The concept of Authenticity

Deconstructing the underlying dichotomy between On- and Offline environments

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Introduction

Real. Original. Genuine. True. Pure. *Authentic*. Words that have come to have a different meaning in the past years. The concept of authenticity is seen in every television ad, internet commercial or heard in radio programs. Authentic words are recognized in adverts like:

 It's the real thing **(Coke)**

Pure clean, pure Ivory. **(Ivory Soap)**

 Consumers in our mediated culture have started to look for *authenticity* in their purchases (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 1). This desire for a so-called authentic economic experience has grown in importance over the last few years. A product that's being true to oneself has become something to boast about. Better yet: it has become so important for the existence and success for businesses that companies actively search for the one aspect that can make them seem authentic, and identify themselves with it.

The concept of authenticity has become imperative in understanding consumer culture of the 21st century. At the annual DICE summit in Las Vegas this year, Carnegie Mellon University Professor Jesse Schell held a presentation titled 'Design outside the Box' (2010). In it he describes how important it was that, when designing a game one should keep in mind the natural desire for authenticity apparent in consumers nowadays. According to Schell, the more people get buried in technological and mediated features and online culture, the more their desire for authenticity, for reality, grows (Schell, 2010). This makes *authenticity* a concept of importance in a mediated culture. Although I will contend that authenticity has been of importance in academic theory crafting since 40 years, it has grown significantly in economic relevance as our technological culture progressed. Schell claims that in digital culture authenticity has become the reason people will or will not make use of specific services or buy products from businesses. The reason behind the importance of this particular aspect has been appointed to the upcoming of the experience economy, in which commodities and goods for consumers get replaced by experiences that get manufactured by businesses (Gilmore and Pine, 2001, 1).

The above mentioned concept of authenticity derives from a consultancy and marketing movement in economic theory. This concept of authenticity was first coined in economic environments relating to a product being a 'genuine copy' (Boyle, 2003, xvii). Authenticity has come to be an important factor of what people or consumers look for in a mediated society of economic *experiences*. The concept of authenticity and the desire for a genuine experience however, cannot solely be mentioned as an important factor in economic and marketing discourse. In the field of phenomenological philosophy of technology, theorists like Borgmann and Heidegger already spoke about authenticity, and the ways in which technology is a threat to or robs people from a genuine connection to 'reality' or a 'primal truth' (Heidegger, 1977, 115). Authenticity here, is coined differently referring to it as, 'primal truth or reality'. Borgmann says that this state of being cannot be obtained through mediated culture; one has to escape technology to be able to find it. This 'connecting to nature' is comparable to the concept of economic authenticity; both seem to advocate a certain 'truth' or 'primary reality'. In both the technology philosophy and the economic marketing discourse a tendency for depreciation of technology or digital culture when dealing with

authenticity can be witnessed, especially when dealing with human contact. Gilmore and Pine and David Boyle can find no meaningful interaction in online environments, and consider them not authentic (Boyle, 2003, 183). Yet can online culture be so easily dismissed as inauthentic or 'fake'? The most adamant statement that is being done by both older and newer theorists is that somehow relationships or connections between people online are worth less that offline versions. The marketing and consultancy movement within economic theory contends that online communities do not offer the same things as offline relationships and communities do. Boyle literally calls online relationships 'fake' or 'inauthentic' (Boyle, 2003, 183). They are not real or 'authentic' because they lack certain characteristics Boyle sees as being imperative for a 'real relationship'. Concentrating on the 'fake' characteristics of online communities Boyle is making some sweeping statements that should be considered more fully. Boyle never gives a clear, solid explanation of *why* these relationships are 'fake'. Online communities come in a great variety of shapes and sizes, all with different functions that do not necessarily pertain to this simplified notion of 'inauthenticity' that Boyle mentions. He claims online relationships are 'fake', yet there is an underlying, more serious predisposition present in these claims. There seems to be a basic understanding of technology being opposite to authenticity. Online contact is seen by both consultant and marketing economist and phenomenological technology philosophers as fundamentally different from offline contact. There is an understanding that online environments are somehow of less value than offline environments, that online relationships are not equal to offline relationships. It is this way of thinking that needs to be reconsidered in order to properly assess the concept of authenticity through different discourses.

In this research paper I will follow the concept of authenticity in the light of these two different movements within discourses. These movements within economic theory and the philosophy of technology each root their concept of authenticity in an innate dichotomy between on- and offline environments. Media discourse however has come to change their perspective in later years about online environments being a world upon itself separate from offline environments. Because of the passion with which the on-offline dichotomy is being maintained in the sector of authenticity and human relations, I will explore media discourse and determine in what ways online environments blur the boundaries with offline ones when looking at communities. Online communities and their users are directly connected and interrelated to offline users, relationships and environments. As will be clarified at a later stage by Nakamura, offline social and economical situations are very much present in online environments. The two environments are directly related and therefore statements done about authenticity and online communities should be reconsidered in light of this. I will attempt to accentuate the futility of a tendency to maintain a strict separation of on- and offline environments when discussing authenticity in the marketing and consultancy movement within economic discourse and phenomenological movement within technological philosophy discourse.

The first chapter will be dedicated to describing the history of the concept of authenticity in light of economic and marketing discourse. These two discourses are very closely related, and both speak about a comparable concept of authenticity. In this chapter, the question '*What is economic authenticity?*' will be central. As well as supplying an outline of the modern, marketing and consultancy concept of authenticity, I will define which aspects of authenticity given by economic theorists are coloured by dichotomized thinking of on- and offline environments. It is these aspects that will be centralized in the rest of the analysis, acting as an example of where the dichotomy-

problem lies, and as a source for deconstructing this dichotomy via media discourse in later chapters.

In the second chapter I will focus more on the concept of authenticity in relation to technology, specifically online communities. After getting a clear perspective on what the economic concept of authenticity entails, I will try and establish what this concept means to theorists in terms of online culture and communities. Communities are especially important here because this is where the dichotomy between on- and offline environments becomes visible in the concept of authenticity. To elaborate on this issue it is necessary to describe the concept of authenticity from a technology philosophy perspective here. This particular discourse discusses a form of concept of authenticity in direct relation to technology and cannot be excluded from an analysis on authenticity in relation to online communities. First I will discuss the concept of online communities itself. In doing so I can clearly discern what exactly online communities are said to be, and according to what theories what prerequisites makes them be considered communities. In the second section of this chapter I will describe Boyle's claims on the particular subject of online communities, and adding Pine and Gilmore's notions on online authenticity. I will then establish how economic theory assesses the problem of online communities in relation to their concept of authenticity. In the third and last part of this chapter I will fall back upon the phenomenological movement within technology philosophy to assess the discussion regarding technology and authenticity in full. Heidegger and Borgmann both researched technology in relation to what seems to be a primary reality which can be compared to (economic) authenticity. These thoughts directly relates to theories about mediated (online) relationships. They should be included in this discussion to get a well-rounded image of the concept of authenticity through a number of discourses.

In the third and final chapter I will deconstruct the on-offline dichotomy visible in the discourses mentioned when discussing authenticity by establishing how online communities and environments blend into offline environments or actions. By using theories from a media discourse, I will show the ways in which economic discourse and technology philosophy incorporate this dichotomy in their theories about authenticity and afterwards deconstruct this dichotomy. I will be making use of a number of case studies to illustrate theoretical arguments, which consist of different gaming communities. I will analyse these because of the amount of different examples of offline aspects that are present in the collection of these games. Specific games bring different characteristics. By studying a number of different games communities, in different genres, I can more fully consider the on-offline dichotomy in relation to authenticity. I will be able to include more facets or examples of blended environments. One genre that I will be elaborating on is Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG's) because these games are produced around a system of communication. They even rely partly on communication and relationships to be played to its full potential. Another genre that is being included is certain fps (First-Player-Shooter) games. These games not so much rely on multiplayer action to be played, yet have a community of players around them that do so because they prefer online human contact while playing. Here, community forming is a side occurrence, yet not less important. I will be looking at game and community forums of these genres of games, as well as community behaviour inside the game. With the help of theorists whose perspective can be based in media discourse I will establish the different ways in which I see the online communities crossing presupposed boundaries between the offline environment and in this way establish the fact that community-wise, a blending of on- and offline environments can be witnessed, creating one hybrid environment. In the last section of this chapter I will use Boyle's

statements about authenticity in online communities as an example of what changes about the definition of the concept of authenticity after deconstruction of the on- offline dichotomy. The changes this brings to his conclusions will contend that in deconstructing the on-offline dichotomy, the definition of the concept of authenticity changes in drastic enough measures to lobby for a redefinition of this concept, this time without the underlying presence of an innate dichotomy. In order to properly define authenticity, it is necessary to let go of the dichotomy that can be witnessed transgressing even into different disciplines of study.

Throughout this paper I will refer to the online – offline dichotomy. Even though I am attempting to show the importance of deconstruction of said dichotomy, I will be forced to refer back to it on numerous occasions by use of the concept of 'blurring boundaries between online and offline environments'. This particular way of describing the deconstruction of the on- offline dichotomy most closely coincides with the idea that there is no such thing as online or offline environments, and that this division should be entirely let go.

Chapter 1: What is economic authenticity?

