

The Gendered Anthropocene: Introduction

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The Anthropocene is arguably one of the key concepts that structure contemporary understandings of the environmental crisis, as well as the various economic, ecological, racial, global, and gendered inequalities that contribute to it. As Reyes and Chirindo posit, the Anthropocene signifies “the generalization of precarity that was once concentrated among those disempowered through perceived racial and gender differences” (2020). And yet the concept’s universal subject has drawn sustained feminist critique. For instance, Giovanna Di Chiro has argued that the Anthropocene, as a recent framing of Universal Man, presumes an Anthropocenic subject that “has no sex, gender, class, or race” (2017, 490). Kathryn Yusoff shows what this supposedly unmarked figure conceals: the Anthropocene expresses “a sudden concern with the exposure of environmental harm to white liberal communities” (2018, xiii), harm that colonialism, slavery, and extractive capitalism had long directed at Black, brown, and Indigenous communities. These critiques bear directly on American studies. The extractive histories Yusoff traces, from racial hereditary enslavement to settler dispossession, are central to the formation of the United States and run through the literary and cultural archive of the field.

Feminist and gender studies contribute to the reconceptualization of the Anthropocene and climate crisis, particularly with respect to the hegemonic—and often gendered—notions of nature, ecology, and knowledge. Richard Grusin identifies one such contribution in “speculation and imagination as forms of queer and feminist knowledge production” (2017, xi). Stacy Alaimo’s material feminism offers a different angle. She describes the Anthropocenic subject as immersed in and enmeshed with the world it alters, a model that puts bodies, and the substances that pass through them, at the center of Anthropocene thought. Both extend an ecofeminist tradition older than the Anthropocene concept itself.

For instance, Val Plumwood indicates how the joint domination of women and nature adhere to a set of hierarchical dualisms, among them culture/nature, mind/body, male/female, and human/nature. She read these dualisms as a logic of colonization that also underwrites domination by race and class (43). The use of ecocritical, feminist, and queer frameworks is intended to challenge the heteronormative assumptions about inherent hierarchies between nature and culture, the human and nonhuman, the living and unliving.

This issue of *WiN* grows out of the Sixth Biennial Symposium of the EAAS Women's Network, held at Karlstad University, Sweden, in April 2025. Former Steering Committee member Marie Dücker proposed "The Gendered Anthropocene" as its theme during her term, and the symposium was co-organized by the Women's Network with local organizers Maria Holmgren Troy, Anna Linzie, and Zdravka Katinic. At the symposium and in this issue, our aim has been to participate in alternative, justice-oriented engagement with the environmental crisis that privileges the perspectives of women and other marginalized groups. With this insight in mind, we found it crucial to attend to this precarization through an intersectional lens, asking how feminist and gender studies can contribute to the reconceptualization of the Anthropocene and climate crisis, as well as hegemonic notions of nature, ecology, and knowledge.

The articles that follow offer a critical intervention into Anthropocene studies through intersectional readings of literature, film, and cultural phenomena, from works by American futurist poet Mina Loy to those by contemporary science fiction favorite Becky Chambers. The authors of our articles engage with the Anthropocene in a variety of genres and media, indicating that it is a phenomenon that suffuses contemporary global and American culture. When it comes to genre, for instance, we find that speculative writing is well-suited to (re)considering the Anthropocene at the global and cosmic scale due to its investment in imagining the world (and beyond) otherwise, often through a particular affinity with non-human perspectives. This kind of alternative envisioning is complemented here and elsewhere by Indigenous authors' work, which shows us that alternatives to the power dynamics and exploitative nature of what we now know as the Anthropocene have always

already been an integral part of the human experience. While speculative fiction often looks to the future for remedies to the ills of our age, realist Indigenous fiction shows us that these remedies are also palpable in history and in our current moment. The interconnectedness apparent in the fiction examined in this volume also becomes apparent in film and cultural criticism, where our authors' examinations of Mina Loy's integration of trash into her artistic works, the commercialization of music festivals like Burning Man, and the horror of aging in the film *She Will* reveal artists' ongoing navigation of inclusion and exclusion, of exploitation and sustainable methods of living. Together with the conversations that developed at the symposium, these articles speak to a developing imperative to think of the individual as inherently networked—with the trash that she and others create, with institutions, and also with the land on which we live and on which our institutions are situated.

