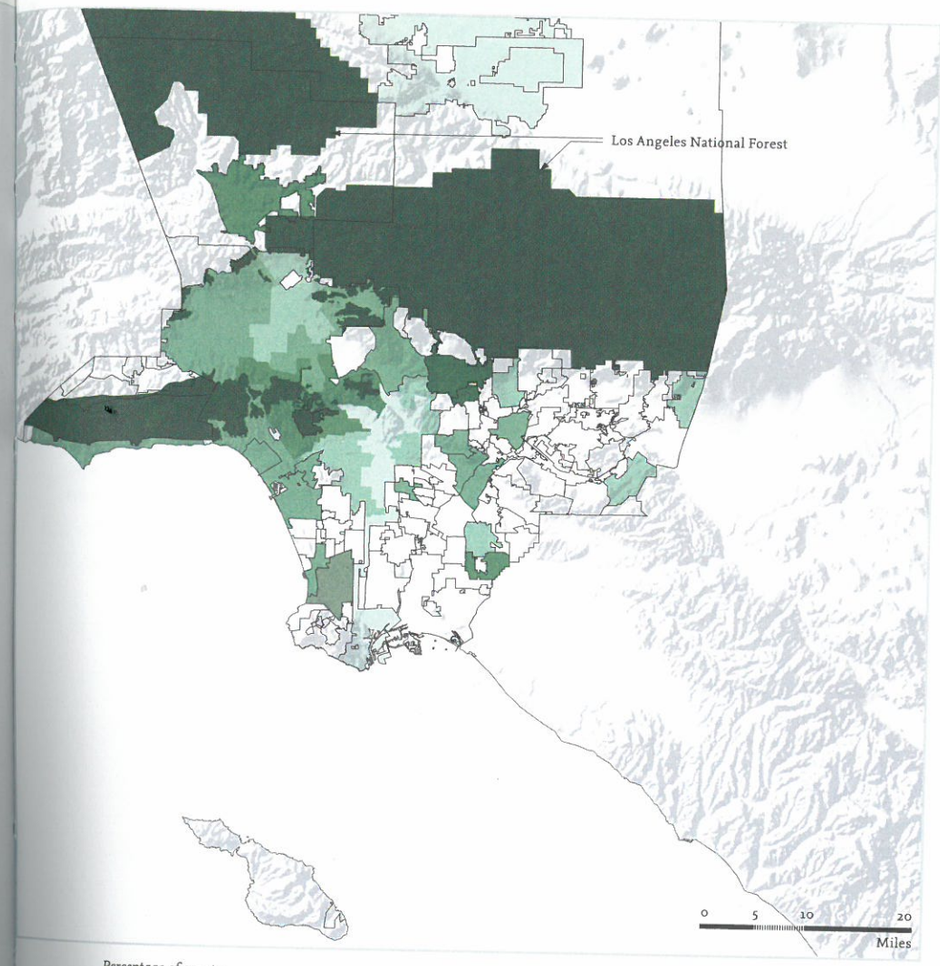
preceding pages:
Tree in Parking Lot

Warren Techentin

TREE HUGGERS
LANDSCAPE

Ask anyone—native Angeleno, recent transplant, or casual visitor—for their image of Los Angeles and you will hear the usual list: surf, sand, and palm tree-lined boulevards marked by the rise and fall of celebrities, shaped and clogged by the automobile, wreaked by repeated racial strife, menaced by impending natural disaster. Through more than a century of exposure through literature, cinema, and media these images insinuated themselves in the imagination. Of all of these clichés, however, the palm tree is the most easily distilled into a single frame, deployable whenever necessary to establish that the action takes place in Los Angeles. And if the city lacks an architectural skyline—not a single downtown skyscraper has managed to burn itself into the collective unconscious—its rows of palm trees substitute.

