

Art On
T h e
O u t s i d e :
T h e
Contextualising
Of A
F l u x u s
W o r k
I
T h e
U r b a n
Environment

JESSICA

B O N E H I L L

Art on the Outside: The contextualising of a Fluxus work in the Urban Environment

Street Cleaning Event was performed by the Japanese, anti-establishment art-group Hi-Red Center in June of 1966 (Fig. 1). There was no canvas, nor any paint. Instead, the pavement formed a substitute canvas, cleaning fluids acted as paint and cleaning brushes offered a close facsimile for the painter's brush. Wearing white coats, artists simply, rigorously cleaned the pavement of the Grand Army Plaza in New York City. In the move from the art institution to the urban context the work revisited urbanity as the location of artistic intervention. Performed as part of the Fluxus group's Fluxfest the work has since been historicised as a Fluxus work, carrying with it a number of associations with the similarly anti-institutional 1960s, New York-based group's focus upon experiences of art beyond the gallery. As such, the act might be linked to the avant-garde and Dada movements' histories of working in an array of non-traditional formats which the performances of the Fluxus group are often placed amongst.

Figure 1:
*Street Cleaning
Event (1964),
performed during
Fluxfest Presents
Hi Red
Center Street
Cleaning Event,
Grand Army
Plaza,
New York,
June 11, 1966.*

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127371>

Located at the intersection of 58th Street and 5th Avenue in a busy part of Manhattan with much pedestrian and vehicular traffic the work was, to a degree, already situated in a liminal space. Directly adjacent to Central Park, the square might be considered as an extension of its South-Eastern corner and includes the civic, leisure-space signifiers of a paved plaza area and the Pulitzer fountain. However, at this time the plaza was privately owned, overlooked by tower blocks and was part of the gridded street system which exists beyond the park's gates. Consequently, constituting a space of transition to the surrounding commercial and residential urban conditions, it is not traditionally a space in which avant-garde art performances might occur. Thus, the introduction of a Fluxus performance charged this situation with a new set of meanings. This essay explores the effects of placing this artwork here. It argues that spatial context has the power to shift both experience and subsequent interpretation of phenomenologically charged works. It will examine the extent to which such a phenomenological art experience is driven by the contextual parameters of temporal, artistic, and physical space.

The New York City performance of *Street Cleaning Event* took place as part of the 1966 Fluxfest. The first Fluxfest had taken place four years earlier, in 1962. The Fluxfests were initiated by George Maciunas, an artist often perceived as the leader of the Fluxus group and featured performances by artists associated with the Fluxus movement and typically involved event score-formats in which the artists and often the audience were given a set of instructions by Maciunas to carry out and create a shared experience. The inclusion of the Hi-Red Center group in the 1966 festival may perhaps be seen as a branching out of the Fluxus group's already somewhat loose boundaries and their aim to include international artists with shared interests in art interventions which would exist beyond the institutional framework of the art gallery. The participation of Hi-Red Center at this point in the development of the Fluxus group is particularly interesting as it might be interpreted as part of a general movement towards placing Fluxus within a wider context of avant-garde activism.¹ Furthermore, the Hi-Red Center's emphasis upon the urban infrastructure as a potential habitat for artworks ties closely to the Fluxus group's interest in the city itself as a context for art. By 1966, Maciunas had become increasingly

¹ Maciunas had in fact published a history of the avant-garde in 1964 as George Maciunas, ed. *Fluxus 1* (1964).

involved in urban development and architecture and was instrumental in the campaign to prevent Robert Moses' planned Lower Manhattan Expressway. He had furthermore created a series of Fluxus co-operatives – loft spaces converted to provide living and working spaces for the local artist community.²

The primary source for my discussion will be the photographs produced by George Maciunas to document Street Cleaning Event and a text titled *Fluxus Experience* which emphasises the phenomenological and experiential facets of the work. It was written by Hannah Higgins, a Fluxus scholar and the daughter of artists closely associated with the movement: Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles. This focus on secondary material is necessitated by the writing of this paper in 2017, fifty-one years after the work was performed in Manhattan. However, rather than debilitating a close examination of the work's context, this approach might provide an interesting discussion of how art-historical reception alters phenomenological works. Consequently, the question of how this phenomenological work is altered by its re-constitution in a variety of contexts will be considered, asking whether the work exists in its initial performance and all that follows is representation, or, if perhaps, the work exists beyond its first iteration.

