6-4 Theory and Practice: "The Woodwork Masters"

Introduction

"Sure, it works in practice, but does it work in theory?" (T-Shirt Slogan, University of Chicago Economics Department)

"This paper will attempt to argue the proposition that degree-level or postgraduate work in film can make only limited sense if it is restricted to *either* practice *or* theory, along with the corresponding proposition that it is the political and cultural responsibility of educational institutions to offer courses which teach both and which try to make sense of each in relation to the other." (Williams, 1981, p.85)

The relationship, if any, between theory and practice is a debate within media studies that echoes through the development of the subject. William's 1981 introduction to his BFI Education *Film and Media Studies in Higher Education* conference paper gives a flavour of the debate. As a pointer to a discourse shifting across time it is worth highlighting the phrase "*the political and cultural responsibility of education institutions*" and comparing this with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable's much more recent view that "*Modern economies are knowledge based and universities are central to how we prepare for that*" (Cable, 2010). The idea that universities might have explicit institutional political and cultural responsibilities would not now feature so prominently within the discourse around the role of universities in the public sphere. The role of the university as a driver of economic growth would be more prevalent and dominates the discourse. So whilst Williams' propositions may be framed slightly anachronistically, the preoccupation with the relationship between theory and practice within media studies still readily surfaces in a discussion of the subject and the participants in this study frequently made

reference to it within their responses. Responses from eleven of the participants are presented here.

Analysis

Participant 15 (course leader at a Russell Group university) sees the theory/practice debate as one of a number of challenges:

> And the balance between practical and theoretical (…) is something that is (…) I don't want to use the word 'challenging' again because I've just said it lots of times (happy). (Participant 15)

When raised by academic staff participants '*theory*' and '*practice*' were sometimes framed as very definite divisions in the subject. Most graphically, Participant 04 recalled from his experience that:

> I have it on good authority that at least one of the theory lecturers used to refer to the practice lecturers as the woodwork masters. (Participant 04)

This view of theory and practice very clearly privileges theory over practice with what is probably an elitist derogatory reference to 1950s selective education in the UK when woodwork was seen as a suitable activity for children at secondary modern schools and distinct from an academic grammar school education (Musgrove and Taylor, 1969). Participant 04 goes on to elaborate by describing two alternatives; a curriculum model that is clearly delimited between elements that are considered '*theory*' and elements that are considered '*practice*' and an alternative where there is a degree of integration. Participant 10 also refers to a clearly delimited delivery of theory and practice, with the practice seen as "fun" when compared to the theory:

> They do practice on Wednesdays, they do theory on Thursdays and they have assessments in each, and that's great. That's fine. Then there are the models where they try and [...] introduce the theory to the practice and the practice to the theory. As I understand it, I mean. (Participant 04)

> Modules where you can actually show where they're making sense practically, er are obviously the best way to do it rather than having a more, "We'll have our theory lessons and we'll have a bit of fun practice afterwards". (Participant 10)

So having set up this strong dichotomy where theory and practice are either two distinct strands to media studies or at least two distinct entities that need to be integrated, it is important to understand how the participants construct this theory/practice framework and how they delimit '*theory*' and '*practice*'. Participant 04 continues by making a link between '*practice*' and '*vocational*' and between '*theory*' and the non-vocational aspects of a media studies course but also expresses the view that this link is unhelpful and should be discouraged:

> There is always a tendency to map the practical onto the vocational and the theoretical, critical onto a non-vocational, (...) and this is an interesting; it's an interesting, different way of seeing the problem that one wants to sort of work against that division becoming too strong in anyone's minds. (Participant 04)

This view of theory and practice resonates with the modalities identified by Elliot in his consideration of pedagogic discourse in relation to integrated theory/practice courses in media studies:

"…it is possible to distinguish between on the one hand courses which teach media (or other) theories and practices to prepare students for work in the media production market, and on the other those which teach them to develop what can be described as a *critical disposition* towards the media (or more widely towards popular culture). I shall call the first modality the *vocational*, and the second the *autonomous.*" (Elliot, 2000, p.19)

