

# Good Architecture: The Mission Church of Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico

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**The church of San Francisco de Asis in Ranchos de Taos, NM, was built to provide spiritual succor to a remote outpost of New Spain in the few years prior to 1815; it has been in operation as a functioning parish church without interruption for over 200 years since. It was not designed by an architect, and by most standards used to assess the success – or value – of a work of architecture, it fails. It certainly satisfies its functional role well, but it makes no didactic declaration of intent; it doesn't exemplify innovation, demonstrate mastery (of form or execution), or provide a scripted transformative experience. The source of its undeniable and enduring allure is elusive and seems to lie outside the realm of architecture as we "know" it.**

**Any consideration of value must take into account at least one of the nuanced definitions of "representation" – whether metaphorical, pictorial or archetypal. Neither value or representation are neutral; both are dependent on time, circumstance, and motive (whether consciously driven or not) and can be assigned by forces outside, and occasionally antithetical to, the control of the architect or client. This paper explores the Ranchos church as a case study in intrinsic (locally decided) and extrinsic (externally imposed) value.**

## I. THE DIVIDE

In October of 2015, on the feast day of its patron saint, the church of San Francisco de Asis in Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico celebrated its 200th anniversary. Here, where the identity of the village is inextricably bound to that of its church, the event can be seen as much as an affirmation of community and steadfastness of culture as a milestone in the life of an architectural landmark.

The church commands the center of the town's original plaza, as if to assert its metaphorical position as the focus of community life; except, of course, the metaphor was preordained by laws governing the establishment of Catholic settlements in New Spain.<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of a church on any new town's plaza purposely conflated the spiritual and physical realms, confirming the indivisibility of Church and community in contemporary thought.<sup>1</sup> Two hundred years later, the church remains the pivot point around which village life revolves – one sustained, in part, by a constantly deteriorating body that requires annual attention on the part of its parishioners.



Figure 1: Aerial view of Ranchos de Taos, NM. The church can be seen oriented S/SE in the center of the image.

The road from Santa Fe to Ranchos connects a string of small villages – Chimayó, Truchas, Las Trampas, Taos -- that once formed the northernmost frontier of New Spain. It is a winding 68-mile drive that was only paved in the 1960s. The mountains and forestland quickly begin to close in shutting out the "big" city and commercial clutter; Spanish begins to replace English on signs and in conversation; crosses appear everywhere. The landscape is littered with them; as Georgia O'Keeffe once observed, "I saw the crosses so often – and often in unexpected places – like a thin dark veil of the Catholic church spread

over the New Mexico landscape.”<sup>2</sup> O’Keeffe’s crosses marked chapels and descansos (resting places) along pilgrimage trails; they capped hills, sentinels silently reproaching the lapsed. The crosses you see today more often mark the site of a fatal accident. Adorned with mementos and brightly colored artificial flowers, they are at once jarringly joyous and poignant. This is one of the poorest areas of the country, and the crosses are evidence of the societal ills that often ride in on the heels of poverty.

## II. “I AM SUSTAINED BY THE EARTH”

*“De la tierra fui formado*

*La tierra me a de comer*

*La tierra me a sustentado*

*Y al fin yo tierra ha de ser.”*

**(“I was formed from the earth, I am fed by the earth, I am sustained by the earth, and in the end I will be earth.”)<sup>3</sup>**

—*Chimayo Penitente Alabado*

A brief history is necessary. During the late 18th century, as the Comanche threat diminished, Spanish settlers began to spread out along the waterways of the Rio Grande valley. Rather than rebuilding distinct haciendas that left them vulnerable to the still-occasional attack, they elected instead to collect in quasi-military plazas located near enough to their farmlands that they could work their fields by day and return to the village at night. The morphology of Ranchos de Taos reflects its origins during this time, and the footprint of the original plaza still organizes the town today.

