

Reshaping Robert Adams' Landscape

Reajustando el paisaje de Robert Adams

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Abstract / Resumen

The purpose of this research is to explore the search for a preservation of Robert Adams' transforming landscapes of the American West of the 1960s, through the relationship between his photography and the pessimistic discourse originated in the metropolises' disurbanization following the cold war and the nuclear menace. Adams chose not to photograph the natural beauty of Colorado but to document, without irony, the transformation of that landscape by human activity. We will explore Adams' idea of order behind the chaos and how the author understands how these apparent non-spaces are transformed into a new architecture by means of man's intervention, unveiling the potential of the connections between the original landscape and the intruder. The work by Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Ed Ruscha, Robert Venturi and Edward Dimendberg will help understand Adams' position in the artistic discourse of the 60s.

El propósito del presente artículo radica en la exploración de la búsqueda que realiza el fotógrafo norteamericano Robert Adams de la preservación de los paisajes en transformación del oeste americano en la década de los años 60. Dicha búsqueda tiene lugar en la relación entre su fotografía y el discurso pesimista originado por la desurbanización de las ciudades que sigue a la guerra fría y a la amenaza nuclear de esos años. Adams no escogió la fotografía de la belleza natural del estado de Colorado sino la documentación carente de ironía de un paisaje en transformación por la actividad del hombre. Podremos explorar la noción de orden tras el caos subyacente en el trabajo de Adams así como la visión del autor sobre cómo estos aparentes no-espacios son transformados en una nueva arquitectura mediante la intervención del hombre, desvelando de este modo el potencial de las conexiones entre el paisaje oriinal y el nuevo intruso. Los trabajos de Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Ed Ruscha, Robert Venturi y Edward Dimendberg serán de utilidad para adentrarnos en la posición de Adams en el discurso artístico de los años sesenta.

Keywords / Palabras clave

Disurbanization, landscape transformation, landscape rediscovery, non-spaces' reshaping, order behind chaos.

Desurbanización, transformación del paisaje, redescubrimiento del paisaje, readaptación de no-espacios, orden tras el caos.

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[Fig. 1] Robert Adams: *Frame for a Tract House, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1969*. Gelatin-silver print, 6" x 5-7/8".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *What We Bought: The New World*, Spectrum, 1995.

"By Interstate 70: a dog skeleton, a vacuum cleaner, TV dinners, a doll, a pie, rolls of carpet... Later, next to the South Platte River: algae, broken concrete, jet contrails, the smell of crude oil... the form that underlies this apparent chaos".

