Introduction: Spanish Francoist colonisation towns under the trialectic lens

Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of space, similarly to de Certeau’s (1990) or Arendt’s (1958: 323) idea of action, relies on the socio-constructionist and post-Hegelian notion of trialectics. In his view, social space – place – is not a given entity, it is rather composed by objects and relations which in turn give shape to normative spaces, those of everydayness, and those ideal or imaginary (Lefebvre 1991: 77). In his terminology, these are representations of space, practised spaces and spaces of representation. The complex rapport between the three dimensions of place, far from being fixed, evolve in spatiotemporal configurations. It is for this reason that Lefebvre relies on historiography as a means of breaking down space into elemental parts. A combination of historical and hermeneutic enquiry of each component within and without its context – découper et retourner in de Certeau’s terms – makes it possible to more accurately determinate their role in the production of space. A number of additional concepts, such as appropriation, domination, or détournement (Lefebvre 1991: 164–168, 2014: 98) refer to the time dimension of places and their study.

Lefebvre’s often intricate, rich, and overwhelming style makes it difficult to elicit method, and in spite of the apparent intelligibility of the basic concepts of trialectics, they can unexpectedly turn elusive when examined in detail. In order to make it more operational, I propose in former writings a framework to break down the evolution of a social space into three basic dynamics by virtue of which components of the represented, representational, and practised spaces recombine. I draw on the social sciences concepts which illustrate such transitional states: bricolage, ritualisation, and fetishisation. Tracing how space evolves over time allows me to single out the materials, relationships, and agencies that are determinant of, for instance, a specific urban space (Torres García 2017), or a ritualised practice within the city (Torres García forthcoming). Moreover, a dynamic approach to the evolution of space allows grasping the different agencies involved in its production. An outstanding question remains regarding its boundaries. This chapter applies this analytical framework to the case of colonisation towns in mid-20th century Spain in order to bring forward how different spaces interact and are contained in each other, giving shape to an intricate geometry. Such complexity must nonetheless
be overcome insofar as a proper delimitation of a spatial phenomenon is a necessary condition for its critical analysis.

The rural settlements developed by the Spanish Francoist regime roughly between 1945 and 1975 can provide for a particularly illustrative use of trialectics, because they are at the intersection of modernist planning and the exercise of power by an authoritarian regime. They are therefore an especially relevant instance of the concept of represented space, which Lefebvre most identifies with expressions of technocracy and ideology (Lefebvre 1991: 45), and with planning and architecture as disciplines.

During roughly the last two decades much attention has been dedicated to the spatial and architectural production of the Spanish Instituto Nacional de Colonización (henceforth INC), both from academia and, as a result, from institutions concerned with heritage study and protection. This chapter relies on this body of literature in order to reconstruct an alternative narrative around the three axes of the spatial triad. The following section characterises the colonies as represented space. Section 3 enhances the scope of the analysis so all three axes of space are represented. As a result, agents of production can be more accurately identified: the architects and their discipline. Sections 4 and 5 confirm this attribution, briefly outlining an additional instance of Francoist leisure architecture, and the more recent efforts for the heritagisation of the INC’s legacy. Conflicts raised by the latter suggest that an alternative delimitation of these architectures is needed in order to better address the people’s right to their space.

The emergence of a representation of space

The ideal of a productive settlement structure that smoothly articulates the Spanish territory was greatly developed during the second half of the 18th century. Following the experience gained during the expansion over the American territories, a rising entrepreneurial class conceptually coupled bringing to order the heart of the nation with wealth and moral health. Further to the effort to pace up productivity in underdeveloped agricultural land, populating vacant territories was to provide safer, smoother transit of goods and people. The idea pervaded spatial projects of all scales, from land division to the town square, from the strategic commerce land routes to the settler’s house floor plan (Torres García 2016).

