Tide: A Neighborhood Laundry Lounge
Reimagining the Suburban Strip Mall Anchor

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B.A. in Art and Visual Technology, May 2009, George Mason University

A Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of
The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
(formerly the Corcoran College of Arts + Design)
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

May 15, 2015

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family for their support, my friends for their tolerance, my co-workers for their flexibility, and my professors for their wisdom.

Also, Jimmy Johns Gourmet Sandwiches for their “Freaky Fast Delivery”
Abstract of Thesis

Tide: A Neighborhood Laundry Lounge

Suburban strip malls have earned a negative reputation for their lack of character and cheap, mass-produced offerings. Although they provide inexpensive and convenient goods and services to the patrons who depend upon them, strip malls deny the middle class a sense of place in their own communities. The combination of three types of businesses under one roof in a vacant strip mall grocery store would maximize the efficiency of the massive boxed-in space. This thesis aims to design a conceptual model for providing access to everyday necessities in an attractive and experiential environment structured around the lives and needs of residents of the Denbigh Village neighborhood of Newport News, Virginia. A laundromat lounge, café and curated home retail store will merge to create an elevated suburban outing.
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Thesis Statement

Converting a vacant generic box store into a destination home retail shop and laundry café designed around local needs and regional character will elevate the experience of middle class suburban life.
Part I. Background and Premise

Introduction

The spread of globalization in post-World War II America resulted in vast sprawls of connected shopping centers and open-air strip malls. Towns blend together and become difficult to discern from one another aside from unique geographical features or structures which have managed to survive the stamp of a global brand. Thus, residents of these suburbs have become disconnected from their neighborhoods and crave a sense of place. Strip malls have earned a negative connotation in the United States, crowded with people coming and going from stores packed with the same merchandise and services available in every other suburban town. Middle class consumers feel as if they are without options to express themselves and are being forced to conform. Shopping in strip mall stores is, at best, disjointed and tedious. While their main purpose is convenience, stores are only open during daytime hours while many potential customers are working or caring for their children. This chapter seeks to analyze the history of the shopping mall in America and pull from observation and analysis an idea of positive elements to highlight and negative elements to minimize in the design of a fulfilling suburban errand experience.

i. History & Current State of the American Shopping Center

Between 1947 and 1953, the suburban population in the United States increased by 43 percent.1 Considering the total population increased by 11 percent in the same span of time, this rise meant serious changes in the way Americans lived, worked and consumed. In the fledgling days of the United States, urban communities revolved
around public shopping spaces and farms and residences spread outward from the core. This city structure remained relatively intact until the mid-twentieth century. In his book *Modern Architecture*, architect and critic Kenneth Frampton attributes the proverbial death of the city to the rise of consumerism. “Increasingly subject to the imperatives of a continuously expanding consumer economy, the city has largely lost its capacity to maintain its significance as a whole.” He blames consumerism for the sprawl, explaining, “That it (the city) has been dissipated by forces lying beyond its control is demonstrated by the rapid erosion of the American provincial city after the end of the Second World War, as a consequence of the combined effect of the freeway, the suburb and the supermarket.”

After World War II and the popularity of planned developments like Levittown in New York (Fig. 1), families moved further away from major cities, creating a need for infrastructure. This movement contributed to job growth and an economic boom. Merchandisers capitalized on the prosperity by centering their efforts in the rapidly expanding suburbs.

(Fig. 1) Tony Linck, for Life Magazine, *Aerial View of Levittown*, June, 1948
In a 1996 essay about the rise of the American shopping center, Lizabeth Cohen, Dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study writes, “Reaching out to suburbanites where they lived, merchandisers at first built stores along the highways, in commercial ‘strips’ that consumers could easily reach by car.”5 This model had originated the seventh century in Syria, or perhaps earlier, in the form of ancient open-air markets, and saw many adaptations through the ages before morphing into the strip mall of today.6 In order to build trust among their consumers, companies relied heavily on recognizable branding and standard internal policies. Cohen explains, “Management kept control visually by standardizing all architectural and graphic design and politically by requiring all tenants to participate in the tenants’ association.”7 As more people flocked to the suburbs, more businesses and services followed, minimizing the need to enter the cities.

Of this period of rapid expansion, R.H. Macy board chair Jack Straus said, “Our economy keeps growing because our ability to consume is endless. The consumer goes on spending regardless of how many possessions he has. The luxuries of today are the necessities of tomorrow.”8 Where the Great Depression generation had conserved and repurposed, midcentury America splurged and sought more space outside of the cramped metropolitan areas.

