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Design Crafts

Research in Context ADAD5003

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Question 3

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.

This essay discusses the manifestos of Dieter Rams (1932 –), Bruce Mau (1959 -) and Allan Chochinov (nd -). For each of the chosen themes, their work is explored and an interpretation of how useful each of these themes would be for someone in the design field writing their own manifesto.

Manifestos are a list of intentions or rules that an individual or group of people will make to show the public how they plan to work or the changes they will make. They are typically created by political parties, most famously by Karl Marx (1818- 1883) and Fredrich Engel (1820-1895) with the communist manifesto in 1848. In the 19th Century literary and artist groups adopted the manifesto for their own use. They would develop a manifesto with their principles of how they would change their work within a new artistic movement (Oxford Reference, 2022).

Manifestos can be useful as they give a designer a criterion to work to. They can be used as a mission statement for a company. This would work well for a group of designers as it outlines the value of a brand so the work is cohesive and meets certain standards. For example, if the manifesto says to work and create products sustainably, this is something everyone will work to.

Clients may agree with points (Owen, 1995) and want to work with a company because of it. For example, a graphic design firm will have their own manifesto which will attract clients with a similar mindset.

Dieter Rams is a German designer. In the late 80s he wrote the Ten Rules of Good Design after questioning his own work.

Bruce Mau is a Canadian designer who wrote the Incomplete Manifesto for Growth in 1998. It was written as a way of thinking in the creative industry. After presenting it at a conference in Amsterdam it spread in success.

The third manifesto is by Allan Chochinov, called 1000 Words: A Manifesto for Sustainability in Design (Chochinov, 2007). Chochinov is the founding chair of the MFA in Products of Design graduate program at the School of Visual Arts in New York City (Chochinov, 2022). His approach to writing this manifesto is much more light-hearted, on his website he talks about manifestos, saying they are not for him but writes one for fun, saying he will not sign it. This suggests that he finds them to be too rigid and once signed designers are bound to them.

The similarities and differences in the manifestos of the three selected are presented throughout the assignment in the three main chosen themes of innovation, sustainability and writing style. One observation when comparing these three manifestos is that the main thread in Bruce Mau's manifesto is the statements have a more philosophical approach. The ideas in Dieter Rams manifesto are to the point about design and processes, this is presented later on in the assignment. An outsider looking at Chochinov's manifesto may be read his as a series of instructions and is very direct in his approach.

This paragraph discussed the influential aspects of consideration at the start of the design that is product, process or client. The term process is referring to the method of experimenting with

different materials and forms for the product before the final design (Takeda, Veerkamp and Yoshikawa, 2021).

'Human centred design' is the idea that a product or service is made intuitively to the user physically, emotionally and cognitively (Giacomin, J. 2014), this means that these products are made solely for its functional purpose and 'wants the best for the user' (Koppen, E and Meinel, C. 2012). Designers will often take an everyday item and redesign it, for example, designer Phillipe Starck designed a juicer to look like a spider, rather than an automatic juicer that would be easier for the customer to use.



Figure 1 (STARCK Site web officiel, 2022)

Ram's manifesto is primarily concerned with the aspect of the product. His points are rules of design for the appearance and functionality of the product rather than being designed with the client in mind or too much focus on the process towards the product.

Mau's manifesto is heavily influenced by process and people as he looks at lifestyle changes to develop new ways of thinking and seeing how we interact with our surroundings. This shows he considers the process of making to be more important than the final outcome as the process is where we learn new techniques and ways of working.

Chochinov's standpoint in product design is to evaluate and reflect on previous designs of other artists and to combine separate parts to create a new process. For example, one process that he advocates is based on sustainability and reinforces that 'Screws Better Than Glues'. By this he means the use of screws to assemble parts is more sustainable and better for the environment than the plastics and toxins that are in glue. To summarise, the combinations of good designs is his process of design.

In the industry it is useful to know the position of each artist in their manifestos. As knowing this level of detail guides the judgement and overall decision in whether to choose that designer or company to design and make the product.

The second section focuses on innovation and how the three designers have differing viewpoints and interpretations of the concept 'innovation'. Two aspects have been identified. Innovation as a new design and innovation by using inspiration of pervious design.

All three manifestos have varying positions on how they deal with innovation. On one hand Mau makes a point of 'Stand on someone's shoulders' suggesting ideas can be built from the ideas of others. On the other hand, Rams statement 'Good design is innovative' makes the reader think that a good design can only come from a new idea. Chochinov's manifesto takes a midway position, he suggests 'Before we design anything new, we should examine how we can use what already exists' and 'We have to start balancing our ability to be clever with our ability to be smart.' showing that we should not design new products for the sake of designing something new. This idea shows that the starting point of an idea will depend on the brief rather than how the work should always be approached. Expanding from a previous design can be just as important as inventing something new.

Originality and innovation are to be considered carefully as often these could be an expansion of an original idea rather than a new one. With the over saturation of the design industry, it can be difficult to identify a product that has not been inspired by an already existing one.

This next section explores the style and use of language and overall message from each of the three manifestos. All three are different in their use of vocabulary, sentence structure and attention to detail.

