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THE GREENEST PLAYGROUND

PLANTING LOS ANGELES, 1930*

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ABSTRACT: In 1930, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce published their commissioned study *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*, carried out by the landscape architects Olmsted Brothers Inc. and Harland Bartholomew. The document promoted the greening of the West Coast metropolis and the implementation of a parkway network. The non-white population and their homesteads were disregarded, although accessibility was advertised. The essay argues that by including Hollywood personnel on the founding committee, the planning was mostly concerned with creating scenic views that reenacted the movie fantasies, but built on the basis of the Native population's suppression and extermination. Moreover, the places of so-called civilization were included in the planning as tourist destinations.

KEYWORDS: Landscape Architecture – Los Angeles – Infrastructure

ABSTRACT: 1930 veröffentlichte die Handelskammer von Los Angeles ihre Studie *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*, die von den Landschaftsarchitekten Olmsted Brothers Inc. und Harland Bartholomew erstellt worden war. In der Studie wird die Begrünung der Westküstenmetropole durch die Implementierung eines Parknetzwerks vorgeschlagen. Die nichtweiße Bevölkerung und ihre Stadtteile wurden dabei außer Acht gelassen, obwohl allgemeine Zugänglichkeit beworben wurde. Der Essay argumentiert, dass die Planung mit der Einbeziehung von Hollywoodakteuren in das Gründungskomitee darauf abzielte, szenische Ansichten zu schaffen, die filmische Fantasien evozierten, aber auf der Grundlage von Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung gebaut wurden. Die Orte dieser sogenannten Zivilisation wurden zudem als touristische Ziele in die Planung miteinbezogen.

SCHLAGWÖRTER: Landschaftsarchitektur – Los Angeles – Infrastruktur

Introduction

When, on March 16, 1930 the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce presented the freshly printed document *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region* to the local press, one could get a glimpse into a highly detailed and thoughtful plan for the transformation of the Southern California metropolis into a green city, pervaded by park lanes and recreational space. On nearly two hundred pages, this plan unfolds with many functional and aesthetic overlays that wanted to provide the rapidly growing city of Los Angeles with a sustainable perspective for all its inhabitants for the following fifty years.

Even though the plan advertised its proposals with utter urgency, the media response remained open completely, apart from two short mentions in the *Los Angeles Examiner* and the *LA Times*.¹ Trade journals like *Pacific Municipalities*, *City Planning*, *American Civic Annual*, *The American City* did not show any signs of notice – which does not mean that the topic was not important or interesting at this point in time. In 1929, various articles on green city transformation were published in *City Planning*, and it is even more surprising, that in the first volume of the year 1931 a report in *City Plan-*

¹ Young 2001, p. 341, 342.

ning titled “Los Angeles County Regional Planning, 1923–1930” did not include the document.²

Nevertheless, it is not enough to claim that another theoretical city plan did not work out, as this document is far off from imagining another Californian utopia.³ This is underlined by the architectural historians Greg Hise and William Deverell, who republished the plan in 2000 with the University of California Press. In their opening essay, they explore the historic background of its emergence and its following failure in the eve of the Great Depression. “The vast hole, in which *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches* disappeared was so vast it did not even receive the dismissive sobriquet ‘utopian,’ a customary response to ambitious, large-scale plans.”⁴ Today, the dust is cleaned up and the included maps, photographs, tables, diagrams and calculations contain more than just two hundred pages of engineer’s prose. The landscape architects and planners Olmsted Brothers Inc. and Harland Bartholomew, commissioned by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, worked over three years on the comprehensive study, including the development, demography and climate effects in the Los Angeles Region. In *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches* they presented a proposal for the greening of the whole urban area with infrastructural connection to the surrounding mountains and beaches, which were endangered by the ongoing privatization of land following the booster years of California. The plan’s objective is a publicly owned park structure, payed for with tax money, that opens up recreational space for everyday use by foot and automobile and prevents the city of further catastrophes caused by floods in the valleys (fig. 1). The study includes more than 3,800 square kilometers, from the beaches of Malibu to the Long Beach harbor, from Palos Verdes to the newly protected areas of the San Gabriel Mountains. In eight chapters the inventory includes the region’s declared environmental needs, a financial plan and the main points *Playgrounds and Recreation Units, Public Beaches, Regional Athletic Fields, Mountains Canyons Deserts and Islands and Parkways and Related Large Parks*.

