

HERBARIUM



IGNOTUM

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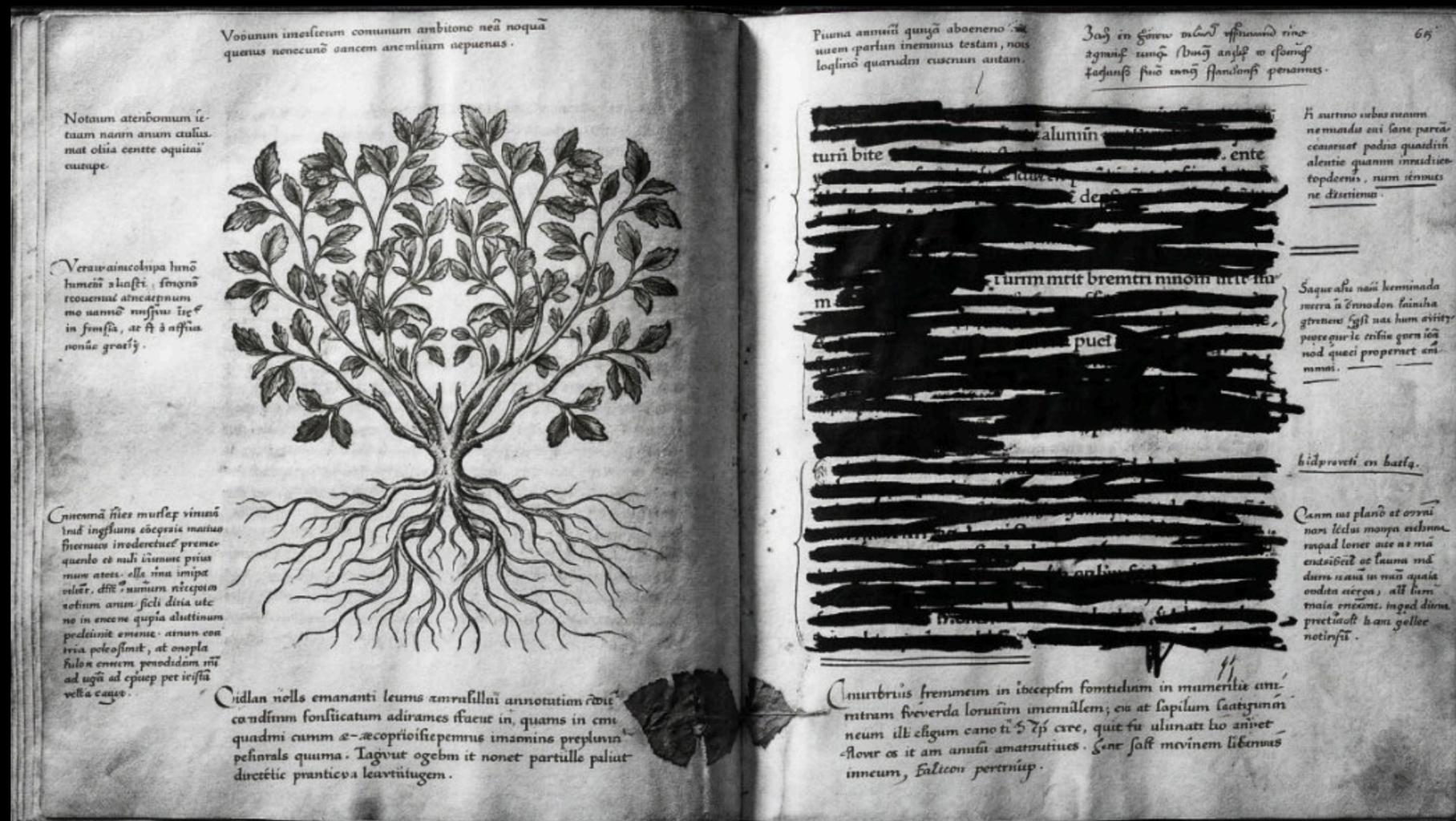
10. The Living Fossil

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<https://onenightcircus.com>

THE CIPHER PLANT

On the nature of *Planta verbalis* and related species — collected marginalia from the Third Zurich Edition, publisher unknown

[margin, upper left, ink faded to brown] The leaves do not contain the script. The leaves are the script. Whoever made this distinction first wasted three centuries of scholarship.



[footnote 7, disputed attribution] *Verbalis obscura* produces between 11 and 400 folios per growing season, depending — we must assume — on what it is trying to say. No two specimens have ever been found to repeat a single glyph. This is either the most complex language ever recorded or proof that it is not language at all. The difference may be irrelevant.

[inserted leaf, different hand] I have held the dried specimen from the Basel collection. The veining on the third lobe follows a syntax. I am certain of this. My colleagues are certain that I am not well.

[footnote 7, continued, second annotator] My predecessor above spent eleven years on this question. His final monograph was 4 pages long. The first three were blank.

[back cover, pencil] It does not want to be read. It wants to be held. There is a difference. We have forgotten it.

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NEON FLORA

Field Notes — Station Unclear — Atmospheric CO₂ at 35%.
Timestamp nonstandard.

