EXPLOITING THE EDGE:
INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF SANDIA
PUEBLO'S SOUTHERN BORDER AND CASINO

by

KRISTA LEE ARMSTRONG

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

Farès el-Dahdah, Director
Assistant Professor
School of Architecture

Michael Bell
Associate Professor
School of Architecture

Keith Krumwiede
Caudill Visiting Lecturer
School of Architecture

Houston Texas

April, 1998
ABSTRACT

EXPLOITING THE EDGE:
INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF SANDIA PUEBLO’S SOUTHERN BORDER AND CASINO

by

KRISTA LEE ARMSTRONG

Recent manipulations and exploitations of the law have allowed the Indian tribes to operate and profit from casinos and gaming activities. The resulting juxtapositions question the relationships between Reservations, Cities, and States. These moments of reorganization expose new possibilities for the future relationships between these overlapping governments and the communities they influence.

The intention of the project is to establish a framework to organize the urban development of the border between the Sandia Pueblo and the City of Albuquerque in such a way that the form of future development along the strip will facilitate economic and physical interaction across and through this border zone, avoid the pueblo landscape, and define the edge of the city.

Future development of the strip would further negotiate the relationship between City and Pueblo. In part, this project outlines one alternative for the city to respond to the pueblo’s strip. The city could choose to ignore, modify, or follow this proposal — the formal reaction of the city development would become part of the story.
CONTENTS

RESIDUE: ............................................. 1
................................................................................. Landscape, History, and Cultures

A PARENTHETIC SPACE: .............................. 22
................................................................................. The Grey Zone and the Border

EXPLOITATIONS: ........................................... 30
................................................................................. Developing the Strip

FOOTNOTES ............................................. 42

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................... 43

Photographs of the site were taken from the west side of the Rio Grande and along the length of the border between the City of Albuquerque and the Pueblo's land.
The history of urbanization in the western United States is a history of islands: cities were founded whole in the sea of nature¹. Until the turn of the century, that Nature existed in order to be conquered, an ethos which has given us the myth of the frontier. The frontier died as the railroad and interstate highway negated its physical practice, predicated as it was on the experience and inaccessibility of vast distances. In the 1930s, with the establishment of the national parks, the US government inverted the relationship of urban island to sea of nature. Today this analogy is largely true.

The line where the city meets the wilderness is an abstract idea drawn by governments and real estate development, represented in laws and as colors on a map. In many cities, this border is at most indicated by a fence along someone’s backyard property line. Despite the importance of this edge to our definition of the city and ourselves, we have largely neglected the visual and experiential exploitation of this line. Steven Holl’s Edge of a City projects, published in 1991, address this deficiency:

*The edge of a city is a philosophical region, where city and natural landscape overlap, existing without choice of expectation.*

*This zone calls for visions and projections to delineate the boundary between the urban and the rural. Visions of a city’s future can be plotted on this partially spoiled land, liberating the remaining natural landscape protecting the habitat of hundreds of species of animals and plants that are threatened with extinction. What remains of the wilderness can be preserved; defoliated territory can be restored. In the middle zone between landscape and city, there is hope for a new synthesis of urban life and urban form.*²
previous page: Satellite image of the United States at night, indicating areas of heavy urbanization and those which are sparsely populated.\(^3\)

top: The transformation of a wilderness area in Cadiz Township, Wisconsin to an urban area over time.

bottom: Undeveloped areas of "Nature" are cut off from one another by the sprawl of urban areas and associated development.
The history of the transformation of wilderness into cities and towns illustrates the unstable nature of the legalities which regulate the exploitation of the landscape in the United States. The boundaries of cities and states move, nature preserves fall prey to logging companies, and money fuels these shifts. These stories illustrate another point: changes are inevitable, and are instigated by those who take an aggressive approach to exploiting existing conditions. At the root of this project is the idea that money and aggression need not serve the cause of evil, but can be used to facilitate less destructive and even creative transformations.

