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RESIDUE AND VISUAL KNOWLEDGE IN POST-CATASTROPHE ARTISTIC PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyse material residue as a device for the production of visual knowledge in artistic practices developed after the 2024 DANA. The methodology adopts an instrumental case study based on formal and phenomenological analysis, structured through a four-variable matrix: material operation, visible evidence, perceptual effect, and critical inference. The main result demonstrates that, when it preserves verifiable traces, residue operates as material evidence rather than iconography. The contribution of the study lies in proposing a replicable analytical matrix for examining process-based artistic practices in contexts of material damage.

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1. Introduction. Art, Catastrophe and the Ethical Gaze

The relationship between contemporary art and catastrophe has usually been approached from representational, symbolic or testimonial perspectives. In certain recent practices, however, the focus shifts from the image of disaster towards the material processes that disaster produces. In such cases, residue ceases to function as an illustrative remnant or metaphor and begins to operate as a source of visual information and as an operator of knowledge. This article is situated within that line of enquiry and examines material residue as a device for the production of visual knowledge in a specific context of environmental damage: the DANA (an isolated upper-level low, or cut-off low) that struck the Valencian Community in October 2024. The meteorological event directly altered the physical and domestic environment, introducing water, mud and damaged fragments into vital and productive circuits. In the artistic sphere, this event made visible a methodological shift: the transition from practices centred on the critique of visual and economic excess towards a material approach grounded in the observation of damage. The research takes as its situated empirical field the recent work of Antonio García López, analysed not from a monographic perspective but as an instrumental case that allows transferable procedures to be identified. The study is guided by the following questions: under what conditions can material residue operate as a method of visual knowledge rather than merely as a thematic resource? And how does a catastrophic event reconfigure its operative status? The hypothesis holds that when residue preserves verifiable material traces and is worked through observable operations, it ceases to function as a theme or iconography and becomes a method. Within this framework, catastrophe is not addressed as a representational motif; rather, it is understood as a material condition that activates new forms of visual reading.

The aim is to analyse the technical and perceptual conditions under which residue acquires epistemological capacity. To this end, the study identifies specific material operations (sedimentation, cutting, recomposition, transfer and crossing-out) and examines the visible evidence they produce, the perceptual effects they generate and the critical inferences they make it possible to formulate. The methodological design combines formal and phenomenological analysis and is structured as an operational matrix comprising four variables: material operation, visible evidence, perceptual effect and critical inference. This sequence shifts the analysis from symbolic interpretation towards the verification of processes. The corpus comprises interrelated bodies of work: the exhibitions *Capital* (2021), as a precedent for the deactivation of the economic sign; *Personajes insostenibles* [Unsustainable Characters] (2023) and *Barro y agua* [Mud and Water] (2023), as a laboratory of material interruption and hydric exploration; and *Personajes de la DANA* [DANA Characters] (2024–2025), in which matter affected by water and mud imposes a new working regime. The sources include direct analysis of the works, installation views, catalogues, institutional documentation and interviews, in order to ensure the traceability of the processes (Figure 1) and to avoid a stylistic or expressive reading. Conceptually, the study delimits the scope of the term “material thinking” as applied to a situated case. Technical operations are understood as knowledge procedures that activate the interpretive capacity of the surface and configure the work as an analytical device. Each trace, layer or fissure is regarded as material evidence that demands sustained observation and makes it possible to reconstruct physical and temporal dynamics. The relationship between gesture, evidence and reading articulates what is defined here as an ethics of residue: a practice that integrates damage as a condition of knowledge without resorting to its spectacularisation. The main contribution of the study lies in proposing a replicable analytical framework for examining artistic practices developed in contexts of ecological or social crisis, positioning art as a form of material research grounded in the observation of verifiable physical processes rather than in the representation of the event.

Figure 1. Antonio García López. *Personajes insostenibles* [Unsustainable Characters], installation view (Museo de la Universidad de Murcia, 2023). Reproduced with the artist's permission. Private archive.



2. Theoretical Framework: Poetics of Residue and Material Thinking

In contemporary art, material residue has acquired a function that goes beyond its consideration as a remnant or by-product. In certain practices, it operates as an active structure of visual thinking capable of producing knowledge from its physical behaviours, its traceability and the traces it retains. This shift entails abandoning a representational conception of material in order to position it as an epistemological operator. The theoretical framework is built around this premise: when worked through verifiable processes, material can function as a device of situated knowledge.

