

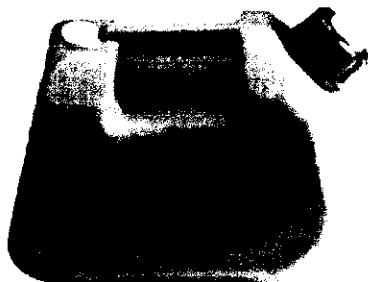
a thesis by Paul M. Owens . . . an optimistic exploration of the opportunities presented by the **MUNDANE**

*r e f u e l*

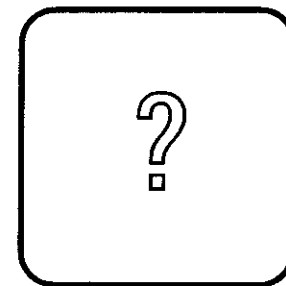
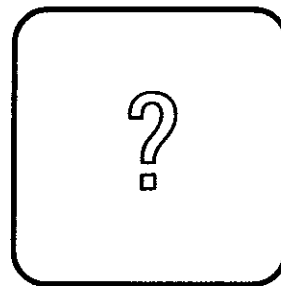
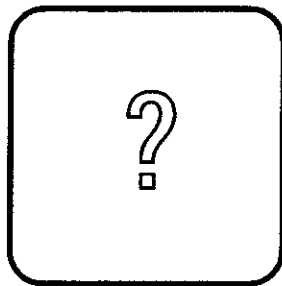
an urban service station

introduction	1
background	3
precedents	8
analysis	1 1
site	1 4
process	1 8
results	2 1
reflection	3 4

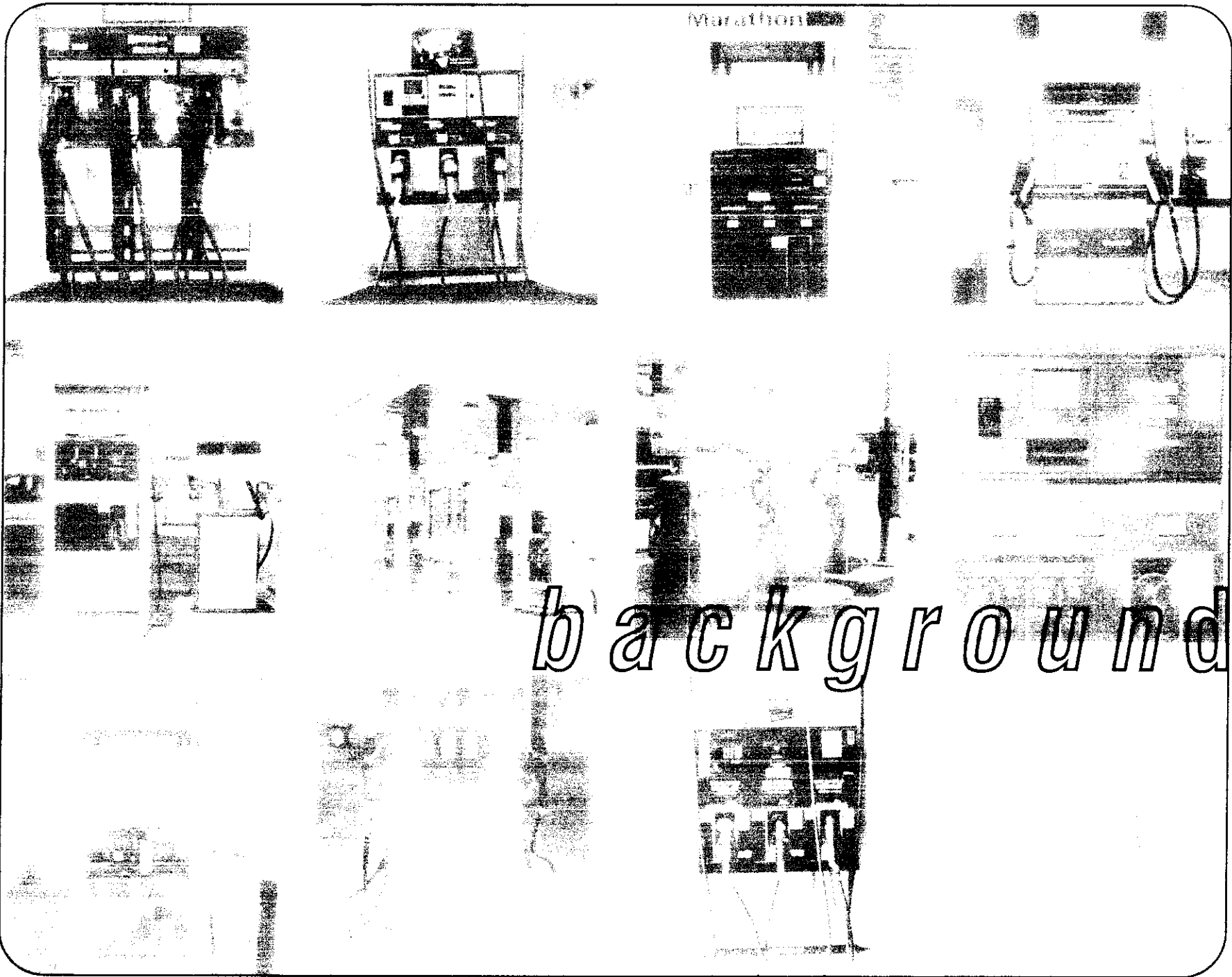
62



**Notice the boxes.** Pick one. Pick any one you want. Which one would you choose? Is there a choice? No, there does not seem to be a choice at all. Based on what you can see, it really does not matter which one you choose. So **any one of them will provide the same experience as the others.** - Now take another look at the same boxes. But replace the question marks with dollar signs. Same physical monotony with a range of a few pennies. Imagine that these boxes are drug stores, **gas stations**, or hamburger joints. Or any other everyday building that contributes to the **mundane clutter** of consumer suburbia. Do the pennies really matter? Do you care for what sort of experience or space is provided? - After a quick glance at the boxes, it is not a far stretch to imagine them as a doctor's office, a hair salon, a flower shop. Plan, elevation, section...all the same. Does it matter if all of these **specialized tasks** take place in identical boxes with different colored facades and parking in front? When i drive down the road, i notice the bright lights, the loud and colorful signs, and cars in the foreground of **superficial facades**. Are these boxes designed? Or just assembled and placed as close together as the building code allows? I think that people notice this. But do they care? - I believe that they do care. When i discuss my ideas with people outside of the design profession, I get reactions of **genuine concern for the spaces that they use every day.** The bank, the laundromat, the video store. Not art museums, convention centers, or corporate headquarters. So are the people of communities being overlooked by the design profession? Or maybe the corporate chains that build these consumer boxes know that we will buy no matter how the boxes and users relate. **Something should be done.**



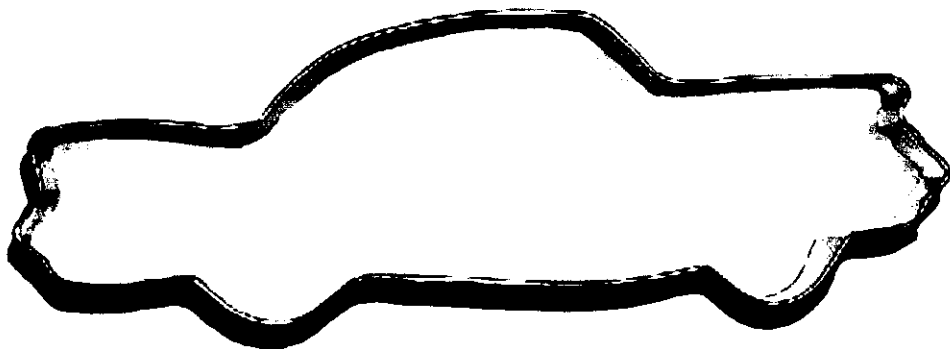
Marathon



*background*

Peter Behrens was the first artist/architect to be included in the industrial mass production. AEG recognized the fact that humans respond to products that are designed with the human in mind. humans are not machines. humans are individuals who have ideas, feelings, opinions, and needs. and humans combine to form communities, towns, and cities that respond to the earth and the conditions in which they exist. it seems obvious to view buildings created for humans in a similar manner. every community provides its own individualism; whether by location, climate, culture, or character. shouldn't the buildings that adorn the streets of a community respect and respond to the elements that provide its identity? Have we forgotten the ideas behind the discoveries of AEG and Peter Behrens? such short memories.

in mentioning Behrens, i do not intend for my thesis to explore the possibilities for the design of mass-produced products. a major result that these revolutionary ideas had on the future was a justification of superficiality. and i think that is exactly our current situation. i believe that Behrens and AEG had good intentions that were distorted as are many valuable ideas. their machine aesthetic is not what i am after. instead, i want to explore the design potential of the everyday building. just like mass-produced objects, our buildings are being pumped out of a mold. but the problems occur in the placement of these buildings, their relationship to the human, and their utter disrespect for the aesthetic environment. dollar-saving efficiency has taken over our communities. and this doesn't just happen in suburbia. you can drive through a downtown, its suburb, and out to the interstate on-ramp and find identical service stations in each region of a community. our communities were not formed by cookie cutters. why should our buildings be?



According to Webster, the word *mundane* means *ordinary* or *commonplace*. My focus is architecture...mundane buildings that stand in a row with a rhythmic interruption of a vast, continuous parking lot...superficial, three-dimensional billboards that have ignored their potential to receive design attention. Mundane is what we see every day. We become used to the mundane and even grow numb to its presence. Mundane fades into its surroundings. And these surroundings often contribute to the same boredom that allows the passers by to simply tune them out with little effort. I imagine that the building with the first neon sign or window decal was quite a spectacle. People probably noticed it because it was different, new, innovative. They might have even decided to go and take a closer look at the new means of advertising. But the streets of today are crowded with billboards, lighted signs, and window advertisements. So these standard items have collectively become mundane. They are all basically similar and demand very little individual attention. Their messages are also similar and only vary on spelling and occasionally a few pennies. People visit mundane buildings every day. They do laundry, get haircuts, buy groceries, and pump gas. Not all of these situations are mundane. But it is safe to say that a majority of them are. Should businesses numb their users? Boredom surely is not the goal of the designers. But our communities continue to spread with streets that connect shoebox after shoebox. Mundane does not invite the user to return. But mundane does encourage the consumer to feel comfortable with any box that looks and feels similar. Design is not the only marketing device. But design is a means to a building that demands attention in the midst of the mundane. Design creates an invitation for the return customer. Specific design attention is part of the answer. Promotion of the mundane is part of the problem.

...the gas station...is undoubtedly the most widespread type of commercial building in America, and yet it is also the most ignored. The history of architecture must not be confined to masterpieces...The subject is much bigger and comprises all that man has done...to shape the environment"

**"The gas station...is undoubtedly the most widespread type of commercial building in America, and yet it is also the most ignored. The history of architecture must not be confined to masterpieces...The subject is much bigger and comprises all that man has done...to shape the environment"**

...Not only did these stations accommodate the needs of the driver, but they also celebrated the entire process of driving.

**Not only did these stations accommodate the needs of the driver, but they also celebrated the entire process of driving.**

**A trip to the filling station was an event that all members of a community valued.**

**They all wanted to catch the eye of the motorist as they drove by.**

**A sort of ongoing expressive competition had begun, and the drivers loved the attention they were receiving.**

**Service stations served as three-dimensional billboards in order to catch the driver's eye from any direction**

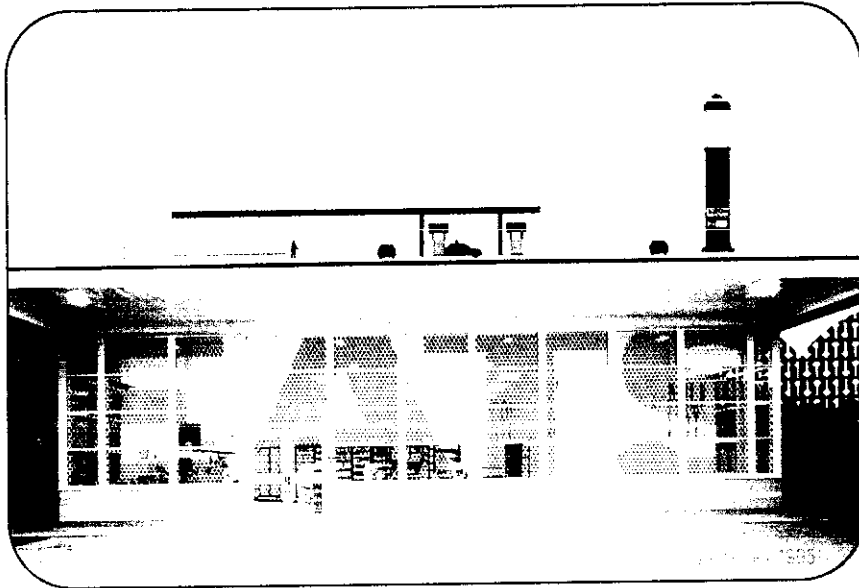
...important as the number of drivers...

