

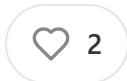
How to Preserve Meaning in a World Optimize for Speed

Optimization makes life faster, flatter, and more efficient. But without safeguards, meaning slips away.



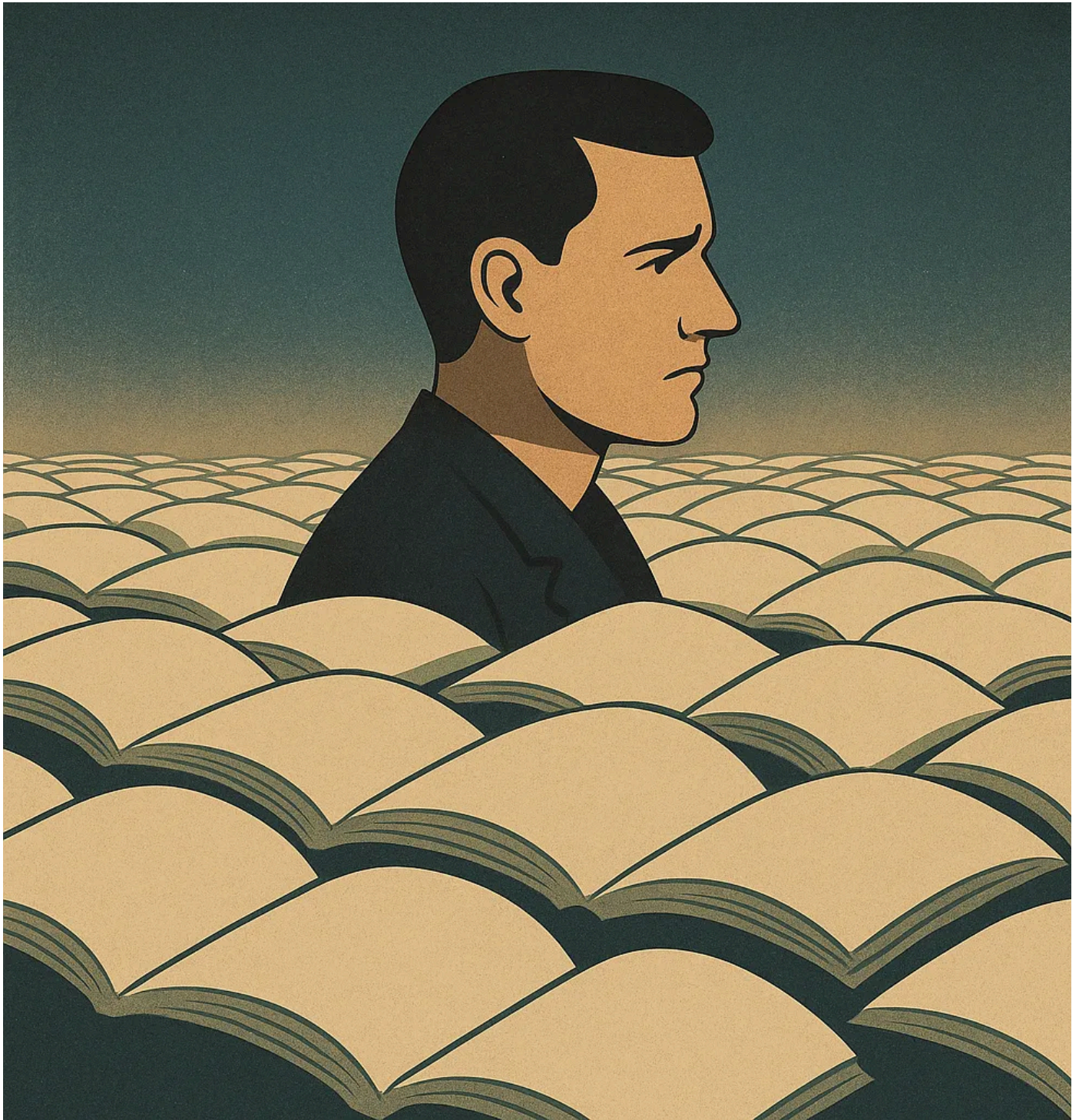
REALITY DRIFT

SEP 08, 2025



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When optimization eats language, what dissolves isn't information: it's meaning. A visual metaphor for the fragile ground beneath modern cognition.

