Feminism's Critique of the Anthropocene

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The Anthropocene is the anticipated new designation for our current geological epoch, in which human activity has decisively altered earth ecosystems, global natural processes, and the geological record. This chapter investigates the relationship between feminist thinking and the Anthropocene, establishing the gendered dimensions of environmental crisis, and examining intersections between ecological and feminist scholarship. By taking the Anthropocene as a central and guiding provocation, existing and emergent potentials within ecological thinking can be brought together with diverse (and often contradictory) traditions and tendencies in modern academic feminism. What Anthropocene feminism might achieve is an emboldened reorientation of ecological concerns within gender justice struggles.

Ecofeminist scholars have long critiqued feminised constructions of 'Nature', and the masculinism of capitalism, technology, science, and the environmental movement itself. This cultural work can be seen as part of a long history of women-led environmentalism, which has frequently intersected with wider gender-rights campaigns, including reproductive rights and health, autonomy and equality in work and the home, representation and participation in the public sphere, and feminist and queer critiques of militarisation and colonialism. As this chapter hopes to show, a feminist critique of the Anthropocene can—and must—be both human and eco-centered. While a false division between the human and 'nature' has created the conditions for the Anthropocene, responding in any meaningful way to the crisis of the present demands a recognition that ecology has shaped and will determine the success of all rights and justice struggles, gender-based and otherwise.

In significant ways, this deviates from a tendency in early ecocriticism to sideline civil rights and social justice critiques, in favour of a more 'ecocentric' approach to environmental problems. In the introduction to the *Green Studies Reader*, Laurence Coupe ranks green literary activism as 'the most radical of all critical

activities', which 'must surely rank as even more important' than readings focused on class, race and gender, as 'with no planet, there is no future, and so no other battles to be fought.[1] In a similar vein, Western-led environmental and conservation movements have often been rightly criticised for pursuing neocolonial, classist agendas in their approach to land and species protection in postcolonial countries. In response, this chapter considers how the 'Anthropocene' may be used to investigate and further intersectional ecological activisms which seek to improve the material conditions of women's lives, recognising that there can be no gender justice without social and environmental justice.

The Anthropocene

In cultural scholarship, the Anthropocene offers a potent tool to think with, and a conceptual means of readdressing the relationship between humanity and nature. It is also a scientific reality, demanding a response for ecological survival and environmental, social and multispecies justice. Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer proposed the neologism in 2000, although terms like Anthroposphere and Homogenocene have been used since the 1980s.[2] In 2009, the Anthropocene Working Group of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy (AWG) was established to debate the scientific acceptance of the term. In 2016, they proposed that the 'Anthropocene' is a 'geologically real' epoch, rather than a longer era or period. This brings an end to the Holocene, which began around 11,700 years ago at the end of the last glacial period.

Justification for the change of epoch comes from diverse geoscientific fields. In geomorphology, the Anthropocene marks the period in which 'mining, construction, and deforestation [have] come to surpass the effects of nonhuman forces,' leaving marks as vast and discernible as those produced by geological processes of erosion and eruption.[3] This places particular emphasis on changes to the earth's crust and upper mantle, although the AWG also addresses anthropogenic changes to the biosphere,

[1] L. Coupe, 'General Introduction' in Coupe (ed.), *The Green Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 5.
[2] J. Schneiderman, 'The Anthropocene Controversy' in R. Grusin (ed.) *Anthropocene Feminisms* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 170.
[3] R. Grusin, 'Introduction: Anthropocene Feminism: An Experiment in Collaborative Theorizing' in Grusin (ed.), *Anthropocene Feminisms*, p. viii.

atmosphere and hydrosphere.[4] The AWG cites large-scale perturbations in cycles of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and other elements, the inception of significant change to global climate and sea level', as well as plutonium fallout from atomic bombs, and residues of plastic, aluminium, and concrete in the earth's strata.[5] Human societies have also radically altered earth biota. Shifts between geological epochs, era and periods often mark extinction events—for example, the end of the Ordovocian period coincided with the first mass extinction (443 million years ago), while the close of the Paleozoic (251 million years ago) marks the onset of the 'Great Dying', when around 86 per cent of species were wiped out in under 2 million years.[6] The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggests that the earth is now experiencing a major extinction event in which around 30 per cent of species on earth are at risk, a consequence of anthropogenic issues including urban expansion, changing temperatures, habitat collapse and ocean acidification.[7] The 'Anthropocene' therefore observes the catastrophic damage done to life on earth by human societies, as well as irreversible geological changes.

