



death of the  
artist

Justin J Bartlett

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*Death of the Artist*

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# introduction

This work is comprised of a collection of short studies on the subjects of art, design and, what I label, *post-ideological*<sup>1</sup> phenomena. The book is intended to form a study and critique of contemporary views concerning art and visual culture today. I also aim to analyse, explore and question the concepts of *Art*<sup>2</sup> and *The Artist*<sup>3</sup> in a more fundamental and definite praxis.

The arrogant nature of the title to this work is intentional. I hope to imply an obvious and deliberately obtuse reference to Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author*. The work is somewhat similar in subject matter and I make reference to Barthes' work. However, *Death of the Author* postulates the metaphorical death of the author as the creator of a piece/work-of-art. Barthes hypothesises about how the author's intentions are not to be considered, as they are in fact irrelevant to the piece, on the grounds that "To give a text an Author"<sup>4</sup> and consign to it one single definitive meaning "is to impose a limit on that text". I conjecture about a different dimension or façade of The Artist, *not* as a creator of artwork, but as the creator of Art (The metaphysical creator of transcendental self-expression). I strongly agree with Barthes' hypothesis and, in some respects, it has helped lead to mine. The "death" I talk about however, is a somewhat more literal collapse than that of Barthes' author (artist). I conjecture that The Artist is not, in actuality, what we suppose it is. And that it does not exist or have any basis in reality, space or time. The Artist as creator of Art is not a physical person or being, but rather a much more complex series of psychological states, events and phenomena that, themselves, present us with a range

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<sup>1</sup> *Post-ideological* - See Glossary of Terms and Phraseology for definition

<sup>2</sup> *Art* - See Glossary of Terms and Phraseology for definition

<sup>3</sup> *The Artist* - See Glossary of Terms and Phraseology for definition

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes – *Death of the Author*

of theoretical paradoxes and superpositions that we must try to make sense of if we ever hope to understand Art.

In the case of Art I believe that we are greatly misunderstanding its point, meaning and function as an intrinsic part of civilisation. Art as human expression is finding itself with less and less space and relevance in modern-day culture. With dynamic capitalism, technological dependence, and Internet fetishism, are we loosing interest in myriad forms of artistic self-expression? Could this loss have detrimental effects on society and humanity?

This study also ponders and questions the reality of Art. What is art's reality? Can it be shaped or sculpted? Does it exist? I feel these are important questions to contemplate and are necessary to ask if we are to gain a true understanding of Art and its functions. We must also inquire about Art's potency. Is Art pure? Does true, artistic expression exist? Can Art ever be absolute? Is its existence or manifestation truly incomprehensible?

In the case of design culture, we are witnessing the deterioration and disappearance of conceptual, considered graphic design. Graphic design and popular visual culture in general is becoming increasingly more concerned with superficial aesthetics. I surmise that we are living in, and witnessing, a post-ideological generation of designers/design. As we study contemporary design culture we can see that this phenomenon is indeed manifest. This should be worrying, as I fear it is causing the stagnation of modern visual/design culture, leading to plagiarism, un-original, un-inspiring, often impotent design concepts. I feel the remedy for this is: acknowledgement and understanding of this phenomena, and advocacy of *Neo-ideologism*<sup>5</sup> within design culture. This must be, firstly, recognised. And secondly, acted upon immediately in order to rule-out the now seemingly inevitable *heat-death* of visual culture.

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<sup>5</sup> *Neo-ideologism* - See Glossary of Terms and Phraseology for definition

on art

a | art's necessary futility

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*That which comes closest to describing the indescribable, next to silence, is music. – Aldous Huxley*

[To start this study I will offer a brief definition of “Art”: *Art is the nonpareil that transpires when attempting to express human-emotion. The emotions expressed through artistic methods (in the creative process) cannot be promulgated by other means (other forms of communication), namely through language. Inability to communicate these intricate feelings leads one to engage in artistic endeavours: expression through Art. It is the metaphysical process of true self-expression that constitutes “Art”.*]

**A**rt and its critique are pointless. If ones feelings or emotions are so profound, so indescribable that their expression must take the form of Art (be it fine Art or music/performance Art) then any attempt to critique the physical fruits of these endeavours as objects or works-of-art, must necessarily be rendered utterly useless, hollow, and indeed impossible. To hold these physical entities as works-of-art, in the sense that they are themselves Art, is truly missing the point. In reality, it is the physical act (the performance) of creating the piece that is expressive. The *modus operandi*, both mentally and physically, of painting, drawing or composing is Art. The *process* is the expression (Art), and not the final “artwork”. The finished outcome or canvas cannot be in and of itself expressive, in the literal sense, as it is an inanimate, unconscious object. Artwork *can* be said to be expressive in a metaphorical sense i.e. “*The brush strokes used are expressive.*” However, the object is not itself the expression. It has come into being as a *result* of expression. The painting or artwork is only the excreta. It is the waste matter of an emotional urge to communicate, or release, a feeling. This, I feel, makes art’s analysis and critique appear quite fruitless.

To express or convey sentiments concerned with how art (the physical article/object) makes one (the viewer) feel, in words, is also futile, as these emotions can never hope to be sufficiently summed up with inadequate syntactical structures. Furthermore,

prior personal experience will change and affect the emotions raised in voyeurs when viewing artwork. Since no two persons can ever have identical personal-experience-states, the emotions raised within one individual will consistently differ from those stirred in any other observer, and so true cognisance of another party's feelings is, at least, limited if not impossible.

Art has no agenda other than self-expression, and this articulation serves no purpose except, possibly, a momentary relief or discharge of exuberance for The Artist. Art serves no purpose, yet the feelings one encounters whilst looking at or creating it, can be inspired and profound. This artistic inspiration has no use and does not require one. In fact, it *needs* to be void of purpose, for it is in pointlessness, that Art's true beauty lies. For *only* from the void, in the vacuum of intention, can we ever hope to achieve pure self-expression.

It may be noted that the act of expressing oneself is purging and cleansing but these senses are merely the side effects of expression. Expression itself has no application; it does not need one. This is Art's necessary futility.

