
ANIMATION

N A R C I S S U S



photos: R. S. Diamond

Norman McLaren **Reflections on a life**

*“So I’m for Norman McLaren.
I don’t think we can
appreciate him enough”*

- British artist and filmmaker Len Lye

McLaren perspectives

The task of the filmmaker

"I always have the audience in the back of my mind. Very often an ill-defined audience. (Sometimes) as a more clearly defined audience. When making *Rythmetic* I thought about children and hoped it would help children be interested in numbers. But even in any film, no matter how abstract it is, or concrete, I have an audience in mind. I think, I keep thinking, of a group of people watching that film and I keep looking out for the possibility of them getting bored. I think this is the task of the filmmaker - you're given this amount of time, and you've got a captured audience and you must keep them interested throughout that whole space of time and not let their interest flag. I'm terrified of letting an audience get bored."

— Norman McLaren (1969)

The qualities of tragedy

"McLaren says a weakness of animated films is their inability to express tragedy. But many people find qualities of tragedy in his films; in his use of comedy to stave off conflict, in the suppressed terror behind the beauty of such films as *A Phantasy* and *C'est l'aviron*, in the lonely search through space, for what? 'Space to me is a kinetic experience,' he says, and watching his films, one often feels oneself being drawn into that great infinity against one's will. Struggles between his characters never end in the kind of fights that are a cliché of U.S.-made cartoons; their aggression at the point of crisis is turned back upon themselves through metamorphosis, perhaps as he turns his own aggressive tendencies back upon himself. *Neighbours* is the significant exception to this; in it the violence became so strong that both Italian and U.S. distributors asked that it be edited.

So complex is McLaren that people who have worked with him for decades say frankly they don't understand him. The symbolism of his movies offers a fertile field for psychoanalytic interpretations. His humanitarianism, which led one writer to call him 'a saint,' has a touching child-like quality to it, of one reaching out to be loved as well as to love. He dresses like a college boy, looks twenty years younger than his age, and has kept the youthful innocence and enthusiasm common to great artists. Far from taking seriously any thought he might express about giving up filmmaking, one shudders to think of what life would be for him without it; the necessity brings him in to work sometimes when he is so mentally depressed and physically ill that he frightens those around him."

— May Ebbitt Cutler

The McLaren process

"When I see a painting on the wall, I don't think of all the stages that led up to that. No, it's a complete work in itself, but in my own experience of doing paintings, I've been very conscious of the fact that they slowly evolve. That process seemed to me to be more important than the final result. When I do a painting - I'm not a good painter at all, I don't know when to stop. The whole thing is a process of chopping and changing around. I am more fascinated by the chopping and changing around than the final thing. This naturally led to trying to channel this into filmmaking."

— Norman McLaren (1969)

The modern artist

"And let there be no mistake - McLaren is a modern artist, working within the same psychic framework as Picasso, as Stockhausen, as Joyce; it would be futile to compare him with Ford or Bunuel or Von Stroheim, for he is not a film director in the Hollywood tradition.

He is a man who, by pixillation, transforms his actors into puppets pulled by the invisible strings of the camera and then has his puppets stand in for humanity. A heightening of artistic process to enlarge the human senses.

He is a man who dares make a film using a single line (*Lines Vertical*, 1960). And then, he turns the very same film sideways to produce a new and very different film (*Lines Horizontal*, 1962). With the senses still reeling from the sheer brilliance of his achievement, he then delivers a knock-out blow with *Mosaic* (1965), the combination of these two films at their points of intersection.

He is a man who has spent his adult life in a constant attempt to communicate his love of harmony and gentleness, and his repugnance of violence and hatred."

— Maynard Collins

by Gordon Martin

Learned volumes have been written in dozens of languages about Canada's best-known filmmaker, Norman McLaren. Yet it is in the simple but elegant tribute of his friend and colleague Guy Glover, that both the most succinct and the most poetic description of the artist-animators work is to be found:

"Far from the talking picture - that vast province of the Cinema that borders, indeed overlaps, on the Realm of Language - there exists yet another province of the Cinema where talk is limited and which touches on the frontiers of Music and Dance.

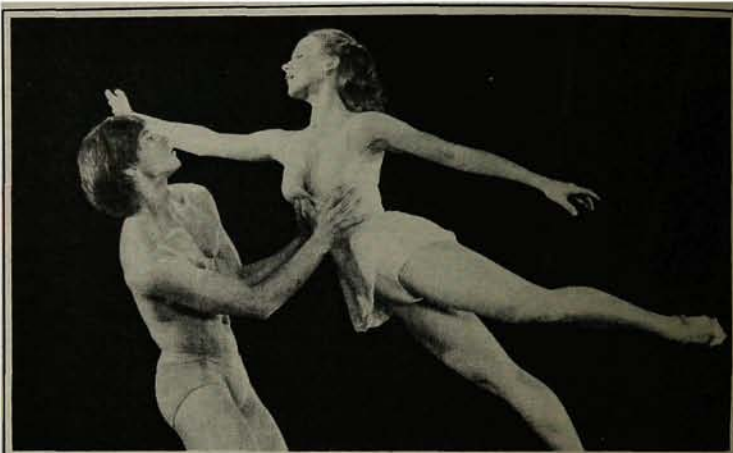
"In a corner of that province is to be found the little garden of Norman McLaren whose films talk only through image and movement."

McLaren's mentor, John Grierson, once said "If there is such a thing as

with the sparse resources of the time. They established McLaren's well-deserved reputation for economy both materially and creatively.

In 1944 McLaren formed an animation studio at NFB and worked with other young artists such as Grant Munro, René Jodoin, Evelyn Lambert, George Dunning, and Jim McKay, as well as musicians Maurice Blackburn and Louis Applebaum. It was a period during which enduring principles of animated filmmaking were established.

Chief amongst these is McLaren's preoccupation with movement rather than the slick static imagery and story line which characterize popular cartoons. Perhaps because he has created directly with pen and ink on film stock, his total grasp of the essence of cinema, or "movies" as he prefers to say, is uncluttered with sophistication and armchair reasoning. Writing for *Sequences* in 1975 he said, "The animator, more than any other filmmaker, realizes most that what



● Narcissus, sorely tempted (Jean-Louis Morin and Sylvie Kinal)

pure movie, be sure that McLaren has been one of its greatest exponents." Indeed it was Grierson who sensed the young Scot's genius when he saw *Colour Cocktail* in 1935 at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival. At the time McLaren was 21 years old and a student at the Glasgow School of Art. He had already completed two films as well as numerous exercises.

The Grierson connection which saw McLaren first join the General Post Office Film Unit in London in 1936, also accounted for this country's good fortune in providing a home and workplace from him for the past 42 years. In 1941, shortly after his appointment as head of the National Film Board, Grierson plucked McLaren from a short-lived yet productive period in New York, and brought him to Ottawa to inject a little fantasy into the sober images being produced by Canada's wartime propaganda film studio.

Although he had been given a free hand in this setting, McLaren, an instinctive pacifist and a gentle spirit, chose to contribute to the priorities which history demanded of Canada's filmmakers at the time. There followed a series of short films and clips, *Mail Early for Christmas*, *V for Victory*, *Hen Hop*, *Five for Four*, *Dollar Dance*, and *Keep Your Mouth Shut*, which are glorious expressions of the advertising art and definitive examples of the possible harmony between form and function. The first five of these were done without a camera and

lies on each frame is never as important as what *has happened* between each frame." For McLaren every film, or almost every film, was a kind of dance.

There were exceptions of course, but these occurred early in his career and only serve to illustrate his amazing versatility and his continuing role as teacher. In 1937 while working for the post office film unit, he made *Book Bargain*, a straightforward documentation of the production of the London telephone directory. In the role of cameraman, he shot Ivor Montagu's *Defence of Madrid* which was a front-line documentation of the struggle against fascism during the Spanish Civil War.

McLaren's absorbing interest in the form has allowed him to move freely from drawing directly on film stock, to creating cutouts and pastel drawings, to using the live-action image at varying speeds ranging from single-frame pixillation in *Neighbours* to a mix of slow motion and standard speed filming in his most recent film, *Narcissus*.

Ever-present in his work is technical challenge. "It triggers me off," he has said. "Often I have to investigate the technique first and then find the subject matter afterwards." Yet he refuses to leave his technical trials as unfinished exercises. Discussing the difference between experiment and art he says "an experimenter will get interested in a technique, shoot a lot of material using it, and assemble it in some kind of order which may be interesting to look at - bits of it will be interesting to look at - but for an artist, shooting the material is just the first stage. He has to weld it into a unity so that it is a complete experience with consistency as well as variety."

