

# FROM HUMANS TO PLANTS AND BACK AGAIN ON THE POSSIBLE IMPLICIT PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN PLANT-THINKING

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## *Abstract*

This paper proposes a critical, yet supportive reading of the Plant Turn from an anthropological-philosophical perspective. First, it discusses the *pars destruens* of plant-thinking, focusing on the challenge of overcoming any ‘x-centric’ bias against vegetal beings. Second, it outlines the *pars construens* of plant-thinking, emphasizing the view of plants as characterized by anti-essentialist, didual traits. Third, it addresses how plant-thinking might turn anthropomorphic in both a *projective* and a *retrojective* sense by considering scientific, conceptual, and ethical arguments.

**Keywords:** Plant Turn; Anthropocentrism; Zootrentrism; Plant Ethics; Didual.

Especially in the last decade, plants have emerged as significant objects of study across diverse fields – from philosophy to anthropology, and from botany to neurobiology – giving rise to what has come to be described as a “Plant Turn” (Coccia 2016). This shift has even led to the creation of book series such as *Critical Plant Studies* (Rowman & Littlefield) as well as interdisciplinary, ambitious journals like *Plant Perspectives*. According to this turn, plants prompt a comprehensive transformation in the ways we conceive of life, agency, and the boundaries between human and non-human existence: no longer relegated to the periphery of philosophical inquiry, plants are increasingly recognized for their complex behaviors, adaptive strategies, and ecological roles that challenge anthropocentric paradigms. This reconsideration would invite us to question entrenched binaries such as active/passive, intelligent/unintelligent, and sentient/insentient, proposing a reorientation toward more holistic, relational, and interconnected models of thought.

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This paper proposed a critical yet supportive reading of the project of “Plant Theory” (Nealon 2015) from an anthropological-philosophical perspective. It is structured in three sections. First, the paper introduces the notion of plant-thinking and discusses its *pars destruens*, focusing on the challenge of overcoming the bias against vegetal beings by developing not only a non-anthropocentric discourse but also a non-zoocentric and even acentric one (Sect. 1). Second, it outlines the main elements of the *pars construens* of plant-thinking, particularly engaging with Emanuele Coccia’s proposal, which emphasizes an anti-essentialist view of plants characterized by traits such as cosmic fluidity, total immersivity, and infinite mixture (Sect. 2). Third, it addresses both the opportunity and possibility of a ‘human-free’ discourse, exploring how plant-thinking might reveal anthropomorphic traits in both a *projective* and a *retro-projective* sense (Sect. 3). On the one hand, the difficulty of truly grasping plant nature is considered through scientific and philosophical arguments (Sect. 3.1); on the other, the image of human beings that plant-thinking could and should reflect was questioned, highlighting that – despite plant-thinkers’ intentions – it may not necessarily be an emancipatory one (Sect. 3.2).

### 1. *Not a second animal: in search of plant-thinking*

The core idea of the Plant Turn is that reconsidering the condition of plants entails a radical rethinking of the very roots of Western culture (Hall 2011), as plants “have populated the margin of the margin, the zone of absolute obscurity undetectable on the radars of our conceptualities” (Marder 2013, p. 2). Philosophers themselves, with the notable but nonetheless essentialist exception of Aristotle and a few others on the fringes of Western thought, “refrained from problematizing vegetal life”, so that “we have not yet encountered them, as it were, in their own turf”, letting them appear as they are (Marder 2013, pp. 2-3; see also Kallhoff 2018; Matthew 2011). In short, what is needed is a genuine plant-thinking that would have consequences at both theoretical and practical levels. Appreciating the unique “genius” of plants – whereby the less they can change place, the more sophisticated their sensitivity and intelligence need to be (Mancuso 2018) – means valuing plants’ active ways of being as something that deserves an non-arbitrary treatment, so that “their indiscriminate destruction” appears as “morally unjustifiable” (Mancuso, Viola 2015, p. 159; see, e.g., also Hall 2009; Pellegrino, Di Paola 2019).

