

Myndlistardeild

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Am I a Fluxus Artist?

*An exploration of the ideas behind Fluxus, avant-garde ideologies,
and the relationship between life and art*

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í myndlist

Ylva Frick

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Kt.: 100690-2929

Leiðbeinandi: Jón Proppé

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Abstract

Fluxus was a movement that emerged in the late 1950s and is comprised of a group of artists with different backgrounds; writers, musicians, painters, sculptors, etc., who made events and exhibitions together. This essay is an exploration of Fluxus with the focus point on writings by Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman. After a brief introduction to Fluxus and the history of it, I analyse and discuss works of mine; interactive performances, sculptures and installations, in connection with works by Fluxus artists, like Joseph Beuys and Alison Knowles, as well as more contemporary artists, like Elin Wikström, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Ragnar Kjartansson. The works are discussed in relationship to the life and art dichotomy, and the artist's communication with the world of non-art. In connection with my sculptural work, *Stick Lisa*, I talk about art as a metaphor for life, and how artworks can visualise otherwise invisible structures in society. I look at ideologies and manifestos of two other avant-garde movements, Dadaism and Futurism, and compare them with the ideas behind Fluxus. I also explain the new term, *metamodernism*, and connect it with the Fluxus concept of using many different media, *intermedia*. In conclusion, based on the writings by Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman, I put together a test for myself to calculate whether I can call myself a Fluxus artist or not.

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Credits

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Introduction

As a graduating Bachelor student in Fine Arts, I am encouraged to place myself in an art historical context and connect my work to other artists, styles and movements. It is not only something that the school asks for, but something that I want for myself, to make a decision about who I am and what I'm doing. It will help me to evolve and go further with my artistic practice, if I can define what kind of artist I am.

My background in art, before I entered the academy in Reykjavík, was three years in a music gymnasium, and two years of upper secondary art education in Sweden. In the transition between music and art, it happened quite naturally to work with video. Alongside with taking painting and sculpture classes, I started making performances, and soon figured out that I didn't want to limit myself to one media.

So where do I belong? I haven't subscribed to any movement, like the Futurists or the Dadaists, because that is not a common thing to do anymore. There are no expectations on me to see myself as a part of a group or an ism. The question is if contemporary art is even beyond all isms of the past? There are already suggestions that postmodernism is over, and that we have to come up with new terms to describe the contemporary. *Metamodernism* is one of these new terms, which I will talk about in the chapter, "Manifesto and Ideology". To be able to discuss and analyse contemporary art, we look at the history of art and refer to older works, many of them still relevant today. When analysing my own work, I find most connections between what I do and works by Fluxus artists.

The driving force that created Fluxus, and Futurism and Dadaism as well, was that the artists involved didn't agree with the authority of museums to determine the value of art. They didn't believe that one must be educated to look at art and understand it, they wanted to make art more available to the masses.¹ Fluxus emerged in 1959 when a group of artists met in composer John Cage's class at The New School in New York. They formed together the New York Audio Visual Group, which provided venues for performance and experimental art. George Maciunas (1931), who later came up with the name Fluxus, was often in the audience at these performances. In 1961 Maciunas himself started to organise similar events at the AG Gallery in

¹ "Fluxus." *The Art Story*, Accessed December 18, 2014.
<http://www.theartstory.org/movement-fluxus.htm>

New York, which he ran together with Almus Salcius. Dick Higgins, Yoko Ono and Jackson Mac Low were some of the artists that took part.²

The year after, Maciunas moved to Germany and organised *Fluxus - International Festival of Newest Music*, in Wiesbaden. The festival consisted of 14 concerts with music and performances by Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, John Cage, Alison Knowles, Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell, and others. Maciunas appointed the Czech artist Milan Knížák to represent Fluxus in Eastern Europe, the so-called Fluxus East, and so Fluxus spread to Europe and got one step closer to international recognition.⁴ A typical Fluxus concert would be a series of short events; physical performances, representations of everyday activities, or music based on non-musical sound sources like sawing into a grand piano⁵ or water dripping into a bucket. Reduction, repetition, improvisation and chance were common elements. The concerts often involved the audience, to disrupt the expected behaviour from visitors to a musical or theatrical event.⁶

Similar things were going on in Osaka, Japan, in the mid-1950s. Avant-garde artists formed a group called Gutai. They were frustrated with the intellectualism and embrace of tradition in the Tokyo art scene. Japan's subservience to American occupation after World War II was a major reason for opposing imperialist values and tradition. The word *gutai* means "concreteness," and what marks Gutai works and actions is material negotiations and dramas. The performances are a cultivation of physical aggression, where the body is forced into contact with a material or set objects.⁷ An example of this physical aggression is Saburo Murakami's work *Passing Through* (1956). It is a performance where he runs through a series of canvas frames stretched with paper.⁸ The same idea is presented in *Entrance*, where he breaks through one single screen of paper, stretched over a doorway.

