INTRODUCTION

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Authenticity has become the ultimate asset. Originally, it was linked to the idea of a core of a thing—its essence. Recently, however, as a consequence of globalization and the ubiquity of technology, we are witnessing new ways of creating authenticity and processes of authentication that differ radically from this traditional notion. The longing to be true to oneself has become a cliché. The Internet is deeply embedded in our day-to-day lives, transforming our routines and allowing us to multiply ourselves in avatars and profiles. It is easy to disregard authenticity as just a hollow shell, but its presence and force are undeniable in these times of digital hegemony. How can one be true to infinite scrolling?

There was a promise that access to information via digital means would be democratized, but instead we have seen digital surveillance and an overabundance of images. Moreover, the digital revolution has given way to the post-digital era, which no longer distinguishes between on- and offline, and which embeds and normalises digital technology in almost every personal relation, labour condition or aesthetic practice. And the concept of authenticity has been a casualty of this change: initially clearly defined and with a well-delineated referential scope, it has seen that its sharpness dissolve in the post-digital era.

Prefixing 'digital' with 'post-' moves us, in referential terms, beyond the era before the internet entangled day-to-day experiences with this and that technology, and users hadn't yet lost their naiveté about

the implications of using digital technologies in their lives. At the same time, we think 'post-digital' is more apt than 'post-internet', which often describes objects or concepts that find their source online and that are then translated back into a physical form. Instead, post-digital allows us to discuss a wider range of behaviours and processes in which on- and offline are mutually intertwined and which have left an undeniable imprint on society.

Airbnb, the online platform, with its slogan, 'Live Like a Local', has considerably altered the way in which we travel and use our own homes. Many cities, such as Amsterdam[1] and Barcelona,[2] are seeing rising house prices, gentrified neighbourhoods, and the displacement of local communities. The effects being wrought by the digital sphere have also been seen in surprises such as Brexit and Trump's election, which have been enabled in part by phenomena that have been developing for years, such as the decay of print media as a central source of information and the rise of social media and the filter bubble.[3] Even groups such as ISIS make their strategic use of digital media. The effects of digital tools and platforms are constantly present: no longer merely virtual, they can be found in our cities, in government, and in our identities.

The term 'authentic' is used to mean either 'of undisputed origin or authorship' or, less rigidly,

[1]
Renate van der Zee, 'The "Airbnb Effect": Is It Real, And What Is It Doing to a City Like Amsterdam?', *The Guardian*, 16 October 2016.

[2]
Stephen Burgen, 'Barcelona Marches to Curb Negative Effects of Tourism Boom', *The Guardian*, 29 January 2017.

[3]
See Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (London, 2011).

'faithful to an original'. To say that something is authentic is to say that it is what it professes (or is reputed) to be, in terms of its origin or its authorship. But things get more complicated when we discuss authenticity as a characteristic of people.

What is it to be oneself? The question raises metaphysical, epistemological, and moral issues. For Kierkegaard, authenticity relies on religious faith. Nietzsche's atheist interpretation involves seeking truth without the use of virtues. And in existentialism, authenticity depends on the degree to which one is true to one's own character despite external pressures.

The Romantic notion of authenticity was about introspection, about getting to know one's true self. It was an internal process, closely related to the etymological meaning of *autos* (self) and *hentes* (being). This shifted in the post-digital context, where authenticity becomes a process that can be purchased and enacted. We share personal information about our lives, work, and relationships on social-media profiles, trading anonymity for the power of social networking. Authenticity is performed, and requires an audience. The process has been externalised. Authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, so to say. Digital technologies have affected both the nature of identity and its socio-cultural function. While the idea of identity is not synonymous with the idea of self, the post-digital era contributes to a dislocation of identity from corporeal being, thus dismantling the concept of

identity and, in turn, the idea of an authentic self. Or, as Chus Martínez puts it: 'By performing the self, one becomes the self.'