As men returned to the workforce after World War II, women ran the households and became the primary targets of mid-century advertising. In his book, Advertising to the American Woman, 1900-1999, Daniel Delis Hill writes, “For the first time, independence was thrust upon many women as their men went off to military service. They entered the workforce in record numbers and earned their own money,
controlled their finances, and made decisions about most everything on their own."9

Ms. Cohen makes the point in her essay that the rise of suburban commercialization led to the feminization of public space. (Fig. 2)10 “From the color schemes, stroller ramps, baby-sitting services, and special lockers for “ladies’ wraps,” to the reassuring security guards and special events such as fashion shows, shopping centers were created as female worlds.”11

(Fig. 2) Women shopping in 1950s shopping center. Image via Daily Mail Online.

While the suburban shoppers of today remain predominantly female, and many of these amenities still exist in modern retail environments, little consideration is given to the needs of parents with children in tow in strip mall settings.

Little has changed about the structure or appearance of strip malls in the last sixty years, and many have deteriorated (Fig. 3). Offering a comprehensive
explanation for the decline of the strip mall, Annmarie Adams, professor of architecture at McGill University, writes:

“The enclosed malls that proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s offered ample parking, huge selections of merchandise, and constant air-conditioned comfort, amenities most older strip centers could not provide. In similar fashion, the old turnpikes and boulevards that served as the primary thoroughfares of the mid-twentieth-century strip could rarely be upgraded to compete with modern, limited-access expressways. Mounting congestion made shopping and commuting along the original strips increasingly unattractive. The commercial and residential tissue surrounding these atrophied arteries began to decay as businesses moved to more upscale locales and new bypasses were constructed to reach the upgraded retail and residential spaces of the much-heralded Edge Cities. Another important but largely-overlooked reason for the accelerating deterioration of the postwar strip is that the original owners of many roadside businesses were members of the Depression/World War II generation; by the 1980s, many were retiring for age- and health-related reasons. Commercial realtors encountered problems finding replacements to take over marginally profitable small businesses that often required considerable investment to refurbish to competitive standards. When storefronts went unrented, commercial decline was often compounded, as customers were dissuaded from patronizing remaining businesses by the accumulating aura of dereliction and decay.”

(Fig. 3) A run-down strip mall in Fayetteville, NC is representative of its kind. Image via wncn.com
In many cases, the same process took place in suburban neighborhoods. In order to illustrate the efficacy of the proposed thesis, such a neighborhood and strip mall have been selected in Newport News, Virginia.

i. Site Location

Newport News, Virginia, located in the Tidewater region of the Old Dominion, is one of the cities comprising the Hampton Roads metropolitan area. With a population of 183,412 in 2013, Newport News was first considered part of Warwick County, an original shire of the Virginia Colony founded by the House of Burgesses and officially chartered as an independent city in 1896.\textsuperscript{13} During the Colonial and Revolutionary War periods, Newport News was known as a relaxed, rural farming town, situated on the Hampton Roads Peninsula, bordered by the James River to the west, the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean to the east (Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{14}
Its proximity to year-round ice-free waterways established Newport News early on as a prime location for farming, namely tobacco, and maritime military installations throughout the history of the United States. The waters off Newport News saw the major Civil War “Battle of Hampton Roads”, between the infamous ironclad ships: the Union Navy’s U.S.S. Monitor and the Confederate Navy’s U.S.S. Merrimack. In the 1880s, railroad tycoon Collis Potter Huntington oversaw the development of train tracks in the area and through the Chesapeake Dry Dock and Construction Co. built a major shipyard now known as the Newport News Shipbuilding (Fig’s. 5, 6). Today the shipbuilding employs 23,000 people, more than any other industrial employer in the state. The waterways, shipbuilding and strong military presence in the area have solidified the local economy.
(Fig. 5) Aerial of Newport News Shipbuilding, 1891. Image via North End Huntington Heights Preservation Association.

(Fig. 6) Aerial of Newport News Shipbuilding in its current state. Image via Atlantic Constructors.
Comprised of small towns and villages, Newport News ranges from urban to rural, in some instances both settings occur within only a few miles. Area residents are predominantly military, blue collar or service industry workers, with the average household earning approximately $51,000 per year.\textsuperscript{16} A population of about 182,000 people consists of 51% white and 41% black residents.\textsuperscript{17} The Denbigh neighborhood of Newport News, located on its north end, is home to individuals earning less than $50,000 per year and more single mothers than 97% of towns in the United States.\textsuperscript{18} Commercial areas blanket the landscape of Denbigh and consist of big box stores and strip malls with generic businesses ranging from nail salons to pawn shops, and chain businesses such as grocery stores, laundromats and fast food restaurants. Few commercial strips in Denbigh meet modern standards for shopping centers.

