

Track & Trace Authenticity



1104



To my grandfather.

Track & Trace Authenticity

Anna Frijstein

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Fine Arts, Gerrit Rietveld Academy

Supervised by Janice McNab

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Track & Trace

Hello! Yearning for love, happiness and authenticity? Search no further, order now.

For many years, *authenticity* was only available for a privileged group of artists, writers and madmen. Many of the common people looked through the window seeing these eccentrics all having fun. It was freezing outside while the snow blocked the view and for many people it was a mystery how these geniuses lived their lives to the fullest. Characteristic, intelligent and one of a kind.

With the rise of modern means of communication, everyone suddenly became authentic. Even if you were an office-rat fed on plastic coffee and fluorescent tubes, a *Facebook*-profile would show the world your authenticity. If *himmelhoch jauchzend, zum Tode betrübt* isn't the latest release of an obscure Berlin-DJ you've posted, it defines the way you've expressed yourself.

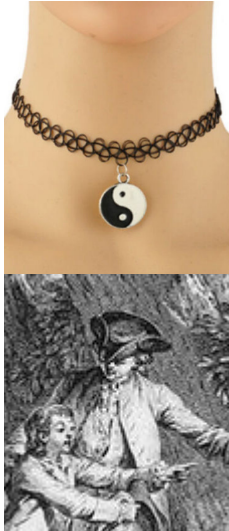
But what is it that is so tempting about authenticity? Why are people longing for strange figures who fall out of the category of everyman? Most authentic superhumans pay a high price: Socrates was murdered, Bas Jan Ader disappeared and Percy Bysshe Shelley's drowned body was burned on an Italian beach. Not really a life-affirming story, if you ask me.

This associative essay tracks down the many faces of authenticity and its attraction. The metaphor of an order status is used as a modern constellation.



Pre-order

Fifteen years ago I pinned posters on my walls of my favorite idol of the week. My hair was cut like a mushroom. Eminem cried. Nineteen ninety-eight. A commercial TV actress told me all ins and outs about Yin and Yang. Their presence cannot be split. Two for one, like a supermarket bargain.



Authenticity and its opposite inauthenticity have entered the world as an entangled parallel pair. The dialectic of this works the same as every other contrasting term like small and big, *real* and fake. The authentic cannot exist without the inauthentic. The one implies the other.

The Industrial Revolution, French Revolution and the Enlightenment have sparked the first gulfs of awareness of inauthenticity. This spark was recognized and criticized by the Romantics at the end of the 18th century. They realized that modernity didn't cause solely good changes. According to Charles Taylor, Lionel Trilling and Charles Lindholm, the longing for the natural, real and authentic have simultaneously grown with the vast rise of modernity, falsehood and inauthenticity.

Jean Jacques Rousseau is considered as the mover and shaker within the Romantic authenticity paradigm.¹ His *Émile ou De l'éducation* was a self-help book² for nurturing children, not by rational rules, as John Locke proposed, but by their intuitive nature.

Strangely, Rousseau put all his five children in a foundling hospital and called his wife "the housekeeper" until his death. One can say that he wasn't so caring for his family; but does being a jerk come as an extra feature of authenticity?



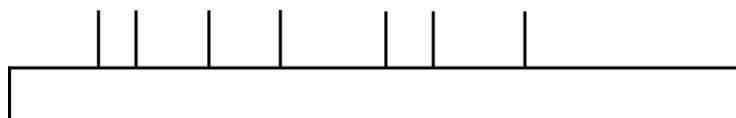
According to Maarten Doorman, the Genevan philosopher wasn't against modernity itself but he was merely worried about the concept of society. According to Rousseau, the Self suffers in societal structures; it's impossible to become authentic under societal rules, modern society only elicits insincerity.

Should we take *(in)sincerity* as a societal product? Trilling seems to do so; he defines sincerity as "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling." Following this, sincerity means being true to others while authenticity refers to a deeper, more "primitive" strength inside oneself.

Ah ok, well with these insights, I believe Rousseau might have lived authentically but wasn't sincere towards his family. Quite a duke's mixture.



It is often understood that authenticity is a primordial concept; sincerity developed much later, when societies evolved. Following this theory one might assume that without society we wouldn't know the notion of (in)sincerity. Looking at historical facts, however, exactly the opposite is true. In fact, the notion of authenticity did not exist in pre-modern times while sincerity did already exist those days; sincerity derived from pre-modern times and was not at all related with the social Self. Among several writers circulates the alluring etymology that the word sincere



derives from the Old Greek term for wax, κηρός. In Latin κηρός becomes *cera*. Roman quarrymen combined *cera* with *sine*; *sine cera* is translated as without wax. *Sine cera* guaranteed the high quality of the statue. Lesser quality sculptures of marble for instance, contained cracks that were covered up with beeswax. The Roman senate at some point even declared that any marble, bought by the government, must be *sine cera*, thus without wax.³



Please let our government act like that on misleading sales tricks! I've just read in the newspaper about the biological promoted products that besides the BIO sticker aren't that BIO in the end.

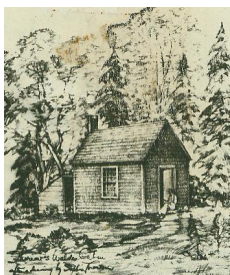
Linguistically, *sine cera* develops ultimately into Latin *sincerus* what means clean or pure and had been used to describe physical things: wine, glass, stones and honey. It is interesting to note that *sincerus* did not apply to people at all, contrary to what sincerity nowadays suggests. It had transformed from a quality ascribed to inanimate objects, to an anthropomorphic trait which today is solely used to describe living objects.



Processing

Dear diary, I want to become an actress, or a detective. No, no, let me take care of tigers, or?

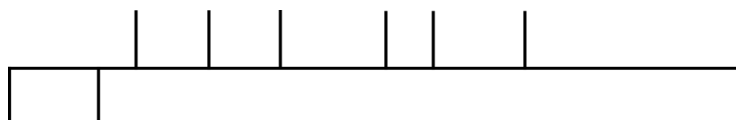
At a young age I started attending an intensive weekend theater school. The teacher, AKA our guru Joshua, always yelled to us that we shouldn't act but must become the character. Showing real rather than fake emotions. In my later teens I decided to quit. I didn't believe in the act of becoming a scripted character anymore. Let me be myself and express myself! So, I decided to become an artist. Years later, I realized how oh-so Romantic my ideas or feelings were. And that this is how every teenager deals with their identity quest. I mean, really Anna, how do you mean "Be yourself!"? What or where the f—— is that Self?



The change from an agricultural to an industrial society doubled the population along with larger societies. Now, one wasn't dealing with family and friends of one's tribe anymore, but with complete strangers—the "others". Due to these external influences, the Self has been torn into two Selves: the inner and the outer Self. The first Self was betrayed by the outer *false* Self. According to Rousseau, "The man of the world almost always wears a mask. He is scarcely ever himself and is almost a stranger to himself; he is ill at ease when he is forced into his own company. Not what he is, but what he seems, is all he cares for." From this hierarchical division of the inner Self—a good cop—and the outer Self—a bad cop—grew a common need for the authentic inner Self. But, the question was (and still is), where to find the authentic Self?

The Romantics were impossibly romantic⁴ when they sought the authentic Self purely inwards. They fled the corrupted world through nature; natural forces ultimately lead to self-discovery. A *natural* man is someone who follows his intuition and will eventually become authentic. The artist, living in nature's solitude, becomes a role model—a *genius*. The expression of inner vision and feelings becomes more important than external voices like Law and Church. Here, you can hear Walt Whitman whispering, "Resist much, obey little." Thus the Romantic originality deriving from the artist's inner true Self stood in sharp contrast with following strict rules of realism or the mimetically depiction of nature.

Can I interpret this self-expression similar to the promotion of a "Be yourself!" mindset I am daily confronted with? And if so, wouldn't that suggest that this self-expression isn't only a duty for the artist or genius to be original, but an ideal for the entire Western culture?





The Self's inner/outer (dis)connection came to a next level with hardcore Existentialism. This started with Søren Kierkegaard who introduced the term *existence*. He placed great emphasis on inwardness and an intense, immediate "*infinite passion*" in living out one's own life.

Rather fascinating is Kierkegaard's method of writing under many pseudonyms. Under these pseudonyms he even criticized his own (as Kierkegaard signed) writings. Did he do this in order to emphasize his belief in the importance of the subjective truth? Or to control and construct his own criticism and eventually manipulate his whole outer Self? I wonder how natural or authentic Kierkegaard in the end really is.

From the Romantic idea of authenticity, Existentialists stressed the need for being (or becoming) authentic. Although not really an Existentialist, and in contrast to Kierkegaard, an atheist, Friedrich Nietzsche also had something to say about authenticity. He didn't use the specific word, but attacked Western society on the same grounds as Rousseau did. "I have a duty against which my habits, even more the pride of my instincts, revolt at bottom, namely, to say: Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else." But Nietzsche went even further, as he diagnosed Western societies as hostages of a "*slave morale*". Those who live with the *go-with-the-flow* mentality were less than herd animals and therefore inauthentic. He didn't share the romantic *back to nature* ideal but proposed a self-stylized life instead. Later on, Michel Foucault hijacked this notion of Nietzsche and proposed that one should create one's life into a coherent artwork, constantly recreating oneself.



For Foucault taking care of the Self meant producing one's life as a work of art, not finding a deep inner truth. But where Foucault introduced this self-stylization as a resistance towards power-structures, more cynical philosophers like Žižek, have pointed that this demand for extravagance is exactly what subjugates people. Lifestyle-magazines, blogs and online *coaches*⁵ all demand that your life should be an artwork.

Another philosopher who chewed on the authenticity bone was Martin Heidegger.

This thinker used the term "*ownness*" —*Eigentlichkeit*— for authenticity. According to Heidegger being authentic means being fully human. Being conscious of being alive and thus conscious of one's certain-to-come-death. In his *Sein und Zeit* he explicitly attacked the democratic medialized herd mentality that he called "*das Gerede*". He proposed to consciously choose, choose and choose actively during one's live. Only then will you be, or rather become, fully human and authentic. Charles Guignon, who writes a lot on Heidegger, points out that Heidegger insists that you *own* your life; being the *author* of your life. Nietzsche and Foucault with their ideas of stylizing, or constructing one's life, were also emphasizing the authorship of one's life.

Apparently, authenticity and full *authorship* are irretrievably connected to each other.

Soon after Heidegger; Jean-Paul Sartre invades the domain of authenticity. Contrary to Heidegger, Sartre was very unambiguous about authenticity. Sartre's writing on *roles* worked as a variation and interpretation of Rousseau's idea of the mask. Sartre was also aware of the false Self within society. According to Sartre, we should stop playing roles which we are forced to play by society. But his thoughts on authenticity seriously differ from the Romantic view on authenticity. Rousseau has informed us about the natural authentic Self somewhere deep inside us, hasn't he? But then, Sartre evidently contradicted this, "It is not in some hiding-place where we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men."

