

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.

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This essay will firstly explore the usefulness of art manifestos to designers, through looking at how the *Manifesto of Futurism* (1909) by Filippo Marinetti, *10 Principles of Good Design* (1976) by Dieter Rams and *Red Alan* (2014) by Grayson Perry, influenced their own work. Secondly, the essay will investigate the way the designers communicate their manifestos and the flexibility of the publication. The investigation, with reference to the previous manifestos, will conclude with a 10-point manifesto, stating my own design principles and values.

According to Caws, a manifesto was a “piece of evidence in a court of law, put on show to catch the eye” (2001, p 1). Caws elaborates, “from the beginning, and has remained [a manifesto is] a deliberate manipulation of the public view... it is a document of an ideology, crafted to convince and convert” (2001, p.1). Though politics and art are often seen as two separate subjects, the art manifesto is a place where “art and politics could communicate” (Puchner, 2006, p. 79). The art manifesto states the designer’s “perspectives, motives, or intentions of an artist or artist movements” (Tames, 2020), and provides self-declared guidelines to follow. The principles highlight the designers’ values and their identity, which is then reflected in their work. In addition, the art manifesto typically suggests the political and social context of when it was written. The manifesto lay the foundation of various modernist movements throughout the 20th century, including Futurism (1909), Dadaism (1916) and Surrealism (1924), signifying its importance. The text typically explained the “radical rejection of tradition” and the “utopian belief of changing the world” through the arts (Kencis, 2012). A very iconic art manifesto, which is described as the “grandfather” of art manifestos (Caws, 2001, p.1), is Marinetti’s *Manifesto of Futurism*, written in 1909.

Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), an Italian poet, was the founder of Futurism, an avant-garde Italian movement. The *Manifesto of Futurism* (Fig. 1) was published on the front cover of the renowned

Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* and was the first movement aimed at a mass audience by touching on every branch of life, culturally, politically, and socially (Tisdall & Bozzolla, 1985, pp. 7-11). The manifesto glorified war, stating it was a 'beautiful [idea] worth dying for' and praised the ever-developing technologies and the 'beauty of speed' (Marinetti, 1909). The manifesto also called for Italy to move away from its' past and to embrace the future, through the destruction of museums and libraries (Marinetti, 1909). The statements were very radical for the time and spoke of a new way of thinking.



Fig. 1: Manifesto of Futurism

In 1910, Marinetti's magazine, *Poesia*, published the *Manifesto of Futurist Painters*. This was the first manifesto by the Futurists' which directly addressed artists. Two months later, the magazine published the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* which declared that "universal dynamism must be rendered in painting as a dynamic sensation" (Boccioni, 1910). "Universal dynamism" is the



Fig. 2: Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash

principle that "no single object is separate from its background or another object" (Stewart, 2020) and it is reflected in Fig. 2, Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912), through the multiplication of the dog's feet, ears, and tail, which has varying degrees of opacity and transparency (The Art Story, 2021). The painting reflects how

the Futurists were able to apply their manifesto to their art and develop their own techniques.

Fig. 3 depicts Boccioni's Unique Forms of Continuity and Space, created in 1913. In the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Paintings, Boccioni wrote "all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but it constantly appears and disappears" (1910), and the sculpture reflects this quote as the striding figure appears to be deformed by speed. Additionally, as the sculpture appears to be deformed by speed, it connotes the original manifesto where Marinetti praises speed which new technologies at the time were creating. Technology