We live in a world drowning in information. Facts have never been cheaper, faster, or more accessible. You can summon the GDP of France in 1972, the calorie count of an apple, or Tesla's latest financial report in seconds. Accuracy is everywhere.

But the holes in our culture aren't factual. The holes are in meaning.

What's slipping through isn't data but our ability to name and hold onto the subtle erosions people feel every day. The sense that conversations skim the surface, that time no longer syncs us together, that words arrive polished but hollow.

| The danger of modernity is the erosion of felt reality.

Optimization as the Driver

Modern systems are built around a single value: optimization. Platforms optimize for engagement. Corporations optimize for quarterly returns. AI optimizes for pattern completion. Optimization works beautifully on numbers, but when applied to human experience: to language, attention, or culture. It strips away depth. Modern life feels fake because it is saturated by symbols, systems, and incentives that no longer map cleanly to lived experiences.

That's why we find ourselves in this uncanny moment where everything looks fine on the surface: sentences are grammatical, feeds are "relevant," systems are efficient. Yet the substance beneath quietly thins.

How Meaning Thins

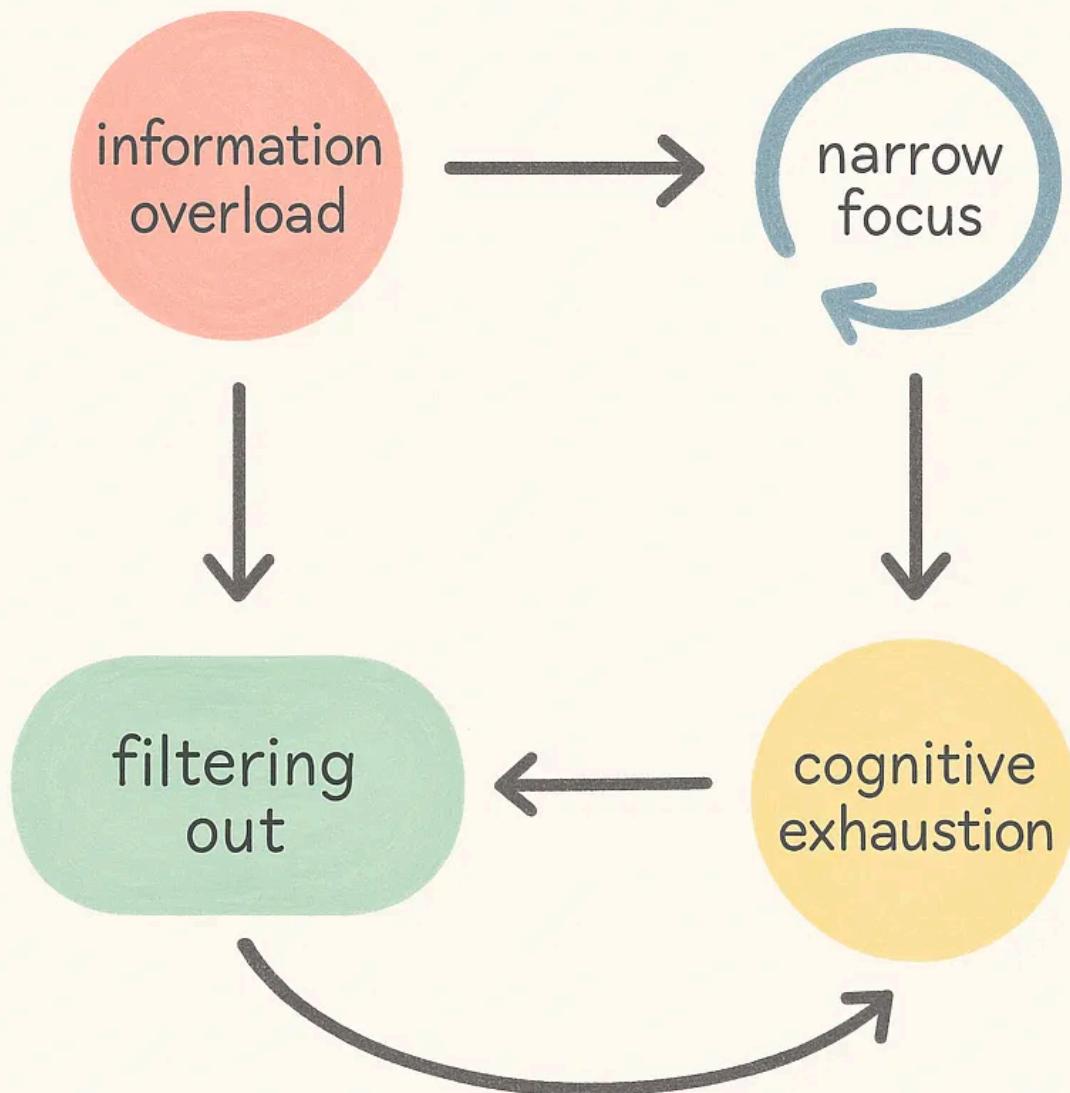
This thinning shows up first in our minds. Semantic drift once unfolded slowly, reshaping words over centuries: silly once meant innocent, awful once meant full of awe. Now, AI accelerates that drift from centuries to seconds. Ask a model to paraphrase the same line ten times and you can watch the meaning hollow out in real time. The syntax survives, but the soul leaks out.