Montreal writer/producer Gordon Martin is directing an animated documentary about British animator Lotte Reiniger.

What distinguishes a film as a work of art is that source of unity and single aim and purpose of mind."

McLaren has often described how he sets technical and artistic limits for himself which become the challenge and direct his efforts and energy. In the words of author Peter Drucker, "Every problem can be seen as an opportunity."

Unity of form despite diversity of technique is not the only search for oneness in McLaren's work. *C'est l'aviron*, one of several films which he made based on French-Canadian folksongs, is a magic journey which draws the viewer inexorably into a union with the infinite. The Oscar-winning *Neighbours* with its powerful personal/social message concludes with unity, albeit in death. Whether the movement is animal as in *Pas de deux*, or geometric as in *Spheres*, there is always a yearning for unification, a kind of magnetic and orgasmic attraction of one object or body for another. This is offset always by the elusive dance of separation, perhaps best seen in *Chairy Tale*, which is a subtle and artist form of the chase sequence.

McLaren has also been a teacher of great talent. His imprint is to be found throughout the world and particularly in the National Film Board's two main animation studios. Here, especially in the French-language studio, animation is pursued in the style of the studio artist. No trace and paint sections are to be found here, in antithesis to Disney or Hanna-Barbera. Emphasis is on form, movement, and exploration of technique rather than story line. Although much of McLaren's influence as a teacher has come through his relationship with colleagues such as René Jodoin, he has also written articles, patiently submitted to countless interviews, and shared his techniques and vision in very deliberate ways.

In 1949 he was sent by UNESCO to China to instruct artists in the preparation of simple audio-visual images which were used to encourage tree-planting, improve community sanitation, and instruct villagers in health care. During this period he witnessed the change of political regimes and felt personally the stressful times which it brought for the ordinary people with whom he lived and worked. No doubt that experience was the stimulus for *Neighbours*, completed in 1952.

In order to create even greater access to his basic understanding of animation, McLaren made five didactic yet beautiful films, *Animated Motion*, during the years 1976-78. These have been followed by *Narcissus*, just completed, which is purported to be his final work in cinema. Perhaps the most autobiographical of all his films, it harmonizes art with personal and social statement. In it, the eternal dance of *Blinkity Blank*, *Lines Vertical*, and *Ballet Adagio* comes to an abrupt end. The metamorphosis and impressionistic imagery which are the hallmarks of McLaren films resolve into a cold external reality.

Whether *Narcissus* is his swan song or not, McLaren has spawned too many "children", inspired too many colleagues, shared his vision with too many viewers, for there ever to be an end. In his 59 films one finds the entire history of motion picture experiences, a delicate quest for the Holy Grail and one senses a reverence for the living and a respect for the inanimate.

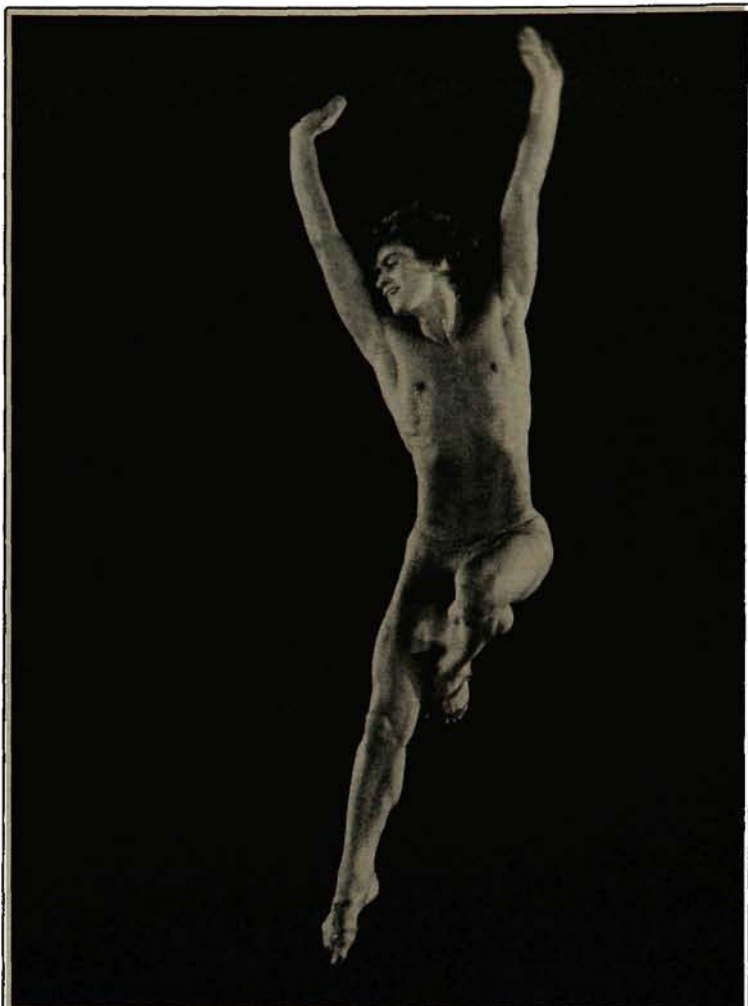
So thank you, Norman! And, with a touch of nationalistic self-interest, thanks too to John Grierson for the phone call to New York in 1941.

Norman McLaren's **Narcissus**

After screening Norman McLaren's 59th film, *Narcissus*, a small group of us met over coffee in the NFB cafeteria with producer David Verrall and assistant director Don McWilliams. Our discussion centred on the film's aesthetic impact, and how various techniques were employed to achieve certain modulations of motion, timing or colour density. McWilliams, who had been up all night cutting the test prints for this almost-but-not-quite final picture version, explained to us largely technique-ignorant critics the painstaking technical process involved in the composition of the film. We were duly impressed. But I was (secretly) delighted that I had just viewed a McLaren film in which the strength of its narrative content overwhelms its own devices. Not that this is the first of his films to achieve this: *Neighbours* (1952) and *A Chairy Tale* (1957) also carry clear moral messages. But most assessments of McLaren's work have (understandably) tended to concentrate on his technical innovations and achievements to the exclusion of his ideas. Maurice Yacowar pointed to this regrettable bias in his 1977 paper, "Norman McLaren: the Narrative and Contemplative Modes," saying how McLaren works seems to have generated more interest than what he is trying to express.

Narcissus is perhaps McLaren's most significant film in that it is a catalogue of his previous work, both technically and thematically. Like many of his previous films, it is concerned with human relationships - both personal (self-to-self) and interpersonal (self-to-others). The first of McLaren's "relationship" films had him establishing a one-to-one rapport with the medium, drawing, painting and scratching directly onto film stock. In his later films, he allowed himself the use of a camera, and experimented with a variety of optical effects to portray the fragile, mutable permutations of human relationships. His most obviously narrative film, *Neighbours*, employs the process of pixilation (figures are "animated" into movement by filming one frame at a time, then moving the objects between frames) to tell the tale of two neighbours who come to wholesale mutual destruction over the possession of one delicate flower. The pixilation process allowed for a limitless range of human movement, carrying the characters to deliberately exaggerated lengths in order to drive home the film's strong anti-war statement. *A Chairy Tale* is a live-action parable employing some pixilation techniques and manipulation of a chair (by invisible threads) to explore the arbitrary nature of interpersonal roles. But the film which most closely resembles *Narcissus* in both form and narrative content is *Pas-de-Deux* (1967).

Both ballet films use a variety of optical effects, such as multiple exposure, to extend and emphasize the dance movements and create a new choreography based on film time. The stunning, sensual effect gives the dance even more beauty than it would have if performed live on stage, and draws us closer to the dancer-character's inner conflict. Both films tell a similar story, with the same moral implications. Both



• Jean-Louis Morin of the Martha Graham Dance Company as Narcissus

portray the relationship of self-to-image and self-to-others. Each film opens with the dancer-character slowly arising from a prone position, awakening, as if to first consciousness of their own bodies. And for each, the first dawning of image-consciousness comes from seeing a reflection of their separate images in a pool. Each dances alone for a while, fascinated with the beauty and grace of their limbs. The young woman in *Pas-de-Deux* learns to project her image outward, gradually allowing it to embrace another person. Although she thrice retreats from the image of herself, and thrice from the male, ultimately the man's attraction prevails and her life is enriched through harmonizing with him. But the male youth in *Narcissus* (Jean-Louis Morin) projects his image outward, only to reflect and dance with himself. He is, at first, perplexedly compelled by the joyous, playful nymph (Sylvie Kinal), then the unself-conscious hunting companion (Sylvain Lafortune). But he ends up spurning each in favour of dancing alone. As in *Pas-de-Deux*, the blur-sequences of flurried limbs suggest wings. This occurs when he dances with his companions, implying that harmony with others frees one from the prison of the self. In the end, Narcissus finds himself imprisoned behind red-brick walls and bars, where he will pine away for love of himself.

