

## EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION

Jay Michael Hanes and Eleanor Weisman

### ABSTRACT

Two artist-educators analyzed their creative process informed by John Dewey's concepts regarding the act of expression. The essay interweaves a description of their performance piece with a discussion of conceptual processes, including intermediality and collaboration as crucial in art making, learning, and pedagogical efficacy. Both the creation of the piece and the written analysis were guided by concepts Dewey identified as compression, impulsion, and expression. The authors argue that experience and expression exemplify creative learning and are transferable to knowledge construction in all areas of inquiry. Throughout an aesthetic learning process, deep reflection plays an essential role with interpretation and application becoming the culminating stages. Amid crises in the early twenty-first century, the value for educational theory of an artistic process that leads toward social justice in a democracy is emphasized.

*Keywords:* aesthetic learning, collaboration, creative process, John Dewey, intermediality, reflection

*... and all the rhythmic crises that punctuate the stream of living.<sup>1</sup>*

Through the course of the twentieth century, John Dewey built a reputation as a pragmatic philosopher who influenced notions of education, democracy, and the arts. Dewey has long been known for his emphasis on the power of reflection, and much scholarship on the role of reflection has been generated for classroom learning and pedagogy. Dewey's definition of democracy emphasized individual freedoms balanced with social responsibility. He identified the instructive value of artistic expression as a worthy human endeavor supported by scientific rationalism. While Dewey did not necessarily weave together the threads of educational experience, aesthetic production, and democratic life, we demonstrate in this paper how the three strands form a coherent pedagogy. We believe that a democratic citizenry can be educated through collaborative intermedial aesthetic practice when it is infused with reflection.

As Dewey's heirs, we recognize that little scholarship exists on the instrumental value of the arts as learning tools in a democratic education. In the opening pages of *Art as Experience*, Dewey identified the problem of separating art from

daily living. By the conclusion, he had discussed moral questions inherent in art and recognized that art is not an “acknowledged power in human association. . . [but rather is] treated as the pleasuring of an idle moment or as a means of ostentatious display. . . .”<sup>2</sup> We argue in this essay that collaborative artistic behaviors have potential to impact public education toward greater democracy when combined with a reflective process that addresses moral and ethical interpretation. Frequently reflection on art is connected with responses as feelings and discussion as psychologizing. As valuable as these are to intellectualize, in the following, we propose that there is more to consider from *collaborative* and *intermedial* aesthetic experience that includes Dewey’s concepts of *compression*, *impulsion*, and *expression*, with deep *reflection* that yields *interpretation* and *application*. These concepts are human ways of being in the world that embrace learning for those who “are happily absorbed in their activities of mind and body.”<sup>3</sup>

While perhaps marginalized in the neoliberal milieu of the twenty-first century, the relationship between art, education, and democracy is not a new idea. An examination of the Fluxus movement of the 1960s underscores the value of collaborative creation of art and the use of multiple modes of art-making tools. Fluxus art production and performance events were not well known amid the popular elite “pop art” aesthetic agenda of that era, partly because the expressions challenged notions of consumption and an artist-audience divide. In this essay, we offer our personal inquiry into the roles of collaboration and the use of intermediality as integral in an embodied democratic and educative art-making process as defined by Dewey.

Perhaps of special interest to educators is the fact that Dewey influenced many artists of the Fluxus movement. For example, Fluxus artist Allan Kaprow was known to have a well-worn copy of *Art as Experience*. Art historian Hannah Higgins, daughter of Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, provided a useful description of the legacy of Fluxus. While drawing on Dewey, she cited French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou, stating, “He contends, as I do too, that an experiential, and therefore unspecialized, pedagogy is central to human survival, to creating a sense of kinship across both disciplines and life experiences.”<sup>4</sup> In this essay, we reflect on our collaborative and intermedial aesthetic process, drawing the same conclusion.

Dick Higgins discussed the meaning of intermedia in an essay written in 1965 and later expanded in 1981.<sup>5</sup> In referring to Fluxus artists who experimented with media in the 1950–60s, he suggested that “the use of intermedia is more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since continuity rather than categorization is the hallmark of our new mentality.”<sup>6</sup> Higgins used “the word ‘intermedia,’ [as it] appears in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812 in exactly its contemporary sense—to define works which fall conceptually between media that are already known.”<sup>7</sup> While Dewey did not necessarily focus on any single art medium,

Marshall McLuhan, media critic of the 1960s, emphasized that media is a crucial aspect of expression.<sup>8</sup> McLuhan had considerable influence on Fluxus art. In fact, the elder Higgins published some of McLuhan's essays through Something Else Press, which was founded in 1963.

