



## Research Article

Jordi Vivaldi\*

# Xenological Subjectivity: Rosi Braidotti and Object-Oriented Ontology

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**Abstract:** The conceptualization of the notion of subjectivity within the Anthropocene finds in Rosi Braidotti's posthumanism one of its most explicit and profuse modulations. This essay argues that Braidotti's model powerfully accounts for the Anthropocene's subjectivity by conceiving the "self" as a transversal multiplicity and its relationality to the "others" and the "world" as non-hierarchized by nature–culture distinctions; however, by being ontologically grounded on a neo-Spinozistic monism, Braidotti's model blurs the notions of finitude, agency, and change, obscuring the possibility of critical dissent while decreasing the overall theory's consistency. An alternative ontological model capitalizing on these elements can be found in Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) and its notion of withdrawal. By associating OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism with Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity, this essay aims at ontologically discretizing the latter in order to overcome these limitations. Grounded on this association and invoking a narrative imaginary propelled by the Greek terms *xenos* (guest-friend) and *xenia* (hospitality), the article paves the way for a form of subjectivity deviating from Braidotti's ecological model and defined as *xenological*, arguing that, within the context of the Anthropocene, it constitutes an adequate alternative to Braidotti's subjectivity.

**Keywords:** subjectivity, anthropocene, posthumanism, Object-Oriented Ontology, Graham Harman, Rosi Braidotti, non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, neo-Spinozistic monism, ecology, *xenia*, *xenos*

## 1 Introduction

For almost three decades now, the Continental philosopher and socio-political theoretician Rosi Braidotti has been one of the most lucid and stimulating voices in postmodern feminism. In the wake of figures such as Gilles Deleuze or Luce Irigaray, the 1990s witnessed the flowering of her philosophical agenda, an adventurous roadmap propelled by various interconnected monographs ranging from accurate accounts of ethics and emancipation to pioneering elaborations on subjectivity. Over the years and through her notion of posthumanism, Braidotti has increasingly framed these concerns in light of a generalized ecology, also known as ecosophy: a relational model merging technological, geological, and biological dimensions while "crossing transversally the multiple layers of the subject, from interiority to exteriority and everything in between,"<sup>1</sup> thus configuring a model of subjectivity<sup>2</sup> in which the subject is fully exposed. By including

1 Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 92.

2 Braidotti tends to use the terms "subject" and "subjectivity" without explicitly establishing distinctions. In this essay, the expression "human subject" should be understood as referring to a person having a particular conception of the self and its relations to the other and the world, that is having a particular subjectivity.

\* **Corresponding author: Jordi Vivaldi**, Department of Urban Design, University of Innsbruck, Faculty of Architecture, Innsbruck, Austria, e-mail: [jordivivaldipiera@gmail.com](mailto:jordivivaldipiera@gmail.com)

the convergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Sixth Extinction in these analyses, Braidotti scrutinizes the notion of the Anthropocene in light of what constitutes the basic research question of this essay: What forms of subjectivity are fuelled by a post-anthropocentric approach? How do we conceive the elements of creativity, imagination, subversion, desire and aspirations of the self, and its relation to others and to the world, in light of our entanglement with human and non-human beings? In brief: How do we engage with human subjectivity in the age of the Anthropocene?

Drawing on an argument developed through a close reading of Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity, the central contribution of this essay consists in approaching these questions by proposing a model of subjectivity defined as *xenological*. In pursuit of this purpose, the text initially argues that, within Braidotti's model, the transversal multiplicity of the self and its non-hierarchical relationality with the others and the world are worth preserving, since they powerfully account for crucial socio-political aspects of the Anthropocene. However, by grounding them in a neo-Spinozistic monism, Braidotti obscures the accountability of finitude, agency, and change, watering down the notion of otherness and compromising the overall theory's consistency. Since, according to this argument, these obstacles derive from the neo-Spinozistic monism propelling Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity, this essay proposes to combine the latter with an ontological framework that emphasizes discrete entities. Relying on its non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) is instrumentalized for this purpose. By capitalizing on this confederation and deviating from a generalized ecology, the essay proposes a xenological form of subjectivity invoking the Greek concept of *xeno* – including both *xenos* (guest-friend) and *xenia* (pacts of hospitality) – as a narrative imaginary in order to accommodate a form of subjectivity whose exposure is no longer absolute, but selective and intermittent. A subjectivity that is thus inexhaustible by any overarching ecology, accounting for the notions of self, others, and world in consonance with the concepts that are maintained from Braidotti's model, while approaching its aforementioned limitations through OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism.

Following this introduction, Section 2 analyses the relevance of Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity in relation to the Anthropocene, discussing her model's difficulties in accounting for finitude, agency, and change. In light of these criticisms, Section 3 briefly presents the non-onto-taxonomical pluralism of OOO while arguing for its compatibility with decisive aspects of Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity. Given this foundation, Section 4 presents the notion of *xeno* and proposes a xenological form of subjectivity, arguing that it constitutes an adequate alternative to Braidotti's project. By way of conclusion, Section 5 briefly signals the relevance that this form of subjectivity might have regarding the architectural notion of home within the Anthropocene.

## 2 Differing togetherness

Defined by Braidotti as “the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet,”<sup>3</sup> the term “Anthropocene” signals a process of *incorporation*: it claims that issues such as global warming or the widening of the ozone gap are internal to the modern narrative of human progress rather than external actors threatening humanity from the outside. Thus, within a context amalgamating beings conventionally indexed to different worlds, the *anthropos* is no longer the delirium of a species who believes itself alien to its own environment; it has become an ingredient in it. Braidotti accounts for these transformations through her notion of posthumanism. Defined as a genealogical and navigational tool “to help us rethink the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as Anthropocene,”<sup>4</sup> Braidotti's posthumanism updates Nietzsche, Foucault, and Deleuze's critiques of Humanism and anthropocentrism by connecting them to technological developments, climate change, and cognitive capitalism. It establishes a multi-directional nature–culture continuum underpinned by a

<sup>3</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 5

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

self-organizing structure of living matter, approaching the socio-political condition of the Anthropocene as a process of *differing togetherness*.<sup>5</sup>

Differing: in order to “mobilize the insights and methods of posthumanism (as critique of Eurocentric privilege) and post-anthropocentrism (as critique of species privilege),”<sup>6</sup> the heterogeneity of Braidotti’s project is twofold: it overcomes the socio-cultural homogenization of patriarchal power and racism by giving voice to minority discourses such as postcolonial and feminism, and it accounts for the irreducibility of zoe/geo/techno otherness by considering them as beings in their own right.

Togetherness: in order to acknowledge the age of computational networks and synthetic biology and the age of climate change and erosion of liberties,<sup>7</sup> Braidotti conceives the planet as a transversal network made of operative kinship, emotional closeness, and “response-ability.” This intense relationality includes human beings and animals, but also landscapes, microbes, technological artefacts, and even the universe as a whole.

Circumventing the scholarship that dismisses the need for a theory of subjectivity<sup>8</sup> or that reinscribes it into the humanistic tradition,<sup>9</sup> Braidotti demands new forms of subjectivity<sup>10</sup> in order to “prioritize issues linked to social justice, ethical accountability, sustainability and trans-species and intergenerational solidarity,”<sup>11</sup> establishing thus a “site for political and ethical accountability, for collective imaginaries and shared aspirations.”<sup>12</sup> By “posthumanizing” subjectivity, Braidotti accounts for a trans-individual, trans-species, trans-generational, trans-ethnic, and trans-gender context in which subjectivity is not constructed under that unitary subject of humanism, but under an *ecological* framework. The term ecology is not invoked in the sense of Arne Naess’s “deep ecology” or James Lovelock’s “Gaia hypothesis,” since in its holistic and sacred organicism Braidotti identifies a full-scale humanization of the environment based on three elements:<sup>13</sup> its socio-constructivist dualism, its technophobia, and its emergence from the impending environmental catastrophe. Instead, Braidotti instrumentalizes Guattari’s ecosophy and the transversal lines running through its three ecologies, since they identify unfamiliar yet decisive interconnections such as those “among the greenhouse effect, the status of women, racism and xenophobia and frantic consumerism.”<sup>14</sup> In connection to Guattari, Erich Hörl’s relationism<sup>15</sup> is also invoked, since “the zoe/geo/techno dimensions, however distinct, are also part of a more general ecology, which is a multi-layered dynamic system encompassing environmental, social and psychic elements.”<sup>16</sup> Braidotti’s posthuman subject becomes thus *entirely exposed*: nothing remains opaque and withdrawn from its relations. Instead, it is propelled by trans-corporeal occupations, in which bodies extend into places and places deeply affect bodies, constituting a subjectivity that is “always already penetrated by substances and forces that can never be properly accounted for.”<sup>17</sup> Braidotti deploys this subjectivity through three interdependent levels:<sup>18</sup> the *self*, the *others*, and the *world*.

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5 Braidotti’s expression “we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same” is emblematic of this combination of difference and togetherness characteristic of the Anthropocene.

6 Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 71.

7 *Ibid.*, 71.

8 In its de-linking of the human being from an universalistic posture, Foucault’s “death of Man” is the emblematic example of this position.

9 Martha Nussbaum’s “Neo-Humanism” or Ken Plummer’s “Critical Humanism” are good examples of this position.

10 Braidotti tends to use the terms “subject” and “subjectivity” without explicitly establishing distinctions. This essay defines the human subject as a person, and human subjectivity as how this human subject constructs their understanding of the self, the others, and the world.

11 Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 41.

12 Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 102.

13 *Ibid.*, 85.

14 *Ibid.*, 93.

15 The reconceptualization of modes of existence, faculties, and forms of life in terms of a relationality that does not consider relations as minor and derivative entities but as originary and central is the primary principle of Erich Hörl’s general ecology.

16 Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 98.

17 Alaimo, *Exposed*, 9.

18 Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 45.