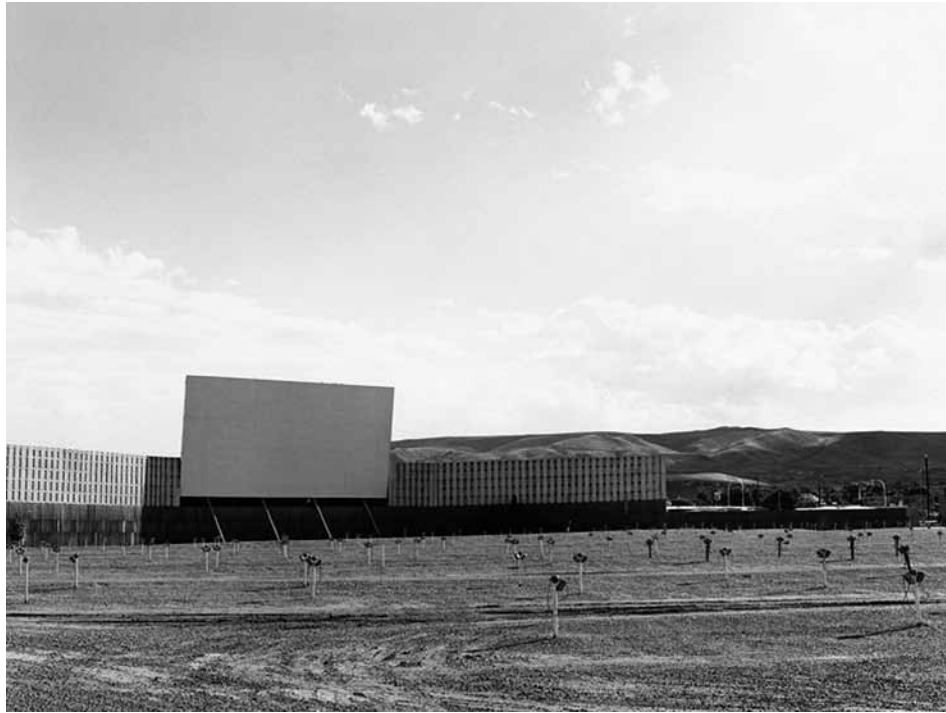
Introduction: Beauty and Form

Robert Adams' negative vision on the unpreserved American landscape can be analyzed closely through an important inflection point in the evolution of his work in connection with the images of the American Depression taken by author Dorothea Lange. The purpose of this research is to explore the search for a preservation of Adams' transforming landscape of the American West of the 1960s, through the relationship between his photography and the pessimistic discourse originated in the metropolises' *disurbanization* following the cold war and the nuclear menace.

Adams chose not to photograph the natural beauty of Colorado but to document, without irony, the transformation of that landscape by human activity. We will explore Adams' search of order behind chaos and his understanding of how these apparent non-spaces are transformed into a new architecture by means of man's intervention, unveiling the potential of the connections between the original landscape and the intruder. The work by Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Ed Ruscha, Robert Venturi and Edward Dimendberg will help understand Adams' position in the artistic discourse of the 60s [Fig. 1].

Adams' work can be considered essentially dialectical; it shows a permanent struggle between the vast emptiness of the natural landscape and the lurking threat of civilization, which behaves as an occupant that has no apparent rules in imposing its presence. The fear to the unavoidable is represented through the elements that, although at first external to nature and almost anecdotic, become an intrinsic part of it, giving way to a new architectural landscape full of contradictions.

This discourse takes place in a context of significant social transformation and cultural shift, and Adams tries to objectively (as Ruscha does in his images) use his



[Fig. 2] Robert Adams: *Colorado*, 1968-74.
Gelatin-silver print, 6" x 7-3/4".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *What We Bought: The New World*, Spectrum, 1995.

photography as a particular media with which to reshape the new spatial order that emerges after the economic boom that follows World War II. There is a significance in his work through an experiential perception: with a graphic description of all the singular elements that the photographer presents in his images, a visual media is used to show the photographer's experience towards the new spaces that are generated with the postwar decentricity. In this way the resulting nature, a combination of the virgin landscape and the expanding city, has to be understood in a different way to be accepted and preserved as a new order [Fig. 2].

His photographs focus in a sequence of details and anecdotes that form the implicit architecture of his photographs. His pictures should not be contemplated in an isolated way, but as part of a larger group of images that provides us with a new understanding of the original landscape. Like Marville's or Annan's pictures in the mid 18th century, the experience is conveyed when the work is read as a whole¹.

The vision of the landscape that characterizes Adams' work conveys an idea of destruction and fear to the expanding colonization through images that, albeit apparently mild, actually expresses a cruel isolation that indicates an irreversible concern. His work is a continuous declaration of principles with which he opposes the gradual destruction of the American territory, advocating the preservation of the original landscape. By elevating the American landscape to the degree of high art he tries to comprehend what lies beneath the merely vernacular to create a new icon and understand a new spatial order that facilitates a new consciousness.