Texturally, *Narcissus* is the more seductive film. Its technical wizardry is less pronounced than that of *Pas-de-Deux*, but it has a "prettier" surface, basked in golden glows and rich, deep blue tones. It is, after all, the story of

surfaces, of a youth who failed to distinguish effect from content, and who mistook the superficial for reality. As a dance film, it succeeds in capturing the magic of motion, while, at the same time, transmitting a strange, conflictual tension and sterility. The ancient Greek Narcissus myth is probably more poignant today than it ever was. In an era where people are turning in droves toward ritualistic self-improvement as a means of staying their underlying profound sense of despair, this "image perfecting" only intensifies the isolation of the self. The warning implicit in the myth, and in much of McLaren's later work, is that a sense of community is essential to one's well-being. Norman McLaren has chosen to end his artistic career with a bleak prognosis for humanity.

Lyn Martin •

NARCISSUS conceived and directed by: Norman McLaren asst. d. Don McWilliams choreography Fernand Nault music comp. Maurice Blackburn dancers Jean-Louis Morin (Narcissus), Sylvie Kinal (Nymph), Sylvain Lafortune (A friend) soloists Margot Morris (harp), John Newmark (piano), Robert Langevin (flute), Maureen Forester (voice) asst. to d. Lorna Brown cinematography David De Volpi, Jacques Fogel cam. assts. Andrew Kitzanuk, Nash Read optical cam. Jimmy Chin sp. cam. des. Eric Miller elect. Guy Remillard, Walter Klymkiv, Claude Derasp, Roger Martin music rec. Louis Hone sound mixing Jean-Pierre Joutel artistic cons. Grant Munro, Vincent Warren, Tom Daly make-up Brigitte McCaughy set const. Jean Parisien loc. man. Marcel Malackiet unit admin. Diane Bergeron p. David Verrall exec. p. Derek Lamb, Douglas MacDonald p.c. National Film Board of Canada, 1983 running time: 22 min. 8 sec., 35mm, color.

photos: Lois Segel



● Louis Malle



● Gordon Willis



Surviving Hollywood

A report on the '83
"Conversations with filmmakers"

by Barbara Samuels

The deadly dullness of a Montreal winter was dispelled briefly this year when the National Film Board and a public relations firm called Primo Piano combined to toss some sparkle into February and March. The "Conversations with Filmmakers" series had its inaugural runs in 1980 and '81 when similar joint efforts brought Bernardo Bertolucci and Wim Wenders to town; the '83 version came officially titled and prestigiously wrapped, with very much the texture of an annual event. The series was primarily designed as an occasion for local filmmakers to encounter the invited guests and one another within the context of an informal seminar, but it also offered the public a shot at the "stars"; open question-and-answer sessions with director Louis Malle and cinematographer Gordon Willis followed the screenings of their films at several Montreal cinemas.

Initially the brainchild of Primo Piano's Eva Zebrowski, the series became a co-operative venture between the Montreal-based, non-profit corporation and the NFB. Also participating this year were l'Institut Québécois du Cinéma, la Cinematheque Québécoise and the Cinéma Outremont. While the seminars themselves were offered free of charge,

Barbara Samuels is a Montreal freelance writer.

criteria for admission were fairly strict, based on a clean 50-50 split between NFB and private-sector attendance. The Board selected 15 directors to participate in Malle's five-hour conference, turning the remaining 15 available seats over to l'Association des Réalisateur de Films du Québec. The same formula was applied to Willis' two-day meeting, with attendance divided between NFB cameramen on the one side and DPs from Quebec's APCQ and SNC on the other. Screenings for participants were held at the Board, as were the seminars themselves.

The series was the newest feather in the cap for Primo Piano, a cultural PR organization founded to promote film and filmmakers both here and abroad; in addition to the earlier seminars, Zebrowski also organized the Canadian Film Week in Rome in 1980. Both she and the Board's Cathy Weller were enthused by the response of seminar participants. Weller termed the sessions "terrific for morale," and felt they filled a need for "filmmakers here to meet other filmmakers of international calibre, and for the public and private sectors to meet each other." The only disappointment was the last-minute cancellation of the third scheduled seminar: director Ivan Passer bowed out due to illness.

Although no definitive plans are set for a similar series next year, there are plenty of ideas, with both Primo Piano and the NFB ready to "feel the situation out."



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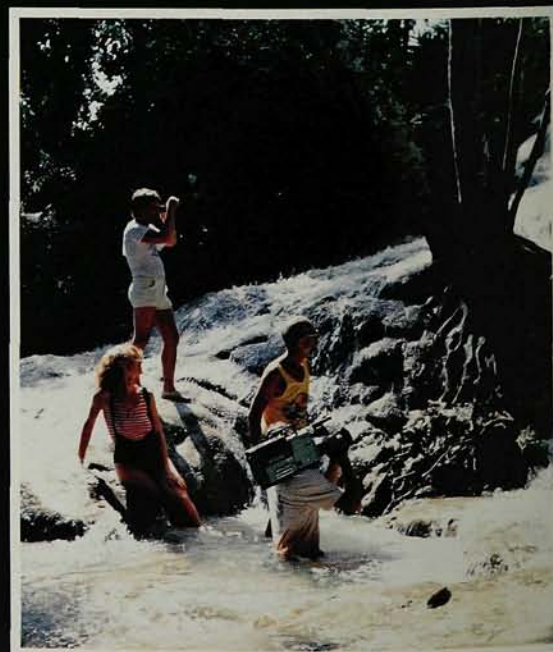
Producer/Director:
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Louis Malle



One of the most eclectic filmmakers on the contemporary scene, Louis Malle is no stranger to Montreal – his Oscar-nominated *Atlantic City* was a Canada-France co-production shot in good part at Montreal's Sonolab studios with a mostly Canadian crew. Although best known for his feature fiction work (*Zazie dans le Metro*, *Le souffle au coeur*, *Lacombe, Lucien*), Malle has also garnered a well-deserved reputation as a provocative documentary filmmaker. His early work with Jacques Cousteau provided his training ground, and he went on to make *Vive le tour*, *Humain trop humain* and the seven-part *L'Inde fantôme*. A new documentary entitled *God's Country* is now being edited.

Malle raised eyebrows and enraged some fellow countrymen several years ago when he emigrated to the United States to expand his career. Unhappy with what he termed France's "cultural stagnation" under Giscard d'Estaing, he sought new challenges in the U.S. and found himself embroiled in controversy with the release of *Pretty Baby*. Several years later, *Atlantic City* won him critical acclaim and a brand-new audience; in the eyes of American moneymen, Louis Malle was suddenly a hot commercial property. He sidestepped the noise and the offers to make *My Dinner with André*, a surprising critical success, and has since completed his first studio picture, the \$10 million comedy *Crackers*.

The following observations were offered by Malle during his Feb. 25 seminar in Montreal.

On the differences between directing in Europe and America: Attitude, first of all. The European is supported by the critics and the public—he becomes a "star." He's recognized as the "auteur" of a film. That was the battle of the Nouvelle Vague. In Italy, Fellini gets mobbed when he goes out in the street, as if he were Brigitte Bardot. Whereas in the States, the director is essentially an "employee" most of the time.

And then there are practical differences. In Europe, for instance, it's normal for the director and the screenwriter to collaborate on an ongoing basis; a lot of directors co-sign scripts because of the amount of work they put into them, but the Writers' Guild of America in the States doesn't allow that unless you can prove you were the writer. So you have a situation where the American screenwriter listens to the director (with a little impatience sometimes), and then suddenly takes off and comes back three months later with a finished script. Most of the time, a producer buys an idea, hires a screenwriter for one draft, has 17 rewrites done, and then decides to hire a director. My own linguistic situation makes me somewhat dependent on a screenwriter now, but I think I'll eventually be able to script in English myself. All in all, I find that kind of ongoing conflict between the director and writer in the States very strange.

On leaving France for the U.S.: I felt I'd really had enough of France. I was afraid I would be turning in circles there soon. It had a lot to do with what was happening there in the '70s, which was a very unhappy period for the country culturally; not much going on in film at all. But I felt a personal need to "change territories." And I chose the U.S. in good part because of the passion we'd always had in France for American

movies. And I made my decision right at the beginning: I'd become an expert on America. I probably know more about the country than 99% of native-born Americans. And I've got a very special status there. I'm not an "American director," and never could be. My reflexes are different. I took at the place with an "alien eye," and I want to preserve that distance.

