

Review: Remedies for a New West: Healing Landscapes, Histories and Cultures
Patricia Nelson Limerick, Andrew Cowell, and Sharon K. Collinge (Eds).

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Limerick, Patricia Nelson, Cowell, Andrew, and Collinge, Sharon K. (Eds.). *Remedies for a New West: Healing Landscapes, Histories and Cultures*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2009. x + 324 pp. ISBN 9780816525997. US\$35.00. Acid-free paper.

The eleven essays composing this valuable collection originated after a lecture series, "Healing the West", formerly organized by the University of Colorado at Boulder. Most contributions can be assigned to eco-criticism, an interdisciplinary scholarship of literary and sociological studies that exploits narrative paths scrutinizing the role of the natural environment in the community imagination. The American West extends from Canada to Mexico and from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast. Its peculiarity lies in the environment, the biodiversity, the unique inventory of road-less intact ecosystem areas, and – in such a landscape – the high visibility of ecosystem damages. The geographical, biological, and human diversity problems of the West, although complex and intertwined, suffer for their association with the oversimplified mythology of the frontier, which still retains a powerful attraction in American life. On the contrary, *Remedies for a New West* challenges any mythological narrative, as it aims to be "a call for action and a provocation to thought" (p.13). Analysing the historical development of the West with an eye to the values assigned or denied to the concept of nature in the human-nature relationships, curators claim that the West narrative should be read as grounded in economic reality rather than in the romantic tame of wilderness, surrounded by such conventional issues as profit, loss, and competition.

Patricia Nelson Limerick opened the path in 1987, when her book *The Legacy of Conquest* debunked the consolidated imaginary about migration and settlement beyond the hundredth meridian. Now, the vision of the western conquest as a vast economic event consolidates with suggestions in this volume for intervention in social debates surrounding environmental depletion and preservation of what remains of the original resources.

Some contributions are on Native cultures, but arguments range from traditional pueblo dances and urban sprawl to acid mine drainage and nuclear plants, testifying to the great diversity of the West's human and natural landscapes. Several case studies offer restorative thinking aimed at conserving what has been left, looking also for the possibility to restore what has been lost. As many stories demonstrate, achieving a social consensus on healing strategies is the biggest challenge: problems "can be dealt with technically, but the politics and economics of the issue are quite another story" (p.15). As an example, Joseph Ryan (in his chapter "Cleaning up abandoned hard-rock mines in the Western U.S."), emphasizes that remediation of contaminated mines can bring whole communities together. Similarly, Brenda Romero ("Matachines, ritual continuity, and cultural well-being") shows how reviving New Mexican dance rituals can raise novel appreciation of a community's multicultural heritage. John-Michael Rivera ("Mexicans and the memory of tomorrow's landscape"), attempts to repair misconceptions between the present and the past recovering the memory of Mexican cultural history, while Len Ackland's reconstruction ("Open wound from a tough nuclear history") of controversies on the Rocky Flats nuclear-weapons complex suggests that even decades after its end, the Cold War's wounds are more easily covered by bulldozed earth rather than being honestly exposed and healed.

The theme of people is what ties together the essays most closely, offering not just a scholarly perspective, but personal, human perspectives as well. As the editors explain, "When we begin to recognize that the technical issue at hand is often inseparable from the social processes of addressing that problem it happens that what gets healed is human society, along with or even in place of the more narrowly defined problem at hand" (p. 19).

This well-thought collection will be useful for everyone interested in analysing and constructing interdisciplinary bridges between socio-economic studies and other disciplines, such as ecology, journalism, art, civil engineering, or history. The cross-fertilization of perspective that ensues this reading envisages a unified awareness challenging the canon of environmental action as separated from concerns of sociology and anthropology. The West's natural landscape and its built environment, with their symbolical charge, are at the heart of the issue of balancing development and natural spaces in the U.S. Elaborating a narrative able to include different versions of past histories and different accounts of personal memories would be an

outstanding achievement for any movement interested in accommodating – not just in the West – demographic and economic advances while preserving natural, human and cultural resources.

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