

PETER METTLER



Born in 1958 in Toronto to Swiss parents, Peter Mettler grows up in Canada. A key figure in the critical wave of 1980's Canadian filmmakers, Mettler produces works which elude categorization. Living and working between Canada and Switzerland, Peter Mettler melds intuitive-associative processes with drama, essay, experiment or documentation. A strong supporter of independent creativity, he has collaborated with numerous filmmakers, artists and musicians including Atom Egoyan, Fred Frith, Robert Lepage, Andreas Züst, Edward Burtynsky, Jennifer Baichwal and Michael Ondaatje. His films and collaborations continue to hold a unique position within cinema and other disciplines, also resulting in works such as live image and sound mixing performance, photography and installations.

PETER METTLER



Peter Mettler's placid resistance

Try describing Peter Mettler and his cinematic worlds and you'll suddenly find yourself "in between" over and over again: for instance Mettler was born in Toronto in 1958 and holds dual Swiss/Canadian citizenship, so it's difficult to say where the filmmaker is really "at home." Send him an email and you won't know whether he's reading it in Canada or in Switzerland. Or somewhere else? Or where his mobile telephone will ring in Switzerland: perhaps in Zurich? Or perhaps in the Appenzell countryside, where he rents an abandoned hotel together with a group of fellow artists?

But there is still much more "in between": Mettler speaks both English and German; he attended school in Europe and North America, studied Film, Photography and Drama; he loves music (he had piano lessons for 10 years) and works as a cinematographer. He shoots films, which are neither strictly documentary nor purely experimental or fiction films, on all continents. He has composed very personal independent works and produced films for television and the cinema with budgets in the millions. He has also used visual footage for music performances and vice versa: sometimes the soundtracks for his films originate in live acts.

"Peter Mettler is a singular figure, a traveller off the beaten track, a patient adventurer, explorer and poet in the intermediate worlds of our perception." Martin Walder, *NZZ am Sonntag*, 22.12.2002

Inner and outer worlds

Finding yourself "in between" means you are not identical, nothing is firmly established, there is no absolute certainty. Only questions, doubt and difference. Sometimes it seems as if Peter Mettler is entirely at home in this difference, in this non-identity. Time after time he has travelled for his artistic work, asking questions, opening his eyes, listening carefully and measuring the bounds.

Evidence of this can already be seen in his first works, films he shot while in high school and at film school: in **Reverie** (1976) the world of the dead confronts that of the living; **Poison Ivy** (1978) juxtaposes human and animal behaviour patterns; **Gregory** (1981) explores the separation of body and mind. Mettler discovered the theme of his first feature-length fiction film, **Scissere** (1982), when he felt the urge one day to go out on the street, stick out his thumb and just hitch a ride. He happened to land in a former cloister just outside Neuchâtel and only gradually realised that the place had since become a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts. He stayed, took photos, returned, made friends and began making a film which confronts the outer world with that of another, namely one which can create a consciousness. In **Scissere** the identity of a young man unfolds soon after he

FILMOGRAPHY

2012	The End of Time
2009	Petropolis
2002	Gambling, Gods and LSD
1997	Balifilm
1994	Picture of Light
1992	Tectonic Plates
1989	The Top of His Head
1985	Eastern Avenue
1982	Scissere
1981	Gregory
1980	Lancelot Freely
1979	Home Movie
1978	Poison Ivy
1976	Reverie

PETER METTLER

> Peter Mettler's placid resistance

leaves the confines of a psychiatric clinic for the first time in many years: mother, child, drug addict, delinquent, entomologist, compartmentalizer, identity fanatic and libertarian.

Describing Mettler's manner of "confrontation" has nothing to do with violence and rigour, but quite the contrary: **Scissere** is dedicated to a young man with identity issues whose "tender, open approach" fascinates Mettler; the film is a "reproduction of the same with cinematic means." This modus operandi and its cinematic simulacrum can be seen throughout Mettler's works. Where in **Gambling, Gods and LSD** water provides the essential metaphor for a way which, although resistive, adapts to the circumstances. In **Tectonic Plates** identities rub up each other the wrong way, but without abrading. In **Balifilm** the dancers' never-ending gentle movements are observed and followed. In **Eastern Avenue** the chain on a woman's neck stands out. In **Picture of Light** a velvety off-camera voice asks questions, explains various definitions of snow in the Inuit language and then asks the viewers: "Are you getting cold?"

Images of the world

Mettler's tender, open approach has nothing to do with carelessness or indifference, if anything with a radicality, a profound quest for truth, an epistemological interest which is not only subjective, but also continually seeks to communicate itself. A third characteristic feature of Mettler's films is thus their reflection on the medium itself – film, video, cinema – meaning both its production as well as the audience's reception. How do I produce images of the world? How will others perceive these images? Will they mistake them for "the real thing?"

"Peter is a poet. He is the epitome of independent filmmaking. Plain and simple. His Canadian contemporaries marvel at his works and perceptions. Peter makes films because for him it represents the closest rapprochement to the spiritual world, to religion, to adoration and ritual in his modern world, to monastic devotion to an art form, a craft."

Bruce McDonald, 1995

The most consistent investigation into rendering the reality of the image is **Picture of Light**, Mettler's attempt to capture the Northern Lights on celluloid. In order to do this, the filmmaker embarks on a journey to the Arctic Circle, the Arctic wilderness, almost to the edge of the world. It requires elaborate technical preparations to even get a film camera to work there, but even then nature can thwart the crew's plans at any moment: it is impossible to take pictures in a snowstorm that show more than just white on the screen. "You frequently have to go to the extreme, to discover something, to break out of thought patterns and rhythms. Or to obtain a perspective of your own thought patterns," comments Mettler. Perhaps Tom McSorley, film critic and director of the Canadian Film Institute in Ottawa, has best described **Picture of Light**: "Basically, the film is an accumulation of portrayals or 'pictures of light', regardless of whether in language, photos or video footage. Each

2009 Petropolis

Premio per la distribuzione, Festival dei Popoli, Firenze; Prix du jeune public, Visions du Réel, Nyon