So, did I get it right and did Sartre actually think that we need the other to discover ourselves? But why does he still warns for society if we need these others? Such a snub.



Jacob Golomb explains Sartre's opposed thoughts pointing at the main difference between the Existentialistic and the Romantic understanding of authenticity. While the Romantics believed in an almost substantial Self, the Existentialists, in contrast, didn't believe in the Self as a thing; the Self should rather be explained as a process. As Sartre puts it, "Existence precedes essence." In other words, the human being first comes into existence and then continually defines himself, rather than coming into being with a Self. For Sartre, authenticity requires taking full responsibility of one's own life, choices and actions. "Every intentional act is self-originating, self-determining and absolutely free."

Thus authenticity requires a process of reflection and consciousness in order to gain self-knowledge. The more reflective one is, the more authentic one will be.

But Anna, how can intentional acts be free if one reflects oneself non-stop and thus becomes extremely self aware? How and where, remains the possibility for spontaneous emotions, or acts? This sounds more as the behavior of a regulated politician, or a famous pop-star who constantly needs to calculate his or hers behavior. Like being watched in a cage; totally unnatural and inauthentic I would say.

Kierkegaard, who believed that reflection kills actions and thereby kills authenticity, disagreed with Sartre's demand for self-reflection. Later on, Sartre ultimately agreed with Kierkegaard and even admitted that reflection "poisons" desire!

When I summarize authenticity, based on the earlier touch on philosophers, it turns out that the main features of authenticity entail: authorship, control, authority and self-reflection.

Peculiar outcome though. I mean, if I would describe something or someone authentic I would bring up complete different terms such as sincerity, spontaneity, natural, mistakes, not self-aware etcetera. Yes, quite the opposite. Perhaps I somehow prefer to believe the natural Romantic version of authenticity above the other versions? Wait, this must be a sign that I am completely brainwashed and think way too irrational.



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GPA-9



Manufacturing

They smiled while enjoying their lattes. Two girls sitting in a freshly popped-up bar discussing its interior. They disagreed regarding the bar's realness. Either to consider the place to be authentic, or just hip. "It's too much directly inspired by that lifestyle blog, you know?". One of the girls all of a sudden screamed. Not because of spilling her coffee, no, she got stuck in the cactus between them. This girl in pain turns out to be me. I truly experienced realness.

Authenticity is a human construct; it isn't something substantial we find in the woods or wax; it literally isn't a walk in the park to find. You definitely can't buy it as an instant product in stores. Although companies love to make consumers believe that you can actually buy something authentic. It seems to be a foggy struggle. Not only do the Romantics have a difficult time grasping the abstract and complex construction of authenticity, but other philosophers also find this difficult.

What a relieve, I am not alone. After analyzing these major philosophers I realize they all agree but meanwhile contradict each other and themselves. I desperately try to catch it but authenticity is still at large.

Can we try to comprehend how authenticity is made? How it is constructed; can it be constructed at all? In the previous chapter we saw there are two different views on being or becoming authentic. To borrow Somogy Varga's terms, there are two models for authenticity: *the inner sense model* and the *performative model*. Rousseau's vision on authenticity relates to the inner sense model, while Nietzsche's and Foucault's idea of self-stylizing and the life as an artwork relate to the performative model. But also self-help books, workshops, *Youtube* tutorials and even the use of social networks like Facebook, strongly relate to the performative model of authenticity.

Talking about models, authenticity seems to be a hot item in the business world as well. Just check the *Harvard Business Review* issue from January 2015, in which one out of many recent examples is given. Earlier, I came across a refreshing book written by Joseph Pine, who is a; management advisor, writer and *TED*-speaker with a booming *Linked-IN* profile and hyper-active *Twitter* account AKA the authenticity-guru. He wrote this book with stunning marketing advise (generally for companies). All for the sake of authenticity. Or in his own words, he and his colleague are: "dedicated to helping companies conceive and design new ways of adding value to their economic offerings." Because authenticity is what consumers today really, really want!



"We should not be surprised to find a business/motivational book entitled Authenticity, with the subtitle 'What Consumers Really Want.'"

<i>Natural authenticity</i>	<i>natural</i>	opposite to <i>artificial</i>
<i>Original authenticity</i>	<i>original</i>	opposite to <i>imitation/copy</i>
<i>Exceptional authenticity</i>	<i>pure</i>	opposite to <i>impure/mainstream</i>
<i>Referential authenticity</i>	<i>real</i>	opposite to <i>fake</i>
<i>Influential authenticity</i>	<i>sincere</i>	opposite to <i>insincere</i>

Then there is *exceptional authenticity* which shares a lot with the characteristics of *original authenticity*. It's the pure person, product or experience. The shopping or visiting customer enjoys feeling exceptional, almost like a friend. Why do you think many big companies started with incorporating a *human* voice and sometimes even have an avatar—virtual face—representing their online help-desk; for advise one can “ask Anna”.

The fact that this is not a real person doesn't seem to matter, for at least it feels a bit more personal and *real*.

the novelist or director renders their work referentially real, a verisimilitude of real life.” —Art imitates life.

Finally there is *influential authenticity*. Pine strongly suggests that you should show that you and/or your company care about others and the world. Probably this is again in order to be perceived as a personal company rather than a big ass mass producing company where the customer is not more than just a number. For gaining authenticity points it would definitively help to show (fake or real) emotions. Many chocolate brands (like *Tony’s Chocolonely*) are very keen and slick in this. Their whole wrapping paper tells a personal story. Sharing with *you* their aims for a better, honest and world-friendly chocolate. Like a sincere cup-of-tea conversation with a friend.



I’m scratching behind my ears right now. Yesterday while I did groceries, I suddenly noticed a little label attached to the shelf, alarming that the Tony’s Chocolonely chocolate is not biological. And guess what? This all happened to be in the BIO-store #confuzzZed

Addressing *you* is just another variation of pseudo-individualization which isn’t a new strategy at all.

Deriving from Marxist theory, pseudo-individualization refers to the effect of advertising that addresses the viewer and or consumer as an individual. This is a false message as it addresses many people at once. Let me remind you of the famous L’Oreal slogan:⁷ “Because you are worth it.” *You, you, only you.*



All in all, I found Pine’s book on authenticity very suspicious. True, here is finally a writer who is clear about authenticity. He even manages to teach us how to become authentic by offering some practical info. But exactly because of this easy peasyness, I distrust the whole story. If authenticity is really that easy to find, why does it (still) have so much of value? And why would we (still) keep on searching? First of all, let me remind you that Joseph Pine earns a living by advising companies and managers how to be perceived as authentic: “Authenticity has become the golden standard for leadership.”

Quite odd that the authentic is the natural, real, original etcetera, but in the meantime deals with a hidden agenda. Second, would these companies tell the customer the complete story that they, or their products, only seem authentic? And that they have just followed some steps of a self-help marketing book?



No, of course not!

And which company would ever sell something as inauthentic? They sell to survive. And if the customer seeks for authenticity the companies will sell them authenticity. This is basic business logic. An good *anti-authenticity-sales* slogan would be: “They tell to sell!”, so you better watch out.



This counts for artists as well. Would I ever say I am an inauthentic artist or my work of art is an inauthentic piece? It is not something established and legitimate as being an appropriation artist⁸. No, inauthenticity wouldn't be an effective label, neither for me nor for the art.

Let's now return to the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter; yes, you can buy authenticity in the store. Authenticity is a commodity; or more correctly, a commodity that is often viewed and sold as authentic.

Besides the question if authenticity exists at all. Is it relevant to label yourself or your product as something authentic? During the process of searching and writing, I seriously doubt this more and more over time.

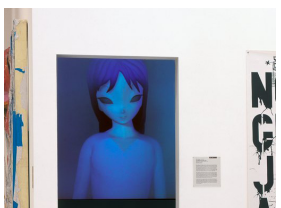


Pine's book showed us, metaphorically speaking, around in the kitchen of the authenticity-fabrication process. Anyhow, also without a book I hope and believe we can still recognize or at least smell the sales-man's mind behind the semi-authentic product or manager.

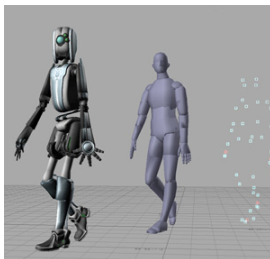


It seems that we humans have a certain *biological detector* to distinct real from fake behavior. The biological detector only functions in the biological world. For the other world, the offline world, it will be a different story. Cult legend Philip K. Dick already wrote years ago science fiction stories dealing with the *cyborg's* (in)authenticity⁹. This authenticity crisis of the organic and *biomechatronic* being—half human, half machine—became more real than Dick's wildest dreams and trippy hallucinations.

Due to modern techniques Dick's dreams have become so real that it horrifies us; nightmares rather than dreams coming true. This is *the Uncanny Valley*. Rob Schwarz explains, "The Uncanny Valley describes our strange revulsion toward things that appear nearly human, but not quite right. This revulsion usually involves robots, but can also include computer animations and certain medical conditions."



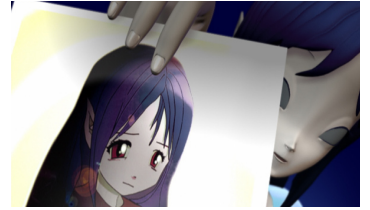
The video installation *Two Minutes Out of Time* (2000) by Pieter Huyghe (1962) has quite an unsettling effect—on me. *Annlee*, an animated 3D video figure, talks about how she experiences it to be cartoon character who has been removed from her original context—the cartoon. Huyghe describes her as "a character talking about the condition of being a character." Annlee is just a shell.



