

Researchify: Immanence and the Artist-Researcher

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[See table of contents](#)

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Researchify: Immanence and the Artist-Researcher¹

As an interdisciplinary artist I use video, new media, animation, writing, installation, experimental collaboration, and drawing to investigate immanence, haptic perception, and non-visual knowledge in moving images. I have been particularly drawn to animation for its inherent ability to suggest the flight of the imagination and the rupture between what is actual and what can be represented. Indeed, the unseen-yet-apparent is often the driving force behind my work. My most recent research explores site-specific media art in public venues. Ephemeral media-based installations allow me to connect an art experience to emergent technologies and to our very localized, specific, sensory ways of being in the world. In these works, people, technology, and the landscape combine in magical surprises.

The epithet *artist researcher* fits me since my body of work has arisen through a critical engagement and theoretical reflection resulting in the production of artworks. Artist research can be defined as either “research *for* visual arts (the array of practices that both inform and constitute artistic production) or research *through* visual art (where artistic practice becomes a vehicle for producing and presenting new knowledge).”² For me, thinking and making are inextricably linked; they are, as Janneke Wesseling puts it, “research *in and through* art.”³ As the term *artist researcher* becomes a burgeoning category within academia, however, I question the basic tenets of this nomenclature. What fuels the expectation that artists can or must “researchify” their practice? And does “re-

search” imply a rational order according to which we justify creative outcomes?

reasonable & senseless is the title of a gallery-based twenty-channel video installation I produced in 2005 to 2008.⁴ Each channel shows a historic, human-made disaster (such as a mushroom cloud) with animated smoke letters superimposed. When read across the twenty channels, the letters spell out the title of the work. The idea of what is *reasonable & senseless* implies that pure reason itself is a senseless force, as exemplified in these technical disasters, which are not accidents per se but logical conclusions to a series of foreseeably ill-conceived steps. They demonstrate that reason alone is a senseless guide to invention and creation and, as we see through studio practice, a limited tool. Thus, given the limits and senselessness of reason, how might we articulate the way individual processes emerge through studio practice? Besides reason and imaginative intellect, what other types of knowledge are at play for artist researchers?

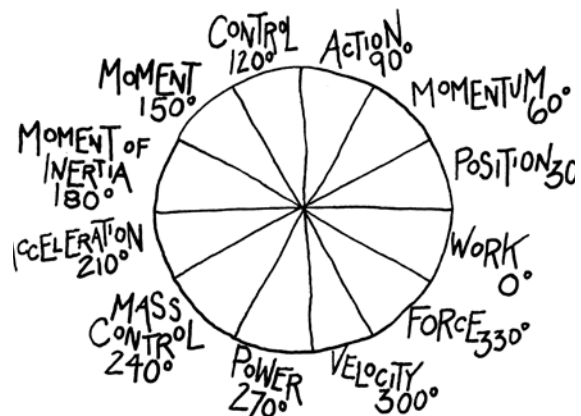
There is a form of thinking inherent in making that can never be fully stripped from object-hood. The art object is not just a thing; it is a thing in flux. At times it is merely an expensive object, at others, a deeply affective encounter charged with meaning, and, most often, both at once. In a studio visit with unfinished work, the artist and the viewer conjointly confront creative struggles in a shared encounter. In opening to unfurling work we engage in a phenomenological co-creative trajectory.



ABOVE: *reasonable & senseless*: “&” channel, 54 sec., 2008. Animated smoke ampersand superimposed upon a nuclear mushroom cloud video. <https://vimeo.com/26110747>.

TOP: *Invisible Histories*, 3D animation, 19 sec., 2012. <https://vimeo.com/51470664>.

—THE GEOMETRY OF MEANING—



The Geometry of Meaning. Ink drawing, 20x30cm. 2013. The institutional urgencies of quantification within an unquantifiable arena, such as art, often inspire me.



Failuer. Lino cut print, 26x35cm, 2013. Limited edition print (process blue typesetters' ink on Arches 88 paper). The work speaks to the impossibility of fully explaining or articulating the creative process. As a Canadian work of art, it also fails in both official languages.

Making and thinking are coterminous, integrating both critical and creative processes.

I believe that, in studio pedagogy, co-creation is the only ethical way to teach how artist research develops and how moments of creative unfurling occur: uncertain, barely perceived, in error, in omission, repressed, or barely visible and limping. My own practice entails an inherent inarticulate process which is in fact a lacuna, to use Giorgio Agamben's term,⁵ a pre-cultural pre-lingual self, indivisible from its enmeshment with the world. I press up against making, precisely because I can never utter experience any more than I can utter what resides in my own non-language, in the recesses of my self.

To embrace the immanent, I would argue, is to refuse a separation between concept and form, to refuse dematerialization. Further, it allows for the artist research position to integrate knowing and doing, visibility and haptic engagement, expertise and collective not-knowing. It affords the possibility of unfurling and flow.

Notes

¹ A draft of this paper was first presented at the Universities Art Association of Canada (UAAC) Conference on 2 November 2012 in Montreal, for the panel *Disciplining Art Prac-*

tice: Getting a Feel for the Game, which was moderated by Risa Horowitz (University of Regina), and included Cliff Eyland (University of Manitoba), Tanya Mars (University of Toronto), and Christof Migone (Western University). On the panel we discussed the burgeoning category of the artist-researcher within university structures. Introducing the panel, Horowitz cited survey responses reported in the *Formative Evaluation of SSHRC's* [now defunct pilot program] *Research/Creation in Fine Arts Program: Final Report* that lead one to believe that artists must necessarily 'researchify' their practices.

² Banff Centre Program Call. "Thematic Residency: Making Artistic Inquiry Visible", <http://www.banffcentre.ca/programs/program.aspx?id=628> (accessed 8 January 2008), n.p.

³ Janneke Wesseling, "Introduction," in Wesseling, ed., *See it Again, Say it Again: The Artist as Researcher*, Amsterdam: Valiz Antennae, 2011, p. 2.

⁴ *reasonable & senseless*. Surrey Art Gallery, 21 May–10 July, 2005; Video Pool, Winnipeg, MB, 10 November–8 December, 2006; Richmond Art Gallery, 18 January–28 February, 2008.

⁵ Giorgio Agamben articulates the space of the lacuna when he writes about the impossibility of testimony. For what testimony reveals, at its core, is "the non-language to which language answers, in which language is born." Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, New York: Zone Books, 1999, p. 38.