On bilingualism:

I don't think it truly exists. I mean, I can consider myself now about as bilingual as one can get, but that's still not enough. Your mother tongue is always your language of reference, of the unconscious. And that carries over into work. When I first worked in English, I encountered problems on several levels. Scripting, first of all, because I was working with an American writer, and found that the references... the nuances... escaped me. And I think the most interesting material is based on nuance. And then the subtlety of the language. I was knocked out to find that there were many different southern accents in the southern U.S. – two in the city of New Orleans alone. The urban population there sounded like New Yorkers. Now you can play with those subtleties when you understand them, as I did in *Lacombe, Lucien* with the enormous range of French accents. But when you change languages, you lose all that.

On *Atlantic City*:

The picture was basically thrown at me as a tax shelter. And the most bizarre thing about it was the way Americans viewed this Canadian tax shelter film directed by a Frenchman as one of the most purely "American" films of the year. I had a marvelous crew on that shoot, one of the best I've ever had. A majority were Canadians; we worked fast, and they were very adaptable. It was wonderful to discover the kind of spirit among the crew members that characterized the films I did in Europe.

On his experience as a "studio director":

I just completed a film in the most traditional mold imaginable. Made right in the heartland of the movie industry, and done for Universal with a Universal producer. It will probably be my first and last Hollywood film. It was strange. Everything went very well, but I had the impression I was working for IBM. One morning I counted the number of people on set and found myself surrounded by

sixty-five bodies. That was a first for me; I'm used to a maximum of thirty. I wasn't even sure what some of them were doing there. And there's a constant turnover in the crew. They're studio employees, and they go off to do a TV series or something, and you get new people in to replace them. Really a peculiar experience; rather like factory work.

The majority of the material being shot there at the time was for TV... 15 made-for-TV movies and series, and only two features: mine, and Brian de Palma's remake of *Scarface*. I think we were both regarded with some suspicion. TV's the thing there, and film has become a very marginal business.

On Hollywood's "energy sources":

I've done a few American films now, and I've sometimes had the impression that everyone on set was doing cocaine. And it shows. It shows in the performances, both in front of and behind the camera. There's something in the eyes. I think there's a certain sought-after "tension" in American films, a kind of hysteria; the American public seems to like it. This is an artificial way to induce it.

On working with actors:

I don't want to wield absolute power over actors... to hold back the script until we're ready to shoot, for example. I look at myself as a link between various elements, and that's how I work with them. I want to put them at their ease, to remind them of their continuity of character, and to encourage them to do what I like and stop them from doing what I don't like. I think it's better to work with them than to fight them, and I think actors in general don't know themselves very well. There's a fundamental insecurity there, and you try to ease it. You're there to give confidence, to flatter, to encourage and to relax. There's a real anxiety in people who do that job, because it's a difficult one; really horrible, in a way. I don't envy them.

On relationships with key crew members:

There are some positions I feel more flexible about filling with different people than others. In France, I always worked with the same cameraman, but I had no problems about working with new DPs because that's a job I know very well – I shot for Jacques Cousteau for a long time. So I can control the cameraman's work. I love Sven Nykvist, because he's reduced lighting to its

simplest, purest form, and he's extremely flexible; he can adapt. I'm not interested in cameramen with their own fixed styles.

But I'm not that keen about changing other jobs around, the ones you can't control that well on set. Sound for example. I kept the same soundman for as many films as I could... my films in France, *Atlantic City*, *My Dinner with André*. I wasn't allowed to use him in L.A. But I simply won't work without my editor, Suzanne Baron. She's 50% of whatever talent I've got. She's on my contracts now. If I changed editors, I'd lose two months right off the top explaining how I work to the new person. Suzanne and I have a great working relationship.

On documentaries:

For me, documentaries are vacations. I was trained by a documentary filmmaker (Cousteau) – it was my first film experience, and I often return to it. I think there are very few filmmakers in my situation who combine a career of both documentary and feature film. But the preparation for features alone drains so much energy. And you're always surrounded by the same people. I remember when Truffaut was doing *Day for Night*. I told him: "François, hold on here. When we start making films about the way we make films, that's when the circle starts to close in on us." I just don't find the cinema milieu that fascinating. When I feel that my whole life is becoming movies, I take a camera and go do a documentary. It puts things back into perspective; a kind of "personal hygiene," if you like. There's an extraordinary freedom in documentaries – in the personal, subjective ones I've done. They don't cost that much, so you can just get an idea and take off to shoot. There's an immediacy there, no time for preparation or reflection. You're working fast to try and capture something that's happening – you'll stop and figure it out later. I think that camera angles, the choice of what you shoot or don't shoot: they're almost made at an unconscious level.

On cultural nationalism:

I know my work in France has always been considered very "French," particularly abroad. I don't know why; I can't define it. Maybe something to do with the Romantic tradition, my education, the influence of French painting and literature. But I don't want to be catalogued, and it's one of the reasons I'm glad to be an expatriate. I think the expatriate's position is a magnificent one. My great literary hero is Conrad, and I was always fascinated by that incredible ambiguity he felt about being as "English" as he could on the one hand, and yet still profoundly Polish. I find that conflict very rich.

In France, they call me a traitor. But that's part of a whole French attitude, a sort of arrogance. Whenever I talk to French journalists, it's always the same. If you were offered the choice of living in Paris or anywhere else in the world, they don't understand why you wouldn't choose Paris. They're got some crazy idea that France is the navel of the world.

National character is something you don't control. It's the sum of all the nuances, all the day-to-day things in life: how you hold a fork at the dinner table. My wife considers me very French, and I consider her very American, but neither of us knows quite what that means.

Gordon Willis



Gordon Willis earned his reputation as one of the world's top cinematographers with such films as *Klute*, *All the President's Men*, *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*. The almost startling use of direct overhead lighting first seen in the *Godfather* films is perhaps his best-known professional "trademark," but Willis is one of the most adaptable and innovative DPs in the business. He has ably demonstrated his range by moving from the black and white subtlety of *Manhattan* and his trendsetting period work in the *Godfather* films to the highly-stylized visuals of *Pennies from Heaven*, all of his work touched both by daring and a highly individual stamp.

Willis' initial aspirations to an acting career were replaced by photographic work during the Korean War, and he attended film school in Burbank, California. An early training ground in industrials, documentaries and commercials proved invaluable to him, and he moved into feature films in 1970.

Although termed "difficult" by some directors, Willis is more generally regarded as a non-nonsense craftsman with little patience for what he terms the "Hollywood bullshit." In the last few years, he has become closely associated with another Hollywood outsider, Woody Allen, and their latest collaboration entitled *Zelig* opens this summer. During his two-day seminar at the Board with Canadian cameramen, Willis had some thoughts on the following topics:

On photographic style:

I feel that most films on the commercial circuit tend to be "recorded" rather than "photographed." There's no thought or idea behind the visuals on the screen. A director or producer will hire a cameraman, and he'll light a series of scenes that run an hour-and-a-half on screen, but there's no basic structure to his thinking. It's simply "lit." That's the easiest form of visual storytelling because it's mechanical - no real thought behind it. Here's the basic psychology: a cameraman walks into a room where a scene will be played out, and his first thought is: "How do I light this room?" The thought should be: "What happens here in the film? What scene takes place here?" He should decide how to do it from that point.

And that carries over into attitudes toward equipment. Lights aren't important; it's what you do with them that makes sense. There's a practice in this business that's a little too common: a piece of equipment comes out, and people make movies with it for a year or two. There's a tendency to design movies for equipment instead of designing a movie and finding the appropriate equipment. The same principle as "recording" a movie.

On shooting period films:

A real period picture works with distance... emotional distance from an audience, the time-frame they have to deal with when they're watching a story. When I did the two *Godfather* pictures, I used a yellow colour structure as part of that "distancing" tool; colour can't be separated from lighting structure. But that doesn't seem to be generally understood. So a lot of people shot what they called "period" pictures afterwards, and the lighting structure was the same for "*Laverne and Shirley*" as it was for a film on, say, the American revolution. They thought: "Gee, this is nice; yellow is a nice colour for period work." But it didn't work, because they were lighting

on one level, and then just pasting yellow on top of it. The overall texture of something isn't just one element - it's everything combined. The lighting, art direction, costuming... whatever else goes into making the one package.

