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"An Arrow, Not a Target": Film Process and Processing at the Independent Imaging Retreat

Scott MacKenzie

The history of Canadian educational film practice must be understood in light of the country's close proximity to the United States.¹ This proximity is not simply geographical, but also linguistic. Like other predominantly English-speaking countries (such as the UK), Canadian film production and education has developed in the shadow of the United States' dominance in English language fiction film production. For this reason, the role of documentary filmmaking as an alternative mode of film production and apprenticeship (in both its traditional and experimental forms) has played a central role in the development and perpetuation of Anglo-Canadian film culture, and the production practices that are taught and valued in the country. This is especially true because of the influence of the National Film Board of Canada / Office national du film (NFB/ONF), which for decades has fostered documentary, experimental, and animated film production in Canada.² Indeed, even practice-based film education outside the NFB often amounts to responses to the aesthetic and production strategies deployed by the organization and the documentary aesthetic permeates the history of Canadian fiction filmmaking.

Another example of this influence is the ongoing practice in Canadian filmmaking production and education of finding ways to let marginalized groups, both inside and outside academe, develop means of making moving images of their own, so as to depict or express their own realities. This practice of teaching film and video production to disenfranchised and marginalized groups as a means of "getting media into the hands of the people" is a legacy of the different programs that have arisen from the NFB over the last 40 years. From their ground-breaking Challenge for Change and *Société nouvelle* programs in the 1960s and 1970s that aimed to combat poverty and other kinds of marginalization, to their recent

"Filmmaker-in-Residence" program, which links radical filmmakers with activist groups and organizations, the NFB/ONF has been at the forefront of reimagining the ways in which nontraditional modes of education in moving image production can be implemented. These programs are hands-on, access-oriented, and far more interested in providing a space for marginalized voices than in developing an aesthetic. This reimagining of the process of making moving images functions as a catalyst for political involvement, personal empowerment, and social change. Dorothy Hénaut, one of the early film-makers/activists of Challenge for Change, stated that she and colleagues such as Robert Forget and Fernand Dansereau

saw the need to give public voice to those [who] did not have one, and they proposed a project to use film as a tool for change that would help disadvantaged communities organize themselves and take control of their own destinies.... If we really believed [in] people's right to express themselves directly, then we needed to eliminate ourselves from the process and find a way to put the media directly in the hands of the citizens.³

This program was an attempt to allow the working classes and disenfranchised to create images of themselves for themselves. Yet, the mandates of Challenge for Change and *Société nouvelle* went beyond the desire to make accurate representations of the working classes; instead, the program strove radically to redefine the way in which communities and audiences were built around films and videos. NFB/ONF directors became "facilitators," whereby they would demonstrate and supervise the functions of the equipment, but the final film or video would be under the control of the community groups. Challenge for Change and *Société nouvelle*, then, had the primary goal of having the working classes film, view, and re-edit the images shot of themselves, by themselves, in order to build a community base for activism. This was accomplished by screening the finished films and videos in union halls and community centers, in order to set up a feedback loop, with participants onscreen being able to critique and change their own images of themselves.

40 years on from this groundbreaking experiment, the NFB's Filmmaker-in-Residence program placed activist filmmaker Katerina Cizek in an urban Toronto hospital. The project is described by the NFB/ONF on its promotional website for the project, in the following way:

Everyone participates—everyone has a voice—and the message is revolutionary. Take one dynamic filmmaker; add a team of nurses, doctors and community members on the front lines in urban and global health; then introduce interventionist media—and you have Filmmaker-in-Residence, a new model for collaboration now recognized worldwide as a blueprint for positive change in the digital age.⁴

The continual presence and success of these histories and modes of practice have greatly influenced three generations of Canadian *cinéastes*, especially aboriginal, feminist, and queer filmmakers. Of special concern in all these projects was the attempt to find a way of circumnavigating the ethnographer's dilemma of obliterating the culture in front of the camera through the process of rewriting

it; the image-makers who were attempting to address social and political issues, such as chronic unemployment and poverty, especially felt this concern. To this end, those who in the past would have been mere viewers now themselves participated in the creation and dissemination of images. Such inclusion allowed the "voiceless" of society to produce their own representations of themselves, which was seen as bolstering their sense of community while providing them with a means of speaking to larger publics. The political "effect" of these image-making practices, then, was found outside the screening room, in what can be called the "counter" or "alternative" public sphere: a public space where voices from the margins can engage in debate in a way that is not sanctified by the dominant institutions of culture.⁵