Work was underway on the Ranchos plaza by 1776, and in 1813, the archbishop in Durango, Mexico, approved the residents’ petition for the construction of a village church. The most probable date of completion is 1815 when the parish priest, Father José Benito Pereyro, wrote for permission to conduct burials in the nave, and it is likely that he was responsible for the design of the church as well. The church’s famous buttresses are not original, but were probably added not long after construction to shore up cracking walls behind the apse and below the bell towers. The buttresses are a very happy upside to a near structural disaster, as they have given the church a sculptural profile that has attracted artists and tourist dollars to the area for well over 100 years.

*“The myths and legends of New Mexico spring from its very soil.”*

—*New Mexico Tourist Ad*

The most intact example of the fortified plaza typology survives today at Plaza de Cerro, south of Ranchos in Chimayó. The hill of *Tsi Mayoh*, which lends the town its name, held an important place in the native Tiwa cosmology, and according to Tiwa mythology, it was once the site of a sacred hot spring that marked the spot where twin war gods killed a giant; the pool dried up, but the local natives continued to visit the site and collect the sacred dirt. In 1815, (coincident with the founding of the church at Ranchos), the ground in the shadow of Tsi Mayoh once again provided the faithful with the raw material for a sacred narrative and dictated the location for divine

exchange. Many variations of the story exist, but the most common one follows:

Bernardo Abeyta was out watering his fields one day when he found an image of Señor de Esquipulas in the *barranco*. He saw a light and went over, and there was a little crucifix with Señor de Esquipulas. He took it to his house and put it there, but in a few days, it disappeared and went back to the fields again. He brought it back home, and it went out to the fields again, back to where he found it by the river. ...Bernardo thought it was miraculous that that statue kept going back to the field. So he went to Mexico to get permission to make a *capilla* there. ... A special room was built on the exact spot – they call it *El Pocito* – where Bernardo found the image of Señor de Esquipulas.<sup>4</sup>

By absorbing native tradition and architecturally colonizing an established sacred site, organized religion acknowledges the power of custom and place and seeks to hide it in plain sight. The practice is as old as religion itself, and ultimately reveals more about common ground than it does about difference. We don’t know whether Bernardo Abeyta was familiar with the Pueblo legend or not, but the dirt in the hole where the crucifix was found soon enjoyed the same reputation for affecting miraculous cures as its native precursor, and the reputation persists to this day. The Santuario of Chimayó has been called the Lourdes of America, and during Holy Week, pilgrims walk, some from hundreds of miles away, to worship and collect vials of the dirt to carry home with them. The church walls are thick with crutches, prayers, offerings of thanks and testimonials demonstrating the efficacy of the power of faith. While there is no known tradition of healing dirt at Ranchos, Señor de Esquipulas is venerated there as well. He appears as the main figure in the *reredo* (altar screen) to the right of the nave, offering parishioners promise of the same aid.

## III. “I AM FED BY THE EARTH”

Gertrude Stein once famously wrote, “it is something strictly American to conceive of a space that is filled with moving.”<sup>5</sup> And if, in fact, there is an archetypal American myth, it is the myth of the pioneer. Paul Bunyan’s first bed was, after all, a lumber wagon pulled by a team of horses. The nascent United States of America certainly saw the country as a vast and empty space to be filled. Our formative history is written in rushes, migrations, and waves as we left hearth, home, and family behind; we forged a national identity defined by optimism and opportunity even as we sought to reinvent ourselves. We do not conceive of land as somewhere you put down roots, but as a temporary host from which one can pull up stakes. Which is why the resiliency of the people and culture of northern New Mexico strikes anyone from the outside the area as almost un-American in its stability. An astonishing number of Ranchos families are descendants of the original settlers – the Vigils, Romeros, Martin(ez)s, Durans, and Sanchezes– who petitioned to have the church built in 1813; their names appear on businesses, street signs and private chapels, and the cemetery is full with their stones. Not unlike the Etruscan culture, the importance to the people of Ranchos

of living proximate to the *manes* (souls) of their forbearers cannot be overestimated. Despite repeated attempts on the part of the Pueblo tribes to exorcise the intruders, they returned (like Señor de Esquipulas), hunkered down, content with their harsh, but fertile, breathtakingly beautiful homeland in the Rio Grande valley...and stayed.