In the 19th century, the law Ley de Colonias Agrícolas (1868) insisted on the importance of a rational distribution of farmers and farming land, which on this occasion was considered to be one of dispersion. To this end, the law addressed the economic dimension of the territory through various incentives and tax exemptions. The 1868 law appears to have found its main limitations when applied to lands of limited agricultural yield. The later Ley de Colonización Interior (1907), which continued to support a dispersed territorial model, also faced shortcomings due to being devised rather as a means to combat social unrest than an effective territorial plan.

One of the most determining precedents of the particular focus of the INC’s work was the irrigation policy fostered during Miguel Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship (1923–1930) (Sambricio 2008). Former hydraulic policy had suffered from overconfidence in the private initiative and shortcomings in strategic planning on the part of the national administration. From 1926 onwards, the initiative on public works was delegated to federations operating on the different river basins, which yielded more significant advances but worsened regional unbalance. After Primo de Rivera’s resignation and exile, the Second Spanish Republic passed the Plan Nacional de Obras Hidráulicas (1933) with a view to solving the disparities across the nation. The new plan envisaged transfers of water resources between the Mediterranean and Atlantic basins, which met strong criticism on both political and technical grounds (Ortega Cantero 1992). The
overarching *Ley de Reforma Agraria* (1932) also faced hostility among large landowners due to its redistributive agenda. This law, though insufficiently articulated and underfunded, was the first to provide for the construction of colonies as a means to make land accessible to farmers. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) meant the demise of the Republic and water policy, at the intersection of technical progress, a utopia of transformation of underdeveloped land into wealthy territories, and a solution for social malaise, became a pillar of Francoist policy and a vehicle for the exercise and expression of power (cf. Swyngedouw 2015).

In this general context, the construction of settlements was a secondary component of a wider economic and socio-political initiative. Accordingly, the INC incorporated an Architecture Service in charge of designing and building towns following very few broad guidelines (Centellas Soler 2010). Granting settlers access to land generated in turn the need to ‘lodge [them] in decorous dwellings’ as well as to ‘group them so as to cultural, religious, associational, etc. life can fully develop’ (INC, Delegación Regional del Guadalquivir 1964: 6). The bourgeois yearning for addressing social unrest by means of providing the masses with a salubrious habitat met the fascist social project of indoctrination.

In terms of architectural design, during the period of autarchy characteristic of the first years of dictatorship, such objectives were sought following the officially sanctioned traditionalism. The advances of modernism were used inconspicuously, as the regime associated its aesthetics to the left wing. As a result, during this first stage, 18th- and 19th-century designs were a common reference, and the central square was considered a source of community and Spanish identity. In the early 1950s, however, architects openly welcomed the International Style as a suitable and much-needed answer to the pressing needs for urban development throughout the nation. The towns’ designs swiftly became more sophisticated and innovative, while keeping the basic elemental spatial features: the single-family dwelling, the selective use of traditional materials and features, and an outspoken propagandist bent.

The colonisation experience also illustrates the characteristic divorce, in modernist spatial planning, of representations of space and spaces of representation. The approximately 300 new towns built across Spain reveal an effort, on the part of the authorities and the designers, to selectively translate everyday practice – farming and dwelling, production and reproduction – into a represented space of established spatial patterns. This is to say, in support of Lefebvre’s argument, that the main elements in their spatial repertoire can be unpacked as an expression of the regime’s power structure and ideological corpus. Moreover, in this case the exercise of power is virtually absolute because its context was one of an authoritarian regime, but just as much due to being a case of almost completely ex-novo design, extended to the re-arrangement of large territories by means of hydraulic engineering and irrigation.

The programme typically included a prominent religious centre, the town hall, and other official premises. Communal buildings and meeting places were usually under the control of sections of the fascist party Falange Española, such as the Sección Femenina, the Frente de Juventudes, the Sindicato Vertical, etc., thus framing social exchange within the parameters set by the Movimiento – the regime’s ideological apparatus. Open spaces were an important part of this represented space; squares appeared associated to the overarching representations of authority: the church and the town hall (Centellas Soler 2010). There was a conscious choice of a compact urban model, which needed in turn that streets were devised. Their expression was nevertheless minimised by design guidelines which advised against long perspectives in favour of discontinuous or curved alignments.