The self: Braidotti's self is neither an identitarian autonomous essence nor an anonymous plurality, but a transversal multiplicity, an embodied and moveable assemblage entangled with a common life-space that is never mastered nor possessed, but crossed and inhabited with a community of others. This scattered self is "glued" by his/her interactions with others and by the powers of remembrance.<sup>19</sup>

The others: rather than equating selfness with a consistent consciousness and otherness with its specular counterpart, posthuman subjectivity "rests on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human others."<sup>20</sup> This non-hierarchical relationality includes all sorts of anthropomorphic<sup>21</sup> and zoe/geo/techno others.

The world: Braidotti's subject is entirely exposed to the world through a profound relationality: becoming posthuman demands redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to others in light of a common world, constituted as a single shared territory, regardless of its multiple dimensions.

The transversal multiplicity of the self and the non-hierarchical relationality connecting it to its others and to the world regardless of culture–nature distinctions configures a subjectivity capable of accounting for the intersecting crises-opportunities of the Anthropocene. Climate refugees, animal genetic engineering, clandestine and institutional bio-piracy, algorithmic gender bias, global warming, automation-spurred job loss, and AI deep fakes present extreme degrees of mixity and multi-scalarity, obsoleting human-centred models of subjectivity.<sup>22</sup> They demand instead a transversal, composite, and locative subjectivity configured "within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings [...] based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building."<sup>23</sup>

However, the art of combining identity and difference transcends Braidotti's alternative between modern "dualisms" and neo-vitalist "multiple becomings," since not every distinction is necessarily a dualism; distinction, here, means the idea that "two (or more) entities, whatever their similarities/forms of overlap may be, are not the same in some epistemically relevant respect."<sup>24</sup> There is certainly more pluralism than dualist oppositions, but this does not eliminate the need to differentiate. And, paradoxically, in its attempt to avoid dualisms through a non-essentialistic self and through a radically immanent relationality with the others and the world, Braidotti's subject becomes a fully exposed entity that might risk dissolving into a single relational *oikos* what she attempts to celebrate: the vast range of human and non-human singularities that are "other" to the European human originated in the Renaissance. Even if entities are close-knit and rarely act or change in isolation, it is possible and often useful to look at entities or persons separately.<sup>25</sup> Besides accounting for the ontological validity of any form of otherness, a crucial reason for a "discrete" approach, in which the subject is not entirely exposed, is to account for political dissent: the capacity to express dissatisfaction with the established socio-political model. Although in her feminist, anti-racist, and postcolonial trajectory Braidotti is certainly a restless dissident, one wonders how dissent can occur under her radical immanence: "An immanent, posthuman project assumes that all matter or substance is one and immanent to itself. This means that the posthuman subject asserts the material totality of and interconnection with all living things."<sup>26</sup>

Although she signals the need for a differentiation "on qualitative grounds"<sup>27</sup> based on the fact that "we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same," Braidotti defines this "we" as "the result of a praxis, a collective engagement to produce different assemblages."<sup>28</sup> Yet, if the self results from a non-

<sup>19</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 138.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> "Non-white, non-masculine, non-normal, non-young, non-healthy, disabled, malformed or enhanced peoples." *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> It also cannot be explained by certain currents of anti-humanism such as Foucault's biopower, whose focus on the *anatomo-politics* of the human body appears incapable of accounting for the molecular governance of our society.

<sup>23</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Gunnarsson, *The Contradictions of Love*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Rosa et al., *Critical Theory and New Materialisms*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

essential multiplicity and the others and the world are immanent to it, how can a qualitative difference occur? How can Braidotti's radical immanence account for what she attempts to reinforce, that is "a radical other, albeit a significant other"?<sup>29</sup>

This essay argues that these difficulties emerge from the instrumentalization of a neo-Spinozistic monism, in which the notion of *potentia* fuels Braidotti's subject by ontologically grounding its conception of the self, the others, and the world. Assuming Spinoza's differentiation between *potestas* and *potentia*, in recent years it has become common to read Spinoza's entire thinking as being centred on the notion of power. While *potestas* needs a referent to dominate or to be dominated by, *potentia* invokes a relationship to the world through harmonic variations. Consequently, Spinoza's *potentia* does not necessarily refer to relations between entities where one has power over the other; rather, it defines beings as such: to know what something is, is to know its *potentia*, what its body can do.<sup>30</sup>

However, Spinoza's *potentia* is connected to *potentia dei*, where the substance (*Deus sive Natura*) operates via affections: modal expressions modifying individual power to be and to act. Power as *potentia* is a ubiquitous medium of constitution whose relationality exceeds any individuality by being heterogeneously distributed across reality without sedimenting into any stable centre. This conception of power propels the immanent and non-essentialist characteristics of Braidotti's subjectivity, fuelling a model in which desire is read as freedom, as *potentia*, as the expression of all we are capable of becoming: desire "is no longer predicated on the negative principles of Lack and Law, but on relational affirmation and plenitude."<sup>31</sup> Updated by French poststructuralism, Spinozist philosophy appears to Braidotti as an "active concept of monism [...] defining matter as vital and self-organizing";<sup>32</sup> in Braidotti's hands, Spinoza's monism unfolds a radical immanence aligning with the Anthropocene's nature-culture continuum, establishing "a direct connection between monism, the unity of all living matter and post-anthropocentrism as a general frame of reference for contemporary subjectivity."<sup>33</sup>

Despite the attraction that this vital and self-organized relationality holds for worldviews stressing the interdependence between nature and culture, distinctions still play a crucial role: if they are blurred, we lose the possibility of examining the relation between the two terms, since one will inevitably subsume the other. Braidotti's indexing of the self, the others, and the world to one ontological big "plateau" risks not doing socio-political justice to any of its human or non-human entities. By blurring their singular *potentia* under a secularized *potentia dei*, Braidotti obscures three crucial notions: finitude, agency, and change. These difficulties, whose origin lies in Spinoza's treatment of "modes," reveal various inconsistencies flooding the trajectory from an ontological monism to a posthuman subjectivity while diminishing its socio-political capacity for dissent.

## 2.1 The possibility of finitude

Braidotti's subjectivity "necessarily entails the limitations imposed by its sheer material nature, since being embodied implies a singular spatio-temporal frame."<sup>34</sup> However, although the posthuman subject is "a finite collective entity,"<sup>35</sup> Braidotti affirms that "being embodied in this high-tech ecological manner entails full immersion in fields of constant flows and transformations."<sup>36</sup> How can a subject be "finite" if it is "fully immersed in fields of constant flows and transformation"?

<sup>29</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 178.

<sup>32</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>34</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 170.

<sup>35</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 140.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

Braidotti inherits this difficulty from Spinoza's resistance to conceive the modes as finite. Since Spinoza understands substance as "what is in itself and is conceived through itself,"<sup>37</sup> its existence in virtue of its essence implies the impossibility of any external limitation, making it infinite. Substance's attributes are also infinite, but while the substance is *absolutely* infinite (it contains all positive ways in which a thing can exist), the attributes are infinite *in their own kind*: they infinitely manifest one possible expression of the substance. The modes are instead affections of substance's attributes, their expression in specific manners. In contrast with the latter, and since modes depend on the substance and on the modal community, they need to conjugate some form of finitude. However, Spinoza defines modes as being *in alio* rather than *in se*: "by mode I understand a state of a substance, i.e. something that exists in and is conceived through something else."<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the autonomy of modes is illusory. Since the substance is indivisible, the modes need to establish some continuity with the substance. But Spinoza affirms that the modes are not illusions, since they express the substance's essence, and thus, they need to be real – that is infinite. Spinoza overcomes this difficulty by differentiating between an *essential* and a *causal* infinitude: while the former refers to the substance and cancels out any external privation, the latter qualifies the modes as being composed of an infinite chain of effects and causes proceeding from the substance.

On these ontological grounds, it is hardly possible for Braidotti's subjectivity to avoid infinitude: if "the posthuman subject rests on the affirmation of [...] the relational connection with an 'outside' that is cosmic and infinite,"<sup>39</sup> and this relation is based on a "neo-materialist perspective inspired by an updated version of Spinozism,"<sup>40</sup> this subjectivity cannot be simply defined as finite. The socio-political relevance of this difficulty is central: as Braidotti asserts, a posthuman subjectivity demands finitude in order to differ from trans-humanism and to "acknowledge the importance of limits as thresholds of encounters with others, to ensure productive relations and prevent nihilistic self-destruction."<sup>41</sup>

## 2.2 The possibility of agency

Braidotti's neo-Spinozistic monism fuels a "political agency that need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of counter-subjectivities."<sup>42</sup> She advocates for a model in which "freedom is written into our system as the desire to expand and enhance our existence,"<sup>43</sup> affirming thus the priority of the relation, the awareness that, in its full exposure, human subjectivity "is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of."<sup>44</sup> However, how can a subject hold "an affirmative form of agency" while being "the effect of irrepressible flows"?

Braidotti inherits this difficulty from Spinoza's understanding of the finite modes as governed by the infinite modes, since Spinoza's laws of nature are embedded in the latter. Every finite mode is fully determined by a horizontal line of causality including all antecedent finite modes and by a vertical line of causality moving towards God's attributes. Consequently, "in nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."<sup>45</sup> Deleuze affirms that Spinoza's *Ethics* aims "at breaking the traditional link between freedom and will,"<sup>46</sup> since the "will" is a mode determined by a different cause. Thus, one is never free through one's

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<sup>37</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 138.

<sup>40</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 135.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>42</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 35.

<sup>43</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 155.

<sup>44</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 100.

