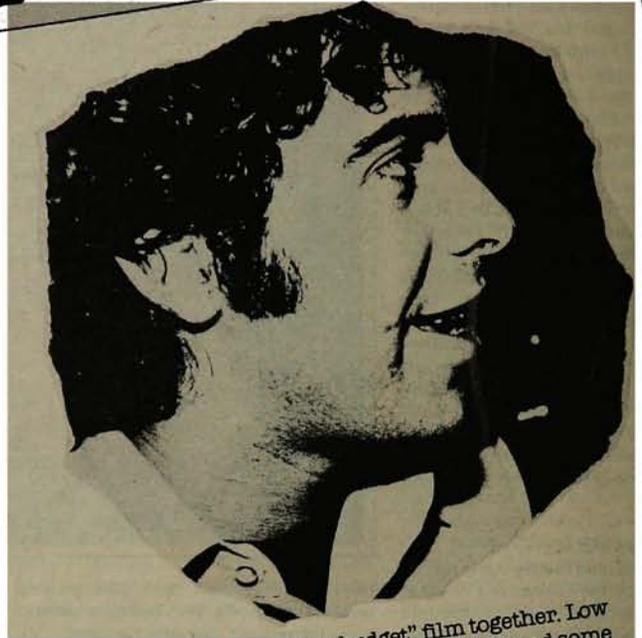


Exclusive :  
The Ron Mann / Peter Wintonick letters

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*

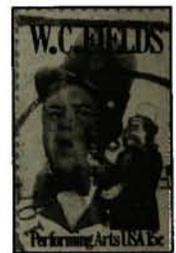


*Greetings from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Visit the world famous fun-town.*

*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.*

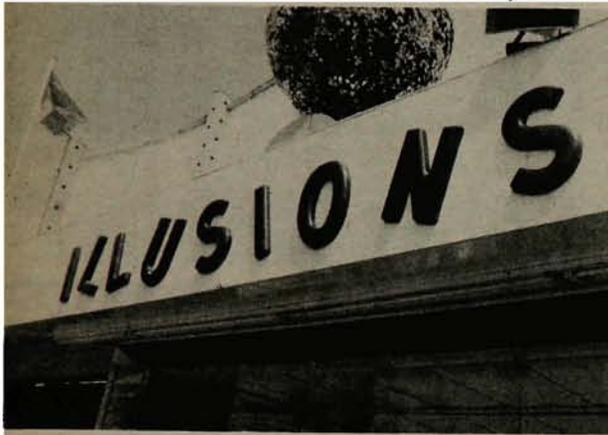
*Enough of this anger for now. Of course there are some real exceptions and there is real hope for the future IF those of us working to produce media in this country can borrow enough money for a pack of matches to light a candle to see our own way out of the Philistine's cave, then light beacons for 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.

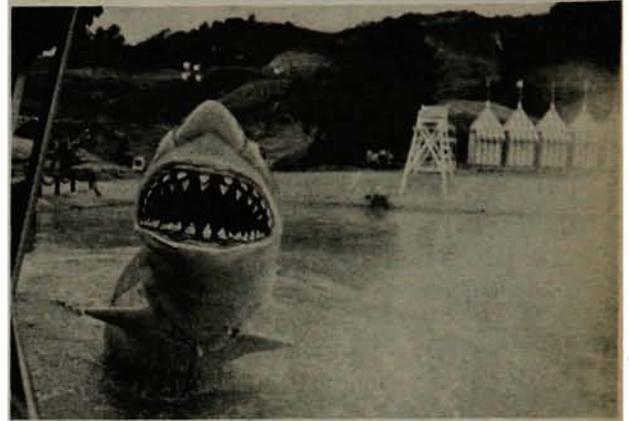
These things may well be true, but leaving all fatalistic economic determinism aside there lies in the Northland some signs of hope. Although all is not Wonderful in Slumberland neither is it Slumbering in Wonderland. There are active film communities outside the traditional Montréal-Toronto Axis. These 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.

