4th International Conference on New Horizons in Education

Reflections ecole and style issues of Turkish photography to photography education

Ozan Yavuz*

*Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Arts and Design 34220, “Istanbul”, Turkey

Abstract

Photography adopted very quickly from the second half of the 19th century in Ottoman Empire. However, it was settled as an institutionally in the context of a university or an art ecole from the late of 1970’s. Through the period until today, intermittents and the problematic progress of ecole and style concepts in the sense of both individual and institutional manners affected the photography education. The reasons of these intermittents are other crucial concepts should be examined in economic, political, cultural and artistic senses. Photography education institutions, which are established in this context, created their education programs within the framework of either modern western ecules or current trends. This study examines the reflections of Turkish photography attitude to photography education, which is still immature or has not a particular ecole or style, for some related institutions.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of The Association of Science, Education and Technology-TASET, Sakarya Universitesi, Turkey.

Keywords: Turkish Photography, Ecole, Education, Institution

1. Introduction

The meeting of Turkey with the photography, or the formation then, the Ottoman Empire, was not very late. The photography entered the Ottoman lands with the photography house opened by Italian Carlo Naya in Beyoğlu in 1945, just after the invention of the photograph had been announced in Paris Science Academy on 18th of August, 1839 (Özendes, 2013). However, this introduction to the
photography was only technical. In other words, photography did not come to Ottoman lands as a result of the cultural developments; neither of transferring the scientific and philosophical thought periods into the technique and nor of the interest of social classes (especially bourgeois class) towards art, science and philosophy. The photography was just a technical outcome. Of course any technique or photography technique can be learned, applied and advanced further by technical means in a short period of time. However, when the creation process of the technique is not understood or adopted, there will be an eclectic issue. That is to say, photography is only the formation of the image put into the frame with one button in seconds. This process is fast and easy. Thus, the process can be completed when the shooting technique and surface arrangement (composition) information are learned. Nevertheless, this kind of training and education will ignore the background. So, we can exemplify this background? The perfectionist art insight and usage of the Renaissance, the concept of orientation of using one’s mind brought by the Enlightenment, the eligibility for application of the experimental methods, acceleration of scientific researches; maybe the most importantly, spreading the relation of art with cultural life towards all parts of society.

Photography has become an extent of the technology as the material response for the importance given towards art, science and philosophy. Thus, this deep-rooted past of the photography does prevent it from being a simply display generator. The fact that the basics of photography had been made in Europe like this helped it became an independent quality during its historical development process and reach a level that it could create various ecoles within. This, of course, was reflected in the photography education. In order to see if such a process formed itself in Turkey, one needs to see the historical development, efforts for identification and the place within the corporal structures.

2.A Historical Look at Turkish Photography

2.1. Photography in the Last Years of Ottoman Empire and in the First Years of the Republic

In Ottoman period, with the great importance given by Abdülhamit II towards the photograph, one can observe that the usage of photography was documental. In this sense, the photographs taken were gathered within a general frame such as the architecture of official and cultural institutions, social life and formal ceremonies. An important visual archive has been obtained by gathering the taken photographs within Yıldız Albümleri. The Ottoman Empire met the photography in a way which we can define as fast and efficient, through the photographers supported by the state and non-Muslim photography houses. However, this meeting occurred as family photographs, studio portraits and the documentation of the current status of the state. In other words, we can observe that there
were no steps taken towards the institutionalizing of the photography training and no artistic developments.

The interest of Ottoman Empire in photography continued with the foundation of the Republic. The foundation of the Republic of Turkey was important by means of photography but the point of view resembled with the Ottoman Empire; the documentation of state continuum and foundation, the visual documentation of the Nation State during its settlement and development and the publication of these photographs accelerated the usage of photography. It was inevitable for the public to meet the photography in this period. The photography studios occupied by the minorities during the Ottoman Empire period helped ‘local’ photography studios get more and more common. Of course this occasion arose from the visual data need of the Republic. The photos that had to be taken for the official documents and new identity cards were the precursor of the fact that the public would meet the photography and then the orientation towards the family photographs (Ervin, 2006).

