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Contextual Practices

'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.'

Manifestos are rules and guides for designers to communicate who they are and the ideals they want to portray. Collection of Style (COS) are a lifestyle brand developed to create clothing that is 'modern, functional and considered design' (COS 2017). Through comparison and contrast of COS and the manifestos of Bauhaus, Brutalism and Minimalism, this essay will explore how COS uses manifestos to design their stores, marketing and products. Firstly, by exploring how useful Bauhaus, Brutalism and Minimalism manifestos have been to COS to design their store layout and convey how they use these design elements of space and structure to create an emotional design environment. Secondly, through an analysis of the way COS designs their website I will discuss how they have used similar manifestos to that of Bauhaus and Minimalism to create narrative within their marketing. Thirdly, I will look at the products created and photographed by COS and compare these to the Bauhaus and Minimalist principles. Through visual deconstruction, I will discuss how COS epitomises the message that the clothing communicates. This can be further broken down into individual clothing pieces and how elements are photographed to illustrate the identity of the brand. Finally, I will conclude by discussing how COS has used manifestos to develop their brand, communicate their identity and how the manifestos of Bauhaus, Brutalism and Minimalism have played an important role in the brand development. This is further developed in my own manifestos and design principles, which will be outlined in a 10-point manifesto.



Figure 1. COS (2015) Store Layout New York

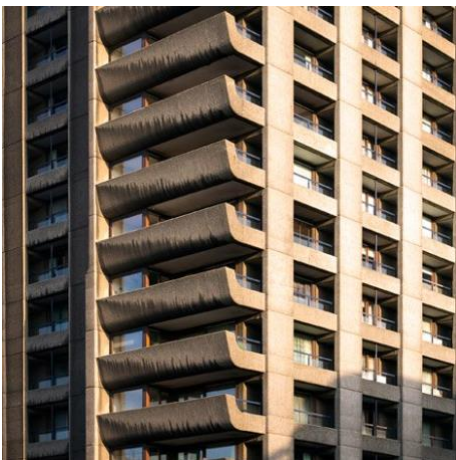
COS visually communicates their brand's manifesto through the design of their stores. COS (2017) states they consider the location of each store and create a welcoming space with modern design, as seen in Figure 1. COS has represented their space to adhere to their identity as a brand, which is easy to read and visually

minimal. Hall supports this by stating 'meanings also regulate and organise our conduct and practices, they help to set the rules norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed' (Hall 1997:4). Therefore COS minimal aesthetic used in the stores has been influenced by the design manifesto of their clothing.

By comparing this to the sculpture *Untitled 1980* (1980) by Donald Judd in Figure 2 COS uses minimalist manifesto of 'unitary geometric forms, monochromatic palette, plain, industrial, factory-made, store-bought mass produced materials' (Understanding Minimalism, 2009) to create a space which mirrors the brand identity and make consumers identify emotionally the connections



between the stores and the products within them, the consumer understands that the surrounding reflects the aspirations of their purchases. As Chapman (2005:18) argues this creates emotional experiences that the consumer can feel emotionally attached to and enjoy the environment. Therefore, reflecting the minimalist manifesto that the space around the clothing is a part of the overall aesthetic. Minimalism as a manifesto is aimed at the 'viewer to be conscious of the space. The artwork is carefully arranged to emphasis and reveal the architecture of the gallery' (Understanding Minimalism, 2009) COS internal store designs are carefully arranged to reflect and support the shape and aesthetics of the products. COS uses the manifesto carefully by arranging spaces to reflect the clothing they are developing 'the concept of experience where the subject and the object meet and merge with one another; designing emotionally meaningful products' (Chapman 2005:99-100).



Through minimal design seen in Figure 3 of the Barbican, the architecture reflects Brutalist design manifesto to create spaces that adhere to peoples fundamental needs. The Brutalist manifesto is 'believing that the things we build can help us live better lives' Kinsella (2015) to which COS adheres

Figure 3. Hayes,L (2014) *Barbican Estate*

through the purchasing of clothing and use of design space as 'clothes are selected for purchase, and for wearing according to their meaning we believe them to have' (Barnard 2007:170). Subsequently, the visually pleasing spatial interior will assure the consumer in the belief that the products they are buying will also reflect the lifestyle that COS is portraying.

The simplicity of the store under sells the products, as stated by Walter Gropius 'Simplicity is multiplicity' (Gropius 1926:148) therefore by COS using the Bauhaus manifesto to limit the stock in their stores the consumer is made to feel as if they are not being pressurised into buying, consequently adding to the enjoyment of the shopping experience.

However, COS is a business where they are using Modernist manifestos as a way to sell products through the styling of the stores. Their aims are different to that of Minimalism as the space these artists are trying to create are not business orientated but similarly to COS are aiming to evoke emotion within the viewer through shape and form. In relation to this, COS have taken on the Brutalism manifesto where spaces can improve peoples experiences of life, while COS uses this to market and sell products that are not essential to peoples lives.

