

Nanopublication – Appropriating a strategy is not (quite) appropriating a codex

by Arnaud Quercy

The line runs between borrowing a technique (appropriation-as-method, inherited from Prince/Levine) and borrowing a codex (the whole intimate-plus-formal structure) – Jafa's account sits exactly on that seam, and P21's binary has no term for the case where the formal layer is inherited but the intimate layer is not.

WHAT THE SOURCE SAYS [1]

An ARTnews profile of the Fondazione Prada exhibition 'Helter Skelter,' pairing Arthur Jafa and Richard Prince, describes how curator Nancy Spector built the show around 'duets' between the two artists, both known for appropriating others' images. Jafa states that his practice 'just wouldn't be possible without Richard's precedent,' frames his own appropriation of Prince's work as homage and 'play,' and insists that adopting appropriation as a strategy let him become 'self-authorizing' – distinct, he says, from Sherrie Levine's more terminal use of the same strategy. Spector describes how learning of Jafa calling Prince 'the blackest white artist' led her to re-read Prince's 'White Paintings' through Jafa's The White Album, reshaping the exhibition's juxtapositions.

WHERE THE LENS GRIPS

P21's borrowed-codex/authentic-codex binary grips real material: Jafa explicitly names the debt to Prince's precedent while insisting the result is his own, self-authorized, and not a relay. P20 (Emitter Synchronization) grips cleanly – two artists in dialogue, exchanging images, deliberately declining to 'collaborate' into sameness, 'coherence with variation' rendered almost literally in Jafa's phrasing. P18a (Ricochet Effect) grips the Spector episode precisely: a revealed statement about intentional relation between the works reconfigures an existing reading (the 'White Paintings' seen anew) and folds back into a new emission – the exhibition's own juxtapositions.

WHERE IT BREAKS

P21 slips IF one reads Jafa's appropriation as borrowing Prince's codex (the shared formal technique of appropriation itself came from elsewhere, making the emission derivative by P21's own logic); it holds if one reads it through P14's split – Jafa inherits only the formal layer (appropriation-as-method) while the intimate layer (self-authorization tied to Black freedom, a different relation to 'property') is entirely his own, which is exactly what P14 says must both be present but need not both be self-generated. P21 as worded has no vocabulary for this seam between borrowing a technique and borrowing a codex; the source sits directly on it without resolving it. Separately, P18a's mechanism fits the Spector episode but through a triangulated structure – a curator revealing a historical remark, not the emitter answering the receiver's question on request – a variant the proposition's dyadic frame does not anticipate, though it does not contradict it either.

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
P14	The Codex as Overture	not audited	evidence-for
P18a	The Ricochet Effect	not audited	evidence-for
P20	Emitter Synchronization	not audited	evidence-for
P21	Codex Authenticity	not audited	pressure-against

Not evaluated (33) – P1, P2, P3, P3a, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14a, P14b, P15, P16, P16a, P17, P18, P19, P19a, 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 19,712 chars · 1 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.

The exhibition 'Helter Skelter' poses the structural question of appropriation as diffraction: when an artist borrows/emits through another's codex (appropriates their visual language, their formal system), what diffraction becomes possible? The question 'What is appropriate to appropriate?' is asking: under what conditions does borrowing a codex generate new meaning rather than dilution? This touches the manifesto's claim that 'to borrow another's codex is to emit through another's overture.' The exhibition seems to investigate whether appropriation can be a deliberate engineering of diffraction—or whether it collapses into recognition (mere copying). The ricochet: revealing the borrowed codex doesn't erase the first diffraction; it generates a second one.

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

REFERENCES

- [1] In Venice, Arthur Jafa and Richard Prince Ask: What Is Appropriate?. ARTnews.com, 2026-05-09. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/arthur-jafa-richard-prince-fondazione-prada-exhibition-profile-1234784682/>
- [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
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Epistemic status	bounded grip
Methodology	Boundary-finding lens applied to one source, model claude-sonnet-5, 1 attempt(s), traceability check passed.

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