



From Designer to Curator: Redefining Authorship in AI-Assisted Graphic Design Practices

Himesh Baboolall

Department of Applied Arts, Faculty of Visual Arts, Banaras Hindu University.

Email: himesh_b@bhu.ac.in

Manish Arora

Department of Applied Arts, Faculty of Visual Arts, Banaras Hindu University.

Email: amanish@bhu.ac.in

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19874627>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 15-04-2026

Published: 10-05-2026

Keywords:

*Artificial Intelligence,
Authorship, Co-creation,
Curatorial Creativity,
Graphic Design*

ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the way people think about creativity and authorship in graphic design. This is why the idea of a designer as an author of inherently creative works is now being looked at critically. People now see the designer as a curator of the works made by algorithms. This paper will examine the increasing decentralization of writers between human and machine agents, drawing on Margaret A. Boden's theory of computational creativity and Roland Barthes' concept of the death of the author. AI systems can create new visual forms based on data-driven processes, but they don't have intentionality, cultural awareness, or depth of interpretation. The study proposes that modern designers can be seen as critical selectionists, interpreters, and conceptualizer of machine-generated content through a qualitative study of AI-assisted design processes. This new position projects the forthcoming paradigm of curatorial creativity as a feature of AI mediation of design. The paper ends by suggesting a re-enactment of authorship as a collaborative and layered practice, in which human agentic has been major in the construction of meaning in technologically augmented creative practices.

1. Introduction

The swift evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly changed the industry of graphic design, introducing a new picture-making and visual experimentation practice as well as creative collaboration. Machine learning tools i.e. generative adversarial networks (GANs) and text-to-image models have allowed designers to create more intricate visual outputs faster and more varied than ever before. Not only has this technological change transformed the workflow, but also brought some fundamental questions to the authorship, originality and even the essence of creativity.

Historically, graphic design has been perceived as the humanized science which is rooted in purposefulness, aesthetic judgment and interpretation of culture (Cross, 2011). The designer has traditionally taken the place of the author as an initiator of ideas and meanings through visual forms. But as AI-based design systems come into existence, this is becoming more and more destabilized. AI is now able to produce images, layouts and visual compositions based on patterns learned by massive data sets and frequently the results are as technically advanced as those produced by humans.

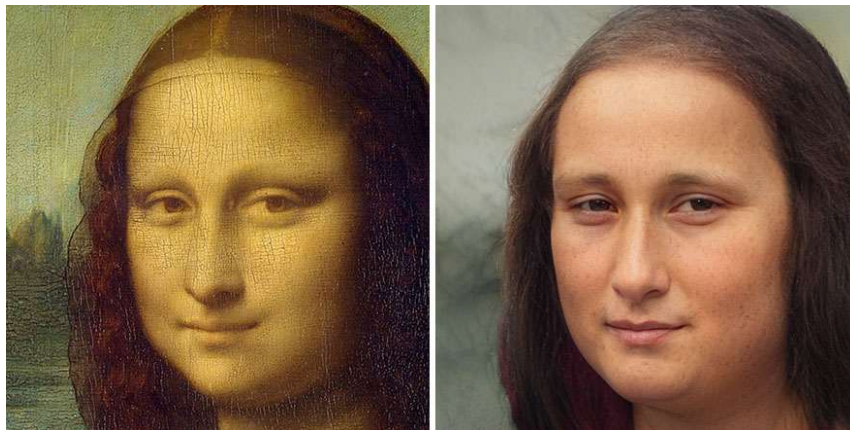


Figure 1: The Mona Lisa recreated using AI, illustrating the shift toward prompt-driven and widely accessible image generation. Source: www.boredpanda.com

This change echoes the seminal notion offered by Roland Barthes (1977) of the death of the author, which criticizes the concept of the single authorship and accentuates the existence of multiple meanings in creative texts. Authorship in AI is made even more complicated, as creative outputs are the result of a human-algorithms interaction and training data based on human production in general.

Margaret Boden (2004) also adds to this discussion by identifying various kinds of creativity including combinational, exploratory and transformational creativity most of which can be modeled by the use of a



computer program. However, in spite of all these possibilities, AI has no intentionality, consciousness and cultural experience, which makes the question of whether it can be a creative agent or not.