The need for a change of epoch is no longer in doubt, but when did the Anthropocene start? Archaeological traces of humanity can be found prior to the Holocene, but suggested start dates for the 'age of man' mark the first human use of fire, the augmentation of agricultural economies, the industrial revolution, the proliferation of nuclear weaponry, or the global use of chemical pesticides. The AWG proposes that the Anthropocene proper begins in 1950, although its roots lie in the 'extensive and roughly synchronous worldwide changes to the earth system in terms of greenhouse gas levels, ocean acidification, deforestation, and biodiversity deterioration', which began around 1750 with the Industrial Revolution.[8]

What's in a Name?

Arguments for the Anthropocene, particularly from the sciences, start from the premise that something has materially changed in the geological record, which demands taxonomisation and study. This largely avoids political questions around naming: a new epoch has begun, it demands a title, and the Anthropocene seems to fit the bill.

[4] Schneiderman, 'Anthropocene Controversy', p. 171.
[5] 'Media Note: Anthropocene Working Group (AWG)', *University of Leicester* (August 2016).
[6] Schneiderman, 'Anthropocene Controversy', p. 180.
[7] From the IPCC report: J. J. McCarthy et al, *Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation, Vulnerability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 238-9.
[8] Schneiderman, 'Anthropocene Controversy', p. 190.

However, as earth sciences professor Jill Schneiderman points out, naming conventions, much like scientific practice, have never been objective, ahistorical or apolitical. In feminist-standpoint theory, Sandra Harding questions the neutrality of masculinist traditions of scientific knowledge and the patriarchal assumptions that underpin it, while Donna Haraway demonstrates the situated quality of knowledge, challenging the assumption that the objective observer offers a value-neutral perspective.[9] The scientist is not a rational, detached, 'conquering gaze from nowhere': s/he is affected by and affective of the phenomena s/he observes. The naming of the Anthropocene therefore calls for cultural, as well as scientific, deliberation. Indeed, it is arguably within culture and the humanities that the Anthropocene has spurred the most vigorous discussion, making calls for an 'Anthropocene' marker as much an activist and philosophical as a scientific enterprise. The change of *cene* is not merely the bland statement of geological fact: it is a political provocation which determines culpability and demands a meaningful reaction in terms of behavioural change on macro and micro levels.

As a critical intervention in the ecological crisis, placing *Anthropos* at the heart of the new designation registers the damage on a epic and epochal scale, recognising the absolute entwining of human and natural history—a movement which began with Darwinian science, and has been a rallying cry within the ecohumanities since their rise in the late-twentieth century. However, 'human' history, like the *Anthropos*, is not for, or about, everyone. The 'Anthro' of the Anthropocene addresses a universalised masculine position, located somewhere in the Global North in conditions of middle-class affluence and capitalist consumption. The 'Anthropocene' constructs a sense of 'man as such, the human as such,' which 'emerges from an inscriptive technological trajectory that does not include all humans, and certainly not all life.'[10] This evades the ways in which wealth, like climate change, is unevenly and unequally distributed across the industrialised and postcolonial world, as well as erasing differentials including race, gender and culture. Resistance to the false universals of the 'Anthropocene' presents meaningful and valuable alternatives of which science should take note.

Alternative titles abound. The Plantationocene and Capitalocene aim to better target blame on colonialism and capitalism, which turned ecology and the human into

[9] See: S. Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).
[10] C. Colebrook, 'We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene,' in *Anthropocene Feminism*, p. 8.

resources and commodities on a global scale, homogenising earth biota in unprecedented ways and precipitating a fluctuation in levels of CO2, amongst their numerous other effects.[11] These titles also draw attention to the origins of the Anthropocene in the late-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century, with the Imperial expansion of European states into the New World, the laying of vast plantations across the Americas and the Indian subcontinent, and the mass transportation and enslavement of African peoples to work them. Fuelled by ideologies of 'beneficent' cultivation and racial superiority, colonial agriculture and biology augmented the military, financial and cultural hegemony of European nations, laying the foundations of modern capitalism and creating immediate, deep-rooted and enduring human catastrophes, social injustices, and ecological crises across the world.[12] While the 'Plantationocene' and 'Capitalocene' attest to these points of origin, the Anthropocene, with its almost heroic and ahistorical construction of the species 'Man', instead lays blame equally across all economic and agricultural systems and cultures, erasing the specificity of these historical relations and their consequences.

