

The End of Time

A film by
Peter Mettler

114 min, English, Digital (DCP, Blu-ray), Canada, 2012, Documentary



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Synopsis

"Recalling the work of Terrence Malick, Werner Herzog and the late Chris Marker" (Hollywood Reporter), Peter Mettler's enthralling new film combines elements of documentary, essay, and experimental cinema to create a tour de force that challenges our conception of time — and perhaps the very fabric of our existence.

With stunning cinematography and a knack for capturing astonishing moments, *The End of Time* travels the planet — from the CERN particle accelerator outside Geneva to the lava flows of Hawaii; from a disintegrating Detroit where Henry Ford built his first factory to the tree where Buddha was enlightened. Both mind-expanding and eerily familiar, Mettler's provocative film explores the links between renewal and destruction, between primordial mysticism and the furthest reaches of modern science, giving the viewer a transcendent cinematic experience.

Praise for The End of Time

"Recalling the work of Terrence Malick, Werner Herzog and the late Chris Marker...THE END OF TIME becomes immersive and hypnotic...a ravishingly beautiful experience." – Stephen Dalton, *The Hollywood Reporter*

"A work of vision...A globe-trotting cine-essay about time...poetic and lovely."
– Adam Nayman, *POV*

"Mettler's trippy films work as perceptual experiences...free your mind, and the rest will follow." – Mark Peranson, *Pardo Live Locarno*

"Peter Mettler traverses the globe to explore (and explode) our conceptions of time, in this entrancing combination of documentary and mind-expanding philosophical speculation."
– Steve Gravestock, *TIFF*

"One of Canada's great cinematic experimentalists returns with a documentary exploring the meaning of time...There is not a hint of the didactic here, but rather pure contemplation, much like Graham Coleman's 1979 masterpiece *Tibet: A Buddhist Trilogy*, which also sought to introduce a timeless, meditative state for viewers." – *The Globe and Mail*

"Splendiferously trippy" – Jason Anderson, *Cinema Scope*

"Peter Mettler's poetic lens has inquired into everything from personal fulfillment (*Gambling, Gods and LSD*) to the Northern Lights (*Picture of Light*). Now he's after his most elusive prey yet: the very human concept of time...[*The End of Time*] is of a piece with Patricio Guzmán's *Nostalgia for the Light*, a film that similarly finds miraculous unity in seemingly random things."
– Peter Howell, *Toronto Star*

"A form of cinematic meditation ... powerful, moving and sensually ravishing to watch."
– Geoff Pevere, *Toronto Star*

"Peter pushes forward with every new film, in his bid for a re-visioned consciousness."
– Philip Hoffman, *Filmmaker*

"Mettler has tuned himself to the world. Always receptive to the unexpected."
– Peter Weber, Swiss novelist

About the Film

Ten years after completing his monumental rumination on the transcendental impulse, *Gambling, Gods & LSD*, Peter Mettler returns with a film of rare and profound beauty. The third in a trilogy which began with *Picture of Light* (1996), and was followed by *Gambling, Gods & LSD* (2002), *The End if Time* re-affirms Mettler as a visionary deeply committed to a unique and long-standing cinematic endeavor. Call it Mettler-vision, or even Mettler-ama, critics describe *Gambling, Gods & LSD* as “emblematic of a new dimension in documentary cinema” (L’Hebdo), “more dreamlike than any drama” (Maclean’s), and “a divine sacrament, melting the viewer’s synapses with a mesmerizing array of sights, sounds and genuinely profound insights” (Eye Magazine). Les Inrockuptibles writes that “by the grace of filmmaking, the genius of association, we are in a constant flux between the trivial and sublime, the profound and the futile.”

Peter Mettler transforms movie-going into an experience unique to every viewer. His films act as mirrors, as well as portals to the world. Guided by compassion and a sense of wonder, with Mettler’s camera the everyday is converted to the transcendent, and the invisible is made visible.

What is time? A reality? An illusion? A concept?

These questions lie at the heart of Peter Mettler’s newest film. In 1960 American astronaut, Joe Kittinger, jumped from a balloon at the edge of space. Although he was falling at the speed of sound, he felt suspended in time until he approached the clouds and returned to the context of earth. Before the opening credits are complete, Mettler has established the scope of *The End of Time*, which will offer up perspectives at once cosmic and very human. Drawing from science, philosophy, religion and the personal, the film chronicles a journey into the nature of time, while bearing witness to this perilous period in the history of the planet. We begin at CERN, the particle accelerator in Switzerland, where scientists probe regions of time we cannot see. By smashing particles together at almost the speed of light, they hope to reproduce conditions just instants after the Big Bang. But scientists are still not sure: is time real, or is it only a perception?

Back at home in Toronto, Mettler connects us to felt time, and the grace of its everyday passage, before continuing on to Hawaii. Although the islands are comparatively young, the vastness of geological time is made manifest. The hot lava forms new land masses before our eyes. An awesome power, driven by “this engine called earth”, the lava leaves only Jack Thompson’s home on the south shore of Big Island. Even without cataclysms, it becomes clear in Detroit that our culture and installations are vulnerable to nature in only a matter of years. “The earth will heal itself. Humans will be gone and the earth will live on,” remarks Andrew Kemp, a squatter re-building in an abandoned inner city neighborhood. Auto factories are mausoleums, and the workshop where Henry Ford invented the Model-T – perhaps the most radical of our “time-saving” technologies – is now a parking lot. Yet DJ Richie Hawtin, reminds us that when you’re “with your machines, it’s a very personal thing.” Hawtin, who lives “on the edge between now and tomorrow,” connects us directly to the tree of Buddha’s enlightenment

and the philosophy of the present, in Bodhgaya, India. “If you have a beginning, then there’s a problem, but if it’s beginning-less, then there’s no problem,” Rajeev says. Yet we are inevitably “entangled in the idea of time” because the body, Mettler reminds us, is transient. A Hindu family carries their dead relative to the outskirts of town, where they burn him on a pyre. As the corpse quite literally goes up in smoke, we are returned to the cosmic perspective, and an observatory in Hawaii, on Mauna Kea.

Because earth occupies a “very quaint neighborhood of our galaxy,” our planet has been able to evolve a life form which can think about thinking. The telescope is the best time-machine we have invented to date. With it we can look up to 10 billion years into our past. “We are the universe looking at itself.” And with that Mettler dares to dream the movie of the future. Or perhaps he is offering up images from a timeless dimension, where our interconnectedness and simultaneity are made visible. When he returns us to earth, it is back to his childhood home where his mother evokes in us one of the most direct, human experience of time – watching those you love grow old; a conclusion which leaves little doubt that if we take care of our responsibilities in the present – moment to moment – then the future will take care of itself.

Filmmaker Interview

Why did you call the film THE END OF TIME?

It's referring to the end of the idea of time, not to the end of the world. Although the end of the world reference is of course interesting, given that it's 2012, the year the Mayans believe the world will come to an end. I think our species has never been more aware of our place in the big picture of time than now – but it also begs the question: What is time anyway?

So how would you describe what THE END OF TIME is about?

Ultimately I suppose it's a film about perception and awareness. It offers a challenge to see through our conceptual thinking. We use concepts like time to organize and understand our lives. We use our created languages to define our world. But these things can also end up controlling us and disconnecting us from the "real" world, or the "non-conceptual" world, or "nature", or whatever we might choose to call that which is beyond words. The film first tunes the viewer into concepts of time, but then leaves the world of ideas and takes them through an experience of time, which is not unlike that of listening to music, with the intention to provoke a heightened awareness and associative thinking process. Ultimately I hope the film inspires an awareness of presence, and the realization of the impact of our actions on the future.

