RICE UNIVERSITY

Los Angeles, 2030

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Architecture

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HOUSTON, TEXAS
May 2018
Los Angeles, 2030
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Abstract

As the postwar terminus of manifest destiny and the established purveyor of cultural fictions, Los Angeles has from its onset represented the American Dream. From the Case Study House program to the developing freeway system, the obsolescence of the electric streetcar, and the rising popularity of the private automobile, Los Angeles fiction 1.0 had been realized early on as the metropolis of suburbia. Today, however, the desperate need for densification is forcing Angelenos to rethink the archaic zoning codes protecting the 1950s vision. On March 7, 2017, Angelenos voted on the “Neighborhood Integrity Initiative” which sought a moratorium on development. Seventy percent of voters voted against S, suggesting a shift in Los Angeles’s urban narrative. Los Angeles 2.0 will be denser with greater equity in access to infrastructure, the environment, and housing. The project is an attempt to synthesize this binary precisely through its dualism as a paradoxical suburban-metropolitan condition.
Acknowledgements

This thesis was presented at the Rice School of Architecture on January 11, 2018.

This project could not have been realized without the guidance of my advisor, Scott Colman. I could not have completed this thesis without your keen eye, your patience, and your support. Thank you for teaching me how to transform my interests into a project.

To the RSA faculty. Thank you for your intellectual generosity. I've learned so much from each and every discussion along the way. Special thanks to Albert Pope for your insight during the final stages of this thesis and for being an inspiration.

To M.Arch ’18. I am fortunate to have had a circle of smart friends to work alongside during the past 3.5 years. To Kalen, Micah, Sidian, and Stephanie, thank you for your friendship and company, especially during the late late nights and early mornings.

Last but not least, thank you mom for everything.
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Introduction

As the postwar terminus of manifest destiny and the established purveyor of cultural fictions, Los Angeles has from its onset represented the American Dream. From the Case Study House program, which first sought out the architectural manifestation of this dream, to the developing freeway system, the obsolescence of the electric streetcar, and the rising popularity of the private automobile, Los Angeles fiction 1.0 had been realized early on as the metropolis of suburbia. Today, however, with the city already built out to its edges and as the housing crisis puts increasing pressure on the suburban model, the desperate need for densification is forcing Angelenos to rethink the archaic zoning codes protecting the 1950s vision. On March 7, 2017, Angelenos voted on the “Neighborhood Integrity Initiative” or Measure S which sought a moratorium on development. Seventy percent of voters voted against S, suggesting a shift in Los Angeles’s urban narrative: Los Angeles 2.0 will be denser with greater equity in access to infrastructure, the environment, and housing.

The project is an attempt to synthesize this binary precisely through its dualism as a paradoxical suburban–metropolitan condition. Los Angeles, 2030 is an intensified version of itself, a city of two American fictions: the detached house and the skyscraper. Potential development is consolidated into a 16 mile long metropolitan strip along Wilshire Boulevard bounded by two infrastructural walls containing the residential units and public space currently lacking in the city. Beyond the walls, the existing tapestry of suburbia remains. The walls themselves are operative boundaries: infrastructure that produces thousands of vertical plots for housing, public amenities, and urban connectivity along its roof. Though starting along Wilshire, this housing infrastructure is projected to continue along all of Los Angeles’s corridors, cultivating a network of urbanism and islands of suburbia. The new vision for the American Dream is this operative boundary, the medium that allows Los Angeles 2.0 to exist as both the suburban fiction and the metropolitan tale.
01

The fiction machine
THE FICTION MACHINE

As the postwar terminus of manifest destiny and the established purveyor of cultural fictions, Los Angeles has from its onset represented the American Dream. By the late nineteenth century, Los Angeles had become the nation's most celebrated destination: an instant paradise composed of an exceptional, ecological mix of desert, mountain, and beach altogether consecrated under a Mediterranean climate. America's Garden of Eden was never destined to be a conventional city through traditional planning; instead, the city was seen as the perfect commodity to be mass marketed to the American people.

Los Angeles would develop through the art of fabrication and promotion, a branding of the city using idyllic narratives convincingly stitching together place with lifestyle, class, race, and ultimately profit. Boosters touted Los Angeles for what it was, bohemianism in the land of sunshine, and what it could be, the crème de la crème, and as more Americans bought into the American Dream, the city became the ultimate fiction machine to consummate one's capitalist fantasies.
THE SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSE

One of the most prominent drivers behind this fiction machine has always been the single-family house. This typology allowed the city to develop quickly by expanding horizontally, producing an urban morphology in line with the economics of a city in which capital was more scarce than land.