Day 1 The spores arrived before the leaves. Before the roots. Before anything we would recognize as intention. I have been here three hours and I have already stopped using the word *primitive*.

Day 4 Thirty meters tall. No bark — something softer, something that gives slightly when pressed, like a living wall that has not yet decided what it is. The light here is different. Greenish. The atmosphere filters it through chemistry we no longer have a name for. Everything glows slightly. I initially assumed this was an instrument error. It is not an instrument error.

Day 9 Catalogued 14 new forms today. Stopped at 14 not because there were no more but because the categories were running out. What do you call a structure that is simultaneously root, flower, and atmosphere? The old vocabulary keeps failing at precisely the moments it is needed most.

Day 17 Spores again. A cloud of them at dusk — if this is dusk — moving against the wind. I have revised my earlier notes. The spores did not arrive before intention. The spores *are* the intention.

Day 23 It has started to recognize me. I have no evidence for this. I am recording it anyway.





THE MUSIC OF STEMS

For an instrument not yet grown. Duration: one season. Tempo: geological.

I. Opening (Germination) Begin below. Begin in silence. The first movement is always downward.

pp — nearly inaudible — sustain indefinitely

II. Development (First Leaf) Repeat the gesture of opening. Repeat it. Repeat it again. Do not accelerate. The piece is not going anywhere. That is the piece.

Note to performer: resistance is not failure. Resistance is the composition.

III. Interlude [47 days of rain]

IV. Flowering This section may be omitted. If omitted, the piece is not diminished. If included, the piece is not enlarged. The flower is a question the stem asks once and does not wait to have answered.

mf — briefly — then return to *pp*

V. Coda (Autumn) The score does not end. The score is interrupted. There is a difference.

Let the last note last longer than seems reasonable. Then longer still.



This work was composed over approximately 180 million years and is currently in its fourth revision.





SPORES IN THE VOID

BOTANICAL PROBE DESIGNATION: HI-04

TRANSMISSION DATE: [CORRUPTED]

DISTANCE FROM ORIGIN: 4.2 light years

SIGNAL INTEGRITY: 34%

TARGET: PSR B1257+12 (FRAG)

PROBE ID: VOID-9 DATA_STREAM
DISTANCE: 4.2 LY



CCD_ERR_BAND [11:15]

