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Write an essay about the dumbest idea about communication or technology you have ever heard.

“Ahhh! It’s time to *BeReal!*”

My friend pulls out her phone and immediately poses for a selfie.

“It’s time to *what?*”

“*BeReal!* I just got the notification and if I only have two minutes to post before I’m *late*,” she explains.

The frequency in which I heard this phrase, “It’s time to *BeReal!*”, only seemed to grow as the summer time went on. By the end of the summer, nearly everyone I knew was on the app, and I’d witness this phenomenon of “Being Real” whenever I hung out with my friends, in real time. It goes like this: you receive a notification from the app that instructs you to “Be Real”, and you have two minutes to do so until you are reprimanded for posting “late”. In order to “Be Real”, you must take a picture of yourself, and the app automatically utilizes the back camera at the same time as the front camera, meaning you allow others to see your face and your surroundings. The app also shares your exact location with the photo. In essence, all of your friends are posting at the same time, just being the glowing picture of ‘authenticity’. The entire app is allegedly anti-Instagram. There is no curation. There are no filters. You post once a day, whenever you receive the notification, and automatically share a picture of your face, surroundings, and exact location with your friends on the app.

To me, this app just seemed like a massive invasion of my privacy, and I never liked it for a multitude of reasons. Primarily, I didn't like being told what to do (*post right now!*). I didn't like that the app would say that you're late, because why am I operating on the app's timing? I didn't like that the camera went both ways, specifically the fact that you had to show your face. I didn't like that it shared your exact location as soon as you posted. And although you manually accept friend requests and can choose who can see your posts (by adding them as a friend), the app proposed major privacy concerns to me. You're posting daily, at certain times of the day, with your exact location tagged. Is this not dangerous? Am I outlandish in thinking that your everyday habits need not be shared and geolocationally tagged for everyone to see? So, I never *truly* used it once. Curiosity killed the cat, and I downloaded the infamous app that all of my friends were using on a daily basis, but I deleted it as soon as I realized that you yourself had to post before seeing your friend's posts. I remember that I just didn't feel like being seen at the time. To me, it was sort of a demanding app, and I wasn't really understanding the appeal at all. But, to each their own. I personally decided against it.

While this form of "online authenticity" is lauded, it begs multiple questions regarding what authenticity even is anymore.

"The customization and editability of our platforms allows us to *always* put our best foot forward and uphold a facade of inherent and total flawlessness. So, can authenticity and cyberculture coexist, or are they paradoxical by nature?

[...]

What would happen if we allowed ourselves to be the version of ourselves that is unrestrained from the seemingly omniscient grip of judgment?"

It was December of last year when a piece I had written on the self in our ever-expansive cyberculture was published in *Blush Magazine*. It's the paradox of our time. Without knowing what media application was to specifically come just months later from this obsession with this notion of *being authentic online*, it was already increasingly evident to me that authenticity, or the appearance of authenticity, was praised on social media applications. *Looking* authentic on Instagram was received much more favorably than the usual eyesore, or lack thereof: posed, calculated, uncandid, and therefore "inauthentic" social media posts by this logic. "Casual posting" has become the performative new cool, but it's not new at all. In fact, people are often expressive in their nostalgia for the "casual era" of Instagram, when the app was fairly new and posting did not equate to the curation of your identity and online persona...it was merely a platform that allowed you to capture moments and share them in real time. While Instagram today still has a camera accessible to take a photo and post it at the same time, posting has long been convoluted into something entirely different. Your platform, your Instagram account, is now the face of your first interaction with anyone you encounter, and everything on the account must be carefully curated with intention to fit and align with the identity you are forming online.

In this sense, *BeReal* is anti-Instagram as there is no option available that allows you to curate. But, the logic doesn't align with me. Using social media is a calculated process by definition. It doesn't matter if you're "posting casually" or scrutinizing the six photos you're going to post on Instagram in a "photo dump"-- the fact is, you're still picking and choosing what it is you're going to put out there. *BeReal* doesn't make sense to me. Since when was posting *anything* a measure of our human authenticity? How are you "Being Real" by posting yourself "Being Real" ? Doesn't that imply that authenticity is now conflated with what we post online? Isn't that a paradox in itself? Oh, yes, I am more authentic than the average social media

user, simply because I post myself more frequently and in more unflattering angles. It doesn't make sense to me. At what point in time did the psychological paradigm shift? How did we get to where we are now? How have we all been collectively cast under a trance-like spell that conflates our human identity with the things we can immortalize on a screen?

I'm genuinely baffled at the continued popularity of this app. When I first heard about it, the entire concept had me convinced that it was just the next transitory app. As of August 2022, BeReal boasts over 10 million active daily users. As of this month, it has been downloaded over 53 million times worldwide, according to a company update post. Saturday Night Live has even come out with an entire skit (advertisement) revolving around BeReal, where two robbers take a bank hostage but are interrupted by all of the hostages' BeReal notifications. It's honestly pretty funny. I can see where people are coming from with the concept of the app, and there's no doubt that it can be fun to see what your friends are up to at the exact same time as you. I just think the definition of what it means to be humanly authentic is becoming muddy with the forces of social media, capitalism, habit, and our human urge to share with others.