This essay interweaves three story lines. The first is a reflective description of our practical experience of collaboratively creating an intermedial performance artwork. The second story is our interpretation of Deweyan concepts for education through the arts. Thirdly, we explore the concepts in application for democratic living, teaching, and learning through the arts.

## INTERMEDIAL TOOLS FOR AESTHETIC LEARNING

Early in the creation of our piece, we established that neither of us would be designated as the *dancer*, *musician*, or *painter*: We both interacted with paper as visual artists, we both moved as dancers, and we both created sounds as musicians. We called this kind of art-making intermedial. Our intention with an intermedial piece was to build a composite performance that incorporated dance, music, and visual presentation. For a traditional proscenium dance concert format, we hoped to engage an audience with a piece that was not isolated or named as separate muses. Any medium can be a tool for aesthetic expression, and we intended to break the bounds of Modernist boxes.

Intermedia is integral to performance art and is a by-product of experimental art of the late 1950s. Similar to a Fluxkit, an expressive toolbox potentially includes words, sounds, movement, and image making through time and space.<sup>9</sup> Selection of tools connotes meaning as a metaphoric symbol. Drawing on Fluxus, we recognized that meaning is inherent in media and hence the medium must be carefully chosen for its message. We recognized the presence of multi-sensorial qualities from various media as a total event integrating muses and evoking a more complete neural and visceral response from the viewer. For our duet, we intentionally chose the fusion or relational aspects of media and muse to suggest that meaning is revealed through embodied action.

Both theory and practice are integrated in pragmatic aesthetic expression. To the mindful person, choosing one's media is an act that draws on science and information while creating an aesthetic statement of meaning. Maintaining separate, individual use of media—human made or natural—confuses possibilities and limits the potential of human experience. Intermedial expressions remove separations that Dewey identified as “trouble[d] present thinking”<sup>10</sup> that further divide natural events and human constructs. Anthropologically, an integrated and extended media seizes an audience captured by experience analogous to the way traditional cultures naturally or inherently knew the power of intermedia. Perhaps the original use of the arts was in ritual and spiritual activities with little division between natural media. All aspects of expression were integral to the whole.

We suggest that isolating media is similar to dichotomizing science and art. Concerning the latter, Dewey stated,

But if modern tendencies are justified in putting art and creation first, then the implication of this position should be avowed and carried through. It would then be seen that science is art, that art is practice, and the only distinction worth drawing is not between practice and theory, but between those modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable, and those which are full of enjoyed meanings.<sup>11</sup>

Integrating science and aesthetic learning intermedially can shift content toward working thematically.<sup>12</sup> Manipulating, integrating, and extending media potentially reveals themes of human experience. Working with new media also uncovers adaptations and purposeful directions for expressive content. Including aesthetic expression in a programmatic context such as STEM has the potential to engage students in meaningful ways. Indeed, intermedial creative process pedagogy has the potential to move beyond STEM or even STEAM.

Dewey's succinct statement that "Science states meanings; art expresses them"<sup>13</sup> supports the importance of both informational and observational knowledge as well as human meaning making in aesthetic expression. The materials of both science and art come from nature, and they are frequently compartmentalized into human constructs that, while useful for understanding categories, also divide and separate. The artist, scientist, and student must have access to all sorts of scientific and cultural information in order to experiment, create, and express. Writing, drawing, moving, singing, and sculpting are all educative acts that have the potential to hold meaning when derived from significant content.

Similarly, thoughtful educators are familiar with the effect of pedagogy on the learner; *how* an instructor presents an educational experience is as important as the content or *what* is taught. Students can be asked to demonstrate their learning through intermedial choices— words, movements, visuals, sounds, scents—metaphors, or expressive acts. Learners should have choices from all of muses available and be guided to recognize the value of their choices in the creative process. Hence, intermediality can be used for classroom aesthetic production, especially through group enterprise. Similar to intermediality, collaborative art production is foreign to the academy; however, collaboration can encourage and develop listening skills, deliberation on issues, and finding value in multiples perspectives.

## COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE

In our own process, we typically rehearsed on Sunday mornings, a significant occurrence that eventually led to the development of this essay. As married partners, we combined our knowledge in dance, music, and visual art in a three-part performance depicted in Figure 1. Each section of the final piece for performance,

while loosely attributed to the aspects of compression, impulsion, and expression, embodied stages of each. Dance was used as a visual element of the performance, drawing from ballet and modern tropes combined with musical influences including baroque, blues, and twentieth-century minimalist themes. The first section compressed both highly structured classical and childlike art forms. The second section became an homage to the Blues and sensual impulse through the manipulation of media. The performance closed with an expression of a conceptual and visual conundrum of drawing and walking a straight line, from a composition by Fluxus artist and musician LaMonte Young.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 1. Performance of *Compress, Impulse, Express*. A moment from Part II (Photograph by Amasa Smith).

Throughout his work, Dewey emphasized the concepts of social transaction and democracy. It is unclear if he recognized that art has the power to advance social change. We view the act of collaboration, individuals sharing parts of a whole in community, as an expressive object and political statement. When power is shared, collaborations may reveal individual strengths while producing an expressive object that could not have been made alone. Audiences can also become collaborators or participants, not just viewers, when affected in some way through aesthetic experience in partnership with an expressive object.

Collaboration and democracy are closely related. On the celebration of his eightieth birthday, Dewey suggested the concept of life in a democracy as a creative act.<sup>15</sup> Democratic participation in the twenty-first century requires the ability to

work with those whose backgrounds and beliefs may drastically differ from one's own. Creative aesthetic processes and learning experiences have the potential to guide harmonious relations as students practice listening respectfully to others and solving disagreements. These skills are central to a democratic citizenry, balancing individuality with responsibility to the whole.

While Dewey's discussion of social control describes the teacher's role as the most mature member and hence guide of the student group, his views also contributed to our understanding of aesthetic collaboration. We conjecture that Dewey might understand collaboration in education to be what he termed "the moving spirit of the whole group."<sup>16</sup> His description of students following preestablished rules and etiquette when playing games could apply to the educator setting ground rules or structures for a collaborative group creative process.

Certainly, a seemingly chaotic classroom, with groups of children working excitedly on a collaborative creative project in fulfillment of an assignment, illustrates what Dewey described as "work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility."<sup>17</sup> Such social control occurs naturally in collaborative, educative, and creative group experiences. Peer relationships become even more crucial in the twenty-first century with the increase in personal isolation and individualized use of technology. Neoliberal emphasis on competition in the classroom can be replaced with collaborative, communal learning, especially when students are guided through reflective self-examination and cultural critique.

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Informally, we heard from audiences that our ten-minute piece was engaging and never boring, but found that audience responses did not refer to meaning or intention. Few people mentioned that the middle section with the *New York Times* was a social commentary, although we had wondered if that might have been too obvious or trite. We questioned whether there were too many symbols and images for the piece to have a coherent impact, but were satisfied that it presented an alternative to popular expectations of dance as competitive entertainment and athletic tricks.

Several dance- and performance-informed people recognized the humor in Jay's use of his beard to draw on rice paper, although some people stated that they were shocked during the ending section. We had intended the representation of *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*<sup>18</sup> to provide a humorous and satisfying closure to the piece. While it could be said that there was disconnection between our intention in the final expression and the audience's reaction, the resulting communication, or lack thereof, exemplified both the problem and the beauty of artistic transaction. While our piece was created for the proscenium stage with an inherent barrier between the performer and the audience, the reflection on our performance led us to question how we might involve the audience more in future works, perhaps as a street performance.

Interestingly, one colleague commented that she was reminded of a couple's ritualized Sunday morning reading of the newspaper and conversation over coffee. Her intuitive understanding of our process motivated us to continue our Sunday morning work and to reflect on the piece and its application to our collaboration as creative researchers. Through our reflection on responses from witnesses, we added the medium of this written analysis to the narrative of our movement, music, and visual artifact. As authors of this essay, we are also co-creators with you the reader in the application of our interpretation of the creative process to education. As audience, the reader is validating these events—collectively adding to the experience—in being part of the intermedial connection through the string of fate.

