

Nanofest: gathering of a film crevice community

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Abstract

Analogue film communities organised around artist-run labs are “crevice communities” existing and growing in the fissures of larger corporate and mainstream modes of film production. They emerge from the discarded debris of once valued constituents of industrial cinema-making. By picking up, interrogating and re-energising this rejected film equipment, analogue film communities carve a defiant space within a technological juggernaut. This article discusses and documents my experience as a filmmaker at an annual analogue film workshop and festival known as *Nanofest*, held at Nanolab, an independent film lab in Daylesford, regional Victoria. The event is hosted by the founding members of Artist Film Workshop (AFW), a vibrant, diverse community of film artists working out of Naarm/Melbourne. Crevice communities situated around intensely physical analogue film practices, share technical knowledge and processes to extend and develop their individual craft. Working with analogue practices in the digital age signals more than a simple delineation between mediums. It is an important act of resistance to digital ubiquity. Artists and their communities who work with analogue film are in a unique position to critique and provide an alternative to the increasingly homogenous, technological cloud-based world.

Introduction

From an ecological perspective, crevice communities are environments that harbour life where none is expected. These communities comprise a variety of organisms including plants, insects, and microorganisms that adapt to the unique conditions found within these openings. The Creative Practice Circle at Charles Sturt University uses this notion as a metaphor for interdisciplinary research and practice, focusing on exploring the unique rather than the general, the small rather than the large, to uncover the “cracks and hollows” from which alternative creative research can grow.

Over two decades ago, communication scholar and activist Clemencia Rodriguez (2001), introduced the notion of “fissures” in mainstream media where citizen media erupts to challenge hegemonic narratives. Rodriguez argues that grassroots media provide important opportunities for diverse voices to challenge dominant discourse and offer alternative narratives. The “crevice” in this article is the in-between space occupied by the artisanal craft of 16mm and Super 8 film production in a membership-based artist-run lab community. In the following I describe my experience as a participant in *Nanofest*, an event created by Richard Tuohy and Dianna Barrie. Tuohy and Barrie have also self-published a series of texts describing the work of analogue film community groups and makers. First, I examine how film “organises” an artist by virtue of the tools they use, following which I examine how these practices “organise” a community, using *Nanofest* as a case study. I connect historical film co-op groups formed around film equipment to modern day artist-run labs by briefly discussing the history of 16mm equipment and the emergence of these groups.

Crevice

A crevice in a tree branch allows a fern to take root in leaf litter and grow in the shade of more established tree branches. In the context of film making, a “crevice community” creates crucial habitat for a diversity of analogue forms of art, where not only alternative communities self-organize and grow, but alternatives to dominant modes of film-crafting emerge and are shared. Crevice communities are vulnerable however, because they rely on commercial forces bigger than themselves to survive, forces which are somewhat antithetical to their very existence. Through the critical act of sharing resources, ideas, and attitudes, otherwise made obsolete by those forces, they fortify.

Popular mainstream Hollywood director Quentin Tarantino resists digital cinema production despite operating in an environment overwhelmed by it. Marketing of his films highlights the 70mm celluloid medium with which they are made and exhibited, a rarity when digital cinema has become the norm.¹ Screening 70mm film requires special projection equipment which only those with the relevant expertise and knowledge can operate. Without audience demand, venues capable of such exhibition decline. In mainstream cinema the projectionist’s craft is minimised by a director’s status.

In contrast, British film artist Tacita Dean explicitly acknowledges both the film apparatus and the team of people involved in the production of her work. Dean is a vocal defender of film’s presence in the context of contemporary art, despite its reliance on commercial production to survive.² Her installation in a recent exhibition at the MCA in Sydney in 2023/24³ presented specialised 35mm and 16mm looping projectors as part of the immersive cinematic experience, foregrounding them as an integral part of the visual presentation, rather than a transparent agent hidden in the bio box (the norm in commercial cinemas).⁴ Dean uses the object label in her

¹ https://wiki.tarantino.info/index.php/The_Hateful_Eight_70mm_screenings_list

² <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/oct/10/tacita-dean-film-turbine-hall>

³ <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/tacita-dean/exhibition-guide-en/>

⁴ Bio box is a small room for projector and audio control usually kept apart from the audience in mainstream cinema.

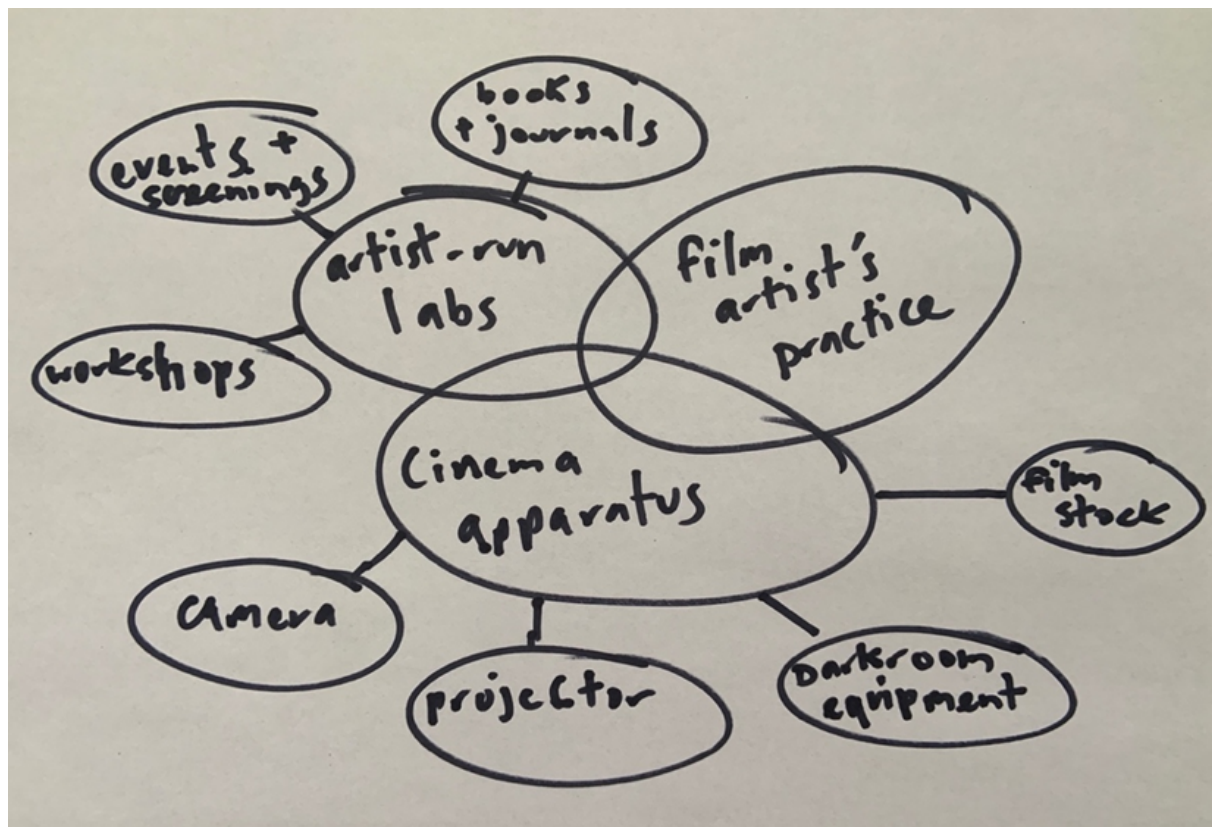
exhibition to foreground the skilled community of makers involved in the production of her works.