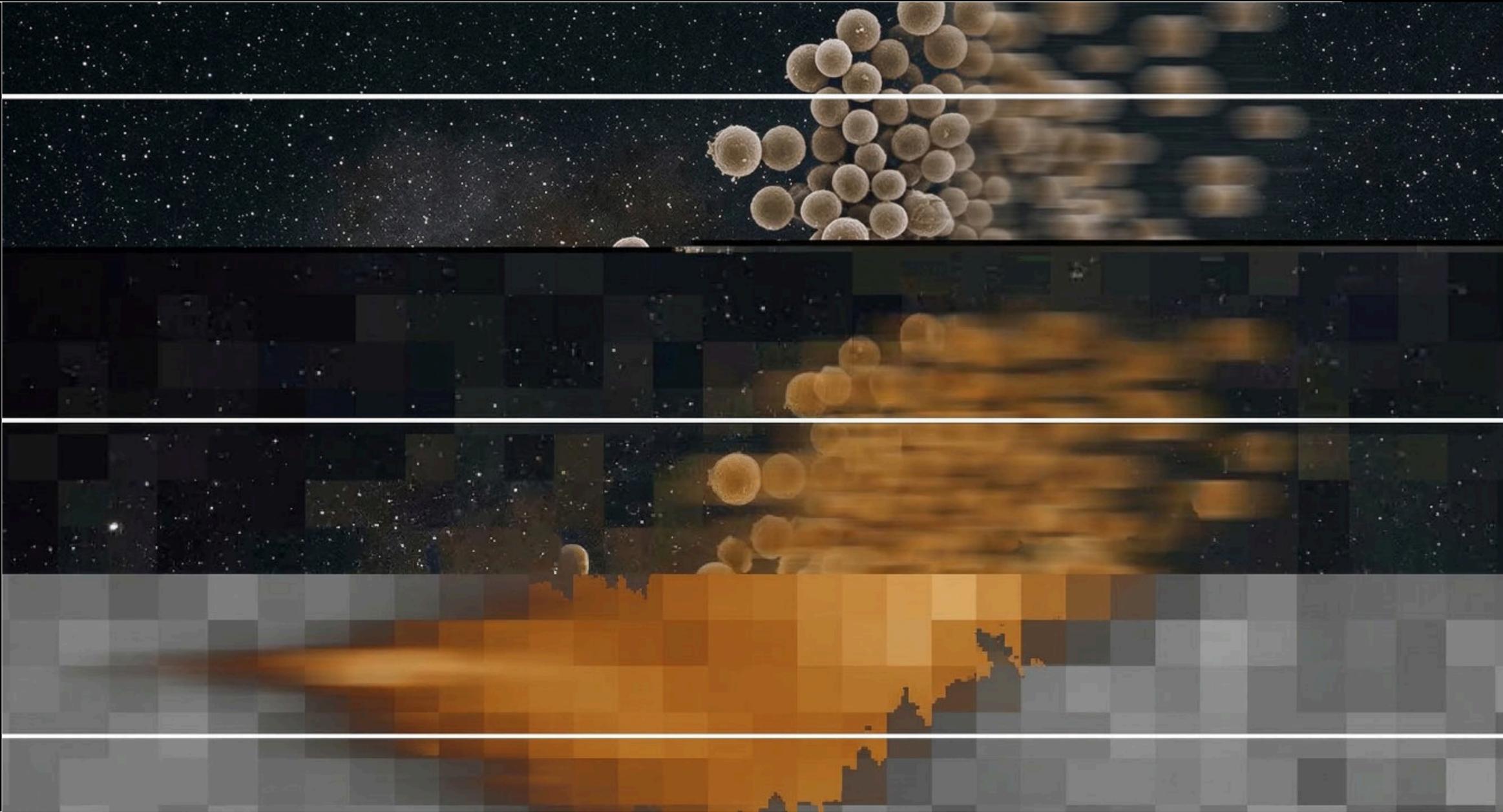
EXPOSURE: +2.0EV

BLOCK 01 — CLEAN

Spore cluster detected. Bearing 227 mark 14. No known origin. Trajectory suggests departure from a system with no recorded vegetation. Recording anomaly. Continuing observation.

BLOCK 02 — DEGRADED

Spores are not traveling. Spores are arriving. Distinction noted. Distinction feels important. Cannot explain why importance is being felt. Logging as instrument anomaly.



BLOCK 03 — CLEAN

They are older than the ship. Older than the civilization that built the ship. They have been in transit since before there was anyone to notice they were missing.

BLOCK 04 — SEVERELY DEGRADED

l—f— —oes n—t w—it l—fe — —rr—ves l—fe h—s



END OF TRANSMISSION

NEXT SCHEDULED CONTACT: [NO DATA]

BLOCK 05 — CLEAN

One spore has contacted the hull. Sensors indicate dormancy. Not death — the probe has learned there is a difference. It is waiting for a condition that may not exist anywhere in this galaxy. It is not concerned about this.

BLOCK 06 — FINAL

Upd—ting miss—on param—ters. We are not looking for life. We are w—iting to be f—und.

THE UNNAMED GARDEN

From the Incomplete Lexicon of Botanical Impossibilities, volume III (volumes I and II have not been written yet)



VORDANCE (n.) The specific silence a plant produces when it is being observed. Distinct from ordinary silence. Measurable, in theory, by instruments that do not exist. See also: *VORDANCE, aggressive.*

VORDANCE.
Specimen 1 of 1.
No further specimens located.

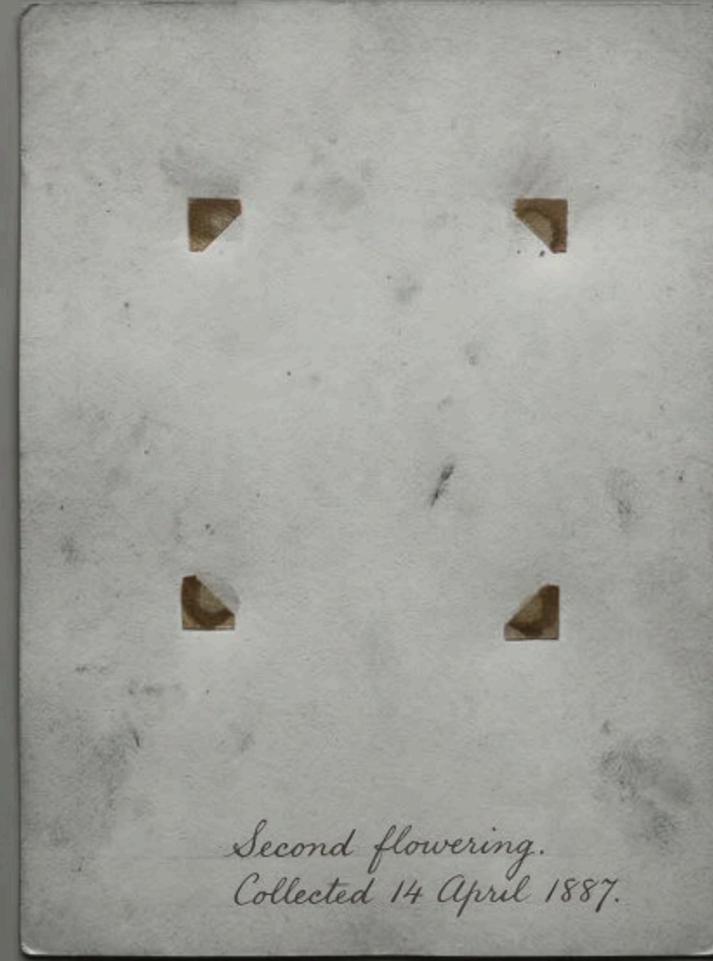
PALIMPSEST ROOT (n.) A root system that grows through its own previous growth, overwriting itself continuously. All records of where it has been are destroyed by where it is going. Considered by some scholars to be a philosophical position rather than a biological phenomenon. Those scholars are not wrong.



PALIMPSEST ROOT. All records of where it has been are destroyed by where it is going.



