

BUT BEYOND SELF-CARE and the ability to (really) listen, the practice of doing nothing has something broader to offer us: an antidote to the rhetoric of growth. In the context of health and ecology, things that grow unchecked are often considered parasitic or cancerous.

( Yet we inhabit a culture that privileges novelty and growth over the cyclical and the regenerative.) Our very idea of productivity is premised on the idea of producing something new, whereas we do not tend to see maintenance and care as productive in the same way.

This is the place to mention a few regulars of the Rose Garden. Besides Rose the wild turkey and Grayson the cat (who will sit on your book if you're trying to read), you are always likely to see a few of the park's volunteers doing maintenance. Their presence is a reminder that the Rose Garden is beautiful in part because it is cared for, that effort must be put in, whether that's saving it from becoming condos or just making sure the roses come back next year. The volunteers do such a good job that I often see park visitors walk up to them and thank them for what they're doing.

When I see them pulling weeds and arranging hoses, I often think of the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Her well-known pieces include *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside*, a performance in which she washed the steps of the Wadsworth Atheneum, and *Touch Sanitation Performance*, in which she spent eleven months shaking hands with and thanking New York City's 8,500 sanitation men, in addition to interviewing and shadowing them. She has in fact been a permanent artist in residence with the New York City Sanitation Department since 1977.

Ukeles's interest in maintenance was partly occasioned by her becoming a mother in the 1960s. In an interview, she explained, "Being a mother entails an enormous amount of repetitive tasks. I became a maintenance worker. I felt completely abandoned by my culture because it didn't have a way to incorporate sustaining

work." In 1969, she wrote the "Manifesto for Maintenance Art", an exhibition proposal in which she considers her own maintenance work as the art. She says, "I will live in the museum and do what I customarily do at home with my husband and my baby, for the duration of the exhibition . . . My working will be the work."<sup>25</sup> Her manifesto opens with a distinction between what she calls the death force and the life force:

## 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—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.<sup>26</sup>

The life force is concerned with cyclicity, care, and regeneration; the death force sounds to me a lot like "disrupt." Obviously, some amount of both is necessary, but one is routinely valorized, not to mention masculinized, while the other goes unrecognized because it has no part in "progress."

That brings me to one last surprising aspect of the Rose Garden, which I first noticed on the central promenade. Set into the concrete on either side are a series of numbers in the tens, each signifying a decade, and within each decade are ten plaques with the names of various women. As it turns out, the names are of women who were voted Mother of the Year by Oakland residents. To be Mother of the Year, you must have "contributed to improving the quality of life for the people of Oakland—through home, work, community service, volunteer efforts or combination thereof."<sup>27</sup> In an old industry film about Oakland, I found footage of a Mother of the Year