Annual Report
2009

Yangon Film School
Non-profit Association for the Promotion of Young Burmese Film and Video Artists
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Summary of Activities in 2009</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Breakdown of the YFS Director’s Activities / Project Plan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Fundraising</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Comments</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Schedule, Methodology, Tutors</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Permits, Participants and Implementation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Training of Trainers</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Management, School Regulations, Copyright</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Company Registration, Licences</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II</th>
<th>The 2009 Art of Documentary Filmmaking Beginners’ Workshop</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Participants</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Week One – Initial Training</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Comments</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Weeks Two and Three</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Comments</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Completion of the Films</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Benefits for the Students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III</th>
<th>The Poetic and the Authentic Camera Workshop</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Background and Aims</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Subject and Participants</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Methodology</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. The Filming Exercises</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Conclusions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV</th>
<th>The Pitching Competition</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Rationale for the Competition</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The Pitches</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The Winners</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Production Plans</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V</th>
<th>Screenwriting Workshops</th>
<th>22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Rationale for the Screenwriting Workshops</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The Beginners’ Screenwriting Workshop</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Participants</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) The Workshop</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Afternoon Screenings</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iv) Script Readings</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The Advanced Screenwriting Workshop</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Rationale and Participants</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Future Plans</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| VI  | Analysis of the 2009 True Fictions Exercise: ‘Like a Bubble in Water’ | 26   |
In its fifth year of activity in 2009, the Yangon Film School continued to embrace a diverse range of activities that reflect the project’s ability not only to foster emerging talent in the media but also to serve the needs of the development sector by portraying examples of change and growth in Myanmar. The year 2009 also brought unexpected challenges which highlighted the sometimes precarious nature of our undertaking and the need to find structures to safeguard those involved. It was also a year during which long-standing YFS students expressed a desire to play more of an active role in decision-making processes – from selection of candidates to day-to-day management of YFS, production of NGO projects and copyright. The year marked the introduction of Training of Trainers during which advanced students were given the
opportunity to train their less experienced peers. Both moves represent an important step towards the participants taking ownership of the project and their commitment to sustainability and self-determination.

During the course of 2009, the Yangon Film School:

a) Cooperated in February 2009 with the European Burma Office to bring YFS student Myo Min Khin to Berlin to join the Berlinale’s Talent Campus where he met other young filmmakers and consulted with high-profile industry professionals working in fiction and documentary in order to improve his understanding of the entire filming process, particularly digital post-production.

b) The school also cooperated in July/August 2009 with its client Pyoe Pin to send Flying Mentor and YFS tutor Melanie Sandford to Yangon to oversee the edit of two YFS projects filmed for this NGO (Our Forests, Our Future and A Bright Future).

c) In August/September 2009 YFS cooperated with its client UNAIDS to send Flying Mentor and YFS tutor George Cragg to oversee the edit of the YFS/UNAIDS project Stigmatize This!

d) In September 2009 YFS cooperated with the Czech film school FAMU to send two female students, Wai Mar Nyunt and Thu Thu Shein on a nine-month scholarship to Prague to attend the school’s international multimedia course.

e) In November 2009 YFS and the FAMU cooperated with the Danish documentary film festival CPN:DOX to send students Wai Mar Nyunt and Thu Thu Shein to Copenhagen to attend the festival’s ten-day Talent Campus and take part in a collaborative documentary project together with two Scandinavian filmmakers.

f) In January 2010 the school cooperated with its client Save the Children to send Flying Mentor and YFS tutor Regina Bärtschi to oversee the edit of the Save the Children project Changes for Us (WT). During her stay in Yangon, Regina also mentored the edit of a long-term observational project filmed by YFS for Pyoe Pin: Rice, Myanmar’s Future.

At the end of 2009 (from 25.10.2009 – 23.12.2009), the Yangon Film School mounted five workshops and two teaching modules:
a) **The Art of Documentary Filmmaking: Beginners** Taking place between 1.11 and 21.11.09, this three-week beginners’ course helped 12 new novice filmmakers between the ages of 25 and 35 to gain basic skills in documentary - from identifying a subject to filming - but also to develop a critical and artistic approach to documenting actuality. This course was taught side by side by tutors and student trainers.

b) **The Poetic and the Authentic Camera** Held between 16.11. and 21.11.09, this nine-day course was designed to liberate the imagination and encourage participants to find the poetry in everyday life. A series of morning seminars presented different documentaries and examined how well-known filmmakers have found ways of telling stories and creating a mood from sound and image alone - without the use of interviews. Students were also given the opportunity to research and film their own short poetic film at a location of their own choosing.

c) **The Art of Screenwriting (two courses: Beginners and Advanced)** Scheduled from 8.11.- 26.11.09 these two courses helped 10 men and women of all ages with some prior experience of creative writing for film and/or television to create outlines for fictional films and animation projects.

d) **Analysis of the 2008 ‘True Fictions’ exercise: ‘Like a Bubble in Water’** This two-day workshop was held on 27.11-28.11.09 and led by cinematography, sound, directing and editing tutors in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the docufiction exercises made in 2008.

e) **The Pitching Competition** was held on 23.11.09 with three prior individual tutorials to prepare pitches. A pitch is a verbal presentation of an idea for a film project. Students were asked to present pitches of not more than 10 minutes to tutors and students who subsequently voted via secret ballot for their four favourite pitches. Four winning pitches will be part-funded in 2010 by the YFS Production Fund set up by students from income earned from films made for NGOs and other clients.

d) **Other Ways of Seeing: The History of Film Form** A nine-day series of lectures with film clips was held from 30.11.09 - 9.12.09. Aimed at all YFS students, the course identified different approaches to film form throughout cinema history, with an emphasis on different interpretations of the poetic.

e) **The Art of Sound Design** This two-week workshop was mounted between 11.12.09 and 23.12.09. It was attended by 9 participants with prior experience in sound recording and mixing.
1. **Breakdown of the YFS Director’s Activities / Project Plan**

**January 2009 – March 2010:**

During this period YFS Director Lindsey Merrison undertook the following:

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<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Preparation of financial and narrative reports</td>
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<td>Grant writing and other fundraising activities including:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Funding missions, visibility actions such as screenings of YFS work to potential clients, festival organisers, NGOs, donors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-workshop organisation including:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Devising of courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sourcing and selection of participants, tutors and staff</td>
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<td>- Workshop permit applications</td>
</tr>
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<td>- Coordination of travel arrangements</td>
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<td>- Research and purchase of equipment and teaching materials</td>
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<td>- Cash flow and fund management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coordination of the YFS Flying Mentorship Programme</td>
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<td>Festival submissions of YFS films and coordination of YFS students’ participation at international festivals and events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creation of individual DVDs and portfolios of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year-round mentoring of individual projects for NGOs as well as individual films by YFS students</td>
</tr>
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<td>Year-round mentoring of YFS students in all organisational and contractual aspects of running the YFS as a media resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing contact between YFS students and international broadcasters, festivals and other organisations in order to pave the way for co-productions, training programmes, scholarships and exchanges.</td>
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</tbody>
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**8 – 17 May 2009:**

Research trip to Yangon undertaken by the Project Director to:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present the 2009 workshop outline to members of the YFS Group</td>
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<td>Conduct individual interviews with Beginner course candidates</td>
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<td>Finalise participants for all workshops and courses</td>
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<td>Monitor the progress of the permit application</td>
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<tr>
<td>Present the work of YFS to INGOs, local NGOs and aid agencies for acquisition purposes</td>
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<td>Mentor ongoing NGO commissioned projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct group discussions on management and copyright issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**30 October – 10 December, 2009:**

Pre-workshop preparation in Yangon followed by workshops proper.

**11 December 2009 – 30 April 2010:**

Supervision of the post-production of the 18 short films and exercises produced in 2009 and during workshops (subtitling, colour correction, sound mix, edit of workshop film, production of four NGO DVDs, two workshop DVDs, cover design, inlay text), preparation of financial and narrative reports and individual audits.
2. **Fundraising**

Approximately half of the YFS’ 2009 budget of 230,000 Euro was secured by mid-2009 from regular donors VIKES, NBC, the Goethe Institute Jakarta and the Heinrich Boell Foundation. However, the unexpected drop in the contribution from another regular funder, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meant that the Project Director was obliged to seek alternative funding to fill the shortfall of approx. 50,000 Euro. As a result, workshops which had been initially planned for May/June had to be postponed until the usual November/December slot. Fortunately, in October, a new funder, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) agreed to take up the shortfall, and the workshops could go ahead back-to-back from 1.11. to 23.12.09.

(i) **Comments**

Annual fundraising and reporting accounts for approximately 65% of the Yangon Film School’s activities. This leaves a disproportionate amount of time for the devising and implementation of workshops as well as visibility actions such as festival presentations and other events, exchange programmes, mentoring and teaching. In order for the school to continue to meet the growing needs of its students and consolidate its presence in Myanmar it is essential for YFS to secure funding for a period of three years, such as that granted by the Finnish Media Foundation VIKES during the period 2008 - 2010. The YFS Director would like to appeal to all donors to consider the possibility of forming a donor pool to cover the period 2011 – 2013, at the end of which the Yangon Film School will hopefully be handed over to its primary beneficiaries as a largely self-sustaining media resource and training centre.

3. **Schedule, Methodology and Tutors**

With five workshops and three integrated teaching modules to be held in eight weeks, the 2009 YFS trainings required another elaborate feat of scheduling in order to make the best use of tutors and time slots, and give as many participants as possible the opportunity to pursue their preferred course of study.

As usual, the workshops were taught in a mixture of classroom teaching, screenings, practical exercises and film shoots that culminated in the production of several short documentaries, exercises and screenplay outlines. As a residential training, participants were able to spend as much time as possible with professional tutors from Europe and Australia, who also screened and discussed examples of filmmaking from around the world to which students would not otherwise have access. Regular individual mentoring sessions, group screenings and discussions of participants’ own material furthered the development of critical analysis among the participants.