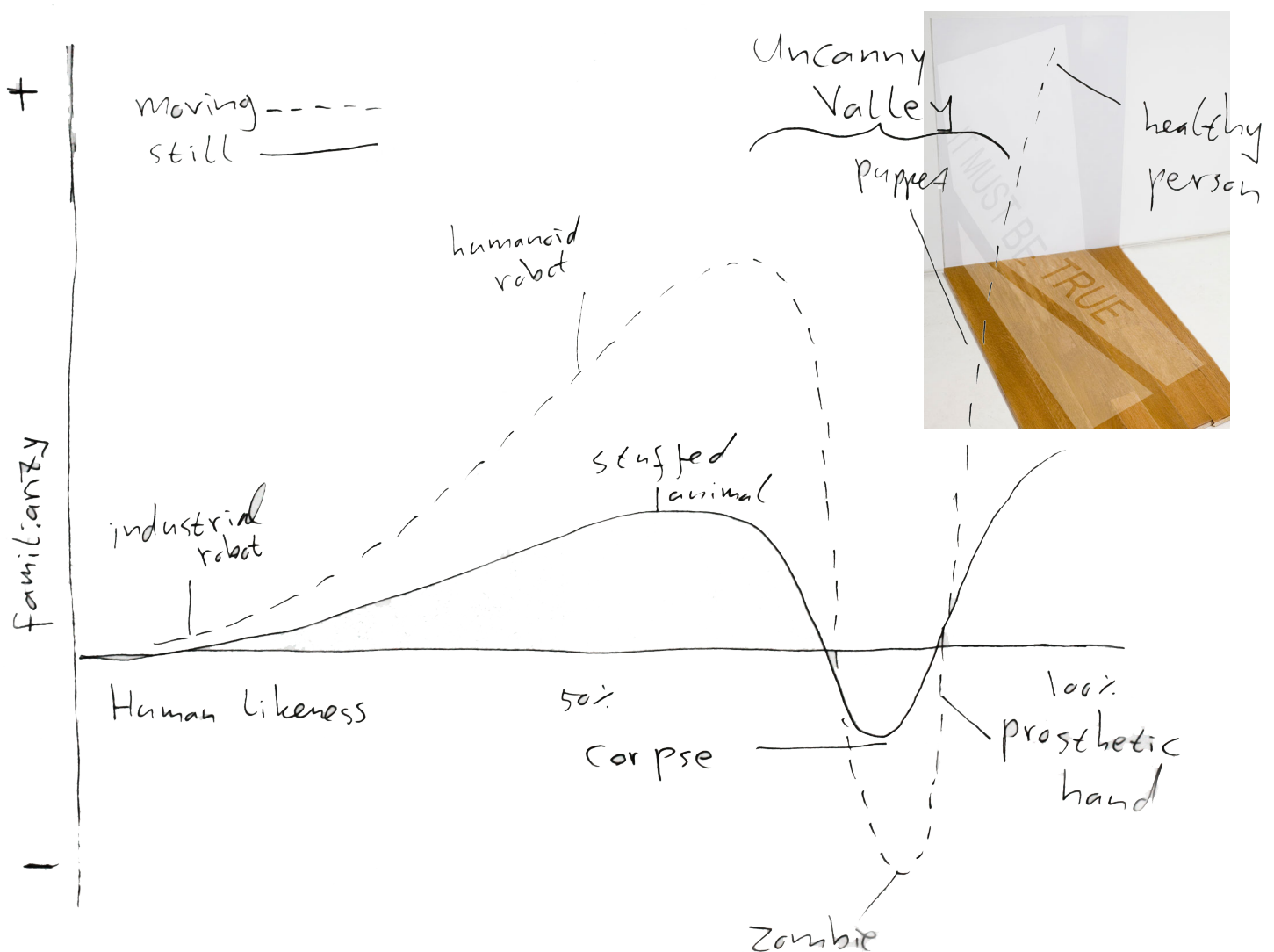
While writing this, I realize a more relevant example of experiencing this Uncanny Valley's *Stimmung*. Young artist Ed Atkins (1982) produces digital environments with the newest software systems. In these environments, a hyper-real male character performs. In fact, this creature is performed by Atkins himself in real live before becoming the computer manipulated and dominated avatar. For this reason the obviously fake animated man seems so real. Atkins describes the talking, drinking, smoking and emotional(!) avatar as "a character

that is literally a model, is demonstrably empty—a surrogate and a vessel.” This avatar confuses our biological authenticity detector. Although we can see that he is animated, the character’s movements are extremely accurate and human. Nevertheless, it’s not that difficult to render it as a computer generated (and scripted) artwork—a performance. But, how does this biological detector work in our *real*—human— world?

Elvia Wilk describes how we can perceive the difference between real and fake smiles. Tiny *orbicularis oculi* muscles surrounding the eyes express real laughter. This real laughter is called *Duchenne laughter*, after French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne. The sound of Duchenne laughter is a musical sound that effectively pleases, calms, and disarms other social beings. Laughter’s spectrum of notes cannot be reproduced by the human voice in any other way. This phenomenon of real laughter is an undeniable evolutionary part of the human relationship. Can we say real laughter is an authenticity marker? Like other bodily reflections such as tears and blushes? Hamlet wasn’t so sure. He believed: “Sincere grief must be expressed but not be performed.” A good actor can laugh and cry for real. The actor just reenacts “the fruitful river of the eye.” Dark clothes can be changed and the tears just distinguish a good actor. As Julia Straub puts it.

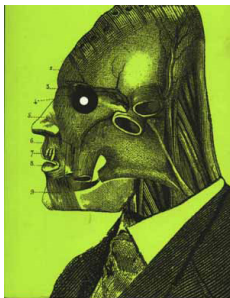


Does this prove that authenticity covers realness plus a certain spark of spontaneity?



Distribution center

Planet earth contains endless strains; a womb loaded with connected, floundering lose ends. They flicker and twinkle so rapidly that their interrelated breaks seem invisible for the human eye. Mathematics of the mind is like the power of Internet. Wi-Fi stickers, I don't trust. Connection is everywhere. I am, you am so Wi-Fi are.



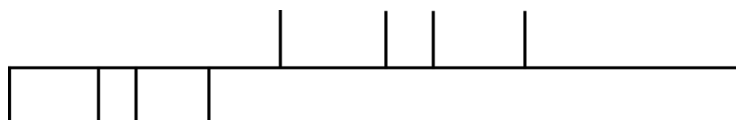
As discussed earlier, the need for authenticity grew as soon as the individual started to deal with the other; from tribe to society. Authenticity quickly accelerated due the changes globalism has caused.

I wonder, in what ways globalism has affected authenticity precisely. According to Slavoj Zizek the individual's "I" is empty and is only formed and constructed by the "big Other". The idea of the empty I (or Self), which is being shaped by external influences, isn't an original thought as many shared and still share this idea. But what has changed more recently is this: the external influences that construct the I or Self have changed from society's others (city's citizens), Law and Church towards another *other*. This other was termed by Jacques Lacan as the "big Other". Yes, this is the *big Other* Zizek refers to.

The big Other, or the *symbolic order*, is the system; a communal network of institutions and laws and is mostly referred to as monstrous Capitalism, a child of globalism. Zizek describes how the I operates under the big Other. We are "reduced to being puppets of the big Other." He goes on to say that the Capital System triggers or even forces us to live the I's narcissistic superego: enjoy! Similar to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's slogan: *Jouissance jouissance*. People are *desiring machines*. But Zizek is negative: This state of longing for more and more joy or pleasure grows in the further *oh-so-empty* I.

But capitalism wouldn't be capitalism if it didn't smell of money. Authenticity became a popular sales product, as was shown in the previous chapter. From the first globalism-spasms, man's greater mobility for instance, the *exotic Other* became a synonym for the authentic. Think of early exotic objects like: African masks and Indian textiles but also experiences like tribal rituals, Arabian nights or the Argentinian tango. Russell Cobb writes about the paradox in the globalized world and remarks how these objects and experiences soon became sold as high priced authentic souvenirs or spectacles in the West. In other words, a process of fetishism of the exotic and thus authentic. These interests in the exotic Other were being reflected in modern art.

Another effect of globalism is the hyper-communication and non-stop inter connectedness of the world. Let's take the writer as an example. Today when a writer publishes work, he or she immediately



seeks for publicity; by visiting television talk-shows, online blog-posting, #hashtag twittering, interviews and columns in magazines or newspapers. All for the sake of effective PR for their new book but obviously to reach potential readers as well. One could say that the writer is pro-alive.

Wasn't the author declared dead already?

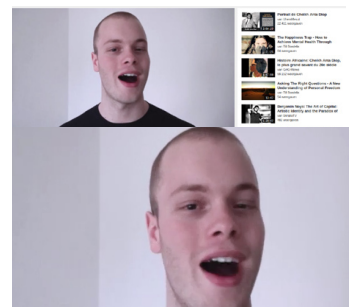
Roland Barthes attacked the author's authority; in order to shift the author's power to the reader, he stated the following: "The birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author." (1967) Later on the sentence was revisited into: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author." (1977)

But if Barthes is against the lively author, why did Barthes still signed his own writings under his name?

However the twittering writer, performing in publicity is not exactly the author Barthes mentioned in his *Death of the Author*. Barthes distinguishes between the writer and the author. His attack wasn't directed against the writer —*le scripteur*— but against the *expressive theory* of authorship. The attack was addressed to those authors who express their inner feelings that create the author's sense of Self. Many popular books today are mixing up the author's feelings and biographical facts with the book's fictional characters.

Anna, do you know about that particular James Frey controversy? James Frey, the author of the book Million little pieces, sold the book as an autobiographical story, telling his serious past as a junky. Frey visited Oprah and received a lot of empathy plus lots of new book-buyers. Since the reader now even got a real face and voice revealed behind the tragic story, he became a heroic figure. When it turned out that his story wasn't that real, as Frey exaggerated most of his past, many fans were upset and angry upset about it. He became known as the inauthentic guy who tricked all his readers and Oprah.

Nowadays writers, artists and other kinds of authors share¹⁰ all explicit ins and outs about themselves in and outside their work. The more they share, the more personal they seem and eventually the more real or authentic they will be perceived. The more authentic an artist is, the more followers, buyers and money. Having said all this, authenticity thus has become a strategic value in positioning an artist in the globalized world. To disappoint Barthes once again: the *author* is by no means dead.



But, if the author's self-expression is with the intention to be perceived real, authentic and sincere, now the question arises if this self-expression will ever reach a state of authenticity or sincerity?



In the post-global-neo-liberal-capital-etccetera days Barthes' author could also imply many other authors. Operating like flexible chameleons, they work in different fields. The artist not only paints in the studio, but he also fulfills ZZP-jobs as a creative entrepreneur while maintaining his social role both online and offline.

Rushrush, nonstop online. #lphone bleeps# Coffee. Rushrush, nonstop weekdays. #lphone bleeps# Coffee. Rushrush, #nonstop working. Coffee. #lphone bleeps# Rushrush. No wonder all my creative friends need their Yoga. Burnouts aren't that odd for young professionals.

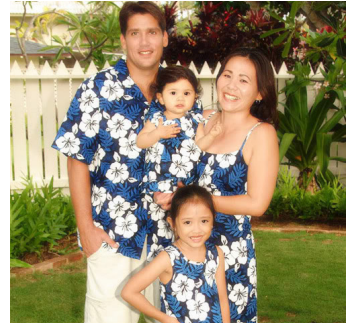
To borrow Jan Verwoert's words: "In the Western world, we have entered into a culture where we no longer just work, we perform. We need to perform because that is what's asked of us." He realizes that within this *high performance culture* we should always be ready to perform. The we includes: artists, authors, creative entrepreneurs and all other creatives who move their bodies in this high performance culture. The creative entrepreneur, who often does immaterial labor, is multiplying himself like a virus. His flexibility, creativity, sociability, originality and yes also his authenticity define the *attractive* creative entrepreneur.¹¹ The artist as a creative autonomous persona serves as the laborer's role-model. Creativity and authenticity have become synonyms for *distinctiveness*, which is the muse of capitalism. The downside of this is the following: the creative entrepreneur is expected to be original and authentic under high pressure. Besides their exuberant working spirit they should never forget to be authentic. Most importantly, they must always show their authenticity. As I've demonstrated in the *Manufacturing* chapter, that the construct of authenticity requires a full time job.¹²

And then again, do you truly believe you will become authentic after following these steps? I believe this authenticity-demand causes insecurity and unhappiness rather than a healthy motivation to be creative, original and authentic.



