

Sustaining the Vision

Communities and Cultures at Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden

Jonathan Baxter and Sarah Gittins

Part one

Hospitable criticality – 'a place to make and think'¹

Hospitality is central to the work of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW) both in terms of hosting visiting artists and providing a productive working environment. Hospitality is also a major theme within contemporary art; both object-based and socially-oriented. (Think contemporary debates about the changing role of the museum and the rise of relational aesthetics and participatory art practices.) To this end SSW's Director, Nuno Sacramento, has written about the need to maintain the tension in 'hospitable criticality'.

'I firmly believe,' writes Sacramento, 'that for the time art dealt mostly with inanimate objects one could deploy criticality alone, but now that it consistently involves people this has to be counter-balanced with hospitality. In a basic sense people must have a reason for wanting to be involved. ... By now I have no doubts that criticality and hospitality, the main elements of a socially engaged project [and, we might add, the making and siting of any object-based artwork], are pulling in opposite directions. While remaining analytical, criticality strives for objectivity and distance, providing a judgement that is eminently rational. It doesn't go with the flow. Hospitality on the other hand is welcoming and warm, inviting people to lower their guards and open up. Intuition tells me that hospitality is conducive to a different type of criticality.'²

In the context of SSW we, Jonathan Baxter and Sarah Gittins, have been asked to highlight the tension in hospitable criticality as it relates to sustainability. And while we cannot address this challenge as it relates to wider socio-economic and environmental concerns we can raise awareness of these issues within the everyday context of SSW and Lumsden.³

Performing agency in the everyday⁴

To this end, and as part of a wider project exploring food sustainability in Lumsden,⁵ we've been observing life within the SSW facility.⁶ In response we've made signage that highlights small actions residents and staff can take to enhance sustainability within the facility and minimise the carbon footprint of the organisation.⁷

1 'A place to make and think' is how SSW define themselves. The document from which this quotation is taken is currently being updated and will be made available shortly. See www.ssw.org.uk for further details.

2 http://www.deveron-arts.com/site_media/old-site/wb/media/pdfs/PraktikaEssay%20Nuno%20Sacramento.pdf – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

3 Here we focus on the domestic footprint of SSW and not on the wider programming or use of workshop facilities.

4 'Performing agency in the everyday' is taken from SSW's summary of its Communities and Cultures programme. The full summary reads: 'Communities/Cultures investigates who are our communities and what cultures they produce, and how visual arts can perform agency within the everyday.'

5 This project was entitled 'When the Future Was Now.' See, www.whenthefuturewasnow.wordpress.com for background information. Last accessed – 22nd April 2013.

6 'Observe and interact' is the first principle of permaculture design. It should also be the first step in any socially engaged art practice. For further information concerning the relationship between permaculture and socially engaged art see, Jonathan Baxter, *Permaculture and Socially Engaged Art: Confluence of principles and practices*. (Contact JB for details.)

7 There's a difference between an ecological footprint and a carbon footprint. An ecological footprint takes into

When developing this signage we've had in mind Mierle Ukeles' *Manifesto! Maintenance Art* (1969). Ukeles' manifesto challenged the boundary between the maintenance of everyday life and the role of artists in society. In her manifesto, and subsequent career, Ukeles draws attention to the 'maintenance ideas, maintenance activities and maintenance materials' that underpin *all* art activities including those of the avant-garde. As Ukeles put it: '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 everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.'⁸

To help flush up awareness of sustainability at SSW and to avoid the pitfalls of endless maintenance 'rules' – who, after all, doesn't want to break or ignore a rule!? – we've utilised the 'characters' of Ukeles and Samuel Beckett to make our sustainability signage more engaging. Ukeles is present to perform the values of maintenance art and Beckett is present to perform the anti-values of avant-garde failure. To paraphrase (and caricature) Beckett's position: All art is failure; the rest is housekeeping.⁹

Ukeles you know about; now a word about Beckett. Beckett was one of the most influential avant-garde writers of the 20th Century. He wrote poetry, criticism, novels, and plays. He's the sort of artist Ukeles' manifesto is (rhetorically) pitched against i.e. a writer concerned with the inherent failure of art to say anything that is *finally* worth saying. "You must choose," says Molloy in a novel by that name, "between the things not worth mentioning and those even less so."¹⁰

Now this isn't the place to discuss Beckett's credentials as an ecological thinker or anti-thinker.¹¹ What we can say is that Beckett's work deals with a psychological, and perhaps spiritual, impasse;¹² one that sheds light on the ecological challenges of our own day. Take, for example, *Endgame*:

HAMM: Nature has forgotten us.

CLOV: There's no more nature.

HAMM: No more nature! You exaggerate.

CLOV: In the vicinity.

HAMM: But we breathe! We change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom, our ideals!

CLOV: Then she hasn't forgotten us.

[...]

HAMM: Absent, always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened. [Pause.] Do you know what's happened? [Pause.] Clov!