The workshops were led by YFS Director, Anglo-Burmesse filmmaker and producer **Lindsey Merrison**. She was joined by eight co-tutors: German cinematographer and filmmaker **Lars Barthel**, British screenwriter and director **Rachel Mathews**, Finnish editor **Tuula Mehtonen**, German editor **Jessica Ehlebracht**, Czech sound engineer and designer **Ivan Horák**, Australian editor **Melanie Sandford**, Anglo-Australian filmmaker and film lecturer **Frances Calvert** and German production manager and workshop supervisor **Helke Madry**.
4. Permits, Participants and Implementation

YFS continues to maintain constructive links with the Myanmar authorities and cooperation with the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation (MMPO), headed by ex-cinematographer U Myint Thein Pe, once again proved productive. The permit application was submitted in July 2009 and a written permit received (see Appendix I) from the Myanmar authorities prior to the workshop, in October 2009. Ten-week business visas were issued to all tutors. Impressed by the emergent abilities and genuine interest in filmmaking displayed by two candidates initially suggested to her by the MMPO in 2008, the YFS Director decided to continue training University of Culture student Su Su Thaing Win and film laboratory supervisor Han Linn Aung, who filed positive reports on the workshops to his employer, the Myanmar Motion Picture Enterprise.

The workshops were overshadowed by the sudden arrest by the authorities of two YFS students one week prior to the trainings. The arrests were part of a broader crackdown in late October by the government against those suspected of having tried to help survivors of Cyclone Nargis as social activists. Fortunately, our two students were released one month later, mid-workshop. However, they were both too traumatised by their experiences in detention (which included sleep deprivation and beatings) to take part in the teaching activities. Another two students had decided to go underground in order to avoid arrest; one of them has now left the country. The other returned to Yangon in mid-January 2010 where he was interrogated by the authorities for one day and subsequently released.

As a consequence of the above events, YFS found itself subject to additional surveillance such as phone tapping and regular observation of the workshop’s hotel venue. This created a psychological burden for many of the regular participants and tutors alike, all of whom were concerned about the fate of the detainees. The tutors felt more comfortable conducting their daily evaluations in the form of an evening walk rather than in the confines of the hotel; tutors were also obliged to make an exception to the rule and tolerate the use of mobile phones during class in order to allow students to receive tidbits of information – passed on via bush telegraph – as to the detainees’ well-being. These exceptional conditions notwithstanding, it was possible for the workshops to be carried out without further incident according to the proposed schedule.

A further three regular participants were unable to attend the workshops due to other commitments: Kyi Phyu Shin was working on a feature film of her own and Koe Yoe and Aung Nwai Htway were busy attending a concurrent workshop run by their employer PSI. However, Aung Nwai Htway was later able to join the Sound Design workshop from 11.12-23.12.09.

In view of this situation the tutors and student trainers decided to invite the most promising participants from the Beginners group to attend the advanced workshops. In this way the total proposed number of participants for each course could be
maintained. Since several participants were absent or engaged in other YFS activities (e.g. as trainer editors, or preparing for the pitching competition) it was not possible to mount the scheduled Treatment Writing course; however, all students receive regular feedback on written proposals throughout the year from YFS tutors.

5. Training of Trainers (TOT)

In 2009, YFS tutors were joined for the first time by **Student Trainers** who shared the teaching of the Beginners during the Art of Documentary Filmmaking workshop. All regular YFS participants, the seven trainers during the beginners’ course were: Lay Thida, Shin Daewe, Hnin Ei Hlaing, Mya Darli Aung, Thaidhi, Thi Ha Thwe and Kyaw Myo Lwin. Burmese screenwriter and YFS participant Dr Aung Min was student trainer on the screenwriting course. The student filmmaking trainers were responsible for organising and conducting two days of Basic Training prior to the commencement of the Beginners’ workshop on 29.10. and 30.10.09. When the course proper commenced, all student trainers ‘shadowed’ tutors during classroom teaching, gave feedback during screenings of rushes, joined the tutors in their discussions of Beginners’ progress and the forming of crews, and, finally, acted as mentors to individual crews during the filming of final assignments.

This training of trainers proved to be a huge success – for all concerned. Beginners enjoyed the ease of communication in their mother tongue and being taught by their peers, whilst student trainers felt privileged to communicate their expertise to novice filmmakers; they also found teaching a useful way of consolidating their own knowledge. Tutors were able to evaluate how much student trainers had learned over the past four years of YFS workshops and drew on student trainers’ own opinions and experiences as much as possible during classroom sessions, screenings and discussions. The programme also served to galvanise the relationship between ‘older’ YFS students and the new intake, who may otherwise have felt their ‘greenhorn’ status more acutely.

“The student mentors were very supportive and generous in the way they shared their own experience with us. They never made us feel inferior but treated us as partners and I’m really grateful to them for that.”

Sann Maw Aung, participant, Beginners’ course
6. Management, School Regulations, Copyright

During the YFS Director’s visit to Yangon in May, several student-members of YFS sought clarity regarding the intellectual ownership of films made under the aegis of YFS. During the workshops in November/December, a series of meetings were held to create a draft agreement between YFS and its student members which enshrined the rationale behind the school and acknowledged the joint input from student-participants and the school alike in all productions. The YFS Director worked intensively with the student-members to flesh out a draft agreement that contained regulations governing all aspects of the school as an office, media resource, training centre and production outfit.

In view of the growing variety of projects and activities it was decided that a decision-making body or Management Committee should be formed. Once in place, this committee will be responsible for the smooth running the YFS in Yangon and decisions regarding crewing, staff members and their responsibilities and the disbursement of monies from the newly founded Production Fund. Other staff appointments (Project Director, Accountant, Cashier/Receptionist, Librarian, Equipment Managers (2), Permit Manager, House Manager) were made collectively by a show of hands, as was the election of a Student Representative (Ko Thiha), whose task is to liaise with the school’s Director on behalf of all the students.

After lengthy discussions it was generally agreed that, in order to exploit YFS-produced films, particularly at international festivals, it was necessary for the school to retain copyright of its productions (as do the majority of film schools); however, alternative models for future co-productions between the students and the school were also mooted. It was also agreed that any income from individual films would be shared 50/50 between the school and student directors but that prize money would be paid in full to the film’s director (who would have the option of sharing this with their crews).

7. Company Registration, Licences

In September 2009 the YFS member responsible for the company registration left Yangon to attend a nine-month leave of study at the FAMU in Prague and so it was not possible to make any progress on this application during 2009. The founding of companies with media links is likely to remain a sensitive area in Myanmar – particularly prior to the election – and for this reason it is difficult to predict when YFS will become a registered company. However, YFS will certainly pursue this application when the YFS member in question returns to Yangon in July 2010.

The YFS Group is still in possession of licences issued by local authorities for filming, production and editing that help to legitimise their filming activities.
The 2009 Art of Documentary Filmmaking Beginners’ Workshop
A three-week workshop mounted by the Yangon Film School in Myanmar from 1.11. – 21.11.09

Participants of the 2009 YFS’s Art of Documentary Filmmaking Beginners’ Workshop

1. Introduction
As with the beginners’ courses held in 2005 and 2007, the 2009 beginners’ workshop ‘The Art of Documentary Filmmaking’ also comprised a mixture of classroom teaching, film exercises, screenings and discussions, culminating in the production of four final documentary film assignments. An innovation for 2009 was the successful introduction of Student Trainers. Recruited from the YFS member group (see Training of Trainers p. 9) these student-trainers conducted basic training, ‘shadowed’ YFS tutors during classroom teaching, mentored and, in some cases, also edited final assignments which, in 2009, were inspired by the topic: “Coming of Age in Myanmar”.

2. Participants
The beginners’ workshop continued to meet the target group of 22-40 year olds from different ethnic backgrounds with an interest in arts and the media and in development issues. Su Su Thaing Win, Khin Khin Su and Kyaw Ko Ko all attend cinema studies courses at the University of Culture; Maung Okkar is the son of revered Myanmar film director Ma Wunna; Zaw Win Htwe is an editor working in the Myanmar film industry; Lahpai Hkawn San and Zaw Moon are both development workers employed by Shalom Foundation in Kachin State; Naw Eh Mwee Aye Wai (who took part in the first YFS workshop in 2005) was a Project Officer at Oxfam before rejoining YFS as Project Director in December 2009; Nyi Lynn Seck is a
blogger; Sann Maw Aung is a journalist and a member of the ‘think tank’ organisation Myanmar Egress, and Khin Myo Myat is a nurse. Four of the participants were Burmese, two were Shan-Burmese, two were from ethnic minorities in Kachin State (Zaiwa), one was Karen, one participant Inntha and another Rakhine. With six female and six male participants, gender parity was maintained.

3. Week One – Initial Training

The course began with a three-day Introduction to Documentary by Lindsey Merrison including screenings of different examples of documentaries. The witty yet humane Latvian documentary portrait The Egg Lady remains a popular introduction to the genre; this year, cinematography tutor Lars Barthel provided a shot-by-shot analysis of camerawork, framing and composition. Other screenings during this first week included Nicolas Humbert and Werner Penzel’s cinematic poem Middle of the Moment, John Marsh’s Man on Wire and two films by student trainers: Thih Thwe’s Far From Home and Shin Daewe’s An Untitled Life, both of which generated much discussion among the participants.

