

Nanopublication – Recognition as the Event: Ukeles's Renaming Strains the Comfort/Diffraction Line

by Arnaud Quercy

The line runs through the word 'naming': the framework needs recognition and diffraction to be opposites (comfort vs. event), but Ukeles's practice is built entirely on an act – renaming labor as art – that could be filed under either. The source does not refute the distinction outright; it shows a case where the distinction cannot be cleanly applied without first deciding what counts as 'the same signal.'

WHAT THE SOURCE SAYS [1]

The documentary traces Mierle Laderman Ukeles's decades-long practice of 'maintenance art,' beginning with her 1969 CARE manifesto, in which she declared unpaid domestic and civic labor to be art after finding motherhood incompatible with the art world's model of the solitary (male) genius. Her performances – washing museum steps, photographing 700 maintenance workers via a method designed to leave no secret negatives, shaking hands with 8,500 New York City sanitation workers over eleven months and thanking each by name – physically enact the reframing of invisible labor as artistic material. The film credits Duchamp with giving her 'the gift of naming and renaming' while noting his and his peers' blindness to the labor underneath their own work (Serra's steelworkers, for instance). It largely omits her parallel life and teaching in Jerusalem.

WHERE THE LENS GRIPS

P6 (Gestural Intention) grips cleanly: washing steps and shaking sanitation workers' hands are not depictions of an idea about labor, they ARE the idea in motion – the documentary presents no gap between concept and act. P19a/P14 also grip: Ukeles supplies both codex layers on demand – the formal rule stated flatly in the CARE manifesto (maintenance labor = art), and the intimate logic she articulates in interviews ('I wouldn't be making maintenance art' if male; the Polaroid method's no-negatives rule to earn workers' trust). The intentional invariant here is not mute – it is explained, repeatedly, in the artist's own words.

WHERE IT BREAKS

P13/P23 (Generative Loss / Diffraction Imperative) strain against the source. These propositions hold that recognition produces only comfort, no event, while irreversible diffraction produces the real jolt. But the documentary presents Touch Sanitation's emotional and political force as running THROUGH recognition itself – the act of naming each of 8,500 workers by name, of making them seen, is described as the work's power, not a comfortable non-event. X slips IF one reads 'recognition' here in P13's sense (signal passing through unchanged, producing familiarity); it holds if one reads the naming/renaming as itself a Duchampian reframing – recontextualizing a laborer as collaborator/artist is a structural shift, not lossless transmission, and so counts as diffraction rather than its opposite. The source does not settle which reading applies; it exposes that the framework's recognition/diffraction binary has no clean instrument for distinguishing 'seeing someone as they already are' from 'seeing someone anew.'

PROPOSITIONAL GRID [2]

Read this grid. “Not evaluated” does **not** mean the source has nothing to say about that proposition. It means **the reading did not instruct it**. That is not a result, and it counts in no denominator. A silence, by contrast, is a finding: the reading touched the proposition without concluding, or noted its absence itself.

Evaluated

proposi- tion		audit status	relational verdict
P6	Gestural Intention	not audited	evidence-for
P13	Generative Loss	not audited	pressure-against
P14	The Codex as Overture	not audited	evidence-for
P19a	Explicability as Condition	not audited	evidence-for

Not evaluated (33) – P1, P2, P3, P3a, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14a, P14b, P15, P16, P16a, P17, P18, P18a, P19, P20, P21, P22, P23, P24, P25, P26, P27, P28, P29, P30, P31

Overall verdict: Bounded – taxonomy of the August 2026 pass, predating the move to relational verdicts. Kept as metadata: the gap between the two forms is data, not residue. This reading’s judgement is in the grid above.

Reading of 2026-05-09 · model claude-sonnet-5 · source 6,708 chars · 2 attempt(s)

FIRST PASS – KEPT AS WRITTEN

Reading produced by the T50 RSS pass, before the boundary lens. It is reproduced UNCORRECTED. Keeping it is the point: without it, a changed title is just a changed title – with it, what the second pass refused becomes legible.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles's practice—making art from maintenance labor, the invisible and unpaid—is a codex-based practice that engineers diffraction through constraint and reframing. Her formal system: take what is culturally invisible (janitorial work) and emit it as art. The receiver's overture shifts. What was background becomes foreground. This is the ricochet effect: the intentional invariant (maintenance as labor, as dignity, as creative practice) is revealed, and it doesn't correct the initial perception—it generates a new one. The work doesn't express Ukeles's vision; it sets a trap that forces the receiver to see differently. The codex is: 'Make the marginal central through systematic attention.'

T50 RSS assessment · 2026-05-09 · remplacée par boundary-lens-2026-08

REFERENCES

[1] The Making of a Maintenance Artist. Hyperallergic, 2026-05-09. <https://hyperallergic.com/the-making-of-a-maintenance-artist/>

[2] Quercy, A. (2026). The 31 Propositions of Ideamorphism. <https://ideamorphism.org/en/publications/2026/03/the-31-propositions-of-ideamorphism.html>

EPISTEMIC PROFILE

Claim type	boundary reading
Voice	third person analysis
Epistemic status	bounded grip
Methodology	Boundary-finding lens applied to one source, model claude-sonnet-5, 2 attempt(s), traceability check passed.

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