the regional complex

In the Culture of Cities, Mumford writes: "In its recognition of the region as a basic configuration in human life; in its acceptance of natural diversities as well as natural associations and uniformities; in its recognition of the region as a permanent sphere of cultural influences and as a center of economic activities, as well as an implicit geographic fact — here lies the vital common element of the regionalist movement." Using this concept of the "regional complex" as a tool to begin to interpret the landscape of the Middle Rio Grande Valley provides us with a framework to re-organize — and in that manner, re-understand — the influences which have created and will continue to shape the area. The regional complex is a definable association marked by three qualities. "The first is its specific geographic character....[The second is] balance, a state of dynamic equilibrium, between
Looking east across the Rio Grande at the Sandia Mountain from the West Mesa
its various parts....Finally, ....unlike the old-fashioned political areas they have not ... any definite physical boundaries." The complex encompassing Sandia and Albuquerque incorporates the cultures and associated landscapes of the Pueblos, the Anglo-American city on the mesa, and the Hispanic irrigated valley.

The river and the mountain define the Rio Grande Valley around Albuquerque. The river attracted the earliest settlers in the area, irrigating their crops and connecting them to the trade routes. Without this precious source of water, no permanent city-building is possible in the high desert. The river also supports the lush bosque, a dense strip of cottonwoods framing the water on each bank. Spanish settlers expanded on the elaborate system of irrigation ditches begun by the Pueblos, imprinting the valley with the distinctive patterns of roads and settlement which persist today. The infeasibility of bringing water to the mesas on the east and west confined the primarily agricultural society to the north/south axis of the river. For centuries, the availability of water was a major factor determining the relationship of the people to the landscape; allowing the Indians, then the Spanish to live comfortably within those limits imposed by an agrarian society. Large-scale profit and capitalistic enterprises were not possible in a land at the far end of any trading routes and so devoid of marketable industry. Mining and other uses of the earth were not significantly exploited until the arrival of the
B

The Bosque and the Mountain from the West Mesa
United States in the mid nineteenth century. At the close of that century, Anglo-Americans imported the idea of large-scale cattle ranching, made possible only because of the "availability" of the vast tracts of land — the communal land grants which were essentially stolen during the political upheavals following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo — necessary to support those animals in the arid climate, and the presence of a market for them in the westward expansion of the United States' increasing population. The axis created by the Río Grande as it bisects the state marks one of the oldest axes of urban settlement in the United States; a proto-linear city always in sight of the river and its bosque.

The mountain, on the other hand, is everywhere. Sacred to the Pueblo, it is omnipresent in at least the subconsciousness of the whole population of the valley. Its visual presence is primary, but its relationship to the people in its shadow is more complex. Before the arrival of the railroad, the trees of the mountain were the only source of wood suitable for building, while its slopes were the access to the plants and animals of another climactic zone. The presence of the mountain certainly affects the weather of the valley as the air circulates from colder to warmer temperatures in the course of a day. At times its bulk and beyond-human scale seem to reflect (and reflect) even the mood of the people in its shadow.
Looking east from the Mesa at the development along the site at the Bosque and Tramway Boulevard
Today, the mountain and the river are resources subject to the organization and control of the law. In an environmental view, their beauty, their availability as a resource, and the species which live there must be protected.

Sandia Mountain itself is a National Park, home to Elena Gallegos State Park in the foothills bordering the city, Cibola State Game Refuge, Sandia Peak Ski Area, and numerous hiking trails. The eastern edge of the city butts up against these "undeveloped" areas, so that the expensive homes in the foothills have the whole mountain as their backyard. The Rio Grande has long been the center of an extensively developed urban area, but relatively shielded by the surrounding bosque and the agricultural bias of the people, so that it has been possible for the state to create the Rio Grande State Park out of the river and its banks. Today this state park meanders through the middle of the city, visually untouched by urban development.
The Bosque and the Rio Grande from the southwest corner of Sandia Reservation
“What New Mexico seems to offer is what it has always offered: the dramatic confrontation between the new and mobile culture on one hand, and the overpowering “timelessness” of an ancient landscape with its cosmic chronology on the other.”

