

EXPOSED

By Cyrille Montulet  
Piet Zwart Institute - Master Education in Arts  
January 2021

## A BRIEF INSTRUCTION

Exposed is the title of my thesis that describes my experiences while working as a video trainer. Being a filmmaker, besides a teacher, led to the creation of a text following the process of filmmaking, while reading it becomes an interactive experience. I wrote my story in the format of scenes (white) and I made complementing illustrations with photos and quotes (black). I remember watching Panavision <sup>(1)</sup> films and being asked to be active as a member of the audience and swap my head from right to left (and vice versa), which led me to experiencing the film in a very different way. The 'widescreen format' of this publication refers to the (Ultra) Panavision cinema. While my story can be read the conventional way, I would like to encourage you to become an active reader and decide which page you wish to turn first. In my text I use the indications '>>>>' at moments when I reflect to the illustration/quote, and in reverse in my illustration/quote I use '<<<<' when the black page should be read first, followed by the text on the white page. Like every writer or filmmaker, I like experimenting and discovering new paths in narration, be it through words or image. In order to pave the way towards new, inventive ways in storytelling, one has to break through standard rules in an existing old-new medium as writing. This, combined with snapshots of my filmmaking journey, is my personal first step towards learning how to teach new inventive ways in storytelling.

1. Ultra Panavision cinema is yielding an extremely wide aspect ratio, popular in the years 190-1960, comparable to Super Panavision 70

## INTRODUCTION

I began my studies of Master Education in Arts (MEiA) at the Piet Zwart Institute (PZI) with the intention to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of subjective storytelling in video journalism and how I can implement my new findings in a future role as video trainer. My curiosity for this subject originates from the time when I was working in the international field as a video trainer one decade ago, where I witnessed young people who were very eager to become video journalists and cover stories about their own community and environment as a tool to advocate for their human rights. However, the media landscape and media news consumption has changed incredibly over the last decade and I wonder if my personal motivation and passion for video journalism might be outdated.

Do my personal and professional ethical values hinder me from teaching future video journalists to become autonomous professionals and stand out from the crowd?

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

During my days when I was a film student, about twenty years ago, my teachers urged me to watch hours and hours of long and (very) slow films by Russian, Scandinavian and Dutch filmmakers with the hope this would help me gain a deeper understanding of the origin of film and documentary filmmaking. I learned that objective storytelling is the only true way of reporting. However, soon after my graduation I started working as a documentary filmmaker with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace International <sup>(2)</sup> and they asked me to produce stories from a specific point of view. Clearly, this was for the purpose of advocacy in the organisation's interests, therefore we can question whether this affects the objectivity of the stories I created here. After working for ten years in the professional field of filmmaking, I received a job offer for a position as video trainer abroad. I felt excited that I was going to get the opportunity to share my learning and experiences in documentary filmmaking to budding local film professionals in developing countries. Fully passionate I was highly eager to share my knowledge with those who didn't have the privilege to be able to attend a film school like I did.

2. Greenpeace is a non-governmental environmental organisation with offices in over 55 countries and an international coordinating body in Amsterdam, the Netherlands (Wikipedia).

Cyrille Montulet - Making things public (PZI MEiA, 2019)



## RESEARCH DESIGN

By writing this thesis I will go on a personal journey from the start of my professional career as a filmmaker to my work as video trainer and I will land with a conclusion about where I stand now in both roles. Through my research I want to learn if a more intimate and personal approach in video journalism still works today, in times where there has been an influx of video news online [Reuters Institute - Page 7]. I will reconnect with a few of my former students in Myanmar (3) and Haiti (4) and I will discuss with them the impact of their past training with me and question what ethics in video journalism means for them. We will also talk about their personal thoughts regarding the future of video journalism in their own country. In addition to my discussions with my former students I will interview two professionals in the field of citizen journalism who also train locals to become film professionals in developing countries. As part of my reflection on my interviews and personal experiences I refer to quotes of Hito Steyerl (5), a female filmmaker and artist. The reason for using Steyerl as my point of reflection throughout my thesis is because I feel a strong connection to what she expresses in her essays and talks [Interview with Steyerl – 2010].

3. Republic of the Union of Myanmar, a country in Southeast Asia. 4. Republic of Haiti, located on the island Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea.

5. Hito Steyerl (1966) is a German filmmaker, moving image artist, writer, and innovator of the essay documentary. (Wikipedia)



Studio CyMon (February, 2020)

## 3 POINTS OF FOCUS

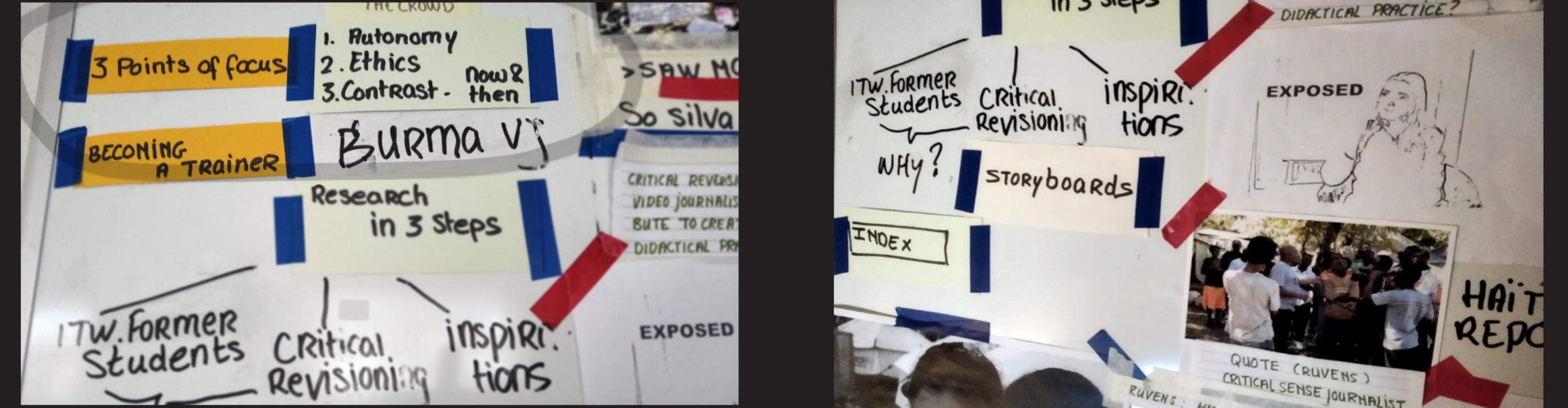
### 1. What does autonomy mean for the video journalists I have trained?

As part of my research I will have conversations with a few of my former students who live in countries where there is no established independent media industry. I want to understand what influence or impact I had as a (foreign) trainer when I trained my students to become autonomous professionals, especially when they live in a society where freedom of speech isn't culturally appropriate or accepted.

### 2. What are the ethical values I find important to teach in video journalism?

In my research I will make reflective experiments as a way of looking at things from different viewpoints and I will look at examples of other filmmakers to help me to become more aware of my personal ethics in film-making.

**3. What developments in video journalism over the last two decades have had the biggest impact on journalism's boundaries?** Technological innovations had a huge impact in the media including in video journalism. I am most interested in what these changes did to the behaviour of the filmmaker and the audience's perception of the film.



Studio CyMon (February, 2020)

## INTRODUCTION

Research question

Index

Personal background

Becoming a trainer

3 Points of focus

Research design

## CHAPTER 1: THEN & NOW

**Intro**

Nanook

**The Uncertainty of Documentarism**

Hito Steyerl

**Through the eyes of a VJ**

Interview with Saw Mort

**In Defence of the Poor Image**

Hito Steyerl

**Case Study 1: Being a foreign trainer**

Unheard Voices & The Vote - A discussion with Mila

**Dynamic teaching**

## CHAPTER 2: AUTONOMY

**So silva rerum**

Kapuscinski

**Photographic Universe**

Hito Steyerl

**Atelier Haïti Reporters**

Interview with Ruvens and Jeanty

**Case Study 2: VPRO's Metropolis**

Interview Stan van Engelen

## CHAPTER 3: ETHICS

**Aesthetics**

Crossing the line of ethics

**The Uncertainty of Documentarism II**

Hito Steyerl

**Vulnerability - Turning tables**

10 Doors, time to go home

**About Power**

Nicolas Philibert, Être et avoir

**Enjoy Poverty**

Renzo Martens

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

**4.1**

Autonomy

**4.2**

Now & Then

**4.3**

Ethics

**4.4**

When arts blend with documentary:

Astro noise by Laura Poitras

**4.5**

Closing statement

## CHAPTER 1 /// THEN & NOW

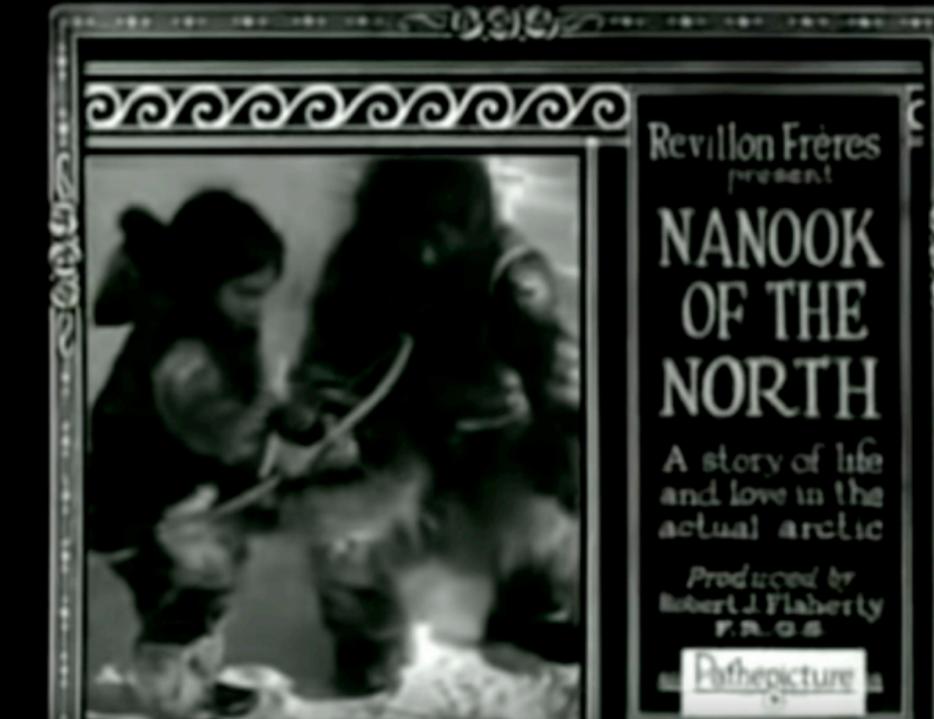
### NANOOK

As a child, my father often took me to the cinema, mainly to arthouse movie centres and film festivals, but at that time I was definitely not always charmed by all these movies. Then one day my father took me to a black and white silent documentary called '**Nanook of the North**' [Flaherty -1922]. It was a classic documentary about the lives of an Inuit (6) community in North Canada. Even though I didn't like the silence of the movie much, I found it interesting to be a witness of someone else's life from the other side of the world. It was because of this film I gained a passion for documentary film, in where intimate stories are being told about beautiful people in far-away countries.

6. A member of one of the several indigenous peoples from the Arctic. (Wikipedia)



Nanook of the North [Flaherty - 1922]



## BECOMING A TRAINER

In 2009 I received a job offer to be a video trainer on the Thailand/Myanmar border. Before that time, I had rarely heard of Myanmar, at this time called Burma. As I was considering the job offer, the film '**Burma VJ, reporting from a closed country**' [Østergaard - 2008] was premiered. The abbreviation "VJ" stands for "video journalists" who are people who risked their safety, their freedom and their lives to record huge protests (7) against the military government of Myanmar and the regime's brutal response. I knew that I had to watch 'Burma VJ' first before I was able to decide if I could accept this job offer or not. What I saw in the film was something that I never had seen before in documentary film: shaky and out-of-focus images captured with video cameras small enough to be quickly concealed in circumstances of danger and chaos. I was struck by the intensity of the video images and I felt that the lack of 'cinematic polish' emphasized the urgency of these pictures and the bravery of the anonymous camera operators. The timing of Burma VJ's premiere seemed more than just a sign to me. I realized that this was a great opportunity to start a new career and support people to equip themselves with film and journalistic skills to fight injustice in their lives. So, I said "yes".

7. These protests were called Saffron Revolution which was a series of economic and political protests that took place during August, September, and October 2007 in Myanmar.



'Burma VJ, reporting from a closed country' [Østergaard - 2008]



- Who did they shoot?  
- A guy with a camera.

In mid-2009 I left to Southeast Asia and soon after I arrived, I met my first group of students who were a group of 10 men and women between 18 and 35 years old. They were all Myanmar dissidents of the Karen (8) ethnic background who had been forced to flee to Thailand and live an undocumented life with no legal status. My job was to teach my team all about video journalism with the aim that they would be able to cover stories about the internal war and human rights violations happening in ethnic-Karen areas in Myanmar and regions where international media could not reach. However, when I told the group about the goal of my training I noticed some disappointment on their faces. During the first gathering with my new students a man raised his hand and asked me if I had seen the film '**Rambo IV**' [Stallone - 2008]. "Yes", I had seen Rambo IV an action film with Sylvester Stallone who plays the role of the protagonist called John Rambo. The film tells the story about war-torn Myanmar and focusses on the Karen ethnic war. My students felt that this action movie was telling 'their true story' and they were aware that millions of people around the world had watched this film. My students told me that they wanted to become action filmmakers because they believed that documentary film was boring and only attracts a small audience. My job was now to convince my students that as video journalists they had the potential to reach a huge global audience who would be seriously interested in their story.