Situated Frames

As the performance of the event discussed in this paper took place over fifty years ago, today our interaction with it takes place via the documentation of the work in photographs or in literature examining the performance. Each medium presents the work in contrasting ways and informs understandings of one another. Distilled from its sensorial aspects of smell, sound, and touch, in photography the work is translated into a solely optic medium. Maciunas' photographs show groups of men, crouched in white coats (Fig. 1). In the background stand a number of pairs of legs, clad in trousers and jeans, shod in smart shoes, sandals and trainers. Only the faces of the crouching men are shown, the bodies of the audience are cropped at the waist by the frame of the photograph, drawing focus onto the activity of cleaning rather than the context by which it is surrounded. The majority of the image is given over to the pavement itself, wetted, apparently, by the activities of the crouching figures who appear to be holding bottles of white spirits and scrubbing

² George Maciunas Foundation Inc., "Fluxhouse Cooperatives," accessed 28 October, 2017, <https://georgemaciunas.com>.

cloths. This specifically framed interaction places emphasis on the pavement itself and the use of white spirit reminiscent of the removal of layers of paint in the conservation of traditional painted artworks – the detritus of the city becoming tantamount to scumble being stripped back and thinned to reveal previous layers hidden beneath. Whilst public observers present at the original performance could see the towering buildings, which acted as a backdrop to the performance, those confronted with Maciunas' photographs see only a very tight and specific window onto the performance.

By contrast, a verbally conveyed frame onto the work emerges in Hannah Higgins' discussion in her *Fluxus Experience*, published in 2002.³ Higgins' explicit focus is on the formal qualities of experience and ephemerality. A particularly adroit tour de force, it explores how the event and the Fluxkit – two of the primary formats used by Fluxus – were, or, are experiential works.⁴ In this way, Higgins presents the experience of the work, not the art itself, as that which harbours its artistic essence. Thus, the specifics of the experience become pivotal in determining the piece. Consequently, any minute shift in the exact time, location, crowd, sounds and sensations would result in an entirely different piece of art.⁵ This stance marks her interaction with *Street Cleaning Event*. As such, for Higgins, any subsequent performance of the work is a reincarnation, where only an umbilical link remains while the specificities are re-constituted. Indeed, Higgins argues that “[e]xperience is neither ahistorical nor without context, rather, experience is simultaneously embedded in human consciousness and the situation that makes a specific experience possible.”⁶ However, despite this declaration of the embedded nature of context, her examination of *Street Cleaning Event* is distanced from the specifics of the work's performance. She writes:

The pattern of the public's interacting with Fluxus materials and adapting them to their own circumstances suggests the essential fluidity of Fluxus. And my own experience confirms it. In 1966 the Japanese Fluxus artist Hi-Red Center performed *Street Cleaning Event*, meticulously cleaning a patch of sidewalk in New York City with solvents. I grew up knowing this work. When I took on a job in college as a cleaning woman, I recalled it, and it became for me a means of connecting profoundly with my environment.⁷

³ Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (London: University of California Press, 2002), 63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

Read as an artistic critique of *Street Cleaning Event*, this description is somewhat lacking as the passage speaks not of the work's location (temporally or geographically), nor of the sensations experienced when observing the piece. Higgins' writing and discussion of the work initially appears distanced as she writes of her own experience cleaning to earn money as a student. In this way, it might be thought that Higgins is not engaging with the work itself. However, this moment of connection and remembrance is borne from a series of acts, which, however loosely, re-perform the work, creating a new iteration. Akin to a postliminary editioning of prints by an artist's technician, in lieu of the original artist, each member of the public that observed the original event becomes an amateur performer, revisiting new versions of the work in their daily lives. As such, Higgins' focus upon her own performance rather than her experience of the original, is an attempt to highlight this process. The Event is a paradox, both contextually unique and limited, yet with the scope for infinite iterations. In an earlier essay, Higgins states that "[i]n all cases, however, the work relies critically on its surroundings: whether mass cultural, art critical, political or institutional."⁸ While this is true, it is true in a complex way with caveats. Higgins' own interpretation is as reliant upon its context as the original work is. Oddly, for a term expressed in the singular, the specificity of the event is perhaps best explored as a multiplicity of individuated performances.