**(Art is expression; expression is pointless; Art is futile.)**

It could be said that expression *is* the purpose of Art. This would demonstrate a misunderstanding of what Art is. Art *is* self-expression. And these two abstracts/words should be equivalent and interchangeable. Art cannot be the reason of itself, so therefore the point of Art cannot be expression and *vice versa*. To expound that *Art* is the justification of *Art*, is to concede that it has no function.

Indeed we should not be concerned with what The Artist is, or was, trying to convey (emotionally) but rather with how *we* interpret the work and what emotions it raises within us. To clarify: these emotions are important *only* to the one who experiences them. There is no necessity, and it is *a priori*

impossible, to divulge these feelings, or even understand them and their significance. We should enjoy the experience of viewing artwork and be fully aware and mindful of the stirred concoction of emotions induced, as they are deep, penetrating, enigmatic and insightful. Moreover, to reiterate the preceding, no two people can ever experience the same emotional reactions to a given work, and so, will not be able to thoroughly comprehend the feelings of the other. Hence discussion and commentary on Art (in regards to emotional content or impact) is useless.

[In common parlance the word “art” is often used interchangeably with “artwork”. However, I do not feel this is helpful when trying to understand Art and its machinations. We must recognise the distinction between the two concepts and, for the purpose of clarification and adherence to personal ideology, in this text I will always use “artwork” or “art” when referring to the physical objects/articles that are manifest as the result of expression; and “Art” (capitalised) as the action, or process mentally or physically, of expressing oneself emotionally.]

## *[Expression in Art and Design]*

Expression in relation to Art and expression within design are distinct phenomena. Art is expression of a considerably deeper, personal, profound and (more importantly) absolutely pointless, level of articulation. Whereas with the discipline of graphic design, expressive content or expression of personal ideology is used (and needed) in order to give enhanced meaning and/or significance to a design. These expressive or ideological elements are necessary for preventing or eliminating *post-ideological* phenomena such as plagiarism. Here (in the case of design) we see that the elucidation of “expression” is more synonymous with “dissemination” as opposed to “emotion” or “feeling” (in the case

of Art). In both cases the final text/piece is a by-product of expression and not in and of itself expressive.

It must be noted that the expression of ones personal ideology is not equivalent to the *projection* of personal ideology (onto the voyeur). In fact, these practices are contrary to each other. The former uses personal concept (ideology) as a metaphysical scaffold or foundation on which the designer can build upon in order to construct an original, effective design concept. Conversely, the latter notion uses design methodology as the chassis. Design techniques become the vehicle, upon which, ideology can be delivered and presented to the viewer i.e. government or party propaganda. The latter should not be practiced or condoned.

So we see the distinction as follows: With Art, expression *is* Art; with design, expression and ideology are only *catalytic* to its conception. Art is *defined* by self-expression. Design is not.

# b | artistic reality

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*"Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape It." - Bertolt Brecht*

If we see Art as a hammer with which to shape reality we touch on a vastly more extensive, tangled subject. Reality. What is reality? Or rather, what is artistic-reality? Can it be “shaped”? Moulded? If artistic reality is relative, does this mean it is illusory or non-existent? Reality, by definition, cannot be relative or subjective. This would, of course, be contrary to its definition. However, what if the *reality* of reality is indeed that it is both relative *and* subjective? That it is not one fixed expression, notion or abstract. Maybe the *reality* of reality is that it is malleable, a theoretical quantum entanglement of two contradictory ideas, its truth (reality) being justified, and indeed, defined by its own contradiction. The fabric of reality is merely a metaphysical, human construction. I feel this *is* the truth of artistic reality, as it must be defined within the limits of human expression. Hence, the reality of Art is that it is un-real. Art can only be defined as undefined: indefinite, shadowy, and vague. This is Art. It can know no limits, as human expression is truly limit-less. Since the peripheries of human expression tend towards infinity; so too are the boundaries of reality, infinitely large. For a boundary to be elucidated as infinitely large is incomprehensible and so we can say that there are none; they cease to be.

To say that there are no boundaries defining or restricting Art is to stipulate that there are no two humans that share identical feelings or personal experience. Therefore no expression (Artistic act) can ever be the same as another, by definition. It is personal experience that shapes us, and therefore also shapes the outcomes of our expressions (our Art). Since no person can possibly have an identical culmination of life experience as another, then no two separate expressions can be identical either. Personal experience and psychology in the individual is so complex, far reaching and all encompassing that no individuals can be indistinguishable. The possibility of personal-experience-states must be infinite. I would also go further and claim that even the same person is incapable

of producing exactly the same expression on more than one occasion. For example: If an artist creates one artwork followed by another piece, just a few minutes later, there has been an intermission and more experiential build-up where that person has existed and therefore experienced more. This happens every second and cannot be avoided unless an individual were able to transcend from the constraints of time (a super-dimensional being). The expression that culminated in the previous Art-piece will also have amassed and subsumed more insight into the Artist's psyche, subtly changing it irreversibly. This means that "The Artist" (the experiential identity) is different to that of the person who created the first piece. The person, in the purely physiological sense, is the same but The Artist (in the psychological sense) is not. The two pieces of work are created by the same person but different Artists. No separate pieces of artwork can *ever* be created by the same Artist. This is how Art must function. To define "The Artist" in the sense that I use here we can see it as follows:

*The Artist is not a/the person. It is merely the state of the person's experiential identity at a particular, specified point in time.*

This is part of Art's reality. If I were to conjecture further, by the same logic, it could be said that even every brushstroke, musical note, pencil line or dance move is created or crafted by a different Artist. If any time elapses at all, no matter how small the increment, there has been additional experience amassed into the creator's subconscious, changing it forever. Thus The Artist is ever evolving, perpetually changing, being moulded by the passage of time and warped by the experience of life. The Artist exists for just a few fleeting moments, to then go on and die; disappear forever, leaving behind only a single fruit, the consequence and proof of their existence. The work-of-art.