8.Karen: an ethnolinguistic group of Sino-Tibetan language-speaking people in east and southeastern Myanmar. Karen nationalists have been fighting the Burmese army for an independent state since 1949.



Burma Issues (Myanmar 2009)



'Rambo IV' [Stallone - 2008]

When I started my first video training I tried ambitiously to implement my documentary filmmaking skills into the field of video journalism. There are obvious similarities between traditional video journalism <sup>(9)</sup> and documentary filmmaking, and one of the points of view they have in common is their attempt to present the viewer with factual information about a specific topic. However, video journalism presents the viewer with (objective) facts while documentary is more about storytelling based on a factual scenario. When I look back on how I shaped my first lessons in video journalism, I can see that I was actually providing trainings in documentary filmmaking with a focus on the technical aspects of film. I was teaching my students to work in teams, a crew of 4 or 5 people and pay full attention to image polishing factors such as composition, light, sound and colour. My approach of teaching video journalism was similar to how I would produce a documentary in the Netherlands. At the same time when I was giving my first trainings in Myanmar (2009), a global revolution in video news reporting took off. More people were now able to purchase inexpensive recording equipment and there was a rapid rise in the popularity of the internet as it became more accessible and cheaper for almost all people around the world. This development had a huge impact on both the production and publication in the field of video news reporting. It was no longer a privilege for a selected group of film 'elite' to become filmmakers and premiere a film. More and more people around the world were now able to produce videos filmed with smartphones, which can be easily uploaded to an online platform such as YouTube.

9. Journalism is unbiased production and distribution of reports on current or past events based on facts and supported with proofs or evidences. (Wikipedia)



**“The increasing number of the possession of mobile phones by people all around world contributed to the birth and rise of a new phenomenon: citizen journalism.” <sup>(10)</sup>**

[Albarado - 2015 page. 1]

10. Journalism that is conducted by people who are not professional journalists (Britannica)

In this excerpt from Hito Steyerls' paper 'The Uncertainty of Documentarism', Steyerl reflects upon images from a CNN news story about the Iraq attack in 2003 filmed with a mobile phone camera. Steyerl calls contemporary video journalism 'modern documentarism' where the intensity of the effect of an image is valued as most successful. This '**intensity effect**' of shaky images is in sharp contrast with the effect of intimacy and intensity which I described at the start of this chapter. Twenty years ago, when I was a film student, shaky and out-of focus shots were a reason to be dismissed at school. But times have changed, both in the technical sense of producing as well as how videos are received by the audience. In the documentary film 'Burma VJ' the footage came from citizen video journalists, but the story was shaped by a professional filmmaker (11). 'Burma VJ' is not only a rallying cry but also a meditation on the contemporary state of independent media outlets, analyzing what they can and can't achieve as solo endeavors [Trinie Dalton – 2009]. Ten years later there seems to be a trend of superior popularity of citizen journalism. This digital revolution of citizen journalism has changed the professional field of video journalism entirely. The power of citizen journalism has resulted nowadays in many revolutions [Alex King 2014], war- and conflicts are covered by non-professionals and picked up by established media organisations, which makes me wonder if this means the start of the disappearance of professional video news reporting and how I should reflect this in my role as a tutor.

11. Anders Østgard (1965)



## The Uncertainty of Documentarism

We are surrounded by rough-cut and increasingly abstract 'documentary' images, **shaky, dark, or out-of-focus**, images that show little else than their own excitement. The more immediate they become, the less there is to see. They evoke a situation of permanent exception and constant crisis, a state of heightened tension and vigilance. The closer to reality we get, the less focused and jumpier the image becomes. Let us call this the uncertainty principle of modern documentarism.

In the age of digital reproduction documentary forms do not only have an incredible emotionalizing effect on an individual level; they are also an important part of the contemporary economy of effect. The need for objective, institutionally guaranteed, even scientific integrity is successfully being replaced by the desire for intensity. In the ubiquitous flows of information societies, sound argumentation is displaced by identification, by compromised messages and affects that are more and more interwoven with the events themselves. Documentary material may have once seemed to be as dry as dust, related to the notoriously cool procedures of jurisprudence or science. But by now, the institutionalization of doubt makes the documentary image into a collection point for emotions just as intense as they are contradictory.

[Steyerl - 2015, page 3]



Does this contemporary tendency in news reporting mean that training in professional skills of video journalism has lost its value?

Cyrille Montulet (2020)

During my first year of studies at MEiA I sent Saw Mort a short questionnaire (December 2018)

**1. How do you consider your role as filmmaker?**

**a. Do you mainly produce advocacy videos?**

When working with Karen Community Base Organization, my role is produce advocacy video, but sometimes when working with News Agency like Karen News, just produce news video."

**b. What is your main goal when producing a video?**

"The main goal of producing advocacy video, to inform and give people a chance to think and making change something."

**c. Is it important for you to finish the video with a message?**

Yes, it's very important to finish the video with a message."

**d. What is your role as video trainer?**

My role of video trainer is to teach the participants of video techniques and use video as a tool for change."

**e. Do you have ideas about new or more alternative ways of storytelling?**

I like to make profile documentary video and travel documentary about telling culture and people way of life.



**Saw Mort**

was in his early twenties when I trained him in video journalism (2009-2011). He was a member of a grassroots movement called Burma Issues, based in a small town on the Thailand/Myanmar border. Today, ten years later he still makes documentaries in Myanmar and he also provides film training for young Myanmar people. Through this job he's financially able to support his family and two young children.

As opposed to the majority of my other former students, Saw Mort refuses to be commissioned by international organisations. He told me he cherishes self-governance.

Saw Mort, Mae Sot in Thailand (February 2019)

## 2. Innovation

### a. Do you have ideas about new or more alternative ways of storytelling?

I like to make profile documentary video and travel documentary about telling culture and people way of life.

### b. What documentary/film inspired you most?

I like Great Big Story channel [YouTube], Some of the videos inspired me.

### 3. Facts and Fiction

**a. Do you think using fictional elements in journalism is allowed?**

I think so, to use fiction elements in journalism. The base of the true fact, our film is to represent the true story. I think it's possible, for example like drawing, animation, poem, drama like reacting.

**b. Think about your last project about the land-confiscation:**

**Would it be possible to add fictional elements to this story?**

I think we can add but will need more work on it. It's also depends on the script that we develop it.

**c. Again, think about your last project:**

**What would be the biggest difference to your documentary if you added fictional elements to the story?**

I am not sure, never tried before. I think will be interesting and will give people to entertain and enjoy.

## THROUGH THE EYES OF A VJ

I met Saw Mort for the last time in February 2019. Saw Mort explained me that through our video training from 2009 to 2011 he was equipped with skills which enabled him to take the responsibility to 'fight injustice'.

When Saw Mort visits villages in the rural areas of eastern Myanmar he tells the people that by filming and publishing their stories he wants to make a positive change in their lives. People like Saw Mort are very close and personally involved in the topics they film, and sometimes they take **the role of ambassador** on their shoulders. That could be an advantage as well be a danger. I think that when people capture stories from their own community and share this with the 'world' it has a beautiful and strong potential, but at the same time there is also a hidden danger because filmmakers like Saw Mort have the tendency to portray the role of victim and the role of evil as black and white.



## What do you think about the future of video documentary?

"As you said, there is a lot of change at the moment, social media, YouTube.

Sometimes I feel people don't serious so much, most of them are for fun and entertainment.

For my experience of Karen people, they more like emotional and action kind of stuff. Sometimes fact is not very important for many people, so the truth left behind.

Anyhow, I think the documentary film can be a tool for educating people.

So it has to be fun, creative and educational film to change people's perspective and mind.

For now, I thinking about select the target audiences and benefit for all general publish, but it's hard."

Saw Mort (Mae Sot in Thailand, February 2019)  
Original excerpt from interview in English, unedited

No longer the 'real thing', but the poor image is instead a bastard copy of a long-distant original, a product of a post-digital world in which information moves according to the logic of what Steyerl calls '**swarm circulation**'. From this aesthetic observation Steyerl goes on to pinpoint the subversive quality of poor images and the networks that sustain them. [E-flux journal #10]

**"Standing against the adoration for quality and resolution commonplace in 'audiovisual capitalism', the poor image represents a lumpen proletarian in the class hierarchy of appearances, depicting all that is the forgotten, unwanted or taboo in contemporary culture."**<sup>(12)</sup>

From this aesthetic observation Steyerl goes on to pinpoint the subversive quality of poor images and the networks that sustain them. "Standing against the adoration for quality and resolution commonplace in 'audiovisual capitalism', the poor image represents a lumpen proletarian in the class hierarchy of appearances, depicting all that is the forgotten, unwanted or taboo in contemporary culture."<sup>(13)</sup>

12. Hito Steyerl in E-flux journal #10

13. Hito Steyerl in E-flux journal #10



## IN DEFENCE OF THE POOR IMAGE

"As an image disperses, it becomes poorer; every rip, edit, upload and share is further pushing it towards a kind of visual abstraction."

In the year 2009 I learned about citizen journalism by watching the documentary film *Burma VJ*, and at the same time I was following the news about the Persian awakening, a political movement called the Green movement or Green Wave <sup>(14)</sup>. Here Iranian citizens and protestors rose up after the 2009 presidential elections and demanded the removal of Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Members of the Green Wave captured the demonstrations in video clips and photographs and effectively launched powerful internet campaigns.



'The Green Wave' [Ali Samadi Ahadi - 2010]

I was captivated by the intimacy and power of the images, which made me more curious about the future of citizen journalism.

## WARPHOTOGRAPHER

During the time I worked as teacher I found it highly challenging to encourage my students to be critical and express their thoughts. I used examples of films to overcome barriers and with this I tried to welcome discussion in class. I chose not to show much of my own work, but started my lessons with showing the film 'Warphotographer', [Frei, 2001] a film about photo journalist James Nachtway who was active in times <sup>(14)</sup> when war photography was only fated for a selected group of western journalists. This film helped me to explain my students about the role and responsibilities of a photo/video journalist, and at the same time by showing this film I could raise the question about the difference in objective and subjective storytelling. Warphotographer is about James Nachtway (1948 New York), a typical 'old-school' photographer who wanted to become a war-photographer. James started his career in the late 1970's, a pre-digital era, a time when the profession of war photography was only fated for a selected group of western journalists. James has a very high opinion of photography as a means of communication. In his opinion, documentary photographs give the victims of war and the citizens a voice in the outside world, a voice that they wouldn't have otherwise.

15. From 1976 on



Warphotographer [Frei -2001]



Through photography, James Nachtway wanted to appeal to people's best instinct, the sense of right and wrong, the ability and willingness to identify with others, and refuse to accept what is unacceptable. [Wright 2001]. While photographing his subjects, who are often victims of social disorder, war, or serious tragic happenings, James has always had a sense of respect and empathy towards them. He never moves too quickly or barges into spaces where he is not welcomed. James has said many times that he always felt that these people who were going through some terrible tragedy or misfortunes somehow wanted him to be there and tell their story. He somehow became their voice, a voice that they lacked and longed for.

After showing this documentary at the start of my training, I always asked my students about their opinion regarding James and his role as a foreign photographer. Without exception their answer was that they were convinced that James was brave and doing a great job. Secondly, I asked them if they believed James was exploiting the people, because he makes a living out of other people's suffering. The answer from my students would always be "**No!, he's helping the people**".



James Nachtway

"Every minute I was there, I wanted to flee.  
I did not want to see this.  
Would I cut and run over the ideal of  
responsibility of being there with a camera?"

James Nachtway in 'Warphotographer' [Frei -2001]

## UNHEARD VOICES

In September 2009 I started my job as a video trainer along the Thailand-Myanmar border with a grassroots organisation called **Burma Issues** <sup>(16)</sup>, run by a group of young refugees from Myanmar living undocumented in Thailand. They had formed a movement with the specific intention to support people living in conflict zones in eastern Myanmar by providing education and awareness through film. The goal of my training was to equip my students with the right skills and tools that would enable them to improve their film skills. Early 2010, my students of male and female new media professionals, in the age of 20 up to 25, were preparing for a advocacy trip in Myanmar. My students were going to the rural areas and conflict zones in east Myanmar where they wanted to talk about the upcoming elections (November 2010). Planning a film shoot and organizing screenings in a country where freedom of press and media is lacking <sup>(17)</sup> shows the great courage of my young students. I believed that gathering the voices of the 'neglected communities' would be of great importance, and this could only be done by media professionals who have a good understanding of the living conditions of the people they are filming. We called this project '**Unheard Voices**'.

16. Burma Issues has operated since 1990 as a grassroot movement in Myanmar, with 5 operational offices along the Thailand-Myanmar border.

17. World Press Freedom Index 2009 - Burma ranked 171 out of 175 countries.



## Burma Issues presents 'Unheard Voices' documenting inside voices on the 2010 Elections

In February and March, Burma Issues' video team went on a trip inside Burma.

Armed with video cameras about the upcoming election in 2010

they tried to inform local people of their human rights to a free and fair election.

