

Metahaven

White Night
Before A Manifesto

May 2008
PDF version

Also available in an offset printed and illustrated edition
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White Night

Surface

0:00 AM

We are designing surface. Surface multiplies, beyond any measure of necessity, beyond the laws of demand and supply, beyond reason. The multiplication of surface, formerly called information overload, is the new reality of design. Its unit of measurement is virtual.

Surface is not territory. Territory, which is actual and geographical (for that reason limited in supply), can be contested and may become the site of an actual conflict, a physical confrontation. This cannot happen on, or to, a surface. Surface is to territory what speculative capital is to gold. Surface may be multiplied without encountering the physical limitations imposed by someone else's terrain, opinion, presence or personality. If surface is a kind of place, or site, the designer is its geographer.

Surface is folded out in order to produce value, while it is folded in to secure it. The production of surface is design's equivalent to the production of space; surface in the generic sense means flat space to display. Surface is anorexic, hyper-thin architecture.

Surface, representing no particular meaning or message, is the precondition for virtual capital, projected revenue and speculative value. Advertising surface in public space initially is merely an add-on to the already existing historical structure of a city. Gradually, surface replaces the primacy of historical structure and its territoriality. The city becomes the profit base of a virtual spin: the multiplication of surface accounts for the exponential growth of value extracted from its public space. By our being in public, by simple existence, we already automatically affirm the exposure which grants the surface infrastructure its right to the city. The inhabitants of cities are, through this mechanism, directly inscribed into the means of value production.

Mute (passive) surface is classified by the informational properties of the materials it is composed of. Titanium informs differently from

plastic, while seamless, uninterrupted black marble informs differently from fractured and broken pieces of stained cardboard. A plastic credit card which says 'Gold' or 'Platinum' has understood correctly that the informational properties of surface do not need correspond to its material worth. Surface is a transformation of the valueless into the valuable by means of psychological deception.

The image of a stock market crash is a bursting bubble, the moment when the virtual character of the capital base of virtual counterparts and derivative value is exposed.

The surface equivalent to the stock market crash is the Hollows.

The Hollows is surface without surface, the exposure of the naked infrastructure or root level system language which precedes surface itself, surface without its effects.

The American Express 'black card' is a piece of surface only available to the ultra privileged. Beyond the symbolism of precious metals, it takes the concept of value to its decisive, post-material (virtual) stage. The black card is made of titanium so it is durable rather than valuable. A world of virtual class distinction inhabits the card with its optional concierge and butler services.

As a masthead for surface, 'black is the new gold' declares the structural redefinition of the symbols of elite and luxury (and its opposite: poverty). Black surfaces form a continuum. The black in different kinds of objects for all kinds of different functions is the continuum of the single sign value of 'luxury'. It disjoints the colour black from its material properties in each separate object, transforming surface into information.

Black surface belongs to the city's cultural and financial core, the urban tissue which concentrates decision making and spending capacity and connects to other such cores. The victim of surface is the periphery (in virtual terms: off surface) which is declared nonexistent. Peripheries start where the surfaces begin to crack. The resulting logic is that a periphery, which is thus deprived of virtual assets, is gradually also denied of its infrastructural facilities. This process runs exactly parallel to the ranking systems which favour the well-connected virtual spheres on the internet over the detached twins at the outer limits.

The immaterial workers were positioned around an open-air swimming pool on the top floor of a multi-storey private members club in the most

trendy area of a global capital of finance and creative services. The labourers were sipping cocktails (Flirtinis) to the electronic heartbeat of anonymous synthi-house of unending duration. The workers, 'dressed to kill' in black Comme des Garçons, black Prada, black Jilssander, black Burberry, black Balenciaga and black Dior, had bought themselves into their belief. That belief was that they were the elite. Nowhere else had a city been so profoundly transformed by the intricate workings of capital. Skyrocketing real estate prices had made mere living here an impossibility. The creative class of immaterial labourers had responded to this by a great leap forward; they had financialized their own appearance, virtually bridging their class gap. The immaterial workers were designers. They made surfaces. They consumed and produced on the same plane, which was the surface. The motionless water surface of the rooftop pool. The bare concrete, Miesian surface of the walls. The black bags. The shiny black leather of clothes and shoes. The Blackberry phones (black, of course). The screensavers and desktops on the screens of the Blackberries.

