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by

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**Readymaintenance: Systems, Feminist Economics, and the Immaterial
Readymade in the Work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles**

Ann Reynolds, Supervisor

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**Readymaintenance: Systems, Feminist Economics,
and the Immaterial Readymade in the Work of
Mierle Laderman Ukeles**

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin
August 2015

Dedication

For my grandfather, Hans O. Andersen, an innovative scholar committed to social justice through education who once referred to himself as “more a kind of sewer than a connoisseur.” I can only hope to describe myself similarly.

Acknowledgements

All work is collective. This thesis is no different. My advisor, Ann Reynolds, has been a guiding light in this process in ways that I could not have anticipated. “This is *your work*,” she kept reminding me. Accepting that weighty fact took courage. The lesson of the experience of writing this thesis on performance art and labor, for me, is a redefinition of work. It is a 140 page ongoing reminder that intellectual work is never pure, straightforward streams of thought. It is chaotic, nerve-racking, and explosively personal. Ann’s careful and generous advice and perspective continues to shape the course of my research through providing me tools and the freedom to figure out how to use them. Cherise Smith’s mentorship—for this thesis and many other endeavors—has been vital for my development and renewed commitment as a scholar. Their feminist practice in the academy demonstrates a way of doing meaningful political work while advancing knowledge.

I have been directly assisted by many people with whom I share an interest in Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ work. I owe immense gratitude to Casey Dorobek and others at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. Jenny Korn was generous with her time and extremely hospitable when I began roving around in Mierle’s archive. Robert Schweitzer kindly provided the copy of *Gnome Baker*, which proved a fantastic wealth of information. Sharing research with Larissa Harris reminded me that other people have these same questions—a welcome discovery, truly. Of course, Mierle’s work is not only the origin of this thesis but set a high bar for original thought and conscientious engagement with daily life. Her work has changed how I do scholarship and the dishes.

In this process, I have had the enormous benefit of being a part of a community of scholars here at UT and elsewhere. The women of INGZ Curatorial Collective, Uchenna Itam, Julia Neal, and Natalie Zelt, have provided a sense of connection and very real support as we worked to collectively and publicly enact the spirit of our scholarship. My colleagues at the Blanton Museum of Art were great sounding boards who often gave me compelling leads and bolstered my arguments with new contexts, particularly Katie Anania and Alexis Salas. I cannot imagine this project separate from my parallel work of teaching in the galleries. Working with Ray Williams and Andrea Saenz Williams was an object lesson in what can come at the end of this research by building programs and sharing my knowledge with UT students in front of artwork. Though never cited, the insights of Hannah Airriess, Deirdre Smith, Tupac Cruz, and Erick Lyle riddle this project and emerged through many late night discussions and workshops of rough ideas at dog parks. Our shared muse, Gus, certainly played no small role.

I am very lucky to be close enough to the experience of other young artists, writers, and thinkers to witness how they creatively and ethically navigate our shifting cultural terrain. I am even luckier to have the love and support of some of them. Colin Hagendorf, Angela LaMonica, Amber Gonzalez, Richard Marin, Melody Shifflet, Lily Brooks, Sarah Perry, and Amy Kuretsky have given me words of encouragement, pamplemousse LaCroix when needed, and the catalyzing knowledge that there are people who want to see this work, my work, in the world.

Like most things, I could not have completed this thesis, or this degree at all, without the love, support, and unwavering faith of my dad, Pete.

Readymaintenance: Systems, Feminist Economics, and the Immaterial Readymade in the Work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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In 1968, Mierle Laderman Ukeles wrote the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*. She announced a new art making practice as well as an original economic theory from a feminist perspective. Maintenance, “the back half of life,” as she once called it, has been the lens through which Ukeles has made art for more than 45 years. To enact her theory, Ukeles uses the avant-garde tradition of claiming aspects of everyday life as art.

This thesis examines two key features of Ukeles work from before 1977. Her economic theory, Maintenance, is a rich and complex view that centralizes the experience of women and those efforts and workers who keep society going and people living. Leaning on Jean Baudrillard, I argue that this subaltern feminist economic theory refutes the productivist tendencies in avant-garde art and society at large, which Ukeles refers to as “development.” Because Marxism, like capitalism, privileges production and growth over all other aspects of life, understanding Ukeles’ unique contributions to both economics and art requires a different approach to labor and value than has been previously discussed by historians and critics who have relied largely on Marx’s theory of labor value. Beginning with Antonio Gramsci, I offer a close analysis of Ukeles’

theorization from the subaltern position of maintenance that aims to reveal the essential and ever present qualities of maintenance while resisting the hegemony of development.

Building from my economic analysis, I am able to examine how Ukeles successfully performs a subaltern critique in an art practice by developing a technique using *immaterial* readymades. To make maintenance work visible Ukeles developed a technique that extended the readymade practices of Duchamp and others to include the non-productive labor of maintenance. Her readymades manifest as conceptual performances of labor done in the settings in which they would occur –whether that is the largest garbage dump or the oldest public museum in America. Drawing heavily from Michel Foucault and Raymond Williams, I consider how Ukeles’ immaterial readymades reveal discursive constructions of value and meaning. This analysis offers a new way of understanding the functions of readymades more generally.

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Introduction

*Is it peace,
Is it a philosopher's honeymoon, one finds
On the dump?*
—Wallace Stevens “The Man on the Dump” (1938)

“The dump is full/of images,” Wallace Stevens reminds the reader in a set of powerfully enjambed lines in a 1938 poem.¹ In “The Man on the Dump,” Stevens pits rotting bouquets piled up at a dump against the bright freshness of spring flowers sprouting on top of them. The dead flowers physically and symbolically sustain the living ones. The rotting trash, of course, feeds the growing flowers. Symbolically, the central meaning of the poem relies on a contrast between the now-living flowers and continuously dead ones that accumulate daily. The contrast exists “Between that disgust and this, between the things/That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)/And those that will be (azaleas and so on).”² Renewal in the dump is less a cycle than a repetition of support that flows one way. The dump affords the time and space away from ordinary cycles of production and use to consider what Stevens calls “janitor’s poems/of every day.”³

Despite Stevens’ highly stylized language and perhaps morbid or maudlin meditation on dead flowers, his dump is not just a place to feel nostalgia through junk. Stevens presents the dump through an inversion of presumed meanings. As describes the

¹ Wallace Stevens. “The Man on the Dump” in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*.

² Stevens. “The Man”

³ Stevens. “The Man”

dump, its contrasts yields a “philosopher’s honeymoon.”⁴ In particular the tension of the dead flowers’ necessity and their status as trash illustrates the contrast between what sustains life and the low value it is afforded. Stevens reads this contrast as a philosophical engagement. This very same concern is at the heart of Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ notion of Maintenance Art. Like Stevens’ dead flowers giving one-way support to the living flowers, Ukeles focuses on the unreciprocated and undervalued labor of sustaining life. She categorizes this broad swath of life as “Maintenance.”

I begin my thesis on Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ feminist and radical intervention into contemporary art with an unlikely text. Wallace Stevens belongs to a very different world than Ukeles. One was a Harvard-educated insurance agent cum neo-Romantic poet. The other has been the unpaid artist-in-residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation since 1977 and was once kicked out of art school for making lewd sculptures. Nevertheless, both end up at the dump and for similar reasons.

I start with “The Man on the Dump” because that is where Ukeles has taken viewers for more than four decades. Like Stevens, she doesn’t pillage the dump for cheap titillation from abject materials. They share a perspicacious eye that surveys this low site for what it reveals about the nature of the cities (and their societies and systems of value) that shed their waste and send it away.⁵ Ukeles’ Maintenance Art and Stevens in “The

⁴ Stevens, “The Man.”

⁵ I am reminded here of the role of honeymoon trips that Michel Foucault outlines in his essay, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.” Heterotopias are those sites which “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.” The elsewhere of the honeymoon trip, like the garbage dump, provides an external space for the unwanted occurrence of devaluation: “The young woman’s deflowering could take place “nowhere” and, at the moment of its occurrence the train or

Man on the Dump” share an aesthetic sensibility that sees “janitors’ poems” among the dreck.

I begin my own argument about Ukeles in the dump. I privilege it over the domestic as a corrective. Other authors have consistently located Ukeles’ work in the domestic, both physically and theoretically. I situate her work in terms of the dump to better attend to the larger social questions that have animated her work from the origin of Maintenance Art. In her 1968 *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, Ukeles half-jokes her way to the question that guides the rest of her career: “The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution: who is going to pick up the garbage Monday morning.”⁶ Often read as a smug counter to her contemporaries, I take this question literally. Ukeles asks the reader to imagine the revolution from the bottom up, from the unromantic realities of survival. I emphasize these larger social and political question first to avoid replicating the frequent misreadings of her work that limit the origin of her feminist analysis to the domestic and wedge her original economic theory into familiar, but insufficient categories of labor and production inherited from Marx. Like maintenance, whatever has been placed inside the dump is now cast outside cycles of production and consumption.

honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers.” Michel Foucault. “Of Other Spaces” translated by Jay Miskowiec. *diacritics* (1986): 22-27.

⁶ Ukeles, Mierle Laderman. “Maintenance Art Manifesto” 1968. Reprinted in excerpt by Jack Burnham, “Problems of Criticism” *Artforum*, January 1971; reprinted in excerpt by George Babcock, ed. *IDEA ART*, New York, NY: Dutton, 1973; reprinted in excerpt by Lucy Lippard, ed. *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object*, New York, NY: Prager, 1973. More recently, it has been excerpted in anthologies of artists’ writing and conceptual art. It appears in the 1997 volume of the journal *Documents* dedicated to Ukeles put together by Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth. See Appendix A: Maintenance Art Manifesto for a complete copy of this work.

My unusual pairing of Stevens and Ukeles also signals the ways that I open up the understanding of how aesthetics works in Ukeles' art practice. Part of Ukeles' practice is claiming routine parts of life as art and then presenting it through stylized performance. In doing so, she initiates both a new aesthetic and a new theoretical frame for looking at labor. In her *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, Ukeles puts forth a new economic theory, Maintenance –even though nowhere in the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* does she use the words “economics,” “capitalism” or even “labor.”⁷ She opts for phrases less charged with economic specificity like “everyday maintenance things,” “activities” and “systems and equilibrium” to point to the way that economic values organize meaning outside the presumed sphere of the economy.⁸ Her theory is “economic” because she is concerned with how value is established and varies.

Throughout her practice, Ukeles has targeted the low *status* afforded to the work of sustaining life. Ukeles consistently uses Maintenance Art to promote renewal and revaluation of the most denigrated parts of Maintenance: the trash, bodily waste, and cleaning labor hidden from public view. For example, in *Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside* (1973), one performance in her series at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Lucy Lippard's exhibition “c. 7,500,” Ukeles frantically washes the steps of the museum revealing the work usually done after hours and effectively preventing visitors from entering or exiting (Fig. i.1) . In her performance at Vassar College, *Fall Time Variations: The Trees Are Having Their Period: Time Slice* (1974), Ukeles made a fifty-foot sanitary pad for a hundred year old tree's shedding leaves (Fig. i.2). At the end of

⁷ Ukeles. *Manifesto*.

⁸ Ukeles. *Manifesto*.

this performance at a former women's college, she rolls up the enormous pad now filled with red leaves and throws it away.

These examples highlight the range of practices and realms of Maintenance that Ukeles considers. Maintenance consists of a huge variety of efforts from the private management of menses (here projected on a much larger scale) to the fantasy of an effortlessly pristine institution. She names the central binary system that regulates all of labor and the value afforded to it in everyday life, whether waged or unwaged, "Maintenance" and "Development."⁹ Her definitions of this system underscore the subordinate status of Maintenance to Development. Development is "pure individual creation; the new; change; progress; advance; excitement." Maintenance is entirely at its service. It literally does Development's dirty work – "keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the fight."¹⁰

Enabled by her consistent view of the entwined functioning of Maintenance and Development, Ukeles uses art to bring into relief the routine practices of janitors, nurses, mothers and other domestic workers, garbage workers and others responsible for removing waste, preparing food, caring for sick bodies and even wiping dust from

⁹ I should be clear about my use of the multiple meanings of "maintenance." I replicate Ukeles' capitalization in the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, though her use of capitalization varies in other writings. When referring to her overarching theory of these systems or the system itself, I capitalize the term "Maintenance." When referring to the general category of labor, work or workers, I use "maintenance" as an adjective and thus do not capitalize it. I follow Ukeles' initial capitalization of "Maintenance Art" to refer to her art practice to differentiate from when discussing a single maintenance artwork. Rather than put the title in quotes as I would with an essay, I italicize the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* because it is the title of a work of art.

¹⁰ Ukeles. *Manifesto*.

artwork. Before this work can be valorized, it has to be recognized as existing *as work*. This requires a wholesale upending of the social construction of what work *is*. Ukeles' early Maintenance Art prompts the viewer to recognize the categorical disjuncture between needs and work that already organizes much of her life. Much of Ukeles' art springs from uniting the work of keeping people alive with the practice of art making. In the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, Ukeles calls for a kind of art that acknowledges its dependence on unseen labor, an art that develops and promotes value separate from the market. Her work should be seen as challenging the standard approach to art production that enshrines results of production without acknowledging the invisible labor that allows for it.

With Maintenance Art, Ukeles pushes artists who are already rethinking the status of the art object to acknowledge their material and formal reliance on maintenance work. In the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* and elsewhere, Ukeles explicitly critiques the particular exploitation of maintenance labor by artists who she characterizes as a contemporary avant-garde. "Avant-garde, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials."¹¹ Ukeles knows this hypocrisy first hand as she participated in the social and intellectual world of conceptualism, process art, minimalism, and the "eccentric" versions of sculpture and painting that arose in the mid to late 1960s in New York.¹²

¹¹ Ukeles. *Manifesto*.

¹² I follow Ukeles in her casual use of the terms "conceptualism," "avant-garde," "process art" and other terms relating the diverse body of art making practices in New York in the 1960s. I take "eccentric" from Lucy Lippard's term "eccentric abstraction" which grouped many of the same forms of art making that Ukeles is referring to. See Lucy R. Lippard. "Eccentric Abstraction" in *Art International* 10, no. 28 (1966): 34-40.

In her *Maintenance Art Manifesto* she asserts that avant-garde art is “infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials. Conceptual & Process art especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost pure maintenance processes.” Her concern is deeper than the appropriation of form. In a 2009 interview, Ukeles reflects on the relationship between the conceptual art practices at the time and the labor of maintenance as an indicator of a disregard for workers and work in favor of objects:

I felt when I was watching Richard Serra do these very simple things like throwing the lead, or Judd building things —the language of Process Art and Minimalism, which I felt very in tune with—I felt like "what are they doing?" They are lifting industrial processes and forgetting about the whole culture that they come out of. So Serra was this steel worker without the work, without the workers. And Judd was this carpenter without workers. They didn't have workers, they didn't have people, they had objects—or they had results. And I felt that they were falling into the same trap as the rest of this damn culture, which couldn't see the whole structures or cultures of workers that made the kind of work that invented these processes and refined them.¹³

Maintenance Art requires a unity between labor and art. Ukeles is perhaps best known for her works that involve waged maintenance workers, particularly with the workers from the New York City Department of Sanitation. Since 1977 she has held the honor of being the (unpaid) artist-in-residence at the Department.¹⁴

¹³ Ukeles in an interview with 2009 interview with Bartholomew Ryan, “Manifesto for Maintenance: A Conversation With Mierle Laderman Ukeles,” *Art in America*, March 20, 2009. <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/draft-mierle-interview/>

¹⁴ A visit to Ukeles’ studio revealed to me what this position means materially. She has an office on the fourth floor of the department’s building on 44 Beaver Street in Manhattan. Besides space for her large archive, what Ukeles gets is access to workers, to the beating heart of the maintenance of the city. While spending the afternoon in her

Ukeles gained the position after taking a snide remark quite seriously. In the *Village Voice*'s review of the exhibition, "ART ⇔ WORLD," Ukeles' work *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* (1976) captured the attention of the reviewer, David Bourdon.¹⁵ For this five-week performance, Ukeles invited the entire maintenance staff of what was then the largest office building in the world, 55 Water Street in Manhattan, to make maintenance art *if they wanted* for one hour of their ordinary shift. During this hour, the maintenance workers were to keep doing their job but simply imagine that their regular tasks were art. Ukeles would wander the enormous building and photograph workers with instant Polaroid film. She would ask them whether they considered what they were doing "maintenance art" or "maintenance work." She would apply the appropriate label to the white border at the bottom of the Polaroid (Fig. i.2 and i.3). Each day, Ukeles would take the photographs she made of the workers with their labels and put them on display in the Whitney gallery housed in 55 Water Street. Ukeles collaborated with the workers to document their labor as essential to the existence of the building and all the other labor going on within it. She referred to the maintenance staff as the "human support structure" of the building (Fig i.4).¹⁶

In his review, Bourdon suggests that the Department of Sanitation "turn its regular work into conceptual performance, the city might qualify for a grant from the

archive, I was treated to music from the radio and the laughter of workers in the accounting office next door drifting into the space. Even the physical conditions in which she stores *Maintenance Art* is infused with the vicissitudes of the human experience of maintenance labor.

¹⁵ See David Bourdon, "Art," *Village Voice*, October 4, 1976, p. 105.

¹⁶ This work will be discussed more fully in chapter one. Ukeles uses this phrase in two preliminary drawings related to the show.

National Endowment for the Arts” to supplement its dwindling budget.¹⁷ Even though it is tongue-in-cheek, Bourdon proposes a solution that indicates a cultural climate that is difficult for me to imagine. There might have been money available to support the arts in such a way that there were *material* reasons to look to art to find solutions to social problems –more than just the annexing the creativity for repurposing into advertising or technology. In our era of cutbacks and austerity, such a situation seems impossible. Though meant in jest, to Ukeles (and to me), Bourdon’s advice indicates a way to think through art to reimagine the organization of the social. Ukeles clipped the review and sent it to the Department of Sanitation commissioner, Anthony Vicarello, and was appointed shortly thereafter.¹⁸

In her work with the New York City Department of Sanitation, Ukeles exposes the ways that garbage flows through the city via rigidly organized, intensely maligned, and backbreaking labor. Like Maintenance Art made in other contexts, much of her work is participatory and durational and reveals a hidden set of practices. In *Flow City* (1983-1996), for instance Ukeles made a public installation at the 59th Street Marine Transfer Station, a transition site where garbage is moved from trucks that collect it from the streets to the barges that will deposit the trash in the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island. Tom Finkelpearl pins down what is unique about Ukeles’ interventions:

Without *Flow City*, the facility would never be open to the public. Instead of allowing the building to remain separated from the city, she wants to

¹⁷ Bourdon, “Art,” 105.

¹⁸ Ukeles outlines the story in a 1996 interview with Tom Finkelpearl printed in *Dialogues in Public Art*, edited by Tom Finkelpearl and Vito Acconci. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 311.

draw the people into the transfer station's inner workings, or more accurately, to help them understand viscerally that they are already implicated in the plant's inner workings.¹⁹

Ukeles provides a pressing and varied view of elaborate systems in late capitalism which consume the earth and its resources with no attention to the damage or the inconvenient permanence of disposable goods. Though that is often the case in her work, Finkelpearl's assessment gets at another central premise of Maintenance Art. Ukeles wants to change how people think about their personal experience of the systems of Maintenance. The goal of Maintenance Art is to raise the viewer's awareness of all the work that goes into keeping her alive in her social and physical environment –including her own efforts to do so.

In a section of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* that is a proposal for an exhibition of Maintenance Art, "CARE," Ukeles proposes to live in the gallery of a museum with her family for the duration of the exhibition.

I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother. (Random Order).
I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, up to now separately, I 'do' Art. Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.²⁰

For her to make this first performance of Maintenance Art, she has to "flush...up to consciousness" this work for herself as well as for her audience. To flush suggests a

¹⁹ Finkelpearl, *Dialogues*, p 289.

²⁰ Ukeles. *Manifesto*.

pushing out through rinsing, a kind of cleaning out. Awareness is an intangible goal, but one Ukeles has consistently kept as the center of her work.

Her most famous work, *Touch Sanitation*, was a multi-year performance in which Ukeles shook hands with all 8,500 Department of Sanitation (co)workers (Figs. i.3 and i.4).²¹ She followed the garbage collectors on their routes, hung around during break time in their stations, and worked the early morning shift with them. When shaking the workers' hands, Ukeles would thank each of them for "keeping New York City alive." In *Touch Sanitation*, Ukeles demonstrates her commitment to naming survival as a value while drawing attention to the massive labor effort that makes that survival possible – especially on such a large scale.