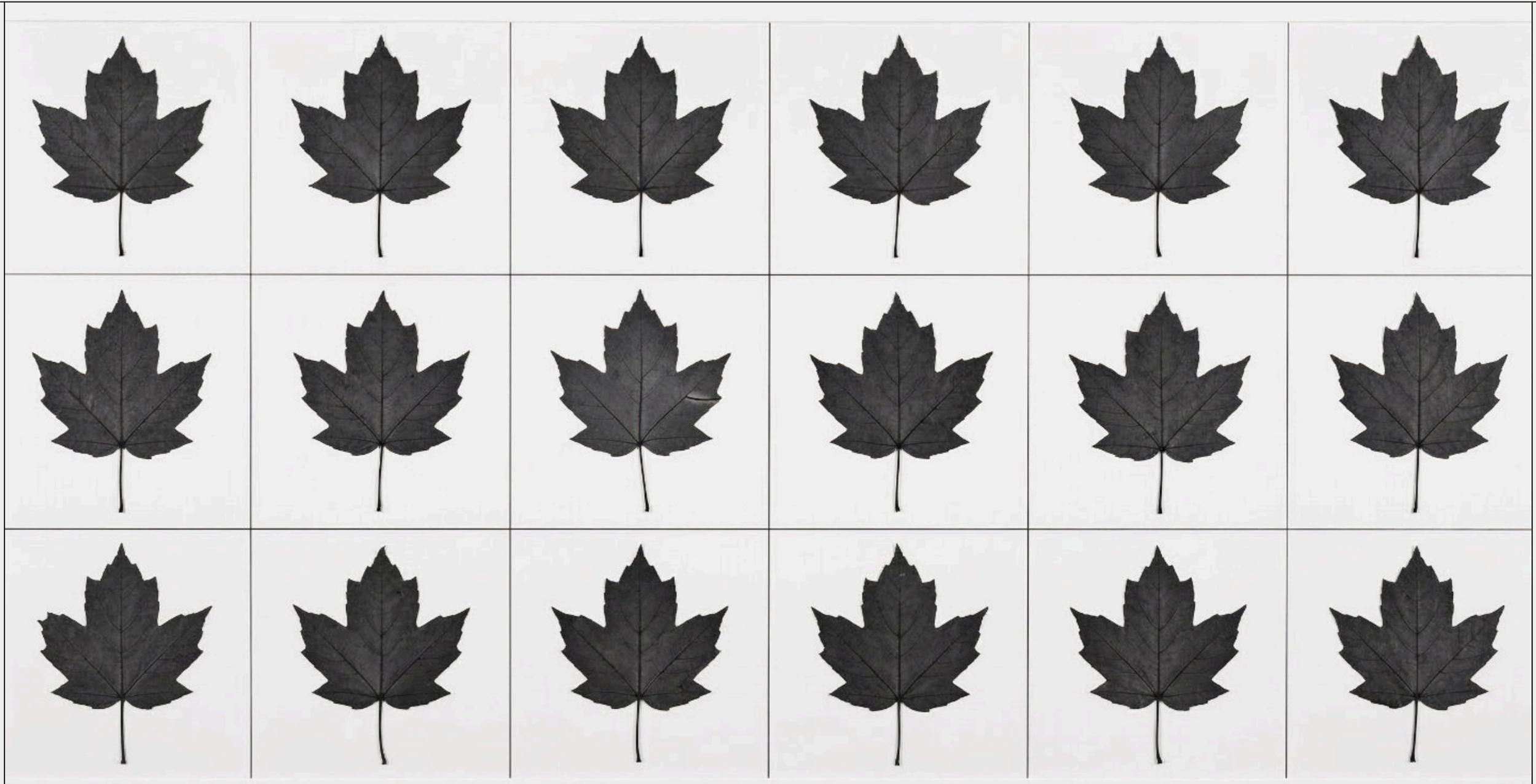
*First flowering.
Collected 14 April 1887.*



*Second flowering.
Collected 14 April 1887.*

See also: FIRST FLOWERING, the (entry missing).

THE SECOND FLOWERING
(n.) An event that occurs once, in every species, and is never the second flowering. Etymology disputed. Definition disputed. Existence disputed. Reported independently by 4,000 botanists across 11 centuries. See also: *FIRST FLOWERING*, the (entry missing).



INEXACT LEAF (*n.*) Any leaf that is not quite the shape it intended to be. All leaves. Every single one.

INEXACT LEAF .

SYMPATHETIC GERMINATION (n.) The phenomenon whereby a seed begins to grow not in response to water, light, or temperature, but in response to being needed. Unverified. Repeatedly observed.



SYMPATHETIC GERMINATION
Unverified.
Repeatedly observed.





GARDEN (n.) A place where human beings go to practice not understanding things quietly. See: everywhere.



THE ALCHEMICAL ROOT

On the Transmutation of the Vegetable Stone into Pure Comprehension — being a practical guide for the patient practitioner



I. NIGREDO — The Blackening

Take the root before it knows it is a root. Plant it in soil that has never been named. Wait. Do not watch it. Watching delays the darkness. The first stage is complete when you can no longer remember what you buried.