The Denbigh Village Shopping Center (Fig. 7), built in the early 1970s, fully embodies the blandness of the area. Retail chains like JoAnn Fabrics, Burlington Coat Factory, and Rite Aid in addition to smaller, nameless stores occupy a portion of the 341,400 square feet of retail space in this strip mall located at the intersection of Denbigh Boulevard and Warwick Boulevard.\textsuperscript{19} Accessed by weaving through a vast, cracked parking lot off the two busy highways (more than 60,000 vehicles pass the site each day), most of the Denbigh Village Shopping Center stores are architecturally void, with bland concrete facades, no vegetation, distinguishing materials, or indication that it belongs to a particular city or region of the United States. The largest of the unoccupied spaces is a former Kroger grocery store (number 7 on Site Map, below) built in 1971 and renovated in 1996 (Fig. 8).\textsuperscript{20} With nearly 50,000 square feet
on one floor of the centrally-located, windowless, boxed-in space, the building begs to serve a larger purpose in the community.\textsuperscript{21}

(Fig. 7) Denbigh Village Shopping Center. Image via DDR Corp.
ii. Concept

In order to maximize the utility of the former grocery store, infuse the shopping center with local character and serve the residents of Denbigh Village in a less-superficial manner, this thesis proposes to convert the site into a laundromat lounge, café, and home retail destination in the spirit of the region. This balanced, three-part program would maximize the functionality of the large space while allowing visitors to maximize their time: completing a daily chore; accessing healthy, affordable food; and purchasing basic household items.
A. LAUNDROMAT LOUNGE CONCEPT

The commercial landscape of Newport News features laundromats on almost every block. Area residents often cannot afford the initial cost or maintenance expenses over time to own their own laundry machines. The predominant laundromat chain in the area, Soaps N Suds, offers access to self-serve, coinless machines from 7:00 am through 10:30 pm at nineteen locations around the Hampton Roads area. Though conveniently located and open during a fairly wide range of hours, the Soaps N Suds laundromats (Fig. 9) often host unattended children, loitering teenagers and occasional criminal activity. The lighting is fluorescent and unwelcoming. Seating is uncomfortable and does not offer any privacy. A few televisions and snack machines offer little to those waiting for their clothes cycles to finish. Machines break frequently, and locations are inadequately staffed to address mechanical or other issues. The proposed laundromat lounge program would meet the demand for laundromats in the area and provide a welcoming and safe atmosphere for children and adults. The supplementary programming will allow for the time spent waiting for laundry to be put towards healthy eating, private or public lounging, as well as necessary retail.
B. HOME RETAIL CONCEPT

The home retail offerings in the Denbigh area are generic. No unique boutiques or specialty stores occupy commercial space, but the demand for more accessible, basic items dictates the supply of the local market. Denbigh features no major cultural or artistic institutions, which categorically enrich and distinguish towns and cities across the world. By showcasing everyday household items in a highly visual manner where the product functions as display (Fig. 10) inspired by the overall regional character, the proposed retail space in the former Kroger would double as a destination experience for residents and tourists. The space would elevate the home necessities retail experience, turning needs into wants through thoughtful use of materials, product placement, and strategic lighting.
C. CAFÉ CONCEPT

Dominated by fast food, Americanized ethnic restaurants and enormous grocery chains, the culinary scene in Denbigh leaves residents few healthy, affordable options for feeding themselves or their families while out running errands. The proposed café would offer freshly-prepared, grab-and-go options for people to enjoy while waiting for laundry, shopping in the retail store, or enjoying the private work/dining spaces. Individually lit, pod-like tables, small enough to discourage large groups from gathering and large enough to accommodate a family, these moveable, modular cocoon-like structures would provide intimate, personal space in a public setting (Fig. 11).
Part II. Proposed Programs and Methodology

i. Goals and Approach

In order to successfully integrate a laundromat, retail store and café into one building, programmatic needs, proximities and hourly use must receive careful consideration. The overarching design goal is for the space to feel at once experiential and exciting while remaining approachable and unpretentious. To achieve this goal, a consistent, minimal style shall be applied to the space as a whole, with as few walls, doors or confining elements as possible. The use of subtle design tactics like the contrast between types of material, manipulation of natural light and the visual interest created through repetition will engage the eye and move users throughout the space organically without distracting signage or other literal way-finding elements.
A pragmatic goal for the space involves the delicate opening and closing of various components throughout the 24-hour operating cycle. Closed components must remain engaging and visible even when closed. No one component (laundromat, café or store) must dominate the design, so as to maintain a balance within the space.

The space and each of its components must feel pleasing and remain accessible to several hypothetical guests, rotating their usage over a 24-hour period. Hypothetical, representative guests include: a lower-middle class single mother with a 9-to-5 job and two small children; a middle-aged man who works night shifts; and a twenty-something woman who rents a nearby apartment, works part-time and attends college classes three nights per week. The space should be able to accommodate the needs of each of these representative individuals, serve the community directly and attract a wide variety of users.

i. Programming & Programmatic Case Studies

A. CASE STUDY: LAUNDROMAT LOUNGES

Common in Europe and Asia, multi-purpose laundry facilities have spread into the United States, but have not yet reached their stylistic or social potential. By replicating the general look and feel of more attractive examples, while allowing for the community involvement aspect demonstrated in others, the proposed laundromat lounge will enhance the everyday chore of laundry.