In *Experience and Education*, Dewey explained that experiences that are thoughtfully presented and reflected upon hold the key to learning. Dewey said, "To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind."<sup>19</sup> Additionally, he claimed that experiences that merely occur without reflection are not truly educative.<sup>20</sup> But one can learn from both mistakes and disappointing experiences as well as from successes that appear praiseworthy. Reflection leads one to pose questions for further investigation. During an aesthetic expression, one can reflect and learn for future endeavors, asking the following: What made it successful, or how could it be improved or otherwise changed for the future?

Reflection occurs throughout a process to promulgate effective or useful outcomes, such that according to Dewey, "reflection, even long and arduous reflection, may have been concerned in the generation of material."<sup>21</sup> However, his discussion of reflection in the realm of art mainly addressed the experience of the audience. Dewey stated, ". . . when reflection sets in, as it does in criticism and in theory"<sup>22</sup> it becomes a means of understanding the art object. Where, in *Art as Experience*, Dewey does not formalize reflection under *The Act of Expression*<sup>23</sup> as a stage in the cycle of artistic process, we recognized that he valued it in the context of experience and the education of the live creature. We view this reflective stage as necessary for the integration of learning through the artistic process.

Carol Rodgers has distilled four criteria that fulfill Dewey's goals for reflection.<sup>24</sup> She defined reflection as a process of meaning-making and self-growth that is systematic and rigorous, occurring in relationship with others. Rodgers' definition of reflection is useful and provides space for further distinctions. While she emphasized the role of scientific inquiry in reflection, we discovered that the creative process also offers rules and tools for reflective practice. We believe that the arts offer an application of reflection in service of democratic action.

A personal, inwardly focused reflection on the creative process does not necessarily address interpretation of learning and application of that learning to future endeavors. Perhaps all too often artists descend into an emotional cascade of

interiorization. In fact, self-growth does address the emotional health of the individual, but it need not stop there. Collaborative group reflection moves learning beyond the individual's psychological growth into the physical experience of being and democratic social interaction. When it does so, profound education has occurred. Our reflective findings on aesthetic experience suggest that revisiting reflection throughout an educational, creative process guides interpretation and application of learning. Reflection is valuable not only for an artist, but for any educative endeavor, especially when following the principles of interpretation and application.

### Interpretation

A rich creative process can become truly educative when interpretation is included as an action step. Through reflection, an individual can interpret his or her experiential learning and apply it for profit or altruistic gains. Dewey emphasized the democratic dimension of learning. We posit that the interpretive aspect of group reflection demands that participants weave insights into socially responsible insights. Through the stage of interpretation, critical thinking occurs. Issues of social justice arise when cultural assumptions are examined. From a democratic interpretation of experience, one can reflect with an eye to the future, unraveling how to use past experience to contribute to the greater good through the creative process.

Without the stage of interpreting new knowledge for use in further experiences, learning loses its purpose. Sharing reflections validates perceptions and provokes critical thinking. In addition, through collaborative reflection one will find interpretative meanings that may be obscured to an individual. Socially conscious citizens will wish to know how to take a creative expression into public action or begin plans for a larger, more comprehensive work that includes new knowledge and participation. No matter who the learner is, reflection must transfer the learned knowledge to future life experience for the original process to be meaningful. Similarly, within the scientific method the scientist examines the way the current experiment helps determine the parameters for the next.

### Application

In other words, the spiral of reflection includes application of learning to find the next problem and its ensuing solutions. Dewey emphasized that the teacher must look forward and apply current experiences to future learning explorations.<sup>25</sup> For the teacher, application of reflective learning addresses the requirements of assessment. Evaluation of success in fulfilling learning objectives reveals the developmental aspects of educative experiences. Effective educators interpret formative and summative assessments, as aspects of reflection, and apply those findings toward developing subsequent learning experiences.

Central to this essay is the application of reflection on the creative process for social growth. Hansen and James argued that it is possible for individual teachers, within their unique educational environments, to guide students in the cultivation



of democratic habits of mind. They drew on Dewey's *Democracy and Education* to state that, "A balanced educational environment supports individual development while also animating a social and moral consciousness."<sup>26</sup> Here, we further develop that thesis by suggesting the potential of collaborative artistic exploration, production, and reflection as a means for guiding student growth as individuals in a democratic society. Similar to how young children learn to share in play, more mature students can evaluate their skills in democratic participation.

