

6-7 Two Worlds: “I call it reality”

Introduction

“There is, to begin with, the reification of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. It is assumed that the only way to justify what goes on ‘inside’ is by demonstrating some benefit that happens ‘outside’. But we are none of us wholly ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ any of the institutions or identities which partly constitute who we are; these risk becoming misleading spatial metaphors.” (Collini, 2012)

One of the most striking elements of education discourse is the representation of education as one ‘*world*’ and everything else as a different ‘*world*’. Whilst education could be plausibly represented as an integral component of society with interactions at the level of both institutions and individuals, it is often portrayed as detached, irrelevant and lacking authenticity. There is education and then there is ‘*the real world*’. These examples are taken from the public sphere (researcher’s emphasis):

“And our high schools are populated with cynical kids who have learned, if they have learned anything, that they must jump through ridiculous, meaningless hoops if they ever hope to get **out there in the real world** where their **real education** can finally begin.” (‘Teacher Tom’ blog, 2014, researcher’s emphasis)

“...an education is often associated and used as a means to prepare for “**real life**” and what’s **out there in the real world**.” (mathsNews, 2014, researcher’s emphasis)

“But mostly we’re just trying to give these kids a good foundation in what painting is all about, so when they get **out there in the real world** and paint their kitchen they don’t make a total mess of it.” (Lockhart, 2009, researcher’s emphasis)

“I’m not so sure it makes any sense for people to spend three or four years of their life going through business school. The money that is spent doing that could be used to start a business and **get out there in the real world**.” (Preston, 2012, researcher’s emphasis)

“A cookie-cutter course list that involves several hours in the classroom **instead of out there in the real world** is simply incapable of preparing you with the tools you need to have success.” (CSA Learning Center, 2014)

“All the subjects that you think is hard right now in high school, trust me, it gets harder **out there in the real world**” (Carmelo Anthony in Ziegbe, 2010)

This ‘*two worlds*’ view of the place of education pervades not just the external representations of education but is also commonly featured in the way people embedded in education practices represent education. Waurechen laments this phenomenon in her article on assessment practices in higher education:

“I also just can’t buy into the “out there in the real world” ideology that dictates students should learn to deal with the occasional shitstorm that the world will throw their way, preferably sooner rather than later, because life has been “too damn cushy” for them up until now.” (Waurechen, 2014)

The participants in this study were not prompted to talk about this phenomenon directly but a significant number (eleven) of the participants chose to use this representation of education in their responses whether they are lecturers, course leaders, other education professionals or media graduates.

Analysis

This representation is crucial to an understanding of the discourses that characterise media studies and higher education because of the hierarchy and power it implies. If education is not part of the ‘*real world*’ then that implies that education practices are necessarily ‘*unreal*’. Education can then be portrayed as an ersatz process, subservient to a world ‘*out there*’ that is genuine, ‘*real*’ and so rightfully dominant. Eleven of the nineteen participants in this study made an unprompted reference in some way to a distinction between a media studies

education and the '*real world*'. These included participants from all the backgrounds represented in the study:

One of the things which impacts on the students' ability to get good quality jobs is having some real world experience (Participant 02)

The students are then introduced to the real world of filming and making films within their degree. (Participant 03)

When I was shuttling between the two worlds... (Participant 04)

When you get to the real world... (Participant 05)

But out there in the real world some people might just think... (Participant 08)

That you have developed certain skills (...) that (...) you can operate in a world out there (Participant 12)

...where you physically go out into the real world... (Participant 13)

...putting it into (...) s-some of your theory into practice. I call it reality. (Participant 13)

...in the (...) world that the students are going to go into (...) they need to... (Participant 15)

...huge tumult which (...) represents, reflects what's happening in the real world (Participant 17)

The prominent maintenance of this '*out there in the real world*' distinction when discussing media studies is more noteworthy than it might be for some other subjects given the nature of media studies as an interdisciplinary subject with its focus on a single, reasonable well-defined area of what is very much a part of the real world; the mass media. Whilst some other subjects are based around a single disciplinary approach or a particular canon, media studies is a subject explicitly formed around the mass media industries, a very '*real world*' human activity. So in media studies, '*out there in the real world*' is often a quite specific reference to the practices of the media industries or perhaps the broader creative industries rather than society as a whole. This narrower view of the '*real*

world' is clear from the responses of some participants and is often contracted to just *'the industry'*:

...if you look at it that way in terms of employability then they're serving (...) the industry. (Participant 14)

Participant 14 uses the term *'the industry'* when discussing employability and makes his perception of the hierarchy clear through his use of the word *'serving'* in relation to employability. Whilst the employability discourse (see Chapter Five, Section 5-5) is often centred on students, their development of particular skills and a discourse of individual *'empowerment'*, this participant sees it in terms of dominating industry requirements. Participant 06 expands on this relationship between media studies and the *'real world'* of the media industries:

Yes we go for the industry standard because as we said before we, we're, we are keen to encourage students who actually actively want to pursue this as a career. So then when they leave here they have what they need in order to apply for whatever vacancies, understand networks, contacts, have a solid show reel which they can say "Okay here's a factual TV show. Here's a film based DoP etc." and so on. So yes we apply the industry standards because that's where we've come from and we understand that's what is needed in order to apply and survive in the industry (Participant 06)

This participant gives a very clear picture of the way she sees the relationship between her course and the associated media industries. The basis of this relationship is derived from the experiences of the staff in professional practice within these industries prior to their appointment to academic posts in higher education ("*because that's where we've come from and we understand that's what is needed*"). She regards their previous professional practice experience as a validating qualification to prescribe what students *'need'*. This concept of what students need in order to be successful in the media industries is encompassed in

the term used twice in this participant quote, “*industry standard*”. The use of this term echoes its narrower usage in relation to technical standards within specific domains such as engineering. It alludes to highly specific and rigorously defined standards that emanate from organisations such as the British Standards Institute and the competitive endeavours of commercial organisations to establish their technology as a de-facto industry standard with the aim of being formally adopted as a defined and widely applicable standard across an industry segment (Hill, 1997). However, within the context of this participant response, that narrow technical definition is not what is intended. In this case it is more reasonable to interpret the participant’s use of the term ‘*industry standard*’ as ‘*prevailing industry practices*’ with the use of the word ‘*standard*’ implying a greater degree of certainty and uniformity than is probably the case. Phrasing this idea as ‘*industry standard*’ makes an assertion about the authority of these practices and precludes any discussion of the effectiveness of these practices, any variations across the creative industries and their overall value to creative industry practitioners or wider society.

This is consistent with a discourse of ‘*out there in the real world*’ that shapes participants’ thinking about the relationships between media studies and the creative industries. It militates against a dialogue between academia and industry that could address questions based around a consideration of what new graduates could offer the creative industries and the potential to challenge and improve prevailing industry practices.

Summary and Conclusions

“Theory is *about* something other. Practice is positioned as concrete, it is about what we do, and it is material. This (non-)dialogue is also reproduced in some of the discourses of research *and* practice, where research is located in the abstracted academy and practice is what goes on ‘out there’ in the ‘real world’. There is a separation performed in the very enactment of seeking to conjoin.” (Edwards, 2012, p.526, original emphasis)

Edwards’ philosophical consideration of the relationship between the academy and practice summarises the artificially constructed divide between media studies and the media industries evidenced through the discourse instantiated in the participant responses. By not being seen as part of the ‘*real world*’ within both internal and external discourses, media studies can document the media industries but never challenge and never change them.