

P I C T U R E O F L I G H T

a f i l m b y P E T E R M E T T L E R



*We live in a time where things do not seem to exist if they are not captured
as an image.*

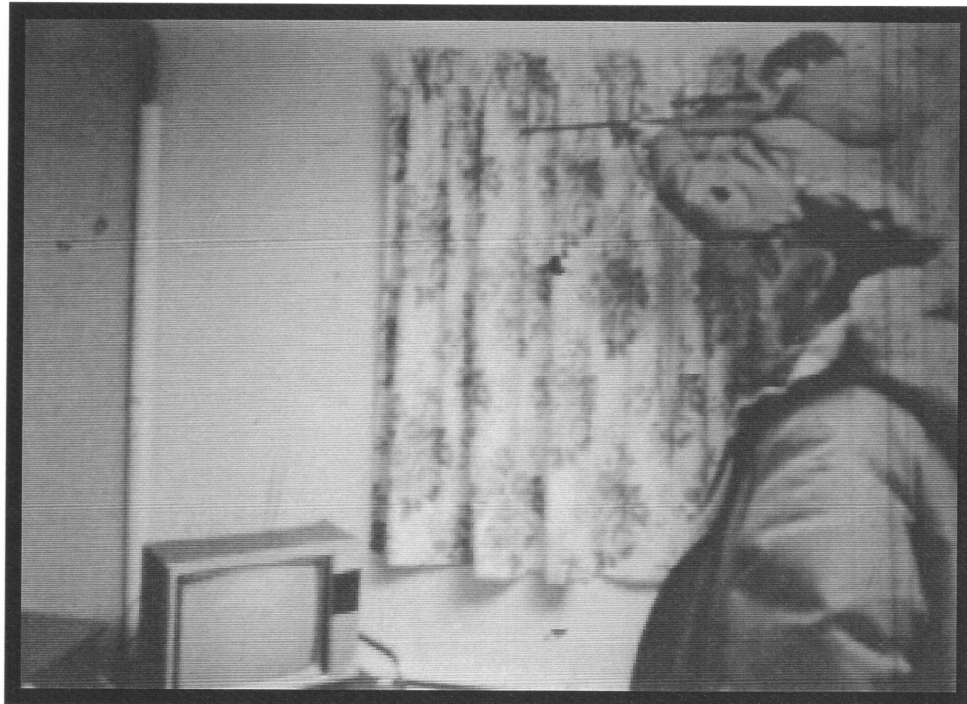
*But if you look into darkness you may see the lights of your own retina —
not unlike the Northern Lights, not unlike the movements of thought, like a
shapeless accumulation of everything we have ever seen.*

*Before science explained, the Northern Lights were interpreted as visions,
prophecies, spirits — a trigger for the imagination — images provided by
nature framed by no less than the universe itself.*

P I C T U R E O F L I G H T is an hallucinatory tale which documents a filmmaker's journey to Canada's arctic in search of the Northern Lights.

While combining glimpses of the characters who live in this remote environment and the crew's both comic and absurd attempts to deal with extremes, the film reflects upon the paradoxes involved in trying to capture the natural wonder of the Northern Lights on celluloid.

...aurora borealis...the lights with no bodies, pouring colours from the sky...images provided by nature more special than any special effect... Their majesty and mystery lead the film to a most unexpected and haunting finale which considers the future of our relationship to technology and Nature, in an increasingly artificial or "virtual" world...



PETER

What are you doing Gavin?

GAVIN

Well. Just trying to thaw her out so this slips down easy, so when you stick the bullet in...you have to lock it and slide it down.

