Sanitation Celebrations: Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s Performative Monument with/for/by Sanmen

Diya Vij
CUNY Hunter College

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: http://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_sas_etds

Part of the Contemporary Art Commons

Recommended Citation
http://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_sas_etds/69

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Hunter College at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Arts & Sciences Theses by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.
Sanitation Celebrations: Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s Performative Monument with/for/by Sanmen

Diya Vij

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History, Hunter College of the City of New York

2016

Thesis Sponsor:

May 19, 2016
Date
Harper Montgomery
First Reader

May 19, 2016
Date
Cynthia Hahn
Second Reader
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration List</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Site</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Participation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Ongoing Permanence</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mierle Laderman Ukeles for her generosity and willingness to allow an interested student and worker into her archives, her process, and her life’s work. Her forty-year commitment to maintenance art and advocacy for maintenance work is a beautiful example of living with intention and conviction, a lesson that I hope stays with me throughout my life. I am grateful for the support, encouragement, and flexibility of: my family and friends; Tom Finkelpearl; my Queens Museum family; and my co-workers at the Department of Cultural Affairs. Lastly, but importantly, I would like to extend my gratitude to my advisor, Harper Montgomery, for her insight, patience, and support throughout this process.
List of Illustrations

Fig. 1. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Banner*, 1983. Banner constructed from the fabric of Sanitation workers’ uniforms. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY


Fig. 3. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, co-created with Sanitation workers, 1983. New York City Department of Sanitation mechanical sweepers on Madison Avenue, New York City. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 4. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part III: Ceremonial Sweep, Sanitation Celebrations*, 1983. Participants sweep the streets with brooms, New York City. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 5. Interior of one of three rooms of Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY. Photograph: Diya Vij

Fig. 6. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, South Bronx, 2013. Photograph: Daniel Creahan for Art Observed

Fig. 7. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969!* Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Fig. 8. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, September 16–October 20, 1976. Performance with three hundred maintenance employees from day and night shifts. Installation at Whitney Museum Downtown at 55 Water Street. 720 Polaroid photographs mounted on paper, printed labels, color–coded stickers, seven handwritten and typewritten texts, clipboard, and custom-made buttons, overall: 12 x 15 ft. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York


Fig. 11. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation Performance*, 1979–80. Map of route. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY


Fig. 13. Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*; detail with Washington Monument, 1982. Constitution Gardens, Washington, DC, two walls 240 x 10 ft. at highest point. Photograph. Contemporary Architecture, Urban Design and Public Art (ART on FILE Collection)

Fig. 14. First NYC Art Parade participants in costume, September 28, 1983. *Newsday* press clipping. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 15. Sanitation Worker Parade organized by Commissioner Waring, ca. 1905. Photograph. Collection of Museum of the City of New York

Fig. 16. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Saint Patrick’s Day Parade*, 1977. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 17. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part III: Ceremonial Sweep*, letter [invitation to sweep] to the Honorable Joseph E. Lisa, September 14, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 18. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part III: Ceremonial Sweep, Sanitation Celebrations*, 1983. Participants sweep the streets with brooms and NYC Department of Sanitation workers, New York City. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 19. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Ceremonial Arch Honoring Service Workers in the New Service Economy I*, 1988. Steel arch with materials donated by New York City agencies, 11 ft. x 12 ft. 4 in. x 9 ft. New York City Department of Sanitation. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY


Fig. 22. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *The Social Mirror*, sketches, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 23. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *The Social Mirror*, proposed uniform sketch, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 24. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, co-created with Sanitation workers, rehearsal on Randall’s Island Training Ground, 1983. Video still. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 25. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, choreography drawing co-created with Sanitation workers, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 26. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, daily notes on choreography co-created with Sanitation workers, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 27. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, figure-eight movement, co-created with Sanitation workers, 1983. New York City Department of Sanitation mechanical sweepers on Madison Avenue, New York City, 1983. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 28. Fernand Léger, Frame enlargements from *Ballet Mécanique*, 1924. Photograph. The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 29. M-Series garbage collection truck printout for planning *The Social Mirror*, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY

Fig. 30. Lee Freidlander, *New York City*, 1963. Gelatin silver print, 8 1/2 x 12 7/8 in. Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, CA

Fig. 31. DSNY Commissioner Norman Steisel, letter of gratitude from to DSNY worker John G. Schweikart, April 9, 1984. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
**Introduction**

On Tuesday September 27, 1983, thousands of people stood alongside thirty-two blocks of Madison Avenue from 72nd to 104th streets at seven o’clock and watched New York City’s first Art Parade come to a close. The parade featured uniformed Sanitation workers, elected officials, union leaders, art world luminaries, environmental organizations, all of whom enacted a three-part performance that featured large sanitation equipment and dozens of invited participants.

Usually an invisible workforce, “sanmen”—a term commonly used for uniformed Sanitation workers within DSNY—typically appear to collect the garbage and clean the streets well after a parade has ended and the public has dispersed. On this occasion, however, the sanitation workers took center stage in *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of New York City’s First Art Parade* (fig. 1), which was presented by Creative Time and created by the New York City Department of Sanitation’s (DSNY) official artist-in-residence Mierle Laderman Ukeles (born 1939, Colorado, United States). The parade was led by a massive garbage collection truck, which Ukeles wrapped in mirrors, forcing parade spectators at the onset of the parade to confront their own reflections. Called *The Social Mirror* (fig. 2) by Ukeles, the truck drove down Madison Avenue, followed by six DSNY uniformed workers, each driving a mechanical sweeper – a vehicle with mechanical brooms for cleaning the streets. These workers were performing a “ballet,” in which they maneuvered the vehicles down the parade route performing synchronized choreography (fig. 3).

As night fell, the Sanitation Commissioner and Executive Committee, Union presidents, reporters, municipal leaders, art experts, and Ukeles’s family at the rear performed the *Ceremonial Sweep* (fig. 4). Armed with brooms, these participants, instead of the workers, cleaned up the trash left behind by the parade.
Officially appointed as Artist-in-Residence by DSNY Commissioner Norman Steisel only in 1982, Ukeles has held this position in the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY) from 1977.¹ Often collaborating with Sanitation workers, Ukeles has realized several temporary and permanent works, performances, and events intended to raise awareness of issues related to maintenance work and workers. Her unprecedented residency embedded an artist in a city government agency. This arrangement stood in contrast to public art—permanent artwork paid for by public dollars and commissioned for publicly owned sites—which was, at the time, the most common interaction between the government and artists. Ukeles self-identified as a public artist, but shifted that role’s focus from producing a permanent art object to creating ongoing process-based works from within a government agency. The Artist-in-Residence title signified a disparate intention, setting expectations that Ukeles would largely produce process-based ephemeral works inside the public agency. As a result of its novel form, when she began her residency, there was no way to predict how her work would unfold. Today, she has been part of the DSNY for over thirty-eight years.

Ukeles’s work has been critically analyzed from many different scholarly perspectives. Her performances have been contextualized within feminism,² New Genre Public Art,³ site-specific public art,⁴ systems aesthetics,⁵ ecological art,⁶ cooperative art,⁷ socially engaged

¹ Ukeles is not paid, but is given in-kind support including permanent office space.
performing arts, and contemporary activist art, and, most recently, has been associated with the confluence of art and life. This year, Kari Conte edited a book of Ukeles’s writings on her seven work ballets, collaborative mechanical ballets performed around the world by maintenance workers.

No scholar has yet addressed the implications of her DSNY residency as a single, ongoing, thirty-eight year performance that generates cumulative and lasting meaning and is manifest in her archives (fig. 5). This thesis argues that Ukeles’s work teaches us something new about what monument-making can be when it is socially engaged. The durational process and motivating desire to elicit gratitude for the DSNY labor force of Ukeles’s residency in the Sanitation Department raises pressing questions about the conventional nature of how monuments are typically conceived and executed and to whom these works are directed. Analysis of her three-part performance Sanitation Celebrations, just one engagement within her long-term performative monument, explicates the intricacies of Ukeles’s process-based performative practice. Where conventional monuments have failed, Ukeles’s monument succeeds. Conventional monuments have been criticized as authoritarian in their assertion of history onto the present physical site and viewing audience. As a result, they fail to resonate over time. In contrast, Ukeles approaches the formal elements of the monument with great

---

complexity. By embedding her work inside DSNY operations and by collaborating with its workers, Ukeles creates a performative monument of ephemeral gestures that unfold and accumulate over time with the objective of showing gratitude for and reminding the populace at large of the life-sustaining work of Sanitation workers. She makes both permanent and ephemeral works, both adding to the complexities of her performative monument.\textsuperscript{13} *Sanitation Celebrations*, the grand finale of the Art Parade, locates this parade and clarifies Sanitation’s role within the history and narrative of civic rituals. Instead of presenting a dominant history, Ukeles calls to attention the unrecognized contribution of a labor force. The multilayered processes of participation in *Ballet Mécanique* and *The Social Mirror* implicated specific people and their personal narratives. Groups of DSNY workers became co-creators of *Sanitation Celebrations*, both presenting DSNY labor and being presented and honored for their service. Consequently, the performance offered an alternative and inclusive method of monument-making, which provides a venue to thank an overlooked population by referencing a local history. By re-contextualizing maintenance work and workers into maintenance art and artists, Ukeles expands the boundaries of the producers and subjects of culture. The result is an expression of ongoing gratitude for the Sanitation labor force.

Ukeles’s performative monument functions by creating social situations to effect emotional realities. Erika Doss offers an analysis of contemporary American monument culture, what she calls “memorial mania,” which frames a resurgence of monument-making in the past few decades within the concept of “public display of affection.”\textsuperscript{14} Contemporary commemoration, she argues, partakes in the making and meaning of emotional affect. For

\textsuperscript{13} I am not discussing her permanent works in this thesis, but I believe they only add to the complexity and strength of her performative monument.

shame, commemoration offers redemption; for social debt, commemoration offers gratitude. In his 1988 essay “Monuments,” Austrian writer Robert Musil emphasizes a monument’s need for notice from an audience. Critiquing the ability of a monumental statue to attract and maintain an audience’s attention, he argues that, to harness monuments’ social potential, artists should shift their intentions away from an authoritative historical narrative. According to Musil, monuments should involve an audience to enforce a social bond, resulting in historical consciousness. Going farther, Doss argues that collective affective sentiments motivate the prevalence of, or “mania” for, contemporary monuments, which target an audience to reinforce or reverse a particular collective emotional situation. Monuments are built to do something. Their function is social.

As I will discuss, Ukeles entered DSNY at a financially tumultuous time which was depleting the morale of the workers. To react to and reverse sanmen’s poor morale—caused by the job’s stigma—the artist intended that audiences and participants engage with Ukeles’s performative monument Sanitation Celebrations, collectively acknowledging and exhibiting respect for their work. Through their participation in the spectacle of the parade and their in-depth collaboration with Ukeles, DSNY workers used the monument for redemption and to transform present feelings of shame. As adoring spectators watch the performance unfold, the workers become the headlining act of the first Art Parade.

