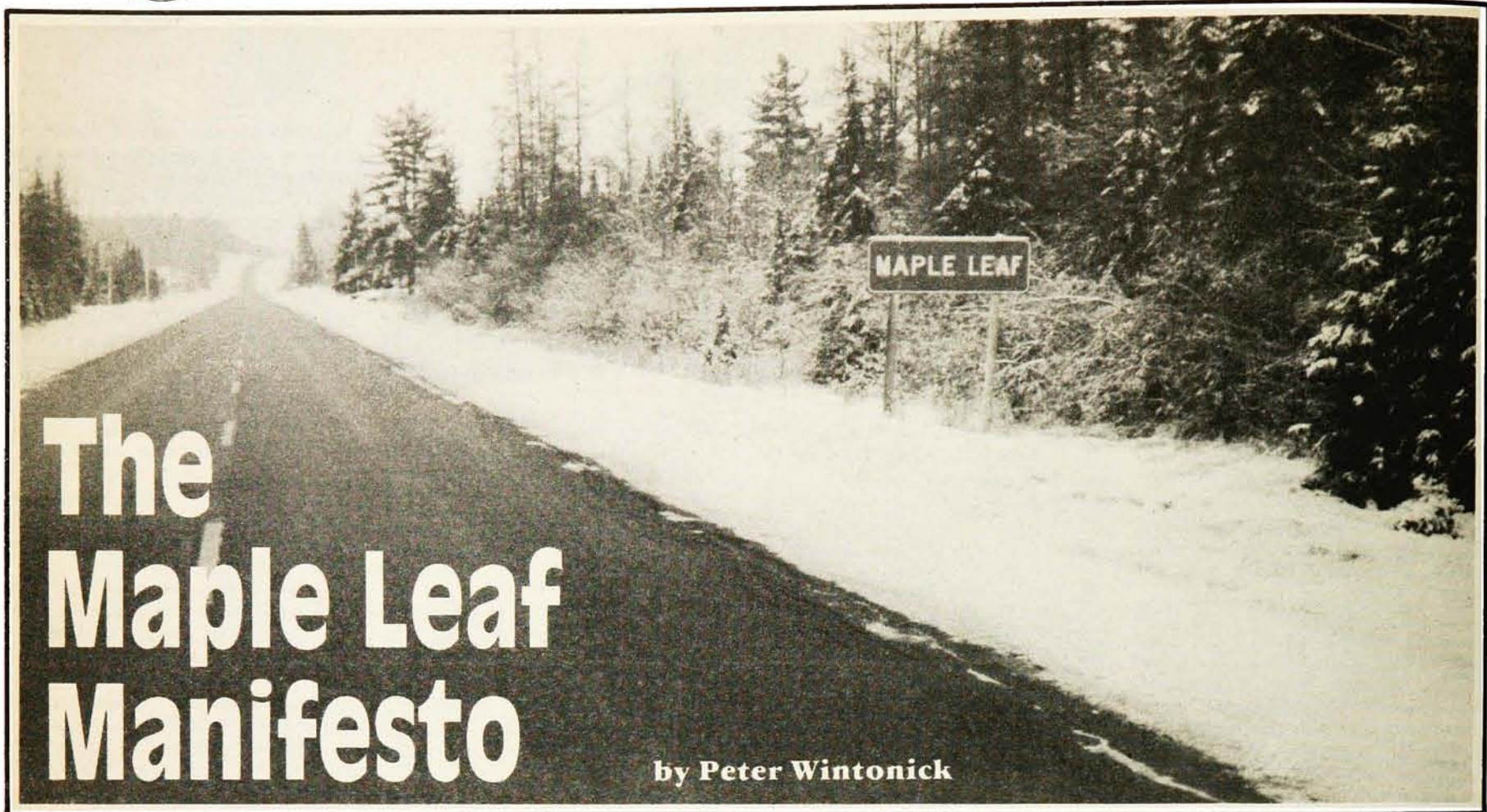




photo: Peter Wintonick



The Maple Leaf Manifesto

by Peter Wintonick

We are here to talk to each other. We are here to create something together. A Manifesto of sorts. Something reflecting our national dream. Our cultural Borealis. Something which has nothing to do with generic Genie award films with their interchangeable scenarios, nothing to do with the top 10 films of the year, with *National Enquirer* Dionne quintuplet dolls made in the U.S.A., or softwood trees turning into money trees in a free trade climate, or with Can-Am relations, whatever that is.