While I love trash and Ukeles' work with it, this thesis barely considers her many works –famous, infamous, and those unscavenged— with the Department of Sanitation workers. There is much to be said about what it means to join a city department *as an artist* in a nearly bankrupt city after a wave of much-hated garbage strikes –let alone the numerous compelling works that Ukeles made with and about garbage workers in the intervening 38 years. But before joining the department, Ukeles was already thinking deeply about the nature of survival and the way the work of staying alive goes unrecognized even as it demands so much of our lives.

By focusing on Ukeles' first articulation of Maintenance Art and her early Maintenance Art works made before joining the Department of Sanitation, I am able to trace the emergence of the complex theoretical base of Maintenance Art and the

²¹ The duration of *Touch Sanitation* varies in the discourse. Sometimes the work is as short of as a year, lasting from 1979-1980. Other times the later installation of *Flow City* are included, expanding the work to six full years, from 1979-1985.

development of techniques crucial to her practice. This thesis seeks to chart how Ukeles retools the readymade to include maintenance work's practices and tasks rather than merely the mass-produced objects chosen so that she can enact her subaltern feminist economic theory, *Maintenance*. I root my analysis of Ukeles' economic theory and artistic practice in the content and performative form of her *Maintenance Art Manifesto* (1968), her use of questionnaires and interviews, as well as two performances *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* (1973) at the Wadsworth Atheneum and her collaboration with the 300 maintenance workers at 55 Water Street, *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* (1976). A rough, annotated draft of her Masters Thesis from 1977 provides a direct discussion of her motives and thought not found anywhere else. No other scholar has yet made use of her thesis.

MAINTENANCE AS SUBALTERN FEMINIST ECONOMIC THEORY

Curator Victoria Rogers notes that *Maintenance* is “simultaneously oppositional and dependent.”²² This is a particularly succinct summary of *Maintenance*'s status as subaltern. In chapter one, I unpack what Ukeles means by maintenance while considering how she calls for recognition for *Maintenance* as a kind of miserable, unavoidable but nonetheless venerable and essential kind of work. I first offer a close analysis of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* itself and the novel and sophisticated economic analysis Ukeles expresses within it

²² Victoria Rogers, “Maintaining Development: Redefining the Relationship” in *Maintenance Required* edited by Nina Horisaki-Christians, Andrea Neustein, Victoria Rogers, and Jason Waite, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013), 11. Exhibition catalogue.

I bring two different economic models to bear on her thought. I read Ukeles' construction of Maintenance and Development through the lens of hegemony via Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams. The work of Gayatri Spivak and others from the Subaltern Studies Group informs my use of subaltern as a category. The dynamic between hegemony and the subaltern corresponds to the way that Ukeles constructs Maintenance and Development. Examining the hegemony of development is one way to consider why Maintenance is so hard to name and to see despite its ubiquity.

Calling Maintenance "subaltern" secures its position as durably and necessarily subordinate to Development. Importantly, subaltern does not simply describe the oppressed class. It designates those specifically excluded from recognized political participation under certain regimes of power, such as colonization.²³ Ukeles issues her critique and art making from the margins of traditionally recognized political and social activity, or "from below" as the position of the subaltern is often described.²⁴ Because Ukeles wants to make *Maintenance Art*, she has the particular challenge of producing artwork that continues to support Development without becoming it. Maintenance Art has to *do* work not just be *about* maintenance work. Yet, it also cannot produce commodities or even material objects which would be labor that falls under Development. Ukeles constructs a nimble solution to these dual obligations by using the immaterial labor of

²³ For the condition of voicelessness, see Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1988).

²⁴ Here, I rely on the currency of this phrase in the work of Homi K. Bhaba, and Ranajit Guha, and others in the Subaltern Studies Group which comes in the wake of E. P. Thompson's 1966 essay "History from Below" as well as Antonio Gramsci's revitalization of the term "subaltern" and Edward Said's work in the 1970s on Orientalism.

maintenance to do real work while claiming it as art, as Duchamp did in the production of his object-based readymades.

My discussion highlights several feminist themes in Ukeles' work. More than simply describing the life of a housewife, as some critics have claimed, Ukeles develops a complex economic theory from the marginalized position of maintenance that makes visible a diversity of labor practices.²⁵ For her work to be subaltern rather than hegemonic, Ukeles cannot determine, articulate, or even predict the experience of others. Her radical and inclusive approach to the feminist axiom "the personal is political" structures much of her participatory artwork. In this effort she engenders a feminist consciousness-raising aesthetic strategy that affirms that personal experience is undeniably political.

For Ukeles, this claim is not just for others or an abstraction. As the content of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* clearly states "MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK." This includes her validation of her own banal and laborious experiences of motherhood as a practice worthy of art. The open definition of Maintenance permits her to develop a coalitional model of labor distinct from most other feminist models of the time. Both implicitly in her work and explicitly in later interviews, Ukeles refutes the importance of reformist feminist championing of women's entry into the paid workforce. She also eschews the common model of labor organizing inherited from Marx that

²⁵ See Robert Morgan's *Art Into Ideas* for a particularly egregious version of this where he summarizes the overarching intent of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* as a work that "challenged the delegation of housework to women." Robert C. Morgan, *Art Into Ideas: Essays on Contemporary Art*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178.

presumes a shared physical worksite as the foundation for coalition building. She presents a unified Maintenance class that ignores the hard divisions of public and private.

Also in this first chapter, my critique of productivism draws out Ukeles' construction of value based on Maintenance rather than production or development as in Marxist and Capitalist systems of all stripes. Productivism refers to the tendency to privilege production over all other modes regardless of economic model. In his 1973 book *The Mirror of Production*, Jean Baudrillard considers the inability of Marxist models to overcome the entrenching of capitalist approaches to value and social organization because of their reliance on capitalist models of exchange and a faith in the moral good of work and production.²⁶ Anthropologists Gerhald Bethoud and Fabrizio Sabelli summarize the rise of critiques of productivism in the early 1970s which "reconsider the view of political economy in which everything is utilitarian. According to this view, workers, goods, space, and time are to be managed in order to ensure 'progress.'"²⁷ It is important to note the collapsing of all importance toward the single goal of "progress." This assessment of productivism parallels the ideological dimension of development as Ukeles constructs it.²⁸

²⁶ Jean Baudrillard. *The Mirror of Production*. (St. Louis : Telos Press, 1975).

²⁷ Gerhald Bethould and Fabrizio Sabelli, "Our Obsolete Production Mentality: The Heresy of the Communal Formation," *Current Anthropology*, 20, No. 4 (Dec., 1979): 745-760

²⁸ George Bataille and Jean Baudrillard, key thinkers in the 1970s discussion of productivism, emphasize the destruction of material wealth as a consumption that thwarts the instrumentalization of all resources for production of goods. Ukeles, of course, is concerned with maintenance as the primary model not consumption. Because of the differences between the two spheres, I do not contrast maintenance with Baudrillard's model of symbolic exchange or Barthes' model of a general economy that he discusses in *The Accursed Share*. Though, because Bataille and Baudrillard, like Ukeles, are

Connecting the mid 1970s critique of productivism to feminist work occurring at the same time allows me to argue that women's unwaged work has always been outside the Marxist frame of production defined by the creation of discrete object for consumption after exchange. Such work is the bulk of Maintenance. As such, Marxist models of labor and value cannot explain maintenance work which, by definition, cannot yield discrete objects for the market. Though maintenance work is associated with women, the exclusion of maintenance work from production is not caused by the gender of the laborer alone. It comes from the hegemonic function of naturalizing the work of survival and reproduction to women while simultaneously denigrating the nature of this work without naming gender. Together this circular logic provides a rationale for not paying for maintenance work despite its necessity for the production of surplus value. As Maria Mies observes, it is a collusion of the patriarchal construction of women as innately predisposed to do caring work with economic exploitation: "The construction of woman as mother, wife, and housewife was the trick by which 50 percent of human labor was defined as a free resource."²⁹ By joining this discussion with an analysis of productivism, the full range of ideologies (not limited to capitalism) disputed by Ukeles' model of maintenance is revealed.

The biggest challenge of this project has been –and continues to be— setting limits and selecting which topics and tools among the many pertinent ones to analyze. Ukeles' work is complex, savvy, and innovative. Her analysis is astute though often

interested in restoring a neglected sphere of human activity there are some interesting connections that unfortunately cannot be addressed in this paper.

²⁹ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. (London: Zed books, 2001), ix.

usefully oblique when deployed. She is interested in exploring new territory while also refusing — strategically— to state the limits of Maintenance exactly. So much of the premise of Maintenance art is a challenge to see something so culturally denigrated to the point that it is denied its existence as valuable work or as work at all. As a theory, Maintenance undermines nearly every assumption that can be made about labor or value. Ukeles ignores presumptions about what counts as work such that some of her work requires the continuous redefinition of work itself by viewers, as in *Maintenance Art Questionnaire 1973-1976*.

This is unstable ground on which to begin an analysis. For me, it has also meant settling upon methods that draw out her radical openness and elaborate on her strategies. Ukeles' challenge comes from a commitment to a subaltern position: how do you articulate a new category that does not replicate the hegemonic bounds of categories or presume a privileged norm? My challenge is to try to keep the space that she initiates open in my consideration of it. If the arguments of the first half of my thesis seem less straightforward and definitive than those in the section on her use of the readymade, it is (I hope) due to the difficulty of addressing Ukeles work fairly without reducing it to more familiar and convenient terms.

I am not the first to take Ukeles' economic thought seriously. Helen Molesworth, Miwon Kwon and Shannon Jackson have each considered the connections among Ukeles' art making practice, economics, and feminism from a Marxist perspective.³⁰

³⁰ See Helen Molesworth. "Work Stoppages: Mierle Laderman Ukeles' Theory of Labor Value." *Documents*, 10 (1997): 19-22; Miwon Kwon *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Shannon Jackson's chapter "High Maintenance" in her book, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Molesworth marshals feminist political theorist Carole Pateman's 1980 study *The Sexual Contract* to understand the division of domestic labor via a theory of the social contract.³¹ However Molesworth's read does not extend far enough past the economism that limits the contract model Pateman uses. Molesworth specifically refutes any privileging of the domestic.³² But, because she only integrates Pateman's analysis into her reading of the gendered experience of labor, her consideration suffers from a treatment of women's work situated in the home as the fundamental event from which all other gendered exploitation of maintenance issue.

Ukeles specifically structures Maintenance as a class of work without a locus or favored protagonist. The overemphasis on unpaid housework as its privileged version of Maintenance misses and even represses one of the more radical and nuanced features of Ukeles' work: the true coalitional model of her subaltern approach. Similarly, Molesworth specifies Ukeles' critique as against "the ideals of modernity"³³ which she accurately connects to Development and usefully glosses. But this limits the Ukeles' critique in scope. Foreclosing her argument this way misses the deeper observations within Ukeles' critique that unearth the ways that power derives from the hegemony of Development. Certainly, the "ideals of modernity" are part of what Ukeles critiques but only within a much larger complaint.

³¹ Helen Molesworth. "House Work and Art Work." *October* Vol. 92 (Spring, 2000): 71-97.

³² Helen Molesworth, "House Work," 79. She says of Ukeles: "Incisively, she does not refer to maintenance as domestic labor or housework, for it is evident that such labor is not confined solely to the spaces of domesticity."

³³ Helen Molesworth, "House Work," 78.

Miwon Kwon uses Marx's theory of Labor Value to understand how value is attributed to work.³⁴ Shannon Jackson makes use of the same theory in more diffuse ways that integrate psychoanalysis and performance theory.³⁵ While adept in their assessment of the importance of economics to Ukeles' thinking and practice, none of their readings get past the blind spot created by locating the pivot of value in exchange. Unlike the productivist models of capitalism and Marxism, Ukeles imagines a value that cannot be exchanged at all. In an effort to avoid appealing to the hegemonic structure of value, Ukeles does not turn to the systems of value found in production. She doesn't want wages for this work.

Maintenance Art successfully performs a subaltern critique in the ways Ukeles theorizes and implements Maintenance Art. Ukeles constructs a subtle feminist model of value in her theory of Maintenance that is not based on the market or the exchange of commodities. This shift centralizes the experience of a unified class of maintenance workers. Ukeles acknowledges how a wage cannot automatically reverse the cultural disregard for survival. I contend that Marx's emphasis on exchange and material consumption as the locus of value cannot attend to Ukeles' understanding of inexchangeable and immaterial labor that defines maintenance or the system of value beyond fungibility that she seeks.

³⁴ Miwon Kwon. "In Appreciation of the White Cube," *Documents* no. 10, (Fall 1997), 23-30.

³⁵ Shannon Jackson. *Social Works*.

IMMATERIAL READYMADES: EVERYTHING I SAY IS ART IS ART IS MAINTENANCE ART

The second feature of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* I consider closely is how Ukeles uses a strategy of “claiming” as art aspects of ordinary life. She appropriates this strategy from Marcel Duchamp and redeploys it in the service of Maintenance. In her manifesto, Ukeles defines the power while simultaneously claiming it for herself: “Everything I Say Is Art Is Art.” In chapter two, I examine how Ukeles uses the immaterial readymade to consider embodied maintenance practices rather than commodity objects, the category of things usually appropriated as in the readymade. Ukeles harnesses the claiming function of the readymade to name specific performances of maintenance work as art thereby creating a readymade from immaterial labor, or immaterial readymades, as I term them. I look to several critics and scholars for interpretations of the process of producing a readymade to contextualize Ukeles’ use of claiming-as-art, particularly Craig Owens, David Joselit, and Thierry de Duve.

Ukeles opts for a readymade composed of embodied maintenance practices rather than objects for specific reasons. I pay close attention to how this change alters key assumptions about the readymade. In particular, Maintenance requires different models of materiality and objecthood, utility, and temporality. Leaning on my previous assessments of the definitive conditions of maintenance work as unable to yield commodities, I assert that Ukeles appropriates immaterial labor so that she can use the model of the readymade to make visible the subaltern work of maintenance. To address Ukeles’ dematerialization of the appropriated thing in the model of readymades, I consider her own grounding of

her claiming as an aspect of the readymade. This technique catalyzes most of Maintenance Art.

When considering the aesthetics of what is visible in Maintenance Art, I borrow from Lucy Lippard's treatment of contemporaneous forms of dematerialization happening in New York City. Lippard was the first to give Ukeles the opportunity to enact her approach and techniques in a gallery in the traveling exhibition, "c. 7,500." Sianne Ngai's assessment of the aesthetic of information also corroborates my reading of aesthetic forms in maintenance art and post-Fordist forms of immaterial labor.

As I establish in chapter one, Maintenance work cannot produce a commodity and cannot stand alone or in any way exist separately from its role in supporting production. Maintenance has to do work or it doesn't exist. Thus, it cannot be removed from its ordinary use in tact. The continuity of utility allows for Maintenance work to be actually done while also complicating the ways that this quotidian work is understood. I offer a close reading of Ukeles' 1973 performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* to illustrate the simultaneity of divergent meanings of the same task. In this work, Ukeles orchestrates a triple cleaning of a vitrine containing an Egyptian mummy at the Wadsworth Atheneum. First performed by a janitor, then by Ukeles herself, then by conservator, *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* points to the multiple ways the same task can be valued. A model of discursive practice from Michel Foucault as well as Paul Willis and Philip Corrigan's description of cultural forms that incorporates discursive practices aid my reading.

When Ukeles changes the static object that is the end-result of a process of production into the live performance of a chore, the issue of immediacy comes to the

fore. Rosalind Krauss, Helen Molesworth, and David Joselit have emphasized how the readymade indexes the past via the status of the object having already been produced prior to being made into an art object. Ukeles shifts the frame from the past to the present.

Ukeles' dematerialization of the readymade to disregard commodity objects in favor of the performance of maintenance tasks is strategic. She annexes as part of art those parts of daily life that don't fall under commodity production. Her comparison of divergent products of identical tasks allows for Ukeles to point to the unfair system of value that organizes labor inside the museum and out. Ukeles reveals how value is produced unevenly through multiple discourses at once.

The more radical upshot of this discussion is the possibility that even readymades made from commodity objects demonstrate their ability to mean more than one thing at once. This includes any consideration of mass production or market exchange. Ukeles retooled in the readymade to include immediacy and work that does not produce objects. The readymade, then, is not contingent on mass-production, commodity status or even objecthood. Instead, the readymade is a lens for seeing discursive contingency.

SPECTERS OF MARXISTS

While this thesis is deeply informed by Marxism, it is also an attempt to demonstrate alternatives to Marxist assumptions about labor, workers, and value and the Marxists from whom I borrow are not the most orthodox. The strains of cultural theory that I use from Antonio Gramsci to Raymond Williams make massive interventions into

Marx's view of culture as epiphenomenal to and determined by economy. It feels to me less an elaboration of Marx than a refutation.

Like any long-term project, what directly appears within this thesis is but a sample of the work I have done to arrive at my analysis. I want to foreground here some of the thinkers who have informed my thinking throughout my research process, but whose work cannot be fully considered within the frame of this argument. The work of Italian Autonomists influences my attention to the importance of the immateriality of labor. This is a disjuncture between Marxist thought and work that does not result in commodities. A radical faction of workers in the 1970s, the Autonomists (occasionally called Workerists) agitated for labor conditions in an increasingly deindustrializing Italy.

Contemporary theorists like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri pick up on the autonomist attention to immaterial labor. In their widely discussed text, *Empire*, they offer a definition of immaterial labor borne out of a shift in production:

Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we define the labor involved in this production as *immaterial labor* – that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.³⁶

Like me, these authors are particularly indebted to the feminist interventions of the women who organized the Wages for Housework Campaign: Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Sylvia Federici Selma James, Leopoldina Fortunati, among others.³⁷ The extremely

³⁶ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 290.

³⁷ For an in-depth look at the personal and political development of Wages for Housework, see Silvia Federici's collection of their works from the 1970s and reflections

insightful critiques inherent in their demands for a wage for immaterial labor continue to provide the best models for critiquing the experience of the exploitation of unwaged domestic work.³⁸ These workers, who were also mothers and wives, did not want to join the work force as they were already doing the work that is as essential for production as anything done inside a factory –they keep the workers alive. Their demand for a wage for Maintenance Work relies on a similar observation of the essential qualities of Maintenance. As Harry Cleaver observes:

They brought out the way the wage divides the class hierarchically into wage (factory) and unwaged (housewives, students, peasants, etc.) sectors, such that the latter groups appear to be outside the working class simply because they are not paid a wage. They pushed forward the analysis of the work of reproducing labour-power and analysed its structure both within the home and in the socialized forms of schools, hospitals, and so on.³⁹

However their central goal –a wage—is not shared by Ukeles.

of the experience, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2012) as well as Selma James. *Sex, Race and Class—The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings 1952–2011*. (Oakland: PM Press, 2012) and the original work, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James. *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. (Bristol: Falling Wall Press 1975). See also Kathi Weeks. *The Problem With Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁸ I am not the only person to link Ukeles and Wages for Housework. In the exhibition guide to a 2013 solo show, “Mierle Laderman Ukeles Maintenance Art Works 1969-1980,” Sarah Knight includes a few paragraphs on the group. Though, she does not analyze consider their similarities or divergences. She uses them to flesh out an interesting and non-canonical background of feminist thought. See the Arnolfini Exhibition Guide available as a pdf: <http://www.arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-art-works-196920131980/MierleGuidedefinalweb.pdf> The common reference is sheer coincidence.

³⁹ Cleaver, Harry. *Reading Capital Politically*. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), 72.

Returning to the question of the role of Marxism, Wages for Housework was quite clear: “We needed to clarify and explain, first of all to ourselves, and then to the entire movement, why militants needed to go beyond the Marxian categories and in which sense. For example, in which terms could women be considered working class? Which women?”⁴⁰ For the Wages for Housework Campaign, Marxism’s key limitation is its inability to fairly include the full diversity of women’s experiences as workers –waged and unwaged.

Much of my attention to this fissure derives from anarchist and autonomist rejections of production as an a priori good as well as their disinterest in the Marxist dream of unalienated labor. I am particularly drawn to Ukeles’ refusal to follow Marxist delineations of work and value that ignore the presence of women as workers. She does not make reformist appeals to be included in a system built on the ongoing exploitation of the work done to survive. In addition, she sees that the misery of the work of survival will not be and cannot be resolved through technology.