Students, as both artists and scientists, can ask themselves why their work matters and what applications to a future democratic world can be made next. The forward-looking application is not necessarily the final stage, but it can be seen as part of the process in the stream of living. In the twenty-first century crisis of democracy, all areas of inquiry, with their various epistemologies, must apply their work to the social impact of their study. Our reflection on group aesthetic processes in learning overlaps with Dewey's theory of the creative process.

## THE AESTHETIC LEARNING PROCESS

Dewey began his discussion of *The Act of Expression* with the term "impulsion" denoting the preliminary step in all experiences. He mentioned the idea of "compression" as a brief intermediary step between impulsion and expression. Dewey saw compression as a means for guiding an impulsion toward informed articulation. We suggest that compression includes the reflective culmination of experiences that precedes impulsion and expression. For educational purposes, we think that the compression stage can be emphasized in research and inquiry.

### Compression

In our own process, we chose the verb "compress" to explore our personal and collective backgrounds in response to the surrounding cultural and historical milieu. We understood "compress" in terms of viewing the "now" of the present as a result of the past and its influences. Our acknowledged intellectual and experiential supports included the following: the play of childhood; training in ballet and modern dance; exposure to Japanese *butoh* dance; trumpet ensemble and Japanese tea ceremony practice; and Dewey's "things he [sic] does not take to be the arts: for instance, the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip. . . ."<sup>27</sup> Historical figures and movements, such as Edith Piaf, Kazuo Ohno, Fluxus, Agitprop Theater, as well as current events were major influences. In addition, we could not avoid our personal relationship as domestic partners who met at The Ohio State University where we both pursued PhDs in art education in the early 1990s.

Our opening section, *Compress*, began with entrances from opposite wings, followed by ritual bows to each other and the audience. Still in silence, we moved into position and Eleanor drew a chalk hopscotch court on black paper to be used later during the section and left as a visual archive of the dance. This act foreshadowed Jay

drawing a straight line in the final section. Next Jay played *Adagio in G* on an 1883 Besson cornet. The score was attributed to Tomaso Albinoni and reconstructed by biographer Remo Giazotto from a fragment of the original notation recovered from the bombing of Dresden, Germany during WWII.<sup>28</sup> While the music adhered to the score, the dance followed a structured improvisation that progressed from images of German Expressionism to ballet to modern dance to hip-hop, and ended with melodramatic sensualism. As an older dancer, Eleanor relied on presence and focus in performance, including humorous moments, rather than on technique or tricks. With a total of 121 years of human experience between us, the present moment of each performance was compressed by a multitude of aesthetic and historical influences.

We were impressed with Dewey's statement that, "unless there is a compression nothing is ex-pressed."<sup>29</sup> Compression includes the study of one's historical context and cultural heritage, with accompanying assumed understandings, crucial in any educational or artistic endeavor. Through reflective compression, artists and scholars build on what others before have done. Knowledge of the past is part of one's self-awareness, whether psychological or cultural. Inquiry into personal experience acknowledges what has gone before. Relatedly, one's previous training and skill-building in any medium can allow for enhanced creativity rather than limiting one to a particular style of practice.

The study of history and previously uncovered information can be viewed as data input. It is common practice for students to be exposed to the history of a field of study whether that is science, art, geography, or anthropology. Those fields are not stagnant, but change over time, constantly recycling methods and facts while evolving innovative approaches and worldviews. New data for compression in the creative process comes in many forms, from experience in traditional or emerging media. Compression is an epistemological effort.

In creative process as well as educational exploration, one can draw on prior experience as one innovates. Examining traditional aesthetic rules can be useful as a point of departure. Modernism is only one influence and learners can be exposed to other cultural and historical aesthetic systems. A postmodern compression will emphasize multiple layers of context and can place the learner, artist, and audience as part of tradition as well as inspired persons, potentially becoming agents of change. Intentional compression of anthropogenic impact may offer new responsibilities for human activity. Each culminating product for an educational unit can be viewed as a unique moment in time and space that is not an end in itself, but rather a means toward the next step. Compression of previously stored data along with new inputs can spark an impulsion.

