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## THE INVISIBLE VILLAGES. UP-TO-DATE IMAGES OF SETTLEMENT IN SPAIN

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### **Abstract**

The role played by photography in the creation of icons as well as in the dissemination of architecture has been fundamental since the early days of the Modern Movement. Both iconic Kindel's images of settlement villages in Spain and other archival photographs —created during Franco's dictatorship for greater propaganda purposes— sparked our curiosity and instilled in us the necessity to see with our own eyes those architectures which have remained not only unknown for a non-specialised public, but also somehow invisible outside strictly academic realms. Urban planners that would later become key figures in the Spanish architecture of modernity carried out these innovative, experimental projects on the basis of the observation of the popular and the anonymous, consciously departing from the grandiose rhetoric of the time. We believe it is necessary to examine what has become of the INC's colonisation programme, and thus highlight a fundamental episode in our recent history which brought about the main migratory movement in 20th-century Spain. Such a task seems to us particularly significant at this point in time in which architecture is being redefined (as was the case with Spanish architecture in the 50s and the 60s), and sustainability and the social function of architecture are highly topical subjects. In this vein we have revisited these settlements and we have documented, with a contemporary gaze, the legacy left by the construction of a new memory upon the already colonised architecture. It is our aim to make visible and announce such legacy to the general public as well as to its own inhabitants, so that these villages cease to be mirages amidst a transformed landscape.

Keywords: photography, colonization, revisit, memory, traces

# THE INVISIBLE VILLAGES.

## UP-TO-DATE IMAGES OF SETTLEMENT IN SPAIN

Written by Ana Amado & Andrés Patiño

Photography has played an instrumental role in the creation of icons and the dissemination of architecture since the very onset of the Modern Movement. The appearance of the professional architectural photographer and some providential architect/photographer pairings would be key to the massive diffusion of the International Style. For the first time, by virtue of the sublimation of the architectures of modernity conveyed by those photographs, architecture would come to be regarded as a consumer item<sup>1</sup>. The International Style reached universal status thanks to the dissemination power of, among others, the photographic works produced by Shulman, Stoller and Hervè<sup>2</sup>.

Our research project sees the light of day guided by one such fortunate pairing, and focuses its attention on Spain from the 1940s to the 1970s, on the strength of the great evocative power of the pictures taken by photographer Joaquín del Palacio (Kindel) of the new colonization villages devised by architect José Luis Fernández del Amo that had been erected by General Franco's regime after the Spanish Civil War<sup>3</sup>. This colonization programme, developed by the Instituto Nacional de Colonización (INC), with precedents in the 2nd Spanish Republic and fascist Italy, aimed to stimulate the devastated Spanish economy through its agriculture by means of tilling new fertile lands. For that purpose, a large number of dams and canals were built to provide water for new irrigation lands and some 300 new population settlements which were to be occupied by colonists from nearby villages<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "Photography does for architecture what railroads did for cities, it transforms it into merchandise and transports it through magazines to be consumed by the masses. It adds a new context to the production of architecture, which corresponds to a circuit of independent use, superimposed on that of the built space, an added value", p.54. "Modern architecture does not only address or exploit mass culture; architecture itself has from the beginning been an article of consumption", p.135. Colomina, B. (2010) "Privacidad y publicidad. La arquitectura moderna como medio de comunicación de masas". CENDEAC, COAMU, OBS. Murcia.

<sup>2</sup> "At the same time, those committed architects understood that the photographs of their buildings were the ultimate crystallization of their work and what really transcended in terms of their recognition and personal satisfaction. These back-and-forth needs, consecrated the figure of the architectural photographer as a specialized technician that gave form to this particular visual narration.p.50. Bergera, I (2015) "Fotografía y arquitectura moderna en España", in *Fotografía como arquitectura*. Click1, Iniciativa Digital Politécnica y Prensa de la Universidad de Zaragoza. Barcelona.

<sup>3</sup> Delgado Orusco, E. (2013) "Imagen y Memoria. Fondos del archivo fotográfico del Instituto Nacional de Colonización 1939-1973". Ministerio de Agricultura, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente. Madrid. Delgado Orusco, E. (2015) "El agua educada. Imágenes del Archivo Fotográfico del Instituto Nacional de Colonización". Ministerio de Agricultura, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente. Madrid.

<sup>4</sup> Calzada Pérez, M. (2006) "Pueblos de Colonización I, II, III". Colección Itinerarios de Arquitectura 03, 04, 05. Fundación Arquitectura Contemporánea. Córdoba.



ANA AMADO & ANDRÉS PATIÑO  
The Girl and the Street, from "Colonos", 2016. Vegaviana, Cáceres.

ANA AMADO & ANDRÉS PATIÑO  
Housing, from "Colonos", 2016. Vegaviana, Cáceres.