How we interpret this dialogue depends on the questions we bring to it. (Is this a post-apocalyptic scenario or was there never such a thing as 'nature' anyway?) But whatever concerns Beckett had when writing *Endgame* the power of good art speaks beyond an author's intention. To this end

account all of the environmental factors that go into making and processing a product. A carbon footprint measures a specific output forming part of our ecological footprint. From a sustainability perspective the smaller our ecological footprint the better. However, from the pragmatics of measurement – one step in a longer journey – it's easier for an organisation to account for its carbon footprint.

8 See http://www.feldmangallery.com/media/pdfs/Ukeles_MANIFESTO.pdf – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

9 The full quote reads, '... to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living.' Samuel Beckett, *Proust [and] Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (1965/1987), p.125.

10 Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Molone Dies, The Unnamable* (2009).

11 See http://www.academia.edu/350917/Endgame_Becketts_Ecological_Thought – last accessed 22nd April 2013 – for an informed discussion of this topic.

12 For an unusual reading of Beckett, but one we find persuasive, see Paul Foster, *Beckett and Zen: A Study of Dilemma in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (1989).

Beckett and his oeuvre can be used to highlight environmental concerns and so enrol resident artists who might otherwise ignore good maintenance signage!¹³

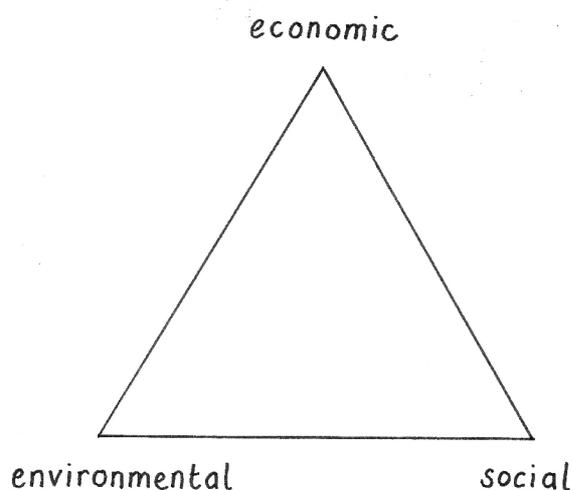
Part two

Sustainable / unsustainable – the difference between them

Sustainability refers to that which endures. ('I can't go on, I'll go on' – to appropriate Beckett's *The Unnamable*.)¹⁴ It's a technical term of neutral value. Things either do or don't endure. As for what should or shouldn't endure, well, opinion is divided. But this difference of opinion – which in time becomes a value – needs to be scrutinised and challenged through honest conversation.¹⁵

In the context of our work at SSW we define sustainability as *biological and cultural diversity, subject to change and enduring over time*. This definition is based upon an ecological understanding of sustainability, one that takes the longevity and biodiversity of biological systems as its model – a model that includes the longevity and biodiversity of land realms, biomes, and particular species within an ecological niche. This definition of sustainability can also be applied to human beings within a trans-ecological niche. Here the *science* of ecology enters into dialogue with other cultural *values* – not all of which complement environmental sustainability.

A useful way of thinking about sustainability is through the sustainability triangle.¹⁶ This includes environmental, social and economic factors.



Here, and elsewhere in our work, we follow Murray Bookchin in highlighting the different spheres of sustainability within this three-fold model.¹⁷ For the sake of clarity we define environmental sustainability as 'first nature' (air, water, soil, and vegetation etc.) and social and economic

13 'When will they stop making me say more than I said?' Beckett once asked Raymond Federman. See, <http://www.samuel-beckett.net/imagery.html> – last accessed 22nd April 2013. Clearly, we are making Beckett say more than he said!

14 Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Molone Dies, The Unnamable* (2009).

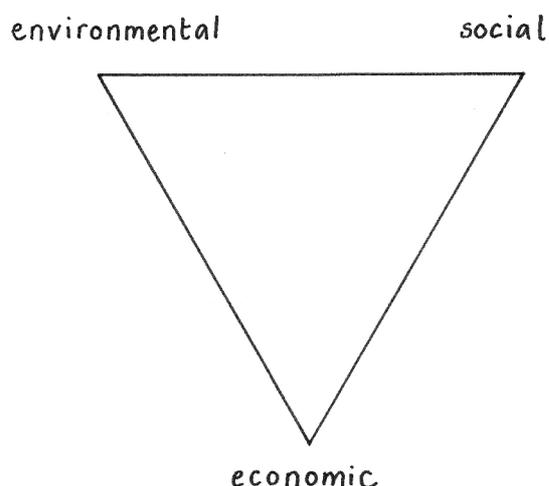
15 Here we use the word 'conversation' to signify a plurality of voices and perspectives. Open and honest conversation is agonistic but not antagonistic. See Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (2000) for a useful definition of agonism.

