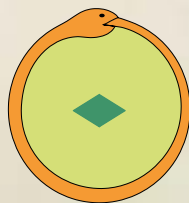
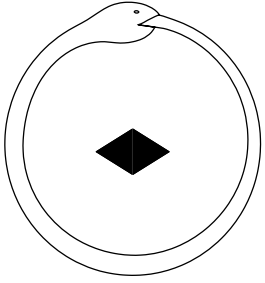


DANCE AND  
THE PLOT OF METAMORPHOSIS

Mauricio Flórez



notebooks  
SELVAGEM



## DANCE AND THE PLOT OF METAMORPHOSIS

Mauricio Flórez

*This text was written based on the memories of the dance workshop  
'body metamorphosis', offered by Mauricio Flórez  
to the Selvagem Community in October 2022.  
The collage on the cover was created by Mauricio.*

### SÃO PAULO, SUMMER OF 2023

Dear Pitanga tree, I would like to learn how to dance like you. We've lived together for more than 10 years now, you are always in the yard. I also like spending a lot of time there, looking closely at you, contemplating. That is how I discovered that you slowly expand in all directions; that even though you are at rest you seem to express yourself all the time; that you like to bloom in Winter, that your body is not fixed, it changes all the time, just like me. Your permanence and rigorous aesthetics are, at the same time, your dance and your language.

There was a day, during isolation when we began to get closer, when I began playing to be you, in an attempt to momentarily abandon my human way of being to move towards a plant way of being. I would like to learn to dance like you, making melody out of silence. It is so beautiful and elegant when you sway with the wind, when your trunk sheds its skin, when the sun strolls around the curve of your leaves... The shimmer left by the rain, your red fruits, your abundance, those sways of unpredictable coordination, so much strength in your stillness.

Contemplating you carefully, I perceive a certain mystery in the silence of your movements. It is as if you constantly revealed something that remains hidden from my eyes and that seduces me deeply. It is hard to explain, but the closer I get to you and the more I observe you, the less silent you become.

Looking at you, I can realise the beauty of your shapes and colours, but there is a serene pace to your small movements that remains hidden from my eyes. Perhaps it is that magical mechanism you use to nourish yourself through the surface of your skin, capturing the energy that comes from the rays of the sun<sup>1</sup>. I don't think you realise it, but I see when you do these things, I know that you feed on light, on rays that come from outside the planet, and even though this process is invisible to the eye, you let yourself be discovered when you mix this light with the water that seeps through your roots to create your *pitangas* [surinam cherries]. That is when I understand your creative force, in your blossoming, in creating your fruits.

I would like to be like you. I want to learn to dance with you. I would like to think without having a brain<sup>2</sup>, to move without having muscles<sup>3</sup>, to have the courage to dive into the dark as your roots do, while another part of my body subtly stretches towards the sunlight. I would love to give myself over to the wind with that sensuality with which you do it, to have the detachment to let go of the leaves in the fall, to have the elegant plasticity that manifests your intelligence to adapt to the environment<sup>4</sup>. I would like to relearn how to be savage like you, to know how to wait, wait, wait for the right moment to blossom.

To be like you, to inhabit a plant way of being, I had to learn how to slow down, to move to another time scale. I had to borrow your qualities and shapes<sup>5</sup>, your mannerisms, to get ahold of your silence, your size, to emulate your curves and torsions.

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1. Photosynthesis is the most important biological process that takes place on Earth. It is the way in which all energy enters the planet. Photosynthesis is the intimate relationship between plants and sunlight.

2. This idea is developed in Jeremy Narby's *Selvagem Notebook*, *Plantas como Cérebros*.

3. Plants move very slowly and in recent decades, thanks to advances in technology, studies with time lapse, stop motion or time-lapse photography devices have revealed the incredible motor skills that plants have. This idea is developed in the book *The Plant Revolution* by Stefano Mancuso.

4. To expand on the idea of plasticity and plant intelligence, I suggest you take a look at the *Selvagem Notebook*: *Aspectos da Inteligência das Plantas*, by Anthony Trewavas.