Topics covered during classroom sessions included the many ways in which documentary can be defined; what makes a documentary filmmaker (the need for emotional honesty, the question of ethics, the bid to interpret the human condition) and, last but not least, the search for one’s own artistic identity. The first exercise, conducted on Day 2, was “Ways of Seeing”, during which a woman was filmed performing certain tasks in a room by camera-and-sound teams. This exercise enabled tutors and student-trainers to observe the beginners and find out which participants displayed an aptitude for cinematography, directing or sound recording. On Day 3, which was devoted to interview technique, participants were asked in teams of four (camera, sound, director and protagonist) to take turns interviewing each other. In a preparatory session, beginners, tutors and student trainers sat together in a hotel room and shared their memories of reaching adulthood. This session, which has been a part of YFS workshops since 2005, can sometimes elicit unexpectedly emotional responses. This year was no exception as some members of the group shared painful recollections – such as a beloved father’s descent into depression, or remembering the brother who was forced to leave Myanmar to find work abroad twenty years ago and has never returned – but also joyful moments, such as the bliss of finding a love that, although not perfect, you can at least call your own.
Day 4 saw three-person crews (selected by drawing lots) filming short portraits of staff members working at the Princess Hotel where the workshop was held. While these exercises (see “Stories from the Princess Hotel 2009” on the workshop DVD) were edited on Day 5 by editing tutors Tuula Mehtonen and Jessica Ehlebracht, the students took part in the ‘Changing a Tyre’ exercise which enables participants to practice filming a real life process, as it happens. The end of the first week culminated on Day 6 when Lindsey gave a talk on how to identify a subject and a good protagonist after which the participants were assigned to their crews and chose student-mentors for the final filming assignment. Evenings were reserved for screenings and discussions of participants’ filming exercises.

Beginners’ Workshop students filming the Changing a Tyre exercise

(i) Comments
The tutor and student-trainer group met regularly to discuss the progress of individual students on the beginners’ course. This year, three female participants – Eh Mwee, Khin Khin Su and Su Su Thaing Win – displayed an unmistakable eye for composition and framing and consequently all three were assigned as cinematographers for the final film (the fourth cinematographer being male participant Kyaw Ko Ko). Although gender has – ostensibly at least – never been an issue at YFS, we were surprised to discover that, when the crews for final assignments were announced at the end of Week One, two male participants (Hann Lin Aung and Zaw Win Htwe) were so crestfallen to learn that they had not been assigned as cinematographers (mistakenly perceived to be an intrinsically ‘male’ occupation) that they were reduced to tears. In addition, they felt ‘unmanned’ at the prospect of working as sound recordists alongside female cinematographers. Only after tutors and student trainers assured them that the assigned positions were by no means roles for life, and reminded them of the crucial role played by sound in filmmaking and the importance of team work, were they prepared to apply themselves to their appointed task. By the end of the workshop, however, these participants were clearly enjoying doing sound and were later both enthusiastic participants of Ivan Horák’s Sound Design workshop.

4. Weeks Two and Three
The second week of the beginners’ course was reserved for the research and filming of the beginners’ four final assignments on the topic of Coming of Age in Myanmar. Classroom teaching concentrated on the importance of thorough research and a well-written treatment in the creation of a documentary portrait. The necessity for a productive relationship between team members and the responsibilities of each individual within the crew were also discussed. While directors went out to various locations to find their protagonists and write their treatments, camera-and-sound crews were taken through their paces by student trainers for Cinematography and Sound. On the eve before the first day of filming, Directors discussed their treatments
with Lindsey and were given budgets and instructed by Helke Madry as to their dual role as the film’s director and organiser. The student-mentors also guided their beginner crews through the production process. They were not, however, encouraged to accompany teams to locations, since making mistakes is often the best way to learn how to achieve better results.

On the last two days of week two, material shot by each team was screened to the whole group and discussed, and all crews went back to film pick-ups. Rushes were digitalised into edit suites by student-editors and the basics of the post-production process were explained to the beginners. The third and final week of the Beginners’ Workshop was devoted to working on the edits of the four final assignments. After introductory talks on the laws of perception and the Final Cut editing programme by editing tutors Tuula and Jessica, four student-editors Kyaw Myoe Lwin, Lay Thida, Zaw Wynn Htwe and Hnin Ei Hlaing joined beginner-directors Maung Okkar, Sann Maw Aung, Khin Myo Myat and Nyi Linn Seck in individual edit rooms to work on edits of beginners final assignments under Tuula and Jessica’s tutelage. Rough and fine cuts of these films were screened and discussed by the entire group a week later, during the Poetic Camera course.

(i) Comments

The protagonist from the Beginners’ Workshop film Charcoal Boy

The participants responded extremely well to the topic for the beginners’ workshop, Coming of Age in Myanmar, and displayed versatility in their choice of protagonist. The subject of Sann Maw Aung’s portrait Middle of the Road – the privileged and somewhat reticent son of a big-shot – proved to be the most challenging in filmmaking terms. Although Sann Maw Aung’s training in journalism made her determined, she quickly learned that the journalistic practice of chipping away at a reluctant protagonist’s carapace does not always produce results and that, in documentary, it is important to allow the viewer to get as close as possible to the protagonist in order to understand their worldview – even if one doesn’t agree with it. Director Khin Myo Myat’s ability to put not only her female protagonist but her protagonist’s entire family at their ease shines through her film Hey, Girl!, about a
young woman trying to prepare for her third attempt at her matriculation exam in her warm but noisy household; in fact, the most challenging aspect of shaping this film was finding a place to cut this talkative protagonist's never-ending stream of consciousness! In Charcoal Boy, director Maung Okkar’s relative youth (at 22 he was the workshop’s youngest participant) paid off in the way he was able to gain his teenage protagonist’s trust and poignantly reveal the boy’s high hopes of one day marrying a middle-class girl. Finally, in Killing Time, director Nyi Lynn Seck and student-editor Hnin Ei Hlaing made good use of the ironic gap between the way the protagonist sees himself and the way others see him in this humorous portrait of a would-be high-school drop-out who finds solace in computer-games.

While most of the Beginner students worked on the edits of their final films or took part in the Poetic Camera Course (see page 16ff.) Beginner Han Linn Aung was given the opportunity to edit material about his mother-in-law which he had shot with co-student Su Su Thaing Win during the introductory documentary course at the end of 2008. To the surprise and delight of the whole group, he succeeded in turning out a tender short portrait which exudes the love and affection he bears for his relative. His film A Grandmother can be seen on the 2009 Art of Documentary Filmmaking DVD.

(ii) Completion of the Films

Although the Beginners’ course doesn’t include editing tuition (this is to be the focus of a Beginners editing workshop in 2010), mixing, colour grading, subtitle refinement or DVD post-production, the Training of Trainers programme enabled student editors Zaw Win Htwe, Lay Thida, Kyaw Myo Lwin and Hnin Ei Hlaing to work on as much of their film’s edit as possible. Hnin Ei Hlaing (who was also a student trainer for sound) succeeded in editing the entire film Killing Time with great panache. Each year, YFS aims to teach more aspects of post-production so that, in time, it will be possible for students to complete the whole process in Yangon rather than tutors having to take films back to Berlin for post-production, as is currently the case.

(iii) Benefits for the Students

As with every YFS workshop, feedback and evaluations were canvassed from both the participants and the student trainers as the intense three-week Beginners’ workshop drew to a close. Here are some of their comments:

“This is my first encounter with documentary. It’s a completely new experience for me. I’m attending applied psychology at Yangon University but after I graduate there’s basically nothing for me to do. I’ve decided I want to start directing documentaries. I can’t wait to attend another workshop, if there is one.”

Maung Okkar, participant, Beginners’ course
“I think it’s good to work to deadlines because it gives us the impetus to try our best. Putting us into different crews also made us work efficiently. And it’s great to have an opportunity to use good equipment.”

Khin Khin Su, participant, Beginners’ course

“I liked the way we were taught because we were allowed to make mistakes. The student trainers are also very good. They are Burmese and we can communicate with them directly in Burmese, which is great. This course has been extremely useful because it’s sharpened my vision. I thought I wanted to make video art but now I want to make films about our country’s rich culture and many ethnic minorities. This course has provided me with a proper grounding.”

Nyi Linn Seck
participant, Beginners’ course

“I’m so pleased to have this opportunity to learn from foreigners. It’s not easy to study abroad and so it’s great that these teachers are willing to come here from foreign countries and teach us. It’s wonderful being able to use this equipment too. Sound wasn’t my first choice but I now know how important and creative it is.”

Han Linn Aung, participant, Beginners’ course

“Teaching others helps you to clarify your own practice. When you hold the camera all you think about is filming but it’s quite different when you come to teach others what you’ve learnt; you can’t always quote some theory. Teaching really helps you identify what you know and realise how much you’ve learnt.”

Mya Darli Aung, student trainer, Beginners’ course

III The Poetic and the Authentic Camera
A Yangon Film School Workshop held in Myanmar from 16.11.-26.11.09 led by Cinematography Tutor Lars Barthel

1. Background and Aims
From the outset it was a basic tenet at YFS for all students to direct their filmic gaze at the reality of Myanmar, observing everyday life as well as special interpersonal situations and changes in society. All the films made so far are characterised by a deeply honest documentary approach to reality. In most cases a person – a positive
hero – stands at the centre of the film and the story is told from the perspective of that person, using their commentary.

At times there are several people alternating amongst themselves, talking about various facets of the subject and their lives. In the process, it was important to us up to now that the filmmakers’ presence in the final film be as imperceptible as possible. I think we have succeeded in planting in the minds and hearts of a series of YFS students this formal-aesthetic of reticence in the face of the richness of life. We can be proud of this.

However, documentary film can achieve more. First and foremost, a documentary should – like all good films – speak to viewers’ emotions. It must be touching and enchanting and, in the best scenario, never disappear completely from the viewer’s memory.

Of course there are examples amongst previous YFS films of enormous emotional depth of storytelling: one example is Lay Thida’s Just a Boy (YFS 2006). The strength of this film lies in the observation of a small boy’s daily life as he collects garbage on the streets of Yangon. Observation in long takes makes the viewer go some way towards feeling part of the boy’s life and identifying with him. This observational camera has an emotional effect in Lay Thida’s film and yet in form it remains unpretentious and restrained.