In her article, "Vague Terrains and Refusées," Johanna Pelikan turns to the early 20th-century work of mixed media artist and poet Mina Loy to interrogate the social entanglements of waste and womanhood. Pelikan argues that Loy responded to the social denigration of women as sites for social dumping and women as de-individualized wastelands by integrating trash into her work. In doing so, she repurposed trash in a powerful act of reclamation that troubled the devaluation of women and their labor in capitalist society.

In "Re-Imagining Scientific Inquiry: Affective Practices of Ecological Knowledge Production and Relations of Care in Becky Chambers's *To Be Taught, If Fortunate*," Jade Arbo and Judith Rauscher propose a feminist ecocritical reading of Becky Chambers's science fiction novella, *To Be Taught, If Fortunate* (2019). Drawing on feminist epistemology and affective ecologies, Arbo and Rauscher propose a reading of the novella as a narrative of an ethical encounter with alien ecology, where queer and feminist relationality privileges care and responsibility. The authors argue for a transformative potential of science fiction as a genre that can help reimagine scientific inquiry and knowledge-making as a deeply empathetic, collaborative endeavor.

In her article "Performing Gender and Neoliberal Desire(s) in the Desert Anthropocene: An Ecofeminist Perspective on Burning Man," Marine Dasse situates Burning Man within the

broader rise of large-scale events that have reshaped how contemporary societies experiences leisure, creativity, and collective identity, offering transformative experiences for some participants and packaged consumption for others. The article presents Burning Man as occupying a distinctive but increasingly ambiguous event which was originally a countercultural gathering rejecting consumerism but has evolved into one of the world's most mythologized festivals. She argues that Burning Man's self-image as an autonomous event outside mainstream society sits uneasily with the logics of late stage capitalism, as it becomes increasingly commodified.

In "Any Pain? Every Pain: From Anthropocentric to Symbiocenic Politics of Female Aging in Charlotte Colbert's *She Will*," Marta Miquel-Baldellou explores Colbert's 2021 film in light of both the Anthropocene and the Symbiocene. Through considering how the concept of interconnectedness is interrogated in Colbert's use of symbolic/historical landscapes, and the aging female body, Miquel-Baldellou argues that trauma plays a pivotal role in how women interact with and experience the environment. Through confronting the past, the main character in Colbert's film is able to face her future more confidently, and accept that aging is a process of transformation that can also be revelatory and invigorating.

In her article "Gendered Resistance in the Age of Anthropocene: Eco-Stories by Page, Maracle, and Mehrotra," Şeyma Yonar explores the role of gender in the writing of the Anthropocene. She argues that ecological catastrophes reflect the gendered hierarchies of power already in place. Using feminist ecocriticism and intersectional theory, she analyzes three eco-stories written by contemporary Canadian female authors that challenge the dominant environmental discourses and question the concept of the "Capitalocene" by placing female, Indigenous, and postcolonial experiences of collapse at the center, thus acting as counter-narratives that offer a more nuanced approach to the planetary crisis.

Each of these articles explore facets of the ongoing questions we ask of ourselves as women's and gender studies scholars in the global North, with respect to the imbrication of our own institutions in the power structures of the Anthropocene and our own investment in those power structures. As a Women's Network of American Studies scholars in Europe, we

will continue asking these pressing questions about the future and the role of the humanities. Our next symposium, on “Emergent Strategies of Care,” in June 2027 in Novi Sad, Serbia, will require us to direct those questions to our local networks—and to our capacity to enact care on small and large scales. The ethics of care already featured in the Karlstad call for papers becomes the organizing question in Novi Sad. If the Anthropocene distributes precarity unevenly, it also distributes the labor of maintaining and repairing shared worlds unevenly, and that labor has long fallen to women and to Black and Indigenous communities and other communities of color. The symposium’s title takes up adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategy* (2017), which locates large-scale change in small-scale, relational practice. For a network like ours, this is a methodological commitment: the questions this issue raises about land, institutions, and whiteness apply first to how we organize, host, cite, and include one another, and from there to the structures in which we live and work.

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