On the course of the trip, the voices of those speaking about the 2010 elections were collected.

It was impossible for me to travel together with my team in the conflict zones of Myanmar; I am a tall, white, blonde European woman and I would attract too much attention and put myself and others in danger. But I was very curious how my students would perform during the trip and for this reason I sat down with the group and I told them I was certain that their trip and the work they were going to do was **worth to show to 'the world'**. I asked them if they would not only film the people in the villages, but also themselves along the way.

After two weeks, when the team returned from their trip to the 'safe zone' of the Thailand-Myanmar border I created an edit of their footage which I sent to international media agencies. International broadcasters such as Al Jazeera <sup>(19)</sup> and SBS Dateline Australia <sup>(20)</sup> showed strong interest in the authenticity of the material especially because it contained shots and interviews which their own reporters would never be able to shoot. My team of young video journalists couldn't believe that **their footage** was aired by international broadcasters.

19. A free-to-air international Arabic news channel based in Doha.

20. Dateline is an Australian television public affairs program broadcast on SBS. Since its debut in 1984, it has focused largely on international events, often in developing or warring nations. Since 2000, Dateline reporters have travelled by themselves without a camera crew or sound engineers.



Filmcrew Burma Issues, Myanmar (March 2010)

In a time and country where even the possession of a camera was reason enough to put you in jail for years, asking my team to film in these conflict zones was a big risk.

But they said **"yes, tramu"** <sup>(18)</sup>

18. Tramu = 'teacher' in Karen language

## CASE STUDY 1: BEING A FOREIGN TRAINER

In my reflections of 'Unheard voices' I discuss my experiences as a tutor in this collaborative project with my students and also with Canadian filmmaker Mila Aung Thwin, who did a similar film training project in Myanmar, five years later in 2015. Together with his students, Mila and his colleague Van produced a film called **The Vote** [EYESTEELFILM - 2016]. I sought contact with Mila and asked him to explain to me more about his training experiences in Myanmar and the strengths and weaknesses of collaboration projects between students and teachers. What both 'Unheard voices' and 'The Vote' have in common is the fact that they talk about upcoming elections in Myanmar. Also, they were both filmed by students, but sculpted in editing by the teacher to get it ready for an international audience.

"Myanmar students did know the visual language but documentary-style filming was brand new to them. I believe their great eagerness to learn comes from the absence of film schools in Myanmar."

Mila Aung Thwin in an interview with Field of Vision [Heynes - 2016]

"The students were more earnest, more serious because they were learning something innovative, what did not exist yet in Myanmar and this made the students feel privileged."

Van Royko in an interview with Field of Vision [Heynes - 2016]

My first question to Mila Aung Htwinn was how he got involved in this work as trainer. Mila explained to me that because he has partly Burmese roots (23) he had always been curious about Myanmar and for this reason he travelled to Yangon in 2014 to visit the Human Rights Human Dignity International filmfestival. Under the umbrella of this film festival a film school<sup>3</sup> was founded by Anglo-Burmese filmmaker Lindsey Merrison (22). Mila came into contact with Lindsey and was asked to teach their documentary course. In 2015, Mila and his companion Van began teaching and in collaboration with their students they filmed 'The Vote'. I believe the Yangon Film School (YFS) is a unique initiative, in order to support and encourage a burgeoning community of young media workers in Myanmar. YFS regularly brings together experienced filmmakers from around the world and young Myanmarese men and women, some of whom have little or no prior experience in media, for regular film trainings in Yangon, Myanmar on all aspects of filmmaking – from screenwriting to editing. >>>>

These two questions raised by the Yangon Film School are fascinating and ambitious since there hasn't been an existing independent film industry in Myanmar and no media freedom for six decades [Art Radar Journal 2014 - page 1]. Just 3 years after a new 'democratic' government was installed in March 2011 [Turnell 2011] the media and film industry in Myanmar slowly started to open up many new initiatives in the field of media and film, often initiated by foreign organisations.

21. Mila Aung Htwinn: "Yes my last name is Burmese. My father was from there and came to Canada after he finished high school. His family was part Burmese, Mon, Karen and British."

22. <https://www.der.org/resources/filmmaker-bios/lindsey-merrison/>



Yangon Film School (2014)

1. How do we get more homemade (Myanmarese) quality filmmaking?
2. How do you tell your own stories?

Yangon Film School (YFS)



## TRAINING VS EDUCATION

It's interesting to research where a video training such as Mila's and mine stands compared to (national) art education in a country as Myanmar. In the interview with Field of Vision, Mila talks about his experience in Myanmar working with youth who showed incredible high respect for teachers in general. This pose probably finds its roots in Myanmar's history, because in times living under the oppression of a military junta, education in Myanmar was highly underfunded and teachers were underpaid. The people of Myanmar always had full respect for those who 'dared' to work as teachers and these feelings are still alive.

Both Mila and Van explained that they experienced that their students were very polite and incredibly attentive. This is something I witnessed too during my trainings as well. For example, even though my students weren't used to a school- and learning system and despite my western style of teaching including our language barrier my students were able to remember my instructions from a training one month before.



'Promoting freedom of speech in Myanmar' [Yangon Film School, 2014]

“I joined the Yangon film school in 2011.  
This is the first and only film school in Myanmar.”

Seng Mai Kinraw in 'Promoting freedom of speech in Myanmar' [YFS - 2014]

The film **'Promoting freedom of speech in Myanmar'** [YFS - 2014] opens with a beautiful scene of a young woman called Seng Mai who explains in a very strong way why the film school is important for her and for Myanmar. She also stresses the importance of documentary filmmaking for the identity of a country and the people. These two points motivated Seng Mai to continue creating authentic stories such as 'Last kiss' [YFS - 2014].

Even though the Yangon Film School was founded by a foreign organisation, the school has been able to successfully transform itself into a school with a (more) Myanmarese identity. In my discussions with Mila Aung Htwin, he told me that the school is active in training alumni to become tutors at the school. I believe this example shows great commitment when a foreign school tries to gain its own national identity by including local teachers committed to the school's goals. >>>>

In chapter #2 I will describe a similar example with a film school in Haiti, where the final result turned out differently.



*documentary: "Last Kiss"*

That's why documentaries are important for Myanmar.

“ Once we do documentary filming,  
we unveil lives.  
Documentary film is finding the unseen truth.  
That's why documentaries are  
important for Myanmar.”

Seng Mai Kinraw in 'Promoting freedom of speech in Myanmar' [ YFS - 2014]



## DYNAMIC TEACHING

Referring back to the filming of 'Unheard Voices': even though I could not join my team on their film shoot in Myanmar, I felt at that time that this was a truly **collaborative project** between students and teacher from start to finish. We combined our skills: my students were the experts about the subject and I was the film expert and responsible to get them ready for the shoot. Together we were able to create the documentary 'Unheard Voices'. When I talked to Mila about my experiences, he told me that his training and the production of 'The Vote' was similar to mine in practice. Mila called this a collaborative way of teaching '**dynamic teaching**', and we both agreed that this is an effective way of teaching to overcome barriers such as language and culture differences.



"I took ephemeral and experimental decisions in a texture of proud and eagerness to share this with 'the world', without realizing what effect this could have on the next steps of my training"

Mila Aung Htwin (March - 2020)

When students and teachers work collaboratively, it provides an opportunity to create a bond of trust between local novice video journalists and a foreign trainer. My interview with Mila was a talk of recognition and full reflection of my own experiences. We had both started in our roles as trainers with no pedagogical background. But our background as a film-makers fuelled our eagerness to produce 'perfect' productions, which was not actually realistic or achievable for the students without the interference of the teacher. These two projects, 'Unheard Voices' and 'The Vote', were honest collaborative projects between students and teachers, but frankly mainly relying on the interference of the teacher. I found it very interesting to hear what Mila had learned from his first training in 2015 and what changes he had made to his trainings in the following years because of his findings.



'Unheard voices' [Burma Issues - 2010]



'The Vote' [Field of Vision / EYERSTEELFILM - 2016]

When students and teachers work collaboratively, it provides an opportunity to create a bond of trust between local novice video journalists and a foreign trainer. My interview with Mila was a talk of recognition and full reflection of my own experiences. We had both started in our roles as trainers with no pedagogical background. But our background as filmmakers fuelled our eagerness to produce 'perfect' productions, which was not actually realistic or achievable for the students without the interference of the teacher. These two projects, 'Unheard Voices' and 'The Vote', were honest collaborative projects between students and teachers, but frankly mainly relying on the interference of the teacher. I found it very interesting to hear what Mila had learned from his first training in 2015 and what changes he had made to his trainings in the following years because of his findings.

There are several huge barriers when you work as a foreign trainer in a country like Myanmar. First, the students look up to you as a teacher because you're from abroad (from the West). On top of this, working in a country where it's not common or even allowed to express your thoughts makes it difficult for a teacher to have open discussions with students. But Mila said something very interesting: "When a teacher opens up and dares to be vulnerable, hopefully the students will follow." >>>>

"Teaching is all about exchange"

The reason I started my job as a video trainer was because I wished to train video professionals, so the final question I asked Mila was about his students “Do you know what happened to your students after they completed their training?” I asked Mila this question because I wondered if it’s maybe too ambitious to train young professionals in a country where there’s no national demand for independent video journalists. Mila told me that his graduated students had a great desire to continue in the (local) industry, but they found it very difficult to find a professional job. Only the few who mastered the English language were able to find a job within an international organisation and make a living. Those who lacked international language skills often felt underutilized by the national (film/media) industry. Bit-by-bit the Yangon Film School tries to become part of the national education system which the hope that future alumni at the film school will graduate with a diploma what is nationally recognized.

Two stories of survival and success which I consider to be great and positive examples worth to mention:



Have my students been able to establish themselves as independent professionals?

Cyrille Montulet ( 2020)



Saw Dee Ko Dee with Burma Issues (Myanmar, 2010)

## THU THU

In 2015 a young girl joined the video training with Mila and Van. Thu Thu was a very shy girl from a small village who turned out to be very talented and engaged in filmmaking. After completing her training with Mila and Van, Thu Thu wasn't able to find the (financial) resources to continue filmmaking. So she returned to her village and continued helping her father in his daily job of house maintenance. Mila and Van considered this a huge loss of a great young talented film professional. During their next trip to Myanmar (2015) Mila and Van called Thu Thu's father and told him how her skills are invaluable in the new Myanmar film industry, and with the effort of Mila and Van, Thu Thu became the second unit director at the training school of Yangon's Film School.



Yangon Film School, Myanmar

## POE K'LAH

In March 2010, as a result of my initiative, one of my most talented students from the Burma Issues team went on a film shoot in east Myanmar with a crew of 6, to film evidence of land confiscation (23). The team was traveling through a conflict-zone, highly contaminated by landmines [Myanmar times 2017]. Saw Poe K'Lah called me by satellite telephone and told me they weren't able to make shots of the fences which illustrate the land-confiscation, but I urged the team to shoot the missing shots. The next day, Saw Poe K'Lah stood on a landmine which resulted in the amputation of his right leg (24). I felt fully responsible for his injuries and moreover the shattering of his future plans of becoming a cameraman. It was my responsibility to offer Saw Poe K'Lah new opportunities for his professional future, so because of this I invited Saw Poe K'Lah to join my film shoot of '10 Doors' in 2013 [chapter #3]. Ever since this Saw Poe K'Lah continues working as the 'one-legged' cameraman.

23. The compulsory and uncompensated seizure of land from its owners by the state.

24. Being a video journalist in exile is the reason that Saw Poe K'Lah couldn't ask for official medical aid in Myanmar, the trip to a Thai hospital took 9 days.



Saw Poe K'Lah (Myanmar 2010)



Team Burma Issues, Saw Poe K'Lah wounded (Myanmar 2010)

## CHAPTER 2 /// AUTONOMY

Kapuscinsky (1932 – 2007) was a journalist who wrote about and reported on war, conflict, political coups and revolutions in Africa, Asia and Latin America for almost six decades. He is known for his remarkable way of news reporting, that is often called journalistic literature [Westerman 2015]. For me, Kapuscinski stands out because he paid great attention to the human factor in events and was able to describe aspects such as sounds, smells, and colours in such a way that made me as a reader feel as part of the occurrence. His great capability for describing events in such a rich way was a great source of inspiration for me. I remember in an interview Kapuscinsky once said: “Capture the world, you have to penetrate it as completely as possible”. When I look at Kapuscinsky’s words I wonder how to translate them into my lessons in documentary filmmaking, so I asked myself the question:

**What is the difference between watching and experiencing?**

This question triggers me to think more in depth about the strength of subjective storytelling in video journalism and how this can create new and other opportunities.



“A story is the beginning. It is half of the achievement. But it is not complete until you, as the writer, become part of it.

As a writer, you have experienced this event on your own skin and it is your experience, this feeling along the surface of your skin, that gives your story its coherence: it is what is at the centre of the forest of things.”

SO SILVA RERUM (25) [Kapusinski - year?]