And I have a theory about period movies which some directors think is bullshit, and others understand completely: I don't think you should introduce contemporary mechanics when you shoot pure period. Even though the audience may not know exactly what you're doing, they feel there's something "not pure" about it... like helicopter shots in 1900 movies, or zoom lenses. Dolly shots are OK if they're done in a tableau fashion. You can't always make it work, but there's still definition in it that audiences will accept, as opposed to helicopters and zooms, which throw them off. Period pictures should be done in that tableau fashion reminiscent of paintings and photographs, because people don't have any references as to what things looked like then. Neither do I. So it's only interpretive, and the only reference left in the modern world, really, is painting... it has a pure form.

On choosing an operator:

It's very difficult. Hopefully, you have someone around that you've worked with for a while... who understands. Someone who's intelligent enough to understand that when something happens that you didn't quite discuss, the structure should remain the same. You should "play" so that you end up with the same movie. I don't know the secret for that; you just have to be fortunate and get to know as many people as possible. A guy who communicates well, who listens and understands what everyone is doing... he's a great asset, in my opinion, because it's a difficult job. You get caught between everybody. You get your head slammed in the door by the cameraman or the director, or the

actor who doesn't want to do things a certain way. I had an operator who was the best I'd ever worked with; he could absolutely deal with it all, and he was intelligent. But guys like that are hard to find.

On communicating with a director:

I don't talk to a director in terms of where the key light is going to be, or any specifics at that level. He'll simply say: "I want this kind of movie, we should take the opportunity to do this or that." You break it down to the specifics of what it should be after it's lit. Everything comes out of a long discussion with the director, pre-shoot. I don't think the shoot is the time to decide what the damned thing is supposed to be about.

You can't do anything wonderful unless you spend a great deal of time with a director, so that he thinks he's doing something wonderful. And so you both know what you're doing.

On actors:

First of all, you want to make an actor as comfortable as possible. That doesn't necessarily mean physically comfortable, but mentally and emotionally comfortable, so that he or she can function well. I haven't had too much difficulty with that. There's always the occasional actor who doesn't want to do what's supposed to be done, so you spend the rest of the job tricking them into what they have to do.

But actors are very vulnerable, so I try to make them comfortable, because they're very insecure - women, especially. They want to be OK physically. And the men are sometimes a bigger pain in the ass than the women, because there's a point in an actor's career when he begins to feel foolish. He feels he shouldn't be doing this for a living. And you find he does a lot of funny things to substantiate his position. So I try to make them all comfortable, but I expect

them to know their craft, because they're the ones who get hurt if they won't cooperate. You're trying to do what's best for them.

But I like actors, and I have a good time working with them. All I ask them to do is "block." Once they do that, they can go off and rest, and just come back out once in a while for a visual check - I usually ask women to do that. But not too much. I can sort of be a pain in the ass about actors making their marks: some of them came out of theatre and never learned to work in movies, so they tend to be a little sloppy about it. But 99% of the time, it works out.

On "sameness" in movies:

I tend to agree that things are getting locked into one given style. I honestly don't know how to deal with it. You have to be fast and very clever to get something done that makes sense, that's different, and that still makes money. I mean, you could be painted yellow, and you're running around like that; if they're painting everything red, sooner or later, you're going to get painted red, too. That's the whole business structure of movies. It's hard to find people who are willing to define themselves and take chances. To me, a chance is nothing more than an interesting way of doing something. And yet what I consider "interesting" is scary to some people.

What's scary to me is the American market right now: it's very spooky. There's a large percentage of the American public that's now become polarized - visually and emotionally. They can't function anymore. They're so desensitized by what they've been fed on TV for on a whole generation that they can't define "good" and "bad." What you have to do to get their attention on screen is mind-boggling; they don't respond.

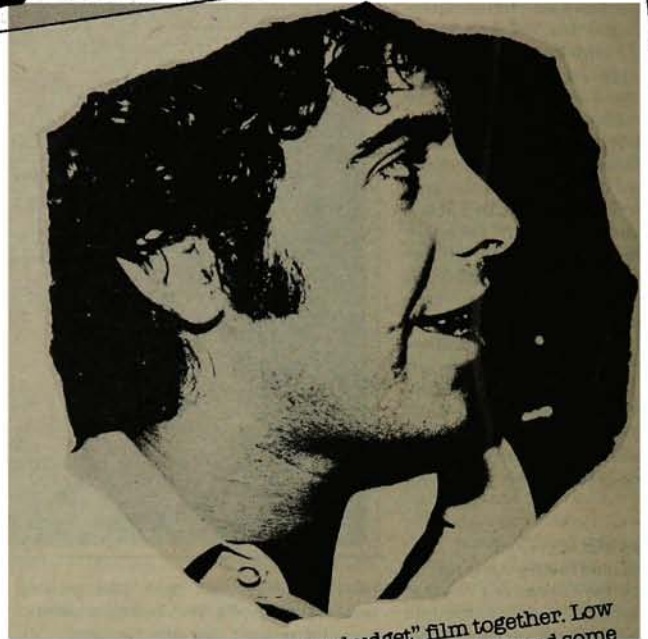
And the other side of the coin is the establishment that finances movies. It takes the easy way out and injects more of the same drug. They'd rather spend money on a safe, bad thing than actually make a good product, because they feel the risk is too high; they feel they may miss. And they won't miss with "*Werewolf III*". So it's a scary combination, because you're losing a percentage of filmmakers who shoot movies differently. It's very hard to keep unwrapping things and making them interesting, or better, because they don't want you to do it.

On the DP as superstar:

Film is a collaborative art. There are a certain group of people who make a movie: the director, the cameraman, the writer, the actors. You're strung together, and if everyone isn't doing it right, it really doesn't matter who's doing it better, because it doesn't turn out very well. But I think that DPs sometimes get more credit than they deserve. I don't want to find myself waking up one morning, and saying: "If it wasn't for me, that guy or this thing would look like shit." The only thing that matters is that you had the chance to work in tandem with a group of people, and that it turned out to be a good movie. If you happen to be better at it than someone else, that's good for you. You might get more money or more jobs. Chances are, you get less jobs today, because if you're good at what you do, it's hard to deal with the majority of the people working in the business; there are a lot who don't want to hire you. But overall, I'd rather have the whole thing function with a little less of a star system.

Exclusive :
The Ron Mann / Peter Wintonick letters

Prescriptions for a film future



Dear Peter,

As you know, I was approached by Cinema Canada to write about how to put a "low budget" film together. Low budget should first be defined. I went to a trade forum meeting at the Festival of Festivals one year and some creep was giving a speech about "low budget" films and said those fell in the range of three to four million. For me that figure reads out of sight, out of mind. Let's be real : any film can be made for any amount of money, e.g. **Imagine the Sound, Poetry in Motion, and Echoes Without Saying**. My neighbourhood is under \$200,000. Everything else is just fat.

So let's talk about fat. This comes under the pretense of producers' fees or above the line. You and I both know who the fat cats are, no need to mention'em. They are the ones that sat on the Canadian Film Industry. Money is the critical problem, where and how to get it.

A good beginning is reading William Mayer's "Dropping Out." I read it when I was young, no jokes please. A manifesto for getting things done no matter what the odds, cost or humiliation. Of course many don't have the staying power. They drop out. My method was to ignore all signals of failure and go into the unknown.

Nobody was going to produce the films I wanted to make so I produced them myself. My first 16mm film cost \$2,000. It was black and white and fifty minutes in length. I worked all summer at various jobs and made enough money to cover all my film expenses. I decided that instead of going to film school with the money, I would invest my earnings in learning how to make a film first-hand. I used my friends as actors and did practically everything technical myself.

A young filmmaker, fresh out of film school, said to me that what he would like to accomplish first as a filmmaker was to make a good exploitation film, say like **Screwballs**, make a lot of money from it and then start to do the films he really wants to do. I recoiled and told him this was a false way of going about things. You either make the film you want to make, or you don't. The choice is clear. Even if you have to drive cab for three years (Barry Greenwald and others can tell you about that.)

I don't consider film as products. I don't manufacture films. I don't consider how much popcorn it sells. You and I have no interest in making films we don't care about.

I was on a panel once with other independents. Stan Colbert (CBC) had the most intelligent anecdote to tell of his first experience in film. Too lengthy to repeat here but it amounted to doing whatever you can to get that first film made. Call Stan up at the CBC. He's someone who can give advice to young filmmakers. All seminars and conferences are boring. Tired filmmakers, producers who have ejaculated for the last time dodging straight questions by hungry filmmakers. Everything that has been said, has been said. It would be good if the older generation would just pass down their phone books.

