Photography

http://doi.org/10.15788/s2022.curio3

Touched Landscapes

Americans' changing perceptions and interactions with the West

Phoebe Celia Zea

School of Film and Photography, Montana State University

In 1854, the United States and Mexico finalized the Gadsden Purchase, in which the U.S. purchased a 29,670 square mile portion of Mexico which later became Arizona and New Mexico—today's "Southwest." Before and since then, the Southwest has undergone major changes in landscape, demographics of its population, culture, beliefs and land uses. Phoebe Zea's Touched Landscapes explores the multitudes of and reasons for such changes within this American region. The project also explores the people who reside within the Southwest, and their shifting beliefs about the land, as well as the ways in which they have in the past, and continue to, interact with and utilize the vast landscapes of Arizona and New Mexico. Touched Landscapes focuses on Southwesterners', as well as generalized Americans', sense of 'place' within the given landscape, and how interactions with various landscapes can affect our sense of belonging to the land. The photographs in this project seek to emphasize the uses of the landscape, the people within, and the diversity of cultures and narratives shared among the region.

Introduction

Touched Landscapes is a printed series of ten photographs, each capturing an aspect of human interactions with the landscape of the Southwest (Arizona and New Mexico). With Native inhabitants in New Mexico dating back more than 2,500 years, the purpose of the landscapes of the Southwest have shifted greatly, and will continue to do so over time. As Americans, we rely heavily upon a place within the landscape to create our identities. Often, shifts in culture, population, and changes in the land and its use affect our sense of home. Touched Landscapes shows the changes in culture and lifestyles throughout the Southwest, and how use of, connection to, and a feeling of place within landscapes has shifted over time.

I. Changes in Land Use in the Southwest

The photographs of Touched Landscapes capture many facets of life in the Southwest, including Puebloan life, ranching, the height of road-tripping America and Route 66, Catholic missionaries, as well as modern tourism. With each change in land use came new inhabitants, cultures, and most of all a change in the perception of the Southwestern landscape, and the way in which its people consider it their 'place'. Lucy Lippard, author of Lure of the Local: Senses of Place within a Multicentered Society, explains that landscapes are simply facets of land that are observed by a person. Along with landscapes are often used the terms "beautiful," "serene," and other words that have a face-value. However, Lippard considers a place as one that is lived-in, appreciated, and connected to. One's place can be considered the home and its surrounding region, and descriptions of such a place should include more depth and meaning. "Taos Apartments" (3) seeks to evoke an authentic, Native-style home feel. The pueblo-style apartments are in the heart of downtown Taos, New Mexico, the state's oldest inhabited town. Taos Pueblo dates back roughly 1,000 years, and is the oldest living Puebloan community in the United States (now a UNESCO Heritage Site). Today, the buildings captured in "Taos Apartments" sit directly behind a kitchen-ware shop and a café, feature a gravel parking lot and provide wireless internet and cable. While likely not a home to many, the motel captured in "A roadside swim" (5), shows another, very different, connection to the landscape –one based on tourism, and tied directly to the beauty of the surrounding land. The Quail Park Lodge in Kanab, UT is a highway-side retro-style motel that boasts its central location to large tourist

Photography

(1)
Summer Saguaros, Sonora Desert 2021

(2)
Painting the billboard, Bryce Canyon Village 2021

(3)
Taos Apartments, Taos 2021

(4)
Triplets, El Santuario de Chimayo 2021

(5)
A Roadside Swim, Kanab 2021

(6)
Teepees, Route 66 2021

(7)
Distant mountains, Jerome 2021

(8)
Salt flats, Bonneville 2021

Photography

(7)
Peaks, Springdale 2021

(8)
Window shop, Taos 2021

attractions like the Grand Canyon, Lake Powell, and Bryce Canyon. Although no one considers the motel home, motels like the Quail Park Lodge must provide travelers a homelike feel through their familiar decor and emphasis on famous landscapes nearby, and have the ability to utilize the scenery as a way to garner more businesses than the chain motel directly across the street.

