

*Sensing Botanical Sensoria*

# *A Kriya for Cultivating Your Inner Plant*

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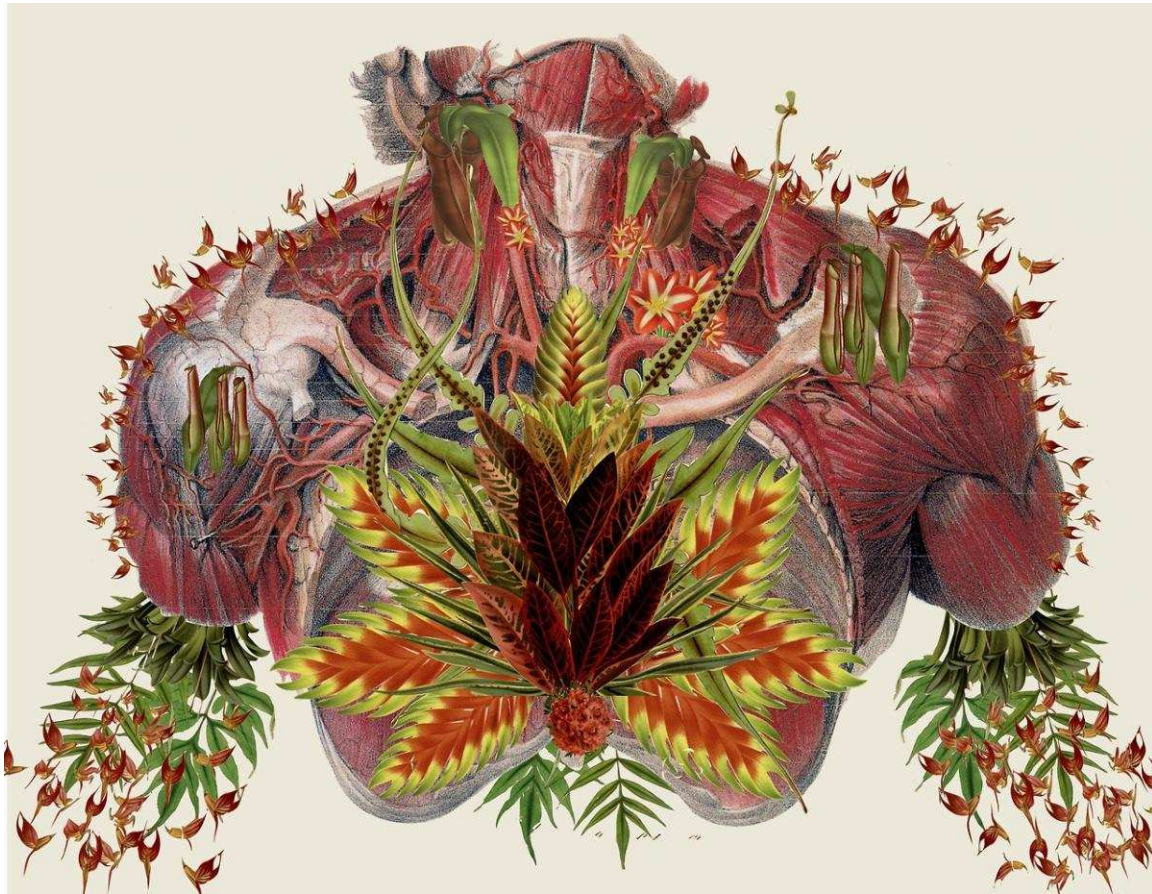
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Never forget this: your body does not end at the skin.<sup>1</sup> Your contours are not constrained by physical appearance. Your morphological imaginary is fluid and changeable.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, your tissues can absorb all kinds of fantasies.<sup>3</sup> Your imagination generates more than mere mental images; its reach extends through your entire sensorium. Simultaneously visual and kinesthetic, imaginings carry an affective charge. They can excite your muscles, tissues, and fascia, heighten or alter your senses. You can fold semiosis into sensation.<sup>4</sup> Perceptual experiments can rearticulate your sensorium.<sup>5</sup> And by imagining otherwise, and telling different stories, you can open up new sensible worlds.

