The Franchise Gas Station
a study of
Agenda, Subtext, and Consequence

thesis submitted to the

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Architecture

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May, 1993

Blacksburg, Virginia
The built environment is not only the constructed tectonic, but also a reflection of cultural motivations. Architecture, as a stimulator of the built environment, consequently consists of both the social and the political, along with the aesthetic. Each of these aspects exists in a network of power relations which alters and varies in each particular circumstance of a building. Architecture, in its multiple circumstances, provides shelter, displays splendor, and reflects and influences the structuring of activities and lives in which all participants are involved. Participation is an inherent aspect of the built environment. Every person is involved in various roles related to her surroundings. Different roles are played by the investor, architect, builder, customer, and employee. They are in constant interplay and reflect the interests of each role. Each role is a part of a larger group, and as such, subject to the group's constructs. Participation represents the effects of ideological forces. These forces are often influencing and controlling the solutions in the building as a result of whether it is intentional or not.

The desire for profit and ideological force well known to all participants. The actions taken to build, maintain, and represent profit influence the ways in which financial resources are spent. In relation to architecture, the question of finance and profit is asked on every level of the construction process. Often architecture reinforces a notion of the social condition as a financial condition. Such a condition often does not include a consideration of those participants who are not financially empowered in the process of forces which run contrary to the profit. In the construction of architectural features, architectural matters to be studied are mere solutions which solve problems - productivity and advertising. Consequently, such a profit/solution orientation appears for design which are mass-produced and multiplied, yet ignore the social assertion that exist in each local circumstance.

In the process of the social becoming the financial, a notion of the architect's position is conditioned by many factors. As a profession institutionalized through education and practice, architecture is subject to being able to maintain a critical distance from its interactions with other institutions. Maintaining a critical distance requires engagement in its practice, but it also requires a critical distance from the ideological position of the client, the institution, or the architect within the profession. Architectural actions undertaken without engagement may unintentionally affirm totalizing ideologies of harmful effect. Such a condition requires an architect's awareness of the structure of the struggles between the interests of the main stream and the marginal.

The mainstream and the marginal are participatory. In power and in the relationships which are multi-directional, which means that all participants have power and influence. Architecturally, the marginal is often neglected or ignored as being non-existent or influential. If an architecture would like to consider the marginal, there would be a greater possibility for altering the structure of participation. This would include marginal obligations and effects of architecture in relation to the mainstream. Such the reevaluation would not be searching for an opposing binary. It would use a marginal informant which might indicate a real assessment of the conditions and effects of architecture in relation to the mainstream. Such the reevaluation would not be searching for an opposing binary. It would use a marginal informant which might indicate a real assessment of the conditions and effects of architecture in relation to the mainstream. Such the reevaluation would not be searching for an opposing binary. It would use a marginal informant which might indicate a real assessment of the conditions and effects of architecture in relation to the mainstream. Such the reevaluation would not be searching for an opposing binary. It would use a marginal informant which might indicate a real assessment of the conditions and effects of architecture in relation to the mainstream.
This new customer friendly design is a product of extensive consumer research conducted in communities which represent the major markets. The goal was to develop a new service image which meets the needs and expectations of the customer and the communities which support the business. The result is a unique package of pleasing graphics, unobtrusive architecture and substantial landscaping which works in harmony to provide immediate brand recognition and safe, easy use of each facility. This new customer friendly design is the "Hallmark" of commitment to your community.

The icon of the corporate gas station is a familiar site to any mobile consumer in the United States. Its familiarity is a result of the high demand for a product and repeated structures present in each community. According to the marketing materials, such recognition is a desired architectural end, yet this end is not the result of architectural endeavors alone. For the advancement of the corporation, marketing is used here to promote the ease of use and the desired corporate image. There is no fault in such a procedure. It is interesting to consider the gas station as a paradox of forces and intentions. The paradox consists of the images of the literature and the reality of the structure. The literature projects an image of desired harmony, non-obtrusive and neutral participation in any environment. At the same time, the recognition of a moulded and repeatable form is used to attract and comfort the customer into a situation of "brand recognition". Therefore, the building distinguishes itself from its background. Obviously, this is in order to advance profits by attracting customers. Neither interest is "incorrect", yet the dually directed function of the structure is not always expected or considered. Claiming the accommodation of both the community and customers within the same structure is a desired policy of the corporation.

The architecture has been designed in a clean and simple style to help communicate an open, friendly, uncomplicated atmosphere. Combined with neutral base colors, the design is intended not to impose on the neighborhoods served.