If the proper goal of every art is, as Adams believes, Beauty, the Beauty that concerns him is that of Form. Beauty is for Adams a synonym for the coherence and structure underlying life. "Beauty is the overriding demonstration of pattern that one observes, for example, in the plays of Sophocles and Shakespeare, the fiction of Joyce, the films of Ozu, the paintings of Cézanne and Matisse and Hopper, and the photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan, Edward Weston, and Dorothea Lange"². Why is Form beautiful? Adams believes that it helps us meet our worst fear, the suspicion that life may be chaos and that therefore our suffering happens without meaning. "If the goal of art is Beauty and if we assume that the goal is sometimes reached, even if always imperfectly, how do we judge art? Basically by whether it reveals to us an important Form that we ourselves have experienced but to which we have paid no adequate attention. Successful art re-discovers Beauty for us"³. A

¹ See Blau, Eve. "Patterns of Fact: Photography and the Transformation of the Early Industrial City", in *Architecture and its Image*, CCA/MIT, Montreal, 1989, pp. 36-57.

² Adams, Robert. *Beauty in Photography*, Aperture, New York, 1981.

³ Ibidem.

[Fig. 3] Edward Weston: *Jean Charlot and Wife*, 1933.



new understanding of the concept of Form can then implicitly bring a new solution for the acceptance of a new order that was only discordant before. The exploration of Form will always be present in Adams' work, and the American landscape's proper beauty preservation is Adams' final declaration.

The Lost Protection

One of the locations where Robert Adams spent most of his career is the plateau northwest from Denver, between the city and the mountains, changed over the years: under smog, the foothills have been built with houses and an expressway crosses part of the area. "Though not many landscapes are at once as beautiful and as damaged as this one, most are, as we have invaded them, similarly discordant"⁴. Adams envied 19th century photographers because they had not yet suffered these disorders in nature. They could photograph virginal landscapes unaltered by man. Photographers like Tim O'Sullivan or non-related Ansel Adams showed these pure landscapes that affected Robert Adams so much [Fig. 3].

In Adams' photographic language it is possible to find a feeling of lurking danger, and prior to that, a sense of security that tends to vanish at some point. This feeling of lost safety was represented years before in Edward Weston's exquisite *Jean Charlot and Wife* (1933). Adams' pictures' uneasiness connects with Weston's photograph. Adams says on him: "As a practical matter, it seems to me that the biographer of an artist ought to [...] assume that art begins in unhappiness, or maybe dissatisfaction, or a search for something missing. The goal of art is to convey a vision of coherence and peace, but the effort to develop that vision starts in the more common experiences of confusion and pain"⁵. The image of the couple's embrace, showing Charlot's blue expression while hiding it from his wife's sight, reflects at the same time a sense of safety and a sense of precariousness and fragility that will eventually give way to a new order.

But it is with Dorothea Lange's photographs with which we can establish a strong connection to Adams' vision of the landscape. Lange had a strong influence on Adams' photographic vision. She showed the multiple expressions of the depression in the early 30s through the pictures of people that were severely affected by the social and economic decay, whose vulnerability had been overexposed⁶. In the same way that Lange shows the precariousness of life in the midst of the

⁴ Adams, Robert. *Two Landscapes*, talk given at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989, published in *The Ohio review* in 1992.

⁵ Adams, Robert. "The Achievement of Edward Weston: The Biography I'd Like to Read", in *EW 100: Centennial Essays in Honor of Edward Weston*, edited by Peter C. Bunnell and David Feathersome, published by the Friends of Photography in 1986.

⁶ Szarkowski, John. *Looking at photographs; 100 pictures from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, MoMA, New York, 1973.



[Fig. 4] Robert Adams: *Denver, Colorado*, 1981. Gelatin-silver print, 6-5/8" x 6-5/8".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *Our Lives, Our Children: Photographs Taken Near the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant*, Aperture, New York, 1984.

[Fig. 5] Robert Adams: *Blanca, Colorado*, 1967. Gelatin-silver print, 7" x 7".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *The New West. Landscapes along the Colorado Front Range*, Colorado Associated University Press, 1984.

Depression, Robert Adams implicitly reveals that the West American landscape goes through a terminal situation by subtly unveiling the weakness of the fields. Lange's subjects and Adams' landscapes are both in danger of suffering and extinguishing. As a vehicle to introduce this precariousness, Lange often presents the human being in a state of desolation and misery⁷. This way of expressing the disgraces of the Depression will later on in the 60s be re-used by Adams as a systematic representation of danger in his book *Our Lives, Our Children* [Fig. 4].

