

My Manifesto

Design and My Place Therein

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P151282

Forward

This is a manifesto subjectively written to solidify what I believe as a designer. What others may think may contradict me and my writings, however, this is the case with every design manifesto. Not everyone agrees with what is said by every person. Therefore, I am happy for others to read this and disagree with what is written.

Here I will also make it known that I am dyslexic. As this is a writing of my thoughts on design, design culture and my place therein, I will edit what I write, however, will not change the structure and method of my writing as this is my personal manifesto.

A Designer

A designer is a creative person that chooses to apply art, problem solving, investigation and world understanding to create products for clients. These clients may change on a project to project basis or they may stay the same. Designers are people that are always learning and discovering new things about what they do and who they design for. They will work for direct and indirect clients; A direct client would be the person who has contracted a designer to produce a product for them and an indirect client is a person who will use the product without meeting the designer. Being a designer is also about exploration, investigation, problem solving, morality and learning. Really, a designer is a person who breaks the idiom "Jack of all trades, master of none" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018) since designers are the ones that bring all the trades together and make them work in a coalition with each other. On the client side a designer must always be aware of money constraints, environment, client needs, wants and emotions. We also need to be aware of manufacturability, material choice, production chain and if a customer has to build the product themselves or if it arrives pre-built. A designer should know, from start to finish, the impact of their product and how it is interacted with. This is what a designer is to me.

Design is an ever-evolving thing. It is subjective and down to the individual. Design is an art, some people will like it, others will not. There is not one thing that exists that a person can point to and say "This here is what shows the whole spectrum of design", it is physically impossible. Design is a living and breathing thing that has been given life by humans. Our collective creativity is what gives design it's blood, but people are the heart that keeps that blood pumping through our society. We even give meaning to design outside of human made things because we see nature as a creative force, bringing life and form into the world in ways which we could never have conceived of. Life is often far stranger than we give it credit for and because of that we can learn that the crazy or seemingly

unusual sometimes work. Sometimes it's important to look at something for a long time to realise its value and to appreciate it fully, particularly if what is being observed is unusual.

Most importantly, a designer must be what they believe to be a designer. Above are my thoughts on what a designer is and what they should do and be. Another designer might disagree with what I have written but if they do, I want them to stick true to what they believe a designer is, not what I believe.

Self-Understanding

A designer should be true to themselves. If they are unable to know who they themselves are, they will find it harder to work for clients with needs centred around people. An understanding of one's self opens an understanding of how other people work and think. It's liberating to know where you are and why you are that way. It's a window into the lives of others since by being able to compare how you think with others that. I will admit that for some it's far harder to know themselves due to societal standards and barriers as well as personal barriers. However, a designer should do everything in their power to know themselves and their own mind. For example, I am trying to be more humble in my design as I am trying to be more humble as a person. I want this to reflect in work as it happens in my private life.

It's through growth, understanding and knowledge that a person evolves. They learn, can think about what they already know and how this new information might conflict with that. Designers are people just like everyone else and it's important to remember that. We still owe it to ourselves to be kind and honest with those around us but we also have an advantage over others, we have the ability to help society from a position of influence without it being obvious. We're not the puppet masters, but we make the strings.

In the forward of this manifesto, I have written that I must know my place within design. My place, as of the time of writing, is still at the beginning of the maze. My future will wind and weave in a hundred different ways, some will lead where I wish to go, others will make me backtrack for a time. I am still a new designer and have years of exploration, discovery and struggle ahead of me. I must always be thankful to be able to be in a position where I will be able to continue learning for the rest of my career.

Learning

Each and every day we learn something about the world. It could be something small or something big. Today someone might learn their best friend's favourite colour, something small, or they might learn how a car engine works, something big. Every piece of information has value. The modern age has brought information to the tips of our fingers, even as we are on the go. Thanks to the increased access to the internet, a lot of information is now available on our phones through the internet, where thirty years ago that information would have almost only been accessible in libraries or newspapers.

What this day and age has done for us is given us the opportunity to learn about anything we want, given that the drive to learn is there. If I wanted to learn a new language all I would have to do is pick one of a myriad of websites (Duolingo, 2018) (Babbel, 2018) and start learning. I can find other people around the globe who are interested in the same hobbies, same books, same music and talk to them and learn from them about where they come from, what they do and why they do it. As humans, we are closer together than we have ever been. All we have to do is go out there and find those connections. This is where design has benefited from communication technology like never before. The access to information and direct communication, particularly through the internet (Fischer-Baum, 2017), allows a designer to talk and

research like no other point in history, what they need to do on an individual level is utilise that access to their advantage.