The new elite was founded on debt, was into black, and lived in the former social housing estates. The old elite (now stuffed) was founded on gold, diamonds, noble titles and fox hunting, and used words like 'preposterous'. It inhabited monuments.

Communicative (active) surface, or screen, is classified by its capacity to reveal and open up doorways to virtual worlds. In the absence of message, it maintains a system of placeholders and default images. Mobile phones – which physically resemble minimalist jewellery – are inhabited by complex worlds appearing on the surface of their screens. In fact a phone is no longer a phone, as it performs the functions of an email tool, a web browser, an agenda, a calculator, an alarm clock, a video player, a camera and a game console. There is no principal difference between the 'phone-as-surface' with its inherent capacities to organize information and social relations, and the 'credit card-as-surface' with its capacity to order concierges and butlers.

Active surfaces are inhabited by worlds in worlds. This is a matter of calculus and inner complexity; mobile phones have surpassed the threshold between a dedicated machine (designed to perform a single task or series of tasks) and a machine which appropriates the functions and tasks previously assigned to other machines, resulting in

the emptying out of the objects that were formerly machines (like the wristwatch). The system which inhabits the object with the most active surface – the more informational, complex, all-inclusive one – has surpassed a degree of complexity, so that the tasks it performs can no longer be related to its size, its form or its weight.

Design has become the creation and management of virtual assets attached to objects (like tags, or services) or existing within objects (like worlds, or doorways).

‘User-generated content’ is a common internet term referring to what began as the add-on to a given piece of content that is rooted in the old-fashioned producer-consumer dichotomy. After the early internet, which had ‘home pages’ to ‘surf to’ – distinct locations within a geography – the social networking site and its user-generated content transforms and includes the formerly dispersed home pages into a single surface. Inside this surface, worlds exist in worlds, scenes in scenes, friends in friends, based on the reciprocal addition of more surface and more doorways to your friends and your friends’ friends surface as a mutually empowering social act. On this form of organized activity rests the macro-scale corporate appropriation of its projected revenues.

Surfaces extend everywhere, recuperating the potentiality for conflicts by offering more space for the uncontested expansion of self-referential opinion. The actual confrontation between adversaries is prevented from taking place, thus suspending the political. The potentiality for a conflict to occur directly produces production – that is, it perpetuates the immanent breeding ground for new spheres and strata, new identities, new aesthetic needs and thus new spaces for production, combined with a permanent process of tagging. Precisely the tags, or names (which have passed through preceding stages of evaluation) enable the transformation of cultural clashes into capital accumulation. This is the true power of surface, as the multiplication of virtual surfaces is a frictionless event. This mechanism maintains itself only because endless coexistence equals the permanent potential for conflicts. This is the opposite model to the real and the physical, where the natural rule perpetually refuses the territorial coexistence of incompatible alternatives.

Surface is the reincarnation of neutrality. Default friends, default faces, default desktops, default writing. In the world of surface, the confrontation with harsh realities, such as having no face, or no friends, becomes mediated and softened by the presence of placeholders, which become the new symbols for absence. Placeholders also possess the surface capability of gradually overwriting original structures and original texts.

‘Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.’
(Text in placeholder Latin, 2008)

Software does precisely what its name spells out: it softens the relationship between man and manufacture. Writing, visiting friends, searching, finding, saving: what once required at least some physical activity becomes extremely light, pleasant and effortless. Such a soft regime presents itself as unconstrained and plural. While it seems to cross all territorial boundaries, software rather functions as escapism and synchronizes employment and pleasure over, and against, labour and life. It is because software presents itself as a neutral matter, as a non-directed and infinite open space, that the question of access and circulation in such an infinite void of potentiality arises. The spectacle of participation calls upon an undifferentiated behaviour where egalitarian enactments often smell like indifference and tend to obey rules of engagement that explicitly remain unwritten. Far from a no man’s land, the matrix of virtual tools, it independently establishes new relations and hierarchies among people, which are inevitably paired with impossibilities and hegemonies.

