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Erratic Drift: Notes towards human-geological drifting

These artists' pages are notes and sketches towards a speculative practice research project, provisionally titled *Erratic Drift*.

Erratic Drift aims to develop a human-geological performance practice — that is performance with and of rocks and stone — and to explore its potential as an ecological practice.¹ *Erratic Drift* takes as its starting point four themes or concepts: the notion of rock and stone as lively materials, which perform and with which humans perform; the expansive temporal and spatial scales of geological change; the city as more-than-human landscape; the phenomenon of the erratic. *Erratic Drift* brings these concepts into critical conversation, exploring human-geological ways to drift.

Erratic Drift: a glossary

1/ *La dérive* [drift]. The most common English translation of *la dérive*, a tactic for navigating cityscape practised by members of the Letterist and Situationist International movements (LI and SI) in Paris in the 1950s and 1960s. The LI/SI drift entailed responding to 'sudden changes of ambience in the street', 'zones of distinct psychic atmospheres' and the 'appealing or repelling character of certain places' (Debord 1981 [1958]: 6–7). The LI/SI drift had political intent: to subvert the normative or prescribed social and political behaviours and functions of the (capitalist) city.

2/ Geological [drift]. The term used by geologists to categorize stratum created by the movement and settlement of unconsolidated rock matter. The term was replaced by the more prosaic category of 'superficial deposits' at the start of the twenty-first century, with the latest use of 'drift' recorded by the British Geological Survey in 2006. The term 'superficial deposits' was also extended to include 'artificial deposits' (British Geological Survey 2018).

3/ Continental [drift]. Referring to the phenomenon where continental land-masses were observed to shift in relation to one another, now attributed to tectonic plate movement.

4/ Erratic [drift]. A rock or boulder that has been transported by glacial ice from its originary location and deposited on terrain of a different lithic type.

Erratic Drift: some questions

- How might notions and practices of human and other-than-human drifting be brought into productive and critical conversation?
- Can human-geological drifting function as a strategy for reimagining the urban landscape as a more-than-human ecology?
- How might cities be conceived, constructed and inhabited differently if greater heed were paid to their (entangled) human-geological forms, fabrics and flows?
- How might human-geological drifting unsettle anthropocentric conceptions of time and space, permanence and stasis, territory and borders, local and global, natural and artificial?
- What might human-geological drifting bring to debates about the Anthropocene?

¹The term 'ecology' is used to describe a mode of being and thinking that acknowledges and considers humanity's entanglement in a much-more-than-human universe, following, e.g., Jane Bennett, Donna Haraway and Tim Ingold.

Tactics for human-geological drifting²

Quarry Drift

Choose a building in Glasgow. Identify the quarry from which stone used in its construction was excavated. Drift from the quarry site to the building. (The quarry might be in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Portugal, Argentina...) You might take with you on the journey a piece of stone from the quarry or from the building. Leave this stone at the endpoint of your journey, to embark on its own drift.

Alluvial Drift

With reference to the 1961 British Geological Survey geological drift map, attempt to walk along the line on the north bank of the River Clyde that marks the limits of freshwater alluvia deposits from the river, dating from up to two million years ago. Mark this line by sprinkling a mixture of silt and clay, borrowed from the River Clyde, on the ground as you walk.

Artificial Ground Drift

With reference to the British Geological Survey's current geological map of superficial deposits, follow the line that marks the extent of deposits categorized as 'artificial ground' adjacent to the River Clyde, on the south bank.

Lithic Mapping

Using translucent tracing paper, trace the lines and marks that are visible on the surface of a block of stone in the city centre. These are likely made by cross-bedding and layering or fossilized organic matter. Lay the tracing over a street map of the city. Follow the lines and marks — non-linguistic lithic inscriptions — interpreting them as pathways to drift across the city.

² The tactics for human-geological drifting refer to the cities of Glasgow, Scotland and Madrid, Spain but can be adapted to any urban environment where stone is used as a construction material

Rolling Stone Drift

Select a stone that you like. Roll the stone along a city street — by hand, or nudging it gently with your foot or another part of your body. Treat it with care and respect, practising geophilia, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2015: 19–66) would have it.

Attend to the direction and quality of the stone's movement over the surfaces and undulations of the street, the extent to which you are directing the stone's movement and how your path is determined through the entangled agencies of stone, pavement, urban topography, weather... Leave the stone to continue on its own drift.

Hail Stones

Drift through the city, led by the stones that attract or 'hail' you, as Rebecca Schneider suggests they might (2014) or that 'summon' you, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen asserts (2015: 86). Try to experience the city as lithic landscape, disregarding shop and street signs, people and vehicles. If you feel moved to do so, greet the stones by placing a hand on them in a gesture of hailing. What do you sense/feel? Can you and the stone 'communicate across obliterating sweeps of time' (Cohen 2015: 78)?

What Time is This Place? (Lynch 1972)

Choose a number of buildings in Glasgow in different parts of the city. Choose buildings with which you have a personal history, which are over 100 years old and which use stone in their construction. Compile origin dates of different types of stone used to fabricate these buildings, dates from their construction history and dates of your personal encounters with your chosen buildings. Use the dates and locations of the buildings and materials to create a timetable, modelled on public transport schedules. Use these to navigate the city and beyond.

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