

# Chus Martinez

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## **An Inexhaustible Goodwill. From leaves to politics**

The claim that humans are animals that are different from all the others was first expressed by Aristotle. He formulated his definition of humans as “living beings possessing language” (*zōon logon echon*), which later, in the passage from Greek to Latin, acquired the classic form *animal rationale*. However, Aristotle’s definition was clearly in contrast with, or in reaction to, those of his predecessors, from Homer to Empedocles, Parmenides, or Democritus, none of whom cared less about discussing the differences between the various faculties of animals, humans included. Ascribing an intellectual power to all animals and plants introduces very interesting new twists on the relation between thinking and perceiving. For many, all these ideas, all these experiments conducted by thinkers, or by artists proposing to be an animal or a plant, are still too extravagant; indeed, many are apprehensive about leaving behind the political truths as the Left understands them, as matters of human awareness and interest.

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For centuries, language and labor have defined the position of human. How can we leave that position to become a flower? A passion flower, even? But Ingela Ihrman proposes to reverse this common-sense notion, the cultural personality of the passion flower as unnecessarily humanized by the seventeenth-century Spanish priests who named it in South America. In calling the flower “La Flor de las Cinco Llagas,” or the “The Flower With The Five Wounds,” referring to Christ’s suffering, his Passion, they inserted it into the logical model of transcendence, of the dialectical suppuration of earthly senses by a suffering that transforms pain into glory. So it seems to be a really good idea to get inside the flower, and not only observe it or direct it, but try to reverse that logic and return it to a plane of immanence, to the order of life. True, we cannot perform this operation with every single animal and plant, with every single living creature, including humans, but it is an incredible proposal to introduce to our imaginations, to persuade us that we should and may do such a thing.

And so, when that flower bloomed on June 13, 2017, and on the day we tested the notion that perception occurs by means of slight mutation, in which the sensing body acquires something of the nature of that which it senses. It will be very difficult to describe here what I felt and so the many others in the room with me in seeing a human being as a flower. It will be wrong to call this a performance, since it was a true transformation, a metamorphosis. That coming to life of a flower, opening up, with its gigantic petals and pistils offering itself to us, as if we were all the birds that may approach the flower to drink its nectar.

That flower, prepared with care by the artist over a long period then actualized in all of us the experience that life not so much “is” as “becomes”. And that, accordingly, it is not possible to observe the processes of life themselves, but only the structures that convey them. This is why artists and their interest in life is so relevant. Not because they provide art with another “subject”, but because they are making an effort to provide art with life.

This means the emergence of a practice where the coalescence of all forms of being into a single pulse, a single urge: This is an idea of the creative, form-generating power of pure energy – the captivating power of forms emerging from formlessness.

In his Italian journal Goethe wrote: “All is leaf”

“All is leaf”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The plants provide the poet with the matter to claim metamorphosis is not only a rule in nature but a thinking method. Metamorphosis is the name for transformation and it is entirely different from change – the core notion of the Modern experience. In the life of plants and flowers, Goethe saw his quest for unconditional creativity arising from the raw matter that transformed into leaves, in this successive and pronounced differentiation he discerned a knowledge ideal, since metamorphosis relates nature’s permanence to its mutability: Form becomes formation, shape turns into transition.

Therefore, sensing like a flower can be seen as the result of a fundamental and necessary transformation, namely one being altering the consistency of another. The Left call it “tolerance,” but that is an inadequate term. The flower shows us we need more than just “allowing,” and in that ‘more’ lies the true seed of future forms of democracy.



## For a Peace Treaty with Plants

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Start with fiction

However, if this way of thinking through nature and organicity is still too much for you, you could still start with fiction. Think of the animated character Barbapapa – created in the 1970s by French architect Annette Tison and her husband Talus Taylor. The power of

this cotton candy-like new living species is its ability to don any shape. Its creators write: “With a few shape-shifting and a brilliant imagination, he smoothly overcomes the most difficult situations! He is always ready to help. His goodwill is inexhaustible.”

If offering Barbapapa in exchange of solid critical-school ideas of opposition seems too much for many, it is. To think about the possibilities of this inexhaustible goodwill as a method to deal with the relation of public memory to history and forgetting in our dramatically changing social context insufflates pure encouragement.

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And this is what really contributes to the creation of a new and productive epic style. It is one made not of all the disasters in front of us, but of a necessary joy in this transitional moment. It promotes a sense of the people, of us all regardless of our citizenship, an invocation in the present tense to the goodwill we need in order to develop a new social body.