<sup>45</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

will, but through one's degree of power: "Man, the most powerful of the finite modes, is free when he comes into possession of his power of acting."<sup>47</sup>

The Spinozistic freedom–power connection is relevant for Braidotti's posthumanism, since its "materialist politics of posthuman differences works by potential becomings calling for actualization."<sup>48</sup> Agency is thus neither the ability to choose at will (freedom of indifference) nor the ability to adjust itself to a model (enlightened freedom), but the ability to unfold the *potentia* of Life as perpetual becoming.<sup>49</sup> Mediated by a secularized *potentia dei*, in Braidotti this *potentia* is the degree of power of "a force that is not confined within feedback loops internal to the individual human self, but is present in all living matter."<sup>50</sup> Thus, since Braidotti's agency resides in one vital force traversing "all living matter," its plurification into various collective agencies demands an accountability that Spinoza's monism cannot provide. This difficulty compromises, for example Braidotti's take on animality: to avoid animals being reduced to humans' self-projection and moral aspirations, "the point about posthuman relations [...] is to see the interrelation human-animal as constitutive of the identity of each."<sup>51</sup> A zoological "eachness" that can only be fully acknowledged if its zoological agency is granted beyond its human or non-human identity.

### 2.3 The possibility of change

By arguing that "socially embedded and historically grounded changes require a qualitative shift of our 'collective imaginings',"<sup>52</sup> Braidotti underlines the depth of these transformations, which transcend symbolic actions or isolated behavioural patterns. However, if "what constitutes subjectivity is a structural relational capacity, coupled with the specific degree of force or power that any one entity is endowed with,"<sup>53</sup> how can the subject retain something in reserve in order to avoid its petrification under full relationality?

Braidotti inherits this difficulty from Spinoza's problems in accounting for modes' transformation within an immutable substance. Since Spinoza defines change as "whatever variation there can be in a subject while the very essence of the subject remains intact"<sup>54</sup> and claims the equivalence between substance's existence and essence, any change in substance's existence is a change in substance's essence, therefore, violating its immutability. Due to Spinoza's monism, this problem extends to the modes: if the properties of modes are properties of substance, then when a mode changes, the substance changes. By positing an immutable substance traversing all modes, Spinoza risks freezing them, and, since Braidotti ontologically relies on a neo-Spinozistic monism, she inherits a similar problem, although with a different terminology. Braidotti also emphasizes the unity of all matter, constituting a subjectivity "marked by the interdependence with its environment through a structure of mutual flows and data transfer that is best configured as complex and intensive inter-connectedness."<sup>55</sup> However, if in its full exposure this subject has no private properties besides those that are already in relation, nothing can ever move. In its Spinozistic rejection of any ontological interruption, Braidotti's relational monism implies that entities exist in reciprocal interrelation, gaining their significance from, and thus being exhausted by, neighbouring entities. But then, how can an entity keep something in reserve in order to establish qualitative transformations? Paradoxically, this difficulty relates to Braidotti's project itself; by questioning the humanist principles in

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>48</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 138.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>51</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 79.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>53</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 321.

<sup>55</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 139.

which we are embedded, her posthuman model aims at a radical reformulation of our collective imaginaries: “a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to think at all.”<sup>56</sup>

The difficulties in accounting for finitude, agency, and change have socio-political implications, since they are crucial to account for dissent. Since the *zoe/geo/techno* dimensions are “part of a more general ecology, which is a multilayered dynamic system encompassing environmental, social and psychic elements,”<sup>57</sup> there is no room for beings transcending the network of relations in which they are inscribed; since entities are entirely exposed and thus exhausted in their current interconnections, it is impossible for the former to interrupt the latter. This poses severe difficulties when it comes to explaining dissent from a posthuman perspective, leaving activist insubordination with regard to crucial issues such as class (“Yellow Vests Protests” (2018), “Arab Spring” (2010)), environment (Greta Thunberg since 2018, Greenpeace since 1971), gender (the “International Women’s Strike” (2018) or the “LGBT movements”), or origin (the Indigenest movements in South America, Black Lives Matter since 2013) unaccounted for.

How can these disruptive activities be compatible with a general ecologization that is based on “the reconceptualization of modes of existence, faculties, and forms of life in terms of relations”?<sup>58</sup> How can one effectuate an act of insubordination within the system of relations in which one operates if one’s being consists precisely in relation to that system? How can we account for socio-political dissidence if the horizon of possibilities of every entity is framed within the overarching ecology of interrelations in which it is fully embedded?

In her insistence on an affirmative bond that reduces subjectivity to an ecology of relations, Braidotti risks ontologically dissolving oneself, the others, and the world into those flows of relations, cancelling any attempt at socio-political insubordination. As we have seen, these perils emerge from the difficulties in accounting for finitude, agency, and change, which, in turn, derive from Braidotti’s underpinning of posthuman subjectivity with a neo-Spinozistic monism. However, these arguments do not pretend to extinguish Braidotti’s project; as we previously argued, conceiving the “self” as a transversal multiplicity and its relationality to the “others” and the “world” as non-hierarchized by nature–culture distinctions are crucial contributions to account for the Anthropocene’s differing togetherness. The challenge is thus to configure a model of subjectivity responding to two requisites: first, a conception of the self, the others, and the world that is compatible with the aforementioned posthuman characteristics, and, second, the instrumentalization of an ontological framework overcoming the limitations of Braidotti’s neo-Spinozistic monism.

This essay proposes to address this challenge through an ontological discretization instrumentalizing the non-onto-taxonomical pluralism of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). This hypothesis might seem rather surprising; Braidotti’s hostility towards OOO’s principles is explicit: “by claiming there is no need for a vision of the subject, [object-oriented ontologists] ignore and dismiss feminism, postcolonialism, race and ecological thinking.”<sup>59</sup> However, it will be argued that by underlining certain compatibilities among both proposals, an alternative form of subjectivity contrasting with the ecological model and defined as *xenological* can emerge – one whose conception of the self, the others, and the world is capable of socio-politically accounting for the Anthropocene’s human subjectivity while dodging the difficulties derived from Braidotti’s neo-Spinozistic monism.

### 3 An ontological discretization

Unicorns and tables, you, me, this thought. Yesterday’s dinner, the Andromeda Galaxy, protons. Mars and Popeye. Graham Harman’s OOO advocates for a kaleidoscopic constellation of entities irreducible to its

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>57</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 98.

<sup>58</sup> Hörl, *General Ecology*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 60.



parts or to its context: objects. Although the universe might be populated with an infinity of them, objects come in only two types: “the real object that withdraws from all experience, and the sensual object that exists only in experience.”<sup>60</sup> This distinction does not designate two distinct groups of objects, but rather differentiates two modes of being: sensual and real. An object is a unified entity withdrawn from all access (real object) yet somehow manifest (sensual object). Withdrawn and manifest, at the same time. Withdrawn: objects retreat from all relations with other objects, enclosing themselves in a vacuum-sealed region precluding any attempt at knowledge. Manifest: despite their radical distancing, objects allude to their inscrutable reality by appearing in the experience of other objects. Objects play hide and seek.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the various voices lamenting that OOO advocates for “a brutal eclipse of the subject,”<sup>62</sup> OOO retains the human subject as a component in many real objects, and thus it is by no means nonsensical to rethink human subjectivity through ontologies that are “object-oriented.” In order to discretize Braidotti’s posthuman subject in a way that accounts for the transversal multiplicity of the self and its non-hierarchical relationality with the others and the world, this essay capitalizes on one of OOO’s main principles: its non-onto-taxonomical pluralism.

Since the limitations of Braidotti’s posthuman subjectivity stem from its ontological underpinning in a neo-Spinozistic monism, it seems reasonable to overcome the limitations that the latter inflicts on the former by instrumentalizing a pluralist ontology. OOO may be characterized in these terms to the extent that it recognizes an equal ontological autonomy for an infinite plurality of entities *qua* objects.<sup>63</sup> Despite holding their own intimate reality,<sup>64</sup> objects interact by being grafted one within the other in the form of *compounds*. Nothing else populates Harman’s pluriverse, only objects – individual entities that, whether natural or cultural, physical or ideal, material or semiotic, exist on the same ontological plane.

Since Braidotti’s project accounts for the non-anthropocentric subjectivity of the Anthropocene, its ontological discretization needs to be non-onto-taxonomical. The postulation of two fundamental ontological domains is the primary onto-taxonomical gesture: while the first domain “is earmarked exclusively for human beings [...] and their products [...], the other is reserved for everything else that is supposedly non human.”<sup>65</sup> The various historical forms “have either postulated an a priori fissure separating humans from everything else [gap onto-taxonomy], or an a priori relational bond between the two [correlational onto-taxonomy].”<sup>66</sup> Onto-taxonomy is the nemesis of OOO for at least three reasons.<sup>67</sup> First, by positing a hierarchical twofold ontology, onto-taxonomy obscures the discussion of beings as such. Second, by associating one realm with the human being and the other with the rest of beings, onto-taxonomy is anthropocentric. Third, by reducing philosophical thought to a thought on the human, onto-taxonomy expels philosophy from thinking about object–object relations. The crucial factor here is objects’ withdrawnness, since it is the condition shared by all objects, independently of their nature, thus precluding a priori ontological distinctions. However, it is also crucial for OOO’s account of finitude, agency, and change.

As for finitude; in OOO, “everything is split up according to definite boundaries and cut-off points rather than along continuous gradients.”<sup>68</sup> Since an object is *autonomous* from its context and from its pieces, it is necessarily demarcated from its environment. Despite the fact that any real object can vicariously relate to another real object through its sensual object, the former’s ontological withdrawal

<sup>60</sup> Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Bennett, “Systems and Things,” 225–33.

<sup>62</sup> Malabou, “Le vide politique du réalisme contemporain,” 2.

<sup>63</sup> Harman’s pluralism differs from other pluralist ontologies such as Aristotle’s substances, Leibniz’s monads, and Husserl’s objects; while objects’ difference from substances and monads lies in their requirement of simplicity – thus precluding accountability for aggregates, objects’ difference from Husserl’s intentional objects lies in Husserl’s consideration of objects as correlates of intentional acts – thus obscuring accountability for autonomy.

<sup>64</sup> Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 74.