Consider tying on the habits, compartments, and sensitivities of other bodies. Becoming with and alongside others, you might begin to see with new eyes, smell with a new nose, and taste with a new tongue. [6] <sup>6</sup>Indeed, we have opportunities to do this every day in our entangled mimetic dances with others — human, more than human, and machine. These encounters can incite other ways of seeing, feeling, and knowing. Altered perceptions can destabilize entrenched sensory regimes and bring otherwise imperceptible phenomena within grasp. What you once thought were stable boundaries between bodies may begin to break down. The very order of things may come undone.

Consider this as an invitation to deepen your already multispecies Yoga practice. Cat, Cow, Dog, Crow, Scorpion and Fish Poses torque your body into mimetic affinities with animal forms. Here I invite you to cultivate your inner plant. This is not an exercise in anthropomorphism – a rendering of plants on the model of the human. Rather, it is an opportunity to *vegetalize* your already more than human body. In order to awaken the latent plant in you, you will need to get interested and involved in the things that plants care about. Follow the plants.<sup>7</sup> Let yourself be lured by their tropic turns and you will acquire freshly vegetalized sensory dexterities. Try this Kriya.<sup>8</sup> Tree Pose will never be the same again.



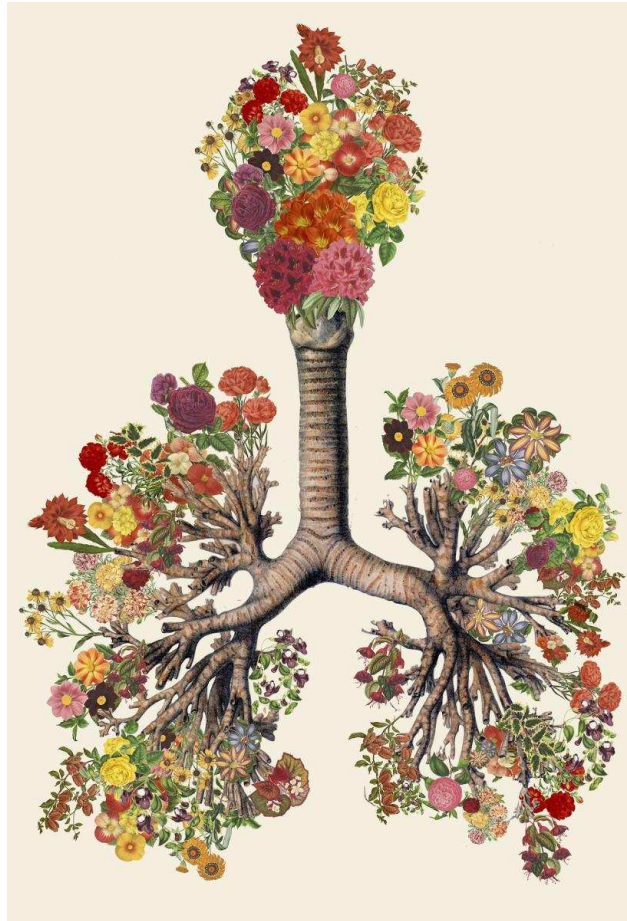
[Artist: Travis Bedel, Anatomical Collage](#)

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Find a patch of sunlight. Stand tall, let your feet sink into the ground below you, and close your eyes. Reach your bare arms outward and feel the sun warm your skin. Drink it in. Now, let go of your bodily contours. The skin and flesh of your arms thins and fans outward, becoming membrane thin. Your bones dissolve, and your muscles melt away. Begin to pump water through your veins until they elongate and branch into turgid vessels. Draw water up your growing stem into your leaves. Play with this new buoyancy, feel the lift and lilt as your leaves and stems reach for more sunlight. You are becoming *phototropic*. Lap up the sunlight through your greening leaves. Feel a cool pocket of air forming on the underside of your leaves as you release atmospheric vapours. You are photosynthesizing: eating sunlight, inhaling gaseous carbon, exhaling oxygen and releasing water.