Virtually every aspect of life in Los Angeles is modulated with plants: its streets and parks, front yards, parking lots, fast-food drive-thru islands, even indoor corridors of malls and stacked office landscapes. Instead of acting as a civilizing measure, however, Los Angeles's plants suggest wildness; just as Paris is known for its arborescent *grands boulevards* lined with columns of identical trees, regimented like the Napoleonic army, Los Angeles is known for its formless, polyglot landscaping. So long as it can somehow acquire access to water, it seems, any plant can thrive in the California sun. Deliberately planted or accidentally imported, around a thousand different species of trees can be found in the area, making it perhaps the most bio-diverse region on the planet. This essay will analyze landscape as a foundational infrastructure in Los Angeles.



Percentage of canopy cover in Los Angeles County, by city

Source: author

Ed Ruscha, A Few Palm Trees, 1971

According to the Bureau of Street Services, 10 million trees over 465 square miles comprise Los Angeles's urban forest. And yet, when compared to other cities, Los Angeles isn't particularly "well-treed." More well-paved than well-treed, it boasts a city canopy (a measure of what percentage of the city has tree coverage) of only 18% compared to the national average of 27%.[1] Not surprisingly, greater effort has been expended on the roads: reputedly over two-thirds of the city's surface is paved.[2]

Starting in 2006, Los Angeles began augmenting its organic infrastructure by planting one million trees.[3] The palm is not on the list of new trees the city will plant. Officially the city is omitting the palm "because of its lack of shade."[4] But there are other factors as well. Demand for palms from desert cities—most notably Las Vegas—has driven up the cost of new specimens, doubling the price over the last decade. Nor does the higher cost end with planting: palms are nearly twice as expensive as other trees to maintain, and the cumulative mass of the fallen fronds and their impact on storm drains and landfills is substantial.

1 Laura Mecoy, "L. A. sets goal to plant 1 million saplings: Race is on, and Sacramento may lose standing among world's great tree cities," *Sacramento Bee*, September 5, 2006. According to Mecoy's article the top 10 tree cities defined by the number of trees per capita) are as follows: 1. Moorestown, NJ, 2. Morgantown, WV, 3. Atlanta, GA 4. Calgary, Alberta, 5. Woodbridge, NJ, 6. Syracuse, NY 7. Freehold, NJ 8. Sacramento, CA 9. Baltimore, MD 10. Oakland, CA.

2 Tree people. excerpts from Harry Wiland and Dale Bell, *Edens Lost and Found. How Ordinary Citizens are Restoring Our Great American Cities* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2006), Tree People Web Site, http://www.edenslostandfound.org/home/preview.php?id=32.

3 Million Trees Los Angeles, "Frequently Asked Questions," Million Trees Los Angeles, Los Angeles http://www.milliontreesla.org/mtabout8.htm. "We will be encouraging the planting of California friendly trees; that is, trees that are adapted to our semi-arid climate and will not use too much water. There have been a lot of questions about Palm Trees. We have no intention of eliminating or replacing Palm Trees. If people choose to plant them, they will count as part of the Million Trees LA program. Palm Trees have cultural and historic value in this city, and they add to its aesthetic and visual texture. We are not targeting replacement of any trees; rather, we want to plant new trees where there are none currently. We want to bring shade to areas that don't have any. While there is no current plan to put Palm Trees in those targeted areas, our program is not planning to replace or eliminate them where they are now. Further, we will work with the communities of Los Angeles to determine what trees they would like in their neighborhoods."

4 For more information about approved street trees, see the Web site of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), "Tree Planting Frequently Asked Questions," Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, http://www.ladwp.com/ladwp/cms/ladwp000747.jsp. The LADWP will provide free trees from a selected list to all customers who take a short, on-line course to help reduce cumulative energy consumption through the shading of their homes.