2002 Gambling, Gods and LSD

Grand Prix & Prix du Publique; Visions du Réel, Nyon; NFB Best Feature Documentary, Vancouver Int. Festival; NFB Best Documentary, Montreal Cinema Nouveau; 3SAT Prize for Best Documentary, Duisburger Filmwoche; Top Twenty Canadian Films & FIPRESCI Documentary runner-up, Toronto Int. Festival; Best Feature Length Documentary, Genie Awards, Academy of Canadian Cinema; Award for Excellence in the Arts, Swiss Federal Office; One of the Year's Best Films, Lincoln Center/Film Comment

1997 Balifilm

Best Short Film, Duisburger Filmwoche

1994 Picture of Light

Best Film, Best Cinematography & Best Writing, Hot Docs Toronto; La Sarraz Prize, Locarno International Film Festival; Award for Excellence in the Arts, Swiss Federal Office of Culture; Grand Prize (Images & Documents), Figueira da Foz International Festival; MCTV Award, Best Ontario Film; Award for Excellence, Yamagata International Documentary Festival

1992 Tectonic Plates

Most Innovative Film of the Festival, Figueira da Foz; Catholic Jury Award, Mannheim Film Festival; Grand Prize & Award for Excellence, Columbus, Ohio

1982 Scissere

Best Student Film, Norman Maclaren Award

PETER METTLER

> Peter Mettler's placid resistance

picture is unfinished, just a simulacrum; each an explanation or limited interpretation. Nevertheless, each is stunning. While the aurora borealis are revealed in a spectacular manner (shot in time lapse and partly decelerated in an optical printer), we're reminded that we are not seeing reality. But it doesn't matter. The physical tricks and the camera's 'lies' (made possible by the images) inspire wonder and awe. The paradox is complete."

More often than not, the outcome of Mettler's projects is left open; while filming he rarely knows in advance how it will end. "When even the continents are drifting apart and against one another," asks Martin Schaub, citing **Tectonic Plates**, "then how is it possible to understand the human longing for the secure and solid, this obsession with rendering everything innocuous by naming and defining it? Peter Mettler suggests in all of his films, not only in **Tectonic Plates**, an actual mobility – and not just externally – by realising it in his art."

"Mettler's films can be described as an attempt to dismantle the convention of film, to subvert its formality by all available means, to put an end to its confinement in linear stories." Martin Schaub, 1993

Cinematic barter

This process of realisation has something extremely unassuming and yet at the same time something all-embracing about it. To think, create, manifest and experience a film about transcendence for years, for instance, and then to realise it against all odds. With any other filmmaker facing such a project, it would be attributed to megalomania, but not with Peter Mettler. This is also due to the simple (but by no means banal) manner in which he communicates these goals. "I think it's about the process of comprehending the world in which I live," he explains. He travelled three continents for **Gambling, Gods and LSD** and over the course of three years viewed and edited approximately 120 hours of footage. The preliminary version was still 55 hours, with the final cut of the condensed film lasting more than three hours. Mettler had shot worldviews of three different continents: Asians who fantasise their idyllic world in Switzerland together. Europeans and Americans who are ensouled and inspired by the Far East. Global and local issues. Sundry religions. A myriad of healing methods. Microcosms and macrocosms. And always human beings. Old friends with whom one can exchange drug experiences. An invalid, lame man who drags himself closer to the camera to make contact. A fanatic who runs "Paradise Electro Stimulation" touting the ultimate orgasm. But Mettler interposes, queries against the ordinary flow of information. Take the female demonstration object in the erotic show for instance, who is she, what does she enjoy doing otherwise. In contact with these people, one senses an exchange, which is much more than mere curiosity, which invariably means divesting a part of the self as well. Mettler gives before he receives: a bit of himself for a picture or a word.

Dr. Veronika Rall majored in German, Film Studies and Philosophy in Germany and in the USA. As a freelance author she writes for *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *epd film*, *Tagesspiegel*, *Die Zeit*, *Die Tageszeitung*, *Tages-Anzeiger*, *Die Wochenzeitung*, *Frauen und Film*, *Visual Anthropology Review*, *Filmbulletin*, among others. Her dissertation at the Film Studies Department in Zurich was on the relationship between film and psychoanalysis. She lives and works in Zurich as a film expert and freelance author.

PETER METTLER

> Peter Mettler's placid resistance

For him film is a means of bartering, for which there is frequently a price to pay, whose currency is still up in the air – be it the astronomical amounts a film can cost or the risk of appearing vulnerable, searching or uncertain.

When Mettler shoots a film, he films at eye level, on equal footing with people. But simultaneously or later for a brief moment, he manages to step back and distance himself, to reflect and ask. What is it? What are the others searching for? And what am I looking for here? What is my camera searching for? Or my microphone? For all that, he is not caustically analytical or even overly didactic. His voice in the voice-over comments remains soft and gentle. It's a voice a child would like to hear when listening to bedtime stories, a voice easing the transition from daily rationality into the unearthly world of dreams.

Mettler's filmmaking may have its origins in the difference, in the non-identical, but in his works themselves there lies something reconciliatory: an infinite goodness and largesse, a state of grace. It can be heard in all opinions voiced about his work and his person, for example: "There is a humaneness and compassion, a love for life and the beauty of nature which goes beyond formalism in Peter's work," writes the Canadian filmmaker Jeremy Podeswa, with whom Mettler has worked as a cinematographer. Or the actress Christie MacFadyen, who as appeared in his films, says, "You seldom find someone like Peter who sees with so much benevolence and tact, and I've never felt so fortunate in front of any other camera." Pipilotti Rist, with whom Mettler shares a house in the Appenzell countryside, writes, "Funnily enough, Peter Mettler's films look like he does: big, beautiful and gentle. They move slowly, but steadily and decisively. Like an animal in trance, thinking and reflecting. His films are his eyes, full of the same big blue." And lastly, the Canadian film director and screenwriter Patricia Rozema: "I think Peter is a visionary, a poet and a philosopher, whose regard for the immediate goes beyond the physical, photographic world – which film purports to capture. I always have the impression that his eye is directed towards a netherworld, where he catches sight of wonders and brings them back in a new form. And then, wonder of all wonders, he brings us closer to what he has snatched, something somehow very concrete, to a strangely familiar place: to ourselves ...our home." Veronika Rall, Mai 2006

REVERIE

| 1976 | Super-8 | colour | 20'

Mettler's first film, made at the age of 17 in a high school film club, is the story of a young man who buys a dream from a gypsy woman on the street. The dream holds both the secret and knowledge of death. The young man awakes, only to discover that the world of the living is

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler
Sound: Peter Mettler
Editing: Peter Mettler

Cast: Kevin Jamieson (later aka Lancalot Freely), Sonja Haferkorn, Wendy Rowntree
Production: Upper Canada College Film Club
World Rights: Grimthorpe Film
Original Version: English

not unlike that of the "netherworld." A short fiction film with documentary elements and animation sequences, accompanied by contemporary pop music.

