

# Research Portfolio of London Deviations

Architectural Design Crossovers Graduation Studio



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# Preface

This research portfolio is submitted before the P4 presentation held on May 26, 2021. The presentation is part of the graduation studio 'Architectural Design Crossovers', which itself is part of the Architecture master program. The project was mentored by Joran Kuijper as tutor for architecture, Florian Eckardt for building technology and Alper Alkan as research mentor. In the early stages of the studio the project was also guided by Roberto Cavallo and various guest lecturers.

The project deals with the topics of 'identities & experiences' in the ever changing contemporary city and how we can design authentic architecture that belongs in it. This was studied by researching the front and the backside of the city which resulted in, simply put, the design of a medium sized music venue with accompanying practicing spaces, studios, ateliers, etc. This is done around an alley with a courtyard in the up and coming northern area of Southwark in the city centre of London.

The document comprises three different texts. First is the Research Plan, written in the first semester before the design phase. The second is the Research Essay which is a position paper that follows from the Research Plan. The third is a brief reflection on the whole process.

Due to constant changes in the project because of new insights and understandings, the path set out in the research plan has been subject to some small changes. Therefore, the Research Essay and Reflection don't follow from the Research Plan exactly as described there, but are rather continuations in thinking about the topics mentioned and the overall development of the project.

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# Glossary

## Hotspot

A place of high interest in the city; a popular destination where people meet and stay for a while. These are the immediate places you think of when you think of a city, and are the main attractions.

## Front

The instant and obvious 'image' of the city. It is the 'open' and accessible façade of the city where an active city life prevails. These are the spaces that connect the hotspots and generally comprises both these hotspots and the primary network of the city, i.e.: main streets, public squares, parks, etc.

## Deviation

Deviations are places that are hidden from the main network, the antithesis to the fronts. They are however just as part of the city and equally important for understanding its authentic image. They can be, for example: alleys, courtyards, gardens, backstreets, hidden pockets, etc.

## Identity

The character of which the city is made of. This is not only the literal physical design of the city, it is the history, 'collective memory', cultural offerings, people and communities as well.

## Experience

How the city is perceived by the user. What the user notices when they stroll through the city, how it makes them feel and how it influences them.

## Dark Space

Spaces and/or areas that are not literally dark (per se) in the sense of amount of light, but are dark in a metaphorical way. They are ambiguous spaces where people can't immediately place in or identify themselves with, which means the person has to stand still and fully take in the surroundings. This results in a 'in the moment' experience.

# Research Plan

## Identity & Experience in a Globalised City

### I. Introduction & Problem Statement

London has undergone a long process of regeneration, which is ongoing. This results in the steady increase of housing prices: only the top 1% can still afford an accommodation in the city centre (from now on called the Central Activity Zone, or 'CAZ'). This causes the people who lived there for generations to leave their beloved communities and move to the outer parts of the city.<sup>1</sup> The same goes for smaller enterprises that can no longer run their business as property prices rise.<sup>2</sup> This is true for local bars and grassroots venues for example, which are being replaced by big retail chains and international franchises. They have been historically important for putting London on the map as a cultural capital, from the British Invasion in the sixties to the Britpop scene in the 1990's.<sup>3</sup> Accessible local culture is disappearing also according to mayor Khan.<sup>4</sup> We could say that London has become an international metropolis of international culture for tourists and the super-rich, who are either in the city for a short amount of time, or don't even live in the houses they bought, often it's just investment in real estate.<sup>5</sup> There is therefore an increase in distance to the city centre and a decrease in accessibility to its wide offerings in culture for example. This globalisation can also be seen in architecture. Just look at the new financial district and compare it to Amsterdam's Zuidas, or Hudson Yards in Manhattan.

So, the CAZ nowadays is only for the very rich and tourists, moving from hotspot to hotspot. These attractions, and problems aforementioned, are mainly found at the *fronts*, where they serve as the façade of the city. Yet, London is also home to many alleyways, courtyards and backstreets, which are situated behind these fronts, i.e. deviations from the main network. Though diminished in quantity, the remaining deviations have stood the test of time and have been relatively constant throughout the years.<sup>6,7</sup> It is therefore at these historically rich places where a more 'authentic' local identity prevails. They are places with an informal and 'being in the moment' feel. By and for the people, forming small communities, and are for this reason a good tool to try and understand what they can tell us about 'true' London. Studying their identities and how they are experienced will be crucial to answer the question: How can we add an appropriate, but idiosyncratic, contemporary architecture to a dense and historic city?

## 2. Research Questions

The main research question is:

*“How can we add an appropriate, but idiosyncratic, contemporary architecture to the dense and historic city that is London?”*

To answer this, the following sub questions are formulated:

1. What are the material aspects and qualities of the deviations, and how do they relate to their respective fronts?
2. How are the deviations experienced and how does this relate to their respective fronts?
3. What elements discovered through researching these themes in the deviations can be distilled and utilised in new projects?

### 3. Definition of the Theoretical Framework

Broadly speaking, this research can be reduced to two themes: those of identity and experience. Together they deal with subjects which include material and physical properties that make a place as it's objectively put together, and how the place is used and in that way (subconsciously) experienced. The themes are therefore inextricably linked, but require a different discipline to study them further.

For the first theme, identity, and consequently the material conditions, the book 'Critical Regionalism, Architecture identity in a Globalized World' by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis is used. In their book, they deal with "the value of the identity of a physical, social and cultural situation", looking at regionalism as a "long-term historical phenomenon".<sup>8</sup> As such, this ties in directly with the main question: adding appropriately in the contemporary layered city.