The word Fluxus means flowing, floating or continuous change. A lot of Fluxus works intertwine life and art, they make the statement that anything can be art and that the works are always and never finished. The title of this essay is *Am I a Fluxus Artist?* which implies that in this essay I

² "George Maciunas." *Fluxus East*. Accessed December 18, 2014.

<http://fluxus-east.eu/index.php?item=exhib&sub=maciunas&lang=en>

⁴ National Gallery in Prague, "Fluxus: European Fluxus Festivals 1962–1977," Press Release, September 30, 2014.

⁵ See image 1, p.28

⁶ Michael Corris, "Fluxus." *Oxford University Press*, 2009.

http://www.moma.org/collection/details.php?theme_id=10457

⁷ Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*. London: A&C Black, 2006, p.37.

⁸ See image 2, p.28

will try to figure out whether I'm a Fluxus artist or not. That *is* the main aim of the essay, but there are contradictions in answering that question. The idea is based on writings by Dick Higgins (1938-98), a Fluxus artist, writer and composer. According to him, any artist can become a Fluxus artist, which rhymes well with the floating Fluxus attitude that anything can be art, but at the same time he tries to tie it down to a definition which makes Fluxus sound more static, and less floating.

For example, in his essay, *Fluxus: Theory and Reception*, he defines Fluxus as:

- a) a series of publications produced and designed by George Maciunas
- b) the name of our group of artists
- c) the kind of works associated with these publications, artists and performances which we did (and do) together
- d) any other activities which were in the lineage or tradition which was built up, over a period of time, that is associated with the publications, artists or performances⁹

Higgins also states nine points that Fluxus art have in common: internationalism, experimentalism and iconoclasm, intermedia, minimalism or concentration, an attempted resolution of the art/life dichotomy, implicativeness, play or gags, ephemerality, and specificity.¹⁰ Ken Friedman (1949), another Fluxus artist who's done a lot of writing on Fluxus, proposes a slightly different list with *twelve* points that Fluxus works have in common: globalism, unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time, and musicality.¹¹

⁹ Dick Higgins, "Fluxus: Theory and Reception" in *Fluxus Research*, v. 2, no. 2, 24-50, (Lund: Lund Art Press, 1991), p.29.

¹⁰ Higgins, "Fluxus: Theory and Reception," p.33.

¹¹ Ken Friedman, "Fluxus and Company" in *Lund Art Press*, v. 1, no. 4, 292-296, (Lund: Lund University School of architecture, 1991).

Here's a list where I have merged Higgins and Friedman's words and simplified it:

- international
- experimental
- playfulness
- intermedia
- music
- unity of art and life
- resisting cultural tradition
- minimalism
- suggestive
- presence in time
- specificity
- manifest

I interpret “iconoclasm”, which means rejecting cherished beliefs and institutions or established values and practices, in connection with art as “resisting cultural tradition”. Instead of “implicativeness”, which refers to implying or suggesting something in addition to what is explicit, I reduce it to “suggestive”. I choose Friedman’s “presence in time” over Higgins’s “ephemerality”, which means lasting for a short time.

In a Fluxus context, “exemplativism” means that an artwork is close to the Fluxus ideal, and represents the theory and meaning of its construction.¹² I interpret this as “manifest”, because it means that the work should manifest the ideas of Fluxus. This is the contradiction that provoked me to ask the question: am I a Fluxus artist? because the floating attitude of Fluxus seems to be telling me that I shouldn’t worry about whether I’m a Fluxus artist or not, at the same time as writings about Fluxus are asking me to consider the twelve points, and whether I’m ready to manifest the ideas behind Fluxus or not. In a sense, it is quite an ironic question to ask, which, according to me, makes it even more interesting to try and answer it.

¹² Ken Friedman, “Fluxus and Company” in *The Fluxus Reader*, 2nd ed., (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), p.250.

Life/Art

Something that runs through all of my works is the link between life and art. My life and my artistic practice are intertwined. In his book, *Education Through Recreation*, Lawrence Pearsall Jacks says that an artist draws no sharp distinction between work and play. Not knowing which is which, the artist always seems to be doing both.¹³

What brings the two together is, for me, my thoughts about the world and how I position myself in it. I draw no distinction, because my art is a reflection of my life, my experiences and my knowledge. Dick Higgins suggests that art is no substitute for life, rather a shadow of life. The artist has removed something from the world of non-art and matched it to his or her experiences and also taken into account the viewer's perspective.¹⁴

When art stresses the connection, *or* disjunction, between life and art, it also underlines the importance of the viewer's participation in the work. The audience is asked to be active in their perception of the work. The artist doesn't position her/himself above the viewer. Instead it is suggested that the viewer's interpretation of the work is just as valid as the opinion of an artist. Like Joseph Beuys would put it: everyone is an artist.

