**Lift Labs Eco Talk – Phil Hoffman**

I will divide my talk into two parts. Firstly I will talk about the `ecological spheres’ that we all have to traverse in our practices and workshops, and then I will talk about some details that connects to processing film, ecologically.

Some background: My practice as an experimental filmmaker has been fueled by the processes developed since 1994 at Film Farm (Independent Imaging Retreat), which is a week long hand-processing analog filmmaking workshop in Southern Ontario..near Mount Forest. As well, this practice has been further developed through an MFA course I have been giving at York University since 2007, called Process Cinema. 'Process Cinema' in filmmaking, is a way of working which is improvisational and interactive. Through a process-driven methodology, the screenplay as governing document is replaced by a fluid integration of writing, shooting and editing, not necessarily in that order. In process cinema, the world becomes a partner in the making of the film.

**Ecological Spheres:**

Semiotics isn’t only the reserve of humans….animals birds, maybe even plant use signs to communicate with other species and processes

In my film vulture, there is one section in the middle of the film where a young British boy, Brin Wigley, astutely observes:

*When the vulture is flying in the sky, the lions look out for them because the vulture shows them where food is.*

So to as Karel Doing, who visited the Film Farm in 2018, points out plants communicate too, through some kind of biological sense… they connect with the sun beams and grow in that direction for instance

I think being ecological is not only thinking about the effect of the chemistries and their toxicities which we use to process film.

When the wild cucumber vine has traveled across my garden path, I have to think about that before I trim it back….its growing that way for reason…can I give these plants some autonomy, and be in partnership in the making of my garden….afterall the wild cucumber vine is growing that way for a reason (light? water?). To me this connects to the same sensibility as what we try to maintain at Film Farm and through the practice of Process Cinema: that somehow the world has a say in the making of our films….so trying to have some kind of emphathy with the world and its forces.

The German biologist Jakob von Uexkull used a term to describe these subjective spheres. An `umwelt’ is the circle in which the lion and the vulture and the dying or dead animal hold together, and are in a relationship…..or the runaway wild cucumber vine in relationship with the water or sun it bends to ….I think being ecological is acknowledging these various `umwelts’ and our relationships to them…and being selfconscious about our own `umwelt’ and how we traverse the world. Our relationships to humans, plants and animals.

One of the most fulfilling experiences the Film Farm for the past 5 years has been workshops with Saugeen First Nation situated in Chippewa Hill, an hour north of the Farm. The workshop was conceived as an exchange. Saugeen Elders would teach us about the medicinal properties of plants, and we would teach local artists from various practices (painting, dance, storytelling) how to process film with flowers. The workshop opened with a welcoming ceremony lead by educator and elder herbalist, Lori Kewaquom. When I somewhat proudly told Lori that at Film Farm when we collect plants for processing film, we never take more that 25% of the plant, so that it could regenerate, she generously offered to teach us how to ask the plant how much we could take. And she did. The whole process was based on bodily responses to the plants and a playful conversation with our self.

**Processing Ecologically:**

I just want to touch on the other ecological issue, maybe more obvious. The Film Farm has mostly shifted to flowers and plants for film processing and phytogram-making. This has occurred through the support of RICARDO LEITE, DAGIE BRUNDERT AND KAREL DOING and I guess we might add ANNA ATKINS, the botanist and developer of the cyanotype. `Every recipe has a lineage’.

 Plant/Flower processing involves less toxic simple household ingredients like washing soda (sodium carbonate) and vitamin c powder (ascorbic acid) and plants/flowers, for developing, and salt for fixing, though since it can take 1 or 2 days to fix we’ve also adopted Esther’s ideas of continued use of chemical fixer, which doesn’t have to be constantly replaced as it has potency for a very long time…so you put less fixer into the world by prolonging its life. Another methodology Film Farm member Rob Butterworth has developed for diluting the toxicity of the materials used for developing is mixing all the exhausted chemistry into a large garbage pail, putting a screen on top, and placed in a well ventilated area, and over the year through a process of percolation the toxicity is diluted and the fluids slowly evaporate. Then the ingredients can be taken to a landfill for further percolation to some degree.

Just a note, I see great value in keeping all the conventional chemical processes going, which the Labs are dedicated to ….different processes create different visual forms which need to be kept alive…but I thing there should be a choice of flower processing, for all kinds of reasons…and I would suggest that Labs, over the next few years, have some support for flower processing at the lab, if its not something that has yet been developed.

Finally why I love working with flower processing is because there is always something new surfacing as I work with different flowers and plants… the various species of plants create different textures as they rub up against the film during development…various colors are possible through different flowers, fruits and roots.

…..and I’d like to end with a clip from my new film Deep 1..the first part of this section was shot and processed at Dawson City last Autumn in a workshop I gave at KIAC…we collected 12 Tundra plants and they all worked…this first section was processed in lichen. The second part of the film was shot at the farm and was accidently decayed in a diluted bath of hyacinth, washing soda and vit c. I had shot footage of farm animals but over-developed them because the temperature was too hot, ..disappointed, I left the film for a few weeks in the diluted bath of hyacinth, washing soda & vit c, and to my surprise the footage got resurrected through this unexpected decaying process.