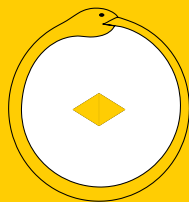
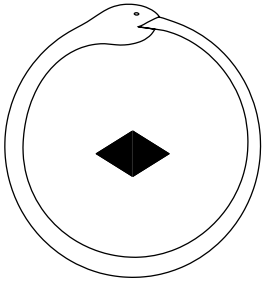




LIFE IS SAVAGE
Ailton Krenak



notebooks
SELVAGEM



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Ailton Krenak

VESSEL

*Near to the wild heart*¹. It is like being close to the Sun and knowing that right there is a very warm and wonderful place to be. Close to the wild heart is to be close to the Sun. It is inside of that atom.

Different from a moral acknowledgment between civilized and savage, I have remarked the Selvagem as life. The expression of life is savage. In Emanuele Coccia's understanding, life is metamorphosis; it is not limited to human species. Life does not seek for our species, it rather traverses our species. That is why a tree was once a rock and a river was once a cloud. It is so wonderful, you look at a cloud and you see a river. This is an experience of evolution, but not in the narrow sense which was conceived in the 20th Century, as something that happens outside of us. An evolution that is a prisoner of two lines: culture and nature. When Coccia succeeds to escape from this dichotomy, he transcends toward a cosmovision, a poetics of life, in which he even affirms that our DNA is a mix of everything that has existed before us. This places us at the origin in life, to another perspective of transformation which links us to the mythological. This is something that Lévi Strauss went after some time ago, and the naturalists had already been doing.

Of course for a 17th Century naturalist, savage was not the opposite of civilized. Savage meant that natural truth of life, which they were seeking. Where did so much profusion of life come from? Striving to exist in the mountains, in Everest, in the Himalayas, in the African deserts, in the Andes. They searched for the source of life, their folly was to go after where life was. It is interesting to notice that searching for the origin of life becomes a childish human experience

1. Reference to the book *Near to the wild heart* by the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (N.T.).

since life is already traversing us. Drummond², in that wonderful poem “The man; and the voyages”³ says that the man feels annoyed here on Earth, because it is a dull, no fun place, decides to go to outerspace to hunt things in the cosmos. That is exactly what the Naturalists did.

They were hunting for life. The poet says that the great journey humans have to make is from oneself to another. And this is not a mystic message. He is not suggesting there is a spiritual transcendence that we should go after somewhere. What he is saying is the following: we are life already. We don’t need to look for it anywhere else. I find this so wonderful because it gives us confidence, a firm confidence that life is greater than any observation we can produce, including science.

I think the role science has been taking in these times of negationism, of the flat earth, is very nice. It has been kindly showing evidence that life has been existing long before human interpretations captured it. Life had already been set up here billions of years ago. It is as if we took the train at a remote station, far from the starting point. We are getting a ride on this train. This is sort of a burlesque idea, but this world we have been living in is bigger than us.

We are creating a mess, littering the beaches, spilling oil everywhere, perforating the roof of the sky, as *Kopenawa Yanomami*⁴ puts it. He says that the *napos*, the whites, are overheating the Earth’s body and this is piercing *Hutakara*’s chest, the sky. But it is not that sky of clouds. It is as the song “*Maracatu Atômico*” says: “[...] behind this sky there is another sky, another sky”.

There in that other sky its chest is suffering a burn. It was a remark made before ECO-92, when the scientists finally said “we are making a hole in the sky”. The shamans had already spoken about this danger of hurting the sky. This sensibility of a shaman in understanding the sky also feels is wonderful because they are saying that life is everywhere, life is even in the sky, too. Neither the sky escapes life.

2. Well-known Brazilian poet (N.T.).

3. Free translation. Original title “O homem; as viagens” (N.T.).

4. Davi Kopenawa is a spiritual leader from the *Yanomami* people who wrote a book called *The falling sky: words of a Yanomami shaman* with french anthropologist Bruce Albert (N.T.).

There are people eager to seek life in the sky, but life is already here, it is there, it is everywhere. This meditation on understanding that life is everywhere, is wonderful because it gives you the potency to go through life, along with all these periods in time: historical periods, geological periods.