Another version of this thesis could have proceeded without any direct engagement with Marx in favor of anarchist models of political economy to consider Ukeles’ reevaluation of survival as the key determinant of value. Peter Kropotkin’s notion of the Physiology of Society from his 1892 *The Conquest of Bread* parallels Ukeles’ approach to Maintenance more closely than any other attempt to theorize social

⁴⁰ Fortunati, Leopoldina. *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*. Edited by Jim Fleming. (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1995), 45.

change relative to an economic analysis of need.⁴¹ Besides this alternative autonomist and anarchist economic model, yet another version of this thesis could have situated Ukeles' theory of maintenance more fully within the discourse of feminist political economy. I have deeply considered the work of Nancy Fraser, Linda Zerilli, Chantal Mouffe, Maria Mies, and Carole Pateman.⁴² Each of them offers avenues for thinking about the feminist use of the economy that can illuminate aspects of Ukeles' theory.

These two shadow versions of this thesis share a commitment to the centralization of need over and against exchange as occurs in Marxist and Capitalist models of value. Despite the limited discussion of these economic models, the spirit of these arguments lies behind much of my thinking about and excitement for the unique economic vision of Ukeles' art.

⁴¹ See the chapter "Production and Consumption" in Piotr Kropotkin and Marshall S. Shatz. *Kropotkin: "The Conquest of Bread" and Other Writings*. (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴² Of note and not cited elsewhere in this thesis: Nancy Fraser. *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. (New York: Verso Books, 2013) and "Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy," *Social text* (1990): 56-80; Linda Zerilli. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Chantal Mouffe. *The Democratic Paradox*. (New York: Verso, 2000); Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Claudia Von Werlhof. *Women: The Last Colony*. (London: Zed Books, 1988).

Chapter One: Manifesting Maintenance

Ukeles wrote the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* in response to an extremely personal and gendered experience. In a 1996 interview with Tom Finkelpearl, Ukeles recounts a turning point in her awareness of the gendered presumptions about who could be an artist. While she was pursuing her Masters of Fine Arts degree in Interrelated Studies at New York University, Ukeles chose to become pregnant. “I was the favorite student of a famous sculptor. The first time I came to class when it was obvious I was pregnant, he took a look at me, and said: ‘Well, I guess now you can’t be an artist.’”⁴³ After this callous and symptomatic exclusion, Ukeles recalls, she went home and wrote the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* in a single sitting.

The catalyst for the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* was personal but Ukeles’ analysis within it is broad and comprehensive. As is evident in the sweeping scope of her economic theory outlined in the manifesto, Ukeles understood that her personal experience was part of a larger problem operating in the avant-garde and in society generally. Rather than assume her maltreatment was something that affected only her, Ukeles saw it systemically. It wasn’t that only she was no longer eligible to be an artist suddenly. It wasn’t even really about her personally. She is part of a class of people, a kind of work, and a set of themes that were excluded from avant-garde art. She recognized how this widespread regulation functioned ideologically and economically. The disregard for these things was the same in the home kitchen as in an office building after hours as in studio lofts in Soho.

⁴³ Ukeles in Finkelpearl, *Dialogues*, 302.

In her 1977 Masters thesis, Ukeles calls the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* “the first medium of Maintenance Art.”⁴⁴ Though she does not say it so boldly in the text itself, “the fundamental intention of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* was to create Maintenance art itself: to select-as-art what, in the Duchampian tradition the artist declared was art –in her case, the idea of maintenance revealed in its processes and ramifications.”⁴⁵ In revealing these processes and ramifications, Ukeles evinced an economic theory that makes visible the denigration of work performed across public and private spaces by bodies of all kinds that is nevertheless associated with women despite the fact that all people require maintenance.

Ukeles specifies that the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* is simultaneously a work of art *and* a call for a new kind of artwork. It is “a declaration and proposal of intentionality.”⁴⁶ The *Maintenance Art Manifesto* appears more or less as an outline. It is brief, punchy, and segmented. A section entitled “Ideas” and a proposal for an exhibition of Maintenance Art, “CARE,” comprise the manifesto. Ukeles breaks each of these sections down further into short, lettered subsections.

In “Ideas” she lays the terrain of maintenance from the most abstract and hidden drives to concrete tasks. Ukeles bases her theories on analytic social observation and her own personal experiences. She does not claim objectivity but acknowledges her personal perspective on the commonplace needs of sustaining life corporeally and socially. This

⁴⁴ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

⁴⁵ In her Masters Thesis, Ukeles refers to herself in the third person with terms such as “the artist,” and as in this case, “her.” I set aside the action she describes here. “To select-as-art” is the subject of the next chapter.

⁴⁶ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

section focuses on just how boring, miserable, and crazy-making the labor required by these complex and ubiquitous systems is. “Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.). The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance[,] jobs = minimum wage, housewives = no pay.”⁴⁷

From the outset, Ukeles describes the affective experience, repetition of tasks and socially-constructed meaning for Maintenance work. She conjures the stifling experience of maintenance’s repetitive and rigid tasks by providing evocative litanies of obligations. Her lists are overwhelming and seemingly unending enumerations of Maintenance tasks written in a stream-of-consciousness style. She mixes direct commands that could be heard in the workplace with others more suggestive of domestic tasks: “wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby’s diaper, finish the report.”⁴⁸ At times the commands fade into abstraction and ring with the all-too-familiar self-negating desires for repressing the signs of a living body: “pay your bills, don’t litter, save string...call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.”⁴⁹ At times the obligations are funny and absurd even if common: “Watch out don’t put things in your nose.” Playful rhyme and juvenile words choices like “stinking garbage” and “the sourball of every revolution” add a lighter tone to the sense of exhaustion that she evokes.

At the end of this section, Ukeles points out how maintenance work specifically appears in avant-garde art and social scenes. Her concern is that maintenance is an unacknowledged source of aesthetic and material support. “Avant-garde art, which claims

⁴⁷ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁴⁸ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁴⁹ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials.”⁵⁰ To be clear, Ukeles does not want to expunge Maintenance from art or any other part of life. It is unavoidable and should be valued for its utility. Art, as the manifesto itself demonstrates, is one avenue for pursuing that value.

The second half of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* consists of the proposal for “CARE.” Conceptually, Ukeles organizes the exhibition into three parts: “personal,” “general,” and “earth” maintenance. Each illustrates how Maintenance occurs at its respective social level. In the gallery space, she uses these three divisions as interactive spaces where labor is visible and participation elicits the viewer’s personal reflection. Ukeles plans to “flush up to consciousness” ordinary behavior and “exhibit it as contemporary art” which would offer a “clarity of issues.”⁵¹

The “personal” would be represented by a durational performance in which Ukeles would live in the gallery maintaining herself, her family, and the gallery space. Ukeles would reveal the ordinarily private work she performs as a mother and wife, making art out of her chores. “I will live in the museum as I customarily do at home with my husband and baby, for the duration of the exhibit...the exhibition area might look empty of art, but it will be maintained in full public view.”⁵² Keeping herself and her family alive would be tied to maintaining the gallery as a space.

I will sweep and wax the floors, dust everything, wash the walls (ie floor paintings, dust works, soap sculptures, wall paintings, etc.) cook, invite

⁵⁰ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁵¹ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁵² Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

people to eat, clean up, put away, change light bulbs, make agglomerations and dispositions of all functional refuse.⁵³

Dirty diapers and old lightbulbs become art “agglomerations” –itself a send up of the sculptural form of “assemblage” often associated with the avant-garde in the 1960s. Ukeles puts the action of changing a lightbulb or a diaper on par with painting. Even if somewhat sarcastically, Ukeles unifies the labor of cleaning and the production of art.

The “general” section of “CARE” addresses the social construction of Maintenance by exposing the viewer to a wide variety of personal maintenance experiences via interviews. In an interview station visitors would be able to read a sampling of individual responses to a series of questions about maintenance in everyday life. The questions: “What do you think maintenance is; how do you feel about spending whatever parts of your life you spend on maintenance activities; what is the relationship between maintenance and freedom; what is the relationship between maintenance and life’s dreams” would be posed to people “from, say, fifty different classes and kinds of occupations.”⁵⁴ The responses gathered would be “typed and exhibited,” though Ukeles does not specify how they would be displayed.

An “Interview Room –for spectators at the Exhibition” would follow the displayed interviews: “A room of desk and chairs where professional (?) interviewers will interview the spectators at the exhibition along same [sic] questions as typed interviews.”⁵⁵ Here, the act of collecting data becomes participatory performance art. The in-gallery interviews would be audio recorded and then broadcast throughout the gallery.

⁵³ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁵⁴ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁵⁵ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

The viewer would not only actively engage the work, the thoughts she shared could cycle back into the work itself.

The “earth” section of CARE demonstrates the ecological aspects of Maintenance. Ukeles is acutely aware of the impact of productivism and Development on the earth. In this section of the exhibition she performs ritual healing as an act of Maintenance Art. Ukeles calls for a collaboration between artists and scientists to develop processes to purify contaminated water, soil, and air. These poisoned resources along with the contents of one garbage truck would be brought into the museum to undergo these purification processes. “Once at the exhibition, each container will be serviced: purified, de-polluted, rehabilitated, recycled, and conserved.”⁵⁶ Importantly, this kind of process does not yield a discrete object as much as a shift in value. Quantifying this change would be impossible and in Ukeles’ view undesirable. A qualitative appreciation of immaterial labor threads through much of Ukeles’ work.

Each section of “CARE” provides a space to encounter maintenance work as it occurs at various levels. By levels I mean to suggest that maintenance work is diffuse throughout the social and exists at varying distances from any one body or vantage point. The “personal” contains a microcosm of the work done as individually to keep bodies running including the upkeep of inhabited spaces. By performing the work the gallery needs Ukeles demonstrates the use of maintenance for the endurance of institutions as well as bodies. “General” contextualizes the personal work as a shared and varied condition. “Earth” situates the necessity of maintenance beyond human need –social or

⁵⁶ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

individual. To imagine a sphere of maintenance requires a simultaneous envisioning of all these levels.

Maintenance work is immaterial, ephemeral, and often unwaged work. To include it as part of the economic structure changes many common notions about what counts as work and what gives work value. By definition, Maintenance is opposed to growth – including production. Ukeles leaves behind the Marxist expectation that work is what has transpired only when an object is produced. “Anti-productivist” is another way to define Ukeles’ model which does not privilege markets, objects, or exchange. The ideology behind what Ukeles calls Development is nearly synonymous with what Baudrillard and others term “productivism.” Critiques of productivism unveil an obsession with growth, technology, production, and the moral imperative of progress as found in Marxism *and* the various stages of Capitalism. It is an ideological tendency evident in contemporary attitudes about work ethic, neoliberalism, privatization, and other claims that privilege growth and production –development as Ukeles sees it. Like development’s ability to monopolize value, productivism works to “code all human material and every contingency of desire and exchange in terms of value, finality, and production.”⁵⁷

While I want to stick to the terms Ukeles outlined, it is useful to reference productivism here to explain why Marxist models of labor cannot align with Maintenance. Baudrillard critiques Marx’s inability to transcend an “unbridled romanticism of productivity” to be able to get out of the instrumentalist attitudes

⁵⁷ Baudrillard, *Mirror*, 19.

inherited from capitalism.⁵⁸ “The critical theory of the *mode* of production does not touch the *principle* of production.”⁵⁹ In particular, the critique of productivism reveals in Marx’s thought precisely what Ukeles opposes –the total disregard for anything outside of growth. According to Sabelli and Bethoud, Marx constructs a theory of the “economy in which everything is utilitarian. According to this view, workers, goods, space, and time are to be managed in order to ensure ‘progress’”⁶⁰

There are several ways in which Maintenance falls outside of production and in fact works against the logics of value that operate within it. By definition, Maintenance work cannot produce objects for circulation on the market. First, maintenance work is immaterial labor. All labor is action and thus not material. But, the lack of material objects at the end of Maintenance work distinguishes it from other kinds of labor – specifically productive labor. Even those things that are made in the process of maintenance—such as a meal—are consumed. Maintenance does not privilege the end or the object-outcomes of labor but the *ends* or purpose of the work done. Work is maintenance work when it sustains living things whatever that may look like or require materially.

“Immaterial labor” is an economic term often applied to the kind of labor that does not yield tangible goods such Maintenance work. Maintenance can only *maintain existing* objects, people, institutions, structures, and cultural values. Development can

⁵⁸ Baudrillard, *Mirror*, 16.

⁵⁹ Baudrillard, *Mirror*, 16.

⁶⁰ Bethoud and Sabelli, “Obsolete Production Mentality,” 746.

produce tangible objects, including commodities for purchase –this is an essential difference between the two categories. Marx explicitly locates value in objecthood:

The utility of a thing makes it a use value. But this utility is not a thing of air. Being limited by the *physical properties* of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity. A commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far *as it is a material thing, a use value*, something useful.⁶¹

Not only does he require materiality –thereby disqualifying the immaterial labor of maintenance from value –he collapses the object into just its use. It “is...a use value” which is to say its ability to be used to produce another object is the source of its value.

Secondly, Marx asserts that value can come from exchanging one object for another. “To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use value, by means of an exchange. Lastly nothing can have value, without being an object of utility.”⁶² The value based on objecthood of utility cannot calculate the work of maintenance. The work of maintenance is never discrete and cannot be quantified. What is the use value of being fed? How could one compute the use value of staying alive? For Ukeles, a fungible measure of value is irrelevant. Maintenance as a frame seeks a different end –a non-material understanding of value.

Another incongruity exists between Marxist and Maintenance conceptions of workers and worksites. The temporal and spatial view of Maintenance is far wider than Marxist models. Maintenance is the *work* that comes before and after production. The

⁶¹ Karl Marx. *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London, New York: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990-1991, 131.

⁶² Marx, *Capital*, 131.

protagonist of Marx's vision is always the factory worker proletariat –always presumed male.

In chapter twenty-three of *Capital*, Marx renders the labor of reproduction as just the natural interest in staying alive on the part of the factory worker himself. “The maintenance and reproduction of the working-class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave its fulfillment to the laborer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation.”⁶³ Marx's treatment of the reproduction of that worker's labor power does not consider the work that goes into that reproduction *as work* let alone critique the ongoing exploitation of those supporting the industrial worker. He does not acknowledge the systemic support of the community or the direct support of the worker's family –which is work likely done by a wife, mother, or daughter.

Maintenance occurs in the industrial factory. In fact, unlike industrial production, maintenance work is untaken everywhere. Its worksite is wherever people are laboring to sustain themselves and others. Marxist theories emphasize industrial production. They do not centralize the working conditions of women and other marginalized workers but measures them against standards based on production by primarily done by men. In their 1971 pamphlet, “Women and the Subversion of the Community,” Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James describe the obfuscation of women's work:

Woman on the other hand has been isolated in the home, forced to carry out work that is considered unskilled, the work of giving birth to, raising, disciplining, and servicing the worker for production. Her role in the cycle

⁶³ Marx, *Capital*, 710-713.

of social production remained invisible because only the product of her labor, *the laborer*, was visible there.⁶⁴

Because Ukeles wants to make maintenance work visible—including the experiences of women as mothers, wives and caretakers working in the home—the traditional model of the worksite of the factory cannot be the standard. The assembly line can and does contain women’s labor as mass production, particularly those women who live on the margins of empire. But simply including their bodies and effort as present continues to privilege the models of production based on commodities made primarily by men because it does not take the whole of women’s labor into account.

Given its scale, it could be argued that “mass production” as defined by women’s experience is found in the home, in kitchen, in the laundromat. It is contained within the invisible, non-object of the renewal of themselves and others prior to their entry to the public sphere of production. Dalla Costa and James emphasize the centrality of this domestic maintenance labor and the strategic opportunity it affords: “Every place of struggle outside the home, precisely because *every sphere of capitalist organization presupposes the home*, offers a chance for attack by women.”⁶⁵

Much of mainstream discussions in the late 1960s about women’s maintenance efforts focused on the ways that women *felt* trapped in the home and tethered to domestic work. Betty Freidan’s 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique* launched a national conversation about the daily lives of housewives. Though specific in her presumptions about race, class, and suburban living, Freidan offers an important look at certain

⁶⁴ Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *Subversion*.

⁶⁵ Dalla Costa and James, *Subversion*.

women's frustrations. "The problem that has no name" that Freidan considers is related to the difficulty of naming Maintenance that Ukeles describes.⁶⁶ "I was doing work that is so common; yet there was no cultural language for this work"⁶⁷ For Ukeles, this inability to discuss a common experience was not unique to suburban women in the home. It was a function of the cultural disregard for Maintenance labor that cannot be considered as distinct from its occurrence in other spaces and spheres.

Maintenance work is inextricably linked to the unwaged work of women—even when done by workers of any gender for a wage in the public sphere. As I have suggested, Ukeles creates a class of workers that cuts across traditional divisions of gendered space and the socio-economic class divisions that typify labor organizing that would not find common cause among, say, janitors and women office workers whether CEOs or secretaries. Ukeles can bind them because of the omnipresence of maintenance labor.

There is also political utility in this grouping. Ukeles enacts a radical approach to coalition building. According to Ukeles, one of the failures of the feminist movement was its refusal to "connect with other people who did a similar kind of work."⁶⁸ Which is to say that much of mainstream feminism chose to maintain class and race affiliations over and against a coalitional model that bridges their differences.

Ukeles rejects reformist feminism's rather narrowly conceived push for women to join the workforce. It was widely thought that joining the waged workforce would

⁶⁶ Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2010).

⁶⁷ Ukeles in Finkelparl, *Dialogues*, 302-3.

⁶⁸ Ukeles in Finkelparl, *Dialogues*, 310.

liberate alienated housewives from their isolated work in the home and grant economic independence from men. Though these are important goals, Ukeles challenges the idea that waged work would result in liberation without coalition and laments the shortcomings of reformist gains:

I really believed that there could have been a revolution linking up feminism with service workers, crossing gender with economic class; that did not happen. Instead we got partial and mainly middle class measures: health clubs, preventative maintenance, flextime. There was no major reorganizing.⁶⁹

Despite the historical outcomes she mentions, in her theory of Maintenance, Ukeles unites garbage men and housewives into a single class of workers. Because, Maintenance work is required in every economic stratum, there can be no shared socio-economic background in the formation of this class of workers. Ukeles notes the make up of this “odd coalition” her 1998 essay for the *Matrix* catalogue:

Many women, the ancient maintenance class who were told that’s who they were meant to be without bothering to ask them. Then there were the service workers, men and women, often of color. Actually, most people in the world were spending most of their time trying to keep someone going. Someone alive, sustained, doing service work, maintenance work of one kind or another, they were, however, trapped in a high culture frame that frozen them into being seen as “do you do anything?” (of importance, not this stuff), or not present with power. And without voice.⁷⁰

Maintenance is ubiquitous but not uniform. The experience of race and class produce different relations to maintenance work. Even the consistent devaluation takes a variety of forms while sharing the bizarre status of not even counting as ‘doing something.’

⁶⁹ Finkelpearl, *Dialogues*, 310.

⁷⁰ Mierle Laderman Ukeles. “Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Matrix #137” Sherry Buckberrough and Andrea Miller-Keller, curators. Exhibition guide. At Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. September 20-November 15, 1998.

Ukeles points out how Maintenance is seen as the natural condition of women, the “ancient maintenance class.” Maria Mies triangulates defining women as naturally predisposed towards caring work with the cultural visibility and material value of women’s labor in the home and in the global capitalist market.

It became clear that women’s unpaid caring and nurturing work in the household was subsidizing not only the male wage but also capital accumulation. Moreover, by defining women as housewives...not only did women’s unpaid work in the household become invisible, unrecorded in the GDP, and ‘naturalized’ -that is treated as a ‘free good’- but also her waged work was considered to be only supplementary to that of her husband, the so-called bread-winner, and thus devalued.⁷¹

Like Ukeles, Mies, in her theory of Subsistence Feminism, is concerned with the economic relation of money only insofar as it is an index of cultural value. Ukeles’ interest in immaterial value is an important corollary of the subaltern and anti-productivist qualities of maintenance. Money only comes up when she considers the differences inside the class of maintenance workers which includes waged maintenance staff who work outside their own home and unpaid domestic workers. Ukeles does not call for maintenance work to be universally waged –as other contemporaneous activists such as the group Wages for Housework did. Ukeles wants an intangible value for this intangible work.

