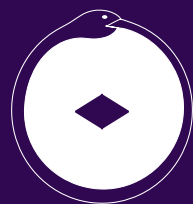
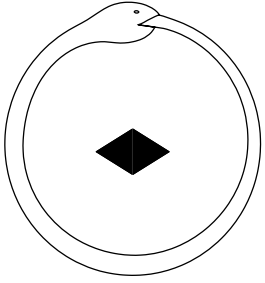


LIGHTNING STRUCK
RIGHT HERE NEXT TO US
Ailton Krenak



notebooks
SELVAGEM



LIGHTNING STRUCK RIGHT HERE NEXT TO US

Ailton Krenak

When we understand life's DNA transforms us, it takes us out from this apparently steady place of the body, of the cocoon, as Emanuele Coccia says, and, coming out of the cocoon, we realize we are life, life in everything: life going past from us, through us.

In *The cosmic serpent, DNA and the origins of knowledge*, Jeremy Narby brought us into contact with the thinking of the pajés, the shamans who lived their continued experience inside the forest, learning from plants and other non-human beings this transcendence, this possibility of associating ourselves with a joyful, celebratory cosmivision of life, in the understanding that life is Earth itself. She is life. And our body is composed of cells, of microparticles of life from this organism that is Gaia.

So we are capable of doing this experience, of relating breathing, the beating of the heart and the functioning of the lung with the functioning of the biosphere, of this fantastic organism that is the Earth. We are also able to grasp the idea of life in transformation all the time.

I am very happy to have Jeremy Narby, Emanuele Coccia, Antônio Nobre and Fábio Scarano as colleagues, those folks who came and revealed science to us. Science that was kept in a cute showcase in front of which people pass by, they think it is beautiful, but they do not touch it, because science is something quite shielded for common sense.

The cosmic serpent, by Jeremy Narby, shatters the single vision of science and shows that in all cultures, all over the world, the serpent, the DNA, the little ladder, us, the sky and the earth, as well as suspending the sky, singing, dancing, constitute themselves in the same poetics of existence. There is no forbidden science. Science is not forbidden just as the tree of life is not forbidden. The tree of life is unimpeded for the experience of knowledge which ignites a loving disposition towards life and all beings. This experience of the human being able to celebrate itself as life is wonderful.

The knowledge of our pajés, the knowledge provided by the plant teachers or by the scientist in a laboratory are all interrelated knowledge. Knowledge communicates, even within decades of distance between one observation and another. The knowledge of those who have lived inside the forest for centuries is capable of reaching conclusions very close to science.

In the book *The falling sky*, Kopenawa Yanomami talks about the xapiri, not visible to the naked eye. It requires a sophisticated device, which this pundit of the forest can use to see where the invisible presence of this entity is, of this matter, which he knows it exists and which can be a danger, depending on the types of relationship that are established between the bodies, between the human body and other bodies that are alive.

In addition to the ecology that is determined for the human body, it, the body, is active in another field: in the cosmos. It is not just limited, for instance, to a tropical environment. That idea of the tropical environment enables the emergence of some kind of virus, this non-life which is almost alive can be deadly. The universe of beings that can harm us is countless. It is as complex as we can imagine the complexity of life. This complexity is the same as that of contacts which may become a contagion.

The knowledge of the forest, which is made up over centuries, continuously transmitted, tested, experimented in the same way as laboratory practices, implies testing, experience and observation. The works and knowledge about the healing power of plants will always be associated with another knowledge, which is not only the use of the plant.

Talking to an indigenous woman from the *Guarani Kaiowá* people, she said: “My mother protected us against Covid-19 using our medicine. Because we don’t have a hospital, we don’t have any of those equipment out there. We didn’t wait for a vaccine. We protected ourselves with our knowledge”. I understood that she was with her maracá and pronouncing sacred words. The *maraca*¹ and the sacred words, together with the

1. Maracás (from guarani *mbaracás*) are rattles of divination, an oracle of the Brazilian Tupinamba indigenous, found also with other native tribes, such as the Guarani, Orinoco and many others (N.T.).

use of plants, create an effect, promoting a kind of change that does not come only from plants or words. There is a set of elements which are summoned: the *maracá*, the song and the active principle that is in the plant. For example, when we take Ayahuasca, the experience we have is not exclusively from taking that drink. It is also our subjectivity, the loving disposition with which we are getting in touch with that knowledge. This is how we will be admitted as pupils. When we speak of a plant teachers, it is because we have to face it as a teacher, otherwise it will not treat us as an apprentice either.