In the same way, this year’s camera workshop set out to search for a visual means of representation that can achieve greater emotional effect in our films.

“I somehow thought that the Advanced course would be about the workings of the camera. But we’ve learnt a whole new concept that is quite different to the approach to documentary taught during the Beginners’ course – I like that a lot.”

Kyaw Ko Ko, participant in Beginners’ and Advanced courses

2. Subject and Participants

There were five women and five men on the course. The participants included both more experienced camera and/or directing students Thaiddhi, Shin Daewe, Thi Ha Thwe and The Maw Naing, intermediate students such as Kyaw Ko Ko, Mya Darli Aung and Tay Zar Win Tun and beginners Eh Mwee, Su Su Thaing Win and Khin Khin Su. Regular YFS participant Ko Yoe was unable to attend the course due to a conflicting workshop hosted by his employer, PSI.

The subject of the workshop was ‘the search for the poetic in documentary film’, or ‘the poetry of reality’. In my presentation I made clear how nebulous this concept of poetry in film is and assured the students that it would be a journey of discovery on which we would embark together.

Just as in literature, the concept of poetry in documentary is based on something non-visible, something that touches the viewer in a subtle way. Poetic realism in
documentary film transforms moments of reality, as well as the people in a film, into something that goes beyond their mere depiction. When that happens, something metaphorical, deep and meaningful shimmers through what one might describe as the ‘threadbare, scuffed fabric of the world’, something metaphysical, deep and meaningful as if a higher force shines through the profane and the mundane.

3. Methodology

To help the participants search for this almost indescribable quality, we spent several days analysing different filmic examples of poetic documentaries. The British Free Cinema film movement of the 1950s particularly impressed the students. In these films – Mama Don’t Allow, Every Day Except Christmas, O Dreamland – it is clearly evident how poetry arises from the precise filmic observation of everyday life. In addition, the touching observations of a Kindergarten by the Russian film-maker Victor Kossakovsky helped us see the emotional value that emerges from the precise observation of situations.

In order to describe the integral role played by the editor in bringing out the poetry of a situation, Finnish Editing Tutor Tuula Mehtonen (pictured left) presented an analysis of the famous diving sequence in Leni Riefenstahl’s Olympiad, in which rhythm and camera angles are deliberately combined to allow the sequence to progress from the athletic to the poetic as the divers begin to soar and glide like birds through the sky. In another session, Lindsey Merrison examined the confluence of public and personal history in her presentation of Canadian filmmaker Lawrence Green’s poetic investigation of a long-buried family secret in his film Reconstruction. Burmese subtitles had been added to this film to make the filmmaker’s dense voice-over more accessible to the students, for whom the idea of autobiographical or personal documentary represents new and as yet unchartered territory.

The students’ practical exercises were designed with the goal of helping them find the poetry in the everyday. We were all very curious as to whether anything at all like a ‘poetic quality’ would appear after two days of filming with two sixty-minute video tapes at their disposal.

Divided into five two-person crews, the students filmed at the following locations:

- A school for blind children
  Thi Ha Thwe / Thaiddhi

- A textile printing factory
  Khin Khin Su / Eh Mwee

Khin Khin Su (on camera) and Eh Mwee filming at a textile printing factory
4. The Filming Exercises
The students were given the task of observing with the camera ‘from the edge of what is being filmed’ and not to get involved and influence what was happening. They were instructed not to conduct interviews with the subjects, but instead to capture astutely their conversations amongst themselves, taking care not to miss any special moments.

If the initial results were somewhat disappointing, all this changed rapidly as they returned to their locations again and again and, gradually, their ability improved to see and capture the poetry in the everyday.

- In the factory for printing textiles, for instance, situations full of poetry emerged in which the workers suddenly broke into song and called out the latest lotto results.
- In the book bindery the monotonously routine activity was interrupted by a power cut and the workers held private conversations in the semi-darkness.

5. Conclusions
It could be said that poetry in documentary is the loving way of dealing with everyday life. Poetic story-telling is certainly an artistic challenge for our students. We hope that when the exercises are finally edited they will prove productive for future films. We also hope that our students’ choice of this filmic mode will give them greater self-confidence and strengthen them as filmmakers.

Lars Barthel, YFS Cinematography Tutor, January 2010

“At first, I couldn’t follow the idea of a poetic film, but as I watched the material again and again and discussed it with the tutors, I began to understand what visual poetry might mean. It was something with which we students were not at all familiar and so it was a hard concept to grasp.”

Hnin Ei Hlaing, editor of the poetic exercise ‘Falling Blossoms’
IV  The Pitching Competition  
Yangon, 20.11. - 23.11.09

1. Rationale for the Competition

YFS is keen to encourage its students to initiate film projects outside the work undertaken during the workshops and in the production of NGO films. The latter provide valuable training and income generating opportunities and are a mainstay of YFS filmmaking. However, as artists and filmmakers, the students need the opportunity to make more personal films. Such projects will also help to strengthen the profile of the School e.g. through recognition at international film festivals.

YFS equipment is available to all YFS-trained filmmakers and some students have already filmed projects on their own. One of the most successful of these is Shin Daewe’s documentary ‘An Untitled Life’, a delightful portrait of the Myanmar artist Rahula, which is starting to enjoy festival success. However, other students appear to be less willing to come forward with personal projects. It was decided that a competition might be just the thing to provide the impetus – and a small amount of production money – to generate new ideas.

Thus, YFS Director Lindsey Merrison discussed the concept of a Pitching Competition with the YFS students during her trip to Yangon in May 2009. The students agreed it was a good idea and also that some of the money in the YFS Production Fund – a sum garnered from the modest profits made by NGO films – would be awarded to the winning pitches. A ‘pitch’ is a verbal presentation of a film idea. Industry practitioners are required to pitch their ideas to funders, commissioners and other potential collaborators and it is a skill any successful writer, director and/or producer needs to develop.

It was decided that students could pitch for short documentary projects, short ‘True Fictions’ type projects (both to a maximum running time of 30 minutes) or request completion funding for a project they had already begun. Each pitch would be supported by a one page outline. Tutor-mentors were appointed to help the individual students develop their outlines and pitches.

The Competition was held in the middle of the Winter 2009 Workshop. This gave the students time to make final preparations to their pitches with the assistance of their mentors and to receive pitching coaching during the first week of the Workshop.

2. The Pitches

Seven projects were pitched – two ‘True Fictions’ and five documentaries – to an audience of YFS students and tutors. The pitchers and projects were as follows:

The Maw Naing (pictured left, during his pitch) – a ‘True Fictions’ short film based on a true story adapted for the screen by Dr Aung Min about a dying man who takes a final taxi ride around Yangon to visit places and people
important to him during his life. In the end the man reaches an acceptance of his situation and returns to the hospital to die.

**Ko Thi Ha** – a ‘True Fictions’ short film based on a Myanmar short story written in the 1940s about a gambler who, having lost all his cash in a card game, takes money from a beggar sleeping on the street. The gambler returns to the game and makes the money back. He buys food and takes this, along with the ‘borrowed’ money, to the beggar. It is only then revealed that the beggar is dead.

**Hnin Ei Hlaing** – a documentary based on her own story. During the civil unrest in Yangon in 1988, Hnin Ei Hlaing’s mother became so concerned about her three year old daughter’s safety that she sent her on an unaccompanied plane ride to relatives in the north of Myanmar. The documentary will look at what made her mother take this course of action and how, after a number of misadventures, Hnin Ei Hlaing finally found a safe haven.

**Thaiddhi** (pitching for Kyaw Myo Lwin) – a poetic documentary about an area on the outskirts of Yangon where people make a living recycling old tyres into the soles of shoes, parts of electrical fans, wire brushes, etc. The film will have a voiceover written by poet and screenwriter Lu San reflecting upon how the rebirth of tyres is a metaphor for the rebirth of the people making their living in this way.

**Shin Daewe** – having recently made an NGO film about monastery schools, Shin Daewe pitched a more personal documentary on the same topic, recounting how as a Communist in her teens she regarded monks as parasites but underwent a transformation in her attitude upon discovering the work monks are doing to educate impoverished children in Myanmar.

**Lay Thida** – a documentary about a teenage girl in Yangon who developed kidney disease. Her family was unable to afford the transplant which would save her life. When the girl realised she was going to die, she pretended she was getting better and returned home from the hospital only to die a few days later. The film will be constructed around the single remaining photo the family has of their lost daughter.

**Aung Nwai Htway** – documentary about his father, a famous Myanmar film-star. Ko Nwai’s mother, an actress, met his father on a film set when they were cast as young lovers. They married and had children but then got divorced and Ko Nwai lost touch with his father. He met him again in his late teens and discovered his father had turned his back on fame and devoted his life to Buddhism. The documentary will tell the story of the father and also of Ko Nwai’s search to rediscover him.

### 3. The Winners

After a vote by YFS students and tutors, the four winning projects were **Aung Nwai Htway** documentary about his father; **Ko Thi Ha**’s story about the gambler; **Thaiddhi** and **Kyaw Myo Lwin’s** documentary about the tyre recyclers; and **Lay Thida’s** project about the dying girl. However, because the girl has only recently died and the family’s grief is very raw, it was decided that this project would be postponed until 2011. Hence runner-up **Hnin Ei Hlaing**, with her story about what happened to her as a
three year old child during the troubles of 1988 was given the go-ahead to be the fourth project in this round of production.

4. Production Plans

The four winning projects were mentored via a series of meetings during the remainder of the Winter 2009 Workshop in order to develop them to a stage where they are ready to go into production. The directors selected their production managers and crews and wrote fuller project treatments – or, in the case of Ko Thi Ha’s ‘True Fictions’ project, interviewed YFS-trained screenwriters to find a collaborator who could adapt the story into a screenplay.