16 There are other ways of modelling sustainability. For example, through the use of systems theory and nesting diagrams. However, because the sustainability triangle is a dominant model (and a strong visual metaphor) we use it to enter into dialogue with mainstream planning and developmental practices.

17 See, for an overview of Bookchin's writing, Janet Biehl (ed.), *Murray Bookchin Reader*, Black Rose Books, (1999).

sustainability as 'second nature' (or culture). In reality there's an overlap (or mesh)¹⁸ connecting these three spheres of sustainability. Afterall, without air to breathe, water to drink, or food to eat, social and economic life would be as diminished as a Beckett stage set! Likewise, without social and economic sustainability there wouldn't be anything resembling a human being or human culture.

But to be clear about our definition of sustainability it's important to emphasise the *re-orientation* of values at the heart of our work. Here we invert the usual representation of the sustainability triangle and flip it on its head.¹⁹



In this way we *re-prioritise* environmental and social life over and above short term economic interests. (We're all for growth and productivity but only if they have environmental and social yields.)²⁰ Whether-or-not you agree with us we hope this agreement-disagreement can contribute to a fruitful conversation about the role of art in sustaining communities and cultures at SSW and further afield.

A sustainable vision statement

Bearing the above in mind we've written a sustainable vision statement for SSW. It's a vision statement rather than a policy.²¹ It aims to generate conversation and practical action in support of sustainability. This is something that SSW would like potential residents to consider when applying to and staying at SSW. So from hereon this text is written in the voice of SSW.

SSW recognise the need and the benefits to be accrued from developing a culture of sustainability within our environmental, social and economic practices. It's the prerogative of art and arts organisations to challenge cultural practices and to innovate at the edge of contemporary life.²² To this end SSW are committed to dialogue across

18 For a fascinating interpretation that explores ecology through the root metaphor of a mesh and relates this to aesthetics see Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007).

19 This in the spirit (but not following the letter) of Ivan Illich's understanding of political inversion. See <http://olivier.hammam.free.fr/imports/auteurs/illich/tools5.htm> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

20 Clearly this summary is all too brief. For a useful overview of the sort of political policies we would favour see Roberto Mangabeira Unger's *The Left Alternative* (2009).

21 For further information about environmental policies when applied to arts organisations see <http://www.juliesbicycle.com/resources/environmental-policy-guidelines> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

22 SSW define the 'edge' as a threshold for the 'yet-to-come.' 'This is the space for the "yet-to-come", the open and the unplanned, allowing the freedom to develop and engage through cross-discipline arts practice, discourse, and education.' (As summarised in SSW's [space] programme. This has parallels with permaculture's understanding of 'edge'. See <http://www.permaculture.org.uk/principle/11-use-edges-and-value-marginal> – last accessed 22nd April

traditions, disciplines and crafts. We honour local skills and recognise their relevance for contemporary culture. As a consequence we commit to rethinking our *raison d'être* in light of sustainability. We acknowledge the scale of the challenges we face and the interrelationship between fields of activity: personal-political, private-public, local-global. We also acknowledge the reality of unsustainable practices within our own organisation and seek to transform these practices into more sustainable yields. We therefore invite SSW residents to join us in our transition towards a more sustainable future *now*. And we look forward to celebrating our shared successes along the way.

Part three

Small-scale practical action

Staying at SSW can be a very rewarding and pleasurable experience. It includes warm accommodation, communal meals, hot showers, trips to Huntly or Alford, cups of tea, coffee and beers! How to enjoy being here as part of an ever-changing community whilst minimising the environmental impact that comes with living in comfort in a rural environment is a question we have to ask ourselves. In what follows we've focused on 6 areas of practical action for you to consider when staying at SSW.

Transport

To get to SSW you'll need to choose an appropriate form of transport. Travelling by bus or train has a lower carbon footprint.²³ For this reason buses and trains are recommended as more sustainable modes of transport. There are many advantages to slow travel: time to relax, read a book, catch up on correspondence, experience the landscape you're passing through etc. From a permaculture perspective there are also more edges and yields:²⁴ people to meet, a sense of the wider social infrastructure, time between connections to explore new cities, towns and villages. In short, if you're visiting SSW perhaps you could consider your journey as part of the overall experience and factor in sustainable travel as integral to your time here.

To support positive action on this issue SSW offer discounts to visitors and residents who choose to travel by bus or train. We also off-set our own carbon emissions generated through air travel by a system of carbon offsetting in collaboration with local environmental initiatives including a local permaculture project.²⁵ (We recognise that off-setting is more symbolic than genuinely sustainable. However, this action does have practical environmental benefits despite its contradictions.)

SSW also encourage a culture of car sharing (if the bus and train are impractical). We do this by putting people in touch with each other if they're travelling to SSW from the same geographic location. We also have a sign-up board in the main studio for regular car sharing opportunities and to minimise single occupancy car travel.²⁶

2013.