Architecture (as Image)

The initial engagement of the corporation with the community is done on the basis of the corporate marketing materials. These materials are a force which desires to persuade all participants into easy cooperation. Architecture plays a role of support. Marketing materials justify the position of the corporation and place architecture as an image designed to serve the corporation through imagery and wording. It is the concern of this study that neither the corporation nor its endeavors are attacked, but considered as important forces imposed on architecture as a profession. There is, however, a contradiction between the concept of the corporation and that of the profession. In this example, "architecture" is used as an advertising image which conflicts with any notion of architecture as either art, building science, or design. Part of the advertisement revealed in the marketing materials is what is communicated to the passing mobile consumer. The literature indicates the desire for a friendly, uncomplicated, and non-imposing structure designed in sensitivity to the community. These attributes are achieved by the repeated use of the same design, often in close proximity and similarity to other competitors of the gasoline market. The repeated image is comfortably numbing in its familiarity. This numbing then effectively prevents resistance to any design whether it is visual or service related.

Besides the repeated image and patterns of use, the language used in the marketing materials is highly provocative. The conveyed neighborly demeanor promotes the station as the ideal business for every community and as a next door neighbor. There was once a time when such a condition was possible, but in this anonymous design, there is the same station, with no regard to the neighborhood, ownership or employment. In the corporation’s attempt to seem neutral the paradox is reinforced. As a commercial institution selling a product, the corporation is never neutral to the surroundings, no matter what atmosphere is designed. This design approach ignores the histories of the particular location and the cultural institution of the gas station.
Restrooms

Seeing to the needs of our customers is a primary focus of our customer service philosophy. Providing and promoting clean, safe and convenient restrooms facilities is another valuable service to our customers and your community.

Service Philosophy

Providing the mobile consumer with services such as restrooms, vacuum and air stations, car washes, and snack counters adds to the paradoxical nature of the contemporary gas station. In the past, such services were not always available, and stations of the same brand of fuel did not even represent a consistent, recognizable aesthetic. At each location, instead, there was a set of people: owners, attendants and regular customers. In the actions of the people, the station was service rather than the image of service. In the evolution of the self service option for purchasing and the elimination of a mechanic on the premises, the contemporary station advertises services focusing not on people and personality, but on amenities. These amenities are designed displays which attract additional customers that otherwise might not have pulled over from the roadway.

In the notion of “service” altering from the actions of people to amenities, the role of the gas station within the community is expanded. It is not only the source of a vital product, but the convenient solution for satisfying any other needs, whether they be tampons or a gallon of milk. This act of convenience availability establishes a connection between any basic need and the purchase of gasoline. Such connection reinforces the importance of gasoline in the economy and lifestyle of any community in which a station is located, yet it is based on a commodity rather than a community.

The Hallmark Concept

From the ground up, Chevron's Hallmark Station was designed with your community in mind. The simple architecture, open layout, neutral building colors, materials and graphics have been carefully selected to meet our customer's aesthetic and functional needs. The clear identification of services, amenities, product offerings and process have been highly integrated to communicate a controlled and consistent message.

The Hallmark Concept

In addition to the products provided, the marketing materials emphasize an aesthetic service to the community. In this example, the variable locations of the gas station are accommodated and "serve" the individual communities aesthetically by changing roofing materials. It is in this realm of the visual, informed by subagendas of the mainstream or the marginal that the architect can take an important role. In a role relating design to potential franchise owners, architectural review committees, and the corporation, the architect must be able to recognize and manage several factors: the way in which architecture is made and used is not necessarily in accordance with the intentions of the architect; the interest agendas of each role are managed so that realistic intentions are concealed, but still effectively manipulative; the given influence of marketing cannot be denied in motive or effectiveness, nor can its influence be ignored or suddenly stopped. It is the decision of the architect how to manage such factors and how to be critically responsible for consequences. The decision of the architect in this circumstance has been to use the tools of marketing, design, and cultural referents to make and sell. The product is suggested and presented as follows:
Every day millions of people in the U. S. stop by your stations, fuel up and keep on the move. What makes each station different is not always apparent. Here is a unique strategy to make stopping by a different experience at each location of your franchises. The idea was to develop a station which would project a recognizable image to the customer, but at the same time to present a visual difference in each station, in making a difference. This strategy does not follow its competitor strategies which “recognize” the community with a generic building. It recognizes each station location as unique and different from all others within the franchise system.

the maker’s agenda is informed by different forces than the critic’s agenda. the agenda of the maker may be concerned with various aspects of an object physically, while the critic may have a specialty of concerns about the organization of the object. as a double agent, i am in constant interplay among agendas and the results of their meeting. Each agenda has a subset of the forces which informs it. subsets are not in a specific set of logical relations, but must be recognized. this is an attempt to reveal the subset in order to expose, not explain.
The Flexible Component System

The opportunity for your corporation to make a difference is important. This influence is available with the flexible component system. Given a location, the basic components of the tankhouse, pumps and restroom, your corporation, the franchise owner, and community with the help of the corporate architect can make stations which recognize that each location is particular. By recognizing the particular, you don't make the station just a landmark of your corporation alone, but the sign of a group initiative. Each of the components is designed with the customer and employee in mind. The station not only looks different, but acts different towards the customers and employees.

