculating against narcissism and myopia. And once evaluation is over, a person has to apply what s/he learned, not via a new experience, but to a better understood context that will now form a new/better experience. (Martin F. Lopez, text message to author, June 24, 2016)

IPP does not offer us a completely novel idea, but its primary focus on the importance of establishing context is vital to the development of a critical learning experience for the student. And while the notion of context differs from topic to topic, as well as the educational

environment in which it occurs (e.g. high school versus college), it should remain a part of curriculum planning if instructors are to successfully engage with students.

I task my students with contextualizing main assignment components, such as researching details about an artist (e.g. Andy Warhol) or a philosophy (e.g. Postmodernism). I found that after I began including the notion of context in all of my classroom materials (i.e. in-class activity or a formal essay), the level of student engagement increased, as did the overall quality of students' work. Although I did not specifically track and quantify each student's progress through the various curriculum iterations (a limitation discussed in chapter five), I can anecdotally report that student's quality of work increased after I began including pre-writing exercises (which is partly supported by the course's grade records). This increased occurred in two ways: 1. Students became more engaged with the material when they understood its context, which was evidenced through student self-reporting, and the rise of in-class participation and positive feedback, and 2. Splitting up the assignment allowed students to avoid procrastination and to take advantage of receiving instructor feedback prior to writing the final paper, which in turn allowed for higher quality student essays and better grades.

As illustrated in chapter four, all formal assignments in my courses have a pre- and post-writing exercise, the former focusing on context, and the latter on reflection. I began applying the element of context to my course materials early on in my teaching career; however, the ways in which I have applied context in my class has evolved throughout the years, particularly after discovering IPP. For example, despite limited class time with college students, I began to include mandatory, but informal one-on-one meetings (mid-semester) in order to better access and aid my students in their learning process (i.e. my personal process in contextualizing students

according to IPP's true notion of "context"). Although some in-class time must be used to accommodate these student-teacher meetings, I have found the meetings to be undeniably valuable in connecting with students outside of the classroom environment. All too often instructors' office hours remain unused by the majority of students, so creating a space within scheduled class time to accommodate one-on-one meetings offers a way to incorporate IPP's notion of context, which allows instructors to gain a better understanding of students' personal circumstances.

Employing IPP in the classroom may present some instructors with initial hesitations, such as IPP's religious ties. However, IPP's "focus on learning to pay attention, developing the ability to reflect on one's experience, and then acting and evaluating [...] one's presuppositions are key learning events appropriate for any educational endeavor – religious or secular – committed to a student's intellectual and moral development" (Mountin 135). Although principal elements of IPP are derived from Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, it does not need to be employed in a religious context or within the confines of a Jesuit institution. Nor are there real limitations in fusing IPP with avant-garde as pedagogy – the biggest challenge in undertaking such a project is for the instructor to be open and willing to become creative in re-designing their curriculum.

Elements of IPP (in any number of variations) are adaptable to any classroom or academic discipline, regardless of its religious affiliation. While I have taught at a private university, as well as a state college, my teaching experience has been focused on secular, post-secondary education. In adapting and employing various elements of IPP into a course curriculum, its Jesuit affiliation should not present itself as a limitation nor a challenge; thus, aside from an instructor's personal hesitations in using a religiously derived pedagogy, IPP

provides a great model for critical pedagogy in the classroom, as it creates the needed pedagogical foundation to seemingly unpractical avant-garde methods.

The Jesuits and the Avant-Garde

The Jesuits share a direct and unique, but not commonly known, connection with the avant-garde, a connection that further substantiates the notion behind adapting avant-garde methods to IPP in the classroom, as well as at the institutional level. The Jesuit/Avant-Garde connection become clear when reading the article *The Fab Formation (of a Media Arts Organization)*, which is about the cultural and financial demise of 1960s New York and the formation of various independent film and media labs that surfaced around the same time. Below is an excerpt from said article:

Those of us who lived in Manhattan at the time wanted to believe...the Big Apple was where all of America's contradictory cultural impulses got regurgitated and redefined, if not resolved. One of the raging debates of the era was over media, its nature, its content, and its impact on all of us. Marshall McLuhan's study, *Understanding Media* [sic]...was a seminal book, less for what it said than for the fact it acknowledged the enormous power television held over our lives. It was also no accident that McCluhan was Catholic. Church laity and clergy were in the forefront of this examination of media. (Loewinger)

To promote Freire's notion of co-intentional education, instructors should complete the same assignments they assign to their students. Thus, I began the historical contextualization between Catholic Clergy and Media Studies, which served as the pre-writing context exercise for this dissertation (i.e. my "assignment") – a research prompt that would go on to alter the overall

research focus. Shortly thereafter, the missing puzzle piece in the connection between Catholics and the Media revealed itself – the missing piece was a man named John Culkin.

Culkin attended an all-boys Jesuit college prep school in Manhattan. After graduating from high school, Culkin was inspired to enter priesthood, so he joined the Society of Jesus and later became ordained at Fordham, a Jesuit University in the Bronx. As a seminarian, Culkin became interested in the study of media and subsequently took his interests onto Harvard, where he completed a dissertation outlining a curriculum focused on employing film as an instructional tool in the secondary classroom. The concept of a film-based curriculum may seem obvious by today's standards; however, Culkin's work at the time was pioneering a field of study yet to be developed. Culkin not only helped define the academic discourse surrounding the study of media, he was the primary figure in the development of Media Studies as a discipline.

In 1964, Fordham offered Culkin a professorship and he quickly became an influential figure in the development of their Media program. Culkin shared a personal and professional rapport with scholar and Catholic-convert, Marshall McLuhan, and in 1967, despite Fordham's financial troubles, McLuhan was offered a one-year appointment – an appointment he may have declined without Culkin's persuasive support (Schroth 271). In the spring of 1967, Culkin conducted interviews with students eager to fill the 40 available spots in McLuhan's year-long seminar. Culkin assured the students that "McLuhan was a 'genius' and a 'threat to organized traditional ways of thinking,'" and following Freire's anti-banking model of education, Culkin advised students that they would be McLuhan's "coworkers, and not an empty bucket into which you pour knowledge" (Schroth 272).

Culkin left Fordham (and priesthood) in 1969, and moved back to Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood, where he founded the Center for Understanding Media in 1970 (the title of which was in homage to McLuhan's famous book). Culkin's ultimate goal was "to teach teachers to think in new ways" (Moody). One of Culkin's most well-known and prolific projects was the development and implementation of the Graduate Media Studies Program at The New School for Social Research – a program that still remains one of the most prestigious in the nation. Culkin was also key advisor to the Children's Television Workshop (creators of *Sesame Street*), as well as instrumental to the development of the American Film Institute (AFI).

Culkin's biggest pedagogical contribution, however, was in demonstrating and establishing the need for media literacy, as well as creating the initial components for a related discourse. Edmund "Ted" Carpenter, an anthropologist often quoted by Culkin, describes how media is itself a language:

English is a mass medium. All languages are mass media. The new mass media – film, radio, TV – are new languages, their grammar as yet unknown. Each codifies reality differently, each conceals a unique metaphysics. Linguists tell us that it's possible to say anything in any language if you use enough words or images, but there's rarely enough time; the natural course is for a culture to exploit its media biases. (qtd. in Moody)

In attempts to develop the unknown grammar of new media technologies, Culkin created a summer program designed with the specific intent to teach the foundational elements of media literacy to a small cohort of instructors and students working together. "The summer program aimed, first, to help participants use film and television to look at themselves in their teaching environments and, second, to develop one special area of competency, such as videotaping or

animation” (Moody). Culkin’s work encompasses the creativity of avant-garde methods with the structure of critical pedagogy. His tenure at Fordham University, along with the McLuhan partnership, proved solid testing ground for his experiments on developing a grammar for the teaching and learning of new media technologies. Culkin’s work also focused on transforming education at the classroom level, as well as the institution.

A pivotal moment in Fordham’s history came soon after Culkin’s arrival, but years before McLuhan’s. In the mid-60s, the Jesuits embraced the avant-garde spirit, and created the little known, but highly experimental school, Bensalem College. Bensalem was likely a reaction brought on by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), a period of contemporary, institutional reformation of the Catholic Church. The creation of an experimental, Catholic-run college was the first of its kind, and within the scope of the revolutionary spirit of 1960s America. Given the context of New York in the ‘60s and the Vatican’s efforts to remain relevant amidst cultural and technological changes, the unity between the avant-garde and Jesuits’ high academic standards was a natural occurrence. With an artistic presence such as Fluxus and Warhol’s *Factory*, New York was a hotbed of avant-garde art during the 1960s. Ironically, Paik ushered in video art through his impromptu filming of the Pope’s 1965 visit to New York.

The idea to open an experimental avant-garde school on Fordham’s campus originated in 1965 through talks between Professor of English Literature, Elizabeth Sewell and Fordham’s then-president, Leo McLaughlin. Sewell’s hope was “to make life so interesting that students won’t need LSD” (*A Radical Departure*). Sewell argued that, “student revolts such as the one at Berkley campus of the University of California have shown that many students feel they have been fed into a machine and want out” (*A Radical Departure*). The revolution against the

educational system was a direct call to action for a complete reformation of contemporary education, and an experimental college that broke away from the established rules of traditional education provided one solution to the problem. Thus, Fordham decided to create its own avant-garde college.

Bensalem College allowed for absolute personal and academic freedom. The college's complete lack of institutional structure meant there were no grades, no required attendance, no assignments, no curriculum, and no rigid entrance or graduation requirements. In a 1970 article for *Look* magazine, Journalist Isabella Taves described the college:

Fordham University's Bensalem is the farthest out college in the U.S. today. No exams, no compulsory classes, or papers. Study what, when, and if you like. Sleep all day or night. Mixed apartment sharing for students and faculty. No curfews, no house rules. Credit for time spent traveling or working. Students admitted based on interviews with two students and one faculty member. You don't even need a high school diploma to get in. Grades? Forget about them. Nobody can expel you. And if you survive three years, you get a B.A. from Jesuit-run Fordham University in New York. (qtd. in *A Radical Departure*)

What is most exceptional and unique about Fordham's experimental college, is that any student who survived the three years at Bensalem would be awarded a degree from a nationally recognized and accredited university. Fordham successfully created an avant-garde school that circumvented the traditional institutional structure, while still fostering the progressive, democratic agenda. Unlike other experimental schools such as Black Mountain College, students

and faculty at Bensalem enjoyed its avant-garde fluidity, while comfortably residing within the umbrella of a larger institutional structure.

Although a direct connection between the two has not been established, Bensalem may have been modeled after the quintessentially avant-garde Black Mountain College, which operated on a remote farm in North Carolina from 1933 to 1957. John Rice, Black Mountain's founder, explained that the school's "central and consistent effort is to teach method, not content; to emphasize process, not results; to invite students to the realization that the way of handling facts and himself amid facts is more important than the facts themselves" (Molesworth et al. 77). The school followed a communal structure where professors and students lived and worked alongside one another. There were no grades, no required attendance, and no specified curriculum. There was also no endowment or any other type of financial assistance, due to the school's lack of traditional accreditation that "regular" educational institutions possessed. Black Mountain was a progressive, liberal arts school, albeit without the institutional accreditation of Fordham's Bensalem College.

Black Mountain was centered on Deweyan principles that "conceived of education and life as deeply intertwined, and that placed the arts at the center rather than the margin of learning" (Molesworth et al. 77). "Dewey visited the college multiple times, eventually joined the board of advisors, and donated hundreds of books to the college library. While he never spoke in detail about the college, Dewey understood it to be deeply intertwined with democracy" (Molesworth et al. 79). Ironically, the unaccredited and highly experimental Black Mountain, which operated for well over two decades, had a pedagogical structure in place that was lacking from Bensalem. Bensalem, which was accredited and survived less than seven years, would have

benefited from the organized structure of the nearby Jesuits, such as adapting some variation of IPP to its fluid curriculum. In a 1935 letter to Rice, Dewey wrote that, “No matter how the present crisis comes out, the need for the kind of work the College does is imperative in the long-run interests of democracy. The College exists at the very ‘grass roots’ of a democratic way of life” (Molesworth et al.79). Although Dewey died years before Bensalem’s inception, he would have likely made a similar statement in support of pushing forward progressive education by any means possible, whether at the institutional level or through a course assignment.

While IPP was not employed in the Bensalem classrooms, as there was no set curriculum in which to apply a pedagogical method, the school’s lack of structure and anti-institutional model was reflective of the avant-garde as a whole. Fluxus artists, for example, created their own gallery spaces and publication venues as a means of bypassing the museum system and traditional publishing houses. While Fordham did not abandon their structured educational system (as most of the university’s other colleges remained unchanged), they developed a side project with the specific intent of experimenting with a radical form of education established to encourage progressive education’s agenda of experiential learning. What Fordham did at an institutional level, instructors can do at a classroom level. Working within the confines of an institutional structure does not preclude employing the avant-garde as a means of transforming that structure, even if only from a theoretical perspective.

Bensalem College was founded in 1967 and closed in 1974 (*A Radical Departure*). Like other avant-garde endeavors, the school had the right intentions in promoting absolute freedom of expression, but in due time, it inevitably turned into a place where madness and chaos ran amuck. However, Bensalem, like Black Mountain, was a success. While Bensalem was not

successful in regards to faculty retention or the rate of student graduation, the experiment was a success in setting Fordham apart from other universities. Bensalem helped established Fordham's reputation as a forward-thinking and progressive school, inadvertently promoting its mission, albeit in the guise of an avant-garde experiment.

Bensalem serves as further validation of Freire's argument that critical pedagogy only functions through equal exchange between teacher and student, thus, when no relationship exists, neither does the process of true liberation. However, Bensalem offers an example of the challenges of allowing such freedoms and just how can quickly it can become destructive:

Of the 17 [Bensalem] graduates of its first class, six won Woodrow Wilson fellowships, three won Danforth fellowships, and most went on to impressive graduate schools. But by the time a second class was to be recruited, Bensalem had become known along the student grapevine as a 'free and experimental school, a place where you could do your own thing.' Bensalem was bombarded by radical students who in the late 1960s were looking for colleges to take over as their own. The uproar these people made turned against Dr. Sewell's ideas of a "community of scholars." (Coyne 40).

In turn, Sewell herself resigned after only a year at the college, stating: "I have learned here that total freedom can be the most destructive and terrible thing in the world" (qtd. in Coyne 40).

Also, Bensalem and Black Mountain further substantiate my argument regarding a need for avant-garde as pedagogy. That is, the avant-garde, although creative and experimental in nature, lacks the needed structure to sustain itself beyond a short period of time. And pedagogy, be it at the institutional or the course level, lacks the inherently creative and engaging characteristics of the avant-garde, but provides a foundational structure.

In order to create a fusion between the avant-garde and pedagogy that is conducive to both student engagement and the promotion of interdisciplinary thinking, instructors must first select a pedagogy that promotes progressive education (i.e. Critical and/or Ignatian), and then select methods from a range of avant-garde movements, particularly those consisting of elements easily adaptable to an educational setting (e.g. Dada and Fluxus). As the next chapter further illustrates, pedagogy combined with avant-garde methods offers instructors a powerful, yet often unused tool in which to provide students with a collaborative and experimental learning environment.

CHAPTER THREE: THE AVANT-GARDE

In Latin, Fluxus means to flow; thus, to this group, art was not something institutionally or ideologically fixed, but something that was always flowing.

– Kim Jung-rak

This chapter's purpose is to demonstrate how Fluxus, an experimental, postmodern avant-garde movement, acts as a model for research and artistic creation. The chapter also examines how Fluxus disrupted the museum system by pushing beyond the norms of acceptability for art through the 1950's, such as creating their own network for the distribution of art. While critical pedagogues were concerned with the purposeful, ongoing oppressions of minorities by the educational institution, Fluxus shared similar concerns about the art world. "Most of the artists associated with Fluxus shared the belief that the art world had become overly restrictive and too dependent on a social elite, that works of art had become commodities, and that the role of the artist had developed into a mere profession" (Armstrong 34). In order to propel the Fluxus' principal ideas – anti-institution, anti-ego, and anti-art – the movement called upon its international social network of artists to employ a conceptual model of creating art focused on the artistic process, and not simply the finished product (Armstrong 34). As a way to reject institutionalized art, Fluxus artists began experimenting with creating publications and performances, activities that can be easily adapted as a pedagogical method in the classroom.