Similarly, independent and emerging artists toiling in the craft of film well know that film art comes with a whole host of structural and financial challenges best faced while being supported by a community of practitioners. That community includes those with the specialised knowledge and experience not only to operate and maintain various equipment involved in analogue film production, but also to nurture ideas and concepts. In this way, communal organisation and collaboration is necessary and facilitative, nourishing the production of art despite the “thin soil” of commercial demands under which artists work.

How film organises a community

Film art is made by thinking with technology, sometimes thinking through failure and experimentation, and using the human body. The cinema apparatus is the set of instruments used to photograph, develop, distribute, and project film. This equipment brings with it a host of methodologies and practices best performed and shared in a group setting.

Image 1: Sketch diagram of film artist's practice and its intersections.



The above is a sketch of a film artist's practice and its intersections with artist-run lab communities that surround the apparatus underpinning these practices. As a film artist I choose

to work with a material which relies heavily on factors outside of my control. For example, film stock availability is connected to massive production lines that are driven by commercial markets. Making cinematic artworks are inherently industrial, but paradoxically it doesn't feel like this. Film feels like an intimate collaborator.

Robert L. Shanebrook, a Kodak employee for 35 years, describes all photography as “capture and playback” in his extensive technical survey, *Making KODAK Film* (2016). Shanebrook argues that George Eastman (the founder of Kodak) aimed to “make the camera as convenient as the pencil”; Eastman's motto was “you push the button, and we do the rest” (p.440). Smartphone technology may have perfected these ideals. A smartphone allows you to adjust image parameters strictly defined by the software and hardware maker. Where silver halide technology⁵ is such that artists can interrogate the medium during shooting, development, editing and laboratory printing. Each stage presents rich territory for physical intervention. This relationship between the physical qualities of a material, and the experience and manipulation of the material as a medium, has always been central to analogue film production.

Film communities organise around film apparatuses. Alva Noë considers the role of art to be a tool for reorganisation. In his book *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (2015), Noë argues perceiving is an organised activity in a feedback loop between behaviour, culture and the environment. For Noë tools and technology naturally organise us. For example, he argues “a tool (such as a hammer or a commuter) is a hub of an organised activity” (p. 33). Psychologist James J. Gibson examined visual perception to assist fighter pilots training in the second world war. He came to develop an ecological theory for visual perception which saw human behaviour linked to environment niches. For Gibson a tool becomes an extension of the body, like scissors do, when employed for cutting, the hand becomes the cutter (1979, p. 35). Similarly, a film editor's splicer is both a cutting and a joining device. It becomes an extension of the hand and in turn, an extension to thinking. Gibson writes:

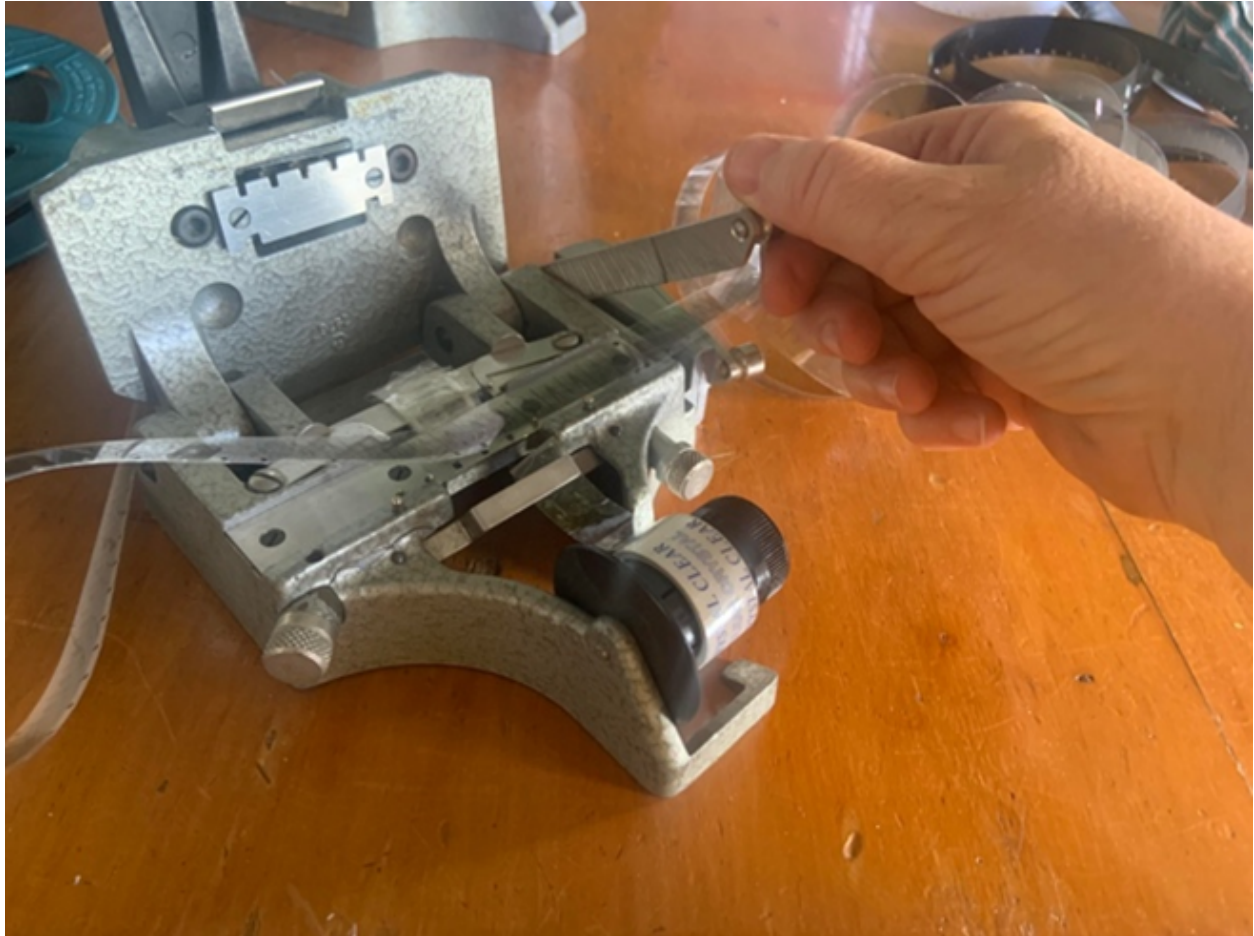
This capacity to attach something to the body suggests that the boundary between the animal and the environment is not fixed at the surface of the skin but can shift. (1979, p. 35)