The second theme is that of experience, both sensory and in movement. On the one hand, this theme is seamlessly linked to that of identity, but also works as a follow up to it. The material properties in themselves are static and don't mean much, they only become interesting and relevant when a human connection is linked to it, when there is a sensory interaction. What do the material properties do to the user, how do they influence them? Think of: building height and density, verticality and horizontality, fragmentation, possibilities in making contact with other people. This makes it a fairly broad theme, though interconnected, as is also apparent from Jan Gehl's 2011 book 'Life Between Buildings'. In it he describes exactly the aforementioned points and how to utilise them in new designs.

In-between where the two themes meet, a 'zone' exists where the physical built environment 'touches' the realm of the user's experience. The human scale is at play here, the interaction of the building construct as a stage and the user as actor. This is a certain edge, and the level of interaction can be defined in its softness. The 'soft edge' is something dealt with in *Life Between Buildings*, but also in David Sim's book *Soft City*. This is the final step in bringing the two themes, and consequently the built environment and user movement and sensory experience, together and understanding the full 'situatedness' of a place: identity and experience intertwined.

### 4. Methodological Positioning & Description of the Research Methods

For this research, multiple methods will be used. *The* tool to research the deviations is on the basis of case study, which produces a catalogue. Preliminary research has shown that most are located in the historic parts of the city, the CAZ. Here, and because of this, the problem this research aims to study is also the most relevant. Because this area is historical, it is the most layered and holds the most character, the extremes are greatest here. A selection has been made of a number of deviations in different neighborhoods of this part of town: Soho, Covent Garden, City of London and Southwark. In these areas a subdivision has been made based on activity, their position on a larger scale or historical relevance, representing the full scope of types of deviations.

The deviations are studied in two ways, both on the theme of (material) identity and on the basis of experience. For example, it will be mapped how they are constructed, analysed in cross-sections, how material aspects such as material and use of colour can be displayed in a panorama of the street scene, from which these elements are distilled. The morphology is mapped and pulled apart in fragments to find the

rhythms of these places, since they often consist of multiple parts. In doing so, relevant historical maps from 'moments of rapture in time' are also used to understand the development over time, such as John Rocque's detailed 1746 map and Insurance Maps from the mid to late 1800's, after the Cholera Epidemic and the Metropolitan Board of Works provided a whole new infrastructure for the city.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the research investigates by mapping out how the user moves through these spaces, whether one can clearly position oneself in the space, or whether there are sensory distractions, etc.

A pitfall of this is that this cannot be done at first hand, because of the Corona Pandemic, which means that more data from third parties will be utilised than usual, such as Smelly Maps for the experience of smell, or tools as Google Earth for mapping the sites of interest, rather than firsthand experience. Additionally, something else that should be kept in mind doing this research, is the fact that especially experience as a theme is fairly personal. It is therefore complemented by theory in a literature study. Material aspects and the local properties will be linked to the theories described in 'Critical Regionalism'. The sensory aspects can be linked well to 'Life Between Buildings' and the transition between the densely built city and living space to 'Soft City'.

## 5. Arguments on Relevance

The aim of this research is to address that there isn't an 'either this or that' solution to the problem, it's too complex for that. In a metropolitan city such as London, with a projected population over 9 million people in 2021,<sup>10</sup> with different backgrounds, there are many different views on and opinions about the city, and because of its metropolitan status, outsider opinions too. Especially in current times, so many architectural and design styles and trends have come and gone, all with their own values, qualities and pitfalls. A lot has been tried and done already.

This is however not a research into architectural styles. Rather, it tries to find a balance in the way our built environment is constructed and how it is experienced by the people, and how and why that fits in appropriately into the image of the city, to make it a place where the inhabitants can relate to and feel at home. There remains demand for new built additions to the city, and now that this city has been defined for over hundreds of years by all that it went through, the question becomes increasingly harder to answer, especially in the global city that it is today. How do we relate to both the cultural heritage and the present day zeitgeist? This is relevant not just for London, but for every historic city around the world.



## 6. Bibliography & References

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Critical Regionalism – Architecture and identity in a Globalized World, Liane Levaifre & Alexander Tzonis (2003)

In their text they offer an 'alternative theory' (critical regionalism) as a reaction to the top-bottom approach of both modernism and post-modernism, pleading for a local approach to architecture. which falls in line with the theme of identity. They deal with "the value of the identity of a physical, social and cultural situation", looking at regionalism as a "long-term historical phenomenon". As such, this ties in directly with the main question: adding appropriately in the contemporary layered city.

Life Between Buildings, Jan Gehl (2011)

In his book, Gehl describes what make good public places by explaining what subtle qualities are needed, from a humanistic point of view. He talks about what kind of activities there are and what they entail. Gehl relates this among other things to the human senses and how our environment influences these. This can then be used as a tool both to analyse the deviations as well as a design tool for implementation. In the latter parts of the book he deals with 'places for staying' and 'places for walking', which are what the deviations are. This book will be mostly used for the theme of experience.

Soft City, David Sim & Jan Gehl (2019)

Soft city deals with the contemporary dense city. David Sim notices that as "more people are forced in to smaller spaces, balancing privacy and sociability becomes more difficult".<sup>11</sup> It is exactly at the most dense and 'narrow' places in the city that this research deals with. Just as 'Life Between Buildings' this book looks at the city from a more humanistic point of view, studying behaviour of the people that inhabit the city, though more focused on the contemporary dense city and the problems it faces these days . As such, this is a good addition to the previously mentioned book on the theme of experience in a 'dense and layered city'.