The purpose of research and experimentation, particularly in the context of arts-based inquiry, is to acquire knowledge about the world around us, from altering our personal perspective to understanding institutional practices. Following an arts-based approach in pedagogy can work to increase student-engagement and interdisciplinarity, as it challenges

students to think critically about topics in a more creative way. Art theorist Graeme Sullivan argues for the significance of artistic practice as research:

The process of making art and interpreting art adds to our understanding as new ideas are presented to help us see in new ways. These creative insights have the potential to transform our understanding by expanding the various descriptions, explanatory, and immersive systems of knowledge that frame individual and community awareness. These forms of understanding are grounded in human experiences and interactions and yield outcomes that can be individually liberating and culturally enlightening. (97)

Avant-garde methods of inquiry follow a path of research and experimentation that allows us to depart from inside-the-box investigative approaches, such as those primarily based on archival and/or quantitative research. Grounding research in historical analysis and using qualitative or quantitative methods of interpretation continue to be foundational to academic research; however, these methods do not preclude employing additional creative and inventive tools that can provide for a more dynamic inquiry process. Referring to the works of Sigmund Freud—particularly those related to the conscious/unconscious mind—Surrealism’s founder, André Breton, directly addresses methods of inquiry that go beyond the conventional. In the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, published in 1924, Breton states:

On the evidence of [Freud’s] discoveries, a current of opinion is at last developing which will enable the explorer of the human mind to extend his investigations, since he will be empowered to deal with more than merely summary realities. Perhaps the imagination is on the verge of recovering its rights. If the depths of our minds conceal strange forces capable of augmenting...those on the surface, it is in our greatest interest to capture them;

first to capture them and later to submit them, should the occasion arise, to the control of reason. The analysts themselves can only gain by this. But it is important to note that there is no method fixed a priori for the execution of this enterprise, that until the new order, it can be considered the province of poets as well as scholars, and that its success does not depend upon the more or less capricious routes that will be followed.

Breton here discusses how an artist or researcher is free to extend his/her investigation into the realm of the unknown and should s/he deem it necessary or appropriate, can in turn analyze the results of such inquiries using conscious logic. Breton's main preoccupation was with the actual *process*, even if such processes consisted of information primarily, if not solely, derived from a mental state extending beyond our conscious ability to think and reason logically.

Through the use of research and experimentation, Fluxus artists employed methods of inquiry that sought to reveal new capabilities in artistic production, such as the interaction between artist and audience. By using a historical methodology in reviewing Fluxus literature, as well as a qualitative analysis of Fluxist art works, this chapter seeks to further substantiate Fluxus as a groundbreaking art movement that offers practices that can be adapted as critical pedagogy in a classroom. In addressing the concept of Ideological State Apparatus (ISAs), derived from Louis Althusser's seminal work, the museum system is an apparatus that both narrowly and consistently drives the cultural and oppressive ideologies regarding what does and does not constitute art. By creating its own publications, performance festivals, and other artistic collaborations, such as mail art, Fluxus sought to transform the museum institution from an oppressive system to a democratic one.

Several facets of Fluxus ideology, such as the destruction of the artistic ego, the breaking down of boundaries between high and low art, the element of interactivity between artist and audience, and the intertwining of Eastern and Western philosophy, mark Fluxus as a historically significant movement with an impact on research and artistic processes. “Fluxus offered a research methodology for...’networked ideas’ and demonstrated the value of these ideas in various experiments... These networks are based on an interactive model of art rather than on the traditional model of art as a one-way communication from sender to receiver” (Saper, *The Fluxus Reader*, 136). The ideologies and methodologies of the Fluxus movement were vital in propelling their own creative agenda, but can also be a valuable tool for promoting outside-the-box thinking in the classroom.

Fluxus artists created artwork that redefined traditional notions of art, such as their in-house publications and performance pieces. While elements of Fluxus methods mimic institutional practices, e.g. academic publications vs. in-house publications, it still sought to answer, or at least give momentum to, numerous boundary-pushing questions such as: What is art? Who is the artist? Can cheaply made, mass produced items ever be considered art? Is the museum system necessary for art to become art? Can elements such as humor and irony be taken seriously by the art world? The latter question, in particular, ultimately pushed Fluxus artists to create works with a renewed sensibility to redefine the meaning of art. By addressing real issues of institutional oppression, Fluxus artists sought to make art democratic by having it easily accessible to everyone, therefore breaking the pre-existing boundaries of the established museum system. Similar to its modernist avant-garde predecessors, Fluxus was successful in challenging

the questions posed above, by presenting elements of avant-garde art as research and by showing how these elements proved critical in redefining art.

Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism

The rise of the avant-garde in the early 1900s coincided with a modernist assault on the contemporary standards and conventions of the art. Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, serve as precursors to the ideologies and methodologies that partly make-up Fluxus; however, the main reason I reference these three particular avant-garde movements is because they were the ones who initially set the stage for using arts-based methods as pedagogy. Also, in my experience developing and teaching an undergraduate course on 20th century humanities, I spent several weeks of class time on modern avant-garde movements. In order for students to engage with the avant-garde, they have to first understand its basic tenets. Students conducted historical research in order to place the movement into its context, which in turn allowed them to begin appreciating why Futurist artists were obsessed with the sounds of war, why Dada was nonsensical, and why Surrealist methods borrowed from Freud.

Since I challenge my own students to think critically about historical elements of the avant-garde, I include my own historical overview of these three movements below. Firstly, I highlight the research and experimental methods of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, and secondly, I argue how each movement influenced Fluxus activities. Understanding the underpinnings of these movements is critical to understanding Fluxus, and I am developing elements of my dissertation in ways that I expect my students to develop their own projects.

Modern avant-garde artists had great interest in experimentation, “but took a far more transgressive and subversive stance towards the institutional framework of the production, distribution, and reception of cultural artifacts” (Berghaus 14). By producing written works deviating from the five-paragraph essay, or distributing works via video rather than paper, or acting as cultural critic when conducting peer-review, I challenged my students to also move beyond institutionalized methods of production, distribution, and reception.

Futurism

Aspects of Futurist activities can be adapted to the college classroom to disrupt the monotony of writing assignments. Futurism began breaking the rules of grammar and syntax around 1909, when Filippo Tommaso (F.T.) Marinetti wrote the *Manifesto del Futurismo* demanding the younger generation of artists to “glorify war — the only cure for the world— militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman” (*Futurist Manifesto*). The Futurist manifesto, the first of its kind in the 20th century, was written in a demanding tone that called for a restructuring of Italian culture. Since the manifesto lacked a positive artistic agenda, made numerous references to the necessary revitalization of Italian culture, and contained alarmingly strong fascist and misogynist undertones, Futurism established itself as an experimental and controversial movement.

Futurists worked with a wide range of different artistic mediums including film, painting, photography, literature, architecture, sculpture, design, music, and performance. With the inception and proliferation of machine guns during World War I, Futurists became fascinated with the concepts of speed, light, sound, youth, and violence, all of which became fundamental elements of Futurist art. Although they continued to produce works into the early 1940s,

Futurism's most significant period was during the 1910s, particularly with the innovative breakthrough writings such as Luigi Russolo's "The Art of Noises" (1913). Elements from Futurist music and performance were adopted by the Fluxus movement, which arose decades after Futurists had completely ceased creating art.

Futurism and Fluxus

Although there is little existing academic literature establishing a connection between Futurism and Fluxus, or discussing how the two movements relate to one another in terms of artistic development, I argue these two movements are clearly related to one another, albeit indirectly. Futurism was a short-lived movement, but their philosophies and underlying ideas continue to thrive over a century after their introduction. Elements of Futurist experimentation, notably music composition and live performances, have helped to further develop artistic elements through a wide range of mediums. Other avant-garde movements subsequently adopted elements of these experiments to fulfill their own creative and experimental agendas just as Fluxus did with its strong emphasis on collaborative performance.

A parallel between Futurism and Fluxus is seen through the chaotic and dissonant nature of their musical compositions, as well as the absurdist and comedic elements of their live performances. In regards to music, Russolo's essay on noise proposed numerous innovative tactics for composing, recording, and performing pieces of music, which subsequently became vastly influential for many styles of music throughout the 20th century. Russolo argues, "to excite our sensibility, music has developed into a search for a more complex polyphony and a greater variety of instrumental tones...It has tried to obtain the most complex succession of dissonant chords, thus preparing the ground for Musical Noise" (5-6). Genres of music, such as electronica

and noise rock, along with artists like Aphex Twin and Sonic Youth, were influenced by Russolo's call to use machine and industrial noises in creating musical compositions.

Second, regarding performance, Futurists developed a style of live performance called *serata*, a theatrical innovation transforming lyrical soirées into absurd public performances. As a means of pushing forward the ideological agenda of Futurism, the *serata* consisted of a combination of the reading of manifestos and the presentation of art works created from the theories discussed within the manifestos. The *serata* was met with extreme derision from audience members, who would protest the performance by throwing various vegetables onto the stage, an action Marinetti famously criticized by exclaiming, "Throw an idea, not a potato, you idiot!" (Berghaus 31). While one of Futurism's main concerns was with the technical advancements created by warfare, *seratas* did not employ any type of technology in its productions. The *serata* was akin to a traditional theatrical performance, as it featured actors on stage reciting lines from a script or simply improvising, and did not include any technology such as a film camera that could record the performances.

Dada

Critical pedagogy developed as a response to an oppressive political regime of 1960s dictatorial Brazil. Where Paulo Freire created a pedagogy to help liberate individuals from the system that was supposed to protect them, Dadaism created an avant-garde to protest the bourgeois elitist ideology they believed was the cause that led to World War I. Dada was created in 1916 at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Switzerland, and arrived at its unusual name by having a knife randomly placed within the pages of a closed dictionary. The word in which the knife's point rested upon when the dictionary was opened – "dada," from the French meaning

“hobbyhorse,” – became the movement’s name. Such an unusual beginning to an artistic movement is demonstrative of the nonsensical side of Dada. Aside from senselessness, the element of shock and a profound anti-art philosophy were core ideals of Dadaism.

Similar to other avant-garde movements, Dada developed as a reaction to bourgeois society. However, instead of focusing on elements of violence and war like the Futurists, Dada artists championed a leftist anti-war agenda and focused on destroying the notion of art that existed up until the 1910’s. Dadaism further developed Marcel Duchamp’s concept of ready-made art, which consequently changed the role of both art and artist. Additionally, Dada successfully adopted the collage, assemblage, and montage originally developed by the Cubists, and transformed each element into an integral part of their creative method. Tristan Tzara, one of the founders and principal members of the Dada Movement, once “famously declared that Dada makes no sense, refusing the centuries-long work of producing artistic meaning and cultural legibility” (Molesworth 180).

Elements of shock and senselessness may not translate well into a college classroom; however, creative Dadaist methods are easily employed in any classroom, particularly when we consider the prevalence of “copy and paste” activities in the development of young children’s spatial and motor skills. Some of my students scoffed at the idea of making a collage past elementary school; however, when tasked with creating a collage with the nuanced level of political satire such as Hannah Höch’s *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (fig. 2), students quickly realized the process was not as easy as they originally thought. In turn, the non-sense, anti-art content of Dada works may veer away from a pedagogical application, but Dada method of artistic creation does not.



Figure 2: Cut with the Kitchen Knife

© 1919 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Dada and Fluxus

“Like Dada, Fluxus strove to strip artistic expression of its significance and sensible qualities as part of a questioning of the established system of constructing and evaluating meaning” (Brill 124). Many Fluxus artists also taught college, thus, their activities naturally took a more pedagogical form than Dada, and provided an example of how to create works that followed an institutional structure, while simultaneously circumventing it (i.e. in-house Fluxus

publications). Dada firmly established its roots through Duchamp's 1917 ready-made, *Fountain*. The urinal was removed from its original context and subsequently placed as a piece of art within the confines of an open art exhibition in New York. At the time, the Society of Independent Artists exhibition committee rejected the piece as legitimate art; nevertheless, Duchamp had successfully altered the traditional trajectory of artistic discourse.

According to German artist Wolf Vostell, however, "Duchamp had made the mistake of declaring the urinal to be a sculpture but not to consider that using the urinal was an equally artistic activity" (Brill 134). Duchamp's apparent oversight into the creative process by misjudging bodily activities as non-artistic inevitably opened the door for Fluxus to continue its exploration of Dadaist and Duchampian standards. Ultimately, "Fluxus extended the concept of the ready-made from objects to fields of activity and expression, fulfilling Duchamp's intention to create something new" (Brill 135). Through its publications, performance activities, and indirect connection to academia, Fluxus became a more sensible and grounded movement than Dada, while still maintaining a strong diversion to the institution, particularly the museum system. In regards to pedagogy, even if an instructor chooses to forgo employing Dada and Fluxus methods in the classroom, these two avant-garde movements provide plenty of material for robust classroom discussion on the meaning and making of art.

Surrealism

Surrealist activities such as automatism, dreamwork analysis, and the exquisite corpse game can be used in the college classroom as engaging writing exercises. While Futurism and Dada offer insight into the experimental practices of the avant-garde, it was the Surrealists who saw themselves as scientists first and artists second, hence a greater pedagogical applicability in

their work. In his 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto*, Breton outlined the goals of the Surrealist movement, which aligned well with Freud's work. At the end of the manifesto, Breton provides his encyclopedic definition of Surrealism as being "based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life." His definition points to the experimental nature of the movement as a way in which to provide insight into the mind, as well as possible solutions to life's dilemmas.

Drawing upon Freudian concepts, Surrealists were primarily interested in conducting experiments to test the capabilities and limitations of the human mind. One of the ways that Surrealists conducted research was through experimenting with the creative process by incorporating elements of dreamwork into visual art. Surrealists also saw themselves as philosophers with a revolutionary agenda, and the various artworks they created became the by-product of the philosophical, revolutionary, and experimental process they continuously pursued. For example, a mere four days before the publication of the *Surrealist Manifesto*, the Bureau of Surrealist Research (*Centrale Surréaliste*) was established in Paris. The Bureau featured a group of individuals interested in advancing Surrealist ideology focused on scientific rather than aesthetic research. More specifically, the Bureau's "aim was to gather all the information possible related to forms that might express the unconscious activity of the mind" (Durozoi 63). Capturing unconscious activities became an important endeavor in the research process, as the concept of automatism, for example, was partially independent of conscious mental control, in turn overpowering the natural element of censorship and allowing for unrestricted results.

Surrealists' interests moved beyond simply adopting Freudian concepts of automatism or dreamwork; they also wanted to filter such concepts through a research community that could issue press-releases and publications in order to solidify the movement's political and cultural agenda. In relation to the philosophical foundation behind the Bureau's establishment, their publication, *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, explains Surrealists' research interests:

No domain has been specified...for this undertaking, and surrealism proposes a gathering of the greatest possible number of experimental elements, for a purpose that cannot yet be perceived. All those who have the means to contribute, in any fashion, to the creation of genuine surrealist archives, *are urgently* requested to come forward: let them shed light on the genesis of an invention, or propose a new system of psychic investigation, or make us the judges of striking coincidences, or reveal their most instinctive ideas on fashion, as well as politics, etc., or freely criticize morality, or even simply entrust us with their most curious dreams and with what their dreams suggest to them. (Durozoi 63, emphasis in the original)

As the above passage indicates, Surrealists wanted to create a community of like-minded individuals interested in researching and discussing a wide range of topics, such as developing new ways of representing surreal phenomena in the physical world. The activities mentioned indicate a desire to create politically conscious art, while working through sustained research activities – a development that would go on to influence Fluxus as well.