"Teepees," which was captured in New Mexico along the old Route 66 (now formally Interstate 40), depicts two teepees at a roadside tourist "trap." Not pictured are a nearby geodesic dome, laden with Native paintings, and an abandoned souvenir shop and parking lot. Route 66 served for years as America's most famous highway, taking drivers from Chicago, IL to Santa Monica, CA. Pit-stop destinations, such as those depicted in "Teepees" (6) evoke for many a time of family road trips, and a simpler, better America. The route took travelers through Native American reservations, major cities, and miles upon miles of deserted landscapes. This photo, despite the rugged beauty of the teepees and the terrain, depicts one of millions of landscapes scattered throughout the Southwest. Few, if any, would consider this roadside attraction their place — no home was ever built here, and the connection to the landscape likely ended for most at the cash register. Early in Alexander Wilson's book The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the EXXON Valdez, he notes that it is common for Americans' relationships with nature and the landscape to be largely those of greed and domination. For decades, Americans felt it within their rights to harness the environment and alter it to cater to the needs of humans and societies. This mindset brought with it fossil-fuel emitting factories, roads cutting straight through magnificent landscapes, and the culling of herds of wild animals. Although outlooks on society's interactions with the land have changed over the years, roadside attractions like those pictured in "Teepees" demonstrate the lasting effect souvenir-tourism has had on the landscape.

Throughout the Southwest, it is apparent that there is tremendous effort to either refurbish old buildings, such as adobe homes like those depicted in "Taos Apartments", or build new structures that are based off of older buildings like the pueblos. In Wilson's book he examines the "back-to-the-land" movement of the 1960s. During this period, there was a large movement of natural-landscape tourism, which coincided closely with the boom of "road-tripping America". Along with this came the naturalization of the suburban landscape and a move to correlate it with the region's natural environment. Such trends are evidence of a growing inclination to feel at-home within one's landscape, as we see occurring within "Taos Apartments" and "Window Shop." This trend is seen commonly throughout the Southwest, with pueblo and mission -style buildings scattered throughout the region. Such buildings are extremely supportive of the inhabitant's connection and immersion with the landscape. Buildings based upon Native homes are proven to be more conducive to both comfort within hot climates like the Southwest's, as well as the protection of the environment (reduced energy use with natural cooling-systems, less water usage with planting of native fauna, etc.). Basing architecture and dwellings off of the natural landscape allows Southwesterners to feel more in-tune with the land, and provides an outlet in which they can consider their home a 'place', rather than just a landscape.

Crafted to cater to tourists seeking the Route 66-experience, the motel in "A roadside swim" promotes its retro, classic Route 66 décor, its view of the Vermilion Cliffs in the background, and its refreshing swimming pool. Similarly, "Painting the billboard" (2) captures a local Native artist painting a billboard that mostly tourists will view as they enter Bryce Canyon National Park. The photographs epitomize the lure of Route 66 to the millions of Americans and tourists who embarked on drives on the cross-country highway, and the adaptations such road-side attractions have had to make to stay afloat through the decades. The motel's pool, found conveniently in the middle of the parking lot, caters to the trend Wilson refers to as "casual outdoor living," found almost exclusively in California and the Southwest. While many travelers likely considered the Quail Park Lodge home for only a few nights, the pool, its lounge chairs, and the encompassing palm trees provided a place to sit down, relax, and cool off in the midst of the Southern Utah heat. The boom of Americans road-tripping following the expansion of the American cross-country highway system and post-war economic boom, and the subsequent motels, diners, and souvenir shops along highways are part of what Wilson considers a consequence of the privatization of travel, something he says falls strongly in line with the American psyche of individualism. Suburban America packed up their suitcases and station-wagons in the 1950s and 1960s to travel along miles of highways, confined to a private vehicle with only family-members and friends, passing-by thousands of other Americans en-route to

the same destination. Along the way, the landscapes surrounding large by-ways, such as Route 66, were forced, however willingly, to cater to such travelers.

II. Culture and Identity in the Southwest

From Native settlements to ranches, and national parks, the Southwestern culture has been and remains diverse, as do its people. While the Puebloan people of the Southwest were the first to inhabit the region and were known as peaceful farmers, basket makers, and potters, colonialism brought with it Hispanic influence from South America and Europe, and the frontier cowboy depiction of the region following the building of railroads brought American-patriotism and individuality. More recently, the melding of American cultures has brought people from other regions of the country to the Southwest, as well as foreigners. While many facets of 'classic' Southwestern culture have remained, including a focus on Native-style art, Hispanic-American cuisine, and an appreciation of the cowboy lifestyle, influences from other cultures are extremely present today. Simultaneously, people inhabiting the region have had to adapt their identities to fit within such a diverse and unique culture, and to continue feeling able to call the region their 'place'.