As soon as the treatments and/or scripts and budgets are signed off by the YFS Director (hopefully in April 2010), the money will be released for these films to go into production. The four films will be shot during the spring of 2010 and edited during the Editing Workshop proposed for the summer of 2010. The films will receive their premiere screenings during the Winter 2010 Workshop before being submitted to festivals and TV stations for further screenings and sales. A proportion of any profit made by these films will be returned to the YFS Production Fund to help finance further personal projects in the future.

Rachel Mathews, YFS Tutor, December 2009

V Screenwriting Workshops

Two Yangon Film School Workshops held in Myanmar from 9.11. – 7.12.11.09 led by Screenwriting Tutor Rachel Mathews

1. Rationale for the Workshops

Building upon the work undertaken during 2008’s ‘True Fictions Workshop’, we placed a strong emphasis in 2009 on finding and developing further writing talent and increasing contacts between YFS–trained screenwriters and the School’s filmmaking students. Documentary will always be the core concern for YFS but we would also like to encourage the production of ‘True Fictions’ style feature films i.e. films which can be shot on a low-budget using non-professional actors in real locations. The challenges of censorship notwithstanding, we hope such films will say something about the difficulties and triumphs of life in Myanmar in a more in-depth and honest way than is evident in the films currently produced by the Myanmar feature film industry.

To this end, in 2009 YFS held a second ‘Beginners’ Screenwriting Workshop’ for Myanmar poets and prose-writers who had little or no experience of screenwriting and an ‘Advanced Screenwriting Workshop’ for writers who had previously taken this Beginners’ Workshop. We also appointed a TOT (Training of the Trainers) Trainee to shadow screenwriting tutor Rachel Mathews. Dr Aung Min, a talented Yangon-based writer – and participant of the 2007 Screenwriting Workshop – was invited to take on this role with the intention that he will lead YFS screenwriting workshops himself in future years.
2. The Beginners’ Screenwriting Workshop

Yangon, Myanmar, 9.11. – 21.11.09

(i) Participants

Two of the participants – Lu San and Tun San – were recruited as the most promising writers from the YFS ‘Taster’ Screenwriting Workshop held in November 2008. Dr Aung Min recommended a further two participants – Aidii ‘Anna’ Artz and Su San Zaw Win – from workshops he has been running in Yangon. Lwin Ko Ko Oo, Myo Chit and Saw Hla Nwe were recommended by YFS students as writers who were interested in the screen and/or had some knowledge of filmmaking (e.g. Lwin Ko Ko Oo has just graduated from the Film Department of Yangon University). The final participant, Hkawn Mai Aung, is the daughter of the Deputy Director of Myanmar Motion Picture Enterprise. This, combined with her demonstrable interest in writing, made it politic to invite her to join the Workshop.

This resulted in a class of eight students with an even distribution of the sexes. A ninth participant, Kyaw Naing Tun, attended a couple of classes but unfortunately had to drop out because he is the sole supporter of his family. Although YFS offered him a bursary, he was unwilling or unable to accept this money. This illustrates the commitment – both financial and in terms of time – which is required by students to join a YFS workshop.

It was evident from Day 1 that this group of writers had a keen interest and commitment to screenwriting. YFS is meeting more talented writers every year that we hold workshops in Yangon. With the assistance of people like Dr Aung Min and the YFS filmmaking students, we are now tapping into a writing community and
identifying potential talent in a way which was difficult when we first scouted for writers for the Beginners’ Screenwriting Workshop in 2007.

(ii) The Workshop
Participants of the 12-day Beginners’ Screenwriting Workshop were asked to bring a synopsis for a short film idea to the workshop. Tutor Rachel Mathews worked with the group, taking them through each step – from writing a dramatic premise to discussing three-act structure, from developing convincing characters to creating engaging dialogue – in the process of developing these ideas into screenplays of 10-15 minutes in length. The intention of the Workshop was not only to work on these individual ideas, but also to give the participants a sound knowledge of the general techniques and tools of screenwriting so they will be able to develop screenplays – both short and long – independently of YFS tutelage in the future.

The ideas were as diverse as the group, ranging from Lu San’s story about a firewood-seller on the outskirts of Yangon whose business is threatened by the increasing popularity of electric cookers (luckily the city’s unreliable electricity supply persuades his customers to retain their wood-burning stoves!) to Lwin Ko Ko Oo’s tale – based on the experience of his own grandparents – about the growing gap between old people living in the countryside and younger city dwellers who are losing touch with the villages where they grew up.

Anna, who comes from Chin State, developed an engaging and moving script about the phenomenon of ‘Parcels’ – young women from rural areas who are contracted to marry men from abroad, often without meeting them first, and who are then shipped off like parcels. All three of these ideas fit in well with YFS’s ideal of ‘True Fiction’ type films, in particular Anna’s story which has strong potential to be developed into a feature length script.

Su San and Saw Hla Nwe – the youngest members of the group – wrote lively animation scripts with Su San focusing on a tree who longs to become a wooden puppet and Saw Hla Nwe telling the tale of a pair of conceited high-heeled shoes who learn the meaning of true worth. Myo Chit and Tun San both wrote about middle-aged men finding it hard to adjust to life in the city, with Myo Chit developing a comedy about a pedantic professor who is plagued by noisy neighbours and Tun San writing about a father who creates an imaginary rival to encourage his schoolgirl daughter to pass her all-important Matriculation Exam. Hkawn Mai Aung wrote about a hard-bitten Yangon businesswoman who sets out to
steal a husband, but realises ultimately that this course of action is not the best remedy for her loneliness.

(iii) **Afternoon Screenings**
The morning classes were supported by afternoon screenings of a wide range of feature films chosen chiefly for their illustration of key screenwriting techniques. In order to give the students a working knowledge of different film genres and traditions – from the Italian Neo-Realism of Vittorio de Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves* to the American Gothic of Charles Laughton’s *Night of the Hunter* – each film was introduced by the tutor who gave a brief talk on the filmmaker and the tradition in which they were working. The screenings were followed by a discussion of the film in question, analysing in particular its screenwriting techniques.

These screenings worked well, introducing the participants to filmmakers – Robert Bresson, for example, John Cassavetes, Jim Jarmusch – whose films are rarely available in Myanmar and reinforcing the Workshop’s teachings with an illustration of how major screenwriters and filmmakers approach the art of storytelling.

(iv) **Script Readings**
The Beginners’ Workshop culminated in two mornings given over to reading the first draft scripts produced by the students during the previous fortnight. Devoting a morning to four scripts meant there was enough time to ‘perform’ the scripts in class and have a full discussion about their strengths, weaknesses and the writer’s plans for a second draft. The tutor will provide further feedback via email. The participants have all expressed the desire to write a second draft which will then be distributed amongst the YFS filmmaking students to encourage future collaborations.

3. **The Advanced Screenwriting Workshop**
Yangon, Myanmar 24.11-7.12.09

(i) **Rationale and Participants**
In addition to training newer writers, YFS is keen to maintain links and give further encouragement to the most committed and talented participants of previous screenwriting workshops. To this end, we invited three writers to join an Advanced Screenwriting Workshop – **Dr Aung Min**, Linn Ti Oo and **Thet Ko Ko**. Unfortunately Linn Ti Oo was unable to come up to Yangon for the Workshop. Hence, the participants for this workshop comprised of two.

This Workshop was intended to be a meeting between writers who already had a proven track-record in their craft but who would benefit – as all writers do – from discussing their work and ideas with fellow writers. Thet Ko Ko and Dr Aung Min sent first draft scripts (via our translator – all YFS writers work in the Myanmar language) to tutor Rachel Mathews before the Workshop began. We met up for three half-day sessions to discuss these initial ideas, to formulate a plan for writing a second draft, and then to discuss the completed second draft scripts.
The script explores what happens when Ma San loses her false weight and is forced to sell her peas according to their true weight instead. The story not only focuses on an everyday aspect of Myanmar life in a lively and engaging way (Ma San is an obstreperous, funny, ultimately sympathetic character) but also explores what it means to be true and false, not only in buying and selling but also in other aspects of Yangon life.

Dr Aung Min developed a script about an elderly Kayan man who has lost his family and lives alone. He comes into conflict with a young orphan stealing from his bamboo plantation. An unlikely friendship develops between the two and, as he reaches the point of death, the old man realises he finally has something to live for. This is an engaging script, full of vivid details about Kayan life and traditions, and one which gives humane insight into the hardship many Myanmar people experience, particularly in rural areas.

As with the Beginners’ Workshop, these scripts will receive further feedback from the tutor via email and will be distributed amongst the YFS filmmakers.

(ii) Future Plans
As well as fostering links between YFS-trained screenwriters and the School’s filmmaking students – links which are already paying off, for example, in a collaboration between poet and screenwriter Lu San and YFS students currently developing a poetic documentary – YFS would also like to use a selection of the scripts emerging from its various screenwriting workshops to provide further training in ‘True Fictions’ type filmmaking. It is possible that another ‘True Fictions’ Workshop will be held in 2010. If this is the case, YFS has a strong supply of short film scripts available. In 2011, we hope to encourage and oversee the production of YFS’s first full-length ‘True Fictions’ feature film.

Rachel Mathews, YFS Screenwriting Tutor

VI Analysis of the 2009 True Fictions Exercise: ‘Like a Bubble in Water’

In November/December 2008 YFS students took part in the ‘True Fictions Workshop’, receiving training in the making of fiction films with a documentary ethos. The TF Workshop culminated in the students shooting two versions of the short screenplay ‘Like a Bubble in Water’. Two editing teams then cut the rushes from each shoot, resulting in four different filmed versions of the same script. The final editing and sound design was completed after the 2008 TF Workshop had ended. This meant
the students had not had the chance to watch the different versions as a group alongside the tutors in order to analyse the work they had undertaken.