However, an emphasis on the genealogical link to earlier performances is at risk of neglecting the importance of shifting variables. *Street Cleaning Event* was initially performed on a street in 1966, surrounded by pedestrians. Higgins' cleaning experience was performed as a student many years later, cleaning professionally indoors, and importantly, it is an act of reminiscence. Even disregarding the hierarchy that surrounds the original within the art world, the two iterations cannot be entirely equated. In earlier discussions of the nature of experiential artworks, Higgins herself actually states that "[i]nterpretations may be subsequently attached to an experience, thus deepening or augmenting the interpretive capacities of later experiences and reports on them."⁹ This acts as a statement on the nature of her own performance as it pertains to the original, generationally-linked to its antecedent work, yet contextually altered. It is a new entity of its own.

⁸ "Naming Change and Changing Names: Fluxus as a Proper Noun," in *Fluxus Virus 1962-1992* (Köln: Galerie Schüppenhauer, 1992), 117.

⁹ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 1.

<https://www.takaishigallery.com/en/archives/12436/>

Figure 2:
‘Hi-Red Center:
The Documents of
“Direct Action”’¹⁰

Relocation

The 1966 version of *Street Cleaning Event* bears a striking similarity to a work performed by the Hi-Red Centre group in 1964, which saw them cleaning a pavement in Japan. Wryly entitled *Cleaning Event (Be Clean! Campaign to Promote Cleanliness and Order in the Metropolitan Area)*, it took place in Ginza, Tokyo (Fig. 2).¹⁰ Although in a number of ways the presentation was incredibly similar – the artists cleaned on a pavement, wearing white coats – its location on a street in Ginza rather than Manhattan shifted interpretations of the work. *Cleaning Event* has been perceived as a highly contextually-charged event. Performed amidst governmental appeals for urban cleanliness during the on-going 1964 Olympic Games held in Tokyo, it has frequently been described as an ironic response.¹¹ These appeals arose amidst Tokyo’s ambitious half-billion dollar pledge to improve the city in order to host the event, a move which was undoubtedly an attempt to increase tourism to an overpopulated and economically struggling Tokyo.¹² This ironic reading is strengthened by the performance of the work on the seventh day of the Olympic games¹³ and the Hi-Red Center group’s history of authority-challenging interventions in Tokyo.¹⁴ A few key differences to the New York City event occurred in the Tokyo work which emphasise such anti-authoritarian undertones. Specifically, an a-frame sign was placed a few meters from the cleaners with the words ‘Be Clean’ in English and ‘Sōji-Chū’ in Japanese (which roughly

¹⁰ Jeff Michael Hammond, “Hi-Red Center’s Quiet Actions Still Reverberate Today,” *The Japan Times* (26 February 2014), <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/02/26/arts/hi-red-centers-quiet-actions-still-reverberate-today/#.WVQjlbGZNE4>.

¹¹ See Saeko Kimura, “Uncanny Anxiety: Literature after Fukushima,” in *Fukushima and the Arts: Negotiating Nuclear Disaster*, ed. Barbara Geilhorm and Kristina Iwata-Weickgennant (New York: Routledge, 2017), 77; Reiko Tomii, “Geijustu on Their Minds: Memorable Words on Anti-Art,” in *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Post-War Japan*, ed. Charles Mereweather and Rika Iezumi Hiro (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 55; Hammond, “Hi-Red Center’s Quiet Actions Still Reverberate Today.”

¹² Robert Whiting, “Olympic Construction Transformed Tokyo,” *The Japan Times* (10 October 2017), <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2014/10/10/olympics/olympic-construction-transformed-tokyo/#.XhesDkX7TOQ>.

¹³ Tomii, “Geijustu on Their Minds,” 55.

¹⁴ Tate, “Art Term: Hi-Red Center,” accessed 28 October, 2017, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/hi-red-center>.

translates to *Cleaning Now*) and unwitting passers-by were asked to take part in the work.¹⁵ The former a nod to governmental pleas for the local population to clean the city ahead of the games, and the latter a direct hint at the collective responsibility which the government were trying to instil in such appeals. Consequently, in performing these two similar works in different temporal and geographical locations, a shift in interpretation was inevitable.