My phone rings off the hook. I've just met a group of filmmakers who are trying to get a film on Borges off the ground. They will be successful because they are smart. They have an excellent idea, have unlimited energy and enthusiasm and act professionally. The financial contacts will fall into place. They met someone who has a love for Borges' work, went to see a publisher about book rights ; they seek out sponsors, they ask for grants... they explore all possibilities.

An epistolary debate towards a redefinition of Canadian filmmaking

The financial possibilities as I see them very generally:

- Private money or sponsorship - this can be done through a private memorandum or a public offering
- TV pre-sales
- Grants
- NFB or similar organizations
- Distribution pre-sale
- CFDC
- Working hard and putting your own money in it and/or deferring salaries
- Robbing a bank

To give an example, I'll talk about my last film, **Echoes Without Saying**, a half-hour documentary on the Coach House Press in Toronto.

I always run into debt. I run into debt and start a new film to get me out of debt and then go into debt and start a new film. A joyous cycle. (Probably because I am honest and need a good production manager, I get taken by people I trust. I am a sucker. It's good to make mistakes to learn only. Never make the same mistakes. I don't hang out at the Windsor Arms Hotel. Let the creeps gaze at each other, hold meetings, impress each other. I will never forget the time I was kicked out for wearing construction boots.)

With **Echoes** I didn't have a bean. I borrowed \$700 for film stock. Film stock is the only thing you can't defer. Kodak is a smart company. With film stock in hand, I convinced everyone, including the best lab in Canada, Film House, to defer all costs. I had no idea where I was going to get the money to pay back everyone but I had faith in what I was doing. With the help of the elegant and talented Elaine Foreman, who acted not only as the editor, but really producer (next to you she's the hottest editor going), we assembled a rough cut. Ron Sanders gave us his editing machine. I applied for an Ontario Arts Council grant and was refused. That was hard to take, but they have their reasons.

I am grateful for the support the councils have given me in the past. If it wasn't for a grant for **The Only Game in Town** I would not be making films. I don't, however, recommend applying for a grant unless you are really in need of it. I have always felt that there are other avenues you must pursue before approaching the councils. I might mention that Canada has the best system for artists/filmmakers as a result of organizations like the Canada Council and the OAC and I wouldn't have it any other way. Their contribution to filmmaking in this country is enormous and must be continued and encouraged. Ms. Francoyse Picard is a saint.

I talked with TVO about purchasing **Echoes** but they were in the process of cutting back so after initially offering me \$10,000 they truncated that figure down to a respectable \$3,000. I turned it down.

At zero hour I placed a call to the CBC, to Rena Krawagna of program purchasing, considered by everybody to have given every filmmaker their first break and who continues to struggle and fight for filmmakers to the last count. The CBC bought the film and arranged to get me enough money for breathing room. I then found out that the CBC would be able to help me complete the project. Thus the film was made and everyone will be paid. Happy ending. The film was made ostensibly for \$700.

My other films were not done this way. All films are different. There is no plan but there is hope. Find a good lawyer. The best. Say to him you can't afford him but you want to use him anyway. Pay him only if your project gets off the ground. Learn from mistakes as I did. Get a good production manager or at least someone who knows how to look after budgets and books. Do it yourself and don't let others do your dirty work for you. They will foul it up. Don't involve partners. Own everything you can or try to hold on to rights, especially creative. Never be satisfied. Pay yourself (I never do). Pay everyone that works for you. If you can't afford it then pay them when you can. Get a good accountant. Get many accountants that have rich clients. Let the rich take you for lunch. The rich aren't all bad. Some are fun. They don't know what to do with their money so take it from them. Film is a business so make the investment attractive. Don't kid yourself. Don't expect money to fall from the trees; you have to climb up and get it. It takes a lot of work. Be honest. Be honest with the people you deal with. With the people you employ. Above all, be honest with yourself. Help each other out. If everyone continues to screw each other, we'll never get ahead. Ok, Peter. Your turn now. The soup is on and I haven't eaten dinner yet.

Ron Mann

A view from the bridge

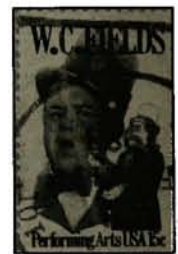


Greetings from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Visit the world famous fun-town.

Dear Ron,

HERE I AM IN THE HEART OF AMERICANA. Myrtle Beach, South California, the Gold Course capital of the World where Canadian money is still accepted at par. I'm taking a little break from my other-worldly duties in Montreal— i.e. developing projects, writing proposals, begging for financing on street corners and editing my New Cinema tape. Today I walked up the boardwalk past all the hot dog stands (this was murder for a vegetarian) and went into a tacky souvenir cum liquor cum munitions store where the fat lady behind the counter told me that she really loved fat Canadian filmmakers, and asked me to put her in a movie. I said that I would if she gave me this stack of post-cards in the rack. She did and was kind enough to throw in a postage stamp and a six-pack of Coors, the union man's champagne. I went back to sit on the bridge that spans the Inland Waterway. I watched Canadian yachts steam north for the summer and Canadian Snow Geese dodge anti-aircraft fire as they headed home to Baffin Island. I started to write down these simple thoughts about the Canadian state of things — a view from the bridge.

Peter Wintonick



To :
Ron Mann
41 Riderwood Drive
Willowdale
Ontario

Here I am, in the heart of Americana

This place reminds me of a Canadian film – it looks O.K. but it just doesn't feel right – there's something strange about it. Maybe it's inherently, patently and purposefully false. Maybe it's a massive genetic-cultural effect. There's a lot of superficial flash and smoke, and it's usually technically correct, but for the most part it's unfound soul echoes across wide prairies and tundra looking for a place to hide. It runs screaming from the spectre of reality and looks for "meaning", "definition", and "self-identity", not realizing that it is, in fact, all of those things. This place reminds me of the boom years in the Canadian film industry when, to keep occupied before the editing of the film began, I would run all over Montreal looking for the right American location. I would do my best to disguise French signs and would literally leap from rooftop to rooftop tearing down Canadian flags, only to replace them with the good ole Stars and Stripes. Now, in other times and places this would be considered a subversive and revolutionary act but it seems that this activity had the official sanction of Capital Cost Producers and Accountant Directors, those paragons of production prowess and creativity who could dictate their visions of a national cinema to the boys in the government offices in Ottawa. (At this time they didn't allow girls to make decisions.) The Powers-That-Were nodded their heads in benign acquiescence as if to say "Yes. Go ahead. Do what you want." Or were they just falling asleep under their fluorescent lamps while the film industry went down the drain?

VISIT MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA –
A PERFECT LOCATION FOR A CANADIAN FILM



This view is no doubt clouded by facts of history and the titles of hundreds of unseen films. But we'll leave this one alone. We all know about those days and those films. They say things have changed. Or have they? They say it's time to become optimistic. But allow me to slip back for a second, just one more time. For the most part, the films and video programmes produced in this country, are junk food – they're even more dangerous to your psychic health than junk food. But this cinematic consumer product does not reach the mass audience that junk food does. No one eats it. It doesn't even taste right. It is food for no one. It is not food for thought. It is not representative of our culture. It is only shadow-boxing. Shadows of non-stories, non-characters, non-images, non-reality. These are not magic

A VIEW FROM
THE BRIDGE LUNCH ROOM,
MONTREAL, QUEBEC



shadows that are thrown by our magic lanterns onto our collective cinema screens. They yield no light. They don't even assume or pretend to portray our people – the average person – on their screens.

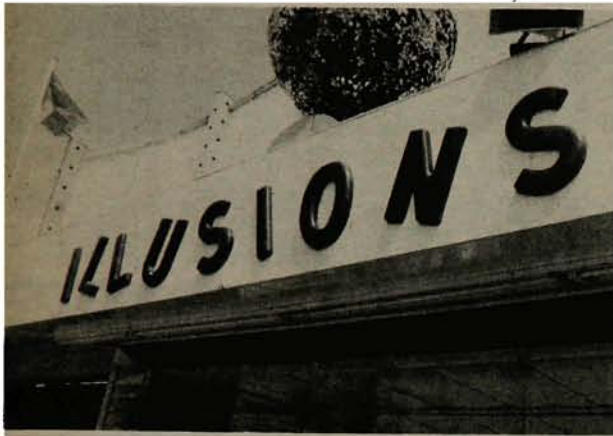
Enough of this anger for now. Of course there are some real exceptions and there is real hope for the future IF those of us working to produce media in this country can borrow enough money for a pack of matches to light a candle to see our own way out of the Philistine's cave, then light beacons for others to see, then metaphorically torch those institutions that prevent the production of relevant, symbolic, moving images of ourselves and those institutions that prevent access to our audiences by controlling the distribution systems.