<sup>65</sup> Young, “Only Two Peas in a Pod,” 28.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Harman, *Immaterialism*, 15.

constitutes it as a “walled island.”<sup>69</sup> In contrast with Spinoza’s modes, real objects’ exodus and exile from their environment imply objects’ constitution as finite individuals. This finitude is twofold: since objects are distinct, they are also countable. In the first case, objects’ finitude implies a number of attributes – real qualities – providing thisness, that is haecceity to each object: objects are *specific*. In the second case, objects’ finitude implies a multiplicity of entities in their own right whose individuality is irreducible to one overarching substance: objects are *many*.

As for agency, in OOO, each object “is a thing-in-itself, since it cannot be translated without energy loss into any sort of knowledge, practice, or causal relation.”<sup>70</sup> Contrasting with the inexorable presence of Spinoza’s substance in its modes, an object cannot be reduced to its effects (overmining) or to its parts (undermining) by another object, since that would imply that real objects are no longer withdrawn. The inaccessibility of objects paves the way for a form of agency in which all objects are equally a source of determination, since their essence is not limited by any exterior being. However, the fact that in OOO essences are not directly knowable, and thus objects’ agency can never be totalized, does not imply the complete freedom of an object in the sense of the liberal tradition, since it is subjected to its own essence, whose reality is also veiled to itself.

As for change, in OOO, “change is intermittent and stability the norm”:<sup>71</sup> not every relation is equally significant for the transformation of an object’s reality. Harman invokes Lynn Margulis’ serial endosymbiosis theory<sup>72</sup> to differentiate variations from turning points, which “rarely result from introspective brooding in one’s private chambers,”<sup>73</sup> but mostly occur through symbiosis with another object. Rather than the eternal character of Spinoza’s substance or the volatility of Deleuzian entities, by instrumentalizing Margulis’ symbiosis Harman invokes a relation “changing the reality of one of its relata, rather than merely resulting in discernible mutual impact.”<sup>74</sup> The real object’s withdrawal is crucial: contrasting with Spinoza’s modes, the nonexhaustion of objects in their relations permits them to keep something in reserve, leaving room for the possibility of change.

The contrast between a continuous monism and a discrete pluralism thus has divergent ontological implications regarding finitude, agency, and change. This opposition is noted by both authors; while Harman lists 9 axioms<sup>75</sup> tracing the differences between new materialism and his immaterialism, Braidotti affirms that by opposing vital materialist theories OOO seems to have “no comments on the mixture of panic and elation before the massive technological shifts, occurring with climate change and devastation.”<sup>76</sup> Under this crossfire, it might seem an entelechy to search for decisive compatibilities between Braidotti’s subjectivity and OOO’s non-onto-taxonomical pluralism. However, this essay argues not only that a significant portion of the socio-political statements of Braidotti’s posthuman subjectivity are compatible with OOO, it also affirms that their confederation can propel a *xenological* subjectivity that, by distancing itself from the full relationality of the ecological model, might overcome the aforementioned difficulties. This implies ontologically disengaging the conception of the self as a transversal multiplicity, and its relationality to the “others” and the “world” as non-hierarchized by nature–culture distinctions, from Braidotti’s neo-Spinozistic monism.

In *Posthuman Knowledge*, Braidotti provides a non-exhaustive but synthetic fivefold summary of posthuman subjectivity; its concision makes it particularly adequate to measure the compatibility between OOO’s non-onto-taxonomical pluralism and her posthuman subject. Although Braidotti’s subjectivity certainly has more subtleties than the ones revealed by these five points, Braidotti’s conception of the “self” as

<sup>69</sup> Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 112.

<sup>70</sup> Harman, *Immaterialism*, 33.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>72</sup> For Harman, one of the key points of Margulis theory is that “the gradual shaping of the gene pool through natural selection is a less important evolutionary force than the watershed symbioses of distinct organisms.” This point is crucial for OOO’s emphasis on discrete turning points rather than on continuous variations. Harman, *Immaterialism*, 46.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–6.

<sup>76</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 60.

a transversal multiplicity and of its relationality to the “others” and the “world” as non-hierarchized by nature–culture distinctions relates to these points entirely. Although the last three are eminently socio-political, the first are explicitly ontological:

“The first feature [of posthuman subjectivity] is a materialist process *ontology* based on immanence and becoming, defined as a creative praxis of actualization of the virtual. Secondly, posthuman subjectivity is structured by *ontological* relationality, which is the power to affect and be affected.”<sup>77</sup>

Since these features affirm what this essay attempts at replacing, they need to be rephrased rather than endorsed:

*The first feature is a pluralist and immaterialist ontology based on transcendences and turning points, defined as a creative praxis of production of compounds. Secondly, subjectivity is structured by ontological essentialism, which enables the former to avoid being entirely exhausted in the practices of affecting and being affected.*

Two questions are now crucial: in what sense are Braidotti’s last three points worth retaining to conceive a model of subjectivity within the Anthropocene? And to what extent are these three points compatible with OOO’s non-onto-taxonomical pluralism? Let us address each of them now.

*Thirdly, [posthuman subjectivity] involves a critical detachment from both Humanism and anthropocentrism, which respects the force of non-human elements.*<sup>78</sup>

This twofold detachment is decisive in accounting for a *transversal* subjectivity that is non-hierarchized according to nature–culture distinctions. It endorses the criticism of the discriminatory aspects originated within Renaissance humanism, which have historically been voiced by the anthropomorphic others of “Man,” and it explodes *a priori* boundaries between Man and other species. Within the Anthropocene, the socio-political power of this twofold movement lies, for example in the possibility of accounting for feminist or postcolonial issues in connection to those of artificial intelligence (AI) or climate change. This is crucial in order to cover hybrid forms of human subjectivity associated with web activism, AI gender bias, or postcolonial ecocriticism.

In its non-onto-taxonomical vocation, OOO propels the transversality of this twofold socio-political endeavour. Harman’s non-onto-taxonomy dismisses both classical humanism and biological anthropocentrism, since OOO discards human relation to the world as holding any ontological privilege in relation to other beings. However, objects are not only liberated from a human privileged being, but from *any* privileged being: there is neither an individual entity at the centre as an Archimedean point of departure, such as a cogito or a transcendental subject, nor an underlying matrix-like entity such as the *flesh* or the *il y a*.<sup>79</sup> This does not imply that Harman’s ontology ignores the human subject; it simply indicates that the human does not hold, in advance, any ontological priority over the rest of beings.

*Fourthly, transversal subjectivities are composed in the mode of ecosophical assemblages that include non-human actors.*<sup>80</sup>

This compositional approach to subjectivity accounts for the Anthropocene’s differing togetherness by integrating various beings through a *composite* model capable of assuming the zoe/geo/techno dimensions constituting human subjectivity in our age. This makes it possible to account, for example for the complex forms of human subjectivity associated with climate refugees, human cyborgs, AI-assisted humans, driverless cars, etc.

By conceiving “every entity [as] a compound,”<sup>81</sup> OOO lines up with Braidotti’s *composite* subjectivity. Harman’s ontology unfolds this aggregative logic by creating a new object when a new relation occurs.

<sup>77</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 54–5 (emphasis added).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Niels, “Burning Bridges,” 2.

<sup>80</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 54–5.

<sup>81</sup> Harman, “The Only Exit From Modern Philosophy,” 132–46.

However, this compositional model introduces a decisive nuance with regard to Braidotti's project: the fact that an object contains various objects–components does not mean that the former can be reduced to the latter (undermining). The crucial concept here is that of *strong emergence*:<sup>82</sup> a high-level phenomenon X is strongly emergent with respect to a low-level phenomenon Y if X arises from Y, “but truths concerning that phenomenon are not deducible [...] from truths in the low-level domain.”<sup>83</sup> Since emergence is thus a specific grouping of objects arranged in such a way that they form “a larger compound entity *per se*,”<sup>84</sup> an object–compound necessarily differs from the sum of the objects–components conforming it. Consequently, its collective register constitutes a form of emergent individuality that, by exceeding and respecting that of its components, significantly differs from the individuality of the liberal tradition.

*Last but not least, I want to stress the grounded, situated and perspectivist dimension [of posthuman subjectivity], which is enhanced by the ethical aspiration to compose a missing people, defined as a virtual entity.*<sup>85</sup>

Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity is “grounded, situated and perspectivist” because it is embedded and embodied, and thus limited: “our flesh is framed by the morphology of the human body, it is also always already sexed and hence differentiated.”<sup>86</sup> Braidotti stresses the *locative* dimension of a subjectivity capable of accounting for the locus it is speaking from, thus conforming a powerful tool to elaborate a model of subjectivity within the Anthropocene; it fuels a politics of location, paying attention to subjects' physical and socio-political consistency, rather than assuming those dimensions as irrelevant.

In the withdrawal of an object according to its characteristics and those of its interlocutor, OOO aligns with the locative dimension of Braidotti's subjectivity. OOO's example of the interaction between fire and cotton is revealing: the fire only relates to certain attributes of the cotton – inflammability – rather than with all of them or with the same ones as other beings do. Moreover, objects can be read as embodied in the sense that the “only *place* for two objects to make contact is the interior of the one object defined by the intentional relation as a whole.”<sup>87</sup> Consequently, by no means can Harman's objects be read as dis-embodied entities operating from nowhere, because their action is always *located* in a third object.

Despite the decisive ontological differences mediating between OOO's non-onto-taxonomic pluralism and Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity, the *transversal*, *composite*, and *locative* dimensions of the posthuman subject are compatible with OOO's principles. Since these three elements underpin Braidotti's conception of the “self” as a transversal multiplicity and its relationality to the “others” and the “world” as non-hierarchized by nature–culture distinctions, they can be conjured from the perspective of OOO and without reference to a neo-Spinozistic form of monism. Since, as we have seen, the latter obscures the accountability of finitude, agency, and change while muddying the notion of otherness and its capacity to dissent, the alliance of OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism and the posthuman subject might be valuable: it paves the way for an alternative model of subjectivity within the context of the Anthropocene, assuming the aforementioned posthumanist contributions to the self, the others, and the world, but whose subject's exposure is no longer absolute, but intermittent and selective.

