

# WHAT IS A FEMINIST LANDSCAPE?

## A Vocabulary for Re-visioning Place in the US West

*Audrey Goodman*

Consider the monotype print *She Walks Forward* (2012) by Melanie Yazzie (Diné). The landscape consists of cut-out animal and plant figures created from delicate washes of blue against an even paler blue background. This scene rejects the horizon in favor of the here and now, the present visualized as a space created by a female body in motion, shared within a natural cycle of time. Yazzie varies the degree of saturation in the pigment and the thickness of the white line that outlines the figures, indicating that the beings in her imaginary landscape coexist, intersect, and shift. While the background offers the space and air necessary for movement, its semi-opacity precludes any deep view or referential certainty. Resolutely two dimensional and layered, each animal or plant figure seems placed independently on the paper, made still for this one moment, yet seemingly connected, conveying the quality of floating (Figure 32.1).

Another monotype, *Quiet Talks Down by the River* (2005), further shows how this artist's vision of place emerges from private interactions and through conversations; through thoughts and action, the figures create beauty and community.<sup>1</sup> In order to share visual space and create a composite landscape, figures overlap, with one lightly touching but not crowding the other. The conversations Yazzie evokes could be among humans or other beings in the environment; because the action revolves around unnamed figures and invisible sounds, the print entices viewers to listen in and imagine a range of voices (Figure 32.2).

The landscapes Yazzie assembles invite her viewers to inhabit places at once embodied, cultured, and imagined. In all of her prints, “the environment is powerfully present,” feminist art historian Lucy Lippard asserts, although “landscape in the Western sense—a specific place, an identifying horizon—is invisible.”<sup>2</sup> I begin this interrogation of the feminist landscape in the US West with attention to Yazzie's work because it exemplifies one of the many ways that contemporary women artists work with landscape as a medium to explore their lived experience and their cultural knowledge. They do so with many different materials and by visualizing relations within western lands as emerging over time, creating palimpsests rather than single views. With heightened attention to the artifice of nature and wilderness, and to the political work performed by traditional representations of landscape in European and American painting and photography, these artists write themselves into mobile, multidimensional frames;

*What Is a Feminist Landscape?*



Figure 32.1 *She Walks Forward*. Artwork © Melanie A. Yazzie, image courtesy of Glenn Green Galleries



Figure 32.2 *Quiet Talks Down by the River*. Artwork © Melanie A. Yazzie, image courtesy of Glenn Green Galleries

speak many different kinds of memory, human and nonhuman; and test the effects of physical, imaginative, and ongoing contact.

As Yazzie's printmaking and Lippard's assessment of it suggest, "landscape" is a concept that might seem too simple, excessively capacious, and indelibly associated with Euro-American aesthetic traditions and the visual grammars of settler colonialism to describe contemporary representations of place in the US West. Some scholars consider the term nearly obsolete for these very reasons. For example, literary critic Elizabeth Helsinger wrote in her response to a seminar devoted to landscape theory that while "the term itself, like all that it may be imagined to embrace" has a "long history," the familiarity "of the language of landscape in contemporary usage (popular as well as scholarly) might simply mask the obsolescence of the concept."<sup>3</sup> Others, including foundational landscape historians J. B. Jackson and Denis Cosgrove, have been calling for new definitions that incorporate the social and economic dimensions of spatial formations since the 1980s. In "The Word Itself" (1984), Jackson writes that no one agrees on the meaning of "landscape" and states, "What we need is a new definition."<sup>4</sup> Jackson argues for the value of the term when redefined as a "synthetic space" or as "a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence,"<sup>5</sup> because, in his view, the word "can give vividness to a thought or event or relationship."<sup>6</sup> His vigorous re-definition in this essay substantially shifted critical perspectives in the field, moving away from private and privileged European views of landscape as a scenery and toward conceptions of landscape as a verb—that is, toward understanding landscape as the result of collective acts of composition.

Viewers and critics still rely on language to clarify the thoughts, events, and relationships that take shape in space and time. Following the models set by Jackson and others, it is time for newer definitions that address not only the gendered assumptions evident in the discourse of landscape theory but also the complex role that gender plays in constructing landscape as "a concrete, three dimensional, shared reality."<sup>7</sup> Pairing the term with "feminist" not only modifies but redefines it once again, insisting that spatial realities and their representation are equally "shared." The pairing challenges viewers' assumptions and promotes what Adrienne Rich and Susan Stanford Friedman have theorized as feminist "re-vision."<sup>8</sup> To consider places in the US West as landscapes at our current moment is to contend with all of the ways that they are thoroughly entangled in complex global histories and gendered Anglo-European practices of seeing. It is also, at the same time, to initiate practices for mapping the urgent, if less visible, histories of encounter, transformation, protest, mourning, and refuge. Here I pursue the second contention, focusing on ways that contemporary artists and theorists represent three-dimensional shared realities in the United States in ways that signify those global histories and interrogate such intractable power relations while also visualizing spatial relationships as emerging in place and over time.