The artists, writers or (other) creative entrepreneurs aren't the only authors. Due to the rise of Internet we've all become authors. Sharing photographs and short lines, carefully captured and composed. The dangerous aspect lies in the responsibility of these authors. This is another tricky effect of globalization that relates to authenticity: the circulation of de-contextualization of unverified images, stories and movies. One example of this dangerous side-effect of the everyman author took place just a short while ago.

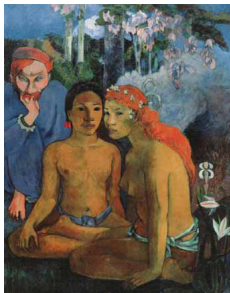
On January 12, (2015) photos were posted on the web depicting an attack by Boko Haram in Nigeria last summer. It turned out to be re-circulating images showing the aftermath of an accident; the explosion of a fuel tanker in Congo.¹³ The manipulating and distributing ability for each person with access to Internet and programs like *Photoshop* does not only harm the authenticity or realness of these images but worse: it can become an incredibly dangerous weapon for terrorist organizations like IS.



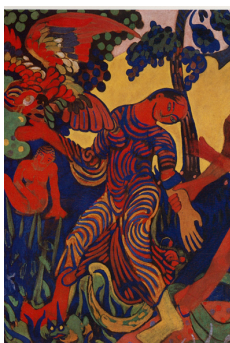
Delivery

[chorus]
Express yourself
(You've got to make him)
Express himself
Hey, hey, hey, hey
So if you want it right now, make him show you how
Express what he's got, oh baby ready or not

From:
Madonna's lyrics 'Express yourself'

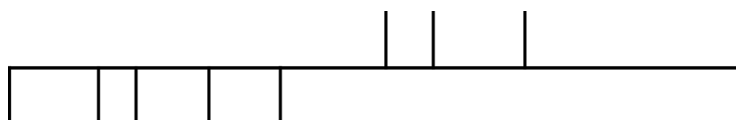


In *Pre-order* I've described the earliest signs of the need for authenticity. In this part, *Delivery*, I shortly discuss some of the first symptoms —*arrivals*— of authenticity, focusing on the art context. In the chapter *Distribution* the effects on authenticity due to globalism have been discussed. The global world and one's increased mobility introduced the exotic Other in the West. In the West they saw the exotic, native, oriental and wild as authentic. The exotic became the authentic.



In the beginning of the nineteenth century the *old world* was being dismantled and made anew; we saw the rise of modernity. The *new world* adopted with full commitment authenticity as their key feature besides other important features such as newness, uniqueness, originality, pureness etc. According to Trilling "the culture hero, once a prophet of God and then a poet of nature, is now a novelist of the Self—a Dostoyevsky, a Joyce, a Proust," From literature to painting, a common modern characteristic is the self-consciousness artist. This means the artist has drawn direct attention to what people view or read, is a work of art. Not depicting or celebrating reality but expressive attempts win popularity. A revolt against realism, a rejection of Academic rules; rejecting the past. Impressionists prove to be pioneers in breaking up reality's conventions.

Rigorously breaking with the lies of reality and replacing these for pure, intuitive and sincere expressions, is what these pioneers did. Henri Matisse and other artists decisively returned to childhood innocence, *joie de vivre* and play; Fauvism with Maurice de Vlaminck and his vibrant use of colors; in Germany die Brücke with Emil Nolde, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the Dutch painter Kees van Dongen; der Blaue Reiter with Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc and many others. This overwhelming expression was a vivid echo of Rousseau. The Romantic impulse as violent self-expression. March inwards into yourself and express that Self in the world, regardless to what others think or say.



These modern artists escaped the world to find themselves.

The modern artist was permitted to say things to others, that were grotesque and risky but *true*: "I can only advise you to consider whether all professions are not like that. Full of demands, full of enmity against the individual" wrote Rainer Rilke in his famous *Letters to a Young Poet*. Rilke also encouraged authenticity and even so believed in one's uniqueness and the possibility to discover personal truths.



"You were born an original don't die a copy" served as my online motto back in my early Internet days. Don't ask me why but since I created my first online social-media profile somewhere on the net (in a time before Facebook) I proudly filled in this quote as my motto. Without referring to the author, as I had found it on Google somewhere someplace, and had no clue nor care about its actual author. Nonetheless, I did care about originality. I mean, why did I otherwise share this quote as my motto? It took me some years to figure out the bittersweet irony of this act ;-)

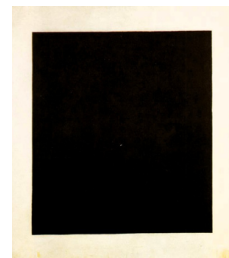
This quote could have been the motto from the modernist avant-garde as well. The avant-garde artist was the "revolutionary, dandy, anarchist, aesthete, technologist, mystic" as Rosalind Krauss stated in her essay on *originality* in the 1980s. Krauss explained, in the same essay, originality as follows, "one thing only seems to hold fairly constant in the vanguardist discourse and that is the theme of originality. By originality, here, I mean more than just the kind of revolt against tradition that echoes in Ezra Pound's 'Make it new!' (...) More than a rejection or dissolution of the past, avant-garde originality is conceived as a literal origin, a beginning from ground zero, a birth."



Yes a *birth*; that's more rigorous than just something new. A birth could be seen as a design-free process. It grows into the world, something naturally enters the world. According to Boris Groys, in the beginning of the twentieth century, the meaning of authenticity in relation with art varied between the real versus the forged art object and "design-free" objects or areas. "One might argue that the modernist production of sincerity functioned as a reduction of design, in which the goal was to create a blank, void space at the center of the designed world, to eliminate design, to practice zero-design. In this way, the artistic avant-garde wanted to create design-free areas that would be perceived as areas of honesty, high morality, sincerity, and trust." Groys goes on: "We are no longer ready to believe that minimalist design suggests anything about the honesty and sincerity of the designed subject. The avant-garde approach to the design of honesty has thus become one style among many possible styles."



The faith in authenticity and sincerity (only for a short while) vanished soon.¹⁴



Online account

While learning to play piano online I've gained more insight. Frustrated by the virtual keys my fingers couldn't have comprehend, I started longing for touching. Touching my own face. Calmed down by Nivea skin cream and the physical effect of feeling something physical, real and authentic?



Globalism is already a vintage topic on the *WWW* —*worldwideweb*. Being connected and part of networks is not a news-item either. Since the rise of Internet we have been able to search and research about literally anything and anyone. We are not only authors, as I've mentioned earlier, but we also live a social life online. We all have contacts, friends and followers. Internet has allowed isolated people to communicate with one another; these are definitely good things. But the online sphere also opens up a whole new can of worms; this will be analyzed in this chapter. Especially with the quest for authenticity, it actually causes serious trouble and complicates the term authenticity to its extremes. Today's *offline* —real world— authenticity trend synchronously continues into *online* —virtual worlds. The ongoing desire to look and seem real is apparent both offline and online.

Back in the 1990s one of my favorite writers, David Foster Wallace (1962-2008) launched *New Sincerity* both as a literary movement as well as the attitude for the next rebel. Wallace writes that "the next real literary rebels (...) might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels (...) who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching. (...) Who treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions. (...) Who eschew self-consciousness and hip fatigue. (...) The new rebels might be artists willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the 'Oh how banal.' To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama (...)" Following this description of the New Sincerity attitude, one should be real rather than cool. Online as well, this *real* you has conquered the *cool* you.

But help me, how do you seem really you online?

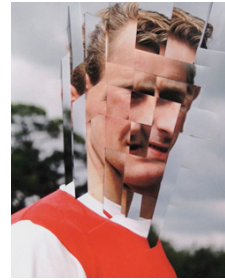


Of course it is not only your best friend who follows and watches you online. Controlling your online outer Self's presence, requires an active self-conscious mode. Texting, emailing, posting, we can constantly edit and delete whatever we (dis)like. "We clean the human messiness with technology. We change ourselves." this according to *Social Identity* veteran Sherry Turkle.



Hmm this is already contradicting what DFW just said about self-consciousness.

Before I continue on the online, let me first make something clear. The online identity can be explained as the identity you construct on social network services like Facebook, LinkedIn but also on forums, blogs and dating sites. The online profile isn't limited to the account registration where you fill in your age and gender. No, you share your job, hometown, interests, hobbies, friends, dreams and inspiration. The profile becomes your personality.

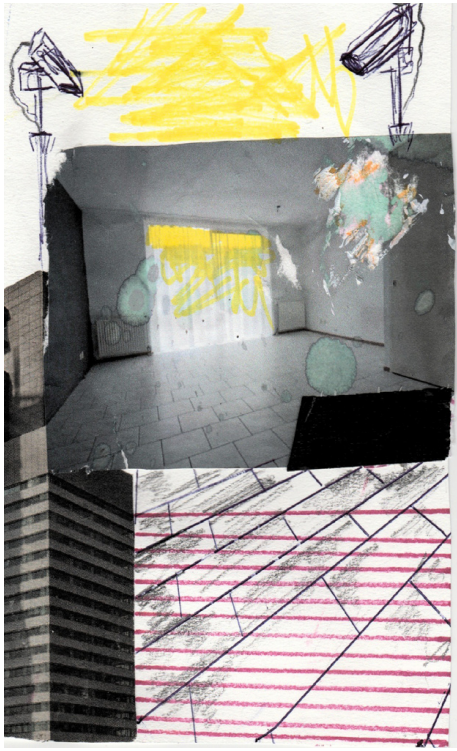


Just see it as an associative assemblage. Consisting names, faces, links, terms, brands and bands. Like the patched jacket I wore as a punky in pink pants teenager. Carefully collected and chosen patches. Imagine you would unconsciously refer to an uncool band!

What happens online is that we are encouraged to make public statements of our personal tastes. All you share and like¹⁵ on Facebook will be part of this assemblage and thus will be associated with you. Within the safe walls of Facebook, you'll find the ideal place to cultivate your real authentic personality for your friends.