For Gibson affordance describes how an animal directly perceives the environment (1979, p. 119). His concept became a useful tool to understand how objects afford or limit human actions within the context of their environment. Diverse fields from applied sciences to philosophy, sociology and education studies have employed Gibson's notion of affordance to explain and understand human interaction with the environment (2020, p. 25). Some media theorists have argued for a Gibsonian media theory to explore the effect of film on spectators from a biological standpoint (Anderson J & B. Anderson, 1996). But when media theory focuses on the spectator, the affordance of the *process of making* is overlooked. Jenny L. Davis argued for an updated framework for design affordance theory which moves beyond the problem of what objects afford to “how, for whom, and under what circumstances” (2020, p. 19). Following Davis I will

⁵ When this article refers to ‘analogue film’ I am referring to a chemical-based photography where silver halide crystals embedded in gelatine are developed into an image that is supported by an acetate or polyester base.

examine how film tools organise a community, how film tools afford certain practices and in what context.

Image 2: editors' 16mm tape splicer in cutting mode. Image by author.



The physical actions which constitute analogue film practice - such as shooting, developing, and joining film - are laboursome. Tools that afford certain film practices also require maintenance and repair. Repairing, storing, and collecting analogue tools is an activity a film artist does in parallel with making. Activities become sustainable in a community where such tools, and effort they require, are valued. The ecology of film tools consequently organises a dedicated film community.

Under digital hegemony film can be examined for its unique properties. Kim Knowles, in her book *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* (2020), argues that “this marginal position is crucial from both an aesthetic and a political perspective” (p.8). Artists that embrace analogue film, she writes, do so because its “marginal status, inconvenience, awkwardness and time-consuming working methods are an attractive quality for those who wish to carve out a position of resistance against convention” (p.225-6). When digital image making is championed for its perceived accessibility, artists who seek out cumbersome analogue methods are significant

because their actions elevate process beyond artistic value. For example, Richard Tuohy and Dianna Barrie are Australian film artists with international reputations and experts in their field, whose work often embraces structuralist concerns. Knowles describes Tuohy and Barrie as “central figures in the artisanal film ‘movement’, and widely recognised for facilitating the establishment and development of several artist-run film labs” (p.109). Tuohy and Barrie screen their films and those made by members of the Artist Film Workshop (AFW) (an artist-run lab they initiated) locally, nationally, and internationally. They host film workshops while also attending international analogue film festivals and symposia on artist-run lab communities. As I argue throughout this article, the work of artists like Tuohy and Barrie does not take place in a vacuum. To thrive, it needs a community to engage and respond to it.

The forming of Artist Film Workshop

Tuohy and Barrie started their film business Nanolab in regional Victoria 2006, focusing on processing Super 8 film. Tuohy writes in *Film Is* magazine that “[Nanolab’s] country location meant that it struggled to form a community there” (2015, p.2). From 2009 to 2012 film workshops were organised by the Nanolab team in Melbourne. AFW was formed from these gatherings. It is no coincidence that Tuohy and Barrie live and work where their studio is situated. Analogue filmmaking is cumbersome. It requires space to house editing equipment, projection equipment, copying machines and shooting materials.

Image 3: Nanolab print studio. Image by author.



Wrestling with, and understanding how, obsolete filmmaking machines work acquaints filmmakers with their tools. Tuohy (2017) writes that “you enter the machines, and they enter you” (2017, p. 18). Tuohy recognises the influence of the tool on his outlook. This suggests that if tools change our thinking, then the nature of the tool must affect how and what we make with them.

Tuohy and Barrie’s practice is grounded in expert knowledge that includes that of the mechanic, the electrician, and the chemist. They tend to their machines as they tend to their local AFW film community. The group is member-run and exists to support other artists in a communal manner.⁶ Tuohy and Barrie’s expert knowledge offers the AFW group an informal scaffolding which supports the technical and creative growth of their members. I am an out-of-town member. For

⁶ <http://www.artistfilmworkshop.org/about>

me, membership offers practical advice in tackling technical problems, and solidarity in being part of a group that shares a set of common practices.