Having established these modalities, which appear to set up a further dichotomy, implying that the '*vocational*' is characterised by a lack of autonomy, Elliot sets out the challenges associated with the breaking down of the divisions that Participant 04 perceives negatively:

"…theory-practice courses are structured by pedagogic discourses which project a 'split' pedagogic subject, that is, a pedagogic subject which is unable to integrate the two or more forms of social relation, identity, and order which are associated respectively with 'theory' and 'practice'. Unless a course mediates the relationship differently, the kind of reflexivity and self-reflexivity associated with 'theory' discourses is incompatible with the relatively unselfconscious reproduction of *techne* associated with 'craft' forms of media production." (Elliot, 2000, p.30)

For Elliot, the construction of a "'split' pedagogic subject" with a '*theory*' discourse that he associates with reflexivity and a '*practice*' discourse that he regards as unselfconscious sets up a dichotomy that, by its nature, will be difficult to integrate; if academics talk about '*the theory*' and '*the practice*', the focus will be on the differences and not the commonality. In posing this dilemma Elliot points to '*the course*' as a mechanism of mediating this relationship and so the ways in which participants relate theory/practice to course structure and design is significant (see below).

The views of Participant 04, an experienced and senior member of academic staff, are significant when compared to the response of Participant 05, a media studies graduate now working in the broadcast television industry whose responses seem to embody Elliot's 'unselfconsciousness'. Whilst the academic member of staff regards theory and practice as distinct and important concepts, the graduate appears to have collapsed the two ideas and regards *practice* as

making films and *theory* as knowledge of how to make films; "*knowing how to frame a shot*", "*knowing about camera angles*":

> Okay, well in my opinion, I think theory is important, because you know, little things like knowing how to frame a shot, or knowing why… knowing about camera angles like when <lecturer name>, is it <lecturer name>? You know, knowing about camera angles, was useful, and also knowing about script, and pacing and things like that was quite useful. The only thing that would've been useful, looking back, was we did a little bit of theory to start off with, but then we started filming, and I think we never came back to theory? (Participant 05)

Although a first reading of this response suggests that the participant shares little of the academic's view of the value of theory ("*I think we never came back to theory*"), there are clues that there may be more similarity in their perceptions than first appears. Although he does not elaborate, Participant 05 does include the phrase "*knowing why*", a question more likely to be answered by a theoretical perspective on the subject. Although it is in reference to production practices, it is possible that "*knowing about script, and pacing and things like that*" implies an understanding of the ways in which meanings are created for an audience within the moving image and so suggests a theoretical, albeit totally integrated, understanding of the media in addition to practice-based knowledge and skills. Participant 03, also a media graduate, expresses similar ideas but is more explicit in drawing the connections between film theory and film-making practice:

> I got more than I expected. I mean, the fact that I was spending a lot of my time understanding film from a theory point of view gave me a good grounding for when I started making films structurally, for narratives for the way that they're created and the way that they're produced. (Participant 03)

For an academic staff viewpoint of this, Participant 18 (a member of academic staff who self-identifies as a 'theory lecturer') makes a succinct case for a theory-led approach to the integration of theory and practice:

> You need to watch a lot, then you need to understand a lot [laughs], then you can make it (Participant 18)

This phrase summarises an approach based on a familiarity with a canon of work ("watch a lot") and a theoretical and critical understanding of film ("understand a lot") as prerequisites for undertaking practical production work ("then you can make it"). And, as a rhetorical device, speaking as though he were a 'practice lecturer':

> "the thing is, it takes me three minutes to teach someone how to point a camera. It takes you, the theory guy, three years to teach someone what to point the camera at". (Participant 18)

Whilst Participant 03 and Participant 05 welcomed the opportunities provided by practice-based learning to enhance their practice-based skills, knowledge and experience in preparation for professional practice, Participant 14 had a different approach to theory and practice when looking for a course to study:

> I saw the course at <university> which was kind of very theory based, it was always all theory at the time, there was no (…) practical. (…) really excited me, so I kind of consciously took a- because I was (…..) I had a plan to make stuff anyway so I didn't really want to go and do anything that was too practical (…) 'cause I was quite interested in just (…) making it up as I went along. If I make stuff, you know what's, what's the impact of that going to be contextually and conceptually? (…) and I guess theoretically as well I was, you know (…) it was all new, so it was all exciting. All theoretical. (Participant 14)

His choice of course was based on the premise that he would have access to practice opportunities outside university ("*I had a plan to make stuff anyway*") and so the best value to him would be obtained from accessing the theoretical aspects of media studies, an opportunity not readily accessible outside higher

education. He perceives a theoretical understanding very positively ("*all theory at the time, there was no (…) practical. (…) really excited me*", "*it was all new, so it was all exciting. All theoretical.*"). This emphasis on theory is not independent of practice though ("*If I make stuff, you know what's, what's the impact of that going to be contextually and conceptually? (…) and I guess theoretically as well*") but it is expressed as a concern for the impact of his future practice rather than seeing a theoretical understanding of the media as a necessary precursor to professional practice.

Participant 10 is an experienced lecturer and course leader and she alludes to the important ("*absolutely crucial*"), continual, on-going and perhaps necessarily unresolved tensions between theory and practice in media studies ("*one of those ones that we've always debated*", "*debate fully [emphatic] er and at length*"):

> I think that's absolutely crucial and it's one of those ones that we've always debated isn't it? And I think courses with any practical content debate fully and at length. Erm (…) for me I think the best way to integrate theory and practice is, is having both run alongside, both modules actually, er modules actually having theory and practice within it, erm and they're at their strongest when they do that. (Participant 10)

Although this participant sees the theory/practice debate as on-going and unresolved she does have personal views on the best way of integrating theory and practice within a curriculum ("*modules actually having theory and practice within it, erm and they're at their strongest when they do that*"). This refers to course design within a modular/unitised framework where a course consists of a sequence of discrete teaching/learning elements normally primarily defined by a number of intended learning outcomes, aims/objectives, a programme of learning

activities and opportunities and associated formative and summative assessment.

Successful completion of the course is defined as successful completion of the summative assessments of the constituent modules/units:

"Viewed as a learning theory, the philosophy of modular course design asserts that teaching and learning activities can be quantified. Measurement of size, arrangement, equivalence, and outcomes are introduced which can in turn be manipulated in a variety of ways to reflect local or national circumstances. In this way a system of curriculum accountancy is created." (Bell and Wade, 1993, p.3)

When designing theory and practice elements within a modular framework there can be a tendency to create 'theory modules' and 'practice modules'. The reasons for this can be through module delivery staff self-identifying as 'theory lecturers' or 'practice lecturers' (see Participant 04 above), organisational access to appropriate learning resources and spaces, or constraints on methods of summative assessment.

Bell and Wade note in their review of modular course design that:

"…whilst the construct of a module of teaching and learning is apparently neutral, its deployment in the field of education and training is not and can never be value free. In this way, modular course design can be as much a move back to the traditional and conventional as a change away from the old order." (Bell and Wade, 1993, 5-6)

The way learning is structured into a media studies course consisting of units/modules gives an indication of the values and principles of the designers although it needs to be recognised that a range of constraints (see sections 6-2 and 6-3) may limit the scope of the course designer(s) to implement their preferred structure.