...billboards in order to catch the driver's eye from any direction

...important as the number of drivers...

5

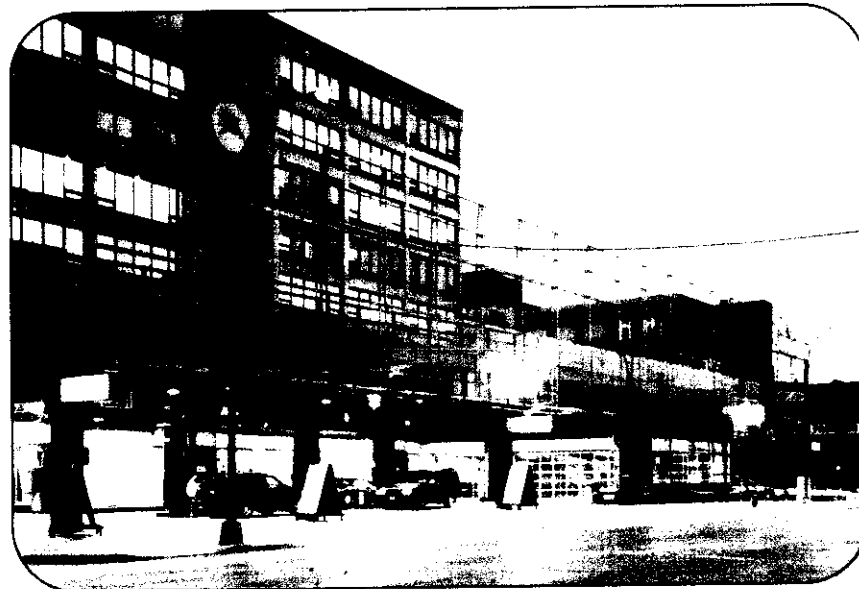




**Exxon Station, Venturi Scott Brown - Orlando**

"It is with good reason that Venturi and Scott Brown call this gas station a prototype. It can be seen as the gas station to end all gas stations. A perfect and virtuoso game with all the elements that define a gas station. The supersign of the petrol pump right on the road, the large roof, the self-service shop. And behind the gas station the garden, the significant garden fence, the silhouette of the trees. You can really see the day-to-day life of the gas station. The fast, hectic bustle and beordome of the waiting times. The anonymity of the customer and the individuality of the attendant. Actually the architectural messages of this prototype...could be used to tell the cultural history of a mobile society."

*--Domus, November 1995*



**Chelsea Carwash, Cybul & Cybul Architects and Christopher K. Grabe - New York City**

"The program is straightforward, and no different from its anonymous highway brethren: There is a mini-mart, lube station, car wash, and several gas pumps. But unlike them, the Chelsea Carwash manages to transform a mundane lube job or fill-up into an aesthetic experience. Its services are tucked under the shelter of the viaduct, which essentially was left open to the street. The steel-and-glass armature becomes more of a transparent billboard than a wall, and its architect Christopher Grabe collaborated with graphic designers to develop signage that will eventually cover the scaffolding's upper level.

*--Architecture, p. 90, October 2000*

### **Auto Bistro Prototype, BOORA Architects**

"BOORA decided to overturn the conventional fast-food delivery process. The team opted for a drive-thru, not an eat-in restaurant, emphasizing a healthy menu and streamlined, personalized service: A "motor d" hands menus out to cars as they pull into the drive-thru entrance. Rather than talk to a squawking box, customers give orders to waiters stationed under a plasticized fabric canopy that is supported by a freestanding steel frame. To speed up delivery time, food can be served to several cars at once, from three perforated, stainless steel-clad "vittleveyor" chutes that hang beneath and elevated food preparation area."

*--Architecture, p. 65 May 1998*

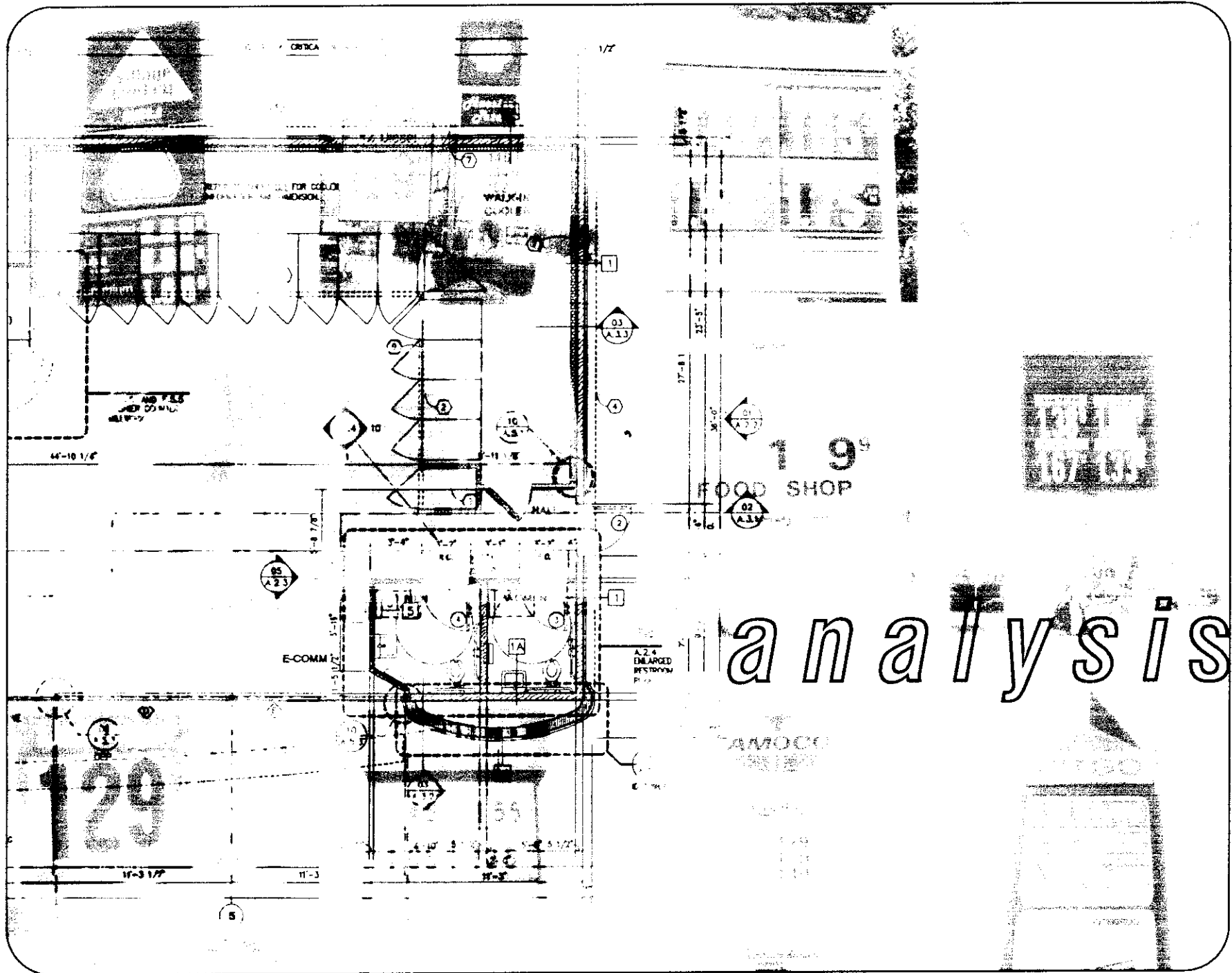


### **BP Connect Station - Indianapolis, IN**

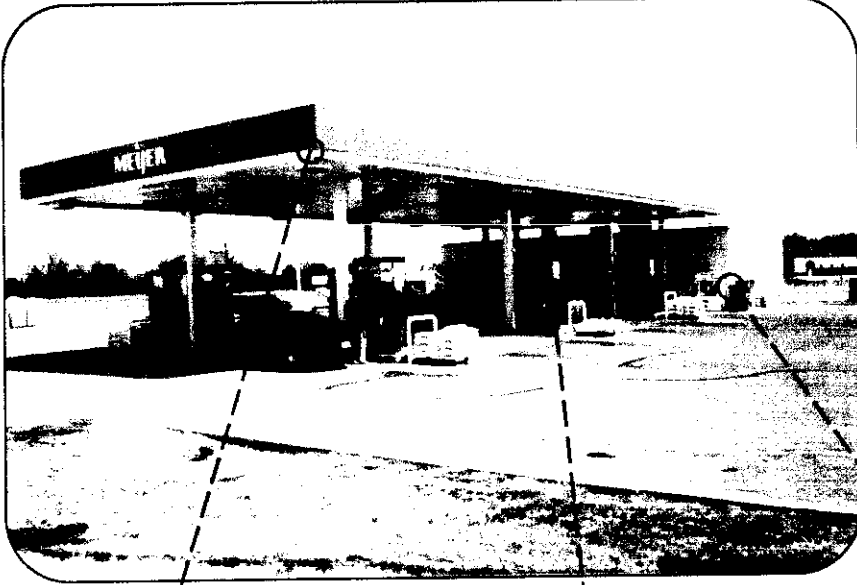
Although it is still among the collection of typical gas stations in this world, the new design for the BP Connect stations has risen to the top. BP has made a conscious effort to provide a new image to a building type that is typically ignored or looked down upon. The new curved canopy, the redesigned pumps, and the smarter facade are definitely steps in the right direction. But these new stations are just opening the doors to the realization of the design opportunities presented by the service station. Most of the improvements seem to remain superficial. Even the internet mapping stations just poke at the possibilities of "connecting" its customers. Nonetheless, BP must be applauded for their notable efforts with innovation.



The drawing to the right is the plan of the newest development in gas stations to hit the Midwest. Sounds exciting, right? Well, there isn't much excitement in what I see. I spent a summer as an architectural intern at a firm that is responsible for the design of a recognizable chain of gas stations. And from what I experienced, this plan does not look any different than the buildings that I worked on. In fact, this is basically the same organization as most of the stations that I helped to draft. The name of the gas station represented by this drawing is BP Connect. Their commercials introduce their new buildings as being a new experience and as more user friendly. Those are great ideas, but their methods of producing the tangible forms of these concepts are simply superficial. At the new BP stations, a customer can order a sandwich from the pump and have it brought out to the car. The building aesthetic is crisp and clean as it displays a new corporate logo. And the pumps have new curvilinear casings and are protected by a canopy shaped by a convex bow truss. Is this all it takes to create a new experience?



analysis



12

**canopy**

The canopy is a critical element of the gas station's design. It provides shelter for the pumps and the customer. The canopy's design should be functional and aesthetically pleasing. The canopy's height and width should be appropriate for the pumps and the customer. The canopy's color and material should be durable and weather-resistant. The canopy's design should also consider the station's location and the surrounding environment.

