



The language of practice, research and the artefact

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volume 3 content
journal home pag
conference home pag
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to cite this journal article

Saorsa, J. (2004) The language of
practice, research and the artefact
Working Papers in Art and Design :
Retrieved <date> from URI
http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research_papers/wpades_vol3/jsfull.htm
ISSN 1466-491'

This paper is based on my PhD research, which constitutes an enquiry into whether and how drawing practice can be used as a method with which to explore and interpret ordinary verbal interaction. The principal research question is derived from a deeper philosophical concern as to the nature of the relation between our meaningful engagement with the art object, and our inherent predicament as human beings in a social world. Drawings, 'artefacts' in the sense of their being the tangible result of art practice, are a crucial and integral part of the research process.

The research procedure is indebted to the principals of grounded theory and moves inductively from quantitative procedures that provide a basis for more qualitative methods, towards a final pragmatic analysis of viewers' responses to art objects, in this case, drawings. It is described as hermeneutic in the sense that it is based in interpretive understanding, and also in the hermeneutic concern that there is no defensible subordination of image to word with respect to art works. The methodological approach to the research question uses linguistic procedures, which are derived from the social sciences.

Primary data consists of an original conversation that is recorded and transcribed using conversation analysis methodology, and the written transcription, an interpretation in itself, becomes the secondary data. Both are used in a comparative analysis with drawings that have been generated from a creative and intuitive response to the audio recording in order to find equivalences. From an intertextual viewpoint the original conversation, the recording, the transcript and the respective drawing are all considered to be 'texts' in their own right, and as such the whole process is based on a 'reading' or further interpretation of these texts in order to establish meaningful understanding. Far from being an isolated and individually subjective phenomenon, the experience of art is understood here in hermeneutic terms to be a profound dialogical achievement that is at least relative to the kind of achievement that is definitive of a casual conversation.

The research procedure is characterised by a synthesis of philosophy, art practice and social science methodology. It is 'contextualised' in art practice through a focus on the drawing activity as a basis for an exploration of meaning through interpretation, towards understanding. The drawings themselves are not the objects so much as they are the subjects of research in this project and, as 'artefacts' derived from a practice that is in itself an interpretation of a text (the original conversation,) it is difficult to consider them as distinct from the research methodology as a whole in terms of process. This paper is intended to demonstrate therefore how artefacts can and do contribute to research procedure in ways that go beyond the mere illustration of a concept.