POISON IVY

| 1978 | 16mm | b/w | 20'

A lyrical film that juxtaposes a series of human and animal activities. It illustrates habits, instincts and aggression as well as several of modern mankind's absurd undertakings. The film includes clips from **Triumph des Willens**, portrays a

Script: Peter Mettler, Greg Krantz, Wendy Ord, Cary Smart
Cinematography: Peter Mettler, Greg Krantz
Sound: Peter Mettler, Greg Krantz, Wendy Ord, Cary Smart

Editing: Peter Mettler, Greg Krantz, Wendy Ord, Cary Smart
Cast: Various appearances
Production: 1st year Ryerson Polytechnical Institute
World Rights: Grimthorpe Film
Original Version: English

prominent local punk and many animals (especially gorillas) from the zoo in Toronto.

HOME MOVIE

| 1979 | 16mm | b/w | 15'

This film from his schooldays is about self-awareness: while a filmmaker attempts to carry out normal human activities, he is constantly wondering about the possibilities for filming them. This addresses the dilemma of obsessive impulses, of translating everyday life into a cinematic form. The soundtrack is like a film in a film: we hear Mettler show-

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler
Sound: Peter Mettler
Editing: Peter Mettler
Cast: Greg Krantz and other appearances

Production: 2nd year Ryerson Polytechnical Institute
World Rights: Grimthorpe Film
Original Version: English

ing the film to his parents at home. We hear their bewildered comments couched in a compulsion to be proud, conveying a feeling of alienation; the estrangement between filmmaker and family, filmmaker and film, filmmaker and life.

LANCALOT FREELY

| 1980 | 16mm | b/w | 20'

// My name means much the same as I do it freely. 'Lance' is actually a word like 'fuck' – screw or prick, but 'Lance' has another meaning, more the latter ... You see, it's also about fixing, drugs, get it? And 'fuck' here also means more than just shagging a chick ... It also means 'fuckin around', bugging about, screwing things up, OK? The word is not taken all that seriously. But 'Lance' actually means all these things and drugs as well, you know, it's everything in a nutshell. 'Freely' means as you please – as often as possible, whenever I can, all the time, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Lance Freely every day – I couldn't give a shit what day of the week it is or what time it is..." Lancelot Freely

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler
Sound: Peter Mettler
Editing: Peter Mettler
Music: Sandy MacFadyen, James Chance and the Contortions

Cast: Lancelot Freely and friends
Production: 3rd Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Toronto
World Rights: Grimthorpe Film
Original Version: English

Produced during film school, this is a bristling documentary portrait of Mettler's best childhood friend, whom he saw after he had left his parents' home, intent on leading a self-indulgent lifestyle. "My instructor couldn't believe that I had made a film about such a ne'er-do-well," recalls Mettler. In a long take Lancelot speaks directly to the viewer, revealing his extreme personality roiling with fury. In order to disrupt the illusion of the neutral, objective documentary film, the camera was handed over to the subject himself from time to time. Lance discloses several of his philosophical views and favourite haunts while capriciously "battling to the final rift."

GREGORY

| 1981 | 16mm | b/w, colour | 25'

A man and a woman awake suddenly in the middle of the night. The woman is confounded by her dreams and the intangibility of the psyche in contrast to the physical body. The man tells a story from his childhood: because he wasn't allowed to go outside and play, he sent his soul instead. An elliptic succession of scenes unravels, evidently in the man's mind – encounters with an epileptic, a prostitute and a

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler
Sound: Peter Mettler
Editing: Peter Mettler
Music: Excerpts from Weather Report, Codono, Don Cherry

Cast: Greg Krantz, Christine MacFadyen, Peter Mettler, Kristin Ruchards, Joey Hardin
Production: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Toronto
World Rights: Grimthorpe Film
Original Version: English

deranged therapist – all of which deal, in a way, with the schism between mind and body. A school film, written and shot within two weeks and initial techniques for image manipulation: for example, contact copying. The sound editing here is applied in a musical sense for the first time as well.

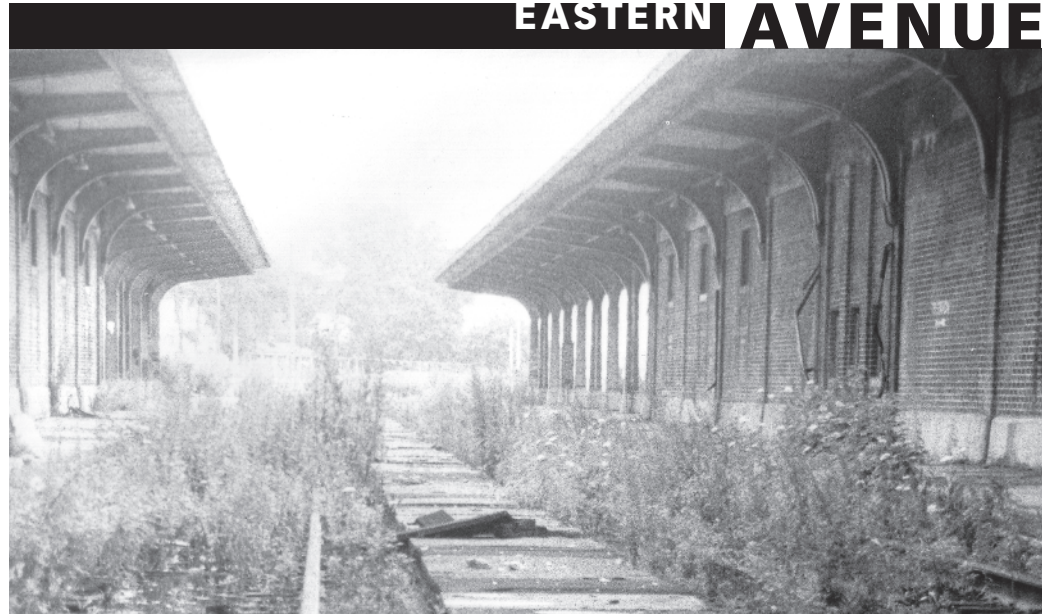
Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler

Sound: Peter Mettler, Judy Dryland
Editing: Peter Mettler

Music: Jean Marc Larivière etc.
Production: Peter Mettler, National
Film Board of Canada

World Rights: Grimthorpe Film
Original Version: without dialogue

Mettler manages once again with little language. Hovering above the images on film are solely sound collages (for example, from inside the Taj Mahal) and the gentle sounds of a cello and a violin. And now and then Mettler himself also looks directly into the camera, initially gravely, then he laughs. Although the laugh gradually disappears from the corners of his mouth, it can still be seen in his eyes. When Mettler finally disappears at the bottom of the frame, he replaces himself – with a water glass and a snow globe with edelweiss. And in some way it appears to be a friendly gesture. Veronika Rall



| 1985

| 16mm

| b/w, colour

| 55'

Although Peter Mettler originally did not intend to show **Eastern Avenue** to the public, the film is one of his most beautiful works. And beautiful is not used in this context for want of a better word: the film exudes something akin to pure beauty in every shot. “In spring 1983,” explains Mettler, “I undertook a journey following my intuition, which led me to Switzerland, Berlin and Portugal. The majority of the images are impulsive, intuitive reactions to the people and places I saw.” And what did Mettler see? The wing of an airplane. Clouds. The piece of jewellery on a woman’s hand, the chain around her neck. Empty houses. The Berlin Wall. People skiing. A woman painting. A child building roads in a sandbox for his toy cars. Various people he zooms in on. German autobahns. The sea in Portugal.

But perhaps the question “What did Mettler see” bypasses the heart of the film. It would be better to ask how he saw it. Once again the camera is fleeting here; in reference to a word coined by the German film critic Karsten Witte, “passager” would be more appropriate. It does not judge. It does not hold fast. And above all: it does not explain. It does not opine. Neither itself nor the object of its focus. It only notes. And in the end nothing more than the reality of the images remains, the actual state, existence, the rhythm in which they are assembled.

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler

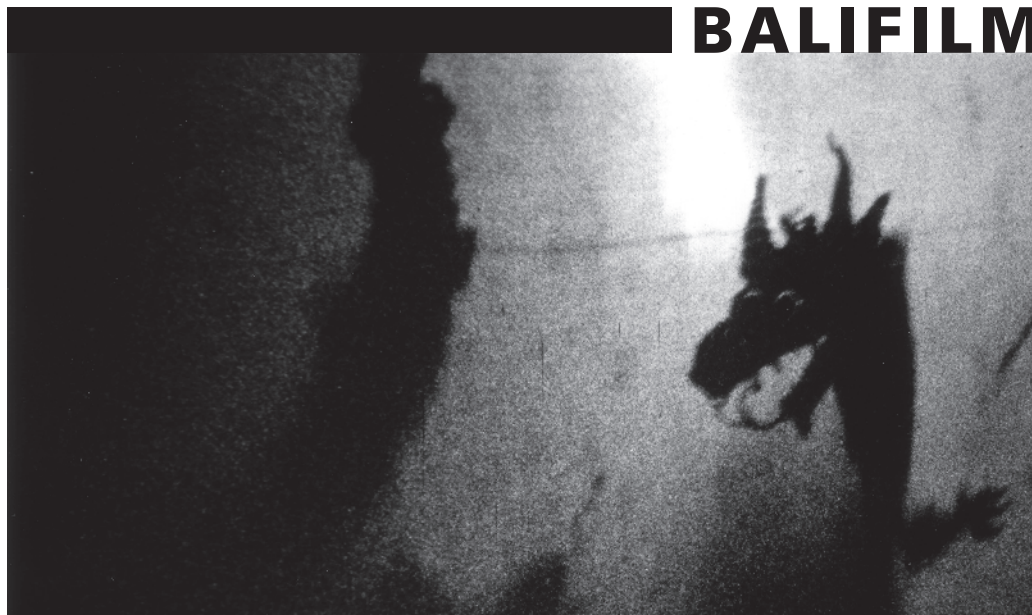
Sound: Peter Mettler
Editing: Peter Mettler

Music: The Evergreen Club Gamelan
Production: Grimthorpe Film Inc.

World Rights: Grimthorpe Film Inc.
Original Version: without dialogue

Mettler juxtaposes images associatively, his manipulation of which seems to be unbounded: the shift from colour to black and white, from fade-outs to fade-ins, or from time lapses to stills sets the rhythm and cadence of actions and dance rituals. Blurring the movements by means of extreme slow motion lends the images a painterly quality. (...) As a playful mosaic, *Balifilm* provides fascinating yet unorthodox insight into a different culture.

Cinema, Nr. 43/1998



| 1997

| 16mm

| b/w, colour

| 28'

Once more a film like a diary, not unlike *Eastern Avenue*, only this time Mettler obviously found a subject with two trips to Bali – spiritual portrayals, the link between culture, nature and religion. This interest led him from the rice paddy to the shadow theatre, where demons appear to battle against each other. Initially, he remains behind the scene with the figures, watching how the filigree silhouettes move and are guided in front of the fire. Then he changes to the audience's perspective, following the minutely detailed movements projected as shadows on to a screen. The original model for the cinema? But Mettler moves on to dance: women rehearse with the intricate figures in everyday clothing, at times they react animatedly to the camera, at other times they shyly withdraw. By contrast, Mettler seems to be especially fascinated by how they work with their hands, flexing agilely in constantly new forms.