The Canadian example, then, points to the ways in which alternative modes of education in filmmaking practice function not simply as means of teaching new skills to people often left outside traditional educational structures, but also as facilitating the articulation of their voices within the public sphere. One of the key outcomes of this process is that participants often found voices that in many cases they did not know they had. These process-based models of educational practice may have far more long-term value than traditional modes of practice-based film education. The two examples from the NFB/ONF point toward the centrality of "process" in the production of alternative modes of practiced-based image-making education in Canada, and the importance of a participatory practice in the development of radical, political modes of moving image production. What the Challenge for Change, *Société nouvelle*, and "Filmmaker-in-Residence" programs develop is a model of a process that is about inclusion of the disenfranchised, with inclusion being secured by letting the subject of the film become, in part, its maker too. Yet, other kinds of "process" have also become central to the ways in which alternative film practice is taught in Canada. The kind of "process" on which I focus in this chapter differs substantially from the participatory models outlined above. In this second example, which is central here, "process" is about the filmmaker being self-reflexively aware of the means by which film is made, where "process" becomes part of a DIY practice. Here, filmmaking is not about getting media back into the hands of the people; rather, it is about getting the means of production back into the hands of the filmmaker.

Film Education: Why Bother?

In the Canadian context, as is no doubt the case elsewhere, one of the key questions that often goes unasked when raising the issue of practice-based film education is: Why bother? If one is to rethink the modes and means of film education, one must also ask the question as to why teaching people how to make films and other forms of moving images is in any way important. In a society that champions an educational regime that foregrounds "learning outcomes" and "work skills" as the central, if not sole, goal of higher education, the idea of teaching more people how to make moving images seems, on the face of it, ludicrous. If

we look at the Canadian example, BFA and MFA programs in film production produce more graduates than can reasonably be expected to become filmmakers, or even to be merely involved in the film industry.⁶ Even for those who do get jobs, the Canadian film industry itself often has a branch-plant mentality in relation to the United States, with much of the Canadian industry producing sub-American products, most of which are never seen by anyone. Films that are produced in Canada often use Toronto as an affordable stand-in for any number of American cities, and Montréal for the cities of Europe. So, if the above points are true, is there much of a case to be made for the efficacy of developing practice-based film education in Canada further?

There are causes for hope and a number of preliminary answers one could put forward. The first answer is that the reimagining of what practice-based film education *ought to be* begins with a consideration of what the potential roles of moving images (as cultural, political, and social texts) are, and of the opportunities that such images afford for intervening in the public sphere. The second answer is that there is more than one kind of filmmaking, no matter how dominant what Jean-Luc Godard used to call "Hollywood-Mosfilm," or dominant narrative cinema, seems to be. To acknowledge these differences is perhaps to keep in mind what Alexandre Astruc argued when he outlined the notion of *la caméra-stylo*. Astruc's claims are as follows: the camera "can tackle any subject, any genre. The most philosophical meditations on human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province. I will even go so far as to say that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only cinema can do justice to them."⁷ Astruc's manifesto for a new kind of cinema also echoes with the way in which Canadian alternative film-practice education has undertaken projects to get "media into the hands of the people." The cinema evolves not by simply changing the *venues* in which filmmaking is taught but also the way in which *process* is foregrounded as a central aspect of what constitutes practice-based film education, leading to the development of new forms of cinema. The example that I focus on presently foregrounds both the cognitive and material processes that are central to film practice and education. I see it as being of particular interest in the context of *The Education of the Filmmaker in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas* inasmuch as it involves a rethinking of relevant practices, both for the purposes of pedagogy and as a means of reimagining cinema itself.

The Independent Imaging Retreat, or, "Film Farm"

As a new art form comes in governed by the digital realm and of course fuelled by the commercial film industries, the old forms like 16mm and super-8 are used entirely as an artistic practice, not driven by commerce. People are even making their own emulsions, I suppose readying themselves for when celluloid is gone altogether. I think this is all happening because people realise film is different from the digital. So, it's not going to disappear.⁸

(Philip Hoffman)

Perhaps one of the most innovative examples of practice-based alternative filmmaking education can be found at Canadian experimental filmmaker Philip Hoffman's Independent Imaging Retreat, more colloquially known as "Film Farm," which has taken place most summers on his 50-acre farm in rural Mount Forest, Ontario since 1994.⁹ Responding to the increasing bureaucratization of film production in Canadian higher education, Film Farm is a process-based, artisanal film workshop, where over the course of a week, 10 to 13 filmmakers, both experienced practitioners and graduate students from Canada and abroad, come together to shoot, hand process, tint, tone, and scratch films. By the end of the workshop, some of the participants will have produced a completely finished film, but most of them emerge with a black and white 16mm film that is still a work-in-progress. The darkrooms, screening spaces, optical printers, animation stands, and editing bays for this workshop are all located in a barn, hence "Film Farm." Goats live out back; roosters and hens wander around freely; free-range cows and pigs graze nearby in the adjacent field.