---

16 Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 13-15
Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Gramsci Monument*\(^{18}\) – another example of a monument that is socially engaged – in the South Bronx shares many aspects with *Sanitation Celebrations* and Ukeles’s performative monument in its entirety. The last of Hirschhorn’s series of four temporal monuments, which he dedicated to major writers and thinkers, *Gramsci Monument* (fig. 6) offers an example of another performance-based durational monument.\(^{19}\) Activated between Monday, July 1, 2013–Sunday, September 15, 2013, to pay tribute to the Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), this work embodies a monument’s ability to unfold over time and last in memory. Its series of pavilions, constructed from vernacular material such as plywood by residents of the Forest Houses public housing project, was intended to provoke encounters and create events. The monument featured daily programs including philosophy lectures, children’s workshops, an in-house radio station, and a self-published newspaper as well as weekly events such as poetry workshops, plays, open microphone nights, and seminars on Gramsci himself.\(^{20}\) Over the course of the summer, residents of all ages from the housing project coordinated programs in the spirit of Gramsci and socialized with artists, philosophers, educators, and other community members. The monument was an experience to live through instead of a structure to view. Thus, Hirschhorn describes his work as a “precarious” and “unintimidating” monument that is conceived not as authoritative or individual, but as a community commitment. He writes, “The ‘Gramsci Monument’ is a Form; it is a new Monument Form. It is a new Monument

\(^{18}\) *Gramsci Monument* by Thomas Hirschhorn, grounds of Forest Houses, a New York City Housing Authority development in the Morrisania neighborhood of the Bronx, New York. Commissioned by Dia Art Foundation

\(^{19}\) 1999 with *Spinoza Monument* (Amsterdam, the Netherlands), followed by *Deleuze Monument* (Avignon, France, 2000), and *Bataille Monument* (Kassel, Germany, 2002).

because of its Dedication, it is new because of its Location, it is new because of its Duration, and it is new because of its outcome.”

While Hirschhorn’s Gramsci Monument took the organizational form of a short-term community and recreational center for a community geographically united, Ukeles’s monument relates more specifically to a community of workers, those of DSNY, and unfolds within the government agency over a much longer period of time. Ukeles arrived at her residency with DSNY, and ultimately at her performative monument, based on a need to conceptualize an utterly different approach to acknowledging and honoring labor. There are a number of important ways that Ukeles’s approach differs from Hirschhorn’s, including site, participation, and duration, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

Ukeles’s early engagement with feminism shaped her approach to conceiving of the Sanitation Celebrations monument to honor sanmen. She arrived at her practice of working inside the massive DSNY labor system via the intellectual path of feminist politics, particularly the feminist movement of the 1960s, as Tom Finkelpearl argues in his 2013 book What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation. In 1969 Carol Hanisch wrote one of the most influential critiques of Betty Frieden’s The Feminine Mystique titled “The Personal is Political,” a phrase that became the mantra of second-wave feminism. She writes, “We discover in these groups that personal problems are political problems. There are not personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for collective solution.” Mary Ryan, a women’s studies professor at the University of California, Berkeley, opines that feminist scholars and activists sifted through their personal experiences as well everyday women’s experiences for

---

22 Finkelpearl, What We Made, 18.
issues that required publicity. This intellectual climate of feminist activity reverberated in Ukeles’s personal art practice during the 1960s and ultimately by 1969, led to the formation of her concept of maintenance art, the foundation for *Sanitation Celebrations*. The same year that Hanisch composed “The Personal is Political,” Ukeles wrote *Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969!* (fig. 7), signaling the start of ten years of ongoing work investigating the intersection of feminism and labor. As a mother, she acutely felt the lack of respect for or acknowledgement of childcare and housework. Confined to the never-ending, repetitive tasks of taking care of her family and maintaining her home, she was unable to dedicate time to her art, a nonissue for her male counterparts. In one frustrated sitting in 1969, Ukeles wrote the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* where she boldly declared,

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. . . . MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK.

Not only is this an assertion of her many fragmented identities as a woman; it is also an intrepid declaration of the value of her labor in the home, which she elevated to the same value as the work she did as an artist. Ukeles equates the labor and emphasizes the low societal esteem of housewifery and minimum wage work, writing, “The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay.”

In her *Manifesto*, she established “maintenance jobs,” both inside the home and within a larger global context, as critical to

---

23 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
sustaining life, an idea that would be fundamental to her work with DSNY. She outlined a division between what she called the “Death Instinct,” defined as “separation; individuality; Avant-Garde par excellence; to follow one’s own path to death—do your own thing; dynamic change,” and the “Life Instinct . . . unification; the eternal return; the perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species; survival systems and operations; equilibrium.” This duality is found in a patriarchal hierarchy that rewards the Death Instinct and suppresses the Life Instinct. Instead of binary forces, Ukeles framed these oppositional systems as a feedback loop whereby the Life Instinct is the indispensable support structure for the progress allowed by the Death Instinct. She provocatively asks, “After the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?” This text lays the foundation for Ukeles’s career in maintenance art while making public her own women’s everyday experiences. At the time she wrote her Manifesto, Ukeles began performing various acts of maintenance art in art institutions, including publicly washing sidewalks and cleaning vitrines during museum hours for art critic Lucy Lippard’s traveling exhibition of conceptual female artists “c. 7,500” (1973–74).

Gradually she narrowed in on concerns related to labor systems. Her residency at the Sanitation department in 1977 was preceded by other projects between 1969 and 1977, in which she focused her ideas of maintenance art through an examination of labor systems. Her

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
personal maintenance actions included \textit{Maintenance Art Tasks} performances at the Wadsworth Atheneum, 1973. During her performance \textit{Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object} (July 20, 1973), Ukeles cleaned the vitrine of an Egyptian mummy on display during museum hours; \textit{Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Inside} and \textit{Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside} (July 23, 1973) was a grueling physical performance in which Ukeles washed the stairs of the main entrance in the morning and the interior marble floors in the afternoon.\footnote{Sherry Buckberrough and Andrea Miller-Keller, \textit{Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Matrix 137}, exh. pamphlet (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1998), \url{https://thewadsworth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Matrix-137.pdf} (accessed April 30, 2016), 5-6.} Eventually Ukeles expanded into in-depth collaborations with large-scale maintenance departments, a crucial step in the development of her practice. Part of the group exhibition “ART<-->World Whitney” at the Whitney Museum Downtown at 55 Beaver Street, Ukeles’s 1976 \textit{I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Each Day} was a six-week-long performance with three hundred maintenance workers. Working in collaboration with workers responsible for the upkeep of the 3.5-million-square-foot building, she asked these laborers to perform their usual daily tasks, but to select one hour of work each day and perform it as art. She then photographed workers during their “art hour” and asked each one to label his or her photo as either “maintenance work” or “maintenance art” (fig. 8). The answers were often inconsistent with some workers selecting art for the same tasks that others defined as work.\footnote{Finkelpearl, \textit{Dialogues}, 311.} The tenuous separation of art and work emphasized in this performance raises issues that are also apparent in \textit{Sanitation Celebrations} and that will be discussed chapter one on site and chapter two on participation. Art and labor intertwined, workers became \begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
artists/subjects/viewers in a performance, and the spectators viewed usually hidden maintenance work as the artwork on display. The performance placed the building’s maintenance workers and their work in the context of art, something Ukeles would continue with her work inside DSNY. In an enthusiastic review of the performance for the Village Voice, David Bourdon suggested that the New York City Department of Sanitation apply for a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to make up for its massive budget cuts.31 Thrilled by the proposition, Ukeles sent the review to the then–Commissioner of the Department of Sanitation Anthony T. Vaccarello. Shortly after, his assistant called Ukeles and asked, "How would you like to make maintenance art with 10,000 people?"32 She began in 1977 with her ongoing residency at the DSNY.

This unusual partnership between Ukeles and DSNY was born from a convergence of agendas: Ukeles’s commitment to her own practice, which addressed issues of labor and sanitation, and DSNY’s response to New York City’s economic crisis of the 1960s and 1970s. By 1974 the City’s debt had escalated to an astounding $11 billion (the equivalent of $54 billion today).33 Sanitation workers went on two major strikes during this time: one in 1968 for over one week and the other in 1975 for two days. During the former, one of the longest sanitation strikes in modern memory, over one hundred thousand tons of uncollected waste accumulated on the streets. In the summer of 1975, the City had laid off a huge number of policeman and firefighters as well as three thousand sanitation workers. There were massive protests around the City: police stormed the Brooklyn Bridge, firefighters occupied stations in North Brooklyn under threat of shutdown, and sanitation workers went on a wildcat strike—without the support of their union

32 Finkelpearl, Dialogues, 310.
leaders—for two full days. Tension among workers in the City government was high and morale was low. New York City residents were increasingly frustrated with seeing waste on the streets.\textsuperscript{34} One sanitation worker was quoted in \textit{The New York Times}, “Do you think we like to pick up garbage? We took this job for security.”\textsuperscript{35} Another sanitation worker, responding to pervasive criticism of the strikes, summed up a common sentiment among DSNY workers:

When men had the means to make daily pickups, there had never been a garbage problem. . . . “It’s public apathy,” he said, “we’re like Mother Hubbard. As soon as we go in and clean a street, people, like children, start throwing things again. The Sanitation Department was never meant to be a valet for the individual. Garbage is not a pleasant product, remember. It’s beyond everybody’s dignity to stoop to pick it up. So it’s left to the sanitationmen, but the problem is lazy people.”\textsuperscript{36}

In the fall of 1975, lawyers for New York City filed a bankruptcy petition with the New York State Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{37} In 1977, just two years later, Commissioner Vaccarello (through his assistant) invited Ukeles to “make maintenance art” in collaboration with ten thousand people, an urgent and creative attempt to boost the public image of and morale within the DSNY.\textsuperscript{38}

Ukeles’s early projects indicate her use of site and participation to challenge conventions of monument and instead stage a long-term, ongoing performative monument. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to go into each of her projects with DSNY (there have been some fifty during her thirty-eight-year residency), two of these works can serve as examples of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{34} Cite poor worker morale + NYC residents’ anger at dirty streets
\item\textsuperscript{38} Finkelppearl, \textit{Dialogues}, 311.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
ongoing nature of her work and her use of site and participation and provide context for my
examination of Sanitation Celebrations: Touch Sanitation (1979-80) and Cleansing the Bad
Names (1984).\(^{39}\) Her staging of a performative monument depends on her articulation of these
three concepts: site-specificity, participation, and permanence. Upon her arrival at DSNY,
Ukeles was quickly given an office and access to all facilities. She showed up every day and
learned as much as she could about the operations of the agency. In 1977–79, based on this
initial research of DSNY, Ukeles wrote a series of proposals for artworks titled Maintenance Art
Works Meets the Dept. of Sanitation. Many of these proposals were realized over time in
iterations of the original proposal. In these proposals, she began to outline a process that was
paramount to the creation of her ongoing performative monument. Embedding herself in its
systems, Ukeles worked within the fixed and temporal sites for DSNY work and in collaboration
with DSNY workers to reverse sentiments of shame, dishonor, and neglect—a common
motivation for monument building\(^{40}\)—suffered by the sanmen during the economic crisis of the
late ‘70s. Through the simple act of showing up and being present, Ukeles proved her
commitment to engage in active critical observation and pedagogy. It is during this period that
Ukeles speaks about first encountering terrible conditions of crumbling facilities and depleted
self-esteem of sanmen. Ukeles recounted the feeling in the facilities, “It was so bad. There was
such a level of disconnection ratified by almost everyone that I met, ‘I’m invisible, I don’t count,
I’m part of the garbage.’ It was sick.”\(^{41}\) Equally critical to the development of her work, she

\(^{39}\) For a complete list of works, see “Mierle Laderman Ukeles's Biography,” Ronald Feldman
Fine Arts, New York,
December 1, 2015).
\(^{40}\) Doss, Memorial Mania, 311-312.
\(^{41}\) Finkelpearl, Dialogues, 312.
learned that sanitation “goes everywhere, and never stops.” With the exception of twelve federal holidays, sanitation workers collect garbage twenty-four hours per day from 8.2 million residents. Six thousand miles of streets are swept weekly, and eleven thousand tons of household trash and two thousand tons of household recycling are collected daily. Ukeles decided art, too, should go everywhere, all the time. Consequently, DSNY operations became both the structure and source material for her future work.

