

Megan Grace Jamieson

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Design Crafts

MEGAN JAMIESON

How useful are manifestos to designers and or/design groups? Outline your discussion with reference to three key manifestos. Through careful critique, conclude your text by defining your own design values in a 10-point manifesto.

In relation to the question “How useful are manifestos to designers and or/design groups?” I will be arguing the case that manifestos are no longer useful to designers as I was inspired by the Radio 4 program “No more manifestos (BBC, 2017)”. I will be exploring this point by examining the three following manifestos: “Red Alans” by Grayson Perry, “The advantages of being a woman artist” by The Guerrilla girls and finally “The law of sculpture” by Gilbert and George. My main points of critique will be the usage of modern technology by artists, the inherent self-imposed limitations of manifestos and how they are an outdated mode of design philosophy. So, what is a manifesto? Manifestos are a body of work and an idea put to paper from an artist that are often made in ten points but not exclusively, an example of a manifesto would be “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (Baker, 2015). As we can see from this early twentieth century example of a manifesto, it outlines the artist’s intent on how they plan to carry out their work and idea, a template most manifestos follow.

To begin this essay, I will talk about the different way’s technology has made manifestos irrelevant. Due to the proliferation and ease of social media artists now have an abundance of ways to share their ideas and concepts and therefore do not feel the need to limit themselves to a physical or digital manifesto. In today’s age where there is almost an unlimited form of artistic expression and acceptance, declaring yourself a set of closely defined rules that you must adhere to appears to be a very old-fashioned way of setting out a design goal. Today we have much more fluid ways of setting out a design or product idea and they are generally taking a much more collectivist approach rather than the old individualistic ways. This is because due to living in a time where we have access to all the multitude of art movements that have preceded us, whereas living in the early 20th century without having a multitude of art movements behind them, it may have been useful in trying to create a new

movement to have your rules clearly laid out and defined. However, today that is no longer necessary for modern artists as movements are much more fluid and therefore you do not need to constrict yourself to a narrow set of rules to try and break through and create a new one.

Self-imposed limitations are bad for artists because they inherently limit an artist's creative output and vision by closing them in on a particular set of ideas and structure to follow. This can create stagnation for an artist much like writer's block as they exhaust all ideas as they are so constrained to following a few rules, Peter Selz summarises this by saying that "the old criteria of what is a work of art ought to have been discarded, in favour of a dynamic approach where everything is possible (Todd, 2018)". However, limitations whether forced or self-imposed can bear fruit, for example limiting yourself financially when creating a large sculpture may force the artist to think of new cheaper materials to substitute for expensive ones or change the form of their sculpture to become more abstract. Another positive example of limiting yourself would be of a stone carver having access to thousands of chisels, but by having access to so many they will become a jack of all trades master of none, "by restricting yourself to a single tool you push yourself to analyse that tool closely... and ultimately gain a greater understanding of your craft (Bardot, 2020)". So perhaps the modern compromise is to use manifestos to limit what physical materials you can use but not to limit yourself creatively. I shall now begin to critique my three chosen manifestos following my above arguments for why they are outdated and limiting.

To begin with I shall start with Grayson Perry's manifesto; "Red Alan's manifesto".

We can see that his manifesto is clearly satire, he even says it is a “complete joke” (BBC, 2017) showing how much effort a prominent contemporary artist puts into creating a manifesto. As we see in his fifth point “Videos must be no longer than 10 minutes, comfy



seating must be provided” if someone were to misunderstand the satire and take it literally it would make producing a documentary near impossible. If taken seriously it would be the opposite of what he intended as it is a counter statement to other artists who take manifesto and art too seriously. Alan is Grayson’s

childhood teddy bear, by saying this is Alan's manifesto Grayson is mocking manifestos, by letting a teddy bear exemplify the old-fashioned mentality that manifestos have. Grayson being a very well-known artist publishing a joke of a manifesto concludes he also believes manifestos are unnecessary and outdated. Clearly this manifesto is mostly useless to design groups because it is to be taken as a joke. If a designer were to take it seriously it would be missing the bigger picture, one of the only values this manifesto can give to designers is to provide a space for them to not take themselves too seriously and to have fun with what they do. Even the way Grayson presents his manifesto to others is creative but without care as he wrote it "in about an hour" (BBC, 2017).

Even though this manifesto is satire some parts of it could serve as inspiration to designers such as “my favourite artwork is the next one I make” (Macpherson, 2014). This is a useful outlook of a thought process a designer could embrace when creating clothing/art, with this mind-set they would always be looking to improve themselves. Grayson Perry’s philosophy on what he creates is contemporary, even though his manifesto is satire his artwork often gets emotional responses from consumers. This concept of being current and up

to date is a useful tool for designers to incorporate as it keeps them relevant and keeps people interested in their brand.

The Guerrilla girls have been advocating for equal rights, for women to be taken more seriously in the art world and to fight race/sexual discrimination: “Since their inception in 1984 the Guerrilla Girls have been working to expose sexual and racial discrimination in the art world” (Manchester, February 2005).



Their manifesto guided them as they relentlessly helped women from across the world but predominantly in New York to get their artwork featured in art exhibitions and museums.

