THICK LOTS

THE BRAND BOULEVARD CORRIDOR HAS 33 ACRES OF CONTIGUOUS PARKING LOT FROM COLORADO AVE. TO SAN FERNANDO ROAD. THIS IS AN AREA ROUGHLY THE SIZE OF LOS ANGELES’ MACARTHUR PARK. COULD SOMETHING MORE PRODUCTIVE INHABIT THIS SPACE?

A FAILED MANIFESTO

Brand Blvd. can be seen to represent a failed manifesto, once a typologically urban corridor with a trolley car defining its function and potential, it is now restrained by an increasingly static inventory of cars. This consumes 33 acres, equivalent to 35 city blocks, for the exhibition, storage, and maintenance of new and guaranteed vehicles. The boulevard, like many other corridors of concentrated auto commerce, embodies a persisting myth about the liberation enabled by the personal vehicle. Yet the local consequences have taken their toll on the spatial and cultural landscape.

The longevity of this monoculture as an economic and land use typology must come into question as our methods of achieving mobility and our reliance on petroleum become less viable. Historically the city has benefited from the property and sales taxes of the dealers, while putting funding back into the boulevard for the beautification, enhancement, or expansion of the dealerships. Yet in the last year California dealer sales have fallen 42 percent. This has prompted a number of Southern California cities to structure their own bail outs for local dealerships, which they have seen as essential to the local economies. Further, as the Federal government has pitched in to salvage American car companies, as well as individual purchasing power with the “Cash for Clunkers” program, we are prompted to ask what the public actually “gets back” from these increasingly unproductive spaces.
PHASED THICKENING
FROM PARKED TO PARKWAY

A newly defined Brand Boulevard is inevitable, our proposal anticipates car purchasing and use evolving through the next decade. An increase in online car research and multi-modal Angelenos, will make maintaining such large inventories impractical and ultimately obsolete. It will become compulsory for the car companies to alter their way of doing business and how they situate themselves with the local consumer. This proposal recognizes the need for updated methods of car display, where the potential for consumer appeal is heightened while the amount of space consumed is reduced.

This proposal is based in the specificities of the place, the vernacular is re-appropriated, made more productive, updated, cosmically enhanced but tactically salvaged and repurposed. Despite the quirky manifestations of this particular corridor, its tendency toward the bland is common to many dealership-lined streets across America: stuck between the urban, suburban, and pastoral. These spaces are embedded with the potential to be redeployed towards more productive and sustainable initiatives. Our strategies embrace this tension by allowing provisional occupations that both make maintaining such large inventories inevitable; our proposal anticipates car display is limited to a portion of the space. Street Parking is removed and given over to bicycle traffic. New pedestrian crossings are reinforced. Back alleys become linear gardens and bike-ways.

PHASE I
APPROPRIATIONS
Remote dealer lots are appropriated for spongy surfaces retrofitted with gravel, underground water storage and productive fences for energy or agriculture. Additionally these lots are planted with mini-sequestration groves of cottonwoods, willows, and aspens. Remote sales rooms are given over to the city for mixed vendor uses: farm stands, coffee shops, food vendors, uses could rotate daily or weekly. Three main civic showrooms are targeted for reuse and begin developing multi-use programs, car display is limited to a portion of the space. Street Parking is removed and given over to bicycle traffic. New pedestrian crossings are reinforced. Back alleys become linear gardens and bike-ways.

PHASE II
INVENTORY DENSIFICATION
Dealer inventory is densified and reduced. Below ground parking dispensaries become major infrastructures for dealer inventory, parking and city owned car-share facilities. New featured models are exhibited in multi-branded spaces framed by the newly deployed productive skins. The street median bolsters the water infrastructure as a infiltration strip where excess water flows from the Sponge Lots through a sub-grade channel down slope to the lowest lot. Here water is filtered and reused for new aquatics programs.

