

**Quercus**

**2020**

**Video**

**Duration: 13:06**

**Transcript**

You probably are surprised to hear me speaking.

You've always imagined us as incapable of intelligence, language, empathy.

You can think of me only as a raw material to build your world.

In your mind we have been and continue to be obtuse green stones, brownish mineral zombies, at best green spots at the edge of your sight.

But I am alive. Just like the pets that surround you. Or, probably, more intensively alive than them.

You have spent the last years and decades trying to acknowledge the rights of animals: you have extended your human privileges to them.

Now we are claiming those rights. We do so because, in the end, 90% of the biomass on this planet is vegetal matter.

We are alive.

Exactly like you, although we live much longer than you do. Therefore, we know your lineage, we know your story.

We are, after all, old friends.

That is why you keep addressing me in Latin, a language that is long dead. To you, I am Quercus. I am a deciduous tree, that means I throw away my leaves during the winter. This allows me to resist the seasonal cold much better, and to live where other comrades cannot.

The fact that I can get rid of parts of my body must be incomprehensible to you: you guard every inch of your body jealously, because if you lose it you can no longer grow another. I'm throwing them away because I can rebuild everything.

Vegetal beings can say "I", but we do it differently from you. Each of us is perfectly capable of knowing what is happening around us and of distinguishing between the outside and the inside, between the world and the non-world. Each of us is therefore self-aware and able to communicate with other trees, especially those belonging to the same species.

But in a tree like me, the functions are taken over or performed in a generalised and pluralistic way.

Think about reproduction: I am a living being that can build hundreds of sexual organs.

Consider that for us reproduction is not a private and single species activity, it is an ecological orgy, a concert of vegetal and animal beings cooperating in mating.

The same is true for the self. I am not a being without "self", I am a being whose "self" takes place in hundreds of parts of my body simultaneously: I am an organism that is plural but not schizophrenic. From this point of view, I am not only an "I", I am much more "I" than you and all of you. I am not saying "me" only once, but hundreds of times simultaneously in the same body. I am a being that can say "I" with any part of my body.

Unlike you, I never stop growing. This means that I am constantly chiselling my body. I am obsessed with my own shape. I am the designer of myself, constantly changing and adapting. Being, for me, is a matter of pure design: the production and modification of forms. My body is not something given once and for all, it is always yet to be built, a sort of somatic do-it-yourself process.

The fact that I don't stop growing with maturity means that my body is multi-aged. Some parts can be 700 years old, while others just a few months old. My body is a constant accumulation of tissues, an alternation of dead parts, wood, and living cells.

There is no struggle between the living parts and the dead ones in us. Death is not an external event which we must oppose or escape.

My body is with you, and in your life, in the most unexpected forms. I am the chair on which you sit, the table you use to write, your wardrobe, your sideboard, but also your most ordinary and extraordinary tools.

We are in you as much as outside you. You just have to breathe: the oxygen that is contained in the air you inhale at any time is only a by-product of our metabolism, and yet it is only through this detritus of our existence that you are alive. To breathe means immersing yourself in our life and being penetrated by our aerial selves. Every breath is an intimate communion with us.

Our whole body is built on the energy coming from outside of the closed system you call Earth. We get our food from the sun. For us, to build a body means to capture energy from the stars. Every tree or plant is therefore an agent of assimilation of extra-terrestrial matter into Gaia's mineral body. It is only through our act of cosmic digestion that you can assimilate nutrients.

I hope it is clear, at this point: we fabricated the very conditions for your existence.

We did not only make the medium you inhabit: it is to better catch our branches that you have learned to oppose the thumb with the fingers, and it is to better grasp the depth of the visual field (a decisive skill when you live among us) that you have favored the presence of two eyes on the same surface of the face. Green is still the colour you perceive with the most contrast: to distinguish between leafy backgrounds and predators was a matter of life and death to your ancestors. You developed “plant blindness” because we are not a threat to you.

You always talk about the domination of fire, as it is that element that has made your technique and your civilization grow immensely, but it has always been our sacrifice that have made the existence of fire possible. We taught you what technique and technology is. It was we -and not stone or metal - who always offered you the material and form of your first inventions.

You should not talk about the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, but about the Holm-oak Age, the Pine Age, the Larch Age. Everything you know, everything you built, you learnt it from trees.

We are the ones who taught you about the stable and common life - what you call a city. And it is in order to remain faithful to our existence that you began to establish yourself in a place and abandon your nomadism. Urban life exists only in opposition to us, because cities exist as long as they are not forest. But there is no city that can be built without leaning against us, sculpting through our anatomy, even if you prefer brick or cement to wood.

A world made of only stone is, technically, a desert, and the mineral fury of man can only lead to the desertification of the planet.

Wood is not just dead fabric that gives structure. It is also, and above all, a historical archive of the earth's climate. This is why we are not extraneous to your culture: we are archives of the climate, that record every slight variation

in the environment, we are taking notes of what you do. You just have to pay more attention to our language, the way we communicate, the way we are.