An example of her unconventional conception of site-specific works, the proposal for *Touch Sanitation Performance* was a durational gestural performance, in which Ukeles subsumes her artwork into the site and the context of DSNY (fig. 9). From July 1979 to June 1980, Ukeles traveled to all fifty-nine DSNY community districts and shook hands with each of the 8,500 sanmen while they were on their work route. She thanked each one individually for “keeping the city alive” (fig. 10). The thanksgiving performance was a clear response to the morale of the workers that she had witnessed and the poor conditions of the garages where sanmen were based. Ukeles wanted to meet the workers on their own turf to acknowledge the importance of their work, in spite of their crumbling surroundings. *Touch Sanitation Performance* functioned to prove her own commitment to DSNY’s workers, break through the isolation resulting from terrible worker morale, combat the conception of sanmen as untouchable, and separate the sanitation man from his product. She sought to achieve these social goals by integrating herself into and following the direction of DSNY operations and its large-scale coordination. Using routes mapped by DSNY administrative staff, Ukeles created a performance that traveled the

42 Ibid., 314.
same paths as Sanitation workers (fig. 11). She wanted to physically “inject [herself] into ‘real public work-time,’”45 defining “real” as the municipal structure of work-time (shift) and workplace (collection route). The performance mirrored the movement of Sanitation workers in order to acknowledge and honor each worker’s role in maintaining the city.46 Embedding herself within DSNY structures, a form of systems aesthetics,47 Ukeles temporarily shifted the context of workspace to that of art, the time and space of Sanitation work to the time and space of artwork.

Ukeles’s performative monument employs participation to create new situations in which sanmen are honored and respected. Her performance Cleansing the Bad Names necessitated audience participation instead of passive viewership in order to erase sanmen’s previous shameful memories through gestures of respect (fig. 12). Cleansing the Bad Names took place on September 9, 1984, as part of the Opening Ceremonies for the Touch Sanitation Show at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts on Mercer Street in New York City. During the Touch Sanitation Performance (1979–80), one sanmen, while shaking her hand, shared a memory with Ukeles. He recalled being shooed away by a woman for “stinking up her porch.”48 As a response to that story, for Cleansing the Bad Names, Ukeles reproduced that woman’s porch outside the Feldman Gallery. From sanmen she collected slurs and insults that had been leveled at them, and wrote the words on the walls of the gallery. For the performance, she invited members of the public,

45 Ibid.
46 I capitalize Sanitation when referring to the NYC Department of Sanitation and use lowercase sanitation when referring to general cleanliness or maintenance.
47 Jack Burnham, who had quoted Ukeles’s Manifesto extensively in an essay for Artforum in 1971 was central to theory of systems aesthetics and the use of systems as a medium. He wrote that social systems could be changed by active artistic participation in the system and that artists could integrate systems into their work, thereby bringing the “real world” to art practice. See Burnham, “Problems of Criticism, IX: Art and Technology,” Artforum, January 1971: 40-45.
48 Finkelpearl, Dialogues, 318.
including DSNY executive staff and art-world leaders, to wash each disparaging comment away. Employing this method of commemoration, as opposed to a physical monument, the artist made use of participation and duration to affect a shift in sentiment. In contrast, artist and architect Maya Lin’s 1982 *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington, DC, is a permanent physical monument and uses a convention of naming to honor (fig. 13). Etched onto the gabbro of the *Memorial* wall are 58,307 names of servicemen as a gesture to honor their sacrifice. Viewers visit the *Memorial*, and most frequently interact with the work by spending time staring at the names, a passive act of showing gratitude. While Lin’s Memorial offers a deeper level of audience engagement than a conventional monument (a spectator is immediately reflective of and engaged with the sheer number of names written on the wall and often leaves mementos or makes a rubbing of an individual name), the participation of the spectator is not required to complete the work. Contrary to this passivity, Ukeles asks viewers to become participants in her performance. By physically erasing specific moments of dishonor in the past, participants acknowledged the sanmen’s mistreatment and actively honored them for their service in the present. The gesture of this performance was not enacted by the artist, but instead by the participant; the memories were specific to individual workers and the actions were personal to individual participants. In place of the physical permanence of Lin’s *Memorial*, Ukeles created a lasting impression in the consciousness of the honored sanmen, many of whom were personally implicated were present at the performance. While Lin’s *Memorial* is for the audience to honor the deceased, Ukeles’s performative monument was for participants to co-create gratitude for the service of current laborers.

In this thesis, examination of Ukeles’s 1983 three-part performance *Sanitation Celebrations* will reveal how she has created a performative monument that re-evaluates
conventional notions of site-specificity, participation, and permanence of monuments, respectively. Although unconventional, this monument honors the labor of the sanmen by simultaneously working with and for them. Chapter one addresses the particular way Ukeles expands the idea of place-bound site-specificity to include the historical context of the parade and the public streets of New York City. In this chapter, examination of Ukeles’s use of site, particularly in Ceremonial Sweep, shows the ways in which her work reverses an established power structure that places DSNY workers at the bottom of workforce hierarchy. Chapter two looks at the many layers and forms of participation Ukeles incorporates into Sanitation Celebrations in order to implicate many publics in the process of honoring sanmen. Here Sanitation was rendered visible to and celebrated by a viewing audience through the unexpected collaboration between DSNY workers and Ukeles to transform a garbage collection truck into The Social Mirror and street sweepers into choreographers and performers in Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers. Lastly, chapter three challenges the ideal of permanence in conventional monuments and claims that the ongoing nature of Ukeles’s work lends itself to a continued relevance. Located in one section of Ukeles’s comprehensive and growing archive, Sanitation Celebrations holds a permanent position—through memos, correspondence, photographs, and video—within Ukeles’s ongoing performative monument and communicates the many experiences and memories of those involved.
Chapter 1: Site

In February 1983, Anita Contini, founder and director of Creative Time, Martha Wilson, founder and director of the Franklin Furnace Archive, and Ed Jones, curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, nominated Ukeles to create a performance for the grand finale of the first NYC Art Parade. Held on thirty-two blocks of Madison Avenue and running downtown, the thousands of artists and art workers in the parade were to take over neighborhoods from El Barrio to the Upper East Side with a celebration of contemporary art (fig. 14). The call to artists was simple: “Strut your stuff before an audience of a million people.” Responding to the call, Ukeles created Sanitation Celebrations, which was the three-part finale performance of the entire event, grounding the work in the context of the parade and the street.

Produced specifically for the NYC Art Parade in 1983, Sanitation Celebrations proposed a new method in monument-making in the way the performance redefined the site: as historically inflected, as unfixed in time and duration, and as a location for civic activity and celebration. These aspects of the site, further expounded on below, are dynamically illustrated in the final element of Sanitation Celebrations, the Ceremonial Sweep. In this part of the event, notable government, art, union, and environmental leaders came together to perform sanitation work as the final act of the NYC Art Parade, renegotiating power relationships on the street.

The consideration of site in Sanitation Celebrations takes on greater intricacy and significance when seen within the then-current climate of public art most commonly defined as place-bound works. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, public art programs redefined parameters for commissions, asking artists to emphasize site-specificity, in contrast to their

---

previous focus on stylistic form and historical content that did not necessarily respond to the installation location. Patricia Fuller, former curator of public art at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, claims that, in the 1970s some artists and administrators began to differentiate between “public art,” sculpture located in a public space, and “art in public places,” which focused on the particular location or space for the art. By the mid-1970s the General Services Administration, the division of the federal government responsible for commissioning public artworks, changed the far-reaching Fine Arts in New Public Buildings program to Art in Architecture, marking a shift toward site-specificity. The National Endowment for the Arts created the Art in Public Places program in 1967, which called for artists to create work appropriate for the environment, and by 1978 had expanded this notion to encourage applicants “to approach creatively the wide range of possibilities for art in public situations.” These programs influenced subsequent municipal Percent for Art laws that place permanent public art on public sites. The “physical, institutional, social, or conceptual context” of public artwork, including commissioned monuments, was integral to each work’s meaning.

Site-specificity within official public art programs is predicated on the notion of a fixed identity attached to place. The notion of site-specificity deals with the site as a constant, stable place. Miwon Kwon argues that public art is charged with generating a sense of “place-bound identity” to lend an aura of distinction to indistinct public spaces. This is simply not the case with Sanitation Celebrations, which instead of offering an identity to an indistinct space, calls to attention the multifarious identities already at play within the site of the public streets.

---

50 Felshin, But Is It Art?, 20.
51 Ibid.
52 Lacy, Mapping the Terrain, 22–23.
53 Ibid., 23.
54 Doss, Memorial Mania, 31.
But what are these identities and how are they activated within the site? Specifically, *Sanitation Celebrations* brings the everyday street into the context and language of civic rituals. Public streets carry multiple meanings for multiple audiences at varying times; for the Department of Sanitation, however, the streets serve as workspace. Host to activities ranging from the mundane oblivion of daily travel to the antagonistic and sometimes disruptive actions of strikes, city streets are constantly utilized as sites of civic engagement. The streets are the location in which the populace meets municipal politics and serve as sites for sanitation, transportation, and civic engagement, from protests to parades. At times of unrest, people take to the streets to express anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction with authority, such as a company’s leadership or government actions. The public enters the street to take, reorient, or negotiate power. Rosalyn Deutsche argues that public space is “inseparable from the conflictual and uneven social relations that structure specific societies at specific historical moments.”

According to contemporary geographer Doreen Massey, the identity of the site comprises such social relations. Massey recognizes place as “a constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus . . . , which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world.” *Sanitation Celebrations* connects to the wider world of the municipal functions of the city and the identity of the place, the street, which is constantly in flux depending on who occupies the space and in what capacity.

On the other side of the spectrum, a parade is a civic ritual ceremony constructed and produced frequently as an official acknowledgement of the contributions of a specific population to the city. Simultaneously, the city utilizes parades to promote the image of exuberant civic

---

55 Ibid., 34.
pride. Yet, as these boisterous civic events occur, Sanitation continues to maintain the streets, remaining outside of the festivities or demonstrations.

Casting the streets as a site of both conflict and ritual, Ukeles’s *Sanitation Celebrations* refers to DSNY’s use of civic celebration and play during more positive eras in its history. DSNY had its own history of using parades to ensure sanitation workers were rendered visible to the public they served. Commissioner of the then–Department of Street Cleaning (DSC) from 1895-1898, George Waring is credited for cleaning up New York City by implementing reforms that laid the foundation for modern recycling, street sweeping, and garbage collection. Working to combat the same false perceptions of cleaners in 1905 as Ukeles was in 1983, the commissioner understood that the social contract necessary to maintain a clean New York City was incomplete, lacking the cooperation of the whole society. He needed to shift the public’s attitude towards sanitation work and workers, who were denigrated as occupying the lowest rung of society. In addition to addressing worker morale through administrative upgrades, Waring employed symbolic performative tactics, such as requiring all DSC workers to wear uniforms of white trousers and jackets with tall white helmets so they would be associated with hygiene. These tactics were crucial to his objectives of changing social behavior and convincing the masses that modern waste disposal was integral to maintaining public health and hygiene. According to DSNY’s anthropologist-in-residence Robin Nagle,57 the change in uniform was a particularly brilliant move, making “the men . . . no longer invisible, and the public could no longer avoid seeing them.”58 Waring also organized the first sanitation parade. In May 1896, the entire department of twenty-two hundred workers marched down Fifth Avenue in their white

---

57 Robin Nagle has been DSNY’s anthropologist in residence since 2006. I cite her 2013 book, *Picking Up: On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City*, in this thesis.
uniforms, brooms over shoulders (fig. 15). This was an exceedingly proud moment of civic recognition for the department and its workers. Journalist and photographer Jacob Riis wrote, “Colonel Waring’s . . . broom saved more lives in the crowd than a squad of doctors. It did more: it swept the cobwebs out of our civic brain and conscience.”

