The Canadian Film Institute: Part II
or
How I Tried Very Hard to Interview Frederik Manter and after Waiting Fifteen Weeks, Decided to Write an Article Without his Participation

by Patricia Thompson

Many nations, interested in cinema, have film institutes. They tend to resemble each other, providing public screenings of important films, publishing books and guides (often including a film magazine like Britain’s “ Sight and Sound”), collecting material for archives and generally enriching a nation’s film culture. The British Film Institute, the Australian Film Institute, the Swedish Film Institute and the American Film Institute are all cut out from the same cloth.

In all of the above nations, the film institutes receive the enthusiastic (but not uncritical) backing of the nation’s film industries. They are integral parts of those industries, and provide important services, defending film culture as others defend film businesses.

Only in Canada does there exist a film institute which, having accumulated a debilitating deficit, has ceased to perform all functions of a film institute. Only in Canada does that institute exist in chaotic isolation from the industry, providing no service over many years and receiving no moral support.

The contacts between the private sector and the Canadian Film Institute have been frustrating in the extreme for some years now. Records are not made public, interviews are not given, and a veil of secrecy covers most decisions. Cinema Canada tried to tell the story in October 1981, but questions were not answered then by the executive director, Frederik Manter. The following story documents the frustrations of trying to find out what is happening there today, and why.

Pat Thompson’s account is detailed and, some may think, overdone, as the sentence. “The CFI wishes to make no comment at this time,” might have covered the situation adequately.

Cinema Canada felt it important to publish her account for several reasons. The reticence of the CFI to make clear its situation is not the product of a present reorganization, but is a reflection of its posture over many years. This organization, due to fumbling under the weight of its errors and, ultimately, its lack of essential services, has just been bailed out by the Minister of Communications to the tune of almost $200,000. Yet, the CFI is apparently in an illegal situation, having violated its own by-laws repeatedly in the past few years. The Minister has made no mention of any conditions he has imposed upon the CFI which might promise better management in the future.

Several years ago, the CFI nominated many new directors, and the roster began to look like a who’s who of Canadian cinema: Sam Kula (director, National Film Archives), Ian McLaren (director, Cultural Industries Branch, Department of Communications), Andrée Lamy (executive director, Canadian Film Development Corp.) Peter Mortimer (policy writer, DOC), and Sydney Newman (past federal film commissioner).

Wags have suggested that the Minister may have bailed out the CFI simply because it would have been embarrassing for the Institute to go bankrupt while his entire senior staff sits on the Board.

Film institutes are generally public trusts; members come from the private sector and meet annually to choose the directors. This is how the CFI was structured, but it no longer has an extended membership. It is now, as one director admitted, an organization in search of a role, a policy, a stance to justify its own existence.

Are we now so rich that we can afford to fund organizations which have outlived their usefulness? Does the Minister, or the directors, or even the executive director have some new agenda, one which will rally the private sector around the Institute and move it back into center stage, giving it a pivotal position occupied by every other film institute around the world?

The will of the new board is to get on with business at hand, and to forget about the Institute’s past shortcomings. These, however, are not minor occurrences, but major problems. Until some questions are answered, publicly and fully, no amount of goodwill can make up for the damage done to the CFI by the past and present reticence to join in open dialogue.

In April 1982 I set out for Ottawa, and an Easter weekend with Friends. After a pause, the week would be devoted to another article on the Canadian Film Institute. This to follow-up Penelope Hynam’s piece in Cinema Canada, No. 78, October 1981.

Well in advance I’d written a letter to Frederik Manter, CFI Executive Director, requesting an interview between April 15 and 18. Only a cloud or two marred the horizon — he hadn’t replied or telephoned... and a current list of CFI Directors didn’t seem to be available, and so they couldn’t be contacted in advance. But, everything would work out...

A veritable torrent had flowed under the CFI bridge since the Hynam article. Pier’s handling and three other employees had resigned, circulating an account of the CFI’s deficiencies in November 1981, calling for an investigation. This statement cited many facts: almost no work was being done at the CFI; the National Film Theatre had been closed for five months; Film Canadiana was months late in publication. In addition, it was alleged that the CFI had broken its corporate by-laws with memberships being unilaterally abolished in 1975; no Annual Meeting was held in 1980, and on and on.