The exclusion of plants from ontological and moral consideration would be the most radical expression of the traditional conceptual gesture of “dignifying one through degrading the other” (Pouteau 2013, p. 8); that is, elevating the human (meaning the – white, heterosexual, neurotypical, etc. – *man*) by demeaning the animal, and elevating the animal by demeaning the plant, rendering it a kind of comatose animal and thus easily exploitable (Delaporte 1982, p. 179). For plant-thinking, plants cannot truly be redeemed by treating them as “second animals”, as it is typical of the standard extensionist strategy, which grants plants moral and legal status only insofar as they, *like animals*, possess sensitivity, and/or self-agency, and/or autonomy, and/or intelligence (Pouteau 2012, p. 155; 2013, p. 7). Instead, plant-thinking should expose the bias against vegetal life already perpetrated by the biblical narrative of Noah, which presents a fauna deprived of a flora – that is, it depicts only the ark of *Zoon* and erases what should be the real flagship: the ark of *Phyton* (Hallé 2002, pp. 23-40, 296). Therefore, our attitude toward plants is not merely anthropocentric but also *zoocentric* (Sandford 2022), revealing an “animal chauvinism” (Arbor 1986) that renders even (supposed) anti-speciesist animalism a form of narcissism – this time, animal-centered (Coccia 2019, p. 16). This approach would reflect the structure of the classical *scala naturae*, with its four ascending steps of rocks, plants, animals, and humans (Mancuso 2023), a model that – though scientifically obsolete – remains so entrenched in our conceptual framework that even scholarly papers in evolutionary biology continue to employ a language aligned with the pre-evolutionary metaphor of “the great chain of being” (Rigato, Minelli 2013).

Against this background, any attempt to gain moral insight into plants should abandon reasoning “in reference to the animal exemplar”, which ultimately prevents us from genuinely decentering “the human subject as *the moral subject and object*” (Houle 2018, p. 71). Indeed, plant-thinking would be paradoxically hindered not only by ‘the human’ but also, and perhaps even more so, by ‘the animal’, since Western philosophy is saturated with using the latter to mark what differentiates the former from all other beings. Acting as our “not-being”, like “the ontological family pet – always there, right beside us, if a little lower” (Houle 2015, p. 38), the animal would have become the benchmark for establishing and evaluating the being of plants in its turn – that is, their own “not-being”. This would suggest that the “animal-as-non-human” dominates the character of our thought not only in its contents but also in its very architecture: plants are taken as the “non-animal” because our minds are deeply conditioned to understand the nature of Y in terms of ‘not-X’ (Houle 2015, pp. 39-40).

This structure represents the very matrix of the “anthropological machine”, in which inclusion and exclusion always march together – first between human and non-human, and subsequently among humans themselves (Agamben 2004). For these reasons, resisting the premise of ‘the animal’ is tantamount to resisting the premise of any ‘x-centered’ mode of thought.

In this sense, all extensionist strategies must confront the problem that many traits ascribed to plants are consistently derived from “non-plants”, making it difficult to value plants *qua* plants. For example, *ecocentrism* determines the intrinsic value, dignity, and worth of plants based on their participation in ecosystems; *biocentrism*, on their status as living species; *zoo-centrism*, on their sentience; *personalism*, on their person-like capabilities; and *perfectionism*, on their possession of a life trajectory (Pellegrino 2018, pp. 16-18). Contrary to these discourses, plant-thinking argues that finding the significance of plants without invoking any external referents requires a radical revision of traditional concepts to develop an understanding of the natural forms of plants themselves, one that “in no way derives from, or depends upon, similarity of function or value or morphology” to other beings – this would constitute a true “ethics of difference” (Houle 2018, pp. 71-76). Hence, plant-thinking wants to firmly avoid the projection of attributes belonging to other unique and valuable entities onto plants: if “making sense cannot be reduced to empirical chains of resemblance”, then the guiding principle for considering plants must be “otherness” (Pouteau 2013, p. 18).

Ultimately, plant-thinking does not merely oppose anthropo-centrism, zoo-centrism, bio-centrism, or similar frameworks; rather, it questions *centrism* itself – that is, the very notion of reasoning in differential-negative terms. Thus, de-humanizing our thinking and rendering it plant-like commits us to the broader task of approaching plants’ otherness without perceiving them as simply ‘other-than-X’. With these premises constituting the *pars destruens* of plant-thinking, its *pars construens* does not merely assert that we need to become acentric to give theoretical as well as ethical justice to plants; rather, it argues that such a radical decentering is directly implied by the nature of plants themselves, which – if approached without biases – introduces us to a genuinely acentric world. The next section will delve into this claim by presenting the supposed ‘an-essentialist’ traits of plants.

