

# Semester Project Paper: The Making of Paling Funk

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February 2016

## Searching for Authenticity: the explorative phase

Exploring the theme of authenticity, we started by researching the multitude of definitions and associations of the word, slowly refining the structure of meanings, digging deeper into forks that we found interesting, because they resonated while barely passing several aspects that we found obvious or plain. In regular meetings we discussed for hours about what we had read, heard, seen, experienced on related topics, sharing the thoughts we had and the people we talked to, and drew graphs of the different definitions we found, pinpointing contradictions between different angles. In the following sections, these early explorations are outlined.<sup>1</sup>

### *Etymology and common definitions*

The word authenticity stems from the Greek *authentikós*, meaning “genuine, original, firsthand”, which stems from *authentēs* meaning “acting on one’s own authority”.<sup>2</sup> The adjective “authentic” is often used to describe something as being real, the opposite of fictitious or fake, a thing that is authentic is of undisputed origin. To be authentic as a person is to be true to oneself as well as in presentation to others<sup>3</sup>

### *A myriad of meanings and connotations*

In an early brainstorm session, we drew the graph digitized in *Figure 1*. It shows different words related with the central “Authentic”, grouped along main themes, “Original” above, and “Representation of Real” below being the densest hubs. These attempts of dissecting authenticity in its different forms were influenced by things we read, things we knew, and, as is clearly seen in hindsight, influenced our future research and ideas. Here several of our influences and ideas on these broad categories are summed up in a non-linear fashion, including later additions.

Authentic in the sense of real, i.e. not fake, acts as a borderline between fiction and reality. Among the subjects that drew our attention were true and false memories (so-called Flashbulb Memories), the importance of honest data gathering methods in science, the inauthenticity of propaganda messages, the desire for imperfection (authentic is often equalled with hand-made)

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<sup>1</sup> During the course of the project, we shared a collection of sources as a collage on various *Trello* boards, in *Google Drive* folders, in e-mails and on other communication channels. Here, a selection is shown that is loosely related to the final outcome.

<sup>2</sup> from the Online Etymology Dictionary: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=authentic>

<sup>3</sup> Authenticity. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/authenticity/>

<sup>4</sup>, the difference between an original artwork and a copy<sup>5</sup>, the importance of verification of data for verdicts in court, and for determining the price of a work of art, the effort and knowledge needed to make this distinction, and the virtue of honesty versus fraudulence.<sup>6</sup>

Authenticity has also a strong connotation with originality, an authentic idea is often interpreted as an idea that is truly yours, that defines you. In this context, we discussed the idea of inheritance, the concept that all ideas are remixes<sup>7</sup>, the ideal of authenticity in artists and art, tradition<sup>8</sup>, and the contradiction between an “authentic village” (conserved, frozen in time, an exact copy from history), and “authentic persons” living in that village (who may renew themselves, change, be dynamic)<sup>9</sup>, the perceived authenticity and how “authentic” is seen as a label of quality, as an inherently good virtue.<sup>10</sup>

Authenticity often also refers to independence, where it can be seen as a ideal of self realization. Sartre defined authenticity as the goal in life: to be free, and to make one’s own moral choices. This version of authenticity is being criticized by a current generation of philosophers, who say that the old view on authenticity amounts to insular individuals, whereas in reality the values of an individual are shaped by society and vice-versa.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the current individualism that is a consequence of the popularity of the old-fashioned definition of the ideal of authenticity.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that authenticity, genuine, being true to itself, is different from originality, uniqueness and identity, i.e. an authentic cheese can be truly made according to the recipe that it says it does, that does not imply that that cheese is unique, original.

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<sup>4</sup> ... in design, but also in language and in people, as described by professor Ellen Rutten in her oration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZYdxa9N5nw>

<sup>5</sup> Later we also discovered Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, wherein he describes the aura that distinguishes original works from copies. Benjamin, W. (2011). The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. *Visual Culture: Experiences in Visual Culture*, 144-137.

<sup>6</sup> David Foster Wallace’s 2004 story “Good Old Neon” is about a protagonist who feels that he has a fraud all his life, being dishonest to the ones around him, the story is about the chasm between who we are, and the impression we make on others, and the paradoxical impossibility of language to ever really establish a purely honest connection. Wallace, D. F. (2004). Good old neon. *Oblivion: Stories*, 141-81.

<sup>7</sup> Notably Kriby Fergusons web documentary series “Everything is a remix” (<http://everythingisaremix.info/watch-the-series/>) and Brett Gaylor’s 2009 “RiP: A Remix Manifesto” (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1397511/>)

<sup>8</sup> Although copying often serves as inspiration, i.e. Kleon, A. (2015). *Steal like an artist*. Noura Books.