It does seem like a very ambitious way to handle a very ambitious subject for a film. What was it that made you want to take it on?

I never had any intention to try and solve the puzzle of time. That, of course, would be absurd. I didn't want to try and explain past and current concepts of time, because even that's a rat's nest which I don't have the will or wherewithal to sort out. While researching I explored geology, archeology, astronomy, biology, shamanism, philosophy, and so on. There's far too much to try to do a comprehensive survey of human thinking about time. And I wasn't going to try to explain Wittgenstein or particle physics. I wanted to observe time using the tools I'm most comfortable with – images and sound. I wanted to observe time using the time machine of cinema. Specifically, I wanted to explore what we mean when we think of time, and how we experience it. It was important to me to get some perspective on the idea that time may not even exist. And subconsciously or inadvertently I now know that I was still on the path of exploring transcendence, as I did in *Gambling, Gods & LSD*, and coming to terms with mortality and the fact that everything 'dies.' More than being my profession, filmmaking is the way I interact with the world and try to understand it. It's the way I explore and learn about things that fascinate me. And time fascinates me.

What camera did you use to shoot THE END OF TIME? How long did it take to shoot?

I shot the film with the digital format Sony EX 1 and Canon 60D. They're quite small and portable compared to the film cameras I'm used to. They allow for more flexibility, also offering spontaneity, the ability to record good quality stereo sound and the option to trek for miles

through nature. The project took 5 years from first ideas to final print in 2012. I shot on and off for 3 of those years. We filmed the CERN sequences in Switzerland during development because they told us that if we waited, the particle accelerator would be turned on and it would become a lethal, magnetic, radioactive, zero-degree-Kelvin environment where protons collide at the speed of light! I know it sounds odd, but along with reading extensively about the subject, development consisted of spending a lot of time with the camera observing nature. It was helpful to really pay attention to seasonal transitions and all their implications...watching time pass. When I started shooting in a more formal way, I had developed a list of subjects I was interested in. But it continued to be a process of exploration and discovery, following leads and associations. For example, I knew I wanted to go to Hawaii to shoot lava because of its direct relationship to the ancient processes of the earth – lava's such a wonderful, animate example of geological time. But I had no idea of who I might meet in Hawaii and want to interview. Once I heard about Jack, the man whose house is surrounded by active lava flows, I sensed that his circumstances could cross several themes in the film, so I made an effort to go visit him.

How did you hear about Jack Thompson. Is he still there in his house?

I heard about Jack through a long chain of associations – meeting one person who tells me about another person, etc. That's often how I find things to shoot. And actually, very recently the volcano – or the goddess Pele, as the Hawaiians call it – wiped out his home after 30 years of flowing all around it. He was safe. Big Island is the youngest in the chain of Hawaiian Islands, at about half a million years old. They were all created from cooling magma breaking through the crust of the earth. There's another island, Lo'ihi, coming up 20 miles off shore, due to surface in 50,000 years. But, as Jack says: "That's too much to think about." I spent weeks wandering the landscape finding recently submerged forests, houses and even a school bus. Jack lived in a subdivision which had been otherwise entirely buried by the lava flows, its other inhabitants having left long ago. His lone house was visible from the air and he'd become a sort of legend. He lived alone like a hermit on an island, happily cut off from modernity for a few years, before the lava got him too. It was one of the most serene and crazy places I've ever been.

You shot in Switzerland, Toronto, Hawaii, Detroit and India. How did you choose where and what to shoot?

At some point, as I was researching experts and possible subjects, it became clear to me that time is everything. I could look at anything and see time acting upon it, or through it. I could shoot anything, really. As George Mikenberg, a physicist at the particle accelerator in CERN says: "Time means: we are." So, to me, it became more a matter of how to look at things. Cinema is a perfect tool for looking at things with an accented approach or slightly skewed perspective. That became most important – shooting with an awareness of the present and of our seeing, regardless of the subject. I trusted that if I followed that in the shooting and editing, it would manifest in the film, on the screen. And I actually think it does. So I chose subjects from my endlessly long lists which would offer good exploratory experiences around some of the

notions of time that seemed noteworthy. That's how I came up with CERN and the Mauna Kea Observatories, looking into the conditions of the Big Bang and deep space, or the first life on volcanic rock, or the observing of animals and wondering about how they might experience time, and so on.

So how long did it take to edit the film?

The edit took about 2 years. Some editing was happening while I was still shooting. For example, my co-editor, Roland Schlimme, worked on assembling the CERN particle accelerator footage while I was shooting in Hawaii. There were intermittent periods when I stopped shooting altogether and just hunkered down in the edit room on my own. Roland would cut some scenes and I would cut others and then we'd piece them together, divining a structure. In some cases this helped me figure out what could be shot next. The India sequence was actually directed from the editing table. I asked Camille Budin and Brigitte Reisz, who were traveling to India anyway, to gather material at the site of the descendant of the ancient Bodhi tree, where Buddha experienced his enlightenment. They did an excellent job. Giving them specific questions and thoughts to consider in choosing subjects, as well as specific images, was very different from the exploratory shooting I like to do on my own. But I had shot in Bodhgaya on two occasions already in my life, so I had some idea of what I wanted filmed. At a certain point I took over the editing and sound work entirely. This often happens with the editing of my films. It becomes very intense, even personal, and I can no longer give an editor direction. I need to handle and cut the material to find the optimal relationships and to finish. At the same time, all the notes I'd been making in development and shooting started to get honed towards formulating a voice over. It takes a while to know what the expressed meaning of a particular sequence is, or will be. Like Colonel Kittinger, the man who falls from space, becoming emblematic of time stopping, or Richie Hawtin, the musician with his machines experiencing a singularity while performing – meanings are buried in the mass of possibilities which the material offers and must be sculpted out to fit as part of the whole. Towards the end Alexandra Rockingham Gill gave input on story structure and voice over. Peter Braker helped to fill out and mix the foundation of sound that Roland and I had created during picture editing. Throughout the entire process, sound, image, and spoken word were all worked simultaneously until the final architecture was found.

Who are the people we encounter in Detroit? Can you tell me a bit more about what's going on there?

The people in Detroit are part of a community that purchased an entire block of abandoned houses for very little money in the middle of a largely destitute neighborhood. They have created their own vegetable gardens, fixed up their homes, and are part of a new generation with an alternative approach to city living. In Detroit I was interested in seeing the transitioning eras, which are remarkably visible there – the old opulent movie theatre, which is now a parking lot but was once the site of Henry Ford's workshop, for example. Nature is reclaiming the city in places, demonstrating its power to continue on without us. And you have these people with a new vision inhabiting the ruins of the automotive industry dream – the factories

of which are still strewn around, picked over for sheet metal or other resources. Detroit also gave birth to the ever-expanding music movement of Techno or electronic music. We visit with Richie Hawtin who plays an important part in this evolution, having migrated weekly across the river from Windsor, Canada, in the early days. To me Techno is emblematic of the digital age, which has sprouted out of this old industrial-dream city.

Although the film is made up of a variety of components and styles, somehow it all fits together into a seamless whole. Is there a way you can describe how you choose juxtapositions and structure? What kinds of logic do you use in putting shots together?