This paper investigates the role of the graphic designer in changing to an AI-assisted space, arguing that the role should shift to that of a curator. It explores the re-definition of authorship in collaborative systems involving humans and AI, and proposes a new paradigm, curatorial creativity, as a conceptual framework to explain the present design practices.

2. Research Objectives and Methodology

2.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Analyze how authorship in AI-assisted graphic design practices is changing.
- Examine how AI is an agent of co-creation in visual creation.
- Explore the new possibilities of the designer as curator.
- Suggest a conceptual paradigm of curatorial creativity.

2.2 Research Methodology

The methodology of the research is qualitative and interpretive, which is especially appropriate when it comes to the investigation of graphic design, visual culture, and the new technological practices. Instead of quantitative measurement, the study is aimed at achieving the understanding of the conceptual, cultural, and philosophical aspects of authorship in the contexts of AI-assisted design. Through this method, the negotiation of meaning, creativity and agency between the intelligent systems and the human designers can be explored in a more detailed way.

The methodology combines several approaches of analysis, such as:

- Theoretical study of major works in the field of creativity, authorship, and artificial intelligence based on the already existing frameworks, including computational creativity and design cognition.
- Case study research on artificial intelligence and art, and current design projects, with the focus on the allocation of authorship in human-machine relations.
- Relative assessment of human and AI-assisted design processes, including intentionality, originality and contextual interpretation.

Moreover, the research has an interdisciplinary approach, combining the knowledge of design theory, computational creativity, media studies, and cultural analysis. It allows a better appreciation of the role that AI is not just revolutionizing design processes, but also upending the theoretical principles of authorship. The approach allows a more subtle and critical analysis of the changing role of the designer as curator in the modern graphic design through placing AI-aided practices in the broader socio-cultural and technological context.

3. Case Study Analysis

3.1 Case Study 1: *Portrait d'Edmond de Belamy* (2018)



Figure 2: The first-ever original work of art created using artificial intelligence to come to auction, Portrait of Edmond de Belamy (2018). Source: Christie's Images Ltd.

Among the most popular works of AI-generated art, there is *Portrait d'Edmond de Belamy* by the Paris-based group Obvious created with the help of a GAN model. The painting was sold at Christie's at a price of \$432,500, putting the issue of AI in the creative production into the limelight around the world. The portrait which was produced based on the database of historical paintings breaks the conventional view of authorship. The human collective filtered the data, chose the outputs and placed the work in an artistic context, although it was the algorithm which generated the final image. GANs, as Elgammal et al. (2017) explain, are able to produce new images, but they are not aware of what the pictures are supposed to represent. This example is an illustration of the movement to distributed authorship when the creativity is not stored in the agent but rather is the result of human and machine interaction.

3.2 Case Study 2: AI-Generated Design

In the modern graphic design field, AI-based applications like Midjourney and DALL·E 2 have opened up the potential of visual creation to a whole new level of complexity, allowing designers to create



complex images based on text prompts. These systems are based on deep learning systems that are trained on large data sets of images and text and can process linguistic input to generate visually plausible output (Ramesh et al., 2022). This has led to the increasing mediation of the design process to include language, selection, and iteration instead of just manual construction.

One of the most prominent instances of this change is a magazine cover, generated by AI the first in the history of Cosmopolitan using DALL·E 2 in 2022. Cover, which is conceptualized by human designers and editors and visually created by AI, represents a surreal astronaut figure in a stylized and colorful landscape.



Figure 3: DALL-E 2 Makes Its First-Ever Magazine Cover for Cosmopolitan.

Source: cosmopolitan.com

The project is a turning point in the mainstream design practice as AI was not only utilized as a supporting tool but rather involved in the creative process. Although the AI provided several visual options, the end result was shaped by human intervention- editors and designers edited prompts, chose the desired results and edited the visual narrative to suit the identity and needs of the magazine.

In this respect, the role of the designer is significantly changed. The designer does not paint every single visual element, but is instead involved in a process that entails:



- Working on the specific and creative prompts to instruct the AI system.
- Comparing and choosing the outputs among a variety of variations generated.
- Revising and making compositions contextual so as to be coherent and relevant.

The workflow is indicative of a larger trend towards what can be characterized as curatorial involvement, where creativity is manifested in decision-making, interpretation and framing of context, as opposed to being performed by hand alone. The cultural production in the era of artificial intelligence, as Manovich (2019) suggests in his discourse on the so-called AI aesthetics, is more and more influenced by the algorithmic process that creates enormous realms of visual possibilities. The designer, thus, is in this widened domain as an interpreter, manipulating, sifting and distorting outputs to form a significant visual discourse.