Since its inception, over 125 filmmakers have participated in the retreat, producing a wide variety of completed films, including *We Are Going Home* (dir. Jenn Reeves, 1998), *Scratch* (dir. Deirdre Logue, 1998), *5 Spells* (dir. Helen Hill, 2000), *Praise* (dir. Barbara Sternberg, 2005), and *Captifs d'amour* (dir. John Greyson, 2011). Almost all the films are set on the farm itself. Initially it may seem incongruous for films, a product of a nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* technological revolution, to be made in an agrarian setting. Yet, as Michael Schmidt, a local organic farmer suggests in Hoffman's film *All Fall Down* (2009), if things are not created on farms, the barns will come down and a way of life will end. Schmidt notes: "Barns fall down because our culture does not understand the need for cultivation... Anything connected to the human spirit which can fill these barns—that keeps them alive." Indeed, the barn and its surrounding natural environs play a key scenic role in a majority of the films made at Film Farm. The productive, cooperative, creative spirit of agriculture in no small way informs the filmmaking that takes place at the retreat.

Before delving too deeply into the actual structure of the Independent Imaging Retreat, a thorough examination of its genesis and *raison d'être* are in order. Like any good film movement, the Film Farm has a manifesto. The key passage for present purposes reads as follows:

Our Mandate: The Independent Imaging Retreat

The Independent Imaging Retreat began in the summer of 1994 as a pro-active response to the increasing cost and commercialization of film production programs, professional development opportunities for artists and filmmaking workshops.

Frustrated with federal and provincial cutbacks to education and limited creative opportunities for independent filmmakers, Canadian experimental filmmaker Philip Hoffman set out to create a context in which film could be taught and explored with integrity, innovation and compassion. The workshop would place an emphasis on experimentation, personal expression and the use of hand processing techniques. The Retreat began with a modest budget at Hoffman's

home in rural Mount Forest, Ontario. With the most basic film materials, an antiquated film processing machine, a makeshift darkroom and screening facility, ... it quickly became evident that imperfections and surprises were to become a critical source for creative and aesthetic possibilities and a philosophy for the workshop was born.

Our Mandate:

Is based on the following priorities:

- Maintaining a focus on “artisan” filmmaking.
- Combining a range of artistic disciplines.
- Creating contexts for public screenings and critical discourse.
- Remaining financially accessible to artists.
- Encouraging the participation of artists typically under-represented in mainstream film production.
- Encouraging the participation of artists living and working outside of major centers of film production.
- Providing an opportunity for Ontario based artists to network with international artists and curators.¹⁰

The workshop itself is built around a very specific notion of *process* (and one quite distinct from the first kind of participatory process briefly outlined at the beginning of the chapter): not simply the “process” of making films, but also the material process of processing them. The workshop downplays the goal of achieving a preconceived work. More specifically, it is not a matter of producing a prescribed, preordained finished film, and instead the focus is on chemicals and celluloid, chance and creativity; in other words, the workshop concentrates efforts on the creation of the film, both in terms of its material and conceptual characteristics, as *process* rather than *product*. What is practiced is a labor-intensive, artisanal form of filmmaking that is also a conscious rejection of the model of industrial-based filmmaking that now dominates North American universities.

Participants cannot preplan what they are shooting at Film Farm. This is only one of the many innovations that the retreat brings to practice-based film education in its standard form. At the Film Farm, experiencing the moment trumps planning for it. Thus, unlike most university film production courses, the readings that participants receive from Hoffman are not obtuse techno manuals or scripting models of the Syd Field variety. The goal is emphatically not that of having the whole film mapped out before exposing the first frame. Hoffman's own cinematic process is inspired by the Beats, and he begins the workshop by giving the participants a series of handouts that describe the philosophy behind process-based filmmaking. What one finds in these handouts points toward the reframing of production that Hoffman seeks to enable and encourage. The packet begins with ten or so pages of quotes, beginning with one by Allen Ginsberg: “It is possible through mindfulness practice to bring about some kind of orderly observation of the phenomenology of the mind and to produce a poetics. ... Observe your mind rather than force it, you will always come up with something that links to previous thought forms. It is a question of trusting your own mind finally and trusting your tongue to express the mind's fast puppet... spitting forth intelligence without embarrassment.”¹¹ This quotation sets the framework

for the mental practice Hoffman envisages as central to self-exploration and the creative process. He continues with quotes, referring to memory and the photographic image, taken from Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*: “The (true) realist does not take the photo as a copy of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art... its testimony bears not on the object but on time... the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation;”¹² and from Walter Benjamin's “Theses on the Philosophy of History”: “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.”¹³ These quotes illustrate the profound role played by chance and serendipity in the practice of filmmaking as a means of self-expression; they bring focus to the thought processes that lie behind experimental and exploratory image-making, placing the oft-fetishized technical skills required to reproduce images that everyone has seen countless times before on the back burner, so as to foreground instead the lived moment as it is experienced and then reimagined and understood through memory. Hoffman also provides quotes from experimental filmmakers like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Maya Deren, and David Lynch, along with excerpts from Robert Bresson's *Notes of the Cinematographer* and writings on the function of memory. Also included are his own notes on process cinema:

PROCESS CINEMA: collect, reflect, revise—shooting editing writing shooting writing shooting...