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL AGENCY

In Photographic Universe [YouTube 2013] Hito Steyerl talks about what happens to the context of images the moment they appear on screen. One of her quotes stuck with me: >>>>

Steyerl is an essayist filmmaker who pioneers the language of the new digital era. She researches, asks questions and makes that language the subject of discussion. Steyerl says that making images public is a form of a transition, where reality is transformed to a new dimension where the public is enabled to create their own reality. This is in contradiction with Kapuscinski who tries to involve his readers in his personal perception of an event. Even though Kapuscinski originates from the analogue era and Steyerl focusses in her work on the the contemporary digital world of media I believe they have something strong in common: Kapuscinski and Steyerl both 'make use of' reality and transform this into a new format of words, reality is conveyed through transformation. When I read Kapuscinski 's novels I create my own image of his reality, in contrast to Steyerl's (video) art where the images are presented to me in such a way that I try to interpret one reality.

“ Through the transition images start to invade reality”

Hito Steyerl in Photographic Universe [Youtube 2013]



I consider Steyerl's two questions to be very important in my search of my personal ethical values in filmmaking, especially when I think about the students who I have trained to become autonomous professionals. I believe local young media professionals are in an unique position where they can decide how their images should present their reality, which is completely different from the point of view of a foreign crew who 'capture a story'. From personal experience I know that when I film I tend to adapt to the expectations of my audience, because I wish my story to be watched. In contrary, when I am in the role of video trainer, I have always found it important to teach my students **to stay in control of their own work**. I wonder why I teach my students ethical values about autonomy whilst in my own work I don't fully carry this out myself. I want to know what was the result of my lessons and messages about the importance of autonomy in their work as video journalist and for this I got back in contact with two of my former students in Haiti.



“Which images do we want to become real?”  
“How do we change reality by means of (post)production?”

Hito Steyerl in 'Photographic Universe' [Youtube 2013]



## HAÏTI REPORTERS

Atelier Haïti Reporters, a school for film and journalism in Port-au-Prince, Haïti's capital was a place where autonomy played an important role. This school was an initiative of two Dutch filmmakers/journalists <sup>(26)</sup> who were able to establish it with support from international development funds. The two founders started the school only 6 months after a devastating earthquake <sup>(27)</sup>, when a heavily increased need for food, shelter and health care and education arose. The demand for education was also huge due to the long-term poverty in Haiti and recurring natural disasters. Soon, in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, the country was flooded by Western media crews, eager to report stories from this impoverished and destroyed country.

26. Siebren Hodes (VPRO broadcast, Hilversum The Netherlands) and Ton Vriens (Associated Press – AP- , New York USA)

27. 12 January 2010, with a magnitude of 7 Mw. Between 160.000 – 240.00 people killed, Hatian government claims 316.000 deceased (number is still under discussion).



Students of Atelier Haïti Reporters (Port au Prince in Haïti, 2011)



When Haiti is reported on in the West, the news story often contains negative associations such as “poor, densely populated, over-crowded, aid-dependent.” The media plays a prominent role in shaping this public perception of a country like Haiti and tend to paint a misleading picture [Breen - 2013]. The two Dutch journalists, Hodes and Vriens, witnessed the situation in Haiti and felt a strong emergency to train locals to become video journalists in order to fill a gap in national independent news reporting. In October 2010 Haïti Reporters was established, and during the following 3 years, all together 135 young Haitians were trained to become professional photo- and video journalist. In June 2013, 3 years after the school was established and reached its goals of training local video journalists, the school building and all video- and photo equipment was donated to the most talented alumni, who were encouraged by the founders to continue running the place as an independent production company.

**RUVENS ELY**

One of the Haïti Reporters students I trained in the period September 2011 to December 2011 is Ruvens Ely Boyens, a young man who showed a great eagerness to learn and was highly talented. I lost contact with him for a few years, but in December 2019 we got back in touch. My first question to Ruvens Ely was what happened to him after he finished his studies at Haïti Reporters in December 2011. >>>>

In contrast to the (apparent) success of the intergration of the Yangon Film School in Myanmar [Chapter #1], the continuation of Atelier Haïti Reporters wasn't as successful. Even though the film school was handed over to chosen graduates from Haïti Reporters to continue as a fully functioning media office, they were not able to keep it going for more than two years. As Ruvens Ely told me (December 2019):

**“A small initiative like Haïti Reporters can't compete within an existing, corrupt media environment.”**

For people like Ruvens Ely, who I consider to be an honest and earnest professional, there is not much liberty when it comes to making a living in a country like Haiti you must flow with the established 'national rules', you work commissioned by an international organisation or you are jobless.



Ruvens Ely Boyens (boom operator) [Port au Prince in Haïti November 2011]

“ Between 2012 and 2014, I got the opportunity to contribute to the establishment of Atelier Haïti Reporters (HR) as an independent production center intended to produce programs for the Haitian media. We managed to produce “MétroMag”, a fairly interesting program for Télé Métropole. However, we could not last long since the Haitian media for the most part are not able to mobilize resources to have the service of our team. In general, journalists in Haiti are underpaid. Which makes them vulnerable and corrupt for some. Many of the former HR students have taken the initiative to set up their own production, others work as freelancers, still others are hired by international organizations or NGOs. This is the case with myself, I work in the communication unit of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Haiti.”

Ruvens Ely Boyens, (December 2019)

## JEANTY JUNIOR

In December 2019 I got also back in contact with another former student from Haiti, a young man called Jeanty Junior Augustin. I remembered him as a very serious and highly critical student. During class, we had often intense discussions, because Jeanty did not always appreciate my approach of teaching. I remember he said one time that he found me too experimental in my role as tutor, because often I told my students to 'just try and see where it ends' whilst Jeanty wished to receive a full detailed instruction. >>>>

What strikes me most about Jeanty's answer is the strong confidence he seems to have about a four-month training programme at a non registered educational centre compared to a four-year study programme at an established governmental university. I wonder if this reflects something about the educational level in Haiti, or are initiatives as Atelier Haiti Reporters trying to fill a gap in what is lacking nation-wide. In order to find an answer to this question, I asked Jeanty more about his expectations regarding his studies.



Jeanty Junior Augustin  
embedded with MINUSTAH (United Nations - UN Haïti)

### 1. With what intention did you start your study at Haïti Reporters?

"It was in my 4th year University at the Faculty of Law and Economics when I decided to devote myself to photography, videography and video editing. I started studying with Atelier Haiti Reporters because I wanted to become one of the best in the field."



## 2. At the end of your studies with Haiti Reporters did you acquire the knowledge you hoped to acquire?

"I don't mean to brag but Haiti Reporters was the best school in citizen journalism in Haiti. During the 4 months I spent there I acquired the knowledge of a student who spent at least 2 years in film school. I remember when we were in Haiti Reporters our Belgian photography teacher Jean Marc Vantournhoudt <sup>(28)</sup> put us in correspondence with some students of a University <sup>(29)</sup> where he also was teaching. When comparing our work, they asked us what are you year and we answered them that we are not in university we are in an intensive course we only have 3 months at the time. So it was a school that taught us a lot."

## 3. Did your training correspond well to the professional field?

"In Haiti there is not really a legal framework on the multimedia profession, so it's difficult to say but I think **'yes'**."

28. Jean Marc is Photographer / Exhibition curator at the Hauts de France Regional Photography Center

29. Ecole supérieure des arts de l'image-le 75, Brussels Belgium

**4. Do you feel you have autonomy in your work as a photo / video journalist?**

“Yes, I have autonomy in my work either as a photojournalist or as a videographer. I think so, because Haiti does not have an agency that produces photo or video content.”

**5. And do you think it is important to have your own agency?**

“But it can also take time for you to be competitive on the international market because the Haitian media does not really consume photos.”

I believe what Jeanty is trying to say is that he was trained as a high level video journalist for which there is no demand nation wide. I realize now, Jeanty and all other former Haiti Reporter students are trained by foreign tutors to become professionals suitable to work for international organisations. This confirms my doubts about whether it makes sense that foreign trainers attempt to school autonomous professionals in their own country.

One of the founders of Atelier Haïti Reporter was film journalist Ton Vriens, who spent 15 years traveling frequently to Haïti to realise his dream to support young Haitian film journalists by establishing Atelier Haïti Reporter. During the time I worked at the school I had many discussions with Ton and he seemed to be very convinced that 'our' alumni would be able to 'shake up' the Haitian media landscape. Ton unfortunately passed away in December 2015, believing that his dream of independent journalism in Haiti would survive by the initiative of Haïti Reporters.

Jeanty's answer confirms my doubts regarding Ton's theory because even in his best intentions, in the end Atelier Haïti Reporter trains professionals who are skilled to work for international commissioners, instead of becoming professional autonomous entrepreneurs in the context of their own country and 'shake up the Hatian medialandscape'.

## CASE STUDY 2 - VPRO METROPOLIS

Metropolis is a television programme produced by Dutch broadcast VPRO, which aired on Dutch television from 2008 until 2015. In this programme, around 50 local correspondents from all over the world provided an inside look into their lives, their community and environment. 'Reporting from inside, through the eyes of young local filmmakers, video journalists or video bloggers'. The local reporters need to be able to report from own point of view in stead of reporting within the borders of regular objective journalism. Each programme covered a different theme, and showed how the approach on this specific theme or issue differs in different countries, such as: how is it to be woman, teenager, depressed or menstruating?

Stan van Engelen is VPRO's chief editor and responsible for the format of Metropolis. I invited Stan for an interview (July 2020) because I wanted to talk to him about his experiences with the correspondents during the production of Metropolis (2008 – 2015). I was curious to learn from Stan about his view of guiding professionals from a distance and train them to how to distinguish themselves from Western film crews.



"Welcome to a world like you will never see somewhere else" - VPRO Metropolis (September - 2009)

From Senegal to Nepal and from China to Peru, flyers and posters were spread and put up at places where (video) journalists gather, with the invitation to become a member of the Metropolis correspondent roster. VPRO reached many journalists including people who were already involved in projects such as 'Freedom of speech'. VPRO's Dutch editorial team selected 50 correspondents from all around the world and with them they started the production of Metropolis. Each week a new theme was selected and an invitation was sent to all the correspondents to explore different stories in their environment related to this subject. The best 8 to 10 correspondents' ideas were selected for broadcasting.

**"A local reporter has a head start to create stories from an own point of view instead of adapting to the limitations of objective journalism"** [Van Engelen - July 2020]

Stan explained to me that VPRO gave their directions with unbridled excitement and an attitude of equality towards all the correspondents. VPRO's Metropolis wasn't a Western organisation trying to get footage for little money, but a serious broadcast programme aiming to cooperate with talented professional journalists around the world and provide them with an opportunity to gain experience working at an international and professional level. Stan calls this '**pure journalism**', an authentic way of storytelling



VPRO Metropolis reporter Maryorit (Nicaragua, September 2009)

**" It's about the effect we want to bring about, with images, text, sound and deepning of a matter."**

Stan van Engelen, VPRO Chief Editor (July - 2020)

I was very surprised when Stan told me about a survey Metropolis did a few years after the programme was launched. VPRO asked all the correspondents they had worked with if their cooperation with Metropolis had brought them any kind of benefit. Many of correspondents responded by saying that they felt this had been an experience that had helped them become more professional. The VPRO team encouraged the correspondents to prove themselves and really go for it, but serious discussions also took place at times when the Dutch production team wasn't satisfied with the quality and strength of the stories. Most of the correspondents weren't used to critical reviews, but they all stated in the survey that in the end they felt they were being taken seriously and learned a lot from this.



**“A local reporter has a head start to create stories from an own point of view  
in stead adapting to the limitations of objective journalism”**

Stan van Engelen, VPRO Chief Editor (July - 2020)

After I finished my interview with Stan I started to think about what had made Metropolis so successful and how I could learn from this. First, I believe it's quite valuable when a broadcaster takes responsibility and makes the effort to learn from their cooperation by taking a survey. During the interview, Stan emphasized several times that the cooperation of Metropolis and the local correspondents was not about 'pampering' them, and in the survey it became clear that the correspondents appreciated this equivalent approach. Bearing in mind Stan's statement about 'equality', I began to wonder how to translate this to a training when you are a foreign trainer in a culture where there's a rusted trust in the hierarchy between teacher and student. In Chapter #1 I discussed this same issue with Mila Aung Htwin, when we talked about making yourself vulnerable as a teacher by showing your own work. From my experiences in the role of a teacher in two opposite cultures as South East Asia and the Caribbean, both times I strongly experienced the hierarchy between teacher and students.

What I recognize in my interview with Stan, is the fact that we transfer technical skills to local video journalists. And thanks to this interview with Stan I realize that emphasizing the importance of local journalists reporting within their own environment. The next question is, how to share this with a broad, and maybe global audience? In my case study in Chapter #3, I get back to this question.

## CHAPTER 3 /// ETHICS

It was in the second trimester at PZI when I showed my classmates a short trailer of a film I was working on in 2019. The story is about a Rohingya girl, called Rukhya, who fled from Myanmar together with her parents, and now lives in an overcrowded refugee camp in Bangladesh. In 2017 my MSF <sup>(30)</sup> colleague and I decided that we wanted to make a film about the genocide on Rohingya communities in Myanmar and influx of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh. We chose to create an intimate portrait of a 12 year old girl called Rukhya and we followed her and her family for the next 3 years. During that time (2017-2019) my colleague visited Rukhya at least twice a year in the refugee camp in Bangladesh and filmed her. After each visit my colleague sent me the footage and I continued to edit it in the Netherlands to create a long documentary and a complementary trailer. When I showed my MEiA class the trailer of Rukhya [MSF 2019], one of my student colleagues raised his hand and told me that he found the shots too aesthetically pleasing which did not fit the story. My classmate's comment was an eye-opener for me and provoked me to question if a documentary story loses credibility or even its impact when it is filmed too beautifully.