Our relatives from the upper Rio Negro - the peoples of the black waters, as Berta Ribeiro says -, the **Tukano**, the **Desana**, the **Baniwa**, all this constellation of peoples have one narrative about the body's transformation which we now carry as humans into other forms, into other experiences, like fish, water. Look how life is contagious with memories, it conveys ancestral memories. Ancestral is not just anthropomorphic. When I think of ancestry, I am not thinking of a bunch of people who look like myself. I am thinking of unimaginable beings, savages.

This is the understanding of savage. It is not that culturalist, controlled thing, as referenced by the Greek. Obviously, when Plato and his colleagues strolled through Athens, they could look at the world around them and say: the world is savage. They would not fail to be telling the truth. They were savages as well.. The Greek and us.

When we chose the word *Selvagem* to name the cycle of studies we started three years ago, there was a discussion about the transversality and transculturality, underlying desires to step outside the bounds of the science field, and think without a railing. We have decided to think without rails and it was really good. Some people found a quite bold provocation when we called Emanuele Coccia, Antonio Nobre, and other more active contemporary thinkers to a *Selvagem* cycle, but it does not matter to be a provocation, because it is a creative provocation which destabilizes the scientist's place.

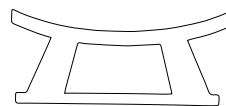
Life crosses us all and it is savage. We are giving back a meaning of wonderment to life, like the colorful parachute, which is a device to expand the mind, and the subjectivity.

Aldous Huxley spoke about the doors of perception. In this pandemic time in which we find ourselves confined, looking through little virtual windows, I have thought a lot about the idea of windows as an effort to leak out from the contained place, from the enclosed space. The window can also be perceived as our own eyes. It is with them that

we see life around us. Then, we experience other sensitivities, such as touch, but the world's first sight is from this eye-window.

Krishnamurti, and other masters from India, say that a grain of sand contains the entire universe inside. This perspective helps humans to calm their thoughts and hearts a little, and to understand that we do not need to take an expedition to the cosmos. We do not need to launch rockets into the sky. We can search for these cosmic landscapes we yearn for so much in the microorganisms which are in our own bodies and around us. They are here. Life is everywhere and these cosmic landscapes are here, because they are in a cell. Those speculations about: "Oh, but is it true that life has begun here on Earth?" It is a matter of speciesism. It is the typical question that could only have been asked by a human. No other being asks this kind of question because they are in the flow of existence in such a full way, which is just producing life. I have told people: "Look, you don't need to leave the planet for that. You can do it right here- Experience this contentment with life".

The Selvagem cycle of meetings, which we held in person in 2018 and 2019, helped me a lot to keep my foot on the ground, to sit like the *kumus*⁵. They come, set their little stool on the floor and sit carefully. Together the shaman's body and the stool become a vessel.



5. Healers from the *Tukano* people (N.T.).

We are going through detrimental times sensibility wise. We can no longer go around, moving, hugging, or playing with other people, which profoundly affects our sense of being alive. But we can improve a little bit, as if making a mild tea to bear this experience without letting it settle in our body. It is more or less like having asymptomatic contagion. Then, let us relate to this experience of temporary confinement as an asymptomatic contagion. It does not need to have symptoms. Symptoms are a production of their own. The person will produce symptoms according to their own disposition towards life.

Erik Jennings Simões, a medical doctor who works with the Zo'é, an indigenous people who has recently initiated contact, was very much worried about the damages that pandemics would cause to them. He managed to keep them isolated during the peak of the contagion. Happy, he told me that no Zo'é person had gotten sick. In response to what they did to avoid contagion, the Zo'é said: "We fled into the deepest interior of our forest. We escaped from the known routes. We went to places where we would not cross paths with each other. We put avoidance into action, which is a cultural practice of ours."

When a child is born, the child's father cannot see the grandparents. It is part of their cultural system. The child's father has to stay out of the circle, cannot be seen. If he is seen, the child becomes ill. Another example of avoidance is the hunter. When you have a new baby, or when your partner is pregnant, you cannot go out to the woods to hunt animals randomly. You must be very careful as the spirits of animals can hunt you and affect the baby's and the mother's health. There is a whole discipline and culture of avoidance.