The formal, aesthetic process is a key factor of the film again: Mettler only used remaining footage which he edited on video and ultimately rendered back on film. The creation of the film score is also rather complex: to begin with Mettler showed the images at a live performance, from which Mettler made recordings – thereafter the Gamelan Orchestra used these 'notes' to create a soundtrack for the film. To such an extent, *Balifilm* – extremely and rhythmically edited – is a composition of both image and music, one you can watch and listen to over and over again – like a song.

Veronika Rall

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler
Sound: Peter Mettler
Editing: Peter Mettler

Cast: Greg Krantz, Natalie Olanick,
Sandy MacFadyen, Anthony
Downes, Christie MacFadyen

Production: Collaborative Effort
Productions, Toronto

World Rights: Grimthorpe Film
Original Version: English

Scissere is a film that many resent – it demands as much as it is willing to give. And what it is willing to give is nothing less than a heightened awareness of all that we can see and hear in the world around us; a heightened awareness of ourselves, or others, and of how we cope or fail to cope in a world of increasing complexity and alienation. Laurinda Hartt, *Cinema* (Canada), 10/1982

With its cutting tone, the title evokes mental images: tearing, splitting, rupturing, gliding, fading. But *Scissere* is a person's name, the name of a young man. [...] In the film Mettler intermixes and superimposes various perceptions and narrative levels, films them and then films the filmed, decelerates and accelerates occurrences with complete disregard for convention, acquiescing only to the 'conformity' of the imagination. Martin Schaub, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 6.1.1984



| 1982 | 16mm | b/w, colour | 83'

The 83-minute film **Scissere** is not only Peter Mettler's first longer film. With this film, he also concludes his Film and Photography studies at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto with it in 1982. The film is based on Mettler's stopover at a rehabilitation centre for heroin addicts in Neuchâtel, where he meets Bruno **Scissere**, a young man who repeatedly reinvents his identity. **Scissere** not only shares his name with the title, the film is also dedicated to this young man. Before **Scissere** ushers his audience into the psychiatric ward via the soundtrack and several stills, Mettler opens with a long nature sequence: water, waves, trees, leaves shimmer across the screen, initially as gentle and romantic tableaux. Gradually the rhythm increases to such a stunning and abstract symphony, only a human pulse seems to curb the orgiastic ado and leads us into the hermetic home. A patient leaves the institutional confines here and confronts the world. **Scissere** now begins with a sort of a narrative based on the perception of four different people (a mother and her child, a heroin addict and a former entomologist): it is not the story that renders Mettler's **Scissere** so striking, but rather his style. The long, seemingly effortless, fluent tracking shots already define the aesthetics here and accentuate the ephemeral, faint tangibility of the film image. In their intention, they are complemented with animated photographs, slow motions, stop-motion effects as well as with a soundtrack that manages practically without words. Only rarely are sentence fragments comprehensible, in a way it is more like a sound tapestry comprised of music, language and noises underlies **Scissere**. Veronika Rall

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Tobias Schliessler, Peter Mettler, Gerald Packer
Sound: John Martin
Editing: Peter Mettler, Margaret v. Eerdewijk

Music: Fred Frith, Jane Siberry
Cast: Stephen Ouimette, Gary Reineke, Christie MacFadyen, David Fox, Julie Wildman, David Main et al

Production: Rhombus Media & Grimthorpe Film Inc.; Telefilm Canada; Ontario Film Development Corporation; Canada Council; Ontario Arts Council; National Film Board of Canada

World Rights: Grimthorpe Film Inc.; Rhombus Media
Original Version: English

The question concerning 'balance' is reflected in the film's structure and images that form the basis of the film. Director, cameraman and author Peter Mettler created a lyrical work, which presupposes the willingness to allow yourself to be transported to a dream-like mood and take part in a journey of discovery into one's own soul. [...] The director deliberately includes the other arts, which rarely exist in commercial cinema. The soundtrack composed by Fred Frith simulates the structure of the film, both well thought out and improvised. Salome

Pitschen, *Zoom*, 3/1990.

In this puzzle of images – *The Top of His Head* – Peter Mettler tells a fairy tale set in the age of total media exchange and total media control. Everything can be sent everywhere and anything received from anywhere. Like a somnambulist, a media specialist traces the mysterious tracks laid out by the woman he loves. It is the tale of walking through the magical forest, you have to know or find the right words and to learn, as Parsifal did, to ask the question, except that in the meantime the magical forest has become a landscape filled with antenna. Verena Zimmermann, *Solothurner*

Zeitung, 10.8.1989



| 1989

| 35mm

| colour

| 110'

Compared to his previous films, **Top of His Head** was a major production for Peter Mettler. With a budget of 1.2 million Canadian dollars, the film not only cost about 120 times more than **Scissere**, it was the first time Mettler worked for and with the commercial film industry. Based on the filmmaker's screenplay, **Top of His Head** tells the story of Gus Victor, a satellite dish salesman. Victor is a reasonably straight guy who has made it in the world of suits, ties, cars, posh offices and smart career plans. His world is turned upside down, however, when he meets the performance artist Lucy. He has barely become acquainted with the attractive woman when she vanishes, leaving behind a cryptic note for him, a page torn from a TV programme magazine announcing the film "Where East meets West." The summary reads: "A mysterious woman vanishes and leaves a cryptic note for her inquisitive young friend. He has to solve the riddle or risk his life."

While searching for Lucy, Gus also chances on others, such as the hitchhiker Jolanda, who has a brain tumour and is supposed to undergo an operation that would leave her blind. This story can in fact be traced back to Mettler's encounter with a woman, but the other way round: she picked him up while he was hitchhiking. "During the short time I spent with her, it was if I was seeing through her eyes, her world was more beautiful, much more ephemeral than mine." At first glance, **Top of His Head** seems to demand clear decisions from its protagonists: to go either east or west, to live in the world driven by technology or by intuition. But this only scratches the surface of the film. For Mettler it is primarily a question of perceiving various versions of the world. In the film he asks: "If everyone's view of the world is based on what they see, then how can it be defined?"

