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View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

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Considering the literature on feminist militancy and "domestic labor" of the late 1960s and early 70s from the perspective of Western visual culture, the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles is undoubtedly a central figure. Surprisingly, however, her works has rarely been read through the lense of the international Wages for Housework movement. This essay proposes to read Ukeles' cultural activism and work through the writing and political organizing of Silvia Federici, who also distanced herself from previously dominant and at times sectarian feminisms to articulate a pointedly (post-)autonomist feminism as a political project. The author is trying to grsp and describe the truly radical and imperative position that Ukeles activated, and continues to "maintain."

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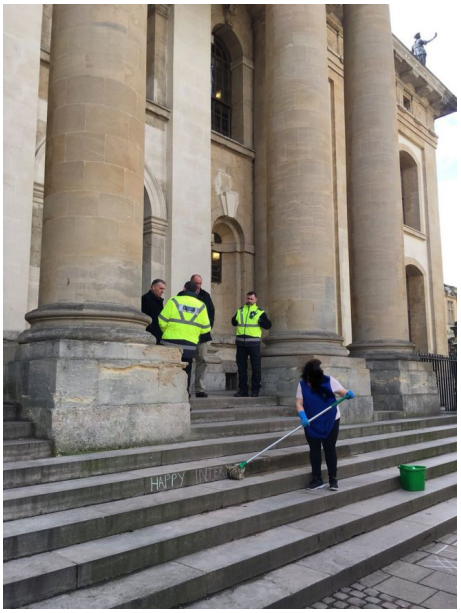
Mierle Laderman Ukeles' Maintenance and/as (Art) Work

Preface

> It's one of the funny things about maintenance, it's almost impossible to see.
>
> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 2008

On International Women's Day (IWD), an aptly despondent image began to circulate on social media. Pictured is a low-wage woman maintenance worker cleaning the "detritus" of (liberal) feminist protest at the behest of Oxford University administrators – or more likely, as is true for most universities (and the greater neoliberal Post-Fordist economy), instructed by managers from an outside company contracted to keep the (often immigrant) waged workers without labor protections and benefits.[2] The waste in this case: a chalk graffiti slogan of women's liberation from the historically significant, if already absorbed by liberal institutions, day of organized protest. Posted to Twitter by Dr. Sophie Smith, Oxford professor of political theory, her caption read: "Oxford security makes a woman cleaner scrub out 'Happy International Women's Day' on the Clarendon steps. What an image for #IWD."[3] Oxford was of course quick to apologize and reaffirm its "support" for IWD and those marking the day.[4]



Sanitation worker cleaning the steps of the Claredon Building, Oxford University, March 8, 2018. Photograph: Sophie Smith

Employing a sparse visual economy, the image depicts some of

the many inconsistencies, still subjects of debate, of various feminist programs from the 1970s, including strategies of organizing for the (monetary) valorization of "women's work" or in addressing the broader notion of "social reproduction." The latter term has taken on diverse meanings in feminist critiques of gendered (and racialized) capitalism, and will be discussed at greater length below.

Of course, the photo is also indicative of the inconsistencies of certain, dominantly white, heteronormative, second-wave feminist responses to the "international women's question," as it was posed in the past. A prominent critique of this conception of "domestic labor" was mounted by contemporaneous radical feminist thinkers such as Angela Davis and Hazel Carby, in the legacy of Claudia Jones' much earlier work, to show that many critiques of domesticity and the conception of the "housewife" were specific to white working- and middle-class women. Rada Katsarova's informative essay "Repression and Resistance on the Terrain of Social Reproduction: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Openings," for example, summarizes Davis' critique: "Black women's labor was mobilized in the reproductive realm as well as in the manufacturing and service industries long before discourses of the 'double burden' emerged in white feminist thought."[5] In much feminist discourse today, it is better acknowledged that a large percentage of care, reproductive, and maintenance labor in the Global North is undertaken by women of color, many of them migrants in highly precarious socio-economic positions.

Turning to this image of the Oxford sanitation worker – disseminated as photographic evidence to make her labor visible – the personal is clearly political, while the private is certainly public. However, the non-intimate documentation is also impersonal, commanding, and even somewhat advantageous given its subsequent media attention.[6] This wasn't a "gaffe," as per *The Guardian*'s swift recounting of the event;

rather, things were working exactly as they have been organized – press and imminent social media criticism of Dr. Smith's post included. The devalorization of "women's work" (not necessarily a withholding of wages, but perhaps alienation via the wage contract itself), given its gendered *and* classed *and* racialized compartmentalization, is kept as such in order to maintain the illusionistically "free" veneer of neoliberal wage agreements clean, and to render the social reproduction necessary for the continuation of surplus production obscured under layers of waste. The question then: how can an image properly engage this series of problematics?[7]

One potential example is the powerful slogan mounted by protesting students at the opening of the Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art in September 2018, which illustrates the struggles referenced here with elegant economy: "Who keeps the cube white?" they asked.[8] The protests were organized outside the inaugural exhibition of work by Mika Rottenberg, as a call to bring the sanitation workers of the art center in-house, rather than subcontracting maintenance labor. The university was quick, unsurprisingly, to lend an air of support to the protestors – citing the history of political activism and agitation by its students, they conceded to "consider" the demands. More interesting than this recuperation of protest, however, is how the action was discussed in reviews of the exhibition itself – demonstrating mainstream art criticism's generalized inability to engage with political action undertaken through visual culture. In the *Guardian*'s take, for example, the topic is only broached in the last paragraph of their review of Rottenberg's exhibition, to

Photograph of an action by Justice for Cleaners-Goldsmiths at the inaugural exhibition of the Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), September 6, 2018. Courtesy Justice for Cleaners-Goldsmiths

quickly mention that she had written a statement (left unquoted) of support.[9] The reviewer employs a pre-eminent art-historical methodology, formulating a juxtaposition between the exhibition on one side, and the staged performativity of the protest on the other. This, quite directly, turns the politics of the action ("the vuvuzelas and loud music" included) into the choreography of a politicized art performance – a breakdown of political aesthetics for the sake of the aestheticization of politics, we might say, echoing Walter Benjamin's famous distinction. While this is nothing new, of course, a pertinent question here, of protest, the university, an art center, and an artist, would be: why not question waged work itself? How might we make labor *visible* in visual culture, without propping up the way labor value is itself extracted, promulgated, mythologized, and reproduced at the behest of neoliberalism? In the words of Kathi Weeks: "How might we expose the fundamental structures and dominant values of work – including its temporalities, socialities, hierarchies, and subjectivities – as pressing political phenomena? [...] How might we conceive the content and parameters of our obligations to one another outside the currency of work?"[10]

Introduction. Wages for (and Against) Housework

> What I am talking about is a new revolution in the labor movement [...] questioning the meaning of "work" altogether.
> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, letter to Lucy Lippard, 1981