It could be said that there is an authenticity industry that constantly attempts to stage the effects of the genuine. Consumers want to acquire the products in which that genuineness inheres. Authenticity is featured as a central concept in brand strategies: businesses rebrand their products as authentic, and buyers respond by crediting themselves with a sense of discernment for buying them. Authentic commodities are similar in some ways to luxury goods, including in the ways they impart privilege. The same level of privilege that it is observed in consumer society is found in the virtual space. The digital sphere is not devoid of schemes of inclusion and exclusion, since the construction of authentic experiences is intrinsically biased because structural oppression, as Jazmina Figueroa points out in her text.

The value of authenticity, as it applies to commodities, increasingly applies to cultural artefacts too. The status of a unique work of art or a heritage landmark has changed. Provenance issues are at play not only for heritage items, but increasingly for digital art and culture as well. The circulation of digital files often increases their value, while erasing dilemmas in terms of origin, which become unimportant when one assesses their worth. Moreover, new tools, including digital tools such as

blockchain,[4] provide new solutions for authentication.

Historically, there have been two criteria that had to be met in order for something to be regarded as authentic: provenance and content. Authentic objects and personas are original, real and pure: they are what they claim to be, and their origins are known and can be verified: essence and appearance are one. These forms of authenticity are not always appropriate when dealing with the post-digital context, nor are they equally important in all situations. The opposite of each may then be whatever is superficial, false, deceptive, or just new. A revision of both is needed in order for a new framework for authenticity, in its current meaning, to be established. As David Joselit puts it: 'Instead of aura, there is buzz.'

Based on experiences and talks at the Impakt Festival, which took place in October 2016 in Utrecht, the Netherlands, this book is a collection of reflections and observations, from political, social, technological, and artistic perspectives, on contemporary authenticity. In this way, the book turns authenticity into a fruitful point of departure for the analysis and better understanding of changes in the post-digital age.

The book starts with three essays that address the new conceptualization of authenticity as an agent of affect. Timotheus Vermeulen questions the validity of authenticity by contrasting an existentialist notion with one found in one's own subjectivities. Rob Horning explores the allure of authenticity in our consumer society, and delves into how it is perceived and commercialized, in order in turn to reframe the notion of authenticity as a tool for products and personal branding. For his part, Beny Wagner uses memories, metaphors, and pop-cultural references to draw an analogy between the extraction of resources and the extraction of affect and memory from people.

The next three texts in the collection look into authenticity in relation to provenance, tapping into its repercussions in artworks and heritage. David Joselit maps the difficulties of exhibiting cultural-heritage items that have been uprooted from their original find spot. Erika Balsom discusses the comeback authenticity is making in contemporary exhibitions, and interrogates how it is being used and the purposes it is being put to. McKenzie Wark addresses questions around authenticity from by looking at the circulatory value of digital images.

Jazmina Figueroa, Mat Dryhurst and Holly Herndon, and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi each delve in different ways into the political impact of digital technologies for authenticity. Jazmina argues that the constitution of the hegemonic authentic in virtual spaces deletes the position of marginalized groups, thus generating a situation of inherent discrimination. In the interview we conducted with Mat Dryhurst and Holly Herndon, we inquired about

the role and influence of technology in their music, life, and work, which bring out the sometimes-latent political undertones of the post-digital condition. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi cites the acceleration of what he calls the 'info flow' as the reason for the saturation of the social mind and the deadening of its critical capacities.

Oliver Laric's 3D scan of a *Double Herm with Epicures and Metrodorus* appears throughout the volume in the form of a flipbook. This open-source file[5] is a scan from the collection of the Institut für Klassische Archäologie in Vienna.

This book explores the position of the new authenticity, and attempts to conceptualize and understand whether it is relevant beyond Walter Benjamin's aura of the original—and, if so, in what ways. In ten texts, essays, interviews, and artists' contributions, it constructs a framework through which to explore contemporary connotations of authenticity. It is an inquiry into its value and relevance—into its status as a fluid, performative process dislocated from concepts such as identity and truth.

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