In 1946, Arts and Architecture magazine sponsored a series of housing experiments known as the Case Study House Program, which sought out the architectural manifestation of the American Dream: replicable, modern prototypes for the American home. Many of these proposals endorsed the low-density urbanism of postwar America while wartime services and restrictions made way for new ideas in design and construction ("after total war comes total living"). However, the Case Study projects ultimately failed to mature into mass-produced objects and instead became objects of mass desire.

While the objects themselves could not be successfully mass produced, the canonical photographs following the projects mass marketed the image of Los Angeles living. As one of the objectives of the Case Study Program was to invent prototypes easily adopted by developers, publicity of the project was imperative. Architectural photographer Julius Shulman was commissioned to document the built Case Study House projects, and what distinguished his photographs from that of other traditional architectural photographers was his inclusion of people in the once cold and indifferent Modern construction. His photographs not only represented a modern edifice but a lifestyle.

1 The Case Study House Program ran intermittently from 1945 until 1966, producing a total of 36 designs. Twenty-six of these were constructed and 22 houses remain today. Most of the built houses were constructed in Los Angeles.

2 Popular post-war slogan representing the optimism of a better tomorrow. First published in Revere’s Part in Better Living in 1943.
THE PRIVATE AUTOMOBILE

The Los Angeles lifestyle was not limited to the confines of the house. Not only was the house symbolic of the good life away from the squalors of the traditional city, the private automobile was also an important constituent in the city’s development. By the 1970s, the developing freeway, the obsolescence of the electric streetcar, and the rise in popularity of the private automobile acted as a catalyst to Los Angeles’s swift suburban development. And so began Angeleno’s retreat away from the traditional city and into their private residences and automobiles.

In 1971, Reyner Banham asserts the American Dream realized in Los Angeles: “The house and the automobiles are equal figments of a great dream...the dream of a good life outside the squalors of the European type of city...Los Angeles cradles and embodies the most potent current vision of the great bourgeois vision of the good life in the tamed countryside.” The four ecologies—freeways, surfurbia, foothills, and flatlands—were emblematic of the individual’s liberation and the triumph of hedonism in the contemporary metropolis. For Banham, Los Angeles represented the optimism in the infinite horizontal expansion, the “city of the immediate future.”

Figure 3. Still from BBC Film “Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles,” where architectural historian Reyner Banham takes the viewer on a scenic drive around what he coined Los Angeles’ Four Ecologies: freeways, surfurbia, foothills, and flatlands.
THE LEGACY OF SPATIAL INJUSTICE

By the 1990s, Los Angeles is more noir than sunshine and the narrative that dominates the city is that of spatial injustice: the city is a place of terror with citizens at war. Urban theorist and historian Mike Davis depicts Los Angeles as a prisoner factory and a city of militant privatization, where the “ruling elites crush the poor...whites exploit people of color...public space turn into fortresses...traffic and pollution conquer all.”¹

This narrative was nothing new, however, as the legacy of oppression and inequity had always been a part of Los Angeles’ DNA. In response to the deficiencies in earlier fair housing legislation, the California Fair Housing Act of 1963, also known as the Rumford Act, was enacted to protect the rights of people of color in their ability to purchase housing in private or public dwellings with more than five units without racial discrimination. Although it excluded the majority of homes occupied by white Californians, such as Los Angeles’s characteristic single-family house, the legislation was immediately faced with opposition. The California Real Estate Association (CREA) promptly launched a repeal campaign which ultimately resulted in the nullification of the Rumford Act via the Proposition 14 referendum in the November elections of the following year. The vote passed with a 2-1 margin.

A heightened parallel of the Watts Riots of 1965², the Los Angeles Riots of 1992, or the Rodney King riots³, resurfaced these underlying tensions caused by residual residential segregation and ongoing police discrimination. Once again people of color were reminded that the fiction of the American Dream was made for white America; for everyone else, the American Nightmare.