The most riveting piece of information estimated the accumulated debt of the CFI at an astounding sum of $180,000 as of April 1981.*

As things turned out, I didn’t get to interview Frederik Manter, and Judith Crawley (CFI President in April) stepped not very neatly. Since no one was available, and things were said on the phone, I asked to find a list. Crawley told me there were 15, but the Board had “permission” from the Minister of Communications to increase this number to 21. The current CFI Directors are an informed group, as to how these people were chosen, and she said they were “nominated.” I asked “By whom ?,” and who was entitled to vote for them, and Crawley then stated: “I don’t want to give an interview.” ** I pointed out that I was only asking for facts.

She continued with a few remarks to the effect that I had been around a long time, and added a few personal stories. Pat Thompson is Editor of the Canadian Film Digest Yearbook, a film researcher/programmer, and has observed the CFI for 25 years.

Wednesday, April 14: Called Manter at home at 8:15 a.m. but no reply.

Called CFI at 9:30 a.m. to be told that Manter was out of town for the week.

Called Judith Crawley, CFI President, and left message on answering machine.

Crawley returned call. She launched into a long explanation, the gist of which was that my letter to Manter (a simple request for an interview) and a list of current CFI Directors had been discussed at an Executive meeting the previous week. It had been decided that only Manter and Crawley would be available, and that the Board had “permission” from the Minister of Communications to increase this number to 21. The next Annual Meeting was held in 1980, and on and on.

Pat Thompson is Editor of the Canadian Film Institute file and look for a list of current directors.

First, the contacts.

Tuesday, April 13: Telephoned Frederik Manter at CFI at 9:30 a.m. but he was not in. Manter returned the call, but I was unable to get back to him.

** I finally ended up going to the Corporations Branch in Hull, Que., to read the Canadian Film Institute file and look for a list of current directors.
time and I must know that it took a long while to "work" and then it said it had taken "Frederik a long time to recover."

Crawley added that Manter was "terribly busy," working on financing and reorganization. I asked, "What has been the reorganiza-
tion?", and she replied that it had been going on for over a year - long before "we were even thinking of streaming into the future and when the people left last year."

The distinct impression at this moment was that Pierre Handling et al were let go in a streamlining exercise.

She also said Manter was working on the Animation Festival and its financing. Leading to my immediate enquiry, "Is it "taking "Frederik a long time to recover."

She then said it had taken a long time and I must know that it took a long time.

Manter would not be at the French Embassy reception at the National Library was moved, "we are reduced organization with specific busy."

Judith laughed and said, "I think that Manter had promised to help her."

Embassy reception at the National Library was moved and "we are reduced organization with specific busy."

Manter mentioned the possibility of this major change, Manter said that the CFI should be a much better organization and would "instruct" the CFI to operate under a new regime - or lack thereof. A news release was put out by the Federal Film Commission under date of May 31, 1982 (see box).

Crawley added that Manter was "terribly busy."

Snippets of information have percolated through the CFI and its operations - or lack thereof. A news release was put out by the Federal Film Commission under date of May 31, 1982 (see box)

The CFM Board met on June 30, 1982 in Toronto. The CFI has been moved to Mississauga and is about the only visible sign of the CFI left last year; since I have been running the money end."

Following this meeting, Reta Kilpatrick (Assistant Film Commissioner) told me that the CFI has undergone a "reduced organization with specific rules not covered by government."

From that day, the Board's Executive instructed the CFI to stop doing, it would require more funding.

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In 1980-81, the Institute loaned nearly 19,000 films to universities, community colleges, medical schools and other educational institutions across Canada.

"The Institute also plays a significant role in promoting the study, appreciation and use of film as an educational and cultural medium in Canada and abroad/" added the Minister. "It provides up-to-date information on every film produced in Canada, and has published many books on Canadian films and filmmakers. The International Animation Festival is the most competitive and important in North America."