Dwellings were designed following a principle of serialisation of the single-family home. Although this approach was unequivocally inspired in the advances of modernist architecture and planning (Álvaro Tordesillas 2010), agreements with the popular culture were sought to profit
from readily-available, economic materials and construction techniques (cf. de la Sota Martínez 1955). Thus, the buildings incorporated much-sought elements of traditionalism in order to support both a nationalist narrative and the biopolitical (Foucault 2008) project of the farmers’ attachment to the land. It is worth pointing out that rural migration was a pressing problem not only for the purposes of colonisation, but in cities at a national scale (Capel 1967: 37).

The designs, therefore, prescribed a population whose social identity was defined strictly along the lines of National-Catholicism. They were hemmed in the overarching boundaries of the Movimiento – family, municipality, and syndicate – an order which was monitored by the Church as a transversal agent. Thus, the radical processes of emergence which rise from within the spaces of representation were curtailed from logics of social control. Such rationales were not only inspired by fascist ideology; a wide range of references in play by the ensemble of colonisation experiences are drawn from the Enlightenment and bourgeois logics – social order, family, property, and a reflexive mistrust of the streets – and represent the meeting of right-wing traditionalism and the left-wing lens on the working class. Notably, the immediate precedent of the INC was the Second Republic’s Instituto de Reforma Agraria, on a much more modest scale, and it is consistently pointed out in the literature that the staff of the INC Architecture Service was ideologically variegated.

Establishing a status quo involves social codes, social bodies, and the space over which they move; the practical, the performative (Schechner 2003: 44), and overarching discourses and knowledge structures (Foucault 1975). I use the term ritualisation in order to transcend a static portrayal. I see ritualisation as a derivative of Lefebvrian represented space; it is the process through which elements from performance and practice are constructed as memory (Ripoll and Veschambre 2005; Veschambre 2004) and closed down to contestation (Massey 1995 in Edensor 2005). Along with symbols such as the church or social spaces, the farmers’ everyday practice was assimilated in the process of creating the new towns. Those leading to improved production and the support of the Movimiento’s principles were adopted. It is the case of the use of carts for transport, which was stripped of any social significance and conceptualised as a basic distance module: a 45-minute trip, deemed optimal for the day labourers’ purposes, ruled the distribution of settlements and plots. Traditional customs such as locally-sourced, cost-effective construction techniques were also utilised, which were in turn détournés, at a narrative level, into a praise of traditional know-how:

[The town of] Esquivel is an attempt to turn those who always built the towns into masters, who did indeed a wonderful job: the rural bricklayers and master craftsmen.

This is a theory for the architectural approach, not applicable to the town layout: to build a small town of one or two hundred houses is not to build one or two hundred houses together so a village results; it is a different problem. (de la Sota Martínez 1955: np)

The second part of this quote shows how, conversely, the practices that did not support the intended socio-technical schema were de-territorialised from the project. This was particularly true for spaces of casual encounter and of collective life. The primacy of represented space meant the eradication of spaces of representation.

Searching for the complete trialectic picture

Colonisation towns, as portrayed in the former section, seem incomplete spaces if the trialectic lens is to be applied. At first glance, they were not but represented space built out of officially-sanctioned representations of labour and dwelling. Deprived of elements of practice and of
their spaces of representation, the farmers and settlers do not appear to carry out their daily life in a complete space. Granted, everyday use would soon trigger processes of appropriation and détourment (cf. Loren Méndez 2008), but let us examine this space in its pristine form, right off the hands of the designer, for a little longer: Can only represented space be produced? Must it be part of a space encompassing the three axes of the triad?