5. Indigenous specialists from the *Desana* group use the idea of momentarily borrowing jaguar's qualities by wearing them as clothing as a mechanism for transforming into the animal. *Selvagem Notebook*: *Complementaridade e Transformação Yepamahsã*, by João Paulo Lima Barreto.

I had to imagine it as freely as a child. To imagine that my fingers glide through the air as your roots do inside the Earth, to imagine that my hands are flowers<sup>6</sup> and my arms are branches, I had to learn to breathe with my whole body, to breathe through my feet, through my neck, through my fingertips, I had to be aware of my contour, to imagine that the wind around my skin is part of my body, as if it were a living extension<sup>7</sup>. I had to learn to feel that my body does not end at the edge of my skin, that it extends beyond it, that it merges with the world and, if possible, extends to the stars. I had to learn to embrace the air with my eyes closed, standing in a single place. I had to learn to walk softly and deeply while maintaining a light weight that blends with gravity, to create a soft, rhythmic pulse to make my leaves grow, creating beautiful entangled shapes, to carry birds on my elbows.

It was by carefully contemplating your body, your way of being, that I approached this transformation, this metamorphosis of the body into a plant. At first it was an entirely sensitive approach, through affectionate observation of your gestures, but to capture this hidden mechanism that manifests itself in your vitality, to feel this life that animates your body and try to unravel its mysteries, I had to fuel my imagination by personifying you<sup>8</sup>, creating a creative dialogue, as Cristine Takuá<sup>9</sup> taught me. I approached mythical narratives that speak of plant spirits, of an enchanted plant nature, of worlds where humans and gods mix with plants, altering the anatomy of their bodies to create magical transformations. I also got closer to science and started studying botany, the Selvagem Notebooks of Margulis, Trewavas, Hallé, Narby... Trying to

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6. In a meeting with Carlos Papá, during the Reading Cycle on the book *Mbaé Kaá, o que tem na mata* [Mbaé Kaá, what is in the woods], by João Barbosa Rodrigues, he said that, for the Guarani Mbya, the hands are the flowers of the body.

7. The idea that plants turn the environment around them into part of their bodies is developed in the Selvagem Notebook: *Propriocepção: Quando O Ambiente Se Torna O Corpo*, by Lynn Margulis, Dorion Sagan, Ricardo Guerrero and Luis Rico.

8. The personification of the elements that make up nature (rivers, plants, mountains, rocks...) is called animism, a sensitive approach to contact with nature used by various indigenous peoples. Luis Eduardo Luna, in Selvagem Notebook *Biosphere, anthropocene and amerindian animism*, says that understanding animistic thinking could be a way out of the current ecological crisis.

9. In the Selvagem Notebook *Creative beings of the forest*, Cristine Takuá, a teacher, artisan and philosopher from the *Maxakali* people, invites us to get in touch with animal and plant beings, establishing creative dialogues with the expressive potency and knowledge that these living beings carry.

understand what your elegant forms hide from my eyes. From approaching and merging these two systems of knowledge that are mythology and science, I have come to realise that, even though we are so different, you and I have many things in common. We are relatives, we are family, starting with life. We are alive and this life which circulates in us is the same, as Ailton Krenak and Emanuele Coccia<sup>10</sup> say. It is a life that does not belong to you or me, it crosses through us. Our forms are different, but this mysterious vital impulse that animates us is the same. We are born from other bodies and we carry in them the ancestral memory of a past that knows no bounds. You and I came from the dark<sup>11</sup>, you being a seed inside the earth and I being a seed in my mother's womb. We both entered the world through that mysterious channel that is metamorphosis<sup>12</sup>. Inside the earth you knew how to wait, wait, wait for the right moment to begin your dance. As soon as you woke up from your dormancy, all soaked in water, you broke your repose and, with small movements and adjustments, you made space by sliding through a dark labyrinth and embarked on a highly polarised path towards obscurity and light. You had the care, creativity and gentleness to create yourself, to mould your own body by gradually taking ownership of it, inhabiting it, turning the environment around you into an extension of you.