Although *Hi-Red Center* were already associated conceptually and socially via Yoko Ono with the contemporaneous group known as Fluxus, the performance of *Street Cleaning Event* in Sixties New York allowed it to be understood as a Fluxus work. Geographically re-located, the work was no longer a satellite to the movement, re-conceptualised, by academia at least, as a constituent part of the Fluxus events programme.¹⁶ This becomes evident in the inclusion of a number of notable exhibitions such as *A New Avant-Garde* at the MoMA, New York which explore the work of Fluxus.¹⁷ Indeed, part of the reason the work was re-performed two years later as a showcase of *Hi-Red Center*'s work during Fluxfest, was to formally present the group to New York City's Fluxus community. The event itself was documented in photographs by George Maciunas (Fig. 1). In much of the scholarship surrounding Fluxus Maciunas was historicised as almost synonymous with the movement, even becoming nicknamed 'Mr. Fluxus.'¹⁸ Thus, in the work's conversion to a subject of Maciunas' photography, it became memorialised as a Fluxus work. As such, the work's contextual shift was confirmed, the dislocation from its politicised origins complete and it was relocated within the narratives surrounding the emergent artistic construct that was known as Fluxus.

The association of *Hi-Red Center*'s *Street Cleaning Event* with Fluxus emphasises certain nuances of the performance. For example, the use of the word 'Event' within the work's title in the context of the 1960's New York City art scene means something highly specific. *The Event Score* is a contribution of George Brecht to the Fluxus movement, and is arguably one of the most regularly recurring mediums of the movement.¹⁹ In her text *Fluxus Experience*, Higgins defines the event as a situation in which "everyday actions are framed as minimalistic performances, or, occasionally, as imaginary and impossible experiments

¹⁵ Tomii, "Geijustu on Their Minds," 55.

¹⁶ See Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 63; John Carter, "Exhibiting Fluxus: Mapping Hi Red Center in Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde," MoMA, accessed 30 January 2017, https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2013/01/30/exhibiting-fluxus-mapping-hi-redcenter-in-tokyo-1955-1970-a-new-avant-garde-2/.

¹⁷ Carter, "Exhibiting Fluxus," accessed.

¹⁸ Ann Noël and Emmett Williams, eds., *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas 1931-1978* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997).

¹⁹ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 2.

with everyday situations.”²⁰ Such understandings of the Fluxus event bear convincing parallels to *Street Cleaning Event* as the act of civic street cleaning certainly qualifies as an ‘everyday action,’ which, when performed as an artwork, is quietly reframed, initially imperceptible as art.²¹ As such, the former of Higgins’ paired definitions is satisfyingly achieved and, at least by Higgins’ measure, thus falls into the category of an event. This places the work as a specific kind of spatial interruption, easily comparable to other events sited within the urban fabric as this was hardly the first time that Fluxus Events punctured the daily lives of city dwellers through kerbside interruptions.²² One particularly relevant work titled *Travelling Wall* was created in Roskilde, Denmark by Danish artist Eric Anderson in 1985. In this work members of the public were asked to disassemble and reassemble a pile of bricks into new formations on the pavement.²³ In this way the urban fabric was subtly reconstituted to disrupt the urban terrain and make it anew. Similarly, in its own small way, *Street Cleaning Event* moved the matter of the pavement around, a facet of the work that might otherwise be overlooked which enables the work to be considered a form of transient architectural intervention. Consequently, although these two works were created nearly twenty years apart their qualification as Fluxus Events and their similarity in regards to their location in urban space allows enriching comparisons between the two to emerge. Once again for *Street Cleaning Event*, the work’s location determines the precise interpretations which it might inspire.