Etruscans who did relocate took with them a clod of dirt representative of the sacred ground where their ancestors had been buried and to which their souls still clung, a gesture entwining memory, place, and a sacred understanding of continuity. Earth, soil, place, and culture have become conjoined in the Rio Grande valley over time as well. John Stilgoe recalls the local custom of “turf and twig,” a ritual of “almost religious significance” where the “mayor took a new settler to his *suerte* (tract of land), led him along its borders, and then plucked from the ground a lump of sod, drove a stick through it, and presented it to the newcomer.” The custom “did more than ensure that at least once the grantee perambulated his bounds; it symbolized grazing, planting, and lumbering rights, the rights that bestowed identity and responsibility on the owner.”<sup>6</sup> Dirt is a material conduit to the divine, invoked for its curative powers; it helps nourish; it ensures familial, if not societal, continuity; and it provides shelter.

#### IV. OUTSIDE ARCHITECTURE

“The Ranchos de Taos Church is one of the most beautiful buildings in the United States by the Spaniards. Most of the artists who spend any time in Taos have to paint it, I suppose, just as they have to paint a self-portrait. I had to paint it – the back several times, the front once. I finally painted a part of the back thinking that with that piece of the back I said all I needed to say about the church.”<sup>7</sup>

—Georgia O’Keeffe

We applaud the poetics of construction for what it can reveal about the hidden matter of building – the effort expended in its assembly, or the dynamic expression of statics, for example. The buttresses of the Gothic cathedrals, light, airy and elegant, translate the invisible forces of thrust and counter-thrust into material reality and, in doing so, give birth to the architecture. They are the products of forethought, designed to satisfy an anticipated structural need. It is doubtful the architect/priest at Ranchos could have predicted the failure of its thick load-bearing walls, and the shape of its buttresses, massive, squat, earthbound opposites of their Gothic cousins, suggest an expedient and pragmatic solution to an immediate threat. From the rear, they compromise the legibility of the cruciform plan, calling attention to themselves and away from the meaning of the form – essentially “deforming” the church. By most standards which we use to judge the success of a work of architecture, and thus assign value, the design is a failure. This is outsider architecture<sup>8</sup> for many of the same reasons outsider art is considered such: it was executed by someone without formal training or knowledge of the discipline’s defining tenets; it is unrefined; it is outside any stylistic tradition; it doesn’t meet any recognizable standard of beauty (the Ranchos church is more *joli-laid* than overtly beautiful). It is an unfamiliar, curious structure, and it invites a reciprocal response.

But where the familiar and conventional might bring us comfort and peace, its opposite inspires curiosity. And curiosity, once aroused, has the power to intrigue and inspire.

The extrinsic value of architecture can often be measured in tourist dollars. It is almost impossible for anyone familiar with New Mexico to picture it without imagining its signature architecture, monolithic adobe structures perforated with small punched openings trimmed in bright turquoise. Santa Fe has certainly recognized that its tourist-based economy is dependent on the symbiotic association between architecture and identity by mandating the style (if not the material) in its building codes. In the early 20th century, the railroad excelled at exploiting images of the area’s Native people and its “authentic” architecture to sell the Southwest as a new vacation destination, and no structures appear in their ads more often than the Taos Pueblo and the Ranchos church. With their seductively soft profiles of sun-baked earth, they must have been seen as exotic and foreign (one brochure, published in 1912, compared it to “a village in Palestine”), bewilderingly unlike the familiar hard-edged clapboard, stone, and brick edifices back home. Promoters marketed a remarkably consistent – and persistent – version of the southwest as a region inhabited by peaceful, pastoral people – the Noble Savage and the Humble Farmer – living in their adobe architecture. The Fred Harvey Company proved particularly savvy in this regard, building hotels adjacent to the train stations with showrooms of Native crafts, workshops where craftsmen could be viewed at work and, of course, gift shops where you could purchase a piece of the authentic American west to take home with you.

