

What Does the World Need to See?

Years ago, whilst discussing with students the limits that exist within documentary work using a scene that I had shot myself, from my film 'Eiserne Engel' (Iron Angels), as an example, one of the students in the group confronted me with the question, "What images does the world need?" adding abruptly, "Certainly not these!" The scene in the film depicts an elderly man dying despite an emergency doctors efforts to resuscitate him. I had accompanied a helicopter rescue team for three weeks and in showing the scene wanted to share the experiences of difficult filming conditions with the students.

In a world filled with medial over-stimulation the question we faced was how to aesthetically and narratively deal with, or avoid, such challenging daily occurrences that society confronts us, as film makers, with. This very aggressive and dismissive question really touched a nerve. It could also have been asked: What stories does the world need?

Back then it was already clear to me that we, the lecturers, could learn at least as much from students as they from us. It is just a matter of listening to them and letting their questions take effect. The uncertainty that that initial question stirred in me still affects me to this day and serves as a warning in two ways: On the one hand; to always be prepared to question your own (cinematic) process anew and, on the other, the importance of rigorously maintaining a dialogue about content with students. It is only through constant dialogue that both teacher and student can together find reward within the immense pressures of film training.

Here in Ludwigsburg it is our understanding that film training is primarily the transfer of experience through dialogue and, though basic knowledge and skills are obviously crucial, 'learning by doing' is the most essential component to our educational philosophy. The importance of this was correctly identified by the founders of the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg, as well as the need to bring the best practitioners in the film industry to teach in Ludwigsburg. Practical teaching alongside film projects; development in teams; total equality and the equal treatment of the various genres and trades; initial foundation studies in a protected space and later in a safe open (market) space; individual teaching with a generous regard for time, essential to the film making process. These factors remain, for me, the unchanging foundations of a successful education, the core of which should concentrate on two things; the narrative and technical qualities of the stories being told and the quality of character of the people who create them.

After more than 20 years as a lecturer and a good 11 years as Director of the Film Academy fundamental theories on film training have crystallized for me. I am thoroughly convinced that film training must provide students with a great deal of freedom, whilst also providing them with a binding framework. I have also learned that 'artistic' and 'mainstream' cinematic forms are not contradictory, but can form a wonderful symbiosis; that the first creative crisis students often face can be the most important and instructive, that a protracted 'failure' can be ultimately more instructive than a quick 'success'; that quick success can make you become complacent and tired; that creative conception must always come before commercial production, and that the path to a (good) film is not straightforward but full of twists and turns and surprises.

Throughout the absolutely essential dialogue with students, educators must always be exacting, and they must motivate and challenge them. The dialogue must be analytically oriented and should avoid becoming the product of one particular 'taste'. The students are, after all, here to learn to create their own work and not ours. Film needs a transportable spirit just as much as a transportable body. It requires incredibly good organization and a sufficient budget. Film making is a balancing act, always on the brink of catastrophe and the constant need for re-invention. Film and the film market are in a constant state of motion, development and change.

In order for the Academy to remain relevant, we must remain open, paying great attention to our educational content and structure. This is no simple task, and is for students, lecturers and colleagues a daily challenge. Though one of tremendous worth. The proof is in the over 250 films emerging from the film academy each year. Taking, for example, just the degree films from the current year, with their diversity of narratives and styles, their successes both artistically and commercially, it is enough to convince me that all of our efforts, despite the inevitable creative conflicts, are rightly directed. Film is a significant and relevant medium capturing a large audience, lending itself to the transportation of socially relevant themes, with all of their questions, their light and shade, profound and entertaining.

With this in mind, it is my wish to keep learning more about our students and their film work. It is my hope that our wonderful and unique Ludwigsburg academy campus in Europe, with its endless creative opportunities, remains a place where students feel happy and where they can have fun.

I encourage you to be courageous, and would love to support you throughout your studies here in Ludwigsburg. Stay playful, be open, show feelings, form groups, cause creative unrest, explore empty spaces, make mistakes, fail with passion, go through crises, communicate, listen to one another, learn to take criticism, assume responsibility, believe in your dreams, be willing to learn and continually surprise us with your films.

Training the film makers of tomorrow is about preserving utopias, as well as the nurturing of dialogue and the development of skills, personality, character and strengths of the individual. It's about supporting system-resistant personalities who hold onto their dreams and are prepared to tackle the harsh realities of the market. Who else should decide which images and stories this thought-provoking world needs?

(Thomas Schadt, May 2016)