<sup>9</sup> We interviewed Jan Sleutels to discuss authenticity, and he also mentioned the topic of control: authentic in his vision means uncontrolled. This is a contradiction between authenticity in the sense of tradition, and authenticity in the sense of freedom.

<sup>10</sup> Pine and Gilmour describe the current economy as an Experience Economy, where consumers no longer buy goods but experiences, and companies create worth by *rendering* authenticity. They give a solid summary here: Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (2007). Museums & authenticity. *MUSEUM NEWS-WASHINGTON-*, 86(3), 76.

<sup>11</sup> Most of all Taylor (1989), as mentioned in Authenticity. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/authenticity/>

<sup>12</sup> In i.e. Jacobs (2015) it is mentioned that the current age is called sometimes “the age of authenticity”, this obsession with authenticity has, according to marketing experts, more to do with an individualist view on life than with a community-driven outlook.

### The Artificiality of Authenticity

It's easy to get lost in the many meanings of authenticity. Authenticity means different things in different contexts, and a romantic notion of "authentic culture" (nostalgia-inducing, true to its tradition) at first glance contrasts with an "authentic experience" (unscripted, subjective and unrepeatable). The search for the meaning of authenticity nihilistic, or ironic, rather, attitude in the researcher. The whole artificiality of the concept was a reason to include it in the exhibition in the first place. "Authenticity is a scam", we had written. Later we discovered that we were not alone in this dilemma between the meaning and meaninglessness of the term, when interviewing sociologist Ruben Jacobs who wrote a book on authenticity<sup>13</sup>, who said "Maybe in the past when I was writing I sometimes had this tendency to say 'let's just finish talking about authenticity, because it does not really exist', but I kind of found out it's not really about whether it's real or not, it's more about whether it's something that we should value or not."



Figure 1: Digital version of sketch during an early brainstorm

<sup>13</sup> Jacobs, R. (2014). *Iedereen een kunstenaar: over authenticiteit, kunstenaarschap en de creatieve industrie*. V2\_

## Narrowing down

### *Focusing on statements*

In our search for statements, we focused on the aspects we found most interesting, looked for contradictions and sought to reveal hidden currents underneath the common meaning of the word. The above statement by Ruben Jacobs, who we came to speak much later in the process, illustrates, and perhaps explains the wicked observation that despite it being such a vague and pluriform concept, authenticity holds so much importance to people. Traditions are for example often seen as inherently good, whereas it is often not realized that most of our traditions are relatively recent inventions.<sup>14</sup> Other contradictions include the artificiality of products that are often described as “authentic” (which is associated with real), the more fundamental issue that trying to control something which is authentic renders it inauthentic, if authenticity is defined as being uncontrolled, and the greater public’s almost religious passion for authenticity, whereas the difference between real and fake can only be spotted by a limited few. Moreover, why should it matter where things come from, whether they are “real”, or “fake”, and whether there is one identifiable author or creator assigned to them, or not, i.e. their existence is acknowledged to be part of a (perhaps fuzzy) web of prior influences.<sup>15</sup>

From these issues we created several statements, among which “the craving for authenticity is related to the feeling of control”, “in authenticity we trust”, “authenticity is a scam” and “an authentic experience cannot be repeated” were lost in first iterations of the democratically arranged shortlist. After discussions with Edwin van der Heide and Media Technology colleagues, we narrowed down to three statements, “authenticity is manipulable” (related to the real versus fake dilemma, and the susceptibility of people to fakes), “the striving for authenticity leads to artificiality” (related to the issue of control) and “authenticity is dead - long live the

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<sup>14</sup> Mostly framed as conscious traditions during the Romantic period at the end of 19th century. Ruben Jacobs mentioned this. Jippe Kreuning, the youngest miller of the Netherlands, also mentioned that the value of tradition is often inspired by nostalgia and the stories we are told in our youth: “I am very interested in this topic. I am now part of a committee for the protection of the miller tradition. The problem is that there will be too few millers to keep all the mills turning, but strangely the other millers in the committee only want old people to take over their jobs. They think that they can find old people to be millers now, and then after a couple of years, there will be more old people to take over these mills again. They forget, however, that the generation that is becoming miller now (of, say age 50 - 70), wants to become miller because they know it from when they were young! It was on radio, in songs, on TV... when our generation is old, we do not join the millers, but a Nintendo committee!”