While less material, the value Ukeles seeks is just as powerful and vital as a demand for economic remuneration. As Ukeles claimed in an interview: “there is a

⁷¹ Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. (London: Zed Books, 2001),11.

symbolic power that is just as alive as anything else”.⁷² Ukeles develops Maintenance Art to pursue that symbolic power for the work of survival. From this perspective, her choice to develop an aesthetic approach is shrewd. With art’s ability to focus vision, Ukeles makes visible the power structures that enforce the ongoing devaluation of survival. It already exists in symbolic terrain. Culturally, we already permit it to evoke feeling and organize new meaning. Ukeles uses this politically to enact a subaltern feminist awareness. “The hoped-for end result of these relationships is the new consciousness, previously unconsciousness, ignorance and misunderstanding, of the limitations on all freedom, not only of the artist, that are produced by ramifications of maintenance.”⁷³

The immaterial labor and inexchangeable symbolic value that define Maintenance exist outside of productivist models. Instead of theories that confirm the productivist ideals that Ukeles refutes, a theory of hegemony offers several useful insights that a strictly economic model cannot. Attention to the hegemony of Development provides a nuanced understanding of how the culturally powerful view of Development produces the subjugated conditions that Ukeles wants to make visible.

Antonio Gramsci’s defining theorization of hegemony offers a broad understanding of the mutually constitutive forces of economics and culture. In particular, hegemony reveals the ways that culture is not merely a secondary effect determined by an economic system –the superstructure that can only reflect the base, to put it in Marxist terms. Gramsci and those that have made use of his critique of hegemony benefit from an

⁷² Ukeles quoted in Doug Ashford. “Democracy is Empty,” interview with Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Documents*, no. 10, (Fall 1997), 23-30.

⁷³ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

emphasis on lived experience and an acknowledgment of agency on the part of the oppressed. The model of hegemony revises the concept of ideology to address the ongoing participation and consent of the exploited. It unites the influence of cultural forms with and within economic and political structures into a single force, hegemony. Gramsci structures hegemony as a unified set of forms of power and their apparatus:

The one that can be called “civil society,” that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called “private” and that of “political society” or the “the State.” These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of “hegemony” which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand the “direct domination” or command exercised through the State and “juridical” government. The function is precisely organizational and connective.⁷⁴

Part of Gramsci’s contribution is the awareness of the domain of civil society’s political and economic consequences. The State and civil society are two inextricable levels –not unlike the bond between Maintenance and Development. Hegemony ties together the direct domination enforced through mechanisms of power while also bringing light to the ways that people chose to participate in these structures in their daily lives and the role of culture in promoting and enforcing the thinking that permits exploitation. Including the influence of negotiation under coercion provides a fuller understanding of how social order is maintained. Gramsci’s take on civil society as a determining factor in social organization is akin to Ukeles’ insistence that Maintenance is necessary to society’s functioning. Both gestures restore a latent component that a narrowly economic analysis leaves out.

⁷⁴ Antonio Gramsci. *Prison Notebooks*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 12.

Like hegemony, Maintenance and Development are totalizing systems. Raymond Williams explains the scope of hegemony: It “is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and his world.” Maintenance and Development are categories of systems that are composed of practices that order our daily lives. Hegemony is a way of uniting these disparate systems that takes into account the power that they accumulate. It is not just an economic system that operates exclusively for economic ends. Hegemony groups together the many instances, forms, ideologies and practices of Development under a heading that expects shifts and internal contradictions. To say it another way, the hegemonic force of Development is composed and enforced through a set of beliefs, values, and practices.

Williams notes that an overlooked strength of hegemony is its “elements of real and constant change” that allow for major shifts without ceding power.

We have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be *renewed, recreated and defended*; and by the same token, that they can continually be challenged and in certain respects *modified*.⁷⁵

Ukeles notes this same mutability when she compares Development’s ability to change to Maintenance’s static form. She airs her frustration at the invariable requirements of maintenance work. It is “characterized by the mind-boggling, deadening, stifling repetition of tasks.”⁷⁶ In fact, by nature, hegemony is a system that requires maintenance

⁷⁵ Raymond Williams. *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays*. (New York and London: Verso, 2005) 168. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁶ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

to continue operating. Williams summarizes the needs of hegemony in nearly the same way as Ukeles lists Development's key traits in the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*: Ukeles uses the verbs "preserve, sustain, protect; *defend* and prolong, *renew*, repeat"⁷⁷ to describe maintenance's *raison d'être*.

Part of hegemony's power is its ability to operate seamlessly, to render its production and contingency as the natural state of things. Gramsci sees this normalization and naturalization inherent in hegemony as a function of "common sense." Hegemony is "a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming."⁷⁸ This means that hegemonic values are felt as natural and inarguably true. Functionally, this trait makes isolating the logics and aims of the dominant forces nearly impossible. Considering Maintenance through this aspect of hegemony, it becomes clear that the degree to which Ukeles must work so hard to name this pair of essential labor and needs is a measure of the hegemony of the system itself. Maintenance work happens constantly, but, given the hegemony of development, the ability to consider it was beyond the limit of common sense. Following Ukeles' practices, valuing Maintenance is itself a challenge to the hegemony of Development under productivism. To reach Ukeles' ultimate goal of a widely held appreciation of the work that goes into survival, Maintenance must first be comprehended and named.

⁷⁷ Ukeles, *Manifesto*. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁸ Williams, *Culture*, 169.

In a quotation cited earlier, Ukeles describes maintenance workers as sharing a condition of being seen as “not present with power. And without voice.”⁷⁹ Like development and maintenance, hegemony has a subservient twin, the subaltern. Voicelessness and powerlessness are the defining traits of a subaltern position. The subaltern is a fluid category for those populations excluded from participation in official political structures, those on the margins of an imposed social order. It is not that all maintenance workers are necessarily subaltern in all moments. Rather, *the labor of maintenance is subaltern.*

As a subaltern class, Maintenance has to accommodate the vast diversity of experiences of its constituents. To avoid hegemonic control of the category, Ukeles has to leave it radically open. A model of multiplicity that refuses privileging any one experience or form as the essential version of maintenance avoids hegemonic domination. For this reason, Ukeles cannot define Maintenance in any finite way. She couldn't say it's *only* unwaged work done by women when there are plenty of men doing maintenance work for a wage—as her numerous projects with janitors and garbage workers including men illustrate. Similarly, it is a mistake to privilege the domestic when maintenance work is done everywhere. Though, the association of maintenance work with women should not be minimized, it cannot be reduced to a function of gender. Positionalities and identities condition the experience of maintenance dramatically. In the collections of interviews in “CARE,” it is the contrasts between participants' answers to questions about their personal experience of maintenance that lend meaning to the experience.

⁷⁹ Ukeles, Mierle Laderman. “Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Matrix #137” Sherry Buckberrough and Andrea Miller-Keller, curators. Exhibition guide. At Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. September 20-November 15, 1998.

Ukeles' challenge is to bring a subaltern position to light without creating a hegemonic system of value or set of standards. To function at all, maintenance art has to become the actual performance of her subaltern critique. The obligation to keep the category of maintenance open becomes a key feature of Ukeles' aesthetic and much of the content of her work in the early 1970s. In the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* and many of her works from this era, Ukeles utilized an open-ended approach to understanding Maintenance that empowered viewers to reflect on the particularities of maintenance in their own lives. Ukeles needed to generate some sense of what maintenance is so that the viewers could understand the terms central to her work. Without gaining an understanding of Maintenance, Maintenance Art as an intervention would not be particularly effective. However, she could not just tell viewers what Maintenance has to be or how occurs in their lives. On the one hand, because of the mutable nature of the hegemony of Development, there can be no one standard for what Maintenance looks like. On the other hand, Ukeles confirms Maintenance Art's position as subaltern by refusing a top-down model, even for her own terms.

Ukeles avoids a finite definition of Maintenance, the principle term of her art-making practice and her manifesto in her own definitions too. Giving voice to concrete and commonplace experiences, she offers litanies of chores and directives, specific complaints, and abstract observations. In clear, vernacular language Ukeles juxtaposes the taxing efforts of maintenance with the denial of it as work. To get a sense of Maintenance as a diverse and open-ended category as well as how Ukeles chose to represent it, it is best to quote her at length:

clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floors, wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby's diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out don't put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills, don't litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store, I'm out of perfume, say it again—he doesn't understand—seal it again—it leaks, go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.⁸⁰

Her description of Maintenance is a virtual “to do” list. Her choice is rhetorical as much as aesthetic. This familiar form echoes how many people write down their experience of Maintenance—as a staccato list of obligations that they have to tackle. Ukeles anticipates that most people consider maintenance in stripped down efficient steps or in sudden recollections of forgotten obligations. She aims much of her work at raising awareness of personal experiences by prompting reflection. Choosing a recognizable form from everyday life allows viewers to easily draw comparisons between the examples she provides and their own lives. In turn, Ukeles encourages viewers to use her model to understand their own behavior patterns and experiences while leaving room for variation.

The litanies provide an ostensive definition through a collection of examples that fit into a category. As a linguistic term, an ostensive definition comes from the use of physically pointing at an example to clarify what is meant. Wittgenstein notes that an ostensive definition “explains the use — the meaning — of the word when the overall role of the word in the language is clear.”⁸¹ The role of maintenance is clear but it's

⁸⁰ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁸¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. (Alden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), paragraph 30.

meaning is not.⁸² It is clear *why* the garbage must be taken out. Ukeles urges the viewer to recognize the social use and culturally determined meaning of this kind of work. Because she is using an ostensive definition for a subaltern concept her examples cannot represent the totality of possibilities. As she uses these definitions to raise awareness of ongoing labor in daily life, this open-ended approach enacts the feminist lesson that the personal is political.

Ordinarily, the essential term of a manifesto is not up for debate let alone theorized through a proposal to ask viewers what the term means. Ukeles dedicates a full third of “CARE” to questionnaires and interviews for viewers to discover their own personal experience of Maintenance. When she invites visitors to participate by completing an interview in the gallery space, she includes a performance of the very consciousness raising she is ultimately after. Her questions demonstrate feminist consciousness-raising techniques that were popular at the time.

In consciousness-raising groups, women or other marginalized people would gather to discuss their daily lives. Collective participation gave voice to the common experiences of oppression and subjection that are often unrecognized by conventional and hegemonic definitions and models of politics. These groups brought to the surface shared experiences of marginalization and oppression as a political practice. Participants would discover that what felt like isolated and personal problems were common experiences produced by systems of power and oppression. Much like Ukeles’ reaction to being told that her choice to be a mother was tantamount to choosing to not be an artist, personal experiences were examined for what they revealed about political systems and structures.

⁸² This concept will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

The axiom “the personal is political” underlies the premise of such consciousness-raising groups as well as Ukeles’ intent to prompt viewers to consider Maintenance’s role in their own lives.

Ukeles used several versions of interviews and questionnaires during the 1970s. In 1972, she interviewed passerbys on the street in front of the A.I.R. gallery in Soho (Fig. 1.1). In this performance, the questions she poses are nearly identical to the ones she outlines in her proposal for “CARE.” Participants were weighed on a scale before and after completing the interview. Any change in their weight would suggest the connection between the experience of maintenance as a burden and the body.

In the art zine *Gnome Baker* Ukeles reprinted her *Maintenance Art Questionnaire: 1973-76*. The questionnaire had circulated amongst the New York art scene before its inclusion in the publication where it was then distributed through different channels. The questionnaires were to be completed and mailed back to Ukeles (Figs. 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4). The questionnaire begins with a brief description of Maintenance and Development adapted from the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*. She addressed the person answering the questions in a letter: “Dear Person, I wish I could ask you these questions face to face, but I can’t because neither of [us] has time.” Even the act of considering Maintenance occurs under the extreme pressure of juggling the obligations of daily life.

She includes a worksheet of sorts for the participant to break down her efforts (Fig. 1.2). More or less, Ukeles places a multiple-choice selection of specific tasks under categories. “Cleaning, repairing, protecting, storing, disposing waste” are among the choices under the complex yet vague heading “Maintaining Objects/Person: property [sic], Abstractions, Systems.” “Maintaining Life/ Person: Person(s) [sic], Being,

Environments, Institutions” features the same categories save for the switching of “storing” for “preserving.” She requests that the participant “circle at least 10 items (or fill in “other” [blank]) that gives the best profile of the kind of maintenance work you have to/choose to do.”⁸³

In part, the questionnaire functions like an ordinary instrument that collects raw data. But, it also gives the participants a framework to consider their own experience of Maintenance for the first time. The viewer provides the concrete details before reflecting on the more abstract questions. The set of questions designed to prompt reflection on the relationship between Maintenance and “life’s dreams” hardly seems neutral. These questionnaires demonstrate Ukeles’ rhetorical use of questions. Though they are meant to prompt reflection, she hones them to direct the participant’s thinking. I don’t mean to suggest they are too heavy-handed. As discussed, Maintenance is so hard to see and harder to understand. Crafting questions this way leaves little room for misunderstanding.

Her questions assume that any analysis of these invisible systems is necessarily political. She leaves behind the presumed neutrality of the social science survey in favor of questions that ruminate and wander. They anticipate messy and long answers with no possibility for a binary yes-or-no. It is an indication that maintenance is not discrete. Her questions allow room for ambiguous feelings. Prompting complicated answers subverts the efficiency of productivism or instrumentality of Development.

While the nature of her questions demonstrates a position counter to productivist systems, Ukeles’ political aim is even more overt. Some questions explicitly ask the participant to code their experience in positive and negative terms: “Does the energy used

⁸³ The agency she affords the viewer in actively choosing their participation in maintenance reflects the hegemonic requirement of consent.

on maintenance affect how you spend time on development (non-maintenance) –free you, drain you, dull you?” “What is the relationship in your life between maintenance and freedom?” Ukeles asks the viewer to consider the nature of maintenance itself relative to art. “Do you get involved in doing maintenance well –‘beautifully;’ is there an aesthetic to maintenance?”⁸⁴

Around this time, other conceptual artists solicited viewers’ opinions. For instance, Hans Haacke’s 1970 *MOMA Poll* invited visitors to the MOMA’s “Information” exhibition to cast a vote by placing a piece of paper in one of two clear plexiglass boxes (Fig. 1.5). A large sign was affixed to the wall above the boxes asking the question: “Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?” Dropping a ballot in the left box indicated yes, while placing one in the right box was a vote no. Because the boxes were clear, the viewer could quickly see how others had voted. Haacke created a real-time voting system that required the viewer to consider her own views on a political issue as a form of participation. Ukeles’ questionnaires and the polling question both elicit a political response from a systemic position. But, while Ukeles anticipates subjective and personal responses, Haacke’s question prompts a single binary answer.

The point of the *MOMA Poll* was to draw direct connections among the institution, the viewer, and the war in Vietnam. Haacke uses systems to point towards the museum’s status as an institution involved in violent colonialist wars and capitalist exploitation. Ukeles prompts self-reflection on the individual experience of a different

⁸⁴ Ukeles. “Maintenance Art Questionnaire: 1973-76.” *Gnome Baker*.

kind of system. Haacke didn't ask visitors what they thought about Vietnam or their personal experience of war or whether voting for Rockefeller would ultimately matter in the many fronts of the cold war. I am not suggesting that he should have. The strength of that work is its single feedback loop that delineates two options for responding to a single specific problem. Of course, the question had real bite. The aggregation of votes and the work itself seem to be directly addressed to Rockefeller who was on the MOMA board at the time. Haacke intended to harness the viewers' collective response to put pressure on those in power illustrating the institution's role in contemporary politics.

If Haacke directs the public's voice vertically to the board of directors at the MOMA, Ukeles orients her questions horizontally. Haacke provides a recognizably political act –voting– to confront the intersections of the State and the museum. Because Ukeles is concerned with the lived experience of those who are not at the apex of power, she invites viewers to consider their own experience for themselves. She provides interactive experiences that reveal what is not already considered to be political as exactly that. She compels people to consider their own exploitation and devaluation as well as the ways it is produced systematically. She explicitly attends to how these systems control daily life, value, and ideology. This is the exact definition of class-consciousness. Importantly, she does not direct that power anywhere. The point is only to empower people to consider the political reality of Maintenance in their own lives.

In much of her work Ukeles aims to empower viewers to make choices and define maintenance for themselves. In *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* (1974), Ukeles presented the maintenance workers of the largest office building in the world with the opportunity to define not just maintenance work for themselves, but whether or not

their was maintenance art. In making the photographs of the laborers (with their permission), Ukeles makes their hidden maintenance work and maintenance workers durably visible. By asking them to select between the labels “maintenance art” and “maintenance work” she signals that the treatment of maintenance is something contingent on individual desires and decisions (Fig. 1.6 – 1.10).

Ukeles really saw the workers at 55 Water Street as artists. She collected some of her notes from her performance and published them in *Gnome Baker* zine. In these notes, Ukeles documents some of the workers’ reactions. “Carlos wanted to make traditional art. He asks if I want him to tell the workers what to say: Art or Work. No, Carlos, it’s their own business. He thinks I am inefficient.”⁸⁵ She draws out the workers’ desire to aestheticize their labor for her and for their own enjoyment. Raoul, an assistant supervisor on the night shift,

liked to make very large scale art. He arranged a production just for me, and told me how to photograph it. ‘The washing area of the concourse,’ the loading dock, a huge area. Had [sic]it washed with fire hoses, giant arcs of water bouncing off the walls. Raoul had a sense of grandeur.⁸⁶

Ukeles also fondly recalls when workers hated the idea of calling their labor art:

I remember one guy who was probably the greatest maintenance worker of all. He was a star, every single move looked effortless. His name was Bruno. This building is huge. The hallways are literally a block long. One day the elevator door opened up and there was Bruno. He had stuffed the elevator with huge garbage bags; then he saw me. I was a block away. He yelled “This is not art! This will never be art! “ and the doors shut. It was

⁸⁵ Ukeles, notes in *Gnome Baker*.

⁸⁶ Ukeles, Notes, in *Gnome Baker*.

so great! I caught up with another worker, Vanilla, at 4am in the sixth week of the performance work. “I have been waiting for you every night for six weeks,” she told me. Then she took me on rounds. She was making Art.⁸⁷

Bruno’s complete refusal to call his labor art is in no way at odds with Ukeles’ intent. Her point is not to make all labor into art. Ukeles’ work uses the category of art and the ability to designate it to bring out the ways that there is choice in how labor is constructed socially.

In her communications with workers, Ukeles acknowledges the lack of appreciation for their work. In the letter to the maintenance staff inviting their participation, Ukeles clearly states her interest in presenting the labor of the maintenance workers to the rest of the building’s occupants:

I want people to know about and to see these kinds of jobs you do, because this whole building NEEDS your work. Without your work the building could not operate. Then all the people who do office work, bank work, business work couldn’t continue their jobs here. In a way, it is your daily support that keeps this building up just as much as steel, marble and glass.⁸⁸

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ukeles is refuting the hidden and devalued status of this particular instance of subaltern labor.

In advance of the show, Ukeles wrote a letter to the curatorial staff of the Downtown Whitney which hosted the performance with the subject: “Supplementary (Aesthetic) Information related to memo presented to management.” In this letter she

⁸⁷ Ukeles in Finkelpearl *Dialogues*. p309. I believe Fig. 1.6 has images of this interaction.

⁸⁸ Ukeles, Letter to workers, reprinted in *Gnome Baker*. See Fig. 1.10 for a graphic representation of the same idea.

explained the importance of choice in *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* (here referred to as “Building Maintenance Art event”):

The ultimate aim of the Building Maintenance Art event is to elaborate the artist’s commitment to a non-elitist, reality-oriented Art-as-freedom-of-choice. In this piece, the Artist freely gives away her “artist-power” (of extreme free-choice through which she has chosen maintenance-work-as-art) to the maintenance art personnel at 55 Water Street. Hence, she thinks of this work as one done (by her) in absentia by others through their own free choice in their own minds with their own individual universes of meanings and desires (and boredom and despair).

The full range of personal emotions that Ukeles anticipates is among the most striking things about this proposal. Though Ukeles is orchestrating the performance, the meaning that comes from the workers’ selection is not up to her and, even more radically, it is not intelligible to her. She acknowledges the limit of the artists’ power as well as the open-ended possibilities of the lived experience of Maintenance. The construction of *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, like the questionnaires and interviews, suggest Ukeles’ genuine interest in unpredictable outcomes. More experiment than experimental, Ukeles’ subaltern practice allows for divergences, refusals, and self-discovery.