"This special one-time grant is intended to reduce the Institute's deficit and constitutes a recognition by the government of the Institute's important contribution to Canadian film both here and in the past/" said Mr. Fox. "I have every confidence that this contribution will continue in the future."

"Last year, Institute management undertook an extensive reorganization and began to contract out many services such as book publishing and film distribution," said Mr. Fox. "These measures, along with federal support, should put the Institute well on its way to full financial recovery."

The press release

Communications Minister Francis Fox today (May 31) announced approval of a special one-time grant of $325,000 to the Canadian Film Institute in order to help reduce its deficit.

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The good news

Dear Mr. Manter,

Some time ago you wrote to me, requesting financial assistance from this department to help reduce the Canadian Film Institute's long-term accumulated deficit. I would like to inform you that I have approved your request for a one-time contribution of up to $125,000 to your Institute for this purpose. A cheque in the amount of $125,000 will be forwarded to you under separate cover upon receipt of the signed copy of this letter.

I am approving this contribution on the understanding that you agree to the following terms and conditions: this one-time contribution will be made to the Canadian Film Institute to help reduce its accumulated deficit and, in doing so, to reduce its deficit for the fiscal year, up to a maximum of $60,000. I hope that this assistance, in addition to the contribution being made by my department, will enable you to place the Institute on a sounder financial footing during the coming year.

I have noted with interest your recent correspondence with the Deputy Minister of Communications with respect to the quality of service to both official language communities and would encourage the Institute to take any action necessary to ensure an equal and acceptable quality of service to both official languages.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your colleagues every success in your activities.

Yours sincerely,

Francis Fox
and 21 Directors during the festival. All sorts of wonderful things will be seen and heard within the atmosphere of euphoria that characterizes one of the most friendly specialized festivals in Canada. No one will ask awkward questions to spoil the lovely summer film mood... so I'll ask them now.

- How can the CFI justify its existence as a film institute and why does it need National Film Theatre programs in the capital city or across the nation, no area coverage reference material?
- Why does the CFI need 21 Directors to run such a small organization?
- How are the CFI Directors nominated and by whom?
- Are CFI memberships wiped out, thus cutting off support by people who cared about non-commercial film in this country?
- Does the CFI need two office locations?
- If the CFI needs a distribution presence in Toronto, why doesn't it need one in Montreal too?
- If, as Frederik Manter has said, the CFI wants "to get away from the public trough", why does it maintain an office in Ottawa?

**A letter to Cinema Canada**

"The recent decision of the Minister of Communications to award a special one-time grant of $125,000 to the Canadian Film Institute (CFI) appears to have been misinterpreted by some sectors of the film community. I wish to clarify the matter.

The CFI has long enjoyed close cooperative relationships with the Government of Canada and its related film agencies. It has produced valuable services, consistent with its mandate as a film institute, over a period of years. For the last 2 years the Institute carried the burden of an accumulated deficit of more than $100,000. Efforts at self-imposed economy by organizations create their own internal problems and the CFI was no exception in this regard.

The combination of overall constraints in cultural funding over recent years and the severe fluctuations in interest rates last year frustrated CFI efforts to handle their deficit and maintain their programs. The cost of carrying the deficit became insupportable and there were no further practical internal economies that could be made; at this point the Executive Director approached the Minister of Communications for assistance.

Overriding considerations in our examination of the CFI situation were the undeniable contributions of the Institute in the past and its future potential, as a continuing resource to the film industry in Canada. These considerations and the present difficulties made it clear that assistance was imperative and should be provided. This was the basis of the decision made by the Minister. Mr. Fox indicated that the grant was special and specific to the retirement of the CFI deficit and a recognition of the CFI's past and potential contributions to film in Canada.

The Institute is now free to develop ongoing sources of support for itself and its programs unhampered by the burden of a major deficit. I cannot imagine why anyone would wish them other than the best of luck as they tackle the difficult tasks ahead."

**A statement**

The Canadian Film Institute is unable to provide material to Cinema Canada to complement the article on the Institute which we understand is being reprinted from Maclean's and published in this issue.