Considering that the average lifespan of a palm tree is seventy to a hundred years and that most of the palms visible now were planted to beautify the city for the 1932 Olympics, the bulk of Los Angeles's palm trees will disappear within a decade or two. But regardless of its link to the city's popular image, the palm has never been the city's official tree. Instead, that honor goes to the flower-bearing Coral Tree (*Erythrina caffra*), another non-native species requiring large amounts of water to maintain. In a city that, Norman Klein reminds us, has always depended on the creative destruction of forgetting, the palm tree's impending doom has generated widespread debate and anguish.[5] Perhaps in anticipation of the need to commemorate the loss of the palm as city icon, Robert Irwin, the artist in charge of designing the new gardens at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is proposing a palm oasis, an idealized fragment of landscape that would serve as a memorial for the palm, fittingly located nearby the fossils of the La Brea Tar Pits.

At LACMA, Irwin pays homage to the crucial role that palm trees play in the city and its cultural landscape, but he is not the first artist to do so. In the 1960s and 1970s, Los Angeles artist Ed Ruscha produced a series of small books cataloging various elements of Los Angeles. Along with his other books on key forms of Los Angeles infrastructure such as gas stations, swimming pools, and parking lots, *A Few Palm Trees* reveals that palms are not merely a decorative accident of urbanism, but rather a constituent element in the urban landscape. The book reads as both a catalog and a collection of family portraits. Selecting a tree (or small clump of trees) as the subject of each page, Ruscha exposes their twofold existence in the city. On the one hand, each photo serves as a guide to identifying and potentially selecting a palm for use in the city, as if from a catalog. On the other hand, each photograph personalizes each tree, showing the reader the unique features of each as if they were old friends from the neighborhood. Together, Ruscha's books point to the repetitive nature of the city and the banality of the objects of which it is composed. *A Few Palm Trees* builds an image of the city out of a series of barely noticed, minor elements, an index of Los Angeles's dispersed and decentralized urbanism.

5 Norman Klein, *History of Forgetting* (New York: Verso, 1997).

Landscape as agriculture As a symbol, the palm tree suggests that Los Angeles—once a desert—is now an oasis. In truth, this isn't far off the mark. Historically, the landscape of the Los Angeles basin—with the exception of a few riparian episodes—was largely featureless, a semi-arid mix of swamp and scrub virtually devoid of trees.

Carl Jung suggested that all things spring from the archetypical World Tree. Los Angeles is no exception. The Gabrielino Indians formed their central village, Yangna, near what is present-day downtown Los Angeles by the "Council Tree" (a giant sycamore or Aliso tree) around which elders would meet to discuss tribal affairs. The Spanish settlement took roots near this tree as well—ignoring the Laws of the Indies' demand that new towns be settled away from indigenous settlements. Historians suggest that the missionaries chose the area because the sycamore was one of the few trees of any significance in the vicinity that provided substantial outdoor shade from which to retreat from the heat. From the start, then, trees and the very real need for urban shade and shadow have been part of the city.

Nearly a hundred years later, the Aliso tree would fall to make way for the vineyards of Jean Louis Vignes, generally considered the man who brought grape vines and serious wine-making to California. In conjunction with many others, Vignes contributed to the wholesale planting over of the region with agricultural trees and other crops. The most prominent of these was the orange tree. Thousands of acres of orange and other citrus trees were planted, contributing not only to the early wealth of the region but also to the exotic, bountiful image of the fledgling city. Soon, the refrigerated railcar would allow the city's produce to reach across the entire country within a week.[6] But like Eve's apple, the orange was a fruit that set in motion an unstoppable process, a fall from grace. The need to water the economic base of the orange groves required radical interventions to bring water to the Los Angeles basin. In turn, the tax revenue agriculture brought in helped fund those projects. With the construction of the Owens Valley aqueduct, the area would be utterly transformed, satisfying the needs of agriculture, but also allowing for an ever-increasing population that eventually supplanted the agricultural order, bringing with it a diverse, immigrant, ornamental plant life. Thus, in contrast to a medieval village that carved out civilization from the wild nature of the forest, the urban forest of Los Angeles was entirely planted—a confluence of the desire to transform an empty landscape and to take advantage of the city's imported water. It is also during this period that Los Angeles realized the painful fact of its existence: the city would forever be destined to live beyond its means, irrigated by water from far away lands.