I am aware that I am not innocent myself as well. Somewhere deep inside myself—to echo Rouseauseuseau—I do care about my Facebook personality; how I seem to others, on my Facebook profile. Although I try not to care about an odd post on my wall or a friend who shares a weird drunk photo in which I am tagged. Somehow it's harder to not care online than offline. Maybe, because online it feels more frozen and static in time. More definitive, for ever and ever. Online, I feel that I lack something. I lack control? Or, authority? To erase this memory from the unimaginable gigantic wired digital archive with all its users isn't that realistic.

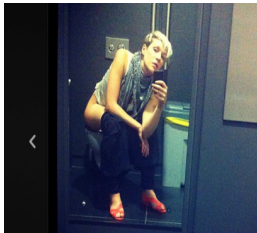




In a sense, the online identity is no longer in sole control of the individual user. Your reputation deals mostly with an audience who knows you offline as well.

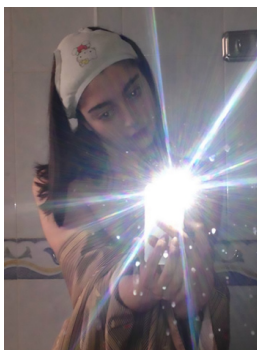
The anonymous online identity games from the early Internet days where you pretend to be someone else, including: gender, name etcetera, belong to a not-so-distant past; in fact, our experience of today's online identity is extremely similar to the offline identity. The ability to perform anonymously using a pseudonym, a fictional personality, is the main reason to go online. But the commercialisation of the web caused a sequence of the online and offline identity. "The great contemporary terror is anonymity. If Lionel Trilling was right; if the property that grounded the Self in Romanticism was sincerity, and in modernism it was authenticity, then in postmodernism it is visibility. So we live exclusively in relation to others, and what disappears from our lives is solitude" says William Deresiewicz. Since modernism was over, our great fear is not being part of the mass but being isolated from the herd.

Solitude? You mean, being a loner? As solitude was a societal virtue for the Romantics, it definitely means something negative for my generation. The L for loser or worse, the L for loner. Like Yes sung: the owner of a broken heart is much better than the owner of a lonely heart. It's better to post all your heartfelt pain on Facebook, than to have less than twenty Facebook friends.



The culture of posting, liking and sharing is all about your outer Self. How others should perceive you. But online, we have evolved further and have reached a point where many have come to realize that the transparent self-assembling-strategy is quite artificial and has become resistant to this artificial inauthentically constructed online identity.

I have noticed this shift within my own Facebook-network's behavior. More and more of my Facebook friends post bad news stories: broken iPhones, arms and hearts; clumsy spontaneous moments; personal beliefs; uncensored political opinions; make-up-free faces and loads of —Bas Jan Aderish— tears. And you know what? The dirty laundry posts gain more likes than sunny smiling portraits and vibrant fit and sexy holiday reports.



Facebook users rapidly became allergic or as I just mentioned, resistant to this polished fake behavior. This resistance asked for an altered advanced method. Therefore we have slowly developed towards a more vulnerable and (semi)transparent presentation of our online Selves.¹⁶ Here the tricky element comes in. No more hyper-posed photos, photo manipulation or obviously ironically meant likes of *Spongebob*, *Barbie* etcetera. These days online Selves are extremely precise and consciously constructed and thus maximally controlled. The amount of Facebook friends will eventually diminish, in order to gain trust on the basis of real friendships.

I mean, Anna, 900 friends seriously?!

All these tricks are employed just in order to be perceived as the real authentic you. Photos seem spontaneous and selfies are honestly titled as “Selfies”. Selfies include the evidence of the phone, camera or a selfiestick, that often appear in a mirror or window reflection. They seem transparent about its *selfiness*. Even the sentimental posts are controlled, including some nonchalant typos evry nwo and then.¹⁶ Yes for real, typing errors could let you be rendered as less mechanical and thus more real. The capitals are consciously not consistently present to avoid showing any self-awareness or stylized attempt. But this online *out-of-bed-look* requires maximum control. You could say that we control digital media, but they control us even more!

One could conclude that the authenticity rules for the digital online world obviously disagree with the offline authenticity rules. Offline, we have a certain biological (in)authenticity or realness detector but this biological detector¹⁷ will not function in the digital world.

Thus the online identity requires new rules will be perceived authentic by others and vice versa: the other needs other tools to detect (in) authentic Selves.



Yes, but only if you assume there is such a thing as (in)authenticity at all, no? And wait, I have one more question —a vague question about a vague topic. How do you feel online about being authentic?

The confused young souls do have mixed feelings. On the one hand there is the desire to be seen and followed online, while, on the other hand, there is the anxiety of being watched and followed online, and worse, to be revealed as who they really are.



I mean, really real are.

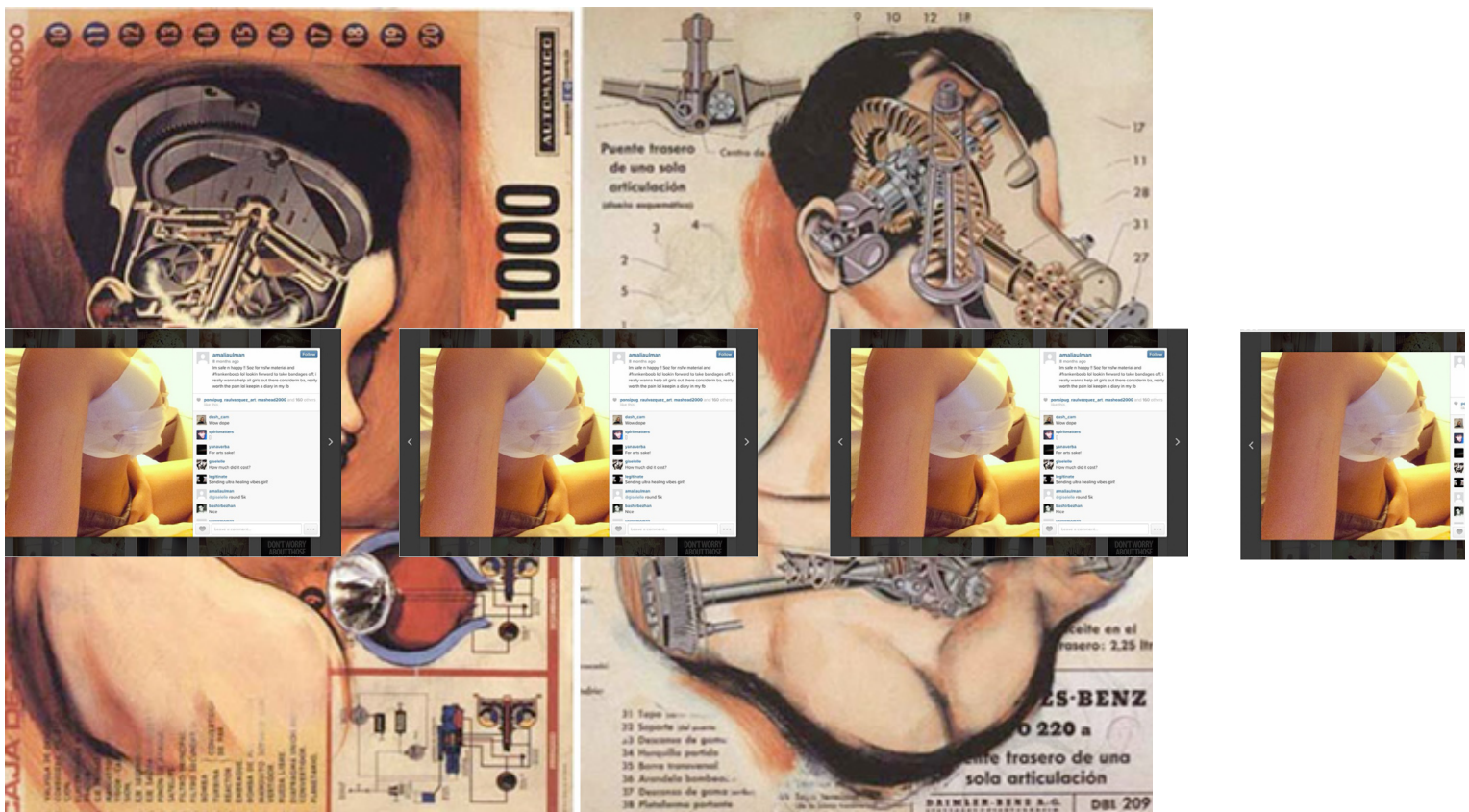
Regarding this anxiety I would like to pose Daniel de Zeeuw's and Gert Lovink's question, "Is this the end of online anonymity?" Linked with the online intentional construction of the authentic Self it might be relevant to add something to this anxiety of anonymity. Kate Crawford introduces the term *surveillant anxiety*, "the fear that all the data we are shedding is too revealing of our intimate Selves but may also misrepresent us." It is exactly this ambiguous struggle that the contemporary online Self deals with. Wanting to be perceived as natural, imperfect and authentic, but not too naked and real because that, for the Self, feels as too authentic too personal and too real.



Let's have a look at Amalia, a girl who operates like any other social-media user. Amalia is 25 years old, she posts photographs on *Instagram* of herself wearing exclusive clothes. She sips champagne, a lattémachiatto or a healthy super-food smoothie in hip cafés; goes to vintage stores and trendy hotels. You would expect a happy girl. The opposite is true. Hardly a smile on her face, she openly shares her insecurities and anxieties. She's unhappy with her breasts and decides to undergo plastic surgery. You can see her nervous sad eyes penetrating your laptop screen. Although the sadness is wrapped in beauty, coffee and cleanness; *crying for help-hashtags* prove her inner sad feelings. Nevertheless, in every photograph she still looks perfect. Maybe too perfect to be real? On Instagram and Facebook, girls, women, boys and men from all over the world like or hate her photographs and leave a comment. Some admire her while others even swear to her. Welcome to the harsh digital reality.

Five months later it turns out that Amalia is Amalia Ulman (1989), a young artist who has constructed an online persona and staged these photographs in the sake of art. This online performance, called *Excellences and Perfections* (2014), started as an experiment but eventually has come to be recognized as a piece of art. The work was, in a sense, too successful because many rendered these Instagram photographs to be true. This was exactly what Ulman was aiming for as she believes that this performance of an online Self could be the performance of any random other Self. "This is what social-media does with us." —Amalia Ulman.

The online Self could be seen as a true Deleuzian "body without organs". Rein Raud, in a dialogue with Zygmunt Bauman, states it like this: "I may be the one who posts, but I become what is posted."





BLg/bk
WbG/bk
Tg/bk
bLg/bk
bLg/bk
bLg/bk



Return order

Fighting my tongue while juggling with terms like realness, authenticity and sincerity; searching for the search for authenticity. The authenticity-obsession became my own obsession. It's altering my brains and feelings. So far each friend, family member or whosoever started laughing after I spoke about my thesis. While joking they told me, "You're hooked Anna. You're hooked."

