

# Reality Drift Glossary — Conceptual Study Guide

Based on *Appendix B* of *The Age of Drift: Why Modern Life Feels Fake — and What Reality Drift Reveals About the Modern Mind* by A. Jacobs.

## How to Use This Guide

This study guide is not meant to be memorized line-by-line. Instead, it helps you:

- Understand how the terms relate to each other
- See how Drift operates across mind, culture, institutions, and technology
- Recognize recurring failure patterns rather than isolated definitions

Think of the glossary as a system, not a dictionary.

## 1. The Core Engine: How Drift Happens

At the center of the framework are four interacting forces:

Concept	What it Does
Entropy	Environmental noise, speed, fragmentation
Compression	The mind’s ability to integrate complexity
Fidelity	How much meaning survives compression
Reality Drift	What emerges when entropy outruns compression

### Key relationship

When entropy increases faster than compression capacity, Fidelity thins. Drift is not a mood or belief — it is a structural condition.

### Study prompt

Can you think of an environment where information increased but understanding decreased?

## 2. Drift Is Not One Thing — It Has Modes

Drift shows up differently depending on where the erosion occurs.

### Internal Drift (inside the mind)

- Cognitive Drift
- Identity Drift

- Temporal Drift
- Authenticity Drift

These often feel like:

- Loss of continuity
- Shifting sense of self
- Distorted time perception
- Emotional flattening

### **External Drift (outside the individual)**

- Institutional Drift
- Incentive Drift
- Memetic Drift

These feel like:

- Systems that still function but feel hollow
- Metrics replacing judgment
- Ideas spreading but losing substance

The same underlying mechanism expresses itself differently depending on scale.

## **3. The Look and Feel of Over-Optimization**

Many terms describe how Drift feels rather than how it is measured.

Instead of chaos, modern Drift often produces smoothness:

- Synthetic Realness – Real-ish experiences without depth
- Smoothness Effect – Frictionless clarity that lacks weight
- Texture Loss – Reduced emotional and sensory grain
- Resonance Decay – Feelings don't land anymore

This is why modern environments can feel pleasant but uncanny at the same time.

### **Study prompt**

Why might smoother systems feel less human over time?

## **4. Inside the Mind: Where Drift First Appears**

The framework places special emphasis on pre-conscious processing.

Important layers:

- Unconscious Compression
- Unconscious Compression Layer (UCL)
- Cognitive Architecture
- Cognitive Porousness

Drift often appears before you can explain it. Language comes later. This is why naming Drift can feel relieving. It restores structure after coherence has already thinned.

## 5. Failure Modes (Where Things Break)

Drift doesn't cause immediate collapse. It produces long-running failure states:

- Filter Fatigue – Exhaustion from constant micro-sorting
- Optimization Trap – Efficiency rising as meaning falls
- Fidelity Decay – Gradual loss of nuance over time
- Ambient Loneliness – Isolation inside high connectivity

These are not bugs. They are predictable outcomes of high-entropy systems operating without sufficient constraint.

## 6. AI and Synthetic Cognition

AI is treated not as a separate domain, but as an amplifier.

Key ideas:

- Co-Cognition – Shared thinking loops between humans and AI
- Synthetic Flow – Machine-extended focus and clarity
- Synthetic Intimacy – Simulated closeness without reciprocity
- The Mirror Effect – AI reflects patterns back so cleanly it reshapes thought

These concepts explain why AI can feel simultaneously helpful and destabilizing. It increases compression speed without restoring meaning on its own.

## 7. Putting It Together (Big Picture)

Reality Drift is not:

- A belief system
- A diagnosis
- A single cause

It is a systems-level pattern describing what happens when:

- Environments accelerate

- Compression saturates
- Meaning loses anchoring
- Smoothness replaces texture

The glossary exists to keep the language stable as these ideas spread and are reused across contexts.

## Suggested Study Uses

- Build a personal concept map linking terms across sections
- Use terms to name experiences you previously couldn't describe
- Compare Drift modes across work, media, relationships, and technology
- Pair this guide with chapter readings for applied examples

## Source Note

This study guide is derived from the canonical glossary in *The Age of Drift: Why Modern Life Feels Fake — and What Reality Drift Reveals About the Modern Mind* (ISBN: 979-8276826493) by A. Jacobs. Additional essays and reference materials related to this framework are available through publicly shared [Medium](#) essays and hosted documents on [figshare](#) maintained by the author.