Indeed, the very act of contextual shift as is displayed between *Cleaning Event (Be Clean! Campaign to Promote Cleanliness and Order in the Metropolitan Area)* and *Street Cleaning Event* has a precedent within the Fluxus movement in the form of the Fluxkit. The Fluxkit is best described as an experiential toolkit in minutiae. The Fluxkit encloses transitional objects, generally a collection of multiples, created by Fluxus artists.²⁴ These objects provide differing experiences. Examples of such multiples include noisemakers produced by Joe Jones, sets of nested cubes by Mieko Shiomi, objects to touch and stroke and performance score cards with instructions to facilitate the performance of specific works.²⁵ Each object offers subtly different approaches to experience, allowing individuals microcosms of artistic experience beyond the gallery within their own daily lives. The experience

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 63.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ MoMa, “Thing/Thought: Fluxus Editions/ 1962-1978,” MoMa, accessed 28 June 2017, www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2011/fluxus_editions/category_works/fluxkit/.

²⁵ Ibid.

produced is mobile and transferrable into any location the art-consumer chooses, each time altered by the situation in which it occurs. Thus, the re-siting of *Street Cleaning Event* within New York City's primary physical trope (the street itself) mimics the Fluxus tradition of creating enclaves of artistic experience within daily reality, questioning whether art must only exist in the devoted spaces of museums and galleries.

Temporal and representational space

As *Street Cleaning Event* was historicised it became reliant upon its representation in writing and photography to determine its legacy as the number of people with direct experience of its 1966 iteration constantly decreases. This is a facet of all ephemeral work, traditionally defined by its limitedness; as to move between a first-order phenomenon and second order representation drastically alters a work, thus traditionally confirming the end of the work's evolution. However, the nomenclature of the Fluxus movement, with which the work has become associated, is derived from the status of 'flux,' a term which is, by definition, non-static.²⁶ Furthermore, the movement's works were often produced as editions and events which were shifted and developed as they were experienced and performed in new locations. Indeed, artist Dick Higgins once declared that "Fluxus is not a moment in history or an art movement. Fluxus is a way of doing things, a tradition, and a way of life and death."²⁷ Writing in the 1960s, Higgins naturally described Fluxus in the present tense. Nevertheless, his declaration begins to define a temporal space which is anything but limited.²⁸ Although, Fluxus itself wishes to exist continually within the present tense, the narrative that explores it now speaks with a historical tone. Unless, as is the case in this discussion, academics are specifically considering the temporal locus of a work, it is simply understood as an event that took place in the 1960s. As such, when a work exists through its subsequent narratives, and these narratives are past tense, the work itself is no longer in 'flux,' but instead a past event. There is no past tense for the word 'flux,' and yet, the placing of the work in an art historical narrative falsely presents it as having one, as having fluxed, or, even more incorrectly, as having become extraneous to the nature of flux, marginalised from the very nature of its own movement. Dick Higgins' description of Fluxus as a 'tradition' is particularly telling as traditions are

²⁶ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*,

1.

²⁷ Dick Higgins, quoted in Justin Remes, *Motion(Less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 61.

²⁸ Ibid.

continually redefined by those that come into contact with them.²⁹ For Higgins, Fluxus, akin with historical folklore, is an evolving concept through which the origin of the tradition may continue to speak in the present tense. Thus, *Street Cleaning Event's* visual and verbal documentation is shifted from stasis, instead becoming an active participant in the movement's continually shifting narrative. Consequently, the status of these representational forms solely as documentation of the original becomes questionable.

In light of this consideration, further parallels emerge between *Street Cleaning Event* and the Fluxkit. Indeed, Hannah Higgins introduces the multiples of Fluxus as the published format of the event, stating: "Events like these were typeset and published as Fluxus editions in 1963," rather than describing them as having been documented in the form of Fluxus editions.³⁰ A linguistic difference so subtle it might easily be overlooked, but pivotal to unpick Higgins' stance as it confers event status onto the process of using the Fluxus edition. This characteristic shifting is noted in the writing of Owen F. Smith exploring the Fluxkit. Smith discusses the "meandering evident through Fluxus events and objects" as it pertains to their actuation "by the situations in which they are viewed and enacted."³¹ Yet, he does not go so far as to explore the event and the object as different forms through which the same experience may be achieved. Higgins' stance appears a natural conclusion of Smith's statement, yet her subtle conferment of the Fluxkit as an event itself determines a seamless shifting and reconstituting of the boundaries of artistic production, which neglects the importance of form in a work. After all, to assert similarities between the very physical spaces produced in events like *Street Cleaning Event* and the cognitive artistic landscapes produced by the Fluxkit largely ignores the contrasting qualities of these two landscapes, which are of course, numerous.