This essay wants to understand this plan as a ‘living document’ and argues, that these pictures of an imagined urban green landscape were functionalized for automobile infrastructures, urban segregation and neo-colonial politics as well as touristic

² Young 2001, p. 341, 342.

³ See also Hayden 1976.

⁴ Hise, Deverell 2000, p. 6.



Fig. 1: Olmsted and Bartholomew's Reservations (red) and Parkways (green) in the Los Angeles Region, 1930

economization. Since the population of Los Angeles rose to over two million between 1900 and 1920, the city expanded into the rural landscape unconceivably fast, catalyzed by land and development speculation. All this stood in an ambivalent relationship to the touristic self-marketing of California as a paradise lined by citrus groves, eucalyptus trees and old oaks in blooming gardens, embodying the flair of agriculture and Hollywood, glamorous, harmless and white-washed at the same time.

Planning the Scenic City

The Olmsted Brothers Firm was one of the most prominent landscape architecture and planning firms in the United States, working from their locations in Brookline, Massachusetts, and St. Louis. Until 1930 they worked on several sites in Southern California, including Burbank, Leimert Park, Pacific Palisades, Palos Verdes, Pasadena and Torrance; Bartholomew Associates designed a Masterplan for Glendale in 1926 and both firms cooperated for the *Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles* in the same year.⁵ For the Los Angeles project, they were officially commissioned by the newly established *Citizen's Committee on Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches* – actually, this *Citizen's Committee* was comprised of members of the Chamber of Commerce, the biggest of all Chambers in the United States, and therefore by definition the white industrial elite.⁶ Here, like the film-historian Mark Shiel pointed out, reform and reorganization of urban space went hand in hand with the attitudes of film stars and industrial executives who were active in the community.⁷ The entrepreneurial and civic elite who made up the 161-member Citizens' Committee included eight prominent film industry personnel: Cecil B. De Mille, Douglas Fairbanks, Samuel Goldwyn, Carl Laemmle, Sol Lesser, Fred Niblo, Mary Pickford and Joseph M. Schenck, as well as Bank of America president A. P. Giannini and the Hollywood realtor C. E. Toberman.

On October 28, 1926, the *Committee* invited the actress, producer and later member Mary Pickford for a lunch lecture to speak about the impact of greening the city.

When our visitors come from East or from Europe instead of going down to the city to come in, we always get them to get off in Pasadena. It is never downtown, always Pasadena, and I am wondering if it would not be possible when they are discussing the new station to bring it into an attractive part of the town, surrounded by a park with fountains. The

⁵ Hise, Deverell 2000, p. 22, 31.

⁶ Young 2001, S. 335.

⁷ Shiel 2012, p. 116.

first impression of Los Angeles would be a beautiful one and the last one something that they can carry away instead of going through packing houses. [...] It is very important. That is part of the staging of a city.⁸

To hear this remark from a highly successful woman who worked in film production for twenty years is not surprising. Ultimately, it would be the city's responsibility to operate the image and gain capital out of it. At the same time, Pickford also understood what it meant to come from the East to the West Coast, since she first did her work as a producer in a film studio in upstate New York. Her comment not only states the transformation of the city into a film backdrop, but opens up the term *scene* into the dimensions of movement. Not for nothing does *scenery* carry the dual meaning of landscape and backdrop. And in California, this *scenery* is particularly palimpsest-like, between the city's horizontal spreading and its vertical industrial growth, the historical depth of layered colonization and the contemporary segregation politics played out in the recreational field.