This manifesto is more about ice on our acid rain maple trees and who and why we are who we are. We are independent film and videomakers and I am a cultural investigator. It has fallen upon me to inscribe the synthesized thoughts of a number of people who are working in low-budget independent cinema here in Canada. This is an intuitive blueprint for a future for film, but it is by no means cast in stone, iron or celluloid. It is malleable, to be added to and subtracted from, to be completely rewritten if need be, custom crafted to suit the individuals that we are.

Let me tell you about how I came upon it. It is a story. I started with the dictionary definition. Not just any old dictionary definition, but the complete Oxford old English dictionary definition. Trust a Canadian to use a foreign source to define oneself. But I couldn't help it — the term Manifesto doesn't exist in the Canadian lexicon, or at least not in the Canadian Encyclopedia. Manifesto means: a proof; a piece of evidence; a public declaration or proclamation, usually issued by or with the sanction of a Sovereign Prince of State, or by an individual or body of individuals whose proceedings are of public importance, for the purpose of making known past ac-

tions, and explaining the reasons or motives for actions announced as forthcoming.

The word first appeared in 1644 on a title page by Bulwer, although it is, of course, originally an Italian word. Right next to the word, in an American encyclopedia, was an interesting and relevant entry: Manifest Destiny. This term first appeared in an editorial written in 1845 in support of the U.S. annexation of Texas. As imagined by John L. O'Sullivan, it referred to "our (their, as in U.S.) manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." Later in 1865 an editorial in the *New York Herald* declared: "It is our manifest destiny to lead all nations." It certainly seems that way. As pure a definition and *raison d'être* of Hollywood, the collapse of the Mexican economy and the 75-cent Canadiamerican film as I've ever seen.

Now I was on to something. At least something to oppose which is what the cinema of resistance is all about. It is our cinema. Still I was not happy. If I was going to write a manifesto, it would have to be in the right form, with the right sense of history. I kept searching.

I looked at other famous manifestos, how they were formed, how they were worded, as in "So strong is the belief in life, in what is most fragile in life — real life, I mean — that in the end this belief is lost..." (Opening of André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 1924). This seemed to be poetically correct and humanistically correct but too existentially sad. Not Canadian enough.

I looked elsewhere. To our own constitution. "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law..." (*The Canadian Constitution Act*,

1982.) That was it. I should look to religious writings for inspiration and the proper dose of legitimacy. If we had God on the side of independent film we could never go wrong. "In the beginning, Euroynome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, but found nothing substantial for her to rest her feet upon, and therefore divided the sea from the sky, dancing lonely upon its waves..." (The first myth in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Vol. 1, 1955). Well I could not find anything substantial in there except the idea of dancing by yourself upon the waves. It reminded me of Newfoundland.

I turned to mysticism for first impressions, to find the proper first words — Preparatory Phase: Cultivating Awe..." (Chapter one, *The Kabbalah, the Way of the Jewish Mystic*). Awful, I thought, that seems to define what Canadian cinema is, not what it could be. I kept reading: "We live in an age of science and of abundance... The weeder is supremely needed if the Garden of the Muses is to persist as a garden..." (From Ezra Pound's, *The ABC's of Reading*, 1934) That was closer, the idea that we had to pull out the bad weeds — but Zen, what did Zen have to say about the matter? As in Question: "In clapping of both hands a sound is heard, what is the sound of the one hand?" Answer: "Without a word the pupil thrusts one hand forward..." (from *281 Zen Koans with Answers*, Yoel Hoffman, 1977). Nothing like a little Zen now and Zen and it was nice that they give you the answers but what was the question? It was conceptual. High Concept as they say in Hollywood and I liked the sound of it but... would it play in Whitehorse?

When in doubt turn to heroes. I turned to my hero. "The friars who are engaged in the ser-

vice of lay people for whom they work should not be in charge of money. They are forbidden to accept positions of authority or take on any job which would give scandal or make them lose their own souls..." (Chapter 7, St. Francis of Assisi, *Rule of 1221*). Well at least that spoke about the plight of the independent filmmaker who makes no money, is never in power, is always chastised for never having to lose his or her soul etc.