As mentioned previously, authenticity has been playing a big role in economic theory crafting in the last years. The concept is first visible in economic discourse by the introduction of it by David Boyle. Boyle is an economic journalist, bordering on philosopher in some works, including his *Authenticity: brands, fakes, spin and the lust for real life* (2003). Although Boyle cannot be called an academic per say, his journalism work in the field of economics makes him a well respected source of information in economic discourse. In later years the economic concept of authenticity has grown to be of so much importance it has started to colour business plans as well. It was *Authenticity, what consumers really want* (2007) that first discussed authenticity as a business tactic. In doing so, its authors James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine situate themselves in a marketing discourse. Both Gilmore and Pine are, first and foremost, business consultants. Both have academic degrees, yet have not embarked on an academic career. Instead, both have worked for numerous prestigious commercial companies before starting up a consultancy agency. Gilmore and Pine are big influences on the marketing discourse. Both the works of David Boyle and Gilmore and Pine are most influential when considering the marketing and consultancy movement within economic authenticity, and will therefore be centralized in this chapter.

The consultancy and marketing movement within economic discourse both make use of an identical concept of authenticity. In order to fully comprehend the economic concept of authenticity it is also necessary to touch upon the on-offline dichotomy and establish where this online vs. offline discussion becomes apparent.

As been mentioned in a prior paragraph, one of the first authors to write about the concept of economic authenticity extensively was David Boyle. In his *Authenticity: brands, fakes, spin and the lust for real life* he witnesses a trend in consumers desire for 'real' experiences. Although he recognizes it is a hard concept to grasp, he considers the desire for authenticity to be a counter movement against artificiality. With this artificiality Boyle means people are more and more starting to believe that their future is going to be overwhelmingly global and virtual (Boyle, 2003, 3). This means more human-produced fabrics or products and more importantly, artificially constructed and/or mediated experiences. Boyle mentions the need for authenticity as a countermovement to this globalization, and the artificiality that accompanies it. This counter movement according to Boyle seems to take shape because of a fear of every experience offered in a mediated world being fake in that it's trying to persuade, shape or cajole consumers (Boyle, 2003, xviii). Boyle makes a point of stating that this counter reaction to artificiality in a mediated culture is to be perceived as a struggle. This struggle works from both ways simultaneously: people are reacting against the artificiality, and rediscovering the importance of authenticity (Boyle, 2003, xviii). This means the desire for authenticity is a direct effect from the *experience economy*. Experiences have been made into a product to consume, a commodity and a construction, which is why they are now feared to be 'fake' or not real. According to Boyle, the desire for authenticity can be perceived as resistance to this movement of artificially produced, fake experiences.

The experience economy was first defined by Gilmore and Pine in their 1999 *Experience Economy*. In this book, they describe the ways in which they witness the economy grow into a different tactic to attract consumers. After years and years of bringing down prices to attract customers in the so-called service economy, businesses in all industries can't rely on this tactic anymore to generate growth and sustainability (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, ix). A shift can be witnessed from this service economy to the so called experience economy. Instead of competing on the basis of price, they see producers starting to compete based on creating an experience for the consumer. This makes an experience a genre of economic output, a legitimate economic offering (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, x). Gilmore and Pine show the value of seeing experiences as an economic output or offering through a very simplified example: the coffee bean. They describe how a company that trades or harvests coffee beans gets around one dollar a pound, translated in one or two cents a cup. Yet, when a manufacturer goes through the process of grinding and packaging it, he can make up to five and twenty-five cents a cup. When the ground beans get brewed in a diner or coffee shop you can up this amount to between fifty cents and a dollar per cup. Depending on what a business does with it then, coffee can be any of three economic offerings: commodity, good or service respectively. The fourth offering of an experience though, can earn even more: "serve that same coffee in a five star restaurant or espresso bar, where the ordering, creation, and consumption of the cup embodies a heightened ambience or sense of theatre, and consumers gladly pay anywhere from $2 to $5 for each cup." (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, 1). This particular example not only shows the value of creating experiences, but also the evolution of economic offerings from commodity-goods-service and finally experience. Gilmore and Pine see the experience economy as the natural progression of economic value from commodities to experiences. Commodities here, are always agrarian and natural, mostly stored in bulk, sold on a market for the highest price. The economic function of commodities is to *extract*. Like the coffee bean that gets harvested and traded. Goods, however, are industrial because they are commodities made into tangible items sold to anonymous customers. Mostly standardized, their economic function is to *make*. This we see happening when that same coffee bean goes through the process of being grinded and packaged. The third offering of a service relies on goods. Service provides use these goods to perform operations on a client. These services are always customized, and their immediate economic function is to *deliver*. This we recognize in the ground beans being brewed in a coffeehouse or diner. The offering of an experience has naturally evolved out of this service. Experiences are memorable and personal. Their economic function being to *stage* (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, 6-15). As well as natural progression, Gilmore and Pine mention technology as an important enabler of the experience economy as well. It can be seen as the fuel for most experiences, and most of the times it is essential to make the experience possible. This aspect on its own raises questions about Gilmore and Pine's reasoning. Somehow, technology is seen as the enabler of the experience economy, yet inside that experience economy, an authentic experience has to be achieved by stepping away from technology? Is that even possible when reasoning that technology is one of the most important enablers of the entire experience economy? There's already an inherent contrast hidden within this reasoning that does not get further defined or answered by Gilmore and Pine.

The experience economy consists of certain characteristics. In it for instance, Gilmore and Pine argue "every business is a stage, and therefore work is theatre" (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, x). On this stage,

the workers are acting (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, xi). This means the process of acquiring a product is just that, a process, a *happening,* an *experience* for the customer. This is also exactly the difference between a service and an experience: when a customer purchases a service, he or she buys "a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf" (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, 2). Yet, when a customer purchases an experience, he or she pays to enjoy a series of "memorable events that a company stages –in a theatrical way- to engage him in a personal way" (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, 2). The first company to stage experiences for its customers was Walt Disney in their theme parks Disneyland in California and Walt Disney world in Florida. Walt Disney aimed to immerse guests in rides that didn't only entertain but involved them in a developing story. For every guest, the 'cast members' or employees would stage a complete experience including sights, sounds, tastes, aromas and textures. Cast members would get trained in what to say to customers in forms of receiving a script. Details like this point to Walt Disney being the very first employer to visualize his business as a stage offering theatrical experiences. Apart from obvious entertaining experiences, companies can also stage experiences by just engaging with the customer in a personal way. British Airways, for instance, is known to provide an experience of relaxation and a respite from the stress and strain of a long trip while travelling from point A to B (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, 4). In the experience economy, businesses focus their attention not to the internal mechanics of the goods themselves, but to the individual's use of the good: how the customer performs while *using* the good (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, 15). The accent is on a fleeting process, not a stationary item. Businesses *experientialize* goods (Gilmore and Pine, 1999, 16).

As mentioned before, this experience economy is seen by Boyle as well as Gilmore and Pine as the main instigator of the desire of authenticity witnessed in consumers in modern culture. "In a world increasingly filled with deliberately and sensationally staged experiences –an increasingly *unreal* world- consumers choose to buy or not to buy based on how *real* they perceive an offering to be" (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 1). Authenticity then, according to Gilmore and Pine, is the basis on which consumers decide whether or not to buy something in an experience economy. As commodities are bought based on availability, goods based on cost, and services deemed worthy based on quality, so do experiences get judged on how original, genuine, sincere, *authentic* they are (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 6).

According to Gilmore and Pine however, the experience economy is not the only reason a desire for authenticity has emerged in consumers. They mention five cultural elements that are responsible for the upcoming of a desire for authenticity in all consumers. At the base of this is the first element given, as described before: the experience economy. Staged experiences leave consumers wanting for less contrived encounters (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 12). A second important element directly linked to the first one is consumers' frustration with technology when dealing with businesses. With increased commoditization of services, businesses have had to resort to automating labour. This way, consumers interact less with people and more with machines (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 13). A third underlying element Gilmore and Pine mention for the rise of a desire for authenticity can be seen in post-modern thought, and the ways in which it influences personal and consumer behaviour. According to what Gilmore and Pine perceive to be post-modern thought the world is made up out of Socially Constructed Realities: there is no objective truth anymore. The need for authenticity can be a direct effect on this realization (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 17). This is comparable to Boyle's aforementioned claims on the desire for authenticity being a counter reaction to artificiality. The realization of consumers that their experiences are being artificially constructed in a globalized

world makes them fear for the authenticity in those experiences. It has become hard to distinguish what is real and what is not, hence the desire for simple authentic produce as a counterweight to the constructed experiences. The fourth element given by Gilmore and Pine for the love for the real is baby-boomers and their influence of their consumption decision on everyone. Baby boomers are said to redefine their personal identity through consumerism, and go for authentic brands that they can relate to (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 20). The last possible cultural element that can be responsible for the upcoming of a desire for authenticity is the disappointment and distrust in our social institutions like corporations or the educational/political institution. Scandals and lies has made the public lose faith in a lot of these institutions, making them search for something more basic, simple, less pretentious and authentic (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 23). These five elements are responsible for a feeling of need for authenticity in consumers. They are all global, cultural developments, and thus, according to Gilmore and Pine, (practically) *all* consumers crave for this authenticity (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, 5).