## Impulsion

There were several separate elements that served as impulsion in our creative work, helping us to distinguish between the terms inspiration, motivation, and intention. A found red dress became an inspiration for Eleanor to dance, and Jay's recently redeveloped

passion for studying music theory motivated him to perform with an antique horn. But the impulsion for our piece was to make a critical statement about contemporary times where conservative forces repress or reject activist expression. The middle section of the piece “Impulse” used that day’s *New York Times* as a paper visual artifact. The newspaper was torn, crumpled, and strewn around the stage in a disgusted response to current events. Simultaneously, the cornet voice became jazzier and more uplifted in a rendition of *I’ll Fly Away* by Albert E. Brumley, written during the Great Depression in response to human-caused destruction and environmental degradation.<sup>30</sup> We viewed this section as a wake-up call to action, denoting need to change structures of society that promote racism, climate change, and the loss of human self-dignity as seen both locally and globally.

The formal qualities of this section were intentionally designed. For example, the music went up as the mover went down to the floor. The movement, in the style of Japanese *butoh* dance, expressed pain, while also incorporating images from Martha Graham. Perhaps audience members with sophisticated knowledge of dance history grasped the movement allusions, but even if not, those idioms were valuable elements for the performer during the structured improvisation.

Our impulsion for the entire piece was to put Dewey’s process into a performance. We were inspired by his explanation of impulsion:

Every experience, of slight or tremendous import, begins with an impulsion, rather as an impulsion. I say “impulsion” rather than “impulse.” An impulse is specialized and particular; it is, even when instinctive, simply a part of the mechanism involved in a more complete adaptation with the environment. “Impulsion” designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism to which special impulses are auxiliary.<sup>31</sup>

Determining what matters, what is at stake, is inspiration at the core of impulsion. However, an inspired, momentary emotional reaction or feeling must be refined into a carefully crafted and mediated response. In a therapeutic use of art, the artist might unleash emotional content and then personally feel refreshed. In a process that engages intentionally with the social control<sup>32</sup> of an audience or witness, an impulsion must be fleshed out to be effective. Hence inspiration becomes a crucial aspect of a creative process that goes beyond self-expression.

Furthermore, Dewey selectively chose the noun form of impulsion to name an act that is carried through to the formation of an expression. This notion is transferable to other fields, disciplines, and possible life actions. Reflective mindfulness illuminates an impulsion to select meaningful material. It offers opportunities to follow through to larger ideas. When hurdles to the creative process are identified, the successful artist returns reflectively for increased compression to move beyond obstacles.<sup>33</sup> Dewey distinguished creative process from other activities, including therapeutic aspects of art, by emphasizing that there must be “something at stake” beyond emotional discharge.<sup>34</sup> The effect of impulsion, refined through the creative process, potentially leads to expressive meaning making with intention and clarity.

In a democracy, an artist has the potential, and possibly a responsibility, to engage social justice. An impetus or aesthetic impulsion may result from compression and identification of issues that question current human behaviors and interaction as well as inequitable structures of social institutions. One role of an artist is to reveal problems facing society and to ask questions that give rise to the potential for multiple answers. The aesthetic object alone does not solve the issue, but it raises questions for members in a democratic society to deliberate. Asking pertinent questions and prompting students to frame their own inquiry are ways that educators can guide impulsion toward complete, successful, and effective expressions.

### Expression

The third section of our piece “Express” was a ritualization of the call to action previously presented. We arduously thought about this section, chose the inspiration from La Monte Young, and practiced each detail. However, it was in effect the simplest of the sections and required the most focus in the present moment of performance. This final section represented a sense of Zen mindfulness in its concentration and mood. We set the tone for the final section with the ringing of a singing bowl and the raising of a *raku* tea bowl. In doing so, we shared a liminal state with the audience juxtaposed with a sense of humor. Jay painted a line on a six-foot length of rice paper involving the support of his entire body while using his beard as a brush. This action created a dissonant tension with the *suriyachi* walking and gong ringing background that Eleanor performed. The piece ended with ritual bows to the audience and then to each other. Exits were made in opposite directions during the applause.

The audience applause completed the expression as it received the images we presented. Dewey offered that, “when excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of attitudes and meanings derived from prior experience . . . . Aroused into activity they become conscious thoughts and emotions, emotion-alized images.”<sup>35</sup> The conscious act of producing an aesthetic object or actual performance is the expression. In the static arts, expression is a stable product that merely dissolves over time. In the performing arts, expression is ethereal and changes in each event, although an audience might not perceive those shifting moments. In either case, expression is the productive aspect of the aesthetic process.