In light of OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, this exercise of discretization sets the scene for an alternative model of subjectivity, associating Braidotti's posthuman subject with a conceptual imagery that is no longer limited to compounds, hybridizations, or meshes. It also invokes conceptual figures such as alienation, exteriority, or remoteness – elements that are peripheral within Braidotti's theoretical equipment yet crucial for conceiving an alternative subjectivity within the Anthropocene that can overcome posthumanism's limitations. Within this context, the following section articulates a model of subjectivity

<sup>82</sup> Although, to date, Harman has not given an in-depth account for emergence in OOO, Niki Young has reconstructed a careful analysis of it which is crucial for this essay. Young, “Object, Reduction, and Emergence,” 83–93.

<sup>83</sup> Chambers, “Strong and Weak Emergence,” 244–5.

<sup>84</sup> Harman, *Immaterialism*, 8.

<sup>85</sup> Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 54–5.

<sup>86</sup> Braidotti, *Borrowed Energy*, 2014.

<sup>87</sup> Harman, “Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos,” 7, emphasis added.

in which this conceptual miscegenation is brought to light by invoking a type of interaction irreducible to an ecological framework: the pacts of hospitality that were established with foreigners in ancient Greece and referred to using the term *xeno*. As a sort of allegorical figure, and in the context of the Anthropocene, this imagery will narratively weave together the association between Braidotti's posthumanism and OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism in order to propel a *xenological* model of subjectivity.

## 4 Xenological subjectivity

Frequently used in the formation of compound terms such as “xenogamia” or “xenophilia,” the term *xeno* generally refers to the “other,” the “strange,” the “alien.” It is precisely by invoking this generic form of otherness that fields of studies such as xenology – the scientific investigation of extraterrestrial life – or xenosophy – the wisdom emerging from the encounter with the other – take their names. However, these examples detach the notion of *xeno* from the semantic milieu in which it was originally coined in Ancient Greece: the *xenia*, the moral principle of giving gifts to foreign acquaintances, later absorbed by the ethical precept of hospitality.<sup>88</sup>

Within this context, the term *xenos* gains a slight yet decisive nuance: rather than signalling a generic otherness, it embodies the latter within the figure of the guest-friend, the foreign traveller being hosted by an *amphitryon*.<sup>89</sup>

In the Greek world, hospitality was certainly a moral endeavour, but it was also a legal practice, a contract, a pact linking host and guest under obligations regulating their permutability of roles. Among the numerous details characterizing these ritualized forms of hospitality, two of them, respectively, focusing on the *xenos* and the *xenia*, are particularly relevant when approaching the notion of subjectivity within the Anthropocene.

First, despite the care with which the host accommodates, nurtures, and protects the *xenos* and the courtesy with which the latter addresses the former, each one's strangeness is by no means watered down within the new domestic context in which the *xenos* is lodged. A certain opacity is instead retained, since the intermittent and selective interaction established between them finds its driving motor in their mutual distinction. The singularities of both are thus not necessarily blurred under a process of assimilation, but they are nourished – and occasionally altered – as that which binds host and guest *together-in-their-difference*.

Second, although as a contract of hospitality the *xenia* is forged through two present individuals, its pacts are, above all, a genealogical entente: they concern various familial ramifications involving past, present, and future actors, being thus a collective endeavour granting equal importance both to presence and absence. However, this is not a case of the straightforward extension of a solitary right, of opening out to the family and subsequent generations a right initially granted to the individual.<sup>90</sup> Rather, from the beginning, the *xenia* commits two house-holds, two lines of descent, two ethnic groups; it is a collective endeavour invoking both a synchronic and a diachronic “we,” a ritualized practice that in some epochs transcended the framework of a private contract, stabilizing in the more institutionalized form of a *proxenia*, the institution regulating the relations of hospitality between two cities, two urban subdivisions, or two cult associations.<sup>91</sup>

Within the context of the Anthropocene, the concept of *xeno* – including both the *xenos* and the *xenia* – is conjured up as a narrative figure; like an explanatory myth of sorts, it helps us weave a model of subjectivity that, as occurs with the *xenia*, instrumentalizes present individuals while involving present and absent collectives, and as occurs with the *xenos*, its exposure is not absolute, but intermittent and

<sup>88</sup> Weir, “Ontological Withdrawal and the Symbols of Symbolism”.

<sup>89</sup> Generally speaking, strangers are *xénoi* to each other, though in a civic context, *xénoi* are persons who visit a city and need to be hosted. Weir, “On the Origin of the Architect,” 10.

<sup>90</sup> Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 55.

<sup>91</sup> Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, 130.

selective. Despite stemming from the urges of our present, the invocation of this narrative figure is openly speculative, nurtured by various aesthetic dimensions and by no means limited by its historical weight, although certainly inspired and propelled by it. As an epistemological instrument, as a toolbox for thinking and making, the *xeno* has the virtue of complexifying the paralyzing disjunctive that seems to force us to choose between a single planetary continuum of gradients and a mere concatenation of folkloric locations. As an experimental figure, the *xeno* aims at configuring a programme, a framework; it lodges us within a stratum in which new emancipatory forms of subjectivity can be tested and evaluated by experimenting with the opportunities it offers and by playing with its potential lines of flight. By instrumentalizing the term *xenos* in relation to the Greek *xenia*, a xenological model invokes a form of “differing togetherness” that significantly diverges from the techno-ecology or general ecology associated with the Anthropocene. This is the case with Braidotti’s posthuman subject, whose full exposure responds to an ecological model capitalizing on the intense relationality of a general *oikia*, a common “house” in which zoo/techno/geo beings are exhaustively entangled, since “the universe is 100 percent relational.”<sup>92</sup> The xenological model invoked through the Greek term *xenia* is relevant to the constitution of a model of subjectivity within the Anthropocene because it leaves much more room for individuals and their singularities than the ecological model; it capitalizes on transversal, permutable, and intermittent forms of hospitality in which the *xenos* is capable of performing what under an ecological thinking would be an impossible pirouette: the retention of individual strangeness despite its immersion within an alien context. An immersion whose consequences are uncertain, since this engagement can be allegorical or operative, fleeting or long-lasting, decisive or insignificant, involved or tangential, restrictive or expansive, shifting or stable. However, in contrast with a generalized ecology, these consequences are not necessarily symmetrical, reciprocal, or holistic, since there is no longer a common single “home,” a general *oikia* in which all participants are fully exposed. Instead, they engage in various forms of *xenia* composed of distinct individuals freed from any general ecology underlying them. The double ambiguity of the Greek word for “host” is here beautifully revealing: while its twofold meaning as host and guest<sup>93</sup> conjures the permutability of role characteristic of the *xenia*, its proximity with the term “ghost” assumes that “the presence of absence was always key to *xenia*”:<sup>94</sup> although the guest might depart, its ghost can eventually remain with the host through the *symbolon*, the gift signalling the moral tie established between them and leaving room for future encounters.

In the form of an unexpected outside, the *xenos* appears thus as the other within, the abrupt arrival of another meaning. However, in the age of the Anthropocene, its significance can no longer be limited to the folkloric human scene of a remote and exotic foreigner being candidly sheltered in the warmth of a welcoming home. Rather than a social contract, and although it could certainly include ethical customs, the *xenia* today would be closer to Michel Serres’ “natural contract.”<sup>95</sup> The term “nature” is misleading here, however, since, in addition to conflating all non-human beings and their singularities under one generic concept, it assumes that culture and nature are the two only poles of reality. Conversely, within the Anthropocene the *xenia* propels dynamic and flickering constellations of organic and inorganic alliances, technological, biological, and geological pacts for a hospitable co-existence, in which the human subject is not necessarily always an ingredient; pacts aimed at being hospitable to zoe/geo/techno aggregates, pacts transcending the immediate experience of their participants; pacts eluding a grounding in or derivation from any general *oikia*; pacts nested at multiple scales of temporal and spatial coexistence; pacts establishing permutable complicities with the unfamiliar, the strange, and the figure of the unknown; pacts overcoming restrictive alliances with the neighbour, the alike, and the figure of the compatriot;<sup>96</sup> pacts

<sup>92</sup> Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 111.

<sup>93</sup> This twofold meaning can be found as well in the Spanish word “huésped.”

<sup>94</sup> Weir, “Ontological Withdrawal and the Symbols of Symbolism” (wording adapted slightly by the author).

<sup>95</sup> Serres, *The Natural Contract*.

<sup>96</sup> “Indeed, patriotism and guest-friendship would sometimes appear as antithetical principles structuring the dialectics of political rivalries. Demosthenes, for example, while priding himself on having preferred the common interest of Greece to the gifts and *xenia* of Philip of Macedon, accused Aeschines of having put his *xenia* and *philia* with Philip above the fate of the city.” Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, 3.

whose various dimensionalities are not ingrained within a single “big-world continuum”; pacts involving non-contiguous and even remote beings; pacts that can be decisive for their participants and unimaginably vast or remarkably minuscule in their spatio-temporal extent, but that by no means exhaust the singular strangeness of the *xenos*, whatever its form might be.