To pursue this hypothesis to extended reasoning: If Art is not real, we might legitimately ask: Does “The Artist” exist? Can the creator of *nothing* be the creator of *something*? I hypothesize that infinite nuances and shades of The Artist exist but as it is the passage of time that destroys them, The Artist’s existence is also its death. As The Artist comes into being it is immediately annihilated with a diminutive passing of space-time; its existence is equally its own annihilation. The death of The Artist is also the birth of the next and so both death and birth are inextricably linked; two links in an infinite chain of construction and destruction. As *time* changes The Artist, it cannot exist within the realm of space-time. Yet it must also necessarily exist, unconstrained by the dimensions of space and time. Thus, it can be said that The Artist both exists *and* does not at the same time; its existence and its non-existence being in superposition: The Artist is Schrödinger’s cat.<sup>1</sup>

This is the profound and esoteric weight of Art. Maybe we realise and truly understand this significance deep in our subconscious. Could it be the reason we appear to be, on occasion, intuitively drawn to look upon artwork for no obvious, explicable reason? Does the work resonate an apparent supernatural, ethereal energy or nostalgia? There is certainly a romance to be found in art by simply knowing about the creator (not The Artist) of the piece. It gives us a personal connection and helps us conjecture and wonder about what is hidden or expressed within the work. An artwork provides us with a brief insight into the psyche of the creator, a connection with The Artist who no longer exists and can never again materialise, a glimpse back in time, the evidence of The Artist who never existed.

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<sup>1</sup> *A hypothetical thought experiment devised by physicist Edwin Schrödinger to describe quantum weirdness. The subject of the experiment (a cat) is proclaimed to be both dead and alive at the same time, existing in superposition.*

# C | digital discharge

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*"Technology, like art, is a soaring exercise of the human imagination."  
- Daniel Bell*

Recent advances in technology and inventions such as Painting Fool have raised interesting questions and inflamed debate about Art, its significance and its future. “*Can a machine ever be capable of creating art?*” has become a topic of much debate among artists and scientists alike. Many people seem disturbed or confused by the possibility of an unconscious machine creating artwork and it is a truly fascinating conception. However, I feel that views regarding the capability of machines to produce Art are slightly irrelevant, missing and concealing a more profound point.

In this discussion both sides, to use the old proverbial turn of phrase, are “unable to see the wood for the trees”. Machines are incapable of producing Art (at this moment), as without a conscience they are unable to express themselves and it is this self-expression that constitutes Art. If machines were to ever develop consciousness then they could, without question, be capable of expressing themselves and therefore it is also plausible that they could create true Art and works-of-art as the consequence of their self-expression.

The work that is produced, although creative in the simplest definitive sense, is irrelevant and nothing more than inexpressive, meaningless, superficially aesthetic, digital discharge. But this is really a digression or tangent along which we will not proceed as what we are missing here is the real *pièce de résistance*; the true, sincere, pure product of artistic-expression in front of our very eyes. **The machine.** In this case our shallow or ignorant misunderstanding of what constitutes Art is masking the real masterpiece. Does the *machine* not embody the true expression of human want and desire (Art)? How could the conception and creation of such a thing *not* be the fruit of Art? The Artistic, physical-embodiment of the creator’s desires. The object born of *pure* expression. *Pure* Art. The subconscious, unintentional product of humanity’s curiosities and complexions. The

creator/scientist/engineer (and equally the human race) can be said to be the Artist(s), the unwitting, unsung architects of absolute expression. Furthermore, does its subconscious manifestation not present us with a much more deeply profound, innocent and unequivocal form of expression? Free from ideology, aspirations and preconceptions of Art, yet still quite purposefully created? Maybe *pure* self-expression is impossible to attain unless articulated subliminally in this manner. Have we stumbled upon the only way to create pure, absolute Art/art without realising it? This oblivious manifestation is of importance and should not be overlooked or diverted by fruitless discussion of whether the works produced by the machine are Art. They are not. *This* debate is based, I believe, on ignorance and misunderstanding.

Could the aforementioned hypothesis not be said of *all* technology? Is it possible that the phenomenon of technology is a global Artistic movement that has always been overlooked? Everything that humanity wants and stands for is embodied and expressed in our technologies. We could use technology as the evidence, on the basis of which we might psychoanalyse the human race. And what a damning psychoanalysis it would be, demonstrating a susceptibility to, and a penchant for, narcissism, cruelty, war, consumerism and greed. These are the emotions we express through our weapons, vehicles, medicines, communication devices, social networks and poisons. The technologies and sciences are the paintings; humankind – the Artist; narcissism and war - the expression. Is it such an exceedingly pure expression that we are unable to conceive of it as an expression (Art) at all? Are we unable or unwilling? Perhaps we cannot except that technology may be the artwork born of the most profound Artistic expression we have ever created.

This stated it seems we must come to terms with the inevitable conclusion of this theory: That we can never create *pure* Art or *truly* express ourselves unless unaware and oblivious to our

endeavours. When *trying* to express “us” the outcome is never a *true* expression, precisely because that is what we are trying to do. This is the paradox: we are incapable of creating a true expression (pure Art) if that is what we *intend* to do, as our intention necessitates awareness. Awareness of our exploits dilutes, taints or eradicates true expression. Pure Art cannot exist in the presence of consciousness. It is the child of the sub-consciousness, analogous to the quantum physical, sub-atomic world; the observation determines the outcome. The consciousness defines the expression. As soon as we *try* to generate true expression it becomes contaminated and the truth instantly evaporates, equivalent to *waveform-collapse* observed in the sub-atomic realm.

The apotheosis of this chapter can be termed *artistic indeterminacy* - pure Art is indeterminate as our wish to express diminishes our ability and potential to create Art in its absolute form.

[What we might term as “traditional” or conscious expressive methods of Art (painting, composing etc.), are not ineffective forms of expression and they constitute an important part of our artistic heritage that continues to influence, drive and shape visual culture today. This traditional Artistic expression, whether it conforms to Modern or Post-Modern schools of thought, is still expressive and continues to function as an important part of society and cultural/intellectual achievement. It may be argued that different schools of thought promoted and championed methodologies that were capable of producing expression in varying degrees or nuances purity, some being, arguably, more diluted than others. But although we might taint or reduce our expressive effectiveness by striving to express ourselves truthfully, this want and urge to express or communicate emotion through Art, forms a large and important part of our culture and should not be neglected or lost. This Artistic endeavour is proof that we

understand expression's importance to humanity and society and should never be forgotten or neglected. Indeed expression is void of purpose but it *is*, and has been, essential and paramount to modern civilisation and us, as individuals.]