The Zo'é activated their own therapeutic device that did not let them get sick. Looking at this from the Western medicine point of view, Erik said he was amazed to see that the Zo'é knew what to avoid, even living deep inside the forest. When he asked them why, they replied "because the spirit of this disease is in the air". They see the spirit of this disease as it walks in the air. The Zo'é know this from their culture, from their social practices. Erik was astonished to find that our Zo'é friends, a people inside the Forest, have an efficient medicine to avoid contagion.

A poem that once came to me and I called it “Tradition” says: “singing, dancing, passing over fire, we follow the trail of our ancestors in the *continuum* of tradition”. In this time of privation, we are passing over fire. We need to be very careful, pay attention, because people who are initiated to pass over fire, when they get distracted, they burn their foot. You have to be in a state of concentration so deep that allows you to pass over fire without knowing that you are actually passing over fire. This is true in many of our cultures.

In different moments of this year (2020) some people suffered a kind of crushing in their bodies. Even people who do not stop to respond to their bodies, nor pay attention to it, have felt this suffering. We are going through an unusual experience. I heard a person saying she wanted her life back. I thought “that’s so much suffering”. This person wants her life back. It is another word for what they call the “new normal.” There is a huge anxiety in people wishing to escape from the state of “suspension”. I have not yet found a better word than “suspension” to speak of the time we live in.

Someone with objective training, focused on the scientific logic of daily life, when they suffer a break from this daily life, may even get sick. Many can get sick not from covid, not from contagion, but because they feel compelled to stop their lives. Routine is like a monoculture. A monoculture inside life. Monoculture is not a good thing under any circumstances whatsoever. Not even when it is inside you, alone, because it takes away our connection with all the other senses of being alive.

There are billions of people wishing to get their lives back. What have they done with their lives before in order to want it back now?

Some rare people, having escaped the mental configuration of living an interior monoculture inside themselves, who were involved with other existences, getting fed on living with other lives, lives of trees, of birds, of fishes, of mountains, they found something that has a lot of resemblance to the soul.

Defining life as a monoculture experience is the kind of life experience that isolates the other connections. It is necessary to understand that everything lives: the flowers, the clouds and the wind.

Many people cannot experiment the situation of being at home and are anxious to get out of that cocoon to go somewhere else. The cocoon

is uncomfortable. This also leads us to think about what life we were leading, and what life we want to lead. I think it is very important to seek comprehension about the multiple life-forming processes. We need to engage get involved with the experience of life, beyond the intellectual experiment, beyond what we are able to know from reading, literature and other narratives. We are provoked to experiment with ourselves.

I wanted to look for an image to talk about this idea of the future, this Cartesian perspective that time would be a foresight, with a single direction. I identify this foresight with the movement, in which we are all globally involved, to probe tomorrow. In the text *Tomorrow is not for sale*⁶, I question our anguish of knowing what is on the other side, what tomorrow is.

In narratives, as well as in scientific studies, the instant in which a cosmic explosion took place is neither after nor before anything. I call this event the “Time of Myth”, prior to our anguish of knowing about tomorrow.

The live uncertainty, which has already been theme of the Bienal de São Paulo⁷, is an experience prior to the anguish of the uncertainty of knowing if we are going to have a vaccine for the pandemic, if we are going to dispatch vessels to Mars, if we are going to be able to colonize other planets. It is the same fury. It is the same anguish. I have insisted on this, because the other beings, who experiment life together with us, are not probing tomorrow. An experience fully surrendered to the sense of being alive, without any warranty.

Perhaps this is a recurring idea of the colored parachutes, of this possible fall, from which there is no need to run away, we do not need to be afraid or anguished. We are making a poetic experience, facing a scare, almost. I believe that if we can connect with the meaning of life in everything, living the day is no longer a task, and becomes such a wonderful experience, that in fact nothing is missing.