**convenience store**

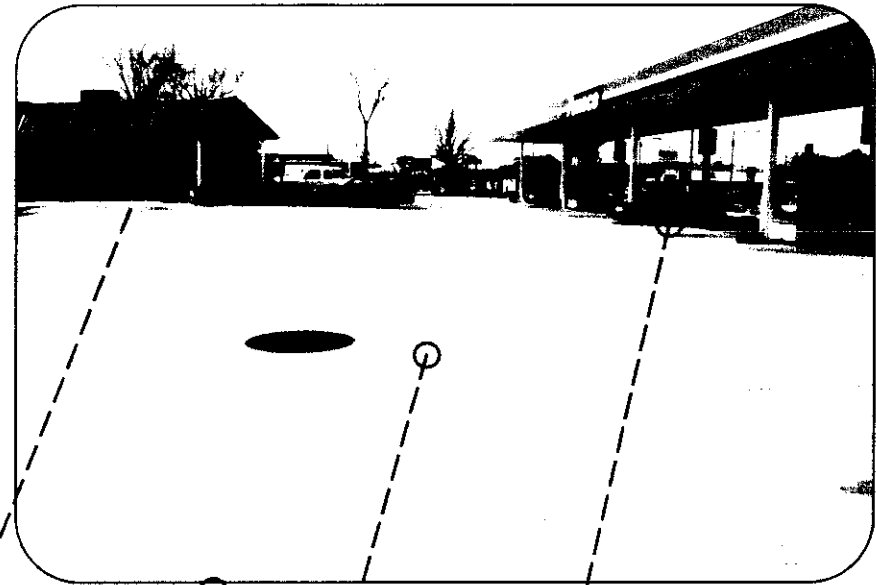
The convenience store is an essential part of the gas station's service. It provides customers with a place to buy snacks, drinks, and other necessities. The store's design should be functional and efficient. The store's layout should be clear and easy to navigate. The store's inventory should be well-stocked and organized. The store's design should also consider the station's location and the surrounding environment.

**restrooms**

Restrooms are a necessary feature of a gas station. They provide a place for customers to use the restroom. The restrooms' design should be functional and clean. The restrooms' layout should be clear and easy to navigate. The restrooms' inventory should be well-stocked and organized. The restrooms' design should also consider the station's location and the surrounding environment.

For a gas station, this is about as typical as you can find. It functions relatively well, and most people probably never complain about this particular station...or most others for that matter. The fact remains that we need it. The automobile has woven its way into our lives to the point that we rely on its services. Therefore, we also rely on the services of these gas stations. This particular station happens to be a Meijer station along 332 in Muncie, Indiana. But nothing about it tells you anything about its location, except maybe that it is likely alongside a major road. It serves gas. Does it really matter that it's in Muncie, in Indiana, in the United States? No. All that matters is that it serves gas. Aesthetics are not the issue. The user isn't even the main concern. This image is primarily the result of budgets that ignore environments. People use this building more than once every week. Designers should be aware of the everyday.

This is another everyday image. It is actually just a few miles down the street from the previous example. The logo on this particular station bears the familiar Amoco label. But just below that label, this example can boast of a vast expanse of concrete that allows the driver to drive through, back up, turn around, or basically do whatever the car will allow. Most stations adhere to this suburban mentality that open space is an American right to anyone that can afford it. We spread out, consume land, and wonder why we have chaotic suburban arteries littered with huge signs, bright lights, and no place to walk. The oil companies have paired down their buildings to efficient, little boxes that sit back off of the street to allow the car to rule not only the streets, but also their fueling sites. Gas stations have evolved from family destinations to necessary community blights. Let us hope that these blights may continue to evolve.



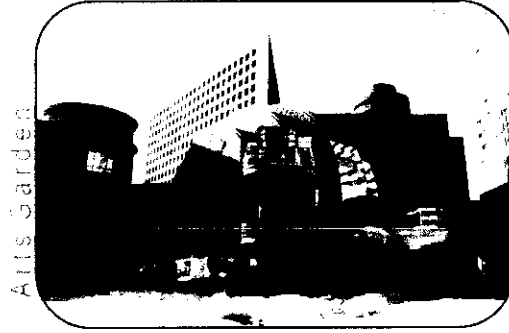
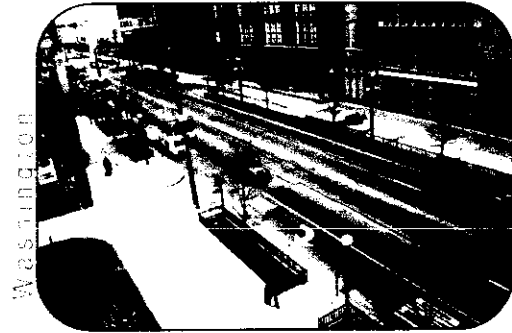
**"The styling:** This is a classic example of the suburban mentality. The building is a simple, boxy structure that sits back off the street. The concrete area in front of the pumps is a vast expanse of open space that allows the driver to drive through, back up, turn around, or basically do whatever the car will allow. This is a classic example of the suburban mentality that open space is an American right to anyone that can afford it.

**"The client:** The client is a local business that is looking for a way to increase its customer base. The client is a local business that is looking for a way to increase its customer base. The client is a local business that is looking for a way to increase its customer base.

**"The site:** The site is a classic example of the suburban mentality. The building is a simple, boxy structure that sits back off the street. The concrete area in front of the pumps is a vast expanse of open space that allows the driver to drive through, back up, turn around, or basically do whatever the car will allow.

**"The service area:** The service area is a classic example of the suburban mentality. The building is a simple, boxy structure that sits back off the street. The concrete area in front of the pumps is a vast expanse of open space that allows the driver to drive through, back up, turn around, or basically do whatever the car will allow.





← **The gas station is typically a suburban building type.** Their basic designs force them to occupy a larger site than is usually available in an urban setting. And even when gas stations are found in more dense areas, they are typically identical to the stations found in suburbia and near the interstate. So one of the reasons for choosing this site in downtown Indianapolis is to **challenge the preconceptions of where a service station should be located.** People drive downtown. So it is logical to assume that a service station would be just as appropriate as a parking garage. Another logical assumption would be that it would receive business...by default. There are no convenient service stations in the central part of downtown Indy.

← **Urban centers are places that service stations should be seeking out.** In a successful downtown, such as Indianapolis, there is a concentration of the best and the brightest. **Downtown is a destination** that features the finest dining, the best shopping, exciting sporting events, and some of the richest cultural experiences to be found in a city. And there are usually very few, if any services that respond to the driver. Thousands of people come to work everyday in the downtown area. Gas stations continuously boast of convenience, but they ignore the opportunity to serve a large portion of the population. A successful urban center would heighten the image of a oil company. And isn't image the most valuable of all marketing tools?

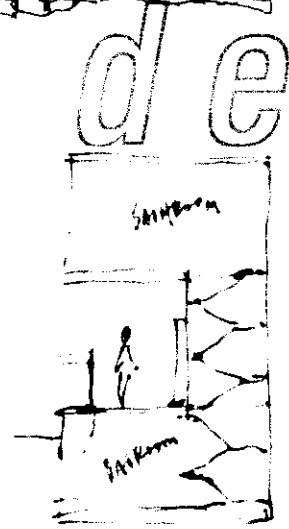
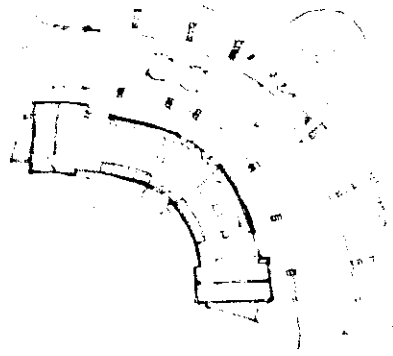
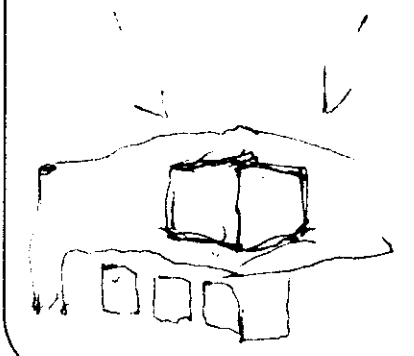
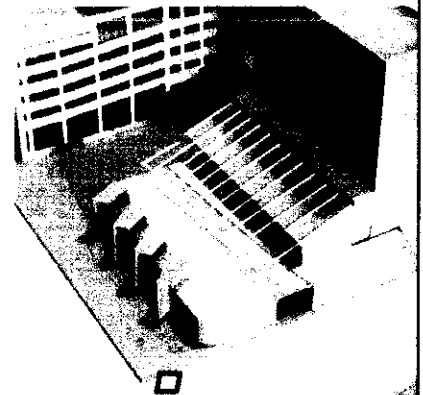
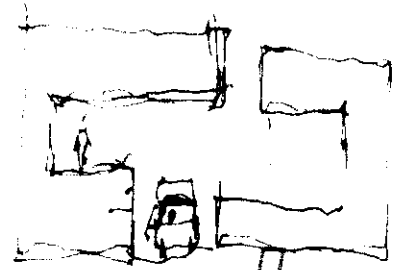
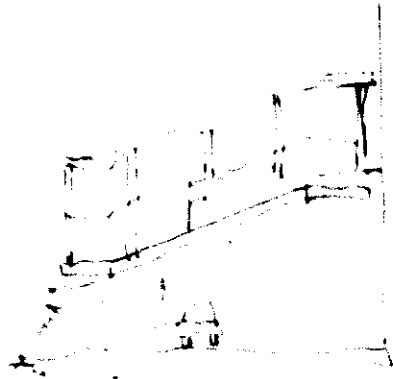
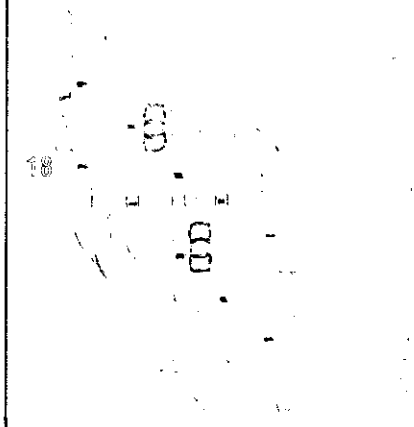
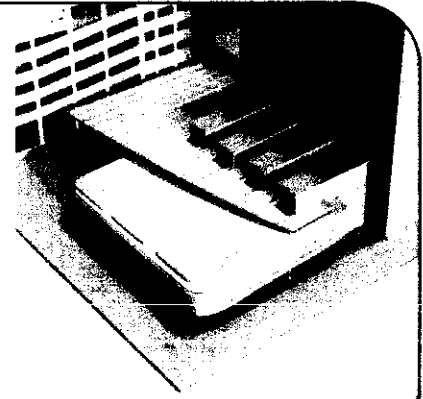
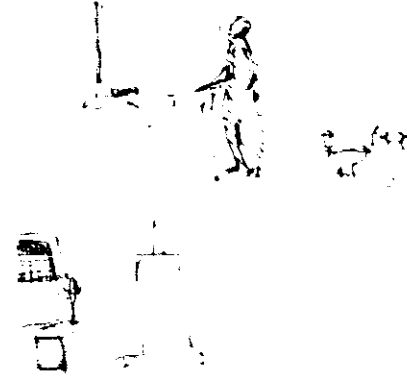
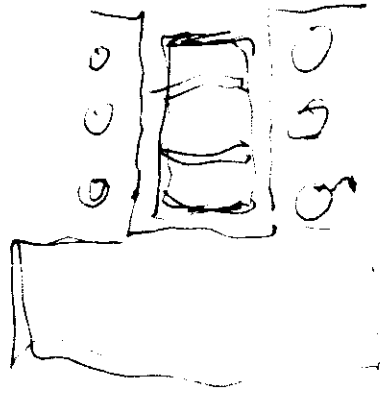
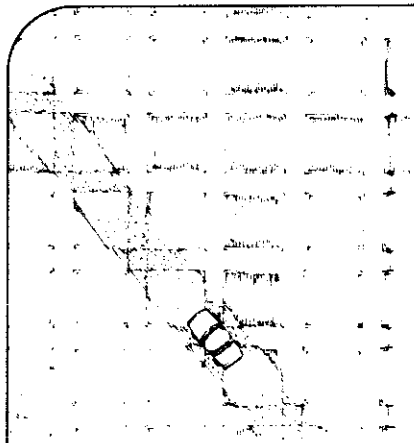
← Urban areas are one of the few places left in our cities that **people feel comfortable in their cars as well as on foot.** And until the entire world decides to exclusively use credit cards, the service station will continue to be a place of auto and pedestrian. **But a service station is not typically a pedestrian's destination.** The convenient store prices are high, and the typical junk food does not usually fall within the diet of a person out for exercise. So an urban site would provide a **perfect opportunity to appeal to the driver and the pedestrian.** A lunch spot for workers on break, a place to drop your car for a tune-up, and a place to interact with the world via the internet. A mesh of the auto and the pedestrian would serve downtown Indy well.