WASBAR (Fig. 12), a laundromat/café/hair salon designed by Belgian design studio Pinkeye, operates three locations in Europe.23 Dezeen Magazine contributor Amy Frearson describes the WASBAR atmosphere:
"Washing machines line the edge of the room, while pastel-coloured cafe furniture fills the centre and two hairdressing stations are located at the back. Pinkeye developed the concept searching for a better solution to the "garish strip-lighting" and "soundcloud din" of everyday launderettes… Each washing machine has a name inscribed on the wall above it and all the pipes are tucked away out of sight…

Pinkeye conceived a palette of toned-down salmon pink, pistachio, cornflower and royal blue, as well as a graphic identity in the form of a two-fold logo: a clothes-peg crossed with a bottle-opener. They created lampshades from coat-hangers and colourful clotheslines playfully break up the space. Second-hand chairs were given a lick of green or blue paint. Fashion designers Black Balloon created dapper laundry bags so that you don’t have to trawl through the city with a transparent plastic bag full of personal wares.”

Of this decision, Pinkeye’s Ruud Belmans explains, "There's nothing about a washing machine which says it has to stand in an unpleasant space." He continues, "For us it was important to create a solid identity. A couple of pieces of vintage furniture doesn't cut it."

While WASBAR’s overall concept successfully merges three program components, the aesthetic appeals to a collegiate European crowd, and a more streamlined, less kitschy look would best suit the proposal for the Denbigh site.
Suds Laundrette, located in South Yarra, a suburb of Melbourne, incorporates lounge seats into the design of its extended service laundry facility. Offering standard and commercial laundry options as well as ironing, dry cleaning and alterations, Suds also provides high-speed internet access and attractive, comfortable seating to its guests. Similarly to WASBAR, Suds eschewed a grid of institutional fluorescent lights in favor of strategic recessed lighting for a more modern, inviting effect. In a 2011 review following Suds’ opening, Caroline Clements from Australia’s Broadstreet wrote, “Designed by Plus Architecture, Suds is a laundromat that looks more like a bar or retail space from the street. The bright green interior references...
Alice in Wonderland with mod grass-clad washing machines and walls cut out like checkerboard hills, and bubble cut-outs that double as seats for waiting washers.”

Most notably, Suds incorporates advanced, environmentally-conscious machinery into its laundry room. According to their website,

“Our modern front loading washing machines offer easy to use electronic controls and wash cycles with varying temperature settings. This ensures your garments are always washed at the optimum temperature. High speed spin cycles are also offered, extracting more water, reducing drying times and saving you money. Our high quality dryers use gas burners with electronic ignition, ensuring they heat faster and use less gas. Airflow distribution is also used to reduce energy consumption.”

Although Suds offers extended hours for local residents and appropriate use of materials, the space is dominated by machines and folding space, leaving little room for seating, the individual chairs discourage human interaction, and customers must leave the building to purchase food or drink.
While it lacks effective design strategies, Philadelphia’s Laundry Café’s two locations serve as an example of how common public space can engage and elevate a community. Like many laundromats, The Laundry Café offers traditional clothing care with 24-hour access to coinless, self-operated machines or drop-off services. Both locations are situated in generic strip malls, but the facades and interiors are clean, open offer curbside assistance, house 140 machines as well as big-screen televisions, a Starbucks kiosk and computer workstations. But perhaps the most revolutionary element of The Laundry Café is its mission to better the suburban Philadelphia communities from the inside out. Prominently featured on the company website, a statement on the Cater to You section reads that it is, “Devoted to providing our customers with helpful information regarding community events, laundry tips, and job alerts. The Laundry Café has proudly hosted and led several community-based events during the first six months it has been open for business and we will continuously invest in the betterment of the communities we serve.”

In a 2012 article about its services and community efforts, Philadelphia Daily News columnist Ronnie Polaneczky wrote, “Customers are pulled in by a breadth of amenities usually not offered in low-income areas. What makes them stay, the (owners) are convinced, is the unspoken message those amenities telegraph: That customers are worthy of them.” Polaneczky continues, “By offering fabulous service - and supplementing it with 24-hour-day operations, after-school tutoring, interesting workshops and reasonably priced Starbucks - they're proving that people respond well when you treat them well, no matter their income.” The Laundry Café’s website links to job search websites, Veteran’s benefits pages, voter registration rules,
and tools for learning about real estate, living wills and entrepreneurship, in addition to dates and times for pizza parties and community roundtables. Another section of the website, Customer Voice, features nine videos of regular customers sharing their personal testimonies about how their trips to The Laundry Café brighten their days. Each individual appreciates the functionality of the laundromat, but the dedication of space to community enrichment elevates the domestic errand to a more gratifying level.