WHEN IN PARIS, CANADIAN FILM PRODUCERS
DINE AT THE HOTEL SCRIBE, A FEW SHORT STEPS
FROM THE OPERA

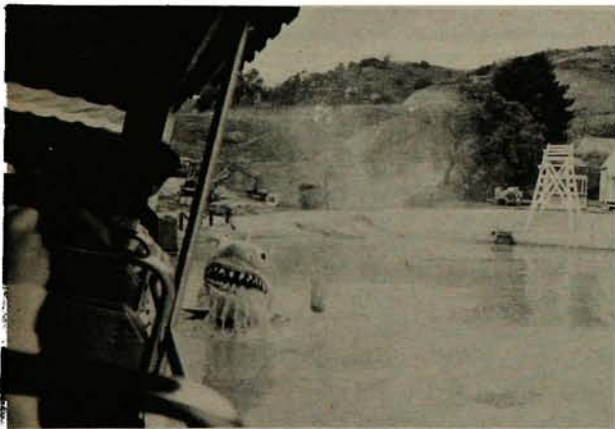


When I was in Paris during the shooting of "Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid" I became involved in a search of Faustian proportions. Late one night, after emerging from the Paris Opera House and possessed by visions of Don Giovanni, I went for a walk through the streets and alleyways of the surrounding quartier until I finally found what I was looking for – The Hotel Scribe – a personal Mecca. I entered the darkened lobby and looked for the café. The night concierge, puzzled by my inexplicable actions, confronted me. I told him that I was looking for a certain indication of a time long forgotten. "But of course," he offered, "the plaque." "Yes, that's right," I smiled, very much relieved. A bronze plaque on the wall said, "Where the hotel now stands was once the Grand Café, a well-known watering hole for the intelligentsia." It was in the Salon Indien, on December 28, 1895, that the Lumière brothers first showed moving pictures. The entrance fee that night was one franc and the brothers managed to collect 33 francs. When a train seemingly rushed out of the screen the audience leapt under its seats. But the owner of the Café, Monsieur Volpiny, wasn't impressed with the commercial possibilities of the new medium and demanded 30 francs rent (90% of the gate) from the Lumière brothers. They offered 20% and Volpiny refused and thus was born the art/business dialectic which has, since that time, sent artist-creators and producer-businessmen to their respective barricades. It would be safe to say that it is not only the Canadian filmmaker who receives pennies for his or her pain. LONG LIVE THE LUMIÈRE BROTHERS! LONG LIVE GEORGES MÉLIÈS!

MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA. SEE THE GLASS HOUSE, THE CELLULOID CELL AND MANY OTHER FAMOUS ILLUSIONS



WHEN IN CALIFORNIA, VISIT THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD, UNIVERSAL CITY



REFLECTIONS: Is that red and white glow on the horizon a sunset? Illusion? Delusion? Or is it the Canadian flag being lowered for the last time? We are struggling. We realize, as the Lumière did, that knowledge, art, desire and hope have no place in the boardrooms of corporate cinema. Bottom lines, baby. That's what it's all about. Other kinds of lines as well. Mirrors and white powder. Or is that white power? It's very incestuous — to have an affair with your own ego. Narcissism and nepotism go hand-in-hand down panelled hallways.

But now it's time for our visions to be considered. Us. Those who want to create. To work. To make films of value and meaning. I understand that here, on the verge of thirty, inbred qualities of illusory idealism and '60s-inspired positivism and respect for the collective possibilities of filmmaking pale and whither away in the face of the oligarchical, patriarchal realities of the FILM BUSINESS. I had always hoped that it would be possible for individuals and for groups of individuals to move beyond that stage. I know it is possible because I have seen it done. In my mind are 25 examples. That's the number of video interviews I did with independent, international film directors for the New Cinema project. They all stand as testimonies to the possible. They all struggle and in the end they all do it. WE can do it. Find the money somewhere — foundations, corporate guilt money, money from advocacy groups, government money (yes, even the CFDC, NFB, and CBC can be sympatico when you march into their offices.) Become known. Meet people. Hang around. Understand what you want and then take it. Be polite when you do. If they refuse ask again. They'll eventually give it to you. Learn to beg. Learn to think on your feet. Learn to change tactics. Learn to trust. Be honest. Confront. Confront reality. Make your own reality.

MANIFESTO DESTINY. I met a particularly disgruntled Canadian filmmaker in a bar in Hollywood who was, I found out later from a mutual friend, waiting for his green card. That was his reality. "In the beginning," he pontificated, "God created Hollywood and Hollywood begat America and America begat the actor-president who stepped down off the white screen, who remains larger than life and just as black and white, who addresses the nodding heads of a supportive Congress, an apathetic public and the very corporate media. Hollywood, owned and created by Gulf and Western, Coca-cola and other megamessengers, has become the voice of the American way of life that it attempts to define and protect by extending what are called its international spheres of influence." I ordered another beer, a Molson's, and listened to more.

"Visionary hegemony and shameful Shamanistic domination allows the Prophet of profit to create pre-fabricated images for unknowing and inferior Canadians to consume and worship. Canada and Québec are only pieces of the market and are considered as part of the U.S. in Variety's weekly box office reports. Just another precious or not-so-precious commodity, we, as an audience, are sold through marketing and advertising agencies to corporate sponsors as time on television, on a billboard or on a cinema screen. An audience becomes an electronically, demographically correct number on a computer print-out video display terminal. WE, ourselves, become addicted, mindless, sexist, violent and vacuous victims of the process."

"Are there any positive sides to your peculiar view of the control of these art and information systems?" I asked this angry young man in the Hollywood bar. "Is there any hope for the unemployed and unemployable Canadian artist, on the eve of 1984?" "Yes," he said as he stepped out into the sun on Sunset Blvd. "HOLLYWOOD is only a metaphor and even metaphors can change." I found myself wishing he was right.

In the beginning, God created Hollywood

Of course "Hollywood" can be as wonderful and independent as any film industry anywhere. It undergoes certain pangs of consciousness from time to time, it aberrantly makes mistakes that sometimes turn out to be perfect films which also happen to make enormous amounts of money. "Missing" was a good film. Hollywood is a many-headed monolith. Systems can and do change and ways can be found to produce an important film. The people who work in the studios are just as confused as the rest of us. Regardless of what they seem to say they have no idea who or what the audience wants or is. They can be fooled. Indeed every country's national cinema could be said to include the contradictory forces of art and money. Film artists everywhere struggle for the right to self-expression and self-determination and are faced by the same arguments about faltering economics and the audience's true desires by the same kinds of schlock, gore and smut producers that we face. In the New Cinema interviews Midori Kurisaki, a Japanese woman who directed an incredible Bunraku film "Double Suicides At Sonezaki," told me that she had trouble distributing her film in her own country. There wasn't enough sex or violence to please a distributor. HO HUM. OH WELL.

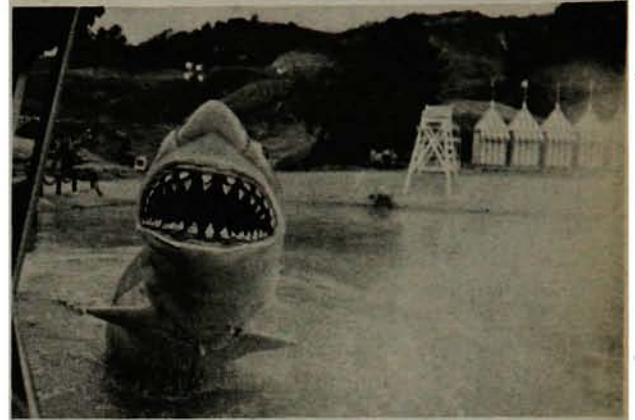
These things may well be true, but leaving all fatalistic economic determinism aside there lies in the Northland some signs of hope. Although all is not Wonderful in Slumberland neither is it Slumbering in Wonderland. There are active film communities outside the traditional Montréal-Toronto Axis. These include Saint-John's, Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Regina, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver. In fact, virtually any acre of land in Canada could, at any time, sprout a giant of a filmmaker by the 21st century. If your idea is brilliant it will be done, if you can excite others by its possibilities. You can enlist the aid of the famous and infamous. Witness Martin Sheen's gracious donation of time and salary in de Antonio's "In the King of Prussia." He even donated \$5000 to the cause. Anything is possible. Think on human levels. Corporations can be disembodied. There are even some beings within their bellies that can occasionally see beyond their own profits. Retain your self-control. Retain control of your film. Selling out may satisfy your bank manager but you have to live with yourself. Think small if you have to. Use video. Use Super-eight. The most interesting film in the developing world is super-eight and we all know that Canada is the only third world country with snow. Keep writing. Reading. Researching. Find other people like yourself. Don't lose hope. Do something else. Film isn't everything. Film is dead anyways. (I'll never believe it even if it is true.) At any rate, there's absolutely no reason to jump off the bridge. It isn't going anywhere.

