

## Criticality in documentary workshops

In my art pedagogic study, I am researching how learning happens in photography studies in higher education. Using Bruno Latour's socio-material theory (ANT)<sup>1</sup> I look at how human and non-human actors are forming a collective in photo-documentary workshops. In this process learning also occurs. In my view learning happens in multiple relations. Not only artist teachers, but also cameras, pictures and the whole environment with its changing values are teaching the students. In this paper I will concentrate on what criticality means in the context of documentary workshops in our time.

In 1970's many art universities were political, supporting leftist thinking. Photographers were in the front line criticizing the society. At the same time rose the criticism of representation which challenged photographer's practices as documentarists. How to talk about the lives of the others? New methods and new subjects emerged when photographers where trying to find a way out from their power positions to a more dialogical way of working with people and producing documentary images. Since 1990's black and white esthetics have been replaced by a whole variety of photographic methods and techniques. The works of photographers are often also dealing with the issues of truth and the social practices where visual truth is produced.<sup>2</sup>

Many political phenomena are shared in the whole western world, like how the political left-right division is about to become history and the new division has risen splitting people into conservatives and liberals in questions like nationalism, globalization, migration, climate and gender-issues etc. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we live in the "post-truth" era where media institutions are in a crisis and social media dominates young people's communication. Social media is seen as supporting democratic communication, but we have also seen how it's used as a tool for political propaganda.

In this scene, I am interested in how digitalization has changed photographer's studies in higher education. It's not only digital cameras, computers or programs that are shaping the processes and studies in the field of photography, but it's also the shift in how consuming media and images has widely changed. Social media has affected even the way political issues are discussed. We might find out that the very undisputed manner of discussion enters the classroom as well.

In a politically and culturally fragmented world young students are now learning photography as a professional artistic media, but they are also approaching ambivalent political issues with their medium. To be critical in our time has new challenges when both political correctness and strong opinions are present at the same time.

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<sup>1</sup> Fenwick Tara, Edwards Richard (2010): Actor Network Theory in Education. Routledge. London

<sup>2</sup> Darren Newbury (2009) Image, Theory, Practice: Reflections on the Past, Present and Future of Photographic Education, Photographies, 2:2, 117-124