Tuohy writes that “my head is in the machine” (2015, p.43). The machinery of film making has many working parts and is an integral component of an extended ecology for production and exhibition. In the industrial mode of film making, production happens in silos, commonly divided into stages called pre-production, production, and post-production. For artists such as Tuohy and Barrie, who carry out all aspects of film production, these three stages are collapsed and cycle back into one another. This cyclical process of making shows up in their films because it is at the heart of their artisanal method. When Tuohy says “my head is in the machine” I take this to be an ecology of machines involved in analogue processes, as well as his thoughtful cultivation of community.

Workshops as gathering places

An artist whose work is exhibited outside of the industrial venues of commercial cinema needs a crevice community to sustain them mentally, emotionally, and practically. While there are practical ‘how to’ guides on DIY film processes in specialist books, magazines and pamphlets made by other film artists, it is only showing up at workshops and events like Nanofest, that a place for building relationships is nurtured.

Workshops offered on the website of AFW cover diverse processes including black & white film processing, colour film hand processing, using Bolex cameras, optical printer use, and novel techniques such as Chromflex.⁷ While sharing knowledge is the focus of these workshops, it is also the site where people form bonds because they show up and take part in workshop activities to assist others.

These groups not only use technology regarded as ‘obsolete’ by mainstream media, they also innovate with it, extending its use. Tuohy (2017) writes that “More than ever before now, exists the opportunity for artist filmmakers to fully explore the other half of the film mechanism; not just camera, and projector, but also the possibilities of chemistry and printers. The machine of cinema is all of these things” (p.16-17). The machine of cinema is also a gathering of people when making and when watching. A community gathers around these practices because skills are best learnt and shared through interpersonal corporeal engagement.

Gathering at *Nanofest*

Nanofest is held at Nanolab which is spread across several buildings, each containing the necessary parts from which Tuohy and Barrie create their film art and run their film laboratory business. The *Nanofest* outdoor cinema’s automated screen lowers at a push of a button between two large trees – an incongruous electronic feature in a woodland scene. Participants camp amongst the many buildings that house Tuohy and Barrie’s film studios surrounding their bush block home. Some participants have brought with them their own work-in-progress films to

⁷ <http://www.artistfilmworkshop.org/workshops>

show during the festival. A small outhouse sized shed has been constructed for a 16mm projector, which on nightfall, screens a curated program of experimental short films from the National Film and Sound Archive. 16mm projection, radiated across a fire pit, casts an unusual light, broken up by the heat and smoke of the fire. An informal discussion at the end of each film ranges from the technical to the conceptual, and continues late into the night. The atmosphere is of curiosity and mutual respect. The fireside gathering opens a fissure for participants to imagine how they might resist all that dissuades an artist from pursuing an art form as complicated and laboursome as handmade analogue film making.

Image 4: Nanofest gathering 2022. Image by author.



The recent hands-on *Nanofest* workshops I attended explore the hacking of devices which often hover between the industrial and the amateur. The 2022 program explored digital sync sound and 16mm film, as well as hacking the amateur Super 8 cartridge to rewind the film and create superimpositions through re-exposure. The 2023 workshop program was centred around the traditional analogue workflow of cutting a 16mm work-print to achieve a neg-match⁸ and an exhibition print.

⁸ Neg-match is a process where pristine camera original negatives are matched frame for frame against a positive working copy of the film that has been edited (and therefore handled).

AFW members and their associates came to regional Victoria from New South Wales, Tasmania, and South Australia to attend. While local members might meet each other at the Melbourne/Naarm workspace, *Nanofest* offers a structure where members can work together in groups, producing connections for future collaborations. Since attending Nanofest I began a collaboration with members Paddy Hay and Sebastian Vaccaris on several interstate screenings and workshops in Gadigal/Sydney and Kamberri/Canberra. *Nanofest* is therefore a multi-purpose site for crevice community activities. It is a site where practical knowledge is shared and a site of bonding through group activities which lives on beyond the activities of the festival itself.

Innovation which challenges the notion of 'obsolete'

The modular nature of the film apparatus has much potential for extension by digital means. The *Nanofest* 16mm sync sound workshop was an innovative demonstration of shooting sync sound using analogue and digital methods. There are various ways to project sync sound in the analogue environment. For instance, double head projection, where sound and picture are screened on separate devices and in sync or, single head projection where the film print contains an optical or magnetic sound strip alongside the image. These sound pathways bring with them a whole ecology of sound recording and playback machinery that are now hard to come by and take expertise and finances to run. Tuohy, Barrie, and an AFW collaborator, Carl Looper, devised a rotary timecode⁹ reader that works on potentially any 16mm projector. This allows the imprecise nature of variously built and branded 16mm projectors and digital soundtracks to be kept in sync. This is a radical act because it challenges the idea of 16mm being an obsolete technology. In this sense, analogue artist-run film labs can create fissures or openings for other forms of filmmaking, through crafting, repair, and reuse and importantly, invention.

To learn the new innovative sync sound production method developed by Tuohy, Barrie, and Looper, participants gathered in four groups to shoot black and white film that had timecode pre-exposed to it. Our group made a film called *Transmission* that I edited (Crowe et al, 2022).¹⁰ *Transmission* is a portrait of the process that underpinned the creative decisions our group negotiated when shooting. Some of our group wanted to make a narrative drama, others, a structural film. The soundtrack portrays this and the country environment we were in.

⁹ Timecode refers to a series of numbers that counts frames and allows picture and sound to be kept in sync.

¹⁰ *Transmission*, a 3-minute film can be seen here <https://vimeo.com/875019642/e729e459a4>

Image 5: Transmission (2022), Bolex camera with optically exposed timecode. Image by author.



The above image shows the optically produced timecode on the right-hand side, which software “chases” to keep the digital audio file synchronised with the picture. Of our four groups, only one group was able to complete the sync workflow over the weekend. Even though not all groups completed all the steps during the workshop, we now know that this innovative workflow is possible. Failure can be a place to lose hope, particularly as an individual, but seen from within a community that accepts struggle, failure can be re-framed as an avenue to what’s possible.