Surrealism and Fluxus

Surrealism further developed some of Dadaism's core ideals of anti-art and anti-ego, while simultaneously evolving into a more cohesive art movement, focused on experimenting

with the capabilities of the human mind. In turn, Surrealism played an influential role in the development of Fluxus, albeit in a more obscure way than Futurism or Dada. Fluxus was an artistic movement primarily driven by a collective attitude among a group of international artists. Like Fluxus, Surrealism “is not just an art movement; it’s a way of thinking; a way of life – a way of transforming existence” (*Unlock Art*). Thus, both movements shared a collective attitude in the democratic creation and distribution of art, as well as in wanting to transform the art world’s inherent belief system – a system that placed a tremendous amount of prominence on the sole genius and the individual ego.

The Bureau of Surrealist Research (*Centrale Surréaliste*), founded in 1924, was dedicated specifically to the development of research and archival practices primarily related to the unconscious mind. The Bureau, “where an atmosphere of effervescent research reigned” (Durozoi 65),

was supposed to implement the theory that surrealism resembled scientific investigation and promoted experimentation in the field of psychology and linguistics. Unfortunately, although people from various parts of Europe sought out the research center, it also attracted crackpots and became the locus of many belligerent confrontations. (Balakian 79)

Nonetheless, the Bureau established Surrealism as more than an artistic movement; it helped ground its philosophical ideas into the realm of scholarly work. Surrealist research drew upon the main elements of the scientific method and inquiry and used such methods to experiment and transform art in significant ways, such as re-appropriating Freud’s scientific inquiries of the human mind into visual spectacles to be experienced by an audience.

Surrealists created and published various literary works such as books, manifestos, poetry and automatic writings, the latter of which was Freudian-influenced work on the human unconscious. A prevalent quality of Surrealist literature was humor, which often derived from illogical situations and bizarre juxtapositions, making surreal humor dependent on absurdist qualities for comedic effect. Not only did Fluxus also publish its own literary works, most of its activities were also inherently comedic. Fluxus activities, musical compositions or live performances, were often developed as a series of gags performed collaboratively by artists. In similar fashion as Surrealism, Fluxus drew upon seemingly illogical and absurd elements in order to confuse the audience and push the boundaries of accepted art forms, as well working on transforming mundane everyday activities into performance art.

Fluxus Experimentation and Research

Fluxus was a forum for experimentation. The commitment to experimentation and research was profound. It was characteristic that Fluxus participants not only asked “Why?” but “How?” – and then they would generally go on to ask “Why not?” and “How Else?”

– Ken Friedman

In 1981, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins developed a criterion he felt was integral to explain the concept of Fluxus as it had evolved up until that point in time. Thirteen years later, fellow artist Ken Friedman revamped and expanded Higgins’ list to include a few more central tenets of Fluxus, each of which he subsequently explained in greater detail in his article “A Fluxus Idea.”

According to Friedman, in the twelve Fluxus ideas listed below, he is simply “describing ideas and issues, not prescribing a series of standards” (91-92):

1. Globalism
2. Unity of Art and Life
3. Intermedia
4. Experimentalism, Research, Orientation, Iconoclasm
5. Chance
6. Playfulness
7. Simplicity, Parsimony
8. Implicativeness
9. Exemplativism
10. Specificity
11. Presence in Time
12. Musicality

The first item points to the extensive involvement of Eastern artists within Fluxus. Friedman argues that globalism is the most central Fluxist idea, because culture is one of the only ways “in which nations can push themselves forward as national interest groups with identities defined against the identities of other nations” (Friedman 92). Through art and culture, “Fluxus encourages a dialogue of unlike minds when social purposes are in tune,” thus allowing for an international discourse among distinct cultures throughout the world (Friedman 92). Intermedia, the third item on the list, relates specifically to an interdisciplinary relationship in art, such as the fusion of literature and video, or poetry and theatre – a concept I adapt to every class I teach.

The second and fourth item on the list, however, is of particular interest to my argument. “The unity of art and life,” along with “experimentalism, research, orientation, iconoclasm,” not only refer to the importance of the fusion of life and art with one another, but also to the significant role that research and experimentation played in Fluxus activities and the movement’s collective attitude. Friedman is clear in stating that, “Fluxus applied the scientific method to art.” Despite many artworks being created by solo artists, collaboration via artistic experimentation was common (93). The notion of Fluxus experimentation was not simply in relation to trying out new things, but in assessing the results as well. Addressing the scientific and research orientation so inherent to the collective Fluxus attitude, Friedman argues the following:

Most artists, even those who believe themselves experimentalists, understand very little about the way ideas develop. In science, the notion of collaboration, or theoreticians, experimenters and researchers working together to build new methods and results is well established. Fluxus applies this idea to art. Many Fluxus works are the result of numbers of artists active in dialogue. (93)

“Fluxus artists explored behavioral presentations, objects, enunciations, concepts and set of choices as alternative means to contribute to knowledge and the ‘rebuilding of foundations’ (Armstrong 95). Fluxus research was about transforming everyday objects and ideas into art; it wanted to change the perception of what could and could not be considered art, from audience to artists to the museum itself. Its aim was to distribute art cheaply and abundantly to the masses by completely bypassing the museum system, in turn allowing artists the freedom to create and audiences the freedom to partake without the oppressive nature of the institutional apparatus. Fluxus’ primary methodology was to create art in a democratic way, which was accomplished

through collaboration among artists around the world. While there are many different manifestations of Fluxus art, the two most prevalent forms fall under the categories of performance and publication.

In similar vein as the Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists, Fluxus concerned itself with the *process* of making art. However, the finished product became a marker of a successful creative process, rather than simply a product to be easily discarded or transformed into a commercially valuable item. A Fluxus performance, for example, focused on components of the creative process more so than the finished product. The creative processes of a Fluxus performance piece followed a path of experimentation akin to the scientific method, which in turn can be adopted as an invention tool in the pursuit of knowledge through scholarly research and/or artistic creation.

The scientific method itself, however, is not without controversy, as it has been a topic of continued debate among scientists for generations. There are numerous approaches to the scientific method, including variations in the process itself, but the main issue lies in how the method can actually produce new scientific knowledge. Various schools of thought offer different perspectives regarding the process of scientific inquiry, from Aristotle's *deduction - induction* method to Thomas Kuhn's *paradigm shifts*. While there is no universally accepted version of the scientific method, it nonetheless offers core principles foundational to the discovery process. The National Center for Atmospheric Research, in reaction to the continued debate about climate change, provides a concise explanation of the continued importance of the scientific method, even with its apparent flaws:

Science is a human activity, and no human is infallible. Science is also a community activity, and scientists rely on each other to question, challenge, and improve one

another's work. When corrections are made, this is not a sign that the system is broken but rather that it's working as designed. (NCAR)

The scientific method functions as a simplified aid in organizing the discovery process towards the acquisition of new knowledge, and as addressed herein, refers to a continuous process focused on producing new knowledge or a different perspective on the existing body of knowledge. The scientific method is a general guide to the process of discovery and it is therefore open for continued interpretation and revision. The six-step process below is my own reinterpretation of the modern scientific method:

1. Ask a question
2. Conduct research
3. Create a hypothesis
4. Test the hypothesis via an experiment
5. Conduct an analysis of the experiment's results
6. Draw a conclusion

In relation to Fluxus specifically, experimentation involves taking an idea or object and putting it into action in ways not previously done. Fluxus artists did not directly employ the scientific method in their works, but they sought ways to break from the institutionalization of the museum system and the traditional publication house. For example, "shocking" the audience was particularly valuable in relation to pushing the boundaries of acceptability within art. In turn, elements of a Fluxus performance had to first be designed to create a feeling of shock in its viewer (i.e. develop a hypothesis), and then the hypothesis could be put in place in order to verify if the intended results were achieved (i.e. execute the experiment). Once the experiment's

results are analyzed (by taking a closer look at various performance elements such as audience reaction/interaction) and the data leads to the conclusion that the performance failed to support the intended hypothesis, the experiment can be redesigned and reproduced until the intended result is achieved.

If the experiment was successful, then it could be repeated using different variables, but since the artistic experiment is cultural in nature, the results vary greatly from one experiment to another. Either way, the creative process consists of an ongoing cycle of research and experimentation. Similar to the scientific method, the options for testing an idea could be endless. Failure could be defined as the artists' inability to achieve the desired effect or product, but could also inadvertently make a discovery in the process. Grades aside, teaching students the value of ongoing experimentation and failure prevalent in Fluxus can help students break through their own personal barriers such as insecurity or shyness. For example, when placed in small groups and tasked with creating a 60 second performance art piece, a common student reaction is to feel overwhelmed. However, students taught the value of process over product can feel more at ease in accomplishing a task that originally seemed arduous. So while students' grades are dependent on the performance, getting an "A" was more easily achieved through the collaborative and creative process that went into making the performance.

Thus, the end product may prove to be of remarkable value, but the process can be as valuable as the end result, even with its failures. Important discoveries do occur through the process of research and experimentation, particularly if one is equipped to recognize chance happenings; Alexander Fleming's accidental discovery of penicillin is one such example. In the article, "Causal Thinking in Science: How Scientists and Students Interpret the Unexpected,"

psychology professors Kevin Dunbar and Jonathan Fugelsang describe how serendipitous events can be vital components in the process of scientific inquiry, particularly if the scientist is prepared for the unexpected. Expanding on Louis Pasteur's belief that "chance favors the prepared mind," Dunbar and Fugelsang's argument supports the notion that since nearly half (or more) of all scientific discoveries encounter an unanticipated element, scientists will benefit from being prepared to observe and embrace the unexpected when conducting their experiments (62-64).

Another example of the relationship of chance and method comes from avant-garde artist and music producer Brian Eno, who strongly believes in the importance of "happy accidents," particularly as it relates to the process of making music and the inevitable mistakes that occur. Eno justifies the notion of "honor thy error as a hidden intention," by arguing the following:

There's two things [that can] happen...First of all, you can very laboriously set up a set of conditions, because you hope that at a certain point there'll be a – snap! – [and that] ...suddenly the thing will have a direction. But of course...you very laboriously will set up these conditions, and they don't generate anything. So you set it up deliberately so that it gets to the point where a synergy happens among the elements that you don't understand; it's not true that you can make something that you're finally in control of, rather the opposite thing: you can make something that extends your notion of control. (Bangs, *Furious.com*)

An intrinsic part of the avant-garde process is its openness to the unanticipated element and the chance moment that occur in the mundane aspects of everyday life. Chance, however, can be pre-planned and manipulated or occur naturally and accidentally or, as Peter Bürger

argues, chance can be *direct* or *mediated*. Avant-gardists employed the element of chance in both ways, for example: direct chance allows materials to develop naturally, with minimal interference, as is the case with action paintings; mediated chance carefully creates a situation, but allows results to be unpredictable, such as happenings (Bürger 67). Bürger uses the work of Surrealists in order to highlight his argument: “Starting from the experience that a society organized on the basis of a means-end rationality increasingly restricts the individual’s scope, the Surrealists attempt to discover elements of the unpredictable in daily life,” which requires “a behavioral type that renounces specific goals in favor of a pervasive openness to impressions.” However, Surrealists are not content with only allowing for direct chance events to occur, thus, they seek to “bring the extraordinary about” (Bürger 65).

“Human beings, in general, and scientists, in particular, appear to have a propensity to attend to the unexpected, have definitive strategies for sifting through these findings, and focus on the potentially interesting” (Dunbar 73). Thus, scientists and artists employ chance events in developing their theoretical and artistic pursuits. The various modernist avant-garde movements discussed herein follow similar patterns of research and discovery throughout their own art making process, regardless of how different the end product appeared.

Using the trappings of the science experiment suggests a way to further displace the interpretation of Fluxus as an art movement. Building and interacting with their work, rather than passively appreciating it as a finished product, changes interpretation into a generative project. (Saper 137)

Moving from an interpretive project to a generative one is key in promoting student engagement and critical thinking, particularly in a media-saturated society. Students understanding the basics of video production, for example, can help them move from passive viewers to active producers.

Similar to scientists redeveloping an experiment based on initially unexpected results, Fluxus artists perceived value in the experimental process of trial and error, regardless of whether the process was completed and a finished product was achieved. An “error” in a Fluxus experiment could come in the form of unanticipated audience reaction to a performance or installation piece. Unlike the sciences, however, the unexpected results of a Fluxus experiment become part of the process itself, as artists may be more interested in the varying results of a particular experiment, rather than conducting the same experiment over and over again in order to gain a specific result. When an artist experiments with various methods in which to achieve the end product, be it a painting, sculpture, film or performance, they are conducting a specific type of research through the process of experimentation, analysis, evaluation, and as was often the case the case with Fluxus works, collaboration. Examples include Fluxus-founder George Maciunas’ development of a school curriculum focused on the practical components of an art-based education (Appendix A) or his revitalization of New York City’s SoHo neighborhood, as well as Paik’s continuous efforts to reinvent performance art by adding unique elements to it, such as human sexuality and media objects.

Drawing its influences from Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, Fluxus built a strong foundation reliant on the process of research and experimentation. Paik, who is considered one of the main contributors in the establishment and popularity of the Fluxus movement, was no exception in his dedication to the artistic process of research, experimentation, and failure in

creating new forms of art. Focused more on the process, rather than the product, Fluxus redefined the concepts of artistic creation by publishing its own material, creating its own distribution network, collaborating across boundaries to develop elaborate live performances, adopting elements of chance and chaos in musical composition, and altering the convention of traditional media through Paik's artworks, such as [*Exposition of Music – Electronic Television*](#) (1963).

Throughout its various activities, Fluxus was akin to a laboratory with large manufacturing concerns, as “they attempt to develop new products through endless rounds of experiments, failures and sharing of success among participants” (Saper 139). The classroom should function in a similar way: an experimental place where information is presented, researched and questioned, subjectively/objectively contextualized, subsequently connected interdisciplinary and otherwise reinvented. Fluxus was a dynamic movement that consistently sought to break from the institutionalized boundaries of the traditional art world. In the Fluxus experimental lab, two artistic elements created with an intended goal to achieve such liberation are publications and performance.

Fluxist Publications and Performance

Fluxus publishing and performance activities are relevant to my argument due to their applicability in the classroom. As mentioned before, performance is a great way to engage students creatively, while simultaneously fostering collaboration. Publications, in terms of the undergraduate classroom, can be transformed into a writing exercise, such as students

maintaining a project journal throughout the course of the semester. Lets take a closer look at these Fluxus activities in order to further understand and appreciate their dynamic nature. To begin, Fluxus experiments can be divided into three stages, as outlined below:

1. Proto-Fluxus and Early Fluxus Performance: 1961-1964

- a. Significant events that occurred before the first public appearance of Fluxus in 1962, as well as the first series of Fluxus activities by artists such as Al Hansen and La Monte Young. Numerous musical compositions and performances by Paik were also notable during this time period (e.g. *One Violin for Solo*) (Jenkins 24-26).

2. Publishing and Multiples: 1964-1970

- a. Most Fluxus writings and objects (e.g. Fluxkits) were published during this time period, including the works of various artists like Ben Vautier, George Brecht, and Ken Friedman. During this time Paik wrote about the important of Fluxus as a vehicle for distributing art (Jenkins 30, 34).

3. Late Fluxus Performance: 1970-1978

- a. This period was marked by a renewed interest in Fluxus performance, with numerous Fluxus artists performing Maciunas's various activities, as well as performances by Geoffrey Hendricks and Paik, the latter of whom would give tours of New York City, known as Flux-tour (Jenkins 35).

While performance and publications were integral to Fluxus identity, both of these distinct mediums demonstrate how the experimental and collective mentality of the artists, their shared belief in collaboration rather than sole genius, as well as their anti-institutional endeavors,

were successful in building a tightknit community of artists who have been influential to the development of peripheral and mainstream art. Fluxus' social network among artists throughout the world served as a foundation for artistic creation and collaboration, particularly through the development of distinct art forms, such as mail art, which began with Ray Johnson's (intentionally misspelled) New York Correspondance School, as well as the early performance work with collaborating Fluxus artists like Yoko Ono and Charlotte Moorman.