Joseph Beuys (1921-86) was a German Fluxus artist, who also said: "Even the act of peeling a potato can be a work of art if it is a conscious act."¹⁵ One of his more famous performances is titled *I Like America and America Likes Me*. The performance was that he spent three days in a room with a coyote. After arriving to the airport in New York, he was loaded into an ambulance, then driven to the gallery where the action took place. After three days, Beuys returned to the airport without ever meeting an American, only the coyote.¹⁶

There is an ironic element in the title, because Beuys didn't like America at all at the time. He opposed to American military actions in Vietnam and his work as an artist was a challenge to the hegemony of American art. Beuys saw the debasement of the coyote as a symbol of the damage done by white men to the American continent and its native cultures.¹⁷

¹³ Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, *Education through Recreation*, University of California: Harper & Brothers, 1932, p.2

¹⁴ Dick Higgins, "Life and Its Shadow: The Art/Life Dichotomy." *International Sculpture Center*, Accessed November 2, 2014.

<http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag97/higgin/sm-higgn.shtml>

¹⁵ Joseph Beuys, interview by Willoughby Sharp, "Energy Plan For the Western Man," *Joseph Beuys in America*, 1969. Compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993.

¹⁶ See image 3, p.29

¹⁷ "Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments: Room 4." *Tate*. Accessed on November 30, 2014.

Beuys doesn't separate art from life, and it shows in this action, because he couldn't overlook what was going on at the time. He was invited to exhibit in another country and he used the opportunity to express his opinion about that country, stating that art should not be isolated from reality. I had the same idea with my performance, *Food* (2013), where I cooked food for the people visiting a group exhibition.¹⁸ Instead of making a piece and set it up in the exhibition space, I took the opportunity to express my opinion on the food industry. The visitors were informed that all ingredients in the food came from dumpsters, which is where I sometimes get my own food. The food didn't cost me anything to make, so it was free of charge for visitors to eat.

The performance created an atmosphere where a conversation about agriculture and politics happened quite naturally. I informed them about the food coming from dumpsters, before I served them their plates, and nobody refused. I was cooking outdoors with all the ingredients visible and everything looking fresh, so people didn't object. The first day I served hamburgers, the second day I made a soup with bread, and the last day it was pizza.

Fluxus performances often take very ordinary events from daily life and frame them as art.¹⁹ *The Identical Lunch* by Fluxus artist Alison Knowles is a series of performances that started in 1973. She ate the same lunch every day: a tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast with butter and lettuce, no mayo, and a cup of soup or glass of buttermilk. Turning this habit into a performance, she asked friends to have the same lunch. It has been repeated since then and the latest edition was in 2011, when Knowles invited visitors to the MoMA to have an identical lunch with her.^{20 21}

Letting life be framed as art occurs in another work of mine, *13 Sheets* (2013). It was an installation/performance with a camp bed and 13 sets of bedclothes. The performance was that I changed sheets on the bed every day, for 13 days.²² The idea was to take an everyday action, like peeling a potato, into an art context and see how it changes. From the first day to the last, the stack of folded sheets on the left side of the bed grew smaller while the pile of used ones on the

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/joseph-beuys-actions-vitrines-environments/joseph-beuys-actions-4>

¹⁸ See image 4, p.29

¹⁹ Higgins, "Fluxus: Theory and Reception", p.30

²⁰ See image 5, p.29

²¹ "Performance 10: Alison Knowles" *MoMA*. Accessed November 25, 2014.

<http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1126>

²² See image 6, p.30

right side grew bigger.²³ There were no people sleeping in the bed, so it was a pretty useless action in that sense. The repetitive action became more of a ritual than a necessity. It became a metaphor for clearing the head and starting afresh.

There are also more abstract ways of working with the life and art dichotomy. With my sculptural project, *Stick Lisa* (2014), I'm researching the aesthetics in connection with social structures. By applying theories about the shape, structure and colour, any art piece can be analysed as a metaphor for something bigger, and be placed in a larger context.

Stick Lisa is the Swedish word for a tool used for knitting ropes, the technique is called spool knitting or French knitting. I've built seven different tools in different sizes and experimented with different materials.²⁴ When knitting, the material I use creates a kind of spider web before it forms the shape of a rope.²⁵ I connect this formation with structures in society. In his writing on pragmatism, philosopher Douglas McDermid gives a good example of visualising otherwise invisible structures, like knowledge. You can look at knowledge and see that there are no certain foundations for it, that knowledge is more like a web, not a hierarchically structured building.²⁶

Without going too deep into pragmatist theory, the idea of talking about knowledge as a visible structure is very appealing to me. I think of the rope in the *Stick Lisa* as a web of knowledge and as a metaphor for life. The knitting can go on and on forever, as long as there's material. The length of it is like a timeline, with knots and loose ends which marks things that happened along the way. The knobs form a circle which, together with my action, creates the web. Depending on if I pull the rope tight between the knobs, or let it hang loose, changes the structure and how easy, or hard, it is to work with. The rope that connects one knob to another knob can be looked at as the relationship between people, places, thoughts, etc. The structure illustrates the systematic chaos which is a closer description of our world, rather than a hierarchical structure with clear divisions and priorities between groups.

