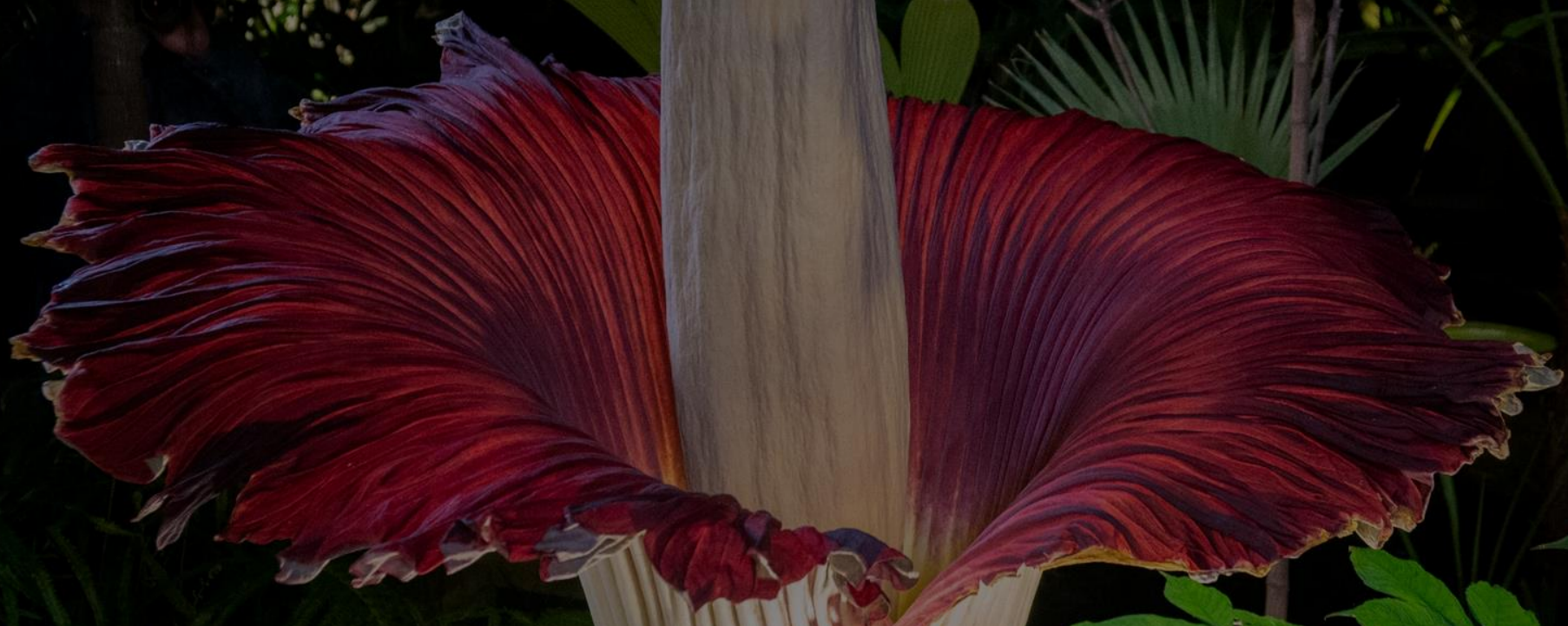


The Creaturely Plant?

Sumatra's Titan Arum and the Ethics of Botanical Time-Lapse



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Overview

- a) Introduction: Time-Lapsed Glimpses of Titan Arum
- b) Historical Views of the Ethics of Botanical Time-Lapse
- c) Towards an Intermedial Vegetal Ethics
- d) From *Anthocentrism* to *Phytocentrism*
- e) Conclusion: Vegetal-Cinematographic Bodies In-Becoming

Part 1

Introduction: Time-Lapsed Glimpses of Titan Arum





Titan Arum in the wild, near the edge of the Kerinci Seblat National Park, Sumatra, Indonesia (Luke Mackin, Flickr)



Perry the Corpse Flower Full Bloom Cycle 2013. Gustavus Adolphus College. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cz4gi8mhBvw>



Corpse Flower Time-Lapse Video 2016. Chicago Botanic Garden. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSMKcE5XbAQ>

Part 2

Historical Views of the Ethics of Botanical Time-Lapse



Botanical Time-Lapse

- “the plant is no longer a kind of half inanimate being, but stands revealed” (Leonard Donaldson, 1912)
- Oskar Messter’s one-minute sequence of flowers blooming and wilting over twenty-four hours
- Between 1898 and 1900, Wilhelm Pfeffer produced time-lapse studies of flowering cycles and stem movements in response to gravity
- Frank Percy Smith’s *The Birth of a Flower* (1910), *From Bud to Blossom* (1910) and *The Germination of Plants* (1911)
- In 1912, Arthur Pillsbury began producing and exhibiting time-lapse images of Yosemite National Park wildflowers to bolster their conservation
- “One of the first reactions of seeing a reel of flowers growing and opening was to instill a love for them, a realization of their life struggles so similar to ours, and a wish to do something to stop the ruthless destruction of them which was fast causing them to become extinct” (Pillsbury, 1912)



Part 3

Towards an Intermedial Vegetal Ethics



Intermedial Vegetal Ethics

- Critical Plant Studies advocates a transdisciplinary approach to plants as intelligent, conscious, and capable subjects—as volitional agents in themselves
- Seeing the plant body as “a loose alliance of multiple temporalities of growth,” Marder posits the idea of “vegetal hetero-temporality” (104).
- An intermedial vegetal ethics moves beyond a focus on cinematographic depictions of plants as spectacular, creaturely, and monstrous towards a realization of media and plants as vibrant bodies in dynamic interchange.
- “Distinguished by their degree of complexity, different levels continuously in-form and mutually determine each other” (Hayles 100)
- An intermedial vegetal ethics counters the dominating, enframing, disclosing, decoding, and denaturalizing of plants by the moving image. Rather than humanizing vegetal being, plants and film become co-engendering, mutually-determining actants in emergent media ecologies.