Expression can be viewed scientifically as an output of data and the record of an event. It includes objective choice of intermedia and explores impulsion through communication with others. Ultimately, compression and impulsion are subsumed into expression. While an artist may feel that the act of expression is not a final product, it does present a current culmination of the data input thus far and the purpose of the process. Formative acts of expression are labeled “works in progress” and demonstrate the process up to the moment.

The viewer or witness of an expression fulfills an expressive stage. While compression-driving impulsion produces aesthetic expression, an audience completes a work of art through dialogue. When the expression has power and hosts a transformative aesthetic experience, the witness is changed by the transaction. While crafting an expression, an artist relies on reflection to build refinements into the work or as impulsion for the next expressive act.

We now return full circle to the use of intermediality amid a community of creative learners. Conscious production of creative expression presents knowledge gained, interpreted, and applied. From our experience and reflections, we believe that the arts, while often neglected, hold potential as effective learning tools in any discipline. Because the arts stimulate imaginative thinking they have a moral effect; as Dewey stated, "It is by a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress."<sup>36</sup> Since Dewey's era, and continuing into the twenty-first century, the arts have unfortunately been relegated to an auxiliary role in education:

It is by way of communication that art becomes the incomparable organ of instruction, but the way is so remote from that usually associated with the idea of education, it is a way that lifts art so far above what we are accustomed to think of as instruction, that we are repelled by any suggestion of teaching and learning in connection with art.<sup>37</sup>

Our response to the paranoia of living in a state of neoliberal inequality, consumerism, privatization, competition, and global militarization is to emphasize intermediality and collaboration in embodied creative process. Throughout the aesthetic learning process of compression, impulsion, and expression, the cycle of reflection must include interpretation and application. The conclusion reenters compression.

## CONCLUSION

In 1966, we were children during the angry racism of the Civil Rights Movement and the Cold War, practicing duck-and-cover drills in school. John Dewey's ideas regarding experience had already influenced the underground art movement of the decade. Fast forward to the summer of 2014 when we decided to create an intermedial performance piece that would include muses of movement, music, and visual artifact. We approached our creative process guided by Dewey's articulation of the act of expression. Our scholarly reflection arose from the creative experience through interpretation of our sense of social responsibility and application to learning.

When reflection on creative experience is integrated with intellectual learning, issues of social justice in a democracy may be considered, much as occurred in the happenings of the 1960s. While reflection is not necessarily the final stage of an educative experience, it holds together the ideas of this essay. Through the reflexive work of our creative process and writing, we recognized the fluid exchange between

education and culture. Both artists and educators must acknowledge their roles as culture and knowledge workers. Relatedly, Dewey demanded that democratic values and social transformation be central to public education and curriculum.

With Dewey providing the backbone for our multidimensional creative process, we fleshed it out with the Fluxus movement almost coincidentally. Only upon reflection in the writing of this essay did we discover the historical relationship between Dewey and Fluxus artists. That investigation led us to McLuhan, who, in 1967, quoted Dewey and published his statement written backwards as a symbolic gesture to help us understand the importance of choice and use of media:

... compartmentalization of occupations and interests bring about a separation of that mode of activity commonly called "practice" from insight, of imagination from executive "doing." Each of these activities is then assigned its own place which it must abide. Those who write the anatomy of experience then suppose that these divisions inhere in the very constitution of human nature.<sup>38</sup>

To avoid the dangers of compartmentalization, synthesis and integration are necessary tools for an educated citizenry. Further interpretation of McLuhan offers critical understandings of current trends in digital and social media. Educators, especially in the arts, may find themselves in crucial roles as they guide young people of the twenty-first century.

Academic institutions have the responsibility to teach critical thinking, whether one is working with young children or older adults. Certainly as the younger Higgins discussed, higher education arts departments and liberal arts schools must guide students to ask questions concerning power and privilege.<sup>39</sup> Witnessing the demise of higher education and the corporatization of K-12 schooling in the twenty-first century, we embrace aesthetic experience as an educative remedy.