23 In terms of carbon emissions the scale of emissions when travelling from London to Lumsden are roughly as follows: bus/coach (28.1 kg), train (50.1 kg), small car (120.1 kg), plane (160.8 kg), large car (241.5). See <http://www.transportdirect.info/Web2/JourneyPlanning/JourneyEmissionsCompare.aspx> – last accessed 22nd April 2013 – to make your own calculations.

24 As with edges (described above) permaculture emphasises the multiple yields that can be gained from any environmental and social activity. 'Obtain a yield' is the third out of twelve design principles that can be applied to socially engaged art and arts organisations in general. See Looby Macnamara for a socially oriented introduction to permaculture principles. Looby Macnamara, *People and Permaculture: Caring and Designing for Ourselves, Each Other and the Planet* (2012).

25 Tap o' Noth Permaculture Farm is a local initiative still in its infancy. For more information see <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Tap-o-Noth-Permaculture/370339819660043> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

26 Again, this is a very simple way of cutting carbon emissions. The more people you share with the greater your

Food

Food is a staple need whether you're at SSW or elsewhere. Regrettably Lumsden no longer has a local greengrocers – although the garage shop does stock basic foods and other essentials. Most residents at SSW shop at the local supermarkets in Huntly. While this is convenient from one perspective it does create a sustainability deficit. For example, due to the dominance of supermarkets local farmers are forced to sell their produce at reduced prices. This makes it difficult for farmers to invest in sustainable practices, which in turn effects the quality and diversity of food produced in the locality. Smaller shops and farmers markets also find it difficult to compete with supermarket prices. All of this has the negative cumulative effect of diminishing the local economy and hollowing out the character of towns and villages in the region.²⁷ If you need to shop at supermarkets consider visiting the Co-operative in Alford – an organisation that has co-operative ownership, wealth creation and sustainability at its heart.²⁸

SSW can also order in bulk from SUMA and Greencity Wholefoods.²⁹ Information regarding seasonal foods and local producers is also available in the SSW kitchen along with a timetable for the local farmers markets in Huntly and Alford.

Food waste also provides an opportunity for action. Globally we throw away one third of the food we produce and purchase.³⁰ In a situation where visitors are resident for relatively short periods of time this problem is intensified. The rule of thumb is not to buy more than you can eat. If you do find yourself with an excess of food we'd recommend sharing it with others before you leave. They'll be happy, you'll be happy and you'll have done your bit to prevent food waste going into landfill.

If all else fails you can add uncooked vegetable waste to the compost bin. In this way your food waste will become a sustainable earthwork as it metamorphoses into compost for the SSW raised beds and window boxes!³¹

Water

Without water neither we nor the planet would be here! Up to 60% of the human body is water. It's predicted that future global conflicts will be fought over access to water.³² Yet to many of us water is just another 'utility'; we drink it, wash with it, but rarely pay it much attention.

At SSW we're lucky to have plenty of water. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do our bit to conserve it when we can. Taking a bath, although pleasurable, uses more water than taking a shower. And taking a 5 minute shower is considered optimal in terms of balancing washing and water usage.

carbon reduction and the more social the experience.

27 Here global and local trends mirror one another. See http://www.iisd.org/tkn/pdf/tkn_supermarket.pdf – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

28 See <http://www.co-operative.coop> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

29 See <http://www.suma.coop> and <http://www.greencity.coop> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

30 See <http://www.unric.org/en/food-waste/27133-one-third-of-all-food-wasted> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

Landfill sites of food and green waste also give off methane - a green house gas 25 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

31 The food supply chain generates about one fifth of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. When we throw away food we also waste the energy used to produce, process, transport and store food. According to a report on food waste collections, if we stopped throwing away edible food we'd save the equivalent carbon footprint of taking 1 in 5 cars off the road. See www.foe.co.uk – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

32 See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/mar/22/water-wars-countries-davey-warns> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

Waterwise,³³ a leading UK NGO focused on reducing water consumption, have two suggestions when it comes to taking a bath. 1. only fill the bath with the amount of water you need. 2. take a bath (or a shower) with a friend. (The latter may lead to slightly longer bath times but perhaps it's a risk worth taking – it also has the added advantage of helping you get to know fellow residents at SSW!)

Beyond the more obvious uses of water there's a high water footprint in paper – a single sheet of paper has a water footprint of 10 litres!³⁴ There's also a large water footprint in packaging and food. Not wasting paper, packaging or food, and recycling it when you can, is high on the list of good sustainability practices. Likewise, avoiding over packaged foods and eating seasonal vegetables helps reduce water and energy consumption.

Energy

Energy comes from many sources; both fossil fuels and renewables. At SSW we're lucky to have a well insulated building with a biomass wood pellet boiler and photovoltaic panels – this heats the the office, studios, ceramics workshop, library, upstairs accommodation, and the water. But energy use is still high at SSW – especially in the foundry – so where possible we try to minimise our consumption.