Elements of authenticity

David Boyle defines ten elements of authenticity that can be recognized in businesses or products, they are ten definitions of what 'real' might mean to a consumer. These ten definitions describe aspects of economic experiences that would be considered authentic by users. According to Boyle, it is these ten elements (and these ten only) that make for an authentic experience. He mentions *ethics*, *naturality*, *honesty*, *simplicity* and being *unspun* as important facets; but also *sustainability*, *beauty*, something being *rooted* or *three dimensional* and *humanity* are mentioned (Boyle, 2003, 16-22). According to Boyle, these are ten different aspects that make consumers value something as authentic. He does emphasize however, that these ten elements can be interpreted differently by consumers because of personalized opinions, memories and experiences. He recognizes the fact that it is still quite difficult to pinpoint the characteristics of an authentic experience because of this.

Gilmore and Pine seem to agree with most of David Boyle's revelations of what makes something authentic for consumers, although I also recognize some differences in their findings. Gilmore and Pine, like Boyle praise *natural* authenticity. Commodities that are untouched by human hands, not artificially or synthetically constructed are preferred when searching for authenticity (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 49). They are also adamant on pressing the importance of *human care* (or *humanity* according to Boyle) when performing a service. It is important services are executed individually and personally (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 49). Gilmore and Pine note that authenticity can be referential. They mean that consumers tend to find experiences or products that refer to some other context or draw inspiration from human history authentic (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 50). In this Boyle's notion of *rooted* authenticity can be recognized. A product or experience having a context could imply to it being rooted in its environment and tradition. Referring to history or shared memories can be seen as a way to root the object in question in culture, giving it a place of origin (Boyle, 2003, 21). Another aspect of Boyle can be recognized in Gilmore and Pine's *influential* authenticity. A business is influential when it calls consumers to a higher goal and provides a foretaste of a better way of life, not without meaning (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 50). In other words: consumers search for experiences and businesses that can influence them or others for the better. This relates directly to Boyle's ethics: consumers do not want their actions to undermine people or the planet because they want to morally connect and support the products they're using, so they go for business conducting for instance fair trade. Note however that Boyle nuances this statement with the remark that the

consumer has to *agree* with the statement and goals of the company, something which is not further defined by Gilmore and Pine. A last notion of authenticity made by Gilmore and Pine is originality. Something which hasn't been done before is perceived by consumers as being authentic (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 49). This is an aspect that can't be found in Boyle's elements of authenticity. All the above mentioned aspects are aspects that help consumers decide whether or not an experience or product is authentic. Authenticity thus can be a tool with which the consuming of experiences can be monitored.

Of these, there are three aspects, recognized by David Boyle as well as Gilmore and Pine that can be considered most important. These are: *natural* authenticity (untouched by human hands), *human care* or *humanity* (contact with real people)*,* and *rooted* authenticity (rooted in a time and place, or tradition). It is also these three facets of authentic experiences that have serious consequences for online culture. In all three aspects a tendency can be seen to characterize it by physicality. As mentioned, *natural* authenticity deals with products or experiences that have not gone through a human production or alteration stage. This for instance means products fresh from the land, free of human intervention. *Humanity* is an important factor when determining authenticity in experiences because it signifies consumers dealing with actual people. Here, robots or machines are devalued. Contact with a living, breathing person is preferred to consider the experience authentic. This is visible in numerous ad lines used by bigger corporations. Physical touch and a sense of humanity is implied by for instance Nokia and AT&T:

Connecting people. **(Nokia)**

Reach out and touch someone. **(AT&T)**

Rooted authenticity is known as such because it roots the economic experience in a certain time and place or even in tradition. Consumers perceive an experience as authentic because they can trace it or the product back to a certain time in history, or a place in the world. These three aspects of authenticity then, will be central in this analysis because they represent the need for economic and marketing theory to equal authenticity to physicality. It is precisely in this physicality that we can witness an inherent need for dichotomized thinking. Physicality in these three important aspects of authenticity is valued, this way eliminating online aspects completely from the equation. A strict distinction is being made between online and offline environments/aspects in this definition of authenticity.

Online culture is not literally mentioned in any of the authentic aspects of Gilmore and Pine or Boyle. Yet, possibilities could be seen to translate some aspects to it. This is demonstrated by the way Gilmore and Pine phrase their important authentic aspects. Boyle seems to accentuate physicality in authentic aspects more than Gilmore and Pine do, in this fact we can read his tendency to be critical about (online) technology. He mentions human contact as an important aspect, as well as rooted in time and place. As shown above, Gilmore and Pine have similar thoughts about authentic aspects, yet phrase them differently, which makes them more open to a digital approach. Aspects as a product referring to something else, being influential, or even rooted are phrased in such a way where digitalism is not necessarily cut off. Gilmore and Pine's rooted aspect for instance, describes the ways in which a product can be referring to environment and tradition, it does not actually have to physically be present there. Yet, despite the possibility for online culture to be taken into account in some of the aspects, a tendency can still be seen to label anything in reference of 'the real world',

or offline environment as authentic. Describing aspects as 'natural' or '3D' implies that offline aspects only are to be considered authentic. Even more striking, when speaking about online communication between users, there is a very clear 'authenticity equals human contact' policy to be found, echoed in the aspect of *humanity.* This completes shuts out the possibility of online contact being authentic, seeing as physicality is seen as a prerequisite.

Economic authenticity then, is a concept that has been winning ground since 2003. It has grown in importance as the experience economy progressed and developed. Where Boyle laid the ground works for the understanding of authenticity in economic theory, Gilmore and Pine are at the forefront of marketing theory in analysing different economic offerings based on how authentic they are perceived, and even describe the ways in which companies can manually create this experience of authenticity. The problem with economic authenticity lies in its hidden implications for online culture and even more so for online communities. In order to fully grasp these implications, it is necessary to look at authenticity and technological theories in relation to online culture and specifically online communities.

Chapter 2: Authenticity and technology: Online communities in the discourse of technology philosophy.

Authenticity in relation to technology is a complicated subject. As mentioned before there are discrepancies in economic theory when speaking about it. The most adamant statements that are being done about authenticity and technology within the marketing and consultancy movement are concerning online communities and online human contact. It is here where most resistance can be seen towards technology, but it is also the subject that needs to be reconsidered. When discussing the concept of authenticity in relation to technology and in specific online communities, it is necessary to consider a broader view on authenticity than the marketing and consultancy concept described in the previous chapter. An important aspect of economic authenticity as described before is physicality, mentioning human contact, referred to as *human care* by Boyle, and *humanity* by Gilmore and Pine in particular. Human contact and relations are seen as fundamentally authentic and genuine. Technology and human contact have been important in academic theories since long past. Theorists like Heidegger and Borgmann already spoke about a sense of 'natural contact' with each other and nature being disrupted by technology (Heidegger, 1977, 115). In this 'natural contact' a comparison with the economic concept of authenticity can be made. Both seem to consider a certain predisposed, natural state of human being, a primal truth that can be found in physical contact between human beings. In the discourse of phenomenological technology philosophy, the concept of authenticity thus concerns itself mainly with questions about human contact and (mediated) technology.

To better understand the concept of authenticity in relation to technology it is therefore necessary to consider these technological reservations against mediated contact and include the discourse of philosophy of technology in our understanding of it. Before this is attempted however, it is important to define mediated human contact further. Economic theory has a strong tendency to consider online human contact or communities as the most important and prominent form of what they consider mediated human contact. When speaking about 'fake' contact, Boyle considers online communities to be a prime example of this, mentioning 'chatting' as impersonal and inauthentic (Boyle, 2003, 183). When dealing with telephone calls or voice chat programs the user has a *live* and *instantaneous* connecting to a human being which according to economic theory is still authentic (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 14). The movement of marketing and consultancy within economic theory seems to equal exclusive online contact to mediated, in which there is no live voice or visual contact between users. It can be reasoned that techniques as webcams are considered authentic by this movement in economic theory because of an instantaneous, live, audio and visual connection to the other user. Raising an interesting question seeing as communication via webcam is still considered 'online'. Why would webcams be authentic and live, instantaneous textual connection be fake? However, because of this distinction being made in the consultancy and marketing movement of economic theory, it is the exclusive textual form of online human contact that will be considered the best example of mediated human contact in this analysis. These online communities need to be further analysed before we can get into the discourse of technological philosophy and its' views on authenticity and technology.

Online Communities

Communities are groups of like-minded people that congregate to discuss, chat, relax and find solace with each other. Offline communities have typically always been location-based. In fact, this is one of the most important aspects of communities world-wide: they are rooted in a certain time and place. Nick Stevenson is a theorist that focuses his work on the relationship between culture and politics. In this he maintains a primarily sociological perspective. In his *'Cultural citizenship: cosmopolitan questions'* he describes the ways in which the phenomenon of communities being ingrained in a local time and space have started to disappear in modern and even pre-modern societies. He defines this as the disembedding of social systems and a stretching of social relations (Stevenson, 2003, 12). This disembedding however, has been challenged in later theories about online communities, which I will be elaborating on in chapter three. As well as sharing a general location, communities form around shared beliefs or interests. Members of the community share these beliefs or talk about their interests and in this way form a relationship with the other members.

