



citydrift/Bushwick

Towards a New Urban Poetic

A replicable art based meta-event

September 7-9, 2012

www.citydrift.org

The Beginning as *Homage*

Imagine... a warm September night with hundreds of artists, writers, curators, friends, or the simply curious, milling somewhat nervously inside, or outside the main galleries of several large urban art institutions. There is no work on display, and everyone is in anticipation regarding what will come next. Holding their white wine, bottled water, or Pabst Blue Ribbons, there is a nervous thrumming as the clock works towards 9 or 10pm, suddenly an announcement comes forward that people should all be prepared to leave in groups of three, four, or five, and head outside *to find the exhibition*. Lightly buzzed, smoking, talking, iphones aglow, and most importantly, *drifting* in the darkness everyone walks towards the night laughing gently.

At this precise moment... I will be at once smiling, and deeply saddened. Happy in the knowledge that at this future moment the joyful, anarchistic, and profoundly playful spirit of Colin De Land will be present, and wistful that my ten year struggle to find a way to honor the unspoken debt of gratitude that I, and our culture, owed to him, will have been repaid only in his absence.



What is *citydrift*?

citydrift was originally developed as an homage to the meta-gallerist Colin De Land and his partner and fellow gallerist Pat Hearn. As one of the first artists represented by American Fine Arts Co., and as a friend and philosophical partner to Colin's endeavors I had been searching for a way to imagine his own response to the unlikely realization that his curious projects like the Gramercy Hotel and The Armory art fairs had become simply two more incarnations of the institutionalized art world. This would have both surprised and amused him, for his whole life had been a form of interrogation into how this institutional structure could be opened and amended to include more *playful poetics* outside of the normative exchange of "goods for money" that characterizes these now over determined, and uncritical paradigms. Thus, **citydrift** began as a way to embody the spirit, or *geist* of an individual within the structure of a public art act, event, or meta-event. That is to say, a thing that at once can be experienced as a *thing* in itself, concrete, and describable, but that is also, simultaneously, an *interrogation* of the very ways that art is institutionally experienced. So, **citydrift**, is both an event, but at the same moment a *meta*-event that has us "looking" at ourselves as we "look" at...**what exactly?**



The Concept of the *Drift*

At the very core of citydrift *is* the concept of the “drift”, or *derive*. In the sixty years plus that exist between us and the founding of the Situationist International the concept of the *derive* has become a well established art world trope, with its’ own vital and rigorous history. Younger artists especially have consciously or more likely, unconsciously deployed the central philosophical tenants of the *derive* and its disembodied urban poetics with increasing frequency, however, while embracing the practice of the drift many too have lost sight of the critical function that the *derive* and those who first employed it were also intending to “commit” public acts of “meaning”, or more precisely inspect “how meaning occurs”, or at the very least “how meaning *might* publically occur”. So it must be understood that all the resulting gestures, acts, interventions, *detournements*, and playful *bricolages* that will eventually comprise the festival environment that is to be **citydrift** must, by *spiritual* impetus, and formal convergence, circulate around this central concept of the *derive* produced in a public setting. In this way the *viewers* become *drifters*, and as in so doing become, through the act of “**looking for**”, and not simply “**looking at**”, active participants, and not disembodied spectators.



In "Theory of the Derive," **Guy Debord** quotes the 19th century sociologist Chombart de Lauwe:

"An urban neighborhood is determined not only by geographical and economic factors, but also by the image that its inhabitants and those of other neighborhoods have of it."

Descriptive Parameters of *citydrift*

The organizational structure of **citydrift** will reflect the non-hierarchal,

decentered, but complex concept of *nodes and edges*. So, it has written into its “DNA” a kind of loose *node and connection* paradigm that is more closely related to a social networking system than any more traditional top down art structure. But, as with poetry, the appearance and openness will belie a very precise philosophical concept. So, while **citydrift** is written with an “open sourced” code it will (by virtue of curatorial oversight) continually bring all gestures back to the original intent that...