This correspondence between the compartmentalisation of media studies into theory and practice and the framework of course design is also recognised by Participant 15 (Russell Group course leader) with "*the balance of modules on the programme*" being associated with the "*balance between academic and practical*":

> …So we've got a sort of balance and that reflects th-the balance of modules on the programme (…) and the balance between academic and, and practical… (Participant 15)

In this response however, the dichotomy is posed slightly differently with a reference to '*academic*' rather than '*theory*' and '*practical*' rather than '*practice*'. This is an important distinction because, by setting up the two terms as entities to be '*balanced*', there is an implication that they are distinct and so, for this participant, '*practical*' work is not '*academic*'. To further understand the implications of this, the use of the term '*academic*' by this participant requires further contextualisation. Deriving from its Platonic origins, a dictionary definition of the term when used, as here, as an adjective is "*of, relating to, or associated with an academy or school especially of higher learning*" (Merriam-Webster). Collini sees the term 'academic' as "*a tricky, loaded word, but one which here suggests the pull away from the practical to forms of enquiry with their own protocols and ambitions*" (Collini, 2012, p.27). This would suggest that, despite leading a course that values '*practical*' work and arguing a case for its role in developing students' skills, the participant does not see it as intrinsic to the activities of a university, at least in media studies. This may relate to what Elbow terms '*academic discourse*' which he defines, in the context of academic writing, as "*the discourse that academics use when they publish for other academics*" (Elbow, 1991, p.135). As this participant is part of a university that emphasises its

research-intensive focus and a department that concentrates on communications studies, she is associating '*academic*' with research that results in written and published outcomes (rather than the practice-led research carried out within departments that take a more art school approach to media studies) and is giving primacy within the undergraduate programme to theoretical ideas and written work. The '*academic*' discourse is constructed and constrained by what people who identify themselves as '*academics*' feel they can and cannot say to each other.

Conversely, the use of the term '*practical*' rather than the term '*practice*' by Participant 15 indicates that she sees a role for practical elements in a course but this is not synonymous with professional practice, aspects of which would probably be considered '*academic*'. When prompted to elaborate on practical aspects of the students' work, the details provided by the participant all relate to extra-curricular activities rather than integrated practical learning opportunities with associated assessment and any attempt at the formal integration of theory and practice:

> I mean a lot of them do work in the student media that we have which is all brilliant and award-winning. We've got <university>'s student newspaper, <university> student radio <university> student TV lots of them go off and get placements in local (…) media organisations but (…) yeah, the practical element is very, very important. (Participant 15)

The examples of practical work in the response are all student-led and likely to be part of the student union activities rather than a formal part of the course. The participant does then go on to point to students completing relevant work placement activities within the local media industry. These are likely to still be

extra-curricular with an emphasis on the students taking responsibility for finding the placements ("*lots of them go off and get…*"). So the participant asserts that practical work is "*very, very important*" but sees it as outside the formal 'academic' content of the course and not essential as a means of exploring and challenging theoretical approaches, a rationale that is invoked for courses that adopt a more integrated theory/practice position.

This view of the relative value and importance of theoretical and practical work contrasts with the response of participant 06 (course leader working in a post-1992 university art school environment) who contrasts students who are committed to making practical work with others who she refers to as taking "*the whimsical route*":

> I think what's really interesting is that those students who are committed, those that aren't pursuing the whimsical route but those students that are really committed (…) want to, to make projects and so they will take on work experience. (Participant 06)

This participant is convinced of the value of practical work and sees the learning coming from the opportunities to try new things and to learn, in a supportive environment, from what goes wrong:

> What's the point of students doing practical work (…) in terms of their learning? (…) What do they learn? They learn from their mistakes. (Participant 06)
>
> And it is to learn, it is to facilitate that learning process in an environment where they are not penalised in terms of industry for the mistakes that they make. You know it's actually learning from those mistakes, so if you're learning to work within a production team those tensions will exist. (Participant 06)

Participant 08 is the head of a media department within a small specialist arts institution that identifies with the 'art school tradition'. She does not see their

courses as solely 'practice-based' but characterises them more subtly as 'practice-led' ("*we're very much about the practice, so all the theory and all the questioning grows out of what people make and do*").