Publications: Mail Art

I have not yet incorporated elements of mail art to my course assignments, but it is an activity that nonetheless translates well into the classroom, albeit with some limitations. One such limitation is course subject matter, as a mail art project would have greater applicability in a Media Literacy course versus one on Biology. I have, however, created mail art pieces as a graduate student and as an artist. Mail art is a largely creative activity and can be as simple and cheap, or as complex and expensive, as one desires it to be. Understanding the context and goals of mail art will aid instructors to find ways in which they can employ this wonderful Fluxus activity into their classrooms.

“At least since the 1950's, some artists and poets have sought innovative ways to reach their audience and collaborators. These artists have sought to circumvent the gallery system by means of direct mailings and alternative distribution networks” (Saper 129). Mail art initially came about in the 1940s through the work of New York based avant-garde artist Ray Johnson. Mail art's popularity increased throughout the 1950s via Johnson's famed [correspondence school](#), and currently has a global stronghold through the International Union of Mail-Artists, an association created in 1988 by Dutch artist Ruud Janssen.

While mail art refers to a form of art that is mailed from one person to another or between networks of individuals that does not imply the physical mailing of an already-created artwork. Mail art is specifically created for distribution through the mail, and often takes the form of smaller, easy to send items such as stickers, drawings, clippings, CD's, cassette tapes, postcards, envelopes, or custom made stamps and cover a wide range of media from literature, sculpture, drawing, painting, sound, music, and collage. In general, there are no set rules for mail art, besides a general consideration to avoid mailing sexually explicit materials. Otherwise, mail art can take any form the artist wishes, as long as she is willing to pay for the postage.

Mail art often called for a simple action to be taken by the recipient in order to complete the art piece. For example, a postcard is painted by one artist and subsequently mailed to another. Depending on the postcard's specific instructions, the recipient would then complete the requested action and subsequently forward the piece onto someone else, or return it to the original sender. Through mail art, artists can create and successfully distribute his/her own art pieces without the financial, mental, or emotional burden of established art markets. The assessment of mail as art was made upon the successful circumvention of the museum in the distribution of art through the postal system. As Friedman asserts,

Fluxus approached mail art as an opportunity to experimentation, to communication and to interaction. At the beginning, Fluxus artists were part of that primary group of individual participants on a small network: at the end, the trenchant experimentation that Fluxus artists pursued, the paradigms they developed [...] redefined the medium. (24)

Mail art became a successful experiment in creating a new artistic dimension that remained true to the avant-garde spirit, not only in its use of a social network, but also in its

development of a unique art form. The popularity and use of the postal system, due to the proliferation of the Internet, has decreased dramatically over the last two decades, further substantiating the idea that mail could be considered art. In fact, many mail artists have chosen to move their mail art network into the digital realm by sharing audio and/or visual files through various social networking sites to not only avoid the rising costs of postage, but to also create and distribute mail art in ways more appropriate for the digital age. Ultimately, a principal Fluxus contribution to mail art “was the exploration and use of the medium of mail as a communication system,” first and foremost, which in turn manifested itself in three parts: communication, exhibition and publishing (Friedman 22).

Publications: Books et al.

Fluxus sought to produce and distribute writing in unique and creative ways, and I decided to follow suit in my classroom. Two years ago, tasked with teaching English Communication to foreign students, I sought creative ways to consistently engage students with writing without overwhelming them. While students were still required to submit at least two formal essays for evaluation, they were presented with many other “publishing” opportunities throughout the semester. For a Composition Workshop I taught last year, students’ writing was evaluated with daily “one-minute” essays, in addition to weekly journal entries and two formal academic essays. Students created their own ways of producing and publishing content, and often did not realize how these seemingly mundane writing activities helped develop their writing skills. By the end of the semester, many students’ writing had improved dramatically and, if nothing else, the student felt more confident in writing and sharing his/her work.

Publications were central to Fluxus experimentation efforts in breaking down conventional methods of creating and distributing art. “Not content with rewriting the rules of publication and distribution, Fluxus...rewrote the notion of conception, creation, and consumption” (Armstrong 55). The publishing endeavors of Fluxus demonstrate an experimental spirit, where the collective of artists, particularly Maciunas and Higgins, set out to redefine the conventional forms of publications. They were unhappy with the current state of publication and sought to change it by developing their own method of creating and distributing publications. One such example is Higgins’ [*Something Else Press*](#).

Something Else Press was “born in 1964 out of the impatience with Fluxus publishing problems, and grew to be one of the most important disseminators of experimental activity in the 1960s and 1970s” (Armstrong 52). Higgins established the press as a continuation of Fluxus publishing endeavors and these publications helped solidify, cultivate, and spread the Fluxus attitude throughout the art community. It is difficult to ascertain how influential Fluxus might have become without taking into consideration its devotion to publishing a wide range of materials in a relatively short amount of time. The publications served as a way to directly distribute Fluxus’ ideologies to their respective audience without becoming dependent on an institutional broker. By controlling what information was published and how the publications were distributed, the Fluxus community reduced unnecessary financial and philosophical costs.

Fluxus publishing activities included more than just writing; it also included the publication of objects known as Fluxkits or Fluxboxes. Flux objects were cheap, mass-produced items filled with easily discarded items such as small toys, notecards, flowers, dead skin, matches, dice, soap, photos and film reels. During the time period when the kits were made, each

one sold for about \$4 a piece, if they sold at all. Ironically, these mass-produced, cheap objects, which were unpopular during the time they were originally made and sold, now sell for an astronomical amount of money considering the original price tag. Fluxkits can be a great topic of classroom discussion regarding the merits of art, as many students are dumbfounded that a box containing dead skin clippings (e.g. Ken Friedman's *Flux Clippings*, 1969) would ever be considered an art piece.

Aside from consisting of inexpensive materials and a shared commonality in their representation and distribution, Fluxkits also contained elements of audience participation and humor, both of which were central components to Fluxus (Jenkins 54). In similar fashion to mail art, Fluxkits were partially dependent on audience participation for the completion of the art piece. For example, Benjamin Patterson's washing sets contained a small piece of soap, a towel and provided the audience with the directive "Wash your Face," in order to complete the art work (Jenkins 55, 57). The directives attached to many Fluxus works demonstrated the artists' playful side, but the directives also served as a way to question the formality and seriousness of art in ways that other movements like Dada had done decades before. Humor, mass production, audience participation, and the use of cheap products were "central to the Fluxus program of demystifying art and, simultaneously, raising conscious activity of participators," while continuing on with their artistic experimentation (Jenkins 54).

Performance

Chapter four details an in-class activity where students are tasked with creating a 60-second performance art piece in a small group of their peers. Following, is a description of performance as it relates to Fluxus and a few of its respective artists.

Fluxus performances teach how a process is part of content and content is the form of process: they present models of how the meaning of content is determined by the processes in which the substance of that content was formed, and by the ways it is received. (Armstrong 95)

Fluxus performance sought to push the boundaries of acceptability, as they often included a wide range of activities such as the mundane task of eating an identical lunch at the same time and place every day (Knowles' *Identical Lunch*, 1967), or as surprisingly bizarre as Paik's 1960 piano performance in Cologne, where he "threw himself on the piano and rushed into the audience, attacking [John] Cage and pianist David Tudor by cutting their clothes with scissors and dumping shampoo on their heads" (Muchnic).

Alison Knowles began her *Identical Lunch* project in 1968, which was performed by various artists for a numbers of years after its initial debut. While the performance was meant to be identical every single time, in reality, it was not. Knowles ate a tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast with lettuce, butter and no mayo, accompanied by either a large glass of milk or a bowl of soup. She ate this particular lunch at the same place and at the same time every single day (Jenkins 89). Several other artists set out to replicate Knowles' exact lunch routine, thereby transforming the piece from a solo project into a collective one. However, each artist could not possibly replicate an identical daily routine and consume the same lunch, at the same place, at the same time and for the same price. The reason for the break in continuity was simple: life is simply not that predictable. Kristine Stiles, artist and art history professor at Duke University, argues that *Identical Lunch*:

Offers a model of activities by Fluxus artists for the ways in which they negotiate the content and processes of life and infiltrate the social fabric with the ethos of Fluxus. It examines the sameness, unity, homogeneity – all aspects of individual identity unmitigated by the social – and simultaneously the foils of opposition, counterpoint, and heterogeneity that are characteristic of the communal. (Armstrong 89-90)

The variations in *Identical Lunch* served as a collective experiment in chance operations, such as those provided by the Chinese Book of Changes, *I Ching*, which was famously used by Cage in creating his groundbreaking compositions. Although Knowles' performance was intended to be identical throughout all conditions, including the numerous artists performing the piece, each performance failed to be an exact replica of one another. Fluxus experimentation embraces both sides of the research spectrum: the carefully pre-planned side and the side that allows for the element of chance to occur. On the one hand, performances such as Allan Kaprow's *Happenings* can appear deliberate and chaotic when in fact they were all carefully pre-planned with key event elements drafted ahead of time. On the other hand, performances are altered by random chance events unforeseen by the artists, such as change in a restaurant's menu. Either way, it points to experimental methods of artistic creation.

During one of Paik's early performance pieces, [*Zen for Head*](#) (1963), which was a directive to LaMonte Young's "Draw a Straight Line and Follow it" (*Compositions 1960*), Paik dipped his head, hands, and neck tie in tomato juice (or possibly red paint) and dragged it across a 13 foot long blank scroll. The piece draws on various Eastern sensibilities, such as intricate scroll paintings common throughout Asia, as well as elements of Zen Buddhism. Particularly during Paik's involvement with the Fluxus movement, he experimented with pushing the

boundaries of acceptable art forms, which were initially accomplished through performance art, and then subsequently became engrained within his later TV and video works. With his Fluxist performance art, however, Paik often experimented with elements of shock and senselessness:

Examples of the first type of senseless are Paik's pieces on action music, in which the artist's doings surprise the audience by appearing to them as utterly senseless, nonartistic, stupid, and ridiculous. As Paik made clear, these actions were explicitly designed to induce a reaction of shock, and thus they show an unmistakable affinity to works and performances typical of dada. (Brill 153)

Knowles and Paik are only two of several Fluxus artists pushing the envelope of the artistic process through experimentation. Yoko Ono was another influential Asian artist who contributed greatly to Fluxus. Her performance, [*Cut Piece*](#) (1964), is an example of the simultaneous vulnerability and audacity of a typical Fluxus performance. In this piece, Ono sits on the ground, legs politely folded by her side, accompanied on stage simply by a pair of scissors. The audience is invited to come up to the stage, take the scissors, and cut off a piece of Ono's clothing. The performance creates a sense of defenselessness on Ono's part, as she is entrusting complete strangers to take a sharp object close to her body in order to cut off pieces of her clothing. During one particular performance, an overzealous audience member decided to spend a considerable amount of time cutting off Ono's camisole, in addition to both bra straps, in turn forcing Ono to cover her chest to avoid her breasts becoming exposed (*Cut Piece* video).

Ono's performance does not simply rely on the openness and trust of the artist; it also relies on the audience. Imagine an audience member being asked to go on stage during a performance only to become an integral part of said performance. Although the invitation is open

to anyone in the audience, it would likely take a certain amount of courage for the average person to step up on stage and become so intimately intertwined with the artwork. Public speaking and performance is a common fear, and the additional level of attention and vulnerability for both artist and audience can be overwhelming, particularly during the brief moment of cutting. Of course, the tradition of vulnerability and interaction between artist and audience continued for decades after Ono's initial performance, and can be seen in various contemporary performance art pieces, such as the works of Marina Abramović (e.g. [*The Artist Is Present*](#), MoMA, March to May 2010).

Cut Piece is particularly brilliant in its nuances as both artist and audience transform the roll of performer. Ono successfully broke the fourth wall. Elements of trust, vulnerability, courage, interactivity, embarrassment, and personal intimacy become tangled with one another in the relatively short but unique performance. *Cut Piece* was an experiment in human interaction and in breaking pre-conceived notions of artistic process and product. Ono's performance can be as seen as a response to Duchamp's *Fountain*, where an ordinary everyday action transforms the accepted idea of art. By directly involving its audience in the performance, Fluxus sought to destroy the preconceived notion of classical storytelling and structure. Elements of Fluxus performance follow the tradition of the ancient philosophical notion of Cynicism – a group of individuals who actively sought to free themselves from the social conventions of contemporary society.

Closing Thoughts

Throughout the chapter I have illustrated how four different avant-garde movements – Futurism, Dada, Surrealism and Fluxus – used experimentation as vehicles for research and artistic creation, and how elements derived from these movements, such as automatic writing and performance art, can be employed in the classroom to promote engagement and interdisciplinary thinking. Fluxus was anti-institutional, anti-ego, anti-art and focused its creative efforts on producing and distributing art in democratic ways. Through its experimentation and research endeavors, Fluxus developed two main forms of art: publication and performance, both of which were created and executed in order to successfully bypass the museum system, redefine the notion of art, and destroy the concept of the solo artistic genius. Fluxus sought to create art for the people, by the people – and it accomplished that goal. The democratic and fluid nature of Fluxus and the avant-garde led to development of numerous creative and collaborative activities. An instructor with the desire and basic knowledge can adopt any number of variations of avant-garde methods into the classroom as pedagogical methods.

The research agenda and experimental spirit of Fluxus activities are demonstrative of how seemingly mindless, comedic, absurd or boring ideas can be transformed into art, even if just through a conceptual process. While students must, at some point in time, be evaluated based on a finished product (i.e. exam or essay), teaching them the importance of the process is equally crucial, and by creating engaging, yet challenging materials, instructors can make the course much more dynamic. Paik argued that, “in a nomadic post-industrial time we are more experience-oriented than possession-oriented” (Pijnappel 9). Paik’s argument points to the need of shifting focus from the narrow lens of *product completion* to the wider lens of *creative*

process, as the latter lends itself to a more significant interpretation of life and the acquisition of new knowledge, or at the very least, can offer us a renewed perspective on art and culture.

Having now established the context of pedagogy and the avant-garde, the following chapter will more thoroughly discuss and illustrate how these two elements function in relation to undergraduate education, as well as how Paik's contribution to media arts and communication may aid in the process of transforming avant-garde methods into pedagogy.

CHAPTER FOUR: IN THE CLASSROOM

What agencies of society should lead the way? Those two giants who don't speak to each other: the school and the mass media. Anyone for dialogue?

– John M. Culkin

This chapter illustrates how avant-garde methods function as pedagogy and also presents elements of Paik's artistic process, particularly in relation to his re-invention of new media (i.e. television and video) as an artistic objective and a tool for two-way communication. Paik's artistic processes are exemplary of the fusion of avant-garde methods and pedagogy; however, his works are certainly not the sole way in which to engage students with interdisciplinary materials. Instructors can teach *with* and *about* Paik, in similar fashion as the various other avant-garde methods already discussed throughout. However, in order to successfully engage students by employing avant-garde methods in the classroom, an instructor should take into account key elements of *context* and *experience* as proposed by the Jesuit's IPP, which seeks to fulfill a progressive education agenda. Since Paik's creative methods transformed the medium of TV and video, I begin by contextualizing those elements in his approach to art making. Consequently, I discuss and demonstrate two activities developed for my "20th and 21st Century Humanities and Technology" course.

My first introduction to Paik's art came many years ago via a modern art exhibit in Berlin, Germany. I first connected with his work as an artist and student, and then as a college instructor. In leafing through the pages of the Humanities course textbook, I found a reference to Paik and his contributions as a globalizing force in art and technology. I was originally fascinated with his video art works, particularly his multimedia installations; however, my

interest in his works grew upon discovering his involvement in the development and proliferation of Fluxus. Paik's work as a Fluxus artist was groundbreaking for its performance, as well as musical elements, and has remained influential to a subsequent generation of artists. I spent considerable time researching several dozen of Paik's art works both in-person and through library archives in the U.S. and South Korea. I then narrowed down my analysis to 24 pieces, ranging in scope from performance art to large-scale video installations. This process period of research and analysis led to the extraction of an artistic method deployed by Paik when creating his various artworks. I found that his creative process followed a pattern of research-through-experimentation with the artistic object serving as the tangible product of these developments.