This essay begins by identifying critical foundations in fields ranging from art history and cultural geography to literary, place, and Indigenous studies and thus assembles some of the multidisciplinary tools needed to create new frameworks. Then, following from my initial proposal that to modify a weighted term like landscape with "feminist" is also to redefine it, I introduce a vocabulary, a series of paired terms for future landscape study: interior/exterior; intimate/planetary; urban/mobile; layered/fluid. My aim is to interrogate the slashes that separate and link the terms, not to impose a new series of binaries; I am interested in what happens when we relieve the pressure on single terms to do all the definitional work and consider a more relational, mobile theoretical framework. To explore the potential of this paired vocabulary and to reveal the reconstructions already underway, I proceed to analyze selected compositional techniques, forms, and languages used by contemporary women printmakers, painters, photog-

raphers, and poets. Varied in their racial, cultural, class, and gender identities, artists such as Joy Harjo (Muscogee), Layli Long Solider (Oglala Dakota), Natalie Diaz (Mojave/Latinx), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna), Gloria Anzaldúa, Esther Belin (Diné), Wanda Coleman, and Jennifer Elise Foerster (German/Dutch/Muscogee) assemble their landscapes from materials at hand and create visions of place through many different encounters. Both their choices of material and strategies of assemblage work to transform landscape from a privileged view to a collective and contentious verb.

### Reframing: Feminist Foundations for Landscape Studies

Geographers and art historians have led the way in reframing and activating the concept of landscape in recent decades. For geographers Denis Cosgrove and Doreen Massey, any study of the landscape encompasses questions of aesthetics and economic and social analysis. In *Landscape and Power* (1994), W. J. T. Mitchell focuses on landscape as action, urging readers “to change ‘landscape’ from a noun to a verb” and to consider it as “a process by which social and subjective identities are formed.”<sup>9</sup> While recognizing the social work performed by conventional landscapes, Mitchell argues that it is also necessary to look beyond the European origins and imperial ideologies of landscape aesthetics and toward the ways landscape could function as “a medium of exchange between the human the natural, the self and the other.”<sup>10</sup>

In order to understand, analyze, and theorize the relation between landscape and gender in the US West, viewers and readers need new frameworks and flexible terms drawn from a rich array of sources across disciplines and media. In conventional terms, landscape has been understood as “a way of seeing—a way in which some Europeans have represented to themselves and to others the world about them and their relationships with it,” to quote Cosgrove’s widely cited explanation.<sup>11</sup> The formal features of European landscape art typically include an illusion of depth, the presence of a path or road to provide visual access to cultivated or wild lands, and minimal or domesticated human presence. In the US West, this European way of seeing was what theorist W. J. T. Mitchell terms “an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions.”<sup>12</sup> Through imperial eyes, European and Euro-American viewers naturalized access and laid claim to Indigenous lands in the Americas; their representations of these lands in pictorial, photographic, or literary landscapes often seemed to invite not only aesthetic contemplation and fantasy but the visual and imaginative exercise of possession as well.

Lucy Lippard’s “Undertones: Ten Cultural Landscapes” (1995) and Kate Morris’s *Shifting Grounds: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art* (2019) exemplify how feminist critics and art historians have also shifted critical attention to the ways that gender intervenes in relationships between place and power and created an interdisciplinary foundation for regional and landscape studies. Lippard explains, “Only recently have women photographers in North America been cutting their own paths into the land-mined ‘wilderness’ of landscape photography, and they have done so not as an influential group but as isolated individuals . . . responding to and critiquing their own cultural circumstances as echoed in the environment.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, while the artists themselves may be feminists, she cautions against considering their work “feminist landscape.” She asks,

And what would that be, anyway,—a feminist landscape? Something intimate and comfortable, either the opposite of the Marlboro man’s domain or a subtle intervention therein? A landscape seen as the body of a woman? A critique of the landscape photography made by women?<sup>14</sup>

Dissatisfied with each of these options, Lippard proposes that a feminist landscape might be “an acculturated landscape,” a location “where culture and nature meet.”<sup>15</sup> Recognizing the diversity of work done by women landscape photographers, she argues that collectively they experiment with seeing how places mean to the people who live there, “rather than *viewing* everything from the outside.” She contends, “The idea of landscape must include the ways that land is formed by social relations and the ways that social relations are formed by the land.”<sup>16</sup> And she charts with great care attention paid to the “deeper layers of life that form a cultural landscape” that she identifies in the work of contemporary photographers.<sup>17</sup>

If painted and photographic landscapes created in the European tradition have historically provided viewers with too easy access to the West’s seemingly open spaces, landscapes created by contemporary and Indigenous women artists serve to open sites of exchange as they confront and remake colonial visualities. According to Kate Morris, such landscapes tend to be “anti-invitational.” Instead of enticing viewers to claim the land, they serve as “a vehicle for the expression of place-based knowledge.” The complex, layered understanding that they express often can’t be transferred at a first or second glance; these landscapes take time to assemble.<sup>18</sup> They may refuse the illusion of depth of field or situate the viewer so close as to block the perception of a horizon. They may offer signs for viewers to read or insert diversions to create time for affective responses or memory work. Each of these strategies functions to counter the illusion of possession.