You had the immersive strength to penetrate the world, to dive into the air as fish do into the water, and in that dive you never stopped transforming<sup>13</sup> yourself. For you and me, metamorphosis is our destiny, a destiny<sup>14</sup> that coincides with the very life of the Earth.

It is because of this admiration I feel for you and your relatives that I have embarked on this path of metamorphosis of my body. It all started with a childish desire for transformation and turned into an artistic project, a creative process to create a dance piece that would allow me to transition into a plant way of being, temporarily moving away from my human way of being. Perhaps this intention to be like you was a pretext

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10. Conversation between Ailton Krenak and Emanuele Coccia during the launch of the book *Metamorfoses*. The video can be accessed [here](#).

11. Carlos Papá has a beautiful reflection on the darkness in the Selvagem Notebook *Pytum Jera, night blossom*.

12. Book *Metamorfoses* (Dantes Editora, 2020), by Emanuele Coccia.

13. This idea of the immersion of the plants in the air is developed in the book *A Vida das Plantas* (Cultura e Barbárie, 2018), by Emanuele Coccia.

14. Book *Metamorfoses*, by Emanuele Coccia.

for me to learn more about life, about your life, about the life of plants and their incredible ways of inhabiting the world.

You are probably wondering if it is actually possible for me to become you, if it is possible for me to incorporate your way of being, your qualities, into myself. I ask myself this question too, but I feel that yes, it is possible. And so as not to feel alone in this search, I tell you, my dear Pitanga tree, that I recently had the opportunity to share these desires for transformation with other people. In October 2022, I offered a dance workshop for the Selvagem Community which I called Metamorphoses of the body. During the meetings I shared a set of body practices that activate memory and imagination through movement, proposing the metamorphosis of the body as a plot, an invitation for human beings to transform into plants. I feel that dance is an archaic technology for the plot of transformations, for producing another type of presence and quality of movement which diverts from the monotonous ways of inhabiting the body. We humans, unlike you, maintain routines where there is little room for sensitivity; we are vain, anguished and individualistic, we sit too long, we lose focus easily, our bodies ache and we are often tired. Playing at being like you and your relatives can be a path to a deeper understanding of ourselves, of our bodies, a possibility to postpone the end of the world by relearning the natural truth of life which is to be savage<sup>15</sup>; a path to rethinking the way we inhabit the Earth, time, space, the body. A way to let life fully manifest in us.

I know that in this transformation I am looking for, no leaves are going to grow out of my hand's fingers, my feet will not dive into the earth and my chest will not harden into a trunk; I am too soft, so it is only through the practice of imagination that I can transform myself. Metamorphosing through dance is possible, and from this transformation we are capable of a totally sensitive evidence, which I like to call the enthusiasm of similarity: the evidence that I have managed to momentarily transition to another way of inhabiting the body.

I will try to explain to you what I have been thinking about this process of body's metamorphosis: in order to dance, you have to want to dance. This desire comes from life wanting to manifest itself intensely in the body; life is dance itself. To nourish this dance that comes from

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15. Selvagem Notebook: *Life is savage* by Ailton Krenak.

this desire to move, I like to create bodily indications linked to images and verbal statements that open the doors of my sensitivity<sup>16</sup>, which make the body available for movement, for something to manifest itself. For example: thinking about caressing the air with my fingers, absorbing light through my skin, imagining that my hands are flowers or that my body slides with difficulty inside the earth like a seed which has just woken up from its dormancy. These images evoke a certain physicality that eases transformation, they feed the imagination and mould the anatomy of the body through the creation of forms. Little by little I get ahold of the image, it becomes a body and subtly creates a sensation; I feel it, I know it, you know when a sensation comes from the inside to the surface of the body, something changes, it seems that suddenly I am somewhere else, the whole body becomes the sensation itself. To carry on the metamorphosis, one has to linger, linger, linger on the sensation, savour it, not consume it, completely surrender to it and let it take them wherever it wants to. Suddenly it becomes all too delicious, something magical happens, I become you, the imagination takes over my body completely, I lose the notion of inside and outside, it is life manifesting itself fully in me, it is as if, out of nowhere, the brain has become serene and silent, as if my self has stood aside to let the dancing dance. That is when the transformation takes place, when I totally coincide with the image, a perfect coincidence between my body and you, who was the object of my transformation. It is an enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of similarity, a childlike enthusiasm that tells me: “You’ve been transformed, your body is fully in tune with the movement that animates life”. Enthusiasm! The enthusiasm of the similarity of being like you, my dear Pitanga tree, of feeling you in me, of incorporating your qualities and ways, the sensitive evidence that I have been transformed.