By claiming the streets, Waring proclaimed the civic importance of sanitation by raising the workers’ visibility.

With the exception of the 1896 parade, the sanmen were often rendered invisible in the roles they played in parades. Addressing the parade as a site of civic action, Ukeles also sought a way to change the sanmen’s contribution to this ritual. In one of the first letters between Ukeles and parade organizer Ed Jones on February 2, 1983, the artist recounted a memory from her experience with the 1977 Saint Patrick’s Day Parade, during which she paid careful attention to the sanmen. Ukeles observed that, “‘every’ body is having a ‘great time,’ and then along come the sanmen at the end shoveling up the horse shit. It made a lasting impression on me” (fig. 16). She noticed the “public-ness” of the parade: the spectators gazed unabashedly at the marchers. The Saint Patrick’s Day Parade participants were hyper-visible; consequently, the sanmen were also on display, undoubtedly some unwillingly. Immediately after the parade ended, the sanmen, in conjunction with DSNY mechanical sweepers, set to work to return the streets to their regular function. As the Sanitation workers moved animal droppings towards the side of the road, near the crowd, the spectators looked down, apparently, according to Ukeles, fearful of being hit by the waste.

59 Colonel Waring served in the American Civil War.
60 Ibid., 111.
62 Ibid.
sentiment of shame for the sanmen that was expressed by their refusal, since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, to march in uniform in any city parade.  

As a result of her observations, Ukeles wanted to create a version of the Saint Patrick’s Day Parade that honored rather than embarrassed sanitation workers. Ukeles later said, “I promised myself, right there in 1977, that one day I would create a work where regular sanitation workers were in the parade, of the parade, were the parade, proudly on show, even as the grand finale, not what comes after.” The NYC Art Parade offered her the opportunity to make a redemptive monument, in Doss’s terms, by reclaiming the streets where shame had previously occurred and subjecting them to reimagined uses. Doss argues that shame is an affected sentiment that social interaction manufactures and that often motivates monument-making, offering redemption for those shamed. She cites Sartre, who similarly describes shame as the degradation of the gaze, the indignity of being viewed by someone else as an object. The act of being derisively watched and subsequently struck by embarrassment and humiliation is inherently social, triggered by the dishonor of someone else’s scrutiny. In contrast, Doss maintains that the redemptive potential of shame depends on the affirmation of others. Those who experienced shame, in this case the sanmen, need to be recast as and perceived as legitimate members of society. In an interview with Tom Finkelpearl, similarly, Ukeles affirmed: “One of the functions of art is to play time over again and remake history better this time.” Going farther than Waring, Ukeles made the streets into a stage for enacting this process in Sanitation Celebrations.

63 Ibid.
65 Doss, Memorial Mania, 261.
66 Ibid., 311–12.
67 Finkelpearl, Dialogues, 318.
While *Sanitation Celebrations* as a whole provides a means for casting the street and parade as sites for redeeming sanman, a focus on the structures of power at play on the site of the street bears additional exploration. The *Ceremonial Sweep*, the final act of the performance, reversed conventional labor-power structures as they play out in the street and parade as temporal-spatial frameworks. Political geographer and urban theorist Edward Soja uses the term *thirdspace* to describe a “Lived Space” that is at once “multi-sited and contradictory, oppressive and liberating, passionate and routine, knowable and unknowable.” In *Sanitation Celebrations*, the “Lived Space” of the street and DSNY work is “knowable” or expected in the everyday but becomes “unknowable” or unexpected when used in the Art Parade. Despite taking place on the same site, the way spectators relate to DSNY workers every day is dramatically different from how they do so during the NYC Art Parade. During the day, sanitation goes unnoticed, but during this parade sanmen are hyper-visible in a positive way, as artists, performers, and important contributors to the functioning of the city, no longer blending into the regular maintenance of the city street. The same site of the street takes on multiple identities wherein sanitation work is common and thus, invisible but when the street is transformed into a stage, sanitation is no longer routine, but a new, surprising performance.

Instead of sanmen, in *Ceremonial Sweep*—the final performance of *Sanitation Celebrations*—parade spectators and DSNY workers observe white-collar workers cleaning the street. The artist’s intentions for the *Sweep* are explicitly outlined in the invitation she sent to participants. Conceived as a “work-hierarchy role-reversal” action, Ukeles, on behalf of DSNY Commissioner Norman Steisel, invited people in power to “do” sanitation as a gesture of support.

---


69 Invitation to participate, Ukeles Archive, New York.
and evidence of shared responsibility for maintaining the health of the city. She invited Commissioner Steisel; United Sanitation Workers Association Local 831 President Ed Ostrowski; Sanitation Officers Union President Joseph DiMasso; Superintendent of Schools, the Honorable Anthony Alvarado, among other DSNY leadership; City Council members; union leaders; environmental professionals; heads of art organizations; members of the press who had previously written negatively about DSNY, alongside any willing member of the public, to participate in a “performance Maintenance Art/Work” (fig. 17). Together, each individual picked up a broom, provided by DSNY, and swept for thirty-two city blocks, southbound on Madison Avenue, erasing the tracks of the NYC Art Parade.

Bringing notable leaders to conclude the celebrations in Ceremonial Sweep created a social role reversal: government officials commonly lead parades, but in Ceremonial Sweep they stand in for DSNY workers who normally arrive after the parade ends to clean up invisibly. Onlookers usually ignore Sanitation work in the “Lived Space” of the street, but here, on the stage of the Art Parade, men and women in business attire and street clothes—signifying culturally that they are meant to be seen, not be invisible—marched the length of the parade sweeping its remnants (fig. 18). As opposed to the 1977 Saint Patrick’s Day Parade, these spectators, including DSNY sanmen, fixed their gaze on prominent members of society cleaning

---

70 Ceremonial Sweep participants (incomplete list): DSNY Commissioner Norman Steisel; United Sanitation Workers Association Local 831 President Ed Ostrowski; Sanitation Officers Union President Joseph DiMasso; Superintendent of Schools, The Honorable Anthony Alvarado; Roger O’Sullivan, We Care About NYC, Inc.; We Care About NYC, Inc. Cochairperson Marion Heiskill; the Honorable Henry Stern, Council on the Environment; Parks Department Commissioner; several members of the New York City Council; DSNY Executive Committee members; Feldman Gallery Owner Ron Feldman; Creative Time Cofounder and Director Anita Contini; Andrea Pedersen; Nancy Princenthall; and Bill O’Conner. See Creative Time, run-of-show memo, September, 27, 1983, Ukeles Archive, New York.

the streets in the Ceremonial Sweep, a truly spectacular reimagining and highlighting of the work of Sanitation. Sanitation work became visible in Ceremonial Sweep by being unexpectedly performed on the street by respected executives rather than “garbage men” largely stigmatized for doing “dirty” work.

The performance Ceremonial Sweep uses time as a tool to politicize, going beyond power relations, the site of the Art Parade. Kevin Lynch in What Time is this Place proposes the term time-place to imply a necessary shift in dealing with site-specific art beyond a primarily spatial coordinate towards a temporal construct. In a performative monument, site cannot simply be bound to a physical location but instead must also be contextualized through changing social relations over time.72 Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art, edited by Paul O’Neill and Claire Doherty in 2011, similarly challenges the orthodoxy of site-specificity by considering durational performances, a fundamental element of many performative monuments. David Beech, in the same book, writes that duration within a dematerialized monument re-contextualizes and politicizes site in terms of time. He writes, “Duration is problematic because it is presented as a solution for art’s social contradictions, whereas the only viable political solution must be to problematize time for art.”73 Duration is defined here as the length of a performance, a critical formal element of performative work. Time, here, is rooted in contextual identity of a space. Ceremonial Sweep uses duration, the unfolding performance, to point to the problematic nature of sanitation work that takes place after the time of the parade instead of within it.

The contextual meaning of site is a fundamental component of Ukeles’s reimagining of the contemporary monument. Contrary to place-bound notions of site-specificity in public art programs of the 1970s, *Sanitation Celebrations* responds to site not as a physical space but as a set of changing social relations. The functional identity of site is unfixed and changes in time. As a result, the performance responds to history, memory, and time as the fundamental components of the site of the parade. Birthed from past interactions with sanmen and rooted in DSNY history with civic ceremonies and festivals, Ukeles’s *Sanitation Celebrations*, and specifically the *Ceremonial Sweep*, offered a re-presentation of a shameful past as a spectacular and gracious temporal artwork. The grand finale of the Art Parade became a site for redemption as well as commemoration of the DSNY worker. While contextual considerations are fundamental to Ukeles’s work, her work remains incomplete without social interactions and particularly without collaboration with Sanitation. In the next chapter, a formal analysis of her participatory and collaborative process used in *Sanitation Celebrations* will be analyzed as a method for creating a cultural reconceptualization and new formal articulation of the meaning of the Sanitation worker and maintenance work. Ukeles’s particular use of site enables a reevaluation of the use of participation in the performative monument.
Chapter 2: Participation

In the Art Parade Ukeles’s use of participation is an early example of a socially engaged art medium whereby the art is located in the interactions between people. From conception to performance, Sanitation Celebrations unfolds and transforms over time and based on social relations and varying methods of collaboration. Sanitation Celebrations, like all of Ukeles’s work with DSNY, has a functional purpose that relies on participation from DSNY and reception from an audience. The goal of the performative monument is to make visible the often-invisible labor of Sanitation and ultimately, create a situation where a collective populace shows gratitude towards Sanitation workers. She wishes to implicate a waste-producing public, moreover, in the process of sanitation work. Ukeles’s intentions are “to move to a social state of interdependence.”

In Sanitation Celebrations, Ukeles created a situation in which the spectator, the collaborator, and the institutional coordinator all contributed to the creation of the performance in various capacities. In this chapter, these forms of participation in Sanitation Celebrations will be examined, specifically the role of the spectators in The Social Mirror, the sanmen as co-creators in Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers, and the institutional coordination within DSNY. Here I will show how commemoration occurs, ultimately, through collaborative practices in all of these cases.

While scholars do not agree on a term to describe participatory art practice, most agree that the impetus for collaborative art is to effect change, whether social, political, or pedagogical. Art should do something, and that something occurs through participation. Suzanne Lacy refers to early socially-engaged art as new genre public art, arguing that, beyond subject matter, this

74 Ibid., 17.
kind of art is about an “aesthetic expression of activated value systems.”

According to Lacy, the “unknown relationship between artist and audience” is “a relationship that may itself become the artwork.”

Nina Felshin links participatory art practice to a history of new activist art that relies on sustained public participation to effect social change. Jeff Kelley argues that a dialogic process can change both the artist and participant. Grant Kester posits that socially engaged projects exist on a spectrum of participation, differentiating between collaborative, “dialogical” works and projects based on a scripted encounter.

Tom Finkelpearl, extending Kester’s idea of the spectrum of participation, creates the term social cooperation to imply varying levels of collaboration throughout the duration of a project. While collaboration implies co-authorship from start to finish, Finkelpearl explains cooperation simply implies that people have worked together on a project.

In Sanitation Celebrations, the levels of participation and definitions of participants vary with each component, aligning most closely with Finkelpearl’s definition of social cooperation. As will be elaborated in this chapter, Ukeles is the sole author of The Social Mirror, DSNY sweepers are coauthors of the Ballet Mécanique, and invited participants perform a task directed by Ukeles in Ceremonial Sweep. Each element required different levels of coordination from DSNY administration. It is inaccurate to say this performance is solely authored by Ukeles, and equally fallacious to claim it is a consistent collaboration from beginning to end. Each contributor instead takes on different levels of engagement at different times within the performance.