J.B. Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time.*
Casino Sandia at the intersection of Interstate 25 and Tramway Boulevard.
a story:

The Pueblo Tribes have been in the area since around 1200, while Sandia Pueblo was built around 1300. These politically independent towns resembled the idea of the polis, with their densely built centers supported by the surrounding fields and landscape. In the sixteenth century when the Spanish arrived, the conquistador Coronado visited Sandia during the winter of 1540-41. These Europeans introduced to the area the idea that land had to be owned, and began to distribute the land of the Spanish Empire's far northern frontier to its colonists. The Spanish established towns and churches and tried to organize the landscape of New Mexico to fit their world-view. Interestingly for our story, however, is the disagreement between the Spanish civil government and the Catholic clergy over the nature of this re-organization. In the midst of these arguments, with both sides accusing the other of misusing the native population, the Spanish Colonial government awarded land grants to the pueblos, marking out the land which included their towns and fields. The majority of the land grants in this frontier were given not to individuals, but to communities and extended family groups, to be used and shared by everyone. The pertinent fact of this episode is that, because of a rift between the colonial church and state, the Pueblo tribes had been awarded their land by the King of Spain, and thus owned it with the same legal status as their Hispanic neighbors.
Looking east to the Casino with the Sandia Mountain in the background.
In 1823, Mexico gained independence from Spain, but was not overly concerned with the goings-on in the north. The westward expansion of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century brought the first few Anglo settlers into the area. The Southwest became the point of interaction between three distinct cultures: Hispanic, Indian, and Anglo. Eventually, friction between Anglo and Spanish cultures led to conflict. The United States arrived in New Mexico during the war with Mexico, when the US army occupied Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe ending the war gave certain territories to the United States. Part of the treaty stated that the Royal Land Grants were to remain intact, including the provisions for the self-government of the pueblos. Several tribes signed individual treaties with the United States government as well.

In 1912, the territory of New Mexico was split in half and admitted to the US as New Mexico and Arizona. The US Constitution stipulates that only congress had the power to negotiate treaties with the Indian Nations; this fact, combined with the rights associated with the Land Grants, served to keep the pueblos independent from the State of New Mexico. The pueblos became, in effect, semi-sovereign political entities within the United States. The first US Territorial governors were also the liaison between the tribes in the region and the federal government, but soon the federal government appointed an Indian Agent to take over this task. By the time New Mexico became a state, the pueblos were severely economically depressed, without the capital to compete with the oncoming tide of Anglo-American business brought by the railroad in 1881, the Indian population was discriminated against, and the survival of their culture threatened. Federal Indian Policy focused on “protection” — in a way which loudly expressed the idea that the Native Americans could not take care of themselves — but did nothing to actually help them.

The history of the legal status of the pueblos in New Mexico is a convoluted story, without a
Casino
Sandia and the West Mesa from east Tramway Boulevard
clear narrative. The legal position of the tribes today is not the result of an educated, well informed plan of how to define the independent yet cooperative status of a nation within a nation. As we have seen, nearly every element of the story is the by-product of another story; but the end result is one which allowed the tribes to exploit the legal jumble and develop gaming operations which are bringing money into the reservation.

Casino Sandia first opened in 1984 as “Sandia Indian Bingo,” after the pueblo enacted laws to regulate gaming on its own tribal lands. Up until 1987, the New Mexico pueblos operated only games that were legal elsewhere in the state; but in 1987 the US Supreme Court (in Cabezon Band of Mission Indians v California) stated that the tribes had the right to operate casinos independent of the state’s laws. The next year, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act outlined the relationship between the tribes and the states regarding gambling. Gambling operations were organized into three classes. (Class I is “traditional,” social small-stakes gambling; Class II is fund-raising type games and games like church Bingo; Class III covers everything else, including casino gambling. The IRGA requires states to agree to compact with the tribes to regulate all Class III gambling operations. Although the New Mexico pueblos have been operating their casinos for nearly ten years, the issue is still a constant topic of debate. Casino Sandia is one of the most profitable operations in the US, and has allowed the tribe to begin ambitious new community-oriented projects, make plans to expand their gambling/entertainment facilities, and to buy a small airport, Coronado Airport, at their southern border.
Looking east across the center of the site toward the river
The movement away from the countryside is everywhere, but in the relatively empty landscape of New Mexico the fluidity is more easily discerned, and we can see more that the decline and death of the traditional order. We can see the emergence of a new kind of community -- new in that it represents a different relationship with the environment, a deliberate confrontation with elements in the landscape that earlier generations sought to avoid.