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[oldmapsonline.org](http://oldmapsonline.org)

For historical maps, mainly of the 1800's.

[locatinglondon.org](http://locatinglondon.org)

For John Rocque's 1746 map.

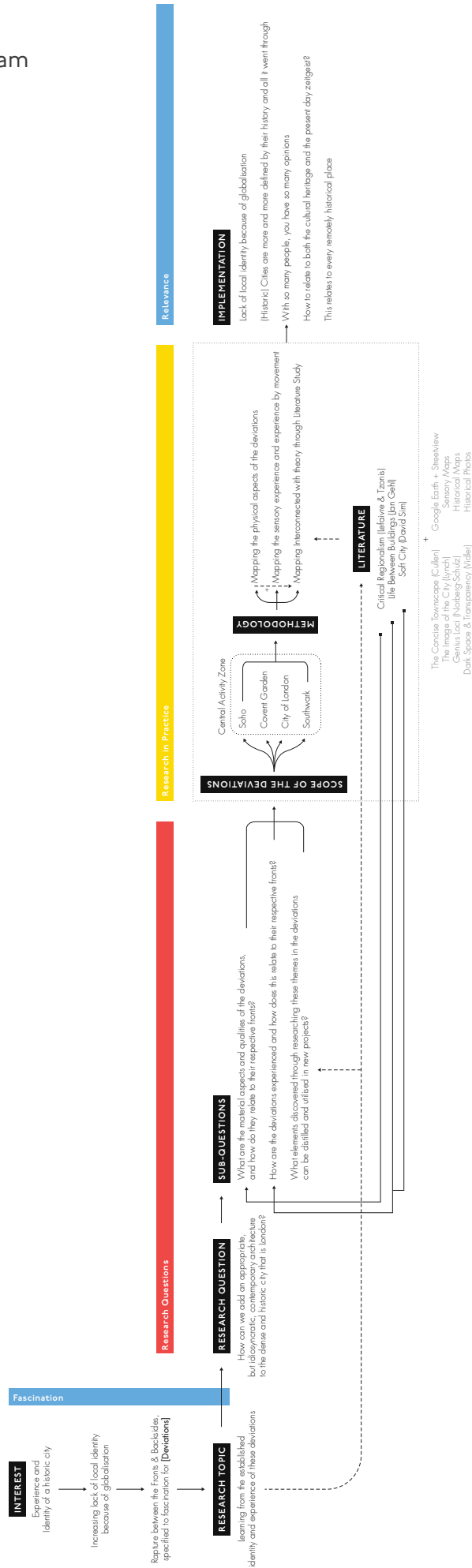
[goodcitylife.org](http://goodcitylife.org)

Sensory 'Smelly Maps'. This map collects smell data per street, retrieved from gathering data on social media and connects those to feelings such as anger, joy and anticipation as well. This is probably the best substitute for gathering this information without visiting the place, which is currently impossible due to the Corona Pandemic (as of January 2021).

London Identities Report, Centre for London (2018)

How do Londoners identify themselves and how does that compare to a few decades ago? A study done by London think tank 'Centre for London'.

# 7. Research Diagram



## 8. Endnotes

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# Essay

Identities & Experiences in an ever-changing city

## I. Abstract

This graduation research aims to understand the ever-changing historic city with its multiple identities and experiences offered. With this it tries to find a way how one can design an idiosyncratic architecture that still fits in appropriately in the complexity of the historical contemporary metropolis. The city that was the case for this study is London. In its historical parts two identities and experiences were discovered: the front and the backsides, the latter deviating from the former. These deviations were researched on their own and in relation to their fronts. Themes as 'continuation', 'scale', 'sequence', 'stimulation', 'use of greenery', 'surprise effect' and 'hidden in plain sight' were discovered and recognized as 'typically London'. It is however not complete as the modern city turned out to be too complex for that. After these findings five points are noted that are seen as important in the case of adding fittingly to a heterogeneous historical city. Following this, an attempt for a general framework to be used for the analysis of other cities is proposed, based on the study on London. Concluding with a short discussion on this essay.

Keywords: City, Identity, Experience, Alley, Backstreet, Front

## 2. The steady but ever-changing city

In the contemporary city that is increasingly becoming more and more global, crowded by people hurrying to their next destination and tourists hastily moving from hotspot to hotspot, the in-between spaces are easy to miss. But are they not just as important as the fronts of the city, the main network comprising the instant and obvious image a city provides? A quick Google search on 'London' shows the Tower Bridge, the Big Ben and the London eye a dozen times.<sup>1</sup> Apparently that's what London 'is'. But London also consists of *many* smaller streets, alleys, courtyards, hidden gardens.<sup>2</sup> They are just as much part of the city, albeit less obvious. These spaces, from now on called 'deviations', are the spaces in-between destinations. Easy to miss, but at these places we can find a more sheltered, true and authentic London.

That is the aim for this essay: to understand how we can add new architecture that only belongs to that specific place. With this I'm not necessarily saying we should study every contextual aspect in detail and blatantly copy them and use the same facade designs and materials over and over again<sup>3</sup>, though this does help enhance familiarisation and there for identification with the place.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps contrasting is the way to go, or the useage of modern materials in lineage with historical methods. It is clear that the new high rises in the financial district are aesthetically the opposite of the traditional buildings in the city. Compare them to the Zuidas in Amsterdam or Hudson Yards in New York for example and notice how similar they are (fig. 1). In this sense, they aren't exactly true and authentic London. But now that they are there, they are just as much part of the city as Westminster Abbey is. We need to treat the city how it is now but by understanding it in a historical way, the fronts and the deviations.