The portrait cannot be wholly dismissed as marketing genius; there is ample evidence that even resident artists harbored a sincere, if similarly naïve, appreciation of the region’s charms. The remoteness, the space, the sense that here was an intact and ancient authenticity, is something that attracted the first non-native artists to the area in the late 19th century. Anxious to break ties with the European-dominated art scene (and coincident with increased interest in arts of “primitive” cultures), American artists of the time began a search for subjects and settings more representative of their own country. In the Taos area, with its strong native presence and adobe architecture, the artists believed they had found both; many visited and many subsequently stayed. In a letter written to architect Rudolph Schindler in 1915, Taos artist Victor Higgins unequivocally stated, “The Pueblo Indian’s architecture is the only naturally American architecture in the nation today. All other styles are borrowed from Europe. Being so completely the product of their surrounds, they give the painter a host of fresh and original ideas. This strong primitive appeal calls out the side of art that is not derivative.”<sup>9</sup> He later added, “There is in the mind of every member of the Taos art colony the knowledge that here is the oldest of American civilizations. The manners and customs and style of architecture are the same today as they were before Christ was born.”<sup>10</sup>

After almost 400 years of Spanish occupation, the notion that the native architecture was unaffected by European tradition is, of course, its own myth – just as the oft-repeated notion that the

traditional Spanish still spoken in northern New Mexico is the same pure Castilian Spanish spoken by the conquistadores. Both are “dialects” that may have begun with some kind of culturally unadulterated raw material, but each adopted from other traditions over time to become something altogether...muddy.<sup>11</sup> An indigenous tradition of building by compressing balls of dirt and water to form a wall preceded colonization, but Pueblo builders quickly appropriated the more regularized and structurally stable Spanish method of adobe brick construction. Certainly, by the time the church at Ranchos was constructed, the technique of building with adobe block had become commonplace.

Schindler may have been inspired to visit the area after seeing a model of the Taos Pueblo sponsored by the Harvey Hotel chain on display at the San Francisco Pan-Pacific Exposition, and one of the earliest extant images of the now-famous rear view of the church was taken by him while on a Union Pacific tour in 1915.<sup>12</sup> Schindler neatly sidesteps the trap of regurgitating the myth of an unmediated and authentic “American architecture” in a 1920 letter to fellow-architect Richard Neutra: “When I speak of American architecture I must say at once that there is none...”<sup>13</sup> He follows, however, with something much more poetically provocative in the next sentence: “The only buildings which testify to the deep feeling for the soil on which they stand are the sun-baked adobe buildings of the first immigrants and their successors – Spanish and Mexican – in the south-western part of the country.”<sup>14</sup>

#### V. “I AM FORMED FROM THE EARTH”

The discontinuity between building and ground is often obvious in the hard line where the horizontal snaps to bolt upright. Adobe structures,<sup>15</sup> on the other hand, appear to have been conjured rather than constructed – called forth from their host sites fully formed. The horizontal plane eases skyward, gently bending the line between building and ground. Georgia O’Keeffe captured that ambiguity perfectly in the series of paintings of the church’s rear façade executed between 1929 and 1931. Her precise brushwork and subtle gradation of tone renders the juncture virtually imperceptible, clearly conveying the intimate material connection between adobe architecture and the earth.<sup>16</sup>

As part of the second wave of artists who came to the area in the 1920s, O’Keeffe was one of a loose circle of New York artists that called photographer Alfred Steiglitz (later O’Keeffe’s husband) its center. Fellow members Ansel Adams,<sup>17</sup> Paul Strand, and John Marin were also frequent visitors to the southwest who included images of the Ranchos Church in their portfolios, but it is O’Keeffe who we identify most strongly with the genre of contemporary southwestern art. It is almost impossible for anyone familiar with her work to spend any time in the area without the landscape dissolving into her characteristically fluid forms, without roads transforming into blue ribbons, distant vistas gathering into immediately recognizable profiles, geology reduced to an inevitable color palette. The images of New Mexico she produced early in her career reflect the influence of photography’s ability to capture minute detail at an enlarged scale,

occasionally magnifying subject matter to a point beyond recognition. Such abstraction requires creative editing – the suppression, if not elimination, of information extraneous to the artist’s intended purpose. O’Keeffe’s *Ranchos Church, No 3*, (1929), a simple composition capturing the contrasting contours of the apse and transept walls of the church against a background of blue sky and clouds, is a portrait of isolated focus, excluding everything – community, parishioners, iconography, any outward sign of the building’s function. In the absence of circumstance, only form – and formal interpretation – remains. The