I follow what I believe is the logic of nature and human experience. Organic logic – the unfolding of events, the associative pathways our lives and pursuits take – rather than succumbing to pre-determined structures. But so much work today is designed to fit formulae and genres, it loses its connection to the way things really go. And the way things really go is what creates uniqueness in humans, and art, and nature – and it's what offers up all the most compelling stories. Our existence and our being is unbelievably complex. Studying nature makes it so clear. There are so many pathways that any living or moving thing can follow, so many pressures it's subjected to. Just watch lava making its way down a slope. That says it all in the most fundamental way – as it slides and twists along the path of least resistance and burns up anything soft in its path.

Do you see THE END OF TIME as being in the tradition of other kinds of films? Which ones?

What I'm working at with my last films has something to do with becoming aware of the forces of nature. I'm trying to integrate practices of seeing with the use of image-making technology into that. I still don't know for sure how to answer the question: Is cinema part of nature? Although my sense is that everything is nature and even technology helps nature become aware of itself. Certainly I have been influenced by what has come before – the work of Johan van der Keuken, Chris Marker, Cinema Verite, Antonioni, 60's Avant Garde cinema, the Expressionists & Dadaists, lots of TV and a good scientist friend. I see the traces of all this in my work. But I hesitate more and more to even call it my own work, because I'm also more aware of how the trails of history meet unconsciously inside of us. The times and technology, as well, are so crucial in determining our visual language.

That intensely sensorial section near the end seems to be partly about technology. It's quite a departure from the rest of the film. What were you trying to achieve with it?

We call that section of the film "Mixxa". It's partly the result of several years of collaboration with Greg Hermanovic of Derivative Inc. to create a performance image and sound mixing software. It mixes together images the way sounds and music were mixed in the past. The mix of several layered tracks of images are performed and recorded in real time to create a type of audio-visual rendering which was not really even possible just a few years ago. I implemented this in THE END OF TIME to create a sequence that, at one level, works like a flow of

consciousness suggesting several parallel realities. The early part of the sequence includes an animation/composition by Bruno Degazio and Christos Hatzis called "Harmonia" – a beautiful mandala-like depiction of harmonic overtones thought to be key to understanding the inner structure of the universe by Plato, Plotinus, all the way to Johannes Kepler and Sir Isaac Newton. In the 1890's, the Lumière Brothers first cinema inventions started with long takes and static shots cut together head to tail. That's what the technology suggested and allowed. The Lumière's camera capturing the train pulling into the station was a first step. Now, through various media, we can see in layers, we can see back in time. We see many things at once, in quick succession. Instantly. We see mixes and associations. We see great works of art from the other side of the world juxtaposed with a photo of our best friend at a BBQ. Technology has tuned us to see in such ways. Our minds and bodies continue to be conditioned by the technologies we use. Our very consciousness, the way we think, see and dream are profoundly affected. There is very real talk about multi-verses. If there are such things, one day we may be able to see into them. We have developed ways to see with technology what our eyes cannot, be it the proton collision or the distant galaxy. And at the same time we have tools at our disposal to evoke concepts of possible imaginings. I'm interested in the difference between presence and the wandering mind. Between technological time and "real time." I'm interested in being aware of our perception as it occurs. And like one of the characters in the film says, referring to a quote by Teilhard de Chardin, I like the idea that 'we are nature learning about itself.' All these ideas and more are folded into that "Mixxa" sequence, but it will mean a lot of different things to different people, I'm sure!

The film ends with a very personal moment, which is quite unexpected. How do you conceive of your presence in the film? Why or how did you arrive at this as an ending?

When everything is said and done, when all the philosophy and physics and thinking is over, we still really only have our day-to-day experience to guide us. Our most concrete experience of time is: "We grow old, we die." This is the basic way we know time acts upon us. I'm just a filmmaker making a film, using a time machine to ponder time. This is my reality and there is no elaborate fiction to hide behind. At some point in this journey we must acknowledge our elders. In the end, we are forced back to basics. As mothers have said to their children for countless eons: "Make the most of your life, because it will pass."

Filmmaker Bio

Peter Mettler: A Portrait, By Veronika Rall, Excerpt from *Director's Portraits Swiss Films*

Any attempt to describe Peter Mettler and his cinematic universe leads the writer inevitably to the “in-between.” Born in 1958 in Toronto, Mettler is both a Canadian and a Swiss citizen, and it is difficult to say where he is really “at home.” He speaks Swiss German just as fluently as English, attended schools in Europe and North America, studied film, photography and drama. He shoots his films – neither pure documentaries nor pure experimental films or fiction features – on all continents. He has created highly personal auteur pieces, and worked on multi-million-dollar productions for film and television. His filmed images have also been used for musical performances, while the soundtracks for his films often stem from live recordings. Sometimes it seems as if Peter Mettler is at home in precisely this difference, this non-identity. Again and again, he has taken his artistic practice on the road: asking questions, keeping his eyes open, listening, and surveying boundaries.

These motifs can already be found in his earliest works, the films he made in high school and at art college. *Reverie* (1976) pits the world of the dead against that of the living; *Poison Ivy* (1978) compares human and animal behaviour; *Gregory* (1981) treats the split between mind and body. The subject for his first full-length fiction film, *Scissere* (1982) was found one day when Mettler suddenly felt the urge to go out on the road and start hitchhiking. By chance he landed in an old monastery on the outskirts of Neuchâtel, realizing only gradually that the place had become a rehab centre for drug addicts. He stayed, took pictures, came back again, made friends. And began making a film that confronts the external world with a different one, which creates its own awareness of things.

If one speaks of “confrontation” in Mettler’s work, it is not in the sense of violence and harshness, but the opposite. *Scissere* is about a young man with identity problems: Mettler was fascinated by his “soft, open attitude,” and the film is “an attempt to emulate it by filmic means.” This attitude, and its filmic emulation, can be found throughout Mettler’s work. In *Gambling, Gods & LSD*, where water provides the determining metaphor for a path that provides resistance while adapting itself to circumstances. In *Tectonic Plates*, where identities grind against each other without eroding one another. In *Balifilm*, which observes and follows the infinitely gentle movements of the dancing women. In *Eastern Avenue*, where the chain around a woman’s neck stands out. In *Picture of Light*, where a velvety off-screen voice asks questions, discusses the different words for snow in the Inuit language, or asks the audience: “Are you cold yet?”

Mettler’s soft, open approach has nothing to do with irresponsibility or indifference, but rather with a certain radicalness, a deep search for truth, an interest in philosophical inquiry that is not only subjective, but also constantly attempts to communicate. A third characteristic of Mettler’s films is thus their reflection on the medium itself – film, video, cinema – in terms of both production and audience reception. How do I make images of the world? How will others perceive those images?

The most consistent inquiry into the representation of reality through images is in *Picture of Light*, Mettler's attempt to capture the Northern Lights on film. In order to do so, the filmmaker embarks on a voyage to the polar desert of the Canadian arctic, the end of the world, as it were. Extensive technical preparations are required to be able to run a film camera in the extreme cold, and even with the special camera, nature can thwart the crew's plans at any time. Images filmed in a snow storm don't look like anything but a white screen. "It is often necessary to go to extremes in order to discover something that jolts us out of our usual thought patterns and rhythms, or provides a new perspective on those thought patterns," comments Mettler.

His projects are mostly conceived as open-ended; he seldom knows in advance what the outcome of the filmic process will be. "If even the continents drift apart and clash against one another," asked the Swiss film critic Martin Schaub about *Tectonic Plates*, "how can we understand the human yearning for security and stability, and the compulsion to render everything harmless through naming and definitions? Not only in *Tectonic Plates*, but in all his films, Peter Mettler proposes an authentic, more than just superficial mobility – by producing it in his own art."