Based on this, we can already conclude that the city consists of multiple identities. For now at least the monumental fronts and the small scale deviations which are historically speaking more authentic, and the new international style glass-cladded high rises. This essay focuses mostly on the deviations and their fronts. This is because at these sheltered spaces time stands still in a way and small communities are present. It is part of the collective memory needed for identifying with a place.<sup>5</sup> Here, smaller scale shops and pubs are still present, as opposed to the gentrified fronts where bigger franchises like McDonald's and Starbucks are slowly taking over traditional local businesses more and more. Deviations are where London is itself, not the international London of the fronts that could also be replaced by every other big city.<sup>6</sup>

When we understand what these deviations are and how they relate to their respective fronts, what their identities are and how they are experienced, we can draw a conclusion on what the city 'is' and apply those findings to other places. Then it becomes possible to determine how we can add to the existing city. How can we deal with the question how to add idiosyncratic architecture to the historically layered and dense city, taking local and regional qualities and identities in mind, without historicising the matter and thus refraining from neglecting an ever changing society?<sup>7</sup>

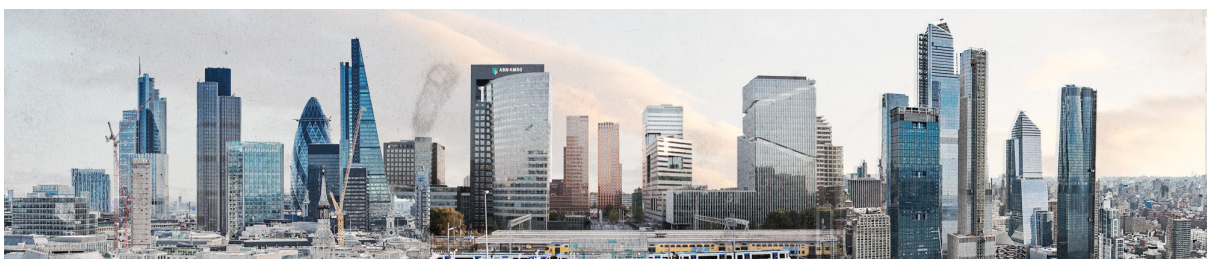


Fig. 1: Financial District  
Zuidas, Hudson Yards

### 3. Relevance & the Importance of Local Identities

People are living in cities more and more. Often the city centre is the throbbing heart, the attractor for people to live in that particular city. The place where culture, working and living all come together on a relatively small scale. This is no different for London, we can probably go as far as to say that this is especially the case for a city like London. The problem however is that the available space in relation to supply and demand is little. It results in higher pricing for property and therefore only the richest can live there<sup>8</sup>, oftentimes without actually being present at their property (it really can't be called home this way).<sup>9</sup>

So the old and dense city doesn't always function anymore as is wanted. This isn't anything new and therefore the city is constantly changing. Look at newly transformed places like Mercer Walk in Covent Garden<sup>10</sup> or the new designs at Charing Cross Road.<sup>11</sup> New architecture is constantly injected into the existing urban tissue. But since the older areas of the city have a lot of historic value and qualities related to identity and the image of the city, it is of great importance that the architecture in question truly fits in well. Reflecting the user, its use and its position in historical lineage. In short: the importance of taking context into account, in the broadest sense.

Context can (and should if necessary) be broad: London is not a small regional village, it is the capitol of the United Kingdom, and however you view it, it also *is* an international metropolis. With a projection of over 9 million inhabitants in 2021<sup>12</sup> it is a cultural melting pot and a city *of* and *for* the world. But precisely because of this more authentic identity is actually needed. In a century where everyone is connected and where we are able to see everything the world has to offer in the blink of an eye, wouldn't it be much more interesting to highlight and emphasize the qualities of different cultures now we can do that so easily? The world as a stage with different cultures and identities living closely together, such as is the case in London. What is interesting about living in London if it would look and feel the same as Amsterdam or New York? This is the case for the Financial District and Canary Wharf now for example. But the former is constructed for businesspeople working in a business that operates internationally. Perhaps an international style is fitting. This alludes to there not being a definite or single 'style' to implement. This is form follows function in a sense. Architecture shouldn't be informed only by its context, but also by its use and users.

### 4. A Study on Deviations

Multiple deviations with different characteristics are selected in Soho, Covent Garden, City of London and Southwark, all within the historical city centre. The characteristics range from levels of activity and morphology: linear passages and courts, or a combination of the two. For this reason, some deviations are highly active and can be seen as fronts, turning the backside inside-out. It is however important to study them as well to get a complete idea of the full scope of these deviations.

The front related to each deviation is of course also important to study since only then the full scope of the contrast can be understood. The front and deviation are part of the same whole but can paradoxically never be experienced at the same time. Jan Gehl's 'Life Between Buildings' deals with topics that are relevant to what was found in the deviation study. The deviations were analysed on multiple aspects. Some from the start, some updated after work on them had begun and new insights were gained.



## History

A short summary was written on the history of the site, its functions in the past and the way it has developed throughout the years.

## Activities (program)

Mapping the program present at the deviation and surroundings, including: restaurants and cafés, stores, entertainment and residences.



Fig. 2: Activities

## Streetscape of the front

A panorama of the facades with annotated parcel width and colours used.