I moved here to Montréal eight years ago after suffering through university and then finding the right track at film school in Ottawa. In my early days with International Cinemedia (Kemeny, Koenig, Duprey) I was swept away by brightening prospects of a lively emerging Canadian and Québécois film culture. The forerunners/hero(ines) gave me hope. SHEBIB/PEARSON/CARLE/SPRY/LEFEBVRE/MANY, MANY OTHERS. I welcomed the chance to live in Québec, a dynamic, socially democratic nation-to-be. The social commitment and sense of purpose borne out of knowledge of one's own culture rubbed off on this naive Anglo without much sense of his own roots. It was refreshing to leave behind never-ending searches for identity and examinations of the inferiority complex—the requisite activity in Canada, for a place which had evolved a definite shared expression of a culture. It's nice to be among people who know where they've been, where they're going and who they are. This all expresses itself in a national cinema which reflects its audience and the lives and thoughts of its filmmakers. This is not to say that there aren't any problems here. It is very difficult to see Québec film in Québec. And businessmen and bureaucrats live here too, but maybe the new law on cinema and video, Bill 109, will help protect us.

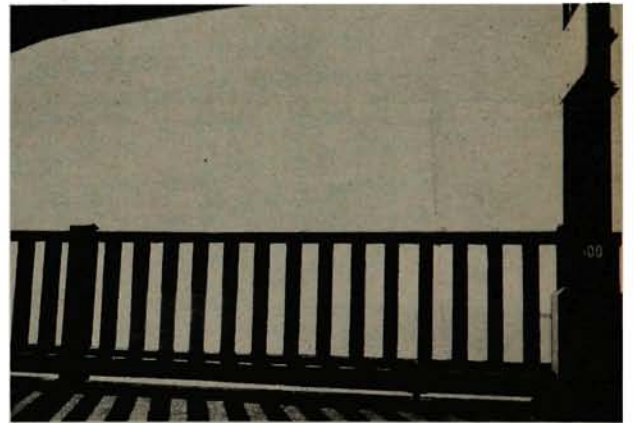
Contrary to the commonly held view by foreign producers and distributors, the average audience is not made up by 15-year-old boys in a New Jersey suburb with a penchant for sex and blood. There is every indication that the Québécois cinema, if given the chance, can say something to international audiences with stories and characters that are original and universal at the same time.

Even though I experience a basic gemini-inspired schizophrenia, an Anglo in alienation in an ALIEN NATION unassimilated by a culture which is not really mine. I love to tightrope walk up and down the streets of Montreal. I know that I can observe and learn more about the possibilities of a country's culture by living here and watching it express itself with all its veracity and with all its energy. It is starting to happen in the rest of Canada too. Slowly, but measurably. We can all learn from the experience of Québec.

WHEN IN HOLLYWOOD SEE THE GREAT WHITE SHARK AND OTHER SIMILAR AGENTS, PRODUCERS, AND HUCKSTERS



LOOKING NORTH FROM THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE, THE SCENE OF MANY APPARENT SUICIDES AND MANY MORE DRAMATIC RECREATIONS, TOWARDS GEORGE LUCAS' RANCH AND BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA



THE MUMMIFIED REMAINS OF TWO CANADIAN FILMMAKERS LOOKING WEST ACROSS PARIS FROM THE NOTRE-DAME CATHEDRAL TOWARDS QUEBEC



Wider vistas of internationalist thinking might help to define one's own National Vision and it is this possibility of crossing barriers to reach people everywhere in the world that we most love about making films. We celebrate and take note of the birth of new national cinemas in New Zealand, Brazil, Africa and the Philippines. The Native American cinema. We may be warned by the apparent victimization of the Australian film industry by forces which almost destroyed our own. We may take as an example the growing influence of the born-again British and Scottish Industry and the New Wave upon New Wave of the West German one. ALL these trends and tendencies can encourage a re-birth and a re-definition of our own film culture. And people too, people like Ron Mann, Holly Dale, Phil Borsos, Norma Bailey, Paul Donovan, Elvira Lount, Peter Raymont, Laura Sky, Eugene Fedorenko, Lisa Steele, Derek Lamb, Clay Borris, Larry Keane, The Halifax Co-op, Mainfilm, Atlantis, Martin Duckworth, Canadian Images, Avantage, Robert Duncan, and hundreds of un-named others in Canada and Quebec who are carrying forward and joining the older others who have defined and developed our film tradition - BRAULT/THOMAS/KING/MCLAREN/CRAWLEY/LOW/BRITAIN/GULKIN/KATADOTTIS/DALY/BODET/GROUX/ARCAND/LEDUC/THE INVISIBLE WOMEN.

THESE emerging and recognized talents will, in their prolific manner, eventually join with hundreds of other craftpeople, artists and creators to take control of our national identity and give us back images of ourselves. And when bureaucrats become enlightened or else victims of a soon-to-be-elected Conservative government then the day will come, in another time, in another galaxy, when some strange being will pick up a lone signal in space and it will be a Canadian Pay-TV channel and - Heaven's above - there will be Canadian Films and Video Programmes which truly reflect the dynamic, diverse, and, funily enough, human culture that it is.

It is no longer necessary to measure ourselves from New York, Hollywood, London or Paris. In fact, it is no longer necessary to measure ourselves. It is only necessary to state clearly and purely, with an understanding heart, and without self-consciousness, who we are. We are, in fact, Good. Tolerant. Peaceful. Stubborn. Resourceful. A People with artists who must be allowed to say what they need to say, who must be allowed to bring to light and to life what they see and what they feel and what they think about themselves and the larger world around them. This is the strength of our film tradition. Socially conscious. Direct. Moving. Vérité. Social and Natural Realism. This is what we do best. This is WHO we ARE. We must find our subject matter in ourselves - in our reality - in the daily life-struggles, aspirations and successes of real people. In collective celebration we can turn to our own ongoing stories and those things in the larger world which can touch others. In these economic hard times and on the brink of the Last World War it is necessary to change the way things are and the way things have been. To politicize in the broadest possible sense of the word. In this reality of cultural and self-identification there is no time or room to dream. People do not need or want to escape. This has been the traditional Orwellian-Hollywoodian solution. People need reel contact with reality, not thrills and popcorn. They need to find their own answers. They demand a voice and a self-made image. No idols. No heroes. It is the duty of everyman and everywoman involved in the production of MEDIA and IMAGE in this country to provide the means to achieve that NEW IMAGE. NEW IMAGINATION. NEW MAGIC. It is necessary now to take those first steps towards the building of a new bridge to the future and to each other.

THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, N.Y.C.
KING KONG SLEPT HERE. NO MORE.

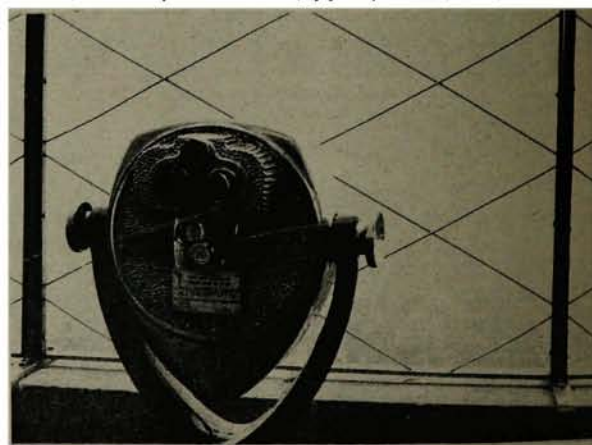


Ron Mann (Imagine The Sound, Poetry In Motion) is a Canadian filmmaker living in Toronto. Film editor Peter Wintonick lives in Montreal.

LOOKING NORTH ACROSS THE GRAND CANYON, ARIZONA, TOWARDS CANADA, THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD



THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING NEW YORK CITY
LOOKING NORTH ACROSS THE SOUTH BRONX
TOWARDS THE LITTLE APPLE, TORONTO



This, the last communiqué :

TURN TO CLEAR YOUR OWN VISION
THEN
TURN TO CLEAR MINE.

See You Soon, at a cinema near you.

PETER WINTONICK



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