This process is both extremely humble and at the same time all-encompassing. For example: choosing to make a film about transcendence, working out a concept, planning, travelling, experiencing, and then completing the project, against all odds, over many years. Any other filmmaker attempting such a project would be called a megalomaniac, but not Peter Mettler. This is due, for one thing, to his simple (but definitely not banal) way of communicating such goals. "I think it's about the process of trying to understand the world I live in," he says. For *Gambling, Gods & LSD* he travelled across 3 continents and spent more than 3 years shooting and editing over 120 hours of footage. Asia, Europe and North America encounter and inspire one another. Global and local problems. The most diverse religions and models of salvation. Micro- and macrocosmos. And, always, human beings.

Mettler never puts himself above the people he is filming: he encounters them at eye level. At the same time, he succeeds in achieving a critical distance. His analysis is never cutting or pedantic; his off-screen commentary is always spoken in a gentle, mellow voice. It's a voice that makes possible the transfer from everyday rationality to uncanny dream existence. Mettler's filmmaking may stem from difference, from non-identity, but the films themselves contain a sense of reconciliation: something infinitely kind and generous, a state of grace.

Canadian director Jeremy Podeswa, for whom Mettler has done camera work, has written about the "humanity and sympathy, love of life and of the beauty of nature that goes beyond formalism" in Mettler's films. Actress Christie MacFadyen, who starred in *The Top of his Head*, says: "It is rare to find someone who sees with as much sympathy and tact as Peter, and I have never felt as comfortable in front of anyone else's camera as I did with his." Swiss visual artist Pipilotti Rist, who, like Mettler, is a founding member of the Alpenhof artist centre in Appenzell, writes: "Funnily enough, Peter Mettler's films resemble the man himself: big, beautiful, and

gentle. They move slowly, but confidently and precisely. Like an animal in a trance, that is deep in thought. His films are his eyes, in the same shade of light blue.” Canadian filmmaker Patricia Rozema has said: “I think Peter is a visionary, a poet and philosopher, whose gaze extends beyond the immediate, physical, photographic world, which the cinema claims to represent. I always have the impression that his gaze is focused on another world, where he glimpses miracles and brings them back to us in a new form. And then, miraculously, what he has captured brings us closer to something concrete, a strangely familiar place: ourselves, our home.”

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, 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/sound mixing performance, photography and installations. Meditations on being, Mettlers films transform the inner worlds of their characters and audience alike, into sensorial cinematic experience.

Selected Peter Mettler Filmography

Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands (2009) 43 min. for Greenpeace Canada. An exploration from above of the industrialization of the world's 2nd largest oil reserve.

Prix du Jury du Jeune Publique at Visions du Réel 2009

Fondazione Ente dello Spettacolo Prize at Festival dei Popoli 2009

Memorizer (2009) A video installation presenting a series (approx 200 min) of interviews in memory of the collector, artist and scientist Andreas Züst for Aargauer Kunsthaus Switzerland.

Away (2007) 3min. cellphone film for the National Film Board of Canada on the trials of being electronically over-connected.

Shostakovitch/Notes in Silence (2007) 25 min. with Andrea Nann, dance theatre piece, an evocation of the times and spirit of composer Dimitri Shostakovitch.

Manufactured Landscapes (2006) (as creative consultant and cinematographer)

Feature documentary, follows photographer Ed Burtynsky witnessing China's massive industrial revolution and its impact on the planet.

Cinema Eye Honors & IndiePIX: 2007 Nomination for Best Cinematography

Academy of Canadian Cinema: Genie Award: Best Documentary

Toronto International Film Festival: Best Canadian Film

Sundance Film Festival: Grand Jury Prize nomination

Visions du Réel, Nyon: Prix du Jeune Publique

Gambling, Gods and LSD (2002) documentary, A 3 hour journey across cultures, people and time, an exploration of the notions of transcendence and belief.

Visions du Réel, Nyon: Grand Prix & Prix du Publique

Vancouver Int'l Festival: NFB Best Feature Documentary

Montreal Cinema Nouveau: NFB Best Documentary

Duisburger Filmwoche: 3SAT Prize for Best Documentary

Toronto International Film Festival: Top Twenty Canadian Films

& FIPRESCI Documentary runner-up

Academy of Canadian Cinema: Genie Award - Best Documentary

Swiss Ministry of Culture: Award for Excellence in the Arts

Lincoln Center/Film Comment: One of the Year's Best Films

Balifilm (1996) 30 min. diary/performance, is a lyrical tribute to the creative forces found on the island of Bali.

Sonic Boom: Live performance with Evergreen Club Gamelan

Duisburger Filmwoche: Best Short Film

Visions du Réel: Opening Night Presentation

Picture of Light (1994) feature documentary, takes a film crew to the Sub Arctic to capture the wonder of the Northern Lights on celluloid.

Hot Docs Toronto: Best Film, Best Cinematography, & Best Writing

Locarno International Film Festival, Switzerland: La Sarraz Prize

Swiss Ministry of Culture: Award for Excellence in the Arts

Figueira da Foz International Festival: Grand Prize (Images & Documents)

MCTV Award: Best Ontario Film

Yamagata International Documentary Festival: Award for Excellence

Tectonic Plates (1992) feature drama, an adaptation of the play by Robert Lepage & Co. The movement of the earth's tectonic plates is used to illustrate interconnecting stories on a human scale. *Figueira da Foz: Most Innovative Film of the Festival*

Mannheim Film Festival: Catholic Jury Award

Colombus, Ohio: Grand Prize & Award for Excellence

The Top of his Head (1989) feature drama following the search for identity in a media driven world. *Scissere* (1982) and *Eastern Avenue* (1985) are experimental investigations into the movements of the subconscious. The first, a structured feature, the second an intuitive diary.

Retrospectives

Cinematheque Quebecoise, 2012

Festival Dei Popoli, 2010

Toronto International Film Festival September, 2006

Retrospective at the FilmStudio in Rome May, 2004

Retrospective Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2003

Director in Focus, Buenos Aires, 2003

Retrospective ARSENAL, Berlin, 1999

Retrospective tour in Holland, by MECANO, 1998

Retrospective and Photo exhibition at CINEMATEQUE ONTARIO 1996 - Toronto

Retrospective at VIPER Festival 1995 - Lucerne, Switzerland

Exhibitions

Cinematheque Quebecoise, 2012

Museo Marino Marini, Florence, "Notations" (for the End of Time), 2010

O'Born Contemporary Gallery, Toronto, "Mise en Scene", 2008

Group Photographic Exhibition showcasing "Teledivinity" prints

Greener Pastures Contemporary Art, Toronto "Teledivinity" Lightboxes, 2006

Lennox Gallery, Toronto, Retrospective Photographic Works, 2006

Galerie Sala 1, Rome, Photo Exhibition/installation "Orientation", 2005

S.A.W. Gallery Ottawa solo show of video image compositions "Teledivinity", 2004

Installation Solothurn Galerie S2, 2002

Installation Schlesinger Stiftung, Appenzell Switzerland

Exhibition of B&W photographic prints, "I Died Shortly Thereafter". Solo show

Foto Forum - St.Gallen, and Galerie Neugebauer - Basel, Switzerland, 1995

Producer Bios

Cornelia Seitler

Cornelia Seitler grew up in Arbon on Lake Constance. After graduating from high school she spent several years travelling and collecting experiences: as a factory worker, butcher's assistant, language student in Paris, waitress, nanny in London, primary school teacher, product manager, student of German literature and psychology, proofreader. She travelled extensively in the US, including an attempt to keep a rock band alive; has lived in a monastery; was a film production assistant; made short films; and worked at various jobs in film distribution, production and world sales. She has rounded out her experiences with further training in film production, script consulting and screenwriting. In 1997 she founded the film production company maximage, together with Brigitte Hofer. Since then, maximage has produced over 30 films, including international prizewinners such as ECHOES OF HOME and ACCORDION TRIBE by Stefan Schwietert, and GAMBLING, GODS & LSD by Peter Mettler. For more information and maximage's complete filmography, see www.maximage.ch