<sup>15</sup> Two artworks that comment on these topics are Song Dong’s “Original Fake” (2015) - a grass landscape of green-coloured whipped cream, and a chocolate solar eclipse, as seen in the Groninger Museum, with the accompanying text “Whereas great emphasis is placed upon concepts such as authenticity and originality in the West, especially in the art world, contrary words such as ‘fake’, ‘copy’ or ‘imitation’ in China have a much more positive sound than their Western counterparts.” - and Paolo Cirio’s “People Quote People” (2007), where quotes questioning authorship, such as “Plagiarism is necessary, progress demands it”, were randomly (and falsely) attributed to famous dead writers, and engraved in marble.

community” (both breaking ties with the older connection with individualism, and questioning the importance of authorship).<sup>16</sup>

### *Ideas for installations*

We thought about several installations, the ones of which we liked most included some element of fooling the visitor, including a vase that seemingly breaks because of the visitor’s intruding behaviour, and then re-ensembles again. Most ideas focused on the manipulability of authenticity, among those one that would show that the aura of authenticity around objects in a museum context. We wanted to repeat the rituals in a museum, to show that the perceived authenticity of objects is largely elicited by the context, and that glass, security lines, guards and cameras could make a worthless object be perceived with awe.<sup>17</sup>

## Paling Funk

### **The following part contains spoilers and is therefore best to be consumed after experiencing the Paling Funk documentary**

The Paling Funk project searches to communicate the statement “authenticity is manipulable”. The work is a documentary about Paling Funk, a mash up genre of the Brazilian Baile Funk, and the Paling Sound from the Dutch town of Volendam.<sup>18</sup> A concept that was co-idealized by the artist/design researcher Ruben Pater. The Paling Funk does not exist (yet), we create the music, culture and stories that define it. In the documentary we search for the origin of Paling Funk, in the beginning of the 2000s in the Volendam underground.

The medium of documentary film medium was consciously chosen over other shortly considered scenarios. We experienced documentaries to be great vehicles for mindgames. Watching a documentary adds to the immersion because people expect to see something real, i.e. not fictive. In our research we enjoyed watching documentaries that play with the audience’s conceptions.<sup>19</sup> Like the latter examples, the documentary is intended to vary in believability,

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<sup>16</sup> Apart from Robert Taylor, who is heavily mentioned the second half of Ruben Jacob’s beforementioned book, Paolo Cirio’s essay, or perhaps manifesto would be more suitable, “The Death of the Author 2.0” had a great influence: <http://www.peoplequotepeople.com/about.htm>. Additionally, we read The Pirate Book around this time: <http://thepiratebook.net/>

<sup>17</sup> A work that aims for a similar reaction is Niklas Roy’s “WIA < > WIA” that fooled the 2009 ARS Electronica festival into believing it’s of African origin (Niklas is 100% German): <http://www.niklasroy.com/project/49/wia-wia-water-in-africa-water-in-austria>

<sup>18</sup> Funnily, in earlier stages we considered taping ourselves and our work for a kind of “making of” - regardless of what the ultimate result would be. For this reason we taped an brainstorm with Jan Sleutels, parts of which end up in the final documentary.

<sup>19</sup> Ranging from clearly satiric documentaries such as *Darkest Austria* and episodes of *Brass Eye*, and documentaries that research the grey area between fact and fiction, and leave the viewer confused, such as *F is For Fake* and *Exit Through The Giftshop*

thereby swinging the audience between trust and doubt.<sup>20</sup> The cinematic setting allows to capture the attention of the viewer for a fixed time span.<sup>21</sup> Our goal for the viewer experience is for the audience enter the experience with the implicit expectation of a faithful representation of a subject, the flyer text was designed to add to this expectation: *When do we call something “original”, if everything is a mix of different influences? Where do the origins of ideas lie, and who owns them? In the old town of Volendam, you are confronted with such questions. Join us on our search for the real story behind the underground music scene of Paling Funk.*

### *Storyline*

In the Paling Funk documentary there is a search for the origin of the Paling Funk music genre through interviews with DJ's, producers, fans and other people. A characteristic trait of the Paling Funk community is that the members both have a to have a strong stance on authorship laws due to their use of copyrighted material and have a strong attitude of openness, also for otherness, regarding self expression and being yourself within the community. To reflect upon these phenomena the documentary also includes interviews with writers and students who discuss these issues.

### *Multiple layers*

The content of the documentary marks a return to our earlier interest in remixes and originality, whereas the location of Volendam reconnected us with earlier research into traditions. We saw these multiple layers as an advantage of the medium, both adding to the believability and keeping the audience busy. Multiple layers within the documentary are outlined.