30. Médecins sans Frontières



Rukhya - Cox's Bazar Bangladesh (December 2018)

### **When do aesthetics cross the line of ethics?**

The interviews with Rukhya and her father are not a reconstruction but they are styled in such a way to dramatize the situation. Even though video journalism is expected to show an unobstructed, undressed reality, this has not proved true since the birth of documentary.

In an attempt to answer my question about when aesthetics cross the line of ethics I was reminded of what I had learned in film history classes about Direct cinema <sup>(31)</sup> which stems from the cinema Vérité film movement <sup>(32)</sup>. Direct cinema can literally be translated as 'cinema of truth' which originates from rapid technological development in the film documentary industry in the 1960s (mainly in the US). During this decade there was a turn from formalized and standardized styles of documentary film making to the idea that the 'truth' could also be expressed through the aesthetics of the film. >>>>

31. Cinematic practice employing lightweight filming equipment, low-budget early documentarians.(Wikipedia)

32. Characterized initially by filmmakers' desire to directly capture reality and represent it truthfully (Wikipedia)

I wonder what the difference is between an interview where interviewees are being asked to retell an event and a scene in which they reconstruct an everyday event?

In Chapter #1 I talked about my experience as child when I watched the film Nanook of the North [Flaherty - 1922] together with my father. This film claims to be a semi-anthropological documentary with the intention of exploring the life and experience of Inuit people in Northern Canada and explaining it to the audience in the West. Flaherty creates a reality that arguably does not exist, or at least one that is a highly romanticized reflection of what the Inuit culture may have been hundreds of years ago. Different scenes to present this distorted image had been set up, reconstructions of events that have no basis in objective reality. What I remember from my own film education is that reconstruction is rated poorly by documentary teachers and is seen as something that is used as last option to fill gaps in your footage. Twenty years later I am starting to think differently about what I had learned at school, and wonder what the difference between an interview where interviewees are being asked to retell an event and a scene in which they reconstruct an everyday event. For over three years I have been working on the edit about Rukhya, because my colleague and I wanted to show an intimate and touching, but most of all a true story. I am editing, polishing and and stylizing the story of Rukhya, to create an attractive documentary meant for a western audience. Ultimately, I am reconstructing Rukhya's story as well. I am creating a story about a girl I never have met and she probably doesn't not even know about me.



Rukhya - Coxs Bazar, Bangladesh (MSF - December 2019)



Studio CyMon (The Netherlands- 2020)



## **THE UNCERTAINTY OF DOCUMENTARISM** [Steyerl - 2007]

Documentary forms convey, regulate, and administrate huge emotional potentials that they both keep in check and unleash explosively. They bring distant events close enough to get under our skin, and alienate what is closest to us. They heighten a general sense of fear that increasingly being used as a political instrument. We do not need to see anything concrete to feel the atmosphere of war. In this affective mode, documentary forms create false intimacy and even false presence. They familiarize us with the world but give us no possibility for taking part in it. They show us difference but sow enmity. Their shock effects are amplified; they can trigger horror and disbelief, just as they can bring endless relief and satisfaction. Doubt as to the truth-value of the documentary claim is actually part of this series of emotional simulations. It is precisely the documentary images' exited lack of focus, not its clarity, which gives it such a paradoxical power. They reflect the precarious nature of contemporary lives as well as the uneasiness of any representation. The abstract pixels that flicker across the screen are the crystal clear expression of a time in which the connection between images and things has become questionable and is under general suspicion. They document the uncertainty of representation, just as they bear witness to a stage of *visuality* increasingly defined by images where one can see less and less.

(text continues on next page)

In this second excerpt of Steyerl's paper 'the uncertainty of documentarism' I found some very real interesting theories which I feel relate to the question I raised at the start of this chapter "Can aesthetics cross the line of ethics?" Steyerl discusses the impact of citizen journalism and calls handheld shots that are often filmed with mobile phones an effective way of video reporting, which I consider as something completely opposite to the traditional stylized way of filming I am used to. Steyerl continues by saying that "this affective mode of documentary creates a false intimacy and even false presence." They familiarize us with the world but give us no possibility for taking part in it. When I read this I start to understand my classmates comment when he said the film Rukhya looked too beautiful and too styled. And I realize that this way of documentary filming can create a distance between the intentions of the filmmaker and how it is received by the audience.

Steyerl continues to explain about the handheld filmed videos which are images that are not 'in focus' and not clear, but says that this is what gives it such a paradoxical power in contemporary times. Maybe the standardized (traditional) way of filmmaking is too predictable for an audience nowadays, and perhaps this is what is lacking in Rukhya's documentary.

Does the documentary image represent? Maybe. One can, however, be certain that it presents its own context by expressing it. In the midst of all this uncertainty, this is something we can be certain of, insofar as documentary forms are concerned. But there are many open question.

**"How can one reclaim a documentary distance that would once again free up a vantage onto the world?"** <sup>(32)</sup>

Where should one locate the standpoint of this picture, if we are all always-already embedded into the power of the image? Such distance cannot be defined in spatial terms. It needs to be thought ethically and politically, from a temporal perspective. We can only regain critical distance from the perspective of the future, a future that has already changed and that released images from their enmeshment in power. In this sense, critical documentarism cannot show what is always present, namely embedding in the relations we call reality. From this perspective, the only real documentary image is the one that shows something that does not yet exist and maybe come one day.

33. I understand this as : Looking at things from a different perspective.



## VULNERABILITY

what does this mean to me?

I film people and ask them personal questions which means the protagonists of my stories are being put in a vulnerable position. But I never appear in front of the camera myself, simply because I don't like to be in front of the camera and I really dislike to be confronted with myself. For me personally, I feel that one of the best advantages of being a filmmaker is that I have a solid excuse to avoid the lens of the camera! >>>>

It was in 1999 during my final year as film student when I decided to make a documentary about a my personal life which I believed could only be told from my own perspective. I filmed my partner, family and friends, but not myself. I called this documentary 'Nieve en Holanda' (Snow in Holland) and it was screened at my film school graduation presentation in 2000. In this personal documentary you can hear my voice, but for the full 30 minutes duration I managed to stay off-screen. My teachers congratulated me on my experimental approach to storytelling, but when I joined the public graduation-screening I began to realize that in this film I had actually made use of my close relatives as if they were objects to project my personal story because I didn't have the courage to appear on screen myself.



'Nieve en Holanda' (1999) - (Alan Henrique and Fiona Hoogveld)  
"All depends on Cyrille, what do you want to discuss with us?"

The intimacy of a camera lens gives the person behind the camera power and puts the other person in front of the camera in a pretty vulnerable position."  
"The subject is not always subordinate to the camera and the operator, but the camera becomes oppressive by the way it's used.

Cyrille Montulet [Workshop PZI MEiA - 2019]



## TURNING TABLES

In the third trimester of my first year at MEiA, one of my classmates asked me an ethical question during class: “Cyrille, you have been filming people for many years already, but have you ever been in front of the camera yourself?” My answer to this question was “**No**”. In my attempt to get a better personal understanding about ethics, I could not avoid this challenge to turn the tables and finally put myself in front of the camera. >>>>

In the following class I brought my camera, microphone and lights and I asked my classmates to film me and ask me anything, uncensored. My idea was to get a better understanding of feeling power (the camera) and being vulnerable (in front of the camera). In my work as creator when I film, I search for touching answers and I make close up shots of facial emotions. When I succeed in this, I call my recording successful. Through my experiment in class I wished to create a similar situation, so that I could feel and experience what I do to others. My workshop in class turned out to be fun for me and it also seemed for the others but I didn’t gain the true understanding I was looking for. I realized this constructed experiment could never relate with a real situation.

Can critical reversing contribute to my creative and didactic practice?

## 10 DOORS, time to go home

Even though my 'turning tables' experiment in class (April 2019) wasn't completely successful for me, I was still curious about this principle and how this could help me to learn more about vulnerability in documentary film. I thought about a new situation in which I would place myself in an opposing position and see how another person would feel like in that position. The intention of turning the tables on myself as a learning point stayed in my mind, and in my search for a new experiment I decided to try again to involve one of my former students. In early 2020 I got back, one more time, with Saw Mort in Myanmar and I asked him if he wanted to switch roles and be my teacher.



'10 Doors, time to go home' [Montulet - 2014]

In 2014 I filmed footage for my documentary '**10 Doors, time to go home**' that tells the story of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. I spent two weeks with the workers, I stayed in their tiny rooms, slept on the concrete floor and twice a day we ate rice with fish-paste together. After spending a few days with them in their home I felt the group were relaxed around me and trusted me enough to start filming. With the help of an interpreter, my former student Saw Poe K'Lah, I shot ten interviews and even though we didn't speak the same language, I was able to capture some very strong and intimate stories. After the translations were finished I went home and started editing the footage. However I have struggled with the story ever since. In the end I made two versions of the film but wasn't satisfied with either. Six years later I talked with Saw Mort and I asked him to switch roles and **be my teacher**. I asked him to watch my latest version of '10 Doors' and give me feedback from his point of view in the role of a tutor as well as a 'local'. Most importantly, I wanted to know from Saw Mort what he felt my story was lacking and I was curious to find out what Saw Mort would have done differently. My aim was to learn from him if my ideas about teaching subjective reporting made any sense.

## MY QUESTIONS

1. From your point of view: is it clearly a short documentary what is filmed by a foreigner? - Examples?
2. Is this a story what could be interesting for you and your community?

## ETHICS

3. Do you believe the interviewees give certain answers, just because it's a foreigner who is filming?

## CONTRAST

4. What do you think I could do differently to be able to successfully publish this story?

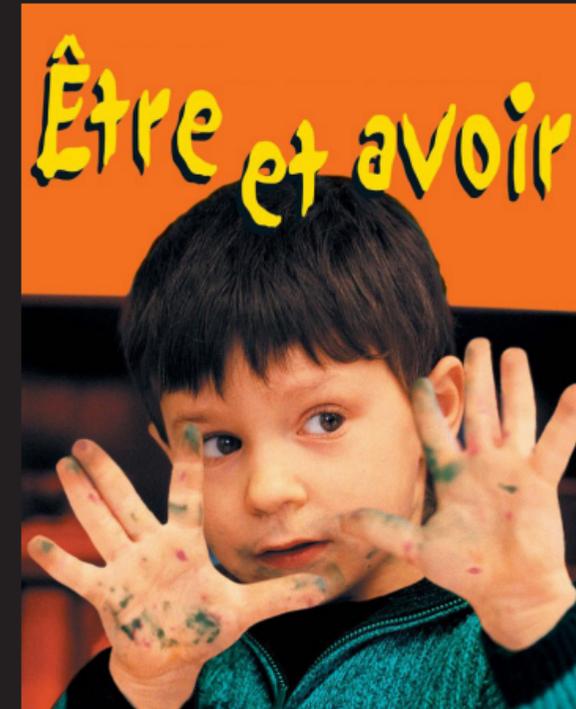
Unfortunately, I haven't been able to succeed in this experiment either. I lost contact with Saw Mort in mid March (2020). I can only presume that he got caught in the flare up of internal conflict and was staying in areas that made further online communication between us impossible. I can only guess what his answers to my questions might have been.

## POWER

The opposite of vulnerability is power. Because my two experiments failed, I searched for another example of a documentary film where 'power' and 'vulnerability' are challenging each other. As an example of the tensed line between power and vulnerability I would like to look at the documentary 'Être et avoir' <sup>(34)</sup> [Philibert 2010]. A story about a small rural school in France where all children between 4 to 13 years old fit in one classroom. The protagonist is the old-fashioned schoolmaster Lopez, who proves that the quality of education can only be partially captured in inspection reports. Mister Lopez has own way of teaching, which doesn't always match with national educational curriculum.

Being from French descent and a mother of a young child, I am highly interested in the subject of the French schools and I consider this documentary to be a very strong story about how the French educational system functions in rural places. I believe it was Philibert's best intention to capture an honest picture about the subject. In an interview [Baker chapter 2 - 2005]. Philibert explained his method of documentary filming: "What I like about making documentaries is that I can invent the film, day by day. With a mix of fragility and freedom."

34. 'To be and to have'



In an interview for the book "Documentary in a digital age" Philibert talks about his consciousness of dilemmas when he films in sensitive situations:

"It's important for me that things are not prepared.

The less I know about the subject the better I feel.

My point of view is not to teach the viewers something they need to know. I don't want to deliver 'a message'. I want to learn myself without prejudging. I approach a subject with a certain innocence, naivety."

Nicolas Philibert in an interview [Baker, chapter 2 - 2005]

I consider this quote by Philibert essential for each documentary filmmaker to be aware of, no matter if you're filming 'as a local' within your own community or when you're an 'outsider' who wishes to capture some 'exotic' footage. As a filmmaker you make use of the portrait of others in order to create your own work, with the possible gain of money and/or fame. But there is a fine line between telling a true and honest story involving people and where the 'exploitation' of these people starts. Early in 2000 a few leading media agencies such as AP <sup>(35)</sup> started to work on the topic of 'portrait rights' meaning that the person shown in the image should receive appropriate compensation for the fact that this/her portrait is used worldwide. AP invented some innovative ideas; when a video or photo is taken (by a western crew) and generates a lot of money the agency is obliged to make an effort to find the person in the picture to share a part of the financial earnings with the community of the person involved. This idea originates from the photo of the Afghan girl [McCurry - National Geographic 1984] <sup>(36)</sup>, when the photographer Steve McCurry gained a lot of fame (and money) with this girl's image whilst this girl (Sharbat Gula) continued living in poverty. I found the intentions of an agency like AP very interesting, but unfortunately I can't find any data how it this idea developed. In the following case study I will discuss the film 'Enjoy poverty' [Martens - 2008] and explore the subject of the exploitation of vulnerable people in the media.

