

Abstract

Sarah Zollinger
August 1, 2006

Culture and Materials:

Sustainability in the Architecture of *Colonias* in Texas and Mexico

I have spent the past semester researching sustainability in two ways. First by looking at materials and the appropriateness of site-specific modes of construction and secondly by researching communities (including *colonias*) and projects that strive to find balance between what is 'modern' and therefore 'advantageous' and what is culturally sustainable. While I am taking part in the NASHCC exchange between the University of Texas at Austin and Dalhousie School of Architecture and I hope to take this research out of the realm of theory and engage with communities, make connections with people and understand both culturally and materially what *colonias* are and what they might become in the future.

Colonias inhabit, translate and transgress a multitude of in-between spaces. *Colonias* are both buildings and "architecture": self-built vernacular. The homes built here are amalgamations of styles. Like the residents, *colonias* are no longer Mexican but they are also not entirely 'American'. *Colonias* are propertied places of dwelling, but many think of them as slums and the residents as squatters.

A house is a 'container for culture and meaning (Pereau 87)' and home also describes a cultural state. When one then 'reads' the *colonias* of Texas it is clear that there are changes taking place in the cultural makeup of the peoples as they shift away from the flat roofed adobe style houses and into the *dos aguas* (pitched roof) of American suburbs. *Colonistas* pick their way between their Mexican traditions and new American experiences and this change in thought and understanding is expressed in the dwellings that they build for themselves.

Adding to my current research, I would like to closely examine one *colonia*: several dwellings and a gathering space, by making a collection of drawings and photographs that would start to visually describe a place. Accumulating conversations and stories from the people of that place would permit me to gather a fuller picture of this interstitial space. This research would allow me to work at IC2 with under the supervision of Professor David Gibson. As well as allowing me to make connections with other interested professors at the University of Texas at Austin, including Peter Ward and Chad Richardson and School of Architecture professors, including Sergio Palleroni and Steven Moore, who are currently working with ideas of material and cultural sustainability.

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Education:

Master of Architecture, Dalhousie School of Architecture,
Halifax, NS (Spring 2006-present)

Bachelor of Environmental Design (BEDs), Dalhousie
School of Architecture, Halifax, NS (2006)

Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), Emily Carr Institute of Art
and Design, Vancouver, BC. (2003)

Work Experience:

Jr. Design Associate, (August-December 2005)
Scrafano Architects,
Los Angeles, CA

Architectural Intern, (September-December 2005)
Siegel: Office of Mobile Design,
Venice, CA

Research Assistant (Sept. 2002- Feb 2003)
Prof. Ashok Mathur, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design,
Vancouver, BC.

Operations Supervisor
(Oct. 1998-Jan. 2002)
Pacific Boarder, Vancouver, BC.

Exhibitions:

Ignition (2005)
Edmonton, Alberta.; Collaborative cahrette, part of the
Canadian Architectural Students Association's conference

Graduation Show (2003)

Emily Carr Concourse Gallery and Charles H Scott Gallery, Vancouver, BC; Final exhibition of work of graduating students.

PKD: Welcome to the Desert of the Real (2002)

Emily Carr Concourse Gallery, Vancouver B.C. Retrospective exhibition based on the work of Phillip K. Dick.

Ceramic Show (2001)

Emily Carr Concourse Gallery, Vancouver BC. Collected works from the ceramics department.

Then & Now (1998)

Anna Leonowens Gallery Halifax, NS. Selected works of former foundation students with current work.

Works Published

'Ignition'. Studio East 2004/5, Halifax: TUNS Press, 2005.

'Leaps of Faith, Suspending Belief and other Phenomenon'. Halifax: TUNS Press, 2005.

also in,

'CraftWerks: Shoreline Sightings'. *On Site*, v15, Spring 2006.

Academic/Research Interests

- Interstitial spaces, borders and the places in-between. Where and how these spaces exist and how we interact with them.
- Home and the implications of personal space on life experience.
- Homelessness in North America, specifically on the ways cultural understandings of "homeless" affects the ways in which the homeless self-house.
- Self-building and the integration of appropriate solutions
- Sustainable materials and place-specific technologies.
- Community and participatory design/build