## 2. *What is it like to be a plant? Cosmic fluidity and infinite mixture*

For the project of plant-thinking, a true “ontophytology” and “epistemophytology” consists of an “essentialism-free way of thinking” that is “fluid,

receptive, dispersed, non-oppositional, non-representational, immanent” (Marder 2013, p. 152). This conceptual framework would arise directly from the fundamental “plant’s inseparability from the environment wherein it germinates and grows”, as well as from “its style of living devoid of a clearly delineated autonomous self” (Marder 2013, p. 162). In other words, plants manifest an essential incompleteness, vivacity, dependence, and unrest that cannot be recognized in their singularity according to traditional “schemas of identitarian thought”. Instead, plant-thinking recognizes and embraces the non-identity of plants, to the extent of rejecting even “the principle of non-contradiction in its content and in its form”, thus defining itself as “at once thinking and not thinking” – that is, as “not at all opposed to its ‘other’” (Marder 2013, p. 164). Ultimately, “a vegetable-like person” does think, but “without following the prescriptions of formal logic and therefore, in some sense, without thinking” (Marder 2013, pp. 164-165). Plant-thinking thus rejects any form of ‘x-centrism’ precisely because of the nature of plants themselves.

According to such a line of thought, plants are embedded in their environment in such a way that there is no center, no distance, no opposition, and so forth: vegetality is characterized by maximal immersion in a milieu, which renders plants constitutively indeterminate and exposed. The center of a plant is out in the open; it exists outside – it is a matter of “roundness”, corresponding to a “non-Euclidian” or “non-Cartesian” way of relating to space that exists both before and after the distinction between inside and outside (Pouteau 2018, p. 86). Among the various philosophical contributions to plant-thinking, one of the most explicit and provocative formulations can be found in the work of Coccia (2019), which aims to redeem plants from the “metaphysical snobbery” to which they have allegedly been subjected (Coccia 2019, p. 14). In what follows, I reconstruct the key traits of his proposal to highlight the conceptual architecture underlying a certain strand of plant metaphysics, and to prepare the ground for its critical examination.

Coccia presents plant life as a condition of radical openness and ontological exposure – a mode of being in which the boundary between organism and environment is not simply blurred but altogether dissolved. For him, the immobility of plants is not a sign of passivity, but the expression of their total adhesion to the world, both physically and metaphysically. Plants do not stand apart from what surrounds them; rather, they exist as pure continuity, embodying what he describes as the most paradigmatic form of being-in-the-world. In this framework, vegetality constitutes a rupture within the self-referential logic of the living: it undermines the prin-

inciple of interiority by inhabiting a space of constant transformation, metamorphosis, and ontological porosity. This leads to a metaphysical shift in which being is no longer conceived in terms of separable entities or stable identities, but as an infinite and universal mixture – a dynamic interplay without rigid distinctions between container and contained, subject and medium, body and soul, mind and matter. The guiding motif of this view is permeability: a world in which everything flows through everything else, in continuous and reciprocal imbrication. Coccia thus invites us to rethink metaphysics itself through the lens of plant-being – as a cosmic process of fluid, immersive co-existence (Coccia 2019, pp. 15-55).

According to him, the total immersivity of plants reveals a profound reconfiguration of conceptual oppositions such as passivity and activity, being and doing. Rather than representing inertia, the plant's full adhesion to the world exemplifies an active form of openness – one that does not require resistance or autonomy to manifest intensity (Coccia 2019, pp. 57-59). This perspective discloses a reality in which incompatible states coexist and constantly transform into one another, as if plants inhabited a kind of metaphysical laboratory where identities are fluid, contingent, and relational (Coccia 2019, p. 67). Such a condition is not to be understood topologically – through spatial contiguity – but ontologically: everything in the world is entangled with everything else in a process of reciprocal penetration. In this vision, the world itself becomes a field of constant circulation and contamination, in which notions of frontier, protection, or fixity dissolve. Plants embody a radical permeability, suggesting that existence is structured not by separation but by flows – by the continuous entering and exiting of forms and forces through one another (Coccia 2019, pp. 100-103). If we were to associate plants with any form of centrism, it would be a paradoxical one: not grounded in soil, identity, or stability, but heliocentric in a metaphorical sense – centered around the absence of a center, oriented toward openness rather than enclosure. In this framework, the dual movement of digging into the earth and growing toward the sun becomes emblematic of a deeper metaphysical dynamism – the breath of a world no longer defined by opposition or hierarchy, but by mixture and resonance (Coccia 2019, pp. 127-134).