Now drop down into your roots. Extend yourself into the cool, moist earth. Feel your strength as a downward thrust that inspires an upward lift. Experiment

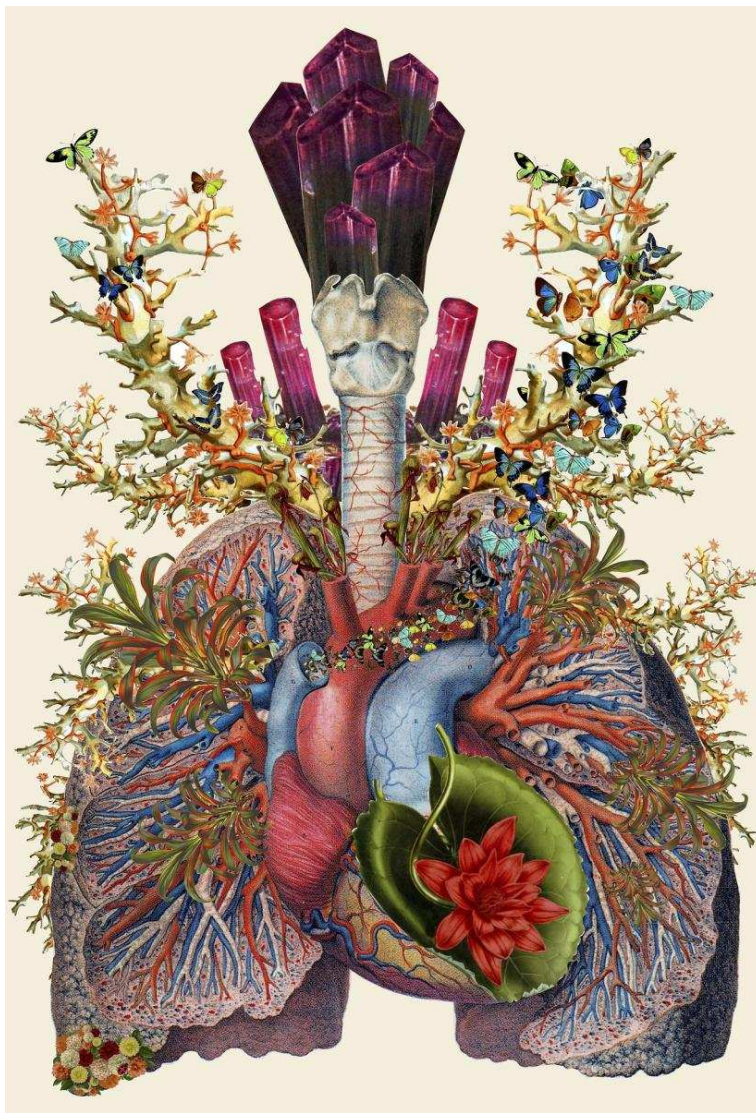
with *gravitropism*. Feel the rush as you redistribute your awareness through this thin, filigreed tangle of roots and that branch and branch until they reach the width of just a single cell. Find one of your root tips. Taste the wet, metallic soil; smell that musty gradient of decaying matter flush with nitrogen and phosphorus. Propel yourself towards the source. Experiment with your strength. Push yourself up against the soil; grow through minute crevices between crumbling pieces of earth. Wherever the soil resists, just release your chemical stores to dissolve whatever is in your path.



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Now multiply this sensation. Feel two searching root tips. Then four. Can you extend your awareness to five? What would it like to feel one thousand root tips extending through the soil? Feel the rush as you expand your awareness to millions of sensitive root tips. Dive downwards and run outwards, drawing water and nutrients in and up through all of them simultaneously. Feel your whole root system humming with an electric charge. You have become one giant nerve cell merging with soil.<sup>9</sup> Now hook yourself into a thickening mycelial network of fungi, microbes, and other roots all around you.<sup>10</sup> Feel the energetic thrill of connection. How far can you extend your awareness? Run with it, in every direction.<sup>11</sup>

Without letting go of this excitement, draw your awareness back up your stem and into your leaves. You no longer have eyes, a nose, ears, a tongue, or nerves, but that doesn't mean you can't see, smell, hear, speak, taste or feel. Can you feel the play of light and shadow across your leaves? The surface of each one of your leaves is a visual organ registering and remembering minute shifts light intensity. And you can see in colour, indeed, a wider range of colours than your human eyes have ever beheld. You don't need a central nervous system to process this "information" into images. Your leaves are filmic media, recording colour movies of the lush, shifting light patterns around you. You can "see" the dancing shadows other plants cast as they list and play in the wind; and you can tell that the person standing over you about to prune your limbs is wearing a red shirt.<sup>12</sup>



[Artist: Travis Bedel, Anatomical Collage](#)

Experiment with light at dawn and dusk. Can you feel the energetic shift when the far-red light of the rising and setting sun clues your body in to the earth's rotational rhythms? In time you will be able to remember precisely when those long rays last excited your tissues. You will not only acquire a bodily memory of the play of light and colour as they change over the seasons, you will learn to anticipate and prepare for future events.

