



Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Culture

A Critical Anthology

EDITED BY **Scott MacKenzie**

FILM MANIFESTOS AND GLOBAL CINEMA CULTURES

A Critical Anthology

Scott MacKenzie



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My partner, Darlene, put up with what must have seemed like (because it almost was) a never-ending project, providing many pleasurable diversions and some truly magnificent rants (she was born to write manifestos). She also helped with the Herculean task of data entry and, with a great deal of mock rage and good humor, argued with the ideas put forth in the manifestos that she undertook the unenviable task of transcribing, given her background in scientific thought. For this, her support, dark sense of humor, and so much more, she deserves my profound thanks and heartfelt gratitude.

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Any mistakes remaining herein are my own.

INTRODUCTION

“An Invention without a Future”

The cinema is an invention without a future.

—LOUIS LUMIÈRE, AUTHOR OF THE
FIRST FILM MANIFESTO

To forge oneself iron laws, if only in order to obey
or disobey them *with difficulty* . . .

—ROBERT BRESSON, *NOTES ON THE CINEMATOGRAPHER*

THE FOURTH COLUMN

Manifestos are typically understood as ruptures, breaks, and challenges to the steady flow of politics, aesthetics, or history. This is equally true of film and other moving image manifestos. Paradoxically, film manifestos pervade the history of cinema yet exist at the margins of almost all accounts of film history itself. An examination of this elision raises not simply the question of whether manifestos have changed the cinema (even if their existence has often been marginalized in film history) but whether the act of calling into being a new form of cinema changed not only moving images but the world itself. For this proposition to make any sense at all, one cannot take moving images to be separate from the world or to be simply a mirror or reflection of the real. Instead, one must see moving images as a constitutive part of the real: as images change, so does the rest of the world. By way of introduction to *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures*, I examine what exactly a manifesto is, consider the role played by manifestos in film culture, offer an overview of some of the film manifestos and manifesto movements covered in the book, and map out a critical model of what constitutes a film manifesto and a manifesto-style of writing. My aim is to outline a theoretically informed counterhistory that places film manifestos, often neglected, at the center of film history, politics, and culture.

Film manifestos are a missing link in our knowledge of the history of cinema production, exhibition, and distribution. Often considered a subset of aesthetics or mere political propaganda, film manifestos are better understood as a creative and political engine, an often unacknowledged force pushing forward film theory, criticism, and history. Examining these writings as a distinct category—constituting calls to action for political and aesthetic changes in the cinema and, equally important, the cinema’s role in the world—allows one not only to better understand their use-value but also the way in which

they have functioned as catalysts for film practices outside the dominant narrative paradigms of what Jean-Luc Godard pejoratively calls “Hollywood-Mosfilm.” Yet manifestos and manifesto-style writing have also greatly influenced, and indeed regulated, narrative cinema, especially that of the classical Hollywood period.

One of the other goals of *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures* is to reconsider the status of the film manifesto in film theory and history. Part of my desire to do this stems from my coming of age, as an academic, during the “theory wars” of the 1990s (nowhere near as sexy as the “Clone Wars” but similarly populated with mutterings about the “dark side”). Many of the most contentious essays at the center of the “theory wars” are better understood not as theory *qua* theory, in some empirical sense, but as manifestos—calls to arms to change, destroy, and reimagine the cinema. Certainly, this is the political and aesthetic power that lies behind a multitude of central writings on the cinema, from Sergei Eisenstein’s “The Method of Making Workers’ Films,” and Dziga Vertov’s “WE: Variant of a Manifesto” through Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and Claire Johnston’s “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema” (indeed, some of the writings from the analytic side of the debate by Noël Carroll and Gregory Currie can be read as manifestos for film theory itself).¹ To get tied up in positivist arguments about the empirical nature of these texts is to miss the means by which they functioned as catalysts for writers and filmmakers alike to reimagine the cinema.

Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures brings together film manifestos from the global history of cinema, constituting the first historical and theoretical account of the role played by film manifestos in filmmaking and film culture.² Focusing equally on political and aesthetic manifestos (and the numerous ones that address the relationship between aesthetics and politics), *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures* uncovers a neglected yet central history of cinema through the exploration of a series of documents that postulate ways in which to reimagine the medium, how moving images intervene in the public sphere, and the ways film might function as a catalyst to change the world. Many film manifestos accomplish these goals by foregrounding the dialectical relationship between questions of aesthetic form and political discourse, raising salient questions about how cinematic form is in and of itself a form of political action and intervention in the public sphere. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of film manifestos could be understood by the maxim “aesthetics as action.”

Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures brings together key manifestos of the last 110 years, alongside many little-known manifestos that, despite their obscurity, have nevertheless served to challenge and reimagine cinema aesthetics, politics, distribution, production, and exhibition. To this end the book includes the major European manifestos (those of Sergei Eisenstein, François Truffaut, Free Cinema, Oberhausen, Dogme ’95, et al.), the Latin American political manifestos (Fernando Birri, Jorge Sanjinés, Julio García Espinosa, Fernando Solanas, et al.), those of the postcolonial nation-state independence movements (Scotland, Québec, Palestine) and those of avant-garde filmmakers and writers (Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, Jonas Mekas, Keith Sanborn, et al.). *Film*

Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures also brings to light many manifestos largely unknown in Anglo-American film culture, as the book contains many previously untranslated manifestos authored or coauthored by figures such as Icíar Bollaín, Luis Buñuel, Guy Debord, Jean-Luc Godard, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Isidore Isou, Krzysztof Kieślowski, and François Truffaut. The book also includes thematic sections addressing documentary cinema, feminist and queer film cultures, and state-controlled filmmaking and archives. Furthermore, it includes texts that have been traditionally left out of the canon of film manifestos, such as the Motion Picture Production Code and Pius XI's *Vigilanti Cura*, which have nevertheless played a central role in film culture (indeed, the Production Code can be seen as the most successful film manifesto of all time). Finally, I have also included many local manifestos, ones that were influential in specific scenes and micromovements. The counterhistory that emerges from these varied texts brings to life, in essence, a new history of the cinema.

WHAT IS A MANIFESTO?

Before turning to film manifestos, consideration must be given to what, in general, constitutes a manifesto. To begin, then, a perhaps audacious claim: the last three thousand years of Judeo-Christian history are based on a manifesto. The Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, declaimed in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, functions as Western culture's first and most definitive manifesto. The rules it sets out defined the basic structures around which Western culture has organized itself and its belief systems. The Commandments, like any good subsequent manifesto, offer not only rules to live by but nothing less than a totalizing vision of how one ought to live one's life. An examination of the Decalogue also allows one to delineate the difference between a manifesto and what could be more broadly construed as rules: "You shall have no other gods before me" or "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God" (Exodus 20:3, 7; and Deuteronomy 5:7, 11) are imperatives that effect one's morality and ethics in a way that "don't run with scissors" does not (even though the latter may be considered a more pragmatic piece of advice).

While the Decalogue is only the most prominent of the myriad of totalizing theological proclamations of the way in which one ought to live one's life, contemporary manifestos and our understanding of them date from the upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most notably with the United States' Declaration of Independence of 1776, the Constitution of 1788, and the Bill of Rights of 1791; France's *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* of 1789; and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (*The Communist Manifesto*) of 1848. These foundational documents of two of the three competing ideologies of the twentieth century (the other being fascism) have taken on a quasi-religious status, partly replacing old messianic principles with newly found societal and secular ones; for instance, James Madison once referred to the founding American documents as "political scripture." Here, the political

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