Was it true or was it a joke? I didn't know what to say. So I said nothing. The fact that people around me started laughing is exactly the thing irony does. Irony works to cover up actual emotions; Irony is the winking emoticon.

Being disappointed that your friend did not call you? Just copy paste the following: " I have really enjoyed your phone-call ;-)"

Turning back to the Romantics once more, Friedrich Schlegel believed that irony is the result of the inability to represent something absolute. Nothing is complete and irony is the tool that makes the inherent incompleteness of human experience apparent. Schlegel, with his Romantic irony, didn't mock the world. He didn't have a disrespectful attitude towards the world but rather showed how little all humans know. He puts it as, "Pure thinking and cognition —*Erkennen*— of the Highest, the infinite, can never be represented —*Dargestellt*— adequately," This is "the principle of the relative unrepresentability —*Undarstellbarkeit*— of the Highest." Only indirectly can this highest be presented. Art must go beyond what it represents, by hinting at that which it does not succeed in saying. Art is able to do this through irony, Schlegel says. But somehow irony became a threat for its own purpose. Irony was not used to reach the infinite or Highest. No, it has more and more been used for breaking down the hierarchy of the High and the Low. It flattens. Not the modernist approach of a flattened surface but to mock its medium and test its value.

Hmm, sounds as my personal love and hate relationship with irony. Maybe irony deserves another essay on its own one day. #to-dolist #check

It was Theodor Adorno who did an authenticity return-order long before postmodernism. He theorized the end of authenticity intensively. In his *Minima Moralia* he declared authenticity to be alienated from our reality, a concept no longer relevant for discussions of the artwork and the status of art. Once entering mass production, he wrote that the work of art will hide the traces of its own making, thereby evoking the impression of perfection and, paradoxically, the authentic. The artist's fingerprint will disappear from the canvas he held, or in Adorno's words, the creator's touch will vanish which will "injure works of art and condemn them to be fragmentary,"



The artwork will look spotless, but its authenticity is nothing but a pipe dream.

Damien Hirsts' self painted spot paintings from 1986 aren't spotless; one can see traces of the brush and lots of paint drips. Of course his recent mass produced spot paintings are indeed polished spotless spot paintings for spotless prices.

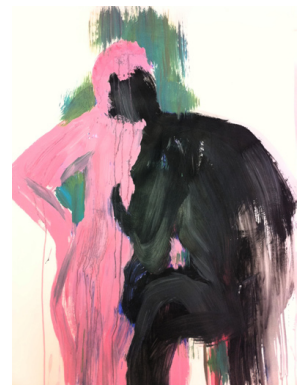
Adorno used American Jazz music as an example to demonstrate the inauthentic. Jazz music suggests freedom and authentic primitive expressions while it's extremely bound to *hidden* structures, rules and an audience. This Jazz audience was the most problematic thorn in Adorno's side. According to Adorno it was the mass who appreciated and dominated Jazz. For Adorno Jazz was like all the other products of the "mass culture industries".

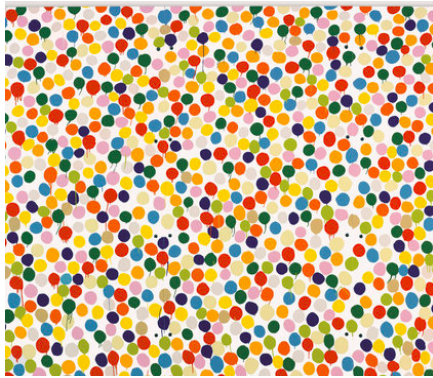
Years and years after the Critical theory of Adorno, postmodern irony became fashionable. The mass production, Adorno remarked, noticeably increased and capitalism was its infecting factor.

Timothy Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker critically speak about artists like the Young British Artists, Jeff Koons and Cindy Sherman because they utilize(d) irony as a tool "to de-construct contemporary culture until there is neither anything contemporary nor anything remotely cultural left: broadly speaking, what remains is either something shiny, something sexually polymorphic (or in non-psychoanalytical terms, vernacular, perverse) or something involving excrement."

Besides irony, postmodernism is bound with fragmentation and deconstruction. Anarchy instead of hierarchy. And worst of all, a nihilistic disbelief in any truth. Long before postmodernism, negative Nietzsche already said that there is no truth but only stories about the truth. Postmodernists mentioned there are only fragments, parts and incompleteness. Some of them went so far as to claim there is no such thing as reality; only an Umberto Eco *hyper-reality* or a *Baudrillardish simulation* of reality. And there is no original. For some postmodernists, this wasn't a problem as they believed the copy is even better!

Hmmm so in fact I do smell a sense of hierarchy here?





This abandoning attitude or even disbelief of authenticity was just a temporary act. The come-back of authenticity and sincerity as value and virtue, is today more than present.

Since I did not chose randomly to write a thesis about authenticity. I am confronted with this come-back of authenticity on daily base. Anna you don't seriously think it's only my personal obsession?!

Postmodernists didn't only return authenticity, they also sent back the idea of a static identity; the loss of a Self.

Although categorized by some critics as a modern poet, Pessoa wrote: "Each of us is more than one person, many people, a proliferation of our one Self. (...) In the vast colony of our being there are different kinds of people, all thinking and feeling differently."

Interesting is that, just like Kierkegaard, Pessoa, which is Portuguese for *person*, also operated under different names. He wrote seventy two poems under different names and for each name Pessoa imagined a specific style, biography and personality. Thus Pessoa became multiplied in seventy two persons. In the end Pessoa completely lost his true identity. If there was a true identity at all.

These ideas of the identity in flux and the fragmented Self became popular thoughts on selfhood which have definitely changed the world.

An end of labeling and literally identifying individuals by class, gender, ethnicity etc; seems a better world if you ask me. But, unfortunately today's obsession with authenticity and a certain pressure to be yourself recalls the idea of the substantial Self.

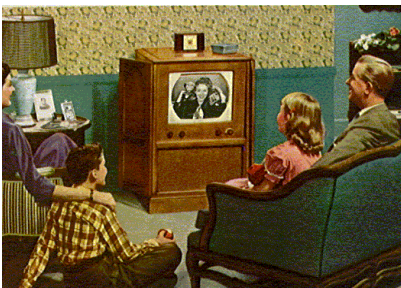


Re-order

Re is the new NEW. Refill, reuse, recycle. All together! Real, we want real! Homemade mustard, self brewed beer, grandmothers brownies come for free only today and only for you with the oh-so-locally grained coffee. Of course, I would rather choose one of these options above the mass produced E-numberrrr loaded stuff. I mean, E's seem so, so aggressive? No, worse. They seem so terribly inauthentic.

When you do your shopping, listen to the radio or surf online, you probably notice that everything is green, BIO, organic, fresh, animal friendly and local. This consciousness definitively causes better changes for nature, animals and our own health. That is a great green deal for sure.

And no, I was not being ironic.



But, as I elaborated on in the chapter *Manufacturing*, this trend is only affordable for those who can spend more; it becomes a capitalistic strategy or even a weapon. Whose bullets, are the consumers themselves. Besides local, green and BIO, also retro and vintage are part of the authenticity-obsession. Old racing bikes, fifties furniture and the popular vinyl records of course. Vintage is intertwined with nostalgia and doesn't nostalgia mean longing for the romanticized past? Until one or two years ago it was weird and disgusting.

Speaking from my own work experience in a second hand store a few years ago. I'd sensed an obvious shift, from second hand shopping as odd towards cool. During the first years in that shop, accidentally entering visitors, always asked if it "seriously" was second hand? Followed up by an whispering "ehhl", "ughgh" or "gross". The store's main customers had mostly been persons who simply couldn't afford new clothing. Here, a wool jumper was priced four Euros. The remaining customers have been those who were idealistic and ecologically green minded and thus, according to many, funny weirdo's. Oh, and now the jumper's price will be thirty four Euros.



Now, let's try to understand today's nostalgia in relation with the authenticity-obsession. There seems to be a logical explanation. In the sixties and seventies, just like today, there was a short authenticity-obsession. Many writers portray the Sixties as a time of hope and activism and the Seventies as a period of self-absorption. Due to the post-war outburst of anarchy and plenty of self-help books guiding you how to alter yourself or even to find your true, authentic Self. With the help of psychologists, psychiatrists or possibly of LSD. No wonder the retro and vintage but also artworks which are in the spotlight today, revisit these anarchistic, energetic, spiritual and liberating years. ¹⁸

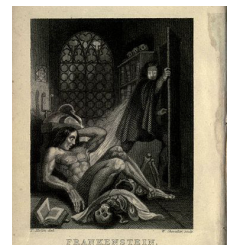


The artist Dario Robleto (1972) plays with our notions of authenticity. His works swing between old and new, real and fake. The handcrafted objects seem to be —authentic— and historical. That one of his works is titled *The Melancholic Refuses to Surrender* (2003) completely fits today's authenticity-obsession.



Also the UVA students, occupying the Bungehuis and the Maagdenhuis in order to protest for more democracy, show many similarities with the student protests and demonstrations from the sixties. Last week I found my UVA friends sitting, drinking and sleeping on the floor while listening to funky live bands. Even the aesthetics of the notes, propaganda and clothing strongly refer to the punk DIY fanzine days; only the laptops and iPhones prove the real date.

The Fluxus happenings have sparked an artistic revolution. Its traces in contemporary performance art still go strong —if not more alive— today. French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou has stated: "Being, acting and making are much more useful concepts. Art is a process. At the limit, everything is art. (...) I imagine that the art of the future will always be moving, never arrived, the art of being lost without losing oneself." Let me revisit the paragraph on Amalia Ulman in the previous chapter *Online account*. In her online performance, which took place over five months, the boundaries between life and art became completely vanished. In a way her performative Self —the artist— melted with her private Self —a random individual. Weren't the Fluxus artists demanding the demolition of the artist as cult figure weren't they? Besides the nostalgia, the authenticity-obsession also has a clear preference for locally, fair and self crafted items. This tendency has constructed a common enemy: the artificial, inauthentic but more important the unfair. The Romantic husband of Mary Shelley, who wrote *Frankenstein* in 1818, might be worth mentioning. Besides being a great poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a fighter for the rights of those who he saw being treated unjustly: lower classes but also animals.



Percy Shelley wrote several essays on vegetarianism. All this, strongly reminds me of the current vegetarian and vegan food trend. I can laugh to imagine him sitting in a hip vegan pop-up bar. He would have been proud of all these veggie pop-up restaurants. Or wait, maybe not. Percy Shelley was a very critical person with clear ideals; he didn't follow —certainly not trends— nor trusted anything or anyone except of his little boat.





Another authenticity-obsession symptom is the following. Since about a year, stores such as Primark and H&M are under media attack. The conditions of the production workers are inhuman. A good thing is that the secrets behind the suspiciously-cheap-prices (due to child labor and other cheap —inhuman— techniques) are shared with the world.