Paik's process consisted of four simple steps, each developing upon one another: *question, contextualize, experiment, and reflect*, which shares some similarities with IPP. The importance of Paik's method is in understanding the context of an object from its historical (and original) disciplinary perspective, as well as transforming such objects through interdisciplinary experimentation that can lead to the development of new knowledge on a personal and academic level. Applying Paik's methods to an undergraduate Media Studies course, for example, gives students the opportunity to act as responsible agents by expanding their media literacy, as well as allowing them to transform their new knowledge into an actionable cause that serves for the betterment of future media developments. Helping students understand the context and evolution of media advancements is the first step in guiding them to understand the nuances of these technologies, much in the same way that Paik did when experimenting with television and video.

Paik spent many years teaching at the college level while also experimenting with the ways in which to transform modes of communication via art. Although they never met, Paik and

McLuhan worked parallel to one another, which coincided with McLuhan's 1967 professorship at Fordham's Bayside Campus. While McLuhan focused on creating robust theoretical arguments regarding the merits and ills of the mass media, Paik focused on experimenting with transforming new media into an artistic and communicative object. Paik and McLuhan created separate but parallel arguments that aided in the advancement of artistic research through new media technologies, and I have used their inadvertent connection in my course to teach students about significant media developments.

Mid-semester in my Humanities course, students are simultaneously introduced to McLuhan and the rise of Postmodernism. Without fail, students begin to get lost in the subject matter. While students find the course materials more relevant and interesting to their personal lives, they also find the materials much more difficult to understand. In other words, once we begin discussing the "information age" of television and media, students immediately engage with materials as they can relate to watching TV more so than viewing a silent, black and white film. However, when students are also challenged to understand the nuances of Warhol's experimental films, postmodern art and literature, concepts of Minimalism, or why the works of Damien Hirst are considered art, students can begin to shy away from materials. I have had the occasional brave soul do a final project on postmodern theory, but that is a rare occurrence.

Discussing Paik's creative process and art pieces often leads to a fruitful student discussion in class. Paik's visually stimulating work can illustrate difficult topics such as McLuhan's new media theories or postmodernism's incredulity towards an absolute reality. As I have mentioned before, I have used Paik as a teaching tool in two ways: directly (teaching *about* him), as a conduit for classroom discussion, and indirectly (teaching *with* him), as an aid in my

lesson planning. In the late 1950s, Paik began asking questions about how television functions outside of the passive viewing of American living rooms. Posing a similar scenario to students today can generate equally colorful and quizzical responses, such as “No, a television is not art,” or “Why would anyone think that a TV set is art? Does that make my iPhone art?” Although I began teaching *about* and *with* Paik in a Humanities course, there is undeniable value in teaching Paik with a media literacy lens in particular, and tasking students with understanding the context, as well as overall effects of contemporary new media technologies.

Students are often surprised to discover the media they believe to be new, such as smartphones or the Internet, was around decades before they were born. Thus, breaking through students pre-conceived notions is a fundamental process in the college experience, and often times can be accomplished by simply introducing students to a significant topic or person and challenging them to think about it in an critical, intertextual way. When first introducing Ai Wei Wei to a classroom of 40 students, almost half of whom were from Mainland China, the discussion grew tensely political with reactions ranging from rage to empowerment. While most course topics do not easily lend themselves to such passionate discussions, politically sensitive subjective matter, for example, can function as a trigger that forces students to become hyper aware of their personal feelings and biases towards a specific topic. A student’s awareness of her feelings can serve as a step toward understanding her personal context in relation to the world – such as beginning to contextualize the problematic and oppressive nature of the Chinese government in relation to citizens’ lack of personal or artistic freedoms.

Paik's Experimentation and Artistic Process

Paik once exclaimed, "I want to bring McLuhan to kindergarten children," (Pamphlet, *Department of Art Presents*) hence why television and video were two focal points of experimentation for Paik – the experiments of which led to fundamental changes to new media objects as tools for art and communication. When Paik depicted TV sets as principal artistic components in a video installation, he altered the intended purpose for a ubiquitous object, as he removed television from its original context and placed it into the art world – a concept that today's students, as stated above, can still find pretty remarkable. Paik's artworks were the end products of dedicated experimental periods, where he conducted extensive research on ways to alter the television set, manipulate the video image and subsequently create a multimedia art installation. Simply put: he learned the rules in order to break the rules. Instructors can cautiously teach students to break the rules after learning them, particularly in driving forth the importance of truly understanding the context of a given topic, as without the proper context, we are left with nothing more than subjective judgments and assumptions.

Despite his denial, Paik's works carried a political tone, as he sought to transform a media object like television from a passive to an active device. Whether or not he wishes to embrace it, the action of democratizing a technology carries a heavy political agenda, not dissimilar to the democratization sought by critical pedagogy. Paik was actually the first artist to create, and publicly exhibit, an installation using television sets as art. His process of artistic experimentation initially failed, as individuals attending the *Exposition of Music* exhibit did not realize the TV sets and videotaped images were the artistic component of the installation. Eventually however, audience and critics alike began to appreciate the possibility that TV and

video could actually be art objects. The acceptance of TV and video as viable art forms was solidified through continuous experiments conducted by Paik, and carried on by other video artists such as Shirin Neshat and Pipilotti Rist.

Magnet TV

Paik's first television experiment consisted of placing a large magnet on top of a TV set, subsequently forcing the internal workings of the set to contort and reduce the image to nothing more than a distorted line. Parallel to the desire of critical pedagogues seeking ways to free the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor, Paik sought to remove the power of the television as an autonomous object, and in the case of an art installation, that power shifted from the artist's hands to that of the audience. The first installation that employed such a concept was [*Magnet TV*](#) (1965), which consisted of a large magnet placed on top of a TV set allowing visitors to manipulate the on-screen image simply by moving the magnet around.

The installation was acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and has now become a typical museum piece that is devoid of any interaction from visitors. Thus, *Magnet TV* has become institutionalized to the point that its original intent is completely lost. The numerous versions of Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) have suffered a similar fate, as museums around the world grew tired of dealing with performance artists attempting to urinate inside the piece. Both *Fountain* and *Magnet TV* provide for great classroom discussion, as the topic encourages students to work through the critical thinking process in order to understand the foundational reasons why these two ready-made objects are considered art.

Paik's video art set the stage for the postmodern visual spectacle, such as the popularity of MTV's music videos, or viral videos spawned from YouTube culture. Paik most likely

envisioned video's potential as a commercially viable and popular product, as his new media experiments were valuable in redefining the ways in which individuals communicate, as well as what objects could be considered art. Paik's research was conducted in the form of artistic experiments, and his finished products, were the art objects themselves. An instructor can translate Paik's practical experimental activities into the classroom by allowing students to conduct avant-garde style experiments and call it research. For example, students can be tasked with taking the last 20 photographs shot with their smart phones and then creating a narrative that speaks of a societal issue, such as poverty or racism, or a cultural one, such as the narcissistic nature of selfies.

Electronic Superhighway

Paik sought to make interdisciplinary connections and approached experimentation on a theoretical as well as practical level, a trait indicative of his intellect and insight into technology and society. For example, in the 1970's Paik coined the phrase "electronic superhighway," envisioning the foundational elements that would become the Internet and the World Wide Web. The term was later adopted by the Clinton administration and altered to the well-known catch phrase "information superhighway," a term often associated with Vice President and environmentalist Al Gore. In a 1993 article, Paik acknowledged the connection and stated: "In 1974 I proposed the "Electronic Super Highway" to the Rockefeller Foundation and made 12.000 \$. The idea was published in German (3.000 copies) in 1976. Maybe Bill Clinton read it in the Oxford Library" (qtd. in Buszmann 110). Paik's light-hearted accusation of Clinton is indicative of Paik's awareness of the Internet's power as a tool for communication – an idea that

for Paik, started off as an interdisciplinary and experimental exercise stemming from an idealized notion of a globalized and interconnected world.

An artistic rendition of Paik's 1974 Internet theory came to fruition about 20 years later with the 1995 installation, [*Electronic Superhighway Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*](#), which is a TV art object that breaks the notion of television as an indoctrinating medium. *Electronic Superhighway* is a large 51-channel video installation (approx. 15 x 40 x 4 ft.) designed in the shape of the continental U.S., with Alaska and Hawaii as separate pieces. The installation is a criticism of American culture's obsession with television programming and bright, flashy things. "Paik augmented the flashing images 'seen as though from a passing car' with audio clips from *The Wizard of Oz*, *Oklahoma*, and other screen gems, suggesting that our picture of America has always been influenced by film and television" ("Electronic Superhighway"). In Paik's 1974 essay, "Media Planning in the Postindustrial Society," he declared that:

Assuming we connect New York with Los Angeles by means of an electronic telecommunication network that operates in strong transmission ranges, as well as with continental satellites, wave guides, bundled coaxial cable, and later also via laser beam fiber optics: the expenditure would be about the same as for a moon landing, except that the benefits in term of by-products would be greater.

Paik believed Americans were obsessed with consumer culture and *Electronic Superhighway* acts as a reflection of a country unified through an odd devotion to capitalist and postmodern ideals. The above quote, however, describes Paik's idea of creating a democratic network to seamlessly connect the East Coast with the West. Thus, on the one hand, Paik's theoretical notion of the "electronic superhighway" is descriptive of the democratic

communication capabilities of the Internet and the World Wide Web. On the other hand, Paik's practical notion of the "electronic superhighway" illustrates strong consumerist tendencies and creates a disconnect in human communication stemming from the proliferation of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Paik highlights both the benefits and drawbacks of new media developments – a similar nuanced approach on the good and the bad of technology is critical in helping students develop strong media literacy skills. Students may be initially attracted to the brightly colors of Paik's *Electronic Superhighway*, but can be soon dissuaded once they learn the idea behind the installation is of a darker tone. I have used Paik as an object of study in a Business Communication, as well an English Composition course, both with much success in engaging the students with creative, thought-provoking materials.

Paik and Avant-Garde as Pedagogy in the Classroom

A quick Google search for the terms "Nam June Paik assignment," generates results for instructor created course assignments, as well as student responses. I analyzed two different student blog entries created in response to course prompts. One assignment was a well-written blog post about Paik's *TV Buddha* (1974), created by a fourth-year student for a "Computational Media" course at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia. Another assignment was for a "Digital Arts in Context" class and featured a student's original visual essay. The essay was a watercolor drawing of a television set, similar to the many drawings that Paik created throughout his career. On the left-hand side of the painted TV, the student included

a quote from Paik, and on the right-hand side, the student wrote the obvious reason for creating a painting featuring a television (i.e. because Paik was the father of video art).

While the student responses above demonstrate some creativity and insight, they both fail to take into account the technological context that is central to Paik's artworks, such as pushing the discussion further into the realm of *why* and *how* Paik destroyed new media objects as a way of highlighting the complexities of living in a heavily mediated, top-down structured society. Also, neither student directly engaged in discourse with Paik nor did the students create a media object that could better convey his methods and ideas. Many of the Paik-related course materials and student responses that I have come across online are not only limited to the scope of Media Studies, the assignments focus on merely an expository regurgitation of Paik's life and work as an artist. There is an abundance of materials detailing Paik's art, but most are generalized surveys that do not discuss the complex nuances of his work. Considering that Paik is generally only discussed within the confines of a Media Studies course, instructors should challenge students to interact with Paik's work in a more critical, meaningful way. One way of promoting student engagement and interdisciplinary thinking with Paik's art is to have students create their own video works and share them with the class, in the same way that Paik created his early videos and shared them with fellow avant-garde artists – a venture that started in the mid-60s.

Paik acquired a Sony Portapak camera in 1965, two years before it became commercially available to the American market. That same year, by a random stroke of luck, Paik got the opportunity to videotape Pope Paul VI's visit to New York, and he later showcased the raw, unedited footage at *Café au Go Go* in Greenwich Village. Paik's public video showcase of the Pope's visit was the moment that ushered in the age of video art. Video art began as a simple

record and *replay* of an unedited event – similar to the documentary style footage that marked the beginning of the film industry (e.g. The Lumière Brothers' *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, 1895). While Paik did not directly experiment with film techniques, his long and prolific career consisted of ongoing experiments using various other media, ranging from music in a sexually charged opera ([*Opera Sextronique*](#), 1967) to video in an extremely large art installation ([*Dadaikseon*](#), 1988) to an exhibition featuring lasers ([*Baroque Laser*](#), 1995).

Paik maintained control of the artistic process, as he was aware of the political implications of the objects he used in his art pieces, such as the passivity and propagandistic qualities of television, for example. He did not approach creative experimentation without first understanding the original context of the objects he chose to manipulate. The reason Paik chose to work with inherently oppressive mediums like television and video, was due to the desire to democratize art by allowing TV and video to be made for the people, by the people. In turn, with the advent of consumer video technology in the 1960s, the power structure of control began to shift from producer to consumer, where an artist or anyone wealthy enough to afford a video camera could easily capture endless images and share them with an audience of their choosing.

Nowadays, with the ubiquitous presence of the Internet and ease of production, many active consumers are often referred to as *prosumers* (producers + consumers), although most individuals (not just students) often lack a deeper understanding about the complex nuances of the technologies they are using. However, the ease of production, distribution and consumption of contemporary video works via sites like YouTube have fulfilled Paik's wishes, as the power structures have shifted away from the institution and towards the consumer (e.g. transforming communication from a passive, one-way into an active, two-way mode).

Professional video artists may now use high end equipment to create stunning art pieces (e.g. Bill Viola's [*Inverted Birth*](#), 2014), but the ubiquitous nature of smart phone technology and free websites has created a new generation of prosumers inundating the Internet with poorly shot, unedited footage and that gave rise to the "viral video." There has been a dramatic rise in democratic filmmaking (i.e. the ability for practically anyone to make and distribute videos) that fulfills Paik's desire to break from mass media's institutionally oppressive nature; however, these prosumer films present a new set of issues for debate such as surveillance, privacy, quality and artistic merit. Do students truly understand the possible consequences of shooting video with their iPhones and then posting them freely online for the world to see? Students often lack the knowledge and/or understanding of the implications of the media they are so accustomed to using on a daily basis; thus, it is beneficial for instructors to teach students about these technological nuances, so that like Paik, they too can be informed consumers and producers. With a continuing trend in the widespread use of media technologies in the college classroom (e.g. smart phones, videos, blogs), teaching *with* and *about* Paik's avant-gardist processes becomes an even more crucial pedagogical approach, regardless of subject matter being taught.

Paik's process is exemplary of avant-garde as pedagogy for two main reasons. First, he was an avant-garde artist who influenced the creation and proliferation of anti-institutional and democratic ideologies espoused by Fluxus. He broke ground in music by fusing it with raw sexuality, he employed absurdist methods in performance art, and he destroyed hundreds of TV sets in order to challenge their sedating presence in our living rooms. Paik was avant-garde in his personal and professional life, even after he became commercially successful. Although he suffered a stroke in 1996 that left him partially disabled, Paik's avant-garde activities continued.

One such example was Paik's meeting with President Bill Clinton in June of 1998. Paik, who was confined to a wheel chair at the time, decided to walk across the receiving line with the help of a walker and his nephew, Ken Hakuta. As he greeted President Clinton, Paik's pants fell to the ground, and ironically, he was not wearing any underwear ([Mkenti](#), *YouTube*). Paik pulled many absurdist stunts during his long career, so it is not far-fetched to presume the incident with the President was intentional – similar to an avant-garde “happening.” Second, having experienced both sides of the student-teacher spectrum, Paik must have been aware of the pedagogical struggles in the college classroom. In addition to being a pioneering artist, Paik was an educated immigrant with insight into media advances and their side effects on society. Paulo Freire states that “the teacher is...an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can...shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves” (Horton 181).

Discussing elements of the avant-garde with students and immediately asking them to mimic avant-garde methods can lead to confusion. Confusion sets in because students may hyper focus on the idea of the “avant-garde,” a notoriously difficult term to define, and then choose to simply give up on completing the exercise. Although instructor explanation of abstract concepts and well organized presentations have been found to positively impact students' critical thinking (Shim 21), sometimes implicitly engaging students with the avant-garde is more effective than overly explaining the topic (e.g. following Ulmer's work with the *popcycle*). I do not mean to imply that students should be wholly unaware of avant-garde methods (on the contrary, they must become familiar with the fundamentals); however, I recommend that, depending on the

course, instructors challenge students to create avant-garde work without making it explicit that they are following elements of avant-garde methods.