# d | art's self-destruction

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*Let us step into the realm of futurism, and peer into the ensuing abyss that is society's future...*

I feel that in contemporary, and future, civilisation artistic tradition may be under threat. Ironically, I surmise that the threat comes from technology, the very technology that, I claim, may be the purest form of Art. Will Art eat itself? I believe it is slowly starting to subsume itself. There *are* prominent signs of this happening. We can see this transpiring in the way that technology's influence over us is growing exponentially and rapidly becoming a significant, formidable and monstrous part of our everyday lives. Its ferocity is driven on and perpetuated by the rise and expansion of more extreme, ruthless, dynamic incarnations of capitalism that staunchly promulgate and uphold consumerism and commodity-fetishism as the values, rights and privileges of the "free" populace.

Let us step into the realm of futurism, and peer into the ensuing abyss that is society's future. We move here in order to speculate about the prospects and expectations of technology and, in turn, our lives. Personal choices and freedoms are, in fact, slowly diminishing. Algorithms and *recommender systems*, used prolifically in virtually every online store, Internet site and app., that makes use of personally targeted advertising, help you to choose what they think you would like to buy (e.g. what music the consumer wants to listen to or what movies they want to watch). However, far more than predictions, they function more effectively as dictations. These systems operate in a way that means your choices are made for you or forced upon you without ever even seeing the full plethora or range of options available. This forcing may not be deliberate, however, intentional or otherwise, the operations will generate the same outcomes. Presently there exists such a vast pool of data made available through these systems that it would be possible to create/fabricate cultural artistic products that satisfied what the computer systems "predict" consumers will enjoy (purchase). This designing of cultural products to satisfy algorithms, I postulate, would

inevitably lead to the dictation of *all* popular culture, where *nothing* is created for Art's sake or for expression, but where we are told what we like and "Art" ceases to be Art and is created *not* for personal expression but for personal gain. I foresee that this could be the suicide of Art, art and visual culture.

"Still there are wider implications to consider if we collectively delegate more and more of our decision making to algorithms. The recommender systems used to personalise our entertainment choices could even start to shape culture itself. It is possible the films or plays would make more money if their authors wrote them to satisfy an algorithms idea of what people with particular tastes like to watch. If that sounds unlikely, consider that many online journalists already write news and headlines in a style that ensures that Google's algorithms place their stories higher in search results. They are not just writing for their human readers; they are writing for algorithms too." – Helen Knight <sup>1</sup>

More concisely we can see the workings of this condition, and predict their future influence on culture, as follows:

- Art and cultural items (artwork, music, film etc.) are created for expressive purposes.
- People enjoy and purchase them.
- The items customers enjoy and purchase most often are monitored in order to predict what similar items you might like.
- These suggestions are then presented to, and effectively forced upon, the consumer, as they are offered no other choices.

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<sup>1</sup> *New Scientist Magazine, issue 2860 14 April 2012 – The Decision Lense – Helen Knight*

- The consumer is coerced into picking the prediction/dictation.
- Because sales of the predicted items increase, copies and similar items are then created in order to satisfy your “wants” in the hope of being more lucrative.
- This continues....
- Artistic and expressive content within popular visual culture slowly diminishes until it ceases to exist.
- Pop culture items are no longer produced with *any* expression, emotion, philosophy or ideology, they are *only* created to satisfy the predicted “wants” that were forced upon us by technologies predictions in the first instance.

Aside from the aforementioned workings of technology diminishing Artistic culture, there are other side effects of technology that will further assist and accelerate Art’s suicide. One of these symptoms could be social-media. With our lives becoming more and more influenced by the social-media technology, now inescapably woven into the fabric of our reality, We must ask: Is this technology diverting our attention from classical or traditional forms of Art and methods of expression? Are we becoming addicted to, and dependant on, such technology? Is it influencing us on much more subliminal and sub-conscious levels than most of us realise? Is it making us less expressive? Are we spending more and more time online and less time pondering, questioning and expressing ourselves through Art, philosophy and discussion? I believe that these are valid and important questions that must be asked. The way we live our lives in this technological era *is* subtly changing peoples habits. The psychological effects of such technology should not be underestimated. And furthermore, I might conjecture that prolonged use of technology and of social entertainment media contributes to the dumbing-down and re-optimisation of the human brain/psyche. The human attention span and other

psychological workings are already being studied due to fears that they may be affected by such technologies.<sup>2</sup>

Human participation in online simulated social networking can be termed *collective isolation*<sup>3</sup>. Collective isolation describes the phenomenon of social networking. This form of socialising is somewhat paradoxical as it relies on each participant being alone and isolated in order to communicate. We must ask some more important questions about social media: Are we witnessing a slow erosion of real-life social interaction into simulated, metaphysical communication, accelerated by social networking trends? And is this intentional? Does Socialising technology create a false, or illusioned, reality? Will this false Baudrillard-esque *hyper-reality* eventually lead to the inability of ones consciousness to distinguish reality from fantasy? Is there really any solidarity or communication between the participants? Or, are we all “collectively isolated” and blissfully unaware of our impotence? I fear that worldwide, mass Internet-fetishism is leading us to communicate only on very simple and superficial levels. And this addiction is changing our behaviour, leaving us with less time, want and need to express ourselves through more traditional methods such as Art or philosophy. This could easily deteriorate further and lead to a total stagnation of culture, following the logic of The Second Law of Thermodynamics, I fear we might soon be witnesses to the *heat-death* of Art, expression and therefore all visual culture?

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<sup>2</sup> *Psychology Today* - <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mr-personality/201001/the-psychology-social-networking>

<sup>3</sup> *Collective isolation* - See *Glossary of Terms and Phraseology* for definition

# on design

*Death of the Artist*

# a | post ideologism

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*It is notoriously easy for satisfaction with what has been already achieved to degenerate into complacency.” – Emil Ruder*

I hypothesise that we are seeing a concept-less generation of design. This may be true of all of the visual arts and all genres of design but here I will focus on the discipline of graphic design and, more specifically, typography in order to focus the argument more precisely. I believe it true that we are witnessing a state of “Post-ideologism” within the design community. It seems apparent that there is a *tubula rasa*, a considerable lack of, and a continued waning of, high concept or even mildly meaningful typographic/graphic design.