---

75 Lacy, Mapping the Terrain, 30.
76 Ibid., 20.
77 Felshin, But Is It Art?, 21.
78 Ibid., 12.
79 Finkelpearl, What We Made, 4.
80 Ibid., 49–50.
Similar organizational structures pervade a few of Ukeles’s other works. In her 1978–80 *Touch Sanitation Performance*, discussed in the introduction, Ukeles relied heavily on DSNY coordination. DSNY administrative staff charted her route so that 8,500 sanmen were able to accept her handshakes and thanks while on the job.\(^1\) In *Ceremonial Arch Honoring Service Workers in the New Service Economy I* (1988, fig. 19), Ukeles collected used items from service workers across government agencies like DSNY, the New York City Police Department, and the Fire Department of New York, including gloves, subway straps from the Metropolitan Transit Authority, walkie-talkies from policemen, among others. She fabricated the *Ceremonial Arch* in an unfinished section of New York’s World Financial Center in Battery Park City as part of the group exhibition “The New Urban Landscape.”\(^2\) Each of Ukeles’s works discussed above thus required a different level of outside participation. So, Finkelparl’s notion of *social cooperation* holds true within many of Ukeles’s works since the methods and levels of participation are nuanced and specific to the situation. When considering just one of her works or many together, it is most accurate to say that many people have worked together on her projects, than to assign a singular definition of participation.

Parade spectators, as passive but still engaged viewers, played a crucial role in rendering effective the performative monument of *Sanitation Celebrations* in its production of gratitude for sanmen. This contribution by spectators holds especially true when considering *The Social Mirror*, the first part of *Sanitation Celebrations*. In this aforementioned aspect of the work, a mirrored garbage collection truck driven by two Sanitation workers cruised down the Art Parade route, inaugurating the performance *Sanitation Celebrations*. The documentation preserved in Ukeles’s archive clarifies her intention to create sculptural work out of Sanitation objects and, in

---

\(^1\) Finkelparl, *Dialogues*, 314–15.
\(^2\) Phillips, *Ukeles: Maintenance Art*. 
this case, use reflective material in order to implicate each viewer’s personal role in the cycle of waste creation and disposal. Video footage of the Parade also reveals that the unusual sight of a pristine, reflective garbage truck caught the attention of and prompted wonderment in viewers, causing them to unthinkingly interact with Sanitation. The name of Ukeles’s proposal succinctly declares her ultimate goal for *The Social Mirror*: “See Sanitation — See Yourself.”

Documenting *Sanitation Celebrations* from fabrication and rehearsal to performance, an edited video recording from the artist’s archives shows the production stages of the *The Social Mirror*. Although the video cuts between segments of *Sanitation Celebrations*, *The Social Mirror* first appears in a DSNY garage where workers inspect and weld the cabin of the collection truck. These laborers then wrap the sculpture in brown paper and packing blankets (fig. 20) and drive it, covered, to the staging area for the Parade, a quiet street adjacent to Madison Avenue. Parked on the street but hidden under its covering, the truck went unnoticed by passersby. As Ukeles looked on, a group of DSNY workers, in casual uniforms of green pants and orange T-shirts, unwrapped and cleaned the sculpture and carefully folded the packaging. They looked at each other smiling and laughing and congratulated Ukeles. The growing sense of pride, even mediated through video, is palpable among Ukeles and this crew of DSNY workers. As the mirrored collection truck stood stripped of its protective covering in the Parade staging area, children flocked to the reflective surface. Two children approached the sculpture in awe, inspecting the exterior, touching the mirror, and gasping at their own reflections. This was no regular garbage truck. Driven by DSNY workers Richard Carr and Michael Cararra, *The Social Mirror* opened *Sanitation Celebrations*, moving slowly south on Madison Avenue with the setting sun reflected

---

84 Ibid.
on its surfaces. Playing the role of Sanitation’s Parade float, *The Social Mirror* was surprising and dynamic. The mirrored panels were spotless, splitting the street in half and reflecting a clear image of parade spectators and the cityscapes behind them on either side of the street. Sanitation was quite literally a reflection of the environment. Group after group of people standing curbside of the Parade looked on in disbelief and cheered. The audience’s outward reactions activated the sculpture, creating a real-time feed of praise and an unknowing acknowledgement of their involvement within waste systems.

Ukeles intended for *The Social Mirror* to activate viewers so that they become active agents in commemorating the work of sanmen and take responsibility for their participation in waste creation. Ukeles first described *The Social Mirror* on February 5, 1979 in her Maintenance Works proposal (fig. 21). Formatted like most of Ukeles’s proposals, it begins with a “problem” that faces DSNY, followed by her solution through art practice, and finally, methodology or notes on how she will realize the project. In this case, Ukeles observes two related problems: the disconnect between DSNY and its public and the inability of the public to accept the responsibility of maintaining shared environmental city-space. A mirrored sanitation truck, she proposes, will solve these problems by acting as a mediator between the municipal service of Sanitation and the public served by Sanitation. She writes,

See the surface of the truck’s exterior as the literal interface between the Department and the public. The Sanitation truck does not belong to the Department. It belongs to the public. Mirrored, it reflects the real public space it serves. / Surface is mediator between public service/space (truck) and public served in space (streets).

---

87 Ibid.; Creative Time, run-of-show memo.
She concludes by saying she will use some kind of industrial mirrored material—known for its durability and as a common material found in the cityscape. While Ukeles nearly realized *The Social Mirror* to the specifications of the vehicle described in her proposal, she was unable to mirror the entire truck. The front cab where the drivers sit was too expensive to fabricate in reflective material. While it is difficult to prove that Parade spectators, while watching *The Social Mirror*, felt responsible for their contribution to Sanitation systems, one could argue that the collective audience reaction seen in the video is a mark of success for the work. In stark contrast to the embarrassment and shame that Ukeles described in the 1977 Saint Patrick’s Day Parade, the audience’s excited reaction to *The Social Mirror* is a positive acknowledgement of Sanitation. At the very least, these displays of wonderment from the audience inserted a new, complimentary narrative within the history of DSNY’s involvement of parades. This positivity, in turn, could be interpreted as gratitude for the sanmen’s service.

Ukeles further used the concept of “reflection,” pushing beyond the singular event of the parade to prospective works related to *The Social Mirror* that might have deepened the participation of the spectator. In a June 2, 1983 memo accompanied by sketches addressed to DSNY Commissioner Steisel, Ukeles proposed, but never realized, using the sanitation symbol of the mirrored truck in posters and etched drawings, which she would distribute during the parade (fig. 22). By removing its function, *The Social Mirror* reduced the garbage truck to its simple form. The vehicle, widely recognizable in its shape, became a symbol for sanitation. Ukeles’s proposal for the etchings and posters of the collection truck pushed its connotative value even farther by turning the Sanitation truck into an emblem for the agency.

---

90 Ukeles describes her disappointment in not being able to mirror the entire truck and outlines the circumstances that led to this disappointment. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, letter to her gallerist Ronald Feldman, 1983, Ukeles Archive, New York.
In this same memo, Ukeles also sent sketches of mirrored strips for all DSNY trucks and mirrored shoulder treatments for DSNY uniforms so to continue to “implicate by reflection” as part of every interaction between the sanmen and the public (fig. 23). She wrote to Commissioner Steisel, “It seems to me that if a sanitation vehicle and uniform would always include reflective material, so that literally adhering to it—that conveys your meaning immediately, the often missing link of INTER-DEPENDENCE.”\(^91\) Not only would the mirrored surfaces continue the work of *The Social Mirror* to connect Sanitation service with the public served, but the new uniforms would also act as a symbol of honor for sanmen. The mirrored shoulder of the uniforms would “operate like a ‘mantle of office—public’ and would be spectacular looking as the man originates most of his upper body movements from there.”\(^92\) By encountering these elements as part of everyday Sanitation activities, ideally, viewers would more readily take notice of Sanitation work and even begin to consciously reflect on the role of this workforce within the city. Artist Pablo Helguera defines the related term *nominal participation* in his 2011 handbook for participatory art practice, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*. Nominal participation, he claims, asks the viewer or visitor to be reflective.\(^93\) At the First NYC Art Parade, *The Social Mirror* provoked spectators’ wonder without social or political activation, but instead as a result of pleasure in witnessing something concurrently strange and beautiful. In Ukeles’s uniform proposal, the reflective motif would carry into the everyday and transform the spectator into a nominal participant. Sadly, the new uniforms were never realized.

There are parallels between Ukeles’s engagement in participation in *The Social Mirror*

\(^{91}\) Mierle Laderman Ukeles memo to Commissioner Steisel, June 2, 1983, Ukeles Archive, New York.
\(^{92}\) Ibid.
and the writings and artworks of historical figures of the 1950s to the early 1970s. At the time Ukeles wrote the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, artists were challenging traditional divisions of artist and audience. In his 1957 essay “Towards a Situationist International,” Guy Debord shifts the paradigms of art and viewer, arguing that “situations” should not be judged by whether they themselves are interesting, but instead, if the “liver” – neither a “walk on” nor an “actor” in a “situation” – could herself “become interesting under the new conditions of cultural creation.”

In *The Social Mirror*, Ukeles creates the conditions for making the “liver” (one who lives through the situation) interesting. Expanding upon Debord’s ideas, she features the reflections of the spectators prominently and makes the viewers the actors in the artwork. This expansive practice, connected to social sculpture and Fluxus, casts the audience as an active agent in the creation and implementation of an artwork. In the multi-sited and politically charged notion of the streets, as in the case of *The Social Mirror*, onlookers become active agents in the construction of the meaning of an artwork. In 1973 Joseph Beuys introduced his concept of the social sculpture, taking the action art of Fluxus and Happenings to a far more inclusive space; in “I Am Searching for Field Character,” Beuys declared, “every human being is an artist,” a creator of social sculpture/social architecture set in context of the whole society. True democracy cannot be realized until everyone can participate in a total work of art.

For the *Ceremonial Sweep*, Ukeles engaged participants, in contrast, for the *Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, she needed collaborators. The former has been described at length already, but in the latter, the finale of *Sanitation Celebrations*, invited guests became participants, requiring more involvement than just being present in order to perform a

---

96 Ibid., 126.
gesture of gratitude towards sanmen. Helguera would refer to this action as directed participation, in which the visitor completes a simple task to contribute to the making of the work. Those who performed in the Ceremonial Sweep deepened their commemoration of sanmen by physically honoring their work in front of a viewing public. As discussed in the introduction, the participants in Ukeles’s 1984 performance Cleansing the Bad Names partook in removing the dishonor placed on sanmen by washing away the previously heard insults that were written on the Feldman Gallery wall. By performing this action, the participants both removed the humiliating memories and demonstrated respect for the sanmen’s service to the City. Ceremonial Sweep uses the same framework of participation to perform gratitude towards Sanitation workers and does so in front of a large audience.

Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers Ukeles collaborated and co-created with DSNY sweepers. She created situations in which DSNY workers could imagine and realize an artwork as collaborators (despite the rigidly hierarchical paramilitary structure of DSNY), leading to greater efficacy and lasting impact of her monument’s production of gratitude. Ukeles had ridden on mechanical sweepers with DSNY drivers several times and had noticed how the drivers were forced to maneuver through double-, sometimes triple-parked cars. According to Ukeles, they did so with expert movements but were still honked at and chastised by passenger cars blocked behind the sweeper. She sought to clear the streets for the sanmen to preform these moves freely.