The willingness of this woman's family, to face the risk of a contagion protected only by plants, *maracás* and songs, seems to me a knowledge that enables us to negotiate our life experience with other living and non-living beings, in the sense of understanding life as this subtle distinction between the virus and the poison. The poison is in everything, as the possibility of a virus is. A life that negotiates daily with other beings, from water, fire, earth and air, its presence in this concert of living beings on the planet. It is not only when we get sick. You do not wait for someone to get sick to start dealing with what can kill you.

In the forest, or even in the desert, you are walking in a territory where many other beings inhabit. It is necessary to exchange some kind of understanding with them, so that we are not killed. This is the experience that many people have had this year and got into a state of shock. Because I think many have been forced to understand that the possibility of dying, of something killing you, is not just a conflict between humans. It can be something that comes "out of nowhere", from a hidden place.

It is a wonderful learning experience, which is being widely disseminated, because the sanitary crisis has reached everywhere. Simple people and more educated people, everyone is being forced to look around and realize what might kill them. Not to generate paranoia, but to generate awareness.

In addition to all the remarks that have been made about the effect of the virus on our economic and behavioral reality, I found very interesting Jeremy Narby's remark about the fact that we have globally been living an experience that can re-educate us to think about the human place.

How much is this human capable of taking care of himself? In one of the public conversation opportunities I had this year 2020, inspiration came to me that the Earth is saying to us: “Silence”. This inspiration, as well as the visions expressed in *Ideas to postpone the end of the world* are the result of a sensitive communication with people I have lived with for the last 40, 50 years, in different cultural contexts, but mainly with our relatives who live life in the forest and who need to negotiate every day for hunting, fishing and food that is taken from the swidden.

When you go to harvest a plant, you ask the place where it is for the right to remove it. Be it some pieces of the plant for you to make a medicine, be it harvesting food from the garden or the swidden. You make the same request when you go fishing, hunting. You do not hunt just anyone. You seek negotiation and a certain authorization to obtain from nature something you need for yourself. You must justify this. You cannot assault nature. There has to be a reason to take out. So it looks like the virus might be giving us a kind of warning, saying, “You can’t take what you want. You need to explain why you are taking it.” It is wonderful to imagine, despite the suffering and the fact that many people are dying from the virus, we are going through a hard lesson that can re-educate us, lead us back to a life experience here on Earth, even if not with this population we are used to.

We are eight billion people on the planet. And nobody stops to think when we will be twenty or one hundred billion. We have no limit. We put no limit on our own ambition to consume, consume, consume. It is in this sense that I say that the idea of recycling, as well as the idea of sustainability, are arguments limited to the socio-economic environment. If we are thinking of an arrangement to justify economics dominating ecology, we say that such a thing is sustainable. But if we think critically, outside of this consumption economic model, we will understand that, in nature, there is no possibility of a sustainable equation.

In nature, one can always kill the other. If one can kill the other, and this is what the virus is showing, it also teaches us that a mental elaboration intending to justify consumption with the idea of sustainability will prove insufficient when the oceans are sick and when the waters start rising in coastal cities, setting up an extreme situation, in which the

planet's climate cannot hold up our behavior. In a way, the virus comes to re-educate us, with an authoritarian pedagogy of violence. It arrives and says: "Since you don't learn on your own, I'll cut your heads off". By killing us, this is what the virus is saying: "Look around you, because there are many things that can kill you".

Such realization may be perceived by someone as extra pain. But it may also be perceived as an important lesson for those who survive. We know this lesson implies killing, it is a lesson that kills. If we are living in a transformation time, this lesson can be an element of our evolution. Instead of condemning the experience of the virus as a curse, a disgrace that has befallen us, we could understand that we are being called to greater attention, greater care with everything we relate to. The need to clean your hands with alcohol gel sanitizer, to keep distance, to avoid gatherings, to wear a mask are pedagogics the virus is using. It's like raising a child: "Don't go there; don't put your hand there, it's dangerous". The virus is treating us with such delicacy. It's saying, "Look, if you go over there, I'll kill you, okay?".