"The [gas station] is the most repellant piece of architecture of the past two thousand years. There are far more of them than are needed. Usually they are filthy. Their merchandise is hideously packaged and garishly displayed. They are uncontrollably addicted to great strings of ragged little flags. Protecting them is an ominous coalition of small businessmen and large. The stations should be excluded entirely from most streets and highways. Where allowed, they should be franchised to limit the number and there should be stern requirements as to architecture, appearance, and general reticence. When we begin on this (and similar roadside commerce), I will think that we are serious."

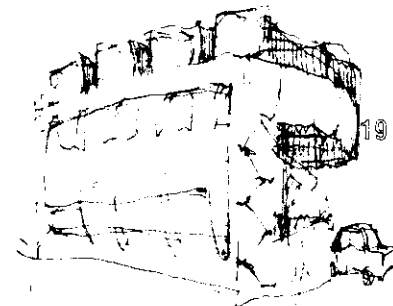
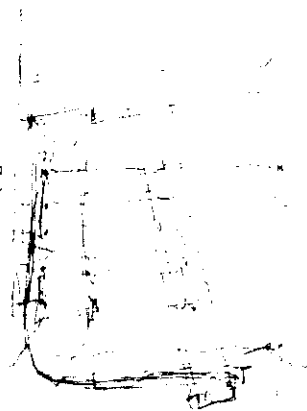
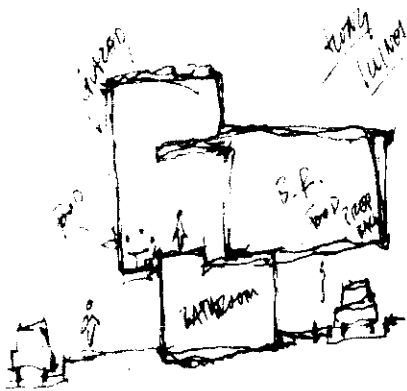
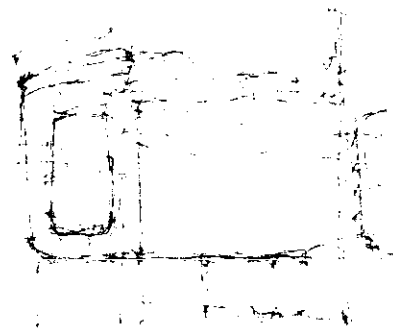
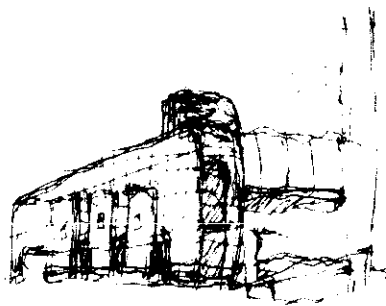
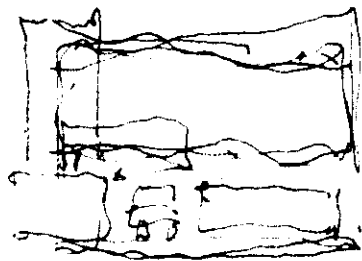
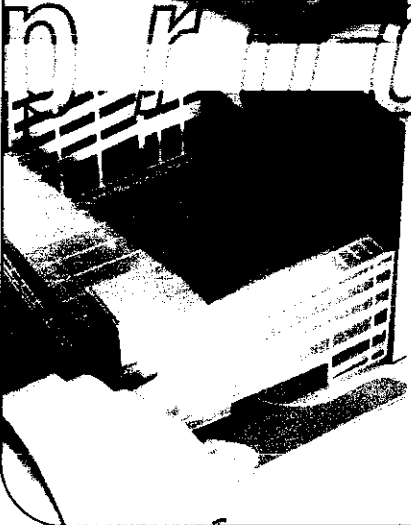
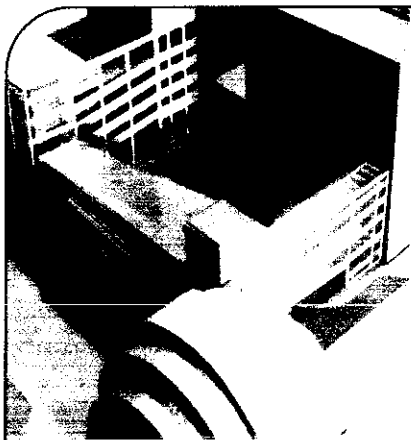
-- John Kenneth Galbraith

Does this suggestion sound like a logical solution? Whether we have figured it out or not, the automobile is going to be around for awhile. And the proposition of "excluding entirely from most streets and highways" the very building that enables us to fuel our vehicles is at best naive and unrealistic. On the other hand, many gas stations are "filthy" and "repellant." But one of the aspects of the architectural profession that has motivated me thus far is the opportunity to solve problems. Architects, in many ways are problem solvers. So the *optimistic approach* that I have mentioned seems obvious in a case such as this. We have a collection of filthy, repellant, mundane buildings. That is the problem. And instead of excluding an American icon, maybe designers should recognize the opportunities that the typical gas station presents. Should we just eliminate the things in society that don't appeal to us? I believe that being "serious" means dealing with a problem.

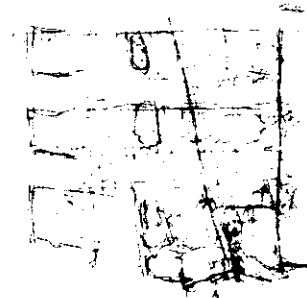
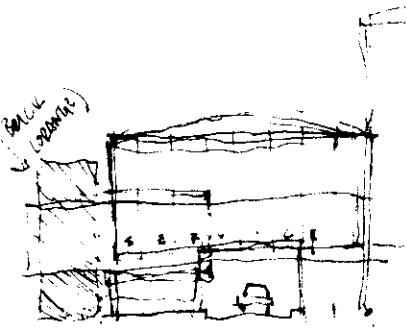




de s i a n



# PROCESS



3

One of the major reasons that service stations are not located in dense, urban areas is the simple fact that there isn't very much room. Unlike a typical urban infill, service stations require refueling themselves. Large **fuel tankers** are one of the major influences on the size of a typical site of a gas station. They require a much larger turning radius than a car, truck or SUV. And the process of turning around and backing up does not fit well into an urban setting. But it is a possibility.

2

Another force that has influenced this site is the obvious one...the **automobile**. In order for a service station to serve the automobile, movement onto and off of the site is typically a necessity. And although the radius is not as great for a car, comfortable turns are a must--especially for a higher class of customers/drivers within Indy's most desirable business district. A simple and direct route through the sight is also important so as to encourage customers to return and recognize the attention paid to the human user. Some may criticize the idea of driving onto a site in an urban area, but there is really no difference when a driver decides to access a parking garage.