The design of The Laundry Café lacks visual order and falls victim to loud machines and fluorescent lighting, lacking natural light. Mismatched materials, bright colors and repetitive signage contribute to the chaos (Fig. 14). In order to serve the community and build upon the uplifting feeling a supportive public space can provide, the proposed laundromat lounge must employ a unified physical design through strategic lighting, sound-absorbing materials, comfortable seating, a calming palette and clear division of space.

(Fig. 14) The Laundry Café, Philadelphia. Image via The Laundry Café.
LAUNDROMAT IN TIDE

In the proposed space, the laundromat shall be situated at the front for easy access for those with laundry in tow. Situating this program front-and-center will also establish its role as the primary function of the space, and elevate a mundane chore to a new level of stature. Entryways on either side of the building are equipped with check-in desks where employees assign laundry/shopping Tide cards and metal push carts for clothes or purchases. Enclosed in a glass atrium, the laundromat is presented as the main attraction, a gem in a sea of concrete and asphalt. This arrangement punches into the existing box structure and draws natural light further into the space. Individual stations will include sleek, industrial strength washers and dryers on raised powder-coated steel platforms to eliminate strain and reference the scaffolding of the neighboring shipbuilding, shelving below for basket storage, lockable drying cages for line drying, and two folding surfaces. Stations will be placed back to back, with a transparent glass wall between, housing ducts and drainage pipes. The stations will occupy the center of the atrium in rows, allowing for ease of navigation with carts.

B. CASE STUDY: VISUAL MERCHANDISING & RADICAL CONFORMITY

Convenience stores place as many sku numbers as possible into every square inch of shelf space. Luxury retailers rely on gallery-like display to let couture treasures sell themselves. But incorporating basic products into the design of a retail space and using their colors, materials and shapes as a graphic treatment, the products are elevated from common necessities to extraordinary art objects.
One example of product-as-graphic display appears in the Lego Flagship Store in New York’s Flatiron District (Fig. 15). In addition to boxes of Lego sets displayed on shelves, the bricks themselves play a major role in the design of the space. A *TimeOut New York* review of the newly-opened store describes, “The 3,535-square-foot space will also be equipped with a pick-a-brick station featuring some brand-new LEGO colors and a LEGO Lounge area with LEGO children’s books, a LEGO building carpet, free charging stations and oversized couches for families to relax on.”

Large-scale bricks cleverly house light fixtures on the ceiling, while the floor pattern doubles as wayfinding and a nod to a traditional bricklaying pattern. A base-layer of gray walls, ceilings and floors allows the primary colors of the Lego design elements to pop in the space. A wall of bins containing grab-and-go Lego bricks of varying sizes and colors makes a pattern out of the ubiquitous toy. The wall reflects in the high-shine flooring, making the repetitious display doubly impactful. Massive *Statue of Liberty* and Big Apple pieces made entirely of Legos pay homage to the city.
Another example of product repeated in display to create interest appears in Japan’s Uniqlo Flagship Store in Tokyo’s Ginza District. Designed by Wonderwall’s Masamichi Katayama with nearly 5,000 square meters (roughly 54,000 square feet) occupying twelve floors, Ginza’s Uniqlo relies heavily on the graphic power of its simple offerings displayed in ruler-straight rows (Fig. 16). A Tokyo Fashion article about the store opening describes the physical design:

“Katayama’s inventive interiors are astounding and delight in quirky designs such as rows of revolving mannequins, stunning LED displays and a recreation of a family home for the Uniqlo x Undercover floor. The store, which hopes to attract Ginza’s many retail tourists as well as Tokyo natives, has 15 speakers of 6 different languages (Japanese, English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Korean) making it a lot easier to get your hands on what you want without language barriers.”
As in the Lego Flagship, reflective floors and ceilings, linear light fixtures, and cubby-style display shelves exaggerate the repetitive lines of the perfectly-aligned columns and rows. This gallery-style application draws attention to the details of the clothing and, paradoxically, makes the inexpensive pieces seem special in their commonness.

(Fig. 16) Uniqlo Ginza. Image by Will Robb for Tokyo Fashion.

The play of elevating common items to a level of artistic interest has inspired artists and designers for generations. In a summary of the work of Marcel Duchamp, Nan Rosenthal, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, explains, “The object became a work of art because the artist had decided it would be designated as such. Bicycle Wheel (Fig. 17) consisted of a fork and the wheel of a common bicycle that rested upon an ordinary stool. The mundane,
mass-produced, everyday nature of these objects is precisely why Duchamp chose them (later works would include a snow shovel, a urinal, and a bottlerack, to name a few). As a result, he ensured that the fruits of modern industrial life would be a fertile resource in the production of works of art.”