In the context of contemporaneous processes of subject-formation, the term *xeno* recently gained prominence as part of the title of Laboria Cuboniks’ text *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*.<sup>97</sup> In its accelerationist vocation, xenofeminism reclaims the liberating potential of technology by pushing capitalism to its limits in order to speed up its collapse. While portraying itself as a universalist politics that is not of benefit to women exclusively, xenofeminism expresses its dissatisfaction with current feminism’s focus on identity and micro-communities, insisting instead on a politics of affinities aimed at a large-scale social change by instrumentalizing the concept of *xenos* as a form of alienation. However, while for Marx the term “alienation” refers to worker’s deployment as the means to another’s end, for xenofeminism it refers to “the perpetual state of estrangement ensuring the fluidity of potentially liberating interactions between technology and society.”<sup>98</sup> Paradoxically, xenofeminists accept the view of alienation and technology proposed by Heideggerians, but they then simply invert it: precisely because technology can produce alienation rather than authenticity, it can eventually provide space for subversion. Although the correlation between estrangement and insurgent power is a crucial aspect of a xenological subjectivity, xenofeminism obscures the emancipatory potential of the anthropogenic subject by preserving the same dualism informing ecofeminism: the understanding of nature and technology as opposite dimensions. Through a dividing gesture that is reminiscent of what Harman critiques as onto-taxonomy, xenofeminism enlists only with nonhumans that are perceived as technological,<sup>99</sup> ignoring a number of potential revolutionary allies such as geological forces or nonhuman animals.<sup>100</sup>

This essay’s instrumentalization of the *xenos* and the *xenia* configures a xenological subjectivity that differs from the universal techno-anthropocentrism of xenofeminism, yet retains the subversive power that the latter concedes to alienation. Although it is often positioned as something to overcome – since in some circles it signals social anemia or dehumanization, a completely de-alienated world would bind us to familiar cognitive schemata in which the singularities of the unknown, the foreign, and the strange are rapidly simplified into naturalized categories of common sense. However, this essay’s instrumentalization of the *xenos* is neither reducible to simple otherness nor limited to human and technological forms of alienation. First, the notion of otherness is invoked here as an ingredient of the *xenia* and, second, its range covers a wider variety of beings: it certainly includes silicon-based, carbon-based, and chlorophyll-based actors, but also various forms of animality such as humans, fish, insects, bacteria, or mushrooms. This composite and non-hierarchical transversality is certainly shared with Braidotti’s posthumanism, but while the latter’s monism diminishes the *xenos*’s estrangement – since any form of alienation would interrupt Braidotti’s general ecology, OOO’s non-onto-taxonomical pluralism propels it, since objects’ ontography consists in veiling the real object while exposing its sensual objects.

Ontologically grounded in OOO’s non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, in dialogue with Braidotti’s project, and located within the Anthropocene, this essay proposes a xenological model of subjectivity based on a human subject that, despite its selective and intermittent exposure, is both participative and participated. Confederated with and composed of various zoo/techno/geo clusters, it is yet partly opaque to them, never fully revealed, never fully entangled, remaining in some measure entrenched within private chambers. This partial yet abyssal model of alienation fuels a form of desire that, in contrast with Braidotti’s ecological model, does not conceive desire as *potentia*,<sup>101</sup> as a relational plenitude opposing the negative principles of

<sup>97</sup> Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*.

<sup>98</sup> Konior, *Alien Aesthetics*, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Helen Hester’s terms “xeno-solidarity” and “xeno-hospitality” are good examples of this techno-anthropocentrism.

<sup>100</sup> The full deployment of this argument can be found in: Konior, *Alien Aesthetics*.

<sup>101</sup> From an OOO perspective, *Potentia* is seen as leaving actuality undetermined and ultimately uninteresting: “it reduces what is currently actual to the transient costume of an emergent process across time, and makes the real work happen outside actuality itself.” Harman, *Prince of Networks*, 129.

Lack and Law. It is a desire grounded instead in a constitutive opacity borne out of the essential closure of the self and the other, an opacity nurturing a fantasy of syntonization rather than of epistemic revelation, a fantasy that is not fulfilled by the promise of a potential arrival, but by the immediate yet enigmatic presence of a foreigner whose strangeness is already here, installed at home, although selectively and intermittently exposed. Thus, a “fantasy [that is] a direct response to the withdrawal of objects or others”<sup>102</sup> and propelled by an opacity holding an emancipatory dimension, a space for subversion that is hardly conceivable within the radical relationality of a generalized ecology.

Since this model of subjectivity is conducted in conversation with Braidotti’s project, her categorization of the posthuman subjectivity according to the self, the others, and the world is repeated here. Despite each level being individually addressed, these categories appear as different conjugations of the aforementioned tension between an abyssal yet emancipatory retreat and an operative yet limited exposure. Within this context, the *self* comes to light as a composite agency whose singularity emerges from a persevering oneness not fully accessible even by introspection; the *other* takes shape as an alluring form of estrangement capable of detotalizing the subject’s given condition while syntonizing with some of its rhythms, patterns, and behaviours; and the *world* is cancelled as an ecological entity on which all beings are lodged, pluralizing instead into bubbling collectives that are always limited and in progress.

#### 4.1 The self: Composite agency

Within the mainstream legacy of the poststructuralist feminist philosophy in which Braidotti inscribes herself, the unitary conception of the self “is always equated with totality, totalitarianism, and imperialistic universalism.”<sup>103</sup> Without abandoning this feminist legacy as a whole, a xenological subjectivity differs from Braidotti’s premise, according to which the nonunitary nature of the self is the key guarantor of the latter’s inherent mobility, transformability, and instability. Although the core of this statement is quite convincing when observed in the light of a tradition that, ranging from Cartesianism to positivism, identifies the unity of the self with the hegemonic and sovereign “I” of a soliloquy, this act of dethronement holds its own lacunae: How to account for the continuity that underlies and enables subjective transformation? How to account for a topos of critique and a locus of resistance without the persistence of a certain oneness gluing together that unstable and fragmented “I”? How to establish forms of hospitality (*xenia*) without an instance (*xenos*) that continues to be there as a possibility of critical distance?

The acknowledgment of the Anthropocene and its multispecies forms of differing togetherness reinforces a key contribution of poststructural feminism: the awareness that enlivening the solid oneness of the Cartesian self is not an option. The Anthropocene reveals the extent to which the self is associated, traversed, and constituted by a vast plurality of clusters, hybrid composites invoking various zoe/geo/techno regimes, and approached by Braidotti as forms of transversal multiplicity. Bodyhacking processes of augmentation emblematically represent the compositionality of today’s self: the cases of Neil Harbisson – who has an antenna implanted in his head giving him the synaesthetic sense of “hearing color”<sup>104</sup> – or Moon Ribas – who has a sensor in her arm letting her detect earthquakes<sup>105</sup> – expand the sensibility of the human by intimately connecting it to technological entities. The injection of horse tissue immunoglobulin within the human body of Marion Laval-Jeantet<sup>106</sup> or the chlorophyll-blood running through the veins of Quimera

<sup>102</sup> Bryant, *Democracy of Objects*, 189.

<sup>103</sup> Kolozova, *Cut of the Real*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> More information on this case can be found in Harbisson’s lecture in TEDGlobal in 2012, which is available at [https://www.ted.com/talks/neil\\_harbisson\\_i\\_listen\\_to\\_color](https://www.ted.com/talks/neil_harbisson_i_listen_to_color).

<sup>105</sup> More information on this case can be found in Ribas’ lecture in TEDx Manchester in 2019, which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O92DEeTcTQg>.

<sup>106</sup> More information on this case can be found in the following book: Laval-Jeantet and Mangin, *Art Orienté Objet*.



Rosa<sup>107</sup> and their photosynthesizing tattoos also promote a composite form of subjectivity: the human appears as a socio-techno-animal able to self-redefine its contours and capacities, conceiving its own self as a trans-species platform for public interventions in which the *xenos*' singularity is not watered down within the host's domicile. It is instead promoted through permutable forms of hospitality whose transversality can be read in continuation with feminism and decolonialism's abolition of essentialisms based on gender, class, sexuality, origin, etc. With the Anthropocene as a background, the challenge of a xenological form of selfness is thus to compatibilize the idea of a self's continuity with that of Braidotti's transversal multiplicity. Is it possible to conceive a self according to some form of unity that is not totalitarian, a self of auto-transformative oneness, of identitarian mobility, in short, multiple in one sense yet an instance of oneness in another?<sup>108</sup>

A xenological subjectivity assumes the premise affirming that a composite form of selfness does not necessarily entail a fragmented and scattered "I," which, like Braidotti's self, is then timidly "glued" by "his/her expressions, acts and interactions with others and by the powers of remembrance."<sup>109</sup> The oneness of the xenological self posits an "I" whose unity is neither grounded on a solid, accessible, and immutable substance – incapable of accounting for the transversal variability of the self – nor on a mere "organization of differences" – incapable of investing the self as a site of revolt, since its truth is derived from that of its components or of its context. Instead, since thinking beyond relations implies thinking in terms of singularities, the unity of this self appears, in resonance with OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, as a form of irreducible yet mutable specificity – a form of *thisness* operating as an instance of continuity behind the changes, and which claims possession of these changes as its own. The fact that this self has causal antecedents is composed of various forms of zoe/geo/techno entities or is connected to subpersonal and contextual processes does not mean that only those elements can have independent reality. In brief: in contrast with Braidotti's subjectivity and as occurs with Harman's objects, the fact that the self is a compound does not preclude the possibility of an emergent unity, understood as perseverance of oneness and qualitative singularity. This interplay of unity and nonunity, present as well in the simultaneously collective and individual nature of the Greek *xenia*, is made possible by the fact that both rest on different ontological levels that do not exhaust each other's autonomy, constituting instead a *composite agency*.

Defining "agency" as "goal-directedness and self-governed activity,"<sup>110</sup> biologists define composite agency as a form of agency being established via the symbiosis of different kinds of free-living agents or sub-agents.<sup>111</sup> These symbiotic relations operate through the forms of hospitality characteristic of the *xenia*, since by no means do they melt both specificities, but instead are promoted by them. Although a biological agent is a unified being that could theoretically exist without subagents, living agents develop composite organizations because the functions of living systems are diverse and generally cannot all be performed by a single agent, thus requiring the cooperation of subagents to which to "outsource" certain tasks. However, the emerging unified organism does not integrate its components further because a composite organization tends to make functions more efficient and robust while supporting the adaptability of organisms at various spatio-temporal scales. A single agent has only a few options for modifying its actions, whereas composite agents have many subagents available for modification. In light of this composite model and in line with Harman's compounds, the transversal multiplicity of the xenological self does not entail any reduction to its components (undermining) or context (overmining). It is proposed instead as a mode of non-unitariness within a concept of self that, in its ultimate instance, is unitary: a composite self whose unity *emerges* from (although is not fragmentable into) various sub-agencies. As literarily illustrated by the totemic incorporation of a cockroach by Clarice Lispector's protagonist in *The Passion According to G.H.*, the human self becomes an irreducible site of dynamic interaction: it is a mestizo and colourful *locus* traversed by various zoo/techno/geo regimes that do not imply the cancelation of the emerging self's individual and unified form of agency.