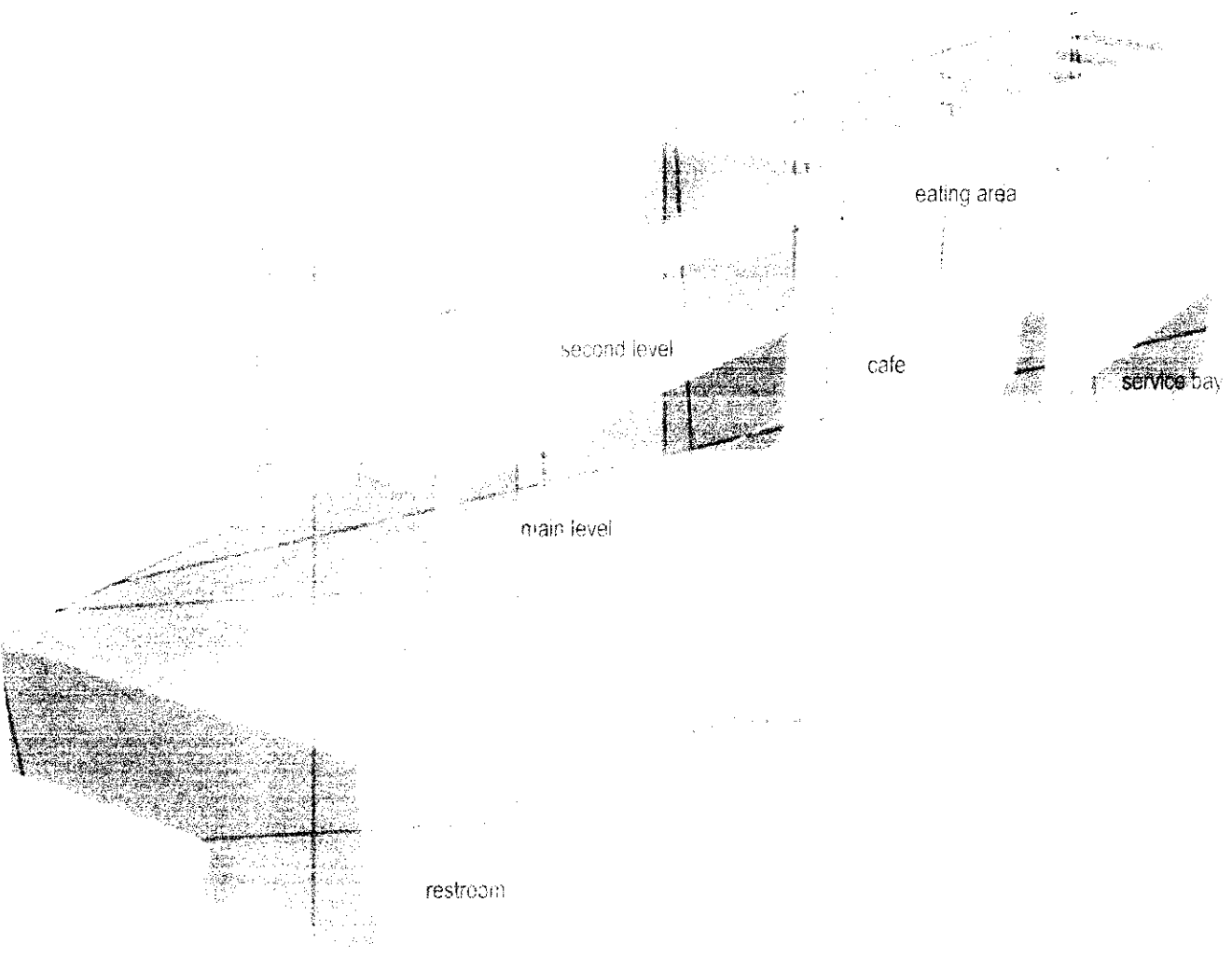
1

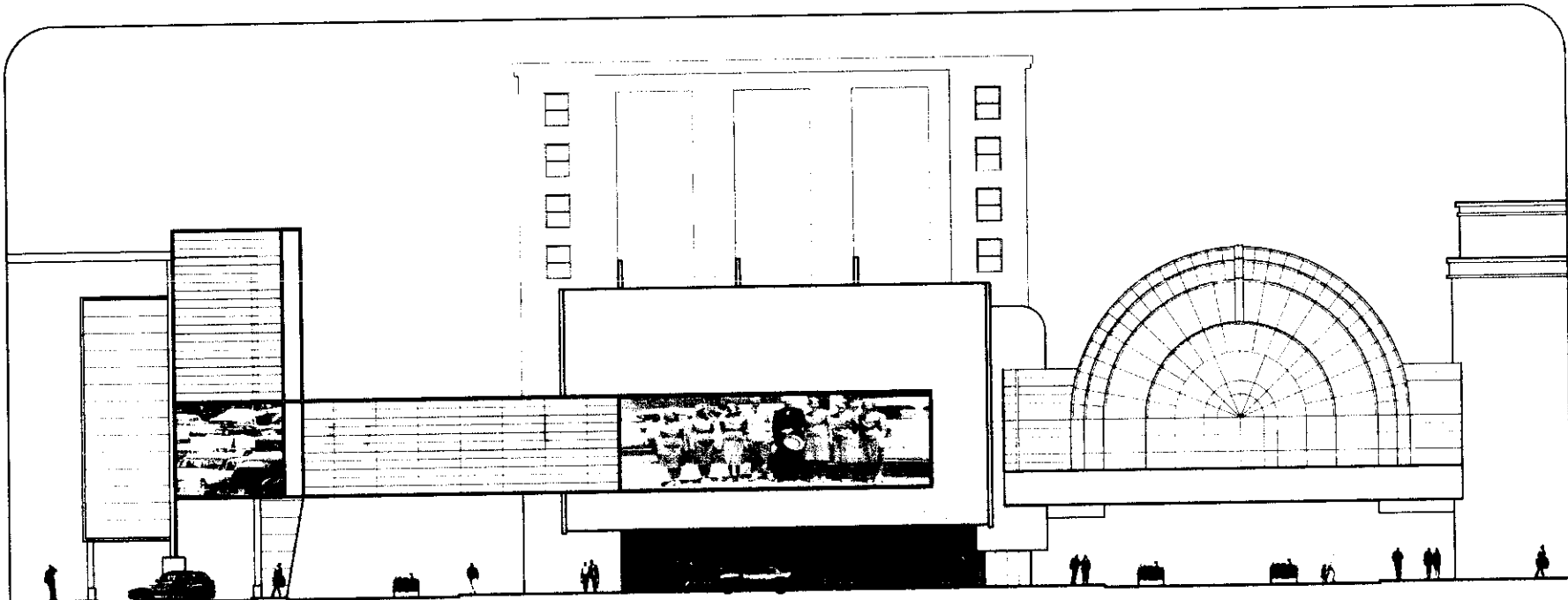
One of the most influential forces on this site are the streets that define its corner. Washington moves cars one way west with a signaled intersection under the Arts Garden. Illinois moves one way north from the same in intersection. **One way streets** are probably another factor that keeps service stations out of downtown areas. Many cities have urban stations, but one way streets do cut down on the number of choices to be made by the driver. So the site must be treated like it is an urban site upon which the new building must not impose its suburbanite baggage. Urban areas control the auto with their own defining forces. So should this site.



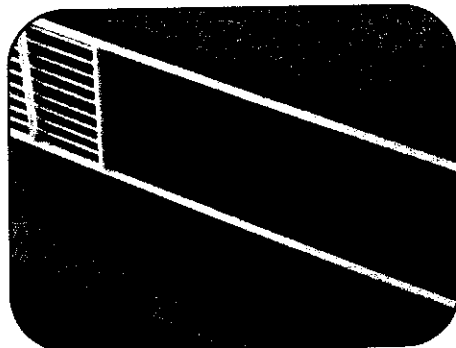
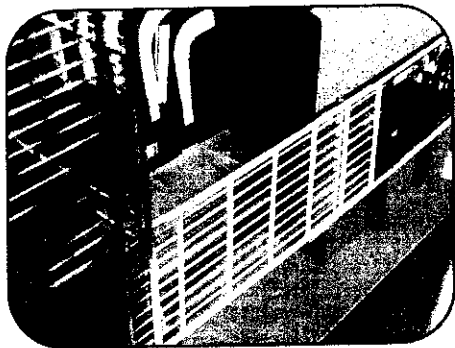


This structure represents the third component of a service station besides, of course, the fuel service islands. Although not found in all service stations, the **fast food restaurant** is becoming a regular service offered by most stations today. Popular fast food restaurants usually team up with a gas manufacturer, a general contractor, and a fast food franchise to create a more efficient service station. In a fast food area such as a downtown city, the customer can get a gas fill-up, a quick bite, and a rest room all in one place. There is a fast food counter where the customer can get a quick bite, the typical fast food fare. There is a fast food counter where the customer can get a quick bite, the typical fast food fare. There is a fast food counter where the customer can get a quick bite, the typical fast food fare.

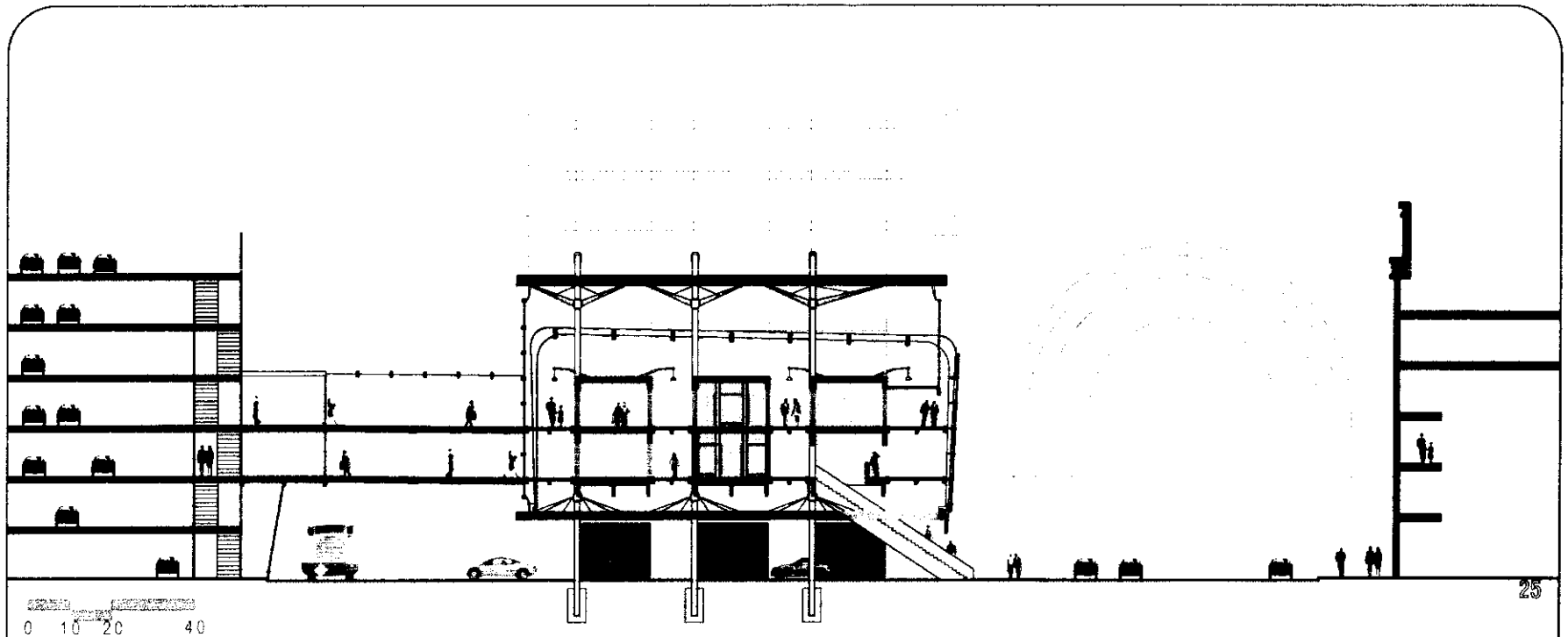




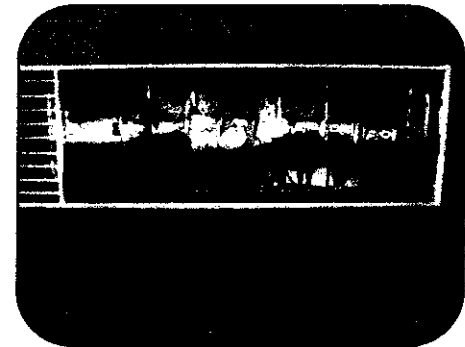
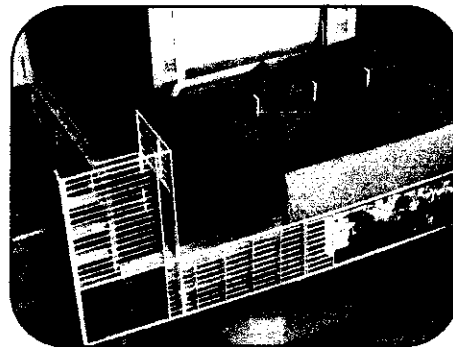
0 10 20 40

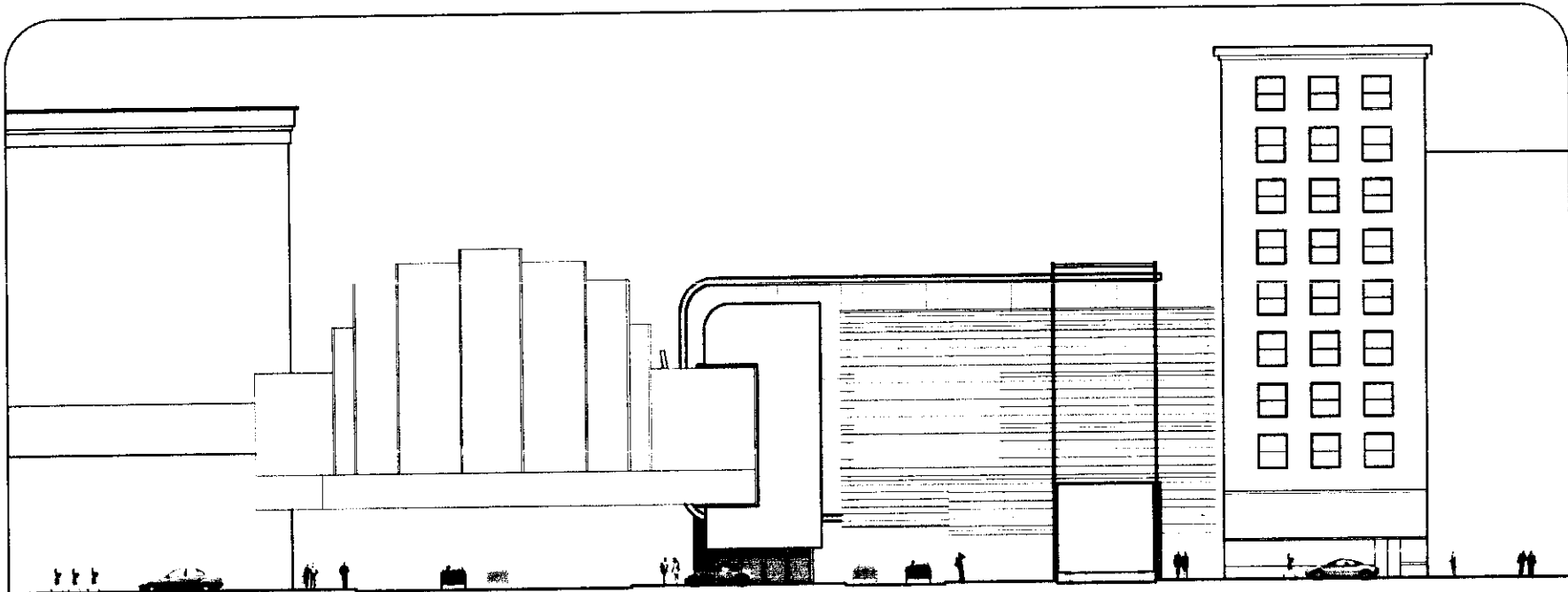


The Illinois St. facade is found in a unique situation. The approach from south to north is not important due to the Arts Garden that hangs over the intersection. There really are no views from the car, and very few from the sidewalk, until one passes under the Arts Garden. Therefore, more obvious colors are applied to this stretched billboard facade along Illinois. The scale of the service station is influenced by the Arts Garden, the parking garage, and the storefronts that face it on both sides. The new service station should respond the scales of the human and the auto.

