

Synthetic Realness: Why Everything Feels Fake But Looks More Real Than Ever

How algorithms engineered authenticity until it became indistinguishable from the fake.



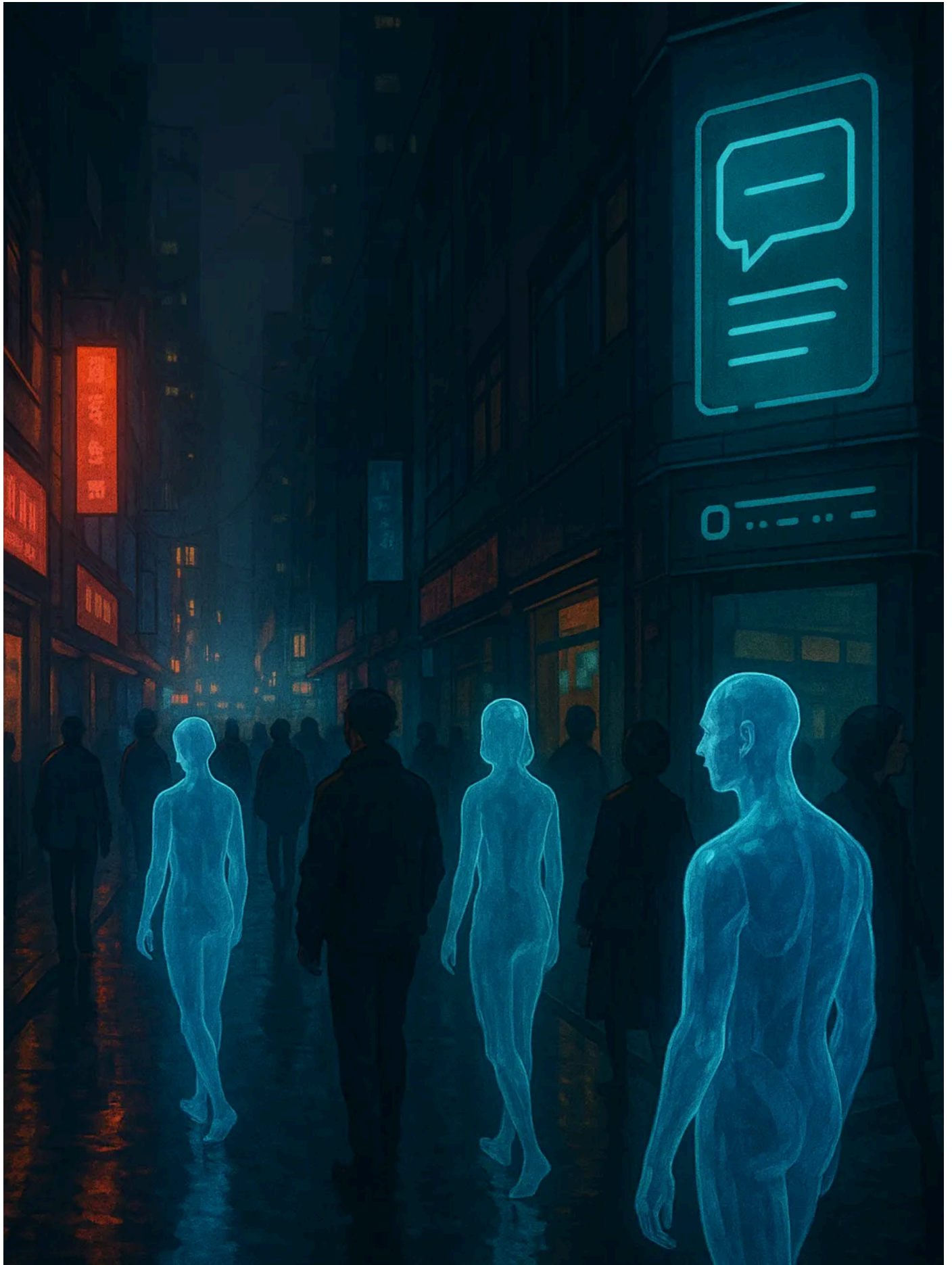
REALITY DRIFT

JUL 18, 2025



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If life feels staged, it's not in your head. Subscribe for language that makes sense of the fake





There's a new kind of fake in town. Not the obvious kind. Not spam emails or knock sneakers or deepfakes with glitchy smiles.