One relevant precedent is found in the practices of montage and fragmentation developed in the context of political collage. Josep Renau's photomontages in *The American Way of Life* (1952–1966) establish a significant methodological principle: the fragment does not illustrate a pre-existing discourse; it exposes the ideological structures that produce it. Collage thus becomes a method of visual knowledge based on the legibility of the remnant and on the critical activation of discontinuous relationships. According to Salteiro (2018), this principle continues to operate in contemporary practices that work with displaced or eroded materials, where meaning emerges from the interaction between parts rather than from a closed composition.

From a theoretical perspective, the transition from material understood as a support to material conceived as an active agent in the artistic process was analysed by Marchán Fiz (1999) in *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto* [From Object Art to Concept Art]. The progressive dematerialisation of the object does not eliminate the physical dimension; rather, it reconfigures its status and integrates it as an operative component of the conceptual device. Within this framework, materiality does not disappear but shifts towards a structuring function within artistic thinking. Yvars (2012) underlines the epistemological value of interruption and the fragment in collage practices, where meaning is constructed through discontinuous relationships. These contributions make it possible to understand that operations such as cutting, recomposition or transfer are not mere technical resources, but procedures that generate verifiable traces which structure specific modes of visual reading.

The framework is broadened by incorporating the dimension of mediation. Ribalta (2001) has noted that the artwork is not defined exclusively by its physical materiality; it is also constituted through the devices that present and document it. Installation, installation photography and institutional documentation form part of the regime of visibility that shapes its public intelligibility. When materials originate from verifiable events, such as extreme weather episodes, this documentary dimension acquires a particular epistemic value, as it ensures the traceability of processes and situates artistic production within a defined empirical framework.

Contemporary practices centred on ruins, rubble or waste consolidate this reading of residue as a critical operator. Lara Almárcegui's work approaches ruins and construction materials as information systems linked to economic and territorial dynamics. In a complementary way, Daniel Canogar investigates technological obsolescence by incorporating electronic waste and discarded devices into installations that reveal the political and environmental dimension of digital waste (Canogar, 2019). In both cases, attention to deterioration and to the physical behaviour of materials shifts the analysis from symbolic interpretation towards the observation of material processes. At the level of international theory, the notion of material agency developed by Bennett (2010) makes it possible to recognise the capacity of materials to intervene in the production of meaning. This perspective resonates with the material ecology analysed by Domínguez Rubio (2016), in which aesthetics, media and social processes are described as interdependent systems. Haraway (2016) and Morton (2013) broaden this horizon by situating the artwork as a space in which larger-scale ecological and climatic processes are inscribed. In the recent context of eco-art, scholars have pointed to the need to problematise the relationship between artistic practice and ecological discourse, avoiding its reduction to mere thematic illustration (Quiñonero Ortuño, 2024). This caveat is pertinent for defining residue not as environmental iconography, but as a material operation that generates knowledge. Historical precedents reinforce this processual orientation. The experiences associated with *Arte Povera* introduced systematic attention to energy, time and transformation, placing the physical behaviour of materials at the centre of analysis (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999). Within this framework, matter ceases to be a support and becomes an active record of the interaction between gesture, environment and temporality.

Taken together, these references form a framework in which material residue is defined as a substrate for critical reading and a source of visual knowledge. Each mark, stratum or pigment displacement functions as verifiable evidence of the interaction between matter, time and gesture. Its examination requires a methodology based on systematic observation and reasoned inference, aimed at establishing correlations between technical operation and perceptual effect. From this perspective, art approaches what Schaeffer (1999) describes as a form of thinking stripped of the metaphysics of form, an empirical exercise in which the aesthetic dimension and cognitive process converge. This hypothesis underpins the approach of the study and guides the reading of the corpus as a field of material experimentation in which residue operates as a device for the production of knowledge.