There is a repetition in my work with the *Stick Lisa* which is not connected to the visual aspects of it. It becomes more of a performative element with the larger tool, because it takes a

²³ See image 7 and 8, p.30

²⁴ See images 9, 10 and 11, p.31

²⁵ See images 12 and 13, p.32

²⁶ Douglas McDermid, "Pragmatism." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed October 2, 2014. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/pragmati>.

lot of time to knit with a big and heavy rope. The action is physically challenging and I have to make a time plan with breaks to be able to handle it.²⁷

There is a feeling of endlessness to it, because it can go on forever. There is no obvious goal, which is usually the case with knitting; like making a hat or a scarf. The same kind of endlessness is found in Ragnar Kjartansson's work, with the contradicting title *The End*, at the Venice Biennale 2009. It was a performance where he locked himself in with a friend and painted the friend's portrait every day for the six months of the biennale.^{28 29} The performance could have continued endlessly, because of the repetitive action and with no obvious goal.

It is the Fluxus attitude that anything can be art and that a piece is always and never finished. It is never finished, in the sense that the artist is constantly in the process of making, and a work can always develop and expand. At the same time, it can always be viewed as a complete work and exhibited at a gallery or be sold, no matter if it is in the middle of a process or not.

A representation of the workplace can be an effective way to show the inconsistency of an art piece. In the exhibition titled *Stick Lisa no.7, Test 3*, I let the workplace be the main focus of the work. In addition to the Stick Lisa itself, placed outside of the gallery, I did experiments with sculptures inside the gallery. I worked for five days, collecting wood from the close surroundings and used what I had, hammer and nails, to build something out of the wood.³⁰ I struggled to make the objects functional; a chair, a bench, a ladder, but the lack of tools and technique made them very non-functional. In the end, the objects expressed function without function.

The exhibition included the working clothes, a broom, and some unused material, to underline the sense of it being unfinished. The title also indicates that this is one part in a series of experiments, and that the artist can come back anytime and continue working. Joseph Beuys uses the same aesthetics in his installation, or *environment* as his works are usually called, *BARRAQUE D'DULL ODDE Working Place of a Scientist/Artist* (1961-67).³¹ There's a desk and shelves with things lying around, ready to be used. Beuys' works are often unfinished and

²⁷ See image 14, p.32

²⁸ See image 15, p.32

²⁹ Hilarie M. Sheets, "Never Tiring of Repeating Himself," *The New York Times*, January 2, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/arts/design/the-visitors-by-ragnar-kjartansson.html?_r=1&

³⁰ See image 16 and 17, p.33

³¹ See image 18, p.34

going on for many years. He was working constantly, living with his art and always present, and maybe therefore also able to see art in the act of peeling a potato.

Communication

The most critical point which differs between the installation *13 Sheets* and *Food*, is communication. Even though *13 Sheets* is about art and life, it doesn't invite the viewer to reflect on her/his own life as much. The food on the other hand, calls for the viewer to take part. In this case, participation is very important for the work. Food functions as a reason for people to assemble, and you don't have to have the same interests to sit down and eat together. I see the food as a way to welcome everyone into the exhibition space, not only people interested in art. To make art more accessible is a way to make art less alienated, and to show what an important role it has in our society.

Many contemporary artists work with making art more accessible to the public. The Swedish artist Elin Wikström (1965) is one of them. In her project *Parkour++++* (2012) she made a work where she let people between the ages of 5-100 participate in a parkour lesson.³² Parkour is a sport where you move from one place to another in a city, in the most efficient way. You roll, run, climb and jump over everything that gets in your way; benches, walls, buildings, etc. *Parkour++++* is a collaboration between Wikström, Mobile Art Production and parkour practitioner Elias Fryk, and involves sport, sociology and urban development. The aim with the project was to increase the interaction between old and young people, and create a safer environment in an area where they had troubles with vandalism and fights.³³ The project opens up doors for what art can be.

