**Excerpt from “From Chapter 4, *From Film Lab to Film Farm* by Kim Knowles from her new book *Experimental Film and Photo Chemical Practices:***

As the bustling city streets gradually gave way to open fields, I sensed a physical easing – a collective bodily sigh that brought us together as we moved closer and closer to the ‘Farm’. We tumbled out of the bus, greeted by Hoffman’s partner Janine Marchessault and their canine companion Astrid, followed by the rest of the crew and the other six participants. We were an eclectic bunch, with an age range of 25 to 60, originating from Britain, Finland, Austria, Iran, Canada and the USA. We all carried the look of eager anticipation, fresh from the city and ready for our countryside ‘film camp’, as one of the previous participants Helen Hill liked to refer to it.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Walking into the barn, I am overcome by the sight of so many objects, signs, relics, souvenirs and leftovers from the past twenty-five years that carry the aura of previous workshops. I can almost sense the trace of the many participants who have moved through these spaces. The place is perfectly equipped and impeccably thought-through but also reassuringly chaotic, as any handmade film retreat with such a long history should be. ‘Hey Stranger, Look Danger!’ says a sign on the stairs leading down to the barn’s darkrooms. Outside the upper darkrooms sits an Eiki projector, apparently mid-autopsy. In the corner, below an opening in the barn that resembles the 4:3 aspect ratio of 16mm is a makeshift screening area with old cinema seats and beat-up sofas. Wandering around, I feel instantly at home.

Over the next few days, our world reduces to the contours of this barn and the surrounding fields, but I feel my mind expanding into new terrain. We are taught how to operate the Bolex camera, how to hand-process as negative and reversal with traditional chemistry, as well as eco-friendly formulas with local flowers and plants. We plunge ourselves into the colorful world of tinting and toning, the handmade and largely unpredictable processes that define such films as Jennifer Reeves’ *We Are Going Home* (1998), Eve Heller’s *Behind This Soft Eclipse* (2004) and Penny McCann’s *Crashing Skies* (2002). We experiment with solarization in the dark room, each of us secretly hoping to get results as striking as Chris Chong’s *Minus* (1999), an uncut stream of superimposed movements on a single roll of film that were apparently produced in one sleepless night at the barn.

1. ‘Helen Hill and I used to have a playful argument as she called it Film Camp, and though it may seem like that I always steered it away from camp … in 1999 Helen Hill, Trixy Sweetvittles (Wattenbarger) and Amy Lockhart drove to the Film Farm all the way from Halifax, in an old car with Film Camp or Bust spray painted along the side of the car, and a candy floss machine in the back seat for all to enjoy!’ Phil Hoffman in an interview with James Holcombe: <https://lux.org.uk/james-holcombe-philip-hoffman-film-farm-interview>

(accessed 16 July 2019). Hill was a participant in Film Farm in 1999, 2000 and 2002. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)