> We don't do that much on the politics of the media, on media institutions, on journalism, we don't do much on public relations, so the kind of, what you might think is the more theoretical aspects of media. Erm, we're very much about the practice, so all the theory and all the questioning grows out of what people make and do. (Participant 08)

The practice-led approach outlined here is characterised by Archer:

"There are circumstances where the best or only way to shed light on a proposition, a principle, a material, a process or a function is to attempt to construct something, or to enact something, calculated to explore, embody or test it." *(*Archer, 1995, p.10*)*

Participant 08 then elaborates on the implications of this for teaching and learning practices within her institution. The consideration of theoretical concepts is not synonymous with 'written work'. Learning is driven by the production of media artefacts and this process is used to surface concepts ("*using the work as the starting point to talk about, I don't know, gender representation, or something*"):

> The teaching styles here would be … there's much less written work, more production work and lots more crits so there's a kind of critical discussion that goes on using the work as the starting point to talk about, I don't know, gender representation, or something. (Participant 08)

In describing this process, the participant refers to the use of 'crits' (a contraction of 'critiques') as a means of exploring the conceptual and theoretical issues that arise from the production of media artefacts.

"Formal design critiques, or crits, are occasions where each student's work is publicly discussed in the presence of the exhibiting student, their class mates and often other instructors, invited critics and guests. In these assessment interactions the student and instructor meet face-to-face and give personal voice to the wider debates that occur within design, and design education." (Oak, 2000, p.88-89)

Although widespread in art and design education and so present in media studies courses delivered with an 'art school' ethos, its value as a method of summative assessment has been questioned, notably by Jones with a concern that there is an "*unresolved connection between formative and summative assessment occasions brought about by an apparently unavoidable association between the work of students and the students themselves*" (Jones, 1996, p.133). This issue is described more graphically by Henderson and Till:

"Looked at from the outside, the crit can appear as a perverse form of anthropological ritual. The macho, adrenaline fuelled atmosphere means that the crit is too often a thing to survive rather than an event to learn from. Many students think of the crit as an ordeal devised by tutors to leave them feeling as though they have been undressed in public." (Henderson and Till, 2007, p. vii)

A response from Participant 05, a media graduate, does point to a primacy for practice:

> Well, my idea is, you don't get, if someone asks you to make a TV show, they don't say 'write an essay about it' they say, 'go make it'. So that's, I think that's probably why you practise this stuff, isn't it? Yeah… you know, surgeons practise on corpses and medical bodies, they don't get straight in on a [laughter]. They don't write essays on it! [comical]. (Participant 05)

In this response he does not directly characterise the dichotomy as '*theory*' and '*practice'* but relates it to the course teaching and learning activities by referring to "*they don't say 'write an essay about it' they say, go make it*". Here 'they' refers to the television industry ("*if someone asks you to make a TV show*") and so has the implication that this participant feels that the media industries are more

interested in the mechanics of making a television programme than they are in the context. The participant then goes on to assert the efficacy of practice-led learning by relating it to the traditional *vocational* subject of medicine and the learning that trainee surgeons undertake through simulation activities ("*surgeons practise on corpses and medical bodies*") before they carry out surgery on patients. This response points towards the participant's view of the value of practice-led learning as he then goes on to make the point that trainee surgeons do not and cannot learn the skills of manual dexterity associated with performing surgery by learning the theoretical aspects of medicine ("*They don't write essays on it! [comical].")*. It is doubtful that this statement indicates that the participant thinks that there is no role for the theoretical aspects of medicine in the education of surgeons, rather he is making a specific point about the best way of acquiring particular skills required for professional practice in this area.

The context of this remark is also worthy of consideration. At the time of the interview, Participant 05 was working on the Channel Four television programme *Embarrassing Bodies*:

> At the moment I'm working as a researcher on Embarrassing Bodies on Channel 4 and Embarrassing Bodies: Live on Channel 4. (Participant 05)

This current professional practice experience may explain why this particular comparison spontaneously occurred to the participant as he had been working within a number of medical settings as part of the research for the programme. It is also a programme that raises a number of theoretical issues around media representation and media ethics (Hadley, 2012) but the participant has not made

any direct link in the interview between the theoretical aspects of the media course that he studied and his current professional practice.