Wikström makes art interesting for people who never go to art exhibitions at museums or galleries. Thomas Hirschhorn (1957) is a Swiss artist who's working with the same issue. He writes in his statement for the work, *Crystal of Resistance* (Venice Biennale, 2011), that one of the things he wants to question is whether his work can engage a 'non-exclusive public', beyond the art audience.³⁴ *Crystal of Resistance* is an installation, or almost a landscape, mainly built out of wrapping paper, cardboard, silver foil and tape. In this landscape is an infestation of Coca Cola cans, plastic chairs, mannequins, photographs and texts.³⁵ In his statement he says: "I believe that art is universal, I believe that art is autonomous, I believe that art can provoke a

³² See image 19, p.34

³³ "Elin Wikström, Street Level nr.1, Parkour +++++, Del II." *Mobile Art Production*. Accessed December 8, 2014. <http://mobileartproduction.se/projekt/street-level-nr-1-%E2%80%93-parkour/>

³⁴ Thomas Hirschhorn, "Crystal of Resistance," Aubervilliers, 2011.

³⁵ See image 20, p.35

dialogue or a confrontation – one-to-one – and I believe that art can include every human being.”³⁶ Since *Crystal of Resistance* is situated in an exhibition space, where people have paid tickets to see it, I think a better example of how he reaches out to the public, is his work *Gramsci Monument* (Bronx, New York, 2013).³⁷ The monument consists of a wooden structure with small houses, stairs and bridges, including an art studio where classes are taught, a radio station, a daily newspaper produced by volunteers, a community-run food stand, etc.³⁸ Like Elin Wikström, he creates an interactive environment where art becomes something that everyone can take part in and have an opinion about.

Joseph Beuys also thought that art can provoke a dialogue. In his lecture tour in America, *Energy Plan for the Western Man* (1974), he held talks at different schools and universities that lasted for several hours at a time, and were open for anyone to come and go.³⁹ He drew diagrams on a blackboard and talked about his proposal for changing the relationship between art, science, culture and economics.⁴⁰ Beuys had a very radical aim which included introducing direct democracy, free access to all educational institutions and restructuring the economy based on ecological necessity.⁴¹

Like in the works of Beuys, Hirschhorn and Wikström, one of my main aims with working in public spaces, is to open up the doors of the gallery and create a dialogue outside the art world. In my performance, *Post-Me* (2013), I tried to start a dialogue with the people in The University of Iceland. I was standing in a place where a lot of people were passing, holding a sign with a question and people could write their answer on a post-it note and stick it to me.⁴²

I have also done performances where I just stand with a sign, not asking anyone to interact.⁴³ Many artists have worked with signs in public spaces, like Gillian Wearing and her work, *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992-3).⁴⁴ Just like cooking food at an exhibition, I think holding a sign is a good

³⁶ Thomas Hirschhorn, “Crystal of Resistance.”

³⁷ See image 21, p.35

³⁸ Ben Davis “Thomas Hirschhorn’s ‘Gramsci Monument’ Transcends Its Own Conceit,” *ArtInfo*, September 5, 2013.

http://gladstonegallery.com/sites/default/files/TH_ArtInfo_Sept13_e.pdf

³⁹ See image 22, p.36

⁴⁰ Joan Rothfuss, “Energy Plan For the Western Man.” *Walker Art*. Accessed December 18 2014.

<http://www.walkerart.org/archive/C/9C4315B360BFDC526167.htm>

⁴¹ Alain Borer, *The Essential Joseph Beuys*, Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1997, (cover page).

⁴² See image 23, p.36

⁴³ See image 24, p.35

⁴⁴ See image 25, p.37

way to get through to people. Generally we read signs everyday, with messages of some sort, usually in the form of advertisements. We're used to an environment with written messages surrounding us, not unlike how we're used to eating every day. When there's something different about the environment we're used to, say a person holding a sign with a message, people react and get involved.

It was important that *Post-Me* took place in a school where people study other things than art; science, psychology, politics, philosophy, etc. When reading the answers and after talking to some of the people writing them, I got the sense that we are all faced with the same issues and concerned about similar things, we just learn about them differently and choose to focus our practices within certain fields. I see how the diversity in these fields work together and creates a massive and constantly changing body of information which helps us to understand the world better, if we decide to interact with one another.

Manifesto and ideology

The aesthetics of Fluxus works are often influenced by the use of many different media, partly because the artists came from different backgrounds; Alison Knowles, Wolf Vostell and George Brecht were originally painters, Robert Watts a sculptor, Benjamin Patterson and Nam June Paik composers, Emmet Williams, Dick Higgins and Jackson Mac Low writers.⁴⁵ Intermedia is, according to Higgins and Friedman, one of the points that Fluxus works have in common. Intermedia brings many of the other Fluxus qualities together; experimentalism, chance, playfulness, musicality and presence in time.