2.2. First Signs of Institutionalization Operations

We observe that the photography concept after the Ottoman period had got common via the Village Institutes (1940) before a corporate identity was formed. The objective here was to follow a ecole and formation with the ‘Bauhaus Ecole’ insight by making art functional. The education provided to be applied to daily practice were towards the technics of photography rather than creating an artistic identity or manner. Thus, in the light of the thoughts of John Dewey, the education that would be converted to practice with a pragmatist attitude would be more beneficial.

A different approach was followed in Community Centers. The photography education attitude in the Community Centers, founded in 1932, was towards focusing the artistic attitude rather than being a technical applier. In this sense, the following saying of Vedat Nedim Tör is about putting the artistic manner of the photography forward: “To see our neighborhood better, to seek (the beauty) more and to know the realm better” (Tör, 1940). In addition, Ankara Community Center stated in its Conditions for 2nd Photography Contest that photographs could be documental; however, the artistic ones would be taken into account more (Tör, 1940). Another aim of this saying served the objective to meet the art with the public (Ak, 2001). This objective tried to spread photography (and other practices) to the public, positively influencing the democratization process. In this process, “In accordance with the populism principle, artists were sent to Anatolia in groups and they had the opportunity to observe the beauties of the realm between 1939 and 1944. Thus, ‘art’ insight began to form within the people through the painting” (Ervin, 2006). The development of the photography was in line with this insight. It accompanied a romantic perspective towards Anatolia.

To sum up, the ‘artistic’ and ‘functional’ perspectives of Community Centers and Institutions in the early periods were interrupted by technical deficiencies and the fact that political and civil constitutions were not continuous. Likewise, the fact that Community Centers and Village Institutes were discontinued in 1951 and 1954, respectively, prevented the photography from seasoning as documental, experimental, artistic or functional.

2.3. From “A Look at Anatolia” to “Experimental Movement”

Economic and political straits during 1950s and later resulted with the photographers acting in line with ‘social realism’. The immigration to İstanbul and the life in Anatolia were reflected in the photographs. Photographers like Ara Güler and Fikret Otyam documented the social life in İstanbul and Anatolia. In this phase,
these photos that reflected their impact in 1960s unfurled the current social status of the people rather than introducing the country. This process continued during 1970s. Following the changing political regime in 1980s, the change in the perspective towards Anatolia resulted with the photography to move into a different aspect. The sounds of experimental photography that rose helped coming up with more personal works in accordance with the critics towards the fact that social documentary photos lacked style. Experimental photography, placed between the social documentary and communal documentary photography were subjected to critics by means of content. It’s known that these types of critics have been made by each movement or insight towards each other. The discussions there were about which method was better. However, the fact that the “non-existent ecoles” in Turkey tried to ignore each other rather than creating a ecole or identity during the development struggle of photography made it hard the way that the identity would be created or led it to disidentification. During the 1980s, the works sprouting under the name of ‘experimental photography’ did not make Turkish Photography a ecole. The material which had been out forward was the repetition of the method or area as personal or a group; not a ecole.

3. What the Polarized Kingdom Brought

The reflection of 1980s to the photography was not related only with the emergence of the experimental photography. A strange type of documentary photography was being formed as well. During the romantic area until 1950s, we encountered it as a more orientalist version of the photographers seeking towards Anatolia. This perspective, dragging the Turkish photography insight towards an effort to achieve the ‘beautiful’ and towards a self-orientalist perspective; along with the photographers having this insight, setting and directing the photography trend after 1980 affected the corporate education in the same way mostly having been supported with photography contests. It came up as a type where the modern photography technology was being used to its last extent, having been defined by the classical compositions of the ‘documenting’ feature of the documentary photography, the appeal of tour photography and the astonishment of the ‘moment photography’. A type depending on the image hunting, the beauty given by the singular photography of which was sublimed with contests, having no context and easily repeatable formulas and expressing opinion as these formulas are the mere correct thing. The source where this insight, defining itself to this extent, had been Anatolia, while in time, it turned out to be exotic places such as India, Morocco, Far East and South America.