Online or virtual communities seem to consist of the same base principles: they are groups of people who share interests, emotions and stories. In doing so, they form bonds with between each other, connecting themselves to a certain group of people whom they feel related to. As Rheingold, one of the first and foremost theorists on virtual communities puts it:

"Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993).

Barry Wellman also accentuates the web of personal relations in his definition of a community: "Communities are networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity" *(*Wellman, 2001, 1).Virtual or online communities then can be classified in a similar way as offline communities can, yet, obviously consists of unification between technology and human contact. This amalgamation of digital technology and social contact make for a new kind of community (Rheingold, 1993). The mixing of technology and human relations is the main difference between an offline community and what Boyle and Gilmore and Pine consider to be a virtual one, and is also (as mentioned before) the main reason these movements within economic theory and technology philosophy discourse are so reluctant to accept it for real. The mixing of technology and the sanctity of human relations is considered to be unreal or fake (Boyle, 2003, 5). Castells however, mentions in his '*The Internet Galaxy*' (2001), that even people who live their lives on the screen are bound to their physical selves (Castells, 2001, 118). Meaning their personal backgrounds and opinions would carry through to their online relationships.

A community can be any group of people sharing interests and having meaningful conversation with each other. 'Meaningful' here, indicates that communication between members *means* something for the people involved. This *meaning* lies in the fact that members feel responsibility towards other members and have a need for them. This will be further explained in chapter three. For now, it is important to remember that communities, offline as well as online, are mainly considered as such by the marketing and consultancy movement within economic theory because of these two aspects of responsibility and need.

These two base prerequisites for community-feeling in members would imply that there are a lot of different instances online that can be considered communities. Ranging from social networking sites to self-help groups or fan bases, a community can shape itself around any interest as long as there is the possibility of communication between members. Therefore, a system for communication has to be in place in order for the members to communicate. These systems can be found in many different shapes and sizes, but all cater to the basic need of a possibility for two-way conversation taking place. Different systems of communication can be recognized on for instance social networking sites, where players not only have the opportunity to converse in an asynchronous manner by leaving messages,[1] but real-time chat functions are also implemented. Forums themselves, equally offer a basic system of communication to enable of community to grow. Yet, besides systems like these, where the sole point of the site is to facilitate communication, we should also take into consideration the systems of communication hidden within sites build around other goals. An important example of this is the ability to communicate in games. This generates a unique possibility for the constructing of a (online) community. Although the goal of the game can be to let people enjoy/beat it, the system of communication allows for communities to grow. This is true for Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (mmorpg's) but also any other game that allows for multiple people to play at once like FPS[2] or RTS games[3].

All of these different communication systems allow for communities to develop, making it safe to say that in online culture, many different kinds of communities can be found. Whether they are constructed as the main purpose of the platform or the community is an extra dimension next to a separate function, it still has to be considered a valid community and thus relevant in my research.

Economic authenticity and Online Communities

Economic and marketing theory contends that authenticity is a big part of a consumers' tool in determining whether an experience is worthy or not. As mentioned before, it is described that the upcoming of this need for authenticity stems for a big part from the upcoming of the experience economy. Yet another aspect gets mentioned as an instigator of a need for genuine, authentic experiences: technology. As Naisbitt claims: the more people get surrounded by technology, the more they will want to aggregate: be with other people (Naisbitt, 1982, 45). This even goes as far as having an innate urge for human contact. "The more high technology around us, the more the need for human touch" (Naisbitt, 1982, 53). This notion seems to not only be apparent in Naisbitt, but also Gilmore and Pine, who classify this feeling as frustration with technology (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 13). Technology then, seems to be explicitly connected to the concept of authenticity. In the way theorists describe technology, it is apparent they consider it to be the opposite of authenticity, a generalisation that has to be reconsidered.

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[1] Asynchronous communication is two-way communication that does not take place in real time. A popular example would be forums or e-mail, where people can leave messages for the other, which can be seen and replied to by the recipient at any given time.

[2] The extremely popular first-person-shooter (FPS) game consists of players shooting opponents in army like surroundings and storylines. Almost exclusively played in first person perspective. Examples of these games include the Call of Duty, Counterstrike or Battlefield series.

[3] Real Time Strategy (RTS) games deal with players gathering resources, building armies and defeating the other player. Played from a bird view perspective, it deals with strategic decision making and timing. RTS games are a popular genre to be played professionally, with sponsored players 'fighting' each other from all over the world.

This general sentiment can be seen in Boyle's theories as well. When mentioning media or technology in conjunction with the concept of authenticity he tends to take the same approach as Gilmore and Pine advocate: mediated technology can not equal authentic, genuine experiences. Without explicitly stating that online culture can never be authentic, Boyle claims all relationships created online are 'fake' (Boyle, 2003, 5). He defines these by being made by people with fake names, never meeting. All virtual contacts like virtual bankers, doctors, pharmacists and carers offer fake services, not to be confused with authentic help (Boyle, 2003, 5). Boyle is very careful to establish a difference between online contacts and contacts that have been made by online methods protruding into an offline environment. Contacts in real life that came to be with the help of virtual means are coined as *virtual real* (Boyle, 2003, 59). Even in this distinction Boyle makes, a firmly rooted belief in a fundamental difference between offline and online relationships can be recognized. He distinguishes relationships that have been made online but continue offline as different from relationships that take place in a solely online environment. He in fact values these *virtual real* relationships more than online relationships (Boyle, 2003, 59-60). This shows a tendency to value online contact by means of analysing the effect it has on offline environments. Online environments here, do not have any value outside of the effects on offline environments, and are therefore dependable on offline environments to be at al meaningful. Even the name *virtual real* implies an assumption of an opposition between something that is virtual (online) and 'real' (offline). Literally stating in that name that virtual is not equal to 'real', thus online is not offline. In Boyle's mind, these two things are very different and naturally opposed, devaluing online contact as opposed to offline contact.

This sentiment in both Boyle's theories and Gilmore and Pine's findings is echoed and becomes even more apparent in their examples of authentic aspects in economic experiences. As seen before, physicality is especially valued as a trait that makes an experience authentic for users. Three aspects that are agreed upon by Gilmore and Pine and David Boyle to be perceived as authentic are *natural* authenticity (untouched by human hands), *human care* or *humanity* (physical contact with real people)*,* and *rooted* authenticity (rooted in a time and place, or tradition). These three important aspects are physical, offline ones, underscoring again the difference in these theorists perception of online and offline environments. They all reference to physical traits that needs to be possessed by an authentic experience in order to be perceived as such. In stating this, Gilmore and Pine and David Boyle make an instant division between offline and online environments, valuing one over the other when it comes to authentic experiences.

This perspective is apparent in aforementioned theorists, almost as a uniformed truth. Yet, we do not see arguments or excuses for an extreme perspective like this. It seems to be universally understood that in order to have a genuine and authentic experience of reality, we need to get away from the mediated culture we live in. This natural opposition that is being made by theorists has no ground to stand upon when considering a statement of Gilmore and Pine. They claim in their book that everything in fact, is artificial and fake (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 87). In human culture, nothing is unspoiled anymore, nothing is pure. Gilmore and Pine even mention The Netherlands as an example: The country as we know it would not exist without human influence to keep it there. Holland is not pure and unspoiled: it is artificially created and fake. Gilmore and Pine's idea of authenticity in their book then, is based upon a *perception* of reality. "All human enterprise is *ontologically* fake...and yet, output from that enterprise can be *phenomenologically* real – that is, perceived as authentic by the individuals that buy it" (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 89). This means the

concept of authenticity Gilmore and Pine speak about in their book is considered a concept of perception. Even when describing authenticity this way, Gilmore and Pine fall back upon traditional, physical aspects to construct this perception of authenticity, in doing so automatically opposing physicality to mediation, authenticity to inauthenticity. What should be considered is online communities like offline communities being *perceived* by their users as authentic. This perception of authenticity can be appointed to a clear unification of offline and online environments in communities. The unification of these environments should eliminate any thought of a polarised difference between online and offline communities.

Authenticity and online communities in a phenomenological technology philosophy discourse

Gilmore and Pine and David Boyle have related a very detailed account of where the need for authenticity comes from, and what it means to the consumers that desire it. Authenticity however, cannot be considered just an economic concept. In the discourse of phenomenological technology philosophy the concept of authenticity can be recognized in theories by Heidegger and Borgmann. Even though these theories are older and based on more primal understandings of what 'authenticity' is (a 'primal truth' or 'primary reality'), they are important to include because their definitions and underlying problem of dichotomized thinking seems to be comparable to the newer theories of Gilmore and Pine and Boyle, proving that these theories of Heidegger and Borgmann, even when tainted by dichotomized thinking, are very much alive in other disciplines and newer theories about authenticity. The first of these two theorists to contemplate about this particular subject was Heidegger. He considers technology to be the ways in which we interact with the world. In his article on Heidegger, Ijsseling states that this means all tools people have come up with to help themselves survive in this world can be considered technology (Ijsseling, 1994, 28-30). This includes things as fire, spears or stones. This broad understanding of technology is at the base of Heidegger's beliefs about our dependency on this technology. He thinks of technology as a 'Gestell', a system of interconnectivity and unity that encompasses everything (Heidegger, 1977, 113). There can be no escape from this system, partly because it is everywhere, and partly because we would not be able to survive without it. In describing this power, Ijsseling paraphrases Heidegger and explains that in this system, man has become infinitely powerful, but the individual has lost all his power (Ijsseling, 1994, 29). The power and possibilities of mankind has grown exponentially while the use of technology progressed. Yet, individually, men have grown too dependent on this technology, losing power over themselves and not being able to function without it. An aspect of Heidegger's theories is a firm belief in a certain 'primal truth', and technology threatening this particular primary reality. He states:

"The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence. The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth" (Heidegger, 1977, 115).