This text engages two wide theoretical conceptions of social reproduction and their use in a specific historical moment, in order to engage with the early work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles from the perspective of visual culture. In doing so, I intend to demonstrate that her practice isolates a model of art working that can account for both a feminist and post-work critique of the production of gendered and invisible subjectivities in the very

site of work itself. To summarize a foundational assumption in the cogent arguments in (autonomist and Foucauldian) feminist discourse of the last few decades, which this essay will center around: while "domestic labor" is performed inside and outside the home, it is nonetheless rendered invisible and must be reified, potentially through, or *against*, an abstraction such as the wage. Though "social reproduction" is a crucial component of productive forces and labor power, and for the accumulation of capital (if we allow for the time being a classical Marxian distinction between productive and reproductive forces), its "devaluation" is written into the fine print of most social contracts. The assumed labor/sex agreement of the marriage contract is one especially clear and ubiquitous example of the not-so-invisible ink of subjugation in domesticity.[11] Of the many different definitions of "social reproduction" employed, we can consider the breakthrough work by a specific contingent of 1970s Euro-American feminists, particularly the International Wages for Housework Campaign, who, in Katsarova's well-worded summary:

> identified social reproduction as a field of productive, generative activity [...] showing how patriarchal social organization was a structural element in capitalist exploitation, and further, how the history of working class struggle had effectively mirrored and reproduced patriarchal relations and gender norms under capitalism.[12]

As briefly mentioned, branches of feminist theory concerned with "domestic labor" that reinforced the separation of productive and reproductive forces were not without their limitations. Katsarova is right to point out much of the literature's tendency to consider an essentialized, heteronormative, and static body while also overlooking struggles waged by women of color and in anti-colonial contexts.[13] However, as Marina Vishmidt remarks: "'Society' or 'the social' is a projected

imaginary [...] and what actually counts as its reproduction is potentially open-ended and ambiguous."[14] Vishmidt has recently proposed that we consider two distinct conceptions of "social reproduction" that emerged in certain feminist writing of the last five decades: a materialist understanding of gendered, racialized, and often unwaged work on the one hand, and, on the other, the literal reproduction of capital and productive relations, following Louis Althusser's critiques of classical (and later Stalinist) Marxism developed in the years after May 1968. Ukeles' well-known work, when read in the dialectic of social reproduction as sketched by Vishmidt, demonstrates a practice capable of engaging both critiques.

During the years 1965–1977, before entering the Department of Sanitation as an (unsalaried) "artist-in-residence," Ukeles worked in plastics factories, penned her seminal *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, produced plastic sculptures and proposals for major art collaborations with scientists (in the era of projects such as Experiments in Art and Technology, and so on), became aware of feminist artist networks such as WEB (West-East Bag), and began to contemplate the meanings implicit in "development" and "maintenance" – or more precisely: administered economic development and its mitigation (typically via austerity). Importantly, in the late 60s and 70s, she had given birth to three children, and though she had met with other cultural workers active in feminist organizations (most consequently with Lucy Lippard), Ukeles' first "maintenance" works were staged in the home (parallel to claims outside art production that the "home is a factory"). She then shifted the environment of maintenance to the corporate workplace and the museum (equated as such), and by the end of the decade to the municipal structure of public sanitation, a larger civic institution of "maintenance."

I contend that this series of operations – taken from the home to the museum to the municipal – point to a strategy of cultural activism that invites collective participation via a form of

feminism *as* politics, rather than an essentialization or individualization of women on the one hand, or a proposition for a psychoanalytic analysis of gender and maternity as labor on the other; the examples chosen here to remind us of the now-tired debates of the period.[15] Ukeles instead approached the worker, phenomenologically and physically ("in real life"), while becoming one herself.[16] Her practice demonstrates a mode of collectivist, socialist, feminist, and *materially* productive practice, notwithstanding its own partial inscription in the capitalist relations of production and patriarchal considerations of power constituting the culture industry. Rather than invoking immaterial labor to produce information or a generalization of affective labor (in Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's conceptions, for example), or dematerializing the work and site of exhibition (following Lippard, Seth Siegelaub, and so on), Ukeles instead reifies domestic labor by proposing to equate all "affective work" with artistic work, and subsequently enters herself *and* her labor power into low-wage service and municipal systems.[17]

In the Part I of this text, I map out some of the Euro-American art-historical landscape within which Ukeles' practice emerged, and propose a re-reading of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* alongside Silvia Federici's manifesto *Wages Against Housework*, as a way of re-introducing key early works by Ukeles that she performed in the home. Part II discusses Ukeles' explicit critique of value production and class, and the implicit critique that unsettles the reproduction of (gendered) productive relations in the site of (exhibiting art) work, as it shifts from domestic space to the museum. Lastly, in Part III, I apply this argument to her engagement with a corporate managerial structure and her initial entry into the DSNY (the City of New York Department of Sanitation), demonstrating how her model operates on the level of the municipal (in some ways a corollary to the "multitude"). Such a model of art working is shown to be an attempt at answering the problem, in the words of Federici, of

a missing political formation or "political perspective" in the broad socialist feminist position of the late 60s. This is the truly radical and imperative motion that Ukeles activated. In fact, if we turn again to Kathi Weeks' book *The Problem with Work* – and consider that Ukeles' position at the DSNY is unsalaried – we might read her practice as a formidable answer to one of Weeks' introductory questions: "How might feminism contest the marginalization and underestimation of unwaged forms of reproductive labor, without trading on the work ethic's mythologies of work?"[18]

Manifesto in and Against the Home, the Languages of Social Reproduction

MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK
Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, 1969

In the contexts of visual culture and feminist writing of the late 60s and early 70s on "maintenance," Ukeles is undoubtedly a central figure to consider – both for her legendary, and still entirely relevant *Maintenance Art Manifesto: Proposal for an Exhibition, "CARE,"* and her later maintenance art performances, before and after becoming artist-in-residence at the DSNY in 1979.[19] Her five-decade career continues to provide a productive critical model for analyzing certain drawbacks of political agitation and organization towards women's economic and sexual liberation via identitarian representation or with the idealistic potentials in collective bargaining. Both strategies were of course prominently employed at various points by different feminist contingents after May 1968.[20] Ukeles' work has received much more attention (most prominently in the constructed art-historical canons of "institutional critique," "feminist art," and "social practice"),[21] though more importantly it has become a much-needed source of reference for scholarship on social reproduction and "housework" in recent years.[22] To my

knowledge, however, there has been little art-historical scholarship to endeavor a more pronounced reading of her work through the lens of Federici's critique, a key figure whose writing and activism broke with then-dominant Euro-American feminisms (liberal, radical, and socialist, essentialized into the broadest of categories) to articulate a pointedly post-autonomist feminism as a *political* project. I refer specifically here to Federici's legendary manifesto *Wages Against Housework* (1975) and the work of International Wages for Housework (WfH) Campaign. Vishmidt takes up this line of thinking in her work, and keenly remarks: "Ukeles may have spoofed the transcendent universality of the (male) artistic subject by proposing housework as art, but her targets were more extensive and, like the Italian feminists, these targets included revolutionary politics."[23] She refers here to an important line in Ukeles' manifesto, which asks: "The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?" This is a key point to Ukeles' self-reflexive critique of (socialist) feminist projects, running parallel to the critiques levied by WfH. Vishmidt continues:

> Thus, like Wages for Housework, Ukeles sought to valorise the excluded – here the excluded of the institution of art in its broadest sense, there of wage labour and the labour movement. In both cases, this valorisation is also a *de*-valuing, that is, a strategy which also challenged the institutions that orders visibility and invisibility, inclusion and exclusion, as well as the larger system that it represents.[24]

If Ukeles' and Federici's manifestos are positioned as parallel texts across the divide between cultural and political activism (if we choose to accept this distinction), one will notice that the agitation, refusal, and linguistic recoding in both texts are of startlingly similarity, and that in their juxtaposition this distinction seems to evaporate.[25]