Chapter Two: From Work to Frame...and back to work

In her Masters thesis, Mierle Laderman Ukeles clearly states the intent of her 1968 *Maintenance Art Manifesto* as a founding claim. “The fundamental intention of the Maintenance Art Manifesto was to create Maintenance Art itself.”⁸⁹ She glosses this effort as “to select-as-art what, in the Duchampian tradition the artist declared was art – in her case, the idea of maintenance revealed in its processes and ramifications.”⁹⁰ In this quote, Ukeles situates herself and her work in several ways. She inserts herself into a lineage of art production defined by Duchamp’s readymade. Here, and in her work generally, Ukeles distills a moment of choice in the production of the readymade. Putting aside what art historians and critics have seen as subsequent steps recontextualizing an object within the space of a gallery, Ukeles isolates the act of sheer selection.⁹¹ To “select-as-art” as Duchamp did with a urinal, a stool, a snow shovel, and other objects empowers Ukeles to declare maintenance work –which is not an object at all– a kind of art.

Lucy Lippard refers to this Duchampian gesture when reused by artists in the 1960s as “claiming.”⁹² Benjamin Buchloh critiques this same declaration in

⁸⁹ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

⁹⁰ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

⁹¹ The production of the readymade as described by David Joselit, Benjamin Buchloh, Thierry de Duve, and others sets up a three-step process where an object is selected, named and inscribed, then placed into a new environment in which the object is not frequently found. This process and Ukeles’ intervention into it is the subject of this chapter.

⁹² Lucy Lippard. “Escape Attempts” in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), IV and XV.

conceptualism of the 1960s and 1970s under the heading of the “nominative function.”⁹³ Thierry de Duve uses “nominative function” as well as the phrase “enunciative function”⁹⁴ to mark how Duchamp’s naming is also a statement about what an object *is*. He also refers to Duchamp’s “pictorial nominalism” to link his pre-readymade paintings with his later appropriations.⁹⁵ While we are each describing the same “select-as-art” technique of the readymade, I use the term “claiming” rather than “nomination” because it emphasizes the appropriative strength of the on-going and performative act of declaration over the descriptive or naming function.

Ukeles’ use of actions as readymades sets her work apart from other readymades which are static objects, usually considered sculptures. While I am very specifically calling Ukeles’ maintenance performances “readymades,” I am only able to attend to a narrow discussion of this hugely important and influential art making practice. The body of literature on Duchamp and the readymade is enormous. The discourse on the much-debated role of Duchamp in the emergence of conceptualist practice of the 1960s and 1970s is also sizeable. I don’t wish to rehearse any overestimation of the role of Duchamp as the father of all conceptualism. Nor do I want to suggest that Ukeles work is

⁹³ Interestingly, what Buchloh laments as the liquidation of political possibility is the same feature that Lippard names as an avenue used by artists to more directly address politics. See Lippard’s “Escape Attempts” and Buchloh’s “Conceptual art 1962-1969: From the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions” in *October* (1990): 105-143.

⁹⁴ Thierry de Duve. “Critique of Pure Modernism” in *The Duchamp Effect*. Translated by Rosalind Krauss. Edited by Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon. (Oxford: MIT Press, 1996).

⁹⁵ Thierry de Duve. *Pictorial Nominalism: on Duchamp’s Passing from Painting to the Readymade*. Translated by Dana Polan. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

valid because it is similar to the work of a lauded male artist. I consider Duchamp's production of readymades because it is the tradition and technique that Ukeles has consistently named, made use of, and continues to expand as a political possibility for feminist art making.

In her Maintenance Art of the 1960s and 1970s, Ukeles used the readymade in a unique way. She did not appropriate mass-produced objects as Duchamp did. Instead of objects, Ukeles claimed the *tasks* of maintenance work for art. A very literally parallel: Duchamp's *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915) is exclusively composed of an ordinary snow shovel (Fig. 2.1). In *SNOW REMOVAL/TRACKS/MAINTENANCE*, a 1974 performance at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, Ukeles frantically shovels the walkway of the museum during a snowstorm.⁹⁶ During the performance the snow kept coming. She did not even leave a clear path, let alone an object. Her cleaning—an ongoing effort—is the artwork. As Ukeles wrote in her proposal of “*CARE*” that foregrounded these task-performances, “MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK.”⁹⁷

It is clear that Ukeles is concerned with bringing the everyday experience of maintenance to the fore. Why does she opt for tasks rather than displaying tools of maintenance work? The ubiquitous tools of maintenance work would be a natural fit for making readymades. Helen Molesworth notes that many of Duchamp's readymades were in fact maintenance objects.⁹⁸ However, Ukeles wants to expose the experience of maintenance labor, not its materiality. It is not necessary to demonstrate the means by

⁹⁶ Unfortunately, I am unable to locate any images of this performance at this time.

⁹⁷ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

⁹⁸ Helen Molesworth, “Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades,” *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 50-61.

which maintenance occurs. For instance, the tools of cleaning cannot describe the conditions and importance of maintenance work. Ukeles wants to bring out what it feels like to be responsible for the “mind-boggling, deadening, stifling repetition of tasks” that enable “the equilibrating support systems that makes it possible to continue from one minute to the next without total destruction or total recreation of the world, ongoingness, continuance, preservation, sustenance, care.”⁹⁹ Here, and in most discussions of Maintenance, she emphasizes the active, repetitive, and endless nature of maintenance work. An object like a snow shovel might be a symbol of labor to the extent that it references a potential use but it does not itself demonstrate motion and ongoing effort.

Ukeles’ choice to make her “working” “the work” enables her to attend to Maintenance in two important ways that object-based readymades cannot. One way to understand her choice of tasks over and against objects is through the lens of dematerialization. According to Lucy Lippard and John Chandler’s 1968 essay, dematerialization as found in “ultra-conceptualist art...emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively” and “may result in the object becoming wholly obsolete.”¹⁰⁰ Dematerializing the art object not is an a priori good. It is a specific symptom of the climate in which it was produced. Lippard characterizes the move away from the object as an attempt to make art that “would be free of art-world commodity status.”¹⁰¹ Ukeles concurs that the turn away from the object in the 1960s and 1970s was motivated by

⁹⁹ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

¹⁰⁰ Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art” in *Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 47.

¹⁰¹ Lippard, “Escape Attempts,” ix.

commodity status. She adds to this the impact of the ongoing war in Vietnam as it registered in concerns about taking up space as a kind of imperialism. “The dematerialization of the art-work really came out of pulling away from materiality itself, the marketplace, selling objects...all this was aimed at work that would be free, unencumbered, and not imperialistic.”¹⁰² While commodity-based readymades certainly have to contend with those pitfalls of materiality, maintenance by nature is neither a commodity nor a form of domination.

As I previously discussed, maintenance labor cannot produce commodities. It does not yield objects for sale in the market. Thus, Maintenance Art does not have to turn away from commodity status because it is necessarily outside the market. All labor is activity and thus in its moment immaterial. Maintenance labor, however, is immaterial in a second sense because produces no tangible objects. It exists exclusively in efforts of non-productive labor so no object could actually be an instance of maintenance. Objects could never contain the essential feature of maintenance –its status as support rather than production.

From another angle, Ukeles wants to make maintenance art that is still maintenance work –“my working will be the work.” Maintenance is labor defined by its ability to support development. To make maintenance art Ukeles’ works could not be tasks or labor that fall under development. This opposition to development explains the refusal of objects. It also enables a more complicated critique. When Ukeles makes Maintenance Art, the tasks have to actually maintain something. Though choreographed and aestheticized, they are not ineffectual versions of real work. When Ukeles shoveled

¹⁰² Ukeles in Finkelpearl, *Dialogues*, 301.

the walk in Boston, it was both a maintenance artwork and a real effort to maintain a walkable space. Because of this requirement, Ukeles developed performances that were strategies for uncovering the various and contingent meanings of an act of Maintenance. Ukeles calls these pieces “on-site working” rather than performance. These “on-site workings” allow her to “move beyond the elementary level of process as the simple linear unfolding of a maintenance activity to the richer more complex level of process as a value-oriented method of testing-and-celebrating.”¹⁰³ This obliteration of the line between performance and the real further strengthens Ukeles’ view of Maintenance as necessary. Even when being performed as art, her maintenance labor is still very literally at work.¹⁰⁴

When Ukeles claims her maintenance tasks as art, the readymade is no longer a material form of art at all. Ukeles does not dematerialize the content –maintenance tasks are already immaterial labor. Rather, she dematerializes the form of the readymade from an object-based sculpture to a performance of immaterial labor. Dematerialization as a term indicates a chronology where an existing object loses its material form. It suggests a sequence of events with a trajectory from materiality to immateriality. Since Ukeles appropriates things that are already material-less, tasks, she does not have to dematerialize the particular thing she appropriates. Nevertheless, it is useful to understand her act of selection in relation to contemporaneous dematerialization of art to

¹⁰³ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

¹⁰⁴ Ukeles’ dismissal of the premise of the autonomy of art is unfortunately beyond what I can attend to in this paper. Her belief in the total integration of the performance of tasks into daily life is a clear indication that Ukeles in no way separated art from the rest of everyday life.

understand the shared goals and even tactics between maintenance art and its fellow travellers in emergent forms of conceptualist practice in the late 1960s.

While conceptualism and dematerialization might be characterized by their disregard for the object, artists still employed certain forms of representation and modes of display. Sianne Ngai finds the origin of “the distinctive look of conceptual art” in “the post-Fordist knowledge work” with “its idioms of inventory, classification, and documentation.”¹⁰⁵ She refers to this look as “the aesthetic of information.” According to Ngai, Mel Bochner’s 1966 exhibition at the School of the Visual Arts in New York, “Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art” sets the standard (Fig. 2. 2 and Fig. 2.3).¹⁰⁶ Particularly, his use of “xeroxes of lists, invoices, blueprints, notes, and plans by architects, composers, mathematicians, and visual artists, mixed in with pages from *Scientific American*” mark the style.¹⁰⁷ Ukeles’ use of questionnaires and her display of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, report forms, and polaroids of the workers at 55 Water Street in *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* all fall squarely into Ngai’s description (see Figs. 1. 1.). Given Ukeles’ concern with work itself, it is not surprising to find aesthetic forms derived from contemporary forms of work in her practice.

¹⁰⁵ Sianne Ngai. “Merely Interesting” in *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 2008), 792-3.

¹⁰⁶ This exhibition was not exclusively of work by Bochner. Bochner compiled sketches, notes and working drawings by Carl Andre, Jo Baer, John Cage, Tom Clancy, Dan Flavin, Milton Glaser, Dan Graham, Eva Hesse, Alfred Jensen, Donald Judd, Michael Kirby, William Kolakoski, Robert Lepper, Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Robert Moskowitz, Robert Smithson, and Kenneth Snelson. Bochner xeroxed the drawings and put them into a four identical binders and installed those on pedestals in the School of Visual Arts gallery.

¹⁰⁷ Sianne Ngai. “Merely Interesting,” 792-3.

Ukeles suggests that her formal choices are about utility. “The more concrete yet also flexible system of the continuum enables Maintenance Art to move forward easily by using whatever materials are necessary -from functional materials (photographs, tapes, questionnaire[s]) to relevant ideas to performing as testing and celebrating to ultimately the consciousness producing medium of relationships.”¹⁰⁸ Ukeles’ teleology of dematerialization is not from material to immaterial, but from functional representation to the totally massless medium of “relationships.”

Lippard links the aesthetic of information to an interest in considering everyday life through art. “Lists, diagrams, measures, neutral descriptions, and much counting were the most common vehicles for the preoccupation with repetition, the introduction of daily life and work routines, philosophical positivism, and pragmatism.”¹⁰⁹ This aligns closely with Ukeles’ attention to the miserable repetition, invisibility, and the necessity of maintenance. The language she employs in the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* is a perfect example. As discussed previously, Ukeles makes use of lists of tasks to demonstrate both the nature and the affective experience of maintenance work. Moreover, her effort to classify all of life into two systems, Maintenance and Development, is a kind of philosophical positivism. Importantly, Lippard notes that these were the formal tendencies for artists “looking to restructure perception and the process/product relationship of art.”¹¹⁰ For these artists, like Ukeles, “information and systems replaced

¹⁰⁸ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

¹⁰⁹ Lippard, *Six Years*, xv-xvi.

¹¹⁰ Lippard, *Six Years*, xv.

traditional formal concerns of composition, color, technique, and physical presence.”¹¹¹

Ukeles’ choice of the “medium of relationships” marks this disinterest in the material elements of form in favor of understanding, or as she calls it “consciousness.”¹¹²

When Ukeles proposed her project at 55 Water Street, *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, she invited the 55 Water Street building workers to “take for themselves,” that is, appropriate, her “idea of art.”¹¹³ In a letter addressed “Dear Worker-Friend,” she defines her idea of art with the claiming of maintenance as art. “I use my idea of ‘artistic freedom’ to call ‘maintenance’ –the work you do, the work I do –‘art.’”¹¹⁴ This call to appropriate her idea is inherent in the logic of her idea of art that she wants to give away. Her declaration that her idea of art is the ability to claim an ordinary part of life as art is itself an unembarrassed appropriation of Duchamp

The artwork is indistinguishable from the rest of the worker’s labor. Further, it is so dematerialized that it can literally take place inside a worker’s head at any time or any place with no visible or productive consequences. “You will not have to do anything different from the way you always do. Really, it will just take place inside your head... You do not have to tell anyone about it while you do it.”¹¹⁵ The workers are to “think” and “imagine” their work as art but keep also working. Immaterial, ephemeral,

¹¹¹ Lippard, *Six Years*, xv.

¹¹² Ukeles, *Thesis*.

¹¹³ Ukeles, Letter to workers, excerpted in *Gnome Baker*.

¹¹⁴ Ukeles, Letter to workers, excerpted in *Gnome Baker*.

¹¹⁵ Ukeles, Letter to workers, excerpted in *Gnome Baker*.

and even secret, whether the maintenance art exists Ukeles says is “entirely your business.”¹¹⁶

With her “living Maintenance Art Work,” Ukeles aims to raise awareness of this massive building’s dependency on maintenance labor that is actively occluded. “I want people to know about and to see the kinds of jobs you do, because this whole huge building NEEDS your work.”¹¹⁷ This necessary labor was captured in photographs and (though infrequently used) report forms to record the kind of action preformed (Figs 1X). When Ukeles displayed these documents of the workers’ maintenance labor she was contesting the management of the building’s aestheticization that erased the labor and even attempted to hide the need for Maintenance. As she described in the write up of the performance in *Gnome Baker*, “National Cleaning has developed its own aesthetic of calm, quiet, Apollonian order... cleaning is a formal ‘procedure.’” Reversing this and making visible the work that goes into to producing that order would result in “a true picture of 55 Water Street.”¹¹⁸

Sanctioned vision does not operate evenly. While the work of the maintenance staff and the staff themselves are to be invisible to the other workers in the building, the information-based work of administration is to be invisible to the maintenance staff. “Cleaners are to move through offices without seeing what goes on there. Information is

¹¹⁶ Ukeles, Letter to workers, excerpted in *Gnome Baker*.

¹¹⁷ Ukeles, Letter to workers, excerpted in *Gnome Baker*.

¹¹⁸ Ukeles, Notes, printed in *Gnome Baker*.

power and it is not for them.”¹¹⁹ Ukeles use the status of art in the performances of maintenance tasks to make visible work that is not privileged as valuable.

In *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, the visibility of the worker’s labor as display in photographic documentation makes the visibility of their work durable. The installation in the gallery space of the building was made to bring into vision the invisible work. Her daytime display of instant photos overcame the intent of the management to hide this labor through scheduling it at night and enforcing strictures on how the workers could complete their tasks. The fantasy of the residents of the building turns this hard labor into a “formal procedure.”¹²⁰ The photographic array also brought together the labor of 300 workers who could not otherwise see their coworkers’ efforts.

Her audience was not just the white collar workers of the building. She ensured that the maintenance staff could see the nearly 700 photos of their collective labor. Ukeles organized a special opening/closing reception for the maintenance workers who would ordinarily not be able to see the exhibition during its normal working hours due to the timing of their shifts (see Figs. 2.4. and 2.5).

The nighttime workers kept saying, ‘what did you do with the pictures?’ ‘They are in the museum on the second floor,’ I answered. But its [sic] locked. It’s closes at 3pm (That’s the middle of the night for these people.) So the staff at the downtown Whitney gave all the maintenance artists an ‘opening-closing’ the last night of the exhibition. The museum was opened from midnight to 1am so the nighttime people coming and leaving between their shifts could come and see their art-work. And they did, with refreshments too. A separate and true event: the union of the artist and the worker in the museum.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ukeles, Notes, printed in *Gnome Baker*.

¹²⁰ Ukeles, Notes, printed in *Gnome Baker*.

¹²¹ Ukeles, Notes, *Gnome Baker*. Irregular use of quotation marks in the original.

Beyond the sweet gesture, this quote also indicates the ways that Ukeles understands the workers as artists in their own right.

Since her idea of art is predicated on the claiming function and she invites the workers to take this idea for themselves, Ukeles makes claiming part of the art making process. She does not document the workers working and call it maintenance art *for them*. The worker in the image decides if the work she is doing is maintenance work or maintenance art. Ukeles applies a label reflecting the worker's choice to the white border on the bottom of the photograph (Figs 1.5 and 1.7). This labeling is akin to the inscription Duchamp requires in his specifications for a readymade.¹²² Andre Breton defines the labeling of the readymade as a "tactical means" to "divert the object from its destination by attaching a new label to it, signing it, and thus reclassifying it as something chosen."¹²³ This interruption in the trajectory of the object does not hold for Immaterial Readymades. Like the actions captured in the photographs, to exist at all these maintenance artworks have to take place exactly as they would have were they not called art.

David Joselit notes that the "displaced commodity" as a necessary element of readymades often emphasized over the linguistic claim that he wants to consider. "Duchamp's definition suggests the readymade is conceived not simply as a displaced

¹²² See de Duve, "Critique of Pure Modernism," p 106.

¹²³ Breton quoted in Thierry de Duve, "Authorship Stripped Bare, Even" in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* No. 19/20, (1990/1991), 235.

commodity but as a dynamic of linguistic specification.”¹²⁴ Often, the part of the productions of readymades that is given the most attention is the insertion of the appropriated object into the physical context of art. Craig Owens theorizes the displacement of the object into the museum through a model of framing. “It is customary to attribute recognition of the importance of the frame in constituting the work of art to Duchamp (the readymade requires its institutional setting in order to be perceived as a work of art)...”¹²⁵ This, it is useful to understanding the course of events after an artist has selected an object from everyday life as a spatial strategy. The object is removed from its ordinary context and “framed” as art whether that frame is materialized as a vitrine or an implied framing through display in a gallery. In the case of Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), for instance, the urinal is “displaced” from its presumed location in the bathroom and displayed in the gallery.

Owens connects the importance of the frame to an emphasis on the network of practices and assumptions tied to the sphere of art production and circulation. “More often than not, however, the ‘frame’ is treated as that network of institutional practices (Foucault would have called them ‘discourses’) that define, circumscribe and contain both artistic production and reception.”¹²⁶ Unlike object readymades, Ukeles’ immaterial readymades take place in locations where they are ordinarily found. Rather than making

¹²⁴ David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp, 1910-1941*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 72.

¹²⁵ Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 127.

¹²⁶ Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, 126.

use of the switch between different institutionally-determined discourses, Ukeles reveals competing discourses inside a single space and even in the same task.

In 1973, Ukeles did four performances at the Wadsworth Atheneum as part of Lucy Lippard's exhibition, *C. 7,500*. Ukeles organized *Transfer the Maintenance of the Art Object* as a sequence of three cleanings of the vitrine containing a mummified female body (Figs. 2.6 – 2.14). Three different people each with a different role in the institution of the museum completes the cleaning task. First, a janitor from the museum staff completes his routine maintenance of the surface of a support structure. To do this, he sprays the glass with a cleansing solution and wipes it with cloth diapers, the standard materials for the cleaning glass in the institution. After he completes his usual maintenance task, he passes the spray bottle and diapers to Ukeles. Ukeles in the specific role of “maintenance artist” cleans the mummy case. However, her cleaning results in a “dust painting.” Ukeles stamped the cloth diapers that she and the janitor used to clean as well as several others. After she had finished, a museum conservator completed a condition report for Ukeles' painting (Fig. 2.15). He then completed the third and final cleaning of the vitrine.

