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 Borealism. Something which has nothing to do with generic Genie award films with their interchangeability 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 filmmakers 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. Just not 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 actions, 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 overshadow 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 Canadian film as I’ve ever seen.

Now I was on to something. As 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. I we had God on the side of independent film we could never go wrong. “In the beginning, Eireoneym, 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, Yovel 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 service 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 film maker who makes no money, is never in power, is always frustrated by 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
We open for business again, May 19, 1986). More depression, but even more anger. (Forbes magazine special issue on Canada being open for business again, May 19, 1986). More depression, but even more anger.

We are starting to co-opt and corrupt our own senses or show us how to see in our own way. (as in Speed and Politics, 1977) Now we are 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 of our 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, and I saw the Prime Minister who had the gumption to sell tourist openers and whoopee cushions. 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 my dear friends. 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 from the movie business. I was surrounded by my dear friends. It was a time of incredible 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.