Since Olmsted and Bartholomew as well as the ordinances that governed Los Angeles city parks, playgrounds and other recreational areas like beaches and pools made no reference to race at all, it seems that people of color were initially integrated. Additionally, during the "Southernization" of the Los Angeles area during the 1920s and 1930s a large number of African and Latin Americans immigrated to the city. Their population quadrupled between 1920 and 1940.⁹ Despite restriction, they were allowed to buy houses and cars, vote and formally seemed untouched by the Jim Crow era that dominated most of the United States. That obviously promoted the immigration to California despite the reasons also white people wanted to go west: the claim to recreation and recreational space that stood at the core of the city's civic life and touristic identity. Combining the two, people of color and especially African Americans became even more of a 'threat' to white dominance on the west coast.¹⁰ The prospect of non-white land ownership, may it be private or commercial property, was not met by the county's government officials through segregation laws. The government could rely on the racist habitus most of its white citizens would embody.¹¹ It were projects like the Chamber of Commerce's *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches* that used the pretext of

⁸ Cited after Hise, Deverell 2000, p. 33.

⁹ Culver 2010, p. 425.

¹⁰ Culver 2010, p. 426.

¹¹ Culver 2010, p. 428.

‘public’ recreational space, knowing that people of color did not need to see signs or encounter the police to be reminded that they dared to enter a ‘public’ space, may that be a beach, a park or a playground.¹²

Green Infrastructures

Within *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches*, the parks and parkways take up the project in large parts. As Los Angeles already started to sprawl with housing and industrial developments in every direction, these developments not only needed to be connected by freeways, but the use of the automobile skyrocketed accordingly. Olmsted and Bartholomew described the city’s *status quo* as “monotonously urbanized territory” that was a waste of time to drive through even though that was mandatory.¹³ Instead, they wanted to produce an environment for *pleasure travel*, that interlinks the duty of driving with the joy of it.¹⁴ Commuting from one’s home to the workplace or after work for leisure was envisioned to be fun, because it took place in a parkway, which was a beautified greened freeway with separate functions for different kind of travelers (fig. 2). The relation of spaciousness and seclusion is mentioned as a central character of the parkway, which should provide a variety of scenic effects. “In order to provide for travel amid pleasant surroundings, parkways necessarily should be greatly elongated real *parks*,” the planners write in their first chapter of general considerations.¹⁵ “Except that they include roadways for automobile travel, they have almost nothing in common with ‘boulevards’ as that term is generally used in America.”¹⁶ And since locals *would* drive fifty to hundred miles on a “really pleasant” route, the planners argue, the suggested park system should be as large as possible.¹⁷ “The prove of the pudding is in the eating. The people are voluntarily spending millions of dollars every year for such recreation under conditions which are growing more and more imperfect and unsatisfactory.”¹⁸ To implement a park system would prove sustainable, present and future generations would enjoy the privilege of having a larger park only a few miles away

¹² Culver 2010, p. 428.

¹³ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 12.

¹⁴ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 13.

¹⁵ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 13 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁶ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 13.

¹⁷ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 13.

¹⁸ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 13.



Fig. 2: Exemplary Parkway, designed by Olmsted Brothers Inc. for the Palos Verdes–Hollywood Parkway, ca. 1927

from home – and enjoy the constructed landscape out the window or the rear mirror of their car.

With over 700 kilometers of parkways the park system of Olmsted and Bartholomew would have been about 288 square kilometers big. The largest park areas were planned on existing green sites: Griffith Park in the north, Elysian Park south of it and six parkways conclude in the area that today is Chino Hill State Park. New park areas would be found between Compton and Wilmington, next to Venice Beach, in the far north east near Pomona and Monrovia, the far west throughout the Santa Monica Mountains and the San Fernando Valley. The park system would have effectively quadrupled the size of existing green areas.¹⁹ Overall, the system was grouped chiefly along three main east and west routes and six north and south routes: *The Mountain Chain* was extending along the base of the San Gabriel Mountains and along the San Fernando Valley, *The Coast Chain* which followed the coast coming from west until El Segundo, then crosses land until Long Beach, and *The Hilltop Chain*, which was constructed to provide a middle route and a scenic view of the mountains, connecting so called points

¹⁹ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 32.

of interests.²⁰ The north and south routes all follow a way from the mountains to the beach, doubling as a drainage system for rain and flood periods. Where both crossed, larger parks formed.