For example, if I am teaching my Humanities students about Surrealism, and task them with completing an assignment using surrealist methods, I would discuss Surrealism as an avant-garde movement and then automatic writing as a method. Students would then work on contextualizing both topics as part of the process in completing the assignment. Recognizing that most instructors would likely not find themselves teaching students about avant-garde movements, but rather just employing its methods, it is useful to provide students with a baseline rationale for whatever method is used. However, if instructors go into great detail about the hows and whys of avant-garde techniques, it would likely serve to distract students from completing the assignment. Thus, implicitly following avant-garde methods eliminates the possibility of indoctrinating students into specific modes of creative production. When given the freedom and opportunity to be creative, students can demonstrate a surprisingly high level of insight into a topic originally thought to be beyond their intellectual grasp.

As I have mentioned throughout, I first uncovered the idea of employing avant-garde as pedagogy as a way of encouraging students to engage with the course materials. During the last several years, I have experimented with creating various types of exercises and assignments in hopes of engaging my students with the materials they often perceive as trivial, as well as encouraging them to think about such materials in a contextualized and interdisciplinary way. Of course, not all of my experimental assignments have been successful in achieving my intended pedagogical goals, partly due to the student body of a particular course and/or the subject matter. Despite the lack of success with some assignments, I have continued challenging myself to

engage with the course materials I teach in new and unique ways. I continue my pedagogical experiments to not only avoid staleness in my curriculum, but to also discover what works and does not work in a particular class, and why.

With that said, I acknowledge the pedagogical methods I propose herein neither guarantee students will engage with, nor think about, the subject matter beyond conventional boundaries. Factors such as a students' personal, cultural, or academic context should be taken into account by instructors when they are evaluating the level of success of a particular assignment and the ways in which it can be effectively restructured for future use. When teaching in South Korea, I made numerous adjustments to my class activities due largely in part to a vastly different cultural approach to education, an approach that made it a challenge for me to teach and for the students to learn. While I cannot speak to the depth of the complexities of transnational education and cross cultural communication, I was teaching at an English-only global business school accredited by AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), an American organization; thus, the pedagogical approaches in my classroom were expected to be derived from the perspective of the U.S. educational system.

Although attempts to adapt several elements from a U.S. course into a Korean one failed miserably, I nonetheless found ways to successfully employ avant-garde methods in my courses in both countries. My success in adapting avant-garde methods in my courses came through experimental periods of trial and error, not unlike my teaching experiments in the U.S. However, simply because I used the avant-garde in developing my course materials does not imply that my courses were inherently avant-garde in nature. For the most part, my class environment is interactive and student-centered, with a variety of course activities that employ a combination of

different learning modalities ranging from aural to visual, analog to digital, and from the traditional to the avant-garde.

Moving away from traditional modes of education (i.e. teacher-centered lectures, the 5-paragraph essay, exams based on rote memorization, etc.) can increase student engagement and makes the process of learning more dynamic for both students and the instructor. Granted, over the last 100 years, the educational system has not ignored the faults of traditional education methods and has shifted focus to a more student-centered learning environment, often times on a college-wide level. More often, the assignments simply asked students to analyze a particular video or artwork and provide their subjective thoughts and opinions. Critical thinking is generally not facilitated by a teaching approach focused on content over process (i.e. on *what* to think instead of *how* to think) (Gul 38). Thus, instructors should challenge students to think beyond mere analysis, and the process of contextualization can be a strong aid in further developing students' critical thinking skills.

What is vitally important to students' learning process, at least in relation to the Humanities-based subject matter I teach, is their ability to understand a topic's context, and to connect one topic with another. Students must not only learn that ideas do not develop in a vacuum; they must also appreciate the basic tenets of a given topic. If nothing else, instructors should ensure they are able to guide students away from subjective bias and/or ignorance. When I first began teaching, my course assignments were much more rudimentary than they currently are, but they nonetheless included key elements designed to aid in student understanding. Besides assignments and activities designed to include the idea of context and connections, I have since re-developed them to include an experimental, avant-garde approach that I argue is

less oppressive to students' academic development, as it gives them more freedom of personal expression, while simultaneously challenging them to think objectively about a topic.

My out-of-class assignments, whether theory or practice based, follow a three-part, graded process: pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. Only recently did I decide to include a post-writing exercise, and I did so because I believe it to be a valuable feedback tool for the instructor, as well as a great reflective exercise for the students. I began employed a pre-writing exercise early on in my teaching career, but it has gone through several revisions in recent years, making it a more streamlined, and helpful learning tool for students. The pre-writing serves as a proposal, where students are tasked with conducting preliminary research about their topic in order to contextualize it, as well as to begin thinking about possible interdisciplinary connections. While it does generate a bit more work for the instructor, I have devised the pre-writing exercises in a straightforward manner that allows me to grade and return them to students on the same day of submission, such as during a film viewing or an in-class exercise.

The pre-writing exercise helps to keep students on track and reduces the chances of procrastinating with the main assignment. It also allows the instructor to understand some of the issues students may encounter ahead of the assignment due date, and work with them to troubleshoot such issues. Also, making the pre- and post- writing exercises a graded component of the main assignment encourages most students to take an interest in completing these brief exercises in a timely manner. Of course, there will always be students in class who are merely interested in receiving a barely passable grade and their work ethic will reflect that, often not taking any interest in completing what they perceive as busy-work. Nevertheless, employing

pre- and post- writing exercises helps students through the learning process, and the extra effort on my end aids the students and myself, as I end up receiving higher quality work to evaluate.

I employed context-based pre-writing exercises before learning about IPP, which also begins its exercises with the notion of context. Following context, IPP also considers experience, reflection, action, and evaluation to be foundational to the learning process. The largest difference in the way I employ context versus the way IPP employs it, is that I challenge students to focus on building the context of the topic, whereas IPP requests for the instructor to build context of the student. In other words, my context-based exercises focus on the relationship between student and topic, and IPP's context focus is that of the student's personal life and their relationship with the instructor and the topic.

While I do not use IPP in the strictest sense in my classes, I find there is great value in the method and have since revised the way I approach context-based exercises. My pre-writing exercises now ask students to not only contextualize the topic itself, but to also contextualize themselves within the topic. Such a contextualization creates a personal relationship between student and topic, simultaneously encouraging them to make connections. For example, a student is tasked with contextualizing the film *Citizen Kane*, and after conducting some preliminary research on the film's basic details (i.e. director, ideology, main characters, etc.), the student realizes she shares a birth place with Orson Wells.

The discovery of a minor personal connection may initially appear to be irrelevant. However, Ulmer, famous for proposing a new rhetoric appropriate for the electronic age (i.e. *electracy*), would argue there is value in the student's personal discovery and connection to course materials, as it aids in developing his/her *mystory*. As Ulmer describes, "a mystory is to

learning, to the experience of a person as learner, what history historiography – is to the collective experience of a people...It is a representation of the exchange across discourses that happens in the invention process” (199). The invention process depends on “circulation of ideas through the principal discourses and their institutions organizing our culture,” and can begin within a student’s personal context and its relationship to the course, the topic at hand, the instructor, and/or the college as institution (Ulmer 199).

So, at the pre-writing level students are tasked with contextualizing the topic and subsequently placing themselves within that context. Depending on how a student engages with the pre-exercises, if they engage at all, gives me preliminary feedback on their context as a student in my classroom. That is, I am able to discern their level of interest and dedication to the course, as well as their skill level as it relates to thinking and writing about the assigned materials. The pre-writing exercises give me a contextual feedback on my students and allows me to make strategic changes for the benefit of the individual student and if needed, the class as a whole. At the post-writing level, I task students with contextualizing their experience, in turn giving them the opportunity to place themselves within the context of the assignment they just completed. The post-exercises are a way to contextualize the process, rather than the topic, as it is focused on evaluating the learning experience and the knowledge gained after assignment completion.

Aside from the college-driven, end-of-semester evaluations, I seldom requested my students to provide feedback for a particular assignment or the overall course. However, after familiarizing myself with IPP, I believe that a reflective exercise, no matter how brief, can be incredibly valuable to the learning process for both students and instructor. The post-writing

exercise follows the “reflection” component of IPP, as it calls for students to reflect on their experiences. The real value in the post-writing exercise comes from encouraging students’ to directly engage with their thoughts and feelings about their experiences and explain why they liked or dislikes the assignment. So while their feedback can be helpful to the instructor in future lesson planning, I believe the reflection exercise to be more valuable to the students as a way to not only voice their opinions, but also reconnect with the knowledge they gained.

Also making the post-exercise a graded assignment component further incentivizes students to complete it. However, I am careful in allocating an appropriate amount of grade points relative to the required effort and level of difficulty for the assignment; thus, the pre- and post- exercises carry a weighted total that is sufficient enough to encourage students to complete it, but not too high so as to overshadow the importance of the main assignment. For example, for a three-page written film critique, I would allot a total of 80 points for the main assignment, and the other 20 points for the pre- and post- exercises, with 10 points being awarded to each exercise respectively. That way, students still have the ability to pass the assignment even without completing either the pre- or post- exercise, but the overall quality of their work will likely suffer and final grades will appropriately reflect their efforts.

Ignatian pedagogy has aided in the development and continued revision of the pre- and post- exercises in all of my courses. However, it is avant-garde methods that have influenced a transformation in the types of activities and assignments I develop and employ in my classroom. In turn, IPP’s notion of “experience” consists of the main assignment given to students, and that experience, like Paik’s, often calls for a research-through-experimentation approach where students are tasked with thinking and acting like avant-gardists. The main assignment challenges

students to think about the topic in a critical and interdisciplinary way, and it is also the opportunity for students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of course materials, along with their written and analytical skills. While avant-garde artists were not completing college assignments, they were conducting ongoing experiments and experiencing the fusion between life and art, such as Fluxus' collaborative performance art pieces. With that, instructors can transform their classrooms into creative laboratories, and engage students to become Fluxus artists in their own right.

For example, students can be shown one of Paik's video pieces, given a brief overview of his life and art to establish context, and then instructors can task the students with writing down their thoughts for one to three minutes without interruption. For this particular activity, neither critical thinking nor editing of any kind should be allowed. The activity presents students with a challenge to break from rational thought in order to write freely about whatever comes to mind, much like a stream of consciousness. In turn, Paik's Fluxus art serves as a writing prompt to engage students, while a modified version of the Surrealist game of automatism serves as the experience that helps in further developing and fine tuning their creativity and writing skills.

This dissertation itself is an example of a Paik-infused avant-garde as pedagogy assignment, albeit at a larger scale. In chapters two and three, I contextualized the foundational elements of pedagogy and avant-garde methods as separate topics, and then I connected each subject in relation to my doctoral research, as well as my experimental activities in the classroom. Chapter one, the introduction, acts as my pre-writing exercise, as it is where I initially outlined and briefly contextualized all of the key elements I would be discussing throughout. Chapter five, the conclusion, is the post-writing exercise that allows me to reflect on my theories

and experiences during the lengthy research and writing period of my dissertation work. In this chapter, the fusion between the topics of avant-garde art and pedagogical methods, as well as its applicable uses in class are discussed and demonstrated throughout the dissertation, with two more specific examples illustrated below.

Activity: Performance

Each chapter of the 20th Century Humanities course textbook covered various literary figures and movements, beginning with T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost, and ending with Chinua Achebe and Sandra Cisneros. Each chapter also discussed other types of media such as music, painting, and dance, which may explain why students appeared to have the most difficult time relating to the literary segments. It was not uncommon for class discussion to come to a complete halt while covering the literature sections, even though generally, at least half of the class read the assigned materials. Literature was not a main component to any of the course chapters nor is it my field of expertise, so it did receive less attention in class than other sections; however, I felt it was still of vital importance that students engage with significant literary movements and their respective key figures.

With that, I worked on devising a small in-class group exercise to aid in increasing student engagement with the materials. There was a higher likelihood of students engaging with literature if they not only had the support of fellow students, but that the activity did not directly involve reading and recitation. The first time I employed this literature exercise, it followed a more traditional format, as it asked students to verbally describe key elements of the story in order to highlight their understanding of the assigned readings. In experimenting with devising different in-class activities to increase student engagement with literature specifically, the

exercise was transformed from a traditional group presentation into an avant-garde group performance. Both variations of the activity include students working and collaborating with one another; however, in a group presentation, students get together and create a mini-lecture based on the assigned readings, whereas a performance takes the activity one step further by challenging students to get creative in the ways in which to deliver the mini-lecture. I first employed a variation of the literature activity as an in-class activity and found that its collaborative nature was more successful in directing student engagement than previous attempts that were more focused on traditional instructor-led discussion.

Rather than a separate grade, students received a participation grade reflective of their engagement with the activity and their peers; thus, higher levels of student engagement with the activity and their peers meant higher participation grades for the day. My immediate concern was not the quality of the students' performance; rather, it was with the quality of students' interactions with one another, their interpretation of the literary prompt, as well as the level of creativity displayed. Some students can create a performance that ends up showcasing their lack of acting skills, but simultaneously demonstrates their understanding of course materials. Other students may create a great performance that fails to demonstrate their knowledge of the given literature. The group with content knowledge, but lack of acting skills, is likely going to receive a higher grade. If anything, the intellectual insight, coupled with lack of skill, is more exemplary of avant-garde art than the other way around.

One of the biggest challenges in employing the literary activity in the classroom was getting students excited about it in the first place. As mentioned before, my Humanities students had little interest in the courses' literature sections, which made engagement with the topic

difficult from the beginning. “Empirical evidence suggests that teacher-student interaction and interaction among students influence the students’ cognitive and affective learning outcomes” (Gul 38). So placing students into small groups helped tremendously, as they were able to discuss their ideas with peers prior to sharing them with the whole class. Additionally, the activity also gave me additional in-class time to work closely with each of the five groups, rather than with 27 students individually.

A successful re-development with this type of activity would be to transform it into a form of theatre for the oppressed, following Augusto Boal’s work. Boal, an influential Brazilian theatre director and politician, adopted Freire’s critical pedagogy and used it to transform theatre into an instrument of revolution. Boal developed the concept of “spect-actor,” (a fusion between a passive spectator and an active actor), a foundational component to the theatre of the oppressed, because it calls for direct participation from any willing individual, not just from professional actors. As a financially secure white male, Boal initially had difficulties inciting participation from oppressed minority groups in Brazil, until he decided to give them a voice and deflect his presence as a perceived oppressor.

Boal was aware that his race and social economic status automatically defaulted him to status of oppressor, in similar fashion as it can with a teacher from a privileged background working in a poor, inner city school; however, Boal successfully engaged his students by giving them the power to act, speak, create, and manipulate the theatre in any way they chose. Boal strongly believed that theatre could bring forth liberation from oppression and stated that, “the poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he

thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action!” (Wardrip-Fruin 352). Similar to a critical pedagogue, Boal was a facilitator, not an indoctrinator; thus, his philosophy of democratic theater is a powerful example of avant-garde pedagogy that can and should be applied in an educational setting.

Boal eventually held an elected office in the Brazilian government, and successfully applied his theory on the theatre of the oppressed to democratize the challenging atmosphere of Brazilian politics. Similar to the ways that Paik sought to democratize television and give consumers an active voice, Boal developed the concept of legislative theatre. Legislative theatre encouraged individuals to voice their opinions, in turn creating a two-way flow of communication between politicians and voters. More than a dozen laws were created and signed into legislature during and immediately following Boal’s tenure in government. Boal’s avant-garde methods were successful as democratizing tools because he employed these methods with pedagogical implications. Boal used the avant-garde as a way to encourage participation and collaboration among individuals of all walks of life, and did so with the purpose of liberating them from the oppression of the established institution. With a basic understanding of avant-garde as pedagogy, instructors can elicit the same amount of change in their own classrooms.