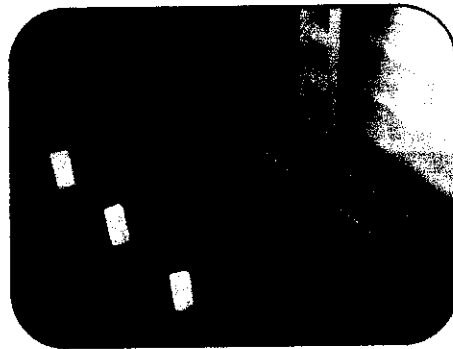
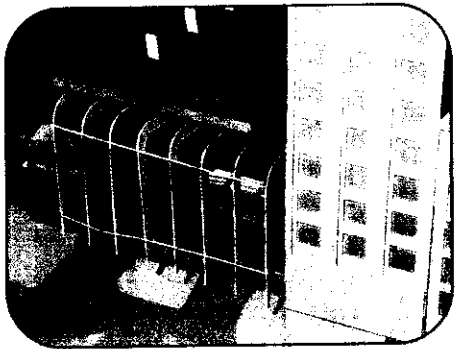


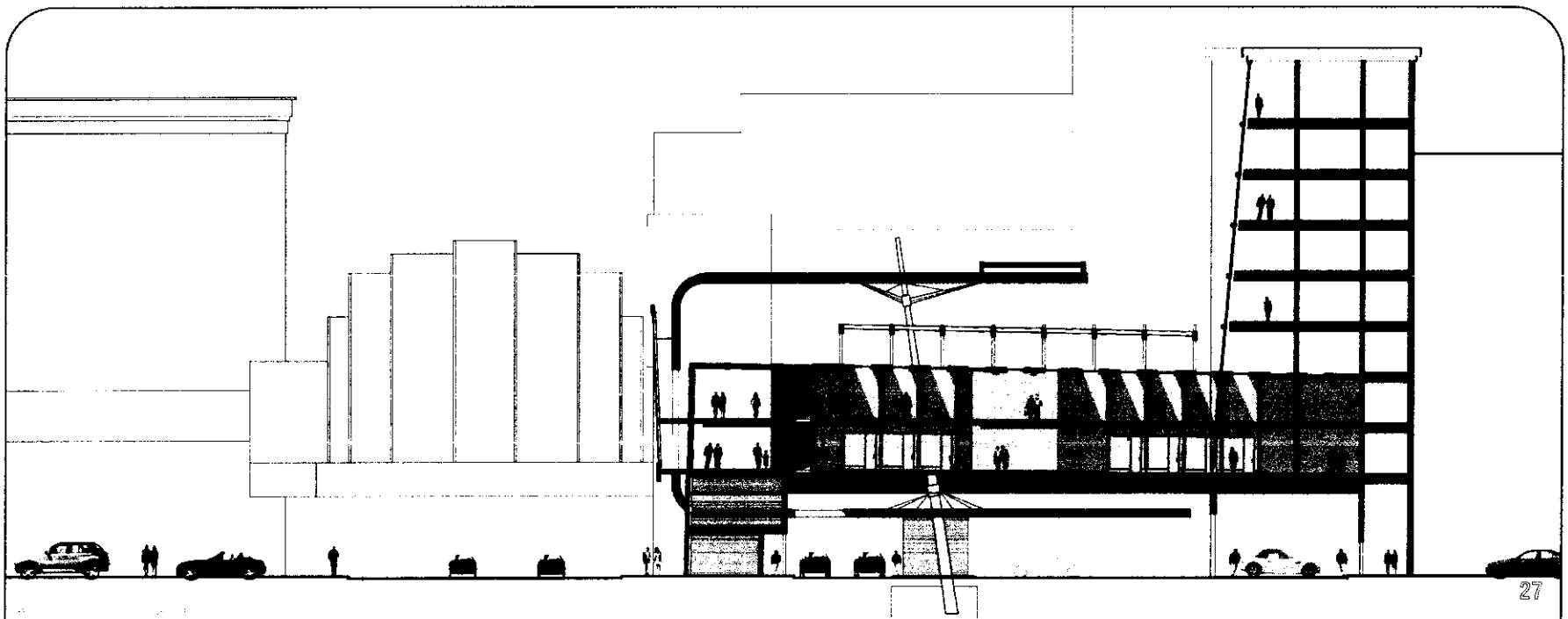
The Illinois St. section displays the true scale of the building. The building's outer shells act as a step down from the taller office buildings. And with the integration of the three blue components, the scale is brought even closer to the pedestrian and automobile. Above the ground (auto) level, the two main levels allow the path of the Arts Garden to continue all the through the Emmis Building and eventually into Monument Circle. The three tangential components display their functions along this walk and provide choices for the customer to enter the functional portions of the building.



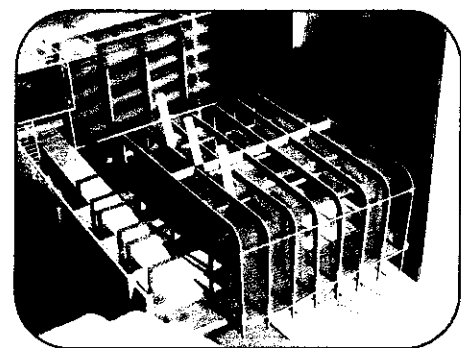


The Washington Street facade is the initial reception of the major forces that act on the site. It features three pedestrian entrances, and the only entrances for the automobiles and the refueling trucks. Many of the determining dimensions were determined by the Arts Garden's floor level and the height regulations for vehicles in the state of Indiana. The refueling truck entrance is only used on occasion, so a large billboard panel acts as facade as well as a garage door that is lifted only when the trucks arrive, so as not to cause confusion for the auto driver. A facade that moves to serve.





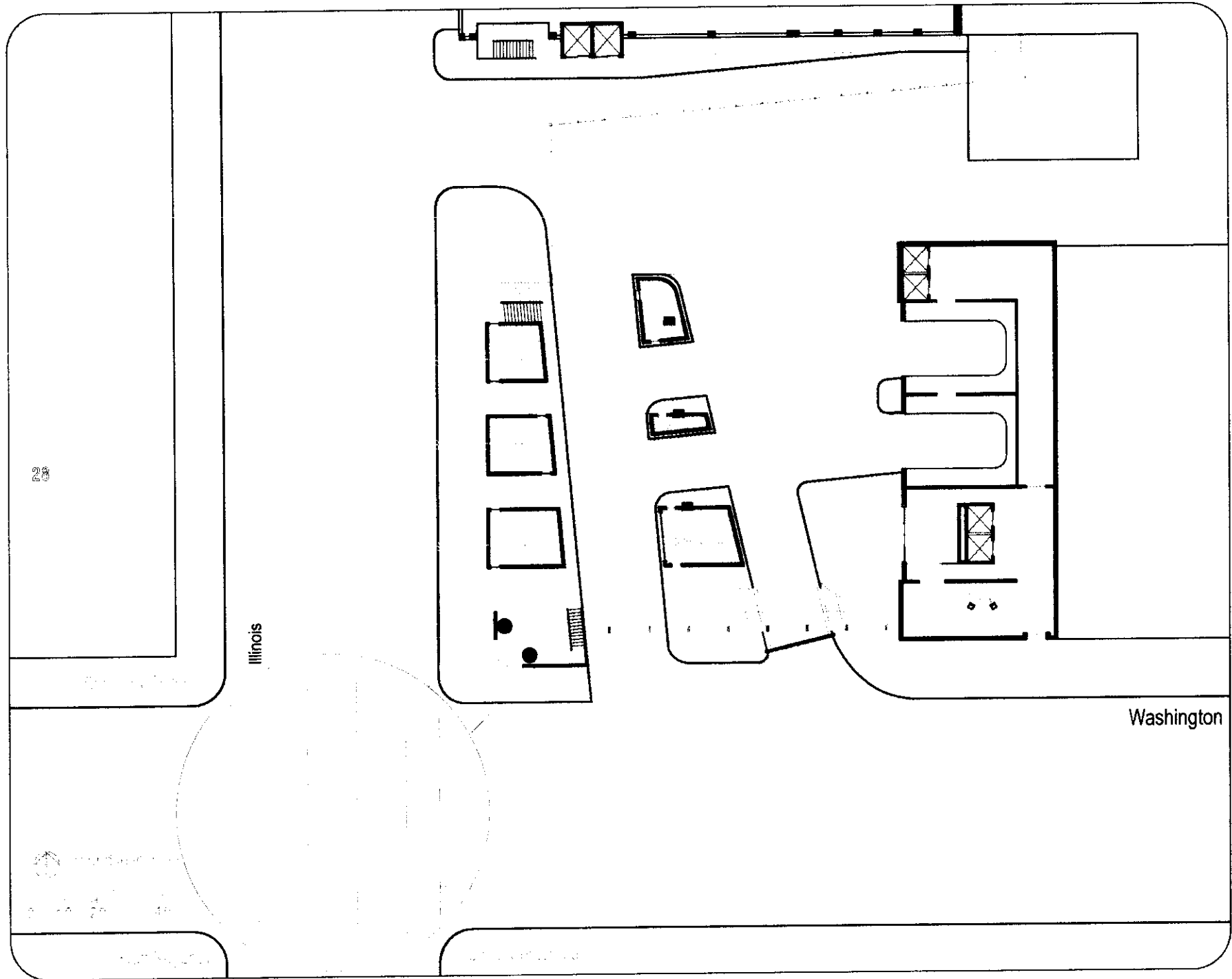
The north section viewed from Washington shows the relationship of the new structure to the existing building to the east. The taller building was originally designed with two other buildings of similar scale to its west. So the west facade has been unintentionally exposed due to the demolition of those other buildings. Being a facade that receives a great amount of sunlight, it begged to appropriately respond to that light, instead of just being satisfied with its current situation. The three blue components penetrate the building creating an opportunity to open the rest to the sun.