According to Ukeles’s recent writings on the Seven Work Ballets, DSNY selected six of the agency’s best drivers from the Safety and Training Office to participate in the Ballet. These

---

97 Helguera, Education for Socially Engaged Art, 15.
sanmen were told they were to drive in a ballet by DSNY’s artist-in-residence that would be the final act of the Art Parade. The drivers had never worked together or with Ukeles. They met at the DSNY Training Headquarters on Randall’s Island where lanes had been marked that corresponded to the dimensions of Madison Avenue: fifty-four feet wide, from curb to curb, and many city blocks long (fig. 24).\textsuperscript{99} The drivers operated mechanical sweepers: small three-wheeler machines with a “main broom” on the front end that runs transversely for the full width of the sweeper unit. This circular main broom rotates clockwise, sweeping debris into a containment hopper. The mechanical sweepers require specific training to maneuver. Ukeles was told not to plan moves that needed more space than thirty-six to forty feet wide by two hundred feet long. With just three days to choreograph and one to rehearse, time was crucial. On the first day of rehearsal, one driver asked Ukeles what she wanted them to do. Ukeles replied, “I’m an artist. I’m not your supervisor. I have some ideas but you are the experts of your vehicles. Not me.”\textsuperscript{100} Ukeles then remained silent to prove her statement; she was not in charge and was committed to a collaborative process. Halfway through the first day one driver proposed an idea, which snowballed into a lively discussion of the potential movements and sequences to be performed.\textsuperscript{101} According to Doherty an artist can “create the capacity for creative illusion—that is, the ability to think and act as if things were different.”\textsuperscript{102} By inventing a new reality for DSNY work to exist—one of art production instead of garbage collection—the DSNY drivers were able to reimagine their work within a different context.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
The process of collaboration allowed DSNY workers to use and present their expert skills of their craft, as opposed to simply completing tasks as part of their job. Helguera calls this creative participation, in which the artist establishes a foundation and structure and the visitors provide content for a component of the work.\textsuperscript{103} Ukeles enacted Beuys’s notion that “communication occurs in reciprocity . . . [and] must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught.”\textsuperscript{104} In \textit{Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers}, Ukeles replaced hierarchical communication between boss and employee (akin to teacher and student) with collaboration that explicitly focused on each participant’s expertise.

The six sweepers took charge, displaying great mechanical knowledge. In dance, the term “body knowledge” analogously refers to an awareness of one’s body, and its possibilities, capabilities and limitations.\textsuperscript{105} Using a deep understanding of their machinery, the drivers entered a space of co-creation, in which they pushed their craft to the limits through improvisation and play. Together, these sanmen created a dance sequence of five gestures for birds-eye (fig. 25) and street-level viewing: \textit{Serpentine, Crisscross, Spider, Face the Audience and Flex Your Muscles}, and \textit{Circles and Figure Eights in the Intersections} (fig. 26). All five moves were to be repeated every six blocks down the parade route. The entire sequence would repeat five times in total. Ukeles’s notes on daily progress and sketches of the choreography express the coauthored vision of the ballet.\textsuperscript{106} In a conversation with Ukeles, Shannon Jackson locates the moments of art in this performance in “the creation of space between you and the workers that didn’t exist before, to me the social effect has aesthetic value. . . . This social interaction is the aesthetic

\textsuperscript{103} Helguera, \textit{Education for Socially Engaged Art}, 15.
\textsuperscript{106} Mierle Laderman Ukeles, notecard, Ukeles Archive, New York.
In the Randall’s Island rehearsal space, the drivers choreographed intricate movement patterns requiring cooperation, coordination, and dependence on the abilities of each other. Ukeles temporarily created a new reality for DSNY drivers to reimagine the purpose and methods of their work.

During the Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Workers, the six mechanical sweepers and their drivers—R. Duonola, J. Fleming, N. Habafnick, J. Schweikart, J. Siere, and G. Vega—took the “stage” as the primary performers.108 Traversing the wide-open four-lane avenue, the machines moved with a freedom that had never been allowed on the streets (fig. 27). Each of the five sequences was choreographed based on an emotional counterpart. First, the sweepers entered Serpentine, for beauty: two by two the mechanical sweepers moved diagonally in one line to the left curb and then to the right. The pairs of sweepers were so close to one another, their brooms were “kissing.” After two blocks of continuous rhythmic curving, the performers assumed Crisscross, a move of intelligence, in which two groups of three sweepers executed interwoven actions, moving in such tight formations that they appeared to be passing through one other. This sequence developed over the course of two full blocks until transitioning into Spider, the feeling of power. The six sweepers assumed the shape of an expanding and contracting flying wedge, billowing down the streets. Then four sweepers rotated in opposite directions to approach each curb for Face the Audience and Flex Your Muscles. In this movement for joy, two sweepers moved to each side of the street and came to a complete stop, coming face-to-face with the audience on both sides of the street.

Up to this point, the momentum of the machinery had sustained a forward motion and an even tempo, so the change of pace and upending of established rhythm was surprising. In front of the now-near audience the sweepers performed a playful, intricate broom sequence: “lift the hopper, drop rotating curb broom, rotate the curb brooms, then tilt them this way and that, open the cab door, stand up and show yourself to the audience, go back in, back up the sweeper with the backup beepers on and lights flashing.”\(^{109}\) When the performers exited their machinery to present themselves, they momentarily broke the fourth wall to huge applause.\(^{110}\) Simultaneously, the remaining two mechanical sweepers occupied the intersections ahead and behind the *Flex Your Muscles* routine. These two sweepers performed the fifth and final move, *Circles and Figure Eights in the Intersections*. A movement for virtuosity, the two sweepers drove in energetic, tight circles followed by figure eights, filling the entire intersection in rapid movement. The vigor of these two sweepers counterbalanced the stationary stance of the four sweepers in the middle.

The result of the collaborative process was a fantastical display of Sanitation’s skills that generated praise and acknowledgement for their creativity; they made art.\(^{111}\) *Ballet Mécanique* extended down the parade route, captivating the audience. Even in the midst of a thousand-participant art spectacle, the ballet was unexpectedly whimsical. The everyday activity of street sweeping entered a new reality in which common actions were exaggerated and animated into a complex dance, pushing the machines to their physical limit. The heavy trucks transformed into seemingly weightless dancers through playful choreography and its expert execution. Ukeles

---


remembered, “We sailed down Madison Avenue, owning the street.” The seeming lightness of the trucks evokes an expert ballerina’s ability to translate intense physical movements into effortless, weightless grace, unfolding all the way to the bounds of the stage. To stage a mechanical ballet with an exclusively male uniformed workforce was a clear feminist gesture by Ukeles. Not to mention, the performance was a reference to male avant-garde Dadaist artist Fernand Léger’s 1924 film *Ballet Mécanique* for what Ukeles refers to as the films “revolutionary spirit” (fig. 28). In addition, the performance is a nod to the legacy of Russian constructivism to use art for social purposes. These contextual roots were unimportant to the viewing public’s ability to understand and react to the *Ballet*. According to Ukeles’s description in *Seven Work Ballets*, the crowd was vigorously engaged with the unexpectedly balletic routine and was audibly present. The only rules Ukeles had to abide by were: don't tip the trucks, don't run anyone over, and don't go backwards. One driver was so taken by the energy of the crowd and the excitement of the choreography that he spontaneously performed the figure eights backwards. As seen in the video documentation of the event in Ukeles’s archives, DSNY drivers captivated the audience with the performance of light and motion, showcasing their craftsmanship and exaggerating the everyday. As coauthors of the performance, DSNY workers reaped acclaim for their performed movements from a viewing public, making this *Ballet* a real gesture and not a symbolic one.

This work ballet created the framework for Ukeles to perform seven more. There were barge ballets in New York City in 1984 and Pittsburgh in 1992, along with five other international performances with sanitation departments in Japan (twice), Germany, and

---

112 Ibid.
France. In each iteration workers became co-creators of maintenance art and were offered direct praise for and commemoration of their service and skill.

Institutional participation in *Sanitation Celebrations* is the final form of participation that merits discussion. As with most of Ukeles’s sanitation works, DSNY actively assisted with the coordination and fabrication of works and lent facilities to do so. This process of participation is highlighted through the production of *The Social Mirror*, part one of *Sanitation Celebrations*. Because Ukeles considers her process-based artwork to begin with the first written proposal or letter for support of an idea, every phase of collaboration is an integral component of the work. Paul O’Neill and Claire Doherty write that often durational artwork is sustained by a “gift economy.” The host institution gifts materials, time, and other resources because there is an implicit understanding that the project is societally important or mutually beneficial. After DSNY Commissioner Steisel approved this proposal for *Sanitation Celebrations*, Ukeles received a twenty-cubic-yard “M-Series” garbage collection truck (fig. 29). In a letter dated April 27, 1983, Commissioner Steisel asked Deputy Commissioner Vincent P. Whitfield to coordinate with Ukeles on how to best produce her three-part concept practically and affordably. The truck went to two mirror fabricators in Brooklyn. The cab, the front portion,

---


could not be fitted with reflective material, but the rest of the truck was adorned with mirrored panels. The mirrors were so striking that DSNY determined the truck could not be driven uncovered, as it would disorient other drivers. Clearly a source of pride for DSNY workers, the truck was given an official Sanitation designation: 25M-271 A.F.F. (Auxiliary Field Force) on September 17, 1983.\textsuperscript{119} On the day of the NYC Art Parade, a skilled DSNY welder made structural repairs to the cab – there was a malfunction in the fabrication that would have rendered the truck immobile if not for these repairs\textsuperscript{120} – and other DSNY workers carefully wrapped the truck in two layers of coverings to prepare for its transport. Although initiated and authored by Ukeles, the fabrication of \textit{The Social Mirror} was only possible because of DSNY will, resources, coordination, and expert maintenance.

Grounded in a history of art from the 1950s onward that re-oriented the spectator into an active participant, \textit{Sanitation Celebrations} required more from its audience than passive viewership. \textit{The Social Mirror} required excitement and acknowledgement from an engaged viewer, \textit{Ceremonial Sweep} necessitated directed participation, and \textit{Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers} was a co-authored playful, unusual display of sanitation. Each element of \textit{Sanitation Celebrations} employed a different method of participation and in doing so, created participatory and collective sentiments of commemoration for sanmen, critical parts of Ukeles’s performative monument. Ukeles set the stage for Sanitation to perform and the prompts to elicit the performance. The astonishment of \textit{The Social Mirror} spectators, the actions of gratitude by the \textit{Ceremonial Sweep} participants, the expertly choreographed and danced \textit{Ballet Mécanique for

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 18
Six Mechanical Sweepers by sanmen collaborators, and the institutional coordination from DSNY administration all contributed their time and expertise to physically perform acts of gratitude to sanmen and to showcase the important work of sanitation during Sanitation Celebrations. The performance from inception to execution transforms labor into art. In order for Sanitation workers to personally receive gratitude, they needed to be celebrated as part of the creation and presentation of the art. Each action within the parade received a positive reaction from an engaged spectator or participant to close the shame to redemption loop and to show meaningful and lasting gratitude and goodwill toward DSNY workers.
Chapter 3. Ongoing Permanence

Ukeles’s office, on the second floor of DSNY’s 44 Beaver Street building, contains an archive filling one thousand square feet divided into four small rooms. Filing cabinets, boxes, shelves, rolls of prints, and various other media pack the space (fig. 5). The archive is divided into sections covering temporary works, permanent works, media (slides and photographs occupy one bookshelf, VHS tapes and DVDs another), Ukeles’s lectures and writings, press clippings, and books and essays about the artist. These sections are loosely chronological and contain memos, daily notes, contracts, letters, media, press clippings, and various objects relating to each of her works. The single most comprehensive resource for rediscovering or reliving Ukeles’s work, curator Kari Conte refers to it as a “monumental archive,” recognizing Ukeles’s immense commitment of time to DSNY.121 Every day that Ukeles remains working within the agency, her archive grows. Only now that the trajectory of her practice over many years can be seen and after gaining perspective from copious records spanning decades, can her time with DSNY be understood as a single, long-term work, beginning in 1977—the year of the first filing cabinet in her archive—and continuing to unfold in the present day.122

Sanitation Celebrations continues to exist: through its documentation in the archive the performance becomes an ongoing monument. In the temporary works section, in a filing cabinet marked “1983,” resides every document chronicling Sanitation Celebrations, from Ukeles’s first letter to NYC Art Parade organizer Henry Korn in February 1983123 to a letter thanking Mayor Ed Koch for his participation in the Parade and inviting him to the Touch Sanitation Show

121 Conte, “The Ballet Book,” in Seven Work Ballets, 12.
122 This is from my own observation from spending time in Ukeles’s archive.
Within these folders, documents chronicle every person involved, milestone achieved, and activity planned and executed that led to the performance and its lasting ramifications. There are two binders of slides, VHS tapes, and corresponding DVDs that chronicle the fabrication of *The Social Mirror* and the rehearsal and ultimate performance of *Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*. On a shelf full of objects, including a bag of dirt Ukeles saved from her 2013 sweeping performance at the Queens Museum, there is a *Sanitation Celebrations* pin that Mayor Ed Koch and NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Bess Myerson wore when they kicked off the parade. Within Ukeles’s archive, the physical presence of items related to *Sanitation Celebrations* ensures the ongoing permanence of the performative monument. In this chapter, *Sanitation Celebrations* will be discussed as it exists in Ukeles’s archive. I will show how the performance continues to exist through its records, which, instead of a permanent physical structure acts as a symbol of commemoration, offers an ongoing commemoration of sanmen.

