

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 from the same cloth.

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

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 haughty isolation from the industry, providing no important service 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 simple 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 fold 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), André 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 the 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 13 and 16. 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. Piers 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) side-stepped not very neatly. Since no one would meet me and answer questions, this safari resulted in a few notes about contacts and a list of unanswered questions.

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.

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 for 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 see me, and together. However, I had not been available the previous day, and Manter was now in Montreal for the rest of the week.

I pointed out that my letter to Manter was dated April 2 and there had been ample time for him to let me know he would be unavailable. Crawley then suggested that any interview would be more informative after the Annual Meeting in May. I then asked who the present CFI Directors were, as I couldn't 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 next Annual Meeting. I enquired 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

** 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.

Pat Thompson is Editor of the *Canadian Film Digest Yearbook*, a film researcher/programmer, and has observed the CFI for 25 years.

time and I must know that it took a long while to "recover". She then said it had taken "Frederik a long time to recover after the last debacle"...

Crawley added that Manter was "terribly busy" with financing and reorganization. I asked, "What reorganization?", and she replied that it had been going on for over a year - long before "we were asked to streamline", and when the people left last year. (The distinct impression at this moment was that Piers Handling *et al* were let go in a streamlining measure).

She also said Manter was working on the Animation Festival and its financing, leading to my immediate enquiry, "Is Kelly O'Brien the Festival Director this year?" Crawley confirmed she was, but that Manter had promised to help her. As an aside, I asked if it was true that Manter would not be at the French Embassy reception at the National Library, preceding the Abel Gance opening the next day, which was a CFI benefit. Judith laughed and said, "Well, yes, but Frederik is *terribly* busy."

Thursday, April 15:

Lunchtime call from Frederik Manter, who was apparently in town for a few minutes. He was aggressively pleasant, and laughingly brushed off the fact that Judith Crawley had informed me the CFI Executive wished the two of them to see me together.

He launched into some remarks about the CFI being sued by a group of former employees, so he couldn't say too much, then went on to the CFI reorganization "to get away from the public trough," and the intelligence that the National Film Theatre was closing because it was losing money. I managed to interpolate a query as to what the CFI was going to be doing.

Off and running again, Manter said its Library had been moved to Mississauga (Toronto), that this had been a high priority, and it was sharing facilities with others. Asked to define the Library, Manter said that it operated under a contract with the National Research Council and only distributed science material, old films and films of historical significance. "We don't want to compete with the private sector." Income from films rented was \$150,000, about 60% of which is required to operate the Library, with the balance going into acquisition of new 16mm films, and tapes. The Library moved February 1, 1982 and, when asked who had been informed of this major change, Manter said that notices went to all CFI customers. The CFI would continue to maintain an office in Ottawa.

Rattling over points like an express train, Manter mentioned the possibility of a Documentary Film Festival next year, and said that *Film Canadiana* was two years overdue. In January 1981, he continued, the Film Commissioner put together a meeting with the CFI at which Manter's position was that, if the CFI was to continue as it had been doing, it would require more funding from government. If this was not forthcoming, it would have to eliminate various things. Manter then averred that the CFI had its "first deficit last year since I have been running the money end." Following this meeting, Reta Kilpatrick (Assistant Film Commissioner) told him that the CFI should be a much "reduced organization with specific rules not covered by government." From that day, the Board's Executive instructed Manter to do this. "That is why the Library was moved and "we are getting

out of the record-keeping business."

An IMAX theatre in Ottawa is apparently an ongoing project, with Hamilton Southam working closely with the CFI, and funding to come from the private sector.

During this fifteen-minute avalanche of P.R., I was hard-put to get in a word or two, even though much of the above was obscure, even to me. I finally said that I had to have a personal interview to ask many questions about reports of the deficit; about secrecy of operations and decisions of the Board and its Executive; about how people were elected to the Board, and more. The call ended with Manter promising to call me when next in Toronto.

At the French Embassy reception, preceding the opening of the Abel Gance benefit for the CFI, Sam Kula (Director of the National Film, Television and Sound Archives) jocularly enquired what I was up to. He had that day received three 'phone calls asking why Pat Thompson was in town, and why was she asking a lot of questions? I remarked that anyone with whom I had communicated had been made aware that I was gathering information for a *Cinema Canada* article.

I was also introduced to Judith Crawley at the reception. She was pleasant but nervous, and right out of the blue said she hoped I understood her position, because she had been "instructed" by the Executive not to talk to me alone...

Wednesday, April 21:

Manter called from Ottawa and would be in Toronto April 29 and 30. He wanted to take me to see the CFI Library in Mississauga adding, "I don't think I gave you enough over the phone in Ottawa." I indicated I would be available at any time during his two days in Toronto.