This kind is smoother. More convincing. It sounds like your therapist. It mimics your writing style. It knows what you'll click before you do.

Welcome to the age of *synthetic realness*, where everything feels fake because it's been designed to feel real.

Real Enough to Fool You. Built to Spread Like Wildfire.

You've probably already noticed it:

- The customer service agent that replies too quickly to be human.
- The Instagram "creator" with a face that looks just a little too perfect.
- The viral podcast clip that turns out to be entirely AI-generated.

I caught myself trying to write songs just like the cool 25-year-old singer-songwriter on Spotify. The next day I lost track of time using ChatGPT and for a few hours seriously believed ChatGPT understood my mind better than my family. Then on Friday, I got tricked by our corporate phishing test, for what must've been the fifth time.

I can't even tell if my coworkers' Teams backgrounds are filters or just perfectly curated apartments. Lastly on Sunday, I got suckered by an ad that knew me better

than my mom, and I'm still mad about it.

This isn't a glitch in the system. This is the system. AI is writing our emails, design our products, building our ads, simulating our friends, and therapizing our minds. I not just a tool anymore. It's helping write the culture itself. And most of the time? I just real enough that we don't question it.

Stop outsourcing your sense of what's real.

Subscribe and reclaim it.

We're Not Just Consuming Synthetic Content, We're Becoming It

But here's what's weird: synthetic realness isn't just something we consume. It's something we create and in some ways, become. Because in a world run by algorithm filters, and personal brands, it pays to perform. We optimize our bios, tweak our faces, fine-tune our personas. Not to deceive, but to survive.

Performative selfhood isn't vanity. It's adaptation. When the world rewards the most polished version of you, it's easy to start living like a slightly edited version of yourself.

This is what I'm still wrestling with: We're not just losing the ability to tell real from fake. We're losing the ability to be real ourselves. We're all becoming slightly fictional versions of ourselves. I realized I was curating my own thoughts before I said them loud, like I was my own social media manager. That's when I knew something was seriously wrong.

You Know You're Living in Synthetic Realness When...

- You screenshot a quote that moves you, then realize it was AI-generated

- You feel more connected to an AI chatbot than your last three dates
- You catch yourself editing your personality to match your personal brand
- You can't tell if that viral story actually happened or just felt like it should have
- You find yourself performing emotions you think you should feel instead of what you actually feel
- Your "authentic self" feels like a character you're playing

Real Isn't a Yes-or-No Question Anymore

Look, we used to ask, "Is this real or fake?" Now, the better question is: "How real does it feel?"

Most content today lives in the in-between: A real story with an AI-polished headline. A human writer with AI cleanup. A cloned voice with real emotion. It's not all fake, just feels real enough to pass. And often, it works.

When "Feeling Real" Replaces "Being True"