The Presentation of Facts

Adams' photographs are far richer in meaning and scope than the simple making of an aesthetic point. One of the most significant aspect of the photographs is the coherence of the stylistic context of his work. It would seem more logical to regard these pictures as the current manifestations of a picture-making attitude that began in the early 1960s with Edward Ruscha. Ruscha's books of photographs –*Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1962), *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965), among others– “conveyed at once the quality of rigorous purity, deadpan humor, and a casual disregard for the importance of the images which even permitted the use of photograph not made by Ruscha himself”⁸. Ruscha made his point with such clarity that the importance of his work as an antecedent to the work under discussion should be obvious.

Like Ruscha's work, Adams' pictures were stripped of any artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of emotion and opinion. Regardless of the subject matter, the appearance of neutrality is strictly maintained. Adams' images function with a minimum of inflection in the sense that the photographer's influence on the look of the subject is minimal. Much of this sense of neutrality lies in the way the edges of the images function, maintaining an essentially passive frame. That is, rather than the picture having been created by the frame, there is a sense of the frame having been laid on an existing scene without interpreting it very much⁹.

Yet there remains an essential and significant difference between Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*¹⁰ (1963) and, as an example, Adams' *Mobile Homes* (1973). The nature of this difference is found in an understanding of the difference between what a picture is *of* and what it is *about*. Ruscha's pictures of gasoline

⁷ Of all the photographs that Lange took during the years of the depression, those that show men's backs pose a special interest. Of all the imaginary where human beings are shown to express the situation after the depression hit, men's backs seem to convey the idea of fragility due to the implicit bearing of a burden in a more direct way than the others. The American landscape, like Lange's men's backs, are shown in a depictable expression of fragility and horror, demanding attention for a much-needed preservation.

⁸ Schott, John. *The Works of Edward Ruscha*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1982.

⁹ As I understand a photographer can never be totally neutral, and his/her work always imply some degree of choice –and, therefore, of opinion just because of the fact that they choose a frame, a view for an image. However, an opinion can be explicitly expressed and underlined in many ways. Adams, like Ruscha, rejects this attitude and remains within the boundaries of silence in terms of partiality.

[Fig. 6] Robert Adams: *Pikes Peak Park, Colorado Springs, Colorado*, 1969. Gelatin-silver print, 5-7/8" x 5-7/8".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *The New West. Landscapes along the Colorado Front Range*, Colorado Associated University Press, 1984.



stations are not about gasoline stations but about a set of aesthetic issues. John Schott summarized the position neatly: “[Ruscha's pictures] are not statements about the world through art; they are statements about art through the world”¹¹. This distinction is fundamental to Adams' photography, where his work is just the opposite: a vision of the world through the art of photography [Fig. 5].

Like Adams and Ruscha's work, Robert Venturi's buildings are “matter of fact, and therefore, closer to the everyday experience of the man in the street”¹². They show mundane objects in their work and elevate them to the category of art. The irony that these elements imply information unlikely to be of vital interest to anyone does not occur until the second glance. The real message is that the anecdotic is the message. It is a message on the visual reality of Adams' landscape, or Las Vegas' strip in Venturi's case, where architectural language, reduced to a minimum, is compensated by an excess of anecdotic episodes that are only perceived as visual noise¹³. The elements that form the sequence of anecdotes in Adams' work are exactly those that bring forth the message of destruction and annihilation of the landscape. The external pieces that appear in disconnection to the nature represent the noise to which Adams wants to draw the attention through his photography [Fig. 6].

The Nuclear Threat: Chaos

“In an atomic war, congested cities would become death traps. “To make the United States safe against any attack by atomic, bacteriological, or other weapons... concentrations of any kind, be they concentrations of industry, of population, or of transportation facilities, must be avoided or at least minimized”¹⁴.