Super 8 multiple exposure workshop

Super 8 is an amateur film gauge in cartridge form invented in 1965. The cartridge makes film loading easy and was targeted at the home film market championed by Kodak. Tuohy held a ‘ask me anything session’ explaining the quirks of the Super 8 system as well as a workshop on how to hack the one-way film cartridge to allow multiple exposures. The significance of this is that laboratory procedures can be done ‘in camera’ at the same time as shooting. The focus of this workshop is ingenious because it opens the limited home movie cartridge to other, more complex, and potentially structural film making possibilities. Hacking the cartridge system allows artists to interrogate and extend their purpose.

Image 6. Screenshot from *In-camera super 8 matting* (Tuohy).



Tuohy's *Super 8 In Camera Matting* (2020),¹¹ a multiple exposure experiment shows the potential of this technique. Years of experience with laboratory and mechanical processes allow Tuohy and Barrie to disrupt and invent novel processes. The generous sharing of their knowledge is an example of where crevice communities excel because they provide a space not driven by markets and industrial notions of film craft, but by exploration of process.

Work-print and negative matching workshop

The focus of the *Nanofest 2023* was for participants to learn the traditional analogue workflow of editing a work print which is matched to an original camera negative, to produce a distribution film print. The process of joining film negative was historically done in the industrial mode of cinema in a lab by specialist technicians. This was an exclusive and rarefied activity - even more so now that digital production is the norm. Learning these techniques allows artists to produce high quality distribution prints for display at film festivals or gallery exhibition. Importantly it allows artists to make creative decisions during this part of production, which would not

¹¹ To see Tuohy's expert use of Super 8 in camera matting see <https://vimeo.com/446409350>

otherwise be possible using the industrial mode. Offering instruction on a laboursome and technically difficult procedure over a weekend is as ambitious as it is generous.

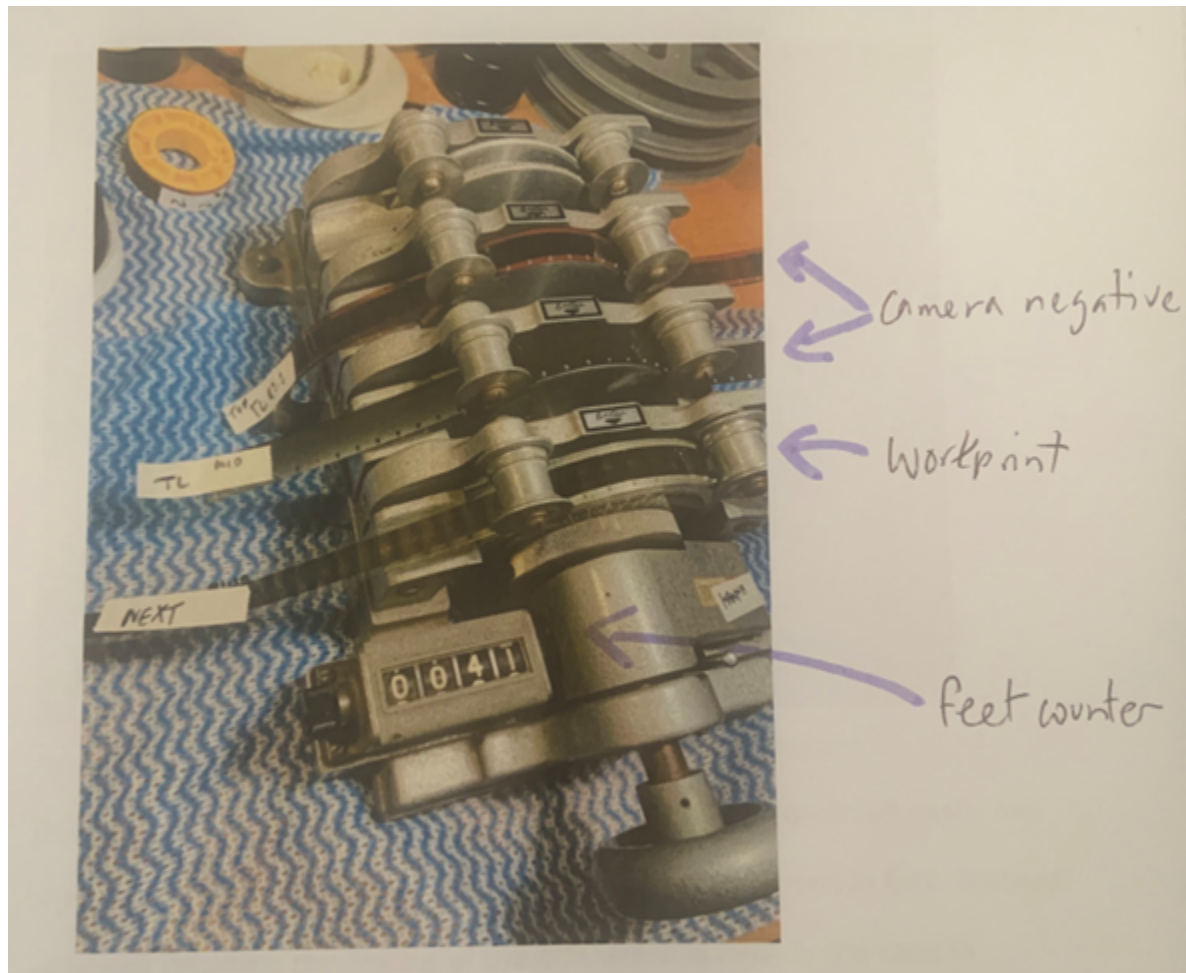
Our group used a bench fitted with film winders and a small viewer that projects an image onto a tiny glass screen.

Image 7: Paddy Hay at work on the small editor viewer and winding bench. Image by author



It is difficult for more than one person to see the screen at a time so editing decisions became mathematical discussions rather than visually driven decisions. The limitation afforded a formal approach, this became the central paradigm of our film.

Image 8: Gang sync, Nanofest 2023 Image by author.



The footage is laced through a gang sync (image 8) fitted with a counter that measures the film.

Image 9: Trim bin, Nanofest 2023. Image by author.

