

MIMOSA PUDICA

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Searching the planetary in every grain of sand
Lukáš Likavčan & Digital Earth

I look for disturbance-based ecologies in which many species sometimes live together
without either armony or conquest
Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Il Fungo alla fine del Mondo*, 2021

I thought that each of my words (that each of my movements) would persist in his
implacable memory; I was benumbed by the fear of multiplying useless gestures.
Funes the Memorious, J. Borges, 1942

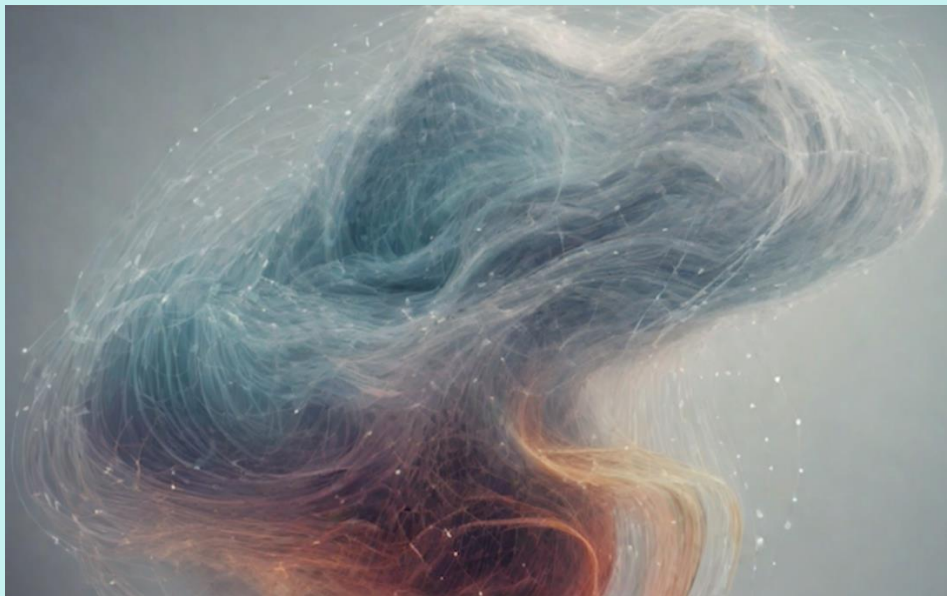


Ginkgo leaf fossil and Ginkgo leaf. Stonerose Interpretive Center Collection (research image)

How do plants remember? What do they remember? For how long? What is time for a plant or a fungus? Do plants remember collectively or individually? Can the decentralized, rhizomatic, and transnational structure of plant life serve as a model for unlearning leadership? Can web technologies, such as blockchain, learn with plants how to forget? Can plants suggest how to connect and interact with AI?

Like Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing embarks on the search for matsutake mushrooms to find in their networks and tangles the challenge of imagination necessary at a historical moment when the stability advocated by dreams of modernization and progress has been replaced by the climatic, technological, and institutional precarity of the ruins of capitalism. So, with *Mimosa Pudica*, I aim to delve into the functioning of plant memory, seeking traces and suggestions to imagine how to interact with the prodigious memory of web technologies reminiscent of that of Ireneo Funes in Borges' eponymous story.

A study conducted by the International Laboratory of Neurobiology at the University of Florence with the Western Australia University in 2014 showed that plants possess memory. Researchers Stefano Mancuso, Monica Gagliano, Michael Renton, and Martial Depczynski exposed some *Mimosa Pudica* plants, a shrub that closes its leaves when disturbed, to various stimuli, demonstrating the shrub's ability to distinguish and learn from them, recording and storing information for long periods.



Valentina Vetturi, *La Matematica del Segreto*, Lecture #1, 2023, frame video, detail

In parallel, the issue of the enormous amount of data we produce is becoming increasingly evident, intertwining with ethical issues related to the right to individual privacy and the "permanent records" held by states and companies, or the implicit biases in the data used to train large language models, the automation of training these AIs which sometimes risk amplifying falsehoods or the speed at which, for example at CERN, through the use of AI, the vast amount of data produced in collision processes is selected and filtered.

At the core of this research proposal are two questions that have fueled my artistic practice for over a decade: how do we remember and forget individually and as a society? And what remains of us when we no longer remember anything or if we remember too much? The movement, the space created between the experience of forgetting and remembering, shapes the essence, the core of our mutating, hybrid, multiple identities as individuals and collectives.

Over time, I have sought answers to these questions in the functioning of human memory with the cycle of works *Alzheimer Café* (2014/ongoing), dedicated to the persistence of musical memories even where neurological degeneration of mnemonic processes has advanced. With *La carta ricorda* (2020), I observed the fragile memory of papier-mâché dissolving in water. Then, I turned my gaze to machines, to web technologies, in their immaterial (*I Never Think of the Future. It Comes Soon enough* 2016/ongoing) and material dimensions (*Tails*, 2023). I looked at the depths of the permanent records produced by these originally decentralized systems and how the issue of data storage intertwines with those of privacy and digital identity. Finally, *La Matematica de Segreto* (2023, ongoing), is dedicated to how the vast amount of data is used to train generative AIs and to the idiosyncrasies of these trainings.

Now, I turn to the plant world. Can plants suggest a digital ecology in which to balance the enormous accumulation of data and information and the speed at which we forget? Can they suggest criteria for sifting through, for forgetting the vast permanent records? Can they suggest how to interact with AI training? Can they indicate ways to interact with the technocosms that shape our daily lives?



Mimosa Pudica (research image)

Inverting the human-centric perspective, I intend to activate practices of listening, observation, interaction, and learning with plants, questioning how they remember and if they forget. This phase of individual listening will be alternated with group experiments in which I will create spaces of shared experience among plants, living beings (involving also biologists, web scientists, philosophers, and scholars from diverse disciplines), and machines.