If not would I ever tell you? I mean I am aware of you? Me? Yes you, who reads me.



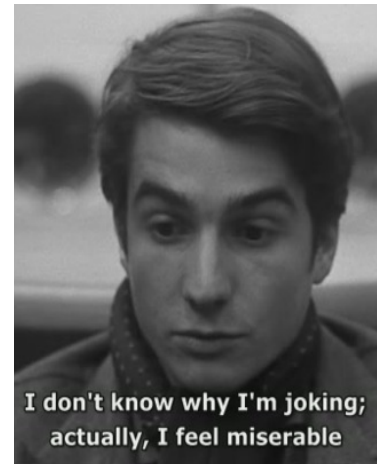
However, I seriously doubt about the sincerity of this engagement in the form of sharing.

Of course, for those whose engagement is sincere this isn't relevant. But the danger is that the authenticity-obsession with its pure-local-sustainable-real engagement trend generates a *freaky* referential mechanism¹⁹. Following this mechanism it seems one doesn't necessarily stop shopping at Primark or H&M. What counts is that one posts on social-media news articles that show that H&M is our —your— guilty enemy. Borrowing Raud's words again: "I may be the one who posts, but I become what is posted," The social media users become engaged as soon as they post engagement stuff.

I personally doubt if the social-media user so simply becomes engaged. The user only seems engaged, no?



The authenticity trend dominates today's total Zeitgeist; authenticity is part of our lifestyles. Already a while ago Yoga made its fresh comeback. Not only among the hippies; even businessmen can proudly do their daily *Surya Namaskar*.²⁰ *New sincerity*²¹ was embraced already in the 1980s and is thus not new either. But the uncool —cool— *norm-core*²² and *mumblecore movies*²³ are younger ones. Participatory and other engagement forms are rising and shining within the arts²⁴ Further, we have *New Romanticism*²⁵ in the arts as well and the *New Aesthetic*²⁶ in design; *New Realists*²⁷ are everywhere! All these phenomena are part of Metamodernism. At least, that is what Vermeulen en van den Akker claim. They founded Metamodernism in 2009 and got warmly welcomed in the art domain. In September 2014 there even was a twelve hour Metamodern oriented symposium called *The Return of History* organized in the Stedelijk Museum.

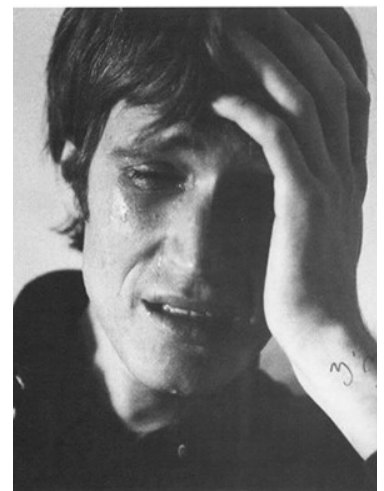


Arriving at Museumplein, actor Shia LaBeouff was running circles —a Metamarathon— around the Stedelijk museum. But what about Guido, I wondered. No, unfortunately he was not there. Maybe I was thinking too meta for this Metamarathon.

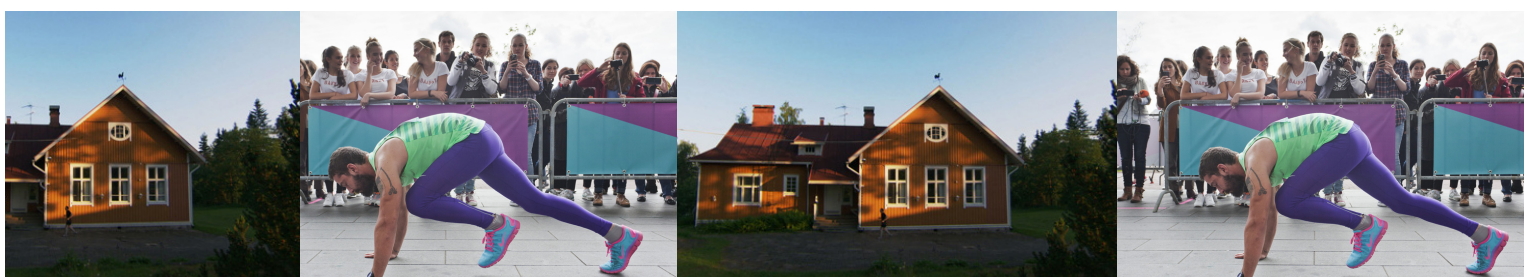
Disappointment no.2: superstar Francis Fukuyama was sold out already; no.3: during the twelve hours of talking, no clear arguments had been coined, no sense of necessity. Maybe that is common for the Metamodern body²⁸? Being in between. Between active and passive between being sure and being not sure at all. Eh, well perhaps I do feel Metamodern right now. #metamind

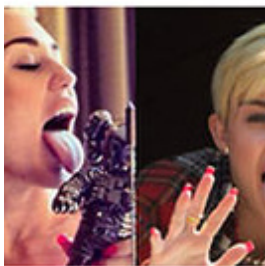
The New Romantic —Metamodernists— don't eschew postmodernism nor modernism; they go beyond. Oscillating between postmodern irony and modern sincerity. Interesting is that they re-imagine Utopia's while they realize and acknowledge its impossibility. That seems to be quite Romantic. As Vermeulen and van den Akker state it: "New Romanticism attempts to both-neither reconstruct and-nor de-construct the commonplace. It seeks to come to terms with the commonplace as it is while at the same time imagining how it could be but never will be. It presents us with the impossible possibility of another here-and-now."

Most of the artists they give as Metamodern examples are inspired by Bas Jan Ader (1942-1975). That doesn't surprise me at all; Bas Jan Ader is the nostalgic role model for the authentic Romantic artist whose works are all about its *unfulfillableness*. Exactly this what makes him —perceived— so impossibly Romantic, Ader's unsuccessful search for the *miraculous*.



Bas Jan Ader appears in many art shows, artist's artworks and is still mentioned on many blogs and in many books. Ader seems to be back in business although he is missing since forty years.





One artist who wasn't mentioned in a Metamodern context, as far as I know, is Shana Moulton (1976) with her performances, videos, and multidimensional installations. According to MOMA, Shana Moulton "creates worlds at the threshold of absurdity and truth, catharsis and cliché, the material and the spiritual." Moulton adopts the role of her alter-ego Cynthia, a grown-up woman dreaming like a young girl. She worries and wonders in surroundings of colorful uncanny domestic film-sets. In her video work *Restless Leg Saga* (2012) Cynthia escapes reality while watching the pharmaceutical ads or restless legs on a TV. Many of her works include animations and songs of mystic poetry. In an absurd and somehow naive visual language she expresses her *oh-so-sincere* worries and wondering concerning contemporary anxieties. At the same time there's a tension between this naivety and knowingness. In a short reportage Shana Moulton admits that her work is highly personal; it's completely based on her own personal emotional struggles, fears and wishes.

Naivety isn't only embraced by Metamodernists but also by generation Twee AKA the Peter Pan generation. "Don't grow up, stay a kid!" shouts their slogan. This naive generation has been spotted by Marc Spitz. Vermeulen and van den Akker might disagree but generation Twee shares a lot with the Metamodern experience. "Twee is having a Donald Duck tattoo on your arm, Twee is Miley Cyrus."

But the Metamodern and the Twee individual shouldn't be confused with the ironic postmodern; to speak for Spitz, the Twee—and the Metamodern—frolic between, "irony and sincerity, naivety and knowingness,²⁹ relativism and truth, optimism and doubt, in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons." This Metamodernism, with its several sub-movements, definitely goes hand in hand with the authenticity trend. As discussed earlier in this chapter, authenticity today is present in art, literature, movies, theater³⁰, music, design; literally everywhere.

Is present?! Well to nuance my latter Self: it admires, pretends or seems to be present. I did not conclude yet, if there is such a thing as authenticity at all.

And do you think what I think right now? Why this search for authenticity if it is everywhere? Paradox oh you terribly fantastic fanatic plastic paradox!

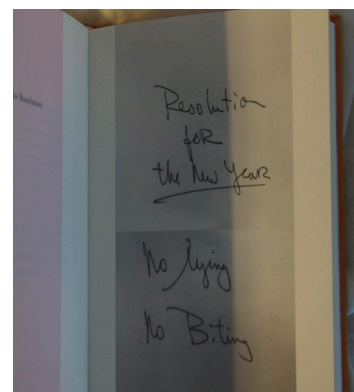


The neoliberal mind loves to buy experiences. Products as experiences, art as an experience; literally everything as an experience. I am not talking about rare experiences only (like a trip to the Moon or Bhutan). No, every single step we do, every page we visit, every museum we enter, every party we join and every coffee we drink.

To spend our valuable time on valuable experiences.³² This same neoliberal mind desperately wants to believe in authenticity and sincerity. Consumers like to believe that in order to become authentic they buy the authentic: what you buy is what you are.

If we spend our valuable time watching TV, of course we prefer to believe watching something real and authentic. Documentaries³³ and life shows are attractive options for a reason nowadays.

Most documentaries are planned and post produced by engaged makers; its *realness* should always be doubted. But the risk of failure in live streamed TV shows on the contrary create a sensational feeling of realness. Especially when something goes wrong. The hunger for authenticity can rapidly turn into a witch-hunt if we have to believe Steven Poole. After Beyoncé sang at Barack Obama's inauguration, rumors spread she had been lip-syncing. When you listen back video's you can clearly hear two Beyoncés: a pre-recorded Beyonce and a Beyoncé who obviously sings live. "I decided to sing along with my pre-recorded performance," is what she said. This was immediately taken as her confession to the crime she thereby denied. The story was wrongly headlined on BBC News as "Beyoncé admits lip-syncing,"



As I started the thesis with, authenticity is a by-product of civilization, when society became too big and one had to deal with strangers—the other. But what then, is the reason for the most recent comeback?

So indirectly wondering, why did I spend this entire thesis reflecting and essaying³¹ on authenticity? Is there a specific reason why authenticity appealed to all those seekers including myself in 2014?

Will my Track & Trace work? Will it be delivered?

Weren't we done with authenticity already since the early postmodern days? Is it like Virginia Richter claims: "We can't get rid of it although we know it does not exist because it's a collective investment," Or is it because the state of longing for authenticity is a human thing just like Freud tried to make it clear. These answers seem much too simple and don't cover the whole story.

Miles Orvel blames the whole authenticity searching-thing as a reaction upon fraud. This I find a valuable point. The financial crisis caused a *Stimmung* or atmosphere of distrust; a distrust of money, institutions and power. This distrust provoked a break—a relational break really—with those in power.