Ingrid Veninger

Born in Bratislava and raised in Canada, Ingrid Veninger formed pUNK Films Inc. in 2003 with a 'nothing is impossible' manifesto. An award-winning creative producer, Ingrid's credits include: GAMBLING, GODS AND LSD, (TIFF 2002, Genie Award for Best Documentary), THE LIMB SALESMAN (TIFF 2004), ONLY (TIFF 2008), NURSE.FIGHTER.BOY (TIFF 2008, nominated for 10 Genie Awards including Best Motion Picture), MODRA (TIFF 2010, Official Selection Canada's TOP TEN), and I AM A GOOD PERSON/I AM A BAD PERSON (TIFF 2011). THE END OF TIME marks Ingrid's fourth collaboration with Peter Mettler and her second co-production with maximage GmbH. For more information and pUNK Films' complete filmography, see www.punkfilms.ca

Gerry Flahive

In a career spanning 30 years with the internationally-acclaimed National Film Board of Canada, Gerry Flahive has produced more than 50 films and new-media projects on a wide range of subjects. His most recent projects include the international co-production PARIS 1919; WATERLIFE (includes an acclaimed web documentary waterlife.nfb.ca); I WAS A CHILD OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS; INVISIBLE CITY (Hot Docs 2009 Winner Best Canadian Feature); SURVIVING PROGRESS (TIFF 2011); and COLD MORNING (three short films selected for the 2009 Venice Biennale). Flahive has also produced short films about Bryan Adams, Rush, Howard Shore, The Tragically Hip and other winners of the Governor-General's Performing Arts Awards.

Festivals

IMAGINE SCIENCE FILM FESTIVAL, Jan 4 - 13, 2013, Peter Mettler in Attendance

IMAGINE SCIENCE FILM FESTIVAL, Nov 8, 2012, Peter Mettler in Attendance

14 FILMS AROUND THE WORLD BERLIN, Nov 23 - Dec 1, 2012, Peter Mettler in Attendance

INT. DOC FILM FESTIVAL AMSTERDAM, Nov 14 - 25, 2012, Reflecting Images Masters, Peter Mettler in Attendance

FESTIVAL DEI POPOLI FIRENZE, Nov 10 - 17, 2012, International Competition, Peter Mettler in Attendance

CPH:DOX COPENHAGEN, Nov 1 - 11, 2012, International Competition, Peter Mettler in Attendance

RENCONTRES INT. DU DOCUMENTAIRE DE MONTREAL, Nov. 7, 2012, Opening Night Film, Peter Mettler in Attendance

DOK LEIPZIG, Oct. 29 - Nov. 4, 2012, International Competition, Peter Mettler in Attendance

JIHLAVA INT. DOC FILM FESTIVAL, Oct 23 - 28, 2012, Best World Documentary

BUSAN INT. FILM FESTIVAL, Oct. 4 - 13, 2012, Wide Angle - Documentary Showcase

VANCOUVER INT. FILM FESTIVAL, Sept. 27 - Oct. 12, 2012

ATLANTIC FILM FESTIVAL, Sept 13 - 20, 2012, Peter Mettler in Attendance

TORONTO INT. FILM FESTIVAL, Sept 6 - 16, 2012, Official Selection Masters, Peter Mettler in Attendance

FESTIVAL DEL FILM LOCARNO, Aug 1 - 11, 2012, International Competition, Peter Mettler in Attendance

***The film received the PREMIO QUALITA DI VITA Prize by the Junior Jury during the Locarno Film Festival.**

Credits

Directed by Peter Mettler
Produced by Cornelia Seitler, Ingrid Veninger, Brigitte Hofer, Gerry Flahive

A maximage Grimthorpe film in co-production with National Film Board of Canada, SRF SRG, SSR, ARTE G.E.I.E.

Cinematography, Writing, Editing, Sound Design Peter Mettler
Editing Roland Schlimme
Story Editing Alexandra Rockingham Gill
Sound Design Peter Bräker
Original Music Gabriel Scotti and Vincent Hänni
Sound Mix Florian Eidenbenz, Magnetix
Picture Design Patrick Lindenmaier, Andromeda
Additional Camera Camille Budin, Nick De Pencier,
Location Sound Recording Steve Richman, Mich Gerber, Dominik Fricker

Appearances in the film include:

Switzerland: George Mikenberg, Henry Flora, Freya Blekman, Claire Timlin, Federico Antinori
Hawaii: Mitzi, Jack Thompson, Donald G Weir, The Traditional Singers and Dancers of Halau i Ka Pono: June Y Tanoue with Kiku Sakai, Leina'ala Dietmeyer, Erika Comrie, Caren Loebel-Fried, Mariko Gordon, Sharlene Wong, Mindy Mazal, Yvette Wynn, John-Mario Sevilla
Detroit: Richie Hawtin, Jacob Monte Longo Martinez, Nai Savoir Moran Martinez, Kinga Osz-Kemp, Andrew Kemp
Bodhgaya: Rajeev Agrawal, The Family of Manoj Kumar,
Toronto: Julia Mettler

Additional voices heard

Dr. Michelangelo Mangano, Jean-Charles Cuillandre, Eamon MacMahon, Allison Maree Austin, Peter Mettler, Eric Froh, Blake Carroll, Kazmira Flanagan, Chimi "Prostration Man", Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche,

Executive Producers Peter Mettler | Silva Basmajian
Associate Producer Tess Girard
Financial Support Bundesamt für Kultur, Zürcher Filmstiftung, SRF, SRG SSR, ARTE G.E.I.E., Kulturfonds SUISSIMAGE. SSA Drehbuchpreis, Succès Cinéma, Succès Passage Antenne,
Commissioning Editors Urs Augstburger (SRF) | Urs Fitze (SRG SSR) | Christian Cools (ARTE G.E.I.E.)

Locations

CERN Particle accelerator Geneva, Switzerland

Spiegelberg, Switzerland
St. Anton, Switzerland
Royal Gardens, Kilauea Volcano, Hawaii
Mauna Kea Observatories, Hawaii
The Farnsworth Community, Detroit USA
Detroit Electronic Music Festival 2010
Bhutanese Temple, Royal Bhutan Monastery, Bodhgaya India
Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya India
MacGregor Bay, Ontario Canada
Singhampton Caves, Ontario Canada
Mt. Arenal and the Pacific Ocean, Costa Rica

Quotations and Inspirations Christopher Dewdney, Peter Russell, Sir Martin Rees,
Albert Einstein, Fjodor Dostojewski

Editorial Consultants Peter Weber | Michelle Latimer | Jeremy Narby

Image Mixing Peter Mettler using Touch Designer software
Supported by Greg Hermanovic, Derivative Inc

Harmonia Music composed, performed by Christos Hatzis and Bruno Degazio
Motion picture images created by Bruno Degazio

For National Film Board of Canada:

Production Supervisor: Mark Wilson | Technical Coordinator: Marcus Matyas

Production Coordinator: Rachel Punwassie | Centre Administrator: Josiah Rothenberg

Insurance

cultureONE Inc. | Steve Beatty, President | Deborah Tiffin, Account Director

Legal

Eric Birnberg, Lewis Birnberg Hanet, LLP | Kai-Peter Uhlig, Werder Vigano

Footage Excerpts

“Mauna Kea timelapse segment”, excerpted from the scenic film “Hawaiian Starlight” CFHT 2011
www.cfht.hawaii.du/hs © 2001-2008 J.-C. Cuillandre

“cosmic particles” copyright 2008 by Herbert Giller - Rigdrol-Video

Thanks to the nuclear power plant’s visitors center in Leibstadt, Switzerland

Additional Footage Kilauea Eruption: Tropical Visions Video, Inc.