The responses of Participant 09, a course leader for a Foundation Degree media programme delivered by an FE/HE college, highlight the potential tensions that can arise from a consideration of theory and practice within this context:

> We look at sort of business elements of media production, different types of contracts, … and then alongside that of course we have media theory where we explore the usual stuff really, the usual media theory of film discourse and analysis in film. (Participant 09)
>
> We're hoping in a way that we can give students enough kind of theoretical knowledge to move into a third year so they're not left behind, but at the same time if they wanna finish after two years and wanna set themselves up as, you know, freelance video producers, you know, doing anything from wedding videos to pop music videos. (Participant 09)

Foundation Degrees were introduced to UK higher education in 2000 and are Level Five qualifications within the UK Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) (Quality Assurance Agency, 2010). Full-time students generally study a foundation degree for two years, entering with FHEQ Level Three qualifications or the equivalent. On completion of the course there is an expectation that students will be equipped to enter employment related to the area of study although foundation degree graduates may also continue to study by entering an honours degree course at FHEQ Level Six, a route many foundation degree graduates pursue. For example, according to a 2007 Report for the University of Plymouth, sixty-six percent of students graduating from foundation degrees delivered by Plymouth's University Partner Colleges consortium in 2005 were undertaking further study with over ninety per cent of

those undertaking a 'top-up' year to achieve an honours degree (Lintern and Hicks, 2007).

The specific rationale for foundation degrees, according to the Quality Assurance Agency is to:

"provide graduates who are needed within the labour market to address shortages in particular skills. Foundation Degrees also aim to contribute to widening participation and lifelong learning by encouraging participation by learners who may not previously have considered studying for a higher level qualification." (QAA, 2010, p.1)

The language of this definition contributes to the higher education as '*economic driver*' discourse with the terms "*needed*", "*labour market*" and "*shortages*" together with a definition of foundation degrees in terms of "*skills*". The rationale then goes beyond this to define a role for foundation degrees in "*widening participation*" and "*lifelong learning*". The term '*widening participation*' was adopted by central government following the Kennedy Report (1997) and was a major feature of UK higher education policy over the ensuing decade (Jones, 2008) although Jones questions whether a policy distinction was made between '*widening participation'* and '*increasing participation'*. A prominent policy aim for the Blair government over this period was to increase participation in higher education to fifty per cent by 2010, a goal that could be achieved by increasing the depth of participation by groups already well represented within the higher education student population rather than increasing the participation of under-represented groups. It is within this public sphere discourse that the response of Participant 09 needs to be considered.

When this participant frames theory and practice within the context of a foundation degree, his first characterisation is one of overt business-related course content and the contractual arrangements around media production as a commercial activity ("*We look at sort of business elements of media production, erm different types of contracts*") and this is contrasted with "*the usual stuff*" which he expands on as "*the usual media theory of film discourse and analysis in film*". So whilst the sector rationale for a foundation degree is accommodated by course content that directly relates to professional practice that is relevant to the course title and the participant leads his response with this aspect, this is followed by a reference to theory-based content that he considers conventional and uncontroversial ("*the usual stuff*"). His expansion of this as "*the usual media theory of film discourse and analysis in film*" is not particularly distinguishable from the ways the theoretical aspects of many media studies courses may be described. This suggests that whilst the sector, government and regulatory rationales for honours degrees and foundation degrees might emphasise their distinctiveness and higher education institutions might seek to differentiate their offering from the courses offered by other institutions, the evidence from these participants points towards a more shared understanding of what constitutes appropriate theory-based material in a media course. This demonstrates an instantiation of the '*academic discourse*' discussed above.