“When the villagers with ox carts and donkeys were replaced with the tractors, The Song of Anatolia ended as well. Tractors were not interesting for the ones living in a city. Comprehensive reviews which had been done 50 years ago in the west were not brought up already. It sufficed only to lurk on the turning point. Have you seen any comments from the great social confusion in our cities? Anyone that grabs a camera heads towards the lower classes. Are there no topics at your houses, neighborhoods, work places? Just as you realize your surroundings or your country loses its appeal after 3-4 trips, you hit the road towards the countries that keep their local colors” (Beyhan, 1992).

The only positive aspect of 1980s can be observed to have been the reflection of economical movement to the photography. The fact that the availability of the technical material increased also increased the quality of the applications in the photography. This process, during which quantitative increase was observed but there was no qualitative end, strengthened the singular photography saying and made it open for personal consumption and getting pleasure.

“In the game of subjects (artist, politician, scientist, employer, etc.) and subjects (society, people, masses etc.) played in Turkey so far, instead of trying to find a way regardless of the cost to solve the object, which it has never tried to analyze and explain completely so far (exceptions don’t break the rule), the subjects gave up on this, got cross with the object, closed upon itself and initiate ways towards personal salvation or lost within the object, having ended its own qualifications (qualifications that have not settled, so to say)” (Çoştuğoloğlu, 1992).
Primarily the fact that the political and civil constitutions were not consistent, that the art could not be transferred to the society, thus there were no civil settlement other than the government can be counted among the main reasons causing this. Consequently, the consistency, of the scientific, artistic and the cultural changes of the communal and personal constitutions is significant. “In the societies open to evolution and development, ‘parted life’ is a fact of the transition. If the ‘parted life’ period gets longer in a society closed for development and rationality, it turns into a permanent communal disease. The sight in Turkey advances towards a disease as well” (Çoştuğrulu, 1992).

It is observed that, the identification of the photography is not only about solving the internal constitutional problems within. Firstly, the photography and its artistic aspect should be internalized and defined by the society and its users. We need to take the photography, thus art, beyond being merely a usage; to solve abstract and tangible problems; to be able to observe and reflect the localness and while doing these, we need to do it without kitsch and with going beyond the analogy.

4. Turkish Photography Institutionalizing (is it?)

The story of the photography reaching the corporate level in university scale in Turkey is very interesting and tragicomic:

“In 1978, when the Fine Arts Academy of the period summoned us and launched this institution, its reason was not the need for higher education in photography branch. A Japanese photographer named Namikawa was going to prepare a book about Topkapı Palace and he needed to abide by some rules in order to take photographs comfortably. “Let’s open a photography school for you and get aid from the Japanese corporations,” he suggested to the Tokyo Embassy of the time. This wish just ignited the fire. Later, Namikawa appeared only two times and disappeared, minding his own business. After some period of time, the expected Japanese aid was proven to be a dream but it was decided to go along with the foundation having made so much preliminary works. So, Photography Institution was founded. When the first one was founded, it led the way for the similar ones in other universities” (Kalfagil, 2013).

Naturally, such a start unearthed some problems. Of course, out of these problems…;

“…the photography education takes its share. The start of the photography education was not due to the accumulated needs of the market. The market needs interlude workers. This need could be fulfilled with secondary level education; a photography business high-school. The functional photography production had experience to some extent within the course representing the Turkish photography abroad and amateur and professional organizations reached a level of activity” (Kalfagil, 2013).

The emerging educational model was a co-ed, in other words, a syllabus oriented to satisfy the needs of both the art and the market had been prepared. Of course, this occasion can be evaluated under another heading, for the sake of the institutionalizing of the photography. The problem was that the conformity of the photography education model with the local conditions was not questioned and a lesson plan oriented to the needed area was not prepared. Apart from these, the fact that the photography activities and trends were inconsistent, shallow and that they ignored each other from time to time affected the ground and future of these corporate constitutions.