Coccia's position most clearly and radically exemplifies the way in which the Plant Turn – at least in its more ontologically and metaphysically ambitious articulations – aims to promote a posthumanist abandonment of the narcissistic terrain of human-centered thought (Lemm 2022) by embracing a new, genuinely realist discourse (Kohn 2013, pp. 9-10) that “breaks open the circular closure that otherwise confines us when we

seek to understand the distinctively human by means of that which is distinctive to humans" (Kohn 2013, p. 6). The intention is to end the 'projective + retrojective' movement through which – on the one hand – human assumptions and properties are projected "onto nonhumans", and – on the other hand – we also ask them "to provide us with corrective reflections of ourselves" (Kohn 2013, p. 21). In other words, plant-thinking is not only engaged in understanding plants *qua plants* – that is, in their radical a-centeredness – but also seems inclined to avoid taking them as a kind of counter-center around which a new image of human beings could or should revolve. Indeed, such an outcome would represent the last-ditch effort of wounded human narcissism, imploring plants with a desperate, 'but please, tell something *about myself!*'. Once we have finally put ourselves in plants' shoes for the first time in our history, we must also resist any anthropocentric temptation to reappropriate them for human, self-centered purposes. Once we go 'plantish', we will never go back to centric thinking again – or, at least, this is the ambition underlying plant-thinking. But are such intentions sufficient to truly break free from the human dimension? And even before that: is such a radical departure genuinely desirable?

Indeed, there are good reasons to question the value of such an extreme attempt at overcoming. First, it remains debatable whether such a renewed understanding of plants as acentric beings is truly groundbreaking. For example, even within the more 'sinful' territories of classical philosophical anthropology, one might consider Plessner's understanding of plants' "dividuality" in their own terms and within a generally non-essentialist framework – without even mentioning the ancient understanding of plants, which is more nuanced than plant-thinking tends to assume (see, e.g., Repici 2000; 2015). Undoubtedly, Plessner or others might be accused of some degree of anthropocentrism, but we should at least question the firm belief that we must throw out a potential baby with all the supposedly polluted bathwater. Second, it remains to be determined not only whether plant-thinking is genuinely free from any human influence, but also whether it truly renounces to any form of human concern. The next section delves precisely into these issues.

### *3. A human-free discourse? The anthropological implications and concerns of plant-thinking*

Any aspiring post-human discourse encounters the fundamental, structural difficulty of justifying if and how we can truly access what is beyond

the human. In line with the *Speculative Turn*, which advocates for the possibility of even adopting an “alien” point of view (e.g., Bogost 2012; Shaviro 2016), the Plant Turn is also exposed to the trap of anthropomorphism that – Kant still *docet* – is implied in every aspiring totalizing, noumenal knowledge (Kant 1998, pp. 583–589). Thus, we must consider how even plant-thinking may be, in its own terms, undermined by use of certain, particular human lenses and involvement in human interests. To engage in a more detailed reflection on the possibility of genuine plant-thinking, two relevant criticisms can be addressed. The first concerns *projection* – namely, the possibility of grasping the true nature of plants without projecting onto them any extrinsic, human attribute (Section 3.1). The second concerns *retrojection*, that is, the kind of image of human beings that might be reflected by a truly ‘plantish’, acentric, and individual understanding of plants (Section 3.2).

