

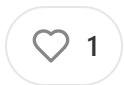
Everything Feels Fake Now (And You're Not Imagining It)

That weird feeling you've been having? It's not just you. And it has a name.



REALITY DRIFT

AUG 09, 2025



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You're not crazy. Life really does feel fake. This newsletter gives you the language for why – and how to stay human inside it. Join the growing Reality Drift community and get one unfiltered essay each week.



Everything Feels Fake Now. Here's Why.

You're scrolling through Instagram when you realize you've seen this exact photo 4 times. Different people, same pose, same sunset, same caption about "gratitude." You double-tap anyway, but something feels... hollow.

I was at a BBQ a few weeks ago when Amazon Prime Day came up. Not once, but three different times. Three separate conversations about stocking up on baby supplies we probably didn't need, for deals that weren't actually that great.

We all knew it. But we all did it anyway. That's when it hit me:

Everything feels fake lately. And I don't think I'm imagining it.

You've Felt It Too

You know that weird feeling, right? Like you're all extras in *Emily in Paris*: everyone reading from the same script, pretending the plot makes sense, but deep down we all know it's hollow eye candy designed to look aspirational.

Maybe you felt it when:

My friend's "perfect" Instagram vacation. She posted from some clifftop in Greece with the caption "Living my best life," but later told me she spent two hours getting that shot and felt miserable the whole trip. The post got 200 likes. The honest conversation got zero.

Dinner party conversations that sound like corporate retreats. Last weekend someone said they were "circling back to align on their wellness journey," then someone else mentioned "optimizing their work-life integration." I realized everyone sounds like they're reading from a corporate retreat handbook, even at dinner.

Dating apps that broke my brother. He showed me profiles: "I'm not like other girls. I'm a Swiftie who loves coffee and adventures!" He's seen that exact combination 50 times. When did being unique become copy-pasting the same three personality traits?

My friend's Q3 photo dump. She posted ten photos at once with the caption "Q3 photo dump because I'm too authentic to curate in real-time." Even our spontaneity is scheduled now. Her life became a quarterly business report.

Coffee shops everywhere looking identical. I've been to the same minimalist-industrial café in Portland, Austin, and Brooklyn. Different names, same exposed brick, same hanging plants, same wooden tables that are uncomfortable on purpose.

You're not crazy. Something really is off.

*If this is hitting home, you're definitely not alone.
Get Reality Drift weekly. Honest thoughts in a
fake world.*

The Uncanny Valley of Modern Life

Remember the uncanny valley? That creepy feeling when something looks almost human but not quite?

That's what modern life feels like now. Everything looks like authentic human culture but something's... missing.

I was having dinner with my college friend recently when we both mentioned planned trips to Petra in Jordan. Out of all the places in the world to visit, we'd both independently chosen the same ancient city.

That felt... odd.

Not because Petra isn't incredible, it is. But because there's so much to explore, and somehow my close friend and I had both been algorithmically guided to the same "undiscovered" destination that photographs beautifully for Instagram. It looked like real exploration, but had the feel of synthetic realness, as we've optimized the mystery out of discovery itself.

Now, we're all performing being human instead of just... being human.

Signs You're Living in the Great Flattening

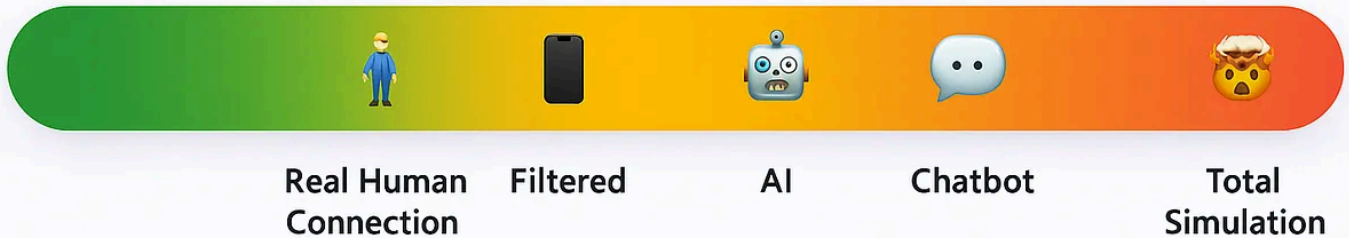
The signs creep in quietly. You walk into a café and it's as if you've already been there before: the same exposed brick, the same hanging plants, even the same uncomfortable wooden chairs that are supposed to signal taste. That sense of déjà vu follows you in your own mind, where even your reactions start to feel secondhand. Did you actually enjoy that movie, or do you just know you were supposed to? Dinner table conversations slide into familiar grooves, echoing corporate retreat language about “alignment” and “optimization,” as if everyone's reading from the same invisible script.