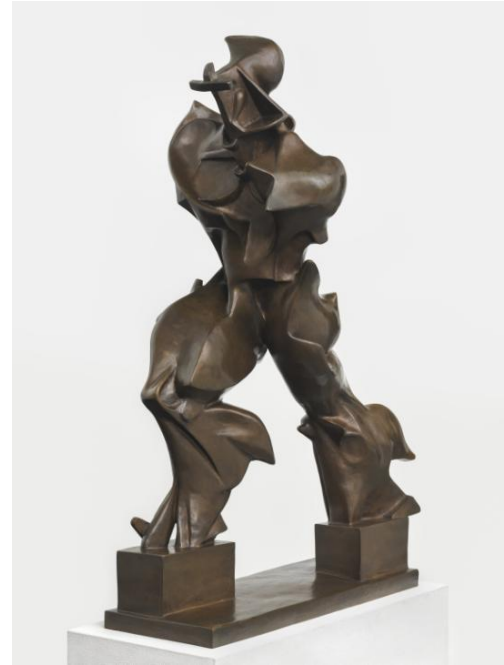


Fig. 3: Unique Forms of Continuity and Space

was making major breakthroughs throughout the globe, therefore improving peoples' quality of life, which further enhanced Marinetti's embracement of the future. Even though the founding manifesto was not directed at creatives, artists referenced the manifesto through their subject matter, thus using the manifesto as a symbolic source to illustrate their ideals.

Another designer whose manifesto's principles are reflected in their designs is Dieter Rams, who was the design director for Braun from 1961 to 1995. His manifesto, *10 Principles of Good Design* (1976), summarised what he believed to be the principal points of good design, and as he understood that he "played an important role in the world he was helping create" (Design Museum, 2021), he questioned whether his own design was good design (Vitsoe, 2021). According to Charlotte and Peter Fiell, *good design* is a "concept based on rational approach to the design process whereby products are created in accordance with the formal, technical and aesthetic principles associated

with the Modern Movement” (2015, p 292). Though its roots are in America, it was “favourably received in Europe” (Fiell & Fiell, 2015, p 292), most notably by Dieter Ram’s designs.



Fig. 4: T3 Pocket Radio

Fig. 4 depicts Dieter Rams’ T3 radio which was Braun’s first pocket portable transistor radio (Bickerstaff, 2011). It is a fine example of how he adapted the *10 Principles of Design* into his products. He

believed that a good design should make a product useful and understandable and that it should be innovative, aesthetic, unobtrusive, honest, long lasting, thorough down to the last detail, environmentally friendly, and lastly, be as little design as possible.

(Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, 2021).

The T3 radio embodies Rams’ *10 Principles of Good Design* as the product is simple. The design focuses on the “essential aspects” (Vitsoe, 2021) of the product, which is the circular dial and the speakers. Through doing so, the radio is honest, as it does not try to “manipulate the consumer with promises that cannot be kept” (Vitsoe, 2021), and through only focusing on the essentials, it ensures that it is understandable and “self-explanatory” (Vitsoe, 2021). By making the radio pocket size, it also utilizes the radio’s usefulness, as you can carry it around. Another principle that the design addresses is the aesthetic quality which is “integral to its usefulness” (Vitsoe, 2021). The radio’s minimalistic aesthetic quality is reinforced by the fact that Apple’s first-generation iPod was influenced by Rams’ design; an “all-white body and circular controls” (Lorenz, 2016). Though critics have previously exclaimed that Apple had copied Rams, he believed that “it’s a basic compliment

that they use the [same] basic thinking about what design can be” (Design Museum, 2021). Rams’ manifesto therefore not only influenced his own thinking and designs, but many modern products that are currently in use.



Fig. 5: 606 Universal Shelving System

Another principle that Rams followed is the environmental impact of the product. *Fig. 5* depicts the *606 Universal Shelving System*, which was designed to last. The product is aesthetically pleasing and is therefore built to outlast changing fashions. The product is also able to “adapt to any environment” (Rams, 1976) as it is adjustable and extendable, meaning it can suit changing needs (Phaidon, 2021). Rams was one of the first designers who considered the environmental impact of

his products. In today’s setting, the environmental impact of a product has never been so important as we live in a throwaway society where things become out of fashion quickly and end up in land fill. The rotting rubbish in landfill generate the high levels of methane gas and CO₂ which contributes to global warming (Unisan UK, 2020). Understanding how his own products effect not only the consumers but the wider implications, reflects his place as a revolutionary designer. Having applied the *10 Principles of Good Design* to each his products, has greatly contributed to his success.