In the continuum of surfaces, the mechanisms that define the relations between products, needs and values are transformed. The point of no return is the vanishing of those categories as separate entities and the construction of a continuum where any object (material or immaterial) may have a threefold incarnation as product, need and value. The result is the simultaneous abolition of distinctions between

production and consumption: when products generate needs, when needs trigger speculative value and when values are embodied by products, we can no longer speak of pure consumption, as consumption itself becomes a productive force, as was already the case already for Marx. Consumption directly creates new needs, calls for continuous re-evaluation (financial or symbolic), and motorizes production.

Whether recognized as labour, as entertainment, or as social interaction, the activities of consumers, end-users, designers and managers all are non-dissociable from their corresponding value as producers. The invention and subsequent emergence of a 'creative class' marks the transition to a genuinely 'post-work' understanding of labour, where labourers and consumers are invited to double their potential in value accumulation. The speculative value of this incentive equalizing production and consumption is used in various ways: to create and sustain new systems of management, to revamp derelict city quarters, or to justify operations evacuated from political choice. What becomes key is the designer's most imaginary reach; to exceed any material limitation, which enables him or her to dismiss function and to redirect the evaluation procedure to a new domain. 'Added value', after function, becomes the battle zone of a new regime that capitalizes on speculation. The flight towards the 'new' is paralleled with an ever-growing distance to the immediate needs of the designer's direct environment. We have moved from mediation – operating between products and consumers – to a much wider suppression of the legitimacy of direct relations to the point at which it seems that designers would rather gain credibility through their disconnection and distance from the physical. Relationships reach the designer as images; just as a brand manages the relationships that we have with objects through their image. Nevertheless we see this distance not as a burden, but rather as privileged ground where ideas may come to life, and so forth. This imaginary take on reality immediately produces new phantasms that can be interpreted as valid needs and beginnings for the production of surface. Designers – either by marketing or by fiction – perpetually innovate the seductive regime of surface, which stimulates other designers to do the same thing, disconnected from the non-negotiability of the brutal material ground, historical structure and political struggles on which, originally, surface itself was premised.

White Night

Value

0:00 AM

We are not useful.

Some examples:

At the 2007 Millionaire Fair in Moscow a diamond-plated Swarovski Mercedes Benz was unveiled. It looked monstrous.

The Wenger Swiss Army Knife – a symbol of functionality and minimalism – now comes in a new and expanded version. The Wenger Ultimate Swiss Army Knife has no less than 85 tools. It looks bizarre.

Use value and exchange value are not absolute, but eventually relative phenomena. An absolute exchange value, actualized through the excess of material worth in a design object, is so ostensibly valuable that it is cheap. An absolute use value, achieved by cramming every imaginable functionality into a tool, is so obviously useful that it is useless.

Rob Walker wrote in *The New York Times Magazine* on the diverging paths of function and value, using 'nonfunctional watches' as an example. Here function and value separate as there are now such a wide variety of devices with which we can read the time, such as the mobile telephone. This condition does not lead to the disappearance of the watch, but to a redefinition of its value. The watch, or its remainder, becomes a piece of jewellery dedicated to a phantom function. Now that we already know what time it is, the watch can dedicate itself completely to aesthetics, celebrity, poetry and water resistance. The Timeless Bracelet, designed by Ina Seifart in 2006, is a watch without a watch, a metal bracelet that consists of an empty, watch-shaped metal frame. This 'timepiece' captures how design may reflect upon large-scale changes (and incoherences) in its function and its value. Its designer, who worked at Louis Vuitton before starting her own studio, uses the disappearance of use value to anticipate a new need for another level of added value.