(Fig. 17) Bicycle Wheel, Marcel Duchamp. 1913. Image via Artsy.

A similar fascination with everyday objects resonated in the work of Andy Warhol. A biography provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts describes his approach:

“Building on the emerging movement of Pop Art, wherein artists used everyday consumer objects as subjects, Warhol started painting readily found, mass-produced objects, drawing on his extensive advertising background. When asked about the impulse to paint Campbell’s soup cans (Fig. 18), Warhol replied, “I wanted to paint nothing. I was looking
for something that was the essence of nothing, and that was it”. The humble soup cans would soon take their place among the Marilyn Monroes, Dollar Signs, Disasters, and Coca Cola Bottles as essential, exemplary works of contemporary art.”³³

(Fig. 18) Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup II* (1969) at the Dulwich Picture Gallery. Image: Luke Macgregor/Reuters via *The Guardian*

While the meanings behind the work of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol remain subjective, their tongue-in-cheek commentary on consumer culture and methods for questioning the context of objects find relevance in the reinterpretation of a strip mall. Through the use of repetition, lighting techniques, color psychology and playful scale, a product may be re-contextualized as an object, thus empowering viewers by placing them in control of their own interpretations and desires. In this way the act of shopping and the building itself become satirical art, allowing the observer in on the joke.
VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND RADICAL CONFORMITY IN TIDE

While Tide will primarily function as a laundromat lounge and café, the interspersed retail elements shall pull inspiration from art that comments on consumerism, such as the work of Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp. By placing less glamorous items like toilet paper or soap on pedestals, under dramatic lighting or glass domes, the intent is to ask “What are we really buying: the product or the presentation?” In a less subversive way, the unusual merchandising will make basic items feel more special and allow patrons to grab essentials while out for a bite or doing laundry.

From a design standpoint, storage shall also serve as display through the use of steel shelving walls. With hundreds of the same water jug, for example, placed in rows almost to the ceiling, the products become texture and design elements in themselves. The shelves can be stocked from the staff side, but accessed from either direction so employees or patrons can easily grab items. Cold items (milk, eggs) will be stored in the icebox located near the rear of the space, accessible through glass doors behind the cafe. Supermarket-style refrigerators with front and back access will allow for restocking directly from the loading docks, and quick-grab shopping. In the laundromat, scaffold shelving will present easy access to un-branded laundry detergent, clothes pins and dryer sheets for those who need to re-stock. An attendant will monitor use of machines and add purchases to a Tide card, which is then paid off at checkout.
C. CASE STUDY: POD-STYLE DINING AND WORK SPACES

The number of years humans have eaten at tables while sitting in chairs is matched only by the number of ways to arrange them. Pod-style dining creates an intimate feeling in spaces that feel expansive and overwhelming, ideal for the portion of the former Kroger dedicated to house a cafe.

Italian architects Gerd Bergmeister and Michaela Wolf created their answer to the pod-dining trend with a wooden model named *Lois* in 2006 (Fig. 19). With fully integrated benches, table, roof and floor, *Lois* elegantly defines private dining space without entirely closing diners off from their surroundings.

(Fig. 19) Italian architecture firm bergmeisterwolf’s *Lois* pod dining. Image via bergmeisterwolf.it
San Francisco-based design firm Blitz incorporated pod-style dining and work spaces into their plan for the nearby offices of technology company SquareTrade. Rather than allowing the pods to float in open space, they line the perimeter of a busy hub and serve multiple functions.\textsuperscript{35} The project description on the Blitz website elaborates on the choice:

“The heart of the office lies within a central hive area, where cafe and dining functions are housed. Blitz also designed the hive to accommodate multiple other functions, such as all-hands meetings and presentations. For this space the architects specified natural wood and warmer color temperature lighting, to give the hive an inviting, social feel. But since the hive is in the center of the office, and caters to social and dining activities that create noise, Blitz needed to organize the limited amount of remaining interior space in a way that would mitigate the acoustics between the open office and the hive. To achieve this, the architects created two large banks of conference rooms at a 20 degree angle to each other, which run parallel to the hive and buffer it from the open office area. The result is a visually and functionally impressive design element. Not only do these bars of conference rooms create an acoustical barrier, but their placement also achieves unique sight-lines and divides the open spaces into additional breakout areas.”\textsuperscript{36}

The cube-like structures (Fig. 20) make a deliberate reference to the company’s logo and other design elements. The project description explains, “The project was inspired by the rectilinear nature of SquareTrade’s logo, from the design of the meeting room walls to the custom screen in reception.”\textsuperscript{37}
Recessed lighting and wall fixtures offer plenty of task lighting, while cushioned benches with throw pillows provide comfort and help to absorb sound. However, the proposed café in the converted strip mall building must accommodate families and two-way access would better accommodate multiple diners.