Ukeles first described a dust painting in the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* as a part of the “CARE” exhibition. Ukeles proposes to “live in the museum as I customarily do at home with my baby, for the duration of the exhibition. (Right? Or if you don't want me around I would come in every day) and do all these things as public art activities.”¹²⁷ The sarcastic solicitation of confirmation of “Right?” directly addresses the curator, acknowledging the (presumed) absurdity of her very real proposal. She hedges her tone

¹²⁷ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

here to reveal the unlikelihood of her project fitting the desires of an institution and its curators. She goes on to elucidate some of the action she would perform in “CARE.” “I will sweep and wax the floors, dust everything, wash the walls (i.e. ‘floor paintings, dust works, soap-sculpture, wall-paintings’).”¹²⁸ Ukeles playfully recasts the dull tasks of maintenance as high art. It is funny to offer to come clean a museum gallery and call the results objects with blunt names like “soap-sculpture” and sendups of the most cutting-edge of art production such as “agglomerations and dispositions of all functional refuse.”¹²⁹

What might have been read as a joke in the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* by the imagined curator Ukeles addresses is treated as an absolutely real work of art in the Wadsworth Atheneum. Once she finishes her painting, Ukeles stamps the glass of the vitrine with an inked rubber stamp. The seal on the stamp authenticated the work as a “Maintenance Art ORIGINAL” (Fig. 2.10, 2.11, 2.17 and 2.18.) A fantastic visual pun, the stamp is a machine-made commodity designed to produce only copies of the exact same image. This stamp was part of a set of office supplies that Ukeles had made to represent Maintenance Art as an official enterprise. She wrote much of her correspondence, notes, and project proposals on Maintenance Art Works stationary with a formal heading (Fig. 2.4, for example). Clearly, these fall under an aesthetic of information. Though, for Ukeles, their relationship to the work of secretaries in an office seems more pertinent. In the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, Ukeles lists several tasks that belong to the clerk or secretary. “Finish the report,” and “correct the typos” are direct

¹²⁸ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

¹²⁹ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

commands to do clerical maintenance.¹³⁰ In these citations and forms what is being maintained is the documentation of information itself. The connections with secretarial labor underlie any use of the aesthetic of information in Maintenance Art.

In *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, Ukeles plays around with another bureaucratic form. Before the third and final cleaning of the mummy case, the conservator at the Wadsworth Atheneum confirms the status of Ukeles' dust painting as an artwork with a standard museum conservation report (Fig. 2.15). These official documents record the condition of works of art. A widespread if not essential museum practice, they are the key documents of the maintenance of objects in a museum collection. In this one, the conservator determined that the object was "dusty" and in need of "superficial cleaning." Again, Ukeles makes a joke about the art world's inability to recognize dematerialized and avant-garde art. The museum finds the dust on a painting made exclusively of dust to be a problem –the institution literally cannot see the work. It even obliterates the work when the conservator concludes it needs to be cleaned. Presumably, if Ukeles made the painting through wiping a rag around on the glass, cleaning the case would alter or destroy any particular streaks, lines or other traces. On one level, the conservator in conserving the object ultimately wipes it all away. Though, Ukeles' dust painting is a conceptual gesture so whatever the particular traces look like is not terribly important, to borrow from Sol LeWitt. Yet another view contextualizes the dust painting as a decoy or incidental work that is subject to the larger performance. Whatever its status, it is folded into the work that Ukeles claims as *Transfer: the*

¹³⁰ Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

Maintenance of the Art Object which includes the production and destruction of the dust painting.

The title *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* flags the sharing of cleaning supplies between the workers as well as the changes in the status of the glass vitrine throughout the performances. Importantly, when the janitor gives Ukeles the spray bottle and diapers and when Ukeles passes these things to the conservator, it is not an exchange of one thing for another. It is a one-way motion that does not assume any fungible value. The transfer of materials is ritualized through performance but not measured by any outside assessment. This choice ensures that the focus is on the continuity of the task between the three versions.

Prior to the performance, Ukeles sketched out the order and features in numbered steps and a table with the columns “activity,” “person,” “task,” and “result” (Fig. 2.16). At the top of the sheet of paper she states “Museum Maintenance Rule: Only the conservator is empowered to touch the art object, handle it, clean it.” Two numbered steps follow. “Selection of the Art Object in the Museum: mummy (female figure) in glass case.” As previously discussed, this selection-as-art is the claiming feature of a readymade. Though, here, the artwork is not taken from outside the museum but left right where it is. Ukeles’ artwork is not completed though the claiming and display of the readymade as is usually the case. As the title suggests, the artwork itself is the maintenance of the readymade, the mummy and her glass vitrine. Ukeles draws a rudimentary sketch of the mummy in the glass case to the right of the first step, as an illustration of her choice.

The second step is a formula for the essential elements connected with pictograms of arrows: “3 people → same task → museum → 3 powers.” Ukeles traces the relation between the actors, the action, and location. The resulting “3 powers” could be the culmination of the intersection of those three things as the directionality of the arrow suggests. It could also be an additional element of the performance, the animating feature behind the other three components. In either case, power is an important aspect that is mirrored in the “3 people.” Ukeles further illustrates this in the table below the steps. There are three rows filling out the four columns. The column labeled “Activity” features three versions of the line drawing of the mummy in the glass case. In each a genderless stickfigure touches the case with a rag represented by a mass of varying dark squiggles. These rudimentary sketches are not quite identical. The limbs of the cleaner and width of the mummy vary dramatically. With its minor variation through repetition, the three drawings as a set indicate that the same cleaning task is redone.

The drawing of the mummy is funny. More kazoo-like than a representation of a preserved human being, her tube of a body is punctuated with conical breasts and a squished, circular face hovering separate from her neck. With breasts like goofy cat ears, Ukeles sexes the mummy without sexualizing her. On loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the mummy was the most popular object on display in the Wadsworth Atheneum.¹³¹ The readymade Ukeles chose is an emblem of the preservation of the body of a woman. Though, crudely rendered, Ukeles’ initial plans for the performance suggest the importance of the gender of the mummy for this work. Throughout the performance, there are two bodies on display.

¹³¹ Buckberrough and Miller-Keller, “Matrix #137.”

None of the cleaners are sexed in the drawings or the text. In the column “Person” Ukeles uses the institutional language of job titles meant to avoid gender specificity: “Maintenance Person”, “Maintenance Artist,” “Museum Conservator.” Problematically, she provides only her name while referring to the museum staff workers only by their institutional roles. All three are maintenance workers with very different statuses. The janitor is paid for his cleaning labor but not entrusted with the care of art objects themselves. Ukeles is paid as an artist when she does Maintenance Art. A conservator is a special class of professional maintenance worker. Expected to maintain works of art but not the building itself, the conservator is regarded as a skilled laborer in a way that is distinct from the manual labor of the janitor. Important to the critique implicit in Maintenance Art, Ukeles and the maintenance staff would not be paid were they to clean the glass of a picture frame or window at home. That identical labor would be considered outside of production. However, this consideration is not directly brought out in this performance. Ukeles centers the work on the competing value of the dusting of the vitrine in the museum in particular.

According to Ukeles’ diagram, the janitor’s task results in a “clean glass mummy case” while Ukeles yields a “Maintenance Art Work.” The conservator’s efforts produce a “clean Maintenance Art Work” In the performance, each worker did the same cleaning activity, though Ukeles glosses their tasks differently: The janitor has to “clean the glass mummy case (as usual).” She must “clean the glass mummy case: (‘dust painting’). (Stamp glass as Original Maintenance Art) (Maintenance Person can no longer touch it).” Ukeles produces a painting and signs it however impersonally. She notes that elevation from maintenance object to work of art and its subsequent limiting of accessibility.

Suddenly, because of her annexation of the case as a work of art, it is no longer an object that the janitor may touch. Ukeles' choice to clean the case to produce a dust painting is really a screen that amplifies and projects onto the case her claiming of it as an art object. It ritualizes the selection as a maintenance act, but the transition from supply to artwork is achieved without it. Technically, as with any readymade, there need not be a physical production of an object –only the selection. The conservator's evaluation further institutionalizes the glass case in its new status as a work of art.

Functionally, the condition report enters the dust painting into the museum's collection. The vitrine has physically been in the museum's possession all along. It was subordinate to the work of art it contained, the mummified person. In the logic of the performance, the mummy continues to be a work of art. It also continues to benefit from the protection of the glass vitrine irrespective of their now shared status of being art objects. As with other maintenance art works, the dust painting cannot prevent the glass case from doing its maintenance work –protecting the preserved remains on display from dust, dirt, and human touch.

The sarcasm of making a dust painting on glass meant to be invisible is underscored by Ukeles' art historical reference to Man Ray's 1920 photograph *Dust Breeding* (Fig. 2.19). In this image, Man Ray captures the dense, textural accumulation of dust on Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915-1923, also known as *the Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*). Ukeles' dust painting works in the opposite way as Duchamp's aesthetic dust. Hers is produced through the active effort of cleaning while Duchamp's results from his inaction, his choice to not remove dust as it collected on his work-in-

progress. Later, Duchamp did take action and preserved some of the dust in the work itself permanently by covering it with cement.

Rather than inaction, Ukeles goes into hyperactivity. She stages the cleaning of an already cleaned object twice. Importantly, this repetition displaces any assumption that the cleaning of the case is about removing debris. The aim of each instance of the task varies by the power afforded to each person by their institutional role. Ukeles does not invent new tasks for the museum workers –she asks them to do their ordinary work obligations. She does not import tasks from other places –all the work done in *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* is work that would ordinarily occur in the gallery space.¹³² She collapses the chronology of those tasks. On the most basic level, she orchestrates the performance such that they lead right into one another. But what this allows is for three distinct realms of work all given value by the museum to come into view at once.

Immaterial Discourse

What I have tried to describe is the process that Ukeles uses in *Transfer the Maintenance of the Art Object* to reveal an unequal value of labor based on the institutional role of the person performing the work. Again, she is not concerned with monetary values. Access and presumed expertise are the markers of social estimation she notes. She achieves her comparison by retooling the readymade to reveal how discourse animates the construction of value and order in a single space. Typically, the comparisons

¹³² This is a key distinction between my reading of this work and many other interpretations that cast the work done by as specifically domestic labor brought into the gallery. This misattribution further ignores the labor of paid maintenance workers – including artists—and its importance to the Ukeles’ art practice.

between discourses available to the readymade are made between different contexts and even different discourses. The urinal in the gallery means something different than it does in the museum bathroom. How visitors know to interpret their relationship and expected behaviors is tied to this framing, to borrow from Craig Owens' assessment quoted earlier.

With *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, Ukeles demonstrates the way discourse enforces hierarchy through differing logics of value that order the sphere of the museum. The value of the glass case changes when Ukeles makes it into an art object. The ability to do this is not in the act of "painting" itself but inherent in her status as an artist. Similarly, the cleanings performed by the janitor and the conservator respectively indicate the boundary between their statuses. The conservator would not clean the vitrine, only art objects. The reverse is true of the janitor. Though, it should be noted that the janitor is prohibited from touching art objects in a way that the conservator would be able to clean the vitrine should he want to. The power afforded to each of their positions is different even if both are regulated.

The discourse of the museum doesn't just order bodies or the value of objects. It also produces the objects themselves. In *Transfer*, the results are three distinct things, not just value attributed to the task that each repeats. Thierry de Duve suggests that art itself is produced through discursive statements. Drawing from Foucault's notion of statements from the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, de Duve says:

that a work of art exists as art in fact means that the statement "This is art" applies to it. That the statement in question is "This is art" (and not, for example, "This is new" or "This is expensive") also means that the enunciative function is deployed in a particular field of the cultural formation –the artistic or aesthetic domain...¹³³

¹³³ de Duve, "Echoes," 101.

De Duve points out that Duchamp's lesson is that all art necessarily and unavoidably announces itself as art. De Duve's reading can be seen as a theoretical background of the claiming in function itself. What is an emphatic statement in the readymade is actually present in all art. For any object to be understood as art requires the enunciative function. Necessarily, then, meaning occurs within a particular field of the cultural formation as determined by the statement –not the other way around. The field of art is formed through and around the statement that announces the status of the art object.

I would like to push the terms slightly to better attend to Ukeles' practice. When Ukeles claims (rather than enunciates) a maintenance task, she deploys two simultaneous statements: "This is art" *and* "This is work." Instead of the statement occurring in a single field, it operates in several. In the case of *Transfer*, it occurs in three fields inside the cultural formation of the museum: the artist or aesthetic maintenance, the janitor or low-value maintenance and the conservator or high-value maintenance. In this simultaneity, the contingency of statements and their attendant meanings are revealed.

Ukeles' choice to use immaterial labor augments the clarity of the discursive power she wishes to draw out. In fact, she gets very close to enacting Foucault's description of his method, archaeology, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

But what we are concerned with here is not to neutralize discourse, to make it the sign of something else, and to piece through its density in order to reach what remains silently anterior to it, but on the contrary to maintain in it in its consistency, to make it emerge in its own complexity. What in short we wish to do is dispense with the 'things.' To 'depresentify' them...To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse. To define these objects without reference to the ground the

foundation of things, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects as discourse.¹³⁴

As Foucault suggests, getting rid of ‘things’ that index their past production allows Ukeles to consider “the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse.” This is her general “substitution” of task for object in the practice of the readymade in Maintenance Art. In *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* specifically, Ukeles does not deny or neutralize discursive practices related to maintenance work and workers in the museum. She programs the performance to reveal the “3 powers” that are in fact the rules and order of the institution.

As a method, Foucault’s archaeology reveals the contingency of objects produced through discourse. The dust painting, the clean case, and the documented and preserved work of art are done physically but are produced through discursive practices. This reverses the assumption that the meaning of objects is carried with them, even intrinsic to them, that some critics have assumed of the readymade. Benjamin Buchloh sees the Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) as an icon in that the mass-produced urinal continues to represent its ordinary use when put in a new context (Fig. 2.20). The stable recognition of the urinal as a form and its presumed function enables that iconicity. This mundane iconicity is required for the tension with the new context. However, this cannot hold if the meaning is no longer carried within the object because there is no durable object. Instead, Ukeles presents a contestation of value with little to no representation of outside use.

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 52.

As a performance, *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* models and speeds up the natural frequency of the routine tasks in order to make them visible. This condensation allows for easy if unavoidable comparison. The immediacy of the immaterial readymade changes the assumed indexicality of the object-based readymade. Rosalind Krauss advanced a reading of the readymade in relation to photography based on Duchamp's own assertions. Informed by Roland Barthes' understanding of the photographic trace, Krauss argues that

the readymade's parallel with the photograph is established by its process of production. It is about the physical transposition of an object from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the art-image by a moment of isolation, or selection. And in this process, it also recalls the function of the shifter. It is a sign which is inherently "empty," its signification a function of only this one instance, guaranteed by the existential presence of just this object. It is the meaningless meaning that is instituted through the terms of the index."¹³⁵

While there is much to make of the implications of the empty sign, her description reveals a pressing temporality of the readymade. As in Barthes' assessment of photography, in Krauss's use the readymade object is an index that registers in the present that something happened in the past. Specifically, the presence of the object indicates that something was *made* in the past –hence its status as (al)readymade. Helen Molesworth refers to this as a “delay.”¹³⁶

In *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, there is no delay and no indexing. The immaterial results are produced in real-time in front of the viewer. The results mean

¹³⁵ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 78.

¹³⁶ Helen Molesworth, “Work Avoidance,” 50.

different things, but are not indexes of another moment or of production distant in time and space. Logically, this simultaneity and visual access presses the question of how things witnessed as the same could be treated differently. If *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* reveals the simultaneity of discourses rather than the past production of value or objects, politically, this puts pressure on the naturalization and invisibility of discourse that hides its contingency. Foucault notes the political goal of the control of discourse requires obscuring the causal features (“awesome materiality”) of discourse. “I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality.”¹³⁷

Part of the utility of using the model of discourse is that it explains how maintenance can be so ubiquitous without being recognized as an essential form of work. The discourse of maintenance under productivism requires that we *not see* maintenance work despite its presence. One can imagine a viewer considering the mummy in the case used in *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object* never recognizing the transparent surface between herself and the mummy at all. Certainly she would be unaware of the many cleanings that the janitor must undertake to keep the mummy itself visible. The invisibility of maintenance work and maintenance workers is one consequence of the regulatory function of discourse.

¹³⁷ Michel Foucault, “Orders of Discourse,” *Social Science Information* 10, no. 2 (1971), 8. This is a lecture from 1971 published subsequently.

More than one discourse overlaps for the construction of value in *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*. It could be seen as the intersection of the discourse of specialization that elevates the work of the conservator with the discourse of art that orders the category of aesthetic products as distinct from other kinds of objects with recognized utility in daily life or even with the discourse of the body that compels the ongoing removal of markers of decay.

Foucault's use of the term "discourse" is usefully messy, crossing levels and plural forms. In a 1971 lecture, he reflected on his various usage, "treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, and sometimes as an individualizable group of statements and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements"¹³⁸. Like maintenance, it is necessary to understand the sphere of statements and discourse as a rather complicated mass of practices, instances, values and regulations with varied applications in daily life.

Ukeles is particularly attentive to subversive uses of discourse. Much like her punning and half-joke sarcasm of her very real performance proposals, the complexity of her work is often in its ability to do something while meaning several (even contradictory) things at once. In this way, Willis and Corrigan's definition of cultural forms adeptly describes maintenance:

Cultural forms are comprised of specific, complex, definite relations of symbolic systems embedded in social relationships and activity. Such symbolic systems could be described as "discourses" but they must always be thought in variable combination variable concrete situations with respect to particular relationships. . . . It is implicit in forms of life and concrete practices combining and "profanely" using many "discourses" no matter if - jumped out and abstracted from context - each particular

¹³⁸ Foucault, *Archaeology*, 2.

"discourse" is "structured in dominance." What we must add to the perspective of the internal logic of the "discourse" is some notion of how class struggle, through agents who are not purely "spoken," can push its way into the logic of those discourses and reposition, creatively explore, new contexts for them - especially in relation to each other.¹³⁹

Their revision gets at the subaltern elements of Ukeles' use of discourse. Willis and Corrigan allow for agentive and creative counter-use of institutional discourse. This is precisely how Ukeles uses discourse in her immaterial readymades.

The model of cultural forms as described by Raymond Williams also attends to Ukeles' own conception of Maintenance Art as an immaterial practice. Ultimately, Ukeles sees her progression from "performing as testing and celebrating to ultimately the consciousness producing medium of relationships."¹⁴⁰ In his pivotal 1977 text, *Marxism and Literature*, Williams observes: "form is invariably a relationship" (187) - not the "passive disposition of material elements," but the "activation of specific relations, between men and men and between men and things" (90).¹⁴¹ The cultural form of maintenance, in this sense, is exactly what Ukeles wants to animate. From the consciousness-raising questions she proposes to ask viewers in "CARE," and the questionnaires that manifest them, to the discursive regulation of immaterial labor in *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, or the empowering of maintenance workers

¹³⁹ Paul Willis and Philip Corrigan. "Orders of Experience: the Differences of Working Class Cultural Forms," *Social Text* (1983): 85-103.

¹⁴⁰ Ukeles. *Thesis*.

¹⁴¹ Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 187, 90.

to claim their work as either work or art, Ukeles aims to “flush up to consciousness” the many relations between people and maintenance.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Ukeles, *Manifesto*.

Conclusion: Social Systems

In this thesis I have tried to outline several new ways of thinking with and through Mierle Laderman Ukeles' theory of Maintenance. In part, I aimed to demonstrate a way of working with an artist' practice that mines her work for what it can mean and offer beyond the scope of an individual practice. Calling Ukeles' discussion of maintenance as "subaltern feminist economic theory" assumes that her work within it can be applied in other contexts, including those outside the presumed boundaries of art. At the same time, I have paid heed to Ukeles' own thought and practice rather than bending it to fit more familiar models. To this end, this thesis marks the beginning of an ongoing methodological project that aims to resituate an anarchist and feminist approach to value within the production of art.¹⁴³

My discussion of the class of maintenance worker as a coalition aims to continue Ukeles' feminist approach that acknowledges and builds from the unavoidable particularity of personal experience. One of the more heartening lessons I take from Ukeles is the way she employs the personal to open up possibilities within feminism rather than shut down the multiplicity of experience for a favored model or concern.

An upshot of this project for my ongoing research is my working out of a usefully less orthodox way of doing art historical thinking on conceptualism. I follow Mari Carmen Ramirez, Luis Camnitzer, and others' use of conceptualism as an umbrella term

¹⁴³ I am eager to consider the impossibility of the vanguard model for art and cultural forms that oppose hegemony. In a way that I did not anticipate, this concern bridges earlier work I did in my BA thesis on the construction of vanguards in Zurich Dada and Black Mask, New York-based anarchist art collective in the 1960s, and my current research.

able to hold the many varieties and approaches that artists have adopted to shift the position of the art object. Ramirez reorients the definition of conceptualism away from visible traits and tendencies or a geographically and temporally bound group. Instead she considered intent and impact.