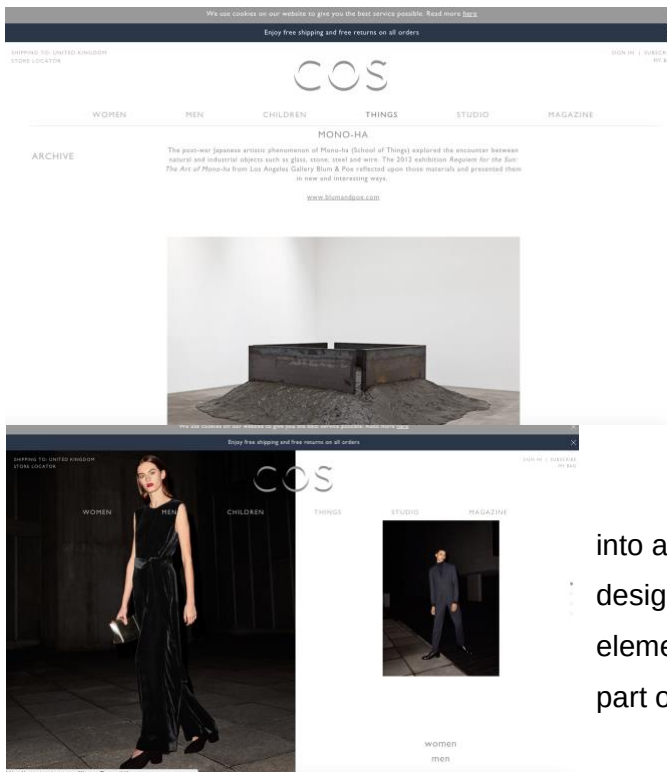


Figure 5. COS (2017) *Things*

Their website and magazine are ways to market and communicate the identity of their brand.

Chapman (2005:121) states narrative plays on the desires and dreams in order to captivate the

audience. The website illustrates to a consumer that they are buying

into a lifestyle that is perceived to be design orientated and through purchasing elements of this identity therefore becomes part of the Manifesto.

The website is stripped back to its

fundamentals using a clear grid system as 'visual signs do bear some relationship to the shape and texture of the objects which they represent' (Hall 1997:24) therefore the website is designed to illustrate the aesthetics of the brand seen in Figure 4, which resonates the minimalist manifesto. Sturken and Cartwright (2001:48) argues that the qualities within do not only reside in the image but upon the context in which it is viewed therefore through using simple designed layouts this communicates the core aesthetic principles of COS. Minimalism 'represents truth, order, simplicity and harmony because it does not pretend to be anything other than what it is' (Tate 2017) this aids with marketing the product as the design of the website and clothing have a cohesive aesthetic.

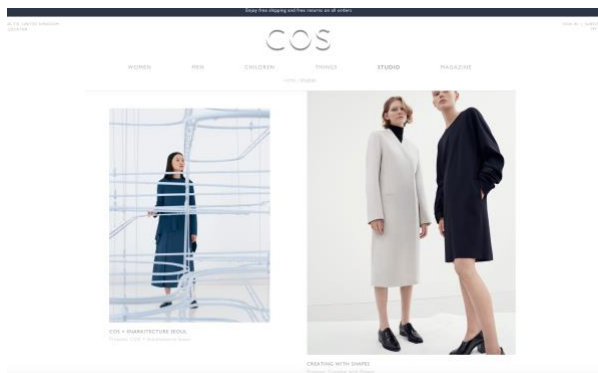


Figure 6. COS (2017) *Studio*

Their website not only sells clothing but also has a menu page called 'Things' Figure 5 which records inspiration such as artists, architecture and other areas that fit within their brand identity. 'Studio' another menu page records the collaborations

between COS, artists and design studios

Figure 6. Collaboration with like minded

designers, creating installation and visually

stimulating spaces use a similar manifesto to that of Bauhaus where the aim was to 'bring together all creative effort into one whole, to reunify all the disciplines of practical art' (Gropius 1919:78-79) Looking at both these pages the consumer can understand buying into COS they are buying into a brand that their design ethic is more important than the profit that they accrue. The brand portrays a 'personality' that is culturally stimulating and therefore enhances the customer experience. COS are targeting an audience that has certain interests in design and by focusing on this are using these interests to sell the garments through associations. This makes the customer feel they are involved within the narrative of the brand as 'culture is about feeling attachment and emotions as well as concepts and ideas' (Hall 1997:2). COS believes that 'by understanding more about the very nature of human need, we can begin to manipulate and gain control over it' (Chapman 2005:38). Hence COS understands the interests of the target audience and market themselves as being emotionally connected to the

consumer. This can have a negative effect as COS can use manifestos as a pretense of having an interest in the design world.

COS states that the products they sell are 'modern, functional and considered design' (COS 2017) in doing so they are echoing the Bauhaus manifesto, as Fogacs (1991:2) states the Bauhaus aesthetic was interested in economy of form using this as a design principle within their work. COS not only aesthetically looks good but communicates to the customer that they can buy into the identity, through a conscious and minimalist tailoring using traditional fabrics. However, the design and look of the garments can be appealing or use cheaper fabrics, but by styling and designing a certain way can disguise this to make money.