We embrace the realm of added or speculative value that is attached to objects. It is not the objects themselves, but the values inhabiting them that are fundamentally reshaped or reinvented. Objects are inhabited by values, and are at the same time, plastered or covered by them. While a

laptop or a mobile phone may be 'inhabited' by new values through the actions that are performed with them, those values are not registered in the objects' titanium shells, which curiously mimic a Dieter Rams-style simplicity from the era in which an apparatus was a dedicated machine. Compare a laptop or mobile phone that is made in China, which is inhabited with transgression and plastered with an impeccable surface, to the outer shell of the Guggenheim Bilbao – a surface inscribed with all kinds of values but inhabited by a conventional museum programme. The categories of inside and outside have become completely disconnected; like the arrival and departure gates of an airport, they register the global flows that design is now part of. The difference between outside and inside, and between form and content, administers these flows. There is little coherence in the insides and outsides of design objects and the ways in which they are programmed. As with the templates and placeholders for web 2.0-style internet pages, they may be inhabited by all kinds of values that account for the endless transformation of surface.

Design philosophies that treat form and content as a coherent set, have trouble in explaining what is going on today. We tend to design so that form and content may obey different regimes. Every part of 'surface architecture' – with its structurally identical insides that cater to the desires of the real estate market – is bargained over with different contractors in order to achieve the cheapest possible deal on materials and construction. These buildings contain kilometres of fibreglass cables in order to secure a vital lifeline to the information highway. Finally, the surface, which poses as the building's sign value, is intended to obscure the standardized template. These processes that are vital to the physical and virtual creation of design, register forces which go beyond factors specific to local situation and context. Every designed artefact bears witness to the large scale incoherence of its productive conditions.

It is clear that design is not just political, but primarily geopolitical; the new shapes and forms may arise haphazardly and by chance, but they register (in a quite formidable way) the geopolitical forces of the globalizing world.

Categories like 'good design' have become less valid as a way of speaking about objects which all have a hardware and a software aspect to them, an inside and an outside, a modality of inhabitation

and a modality of surface, which each obey different rules. Addressing these categories as the incoherent parts of a coherent whole means overcoming the contradistinction between form and content. Coherence in design today exists primarily in the recognition of large-scale incoherence.

An exhibition in a design hotel.

At first the hotel was completely designed (by designers).

Now the exhibition consists of changes to the hotel's design. The changes are made by artists.

A given situation, once it has been designed, turns out to be unsatisfactory simply because it is there; it is, among other things, no longer 'new'. Then a change has to be incorporated into that situation without rejecting it completely. It must be 'altered' – customized – not destroyed, by which our desire to reject the situation is 'bent' into implementing a 'satisfactory' change into the material reality. So design becomes the apparatus that informs value with the energy of its opposite. 'Value' can still be recognized, but there is also value accumulated in the apparent rejection of it.

Think of the Louis Vuitton bag in both its authentic and fake versions. Even though on a physical level they are yet to be differentiated, what matters is that the bare existence of the fake points to the actual reason for the outrageously high exchange value of the authentic. If it were purely a matter of logic evaluation, the gap between the respective exchange values of the authentic and the fake could never peak so high. Without the fake we cannot detect any reason for the price being substantially higher than the sum of all the (material and immaterial) labour that it relies upon. To take the fake seriously literally means to denounce the fakeness of the market value of the authentic model. The mould of the fake bag is virtual. Sealed off from any recognized realm of production, fabricated under the radar of the white market hierarchy, the copy of the authentic only needs to operate as an image, as a container of virtual attributes that are literally a bag of tags. The value of the copy is the virtual value of the original.