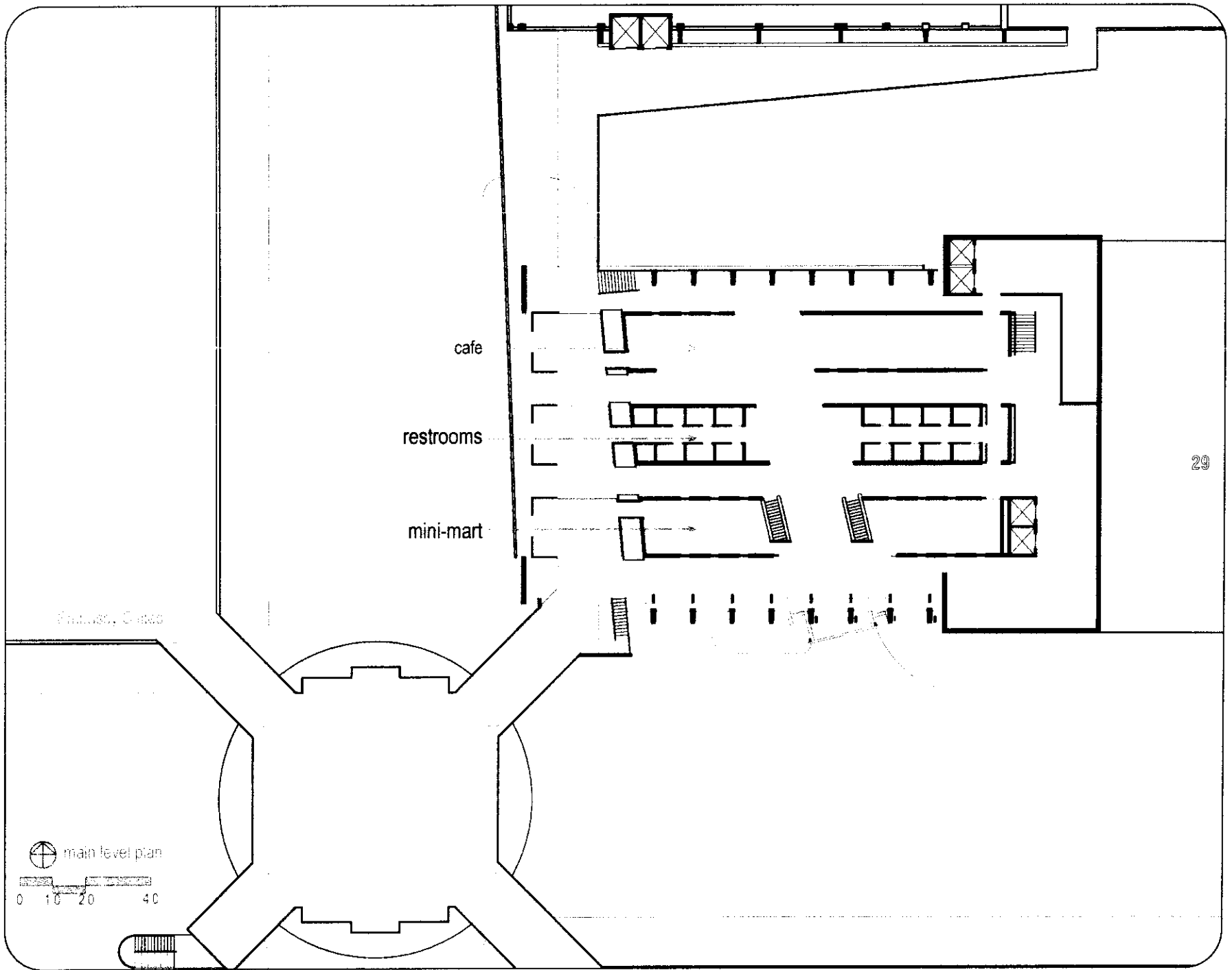


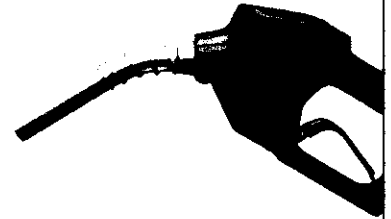
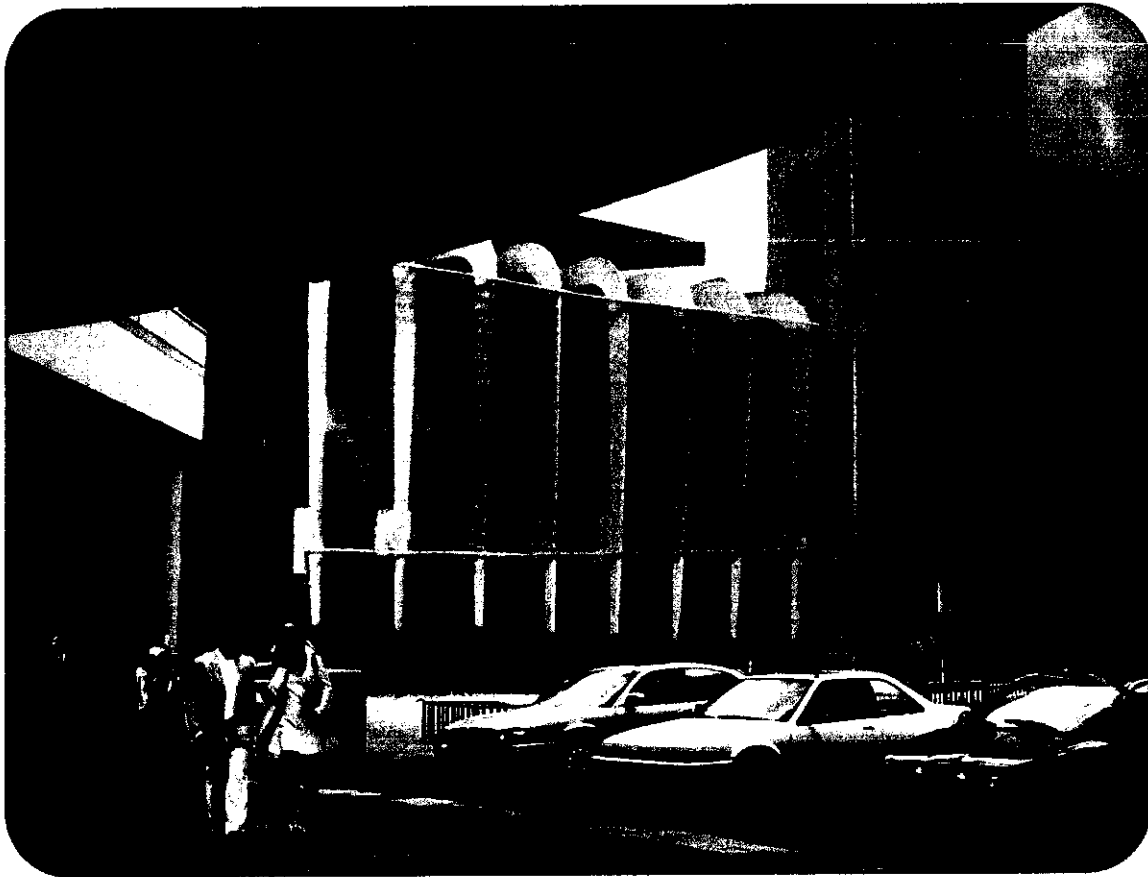
28