Landscape as image Planted for its looks, not for its produce, the palm tree replaced the orange tree in the city's landscape and its collective image. During this period, the ranchos created by the original Spanish land grants gave way to agricultural plots which, in turn, gave way to subdivisions. Large tracts of houses were laid out in grids not unlike the orchards of trees that they obliterated. Developed autonomously, incrementally, and with little master planning, these tracts generated the multiplicity of grids that now blanket the region's terrain.

In today's Los Angeles, both the original landscape and its agricultural successor have been virtually supplanted by alien, ornamental trees. In fact, nearly all the trees that we now identify with the area were imported. Of the twenty-three palms commonly found in the city today, only the California Fan Palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) is native. Palms from the world over were imported to emulate the exotic environments of Mediterranean cities, thematizing the city with historic allusions and supporting the city's original role as a resort town destination for over-heated, asthmatic Midwesterners. Palms evoked the space of salvation associated with an oasis: a thirst-quenching landscape, discovered after a long and harrowing journey and blessed with opulent palaces tucked in amongst lush, exuberant foliage. Trees in Los Angeles were used as props of seduction, fueling an image of the city as an exotic place. During the era of Valentino's Sheik, allusions to European traditions in Orientalism supported by a motif of neo-Egyptian civic architecture were enlisted in the palm-tree-fueled dreamscapes of travel brochures promoting the city as a mysterious but welcoming, sensual land. Films set on the streets of the city, such as Mack Sennett's *Keystone Cops* comedies made evident the temperate, verdant luxuriousness of the Los Angeles landscape and served as vivid propaganda for the city.[7] Events such as the annual Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena demonstrated the perpetual spring of Southern California at a time of year when the rest of the country was under snow. The palm, however, was not the only protagonist: many other alien species, particularly those from regions with sympathetic climates, invaded the southland and took root.[8] According to Sunset Magazine's *Western Garden Book* the most widely planted non-native tree was the eucalyptus tree, promoted by Abbott Kinney, the developer of Venice Beach. Seeking to beautify the state while simultaneously providing windbreaks, firewood, and shade, he led the "Eucalyptus Crusade" in which thousands of acres of the trees were cultured from Australia and obsessively planted throughout the state.[9]

Kinney understood that trees provided a foil against the relentless sameness of the Los Angeles grid. Lacking other "natural" features, developers actively deployed—and continue to deploy—trees to give presence, history, and a sense of luxury. The repetitive, geometric layout of palms along the newly formed streets helped give value to the platting and parceling of otherwise abstract, featureless land. Many streets today still memorialize the efforts of early developers who planted palm trees to attract potential buyers. Visible from a distance, the palm-lined streets symbolized the arrival of a new, upscale neighborhood, allowing visual navigation to the latest home sites. Many communities planted-over their streets with monocultures: Elm Street, Oak Street, Magnolia Avenue, Palm Street announce clearly what grows on them.

After people moved in, so did businesses, and trees and plants were again used to raise the value of commercial properties. The front doors of many businesses in Los Angeles are accessed through parking lots so the effective use of landscaping to provide relief from the acres of asphalt is important for business.[10] In a city built around cars, new forms of landscaping comprised of edging, hedging, containment, concealment, signage, embankment, topiary, and décor emerged simultaneously with the developing car culture. When the pedestrian space of the sidewalk disappeared amidst the spaces of strip malls and parking lots emerged between the street and the building, landscape again helped to soften the deleterious effects of the quickly erected, often bland commercial architecture. Particularly at fast food restaurants, new concepts of landscape were deployed exuberantly, often monstrously,

6 Kevin Starr, *California* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), 151.

7 Starr, *California*, 275.

8 E. Gregory McPherson, George Gonzalez, Greg Monfette, Ron Lorenzen, "Expanding Street Tree Canopy Cover and Repairing Sidewalks in the City of Los Angeles" *Western Arborist* (Fall 2003): 22. According to the article, "The most abundant species are Crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*, 8%), Mexican Fan Palm (*Washingtonia robusta*, 7%), American Sweetgum (*Liquidamber styraciflua*, 7%), Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*, 6%), Indian laurel fig (*Ficus microcarpa* 'Nitida,' 5%), camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*, 3%), and London plane (*Platanus acerifolia*, 3%)."