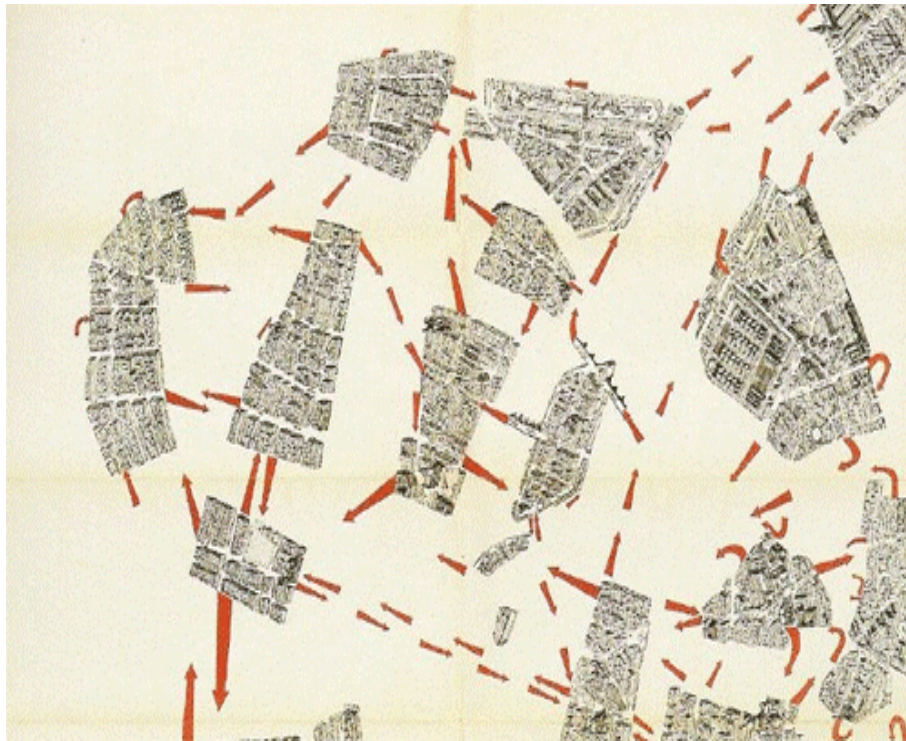


Image of first Parisian dérive

Theory of the Dérive

*One of the basic situationist practices is the dérive, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. **Dérives** involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.*

-Works to be primarily installation based, with an emphasis on found, site specific or *time* based practices.

- Low or very small invasiveness.
- Low or no cost materials and removal.
- Must be damage proof, *citydrift* and the curators take no responsibility for any acts, works, or gestures.
- Emphasis is on strangeness, playfulness, and “found” poetics.
- Artists are encouraged to use practices that are unlike their typical methods and materials.
- Works may be sound, text, visual, dislocations of found objects etc.
- The institution(s) act as “filters” for the exhibition. Works may be installed *inside* as an adjunct to the exhibition, but the viewer/drifter must move *outside towards engagement* as well.
- The exhibition qua event is free from geographical constraints, but the organizers encourage participants to consider engaging the likely “grid” that would exist between the *starting points* of **citydrift**.
- The organizers hope to produce a symposium as a final part of the exhibition. Bringing together participants/curators to discuss the work, and the ideas and histories that accompany it.
- The final images and critical writings and discussion are to be collected with the intent to publish a finished text.
- Images, texts, and projects are to be linked at, and hyperlinked through **www.citydrift.org**

The Organizational Structure of *citydrift*

Because the organizers of this project wish that it be reproduced in

many cities around the world, we have built into the structure a flexible, but strong concept. The goal of **citydrift** is to be a modifiable event that brings to a place teams of curators and artists, but also, and most crucially, works *with* local institutions, writers, curators, and artists. So that each citydrift (Beirut, Bogotá, India, Los Angeles...) has its own *terroir*, or feel. This is to ensure that any event is not the colonization of a city, but a *revealing* of some potential hidden “essences” that may be made clear by those not only familiar with the locale, but also those who “see it” from an outsider perspective. Both viewpoints are essential. To try and ensure this we are prepared to encourage disparate teams of curators to “partner” with local curatorial teams. Each group brings its own artists to bear, but collaborates in helping partner teams to succeed. This process of *outside* being helped by *inside* is then repeatable at future **citydrift** events, but with the terms reversed (i.e. Indian collectives help those from Detroit etc). We will prepare 10-15 curatorial teams and connect them from within. Each *team* then selects artists or art groups to work with. The curator/curatorial team discuss and help decide the projects. It is the goal of **citydrift** organizers to fund the *teams* with enough monies to help realize projects, or to help fly artists in to the site. Of course, we will look for ways to help house and facilitate the work, but **citydrift** is meant to be, if not a NO budget event, then certainly a small budget event. The final **citydrift** is to be structured as a one week event. Two to three days of installation that gives way to an “opening” or “openings” at one or more institutions that in turn produces a one or two day *drift* that culminates with a two day discussion panel(s) at the same institutions. The works may or may not be visible long after, but the initial drift is a 48-72 hour “window” we all operate within. Thus, the final structure is...

- The 48 hour construction/organization of gestures, ideas, installations, etc.
- The 48 hour period of the actual “drifts”, including the “openings”.
- The 48 hour period of symposia following the *drifts*.



Finally, we do not pretend that *citydrift* is some magical panacea to the institutional dysfunction and ills that plague the art world and the larger culture that it is imbedded in, but we will take this messy, provisional first step towards some new model of playful interconnectivity and allow that *any* event that brings an open-sourced, non-commercial, festival like spirit that

embraces “failure” and puts artists, writers, poets, curators, gallerists etc. in close collaboration together, *but outside* of their normal roles is by itself a worthwhile endeavor; so with citydrift/Bushwick we begin this discussion ...and eagerly await the results.

Peter Hopkins
New York City
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