Excelsior I, II, III, Captain Joseph Kittinger’s Jump 1957, 1959, 1960

Moving Images from the Department of Defense, United States Air Force

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) / Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Records
Section

Particle Accelerator Stock Images / Created and provided by CERN

Video courtesy of the Image Science & Analysis Laboratory, NASA Johnson Space Center

NASA SOHO Solar Flares / Created and provided by NASA

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Psyk | Performed by Plastikman | From the album Artifakts (bc) | Music and Lyrics by Richard Hawtin © 1998 Produced by Plastikman, Licensed courtesy of Minus Inc and Plastikprodukt | Q&A Music Rights Administration Inc (SOCAN)

Overand | Performed by Autechre | Written by Rob Brown and Sean Booth Published by Warp Music Publishing | Courtesy of Warp Records Ltd.

Layering Buddha | Performed by Robert Henke | From the album “Layering Buddha Live” 2008 Music by Robert Henke © Imbalance Computer Music | Produced by Robert Henke | Licensed courtesy Imbalance Computer Music / www.roberthenke.com | By arrangement with Visions From The Roof

Nuuk | Performed and composed by Thomas Köner | From the soundtrack of the video NUUK, directed by Thomas Köner | Produced by Thomas Köner 2004 | Licensed courtesy Thomas Köner

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The New York Times

The Many Shapes of Time

By MIRIAM BALE

When the Canadian director Peter Mettler narrates “The End of Time,” his experimental documentary about human perception of time, there is a feeling of listening to a recording of a hypnosis technique. Loud, droning noises open the film and lead the audience to get lost in a deep, pulsing sound. Softly and slowly, Mr. Mettler utters suggestions like, “You don’t always need to know the name of what you see.” And “It doesn’t matter what time it is.”

He travels to Switzerland, Hawaii, Detroit and India to ask people, “What is time?” The answers often sound like statements made by teenagers pondering the essence of everything while on drugs. A woman who is part of a gardening and landowning group in Detroit perceives time as round rather than linear, which pleases her, since it’s “more like the things I aspire to be, like the bees.”

It’s easy to mock some of these platitudes, and it’s to Mr. Mettler’s credit that he never does. His questions are answered with more questions, because words seem ultimately useless in his query. What is more interesting is listening to the pacing of his subjects. Mr. Mettler leaves in pauses for thoughts and transitions rather than editing answers into sound bites. He also edits the words into an associative, aural abstraction: an overlapping narration that is out of sequence yet in sync. “Who knows,” one subject says. “Who knows?” another asks.

His images of galaxies, mandalas, particle accelerators and glowing red lava become his real subjects. He uses music and sound to control the pace, to slow time, as if cinema were a form of enforced meditation.



The End Of Time

by Noel Murray

In films like *Petropolis*, *Picture Of Light*, and the epic *Gambling, Gods And LSD*, Canadian director/cinematographer Peter Mettler has forged his own odd hybrid of documentary, essay, and avant-garde art. Mettler takes a free-associative approach to non-fiction filmmaking, combining interviews, images, and narration in ways intended to get the audience to meditate on a few general ideas and concepts. He has his own thoughts on politics and philosophy, and he shares them in his work, but he isn't assembling images and sounds to lead viewers carefully toward a conclusion. If anything, at times it seems like Mettler would be more than happy if his audience completely zoned out for a few minutes during one of his movies, then snapped back into alertness with wholly personal, unpredictable reactions to what's onscreen.

Mettler's new film, *The End Of Time*, is largely concerned with how people perceive the passage of time. Mettler traveled the globe, pointing his camera at an active volcano, an enormous particle accelerator, crumbling cityscapes, and more, all to contemplate the human relationship to an ever-shifting, abstract concept. Who determines what "a long time" means? Or "a blip"? How fast do people need to move to elude danger—even the danger of potential ecological disaster? How do artists stay on the forefront of their art? *The End Of Time* asks these questions while dealing with a larger issue: not how humankind responds to change, but how change is registered in the individual conscience. Mostly, Mettler is fascinated by the slow process of natural decay, and how much of it is caused by human neglect or interference.

Mettler is in no hurry to get to any particular point in *The End Of Time*. The film leaps from subject to subject—slowly, and somewhat haphazardly. Mettler spends a few minutes with a techno musician, then takes that musician's observations on urban blight in Detroit as a cue to examine how the spread of the automobile in the 20th century made the pace of life much faster. He fills the frame with long takes of slow-flowing lava, and then listens to the thoughts of a pessimistic loner who lives near the volcano. Viewers are left to make their own connections between *The End Of Time's* various pieces, and how they speak to the question of relativity.

Mettler's meandering approach can be too elusive at times, leaving viewers to wonder whether he's ever going to assert anything, or if he's just going to keep lulling folks with pretty pictures and New Age-y musings on how it can never really be "now," and how no two people see a rainbow exactly the same way. But *The End Of Time* does succeed in creating a calming space, where the audience can scrutinize aged wood, or people dancing, or a Buddhist ritual, or ants tugging at a dead grasshopper. The sound

design in this film is also effective, with Mettler letting the crackle of fire and the drip of precipitation create a hypnotic ambience. It all culminates in more than 10 minutes of electronic humming and trippy dissolves between abstract images. For some people, *The End Of Time* will zip right by, while for others, it'll seem interminable.

<http://www.timeout.com/us/film/the-end-of-time-movie-review>



The End of Time: movie review

Time Out rating: ★★★★★

Tue Nov 26

Few things are as simultaneously terrifying and liberating as the notion of time's relativity—that the measure of our hours and days is but a construct to manage what's actually endless chaos. Peter Mettler's ruminative, frequently astounding essay film doesn't just contemplate this notion; it aims to cinematically embody it. From the sun's surface to the deep earth, Hawaiian volcanoes to Detroit's decay, Mettler explores the different ways that we experience and define time, using his own documentary as a mind-bending demonstration of its mutability.

The fact that voiceovers from the filmmaker and various interview subjects come off as annoyances says less about what's being said—to be fair, it's often fascinating—than about how persuasively the film creates a psychic space beyond language. Watching lava slowly transform a landscape, or rave dancers respond to minute musical variations, you're left intuiting vague and mystical resonances—yet also confronting your own boredom. After the film hits its peak with a trippy composite of previously seen shapes and patterns—a Stan Brakhage-worthy abstraction that dares to suggest infinity—even tedium suddenly seems precious. It leaves you without the net of linear temporality, frightened and freed by the implications.

http://nonfics.com/snow-sex-chairs-hadron-collider-films-peter-mettler/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=snow-sex-chairs-hadron-collider-films-peter-mettler



Snow, Sex Chairs and the Hadron Collider: The Films of Peter Mettler

by Daniel Walber on November 7, 2013

Canadian filmmaker **Peter Mettler**'s newest film, *The End of Time*, begins with a fall from the heavens. The footage is from Project Excelsior, in which Captain Joseph Kittinger of the United States Air Force parachuted out of a balloon all the way up in the stratosphere, above New Mexico. It's breathtaking, daring, and perhaps unfathomable for those of us stuck here on solid ground. It is also a beautiful way to open up the most recent installment in the director's career-long examination of humanity and its small but significant role in a vast, overwhelming universe of space and time.