Whereupon I came upon The First Law, from *The Seven Laws of Money* by M. Phillips printed in 1974: "Do it! Money will come when you are Doing the Right Thing is hardest for people to accept and is the source of most distress." While this provided a small mercy and justification, it did not address the main issue facing us all: the ethical dilemma of working in or out of the system and the choices to be made which took me to: THE OBJECT OF LIFE — every art and every investigation, and similarly every action and pursuit is considered to aim at some good... (Aristotle's *Ethics*, fourth century B.C.). Well, say, hey, here was a bit of social consciousness, just slightly ahead of its time. Now we're talking.

That idea coupled with the revolutionary "Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight..." (the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, 12th century, Persia) inflamed me to no end. With my blood boiling I looked for contemporary examples of great and earth-shattering, earth-moving prose and purpose with which to manufacture our manifesto.

I looked at a newspaper: "Producer Samuel Arkoff (*Beach Blanket Bingo*) has arranged through a Toronto financial service company to try to raise 100 million dollars in Canada to bankroll movies and TV..." He gives no indication that any



of the productions will originate in Canada... (*Toronto Star*, June 6, 1987). How depressing. But all the more reason to forge on. "Canada has lurched to the left so often and stayed there so long that most people have long since written it off as a place to do business..." (*Forbes* magazine special issue on Canada being open for business again, May 19, 1986). More depression, but even more anger.

Or what about the fact that "63 per cent of an American citizen's income taxes in Fiscal Year 1987 went to pay for current and past military expenses..." (*War Resister's League* information

sheet, 1987.) I felt there was no hope, but, being a good Canadian I continued to look for some. "There would be no problems of aesthetics... if no one ever talked about works of art. So as long as we enjoy a movie, a story, or a song, in silence - except for occasional grunts or groans, murmurs of annoyance or satisfaction - there is no call for philosophy..." (Beardsley's *Aesthetics*, 1958) That explained the Canadian public's silence on the issue but we filmmakers know in our hearts that we have a Voice.

In desperation I turned to revolutionary thought: "In every revolution there

is the paradoxical presence of circulation... the revolutionary contingent attains its ideal form not in the place of production, but in the street..." (Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 1977) Now we were picking up speed and cruising with gas, even though most of our petroleum industry is foreign-owned. Such xenophobia.

I relived the sixties: "The political function of small-group organizing is to enable individuals to grow, and hopefully to broaden to the point where they are able to work with other individuals or larger groups, building mutual trust

while struggling to actualize changes within society..." (*The Organizer's Manual*, General Principles, 1971) Finally a piece of good advice. With that in mind I joined the Council of Canadians, a small and growing group with a strange big idea - that we protect Canadian culture.

In the spring of 1987 I went to a forum on Free Trade. They created a manifesto that started like this: "Whereas Canada was inhabited during thousands of years by aboriginal autonomous nations and has evolved into a truly sovereign state having its own cultures, values and way of life... and whereas political decisions must not only be legal but legitimate..." (from the *Manifesto of the Canadian Summit Declaration*, April 4, 1987 which was endorsed and created by scores of organizations representing a majority of Canadians. This manifesto was taped to the doors of the House of Parliament on the eve of U.S. President Ronald Reagan's visit to Ottawa. The Mounties blushed.

I turned to an old Canadian guru: "In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message..." (Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, 1964). That was it - the reassurance that I needed. I could make confusing statements that just might make sense. But at least they were statements. People could nod knowingly in agreement. And finally, before I put my fingers to the keyboard and got down to the actual composition of the Manifesto and just to make sure that it was O.K. to tilt at windmills I reread: "What Giants?" said Sancho Panza. "Those are not giants, but windmills." "It is very evident," answered Don Quixote, "that thou art not versed in the business of adventures: they are Giants..." Manuel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 1605) Along with many other Canadian independent filmmakers I was ready to take on the giants and cast them to the wind.

