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**Title** An analytical framework to untangle interpretative approaches in assessment

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#### Part I - Abstract

An analytical framework to untangle interpretative approaches in assessment

This paper presents a framework which enables the mapping of approaches to the interpretation for the purpose of analysing the underlying referential frameworks which inform assessment. The framework productively situates specific assessment practices and discourses against a broader analytical narrative of interpretation. It was initially developed as part of a research project which aimed to analyse approaches to the assessment of complex student submissions in the creative arts discipline of fine art studio practice, and, as such, will include examples of its application when teasing out the assessment structures and practices of institutions and individuals. The framework contributes to research in assessment by providing a means to identify embedded referential frameworks; to detect and reflect on nuances in the structural, cultural and agential approaches to assessment; and to open up tacit process to the stakeholders involved.

#### Part II- Outline of paper excluding indicative reading list

An interpretative framework to untangle approaches in assessment

This paper introduces a framework developed to analyse approaches to the assessment of complex student submissions. The methodological value of such a framework may prove of interest to those grappling with transforming assessment cultures and structures in areas of higher education pedagogical practice. It was initially constructed to analyse the embedded and often tacit interpretative approaches underpinning assessment practices in the creative arts discipline of fine art studio practice, and, as such, examples of its application in that domain will be included in the discussion.

Despite the influence of educational and quality assurance discourses on the development of explicit referential frameworks for assessment, and many sincere attempts at 'innovations' in assessment practice, many are concerned that shifts to assessment practice in higher education have not been substantive. Approaches to assessment are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including national frameworks and norms, institutional cultures, academics' identities and preferences, and expectations of external stakeholders. Separating out assessment practices and values from professional practice, individual, and group identity is an almost impossible task, as in practice they are often enmeshed.

This framework emerged during a project where I sought ways in which to productively situate assessment practices against a broader analytical narrative, informed by constructions of interpretation from aesthetic and literary criticism, towards substratal engagement with the referential frameworks underpinning judgment. What such a broader narrative recognises is that criticism is "more than a means; it is considered a subject matter in itself and as subject matter, criticism is presented as a body of knowledge which has a logic, various recommended procedures, and a variety of goals" i. There are some fundamental mis-matches in purposes, between communities drawing from interpretation, that are important to acknowledge. Evaluation, central to

the interpretative purpose of assessment in higher education, has become one of the least important or desired aspects of contemporary criticism. Historians and critics do not hold responsibility for the effects of their interpretative approaches on the author or art maker. Those teaching, however, are specifically tasked with fostering development and being cognisant of the articulation between summative assessment process on the formative purposes they ascribe value.

What is common to both, is that whether authority resides with assessors in academia or critics/evaluators/ connoisseurs in professional communities, the issue of authorship is fundamentally imbued with the negotiation of power. And when it comes to issues of interpretation, assessment and the possibilities for autonomous learning, authorship is a concern.

The framework enables the mapping of approaches to the interpretation for the purpose of analysing the underlying referential frameworks which inform assessment. Informed by literary and aesthetic theory, the framework's horizontal axis relates to what might broadly be termed the sources or locus of meaning (that is, the author, the text, and the reader); its vertical axis refers to broad approaches to how the problem of meaning is negotiated, whether representation or signification. This is differentiated in the framework as 'eucharistic', 'objective' and 'operative' criticism.

For the purposes of the project for which the framework was developed, evaluating the merit of the different interpretative approaches, in terms of their intent, was not at issue. Rather my concern was with how these different approaches operated within referential frameworks in teaching, learning and assessment interactions in higher education, which impacted on their significance for the conditions for creativity. In this discussion, I will outline how the framework enabled me to compare the summative assessment practices of two art institutions, which differed in their espoused approaches to assessment and interpretation, in addition to conducting small case studies of the formative practices five studio practice teachers. To inform these studies, data was collected from course documentation and generated utilising a variety of hybrid methods. These included observations of the full range of assessment practices (including, oral formative assessment events, internal panel summative assessments, individual moderation assessments and combined moderation meetings); questionnaires and interviews with 14 staff members. That which was espoused and then that which was practiced was mapped to the framework, enabling a visualisation of approaches to interpretation.

The framework contributes to research in assessment by providing a means to identify embedded referential frameworks; to detect and reflect on nuances in the structural, cultural and agential approaches to assessment; and to open up tacit process to the stakeholders involved.

i Barrett, T., 1988. A comparison of the goals of studio professors conducting critiques and art education goals for teaching criticism. *Studies in Art Education*, 30(1), pp.22–27. [Apologies, I am aware the site indicated we should not include references. It is not the author's paper].