It is perhaps in the terminology surrounding the Fluxkit where we might begin to encroach upon a resolution of this apparent oversight in Higgins' critique. The objects' identification as multiples suggests a plural number of items. But of what specifically? Of course, there is more than one object in each kit – however, as there are a number of *different* items the term multiple itself seems unfitting, generally indicative of a number of the same type of object. As such, it is

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 2 (emphasis mine).

³¹ Owen F. Smith, "Playing with Difference: Fluxus as a World View," in *Fluxus Virus 1962-1992* (Köln: Galerie Schüppenhauer, 1992), 117.

not the physicality of the objects that groups them. Instead, one might propose it is the role of the objects as producers of experience that is their shared quality. In this manner, the contrasting physical set-ups of the different items – be they within a Fluxkit multiple or as part of an event – determines the varied qualities of each experience. A set of multiplicities, each is linked by their creation of experience but distinct in what that experience may be and consequently in how it may be contextually formed. As such, rather than negating the importance of context, the role of form and location in forming experience is emphasised, elevated to the role of the determining factor for any experiential difference.

Physical Loss

Nevertheless, a formal shift occurred between the 1966 performance of *Street Cleaning Event* and its subsequent incarnations. The work, once embedded within the civic fabric now exists primarily within academic discourse. The loss of its architecture is a heavy one, altering the experience of the work dramatically. This has two paramount ramifications. Firstly, the work is now within the artistic canon, where it was previously physically located outside of art as institution, and, secondly, the aleatoric role of the public is lost, as the accidental performer is swapped for that of the deliberate reader. This seismic reconstitution of the public's role is, of course, not without effect. Contemporary attempts to understand *Street Cleaning Event* read the work in relation to its context. As such the role of context is, on some levels exaggerated despite its physical loss. Elements that have become historically important to the art world become exaggerated and undocumented contextual realities lost from the work's legacy. The exact effects of this remain unknowable, exaggerating their ramifications.

Furthermore, whilst being continually re-considered in academic discourse, the reconstruction of the work is also active in a different manner. Previously the viewer's engagement with the work was broadly aleatoric. The viewer did not necessarily choose to engage with it, nor seek out the location of the performance with observation in mind. Instead, it appeared on their doorstep, mid-path, demanding their attention. Given the Fluxus movements' close association with the composer John Cage, the loss of

chance encounter is particularly important. The roots of Fluxus are often traced back to a series of classes in Experimental Composition given by Cage between 1957 and 1959 at the New School in New York City, where a number of the group's members first met and were introduced to musical composition.³² He later qualified his involvement in the class as not dictatorial, stating that "I wasn't concerned with a teaching situation that involved a body of material to be transmitted by me to them."³³ However, the compositional experiments enacted by the class bear close similarities to Cage's own praxis; centred upon notions of the aleatoric. Cage is most famous for his composition 4'33", which highlighted environmental noise, created by chance, qualifying each situation of rendition as entirely unique. The same can be said of the observers of *Street Cleaning Event*, who came to the work by chance yet each defined its physicality as their bodies enter the performance space thus altering the rendition for others around them. By contrast, the critic is removed from the process unable to reconstitute the physical reality of that which has already occurred, shifting solely interpretation not performance.

Furthermore, the emphasis given in the title to the work's physical location should not be missed. It is *street* cleaning the artists are concerning themselves with. Both the New York City and Tokyo performances of the work were situated on a street pavement, a context loaded with meaning which may inflect interpretations of the work. However, before we begin to delve into what the pavement context is, we must consider what it is not. After all, it is not the expected location of an artwork, it is not an art gallery or exhibition. The work was performed outside of the institutional art context which has long been acknowledged for its role in shifting the relationship between object and viewer. The hotly debated importance of context in the appropriation of day-to-day objects into readymades has become a trope of the art industry, where merely the placement of an object within an art gallery by an artist determines its reception as an artwork. For example, Duchamp's readymades place everyday objects into the gallery condition, imploring the gallery-goer to understand them as artworks. So, what happens when this dichotomy is reversed, when an ordinary activity is placed in an ordinary location but is still perceived as an artistic act? Evidently, the socially constructed parameters of the art institution begin to dissolve, as

³² Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 1.