Script: Peter Mettler, based on a stage play by Robert Lepage and Théâtre Repère
Cinematography: Miroslaw Baszak, Peter Mettler

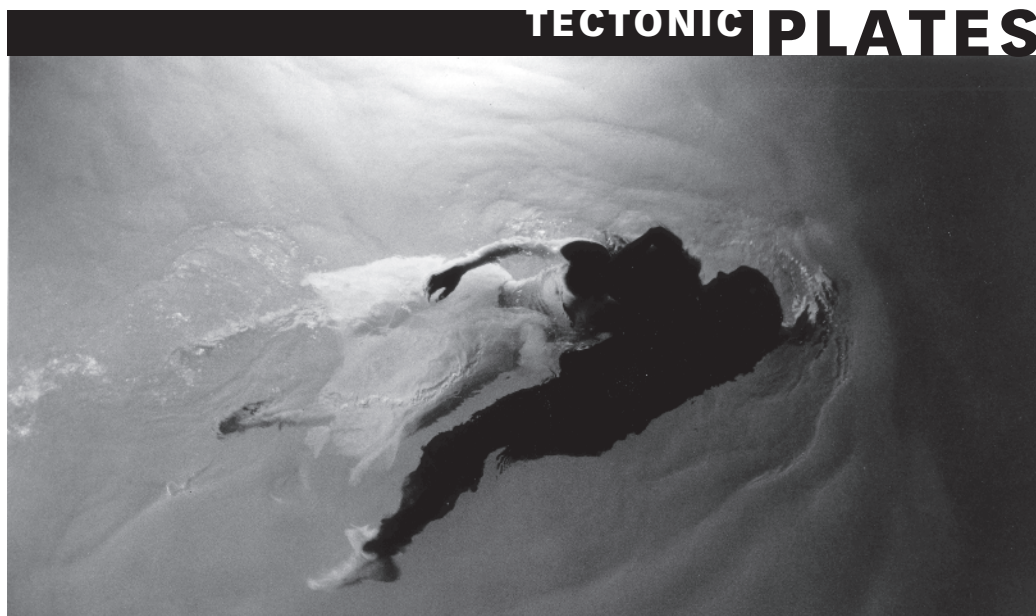
Sound: Jack Buchanan, Catherine v.d. Donckt
Editing: Mike Munn
Music: Michel Gosselin, Frédéric Chopin, Yuval Fichman

Cast: Michael Benson, Normand Bissonnette, Céline Bonnier, Boyd Clack, John Cobb

Production: Rhombus Media; Hauer-Rawlence Productions
World Rights: Rhombus Media
Original Version: English and French

Peter Mettler makes lyrical films, films that hold nothing firm and tangibly impart, but rather films that seek to speak with the viewer's heart, with his retrospections and dreams, with his emotions and intuition. [...] He thinks and works associatively. That is also why the montage of his films becomes a long, open process. The images and sounds are there, raw material that call for musical composition. Martin Schaub, *Das Magazin*, 40/1993

The fascinating thing about Peter Mettler's film adaptation of this stage production is his playful use of the vertical and the horizontal which continually orientates itself on the stage technique, while unobtrusively, almost elusively utilising the cinematic perspective. This renders ironical not least the attempts in many current theatre productions to adapt cinematic techniques like pans or even zooms for the stage. Theatre and film complement one another here very impressively. Michael Sennhauser, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 8.10.1993



| 1992

| 35mm

| colour

| 104'

Robert Lepage is well known as both a writer-director (*Confessional*, 1995, *La face cachée de la lune*, 2003) and an innovative theatre director. He developed the play *Tectonic Plates* together with the Théâtre Repère in Quebec between 1987 and 1991. Mettler was interested in the innovative form Lepage and his team had come upon. He collaborated with the theatre company for one year and developed a screenplay for a film with the same title.

As in *Top of His Head*, the film *Tectonic Plates* also deals with the search for identity: Madeleine is a painter who has fallen in love with the art instructor Jacques. When he disappears, she decides to take her life in Venice, the city of unrequited love. But in Venice she meets Constance, who introduces her to a new world of drugs and homoerotic experiences. As if Madeleine had passed on her suicidal wishes, Constance takes his life and Madeleine, by contrast, lives. Twenty years later she meets Antoine, who had also fallen in love with Jacques the art teacher. Now Antoine sets off to find Jacques in New York and meets with a surprise.

Lepage transposes these narratives with allusions to spirits of individuals and literary figures of the past: Frédéric Chopin, George Sand, Jim Morrison, Oprah Winfrey, Ophelia (from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) and the Nordic goddess Skadi. Lepage had already dispensed with solid ground in his play – Lepage utilises the image of shifting continental plates metaphorically to jar the fixed ideas about humans – and Mettler's film dismantles it even further. Unlike the theatre, the film can leap from one continent to another, from inwards to outwards, from documentary to fiction. Veronika Rall

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler
Sound: Leon Johnson, Gaston Kyriazi

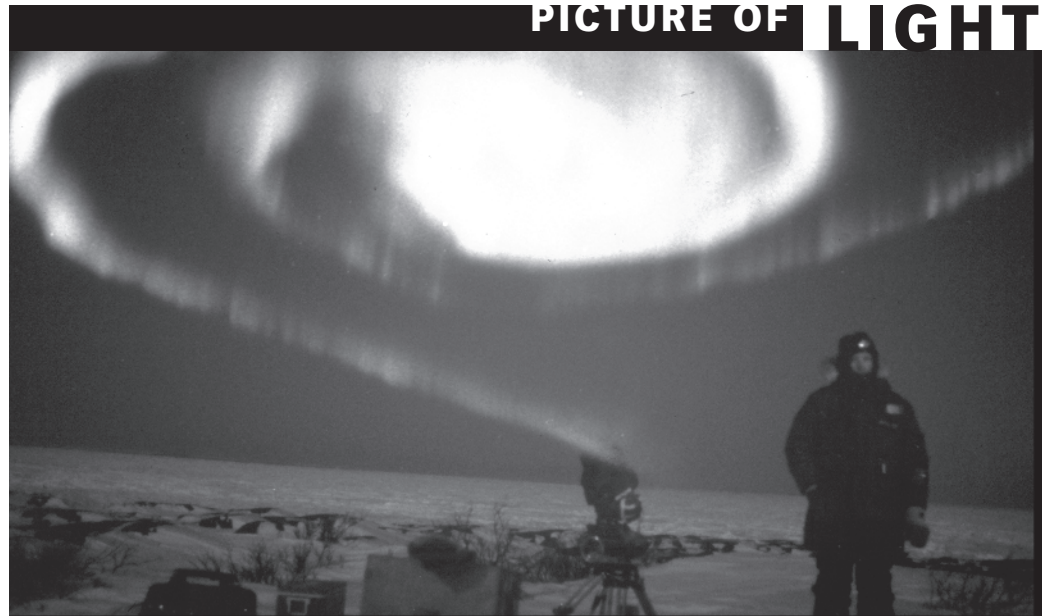
Editing: Peter Mettler, Mike Munn
Music: Jim O'Rourke