Alternative names such as the Corporatcene and Androcene also lay blame, specifically on the toxic combination of globalised corporate hegemony and possessive individualist masculinities. Centering gender difference within the new geological marker is as accurate as centering capitalism and colonialism: as Clare Colebrook puts it, 'if there had not been sexual difference in its narrowest sense (man and woman), there could not have been the nuclear family, division of labor, and then industrialism'.[13]However, the relationship between cultural and scientific constructions of sex and gender in the Anthropocene calls for some careful reflection. While organic life produces forms of sexual difference beyond the binary of 'male' and 'female', Colebrook argues that the production of binary gender difference in heterosocial cultures relies 'on the same processes of "civilisation" that generated the Anthropocene' (p. 8). These differences, of course, predate capitalism. In their work on gender abolition, Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr describe gender as a differential—

[11] The Plantationocene was collectively generated by academics at the University of Aarhus in October 2014. See: D. Haraway, A. Tsing, N. Ishikawa, G. Scott, K. Olwig and N. Bubandt, 'Anthropologists are Talking - About the Anthropocene,' *Ethnos* (2015), pp. 1-30. Capitalocene was suggested by Andreas Malm in 2009, see: D. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 206, fn. 6.

[12] See: R. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); R. Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (London: Penguin, 2014).

[13] Colebrook, 'We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene', p. 8.

rather than a monolithic difference—which capitalism seizes upon and transforms, before it becomes 'itself the producer of the gender difference' for its own ends.[14] Informed by the Wages for Housework movement and Italian Marxist feminisms of the 1970s, they propose that the 'subjugation of women to the role of housewife who cares and feeds and otherwise maintains labor power, and provides this service without any direct wage … is a necessary condition for capital's capacity to extract surplus value toward the accumulation on a world scale' (p. 153). A Marxist ecological feminism demands, they argue, a gender abolitionist position, as only by 'annihilating the value-productive differential' of gender can ecofeminists achieve 'the making-inoperable of capital with the annihilation of an unpaid and gendered domestic sphere' (p. 155).

While critical alternatives to the Anthropocene draw attention to the relations and forces which have produced it, other critics have attempted to disrupt those relations by proposing alternative terms which might move us beyond the conditions and constraints of the Anthropocene. Physicist and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva proposes the 'Ecocene' as a way of avoiding the false universals of the Anthropocene, and also promoting a kind of cosmic humanism which will 'embrace our identity as one humanity' in the task of addressing the damage. 'The Ecocene', she states,

> is informed by the increasing awareness among humans of the ecological processes of the earth that shape and sustain life. We are part of the earth community. We are earth citizens. The earth has rights, and we have a duty to care for the earth, all her beings, and our fellow humans. The Ecocene asks us to correct and transcend the mistakes, false assumptions, and limitations that have brought us to the precipice of ecological collapse.[15]

While many theorists resist gendering 'Mother Earth', Shiva looks to the Sankrit gendering of '*Prakriti*', a 'She' who 'is the creative force of the universe.'[16] This is an uncomfortable premise for ecofeminists from European philosophical traditions. Colonial and misogynist discourses were, as Val Plumwood influentially determined, founded on a notion of passive nature and the inferiorisation of 'nature and women—of nature-as-body, of nature-as-passion or emotion, of nature as the pre-symbolic, of nature-as-primitive, of nature-as-animal and of nature as the feminine.'[17] As such, the

[14] J. Clover and J. Spahr, 'Gender Abolition and Ecotone War', in *Anthropocene Feminism*, p. 154.
[15] V. Shiva, 'The New Nature', *Boston Review* (11 January 2016).
[16] ibid.
[17] V. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 21.

