A CALL FOR DEVIATION

Every city has a grid that could use a shift.

Richmond, Virginia is no different. Like many other post-industrial cities, Richmond is struggling to retain it's past glory as a thriving city. Located on the James River, Richmond became an early center for trade and commerce facilitated by the canal system. Richmond was the Capital of the Confederacy and, after the Civil War, Richmond re-established itself as leading city through the manufacturing and production of tobacco cigarettes and other commodities.

The planning of Richmond began with the street grid. Subsequent growth in Richmond perpetuated the grid. The grid is fair, uniform, and equal. It provides division of land without hierarchy or distinction, freedom of movement for vehicles and safe containment of buildings and pedestrians. In the past thriveing city life of Richmond, this segregation of vehicular and pedestrian movement was not only functional, but also proportional to the amount of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Today, however, the city of Richmond’s population has dissipated. The city has become less dense. Movement on city streets has slowed while the movement between the city and suburb has accelerated. Paths between a particular destination point within the city and the suburb define vehicular movement. Paths between parking lots and office buildings, both within a city block, define pedestrian movement. Ideas of exploration and circulation are restricted and redundant. As a result, the once constant vitality of the city has faded. The life of the city parallels the hours of operation of corporate buildings - open during the week from 9 to 5, closed otherwise. And movement rebounds endlessly between home and work, parking lot and office. This shift in rhythm and movement warrants the uniform street grid as less functional and disproportional. The democratic method of planning leaves the city in excess of street-scape that constrains rather than encourages movement. To regain the freedom of movement and revive the rhythm of the city, our grid could use a shift.
The grid promised freedom of movement to the automobile and safety for pedestrians, but this promise has grown old. Pedestrians feel inhibited and confined within city blocks. And cars have lost their presence and dominance on the city streets. The Deviant Block rebels against the street grid by liberating the confined activities of people within buildings and city blocks by claiming the street as an active zone for people rather than cars.

However, this deviation does not eliminate or ruin the integrity the street grid, but rather it activates the under-utilized street for pedestrian use. The city block expands into the street grid creating super-blocks of freed pedestrian movement. Although the Deviant Block prohibits vehicular movement within and through this zone, vehicular traffic is not banned from the city, but rather diverted around the block. The deviations regains the balance between space and movement that had been lost in the ubiquitous street grid.

Further, the Deviant Block addresses the transient state of the city. People work in the city and live in the suburbs. The city is the exception while the suburbs are the norm. The Deviant Block encourage urbanity by introducing exceptional moments throughout the city. Moments which activate city life apart from corporate hours.

The Deviant Block is neither permanent nor normal. Its abnormality captures our attention and its impermanence leaves us wanting more. It operates on weekdays and weekends on several part-time shifts in various locations allowing the grid to return to its primal state when the shift is completed. It acts as a switch which can turn "on" and "off" activity while diverting traffic.

The Deviant Block breaks free from the endless reverberation between points and creates new rhythms throughout the city. “Collaboration and events” supersede “isolation and places” in the deviant block. People and events confined to the walls of the buildings seek cooperation with other people and events to activate the street-scape. This new zone of activity promotes local programs while attracting the casual on-looker and visitor in the city. The Deviant Block is both an attractor and a barrier. It becomes the counterweight in a city grid that can no longer retain the balance between movement and space, permanence and transience.
DEVIANT TIMES

morning deviants

deviant downtown

morning diversions

DEVIANT DOWNTOWN
DEVIAN SYSTEM

In Richmond, water has been a key feature in the development of the city. The river and canal system supported both commerce and social activities. Water, thus, is reintroduced and transported beyond its natural boundaries into the depths of the city as a means of promoting local businesses and attracting social events. The city is at once a fountain. It is an urban garden with moments of tranquility and moments of excitement. The hard-scape of the streets is softened by the meanderings of people around the sprays of water. The city as fountain becomes an escape from the repetitiveness of the everyday and an opportunity for the exceptional.

Water in the Deviant Block acts as both attractor and barrier - blocking vehicles and enticing people. Its inherent fluidity works with the temporal character of the Deviant Block. Fountains of water intermingle with pedestrians when the block activates and dissipates when the block returns to the street grid. The activity of water and people with events and programs create a momentary spectacle for the city.

The circulation of water promotes not only a system of recycling, but also aids drainage of run-off water from impermeable streets. Run-off and rain water collect in a cistern below an intersections of permeable pavement. The fountains, powered by a pump, are supplied by the stored water. The majority of residual water from the fountain falls back to a return system while excess run-off filters back to the permeable intersections.

This circulation system is self-sustaining with the capacity to supply several fountains of neighboring Deviant Blocks. However, the system is also capable of phasing in growth of the Deviant Block throughout the city. The flexibility of the system allows transformations in the city that are defining yet not limiting. The fluidity of the system allows transformations in the city that are ephemeral yet spectacular.
DEVIANE EVENINGS
IN RICHMOND
MODEL VIEWS

DETAILS OF STREETS AND FOUNTAINS

DOWN TOWN RICHMOND