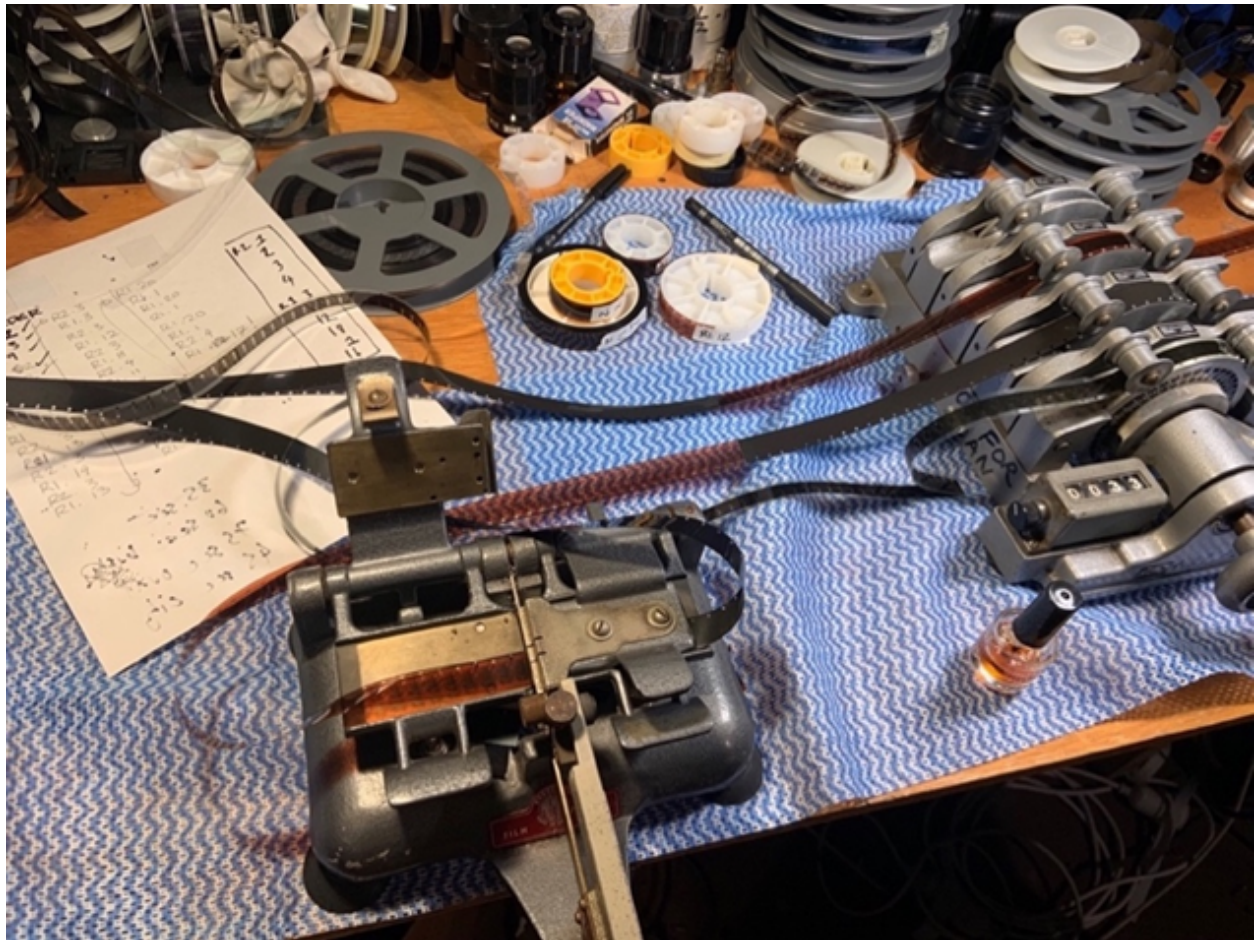


A trim bin helps order sections of footage so they can be re-sequenced into new combinations.

Vivian Sobchack examines writing tools in *Carnal Thoughts* (2004) to explore the effect of tools and the process they support. She compares writing processes when working with a pencil, a typewriter, and a computer, and reports that writing with software results in more footnotes and references. Sobchack falls into a “habit of living according to its spatial, temporal, bodily, and technical coordinates” (p.119-120). Similar to Sobchack, our devices (the trim bin, the gang sync counter and the small viewer) provide limitation as much as they support opportunities.

Tuohy explained the next process of neg matching around the breakfast campfire by lining us up in rows to mimic lengths of film negative. During the weekend he often chose to use participants’ bodies to illustrate the spatial concepts we were learning. Tuohy naturally reaches for embodied actions to explain concepts because analogue film practice is underpinned by the mechanics of movement. These actions generate rhythms a film artist becomes habituated to.

Image 10: Hot splicer, acetone paint, gang sync and film matching notes. Image by author.



The camera originals are spliced together using a hot splicer, where the negative image is physically scraped away with a blade, and melted together using liquid acetone from a nail polish bottle. A print made from camera negative arranged in a checkerboard manner (known as ‘A’ and ‘B rolls’) is more technologically advanced activity which produces a cleaner projectable copy. Some participants commented that neg matching is so heavily labourious and method driven that it may not be appealing for everyone. For others, neg matching became a remarkable and viable option. *Nanofest* opens a fissure for exclusive analogue practices to become knowable activities.

Historical use of 16mm and Super 8

Artists working with 16mm and Super 8 film are tinkering with partly amateur and partly professional gear. In Australia 16mm film has been used across a spectrum of film productions such as non-theatrical industrial films, educational films, television news, advertisements, commercial and independent features. John Grierson visited in 1945 from the United Kingdom to

“advise on the role of film in national life and in strengthening empire ties” (Moran, p.3).¹² His visit initiated the establishment of the Commonwealth Film Unit which later come to be Film Australia. Film Australia was a government authorised large-scale production house that exclusively used 16mm film for production of educational, industrial and documentary films (Moran). They relied on distributing their films to specialist audiences, as opposed to commercial cinemas where 35mm was the norm. Because of government initiatives such as these, there was a demand for the training of projectionists, and for 16mm printing machines to copy and distribute the films across the country. A survey from the 1960s to the 1980s of film production trade magazines and film group newsletters, reveal a formal and informal growing 16mm film industry.¹³

Since the rise of low-cost digital devices, various film machinery such as contact printers and optical printers, still turn up at auctions and university sales, some over 50 years old. Artist-run labs are holding grounds for this now discarded equipment. Many are missing manuals, or are hand-made, with their exact providence unknown. They require experts and technicians to restore and maintain. The act of demystifying analogue processes that Tuohy and Barrie support by holding *Nanofest* is therefore a necessary commitment to cultivate a community evolving around these film practices.