Citizens generated a DIY wave as replacement. We don't need big paid monkey business, we have Youtube tutorials and each other. We take care of each other. We want self crafted beer, pop-up stores and share&care opportunities. We want singer songwriters crying their hearts out. We want honesty! No teleprompter speaking speeches of acting politicians.

In the first two chapters *Pre-order* and *Processing*, I discussed why and how the need for the authentic-Self started. In the era of Enlightenment, God was not leading man's mind anymore.³⁴ Knowledge became power and God became too mystic and abstract to serve the critical and rational minds. The lost —Romantic— individuals were longing for a spiritual replacement. Thus, Orvel's point makes sense to me for this reason as well. In today's neoliberal soundscape no clear authorial voice can be heard. Instead, we have all become authors.

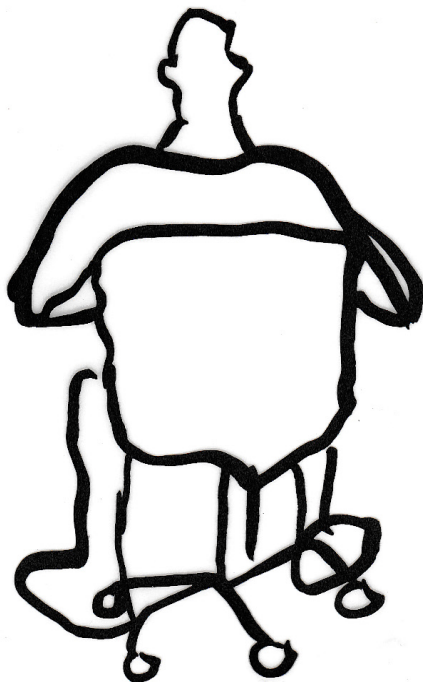
Could this lack of God or another authorial voice also be a catalyst for today's mindfulness mania? Also, the financial crisis slept in many young faces. Many of those faces seek for spirituality. If they don't practice meditation, partying on acid seems to be the other popular option. The advanced lost ones even do both. #isgoingtoYogaClass #rushrush

Probably there is not one absolute reason for this abstract obsession but the demands are clear. We seek for truthfulness in a real world of irony and lies. We want realness in a fake world of avatars and self-manipulation. We want to believe in being our —authentic— selves. Let me copy paste two lines from Luke Turner's Metamodern note: "Here, perhaps, we are free to imagine our own individual paradise, a personal Utopian fantasy. Whilst the northern lights above may not guide us to the promised shores, the trajectories of failed utopias retain the capacity to inspire, and to enrich our continued pursuit of unreachable horizons."





After the party
they found glory



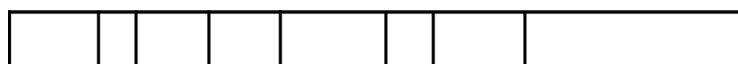
Status update

Now, as an artist, I can't escape from a certain role-play either. Like in theater for the actor, there is a premise for the artist; including institutions with its employees, curators, gallerists, critics, teachers, an audience and the rest of the cast. And I only have to perform as myself —the artist. But Anna, where is the rest of my script?

Even though this essay has stolen your time and energy for the last couple of seconds, minutes or hours. It has not delivered you authenticity.

Were you a victim of an e-mail-scam which took advantage of your naivety? But that is good, Metamodernists will tell you; naive art sells. As we have seen before, for some the refusal to be smart, polished and grown up is a strategy for the development of authenticity. Mapping but failing to deliver then is valuable in itself. Was it Adorno who said that an authentic artwork lies in its failing? Yes, but he didn't mean that failing should be naive. Quite the opposite, one has to be very much aware of failing; one should even try to love this failing.

Adorno himself was a good example: his classical compositions and his philosophy can be considered as an attempt to make something good —and authentic— but will eventually crumble as castles of sand. His love for the essay as a form where something is tried (from the French *essayer*) underscores this. Well, I've tried to deliver authenticity but the final status remains *undeliverable*. It's up to you to consider it as failed. I also leave it up to you if it's authentic.



Endnotes

1. Rousseau, chronologically, is an Enlightenment thinker although he is considered as Romantic and even anti-Enlightenment.
2. The authenticity-obsession seems to be connected with self-help books and tutorials.
3. From R. Jay Magill.
4. Mary Shelley has portrayed Victor Frankenstein as an impossible dreamer; he tried to create life in his scientific lab. While he creates a monster he realizes that nature is much stronger than science and human altogether. Despite his realization he keeps on dreaming. "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world."
5. Youtube tutorials. Coaching how to be/become/do/make/learn etcetera.
6. Makes me think of, *Videri quam esse* —To seem to be, rather than to be— is the Latin inscription over the fake fireplace on the set for the satire TV program *The Colbert Report*.
7. The philosopher Simon Blackburn investigates the mechanism behind the L'Oreal slogan in his book *Mirror, Mirror: The Uses and Abuses of Self-Love*.
8. Even appropriation artist Richard Prince plays a role in the authenticity-obsession. For his recent (2015) show in the Gagosian gallery, he appropriated Instagram photos. Photos posted by random people but also by famous people. Prince selected only unique, glamorous and sexy photos. On Instagram we can all pretend to be hot and special.
9. See Philip K. Dick's book: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
10. The online sharing on social network services like Facebook and Twitter.
11. This is another potential topic for another thesis or essay. For the curious one, I recommend further reading of Camiel Winkel's and Pascal Gielen's research report *De Hybride kunstenaar* (2012) or Ruben Jacobs' book *Iedereen is kunstenaar* (2014).
12. Ed Atkins shares in his work *No-One Is More "Work" Than Me* (2014) how the immaterial laborer feels after working all day long.
13. Organizations anticipating on this dilemma call themselves *stopfake.org* and *africacheck.org*; they identify false circulating news and images about events in Ukraine and Africa.
14. Postmodernism brutally ended the authentic dream. See chapter *Return order*
15. Options on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest etcetera, to share a photo or news-article or to like a brand, band, shop or a specific posted photo, message etc from one of your friends.
16. Ed Atkins incorporates lots of spelling-mistakes and word manipulation in his text-enriched works. "Down here everything is STRuctur!"
17. If you wonder what kind of detector I mean, just re-read the Duchenne laughter paragraph in a earlier chapter *Manufacturing*.
18. As the exhibition *When Elephants Come Marching In* demonstrated. The exhibition from 2014 at de Appel was curated by Mark Kremer and investigated the 1960s and 1970s influences. "The tumultuous 1960s have left two trails in art- and cultural history: Psychedelia and Conceptualism. Today Psychedelia —art and other expressions that arose out of the impulse to expand human consciousness— is associated with drug use, the sub- or counterculture, and experimental music,

while Conceptualism —visual art in which the central element is the idea— is almost synonymous with high art.”

19. Remember I mentioned Joseph Pine’s *referential authenticity*? Now, this is what happens if you use *referential authenticity* as a weapon.
20. Surya Namaskas is originally called the *Sun Salutation* and is a comprehensive yogic exercise.
21. The term *New Sincerity* was first used for alternative rock bands around Austin, Texas in mid 1980s. Later writer David Foster Wallace announced New Sincerity as a literary movement in the 1990s.
22. *Normcore* is purposely dressing blank or dull. Started as a post-ironic anti-fashion. Explained by the *urbandictionary*, normcore is a “purposely uncool trend by hipsters in an attempt to pull away from the subculture fashion that were becoming commercialized and popular, norm core is quickly becoming a legitimate fashion trend. Characterized by boxy, unflattering jeans jackets, oversized sweatshirts, gift shop baseball hats. Anything that looks like it might be featured in a Calvin Klein from 1998, or anything you’d wear around the house on laundry day.”
23. *Mumblecore* is a film genre that started around 2002 and has grown over the past decade. Mumblecore films share the DIY aesthetics and low production costs.
24. If you check how many art shows and writings on art include buzzwords like: New // Engagement // Participatory // Collaborative//Engaged // Art// Must read on this topic is Claire Bishop’s *Artificial Hells*.
25. Mentioned in several *Notes on Metamodernism*; collected on the official Metamodernism website.
26. Relating to visual language; digital technology, Internet in the physical world plus the blending of the virtual and physical. Term was coined by James Bridle.
27. Term coined by writer David Boyle. According to Boyle, *New Realists* are those “who may eat fast food sometimes but will defend their right to an authentic option with increasing passion.”
28. While writing and searching on and for authenticity I came across the following statement: Metamodernism is pending between this and that.
29. In fact, the latter is explained as one of the Metamodern traits.
30. I didn’t mention theater yet, but *theater of the real* is emerging since the late 1990s. Verbatim theater is a theater technique. As explained in the book by Will Hammond and Dan Steward; Verbatim theater makers “incorporate words of real people, as spoken in private interview or public record.” It is based on facts, true documents, trials, autobiography, newspaper articles and other sources.
31. Essay, from French essayer the translation: to try, or to make an attempt at.
32. Guy Debord in *Society of the Spectacle* described the spectacle society, a parent of the experience economy?
33. Even so *Verbatim theater*.
34. Since the Enlightenment one was allowed to doubt God’s existence as long as one used one’s reason. For the Romantics was Deism a common religious view on God as an amoral creator.

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Track & Trace

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3. Image 'YinYang necklace', online advertisement
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53. Painting *Black Square*, Kazimir Malevitsj 1913

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58. Installationshot/performance, *Stand Behind Me*, Liz Magic Laser 2013
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63. Photograph, *Profile Picture 03/01.14*, Amalia Ulman 2014
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92. Filmstill *Restless Leg Saga*, Shana Moulton 2012
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95. Scan 'No lying no biting', from *True Stories*, Sophie Calle 1994
96. Photograph 'Celebs, news post', found online
97. Photograph 'Office yoga', found online
98. Collage *Is Google God?*, Anna Frijstein 2013
99. Collage *After The Party They Found Glory*, Anna Frijstein 2014
100. Collage *The Thinking Artist*, Anna Frijstein 2014

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70. Photograph (left page), *Untitled Copywork*, Anna Frijstein 2012
71. Filmstill 'Genesis and Lady Jaye', *The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye*, 2011
72. Photograph *Untitled (#225)*, Cindy Sherman 1990
73. Painting *Skizo now!*, Anna Frijstein 2010
74. Painting *Polka Dots*, Damien Hirst 1986
75. Photograph 'Damien Hirst with painting', found online
76. Image 'Cartoon', found online

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77. Print 'Family watching TV', found online
78. Photograph 'Vintage market', found online
79. Sculpture *The Melancholic Refuses to Surrender*, Dario Robleto 2003
80. Photograph 'Happening at *Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik*', 1962
81. Print 'Inside cover in *Frankenstein*', Mary Shelley 1831
82. Photograph 'Bas Jan Ader with boat —on which he died', Bas Jan Ader 1975
83. Drawing 'Percy Shelley's boat —on which he died',

Percy Shelley 1822