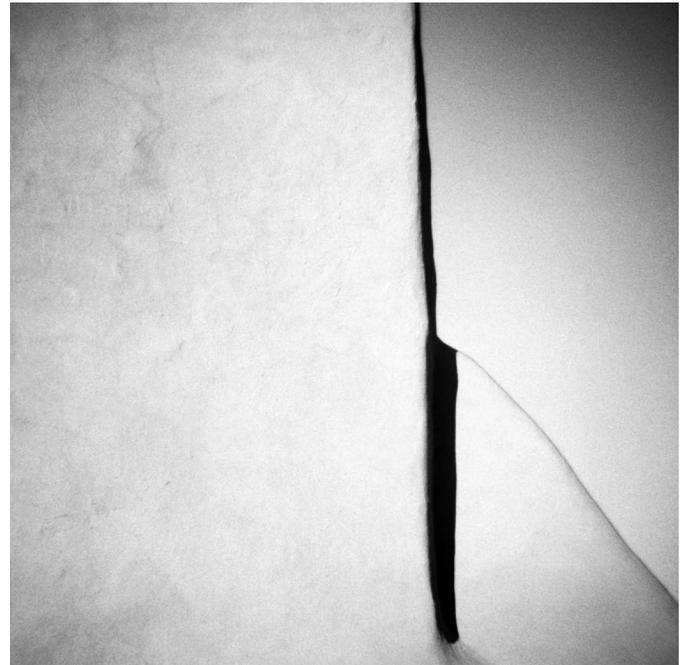


Figure 2: “Ranchos Church, 2007.” ©Judith Birdsong, 2007..

paintings she did of the Ranchos church helped secure its status as an architectural icon, but they stripped the church from the building.

O’Keeffe is, of course, not solely responsible for the church’s fame as artistic muse; hundreds before and since have found inspiration in the play of light and shadow on its walls, in the harsh contrast between blue sky and brown earth, in its enigmatic and seemingly ageless presence. It has been the subject of exhibitions dedicated solely to its image, viewed by thousands who will never experience its presence firsthand – although many were seduced to do so. Not surprisingly, however, some parishioners find the reduction of sacred edifice to secular magnet disturbing. The following, taken from an article imagining a dialogue with the church, was written by the *mayordomo* (the lay person who oversees maintenance of the church) and clearly conveys one Ranchos parishioner’s lack of ambivalence on the subject:

Tourists. I walked away and sat on the bench under the blue spruce that Father Alvarez planted 15 years ago. Intrusion, disrespect, change; never ending. Disheartened, saddened, I looked up into [the church’s] eyes and asked, “What will happen to us? They are so many, so rude, so greedy.”<sup>18</sup>

When the church tries to console him by expressing her appreciation for the fact that she is adored, he counters,

Don't you see what's happening around the Plaza? Galleries, galleries, and now a hot dog cart! This will no longer be a community of families, a stronghold of our culture. The days of children running through your courtyard, throwing rocks at your windows are marked. Soon there will be no children no families, no culture, no love – not here anyway.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 3: "Ranchos Church, 2016." ©Judith Birdsong, 2016.

## VI. "IN THE END I WILL BE EARTH"

"The wall doesn't lie. Before mass we always go to look at our wall. To see how it's holding up."