Scholars in American and modernist studies likewise have been challenging patriarchal and colonial paradigms of landscapes. In *The Lay of the Land* (1984), Annette Kolodny provides powerful critical tools for interrogating “America’s oldest and most cherished fantasy”: that of living in harmony with nature “based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine.”<sup>19</sup> Presenting extensive textual evidence for the association between the land of the New World and “the land as woman” from the writings of early explorers, Kolodny argues that symbolic formations and dream work matter; “fantasy is a particular way of relating to the world,” she explains, one that called many generations of settlers west, sustained them through physical hardship, and blinded them to mounting evidence of the destruction they wrought on Indigenous people and animal populations. She urges readers to examine closely what she calls “the vocabulary of a feminine landscape” and use it as a critical framework to expose its complicity with settler colonialism.<sup>20</sup>

Kolodny’s work and its legacy attest that “letting go our grand obsessions” with mythical landscapes and fantasies of historical continuity is an essential first step toward rethinking and decolonizing American literary landscapes. Equally important is critical attention to the gendered and regional politics of publishing, to the formation of literary publics, and to the uneven visibility of archival materials. In assessing the current state of western American studies in “Toward a Feminist Turn” (2018), Krista Comer highlights both sustained contributions by individual scholars and the groundbreaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) as she sketches new directions for what she calls a “feminist critical regionalism.”

Other anthologies of literary and critical writing in recent decades, such as *The Desert Is No Lady* (1987), *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), *Making Face/Making Soul* (1990), *What Wildness Is This* (2007), and *New Poets of Native Nations* (2018), have also linked questions of gender with the formation of western American landscapes across disciplines. They confirm that it is often through poetry, a genre that contends so intimately with the affective and symbolic power of language, that readers can see most explicitly how writers challenge the formal, visual, and linguistic conventions associated with landscape art. Together these approaches, grounded in archival research, interdisciplinary thinking, and poetic language, constitute a collective foundation for re-visioning relations between gender and landscape in the US West.

## Towards a Locational Vocabulary

The vocabulary of paired terms that follows emerges from the sources sketched above and introduces the powerful landscape work of contemporary artists. Like Eric Hayot and Rebecca Walkowitz, whose edited collection *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism* serves as a model for my approach, I offer an expandable repository of connected terms whose relationship remains fluid, not a list of keywords. While many terms will undoubtedly be familiar, others may be less so or seem tangential to critical thinking about gender and the US West. I propose, however, that familiar, out of fashion, and emergent terms can all do important work if readers consider them as tools for locating and mobilizing thought, pay attention to their origins and their critical genealogies, and seek new knowledge at the intersections and interfaces.

### *Interior/exterior*

Contemporary western women writers explore the historical, physical, and affective dimensions of landscapes within their bodies and in the world outside from many locations. Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna) established critical continuities between “interior” and “exterior” spaces in the essay she published first in 1995, and these continuities also structure her fiction. Meanwhile, borderlands writer Gloria Anzaldúa created literary and theoretical landscapes where geopolitical, cultural, physical, and philosophical worlds collide and intersect. Each writer’s work reveals how feminist landscapes emerge at many different edges and excavate layers of memory.

In “Interior and Exterior Landscapes,” Silko definitively refutes the notion that landscape is singular, out in the world, and contained. “There is no high mesa edge or mountain peak where one can stand and not immediately be part of all that surrounds,” she claims. “So long as human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading.” Rather than jettison the term, however, Silko redefines it by connecting “interior” and “exterior” as interdependent components linked through the viewer’s body and imagination. “Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on,” she insists, asserting the value of inner experience and lived history to practices of vision.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the essay, Silko also recognizes the living presence of everything in her view. She begins by contemplating a “thing” that seems to be dead, so dry it “crumbles under your fingers” like body turned to dust. Silko then takes her readers down to the ground and through the layers beneath a burial site, showing them that all landscapes—even those seemingly barren—are alive. She notes how ancestral Puebloans created burial chambers with great care; “each rock had been carefully selected for size and shape, then chiseled to an even face.”<sup>22</sup> Approached from a Pueblo perspective, any landscape can be seen to contain an infinite range of beings; the value of a place is defined and “*maintained*” through stories that speak “who we are,” not framed with a view, Silko contends.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987/2012), her multilingual theoretical meditation on the dangerous and generative territory that is her homeland and her mestiza identity, Anzaldúa starts with a poem that locates her speaker at the Pacific shore in San Diego/Tijuana, occupying the edge of the continent where the interior meets a vast and unknown exterior, an edge that also divides two nations. She writes, “I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean / where the two overlap.” From this position, where the boundary between Mexico and the United States sinks beneath the sand, she witnesses tenderness and violence.<sup>23</sup> She famously figures her body as riven by the “open wound” that is the US–Mexican border and initiates healing by expressing her love for her Native land; through writing, she wills herself to shift into a new consciousness. At the same time, she attends to the material and cultural histories of the places and people that

nurtured her. Returning to the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the borderlands region in south Texas where she grew up, she evokes its everyday landscape, its scents and flavors, and its vernacular language:

*los pueblitos* with chicken pens and goats picketed to mesquite shrubs ... the Mexican cemeteries blooming with artificial flowers, the fields of aloe vera and red pepper, rows of sugar cane, of corn hanging on the stalks, the cloud of *polvareda* in the dirt roads behind a speeding pickup truck, *el sabor de tamales de rez y venado*.