Each manifesto has been written in a different style. Ram's manifesto points all start with 'good design' this shows that through each point he is reinforcing the ideas of design and shows his thinking is driven by design. His ideas put the product first. The points are short statements which makes it easier for the audience to read the manifesto. This is useful for designers as often when a brief is given, the designer must react and respond in the best way see fit. This means that by following basic design rules they can interpret each point to the best way for the job.

The style of writing used in Mau's manifesto is philosophical. The statements together create a guide on how one could live their life as a creative person. He asks the reader to perceive their environments differently, through observing people's behaviour, looking at the small details in things and enjoying free time. He strongly believes in being aware of everything and being unaware giving yourself time for ideas to come to you. He often uses metaphors and analogies to convey his ideas in a creative way 'Avoid fields. Jump fences.'. His explanations after each statements help the reader to understand his thinking, as without an explanation, his points may be too open ended to be interpreted freely.

Mau's manifesto points are like pieces that work together to help someone to think creatively. Reading one point in isolation is less effective, however when they are interpreted collectively, they complement each other allowing natural space and environments for new ideas to grow. Using the points together will develop work and delve into a deeper understanding of a designer's work.

The points in Chochinov's manifesto are more philosophical than Rams but more to the point than Mau's. The majority of his points tell the reader to do one thing over another, 'balance before talents', 'metrics before magic' and 'climates before primates'. This makes the statements sound more like commands by taking away the option, as his ideas are for the importance of sustainability. His points are then followed with as explanation as just like Mau's without the explanation they may be misinterpreted. Despite him stating he did not believe in manifestos, and that he was writing it just for fun, his points are poetic and thoughtful, which shows he really does believe in sustainable design.

It is useful for the reader as when they read the manifestos, they will choose the one that closely aligns with their own values, beliefs and design style. This is an important consideration as a designer to ensure that the style of writing and use of language reaches the appropriate audience.

Despite being written 20 years apart Dieter Rams and Allan Chochinov's ideas of sustainability still apply. This shows that time does not alter ideas but external factors can contribute to change. Chochinov's manifesto solely discusses sustainability whereas Rams manifesto only suggests sustainability in one statement, this shows that in more recent times awareness to sustainability is heavily present in our day to day lives.

Chochinov's manifesto is driven by sustainability. Throughout the manifesto he does not divert from his core ideas of sustainability, showing his passion for the topic. After reading his manifesto it leaves the reader feeling inspired to design in a more sustainable way.

The Cambridge dictionary definition of sustainable is 'causing, or made in a way that causes, little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

A sustainable design is one that is not only good for the environment and is produced cleanly, it goes 'beyond environmental optimisation' (Roy, 2000). It is a design that considers the resource use and if it can be sustained over a period of time, including the products end of life, how it can be recycled or disposed of in a way that does not damage the environment. The knowledge and continuing to research about sustainability is crucial if a designer is ensuring their manifesto is best fit for the world in which they live and are designing in.

Although it is important to have ideas written out clearly, for a design manifesto it is just as important that the ideas are versatile and fluid so they can be adapted to, as a designer grows or potentially changes routes throughout their career. Their points are a set of values to live by rather than strict rules to follow.

For my own manifesto I would like to use words that I think are important to me as a maker and words that I would like to be able to work towards as goals. I think that by using single words I am not limiting myself to a statement that I am tied to, as when my work develops my statements may develop too. Using individual words can be interpreted differently depending on my age and stage in life and will be viewed differently based on my experiences and new goals. Each word may have a heavier presence in my work throughout my career and will interlink differently for each project. I think it is important that they can be used flexibly as each word will have their own place in each project, they just might have different focusses each time. This means that not all words have to be used each time but as they are relevant.

These of the words for my manifesto with their dictionary definitions and how I identify with them as a maker.

Intuition

'(knowledge from) an ability to understand or know something immediately based on your feelings rather than facts' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Knowing what is right for a piece of work, knowing the material, form and process.

Adaptability

'an ability or willingness to change in order to suit different conditions' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Being able to change the path of a project if something goes wrong. For example, if a machine or piece of equipment breaks, I can continue with my project by working out a new way to work around the issue rather than giving it up completely.

Authenticity

‘the quality of being real or true’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Not changing the way I design and make to fit in with a group of people. By staying authentic to myself and my work I know that I can work to my strengths and not regret making something because I created it the way someone else wanted me to. Being authentic will also make my work more recognisable to me.

Curiosity

‘an eager wish to know or learn about something’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

‘Curiosity is often considered the foundation of learning’ (Smith, 2011). Curiosity will help me to continue to learn about new materials and techniques and not become complacent in my practice.

Knowledge

‘understanding of or information about a subject that you get by experience or study, either known by one person or by people generally’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Sensory

‘connected with the physical senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Obsession

‘the control of one’s thoughts by a continuous, powerful idea or feeling, or the idea or feeling itself’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Patience

‘the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties, or to suffer without complaining or becoming annoyed’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Material

‘a physical substance that things can be made from’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Tacit

‘understood without being expressed directly’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

Understanding a material from experience, knowing when something might break or how it will react. Experimentation with materials and researching them helps to build a wider understanding and knowledge that is used when making (Senker, 1995).



Manifesto

Intuition

Adaptability

Authenticity

Curiosity

Knowledge

Sensory

Obsession

Patience

Materiality

Tacit

Figure 2

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List of figures

Figure 1

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Figure 2

Ashton, M. (2022). *My Manifesto*