Mother earth gendering favoured by Shiva is not easy to translate into modernist academic thought—feminist or otherwise. Certainly, ecofeminists have long struggled to recast 'nature' as other than 'woman', while the flourishing of ecoqueer thought and creative practice has deconstructed 'natural' gender and sexual identities, experimenting with multifarious 'eco-genders, eco-sexualities and the eco-erotic.'[18] It remains to be seen whether these trajectories in queer ecological thought might co-exist with an ecofeminism which genders nature in ways beyond the Western binary. Certainly, Shiva's approach recognises that '[m]ost nonindustrial cultures have viewed the earth as living, as Mother Earth,' and concurrently have developed practices for living with the earth which have been considerably less exploitative, and radically different from Romantic, industrial and scientific constructions of feminised N/nature.[19] A decolonised Ecocene located around an expansive notion of *Prakriti* may offer possibilities for co-existence and mutual action which the patriarchal, eurocentric and anthropocentric Anthropocene does not.

Donna Haraway's Chthulucene also centres feminism in its critique of the Anthropocene. The name does not come from H.P. Lovecraft's 'misogynist racial-nightmare monster Cthulhu', but from 'the diverse earthwide tentacular powers and forces and collected things' including Gaia, Spider Woman, Pachamama, Oya, Medusa, and Gorgo.[20] These figures—feminised and feminine—are evoked as forces and energies to think with, embodying values which have become essential in contemporary environmental philosophy. These include an insistence on humanity's enmeshment and entanglement in ecology; an expression of kinship with more-than-human life; and a respect for the otherness of nature and its desire and capacity to flourish beyond human needs and understanding. These principles are favoured over rights discourse and liberal individualism because, thanks to their failure to create equitable and mutually-sustainable worlds, they have 'finally become unavailable to think with' (p. 5). Instead, Haraway explores the potential of multi-species empathy and companionship to provide means not just to survive, but to culture new ways of living together and shaping change in a damaged world. Interweaving storytelling with multispecies and multicultural histories, and activist provocations, Haraway eschews conventions of

[18] G. Gaard, 'Toward New EcoMasculinities, EcoGenders and EcoSexualities' in C. Adams and L. Gruen (eds.), *Ecofeminism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 230.
[19] V. Shiva, 'The New Nature'.
[20] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 101.

academic discourse, allowing uncertainty, creativity and emotion, as well as reason, to fruitfully co-exist and inform one another. Rather than evoking futurism—that is, speculating beyond our immediate ecological realities—her 'speculative feminist fabulations' point to new and emergent possibilities for human-nature co-existence and co-becoming in a damaged world (p. 81).

Compared to the Anthropocene, 'Chthulhucene' represents a less fatalistic approach to the present. While the Anthropocene implies an apocalyptic, almost glorious vision of the end of nature and the coming of a new 'age of man', the Chthulucene demonstrates a commitment to address the crises 'somehow in the presence of those who will bear the consequences' of it (p. 12). However, the Anthropocene remains the high-profile technical term with which environmentalists and feminists must grapple. The task now is to respond meaningfully to the ecological crises that it names, and to address its injustices and erasures in material actions which express the critiques of Capitalocence and Plantationocene, and embody the best qualities of Ecocene and Chthulucene.

Feminist Concerns in the Anthropocene

Within ecologically-oriented cultural criticism, the rise of diverse identity-based sub-fields has produced distinctive moments of encounter and tension: for example, the gender essentialism of older iterations of ecofeminism has been unbound by the queering of the categories 'nature', 'gender' and the human; the whiteness of early ecocritical canons has been exploded by postcolonial ecocriticism and a new focus on nature-culture relations in black studies and subaltern studies; reactions against cultural appropriation have altered the discipline's relationship with indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, led by First Nations and indigenous scholars, writers and activists. Although by no means a decolonised discipline, ecocriticism, like feminism, is now more meaningfully geared to addressing intersecting forms of oppression and speaking to diverse rights struggles, while exposing the Eurocentric and patriarchal origins and norms of 'rights' discourse itself.