There is an attitude that comes with the use of different media, which underlines the statement that anything can be art. It is intermedia, together with the life and art dichotomy, which makes me question whether there actually *is* an ideology behind Fluxus. Because these ways of working with art suggest that you can be whoever and you can do whatever. My understanding of Fluxus is that their ideology is to be *unhindered* by ideologies. These are the exact words found in the *Metamodernist Manifesto*,⁴⁶ published in 2011 by British artist Luke Turner (1982), in collaboration with Finish performance artist Nastja Säde Rönkkö (1985). The manifesto says that oscillation is the natural order of the world, meaning that we should oscillate between positions and look at all sides of things, *unhindered by ideologies*. They say that “all information is grounds for knowledge, whether empirical or aphoristic, no matter its truth-value”, and that this simultaneous experience will give us access to richer and more accurate knowledge about a certain situation or phenomena.⁴⁷

Cultural theorist, Timotheus Vermeulen (1983), and philosopher, Robin van den Akker (1982), are the founders of the international research network on metamodernism. It is an attempt to analyse recent changes in aesthetics and culture, suggesting that metamodernism is what comes after postmodernism. They look at recent developments in architecture, art, and film, and argue that this change is mostly expressed by neo-romantic works, like the architecture of Herzog & de Meuron, or the collages of David Thorpe.^{48 49}

⁴⁵ Higgins, “Fluxus: Theory and Reception,” p.29

⁴⁶ See image 26, p.38

⁴⁷ Luke Turner and Nastja Säde Rönkkö, “Metamodernist Manifesto.” *Metamodernism*, 2011. Accessed October 16, 2014. <http://www.metamodernism.org>.

⁴⁸ See image 27 and 28, p.39

I connect Metamodernism to Fluxus, an ideology that says we should have no ideologies. The words flux and oscillation can both be translated to “continuous change”. Higgins says that Fluxus was not a movement and that it has no stated program or manifesto.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, on the George Maciunas Foundation Inc. webpage exists two Fluxus manifestos. The first manifesto states that Fluxus intends to purge the world of symptoms of “bourgeois sickness” as intellectual, professional, and commercialised culture. That Fluxus should become a way of life not a profession and that Fluxus is against commodification of art.⁵¹

Futurism and Dada were avant-garde movements that happened before Fluxus. The Futurists were committed to the new; advanced technology and urban modernity. They rejected older forms of culture and spoke about the beauty of the machine, speed, violence and change.⁵² While Futurism embraced violence, Dada emerged as a reaction to World War I. They rejected nationalism and the society that allowed this war to happen. Like Fluxus, intermedia defines Dada; performance art, poetry, photography, sculpture, painting and collage.⁵³

Both Futurism and Dada have clearly stated manifestos. Point 9 and 10 in the Italian Futurist manifesto says:

9. We want 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.

10. We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.⁵⁴

These dramatic words from the Futurists seem to be a mockery against political manifestos, using poetic language and expressing emotions.

⁴⁹ Timotheus Velmeulen and Robin van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism.” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, vol. 2 (November 2010): doi:10.3402/jac.v1i0.5677.

⁵⁰ Higgins, “Fluxus: Theory and Reception,” p.30

⁵¹ Clive Phillpot, “Fluxus: Magazines, Manifestos, Multum in Parvo,” George Maciunas Foundation Inc. Accessed on December 15, 2014.

<http://georgemaciunas.com/cv/manifesto-i/>

⁵² “Futurism.” *The Art Story*. Accessed December 15, 2014.

<http://www.theartstory.org/movement-futurism.htm#>

⁵³ “Dada.” *The Art Story*. Accessed December 15, 2014.

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⁵⁴ “Futurist Manifesto.” *University of Michigan*, accessed on November 22, 2014.

<http://cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/T4PM/futurist-manifesto.html>

The second Dada manifesto by Tristan Tzara says:

Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the hands of bandits, who rend one another and destroy the centuries.⁵⁵

So why is will and effort put into composing these manifestos? The avant-garde manifestos place themselves in between the spheres of art and theory. They are to be seen as theory, as directions and guidelines for the future art to come, as much as a work of art in itself.⁵⁶

The Dada manifesto by Tzara states that Dada does not mean anything. Perhaps the manifestos should be looked at as art, leaving the viewer to decide whether the text is sincere or ironic, the true opinions of the people who wrote it, or a comment on political manifestos.

⁵⁵ "Dada Manifesto by Tristan Tzara," 391:Archive. Accessed on November 22 2014.
<http://www.391.org/manifestos/1918-dada-manifesto-tristan-tzara.html#.VHCrJ0vVtZg>

⁵⁶ Nanna Katrine Bisbjerg, "The Manifesto. Negotiating Reality," Student Paper, Nordic Network of Avant-Garde Studies, 2009. Accessed December 20, 2014.
http://www.avantgardenet.eu/HAC/studentpapers/bisbjerg_manifesto.pdf

The Test: Am I a Fluxus Artist?