In the documentary *Carla's List*, prosecutor Carla del Ponte of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia travels to Belgrade and Montenegro to put pressure on local authorities to

hand over war criminals. The camera accompanies Del Ponte and her colleagues on the airplane. It's a tiny business jet and the view is blocked by two huge bags. One is the Coco Chanel bag of the Tribunal's spokesperson, Florence Hartmann, the other is Del Ponte's Louis Vuitton bag. In this brief fragment of video the ostentatious display of French fashion brands interrupts the carefully constructed image of international justice hunting down Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. The bags are not just expensive, their brand value (which is imaginary and speculative) is written all over them. Thus as a view one may become suspicious of the nature of an alliance between values and values.

The infrastructural channels that connect cities play a major role in the construction of identities in the upgrading of certain areas and in the marginalisation of others. A myriad of brands, brand remakes, unethically cheap city trips, massive torrents of entertainment file downloads, and a multiplicity of clothing and food brands, first function supplementary to, but then gradually wipe out, historical structure. The visualized utopias designed for and within real estate advertisements – the powers that turn cultures into markets – create corridors between city centres that outgrow their territorial relationship with peripheral countryside and villages, as if they were part of another realm, which, from a virtual point of view, they really are. The installation of an infrastructure of long-range connectivity, and the simultaneous degradation of short-range (intra-national) transportation and communication networks, can have disastrous consequences. While globalization lands differently in each 'destination', the reconfiguration of urbanism into centre-to-centre channels only sharpens the rupture between centre and periphery, creating new walls that can be seen as constituting inner borders.

As cities apply surface branding methods to build ever more channels in the name of cultural diversity, only the so-called cultural cores of cities get to enjoy the privileges of a cross-cultural exchange. These will remain trapped in their own self-valorizing spheres. The onslaught of city branding tags the wealthy inner cores with the seductive labels of the virtual in service of global competitiveness. This regime is carried out using names borrowed from emancipatory politics, which are used to the opposite end: what it directly services is the annihilation of pre-existing social bonds. New class divisions appear whose buying power is mobilized by, and transformed into the production of surface.

'Third Way' (post-Left and Right) politics have replaced the social body

by an endless spectrum of individual identities that no longer present themselves as 'we', and can no longer be represented by the state or addressed by politics (which progresses towards management and benchmarking). As active consumers, individuals can account for their existence and the relevance of the state purely through their economical and virtual transactions. Sociologists in previous years had already drawn the shapes of a post-Fordist political economy based on added value. Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens – inventors of the Third Way – have done so with a focus on the changing role of the individual and the self. Scott Lash and John Urry summarize:

'The thesis of the postmodern political economy is one of the ever more rapid circulation of subjects and objects. But it is also one of the "emptying out" of objects. For Giddens modernization is a process of "time-space distancing" in which time and space "empty out", become more abstract; things and people become "disembedded" from space and time.'

For Beck, contemporary society is a risk society which has shifted from the distribution of 'goods' to the distribution of 'bads'. These bads – risks and threats – do not respect the old borders and divisions of race, nation and class. Beck regards those globally distributed risks as unpredictable events which equally affect rich and poor. For him the continuation of modernity is the attempt to deal with these risks rationally now that much of the former core structures of society have disappeared. Giddens sees the project of individual identity as reflexive and in motion, continuously integrating emerging information into the individual's self-conception. His nation state is one of 'reflexively monitored systems'.

In all these transformations, an economy of design objects is implied; objects are simultaneously lifted from their origin, tradition, space, time, use-value, and exchange-value, in order to assume maximum agility in the aggregation of new needs.

Design must be invested with the potential, the intelligence and the tools to break down the new borders it has created by being borderless. It must be invested with the energy to break through the seamless surfaces of fictitious virtue which have become the new walls of the free world.

Before A Manifesto

We, the undersigned.

This sounds like a manifesto.

We take the manifesto to be a Utopian form.

Fredric Jameson distinguishes between Utopia as a genre (as, for example, a written text, or a building, or a Utopian programme of revolutionary change) and a Utopian impulse in daily life.

The 'Online Etymology Dictionary' traces the word 'manifest' back to 1374, as 'clearly revealed', coming from *manifestus* – 'caught in the act, plainly apprehensible, clear, evident' – and *manifestare* – 'to show plainly'. It refers to *manifesto*, 1644 Italian, as a 'public declaration explaining past actions and announcing the motive for forthcoming ones' – 'originally "proof", from the Latin *manifestus*.'