An aspect can be considered in order to frame these represented spaces into more comprehensive social space. It is the double role of the architect – both as a producer and as a cog within the mechanisms of production of space (cf. Stanek’s discussion in Lefebvre 2014: xxxv and f.). If, instead of placing the focus on the dweller, we consider that architects are the agents of production, these towns appear again lived, their humanity restored, their existence to have a more natural texture. In turn, they reveal themselves a part of a wider spatial ensemble.

I use the term bricolage in reference to the creation of a practised space to gain a hold over otherwise undifferentiated space and to appropriate it. Levi-Strauss (1966) formulated bricolage as a mechanism for the creation of myths, which aim to give the (perceived) world a rationale (also Lévi-Strauss 1978). This concept has been revised in a post-structuralism context, mainly in order to weigh the effect of agendas behind myth studies (Patton and Doniger 1996). As a social structure extends over space, bits and pieces of its culture – materials, concepts, and symbols – are incepted in order to turn unfamiliar space-time into practised space-time. In the same way, elements that are found during the process can be incorporated into the dominant narrative, in a re-territorialisation process.

I refer to this process above, when I identify elements from the farmers’ everyday practice which were either incorporated to the representations of labour and dwelling or discarded for not supporting the overarching socio-technical discourse. Much of the latest literature on the INC’s new towns is dedicated to framing the phenomenon in history and within the evolution of contemporary architecture (for instance Álvaro Tordesillas 2010; Pérez Escolano and Calzada Pérez 2008). Applying the trialectic approach to this historiography allows identifying the constituent elements of this space, the rapports between them, and the agencies behind their interaction.

De la Sota’s design for the town of Esquivel, in Seville, is widely regarded as one of the greatest exponents of this bricolage. Along with the symbols of the regime, he draws on international trends of formal abstraction, functional separation of pedestrian and cart traffic, and graceful expressionism. These are combined with shapes and spaces of popular and neoclassical inspiration. The important point to make here is that the producer of space, the author of this bricolage, and therefore the recipient of the resulting space is not the farmer but the architect. A wide range of elements, from local landscapes to international references in planning, were brought together to give shape to a space: that of the discipline.

If bricolage stands for the process of creation of practised space, and ritualisation of represented space, I use fetishisation to characterise the path to spaces of representation (see Figure 13.1). Originally coined to describe objects that were invested with magical powers (Ellen 1988; Pels 1998), the concept of fetish evolved within anthropology into having a definition grounded on cultural processes: ‘Fetishism (…) is by definition a displacement of meaning through synecdoche’ (Gamman and Makinen 1994: 45 in Dant 1996). Critical to Marxist formulations, the semiotologist Baudrillard (1981: 92) sees the fetishised object as no longer a referent for itself, but instead standing for the system of values that originally produces it. Arendt’s understanding of action, as opposed to labour and work, can clarify this point. Action is the sphere of the initiative, of the new. It starts irreversible processes because it exists in the transference between the individual and the collective (Arendt 1958).

Fernández del Amo’s formal poetry (Cordero Ampuero 2014) and de la Sota’s innovative designs are examples of how the practice of planning evolved one town at a time. Again, in
Esquivel, de la Sota pushed the limits of the few prescriptions issued by the INC. The church and the town hall are thus arranged before the town, over which they dominate visually, detached from the square but still strongly asserting their symbolism. Each work, made from elements from practised and represented spaces, symbolised not only the regime’s power over land, water, and bodies, but also architecture as a practice and a discipline. Thus a space of representation was engendered which created a performative sphere for a long list of 80 architects who worked for the INC Architecture Service, including other key emergent figures (Centellas Soler 2010: 110). Their individual takes on urban design re-elaborated the ensemble of the INC settlements and made a contribution to planning as a whole.

In summary, the settlements do not find a clear fit in the spatial triad when considered individually, but within a comprehensive, tessellated, nation-wide complex of architectural concepts, works, and professional figures. A complete social space appears when the focus is not on the farmers, but on the architects as producers. It is the architects’ space, their playground.