Typography is one of the most overlooked but intrinsic disciplines in graphic design. Although, in recent years it has become more popular, and its popularity continues to grow, with a myriad of “abstract” and “unorthodox” typographic works being produced. This recent interest in abstract typography could possibly be attributed to the digitisation and modernisation of abstract<sup>1</sup> graffiti letterforms, coupled with a ready availability of digital design tools opening up and making the creation of digital art (Not Art) and typography accessible to a much wider demographic. It is this wide availability that may have led to the cross over and amalgamation of abstract graffiti letterforms with more traditional typographic styles, which has, in turn, given birth to a new popularity and amenability in type design. In recent years, the already politically active graffiti art scene has become even more concerned with promulgating ideologies as a tool for activism. We can even see this enter prolifically into mainstream visual culture with the now well-recognised work of Banksy. It is strange then that this increasing ideological influence has not also had an impact upon the graphic and typographic disciplines that the street art scene seems to have so heavily inspired and influenced. This begs the question: why? Is the

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<sup>1</sup> Here ‘abstract’ is used in the technical sense meaning non-representational and not the definitive sense in which it is synonymous with ideology.

perceived ideological or conceptual content in contemporary street/graffiti art illusory? Or is the design scene becoming more and more concerned with superficial aesthetic styles and less about conceptual, meaningful design.

In design terms, the optimism and innovation of Modernity is dead and the pessimism and self-awareness of post-modernity too has waned. What seems to be lacking from recent design is any ideological or philosophical content at all. It appears that contemporary design *only* consists of superficial aesthetics. It could be that Aestheticism (art for art's sake) is the school of thought prevailing in contemporary design culture, but this is not so. I believe that there is little movement, conviction, ideology or underlying doctrine, only mass apathy that is leading to an abundance of shallow, meaningless design.

The problem we are faced with, from this lack of ideology, is that it leads to plagiarism. Where this most heinous of intellectual/artistic acts is concerned we are presented with a chicken-egg scenario. It does prove to be difficult to pin-down the origin or root of artistic/intellectual theft. Concisely we can see the working of this problem in the following equation:

**(Plagiarism comes from lack of concept – lack of concept leads plagiarism.)**

Here we see the difficulty. This shows how we cannot know if lack of concept in the individual came before it was spurred on by the pre-existing lack of concept (post-ideologism) in the design community, (or visual culture in general) or after. And so we find ourselves presented with circularity that functions as follows:

**(Plagiarism comes from lack of concept – lack of concept leads plagiarism – plagiarism comes from lack of concept...)**

This circularity is self-perpetuating and will inevitably lead to a moribund, stagnant visual culture. When there is negligible, or

no, emphasis on the ideological foundation of design at all, there is little, or no, (ideological/conceptual) inspiration for the designer to draw upon. This perpetuation will lead to a concept-free design community and a persistent amplification of this attitude. Whether or not it is possible *not* to plagiarise, or if a work is ever *absolutely* original is not the topic for debate here, however, if so, the aforementioned phenomenon will certainly limit this possibility. If it is not possible *not* to copy then, from the very beginning, visual culture has been a ticking clock running down to an inevitable stop or singularity.

To a certain extent somewhat pessimistic, post-modern views on originality and authorship *are* necessarily true. We cannot, *not* be influenced by what has come before us. However, it is this coalescence of influence that is itself new. Personal experience in the individual is so complex, far reaching and all encompassing that no two persons can be the same. The possibility of personal-experience-states must be infinite. Therefore it is this amalgamation of influence that is a new form itself and is therefore, I feel, capable of producing original design.

We could also discuss the Barthian separation of the author/designer from the piece. If the author's intentions are *not* to be considered, and if they are indeed irrelevant to the piece, on the grounds that 'To give a text an Author' and consign to it one single definitive meaning 'is to impose a limit on that text', then it is irrelevant whether the work is post-ideological or not as the ideology is imposed by the viewer.<sup>2</sup> This is logical and indeed plausible, accepting Barthes's hypothesis, however, what we are examining is the *author*. And we look at the piece *only* as a by-product of the post-ideological designer. Therefore, we must view the situation as follows: *if* the intentions of the designer conform to Barthian ideals and he/she therefore does not try to assign meaning or ideology to their work then this philosophy in itself is

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<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes – *Death of the Author*

the ideological content of the piece. The ideology is: *to be void of ideology*, thus generating a paradox or incongruence where this argument falls down.

One might argue that for an artist to be moved enough to create a design or work-of-art initially they must first be inspired in order to create it, and therefore the work is self-justifying and the creation of the piece is itself proof of abstraction. And furthermore, that it is impossible for *any* work to be free of ideology or concept-less. Thus Post-ideologism cannot exist. This is an argument that, I believe, is based on a linguistic or terminological difference rather than a conceptual one. It sees inspiration as equivalent to ideology. There are important differences and so we must be concise with our elucidations. Ideology can be *inspiring* and *inspiration* can bear (create) ideology, in a catalytic manner. However, inspiration cannot *be* the ideology. It can only lead to the creation of ones own doctrine.<sup>3</sup> I offer an analogy in the hope of clarification.

For example:

- A person encounters the work of *Mondrian* and is unexplainably compelled by his oeuvre, to create an art or design piece. -(**inspiration**)
- Upon further inquiry into the work of *Van Goesburg* and other proponents of the *De Stijl* movement, the individual learns about and comes to understand the ideological foundation of the artwork and agrees with the doctrine. - (**ideology**)

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<sup>3</sup> *Creation of ones own doctrine or adherence to another's principles as a result of understanding those principles; analogous to being affiliated with a particular artistic movement.*

In this case we can see that the initial inspiration (The paintings of Mondrian) indeed led the person to an ideological conclusion. By understanding the rules, and adhering to them, was able to create an original piece fitting the guidelines of the movement. The *doctrine* here functioned as a foundation or blueprint to the work. Conversely if the person had *not* sought out understanding of the ideological content (inspiration unlinked or disconnected from any ideology) then they would have only been able to mimic Mondrian's style on a very superficial and purely aesthetic basis (plagiarism).