An explanation of the lack of differentiation between this foundation degree and honours degree programmes in media studies can be derived from the next part of the participant's response ("*We're hoping in a way that we can give students enough kind of theoretical knowledge to move into a third year so they're not left*

behind"). This relates to the evidence from the University of Plymouth (see above) that students often study foundation degrees as a stepping-stone to an honours degree rather than as a standalone qualification leading directly to professional practice in the area of study. The participant's concern is to ensure that foundation degree graduates can integrate with existing cohorts of honours degree undergraduates as they complete the final year of an honours degree programme together. This leads Participant 09 to equate the '*theory*' elements of the foundation degree to preparation for continuing study to honours degree level and the '*practice*' elements as equipping students with skills relevant to the professional practice opportunities that he envisages for students graduating from the foundation degree after two years of full-time study ("*finish after two years and wanna set themselves up as, you know, freelance video producers, you know, doing anything from wedding videos to pop music videos*"). This response also gives an insight into the participant's view of the nature of professional practice opportunities available to his graduating students with an emphasis on self-employment and freelance careers rather than traditional '*graduate*' careers. For universities, a key measure of student '*success*' on graduating is the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE) as the outcomes are used as a factor in a number of media-generated university league tables. Montgomery has identified self-employment as a significant factor in graduate careers within the media industries:

> "For some graduates, self-employment or freelancing is central to employment within key areas such as arts, design and media. Graduates who worked for themselves as arts, design and media professionals made up 42.1% of all self-employed graduates and this is often the only route into employment as artists, sculptors, musicians, dancers, actors and broadcasters." (Montgomery, 2013 p.8)

Two further responses relate not to the primacy of theory or practice but the sequencing as part of a media studies education. Participant 10 relates '*theory*' to '*observation*' which denotes a rather passive activity based on the critical consumption and analysis of media artefacts but sees that as a prerequisite to the production of new artefacts:

> Because of course the theory is about observation but the practice they are involved in making and actually putting that observation in, into practice. (Participant 10)

Participant 19 takes a more extreme view of this approach and asserts that practice-based film-making should be regarded as a postgraduate-level activity or, at least, an activity for mature students rather than being an element of an undergraduate course:

> And I just think, at 18, these kids don't know enough. They're not ready enough. I would rather that all filmmaking course start at 21. Do your first degree, and then let's do film-making. (Participant 19)

Directed particularly at students entering higher education at the youngest possible age and probably coming directly from full-time education in a school or college, the participant perceives this group as lacking sufficient knowledge ("don't know enough") and maturity ("*kids*", "*They're not ready enough*") to become effective film-makers on completion of an undergraduate degree. The participant does not directly specify the preferred undergraduate activity, she just says, "*Do your first degree*" but her view is that it should not contain practical film-making, expressing a view similar to that noted above from Participant 18:

> You need to watch a lot, then you need to understand a lot [laughs], then you can make it. (Participant 18)

Both participants see a need for the development of conceptual and critical thinking skills as a pre-requisite to professional practice. Whilst Participant 18

sees this in terms of a specific ability to critically read media texts ("*watch a lot*", "*understand a lot*"), Participant 19 takes this further with the view that any unspecified undergraduate degree could serve as vehicle for developing the knowledge and skills necessary to begin to learn to practice as a professional film-maker.

Summary and Conclusions

This analysis of the participants' views of the terms '*theory*' and '*practice*' and their perception of the relationship between them provides some insight into the broader questions posed by this study. When considered alongside the ways these terms frame the participants' perception of media studies and the corresponding academic literature a picture of media studies emerges that can be considered alongside the public sphere discourse around the nature and purpose of higher education in general and media studies specifically. Whilst the participants consider '*theory*' and '*practice*' as largely matters of course content and pedagogy there are clear linkages between their ideas of '*theory*' and '*practice*' within media studies and a rationale for media studies that could be to produce economically-active media practitioners or informed and critical citizens, or both.

This analysis of discourses of theory/practice complements the discourses of subject identity explored in the previous chapter and demonstrates some of the connections between the identity of media studies as a subject and the discursive academic practices that follow from that.