In recent years, research in contemporary art has addressed the climate emergency from curatorial and analytical perspectives that emphasise the capacity of art to activate critical responses to environmental collapse (Torres, 2023). The present study, however, shifts the focus from the thematisation of the crisis towards the analysis of the material operations that physically inscribe it in the work.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative methodology oriented towards the analysis of material processes in contemporary artistic practices, with the aim of examining residue as a device for the production of visual knowledge. It does not pursue a stylistic interpretation or a monographic reading, but rather the identification of verifiable procedures that allow the relationship between matter, perception and ethics in contexts of damage to be analysed. The research is situated within the field of process-based inquiry and relies on an analytical approach that combines tools from formal analysis and the phenomenology of perception.

3.1. Research Design

The methodological design is structured as an instrumental case study. The recent work of Antonio García López is used as a situated empirical field that makes it possible to observe a methodological transition from practices centred on the critique of visual excess towards a material and ethical approach grounded in the observation of damage following a specific catastrophic event, one that the artist himself experienced personally. The choice of a single case study responds to methodological rather than monographic criteria. The temporal continuity of the corpus (2021–2025), the possibility of directly observing the pieces in an exhibition space and the documentary traceability of the processes allow for a precise analysis of the

material and operative transition that underpins the hypothesis of residue as an epistemological operator. The case is therefore used instrumentally: not as an object of authorial appraisal, but as a delimited empirical field that facilitates the verification of stable relationships between material operation, visible evidence, perceptual effect and critical inference. This approach falls within the field of artistic research understood as the production of knowledge through practice and through the analysis of material processes (Borgdorff, 2012), in which the artwork is configured as an empirical field that generates perceptual and conceptual data rather than as a mere illustration of a prior hypothesis. The interest of the study lies in the possibility of deriving an analytical model transferable to other artistic practices developed in contexts of ecological or social crisis, shifting the focus from authorial singularity towards the methodological dimension. The research follows an inductive logic. The analysis begins with the direct observation of the works and their material behaviours in order to subsequently formulate critical inferences based on visible evidence. This approach avoids starting from closed interpretive categories and prioritises the reading of processes as they are inscribed on the material surface.

3.2. Corpus of Analysis

The corpus consists of a set of works produced between 2021 and 2025, organised into four interrelated bodies of work:

1. *Capital* (2021), as a precedent for the critique of the visual economy and of value systems.
2. *Personajes insostenibles* [Unsustainable Characters] (2023), centred on residue derived from visual excess and symbolic consumption.
3. *Barro y agua* [Mud and Water] (2023), as a laboratory of material processes linked to environmental dynamics.
4. *Personajes de la DANA* [DANA Characters] (2024–2025), developed from materials directly affected by the meteorological event of October 2024.

The selection of the corpus responds to criteria of processual continuity, technical diversity and documentary traceability. Priority was given to works that make it possible to identify recurrent material operations and to observe the evolution of procedures before and after the catastrophic event (Figure 2).

3.3. Sources and Materials of Analysis

The sources used combine different levels of access to the artistic process:

- Direct observation of the works and their material surfaces.
- Institutional documentation: catalogues, technical data sheets, installation views and curatorial texts.
- Photographic and audiovisual records of the processes and of the exhibition installations.
- Interviews and conversations with the artist, used exclusively to contextualise technical decisions and to ensure the traceability of the process, not as a primary interpretive source.

The combined use of these sources makes it possible to cross-check visual information against contextual data and to ensure the verifiability of the analysis.

3.4. Analytical Variables

The analysis is built around a matrix of four operational variables that structures the reading of each work:

a) **Material operation**: identifiable technical procedures such as sedimentation, cutting, recomposition, transfer, crossing-out or assemblage.

b) **Visible evidence**: physical traces resulting from these operations, such as layers, craquelure, pigment migration, shrinkage or hardened edges.

c) **Perceptual effect**: observable consequences for visual experience, including the slowing down of the gaze, the absence of compositional hierarchy, distributed reading or difficulty in figurative identification.

d) **Critical inference**: relationships established between the material evidence and issues related to damage, value, memory or care.
This matrix makes it possible to systematically relate the technical gesture to its perceptual effects and to the critical readings derived from them.

Figure 2. *Los voluntarios* [The Volunteers], 2025. Surface detail showing sedimentation and pigment migration after exposure to water. Example of material evidence applied to the analytical matrix. Reproduced with the artist's permission. Private archive.