Turning off the lights when you leave the building – or not turning them on if there's daylight – is a simple but effective action. Likewise, turning off the standby function on electrical equipment is a huge cost saver and of environmental benefit. (Roughly 7% of domestic energy use is a result of leaving electrical equipment on standby.)³⁵

The same principle applies to the use of other electrical equipment: only filling a kettle with the amount of water you need, taking shorter showers (as above), and, if you need to use the washing machine, washing full loads at 30 degrees Celsius are simple but effective actions.³⁶ Hanging out wet washing on the line (rather than machine drying it) is also an act of maintenance art: it creates a temporary kinetic sculpture that gives the void its colours.³⁷

Waste

The suggestions outlined above can be summed up by the phrase *waste not want not*. But as Ukeles' work reminds us, 'waste is a false cultural construct; every item is inherently valuable if only our traditional thinking about garbage can be changed.'³⁸ Whether this is food waste added to the compost bin or off-cuts of wood used to make birdboxes, we invite you to rethink your attitude to waste!

The rule of thumb at SSW is *reduce, reuse, recycle*.³⁹ But if you really need to bin it please use the recycling facilities provided. These can be found in the office, studios, workshops, library, and kitchen. Bagging up the recycling and taking a walk to the recycling facilities adjacent to the village

33 See <http://www.waterwise.org.uk> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

34 See virtualwater.eu – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

35 See Tony Jupiter, *How Many Lightbulbs Does it Take to Change A Planet: 95 Ways to Save Planet Earth* (2007).

36 See http://www.2shared.com/document/4ARoYwwS/How_Bad_Are_Bananas_-_The_Carb.html – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

37 According to Albert Camus, the role of the absurd artist is to give 'the void its colours.' See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942/1975), p.103.

38 See Barbara C. Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artist's Interpretations and Solutions* (1992).

39 In the SSW library you'll find examples of sustainable DIY aesthetics, minimalist sculpture, environmental art, and traceless performance practices! If you want to be excessive there are examples of other art practices too – but please consider the environmental costs of your project along with the social-aesthetic and economic factors.

green will also give you an opportunity to stretch your legs, meet the neighbours and play on the swings!⁴⁰

For waste that finally goes into landfill it's worth considering the facts: there are currently no environmental, social or economic yields to be had. This really is a waste. Here 'life ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere, and no question now of ever finding [it] again ...'⁴¹ Unless, of course, you're a maintenance artist and you've got access to a site like Fresh Kill Landfill in New York City.⁴²

Conclusion:

Maintenance and care

Underpinning all of the above is a consideration of maintenance and care as reflected in Ukeles' *Manifesto! Maintenance Art* (1969). To care for our environment (including self-care) is the first step to sustainable living. Maintenance is what keeps SSW up and running. It makes it possible for artists to stay here and create inspiring artwork in a convivial environment.

Maintenance and care also provide an opportunity to take a step back from our art-making; to gain a wider perspective and to reflect on our activities in the clear light of day. When you can't see the wood for the trees, the sculpture for the debris, or the kitchen for the pots and pans you know it's time to take a break, pick up a broom and commence your maintenance art!

With this in mind we invite you to become MCs (Maintenance and Care artists) for SSW. We look forward to working with you and utilising the resources that are ours to share. Let's hope we have them for a long time. For tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow ...

...

Appendix

Maintenance and Care signage

See below:

Please note, these images are for documentation only. They are not formatted for print layout or quality.

40 Recycling really does decrease the environmental impact of future packaging production. For example, it takes the same amount of energy to create one new aluminium can as it does to create twenty recycled cans. See www.hydro.com/en/About-aluminium/Aluminium-life-cycle/Recycling – last accessed 22nd April 2013

41 Quotation from Samuel Beckett, 'Imagination Dead Imagine.' See <http://www.samuel-beckett.net/ImaginationDeadImagine.html> – last accessed 22nd April 2013.