9 Kathleen Norris Brenzel, ed., *Sunset Western Garden Book* (Menlo Park, CA: Sunset Publishing Corporation, 2001), 337.

10 Million Trees Los Angeles, "Frequently Asked Questions." Studies show that commercial landscaping can increase sales as much as 12%.

to enhance the meal. Images of the pastoral suburban landscape of the Garden City, the exotic landscape of Eden, and the topiary gardens of France and Japan were marshaled to screen the growing proliferation of urban artifacts: trash cans, electrical transformers, water meters, building edges, air conditioning condensers, and the sidewalk or roadway itself. All of these objects disappear through carefully selected plantings, thus allowing patrons to enjoy an authentic indoor-outdoor eating experience a few feet away from their automobiles. At any drive-through of a fast food restaurant, a country road is evoked as drivers circle their way between the speaker and pick-up window amidst plants that beautify the wait for food with a pleasing, planted environment that has grown over the stains, graffiti, garbage, insects, and dust of the city.

Landscape as machine While the city may be in the process of abandoning the palm as its foremost icon, trees continue to be enlisted as supplements to urban life. Trees have been intricately intertwined with humanity for centuries as providers of shade, fruit, building materials, and firewood. But the relationship of humans and trees has hardly been equal: we have unceremoniously cut down our arboreal brethren to fuel a vast urban expansion. Recently, however, this relationship has become more symbiotic as we have come to an understanding of the importance of trees in the urban ecosystem. Taken in conjunction with plant life everywhere, trees collectively function like a giant machine—an enormous oxygen-producing and pollutant-filtering infrastructure for the city. Urban forests generate oxygen, absorb airborne and ground toxins, beautify, shade, create privacy, reduce water run-off into storm systems, stabilize soil to prevent erosion, mitigate reflected heat off roads and sidewalks, produce "curb appeal" thereby increasing real estate values, provide wind control, animal habitat, and a source of food and flowers.[11] A single mature tree can absorb carbon dioxide at a rate of 48 pounds/year and release enough oxygen back into the atmosphere to support two human beings.[12] In one year an acre of trees can absorb as much carbon as is produced by a car driven 8,700 miles, roughly the same number of miles that an average driver in California drives every year (according to this rough measure, 8,125 square miles, or an area twice the size of Los Angeles county—most of which is desert or mountains—would have to be forested to make up for the amount of carbon produced by the county's 5.2 million motor vehicles).

Trees play an important psychosocial role in the city. Trees are stand-ins for nature. Simultaneously evocative of the raw, dark power of forests and the generous perfection of the Garden of Eden, trees symbolize man's uncomfortable relationship to the natural world. But this is an inversion of the natural order. Wild nature, or what may be left of it, seems all but removed from collective experience. Instead our cities become dioramas, providing us with the safe experience of, and carefully pruned effects of, nature in episodic demonstrations and specimens.

Trees also mirror the life of an individual—we mimic their branch and root structures with our branching systems of knowledge. In myth, trees and forests typically serve as powerful foils. Bruno Bettelheim, in his analysis of the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, uses forests as a site of individual reckoning: "The forest, where [the Two Brothers] go to decide that they want to have a life of their own, symbolizes the place in which inner darkness is confronted and worked through; where uncertainty is resolved about who one is;

[11] Tree People, http://www.treepeople.org/.

[12] Mike McAliney, *Arguments for Land Conservation: Documentation and Information Sources for Land Resources Protection* (Sacramento, CA: Trust for Public Land, 1993)

Palm trees line a street in Beverly Hills

and where one begins to understand who one wants to be."[13] Individuals standing erect with their arms outstretched, more like humans than like our quadruped cousins (who in turn resemble bushes), trees remind us of ourselves. It is amongst the trees, analogues to individuals, that the sense of the wisdom of the ages and human continuity is gleaned. Even in the city, a typical street tree will outlive the inhabitants that come and go around it.