35. Associated Press

36. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan\\_Girl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_Girl)



**"The camera gives you a certain power,  
the challenge is not to abuse that power."**

Nicolas Philibert in 'Documentary in a digital age' [Baker - 2005]

### CASE STUDY 3 /// ENJOY POVERTY (37)

In Chapter #2 I mentioned the film War Photographer about James Nachtway which I used in my training to inspire my students and start a discussion in class about the responsibilities of a photo/video journalist. I found it interesting to use this documentary film in my class since it's not only an exemplary documentary, but it also tells the story of a western photo journalist (a few decades ago) who travels around the world to report from conflict zones. After showing this film I asked my students what they thought were the strengths and weakness of the foreign reporter and if they believed they could imagine themselves to be in the same role. On my first day in Haiti to start working at Atelier Haïti Reporters, I met Kathie Klarrich (38), one of the guest speakers at the school. Kathie is a writing journalist from San Fransico who has lived and worked between Haiti and the USA for over 10 years. I joined her first class to watch and learn from her teaching method. In her lesson Kathie talked about her experiences of working with Haitian journalists. To illustrate her story she showed the students scenes from the documentary 'Enjoy Poverty' [Martens - 2005].

37. Full title: Episode III- Enjoy Poverty

38. Kathie Klarreich - Exchange 4 Change - <https://www.exchange-for-change.org/kathieklarreich>



'Enjoy Poverty' [Martens 2005]

In this film the Dutch director Renzo Martens <sup>(39)</sup> teaches people in Congo how to capitalize on their own poverty. Martens believes that, just like Western war photographers, the Congolese should also be able to earn a living by photographing all the misery around them. Martens shows two things in his films: first, he criticizes the **'aid industry'** in general and second he tries to help local people by training them to become professional photographers with the aim to sell their photos internationally. Martens tries to tackle a difficult subject: the money that is earned with poverty, in this case specifically in Congo, Africa. Aid money ended up being a major source of income for Congo, even more than copper, diamonds and coltan combined. Because Martens thinks that the Africans should also benefit from this, he makes a light artwork especially for them on which 'Enjoy poverty please' can be read. Logically reasoning but also completely disruptive, he asks the Congolese villagers: "If poverty is such a precious product that can be used to earn money, shouldn't the 'owners' of that poverty get a piece of it themselves?" Because: "It's supply and demand. It's a market out there," says another journalist.

Martens has an idea that could be compared or seen as a follow up on the AP's idea about portrait rights, as mentioned in the previous section. Martens believes that when the people of Congo learn to make photos what sell in the West, the local professionals can compete with international crews and finally earn a living. One of the most striking moments in the documentary is when a Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) staff member flatly refuses to use the photos taken by the Congolese for the campaign because they were "made for the money". Martens asks, "and the Western photographers, they also earn from their photos, why are they allowed to?" There's no response from the MSF employee.

I believe Martens stretches local ethical boundaries by teaching new photo journalists to adapt to the West's request for images of 'their' suffering. Martens' intentions are clear when he speaks to the local Congolese community "If you want to earn money, this is what the international media want". And then he points at a malnourished child and tells his students to take a close-up picture of the skinny boy. I believe Martens makes a very strong point and I'm afraid he could be right in his conviction that if the new student photographers want to make a serious living out of this, they should capture their own misery through a Western eye.

The main storyline of Enjoy Poverty follows Marten's journey to educate and train the local people as photographers, Martens also discusses the role and responsibilities of NGOs <sup>(40)</sup> in humanitarian development. Whether you agree with Martens or not, I find this discussion highly relevant for people like me who decide to work as trainer abroad with the intention of capacity building in developing countries. >>>>

Martens' film has raised many discussions worldwide about the intentions of NGO workers and expats from the West active in developing countries. There are groups saying that it's the hypocrisy of the NGOs to go to places to help but end up enriching themselves. But there are also discussions about Martens' intentions as some film critics [Herbert 2015] said that in the film Enjoy Poverty, Martens seems to use the locals as a backdrop to his own need of punity and in an ironic way broadcast this to the world. In the film, Martens shows a kind of repentance for himself but also for westerners in general, who might want to hear how bad they are. However Martens is not a neutral journalist either, he seems to have a clear agenda to confront western aid workers and media. According to Martens, the westerner considers it to be normal for cameramen to crawl around a corpse like flies and take shots of children sleeping under plastic roofs with UNICEF and UNHCR <sup>(41)</sup> logos.

40. NGO = Non Governmental Organisation

41. UNICEF = United Nations Children's Fund - UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Is there an existing national demand for photo/video journalists or is the demand created by the training provider?

and

Is it possible to implement the specific video / photo journalism training into the regular education system of the country?



I wonder what interest the Western journalists, like me, have in poverty. Even though both mine and Martens' intentions were both of activist nature, Martens' 'Enjoy poverty' was all about becoming a news photographer for the reason to earn money, instead of western crews running away with the money. Martens wanted to fill a national gap in how money is earned. On the contrary, my main aim to become a trainer at the start was less thorough, I watched Burma VJ (Chapter #1) and was convinced that some news stories deserve to be created by people who are involved in the specific story. My students joined my training because they wished to become video journalist and I tried to help them realize their dreams. The fact that we all hoped they could make a living out of this, has always been my second thought.

At the beginning of this Chapter I talked about the film 'War Photographer' presenting American photo journalist James Nachtway who features in it. With all that I have read about Nachtway, I believe his professional intentions were honest with a great sense of commitment and responsibility to the people in front of his lens. James started his work as a photographer abroad in the 1970s, in times that were technically and logistically completely different from today (2020). I believe that current active war media professionals face different issues in comparison to what James went through. Nowadays, in conflict zones it's mostly the citizen journalists who capture the poignant and close-to-the-source images and uploads them onto the internet, whereas Western journalists in war zones today seem to gather more background stories. The biggest difference is that the local/citizen journalists put themselves in most danger and in general don't get paid for this. In comparison, the majority of Western journalists wouldn't even consider going to places such as Syria, Libya or Yemen without a decent payment.

Martens 'Enjoy poverty' originates from the year 2005, in a time when citizen journalism wasn't fully established yet. Martens believed that the people in Congo need to learn how to take photos that will sell in the West, so that local professionals can **compete** with international crews and earn a living. Even though I believe there may be some truth in Martens' idea and I have great appreciation for his tenacity, my opinion is the opposite of his. I am a strong opponent of globalization where everything looks similar and where big businesses and organisations develop a strong international influence that can be detrimental to ethnic cultures. Within this context, I believe local professionals in developing countries should **embrace their local identity** and make this their strongest 'plus' in their work as video journalist.



"You earn one Dollar per month" - Renzo Martens in 'Enjoy Poverty' [ Martens - 2005]



'Enjoy Poverty' [Martens - 2005]

## CHAPTER 4 /// CONCLUSION

For my conclusion, I will highlight 3 findings from my previous chapters, which I consider to be the most important in relation to my research question. >>>>

My research question consists of two parts, first the implementations of ethical and autonomy values in video journalism and second, my personal ambition to promote subjective storytelling in local video journalism. In my research I simultaneously tried to explore both sides that I exercise in my professional work: my role of being a film maker and my role of being a film trainer. My main drive to ask myself questions is the fact that my personal view on the ethical values in video journalism have changed over the past two decades. The transformation of the global media landscape, and how videos are consumed today play an important role in my personal transformation. I was trained to be a critical documentary filmmaker and give priority to objective storytelling, and within this context I believe it is necessary to reposition myself and ask myself the honest question "Do I consider myself still valuable to continue as a tutor or does my personal transformation hinder me?"

Do my personal and professional ethical values hinder me from teaching future video journalists to become autonomous professionals and stand out from the crowd?

Cyrille Montulet (2019)



**4.1** In Chapter #1 I explained the important role that the documentary 'Burma VJ' played in my decision making to become involved in local video journalism. In this film, I witnessed for the first time how video journalists take an important matter into their own hands by filming a political event. I was amazed by what I saw in the film 'Burma VJ' the 'behind the camera' comments especially had a big impact on me. One example is a scene of Burma VJ when video reporters film the monks as they begin protesting in the streets. One of the monks demands that the cameraman stops filming because he's scared. But when 'the intelligence' appears and tries to confiscate the camera from the journalist, the monks realize that it is an independent journalist and they protect him from being arrested. For me, this scene explains exactly what local reporting is about. The impact of the monk's protests was something that could only be covered by a Burmese video journalist, because he or she is part of the story and fully understands it, as well as feeling the greatness of this event. Burma VJ made me also realize that I am highly privileged to have been born and raised in a country where independent media exists and where access to film education is for all and this made me decide that it was time to share my film-skills with young people who lack this privilege in life. I started my work as a tutor without any training experience nor any pedagogical or didactical knowledge. I was just simply very ambitious and passionate about the fact that I was going to change the world.

**“We are shooting this and the police are shooting us”**

'Burma VJ, reporting from a closed country' [Østergaard - 2008]

The film 'Burma VJ' made me decide that it was time to share my film skills with young people who lack this privilege in life. I started my work as a tutor without any training experience, I was just simply very ambitious and passionate about the fact that I was going to change the world with my teachings. One decade later, I look back at how I got started as a trainer and how I performed, and I discussed this in Chapter #1 when I talked with Mila Aung Thwin. Mila confirmed to me that the teachers' ambition can actually be dangerous, especially when the training takes place in a setting of development aid. I also talked with Mila about the great effect of dynamic teaching, so-called collaborative projects of teacher and students. Mila told me about the film he produced with his students called 'The Vote', and how he reflects on this 5 years later. I recognize the eagerness that Mila is talking about, as a teacher being sent abroad I felt the great responsibility to fill a gap and succeed.

**"I took ephemeral and experimental decisions in a texture of proud and eagerness to share this with 'the world', without realizing what effect this could have on the next steps of my training."**

Mila Aung Thwin (2020)

One example that fueled the pressure to be successful as a trainer: I remember when my British employer Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) <sup>(42)</sup> organized an in-country workshop in Thailand for all new foreign trainers with their local organisation. In one of the sessions, my employer (VSO) asked my new colleagues from the Myanmar grassroot organisation to estimate how much it costs all together to hire me for a minimum of two years and have me relocated from Europe to Asia. I felt shocked when the number came up, the amount of money that was invested in me to work as trainer could easily feed 5 local families for one year in Myanmar. I started my job as a trainer with a huge gap of hierarchy between me and my students. I started my career as a trainer with the feeling that I couldn't fail, I needed to offer my students a solid education that would help them in the future.

42. Voluntary Services Overseas, placing of professionals in developing countries with the aim to teach local people to become professionals where national education is lacking (CyMon)

**4.2** When I train people to become video professionals, first I hope that they dare to be creative and second I want to provide them with the opportunity to make a living out of what they have learned. However, I am becoming more concerned about the changes that have been taking place in the digital media landscape for the last decade, and I wonder if it still makes sense to train people in video journalism. Why am I asking this question? In current times the internet is flooded with amateur video-footage, which means many film professionals struggle more-and-more to make money out of their films. In Chapter#1 I refer to 'The Uncertainty of Documentarism', wherein Steyerl talks about '**Modern Documentarism**'. I find Steyerl's text very interesting, but it also feeds my current uncertainty about the future of professional video journalism. I wonder what is the contemporary key to the success of local journalists and what is required for them to stand out from the crowd? By doing my research and writing this thesis, I haven't found the answers to all my questions yet.

Do aid-workers/organisations try to create an industry that doesn't exist nationally?

In Chapter #2 I talked with VPRO's Stan van Engelen about the programme Metropolis (aired from 2008 to 2015) which was at the time a very successful and engaging broadcast format in where it's not hard to identify the 'personal point of view' of the reporters. I think the Metropolis video reports proved the unique strength of subjective storytelling that is a good example of how we could make full use of regional or national perspectives, but not limited to its local borders.

I asked Stan if he believes there's a future for a programme such as Metropolis and he told me that VPRO is thinking about expanding this format and taking global issues to a local level. For example, what do the people in Kenya think about the 'Black lives Matter' protests in the USA? Personally, I really like this idea. Could this format still work in the year 2020? <sup>(43)</sup>

43. In September 2020 VPRO Metropolis renewed their format and aired again

I would like to reflect one more time on the documentary Burma VJ from Chapter #1. The video journalists portrayed in this film are supported by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) <sup>(44)</sup>, an organisation founded by the Burma diaspora <sup>(45)</sup> based in the Norwegian capital Oslo. The stories covered by the DVB video journalists in Myanmar come from an internal demand, and this, I believe, nurtures their stories in an authentic manner. DVB is a media organisation that is founded by Myanmar people instead of a biased international organisation and I believe this makes the difference in how they report. The DVB correspondents want to tell their own stories and this is what they publish. Despite the English subtitles, DVB's (video) reports are authentic and not adapted to an international audience or stakeholders.