Consequently, two days in the 2009 Workshop were devoted to analysing the four ‘Bubble’ films. One of the key issues to emerge was the importance of being clear about a story before filming begins. In documentary it may be possible to find a film’s story in the edit. This is not usually an option for fiction filmmakers. The four groups agreed that some aspects of the ‘Bubble’ script were not clear. There will always be a degree of uncertainty in the filmmaking process, but one of the valuable lessons to emerge from this analysis was the necessity for the film team – in particular the director and producer – to answer key questions regarding the story at script stage e.g. Who is the protagonist? What is the main conflict? What changes during the story? What is the resolution? The students drew up a check-list which should be useful for both fiction and documentary filmmaking in the future.

The analysis also prompted a discussion about tone and genre in film. Again, these are issues the students identified as being important to clarify before the shoot. The analysis of sound in the films led to an interesting debate about the use of music. Two versions of ‘Bubble’ use music, two do not. Students remarked that this music made the films feel more ‘dramatic’ but also perhaps more manipulative. This led to a very useful discussion about the thorny issues of ‘objective truth’ and the manipulation of an audience’s emotions in both documentary and fiction filmmaking.

Overall, this analysis highlighted some key issues relevant to both fiction and documentary filmmaking and encouraged the students to be more reflective about their work. Similar analysis will form an integral part of YFS workshops in the future.

Rachel Mathews, YFS Tutor

VII Other Ways of Seeing
A Yangon Film School Workshop on the History of Film Form led by Frances Calvert, 1.12-9.12.09

1. Aim
This course aimed to develop students’ techniques of ‘reading’, analyzing and understanding films, in other words, cineliteracy. By the end of this course, they were better skilled at watching, describing and explaining how films work.

2. Methodology
This course was developed with practicing filmmakers in mind; hence it proceeded from the practicalities of camera, composition, editing, sound etc. rather than illustrating film history in a slavishly chronological way. Students received a course outline (photocopy) together with a dossier of stills illustrating many of the topics
covered in the course. Film clips illustrating the topics, film form and style and themes were screened as appropriate during the course. Students used their newly acquired analytical skills to supply detailed analyses of both the clips and stills. In certain cases when time allowed, whole films were screened, e.g., Man with a Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov), Mirror of Holland (Bert Haanstra) Rain (Joris Ivens), Ten Minutes Older (Herz Frank).

The course was structured according to the following topics:

a) Cinematography: Realism and Expressionism
The shots, the angles, lighting styles, symbolism of light and darkness and of colour, the effect of lenses). Examples included extracts from the Lumière brothers, Jean Vigo (A propos de Nice), Cavalcanti, (Rien que les heures), Robert Wiene (Cabinet of Dr Caligari), Orson Welles, Vittorio de Sica, John Ford, Bert Haanstra, Herz Frank and others.

b) Mise-en-scène/composition
What is put in front of the camera. (Composition, functions of the frame, how images are structured, dominant and subsidiary contrasts, colour, texture, open and closed forms). Examples included: M - eine Stadt sucht einen Moerder; Eisenstein (Alexander Nevsky) and still picture analyses of scenes directed by Fritz Lang, Walter Ruttman, Dziga Vertov and Leni Riefenstahl.

c) Movement: how movement can 'mean' 
The psychology and language of movement; different film genres; the implications of movement: dolly, hand-held, tripod, tracks, etc. Examples included: On the Waterfront, Passion of Joan of Arc, A Clockwork Orange, Norman McLaren's Neighbours, Flaherty's Louisiana Story, Roll Call of the Dead/Necrology, Night and Fog.

d) Editing: real time versus film time
Cutting for time and space, thematic cutting: Eisenstein; how editing lies; real time and space and how to preserve them. Examples included clips from: Porter's The Great Train Robbery, Zimmerman's High Noon, Baz Luhrmann's Romeo and Juliet, Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin, Gillo Pontecorvo's Battle of Algiers.

e) Sound and Voice
Synchronous and non-synchronous sound, problems of sound and microphones, voice accompanied by sound effects, use of dialect, dubbing, voice-over commentary). Examples included clips from: The Jazz Singer (1927), Fishing with John, Samson and Delilah, Grass, The River.

f) Music
Diegetic and non-diegetic music, high-pitched and low-pitched sounds, loud quiet volume, fast and slow tempo, off-screen sounds, opera on film, poem as voice-over. Examples included: Alexander Nevsky (Prokofiev's 'Battle on the Ice'); M - eine Stadt sucht einen Moerder; Rain, Citizen Kane, Bergman’s The Magic Flute; Losey’s Don Giovanni, the use of Elgar in Night Mail.
g) Genre
Cinema verité/direct cinema). Examples included the Maysles brothers films Crisis and Salesman.

“I’d love to have another class with Frances next year. It’s as if she has slowly begun to open a curtain for us on a wealth of things about which we had no knowledge as well as so many things we simply hadn’t noticed before.”

Shin Daewe, YFS student trainer

3. Assessment
- Students responded enthusiastically to the course structure beginning with the practicalities of filmmaking and moving out to film analysis and theory.
- The method of illustrating concepts with examples of the work of acknowledged masterpieces of cinema provided clarity and fostered understanding.
- The stills were useful aids in learning how to analyse composition, lighting, weighting, proxemic space, etc. Students gained greater confidence in using film terminology and by the end the course they had learned to articulate what images really mean.
- Burmese translations were provided step-by-step and were invaluable.

“In Frances’ class we learned about film history and film language, camera angles and composition and so on; we also learned about realism and expressionism in film. I thought this was a fascinating and I was so pleased to have joined this class.”

Maung Okkar, participant, History of Film Form class

(i) Comments
Ways of Seeing: History of Film Form tutor
Frances Calvert in conversation with YFS participant The Maw Naing

Teaching film history and film language to students in Myanmar provides a rich experience in cross-cultural understanding. One example can be cited: when my students of 2D and 3D animation in Berlin watched Edwin Porter’s 1913 film The Great Train Robbery they volunteered: “Now we know where Tim Burton got the ideas for his films”. In Myanmar the students have not been exposed to the same repertoire of films as in Europe. They were very keen to soak up as much as they could of the films from the period following the invention of film in 1895.
They responded especially well to abstract art in film: Dziga Vertov’s circularity; Eisenstein’s montage of collision; Richter’s patterns of dancing lines and shapes. The decades-long influence of German Expressionism on film was noted, beginning with *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and moving to Orson Welles’ films and *film noir*.

As we moved through different forms of documentary over the decades, the students in Myanmar realised how much can be conveyed surreptitiously through form and movement, colour, choice of shot size, lens length and composition. They were especially sensitive to the colonial gaze and they showed a clear grasp of this, drawn largely from literature. They saw the problems involved with the ethnographic gaze, Eurocentrism and how foreign cultures can be essentialised. This was exemplified in a close analysis of the semi-documentary film ‘Samson and Delilah’, about two Walpiri Aborigines in central Australia. Essentialising means assuming that, because a person belongs to an indigenous minority, e.g., Australian Aborigines, they must know everything about that culture, right down to secret-sacred rituals and practices. The students realized that it is no longer admissible to make documentaries claiming to know everything about cultural minorities. They abhorred the ‘Voice of God’, i.e. the inadmissible use of “us” talking about “them”. Looking at John Lurie’s spoof of this Voice of God narrator in *Fishing with John* brought home the absurdity of this type of commentary voice.

Possibilities for exposing other, self-referential criticism of hoary clichés in film were explored: students discovered that final credits can provide all the humour of a film such as Standish Lawdor’s *Roll Call of the Dead* in which people unknown to the film-maker are credited as ‘man with cancer’ or ‘man just released from jail’.

The course ended with a one-day survey of cinema-verité and elicited insightful comments from students. Films such as *Primary, Crisis* and *Salesman* showed psychological portraits of a famous person, such as the US President, or the ‘little man’ elevated to a metaphorical Messianic figure, or the film-maker’s intense interest in a person living almost next door as their protagonists dealt with social pressures, as seen in the films by the Maysles brothers.

Finally, students saw how arts films can all be different: Ingmar Bergman’s version of Mozart’s opera *The Magic Flute* begins with an intensive gaze on a young girl’s face as she experiences opera for the first time. In Joseph Losey’s film, Italian opera is taken out of the theatre and performed in Italian palaces and gardens that could have been the locations for Mozart’s ‘Don Giovanni’.

(ii) Summary

It is clear that students responded to the myriad of ways in which life can be documented in film. They expressed their desire to move on stylistically, abandoning the easy method of filming a personality, using voice-over commentary to ‘explain’ the person and then including several sound grabs taken from longer interviews. At the end of the course, one student asked about using poems as the basis of documentary, saying he was influenced by the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. In response to this, *Night Mail* was screened, showing how Auden’s poem determined
the rhythm of the montage and gave meaning to the images beyond what they purported to show.

(iii) **Recommendations**
Students' film appreciation and analysis would improve greatly if their English were better. The translator provided an excellent service, however, an English course pitched at students' level but using vocabulary and concepts useful for filmmakers, similar to that which I teach in Berlin, would be very useful.

Frances Calvert, YFS History of Film Form Tutor

**VIII Sound Design Workshop**
*Yangon, Myanmar, 11.12.-23.12.09*

The first part of the YFS course from the sound point of view was dedicated to teaching the beginner students the basics of handling sound equipment and the tasks of a boom operator while shooting. No less important was the second stage focused on finalizing the sound elements in an audiovisual work – **sound design** with advanced students.