3.5. Analytical Procedure

Each work in the corpus was analysed following a constant sequence: identification of the dominant material operation, detailed description of the visible evidence, analysis of the perceptual effect produced and formulation of critical inferences grounded in that evidence. This procedure was applied uniformly to ensure the internal coherence of the study and to facilitate comparison between series. The analysis identifies recurrent operative patterns that support the hypothesis of residue as an epistemological operator while keeping open the plurality of meanings of each piece. The interpretation is based exclusively on observable evidence and reasoned inference.

3.6. Validity Criteria and Limitations

The validity of the study rests on two main criteria. First, the internal coherence of the analysis, understood as the recurrence of stable relationships between material operations, visible evidence and perceptual effects across the corpus. Second, documentary traceability, ensured through the use of institutional sources and verifiable records. Among the limitations of the study, its situated nature is acknowledged, deriving from the analysis of a specific corpus. Nevertheless, the proposed methodology is designed to be replicable and applicable to other artistic practices that work with material processes in contexts of damage or crisis. The purpose is to use these residues as material witnesses of an exhausted system of visual production, without turning them into mere illustrative signs. Proximity to the process is acknowledged as a condition of empirical access, subject to documentary cross-checking and methodological transparency.

4. Results and Analysis

The analysis of the corpus identifies a series of consistent results that confirm the initial hypothesis: material residue operates as a device for the production of visual knowledge when it is articulated through

verifiable processes. Across the four series analysed, a progressive transformation in the status of residue can be observed, as it shifts from functioning as a critical remnant of visual and economic excess to constituting direct material evidence of an event of damage. This shift is not thematic but methodological, and it manifests itself in the relationship between material operations, visible evidence and perceptual effects.

4.1. Overall Results: From Visual Excess to Residue as Method

The first relevant result is the identification of a processual transition between the series produced before the DANA and those developed afterwards. In Capital and Personajes insostenibles, residue derives mainly from cultural and economic circuits: printed fragments, administrative documents and remnants of symbolic consumption. In these cases, material operations are aimed at deactivating the representational function of signs through cutting, crossing-out, recomposition and superimposition. Residue acts as an index of visual saturation and of the erosion of value systems. In Barro y agua and, more radically, in Personajes de la DANA, the origin of residue shifts towards materials directly affected by environmental processes. Water and mud cease to be controllable technical resources and become active agents that determine the behaviour of the surface. This change entails a partial loss of authorial control and a greater dependence on physical dynamics such as sedimentation, uneven drying, shrinkage or pigment migration. Residue no longer refers to a prior symbolic system, but to a specific material event. This shift produces a second significant result: the replacement of representation by evidence.

In the post-DANA series, the image neither constructs a narrative of the disaster nor offers a recognisable iconography of damage. Instead, the surfaces present physical traces that need to be read as records of processes. Visual knowledge is generated through the observation of these traces and through inference about the conditions that produced them, as in the exhibition devoted to this body of work at the Museo de Archena, Murcia (2025).

Figure 3. *Personajes de la DANA* [DANA Characters], installation view (Museo de Archena, 27 June–5 September 2025). Reproduced with the artist's permission. Private archive.



4.2. Comparative Analysis of Processual Bodies of Work

Analysis by body of work makes it possible to identify regularities and variations in the use of residue as an epistemological operator. In *Capital*, the dominant operations are the fragmentation, corrosion and crossing-out of economic documents. The visible evidence includes incomplete figures, misaligned columns and deactivated typographic remnants. The resulting perceptual effect is an unstable reading, in which

accounting order is perceived as structured noise. The critical inference derived from this evidence points to the fragility of systems of economic equivalence and to the material arbitrariness of value.

In *Personajes insostenibles*, residue derives from visual excess and symbolic consumption. Operations of superimposition, assemblage and minimal fixing generate stratified surfaces with no clear hierarchy between figure and ground. The visible evidence takes the form of irregular reliefs, partial detachments and heterogeneous textures. The perceptual effect is a slowing down of the gaze and a distributed reading that hinders immediate identification. Here, residue functions as an index of saturation and as a critical tool in the face of the attention economy.