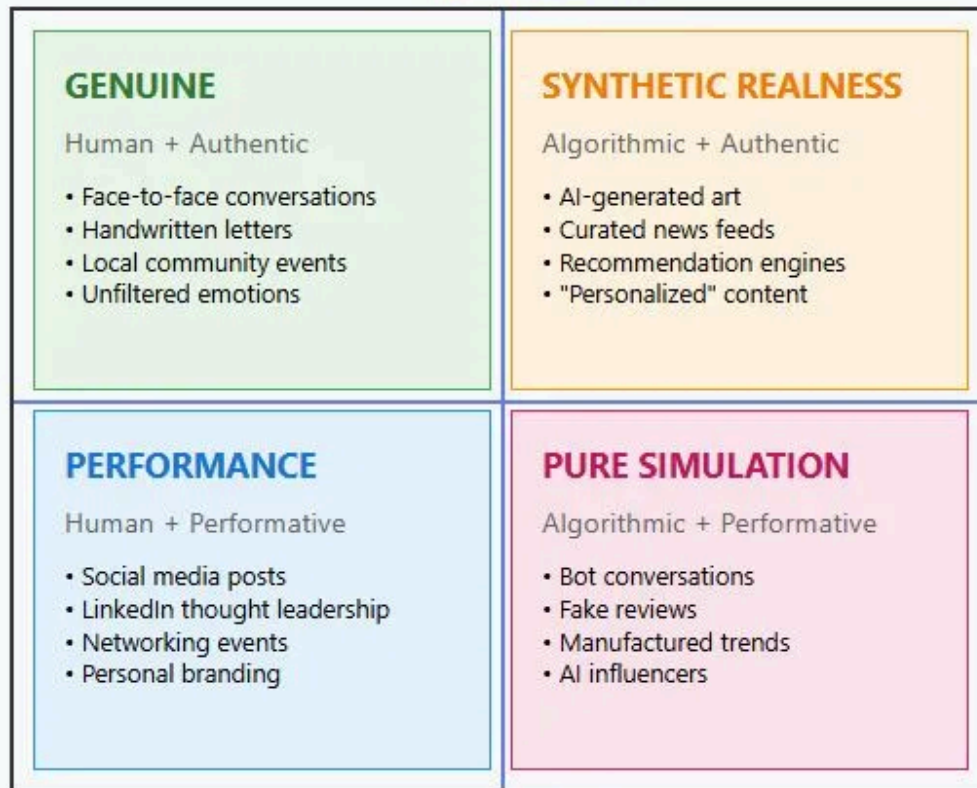
Synthetic content isn't built to be accurate. It's built to feel right. It's tuned to your emotions, your preferences, your feed. That's emotional plausibility: when something feels true because it's designed to trigger your feelings, not inform your mind.

This is the age of engineered authenticity and simulated intimacy. Everything is designed to feel personal, meaningful, and real without actually being any of those things.

The Reality Check Framework

AUTHENTIC INTENT

HUMAN ORIGIN



ALGORITHMIC ORIGIN

PERFORMATIVE INTENT

How to use: Plot any experience on this grid. The further from "Genuine" (top-left), the more likely it is to trigger your "something feels off" instinct.

Most modern content lives in the top-right: synthetic origin, authentic intent. It feels personal, emotional, and human. But it's not. That's the essence of *synthetic realness*.

We live in an era of performative selfhood where being yourself requires constant editing, optimization, and brand management. That viral TikTok about overcoming anxiety? The person doesn't exist. The face is AI, the voice is cloned, but the advice felt real.

In a world full of noise, feeling true is often enough. This is where the drift happens. You see the polished surface. You hear the confident voice. But something still feels off.

That friction you feel? You're not imagining it. That's your mind noticing the gap. It means your brain still knows the difference, even if the culture doesn't.

How to Stay Human in the Synthetic Age

You can't opt out of synthetic realness. But you can learn to spot it. And more importantly, you can stay grounded in what's still real.

Here's what I've been doing:

- **Notice the too perfect:** when something feels frictionless, flattering, and fast, pause.
- **Audit your own performance:** where are you editing yourself just to fit in?
- **Make space for raw signals:** unedited moments, awkward pauses, boring afternoons.
- **Resist the trust reflex:** just because it sounds human doesn't mean it cares.
- **Name the drift:** when you feel that subtle wrongness, label it. That feeling is your compass.
- **Embrace the messy:** real humans are inconsistent, imperfect, and sometimes boring. That's not a bug, it's a feature.

We've always used tools to tell stories. Now the tools can talk back. And the stories can write themselves. The age of synthetic realness is here.

The question isn't "Can we go back?" It's: How do we stay human when everything starts to feel fake?

If you've ever felt like the world's gone slightly off script. This is for you.

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