

TAI-E4014 - Contemporary Art  
and Its Social Context, 5cr

20.09.2018-29.11.2018

Thursday 1pm to 5pm

Aalto ARTS

# TAI-E4014 - Contemporary Art and Its Social Context

22.11.2018 Use(s) of art

- Instrumental vs intrinsic values
- Autonomous art
- Arte útil, useful art
- Social / political / aesthetic / educational use

# Debate

- Art for art's sake
  - Art should never be subordinated to external objectives or interests, art is autonomous
- Art for people's sake
  - Art can serve many purposes, e.g. health and well-being, empowering marginalized people, education...
- Intrinsic / extrinsic, autonomous / useful

# Autonomous art

- Relatively modern, western concept
- Immanuel Kant, European romanticism late 18<sup>th</sup> C
- Apogee: modernism (Clement Greenberg)
- Independent artist & art market
- Theodor Adorno:  
critique of cultural industry
- >> critique: post-modernism;  
art-like art vs life-like art

Allan Kaprow, *Yard*, 1961



# Art's autonomy revisited

- Pierre Bourdieu: art field as a “relatively autonomous” field
- Is ‘autonomous’ art interest-free? (the use of uselessness)



Gunnar Berndtson, Art Connoisseurs in the Louvre, 1879.

# Arte útil

“We have to put Duchamp's urinal back in the restroom.” Tania Bruguera

- Grant Kester: Dialogical aesthetics
- Superflex: Tools
- Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance art
- Tania Bruguera: Arte útil (& van Abbemuseum, Grizedale Arts), Alistair Hudson:

<http://www.axisweb.org/archive/news-and-views/beyond-the-gallery/what-is-art-for-part-one/>

# MANIFESTO!

## MAINTENANCE ART

Proposal for an exhibition "CARE"

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES  
(c) 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 fleeing.

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;

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

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MAINTENANCE ART

show your work—show it again  
keep the contemporary art museum groovy  
keep the home fires burning

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change.  
Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration.

#### C. Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.) The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay.

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

#### D. Art:

Everything I say is Art is Art. Everything I do is Art is Art. "We have no Art, we try to do everything well." (Balinese saying).

Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials.  
Conceptual & Process art, especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost purely maintenance processes.

#### E. The exhibition of Maintenance Art, "CARE," would zero in on pure maintenance, exhibit it as contemporary art, and yield, by utter opposition, clarity of issues.



**Mierle Laderman Ukeles** *Hartford Wash* 1973; *The Maintenance of the Art Object* 1974





Jeanne van Heeswijk, *2Up 2Down*, 2012

- Liverpool Biennial 2012
- Tania Bruguera *Immigrant Movement International* 2010–15
- Turner prize to Assemble 2015

# 'usership'

- Pro-am, produser, crowdsourcing, peer-to-peer or commons-based production...

The past several decades have witnessed what might be described as a broad *usological* turn across all sectors of society. Of course, people have been using words and tools, services and drugs, since time immemorial. But with the rise of networked culture, users have come to play a key role as producers of information, meaning and value, breaking down the long-standing opposition between consumption and production. With the decline of such categories of political subjectivity as organised labour, and the waning of the social-democratic consensus, *usership* has emerged as an unexpected alternative – one that is neither clear cut nor welcomed by all. For usership runs up against three stalwart *conceptual edifices* of the contemporary order: *expert culture*, for which users are invariably misusers; *spectatorship*, for which usership is inherently opportunistic and fraught with self-interest; and most trenchantly of all, the expanding regime of *ownership*, which has sought to curtail long-standing rights of use. Yet usership remains as tenacious as it is unruly. The cultural sphere, too, has witnessed a shift. Turning away from pursuing art's *aesthetic function*, many practitioners are redefining their engagement with art, less in terms of *authorship* than as users of artistic competence, insisting that art foster more robust use values and gain more bite in the real.

Stephen Wright

# Art in use, cultural policies

- Art and artistic methods in social and health care, art and well-being
- ... in empowering communities & minorities
- Cultural regeneration // gentrification
- Advancing tourism
- Branding cities
  
- Cultural and creative industries

# Art & politics

- **Artist's intention**
- Interpreter's / user's intention



**Pablo Picasso *Massacre in Korea* 1950**

# Art & politics

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- Interpreter's / user's intention



Ferdinand von Wright 1853



# Art & politics

- Politics as a sector
- Politics as an aspect



Nestori Syrjälä, Running Man 2016

# Thomas Hirschhorn

- “I don’t do political art, I do art politically”



*Meret Oppenheim-Kiosk, 2000*



*Mondrian Altar, 1997*