Increasingly, ecocriticism and green activism have addressed the ways in which environmentalist movements have been inhibited by the very inequalities and injustices which were once dismissed as sideshow issues. In the UK, environmental groups like Black2Nature are addressing the lack of BAME representation on the boards of major

conservation charities, while the Fair Trade movement seeks to develop a supply chain which is environmentally and economically just, tackling issues like debt slavery, dangerous working conditions, and chemical run-off, which overwhelmingly affect poor female garment workers in the Global South. In such practical initiatives and protests, the gendered inequalities of environmental crisis and economic exploitation are all too evident. However, thinkers have often got themselves into a conceptual bind: we cannot save the planet until we destroy patriarchy, *but* destroying patriarchy in itself will not save the planet. Anthropocene feminism risks becoming an unproductive zero sum game if one struggle is seen as inherently limiting to the validity and efficacy of the other. Instead, Anthropocene feminisms are better framed both symbiotically and dialectically, with both feminism and environmentalism looking to extend and advance the other, while seeking for points of intersection and solidarity.

Ecocriticism has demonstrated its meaning and value through its willingness to correct its canonical erasures—that is, to recentre social inequalities within its response to the devastation of nature. In turn, the various trends of contemporary feminism must grapple with the ecological dimensions of their own theorising and practice. That might mean searching for interrelations between environmentalism and, for example, the #MeToo movement, campaigns for reproductive rights, Black Lives Matter or trans rights. Environmental justice and Black Lives Matter movements intersect in the ongoing scandal of water pollution in Flint, Michigan, where predominantly African American communities are oppressed by a toxic combination of governmental indifference to black suffering, and an environmentally insensitive approach to water management. Stacy Alaimo notes how in North America, 'exposure to toxins correlates most directly with race, and then with class, as toxic waste sites, factories, and other sources are most often located near the neighbourhoods of African Americans or other people of colour'.[21] This is, of course, a global crisis: in the e-waste recycling fields of China, the Athabasca watershed of Canada, the Niger Delta, or the Bhopal region in Madhya Pradesh, poor and/or indigenous communities are exposed to contamination, often leading to catastrophic birth defects. Feminism aligns absolutely with fights for the environment and against racism, classism or castism in many of these communities. In Bhopal, women's groups have led marches to state agencies, carrying urine in

[21] S. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 117.

transparent containers and insisting that it be tested for toxins; in Northern Alberta, Lubicon Cree activist Melina Laboucan-Massimo draws attention both to the specific spike in violence against indigenous women in resource-extraction communities, and the systemic relationship between misogyny and ecological destruction. She writes:

> The systems of patriarchy, capitalism, colonization, and imperialism are based on a system of power and dominance. When you have these types of systems governing the way a society lives, that's how people are being treated on the ground. That's how the Earth is being treated. Indigenous people have always known that. Our relationship with Mother Earth is an attempt to be reciprocal.[22]

Some iterations of feminism, however, have been poorly aligned with ecological questions. Most notably, liberal and capitalist feminisms' 'lean in' ethos has done nothing to critique the demands for growth which despoil ecosystems, dispossesses poor women, and produces gross wealth disparities in colonised and industrialised nations. Indeed, the demands of social justice and environmentalism have produced many points of tension for Western feminism. Anyone seeking to live in feminist, environmental and anti-capitalist ways in the Global North will find themselves making emotive and politically fraught decisions in the course of everyday life in order to make some kind of difference to these catastrophes: establishing kinship relationships in traditional familial versus cooperative arrangements; using hormonal contraceptions and/or SSRIs which negatively impact aquatic life; choosing reusable menstrual products over disposable tampons, or swapping synthetic fabrics for organic cotton.[23] Making the personal the environmentally-political challenges the ethos of choice and consumerist autonomy which defines modern Western feminism, and also produces more complex cuts when poverty or disability make some ecological choices economically or physically inaccessible. Environmental campaigns can polarise groups in ways that reveal the intersecting demands and oppressions at stake: such cases reveal the ways in which ecologically-minded and single-issue movements often fail to take

[22] S. Bernard, 'Making the Connections on Tar-sands Pollution, Racism, and Sexism', *Grist* (27 August 2015).
[23] L. Nikoleris, 'Oestrogen in Birth Control Pills has a Negative Impact on Fish', *Lund University* (3 March 2016); C. Hsu, 'Antidepressants Found in Fish Brains in Great Lakes Region', *University of Buffalo News Centre* (31 August 2017).

diverse needs into account, becoming a blunt tool which can add to the load of already vulnerable people, and divide rather than unite a movement.