She appreciates the powerful movement of the Rio Grande, flowing like a “curving, twisting serpent.”<sup>24</sup> And she pays tribute in her poetry to the people working in the fields, amid “a green sea” of cabbages.<sup>25</sup>

Anzaldúa writes elsewhere that for her, “writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out.”<sup>26</sup> Following these directives, readers and viewers may supply their own examples of landscapes that emerge through the artist’s and the viewer’s bodies and uses them as tools for redefining a landscape’s edges and frames. I think of Ana Teresa Fernández’s occupation of the border fence in Tijuana/San Diego as part of her collaborative performance project *Borrando La Barda/Erasing the Border* (2012).<sup>27</sup> I think, too, of contemporary Native poets Joy Harjo and Layli Long Soldier, whose poems offer powerful examples of how landscape work originates inside the body and then remaps exterior geographies.<sup>28</sup> Rather than focus exclusively on physical landscapes apprehended through sight, these writers vividly articulate landscapes as emerging through senses of touch, smell, and memory.

### ***Intimate/Planetary***

In exploring the connections between private encounter and public and economic life, this pairing builds from some of the redefinitions proposed by Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner in *The Intimate and the Global: Feminism in Our Time*, a volume that focuses on “the specific, the quotidian, the affective, the eccentric” within a worldly, global network. The editors consider intimate and global as terms “not defined *against* one another but rather draw their meaning from elliptically related domains.”<sup>29</sup> In the words of contributor Ara Wilson, “The concept of intimacy captures deeply felt orientations and entrenched practices that make up what people consider to be their ‘personal’ or ‘private’ lives and their interior selves.”<sup>30</sup> The very indeterminacy of the term, and its absence from critical discourse, now offers opportunity for rethinking relationality, Wilson contends.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, this pairing promotes a critique of the gendered connotations of “intimate” spaces in the United States while inviting viewers and readers to reconsider how those spaces are always already traversed with global designs and planetary knowledge. It invites viewers to position “personal” or “private” conceptions of themselves in relation to others on equal terms—a fundamental feminist premise. The term “planetary,” as Susan Stanford Friedman explores in *Planetary Modernisms*, invokes “worldness,” but it also means speaking with many visual languages and envisioning relations to place in many dimensions. “It requires attention to modes of local and translocal meaning making and translation, to processes and practices of perception and expression on a global scale,” she writes.<sup>32</sup> A focus on intimate relations can show how viewers see and assemble meanings of place on a human scale, a critical approach that can prepare for continued interrogation of the process in larger dimensions.

To test this pairing, consider the coupled drawings of desert and sky by Latvian American artist Vija Celmins. Known best for the renderings of the Pacific Ocean made while she lived in Los Angeles, meticulously realistic drawings that impress upon viewers both the magnitude of

natural formations and their closeness, Celmins has also created a series that juxtaposes scrutiny of the desert's surface with distant views of the galaxy. *Untitled (Desert-Galaxy)* (1974) gives equal attention to the surface at the artist's feet and the sky beyond any human reach.<sup>33</sup> As Pamela Lee explains this artist's landscape work, "Space is rendered deeply intimate and subjective for Celmins; it is the ground of both lived experience as well as an evocation of sublime distance rendered close through the artist's hand."<sup>34</sup>

Celmins's work witnesses intimate and planetary spaces as seen and imagined over time, whereas Jennifer Elise Foerster's poetry speaks of bodies that witness transformations through touch and language. What happens when a reader enters a landscape through a single word? What happens when a collective space or term, such as a field, leads to evermore more precise words for the plant's component parts? What does it feel like when grass that has been torn from the root disintegrates? Foerster's poem "Land Art" encourages readers to ask all of these questions and more. "Think about a word—*grass*— / about an individual grass / then about a hundred species of grass." The closer the speaker looks, the richer her language becomes. She catalogues species ("Buffalo grass / Witchgrass / Black bent / Barley") and archives sounds ("how the wind plays harps with the grass").<sup>35</sup> The speaker then becomes part of the arrangement she sees, declaring, "we form a rosette— / we are bunched, decumbent culms, / the involute blades of love grass."<sup>36</sup> With interrogative urgency, this poem counters the limitations implicit in viewing landscape from a middle distance with the speaker's presence and the tactile energy of language. Even so, it slows down the process of looking, naming, feeling, and living. The end of the poem then moves beyond its own frame and dissolves the boundaries between interior and exterior landscapes, the singular and the collective, home and planet: "The light in each grass fast fading— / we lie down in this dark," showing "How the setting / down of art / is as important as its making."<sup>37</sup> Like Long Soldier, whose epigraph to *Whereas* instructs readers "Now / make room in the mouth / for grassesgrassesgrasses," Foerster invites readers to take grass out of the landscape, into their bodies, and names its effects in intimate and planetary terms.