Fig. 3: Panorama Front

## Streetscape of the deviation

Superimposed panoramas portraying the movement throughout the deviation.



Fig. 4: Panorama Deviation

## Materiality/Colours/Elements present at the front and deviation

Distillation from the panoramas of the materiality, colours and elements used, where it is always noted whether this is recurring or if it deviates.

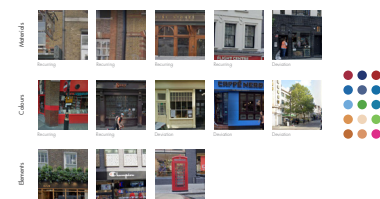


Fig. 5: Materials, Colours, Elements

## Morphology

Mapping the morphology of the deviation as it is, then dissected in parts which are then placed in a linear way in sequence. This helps understanding the next aspects.

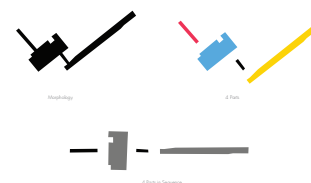


Fig. 6: Morphology

## Experience in movement

Abstract drawing depicting the way a person would experience the deviation by moving through it. Annotated are the way they are guided into the deviation, where it narrows down or opens up, where a certain amount of surprise could be perceived and where the eyes are drawn to.

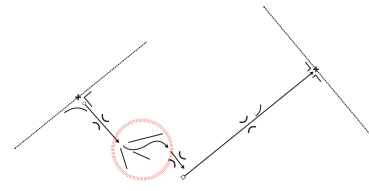


Fig. 7: Experience in Movement

## Experience in rhythm

A diagram relating the morphology in sequence drawing to the experience in movement drawing. Here it is notated how a person keeps on walking or stops/slow down in the deviation.

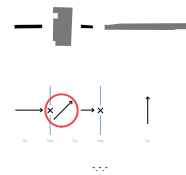


Fig. 8

## Section

A traditional urban section mapping the vertical expression the deviation holds.



Fig. 9: Section

## 5. Identities & Experiences of Front and Deviation

Quickly after studying just a few of the deviations some recurring themes became prevalent. The presumption that these themes were part of the core identity of a deviation got confirmed more and more with every new deviation researched. The themes concluded from the study are as follows:

### Continuation

It turned out that the differences between the deviations in relation to their fronts are not as black and white as the front vs. backside opposition would suggest. Shops and pubs often continue from the front into the deviation, albeit in smaller scale. The plinth/window shops of the front continue and guide into the deviation. Though hidden, the program continues.



Fig. 10: Continuation

## Changes in scale

As mentioned, the scale is different. The fronts often have bigger, horizontally stretched monumental facades, housing stores for big retail chains or franchises. The deviations offer smaller scale enterprises, often independent stores or pubs. Image-wise they are also much more fragmented and 'colonised' by the people that occupy the space, being less rigid, following less strict rules than the fronts.

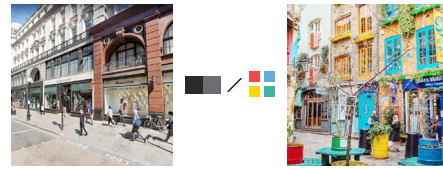


Fig. 11: Changes in Scale

## Sequence

Most of the deviations consist of multiple parts: often a linear passage results in a central court which is then left via another linear passage. Sometimes the smaller passages are covered, when they are not an alley in-between two buildings but rather a passage through a building.



Fig. 12: Converging, Diverging & Sequence

## Converging & Diverging

As can be expected, the parts in sequence are not the same as they all have different characteristics. Generally speaking the passages are a narrow discontinuation of the wide and open fronts. The user gets sucked into the deviation this way. This also enhances<sup>13</sup> the way the courtyard is perceived: an open hidden oasis behind the front street. The passage leading you out is once again small and narrow, possibly even with a low ceiling, guiding you back into the 'real world' once again where life continues as usual.

## Stimulation

Most of the deviations have a shared effect of surprise in that the courts are not just more open in the way of occupied space or volume wise, but are also very much an assemblage of narrow facades cramped next to each other with different heights, shifted window openings and colours used. Combine this with the usage of the court as a terrace and the aforementioned sequencing and you get a very stimulating experience that is great for staying around a bit.<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 13: Stimulation

## Use of greenery

The fronts are pretty barren in their use of greenery, though most shop windows are decorated with planters on top of them. This is also true for the deviations (once again a continuation), though it's more abundant here with the addition of small trees and vines crawling up the facades.



Fig. 14: Greenery

## Element of surprise from front to deviation to second front

Sometimes a deviation connects two areas with different characteristics. This in relation to the aforementioned aspects makes that a person can find himself totally surprised by the place he finds himself in after leaving the deviation. The deviation acts a bit like a wormhole in the city. A mysterious zone connecting two seemingly unrelated areas. The deviation is detached from its surroundings in such a way that a person doesn't necessarily know where they are which enhances an 'in the moment' experience.<sup>15</sup>

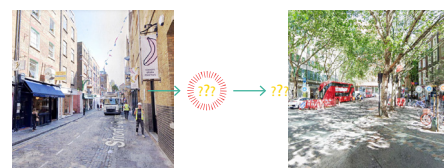


Fig. 15: Element of Surprise

## Element of surprise within the deviation

Combining the aspects of sequence, converging/diverging, stimulation and use of greenery also makes for a surprise or 'wow-effect' within the deviation itself.