Taos Pueblo serves as the only remaining, living Native American community that is designated as both a National Historic Landmark and a World Heritage Site. Continuously inhabited for over 1,000 years, the pueblo reminds its inhabitants and visitors of the history of the region, and is a living example of the Puebloan culture of the Southwest. Adobe buildings, like the Taos Pueblo, were necessary for comfort and habitability before there were advanced technologies like air conditioning and glass-sealed windows. The adobe, a mix of sand, clay, water, and straw provides an extremely durable structure that keeps out heat amidst the blazing temperatures of the Southwest. For many, such as the inhabitants of the apartments depicted in "Taos Apartments," the culture of the Puebloan people is critical to modern identity in the region. Despite today's surrounding roads, highways, smart phones and souvenir shops, the Native and traditional culture of the Southwest works to connect modern inhabitants to the landscape. Pueblos sit among majestic red rocks, deserts and mountains that have deep spiritual and personal meaning to its people. As Lucy Lippard writes in Lure of the Local, the event of landscapes becoming 'place' is often caused by a spiritual connection to the land. This can be through stories and myths associated with natural objects, like the mountains, valleys, and rivers, and through art drawn upon the landscape –a common practice of the Southwest's Puebloans. Such personal touches connected the Puebloans greatly to the land, and continues to do so today, with Native practices and architecture spanning centuries and influencing the culture of the modern Southwest.

In 1816, the Roman Catholic church of El Santuario de Chimayo was built in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Chimayo, New Mexico. Today, the Catholic pilgrimage site attracts over 300,000 visitors per year. While the area surrounding Chimayo was inhabited by Pueblo Indians since the 12th century, the Spanish conquest of New Mexico brought with it Spanish culture –one tightly intertwined with Catholicism. "Triplets" (4) captures a very small portion of the wall of the church, emphasizing its beautiful symmetry and formality, while also catching a moment of magic within the landscape through the shadows falling on the adobe. In Lippard's book, she speaks about the need for one to establish a connection in the community for a landscape to become 'place'. Lippard notes that even while many do not have strong beliefs in a god, Americans tend to "assert that they have been closer to 'it' in 'nature' than not," (Lippard 16). However, Lippard notes that even while Native cultures, like the Puebloans, cite strong interconnectedness to Earth and the landscape, humans continue to be capable of "the ridiculous," while nature serves as the "sublime," (Lippard 16). So, while Catholicism uprooted the culture of the Pueblo Indians, landmarks like El Santuario de Chimayo brought to the Southwest a vast community through the church, and added a layer of culture to the region. Today, the Southwest is abounding with Catholic churches and a strong Hispanic population. This mixing of cultures has partly confused the identities of Southwesterners, while also providing a new definition of 'place' within the region and landscape. While there remains a strong sense of Native cultures and traditions, Spaniards' conquest added into the mix new religious doctrines and culture. Today, much of Southwestern culture is a mix of the two. Lippard connects this new sense of place with what is actually a sense of displacement. Often, a sense of place is rooted in residing there, or celebrating the culture, involuntarily, serially, and is often based on a connectedness to "cultures not our own" (Lippard 33). On one hand, there is the long-standing culture of the Native population, strong in their religions and

traditions. The subsequent conquest of the Spanish brought a new culture that today has mixed with the traditions of the land to create a unique Southwestern culture that may appeal to a more diverse population and give a larger group of Southwesterners the ability to call the landscape their place.