Kindel captured then the work of a great architect, such as Julius Shulman did with the work of Richard Neutra from the 50s onwards, albeit against the backdrop of very different economic and political circumstances<sup>5</sup>. Both intend to portray an idealized lifestyle: the American Dream of the car-owning suburban dweller on the one side, and that of life in the countryside as the epitome of the virtues of the New Spain on the other: the farmer who, through the sweat of his brow and self-sacrificing labour helps lift up his country. In both cases, architecture is presented as a scenery allied with the pursued ideal, while the human figure would play different roles corresponding to the two different political systems.

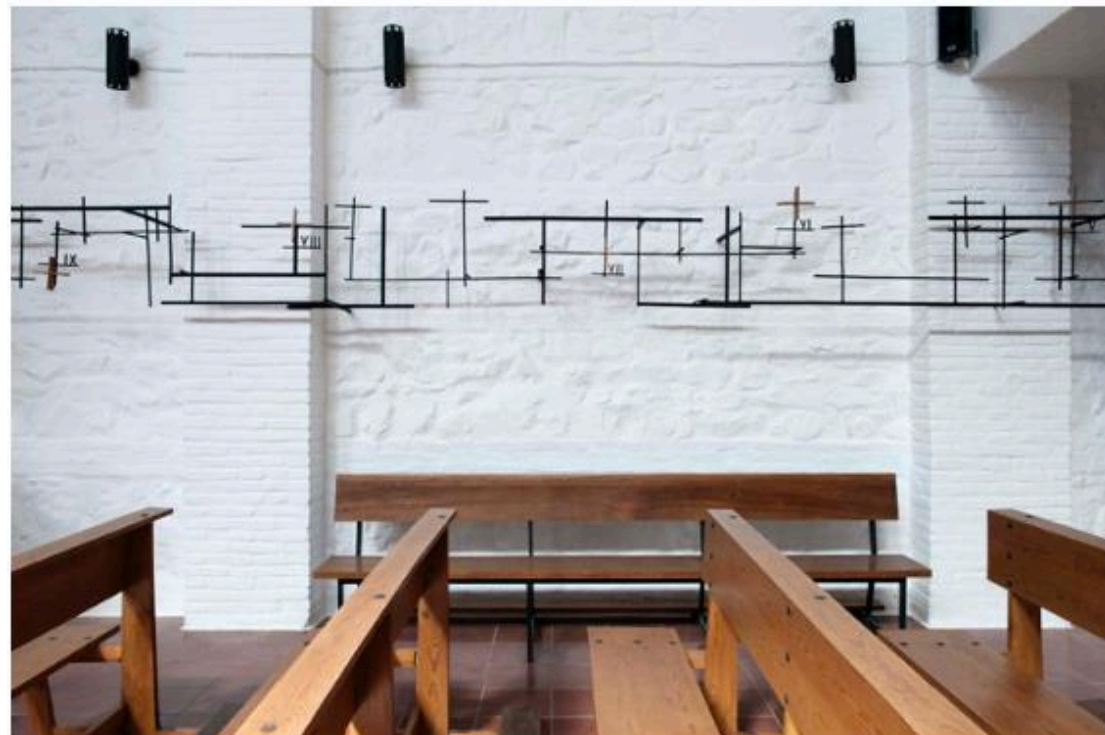
From Hollywood glamour and the perfection of optimistic consumerism of the post-war USA to the humble presence of the newly arrived colonists who adorned the new Spanish villages (dressed in their Sunday best and with no signs of the gruelling effort required by seeing through the great landscape transformation of the new rural Spain). An attractive parallel can be drawn between the mise en scene proposed by both photographers' images: one with an aim to sublimate and the other as the subtle propaganda of a dictatorial regime. The dissemination of these images through the mass media reaches the whole population and it will represent a key element in government propaganda whether democratically legitimate or totalitarian.

The connection between the most canonical and widely acclaimed images of USA capitalism and their contemporary ones of the post-war Spain at a time of economic development plans and new rural settlements explains the reciprocal correlation between two apparently far distant realities, both set against the backdrop of a modern architecture which was to gradually abandon its revolutionary nature and wind up becoming the new western bourgeois standard. The evocative power of some of the photographs that Kindel takes in the villages by Fernández del Amo (the ones taken in the flagship of the colonization programme -Vegaviana- are amongst the better known), has been so powerful that it has prompted a photography project where decades later we have returned to these now largely forgotten villages whose architecture has already been colonized by their new inhabitants<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> "Photography reaches its closest collaboration with architecture when it is used to convert the built worlds of integrated design into promotional images. Julius Shulman was one of the most skillful photographers of modern architecture. (...) Shulman condenses the forms of architecture and design -which have already internalized the appearance and the cultural value of photography- in icons adapted to the media", p.31. Campany, D. (2015) "La arquitectura a través de la fotografía: documento, publicidad, crónica, arte". Construyendo mundos. Fotografía y arquitectura en la era moderna. Fundación ICO, La Fábrica. Madrid.