The object is as temporary as the agenda which influences organization and physical comporture. All agendas are subject to change according to circumstances. Therefore, existing objects may not always be appropriate. Inappropriate objects may need to be destroyed or altered; the participant must decide.
Tankhouse

As the major component, the tankhouse has several functions. It is the storage, protection, and display of the product. It provides the monitoring position of the station, along with the transaction area and the necessary control and maintenance space for business. Within its structure, one can recognize three distinct areas: the control booth, tanks, and multi-compartments. All the areas are elevated above the ground level for the convenience and safety of their use.

The influence of multiple agendas was present in the making of this thesis. The educational, professional and personal agendas all have standards of evaluation and requirements for acceptance. Without acceptance, the results of academic and economic failure loom overhead. Even the most personal decision is influenced politically.
The tanks are no longer hidden cavities, but exposed elements which add interest to the facility. They are stored above ground in order to detect and easily contain any possible leaks. This decision was made following the consideration for the natural environment as one way to care for the customer and community. The tanks are bullet proof and constitute an integral part of the structure which contains them. Their weight adds stability to the structure. Upon replacement, they are easily removed and installed with a sliding carriage system. Business disruption from digging is no longer a problem. The hyperexposure of dead technology is not a reverence; it is a reminder of past destruction and an introduction to local consequences of the dangerous products Americans consume.

The remainder participates quantitatively by exposing how large the tanks are and qualitatively by indicating how much gasoline is consumed and drawing attention to the potential consequences of dependency on gasoline.
The Control Booth

Positioned for convenience and safety, the control booth monitors the station activity. Customers may pay for their purchase quickly without distraction of food sales or smoke filled offices. Non obstructed visibility of the major areas of the facility provides a safer environment for customers and employees.

Every object is a set of mechanistic relations. It is these relations which organize and affect the productivity and pleasure of the occupants. Architecture is the means for making organization for the corporation. Architecture may be a tool to execute its intentions, as it equals architecture justifies the corporate logic.
Product Delivery

The delivery of gasoline is an integral part of each station design. Positioned with easy truck access in mind, the tankhouse provides a protected area for gasoline delivery away from customer traffic, whether in car or on foot.

This study was intended to back away from practices of the architectural institution. The particular practice of specialization has encouraged a numbness to the professions and participants in the built environment. This numbness only intensifies architecture's currently stagnant condition as a corporate tool.
Each design is site specific not only in its arrangement, but in the resulting accessibility as well. Safe and easy ingress and egress provides creating welcomes and exits to your customers.

In any project the terms of evaluation must be specified. If they are not specified, the project may be evaluated by criteria inappropriate to issues at hand. This is an attempt to alter the structure and politics of a chain operated business to architecture methods, organization and image as methods provide tools for further making and critique. But after all, in the market of gasoline sales, the consumer has the economic power to buy or to boycott.
Providing clean, safe and efficient restrooms is important to visitors of your stations. The restrooms have been designed to ensure easy accessibility and use for all.

The obligation to represent an object in conventional methods is constant... there is a need for a clear set of representational images as a premise. One set for construction, another set for selling, and a third set for the truth of the matter at hand. Conventional methods of representation often place an emphasis on the visual aspects of architecture, which is powerful and must be recognized. The technology of representation which are used to manipulate conventional methods of representation continue to operate effectively by increasing the visual and verbal contexts of representational images.
The Employee's Work Place

Your customers and their communities are not the only people vital to your business. Your employees—on whom you depend for the success of your operations and to whom you answer—are also crucial. Your employees are the living component of your business, the human part of your corporation. Your employees are your partners. You must therefore provide an environment that is an extension of your company's principles. This environment should be safe, based on good technology, and provide a sense of order and control. It must also be conducive to creative thinking, as well as productive work. It must be a place where people feel comfortable and can do their best work.

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The design of the employee's workplace is a key factor in the success of any business. The work environment should be designed to meet the needs of the employees, who are the backbone of any successful operation. The workplace should be a place where employees feel comfortable and can work efficiently. It should also be designed to encourage creativity and innovation, which are essential for the success of any business.

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Possible Consequences

Why should you care to engage in such a drastic redesign of your corporate gas station? Because the value of all who participate, whether customer or owner, is only good for business. Decision-making is always better in groups of people who are participants themselves. Each participant has the opportunity to recognize intentions of others. Your corporation's position will be valued at every location, not just as a business offering services, but as one setting an example for others to follow.

There is a myth of technological progress - that it will cure its own ills, yet the seems to be a resignation from the responsibility of avoiding consequence. An illusion that denies any relation of power that actually are an immediate to the believer's own body.