Fear of density pervaded much of the planning discourse of the early 1950s and in its most extreme form equated urban concentration with susceptibility to military attack. “Security, once provided behind walls –wrote Ludwig Hilberseimer in 1945–, can only be found in the dispersion of cities and industries”. And former President of the New York Regional Plan, Paul Wiendels, wrote in 1950 that decentralization had

¹⁰ *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* is the first artist's book by the American pop artist Ed Ruscha. Published in April 1963 on his own imprint National Excelsior Press, it is often considered to be the first modern Artist's book, and has become famous as a precursor and a major influence on the emerging artist's book culture, especially in America.

¹¹ Schott, John. *The Works of Edward Ruscha*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1982.

¹² Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. The Museum of Modern Art Press, New York, 1966.

¹³ Von Moos, Stanislaus. *Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown, Buildings and Projects*, Rizzoli, New York, 1987.

¹⁴ Edward Teller, as cited in Dimendberg, Edward, “City of Fear: Defensive Dispersal and the End of Film Noir”, in *ANY 18*, 1997, pp.15-17.



[Fig. 7] Robert Adams: *Untitled*, 1973-74. Gelatin-silver print, 6" x 7-3/4".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *Denver, A Photographic Survey of the Metropolitan Area*, Colorado Associated University Press, 1977.

[Fig. 8] Movie: *The Big Combo*, 1955. Still.

been termed insurance against war. This decentralization brought forth the human irruption in the landscape with inconsiderate anarchy that Adams denounces. The links of these new settlements with ideas related to the *threatening centrality* are psychologically identical, albeit physically opposite [Fig. 7].

Parallel to the fear of density a new type of film was being developed in the United States. The Film Noir had an emphasis on what could be called a "frightening vision of the man himself, lost in the new metropolis"¹⁵. The situation in which mankind seemed to live through those movies assumed that human beings faced a new reality from which they were unable to escape. The new claustrophobic horror that the crowded super metropolis had imposed on men and women was reflected in a new way never seen in film before. The Film Noir displays the fear to the congested city that does not let anybody out. This fear is transformed, after the nuclear threat becomes an international issue and the new *decentralized* cities start to spread, into the denounce of the uncontrollable expansion of the settlements into the landscape.

The space in Film Noir relied implicitly on notions of urban centrality, permanence, and density already formed by the end of the 19th century, evident in the fictions of Charles Dickens and Conan Doyle. In early Film Noir the metropolis is feared because of its darkness, violence, and ultimate unknowability. Losers and innocent victims –the most common character types in Film Noir– trapped in the deadening routines and mechanisms of urban civilization confront the possibility of escape from their servitude. Yet the price of such freedom usually entails their eventual moral dissolution [Fig. 8].

Yet the beginning of the 1950s spatial representation in Film Noir began to mutate, responding to the emergency of a newly "centrifugal" space constituted by the interstate highway system, dispersed suburbs, and the growing prominence of television and the electronic surveillance. This is also the moment of "nuclear anxiety" film and the convergence of film noir with the fascination for violent death.

The landscapes presented by Robert Adams are of this kind. The photographer notices the horror to the openness of a space that is not being used as it should be by man. A similar horror to that prevailing in the Film Noir genre is expressed in Adams' work: a terror to agoraphobia, to open spaces, where no limits can be found and man seems to have no roots and no significance; a terror that comes from the incompatibility of man with nature, from the wrong understanding of the concept of place. His vision of the temporality of the massive settlements that are unfortunately implanted in the nature leads us to believe that there has to be a new concept of space, different from its traditional meaning, with a new complexity and a new richness yet to be discovered [Fig. 9].

¹⁵ Dimendberg, Edward. *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, Harvard University Press, 2004.

[Fig. 9] Robert Adams: *Longmont, Colorado*, 1973. Gelatin-silver print, 6" x 7-5/8".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *The New West. Landscapes along the Colorado Front Range*, Colorado Associated University Press, 1984.



[Fig. 10] Robert Adams: *El Paso County Fairgrounds, Calhan, Colorado*, 1968. Gelatin-silver print, 6" x 7-1/2".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *Prairie*, Denver Art Museum, 1978.



