

Audio-Visual Practice Research PhDs Define their Space

by AVPhD Administrator and practice-led researcher Zemirah Moffat

The last week end in February saw the orchestration of a two day workshop (AVPhD1) for all doing, supervising and examining audio visual practice research PhDs; a joint initiative between Westminster, Birkbeck, Goldsmiths, Royal College of Art and Royal Holloway and a resounding success.

AVPhD1 examined issues ranging from the assessment and examination criteria to the thorny debates of the relationship between written and audiovisual texts; is one there to illustrate the other, should they stand alone and just what is the role of dense theory in practice?

Reflecting on the event it was quite radical for an AHRC funded symposium. Not only the challenge of incorporating practice within a historically text based examination process but also the fluid mix of examiners, students and supervisors. For once students, supervisors and examiners were working together, in the same room, trying to sort out our placement as practice-led researchers and how to negotiate the often anxiety fuelled terrain of academic assessment. It provided a space for support as people realised they weren't alone, and also proved to be productive as students found examiners and scoped out potential supervisors.

The most useful nugget of knowledge I gained was that there is no standard and that therefore the standards can be set by us and through us. It is through our work and through pushing our individual institutions that we can define our space. Let's be honest we're fairly expensive to keep up, what with technical resources and the amount of hours supervisors and examiners need to spend going through our various media, but no more so than a science PhD. But still there is a market out there, more and more people want to do it and so by generating and encouraging our own local political economy, as it were, there'll be bread on the table for all!

And one last thing, it is often the simple things that make the most impact. I designed two very simple posters, one an arrow on yellow paper and the second the letters AVPhD on equally yellow paper, kindly printed and laminated by our school administrator. No one failed to find the workshops and over half a dozen people congratulated me on the signs. This feedback simply reinforced the point for me that the power and effectiveness of the visual should never be underestimated.