Federici's activist work and writing has also gained a much

wider audience in recent years, as WfH is being re-examined by new generations of feminists – particularly in radical queer and trans feminisms – since the publication of *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (1998). Speaking recently with Jill Richards, Federici described the autonomist preconditions of WfH: "The women's movement as a whole was autonomous because it was clear that our concerns were not important to the male-dominated left. […] By the time our collective formed in 1973, the need for feminist autonomy was well established."[26] As described by Weeks, the focus on the wage by feminists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Federici "as that which sutures the household to waged labor economy" follows an autonomist re-reading of Marx, so that "the wage is understood as the dominant mechanism by which individuals are incorporated in the capitalist mode of cooperation."[27] The key expansion of Marx's explanation of the wage – that it obscures, in its abstraction, the production of surplus value – by Federici and others associated with WfH is that it also hides the necessity of unwaged labor for this same value production.[28] Weeks summarizes further: "[Nicole Cox and Federici] offer a more expansive account of not only who is involved in the wage relation and thus who might contest its terms but also what counts as a wage struggle, in this case going beyond the focus on wage rates to include efforts to secure the provision of social services and reductions of work time."[29] In short, wage labor relations thread themselves through the lives of all who work, including those not paid a wage. It's worthwhile to point out once more that Ukeles' own position with the DSNY is unsalaried.

The artwork most commonly referenced to demonstrate a literal valorization (or reification) of specifically domestic affective work, and thus implicitly a critique of its unremunerated condition as seen in the sites of artistic value production, is Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1979). The piece interweaves the bureaucracy of managerial labor with the

privacy of domestic/maternal work in its organized presentation; it interrogates distinctions between public and private space and (social) reproduction in those spaces by bringing the "refuse" (i.e. the materials of maternity such as diapers) into the white cube; and it engages in a psychoanalytic feminist reading of the relationship between a mother and her infant son.[30] Much less mentioned in this context is Alison Knowles, who began to score intimate domestic tasks as aesthetic/textual operations in the early 1960s. Though associated under the banner cast by the Fluxus "commander in chief" George Maciunas, Knowles isolated her own distinct models of scoring (in her words "proposing") compositions. She composed *Proposition 1* (October 1962), which instructs the reader/performer to make a salad. *Variation #1 on Proposition* (October 1964) instructs: "make a soup." Speaking on her participation in the first group of Fluxus artists assembled by Maciunas to tour in Europe in 1962, she recently remarked: "I was the only woman in a group of all men, and I was making salads and changing diapers on the stage."[31] This is to say that the interweaving of the intimate and the public, the domestic and the political, the home and the museum, were already being experimented with in Euro-American avant-garde visual culture of the early 60s. Clearly, the labor of the home was an aesthetic container to be mobilized in collapsing distinctions between the private and public realms, to critique – or at least address – the capitalist production of gender via the site of work, as famously demonstrated and satirized in Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1969). Ukeles has also often noted the influence of the dancers of the Judson Dance Theater, such as Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer, which in fact suggests an influence on the shift to quotidian movement and objects in her work.[32] In arranging a seemingly unconnected group of artists in this way, it is nonetheless helpful in introducing Ukeles' coalescing of many of these ideas in her manifesto, to mobilize these gestures politically on her own body in her home,

before she engaged on the level of the commons or the municipal.[33]

Ukeles recounts that, while a student at the Pratt Institute in New York, her male professor instructed her to quit art after she became pregnant. She later remarked: "I was split into two people: artist and mother. I had fallen out of the picture. I was in a fury."[34] After leaving Pratt, she continued to study art in Denver and then spent a vital period in Philadelphia, where she worked in a plastics factory. All of the above contributed to her *Maintenance Art Manifesto* (October 1969), which she wrote in one sitting, comprised of two parts: *Manifesto! Maintenance Art* and a proposal for an exhibition titled *CARE*. It is worthwhile looking again at some oft-referenced and brilliant sections of the manifesto here:

> C. *Maintenance is a drag*; it takes all the fucking time, literally; the mind boggles and chafes at the boredom; the culture confers lousy status and minimum wages on maintenance jobs; housewives = no pay.
> D. *Art*:
> Everything I say is Art is Art. Everything I do is Art is Art. I am an artist.

And later in section II (the exhibition proposal):

> 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 everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.[35]

Just as Ukeles understands her gendered role as a domestic laborer to be entrenched in structures of subjugation within a patriarchal system, she also understands that the potential for emancipatory agency can reside in the same site of working, or more appropriately in an autonomous approach to valorizing the productivity of the work itself while eliminating the

necessity for selling one's labor power via a hierarchical contract or lack thereof. For example, notice how minimum wages for "lousy" jobs in culture are positioned next to the unpaid labor of the home. Furthermore, she incorporates the "two people," artist and mother, back into one via the shared axis of maintenance work.

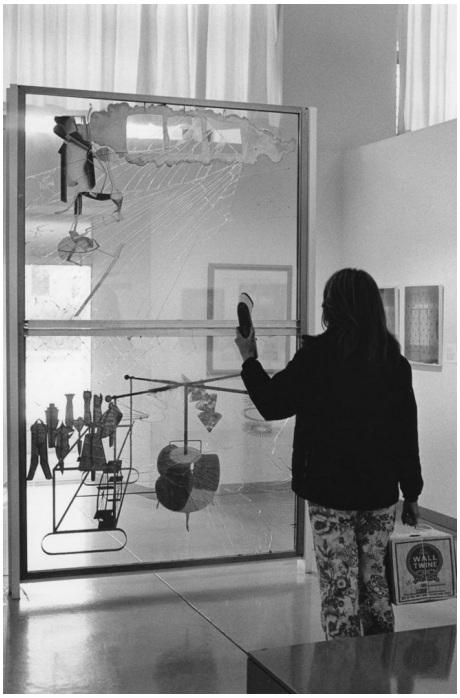
Ukeles performs two key linguistic shifts in the *Manifesto*. By changing "domestic work" to "maintenance work," and thereafter "maintenance work" to "maintenance art," she engages a shift of capitalist hierarchies to counter the stratification that her labor value is inscribed into and subsequently sold or exchanged within. As Pierre Bourdieu remarked on such changes in vocabulary, they can be "both the condition and the result of breaking away from the ordinary representation associated with the idea of *ruling class*" – in this case, the patriarchy of the "male earner" and the male manager.[36] The *Manifesto* ushered in a radically powerful model for incorporating not just art and life, or artwork and labor – quintessential concerns of the modernist avant-gardes – but also for intertwining practice and agitation, private labor and public space, art work*ing* and domestic duties.

In her *Wages Against Housework* manifesto Federici writes: "The things we have to prove are our capacity to expose what we are already doing as work, what capital is doing to us, and our power to struggle against it."[37] The paramount point about valorizing paid housework in the way Federici does is not the reification of that wage itself, but rather of the work, using the wage abstraction. The performative demand in the call "for" wages is a political position that designates the bedroom, the kitchen, the bathroom, and so on, as sites of value production. Federici's manifesto engages in a similar type of linguistic shifting as Ukeles' does. *Wages Against Housework* begins, for example, with an epigraph in which she equates love with unwaged work, frigidity with absenteeism, and miscarriage with a work accident. "Homosexuality and heterosexuality are both working conditions

… but homosexuality is workers' control of production," she writes. Furthermore: "More Smiles? More Money. Nothing will be so powerful in destroying the healing virtues of a smile."[38] Federici once more, beautifully resonant with Ukeles' text: "The things we have to prove are our capacity to expose what we are already doing as work, what capital is doing to us, and our power to struggle against it."