Nevertheless, although AI-generated designs are highly formal, they are still based on datasets and parameters, which they use to generate a design. Lived experience, cultural specificity, and intentional meaning are the factors that limit the scope of AI-generated contextually based design solutions. Computational systems can provide some elements of creativity by being able to simulate combinational and exploratory processes but they do not provide the deeper cognitive and experiential aspects that direct human creative practice (Boden, 2004).

The *Cosmopolitan* cover, therefore, depicts a defining shift in the concept of authorship in graphic design. Authorship is no longer seen as a place within the creative act but is dispersed within a web of human and machine additions. The art of the designer is not to create a single, final work but to make a system of selection and refinement work, strengthening the appearance of the designer as a curator in AI-assisted spaces.

3.3 Case Study 3: AI in Branding and Visual Identity

The use of AI-assisted tools is becoming more and more popular in branding and visual identity design, with the ability to create logos, typography, and visual systems instantly via automated processes. Designer tools like Looka and Brandmark enable designers to generate a variety of different designs using pre-set inputs, much faster than ideation in the early stages. Although these products tend to exhibit formal balance and aesthetic integrity, they are less likely to have greater narrative meaning, culture-specificity, and strategic purpose. According to Amabile (1996), creativity involves not novelty but also relevance and suitability to a particular situation - qualities that AI cannot attain fully.

One such case is the *Nutella Unica* campaign by Nutella (2017) when the algorithms created millions of different packages designs.



Figure 4: Every label was only used once and consumers who bought one, now own a unique piece.

Source: www.retaildetail.eu

The visual identity of each jar was different, demonstrating the possibilities of AI to create a high degree of variation and personalization. Nonetheless, the overall brand story, positioning and emotional impact were all well guided by human designers thus making it consistent throughout the campaign. Since AI-generated design can be based on the patterns identified in the existing data, according to Manovich (2019), it does not always have a culturally grounded meaning.

This example indicates that there is a great change in the role of the designer, instead of creating, he/she decides and gathers. Designers must analyze, filter and optimize AI-created outputs, getting them into alignment with brand values and expectations of the audience. In such a way, as AI provides more efficiency and opens up additional creative opportunities, human intervention is necessary in the process of developing meaningful and contextually brand identities.

4. Discussion

4.1 Rethinking Authorship in the Age of AI

The above case studies, *Portrait d'Edmond de Belamy*, AI-generated magazine design with the help of DALL·E 2 and the example of AI-assisted branding with *Nutella Unica*, all demonstrate a profound change in the concept of authorship in the modern graphic design. Authorship in AI-mediated practices,



instead of being assigned to a single author, is a networked, layered phenomenon, with many agents and processes involved. These include:

- The conceptualizer and decision-maker are the designer.
- Generative system as algorithm
- The data as the source of visual patterns learned

Here, in the example of *Portrait d'Edmond de Belamy*, the GAN model and the human group that selected the final output and curated the data have a share in authorship. Equally, the AI-generated Cosmopolitan cover shows how designers direct the design process by engineering prompts and selecting, as opposed to actually building the visual design. The large variability in branding, like in the case of *Nutella Unica*, is made possible by AI, but the human designers maintain the control of the narrative coherence and brand identity. These instances support the notion that the creative output ceases to be the result of authoritarian authorship but rather a joint action of humans and machines.

This change is very much congruent with assertion of Barthes (1977) that authorship is decentered in which meaning is not a priori but created during the interpretation process. This decentering is further developed in AI-assisted design where the designer is no longer a singular creator, but an assembly of human will, algorithm and culturally embedded data. Since, according to Manovich (2019), AI-based cultural production is based on recombining existing visual forms, it puts a strain on the ideas of originality and authorship.

Additionally, the theory of computational creativity proposed by Boden (2004) is that although AI systems can produce new outputs by using combinational and exploratory processes, they lack intentionality and self-consciousness. This solidifies the differentiation between generation and authorship whereby the machine is used to generate possibilities, but meaning is constructed as a result of being interpreted and placed in context. On the same note, Elgammal et al. (2017) believe that generative systems are able to out-of-sample patterns to generate new visual attributes, although they rely on human-specified parameters and datasets.