These are familiar uses of urban trees. If, however, trees in the city have traditionally been appreciated because they were useless—removed from their non-urban cousins, which exist to provide us with lumber and fuel—they are increasingly becoming machines, bits of living infrastructure. The fall of the palm—that vapid, high-maintenance Hollywood starlet—is tied to this idea of trees moving from being merely ornamental to more performative organic machines—walling us in, generating the air we breath, shading our cities. The rise of the performative tree can also be seen in the emergence of synthetic, mimetic trees—cell phone towers often known as "Frankenpines." Sprouting in our urban forest, these imposters produce new hybrid mechanic-organic systems, grafting onto natural systems and performing better than the original, all the while packaged in familiar, friendly shapes. Cell phone trees suggest that technology is itself natural.

[13] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Random House, 1975), 93.

With the Frankenpine thriving, it is possible to speculate on an urban future in which thousands of artificial trees might be deployed throughout the city: on streets, in malls, and in our office landscapes. In the next generation of office or mall equipment, we may see new tree-machines proliferating amongst this landscape—providing wireless communication, video monitoring, air filtration, security, and space for storage, digital or otherwise. One can imagine a whole forest of imitative, performative, and embedded artificial "trees" deployed amongst real trees or, for that matter, prosthetic systems that would augment living trees, providing necessary features that we otherwise would find disagreeable to look at, some of which may provide a solution for some of today's urban ills such as the reintroduction of animal habitats, methane gas venting, hazmat and security monitoring systems, and so on.

The new importance of trees in Los Angeles can be seen in how they are increasingly codified in local and regional laws. Against its rapid decline due to population expansion, significant steps have been taken to protect the native oak tree.[14] Fines of $10,000 have been assessed for cutting down specimens with trunks larger than eight inches in diameter. The law has generated a reversal of sorts from early modern paradigms and dictums for the making of architecture: "The PLAN fits the trees, not the trees fit the plan."[15] Communities such as Pasadena and districts such as the Mulholland corridor have protected their mature native trees through legislation. Increasingly, each year sees more lawsuits filed relating to trees and property rights. In all new housing developments the city requires one tree planted for every four units built. In commercial parking lots, there is a similar code that requires one tree for every four cars, in hopes of shading the pavement as "the net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day."[16] Because trees are, on the one hand, often entangled with the city's power lines and,

[14] 24. Los Angeles County Zoning Regulations. 22.56.2050 – Established Purpose: "The oak tree permit is established (a) to recognize oak trees as significant historical, aesthetic and ecological resources, and as one of the most picturesque trees in Los Angeles County, lending beauty and charm to the natural and man-made landscape, enhancing the value of property, and the character of the communities in which they exist; and (b) to create favorable conditions for the preservation and propagation of this unique, threatened plant heritage, particularly those trees which may be classified as heritage oak trees, for the benefit of current and future residents of Los Angeles County. It is the intent of the oak tree permit to maintain and enhance the general health, safety and welfare by assisting in counteracting air pollution and in minimizing soil erosion and other related environmental damage. The oak tree permit is also intended to preserve and enhance property values by conserving and adding to the distinctive and unique aesthetic character of many areas of Los Angeles County in which oak trees are indigenous. The stated objective of the oak tree permit is to preserve and maintain healthy oak trees in the development process. (Ord. 88-0157 § 1, 1988: Ord. 82-0168 § 2 (part), 1982.)" 22.56.2060 Damaging or removing oak trees prohibited—Permit requirements
"A. Except as otherwise provided in Section 22.56.2070, a person shall not cut, destroy, remove, relocate, inflict damage or encroach into a protected zone of any tree of the oak genus which is (a) 25 inches or more in circumference (eight inches in diameter) as measured four and one-half feet above mean natural grade; in the case of an oak with more than one trunk, whose combined circumference of any two trunks is at least 38 inches (12 inches in diameter) as measured four and one half feet above mean natural grade, on any lot or parcel of land within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County, or (b) any tree that has been provided as a replacement tree, pursuant to Section 22.56.2180, on any lot or parcel of land within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County, unless an oak tree permit is first obtained as provided by this Part 16.
B. 'Damage,' as used in this Part 16, includes any act causing or tending to cause injury to the root system or other parts of a tree, including, but not limited to, burning, application of toxic substances, operation of equipment or machinery, or by paving, changing the natural grade, trenching or excavating within the protected zone of an oak tree.
C. 'Protected zone,' as used in this Part 16, shall mean that area within the dripline of an oak tree and extending therefrom to a point at least five feet outside the dripline, or 15 feet from the trunks of a tree, whichever distance is greater. (Ord. 88-0157 § 2, 1988: Ord. 82-0168 § 2 (part), 1982.)"

