Navigating the Two Worlds of Research

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Abstract:

This short essay posits a navigational perspective regarding research philosophies, particularly arguing in favor of inclusive philosophies that avoid dividing research communities and scholars into two distinct camps. Thus, researchers are encouraged herein to navigate away from potentially divisive concepts such as “quantitative” and “qualitative” and navigate toward inclusive concepts that distinguish between research approaches without simultaneously fracturing research communities.

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When I posit that there are Two Worlds of research, I imagine at least three general reactions. One reaction for many might well be “what a silly thing to say” or similar (with wits and wags adding “well look at who said it, what else would you expect?”). A second reaction for many others might be to say “Yes, and the Two Worlds are . . .” and state the two worlds they happen to see. And a few might say I am simply preparing my riff mannered on the philosophy of Andy Warhol, getting ready to go from A to B and back again.² Those with the first reaction may well choose to read no further. Those with the second reaction may find what follows something to ponder. And to those with the third reaction: thank you for associating me, even fleetingly, with someone who understood media industries far more brilliantly than I do.

Many problems pop up with the claim of Two Worlds of research, not the least of which is: why two? Why not one; why not many; why not several? In part, I choose two in resigned recognition of what seems to be the habit, choice, insistence, realpolitik, or dream of so many: simply put, you (or me, or whoever) either do “this” or “that” form of research. Qualitative or quantitative. Institutional or critical. Humanities or social sciences. Well, these are some of the Two Worlds out there, and readers can doubtless identify even more sets of Two Worlds. Mind you, I myself do not particularly like the lived experience of the Two Worlds, whatever Two Worlds happen to be on the table at the moment. I much prefer a world without Two Worlds (and I prefer the possibilities of a multiverse of research worlds). Often when the Two Worlds concept crops up (whichever set of Two Worlds has emerged at the moment) and the advocates of either one or the other of the Two Worlds launch their discursive gyrations in favor of their one world of preference, the momentum surges into claiming the one-world identity for those

present who are not adherents to either of the Two Worlds. Yet despite your personal silence or voiced objections, claims are made by others on your behalf as to whether you are, or are not, an authentic member of their world (and truth be told, the real problems emerge when these same claims by others about you are made in your absence, because that increases the probability that those claims might stick). When this happens to me, sometimes I remember an essay written a while back by Linda Alcoff, who wrote eloquently about the problems and misunderstandings that can arise when one speaks for another. In this regard, making claims by, for, and about others—especially when those others are not present or are otherwise unable to speak for themselves—risks misrepresentation and divisiveness in research communities. An alternative is to navigate through research communities in ways that seek inclusiveness while also respecting the value of differences.³

By now you likely gather I personally find the whole Two Worlds thing a bit painful. But I assure you, dear reader, this missive is not my oblique way of turning you into my therapist. It's not my emotional discomfort that leads me to write about navigating the Two Worlds of research but rather my deep pragmatism. Much as I may prefer things otherwise, the pragmatist in me recognizes that Two Worlds is a concept that courses through much of the lived experience of participating in research communities. Two Worlds in some variant or another will regularly rear its head: in the faculty meeting, the research seminar, the grant proposal, the interview, the book prospectus, the journal review—well, the possibilities are endless. Two Worlds is a construct that needs to be navigated—again and again—in order to have a productive research experience.

I have two suggestions for researchers navigating the Two Worlds (or, to shuffle the title of this essay, Two Worlds of research navigation). Again, my pragmatism surfaces with offering two suggestions: simply put, having more than one route among your options is more often than not an advantage. In that vein, multiple routes of navigation probably increase the range of advantages (at least up to a point where confusion might begin to surface through a welter of options, but remember, this essay is about the Two Worlds—no more, no less). Hopefully, offering two suggestions for navigation also helps me to diminish any perceptions that my goal for this essay is to be prescriptive. I'm skeptical about the value of prescriptiveness, because I believe it (intentionally or not) undermines the value of difference, and I value difference. Therefore, I suggest.

My first suggestion may ring a note of familiarity: maximizing, when feasible, the use-value of transforming Two Worlds separated by the word *or* into Two Worlds separated by the word *and*. Qualitative *and* quantitative. Critical *and* institutional. Humanities *and* social sciences. This transformation increases the possibilities of difference, it increases the possibilities of inclusiveness, and it is resonant with multidisciplinary.

My second suggestion is to expand the multiverse of Two Worlds by offering a wider range of conceptual possibilities for Two Worlds. This may seem counterintuitive in that expanding the sets of Two Worlds might raise the risk of additional navigation challenges, and this is true. However, this expansion might also present new navigational challenges that are in fact easier to navigate than a smaller, more traditional collection of Two Worlds. Put another way, if navigating the Two Worlds is a familiar challenge of research—and it is for many—having a bigger set of Two Worlds to choose from might increase your ability to find, at any given moment, one particular set of Two Worlds that can be successfully navigated. In other words, look for opportunities to see the world—indeed, see two worlds—in new ways, and in ways

that foster inclusiveness. Some sets beyond the traditional concepts mentioned earlier that I—and likely many of you—have from time to time found useful include:

- global and/or local
- old media and/or new media
- creating data to analyze and/or analyzing preexisting data

More sets of Two Worlds can be generated, and I welcome the emergence of additional sets for *Media Industries*. Having a multiverse of Two Worlds at hand will better enable *Media Industries* to navigate the vexing problems of excluding work on the basis that it does not represent the one world preferred over the other. Preference of one or the other world is not to be avoided, but rather might be done in ways that minimize the risks from diminishing the values of difference. Having many sets of Two Worlds to choose from and navigate will also allow *Media Industries* to better navigate in ways that sail toward the values of research evident in work that is compelling, controversial, rigorous, finely crafted, and carefully detailed, and work that opens new avenues for future research opportunities, because *Media Industries* will have more options for navigating toward those research values.

Navigating a multiverse of Two Worlds of research sets the stage for *Media Industries* to be prodigious in its quantity, and also creates the conditions for the journal to achieve distinction in its quality. Congratulations to *Media Industries* on its launch, and best wishes as the voyage to navigate many worlds of research now gets underway.

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² Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

³ Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991–92): 5–32.

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