Unfortunately, I have not had the perfect opportunity to employ a full rendition of a theatre of the oppressed in my classroom, although I plan on doing so in the near future. Some of the limitations with Boal’s work in relation to a college course is the relevance with the subject matter being taught, as well as the required amount of time that needs to be dedicated to the completion of such a large scale project. Nonetheless, in my “Dramatic Arts” course, students were tasked with performing solo in front of the class, and also writing and creating their own

original play with a few of their fellow students. Although “Dramatic Arts” was an upper-division course focused on the performing arts, the student body consisted of business majors with little-to-no interest in acting, and for the most part, erroneously perceived the course to be an easy A. Appreciating that the course consisted of non-drama majors, I dedicated nearly half of the semester to the completion of the momentous project, and worked closely with each group to ensure continued progress and participation from all students.

By the end of the semester, students’ final plays ranged from the surprisingly delightful to the absolutely awful. Despite a few groups demonstrating great creative efforts, I would not consider the project successful overall. I mark this experiment a relative failure due in part to a disproportionately large number of disengaged students. I rolled out this project to a class of students in South Korea, and I believe various socio-cultural factors and linguistic challenges greatly contributed to the inability of engaging the majority of students in class. I have not had a second chance to employ a similar project since its original run, thus limiting my ability to experiment in redeveloping elements that would hopefully allow for a higher level of engagement among students. A sample of this in-class activity can be found in Appendix B.

Assignment: Video Collage

Similar to in-class activities, I continuously experimented with creating variations of out-of-class assignments, as well as making adjustments as needed. The particular assignment I am discussing herein was created as a final project for my 20th Century Humanities class, but was originally devised as a more traditional, long-form essay that serves as the culmination for the course. This particular assignment follows Paik’s work more explicitly than the literature activity discussed above, albeit both employ avant-garde methods as pedagogy. Although the original

essay form for this assignment was successful getting students engaged and making interdisciplinary connections among materials, I wanted to make the assignment a fun, practice-based project, an encourage students to think and create like artists.

The final project tasks students with creating a two to three-minute video collage illustrating their knowledge and understanding of two major components discussed in class. One component is a philosophical perspective (e.g. Freudian theory) and the other an artistic movement (e.g. Surrealism), both of which are randomly assigned to students, in turn encouraging them to become even more creative in connecting two elements that may initially seem unrelated. The process of random selection of assignment topics is simple: select several philosophical perspectives and artistic movements that were covered throughout the semester, write the names down on an index card, and make separate piles for each. Then, place the cards in two separate bowls, select one philosophical perspective and one artistic movement, and subsequently randomly assigned the chosen topics to a student.

The exercise of drawing names out of a hat may appear silly, but it actually keeps the instructor's mind and actions in the mode of the avant-garde as well, because "if teachers aim to prepare students at a higher level of cognitive thinking," (Ball 59), then "they must first emulate higher level[s] [of] thinking in their [own] instructional practices" (Gul 38). Thus, instructors should literally practice what they preach. Instructors should not only think critically and creatively about all assignments they develop, but they should also go through the entire process of completing the assignment in order to understand its challenges, opportunities, as well as its flaws. Since I want my students to engage with the avant-garde in a practical and theoretical way, then it is only appropriate that I do the same.

Although I wanted to guarantee fairness in the random selection process of topics for students' projects, I also needed to reduce possible redundancies. Additionally, I wanted to ensure equality in the level of difficulty so as to avoid some students being inadvertently disadvantaged with a very difficult topic or other students being advantaged by having an extremely easy one. I reduced redundancies by ensuring that most, if not all, students were given different topics and I avoided assigning Freud and Surrealism, for example, as it was discussed extensively in class and would not require much interdisciplinary critical thinking from the students. It was not uncommon for students struggle with making connections between the assigned topics, as they often sought connections to be as explicit as Freud's influence on Surrealist art.

However, many students were incredibly creative in their approach to the project. In a previous iteration of this assignment, (one that was more specifically focused on writing about an artistic movement), one student beautifully illustrated Surrealism's influence on Dr. Seuss, for example. When replacing the assignment's written component with a more creative one (i.e. written essay versus video collage), the ways in which students approach their project can differ greatly, particularly because students are much more comfortable with writing an essay, despite not enjoying doing so. Although some students may not initially feel comfortable with creating their own photographs or filming a video, they may generally prefer to spend time creating a visual art piece rather than writing an essay.

Whether assigning traditional or more creative projects, most students will still need to be given clear directions in terms of what is expected of them. I do not use a traditional rubric structure for my student evaluations and grading, but I create all assignments with clear

instructions meant to guide, not indoctrinate, students throughout the project. I give students parameters and goals that need to be met in order to receive a passing grade. Thus, I create my assignments with explicit instructions and I advise students that the assignment itself functions as the grading rubric. All of the information I give students to successfully complete the assignment is the same information I use to evaluate them upon its completion. Not surprisingly, some students choose to ignore instructions, as well as the transparency in my evaluation process, and end up receiving a failing grade.

When presented with a project of a larger scope, students may initially feel overwhelmed or intimidated, more so if instructors stress the idea of the project being “avant-garde.” As a way to ease students’ worry about the project, instructors should ensure they have plenty of time in and out-of-class to work on their projects, particularly since the projects consist of pre- and post-writing exercises. Encouraging students to take advantage of instructor’s office hours and/or submitting an early rough draft for feedback, will make the creative process easier for students and aid them in successfully completing their projects. The literature activity described above somewhat resembles Paik’s relatively rudimentary and unplanned Fluxus performance art, whereas the video collage requires pre-planning and a more defined set of skills in order for the project to be successfully completed. Nonetheless, providing students with plenty of guidance and support throughout the assignment process works to increase their personal investment in the project, while encouraging active interdisciplinary inquiry.

Depending on the instructor or subject matter, there may be some limitations to employing a practical assignment, like a video collage, in the classroom. Some instructors may shy away from assigning a practice-based project due to their self-perceived creative limitations

or perhaps due to a lack of understanding of visual media or the avant-garde. Another challenge may be the amount of time needed to ensure successful completion of the project; however, allocating time for a hands-on creative project can be more beneficial to improving students' verbal and critical thinking skills, than a traditional essay. Plus, including the pre- and post-exercises in practice-based projects, still gives students the opportunity to improve their writing skills. Consequently, I do not believe there are overbearing limitations in employing a similar activity to any classroom regardless of subject matter, as an avant-garde based activity can be employed in a Biology course as it can in a Humanities one. Nonetheless, I recognize the possibility of subjective limitations due to an instructor's personal teaching preferences.

Challenges arise when students become intimidated by a project they initially perceive as too difficult or cumbersome. As mentioned before, my assignment instructions are made explicit in order to swiftly guide students to successfully complete their projects. I remind students that despite a few necessary guidelines for project evaluation, they are encouraged to become as experimental and creative as they wish, which could lead them in achieving a higher grade. The biggest challenge between a practice-based assignment and a written one, lies in students' fear of the unknown. When it comes to writing an essay, despite disliking the activity, every single student in class has been tasked with writing numerous essays long before they even get to college. In turn, students do not often fear writing an essay, because it is not only a familiar activity to them, it is also formulaic.

Breaking away from the familiar and formulaic can be a significant step to encourage creative, outside-the-box thinking from students. The modernist avant-garde and Fluxus challenged established norms of traditional institutions by being experimental, devising new

ways of creating and distributing artworks, as well as working in approaching art making from a collaborative and democratic perspective. Neither instructor nor student need to possess a deep knowledge of avant-garde methods or media technologies in order to experiment with either one in class, as a foundational understanding is generally sufficient due to the user-friendliness of new media (e.g. video editing software), or the self-explanatory nature of avant-garde methods (e.g. Dadaist collage). Of course, moving towards a deeper understanding of the complexities of new media technologies is a worthy goal, particularly for instructors working within Media and Communication Studies – the same idea applies to avant-garde methods, particularly in relation to an Arts History or Studio Art course.

Avant-garde methods do not need to be exclusively used in an Arts and Humanities setting, as I believe they would likely translate well into a Physics course, for example. Additionally, employing avant-garde activities into secondary classrooms may also prove to be remarkably fruitful to improving student's verbal and non-verbal skills. This dissertation illustrates some of my personal experiences as an Arts and Humanities college instructor, but by no means should these experiences limit the applicability of my research to only a college-level Humanities course. Paik once stated he wanted “to bring McLuhan to kindergarten children,” so there is great opportunity to employ the exercises discussed throughout to any course, in any age group, at any school around the world.

One example of school age students doing work inspired by Paik was featured in a 2015 student exhibition of the Asian Society Gallery in Manhattan, which was part of the retrospective show, [*Inspired by Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot*](#). Fourth and fifth grade students from several different New York City public schools were invited to submit their original installation pieces,

employing various concepts and materials following Paik's works. One student, who created a pet robot installation along with a fellow classmate, explained the basis of their artistic inspiration: "There were robot moms and dads but no pets, no animals, so this is kind of based on his art, but kind of our own idea, too" (Nagorski). The students' installation pieces were absolutely stunning, particularly when considering the young age of the participating artists.

Although my focus and experience has been with college students, my ultimate goal would be for such methods to be adapted and employed throughout the educational system, and as the example above demonstrates, the only true limitation to the appropriation of Paik in the classroom may reside with the instructors. In turn, I encourage all instructors, regardless of discipline or grade level, to challenge themselves to appropriate elements of avant-garde methods as pedagogy in their classrooms. My dissertation research is designed to illustrate ways to successfully address issues of lacking student engagement or interdisciplinary thinking – it is not meant to be an all-inclusive remedy for such issues. What I illustrate throughout, is a new and hopefully better way to address some of these issues, but opportunity remains for additional experimentation. Consequently, this dissertation marks the beginning, not the end, of continued research into the various facets of how and why avant-garde as pedagogy works. A sample of this out-of-class assignment can be found in Appendix C.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

To be a teacher is my greatest work of art. The rest is the waste product, a demonstration. If you want to express yourself you must present something tangible. But after a while this has only the function of a historic document. Objects aren't very important any more. I want to get to the origin of matter, to the thought behind it.

– Joseph Beuys

After assessing the experiences in my first year of teaching college, lack of engagement and poor critical thinking skills quickly became evident as barriers to students' overall success in the course. The contextual environment in which the teaching and learning occurred shifted between institutions –a U.S. public college and a private South Korean university – as well as between various disciplinary subjects; however, the issue of lacking engagement and poor thinking skills was present throughout all of my classes, regardless of their specific context. Hence, the main reason behind my appropriation of avant-garde methods, particularly through Paik's artworks, was in finding a pedagogy that could be easily adapted across various disciplines and cultural contexts. Thus, the ultimate goal of this dissertation is to add to the existing, but limited discourse on the matter of employing avant-garde methods as a form of critical pedagogy that leads to the further development of a progressive educational system.

The original question driving this research: How can instructors engage undergraduate college students in thinking critically about topics they generally perceive as trivial? Unfolding that question reveals the common issue of lacking student engagement, as well as student's deficiencies in ability and/or desire to think critically about a topic – both issues which I argue can be remedied by employing any number of avant-garde methods mentioned throughout the

dissertation. The notion of interdisciplinarity is also a central element of critical thinking, particularly in relation to teaching undergraduate Humanities courses, such as Media Studies, Communication, Art History, or English. I was able to engage students in making interdisciplinary connections only when I began applying more creative teaching methods that encouraged them to develop a subjective/objective relationship with the materials. Developing context is the first step and a key tenet in fostering student engagement, and utilizing some, if not all, elements derived from IPP can aid instructors in developing more stimulating and relevant course materials.

A parallel research question I sought to answer in this dissertation: Can the avant-garde works of media artist Nam June Paik offer a baseline in developing and/or innovating ways of critical pedagogy for use in the undergraduate humanities classroom? If so, how? What Paik offers us through his creative process and his finished art pieces is exemplary of avant-garde as pedagogy. Paik, who was a college instructor for nearly two decades, did not appear to employ any sort of pedagogical structure to the teaching and learning process in his own classroom, although research materials on his time as an instructor are extremely limited at best. However, it appears that Paik considered himself a bad teacher and purposely avoided any type of teaching structure he felt would break the fluid avant-garde fusion between art and life. Nonetheless, Paik's artistic process, and not his teaching style, offers us an example of how avant-garde functions as pedagogy, although instructors are not bound to use only Paik as a guide in which to apply the avant-garde to their course materials.

The dissertation's three main chapters – pedagogy, avant-garde, and avant-garde as pedagogy – build the idea of using avant-garde methods as pedagogy for use in the classroom.

The methods I have employed in my own courses derive specifically from four distinct avant-garde movements – Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and Fluxus, although there are other vanguard movements, such as the Situationists (1957-72), that also provide great material to create a more engaging and interdisciplinary curriculum. These avant-garde methods are used to form their own version of a progressive pedagogy that employs the methodological structure foundational to IPP. While his artwork provides some of the base materials for avant-garde as pedagogy, it is Paik's artistic process that is exemplary of how avant-garde can be employed for pedagogical purposes. Paik's passion and dedication to changing media objects he originally had little knowledge about (i.e. television and video), was a form of critical pedagogy in its inherently politically, democratic and collaborative nature.

Avant-gardists, such as Joseph Beuys and André Breton, offer additional insights into how to teach and learn through the avant-garde. An opportunity for future research lies in looking at other avant-garde movements and artists to find additional methods that may be employed in an educational setting, particularly in relation to practice-based media projects. Furthermore, IPP and critical pedagogy are only two of several different pedagogies that seek to build a progressive educational system; thus, future research can also include elements of other pedagogical approaches like problem-based learning. One of the greatest opportunities in employing avant-garde as pedagogy is an abundance of techniques, methods, and activities derived from a wide range of different avant-garde movements. The available array of avant-garde ideologies and methodologies, combined with the structured approach of critical pedagogies, allows for numerous variations that may be successfully adapted into a number of educational environments, be it a college-level Humanities course, or a third-grade Science class.

Some Limitations and Considerations

This dissertation is the starting point on the study of avant-garde as pedagogy. There are several opportunities for further research, mainly to expand the groundwork that I have set out herein. The limitations in my dissertation research are limitations insofar as they provide a more focused approach to the concept of avant-garde as pedagogy – an approach that helped me gain a deeper perspective into my own ways of teaching and learning, as well as allowing for a more precise discussion and illustration of how avant-garde can function within a Humanities college course. Perhaps the greatest research limitation lies within the fluidity of the materials used, characteristic that was not conducive to a systematic or data-driven research study. However, one of the fundamental aspects to the avant-garde in general, is its highly fluid nature, particularly a movement like Fluxus, which de facto defines itself as a fluid combination of life and art.

I did not systematically track the teaching and learning components for my courses, as data was not collected on every course assignment, for single student, in every class, in order to later analyze and determine the rate of success or failure of adopting the avant-garde methods. Since there was no systematic data collection, there was no data in which to quantify and analyze in hopes of substantiating my argument. I conducted my own avant-garde experiment by practicing with its methods in various educational settings. Had I systematically tracked the experiments, I believe that part of the underlying ideology of the avant-garde would have been lost in that systemization. Throughout the course of several years, I created various avant-garde methods for pedagogical purposes, some that have actually been employed in my courses, and others that remain hypothetical and experimental.

For the methods that have not been tried, plans are to test and re-develop such methods as needed, which will be done upon completion of this research study. I recognize the limitation in not being to test out every single pedagogical example illustrated throughout; however, my extensive knowledge, understanding and interdisciplinary experience with researching, teaching, learning and creating *with* and *about* the avant-garde, validate the reasons for how and why the suggestions throughout this dissertation have been made as such. As far as the projects that were actually employed in my courses, I maintained records of student progress through regular school requirements such as mid-term evaluations and final grades. Thus, I can speak to the success and failures of some of these methods based on overall grades, albeit it with some limitations. Nonetheless, a sense of interest and curiosity exists in relation to what would have occurred if I had attempted to systematically track and quantify mini-experiments of employing avant-garde as pedagogy in my classroom.