¹ Excerpt from Mike Davis’ City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (1991)
² August 11, 1965. A six day riot in which 46 square miles of Los Angeles would become a combat zone, resulting in 34 deaths, 1,032 injuries, and 3,438 arrests.
³ April 29, 1992. A six day riot sparked by the acquittal of four policeman on trial for beating Rodney King; resulting in 63 deaths, 3,383 injuries, and 12,111 arrests. The California Army National Guard, the US Army, and the US Marine Corps were brought in to control the situation.
Inequity in housing persists today as the city continues to face crises of homelessness, lack of affordable housing, and gentrification. In May 2017, the California Housing Partnership Corporation (CHPC) published a report revealing Los Angeles County’s inadequate supply of affordable homes: “Los Angeles County’s lowest-income renters spend 70% of income on rent...Los Angeles County needs 551,807 more affordable rental homes to meet the needs of its lowest-income renters...when housing costs are considered, Los Angeles County’s poverty rate rises from 18.3% to 25.6%.”1 In addition to the increasing inequity of housing, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development found that homelessness has increased 75% (from about 32,000 to 55,000) within the last six years; three out of four within this group (41,000 people) reside in cars, tents, and makeshift shelters.

The increasing awareness of Los Angeles’ now limited resources (e.g. water and housing) as well as the ramifications of the city’s inevitable growth under its current sub-urbanism (e.g. congestion2 and pollution) are putting pressure on the economically wasteful and environmentally suspect single-family suburban model. And as the fiction of Los Angeles as America’s cornucopia begins to erode, the desperate need for densification and urbanization is forcing Angelenos to rethink the zoning codes protecting the 1950s vision.

Footnotes:
1 CHPC is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to aiding government and nonprofit housing agencies.
2 Robert Half employment agency surveyed which major U.S. metropolitan areas have the longest and most anxiety-inducing commutes. Unsurprisingly, Los Angeles ranked #1 on stress and #8 on time (an average of 53.7 minutes) out of 27.
02
Corridor City
AMERICA’S PARADIGM

During the 1980s and 1990s, a group of urbanists, collectively known as the Los Angeles School, asserted Los Angeles as the paradigmatic American metropolis of the late-twentieth century. For many of these postmodernist urban scholars who considered “place” a social construct and a means of understanding the spatial organization of economies, Los Angeles was paradigmatic “in terms of the role of the city in present-day capitalism and its social consequences for life in the city.”

However, Los Angeles was not to be seen simply as a finished blueprint but “a laboratory which is itself an integral component of the production of new modes of analysis of the urban;” the city is at once the product and the producer of these dynamics.

Figures 6 and 7.
(Top) Still from Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner film in 1982. Los Angeles is the “Capital of Science Fiction,” often acting as the backdrop for the future. A contemporary example and utopic foil to Ridley Scott’s dystopic film is Spike Jonze’s Her (2013).

1 Jan Nijman’s “The Paradigmatic City” (2000)
2 Michael Dear’s “Los Angeles and the Chicago School: Invitation to a Debate” (2002)
THE CITY AS PRODUCT: 
LOS ANGELES’ URBAN MORPHOLOGY

In an attempt to excavate the city’s underlying urban form, Giuliano and Small developed an employment-based approach to define urban centers in their study in 1991. Unsurprisingly, as the city was conceived through haphazard leapfrogging development of employment and activity centers, Giuliano and Small delimited four centers in Los Angeles (i.e. LA west, Santa Monica, Hollywood, LA airport) with the “main center” (i.e. Downtown) and classified it as “Wilshire Corridor.”

Twenty-one years later in 2012, USC geographer Samuel Kreuger published a contemporary extension of Giuliano’s research and likewise identified multiple subcenters (i.e. Downtown, Hollywood/Hollywood Hills, Koreatown, Beverly Grove/West Hollywood, Beverly Hills) and re-classified it as “Wilshire/Santa Monica corridor.”

Los Angeles is Corridor City.


Genevieve Giuliano is a professor at USC’s Sol Price School of Public Policy.


Figure 8. 
Density map from Samuel Kreuger’s research published in 2012.
THE CITY AS PRODUCER: WILSHIRE CORRIDOR AS LABORATORY

Los Angeles has historically developed outwards rather than upwards. As much of the city has been built to its edges, Los Angeles’s method of growth no longer follows horizontal outward expansion but now operates under infill urbanism, where the city begins to fold back onto itself. Wilshire Corridor can be seen today as the exceptional case study for Los Angeles, a place where this switch in the city’s mode of urbanism has already occurred.