As most people know, the Institute has just emerged from a period of extreme difficulty and attendant internal strife. At the recent Annual General Meeting held on June 30, 1982 an earlier CFI Board decision to increase the size of the Board in both terms of its constituency and regional representation was carried through. The expanded Board will be meeting for the first time on 13 August 1982 to discuss and approve the reorganization of the Canadian Film Institute with modified goals and objectives, the result of extensive discussion and work over the last several months.

Since the new Board has had the opportunity to consider the plans and proposals for the future of the CFI, it would be neither proper nor prudent to make these public.

After the August 13th meeting, the CFI will welcome any expressions of interest in the statement it intends to make.

**Peter Morimer**

Vice President

Canadian Film Institute

- Why does the Federal government give a special one-time grant of $125,000 to reduce the CFI deficit - what is special about the CFI's above all other film activities?
- How did the past Directors let a deficit arise to such an impossible height - what is special about all other film activities?
- Why did Frederik Manter, Executive Director of the CFI, fail to realize the extent of the CFI deficit and warn the Directors?
- How does the past CFI Board decision to increase the mandate as a film institute, over a period of years, fail to understand the burden of a major deficit, 1 cannot imagine why anyone would wish the CFI to keep its job in these hard times it is understandable, but not laudable in this case.

**“Misleading and erroneous…”**

The following letter was received in response to one featured in Issue 86 of Cinema Canada and entitled "Complaints to register."

Dear Ms. Grossman:

Your letter of June 11, 1982 has been reviewed by members of the Toronto Super 8 Film Festival Committee and by other representatives of the Super 8 committees. We wish to draw to your attention that your letter is both misleading and erroneous.

For this letter to claim that two filmmakers who requested information and submitted films in advance of the Festival instead of one. It should be made clear that you and/or your company, who co-signed the letter, was involved in this respect. The facts are as follows:

1. You requested and received the Festival's newsletter and entry form, copies of which are attached hereto.
2. You repeatedly telephoned the Festival office in a vain attempt to inquire about accommodation in Toronto for yourself, and your companion.
3. On May 14th you mentioned on the telephone that you wished to enter a film. The Festival Director advised you to send your film immediately by overnight express in order to be received in time for the jurying as the final entry date was May 20th.
4. Your entry, postmarked May 17th was received by the Festival Office on May 27th by which time it was much too late for viewing by the Jury.
5. Extensions had been made up to May 23rd for late entries.

We note that your letter falsely indicates that you received information to the effect that "all films would be screened at the Festival regardless of jury selection." This is contrary to the Newsletter and has never been a practice of the Festival in its seven years of operation. However, films not selected by the Jury could be screened by the filmmaker under "Open Screening" in an effort designated for that purpose as outlined in our newsletter. In reference to your treatment at the Festival we would like to set the record straight:

1. Upon arrival at the Festival you demanded that your films, which are entered for the Festival, be judged by the Jury, be included in its Program Screenings.
2. The Director kindly arranged for you to attend the Festival instead of one. It should be made clear that you and/or your companion, were involved in this respect. The facts are as follows:
3. Your films were given a rating of 4 to 5 out of 10 by the two Jurors (7 being the highest score of any film in a personal screening attended by you and your companion.})
4. Your films were given a rating of 4 to 5 out of 10 by the two Jurors (7 being the highest score of any film in a personal screening attended by you and your companion.)
5. The Jurors and Mark Nicholas discussed the shortcomings of your films during the event and to the contents of your letter referred to above. The Festivals has rejected your letter of June 11, 1982 has been reviewed by members of the Toronto Super 8 Film Festival Committee and by other representatives of the Super 8 film festivals. We wish to draw to your attention that your letter is both misleading and erroneous.

Dear Mr. Clarkson:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Peter Willmann and Izra Brown. We are currently on location in Ecuador I have spoken to them by phone and they are anxious that I should immediately express our disappointment and sense of frustration that the Festival of Festivals has rejected your documentary film The Breakthrough.

Despite receiving the 1981 Biju Award for Best Independent Production and despite being purchased in July last year by CTY, The Breakthrough has yet to receive a public showing. The producers felt however, that at least they could look forward to seeing the film at Toronto and one of the few critics who cared about non-commercial film in this country.

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