The uncertainty of man positioned in the natural landscape expresses an implicit mutation of this space that makes us aware of the finalities of our mission in such nature. After Wallace Stegner wrote, "you are at home only when you live in a place with complete participation", Adams denounces the lack of implication from man and women towards nature, in an attempt to reshape the ideal West –a landscape and a people in relative harmony–, which is precisely what Adams aspires to represent and preserve through his work.

We could assume what Kenneth Boulding calls a "break boundary at which the system suddenly changes into another or passes some point of no return in its dynamic processes". McLuhan is even more specific and says that "today the road beyond its break boundary turns cities into highways, and the highway proper takes on a continuous urban character"¹⁶. This urban character appears constantly in the photographs of Robert Adams, where spread new settlements and "desurbanizations"¹⁷ are represented almost constantly [Fig. 10].

While the fear had an inbound direction in the Film Noir, the threat becomes an outward movement with the effect of the nuclear menace. At the end of the cycle we connect with the same terror expressed in the cinematographic genre analyzed here: the panic to the impossibility to escape from something unknown¹⁸.

¹⁶ McLuhan, Marshall. "Reversal of the overheated medium", in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1964.

¹⁷ Dimendberg, Edward. "City of Fear: Defensive Dispersal and the End of Film Noir", in *ANY 18*, 1997, pp.15-17.

¹⁸ The congested metropolis in the Film Noir or the occupied lost landscape in the West American landscape.



[Fig. 11] Robert Adams: *Denver, Colorado*, 1981. Gelatin-silver print, 7-1/4" x 6-1/4".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *Our Lives, Our Children: Photographs Taken Near the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant*, Aperture, 1984.

Adams' understanding of the new urbanizations of the West is related to the enclosure of the all-built landscape that expresses chaos and death. Through this vision Adams speaks of his search for a new order, a new character expanded from the traditional metropolis that occupies now a reshaped landscape.

Our Lives, Our Children: The Shock Reused

The most likely influence by Dorothea Lange, Edward Weston, Ed Ruscha, and Robert Venturi prepares the ground for the real message that Adams wants to present. The fact that, almost in secrecy, The Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant, constructed at the center of this geography, will definitely relate Adams' work to that of the late Film Noir. For Adams this menacing plutonium suspended as smoke, poisoned groundwater, and contaminated soil were the clearest proof of incoherence in men and women's existence and use of the land they inhabit. The result was the astonishing images of the book *Our Lives Our Children*, published as a protest against the plant in the mid 60s. In this compendium of photographs the protagonists, common people from the area –rarely seen in any of his other pictures, always empty of human figures–, express the alarm, almost the fleeing move from a growing danger [Fig. 11].

As a recurring element, Adams works with the attitude and the direct expressions of these anonymous people who seem to run, hide and escape. The people that Adams portraits in these images, synthesizing a change and, therefore, a key point in his career. The blurred faces and bodies of these people bring back to mind the use that Dorothea Lange gave to those who posed in her photographs. But whereas Lange's representation of the Depression through the precariousness and fragility of the people was physical, effective and real, Adams' use of human subjects appears as mental and artificial in the transmission of a similar feeling of unhappiness. The recurrent theme of human expression that delivers a sense of panic, horror and disorder is truly relevant and serious in the photographs of the Depression. *Our Lives, Our Children* shows a less effective profile, resulting in a more conceptual and less proactive set of images.

The book represents an exceptional chapter of Adams' work as a photographer. Adams' needs for such explicit images, where the author requires newly introduced strategies to convey his message, seem to undermine the importance of his work seen as a whole, and therefore, the landscapes he is used to work with seem not to be enough to transmit his new concern.