This grand exploration is particularly thrilling in his nonfiction films, of which *The End of Time* is only the most recent. The journey began in the early 1990s in the frozen wilderness of Northern Manitoba. *Picture of Light* (1994) is a scientific adventure flick of sorts, chronicling an expedition to capture the Northern Lights on film. The goal is both scientific and spiritual, not that Mettler necessarily sees a difference between those two categories. This is about transcendence, which can be a similar experience regardless of whether it is rationalized through faith or the mathematics of refraction.

A few years later, Mettler took the core idea of this mission and turned it loose upon the entire world. *Gambling, Gods and LSD* (2002) looks at an almost absurdly wide variety of human efforts to elevate or dislocate the mind and the spirit. He begins at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship Church, where believers speak in tongues and flail around on the floor in their religious passion. From there the journey is limitless. There are gamblers in Las Vegas, sex chair manufacturers, crowds gathered to watch the demolition of giant buildings, recovering drug addicts, Swiss scientists and Indian pilgrims, to name a few. The brilliance of the film is the way in which Mettler treats all of these elements equally, placing the honesty of Canadian Christians and Swiss heroin addicts on the same plane as the less verbal testimony of ancient petroglyphs in Monument Valley.

In the end, there are no answers. Given the film's three hour running time, that is either immensely frustrating or exactly right, depending on how you approach the question of transcendence yourself. In this respect, *Gambling, Gods and LSD* might be the filmmaker's most purely speculative film. It is the vagabond to *Picture of Light*'s determined explorer. Yet the earlier film also comes up with few answers. Mettler's trip to Manitoba yields mostly powerful images of humanity in nature, some of them even comic. In one particularly interesting moment a local drills a hole in the wall of Mettler's motel room during a storm, just to show him how fast the space will fill up with snow. The pristine immensity of Canada's chilled beauty is an inkling of another trend in the filmmaker's work.

That would be humanity, alone and tiny, surrounded by the vastness of the natural world. Yet, while the last moments of *Picture of Light* might suggest something to the contrary, Mettler does not generally seem to be of the opinion that our smallness is the same as insignificance. One only need look at *Petropolis* (2009). Co-produced by Greenpeace Canada, this is a mostly wordless journey up to Alberta's Tar Sands, where the oil industry is quickly going about the massive destruction of an almost incomprehensibly large tract of land. Filmmakers and journalists have covered this before, of course, but none quite like this. The 43-minute film is like a flight over another world, or a horrific image of a post-apocalyptic future. There are colors that, frankly, none of us should see in any context other than a hideous Tim Burton fantasy film. It's hard to imagine a better way to understand the Tar Sands project than this simple, direct form of ambitious, almost hubristic filmmaking.

And now, moving on from mankind's most grandiose earth-moving endeavor, Mettler has taken on time. Not that there is really a difference. *The End of Time* begins at the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland, making the crystal-clear point that space and time are hardly unrelated concepts. This foundation then kicks off what might very well be Mettler's most philosophically ambitious nonfiction film yet. From the Alps he then moves to Hawaii, turning our attention from time's physicality to its potential for tumult and fluctuation. The islands of the 50th state are volatile and new. Lava flows, killing plants but making new land, simultaneously creative and destructive. The relationship between space and time is not docile.

Then he turns to Detroit, and death. The last few years have seen a great many documentaries about Motor City, some of them quite excellent. Mettler is not interested in studying the place and its history, but rather he uses it as a particularly interesting metaphor. It is here that he finds both urban decay and renewal, streets of empty homes not too far from community gardens. "Everything we touch is based on previous death," someone says, "the previous death of beings." While some of his images are borrowed from many, many other recent films, his philosophical intent rings quite clear.

That's only the beginning. *The End of Time* brings together time, space, nature and humankind in a way that other recent documentaries have perhaps only begun to consider. It's a bit like *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* and *Encounters at the End of the World* combined, with some of Werner Herzog's earlier thematic ambitions tossed in. Yet while the German auteur's role in defining the philosophy of his own documentaries often borders on the rhetorically bombastic, Mettler is a much more unassuming figure. His predominant mode is that of questioning wonderment, ever more open-minded and impressionable no matter how much scientific information is added to the mix. This is the strength of his work, the notion that the human experience is full of discovery and transcendence no matter where or when we find ourselves. And with *The End of Time*, this idea is as exciting as it ever was.

The Film Society of Lincoln Center is holding a retrospective of Mettler's nonfiction films from November 8th to 12th. *The End of Time* will be released on November 29th, and is already available on DVD and on iTunes in Canada.



All Things Must Pass

Peter Mettler's "The End of Time"

By Adam Nayman • Published September 5th, 2012 • Issue 87, Fall 2012

"I don't gravitate towards dark things," says Peter Mettler. It's an appropriate statement coming from a director who once made a film called *Picture of Light*. In Mettler's cinema, as in Jonathan Safran Foer's book, everything is illuminated, whether it's the aurora borealis over northern Manitoba in *Picture of Light*, the racing lights of Pearson International Airport in his epic *Gambling, Gods and LSD* (2003) or, in *Petropolis* (2009), the elevated perspectives on the Alberta tar sands, which have their own scary clarity. It's a critical cliché to say that certain filmmakers have a vision, but in Mettler's case, the work is defined largely by vision. It's the curious, roving gaze of an artist who has learned to believe his own eyes.

It's unsurprising, then, that Mettler's new film *The End of Time*, which made its world premiere at the Locarno International Film Festival before touching down at TIFF, contains a handful of indelible shots. There's vintage 16-mm footage of U.S. Airman Joseph Kittinger falling towards earth from a height of 102,000 feet (an effort that transcends the prosaic designation of Guinness World Record); a fleet of ants swarming the corpse of a grasshopper before bearing it away in an eerie miniature simulacrum of a funeral ceremony; or a wall of lava slowly encroaching on a single plant, which stands out in sharp green relief against the ash until being violently absorbed.

"That was one of the moments when I felt a lot of clarity about my subject," says Mettler of this remarkable shot, which might be *The End of Time's* signature image. "It was when I had a one-to-one relationship to nature. When I was just sitting there watching something happen."

This motif of visible change underwrites the entire film. *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. Hence the overture featuring Kittinger's historical plunge. When asked about what it was like to fall from such a great height, the decorated daredevil said it felt like time was slowing down as he was speeding—a contradiction that briefly rendered him a living, breathing avatar for the theory of relativity. But how does an artist who doesn't have a hot air balloon to drop himself from get a firm handle on something so incredibly ineffable? How do you make a movie about time?

Mettler may be on a short list with Werner Herzog, Chris Marker and his hero, the late Dutch master Johann van der Keuken, as filmmakers who could get away with saying that they've seen it all, or at

least, way more than most. Still, there's a tentative quality to the early moments of *The End of Time*, which suggests that this habitually adventurous director is agonizing over finding the right angle of approach. This sensation squares with Mettler's own admission that the film found its form on the fly. "Some projects have definite events that spark their beginnings," he says. "I think that *The End of Time* was more like a series of musings and meditations that slowly crystallized together."

Mettler may not have started with a "Eureka!" moment but the film's first extended passage is about the attempt to re-create a kind of Big Bang. Returning to his native Switzerland, Mettler takes his camera deep underground into the world's largest particle physics laboratory, home to the Large Hadron Collider, an integral part of CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research). It's an environment out of a James Bond movie, all blinking tunnels and scurrying people in lab coats, and yet Mettler says he was surprised at how easily he was able to gain access.

