



Interpreting the rhetoric of contextual instrumentality

Alan Robertson

Unitec, NZ

<joetal@kiwilink.co.nz>

volume 4 content
journal home pag
conference home pag
copyright

abstract ° full paper

to cite this journal article

Robertson, A. (2006) Interpreting the rhetoric of contextual instrumentality *Working Papers in Art and Design* · Retrieved <date> from URI http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research_papers/wpades_vol4/arfull.htm ISSN 1466-491'

Progress is synonymous with scientific/technological research. Research stands at the pinnacle of scholarly practice. Universities wage intense public relations for pre-eminence in the 'research university' wars. What is rated '1.0' in the politics of PBRF*? A double-blind refereed, peer-reviewed book published by a university press. Research authority is synonymous with its mode of dissemination. Books confer professional credibility as repositories for new knowledge extracted from research. Books constitute a 'fount of truth' (pun intended) yet the hegemony of their operation is rarely examined.

Educational theorist Nigel Blake's critique of Digby Anderson's 'Evaluating Curriculum Proposals', a research artefact (book) which critiques educational research artefacts (books presenting curriculum proposals) describes Anderson's double 'instrumentality': that books are significant 'contextual instruments' for the rhetorical presentation of research as though objective, detached, rational science; and that graphic design is contextually instrumental in that rhetorical achievement. During the 1970's professional power in the human sciences came under the scrutiny of 'rhetoric of inquiry'. Lanham argues that 'the seamless web of learning', the 'rhetorical paideia, was sundered by Ramist 'textbooks'. Simons explains the generic characteristics of 'professional rhetorics' and Hariman's Foucauldian 'meditation' on 'knowledge and power' looks at the impact of rhetorical analysis on research scholarship.

Anderson's analysis transcends specialist concerns and goes to the heart of the book-as-artefact whose contextual instrumentality is manipulated by design to engender an overall impression that the book is 'serious' (researched), 'authoritative' (factual), 'practical' (relevant) and 'new' (worthy of interest). But textual analysis can unwrap the rhetoric of authorial typography and the graphic conventions of the book which author, editor, designer and publisher manipulate for rhetorical effect. Yet communication design investigation into rhetoric tends to stop at descriptions of its efficacy for design, and not as the means for critique of design practice. Anderson's book suggests useful guidelines towards that end.