J.B. Jackson, A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time.
The Pueblo's landscape: Sandia Mountain and the foothills from Tramway Boulevard
This project grew out of an investigation of the relationships and patterns of urban development in the western United States. Sandia Pueblo's land constitutes the northern border of the City of Albuquerque, which has expanded to this line. The pueblo's southern border is located in a grey zone, where the effective edge of the city is on the Pueblo's land: Tramway Boulevard and its intersection with Interstate 25, is the first and last exit of the city. Sandia Casino is located at this intersection, benefiting from its proximity to the city and I-25. The Casino is small and ramshackle, but because it draws on the population of Albuquerque for its clients, income, and employees, it has been very successful financially; plans to expand the operation extensively are in the works. The tribe conceives of its southern border as

The Jeffersonian Grid, the City, and the Pueblo. The Pueblo's Reservation lands predate the gridding of America, and represent a void in that fabric.
the buffer zone between its landscape and the American Cowboy landscape of Albuquerque’s gridded city. The city of Albuquerque, for its part, ignores the legal boundaries to its expansion, which include National Forest land and other semi-protected landscapes and continues to sprawl in the manner typical of western American cities.

Given these intriguing relationships — between patterns of development (Pueblo, Hispanic, Anglo, agricultural, and city-building), legal negotiations, and intentions — this project pro-

A NASA satellite photo illustrating the dominant features of the Albuquerque area: the river and bosque, the gridded city development on the mesas, and the mountains. The site of the project — the overlapping zone between the city and the reservation — is highlighted in red.
poses that Sandia Pueblo use the fleeting opportunity presented by a moment in time to make an assertive strike against the unconsidered development of the city, and in this manner control the relationship of the edge of the reservation to the city form. This project proposes that the pueblo use the mode of city building which is threatening their own landscape to protect it, create an inversion or reflexivity of the Cowboy development, and by being more cowboy than the cowboys, dictate the terms by which the city will relate to the border and initiate a potentially more cooperative dialogue across the line and within this parenthetic space.

In order to exploit this fortuitous juxtaposition of situations, this
project proposes a six-mile strip along the borderline, a framework to organize and encourage the future development of the southern border. The strip facilitates economic and physical interaction across and through the border zone, while protecting the pueblo’s landscape by absorbing future development within the grey zone, in a way which can withstand future legal developments as well.