The Metro Purple line extension will run along Wilshire Boulevard, connecting Downtown to Westwood in a total travel time of 25 minutes. The extension is projected to generate 49,300 daily weekday boardings at its seven new stations. Trains are expected to run every four minutes during peak hours, and every 10 minutes during off-hours. In addition to the transportation, Wilshire Boulevard is the home of the majority of Los Angeles’ urban amenities. These qualities have made Wilshire a hotspot for new development. Thus, Wilshire Boulevard is the ideal case study and urban laboratory for densifying suburbia.

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1 The new Metro Purple line had been originally planned to connect Downtown to Santa Monica (“the subway to the sea”). Due to budget restrictions, the final destination will be Veterans station in Westwood.

2 Examples include: commercial districts in Santa Monica and Beverly Hills, business districts in Century City and Downtown, museum district in mid-Wilshire, and entertainment district in Koreatown.
The characteristic of Wilshire Boulevard is not homogenous through its 15.8 mile stretch. Twelve neighborhoods with distinct urban, economic, and social qualities act as archipelagos.

The metropolitan condition is more present in some neighborhoods like Koreatown\(^1\), the densest neighborhood along Wilshire Boulevard and in the city of Los Angeles. This neighborhood is under heavy development, with over 40 high-rise projects taking over the neighborhood.

In others neighborhoods, such as Santa Monica\(^2\) where resistance to densification is rampant, the metropolitan condition has yet to develop.

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1. Koreatown has 42,811 people per square mile, one of the highest densities in both the city and county. The average household size is 2.7 people. Only 7% are homeowners and 93% are renters. Data from Los Angeles Times’s “Mapping LA”

2. Santa Monica has 9,817 people per square mile, about average for Westside Los Angeles and Los Angeles County. The average household size is 1.8 people. About 30% are homeowners and 70% are renters. Data from Los Angeles Times’s “Mapping LA”
The “Neighborhood Integrity Initiative,” or Measure S
PART 3

THE SLOW GROWTH MOVEMENT

To understand why much of Los Angeles’s commercial corridors consist of dilapidated strip malls that have yet to fully develop, one must first look back at Los Angeles’s slow growth movement.

By the late twentieth century, Los Angeles was soon to surpass Chicago in population size. Those supporting the slow growth movement were concerned about the diminishing quality of life that would follow increased urbanization as they believed development would threaten to make their residential paradise the same as their work environment. These advocates were concerned with “overdevelopment only in areas already affected by crushing density, generally on the affluent Westside...and that they do not oppose growth in economically disadvantaged areas.”

“Slow growth” became a key issue in Los Angeles politics in the 80s. Local political groups such as “Not Yet New York,” founded by Barbara S. Blinderman and Laura M. Lake, a land use attorney and an adjunct professor at UCLA, hoped to slow the growth of the city, preserve open space with low density, and ultimately uphold the fiction of the 1950s suburban dream.

PROPOSITION U

Thanks to signatures primarily from affluent homeowners in San Gabriel Valley and Los Angeles’ Westside, a ballot initiative called Proposition U was qualified for the 1986 November election. Proposition U aimed to slow development in the city by specifically reducing the allowable size of new buildings on 85% of the commercial and industrial areas of Los Angeles from a maximum FAR of 3.0 to 1.5. Development capacity for the 29,000 acres zoned for commercial and industrial use was effectively sliced in half. Because these zoned areas also allow for the construction of residential units, Proposition U not only affected the potential amount of commercial development, but residential development as well.

The LA Times characterized this initiative as “stamped[ing] the Los Angeles City Council into passing an ordinance that would protect neighborhoods from the sudden appearance of high-rise buildings on 85% of the land” and because “it [was] not clear how much legal wrangling would be required to make changes that ought to be made to keep up with the needs of a changing city,” LA Times stated “those uncertainties warrant[ed] a no vote on Proposition U.”

Supporters of Proposition U included slow growthers like “Not Yet New York.” Despite the fervent no by The LA Times, albeit not surprisingly, Proposition U passed by a 2-1 margin.
Attempts at densification have since been faced with NIMBYism1 (an acronym for “Not In My BackYard,” representing opposition from residents to new development). While the fear of densification and urbanization is attributed to physically perceivable problems such as the inundation of traffic and parking, it also represents underlying symbolic obstacles that homeowners, often white affluent residents, must face: the introduction of people of different colors and languages as a perceived challenge to the hegemony of homeowner values.

