

OVNI 2006 * The Colonial Dream * Autonomous Zones.

A program of videos, independent documentaries and media archaeology dealing with colonialism and its mutations in the global age.

Colonialism and Eurocentrism are often discussed as though they were things of the past, fortunately overcome. But in life under globalisation, the reality seems to be just the opposite: the occupation and destruction of other worlds and cultures, systematic exploitation of their resources... and also aggressions at the local level, real-estate violence, colonial tourism, migra...

Autonomy and no-zones: other ways of perceiving and creating community-based external realities and subjective inner ones. Autonomous ways of living and thinking, zones without limits, no-zones.

After the OVNI 2005 program Resistances (1), we thought it was necessary to deepen the critical intent of the Observatory Archives through documents that reflect upon some of the roots of the situation we are currently living in. Many situations described in the videos that we screened can be traced back to the colonial pulse, either implicitly or explicitly. Similarly, Eurocentrism and the idea that all progress - even revolutionary progress- must pass through the European experience or take it as an unavoidable reference, are still present in conservative thought, and also, in a worrying and paradoxical way, in dissidence. We also wanted to go beyond the negativity that taking a position of resistance necessarily entails, and to show and share the communal and personal affirmations that are being produced in many societies and cultures, and all around us.

The Colonial Dream*Autonomous Zones sets out on a search that was already implicit in the Archives under different names, an undertaking that will naturally be conditioned by our limitations in the face of such an enormous and complex subject. This first approximation that we share with you now would not have been possible without the many contributions and collaborations that we've received - help in locating particular documents and also finding a direction within the search. In any case, our aim is not to build up a collection of historical documents, or provide a catalogue of specific events, tasks that we would be unsuited for. Rather, given the nature of the Observatory Archives, we want to offer a selection that provides some of the keys and fractals of the subject. This selection is complemented by presentations from some of the people and collectives who have shared the investigation with us or are fundamental points of reference within it, such as the ContraPlano - LAD working group, Michael Taussig (Lecturer at Columbia University and author of *Mimesis and Alterity*, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man...*), Serra Ciliv (If.Istanbul Festival) and René Vautier (*Afrique 50*, *Algeria in Flames*, *Hirochirac...*).

Our search for contemporary news and promotional materials (from 1930 to 1965) that are key to understanding how the imaginary of the time was constructed led us to some of the major audiovisual archives in the world (storehouses of the colonial legacy). Through our contact with them we came to understand the workings of something that is part of the collective memory of mankind, and how such places are managed. "Management" that is largely governed by the criteria of financial gain. Ignoring such things as non-profit, educational, etc criteria, offensive rates are applied to the extent, for example, of charging up to twenty thousand euros for screening 30 minutes of material (2). Private archives, public archives managed by private companies, or public bodies that are run according to similar criteria prevent free access, or any access, to the audiovisual material that, in this particular case, adds up to a catalogue of evidence against Europe's supposedly civilizing impulse; and a "bank" of the arguments that are still applied even now to current crises. The discovery of how difficult it is to access this material made us aware of the urgency of demanding and defending public access to these archives, which, as we said, form part of the collective memory of mankind. And to prevent the same thing happening in future with the material that is contemporary to us now.

We don't claim objective truth for the government and corporate documents, or from those by independent authors or groups - "Film is not now nor has it ever been the technology of truth. It lies at a speed of 24 frames per second. Its value is not as a recorder of history, but simply as a means of communication, a means by which meaning is generated. The frightening aspect of the documentary film is that it can generate rigid history in the present in the same manner that Disney can generate the colonial meaning of the culture of the Other. Whenever imploded films exist simultaneously as fiction and nonfiction they stand as evidence that history is made in Hollywood" (3). In reality, what we're showing are not historical events, but images. And even then, the images can't be pared back to the documentary value of the imaginary they create, images that are real in themselves and not in relation to what they represent. "Imaginary" realities - but not any less real for it. Rather than responding to the criteria of true or false, these images respond to the who, how and for what they were imagined.

In his 1951 film *Afrique 50* against savagery, colonialism and exploitation, René Vautier breaks with the complicity of most documentaries and news reports filmed in Africa at the time, full of "greedy lies and fraudulent complacencies". In his words: "Look what lies in store for the people of Africa: we're in Palaka, in northern Ivory Coast. The village couldn't pay the colonial taxes: 3700 francs! On February 27, 1949 at 5 am the troops came, surrounded the village, fired, burned, murdered (...) On this African ground four bodies, three men and one woman, were murdered in our

name. In the name of the French people! It's mind blowing: burnt houses, massacred townspeople, dead cattle rotting in the sun. Friends, colonialisation here is just like anywhere else, its run by vultures." These reflections led to 13 lawsuits, a year in jail and the film being banned in one way or another for 50 years.