Maintaining the Museum

Ukeles rejected the then-prominent models in "critical art" of "being conceptual" as she refers to them – e.g. engaging in purely textual exercises in semiotics, shallow Wittgensteinian play (in the way of Joseph Kosuth perhaps, or its more elegant and critical rejection in poetics by strategies such as those of Marcel Broodthaers), and the linguistic scoring of emancipation. Rather, in her manifesto, the textual is intrinsically accompanied by the (re)productive: an exhibition proposal, further discussed below, which seeks to bring maternal and collective civic maintenance labor into the museum's galleries. It is here that we might acknowledge, and problematize, the Duchampian influence in her work. Ukeles often refers to Duchamp as her "grandfather," a formulation simultaneously correlative and distancing.[39] Heavily affected by a short meeting in 1963, Ukeles recounts that she was struck by his apparent "exit" from art production – now clearly understood as a myth, or even a mode of performing.[40] A young art student



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Now that you have Heirs/airs Marcel Duchamp: Maintain the Ties that Bind*, 1973. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

taken aback by this feigned "exit," she remarked to him: "Now that you have heirs, you can go back to work." Duchamp's response, the kind that is illuminating but takes some time to appreciate: "Did you mean 'heirs' or 'airs'?"[41]

I imagine that this interaction, and the stated influence from post-war New York Duchampians (Jasper Johns in particular), in addition to her frequent references to the focus on the everyday in the performances at the Judson Dance Theater, likely compelled her to inevitably think of production in materialist terms. It is no coincidence then that, in between publishing the manifesto and first entering the DSNY, she staged the work *Now that you have Heirs/Airs Marcel Duchamp: Maintain the Ties that Bind* (1973), a ceremonial "killing" of the (grand)father. While exhibiting work at the Moore College of Art & Design, Ukeles tied a ball of string to the glass doors near Duchamp's *The Large Glass* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and walked to her own show while unspooling the string, thereby connecting the two institutions and the two artists' work.[42] After arriving at Moore College, she cut the string, severing the material (and umbilical) tie while also slyly alluding to Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913) as the string fell to the ground.[43] While her analysis of labor, artistic or otherwise, remains a pointedly materialist one, Ukeles would not limit the readymade to physical objects, moving to employ scripts, managerial etiquette and behavior, and different forms of waged or unwaged labor as readymade apparatuses.[44]

The second part of Ukeles' manifesto was written as an exhibition proposal, and was turned down. Sent to the Whitney, Ukeles proposed to live in the museum with her child for a period, wherein her mothering would be the work. (Of course Lea Lublin's *Mon fils* [1968] comes to mind here as well). Among other elements, Ukeles also offered to turn part of the exhibition space into a recycling facility in which she would work with scientists (skilled labor) to process trash in the site of exhibition, equating

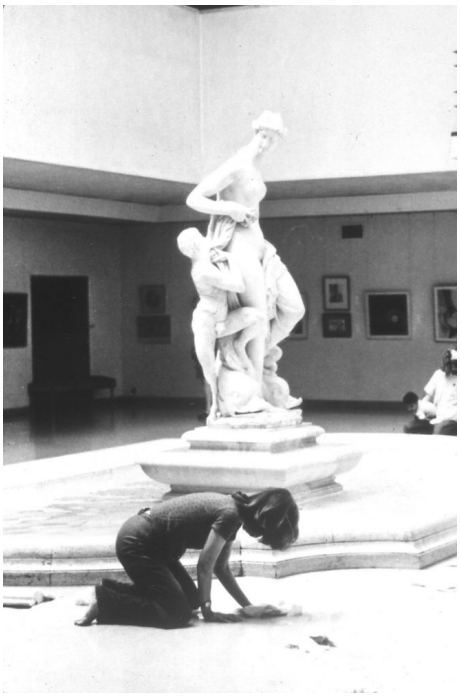
two forms of reproduction. The argument here is that we are all maintenance laborers – some paid, some not, some specialized labor (scientists), some low-wage service labor (cleaning staff) – but remunerated inequitably.

Although the proposal was rejected, in 1971 Ukeles sent it, along with the manifesto, to Jack Burnham, who published large excerpts in *Artforum*, together with four photographs merging a small amount of absurdism with symbolic and literal representations of Ukeles at work in intimate spaces.[45] In *Maintenance Art: Dusting a Baffle* (1970), for example, she is pictured cleaning a semi-transparent plastic artwork that partially distorts her face. Here, in a gesture of self-reflexive critique, she literally maintains her earlier work so that it can continue to exist.[46] Her laboring presence in the black-and-white photograph recreates a form reminiscent of the early twentieth-century photography that aimed to document large typologies of industrial workers. Ukeles, however, shows herself toiling, otherwise invisibly, at home, rather than workers *exiting the factory*, so to speak. Ukeles' critique is also directed towards other strategies of institutional critique, enacting, in part, what Andrea Fraser later termed "a methodology of *critically reflexive site-specificity*," particularly evident when the site of the "event of photography" is the home, and the site of its dissemination is the art magazine, here equated as two sites of (re)production.[47] Once Ukeles shifts this critique from the home to the museum, or later from her own body to the bodies of the multitude at work and the city as site of maintenance, Vishmidt's

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Dusting a Baffle, from Private Performances of Personal Maintenance as Art*, 1970. Photograph: Jack Ukeles. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

argument elsewhere for an "infrastructural critique" applies keenly: "'Institutional critique' is retrospectively identified with a circular or, at best, enervatingly mimetic relation with the phantom antagonist/enabler (or enabling constraint) of the institution that is also 'in you,' whereas infrastructure sounds more like reality – its critique unfolds in a productive register, maybe even *as* production."[48]

The magazine exposure caught the attention of Lippard, who subsequently included Ukeles in her traveling exhibition *c.7,500* – one of the curator's "numbers" exhibitions.[49] Ukeles submitted photographs documenting maintenance work as part of *Maintenance Art Tasks 1973* (1973), including titles such as *Changing the Baby's Diaper, Doing the Laundry, Dressing to Go Out/Undressing to Go In*, and so on, accompanied by a dust rag to be used by visitors to "maintain" the photographs. She also exhibited a maintenance art questionnaire, which Ukeles asked both artists and museumgoers to complete and send to her.[50]



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Inside*, 1973. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

When the exhibition travelled to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Ukeles proposed to perform her maintenance art, and the museum agreed. She famously scrubbed the floors outside and inside the museum (*Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside* and *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Inside* – the former a now-iconic image), washed the glass cases of a mummy (*Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*), and locked and unlocked gallery/office doors (*The Keeping of the Keys*

) – all components of the *Maintenance Art Performance Series* (1973). This was the first time that she performed maintenance art in the museum, rather than exhibiting photographic documentation of maintenance done in the home: a form of subversion that is made explicit when Ukeles clarifies that she considered her performances a "critique of the institution."[51] As Vishmidt elegantly summarizes: "If the daily uncompensated labour performed by mainly women in the household could migrate to the museum and seek legitimacy as art, then it was no longer self-evident that this labour was any less 'creative' than the kind of activity otherwise enshrined as art, and no less public than socially necessary wage-labour."[52]