What’s even more troubling is that “Not In My BackYard” has recently transformed in Los Angeles into “Not In My Neighborhood” with residents believing that owning a parcel of land gives them the absolute right to determine their total surroundings.1

1 In 2015, to caricature Los Angeles’s particular and powerful quirk of “stopping things,” LA Weekly published a satirical comprehensive list of “every kind of NIMBY in Los Angeles.” It includes: 1) the density NIMBY, 2) the bike lane NIMBY, 3) the beach NIMBY, 4) the Hollywood sign NIMBY, 5) the Waze NIMBY, 6) the gentrification NIMBY, 7) the mega mansion NIMBY, 8) the halfway house NIMBY, 9) the liquor license NIMBY, and 10) the rail NIMBY.
On March 7, 2017, Angelenos voted on the “Neighborhood Integrity Initiative” or Measure S. Yes to S would impose a two year moratorium on development projects seeking variances from the zoning code as well as a permanent ban on such projects on sites smaller than 15 acres; Measure S sought to effectively freeze high density development. This development ban required any amendments to the zoning code to take place on a neighborhood scale, reinforcing the concept of “Not In My Neighborhood.”

Thirty percent of votes voted YES to Measure S and seventy percent voted NO to Measure S as Angelenos have acknowledged the correlation between the restriction of development in these arterial, commercial corridors to the decreased supply of transit-oriented housing over the next several decades.

This event marked a shift in Los Angeles’ narrative. The results suggest that Los Angeles next urban fiction will be denser, with greater equity in access to infrastructure, the environment, and most importantly, housing.

Proponents of Measure S were slow growthers and residents of Los Angeles’s Westside. Part of their anti-development propaganda included images of Blade Runner’s dystopic Los Angeles.

A majority opposition seen as the inverse of the results of 1986 Proposition U.
Los Angeles, 2030
LOS ANGELES VIA BINARY OPPOSITION

What is the future of the American Dream in a densifying Los Angeles? Where will the density go? How might the house and the high rise, two of the most salient American symbols of freedom coexist?

The project is an attempt to synthesize the binary precisely through its dualism. For this thesis, I have consolidated potential development into a 16 mile long metropolitan strip ("not S") that runs along Wilshire Boulevard and is bound by two infrastructural walls containing the residential units and public space currently lacking in the city. Beyond the walls, the existing tapestry of suburbia ("S") is able to remain.

While the project's urban set up polarizes this dualism; the architectural project begins to negates the fictional binary between the city and the suburb.

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**Figure 18.**
Diagram of Los Angeles's urbanism in binary opposition.

1 The thesis exaggerates Los Angeles's most compelling and paradoxical condition as the megalopolis-suburb.
URBANISM

Development will occur as an expansion of Los Angeles’s existing urban corridors.

The thesis focuses on Wilshire corridor, which has historically attracted densification and urban amenities, but without fully realizing the potentials or receiving much of the benefits of the metropolitan condition.

The project takes advantage of the current extension of the metro purple line that runs along the corridor from Downtown to Veterans.

This thesis projects that the Purple line will eventually reach Santa Monica to transform the corridor from a single boulevard into a dense, walkable metropolitan strip.

The Wilshire development corridor is widened and two walls are constructed along its length, between which unfettered density will be encouraged. With the encouraged density between the walls, the pressure on the suburbs is eliminated and the suburban area outside the walls likewise maintains and consolidates its suburban character.

The project accepts and reinforces the existing nature of Los Angeles as a city of dichotomy. Los Angeles 2.0 can be both the suburban fiction and the metropolitan tale.
Figure 20.
Map of urban areas in current Los Angeles (top) and Los Angeles, 2030 after development along corridors (bottom).
DENSITY ALLOCATION PRINCIPLES

The wall provides formal demarcation, intensifying the respective qualities of both the urban interior and the suburban exterior of the metropolitan strip. The location of the walls is a constant negotiation between the metropolitan strip and the suburban tapestry.

The principles are:
- The wall infrastructure is generally offset 1,500 feet away from Wilshire Boulevard, the walking distance from the metro main boulevard.
- The crenulations creates spatial variety and qualities of a district for both the urban and the suburban sides.
- The corridor is widened for urban exceptions (e.g. metro stations and cultural facilities).
- It’s narrowed for suburban exceptions (e.g. school districts, parks).
- The wall is projected to continue at corridor intersections, ultimately producing a network of metropolitan strips in the city.