—Parishioner to the author, 2014

Value is often a reflection of investment. Dirt only grudgingly abandons mother earth; if left unprotected, adobe will quickly join hands with rain and slip away to return home. Conservation, in this case, requires replastering the church with a fresh protective mud skin every few years. In the 1960s, faced with an aging and dwindling population, and with a very large, demanding, and deteriorating church, the parishioners elected – not unreasonably given what was known at the time – to attempt a more "permanent" solution to the annual *enjarre* (remudding) and plaster the church with cement stucco. Preservationists, traditionalists, and architects protested, but work proceeded. Within months, cracks in the skin had appeared, although it would be another ten years or so before the full extent of the damage became apparent: the church was melting away inside this artificial shell. Moisture was absorbed through the stucco, and then by the adobe, and couldn't find its way back out; the church quite literally couldn't breathe. And so, in 1979,

the decision was made to return to the tradition of the *enjarre* and restore the protective skin annually, by hand.

Modern conveniences have helped ease the workload, but the hand is still the primary tool. Last year's spalled mud skin must be broken, scraped, screeded, mixed with water and fresh straw, then delivered by bucket and wheelbarrow. Labor divides along gender and generational lines: children and younger parishioners ferry tools and materials, while the men are primarily responsible for applying the



Figure 4: "Carmen Velarde, enjarradora, 2016". ©Judith Birdsong, 2016.

thick mud of the scratch and brown coats; the *alizardorras*, traditionally and, still, largely, women, follow with the *alize* (finish coat).<sup>20</sup> applied with a sponge, a bit of sheepskin, or bare hand in calligraphic strokes that caress the prepared surface – although the most skilled *alizardorras* leave no signature trace.