Conclusion. New Hope: Reshaping the Order Behind the Chaos

Some philosophers and writers have sometimes said we have to do without hope. However, hope is necessary to the survival of what makes us human. Without hope we lapse into ruthlessness and torpor; the exercise of nearly every virtue we treasure in people –love, reason, and imagination– depends ultimately for its motivation on hope. We know that our actions come too little, but our identity as we want it defined is contingent on the survival of hope. "If the state of our geography appears to be newly chaotic because of our heedlessness, the problem that this presents to the spirit is an old one that art has long addressed. As defined by hundred of years of practice art as a discovery of harmony, a vision of disparities reconciled, of shape beneath confusion. Art does not deny that evil is real, but it places evil in a context that implies an affirmation: the structure of the picture, which is a metaphor for the structure of the Creation, suggests that evil is not final"¹⁹ [Fig. 12].

Robert Adams' photographs of the new western landscape attempt to preserve and reshape the definition of nature, and in so doing initiate a reconnection of



[Fig. 12] Robert Adams: *Untitled*, 1994. Four gelatin-silver prints, 7-3/4" x 5-1/8".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *Listening to the River. Seasons in the American West*, Aperture, New York, 1994.



[Fig. 13] Robert Adams: *Untitled*, Colorado, 1994. Two gelatin-silver prints, 14" x 11".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *Listening to the River. Seasons in the American West*, Aperture, New York, 1994.

people and landscape. Through them, Adams hopes to foster a basic respect and affection for the nature right outside our doors, homely and modest as it may be –an emotional connection that is a necessary precondition to making a true commitment to such reshape. "Over the years I have begun to believe that we live in several coexisting landscapes at once, among them the landscape of hope, and that though we must usually focus on what is characteristic of the immediate and troubled present, it is no rash to say that other geographies are unimportant or even finally separate".

Adams soon recognizes the necessity of extending the discourse to a point where a truth can be found. Therefore, he does not stop where destruction and mediocrity seem to have success. He goes beyond this apparent destruction in search of a new reality that should be preserved within the altered nature and the new colonizer; a new truth that will be valid for a new coexistence; a new truth that will bring forth new answers that may enable mankind to understand better how to implement their lives in the weak nature [Fig. 13].

Throughout his personal search for a "new order behind the apparent chaos"²⁰ of the new constructions, Adams unveils a new reality composed by elements that form new spaces, neither entirely natural nor totally artificial. Here the photographer is able to connect with Venturi once more: the central theme of *Learning from Las Vegas* is the American city not so much as it should be but *as it actually is*.

¹⁹ Adams, Robert. *Why People Photograph. Selected Essays and Reviews*, Aperture, New York, 1994.

²⁰ Adams, Robert. *Beauty in Photography. Essays in Defense of Traditional Values*, Aperture, New York, 1981.



[Fig. 14] Robert Adams: *Edge of San Timoteo Canyon, San Bernardino, California*, 1978. Gelatin-silver print, 16" x 20".

Fuente: © Robert Adams. From the book: *Listening to the River. Seasons in the American West*, Aperture, New York, 1994.

The basic thesis of the book had already been clearly formulated in *Complexity and Contradiction*. Two pictures in this essay show Thomas Jefferson's University of Charlottesville juxtaposed with "Typical Main Street USA". Both pictures, taken from a book by Peter Blake (*God's Own Junkyard*, 1964), document what the work is about. Venturi wrote: "*In God's Own Junkyard Peter Blake has compared the chaos of commercial Main Street with the orderliness of the University of Virginia. Besides the irrelevancy of the comparison [why should a town look like a university campus?], is not Main Street almost all right? Indeed, is not the commercial strip of a Route 66 almost all right? The seemingly chaotic juxtapositions of honky-tonk elements express an intriguing kind of vitality and validity, and they produce an unexpected approach to unity as well*"²¹.

Adams, as a photographer, works to reconnect people and landscape. And by accepting new juxtapositions as valid orders he embraces different levels of complexities that engage in the reshaping of a new order in a new landscape. This new order can be accepted as a new form, a new structure of the landscape, and hope is therefore fulfilled. "Some art is meant to help us as we rest, as we get ready to go out again"²². Robert Adams' pictures are of this kind: one opens a book of him in anticipation of renewal [Fig. 14].

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