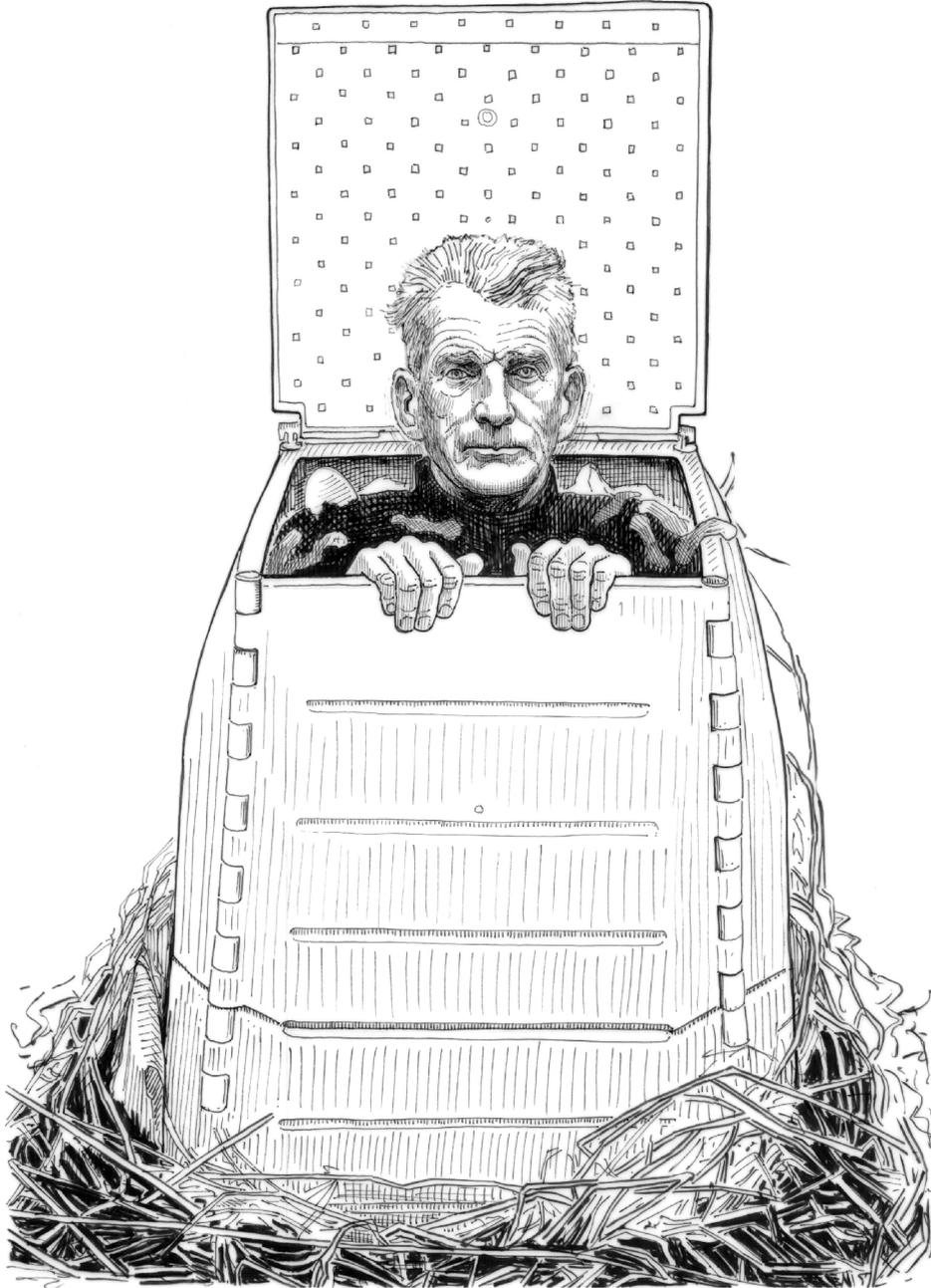
42 See <http://vimeo.com/42191616> – last accessed 22nd April 2013 – for a video of Ukeles talking about her proposals for Fresh Kills.

TRAVEL WISELY, TRAVEL WELL



There is man in his entirety, blaming his shoe when his foot is guilty. *Beckett*

PLEASE COMPOST YOUR FOOD WASTE



**Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day,
suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the
impossible heap. *Beckett***