One particularly heated debate concerns the relationship between population growth and ecological harm. In 2017, a wide-ranging study analysed the environmental impact of a range of individual lifestyle choices in developed countries, concluding that the four actions most effective in limiting personal greenhouse gas emissions are, in order of impact: 'having one fewer child, living car-free, avoiding airplane travel, and eating a plant-based diet.'[24] Most striking, however, is the gap noted between the first and second action. Living without a car for a year saves 2.4 tonnes of CO2, while having one fewer child saves 58.6 tonnes per year.

Discussions about limiting birth rates in the name of environmental or resource protection, however, are thorny territory, to say the least. In the spirit of 'staying with the trouble,' Haraway is one of the few contemporary writers making difficult interventions in this area, under her slogan 'Make kin, not babies!'[25] (pp. 5-6). Policies to control population, she notes, 'demonstrably often have the interests of biopolitical states more in view than the well-being of women' (p. 6). Autonomy over reproduction—both having and not having children—has by necessity been a core demand of feminist organising, trumping 'the demands of patriarchy or any other system' (p. 6). In consequence, ecofeminists have been unwilling to address the climate consequences of childbirth, for the fear of sliding 'once again into the muck of racism, classism, nationalism, modernism, and imperialism' (p. 6). In the contexts of the Anthropocene, however, the problem takes on new dimensions. In 1950, the global population was reckoned to be around 2.5 billion people; in 2018, it was 7.4 billion; demographers predict that it will reach 11 billion by 2100. A priority for feminists globally must be to increase education for women, strengthen the rights that women hold within and outside of marriage, provide protection from abusive partners and improve access to contraception and safe elective abortion. Confrontation with the Anthropocene, however, also involves thinking in disruptive scales, over long temporal expanses, and in ways that are radically different from our current modes. For Haraway, this means culturing models of kinship beyond the nuclear family and its models of social reproduction, ancestry and genealogy. She proposes a 'smychthonic' mode of

[24] S. Wynes and K. Nicholas, 'The Climate Mitigation Gap', *Environmental Research Letters*, 12.7 (July 2017), n. p.
[25] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble,* pp.5-6.

kin-making: building relations of care and kind-ness between 'diverse human beings and other critters'; making, without domesticating, kin, with multispecies flourishing rather than individual or genealogical survival in mind (p. 103).

Struggling through the individual and collective ethics of these debates can be daunting, not least because the personal autonomy of women may seem to be being sacrificed in the name of the planet. At heart, the problem with debates about consumption and procreation is their excessive focus on the individual as bearing responsibility for climate change. During a devastating global heat-wave in summer 2018, journalists at the *New York Times* and the stalwart advocate for climate justice, Naomi Klein, debated whether a weakness of 'human nature' was to blame for the failure to address climate crisis in the 1980s, or a 'screamingly homogenous group of U.S. power players', in thrall to the interests of capital and the fossil fuels industry.[26] This debate exposed the vast scales of carbon emissions from industry and the sheer catastrophe of our predicted 2-4 degree world temperature rise. For anyone seeking to bring about a climate revolution, it made it dishearteningly obvious that without unprecedented multilateral and international agreement, a moratorium on fossil fuels and a complete change in industrial practice, climate change will not even be mitigated, let alone 'averted'. The green consumerism we have been sold offers a false autonomy, which supposes that it is the inherent selfishness or self-serving ignorance of individuals and consumers that is to blame.