Figure 21
Diagarammatic elevations of section through Wilshire Boulevard before and after allocated development.

The distance of 1,500 feet mimics the definition of transit-accessible housing in Los Angeles Mayor Garcetti’s “Sustainable City Plan.”
Urban exceptions

Rodeo Drive  LACMA  Koreatown

Figure 22.
Map of urban exceptions (areas within 1500 feet of Wilshire Boulevard that widen or narrow the metropolitan strip) along Wilshire Boulevard.
**Suburban exceptions**

*Lincoln Middle School*  
*University High School*  
*John Burroughs Middle School*

Figure 23.  
Map of suburban exceptions (areas within 1600 feet of Wilshire Boulevard that do not densely and become part of the metropolitan strip) along Wilshire Boulevard
Corridor intersections

Figure 24
Map of corridor development intersections. Wilshire Corridor is projected to eventually merge with Sepulveda, La Cienega, and Vermont Corridors.
Figure 26
Inside the Wilshire metropolitan strip viewing the new LACMA building.

PART 4 LOS ANGELES, 2030

Figure 25.
Inside the Wilshire metropolitan strip viewing the new LACMA building.
PART 4 LOS ANGELES, 2030

Figure 26. Inside the Wilshire metropolitan strip viewing MacArthur Park in the Westlake neighborhood towards downtown.
Figure 27
Oblique elevation of housing infrastructure from inside the metropolitan strip.
Figure 28.
Oblique elevation of housing infrastructure viewed from suburban side.
ARCHITECTURE

The wall of housing operates under the 1909 theorem, where thousands of plots are created by stacking them vertically. However, unlike typical high rise housing, each new plot has immediate access to the core.

The wall is one plot wide, allowing each housing unit to confront both the suburban landscape and metropolitan strip. The vertical plots can be developed with a range of housing types and offer a unique capacity to dwell on the littoral between metropolitan and suburban.

Figures 29 and 30.
Top. Illustration from Life Magazine (1909)
Right. Plan of building core.
HOUSING

These plots can be occupied by smaller, more urban apartments (e.g. unit B), or by suburban houses with numerous bedrooms (e.g. unit C).

Each unit has its own backyard space that can be either individual or shared.
GROUND

The wall infrastructure is an operative boundary that services both sides of the corridor. It’s open on the ground floor and allows for informal programming to occur, such as a flea market or public concerts.
iii. A performance stage to be used by both local talent and seasoned hosts, such as the KCW-produced "Summer Nights," a free, all ages concert series throughout Los Angeles.

iv. A place of calm for rest and relaxation after exploring the city or walking one's dog.

i. An open air flea market and trading post for unique knick-knacks to vintage finds.

ii. An outdoor game room for retired elders to meet others in their communities.
SUBURBAN

The project provides a stacked smart parking solution on the suburban side.

URBAN

It also provides a pick up and drop off rideshare zone on the urban side.
SKY PARLOR

The sky parlor on the top floor is filled with additional public facilities that can range from work spaces, libraries, classrooms, and entertainment spaces.
i. A classroom, library, and reading room.

ii. A bar and various work spaces.

iii. A cycling center, meeting room, and game room.

iv. Three weight rooms and a cardio room.
ROOF

The rooftop provides open space, recreational facilities, and a connective conduit allowing for pedestrian and bicycle connection in a city lacking such infrastructure.
i. A pedestrian track.

ii. A bicycling trail.

iii. A badminton court.

iv. A basketball court.
THE FUTURE OF LOS ANGELES

Though starting along Wilshire, this housing infrastructure is projected to continue along all of Los Angeles’s developing corridors, cultivating a network of urbanism and islands of suburbia. The new vision for the American Dream is the operative boundary, the medium that allows Los Angeles 2.0 to exist as, and ultimately transcend, the suburban fiction and the metropolitan tale.

Figure 31.
Map of Los Angeles’s corridors.
Figure 32.
Los Angeles, 2030 advertisement as "S".

Figure 33.
Los Angeles, 2030 advertisement as "not S".
Figure 34.
Ground view from suburban ("S") side.

Figure 35.
Ground view from urban ("not S") side.
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Figure 36.
Final printed presentation board layout.