There are many aspects that we are not yet able to understand, to comprehend what is being said, and that are available to us like a book, a primer. We are learning a new way of communicating with one another, humans, opening the possibility for us to communicate beyond our idea of being human, and to make a critical observation about how we want to assign to the world of which we are a part, qualities, projections, that are exclusively of human character. These are human feelings.

The entertainment industry, Hollywood and all this fantastic audiovisual content production, is constantly performing this very serious gaffe of assigning human passion and schizophrenia to non-human beings. Mass culture and the entertainment industry bewilder children, from an early age, with a series of complexities and idiosyncrasies typical of humans.

When our *Ashaninka* relatives warned about the contagion, they used the expression: "The virus knows what it is doing". When we assign to someone an action that can be good or bad for us, we understand from the start that s.he had an intention, or that s.he knew what s.he was doing. This observation has been made by people of different cultures.

There is a dear friend of ours, a relative from the Atlantic Forest – this beautiful forest that we have here on the coast –, who communicates to us an understanding of his Guarani Mbyá people about the idea of the virus: “Why every time we hear from authorities, be it health workers, scientists or politicians, do they speak as if they were waging war on the enemy? This covid-19 appears to them as a terrible enemy, and everyone must be summoned to a war against it. We have learned that this threat should not be treated in a language of war. It should be observed and known from our own practices. We should retreat to the depths of the forest and, after diving very deep, seek that inner refuge in the forest that is within each one of us. And there, in the most hidden part of this forest, meditate, invoke and recognize that we need strength, life. We have to invoke life. We do not need to wage war against anyone out there. It is something we have to know from the inside.” I found this statement so unique, so radically different from the speech of an enemy that must be fought. This observation starts from the understanding that everything has motivation, and knows the action falling upon.

I am not trying to complicate the information scientists have that the virus is not even a living thing. It is not DNA, it is RNA. It is something that has not even reached the status of being alive. But, well, its name is virus, it is poison. And poison has intention. It is wonderful that we achieve this apprenticeship. We are learning.

In this year 2020, I unwittingly put myself in the place of a scientific disseminator. I found it interesting that we could not meet in person, but most of my interviews, lives and lectures were exactly to give public knowledge to the works and ideas of scientists who are our contemporaries, who rescued perspectives that were disregarded in the beginning of the 20th century about, for instance, evolutionism, about us evolving concerted with all life on Earth.

This situation of someone who has been educated listening to the shamans, the plants, now being able to cross paths with scientific thinking and help colleagues to spread ideas like Gaia, a complex organism, or that of a possible virus which intends to re-educate ourselves to inhabit a world that we would like to be large enough to fit everyone. A relearning about us humans and our arrogance regarding life. A life that is wonderful, that goes far beyond the statute of men.

In 2020 we celebrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and I was invited to participate in several debates on the topic. It was impossible for me to avoid telling people that we need to look at the rights of non-humans. That perhaps we have an exaggerated fixation on protecting human beings, whereas they have become a threat to life on Earth. To the point that, in *Ideas for postponing the end of the world* and in *O amanhã não está à venda* [Tomorrow is not for sale], I ended up letting on that humans are becoming a pest on Earth.

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

More information at selvagemciclo.com.br

This text was articulated based upon an online conversation between Ailton Krenak and Jeremy Narby on December 21 2020, in dialog with the ideas presented at the Selvagem Notebook *Invisibility and omnipresence: the covid 19 case*, by Jeremy Narby. Transcription and co-editing of texts in Portuguese by Victoria Mouawad, proofreading in Portuguese by Sâmia Rios.

TRANSLATION

MARCOS MORAES

Dancer and Choreographer Marcos Moraes works as performing artist, teacher and cultural producer. Since 2013 he has created and directs The Performing Kitchen – Collaborative Platform on Artistic Research and Creation. He is graduated in Body-Mind Techniques for Harmonic Development at Espacio de Desarrollo Armónico – Rio Abierto Montevideo. Graduated in English at FFLCH – USP (São Paulo University) Moraes also translates texts and books.

PROOFREADING

ANA LOUREIRO JUREMA

Educator, she has developed and participated in several projects in Brazil and other countries – but she has always been a teacher, mainly focused on teacher’s capacity building. She did a doctorate, does research, has academic, technical and didactic publications, is a consultant and an everlasting learner.

SELVAGEM notebooks
digital publication by
Dantes Editora
Biosphere, 2022



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Instituto Clima e Sociedade
Conservação Internacional Brasil