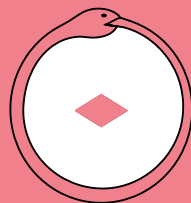
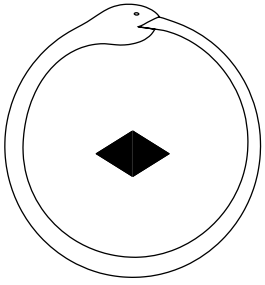


CREATIVE BEINGS
OF THE FOREST
Cristine Takuá



notebooks
SELVAGEM



CREATIVE BEINGS OF THE FOREST

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Talk presented at the *Biosphere* conversation circle during the *Selvagem*, cycle of studies on life, at the *Teatro do Jardim Botânico* [Theater of the Botanical Garden] in Rio de Janeiro on November 13, 2019.
Transcribed in Portuguese by Camila Vaz.

I am going to start my talk with a chant because I believe that these creative encounters bring joy to the soul and chanting helps me, at least, to organize ideas.

(Guarani Chant)

Well, I wanted to share some of the thoughts that I have been thinking over the years and listening to you all, I got a strong energy inside me. I feel that the great mistake of science – and as Ailton says, “of this humanity we think we are” – was to have turned our backs, to have hidden, I believe, denied the knowledge of the world’s indigenous peoples, the great complexity that exists in the knowledge of the forest, which I will not call here “science of the forest” because these traditional knowledge and practices of the forest are beyond science, as if it were a “metascience”, I do not know.

This great complexity that exists in the forest has been in dialogue for many centuries with a strong creative power of plant and animal beings who, like us, have resisted for many centuries and created formulas to continue walking on this planet.

Listening to you, scholars and researchers with your questions and concerns, I am led to think about the concealment of (indigenous) wisdom, and its absence at universities, for example. 13 years ago I dared wanting to study philosophy at university and I realized that the creative dialogue with plant and animal beings is not present in “universities” – which are all but universal.

When I went to study at the university, I was a little scared because it seemed they said that only men think. In the history which was portrayed to me from the birth of philosophy in Greece, men produced thought, systematized their knowledge left in historical books which they rarely put into practice. We notice this, even today, in the lands where “their people” live.

This really startled me and made me, when I left that university, continue to dialogue – at least trying to dialogue – with the creative beings of the forest. And I am calling them “creative beings of the forest” because of a story that a very special woman to me, a healer, the grandmother of my grandchildren, told me one day: a long time ago **Nhanderu**, as the **Guarani** call him, who is our supreme father, had two daughters: **Takuá** and **Ka’á**. They were two beautiful women. He took and transformed these two women into two beings: **Takuá** became bamboo – which today is used for many things such as making baskets, making medicine, making different types of artistic productions; and **Ka’á** became a plant known to many as yerba mate [*Ilex paraguayensis*], which the gauchos call *chimarrão*¹. **Ka’á** has become a very powerful plant. For the **Guarani** people, **Ka’á** is a plant that brings many messages, brings strength, enlightenment, brings healing, in many different ways of what healing is.

When she told me this story, I started to really feel it, observing this mostly female dialogue with **Ka’á** and **Takuá** today. This is how I began to reflect even more on these creative dialogues in the forest, on the knowledge and complex philosophies that have inhabited the lives of the traditional ancestral peoples of the Earth for many centuries. Yet this traditional knowledge is not able to dialogue directly with this university, which writes so much and seems to pay little attention to the subtlety of the various forms of knowledge transmission.

Memory is also a point I have been thinking about. Davi Kopenawa Yanomami always says that white people write a lot and that they have a tireless habit of writing things down so they will not forget. Traditional peoples however, are not in the habit of writing on paper to keep their recollections.

1. The *chimarrão*, or mate (from the **Quechua** “*mati*”) is a characteristic drink of the Southern Cone culture, legacy of the indigenous culture, produced by the infusion of yerba mate plant ground in boiling water at approximately 70 degrees Celsius, in a gourd with a pump (T.N.).

On my father's side I am *Maxakali*. The *Maxakali* are an incredible people of resistance, they guard chants of the most diverse forms of animals, of *ỹamiy* beings that exist in the forest. There are more than 35 bee chants.

Today, some eight or ten species of bees are found in the Atlantic Forest and *Cerrado*² that inhabit Minas. But children know the chants of the more than thirty bees, without ever having seen them. The ancestral memory, which sustains this ancient wisdom, is very complex. So, I keep thinking about this memory, about this strength of creative dialogue with plant and animal beings and I also think of the dream, because I am an educator.