Production: Grimthorpe Film Inc.;
Andreas Züst

World Sales: Accent Films
International Ltd., Montreux
Original Version: English

The images of the Northern Lights are mental images for Peter Mettler, ethereal apparitions of light bearing supernatural quality. He accompanies his film with an entreatingly commentary, frequently speaking directly to the audience in the cinema. In a way, film is a medium, Mettler a shaman who makes it talk. With his images he aims for behind the images of external reality. The Northern Lights, he claims while showing only black film, are similar to the lights of your own retina. Thomas Allenbach, *Der Bund*, 30.3.1995

The filmmaker operates within paradoxes: between nature, which fascinates because it sets limits, and the technology that seeks to overcome these limits. Nevertheless, fascination gives rise to doubt. 'We travelled to the North to capture an image of light. We live in a time where things do not seem to exist if they are not captured as an image...' It is not narcissism when the filmmaker speaks of 'I'. It is the scepticism towards one's profession as a hunter of images. Verena Zimmermann, *Basler Zeitung*, 23.12.1994



1994 | Super 16mm blow-up and 35mm | colour | 83'

Subsequent to the commercial work with **The Top of His Head** and the **Tectonic Plates** theatre project, Peter Mettler's research for **Picture of Light** enables the emergence of his own cinematic form, his own content and his own form – an essay-like enquiry, the constant search and analysis, a composite of trance and reflection. Together with his coproducer, Andreas Züst from Switzerland, Mettler attempts to capture images of the Northern Lights on film in **Picture of Light**. Elaborate technical preparations are required to do this. With everything arranged (and tested in the cold chamber), the crew sets off for Churchill, Manitoba, a small town situated on Hudson Bay. But the aurora borealis prove difficult to capture: at first blizzards thwart the film crew's work, later questions concerning image production arise. Mettler explains: "While producing **Picture of Light**, I noticed that I was inadvertently questioning my developments, intentions and motives. Presumably, it was the staggering force and grandeur of seeing the aurora borealis in the Arctic wilderness, which made me reflect on whether it might be wrong to capture these magnificent images, just so they could be seen on the screen or on the 'box'. A potential viewer would experience the "cinematographic wonder" of the aurora borealis and confuse it with the 'natural wonder', when in fact the actual experience was fundamentally different." Because of this, the filmmaker decides to use a voice-over for the first time. It is his own voice recounting diary-like the creation of the film and, on the other hand, scrutinising his own actions and doings. Because of that, **Picture of Light** is not only a meditation, but also a reflective essay film, in which sound and image are mutually dependent, while contradicting and cross-examining each other. Veronika Rall

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Peter Mettler
Sound: Peter Bräker, Peter Mettler

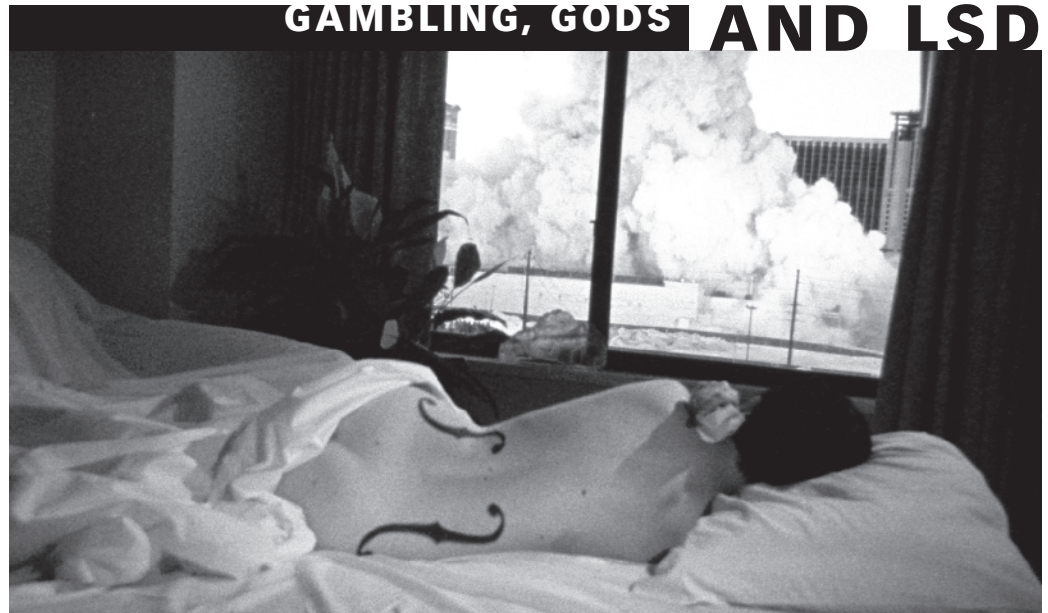
Editing: Peter Mettler, Roland Schlimme
Music: Fred Frith, Jim O'Rourke, Knut & Silvy, Henryk Mikolaj Gorecki

Production: maximage GmbH, Zürich; Grimthorpe Film Inc., Toronto
World Sales: Alliance Atlantis Pictures International, Los Angeles

Original Version: English/Swiss-German (english subtitles)