<sup>6</sup> "Returning to the heroic fifties, that's when I asked Joaquín to come and see the towns I was building in the lands of Extremadura, Levante, La Mancha and the South (...) Here I must say- and I have declared many times- that to the objective, to the sensitivity, to the vision of Joaquín del Palacio I largely owe my successes and I am grateful to him (...) he knows it well that I recognize in him some faculties I took advantage of. We have run together looking for uncharted corners, in the knowledge that we were communing in the enjoyment of the eyes", p.182. Fernández del Amo, J.L. (1995) "El arte en la fotografía de Kindel", Palabra y obra, escritos reunidos. COAM. Madrid.



ANA AMADO & ANDRÉS PATIÑO  
Street, from "Colonos", 2016. S. Isidro de Albaterra, Alicante

ANA AMADO & ANDRÉS PATIÑO  
Via Crucis, from "Colonos", 2016. Villalba de Calatrava, Ciudad Real.

We wanted to revisit those villages driven by the same kind of obstinacy as that described by Barthes<sup>7</sup>. We set out to cast a new, contemporary, analytic gaze upon them with no other aim but to unfold the huge complexity of a phenomenon that has remained invisible to the general public outside the world of academia. After revisiting, so far, 33 of these new villages by means of the photographic image, we have discovered the current interest of the programme. We consider its values remain valid to this day and deserve to be brought into focus, out from the darkness that submerged them, mainly as they were part of a project conducted by a dictatorial regime.

At a time when there is so much talk about the issue of mass migrations resulting from economic and armed conflicts, and the subsequent relocation of hordes of people, it becomes relevant to analyse this case, which resulted in Spain's greatest internal migration of the 20th century (60,000 families in 300 villages). The phenomenon of rural depopulation is another serious issue in present-day Spain<sup>8</sup>. It is of the essence to try to bring back to recollection the memories of places that are fading into time, that are being abandoned. This phenomenon is also affecting colonization villages. The awareness and dissemination of the realities and stories behind these places may contribute to put a stop to their disappearance. The colonization programme also implied land-use, economic and social planning on a national scale. Although it was not economically successful, we do find elements in it that could serve as references today: for experimental town and architectural planning, at a time of redefinition for Spanish architecture, which was then torn between modernity and tradition<sup>9</sup>, for offering better career prospects to new, bright, up-and-coming architects; for the integration of art and architecture, the use of local, low-cost resources and the sustainability of the means employed in the preservation of the natural environment. We do not want to leave aside one very contemporary aspect that we have come across in all the villages we visited: the tension between conservation and transformation.

Time and the life of colonists have left their print on those homogenizing architectures, in some cases under special protection today. Finally, it is worth noting that our project also wants to give back to the colonists their well-deserved protagonism, to push aside the intentionally decorative role they were once given and to put them back on centre stage, on the same level as the whitewashed architecture that housed them, and about which a new story has been written.

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<sup>7</sup> "The essence of photography is precisely this obstinacy of the referent in always being there," p.22. Barthes, R. (2004) "La cámara lúcida", Paidós. Barcelona.

<sup>8</sup> Del Molino, S. (2016) "La España vacía. Viaje por un país que nunca fue". Turner. Madrid.

<sup>9</sup> De Terán, F. (2017) "Antes de salir por la puerta del tiempo. Visión personal de un urbanismo real". Lampreave. Madrid.  
"Copying popular or classic Spanish art leads to folklore or Spanish kitsch. To extract its essence, knowing how to extract those ingredients of truth, of modesty, of joy, of beauty that it does have, would amount to finding the path towards a new architecture and, in general, towards a new art".

Fisac, M. (1949) "Estética de la arquitectura", Boletín de la Dirección General de Arquitectura 11, vol. IV. Madrid. "The popular, purified, stripped of all vulgar ornament, is a treasure trove of findings and surprises".

De la Sota, A. (1956) "La arquitectura y sus tendencias actuales", Boletín de la Dirección General de Arquitectura (4th trimester). Madrid.



## Conclusion

Our project sets out to make the villages in the Spanish colonization programme visible again through a review, under a contemporary gaze, of their current situation by means of photography which, as we have seen, represents a crucial means of diffusion and analysis of Architecture. In the same breath, we would like to point out the fundamental role played by Kindel's photographic gaze at the time when the colonization program was implemented. His photographs, created back then, have served us as a starting point. These are images that, alongside those taken by other photographers commissioned by Franco's dictatorial regime, were used with an eye on state propaganda, this being the main cause why this colonization has remained forgotten for decades, despite it being the biggest internal migration in 20th century Spain. After visiting and photographing more than 30 of this villages we derive as conclusions their current validity, deterioration and alteration alongside their obstinate vocation of permanence by the construction of a new memory upon the already colonised Architecture<sup>10</sup>.



ANA AMADO & ANDRÉS PATIÑO  
Village's skyline, from "Colonos", 2018. La Vereda, Córdoba.

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<sup>10</sup> "If we want to restore a photograph to the context of experience, of social experience, of social memory, we must respect the laws of memory. We have to situate the printed photography in such a way that it acquires something of the surprising decisive character of what was and is," p.65.  
Berger, J. (2008) "Mirar", Gustavo Gili. Barcelona.

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