## Hidden in plain sight

Lastly, the deviations are hidden in plain sight. This means that they are easy to be entered, and not hidden on purpose. They are however well camouflaged by their appearance on the front, where they fit in perfectly in the rhythm of the facades. Only when you stand right before them and look in the distance is when you are guided into whatever the deviation has to offer. Often the greenery or a shop window is visible directly from the front in the natural human field of view.<sup>16</sup>

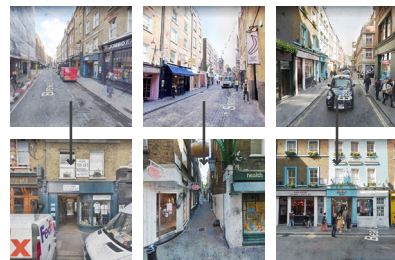


Fig. 16: Hidden in Plain Sight

## 6. How to fit in?

It is clear that there is not one definitive identity and experience, and therefore answer to the question how we can add appropriately to a historic metropolis. The city is too complex for that, there are too many aspects to be taken into account and too many options available to choose from. These extend to the themes of identities and experiences dealt with in this paper, but there are many more that are possible even more relevant in practice such as the costs, not even touched upon here. Multiple options may or would be even correct. In the case of London, do you relate your project more to the fronts? Or to the for London typical deviations? Or do you treat the project as its own isolated thing? Perhaps a combination of all is the best. It is all up to the architect in the end. There are 5 points that I think are necessary to be kept in mind while designing a fitting architecture to the ever-changing historical city:

### Create a distinct experience

The building should function on its own also without taking the context into account. This doesn't mean form follows function per se, but designing a building that works as intended before focusing how it should fit in. If this isn't the case, the design is flawed right from the start as this would mean that the building would merely be a façade and mass as that is what relates the most to its surroundings or what the average passerby would notice. The building should have its own expression however if that's necessary for its function. Besides, this is more interesting in adding to the 'story' of the city rather than blandly blending in.

## Be aware of the collective memory

We as architects are only a small group of people that designs for the masses and therefore have quiet some power and influence on people's lives. People with a specific memory to a place, through events<sup>17</sup>, memories, through small personal landmarks<sup>18</sup> perhaps never noticed by the architect as a relative outsider. This means it's crucial that we have a thorough understanding of the image the local residents have of a place, not just our own perceived image. Who are we designing for? Certainly not just for ourselves or other architects. Design for the general public.

## Don't romanticise the past; design from the present

The world around us is constantly changing, there is nothing we can do about that. All the time we are making progress as a society, too fast for some and too slow for others, changing and adapting nevertheless. Trends come and go, and new technologies are discovered. We shouldn't therefore be stuck in the past or be afraid of how our designs will be perceived in the future. Architecture is a snapshot of space and time and should be a representation of its present day zeitgeist and make the most out of what is possible.

## Keep an eye on the future

In extension to the previous point we should also keep out an eye for the future. As of 2021 we are in a worldwide climate crisis for example that affects the entire world population and future generations. Problems that should be dealt with on every scale, so also the regional one. We can't afford to simply continue using the same construction techniques or unsustainable materials that have always been used for the sake of tradition. We must be aware of the place the building occupies now and in the future.

## Be aware of your position and responsibility as architect

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the fact that there is not an all encompassing solution. The question and situation is too heterogeneous and complex and there will always be contradictions and disagreements. The designer should be aware that not everything and everyone can be fulfilled and that all choices should therefore be well reasoned. The points above are but a guideline, the architect makes the choices in the end and with that comes great responsibility.

Despite there not being a definitive solution, these points can help with designing within a complex, dense and historical context. The project London Deviations also aimed to be a way of discovering how to find an answer to the question posed. Despite not being *the* solution, it provided many insights on how to better understand what it means to design fittingly in the city centre of London. A general framework or set of rules that can be used in projects in other cities all around the world can be deduced from this.

Recognize the hotspots in the city

This is simply the first thing people think of when thinking of a specific city. This should be the basis on which you understand the city and relate the other findings to.

Find a frequent peculiarity in the city

The hotspots and fronts are the obvious image of the city, but what is something else that is frequent and therefore remarkable, but may not really come to the fore? In London it's the deviations. You can imagine that this is similar for Hausmann's Paris with its grand boulevards and hidden pockets behind them. The 'grachtengordel' in Amsterdam is of course very remarkable, but also its many pubs, café's, coffee shops (both types), parks: places in general to hang around. You need to have both as only then you gain a better understanding of what the city and its people are.

Study their experiences and relation to each other

After identifying this, you need to study both the obvious and the hidden on their own but also in relation to each other to fully understand their own specific identity and experience. What sets them apart? What connects them? What are the deviations within the common factors?

Relate the general research to the site for design

How do the results found in the previous points relate to the site for design? How can they be applied in a slightly more targeted manner to that specific place?

Don't forget the use of the building and its user

In such a way that the building remains functioning on its own as well, with its own experience that adds something new to the 'story' of the city and possibly enhances it and reflects the current zeitgeist.

## 7. Final Thoughts

Just like there not being a definite answer in this essay, not just because of the complexity of the matter, but also because it is very personal, this is also the case for this position paper. The essay is my personal view on the topics dealt with, as a twenty-something graduation student in 2021. It is therefore a snapshot that is prone to change, is not perfect, and never will be. That is also not the aim for this essay. While I don't believe there can ever be a final answer to the themes mentioned, I do think more research should be done into what might be a good method of getting a bit closer into a what a true identity and experience is, or to create a toolset/approach into dealing with this subject. London Deviations is just a starting point which should be done for other cities as well to create a stronger position, but this is beyond the scope of the studio. The essay thus provides a snapshot of a substantiated view of the discussed themes and attempts to stimulate thinking about the matter and invites discussion about it. The more opinions and views on this topic the better we can get closer to a better understanding of it.