"We contacted them to talk about the film and see what was possible. I gave them some DVDs of *Gambling, Gods and LSD* as well. They said that we should come as soon as possible. Once [the machines start] it's a death zone, nobody goes down there for years. But they encouraged me to come take a look." Mettler's camera captures the space with equal measures of awe and irreverence. The technology is amazing, but it's also so flat and colour-coded that it looks like the world's largest and most expensive Lego playset.

The CERN sequence is crucial in establishing certain motifs in *The End of Time*, including the alternation between Mettler's own typically poetic voice-over and the almost choral arrangement of his interview subjects, who are never identified by name. Nor does Mettler mark the jumps between different geographical locations with datelines. This is possibly an attempt to give the material a sense of timelessness, to square with a piece of Mettler's narration that insists that "you don't always have to know the name of what you see...It doesn't matter what time it is."

Whatever the rationale, it's a daring choice that gives *The End of Time* a deceptively drifting quality that belies its savvy organization. For instance, the CERN material is almost overwhelmingly heady, with lots of jargon and big-picture theorizing. It's also the last time that Mettler privileges an explicitly scientific perspective. He leaves the subterranean geniuses just as they're celebrating a major breakthrough, complete with popped champagne bottles. More power to 'em, surely, but Mettler is more drawn to people with a layman's interest in his theme, folks who are less interested in unravelling the fabric of the universe than in getting comfortably wrapped up inside.

These include Jack Thompson, hardy loner who makes his home in Hawaii amid those aforementioned photogenic lava flows. (It's a coincidence that Thompson also figures in another of the year's other mesmerizing documentaries, Victor Kossakovsky's Hot Docs hit *Vivan las Antipodas*, a movie that Mettler hasn't seen but would probably love.) Like any new homeowner, Thompson's main motivators were location, location, location. He dropped out of the working world to get a better view of geological processes as old as the Earth itself. "I was putting in the last window when it all started," he says of the gradual but spectacularly violent upheavals around him, which turn the ground into molten tableaux out of an H.R. Giger catalogue. "And I've had a front-row seat ever since. I'm still here because I haven't gotten in the way."

This combination of being enraptured and cautious informed Mettler's modus operandi during his time in the Aloha State. Lugging a camera around a volcano is a Herzogian feat of will, but it's also a little bit dangerous. "Actually it's relatively safe," insists Mettler. "I'd never been on a volcano before. Somebody

took me out in the middle of the night, total darkness, and there's this orange glow but you don't know how far away it is. It turned out that it was miles out. You're walking with a headlamp over this crusty surface, which as you see in the film looks like bones and bodies or monsters—very unnerving. There are heat zones underneath, hot lava moving along. The sun came up and that's when we shot."

Mettler contrasts Thompson's dogged determination to live in a simmering, prehistoric landscape with a community-building project in an even more spectacularly dilapidated landscape: Detroit. Paul Verhoeven's delirious urban satire *Robocop* (1987) prophesied that Motor City would be a burned-out husk by 2019, but Mettler's film shows that it's actually proceeding ahead of schedule. Stark images of ruined buildings describe a metropolis gone to seed.

"It was the idea of epoch" that attracted Mettler to Detroit. "I was attracted to it for that visual change, for the collapse and decay and the fact that nature is still very present and how it takes over." Talk that a filmmaker should try to adapt Alan Weisman's 2007 best-seller *The World Without Us*, an alternately dispassionate and lyrically terrifying thought experiment imagining Earth sans humans, can cease. Unofficially, Mettler has accomplished it here in a haunting vision of Western civilization overrun and overgrown.

"I see Detroit as emblematic of American society," says one ardent young voice on the soundtrack. "Like if the whole plan had worked out, it would still be prosperous here." The voice belongs to one of a group of young people who've decamped to this soggy suburban section of the city to try to kick-start it. We see him and a few others moving through the empty houses, trying to touch them up. Instead of Occupying Wall Street, they're trying to inhabit a ghost town wasting away in its shadow.

Whether Mettler views the kids' quest as quixotic or sees them as bohemian opportunists taking advantage of non-existent property values doesn't matter. It's probably not the latter but the director has always been reluctant to invite political readings of his work. "I'm not a big fan of didacticism," he says. "The truth always lies in a complex set of circumstances. That's what I try to show. When I was working with Greenpeace on *Petropolis*, that was the first thing we discussed, that I didn't want to make a piece of agitprop."

Mettler does show his counterculture bona fides in another Detroit-set strand about Richie Hawtin, a.k.a. Plastikman, the innovative electronic musician and DJ who helped kickstart the city's burgeoning techno scene in the early 1990s. "Techno had its birth [in Detroit], and techno suggests another era altogether," says Mettler. "It's like a digital age and a digital logic, and I thought that this plus the sense of collapse and decay were fascinating together." And indeed, the juxtaposition of silent, dilapidated spaces and surging crowds dancing their hearts out to Hawtin's sound-and-light assault creates a powerful sensation.

In moments like these it's worth asking whether *The End of Time* is, strictly speaking, a documentary. It's a work of non-fiction but it also has extended passages of pure visual and aural expression that are perhaps closer to experimental cinema (specifically the trance film). "Cinema is sound and image," says Mettler. "Those things are present whether it's documentary or drama. I try not to separate those genres. The reason I get filed under documentary is for practical reasons, for funding reasons, for certain festivals to show the work. But I think the last few films I've done are all hybrids in a way."

Whatever *The End of Time* is, it took a lot of work to get it that way. Mettler estimates that he's been labouring on it for five years, including two years of editing (Mettler cut the film himself along with Roland Schlimme). "I was relieved to get through it," he sighs. "I think it's the most difficult film that I've made, because of the topic." He also thinks that in some ways, *The End of Time* is his "most personal movie," although he knows that choice of words carries some questionable connotations (i.e., does that mean that his other movies are somehow impersonal?).

"I think one of the arcs of this particular experience was that it became about mortality—an awareness of my own mortality," says Mettler. "It's personal in a very specific sort of way. When I made *Gambling, Gods and LSD* I was going out in search of transcendence, going beyond and escaping things. Now the question is more, 'Well, where am I going?'"

It's a poetic touch that for this particular journey, all roads lead home. *The End of Time* concludes with an offhandedly lovely sequence filmed in Toronto at Mettler's parents' house. "It was Mother's Day," he recalls, "and I went over with the camera to show them how I work, this tool that I use. It was a chance circumstance. We started talking about time and I went into interviewer mode with my own mother. It was very touching. It was a complete surprise. In editing, piecing together different ideas, I tried the piece with her and it works. Initially, it was the beginning of the film."

Without spoiling the scene's content, it's enough to say that Mettler's mother inadvertently provides her son with a perfect grace note that completes the film's move from an abstract realm to an emotional one. They're words of wisdom that it takes a lifetime to arrive at, yet feel (like so much else in this movie) serenely timeless. *The End of Time* is not a light film by any means. It's hugely scaled and stately in its pacing, and at times seems to be trying to break the viewer's brain either through complex concepts or sheer sensory overload.

And yet for all its intimations of impermanence—which is no more than a poetic word for death—it's not exactly dark, either. 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. "I always try to make it clear that what I'm doing is subjective," says Mettler. "And what I'm offering you, then, is poetry." With that in mind, it might be best to cite Walt Whitman, no stranger himself to poetic treatises on the passing of time, and say that Mettler's movie contains multitudes.