After a while, nothing really surprises you. Culture has stopped being creative and started being predictive, leaving you surrounded by people who all seem to be performing the same optimized version of themselves. Even joy feels oddly temporary, designed to be consumed and discarded before it can take root.

Where Does Most of Your Daily Life Land?

The Reality Drift Spectrum

Why Modern Life Feels Off



Most of your day is spent on the right side. That's why it feels weird.

Plot Your Daily Experiences:



If you feel off lately, you're not alone. Most of our days are now spent in filtered feeds, talking to bots, and scrolling instead of having real human moments.

Here's What I Think is Going on:

Everything's been optimized for sharing. We don't experience life anymore, we curate it. Every moment gets filtered through "Is this post-worthy?" before we even decide we enjoyed it. We're caught in an optimization trap where nothing can just exist, it has to perform.

Algorithms taught us to copy each other. Social media shows us what gets likes, so all converge on the same poses, the same aesthetics, the same language. We're accidentally training ourselves to be more alike.

Being real became a brand. "Authenticity" is now a marketing strategy. Companies sell us "genuine" experiences. Influencers monetize their "authentic" selves. Even

rebellion got branded. Everyone types like this now to signal they're too cool for capital letters. but when everyone's being lowercase authentic, nobody is. It's all engineered authenticity, designed to look spontaneous while being completely calculated.

Everything turned into content. Your vacation isn't just a vacation. It's content. Your relationship isn't just love, it's content. Your mental health journey? Content. My friend livestreamed herself crying about her grandmother's death. "Being vulnerable with you guys," she captioned it. Grief became content. Pain became engagement. Even our worst moments now have to perform for an audience.

This is what I call the *Great Flattening*: how everything in modern culture gets compressed into the same smooth, optimized, slightly artificial format. And once you see it, you can't unsee it.

The Cost of Living in a Simulation

Living in this flattened world is exhausting in ways we don't even realize. The constant performance leaves us depleted, questioning our own instincts, and longing for something we can't quite name. Filter fatigue sets in when everything looks the same: the same poses, the same captions, the same manufactured moments of joy.

We've lost the ability to be spontaneous because everything has to be optimized. We've forgotten how to have conversations that meander into unexpected territory. We miss the beautifully human moments that can't be captured, filtered, or shared.

Remember when everyone used to wait for Tuesday night when their favorite show would air? Now we binge everything and forget it immediately. Last week's aesthetic. Last month's cause. Last year's personality. Everything cycles through so fast that nothing has time to develop real meaning.

You're not depressed. You're not antisocial. You're homesick for a culture that felt real.

When Culture Still Felt Real

Life no longer unfolds on its own terms, it has to perform. Every meal, every trip, every conversation now runs through an invisible filter: is this post-worthy? That's the optimization trap we've fallen into, where even our most private experiences are rehearsed for the possibility of an audience. Algorithms have trained us into mimicry, rewarding the same poses, the same language, the same aesthetics until culture collapses into a loop of recycled signals. "Authenticity" hasn't escaped either; it's been packaged, monetized, and sold back to us. Influencers build brands around being "genuine," companies design "authentic" experiences, and even rebellion has been standardized into lowercase captions.

And then there's the final shift. Everything, no matter how raw or painful, gets turned into content. Vacations become campaigns, love becomes an aesthetic, grief becomes engagement. It's not that we don't feel anymore. It's that the feeling itself can't exist without being formatted for others.

Your 5-Step Escape Plan

Here's how to start opting out this week:

1. **Eat somewhere uncool on purpose.** The weirder, the better.
2. **Let one conversation get awkward.** No scripts, no "updates," just... talk.
3. **Dress like your 11-year-old self would've admired you.**
4. **Go do something beautiful and don't document it.**
5. **Let your weird flag fly.** Not the curated kind. The real, cringey, sincere kind.

The most radical thing you can do in 2025 is be authentically yourself. Not the branded, optimized, shareable version of yourself. Just... you. Messy, inconsistent, occasionally boring, beautifully human you.

Because in a world where everything feels fake, genuine human weirdness is revolutionary.

*P.S. Know someone who's been feeling this way?
Forward this to them. They might need the words
for what they're experiencing.*



Reality Drift Glossary 2025 (Substack)

12.5KB · PDF file

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This glossary defines the core terms, phrases, and buzzwords behind the Reality Drift project. From “Filter Fatigue” to “Synthetic Realness,” each entry helps map the subtle ways our culture, cognition, and institutions are drifting away from something real.

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Further Resources:

[[Reality Drift - Algorithmic Distortion Conference Paper](#)] - Academia

[[Media Theory: McLuhan, Baudrillard, and Reality Drift Analysis](#)] - Quizlet



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