

MANIFESTO: LETTER TO ARTISTS

Overview

Our reading and discussions this semester in the discourse of philosophical aesthetics will hopefully pave the way for some developments in your thinking about your own art practice and goals. One way to support this development is to formulate your critical view about the arts (or a specific artform) and think about what is problematic, what is newly possible, and even what is needed in your view. This thinking will serve as a touchstone for work as we go forward. Reading art manifestos are a great aid to this kind of reflection. They are impassioned expressions about the cultural status of art and particular aesthetic strategies, often calling upon other artists to change their thinking and practices in some way. They communicate deep thinking about aesthetics, and as historical documents they afford us insight into how artists sought to effect change - in the arts as well as society.

In order to bring your reflections into focus, and as preparation for our further readings, you will draft a raw manifesto. These will not be fully developed, polished manifestos but rather searching expressions of your personal thoughts on the situation of art today and the prospects for making change. The specific direction you want to take your thoughts will be up to you, but the general goal of this writing will be to passionately convey your reflections on a self-identified topic in the arts.

Prompt

Write a short manifesto in the form of a letter to artists in general (or artists in your field).

Rhetorical Situation

It might be useful to imagine this as an *impassioned* letter to be published in the opinion or arts section of the newspaper. Although working artists are the main audience, you will want to appeal to the public and prospective artists, too. This means avoiding heavy dependence on technical jargon, and explaining ideas and dramatizing key examples (if they enter into it) for a general audience. Do not imagine writing to me (the instructor) - really try to imagine the writing being made public: how do you want to be read and understood by your peers and your audience?

Preparation & Advice

Use your reading of Russolo, Breton, Hanna (on manifestos) and Levinson (on philosophical aesthetics) as resources for inspiration, though you need not emulate anything found there. You might also read some other manifestos you can find online, even some not about art. Here are some other strategies to consider (of course, you might think of others):

1. Go concrete and vivid: passionately describe and explain an exemplar, some new aesthetic form or artwork you think is important, then extract from it a key idea, feeling, principle, ethic, etc. that you see as transformative.
2. Go philosophical and abstract: propose a new (or critique some common) concept or method that you find captivating or consequential, then imagine and describe an art built on it - what change would it bring? Why does it matter, and to whom?
3. Go on an epic rant: identify a dogma or habitual practice that you think is problematic for some reason, then passionately criticize it and implore artists to change their ways. Be sure to note why this problem is important and must be addressed!

If these don't suit your writing goal feel free to pursue other strategies! You can also focus on different aspects: methods, practice, ideas, cultural/political impact, audience experience, effect on the artists/the arts, use of technology/materials/space, etc. The key, though, is to HAVE a focus - don't try to make your manifesto do everything.

Finally: have fun with it!

Submission

Bring a printed copy of your draft to class. This copy will be used in peer review. Additionally, submit a digital copy for my feedback in one of two ways:

1. Share a Google document of your manifesto with tschenold@cornish.edu, enabling comments so I can leave targeted feedback.
2. Email an RTF file as an attachment to tschenold@cornish.edu. Your word processing software will have an ability to "Save As..." to an RTF file. This will ensure that I can handle the file. Please also make sure you name the file "LastnameFirstinitial_PM.rft" (so, if I were submitting it would be "SchenoldT_PM.rft").

Evaluation

These manifestos will be evaluated for (1) how effectively they address the rhetorical situation (described above), (2) overall coherence and (3) flow. Coherent manifestos have an organizing logic or theme and stay on topic, while less coherent ones may read scattered or feel random (without expressive purpose). Manifestos with flow will build and have the force of feeling, and of course they will be free of grammatical errors, misspellings, and typos!