A key component of the work is its unsettling of the valorization of labor power, particularly evident in *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object* (1973). In this part of the durational work, Ukeles suggests – in a detailed chart – the arbitrariness in distinctions of use and exchange value in work performed by a "maintenance person," a "maintenance artist," and a museum conservator. She chose to "maintain" a glass case that housed a female mummy, on loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[53] Since she cleaned the case as a "maintenance artist," as opposed to a maintenance worker (museum cleaning staff or the like), the "dust painting" she created became a work of art – a playful invocation of the Duchampian adage: it is art if the artist "says it is," or if it enters the institutional site of display. Her intervention was then codified as an artwork via her

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside*, 1973. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

maintenance art stamp – a different form of the artist's contract developing at the time, which redistributed authorial autonomy back to the auratic signature – strengthening the totipotentiality between the work and the artist's hand.[54] After her intervention, the case would have to be cleaned by the conservator, literally assigning non-professionalized maintenance work to a professional. Ukeles describes the work in the following way, which accounts for her strategy of subverting structuralized labor hierarchies:

> I asked the maintenance worker to clean the vitrine, to do his regular work – which they actually did with a diaper [...] Copying him, because he was the expert, I did exactly [w]hat he did, but it was an artwork, *because I said so*. When I finished, I stamped the vitrine with my "Maintenance Art" stamp. Once I stamped that vitrine, the maintenance worker [...] could no longer put his hands on this art object. Then the conservator did a condition report of this artwork, the vitrine and said, "This artwork, the vitrine, needs to be cleaned." At that moment I handed him my tools. He, copying the maintenance worker, cleaned the vitrine. We were photographed at the beginning, and we were photographed at the end. The same people, lined up the same way. But the notion of value had floated through me from the worker to the conservator.[55]

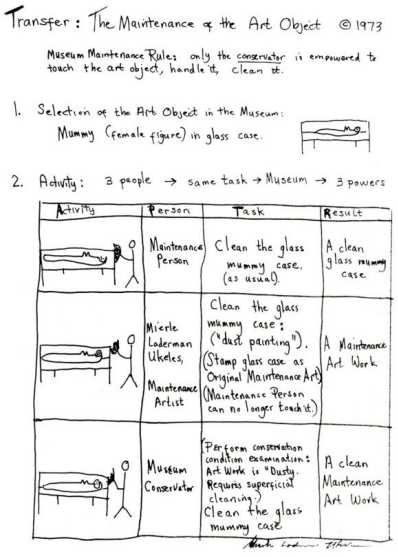
Vishmidt again: "In proposing a world in which 'maintenance' activities were just as legitimately a part of the art as the objects or even the more ephemeral propositions or documentations that announced conceptual art, she was suspending the division of symbolic and physical labour that ensured work and art

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

remained matter and anti-matter, autonomy without a taint of heteronomy."[56] Quite emphatically, Ukeles empowers and increases the value of the museum's cleaning staff, which, if the supposed logics of capital were to hold, would also increase their wage; she also distorts value distinctions and market-determined hierarchies between domestic work, museum work, and art work, as all three results from the maintenance of the glass case are, in fact, exactly the same. In analyzing this piece, Molesworth contends that the three different roles elucidate managerial concerns with the divisions of labor, which is true; however, she goes on to suggest that it legitimates the fact that "anyone *can* do maintenance work." It seems, however, that the more relevant point is that everyone *must do* maintenance (to varying levels of necessity and privilege), "all the fucking time," but that some are paid more, others less, and others still nothing at all, based on the logics of value and the productive relations reproduced in the very site of work.

From the Worker's Club to the Landfill

Returning to Weeks' question posed at the end of the introduction (on how feminism can contest the marginalization of unwaged reproductive labor without propping up the mythologies of the work ethic), a similar question is foundational to Ukeles' decision to move from the rarefied site of the art institution in order to work with sanitation workers. An intermediate step in this move was the durational and participatory performance work *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, diagram, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*, 1973. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

(1976), staged at the Whitney Museum's then-downtown location in the lobby of a corporate skyscraper at 55 Water Street. The work begins with a simple invitation to 300 maintenance workers: to choose one hour of the work they do every day as art. To create documentation of the building-wide "performance," Ukeles approached the workers with a Polaroid camera – working in eight-hour shifts alongside them – and snapped a photograph. After the photo was printed, she would ask whether the image showed them working or making art, so that she could document it as one or the other. This was not the first piece she organized that unsettled the divisions of labor dictating maintenance and art, nor her first use of photographs to document maintenance (art) working as evidence of performed labor. Interestingly, however, this was the first moment when she shifted the scale of analysis to the whole structure of workers, maintenance, and finance: a huge corporate building kept running by an army of workers, typically rendered invisible to the other people present in the building in order to work, exhibit art, and so on. Before carrying out *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* she declared: "I have been waiting for years to get my hands on a skyscraper. Why? Because a skyscraper needs tremendous maintenance." The readymade here is both work and site. The photographs act to uncover the obscured reproduction, operating behind the scenes, which shifts the scope of "social reproduction" from the work identified by a materialist analysis of an individual toiling body, to the reproduction of larger, post-Fordist systems themselves.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *I Make Maintenance Art for one Hour Every Day*, 1976. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

Eschewing a single-body framework for her maintenance works, which runs the risk of essentializing a specific type of laboring body, this shift to larger structures in fact echoes WfH's critique of earlier conceptions of affective labor, which did not take race and class into a wider account alongside gender. Rejecting a Western white-centered feminist program, Federici describes that "the women who launched WfH came from a history of militancy in Marxist-identified organizations, filtered through the experiences of the anticolonial movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the Student Movement, and the 'Operaist' movement."[57] Its foundations came from a vast array of socio-economic and cultural contexts, with women from the US, Peru, Trinidad, India, Uganda, and so on.[58]

As a precursor, Autonomia (alternatively *operaismo* [workerism]) had developed in Italy during the late 1960s through a resurgence of factory workers' struggles, which led to radical re-readings of Marxist orthodoxy, particularly a rejection of the Stalinist Marxism still prominent in the Italian Communist Party. They adjusted Marxian frameworks to allow for the critique of all institutions – from the party to the state, from the union to the political movement itself – most prominently in the writings of Negri, Mario Tronti, and Paolo Virno. However, at the beginning, this group was often antagonistic to feminism and to women members themselves. An infamous event occurred in Rome in 1977 when "the male stewards of *Lotta Continua* and of the *Comitato Autonomo di Centrocelle* attacked a feminist demonstration and its vindication of a woman's right to separate from a man."[59] Such inconsistencies clearly prompted writers and activists to develop more-inclusive frameworks; writers as

diverse as Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Federici in the Italian context (though Federici left Italy early in her life), among many others, would come to be loosely grouped as post-autonomists.

Federici, however, is justifiably critical of a central post-operaist formulation regarding "affective labor," a term used in this context to reconcile the aforementioned duality between "productive" and "reproductive" work. The term gained prominence in part due to Negri and Hardt's writings, particularly in their trilogy that begins with the landmark *Empire*.[60]

Federici criticizes the breadth of their use of the term "affective labor" to mean "the creation and manipulation of affects." Her criticism is that they remain unaware of the massive contributions to the worker's struggle that women have made against the blackmail of "affectivity," or that the majority of this materialist merging of productive and reproductive work has been on the backs of women, often precarious migrants and women of color.[61] On the series of divisions evident in the multiple struggles against sexism, racism, colonialism, and capitalism, take for example the famous 1968 sanitation strike in Memphis, Tennessee, where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his historic speech bridging civil rights and class struggle. In a photo, a group of black men stand holding picket signs proclaiming "I AM A MAN." This radical protest and movement thus employed a gendered call for liberation and an end to racialized violence in line with Weeks' argument that gender is produced in the site of work.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation*, 1979–1980. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

Speaking about the need for a larger feminist movement that leaves the home, Federici remarks: "Women have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatized way. The problem, then, becomes how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and the bedroom and into the streets." Ukeles, after she brought the maintenance of the home into her art, and that maintenance art into the corporate space and museum, continued with taking her art to the "streets," or more appropriately to the municipal system, with its garbage trucks, landfills, and depots.