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## 9. IMAGE LIST

Fig. 1

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Fig. 2-9

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Fig. 10-16 & Front Cover

Menger, C. "P4 Presentation", unpublished (2021)



# Reflection

## 1. Description of the Project

The project 'London Deviations' aims to understand the 'front' and the 'backside' of the city and their relationship. The purpose of this was to find out how contemporary and idiosyncratic architecture can be added to a city so defined by its history and its many inhabitants with different ideologies and views. This also relates to the theme of the studio: London as a heterogeneous melting pot of different synergies, ecologies, etc.

Finding an answer to this was done by researching a set of so called 'Deviations': backstreets, alleys, hidden courtyards, etc.: Places that deviate from the main network of the city but are inherently part of it. They were studied not solely on their own, but also in relation to their corresponding 'front'. Themes such as *hidden in plain sight*, *surprise*, *sequence* and *diverging/converging* were found and attempted to be applied into the architectural project. Not just by translating the urban research into the design of the building itself, but also by incorporating the surroundings into the project, in particular by creating a new deviation.

## 2. Fascination & Personal Interest

The starting point for this was the introduction of the studio, where the students own interests and fascinations were to be explored. For me, these were themes such as *identity* and *experience*. What is the character of the London metropolis? How is the city experienced from eye level perspective? I quickly learned that the city is not a case of one single 'image'. It is changing, and has changed, too much for that. Besides, with over 9 million inhabitants it also seems only logical that this can't be the case. Still, something can be said for a sort of a common consensus of the image of the city. Why else would it be so popular as a place to live, work or visit?

In this lies also the starting point for the approach of the studio. If the city is becoming more and more gentrified and 'designed' for tourism, where then can we find the authentic London? This turned out to be in its many characteristic alleyways, courtyards, etc.: The deviations. Since we concluded that there can't be one single identity, their related fronts (i.e.: the instant and obvious image of the city) were also studied in relation to the deviations.

### 3. Creating a Catalogue of Deviations

A set of nine deviations selected from different neighbourhoods in the city centre were researched in a case study. They ranged from sober passages without too much happening, to popular destinations where, in a way, they almost become a front. They were analysed by their history, program, image, materiality/colour/elements used, morphology and sequence & experience through movement/rhythm. In relation to these mapping techniques, literature such as 'Life Between Buildings' and 'Critical Regionalism' were also kept in mind while researching.

The conclusions from this catalogue were formed in such a way that they could be used as tools for the architectural project following the research. One more obvious conclusion was the surprise effect many deviations hold, not just in themselves as a hidden courtyard for example, but also in the way where a person leaves the deviation and finds themselves in an area that seems completely new and different than the area they entered the deviation from.

Other themes discovered were the fact that the deviations exist *hidden in plain sight*, are often more green than their surroundings and are in fact not *that* different from their fronts: it is more true that they are smaller scale, 'hidden' continuations or extensions of their fronts. Deviating from them, sure, but not totally contrasting them. Furthermore, themes as diverging/converging, sequence/rhythm and the presence of small communities were also topics that could be used in the design phase.

### 4. Synthesis of the Project

While doing the research on the deviations, I found that local music venues were disappearing more and more in England, and London in particular. Venues that are important for the local identities of the city. They also relate quite well to the themes of identity and experience and the small communities aspect concluded from the deviations catalogue. I then also watched a BBC documentary on the British indie scene that emerged in the late 1970's. In this series, aspects as resisting the mainstream (similar to backside vs. front), a DIY attitude and the idea of being literally a *scene*, which is of course more than just music, were discussed.

These are all aspects that also needed to logically become a part of the site for the design. First I came to Soho in the West End, the cultural centre of the city. The scale and the already very established tourist friendly hotspot feeling the site has, made it an illogical choice in the end. On advice of the tutor I looked further for a site better suited to the theme of the project. In the catalogue study I also found an empty plot (which there were very little of in the city centre) in the northern regions of Southwark, south of the Thames. This place turned out to be one with its own rich history, being different from the London north of the Thames, a deviation within the city centre with a more raw and industrial character than the clean and pristine West End I pinpointed previously. There was also room and reason for making a deviation there since it formed an awkward transition from the busy front streets to the residential back area. An unfinished backside that needed intervention.

## 5. the Black Box, the White Box & a Deviation

A deviation is created on the site, connecting the urban front Southwark Street to the residential back area. This is done by connecting three public spaces (of which the area has little): a sidewalk terrace at the front, a courtyard in the centre (as seen in the case study) and a historical enclosed garden for contemplation already present at the site. In-between this deviation two volumes emerge: a so called 'Black Box' and a 'White Box'. The former being the *front*, or *destination*: three music venues and a nightclub, the latter being the space for community building and the 'scene' housing a community lounge, café, practicing spaces for music, ateliers, studios, etc. These boxes are connected by two simple passages. A metaphorically 'dark space' where no program is presented. This instigates a circulation in sequence between the tension the Black- and White Box create. At every corner and turn something is happening in the building, *because of the people*, enhanced by acoustic principles and conclusions from the catalogue, making the routing just as interesting as the destination: the live performance. Just like the deviations in-between the main routing from hotspot to hotspot are just as important for the city as those hotspots.