The survival of a culture's collective memory is enhanced when place – and architecture (as architecture is often implicated in the construction of place) – is sustained. Maintaining the church upholds tradition, community, and a practice that would undoubtedly have died with the last generation of parishioners otherwise. As resident Guadalupe Tafoya insightfully recognized, "This is an organic structure. It's adobe, it's alive, it expands, it contracts so we work with it. It holds everything, it holds joy, it holds grief, it holds sorrow, it holds hope and prayer. Most of all, it holds the traditions of the people of Ranchos."<sup>21</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Ordinance 119 states the church should be placed on the plaza. See John B. Wright and Carol L. Campbell, "Landscape Change in Hispano and Chicano Villages of New Mexico," *Geographic Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (Oct., 2008), 551-56.
2. Georgia O'Keeffe. *Georgia O'Keeffe*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), unpaginated.
3. Marta Weigle, *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood: Penitentes of the Southwest* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1976), 275.
4. Don J. Usner, *Sabino's Map: Life in Chimayo's Old Plaza* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995), pp. 86-7. "Esquipulas" derives from a Chorti word meaning "raised water or spring." See Stephen de Borhegyi, "The Miraculous Shrines Our Lord of Esquipulas in Guatemala and Chimayo, New Mexico," in *The Spanish Colonial Arts Society, El Santuario de Chimayo* (Santa Fe, 1956), 4. The legend of Senor de Esquipulas (also known as the "Black Christ of Esquipulas" because of the color of the wood used to carve the crucifix) is native to Guatemala and the cathedral where the figure is enshrined is also a pilgrimage site likewise known for its healing dirt. Historically, the dirt there is compressed into small wafers known as "tierra santa" or "benditos" and eaten or mixed with water and drunk; they are said to be particularly beneficial to pregnant women. Borhegyi estimates that the cult of the Black Christ had spread to at least seven countries by the mid-20th century. Borhegyi, "Miraculous Shrines," 4.
5. Gertrude Stein. *Gertrude Stein's America*, ed. Gilbert A. Harrison. (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1965), 95.
6. John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 41-2. On life in the Plaza de Cerro, see Usner, *Sabino's Map*.
7. O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, unpaginated. It is interesting that O'Keeffe equates painting the church (which she did on at least seven occasions) with the need to paint a self-portrait because it seems she resisted that need: no self-portraits are included in the 1999 catalogue raisonné of her work. Steiglitz photographed O'Keeffe throughout the tenure of their long relationship, and his portraits of her were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1978; so, too, did Ansel Adams, Yousuf Karsh, Philippe Halsman and others who sought to capture something of her enigmatic persona on paper, but O'Keeffe's own "self-portrait" exists only in the traces she left of her life-well-lived: her homes in Abiquiu and Ghost Ranch; and, of course, in her art.
8. The remote location of these villages so far from the cultural capitals of New Spain in Mexico gave rise to a host of local modifications (some would say aberrations) to artistic convention and sanctioned custom. The music, food, art, architecture, language, and religion of northern New Mexico are all characteristically distinct from their mother material to the south.
9. Albert Narath, "Modernism in mud: R.M. Schindler, the Taos Pueblo and a 'Country Home in Adobe Construction,'" *The Journal of Architecture*, 13:4, 408. It wasn't long before the Taos artists found a market back east, reinforcing the romantic and picturesque portrait of the region, and fueling further curiosity about this uniquely "American" corner of the country.
10. Narath, "Modernism," 408.
11. Adobe construction is itself an adaptation of building methods imported to Spain by the Moors. The word derives from the Arabic, *al-tuba* (mud brick).
12. The earliest published image of the famous rear elevation I have been able to find is one taken in 1912 by Jesse L. Nussbaum, now in possession of the Museum of New Mexico. See "Church of St Francis, Ranchos de Taos, ca 1912," reproduced in *Images of Spirit and Vision: Ranchos de Taos Church*. (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1987), 31.
13. Narath, "Modernism," 407.
14. Narath, "Modernism," 407. I hope the irony of the notion that the true and authentic "America" lay outside the dominant culture isn't lost on anyone.
15. With their monolithic mass and smooth, unbroken surface, adobes seem to resist being described as "buildings" where evidence of the act of assembly always seems to haunt the noun's definition.
16. In fact, the architect/priest at Ranchos would probably have used colored soil or sand to mark out the plan of the building on site.
17. Adams wrote, the rear elevation "defines this building as one of the great architectural monuments of America." Quoted on the Ansel Adams website, <http://anseladams.com/about-the-photograph-saint-francis-church-ranchos-de-taos-new-mexico/>.
18. David A. Maes, "Symphony in mud exploited by Americanos," *The Taos News*, August 18, 1988; reprinted courtesy of *The Taos News*. The alliance of tourism and faith -- a delicate pact of allies with different interests -- has a history that extends to the medieval period when cathedrals actively collected relics intended to lure pilgrims to their doors. The Santuario at Chimayó became a pilgrimage destination in 1816, and an inventory of the shrine in 1818 suggests the people there began exploiting the market in religious tourism very early on. There are two rooms, apparently originally built specifically as a venue for selling goods, located to either side of the entry of the Santuario that are not found on any other church or chapel in NM.
19. Maes, "Symphony."
20. In the tradition of the pueblo Indians, construction was women's work. Whether or not women were responsible for the original construction of the church at Ranchos, until the restoration of the mud skin in 1979 (which required the manpower of the entire parish), women were responsible for the finish plaster work; men are tolerated, but women dominate. One priest, writing in 1940 said, "...it is the rule and naught can change it -- and it is correct. Let the men defend the homesite and plow the ground and get the wood, lay adobes, trade, freight, and watch the stock -- plastering along with all home duties belongs to the ladies. ...Men could assist in menial roles; theirs the heavy work, putting up the high scaffolds, getting the earth, tierra bayita, helping the women in going up and down, standing by for safety's sake. But the real job, the final act -- the master's touch was by the ladies." Rev. Jose Garcia, "Symphony in Mud," reprinted in *Ayer y Hoy en Taos*, no. 12: (Fall, 1991), 10.
21. Susan Montoya Bryan, "Iconic Church Brings New Mexico Village Together," [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38181790/ns/us\\_news/t/iconic-church-brings-new-mexico-village-together/#.WgjdABNSyqA](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38181790/ns/us_news/t/iconic-church-brings-new-mexico-village-together/#.WgjdABNSyqA).