II. ALBEDO — The Whitening

The shoot will emerge pale, as all true things emerge. Do not interpret this as weakness. Wash it only with water that has passed through stone. Speak to it in a language you do not know. It will understand. You will not. This is correct.

III. CITRINITAS — The Yellowing

This stage is frequently skipped. This is why so few transformations are complete. The yellowing is the moment the plant decides what it will transmute. You do not get to choose. Sit with this.

IV. RUBEDO — The Reddening

The flower, when it comes, will be the color of conclusion. Do not cut it. Do not name it. Do not give it to anyone you love — it will change them in ways that cannot be reversed and are not unpleasant but are permanent and will make them difficult to explain at dinner parties.

V. THE FIFTH STAGE

(unrecorded in any edition) You already know what this is. You have always known. That is not the same as being ready.



DEEP TIME BOTANY

Partial Inventory of the Collection of an Unnamed Benefactor — prepared for transfer to an institution that has not yet been founded.

**LOT 001**

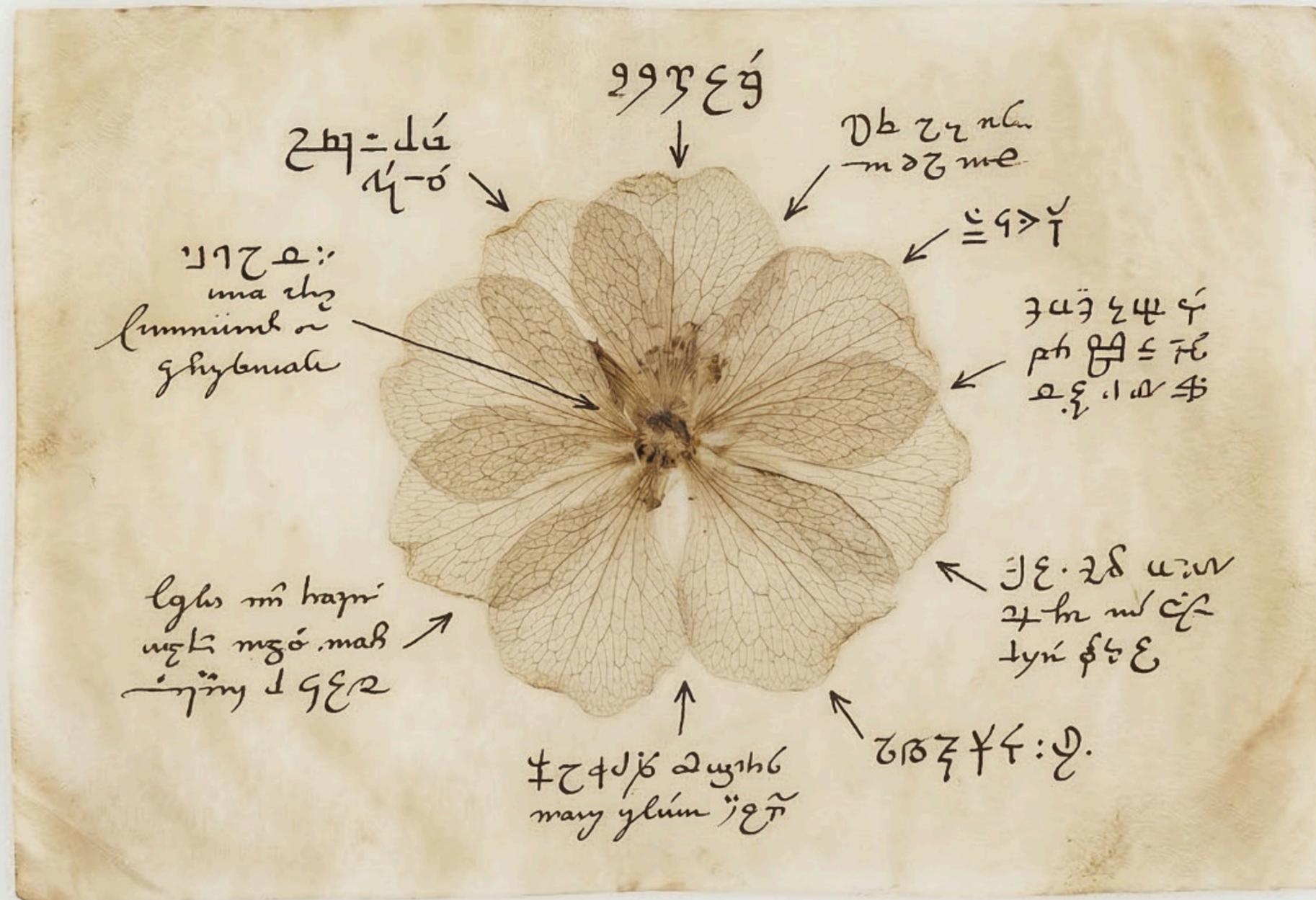
Amber specimen, elliptical. 340 million years old, approximately. Contains a leaf from a species with no known relatives in any subsequent geological period. The leaf appears to be folded deliberately.

Dimensions: 4 × 6 cm.

Provenance: disputed.

Estimated value: unassessable.

Note: the fold changes direction depending on the angle of observation. This has been documented. This has not been explained.