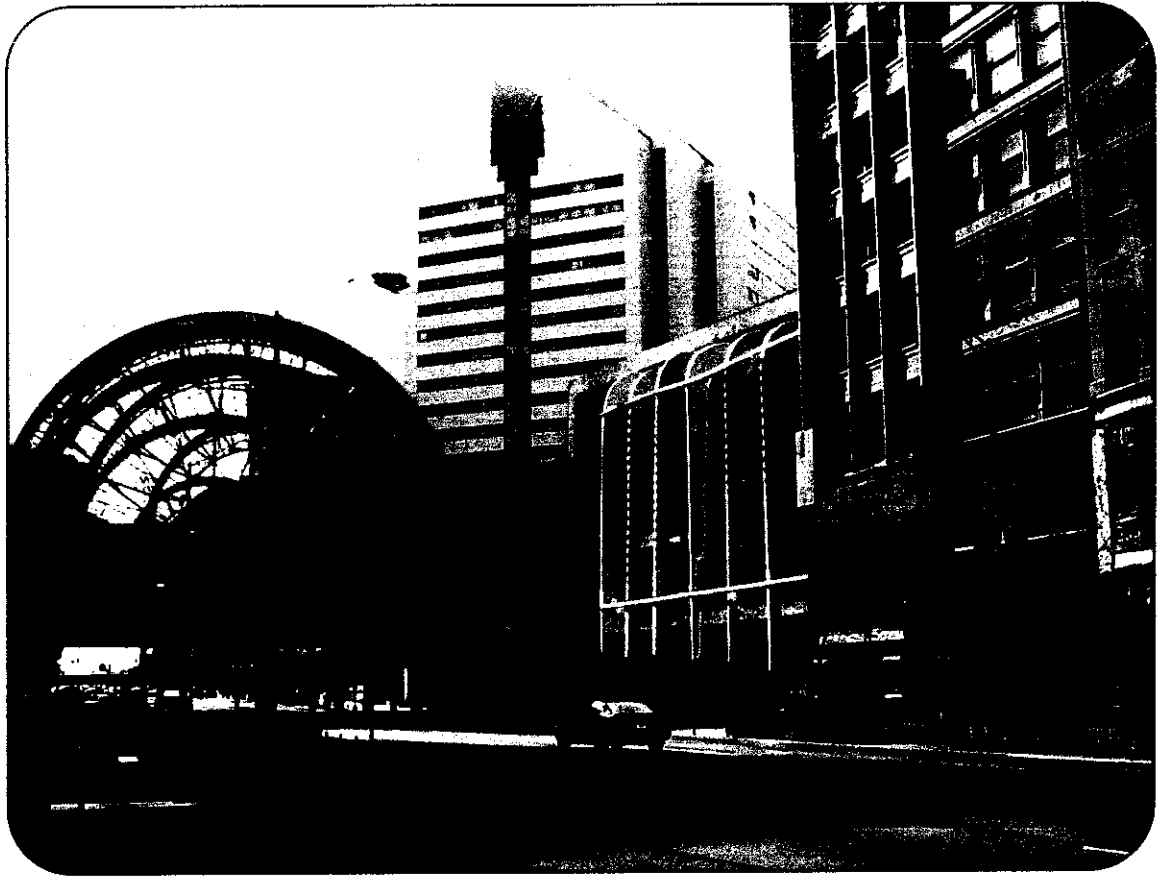
Illinois

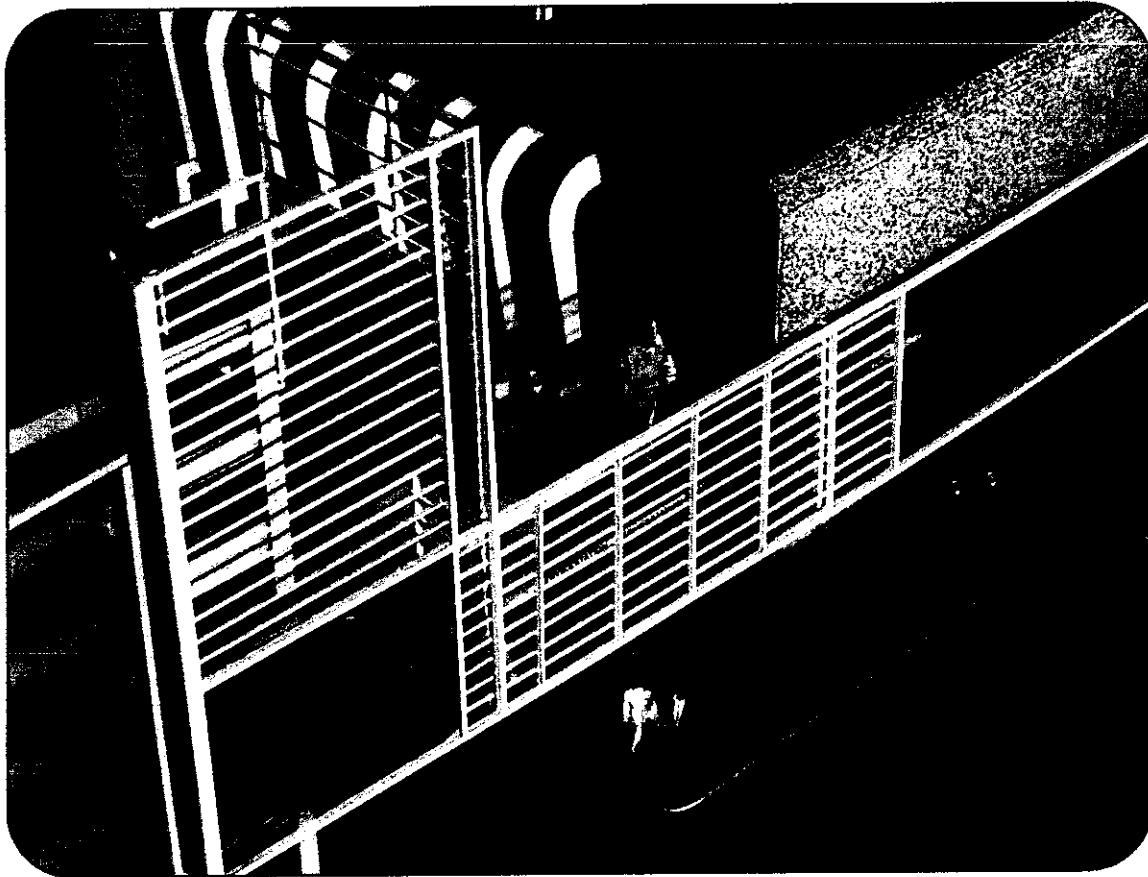
Washington

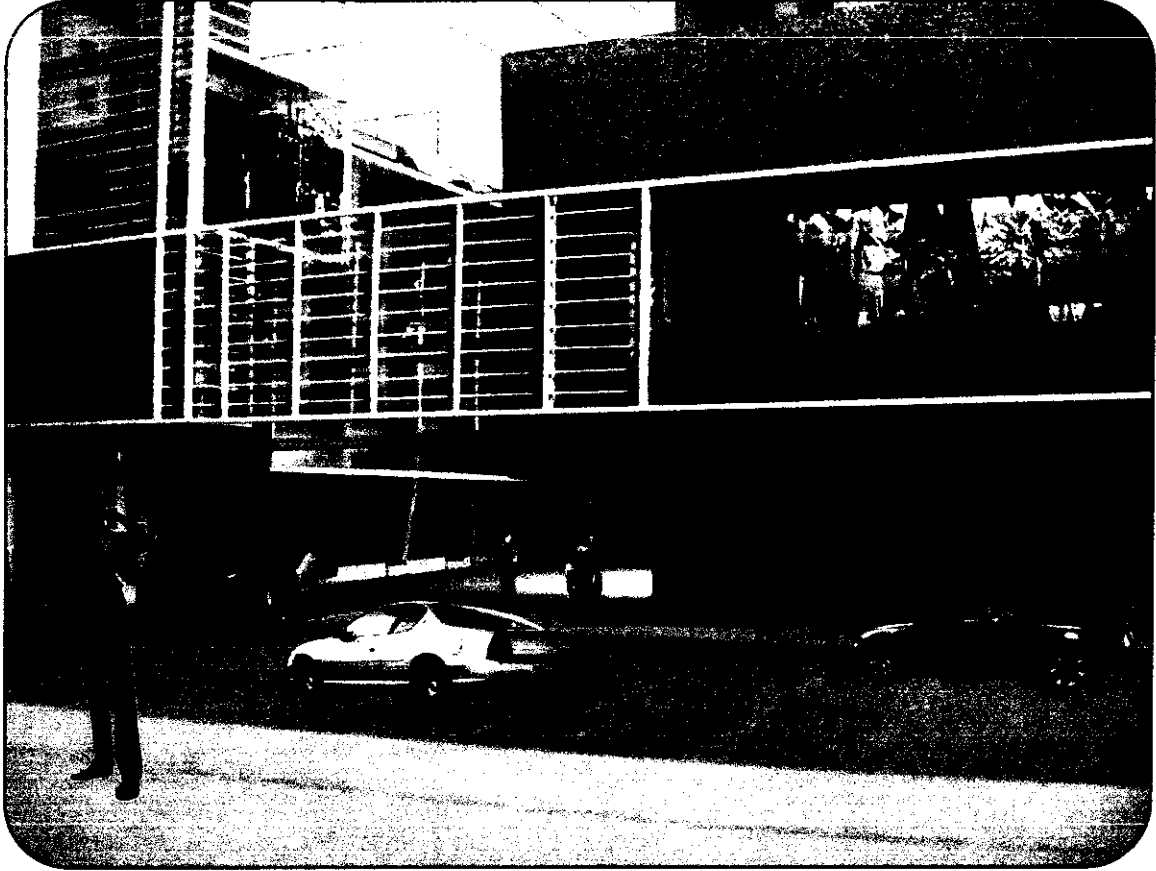


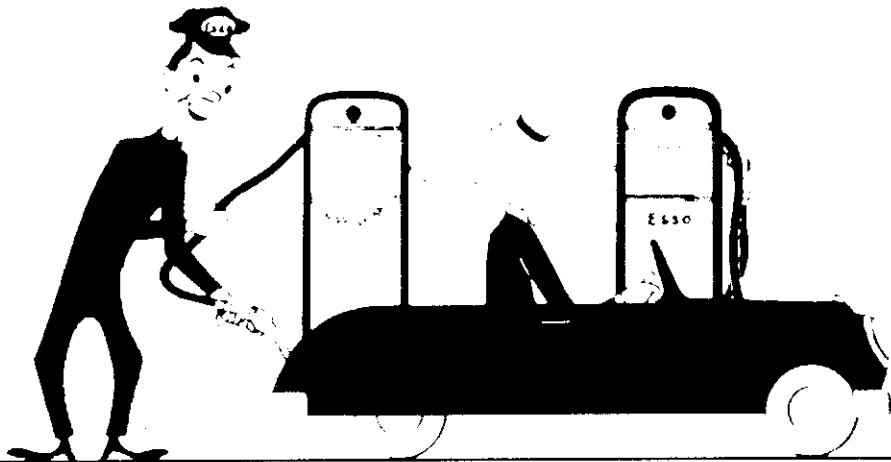




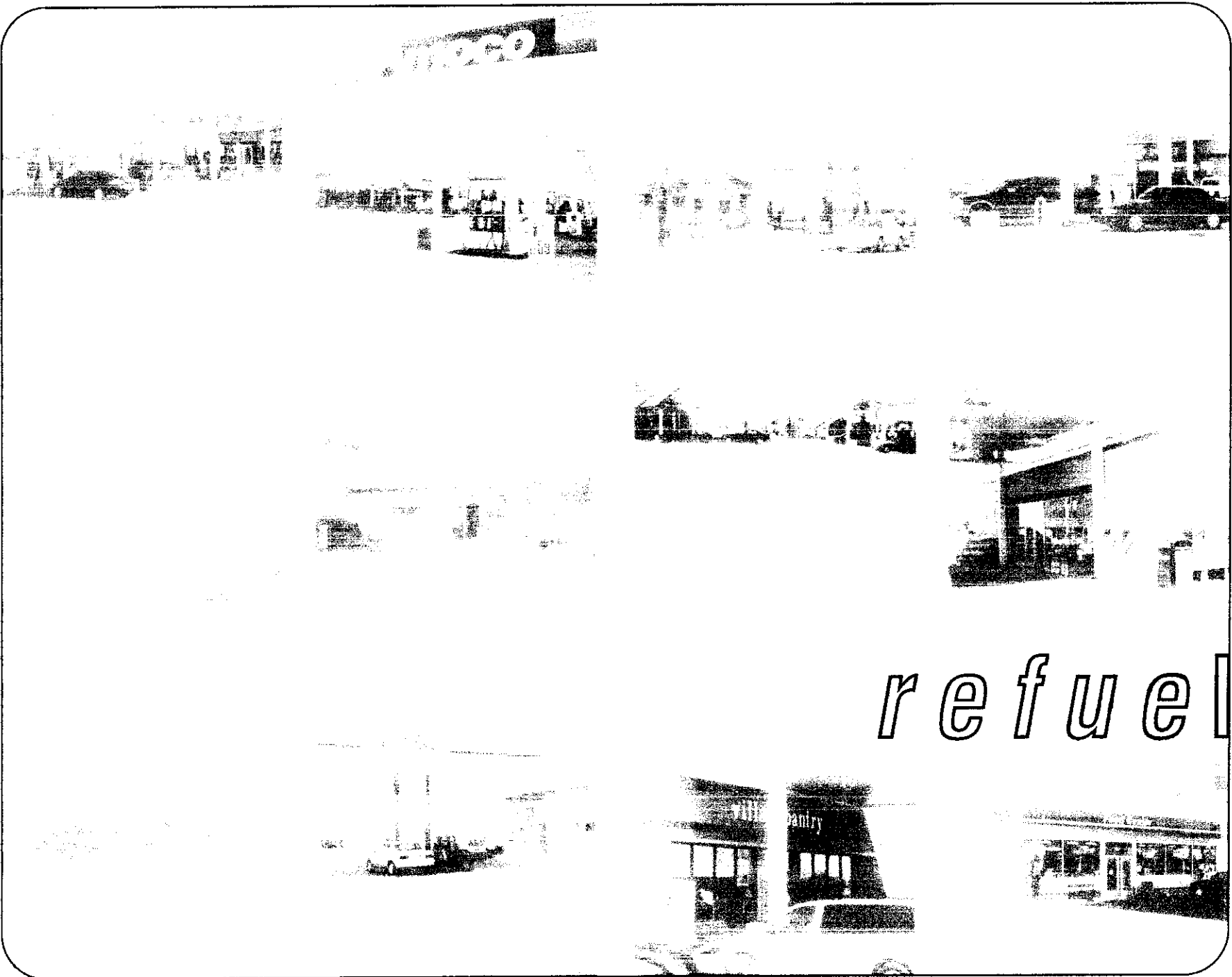




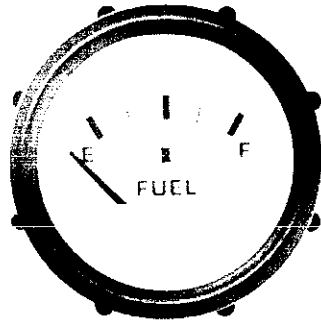




My decision to confront the design issues that concern the everyday building type have not come on a whim. I have spent some time working with a firm that is responsible for the design of gas stations for a major oil distributor. During that experience, I participated in the process known as "cookie cutter" design. I saw the realities of a portion of the business of design. Money is typically the determining factor in situations such as this. So I realize that my ideas cannot be instituted as the norm. And my solution for this service station may or may not be accepted as a financial possibility to companies that are solely interested in saving a buck. But I have viewed this process as an optimistic approach that obviously has far more issues than I can touch on within my time at Ball State. And I think that optimistic design is the only way to open some of the doors that have been closed by jaded communities throughout America. I hope that some of my exposure to this field of design has allowed me to make informed decisions throughout the design process. I learned a great deal from the people I worked with, and I value the time spent. So I hope that this project provides an inspiration for the everyday possibilities.



*refuel*



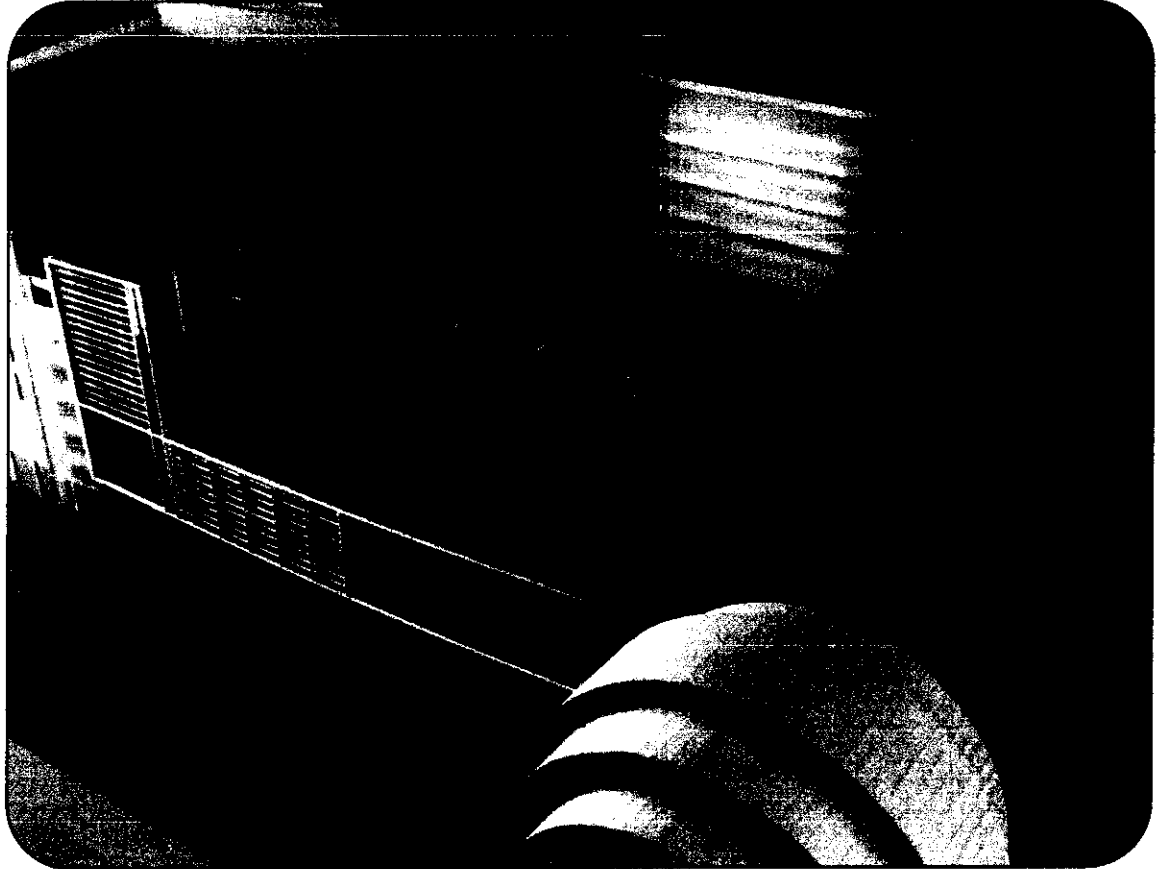
36

*an urban service station by Paul M. Owens - CAP 2001 Thesis*

studio prof. - Andy Seager

advisor - Wes Janz

advisor - Jeff Marshall



52