PHASE III
INFILL AND BIOMASS
Lots become available for infill development. The remaining dealership spaces are reused or leased for parking and rooftop agriculture. In anticipation of the California High Speed rail passing within a half mile accelerates transit oriented development around the boulevard. New infill buildings accommodate other commercial retail, housing, and hotels. The urban forest matures and the parkway becomes a distinctive regional attraction offering recreation, retail, and cultural opportunities.

PROJECTED FUNDING STREAMS: BRAND BLVD OF CARS
(Post - 2009, 43% decline in dealership sales)
A series of new productive and regenerative prototypes overhaul the surfaces of the asphalt lots, territorial fences and oversized warehouses of the boulevard. The new Brand Boulevard anticipates the erosion of the car dealership typology and imagines a more synthetic corridor of productive skins, urban forests, and spongy surfaces, punctuated by newly appropriated civic showrooms, public follies, and vendor sheds. The entire boulevard is embedded with a new system of multi-mobility transit corridors, bike paths, auto dispensarys, and enhanced pedestrian spaces. These prototypes are implemented immediately upon the secondary dealership lots and continue to populate the boulevard over time, knitting each prototype together into a synthetic system.

**PRODUCTIVE SKINS**
New technology embedded skins replace existing freestanding fences and over time are deployed on the facades of salvaged dealerships and new structures. These scale-like skins are woven with micro-solar spheres, efficiently capturing solar energy in the vertical plane, and micro-pace sensors capturing ambient vibration energy in the breeze or from the boulevard traffic. These work to power wireless networks, site lighting and other supply energy for other intermittent site uses such as concerts or performances. Alternately these skins are a substrate for growing crops, or biomass for air filtration or micro-climate mediation.

**URBAN FOREST**
Fast growing native trees of cottonwood, aspen, and willow are planted in remote and excess lots on top of the spongy surfaces, the periodic inundation mimicking their native habitat. New street trees are planted in the widened medians and sidewalks, low-biomass palms are replaced with larger canopy trees. This new urban forest increases the carbon storage, adjusts the microclimate, and aids in air filtration along the boulevard, saving energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere.

**INFILL**
New infrastructure for mobility is added overtime with underground parking dispensaries dually providing for new retail, car storage and display space. Existing dealerships that are maintained are re-leased for car and machine servicing. Where available, extensive rooftop parking decks are converted for urban agriculture with the option for bio-fuel production. Infill development will work its way into the tightly knit urban structure as the corridor's amenities flourish.

**STREETSCAPE**
Initial realignments of the street eliminate existing street parking to create dedicated bus and bike lanes. The joint bike and bus lane is separated from car traffic with a planting strip and pedestrian crossings are enhanced with curb bumpouts for increased pedestrian visibility and traffic slowing. Public transit is channeled to the boulevard. Car and bike share programs run by the city set Brand Blvd to become a regional transit hub. The anticipation of the California high speed rail which will pass a half mile from the boulevard will further bolster transit development along this corridor.
ELEMENTS FOR THICKNESS

- Underrground Car Storage + Dispensary
- Roof Garden
- Rooftop Garden
- Rooftop Garden
- Converted Folly
- Urban Forest Street Trees
- Dedicated Bus Lane, Both sides
- Dedicated Bus Lane, Both sides
- Bike Lane, Both sides
- Infiltration Channel
- Infiltration Channel
- Sponge Lot
- Community Gardens
- Water Storage
- Driving Lanes
- Driving Lanes
- Productive Skin with Solar Tiles
- Productive Skin with Piezo Pennants
THICK WITH POSSIBILITY

The once fallow lots of Brand Blvd. are ripe for the projection of urban possibilities. By instituting new layers of landscape performance, orchestrated infrastructure and suggestive programming, the corridor begins to balance towards a new kind of urban environment, resilient to blight and receptive to new futures. Part urban forest dotted with follies, gardens, and recreational possibilities and part urban boulevard with streamlined infrastructure, consumer and cultural opportunities, the new Brand Blvd represents a hybrid that smooths the unresolved categories of urban, suburban, and pastoral into a seamless corridor of production and experience.