Following “life's threads” in filmmaking through COLLECT REFLECT REVISE,

PROCESS CINEMA: AN ARROW NOT A TARGET¹⁴

On a more technical front, he provides notes on hand processing, shooting, tinting and toning, and “Chemistry and Alchemy of Color,” a practical and philosophical overview of film chemistry by German experimental filmmaker and “film alchemist” Jürgen Reble.¹⁵ Therefore, both practical and philosophical work is foregrounded as part of practiced-based education, but the canon of texts is strikingly different from that of a typical film school.

To achieve greater clarity about this concept of “process,” it is helpful to outline the actual structure of the seven-day program: on the first day, participants shoot some film, familiarizing themselves with the hand-cranked Bolex (many have only used video at this point in their careers and, among other things, are not used to being limited to the 28-second shot), and then proceed to the “Swallow Room” (swallows nest in the rafters above) in the basement of the barn, where the darkrooms are, to hand process their film with the aid of hoses and buckets. It is then left outside to dry overnight on makeshift clotheslines, while screening of experimental, hand-processed works takes place in the upstairs area of the barn. On the second day, the participants run their rushes through 16mm projectors to see what they have captured on film, and to get a better feel for exposures and the texture and materiality of the stock. They then go out and shoot more. In the afternoon, various workshops are run: participants learn about, and practice, reading light meters and setting f-stops, tinting and toning, bleaching, painting on films, scratching off emulsion and dyeing images. The materiality of the hand

processing (the presence of dirt and scratches, for instance) is used to foreground the visual possibilities of the stock and the beauty of chance. On the third day, participants learn about optical printing, which is done by hand in the barn. There is also an animation stand for those who wish to shoot and reshoot frame by frame, or to draw their own animation on makeshift cells. The rest of the week is spent shooting one's film, hand processing it, and editing together the material on one of the four Steenbecks in the barn. On the final day, each participant presents his or her work at a final screening. Throughout the week, each night has a dedicated screening of works that relate to artisanal, process-based filmmaking—on clear nights, the screenings are often held outdoors (each year on average 50 or so films are screened throughout the retreat). This educational process is not simply about learning a skill, but also about incorporating everything into film production that is typically left on the cutting room floor in order to make a perfect product.

The changes in filmmaking that flow from this process are not simply aesthetic ones. Speaking in the context of the disappearance of 16mm filmmaking, and indeed analogue itself, curator and filmmaker Chris Gehman notes: "The Independent Imaging Retreat has played a crucial part in North America in developing and disseminating the basic skills and knowledge necessary for artists to begin taking control of those crucial elements of the filmmaking process that are becoming harder to find from commercial sources." Gehman describes the fundamental relationship between process-based practice and a new form not only of production but also of spectatorship in the following manner:

The filmmaker builds images, ideas, stories, atmospheres, while at the same time keeping the method of construction of the film, and the images which make it up, present in the viewer's consciousness. In this context, the nicks, scratches and inconsistencies in development which result when a roll of film is processed "spaghetti-style" in a plastic bucket are not seen as a problem—as they certainly would [be] in making a commercial movie!—but become part of the film's style and method. Artists mining this cinematic vein tend also to embrace a process-oriented mode of production, in which the film's form and subject are discovered in the course of the making, rather than following a preconceived script or plan—an art of discovery, then, not only of management and execution. This is what allows these artists to dispense with the predictability of laboratory results, knowing that footage they hoped would be particularly good might not turn out as expected in the processing. It is a practice which embraces genuine experimentation and the discovery of a personal method of production.¹⁶

This kind of process allows filmmakers not only to discover a different kind of film practice but also to reimagine why one might want to make films in the first place. Filmmaking, as it is understood here, is not a mere means of making a preconceived statement but also a tool for self-exploration. The process involves transforming one's own practice by working creatively with what would typically be seen as mistakes. The point is to reframe these "mistakes" as opportunities actively to engage with the contingencies that inevitably go hand in hand with hand processing.