<sup>107</sup> More information on this case can be found in the web of the artists: <https://quimerarosa.net>.

<sup>108</sup> Kolozova, *Cut of the Real*, 19.

<sup>109</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 138.

<sup>110</sup> Sharov, "Composite Agency," 157–78.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

However, for the same reason according to which the self cannot be exhausted in subpersonal or contextual processes, a xenological model of subjectivity assumes that self-cogitation does not exhaust it either: the self is not absolutely exposed either to its own consciousness or to any other entity, being thus other to itself. This is a necessary outcome of OOO's ontological grounding, which implies that introspection does not provide us better epistemic access to the inner self than the access we have to the outer other. However, "from the fact that a pure, direct gaze at ourselves is impossible it does not follow that the self does not exist,"<sup>112</sup> since from OOO's perspective the latter's inscrutability is necessary to account for change. Instead, the self's inscrutability questions the dualism between first-person/third-person experience and its differentiation in terms of desire, since from an epistemological lens both of them involve a view from outside: within a xenological subjectivity, the *xenos*, that is the other being hosted, lies both outside *of* me and outside *in* me.

## 4.2 The others: Remote intimacies

In its rejection of modern dualisms, the shift towards nature, life, and affect of poststructuralist feminist debates has considered the notions of other and self in continuity rather than in opposition.<sup>113</sup> Without dismissing the denunciation of certain dualisms, a xenological form of subjectivity rejects the premise according to which every distinction implies a hierarchical dualism. Although the core of this statement is worth retaining since, as Braidotti claims, the division between self and other has often been used to marginalize various human and non-human others, the liquefaction of distinctions within one big plateau has its own lacunae: How can subjects critically respond to the dominant reality if they are inherently melted with it? How can pacts of hospitality (*xenia*) transcending the identitarian and folkloric frameworks be established if there is not an instance of difference (*xenos*) granting the possibility of irreducible distinction?

Far from the vampirized mark of alterity from classical philosophy or the fetishized and necessarily othered other of deconstruction, a xenological subjectivity conceives the (non)human other as a *xenos*, a guest-friend whose temporary accommodation in alien environments does not exhaust its singularity, which is instead intermittently and selectively unveiled. The xenological other of the Anthropocene is thus not analogous to Braidotti's entirely exposed other, but neither is it interchangeable with Derrida's "absolute arrivant," Levinas' "ineffable other," or any romanticized form of radical otherness. Within a xenological subjectivity, the other is certainly conceived as a foreign agent, speaking its own tongue and keyed to its own purposes, but its strangeness regarding the human subject lies precisely in the fact that the other is not necessarily void of humanity: the cornerstone of the blend of fear and attraction produced by agents such as global warming, voice assistants, planetary pandemics, territorial bushfires, transgenic plants, or AI chatbots lies in their bewildering mixture of identity and alterity regarding the human being. Despite their zoo/techno/geo vocation and apparent indifference to the flourishing of any human project, the anthropos is an unexpected yet decisive ingredient in them. Consequently, although not being entirely exposed, as occurs within Hörls' generalized ecology, the *xenos* is not simply a total alien, since its estrangement lies in the possibility of an enigmatic proximity with the human subject, in the awareness of an intimate but strange familiarity distancing the *xenos* from any ungraspable form of complete otherness. The recent synthesization of *xenobots* exemplifies this phenomenon; automatically designed by the evolutionary algorithms of the supercomputer Deep Green, these synthetic life-forms combine skin and heart muscle cells coming from the African frog *xenopus laevis* in order to constitute living robots capable of perception, self-reparation, adaptation, and cooperation. These manufactured micro-organisms are thus automatically designed by computational processes of artificial intelligence and then synthetically

<sup>112</sup> Harman, "The Problem with Metzinger," 25.

<sup>113</sup> Rosa et al., "Introduction," 2.

deployed in life. Consequently, Xenobots appear as radical forms of alterity in relation to (non)human life, since their otherness defies modern epistemic taxonomies based on species, sex, or race while challenging our Judeo-Christian concept of life. However, despite this significant divergence, xenobots are surprisingly close to humans: in contrast with other technologies, their biocompatibility with human cells permits them to bypass the human immune response, making them excellent candidates to treat various human diseases by navigating through our veins. This uncanny mixture of alienating strangeness and operative intimacy constitutes the cornerstone of questions of power and desire regarding the xenological other: the *xenos* can be incorporated, manipulated, addressed, craved, seduced, and emplaced, but it would be a mistake to imagine that it is known: lining up with OOO's withdrawal and in contrast with Braidotti's posthumanism, the core of its distinction remains ungraspable.

With the Anthropocene as a background, the challenge of a xenological form of otherness is thus to compatibilize the irreducible distinction of the *xenos* with operative forms of interaction that do not hierarchize it under pre-established taxonomies: Is it possible to conceive the other according to some form of estrangement that does not reterritorialize it under excluding categories such as gender, origin, class, age, or species? Is it possible to acknowledge the other as a form of alienating proximity and remote intimacy – in short, alien in one sense yet an instance of familiarity in another?

A xenological subjectivity is premised on the idea that there is certainly much more pluralism than the more rigid versions of most dualisms and taxonomies imply, but that does not take away our ability to differentiate. However, this differentiation does not gradually slide along the relational rails of Braidotti's neo-Spinozistic monism; rather, it jumps among the cut-outs of OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism. In contrast with the former's continuity, the latter's discreteness propels a form of estrangement that, as occurs with the *xenia*, acknowledges that what *could be* is foreign to *what is*, and thus finds in the *xenos*' opacity not just a source of desire, but also the possibility to detotalize our given condition. Opposing certain vectors that, grounded in these forces of estrangement, have been put in service for unjust ends by fuelling processes of exclusion and marginalization, a xenological form of subjectivity sees in the *xenos*' estrangement the possibility of collectively alienating ourselves from given pragmatic and cognitive constraints. Consequently, and in contrast with Braidotti's ecological model, the alienating vocation of a xenological otherness aims at undoing pre-established hierarchies “in order to experiment and ramify pathways with and for other structures of cohabitation.”<sup>114</sup>

However, in order to instrumentalize the generative character of this form of alienation within the context of the Anthropocene, the pacts of hospitality established with the *xenos* cannot capitalize on Braidotti's empathy.<sup>115</sup> As Vinciane Despret notes,<sup>116</sup> empathy nurtures a relation subject–object in which the subject, who feels empathy, is certainly transformed, but in an extremely local manner, since, in contrast with the *xenia*, it does not stimulate the permutation of the object's role in order to activate itself as a subject. By placing oneself in the other's position, the empathic subject ends up totalizing the other by claiming that the latter has been understood, that what stands under it has been disclosed: the *xenos* is finally known, its *terra incognita* is irrevocably occupied and colonized. Instead, and in consonance with OOO's withdrawal, the forms of hospitality arising from the *xenia* retain the *xenos*' specificity and its force of estrangement without draining its singularity through an epistemic squeezing that would water down its emancipatory power. A xenological subjectivity does not establish hospitable modes of coexistence with the other in order to understand what it means to be *as the xenos*, but to understand what it means to be *with the xenos*. This semantic nuance is crucial within the context of the Anthropocene. It shifts the focus from the notion of empathy and its phantasy for potential epistemic occupation to the notion of *syntonization* and its phantasy for present operative complicities: syntonization as the ephemeral but productive tuning of rhythms and sounds; syntonization as the momentary and eventually systemic concordance of voices; syntonization as the transitory, intense, and subtle calibration of tones and behavioural patterns;

<sup>114</sup> Reed, “Synthesis and Constructive Alienation,” 2.

<sup>115</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 78.

<sup>116</sup> Despret, “The Body We Car For,” 128.

syntonization as a form of hospitality that, without invoking the universality of a common ground, looks for selective and intermittent confederations among self and other. The various frictions, overlappings, and engagements produced within their zoo/techno/geo regimes most certainly trace them, magnetize them, deviate them; they invest them with new abilities and limitations of more or less significance and capability to disclose hospitable modes of trans-gender, trans-species, trans-sex, and trans-ethnic cohabitation. However, the other's singularity is by no means entirely exposed, remaining instead a locus of exteriority that is illustrative of its *worldlessness*.

### 4.3 The world: Bubbling collectives

Within poststructuralist feminism, radicalizing the ecological integration of the subject within a shared world implies its “merging with the web of non-human forces framing him/her [within] the cosmos as a whole.”<sup>117</sup> Without abandoning the attention that ecological thinking directs towards the current environmental catastrophe, a xenological subjectivity differs from Braidotti's premise, according to which there is an entity called “world” to which all beings are connected as a whole. Although the trans-species register of this relationality is worth retaining since it dismantles *a priori* hierarchies while acknowledging the various spatio-temporal scales at which humans operate, it also entails some difficulties: How do we create and enlarge radical spaces of non-consent if all beings are fully immersed within the same big plateau? How do we account for a locus of exteriority if there is an ecology, an *oikia*, a home, an immense house as big as the whole planet claiming to magnetize all that exists? How do we establish pacts of hospitality (*xenia*) with an instance of alterity (*xenos*) that is already and always at home?

