

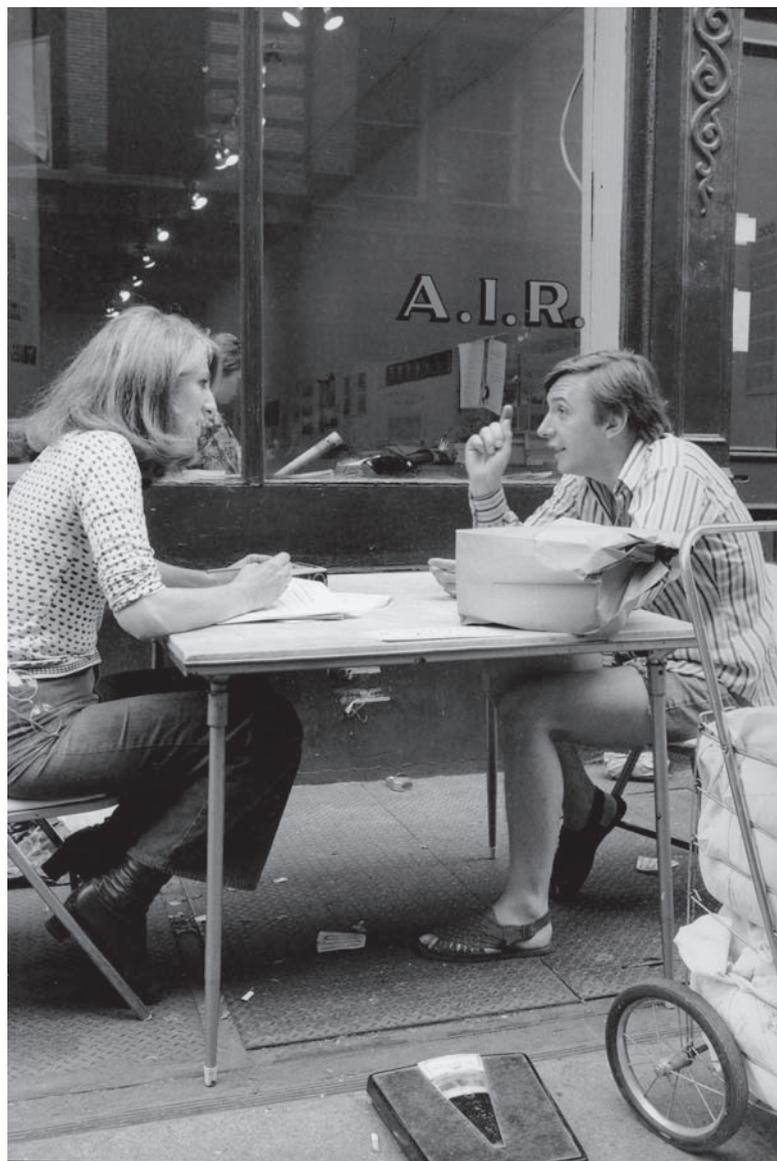
MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

In a 1969 manifesto, Mierle Laderman Ukeles defined a new type of artistic practice: “maintenance art” (see pp. 118–121). Since then, her performative and interdisciplinary work has explored maintenance as a creative act. In her early work, Ukeles imparts value to the domestic activities of housekeeping, childcare, and other care work. Her subsequent work confers value on the act of sanitation and municipal maintenance, contesting the social and class hierarchies in these systems. In so doing, she shows how maintenance activities are integral to the continued functioning of urban space, economic and political discourse, and other so-called productive activities.

Ukeles’s early *Maintenance Art Tasks* (1973) explores the complexity, duration, and choreography of daily maintenance activities by documenting them in detail: hair cuts, doctors visits, changing diapers, and washing dishes among others. The numerous images of a single activity indicate the extended time span that maintenance requires. In *Touch Sanitation* (1979–80), Ukeles shook the hands of and personally thanked all of the approximately 8,500 sanitation workers in the New York City Department of Sanitation. Engaging in public space, *Touch Sanitation* humanizes this alienating work and conveys the importance of a traditionally devalued sector of labor. As the project progressed, she also documented the stories of these workers in the video *Sanman Speaks* (1979–84), providing a space for the workers to articulate their own positions and experiences. The video also records the complex and durational process of collecting and disposing of waste, giving a sense of the physical immensity of society’s refuse. In the performance *Maintaining NYC in Crisis: What Keeps NYC Alive?* (1976), Ukeles reads the job titles of those in municipal bureaucracies threatened by the city’s impending bankruptcy but necessary to keep the the city functioning, a recitation that can be read as both a living memorial and a declarative protest.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation Performance: Sweep 7, Staten Island, 6:00 a.m. Roll Call, 1979–80*. Citywide performance with 8,500 New York City sanitation workers



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Interviewing Passersby on the Sidewalk about Their Maintenance Lives*, 1973–74. Outside A.I.R. Gallery, New York. Part of the Maintenance Art Performance series



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *The Keeping of the Keys: Maintenance as Security*, 1973. Three-hour performance, c. 7,500, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, July 20, 1973. Part of the Maintenance Art Performance series



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Inside*, 1973. Performance view, c. 7,500, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, July 22, 1973. Part of the Maintenance Art Performance series