I think that beyond imagination, memory is also important in triggering the body’s metamorphosis. Do you remember when I was in the backyard, next to you, watching the second Wild Arrow, called *The Sun*

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16. This methodology of creating movement through images and verbal statements is inspired by butoh dance [a form of Japanese dance theatre], which emerged in the late 1950s in Japan. It is a procedure also implemented by the São Paulo dance company Key Zetta & Cia, of which I am a member.

*and the Flower*<sup>17</sup>? There is a beautiful passage where Marcelo Gleiser says that every atom in our bodies was forged in the heart of distant stars, that you and I are stardust, children of the universe, that there is a relationship of continuity between us. This makes me think that if our bodies are made up of the same components, it is easy to move from one way of being to another, as Ovid says in *Metamorphoses*<sup>18</sup>. We are a recycling of bodies that came before us<sup>19</sup> and through dance it may be possible to get in touch with subtle ancestral memories that remain stored in the atoms and cells which make up my body. Perhaps through movement I can recall a distant time when the atoms that make up my present body were part of a bird, a flower, a cloud, a stone, a tree... Then the metamorphosis would not just have to do with having the imagination to transform myself into you, but with recalling some distant time when I was a tree. Emanuele says that “we don’t need to spin the globe to feel the world, to see it, to experience it in all its infinitude.

All we have to do is explore the material and spiritual memory of our own bodies. Each one of us is the history of the Earth, a version of it, a possible conclusion.”<sup>20</sup> I will stop here, my dear Pitanga friend. See you in a while, in the yard.

FLÓREZ.

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17. It is a seven episode series that projects *Selvagem* into audiovisual language. The second Arrow, *The sun and the flower*, combines the different visions of the Sun’s relationship with life on Earth. It is a narrative about the profound interaction between cosmic rays and green matter, which transforms the Earth into a living superorganism.

18. *Metamorphoses* is one of the most famous works by the Latin poet Ovid. This narrative poem was made public around the year 8. In it, Ovid tells stories of transfiguration, about the ‘metamorphosis’ of gods and men into fountains, trees, rivers, stones, animals... in a universe that deliberately jumbles up fiction and reality.

19. Book *Metamorfoses*, by Emanuele Coccia.

20. *Metamorfoses*, by Emanuele Coccia, page 31.



## MAURICIO FLÓREZ

Dancer, teacher, body trainer and choreographer with a degree in dance and pedagogy from the University of Antioquia - Medellín. He was born in Colombia and has lived in Brazil since 2012. He is currently interested in botany and studies the relationship between the human body and the plant body and issues related to the metamorphosis of the body through dance, based on the link between memory, imagination and movement. He is an apprentice at the Selvagem Community and takes part in a group that translates texts from Portuguese to Spanish. Since 2015 he has been part of the artistic nucleus of Key Zetta e Cia.

The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem community. The editorial coordination is by Alice Faria and the design by Érico Peretta. The editorial coordinator of English translations is Marina Matheus.

More information at [selvagemciclo.com.br](http://selvagemciclo.com.br)

All Selvagem activities and materials are shared free of charge. For those who wish to give something back, we invite you to financially support the Living Schools, a network of 5 educational centres for the transmission of indigenous culture and knowledge.

Find out more at [selvagemciclo.com.br/colabore](http://selvagemciclo.com.br/colabore)

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