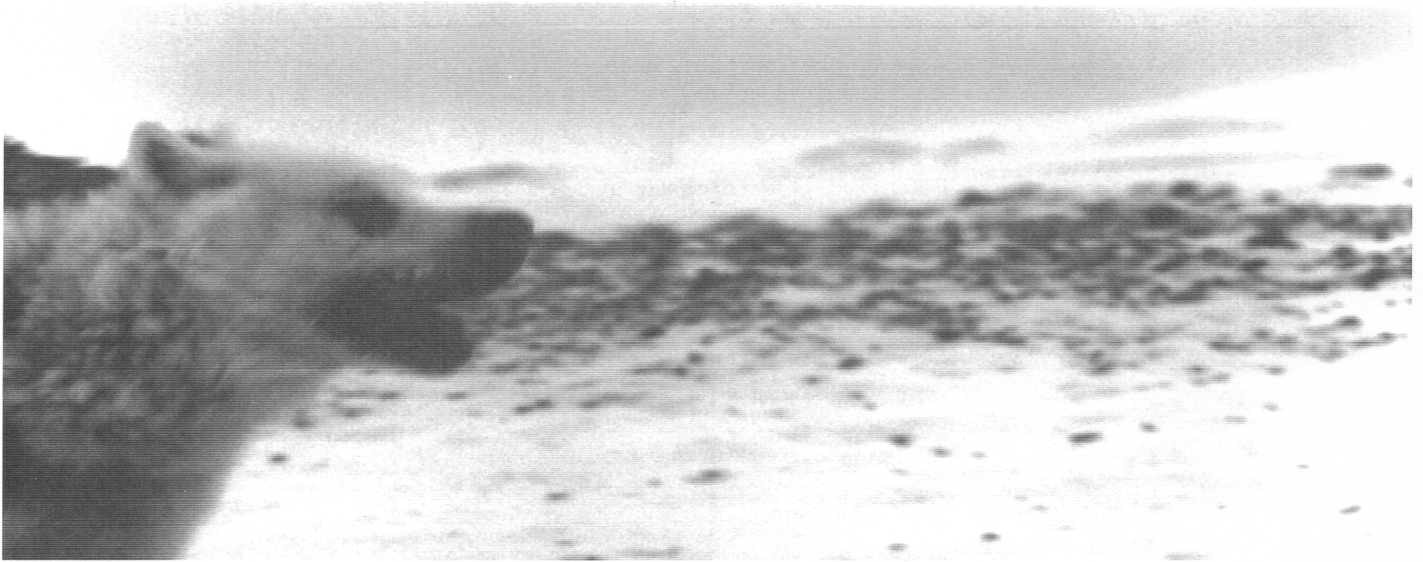
PETER

And what's the idea with this?

GAVIN

What we're going to use it for? Well. Load the gun and we're going to shoot a .22 hole about 18 inches up the wall. Hopefully we'll get a clear shot right through into the bank behind it and from there widen it to about two centimetres. If we have a two centimeter hole the snow should be able to blow right in and form a drift right through this hotel room, quite a massive one, quite a unique one...

(e x e r p t)



PETER

Can you explain this term bathing?

BRIAN

Bathing. Well when you have a blood bath, and you overkill, and the killing is uncontrollable. And you can kill any kind of animal without remorse at any time of the year, just either for pleasure or for visual satisfaction...

PETER

Bathing in blood...

BRIAN

Bathing in blood, yeah. I mean when you don't know better you can be uncontrolled. When you value your own life, when you're taking some other kind of creature's life you know what the value is to them and every hunter, aboriginal or not, sometimes does feel badly about killing something. It's just an emotion that spears through you. I think that's probably the last life of that animal coming out, piercing you in the heart...

(e x e r p t)

DR. DON LIND

Imagine the earth, surrounded by its magnetic field, orbiting in the atmosphere of the sun...

Now, the upper corona of the sun is a supersonic wind that is expanding and blows past the earth, sweeping the magnetic field around the earth into a long tail...If the magnetic field were visible the earth would look like a tremendous comet with a tail that goes way out past the moon...