For this reason, conceptualism cannot be seen as a style or movement. It is, rather, a strategy of antidiscourses whose evasive tactics call into question both the fetishization of art and its systems of production and distribution in late capitalist society.¹⁴⁴

Particularly important in this definition is the expectation that conceptualism address the systems of value that structure how we live. In Ukeles' Maintenance Art the economic aim is reversing the devaluing of maintenance work and those associated with it. The centralization of politics does not contradict Lucy Lippard's observations of dematerialization as *form* even if her positioning of politics within the movement privileges certain artists, cities, and claims. "Conceptual art, for me, means in with work in which the idea is paramount and the material is secondary, likely ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or 'dematerialized'"¹⁴⁵

Ramirez coins the term "Ideological Conceptualism" to reference and inscribe into the genre itself the political aims and content of Latin American conceptualisms. In particular, she disregards the anxiety of commodity status so common in North American narratives of conceptual art vis-à-vis Lippard and LeWitt.

¹⁴⁴ Mari Carmen Ramirez in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, edited by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, (New York: Queens Museum, 1999), 53.

¹⁴⁵ Lippard, "Escape Attempts," vii.

Instead of serving as vehicles to dissect the commodification of art under capitalism, the fundamental propositions of Conceptual art became elements of a strategy for exposing the limits of art and life under conditions of marginalization and, in some cases, repression.”¹⁴⁶

Maintenance Art serves to reveal the invisible social conditions that structure our daily lives and the institutional beneficiaries of these orders as and through conceptualism. In his influential essay from 1968, “System Esthetics,” Jack Burnham figures the importance of the immateriality of art’s meaning. “The specific function of modern didactic art has been to show that art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and between people and the components of their environment.”¹⁴⁷ These relations, like the cultural forms that Ukeles reveals, are systems.

As I hope I have demonstrated, considering Ukeles’ art at all engages Maintenance as a form of conceptualist art making and a viable economic theory. In tracing back the emergence of Maintenance Art to its first publication in 1971, I was surprised to find out that it originated as systems art. In fact, the first time the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* was written about or published was as a defining example of systems art in a 1971 essay in *Artforum* by Jack Burnham. Ukeles’ complex and anti-teleological approach to the overarching systems of labor, value, and meaning epitomized the kind of art making Burnham was interested in. Ukeles’ work demonstrated

¹⁴⁶ Mari Carmen Ramirez “Blue Print Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 554.

¹⁴⁷ Jack Burnham, “Systems Esthetics,” *Artforum* 7, no. 1 (1968): 30-35.

Burnham's theories so closely that Lucy Lippard felt compelled to ask her on the phone in 1971 "Are you real, or did Jack Burnham invent you for his article?"¹⁴⁸

Burnham observed that "we are now in transition from an *object-oriented* culture to a *systems-oriented* culture. Here change emanates, not from *things*, but from the *way things are done*."¹⁴⁹ The immaterial readymade as developed by Ukeles attends directly to that shift while also drawing out the invisible yields of labor historically done by women. Or, to put it another way, Ukeles extended the readymade to include tasks that reflected the shift from a production culture to a service economy. It simultaneously highlighted the persistent economic invisibility of women's service labor that the production economy always depended on. The immaterial readymade allows an artist to use the critique inherent in the readymade to consider the things produced (con)currently –devalued service labor.

Frequently, the subaltern and systemic elements of Ukeles' theory get flattened out in favor of a teleological narrative where Ukeles must leave behind her personal experience before ascending to the level of systems critique. What this amounts to is the disregard for the complicated and inconvenient feminist intervention that would take the

¹⁴⁸ Mierle Laderman Ukeles, interview by Alexandra Schwartz in *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows, 1969-74*, (London, New York: Afterall, 2012) 280. Despite Lippard's assertion that Ukeles' ideas fit perfectly within Burnham's framework, none of the scholarly literature on her considers her work as systems art. This seems especially strange given that nearly every scholarly or critical text on Ukeles cites that the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* was first published by Burnham in *Artforum*. What is commonly left out is that Burnham did not arrange to publish her entire manifesto on its own. He excerpted the manifesto nearly in its entirety *within* his article as a prime example of both an anti-progressive avant-garde and systems art. Given the primacy of feminism and conceptualism within the literature on Ukeles, the way maintenance first appears publicly seems an unexpected omission in the discourse.

¹⁴⁹ Burnham, "Systems," 31.

social claims made in Maintenance Art —whether in the home or in the garbage dump— as having weight in the ‘real’ world.

Take, for example, Robert Morgan’s essay, where he initially limits Ukeles to the domestic space in which her first maintenance artworks appear—and only those early works. He inaccurately assumes that Ukeles’ critique means she is “rejecting the standard ‘housewife’ ideal” as if dressing up domestic labor in a bohemian garb would have in any way addressed the complex social and economic views she was naming.¹⁵⁰ Like other critics he reduces Ukeles’ analysis to be about only one particular kind of worker, the housewife. He further shrinks her analysis to be just *her* status as a housewife. “By accepting the reality of *her situation* as necessary to maintain the household, she discovered the reality of maintenance as a means to the survival of personal freedom, art, and all other social institutions.”¹⁵¹ He mistakes her savvy rhetorical use of personal experience in her analysis for the unavoidable limit of her thought that can index the social at best.

It is as if Morgan cannot consider the ways that housewives are inside of systems, parts of systems, necessary to systems larger than the cycles of personal consumption or that feminism and feminist work does not limit itself the status of housewives. He also misses the essential point of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto*: all Maintenance is a part of a system, including the work of lone women behind closed doors in cul-de-sacs.

Though I am not able to undertake the task in this thesis, by restoring her place in the lineage of systems art I gesture toward a currently neglected social and political

¹⁵⁰ Morgan, *Art Into Ideas*, 178

¹⁵¹ Morgan, *Art Into Ideas*, 179.

thread in the historicization of systems art.¹⁵² Often, it has been historicized as a technophilic tendency and blind love of information and its appearances. I do not mean to suggest that the materiality of early systems art is unimportant. Rather, I want to restore the ways that systems art makes visible the social construction of meaning and thus evinces the possibility of alternative structures.

In her description of *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* to the curators of “ART ⇔ WORLD” Ukeles pits the human and the abstract grid without giving up the scientific or objective quality of “information”:

A paper grid spread across a 14’ wall (between the windows –space indicated for me by Mimi Roberts). On the grid one will see a daily accumulation of action photos of maintenance workers making either “Maintenance Work” or “Maintenance Art” (indicated by the sticker attached), growing each day until the wall is covered with human information which will obliterate the abstract conceptual grid. May end up having many layers of photos. (Or photos may start crawling onto the ceiling and floor).

In her envisioning of this collaboration between herself and 300 janitors, Ukeles proposes to break apart the grid by filling it with images of people doing maintenance. The pictures of their work and their art spill over the bounds of the space designated for Ukeles’ display. The grid itself becomes overwhelmed by “human information” until it cannot hold.

Ukeles’ construction of Maintenance Art offers a unique model to see the way that systems art plays out in the field of the social. Because her work is so radically immaterial, the way that all meaning derives from “relations between people and between

¹⁵² Eve Meltzer’s new book, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn*, is a welcome intervention.

people and the components of their environment” (to borrow from Burnham) is put on display through feedback loops that dramatize the process for the viewer.¹⁵³ Ukeles’ efforts towards the “ultimately the consciousness producing medium of relationships”¹⁵⁴ present a useful opportunity to understand how meaning turns into praxis which produces material and lived consequences. Foregrounding her work as a kind of systems art presents a line of inquiry that would bring out the social elements that Burnham originally intended while also centralizing feminist utilization of the mechanisms and tools of systems.

¹⁵³ Burnham, “Systems,” 33.

¹⁵⁴ Ukeles, *Thesis*.

Figures

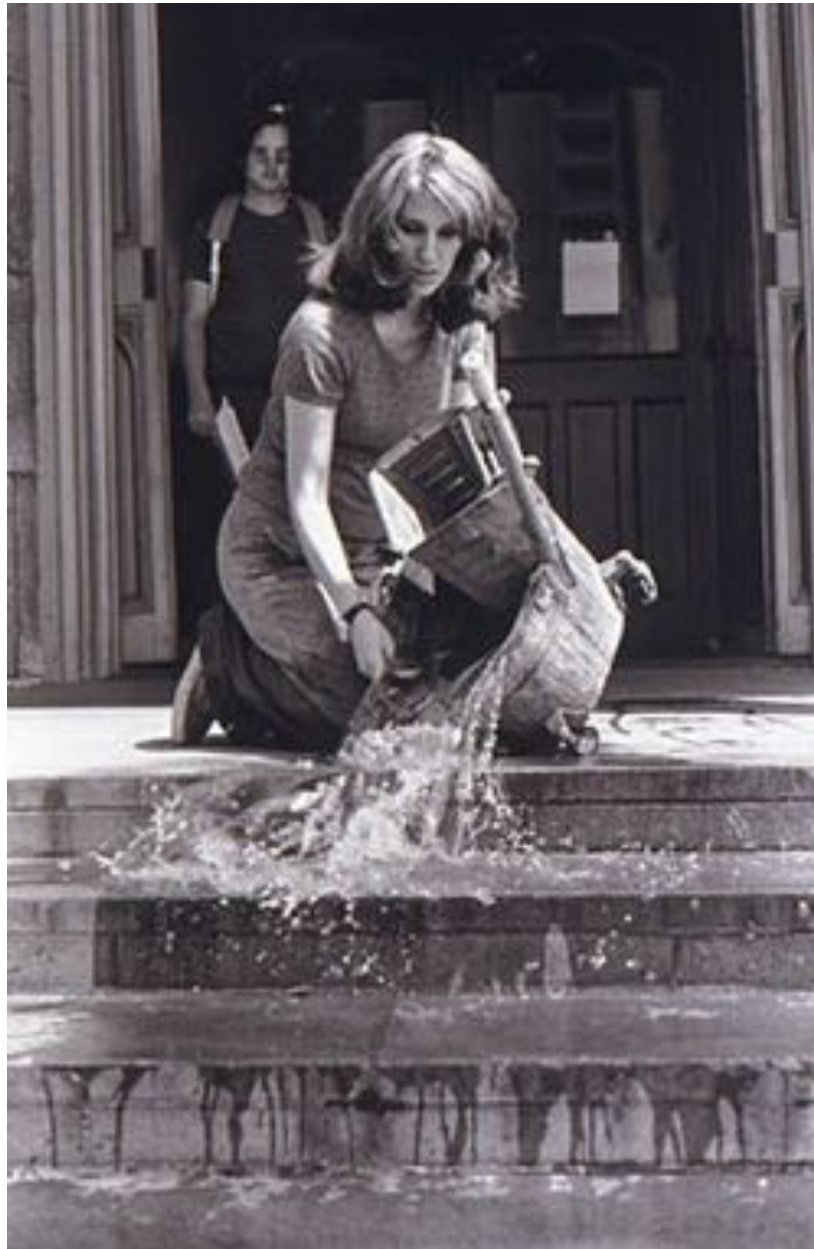


Figure i.1 Unknown photographer. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Photograph documenting the performance *Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside* (1973). Wadsworth Atheneum.



Figure i.2 Unknown photographer. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Fall Time Variation II: The Trees Are Having Their Period/Time Slice* (1973). Vassar College.



Figure i.3. Unknown photographer. Mierle Laderman Ukeles with Department of Sanitation workers in sanitation station as part of *Touch Sanitation*.



Figure i.4. Unknown photographer. Mierle Laderman Ukeles with Department of Sanitation worker in Fresh Kills landfill as part of *Touch Sanitation*.



Figure 1.1. Unknown photographer. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Photograph of the performance *Maintenance Art Interviews*, 1972. A.I.R. Gallery. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles' personal archive.

PROFILE - Circle at least 10
SIMPLE BREAKDOWN OF MAINTENANCE TASKS

<p>I. MAINTAINING OBJECTS/ Person:Property, Abstractions, Systems</p> <p>A. Cleaning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. dusting 2. sweeping 3. washing 4. polishing 5. throwing out 6. Other: _____ <p>B. Repairing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fixing 2. replacing 3. re-ordering 4. Other: _____ <p>C. Protecting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. watching 2. guarding 3. defending 4. policing 5. extinguishing 6. preventing 7. Other: _____ <p>D. Storing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. finding 2. preparing 3. organizing 4. containing 5. categorizing 6. filing 7. Other: _____ <p>E. Disposing wastes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. throwing out 2. collecting 3. decontaminating 4. re-cycling 5. Other: _____ 	<p>II. MAINTAINING LIFE/ Person:Person(s), Beings, Environments, Institutions</p> <p>A. Cleaning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self 2. other independent person(s) 3. other dependent person(s) 4. living things 5. Other: _____ <p>B. Repairing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self 2. other independent person(s) 3. other dependent person(s) 4. living things 5. Other: _____ <p>C. Protecting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self 2. other independent person(s) 3. other dependent person(s) 4. living things 5. Other: _____ <p>D. Preserving</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self 2. other independent person(s) 3. other dependent person(s) 4. living things 5. Other: _____ <p>E. Disposing of wastes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. self 2. other independent person(s) 3. other dependent person(s) 4. living things 5. Other: _____ <p>Other: _____</p>
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Figure 1.2. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. "Profile" in *Maintenance Art Questionnaire 1973-1976*. Reprinted in *Gnome Baker*. From the collection of Robert Schweitzer.

SPECIAL MAINTENANCE ART QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ARTISTS

1. Do you consider yourself to be avant garde?
2. What demands do you place on yourself to progress, make new, move into the unknown in your work?
3. Do these demands proscribe certain activities for you in your work?
4. Do you think a commitment for the new limits you or frees you?
5. What is the relationship between your work and your freedom?
6. How much of your time do you spend on maintenance in your art?
7. Is your art free of maintenance?
8. Does maintenance (activities, processes) affect your esthetic?

QUESTIONS - continued

9. Does maintenance infect your art/art-making? contradict your art-making?
10. Is there a possible esthetic sunken into maintenance as well?

THANK YOU.

Figure 1.3. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. "Special Maintenance Art Questionnaire for Artists" from *Maintenance Art Questionnaire 1973-1976*. Reprinted in *Gnome Baker*. From the collection of Robert Schweitzer.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MAINTENANCE TASKS

1. What is your main job(s)?
2. How much of your time do you spend on maintenance tasks?
3. How do you feel about doing them?
4. How do you feel about other people doing them for you?
5. What do you think would happen if you didn't do them?
6. What would happen to you if you didn't do them?
7. How do you feel about repetition?
8. Is there any inherent value in doing maintenance?
9. Are some maintenance tasks more important than others? Is there a hierarchy of values in maintenance?

QUESTIONS - continued

10. Does the energy used on maintenance affect how you spend time on development (non-maintenance) -- free you, drain you, dull you?
11. Do you get involved in doing maintenance well -- "beautifully"; is there an esthetic to maintenance?
12. What is the relationship in your life between maintenance and freedom?

Figure 1.4. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. "Questions About Maintenance Tasks" from *Maintenance Art Questionnaire 1973-1976*. Reprinted in *Gnome Baker*. From the collection of Robert Schweitzer.



Figure 1.5. Unknown photographer. Photograph of viewer interacting with Hans Haacke's *MOMA POLL*, 1970.

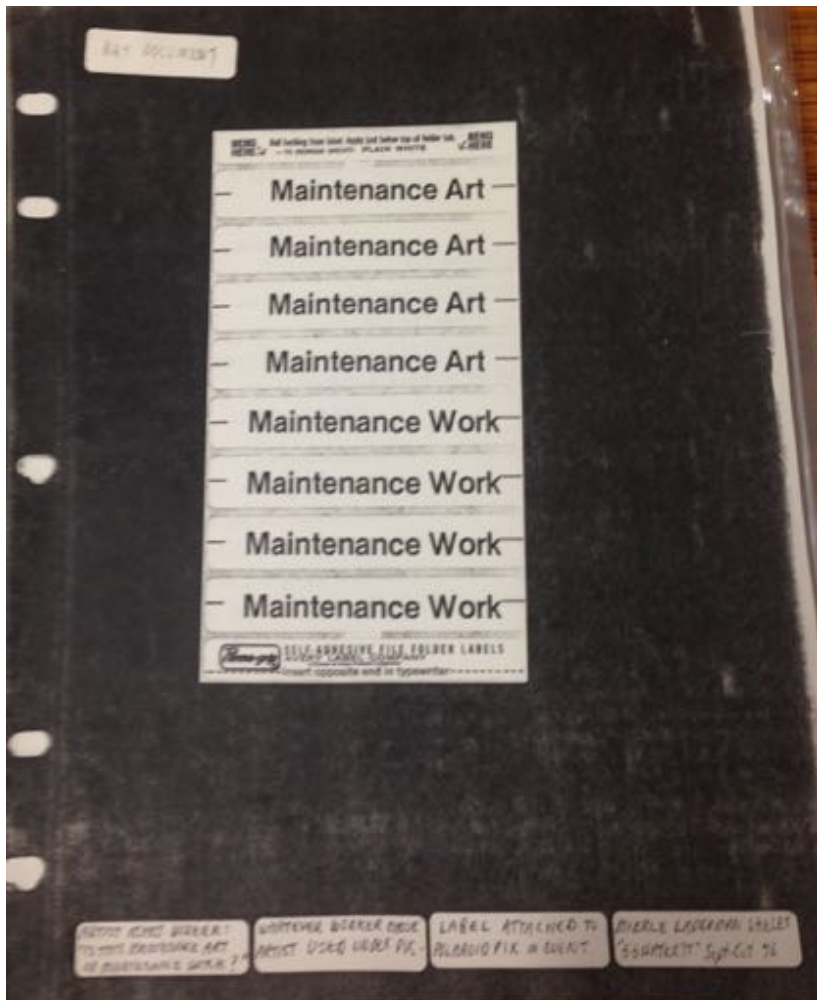


Figure 1.6. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Unused labels with instructions from the performance *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Everyday*, 1974. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles' personal archive.

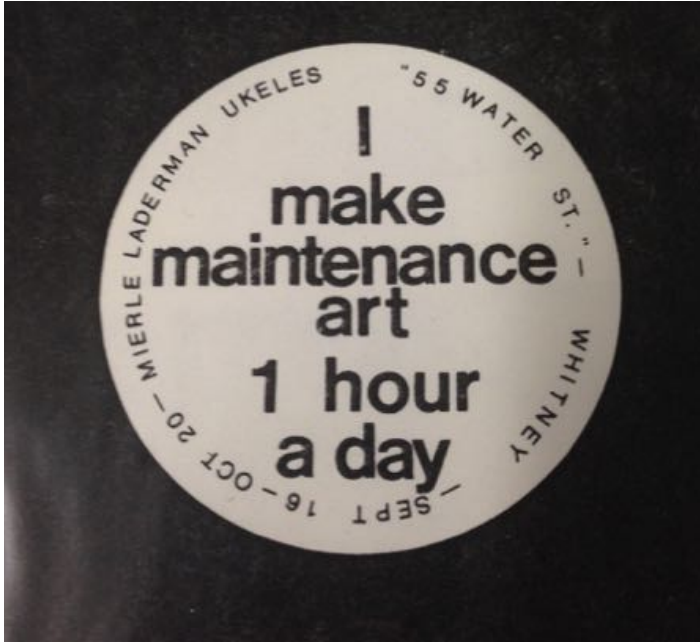


Figure 1.7. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Xerox of the button distributed to maintenance workers as part of the performance *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Everyday*, 1974. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles' personal archive.



Figure 1.8. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Photograph of the display of polaroids from the performance *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, 1974. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles' personal archive. Caption reads: "Bruno –best process artist ever."