## 6. Still Learning

Not everything went equally well during the process. For example, in the first few weeks it was quite a struggle to get to the point of knowing what I wanted to study, only finding the topic of 'deviations' quite close to the P1 presentation. When that became the project I liked to investigate the city inside out, learning from the city by starting with the smallest alleys. This turned out to be undoable, especially time-wise, since there are just too many of them that need to be identified first. After that it went pretty well for a while though, and with some motivation and suggestions from the tutors I could start in a good way on the catalogue.

When the design phase started I tried to stay open minded and experimental, since I recognized that that had been a pitfall in previous projects. This also meant designing *solely* by hand for me, but I couldn't bring myself totally disregarding ArchiCad, but using it this time as a 3D tool to test ideas discovered by hand immediately in a more practical way. This turned out to be a good way of designing for me personally. Still, this had some downsides as well. I went too fast with designing and still made some choices too quickly. This also goes hand in hand with the implementation of the Building Technology course. Instead of using that as an integral part of the design, I used it 'just for solving the architecture' so to speak. By looking from only the technological side of the project in the Total Tectonics Workshop I came to solutions and new insights for the design as well, as an integral whole. This only become more prevalent during the latter stages of the project where technology defines the architecture. Think of the organization of the plan, façade principles, or acoustic enhancement in the routing of the building. It became clear that I'm sometimes still 'stuck' in my knowledge gained during my HBO Bouwkunde bachelor, whereas now I see that you can't design a *good* building without having technological principles in mind from the beginning.

At this time I also started reflecting on the Deviations research too, and implemented that more into the design, which resulted in the project becoming a more continuous process rather than researching first, stopping with that, and designing from scratch. This was done without needing to redo the whole design. I believe you take everything you learn with you, as this becomes your frame of reference. Luckily this was the case in the design as well. In my opinion it remains difficult to link the two, since a finding in one place can never exactly be replicated to another.

In general and in regards to what I've just mentioned, what I have learned is that there is never a 'one fits all' solution. It is never only about fitting in the urban tissue, never only about the building functioning on its own, or being designed technologically 'perfect'. Perfect doesn't even exist. Every option exists on multiple overlapping spectra representing different disciplines. That in relation to the research makes it that you could design a building that is well reasoned, but is also merely the sum of its parts. There is one aspect missing, one that is inherently part of every project. What I found is that you as the architect are the mediator, the middle man, to pick and choose from all the research done and the endless stream of possibilities to make the right design (fig. 1). 'London Deviations' turned out to be the perfect project for discovering just that.

Just like the deviations are inherently their own thing, they still fit in well and are undoubtedly part of the larger framework of the city. There is not one way in which architecture can be injected in the city in a perfect manner. With the project I discovered how to make choices in finding the right answer for the design, mediating many aspects to make a contemporary fitting architecture that still fits the ever changing contemporary city. In my own way.

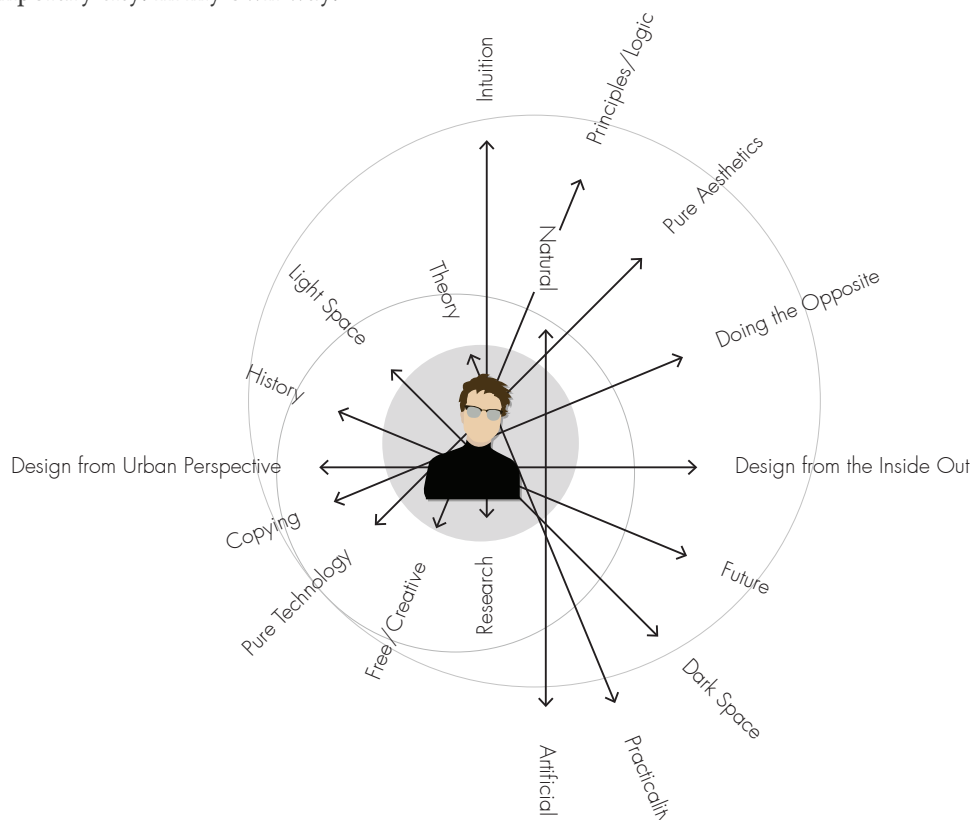


Fig. 1: Intertwined spectra of choices mediated by the designer