Part 4

From Anthocentrism to Phytocentrism

Life Cycle of the Titan Arum

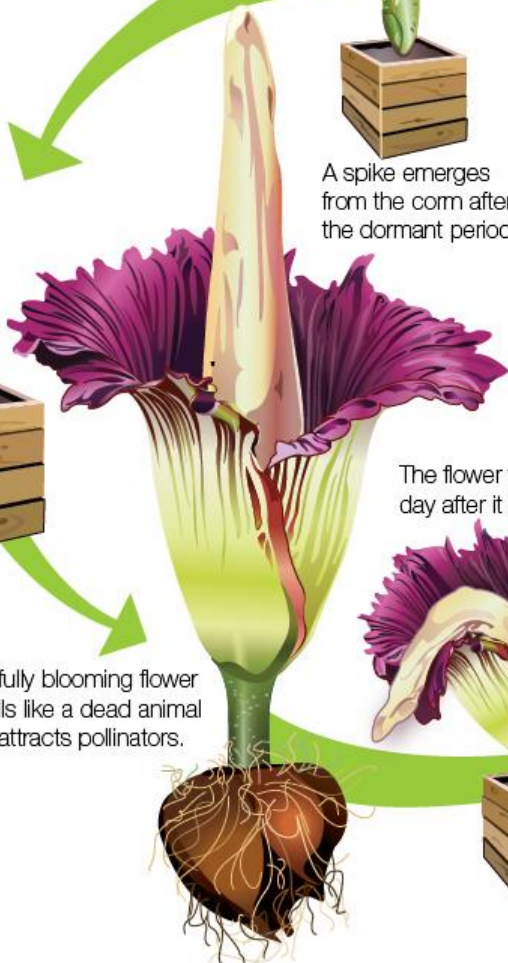
Flower cycle

Once every four to five years, it produces a flower.

Roughly a week before opening, the frills on the spathe can be seen.



The fully blooming flower smells like a dead animal and attracts pollinators.



The flower withers a day after it opens.



A spike emerges from the corm after the dormant period.



While the plant is dormant, its underground corm waits to begin a new cycle.

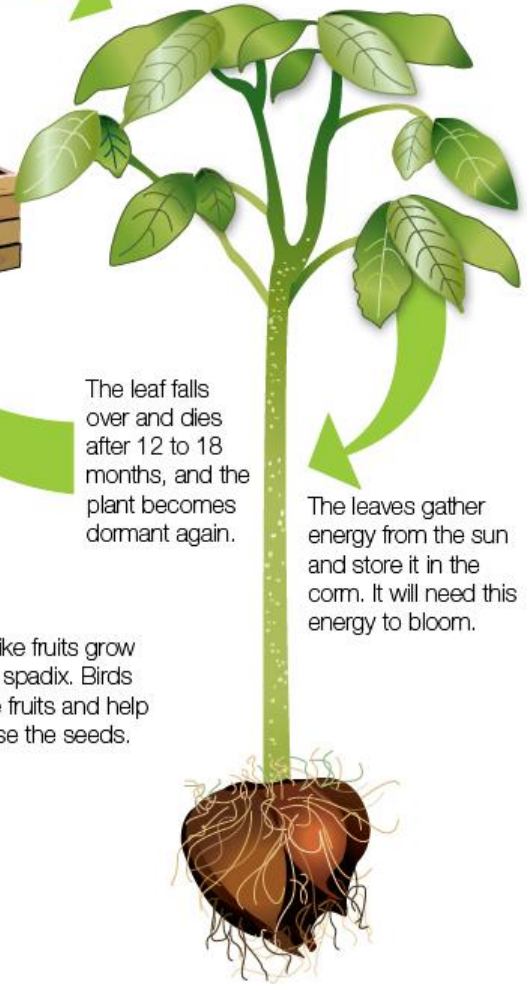


Leaf cycle

Most years, the spike grows into a huge leaf with complex leaflets.

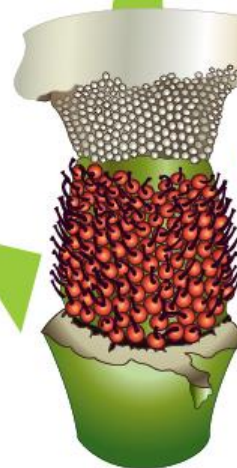


The leaf falls over and dies after 12 to 18 months, and the plant becomes dormant again.



The leaves gather energy from the sun and store it in the corm. It will need this energy to bloom.

Berry-like fruits grow on the spadix. Birds eat the fruits and help disperse the seeds.



From *Anthocentrism* to *Phytocentrism*

- This shift from *anthocentrism* to *phytocentrism* is from hypersexualized fixation on the flower to ethical concern for the plant in its totality
- attends to the trans-corporeality of the whole plant enmeshed with(in) human and other-than-human somatic networks
- resists the anthocentric aestheticization of the vegetal body;
- attempts to represent the multiple convergent temporalities of the plant within its environment;
- engenders appreciation of botanical processes in terms of organismic co-poiesis—of beings becoming together;
- foregrounds in-situ conservation concerns to balance the conventional focus of time-lapse on the ex-situ institutions of greenhouses and related neocolonial institutions
- decolonizes time-lapse by emphasizing the bioculturality of plant species



Part 5

Conclusion: Vegetal-Cinematographic Bodies In-Becoming



Jason Paolo R. Telles
John Charles Ryan
Jeconiah Louis Dreisbach *Editors*

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Thank you for listening...

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