I took a drive through Northern Ontario. Just south of Algonquin Park, I came across what is a moment of revelatory exploration for a cultural instigator alligator like myself. I came across what has to be the smallest town in Canada. Literally, two signposts and a gas station which had the gumption to sell tourist knickknacks to those of us who had fallen, like a black fly into a Venus Flytrap, into the net. The name of the town was emblazoned on all manner of T-shirts, mugs, fishing lures, postcards, bottle openers and whoopee cushions. The name of the town is MAPLE LEAF.

It was surrounded by pine trees. I took this as a signpost. I took this as my sign. I loved the self-assertion. It seemed to me that we, in the Canadian independent film world could learn a thing or two in Maple Leaf about overcoming odds with creative illusion. About asserting our basic and fundamental rights as artists and people. It was in Maple leaf that I wrote this manifesto.



MANIFESTO

Preamble/ramble

Walk around the world with me. We are not alone. In many parts of the globe there are many similarly strangely alienated but powerful film and videomakers who are starting to recognize that the walls and barriers of corporate cinema that have kept creators from their screens and their public are chimera chameleon webs. We have found the holes in the wall. We disguise them with graffiti. Polemics. Art. Humour. We find others around the world who have suffered enough, who no longer want to be strangers in their own land. Who now want to recognize themselves in the projected images of themselves. They are starting to organize. We are starting to co-opt and corrupt the ideals of that corporate cinema. The verdict is in. The doctor is out. Hollywood is dead. There are no subtleties living there. Their films don't speak to our better natures or common senses or show us how to see in a world without windows. Ollywood (as in Ollie North) may be alive and living somewhere in a television studio or a film set in Honduras, but the reach and gasping grasp of the traditionally American Dominant cinema lives only in the spectacular Romanesque circuses, in what Jack Valenti calls "epic viewing experiences" of the monolithic mammoth megaton smash-hit. The Dominant cinema's particle beam projectors display a particularly worthless image. Their collisionary non-visionary "products" and atom smashers have atomized the global village.

But we wish for something else.

WHEREAS in the wake of the destruction of local, native, original and indigenous cultures brought about

by the Superpowerfully systemic production and marketing processes commonly called "the film industry" there is room for the rebirth of what we have come to know as the independent film, the cinema of meaning and resistance,

AND WHEREAS we desire and demand a new reality, or at a least a reality mediated by our own storytellers, writers, producers, persona, technicians and directors with a scale and human interest that we can respond to,

AND WHEREAS others too, around the world are demanding the reconstruction of Babylon. D.W. Griffith is no longer with us. S.M. Eisenstein is no longer with us. Only their shadows remain locked in his-stories, and crumbling granite visions of grandeur.

THEN, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the uninitialized, the uninitiated and the not-yet famous or infamous women and men creators of independent film and video, will work to replace mass hysteria megamedia with our own smaller visions of ourselves and our world that will have, ironically, a much larger scope.

WE DEMAND THE RETURN OF our voices, our screens and the means to create visions and a visual literature that is ours to share equally with others in our own country and around the world.

WE DEMAND FULL AND EQUAL representation on all the boards and committees and juries that make up our cultural institutions. We demand recognition and the means to be recognized.

WE DEMAND that they take the Tele back out of Telefilm. No more moronic media should be produced

for television. There's enough out there already. Let us show you what video is and why it's not television.

WE DEMAND that at least 50, yes 50 per cent of our country's cinemas be made to program Canadian film all the time. We want access. Our own network.

WE DEMAND the return of the billions of dollars of box office receipts that American media companies take out of Canada every year.

WE DEMAND that a voluntary head tax be put on cinema goers and videocassette renters which would go to finance our production.

WE DEMAND that the communications industry get smart. That may be too much to ask but they must come to realize that a healthy indigenous independent film industry is good for their bottom line. People want to see our films. International box office and festival awards have always come to those Canadian films which reflect Canada and have been, for the most part independent and original productions. At the very least supporting our films will enable a swimming pool full of talented and experienced mediartists to be able to continue our country's rich tradition of ground-breaking cinema and thus preserve and build upon what is left of the future of our film culture.

WE DEMAND two hot dogs, a patate and a spruce beer. Because making all these demands can make one pretty hungry.

LONG LIVE THE INDEPENDENT CINEMA