Thursday, April 29:

Manter telephoned and left a message - he's still in Ottawa and won't get to Toronto today.

And there everything grinds to a halt. Not a word from Frederik Manter since that date.

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

Omitted from the release is that the National Film Board of Canada has agreed to purchase contract services from the CFI during the early part of the 1982/83 fiscal year, up to a maximum of \$60,000. Add this to the grant and get \$185,000 - not bad going in a recession.

What does this mean? Has a foot been placed on the Film Commissioner's neck; has he been manoeuvred into this contract? The specific mention of "the early part of the 1982/83 fiscal year" appears to ensure that cash will be in the NFB coffers and available to the CFI.

A comparison between the Federal news release and some of the remarks made by Manter in his telephone conversation of April 15 indicates a gap between federal comprehension of the CFI's functions and what it is *actually* doing - or not doing. The National Film Theatre has gone; *Film Canadiana* may perhaps see the light just once more; the publications program is abandoned; what "contract services" will the NFB purchase from the CFI? With Manter running the Library of films from Mississauga, why is it necessary to have an office in Ottawa, and, if it can be justified,

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 am pleased to inform you that I have approved your request for a one-time contribution of up to \$125,360.00 to your Institute for this purpose. A cheque in the amount of \$125,360.00 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 respect the following terms and conditions: this one-time contribution is made to the Canadian Film Institute to reduce its accumulated deficit and, following the close of the fiscal year, but not later than May 31, 1982, the Canadian Film Institute will provide to the department an audited financial report for the previous fiscal year. I reserve the right to audit the accounts of the Institute to ensure that funds provided were used for the purpose intended. The scope, coverage and timing of such an audit shall be as determined by me. The audit, if conducted, may be carried out by my agents, officials or employees.

If you are in agreement with these

conditions, would you please have this letter and a copy thereof signed by the authorized officer of your organization and return the copy to me.

You will also be pleased to know that the National Film Board of Canada has agreed to purchase contract services from your organization during the early part of the 1982-1983 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 Canadians of both official languages.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your associates best wishes in your activities.

Yours sincerely,
Francis Fox

The press release

Communications Minister Francis Fox today (May 31) announced approval of a special one-time grant of \$125,000 to the Canadian Film Institute in order to help reduce its deficit.

"For the past 46 years, the Canadian Film Institute has provided the major alternative to the commercial theatre chains for film distribution and exhibition," said Mr. Fox. "For these reasons, it must be considered a national institution of vital importance to the Canadian film industry."

In 1980-81, the Institute loaned nearly 10,000 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 in-

formation on every film produced in Canada, and has published many books on Canadian films and filmmakers. Its International Animated Film 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 now and in the past," said Mr. Fox. "I have every confidence that 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 along the road to financial recovery."

does Manter journey endlessly between the two, rather like a filmic Flying Dutchman?

And where does all this lead to? A waste of money and a dead end? My overwhelming feelings are of frustration, sadness, rage, dissatisfaction and revulsion - not necessarily in equal parts.

The CFI Board met on June 30, 1982 in Mississauga, and there are now twenty-one Directors and a new President - Harry Gulkin. However, once again, no information has been issued about decisions at this meeting, or a list of the new Directors and their qualifications. When is the film community going to learn how the CFI will operate in the

future, after its massive debt has been liquidated? Let me make a few predictions.

The International Animation Festival is being held in Ottawa, August 13-18 this year - it only occurs every other year, and is about the only visible sign that the CFI is alive. It is well-organized and run by Kelly O'Brien, who is devoted to its preservation. Frederik Manter helps her, but in what capacity it is hard to see. However, Manter will be front and centre at the National Arts Centre during the AnimFest, while O'Brien will, as usual, slog away cheerfully remaining in the background.

The CFI Manager will stage a press conference or other 'event' to present a new-look CFI with its new President

and 21 Directors during the festival. And all sorts of wonderful things will be announced - all within the atmosphere of euphoria created by 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*, when it has no National Film Theatre programs in the capital city or across the nation, no archives, no reference material?
- Why does the CFI need 21 Directors to run such a small organization?
- How are the CFI Directors nominated and by whom?
- Why were CFI memberships wiped out, thus cutting off support by people who cared about non-commercial film in this country?
- Why 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?

- Why does the Federal government give a special one-time grant of \$125,000 to reduce the CFI deficit - what makes the CFI so special above all other film activities?

