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Celebrating 175: Lucy Lippard, Correspondence, Ukeles, Mierle Laderman, 1977-1988

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a year learning about the Department, I proposed a series of projects. Why Sanitation? Why have I stayed here so long? It sits at the juncture where nature must be managed(how? that equals a definition of culture), nature/culture, where things, materiality, possession itself becomes unmoored, where things, actually thing-ness itself, is in [right margin] AH! Leonard! [right margin] FLUX, where the notion of necessity, that something like this MUST be done or we (immediately revealing the gestalt/reality of "we," together, stuck with each other) will DROWN in yesterday, today. Urban culture, seen from Sanitation's eye-view, means first, before you can proceed from day 1 to day 2, first you have to believe in possible actions in the present, in today. And to be able to move as if "today" were "real" and were "here", then you have to remove yesterday's leftovers, the left behind, the used up, the thrown out, the thrown away--note the spatial, escapist externalization of these common words: "behind," "up," "out," "away"--i.e. from this "in"ternal PLACE of LIMITS which we "share": the City. Sounds simple, reasonable, until "nature" enters into the mechanical space-formula. Nature here means decay, rot, potential disease from the things unmoored, putrescible, dangerous, full of chaos and even death, frightening things, things surrounded forever by taboo, things that can un-glue a limited PLACE. Generally, societies world-wide have relegated this work, this ordering of "natural chaos" to a class of untouchables, a notion obviously unsuited to the basic notion of democracy and equality of opportunity. [Paragraph indicator] So, then, Sanitation becomes very interesting because it possesses these qualities: the primary system that culturalizes nature by making a place for living-in-the-city, from Day 2 and after, possible. As well, Sanitation is the [the is underlined] primary test-case of the truth of democratic society's promise of equality of social place to sanitation workers, not as a class apart. As a feminist, I also found that an all male service-work system gave the immediate lie to gender-determinacy for low-status service work. The sanitation men complained to me that they were "maids" and the "housekeepers"--a female term--of the whole City, and that [underline] that [underline] (doing "women's work") was why they were "the lowest of the low." Finally, it reveals that for society to share a place, there is No "behind", No "up", No "away". [indented] To have a whole healthy society, then, I think all these PLACE notions are "necessary": that urban culture begins at the point of making living-in-the-present in-the-City feasible (wherein culture [underline] includes [underline] and doesn't exclude that), and that its workers are fully human with requirements of equality of place [underline] inside [underline] society. Is that true? Since Sanitation represents the purest forms of these "necessary" conditions, it that true for Sanitation? Are those PLACE conditions visible? NO. That is why I've hung in here putting in the time. To deal with that, as something that has to be changed. Not changed within the specific system itself, as a municipal work problem--there are many experts in Sanitation working on that all

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If you're thought of as part of the garbage (an object to be thrown out of this place--and probably a rotten one at that) and your whole work is perceived of as OUTSIDE, split off from "clean" culture, then what does a notion of freedom, of art, of culture mean? I'm saying that until this system and these workers as a pure example, a model, yes, even a symbol, are part of everybody's notion of belonging INSIDE our GENERAL PLACE (culture), then the notion of art/freedom/culture is elitist, split, impotent, not true, decadent. Of course, other models of societal incompleteness and mis-perception of its potential wholeness can (and should) be exhibited: race and sex especially.

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