Inspiration is, in contrast to ideology, automatic, innate and free from deep thought or conceptualisation. To define ideology in the technical sense, in which I use it here we can see it as:

*A pre-conceived abstract outlining aims and ideals that acts as a foundation to a text. The theorem governs, and is fundamental to, every aspect of the piece from aesthetics to structure and methodology.*

Inspiration is obviously in contrast to this as it is not pre-conceived nor is it intentional. It is the catalyst or pathfinder to ideology but does not form the dogma itself.

# b | neo ideologism

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*“The printing works is not a place that hires out fancy dress. It is not our task to fit out any literary content with a fashionable costume.” – Paul Renner*

If ones works are conceived for purely aesthetic reasons (in an ideological vacuum) then the result will be hollow, insignificant design that serves no purpose other than further promoting and foreshadowing concept-less design in the future. The discussion, until now, concerns the phenomenon of *post-ideologism*. Manifestation and acknowledgement of this phenomenon leads inevitably to the conception of *Neo-ideologism*. Neo-ideologism is not a specific ideology or movement that governs aesthetics, method or thought. It is only a general philosophy that tries to promote the importance and necessity of abstraction and philosophical presence within design.

As previously shown, lack of concept or ideology almost inescapably leads to plagiarism and contributes to un-original and un-inspired design in the future. Here we can see one important role played by ideology in the field of graphic design: as a weapon to combat these post-ideological phenomena.

It would be conceivable for one to argue that there is not a place for ideological content within graphic or typographic design as they are traditionally disciplines that merely serve a commercial purpose. It could be said that the designer simply creates a concept that satisfies the consumer's brief and has no time or need for grandiose delusions or elaborate abstractions concerning self-expression, philosophy or ideology. Whilst it is true that graphic design serves a commercial purpose, it is *not* true that ideology has no place within it, or that it would not benefit greatly from philosophical content. It is true to some extent that these disciplines are not Artistic as they are not, necessarily, concerned with self-expression. However, they *are* concerned with communication. Communication is a fundamental facet of graphic design, which opens the discipline up to vast, innumerable fields of potential ideological influence, including psychology, linguistics, semiotics and Art. It is within these spheres that careful consideration, pondering and philosophical application, *can* be

implemented in order to enhance communication by introducing an ideological component.

This ideological component can conceivably be anything but it must be present. The ideology, of Neo-ideologism is simply the endorsement of a philosophical or conceptual presence within graphic design as a reaction to the realisation that a state of post-ideologism is indeed observable in contemporary visual/design culture. For example I will outline my personal typographic method:

“We can all look at the letters and characters from foreign languages and find them beautiful, intriguing and enigmatic. The characters of the Chinese and Japanese languages, the letters of Thai, Tamil, Sanskrit and Khmer appear truly magnificent aesthetically. Why is this so? If we cannot read said language then it’s letterforms are rendered nothing more than a dysmorphic mess of meaningless lines and abstract geometry.

I hypothesise that this enigmatism is the *very* reason we find foreign languages so beautiful. Because we cannot read or comprehend the words we can therefore appreciate their aesthetic qualities more deeply and objectively without the meaning or connotation of the language overshadowing, tainting or even totally concealing the architecture of the letterforms. For example, I might conjecture that it would be a very difficult and direful task to look at the English words “*murder*” or “*rape*” (knowing their meaning) and thus conclude that they were (aesthetically) beautiful words. With ones own language, if literate, it is of course impossible *not* to read the words and it therefore becomes inconceivable to look at the letterforms and shapes from a purely superficial, objective viewpoint. With my studies I aim to abstract the graphemes of the English language in order to find the aesthetic beauty in the letterforms, for I believe that it is through abstraction, that we will see the true beauty of our own language.

Regarding my own work, and within the field of typographic design more generally, I feel it is of paramount importance to expand and promote neo-ideological thought in order to change

the way people think about type, written language and linguistics in relation not only to the aesthetic-morphology of language but also in the fields of socio and psycholinguistics. Abstraction of these areas opens ones work up to a vast wealth of potential to expand ones design concepts into new, exciting, efficacious realms of communication.

It is essential that high-concept neo-ideological design be further promoted and advocated to develop realisation that linguistics, psychology, art and expression are all intertwined and indeed influence each other respectively. Where typography is concerned specifically, by moulding not just the physical structure of letterforms, but also the metaphysical parameters that constitute language, I feel that, as designers, we are able to disseminate, communicate and connect to the viewer much more profoundly and eloquently.

# C | the danger of inspiration

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*“The printing works is not a place that hires out fancy dress. It is not our task to fit out any literary content with a fashionable costume.” – Paul Renner*

A prominent obstacle for the contemporary designer is the idea of *inspiration*. Why is this a problem? Surely design is a child born of inspiration? This, of course, is true. However, I believe that inspiration becomes a problem within the field of art and design respectively because of a popular, and almost universally accepted, and prolifically misused concept of inspiration. It is one that has become distorted and detached from its original meaning when uttered in relation to Artistic endeavour. Within the design community it has become increasingly common to find websites and blogs featuring “50 Inspirational Designs” or “60 Inspirational Typefaces” among other similar titles. These so called “inspiration galleries” feature a myriad of “inspirational designs” to “get your creative juices flowing”. The works curated in these forums are nearly always used completely out of context, totally separate and alienated from the originally intended, underlying concept or setting (*if* there were one to begin with). This stripping of concept or ideology from the work strengthens and contributes to post-ideological phenomena (most prominently plagiarism). Viewed in this way (in a/the conceptual void) the work can only possibly act as a paradigm or aesthetic model, upon which the “inspired” designer bases their work. The viewer is stimulated only by the way a piece appears on a superficial, aesthetic level (as it is de-contextualized) and not by its *ideological* substance or conceptual make up.