In Chapter #3 I talked about vulnerability and I particularly focused on the hierarchy between camera and interviewee. This is a subject I always emphasized in my video training, and I did this by using the examples of 'War photographer' and 'Être et avoir'. My intention by showing these two films was to encourage a discussion within the group about ethics in journalism. Hierarchy is an important ethical subject for discussion, as is 'manipulation' of the film footage which is also an important ethical value for the students to become aware of.

44. DVB started as a non-profit media organization based in Oslo, Norway and Chiang Mai, Thailand aimed at providing uncensored news and information about Burma (Wikipedia).

45. Burma diaspora refers to citizens of Burma (Myanmar)- regardless of ethnicity- who have moved to second country (abroad).

**“The camera indeed gives you a certain power  
and it's a challenge is not to abuse this.”**

Interview with Nicolas Philibert in 'Documentary in a digital age' [Baker - 2005]

In February 2019 I met my former student Saw Mort (Myanmar) for the last time and he told me that beside his work as video journalist he had also been working two years before as an independent video trainer in Myanmar. I was very curious how he designs his training, and he told me about his preparations for a training 'inside' <sup>(46)</sup> next day. Saw Mort is the grandson of a high appreciated Karen soldate who fought for many decades against the oppression of the Burmese military. This fact gives Saw Mort the privilege of having an international network (mostly Karen diaspora) who support Saw Mort financially and with this Saw Mort is able to train new video journalists in Myanmar and use up-to-date equipmen for this. Saw Mort told me that all his students are eager to learn filming, and the introduction of something like a drone brings in extra motivation. I believe someone as Saw Mort is very capable in teaching new film techniques and he has access to fundings to purchase equipment. But most of all I am convinced Saw Mort is a designated trainer to promote subjective storytelling within his own community.

46. Refugees from Myanmar who live in Thailand, call 'going on a duty in Myanmar' as 'going inside'.

**"I like to encourage students to use their own voice and experience as a salience to stand out from the crowd"**

Saw Mort in Mae Sot Thailand (February 2020)

### 4.3 WHERE ARTS BLEND WITH DOCUMENTARY

This statement by Steyerl in the previous section made me curious about what (documentary) images express rather than what they represent. During my research I visited some exhibitions and I witnessed some very interesting examples of how arts in news reporting are able to blend as a form of artistic practice in a variety of contexts. I noticed in a contemporary context that journalism and arts actually face similar challenges since they both operate to develop equal ethics and knowledge regarding truth-telling. But also, both professional fields encountered disruptive economic and technological challenges in recent decades, wherein practitioners' roles shifted and audience participation normalized.

**“We will never go back to a pure form of journalism.”** (47)

I believe this statement by Gerritzen might be right.

47. Quote from Mieke Gerritzen former director of the Museum of the Image (MOTI - in Breda The Netherlands)



“ I believe that images are really capable of capturing moments of reality,  
though often not on the levels that we imagine.”

“If that were not the case, then we documentarists could give up.”

#### 4.4 ASTRO NOISE

I want to finish my thesis with a short personal impression of the solo exhibition 'Astro Noise' (48) by Laura Poitras (49). The work of Poitras has a strong impact on me and inspires me how I could continue as a teacher in video journalism in current times. The installation of 'Astro Noise' that appealed to me most was '**Bed Down Location**', a projection of the night skies over Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. Countries where the U.S. military conducts 'targeted killings' using unmanned aircrafts. The title of the work refers to the military term denoting where a targeted person sleeps. The work also includes footage taken from the drones and this is shown on the ceiling of the gallery space. A raised platform invites visitors to lay back and gaze at the skies where the drone wars are conducted. At the same time, the public lays down to watch the night skies infrared cameras, as used in fighter planes and drones, which are shown on a monitor where visitors can see the thermal imprints of their bodies as they moved through or lay down on the 'bed' in the installation.

48. Astro Noise is the first solo museum exhibition by artist, filmmaker, and journalist Laura Poitras.

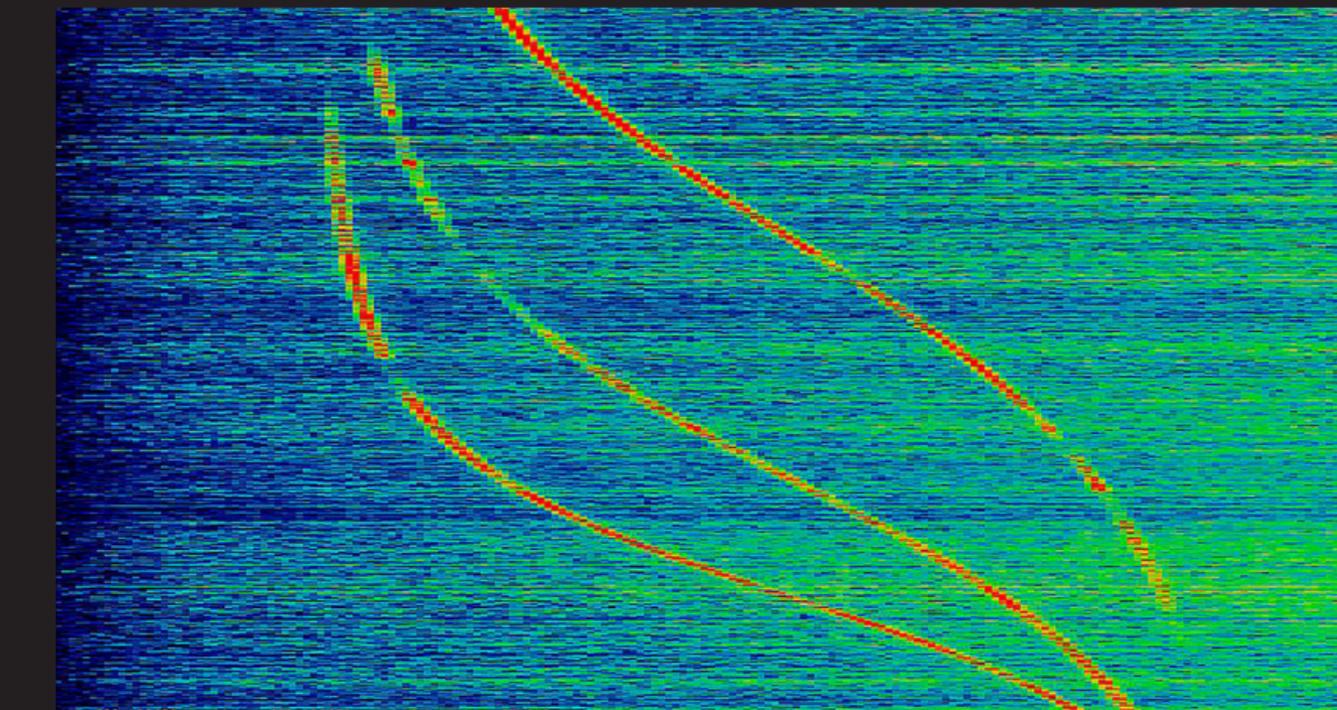
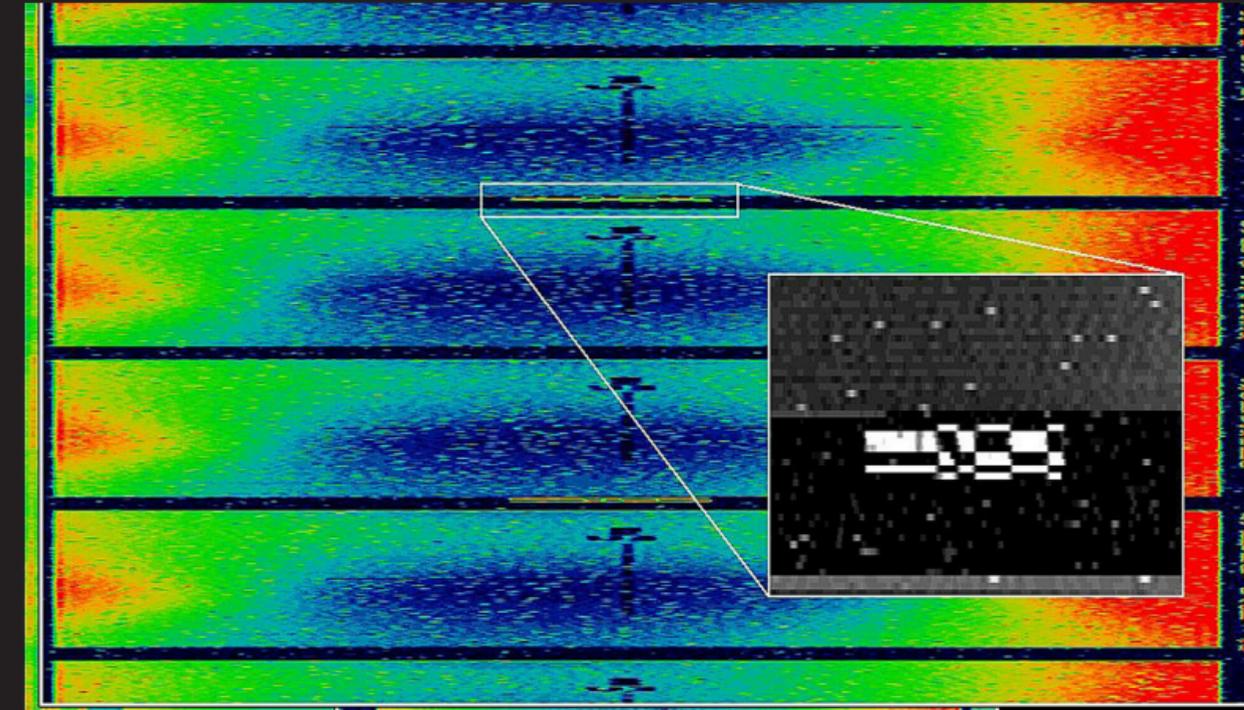
49. Laura Poitras is an American director and producer of documentary films.



Laura Poitras: Astro Noise (2016) in Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City USA

Here Poitras offers the audience the experience of seeing and **experiencing the feeling** of being watched. The reason I like the description and photos about Poitras' installation and want to highlight this in my conclusion is that it brings together multiple aspects of visualization by watching and experiencing an event or a news story. What typically appeals to me about 'Astro Noise' that it's a form of news telling what offers the art of atmospheric effect, where space and audiovisuals blend, and invites the audience to experience. I believe an installation as 'Astro Noise' offers the visitors an experience of an existing event and with this, they are **invited to create their own story**.

I am fully inspired by what I have read about 'Astro Noise', but unfortunately I haven't been able to visit the exhibition. If I ever get the chance to continue as a teacher in video journalism, I will certainly implement 'Astro Noise' in my classes as a contemporary format of documentary storytelling.



Laura Poitras: Astro Noise - Whitney Museum of American Art (2016)

## CLOSING STATEMENT

I started my thesis with my research question: >>>>

My answer on my research question is “**Yes**” it does hinder me.

My two years of MEiA studies and my personal journal while doing my research confirmed me that my personal views on video journalism have changed and I realize now that my professional values don't match with contemporary times. This will certainly hinder me to continue as a video trainer abroad with my same aim ten years ago. But I am fully inspired by examples as 'Astro Noise', and I hope I will get a chance to create future classes where I can implement lessons of 'experience of feeling'. I researched many initiatives and organisations who were active in the last decade in providing training for video journalists in developing countries and I came across many beautiful examples of productions created by local video journalists. I have gained the insight that a teacher in the setting of development aid can bring a great contribution to others by sharing technical skills.



Atelier Haïti Reporters, Port au Prince in Haïti (December 2011)

Do my personal and professional ethics and values hinder me from teaching future video journalists to become autonomous professionals and stand out from the crowd?

Cyrille Montulet (2020)



Personally I believe technical skills are very important, but I am more interested to inspire and motivate new media professionals to have the courage to tell their own story and not adapt to any 'standard', but I have growing doubts if a foreign trainer should set this as his or her goal. As much as I support subjective storytelling, I don't think it can be taught. As a teacher I can inspire my students, but to create and maintain authenticity in video journalism the new media professional need to discover his/her own way in this.

One important story in my thesis is about my former student Saw Mort. During my two years of training with him it was clear to me that he is a very talented cameraman. Instead of starting a well-paid job with an international organisation, Saw Mort is determined to teach and support young video journalists in Myanmar. I feel like he now continues the work where my training stopped in 2011. Saw Mort is able to implement a national identity in his trainings that (to my opinion) never can be done by a foreign trainer.

I am honoured that I am 'partly' responsible, as tutor, for the start of my student's professional career.

It wasn't me, but the students who created amazing stories, and still do.