In a different way, in *Les Maîtres Fous* Jean Rouché shows us how there are other ways of conspiring against colonial domination, when direct confrontation isn't possible. Or in *Moi, un Noir*, how a group of Nigerien migrants would rather return to the "poverty" of their country than struggle to survive in the "wealth" of the colonial paradise.

First Contact shows archival images of the first time the indigenous tribes of an area of New Guinea came into contact with white man, and contrasts these images with the situations taking place now.

In *Les Statues meurent Aussi*, Alain Resnais and Chris Marker look at how difficult it is to dialogue or simply understand other countries from a Eurocentric position, and how other cultures are subjugated to the "colonial" gaze. The colonial imaginaries, made up of images filmed by the colonial powers as a testament to their work and their value, are also reflected in the material on the ex-Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea that was made available to us by the Filmoteca de Catalunya and reflects the obsessions of the times: the task of Christianisation, the idyllic idea of bringing progress to new lands, the enthusiastic hunt for wild animals, the felling of trees, the militarization of life.

Vincent Monnikendam also deals with these and other more complex issues in *Mother Dao*, one of the most enlightening and poetic visions of colonial realities, constructed entirely from images filmed by the Dutch colonisers in Indonesia.

The spectacular directions of this vision already appear on the European continent at the end of the 19th and start of the 20th centuries, with the Colonial Exhibitions that travelled all over Europe displaying not only goods, animals and papier maché tableaux, but also human beings inside them - a subject explored in *Zoos Humaines* and *Paris Couleurs*.

Other documents deal with emblematic cases such as *La Guerre d'Algerie*, with more than two hours of archival images, many of them unseen at the time. Or the case of Rwanda seen from its colonial past and the manipulation of ethnic differences, culminating in genocide in the 1990s.

Global mutations of modern colonialism can be seen in *Iraq, Occupied Land*, which follows colonial development from the fall of the Caliphate to the current occupation and the resistance generated by it. Or in *Life and Debt*, which looks at the economic mechanisms of globalization from the specific case of Jamaica.

And the plundering of American Indians in terra (in)cognita, *Alcatraz is not an Island, Agip y sus vecinas...*

The colonial aspect of tourism can be seen in *Cannibal Tours* and its "activist" version in *Political Travel...*; the strengthening of borders and the fears they generate in *La Forêt*, *Caravana Europea contra la Valla de la Muerte*, *On Translation: Fear/Miedo, Natives...*; stories of migrants in *Welcome to London*, *Cuentos Africanos*, *I See the Stars at Noon...* Local fractals of globalisation in *Calle Guardia 14 bis*, *Bassi Bus*, *A Tornallom...*

We find stories, experiences and strategies for autonomy in *Can Masdeu*, *La Tierra es Sagrada*, *La Vega Resiste*, *Soy defensor de la Selva*, *Alcatraz's occupation*, *Le Batalet - Femmes de la medina...*

Finally, through a specific, controversial action - the pulling down of the statue of Columbus in Venezuela - the deeply felt *Abajo el COLONialismo* poses a narrative thread that runs through the stages of colonialism as suffered by a people who have seen everything change - governments, power, discourses and strategies - but have always remained marginalised and disadvantaged in their own land.

We're all in danger

Modern colonialism, which begins in the 19th century, is heir to the conquest of America and its consequences, added to the specific conditions resulting from the industrial revolution and the technological revolution that it entailed. On the symbolic level, this supremacy confirmed the assumed superiority of the colonising culture, while on another level it created the need to satisfy a growing and unstoppable demand for raw materials, "...while the colonialist and missionary press worked unrelentingly to prove the cruelty and ignorance of the peoples to be conquered, those to be saved from cannibalism and slavery and those waiting to be led to civilization, the relative ease of conquest confirmed the feeling of scorn towards those people who were incapable of defending themselves, strengthening racial prejudices even further through the feeling of superiority of the white race". (4).

This idea extended into the 20th century, and only seemed to officially decline after the Second World War, with the waning of European power and the emblematic processes of independence in India, the Middle East and later in Algeria. However, it's in the resolution of these processes, in their consequences and in others that are still unresolved, that it is easiest to observe how the cultural and economic structures that made them possible still survive today. This is reflected in those surprisingly straight borders drawn up in distant offices that according to geopolitical interests much more than any reality on the ground, in the alliance with the new elites and the founding of "friendly" states. And obviously in privileged access to raw materials.

The emphasis in many of the films of the period, much of the political commentary in the press and particularly in news reports, is on how the independence that is finally "granted" often degenerates into chaos and confrontations, laying waste to the "legendary colonial legacy of peace and progress". That's how the great "civilising" efforts of western powers manage to escape judgement. Now, the supposedly selfless view stresses a paternalistic tone and the need for a certain level of "guardianship" over "young nations" that can't find their paths or take the "wrong" one. Even if it was under the distortions of the bipolar world of the two superpowers, accusations of "neo-colonialism" were openly bandied about during the cold war. That then led to the violent military interventions in Vietnam or in the USA "back yard" of Central America,..., or interference in dictatorships of South America.