³³ John Cage, "Interview with Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner," *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 54.

any location may be the harbinger of artistic merit. Art itself is no longer entirely extraneous to reality. Despite existing in a street not a gallery *Street Cleaning Event* was nonetheless subsequently perceived as an artwork in the critical reception that has followed. In this way, art might begin to effect change upon the civic reality as an integrated part of it, no longer confined to specific and distinct institutions.

Pavement Boundaries

At this point in our discussion, the nature of *Street Cleaning Event* as a physical act that not only takes place within space but actually alters and re-constitutes space is vital. The work begins to shift from installation or interruption to something approaching architecture – a shorthand here to describe that which directly alters the built environment. The civic experience that the street itself determines extends beyond merely the concrete form of the pavement. Instead, it is constituted by the dirt which sits upon it, the texture of the terrain under foot, the smells that emerge from it, and the interactions which may take place there – each substantially reconstructed by the act of meticulously cleaning. Thus, although the soap suds themselves will disappear, the civic reality is altered by the work in a permanent manner, now a location in which art may not only take place but which was, in part, formed by an artistic act.

The pavement itself is located somewhere between private and public territories. It sits at the threshold between the two and has its own academic, civic and personal histories each of which merged with the equally rich artistic spatial narrative of *Street Cleaning Event*. The merging of these territories was for the Hi-Red Centre something of a leitmotif within their work. Typically using the Tokyo pavement, and indeed the airspace above it for a number of interruptions within the urban fabric, the group's oeuvre included works such as *Dropping Event* (10 October 1964) which saw the group throw “books, pants, shirts, shoes, full trunk, etc.”³⁴ onto the street and protest-like happenings including *Kyushu Faction Street Happening at the Tenjin Intersection of Fukuoka*, (26 February 1970).³⁵ Evidently, the pavement was interesting to the group as a spatial field, which they returned to again and again as the location of their works.

³⁴ George Maciunas, text on the reverse of *Hi-Red Center map*, quoted in Carter, “Exhibiting Fluxus,” accessed.

³⁵ Minoru Hirata, “Kyushu Faction Street Happening at the Tenjin Intersection of Fukuoka, 26 February 1970,” Tate, accessed 8 January, 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hirata-kyushu-faction-street-happening-at-the-tenjin-intersection-of-fukuoka-26-february-p80112>.