The Casino as the border: the architecture of the strip exhibits the layered characteristics of the border itself, manipulating the condition in order to conceive of the strip as a filter.
Borders and legal landscapes of the Middle Rio Grade Valley. National and State nature and wilderness areas are represented in green, urban areas — Albuquerque and Santa Fe — are in blue, and Pueblo Indian lands are orange. The red line illustrates looproad-type connections to the site from within the city. In part, these legal distinctions limit the boundaries of the city of Albuquerque and indicate the possible patterns of future growth. However, boundaries defined exclusively by law are always subject to unforeseeable shifts and changes.
MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL:
ALL ARE EXISTING FEATURES OF THE SITE
EXCEPT FOR THE STRIP ITSELF, WHICH
WILL OCCUPY THE BORDER LINE.
At its heart, the project is concerned with the landscape and infrastructure. Sandia Pueblo’s southern border cuts a section through the valley, from the shady banks of the Rio Grande to the foothills of Sandia. The project proposes a strip along this section: two lanes in each direction separated by a median. In this manner, the experience of cruising along the strip, turning back, and entering and exiting the Interstate keeps the site in a constant state of change. Views change, one’s legal position shifts...this motion is mirrored by the formal dialogue which is free to develop along a strip. The presence of the small airport — bought by the Pueblo in part with profits from the Casino — introduces several new ideas into the project: a regional accessibility, the view of the site from the air, and the potential to increase the commercial viability of the strip. Interstate 25 is perpendicular to the border, and this exit — to Tramway Boulevard — is the first and last exit of the city, although it is built on the Pueblo’s land. The project moves this exit to occupy and physically mark the intersection of the border with the highway, linking the motion of the cloverleaf with the organization and definition of the border zone.
The site becomes part of a future loop road composed of Tramway Boulevard and 4th Street, linking up with Interstate 40 twice, and with Interstate 25 at its center. This loop is represented by the red line, while the grey zone of the border is in blue. In this manner, the site — the pueblo's southern border — becomes the edge of the city, reinforcing the boundary and thereby protecting the pueblo landscape. These roads tie the strip into the rest of the city — along the valley on 4th, and to the foothills with Tramway — encouraging the continued economic viability of the souther border beyond the Casino; thus preparing the site to withstand future legal manipulations and to continue to protect and benefit the Pueblo landscape.
The Strip is composed of two parallel roads which in plan, together with the smaller one-block perpendicular streets, looks like a ladder which organizes the pueblo's side of the border zone. The main drag occupies the border line itself, and accommodates the majority of the traffic along the strip. The inner road serves as a service street toward the center of the project near the Interstate. As this back street moves to the east, it serves to separate the flow of commercial traffic from residential traffic servicing the Pueblo Programs. Pueblo Program is varied but begins with living – providing flexible organization of the grey zone of the site in order to accommodate residential areas for those who wish to live in the city and the pueblo landscape simultaneously. Pueblo Program includes zones of the site intended to provide space for the tribe's herd of buffalo. These areas of the grey zone are intended to correlate in part with existing programs, in order to facilitate the integration of the strip with the city fabric, thereby ensuring its continues growth and success.
SECTIONS THROUGH THE STRIP.
THE WESTERN THRESHOLD OF THE STRIP.
THE CASINO: THE INTERSECTION OF I-25 AND THE STRIP
THE WESTERN THRESHOLD OF THE STRIP.
As the economic origin of the border's commercial and entertainment development potential, the Casino is the destination point which begins the interaction between city, pueblo, and state. The Casino as program merges with the action of moving through the site and across the border zone. In this project, going to the Casino becomes more than an evening out; one actively re-negotiates the boundaries with each visit.
Drive - Views: the east and west intersections of the strip and the road which loops into the city as well as the road which loops into the city as well as the Casino are the physical and visual thresholds of the edge zone between one landscape and another.
Drive Views anchoring the eastern end of the strip, providing views and access to the Bosque and the Rio Grande.
Drive Views anchoring the western end of the strip, providing views and access to the mountain.
The strip begins with the casino and hotel at the intersection of Tramway and I-25 and the extension of the physical infrastructure along the length of the strip in order to generate and organize future development along the southern border. Development at the airport suggests one possible reaction to the Pueblo's strip: adopting the street-oriented form of the strip promotes a dialogue across the thickened border zone as it is crossed and re-crossed. Human interaction with the physical form of development is integral to the ongoing definition of the edge of the city. The form of the edge of the city, and its meaning in the cultural landscape is constantly re-negotiated. This project attempts to re-understand the forces which are at work in the formation of that edge. Sandia Pueblo's southern border offers a complex juxtaposition of stories and boundaries - a complexity which engenders just as many rich interpretations. The commercial strip is a typology which accommodates conflicting stories and interpretation, and for this reason is especially potent as a reaction to the organization of the border. It's historical application — The Las Vegas Strip, Route 66 — when layered onto this particular site, suggests an aggressive move on the part of one group to counter the seemingly never-ending sprawl of the city. The Pueblo (financed by the Casino) becomes "more Cowboy than the Cowboys" in order to protect its landscape while benefiting from its potentially destructive proximity to the city.
FOOTNOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY


— *Scenes in America Deserta.* Gibbs M. Smith Inc., Salt Lake City. 1982


Castile, George P. *Indian Sign: Hegemony and Symbolism in Federal Indian Policy.*


Deacon, Robert T., M. Bruce Johnson eds. *Forestlands: Public and Private.*

De Mark, Judith Boyce. *Essays in Twentieth-Century New Mexico History.*


Simmons, Marc. *Albuquerque: A Narrative History.* University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque. 1982