It is related to the idea of living with nothing. Living with nothing is different from living without anything. It is the same as the glass half-full

6. O amanhã não está à venda (Companhia das Letras, 2020), one of the books written by Ailton Krenak. (N.T.)

7. The title of the 32nd Bienal of São Paulo, INCERTEZA VIVA [Live Uncertainty]. Available on: <<http://www.32bienal.org.br/en/exhibition/h/>>(N.T.).

or half-empty. I am sure you have all heard some campaign of this sort “We need to do this because they have nothing.” When you are with nothing, the experience may be different.

Living with nothing is the experience that I find challenging for this world that by May or June will have already consumed the resources equivalent of a planet, per year. The pandemics this year extended the clock count until August. We returned to the mark of 15 years ago, when we consumed half a world. Now, we are getting back to the mark of consuming two planets in one year.

Many people who hear this comment about consuming two planets in one year see this as just a parable. But think about the state of Amapá: it was without electricity for almost a whole month. Roraima also had some power outages. They are clashing with each other to see how they will manage to continue putting the machines to work.

We consume energy in every way. We are talking about the one that moves cities, but there is also the energy that moves us. Eating two planets a year has something to do with what we are thinking about living with nothing. It is not about everything disappearing and nothing being left to us. Indeed it is about living with nothing.

Living with nothing is living with what we have today. Without being in anguish for tomorrow. They are the senses of willingness to experiment living uncertainty.

I have commented that we are so confident in the whole plague we dragged into the 21st century, in such a way that the artificial intelligence is feeling super comfortable. Our little machines have already started giving commands to humans, like “turn off there, turn on here, go there, come back here”. We have been introduced to a new education: the education by machines.

When Tatukrak, the mountain on the other side of the Rio Doce, in front of where I am now, appears with a frowning countenance, rain clouds over the mountain, it recalls that I Ching hexagram “mountain over the lake”. When we look at the mountain full of mist on top, with rain clouds, we think “be quiet, don’t look for trouble today”. If the mountain looks pretty beautiful, with those drawings on it, we understand “wow, what a wonderful day!”. This is living with nothing.

The idea of consuming two worlds is actually not an idea, it is a reality. Science has managed to reach an understanding of the capacity to produce and sustain human life.

Until the 20th century, humankind expanded, occupying all continents, consuming enough for everyone to spread out, inhabit, eat, live, make their projects. Up to the moment when the account of natural resources consumption went into red. This is a very domestic example. We get into debt, and we start eating, until the middle of the year the “resources” that should be on the planet for the following year.

It means that we are depleting the forests, depleting the rivers. The industrial revolution and the entire modern experience was built upon fossil fuels. Ore is taken from the mountains and turned into blades. All the materials that we transform consume the organism which is the planet.

A mountain is transformed into laminates to manufacture cars and devices, cookwares, stoves, refrigerators, which never turn back to be a mountain again. It is one less mountain in the Earth’s organism. Metals and all other materials that are used do not turn back. The idea of recycling is to recycle for another consumption. It is not a return to nature. The oceans are exhausted from so much we take from them, as well as dumping garbage. There are oceanic trenches which are filled with mountains of plastic. I mean, we are disappearing with natural mountains onto Earth’s surface, and creating artificial mountains in the oceanic trench.

We are depredated the planet and eating it. At the same time that we consume new energy, we return waste of spoiled energy which are fossil fuels. We are eating two planets a year. We have a much more rigorous measurement now that there is a climate dashboard. This climate dashboard measures and releases almost weekly bulletins. Scientists who follow the issue of global warming have access to minute-by-minute information on what is happening in the planet biosphere and around us. We are indeed living an experience called the anthropocene. And what characterizes the anthropocene is the trace that humans are able to leave on Earth. It is a very heavy mark, a very heavy trail, which we are not capable of erasing, until we radically change the whole race we have done so far and that has put us on this planet-eating podium.