This approach is made clear in Ukeles' first and most famous project with the DSNY: *Touch Sanitation Performance* (1979–1980), including *Handshake Ritual*, in which she shook the hands of 8,500 sanitation workers and thanked them for their work. She repeated the phrase "Thank you for keeping New York City alive," which clearly carries connotations of care work. In the second part of the durational performance, *Follow in Your Footsteps*, she "became" a (sanitation) worker too, "replicating the sanitation workers' actions as they collected trash," and kept an eight-hour workday for months, "punching in and out," as it were, to become a (sanitation) laborer herself.[62]

When Ukeles first reached out to the DSNY, she met with Edward T. Ostrowski, the president of the sanitation workers' union. After their meeting, he wrote to her: "The union has no objection to your work; in fact we welcome such a project which promotes the sanitation man and gives the public a true insight into their lives and working conditions."[63] Perhaps this praises anticipated press more than it does Ukeles' project, but nonetheless the message she promoted clearly came

across to a group of severely underpaid, under-protected, precarious laborers.[64] Also evident is an initial wish, on Ukeles' part, to foster this "true insight" into working conditions – the productivist and documentary impulse *par excellence*. In her letter to the sanitation workers introducing *Touch Sanitation* and herself, she writes: "Nobody understands enough about what you do, how tough it is to work day after day on a job like this, about how hard it can be in lousy weather [...] What kind of artist am I, you might wonder? I handle regular art 'material,' as you do. [Sanitation workers refer to trash as 'material']."[65] Crucially, she then announces: "I am an independent 'maintenance' artist. I don't work for the city, the unions, the newspapers or networks," which may clearly be read as Ukeles staking a quasi-autonomist position, though it also anticipates the precarious conditions of independently contracted freelance labor that would soon dominate art practices such as hers.[66]

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Follow in your Footsteps*, 1979–1980. Courtesy Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Ronald Feldman Gallery

In the same 1979 letter to the "sanmen," with her tongue firmly in cheek, she writes: "YOU ARE THE BALANCING AGENTS. You do the hard, heavy, physical work, traditional 'men's' work. (No woman has passed the sanman's or officer's entrance exam. Yet.) At the same time, you nurture, you 'husband' the City. It's time for us all to learn to honor this balancing kind of work you do."[67] Of course, if one misses the irony and sarcasm at play here, a major premise of the work would be foregone: the bringing together of this "traditional 'men's' work" with traditionally "women's work." As Ukeles has described on multiple occasions in the decades since, the sanitation workers were similarly invisible – hidden in plain sight – as women are in the home *and* in the workplace. Predictably, Ukeles faced heavy criticism from second-wave

feminists for choosing to work with a municipal department staffed completely by men. She also faced frequent harassment from the sanitation workers themselves at the beginning, when she was taken for a "non-productive" intruder (given the precondition that art is "useless" in terms of materialist function), before they inevitably welcomed her as a colleague. As Weeks writes of her own project: "It is difficult to mount a critique of work that is not received as something wholly different: a criticism of workers."[68] In Ukeles' projects with the sanitation workers, we might rephrase this concern to say that it is difficult to mount a critique of the maintenance labor intrinsic to capitalist reproduction without it being received as something wholly different: in this case, a foregoing of attention for the gendered affective and domestic labor of the home, and the struggles of diverse feminisms operating in concert to liberate women from unremunerated work (but not from work altogether).

Conclusion

At the end of her celebrated "House Work and Art Work" (2000), Helen Molesworth proposes: "That 1970s art work informed by feminism is currently a site of intellectual energy is perhaps due to the problems of labour that shape our current public sphere: from the 'end' of the welfare mother to home officing; from the new threats to privacy made possible by the ever-expanding role of the Internet in the lives of people in developed nations to the multinational corporate reorganization of public space."[69] It seems that in less than two decades of continued neoliberal domination, working to dismantle the mitigated victories of the late 60s, Molesworth's 2000s-era prognosis has already become nostalgic. A less-than-comprehensive update to her list might read: the re-entrenchment of hetero-patriarchal frameworks in socio-political programs constructed by global right-wing reactionary politics; reproductive rights on the verge of erasure all over the world due

to a rejuvenated neo-conservatism continuing to limit crumbling welfare services while enshrining the heteronormative family model; violence against women ever-present and mediatized; global civil war; and the fact that successes (of the bourgeois or liberal feminist variety) for certain women in the workplace feed the need for low-wage domestic and immigrant labor, and underwrite the increasing inequality of neoliberalism. The question today in the context of visual culture should be how cultural producers can respond aesthetically to such a series of attacks in an array of immaterial and mediatized culture wars without being instantly recuperated and absorbed into those very frameworks, which are then mobilized against workers; with oppressive reforms masquerading under terms such as "right-to-work" laws and reactionary neo-conservatism employing the languages of twentieth-century left-wing protest, the linguistic and visual terrain is surely treacherous. Ukeles' work with the DSNY provides a historical template for bridging "social practice" with a materialist feminist political perspective, one that reifies invisible labor without celebrating the wage itself.

1 Thank you to Brynn Hatton for inviting me to present a much earlier version of this research to her students at Williams College in February 2018, and for her helpful discussions of Ukeles' work. Danielle Johnson, Mariana Silva, and Elvia Wilk gifted me their careful readings of this text in various stages of completion and provided invaluable comments. Lastly, I owe my immense gratitude to Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who offered her time and insights in recounting some of the histories discussed here, and kindly welcomed me to look through her archives.

2 It goes without saying that art institutions – private and not-for-profit – are just as predominant in this post-Fordist tendency to contract out low-wage labor to other responsibility-bearers who might not be subject to the same scrutiny as an institution that stakes out a politically left position, if only in the art it exhibits. On the prevalence of outsourcing cleaning staff in neoliberalism, see, for example, *The Dirty Work of Neoliberalism: Cleaners in the Global Economy*, eds. Luis L. M. Aguiar and Andrew Herod (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

3 Sophie Smith, Twitter post, March 8, 2018, https://twitter.com/DrSophieSmith/status/971714934819184640

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4 Alexandra Topping, "Oxford University says sorry for International Women's Day gaffe," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/mar/09/oxford-university-sorry-international-womens-day-gaffe.

5 Rada Katsarova (and Jon Cramer), "Repression and Resistance on the Terrain of Social Reproduction: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Openings," *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 31, 2015, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/repression-and-resistance-on-the-terrain-of-social-reproduction-historical-trajectories-contemporary-openings/.

6 We may even consider Ariella Azoulay's writing on testimony in the event of photography when analyzing how the "evidence" contained therein relates to the worker herself. See: Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York and London: Verso, 2012).