Sound Design tutor Ivan Horáč with workshop participants

1. **Participants**

This edition of the sound design workshop proved to be in high demand among students and even film professionals as this technical field is virtually nonexistent in Burma. Among the advanced students attending the class were Hnin Ei Hlaing, Mya Darli Aung, The Maw Naing, Aung Nwai Htway and Kyaw Myo Lwin. Han Linn Aung is a beginner student but he works as a supervisor at Myanmar's only film lab; among other participants were also feature film editor Zaw Win Htwe and Kyaw Ko Ko, a senior recording specialist in the studio of famous Burmese composer Diramore who attended the class as the ninth student. During the course, I tried to explain not only the principles of completing documentaries, but also feature films and highly stylized creative audiovisual works.
2. Methodology

The course was divided into individual sections, as we gradually moved from theory to practice. The first four days were devoted entirely to the theory of film sound, a subject that is essential. Students cannot learn about sound design and its aspects merely from watching films. Film sound theory is very important to understand the links between image and sound; it is equally important to become familiar with all elements of the sound track.

I described four basic components of sound in film – the spoken word and its varieties as the carrier of basic verbal information; ambient sound that defines individual environments; SFX – sound effects – noises of (un)real objects and subjects, and music that has the highest emotional charge in the sound track and perhaps in the film in general. I also described individual connections between the elements, sound planes, sound perspective, relationships between the image and the sound, sound and image post-synchronization.

A substantial part of the course was dedicated to the spoken word in documentary film, in order to understand the difference between interview, voiceover, and commentary. Commentary was in the end used in two films made during this year’s workshop.

The course was supplemented by a session at a professional music recording studio attended by professional musicians. A sound designer must be able to guide musicians and share his or her creative vision for the emotions to be conveyed by the film. Music is usually composed by a composer after consultation with the director and sound designer, or, alternatively, the musician may improvise under the supervision of the sound designer. The students were able to improvise to accompany a piece of footage, using high-performance virtual digital instruments with a MIDI keyboard and also in the studio with real instruments during the recording session.

During the course we worked on a total of five short films: two poetic documentary films Batik and Son of Buddha, with Batik made in two versions by Hnin Ei Hlang and Kyaw Ko Ko. In order to display the possibilities of sound design in a narrative film, I
used The Maw Naing’s short film Evening, while the use of sound design to complete an observational documentary was demonstrated in the short version of a promotional film Rice: Myanmar’s Future and the final cut of A Bright Future, about an inspired approach to education at a monastic school. I must note that most of the work was done by the students themselves and I intervened only when it came to complicated technical or creative issues.

The class utilized two Pro Tools sound systems manufactured by the well established company Digidesign. Pro Tools systems are very effective and they are used by the majority of sound designers around the world. In this way I intend to make our students part of a broad sound design community; the technical equipment will ensure compatibility with any sound studio. One of the stations was equipped with Waves Broadcast and Production plugins, an effects plugin pack that will help the students achieve better sound design and facilitate restoration of potentially bad-quality sound recorded on location. However, the third studio was PC-based, with the NUENDO system by Steinberg, so that the students were able to try out different systems.

3. Comments
The students proved to be very creative, thoughtful and resourceful despite the fact that, unlike in Europe or in the United States, sound design in Burma does not have a long tradition. Cultural differences between Burma and the Western world are striking and I therefore let the students decide how to approach the storytelling. Theravada Buddhism is a complex belief system that, to a certain extent, restricts one’s mental powers and demands full focus on the mind, i.e. mind fullness. Creative participation on films on Buddhist subjects is a very unusual experience for any European. For hours I debated with the students about the effect of music or an objective, stylised commentary, e.g., a poem, on film.

Benefits of the sound design course are absolutely unique. As mentioned above, the field of sound post-production is virtually nonexistent in Burma. Film sound is finalised by editors during the final editing stage. It should be noted that all films deserve to be completed in terms of sound, both from the technical and creative point of view.

Fostering a new generation of sound designers is essential in every country, including Burma. Sound is one of the key, if not the most important, emotional components of
each film. If one turns the sound off while watching a film, the components conveying information and emotions are immediately lost. Work on the image and the story line is not complete until the sound is also creatively completed.

The majority of students of the YFS sound design workshop grasped this concept, which was the goal of the course. The students were all very enthusiastic and creatively involved in the filmmaking. It was a real pleasure to share my knowledge with the students and I will be happy to continue teaching them in future editions in more advanced classes that should take on more demanding stylization and technical tasks.

Ivan Horák, YFS Tutor for Sound

IX YFS Annual Rooftop Screening

On Saturday, 5 December the Yangon Film School held its Annual Screening on the roof of its workshop venue, the Princess Hotel. Attended by an audience of approximately sixty people, including diplomats, representatives of development organisations and aid agencies (local and international) as well as Burmese media workers (Myanmar broadcaster MRTV4, the Myanmar Filmmakers Organisation), filmmakers, artists and writers, the event showcased some of the YFS students’ latest work for both local and international communities. The programme opened with a beautifully photographed documentary (made for Pyoe Pin) about community forestry initiatives in Kachin State entitled Our Forests, Our Future, followed by all four fine cuts of the beginners’ final film assignments on the topic of “Coming of Age in Myanmar”: Middle of the Road, Hey, Girl!, Charcoal Boy and Killing Time. After the screenings, Beginners were presented with course certificates by the YFS Director and all YFS filmmakers mingled with the audience to discuss the films in a convivial atmosphere.

The Yangon Film School’s Annual Screening before an audience of diplomats, NGO representatives, Burmese media workers, artists and writers
X  

Direct Results of YFS Workshops and Activities in 2009

1.  Visible outcomes

In 2009, YFS participants took part in, produced or are developing:

- 5 residential workshops and two teaching modules
- 2 non-residential workshops conducted by ‘Flying Mentors’
- 4 short documentaries on the topic of ‘Coming of Age in Myanmar’
- Six films for NGOs and/or aid agencies of between 15-20 minutes in length: Our Forests, Our Future; A Bright Future; Rice – Myanmar’s Future (all for Pyoe Pin); Stigmatize This! (for UNAIDS) and Listen to Us and The Long Way Home (both for Save the Children)
- One nine-minute promo version of the film Rice – Myanmar’s Future as tool for a Pyoe Pin in their advocacy work with the Myanmar government
- 5 Poetic Film exercises (currently being edited by the students)
- 10 docufiction, fiction and animation screenplays
- 8 pitched ideas for docufiction films and documentaries.

The films marked in bold, as well as a short film about all the workshops mounted in 2009 including comments from both participants and tutors, are available on two Yangon Film School DVDs: Coming of Age in Myanmar – An Art of Documentary Filmmaking Workshop held by the Yangon Film School in Myanmar in 2009 and Stories from Myanmar 2009 – Documentaries by students of the Yangon Film School to be released in April 2010.

2.  Benefits for Target Group

- Unique opportunity to live and work alongside tutors from all over the world in a relaxed but structured atmosphere in which cultural barriers melt
- Participants acquire solid media skills that are becoming increasingly desirable in a growing marketplace – at home and abroad
- Positive psychological effects as participants begin to take pride in their abilities, assume responsibility and acquire a deeper understanding of themselves, their immediate environment and the world at large

3.  Dissemination of YFS Films

(i)  Commissioned Projects for NGOs and Aid Agencies

In 2009 Yangon Film School filmmakers were once again much sought-after as the creators of authentic, well-crafted documentaries portraying the work of the development sector in Myanmar. In 2009 students made no fewer than six films for
NGOs and/or aid agencies, including three films for Pyoe Pin: Our Forests, Our Future, about community forestry projects in Kachin State; A Bright Future (pictured above), which documents a successful monastic school that has championed an inspired child-centred approach to teaching, and Rice – Myanmar’s Future, (currently in post-production) a beautifully filmed record of a rice-growing project in the Delta which, if implemented all over the country, has the potential to improve the lives of millions relying on this staple foodstuff – either as producers or as consumers. Another YFS-produced film was Stigmatize This! Made for UNAIDS, this documentary provides a warm and authentic record of a series of UN Cares workshops designed to increase HIV-awareness and reduce HIV-related stigma and discrimination among organisation’s workforce. Finally, YFS made two films for Save the Children in Myanmar. Listen to Us portrays some of the young participants who took part in a Child Participation workshop run in their village by this NGO during which the children worked on finding solutions for their problems, and, in the short film The Long Way Home, a young man looks back on his recent ordeal as a victim of human trafficking.

(ii) New Commissions
Among commissions currently in development are:

- A documentary about a community-led HIV intervention project in Kachin State launched by Metta Foundation;
- A film documenting Metta Foundation’s Nargis recovery programmes in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta region;
- A documentary about Shalom Foundation’s post-Nargis trauma healing workshops in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta;
- A documentary for Action Aid about their Fellows Programme (which was the focus of a previous YFS film, The Change Maker)
- A commercial for Save the Children in Myanmar in association with the Department of Social Welfare and funded by UNICEF with the aim of combating discrimination against children who work.

(iii) Cross-border Projects
YFS has also been approached by Save the Children in Bangkok to help develop an idea for a docufiction feature film based on this organisation’s cross-border child protection, migration and trafficking programmes in the Mekong region. Should YFS be able to contribute to this challenging project, it would represent an important opportunity for YFS filmmakers to look beyond their own borders and engage in issues that affect not just Myanmar but the whole region.
Independent Projects by YFS filmmakers

Alongside client-based work, YFS filmmakers continue to demonstrate a strong interest in developing their own projects. Shin Daewe (who directed the 2008 work, *An Untitled Life*, about Myanmar painter Rahula) has begun to chronicle the lives of the members of a poor rural family near Pagan; Pe Maung Same has been following the life of a Burmese writer living in Bago, and Tay Zar Win Tun recently took his camera with him on an Ayeyarwaddy boat trip and used it to record his co-passengers – a group of Myanmar writers and poets – as they aired their concerns for the people whose lives will change irrevocably as a result of the Ayeyarwaddy Myitsone dam project.