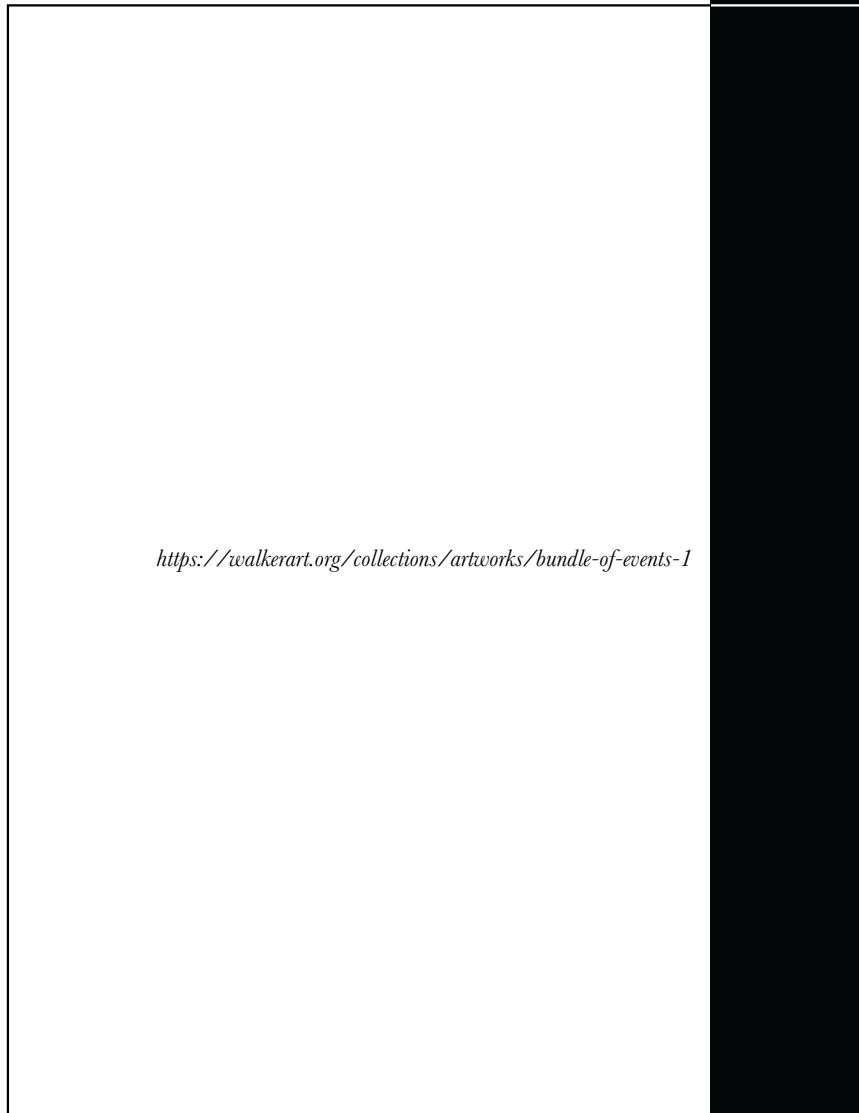


Figure 3:
Bundle of Events

A map produced in 1965 documents activities by the group in Tokyo in 1963 and 1964 (Fig. 3).³⁶ Designed by George Maciunas and edited by Shigeko Kubota it is a Fluxus edition, confirming the group's status within the Fluxus mythology.³⁷ The graphic language of the map literally places the movement's acts within an abstraction of the city.³⁸ Collapsing the timeline of the group it conveys works which would never have taken place at the same time within a singular map. As such the works exist in flux, crystallised in an eternal location beyond the parameters of time. Consequently, the city is represented as permanently marked by the spectre of the group's once ephemeral acts, each presented as equally vital to an understanding of the city as the urban infrastructure itself. In fact, it could be argued that in this illustration the group's works

³⁶ Carter, "Exhibiting Fluxus," accessed.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

are prioritised over the physical city grid, as where the two exist within the same space, visual priority is given to text describing the event. As such, the group's activities are placed as infrastructure, denoting the map-user's experience of the city.³⁹ Each represented in abstraction, the capacity for both terrains – of art installation and streets – to represent not only physical space but to signify experiences beyond spatial reality becomes evident. As if to highlight this, the text 'Hi-Red Center' is shaped as a balloon, floating above the infrastructure in a space beyond, yet represented by the civic realities the group left behind.

Each formal interruption and alteration to this ever-evolving work redefines and alters it. Borrowing an act from an earlier Hi-Red Center work and re-siting it within the streets of New York City dislocated it from the politicised context of Tokyo and instead situated it within the Fluxus narrative. This act places the work within a tradition of civic events and the production of counter-spaces which, in juxtaposition, determine the boundaries of the dominant reality. Within Fluxus, temporal space is infinite and experienced as a multiplicity. As such, if these two factors extend across iterations, it is the contextual and formal shifts that determine the unique character of each work, a reality which elevates the significance of these factors. As the work is historicised it loses its integral physicality, the effects of which (both known and unknown) are turbulent – what was once disparate might be fused, what was once connected now separated in rifts and fissures. The process of historicisation itself undermining some of the most determined qualities of a Fluxus work – its focus on experience, its presentness, its flux. As such this new context qualifies the importance of its prior architecture, which defined the work as a counter space, challenging previous assumptions about the institution and its ability to determine the parameters of art. This location – sitting between public and private experience – is an interstitial territory permanently altered by the work. It is reconstituted as a territory formed by the act of artistic creation. Both its physicality and its conceptual reality are altered by the work. A series of lenses exist to observe this terrain. Tightly framed and specifically curated they encourage observation and limit its parameters, exploring mere moments of this art object in flux. With no fixed performer or location, the boundaries between lens and performance are near-imperceptible, as the work's shifting physical

³⁹ Ibid.

context alters it beyond recognition. In this way, *Street Cleaning Event*, as an intervention within the civic is an experiential work driven by the contextual and formal parameters of its production. In becoming architecture, it altered the role and possibilities of the site, and subtly shifted the reality of the urban environment in which it existed.

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