This primal truth can be compared to the ideas of economic theory about authenticity. A tendency to a belief in a certain primary reality that can be lost or 'damaged' through technology. In this way

this primary reality is comparable to a concept of authenticity, and is classified in the same way: as the '*real* self', first and foremost the physical, *real* world. A contamination of this primary reality or this concept of authenticity by technology hints at an on-offline dichotomy as seen in economic theory.

This critical view on technology echoes through to Borgmann's notions about mankind's relationship to technology. He shares Heidegger views on technology being an all-consuming system in which we have grown dependent on technology in an extreme manner. He recognizes, like Heidegger the danger in technology swallowing everything, it will: 'overflow and suffocate reality' (Borgmann, 1987, 213). Yet, Borgmann retains a sense of optimism when considering the possibilities for people within this system. According to him, escape from this enveloping system of technology is possible in something he calls focal practices. Borgmann feels we can find truth or say, authenticity in simple practices that let us be closer to nature. Tijmes mentions in his description of Borgmann's focal practices examples like hiking, gardening and eating. The most important aspect in this, Tijmes says, is that Borgmann sees focal practices as a meaningful interaction with a focal thing (Tijmes, 1997, 127). This focal 'thing' can be any object, as long as it engages the user: the focal thing has

 "a commanding presence, engages your body and mind, and engages you with others. Focal things and the kinds of engagements they foster have the power to centre your life, and to arrange all other things around this centre in an orderly way. A focal practice results from committed engagement with the focal thing" (Wood, 2003, 22-25).

Borgmann claims that to experience the world in its *natural* state, untouched by human hands we need to get away from the technology. The *natural* state of the world is comparable to the understanding of a primary reality. Like Heidegger, Borgmann feels that technology somehow threatens a uniform truth, inherent to human beings. As mentioned before this is very comparable to economic theory's understanding of the concept of authenticity being threatened by virtuality (Boyle, 2003, 183). According to these theorists, authenticity seems to be inherently opposite to technology or virtuality. It is not the same thing, even worse: one threatens the other.

Borgmann and Heidegger can be said to already contemplate authenticity in their time. Although they do not mention it as such, both were searching for 'real' experiences in a mediated or technological society. They were under the impression that technology is an all consuming system, whereby humans have lost contact with the real, their own 'authenticity'. Especially Borgmann seems to want to define the connection to the 'real, physical' world as focal. These focal practices and things in his eyes are ways to escape the all consuming system of technology and make contact with nature and our primary reality, comparable to authenticity. Borgmann mentions virtual environments as an opposite of reality and states that the virtual worlds in which we more and more often find ourselves, lack the eloquence and engaging power of actual reality (Borgmann, 1987, 219). In the examples of focal practices the views of authenticity in economic discourse can be recognized. Borgmann names gardening, hiking and eating as prime examples of focal practices. These are activities that are constituted by a complete absence of mediation as understood by the marketing and consultancy movement within economic theory. All of these aspects have one important thing in common: they are recognizable for their physicality and offline surroundings. The examples of economic authenticity mentioned by Gilmore and Pine and David Boyle are comparable to this. The aspects of *natural authenticity*, *human care* or *humanity,* and *rooted* authenticity are all

characterized by physicality or an offline environment. Borgmann and the marketing consultancy movement in economic discourse get away from mediation and technology to experience a primary reality (Or as Heidegger defines it: a 'primal truth') or authenticity. Even though Heidegger does not explicitly states anything about online culture or communities (they did not exist yet), from his reasoning and stance on technology and the 'primal truth or reality' it can be concluded that his view on online culture would have been negative because online culture is part of technology in general and therefore a threat to this primal truth. A sentiment echoed by Borgmann. In maintaining this belief these theorists also maintain a strict understanding that an online environment does not equal an offline environment. More importantly, according to both the phenomenological movement within technologically philosophical discourse and the marketing and consultancy movement in economic discourse, online environments somehow cannot be considered authentic because it represents a mediated environment, while offline environments carry in them the possibility to be perceived as authentic. This way, a dichotomy between on- and offline environments is being maintained making the grounds upon which these claims are being done about online communities coloured by this dichotomized thinking. In order to make a fair assessment about authenticity or, in fact, anything related to online communities it is necessary to deconstruct this inherent dichotomy and let go of its confinement.

Authenticity seems to be a concept that was already visible in academic debate before economic discourse touched upon it in the last decade. Technological philosophy discourse describes an idea or a concept comparable to authenticity in musings on technology and the ways in which we relate to it. Words like 'actual reality' can be interpreted to mean the same thing as authenticity: a basic, primary reality that somehow is said to be characterized by physicality and nature. In economic discourse and in a technological philosophy discourse a tendency to dichotomized thinking can be recognized when considering the concept of authenticity. Understanding of the concept of authenticity is marked by underlying dichotomized thinking, even dating back as much as 40 years. This dichotomy between on- and offline environments is ungrounded. On- and offline environments are not easily separated, and should not be considered self-sufficient entities that are naturally opposed. In the next chapter I will deconstruct the dichotomy that colours the understanding of the concept of authenticity and in doing so accentuate the errors in maintaining it when speaking about authenticity.

Chapter 3: The unification of online and offline environments into a hybrid whole

In chapters one and two it was described how the marketing and consultancy movement within economic authenticity and the phenomenological movement within technological philosophy discourse seem to make a statement for a division between offline and online environments when considering authenticity. In order to experience authenticity one has to get away from technology. In doing so, both discourses exclude the possibility of online communities and contacts being considered genuine or authentic. In order to explore the concept of authenticity fully it is necessary to accentuate and show why maintaining this dichotomy in describing authenticity is flawed. I will deconstruct the on-offline dichotomy and show that this dichotomy cannot be upheld by showing the presence of a blended form of environment for users. This unification of the on- and offline environment of users into a hybrid whole has consequences for the definitions of the concept of authenticity. Seeing as this online environment cannot be considered as cut-off from the offline environment that according to economic theory contains all of the physical authentic aspects. As it will accentuate the error in reasoning of authenticity in an economic discourse, so too will it shine a new light on the inherently dichotomized theories of Borgmann and Heidegger phenomenological technology philosophers. As mentioned before, when proving this point, I will be illustrating my examples with the use of different game-communities. The dichotomy between on- and offline environments that is being maintained by theorists will be proven to be non-existent by witnessing and describing a blurring of these boundaries in the users experience. For users in online communities, on- and offline environments are completely interrelated and connected to the extent of it being impossible to refer to them singularly. Examples of this can be seen where people are communicating online with offline acquaintances, but also applies to communities blending on- and offline morals and rules in its composition. This blurring of the boundaries between different environments happens in most online communication, including game communities.

The blurring of boundaries between online and offline environments.

In the middle of the 90's, online communication was hyped up to be a utopian ideal of bodiless communication and boundless possibilities. One of the forerunners of this movement of digital pioneering was John Perry Barlow. In his 'Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace' (1996) he claims that the online environment is a world on itself, separate from the offline environment. "Cyberspace", he says, "consists of transactions, relationships, and thought itself, arrayed like a standing wave in the web of our communications. Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live" (Barlow, 1996). According to Barlow, this bodiless universe was open to anyone and everyone, without prejudice, without interference of race, economic power, military force or station of birth (Barlow, 1996). An open area for pure communication. Besides Barlow being an important supporter of the utopian view on online environments, Sherry Turkle at this time was one of the most important theorists to advocate this view. In her 'Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet' from 1996 she describes the ways in which identity forming changes on the internet. In doing so she defines the internet as a world upon itself, where people are free to shape their fragmented identities in any way possible. It is a world in which little is demanded of us; in which the stakes of life aren't so large, and the consequences of action aren't so final (Turkle, 1996). The hopes, dreams and possibilities of the online environment are accentuated, while seeing it as a world separate from reality. Stevenson's mention of disembedded communities

can be considered here as well. Claiming that communities are becoming more and more disconnected from their physicality, not reliant on being rooted anywhere (Stevenson, 2003, 12). In later years, however, a more nuanced opinion about online communication and environments formed which Turkle quickly adopted. Online communication is coloured by offline environments. The boundaries between online and offline environments seem to blur, it even goes as far as to say that the blurring of these boundaries happens constantly on different levels.