Sometimes I use the word *planet* and sometimes I use *world*, and I am always talking about different things. The planet is Gaia, this organism that we are literally eating. The world is this complex of imagination, visions, perspectives, all this production of ideas that establishes a humanity. We build this. The world is a creation of humans. The planet is not. It has created us, and it continues to maintain us for a while. When we become unbearable, this wonderful planet has its own devices, it has intelligence, it has the capacity to dismiss us from here. Just as we are now fighting a virus, and science is hailed because it has achieved on having hundreds of collectives of scientists inventing, researching and checking a vaccine, this organism, Gaia, does not need to do any research to know how to disappear with us out of here. Gaia is wise.

The idea of cities should be called into question. Because they keep attracting too many people, it does not stop. They consume a lot of energy. And they are consumption accelerators. When you travel, go up the river, go to the village, you visibly reduce your consumption of everything. Even electricity, because there is no electricity there. You get out of that energy drain. Clothes, food, medicine, equipment, everything that is junk, everything that is produced, the “merchandise” as *Kopenawa Yanomami* says. We have to escape this commodity world, but the city is an accelerator of the commodity world. If we continue to encourage people to live in capitals like Paris, London, New York, Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, we also have to call on architects and engineers to talk at Selvagem .

I feel that a lot of people who have been in big cities for generations, when they can connect with our conversation, they connect in a place of content consumers. From someone who is supportive to the cause, who wants to learn about it, but does not feel like they can do anything about it.

Cities are a sort of hematoma in Gaia’s organism and must be questioned. They are dark holes on our planet. But the Illuminism, the positivism made us think of the city as resplendent, fantastic places. Yet we cannot forget that this is the recent history of cities, they were not born with electricity.

When we think about polis like Jerusalem, Machu Picchu, Istanbul or Tenochtitlan in the past, they were not a disease. They have become a disease when we exaggerate. Now, I am provoking architects and engineers asking, “What are you doing given all that? You have a very visible responsibility. You provide the scientific basis to build these towers, these skyscrapers and these very heavy concrete and iron structures.” I am nagging them to think of other foundation models rather than these ones made of concrete, iron, cement, which kill the rivers and anticipate the cemetery aesthetics . I am not saying we should destroy cities. But we must transform them, turn them into a garden, fill it with living things.



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The man, Earth creature so small
gets bored on Earth
place of much misery and little fun
makes a rocket, a capsule, a module
dashes to the Moon
descends cautiously on the Moon
steps off on the Moon
plants a banderole on the Moon
experiments the Moon
colonizes the Moon
civilizes the Moon
humanizes the Moon.

Humanized Moon: so like Earth.
The man gets bored on the Moon.
Let's go to Mars — he orders his machines.
They obey, the man descends on Mars
steps off on Mars
experiments
colonizes
civilizes
humanizes Mars with ingenuity and art.

Humanized Mars, what a square place.
Shall we go elsewhere?
Of course — says the engine
sophisticated and docile.
Let 's go to Venus.
The man sets foot on Venus,
see the seen – is that it?
ditto
ditto
ditto.

The man blows his mind if he does not go to Jupiter
to proclaim justice together with injustice

to repeat feeling down
to repeat the restless
repetitious.

Other planets remain for other colonies.
All space becomes Earth-to-earth.
The man reaches the Sun or does he go around
just to see you?
Don't-you-see that he invents
unburnable clothing of living on the Sun.
Sets foot and:
but how annoying is the Sun, a fake spanish bull
tamed.

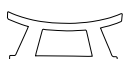
Other systems remain outside
the solar to colonize.
when they all run out
it only remains to man
(will he be equipped?)
the most difficult dangerousest voyage
from self to self:
set your foot on the ground
of your heart
to experiment
to colonize
to civilize
to humanize
the man
discovering in his own unexplored entrails
the perennial, unsuspected joy
of co-living.

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Kumurô: kumus ceremonial stool

PASSING OVER FIRE REFERENCES

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Singing, dancing,
Passing over fire
We follow the trail of our ancestors
On the tradition continuum

*

My father
who is the fire
he burns ceaselessly
What my father
who is the fire
he burns ceaselessly

He burns, burns burns
burns, ceaselessly
He burns what once was
He burns what will be
he burns, burns, burns
burns ceaselessly.

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☶ ☶ KÊN / The Quietness (Mountain)

The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem community.

More information at selvagemciclo.com.br.

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