The architect’s playground

A second contemporary example helps make this point, which is also studied in similar terms — those of design excellence and, as of late, of heritage values. It is the Ciudad Sindical de Vacaciones, built under the initiative of the Obra Sindical de Educación y Descanso on the shore of Marbella, Málaga, between 1956 and 1963. This organisation, originally inspired by the Italian fascist Opera Nazionali Dopolavoro, was in charge of fostering educational, leisure, and sport activities for workers under the umbrella of the fascist Sindicato Vertical. It therefore responded to the same values that ruled the design of rural settlements.
Accordingly, the design programme was similar, in spite of their diametrically opposed purposes – work vs. leisure. As other vacation towns (for instance Perlora in Asturias, or Tarragona), it is a mostly self-sufficient complex where small villas and row houses are unequivocally designed for the single family. The church and the administration building – a foil of the town hall – assume much of the ensemble’s expressive load. The architects resort to a Garden City model, which they combine with white-washed organic shapes meant to evoke an ideal Mediterranean village. Communal spaces are formalised and separated according to use, whereas the role of the streets is reduced to a minimum.

A few elements seem to puzzle the architecture critics. These are apparently whimsical and gratuitous features, such as a useless concrete cantilever resembling a springboard, or the monumentalised water tower which boldly emerges from within the management building and offers an incongruently rural skyline. Also, the church conveys the surreal and organic undertone of the whole complex, underlining its representative role in a gesture that García Vázquez (1999: 266–271) considers ‘paradoxical’. In general terms, the design has been described as ‘ironic’ (Ramírez, Santos and Canal 1987: 57–62) or ‘hardly classifiable’ (VV.AA. 2002: 263).

The true nature of these features comes to light if, as I do above for the case of the rural new towns, the analysis considers not the vacationers but the designers at the centre of this space. To the former, if they hypothetically came from one of the INC settlements, the differences between their everyday environment and their leisure venue would be but superficial. The gentle curves of organic buildings and garden–city roads leading to the beach replace the straight lines of gabled roofs and field furrows. Still, church, administration, and family are ever present and, as their spaces interlock, leave few crevices for spontaneity.

But it is precisely in the in-betweens where Lefebvre locates enjoyment: the ‘total body’ emerges from within the dissolution of order that can be experienced in liminal spaces. As an example, he poses the beach, in the meeting of land, sea, and sky (Lefebvre 2014: 48–49). In the case of the Ciudad Sindical, it is the designers who revel in such a space. They take joy in the confusion between functionalism and fanciful ornament, in the eclectic choice of intellectual and formalist referents, and in the contamination of modernist layouts with textures drawn on tradition.

When writing about his own work on Esquivel, which Cordero Ampuero (2014: 46) somewhat dismissively describes as a ‘surrealist pleasantry’, de la Sota Martinez lets his exhilaration show:

Sometimes, we must outdo our own knowledge and depths; on other occasions, it may be the case, our subtleties and frivolities: it is a matter of getting ready, of vibrating with the issue. When we want to show what we know, we take pride in our work, we swell as peacocks, it is good that the architect arrives. It is hard when, in order to be right, we actually need to forget everything, almost all we know, however little. Once achieved, as we then know nothing, we cannot but start copying…

*(de la Sota Martinez 1955, emphasis added)*

**Heritagisation of the architect’s space**

A 1950s aerial photograph shows the Ciudad Sindical on the then still-virgin coast of Marbella. The image reveals that this exercise of hedonism heralded the saturation of the Spanish Mediterranean shores with an overwhelming succession of self-centred, schizophrenic designs (Ramírez, Santos and Canal 1987). The success of the colonisation initiative is also questionable. Some 130 settlements were built in the region of Andalusia, yielding a success ratio of
approximately one-third in terms of consolidation, integration within the regional urban system, and demographic and economic dynamics (Cruz Villalón 1996).

This evolution has been, in any case, contingent on the wider territorial policies, in which the quality of town planning played a limited role. It rather forms part of a complex geometry of spaces that reach the present day and, like Russian dolls, encase and are contained in each other (see Figure 13.2). The trialectic approach allows the interpreter to characterise the interactions between the components of such spatialisation and to unpack its boundaries.