Another limitation to this research study is that it is not anthropological in nature. Studies focused on the pedagogical structure of course materials and student progress in the classroom likely never moves beyond the current academic semester or year. Thus, this study not being anthropological in nature is more of theoretical limitation than a practical one. In an ideal environment, instructors and researchers would have the proper tools, time, and support in which to conduct a study that would allow them to follow students' progress years after leaving their course. An anthropological study tracking student progress from the beginning of class, to years after leaving school, is both idealistic and unrealistic, although it would likely lead to some fascinating discoveries in relation to student engagement and interdisciplinary beyond the classroom, such as whether (and how) students become civically engaged individuals.

When doing a case study analysis and comparing the overall grades from one semester to the next in my first year teaching the 20th Century Humanities course, significant improvement is demonstrated. The first semester I taught the course, my approach was more traditional and I did not yet include pre-writing exercises for students' assignment, such as the album critique briefly discussed in chapter one. The first semester I had 31 students in class, seven of which failed and only five received A's. That first semester class was also assigned two pop-quizzes, which I only gave out when the entire class refuses to participate in class discussion, in turn demonstrating that most students failed to complete the assigned reading. Despite the majority of students receiving passing grades, far too many failed (several due to plagiarism), and too few received high grades.

Noticing low rates of student participation and higher than usual rates of plagiarism, I decided to revise elements of my curriculum. Such revision included adding the pre-writing (contextualization) exercises to all assignments, in turn providing students with more guidance in the completion process of the assigned work. In comparison, the second semester class had 29 students, only three of which failed, and nine received A's. The second class was not assigned any pop-quizzes as they were a much more participatory class. As far as the album critique assignment, the second class also fared much better than the first, receiving a median grade of 47 versus 37 out of a total of 50 points. While differences in student personalities and level of ambition can vary wildly from one class to the next, I do believe that students being given the pre-writing exercises greatly helped improve the overall quality of their work, as well as increase their interest in the materials being taught.

Opportunities for Future Research

The main recommendation for future research lies in the expansion of this study. The ideal research expansion includes making elements of the research quantitative, interdisciplinary (beyond the Arts and Humanities) and anthropological. While employing at least one of those elements would be beneficial, creating a study of larger scope that encompass all three would be a remarkable research undertaking. An idealistic future research project that draws upon the foundation discussed herein would be a collaborative, democratic, consisting of multiple professors, in various disciplines, across different schools, with each employing avant-garde as pedagogy to a respective course assignment. However, these components can be broken down to smaller projects that still serve the purpose in further substantiating the methods outlined in this dissertation. As mentioned before, the argument and demonstration herein is the first step towards building an avant-garde as pedagogy for the advancement of progressive education; thus, expanding any element discussed would be beneficial in substantiating such pedagogical methods.

There are numerous opportunities for future research, but I believe that establishing the usability and relevance of successfully promoting student engagement and interdisciplinary critical thinking across disciplines and educational settings is the most significant and feasible opportunity (e.g. assessing the applicability of avant-garde methods to non-humanities courses, as well as a K-12 educational environment). In turn, I encourage other instructors and researchers to adopt elements of the avant-garde for their own teaching and learning purposes, and I recommend that further research on the subject be conducted from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. Going forward, I plan on continuing to experiment with adapting

various avant-garde methods into my own classroom; however, I would like to standardize the process in all of my courses, through the length of the semester, and formally document my observations, as well as the results of the experiments. Before employing methods from other avant-garde movements, I will continue to explore and adapt specific methods from Futurism, Dada, Surrealism and Fluxus. However, I recommend to other educators that they explore any elements of any avant-garde movement of their choosing that may be more easily applicable to their own discipline or teaching philosophy.

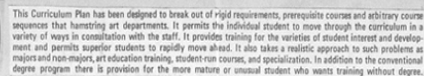
Progressive education, critical pedagogy and IPP offer us a foundational starting point in which to truly engage and challenge students inside the classroom. Continuing the research and development of new ways of teaching and learning, even by employing older methodologies, is crucial in pushing forward the agenda for an educational system that seeks to develop students into well-rounded, socially conscious individuals. There is also opportunity to apply avant-garde as pedagogy as a means of problem solving, particularly in relation to developing a more thorough understanding of new media technologies, even beyond the confines of Communication and Media Studies. Allowing course materials and educational curriculums to become stale, boring and/or irrelevant, fundamentally undermines the goal of teaching and learning, for both instructors and students. Despite budget cuts and time constraints, instructors should continue to engage with students in a collaborative and dynamic way, and opportunities for researching the best methods in which to accomplish a “co-intentional” education are numerous.

The avant-garde remains relevant because it offers unique ways to fuse art and life with one another. As Fluxus artist and educator Joseph Beuys claims, “Every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and

structures that shape and inform our lives” (qtd. in “Felt Suit”). While great strides are currently being made in the promotion of contemporary pedagogical methods, such as media literacy and problem-based learning, instructors have many more opportunities to continue fighting for a truly progressive educational system. Searching for the terms “critical pedagogy” and “avant-garde” via a large online database still renders only a handful of peer-reviewed publications. The lack of literature addressing avant-garde as pedagogy offers interested scholars an additional opportunity to continue researching and developing a better understanding on how to teach and learn in a progressive environment that seeks to place life and art into the same realm.

Reducing the fears and complacency that may exist within instructors, students, as well as the institution itself, works as a giant step forward in re-inventing the ways in which we teach and learn in the classroom and beyond. Such a re-invention can be accomplished by embracing any number of methods derived from avant-garde art movements, in addition to various pedagogical approaches that specifically seek to fulfill the agenda for a progressive educational system. Particularly in a media-inundated society, new solutions are needed to successfully challenge the status quo of outdated modes of education that fail to take into account the nuances of teaching and learning in the 21st century classroom. Thinking and creating like avant-garde artists can be just as beneficial to instructors, as it is for the students; thus, regardless of grade level, academic discipline, cultural context, or media savviness, instructors all around the world can successfully contribute to truly revolutionizing the educational system from inside out, and the revolution can start with something as simple as an assignment redesign.

APPENDIX A:
GEORGE MACIUNAS'
CURRICULUM PLAN



NOTE: Although WORKSHOP BLOCKS are under the supervision of an instructor responsible for management it is urged that equipment shops and the newer technol-

logies be supervised by quality technicians who are available for instruction and surveillance. This is particularly important now when instructors can no longer be experts in several technologies.

ART MAJOR PROGRAM

STUDIO WORKSHOPS

YEARS 1 & 2

YEARS 3 & 4

WORKSHOP BLOCKS

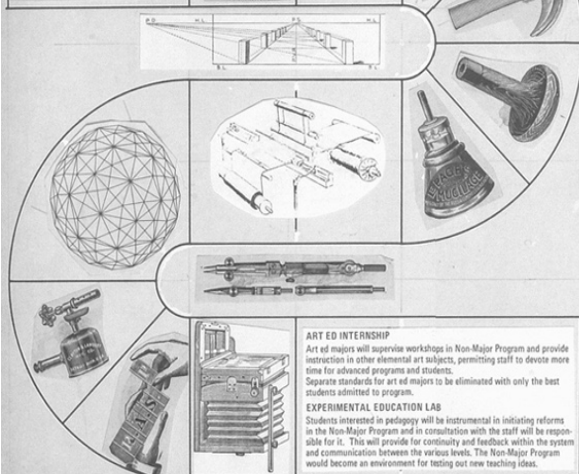
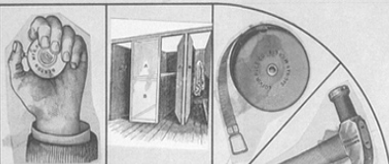
Taught by I.A.'s, art ed majors, advanced undergrads who are interested in teaching; in consultation with staff. All workshops receive elective credit, no grades.

Provide real experience for non-majors. No worry about grades. A place for all who are interested in art. Places to explore, test-out, paint pictures, make pots, photos, etc.

Provide important learning-teaching situation.

Improve morale through student motivated and student taught activities.

Eliminate floaters in art major program.



ART ED INTERNSHIP

Art ed majors will supervise workshops in Non-Major Program and provide instruction in other elemental art subjects, permitting staff to devote more time for advanced programs and students.
Separate standards for art ed majors to be eliminated with only the best students admitted to program.

EXPERIMENTAL EDUCATION LAB

Students interested in pedagogy will be instrumental in initiating reforms in the Non-Major Program and in consultation with the staff will be responsible for it. This will provide for continuity and feedback within the system and communication between the various levels. The Non-Major Program would become an environment for testing out new teaching ideas.

STUDENT-RUN SEMINARS & INVITED GUESTS

student-run activities are of proven value to both students and staff. Students are able to provide relationships to their own environment that have proven nearly impossible for the staff to devise.



ART HISTORY & CRITICISM

These are academic disciplines more allied to history, sociology, anthropology, literature, etc. Art history courses as presently constituted are to be elective courses and can be chosen freely in consultation with instructors. Instructors can recommend specific courses of benefit as well as complementary courses in other areas of learning.

INTERMEDIA

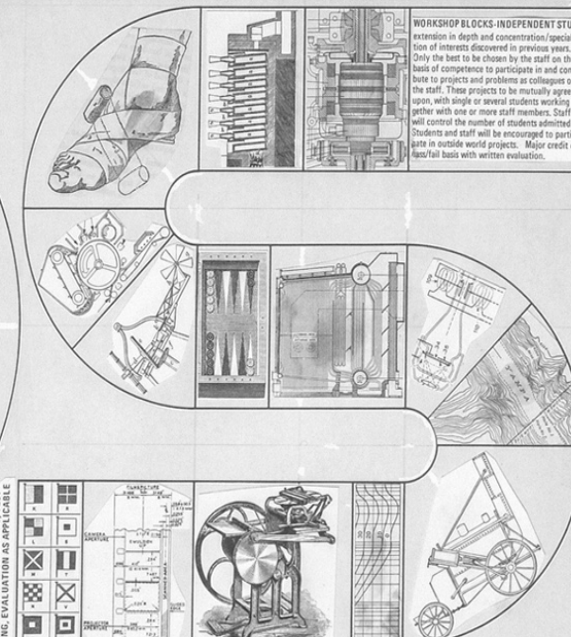


SEMINARS & SPECIALIST PROBLEMS

Seminars can be instituted, often including invited guests, that deal with real art problems of significance, where the history of works and ideas under question becomes more relevant for the studio major. If a graduate program is in effect, top notch seminars can be presented in students' own special fields.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL SEMINARS

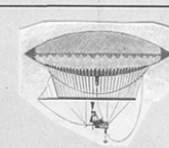
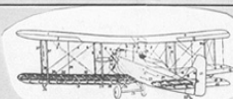
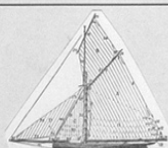
Seminars embracing two or more disciplines should be encouraged as a means of breaking out of rigidly controlled areas of knowledge, permitting valuable exchange of information. Technologies that are now tied up in engineering schools, physics departments, etc. must be made available for artists. It is apparent that artists working in new technologies have made many discoveries that are now in industry.



WORKSHOP BLOCKS-INDEPENDENT STUDY

Only the best to be chosen by the staff on the basis of competence to participate in and contribute to projects and problems as colleagues of the staff. These projects to be mutually agreed upon, with single or several students working together with one or more staff members. Staff will control the number of students admitted. Students and staff will be encouraged to participate in outside world projects. Major credit on pass/fail basis with written evaluation.

The **NON-DEGREE PROGRAM** is an option for completely independent study. It is intended for the few who are self-declared artists, who reject the status of *student* and who regard as objectionable any requirements or screening. This kind of student is not degree oriented but is intent solely on his own highest level of artistic performance. Residence in the program would be acknowledged by a *certificate of completion*.



The only requirement is admission to the university or college. There are no grades and no evaluations. The **NON-DEGREE PROGRAM** recognizes that youth, inexperience, lack of previous accomplishment, even technical mastery, are not necessarily a barrier to significant creative contribution. Hence, the abundant resources of the university are to be made freely available. The principle involved is that of flexibility: for the resident student and for the degree candidate to step outside the program or return to it with a minimum loss of momentum.

APPENDIX B:
IN-CLASS ACTIVITY
PERFORMANCE

LITERATURE ACTIVITY
Chapter 36: Liberation and Equality

Each group has been assigned one line randomly taken from the course reading. Working together, you will use that line as inspiration to create a 30 to 60 second performance art piece. You have complete artistic freedom in creating your group performance – there are no rules.

But there are a couple of purposeful restrictions: every member of the group must participate, and you will have a total of 60 minutes to complete the exercise – that time includes planning and rehearsing. The last half of the class will be dedicated to performance and discussion.

Group One: Richard Wright's *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow* (page 102-104)

“Each time I closed my eyes I saw monstrous white faces suspended from the ceiling, leering at me.”

Group Two: Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (pages 116-117)

“Let me imagine, since facts are hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say.”

Group Three: Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (pages 117-118)

“They have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received.”

Group Four: Alice Walker's *Elethia* (pages 108-109)

“And she was careful that, no matter how compelling the hype, Uncle Alberts, in her own mind, were never permitted to exist.”

Group Five: Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham's Jail* (pages 104-106)

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

APPENDIX C:
OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT
VIDEO COLLAGE

HUM 2495 – Midterm Project

For the midterm project, you will be randomly assigned a philosophical perspective and an artistic movement that we have covered so far in class. Researching more information on your given topics, you will then create a two to three minute video collage that highlights your content knowledge and makes a solid connection between the philosophy and the art movement.

To be successfully, you must think of yourself as an avant-garde artist. Be creative and experimental. Do not be afraid to venture away from course materials in order to make the necessary interdisciplinary connections. The midterm project is designed for you to further develop your critical thinking skills, while demonstrating content knowledge.

As with all other assignments this semester, in addition to the main project, you will have a pre- and post- writing exercise, which are designed to help both you and I, in the completion of your project. Think of your midterm as a three-part process:

- [Context:](#) Contextualize the topic
- [Experience:](#) Research, analyze, create, and experiment
- [Reflection:](#) Reflect on your experience

After you've done the preliminary research and outlined aspects of your project, you will begin selecting specific media for your video collage. You can use any type of media you'd like, but must at least include music, text, and images.

I encourage you to create some images yourself, but you are not required to do so. You are required, however, to make the video collage yourself, even if none of the content you are using is your own. Since it is being made for educational purposes, there should be no copyright issues.

While you are also encouraged to creatively think-outside-the box, there are several assignment guidelines you must follow in order to receive a passing grade. [The video collage must:](#)

1. Be at least two minutes, but no more than three minutes long.
2. Be an original composition that was made by you and only you.
 - a. There are many free and easy-to-use video editing options online.
3. Include some text, music, and a variety of images.
 - a. Creating your own music and/or images is not required, but highly encouraged.
4. Logically connect the philosophical perspective with the art movement.
 - a. Demonstrate your knowledge and ability to think critically and creatively.
5. Clearly convey your understanding of the topic.
 - a. Video needs to make sense to the viewer (i.e. me and other students in class).

HUM 2495 – Proposal

The proposal is preliminary research, where the main point of the exercise is to contextualize the topic at hand by asking basic questions: *Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?* After answering these questions, you can then proceed to the next step, which is learning more about the topic and how it relates to you personally, as well as the world as a whole. The main point of the assignment is to inspire you to think critically about a particular issue, and this is not so much about being right or wrong, but more about your thoughts and contributions to the Humanities.

Topic:

Principal players:

Interdisciplinary connections:

1. Explain at least two things that make this topic important and relevant.
2. Explain your familiarity with the topic.
3. What criticisms would someone else possibly have about this topic?
4. Describe at least two new and interesting facts that you learned in your research.

HUM 2495 – Reflection

In reflecting, your goal is to think about your personal thought process when creating and completing this assignment. You need to move beyond the idea of: “I don’t like this assignment because it’s too hard, too confusing, too boring, etc.,” or “I’m not interested in doing any of this.” Laziness, boredom, closed-mindedness are simply not conducive to learning and growing as a person. So, think about your experience a bit more critically. You may have loved or hated partaking in this project, but fully explain the reasons why you felt the way you did. Be sure to describe what you learned and how you may see yourself using that knowledge in the future.

1. Describe what you enjoyed about this project.
2. Describe what you disliked about this project.
3. What part of this project did you connect to your personal life? Explain.
4. What social/political issue did this project inspire you take action in the future?

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