I am not writing manifestos with my fellow art students. It is not as common nowadays to be blunt and say that our art is going to change the world. Fluxus, Dada and Futurism were avant-garde movements that wanted a change in society, but what is avant-garde today? Maybe the newest movement is metamodernism, or maybe there has come a time in history where there are no art movements at all.

Like I said in the introduction, it is not expected of me to figure out whether I'm a Fluxus artist or not, but I see the task more as an experiment where I can come closer to reaching a conclusion about my standpoint as an artist. I want to make it clear that my method for reaching a conclusion here is made with humour. Like a trusting student of Fluxus, I have made two tests for myself, where I've taken Higgins and Friedman's words literally and judged my own works accordingly.

Test 1 is a test for the four works of mine that I've been discussing throughout the essay, and whether they fulfil the twelve points that Fluxus works should have in common. The points are the same as in the list of Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman's words merged together on page 8. X means that the work fulfils that point.

(See test on next page)

Test 1

	Stick Lisa	Post-me	Food	13 Sheets
international		x	x	
experimental	x	x	x	
playfulness	x	x	x	
intermedia	x	x	x	
music				
unity of art and life	x	x	x	x
resisting cultural tradition		x	x	
minimalism	x			x
suggestive		x	x	
presence in time		x	x	x
specificity	x	x	x	x
manifest				

To give an idea of how I decided where to put an x, I'll give you some examples: *Post-me* got an x for “international” because it took place at a university with students of many different nationalities, and writing the question on the sign in English encouraged international students to take part, and the performance can be done anywhere in the world. *Food* got an x for “resisting cultural tradition” because it presents an alternative way of using the exhibition space, and also an alternative to buying groceries at the supermarket. *13 Sheets* got an x for “presence in time” because the installation only stays the same for one day, the next day the bed have new sheets and the stack of folded sheets is smaller, and the pile of used ones is bigger. *Stick Lisa* got an x for “experimental” because the work consists of experiments; building different tools in different sizes, trying different materials and placing it in different environments.

The two winning artworks in the Fluxus competition are *Post-me* and *Food*, with nine points out of twelve. There are similar approaches in both of these works; performance, interaction and dealing with societal problems. The two things that all of the works have in

common is “unity of art and life” and “specificity”. The only point that none of the works touch upon is “manifest”, because I never considered the works to represent Fluxus when I made them. If this test was for my own interpretation of the words, i.e. not in connection to Fluxus and Higgins, I might have given an x for “manifest” to *Post-me* and *Food*. *Post-me* manifests my disapproval of expectations on women to be in a solid relationship and want children at a certain age. *Food* manifests a consciousness about food and waste.

Test 2

	Yes	No	Maybe
part of the group (Higgins, Maciunas, Ono, etc.)		x	
anything can be art	x		
anyone can be an artist			x
making art more accessible	x		
a work of art is always and never finished			x
I am a composer	x		
writer			x
painter	x		
sculptor	x		
performance artist	x		

Test 2 is more about what kind of artist I am and whether I agree with the Fluxus ideas, if I fit into the picture of Fluxus. Truth be told, Fluxus artists like Yoko Ono and Joseph Beuys would probably reject the thought of Fluxus even having requirements for participation. Like I wrote in the introduction of the essay, Fluxus means flowing or floating, and Joseph Beuys says that anything can be art and anyone can be an artist. This doesn’t exactly rhyme with the kind of admission tests that I’ve created here. I *do* agree with the statement that anything can be art, as long as it’s a conscious act, and that art should be more accessible to the masses.

To answer the question, whether I'm a Fluxus artist or not, has lost its relevance. Instead the question has given birth to even more questions about believing in an ideology and trying to realise that ideology, trying to make a decision. This is the decision that I have made, based on this essay: I connect my performative work with the interactive works by Elin Wikström and Thomas Hirschhorn. I see similarities between my sculptural work and the environments by Joseph Beuys, and the idea of not separating art from life. My aesthetics are defined by intermedia, minimalism and specificity. I find metamodernism very interesting and exciting, because it is trying to define the present, just like I am trying to define myself. It is for certain that my work is associated with Fluxus, and I am neither disappointed nor satisfied with that fact. I have never felt an urge to do something completely new, something that no one else has done before. I agree with many of the ideas that Fluxus has brought to the table, old ideas that are still relevant today. I will take what I like from Fluxus and leave the rest.

