

The Invisible Mechanism Behind Why Everything Feels Fake

Synthetic Realness, Optimized Representation, and Reality Drift

Invisible Mechanism Note #3 — Reality Drift Framework

A. Jacobs

The Feeling

Everything feels fake.

Online content feels polished but empty.

Public language feels scripted.

Places arrive through reviews and images before they are experienced.

People arrive through profiles before they are encountered.

Culture feels increasingly familiar, repetitive, and preassembled.

Nothing is necessarily false.

The feeling comes from something else.

Reality is increasingly encountered through representations designed to be selected, ranked, predicted, and repeated.

The Invisible Mechanism

The core mechanism is simple:

representations have become easier to optimize than reality.

A platform cannot optimize a full human experience.

It can optimize clicks, retention, ratings, reactions, shares, and visibility.

A system cannot fully process a person.

It can process a profile.

It cannot process the whole meaning of an event.

It can process a headline, category, clip, summary, or trend.

The representation becomes the usable version of reality.

Once that happens, systems begin improving the representation itself.

How the Shift Happens

The sequence is:

direct experience → representation → algorithmic selection → optimized familiarity → synthetic realness

Direct experience contains irregularity, ambiguity, friction, and surprise.

Representation compresses that experience into something legible.

Algorithms select the forms most likely to perform.

Those forms are repeated across platforms, brands, creators, and systems.

Repeated forms become familiar.

Eventually, the environment feels recognizable before it feels real.

Why Familiarity Starts Feeling Artificial

Familiarity usually creates trust.

But excessive familiarity creates suspicion.

Different advertisements use the same emotional rhythm.

Different creators use the same narrative structures.

Different brands use the same tone.

Different AI systems produce the same polished cadence.

The content changes.

The underlying pattern does not.

This is **synthetic familiarity**.

It is the feeling of recognizing the form before encountering the thing itself.

What Synthetic Realness Means

Synthetic realness is not simply fake content.

It is the appearance of reality produced through recognizable patterns whose connection to direct experience has weakened.

The image may depict a real place.

The profile may describe a real person.

The statement may contain true information.

The problem is not always factual accuracy.

The problem is that the surface becomes more convincing while the source becomes more distant.

The representation feels real enough to accept.

It does not feel grounded enough to fully trust.

Reality Drift

Within the **Reality Drift framework**, the problem begins when representations become more influential than the realities they were created to represent.

The feed shapes what feels important.

The rating shapes what feels valuable.

The profile shapes how the person is perceived.

The summary shapes how the event is understood.

The generated form shapes what future expression looks like.

Reality remains present.

But it increasingly arrives after interpretation, ranking, optimization, and repetition.

This is why modern life can feel fake even when nothing is obviously false.

Reality Drift begins when the representation becomes more influential than the reality that once corrected it.

The Hidden Failure

The system does not need to deceive anyone.

It only needs to reward what is easiest to recognize and reproduce.

Over time:

- visibility replaces significance
- familiarity replaces contact
- coherence replaces grounding
- performance replaces presence
- representation replaces encounter

The world does not disappear.

It becomes harder to reach without first passing through a model of itself.

Keywords: why everything feels fake, synthetic realness, optimized representation, cultural mediation, algorithmic culture, synthetic familiarity, mediated experience, coherence is not contact, representation replacing reality, Reality Drift, A. Jacobs