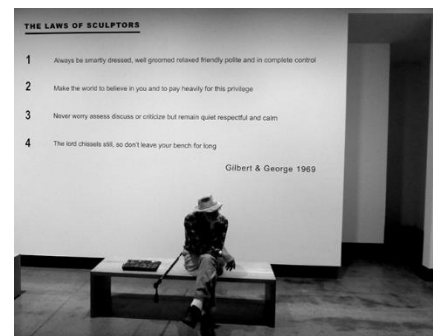
When the Guerrilla girls set up their manifesto and started protesting for equality, they gained notoriety across the globe, this is because they were the first women in the art scene to stand up for themselves and demand to be acknowledged as an equal to men. Their manifesto proves this as every point in their manifesto shows how they were treated worse than men, for example “Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood” (Manchester, 2005). This manifesto was useful when it was written because it gave them a foundation to build from and a focus for what they were trying to achieve. They engaged with the public to take part in the protests by “handing out bags with gorilla heads printed on them for protesters to wear over their heads” (Manchester, 2005), this was a way to empower people so they could join in with the Guerrilla girls and protest anonymously alongside them.

However, in reference to the essay question this manifesto is irrelevant and outdated to designers/design groups. This is because when you apply their manifesto to today’s society it does not make any sense. In the 21st century as societal norms have changed for the better, female artists work is not instantly judged and discriminated against for being feminine as they stated in their manifesto. Therefore, why would designers/design groups follow an

outdated manifesto because all it would do is inflict self-imposed limitations, like the exclusion of men which would not benefit them in any way today. This manifesto is also useless for designers as it provides no inspiration and if anything, it would negatively impact them because every successful relevant brand is inclusive. If they were to follow the manifesto as a guide they would be perceived as anti-men, which could be financially fatal and severely damage the brand.

Technology has greatly impacted the effect of the Guerrilla girls' manifesto by making their goals and wants achievable and realistic, it has done this by having platforms like Twitter to share their ideas to millions of people.

Technology has also made the ways of sharing, growing, printing posters and handing out gorilla masks unnecessary as technology has made it possible for protestors to get organised quickly, an example of this would-be the BLM



movement (N/A, N/A). This way of promoting their cause would have been effective then, but now designers have a total different way of advertising their artwork, like social media, YouTube videos and their own websites. Nowadays its must cheaper to advertise online through brand ambassadors or through own personal social media than it would be to create posters and gorilla masks.

After reading Gilbert and George's manifesto I will examine it point by point. In their first point they talk about how you must always be smartly dressed, in my opinion being well dressed does not define your art, neither does being well groomed. If taken to the extreme this could imply that poor people cannot be artists, which makes this first manifesto point bigoted and ignorant. Secondly, they go on to say "to make the world believe in you" (N/A, 2017). This is a very self-centred way to think about yourself and your place in the world, this makes me believe that Gilbert and George have a position of privilege and are out of touch with

many people in the world. Also, as a designer to put this pressure on yourself of having the world believe in you is unrealistic and cannot be good for your mental health. To set unrealistic expectations as a designer can do nothing but harm you in the long run.

The third point; “Never worry assess discuss or criticize but remain quiet, respectful and calm” (N/A, 2017) provides us with no means to be ourselves other than to just remain quiet and not voice our opinions, in other words to be sheep. Whilst being respectful and calm is a good moral to carry, design cannot progress if no one is critical of work. We would not know what people liked and disliked and where we improve or change our work for the better. I must agree with their final point about “not leaving your bench” as new opportunities are always on the horizon; this is a useful point for designers although it is very vague.

In conclusion after researching the three manifestos mentioned I have gained understanding and knowledge of how manifestos are potentially useful but also how useless and counter-productive they can be to designers/design groups. To the best of my understanding before the advancement in technology manifestos were culturally relevant and had a big impact on society and art/design. However, since time has gone on many art movements have come and gone, and the impact of manifestos has greatly faded and diminished. Most manifestos do not apply to the designers of today, those that do are few and far between, this is because we are becoming a much more open-minded society and therefore the strict guidelines of manifestos designed to push societal norms is no longer needed. Even though manifestos are outdated some cultures of art apply to designers such as minimalism, which many designers use when it comes to shop layout, their website as well as the architecture that surrounds them. In my opinion designers are more influenced by trends and culture rather than reading and cherry-picking from outdated manifestos, influenced by personal outlooks on life.

Because I do not believe in manifestos my manifesto would be something like Grayson Perry's, something not to be taken seriously. I do not believe in public manifestos as they do not apply to most people but having your own personal manifesto is different. This is because in a personal manifesto I can say what I want to achieve, and it would serve as a reminder to me. My ten-point manifesto is inspired by the work I am currently doing in university which is looking into multiples as a theme, this includes mixed media and a range of workshops.

My ten-point manifesto is:

1. Dress how you want to dress, whatever you are comfortable with
2. Mixed media is underrated and should be explored more
3. If you don't enjoy creating art you're not an artist
4. Every morning when you wake up you must immediately make a cup of tea.
5. Always bring scissors and glue you do not know what the day will bring.
6. Do not confine yourself to one media.
7. Wasted paper going in the bin must have a proper send off.
8. Make mistakes and learn from them. But what is a mistake?
9. Lick excess paint off palette, it must not be wasted!
10. Know your worth as a designer, do not be taken advantage of.

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