### 3.1. *The speculative dreams of the plant-seer: on the possible logic of plant-thinking*

An increasing number of scientific studies highlights the lack of solid evidence for several abilities attributed to plants, such that the data presented in support of some of the most prominent ‘plantish’ concepts – such as plant consciousness and intelligence – is flawed and perhaps even non-existent: plant-thinking appears to be incompatible with many well-established observations. This debunking effort suggests that we are dealing with highly speculative claims, whose origin appears to stem from a desire to humanize plant life. To better understand the stakes of this issue, let us recall that pioneering studies have emphasized that plants exhibit forms of systemic electrical signaling, memory-like behavior, hormonal coordination, and responses to environmental stimuli that would suggest a form of intelligence or even “consciousness”. These claims culminated in the provocative adoption of terms such as “plant neurobiology” to describe vegetal organisms as knowledge-accumulating systems that memorize and process experiences, despite the absence of neurons or a central nervous system (e.g., Baluška *et al.* 2006; 2009).

However, many scholars in plant physiology and philosophy of biology have raised serious objections. Some critics (such as Mallatt *et al.* 2020; Markel 2020; Taiz *et al.* 2019) argue that such interpretations rely on misleading analogies with animal neural systems, fail to meet rigorous criteria for consciousness, and lack empirical grounding or repeatability. In their view, terms like “plant intelligence” or “plant con-

sciousness” amount to metaphorical extrapolations that may obscure rather than clarify plant behavior, potentially undermining the credibility of scientific communication, as they tend to erase physiological and behavioral differences that do, in fact, exist between living beings. In short, it risks conflating the functioning of a nervous system with that of hormonal or electrochemical communication networks. These critiques do not simply reflect a conservative reluctance to rethink cognition beyond the animal model. Rather, they emphasize the need for conceptual rigor and empirical caution in proposing new frameworks – also given that the anthropomorphic personification of plants, while sometimes rhetorically powerful, risks leading to distorted ecological narratives and unjustified ethical inferences (Robinson *et al.* 2024). Thus, the question of scientific rigor – namely, the need to describe different natural systems and behaviors using appropriately differentiated models and terminologies – opens onto a broader conceptual concern: the importance of avoiding theoretical elaborations that rely, even implicitly, on undue forms of projection.

It is one thing to invoke intelligence or consciousness as explanatory analogies; it is quite another to attribute these traits in a literal sense, by directly transferring behaviors observed in other species – most notably, the human one. In the latter case, the risk is not only to generate scientific and epistemic confusion, but also to slip into speculative narratives which – however ethically or imaginatively motivated – ultimately transform the empirical datum into a mirror of ourselves. This is precisely what some scholars point out when they describe certain plant neurobiologists as “serial speculationists”, whose work displays “an astronomically high ratio of speculation to data” (Mallatt *et al.* 2020, p. 473). Ultimately, to humanize plants by attributing to them traits such as consciousness and agency, aligns with broader trends in biology toward anthropomorphism, which paint a highly distorted picture of life in general – and of plant life in particular (Robinson *et al.* 2020). This critique resonates with Kant’s warning against the metaphysical “dreams” of the spirit-seer, where the temptation to speak for that which resists our categories leads us into conceptual mirages – composed of self-mirroring – rather than into a clearer understanding of natural phenomena.

Yet this speculative drift is not merely a matter of projecting traits onto plants, but also of conceptualizing them by adopting an approach that reflects a specific human way of reasoning, rather than the supposedly true nature of plants. To clarify this point, I propose using as a heuristic device the distinction between analytic logic, dialectical logic, and oceanic logic

introduced by Bencivenga (2017). Before presenting it, however, it is important to note that this tripartition is by no means a standard framework in the field of logic, and my use of it is not intended to posit anything like a formal logic of plant-thinking – that is, a classification within formal logic. Rather, the term “logic” is used here in a broader, historically grounded sense, closer to the notion of *logos*, that is, as a way of disclosing and articulating meaning, of organizing discourse around certain core claims and a distinctive style of reasoning.