As the solar wind sweeps along the sides of this magnetic field through the dynamo effect, it generates energy that is dumped into the tail. And then every once in a while by some impulsive mechanism that we don't quite understand yet, that energy streams down the magnetic field lines towards the earth and hits the earth's atmosphere in two circles, one around the north magnetic pole and one around the south magnetic pole. When you look at the aurora, you're looking at the stream of particles that is streaming in from the magnetosphere which excites the atoms in the earth's atmosphere to glow... And that constitutes the aurora...

(excerpt)



B I O G R A P H I E S

Peter Mettler

born 1958 in Toronto, Canada

"LANCALOT FREELY"
"GREGORY"
"SCISSERE"
"EASTERN AVENUE"
"THE TOP OF HIS HEAD"
"TECTONIC PLATES"
"PICTURE OF LIGHT"

1980, 25 min, 16mm, b/w, mono
1981, 30 min, 16mm, colour & b/w, mono
1982, 86 min, 16mm, colour & b/w, mono
1985, 55 min, 16mm, colour & b/w, mono
1989, 110 min, 35mm, colour, dolby
1992, 104 min, 16mm, colour, mono
1994, 83 min, 35mm, colour, mono



B I O G R A P H I E S (c o n t .)

P E T E R M E T T L E R — producer, director, cinematographer, editor, sound design
Peter Mettler is known in Canada, the United States and Europe as a cinematographer and director with a broad and unique vision. As a cinematographer, METTLER has collaborated with some of Canada's best known new generation of filmmakers, including ATOM EGOYAN, PATRICIA ROZEMA and BRUCE MCDONALD. As a director/filmmaker, Mettler has created some 10 films including two long experimental works and two narrative feature films.

Mettler's experimental feature length film *SCISSERE* (1982) premiered at Toronto's Festival of Festivals in the "New Directors, New Directions" series and won the Norman McLaren Award for the Best Film, with Special Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Soundtrack. "A film of strange beauty and extraordinary power" (Cinema Canada), *SCISSERE* explores the motions of conscious and unconscious processes in a patient released from a psychiatric hospital through the representation of the worlds of three individuals (a mother, a scientist, and a heroin addict) who also search for connection and epiphany in their own lives.

In reaction to the formal approaches of *SCISSERE*, Mettler created *EASTERN AVENUE* (1985), a 55 minute filmic audio-visual improvisation. *EASTERN AVENUE* is a travelogue in which Mettler used an intuitive method of collecting and collating both images and sounds in preparation for his first dramatic feature film, *THE TOP OF HIS HEAD*.

THE TOP OF HIS HEAD (1989) is a dramatic feature length film which centres on the unravelling of the ordered and rational world of a satellite dish salesman who is inspired to follow his impulses towards emotion and intuition by an elusive woman. *THE TOP OF HIS HEAD* won the Silver Plate Award at Figuera da Foz and runner-up to Most Popular Film at the Vancouver International Film Festival. In *THE TOP OF HIS HEAD*, Mettler "turns his exploration of life into a stunning audio-visual experience" (Montreal Mirror). It is a film of "astonishing, terrible beauty," filled with "radical, haunting imagery" (The Montreal Gazette). It is a "work of visual genius...yet not just a pop culture divertissement. *THE TOP OF HIS HEAD* has a purpose to its passion" (The Toronto Sun). It "opens for the viewer new dimensions of thinking and feeling, leading them to new realities which go far beyond the story of the film" (Berner Zeitung, Switzerland).

TECTONIC PLATES (1992) is a feature length adaptation of the stage play by Robert Lepage and Theatre Repère where the single image of plate tectonics becomes a metaphor for the evolution of human life and culture. The story criss-crosses the globe, following the random yet intricate events and individuals that shape the life and also the art of a French Canadian painter, Madeleine. As Madeleine's memories, visions and collisions with other lives shift from continent to continent, epoch to epoch, the film explores the relative and ephemeral nature of our political, cultural, sexual and personal boundaries. *TECTONIC PLATES* is a complex and evocative voyage into the geology of human behaviour which explores, explodes and cross-fertilizes theatrical and cinematic forms. It has won several awards including the "Most Innovative Film" prize at Figueira da Foz, the Grand Prize at the Columbus International Festival, and the Catholic Jury Prize for Best Film at the Mannheim International Film Festival.