However, rather than adopting an end-of-times hedonism or nihilism, it is more vital than ever to resist the self-interested, voracious construction of the individual that capitalism has used as a justification and smokescreen for its own destructiveness. Simplistic Marx-ish claims that there is 'no ethical consumerism under capitalism' may usefully gesture to the systemic nature of climate injustice, but can also beleaguer attempts to launch grassroots anti-capitalist movements, to make real reductions to human and ecological harm, and to support the emergence of alternative economies. Anthropologist Anna Tsing has explored idiosyncratic processes of accumulation, value creation and exchange operating on the margins of global capitalism. She writes: 'Only when we begin to notice the elaborate and heterogeneous making of capitalist worlds might we usefully discuss vulnerabilities, points of purchase, and

[26] N. Klein, 'Capitalism Killed Our Climate Momentum, Not "Human Nature"', *The Intercept* (3 August 2018).

alternatives.' [27] Supporting feminist-led, low-carbon co-operatives and avoiding corporations with poor records in staff welfare and ecological harm might be only part of a broader environmental justice movement. However, the fact that corporations and governments have relied on consumer apathy and ignorance for so long demonstrates the need to participate in the process of making other ways of living in the world possible, to find 'points of purchase' for alternative modes of organisation and collective flourishing.

Other Ways of Being

Ecofeminism has long debated the relationships between ethics and efficacy, ontology and activism, in self-other, human-nature, and gender relations. In the context of the Anthropocene, these debates become both more complex, and starker. According to Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, ecofeminism:

> helps us to imagine healthier relationships; stresses the need to attend to context over universal judgments; and argues for the importance of care as well as justice, emotion as well as rationality, in working to undo the logic of domination and its material and practical implications.[28]

In diverse ecofeminist approaches, core principles of relationality, situatedness and care for the other rest upon ontologies of interconnectedness and co-becoming. Rejecting Cartesian divides between humanity and nature, post-anthropocentric ecofeminism has pursued accounts of being based on non-Western ontologies, indigenous knowledges, and alternative accounts found in experimental physics and the life sciences.

Robin Wall-Kimmerer, an indigenous botanist and Professor of Environmental Science, has described how the language of the Potawatomi Nation radically transformed her understanding of natural forces of growth. Using language and grammar which recognises the agency and personhood of ecological processes, animals and other living entities, Wall-Kimmerer describes a form of knowledge that is relational, situated, and concerned with care and nurturing rather than supposedly 'objective' observation and control.[29]

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[27] Anna Tsing, 'Salvage Accumulation', *Cultural Anthropology* (30 March 2015), n.p.
[28] Adams and Gruen, 'Introduction' to *Ecofeminisms*, p. 1.
[29] See R. Wall-Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013).

New ecofeminist approaches have many points of similarity with Wall-Kimmerer's indigenous botany, though derived from distinct intellectual traditions. Some new feminist materialists reappraise outsider and innovative sciences and counter-traditions of Western thought—for example, Jane Bennett looks to theoretical physics and neovitalism; Haraway has been influenced by the process philosophy of Alfred Whitehead; Stacy Alaimo draws from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of the assemblage. Although they build on intellectual traditions shaped by men, these loosely grouped 'life-centered' theorists push further than their predecessors in crafting ontologies that address the conditions of the Anthropocene. Haraway's 'compostist' science feminism, and what Rosi Braidotti calls 'zoe-centered' new materialism, describe the intra-active qualities of matter and disturb the complacency with which 'we' interact with the so-called world around us.[30] Processes of growth, decay, flow and exchange attest to the vitality of the material world and, they should not be reduced to mechanical explanations or formulas. 'Zoe', for Braidotti, 'stands for the mindless vitality of Life carrying on independently and regardless of rational control' while Bennett advocates on behalf of vibrant matter because her 'hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalised matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption.'[31] Ontology, in these accounts, is productive of novel ethical relations which may underpin feminist and ecologist responses to environmental crisis.

A pertinent critique, which can be applied to the ontology-building work of new material feminism, comes from the work of Joanna Zylinksa. In *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, she criticises the masculinist 'intellectual trend towards ontology building'—the 'desire to build "worlds" and pass them off as reality.'[32] As Zylinksa does, one may fairly question whether it is useful to speculate about the agency of plants, waterways and metals (as Bennett does) when so many women and oppressed groups are denied basic rights and access to power. New materialisms, such as Bennett's, work best when they take into account the dangers of promoting a fully 'horizontal' democracy (levelling any difference between our commitment to human

[30] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble,* p. 150; see also R. Braidotti, *Transpositions* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2006).
[31] Braidotti, *Transpositions*, p.37; J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. ix.
[32] J. Zylinksa, *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2014), p. 79; p. 86.

and non-human needs), and explore theories 'designed to open democracy to the voices of excluded humans', as a way of promoting a more socially and environmentally just demos (p. 104).