One of the most important arguments for the blurring of boundaries between of on- and offline environments and against this utopian ideal of online communication is found opposite the 'bodiless claim' Barlow and Turkle at that time tended to support. Communication in an online environment was considered to consist only of words. No cultural background, race or any other physical trait was visible and thus did not play a role; it was seen as an open platform known for equality. In more recent studies, this bodiless nature of the internet is strongly contested. The body itself, and even the position of the body plays an important role in online communication. One of the theorists supporting a more embodied perspective of online culture by use of the position of bodies is Barry Wellman. In his research it has become apparent that distance is of big importance in online communication. He states that "Early North American studies have shown that even with the advent of email, there is lower overall contact – face-to-face, phone *and* email – with community ties who live further away" (Wellman, 2009, 6). Apparently communication patterns differ with online contacts depending on how far or close they are geographically. Distance then, is of importance in even online communication and contacts. However, not just the embodied distance matters in online contact, cultural background is also important. One of the most important advocates for embodied online communication is Lisa Nakamura. She has been fighting for the recognition of socio-economical aspects being visible in and influential on online communication for years. In her famous *'Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet'* she states that race and bodies on the internet do matter (Nakamura, 2000, 8). By exploring the possibilities and, more importantly, the limitations of self-descriptions in a LambdaMOO[4], Nakamura determines that certain racializations are quite visible in these online communities, and thus are not excluded from Barlow's 'new home of the mind'. In quoting Chesher, Nakamura described how access to technology and skills can still replicate class divisions or other aspects of 'reality' in a virtual environment (Nakamura, 2000, 14). This way, she determines that certain socio-economical situations can make a difference in a virtual environment. This perspective can also be recognized in Castell's opinions on online communication in his *'The Internet Galaxy'* (2001). He sees real lives shaping the interaction online (Castells, 2001, 118). Castells quotes Sherry Turkle in describing this unification of environments: "People who live parallel lives on the screen are nevertheless bound by desires, pain, and mortality of their physical selves" (Castells, 2001, 118). People cannot distance themselves from their physical bodies, so they inevitably have an influence on the communication in online environments.

The embodied online communication mentioned above can be recognized in gaming communities as well. Cao et al. already mention in their research 'A Community Success Model for Gaming Communities' (2009) the importance of keeping in mind that cultural background is an essential

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[4] LambdaMoo is one of the oldest MOO's (Text based online virtual reality) still running. It was started in 1990 by Pavel Curtis at Xerox PARC. In 1993 LambdaMoo gained notoriety when Julian Dibble wrote the article of 'A rape in Cyberspace' (1993) about the dealings of the community with a 'cyberraper'.

aspect in designing and analysing a game community (Cao et al. 2009, 2). They see this being reflected in the spatiotemporal distribution of players. Shared cultural background helps the players to have the same interests which, as mentioned in chapter two, are important in establishing a relationship between the players. In her essay *'Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft'* Nakamura describes the ways in which race and other social-economical factors can be a determining factor in how the player not only plays the game but gets interpreted by others in the virtual environment he or she is immersed in. She describes how goldfarmers in World of Warcraft have become the source of a general hatred and bias towards Asian players. As the bigger portion of goldfarmers are native to Korea and China, players have established a worrying relationship between the two, even going as far as to equal 'Chinese' to an insult on itself (Nakamura,2009, 4). The fact that 'Chinese goldfarmers' get identified by other players in the game due to particular game-behaviour shows that in the game, racialization of certain behaviour has become normal. Physical aspects have become important and get included in an entirely online environment.

In the aforementioned examples it can be witnessed that it is impossible to think of on- and offline environments as singular entities. For users conducting online communication it seems to literally become part of one new unified environment or reality. The online environment is as much part of the user's life as offline aspects are, resulting in *one* reality or environment where online and offline environments are interrelated and referential. This blurring of boundaries between on- and offline environments makes it impossible to claim that the environment of the online community somehow is completely disconnected and opposed to the offline environment.

One clear example of this blurring of boundaries in a community sense is the fact that many people form online ties or communities with acquaintances present in their offline environment as well as 'pure' online contacts. Family, friends or colleagues are often present in online environments as well: "They also tend to play with friends they have met outside of the game, as well as siblings, parents, children, and romantic partners" (Castronova, 2005, 121). Castells recognizes this aspect as well, and mentions on top of that that most online communication is accompanied by more 'regular' mediated communication like phone calls, e-mail and voice chat (Castells, 2001, 120). Contact that is considered to be authentic by economic theory. Mixing these different forms of communication with online communication actually strengthens relationships between contacts, and thus is a positive influence on them (Castells, 2001, 121). This particular phenomenon can be seen in gaming communities regularly. Cao, Glukhova, Klamma and Renzel claim that 50% of teenagers in the United States play online games with people they know in their offline lives. They keep in contact with these friends by using not only the chat function in the game, but forums, voice chat, and telephone calls. These particular aspects are known to be used by gamers, even when the games have no direct need for them. A clear example of this can be found in most online shooters. The game itself has no direct need for voice chat, nor does it implement this feature itself. Players however, prefer to talk about game tactics with their co-players, in doing so forming stronger ties with their gaming community. Online communities this way consist of contacts met offline as well as pure online contacts (Cao et al, 2009, 87). The gamers form a community mixed with on- and offline friends, blurring the boundaries of these two environments into one new unified understanding of a community. There have also been accounts of players meeting up with their online acquaintances in their offline environments as seen in *fig. 1.1* & *fig. 1.2*. In this also, the blurring of boundaries between on- and offline environments can be witnessed.

Tallenna and Dilaheth reach 80

Veliaf, Dec 16, 09 1:09 PM.

Congratulations to our two newest 80s, Tallenna (yes, another Mirtai alt!) and Dilaheth, both of whom hit level 80 this past weekend.

This means that statistically approximately half of our level 80s are, in fact, Mir. Maybe she should learn to multibox... 🌝 *

Vel.

*Not actually true, just close.

Real Life Meet Up

Veliaf, Nov 3, 09 11:55 AM.

That's right! I am hugely pleased to announce that on the 18th-19th December, our guild will be having its first ever real life meeting!

The meet up will take place in York, England, and will last most of the weekend. Please contact me for more details, either in-game or th

The deadline for having actually confirmed you want to attend will be November 19th to allow us to organize everything, so get in touch
decide not to come.

We hope to see you there; it will be fantastic chance to finally meet your guildies!

Veliaf.

Fig. 1.1: Random extract of a World of Warcraft guild-site.

Fig. 1.2: World of Warcraft 'Meet-up map'.

The blurring of boundaries between on- and offline environments is not just visible in the actual meeting of online contacts, or in the mutliple ways of communicating in these groups. In his book ' *Synthetic Worlds: the business and culture of online games*' Castronova mentions a number of different ways in which we can see offline environments blend in with the online environment of mmorpg's. (2005) The most common feature in these different 'genres' of blending environments is human contact. Castronova gives mention of *group formations*, *conversations*, *sex* and *social events* as fragments of a mmorpg-environment that blends on- and offline environments by means of human contact (Castronova, 2005, 121-122). The communication used to establish *group formations* is described as multimedial, including as mentioned in the last paragraph: face to face. The *conversation* held by these groups of people starts in-game but can extend itself through instant messaging, email, forum posting, blogging, telephone or voice chat (Castronova, 2005, 122). Once again forms of mediation can be recognized that are considered authentic by economic theory. Castronova mentions (online) sex as a blurring of boundaries between two environments because of offline pleasure being attached to online acts. According to Castronova, online sex results in the same physical erruption of pleasure as sex in a completely offline environment: blurring the boundaries between these two environments. *Social events* are very closely related to the *group formations* in that it is a way for these group formations to be active together, be it in on- or offline environments. Castronova for instance mentions player-run candlelight vigils after the attacks on New York City on 9/11: an online event organized for an offline distaster (Castronova, 2005, 122).

While Castronova in his book mentions countless of things that can blur the boundaries between the online environment of a game and the offline environment, the aforementioned aspects are all based on human contact and community. They mostly blend the two offline and online environments by facilitating contact between two parties through both environments, or by establishing that there can be *meaning* to online activities. This is witnessed in Castronova's example of sex*,* where the offline pleasure achieved by manipulating online activities is just as intense as those perpetrated by offline activities.

These examples of the literal blending of online and offline environments and activities have an immense effect on the understanding of a dichotomy between on- and offline environments. It shows that the dichotomy can not be upheld at all when speaking about communication in these two environments because they are not two separate, autonomous divisions. Together they get blended into one unified hybrid whole. It is therefore not possible to exclaim one would be authentic and the other one isn't. It is actually completely impossible to hold onto any statements about authenticity in online communities, because of the complete absence of autonomous on- and offline environments. In the next section we will look at a specific example of what happens to a statement of authenticity made about online environments when we take into account a complete deconstruction of the on- offline dichotomy. For this particular example Boyle's statements will be used, and with them I can contend and show that statements about authenticity in online communities are subject to change and alteration when considering the deconstruction of the dichotomy.