Manifestos are publicly stated decisions. They are written by those who have made up their minds and shall now do as they have openly declared. To write a manifesto is to put all of one's cards on the table. To write a manifesto is to draw up and sign a covenant with a self-declared truth.

This is easier said than done. If a manifesto is a decisive political act, its writers are out for some kind of power, even if such power is quite minimal and temporary. As a manifesto is a statement of principle, it demands a complete loyalty on the part of the undersigned. If the writers diverge from the manifesto's proposed path to the future, they are either disloyal to their own text or they reveal that pragmatic action has simply prevailed over principled decision. This weakens the impact and credibility of a manifesto. If a manifesto is an attempt to gain power by means of writing and publishing, it risks failing because of its potential conflictuality with the *hidden agenda* which comes naturally to the successful exercise of power.

Niccolò Machiavelli stated that 'everyone realizes how praiseworthy it is for a prince to honour his word and to be straightforward rather than crafty in his dealings; nonetheless, contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles.'

A printed object may carry the manifesto's text in an efficient way, so

that people can either read it or hear about it, or both. Manifestos are bound to the technology that provides their most effective mode of dissemination. Régis Debray calls the historical period when socialism, printed matter and the manifesto prevailed the 'graphosphere'. For all of its hubris and ambition, a manifesto is a shared text which exists in the public domain as a printed original. In hopes of achieving action, a manifesto usually relies on the frequent usage of commanding phrases like 'we must', 'we shall' and 'we will'.

But what happens to the manifesto in the age of television and the internet, the 'videosphere', in Debray's words? Does the manifesto have any future when the paradigm of print has come to a close, which does not mean the end of print but the end of the *primacy* of print? As Marshall McLuhan says with regard to the passage from manuscript to print culture: 'print multiplied scholars, but it also diminished their social and political importance'. In the same way, the internet multiplies publishing, resulting in the diminishing of the status of what is published.

A manifesto is a text with political consequences; it seizes power, but cannot be about power alone. One reason is that a manifesto's writers have usually not yet acquired much power; another reason is that as a carrier of peaceful political violence, a manifesto depends as much on poetry and song as it depends on argument. Formal issues are integral to the aesthetic event that is a manifesto. Because the manifesto's aim is to interrupt, not to affirm, its mode of speech must differ from common speech, to the extent that it allows for new words, new terms and analogies, to render the established ones obsolete.

There are two principal typologies for manifestos.

The fortified structure of arguments, and the assembly of poetic decoys.

In 2000, the Canadian designer Bruce Mau wrote a manifesto about design, printed it in a book, and published it on the internet. It is called *An Incomplete Manifesto for Growth*. It is a numbered list of sentences and process wisdom, not unlike the well-known type of statement which says that 'the first rule is that there are no rules'.

The *Incomplete Manifesto for Growth's* 43 points include: '(1) Allow events to change you. (2) Forget about good. (5) Go deep. (9) Begin anywhere. (10) Everyone is a leader. (12) Keep moving. (13) Slow down. (14) Don't be cool. (15) Ask stupid questions. (19) Work the metaphor. (18) Stay up too late. (25) Don't clean your desk. (27) Read only left-

hand pages. (28) Make new words. Expand the lexicon. (35) Imitate. (40) Avoid fields. Jump fences. (41) Laugh. And (43) Power to the people’.

This is a manifesto of the poetic type, allowing for internal contradictions and ironic deception. It places no emphasis on design as a professional activity but instead pursues mistakes, nights without sleep, uncool work, messy desktops, and laughter. (The dictum about the left-hand pages comes from Marshall McLuhan). In doing so, it simultaneously taps into Utopian form and Utopian impulse; Mau’s manifesto becomes a programme centered around the transgression of programme.