An extended meditation on what humans will do to reach transcendent states. (...) The lovingly shot three-hour pic is probably too leisurely for impatient viewers, but the accumulation of arresting imagery, spooky music and thoughtful language weaves a hypnotic spell of its own. Ken Eisner, *Variety*, 09.12.2002

With his visual inquisitiveness, Mettler succeeds in both encapsulating and amplifying his organic and hallucinatory creativity in *Gambling, Gods and LSD*. The film carries on the tradition of creation that eludes any attempts at categorization and deliberately pushes the boundaries. In his previous works Mettler has already demonstrated how suitable the medium of film is for fusing intuition and control, fiction and reality. This gamut of cinematic possibilities is reflected in his oeuvre: his filmography is filled with experimental, fiction and documentary films as well as the respective hybrid forms. The sound design of *Gambling, Gods and LSD* is striking. The symbiosis between sound and image harmoniously blending with the dialogues of the people interviewed and Mettler's poetic voice-over all make up the tapestry of sound, which abounds with the brilliance of a sound tinkerer. Veronika Rall



| 2002 | 35mm | colour | 180'

Gambling, Gods and LSD is (hitherto) Mettler's masterpiece, first of all simply due to the amount of work it entailed: he spent a total of eight years working on the film, the initial raw version was 55 hours, which was ultimately condensed to about three hours. In spite of this, the film is still a trip in every sense of the word: a journey, a foray, a high, a dream, a step off the beaten path, a release. It begins as a journey into the past, to childhood in Toronto. A river where he had once played; an exquisite hotel where he had imagined himself to be. What is it like setting foot in this hotel as an adult, asks Mettler. Do you destroy a child's dream when you know that all the splendour is simply comprised of a few light bulbs, bespangled garlands and a bit of papier-mâché?

Mettler was asking standardised and at times impossible questions. But in contact with people, there is a sense of an exchange which goes beyond this, which invariably means divesting a part of the self as well. He gives before he receives: a bit of himself for a picture or a word. The film's visual leitmotif is the passage, the transition from one place to another. The tapestry of sound in *Gambling, Gods and LSD* also accompanies the viewers through these images like a river. Mettler worked together with Fred Frith again, but Peter Bräker and Dimitri de Perrot also composed for the film. Music and images infuse each other and are mutually dependent, the one conducting to the emergence of the other. And together they give rise to a third which in turn lands with the viewers, who compile their own film, prompting hundreds of other films and thousands of sundry associations in the minds of all the people sitting in the cinema.

Script: Peter Mettler
Cinematography: Ron Chapple

Editing: Roland Schlimme
Sound: Roland Schlimme, Peter Mettler, Martin Lee

Music: Gabriel Scotti

Production: Greenpeace Canada
Original Version: English

Filmed from the air, *Petropolis* offers a perverse, almost meditative beauty as Mettler's cameras soar over a vast wilderness from which oil-laden earth is scooped and trucked to smoke-belching "up-graders," where petroleum is extracted. Mettler avoids bombarding audiences with facts, forcing them to come to grips, visually, with images of destruction. Frank McGurty, *Reuters*, 14.09.2009

PETROPOLIS – AERIAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ALBERTA TAR SANDS



| 2009

| HDCAM SR

| colour

| 40'

Canada's tar sands are an oil reserve the size of England. Extracting the crude oil called bitumen from underneath unspoiled wilderness requires a massive industrialized effort with far-reaching impacts on the land, air, water, and climate. It's an extraordinary spectacle, whose scope can only be understood from far above. In a hypnotic flight of image and sound, one machine's perspective upon the choreography of others, suggests a dehumanized world where petroleum's power is supreme.

Written and directed by: Peter Mettler

Cinematography: Peter Mettler, Camille Budin, Nick De Pencier

Editing: Peter Mettler, Roland Schlimme

Sound: Peter Mettler, Peter Bräker, Florian Eidenbenz

Music: Gabriel Scotti, Vincent Hänni

Production: maximage GmbH, Zürich; Grimthorpe Film Inc., Toronto; National Film Board of Canada; Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen; SRG SSR; ARTE

World Rights: maximage GmbH, Zürich (Europe); National Film Board of Canada

Original Version: English (german/french subtitles)

The End of Time becomes immersive and hypnotic, mostly thanks to its gorgeous visuals. Mettler loves elemental nature, from accelerated time-lapse footage of clouds rolling down hillsides to whirling constellations of stars, from mighty mountain ranges to stunning super-sized close-ups of ants picking at the husk of dead grasshopper. Most mesmerizing of all are the long wordless shots of molten lava in Hawaii, diabolically lovely rivers of fire that leave stunning rock sculptures in their wake. The film climaxes with a sustained experiment in pure audio-visual abstraction, a dazzling montage of symmetrical shapes and overlapping patterns set to pulsing electronic music.

Stephan Dalton, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 05.08.2012

The End of Time is not a metaphor. Mettler's globe-trotting cine-essay is quite literally about time: as an abstract concept, as a metaphysical construct and as a physical reality. (...) It exists in the twilight zone that is home to much of the best non-fiction filmmaking: at once rousing and sobering, baffling and precise, epic and intimate. Adam Nayman, *POV Magazine*, 05.09.2012

The poetic lens of this Toronto cinematographer/director has previously inquired into such elusive subjects as personal fulfillment (*Gambling, Gods and LSD*) and the Northern Lights (*Picture of Light*). Now Mettler is after his most elusive prey yet: the very human concept of how we track our very existence. (...) *The End of Time* poetically explores the human construct of hours, minutes and days, arguing that nature doesn't need watches, clocks and calendars.

Peter Howell, *Toronto Star*, 11.12.2012



| 2012

| DCP-Harddisk

| colour

| 114'

Working at the limits of what can easily be expressed, filmmaker Peter Mettler takes on the elusive subject of time, and once again turns his camera to filming the unfilmable. From the particle accelerator in Switzerland, where scientists seek to probe regions of time we cannot see, to lava flows in Hawaii which have overwhelmed all but one home on the south side of Big Island; from the disintegration of inner city Detroit, to a Hindu funeral rite near the place of Buddha's enlightenment, Mettler explores our perception of time. He dares to dream the movie of the future while also immersing us in the wonder of the everyday.