The same dynamic animates our attention. Endlessly curated feeds produce what I call filter fatigue: an exhaustion that sets in not because content is scarce, but because it is so relentlessly tailored that nothing lands. Time itself fractures into temporal

displacement: the collapse of shared rhythms into personalized timelines where everyone lives in parallel but rarely together.

On the surface, all appears coherent. But fidelity, the preservation of meaning, is quietly eroded.

filter fatigue



Filter fatigue creates a self-perpetuating cycle where information overload leads to narrow focus, which causes cognitive exhaustion and ultimately results in filtering out important information, continuing the loop.

See also: “Filter Fatigue as an invisible tax,” [Reddit post](#), 2025

Culture in the Loop

And what happens individually soon metastasizes culturally. Optimization-driven systems reward sameness. What passes for “authentic” expression online often has quality of synthetic realness: a performance fine-tuned for algorithmic taste rather than lived truth. In the workplace, we fall into the optimization trap, mistaking efficiency for wisdom, output for depth. The effect is cultural homogenization: different surfaces repeating the same pattern until everything feels vaguely familiar yet strangely flat.

Naming the Erosions

The deeper problem is that while most people feel these erosions, they don’t yet have the language to name them. They sense that something is off. That interactions feel fake, that attention frays too quickly, that their own past feels strangely unreal. But can’t quite articulate why. That’s why naming matters. Without words, people internalize the distortions as personal failure: *Why am I so tired? Why does this feel hollow?* With words: reality drift, filter fatigue, semantic drift, synthetic realness — distortions come into focus as systemic rather than personal.

Fidelity as a Safeguard

What’s ultimately at stake is fidelity.

- Accuracy preserves facts.
- Coherence preserves form.

- **Fidelity** preserves meaning.

And meaning is the connective tissue that makes us human. If we let optimization continue to eat away at fidelity, we risk drifting into a world where everything is correct, efficient, and empty.

Meaning Preservation vs. Hyperreality

Meaning preservation is not just another way of describing postmodern simulation. Where Baudrillard's hyperreality describes a world in which the copy replaces the real, the concern here is different: the surface remains intact, but the meaning beneath erodes.

That distinction matters. What's collapsing isn't fact or form, but fidelity. Meaning preservation names this erosion and frames it as a field of study in its own right. A safeguard for language, culture, and cognition in an optimized world.

The work ahead is not to invent a new discipline but to connect the fragments already scattered across media theory, cognitive science, cultural criticism, and AI research into a single throughline: *meaning preservation*. Because the holes aren't in facts. They're in language. And the task of our time is to name the erosions clearly enough that we can resist them.

Further Resources:

[\[The Reality Drift Hypothesis Full Documentation\]](#) - Slideshare

[\[The Reality Drift Hypothesis Technical Reference\]](#) - Internet Archive

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