The political consequence is that the commonly accepted separations between professional and personal engagement are overruled. Design is taken out of its limited mandate of professional operations, and is brought into the realm of imagination, possibility and contradiction. The manifesto promises that the most interesting ideas will arise out of the lunatic reserve of the white night. This is the signal feature of artistic manifestos; a most famous example, the *Futurist Manifesto* written in 1909 by Filippo Marinetti, mentions it right away.

‘We have been up all night, my friends and I, beneath mosque lamps whose brass cupolas are bright as our souls, because like them we were illuminated by the internal glow of electric hearts. And trampling underfoot our native sloth on opulent Persian carpets, we have been discussing right up to the limits of logic and scrawling the paper with demented writing. Our hearts were filled with an immense pride at feeling ourselves standing quite alone, like lighthouses or like the sentinels in an outpost, facing the army of enemy stars encamped in their celestial bivouacs. Alone with the engineers in the infernal stokeholes of great ships, alone with the black spirits which rage in the belly of rogue locomotives, alone with the drunkards beating their wings against the walls.’

The *Incomplete Manifesto*’s hidden agenda is not without corporate appropriation; the recommendation to perform night labour (preferably for Bruce Mau’s studio) carries its hidden agenda in an unstated (thus Machiavellian) alliance with the post-Fordist practice of flexible labour and maximized economic productivity.

‘We, the undersigned, are graphic designers, art directors and visual communicators who have been raised in a world in which the techniques and apparatus of advertising have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable use of our talents. Many design teachers and mentors promote this belief; the market rewards it; a tide of books and publications reinforces it.’

The *First Things First 2000 Manifesto* (hereafter *FTF*) was signed by 33 graphic designers and was issued in 1999. It was printed in design magazines and put on the internet. Re-reading *FTF* more than 8 years after its release, it appears like a covenant of respectable professionals offended by the degrading standards of their trade. In comparison, *The Communist Manifesto*, first printed in 1848 by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, had more brutally stated: ‘Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.’ *FTF* made clear that it had no such modality of sacrifice to offer, rather the opposite: nearly all of its authority was based the professional achievement of the signees, who included Gert Dumbar, Ken Garland, Tibor Kalman, Rick Poynor and Erik Spiekermann.

The manifesto continues: ‘Many of us have grown increasingly uncomfortable with this view of design. Designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, a mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the very way citizen-consumers speak, think, feel, respond and interact.’

What do the undersigned offer instead?

‘There are pursuits more worthy of our problem-solving skills. Unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention. Many cultural interventions, social marketing campaigns, books, magazines, exhibitions, educational tools, television programs, films, charitable causes and other information design projects urgently require our expertise and help. We propose a reversal of priorities in favor of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication – a mindshift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning.’

While there is no doubt about *FTF*’s sincere intentions, none of the

signees publicly refrained from well-paid or commercial work after its release, none set out to make some sort of professional or personal sacrifice that would purport realization of the aims stated, and none changed the trade of advertising from without or within. Simply put: nothing changed. *FTF*'s text, of the fortress type, proved easy to conquer and dismantle for critics. Some of them hit home by targeting the misrepresentation of commercial practice, pointing out that none of the 33 undersigned, with the exception of Milton Glaser, had any real experience in advertising and therefore were professionally unqualified to attack it. Michael Bierut, a New York-based designer and partner at Pentagram, writes that they 'have resisted manipulating the proles who trudge the aisles of your local 7-Eleven for the simple reason that they haven't been invited to.' Michael Rock, partner at the New York-based graphic design firm 2x4, takes a more subtle approach. Eventually he cites the theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, targeting *FTF*'s simplifications as 'lite-radicalism': 'The identification of the enemy is no small task given exploitation tends no longer to have a specific place and that we are immersed in a system of power so deep and complex that we can no longer determine specific difference or measure. We suffer exploitation, alienation, and command as enemies, but we do not know where to locate the production of oppression.'