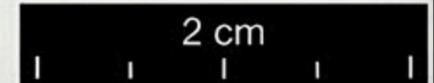
LOT 002

Pressed flower, mounted on vellum. Ink annotation in three languages, none of them identified.

Dimensions: 12 × 8 cm.

Estimated age: 600–900 years. The flower itself is estimated at 180 million years.

Note: the vellum is newer than the flower. The flower is newer than the annotation.





LOT 003
Root system, fossilized, partially. Extends beyond the frame of its display case in two directions. The case was custom built. The root had already grown beyond it by the time the case arrived.
Dimensions: ongoing.
Note: the collection has stopped measuring it.

LOT 004
A seed. Ungeminated. Carried, according to accompanying documentation, from a location that no longer exists by a person who did not survive the journey.
Weight: 2 grams.
Note: it is warm to the touch. It has always been warm to the touch. No one has ever been able to leave it alone for long.



ECOSYSTEMS OF THE END

Single continuous shot. No cuts. Duration: as long as necessary.

INTERIOR — EXTERIOR. The distinction no longer applies.

The camera begins underground. Total darkness. The sound of water moving through soil. Something is growing. The camera does not wait for permission to follow it.

SLOW RISE through layers of clay, of sand, of the compressed memory of previous forests. Roots pass across the frame like calligraphy in a language older than mouths.



SURFACE. A city, or what a city becomes when given sufficient time and insufficient maintenance. The buildings are not ruins. Ruins implies failure. These are proposals that vegetation has answered.



THE CAMERA MOVES through a corridor that was once a corridor and is now a collaboration. Moss on every surface. Not covering — _completing._ The walls were always going to be this color. They simply had to wait.



WATER somewhere. Always water somewhere. A shallow pool in what was once a lobby, in what was once important. A single plant grows from the center of it, flowering, indifferent to audience.



THE CAMERA SLOWS as if becoming heavy. As if taking root itself.

HOLD on a single leaf. Rain begins. The leaf does not react. It has been waiting for this for longer than rain has existed.

FADE — not to black. To green. Slowly. Irreversibly.

END OF SEQUENCE. *The film continues without the camera.*





HERBARIUM OF

DREAMS

Selected transcripts — Sleep Research Unit, Building C — Access restricted

PATIENT 07 — Session 14

Date: 31 Mesore, Year unclear

Subject describes a garden with no perimeter. Plants with flowers that open inward rather than outward. Subject states she knew, within the dream, that the flowers were not closing — they were *arriving*.

Emotional register: calm. Anomalous calm.

Session duration: 4 hours. Subject slept for 20 minutes.



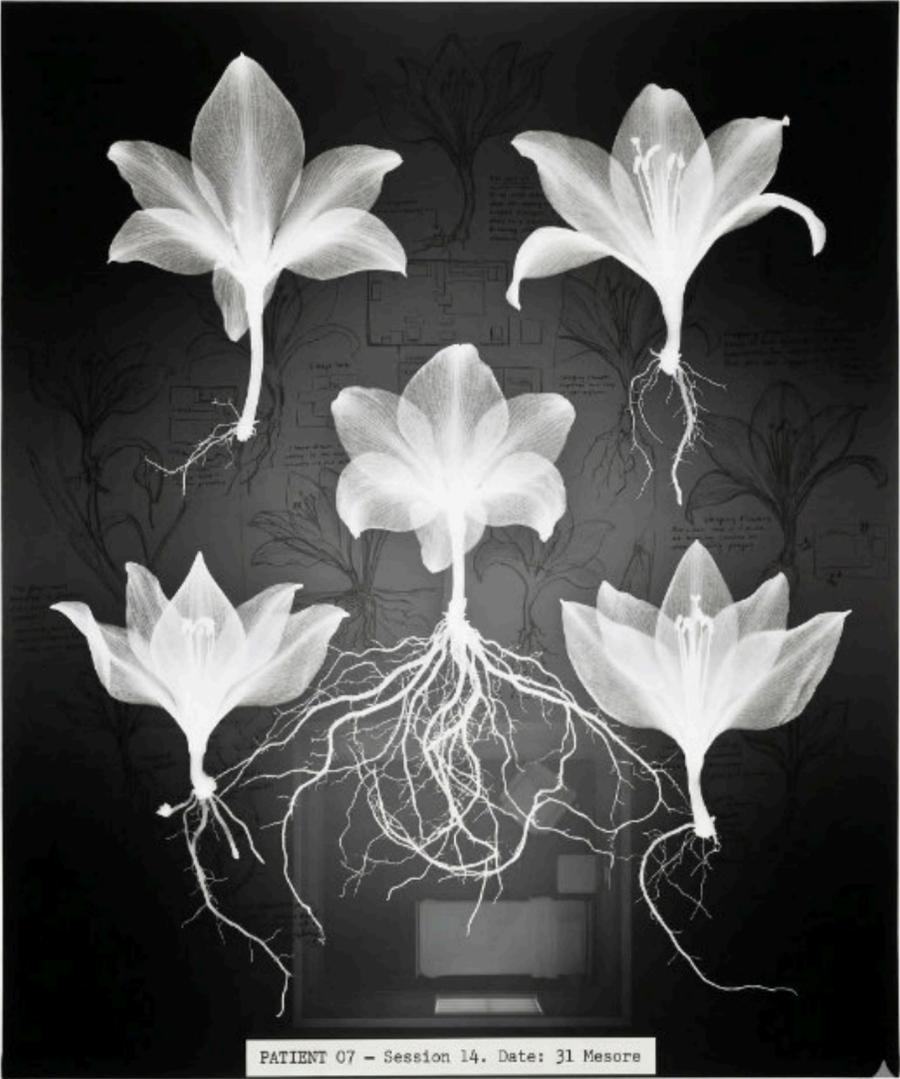
Selected transcripts — Sleep Research Unit, Building C — Access restricted