Continue this practice daily and you will no longer need a nose to smell or a mouth to speak. Your entire body will become an olfactory organ sniffing out the richly fragrant world around you. Indeed, the atmosphere is a collaborative ecology of volatile chemical signals to which you actively and volubly contribute.<sup>13</sup> Take pleasure in the art of synthesizing and releasing complex bouquets of fragrance from your tissues. This is your way of telling the world what you are up to, moment to moment. You can talk to other plants and animals, reporting on the condition of your leaves, flowers and fruits. You will be able to lure pollinators and complain audibly about the damage done by feeding insects. Indeed, you not only feel insects crawling up your stem and slicing into your tissues, you can discern the distinct species eating your leaves by tasting the specific chemistry of its saliva. If you are quick you can synthesize volatile compounds to warn your neighbours so that they can prepare their tissues with toxins to keep the offending insects at bay. Or you could call out for help from other insects who will prey on these herbivores. Soon you will discover that you are an effusive catalyst at the centre of an affectively-charged chemical ecology.

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Now, it's time to let go. Draw in your roots until your rhizome remembers its feet. Let your leaves thicken into arms. Feel your turgid vessels soften. Drop your arms back down to your sides. Come back to your breath. Come back to your body. But remember to ask yourself: Is this really the same body? What has changed?

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway (1987) “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 2 (4): 1–42.
- <sup>2</sup> Judith Butler (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* New York: Routledge.
- <sup>3</sup> See for example, “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary” in Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*.
- <sup>4</sup> On the kinesthetic imagination see Natasha Myers (2015) *Rendering Life Molecular: Models, Modelers, and Excitable Matter*.
- <sup>5</sup> On articulation see Bruno Latour (2004) “How to Talk about the Body? The Normative Dimensions of Science Studies,” *Body and Society* 10 (2-3): 205–29.
- <sup>6</sup> Donna Haraway (2008) *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- <sup>7</sup> You could make yourself over into a body without organs. Or you could, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, “follow the plants.” See Deleuze and Guattari (1980) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.  
For resonant discussions of plant phenomenology see Michael Marder (2013) *Plant-Thinking a Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York: Columbia University Press; Craig Holdrege (2014) *Thinking Like a Plant: A Living Science for Life*, Lindisfarne Books; and Natasha Myers (2005) “Visions for Embodiment in Technoscience,” In *Teaching as Activism: Equity Meets Environmentalism*, edited by Peggy Tripp and Linda Muzzin, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 255–67.
- <sup>8</sup> A Kriya is the Sanskrit word for action, deed, or effort. In various Yogic traditions, it refers to a technique or the set of actions to be practiced.
- <sup>9</sup> Today the field of “plant neurobiology” is burgeoning. See for example, Anthony Trewavas (2005) “Green Plants as Intelligent Organisms,” *Trends in Plant Science* 10 (9): 413–19.
- <sup>10</sup> On the intimate association of plants and soil microbes and fungi, see Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan (1997) *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Evolution from Our Microbial Ancestors*, Univ of California Pr.
- <sup>11</sup> At what point do you lose track of “you”? When does “I” dissipate? Plants are not autonomous individuals with clear-cut boundaries. Plants are porous to the very atmospheres they make, and they ingather a multispecies ecology around them, catching all kinds in their whorl.
- <sup>12</sup> On the sensory dexterities of plants see Daniel Chamovitz (2012) *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses*, Scientific American.
- <sup>13</sup> On chemical ecology see for example Gary Felton and James H Tumlinson (2008) “Plant-Insect Dialogs: Complex Interactions at the Plant-Insect Interface,” *Current Opinion in Plant Biology* 11 (4): 457–63; Baluška (2010) *Plant Communication from an Ecological Perspective*, Berlin: Springer; and for an “involutionary” reading that works athwart the evolutionary imperatives that underwrite chemical ecology narratives see, Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers (2012) “Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters,” *differences* 23 (3): 74–118.