Conversely, if the inspiration and foundation for a piece of design work is, instead, an *ideological*, metaphysical architecture used as a frame on which a design (artistic analogy/portrayal) can be constructed then it is valuable, not only, as design but also as something more discerning and deep rooted. What we see materializing with *this* methodology is also expression. The expression, in this case, is not necessarily self-expression, but rather the expression of an ideology. The true interpretation, and

consequential expression, of a concept, notion, feeling or abstract will *always* differ between individuals. The psychological workings of the creator when expressed aesthetically (or through ones Art or design) will, perforce, result in a diverse heterogeneity of form (if indeed the work is truly, and sincerely, expressing ones own impressions or metaphorical interpretations of the supposed abstraction). When inspiration is drawn from another's interpretation without context, the work can only ever differ very slightly from the copied original, as the aforementioned architecture, that the work is being built around, is the original's aesthetic appearance (plagiarism). The work can then only ever aspire to mimic the original superficially with very slight, negligible deviations in style or method. Here we see *inspiration* used in a manner that is synonymous with "example" and this is how the word is generally perceived and used. However I conjecture that it would be more helpful for the designer to use or conceive of the word in a differing tone, where it is synonymous with words such as innovation, vision or originality. If the term were expounded with this connotation and proliferated with more value amongst the design community, it would *greatly* enhance the scene, and therefore *all* visual culture, with an enrichment of high-concept and innovative work which, I surmise, would consequentially lead to snowballing and exponential growth of progressive conceptual neo-ideological design. The pondered change would be a valuable advancement, a perceptive transformation, and it is this kind of metamorphosis that Neo-ideologism seeks to accomplish.

Others had recognised or predicted the aforementioned situation before. The occurrence of the problem I label post-ideologism was noted and neo-ideologic solutions proposed by, among others, Emil Ruder in his *Manual of Typographical Design* in 1967:

There are two essential aspects to the work of the typographer: he must take into account knowledge already acquired and keep

his mind receptive to novelty. It is notoriously easy for satisfaction with what has been already achieved to degenerate into complacency. For this reason training in experimental typography, which involves the workshop becoming a laboratory and testing station, is more necessary than ever before if typography is not to congeal round principles that have long been recognized. There must be no letting up in the determination to produce vital work reflecting the spirit of the times; doubt and perturbation are good antidotes against the tendency to follow the line of least resistance.<sup>1</sup>

In essence Ruder is saying: We need to value the old but strive for, and push forward towards the new. In valuing and studying what has come before, we will indeed find a strong foundation on which to build a new/future legacy in typographic/graphic design. In looking at past great work we can see that notably successful designers have all strived to push the boundaries in search of something better, more original, innovative and *avant garde*. Striving for avant-gardism is not, as some may feel, rebellion against, dissent from or a rejection of tradition. On the contrary, it is homage to the past that is built with the solid infrastructure of established typographic principles and practices. One can, and should, learn from the forefathers of design as well as ones contemporaries. Actions of plagiarism and general lack of “determination to produce vital work reflecting the spirit of our times” is not a tribute to the typographic design tradition but rather a defamation and an insult to it.

“The printing works is not a place that hires out fancy dress. It is not our task to fit out any literary content with a fashionable costume; we have done our job if we see that it gets a dress in the style of our day. For what we want is typographical life and not a typographical theatre or masked ball.” - **Paul Renner 1931**

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<sup>1</sup> *Manual of Typographic Design – Emil Ruder*

d | an | unwelcome ideology

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*"Printing does not want primarily to be art but the most responsible part of our social, economic and intellectual structure." - Stanley Morrison*

[Being a commercial graphic designer, typographer or Artist one has a moral responsibility. Neo-ideologism aims to promote ideological content within the design community *not* as a platform to project or impose ones ideologies onto others, but only as a step towards, and a methodology of, eliminating concept-less, post-ideological design and plagiarism.]

**This stipulation is of paramount importance.**

**A**lthough there seems to be a lack of ideology on the part of the contemporary commercial graphic designer, in some cases, there can be an ideological agenda on the part of the client. Graphic design is a very powerful tool and, as stated previously, knowledge of psychology, semiotics and other fields can enhance its efficacy profusely. The ability to interact with people's psyches on subliminal and very profound levels is both immensely interesting and extremely ominous. This is where the designer has a responsibility and where ideological content can become sinister and dangerous.

The use of media to promulgate racist ideology, for example, is absolutely immoral. Yet it is something that happens very prolifically in the mainstream media. We can see the consequences in the mass xenophobia or more specifically "*islamophobia*" that is currently spreading through the Western world. What I aim to point out is that this mass prejudice is induced, or at least inflamed, by popular, government or mainstream media/propaganda and is therefore not necessarily a sincere view, or an accurate reflection of sentiments from the majority of people in the Western World. The media has immense power in generating, proliferating and imposing hostile, racist feelings subliminally. Either intentionally or otherwise, through subjective news coverage and scaremongering the views of tabloid journalists inevitably filter through a society and can

become ingrained in the conscience of its people.<sup>1</sup> The manipulation of the media is a very powerful methodology in controlling peoples thoughts and opinions. In choosing and editing what “news” we are informed about and including non-news content such as opinion articles, it is possible to apply thoughts that are insincere, inhumane and potentially dangerous into the personal and nationwide psyche. A recent “in-depth investigation conducted by the Center for American Progress Action Fund reveals not a vast right-wing conspiracy behind the rise of Islamophobia in our nation but” a small “tightly networked group of misinformation experts guiding an effort that reaches millions of Americans through effective advocates” such as “media partners.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, *now* this phenomenon is so apparent that one could term it persecution and it is not difficult to draw parallels between how Muslims are treated in modern day western society and the manner in which the Jewish community was victimised and tortured in Nazi Germany during the 1930's (especially in relation to the manipulation of citizens through the careful use of media and propaganda). To some, it might not be apparent, at first glance, that there are parallels to be drawn, but as one looks at ones views (or their societies views) from a more objective perspective, it appears that there are indeed similarities. Some notable examples are outlined below:

- Prohibition of the Islamic full face *Buqqa* is being enforced in a growing number of countries and states

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<sup>1</sup> *Poor quality subjective journalism is prolific in mainstream media.*  
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1223789/Teenage-girl-14-goes-missing-converting-Islam.html>