Combined with the above points, it can be argued that the concept of authorship in the era of AI is not supplanted but re-organized. The work of the designer changes to the work of an originator into a role of a mediator who navigates, selects and refines the outputs of the algorithm. This redefinition prefigures a more distributed and dynamic definition of creativity where authorship is distributed among and across interconnected systems as opposed to being vested in a single creative agent.



4.2 The Emergence of Curatorial Creativity

The changing nature of AI-assisted design is putting the designer in a more and more curatorial role such as one who chooses, organizes, interprets and contextualizes visual content instead of merely creating it. Such a change can be theorized as curatorial creativity whereby the generation and selection of ideas is shared between generation and selection. Within this kind of a framework:

- Imagination is in choice and decision and not actual production.
- Meaning is made up in an interpretation and framing of contexts.
- The designer is the mediator between machine-generated processes and human cultural situation.

This change is indicative of a wider shift in the creative practice in the digital era. Modern cultural production, as Manovich (2019) puts forward, has been characterized by having to work with huge amounts of data and the possibilities generated by algorithms and thus necessitates a practitioner to be selective and manipulative when it comes to filtering and shaping the outputs. Likewise, Cross (2011) points out the importance of design savvy, which lies in the capacity to frame problems and make good decisions, and which are also central to the generative processes that are automated.

According to Lubart (2005), this paradigm is termed as computer-assisted creativity whereby technology does not substitute the human creativity but rather enhances it. In AI-enhanced setting, this amplification is more pronounced as designers can work with systems that can generate huge amounts of visual variations. The creative process thus changes to orchestrating possibilities where designer decides the relevance, coherence and communicative intent.

Moreover, McCormack and d’Inverno (2012) point out that computational systems are able to facilitate the creative exploration, but they do not provide intrinsic motivation and understanding of the context. This adds to the significance of human agency in giving meaning and value to outputs generated. By this, the creativity of curatorial work is not a lesser kind of authorship but a broadened type of authorship, it involves critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and interpretation.

Accordingly, the rise of curatorial creativity will mean a rebranding of the design practice wherein the designer will be positioned on the border of human intuition and machine potentiality, and influence the results of design through choice, refining and contextualization, instead of authorship.



4.3 Limitations of AI as a Creative Agent

In spite of its highly developed generative powers, AI is essentially inadequate as a creative agent in a number of crucial ways:

- Lack of intentionality
- Lack of emotional intelligence.
- Failure to recognize culture.

The AI systems work by learning and recognizing patterns through statistical means, and give an output in accordance with the correlation of the training data and not with the intentional will or deliberate expression. Computational systems, as Boden (2004) claims, can make some simulation of certain elements of creativity, most notably combinational and exploratory creativity, however, they lack actual understanding, self-awareness or intrinsic motivation. This is an essential difference in the field of design, where creativity does not merely consist of creating new forms, but also in expressing meaning, emotion and cultural value.

Moreover, emotional Intelligence (EI) is an essential aspect of graphic design especially in the context of influencing the audience perception and engagement. With personal experience, empathy and cultural knowledge, human designers create visuals to appeal to a certain audience-abilities that AI systems cannot replicate in an authentic way. Creativity is closely related to intrinsic motivation and relevance to context, which according to Amabile (1996) are essential to creativity and are not addressed by the current AI systems.

Moreover, AI is too reliant on the available data to interact with a wide variety or underrepresentation of cultural stories. According to Manovich (2019), the results produced by AI can be associated with the predominant visual schemes in the training material and homogenization, as well as the absence of cultural specificity. This is especially important in the area of branding and communication design, where the cultural subtlety and symbolism are crucial.

These limitations help to underline the idea that AI can be used as a great creative generator, but it cannot be a creative agent on its own. Rather, it reaffirms the need to have human presence in the process of design direction, interpretation and contextualization, so that creativity is not lost in meaning, purpose and cultural sensitivity.



4.4 Conceptual and Ethical Implications.

The rebranding of authorship in AI-mediated design practices provokes a set of rather complicated ethical and theoretical concerns that question the current models of creativity and ownership. Key concerns include:

- Who is the owner of the AI-generated work?
- What is the originality of the output of an algorithm?
- What is the moral standing of datasets of human-made material?