The products are stated by COS as 'offering reinvented classics and wardrobe essentials, we create pieces that are made to last beyond the season' (COS 2017) essentially they are producing clothing that has already been seen and is nothing new, but by implying it can out last trends makes customers believe that what they are buying will not only last visually but also physically

does not date. COS being interested in making clothing that can outlast and be timeless reflects that of the Bauhaus manifesto as Forgacs (1991:13) states the Bauhaus design stood for ethical values and a functional purpose, therefore by using this manifesto COS as a brand appears to care about design that outlasts trends. Furthermore, COS also combats the trends as the clothing is unisex as seen in Figure 7 and 8 from their website. The clothing can be worn by both genders as there is limited differentiation



Figure 7. COS (2017)
Belted Wool Coat
Womenswear



Figure 8. COS (2017)*Colour Block Shirt* Menswear

between the clothing, this further resonates with the Bauhaus manifesto as ‘any person of good repute without regard to age or sex’ were accepted into the school (Gropius 1919:3). This shows the equality COS sees between certain clothing which they sell. Yet, they still have separate departments for men and women that convey they are a traditional fashion brand, marketing separately to either gender.

Clothing design are simple wardrobe staples, however, by the way COS have photographed their products it is noticeable that the fabric and cuts have been thought out and have been an element of focus. Through the comparison of the detailed photographs of COS clothing to that of screenprint *Never Before j* (1976) by Bauhaus artist Josef Albers (Figure 9) this reflects the aesthetic composition elevating clothing from not only garments but to being pieces of arranged artwork.

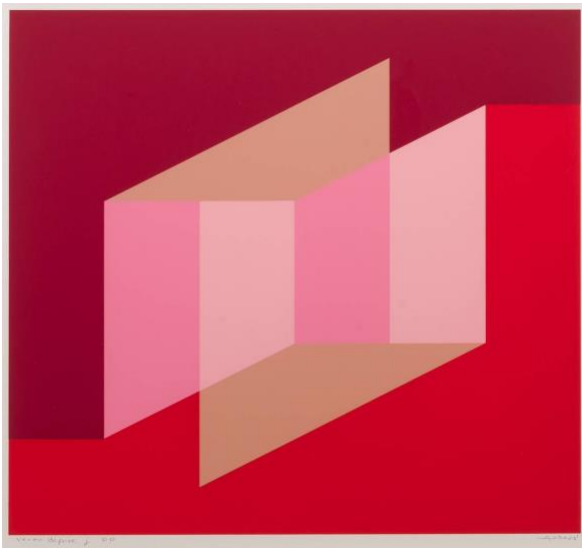


Figure 9. Albers, J. (1976) *Never Before j*



Figure 10. COS (2017) *Details of Product*

The photograph focuses on the textures and design details of the garment portraying a structural composition used within the minimalist manifesto ‘the form and the material are closely related’ (Judd 1964:5). This conveys that the fabric and shape has no tangible artistic meaning but is aesthetically pleasing as the ‘codes tell us which concepts are being referred to’ (Hall 1997:21) this makes the clothing appear to have greater substance by being photographed in a unique way which also reflects the branding identity and artistic influence.

However, the products displayed by COS are items that can be selected at any store

that sells basic essentials but by the use of manipulative photography techniques their products become art pieces within the store environment.

Clearly this essay has show that the main factors which impact upon the use of manifestos within COS branding and identity create emotional response through the use of relating the stores, marketing and products as one design aesthetic.

Through their clever use of changing design details, using different fabrics and colour palettes COS creating a brand identity that seems to have substance and that makes the clothing have meaning. Although COS clothing is simple the use of marketing and store layout creates visual identity that the customer can buy into the narrative. This is further explored by COS through photographing their designs in an artistic way. Analysing COS's manifesto there are similarities between Bauhaus, Brutalism and Minimalism. COS uses there Modernist manifestos to subtly design which is carried through into the whole brand identity and process. This minimalistic method is a lifestyle that is used to create emotional consensus through subtle psychology, which is in direct contrast to that of other fashion stores.

I have learnt and discovered how similar my own manifest is to that of COS, Bauhaus, Brutalism and Minimalism. From this investigation I have decided on particular rules which reflect on the previous manifestos, developing a subtle and structured foundation through the use of wording to reflect that of COS branding ideology.

My ten point manifesto as a designer:

1. Visual connection across all work and branding.
2. Coherent colour palette across designs.
3. A contrast of textures to create depth and interest.
4. All work to be put into context so consumer can visualise it in their own life.
5. Research the materials to develop the possibilities.
6. Work across blended disciplines
7. Timeless design but always relevant
8. Collaborating with other designers
9. Awareness of the Zeitgeist
10. Customer's emotional desires, needs, and habits as foci for design.

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