### ***Urban/Mobile***

The term "urban" often functions in popular culture as a code for impoverished, inner-city neighborhoods or for the commodified cultural productions of Black and Latinx artists. Yet, western cities including Albuquerque, Oakland, Tucson, and Los Angeles have also been mobilized as creative locations for writing, public art, and collective alliances. They have been theorized as Native "hubs," thus contesting settler fantasies of Indigenous relations to western lands. And even as city streets in the US West and throughout the country continue to expose the vulnerability of Black and Brown bodies, artists and activists continue to challenge such racist associations and transform urban spaces into landscapes of protest. The pairing of "urban" and "mobile" I propose here continues such spatial reconfigurations. It separates the seemingly fixed racial, gendered, and economic grids that have mapped urban imaginaries and explores how urban spaces can promote imaginative engagement, self-determination, and political movement.<sup>38</sup> Viewers might consider public art such as monuments and murals to see how artists have manifested collective visions in urban locations;<sup>39</sup> here I offer two brief literary examples from poets Esther Belin and Wanda Coleman, sketching how both writers mobilize their environments to assemble feminist cityscapes.

In the poem "Bluesing on a Brown Vibe," Belin's trickster protagonist travels from Albuquerque to Oakland by Greyhound bus. Proudly strutting on the street, he exercises his right to wander and shows his respect for Oakland's Indigenous people by sprinkling corn pollen in four directions. In her sharp analysis of this poem, Mishuana Goeman points out that this



Coyote “does not assimilate into the white landscape of the US melting pot, which requires a loss of an Indigenous center and Indigenous land.”<sup>40</sup> Instead, he recognizes and preserves cultural differences as he forges new alliances with Ponca and Seminole men he met at the train station. After a shared smoke, “they travel together on the Richmond train / headed for Wednesday night dinner at the Intertribal Friendship House.”<sup>41</sup> Although the speaker in this poem and throughout Belin’s collection *From the Belly of My Beauty* struggle to orient themselves and find companionship in urban locations, they succeed in creating sites of temporary refuge. They discover moments of calm and glimpses of brilliance within each season. As they drive back and forth between homelands, they carry their language and their stories with them.

A native of South Central Los Angeles, Wanda Coleman writes fearlessly about the under-sides of urban experience and the struggles of her inner life. In his introduction to a new selection of her poems, *Wicked Enchantment* (2020), fellow poet Terrance Hayes claims, “There is no poet, black or otherwise, writing with as much wicked candor and passion.” Krista Comer astutely observes that Coleman’s ability to detach her literary imagination “from specific or ostensibly authenticating topographical terrains” creates possibilities for new stories and Black feminist landscapes to emerge.<sup>42</sup> Coleman chronicles how reality and dreams clash moment by moment and day by day for her Black, female, impoverished protagonists. Whether measuring her discomfort at the beach while also taking in the sublime depths of the Pacific (“Beaches. Why I Don’t Care for Them”); determined to keep her old car’s spark plugs and lug nuts functioning while dreaming of riding in a stylish convertible (“I Live for My Car”); or riding buses past “gritty-gray public housing projects with shabby roofs, junk-filled lawns, unmendable fences, and dented primer-splatted jalopies” while dreaming about the Honduran woman who raised her (“Backcity Transit by Day”), Coleman’s protagonists mobilize multiple geographic imaginations.<sup>43</sup> Her poem “Dream 1218” juxtaposes a realistic narrative of being stranded in Hollywood after missing a bus with a memory of meeting an actor and friend at a party; it merges the two locations, imagining that the stylish guests at the party materialize in the street.<sup>44</sup> A similar juxtaposition structures “Joy Ride.” In this story, two newly married Black couples “are momentarily above the worries that define their difficult lives” as they cruise through rich neighborhoods in their “late-model sedan,” snuggling and listening to jazz—at least, until they begin to approach “that poorer, darker section of the City of Angels to which they are intangibly restricted.”<sup>45</sup> As they approach home, their worries surface, bickering erupts, and tension builds. When a gunny sack that seems to move appears in the street, one woman alerts her husband, the driver; rather than stop short, he swerves too late. The party discovers a baby in the bundle, injured but with a “tiny chocolate-colored arm” perfectly intact. “The faces of the watchers are all shades of a shared darkness” as an ambulance takes the baby away, Coleman writes, but only the women, one of whom suspects she is pregnant, cry. This gendered difference suggests that Black women bear responsibility for expressing how dreams and violence are entangled in a city’s internal geography.<sup>46</sup> With defiant restlessness, Coleman’s writing both contends with and remakes conventions of “urban” art.