## REFERENCES

Online publications and films:

1. Reuters Institute (2016) - **The Future of Online News Video**  
Retrieved from:  
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/The%2520Future%2520of%2520Online%2520News%2520Video.pdf>
2. Hito Steyerl interviewed at **Picture This Atelier (2010)**  
Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shszTJ98NZo>
3. Robert Flaherty (1922)- **Nanook of the North**  
Retrieved from: Classic Documentary Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RWHspo-5nY>
4. Anders Østergaard (2008) , First Hands Films – **Burma VJ, reporting from a closed country**  
Retrieved from: (trailer) <https://www.firsthandfilms.com/films/#film-1000285>
6. Sylvester Stallone (2008), **RAMBO IV**  
Retrieved from: (trailer) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0462499/>
7. Sonny Albarado (year?) - **Citizen journalism**  
Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/citizen-journalism>
8. Hito Steyerl (2015) – **The uncertainty of Documentarism**  
Retrieved from: <https://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-55/the-uncertainty-of-documentarism/>

9. Trinie Dalton (2009) - **Review on the film Burma VJ**  
Retrieved from: ?
10. Alex King (2014) – **The revolutionary power of citizen journalism, Little brother is watchin big brother**  
Retrieved from: <https://www.huckmag.com/perspectives/activism-2/revolutionary-power-citizen-journalism/>
11. Eflux journal #10 – Hito Steyerl (2009)- **In defense of the poor image**  
Retrieved from: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>
12. Sean Turnell (2011) – **Myanmar's fifty- year authoritarian trap**  
Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24388183?seq=1>
13. Burma Partnership - **Unheard voices**  
video: <https://www.humanrightsmedia.eu/81/video/81/> or  
<https://www.burmapartnership.org/2010/08/burma-issues-presents-unheard-voices-documenting-inside-voice>
14. Eric Hynes - Field of vision (2016) - **Interview with Mila Aung Thwin and Van Royko, directors of 'The Vote'**  
Retrieved from: <https://fieldofvision.org/interview-with-mila-aung-thwin-and-van-rokyo>
15. Mila Aung Thwin and Royko (2016) - **The Vote**  
Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/185673240>
16. **Yangon Film School** <http://yangonfilmschool.org/>  
Promoting freedom of speech in myanmar - YFS (2014)  
video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58jBjSiDw24>

17. **Human Rights Human Dignity International Film Festival**  
<https://www.britishcouncil.org/mm/programmes/arts/human-rights-festival>
18. **Art Radar Journal** (2016)  
Link not available anymore
19. Yangon Film School (2014) - **Promoting freedom of speech in Myanmar**  
Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wph0Hfe0ll8>
20. Westerman (2015) Ryszard Kapuscinski – **De draagbare Kapuscinski**
21. The Photographic Universe with Victoria Hattam and Hito Steyerl (2013) - **Photography and Political Agency?**  
Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqQ3UTWSmUc&t=552s>
22. Tom Breen (2013) - **Media Portrayal of Haiti Problematic**  
Retrieved from: <https://today.uconn.edu/2013/01/media-portrayal-of-haiti-problematic-says-uconn-researcher/>
23. Médecins sans Frontières, N’Gadi & Montulet (2019) – **Rukhya’s story** - Trailer (draft)  
Video: <https://vimeo.com/264255936>
24. Christian Frei (2001) – **Warphotographer, James Nachtway**  
Full video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xprAexISFZQ>
25. Des Wright (2001) in **Warphotographer**
26. Cyrille Montulet, HKU (1999) – **Nieve en Holanda** (Snow in Holland)  
Not online available

27. Cyrille Montulet (2014) - **10 Doors, time to go home**  
Video (old version): <https://vimeo.com/97211217>
28. Nicolas Philibert (2002) - **Être et avoir** (To be and have)  
Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S49qvE86Qs0>
29. Renzo Martens (2008) , **ENJOY POVERTY**  
Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vF0ZryOPpi8>
30. Lewis Raven Wallace (2019) Uconn today - **Less journalistic objectivity, more activism**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TKEYbMpFfI>
31. Stan van Engelen, **VPRO METROPOLIS**  
<https://www.vpro.nl/programmas/metropolis.html>
32. Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2012) - **Understanding Recent Political Changes in Myanmar**  
Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236728154\\_Understanding\\_Recent\\_Political\\_Changes\\_in\\_Myanmar](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236728154_Understanding_Recent_Political_Changes_in_Myanmar)
33. Rachel Sklar (2017) - **Citizen Journalism A Sudden Essential In Myanmar**  
Retrieved from: : [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/citizen-journalism-a-sudd\\_n\\_66309?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAJD1IcSIIdiLH3i99RMc5XZLm-bsbJhC5WS\\_9jVPv8XGwOEzUWG10VeqqCaRn-9T82RGsJVfab1Arc-wyGkcWmT2QWCXwRnytISNT\\_12MBXz12H\\_rKJkwdj19B4ESW\\_CR3celNZNefvT\\_AJtapLVb4MWrryDrPDP-CxTaxQ\\_M8Qlq](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/citizen-journalism-a-sudd_n_66309?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAJD1IcSIIdiLH3i99RMc5XZLm-bsbJhC5WS_9jVPv8XGwOEzUWG10VeqqCaRn-9T82RGsJVfab1Arc-wyGkcWmT2QWCXwRnytISNT_12MBXz12H_rKJkwdj19B4ESW_CR3celNZNefvT_AJtapLVb4MWrryDrPDP-CxTaxQ_M8Qlq)
34. Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, Mervi Pantti 2011 - pag 126-130 - **Amateur Images and Global News**
35. **DP review 2020** - link not available anymore

## **BOOKS FOR PERSONAL INSPIRATION**

36. Frank Westerrman (2015) – **De draagbare Kapuscinski** – Ryszard Kapuscinski

37. Reza (2008) – **War and Peace**

38. Stuart Allan – **Reporting War , journalism in wartime**

39. Susan Sontag (2003) – **Regarding the pain of others**

40. Stefan Hertmans (2015) – **Het bedenkelijke**

41. Laura Poitras (2016) - **Astro Noise: A Survival Guide for Living Under Total Surveillance**

42. Katie Klarreich (2005) - **Madame Dread - A tale of love, vodou, and civil strife in Haiti**

43. <https://www.amazon.com/Producing-Passion-Making-Films-Change/dp/1932907440>

ORIGINAL CONVERSATIONS IN FRENCH translated to English by Cyrille Montulet - Excerpts as used in this thesis

Ruven Ely Boyens - 26/12/19

Avant tout, permets-moi de vous dire que la formation à Haiti Reporters en 2011 était beaucoup plus que ce qu'on nous a promis. J'en suis très reconnaissant. Et je te remercie particulièrement d'avoir contribué à ma formation. Entre 2012 et 2014, j'ai eu l'opportunité de contribuer à la mise en place de Haiti Reporters comme centre de production indépendante destiné à produire des émissions pour les médias haïtiens. On avait réussi à produire "MétroMag", une émission assez intéressante pour Télé Métropole. Cependant, on n'a pas pu tenir long feu vu que les médias haïtiens pour la plupart ne sont pas capables de mobiliser des ressources pour avoir le service de notre équipe. En général, les journalistes en Haïti sont sous-payés. Ce qui les rend pour certains vulnérables et corrompus. Grâce à cette belle expérience, beaucoup de nos collègues ont pris l'initiative de mettre sur pied leur propre production, d'autres travaillent comme freelance, d'autres encore sont embauchés par des organisations internationales ou ONG. C'est le cas de moi-même, qui travaille au sein de l'unité communication du Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement (PNUD) Haïti. Depuis 2014, je donne une assistance en production de contenus (communiqués de presse, articles d'actualités, success story,...), vidéos, photos, gestion de presse, gestion des médias sociaux, entre autres. Malheureusement, depuis je en dehors du monde journalistique. C'est une nouvelle aventure dans le domaine de la communication institutionnelle. En tant que tel, ma responsabilité consiste à vendre les différents projets de l'organisation, donner une image valorisante de l'institution à laquelle je travaille. Si la finalité est différente du pur journalisme, il reste néanmoins que les connaissances en écriture journalistique et les compétences acquises dans le multimédias à Haiti Reporters ont été de véritables atouts pour moi. Les étudiants de HR sont heureux de leur polyvalence.

Remercient infini à toi et à toute l'équipe pour avoir contribué à cette formation technique intensive en audiovisuel. C'est dommage que Ton Vriens est parti un peu tôt. Aujourd'hui, il serait fier de beaucoup d'entre nous.

Pour répondre directement à ta question, lorsqu'on va produire un documentaire sur un projet au PNUD, souvent nous consultons les documents du projet (le Prodoc) pour se faire une idée du projet, ensuite sur la base de cela, nous proposons un script afin d'établir la façon dont on va procéder pour réaliser le film (personnage central, sur quel ton, avec voix off ou sans voix off, avec texte ou sans texte, etc.). Nous discutons avec les responsables du projet autour du script. Certaines fois, ils ajoutent leurs inputs. Après quoi, on établit un calendrier de tournage. C'est la même démarche que pour un sujet journalistique ou fiction. A la seule différence, pour un documentaire institutionnel, le sens critique du journaliste ne peut plus servir à grand chose. Communiquer pour une organisation ou pour une institution quelconque consiste surtout à montrer ce qui marche et non l'inverse. Le bailleurs de fonds donne sa contribution pour montrer des impacts. Lol.

06/01/19

Je vais essayer de m'expliquer mieux en ce qui concerne la communication journalistique et la communication organisationnelle. Entre les deux, il y a un point commun qui est l'information. La technicité reste presque identique. C'est peut-être dans ce sens que certains parlent de journalisme d'entreprise, d'autres de publi-reportage. Le journaliste et le chargé de communication ont tous deux le souci d'informer le public sur les événements, chacun en ce qui le concerne. Tous les deux partagent le souci d'éthique. Ils veulent dans la mesure du possible dire la vérité, d'être honnête et loyale, de veiller à ne pas manipuler les faits. Quand, en tant chargé de communication du PNUD, je vais sur le terrain interviewer les bénéficiaires d'un projet du PNUD ou une autorité locale ou quelqu'un du Gouvernement concerné par le projet, mes compétences journalistiques sont nécessaires pour mener les interviews, formuler les questions pertinentes,.. Cependant, ce même travail si je le fais en tant que reporter le côté critique sera plus évident. Comme journaliste, je dois essayer de soupeser, faire ressortir ce qui marche et ce qui ne marche pas. Pour le PNUD, je dois vendre une image positive de l'organisation. Si quelqu'un a un avis défavorable sur l'organisation, je ne peux pas le faire ressortir dans le produit du PNUD. Même si je peux le souligner au responsable du projet.

La télévision, les journaux et la radio ne sont pas exclusifs au journalisme. Les médias peuvent produire des trucs qui ne révèlent pas du journalisme pur.

Je continue avec cet aspect de la formation de Haiti qui consistait à permettre aux haïtiens de raconter eux-mêmes leurs histoires quand je donne la parole aux bénéficiaires ou aux populations. Je suppose tout de même que je ne suis pas trop éloigné du but. Parallèlement à ce que je fais dans mon nouveau parcours, j'ai des idées de production qui me tiennent à coeur que je veux produire.

Je suis disponible pour toute autre question dans le cadre de votre recherche.

Jeanty Junior Augustin

19/12/19

J'ai envie de continuer à étudier la photographie et le cinéma mais en Haïti il n'y a pas vraiment d'école si c'est possible de trouver une bourse pour aller continuer avec ces études ce serait une bonne opportunité pour moi. .

18/04/20

1. Avec quelle intention avez-vous commencé votre étude aux Haïti Reporters?

R- J'ai commencé à étudier à Haïti Reporters dans le but de devenir un des meilleurs dans le domaine que je venais étudier à Haïti Reporters car j'ai dit laisser mes 4 ans que je passais à la Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Économique pour me consacrer à la photographie, la vidéographie et le montage vidéo.

2. À la fin de vos études avec HR, vous avez acquis les connaissances que vous espériez acquérir?

R- Je ne veux pas vanter mais Haïti Reporters était la meilleure école en ce que au journalisme citoyen en Haïti. Pendant les 4 mois que j'ai passé là-bas j'ai acquis les connaissances d'un étudiant qui a passé au moins 2 ans à l'école cinématographique. Je me rappelle lorsque nous étions à Haïti Reporters notre professeur de photographie Belge Jean Marc Vantournhout nous a mis en correspondance avec certains étudiants d'une Université où il dispense aussi des cours lorsque de la comparaison de nos travaux, ils nous demandaient vous êtes en quelle année et nous les répondions que nous ne sommes pas à l'université nous sommes dans un cours intensif nous avons seulement 3 mois à l'époque. Donc c'était une école qui nous a beaucoup appris.

3. votre formation correspondait-elle bien à un travail dans le domaine professionnel?

R- Bien sûr que oui, mais si en Haïti il n'existe pas vraiment un cadre légal sur le métier multimédia.

4. Avez-vous une autonomie dans votre travail de journaliste photo / vidéo? Et pensez-vous qu'il est important d'avoir votre propre agence?

R- Oui, J'ai une autonomie dans mon travail soit en tant que photjournaliste soit en tant que vidéographe. Je pense que oui, car Haïti n'a pas une agence qui produise des contenus photographiques ou vidéographiques. Mais peut prendre du temps aussi pour que tu sois compétitif sur le marché international car les médias Haïtiens ne consomment pas vraiment de photos.

5. Le monde du journalisme multimédia a radicalement changé en peu de temps, comme l'essor des médias sociaux en ligne, mais aussi le tournage avec des téléphones portables, etc. Quelle influence ces changements ont-ils sur votre travail?

R- Tout le monde a constaté le changement car l'information vient au public plus rapide, avec le téléphone on a pas besoin de rentrer en studio pour faire le montage etc. Mais ça ne m'a pas beaucoup changé car je m'adapte et les grandes agences ont toujours besoin des professionnels pour les travaux et la majorité des personnes qui utilisent les réseaux sociaux pour donner des informations sont des amateurs. Et nous les professionnels on peut aussi bien faire ce qu'ils font avec le même téléphone qu'ils utilisent.