These are questions brought about by the inherently collaborative characteristics of AI systems, whereby outputs are created as a result of human input, algorithm activities, and existing datasets. In this way, even the conventional concept of authorship as the individual originality and creative will is growing more challenging to implement. As it is not clear whether the rights should belong to the user, the author of the algorithm or to the entire group of creators whose work is the source of the training data, scholars have claimed that AI-generated works complicate intellectual property laws (McCormack et al., 2019).

The question of originality is also debatable. As AI systems create outputs based on the combination of patterns of existing data, their outputs can be considered derivative, and not entirely original. Oden (2004) agrees that as much as computational systems are able to come up with novel combinations, this is a different phenomenon compared to human creativity which is based on intent and understanding of the context. This puts the validity and worthiness of AI-generated design in practice into question.

Additionally, there exist ethical concerns about consent, attribution, and representation with the use of large-scale datasets. Most models of AI are trained using publicly-accessible images and designs without seeking consent of the original creators, and this raises the question of exploitation and the theft of creative work (Manovich, 2019). The matter is of special concern to the fields of graphic design, where visual styles and cultural symbols have certain connotations and backgrounds.

All of these issues demonstrate the necessity of developing new ethical and intellectual property frameworks and models capable of accommodating the intricacies of AI-mediated creativity. With the further development of AI, it will be necessary to develop a set of rules that should be fair, transparent, and considerate of human input, as well as allow the transformative nature of intelligent design system.



5. Conclusion

The incorporation of Artificial Intelligence into graphic design signifies a profound evolution in creative practice, contesting conventional concepts of authorship and originality. This paper has shown that AI can make things that look good, but it can't replace the ability of humans to make meaning, interpret culture, and be creative on purpose.

The transition from designer to curator signifies a more extensive transformation of creative roles in the digital era. This study presents the notion of curatorial creativity, establishing a framework for comprehending how designers operate within AI-assisted environments.

The future of graphic design will be based on collaboration between humans and AI, where technology is used to open up new creative possibilities while people still have the power to shape meaning and context.

Additionally, this research emphasizes the necessity for ongoing critical examination of the developing interplay between technology and creativity. As AI systems become more advanced and integrated into design workflows, it is important for designers, researchers, and teachers to rethink how they teach, their moral standards, and how they do their jobs. It will be very important to stress interdisciplinary dialogue and human-centered design thinking in order to make sure that technological progress does not make visual communication less rich in terms of culture, emotion, and ideas, but instead makes it in more meaningful and responsible ways.

References

- Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context*. Westview Press.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). Fontana Press.
- Boden, M. A. (2004). *The creative mind: Myths and mechanisms* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Cross, N. (2011). *Design thinking: Understanding how designers think and work*. Berg.
- Elgammal, A., Liu, B., Elhoseiny, M., & Mazzone, M. (2017). CAN: Creative adversarial networks. In *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Computational Creativity* (pp. 96–103).
- Lubart, T. (2005). How can computers be partners in the creative process? *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 63(4–5), 365–369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2005.04.002>



- Manovich, L. (2019). *AI aesthetics*. Strelka Press.
- McCormack, J., & d’Inverno, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Computers and creativity*. Springer.
- McCormack, J., Gifford, T., Hutchings, P., Llano, M. T., Yee-King, M., & d’Inverno, M. (2019). In a silent way: Communication between AI and human musicians. *AI Magazine*, 40(2), 35–48. <https://doi.org/10.1609/aimag.v40i2.2846>
- Ramesh, A., Dhariwal, P., Nichol, A., Chu, C., & Chen, M. (2022). Hierarchical text-conditional image generation with CLIP latents. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2204.06125*.
- Russell, S., & Norvig, P. (2021). *Artificial intelligence: A modern approach* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Wheeler, A. (2017). *Designing brand identity: An essential guide for the whole branding team* (5th ed.). Wiley.

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Mona Lisa recreated using AI, illustrating the shift toward prompt-driven and widely accessible image generation. Source: www.boredpanda.com 68

Figure 2: The first-ever original work of art created using artificial intelligence to come to auction, Portrait of Edmond de Belamy (2018). Source: Christie's Images Ltd. 70

Figure 3: DALL-E 2 Makes Its First-Ever Magazine Cover for Cosmopolitan. Source: cosmopolitan.com 71

Figure 4: Every label was only used once and consumers who bought one, now own a unique piece. Source: www.retaildetail.eu 73