

Whenever you walk down a forest path, through a coppice or a meadow, you experience the harmony of nature. After all, it is a perfectly composed entity.

There are no discords, no false notes, no arrhythmias. You absorb its gentle impeccability and restore your inner peace. In nature, there is duty and humility, the beauty and fierce will of life. And this energy that is so foreign to you, the energy of a wild matter, saturated with the hope of re-nascence, re-growth, re-cuperation, of sprouting and regeneration, this energy causes you to drink from it, drawing strength in knowing that you, too, will be given nature's spark of life. You too will get a chance to create yourself anew, forgetting what once was. And then, you will get to do your own thing afresh. But the tree you're touching to borrow its energy, this tree to whom you press your tired, tried face – this tree consists mostly of cells that committed a cruel suicide a long time ago. Almost all of them killed themselves ruthlessly, self-digesting and burning their own life away with acid-like severity, leaving nothing but an empty shell, a husk. They have done it before, and they will keep on doing it. All this for the sake of physiological pragmatism.

Suicide is imprinted in every plant cell, designed as an act of life that must ring out for the plant to exist and self-create. Apoptosis, the pre-programmed death of a cell, happens for real. No rehearsing, no pretending. Trees use this process mainly to create wood and bark.

In the spring, when vascular cambium – the thin jelly film that covers the wood – multiplies, new cells come to life, fresh and alive, so hydrated that everything inside them is tender and transparent like candy wrappers. They are about to turn into wood, become trunk and branches, fill the scaffolding of every leaf's net of nerves, build root cores; it doesn't matter whether it's a root of a wild pansy or a sequoia. Therefore, cells must gain strength first, reinforcing their walls. And just several weeks later, each living stem cell of wood buries itself alive from the inside like Antigone, bricking the exits up with lignin that hardens up like cement. It's happening right there when everything is in bloom, at the height of summer when everything lives, and photosynthesises, growing and persisting. A ripe time for suicide. The cell digests itself, hydrolase enzymes popping inside it. They were there from the very start. The living parts inside the cell vanish. Only when it's almost done killing itself, do the nucleus and DNA disintegrate, only then is the gene book annihilated. As if the dictate of survival was there until the very end.

The mass death of tree cells is a thoroughly pragmatic sacrifice by their mother plant. All this is done to let the water flow through the desolate labyrinthine corridors of wood, this being the only way for it to reach every leaf, every living cell.

But why? Why do cells have to die, why didn't those systems evolve towards preserving life, all life, at any cost?

It's because the Universe is overrun with physics – just like Prigogine's sentences, in which he described the chaos of all complex structures. Billions of multiplied cells, making for an endlessly rich system, this hive of diversity can function only up to a certain level of multiplication. A rebellion is always simmering there, and so are tumours and uncontrolled laziness. It would be too difficult to maintain and synchronise in such a towering living structure.

I'm writing those words; it's very quiet. I place my palm on the beechwood table, push my feet down on the spruce floor.

Excerpt translated by Aga Zano



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