[15] Los Angeles City Bureau of Street Services, Urban Forestry Division, "Oak Trees in Southern California, Can Urban Foresters and Arborists Stop the Bleeding?" http://www.lacity.org/boss/StreetTree/oaktrees.ppt.

[16] U. S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service. "Conservation Plant Identification —Trees and Shrubs" http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/plantid/woodies/.

Tree, after pruning

on the other, provide energy-saving benefits, the Department of Water and Power is responsible for maintaining the urban forest and has created a program whereby it will give people up to seven free shade trees to help raise the cooling effect over the city.[17]

The codification of trees and landscaping into legislation is a response to the contested nature of the landscape in Los Angeles, a "second nature" of legislation and conflict between individuals. Subjective views on landscape's functionality and aesthetics together with concerns about the landscape's impact on property values create arguments in communities. Neighbors sue each other to save a tree from being cut down. In 2004, citing concern that high hedges impede driver's views of pedestrians, the City of Santa Monica began enforcing a nearly forgotten sixty-year-old statute prohibiting hedges higher than forty-two inches. When the city announced it would fine violators at a rate of up to $25,000 a day, outrage ensued, provoking a great deal of discussion. Playwright and Santa Monica resident, David Mamet contributed an Op-Ed piece to the *Los Angeles Times* on the topic.[18] The issue came to a boil in an animated debate at a meeting of the city's council on May 10, 2005, in which the two sides battled it out, one side citing rats, the need for safety, and the "right to public viewing" of a resident's property, the other side proclaiming the "traditional, beautiful, historical, healthful" properties of these hedges and the need for privacy. Both sides cited the presence of drug use and thirteen registered sex offenders in Santa Monica in arguments for or against the offending hedges. The council largely backed away from stringent enforcement.

As space in Los Angeles becomes tighter and more segmented, trees and landscape have become more contentious. While Los Angeles begins its project for a million trees to beautify, shade, and help purify the city, and Santa Monica residents fight for the right to shroud themselves in landscape for their own privacy and sense of luxury, instances of violence toward trees have been documented. Because of the laws passed to keep individuals from cutting down trees, parallel ordinances have been enacted requiring the maintenance of trees to protect views. In towns such as Palos Verdes, neighbors can appeal to a ten-member, neighborhood "View Restoration Committee" to force the maintenance and thinning of another neighbor's trees if they block views of the ocean. In fits of vigilantism, view-deprived neighbors use escrow periods during home sales to prune, trim, or even cut down offending trees. In one instance, entertainment leader David Geffen was paid $700,000 in damages for the unauthorized cutting of eight pines and four eucalyptus trees on a property he was holding under escrow.[19] More dramatically, residents of a neighborhood in San Clemente, masquerading as CALTRANS workers, cut down or poisoned fifty eucalyptus trees that had grown into their views.[20] Trees have gained an enormous hold on the local, public imagination in California, generating more complaints than any other element in Los Angeles with the exception of traffic.[21]

[17] Los Angeles Department of Water and Power "Tree Planting Frequently Asked Questions."