Permanence is unachievable within the formal considerations of physical monuments. Robert Nelson and Margaret Olin, authors of *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, firmly declare that, regardless of their premeditated permanence, “monuments are mortal.” Not only do their materials physically deteriorate, but also the historical messages conveyed through monuments become stagnant and politically and culturally irrelevant over time.

---

125 SWEEPING UP, Performance at Queens Museum, New York City Building, Flushing Meadows, Corona Park, Queens, NY, June 2, 2013.
126 As seen in a photograph from Ukeles’s Archive, New York.
127 Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 323.
128 Photographer Lee Friedlander exemplified this idea in his 1973 book *American Monuments*, for which he traveled the United States documenting monuments in both small towns and large cities. The photograph *New York City* shows billboard and building-sized advertising towering over a monument of Father Duffy in Times Square (fig. 30). Such a monument was meant to
Conversely, Widrich argues that performative monuments have crucial staying power because of their *impermanence*, specificity of audience, and “temporal interaction with an audience that itself is not [an] eternal public, but a succession of interacting subjects.” The ephemeral nature of performative monuments imparts an impermanence that carries lasting impact on those who experience the performances. While *Sanitation Celebrations* was a fleeting moment, not intended to last, its commemorative function and impact was meant to endure in the consciousness of those who participated. Here, permanence is achieved in durational time, not through an object or a performance. The performance collects and generates meaning over time as it continues to commemorate within the collective and individual memories of those involved.

Following the Art Parade, *Sanitation Celebrations* continued its celebration of sanitation workers and artists within the DSNY organization and the media. Documents from Ukeles’s archive evidence this generative gratitude. Widrich claims that documentation serves to “immortalize the project,” entering the archives and becoming an element of permanence, or at least extended duration. In the case of *Sanitation Celebrations*, press, letters, and similar items that arrived in response to the completed performance are themselves part of the monument. These documents, originating after the event, are integrated in the work itself not only because they have entered the artist’s archive as physical objects, but also because they participate in the creation and maintenance of its social goal: to honor DSNY workers while implicating the public in the cycle of waste management. For instance, the archive contains an article dated October 11, 1983 from the *Village Voice* entitled titled “Mass Exhibitionism,” in which Kim Levin writes favorably within a rather unfavorable review of the Art Parade:

---


The mirrored truck and the dancing mechanical sweepers, choreographed by “sanitation artist” Mierle Laderman Ukeles as a finale, were truly a spectacular sight and the one genuine new artwork of the evening. Those rotary sweepers are pretty impressive (if you’re ever lucky enough to see one at work) even when they’re not sashaying down Madison Avenue in formation or twirling in wild figure eights at 79th Street.\textsuperscript{131}

In addition to the positive acknowledgment of the performance, Levin praises the work of DSNY mechanical sweepers outside of the context of maintenance artwork.

City government officials of varying levels of power praised DSNY participants and considered the implications of Ukeles’s work beyond its performance. In a letter to Mr. John G. Schweikart, one of the six performers in Ballet Mécanique, Commissioner Steisel wrote, “Mierle told me what a strong and creative leadership role you played in both the design phase and the street ballet implementation—essentially what an artist you are in your work. . . . We will never forget it (fig. 31).”\textsuperscript{132} Suffice it to say that, in a large city agency, it is uncommon for the commissioner to personally thank workers on the ground. The performance opened lines of communication within the government itself to show gratitude and honor the service of sanmen.

In a letter to Mayor Ed Koch, Ukeles described her memories of the public response to \textit{The Social Mirror}:

\begin{quote}
I watched a policeman lift his cap and comb his hair in [the truck’s] reflection right in the middle of the Pulaski Day Parade [a later showing of \textit{The Social Mirror}], or the Bishop on the steps of St. Patrick’s—his magnificent purple robe caught in the moving reflection—extend his arms and smile in delight and wonder . . . played back in a frame of inter-dependence between the service providers and receivers.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} DSNY Commissioner Norman Steisel, letter to Mr. John G. Schweikart, April 9, 1984, Ukeles Archive, New York.
\textsuperscript{133} Mierle Laderman Ukeles, letter to Ed Koch, October 25, 1983, Ukeles Archive, New York.
Including an article on artist-painted garbage trucks from the June 1983 issue of World Wastes, DSNY employee Joseph J. Grey sent a note to an unknown DSNY employee on July 21, 1987. Grey says, “Thought that you may get a ‘kick’ out of this. It seems like Meryl [sic] started a ball rolling about the importance of waste disposal and its personnel.” One of many such documents found in Ukeles’s archive, Grey’s note and press clipping support the claim that the commemorative function of the performative monument continued after its performance through social interactions within DSNY.

The legacy of Ukeles’s performance continued long after the DSNY internal letters slowed. Doss argues that a monument’s “meaning is neither inherent or eternal, but processual—dependent on a variety of social relations.” The meaning of Sanitation Celebrations accumulates and continues to transform both in the individual memories of those who have experienced the performances and through its preservation in Ukeles’s archive. As part of a conversation with Ukeles, Finkelpearl recounts:

The other day I was walking along and saw sanitation workers who were taking this big pile of plastic bags filled with garbage into their truck. And one of the guys had this special 360-degree turn, where he would pick the thing up and turn it all the way around and throw it in. . . . It was very beautiful but also only visible to me because of your work.

Decades after he first experienced one of Ukeles’s sanitation works, Finkelpearl noticed the aesthetics of an ordinary activity of garbage collection. He saw the sanman as a performer and choreographer of movements. Finkelpearl’s reminiscence can be related to French historian

---

135 Doss, Memorial Mania, 45.
Pierre Nora’s idea that sites of memory “only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.”

In this case, Finkelpearl’s memory extends his gratitude for and awareness of the sanitation worker as an artist in a time and context distinct from his original experience.

_The Social Mirror’s_ afterlife shows the lasting legacy of _Sanitation Celebrations_.

Ukeles’s artwork begins with her first letter requesting support and, according to Finkelpearl, ends “when the last vestige of the feeling of respect vanishes from the workers’ psyches.” It is fruitful to consider a tertiary audience that experiences versions of the original performances, adding to the longevity of generated impact. After the culmination of _Sanitation Celebrations_, _The Social Mirror_ became its own independent traveling artwork. (fig. 2) Less than one year after the Art Parade, Commissioner Steisel wrote in an invitation to Ukeles’s _Touch Sanitation Show_,

“I can state unequivocally that her independently conceived and directed art works, besides garnering international acclaim, have made a major impact on the self-perception and morale of our entire workforce… ‘SANITATION CELEBRATIONS,’ the Finale of NYC’s Art Parade which included the first appearance of ‘The Social Mirror,’ a mirrored 20 cubic yard garbage collection truck which we have made a permanent art work available on loan to public ceremonies . . . It is ‘a model of public art/work.’”

---

137 Doss, _Memorial Mania_, 57.
139 Although distinct and original performances in themselves, Ukeles subsequent mechanical ballets were birthed from the _Ballet Mécanique_ (1983). She worked with DSNY workers to choreograph and perform _Marrying the Barges: A Barge Ballet_ the following year (1984) and has since realized collaborative maintenance ballets with sanitation departments in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (1985); Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1992); Givors, France (1993); and Tokamachi, Japan (2003 and 2012).
The roving sculpture, a symbol for sanitation, has since appeared in dozens of parades, civic ceremonies, festivals, exhibitions, and art fairs. In October 1987, Marie E. McDonald wrote then-DSNY Commissioner Brendan Sexton to thank him for sending *The Social Mirror* to the Ragamuffin Parade in Brooklyn District 10: “The appearance of your mirrored showcase collection truck in the line of march in this year’s Ragamuffin Parade caused a great stir. The children marching and the spectators were very amused.”¹⁴¹ In this letter, she also praised Commissioner Sexton for the clean parade route. He responded by thanking the section supervisors responsible: Anthony Suscello, Thomas Zarcone, and Robert DelFino,¹⁴² adding three more to the collection of names of DSNY workers thanked for their services and commemorated through Ukeles’s work and archive.

Just as Ukeles’s *Sanitation Celebrations* counters the idea of a monolithic public by engaging particular groups of people in specific ways, it also counters the idea of authoritarian and didactic history by locating its permanence in memory and experience. Doss maintains, “History is condemned as hard, cold facts and monolithic master narratives, while memory is welcomed as the feelings of ‘real people’—especially those formerly excluded from grand historical projects.”¹⁴³ Here, Doss sets up a binary of history and memory. History is an authoritative record of the past, created from the top and disseminated down, while memory connotes personal experiences felt and collected by the average citizen. The implication is that

---

¹⁴¹ Marie E. McDonald (President, Ragamuffin, Inc.), letter to Commissioner Brendan Sexton, October 10, 1987, Ukeles Archive, New York. An annual fall tradition, the Ragamuffin Parade began in 1967 in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. It is a costume parade for school children living in the community.


the former is hierarchically produced and the latter is collectively generated.¹⁴⁴ Ukeles counters this imposition of culture with *Sanitation Celebrations* by re-presenting a mostly unknown narrative of and with an invisible labor force and by preserving it in an archive. Michel Foucault would define this oppositional stance as a “counter-memory” that creates a “counter-monument,” which ideally encourages public agency and articulates complexities within modern history.¹⁴⁵ *Sanitation Celebrations* addresses issues of subjectivity, of who constitutes historical memory, and the terms of this history’s representation by honoring a dishonored labor force from within their own work structures and preserving this “monument” in an ongoing, changing archive. While the collaborative performance itself expanded the notion of who creates and is included within culture, the documents preserved and chronicled in Ukeles’s archive re-produce this counter-narrative for future audiences to experience.