- How did the past Directors let a deficit rise to such olympian heights - what about budgets, financial statements, management, forward planning?
- Why did Frederik Manter, Executive Director of the CFI for at least six years, fail to realize the extent of the CFI deficit and warn the Directors?
- What "contract service" is the NFB going to receive from the CFI in return for a maximum of \$60,000?
- Will the CFI make public its annual audit, which must now be concluded, as the fiscal year ends May 31?

Any CFI-watcher can go on and on with questions including, in my opinion, the really big one. Why wasn't the CFI allowed to fold quietly? Its present truncated form does not fulfill the functions of a film institute, and it would have been cheaper for the taxpayers, too. Maybe Manter fights so hard to keep the CFI head above the waves in order to keep his job - in these hard times it is understandable, but not laudable in this case.

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 provided valuable services, consistent with its mandate as a film institute, over a period of 46 years. For the last 7 years the Institute carried the burden of an accumulated deficit of more than \$100,000. Efforts at self-imposed economy in cultural 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 ap-

proached the Minister of Communications for assistance.

"Overriding considerations in our examination of the CFI situation were the undoubted contributions of the Institution 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 if assistance were possible, then it 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, untrammelled 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."

J.A. Ouellette
Director General
Arts and Culture Branch
Cultural Affairs

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 written by Mrs. Patricia Thompson and published in this issue.

As most people know, the Institute has just emerged from a period of extreme financial difficulty and attendant internal strife.

At the recent Annual General Meeting held on June 30, 1982 an earlier CFI Board decision to increase the Board both in 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.

Until 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 Mortimer
Vice President
Canadian Film Institute

"Misleading and erroneous..."

The following letter was received in response to one printed 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 others present at the event.

We wish to draw to your attention that your letter is both misleading and erroneous.

First the letter claims to represent two filmmakers who requested information and submitted films in advance of the Festival instead of one. It should be made clear that you alone and not your companion, 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 advance of the event inquiring 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. (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 area designated for this 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, although unseen by the Jury, be included in its Programmed Screenings.

2. The Director kindly arranged for two Jurors and Mark Mikolas, author of *The Super 8 Handbook*, to view your films in a personal screening attended by yourself and your companion.

3. Your films were given a rating of 4 to 5 out of 10 by the two Jurors (7 being the lowest score of any film selected for screening in your category).

4. The Jurors and Mark Nicholas discussed the shortcomings of your films with you and suggested that you attend the Jury Nomination Reel Screenings to view the prize-winning film in your category as it happened to deal with the same subject matter as your own.

5. According to our information you showed no interest in benefiting from the suggestions made at your personal screening and made no arrangements for an Open Screening of your films.

6. Following your personal screening the Director and other members of the Festival administration received several

telephone calls from yourself and your companion demanding that your films be included in the Programmed Screenings and threatening to publicize your discontent.

Your widely distributed letter of June 11, 1982 is a deliberate attempt to harm the Festival by discrediting it with false information. Contrary to the contents of your letter the Festival is an international event. This year it received and processed 246 film entries from ten different countries. Five different countries were represented by its Workshop Speakers and its Trade Show included technical experts and manufacturers' representatives as indicated in the program. Half of the people attending the Festival were from outside Toronto, one third of these being from the United States.

The Festival Committee and the Administrative Staff take exception to the type of behaviour displayed by you during the event and to the contents of your letter referred to above. The Festival is for the benefit of Super 8 filmmakers in general and we are not prepared to sacrifice its integrity when faced with threats and abuse from particular individuals.

Richard H. Hill
Festival Chairman
The Toronto Super 8 Film Festival

No breakthrough for best film

The following letter is addressed to Wayne Clarkson, director of Toronto's Festival of Festivals; a copy was sent to Cinema Canada. For a review of the film in question, The Breakthrough, see Cinema Canada No. 85.

Dear Mr. Clarkson:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Peter Williamson and Ira Levy. Although they are currently on location in Ecuador I have spoken to them by phone and they were anxious that I should immediately express to you their disappointment and sense of frustration on learning that the Festival of Festivals has rejected their documentary film *The Breakthrough*.

Despite receiving the 1981 Bijou Award for the Best Independent Production and despite being purchased in July last year by CTV, *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 the Festival of Festivals since it must qualify on three counts - as a first rate Canadian film; as an independent production and as a film which, despite its critical success, few people have had the opportunity to see. They were dismayed to discover that these weighty qualifications did not equal the seemingly inconsequential fact that a corporation (Commodore Computers) funded *The Breakthrough*.

Does this mean that the Festival of Festivals would have turned down an opportunity to premiere *Reds* because it received financing from Gulf and Western? or *Quest for Fire* because of the Royal Bank's involvement? Does the Festival of Festivals really only ever show films funded by private investors

(cont. on page 36)