Capital, or, Find the Cost of Freedom

While liberating the filmmaker from techno-fetishism is a key part of the process of Film Farm, the point is also to take issue with the often unspoken rationales that underlie the assumptions of how "film production" ought to be taught. As can be seen in the "Our Mandate" manifesto, one of the key catalysts for Film Farm was the sterile and stultifying nature of so much that passes for practice-based film education, with its fetishization of technological mastery. Janine Marchessault picks up on this aspect of the philosophy of Film Farm and outlines the pedagogical, and feminist, impetus behind the beginnings of the retreat:

Hoffman, weary of overseeing large classes and high end technologies at film school, conceived of a different pedagogical model for teaching film production. Instead of the urban, male dominated and technology heavy atmosphere, The Independent Imaging Workshop would be geared towards women and would feature hand-processing techniques in a low-tech nature setting. The process encouraged filmmakers to explore the environment through film, and to explore film through different chemical processes.¹⁷

In the early years, women made up the majority of the participants in each group; indeed, Hoffman once ran the retreat for women only, creating a space that allowed them to work outside the techno-fetishizing frameworks that often dominate male-centered film production in university classes. Gehman develops these ideas when he notes that the Film Farm was first started "to encourage a direct, hands-on approach to filmmaking that is far removed from the costly, hierarchical and inaccessible industrial model, with its intensive division of labor into many specialized craft areas." He goes on to situate Film Farm as part of a developing trend in film practice and education:

The retreat is part of a little-recognized international movement towards what might be called an artisanal mode of filmmaking—one in which the artist works directly on every stage of a film, from shooting and editing to the processing and printing of the film stock itself. In the past, even the most solitary of avant-garde filmmakers have usually turned the processing, printing, and negative cutting of their films over to professional film laboratories whose primary products are commercial films, advertisements, television programs, etc. A new generation of filmmakers has emerged, willing to forego the predictability and standardization of industrial processes in favor of direct control of their materials, motivated by a combination of necessity and curiosity.¹⁸

Hoffman himself astutely articulates the problems surrounding technology and capital in university-run film schools, describing the chicken-and-egg dilemma of the institutional educational space in the following manner:

The problem that we get into at film schools is that everything needs to be big... We need the newest technology so we need more money... so we need more students... so we get government cuts... and we can't run this big thing that's been

created. It gets out of control. So we started the Film Farm, tore away some of that film school infrastructure so we could get back to the things we like about working in this art form.¹⁹

When the need for the latest technology becomes paramount in order to offer students "proper" training, then the highly conservative and capitalistic philosophy that underlies this sort of training is drawn into relief. What one finds is that when technology reins supreme, its mastery and deployment often leads to the virtual neglect of the actual creative qualities of the films being produced. This produces groups of students able to shoot technologically advanced films, but with little time left to think about the content of the works and the specificity of the medium (as one of the reasons for wanting to make a film, in lieu of writing a short story or painting a picture).

Material Process, or, Return to Zero

One of the central components of Film Farm is the celebration of the aspects of the material process of filmmaking that are often elided or seen as negative, such as scratching your print. At the retreat, these very "faults" are seen as central to the process of filmmaking itself. As filmmaker Cara Morton notes: "Nothing, I mean nothing, beats stomping on your film, rubbing it against trees, rolling around with it in the grass or even chewing on it like bubblegum."²⁰ Morton does note that the last example is a hyperbolic one in the context of what she actually did with her film stock at the Film Farm (though if she had wanted to chew on it, no one would have stopped her). All this directly contradicts the philosophy of traditional film schools, which tends to be about a very different kind of control. Indeed, part of the problem with traditional film schools is the fetishization of mastery. In the case of hand processing, Hoffman describes the dialectic between control and its loss as part of the very process of liberation from these forces as follows:

It's sort of having control of the whole process and at the same time you are out of control. You have a pact with the process...with the world, that it has some say in what the film will be. You have great control in, for example, hand processing the film yourself...you don't have to give it to the man with the white lab coat any more...and all your money along with it....In the hand processed film you are actually putting the film in the developer, swishing it around and putting it into different processes. What's great about hand processed film is that you are never in total control. So it's again being in control and at the same time relinquishing control because within a few seconds you can lose a beautiful image you love by leaving it in a chemical too long or not long enough.²¹

Marchessault also foregrounds the philosophy of hand-processing in the process-oriented model of filmmaking: "Where work prints serve to protect the original negative from the processes of post-production, the films produced at the workshop use reversal stock and thus include the physical traces of processing

and editing, an intense tactility that will be constitutive of the final print of the film." Here, the roughing up of the smooth surface of the film becomes part of the work's projected image and therefore part of the total work itself. She goes on to note the very different role that films made at Film Farm have within a larger scheme of things on account of their status as "works in progress," as compared to finished "works of art."

