

Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies

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Call for Papers

**The Rise of Profilicity (Profile-Based Identity):
Literature and Theory in the Twenty-First Century**

Guest Editors

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Deadline for Submissions: January 15, 2023

Literature and philosophy in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries tend to deal with a substantial social and existential shift that took place during this period: the gradual replacement of role-oriented identity—which Lionel Trilling called “sincerity”—by a quest for inner-self-oriented authenticity. One of innumerable examples of the conflict between sincerity and authenticity in literature is illustrated by the works of Jane Austen. Almost all her stories reflect the tension between traditional (class and gender) role expectations and the exploration of individuality. From Elizabeth Bennet to Emma, Austen celebrates women who choose self-expression over conformity to social norms. The rebellion against moral and social regimes of role-commitment becomes a main theme in modern Asian literature as well—Lu Xun and Natsume Sōseki are among the major authors representing this general trend. Prominent philosophers in the twentieth century, such as Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, reflect systematically on authenticity and elaborated conceptual frameworks to analyze its complexities. Even today, the semantics of the “age of authenticity” (Charles Taylor) dominates cultural production, political debates (“identity politics”), and even marketing: “Being true to one’s self,” whatever that may entail, is still a powerful mantra.

However, the paradoxicality of authenticity has become increasingly obvious: by learning to be authentic from novels, movies, and pop culture, we conform to the expectation to be non-conformist. Ever more holes are poked into the logic,

applicability, and even desirability of being authentic when authenticity is histrionically staged and advertised, especially in commercials or political campaigns. For example, the claim by political theorist Francis Fukuyama (and others) that Donald Trump's success was due to his authenticity is highly dubious: quite clearly, Trump carefully crafted a public persona on social and traditional media that simulates authenticity and makes it part of a political brand. The same appeal to authenticity is seen in the service of all type of brands, from Nike to Kim Kardashian.

To theorize the advance of identity creation via branding into all sectors of society, we coined the notion of "proficiency" (*You and Your Profile: Identity after Authenticity*, Columbia University Press, 2021). Just as we typically perceive a shoe no longer simply as a shoe anymore but in terms of its brand, we frequently perceive one another and the world in which we operate in terms of a profile. As academics, we cannot judge a journal like *Concentric* simply by reading it; crucially, we must know where it is indexed, what its citation metrics are, and how well-reputed its publisher is. Profiles emerge in "second-order observation" (Niklas Luhmann), not simply by looking at someone or something, but by seeing how it is seen by a "general peer," an anonymous public often accessible only through digitally generated data. In all areas of our life, both professional and private, we need to curate, project, and validate our identity, and those of others, in the form of such profiles. This is especially so on a most common sphere of interaction today: social media.

Arguably, the conflict between a waning sincerity and a waxing authenticity of previous centuries has given way to a new conflict between the demise of authenticity and the rise of proficiency. If, indeed, we are currently transitioning from an age of authenticity to an age of proficiency, this shift, along with its contradictions, should be visible in literature, philosophy, and popular culture alike.

This issue of *Concentric* calls for research from literature, philosophy, cultural studies, media studies, and related fields in the humanities and social sciences. Approaches from any cultural or geographical background are equally welcome. Please send complete papers of 6,000-10,000 words, 5-8 keywords, and a brief biography to concentric.lit@deps.ntnu.edu.tw by January 15, 2023. Manuscripts should follow the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Except for footnotes, which should be single-spaced, manuscripts must be double-

spaced in 12-point Times New Roman. Please consult our style guide at <http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw>.

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