A conscious designer is a good designer. Although I usually do not like blanket statements like this, I must admit that a designer who is conscious of their client, the world around them and themselves will always make a better designer than those who are not conscious or self-aware. Designers must know the world around them, this is non-negotiable. A chair will always be a chair, no matter the setting, but being conscious of the setting will elevate a particular designer above another since they are able to design with the setting or purpose in mind. A glass chair is no use in a workshop. No matter the brief or project, design offers the opportunity to learn more about one's self and the world. It opens doors to experiences and opportunities that may have not been there before. In twenty years I may be working for a design company in India or Canada where I will have learned new things about the place I am and the people I meet. This is an important step into becoming an understanding and conscious designer. Asking questions is one of the most important ways for a designer to learn.

The sharing of experience is what pushes design forward and allows new and exciting things to be discovered and created. This is why we have universities, teachers and mentors, to pass knowledge onto the next generation, not just in design but in every other industry in the world. A person cannot become a designer by just picking up a pencil and ignoring everything that came before or what is currently around. This is why research and development is an important thing to keep concurrent with the design process.

Inquisition

A Designer should question everything, even if the answer may be obvious. The way a person responds to a question, be it vocally or through text can open new doors. For example, if

asking after two features that the client mentioned, if they talk about one for two minutes and the second for twenty, they clearly have put more thought into the second and probably believe that to be the more important feature. This might not be reality, but knowing what the client believes, what you believe and what actually is, is very important. Clients don't always know what they want and we as designers guide them towards what they really want rather than think they want.

Asking questions opens up projects further, "Why is this product needed?", "Why does this kind of product need to exist?" and many more questions. The questions don't have to be "Why?" questions either, they can be "how do you currently do this task?" or "Have you tried any existing products already?". It is entirely possible that a designer could point to an already existing product and tell the client that what they are looking for already exists and that they will be able to buy that instead of going through the whole design process. Questions may also reveal things that are not as obvious or would not be mentioned by a client as it is second nature to them. In particular, safety equipment requirements are important to ask after, since a client may use safety equipment without a second thought and that may slip their mind when they are listing their needs and wants for a product.

Ethics

As designers we must know what emotions we are trying to extract from a user and why they are trying to cause those emotions in particular. At the moment the video game industry is facing new legal regulation, such as the outright ban of the sale of loot boxes in video games in Belgium (BBC News, 2018). "Loot boxes are digital grab bags that players have to spend real or in-game currency on, and the trick is that you never know what's inside." (Freedman, 2018). Certain games contain loot boxes that are designed so that they are a form of gambling and cause addiction that affect some people in the same way that traditional gambling

affects people (Lum, 2018) (Evans-Thirlwell, 2018). I personally would not work on something as manipulative as some of these video games are. If a designer doesn't believe something is moral or aligns with their personal ethics they should seek to change the product to fit their ethics and morals. I personally believe no designer should believe one thing and only practice it in their personal life and never in their professional life. If a designer isn't happy with the practices of the company they work with, I would suggest that they try and cause change in the company outlook rather than just quit as this doesn't solve a problem since the company will continue to conduct business in the same way.

Companies that continuously deny the harm of their product are most certainly companies I would elect to not work for. There are some companies, such as *Electronic Arts* and *Blizzard Activision* that I would refuse to work for until they have removed their business practices surrounding loot boxes as I believe that their approach and implementation are immoral as they have been found to be gambling but are not regulated as such by the companies themselves. Games such as *Fifa 19* have loot boxes (Hoggins, 2018) but are classified by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB, 2018) as "E" for everyone (ESRB, 2018), meaning that they are available to purchase by anyone any age. If I worked for a company that implemented such exploitative design methods I would first try to cause change within the company. Trying to help change is more important than quitting since the company would continue to exploit people after I left the job. However, if I was able to work to reduce the exploitative methods used, it would be far more productive and helpful to those who are exploited. Change can happen but sometimes it's much harder to invoke change than others.