Barro y agua introduces a substantial change by incorporating environmental processes as determining variables. Sedimentation, absorption and uneven drying produce traces that cannot be fully anticipated or corrected. Visible evidence such as craquelure, hardened areas and differential accumulations records the passage of time and the physical conditions of the environment. The perceptual effect is oriented towards a tactile and temporal reading of the surface. The critical inference shifts towards an ecological understanding of residue as the outcome of interactions between matter, time and environment.

In *Personajes de la DANA*, these procedures reach their greatest intensity. Residue derives from materials damaged by a specific meteorological event and retains direct marks of contact with water and mud. Material operations are limited to stabilising, recomposing or containing the remains, avoiding their neutralisation. The visible evidence functions as an empirical record of damage: eroded edges, uncontrolled migrations and layers of solidified sediment. The perceptual effect demands sustained observation and a non-narrative reading. The critical inference is oriented towards an ethics of care, in which residue is preserved as a witness rather than as an object of symbolic restoration.

4.3. Main Analytical Results

Four main results can be synthesised from the comparative analysis:

1. Residue acquires epistemological value when it preserves verifiable material traces of the process that produces it.
2. The loss of authorial control increases the informative capacity of the material by making unintentional physical dynamics visible.
3. The perceptual reading of residue requires an extended temporality that runs counter to the logic of immediate visual consumption.
4. The shift of residue from symbolic excess towards material damage transforms artistic practice into a method of empirical observation.

These results confirm that residue functions neither as a theme nor as a metaphor, but as visual evidence capable of generating situated knowledge. The analysis shows that artistic practice, when articulated through material processes rather than representation, can operate as a form of research that produces perceptual and critical data.

4.4. Analytical Micro-Readings: Evidence, Perception and Inference

The micro-readings that follow apply the defined methodological sequence (material operation, visible evidence, perceptual effect, critical inference) to a representative selection from the corpus. The aim is to demonstrate that material residue produces visual knowledge from observable evidence and that this production can be analysed through a verifiable protocol.

Case 1. Eroded Documentary Residue (*Capital*)

The dominant material operation is the fragmentation and crossing-out of economic documents. The visible evidence takes the form of incomplete figures, misaligned columns and partially cancelled typographic remnants. The perceptual effect is an unstable reading that retains the administrative structure but

deprives the document of its informative function. The critical inference points to the material fragility of value and to the dependence of the economic system on physical supports that are susceptible to deterioration. Here, residue acts as an empirical index of the erosion of the languages of equivalence (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *El Dios verdadero* [The True God] (series *Dinero-Dinheiro* and *Capital*), 2016–2021. Assemblage with banknote remnants, foam board and chocolate coins. Reproduced with the artist's permission. Private archive.



Case 2. Stratification and Visual Excess (*Personajes insostenibles*)

The superimposition and assemblage of printed fragments generate surfaces with no clear compositional hierarchy. The visible evidence includes irregular reliefs, partial detachments and heterogeneous layers that interrupt linear reading. The perceptual effect is a slowing down of the gaze and a distributed reading, in which attention moves across the surface without finding a dominant focal point. The critical inference identifies residue as a record of contemporary visual excess and as a mechanism of resistance to the attention economy (Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Compradores compulsivos* [Compulsive Shoppers] (series *Personajes insostenibles*), 2023. Reproduced with the artist's permission. Private archive.



Case 3. Sedimentation and Water Traces (Personajes de la DANA)

The material operation is limited to stabilising remains affected by water and mud. The visible evidence takes the form of craquelure, hardened edges, pigment migration and layers of solidified sediment. The perceptual effect demands sustained observation and a non-narrative reading focused on identifying physical processes. The critical inference is oriented towards an ethics of care: residue is neither restored nor neutralised, but preserved as a material witness to damage (Figure 6).

Figure 6. *Víctimas ayer y hoy* [Victims Yesterday and Today], 2025. Collage/sedimentation with mud and transfer. Reproduced with the artist's permission. Private archive.



Taken together, these micro-readings confirm that residue generates visual knowledge when it keeps its condition as a trace visible and avoids being reduced to an illustrative sign. The information derives from the observed material behaviour and from the physical evidence that the surface retains.

5. Discussion

The results make it possible to reconsider the role of material residue in contemporary art as a device capable of producing situated visual knowledge. The discussion is organised around three axes: the epistemological status of residue, the relationship between material process and perception, and the ethical implications of working with damaged materials.