[18] David Mamet, "Community Theatre: The High Drama of Tall Shrubbery," *Los Angeles Times*, May 08, 2005.

[19] Bob Pool, "Los Angeles; Covert Tree Trimming Prompts Suit," *Los Angeles Times*, November, 30, 2002, Home Edition, B3.

[20] Richard Marousi and Jack Leonard, "A Killer View? Tree Cutting Sprouts Suit," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1999, Orange County Edition,1.

[21] Julie Tamaki, "Many Tree Debates are routed in old age; Passionte battles grow from sidewalk-ripping. view blocking maturity of urban plantings" *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 2003, Home Edition, B1.

Tree pruned to accommodate power line

Los Angeles continues to be a laboratory for urban forestry and gardening, embracing efforts toward sustainability, energy production, and organic gardening as well as continued efforts to increase the public recreational character of the landscape with the creation of bike paths and horse neighborhoods. Experiments toward this end include Lauren Bon's 2005 "Not a Cornfield" project in which the artist planted and harvested corn on the site of a nine-acre brownfield that was once a railyard, making it temporarily the largest, if not the only, urban cornfield in the world.[22] In a nod to earth art, the project surreally juxtaposed large-scale monoculture agriculture with the towers of Downtown. Bon's work parallels efforts all over California to bring agriculture back to the cities as a viable alternative to earlier, unsustainable private pleasure gardens.

In their "Fallen Fruit" project, Silver Lake artists Matias Viegener, David Burns, and Austin Young map all of the fruit trees in their neighborhood. Based on the premise that according to Los Angeles law, fruit overhanging public property is available to all, the project sees the fruit as forming an urban Garden of Eden, capable of year-round sustenance and urging residents to seek out the free fruit.[23] Simultaneously a way to subvert the waste of agribusiness and the divisiveness of trespassing laws with simple strategies for community building, the maps provide a template for a new form of neighborhood ethics and generosity, asking those who download their maps to "take only what you need—say 'hi' to strangers—share your food—take a friend—go by foot."[24]

Los Angeles is the result of a unique interaction and engagement of city form and space with the organic landscape, intimately intertwined since the city's inception. As we hit the limit of available land parcels in Los Angeles, the city finds itself in a quandary. Developers continue to demolish the landscape of single-family houses to build apartment buildings. While the city may yet become hyper-vertical like Manhattan, can the transformation of Los Angeles occur on its own terms and in consideration of the tradition of the many experiments with the landscape, indoor-outdoor living, density itself, athleticism and play, and a new understanding of the productive capacity of landscape? The symbol of Los Angeles has indeed become its landscape—the organic infrastructure—and the city has flourished as has the art and architecture that has used it as an ingredient for exploration.

With the palm tree following the orange tree into the city's history of forgetting, it is again possible for the city to reshape itself through landscape, to look again at the city's trees and its urban forest. The need for a more sustainable environment will demand that the tree and the landscape of the city, in general, offset the diminished global capacity of nature to counteract the effects of globalized urbanism. But the Los Angeles landscape has many other capacities as well. Given a climate so sympathetic to year-round inhabitation of the outdoors, can a new Los Angeles blossom whereby architecture and landscape, inside and outside, become increasingly indistinguishable; in which country and city become less estranged with more of today's functions typically relegated to each, inverted; and the proliferating equipment of the city become more bio-mimetic and responsive to the needs of the city? As infrastructure, landscape has much potential. The dying palms have only provoked us to explore what those are. Down with the Palm! Long live the Palm!

[22] Not a Cornfield, http://www.notacornfield.com/.

[23] David Burns, Matias Viegener and Austin Young, *Fallen Fruit Project*, http://www.fallenfruit.org.

[24] Burns, et. al. *Fallen Fruit Project*.

Matias Viegener, David Burns, and Austin Young

Fallen Fruit Map of Silver Lake