As cinema production has moved away from film production at the behest of commercially driven digital “progress”. A host of film technologies and methods they support are diminished. According to Tuohy:

this ‘primitive’ form of moving picture technology still has more to teach us about itself, and through itself, about ourselves and the world. Artist-run film labs allow creative people to continue to do that, perhaps to a greater extent than ever before, because they help make and keep the whole of the apparatus that is cinema (2017 p. 63).

To inhabit “whole apparatus of cinema” artists create fissures that commercial cinema has overlooked. Scott MacDonald notes that just as technology can provide scaffolding for ways of working, it can also provide a place to pivot from. Cinema studies has mined the history of changing technologies to argue that this changed what cinema is. MacDonald writes in *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema*:

The development of lightweight cameras and tape recorders, more flexible microphones, and faster film stocks during the late 1950s created new options that simultaneously drove documentary filmmaking and avant-garde filmmaking further apart, and created a different kind of intersection between them. (2015, p.31)

MacDonald describes how the advent of 16mm allowed for film societies and film making outside of the mainstream commercial model to evolve (1993). Artist-run labs are the modern

¹² *Projecting Australia: government film since 1945* (1991) is an excellent history of government film production.

¹³ Journals surveyed include *Cinema Papers*, *Script*, *Screen & Art* and Sydney University Film Group *FilmNews* newsletters. In 1975 *Cinema Papers* divided 35mm and 16mm production surveys into two distinct groups. This distinction is later removed as 16mm film technology is developed.

equivalent to film societies that formed around 16mm technologies in the 1970s. These film societies context have been altered by today's almost instantaneous digital mediascape.

Community of printed journals

Tuohy and Barrie also self-publish a journal called *Film Is* under the banner of AFW. As cultivators of analogue film crevices in Australia, they continue the legacy left by the experimental film champions Arthur and Corrine Cantrill. *Cantrills FilmNotes*, a journal published from 1971 to 2000, was a significant space in Australia for experimental film and video crevice communities to discover each other and document each other's works. Fred Harden, an early collaborator on *Cantrills FilmNotes*, reports in *Cinema Papers* that it was first instigated when they felt the National Gallery of Victoria had not provided enough program notes to accompany an expanded cinema event the pair performed at the gallery (Harden, 1991).¹⁴ It grew from this into a journal distributed internationally and supported by the Australian Film Commission (Cantrill, 2000).

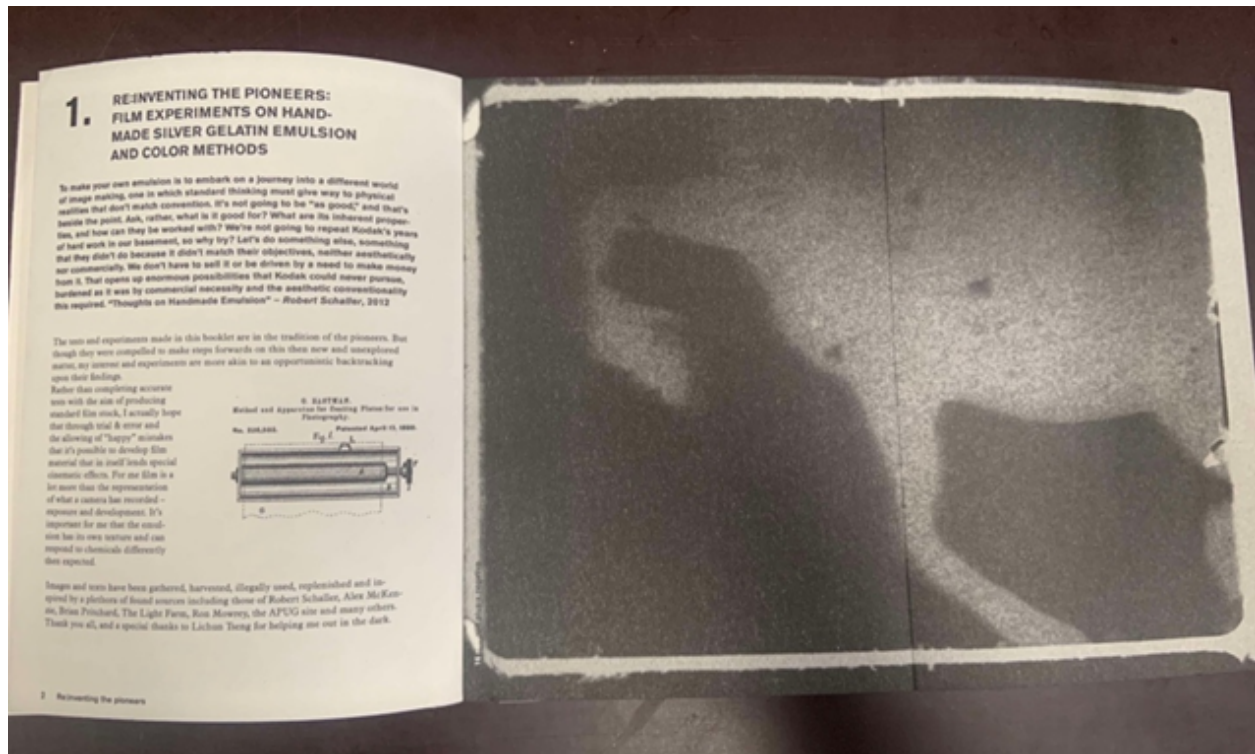
Self-published writing is fundamental to film groups developing an independent voice. *Film Is* shares artists' written accounts of their practice, interviews with film artists, hacks and DIY solutions for film processes. Commenting on the self-published books such as Ester Urlus' *Re:Inventing the Pioneers* (2018) and the comprehensive survey of DIY practices found in Kathryn Ramsey's *Experimental Film Break the Machine* (2016), Knowles writes that "it is this educational impulse, as well as the importance of community building that sits at the heart of photochemical film culture" (p.143).