### ***Fluid/Layered***

Like a name, a place or region “is a story of existing,” to adapt a potent phrase from “The First Water is the Body,” a poem Natalie Diaz wrote for the occasion of the Standing Rock protests. Conversely, any site on the ground, in the air, or on a body, could be considered landscape: “Let’s say it’s all text,” Diaz proposes in another poem, “Snake-Light”: “—the animal, the dune, / the wind in the cottonwood, and the body.”<sup>47</sup> Such fluid transfers between conceptual categories, between the physical environment and the body, and between material and textual realities

indicate how provisional any single landscape representation really is. Diaz re-populates places appropriated by settlers, collectors, and tourists and rewrites them as layered and/or fluid landscapes, expanding and enacting Muscogee scholar Laura Harjo's observation that Native "places exist as a palimpsest, a layer of spatial meaning covered by several layers of settler geographies."<sup>48</sup>

If you want to see a beautiful landscape, don't look too closely beneath the surface or back in time, Diaz's poem "The Fact of Art" warns. To see the process through which a landscape is made into art, however, it is necessary to look through many layers of its history. From two perspectives, Anglo and Native, the poem tells the story of a Hopi basket found at an exhibit at Portsmouth, Virginia. It begins with the "fact" of the basket, its existence in a museum, far from the place and culture that created it; then imagines a scenario in which the US Department of Transportation hired Hopi workers to build a road over the mesa; and ends with a troubling lament by white women that the Hopi creators of those "beautiful, beautiful baskets" didn't match up with their art. This is a landscape difficult to enter the process of being scarred. At the outset, the poem miniaturizes and caricatures the presence of the human figures. The Hopi men and women appear "brown, and small, and claylike" while "white men blistered with sun—red as fire ants" tow their "sunscreen-slathered wives in glinting Airstream trailers" behind them. To render the truth of this invasion, a history not visible in any single frame, Diaz turns to story, layering perspectives of the Hopi workers, Elders, and basket makers with those of the white supervisors and their wives, to show how partial and distorted any single view is likely to be. The paradox of the poem's title applies to the landscape as much as to the baskets. For the beauty of art created by one culture and consumed by another to be a "fact" beyond dispute requires the work to be detached from the conditions of its making.

Another strategy for countering fixed landscapes is through a fluid poetics of place. This strategy runs through "The First Water Is the Body," in which Diaz's speaker asserts that she carries the river in her body because in her own language the name for person means "The river runs through the middle of my body, the same way it runs through the middle of the land." Although the English phrase might be "a poor translation," one not meant "to imply a visual relationship," it conveys powerfully the conceptual alignment of land and body at the center of this poem.<sup>49</sup> Diaz's speaker insists later, "This is not juxtaposition. Body and water are not *two unlike things*—they are more than *close together or side by side*. They are *same*—body being, energy, prayer, current, motion, medicine."<sup>50</sup> Other actions and ideas also converge when spoken in 'Aha Makav: *tears / river; disappearing river / disappearing people; skeleton / ghost; clean / strong; water / good*.

To overcome the binary oppositions between body and nature, original and translation, Diaz proposes diving into a "third place." She writes, "We must go to the point of the lance entering the earth, and the river becoming the first body bursting from the earth's clay body into my sudden body." With each iteration of the word "body," the form changes, the senses gather more knowledge, and the way forward becomes less clear:

We must go until we smell the black root-wet anchoring the river's mud banks. We must go beyond beyond to a place where we have never been the center, where there is no center—beyond, toward what does not need us yet makes us.<sup>51</sup>

She counters her speaker's imagined propulsion into an unknown, uncentered world with imagined journeys into deep and perfect memory: "Back to the body of earth, of flesh, back to the mouth, the throat, back to the womb, back to the heart, to its blood, back to our grief, back back back."<sup>52</sup> It might seem that Diaz's directional imagination is taking us so far from the idea of landscape that there is no way to return. Perhaps there can be no return. To envision colonized places as located and embodied landscapes is not to go back to precolonial visions or to erase the layered

histories of conquest obscured on the surface. Instead, such re-vision exposes those aesthetic conventions and languages that might protect readers from the knowledge of a place's embedded histories. It reveals not a readymade landscape but the desires viewers and readers bring to places: desires to be centered, to be easily positioned to look, to name. Rather than a view, Diaz leaves her readers with the question of responsibility: "Do you think the water will forget what we have done, what we continue to do?"<sup>53</sup> By reversing the gaze from viewer to water and by shifting the terms from aesthetics to ethics, Diaz writes landscape as collective action.

### ***Untitled/Unfinished***

Through strategies such as locating themselves in motion between interior and exterior landscapes, across spatial scales, in and between cities, and through history, contemporary artists in the US West rewrite the discourse of landscape studies and re-vision routes toward partially remembered and still-emerging knowledges. While this essay has not answered Lippard's question regarding what a "feminist landscape" might be, it does identify common threads and points of convergence. The visual and verbal examples discussed above suggest that the everyday is a category of experience where feminist work happens. Landscapes that might be considered "feminist" foreground questions of access to the land and feature the marks of lived experience, local objects, fluid elements, porous surfaces, and untranslated language. They juxtapose close-up and distant formations. These elements, working alone and in conjunction, link categories of spaces and bodies in order to unframe views, create new relationships, and promote memory work across generations.

The last pair of terms in this emerging vocabulary considers the nominal value of a work's title and poses the ongoing challenge of developing new discourses for writing about knowledges of place and land. While many artists choose not to title their work, letting their visual languages speak without verbal interference, contemporary artists may create "untitled" landscapes to contest the histories and meanings of settler place names. For the same reason, authors may cross out oppressive language (as in redacted poems) or rewrite the documents that "authorized" settler colonialism (as in erasure poems). These strategies pose new challenges for viewers. How can we locate a landscape or imagine relations between its elements without a title to guide us?