### *The manipulability of authenticity*

Paling Funk does not exist, however by enlisting the aid of musicians to create 'Paling Funk' tracks according to an invented convention and esthetic direction, setting up a fictitious origin story, discussing possible motivations and attitudes behind the paling funk community and in general creating a lore through speculative discussion we have come close to creating Paling Funk. Oftentimes interviewees have commented on the viability of the genre and concept. The interviewees do not always lie, e.g. give their honest opinion or thoughts and on some occasions have mixed the truth with fiction completely seamlessly and without our intervention. One notable case was someone discussing the intricacies of country music but acting as if they were talking about paling funk. Moments like these blur the line between real and fake for the viewer.

The expert speakers in the documentary (Ruben Jacobs, Ernesto van der Sar) were questioned almost exclusively on their subjects of expertise. Having them alongside people who take on the

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<sup>20</sup> During our preparations, we had one meeting with Taco Stolk who emphasized that we needed to take the audience very seriously: “think of the audience as more intelligent as yourself”. He also inspired us to think about having multiple layers in order to make it both more interesting and more exhausting to watch.

<sup>21</sup> Currently we are considering extending the experience with an extra “making of” which would show segments that would clearly indicate that the documentary is fake. Whether and how this will be distributed remains to be seen (options included burned DVD's and sharing a link to an online video).

roles of fictitious characters creates a counterbalance for the doubt that may exist. Also there is a mix of real musicians and DJ's and fake musicians and DJ's that fulfil the same role.

### *Originality*

An important aspect of the project is the discussion about originality and the creation and remixing of content, in this case music. It explores the relation between old and new, tradition and novelty, ownership and freedom and individualism and community. The Paling Funk is used as a vessel for this discussion, framing Paling Funk artists as people who do not care about authorship and who do not want remain in a world that is frozen in the past. The town of Volendam, which is seen by tourists as a unique time capsule to the past and by the Dutch as a smoke and mirror tourist trap acts as backdrop for these opposites. Also, there is no clear origin of the paling funk genre. It is kept intentionally vague through contradicting stories and dead ends.

### *Being Authentic*

The documentary touches on the possibility that to be authentic you must participate in the world around you and become part of it and the idea that isolation is a thing of the past. The Paling Funk culture is conversely used as a vessel for exploring rebelliousness against having to fit into your role in a small town environment. The artists share the ethic that any kind of music can be used to create something new and that they are part of a collective of artists.

## Making the Documentary

The first steps towards making the documentary where finding people who we could interview, fleshing out the ideas behind the paling funk genre and community and making the music that would be featured in the documentary. These steps were part of the ongoing process. It was clear that to add credibility and momentum (and arguably authenticity) to the project we would have to visit Volendam and obtain interviews and scenery footage from there. We knew of the existence of the Palingsound museum and interviewed its owner Jan Smit. Interviewing people on the streets proved to be less productive but through some contacts we managed to find some people in Volendam who were willing to help with the project. We intensively recruited people that wanted to appear on camera, and interviewed people in the Hague, Amsterdam and Volendam. Some of the interviewees we met my chance without notice and a small part of the interviews were done within minutes of meeting people. One interviewee even turned out to be a huge baile funk fan, to have been to Brazil on multiple occasions and to speak Portuguese. We managed to film in a couple of bars and play some of the paling funk music there.

### *Expert speakers*

It is known that authority figures elicit trust from people. For the documentary we ask expert speakers to talk about their expertise, which we then edit in a way that can communicate our findings from the research phase as well as possible.

### *Improvisation*

We relied heavily on people's abilities to improvise while talking about a subject that they know is not real. Every interview has been an exercise in facilitating a believable performance from people who have never done this kind of thing before. We found that people who were not trained actors were more believable improvising than saying remembered lines. As a consequence, our documentary's storyline, although meandering within borders set by us, changed organically, and filming became an exercise in fitting in the fragments with previous shots like pieces in a puzzle.

### *Mix of truth and fiction*

Our documentary is meant to induce amongst other things a feeling of doubt regarding what is real and what is not in the viewers. These are some of the factors that contribute to the effect: there are people who talk about their expertise and people who fake having one, fictional stories are often embedded in real ones, many people in the documentary share Portuguese as a common language which adds to the cohesiveness of the story.

### *Editing*

Through creative editing we are able to create a comprehensive story out of bits and pieces of loosely related material. Because the amount of believability of the different interviews vary, we had to find a balance between them. Also, editing allows for material to be taken out of context and be used differently. This is a tool for us to communicate our research findings through, because we can cherry pick what lines fit the subject best.

### *Epilogue*

To repeat a statement made earlier: should it matter where things come from, whether they are "real", or "fake", and whether there is one identifiable author or creator assigned to them? The Paling Funk, although having an entirely fake history, being invented by Dutch boys and one Brazilian, now, through the creation of songs, through listeners, and through the experience of viewers, has become a little less fictional.