Boyle's authenticity in online communities after deconstruction of the on-offline dichotomy

As mentioned in the beginning of this work, Boyle makes some sweeping statements about online communities in his book ' Authenticity: brands, fakes, spin and the lust for real life' . Using Boyle's statements as an example, I will explore what happens to the concept of authenticity as described in economic and technological philosophy discourse when letting go of the predisposed underlying dichtomoty between on- and offline environments. Boyle literally considers online communities to be 'fake' (Boyle, 2003, 183). In doing so, separating online environments from offline environments, somehow claiming one is 'real' or 'authentic' , the other one is not (Boyle, 2003, 183). This general sentiment of authenticity in communication somehow dividing online and offline environments into strict polarities of eachother is echoed by Gilmore and Pine, even after they describe how ' nothing is real' anymore (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, 87). In this statement Gilmore and Pine touch upon a more nuanced view on authenticity, yet after concluding that what's important is the *perception* of authenticity, continue to give examples of that percieved authenticity by using aspects based on *naturality,(physical) humanity, aged and rooted* things (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, 49-50). Online environments acording to Gilmore and Pine then,can be percieved authentic as long as they offer these *natural, physical* things, or reference themselves to it. Boyle and Gilmore and Pine then, concieve authenticity as something that is percieved by physicality, naturality (not artificial or man-made) and being rooted by time and space. This seems to naturally exclude online environments in itself, something which Boyle is very clear about. He states that "Virtual communities are self-selecting affairs...without any responsibilities" (Boyle, 2003, 182). "Real life at least acknowledges responsibilities to people around you – and acknowledges you need things from them too. A real life is one that is embedded and rooted" (Boyle, 2003, 183).

In game communities we can see these statements of Boyle being rebuted. Castronova recognizes certain aspects in gaming communities, two of which are giving and recieving charity and trading (Castronova, 2005, 121). Besides giving eachother certain things, trading consists of offering something to a player while wanting something back. In this simple action lies the base prerequisites of Boyle's responsibility and acknowledging you need something from the other. The player has the responsibility to not run off with other people's items, they know the other is expecting something back. This responsibility becomes even more clear in guild-circles in most mmorpg's.[5] The players tackle certain content together. This can only be done by a great deal of planning to get the right people online at the right time, which means players have to trust each other to be present. If not, an entire group of people is let down. This presence is not only exemplary for trust but can also be considered an example of the blurring of boundaries between on- and offline environments. Players plan their offline lives around activities partaking online. Their online presence is dictated by offline planning.

Besides trust however, alot of guilds exercise a rudimentary discipline system in order for them to be sure players do as they are told (*fig. 2.1 & fig. 2.2)*. Players are being instructed to let leaders (officers) know when they are or aren't coming to an event. If they do not sign up and notify the officers, they are excluded from the event.

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[5] A guild consists of a group of players in Mmorpg's that want to work together to achieve a common goal. It can consist of friends and family as well as unknown players that have applied to join because of personal and or social benefits of playing in a group.
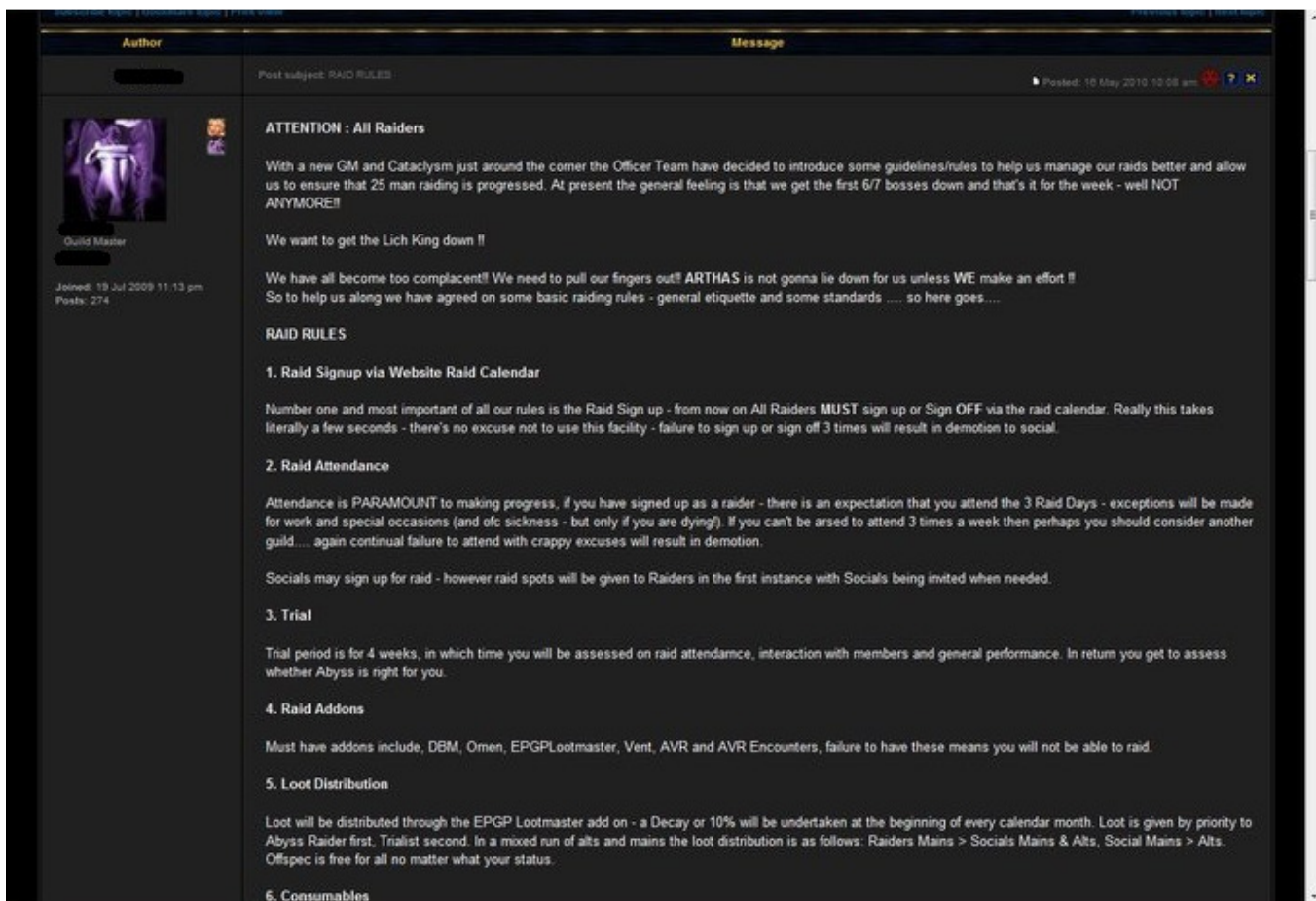
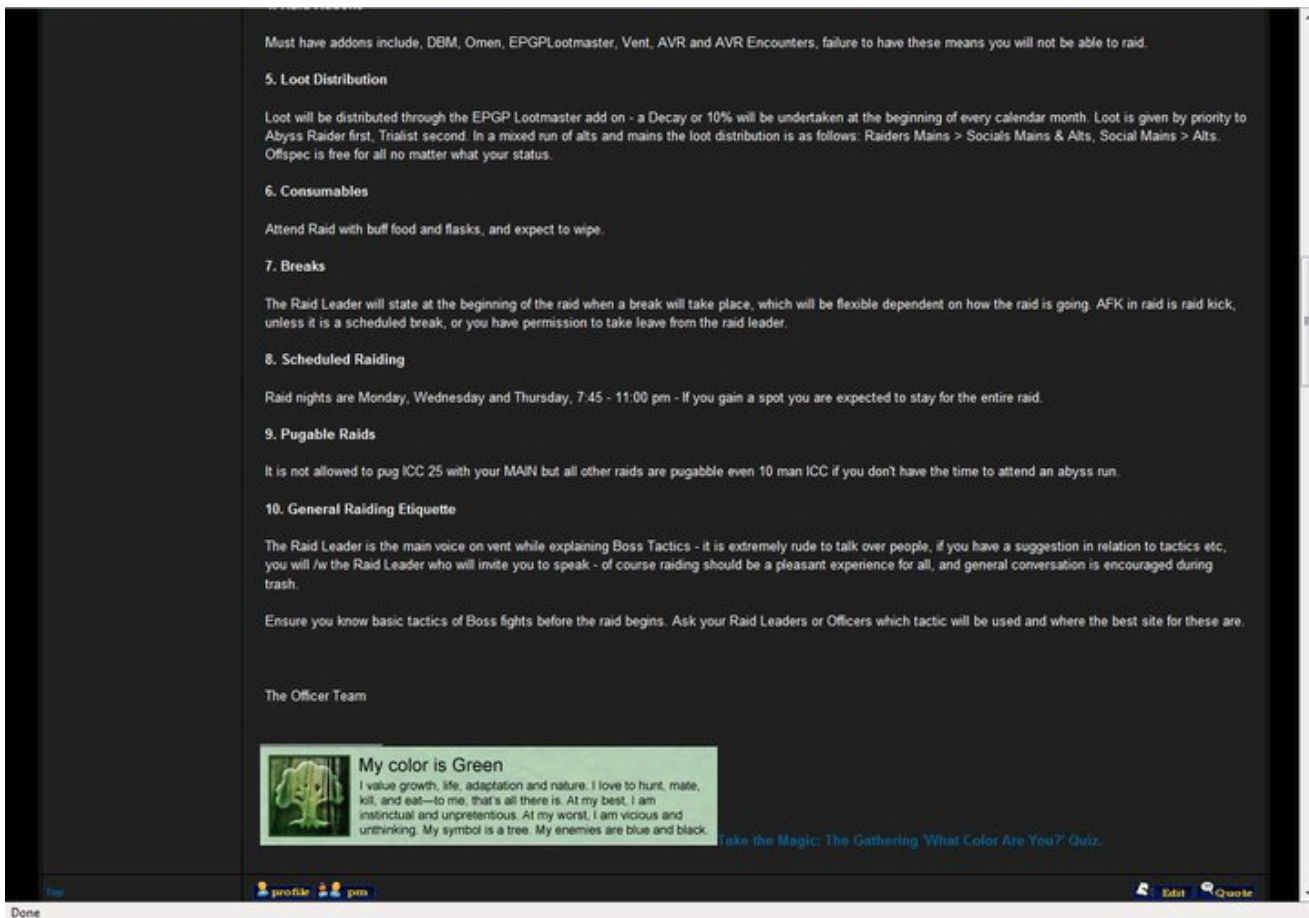**Fig. 2.1:** Guild 'raiding-rules' in World of Warcraft.