Many of the films produced at the workshop are never completed as final works but stand as film experiments—the equivalent of a sketchbook. This is the workshop's most important contribution to keeping film culture alive in Canada. The emphasis on process over product, on the artisanal over professional, on the small and the personal over the big and universal which has been so beneficial for a new generation of women filmmakers, also poses a resistance to an instrumental culture which bestows love, fame and fortune on the makers of big feature narratives.²²

One of the many achievements of the workshop, then, is that it has brought filmmakers back to some fundamental questions: What might motivate someone to make films in the first place, or, as I put it earlier in the chapter, why would one even bother with practice-based film education? As Morton notes, the Film Farm works as a way of reprogramming, or perhaps, more aptly, reexamining why one would even want to make films:

I went to the workshop in the first place because I hate film. I mean sometimes I have to wonder, what has gotten into me? Why am I putting myself through this agony? I've spent most of my grant money. I'm in the midst of editing and I find myself asking: what is this damn film about anyway? Why am I making it? At this point those of you who run screaming from process-oriented work can laugh at me. I don't plan much....I like to [let] things happen, letting that creative, unconscious self reign. But sooner or later that insightful...self turns on me and I'm left stranded in the dark editing suite with the corpse of my film and that evil monster self who thinks analytically, worries about money and just doesn't get it.²³

The cost of making a film at Film Farm runs to about CND\$800 and that also includes the participants' food for the week (therefore, no need for craft services). In contrast, in contemporary film production, even at film schools, the cost of making a short film is often prohibitive. Taking the need for limitless capital out of the equation, process-oriented production places the film itself back at centre-stage, relieving the filmmakers of any need to think of their work in terms of big budgets and distribution deals. It is not a strategy for getting rich, but as noted earlier, most film-school graduates do not end up working in the industry, and never produce their imagined blockbuster epics. Artisanal filmmaking refocuses the teaching of film production on the possibilities of the film medium, and not on the ability, and at times all-consuming need, to raise capital. It is also a way forward for the production of artistically viable works in the context of a small nation.

The Experimental Writing Workshop, or, Book Farm

Part of the “Our Mandate” manifesto proclaims that the workshop wishes to “create contexts for public screenings and critical discourse.” That aspect of Film Farm has developed greatly over the last four years, with the advent of annual guest curators who select screening programs. This praxis has been further enhanced by the development of the Experimental Writing Workshop or “Book Farm,” which runs alongside Film Farm, and brings together academics and curators to workshop their books in progress on nonmainstream image-making practices. Co-organized by Janine Marchessault and myself, the workshop brings together writers to explore creative and critical writing practices outside the confines of traditional educational and institutional contexts. At Book Farm, writers work on their books, giving each other daily feedback as they write in the same process-oriented manner as Film Farm proper, with both groups partaking in communal meals and screenings. The topics covered by writers have been wide and varied, including film manifestos, the cinema of Guy Debord, Hollis Frampton’s *Magellan* Project, the early works of John Greyson, experimental 3D cinema in the 1950s and the Festival of Britain, the works of Humphrey Jennings and Jacques Cousteau, among many others. Book Farm applies the process-oriented philosophy of Film Farm to the equally solitary act of academic writing. Most academics get feedback on their work from conferences, by circulating near-finished drafts to their colleagues, or from anonymous peer reviewers. Feedback is rarely, if ever, gained as part of the writing process itself. At Book Farm, the process of writing is, out of necessity, an act of dialogue as the Experimental Writing Workshop takes as a given that writing itself is always an implicitly dialogic process. Therefore, at Book Farm, explicit dialogue between writers takes center stage as part of the creative process of academic and curatorial writing. The integration of writers and filmmakers from the Independent Imaging Retreat and the Experimental Writing Workshop highlights the ways in which both research and creativity are practices centered on the process of bringing ideas into being. As a result, the initiative takes distance from the notion that academic writing is a process-neutral undertaking. Indeed, the workshop accentuates the fact that engaged writing is actually a form of creative and philosophical reportage on various dialogues that the writer has engaged in; dialogues that have spurred the ideas now being committed to paper. What is achieved is a rethinking of what it means to write, specifically to write academic and philosophical work, and of what the communicative, political, and sociological stakes of the writing process are. Writing moves from the solitary actions of writers in rooms of their own and into the public sphere of dialogue and debate.

Lessons in Process, or, Globalized Film Farm

Book Farm is a logical expansion of the Film Farm ethos, and Hoffman has devised other forms of outreach based on the philosophy of process over product.

