

The Architectural Free Zone – Colonial Space Power, space and border

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I will try to articulate a brief presentation beginning with my work on The Architectural Free Zone. The Architectural Free Zone is a radical and pragmatic implementation of escape from the control of the State. The project of the Architectural Free Zone is committed above all to the destruction of the urban infrastructure or the construction of a community without infrastructure in the architecturally programmed sense. This definition was created through case studies in Reunion Island, after the abolition of slavery in 1848.

The Architectural Free Zone that gives this work its title is the shadow zone, the not-visible, hidden behind that imperial construction. It is a zone off camera that doesn't fit within the framework of the territorial ordering by the plan; a zone off the grid that escapes the table; a zone that doesn't respond to the imposed technical rationality or function via the primacy of vision in urban and architectural planning. This phenomenon articulates aspects of spatial power that differs completely from the imperial colonial project.

I will then present briefly a vision of the colonial space through the plant life. Plants are fundamental to the creation of colonial space from the very beginning: the discovery of specimens, their acclimation into the areas under surveillance, the development of their intensive production, their transportation to the European areas of consumption, their distribution starting with the hubs that, during the Classical epoch, were Amsterdam and London and, to a lesser degree, the French ports of the Indies Company. It's more well-known that the flows of capital, the maritime industry and market capitalization were worked around the plants - sugar, coffee, cotton, etc. But we could also say that the colonial territory was built at the service of the plant and see a reversal of the rules of the game by which the city dominated exterior colonial space. To the extent that plant life has a certain autonomous agency, the major/minor relationship between built and non-built space is inverted. Linking this inversion to the economic, financial, and political conditions of colonialism and postcolonialism allows us to re-read in a different way these territories and their iconic architectures.

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Practice of violence is seen through guerilla theory and counter-insurgency theory. This camera is enhancing the controlling and policing spatial process in the colonial space. Plant life is used again capturing the strength but this time to disappear. Vegetation as a political agent, is seen as the weapon used to free the colonial space by natives after world war 2. Vietnam and Algeria are seen as two different times in this process. The first one illustrating the Ho Chi Minh asymmetrical war theory and the second one, the regulation and administration of the territory, new art of the state through the use of social and architectural devices.

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