PICTURE OF LIGHT is Mettler's first film to stem from the documentary tradition — an exploration which will continue in the development of the upcoming documentary series, *GAMBLING, GODS AND LSD* as well as his next dramatic feature film.

B I O G R A P H I E S (c o n t .)

A N D R E A S Z U E S T — producer, crew member

Andreas Zuest is a Swiss meteorologist, photographer, painter, collector and arctic enthusiast who originated **PICTURE OF LIGHT** in response to his desire to capture the Northern Lights on film. As well as co-producing **PICTURE OF LIGHT**, Zuest is at work initiating a series of artist's books as well as finishing his second volume of the social photo essay, **BEKANNTE, BEKANNTE**.

A L E X A N D R A G I L L — producer, picture & sound editing, crew member

Alexandra Gill is a filmmaker who first worked with Mettler on the set of Atom Egoyan's **FAMILY VIEWING**. She contributed to the postproduction and promotion/distribution of **TECTONIC PLATES** and was involved in all production and creative aspects of **PICTURE OF LIGHT**. Gill is currently completing her second short film, *leda and [sic] the swan*, developing a feature film,,as well as writing a short novel.

M I K E M U N N — co-picture editor, production manager

Mike Munn has worked as picture editor for various Toronto independent filmmakers, including Srinivas Krishna (**MASALA**), and Bruce McDonald (**ROADKILL**). He has been involved intensively with Grimthorpe Film in a variety of capacities since 1988, most recently working with Mettler as picture editor on **TECTONIC PLATES** and **PICTURE OF LIGHT**. Munn has recently completed his first short film, **A HOLE IN THE ROAD**.

J I M O ' R O U R K E — composer, musician

Jim O'Rourke is a composer/musician/producer who lives in Chicago, Illinois. As an improviser he has played with a wide array of international artists including Derek Bailey & Evan Parker, as a producer he recently completed new recordings with Tony Conrad and Faust. His own CDs include **DISENGAGE** (1992), **REMOVE THE NEED** (1993) **RULES OF REDUCTION** (1993), and the soon to be released **SEDE**.

G R I M T H O R P E F I L M — production company

Grimthorpe Film Inc. was created in 1985 by Peter Mettler. The company is based in Toronto, Canada, and maintains an European office in Switzerland. Grimthorpe Film consists of Mettler, Alexandra Gill, Mike Munn and Ingrid Veninger.



Andreas Zuest displays the results of his experiment in **PICTURE OF LIGHT**.

C R E D I T S a n d C O O R D I N A T E S

Produced by
PETER METTLER...ANDREAS ZUEST...ALEXANDRA GILL

Director
PETER METTLER

Camera
PETER METTLER

Editing
PETER METTLER...MIKE MUNN

Sound
GASTON KYRIAZI...LEON JOHNSON...PETER BRAEKER...
ALEXANDRA GILL...PETER METTLER

Music
JIM O'ROURKE

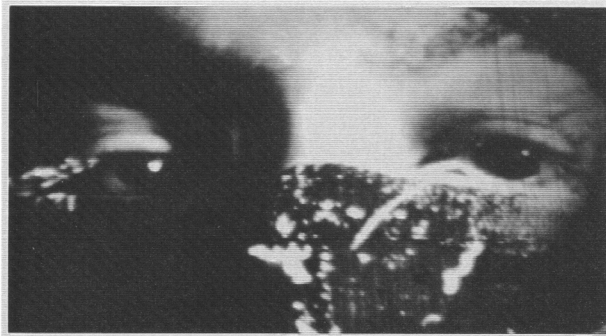
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PETER METTLER

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35mm, 83 min., colour, 1:1.66, optical sound, mono, © Grimthorpe Film & Andreas Züst



...but to simply watch instead...