NOT FOR PRINTING

5 MINUTES = OPTIMUM WATER USEAGE



**If you don't know where you're currently
standing you're dead. *Beckett***

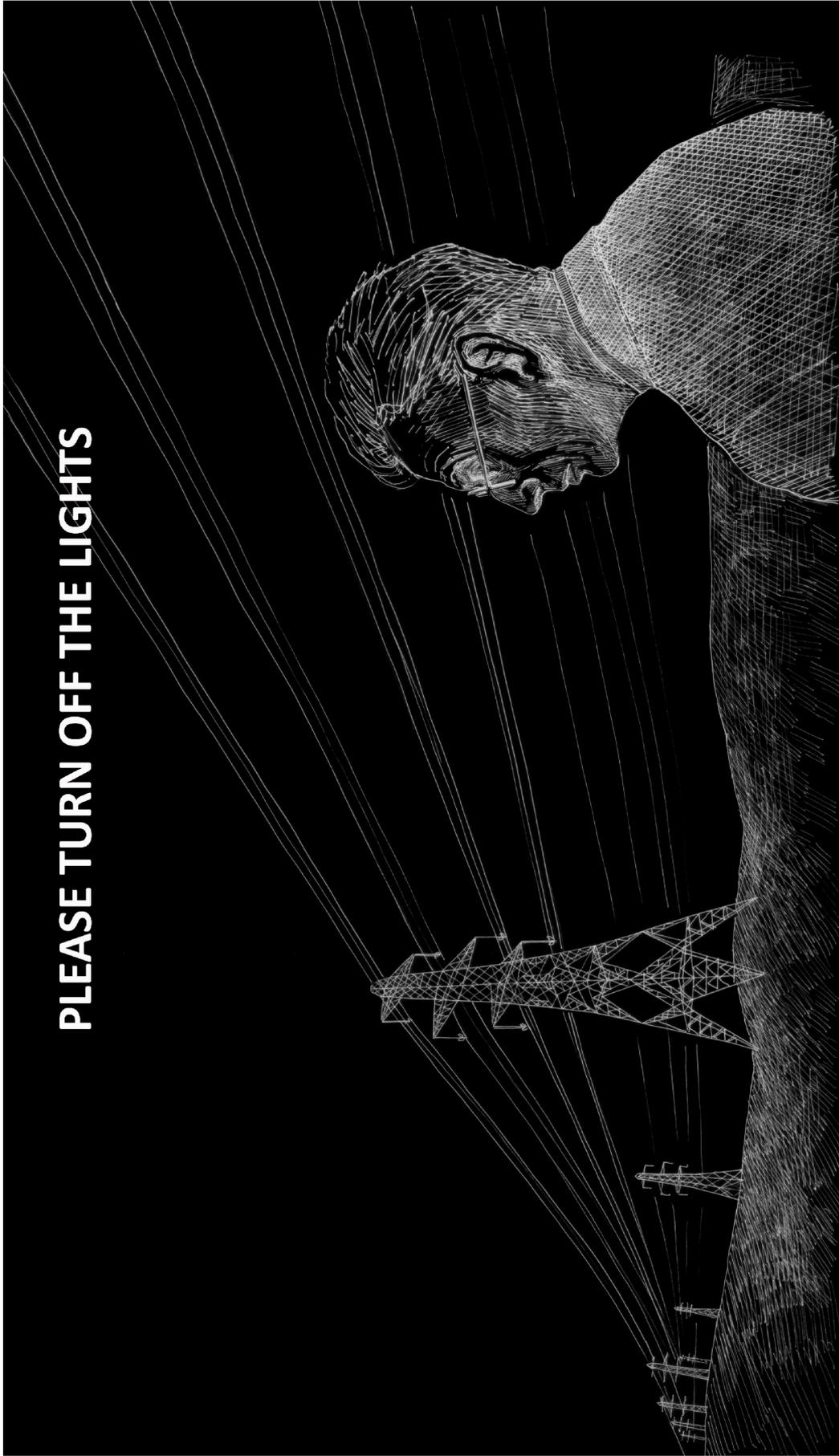
NOT FOR PRINTING

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE



**To find a form that accomodates the mess,
that is the task of the artist now. *Beckett***

PLEASE TURN OFF THE LIGHTS



**And the sun. Last rays. And the moon. ... Nothing left
but black sky. White earth. Or inversely. Beckett**

NOT FOR PRINTING

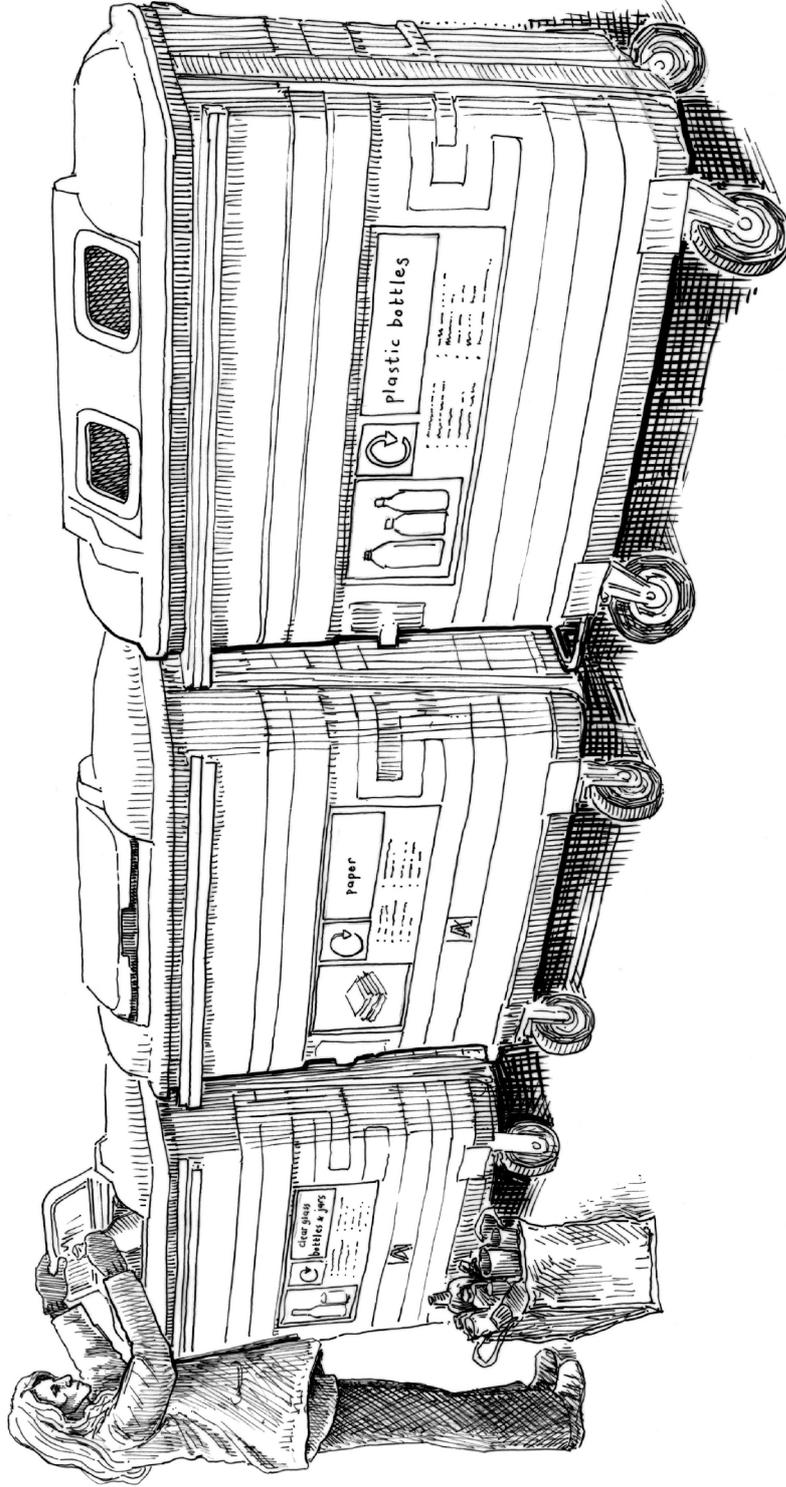