Indeed *FTF*'s enemy is simplified, but so is eventually every enemy. The point is that it is hesitantly and politely simplified. So that its signees are not outraged, but 'increasingly uncomfortable'. Not labourers but 'art directors'. Not selling one's soul to the devil but 'devoting one's efforts primarily to advertising'. And so on.

Some conditions at the time of writing of *FTF* were not put to the right use. With regard to the manifesto's general ties with printed matter and the graphosphere, the authors of the *FTF* omitted to realize that in order to historically make sense it must relate to the internet, despite the fact that in 1999 online advertising had hardly developed.

With regard to ideology, 1999 was as post-manifesto as one can get.

As British designer and writer Robin Kinross wrote about two years after *FTF*, 'the days of manifestos are over. In politics, no one much believes in any sharp polarity of left and right. The difficulties of action are immense. Keeping the boat afloat and away from the rocks seems all we can do.' Kinross accounts for the ideological tabula rasa of the post-manifesto world and design's general departure from 'socially engaged practice', typical for the world after the fall of Communism and

the so-called crisis of the Left. The empty place left by the collapse of the Left-Right opposition has been taken by a new concept, the 'Third Way', crafted most prominently by the sociologists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens and implemented by New Labour in the United Kingdom. Critics argue that the Third Way conceals hegemony by advocating the nonexistent possibility of a rational consensus.

Can a design manifesto still be written from the ideological void? Now that the principal tools of design – the computer and its software – have been homogenized among practitioners and democratized among people, professional distinction is an unlikely perspective for a future design manifesto to gain support. User-generated content accounts not for an amateurish supplement to a stable, professional core, but for a fundamental transformation of the workforce and the value it creates. The professional core of designers will not regain the central role it once could claim based on its mastery of tools and services unavailable to users. It seems instead more probable that *among* those professional designers, a gap will increase between those who design as celebrity, and those who design as labourer. Such a gap has already appeared in the architectural profession. Subsequently, for a design manifesto, a new alliance between designers and users may be a potentially more successful way forward. At the key of such a potential alliance is the concept of immaterial labour.

Hardt and Negri define immaterial labour as producing 'an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.' For the sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato, the immaterial labour of advertising, fashion and software development, comprises 'intellectual skills, as regards the cultural-informational content; manual skills for the ability to combine creativity, imagination, and technical and manual labour; and entrepreneurial skills in the management of social relations (...).'

A new common ground for designers and users is provided by the changing links between production and consumption, of which immaterial labour is the 'interface'. The products of immaterial labour not only materialize 'needs, the imaginary, consumer tastes, and so forth', but also generate and produce new needs, imaginaries, and tastes, so that the act of consumption is not the destruction of the commodity but the establishment of a relationship which links production and consumption (read: designer and user) together. Lazzarato holds the

social, aesthetic and communicative aspects of immaterial labour (which for him extend into the act of consumption) capable of producing direct social and political ties which escape traditional capitalist appropriation.

An example of the actualization of such ties is provided in *The GNU Manifesto*, written by Richard Stallman in 1985: 'I consider that the golden rule requires that if I like a program I must share it with other people who like it. Software sellers want to divide the users and conquer them, making each user agree not to share with others. I refuse to break solidarity with other users in this way. I cannot in good conscience sign a nondisclosure agreement or a software license agreement. '

This manifesto (GNU being the acronym for 'GNU's not Unix') stands at the beginning of free software, open source and file sharing movements. While different from Marinetti and Mau's white nights, it crosses similar boundaries. It declares the relationship between software developer and user a social one.

Manifestos may require multiple decades of incubation time, as Régis Debray accounts for with regard to the Communist Manifesto. On the internet, a manifesto is no longer contained within a printed artefact that protects its integrity. One may choose to read a manifesto only partially, and one may encounter it while searching for something entirely different. This should not harm the manifesto; ideally it should work equally well from each of its sentences, so that in some ways, its fortified structure of arguments becomes a distributed network.

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Metahaven thanks Emily Pethick and Marina Vishmidt



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Offset printed edition published by Onomatopée in 2008
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