With that in mind, the difference between these three *logoi* – each of which can be associated, respectively, with leading exponents such as Aristotle, Hegel, and Bergson – can be summarized through the contrast between looking for the place where a specific shirt has been left while getting dressed (*analytic logic*), reviewing our past life choices and comparing them with those of others to understand who we have truly become (*dialectical logic*), and making a declaration of eternal love in front of a mesmerizing sunset (*oceanic logic*). More technically, analytic logic thinks in terms of distinct substances, carving nature at its joints and assigning each entity its own identity. Dialectical logic, by contrast, proceeds narratively, through processes of differentiation and reconciliation, ultimately resolving contradictions in a higher unity. Oceanic logic, finally, does not acknowledge the existence of individual, ontologically distinct, and independent things; rather, it assumes the pseudo-presence of nuanced modes of being – of entities constantly dissolving into one another – so that oppositions and contrasts melt away by exploiting “the porousness of reality, the flexibility of borders” (Bencivenga 2017, p. 54).

On this basis, my suggestion is that what has been described as plant-thinking seems to mirror oceanic logic. Indeed, as discussed in Section 2, plant-thinking operates through the dissolution of stable boundaries, the precedence of immersion over distinction, the emphasis on fluidity and transition, and the valorisation of paradox. Highlighting this affinity is a way of questioning plant-thinking’s claim to offer a neutral reflection of plant ontology. Instead, it may reveal more about *the mode of our thinking* about plants (and ourselves) than about what plants are: in this regard, then, the projection is not only one of content, but also of form – of a particular way of thinking. This means that plants come to function as a projection surface for categories of thought that are typically human – so much so that they have found, and continue to find, a variety of applications throughout the history of thought. In short, it is not so much that plants are de-centric in themselves, but rather that they

offer the contemporary embodiment of a de-centric mode of thinking – one that belongs to the ways in which human beings have traditionally sought to understand reality and their place within it.

This observation should not be seen as a mere attempt to unmask or delegitimize plant-thinking. On the contrary, identifying its underlying logic is a way to better delineate its specificity and bring its potential into sharper focus. Framing plant-thinking in this way can allow, on the one hand, for a more productive engagement with the history of thought by situating it within a broader constellation of anti-essentialist philosophies and thus avoiding an overly radical or sterile opposition and instead encouraging critical dialogue. On the other hand, associating plant-thinking with a particular style of reasoning may offer its proponents the opportunity to articulate its structure with greater self-awareness and conceptual richness. Finally, such an awareness can also enable a more balanced consideration of the fact that not all anthropological discourses are necessarily harmful – as philosophical anthropology itself reminds us. In the first place, the dynamic of ‘otherization + re-identification’ is an indispensable part of our way of being natural, meaning that we are called to distance ourselves from nature as something that belongs to us and to which we belong. This is the fundamental paradox of our “second nature”, which involves the open, ongoing reconfiguration of what our “first nature” is, as well as of our relationship to it (e.g., Bertram 2020; Fischer 2019). In the second place, such a dynamic does not necessarily imply hierarchy; in other words, establishing comparative differences does not imply that these differences are absolute – relative specificity does not equate to absolute specialty (e.g., De Mul 2014; Korsgaard 2018, pp. 3-15).

It is precisely this open process that grounds the very possibility of learning from plants: not every act of self-recognition or self-constitution automatically reflects a narcissistic attitude; rather, it may represent a way of addressing the inevitable need to define oneself – no matter how provisionally, precariously, or porously. Ultimately, taking an interest in ourselves is not a fault; the issue arises – *and this is precisely where plant-thinking proves insightful* – when this interest is transformed into a universal and unconditional concern.

### *3.2. What should we learn from plants? On the possible ‘plantish’ image of the human*

Despite the strong desire to develop a ‘human-free’ discourse, plant-thinking does not fully renounce the idea that humans can and

should learn from plants: plants would teach us not only how to think, but also how to be, value and live (e.g., Lemm 2015; Kimmerer 2013). In this regard, plant-thinking offers more than a realistic description of nature, more than a rethinking of ontological and metaphysical discourse in Coccia's direction, and more than, finally, an "absolute metaphor" in Blumenberg's (2010) sense – a pre-conceptual or even non-conceptual background horizon of meaning within which our concepts can be formulated, a 'plantish' *Ur-Metaphor*. Rather, the Plant Turn also reveals a genuine *anthropological* aspiration, for rethinking plants implies a fundamentally new "*habitus of living*" (Marder 2013, p. 181), one that enables us to cultivate a radically new attitude. For example, we should not only stop eating plants, but rather start eating "*like a plant*", in the sense of "welcoming the other, forming a rhizome with it, and turning oneself into the passage for the other without violating or dominating it, without endeavoring to swallow up its very otherness in one's corporeal and physical interiority" (Marder 2013, p. 185).