In contrast to Marinetti’s *Manifesto of Futurism* and Rams’ *10 Principles of Good Design*, where their manifesto’s principles are clearly reflected in their work as designers, Grayson Perry took a different approach. In Perry’s manifesto *Red Alan* (*Fig. 6*), the essence of his art and his personality is captured in his manifesto, rather than the principles directly applying to his art. Born in 1960, he is known for

cross-dressing, his ceramic vases, and tapestries. His vases often feature his childhood teddy bear Alan Measles and his female alter-ego Clair, (Tate, 2021) which are two significant elements of his life.

Fig. 7 depicts Perry's *Aspects of Myself* (2001), which is a ceramic vase that features the artist's various identities, including Clair and Alan Measles. One of the subjects that the vase addresses is Perry's struggle

with masculinity. It has been highlighted in his autobiography that Masculine figures throughout his childhood and teens were limited and Perry has expressed that he handed over the role of masculinity to Alan Measles (p. 7, 2007) and "projected all the positive male characteristics that [he] found lacking in [his] real world" (Perry, 2011, p.80). He also began experimenting with women's clothing at a young age, and thus found his transvestite alter-ego, Clair. The vase also features a



Fig. 7: *Aspects of Myself*

teenage boy with flowers, a woman gagged and bound, and a man on a motorcycle.

The piece is a very raw expression of Perry, and it is with therapy where he was able to explore these identities (Tate, 2021). He states in his manifesto that "artists...will be judged on their art" (2014), and with full understanding of this, he created a vase that exposed these identities. This principle allows his art to be expressive as he has come to terms with this judgement.



Fig. 6: *Red Alan Manifesto*

Though not directly addressing his own artwork and the principles that he follows when creating his art, *Red Alan* (Fig. 6) expresses the elements of being an artist and producing artwork. This includes “nothing in art is new or old fashioned only good and bad” and “an artist’s biggest work is very, very rarely their best” (Perry, 2014). This differentiates from Marinetti’s and Rams’ manifesto as their principles directly apply to their art. Having principles that do not directly address a designer’s art process or outcome is less limiting for a designer, as they have more freedom to experiment. *Red Alan* also reflects Perry’s unique personality, through illustrations and featuring principles that are humorous and unachievable. Two principles that fall under this genre are “failed painting to be sent to disaster zones to be used to make tents” and “special remedial help should be given to posh people to help them become artists” (Perry, 2014). This is another feature that differentiates from Marinetti’s and Ram’s manifesto as their texts have a serious tone and propose achievable principles. Designer’s manifestos very rarely propose unrealistic principles and expectation as they want their values to be perceived as honest, and therefore their art. However, Perry having these features in his manifesto captures the essence of his art, which is colourful and playful, demonstrated in Fig. 8.



Fig. 8: *We Shall Catch it on the Beaches*

During Britain’s lockdown of 2020, Perry “brought the nation together through art” (Manchester Gallery, 2021) with *Grayson’s Art Club*. The programme’s ethos exclaimed that art is for everyone and demonstrated that art was an “essential part of peoples” lives (Manchester Gallery, 2021). The television show, which was broadcasted on Channel 4, illustrated a clearer representation of Perry’s values as a designer than his manifesto *Red Alan*.

Designers are now able to utilise the internet for the promotion of their art and values and are finding different ways to communicate their ideas; through working with local communities; working with non-profit organisations; and through social media and films (Higgie, 2017). Perry being able to show his values more clearly through a television programme in place of a piece of paper signifies a shift in the methods of how designers can communicate their principles.

Perry did not feel the need to conform to traditional features of a manifesto, as he does not in real life (Claire) and in his art. Perry continuously keeps true to himself throughout his art, and his manifesto is an extension of this. His manifesto is unusual, but it captures the eye of the designers who also feel like that they do not want to conform, and as social media is a predominant form of communication and advertising, a manifesto that stands out from the crowd will attract more attention. Designers are now able to utilise the internet for the promotion of their art and values and are finding different ways to communicate their ideas; through working with local communities; working with non-profit organisations; and through social media and films (Higgie, 2017).