Visual Pleasures

To the date of publication of *Parks Playgrounds and Beaches* three people owned two cars in Los Angeles on average and car based activities like camping trips and picnics were part of the recreational repertoire. The challenge to measure the city by its relation to cars was evident for Olmsted and Bartholomew and became the crux of the matter: The masterplan interlinks recreation in the mountains, beaches and park lanes with the constant use of cars – a dependence and a liberty.

The experience of other metropolitan areas in respect to their park systems points certain lessons, which are emphasized by analysis of conditions and trends that are specially marked in the Los Angeles Region and are specially associated with the motor-vehicle age as distinguished from the age in which the older metropolitan regions grew.²¹

The crowded traffic in the inner-city neighborhoods and the sprawled development around it was a mutually dependent system that Olmsted and Bartholomew wanted to improve, since crowded traffic became an issue in the downtown area.

The authors argued, that daily driving, to work, to run errands or for fun would not be limited by financial or temporal reasons, but by the infrastructural possibilities and scope of the Los Angeles freeway system. “Travelling on congested roads, through long, tedious stretches of unrefreshing, monotonously urbanized territory, is proving too great a waste of time [...]”²² The solution was not less driving, but building more roads to drive on instead. Since driving became a leisure activity, for those who could afford it, and therefore more than a means to an end, road trips gained popularity but the environment was not matching up. There were simply no long, well-developed roads to drive on, especially with a nice view. It was the planner’s goal to combine the functions of optimizing everyday routes and regional leisure travel with the additional demand of accessibility within a few miles from *every* home in Los Angeles.²³ Here the social aspect of accessibility is linked within the bigger picture of the privileged ‘need’ of join-

²⁰ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. x.

²¹ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 12.

²² Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 12.

²³ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 52.

ing into this newly found car culture and seen in context it provided as much ‘common’ voice as the Citizen’s Committee represented ‘the citizens’.

Olmsted and Bartholomew introduce the term *pleasure travel* at that point, which described a specific way of enjoyable driving that would be enabled in their parkway system. “[The system] should be so designed that, having reached any part of it, one may drive within the system for pleasure, and *with* pleasure [...]”²⁴

The planners continue:

The use of the roads involves four kinds of activities: first, driving along and enjoying views and events from the road; second, pausing in the car to enjoy points of special scenic interest; third, stopping to picnic or to enjoy other forms of isolated outdoor recreation near the car; and fourth, parking the car usually at some parking center and leaving it to go elsewhere by foot.

Ironically, three of the four functions mention activities that do not involve driving, but use the car otherwise as a medium to enjoy the view from a specific spot or use the space outside the car, which is only accessible through the car. Following, it does not surprise that the planners include various small spots in their parkway network that only serve this purpose, especially in the mountain area and the preserved natural habitats. This preference of the visual over the practical continues in the concept of hidden parking space in wide pits, where cars are automatically lowered to not disturb the environmental scenery.²⁵ The tension between the car as something so useful and convenient and at the same time disruptive is literally buried, out of sight. This concept is continued in the notion, that one way streets would not only be safer for drivers, but also more comfortable. “Two roads might cost more than one wider one [...], but two roads will give infinitely more enjoyment to the travelers whose chief reason is to find enjoyment.”²⁶ The fact that one-way construction is more expensive than the usual two to four-way freeway is counterbalanced by a lengthy description of how headlights can blind approaching cars and therefore lead to accidents and following catastrophes like bush fires.²⁷ After all these potential risks to the driver’s safety the planners focus on what they are most concerned with: the driver’s view. Small roads lead to a slower drive

²⁴ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 13 (emphasis in the original).

²⁵ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 88.

²⁶ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 88.

²⁷ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 88.



Fig. 3: Scenic views: Automobile travelling through the desert at the foot of a mountain range, California, s.d. (ca. 1930)

and, therefore, to a better view. The landscape in sight would not be changed, but the view is constructed and mediated through two layers: the parkway, which would be built in order to access these spots and the car, which provides a small screen to enjoy the landscape in a consumable format (fig. 3).

