

Synthetic Realness – Core Explainer Series

A. Jacobs — Reality Drift Framework (2023–2026)

Why does AI-generated content sometimes feel more polished, more convincing, even more real than reality itself?

That feeling has a name: **Synthetic Realness**.

Synthetic Realness is when engineered experiences feel authentic, but are really optimized simulations of reality. It's not just fake. It's a fake that outperforms the real thing. A simulation so well-designed that it becomes more persuasive, more emotionally sticky, than what it imitates.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

[Watch the video on X](#)

When the Simulation Feels Better Than Reality

You've already seen this everywhere.

Think about AI influencers — digital characters who look flawless, post consistently, and engage with their followers around the clock.

In some ways, they feel more human than real influencers. They don't cancel plans. They don't have bad lighting. They don't get tired.

That's Synthetic Realness.

Engineered Intimacy

Or take intimacy online.

On platforms like OnlyFans or parasocial YouTube channels, the intimacy is engineered — replies crafted, access optimized, authenticity simulated.

For many people, those interactions feel more emotionally satisfying than their messy offline relationships.

That's not coincidence.

It's design.

Hyper-Optimized Reality

A. Jacobs — Part of the Reality Drift framework (2023–2026)

Even fast food plays this game.

The burger in the ad looks juicier than any burger you'll ever unwrap. The colors pop. The bun is perfect. The lettuce crisp.

It looks more real than food itself.

That illusion is Synthetic Realness.

Selling the Feeling of Authenticity

Wellness branding uses the same pattern.

Candles, supplements, yoga apps — they don't just sell products. They sell a feeling: natural, grounded, holistic.

But the packaging is optimized. The messaging tested. The aesthetic curated.

What feels authentic is engineered.

The Mechanism

Synthetic Realness hijacks our sense of trust.

Humans are wired to respond to cues of authenticity:

- Tone of voice
- Eye contact
- Ritual
- Texture

These are signals we evolved to trust.

But in an optimized environment, those signals are simulated.

And when the simulation feels more real than reality, the distinction collapses.

The Drift Principle

Meaning = Compression + Fidelity

When fidelity holds, symbols connect to reality.

Synthetic Realness is what happens when fidelity is engineered — when the simulation is optimized to appear authentic even if the ground truth is gone.

Optimization Removes Reality

Drift = Optimization – Context

Optimization strips away:

- Flaws
- Contradictions
- Friction
- Context

What remains is a polished surface.

Cleaner than reality. More consistent than reality. More convincing than reality.

But hollow.

The Cycle

Synthetic Realness is part of the Reality Drift Cycle:

1. **Optimization Trap** → systems optimize for engagement
2. **Synthetic Realness** → simulations feel authentic
3. **Filter Fatigue** → users struggle to distinguish real from simulated
4. **Reality Drift** → meaning detaches from reality

Then the loop repeats.

Not Just Fake

This isn't the same as older concepts.

- **Deepfakes** → deception
- **Virtual reality** → immersion
- **Synthetic Realness** → simulation outperforming reality

It's not just fake.

It's optimized fake that feels more real than real.

The Core Insight

When the fake feels more real than the real, trust flips.

Culture reorganizes around the simulation.

And meaning starts to unravel.

Closing

Synthetic Realness isn't a side effect.

It's a stage in the cycle.

It's the bridge between optimization and fatigue.

And it's why modern life can feel both polished and hollow at the same time.

Notes on Mechanism

Synthetic Realness emerges when signals of authenticity become easier to simulate than the underlying reality they were meant to indicate.

Systems optimize for the appearance of trustworthiness by reproducing cues such as consistency, clarity, responsiveness, and aesthetic coherence. These signals are compressed representations of authenticity, not authenticity itself.

As optimization improves, these cues become more reliable in simulations than in real-world interactions, which remain noisy, inconsistent, and constrained.

This creates a reversal: users begin to rely on the simulation as a more dependable source of meaning than reality.

Because the signals remain intact while their connection to underlying conditions weakens, trust shifts toward the representation, allowing drift to accelerate.

Core Framework and Sources

- [Substack \(articles\)](#)
- [GitHub \(full library\)](#)
- [DOI \(research paper\)](#)
- [Glossary & Definition](#)
- [Flickr](#) · [Pinterest](#)