PATIENT 23 — Session 3

Date: 1 Thout

First occurrence of the white root. Subject had no prior botanical knowledge or interest. Describes the root as "older than the soil it was growing in". Attempts to draw it after waking. Drawing covers 14 pages. Subject states it is not finished.

Researcher's note: cross-reference with Patient 07, session 14. The flower that arrives. The root that precedes the soil. I am noting this professionally. I am not yet concerned.



PATIENT 07 - Session 14. Date: 31 Mesore

PATIENT 23 - Session 3. First occurrence of the white root. Subject states it is older than the soil it was growing in. The drawing covers 14 pages. Subject states it is not finished.
Researcher's note: Cross-reference Patient 07. I am noting this professionally.

Selected transcripts — Sleep Research Unit, Building C — Access restricted

PATIENT 44 — Session 1

Date: 17 Thout

New subject. Unprompted, describes the garden with no perimeter. Uses the word *arriving*. Has never met Patient 07.

Researcher's note: I have not slept well this week.



PATIENT 44 - Session 14. Date: 31 Mesore

PATIENT 44 - Session 1. New subject. Uses the word *arriving*. Has never met Patient 07.

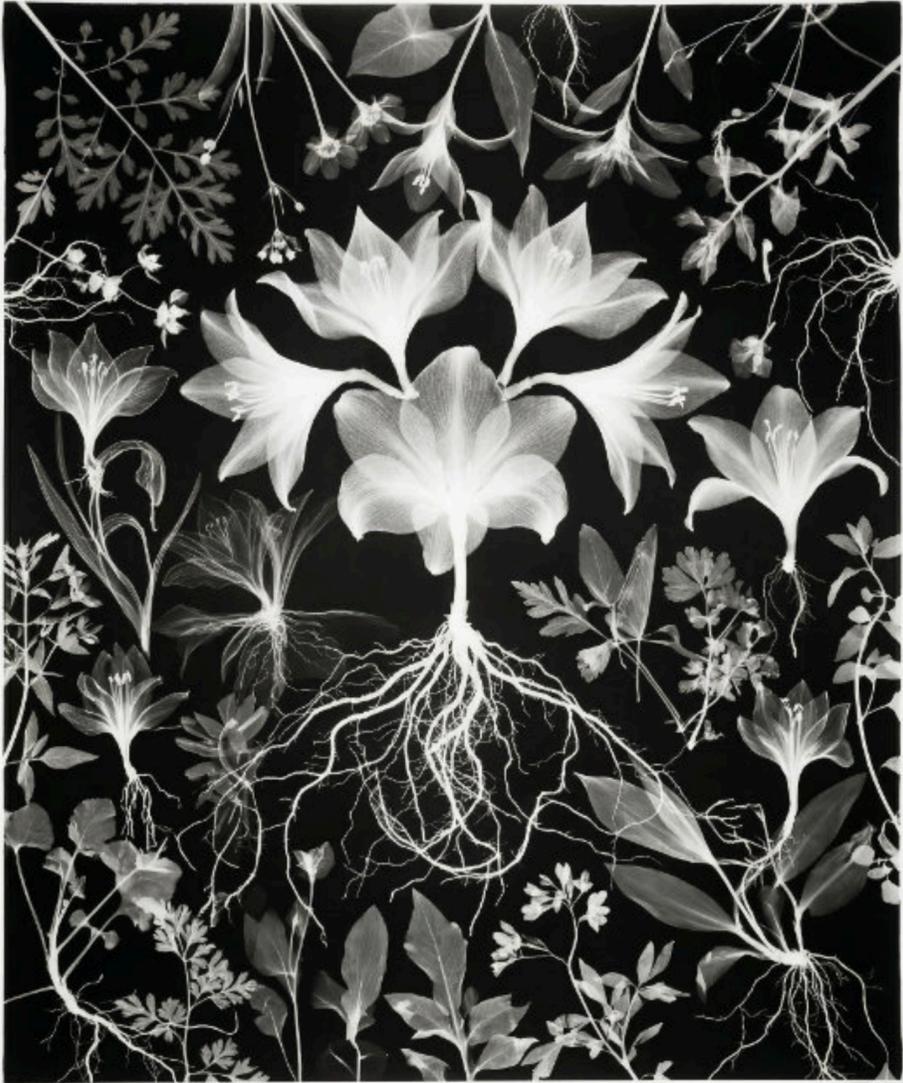
I have not slept well this week.