In *Ethical By Design - A Manifesto* (Mulvenna, Boger & Bond, 2017) the authors have written multiple points "[...]as the starting point for establishing an ethical by design manifesto" (Mulvenna, Boger & Bond, 2017). They call their points "Signposts" as opposed to guidelines which I

appreciate because I interpret that to mean that they are not saying that their points are to be followed but offer direction for designers if they feel they need it.

One signpost in particular that they bring up is "Support the product or service throughout its lifespan". This goes against the practice of planned obsolescence (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). In particular *Apple* have been investigated by the French prosecutors (BBC News, 2018) since "Under French law it is a crime to intentionally shorten lifespan of a product with the aim of making customers replace it.". I personally think planned obsolescence is unethical because it is forcing consumers to purchase a new product when it may have a serious effect on their personal finances.

This issue goes hand in hand with the right to repair (Wiens, 2017). Both are an attempt from companies to make consumers pay more by either repair their product at a specific location as opposed to being able to repair it themselves or having the product become obsolete before the user has had their full use of it. Instead of inciting the consumer into buying a new product through new features or functions, it's forcing the user to buy a new product because it no longer works.

I believe that design shouldn't be about trying to leech as much money out of people as possible. Instead we should be trying to provide people with products that they want to use or find useful. We design for consumers, as they are the ones using the product, not shareholders who want another product released because it will make them more money.

Innovation

When I first read *Ten Principles of Good Design* (Vistoe, 2018) I didn't agree with his statements. However, after I started to think about

the more in-depth meaning of what he wrote I gained a further understanding of what he meant. I still don't agree with all his statements. For example, I disagree with "Good design is innovative: The possibilities for innovation are not, by any means, exhausted. Technological development is always offering new opportunities for innovative design. But innovative design always develops in tandem with innovative technology, and can never be an end in itself."

While I agree that innovative design develops alongside innovative technology, I don't agree that good design has to be innovative. A chair doesn't have to be innovative, it doesn't have to change anything about how we view or use a chair. As long as it allows someone to sit on it in relative comfort, then it is still a good product since it does as it was intended to do.

In my opinion this idea that design must be innovative goes hand in hand with the idea that many designers hold of constantly wanting to "breaking the mould". Innovation is very difficult. Often it comes to a person like a spark and all of a sudden but once it's there it sticks. A good example of continuously trying to be innovative is the company *Apple*. They revolutionised the mobile phone industry with the iPhone but for many years they have tried to be innovative when it wasn't necessary. Their removal of the 3.5mm headphone jack in the iPhone 7 brought a lot of backlash (Gilbert, 2016). This innovation wasn't good design because it alienated part of their customer base.

Limits

Something all designers must know is what their limits are, physically and mentally. For some that will be illness or health, for others it might be motivation or drive. What all of us designers must do is know these limits and difficulties and work around or with them. If someone can only work three hours a day, they best make those three hours the best three hours they can.

This is the case for myself and every other person on earth. I have limits that I am all too aware of and often they hinder my drive but more often than not I know when it's best for me to work and I do what I can to make that time worthwhile. Designers must work with what is available to them. Some days a designer may only be able to work an hour, other days it will be for eight or nine. This is where self-understanding plays a huge part in the life of a designer. They know what their life is like on an individual level, so they are the only one able to effectively dictate how much time, effort and resources they put into a project. Family, work, health and work requirement must be balanced on an individual level, no one designer can effectively dictate for another how their time should be managed, though they can encourage and offer advice on how best to do this.

I personally believe that no human should be working themselves towards their grave. We have failed as a society when people are working to the point where they are unable to rest properly or are working so much that they are unable to have a social life. Humans are social animals and if social and work life isn't balanced appropriately problems will arise. If they are focusing on the social aspect too much, then they are going to have problems in their work place, if they are focusing on work too much, they will regret what they missed out on and what could have been, which leads to degrading mental health. Some companies, such as Perpetual Guardian, are taking steps to experiment with a four day work week to see the effects of this on employee health (Roy, 2018).

I must do what I can, when I can and to the level that I can. I am not an all-knowing person and I am not the pinnacle of a designer, there will never be such thing in my opinion, but I must be happy with where I am because of the work I put into it but only if I put the effort in. I must push myself to be better, to improve and to learn. This philosophy carries over into like outside of design. I believe that all designers should strive for this, though for some it will be different and will have to change, as we are all different in our own ways.

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