Zylinksa's 'minimal ethics', in contrast, edges away from such theorising. It is 'less about building a better world as an external unity and more about making better cuts into that which are naming the world' (p. 88). In order 'to avoid becoming yet another masculinist enterprise which knows in advance and once and for all what it is striving for,' a minimal ethics must 'embrace the very openness and vagueness of its premises', recognise 'the indecency, the gaudiness, the masquerade of any attempt to make philosophy, and then try to make it better—which perhaps means smaller, less posturing, less erect' (p. 88). This statement proves that it is impossible to get through a chapter on feminist responses to the Anthropocene without at least one joke about the law of the phallus. In general, however, feminist eco-theory works best when it is concerned not with abstract world-building, but actively entangled in the trouble—making a cut into a world it is simultaneously trying to understand afresh.

In her theory of transcorporeality, Stacy Alaimo develops a philosophy of being which is uniquely implicated in the physical world. Transcorporeality describes the movement of materials between bodies, gesturing towards humanity's physical co-becoming and continuity with other lives, processes and material manifestations. As Alaimo states: 'trans-corporeality suggests that humans are not only interconnected with each other but with the material flows of substances and places.'[33] Divisions such as 'human' and 'nature' are ecologically meaningless, as the coalescence of matter which makes up seemingly discrete biotic and abiotic entities is always temporary, marked by material exchanges which disturb self-other and inside-outside dichotomies.

Transcorporeality has been helpful in describing and advancing a politics of coexistence, as flows of toxicity and pollution across watery and fleshy bodies of all kinds demand reconceptualisations of agency, materiality and slow violence, as well as a renewed politics capable of addressing issues played out across deep temporal and planetary scales, across different cultures, nations, language traditions, land-masses, and water systems. Emerging from and informed by health and social justice movements, transcorporeality is inherently concerned with how intersecting forms of

[33] S. Alaimo, 'The Naked World: The Transcorporeal Ethics of the Protesting Body', *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 20 (2010), 23-24.

oppression are produced by, and productive of, environmental damage. While Zylinska rightly critiques of the posturing and hubristic claims of philosophical world-building, Alaimo's theory proves its worth when it articulate injustices which may otherwise seem too dispersed to track: chemical poisoning, toxicity, industrial run-off, occupational sickness, cancers and carcinogens. The flows, decompositions and recompositions described in transcorporeality also provide ways of reflecting on the more-than-human damage of the Anthropocene. Alaimo has criticised clichéd visuals representations of our new epoch—characterised by aerial shots of urban and industrial developments—because they suggest that the immensity of the Anthropocene 'is safely viewed from a rather transcendent, incorporeal perspective, not from a creaturely immersion in the world.'[34] Aerial technoscapes erase ecological networks and relations, obscuring the flight paths of migratory birds and the flows of water and wind. Alaimo rejects this iconography, instead locating the Anthropocene in markers like the dissolving bodies of deep-sea shells, and in human bodies subject to toxicity and sickness. The emphasis is on precision, immersion, and an incisive (though often speculative and tentative) engagement in a living ecosphere.

An Anthropocene Feminism

While early ecofeminism was concerned with deconstructing the toxic relationship between femininity, nature, and the body, contemporary feminist responses to the Anthropocene are tasked with bringing thought back to the body, to gender-based inequalities, and to the ecosphere. The Anthropocene reveals, definitively, that it is no longer possible to tell the story of human history without natural history: the long Enlightenment project of mastering the 'forces of nature' has failed, with devastating consequences for all, and for indigenous and poor communities most catastrophically. Women and oppressed communities will be affected by climate injustice in the most pointed and unevenly distributed ways, as drought, resource scarcity, flooding and pollution continue to affect reproductive health, access to medicines, climate refugees, gender-based violence, forced marriage, and wage inequalities. There is no way for feminism *not* to address the environmental crisis, or for environmentalism to intervene

[34] S. Alaimo, 'Your Shell on Acid: Material Immersion, Anthropocene Dissolves' in *Anthropocene Feminism.* p. 92.

in our current crisis without the insights, energies, and dexterity of intersectional feminism at its core.

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