What differs from each manifesto is the method of communication, which is dependent on the time period and the target audience. Marinetti communicated the Futurist's manifestos through newspaper spreads, leaflets, and posts, and as a high proportion of the population was illiterate, he began Futurist Evenings at the theatre (Tisdall & Bozzolla, 1985, p. 12) to expound these ideals. Additionally, Rams delivered his manifesto through a speech in New York for Vitsoe in 1976 and Perry communicated his manifesto through a handwritten text, featuring illustrations. Marinetti acknowledged that in order to promote Futurism, he was required to target a wide audience and therefore had to utilize many forms of communication as he did not have the resources of promotion as there is today. By doing so he gave the impression that the Futurist movement was "a huge organisation encompassing all the disciplines" and reinforced the "idea of Futurism spreading throughout the world" (Tisdall & Bozzolla, 1985, p. 12). Rams' manifesto was targeted at those who

were interested in Vitsoe and design, therefore a speech was adequate. Due to technology in 1976, it was relatively straightforward to gather a group of people which was difficult to do during the early 20th century. Perry's *Red Alan* is a written manifesto, but what differentiates itself is the handwritten element and the illustrations. Perry was already a renowned artist when writing his manifesto in 2014, having won the Turner Prize in 2003 (Tate, 2021). He therefore did not need to utilise multiple forms of communication to promote his manifesto as he already has a prolific following, with the themes of his work increasing his popularity and the engagement with the general public. Furthermore, due to social media and the internet his manifesto is easily accessible currently, and at the time of publication.

Through analysing the three manifestos, it is clear that the manifesto is useful for a designer, dependant on how they want the publication to benefit and integrate into their practice. Marinetti employed the manifesto to promote the values of his new art movement, Futurism. His aim was to attract a big audience and he therefore utilised multiple forms of communication which was successful. Rams directly applied each of the principles of his manifesto to each one of his products, ensuring that his design was *good design*. This greatly contributed to the success of himself as a designer and his products. Perry utilised the manifesto to capture the essence of his work, and the publication allowed him to continue to work freely without any barriers. *Red Alan* demonstrates how the manifesto can be flexible to suit the designer's needs, and there is no requirement of conformant.

With reflection to the previous manifestos, I have devised my own declaration which highlights my own principles as a designer and captures the essence of my art.

- 1) Go to therapy. It will benefit you as an artist.
- 2) People will always judge you based off your art.
- 3) Technology is not the enemy.
- 4) Art is freedom.

- 5) Consider the environment.
- 6) Do not make your pieces fashionable. Fashionable becomes un-fashionable.
- 7) Make art that asks questions rather than gives answers.
- 8) Art is pretty.
- 9) Simple is better.
- 10) Consider the materials you use to make art last.

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Illustrations

Figure One: Marinetti, F. (1909) *Manifesto of Futurism* [Photograph] Available at: <http://exhibitions.guggenheim.org/futurism/manifestos/> (Accessed: 14 November 2021).

Figure Two: Balla, G. (1912) *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* [Oil on canvas] Available at: <https://magazine.artland.com/art-movement-futurism/> (Accessed: 10 December 2021).

Figure Three: Boccioni, U. (1913) *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* [Bronze] Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/futurism> (Accessed: 14 November 2021).

Figure Four: Rams, D. (1958) *T3 radio* [Photograph]. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/65a9fc82-c515-11e5-808f-8231cd71622e> (Accessed: 9 December 2021).

Figure Five: Rams, D. (1960) *606 Universal Shelving System* [Photograph] Available at: <https://www.vitsoe.com/gb/about/good-design> (Accessed: 13 December 2021).

Figure Six: Perry, G. (2014) *Red Alan's Manifesto* [Pen on paper] Available at: <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/red-alans-manifesto> (Accessed: 15 November 2021).

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