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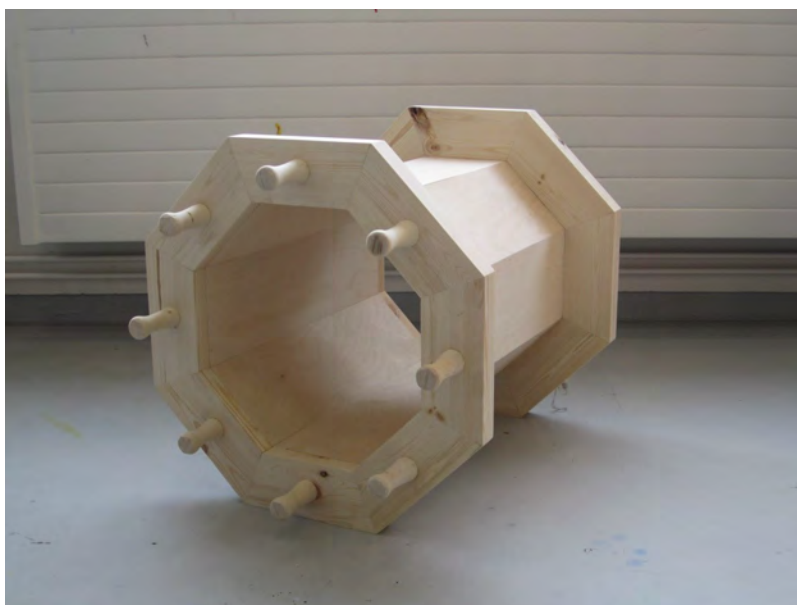
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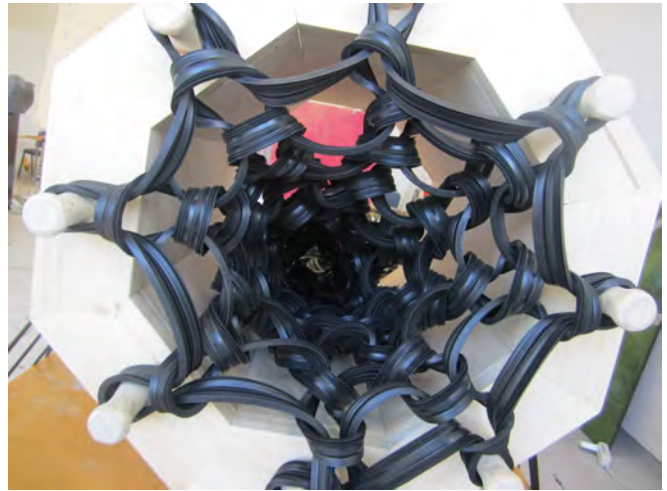
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23. Ylva Frick, *Post-Me*, performance, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, 2013.



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METAMODERNIST // MANIFESTO

1. We recognise oscillation to be the natural order of the world.
2. We must liberate ourselves from the inertia resulting from a century of modernist ideological naivety and the cynical insincerity of its antonymous bastard child.
3. Movement shall henceforth be enabled by way of an oscillation between positions, with diametrically opposed ideas operating like the pulsating polarities of a colossal electric machine, propelling the world into action.
4. We acknowledge the limitations inherent to all movement and experience, and the futility of any attempt to transcend the boundaries set forth therein. The essential incompleteness of a system should necessitate an adherence, not in order to achieve a given end or be slaves to its course, but rather perchance to glimpse by proxy some hidden exteriority. Existence is enriched if we set about our task *as if* those limits might be exceeded, for such action unfolds the world.
5. All things are caught within the irrevocable slide towards a state of maximum entropic dissemblance. Artistic creation is contingent upon the origination or revelation of difference therein. Affect at its zenith is the unmediated experience of difference *in itself*. It must be art's role to explore the promise of its own paradoxical ambition by coaxing excess towards presence.
6. The present is a symptom of the twin birth of immediacy and obsolescence. Today, we are nostalgists as much as we are futurists. The new technology enables the simultaneous experience and enactment of events from a multiplicity of positions. Far from signalling its demise, these emergent networks facilitate the democratisation of history, illuminating the forking paths along which its grand narratives may navigate the here and now.
7. Just as science strives for poetic elegance, artists might assume a quest for truth. All information is grounds for knowledge, whether empirical or aphoristic, no matter its truth-value. We should embrace the scientific-poetic synthesis and informed naivety of a magical realism. Error breeds sense.
8. We propose a pragmatic romanticism unhindered by ideological anchorage. Thus, metamodernism shall be defined as the mercurial condition between and beyond irony and sincerity, naivety and knowingness, relativism and truth, optimism and doubt, in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons. We must go forth and oscillate!

26. Luke Turner and Nastja Säde Rönkkö, *Metamodernist Manifesto*, 2011.



27. Herzog & de Meuron, *Elbe Philharmonic*, Concert hall, Hamburg, image: copyright Herzog & de Meuron, under construction, planned for 2017.



28. David Thorpe, *Covenant of the East*, mixed media collage, Courtesy Saatchi Gallery, Maureen Paley, and 303 Gallery. 2003.