Fig. 2.2: Guild 'raiding-rules' in World of Warcraft.

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Seeing as players individually recieve rewards from these events (like certain items they can use) being excluded from the event can be a punishment. The example shows the responsibility players have towards the other players of singing up and being on time, while it also in turn acknowledges that these players need their guildmembers to recieve individual perks for their personal character. There is a mutual understanding here of responsibility and trust, in exchange for progression into the game.

The examples mentined above show that the reason this sense of responsibility and need is apparent in these players is because the players do not differentialise between online or offline contacts. As mentioned before, players create a new, unified form of community in these games, incorporating friends and family into the group and using different forms of mediation to contact them. This unified community environment consisting of on- and offline elements carries with it just as much of a sense of responsibility Boyle claims is only found offline.

It is clear that when considering the concept of authenticity as described by Boyle after desconstructing the on-offline dichotomy his statements concerning this community lose their power and are shown to be incorrect. Aspects that Boyle claims are missing from online communities are apparent in online communities in present-day, because of the fact that these online communities have become blended environments. Offline aspects are present in these online communities, disproving Boyle's claims on two different levels. First: If online communities are by definition inauthentic, and offline communities are considered genuine and authentic, then when considering a mixed and blended environment this community by Boyle's reasoning can never be inauthentic because it contains offline aspects. Second: online environments and aspects should not be considered inauthentic, not offline aspects by definition authentic in the first place, seeing as there can be no distinction between environments. Even when using Boyle's reasoning then, deconstruction of the on-offline dichotomy in the definition of authenticity makes for the possibility of authenticity in online communities. However, when speaking about authenticity, it is better to let go of the distinction between on- and offline environments completely, and go beyond Boyle's beliefs of online is authentic and offline is inauthentic.

Following the example that has been set by taking an authenticity concept and taking away that predisposition to dichotomized thinking regarding communities an immense change can be witnessed in the very definition of the concept of authenticity. This accentuates the dichotomized thinking that has been at the base of the concept in the phenomenological technology philosophy discourse as well as consultancy marketing movement in economic discourse is a serious handicap for the full understanding of the concept of authenticity.

Conclusion

The concept of authenticity has played an important role over different discourses thorugh the years. A very early version of authenticity already became apparent in technology philosophy discourse in the 70's. As mentioned in chapter two, Heidegger already speaks of a 'primal truth' threatened by technology (Heidegger, 1977, 115). The understanding of a 'primal truth' can be considered as authenticity, in that it predisposes a certain 'natural state' for an human being. Something that is inherently in and around us, without artificiality. Borgmann supports this particular view. He speaks of 'actual reality', comparable to a 'primal truth' in that it is something physical,inherently human and free from technology (or any artificiality). Borgmann accentuates the importance of physicality in the examples he gives of focal practices. Focal practices to him are the ways in which we can reconnect with our 'natural state' and get away from artificial technology. Focal practices have 'engagement', something 'reality' naturally has and technology lacks (Borgmann, 1987, 219). Examples of these focal practices consist of very physical activities like gardening, cooking or eating (Tijmes, 1997, 121-127).

In recent years authenticity has become an important concept in economic discourse as well. It is even used in marketing discourse, as a goal to aim for in a business image. Gilmore & Pine and David Boyle theorize authenticity as an important consideration people in the last few years have started to make concerning economic offerings. It has become important for consumers to consider their ecnomic purchases as an 'authentic experience'. According to economic and marketing discourse, characteristics of authenticity are being rooted in tradition, physicality and naturalism. In its nature, authenticity seems to be a counter reaction to artificially constructed experiences in the experience economy (Boyle, 2003, xviii). Although Gilmore and Pine fairly speak about a reality where we cannot distinguish what is 'real' and what not anymore, when considering 'authentic' elements in economic experiences Gilmore and Pine resort back to the same perspective as Boyle (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, 87). Economic and marketing discourses both define the elements of an economic offering that makes users consider it as genuine or authentic as mostly physical. They include praise for *natural* authenticity (untouched by human hands), *human care* or *humanity* (contact with real people)*,* and *rooted* authenticity (rooted in a time and place, or tradition). Comparable to what is witnessed in technology philosophy discourse, physicality is important in describing authenticity, or as it's coined by Heidegger and Borgmann: ''primal truth' or 'actual reality' In both discourses there seems to be an understanding that in order to experience authenticity, you have to get away from technology and revel in physicality. This goes as far as to suppose an inherent difference and opposition between technology and 'reality'. In the more modern description of authenticity this results in an understanding of a direct polarisation between online and offline environments. The first represents technology, inauthenticity and 'virtuality', the second one stands for physicality, authenticity and 'reality'. This on-offline dichotomy is an underlying factor in these statements about the concepts of authenticity.

This polarisation seems most adamant in the description and thoughts about authenticity concerning human relations. In the first chapters can be seen that especially in the consultancy and marketing movement within economic discourse a tendency can be seen to completely devalue online environments when speaking about communities. Human contact seems to be a very strong catalyst for extreme dichotomized thinking.

In chapter three can be witnessed how the boundaries between on- and offline environments are blurring when speaking about communities, even though this dichotomy between online and offline space or environments was very much present in early media theories about online culture. A general perception of Sherry Turkle for instance, was that online culture is a world on itself, where our divided identities are free to be formed in many different ways. In later years this perspective has been contested. Online and offline environments cannot be considered separate entities. Especially in communities and relationships between people we see the boundaries between these two environments merge and blend. Examples of this are given from different gaming communities where unification can be seen in different forms. Players for instance play games with friends or family they have gotten to know in their offline environments, or meet people from online circles in an offline setting. On- and offline acquaintances seem to mix freely in gaming communities. Besides this obvious unification of on- and offline contacts it is also possible to see physical traits in online communication alone, regardless of the source. In Nakamura's findings a form of embodied online communication can be recognized. She describes how race seeps through into the virtual world of Warcraft, and in doing so proves that socio-economical situations of users can determine how they situate themselves in these online environments but also how other people interpret them in these online communities (Nakamura, 2009, 4). In doing so it establishes a direct relationship between the online and offline environment, making it impossible to perceive the two as separate entities. Players continuously form intricate connections between their online and offline environments, making them one unified whole. An online community is in fact not an online community, it is both offline and online in essence. When letting go of the dichotomy that is at the base of this perception, it is recognized that online and offline environments are not polarised entities, but considered by users as one environment. Communities consist of offline and online aspects, making them meaningful to the user at both levels.

Using Boyle's statement of fake communities as an example it can clearly be seen what happens to the theories of economic discourse when keeping in mind the aforementioned unification. Mentioning online communities as 'self-selecting affairs...without any responsibilities' Boyle is negative about virtual human contact (Boyle, 2003, 182). According to Boyle, there is no responsibility or acknowledgment of need in online communities. Yet, as discussed in chapter three, a sense of responsibility and need in certain gaming communities like World of Warcraft guilds can clearly be seen. The reason for this is the blurring of boundaries between on- and offline environments concerning communities. Players' environments are a mix of on- and offline influences and contacts where a sense of responsibility and need is very much present. It is here the maintaining of a strict dichotomy can be shown to lead to false conclusions and definitions about the concept of authenticity.

When applying the newfound view of authenticity free of dichotomized thinking to the example of Boyle's statements, a fundamental change can be witnessed in this definition of the concept of authenticity in relation to communities. The deconstruction of an on- offline dichotomy disproves Boyle's statements on online culture in relation to authenticity because it shows that through the blurring of boundaries between online and offline environments users will experience one, unified environment that carries in it all the aspects Boyle's finds important in a community and authentic tendencies of these communities. This short example shows how important it is to be aware of predispositions that are at the base of this concept because it changes the definition of this concept in regards to online communication.

It is clear that when considering the concept of authenticity, which has shown to be present in academic reasoning for more than 40 years, it is important to revaluate this concept and not fall into a false sense of security in describing it. In tracking the concept of authenticity, a tendency of dichotomized thinking inherent in the phenomenological movement of technology philosophy can be seen. This tendency gets echoed by newer theories in the marketing consultancy movement within economic theory. This dichotomized thinking in regards to authenticity and online environments, specifically communities should be addressed in order to properly assess the concept of authenticity. It has been demonstrated that in most (media) theories about online communities this dichotomized thinking has been rooted out. It is time for other discourses and movements within discourses to do the same.

To fully understand authenticity, it is necessary to let go and deconstruct this dichotomy that has slipped its' way past the watchful eyes of theorists in economic or marketing discourse as well as in technology philosophy discourse.

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