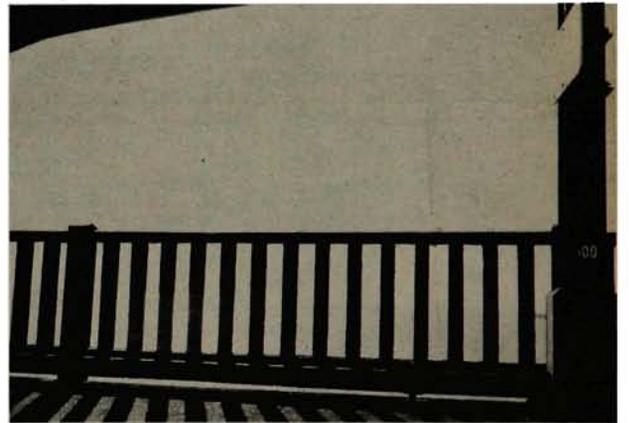
Contrary to the commonly held view by foreign producers and distributors, the average audience is not made up by 15-year-old boys in a New Jersey suburb with a penchant for sex and blood. There is every indication that the Québécois cinema, if given the chance, can say something to international audiences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

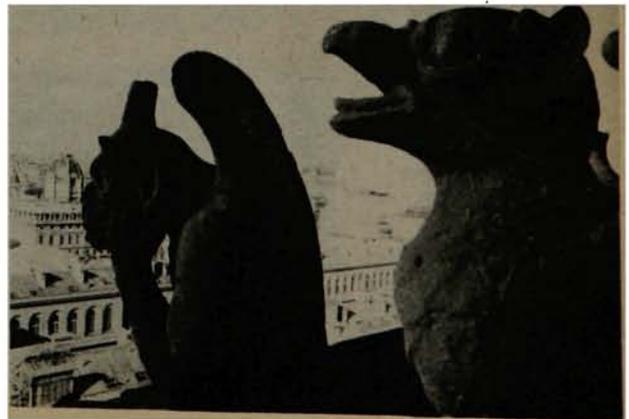
WHEN IN HOLLYWOOD SEE THE GREAT WHITE SHARK AND OTHER SIMILAR AGENTS, PRODUCERS, AND HUCKSTERS



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 Count, Peter Raymond, 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/GROULX/ARCAND/LEDUC/THE INVISIBLE WOMEN.

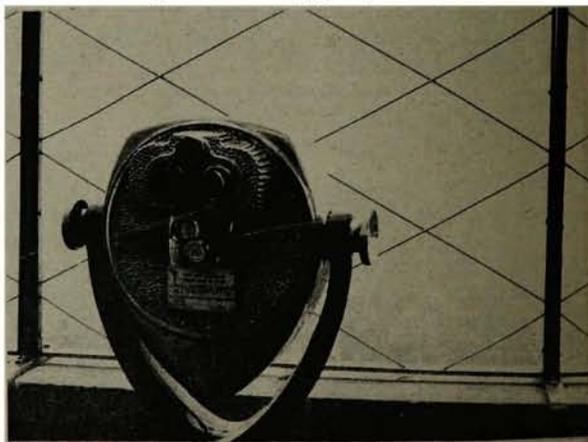
THESE emerging and recognized talents will, in their prolific manner, eventually join with hundreds of other craftpeople, artists and creators to take control of our national identity and give us back images of ourselves. And when bureaucrats become enlightened or else victims of a soon-to-be-elected 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.

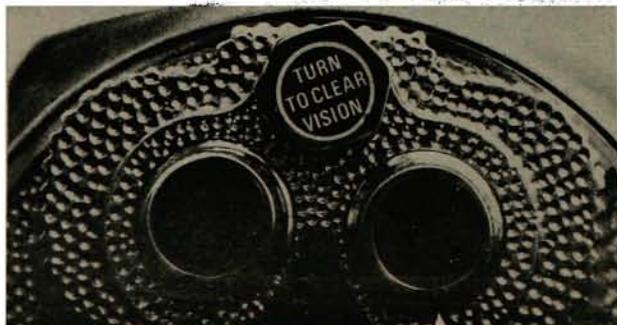
LOOKING NORTH ACROSS THE GRAND CANYON, ARIZONA, TOWARDS CANADA, THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD



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



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.

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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