While Film Farm itself is very localized in nature, Hoffman has taught his hand-processing workshop to different groups and indeed at locations outside the Farm itself. One year, Hoffman adapted the Film Farm Program for children, where they too learned how to make films by hand. He has also run workshops in conjunction with the Durham Fabulous Fringe Film Festival. And, for the last four years, Hoffman has taught a two-week hand-processing course at the International School of Film and Television (EICTV) in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba. Hoffman has recently released *Lessons of Process* (Canada, 2012), a half-hour experimental documentary about his time at the school, which documents his experiences there teaching hand processing, the devastating Haitian earthquake that took place during the week of the workshop, and the slow decline of his father’s health back in Owen Sound, Ontario. The film is an exemplary example of the practice of processing that Hoffman teaches: the film is built around the notion that lived experience and everyday life greatly influence the kinds of films artists make; it shows how these experiences often become part of the work produced; and what happens when a film’s making becomes part of the narrative of the film itself. *Lessons of Process* is about symbolic fathers (radical Latin American filmmaker Fernando Birri, who founded and “fathered” the School—with Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez and Cuban film maker Julio García Espinosa—and who called the institution the “School of Three Worlds”) and biological ones (Hoffman’s own). The film has a tripartite structure, juxtaposing Cuba, Haiti, and Canada, and thereby allowing these three worlds to speak with each other, but without overdetermining the meaning of the images on the screen, or drawing simple parallels between contiguous events. At the same time, a central feature of the film is how these elements intersect with Hoffman’s own life. *Lessons in Process* stands as an exemplary documentary film about the tapestry of these three worlds, but also about process-oriented practiced-based film education itself (as Hoffman says in his process cinema notes: “Following ‘life’s threads’ in filmmaking through COLLECT REFLECT REVISE”). More specifically, the film ruminates on the ways in which filmmakers find their films in their surroundings and lived experiences, as compared with an approach that brings a preconceived, cookie-cutter plan to a film shoot, leading to an inevitable and generic outcome. Process-oriented pedagogy and production center on the journey one goes through while making a film—a process of discovery—and do so to break away from the mantra that shooting is all about getting the preplanned vision of the film onto the screen. The meaning and structure of *Lessons in Process* is discovered through the process of living and working with the captured material, and not through some hermetic world of preplanning and preproduction. This is the real lesson that process-oriented pedagogy aims to impart to students and filmmakers.

In Lieu of a Conclusion, or, the Journey, Not the Destination

In this chapter, I have argued that the new and most radical models of teaching filmmaking practice, at least in Canada, are ones that lie outside the

traditional structures of education in film production (and in Canada these are firmly embedded in the universities). Despite the valid work that these institutions do (indeed, Hoffman himself is a university professor), the migration of educational practice outside the institution allows for a reimagining not only of how film is taught, but of what exactly film is or ought to be. The move to a new sphere and method of practice allows filmmakers to think about how films communicate ideas and how filmmaking allows for political, cultural, and social self-examination. And Hoffman is not alone in getting film education out of the hands of film schools in Canada. Artist-run collectives like LIFT (Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto), the Saskatchewan Filmpool in the Prairies, and the Double Negative Collective in Montreal all engage in practices that allow aspiring filmmakers to find their own voices, and their own specific models of film production, through processes of trial and error leading to unexpected moments of self discovery. The philosophy of these groups and co-ops is based on the notion that teaching students what filmmaking *ought* to be enables astonishingly diverse forms of expression and radically different voices to emerge in the public sphere, because of the different goals underlying process-based filmmaking.

Film Farm accentuates the aspects of film practice education that are as much about self-learning, self-exploration, and self-reflection as they are about simply gaining marketable skills to turn out more bland products. As experimental filmmaker and Film Farm participant Gerald Saul notes: "Central to the film farm is the barn which houses darkrooms to develop film, open spaces to hang film to dry, screening areas, and relaxation spots to talk, think, or read. No modern complex could be as versatile or accommodating. The so-called enemies of filmmaking: dust, wind, light leaks, and noise, are all acceptable commodities in this environment. To fight the flaws is to fight against nature itself. To accept nature as an external force helps to open the door to express your inner nature."²⁴ In an age where moving images are ubiquitous, perhaps this is the political, cultural, and aesthetic future of practice-based film education. This is not to deride the goal that many aspiring filmmakers have simply to be in the industry. What does seem clear, though, is that a return to a set of self-reflexive skills that have often existed at the margins of filmmaking practice is necessary, both personally and politically, to understand and produce moving images in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. My thanks to Janine Marchessault and Phil Hoffman for discussing Film Farm with me in detail, and for offering me the opportunity to be a part of it, and to Anna Westerståhl Stenport for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2. The story of French filmmaking in Canada, and especially Québec, follows a different though equally rich trajectory, but is outside the confines of this chapter. For more on this topic, see Scott MacKenzie, *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity and the Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