Instead of a physical monument disintegrating into irrelevance and nonexistence over time, Ukeles’s *Sanitation Celebrations* finds permanence in the personal memories of those involved in the creation and performance of the work. The archive not only represents the continued gratitude garnered for the sanmen’s labor but also serves as a new experience of the work for future audiences. Instead of a didactic history, Ukeles’s offers particular memories to particular people, establishing a counter-monument that reflects a new, positive narrative for Sanitation work and workers. The impermanence of *Sanitation Celebrations* yields lasting impact and continued relevance through Ukeles’s archive, conserved in the DSNY building. Ukeles challenges the constitution of permanence, fostering the idea that permanence is felt as much as it is seen. After the NYC Art Parade, organizer Henry Korn joined the advisory committee of Ukeles’s *Touch Sanitation Show*, *The Social Mirror* became a traveling ode to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 24–25.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 356.
Sanitation, and *Ballet Mécanique* sparked the creation of six additional work ballets. Thus *Sanitation Celebrations* is just one example within Ukeles’s larger performative monument, which echoes in time well beyond its first iteration.
Conclusion

Taking a deeper look into *Sanitation Celebrations* allows one to see how Ukeles’s performative monument reorients and reconsiders tenets of classical monuments: site-specificity to include a historical and memory-based context; participation from DSNY workers; and permanence in lasting impact. Through her commitment to create work within DSNY systems, she created work that matched the scale of DSNY operations in coordination and duration. This series of engagements avoids the colossal monumentalization of a political view or dominant history. Her work, firmly rooted within the framework of DSNY, speaks to particulars instead of a monolithic past and a present audience.

Her performative monument produces and preserves a new narrative for DSNY in which sanmen are shown respect and gratitude for the keeping the city functioning. Ukeles has also formed a new process for monument-making. Examining only archival material from *Sanitation Celebrations*—notes, letters, and proposals—there are dozens of names of DSNY sanitation men and those who have worked to honor them. Mine the documents in the one thousand foot archive and dozens of names will easily turn into hundreds of individuals who have been personally and positively affected by Ukeles’s performative monument. The filing cabinets, boxes, and shelves of Ukeles’s archive at DSNY’s 44 Beaver Street building contain the names, interactions, and experiences of so many of the sanmen that were honored throughout the thirty-eight years of the performative monument. The presence of the artist’s living archive within DSNY acts as a permanent reminder of the ephemeral monument. It is a physical site within daily DSNY operations where art happens and aesthetics are considered. Artist Pablo Helguera says,

> In these life-art projects, there is familiarity and alienation simultaneously. There are twists in the expected rituals and visual rhetoric. So the built-in, automatic response to a situation unfolds...
into a multi-layer experience. It is like an onion where there is one layer after the next that you can peel off. This intersection of art and life can begin the reinvention of rituals. You might think you are in a conventional place or activity, but it is not life as you know it. It forces you to think and rethink where you are and who you are with. . . . There is attraction, puzzlement, intrigue, aesthetic seduction.

For thirty-eight years DSNY has interacted almost daily with an artist-in-residence who works prolifically to honor its workforce. The ultimate question remains, what happens to the monument when the performance ends? What presence of maintenance art and that gratitude it has conjured will remain housed in DSNY?

Replication presently honors the legacy of Ukeles’s career-long work inside DSNY. Today cities across the country including Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, and New York City have launched various models for artist residency programs. They may take inspiration from Ukeles’s commitment to make work with, for, and by DSNY in order to combat deep-rooted poor worker morale by producing situations to show gratitude to the workforce. Ukeles’s residency did not begin as a performative monument, but

has unexpectedly transformed into a new method of monument-making over time. The residencies organized by U.S. cities, similarly, are short-term engagements that do not seek explicitly to produce monuments. Yet many of these new residencies duplicate Ukeles’s concept of using performative art practice from within government systems to create new situations driven by the production of affected sentiments. For example, artist Tania Bruguera is currently in residence with the New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs where she is working to build trust between the government and undocumented residents.\textsuperscript{153} If the projects within these residencies continue to produce gratitude, honor, and respect for these populations over long-term engagements, will they become performative monuments? How, then, do we prevent what curator Patricia Fuller observed as the “rigidification of processes,”\textsuperscript{154} that accompanied the bureaucratization and formalization of site-specific public art programs in the 1970s that Ukeles so boldly defied? Will the rise in embedded artists within large-scale systems have an effect on the lasting impact and developing meaning of Ukeles’s work? What is at stake in replicating her unique performative monument? What is clear is that Ukeles has instigated a new method of commemoration within public art programs, one that challenges old and proposes new ideas of monument-making.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} Lacy, \textit{Mapping the Terrain}, 22.
Bibliography


Ukeles, Mierle Laderman, Archive. New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York.


Fig. 1. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Banner*, 1983. Banner constructed from the fabric of Sanitation workers’ uniforms. Photograph: Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 3. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, cocreated with Sanitation workers, 1983. New York City Department of Sanitation mechanical sweepers on Madison Avenue, New York City. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 4. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part III: Ceremonial Sweep, Sanitation Celebrations*, 1983. Participants sweep the streets with brooms, New York City. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 5. Interior of one of three rooms of Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY. Photograph: Diya Vij
Fig. 6. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, South Bronx, 2013. Photograph: Daniel Creahan for Art Observed
MANIFESTO!

MAINTENANCE ART

Proposal for an exhibition "CARE"

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELLES
© 1969

I. IDEAS

A. The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct:

The Death Instinct: separation; individuality; Avant-Garde
par excellence; to follow one's own path to death—do your
own thing; dynamic change.

The Life Instinct: unification; the eternal return; the
perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species, survival
systems and operations; equilibrium.

B. Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball
of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going
to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

Development: pure individual creation; the new; change;
progress; advance, excitement; flight or freeing.

Maintenance: 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 flight;

Fig. 7. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
Fig. 8. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, September 16–October 20, 1976. Performance with three hundred maintenance employees from day and night shifts. Installation at Whitney Museum Downtown at 55 Water Street. 720 Polaroid photographs mounted on paper, printed labels, color-coded stickers, seven handwritten and typewritten texts, clipboard, and custom-made buttons, overall: 12 x 15 ft. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
Fig. 11. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation Performance*, 1979–80. Map of route. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 13. Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*; detail with Washington Monument, 1982. Constitution Gardens, Washington, DC, two walls 240 x 10 ft. at highest point. Photograph. Contemporary Architecture, Urban Design and Public Art (ART on FILE Collection)
Fig. 14. First NYC Art Parade participants in costume, September 28, 1983. *Newsday* press clipping. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 15. Sanitation Worker Parade organized by Commissioner Waring, ca. 1905. Photograph. Collection of Museum of the City of New York
Fig. 16. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Saint Patrick’s Day Parade*, 1977. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Dear Council Member Lisa:

As the first Artist-in-Residence in the NYC Department of Sanitation, I would be honored if you would join me and Commissioner Norman Steisel in the "Ceremonial Sweep" of the First NYC Art Parade. Simply to march? NO! To sweep! This is an ART parade. This is a performance Maintenance Art Work. This is the Grand Finale!

The First NYC Art Parade takes place on Tuesday, September 27, 1983 from 7 to 9 p.m., on Madison Avenue from 106th Street south to 72nd.

Commissioner Steisel will be joined in this "hands-on" action by Edward Ostrowski, President of the Sanitation Workers' Union, and by Joseph Di Maaso, President of the Sanitation Officers' Union, in a show of municipal/union unity. Commissioner Steisel stressed to me how much he hopes that you and your fellow members of the City Council in their entirety as representatives of the total population of this greatest of cities and international center of living art and artists, will complete this symbolic--though very real--action with him. He relies on your help as he does in everyday activity because of your continual support of Sanitation and your role in appropriations and insistence on improvement of services. This will make it visible. He'll bring your broom.

Your participation will exhibit two things: a gesture of honor and support for the regular uniformed sanitation workers who are often not properly seen and appreciated for a very difficult job, and secondly, as a symbol that maintaining the health of the city is always a "hands-on" societial joint responsibility and ultimately everybody's job.

I am also inviting members of the public media who regularly "talk" and "write" about Sanitation to "do" about Sanitation by sweeping, following you.

This Grand Finale, SANITATION CELEBRATIONS, has two other components in addition to the ceremonial sweep: "The Social Mirror"(c) a totally mirrored garbage collection vehicle (privately funded), also to literally "show" that Sanitation as the beginning, not the end, of urban culture, is always a 2-way inter-reflective system; and third, a "Ballet Mechanique" in which six mechanical brooms driven by six of the finest drivers in the department have volunteered to do beautiful "sweeping patterns" that I am presently choreographing with them, all the way down the parade route.

Fig. 17. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part III: Ceremonial Sweep, letter [invitation to sweep] to the Honorable Joseph E. Lisa, September 14, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 18. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part III: Ceremonial Sweep, Sanitation Celebrations*, 1983. Participants sweep the streets with brooms and NYC Department of Sanitation workers, New York City. Photograph. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 19. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Ceremonial Arch Honoring Service Workers in the New Service Economy I*, 1988. Steel arch with materials donated by New York City agencies, 11 ft. x 12 ft. 4 in. x 9 ft. New York City Department of Sanitation
MAINTENANCE ART WORKS

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

2-5-79

PROJECT—SANITATION:
"SEE SANITATION — SEE YOURSELF"
© 1979

Problem:
1. Estrangement of Department of Sanitation (and men) from its public.
2. Inability of public to see its commonality in sharing environmental city-space — litter, dirty streets, etc.

Solution:
Mirror the sanitation truck. See the surface of the truck’s exterior as the literal interface between the Department and the public.
The Sanitation truck does not belong to the Department. It belongs to the public. Mirrored, it reflects the real public space it serves.
Surface is mediator between public service/space (truck) and public served in public space (streets).

Variation 1: whole truck mirrored. Difficulty: will get dirty, graffitti, etc., but can probably be hosed down more effectively than present painted surface trucks.

Variation 2: certain panels on the sides mirrored.

Note on mirror material: same kind of industrial mirror material used on skyscrapers: weather extremely well, very tough, reflective enough to get the idea across, relatively easy maintenance (hosing).
Get it donated from manufacturer (new markets!)

Model available shortly.

Fig. 22. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *The Social Mirror*, sketches, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 23. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *The Social Mirror*, proposed uniform sketch, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 24. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, cocreated with Sanitation workers, rehearsal on Randall’s Island Training Ground, 1983. Video still. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 25. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, choreography drawing cocreated with Sanitation workers, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 26. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers, daily notes on choreography cocreated with Sanitation workers, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 27. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Sanitation Celebrations: Grand Finale of the First NYC Art Parade, Part II: Ballet Mécanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers*, figure-eight movement, cocreated with Sanitation workers, 1983. New York City Department of Sanitation mechanical sweepers on Madison Avenue, New York City, 1983. Photograph, Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 28. Fernand Léger, Frame enlargements from *Ballet Mécanique*, 1924. Photograph. The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Fig. 29. M-Series garbage collection truck printout for planning *The Social Mirror*, 1983. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY
Fig. 30. Lee Freidlander, *New York City*, 1963. Gelatin silver print, 8 1/2 x 12 7/8 in. Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, CA
April 9, 1984

Mr. John G. Schweikart
55 Grant Street
East Northport, New York 11731

Dear Mr. Schweikart:

It was my pleasure to thank you in public, at the Preview Reception for our Artist in Residence, Mierle Laderman Ukeles in my office on March 6, for your wonderful performance in the "Ballet Mechanique for Six Mechanical Sweepers," in the finale of the NYC Art Parade.

Your expertise, your thorough professionalism and your dedication to this Department and the City mark you as a role model of what "Sanitation" should and can be.

Mierle had told me what a strong and creative leadership role you played in both the design phase and the street ballet implementation--essentially what an artist you are in your work. I'm happy to have this opportunity to tell you how highly I regard your commitment to quality!

As for the Ballet, I feel you all deserved the lavish media attention, all favorable, that you received. We will never forget it.

Sincerely,

Norman Steisel
Commissioner

cc: Mierle Laderman Ukeles
Artist in Residence
Henry Korn
Director, Art Parade

Fig. 31. DSNY Commissioner Norman Steisel, letter of gratitude from to DSNY worker John G. Schweikart, April 9, 1984. Mierle Laderman Ukeles Archive, New York City Department of Sanitation, 44 Beaver Street, New York, NY