In the end, the cold war and subsequent acceleration of "globalisation" have defined a reality that seems to have inherited, and even enthusiastically taken up again, some of the great settings of the colonial adventure: the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa... Sometimes through occupation or direct military intervention and the imposition of "democratic" regimes, others through "colonialism without settlers" (4), or colonial tourism as a banal substitute for the journey and the culture that receives it. Whatever the method, it is always accompanied by the spread of an aggressive, if not openly violent, practice of economic activity, through transnational companies and the directives of supposedly "objective" organisations. This is not just the case for commerce - it also affects the idea and the experience of almost all practices that affect life. A decisive example is the enormous pressure exerted on "agriculture based on diversity, decentralisation and improving small farm productivity (...) knowledge is shared, other species and plants are kin, not 'property'". Meanwhile, a combat-agriculture is imposed and "the war mentality underlying industrial-military agriculture is evident from the names given to the herbicides (...) Monsanto's herbicides are called "Round Up", "Machete", "Pentagon", "Lightning", "Assert", "Avenge" (5). It's not difficult to see how this example is repeated, like a fractal, in other areas of economics, culture, technology, medicine....

In 1974, Pasolini wrote: "the still anonymous identikit of this new Power displays traits that seem vaguely modern because of its tolerance and totally self-contained hedonistic ideology. However, it also has fierce and essentially repressive traits. Tolerance is an illusion: nobody has ever had to be as normal and conformist and the consumer (...) The old fascism made distinctions, if only through rhetorical degeneration; the new fascism - which is another thing altogether - no longer makes distinctions: it is not rhetorical in the humanistic way, it is pragmatic in the American way. Its aim is the brutally totalitarian reorganisation and standardisation of the world" (6).

The "totalitarian" idea of progress linked to consumption and the regularisation of all aspects of life was already glimpsed by Pasolini in 1970s' Italy. And its roots can be traced back to the alliance between capital and technology, an alliance that Pasolini explicitly denounces in his short documentary *La mura di Sana*.

Modern colonialism is not just a historical phenomenon. Above all, it is an attitude to life and the world. A vision that divides things and cuts them up, a vision that creates and projects the "other" as a space to be occupied - territory, culture, even time - to be colonised. Its own nature does not allow it to understand, much less practice, the organic unity of things or of existence, let alone economy. It permanently requires the "other" even to the point of cutting it off from himself.

It's time to break with the contemporary chorus of irresponsibilities that puts all effective criticism or autonomous practice to sleep. Like that song that tells the story of a boxer killed in a fight - at the start of each verse the narrator asks "Who killed Davey Moore, Why an' what's the reason for?" and all the characters respond in the same way: "Not me," says his manager, "It's hard to say, it's hard to tell, I always thought that he was well"; "Not I", says the referee, "Don't point your finger at me. I could've stopped it in the eighth, An' maybe kept him from his fate, But the crowd would've booed, I'm sure"; "Not me", says the gambling man, with his ticket stub still in his hand (...) "I didn't commit no ugly sin, Anyway, I put money on him to win". "Not us", says the angry crowd, whose screams filled the arena loud. "It's too bad he died that night, But we just like to see a fight". "Not me", says the boxing writer, pounding print on his old typewriter, sayin', "Boxing ain't to blame, There's just as much danger in a football game". "Not me", says the man whose fists laid him low in a cloud of mist, who came here from Cuba's door where boxing ain't allowed no more. "I hit him, yes, it's true, But that's what I am paid to do" (7).

Well, as Pasolini said in his last interview, just hours before he was assassinated: "we're all in danger". (8)

(1) The idea of "resistances" that irradiated from many of the videos we screened responded to Foucault's vision: "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. If there is no longer a centrality of power to submit to or to resist, power cannot be seized (if there is nothing to seize in the centre). If power is reticular, it must be resisted everywhere and in all ways; if power is exercised from innumerable points, it must be challenged point by point". Taken from a dialogue, recorded in Holland, between Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky in 1971. A fragment will be screened in OVNI 2006.

(2) The example cited, one of several, refers to extracts of 1930s to 1950s news reports that we requested from the Britishpathé Archives. Approximately 30 minutes came to twenty thousand euros, including a 50 per cent discount because OVNI is non-profit and the screenings are free to the public. And this was the price for a single screening, without rights to hold a copy in the Archives.

(3) Critical Art Ensemble, *Video and resistance: Against Documentary*.

(4) Marc Ferro et al., *The Back Book of Colonialism*.

(5) Vandana Shiva, *India Divide. Diversity and Democracy Under Attack*.

(6) Pier Paolo Pasolini, *I vero fascismo e quindi il vero antifascismo*, *Corriere della Sera*, 24 de June 1974.

(7) Bob Dylan, *Who killed Davey Moore?*

(8) Pier Paolo Pasolini, in an interview with Furio Colombo, *We're All in Danger*, *La Stampa Tuttolibri supplement*, November 8, 1975.