Such proclamations are as purposeful as they are evocative, particularly when expressed in Deleuzian jargon – as seen in the works of scholars such as Marder, Houle, and Pouteau (see also, e.g., Myers, Hustak 2012) – where the idea of a "becoming-plant" emerges: "becoming-plant evokes a nonhuman becoming which undermines the stability of the subject, and also creates lines of flight away from the human" (Stark 2015, p. 188; see also Houle, Querrien 2012). On the one hand, this suggests a symbolic reorientation rather than a true physical transformation, but on the other, the idea of literal embodiment also takes shape. An example is the concept of North Americans as *materially* "corn people", since corn is such a substantial part of their diets that its isotopes can be detected in the carbon profile of their cells (see Pollan 2011, pp. 15-23; Stark 2015, pp. 191-192). Even without pursuing such an infra-material hybridization, the key point is that changing how plants are understood and treated is certainly a way of freeing them from human narcissism, but "the reorientation of the debate in the philosophical arena is also a necessary reorientation to the human": despite the desire to overcome "the systems of meaning and value that privilege the human", we are, after all, still dwelling on "the meaning of plants for our philosophies". We want to see "what taking plants seriously will do to our philosophies" (Stark 2015, p. 194). In short, once we have understood plants *qua plants*, they can and even should give something back to us: plants should teach us something by becoming a model for our affairs – not just any model, but a positive and even healing one.

This idea is also present in Mancuso's work (notably 2021; 2023; see also Baluška, Mancuso 2020), but without the vagueness characteristic of Deleuze-inspired analyses. Mancuso emphasizes how, in plants, the inability to resist predators by fleeing is "tricked" with the absence of any primary single or double organs and with the distribution throughout the entire body of functions that animals concentrate in specialized organs. While animals rely on eyes to see, ears to hear, lungs to breath, brains to think, etc., plants see, hear, breath, and think with their whole bodies: "the whole plant is equivalent to the animal brain" (see Trewavas 2014, pp. 192-196), plus the other specific organs. For Mancuso, such decentralized organization is the opposite of a centralized, hierarchical architecture, which is both animal and human in its essence, as our Western, modern societies are similarly constructed in a pyramidal fashion – from companies to offices, schools to armies, associations to parties, and so on. Especially given the adverse consequences of this "animal way" of organizing life (bureaucracy, inefficiency, fragility, sclerosis, depersonalization, etc.) in the context of the climate crisis, we should consider diffuse organizations modelled after the body of a plant. Such organizations would be able to respond to catastrophic limitations without losing functionality: they would lack a central core, specialized organs, or a single command room, and instead be composed of repeated, similar modules, constructed to allow for both freedom and strength. In this way, the organization of plants becomes a model for rethinking the growth, development, and functioning of cities and human societies, whose rigid hierarchies are currently so vulnerable that the failure of a single 'organ' could lead to the collapse of the entire system.

Let us assume that plant decentralization can indeed teach us this powerful lesson, although this remains debatable, primarily because discussing 'Plant' and 'Animal' in general terms still appears essentialist. The question then arises as to whether this lesson is the only possible one. In other words, is there only a bright side to the lesson plants offer, or could there also be a dark side? From a Marxian, critical perspective on postmodern discourse, postmodernism represents and (re)produces the cultural logic of late capitalism through its focus on the dissolution of the subject, the primacy of flux, the triumph of becoming, and so on, as well as through a general aestheticization – i.e., 'atmospherization' and 'ephemeralization' – of ethical and political dimensions (e.g., Jameson 1991; Garo 2011; Rehmann 2004). Within this framework, for example, Deleuze's philosophy – or, more precisely, Deleuzianism – has been criticized for sowing the seeds of a pre-critical agenda, both philosophical-

ly and socio-politically, by reinforcing the ideology of today’s digital capitalism (Žižek 2004). In these critical analyses, a philosophical and cultural discourse that revolves around the absence of a fixed center, the importance of continuous transformation, the celebration of exposure, and the exaltation of universal mixture is not just a neutral description of the natural world; rather, it would simultaneously represent the symbolic ‘reduplication’ and ‘makeup’ of dominant material relationships. In short, it would amount to the naturalization of a particular (and oppressive) human condition.