Poststructural feminism has addressed the transversal miscegenations propelled by the Anthropocene by enlarging the semantic space of the term ecology. While keeping its etymological reference to the notion of home, the restricted ecology of nature generalized in the 1970s has transmuted today into Hörl's “general ecology” by including the notion of the technosphere: the “entire formation and global cooperation of natural and non-natural, human and nonhuman actors and forces – from all kinds of flows of energy and communication, via processes of production, to bureaucracies, states, and human beings.”<sup>118</sup> Within this context, the radical relationality of Braidotti's ecological model accounts for today's subjectivity through a blending gesture: the full immersion of both the self and the other within a super-entity called the world, an “organic unity or whole in which all objects interrelate with one another as a compossible system.”<sup>119</sup> This approach reveals a lesson that, as also argued by Braidotti and in concomitance with OOO's non-ontotaxonomical approach, is worth retaining in order to rethink the notion of subjectivity within the context of the Anthropocene: the acknowledgement of the ontological equality held by all existing beings – whatever their form may be – evidences “the violence and the hierarchical thinking that results from human arrogance and the assumption of transcendental human exceptionalism.”<sup>120</sup> However, although Braidotti's ecological model propels a form of subjectivity relating to the world in a non-hierarchical manner – and thus less destructive towards our human and non-human neighbours, it does so by ordering all its members under one big plateau. Since, due to its etymology, the term ecology is inhabited by the metaphor of the house, a more ecological approach to the earth generally evokes the image of an enormous house lodging all existing beings as if they belonged to one big family. In its association with the notion of home, this image implies a common territory, an overarching disposition and general temperament in which all beings participate. It is under this full exposure that the ecological subject of Braidotti's posthumanism is constituted: it acquires an *oikia* and, consequently, a *mundus ordo*, a world. However, this position has a cost: the loss of any

<sup>117</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 136.

<sup>118</sup> Hörl, “Introduction to General Ecology,” 10.

<sup>119</sup> Bryant, *Democracy of Objects*, 275.

<sup>120</sup> Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 94.

exteriority, the incapacity to leave home, to exist and live in the outdoors, to have a political, social, non-domestic life. By assuming the existence of a world, the posthuman subject remains trapped at home and can only be there; its ecological state is a state of quarantine for the course of its entire existence.<sup>121</sup>

Within the context of the Anthropocene, the challenge of a worldless subjectivity consists thus in enabling a non-hierarchical account of beings and transversal forms of interaction without invoking a common *oikia*. Is it possible to configure a model of subjectivity within the Anthropocene conceiving the self and its relation to the others without conflating them under one big plateau? Is it possible for the subject of the Anthropocene to assume a subjectivity that denies its oneness with everything else while producing and being inscribed within various frameworks of reference?

Instead of assuming the ecological principle according to which all beings are related to each other as if they were members of an immense house constituting the world, the xenological subject conceives itself and its others in light of an OOO's premise: reality is not-one, but is replete with intelligible and unintelligible discontinuities. In brief, there is no world-system because the world does not exist. Along with the various ontological arguments proving this point,<sup>122</sup> the inexistence of a world is crucial for conceiving a model of subjectivity within the Anthropocene. Two reasons are crucial here.

First, a worldless subjectivity allows for establishing a logic of transversal collectives that, in contrast with the agglutinative concept of world, accounts for the fact that, as occurs in OOO, not all entities relate to all others: many beings fall entirely outside certain collectives, while these collectives are completely oblivious to them.<sup>123</sup> This is crucial in order to assume the process of human decentralization characteristic of the Anthropocene; it makes it possible to account for the fact that human presence or absence is an irrelevant question in relation to most cosmic occurrences. Consequently, in its worldless condition, a xenological form of human subjectivity conceives itself and the other as being the "host" – in its twofold meaning of guest and host, but also in its proximity to the term ghost – of multispecies collectives that do not necessarily establish associations with all entities, since they can configure entirely different universes with no resonances between them.

Second, the inexistence of the world manifests that collectives are a work in progress, that they must be produced: there is no given environment as a present-at-hand milieu in which subjects exist; rather, they are impelled to *compose* their own context. This is relevant within the context of the Anthropocene because it manifests the impact that the human might have in the multi-species collectives in which it participates, while rejecting the idealization of a given nature under expressions such as green ecology or mother nature. Consequently, in its worldless condition, a xenological subjectivity compels its subject to actively intervene in order to constitute the transversal collectives in which it coexists, rather than merely adapting itself to a given condition.

Within a xenological model of subjectivity, the subject no longer has the possibility to invoke an organic and harmonious *oikia*, a general ecology providing the reassuring comfort of emerging from a common ground, an immense home in which each entity has its proper place. Such a conception of being would foreclose the strangeness of the *xenos* while rendering superfluous any *xenia*, since all entities are already and forever "at home." The fact that collectives are not entirely open to all other collectives but only to some of them aligns with a xenological model in which the subject's exposure is not entirely exposed, but intermittent and selective. However, the *xenos*, the strange strangers, are not simply outside the world or conforming the world. Rather, as Harman has beautifully put it with the expression "carpentry of things," they are themselves constituents of various collectives whose span is always limited. Thus, rather than being ecologically lodged in the world, the xenological subject forges bubbling collectives in which not all entities relate to all others, permitting the rise of new collectives while welcoming new and unheard of strange strangers.

<sup>121</sup> Coccia, "Reversing the New Global Monasticism," 2.

<sup>122</sup> From an OOO perspective, Timothy Morton in *Ecology Without Nature* and Levi Bryant in *Democracy of Objects* provide further justifications for this position.

<sup>123</sup> Bryant, *Democracy of Objects*, 275.

Under the narrative imaginary of the *xeno* and within the context of the Anthropocene, the association between Braidotti's posthuman model and OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism propels a xenological subjectivity traversed by significant divergences and decisive confluences regarding Braidotti's subjectivity. Through its intermittent and selective exposure, the xenological subject marks its sharpest contrast with Braidotti's project, since it is in this point that the former clearly departs from the monism fuelling Braidotti's generalized ecology. Grounded in OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, this discretization frames the form according to which the xenological subject conceives its subjectivity, that is its conception of itself and its relations to its others and the world. While the self resists full accessibility even by introspection and the other appears as an alluring form of estrangement capable of detotalizing the subject's given condition, the world and its agglutinative vocation pluralize into finite bubbling collectives. Narratively woven through the figure of the *xeno*, the threefold modulation of this subject's intermittent and selective exposure becomes the instrument for overcoming the limitations that the posthuman project inherits from its alliance with a neo-Spinozistic form of monism. Within a xenological context and in concomitance with OOO's withdrawal, the ontological possibilities of finitude, agency, and change no longer remain as overshadowed or unexplained questions; by always retaining something in reserve, the xenological subject claims its quantitative and qualitative discreteness (finitude), its resistance to external and internal totalization (agency), and its possibility to turn its being into something new or unheard of (change). By instrumentalizing these elements, the xenological subject is capable of interrupting the full exposure of Braidotti's model, holding the possibility of breaking away from the context in which it is inscribed and thus setting the table for establishing itself both as locus of resistance and a topos of critique.

However, by no means does this ontological *decalage* regarding Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity aim at the latter's erasure. Conversely, it retains and nourishes the transversal, composite, and locative dimensions of Braidotti's project, since they efficiently account for the differing togetherness characteristic of the Anthropocene. Thus, despite invoking a non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, a xenological approach to the self and its relations to the other and the world is grounded in decisive contributions from Braidotti's posthuman endeavour. The self is also conceived as a transversal multiplicity – accounting thus for the composite variety of beings and *zoe/geo/techno* regimes conforming the human subject today, and its relationality with the others and the world capitalizes, as in Braidotti, on a non-hierarchized approach unconcerned in advance with nature–culture distinctions – accounting thus for the critical detachment from both humanism and anthropocentrism demanded by the Anthropocene.

Within this context and accordingly scaled, pluralized, and expanded, the figure of the *xeno* provides a narrative imaginary that is not merely illustrative or ornamental: it underlines the urgency of conceiving the contemporaneous subject as being both host and guest, to invent and design transversal and multidimensional pacts of hospitality enabling us to live well together, to assume the major role that non-human entities play in our socio-political sphere. But it also zeros in on something entirely unattended by Braidotti's project: the need to nourish and promote the estrangement of the *xenos*, of the other being hosted, but also of the other in which one is being hosted. A demand for alienation that does not aim to marginalize, folklorize, or aestheticize the given condition, but to detotalize it, to remind us that what *could be* is necessarily foreign, although not absolutely other, to *what is*.

## 5 Conclusion

By rearticulating key aspects of Braidotti's posthuman subject through OOO's non-onto-taxonomical pluralism, the xenological form of subjectivity presented here not only confirms OOO's capacity to significantly engage with human subjectivity but also manifests the benefits that might emerge from establishing alliances between allegedly antithetical philosophical positions.

In its allusion to the notions of *xenos* and *xenia*, the instrumentalization of the term *xeno* narratively propels a form of subjectivity that is no longer ecological: the xenological subject does not conceive itself as inhabiting a permanent, uninterrupted, and immense house in which all beings are relationally entangled,

but as being immersed in selective and intermittent pacts of hospitality involving human and non-human beings that are never entirely exposed.

By advocating for a promiscuous overlap of habitational patterns void of any general *oikia*, this scenario might lead us to reconsider the notion of home, the design of domestic spaces within an architectural environment. Constructed of literal and metaphorical walls, the home has conventionally made sense as an architectural apparatus through a foundational gesture; the erection of divisory boundaries between interior and exterior has become the instance of separating order and chaos, *civitas* and *barbarie*, safety and peril, culture and nature, humans and non-humans. However, if the notion of *xenia* is scaled up and expanded to all beings and its overlapping *zoe/geo/techno* regimes, the foundational role of the limit within an architectural domestic environment might need to be re-examined. Although the production of spaces within spaces characterizes the specificity of architectural practice<sup>124</sup> and thus grants a pivotal position to the limit, when framing the habitation of the xenological subject, the limit's role might not be reduced to that of being a mere divisory membrane; architectural and urban designers might instead invest the limit with other roles, such as that of holding flesh together-in-its-difference or that of being constituted as a liminal space in itself.

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