3. Dorothy Hénaut, "The 'Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle Experience'" in *Video the Changing World*, ed. Alain Ambrosi and Nancy Thede (Montreal: Black Rose, 1991), 48–49.
4. <http://filmmakerinresidence.nfb.ca/blog/?p=152> (accessed June 26, 2012).
5. For more on these programs, see, for instance, Scott MacKenzie, "Société nouvelle: The Challenge for Change in the Alternative Public Sphere" in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board*, ed. Thomas Waugh, Michael Brenan Baker and Ezra Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Janine Marchessault, "Amateur Video and the Challenge for Change," in *Challenge for Change*, ed. Thomas Waugh et al.; and Katerina Cizek and Liz Miller, "Filmmaker-in-Residence: The Digital Grandchild of Challenge for Change," in *Challenge for Change*, ed. Thomas Waugh et al.
6. For more on the over-production of filmmakers in university programs, see Toby Miller, "Not Every Film School Graduate Ends Up a Scorsese," *The Australian*, May 16, 2012, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/opinion/not-every-film-school-graduate-ends-up-a-scorsese/story-e6frgcko-1226356719938> (accessed June 26, 2012).
7. Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La caméra-stylo*," in *The New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), 18–19.
8. Tom McSorley, "Interview: Phil Hoffman," in *Rivers in Time: The Films of Philip Hoffman*, ed. Tom McSorley (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 2008), 57.
9. Hoffman has been working with a core team of filmmakers, curators, and artists to run the workshop since its inception, including Rob Butterworth, Christine Harrison, Deirdre Logue, Karyn Sandlos, Josh Bonnetta, Scott Miller Berry, Mary Daniel, and many others.
10. "Our Mandate," <http://philiphoffman.ca/filmfarm/purpose.htm> (accessed June 26, 2012).
11. Allen Ginsberg, "Spontaneous," *Public 20* (2000): 56.
12. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 88.
13. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255.
14. Phil Hoffman, "Film Farm Notes 2012" (photocopy provided by the artist).
15. Jürgen Reble, "Chemistry and the Alchemy of Color," *Millennium Film Journal* 30/31 (1997).
16. Chris Gehman, "The Independent Imaging Retreat: Program Notes for the Hanover Civic Centre," Phil Hoffman website, September 20, 2003, <http://philiphoffman.ca/film/publications/Film%20Farm%20folder/The%20Independent%20Imaging%20Retreat.htm> (accessed June 26, 2012).
17. Janine Marchessault, "Women, Nature and Chemistry: Hand-Processed Films from Film Farm," in *LUX: A Decade of Artists' Film and Video*, ed. Steve Reinke and Tom Taylor (Toronto: YZY/Pleasuredome, 2006), 136.
18. Gehman, "The Independent Imaging Retreat."
19. Aysegul Koc, "Hand-Made (in the Digital Age): An Interview with Phil Hoffman," March 2002, Phil Hoffman website, <http://philiphoffman.ca/film/publications/Phil%20Hoffman%20interviews/interview%20march%202002.htm> (accessed June 26, 2012).
20. Cara Morton, "Films and Fairy Dust," in *Landscape with Shipwreck: First Person Cinema and the Films of Philip Hoffman*, ed. Karyn Sandlos and Mike Hoolboom (Toronto: Insomniac Press/Images Festival, 2001), 153.

21. Koc, "Hand-Made (in the Digital Age): An Interview with Phil Hoffman."
22. Marchessault, "Women, Nature and Chemistry."
23. Morton, "Films and Fairy Dust," 51.
24. Gerald Saul, *Fragile Harvest: Films from Phil Hoffman and His Film Farm* (Regina: Saskatchewan Filmpool, 2011), 2, available as a PDF at <http://www.nmsl.uregina.ca/saul/documents/fragileharvestprogramnotes.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2012).

The School for Every World: Internationalism and Residual Socialism at EICTV

Nicholas Balaisis

Cuba in Transition

Recent discussions regarding Cuba have revealed some of the many challenges and contradictions facing the country as it moves into an uncertain future somewhere between socialism and free market capitalism. At a 2008 conference in Manhattan titled "A Changing Cuba in a Changing World," scholars from all political stripes gathered to discuss the future of the island nation.¹ Many of the keynote talks focused on pressing questions both within and outside of Cuba: Where was Cuba headed in the twenty-first century? What economic and political maps should Cuba use? What role, if any, would the international (or specifically American) community play in this future? Like many conferences on the subject of Cuba, the debates were often contentious as economists touting Cuba's repressed entrepreneurial spirit squared off against political scientists sympathetic to the aims and spirit of the Cuban revolution in 1959. While many on the right of the political spectrum envisioned a more "global" Cuba, with open markets freed from restrictions on trade, investment, and entrepreneurship, many on the left were anxious about the risk that these moves posed to key areas of social policy in the country—namely a well-funded, health, education, and cultural sector. However, as the actions implemented by the new commander-in-chief Raoul Castro indicate, change is coming to Cuba. Recent decisions to open up the real estate market, to free up regulations on some forms of small business, and to lay off large sectors of the public service, present major challenges to the revolutionary status quo and will undoubtedly have broad implications for the country in the future.

It is within this changing context in Cuba that I wish to situate the Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV (EICTV) in San Antonio de los Baños, east of Havana.