Olmsted and Bartholomew's plan opens up the view into an ever-changing landscape in front of the car screen. What they refer to as the "typical Southern California landscape," one of extremes, mountains and ocean, deserts and tropics²⁸, could be enjoyed from the privileged and safe position in a double seclusion, the car and the parkway, hiding the parts and history of the city that would prove bothersome. Also, the reality of crowded streets and other forms of transport and movement could be left outside. In the constant evocation of the pleasure of driving the planners create a stark contrast to the hectic situations on downtown streets. Their view from the road reveals the criteria they would use to organize the city, connecting topoi of true American, sublime landscape experience and their motorized and mediated picture in the everyday, all that on top of various layers of land use history.

²⁸ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 100, 101.

The specific kind of movement the driver experiences in the car is one of solitude, of encapsulation. The car becomes a bubble, where the human senses are arranged hierarchically with the visual on the top, followed by the acoustic and – with considerable distance – with touch, smell and taste. Sight and sound are the only stimuli that can reach into the car from the outside. Focused on the visual experience of landscapes, framed by the windscreen, driving oscillated between immersion and limitation.

Excavating Garden Cultures

Following Olmsted and Bartholomew's routes through Los Angeles, the driver would have come along several Spanish missions and their gardens. These spots are the places of "special interest" the planners mentioned before, as their detailed parkway register shows.²⁹ Here, the parkways strikes a new path into the history of green places in the Los Angeles region, they link these gardens to their parkway system, as they did with existing parks like Griffith or Elysian Park. Some Franciscan missions were already closed down and transformed into tourist attractions. But San Fernando Mission was the largest monastery they cross – and to the time, the mission was still active, practicing the colonial mixture of Spanish, Mexican and Native garden culture.

First planned as temporary architectures, missions became independent in the late 19th century as travel destinations for international guests. Before, the pueblos were meant to become permanent dwellings for Spanish settlements, whereas the mission buildings and connected military bases had the aim to colonialize, or in their terms, to "civilize" and convert the Natives. After completing this task, the missions would have been teared down, and the newly colonialized people could work for the Spanish settlement on various ranches.³⁰ So far, this was their theory, in practice the colonialized Natives powered the rapid growth of agriculture and settlements through forced labor. Same as the cattle and horses, they were serfs of the Spanish, during whose rule from 1769 to 1832 Native population decreased by half to approximately 57,000 people. They were exploited to work the soil, to plant vineyards and gardens, to trench water canals and drainage sinks. The mission's water infrastructure was later continued by the Anglo-American settlers and not only provided a supply basis for the mission gardens,

²⁹ Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 113.

³⁰ Streatfield 1994, p. 22.

but also for prospective parks and for what should evolve into Olmsted and Bartholomew's park system.

The romanticized, mythologized image of Spanish California, embodied in the missions, functioned particularly well, because there had been some promotional work done for the last forty years. The most read book in the United States by the end of the 19th century mixed colonial history with romance and drama to a very successful composition: Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, published in 1884, tells the fictional story of Scottish-native American orphan Ramona shortly after the Mexican American war 1848, who grows up on a ranch in Southern California and endures racist discrimination due to her mixed-race identity.³¹ The book was based on Jackson's protocols during her California travels, where she visited Native settlements as well as Spanish missions, which were not in a good shape at that point.³² Sent by *Century Magazine*, Jackson was originally asked to write a report on missions in Southern California. She extended her travel in company of regional developer Abbot Kinney and they collected material, which unfortunately was comprised of second-hand knowledge and folklore about Native American culture.³³ Her knowledge was not a researcher's one, rather comparable with a tourist – which should not mean that her interest was not genuine. Writing a romanticized account of the *status quo* was her way to elevate what she saw, still under the filtered view of a white middle class woman.

In 1887, her book's success peaked and countless people came to visit *Ramona Country*, heated debates were fought over the 'original' mission where Ramona was brought up, and even the Pacific Railroad built a new station at Camulos Ranch, where tourists could visit the 'original' Ramona bedroom.³⁴ Hardly anyone left California without buying a small replica of the bells that ought to have rang on Ramona's wedding. Jackson visited Camulos Ranch during her travels, which was administered by the San Fernando Mission since 1804. Often quoted, her description is a blue print to the original place and renamed *Mureno Ranch* by her.

The house was of adobe, low, with a wide veranda on the three sides of the inner court and a still broader one across the entire front, which looked to the south. [...] Between the ve-

³¹ Jackson 1884.