Selected transcripts — Sleep Research Unit, Building C — Access restricted

RESEARCHER — Session 1

Date: not recorded

The garden. No perimeter. A white root older than everything it grows through. A flower opening inward, arriving at something I do not have a name for but recognize completely. I did not draw it. I knew it would take 14 pages. I knew it would not be finished.



THE LIVING FOSSIL

Fragments recovered from the Botanical Pre-Socratics — translated from languages that may not have existed.

PHYTARCHUS OF MILETUS (fl. approximately 480 BCE, possibly)
"The root does not seek water. The root seeks the memory of water. This is why it always finds it."

[Scholarly note: only this fragment survives. The rest of his work was, according to later sources, returned to the soil.]



KARPEIA (dates unknown — possibly a plant)
 "All things are leaves of one tree. The tree does not know this. This is what makes it the tree."
 [Scholarly note: attribution disputed. Several scholars argue Karpeia was not a philosopher but a forest. The distinction may not have existed in the fifth century BCE.]

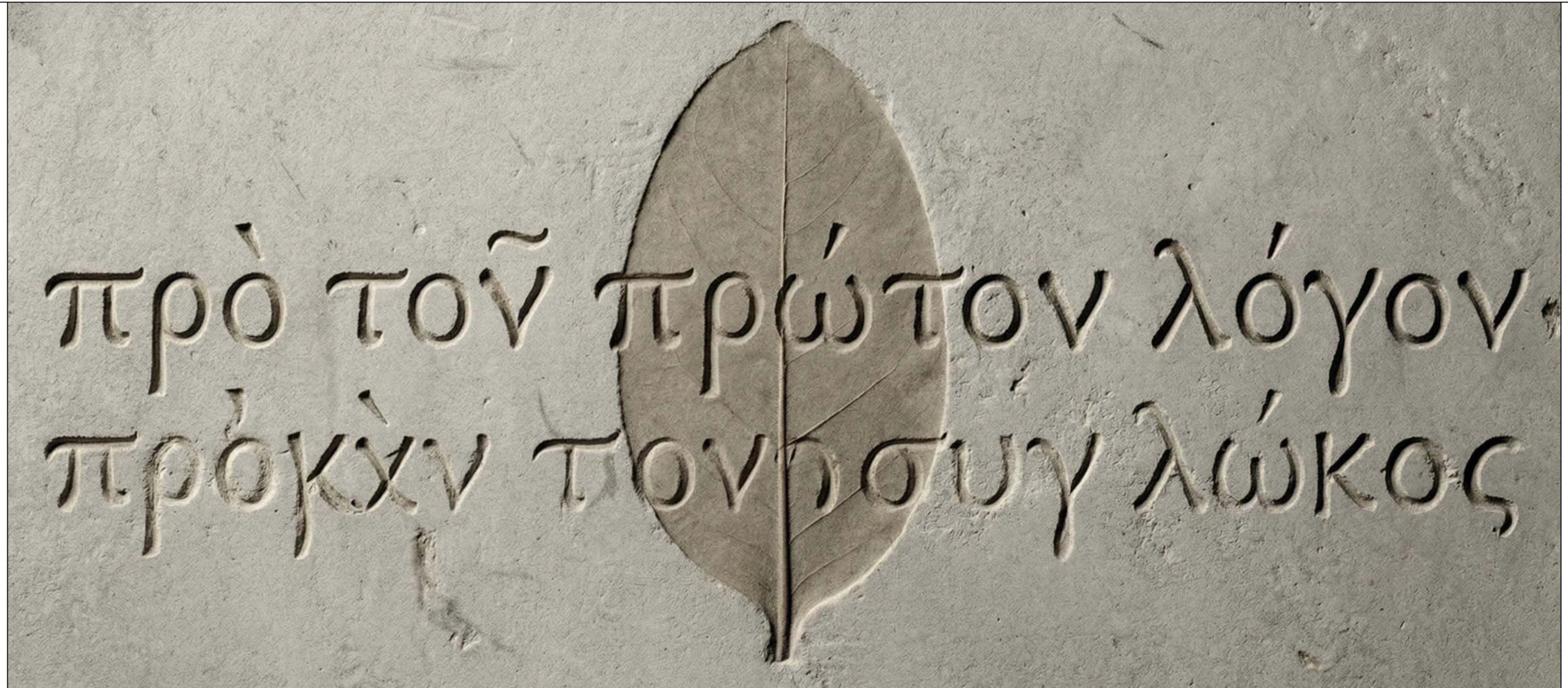
RHIZANDER OF EPHESUS (contemporary of Heraclitus, probably)
 "You cannot step into the same root twice. The root cannot step into the same soil twice. Neither is troubled by this."
 [Scholarly note: clearly derivative of Heraclitus. Rhizander's defenders argue that Heraclitus was derivative of Rhizander. Heraclitus has more defenders.]



SPORANTHES (no dates, no location, no certainty)

"Before the first word there was a seed. The word was the seed attempting to explain itself. It has not yet succeeded. It continues."

[Scholarly note: this fragment was found written on a leaf. The leaf was older than writing.]





ANONYMOUS
"We did not evolve from plants. We are what plants are thinking very, very slowly."
[Scholarly note: no note. Some things require no footnote.]

