

# **To decolonise is to be present, to decolonise is to flee, marronage from toxic hospitality and alliances in the mangroves**

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*It is in the epistemic mangrove that I drag the master to take him out of his depth, finding myself in the absence of landmarks, to neutralise his frontal gaze in the darkness of depths and reveal myself in invisibility.*

**Gauthier Tancons**

To decolonise is to be present, to decolonise is to flee. I offer by design, as an introduction, a title in the form of a contradiction, of which one of the proposals undoes any heroic ambition, or perhaps announces the early days of a practice signifying the need for a shift in terrain to create the preliminary conditions of a different scene. A scene produced inside the echo chamber of marronage, of slave flight – a strategy of appropriating the plantation's spaces, rules and affects. Fleeing as the initial gesture and pattern of both a possible political recomposition and a form of life, one which calls for a certain ecology, freed from the authorities in place. Fleeing from solid ground towards an uncertain, moving soil, demanding a place of becoming where voices would resound in other harmonies; a cave, a hill, a mangrove.

Turning one's back to the frontal posture of struggle, and to a degree to its romantic imaginaries, is not however to lack courage, nor forgetting how much it once was, still is and will again be, necessary to *faire corps*. To appear, as an act of resistance. To be present as a force of life in the face of necropolitical powers. But we also need to look out, perhaps at the very moment when minority figures are becoming visible in France as elsewhere, for the risks of this visibility so often legitimately demanded and desired. And carefully construct, in secret, a means to escape capture, a way to negotiate our presence.

To decolonise is perhaps to produce this body that emerges suddenly, unannounced, in a contradictory double movement, simultaneously asserting its presence and working out its escape. Its flight to a safe place. And this second movement calls for a particular care of the way this place is produced, how its conditions are always negotiated. To flee is not to leave for good. It is to roam a little further from the centres, in the periphery, it is to drag the scene into another light as one discretely pulls the master's tablecloth, leaving the premises through a broken window. And thus the entire table, the dishes, the cutlery and the good manners, the sweat and the knowledge, the dead animals and the wandering plants follow suit in their music of *fracas*, all the way to the place no police patrols. Thus can begin the feast and the examination of the catches from this scene, stripped of its order and authority.

This contradictory body, that ceaselessly flees and reappears, needs not burden itself with the imaginary of another, radically different world. Because it knows there is no other world, only distances and alliances, gestures to piece together a space of one's own, on the edges of a scene of which one should never ignore the toxic ecology if we want a chance to decolonise it. By underestimating its force, its capacity to act and its deft mutations, we run the risk of poisoning ourselves for good, and accompany rather than undo the colonial scene replaying and reshaping itself once again, in a toxic hospitality in which we are invited to stand. Also, to act at the heart of the institution is probably vain in the lack of other grounds to host the scenes of the future, to catch one's breath, gather one's strengths, practice alliances with the living and the dead.

Having for a while given the cold shoulder to Cultural Studies and minority critical productions, practices and knowledges, Western contemporary art undertook a swift enterprise of their reification and capitalisation – each one being the prerequisite of the other. This strategy of sudden promotion and visibility should not be mistaken for decolonisation in any form, given how clearly it first constitutes yet another of capitalism's mutations towards a cognitive form. Driven by artists, art professionals and institutions, this new episode is no less extractive than its predecessors, no less a form of appropriation of all the available resources and forms of knowledge. It is no less competitive or toxic. It sucks dry the transformative force of the minority decolonial gesture by twisting its critical grasp, from an operation capable of affecting political and social order into a simple category of the knowledge economy.

The remarkable absence of intersectionality within these practices, or rather their usually partial and selective intersectional approaches, poorly conceals their true nature – an attempt to play down the importance of race within gender and make questions of class and territory disappear, so many realities that motivate nonetheless the pressing need to decolonise.

All this results in a strange scene which, despite appearances, maintains its attention on the white body, placed at the heart of the game like an ailing body that should be cured of its culpability and its legitimacy anguish, whose multiple discourses of vulnerability should be heard, toxic echoes of the emotional blackmail imposed on house negroes. Those in minority are then reduced to bit player roles, invited to stand where they are told, like objects taken from forced labour into an affective collection, but still in no position to produce their own values which remain indexed to the masters' measure, to organise their own spaces, body-objects suspended in their function of mirrors held up to the dominants' narcissism.

Decolonising won't happen without a darkroom, an echo chamber in which to learn to reveal ourselves in invisibility. Decolonising won't happen without taking the white masters into the mangrove, there where we will need to speak another language from other bodies. We do not care whether they are conscious of their privileges if these are astutely replayed through new forms and systems of subordination. We do not care for their righteous patronising. We do not wish to be saved and refuse to save them in turn. Neither do we ask for them to share their privileges, but for these to be diluted in the movement towards a space that will suspend the order of things as we know it, towards a community in the making that fends off becoming a commodity outside of its own experience, that never ceases to flee to avoid becoming an object of the commerce of culture.

The horizon of this community and the possibility of such alliances can not be formulated on toxic terrain, in a space that at once turns them to capital. We want to be rid of privileges, invitations and horizons, we want to negotiate our way of being present, we want to flee.

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