Image 11: Film Is journal by Artist Film Workshop. Image by author.



¹⁴ Fred Harden is credited as a photographer in their first issue in 1971.

Image 12: “Re-inventing the Pioneers” trifold book by Ester Urlus. Image by author.



The layout and design of these self-published books are often an extension of material practice. Urlus’ “Re-Inventing the Pioneers” is not only an excellent resource, but beautiful to hold. Like Urlus, AFW, are committed to making physical objects of their written output in a time when online publishing is a priority. Tuohy has said that he wishes “to make connections between AFW and the other artist run labs and artists using film in the greater Asia Pacific region” and his hope is that the journal “could be something that helps us all build knowledge of each other and create a bigger experimental film ecosystem in our eastern hemisphere.” (2018, p. 1).

As well as community building, *Film Is* functions as an act of resistance. Tuohy writes in *Film Is* “Our tools are industrial tools. And they need an industry bigger than art to sustain them” (2018, p.100). He positions himself as someone who must fight as a resistance fighter does for freedom. He argues:

We resist the losing of knowledge. We resist the losing of services. We resist the losing of options. We resist the closing of eyes to an infinite universe of aesthetic possibilities. We promote community in the face of Facebook and Youtube. Digital has much of the world.... Digital has won its battles. We are marginalised and overlooked, but still we resist.... We discriminate because doing so makes us stronger together. It lets us see each other and be seen by others. It builds our community where we would otherwise be swamped. (p.102)

Self-publishing certifies an artist's perspective on their own processes and undertakings. It also offers a self-governing platform to express political and artistic philosophies.

The vulnerability of the crevice

The difficulty of working with film compels communal efforts. The documentary *Senses of Cinema: Australian Filmmakers Co-operatives 1966-86* (2022), made by John Hughes and Tom Zubrycki, is an account of the historical tensions that film collectives thrive and sometimes suffer from.¹⁵ It follows the forming of the Melbourne and Sydney Film Co-ops which ran workshops and eventually became a business run for and by filmmakers to distribute their films. Advertisements in early issues of *Cinema Papers* target makers and audiences, listing a network of co-ops across each state of Australia (1974, 1975). Copywriting proclaims, "encouraging film talents at a grass roots level – workshops, discussions, resources, and information" (1974, p. 197). These co-ops had great success in finding audiences by tackling distribution themselves, often hiring halls and equipment to run their own screenings. Filmmaker Martha Ansara says, "It was a fringe in the film industry's point of view, but it wasn't a fringe in society's point of view, because of the ways we got to all sorts of people from top to bottom" (2022).

The film charts the sometimes clashing political and artistic impulses members experienced while working collaboratively. Under pressure from the withdrawal of government financial support that the Sydney Film Co-op came to rely on, it closed. AFW runs on a small budget, without government support, with membership fees covering rent and basic running costs. While this makes them more precarious, they remain independent of a government agenda. Like the film co-ops before them, AFW hold busy film screenings every month. They have had three highly attended screenings at ACMI, demonstrating a contemporary appetite for handmade independent cinema.¹⁶

Independent film groups navigate practical, financial and cultural pressures while promoting their members films through self-publication. Dirk de Bruyn writes that even 25 years after Cantrill's *FilmNotes* was first published, there was still a need to document a medium, but most important was "to find a home" (1997, p.38). The very first issue is hand-made in appearance, in contrast to the highly coloured magazine of the last edition. Many issues urge readers to subscribe to support the publication. Early issues list Cantrill films available for purchase, as well as events for hire; such as lectures on avant-garde cinema history and expanded cinema performances. The publication never featured advertisements. The last editorial lambasts the rising Australian film scene as meaningless and lacking in culture (2000). With the withdrawal of AFC funding for the journal, the Cantrills closed the publication.

¹⁵ <https://sensesofcinemafilm.com.au>

¹⁶ <https://www.acmi.net.au/whats-on/artfilm/artist-film-workshop-2024/>

Film groups standing outside of mainstream organisations preform complex negotiations within their often-democratic operations. Members fulfil diverse roles of the technician, event organiser, journal publisher connector and community member. The AFW community protects its vulnerabilities and builds its home through workshops, self-publication, and distribution, while defending its analogue territory. Staying independent is crucial. The annual *Nanofest* gathering serves the community as rejuvenation before the next battle.

Conclusion

Handmade cinema is the least machine centred process of analogue film making. It points to the most fundamental aspect of the mechanical art, its reactive surface. In *Making Images Move Handmade Cinema* (2020), Gregory Zinman argues that “handmade films, by definition, would also seem to require the corporeal touch of the artist” (p. 255). He points to artists such as Jennifer Reeves, who buries her film, allowing mould to act on it. For Zinman, this illustrates the agency of the environment and non-human actors. For Knowles, film artists who experiment with “posthuman perspectives ask us to think about the world differently, to train our eyes and minds to a more sharpened sensitivity to the energies, forces and multiple agencies that constitute our everyday environments, and to take up alternative subject positions to those pre-shaped by corporate capitalism and neoliberal agendas.” (2020 p.50). The emphasis of the surface of film in handmade cinema reveals a contingent ecosystem.

Analogue cinema is so intrinsically locked to an ecology of tools that constitute its production; it points to how much the mediascape is a product of the technology that underpins it. In contrast, digital cinema appears to make these technologies insignificant by concealing their presence. Knowledge sharing activities such as *Nanofest* go beyond how to use machines and tools for film-making. By offering other avenues of production, *Nanofest* allows other voices to speak, enabling artisanal interruption of an industrial medium.

Film practice is laboursome and solitary in many phases of production. It invites effort and failure. A community of like-minded individuals provides a reason beyond money to not give up. When Tuohy says “my head is in the machine” he is articulating the traces that using these materials can leave on an artist. These are portable attitudes that are applied even when venturing far from the lab because they alter ways of seeing through dedicated engagement. *Nanofest* operates as a tool for radical cultivation of a crevice community which drives against the grain of commercial cinema demands. It is a fissure, with deep roots in historical film co-ops, built from ‘obsolescence’ where individuals cultivate their own potential.

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