Figure 13.2 After applying the trialectic approach to colonisation towns, these appear to contain elements from different previous spatialisations, such as Christian Catholic, fascist, bourgeois, traditional rural life, and modernist architecture. In turn, these towns have become a part of overarching spaces, such as the ensemble of built heritage, contemporary architecture, and everyday country life. Source: author.
Architecture critics and heritage protection agencies consistently consider the new towns as built heritage deserving listing and protection. This is often argued in the same terms that originally ruled their design. The use of international references is praised as a sign of excellence and, not least, construed as the endeavour of architects who escaped the reviled Francoist aesthetics – an argument that tiptoes around the actual ideological affiliation of some of the most representative of them. The combination of modernism and tradition is also celebrated as a sign of the important role of the – then young – architects in the construction of modernity (for instance Junta de Andalucía 2006). As a token of recognition, the spiralling envelope of the Ciudad Sindical church forms part of the logo of the Andalusian Registry of Contemporary Architecture.

The Andalusian Institute of Historical Heritage (IAPH) produced a comprehensive monograph on the colonisation towns as part of the recent efforts towards their study and protection (Pérez Escolano and Calzada Pérez 2008). A dedicated issue in their journal advocates for their protection as heritage from a dedicated approach that encompasses ‘disciplinary diversity’, ‘veteran as well as young authors’, and ‘comprehensive views next to specific cases’, towards ‘a more just project of society’ (Pérez Escolano 2005: 38). The heterotopia of disciplinary rule, expert and innovative authorship, and of an understanding of society as a ‘project’, which was originally created by and for architects, technocrats, and ideologists, now extends to academia and critique and drives the formulation of the ‘heritage regard’ (Pérez Escolano 2005: 38).

My use of fetishisation is closely related to the concept of heritagisation (Veschambre 2004, 2005). Bernbeck (2013) exposes the relationship between the loss of cultural signs and their exaltation as symbols. Perceived at risk of deterioration, the colonisation towns are extolled as symbols of the development of modernist architecture in Spain, creating a space of representation. I favour the term fetishisation, in spite of its connoted and contested meaning, to avoid institutional formulations of ‘heritage’ (Edensor 2005). Its overlapping with administrative tools engenders, again, a representation of space meant to prescribe life and establish meaning:

[The technicians] made me understand that they want to freeze the image… the photographs taken when the town was built… we cannot give our town to the architecture technicians because we need it to live in it.

(J. Caro, mayor of Vegaviana, in Coleto 2016: 51’40"

Conclusions

The latest literature on the colonisation towns excels at identifying the INC experience as an example of the virtues and conflicts raised by modernism in Spain. This chapter’s spatial analysis is buttressed on this wealth of knowledge, but aims to challenge the boundaries of this approach, which, in its current form, and in its translation into the tools currently in place for heritage management, perpetuates inequities of yesteryear. The space devised by the architects as a constellation of performances and authors, to a great extent for the representation of the National–Catholic regime, has outlasted the latter as a sphere of disciplinary practice and values that are recently put forward as drivers for heritage management. This overarching spatialisation is both concrete and abstract, and it contains in it the many instances of settlements which their inhabitants conceive, perceive, and live individually.

The introduction of the time dimension in the trialectic approach allows identifying objects, relations, and agencies operating along the three axes of social space. It also allows the analyst to
approach the boundaries of an otherwise complex geometry of spaces that, like Russian dolls, encase and are contained in each other. After identifying the overarching agents in the production of this space, pressing issues rise as to the role played by the actual residents. Future research should focus on how and why the inhabitants of these settlements use, appropriate, détournement, and adapt them, in order to include additional views in framing the heritage regard. A more encompassing delimitation of the spaces that are the object of planning and management, one able to account for the intricacies of the production of space, can assist in determining who is at the centre, who is excluded, and who holds the right to it.

References