<sup>2</sup> *The Centre for American Progress – Fear inc.- the roots of the Islamophobia Network in America.*

across Northern Europe under the guise of “liberation for women”. (Which of course shows immense ignorance and hypocrisy that need not be discussed other than to say: If liberating women consists of dictating to them what they can, or cannot, wear then a new, or correct, elucidation of “liberation” must be defined.)<sup>3</sup>

- The growing number of Right-wing extremists and political parties in Europe and America, who are inciting racial hatred towards Muslims with mass *Quran* burnings and demonstrations, intended to intimidate and provoke the Islamic community.<sup>4</sup>
- Recent steps taken by the Dutch government to ban *Kosher* and *Halal* food preparation. “New Zealand, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland” also “ban religious slaughter.”<sup>5</sup>
- The outrage and demonstration against the proposed building of a Mosque near Ground Zero in New York.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Christian Science Monitor – 5 Ways Europe is Targeting Islam*  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2011/0412/France-s-burqa-ban-5-ways-Europe-is-targeting-Islam/Dutch-burqa-ban>

<sup>4</sup> *CNN U.S – Church Plans Quran Burning Event*  
[http://articles.cnn.com/2010-07-29/us/florida.burn.quran.day\\_1\\_quran-burning-florida-church-terry-jones-american-muslims-religion?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-07-29/us/florida.burn.quran.day_1_quran-burning-florida-church-terry-jones-american-muslims-religion?_s=PM:US)

<sup>5</sup> *Aljazeera English – Dutch M.Ps Vote to Ban Religious Slaughter*  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2011/06/201162945027320392.html>

<sup>6</sup> *National Review – Rauf's Dawa From the World Trade Centre Rubble*  
<http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/243536/raufs-dawa-world-trade-center-rubble-andrew-c-mccarthy?pg=2>

These examples are all testament to the ignorance, anti-Semitism and hypocrisy we are witnessing in the West. Furthermore they are all indeed examples of persecution.

The link between the Right and the indifferent, impressionable public is the designer. In this circumstance, the designer facilitates the spread of toxic material and indeed strengthens its potency. Of course, interference in editorials and ideology on the part of the designer is not feasible and probably impossible but I feel we do have a moral obligation to decline work of this virulent nature. Circulation of media such as this can only happen if the designer sincerely holds the views to be true *or* if he/she is nonchalant or apathetic about the work that they do. Apathy and ignorance of the role the designer is playing in the chain of promulgation should be seen to be equally as dangerous as racist activism itself, because it facilitates and catalyses publicity of the aforementioned views.

One might profess that certain individuals will always facilitate the spread of such material. *“Someone will always be there to do the job, so why not do it yourself?”* This is a very indolent, pessimistic, and frankly, simpleminded attitude to hold. While the statement may, to some minor extent, be true, it shows that the particular individual uttering the sentiment is displaying a significant lack of altruism or compassion, and indeed a wealth of ignorance. This is however quite a common thought voiced in connection with activism in general and it’s a pessimism that is very helpful to the Right in this circumstance. Furthermore it cannot hold as an argument on account of its paradoxical nature: *if* nobody had this attitude, the phenomenon would not happen. Conversely, *if* everyone had the same attitude then the level of proliferation would be far more serious and epidemic than it is currently. The point of not acting *against* the cause as someone will always act *for* the cause renders the speaker precisely that aforementioned *“someone”* thus the statement is incongruent. This view is black and white and the real scenario is a matter of

degrees. This common notion does not see steady, incremental changes as significant. A polarization in general consensus is, of course, very unlikely to happen instantaneously and sudden change is not presumed. The aim with this style of activism is to slowly reduce numbers from a majority to a minority through gradual, steady progression. Realisation of this moral responsibility is not destined, or expected, to materialise immediately.

Political activism or at least political awareness and consciousness within the practice/field of graphic design should be staunchly upheld, not just in relation to xenophobia but also in relation to other common areas of media-persecution. Ideological content within graphic design should be endorsed in order to deepen and strengthen ones work in benevolent, conceptual dimensions. A personal ideology must be realised to attain depth and originality in a piece. Ones artwork should never be used to disseminate vicious ideology or dogma, this is utterly indefensible.

## *[Glossary of Terms and Phraseology]*

**T**his text incorporates neologisms together with prolific use of personal phraseology, using elucidations of terms with accompanying connotations that may be infrequently used in common parlance. I do this in an effort to ensure clarity, as in many cases dispute or debate can arise due to a lack of correct terminology. These disagreements, in some cases I feel, might be avoided or resolved through the coinage of neologisms and stipulation of precise definitions and connotations in relation to the subject matter. I use them in my work to recognise new or, as of now, undefined and unrecognised phenomena. I note personal connotations of terms by capitalising the word if I feel the elucidation is unusual and where other differing associations would result in muddying, blurring or miscomprehension of my work.

### **Art**

*Art* is the nonpareil that transpires when attempting to express human-emotion. The emotions expressed through artistic methods (in the creative process) cannot be promulgated by other means (other forms of communication), namely through language. The inability to communicate intricate and profound feelings leads one to engage in artistic endeavours (self-expression through art). Art is the metaphysical process of true self-expression.

### **art**

The physical objects and articles that are the product of “human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as

painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Artist / The Artist**

*The Artist* is not a/the physical person but rather, the state of the person’s (artist’s) experiential identity at a particular, specified but brief point in time.

### **artist**

Here I allude to an artist in the traditional sense, the physical person (in contrast to the metaphorical “Artist”) as the creator of works-of-art.

### **Post-ideologism**

*Post-ideologism* is the label given to the state of waning and loss of ideological or conceptual foundations from contemporary art, design and visual culture.

### **Neo-ideologism**

*Neo-ideologism* is not a specific ideology or movement that governs aesthetics, method or thought. It is only a general philosophy that seeks to promote the importance and necessity of abstraction and philosophical presence within art and design practices.

### **Collective Isolation**

*Collective isolation* describes the phenomenon of Internet based social networking. The term acknowledges that this form of

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<sup>1</sup> *Apple Dictionary Version 2.0.2 (51.4) 2005-2007 Apple Inc.*

socializing is somewhat paradoxical as it relies on each participant being alone and isolated in order to communicate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The neologism “collective isolation” was coined by Elena Deeley and defined here by Justin Bartlett.*