As Sabit Kalfagil (Kalfagil, 2013) states, an education model which both would satisfy the needs of the market and would provide artistic education has been emphasized within up to now. For instance:

“The point of origin of the Photography Department is oriented to seek the opportunities to conduct an education in communication with the photography sector in our country. Consequently, a great care has been shown towards the creation of this bond since the foundation phase. It has been aimed that creative photography artists, equipped with technical, aesthetical and notional information, would be schooled” (Marmara Üniversitesi, 2013).
Generally this objective that has been set is an interim or decisive and a medium objective in order to école workers capable of producing art. Consequently, it is not surprising that a non-existing photography école or attitude puts such an education plan forward. But how will this insight be reflected to the photography education? The student generally:

“….continues their education in the remaining two or three years by choosing one of the working areas. These divisions bring forward not only divisions of workshops, but also administrative and hierarchic divisions based on one instructor, being conducted with ‘master-apprentice’ relationship” (Tunç, 2997).

Or, necessarily, it appears before us with an average profile, taking all the basic and specialty areas oriented to photography practice one by one. In this process, which mostly happens in an analogy relationship, the student is eager to get a diploma, rather than putting his/her artistic ability forward. What needs to be is not a repetition; it is a photography insight developing by building upon.

In some institutions where different models are tested with a contemporary approach, the education model is reshaped with the new model between disciplines:

“The model aims to save the photography and video from a position where only their concepts speak and to reproduce them in experimental ways in terms of their borders within the world order of 21st century, which changes quickly by means of education, economy, social and political aspects” (Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, 2013).

Contemporary practices and trends can be followed more easily with such approach. Furthermore, within the scope of the applied education plan, apart from the basic courses, the student can choose the specialty courses from the desired area. The department, started the education in the end of 90s, has been freer by using different disciplines within the photography application area due to its different structure. Consequently, it becomes difficult to observe the effects of the insight of mainstream photography, which I defined not as a école but a strange kind of the experimental photography.

However, over the past five years, it’s possible to observe that mainstream photography insight has been generally being left and the reflection of the contemporary photography practice to the education has increased. Of course, it’s desired that photography education should follow contemporary dynamics in this way. However, again, the same question will come before us: “Which photography attitude and as whom?”

In the light of all these, the thing I wanted to exemplify or explain is related to a description or qualification. École can be defined as the trends generally out of the mainstream; having a sorter quality by means of science, art and intellect and also a special method or attitude; mostly eligible to be initiative. Being a école is related to either putting a new attitude forward or representing the available one in an appropriate way, conforming to its origins.

In this sense, what do we mean by saying “There are no écoles in Turkish Photography”? Actually we can exemplify this situation with various photography écoles:

F/64: The trend led by Edward Weston ve Ansel Adams denies all the interventions in the photography, America, 1932,

Farm Security Administration (FSA): The social documental photography trend started in America during the Great Depression in 1929,

Dusseldorf Photography École: It is mentioned with the photography typologies made by Bernd and Hilla Becher towards the industrial buildings in 1970s, foundation of which was laid by the New Objectivity. Another feature of this école is that it raised world famous photographers with specific attitudes such as Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, and Candida Höfer. The marks the photography philosophies of Bechers can be observed within the productions. However, none of them are similar to each other, nor a reproduction of Bechers.

So, who will we think of when someone mentions Turkish Photography? I’m asking this both as an approach and aesthetical values: Is what we will encounter a reflection of the cultural features or the reflection of an attitude emerging after a cultural, scientific or political movement of the country to art? Are they sparks of the
individual activities? Are they the adaptations of the existing towards the local? Is it repeating Ara Güler, burning with the nostalgia disease? Is it the blindness caused by the failure to notice the contemporary? And how will the reflections of these questions to the education, which have not been solved yet, be solved?

5. Conclusion

It appears that the photography works in Turkey caused the same tentativeness to continue within the education insight due to social and political instability and parties’ failure to share, produce and define the ‘art of photography’.

The important thing is not using an experimental a documental method or discussing and fighting over a method or a technique brought into non-defined or immature attitude, ecôle and movement about which one is better. The problem is not the competency to produce photography in a contemporary way. The problem is to have the conscious of what to produce and how to produce it; identifying it. Thus, the source of the problem is a matter of “defining” and “implementing” this definition.

References

Ak, Seyit Ali, (2001), Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Fotoğrafi, p.197, 1. Basım, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi


Tör, Vedat Nedim, (1940), “Fotoğrafa Dair Bir Fetva ve Bir Kaç Düşünce”, Ankara