7 The practices of post-conceptual photographers such as Darcy Lange, Fred Lonidier, Martha Rosler, and Allan Sekula are also integral to posing this question in a broader context. See, for example: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Darcy Lange: Paco Campana," in *Darcy Lange: Study of an Artist at Work*, ed. Mercedes Vicente (New Plymouth/Birmingham, UK: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Ikon Gallery, 2008).

8 See: José da Silva, "'Who keeps the cube white?': protesters disrupt opening of London's newest gallery Goldsmiths CCA," *The Art Newspaper*, September 6, 2018, www.theartnewspaper.com/news/protesters-disrupt-opening-of-london-s-newest-gallery-goldsmiths-cca.

9 Adrian Searle, "Sneezing rabbits, dismal bingo and labour pains," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/sep/10/mika-rottenberg-review-goldsmiths-london-cca. Rottenberg's support was a combination of solidarity and flattened justification in the hope that it might bring attention to the issue – solidarity by way of crossing the picket line, so to speak – a privileged model of "institutional critique" that involves the "entrance" of the institution. After a very informed and proper discussion of the politics, she writes: "I've been thinking a lot about the right thing to do, how best to support this campaign, and my personal responsibility within this situation, especially given that my work deals in parts with hidden labor. My conclusion is that the healthiest and most productive action for the promotion of this issue, as well as out of respect to the CCA curatorial and installation teams hard work, is to carry on with the exhibition as planned, and perhaps by that help to provide more

visibility for the campaign as well as the debate around the connection between art and activism, ethics and esthetics and the hypocrisies and contradictions that are part of our contemporary reality." Her full statement can be found on the website of the group Justice For Cleaners at Goldsmiths: https://justiceforcleanersgoldsmiths.wordpress.com/2018/09/04/mika-rottenbergs-statement-of-support/.

10 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 35–36.

11 For a foundational text in feminist legal scholarship, see: Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). In this framework, and with an Althusserian implication, marriage is saliently referred to as an "ideology of love" by Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa in *The Work of Love: Unpaid Housework, Poverty and Sexual Violence at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, trans. Enda Brophy (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2008). A more recent study on the household and contractual relations can be found in Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2012), cited in Marina Vishmidt, "The Two Reproductions in (Feminist) Art and Theory since the 1970s," *Third Text* vol. 31, no. 1 (October 2017), 64.

12 Katsarova and Cramer, "Repression and Resistance."

13 Katsarova and Cramer cite Davis' "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing 1998), 111–128. See also footnotes 12–14 in Katsarova and Cramer for a thorough list of key writing on social reproduction and race.

14 Vishmidt, "The Two Reproductions," 52.

15 This fraught and ultimately reductive distinction is analyzed and historicized thoroughly by Helen Molesworth in her essay "House Work and Art Work," *October* vol. 92 (Spring 2000), and even more so in an earlier version of the text: "Cleaning Up in the 1970s: The Work of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly and Mierle Laderman Ukeles," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 107–122.

16 This is not to be confused with contemporaneous mimetic or representational embraces of the image of the worker by a macho-minimal aesthetic, in the manner of Carl Andre, for example.

17 In the context of the dialectics at play between critical art working and labor-

identification, we may consider the so-called "conceptual turn" of the 1960s, temporally paralleled by profound shifts in the relationship between the worker and biopowers. See: Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2009). Considering the "biopolitical turn," in Foucault's formulation of power, which "uses populations like a machine for production, for the production of wealth, goods, and other individuals," this form of discipline clearly seeks to unite productive and reproductive forces under the same rubric, to bring typically omitted persons/workers to the "table." However, as is now more than apparent, coming to the table often just implies trading in one form of alienation for another. Michel Foucault, cited in Antonio Negri, "Foreword: The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics," ed. Mark Coté, trans. Sara Mayo, Peter Graefe, and Mark Coté, in *Cognitive Capitalism, Education and Digital Labor*, eds. Michael A. Peters and Ergin Bulut (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), xii.

18 Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 13.

19 There are of course many other artists from this period and since whose work engages with "social reproduction," either as a critique of affective labor and (post-)Fordist wage agreements or a materialist critique of the preconditions of the reproduction of labor power. See, for just two examples, the artists and tendencies discussed in: Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, artWork and the global imperative* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) and Siona Wilson, *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). On the "Fordist family wage," and anti-poor and racist welfare policies in the post-war US context, see: Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

20 See for examples, important analyses of social reproduction and domestic labor from the (post-)autonomist Marxian perspective: Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* [2004] (New York: Autonomedia, 2014); Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (New York: Common Notions, 2012); and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Family, Welfare, and the State* (Brooklyn: Common Notions, 2015). Though May 1968 is a fraught origin point, and implies a potentially exclusionary teleology, it is nonetheless helpful to consider the feminist projects that emerged out of and alongside the Civil Rights, anti-colonial, and anti-war campaigns of the moment.

21 On Ukeles' work as social practice art, see the chapter "High Maintenance: The Sanitation Aesthetics of Mierle Laderman Ukeles," in Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 75–103.

On this note, Ukeles' gesture of "entrance" into the DSNY – which brought critical attention to the underfunding and severe working conditions at the department – has been recuperated and invoked by the faux-progressive and violently corporate-friendly New York City government under Mayor Bill de Blasio as a model in their 2018 progress report for "OneNYC." Launching a new program of artist residencies called PAIR by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the report states: "The program takes its name and inspiration from artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' pioneering residency with the NYC Department of Sanitation, an ongoing collaboration since 1977." The City of New York, "Progress Report: OneNYC 2018," https://onenyc.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/OneNYC_Progress_2018.pdf (accessed January 6, 2018). As she remarked to me in conversation about the notion of "embedded artist projects" of this sort, specifically on her decision to remain unsalaried: "If you give up independence, then it doesn't have much value." In fact, when Tania Bruguera became the first artist-in-residence for the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs in 2015, Ukeles gave her two pieces of advice, acknowledging the lack of autonomy in such positions now: 1) the artist must be willing to learn from the system, and 2) "no one can tell you what to do." Interview with Ukeles, January 2018. This critique of "social practice," however, is outside of the scope of the present concerns. Ben Davis' salient critique of social practice art, and its somewhat naïve rebuttals by those such as Nato Thompson and Tom Finkelpearl, are available in: *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2016). Davis' essay was first published in *International Socialist Review* no. 90 (July 2013), https://isreview.org/issue/90/critique-social-practice-art.

22 See the exhibition catalogue for Ukeles' 2016 retrospective: Patricia C. Phillips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art*, ex. cat. (Queens: Queens Museum of Art in collaboration with Prestel, 2016); other recent catalogues and monographs include: Nina Horisaki-Christens, Andrea Neustein, Victoria Rogers, and Jason Waite, *Maintenance Required*, ex. cat. (New York: Whitney Independent Study, 2013), and *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Seven Work Ballets*, ed. Kari Conte (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015). More recently, a productive perspective on her work was presented by Elvia Wilk in "The Grammar of Work," *Frieze*, March 23, 2018, https://frieze.com/article/grammar-work.

23 Vishmidt, "The Two Reproductions," 61. This sort of critique was common to much feminist theory and practice that came later (after the "second-wave"). Readers may be reminded of Lizzie Borden's film *Born in Flames* (1983), for example, which poses a similar question. In the film, a decade after a "successful" socialist revolution has granted the workers of the United States ownership of the means of production,

women are still subjugated, disproportionally affected by high rates of unemployment, and continue to experience systemic sexual violence. As a feminist counter-revolution develops, the government attempts to dissuade the movement with a concession: "wages for housework." Borden's text "The New Dialectic," *Artforum* vol. 12, no. 7 (March 1974), 44–51, is included in the bibliography to Ukeles' MA thesis, *An Analysis of Maintenance Art: Inquiry and Creative Process*, Master's Thesis, New York University, 1974.