³² Streatfield 1994, p. 31.

³³ McWilliams 1973, p. 72.

³⁴ McWilliams 1973, p. 72.

randa and the river meadows, out on which it looked, all was garden, orange grove and almond orchards.³⁵

As many others, this ranch was a non-permanent structure that was altered several times and was not in its original state when Jackson visited the place in 1882. Adjustments continued and two more wings were attached to the main building, forming a U-type of floorplan.³⁶ The surrounded courtyard was filled with a garden, rectangular patches that picks up on the Islamic garden's classic form, which is placed in a similar setting, in the courtyards of mosques. Lined by cypresses, a water fountain marked the round plaza's center. This romantic picture of rancho life was completed by the overgrown verandas and porches, from which Santa Clara River could be seen.

Cocooned in blossom leaves and vines one could easily forget that the mentioned place hardly had anything in common with the original Spanish-Mexican missions and ranches. "It was, instead an example of a Spanish-Mexican house so thoroughly Americanized that all that remained to indicate its Mexican origins were its building materials."³⁷ Which was adobe. To the day of Ramona's publishing, this image was the general idea of what standardized adobe architecture would look like, even though these building types would only emerge in the last ten years of Spanish-Mexican rule in California: A hybrid of Anglo-American colonial revival architecture and traditional adobe technique, which was often quite literally a child of East Coast emigrants and Mexican women.³⁸ Similarly, the mission's luscious flower gardens hide their envisioned former purpose. Shrub roses, poppies, pepper trees, acacias and prickly pears were plants that were imported by the Spaniards to Mexico and from there to Southern California, where their life would be cut short by the Anglo-American settlers who saw them as decor, but not more. Even though the Anglo-Americans had not much appreciation for the Spanish-Mexican colonial culture, they accepted the existing gardens and filled them up with their incarnation of garden phantasies.

Plants on Film

Between palms and prickly pears, fictional histories were enshrined into the regional landscape. At the beginning of the 20th century, the myth of Ramona was a fixed

³⁵ Jackson 1884, p. 14-15.

³⁶ Streatfield 1994, p. 31.

³⁷ Streatfield 1994, p. 32f.

³⁸ Streatfield 1994, p. 33.

component of Southern California's self-characterization, a brand that stood for the vanishing Spanish-Mexican "Californio"-culture.³⁹ Tourism towards the locations which functioned as the blueprint of Ramona's story extended into film business as well. D. W. Griffith and his *Biograph Company* crew came along these picturesque Southern California landscapes during their travels along the west coast, which ought to become the perfect setting for several short films.⁴⁰ On May 23, 1910 they publish *Ramona*, a 16-minute silent film which was shot on Camulos Ranch and in the surrounding Ventura Country. On the ranch's famous veranda, a reunion takes place: There she is, Mary Pickford, starring as Ramona, side by side with Henry B. Walthall, who will be made into a star with Griffith's terribly racist *Birth of a Nation* five years later. In this film, a credit is not only given to the actress and actor, but for the first time ever, for the location: Camulos Ranch.⁴¹ This exemplifies, how significant the regional setting was for the retelling of a fictional story that has inscribed itself into the landscape long ago. In *Ramona*, East Coasters re-enacted Southern California's twisted semi-real, semi-fictional history in a romantic setting, that was not afraid of black-facing its white actress and actor, but wanted to criticize the Anglo-American rule by the end of the 19th century at the same time. And, in itself, *Ramona* tells the story of a woman's identity crisis during her realization of being non-white, but not Mexican or Spanish or native at the same time. Following this, she cannot find a place in society – geographically and socially – free from oppression and segregation. The film becomes a disparate, distorted picture of imagined and real history, a product of double translation that simplified, fetishized and awkwardly tried to appreciate the problematic colonial history of the place and people it wanted to, but did not represent.

What happens here, is not only the coincidence of imagined historical lifestyles and cultural as well as ethnical identities, but the multifunction of a place as existing landscape and filmic background. *Scenery* in its double meaning becomes a concept, specifically in California. Fictional images started to be materialized when more and more film production companies resettled to west coast shortly after Griffith's and developed into the business known today as Hollywood cinema.