POD USE IN TIDE

Within Tide, dining pods will be attached to crane tracks, allowing them to spin, slide and lift into the air. The semi-enclosed structures will allow patrons to dine privately or as part of a larger group, turning their pod in any direction or pulling them toward or away from others. If pushed together and turned the same way, the pods can align to form long dining tables to accommodate infinite parties in a family-style setting. The pods shall be constructed of lightweight aluminum to reinforce the industrial theme, and allow for easy manipulation.
ii. Methodology

APPROPRIATING REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

In order to reference the Tidewater Region, the city of Newport News and the neighborhood of Denbigh in a subtle but direct fashion, an overarching theme of abstracting regional elements shall inform all structural and non-structural design decisions.

A. WATERWAYS

The Hampton Roads peninsula of Virginia developed its form from the surrounding waters. Winding along the western edge of Newport News, the James River carries fresh water from the mountainous region of the state to meet the salt water of the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean. Most of the land comprising the peninsula sits at or below sea level, with much of the area’s topographic interest occurring below the water. This geographic characteristic manifests itself through water features throughout the space, such as the water walls in the laundry facility, similar to Fig. 21.
The Tidewater region receives sunlight most days of the year. As most roads in the area terminate at the land’s edge, light reflecting off of the water’s surface characterizes the area. Since a water skylight would place large amounts of weight on the roof of the building, the effect in the building will be achieved by a rippled glass skylight, as exhibited in the *Invisible House* by architects Emma Neville and John Bohane, which projects a fluid pattern onto surfaces below (Fig. 22).
B. MATERIALITY

Another characteristic of the Newport News area, the play between manmade and natural materials, is reflected throughout the space. The contrast between high and low creates visual interest in interior spaces, as exhibited by the crisp white walls and modern surfaces punctuated by the wood beam in designer Anne Sophie Goneau’s *Espace Le Moyne* (Fig. 23). By placing sleek with rough, glossy with matte, and old with new, a harmonic material dialogue will hum throughout the proposed spaces.
C. SCAFFOLDING

In concert with the natural regional elements, the manmade materials of the Tidewater area provide structure and rhythm. The gridded streets run north and south, up and down the peninsula, or side-to-side, back and forth between bodies of water. This grid appears throughout the space and serves different purposes in each zone. One design tactic for introducing a grid is through the abstraction of the scaffolding used at the Newport News Shipbuilding (Fig. 24). Regular rows of tall steel scaffolding allow workers to traverse the levels of ships as they are built. In the proposed spaces, scaffolding offers retail space, division of programmatic zones, structure for glass walls and the layout of seating pieces. The cranes used for building
ships in Newport News appear in the dining space as a support structure to allow the dining pods to slide, spin and lift into the air, opening up the space for event use. This gridded steel will also appear in the laundromat as display shelving and lockable cages where patrons can hang clothes to dry while they explore the other spaces.

(Fig. 24) USS Yorktown from Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Newport News, Virginia, on April 4, 1936. Photo Credit: US Navy. Image via historicwings.com

The most regular design tactic proposed for the design of the spaces is repetition. Repetition of café pods, retail products, and laundry machines will provide a common beat as one traverses the space and unite the various components and programs while referencing the regularity of the tides, gridded streets and scaffolding associated with the region. Repetition also brings a commonality to items that underscores the goals of the space. The scaffolding and cranes with their moving parts create a factory-like experience that aims for the individual to question, or at the very least, reflect on the control they assert over their own society and lives.
D. OTHER REGIONAL REFERENCES

Within the space, smaller moments have been inspired by the Tidewater region. The name of the proposed space, Tide, obviously derives from Tidewater. But Tide also connotes the relationship between high and low, have and have not, plenty and scarcity. It references water, coming clean (even Tide detergent), and mixing of warm and cool, salt and fresh. Tides are regular, but water is irregular: moving, on a large scale, at predictable intervals, but much more freely on an individual, molecular level. This relationship is a metaphor in which the shipbuilding, gridded streets and structured military presence in the region represent the regular and the individuals, nuanced and flawed with personal needs and reactions, are the irregular. This concept serves as an overarching theme within the space, specifically in the moments of play between high and low, natural vs. manmade materials, and is also represented in the name.

Another reference is not exclusive to the Tidewater but is certainly characteristic of it is the appropriation of decking (Fig. 24b). Since many homes are at or near sea level, certain neighborhoods require homes to be built on stilts. Most area roads end at the water, so decks, piers and roof porches are common. Some Hampton Roads communities have pier parties in the summer, where participants boat from dock to dock, or simply gather on backyard decks as fireflies appear. In order to capture this nuanced summer experience, the exposed deck seating within Tide allows for social gatherings under twinkling lights, in contrast to the more private dining cubes nearby. Underneath the raised platforms, children can play in semi-enclosed
pens, giving parents a bird’s-eye view if they attempt to wander.