With these premises, plant-thinking would both nurture and be nurtured by current neo-liberal, financial capitalism, suggesting that a renewed, ‘plantish’ understanding of reality would also imply a particular image of the human condition: that of the contemporary worker who is precarious, long-life learner, eternal teenager, deterritorialized, net-worker, soft-skilled, and so on. Furthermore, financial capitalism aligns with the digital revolution in shaping such a ddividual way of being: the fluid, decentered nature of plants corresponds with the ‘sub-subjectivities’ or ‘pre-subjectivities’ exposed to the new forms of power in the “society of control”, which relies not on disciplining the individual body but on the ddividual partitioning of behaviors, choices, tastes, and preferences, thanks to databases built by exploiting and aggregating sub-personal information of all kinds. In other words, where we once had persons, there are now spectra of temporarily indexed profiles composed of data that can be further decomposed and recomposed – precisely “ddividuals” (see Appadurai 2016, pp. 102-120; Deleuze 1992; see also Moeller, D’Ambrosio 2021 on the idea of “profligacy”). Therefore, the idea of everything entering and exiting from everywhere in an absolute freedom of circulation would match the condition of incessant information flows – that is, the datafication of reality, where there is no such thing as a distinct ‘thing’, but solely streams of dispersed, unstable, and ‘pneumatic’ micro-fluxes beyond any distinction between container and contained.

Let us be clear: these considerations are not meant to suggest superficially that such a ddividual, postmodern image of the human being is the only possible anthropological model outlined by plant-thinking, nor that it is necessarily a negative one. After all, there have been, and there still are, progressive, expansive, and re-socializing experiences and practices of ddividuality, even if they often remain at the margins of Western organizations – as Appadurai himself notes (see also Carbone, Lingua 2023, pp. 146-156, 170-177; Raunig 2016). Thus, emphasizing these potential, undesirable

implications of a discourse revolving around the notion of individual is not a call to return to the era of the classical individual – that is, the narcissistic, self-referential, and self-sufficient human being. Rather, the argument here is that it is mistaken to assume that plant-thinking is immune to any compromise with anthropological issues, or that even when such a compromise is acknowledged and accepted, it necessarily leads to a definitively emancipatory and liberating outcome.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper proposed a critical, yet supportive reading of the Plant Turn from an anthropological-philosophical perspective. It was structured in three sections. First, the paper introduced the notion of plant-thinking and discussed its *pars destruens*, focusing on the challenge of overcoming the bias against vegetal beings by developing not only a non-anthropocentric discourse but also a non-zoocentric and even acentric one. Second, it outlined the main elements of the *pars construens* of plant-thinking, particularly engaging with Emanuele Coccia's proposal, which emphasizes an anti-essentialist view of plants characterized by traits such as cosmic fluidity, total immersivity, and infinite mixture. Third, it addressed both the opportunity and possibility of a 'human-free' discourse, exploring how plant-thinking might reveal anthropomorphic traits in both a *projective* and a *retrojective* sense. On the one hand, the difficulty of truly grasping plant nature was considered through scientific and philosophical arguments; on the other, the image of human beings that plant-thinking could and should reflect was questioned, highlighting that – despite plant-thinkers' intentions – it may not necessarily be an emancipatory one.

This critical examination was not intended to argue for plant-thinking's inappropriateness or futility, nor merely to denounce and stigmatize its underlying philosophical anthropology. Instead, the aim was to contribute to a more conscious and self-critical articulation of the very premises of plant-thinking, without opposing it to what some may consider an outdated form of human-thinking. In this respect, this contribution seeks to enrich our philosophical understanding of plants without adopting a superficially enthusiastic or overly polemical stance against the entire history of Western thought. Such approaches risk not only overlooking valuable insights from past philosophical reflections that may still be worth reclaiming but also conflating all anthropological

considerations with a mere narcissistic anthropocentrism. Ultimately, fostering such a balanced perspective could provide a more robust conceptual backdrop for reconsidering *our* attitude toward other beings in general, and plants in particular.

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