The missions and ranches, that started to derelict when Jackson wrote *Ramona*, celebrate a resurrection in Griffith's film, eternal and intact, and were later included into

³⁹ Delyser 2003, p. 904.

⁴⁰ Delyser 2003, p. 900.

⁴¹ Delyser 2003, p. 887, 900.

Olmsted's and Bartholomew's parkway system as a touristic spot and leisure activity.⁴² I would argue, that this is what Pickford had thought about when she visited the Chamber of Commerce during the concept phase of *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches*. As quoted in the beginning, Pickford intended to promote an attractive city, tailored to tourists and investors that impressed when leaving the train station. Los Angeles should have been a green and lively souvenir picture, a memory that could be packed together with *Ramona* merchandise and a picnic basket into the trunk of a car.

The Greenest Playground

In the double interpretation of the term *scenery* as landscape and backdrop, an experience of nature is staged that can also be understood as cinematic – as long as the silent film remains the point of comparison. In the car capsule, the sensory impressions are reduced to the view forward and partially to the sides. Seeing takes the dominant role alongside the other senses. The city is conceived as an image surrounding the car, a green-tinted film of Los Angeles that takes place on the windshield.

As a comparatively younger city on the continent, Los Angeles has a widely ramified and not unproblematic history in dealing with the Native Americans and immigrants from all parts of the world – a history that Olmsted and Bartholomew had not taken into account. While California was a place that attracted people because of its mild, almost tropical climate and the discovered gold deposits, others tried to build up an existence on the undeveloped areas of the valley basin. In the end, this meant working on the citrus and flower plantations in the valley and being exploited by the Anglo-American settlement and government, which had paradisiacal gardens and great parks laid out in the immediate vicinity to make the promise of an Eden on earth come true. The Anglo-American and Spanish-Mexican gardening and agricultural cultures ran side by side and on top of each other like a palimpsest. Land use practices are exchanged and appropriated, which began between the Native Americans and the Spanish-Mexican settlers in a brutal way. In the missions of the Franciscan friars, cultivation techniques of Natives, colonized by them, were adopted and mixed with cattle and wheat farming imported from South America. About 80 percent of the Native population was wiped out by the mission's colonization system.

⁴² Olmsted, Bartholomew 1930, p. 112f.

After a short time, only a few mission plants remain, as they increasingly became touristic places where the “Spanish flavor”, as Mary Pickford called it, was still in the air.⁴³ The fantasies of ‘original’ places in California were catalyzed by tourism, which in turn was driven by the improved infrastructure. The planned parkways, which would link the park areas and nature reserves, act as a connecting element that would hold the city together despite its sprawling development and form the basis for a new kind of pleasure travel that allows views close to the window, but not beyond it. What was advertised as a new public space that did not yet exist in Los Angeles and would be the biggest and greenest playground the city could have dreamt of, became a project that dismissed the reality of its population’s largest parts and can be lined up in the history of colonial practices in the area. The planning was a child of his clients, the Chamber of Commerce, not his exporters, and it is reasonable to assume that an execution one hundred years ago would not have produced the results one imagines today when thinking of a ‘green’ Los Angeles.

This does not mean, however, that there are no contemporary connections to this planning. Time and again, organizations and chairs of urban research have used the plan as a basis for contemporary considerations. The Latino-lead project *The City Project* advocates for more green spaces in Los Angeles’ neighborhoods, where mainly people of color live – the one thing that Olmsted and Bartholomew had systematically neglected.⁴⁴ *Amigos De Los Rios* and *The Conservation Fund* are also committed to revitalizing the Los Angeles River and creating green spaces modelled on Olmsted.⁴⁵ As can be seen, the struggle for green space and a more democratic coexistence is far from over on the West Coast. Intersectional ecological perspectives could give this idea a new future and take from the planning what could be helpful.

⁴³ Cited after Hise, Deverell 2000, p. 33.

⁴⁴ <https://www.cityprojectca.org> (last accessed: June 17, 2020).

⁴⁵ <https://amigosdelosrios.org>; <https://www.conservationfund.org> (last accessed: June 17, 2020).

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