Art has a role in breaking through cultural mores.<sup>40</sup> It is our vision that the use of art and the creative process in education can promote a more democratic society. Educative experiences in the aesthetic process have the potential to build and reinforce democratic meaning-making. Reiterating Hansen and James's call for the cultivation of democratic habits in educational environments, we believe the arts in education can do so. In fact, Hansen and James close their essay by introducing the often-ignored value of the arts and humanities in the educational process.<sup>41</sup> We question both an over-emphasis on scientific facts, without accompanying humanistic reflection, and traditional moral codes that often interfere with art interpretation. We posit that the artistic process is instructively useful when reflected upon, especially when it evokes a variety of perspectives. Through the reflective and collaborative creative process, social and political criticism may occur, leading to possibilities for enhanced justice in all realms of experience. With current concerns, such as climate change and the perpetuation of racism, institutions of public education at all levels have the potential to promote critically responsible

imaginations. Educators must provide students with tools to develop their own time and space for twenty-first century embodiment of a new anatomy of experience. If art cannot promote a vision of a world for all to inhabit and co-create, what will?

## NOTES

1. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 5.
2. Ibid. 362.
3. Ibid, 3.
4. Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 14.
5. Higgins, *Intermedia*, 49–54.
6. Ibid., 50.
7. Ibid., 52.
8. McLuhan, *Media is the Massage*.
9. Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 34–49.
10. Dewey, Op. cit.
11. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 357–58.
12. Hanes and Weisman, *Thematic Curriculum and Social Reconstruction*.
13. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 87.
14. Young, *Composition #10 to Bob Morris: Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*.
15. Dewey, *Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us*, 389–94.
16. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 54.
17. Ibid., 56.
18. Young, Op. cit.
19. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 87.
20. Ibid.
21. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 73.
22. Ibid., 118.
23. Ibid., 60–84.
24. Rodgers, *Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking*, 285.
25. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 73–88.
26. Hansen and James, *The Importance of Cultivating Democratic Habits in Schools: Enduring Lessons from Democracy and Education*, 103.
27. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 4.
28. Tomaso Albinoni, *Adagio in G Minor for Strings and Organ*.
29. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 69.
30. Brumley, *I'll Fly Away*.
31. Dewey, Op. cit., 60.
32. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 51–60.
33. Ibid., 61–62.
34. Ibid., 69.
35. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 68.
36. Ibid., 360.
37. Ibid., 361.
38. Ibid., 21.
39. Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 203–204.

40. Ibid., 360.  
 41. Hansen and James, 109.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Penguin Group, 1934.  
 ———. *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books, 1938.  
 ———. “From *Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us*.” In *The Philosopher of the Common Man: Essays in Honor of John Dewey to Celebrate His Eightieth Birthday*, 389–94. New York: G. P. Putnam’ Sons, 1939/1940: 299–394.  
 ———. *Experience and Nature*. New York: Dover Publishing, Inc., 1925/1958.  
 Hanes, Jay and Eleanor Weisman. “Thematic Curriculum and Social Reconstruction.” In *Contemporary Issues in Art Curriculum*, edited by Y. Gaudelius and P. Speirs, 170–79. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association, 2002.  
 Hansen, David T. and Carmen James. “The Importance of Cultivating Democratic Habits in Schools: Enduring Lessons from Democracy and Education,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48, no. 1 (2015): 94–112.  
 Higgins, Hannah. *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.  
 ———. “Intermedia,” *Leonardo* 34, no. 1 (2001): 49–54.  
 McLuhan, Marshall. *Media is the Massage*. Corte Madera, CA: Ginko Press, 1967.  
 Rodgers, Carol. “Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking,” *Teachers College Record* 104, no. 4 (2002): 842–866.

## ARTWORKS REFERENCED

- Young, La Monte. *Composition #10 to Bob Morris: Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*. Self Published, 1960.  
 Brumley, Albert E. *I’ll Fly Away*. Waynesville, MO: Hartford Music Company, 1932.  
 Albinoni, Tomaso. *Adagio in G Minor for Strings and Organ*. Arranged by Remo Giazotto. Dresden, Germany: Saxon State Library, 1704/1958.

Jay Michael Hanes is an associate professor in the art department at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. E-mail: [jhanes@edinboro.edu](mailto:jhanes@edinboro.edu)

Eleanor Weisman is an associate professor of dance and movement studies at Allegheny College. E-mail: [eweisman@allegheny.edu](mailto:eweisman@allegheny.edu)