When the Union purchased the areas of Arizona and New Mexico, a new sense of freedom and exploration came along, too. The late 1800s saw the birth of the 'Wild West' era, and the newly purchased land and its new railroad systems gave the perfect opportunity for ranching, outlaw culture and homesteading. The frontier ideal remains today, often involving stereotypes of cowboys, Native Americans, burglars, trains, cactus and saloon towns in the midst of the Southwestern landscape. This era captivated Americans –manifest destiny followed the American psyche of opportunity and individuality. "Summer Saguaros" (1) and "Distant mountains" (7) seek to evoke the vastness of the Southwestern frontier –perhaps the most untouched region of the country remaining. As Americans seek their sense of self and place in the country, the traits of the 'Wild West' often come into play. As the Smithsonian's 1991 "The West as America" exhibit curator, William Truettner, pointed out: "The American's sense of self is indebted to the expansionist impulse that has to rest in the 'Wild West"'. As Lippard notes, photography has long been the art form to dominate the West, able to capture with precision its vast valleys and lure Easterners to its open land. For many Americans who inhabit the West, family and emotional ties to farming and ranching are close at hand. The culture surrounding the West is no less loved by Americans, either. In his book Nature's Metropolis, author William Cronon notes the stereotyped differences in morality between inhabitants of the "country" (or West) and "city" (East). "The urban market concentrated hinterland trade, even the supply and demand for sin," he writes. "Almost always, they [rural publications] made a sentimental appeal to the virtues of rural life… 'All will admit that the country is the natural abode of man,'" William quotes from a Missouri correspondent. The West often affiliates itself with the culture of congeniality, simultaneously holding up traditions of outlaw culture, uninhibited freedoms, and cowboy culture.

Today, the Southwest remains a glaring example of the mixing of cultures, traditions, and religions. While many would consider the region their 'place' within America, the reasoning behind each is likely to be vastly different. To find a sense of place is a deeper connection than simply observing the landscape and registering an emotional response. Finding 'place' involves developing a personal connection to the landscape. The cultures and traditions of the people of the Southwest have inevitably influenced the contemporary culture and interaction with the landscape. Lippard goes on to explain that "What was here is inseparable from what is here: it must all be considered together, without recourse to nostalgia or amnesia," (Lippard 116). It is through art, such as Touched Landscapes, that one can begin to learn of the many cultures and uses of the landscape, and establish a home there. Touched Landscapes depicts places within the Southwest that locals call home, attend religious services, and develop identities within the frontier lifestyle that has lasted generations in America.

III. Photography and its Narrative on the land

Film photographs, such as those in Touched Landscapes, play a critical role in narrative telling, establishing 'place', and assigning personal value on the landscape. While over time, definitions of the landscape and its regions change due to personal experiences and acculturation, photographs provide the ability to harness local narratives and convey personal valuation of the landscape. While the photographer themself has the ability to impart their experience of the landscape onto the viewer with each image, it remains up to the viewer to utilize their own experiences, beliefs, and biases when deciphering the meaning and story behind an image. A visual art piece can only convey so much through capturing a moment in time and space. The deeper meaning associated with photographs must be grounded within the photograph by the artist and understood and interpreted by the audience. Analog, or film, photography further deepens each photograph through its physical preservation of the scene, and its ties to the historical past. Through photography of the Southwest, multitudes of stories about the land, cultures, its people and their identities can be told.

When the Puebloans were the sole inhabitants of the Southwest, their language contained words for the land and its parts –valleys, rivers, and places of historical and spiritual events. As conquistadors and European Americans began to invade the land, however, new terms and names emerged for the landscape that tended to do little with intimacy with the location, but more often served as frivolous names for reference purposes. In Barry Lopez's introduction to

Home Ground: A Guide to the American Landscape, he explains that "The Deni'ina words…had grown up over many centuries, out of the natural convergence of human culture with a particular place," while "the English words on them [maps] were arbitrarily chosen, little more than points of orientation," (Lopez XV). It is the purpose of Home Ground to provide more meaningful words for the places found throughout the Southwest. To be able to apply narratives to the landscape, and subsequently become more connected to a landscape and assert it as one's 'place,' the words and ways in which we describe the land must be more intuitive. Lopez explains that "If we could speak more accurately, more evocatively, more familiarly about the physical places we occupy, perhaps we could speak more penetratively, more insightfully, more compassionately…" (Lopez XVII). Nearly every word in Home Ground that is applicable to the Southwest has been given in Spanish, or in the common Native language. As Lippard explains, the European or colonist renaming of place also provides with it a sense of ownership. "Imperialism favors names that remind people of power and poverty, but the need to familiarize a harsh and unknown landscape must also have played a part in the days of early European exploration and settlement of this continent," (Lippard 47). While European Americans have given names like "Bryce" to the vast expanse of today's national park, Lopez and his fellow contributors provide the word "pösövi" for canyon. More technically, the native Paiute name for the land of Bryce is "Unka-timpe-wa-wince-pock-ich," which translates to "red rocks standing like men in a bowl-shaped recess,". Behind these names are extraordinarily-detailed Native creation stories from the land's many tribes, many of which take place in landscapes like those European Americans have come to recognize as unique. If modern Southwesterners were able to better describe the land they inhabit, they would be able to create a deeper connection to, and better assign their narratives, upon the landscapes.

