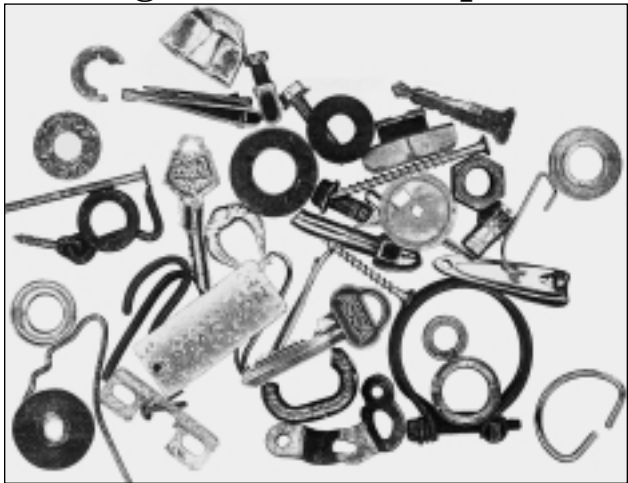


Arrangement for Scrap Metal



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A Composition in Two Parts

Part One:

Place pieces of scrap metal in a line on the ground.

Part Two:

Pick up the pieces in the order in which they were placed.

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The instructions above prescribe a simple activity I performed on a public sidewalk in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle on June 9, 2001. This booklet provides a detailed account for analysis, criticism, or further elaboration by anyone interested.

The Lucky Penny Game

I do a lot of walking in the urban residential neighborhood where I live. I usually walk to work and back. I go on many recreational walks with my wife, Wendy, who also walks a lot on her own. Out of all of this walking a sport has evolved between the two of us called The Lucky Penny Game. We've been playing it for over ten years.

There is a folk custom that a penny found is lucky. I don't want to research the origin of this folklore. But the variation on it that has arisen between us is that whatever luck there is in a penny found does not manifest itself unless the finder gives the penny to their partner. The partner carries the penny for a day or so, allowing the lucky aura to do its work. Then the penny is deposited in the Lucky Duck, a wooden

duck-shaped box. I don't recall just when it became the depository for pennies whose luck had been spent. But after some time it became apparent that the Lucky Duck was beginning to overflow. So Wendy made a bag out of fabric with a duck motif into which the Duck's contents were transferred, and the Lucky Duck began to slowly fill again. It is now overflowing for the fifth time into the Lucky Money Bag.

We don't restrict our game to found pennies. A found nickle or dime is also lucky, although it's indefinite whether the luck is five or ten times as much as that of a lucky penny. Paper currency is lucky on the rare occasion when it's found. Foreign coins (usually Canadian) are lucky. Beyond that the luck in any found object is open to debate. But found items deemed lucky enough to have passed through the Lucky Duck into the Lucky Money Bag include a

paper penny, a wooden nickle, metal dog tags, a State of Mississippi Alcoholic Beverage Control Agent pin, a plastic clown, and so on.

Collecting Scrap Metal

Although I am always saving twist-ties, screws, and so forth for reuse, I think The Lucky Money Game is the principal reason I began picking up small scraps of metal about a year ago. The nuts, bolts, and washers lacked the lucky aura that would channel them into the Lucky Duck, but the habit of playing our game led me to notice a lot of metal on the ground. The scrap metal I began picking up was placed in a small jam jar on the shelf.

Once I'd formalized this pursuit with jokes about my "metal collection" it was easy to build a substantial collection in a short time. Within a year I found

I'd already collected more scrap metal in terms of volume than our ten years worth of lucky money. I acquired scrap metal faster than jam jars in which to keep it.

For all practical purposes, the scrap metal I collected had no value. Sure, a few pieces might still be useful as screws or washers. But the possibility of the metal as a whole to be recycled, even as scrap, was unlikely. Furthermore, along with the lead scraps I picked up I carried home the legal responsibility to properly dispose of this hazardous waste.

The possibility of turning the collected metal into some *objet d'art* seems unlikely to me, although I entertained a few ideas. One was to sandwich the metal between panes of glass, maybe with some internal lighting or back lighting. But none of my ideas seemed as though they would actually add any value

to the metal in the end. The performance idea occurred while I was cleaning the bathroom, the morning of May 13. It amused me. It filled me with dread.

An Example of Fluxus

I have always liked *Zyklus for Water Pails*, by Tomas Schmit (1962):

Water pails or bottles are placed along perimeter of a circle. Performer inside circle picks the only filled vessel and pours into one on right, then picks one just filled and pours into next one on right, etc. till all water is spilled or evaporated.

Schmit's is one performance placed within the circle of Fluxus, an association of certain art and artists

often limited to the early 1960s. I personally believe Fluxus to be as viable today as it was then. Although I did not conceive of "Arrangement for Scrap Metal" with Schmit in mind, in reflection I thought it offered some parallels.