I went to study philosophy and later, when the educational institution opened in my community – where I live today, in the Rio Silveira village, which is in the middle of the Atlantic Forest, on Boracéia beach, on the north coast of São Paulo [state] – I have started talking at school about dreams. The school institution that was created, which previously did not exist within the communities, is causing the children to refrain from dreaming. The time imposed by institutions – time to leave, time to arrive, time to have lunch – makes children lose their natural flow of life. So it is this attention and care that we all must have with children: what is the purpose of school in our life? In our societies there were no schools and there are no mental hospitals, nurseries, retirement homes – none of these locking away or standardized ways of imparting knowledge or molding people. And I have noticed that throughout history it seems that people want to bring these institutions inside the knowledge of traditional peoples.

People are very sick, it seems to me. Sick in the sense of a void: like a tree that is hollow inside. That is just wood on the outside, but inside it is hollow. It seems to me that many are hollow inside. Because, throughout history as well, the faith monoculture, the food monoculture, the

2. *Cerrado* is a Brazilian biome, characterized especially by the savannah biome (in the international sense), but also by seasonal forest and grassland. The *Cerrado* is the second largest Brazilian domain, extending, in its nuclear area, over a territory of 1.5 million km². The “Brazilian savanna” — is a form of vegetation that has several physiognomic variations throughout the large areas that occupy the country's territory (T.N.).

mind monoculture are making people uniform, lose their sense of understanding the very fruition of life, the very complexity of these creative dialogues which place us in another location, which place us in a natural relationship with other beings.

Why have human beings distanced themselves so much from other beings? Why do scientists today have to keep thinking: will we have to leave this planet? Indigenous peoples have been around for centuries: creating formulas, recreating formulas. Resilient, sustainable, regenerative ways to continue this creative dialogue. And I believe that we will not give up. That is why I talked about education: because I believe that the regeneration of Gaia, about which Fabio [Scarano] talked a lot, can happen through education. Not this Western, square, institutional education, but a sensitive education.

Guarani has a term, a concept, that is called *Tekó Porã*. So I think of an education that tries to dialogue with this concept of *Tekó Porã*, which would be like a good and beautiful way for you to be and to remain in the territory. Well, but how are we going to be doing great and in good shape in the territory if the river is dead, if, as Ailton says, the mountain has been eaten? Rethinking – and recreating new forms of existence – is a bit of a painful thing. Changing habits is like shedding your skin, you need courage. Like a mother when her first child is born and starts breastfeeding. The pain in the breast is intense, it feels like sticking a needle in the nipple because it hurts to breastfeed the child. Many give up: “it hurts a lot, I can’t take it”. And then you give up breastfeeding the child.

Changing habits is like this pain: a pain of courage. You know you have to breastfeed your child, because by breastfeeding the child will be healthy. Change habits and have the courage to retrace your steps. It may be painful at first, but it represents a change in ethics that you will carry along on your journey.

I keep seeing a lot of people talking about the Amazon, that the environment needs to be preserved. At the time of Belo Monte³, many people raised the “Belo Monte no” flag. Lots of activism, but lip service.

3. *Belo Monte* [Beautiful Hill] is a Brazilian hydroelectric plant in the Xingu River basin, near the municipality of Altamira, in the north of the state of Pará. Also called “Beautiful Monster” by social groups which denounce the Brazilian’s energetic policy connected to the capitalist globalization of territories, provoking socio-environmental damages (T.N.).

It is useless to raise a banner “long live the Amazon” if you continue to feed what is raping the Amazon.

So when I talk about changing habits, and that this hurts like shedding your skin, I say that it is past time for us to start having the courage to really create an equilibrium - I even call it a certain pact - which would be for you to manage to equilibrate the breath of love which comes out of our mouths when we speak – our ideas, our concerns, our dreams – to equilibrate that word-breath with the cadence of our feet, of our walk on Earth. Because it is no use for my mouth to go there and my foot to come here. This balance between what we say and where we are going is what needs to guide our courage and ethical commitment to ourselves, our children and all other beings.

The universal arrogance of man and the different laws that we have today: human rights, children’s rights, rights, human... rights! And the paca? The agouti? The ant? The bee? The *samaúma*⁴? And all the beings that live in the forest? We are not going to invite them here to talk to us – all the more so that I do not think they would come. When will we be able to retrace our path and dialogue with these beings that are there? The otter is there on the riverside, thinking how its children will be able to play on the riverside that is rotten because of our feces, of everyone’s greed, consumption, consumption and consumption. These are the things I have been reflecting on over these years and trying to dialogue with my students, with the people I live with, in the sense of these ethics and commitment to what we really want.

The great web that involves life, this great interaction of relations between animal and plant beings, has been completely disrupted. Human beings have broken all forms of interactions on this web. How to weave now, and pick up the thread which has been lost is an urgent commitment for all of us. No more writing, no more formulating. You have to practice now, all together, no matter how hard it is.