NOT FOR PRINTING

PLEASE KEEP THIS AREA TIDY



**The living artist enters ... as a wild card. That is her essence,
to be unfettered, even in her maintenance work. *Ukeles***

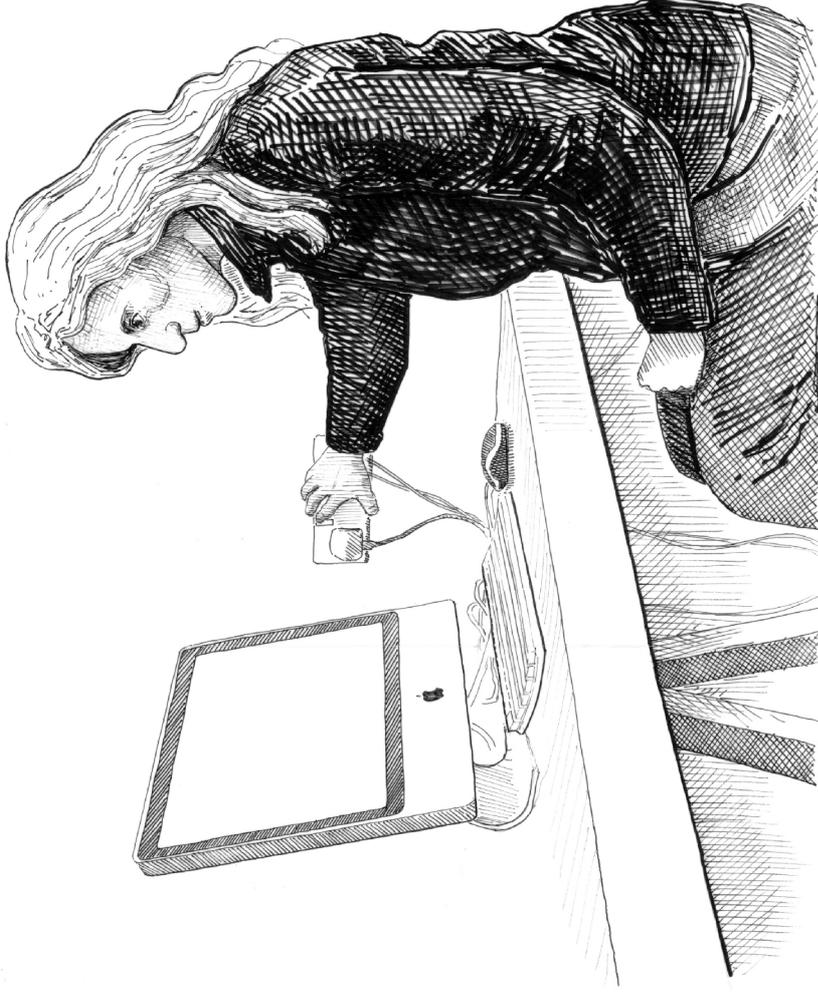
THE DAY AFTER THE NIGHT BEFORE



The sourball of every revolution: ... who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning? *Ukeles*

NOT FOR PRINTING

PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR COMPUTER



**How does a place switch its meaning and become
something else? *Ukeles***