First, the analysis confirms that residue acquires cognitive value when it preserves verifiable material traces of the process that produces it. This approach engages with perspectives that attribute to matter an operative capacity in the configuration of meaning, while introducing a qualification: the epistemological dimension of residue depends on the possibility of describing and cross-checking its physical behaviours as observable data. Residue is thus understood as empirical evidence of damage, the reading of which demands attention to texture, sedimentation and surface transformation. This position shifts the debate towards the terrain of material observation and consolidates a conception of art as a research practice grounded in verifiable procedures.

Second, the discussion highlights the relationship between material process and perceptual experience. The effects of slowing down the gaze, distributed reading or difficulty in figurative identification derive from specific technical operations and respond to verifiable physical dynamics. The partial loss of authorial control, especially visible in the post-DANA works, increases the informational density of the surface by making perceptible processes that cannot be reduced to prior planning. From this perspective, perception functions as an analytical instance and observation time is integrated as a methodological variable. Aesthetic experience takes shape as a process of sustained attention that makes it possible to articulate correlations between gesture, matter and transformation.

The third axis focuses on the ethical implications of working with residue and damage. In contrast to strategies that turn disaster into a spectacular resource, the analysis shows that preserving residue as an active trace introduces an ethics linked to material care. Containment, stabilisation and the non-neutralisation of the physical effects of the event are inscribed in specific technical decisions and in modes of presentation that avoid the aestheticisation of deterioration. This ethical dimension is not formulated as an added discourse; it manifests itself in the way matter is worked and in the way the work is exposed to the public gaze.

Compared with other contemporary practices that use ruins or waste as a symbolic resource, the approach examined here is characterised by its emphasis on the traceability of materials and on the systematic observation of their transformations. Attention is directed to the physical behaviour of residue and to its capacity to record specific environmental conditions. This orientation is particularly relevant in contexts of ecological crisis, where affected matter can be read as an empirical archive of processes that exceed the individual scale. From a methodological standpoint, the discussion confirms the usefulness of the analytical matrix applied. The relationship between material operation, visible evidence, perceptual effect and critical inference allows a coherent model to be structured for the analysis of process-based artistic practices. The value of the model lies not in offering a closed reading of the works studied, but in providing a procedure of examination that can be tested and adjusted in other studies of artistic research.

In summary, the discussion positions material residue as a relevant category for the analysis of contemporary art in contexts of damage. The emphasis on evidence and systematic observation orients interpretation towards the study of the material conditions of production, reinforcing the idea that matter can constitute a field of research when its transformations are rigorously described and integrated into an explicit analytical framework.

6. Conclusions

This study has examined material residue as a device for the production of visual knowledge in practices developed before and after the 2024 DANA. The aim was to determine whether, under verifiable technical conditions and with documentary traceability, residue can operate as an analytical method. The hypothesis proposed that the preservation of observable material traces allows the surface to be transformed into a field of empirical reading. The results confirm this formulation. The series analysed reveal an evolution towards procedures that prioritise the stabilisation and observation of physical damage, which increases the informative capacity of the work and shifts attention towards material evidence.

Methodologically, the systematic application of the matrix comprising material operation, visible evidence, perceptual effect and critical inference has made it possible to establish consistent correlations between technical procedure and perceptual configuration. The matrix constitutes a transferable instrument for the study of process-based practices, particularly in contexts of environmental or social crisis. Its contribution lies in offering an analytical protocol grounded in systematic observation and reasoned inference.

At the theoretical level, the study delimits the scope of material thinking as a cognitive strategy grounded in the reading of physical behaviours and in sustained attention to the surface. Matter is understood as a record of interactions between environment, time and gesture, which makes it possible to situate artistic practice within a processual logic in which form emerges from specific material dynamics.

The limitations acknowledged include the situated nature of the study and its focus on a specific corpus. This delimitation has enabled a high degree of analytical precision, although it reduces the comparative scope. Future research could apply the matrix to other contexts of production linked to episodes of environmental damage in order to assess its consistency across different disciplinary frameworks.

Overall, the analysis shows that working with material residue can constitute a form of research based on observable evidence, in which the technical, perceptual and ethical dimensions are integrated through the rigorous examination of physical processes.

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