Talking with the midwives and with the healers, they have been saying that the forest spirits are very angry and they see everything all the

4. *Sumaúma* is a large tree of the Bombaceae family, whose scientific name is *Ceiba Petrandia*, of white wood, lives in regions with high humidity. The indigeneous peoples consider it the “mother of the trees”, its tubular roots at certain times burst, irrigating the entire area that surrounds it. Its height, size and beauty stand out in the immensity of the forests (N.T.).

time. But could science be dialoguing with the spirits of the forest? Does science understand that it is not enough to just write? That you have to feel, that you have to perceive, that you have to interact with all other non-human forms?

At the beginning of this understanding, of this multicultural grouping which took place in the Americas, a few centuries ago, this monoculture deed arrived. With the cross and the sword monoculture came. However, many creatives – and Ailton is one of them who I admire a lot, as well as others, Carlos Papá, *txai lbã*, Davi Kopenawa Yanomami and the *xeramõi*⁵ here *Dua Buse* – resist by passing on their knowledge, practicing creative dialogues in the forest. A meeting like this makes me very happy. See that each one of you is really concerned with imparting knowledge in the sense of a broad dialogue, because it will not do any good just talking about it here and there.

I think that Gaia's regeneration is possible in the sense that we begin to rethink the principles which guide our children's lives. The technology that is developing, that is swallowing everyone, why do people allow it? Why do people want to communicate so badly with others who are far away and cannot stop to feel "what did I dream of today? Have you dreamed today?" If we start listening to our dreams, I believe it is possible for us to start empowering ourselves and build up the courage to change our habits.

The earth is much stronger than us, it is a great sacred mother. The forest is a great father, with all its plant beings, animals – visible and invisible beings. We are the ones who are small, we are just a small grain in the midst of this great immensity of knowledge that exists in the forest.

So, I wanted to share some of my concerns with you and say that we are all in the same boat. We need to learn to row. If we can all row in the same direction, maybe we will advance. Move forward in the sense of respect, and that one day, for instance, such a university will be able to respect, and equilibrate the several forms of knowledge, even if it does not understand them.

5. *Xeramõi* can be translated as "my grandfather". For the *Mbya Guarani*, the leaders are the eldest, they are the wise ones because they have more experience and knowledge of the culture and spheres of life. The *Xeramõi* can also be *Pajés*, who are the community leaders responsible for imparting the tradition to the youngest (T.N.).

Guarani also has a very complex concept called *arandu*. Many people translate *arandu* as wisdom, but *arandu* is much more than wisdom. It would be, more or less, me trying to dare translate *arandu* as “the person who has the sensitivity to feel his own shadow”. Reaching this *arandu* is what the great *xeramõi*, the great sages, seek when they concentrate on their *petynguá*, which is a sacred pipe, and tobacco.

Tobacco is a very sacred plant, just as yesterday during the opening there was talk of ayahuasca, which various peoples call by other names, like the Huni Kuin who say *nixi pae*, and several others... *penty* with *corró* as the *Maxakali* say.

Tobacco is a very sacred plant, a plant that communicates with you and takes you to meet *arandu*. But society, with this mania for domination, control, accumulation, turned tobacco into a carcinogen product. When I see written on a cigarette box label “be careful, this kills” ... The great shamans teach us that tobacco cures. But in the bar, at markets, they say that tobacco kills.

This inversion of values, and the disrespect for the sacred being that is tobacco, makes me think about this ethic, this commitment to various beings. Why was tobacco marginalized? Why does tobacco cause cancer, as some say? I know some 110-year-old *Guarani* today, active chanters, healers, who use tobacco very wisely.

This makes us stop and think: what is our relationship with sacred beings? With the water? With tobacco? With all beings? I leave this question to you.

Aguyjevete.

She is an indigenous philosopher, healer, midwife, educator and artisan. Cristine Takuá lives in the village of Rio Silveira. She is an independent teacher at the Rio Silveira community. She is also founder and advisor of Instituto Maracá. Cristine represents the unit of indigenous education at the São Paulo Secretariat of Education and is a founding member of the Forum for the Articulation of Indigenous Teachers in the State of São Paulo (FAPISP).

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This notebook features the special participation of Ana Loureiro Jurema and Gerrie Schrik, who respectively translated and revised the text into English.

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. Proud member of the Selvagem Community, contributing as brincante da língua, a language craftswoman, a tongue-reveller

GERRIE SCHRIK

Gerrie lives in a small foodforest on the banks of the Pires creek, in the Piracicaba watershed. Permaculture, native beekeeping... and

much more. She works as a language teacher and with environmental education projects. Hiking, birding, reading and environmental studies are some of her passions.

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