(Fig. 24b) Example of common privately owned pier on a back channel in Hampton Roads. Image via: hamptonroads.com

PRELIMINARY PROGRAMATIC DIAGRAMS

As part of the process for understanding the amount of space required to incorporate a laundromat, café and retail store into 50,000 square feet of an open floor plan, divide those spaces so as to delineate separate functions, and close off the retail component while continuing to allow access to the other components, several diagrams were created. The first, a blocking diagram (Fig. 25) illustrates the proposed division of spaces, with each of the programs and the storage area attributed 10,000 square feet of space to maintain balance, the main entry 8,000 square feet (to include restrooms), the staff area 1,000 square feet (including restrooms), and the secondary
entry 1,000 square feet (including restrooms). The staff and storage facilities will surround the program components so that staff may easily access each area without passing through the center of the space.

(Fig. 25) Blocking Diagram depicting equal distribution between program components.

The second diagram (Fig. 26) depicts the hourly usage of each program component over a 24-hour period, with peak times for each component varying throughout the day.
The third diagram (Fig. 27) uses bubbles relative to the size of each space to illustrate the proximities between components and to exits.
(Fig. 27) Proximity Diagram depicting relative closeness of programs to each other and exits

The fourth diagram (Fig. 28) maps out a sample path for a mother and two children over a two-hour period visiting each of the spaces.

(Fig. 28) Proximity Diagram depicting relative closeness of programs to each other and exits

These diagrams collectively show the relationships between the programs, the utility spaces in physical space and over the course of a day.
Part III. Research Conclusions

In conclusion of the research proposal for the conversion of the former grocery store in the Denbigh Village Shopping Center of Newport News, I have settled upon a list of knowns going into the design portion of the project:

- The space must convey regional character through materiality and the juxtaposition of regular and irregular elements reminiscent of those occurring in the Tidewater Region.
- The programs must function to serve middle-class patrons of varying age/sex/schedules/family structures.
- The site is a former grocery store located in the Denbigh Village Shopping Center of Newport News, Virginia. The neighborhood is diverse and largely middle-class, with a high percentage of single mother households.
- The building is 49,791 square feet on one floor with few windows.
- Each program component will appropriate ideas from case study research. No one program component will dominate the space.
- The purpose of the project is to elevate the experience of middle class suburban life by converting a vacant generic box store into a destination home retail shop and laundry café designed around the local needs and character of the region.
Part IV. Presentation Feedback and Responses

This thesis was presented to a panel of jurors on Monday, May 4, 2015 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Panelists included members of the Washington-area architectural community. Three 4’ h x 8’ w presentation boards were divided into research, programming and rendering sections. (Presentation boards included in Supplemental Documentation). Feedback consisted of the following comments and suggestions:

- Perhaps the cube dining pods and the laundry stations could have been somehow physically combined in an effort to push the boundaries between public and private spaces further.
- Could a professional retail consultant have shed more light on the retail aspects so as to incorporate more consumer science into these spaces and offer a more substantial argument in favor of elevated essentials and visual merchandising? How could the retail element have been pushed further or explored on a micro-scale? If the retail aspects are to provide a level of convenience, how could they be more strategically positioned or designed so as to facilitate this ease-of-purchase?
- The overall idea is “innovative” and an interesting combination of programming has been incorporated. The presentation and boards had a consistent language, design and approach.
- While the glass façade is more engaging that the existing concrete exterior, it could still be more inviting. How could the parking lot have been engaged and
the relationship between inside and outside explored further? How could elements from the interior have been drawn out into the parking lot to create a dialogue between interior/exterior?

- Could the laundry and café spaces have been switched so as to offer more privacy to those using the laundry units and draw the café outside to draw people in and offer an outside dining/lounge option? In this scenario, a logical place for retail would be in the middle area.

- This is a strong concept. The intention of elevating the middle-class and encouraging interaction and furthering community is interesting. There seems to be a struggle with the configuration: could the laundry have flanked the sides, allowing the community space to be front and center?

- There is a great language to this project with the incorporation of cranes, infrastructure and movement. How could it have been pushed further, beyond the literal?

- This was a great presentation, with a very clear oral explanations of the boards, which were laid out in a clear fashion as well.

- There should have been more information on the boards regarding the existing conditions.

- Can this model be translated into any location or region?

- The presentation was clear, but there could have been more exploration of the various spaces on a micro-scale. More information about the materiality and how a mood is created through relationships of material and space may have helped explain the intent more effectively.
Endnotes

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31 (IBID)
*Citation taken directly from The Metropolitan Museum of Art website as provided. (Rosenthal 2004)
34 Images and names: Italian architecture firm bergmeisterwolf’s Lois pod dining. Image via http://www.bergmeisterwolf.it/project.php?abau_id=2181&lang_id=en
36 (IBID)
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