To move toward a provisional understanding of the decolonial work the designation "untitled" could do, consider a monotype print by Linda Lomahaftewa (Hopi/Choctaw). Although Lomahaftewa names many of her pieces to indicate the sources, locations, or people that have inspired her, others remain strategically unnamed. For *Untitled (Horse, Corn, Moon)* (2001), the pairing of (non)title and parenthetical sequence refuses to direct the viewer's interpretation with a single verbal equivalent. Drawn in part from the artist's adaptation of Hopi petroglyph designs from Awatovi, Arizona, each element within the parentheses belongs in the landscape. The scene rises in graduated layers from earth to sky; the fertile dirt produces two lively stalks of corn that yield to a layer of delicate, brilliantly green grass, pale air, and a deepening ochre sky. Echoing the colors and shapes of the dirt, the flat, elongated shape of the horse in the center of the print mediates grass and sky without blocking the view of the air; meanwhile, the moon floats above, a glowing crescent that links earth and cosmos. By visualizing sites of contact, transfer, and transformation, both in the present and through deep time, *Untitled (Horse, Corn, Moon)* invites viewers to consider how feminist landscapes assemble and animate views rather than name them. A landscape that is not yet titled is one that continues into the future, fully present, and still unfinished.

## Notes

- 1 In the artist's statement provided for the exhibit *Memory Weaving* at Santa Fe's Wheelwright Museum in 2018, Yazzie explained that her prints and other forms of art "come from the belief that as a Diné person, I must create beauty and harmony from within: from above me and below me, from in front and from behind, and from my core. We are taught to seek beauty, and to create it within our thoughts, actions, and prayers." For digital versions of some of Yazzie's work, see <https://glenngreengalleries.com/melanie-yazzie>.
- 2 Lippard, "Yazzie Girl, Silver Linings," in *Melanie Yazzie*, 15.
- 3 Helsinger, "Blindness and Insights," 324.
- 4 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 299.
- 5 Jackson, 305.
- 6 Jackson, 301.
- 7 Jackson, 302.
- 8 Originating in Adrienne Rich's 1971 essay "Writing as Re-Vision" and expanded in Susan Friedman's theorizations of global and planetary modernisms, the term "re-vision" can now invigorate aesthetic practices of viewing land and place from feminist perspectives. As Friedman explains, "Re-vision is inherently comparative because it implies seeing from a different vantage point" and assessing the difference between "older dominant narratives" and emerging ones. See Friedman, "World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity," 508.
- 9 Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 1.
- 10 Mitchell, 5.
- 11 Cosgrove, "Social Formation," 20.
- 12 Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 1–2.
- 13 Lippard, "Undertones," 38.
- 14 Lippard, 38.
- 15 Lippard, 38.
- 16 Lippard, 38–39.
- 17 Lippard, 58.
- 18 See Morris, *Shifting Grounds*, Introduction.
- 19 Kolodny, "Unearthing Herstory," 171.
- 20 Kolodny, 176.
- 21 Silko, *Yellow Woman*, 27–28.
- 22 Silko, 26.
- 23 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 23.
- 24 Anzaldúa, 111.
- 25 Anzaldúa, 154–55.
- 26 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en los Oscuro*, 5.
- 27 For photographs and a description of her performance *Borrando la Barda/Erasing the Borderlands*, see Fernández's webpage: <https://anateresafernandez.com/borrando-la-barda-tijuana-mexico/borrando12/>.
- 28 See Harjo's "Call It Fear," in *How We Became Human*, 29–30. In Long Soldier's "Edge," the speaker, a mother following banks and curves while driving on a road along the banks of river with her daughter in the back seat, remains hyper-alert to the "edges" between her interior world in the car and the moving landscape outside, herself and her daughter, safety and violence, edges that the poem tracks without naming. Long Soldier, *Whereas*, 48.
- 29 Rosner and Pratt, *The Intimate and the Global*, 2.
- 30 Wilson, "The Anatomy of Intimacy," 32.
- 31 Wilson, 46.
- 32 Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, 79.
- 33 See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/celmins-untitled-desert-galaxy-ar00162> for a reproduction of this diptych at the Tate Gallery.
- 34 Lee, "Construction Sites," 291.
- 35 Foerster, *Bright Raft*, 36, 37.
- 36 Foerster, 36.
- 37 Foerster, 38.

- 38 To explore new sociological and literary perspectives on urban experience in the US West, consult Ramirez's *Native Hubs*, Furlan's *Indigenous Cities*, Lutenski's *West of Harlem*, and Comer's *Landscapes of the New West*.
- 39 Viewers and readers could begin with the essays by Whitney Chadwick, Angela Davis, and Jennifer Gonzales in *Women/Art/California* and explore a rich array of public art projects, such as Judith Baca's collaborative mural *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*.
- 40 Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 99.
- 41 Belin, *From the Belly of My Beauty*, 6.
- 42 Comer, "Revising Western Criticism," 361.
- 43 Coleman, *Wicked Enchantment*; Coleman, *Jazz and Twelve O'clock Tales*, 55.
- 44 For a vivid discussion of Coleman's poem "The Nest" as inspiration for a hip hop villanelle by poet LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, see <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/podcasts/76759/a-hip-hop-villanelle>.
- 45 Coleman, *Jazz & Twelve O'clock Tales*, 1.
- 46 Coleman, 3.
- 47 Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem*, 82.
- 48 Harjo, *Spiral to the Stars*, 42.
- 49 Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem*, 46–47.
- 50 Diaz, 48.
- 51 Diaz, 49.
- 52 Diaz, 52.
- 53 Diaz, 52.

## Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Albert, Susan Wittig, Susan Hanson, Jan Epton Seale, and Paula Stallings Yost, eds. *What Wildness Is This: Women Write about the Southwest*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.
- . *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, edited by Analouise Keating, 5.
- . *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990.
- Belin, Esther G. *From the Belly of My Beauty*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1999.
- Chadwick, Whitney. "Reflecting on History as Histories." In *Art/Women/California*, edited by Diane Burgess Fuller, 19–42. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Chiasson, Dan. "The Fearless Invention of one of LA's Greatest Poets." *The New Yorker*, May 11, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/the-fearless-invention-of-one-of-las-greatest-poets>.
- Coleman, Wanda. *Jazz and Twelve O'clock Tales*. Boston, MA: David Godine/Black Sparrow, 2008.
- . *Wicked Enchantment: Selected Poems*. Boston, MA: David Godine/Black Sparrow, 2020.
- Comer, Krista. *Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women's Writing*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- . "Revising Western Criticism through Wanda Coleman." *Western American Literature* 33, no. 4, 1999: 356–383.
- . "Toward a Feminist Turn." *Western American Literature* 53, no. 1, 2018: 11–20.
- Diaz, Natalie. *Postcolonial Love Poem*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2020.
- Erdrich, Heid. *New Poets of Native Nations*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2018.
- Fernández, Ana Theresa. *Borrando La Frontera/Erasing the Borderlands*. <https://anateresafernandez.com/borrando-la-barda-tijuana-mexico/borrando12/>.
- Foerster, Jennifer Elise. *Bright Raft in the Afterweather*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2018.
- Fox, Curtis and LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs. "Poetry Off the Shelf: A Hip-Hop Villanelle." *The Poetry Foundation*, December 12, 2013. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/podcasts/76759/a-hip-hop-villanelle>.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

- . “World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, edited by Mark A. Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, 499–528. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Fuller, Diane Burgess. *Art/Women/California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Furlan, Laura M. *Indigenous Cities: Urban Indian Fiction and the Histories of Relocation*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009.
- Goeman, Mishuana. *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Gonzales, Jennifer. “Landing in California.” “Reflecting on History as Histories.” In *Art/Women/California*, edited by Diane Burgess Fuller, 219–40. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Harjo, Joy. *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems: 1975–2001*. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Harjo, Laura. *Spiral to the Stars: Muskoke Tools of Futurity*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2019.
- Harlan, Theresa. “Indigenous Visionaries: Native Women Artists in California.” “Reflecting on History as Histories.” In *Art/Women/California*, edited by Diane Burgess Fuller, 187–200. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Hayot, Eric and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds. *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Helsing, Elizabeth. “Blindness and Insights.” In *Landscape Theory*, edited by Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins, 323–42. New York and London: Routledge, 2008.
- Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. “The Word Itself.” In *Landscapes in Sight: Looking at America*, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, 299–306. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Kolodny, Annette. “Unearthing Herstory: An Introduction.” In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, 170–81. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009.
- Lee, Pamela. “Construction Sites: Women Artists in California and the Production of Space-Time.” “Reflecting on History as Histories.” In *Art/Women/California*, edited by Diane Burgess Fuller, 275–93. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Lippard, Lucy. “Undertones: Ten Cultural Landscapes.” In *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*, 38–57. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995.
- Lippard, Lucy and Lisa Tamiris Becker. *Melanie Yazzie: Geographies of Memory*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Art Museum, 2014.
- Long Solider, Layli. *Whereas*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2017.
- Lutenski, Emily. *West of Harlem: African American Writers and the Borderlands*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015.
- Mitchell, W. J. T., ed. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 4th ed. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015.
- Morris, Kate. *Shifting Grounds: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2019.
- Norwood, Vera and Janice J. Monk. *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women’s Writing and Art*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997.
- Pratt, Geraldine and Victoria Rosner. *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Ramirez, Reyna. *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in the Silicon Valley and Beyond*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Rosenblum, Naomi. *A History of Women Photographers*. New York: Abbeville Press, 2010.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Vigil, Jennifer. “Linda Lomahafewa.” In *Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism*, edited by Nancy Marie Mithlo, 128. Santa Fe, NM: Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 2011.
- Wells, Liz. *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011.
- Wilson, Ara. “Intimacy: A Useful Category of Transnational Analysis.” In *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*, edited by Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner, 31–56. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Yazzie, Melanie. *Memory Weaving: Works by Melanie Yazzie*. Santa Fe, NM: Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, 2018.