



A proper anxiety? Practice-based PhDs and academic unease

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Like any other PhD, practice-based PhDs are also the focus of much anxiety but, significantly, those anxieties reach beyond personal doubt and are shared by supervisors, examiners and senior academic management. Here, I suggest that the anxiety concerning practice-based PhDs should not be lightly dismissed because it is a product of the institutional relations practice-based doctorates put into place. At least in the short-term anxiety is structured into the qualification and the aim of this paper is to examine why.

I argue that the demarcation of disciplinary boundaries is important for judgements concerning academic and artistic expertise. To become an expert you have to have a specialised field, which can only be only mastered if it is clearly defined. Practice-based research crosses many of these borderlines thereby creating anxiety about criteria of competence, assessment and authority. Significantly, however, the practice-based PhD has involved a shift in the *institutional* arbitration of competence. In the past art that crossed disciplinary boundaries was nevertheless evaluated within art colleges and in relation to their traditions and practices, whereas in this instance art is being judged within an academic context and with a different set of expectations in mind. Unlike other previously contentious forms of art practice, this is not a change in medium or subject matter that nevertheless remains within the parameters of the art college, but is a shift in the way that the art object is legitimated as such.

The paper goes on to examine the practical and conceptual consequences of art practice being acknowledged as *academically* valid, exploring in particular the advantages and liabilities of anxiety for all concerned.