



Manifestos and madness

Description

There's something careless, wanton, dangerous, arbitrary, crazed, and appealing about overstatement. The author of the recent graffiti vandalism of a painting at the Tate Modern ([Guardian](#)) has a website called the [Manifesto of Yellowism](#) which highlights the madness of all manifestos. A flourish of satirical art-speak tells us, "In the context of Yellowism, all interpretations possible in the world are realized, flattened to yellow." It seems that everything is



In his famous book *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga illustrates

the human tendency to overstate. A small child rushes in from the garden to tell his mother he has just seen a carrot "as big as God." For Huizinga: "The desire to make an idea as enormous and stupefying as possible is a typical play-function and is common both in child-life and in certain mental diseases" (p.143). (I've cited this [before](#).) Humans at their most basic like to go with the big idea, and push it to extremes, however mad, a tendency Huizinga thinks we could do well to revive.

Bringing ideas into play through exaggeration reveals obvious contradictions, as if contrary to our experience everything must be made of carrots, or yellow. To endorse such a totalising view is a

rhetorical strategy to force some issue. The [Communist Manifesto](#) did something like this. Perhaps by advocating revolution as the only solution to the domination of capitalism Karl Marx was overstating the need to bring about social transformation, by whatever means.

The totalising view activates the idea of the agonistic or conflictual nature of life, reason and experience. Rationality is all free play, or rationality is all rules. The world is all yellow, orange or green. Overstatement doesn't leave much room for pluralism. The proposition that everything is yellow rather than all the colours of the rainbow sets us thinking.

The 1909 [Manifesto of Futurism](#) by F.T. Marinetti provides a prototype for twentieth century overstatement, no less irrational.

We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.

There are banale political manifestos, but artists and cultural leaders recruit manifestos to provoke a response that hints of something creative and new. Also see the 1986 [Hacker Manifesto](#), and something like a manifesto in the declarations of the [Free Software Foundation](#). In 2006 we created an alternative Futurist Manifesto that accommodates digital media. Spot the difference.

Alternative Futurist Manifesto

1. We intend to broadcast the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.
2. Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our websites.
3. Up to now the web has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the hacker's stride, the mortal leap, the rattle of the key board.
4. We affirm that the world wide web's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of instantaneous interactivity.
5. A suped-up processor whose screen is arrayed with coloured pixels, like shards of explosive breath a roaring amp that seems to ride on data is more beautiful than a column of commands.
6. We want to hymn the user at the interface, who hURLs the lance of her signals across the ether, along the fabric of its connectivity.
7. The web designer must spend herself with ardor, splendor, and generosity, to swell the enthusiastic fervor of base data.
8. Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece. Web design must be conceived as a violent attack on unknown forces, to reduce and prostrate them before all users.
9. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent connectedness.
10. We will glorify discussion forums a the web's only hygiene a chat, debate, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for wimps.
11. We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, fanaticism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.

12. [unchanged] We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals; we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke; bridges that stride the rivers like giant gymnasts, flashing in the sun with a glitter of knives; adventurous steamers that sniff the horizon; deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing; and the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd.

We tried to make our own [Web Designers's Manifesto](#), but it's not as good.



Bibliography

- Breton, Andr ©. 1969. *Manifestoes of surrealism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
- Hughes, Eric. 2001. The cypherpunk's manifesto. In P. Ludlow (ed.), *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias*: 81-83. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1955. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Jencks, Charles, and Karl Kropf (eds). 1997. *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*. Chichester: Wiley-Academic
- Kandinsky, Wassily. 1977. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Trans. M. T. H. Sadler. New York: Dover
- May, Timothy C. 2001. A crypto anarchist's manifesto. In P. Ludlow (ed.), *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias*: 61-63. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Rapetti, Rodolphe, Richard Thomson, Frances Fowle, and Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff. 2012. *Van Gogh to Kandinsky: Symbolist Landscape in Europe 1880-1910*. Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland

Notes

- Yellow is indeed a special colour. It looks brighter than the rest. What we register as yellow is light of a wavelength of around 580 nm. At that wavelength two kinds of photoreceptors in the human eye are stimulated, the long and medium wavelength receptors (ie the red and green receptors). We don't see a reddish green however; we see a unique colour different from either, the colour yellow. Unlike the properties of the colours at the blue end of the spectrum, yellow quickly grades to orange and brown if you add in blue light, or diminish the strength of either the green or the red. Is that "yellowism"?
- According to the artist Wassily Kandinsky, yellow moves closer to the viewer, and is warmer than the other colours, especially blue.
- Unreliable online sources provide some links between yellow and madness/insanity. The only association I can think of between yellow and psychology is Freud's ideas about gold, money and faeces.
- Also see [Exaggeration](#). On colour, see [Intoxicated by colour](#) and [Nomadology and colour](#).

Category

1. Creativity

Tags

1. exaggeration
2. Futurism
3. Karl Marx
4. manifesto

Date Created

October 13, 2012

Author

rcoyne99

default watermark