24 Vishmidt, "The Two Reproductions," 61. See also her PhD: Marina Vishmidt, "Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital," PhD dissertation, Queen Mary, University of London School of Business and Management, 2012.

25 Interestingly, when I met with Ukeles in February 2018 to ask her about her views on WfH, I was surprised to hear that she was not aware of the movement, or of Federici's activism or writing in the early 70s.

26 Silvia Federici in conversation with Jill Richards, "Every Woman Is a Working Woman," *The Boston Review*, December 19, 2018, https://bostonreview.net/print-issues-gender-sexuality/silvia-federici-jill-richards-every-woman-working-woman.

27 Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 121–122.

28 See: Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework. A Perspective on Capital and the Left* (Brooklyn: Wages for Housework Committee, 1976), cited in Weeks, *The Problem with Work*,122.

29 Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 122.

30 See: *Mary Kelly*, ed. Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2016). Molesworth has remarked that, in the past, the two works typically juxtaposed to historicize the split between so-called "essentialist" and theory-based feminist artistic practices were Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979) and Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, respectively. She suggests, however, that inserting Mierle Laderman Ukeles' works into this dichotomy disrupts the binary, and "means that theoretical questions of public and private come to the fore, specifically with regards to the problematic of labour." Molesworth, "Cleaning Up in the 1970s," 114.

31 Alison Knowles, Q&A, Museum of Modern Art, New York, at the premier of the documentary *George*, dir. Jeffrey Perkins, February 26, 2018.

32 We can include Lucinda Childs' *Carnation* (1964) in this genealogy, a performance that clearly anticipates Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, in which Childs makes use of various kitchen implements to lampoon gendered suburban domesticity. I thank Lou

Forster for bringing this work to my attention in this context.

33 Federici on the commons: "The idea of the common/s, in this context, has offered a logical and historical alternative to both State and Private Property, the State and the Market, enabling us to reject the fiction that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of our political possibilities." Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons," in *Uses of a Whirlwind: Movement, Movements, and Contemporary Radical Currents in the United States*, eds. Craig Hughes, Stevie Peace, and Kevin Van Meter (Oakland: AK Press, 2010).

34 Ukeles quoted in Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 52. I would argue that the somewhat Lacanian language here is not accidental.

35 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Maintenance Art Manifesto, Proposal for an Exhibition, 'CARE'," [1969] in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 123.

36 Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 123–139: 127.

37 Federici, "Wages Against Housework," [1975] *Revolution at Point Zero*, 22.

38 Ibid.

39 Regarding the re-reception of Marcel Duchamp's work in New York – mostly via the work of John Cage, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, and due to the earlier publication of his first monograph in English and his work's appearance in prominent museums and collections – see: Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," *October* vol. 70, "The Duchamp Effect" (Autumn 1994); for a specific discussion of the effect of Duchamp's legacy on conceptual art in particular, see: Benjamin Buchloh et al., "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," in ibid.

40 See: Elena Filipovic, *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

41 Recounted to me by Ukeles in January 2018. See also: Phillips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 65.

42 Consider also Rainer's oft-quoted quip: "Steve [Paxton] invented running and I invented walking."

43 Of course, a further point of contact here can be found in the dust that collected in

Duchamp's apartment, and was famously captured by Man Ray on Duchamp's *The Large Glass* in the photograph *Dust Breeding* (1920). I thank Elvia Wilk for reminding me of this. See Vishmidt's discussion of Duchamp's "dust breeding" alongside Ukeles' "dust paintings": Vishmidt, "The Two Reproductions," 63.

44 In a 2016 interview, Ukeles recounts: "One day, it was October 1969, I had an epiphany. I said to myself: You're the boss of your freedom. You're not a copier of Marcel, who can't help you anymore. If you're the boss of your freedom then you have the right to name anything art. Marcel gave me that right. So that's how I turned my maintenance work into maintenance *art*." Ukeles, in conversation with Maya Harakawa, *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 4, 2016, https://brooklynrail.org/2016/10/art/mierle-laderman-ukeles-with-maya-harakawa.

45 Jack Burnham, "Problems of Criticism IX," *Artforum* vol. 9, no. 5 (January 1971), 40–45.

46 In the way that much institutional critique sought to replicate the languages and roles of the institution, we can consider how this recodes museum conservation into the work of the home. I thank Danielle Johnson for bringing this to my attention after watching a (woman) conservator vacuum an Anni Albers weaving.

47 Andrea Fraser, "What is Institutional Critique?" in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman, (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2005), 305–309: 305 [Fraser's italics].

48 Marina Vishmidt, "Between Not Everything and Not Nothing: Cuts Toward Infrastructural Critique," in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2016), 266.

49 See: *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74*, eds. Cornelia Butler et al. (London: Afterall, 2012).

50 She later used the information she collected from the questionnaire as part of her graduate thesis at New York University in a Master's program called "Creative Experiences in Inter-related Arts." See footnote 23. The complete questionnaire is reprinted in Phillips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 212–213.

51 Ukeles, in conversation with Alexandra Schwartz, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles in conversation with Alexandra Schwartz," in *From Conceptualism to Feminism*, 286

52 Vishmidt, "Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital," 129.

53 The fact that the mummy Ukeles chose was female should not be overlooked; in fact, she "picked her out because [the mummy] still had breasts." Ukeles, in conversation with Schwartz, 286.

54 See: Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003) and John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London/New York: Verso, 2007).

55 Ukeles, in conversation with Schwartz, 286.

56 Vishmidt, "Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital," 129.

57 Federici, "Introduction," *Revolution at Point Zero*, 6.

58 See: Selma James, *Sex, Race, and Class – The Perspective on Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952–2011* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), brought to my attention first in Katsarova, "Repression and Resistance." See also: *Wages for Housework: The New York Committee 1972–1977: History, Theory, Documents*, eds. Silvia Federici and Arlen Austin (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2017).

59 Enda Brophy, preface to Giovanni Franca Dalla Costa, *The Work of Love*, 8. Women were not "granted" the right to a divorce in Italy until 1970.

60 Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

61 Silvia Federici, "On Affective Labour," in *Work*, ed. Friederike Sigler (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press and Whitechapel Gallery, 2017), 186–188, excerpted from: Federici, "On Affective Labour," in *Cognitive Capitalism*, 57–68.

62 See: Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, and Helen Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, ex. cat (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2003) on the moment that US artists began to refer to themselves as "art workers," coinciding in their analysis with the rise of activist art groups such as the Art Workers Coalition and Art Strike during the Vietnam War.

63 Letter from Edward T Ostrowski to Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 1967.

64 See, for an important element, Ukeles' films as part of *Touch Sanitation*, in which she interviews sanitation workers on their deplorable working conditions, evident in their crumbling facilities, the lethal dangers of their work, and their feelings of being ostracized by the public.

65 Letter from Ukeles to DSNY workers, 1979, reproduced in Phillips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*

, 101.

66 Ibid. I thank Mariana Silva for bringing the consideration of independent contracting to my attention in the context of this quote.

67 Ibid.

68 Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 4.

69 Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," 97.