Just as we require more evocative and insightful words to describe the landscape, better must we be able to read and understand photographs, too. While each photograph in Touched Landscapes has personal meaning, they tie together as a series to elicit the magic of the Southwestern landscape, to make a statement on the changing interactions with the landscape, and to comment on how we establish identity within the land. Photographs have the great ability to tell masses the story of just a few, and in the Southwest the Native populations continue their struggle to be heard. Hopi photographer Victor Masayesva said that photography can be seen as "ceremony, as ritual, something that sustains, enriches, and adds to our spiritual well-being." His film Hopiit is the first portrait of the Hopiland, and hopefully gives Westerners a view "from the inside, as a place, not as a sight or a site," (Lippard 74). In an effort similar to Hopiit, the photographs of Touched Landscapes show the places of people throughout the Southwest. "Triplets" is a small piece of what is a major site of pilgrimage for Catholics in the region, "A roadside swim" captures one of many destinations so vital to the Kanab community, "Distant mountains" depicts the vast, untouched frontier of the landscape, and "Taos Apartments" –the literal homes of those who claim the Southwest to be their place.

Often, the diversity of places and landscape in America overwhelm us –thus the American tendency to consider ourselves "placeless". Americans move more than any other ethnicity, and seems to be one cause for our lack of strong community. We often face paralyzing degrees of "multicenteredness," as we migrate from region to region, bringing with us and leaving behind facets of culture along the way. Through the landscape and its photography come countless ways of viewing and interpreting the land. "Otherness and familiarity are reinforced by impressions of landscape," says Lippard. "Part of the yearning for a homeland left behind is a sense of space and place that differs from the hybrid one that has come to be seen as generically 'American,'" (Lippard 61). Touched Landscapes provides a glimpse into just a few ways the multicultural landscape of the Southwest has been utilized by the people inhabiting the region, and the ways they connect and interact with the land, giving them the ability to call it a place.

Conclusion

Through the ten printed photos of Touched Landscapes the progress of culture and interaction with the Southwestern landscape is depicted. While use of the land over time has shifted from Pueblo communities to Catholic missionaries, ranching and homesteading, and to the tourism of today, so has the identity of those who call the landscape home. While Americans tend to feel placeless due to loosely-bonded communities, frequent moving, the diversity of culture at hand, and the individuality of the American psyche, landscapes have the ability to connect people and tie them spiritually, culturally, and morally to the land. Touched Landscapes provides a look into the shift

between considering a location a landscape to calling it one's place through capturing Pueblo homes, Catholic churches, roadside attractions and the frontier landscape.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program, TRiO, and the U.S. Department of Education for funding and guiding my research; Alexis Pike for mentoring me in the art of photography; David Shannon-Lier for recommending photograph locations throughout the Southwest, and the School of Film and Photography Photo-Checkout for working all summer to allow me to utilize the fantastic darkroom facilities on-campus.

References

Cronon, William. "Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West," W.W. Norton & Company. 1991.

Lippard, Lucy. "The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society," New Press. 1998.

Lopez, Barry and Gwartney, Debra. "Home Ground: a guide to the American landscape," Trinity University Press. 2013.

Williams, Raymond. "The Country and the City," Chatto and Windus & Spokesman Books. 1973.
Wilson, Alexander. "The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the EXXON Valdez," Between the Lines (CA). 1991.

Phoebe Zea is a junior at Montana State University studying Photography and pursuing a minor in Native American Studies. Phoebe has worked for the MSU Exponent for three years as a writer, desk editor and now, managing editor. Phoebe was accepted into the McNair Scholars Program in Spring of 2021 and has been working on "Touched Landscapes" for about a year under the federal program. Born and raised in San Francisco, California, Phoebe moved to Bozeman to take part in the unique undergraduate fine art photography program and experience the Montana outdoors. When Phoebe isn't photographing, she can be found taking her corgi, Butters, for a hike, reading in Cooper Park, or soaking up the sun at Hyalite Reservoir. Phoebe hopes to continue her work post-grad in law school, working on intellectual and copyright law.