The 2009 workshops also provided other students with the impetus to direct their own films:

“Documentary helps us find the truth ... I really want to form a crew with my two female colleagues who work for the same NGO as me and who have also attended YFS courses, and make a documentary with them.”

Zaw Moon (pictured left), participant, 2009 Beginners’ course.

“I’ve found everything I’ve learnt fascinating and I want to put it to good use. I’d love to make my own film but I have to try hard, learn more from workshops – and watch lots of films.”

Khin Myo Myat
(seated left with Khin Khin Su behind),
Participant, 2009 Beginners’ course

Yangon Film School Films at International Film Festivals

In 2009, seven short films by YFS students were screened at five international film festivals: in August The Maw Naing’s *Again and Again* went to the prestigious *Oberhausen* Film Festival in Germany; in September Lay Thida was invited to *Chiangmai* in northern Thailand by the Heinrich Boell Foundation to present her short *Just a Boy*, about a thirteen-year old rubbish collector, at the Friends without Borders’ ‘Flying Beyond the Barbed Wire Fence’ festival. Thi Ha Thwe’s *Far From Home* was also shown at the same festival. Supported by a grant from the Goethe Institute Jakarta, Tay Zar Win Tun went to *Berlin* in November to present his film *Water Boy* at *Interfilm Festival;* in the same month YFS students Thu Thu Shein and Wai Mar Nyunt travelled from Prague (where they are attending a nine-month course at the FAMU) to the Danish Documentary film festival *CPN:DOX in Copenhagen* where they presented their films *A Million Threads* and *Happy Days*, and in September the Friedrich Ebert Foundation made it possible for Shin Daewe to travel to *Seoul* to present her uplifting portrait of Mingun-based artist Rahula *An Untitled Life* at the
Korean EBS International Documentary Film Festival. Shin Daewe’s film also screened at **Guangzhou Documentary Film Festival** in southern China in December.

![Tay Zar Win Tun (pictured far right) being interviewed by a young reporter from the TV channel Offener Kanal about his portrait of a young worker at a Yangon bottling factory, Water Boy, which screened at the Interfilm Festival in Berlin in November 2009](image)

**(vi) Myanmar Television, YFS Crews**

Building on the broadcast of two YFS productions – **A Day with Aye Nan Lin** and **Peace of Mind** – on MRTV4 in 2008, YFS has now appointed YFS-member Pe Maung Same to lobby MRTV in order to get more YFS films shown on Myanmar television. The impetus for this initiative has come partly from NGOs such as Pyoe Pin who are keen for YFS-produced films conveying important development and/or behavioural messages (such as **Rice – Myanmar’s Future**, **A Bright Future** and **Our Forests, Our Future** to name just three) to be broadcast to a wide local audience.

At the time of writing this report (March 2010), YFS has been invited (alongside a number of other Myanmar and international production companies and filmmakers) by MRTV3 and the Myanmar Motion Picture Enterprise to contribute documentaries and other work to a new international channel, Myanmar International, which is due to be launched permanently on 27 March, 2010. Broadcasting in English, the channel undoubtedly represents a bid on the part of the government to counter international media coverage of Myanmar; nonetheless, for YFS this represents a not-to-be-missed opportunity to make use of the ‘relaxed policy on contributing programmes for cultural and traditional reasons’ (MRTV3) to showcase the work of its filmmakers and develop a working relationship with this Burmese broadcaster, which has also announced its interest in co-producing new work.

YFS filmmakers continue to be sought after as crews for local media, NGOs, visiting filmmakers and/or production companies from Asia and Europe.

**(vii) Study Trips Abroad and Exchanges**

In February 2009 YFS student Myo Min Khin was selected to take part in the two-week **Berlinale Talent Campus** with a special focus on digital post-production. He spent a further two-and-a-half months in Germany working with YFS mentor Ulrike Schaz on the edit of the group’s first feature-length documentary, about the psychosocial impact of cyclone Nargis.

Continuing its cooperation with the **Czech film school FAMU** in Prague, in September 2009 two female YFS students Thu Thu Shein and Wai Mar Nyunt commenced nine-month scholarships at this legendary school of performing arts and are currently attending a multimedia course for international students.
In May 2009 YFS student Lay Thida was granted a Visiting Fellowship bursary from the UK-based Charles Wallace Burma Trust to enable her to take part in the prestigious National Film and Television School's Summer Docs course in the UK in July 2009. Unfortunately, the NFTS was not entered on the UK Border Authority’s list of approved colleges at the time and so Lay Thida was unable to obtain a visa to join the 2009 course. The school was finally registered in January 2010. Thankfully, both CWF and a further sponsor, the European Burma Office, were prepared to put their grant offers on hold and it is hoped that Lay Thida will now receive her visa in order to join the NFTS Summer Docs course in July 2010.

In November 2009 Thu Thu Shein and Wai Mar Nyunt were invited by Copenhagen Documentary Film Festival CPN:DOX to take part in their ten-day Talent Campus. During the course of this programme these YFS filmmakers joined forces with two Scandinavian cineastes to develop two film projects (one set at an old people’s home in Mingun, the other in Yangon) which were filmed in Myanmar in December.

Provided sufficient funding is in place, the YFS intends to commence its own Exchange Programme in 2010/2011 in order to bring together Guest Lecturers and students from film schools with YFS filmmakers – either in Europe, Yangon or Asia.

XI Conclusions and the Next Step

Now entering its sixth year of activity, the Yangon Film School project continues to blaze a trail for capacity-building in the media in Myanmar – in spite of enduring constraints. The arrest, interrogation and subsequent release of two YFS filmmakers during 2009 was a sober reminder of the precarious environment in which the school is operating and served to flag, once again, the continuing need to scrutinize all of its activities in terms of risk. For this reason, safeguarding everyone involved in the project – on both sides of the camera – will continue to be a priority. On the plus side, if implemented, the invitation from MRTV3 and MMPE to supply programmes to the new channel Myanmar International represents a way of building a productive and transparent relationship with the authorities that will help to consolidate the school’s position as a media resource.

(i) Assessment and Suggestions

Part of the school’s uniqueness derives from its dual function as training centre and production company. This duality can be seen as both a strength and a weakness: on the one hand, taking on commissions and forging links with international and local clients promotes professionalism, good business practices as well as income for the YFS group; on the other hand, however, it also exerts considerable pressure on the student filmmakers to work to deadlines and, in so doing, denies them the luxury of devoting longer periods of time to experimenting with different film forms and thus the ability to develop further their own creative identities. This last aspect is, of course, at the heart of any film school and should not be underestimated – after all, YFS does not seek to provide filmmakers with a convenient formula with which to merely illustrate a topic, but is determined to foster the art of film by training a cadre
of creative individuals who are capable of putting Burmese filmmaking on the map. This balance between professionalism and creativity will need to be addressed in the next two years if the primary beneficiaries are to assume responsibility for the project in the not too distant future.

Another process of no less importance is the participation of all members of the YFS group in the creation and acceptance of:

- A Set of Regulations governing the YFS and the production and ownership of projects, and
- A Management Committee that will enable the members of YFS to make decisions in a fair and transparent manner.

These two initiatives – crucial in order to promote self-reliance and enable members of YFS to take ownership of the project – have so far met with a disappointing lack of consensus and, in some cases, resistance. However, there are those who have a more constructive, far-sighted approach, as Student Representative Ko Thiha’s comments (below) will confirm. One way of supporting this process might be to mount a Retreat for the whole group in 2010, including a series of group-oriented activities which would foster a sense of belonging and solidarity.

“I really understand and appreciate your endeavour to get a documentary resource centre off the ground for young and enthusiastic Burmese individuals who are interested in making documentary films. … I reiterate my pledge to exert myself to install the YFS regulations successfully. Any organisation without a set of principles is not viable. We all have the same dream – to make YFS a media resource for Burmese documentary filmmakers – so there must be a convergent line where we all can meet.”

Ko Thiha, YFS Student Representative (kneeling, third from right)
(ii) **Workshops in 2010**

YFS filmmakers continue to excel as capable ‘hunter-gatherers’ of well-composed images in all manner of locations and conditions; their material never fails to demonstrate their growing abilities as critical yet compassionate observers of their country and its people. However, learning to shape their sometimes copious material into a convincing film has proved considerably more challenging. Therefore new ways must be sought in order to teach this undeniably difficult and demanding part of the filmmaking process. For this reason, the main focus of the 2010 workshops will be on **Editing**, with two workshops – one Beginners’ Editing Workshop, looking at different ways of storytelling in feature and non-fiction film, and one Advanced Editing Workshop, during which more experienced editors will get to grips with a number of documentaries and docufiction films.

Bearing in mind the need to improve infrastructure and project management at YFS, another focus for 2010 workshops will be the role of the Creative Producer. Feedback from the participants’ of the 2009 workshops also confirmed the desire for the continuation of Sound Design and History of Film Form courses, as well as the return of the extremely popular True Fictions workshop first mounted in 2008.

Funds permitting, in 2010 YFS workshops will focus on the following:

- Editing and Post-Production
- Sound design and mixing
- History of Film Form Part II
- Film Production: Creativity and Commerce
- True Fictions Part II

(iii) **Flying Mentorships**

YFS tutor Melanie Sandford was one of two Flying Mentors (the other was George Cragg) who travelled to Yangon in 2009 to work on NGO projects produced by YFS filmmakers. She is pictured above (on the right) with returnee Beginner student Eh Mwee, who is currently the 2010 YFS Project Director in Yangon.

The YFS will continue to respond to the needs of the YFS students as both producers of commissioned films and emergent filmmakers in their own right. For this reason, projects for clients will, as far as possible, be developed, filmed and edited outside residential workshops. These projects will be mentored throughout the year by YFS tutors via email and during trips to Yangon as ‘flying mentors’.

Lindsey Merrison, YFS Director,
Berlin, March 2010