Like water, scrap metal is ordinary and part of the everyday world. It's not preordained to be art material. The scraps would impose their own limits on the performance: the line would extend whatever distance the scraps would span when placed end to end; the performance would last only as long as it took to lay out the metal, the same way that Schmit's performance lasted until all the water was evaporated or spilled. It would be an ephemeral event. The activity would represent nothing more or less than itself: *removing scrap metal from a bucket piece by piece, then placing it back into the bucket piece by piece...*;

pouring water from one bottle into another, then into another... The performance would require no talent or specialized training for the performer. It could be performed by a child. It would require no specialized training in aesthetics to be understood. No art critic would be necessary to explain it. It could be understood by a child.

Twelve Fluxus Ideas

Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman collectively listed twelve elemental ideas which, they suggested, characteristically suffuse fluxworks. The ideas are listed below, compared to features from my performance.

1. Globalism – The act of collecting scrap metal and arranging it in a line on the ground is probably as easily done in any industrialized city on Earth. There is nothing about doing it in Seattle that gives

this location any enhanced status culturally, technically, economically, or politically. I can't imagine any mayor thinking, "Our so-called artists are now making lines of scrap metal on the sidewalk. Surely this is proof that our city is culturally mature and esteemed enough to make us worthy of hosting an international economic conference. We won't have riots here!"

2. Unity of Art and Life – The scrap metal in the gutter is art material. The sidewalk is a stage.

3. Intermedia – Is a line of scrap metal on the sidewalk a sculpture or a drawing? Was this event theater, dance, or a musical performance? I think so.

4. Experimentalism – This was certainly novel behavior for me personally. Taking the stage and performing is the last thing I would ever desire. Like any experiment, I did make a number of plans, calculations, and hypotheses ahead of time. Although the

staging and execution went as planned, I was quite nervous at the start and forgot to time myself. I worked too fast and without deliberation. I forgot to accurately count the pieces of metal. But I had enough presence of mind to notice some unexpected things – the maple seeds on the sidewalk that needed to be brushed out of the way, the irregular surface of the concrete, the clank of the metal in my bucket as I picked up the pieces. Do something new. See what happens.

5. Chance – The metal was collected by chance. Pieces were taken out of the bucket randomly, although I noticed some of the smallest pieces had filtered down to the bottom of the bucket so the last pieces in the line were the smallest. Staging of the event (time and place) was planned, but there were the unexpected maple seeds mentioned above.

6. Playfulness – A mature, rational adult lining up scrap metal on a public sidewalk? Is this some kind of joke? You've got to be kidding.

7. Simplicity – Place pieces of scrap metal in a line on the ground. Pick up the pieces in the order in which they were paced.

8. Implicativeness – A line of items similar in size and material (metal) but different (iron, brass, aluminum; rusty, shiny, corroded; machined, cast, drawn, plated; scratched, bent, broken...) implies a number of other works: music in which every note is approximately the same length and tone but different in timbre; a line of small snowmen; people walking by on the sidewalk; a life lived in which every day is different.

9. Exemplativism – What? I don't know what this means. I think my composition/performance (like

Schmit's *Zyklus...*) is AN example, but not THE example of a fluxwork.

10. Specificity – The instructions for the event are straightforward, although there are unspecified variables. Size of the scrap metal, for instance, is not mentioned. My scrap metal collection, originally stored in jam jars, required that each piece fit into the jars, limiting them to about 5cm in width and 12cm in length. The piece as scored could be performed with larger scraps, even the size of the Enola Gay. The number of pieces is not specified, but for a line you would need at least two scraps: both the Enola Gay and Bock's Car.

11. Presence in Time – The performance was ephemeral. When it was over, the sidewalk was returned to its initial state.

12. Musicality – The title of the score borrows the

terms “Arrangement” and “Composition” from music. The term “score” implies that anybody can perform it just as music can be performed by people other than the composer.

When my sister-in-law, Sandy, heard about my plan (and had recovered from her disbelief at the inane idea), her drama training came to the fore and she began asking questions like, “Is there going to be any musical accompaniment?” The fluxus point of view would be that the score is the sheet music; the performance is the music itself. A more conservative musical stance would point to the sound of my plastic bucket as I dragged it along the sidewalk during part one, or the clanking metal as I tossed it back into the bucket during part two. Would it have been more musical to have used a metal bucket? I don't think so.

Details of the Performance

So, was my performance a fluxwork? Here are additional details that might count in evaluation.

I performed on a sidewalk on the main commercial street of Ballard, a historically Scandinavian neighborhood that was long ago absorbed into the city of Seattle proper. Most would consider it a middle-class community.