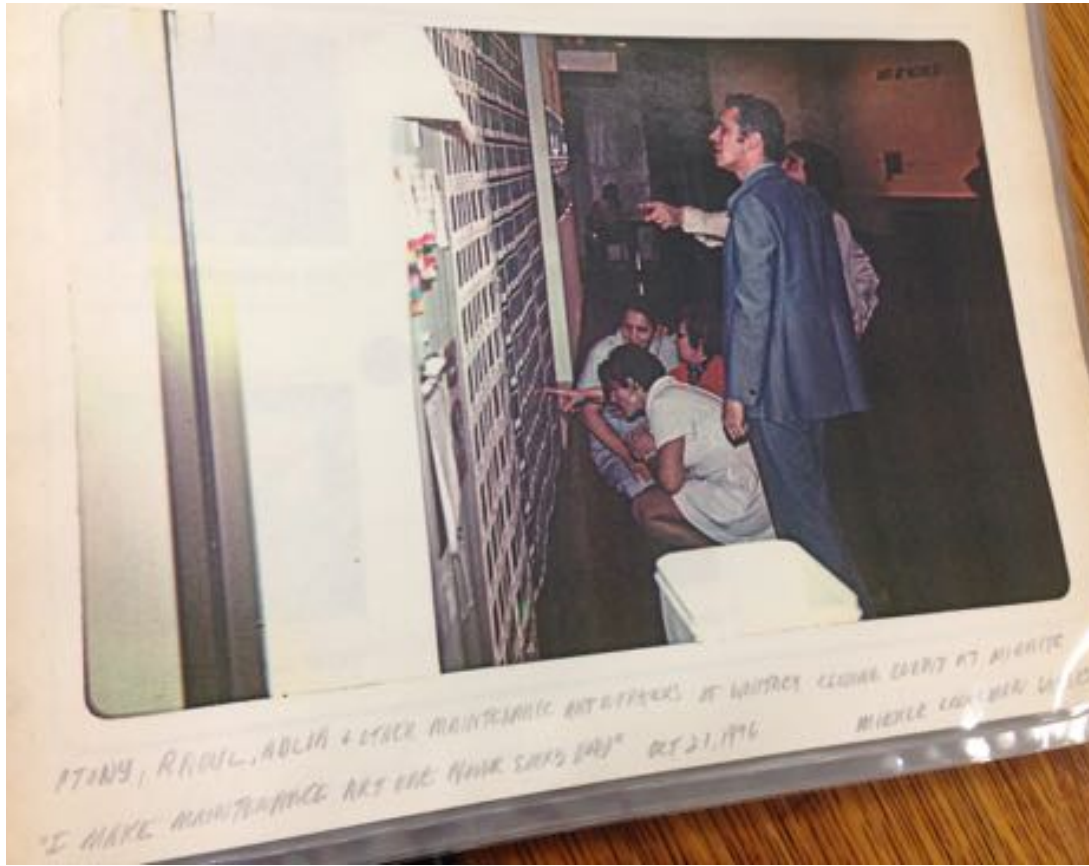


Figure 1.9. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Photograph of the display of polaroids from the performance *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, 1974. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles' personal archive. Caption reads: "Tony, Raoul, Adlia, and other Maintenance Art Workers"



Figure 1.10. Photograph of Mierle Laderman Ukeles installing photographs of maintenance work and maintenance art from the performance *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Everyday*, 1974, in the exhibition “ART ⇔ WORLD”. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ personal archive.



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Figure 1.11. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Photograph of the information display featuring the Maintenance Art Manifesto, examples of labels, labor reports completed by worker and a button, among other documentary ephemera as part of the performance *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Everyday*, 1974. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles' personal archive.

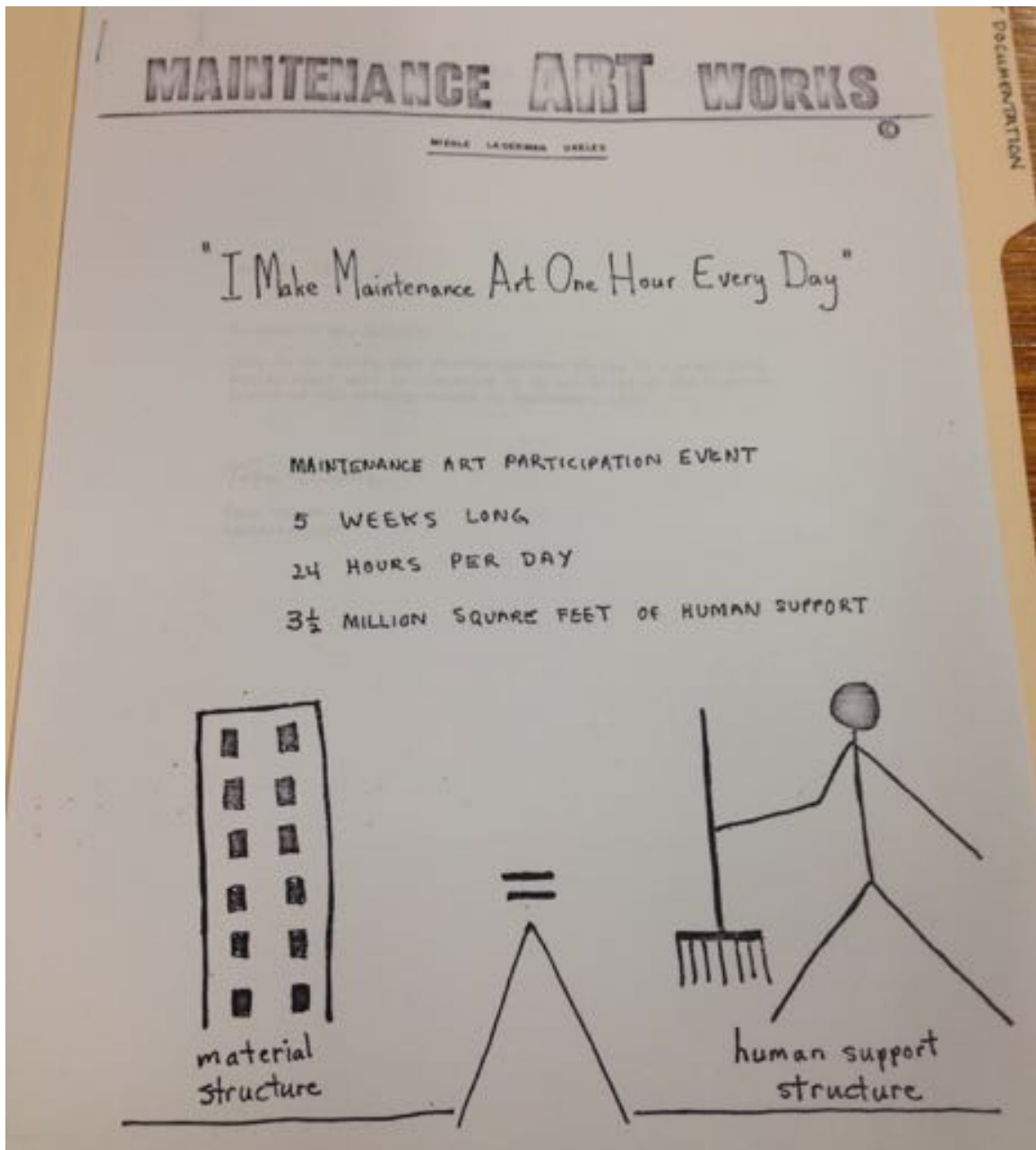


Figure 1.12. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Sketch illustrating the balance between the “material structure” of 55 Water Street and the Maintenance/ “human support structure.” For *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, 1974. From Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ personal archive.



Figure 2.1 Marcel Duchamp. *In Advance of the Broken Arm*. (1915/1964). Wood and galvanized-iron snow shovel, 52" (132 cm) high. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 2.2. Mel Bochner. Binder from the exhibition, “Working drawings and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art” at Visual Arts Gallery, School of Visual Arts, New York, December 2 – December 23, 1966.



Figure 2.3. Unknown photographer. Mel Bochner in the exhibition. “Working drawings and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art” at Visual Arts Gallery, School of Visual Arts, New York, December 2 – December 23, 1966.

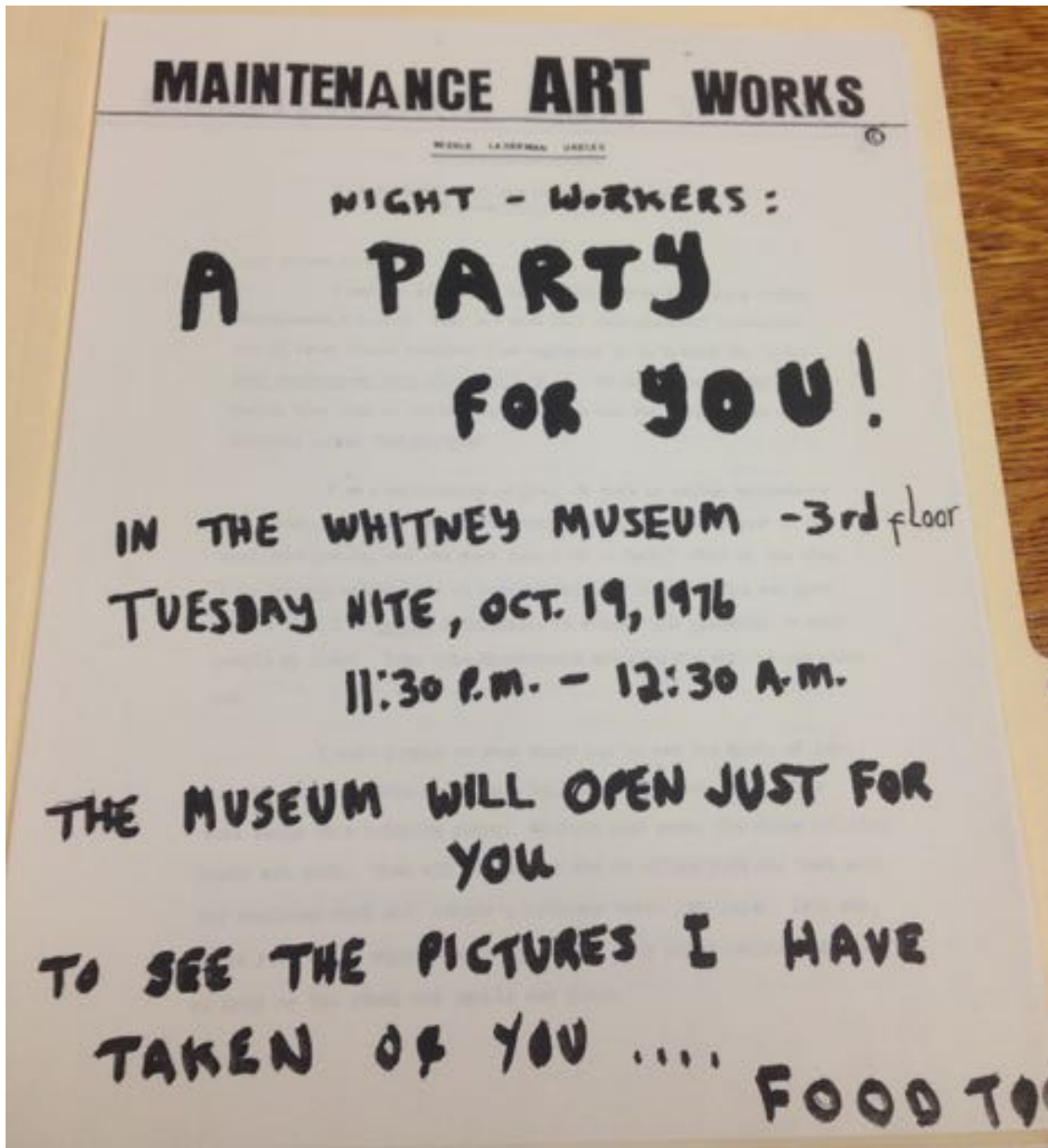


Figure 2.4. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Invitation to the night shift workers at 55 Water Street, 1974. From Ukeles' personal archive.



Figure 2.5. Photograph of the party for the night shift workers. Ukeles center. 1974. From Ukeles' personal archive.



Figure 2.6. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.7. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.8. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.9. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.10. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Gallery.



Figure 2.11. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.12 Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.13. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.14. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Documentation of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

CONSERVATION REPORT FORM

Object: *Glass Case*
 Owner: *Mr. & Mrs. The Ukeles*
 Acq. No.: *None available*
 Artist:
 Date Acquired: *7/20/73*
 Place Acquired: *Wideman Building*
 Provenance: *as the Ukeles' gift*
 Period or Date:
 Signature: *None*
 Medium: *Ident. Painting*
 Frame: *wood*
 Primary Support:
 Secondary Support:
 Backing Material:
 Varnish:
 Dimensions: *7 1/2" (H) x 25 1/2" (W) x 1 1/2" (D)*
 Previous Treatments: *None*
 X-Ray Taken: *None*
 Photos Taken: *Y.V. []*
U.V. []
I.R. []

Surface Condition:

*Dirty. Requires superficial
 cleaning*

Damage:

None

Recommendations:

*Superficial cleaning with mild
 and soft cloth.*

*S.P. 78. Christopher F.
 Conservator*

Figure 2.15. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Conservation Report completed as part of the performance *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object © 1973

Museum Maintenance Rules: only the conservator is empowered to touch the art object, handle it, clean it.

1. Selection of the Art Object in the Museum:

Mummy (female figure) in glass case.



2. Activity: 3 people → same task → Museum → 3 powers

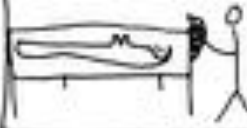
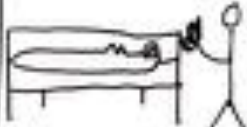

Activity	Person	Task	Result
	Maintenance Person	Clean the glass mummy case. (as usual)	A clean glass mummy case
	Mierle Laderman Ukeles Maintenance Artist	Clean the glass mummy case: ("dust painting"). (Stamp glass case as Original Maintenance Art) (Maintenance Person can no longer touch it)	A Maintenance Art Work
	Museum Conservator	Perform conservation condition examination: Art Work is "Dusty." Requires superficial cleaning. Clean the glass mummy case	A clean Maintenance Art Work

Figure 2.16. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Chart for *Transfer: the Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Figure 2.17. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. *Maintenance Art Work Original Stamp and Cloth*, 1969/1974. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

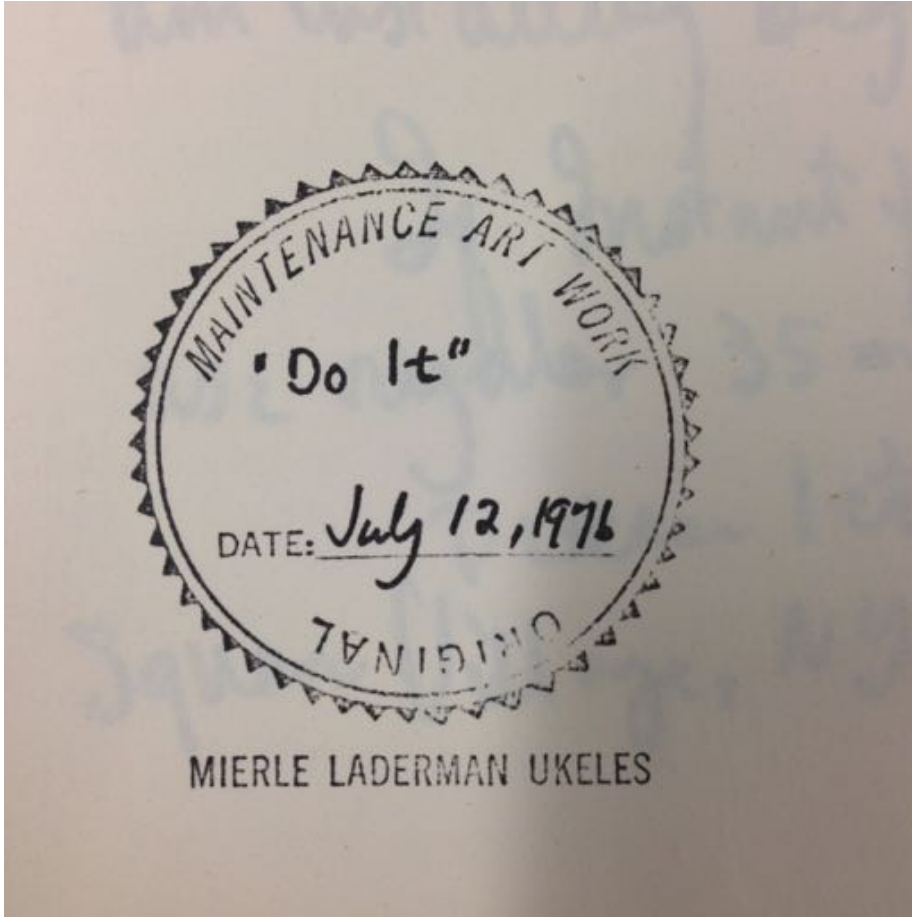


Figure 2.18. Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Applied stamp. From the archive of Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

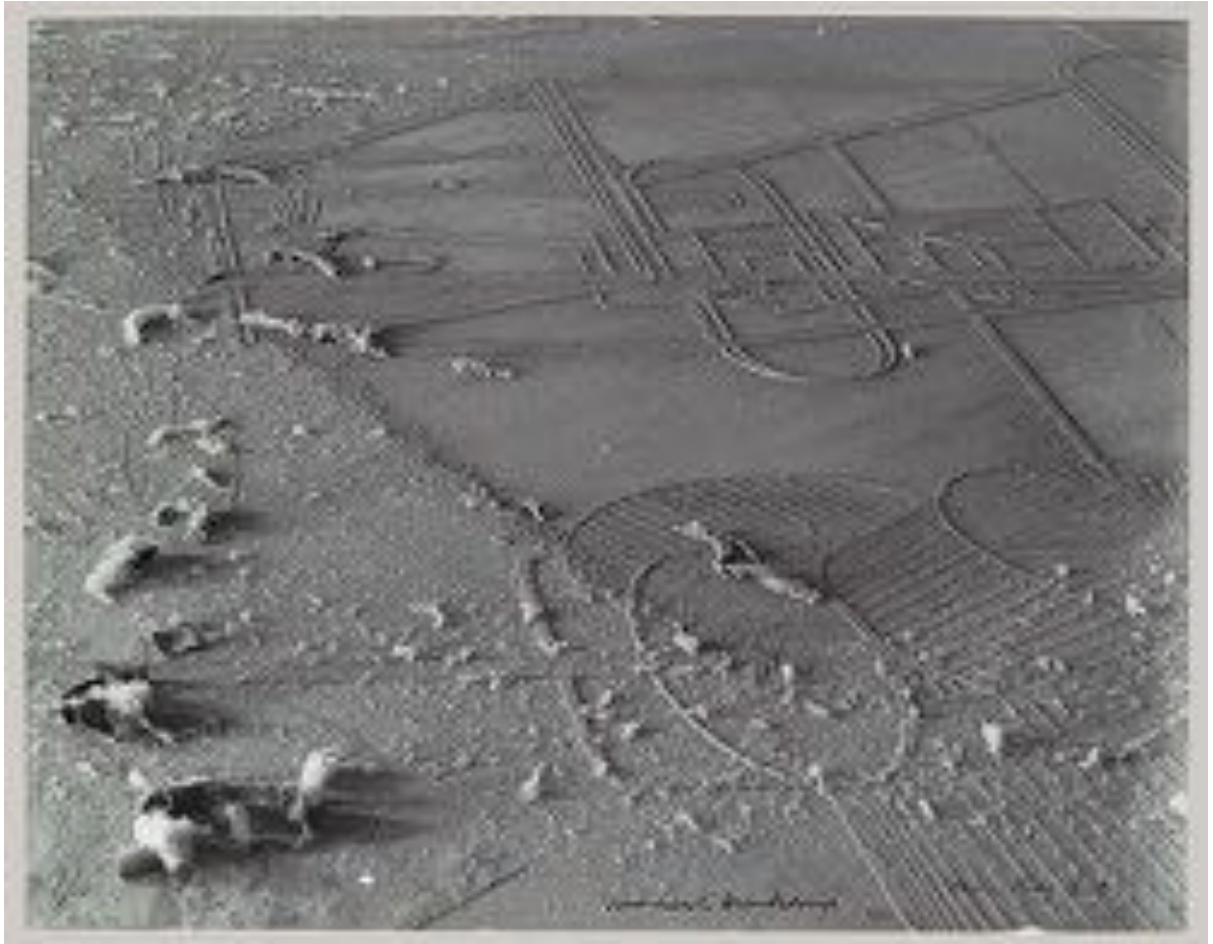


Figure 2.19. Man Ray. *Dust Breeding*, 1920, printed ca. 1967. Gelatin silver print; 9 7/16 x 12 in. (23.9 x 30.4 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 2.20. Marcel Duchamp. *The Fountain*, 1917, replica 1964. Porcelain. Tate Museum, London.

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