The performance site was not chosen by chance. I looked at several sites before selecting the one where I staged it. I considered the length and width of sidewalk and whether a line of scrap metal would impede or block anyone. I noted the presence of bus stops, bicycle racks, entrances to buildings, wheelchair access ramps, and driveways. I looked at how level the concrete was. An important consideration was

that the time and location would coincide with one of the local Artwalks, which I assume to be organized by commercial interests. I had no contact with any organization, however, and (aside from a single announcement on Fluxlist) my appearance was unannounced and unanticipated.

I chose to stage the event in a reasonably prominent public location rather than in private or in an obscure location. I thought it would be better to give the public an opportunity to see it.

The weather was mild – a bit overcast and breezy, but not cold or raining. The sun was still up when I started at about 7:00 p.m. The Artwalk hours were publicised as being from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

I wanted to be anonymous, or perform simply as “Tom.” But I thought it would be more honest to allow feedback from my audience if they wished, so I

put my P.O.Box address on the program/score along with my e-mail address. Since my e-mail address has my full name I was not anonymous. I live and work a few miles away, but I did not want anyone who saw me to know me.

The performance was not altogether impromptu. I made some informal rehearsals in the attic and in the basement, trying to predict how long the performance would take and how far the line of metal would extend. I found myself estimating how much I could extend the line by adding 1cm, 2cm, or more of space between pieces. Wendy said she thought the pieces looked better with some space between them rather than butted together. I also considered making as straight of a line as possible, possibly by snapping a chalk line on the sidewalk first. In the end, I made some use of the lines already existing in the sidewalk

to keep my line of metal relatively straight. I left gaps between pieces of approximately 1 to 2 cm, but did not make any measurements as I placed the metal.

I removed several of the smallest pieces of metal from my collection prior to the event, thinking they might be too small to see and too awkward to pick up off the sidewalk. I carried all the pieces together in a small green plastic bucket to and from the site rather than in the glass jam jars in which I'd originally stored the collection. There were about 450 pieces, weighing a total of approximately 4 kilograms.

I dressed in a relatively tidy but informal manner: a button-down brown cotton shirt with sleeves rolled up past my elbows, clean blue jeans, and inexpensive black dress shoes. I did not wear a bowler hat. By appearance I was a balding, middle-aged man; sober, rational, unobtrusive, but doing something unconven-

tional. I was nervous and avoided eye contact.

Because I was nervous I forgot to record exact start and stop times of the two parts of the composition. It seemed later that it took only about 15 minutes for part 1 and 5 minutes for part 2. This was faster than my rehearsal time, and I attribute the speed to nervousness.

I did not want to try to explain myself. I printed about 40 small programs (see page 1) containing the title, the score, and contact information. These were left on a clipboard at the start of the line of metal, along with an invitation to “take a free program.”

The sidewalk was on the south side of the street. The choreography went as follows. Enter from the west end of the street. At the start (Point A), lay down the clipboard with programs and begin aligning scrap metal on the sidewalk, working from Point A toward

the east. Drag the plastic bucket of metal along the sidewalk as you work. When you have placed the last scrap of metal on the east end of the line (Point B), leave the empty bucket there and return to Point A. Pick up the clipboard with the programs and carry them to Point B. Lay down the clipboard with the programs at Point B, pick up the empty bucket and carry it back to Point A. Place pieces of metal back in the bucket starting from Point A. When you have picked up the last piece of metal at Point B, pick up the clipboard and exit to the east. Don’t look back. Get the hell out of there.

I was only interrupted twice. The first interruption was by a woman (mid-20s, maybe) from one of the businesses in front of which I was laying down metal. She wanted to thank me “for doing this.” “OK,” I replied nervously, forgetting to point out the

programs to her. The second interruption was by a young man (about 20 maybe) when I'd begun picking up the metal. He wanted to know again why it was that I had "set up" the metal. I directed him to the programs. Wendy came by shortly thereafter. She said later she'd seen him smoking a cigarette, contemplating the score. I believe he is the only person who took a program.

I recall hearing three comments while I worked. "I like it," said one person walking by, although I'm not absolutely certain they were talking to me. "What the hell is this?" was a comment from another pedestrian, who I assume was talking about my metal. The third comment, from a female pedestrian, was, "Oh, this must be part of the Artwalk." She kept on walking.

I don't plan to repeat the performance. It's over.

References

Tomas Schmit's Zyklus for Water Pails is cited in "FLUXUS, the most radical and experimental art movement of the sixties," © 1979 by Harry Ruhé, published by 'A', Amsterdam.

The Twelve Fluxus Ideas are from an essay by Ken Friedman found in "The Fluxus Reader," ©1998 by Ken Friedman, published by Academy Editions.

